CHAPTER SIX

NON-HIERARCHICAL EXPERIMENT:
Processes and Issues of Bailancho Saad since 1986

‘Let the liberating power of our voices herald a new dawn’

– Bailancho Saad (Diary 1991)

The women’s collective Bailancho Saad was founded on a firm ideological stand against all forms and symbols of patriarchy, viewing hierarchical processes as contradictory to the organisation’s values. The collective was the first of its kind in Goa and began as a small discussion group in the year 1986. Although Bailancho Saad continues to exist to this day, the journey has been a continuous struggle to negotiate space for itself within a hierarchical society and a battle within itself brought on by the often inevitable compromises it has had to make between its own ideological stands and the organisation’s survival. Within the collective there have been several transformations over the past two decades in terms of its position on issues and its activities as well as the profile of its members. New members have joined, some have left, some have continued to work with a sustained fervour over all these years and still others have remained passive supporters of the cause. But through all its ups and downs, it has evolved over the years into an organisation synonymous with ‘empowerment’ and its outreach has been felt throughout the state of Goa and the work of Bailancho Saad has been acknowledged at national and international levels too both from within and outside the women’s movement.

This chapter looks at the development and growth of the organisation and presents the organising strategies and processes that have been observed through participation in its activities and meetings as well as from discussions with some of the members. The life of the collective is analysed through the phases that have been observed from participation as well as through documentation that exists in the form of
correspondence, press notes, photographs to highlight the events and activities of the organisation.

6.1. Birth of ‘the Collective’

In July 1986, a few women, most of whom had been associated with the progressive students union or with the civil liberties movement, got together to form an informal discussion group. Many of these women were disillusioned by the patriarchal nature of the organisations that they had earlier been associated with and viewed the forming of a women’s collective without a formal hierarchical organisation structure as a refreshing change from those they had experience with. The commitment to function without a hierarchy or a formal structure with elected or appointed leaders, became more than the ideology of Bailancho Saad. It was a sort of goal that the organisation in its founding years fought hard to create, sustain and preserve.

The group first met in Margao and then soon after shifted to Panaji (or Panjim, the state capital). A few months later, that is, on the 12 October 1986, the group was named ‘Bailancho Saad’ meaning ‘women’s voice’, which was derived from the Konkani (the local language) term Combiancho Saad, meaning a ‘cock’s crow’.

At the very inception of the organisation, discussions were held about the importance of working as a women’s ‘collective’. It was resolved very early in the life of Bailancho Saad that it would maintain a non-hierarchical structure because organising collectively was a powerful political strategy based on the value of equality which was the driving force amongst the founder members. The non-hierarchical structure and the spirit of functioning as a collective, was worked at very consciously as the prime organisational process. In this ‘foundation’ phase of Bailancho Saad, non-hierarchy formed the basis of the organisation culture, and was one of the strictly unchangeable principles of the organisation. New members to the organisation were always informed about the non-hierarchical style of functioning and it was upheld almost with the status of an organisational goal.

The group was small at that time (about 15 to 20 members) and there was a noticeable commonality or thread between these members of Bailancho Saad that made working as a collective possible and sustainable. This thread was the common ideology
of an ‘opposition to hierarchy’ and the desire to work for the betterment of the position of women. Specialists or co-ordinators did emerge, as we will see later in this chapter, but this was only temporary and task specific.

The very essence or feminist politics supporting principles of collective organising challenges hierarchy. It cannot be just an ideology, it has to be put into practice in real life and all compromises have to be made to work collectively (Advocate Albertina Almeida, a founder member).

During the formation years of 1986 and 1987, discussions were around what the group members had read in women’s journals and magazines such as *Manushi* and what were nationally considered as ‘women’s issues’ like dowry, molestation, rape, exploitation at work, etc. Soon the organisation moved from intellectual discussions about ‘women’s issues’ into the world of reality and plunged into handling of cases of rape, violence and other crimes against women. The organisation began taking up cases that were reported in the newspapers and it was not long before cases hearing about the organisation from word of mouth began approaching the organisation themselves. It then moved from being a discussion group to more service oriented activities such as case handling while also being actively involved in campaigning for social action and change. The organisation held demonstrations and morchas, as well as awareness campaigns.

