Marry ‘gods’, merry with ‘lords’:
understanding enigmatic
life of solitude of Goan devadasis
through Dekhni songs.

Remy Antonio Dias
(Govt. College of Arts, Science & Commerce)
(remy_dias2002@yahoo.com)

Abstract: Acquisition of new territories denominated as Novas Conquistas of Goa brought Portuguese in contact with Hindu bailadeira community who were customarily married to temple gods but obliged to satisfy carnal needs of dominant feudal elements who sought their services. Many young girls were offered to temples and once ‘sold’ they became ‘property’ of temple, priests, trustees, of village and for villagers. The community’s engagement with mainstream constituents of society was restricted to participation and offering services during socio-religious functions and festivals. Bailadeiras worked for maintenance of temples and offered other services as ‘love retreats for suffering souls’ and ‘soul that sobs’ visited them for solace. Otherwise they lived on margins of society and referred as ‘casta desgraçadas’. Paper de-romanticizes enigmatic history of bailadeira by reading afresh dekhnis (Konkani folksongs) along with lyrics of contemporary Indo-Portuguese poetry.
1. Introduction

Portuguese incorporated in mid-eighteenth century, *Novas Conquistas*\(^1\) in *Estado da India* and signed treaties with dessais (feudal lords) agreeing to protect Hindu customs and traditions\(^2\), later codified as *Código dos Usos e Costumes dos Habitantes das Novas-Conquistas*.\(^3\) In *Novas Conquistas* of Goa, Portuguese encountered *devadasi* system from mid-eighteenth century which requires deeper exploration to reinterpret history of ‘solitude-isolation’ that community was obliged to endure. Devadasis were virgins married to temple gods, but required to entertain village heads and principal villagers, satisfy carnal needs of dominant feudal elements who sought their services, yet forced to lead life of seclusion near precincts of temple complexes with very restricted access to means of living. Such women were referred largely as *bailadeiras* by Portuguese from sixteenth century and belonged to Hindu sub-caste which was marginalised to great extent due to socio-religious factors.\(^4\) Subalternity of bailadeiras can be gauged from fact that very little is written about them in historical discourse - though veins of information can be gleaned labourously from mass of *dekhnis*, folk literature including proverbs and supplementing it with lyrics of Indo-Portuguese poets - during four and half centuries of Portuguese occupation of Goa. *Proverb kirangullichem bott suzlear kitlem suzot?*

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\(^1\) From end of seventeenth century Portuguese empire presented a picture of dismal economic decay and ruin. In 1739, fall of Bassein to Marathas signaled death knell of *Estado da India*. It is a truism that once-glorious *Estado da India* – that had stretched from East Africa to China – had declined following protracted struggle with other European powers in Indian Ocean and various Indian Potentates. By mid eighteenth century, *Estado* presented a picture of shrunken collection of moribund trading posts receiving very little metropolitan protection. However, various governors and viceroys deputed from Portugal did their utmost to preserve and further their interests in Goa. This is evident in territorial expansion of Goa in second half of eighteenth century. Accordingly, *concelhos* (talukas) of Bicholim, Sattari, and Sanquelim (1781), Pernem (1783), Canacona (1764), and Ponda, Quepem and Sanguem (1763) were incorporated into Goa and which acquisition together came to be termed as *Novas Conquistas* (New Conquests). History of these regions finds little mention in works on Indo-Portuguese history. For additional information on Portuguese engagement with New Conquests of Goa refer: A.B. de Bragança Pereira, *História das Novas Conquistas*, Bastora: Tip. Rangel, 1939; Vicente João Filomeno de Figueiredo, *O Desenvolvimento da Agricultura nas Novas Conquistas*, Nova Goa: Imprensa Nacional, 1929; Jose de Oliveira Boleo, “A Incorporação das Novas Conquistas no Estado da India”, STVDIA, No. 8, 1961, pp. 335-389; Filipe Nery Xavier, *Desenvolvimento da Natureza dos Bens dos Desaidados das Novas Conquistas*, Nova Goa: Imprensa Nacional, 1845. pp. 13-18; Filipe Nery Xavier, *Collecção de Bandos, e outras diferentes Providencias que Servem de Leis Regulamentares Para o Governo Economico, e Judicial das Provincias Denominadas das Novas Conquistas, Precedida da Noção ca sua Conquista e da divisão de cada huma dellas*, Vol I, Panjim: Imprensa Nacional, 1840 & Vol. II, Nova Goa: Imprensa Nacional, 1850.

\(^2\) Edital concedendo aos Habitantes das Novas Conquistas todos os privilegios, isenções, usos e estilos, que lhes mantinha o Rei Sunda, dated 5th June, 1763, Doc. 1, pp. 1-2; Bando Garantindo os mesmos usos, e estilos e os afforamentos, tenças e mais possessões, dated 6th August, 1763, Doc. 2, pp. 2-3; Providencia dando dirrecção para o economic e civil regimen, dated 23 December, 1766, Doc. 3, pp. 3-8; Carta Regia, approvando as garantias concedidas aos Habitantes das Novas Conquistas, dated 15 January, 1774, Doc. 8, pp. 18-20; Bando garantindo aos Habitantes de Bicholim e Sanquelim os seus privilegios, isenções e imunidades, dated 25th August, 1781, Doc. 13, pp. 25-26; and Bando deferindo as representações, ou requisicoes dos habitants de Bicholim, dated 15th September, 1781, pp. 26-32, which documents may be read in Filipe Nery Xavier, *Collecção de Bandos, e outras diferentes Providencias que Servem de Leis Regulamentares Para o Governo Economico, e Judicial das Provincias Denominadas das Novas Conquistas, Precedida da Noção ca sua Conquista e da divisão de cada huma dellas*, Vol I Ii, Panjim: Imprensa Nacional, 1840.

\(^3\) Socio-cultural life of people of New Conquests can be comprehended through *Código dos Usos e Costumes dos habitantes das Novas Conquistas*, Nova Goa: Imprensa Nacional, 1861.

(if little finger swells, to what extent it will?), indicates that Konkani community was little bothered about troubles and concerns of marginalised sections.

Paper de-romanticizes enigmatic history of devadasis by reading afresh dekhnis (Konkani folksongs) along with lyrics of contemporary Indo-Portuguese poets like Mariano Gracias,5 Paulino Dias,6 Floriano Barreto,7 Nascimento Mendonça,8 Lino de Abreu,9 etc. Critical research question addressed include: What challenges were faced by Portuguese in dealing with socio-cultural milieu of Novas Conquistas? How earlier in sixteenth-seventeenth centuries Christo-centric Portuguese administration dealt with devadasis/bailadeiras? How dekhnis aid understanding of dessai-dominated feudal Goa? How and why were bailadeiras pushed into life of solitude? How did bailadeiras endure ‘isolation-solitude’, disease and deprivation? How bailadeiras ‘lived not to be alone’ rather to be ‘actually with others’? How did they overcome feelings of being isolated from larger social structure? It is also vital to investigate: How bailadeiras were pawns for administrative expediency to subdue feudal dessais? How republican period opened window of opportunity for them to unshackle fetters of caste-dominated society? How did their progeny carve a niche for themselves from early twentieth century? Challenge is to decode mystifying life of bailadeiras to bring forth their response by reading dekhnis along with works of Filipe Nery Xavier, J.H. da Cunha Rivara, Própercia Correia, archival records, folk literature, etc., piecing a story of very subtle resistance combating solitude-isolation, in caste-dominated Goa.

In attempting to look for historical responses to above research questions paper is split into four sections. Section one deals with research on dekhnis and bailadeiras beginning from early twentieth century. Section two, deals with varied functions of community i.e., as devadasi (servant of god), calvante (performing artist) and vishvaioshitá (naikinn or mulher/mancebas do mundo), and as indicated by Propércia Correia Afonso de Figueiredo.10 Third section analyses lyrics of several Indo-Portuguese poets bringing to light enigmatic life of bailadeiras on margins of Goan society. Section four, is reading of dekhnis afresh followed by some concluding remarks.

2. Research on dekhnis and bailadeiras

Konkani, Goa’s official language (and it’s spoken) symbolizing cumulative non-genetic evolution of its users and language of Goan song appears to have been in existence by eleventh century.11 Konkani protagonists have passionate love of music. And if at time when Konkani language originated people were singing then Goan song has been in existence for at least ten continuous centuries.12 It is unfortunate that array of songs as surviving down the

5 Mariano Gracias, Terra de Rajahs, Bombaim: A Luso-Indiana (Casa Editora), 1925.
7 Floriano Barreto, Phaílenas com uma parte sobre assumptos Indianos, Bastorá: Typ. Rangel, 1898.
millennium were not extensively and methodically recorded when it was still possible to record them, perhaps, for fact that people viewed devadasis/bailadeiras as ‘blot’ on society. Konkani proverb *bail nachli*, *fugddi* (dancing woman has no respect) shows that society reserved very low esteem to dancing women, though, dance and music formed integral part of socio-religious functions. It’s a fact that conservative caste Hindus would not allow daughters to sing and dance until liberation of Goa in 1961, yet smugly avowed ‘ami dusreank nachaitale’ - we made other’s dance - snidely referring to bailadeiras and their role in society. In historical records community of bailadeiras is referred as ‘desegraçadas’. Though literally it means ‘disgraced’, this paper would rather consider community as ‘unfortunate lot’, much maligned and wronged.

Research in Konkani folksongs began from last quarter of nineteenth century and continued thereafter. Attempt has been limited to unearth and publish as many folksongs as possible. Research on dekhni has been carried out by José Pereira, Micael Martins and António da Costa, who published anthology of dekhni songs with text and score (*Folk Songs of Goa: Mando-Dulpods & Dekn尼斯*, New Delhi, 2005). Till date there is no attempt to portray inscrutable life of bailadeiras based on analysis of collection of dekhni songs. This paper is an attempt to bridge historical gap.

