

Mando to Fado : Women in Goan Folksong

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I

While it is true that the soulful melodies of Goa's Catholic folksongs are of infinite beauty, it is useful to examine the content more closely. A cursory glance would suggest that many songs show the plight of the woman as being spurned or forgotten by her lover. The *mando* is 'a Goan dance form of Christian origin.' (See YouTube video, Mando-Dances of Goa) I take up two *mandos* to illustrate this. In the first '*Tujea Utrar re Patienun*' the woman is depicted as waiting for her fiancé as he has promised her that he will come back for her. However, he does not and the damsel is left lamenting her fate. The title of the *mando* is 'Depending on your word.' The lady trusts the man and waits for him. Later she lovingly accuses him for being ungrateful and for not remembering the times that she has cared for him. She resigns herself to her fate saying this is her destiny. This is the end of the road for her. She has no will to live anymore. The sense of doom is upon her.

The maiden has foreclosed all her options. There is no meaning in life for her. Marriage is the ultimate goal for her, failing which all else pales into insignificance. There are no other avenues for fulfillment. This puts the lady in a straitjacket proscribing her choices. The only viable condition to aspire to is wedded harmony – her socially sanctioned role. Everything revolves around the success of the relationship of the maiden with her beloved. If he leaves without a trace – though the fault is his for ditching her – it is the woman who is censured and made to wait *ad infinitum*. When that does not yield results she has to be content to eke out the rest of her days in lonely spinsterhood. Pinning all her hopes on the elusive fiancé, waiting for him, pining for him, she at last realizes that he isn't coming back. In the meantime all her proposals for marriage have dried up and she is faced with living a barren life. Her mental distress is conveyed in physical unease, as she begins to actually feel suffocated. This chilling psychosomatic condition the woman finds herself tortured with is all because a man did not keep his word to her. One would ask, 'Is he worth it?'

This stark reality augurs ill for modern day women in Goa. Still, faced with similar circumstances, they seldom would throw their lives away like the lady in this *mando*.

In the next *mando*, '*Surya Devon Zalo*' the ill-starred fate of the lovers assumes cosmic overtones. The setting of the sun signifies the end of hope. The very elements seem to accentuate the personal tragedy of the lady. The time for the evening prayer, the Angelus, has come but there is no sign of the fiancé. She recalls the moments of intimacy with her beloved but of what use are they now? Trying to rationalize the situation the woman brings herself to say goodbye. However even in her death she does not want to cause him sadness. She tells him not to weep. In a Gothic twist she says there are some letters she has written for him. If upon reading them, he hastens to the cemetery, he will still find her bones waiting for him.

II

A cursory look suggests there is sadly not much literature available in Goa in English on the *fado*. Post-1961 there seems to be an attempt to be embarrassed by the

Portuguese interlude. Books put out by the Government of Goa are very keen to assert a national identity for Goa with amnesia for the past. (*Goa Then and Now*, 1982) Folklorists do not however distinguish between political changes and simply study how a culture survives through its music, its stories, its art. (Ferris)

If one looks at the songs of Portuguese *fado* singer Amalia Rodrigues (1920-1999) one sees a breakaway from the model of the *mando*. Both *mando* and *fado* have similar themes. *Fado* means destiny. But in the *fado* described in this paper the lady is not content to be a mere spectator in her life. The *fado* '*Lá porque tens cinco pedras*' / ['Just Because You Have Five Stones'] is very figurative, and centres on the image of stones and its many connotations. (See YouTube videos) The beloved is seen as having a heart of stone because he has broken the lady's heart with his seductive look. But unlike the case in the *mando* the singer of the *fado* provides a bold alternative to the male narrative of conquest and disposal. She says though the worldly accoutrements of possessions (brilliants) have swelled the beloved with pride and vanity, she is content wandering the cobblestones of the street for they afford her freedom. This re-possession of her freedom – otherwise bound by the relationship – reinstates her confidence in herself. She can walk out of the relationship with her head held high. Unlike the docility of the women in the *mando* the woman in the *fado* boldly proclaims that she will nickname her beloved as a stone for the grief he caused to her. Livid with the experience of being rejected she ends the *fado* with a curse or a veiled warning, 'One who has a roof of glass, should not throw stones.'

III

The difference between the *mando* and the *fado* is only touched upon here. This is by no means an exhaustive study of the same. Nevertheless the textual evidence suggests that while the *mando* signifies a descent into pessimism and despair for the woman, the *fado* offers alternatives in life. The woman in the *fado* can pick up the pieces and move on with her life. The experience has made her wiser and stronger. It is perhaps relevant here that the *fado* seems to be born out of a European sensibility where the woman is liberated and can exercise the freedom of choice. One does not see such confidence in the Konkani *mando* which assumes the character of a dirge.