**Box No. 6.1**

**Bailancho Saad’s Goals (1986)**

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<tr>
<th>Goal</th>
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<tr>
<td>To collectively understand and analyse the status and oppression of</td>
<td>To build up solidarity among women at the national and international level.</td>
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<td>women in general and Goa in particular.</td>
<td>Bailancho Saad resolutions as in its first printed handout (1986)</td>
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<tr>
<td>To raise the consciousness of people about women.</td>
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<tr>
<td>To assist women in gaining confidence to develop their talents and to</td>
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<tr>
<td>live their own lives.</td>
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<td>To take up issues relating to women.</td>
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In the same handout printed in 1986, Bailancho Saad stressed on its new journey towards equality through collective functioning and stated,
We are aware that women’s issues should not be viewed in isolation...We therefore envisage a society that is just to both men and women. We have to fight for emancipation from patriarchal structures that reinforce and perpetuate male power; and other social structures that exploit and oppress us. We have to struggle for our equality, dignity and freedom to participate in the socio-cultural, economic and political processes that shape society (Bailancho Saad 1986).

While Bailancho Saad remains a non-registered body till today, it has two registered wings, namely, Saad Alashiro (A Registered Trust in 1996) and Saad Aangan (A Registered Trust in 2005). While Saad Alashiro functions from the SF4 space belonging to Bailancho Saad, Saad Aangan functions independent of Bailancho Saad. Many members who are part of Saad Aangan do not attend the Saturday meetings of Bailancho Saad. Saad Alashiro, on the other hand continues to be involved with the routine work of Bailancho Saad. For public programmes like March 8 celebrations or campaigns, however, members from Saad Aangan also attend. When Saad Alashiro was registered it was with the prime agenda to buy office space. An office was needed, as the organisation had grown and had along the way accumulated a lot of documentation, files, letters and other reference material that needed to be stored in a place that was also accessible during the weekly meetings or workshops. Then the need to maintain the place, related expenses to enable keeping an office open as well as to sustain Bailancho Saad activities, the registration of Saad Alashiro allowed for the acceptance of regular funding and it was then that the organisation applied to Goa State AIDS Control Society (GSACS) for funding (see Section 4.3 e and f). Interestingly, for the registration a hierarchy needed to be indicated and it was done for the purpose of registration only.

6.2. Routine Functioning of Bailancho Saad

Presented here is a brief sketch of the routine functioning of the collective. A more detailed discussion on the same will follow in later chapters. Meetings are held every week on Saturday, at a fixed time (3.30 pm. to 6.00 pm), at a fixed venue. This has been the practice since 1986 and continues to date. Since the venue, date and time were fixed, there were no invitations sent out calling members for the meetings and no telephone calls made to remind members of meetings either. The venue of the meetings...
in the early years, when the group shifted from Margao to Panaji, were held in an office of the Goa Astronomical Society, Junta House, but this has changed since Bailancho Saad purchased their own office space (SF4, Goa Housing Board, Journalist Colony, Porvorim) in the year 1997. Their postal address (403, Prema Building, Rua de Ourem, Panjim 403 001) right up till 1997, was an apartment that belonged to the family of one of the members.

The Astronomy Hall was a small space that accommodated not more than 15 persons seated around a table so for larger group meetings, meetings on certain campaigns, collaborative meetings, meetings to discuss special programmes other spaces were used including the Prema Building apartment. At meetings in the Prema Building apartment and later in the SF4 Office, members would sit in a circle on the floor. This circular formation as well as the seating on the floor is a comfort to many new members as it not only is an informal arrangement but also symbolic of equality and a physical or visible expression of non-hierarchy. Chairs are only offered to those who were elderly and/or have a physical problem squatting on the floor. If one were to walk into a regular weekly Saturday meeting at the Bailancho Saad office, the meeting space itself echoes the non-hierarchical practice within the group. Thus through the group seating pattern and the body language of the participating members it reinforces the principle of non-hierarchy, the circle formation being symbolic of a collective organisational style.

There was and is no membership fee required from the participants. The collective held a policy of open membership to all women, where the only qualification was that of gender. Participants to the organisation included women from all walks of life – professionals, students, women in the paid labour force, as well as housewives. Men were earlier welcomed only as supporters of the organisation. This has in recent times changed as Bailancho Saad today has two male employees (Victor Mendes and Sameer) on its project funded by the Goa AIDS Control Society and Mendes in particular is also an active participant at the regular Saturday meetings where the discussions are not around project work but also Bailancho Saad issues and individual cases. (The dynamics and change having male members of Bailancho Saad will be discussed later in this chapter).
There is no demand on members for regular attendance. Although the collective meets at a fixed time regularly every week, the members are free to attend and organise meetings whenever they wish to do so. There are some women who are at the Saturday meetings very regularly every week, some who attend meetings only occasionally, some who only go to the meetings when they require help and assistance from the group. Yet, all the women are given equal importance and their contributions to discussions and decisions are taken as seriously.