Konkani community spread along India’s western coast have large repertoire of songs which include *banvarh*, *dekhni*, *dhalo*, *dulpod*, *duvalo*, *fell-song*, *fugddi* or *fughri*, *kunnbi-


*Banvarh* are mourning songs of Hindu community which are sung during death and death anniversary by potter community and are mostly religious in nature.

*Dekn尼斯* is a song imitating Hindu music in the musical idiom current among catholic community of Goa. These songs describe mostly life of Hindus with special reference to temple dancers. On festive occasions and music festivals these songs are sung after *mando*.

*Dhalo* is song of the gaudde (tribals) and harvi (fisherfolks) of Goa.

*Dulpod* which is sung after the *mando* is of quick rhythm and describes the everyday life in Goan countryside especially of the subalterns particularly amongst catholic community. These songs offer a peep into life of marginalized sections in feudalized Goa under Portuguese colonial administration.

*Duvalo* are pregnancy songs.
song,\textsuperscript{21} launimm,\textsuperscript{22} mando,\textsuperscript{23} ovi,\textsuperscript{24} palnnam,\textsuperscript{25} talghari,\textsuperscript{26} tiatr-song,\textsuperscript{27} zagor-song\textsuperscript{28} and zoti,\textsuperscript{29} etc. These may be categorized into four groups: one, which draws on traditional more pristine

\begin{enumerate}
\item Duvalo are pregnancy songs.
\item Fell-songs are those of folk drama or fells which are performed by actors moving from village to village. Fell-songs are said to deal with life of brahmins, chardos, shudras, kunnbis, harvis, khapris, and hindus as well.
\item Fughri are Hindu community’s dance songs frequently sung at religious festivals especially during Ganesh Chaturthi. Themes of songs include Puranic stories, family life in countryside, domestic conflicts, etc.
\item Kunnbi-song is mostly nuptial chant of the catholic kunnbi community (tribals) sung during ceremominal occasion like weddings and are mostly non-religious in nature. These songs offer a peep into the day to day struggle of the community to eke a living.
\item Launnim are very popular Hindu songs with religious and legendary/mythological themes and are sung during Dussehra and Shigmo festivals. These are harvest festivals.
\item Mando is a slow verse or verse and refrain dance song, in six-four time, dealing with love, tragedy and historical events during Portuguese occupation of Goa. Mando songs are said to be composed largely by christo-brahmin (christão-bamon in local parlance) community of Goa which had integrated and assimilated itself, to a great extent with Iberians. Popular perception is that mando is love song even when reading between lines may indicate otherwise. Mando poetry expresses eternal joys and sorrows, hopes and fears, highs and lows, yearnings and lamentations, silences and margins too of Goan Christian community and offers an insight into its collective psyche affected by centuries of incessant colonial hegemonic domination. Francisco Coloço, associated with organization of annual mando-festivals in post-liberation Goa, writes, ‘mando is...biography of Goan heart: a long tale of bitter-sweet history with all joys and sorrows’. Similar in many ways to Portuguese song Fado, Goan mando too is ‘sad and profound’ and most ‘pervasive emotion suggested by its music is melancholy’. To a casual listener mando may seem sweet and pleasant to hear but is poignant with powerful messages reflecting travails of society in turmoil, hemmed in between duo-colonialism, of both Portuguese and British with latter largely orchestrating economic policy framework in Goa from late nineteenth century onwards following singing of Anglo-Portuguese Treaty in 1878. Francisco Coloço, \textit{Understanding Mando – The song of Goa}, https://www.mail-archive.com/goanet-news@lists.goanet.org/msg02019.html, accessed on 06/07/2014; José Pereira, Micael Martins and António da Costa, \textit{Song of Goa – Crown of Mandos}, Panjim: Broadway Pub. House, 2010, pp. 33-4 & 47; Remy Dias, ‘Lip-lock’ to ‘Lethologica’ – Study of Goan Konkani Mandde, \textit{Indian Journal of Social Science Research}, Vol. 2, July-Dec., 2014, pp. 5-52.
\item Ovi songs which are also called as vers or zoti are catholic community’s nuptial songs. It is a fact that text form of mando is based on that of traditional Konkani folk songs ovi/vers/zoti which were earlier sung at Christian weddings until Portuguese banned it vide \textit{Edict} of Goa Inquisition, 1736. English translation of the Edict may be read in Anant Kakba Priolkar, \textit{The Goa Inquisition}, Bombay: A.K. Priolkar, 1961, pp. 92-113. However, they continued in use up to mid-twentieth century in nuptial chants of christobrahmins as well as shudra and kunnbi community, latter two constituting Goa’s commoners. Ovi has three rhymed lines and one unrhymed. Of three rhymed lines each contains three or four words and fourth line has one or two, and sometimes three words. Number of syllables is nine for rhymed lines and four or five for last line. Early Portuguese Christian missionaries adopted ovi-form for liturgical and devotional hymns. Remy Dias, ‘Lip-lock’ to ‘Lethologica’ – Study of Goan Konkani Mandde, \textit{Indian Journal of Social Science Research}, Vol. 2, July-Dec., 2014, pp. 5-52.
\item Palnnam are sweet lullabies.
\item Talghari are songs of the Hindu gaudde of the Novas Conquistas of Goa.
\item Tiatr-songs are those of Konkani tiatr (dramas) especialy of catholic community composed by playwrights like João Agostinho Fernandes (Pai Tiatrist). All tiatr of João Agostinho Fernandes which were earlier with Konkani Akademi, Panjim, have recently been transferred to Central Library, Panjim, and are available to researchers. Both the tiatr as well as tiatr-songs help reconstruct the socio-economic life of people in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century.
\end{enumerate}
Indian form in music and verse as in fugddi or dhalo; two, those having marked influence of western music and intrusive Portuguese words like mando; three, those blending native and western music but interspersed with few Portuguese words and expressions reminiscent of dulpod; and, lastly those which blend western and native music but retain words and expressions from native language, e.g. dekhnis. Main theme of Konkani song is life, in three of its aspects: its ultimate meaning, crucial moments and festive occasions.

However, reality for bailadeiras was that they were viewed as born in ‘casta desgraçada’ (disgraced caste) and had to perform caste specific duties held in low esteem by patriarchal society; with crucial moments signifying emptiness; and happiness was but a mirage as they became objects of enjoyment during festive occasions specifically and throughout the year generally, to villagers and onlookers. This is aptly illustrated in dekhni Ag’y Aga Sonar Xetti (Hey... Goldsmith), in which a dancing girl wishes from her brother a flower of forest fig-tree: Fulo rumborhache dada / derhxam pakolleanchem / bavanum kon-num y aple / boinnim’ diunchem i.e. forest fig flower brother, that too of hundred and fifty petals / a brother should make it and offer to sister. It is a fact that forest fig-tree gives no flowers and though it gets fruits throughout its trunk they are not considered fit for human consumption. In Konkani whenever emptiness/nothingness of any issue at hand is to be expressed people mutter rumborhache ful (forest fig-tree flower) or pipllachem ful (pipal tree flower). Pipal tree likewise gives no flowers. In Goan society brothers go all-out to make their sisters ‘happy’ by striving to fulfill their wishes. However, in this dekhni a bailadeira seeks from her brother a rumborhache ful. Knowing that brother would be unable to satisfy her yearning and that happiness is but a chimera she requests further: arhy forem kudolly bava / karhy eku depo / tajery dovory rompo bhava / rumborhatso i.e. take your spade and pick-ax brother, unearth a clod and plant a sapling of forest fig flower. Sapling would grow to a tree in years to follow but brother be unable to fulfill sister’s wish for a forest fig-tree flower. For girls born as bailadeiras this was bitter reality. Paper attempts to decode and comprehend dekhni song of Goan dancing girl – fille de joie – victim of man’s lust and selfishness. For members of community life was indeed a poignant journey.

Dekhni (song of Deccan or in Deccani style) is a song imitating Hindu music in musical idiom current among Christians in two-four or six-eight time and descriptive exclusively of Hindu life. Dekhni’s main subjects are Hindu temples, partly concealed in shadows of then Goan jungles and people who worship and work in temple complexes. But though there are Hindu elements in dekhni it is not in real sense a Hindu song. Dekhni is sung neither by Hindus of Goa, nor by bailadeira as she danced at Hindu weddings and at temple complex on festive occasions or during public processions. In reality it is a song about bailadeiras. It is a composition largely (though may not be exclusively) of Christian poet and composers of Goa, mostly unknown. Bailadeira is main theme of dekhni song. According to Jose Pereira et al, dekhni’s portrayal of

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29 Zoti are songs of Hindu community sung during Shigmo festivals and include both epic and narrative songs.
32 Forest fig tree is also called Strangler Fig tree.
Hindu ways shows Goan Christians’ nostalgia and reminiscences for lost past but also sense of amusement at seemingly strange habits of people living on other side of River Zuari in Novas Conquistas (Canacona, Sanguem, Quepem, Ponda, Sattari, Bicholim and Pernem) in shadow of their domed temples.

Fascination of dekhni lies to some extent in haunting music with syncopated rhythm of tabla and mridanga and clang of kansollim (cymbals) enhanced by sound of anklets of dancing girls. Lucio Rodrigues subtitles dekhni as ‘song of dancing girl’. Jose Pereira on other hand calls it ‘song of lost past’, referring to rich traditional Indian culture in Goa which Portuguese had tried to suppress in Bardez, Ilhas and Salcete. ‘Intensive missionary effort (…) produced many converts who, it was believed required to be protected from Hindu cultural influences, which included traditional Indian music. Consequently, Third Provincial Council (of Roman Catholic Archdiocese) of Goa, held in 1585, decreed that women were not to learn to dance, play or sing deqhanins or other festive dances and courtly songs of native origin.’ Quarantining of local convert community continued with Goa Inquisition’s Edict of 1736, up to advent of twentieth century. Deqhani or dakni was a profane dance performed by dancing community at socio-religious functions and festivals like Shigmo (harvest festival). Dekhni song is hybridized version which emerged from last quarter of nineteenth century when Portuguese administration developed a more relaxed attitude towards indigenous communities and their cultural traditions.