The obsession with marriage in Goan society deserves attention. In a case of the death of an unmarried girl in Goa, the girl was buried in her wedding dress. This fixation in Goan society forecloses the options for young women in Goa. Many young women when asked if they supported this practice, said they did not agree with it, but society was too powerful in this case.

Folk culture has a role to play in bringing change in society. Though older models like the *mando* do provide a sense of time gone by, one needs to look toward a reworking of the themes to provide more contemporary relevance to today's youth in Goa. Looking at the *fado* could provide some cues. Instead of mindlessly listening to Goan folk music one needs to be wary of its intentions and the possible fallout.

Appendix

TUJEA UTRAR RE PATIENUM (Mando in Konkani)

1. *Tujeautrarrêpatieunum*, Trusting in your word,

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*Aizpasunankvarraulinhanvum,
Tum ingratkitekazaunum,
Vetaimhakarêсанддunum,
Orsanimsambhaulol' dekunum.*

I remained a spinster till today.
Why are you unfaithful,
Leaving me and going away.
I took care of you for years.

Chusmo:
*Devan nirmilol' narêmhaka,
Sodanchsangat(u) korecheaktuka.
Adeuskorunanjeamhojea,
Kiteaksanddunot' rêmhaka,
Kosol' destinsaibamhozo,
Ankvarponnanisonsumnezo,
Kaz' rachonaanimhak' bhorvanso.*

Refrain:
God has not destined me,
To remain in your love.
Saying goodbye, my angel,
Why are you going and leaving me alone.
What kind of destiny/future is mine.
I cannot bear to be a spinster anymore.
I have no more hopes of marriage.

*2. Sukach tem(u) kobharzalo,
Millmilleanchovell(u) pavlo,
Feliz tori zaumnummoga,
Disttipoddlllearpuromhaka,
Millmill' zall(u) bhogtaikallzakmhojea.*

Time of happiness is over,
Suffocation time has come,
At least you remain happy,
Your sight is enough for me.
My heart is burning and suffocating.]

SURYA DENVON GELO (GoanMando in Konkani)

*Surya denvonguelo
Kupantchondrim re udelo
Amorehovellukomesarzalo...}
Mogakhuim tum re pavolo.....}2*

The sun has set,
The Moon has risen in the clouds,
Angelus time has commenced
Where have you gone, my love.

*Sodanchamguer tum yetaloi
Mojeagopantieunbostaloi
Atamkiteakingratu tum zaloi...
Konndusmantukasampoddlo...}2*

You always used to come to our house,
You used to sit in my arms
Now, why did you become ungrateful
Which enemy did you come across

*Adeus, adeusmoga
Itleansonvosarmakanaka
Dollemhojedamtoch re moga...}
Fattleandukamgolloinaka....}2*

Goodbye, goodbye, my love,
I do not want this world anymore
When my eyes close my love
Do not weep when I am gone

*Mojeainteradisa
Don-tin chittimeutoleotuka
Tevuivachuneuxizalearmoga
Ximiterint 'addam' meutelimtuka*

The day of my burial
You will receive two-three letters
That also if you read and come my love
You will get bones in the cemetery.]

LA PORQUE TENS CINCO PEDRAS (Portuguese *fadoby* Amalia Rodrigues)

*Lá porque tens cinco pedras
Não há nada estilhaçado*

Just because you have five stones
There is nothing shattered

Agora falas comigo Com cincopedrasnamão	None spoke to me With five stones in hand
Enquanto nesses brilhantes Tens soberba e tens vaidade Eutenho as pedras da rua Prapassear à vontade	While with those brilliants you have pride and vanity I have the cobblestones of the street To wander at will.
Pobre de mim não sabia Que o teu olhar se dut Não errava a pontaria Como a pedra do pastor	Poor me, I did not know or that your seductive look would not miss the mark Like the stone of a shepherd
Mas não passas sorridente Aalar de ar satisfeito Pois hei-de chamar-te à pedra Pelo mal que me tens feito	But don't walk away smiling Showing off that you can be happy. For I will nickname you 'stone' For the evil you have done to me.
Hás-de ficar convencido Da afirmação consagrada Quem tem telhados de vidro Não deve andar à pedrada	And you shall be convinced Of the verity of the saying One who has a roof of glass should not throw stones.

English translation of the Portuguese by Nizia Moniz Barbosa do Carmo Lobo.

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