At the weekly meetings, new participants are made aware of the matters and issues that are being discussed. It is explained in the language most easily understood. That is, if the majority of participants on a particular day are more comfortable with English, discussions might be in English, but every so often one of the members translates the discussions in Konkani for the benefit of those who do not know English. Similarly, if the majority happen to be more comfortable with Konkani, then discussions will be in Konkani with translations in English. This encourages participation and involvement, strengthens the feeling of group solidarity and commitment and results in shared responsibilities for the collective’s decisions.

While the principle of ‘decisions by consensus’ is still upheld and the weekly meetings follow the policy of inclusion of all members present into the discussion through explaining the subject that is being discussed to even new members or members who were not present for the earlier sessions on the topic, translations into the language that is best understood by the members in the group, there are times when one person or a few persons are more articulate or more active in the discussions and therefore also the decisions. This does not, however, imply non-hierarchy, but a reality that is negotiated with, namely, individual differences.

There are several other observed practices that make the non-hierarchical style of the organisation visible to any regular observer. They include the recording of the minutes of the weekly meetings. This is not done on any fixed system of rotation but different persons volunteer to play the role of secretary each week. While some have reported minutes in brief bullet points others have been more detailed. If the person recording minutes is involved in a heated discussion, very little gets recorded. Sometimes only the subject of discussion is noted down and not the varying views on the issue.
Minutes are recorded by different members and there is no fixed recording style. Of course, this excludes the members who are not literate. However, when it comes to initiating a discussion, handling a case or participating in the discussion or decision making illiteracy does not pose as a hurdle at all. All the members present get an opportunity to speak about the work they have been involved with in the last week, the details of the cases they have handled, the problems, if any, that they have encountered on the way.

As mentioned earlier, Bailancho Saad articulated its rejection of hierarchy right from its inception in 1986. However, it is easier to state one’s stand against the establishment of ‘leaders’ and an administrative hierarchy, but it is more difficult to actually maintain a truly non-hierarchical structure. The almost continuous emergence of subtle and not so visible or obvious forms of hierarchy, such as, those unconsciously created by older members, members who are more regular at meetings and programmes, or those with special skills or formal training often is a hurdle. Shared responsibility may not also be possible for every activity. There are differences in capabilities and some tasks such as writing or public speaking also need special skills or talent which, no doubt, can be learnt but demands a long-term perseverance and its development. The inevitable hurdles that sharing of tasks in a collective brings is that it is often hard to meet deadlines, tasks do not get completed in time. On the one hand, there are times when due to the urgent requirement of a task to be completed, that task would be assigned to a person with most experience or skills in handling the task and less demanding and more routine tasks would be given to those with less experience thereby creating a sort of hierarchy though temporarily.

6.3 Other Aspects of Growth and Change within Bailancho Saad

6.3.1. Membership

From the inception of the organisation, anyone who participated in the weekly Saturday meetings or even those who had initially approached the organisation for assistance but continued to attend Saturday meetings or was involved in programmes organized by the organisation were considered as members of Bailancho Saad. There are no rules set out that determines who is a member and who is not. In fact, one of the
leading woman politicians of Goa had publicly claimed that she was the ‘Chairman’ \(\textit{sic}\) of Bailancho Saad.

While it is a concern that there is no clear list of current members of Bailancho Saad, that although a few older members have clearly stated that they are no longer involved in the organisation and have moved to working on other issues or with other organisations, there are also several members who have been silent but might drop in for the occasional meeting. There are still those that claim to be members of the organisation but have not been attending meetings nor have been involved in the organisations current programmes. However, the fact that membership is seen as a positive asset speaks of the strength of the organisation. It may be pertinent to recall here that, in the earlier days, members were labelled as anti-men, etc and membership of Saad was not necessarily seen as positive.

An interesting discussion took place on the 22nd Anniversary meeting on the 11th October 2008 in the Goa Union of Journalists Hall (detailed below), around the issue of ‘identity cards for members’. This discussion reveals the evolution of the organisation from one that was at the receiving end of public attack to one that is now seen by the public as being in a position of strength.