It is amusing to note that research on dekhni and bailadeira community has not been very wide-ranging. Dekhni songs are fewer (they number over three dozen) than other folksongs of Catholic community like mando and dulpop. Research has been limited to translating dekhni songs into either Portuguese or English depending on readership and restricted to rendering lyrics into prose, for readers to get romanticized perspective of dancing community. Eufemiano de Jesus Miranda (2010) writes, ‘in… Goa, there existed a woman taken to symbolize a contradiction: temple dancer (bailadeira)… over time (she) became a woman who sold [emphasis mine] herself.’ It is not appropriate to say that temple dancers sold themselves. Rather it was circumstances and socio-religious factors that made her what she was. Historians and sociologists have used varied approaches to study this institution.

Short dekhni Xirvorchehim cherhvam / mottinch pamprelam / ugtim galun nidytai zonelam / ail zonelam (bailadeiras of Siroda are great flirts; they sleep with their windows open, Oh yes, their windows open), shows how society viewed bailadeiras as flirts/prostitutes. So while general public shut windows (zonelam/janelas) at sunset, bailadeiras are portrayed leaving them ajar, as invitation to prospective clients for the night. Popular adage cheddiek chandneacho usko i.e. prostitute anxious about moonlit nights, indicate apprehension of bailadeira community when on such nights number of clients were more and they had to endure sleepless nights. Reality was dwellings of these women were such that there were hardly any windows at all. In poem Vatsalá, by Nascimento Mendonça, bailadeiras are shown

to live in small and poor abodes, partly lined with straw and tiles and no windows (zonelam/janelas) in hamlet of Mogras (Bairro de Jasmines), a dependency of temple.\textsuperscript{39}

Theme of bailadeiras has undergone a metamorphosis in romantic imagination to become symbol of beauty and feminine grace and which according to Vimala Devi and Manuel de Seabra exercised strange fascination over Indo-Portuguese poets.\textsuperscript{40} Almost all writers or poets lettering on bailadeiras have been men-folk especially from amongst Catholics of Goa, with few exceptions. Propécia Correia Afonso de Figueiredo, perhaps only women author who broached theme of bailadeiras in 	extit{A Mulher na India Portuguesa} (Nova Goa, 1933), states in unequivocal terms that amongst tribulations that needed urgent attention of Indo-Portuguese society in general and Hindu society in particular none was more grave than condition of bailadeira, which till then only inspired lyric poetry and at most lame protest about their pitiable conditions with nothing concrete done by either government of day or socio-religious leaders and intellectuals to meaningfully ameliorate their conditions. Bailadeira was casualty of socio-religious conditions in which she was born. According to her, way of life of bailadeira was considered as threat to morality of society, which not only allowed for existence of institution of bailadeira but condemned such women to a wretched life (condena irremissivelmente ao seu triste modo de vida).\textsuperscript{41} Undoubtedly, bailadeiras were accomplished in performing arts, which fascinated Indo-Portuguese poets. However, overall they were forced to lead very dismal way of life on margins of Goan society.\textsuperscript{42}

3. Devadasis /bavinas, calvante, vishvaloshítá...

Bailadeiras has been referred variously in Portuguese records and belonged to varied caste groups. Their activities were also of varied nature. Gaspar Correa mentions of bailadeiras, called calavants or calvant (in Konkani and Marathi) who performed functions of devadasis which literally means servant or slave of god. Term devadasi became current only after late 1930’s of this century.\textsuperscript{43} In Goa those who discharged functions akin to devadasis were deulis and bavinas. Dr. Alberto Osório de Castro considered bailadeira as hierodule i.e. a slave or prostitute in service of brahmanical temples. Dekhni 	extit{Are deullea} reminds a temple servant about her chores:

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textit{Are deullea} \quad Hey, temple servant, \\
  \item \textit{Tuk’ sangtam kannim} \quad I’ll tell you something (lit. a story). \\
  \item \textit{Tugelea deulla’} \quad Your temple needs
\end{itemize}

\textsuperscript{39} Bailadeiras were usually given names of flowers, birds, or precious stones. These included, Zaiù, Tará, Gangà, Priaga, Anhani, Calhiana, Mogrém, Vigeia, Surata, Baguém, Gultchabou, Camenêm, Mâinã , Sarasvati, Manquêm, Boiru, Dulgem, Sundorem, etc.

\textsuperscript{40} Vimala Devi and Manuel de Seabra, 	extit{A Literatura Indo-Portuguesa}, Lisboa, Junta de Investigações de do Ultramar, 1971, p. 328-9.

\textsuperscript{41} Propécia Correia Afonso de Figueiredo, 	extit{A Mulher na India Portuguesa}, Nova Goa: Tip. Bragança, 1933, pp. 119-132.

\textsuperscript{42} Propécia Correia Afonso de Figueiredo writes: ‘Um certo elemento de arte entra na vida destas desgraçadas e à sua luz, para quem tenha olhos de ver, mais lúgubre se torna a sua triste sorte. É talvez essa arte que tem exercido tanta fascinação na poesia de todos os países que têm tomado a bailadeira por seu tema.’ Propécia Correia Afonso de Figueiredo, 	extit{A Mulher na India Portuguesa}, Nova Goa: Tip. Bragança, 1933, p. 125.

Temple servants hardly required to be reminded about their duty and obligation to maintain temple premises clean and in pristine conditions. Yet in above song, man wishes to tell temple servant a kannim (story). Does it not imply that he just wants to initiate conversation with bailadeira by commenting that her temple needs sweeping? Vatsala’s lines indicate how bailadeira provided solace to many a troubled soul when she sings:

\[ I \text{ am the dream-tower, airy and shimmering,} \\
\text{The love retreat of suffering souls.} \\
\text{The soul that sobs (emphasis mine) is enlivened on seeing me.}\]

So, bailadeiras worked for maintenance of temples and offered other services as ‘love retreats for suffering souls’ and ‘soul that sobs’ visited them for solace. A proverb, veta zalear vell asa, rovta zalear mandri asa (if you wish to leave there’s still time, if you wish to stay then sleeping mat is there), which in liquid modernity is not much in use, indicates that in times of yore community provided sort of counseling and comforting services with mandri (sleeping mat) equivalent to modern day psychologist’s sleeping couch. Music and dance provided solace to soul that sobs, as such their dwellings got the sobriquet ‘love retreats for suffering souls.’

Terms like deulis (servants of god), calavante (performing artists) and visvvaioashitá (mulher/mancebas do mundo i.e. concubines or society girls), used interchangeably in relation to bailadeira are not synonymous, point to three salient aspects of bailadeira’s life of painful misery (miséria doirada).\(^{45}\) A.B. de Bragança Pereira while discussing jati (caste) system of Hindus of Goa lists following among temple servants and dancing community: one, Pernis who were servants of Hindu temples performed masked dance-drama known as zagor; two, Deulis and bavinas who likewise served in temples. Bovinas sat in temples close to temple deity and had semi-priestly duties like fanning the idol, carrying earthen lamps and lighting them for worship. Deulis also played musical instruments but did not accompany calavantas (bailadeiras) during public functions where dance and music was involved. Some of their daughters married, most practiced prostitution or took to pimping (praticam o lenocínio); three, calavantas or naiquines who were performing artists as singers and dancers at socio-religious functions and festivals.\(^{46}\) Their sons were called ganss, murdangueiros, or gaiacas and were musicians (also referred as bailadores in Portuguese records). Amongst daughters of calavantas or naiquines few married, while most practiced prostitution and pimping similar to deulis and bavinas; last, forgentos, or bonddes and cherés were boys whose parents weren’t married as per Hindu rites and included lot of illegitimates too.\(^{47}\) Similarly, such girls were called chêdvans and those who practiced prostitution were known as columbinas.\(^{48}\)

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\(^{44}\) Nascimento Mendonça, Vatsala, (English Translation), Mapusa, (n.d.)

\(^{45}\) Foral of Afonso Mexia (1526) gives denomination of bailadeiras in Capitulo XLVII and in Capitulo XII speaks of temple women that were mancebas de mundo (concubines)

\(^{46}\) Cala or kala is ‘art’ in Sanskrit and vont in Konkani indicates those ‘endowed with’. Calavant basically means performing artists, but it may be remembered that Goa does not have a tradition of classical dance and music.

\(^{47}\) This group also included lot of improdutivos (infertile men) according to A.B. de Bragança Pereira, Etnografia da India Portuguesa – As Civilizaçoes da India, Vol. II (reprint), New Delhi: Asian Educational Services, 1991, pp. 25-45.

\(^{48}\) São os seguintes os jatis (castas) hindus de Goa: Brâmanas (chitpavanas, caradés, pâdhés, zoixix, e gaud-saraswats: smarts, sasticares, bardescares, pednecares, cudaldescares), maratas (militares), vanis
In caste hierarchy bailadeira held a seemingly lowly position not exclusively due to ethnic reason but socio-religious factors. Inter-dining amongst various sub-castes (jatis) indicates levels of isolation solitude practiced in highly stratified society. Inter-caste dining was based on providing service and is not alike family dining or intra-caste dining. Person could dine at house/place of those castes which solicited one’s service and it involved part payment of service rendered. When bailadeira sings, *y amy’m xaky-baji hatai-i / borxik tendduly’m anim tauxim* (we eat a mess of spiced vegetables, with *tendullim* and cucumbers for savories) or *amgely’ m jevonnom / tup y anim lonnim / tup y anim lonnim dada / tup y anim lonnim* (our meal is butter and ghee... butter and ghee, sir... butter and ghee) they seem to be reminding their prospective clients, about need to serve quality food, on festive occasion when their service were requisitioned and rendered. Yet payments for services rendered are at times not high as clients bargain hard. This is illustrated by Konkani proverb *ganddhik na falli, gandd magta kailloli* i.e. buttocks are not even covered, and woman wishes for sweet cakes.