The discussion around identity cards began with a suggestion that the organisation prepare a sort of map of contacts around Goa which would be a resource particularly for individual cases that needed Bailancho Saad’s intervention, it was then felt that such a map would be difficult as there are some members who are not really active anymore. It was during this discussion that the issue of misrepresentation of the organisation was also brought to the attention of the group. It was felt that there were women who were using the organisation’s name at the police station to get heard by the police. This surely implies that identifying with the organisation is seen as a tool to get work done. However the objection raised by members was that often these women misbehave or speak rudely at the police station and this might tarnish the organisations name and their work towards rapport building all these years. Some members raised the point that often now the police ask for an identification that they belong to Bailancho Saad and therefore an ID card was needed. This again speaks of the strength of the organisation that the police want an assurance that the women they are dealing with belong to Bailancho Saad.
Another aspect that was discussed in connection with misrepresentation was that often women want to be associate with Bailancho Saad even if they are not actually involved in work so that they can strengthen their claim for the numerous awards that are available for social work, working with women, etc. such as the Yashodamini award, etc. Issues raised around the problem of identity cards (ID cards) were:

1. To whom should ID cards be given to due to the unavailability of a clear list of members?
2. What was the real purpose of the ID cards?
3. What should the criteria be for giving members ID cards as there are some old members who have ceased to be active members of the organisation?
4. Should cards only be given to currently active members of the organisation?
5. Should cards be given which were valid only for a year at a time?

Some members felt that the card itself was unnecessary and the member wishing to use the Bailancho Saad name anywhere has to only inform the Bailancho Saad office that they are doing so and anyone who needs a clarification can do it with the Bailancho Saad office. Some members felt that there were instances when they were asked for proof that they were Bailancho Saad members but other felt that the card would be abused by those only angling for an award. Whatever the reason behind the need for ID cards, the fact is that it is now seen as a necessity, speaks of the strength of the organisation today.

Bailancho Saad, in its early years, was a coming together of women from a more or less homogenous background. They were women who were from the educated urban middle class who had had some association with either the Progressive Students Union or with other organisations influenced by the Left ideology. As already mentioned earlier, the group that initially formed Bailancho Saad was a small group of 15-20 women. Over the years Bailancho Saad’s membership has grown and incorporated people from a more diverse background and from a cross section of the society in Goa. Some of these members are those persons that came to the organisation for help, or as a case of some form of violence, discrimination or a victim of oppression that needed Bailancho Saad’s support and intervention and later through the participation at the weekly meetings became interested in the activities of the organisation and committed to the goals of the collective. Some members came into contact with the organisation due to some research
project that they were involved with or some college/university project they were working on. Still others had read about the organisation in news reports and wanted to find out more about what help they could get for a community issue that had till then remained unresolved. There are various reasons for women associating with the organisation but whatever the reason, it resulted in a more heterogeneous composition of the group. Today, a majority of the members who attend weekly meetings of Bailancho Saad on a regular basis are from the rural areas of Goa. While many of them are educated, there are members and active one too who have not had a formal education. There are also some members who do not attend either the weekly meetings or the programmes of Bailancho Saad on a regular basis, but consider themselves ‘members’ of Bailancho Saad.

It must be mentioned here that not all persons present at the Saturday meeting were necessarily included as members. For example, the women who brought their cases to the group for assistance were not listed though their case was minuted in the proceedings. It was only when these individuals continued attending meetings even when their case was not being discussed that those persons came to be considered as members and were listed as such. There was no written policy with regard to the number of meetings to be attended for a person to be considered a member but it was dealt with case by case within the group.

The attempt to prepare a list of the actual members of Bailancho Saad from 1986 to the present namely 2009, was not an easy one and it required a culling out of names from a variety of different sources including minute books, credits at the end of news letters, attendance at Bailancho Saad programmes (which was not necessarily only members but included supporters of the cause that Bailancho Saad stood for), cross checking with participants at programmes. This was rather an impossible task as the list was extensive yet not exhaustive, as on many occasions there were only first names listed and two or more women might have the same first name. However, if we were to simply treat this exercise, however cumbersome, as a mere guesstimate, this list was long. The list below is not conclusive. It does not include all the persons who the organisation has considered as members, nor names of those who have considered themselves as
members. This list also does not include names of persons who attended programmes as the attendance registers had hundreds of names which could not be listed here.

Members associated with *SAAD* Newsletters/diaries (names on printed material)

1. Afroze Shaikh
2. Agnes Messias
3. Aishwarya Bapat
4. Albertina Almeida
5. Albina Rodrigues
6. Alison Martins
7. Angela D’souza
8. Anita Haladi
9. Antonette Rego
10. Arjumand Banu Shaikh
11. Bernie D’Souza
12. Bharathi Naik
13. Caroline Collasso
14. Carol Dixon
15. Cehicleora Torres e Braganza
16. Collette Xavier
17. Collina Fernandes
18. Diana Rodrigues
19. Emerciana Fernandes
20. Eulalia Alvares
21. Fiona Dias
22. Florence Mendes
23. Gemma de Sa
24. Ivonne Pacheco
25. Joanna Pinto
26. Kavita Nair
27. Luiza Fernandes
28. Madhuri Rao
29. Maria Fernandes
30. Mariette Correa
31. Marilyn Fernandes
32. Meenaxi Pednekar
33. Norma Alvares
34. Pratibha Bapat
35. Pushpa Pednekar
36. Rachel Koshy
37. Reshma Naik
38. Rita Fernandes
39. Rosy Barreto
40. Sabina Martins
41. Sangeeta Mandrekar  
42. Savita Lambor  
43. Seema Naik  
44. Shaila Desouza  
45. Sharad Naik  
46. Sheetal Volvoikar  
47. Shruti Chaganti  
48. Srooti Amonkar  
49. Sunita Colimao  
50. Sunita Devi  
51. Suvarna Naroji  
52. Thraisa Sebastian  
53. Ulka Lotlikar  
54. Usha Joshi  
55. Vaishali Das  
56. Vrunda Prabhu  
57. Zita  

Others associated with helping cases and the GSACS project and who are not included above  
1. Vaishali Revonkar  
2. Ragini  
3. Vyjanthi  
4. Salma  
5. Anuja  
6. Dafia  
7. Sufala  
8. Nayan  
9. Nirmala  
10. Victor  
11. Rajeshri  
12. Sameer  
13. Vasudha  
14. Tina  

The only male members are Sameer and Victor. Victor Mendes though involved as an ‘employee’ with Saad Alashiro has been equally involved in Bailancho Saad activities and his involvement has had several positive outcomes for the organisations activities and for the organisation as a whole. Victor is a trained Counsellor and handles several individual cases and says confidently ‘I have no issues being part of Bailancho Saad’. It has often been easier for him to handle violent perpetrators of crime, been able to negotiate compromises with families of the victim, talk to the police and for some victims the support of a male member has also been a symbol of protection.
Finally, we will look at some of the reasons of problems that account for poor attendance at weekly Saturday meetings.

1. Full-time employed persons other than those employed with Bailancho Saad affiliated work such as the projects attached to Saad Alashiro, find it difficult to attend Saturday meetings or programmes that are scheduled during the week.

2. Attendance at weekend programmes relies heavily on the ability of individual members to choose between personal/family commitments and commitments to Bailancho Saad. This balancing of commitment is not always in favour of Bailancho Saad meetings.

3. Today, members of Bailancho Saad are spread all over Goa, logistic problems to attend meetings in North Goa, if they are from the South, and vice versa pose a problem.

4. Transport/travel costs are to be borne by individual members themselves.

6.3.2. From ‘Branded’ to a Brand name for Empowerment

While women in Goa have been involved in social action in the past and have played an important role in the liberation movement, until the 1980s, apart from branches of all-India organisations like the All India Women’s Conference, and two small local organisations, the Women Writers Organisation and the All Goa Muslim Women’s Association (WWO and AGMWA which have now ceased to exit), there were no other women’s organisations in Goa. In fact, there were no organised women’s activist groups or collectives in Goa and Bailancho Saad was the first women’s collective in Goa. Its foundation in 1986, therefore, marked the beginning of a ‘women’s movement’ in Goa. Bailancho Saad continued to be the only organisation that clearly aimed at women’s empowerment even before the word ‘empowerment’ became adopted as a catch word by government policy and other mainstream organisations. From 1986, when Bailancho Saad was started, right up to the early 1990s little about women or the work of Bailancho Saad was reported in the daily newspapers. Bailancho Saad’s struggle was till then a lonely struggle against the system.

However, in the early 1990s there was noticeable growth in the number of autonomous women’s organisations and groups in Goa. Some of these were Bailancho
Manch in Mapuca (North Goa), Bailancho Ekvott in Margao (South Goa), the women’s wing on the Inner Wheel Club (Margao), the Women’s Cell of the Diocesan Cell for Social Action (Panaji and part of the Women’s Desk, Delhi) and Bailancho Jhelo (Aldona). The Centre for Women’s Studies at the Goa University was also established though a few years earlier, in 1988.

Around this time we see a marked change in the attention given to women’s issues and women’s organisations by the press though to begin with, this attention was not necessarily positive or in favour of the women’s organisations. Besides this, when Bailancho Ekvott and Bailancho Manch in particular were set up the newspapers were more interested in highlighting the differences that existed between the organisations which were inevitable especially if their modes of operation were different. The patriarchal nature of the press was obvious in the expectations of the press. A news report that appeared on the front page of the Navhind Times newspaper on the 5 September 1993 by Armenia Fernandes was titled *Petty differences plague feminist movement in Goa*. In this report it is stated that

With the formation of an activist collective, Bailancho Saad in 1986, the women’s movement had finally, though belatedly entered Goa, beginning an awareness of women’s problems and rights, but the subsequent emergence of two more groups, largely working towards similar ends may just result in sidelining of main issues due to petty conflicts and competition between all these groups.