Bailadeira community’s service as performing artists, prostitution and pimping was solicited by others especially dessais (feudal lords). Following dekhni clearly indicates how varied services of bailadeira were sought by dominant sections, the dessais:

- **Fonddecha desigery**
  - *Ek kolvont natsota* at the house of the Desai of Fonddem/Ponda. Hey!
  - *Are vo* This is how she
  - *Ox’m-oxem natsota* (wiggles her hips as she)
  - *Are vo* dances
  - *Ox’m-oxem natsota*

- **Corneticha sadary kolvont**
  - *Ox’m-oxem morhota* this is how naughty girl wiggles.
  - *Are vo* Hey! She lies on the bed.
  - *Pol’ngari nideta* Hey! This is how

*(comerciantes), gourus (servidores dos templos), sonares (ourives), cansares (caldeireiros), mest, que são sutares (carpinteiros) ou lohares (ferreiros), cancanacares ou olares ou boares (fabricantes de manilhas), chimpis (alfaiates), karvis ou gabits (pescadores e marinheiros), gosavis ou zoguis (mendicants), piducares (vendedores de missangas), bandaris ou sudir, e comorpaicos (lavradores de sura), umbares (oleiros), agris ou mit-gauddés (saleiros ou salineiros), gauddés (agricultores), parits ou modvôls (lavadeiros), males ou hajams ou nakhir (barbeiros), melis (azeiteiros), dongores (pastores), goulis (pastores), lingaitas (seita religiosa), gugires (comerciantes), malxis (agricultores), parins, bavins e deulis (serventes dos pagodes), calavantas e ganns ou gaiscas (bailadeiras e músicos), chêdvans e forgentos ou cheddés e bhondés (Prostitutas e bastardos), mahars (farazes), chamares (curtidores). Estas duas últimas são párias (asparchajat), que não podem ter cotnacto com os outras castas. See, A.B. de Bragança Pereira, *Etnografia da India Portuguesa – As Civilizaçoes da India*, Vol. II (reprint), New Delhi: Asian Educational Services, 1991, pp. 25-45.*
Are you oxem lollota (twists as she) rolls.

In above dekhni, services solicited include singing, dancing, and entertaining guests in every possible way, as bailadeira is shown swaying and wiggling her hips, lying on bed and rolling over for pleasure of wedding guests. Besides, bailadeiras too sought service of others especially tailors (who stitched beautiful dresses for them during socio-religious functions), dalits who supplied them with musical instruments, etc. There were also matrimonial relations between bailadeiras and dalits.49

So, pernis dined in houses of those who sought their services like brahmins, marathas, vaishyas and tailors but not vice-versa. Except dalits others did not dine at houses of pernis.50 Similarly, forgentos, bonddes, and cherés dined in houses of other castes except at residences of fishermen, goldsmiths and carpenters. Forgentos, bonddes, and cherés accompanied women of their castes with musical instruments at socio-religious functions. Yet, surprisingly, they were not welcome to dine at place of bavinas, deulis, calavantas, and ganns. This could be due to fact that forgentos, bonddes, and cherés were not allowed to customarily marry girls from amongst bavinas, deulis, calavantas, and ganns. However, Parag Parobo opines that bailadeira community followed its divisions and there were restrictions on inter-dining and each subgroup had its own claims of superiority.51 For instance, calavants’ performing skills attracted upper caste patrons, often considered themselves as ‘high’, although this would not have found acceptance among other subgroups.52 Deulis, bavinas and calavantas or naiquines whose services of singing and dance were in demand and whose presence at socio-religious functions was considered as auspicious could dine at houses of brahmins, marathas, vaishyas, gurous, bangle sellers, potters, fishermen, bhandaris (farmers and toddy-tapers), goldsmiths and blacksmith. However, as amongst pernis, at dwellings of deulis, bavinas and calavantas or naiquines could dine only the dalits. Dalits held a very subservient position in Hindu society who could dine at place of bailadeira community. This indicates that later group was in fact socially very much isolated from caste Hindus.

Inter-marriage amongst various sub-castes of bailadeiras indicates extent to which community was connected in social networks. It is interesting to note that up to beginning of twentieth century sons of bavinas married only with (illegitimate)daughters of brahmins, marathas, vaishyas, agriculturists, toddy-tapers, goldsmiths and blacksmiths as also those from amongst their own caste that did not practice prostitution and pimping. Similarly, gaicas, i.e. sons of calavantes, married (illegitimate)daughters of brahmins, carpenters, vaishyas, goldsmiths, agriculturists, toddy-tapers as also girls from their own caste that did not practice prostitution and pimping. As indicated by A.B. de Bragança Pereira, role of bailadeira community in miscegenation cannot be understated nor can it be fully comprehended.53 Churnings in caste cauldron, made Konkani speakers often wonder aloud: kombo kallo, kombi kalli, tantim koxem

49 Kolvontam y amim / Porvotavelim / Vatto visrunum y amcha / Marvam’ sampol-lilm meaning We are the dancing girls from the holy mountain / We lost our way and ran into a bunch of mhaps. Bailadeiras in above lines indicate that they are trapped in relationship with Mahars (dalits) of Goa.
50 Dalits of Goa include only two castes mhaps and chamars. Dekhni Kolvontam y Amim Porvotavelim / Vatto visrunum y amcha / Marvam’ sampol-lilm tells about bailadeiras of Chandranath Buthnath Temple (Paroda) complex who lost their way and ran into a bunch of mhaps.
52 Ibid.
dhovem? (cock is black and hen too, then how is egg white?). If ethnicity and caste of parents is same than how is progeny dissimilar? Caste is determined through birth and from father’s side. Only amongst bailadeiras, with exception to rule, caste was determined from mother’s side probably to ensure service of community for generations to dominant sections. ‘Mi Konn?’ (Who am I?), autobiography of Rajaram Painginkar (illegitimate) son of a Brahmin widow turned bailadeira discusses inner identity conflict that community and its progeny suffered in caste dominated Goan society.\textsuperscript{54} Only genome mapping of community may give scientific answers to questions raised. Dekhni ‘vaingem cazar zata munn’ sings of marriage among bailadeiras discussing feelings of jealousy and envy amongst other community girls.

\begin{verbatim}
Vaingem cazar zata munn
For eggplant is getting married,
Vaingem cazar zata munn
For eggplant is getting married;
Misangen tambrhem kelam tondo
Chili has reddened her face,
Misangen tambrhem kelam tondo
Chili has reddened her face;
Poddolean orxem kelam sondd
Snake gourd has turned up her nose,
Poddolean orxem kelam sondd
Snake gourd has turned up her nose
Bobran getilam boleponn
And pumpkin has resigned herself
(slumped down in resignation),
Bobran getilam boleponn
pumpkin has resigned herself.
Vernencha tolleant
Temple servant has promised to come to Dulgem’s wedding
Fulol’mm y ek sallok
with a baby.
Dulgealy’ cazra
Keullean geun yet’mm mul-II’mm
Ballok
In the lake at vernem/verna a lotus has bloomed.
At’mm tum, at’mm tum
dance with the temple guy
At’mm tum, at’mm tum
At’mm tum nats go Dulgea
\end{verbatim}

Keulleach’ barabori

It is not possible to identify origin of unfortunate caste. Legend has accorded to bailadeira divine lineage, having descended from *apsaras* or nymphs.\(^{55}\) Concept of *apsaras* and cult of chastity as eulogized in *Vedas* might have induced parents to dedicate their daughters to temple gods. Mythical origin was ploy to cover up aberration of human actions and conduct of subjecting bailadeiras to life where they were forced to practice prostitution and pimping sanctified by religion.\(^{56}\) Konkani proverb *adinch bail asli nachri, ani tiecha paiank bandhleo ghagri* indicating ‘damsel was frolic by birth, now tinkling bells are tied to her feet,’ is intelligible against backdrop that girls of bailadeira community had fewer career options than follow family traditions. Trinkets were tied to girls, initiating as performing artist perhaps against their wish. Often young girls from community were forced to follow caste specific mores by mothers in highly feudalized society. Konkani maxims *xastram sangta ani porlant agta* (recites scriptures and befouls his own heart) and *bhattachem musoll addveim zata, ubheim zata* (pounder of bhatt is either horizontal or vertical) shows wavering nature of society’s conscience keepers, the bhatts (Hindu priests), who were hand in glove with dominant feudal elements in perpetuating prostitution and pimping, sanctified by religion.

History attests to fact that prostitution has had in antiquity a religious character and associated with hieratic and profane dance. Religion of Greco-Roman civilizations as also those of Egypt, Near East and Judeo-Christian heritage attests to fact that prostitution was closely associated with religious tradition juxtaposed with fertility cult.\(^{57}\) Amongst Hebrews there were women (generally outsiders) with appellations of *zona*, *zara*, *nakria*, *kedescha*, and carrying functions similar to bailadeiras of India. Dramas of ancient India refer to priestesses dancing at temples in honour of gods similar to hierodules amongst Greeks. In India, during reign of Chandragupta Maurya, dancers took part in court ceremonies and enjoyed privileged position. In Mauryan period bailadeiras served in secret service of the emperor. As will be seen later Portuguese too used services of these people not too often for state activities. So reads a Konkani proverb: *camarachea kustar kolvontancho khell*. Calavants were made to entertain at municipal council’s expense. They were also used for other state activities in times of need.