Strangely, women’s groups are expected to have a common agenda, common purpose or goal and also similar organisation strategies. This likeness is never expected from other organisations. The same news report mentioned above, despite finding on interviewing key members of the three activist groups that they did not agree with the reporters view that there were petty differences and conflicts between the organisations but merely differences in organisation styles, in the population groups that the organisation was working with and even if they did differ in their views about issues nothing could not be resolved with communication and discussion, the reporter still demonstrates her biased views. In the same report Fernandes says that “All these groups claim to be open to joining hands on mutual interests” and goes on to criticise the groups for not coming together and holding joint meetings on the demand for a special cell to deal with crimes against women, though each group had taken up the issue at different
points of time and their strategies differed. She goes on to say that, ‘it is such seemingly insignificant incidents that could portend a self-defeating competitiveness, one-upmanship and conflict which could very well dissipate Goa’s fledgling women’s movement’. The same expectation of organisations concerned about the problem of HIV and AIDS, for example, would be considered unreasonable. There was little sensitivity shown by the press in their reporting of even violence against women. For example, the names of the victims were often mentioned in the press reports.

In the early years of Bailancho Saad’s existence, the press played a make or break role for the organisation, as it had not yet had time to earn a reputation for itself as it has today and felt very vulnerable with any negative press reports. Armenia Fernandes wrote in the Navhind Times (Panaji) of 6 September 1993 that ‘The collective has seen many trials, from being the butt of chauvinistic jokes to physical attacks on its members, but has remained steadfast’ (p.11). The early years for Bailancho Saad were made more difficult by the insensitivity demonstrated by the press as it also failed to comprehend the novel ‘collective’ organisational style. While the organisation was making serious attempts at collective organising and consensual decision-making, the press would often select women, often the most vocal women and make leaders and celebrities out of them by bringing them into the limelight in the press reports. Further, these select members of the women’s groups were reported in the press interviews as being the ‘Chairman’ (sic) or ‘President’ when in reality there were no such designations within the group.

The press also often confused the readers by themselves getting mixed up with reports belonging to Bailancho Saad, Bailancho Ekvott and Bailancho Manch. Very often a programme of Bailancho Ekvott or Bailancho Manch was reported as Bailancho Saad, or vice versa. The organisations were very sensitive in the 1990s about these mix-ups. While Bailancho Saad was started way back in 1986, Bailancho Ekvott was started on 5 October 1992 by Auda Viegas who was and continues to be its President. Bailancho Ekvott was based in Margao (South Goa) and viewed politics as being the centre of all aspects of life and, therefore, stressed on the participation of women in the electoral process, policy making bodies, panchayats as well as state assemblies. The organisation was very actively involved in empowering women to participate in politics. Bailancho Manch on the other hand was started on 8 March 1993 with a two-member core group
Bailancho Manch was closely associated with the Jagrut Goenkaranchi Fauz and its work in supporting village level anti-tourism committees. They aimed at reaching out to the rural areas. While Bailancho Ekvott remains active today, Bailancho Manch is no more so. Caroline Colasso obtained a law degree and largely handles cases of women.

Some of the negative publicity that Bailancho Saad received in the press was due to the early profile of its members who were unmarried students. Since they were raising issues of women’s rights, they were labelled as ‘man-hating’, ‘westernised’, and ‘attempting to break up the home and the institution of marriage’. This has over time changed with the change in the marital status of the members and the profile of the organisation's membership on the whole.

Apart from negative publicity, in the 1990s, it was very hard for the organisation to get their press notes published. Very little importance was given to women’s issues and press notes given by the organisation would be edited beyond recognition. Today however, the organisation has a long-standing relationship with the press and most, if not all, reports of Bailancho Saad are carried in the press. They are taken very seriously by the press, a reputation earned after a long battle.

Not only with the press but with the other sections of society as well, Bailancho Saad has established links, relationships and a position where it is recognised for its dedication, commitment to the cause of women, and the fruits of its labour, has been witnessed in society. Today Bailancho Saad is more confident of its position in society and the acknowledgement of civil society to its contribution to it. According to Sabina Martins, in the earlier years they would be very worried about how cases were being handled and older members would worry about newer members being given the responsibility because the ‘image’ of the organisation would be at stake. Today, the organisation is not worried about its image, as it has established a reputation which will not be affected by individual mistakes. Even newer members are given the responsibility of case handling. Older members, however, try to pre-empt the mistakes by warning the newer members about things they should and should not do from mistakes made by them in the past or lessons they have learnt from experience.
Today, the organisation has progressed from being branded as man-hating, etc., to a sort of brand name for ‘empowerment’. An 80-year old woman who was being oppressed at home picked up courage to stand her ground within the family and in narrating her struggle to the group said that ‘Aum Bailancho Saad kele’ (I did Bailancho Saad) to mean that she spoke up for her rights. Very often people who have approached the Goa State Commission for Women for help as victims of some abuse of families of the victims have used the name ‘Bailancho Saad’ to mean an organisation that has supported them. Even the Goa State Commission for Women has been called ‘Bailancho Saad’.

The police today have a changed attitude not only to women who approach them but to the work of Bailancho Saad in general. The same police force who would be on the defensive when Bailancho Saad would approach them in the past, today even invite the organisation to conduct ‘gender sensitization programmes’ for their staff (see Photograph 4 and 5). The Inspector general of Police has recently restarted in July 2009 the monthly interaction with women’s organisations in which Bailancho Saad plays a key role.

6.3.3. The Role of Television in Bailancho Saad’s image

While the print media played a make or break role in building the image of Bailancho Saad, the television media was far more influential in extending publicity both to the causes that Bailancho Saad was championing and to the organisation itself. The television as a medium has a wider outreach in Goa, as in most other places as well and Bailancho Saad’s work was taken to even the rural areas that it had not yet worked in. Television, particularly after the local television channels namely Goa 365 was established in 2004, drew more public attention to Bailancho Saad and in particular to women who were more articulate, spoke on camera, etc. According to Sabina Martins ‘we have been working for so many years but suddenly after the launch of local television channels, we are recognised everywhere. I would not be recognised on the street as much even when I was a Member of the Goa State Commission for Women (1997-2003)’. Sabina Martins was Co-convenor of the Goa Bachao Abhiyan (GBA) (see Chapter 3) during the protest against the Goa Regional Plan 2011, which was widely covered by the television media. One of the down sides of this, however, is that certain
members who are more vocal get more attention and are forefronted, making celebrities out of them and building hierarchies and differences between members.

6.3.4. Collaborating with Other Organisations

The collective went through phases where they, in the early years collaborated with organisations in neighbouring states to express solidarity for struggles that were being fought throughout the country. It also attempted collaborating with other women’s groups in Goa and even tried being a part of a federation of different women’s organisations, as well as a larger forum against tourism (see Chapter 3). But the collective’s values of non-hierarchy were not always respected by the other organisations who were collaborating with it. Then there was a phase in the early 1990s when Bailancho Saad valued its autonomy and its own identity more and found that it worked best as an independent organisation functioning as a collective with participation of all its members in the organisational decisions, while networking with other organisations on issues of common interest (Desouza 1998).

However, ever since 1995, when one member of Bailancho Saad was selected to attend the Fourth World Conference on Women held in Beijing as part of the ‘official’ NGO delegation, changes were seen in the organisation’s view towards ‘collaborations’. Sabina Martins was the member selected and the same person was appointed on the first term of the Goa State Commission for Women (GSCW) in 1997–2000. She continued to be appointed even in the second term which was from 2000–2003. During these years there were several collaborative workshops, public programmes and even publications with not only the GSCW but other organisations as well (see Photograph 11 and 12).

Some amount of change in the attitude to collaborations took place after the purchase of the apartment/flat, which was inaugurated on 8 March 1997, about a year after the Saad Alashiro Trust was established. After the purchase of the apartment, there were several regular expenses to be met, including the upkeep of the apartment, staff salaries to keep the place open during the week, telephone and electricity bills and so on. This necessitated taking up funded projects and thus the organisation applied to the Goa State AIDS Control Society (GSACS) that was looking for NGO collaborators for their awareness programmes. It may be pertinent to mention here, that at this time, a member
of Bailancho Saad, Mariette Correa had been appointed as the NGO Advisor on the GSCAS team at the Directorate of Health Services. This made the acceptance of funding seem less foreboding for the organisation’s autonomy. Three of the old members of Bailancho Saad were ‘recruited’ on the project with a salary. Angela D’Souza and Carol Dixon were made project staff and Albertina Almeida was given an honorarium to coordinate the work. This was a targeted awareness intervention.