Institution of bailadeiras came into existence during period between decline of Buddhism and expansion of Islam in India. There are evidences to indicate that by Gupta period devadasi system was taking roots in India.\(^{58}\) It was era of Dharmashastras and Puranas, period of exotic

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\(^{55}\) According to Ramayana when devas (gods) and asuras were churning the ocean in search of ambrosia (nectar) – elixir of life that would bestow immortality – when an apsara emerged from ocean and started dancing. Dance of apsara was so enchanting that devas and asuras forgot their work and started fighting for her possession. Emerging victorious devas took apsara to paradise to god Indra who ordered her to dance to accompaniment of gandarvas (celestial musicians). One of the gods was charmed by apsara’s singing and dance, fell in love with her and a girl was born of their union. Unable to keep the girl in heaven due to her mortal origin the child was handed over to charge of temple priest for upbringing and education. This girl is considered as first devadassi from young age girl sang and danced in temple before the idol. She grew up and was loved and gave birth to seven girls who were taught to dance at religious festivals and three boys who played musical instruments on such occasion. See, Louis Jacolliot, *Voyage au pays des boyadères*, Paris: Dentu, 1873, pp. 1-379; R. E. Enthoven, *The Tribes and Castes of Bombay Presidency*, Vol II. pp. 130-131.


\(^{58}\) Subramanyamst Padma, “The temple as the focal centre of Dance” In Kusummanjal G. Sivaramrumurthi Commemorative volume, p. 140 as quoted in V. R. Mitragotri V.R. Mitragotri, *A socio-
and secret worships of reaction against liberal traditions of Buddhism/Jainism from seventh and twelfth centuries of our era. With development of *puranic* religion and regular worship of new gods Shiva, Vishnu and their avatars along with their consorts, big temples came into existence all over the country including Goa. These divinities were symbols of romanticism and nobility, who substituted earlier Aryan gods like Indra – masculine, warlike and consumer of intoxicating beverage *soma*. Pleasures of new gods were diverse, they liked ablutions, decorations, flowers, soft seats, fruit, milk and, above all, music and dance. Hindu devotees considered god as living entity offering comforts which feudal lords enjoyed. Inscriptions from neighbouring Karnataka refer to *angabhoga* and *rangabhoga*. Giving bath to deity (offering *abhisheksaka*) applying sandal paste (*gandha*), offering flowers, essence, etc. is *angabhoga*. These were applied to body of gods/idols (anga) hence these were part of *angabhoga*. Dance and music concerts held in temple were *rangabhoga*. It was for pleasure of these gods, to entertain them with song and dance that, for first time, courtesans were employed in temples.

Over centuries, bailadeiras included either those born in respective caste-group and had no choice but obliged to follow profession of mothers or young girls who were offered to temple-gods by their parents sometimes even before they were born as fulfillment of vow. This was rather a ploy, to avoid upbringing cost and paying for dowry at marriage, as was customary in society. In Goa, widows who opted not to commit sati also joined ranks of temple servants. Proverb asking derisively: *boddkek kukum ani vanzak kattboll kiteak*? (Why does head-shaven widow want vermilion and barren woman wish puerperal food?), shows how community held widows and child-less women in very low esteem and disdain. Use of vermilion on forehead was a marker of married women’s civil status which practice had to be abandoned when she became a widow. Widows had very miserable existence with no role in socio-religious matters. In fact their presence at socio-religious functions was viewed as inauspicious. Such women probably retired to temple complexes and offered services to prospective clients for survival. Another saying *randd ghov korta aplea sukhak, ganv papi* (when widow takes other man for her pleasure, village is sinful) shows that Konkani society scorned widow remarriage. It also points that some widows who did not commit sati had other men in their lives. Probably such widows joined lot of bailadeiras as coping mechanism to deal with solitude and escape familial isolation. In late seventeenth century Malsa-devi temple of Verna sheltered widows who did not wish to commit sati.

Often, women anxious to have successful childbirth made vow of dedicating to service of temple if child born was a girl. Girls born during inauspicious occasions were abandoned by superstitious parents and given to temples. In Indian society which was highly superstitious, a fifth girl or those born during periods when planetary position was considered inauspicious or with certain mystical birth marks were likewise given to temple. Parents, who did not want such unfortunate girls, could donate them to gods who they believed had power to restore proper balance. Sometimes adulterous wives were banished from households and retired to temple precincts in order to reform and joined band of bailadeiras. Moreover, in times of

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59 Chindanandmurthy M. op. cit., p. 183.

60 Chindanandmurthy M. op. cit., p. 183.

61 In similar fashion parents in Europe sent daughters to convents to be nuns.


hunger and starvation, in ancient and medieval period, poor parents, often, traded children and girls were bought by temple authorities to function as bailadeiras. In poem Vatsalá by Nascimento Mendonça, published posthumously, a young bailadeira Vatsalá is pensive and...her memory lingers, like a sinister and bloody wing, to shadow of night when mother sold her to a Brahmin merchant. Vatsalá was barely fifteen. Trembling, eyes full of hate, and lips fraught with acrimony she bursts out:

\[
\text{My mother gave me odious scepter of vice;}
\]

\[
\text{I was very young, opening like a lotus,}
\]

\[
\text{would that she gave me poison and cilice.}
\]

Once sold, she became ‘property’ of temple, priests, trustees, of village and for villagers; and she laments her fate:

\[
\text{In vain did I dream a limpid and beautiful dream}
\]

\[
\text{I was born for love... what has happened to my dream?}
\]

\[
\text{What has happened Mahadev (Shiva) to my blooming rose-garden?}
\]

With her adolescence troubled, her rose-garden trampled and defiled she cries aloud,

\[
\text{I had face of moon and a smiling heart,}
\]

\[
\text{full of sounds and the golden sun that exorcises.}
\]

\[
\text{My heart died in a frightful storm...}
\]

Though she holds responsible her mother for giving her ‘odious scepter of vice’ it was karma that made her follow caste-specific mores. Though she was born for love, her beautiful dream is scorched too early in life by society as she wails ‘my heart died in a frightful storm...’ The dekhni Sokanny’m Furhem Uttun Cherh’m Muj’m (Rising up early in morning, my girl...) outlines anxiety of another young girl when she sees her tormentor:

Sokanny’m furhem uttun cherh’m muj’m

San-nim mat-talem

Sannam sannam sannam (sannam) sa!

Rising up early in morning, girl was sweeping floor (and this is how it sounded: Sannam sannam sannam sannam sa!). No sooner did she see me, she hid inside the broom!

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64 Vatsala was a beautiful temple-girl who according to tradition was destined to prostitution. She was symbolically married to hibiscus plant. She soon realizes impurity of her life and dreams of a life of pure love. Scorning gifts and lubric advances of feudal lords her attention is drawn to a rishi in forest stretched on tiger skin absorbed in mystic contemplation and meditation. She resolves to conquer his love. However, rishi remains un-swayed by her advances. Frustrated in her attempts, she poisons milk in his begging bowl and rishi dies. Vatsala at last feels vindicated and she kisses dead rishi and jumps on funeral pyre and is consumed by fire along with him. In committing sati along with rishi she attempts to perhaps change her karma.
Tem maka deknam furhem

San-nintum nipolem

Sokanny’m furhem uttun cherh’m muj’m

Vatllleo ganxtalem

Sannam sannam sannam (sannam) sa!

Tem maka deknam furhem

Vatllintum nipolem

Sokanny’m furhem uttun cherh’m muj’m

Tambio ganxtalem

Sannam sannam sannam (sannam) sa!

Tem maka deknam furhem

Tambiantum nipolem

Cherh’m Cherh’m Cherh’m kumparilem

Cherh’m cumparilem

Chintiolyl’m kamm zaly’m ga mugelem!

Rising up early in morning, girl was scrubbing the dishes (Sannam sannam sannam sa!).

No sooner did she see me, she hid behind those dishes!

No sooner did she see me, she hid inside the pot!

The girl, my mate’s girl, my comrade’s girl.

I got from her ‘what I wanted/wished’

(lit. the work I had thought of took place)!

In above song, man comes looking for the girl time and again. She is often found doing domestic chores, dreads his approach and attempts to hide unsuccessfully, but, her work gives her away. ‘Sannam sannam sannam sannam sa...’ sound of floor being swept or utensils being cleaned is also indicative of bailadeira’s walk with trinkets round their ankles. Were the exquisite jewelry and trinkets that bailadeira wore just to beautify them? Or was it to identify and locate them in crowds, temple complexes, village squares and by lanes? Taking advantage of his friendship with mother’s paramour, (lascivious) man exploits young lass again and again in broad daylight and boasts chintiolyl’m kamm zaly’m ga mugelem (got from her ‘what I wanted’). Girls’ defense mechanism of avoiding her tormentor by immersing herself in daily chores is of no help. Referring to Konkani proverb avoi nastem cheddum pottarem (orphaned girl has a big stomach) Antonio Pereira states that many an orphaned girls were often desecrated and defiled. Lines of Vatsalá, in which a bailadeira bemoans that it is ‘golden sun that exorcises...my heart died in a frightful storm’, become significant. For it is exploitation of community girls in broad daylight and sanctified by religion.

When did bailadeiras make an appearance in Goa? In an inscription of Southern Silahara king Rattaraja who was closely associated with Goa, bailadeiras were called danikas. There are references to courtesans in inscription of Goa Kadambas. Tambur inscription records about


streets meant for courtesans called suligere (sule means a prostitute in Kannada). Land grants of Kadambas of Goa and solitary inscription of Southern Silahara king Rattaraja indicate that bailadeiras were not treated as menial servants but treated with ‘respect’ as talented artists with freedom of sex. During, Silahara-Kadamba period they might have enjoyed high status in society. However, after downfall of the Kadambas and subsequently during rule of Vijayanagara it seems that Saraswats became mahajans (temple trustees) of important temples. From then onwards, period of degradation and exploitation of bailadeira community began and this continued till establishment of Portuguese rule in Goa.67

Bailadeiras took part in religious dramas (nataks) performing role of both sexes with ease. One interesting representations is about pastoral scene of gaullan-calá, which only bailadeiras could perform depicting scenes of Lord Krishna with pastoral community. Many young girls were good at needlework executing embroidery, crochet, cross-stitch work, etc. Some excelled in making artificial flowers and glass-bead work. Propérica Correia Afonso tells that she once saw a glass-bead piece depicting Maratha King Shivaji on a horse, done with very high excellence. On whole they displayed good sense of art in embroidery work for their dresses.68

Bailadeiras possessed landed property denominated as miras, inam and namoxin reserved by comunidades (village communities) for their sustenance as temple servants. They possessed these lands from time immemorial as indicated by Afonso de Mexia in his Foral of 1526 (Capitulo XII) which provided for giving uncultivated lands in each village to temple women (mancebas do mundo) that offered their services to village. It may be noted that agricultural land allotted to such women could not be taken away so long as they served village. These lands passed from parents to children and grandchildren within same caste but with a rider. Whenever temple servants stopped or discontinued to offer services to village then said agricultural land was allotted to others that agreed to provide such services as mancebas do mundo (society girls). Communidades tied these women to land by obligating them to offer service for generations in order to enjoy fruits of estates allotted to them. F.N. Xavier informs that in 1824 all the immovable property was divided equally amongst offspring (including daughters) by bailadeiras. In fact women from bailadeira community deserved larger share of property. For, it is they who passed through grind to earn daily bread. Portrayal of bailadeiras, in various publications up to early twentieth century shows women of the caste in forefront as performing artist and otherwise with their men-folk being side-heroes as music accompanist and pimps.

A very interesting aspect sidestepped by most writers and poets is bitter reality encapsulated in proverb zondirio geleo, chin’nam urlim (ankle trinkets are gone, but marks remain). Trinkets worn by bailadeira community were a marker of identity. However, with menopause same had to be discarded and with it was blanked only painful means of livelihood earmarked for community. Zondirio geleo or ‘ankle trinkets are gone’ points to reality that women retired; however, chin’nam urlim signifies that physical, social and emotional pain and hurt persisted. How were such women ‘retired’ from their profession to survive? Popular saying, cheddi mhatari zaleari, potivrata zata? (can a harlot be called chaste in old age?), and its variants shigmo sorlo, kovta urlim (shigmo is over, songs remained), zagr sompl, kovnam urlim (folk-drama is over, songs remained), ratr lhan, suong bhov (night is short, drama is long), and hing gelo, ponh hingacho vas urlo (asafetida is gone, but its smell remains) indicate survival was

excruciating indeed. Asafetida was used extensively as birth control measure in medieval period. However, it was not hundred percent effective and children were born, sometimes, with deformities and had to be cared for. Bailadeiras were perhaps only community within caste system which had enforced retirement and no retirement benefits whatsoever. Coping strategies evolved, indicate they were caught between devil and deep sea. Fearing loss of landed estates allotted by comunidades in lieu of service rendered, daughters were initiated (or forced) into same activity.

It is within this perspective that women of caste preferred not to marry their daughters and from young age forced them to follow family tradition for survival as exemplified by oft repeated Konkani proverb avoi morta dhuvekodden, dhuv morta ganvchea minddakodden i.e. while mother dots her daughter, later enamors her paramour. Young girls were initiated through a simulated marriage ceremony called shens - a ritual ceremony through which girls were ritually tied to temple by means of marriage to an object, usually a hibiscus flower. Shens consisted of an offering by an original settler of village (gaunkar), of a bettle fruit pierced by sword and coconut. Often, the man who made offering earned right to enter into a union with the girl, which, however, took place only after she attained puberty. Temple priest also performed a marriage ceremony for the girl, using usual wedding ritual. A woman, usually an older bailadeira officiated as bridegroom in the ceremony. At puberty there was another ceremony known as hath lavni (touching by hand) which generally culminated in sexual consummation.69 Dekhni At-launnem zalem dada sings about such ceremony which was prevalent among bailadeiras.

At-launnem zalem

Mag direitu

Revezo magtam

Cuxuxu firngi

faravola

José Pereira, Micael Martins and António da Costa while stating that ‘tapping on the shoulder,’ ‘direct’ and ‘contrary’ dealing of cards are all terms of a card game, express inability to decode the song. In all probability the song exemplifies that bailadeiras were considered as ‘objects’ of pleasure by dominant community. Mothers obliged daughters to follow tradition of caste for advantages that accrued. Nascimento Mendonça captures emptiness of such ceremony in following manner:

Put kumkum (vermillion) on your forehead,

Dress the most beautiful sari...

Do you know that it is the feast day?

But I do not see your chest throbbing.

---

Young *bailadeira* is adorned for occasion but she has no true delight. For she has more fears than answers.

> You are trembling silly
> In tears of some hidden pain...

For, who will empathize with her? She is born a bailadeira and will die as such.

> Who for you will suffer and brood,
> Will be like a God in pain.
> ... ... ...
> Your groom? The rubious hibiscus.
> What else would you desire?
> ... ... ...
> Mother-in-law you will ne’r have,
> Nor will you in pain bring forth.
> Beautiful bride of a shrub,
> Lass that the world admires!
> Entwine your elegant bust,
> To the most beautiful Lie.

This was stark reality for community girls. Life was but a ‘beautiful lie’. They had neither any in-laws nor husband to call their own. Neither was their progeny considered legitimate. As grown-ups probably some became highly accomplished (*senhoras de grandes cabedais*), emigrated to neighbouring kingdoms, where they were well paid by *rajahs* and *nawabs* in other parts of India. Bailadeira Baita Naiquinim of Nadora in her will and testament declared to have estate in Bombay with one Mr. George, an English General. Their children were educated in England and as such she bequeathed her property to her niece Caxi, daughter of Baita Naiquinim’s brother Gopi. Community was talented in performing arts, only saving grace, for otherwise their life was very sad and lugubrious. Their artistic talent perhaps exercised a fascination for poetry of those who took bailadeira as theme of their composition.\(^70\)

4. **Lyrics of Indo-Portuguese poets on bailadeira**

Theme of bailadeira has inspired many a poets to pen verses describing their troubles and way of life. Floriano Barreto refers to her as ‘singer... daughter of disgrace... noxious flower which inebriates society’. While Floriano portrays her as a temptress, in Vatsalá Nascimento Mendonça depicts bailadeira as ‘young and beautiful... tender and ravishing’ wishing to be delivered by a Rishi whom she enamors, from wretched life of being tormented sexually by ravenousness of ‘beasts’ who came to drink water from her spring. Rishi, though is unmoved in

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\(^{70}\) Ibid.
his contemplation of life and search for ultimate truth. Impatience gets better of her and in
delirium she poisons Rishi’s bowl of milk, committing sati on his funeral pyre to free herself
from karma’s cruel fate. In other sonnets of various Indo-Portuguese poets bailadeira is
addressed as ‘fallen star,’ ‘disgraced woman’ ‘lethal woman,’ etc.

However, these perceptions seem to be coloured by christocentric dominance of the
Portuguese. For instance, Lino de Abreu, labels bailadeira as ‘infiel’ i.e., ‘unfaithful and disloyal’
for following mother’s profession (mister da sua mae). Maduvra who falls in love with Rada (a
bailadeira) cannot come to terms with ‘other’ way of life and commits suicide. And, Rada in
order to prove her ‘loyalty’ follows her lover by committing suicide too, so that they are united
in death if not in life. Earlier, when Estado was formidable state powers was used not to
reform and make life meaningful to bailadeiras, but banish them in order to ‘save society from
influence of their immorality’. Alvara of 12 October, 1700, bailadeiras were banished from Goa
and if anyone was found in Velhas Conquistas (Salcete, Bardez and Ilhas) they were punished
with death. Any Christian found entertaining them was punished with fine of 1000 xerafins and
nine years jail. Moreover, if any Hindu was found with bailadeira then he lost his xendi (tuft),
was publicly humiliated and sent to jail for ten years. This prohibition lasted up to 1804.

Mariano Gracias describes life of bailadeiras in some of his poems. In A Indiana, Mariano
Gracias eulogizes beauty and artistically talented attractiveness of bailadeira in glowing terms.
In another sonnet O Serão, two dancing girls Abolem and Dudha discuss about their love for
Ravindra while doing embroidery. Abolem loves a fellow villager Ravindra. Dudha too likes
Ravindra’s qualities but realizes that love is indeed frail, like a thread or yarn. This was reality
which many a bailadeira had to face. For them true love was a fantasy at best or worse a bitter
dream. In his collection of poems Terra de Rajahs, Mariano Gracias approaches life of
bailadeira whose beauty and attractiveness he sings praise of:

Formosas bailadeiras de olhos belos
Com lótus de esmeraldas nos cabelos
Beautiful bailadeiras with charming eyes
With emerald lotus in the hair

Mariano Gracias deals with life of dancing community in Terra de Rajahs, in poems Bailadeira,
Dança de Bailadeira and Sundorem. In Bailadeira, Mogrem is described as endowed with
enchanting charm and ‘flaunting looks (which) sparkle in passion…’ Mogrem is femme fatal
whose physical features and attractiveness is cause of perdition of others. In relating Mogrem
to a ‘mulher fatal que só a si adora / mulher que ri, mulher que nunca chora / Bailadeira,
mulher que nunca ama!’ i.e. woman who adores herself… that laughs and giggles and never
cries… bailadeira is woman that never loves, Mariano Gracias seems to be repeating Konkani
adage ‘hanste bailek and roddtea dadleak patieun noie’ (trust not a giggling woman and crying
man). For bailadeiras following caste tradition was critical to survival and so little or no time to
brood over lost love. So goes another Konkani maxim ‘pancham usurpiancho ghovlo kitlosa ge,
maim, togtola’ i.e. Oh, mother, how long will two-penny paramour last. Following dekhni aptly
illustrates how men with meager savings opted for a night’s enjoyment that left them with
hole in their pockets:

Kainch karann nam
Morhkeam’ tandull nam
Potta’ lagoly’ buko
Y atam y anim vosum’ ya re
For no reason at all,
There’s no rice in the pot.
I am hungry.
Let us now go and call on the harlots.
Baiku’ mellunko
The bawd charges a rupee a night.

Baiku rupoi ditai ratiko
Do stay one night with us,

Baiku y amgery tum y ek vellu ravo
call girl.

In dekhnī satti ozranch’m bens muje adinom a lover is eager to part a third of his property worth sixty thousand rupees to bailadeira Boiru.

Satti ozranch’m bens muje adinom
I own property worth sixty thousand.

Sonn’m Sonn’m Sonn’m Sonn’m sal
(Here my wealth jingle – Sonn’m Sonn’m Sonn’m Sonn’m sal).

Tazo tivantto tuka go diinom
I will give you a third of that.

Sonn’m Sonn’m Sonn’m Sonn’m sal!
Besides, I will support you.

Ago Boiru tuje vinnem
Hey there, hey there! Look, see how I have reddened my eyes through weeping for love of you!

Suk maka nam

Men in life of bailadeiras are but not few. Often bailadeiras are perceived to have desire for easy money. This was far from truth. In above song it is the lover who has reddened his eyes weeping for love of bailadeira ready to forego a third of his wealth. In another dekhnī a widower is blamed for ituly’m ozranch’m bens randdugean hailem eka ozra i.e. all property worth thousands the scoundrel let go for a paltry thousands! The following dekhnī Tenddulechim Tenddulim paints a completely different picture of bailadeira’s ‘love’ for money:

Cor: Tenddulechim tenddulim
Chorus: Tenddulis of tendduli creeper are twelve,

Bara ga deva deva
tendduli creeper are twelve,

Tenddulechim tenddulim
oh god, oh god! Tenddulis of tendduli creeper are twelve.

Bara
My lord is not at home,

Muzo poti naim-im gara
oh god, oh god!

Ga deva deva
My lord is not at home.

Poti naim-im gara
They were thrown into my lap,

Muja hankeantum gatulim
oh god, oh god!

Ora ga deva deva
They were thrown into my lap.

hankeantum gatulim ora

The bailadeira in the song has no husband at home and is yet left with 12 children to tend to. It was in fact a tough profession for women to follow when they were left with so many children that needed care and upbringing. This explains deep anguish of young bailadeira sole bread-winner, when she asks her mother ‘how long will two-penny paramour last?’

In his sonnet Dança de Bailadeira, Mariano Gracias also chronicles about unfortunate fate of love of several bailadeiras like Zoivontém, Zaiù, Mogrem, Cassy, Laxmé, Ximbú and Xiuntém. Life of bailadeiras is only to dance, sing, make love to, and, entertain those who wished for
their services. When viewed from perspective of bailadeiras what Laxmé one of the bailadeiras mumbles is an eye opener. She wails *nunca nasce para freira / na minha casta a mulher / pois quem nasceu bailadeira / bailadeira há-de morrer*, that is, never is a girl born amongst bailadeiras destined to be a sadhvi/religious. For those born as bailadeiras die as such. And so Laxmé wonders aloud: *por onde passo armo a tenda / para vender o meu amor... / artigo de compra e venda / sou de todo o comprador* (where to pitch tent / to sell my love / ’am item girl / to all who can buy).

In poem *Nevrose de Amor*, Mariano Gracias, narrates pains of Sundorem, who early in life happens to be despoiled by one Ensó. Sundorem later falls in love with Raiú. While Raiú gives her all sensual pleasures what Sundorem desires is companionship (perhaps lifelong). Her dream for a life-long partner is never fulfilled and she cries: *E quedo-me assim tristonho / nesta torturo constant / porque o amor é como o sonho / dura apenas um instante*. Sundorem strongly desires for true love which remains a daydream, fleeting and lasts only an instant. She waits for Raiú dressed for occasion like a princess. It’s past midnight and Raiú does not come. All desolate she flings her jewelry crying ‘am unfortunate’ and bemoans her luck sobbing uncontrollably ‘minha dor infiada’ (my pain is lasting). In a fit of despondency she undresses and throws her beautiful garment away crying ‘despida, é muito mais linda!’ (Naked, I am much more beautiful!). This was poetic reality and the poet makes it dawn on Sundorem that she is only an object for satisfying carnal pleasures of dominant sections of society. In similar manner following dekhni ‘*Ge Ge Ge Ge Ge*’ exemplifies how a bailadeira offers her ornaments to one of her admirer, who refuses to have anything except kiss her endearingly.
Cor 2: Maka naka go

Lover: I don’t want it. No,

Maka naka go

I don’t want it (I don’t want them)!

E muja poleatso beiju

Dancer: A kiss from my cheek,

Ge ga saiba

do please take it, sir!

Cor 3: Maka zai-i go

Lover: Yes, I want it,

Maka zai-i go

yes I do!

The bailadeira is aware that onlooker is actually gazing lasciviously at her from top to bottom. As his gaze moves from head to toe she tests his feeling by offering him instead flowers, nose ring, necklace, bangles and anklets, which he steadfastly refuses to accept. Finally she offers poleatso beiju (peck on cheeks) which offer he readily laps, indicating what his inner desires actually were, when seizing her up.

Floriano Barreto’s composition *A Bailadeira da Índia* is a study in contrast of two dissimilar aspects of dancing community. On one hand she fascinates and seduces romantic imagination of a poet. On other hand in actual social context she is seen as woman who is disgraced, full of vice and ill-fame. He suggests that society should perhaps never insult a woman that falls for it is not comprehensible for common folks to understand burden under which poor soul groans. Yet, the poet suggests that for bailadeira ‘vice’ is way of earning daily bread.

How does society view bailadeira?

O’ bailadeira da Índia, ó filha da desgraça,

Oh, singer/dancer of India, oh, daughter of disgrace

Ó venenosa flôr que perfumas a praça

Oh, poisonous flower which perfumes a square

Every girl child is born pure and innocent, yet, it is law of karma that flings temple dancer to ignominy. It is religion that makes of temple dancer a slave. Occasion of dance in a village and at temple squares are few and far between in a year making it hard for bailadeira to make honest living and remain chaste. Konkani speaker was aware of adage *chuddo tantunt lipta muddo* i.e. wifedom is safe cover for adultery. Yet, no Konkani protagonist would take as his wife and companion a woman that dances at public square. Floriano Barreto considers bailadeira a victim of society that allows its fateful fall because of operation of law of karma. Bailadeira are not to be seen with contempt, rather, compassion and it is society which needs to reflect and reform.

De chorar, de chorar sobre a tua amargura

From weeping, from crying over your bitterness

P’ra te purificar na agua lustral do pranto

Purify you in the lustrous water from weeping

E fazer-te depois tão virginal, tão pura,

And make you again equally virginal and pure as a lily...

Como um lyrio...
Paulino Dias who refers to bailadeira as *mulher tragic* (actress tragedienne) has penned a long poem *Deusa de Bronze* describing Bhavani who is in love with cobra-capelo (hooded cobra) and finally succumbs to its venomous bite. Poet wonders if anybody in society at all snivel’s at digressed ways of bailadeira. When poem was first published it was critically appraised in local press, indicating that it was susceptible to multiple interpretations. It is set in form of dialogue between poet himself and Bhavani (a bailadeira) who is raised to level of a goddess (*deusa*). As seen in following verse Bhavani reminiscences her birth cursing her fate that she has been breastfed in cruelty and with that has extinguished her heart’s devoutness. In her veins flows blood of lions. She curses her father for impregnating her mother and at that very moment exiling her to a life of bizarre torments. Verse goes like this:

Deu-me um leite cruel com que a piedade morre,
Exilou-me a um país de torturas estranhas...
Eu tive o coração das rochas de basalto

Fed me milk with which extinguished piety
Exiled me to a land of strange tortures...
I have a heart hard of feelings (lit. heart hard as basalt)

Society treats with disdain and arrogance bordering on superciliousness unknowingly and not wishing to show any compassion towards her unfortunate life, condemning to savor dark fate. It does not matter that bailadeiras have pernicious name when in fact for ages community has been condemned to a cursed existence. For Paulino Dias, bailadeira is a woman ruined, and ruined by society, she is not fatal. She is embodiment of unfathomable contradiction of love and hate, enchanting suavity and tumultuous despair. Disdain and despondency co-exists with a certain degree of pride in her. For Paulino Dias *bailadeira* is in fact a woman of forlorn incongruity.

5. **Dessais, bailadeiras and dekhni**

From above discussion it is evident that bailadeiras were at service of dominant sections of the society, entertaining them and begetting children out of wedlock. Portuguese when they acquired, in second half of eighteenth century were obliged to accept terms as often dictated by feudal lords including their customs and traditions as well. Moreover, Estado was held to ransom by insurrection of feudal lords umpteen times, most infamous being that of Dipu Rane (1852-55), Khustoba Rane (1869-71) and Dada Rane (1895-97). Evidently feudal lords had stranglehold on socio-economic dynamics of region. Numerous dekhnis indicate that bailadadeiras were at the back and call of these dominant feudal elements the dessais.

*Aga desia muja mama*

*Tuka kol vont fuinchem zai-i*

*mujem naum-om sundory’m bai ga*

*mujem naum-om sundory’ bai-i Oh my uncle, Desai Sir!*

*Which of these dancing girls do you fancy?*

*My name is Miss Sundorem, Sir.*

*My name is miss sundorem*

In above verse dessais were free to choose from array of bailadeira those they wished for the night. This is also illustrated by another famous dekhni Aum Saiba Peltorhi Voitam. Credit for popularizing it goes to Lourenco Henrique L. Dias, leader of the Banda Nacional da Salcete, who died around 1930. His band was in great demand at upper class weddings, especially for the ‘contradanses de honra’. Aum Saiba Peltorhi Voitam was introduced as one of these
‘contradanses’ at catholic wedding, probably that of Prazeres da Costa (‘Musmbikar’ i.e. the Mozambican), in early year of twentieth century, under title ‘Bailados do Concao’ (Dances of Konkan). It was later published under title by composer Carlos Eugenio Ferreira at Casa Rangel, Bastora, in 1926. The deknni’s probable date is therefore last decades of nineteenth century.

\[
\text{Aum saiba peltorhi voita} \\
\text{Damulea lognank voitam} \\
\text{Paiantulim painzonn’ m ditam} \\
\text{Tariry voichi vatto dakoi} \\
\text{Atantulea pattuleo ditam} \\
\text{Tariry voichi vatto dakoi} \\
\text{Golleantuly’ gollsory’ ditam} \\
\text{Tariry voichi vatto dakoi} \\
\text{Nakantulim noti ditam}
\]

\[
\text{Tariry voichi vatto dakoi}
\]

\[
\text{Maka saiba vatto dakoi} \\
\text{Maka saiba vatto kollonam} \\
\text{Damulea mattvant kolvontantso} \\
\text{fell/mell vo}
\]

\[
\text{Damulea mattvant kolvontantso} \\
\text{fellu/mellu} \quad \text{I am going to the old bank, Sir,}
\]

\[
\text{I am going to Damu’s wedding.} \\
\text{I will give you the anklets from my feet. Please show me the way to the ferry.} \\
\text{I will give you the bracelets from my wrists. Please show me the way to the ferry.} \\
\text{I will give you the necklace from my neck. Please show me the way to the ferry.} \\
\text{I will give you my nose-stud, Sir} \\
\text{Please show me the way to the ferry.}
\]

\[
\text{Please show me the way} \\
\text{I know not the way}
\]

\[
\text{Kalvantas dance at Damu’s wedding} \\
\text{Kalvantas dance at Damu’s wedding}
\]
In dekhni Aum Saiba Peltorhi Voitam the dancing girl has been invited for Damu’s wedding and is anxious to reach on time. Occasion as this were few and far between in any year and she cannot afford to miss for she will lose her day’s earnings. She is eager to find her way to the ferry-point as ferry-men are agents to ferry them across for such occasions as seen in following dekhni Borieche tari / kolvontam darhi dada / kolvontam darhi (send the dancing girls to Borim ferry, sir, send the dancing girls there). Another famous dekhni is Kuxttoba narrating exploits of Khustoba during his rebellion in 1869-71.

Kuxttoba

Miraxi Indiestso
Terroru Gointso
Conflit povatso
Inimig bottatso!
Aik ge y aka
Atam kitem sangum tuka
Bettol’m mujem odruztt
Bettol’m mujem kopal
Boguncha’ Arsenal!”
‘Are muja Ori/Hori
Muja paianch’ geleai kati

Zain aum zain
Zatinum bhanddari
Kapinaxleary gountti!”
’Goiam oche vattery
Vankrheo-tinkrheo mero
Juizacha sent’san
Bottache rojen
Paiam’ galeai sankllo!”
‘Ai, damike sunttun
Bottachi gountti re kapin!”
Bottako mal-lo munn y aple garant
Tsoukox’ pavoili sogle garant
Ofisy (oficio) pattoili fisicalank
Kuxttoba’ galunk y Arsenalant Kuttoba,

India’s heir,
Goa’s terror,
cause of conflict among people,
Brahmin priest’s mortal enemy!
Hear me, elder sister!
What can I tell you?

I have met my misfortune; I have met my fate (lit. forehead) to suffer the humiliation of the Arsenal!

Oh, my dear Hari,
Skin of my feet has peeled off.
May my caste not be Bhandari
if I do not hack off that head!

On the road to Goa,
ridges of fields are zigzagged.

By the judge’s verdicts,
by the Brahmin priest’s permission,
they have clamped my feet in chains.

Oh! By breaking out of the prison, I shall cut off the Brahmin priest’s head!

Because he had killed the Brahmin priest in his own house,
they carried out the search in every village. They issued an order to the officials

To throw kuxttoba into
Arsenal’s cell

Story of ‘poetic and heroic Khustoba’ revolt as described by contemporary poet Frederico Diniz d’Ayalla (1860-1923), is narrated by latter when he says that a bhatt (Brahmin priest) had stained Kushtoba’s family’s honor by raping his brother’s widow, in about 1868. There are other versions to the story. However, Kushtoba vowed that he would avenge himself, and looked for an opportunity to punish the shameless Brahmin. The bhatt, in order to see himself free from Kushtoba’s threat, instead suborned witness to impute a crime of some sort to his enemy slanderously by alleging that they had seen Kushtoba and his father murder someone in deep woods. Person - three in number, as required by law - were not wanting who, moved by indignation against sacrilegious man who threatened to lay hands on person of the priest, agreed to cooperate with impudent Brahmin’s contemptible plot. Kushtoba and his father, with chained feet, groaned for long in prison, being condemned to hard labor for an imaginary crime.

The above dekhni narrates how Kushtoba broke his fetters and disappeared. After a few days, news reached capital city of Panaji that he had put himself at head of a powerful gang, and that he was laying everything waste and ruins. He made himself a terror of New Conquests (and of Old Conquests too), and his dreaded name was sung by people as that of a legendary villain. In fact, he was a skillful guerilla and a brave hillman. He broke out of prison as a tiger
out of a cage, frothing with fury and breathing revenge. He spent his day in prison planning a just crime; when least expecting it, the bhatt was at Kushtoba’s feet, his heart stabbed and his body in pieces. Afterwards, Kushtoba assembled a body of soldiers and concealed himself in jungles, from where he would now and then lead his band to pillage, assassinate and destroy. Fatality of things had turned him from a hero to a highwayman. However, with his thirst for vengeance quenched, wave of blood which had inebriated his brain receded before the pale vision of remorse. He wished to reform, to return home, but could not, because he fell into the hands of law’s minions as he was leaving house of a bailadeira (in police pay?) on the night of 13 June, 1871, who killed him in a cowardly fashion. According to popular version, the government, which had instituted a prize of Rs. 3000/- on his head, if alive, and Rs. 1000/- if dead, succeeded in bribing Kushtoba’s mistress, Bulem bhavin, into betraying her lover. Though above dekhni is silent about Kushtoba’s capture but it is a fact that at hands of bailadeira came about his end. Portuguese government indeed utilized services of community not too often for achieving its political ends. The last revolt of the Ranes took place in 1912 two years after proclamation of republican regime in Portugal. There were two groups one led by Morya Sawant and another by Jil Sawant. The rebels were joined by one Custodio popularly known as Quistulo, a toddy-tapper by profession. To suppress this rebellion Portuguese requisitioned troops from Mozambique. Ultimately the rebellion was quelled and Quistulo was shot dead at Assonora in the house of his mistress (probably a bailadeira) and who was bribed by Portuguese for the purpose.

That Portuguese utilized not to un-often services of bailadeira for political ends is evident too from following dekhni Kolvontam y amim Porvotavelim.

Kolvontam y amim
Porvotavelim
Vatto visrunum y amcha
Marvam’ sampol-llim
Vatto visrunum
Murgonvam paulim
Maxttora baban y amkam
Apounum velim

Cor: Tumy’em amkam siripon-nnaim
go Benddan vankhelim We are the dancing girls from the holy mountain.
We lost our way and ran into a bunch of mhars.
We lost our way and arrived in Murgoum/Mormugao.
There the boss called us and took us with him.
Chorus: You are of no use to us, with your crooked hips!
A bunch of bailadeira in above dekhni lost their way and reached Mormugao instead. This was perhaps the period when the railway line was being built between Goa and British India. The railway line passes near the place identified as Porvot (Paroda, Salcete) where baialdeira stayed near temple precincts. It is possible that during the period when railway line was constructed number of officials might have been present in Estado’s cities who desired their services for the night. Portuguese official finally discarded them saying ‘you are of no use to us, with your crooked hips!’

Reference to construction of railway line finds mention in a dekhni Gonnesposti Raya which states that Inglezany’ bandily’ reilve agim-garhy / Bomboim-Puneam oili / Ankvar cherhvanly’ garhamorhi / bottler bountai barabori (The English have built a railway / train (lit. fire-vehicle) has been taken all the way to Bombay and Pune / unmarried girls have gone wild and cooks escort them). Verse is significant in that it mentions construction of the railway line which led to economic transformation of Goa from agrarian to service based economy dependent on remittances of migrants. Song also indicates that ‘unmarried girls have gone wild’ which refers to a large number of girls and others migrating to Bombay in search of employment. Many a bailadeira went to city of Bombay in search of new life and identity. For when Vatsalā sings: ‘my soul forgets / the unhappy desire / of clinging to life / in this exhausted body’ it point towards frustration of bailadeira community if the indignation they endured down the centuries. From this perspective migration to Bombay became a turning point in reform movement among bailaleira community members which though not subject matter of current paper is in fact a virgin area of research that needs exploration.

6. Conclusion

Bailadeira is theme of dekhni composers as also of Indo-Portuguese poets who describe in verse their life on margins of Goan society. It is a fact that in spite of all prohibitions and restrictions, catholic community of Goa could not forget their Hindu roots. A sort of collective consciousness was attracting them to the cultural inheritance of their ancestors, such as processions, dances, song, sacrifices, festivals, etc. exemplified in dekhni songs describing life of bailadeira community. Struggles of bailadeiras find resonance in both dekhni songs as also lyrics of Indi-Portuguese poets who describe at length operation of Hindu law of karma subjecting women to life of ‘indignity’ even when they were considered as bearers of good luck for fact that they never became widows.