In the late 1990s and continuing to today Bailancho Saad has been collaborating with all kinds of organisations, government, semi-government and NGO’s including national and international ones on issues related to women. In the past Bailancho Saad had no financial support of its own and therefore collaborations with other organisations meant that it was looked on for ideological support for the cause as in the Anti-Tourism Campaign in 1987 where it collaborated with Jagrut Goenkaranchi Fauz or as in 1993 over the Konkan Railway where it collaborated with several organisations or even over the evictions of people in the red-light area of Baina, Vasco (1997–2004). Later, as in the case of the Anti-Regional Plan agitation, the Bailancho Saad’s collaboration was largely for mobilization of people for the campaign as the organisation.

There are also other reasons why Bailancho Saad’s collaboration is sought by other organisations. New organisations in particular look for collaborating with Bailancho Saad to gain credibility for their own involvement with the cause and still others see Bailancho Saad as a part financer of programmes organised. Over the years Bailancho Saad has been able to save money and build a fund for programmes. Interestingly, in November 2008, Goa Panchayat Mahila Shakti Abhiyan collaborated with Bailancho Saad for an awareness programme in view of the Regional Plan 2021. For this public programme, Bailancho Saad contributed financially as well as to the actual programme organisation.

The organisation is now in a position of strength owing to its reputation accruing from its enduring struggle over the past years to establish its place within the patriarchal society and get acknowledged for its work for the betterment of women in the state. Today, when the organisation collaborates with other organisations, there is no fear of having to compromise its ideological stand on the issues. In fact, it does not collaborate with organisations when there is a clear conflict in position towards the issue but might
compromise on other organisational differences such as it did in the case of collaboration with Goa Panchayat Mahila Shakti Abhiyan. This is a political organisation and a hierarchical one but it is also working for the empowerment of women. Bailancho Saad has collaborated with organisations such as the UNIFEM, National Commission for Women, Goa State Commission for Women, other local women’s groups and NGOs for seminars, workshops, conferences, meetings, publications, public awareness campaigns, morchas and demonstrations as well as in the celebration of International Women’s Day on 8 March. 

No organisation works in an absolute vacuum. Particularly, an outreach organisation like Bailancho Saad that works on a variety of issues at various points in time has to interact with sections of the environment. These may be

1. participants or potential participants and other autonomous women’s groups whose values are aligned with those of Bailancho Saad;
2. participants, potential participants and other autonomous groups whose values are not aligned with those of Bailancho Saad;
3. participants, potential participants and other autonomous groups whose values are not known;
4. other agencies, government officials, other NGOs, campaigns that may be aligned with the values of Bailancho Saad;
5. other agencies, government officials, other NGOs, campaigns that may not be aligned with the values of Bailancho Saad; and
6. other agencies, government officials, other NGOs, campaigns whose values are not known.

The organisation has managed to maintain relationships with even other persons and organisations that have not shared the same values and this is because of its underlying belief that ‘everyone has something to offer’.

6.3.5. Funding and Buying the Apartment

In the years between 1986 and 1995, Bailancho Saad saw acceptance of funding from institutional sources as being damaging to their collective functioning, independence and autonomy. Foreign funding, large financial support from one donor
and government aid in particular was seen as highly objectionable. Funded projects, at this time was unthinkable as it would mean being curtailed or supervised from outside the organisation and this would mean patriarchal control. Bailancho Saad survived through a struggle with small funding that was sought through requesting for donations whenever funding was required. The letter reproduced below sent in 1988 is one such example:

Funding for activities was a big constraint for the organisation and as a result in the early years there was little documentation of the work of the organisation. The organisation till the late 1990’s did not possess a camera and so for programmes had to hire a professional photographer to take a few pictures. The issue of funding has been a much debated issue within Bailancho Saad. However in the early 1990’s with the organisations decision to buy a space of its own, funding was a necessity. The apartment SF4 that the Saad Alashiro Trust owns today was bought out of much hard work and sweat of the members of Bailancho Saad. Given its autonomous politics of that time and its refusal to foreign and institutional funding, the money for the purchase of the apartment was collected by members individual and collective efforts at requesting individual supporters for small donations. The organisation also printed diaries, year planners, posters, newsletters and greeting cards that were sold with a note asking for donations to the cause while also affixing a ‘suggested contribution’. The diaries were priced at Rs. 20, the year planners at Rs. 10, the newsletters stared at Rs. 2 and later were Rs. 20 and posters and greeting cards were priced at Rs. 10 each (Letter from Press release p.20).

Apart from this the members have interesting anecdotes about their experiences with fund raising for the office space:

During the Indian National Social Action Forum (INSAF) conference we undertook the task of making cloth folders for 400 participants to raise funds. None of us knew how to stitch very well but we undertook the task, going through frustrations of needles breaking, the gum not sticking right…but we did it and the folders were greatly appreciated! (Sabina).

We even undertook the task of delivering ‘ice’ for a workshop…any job that would help raise funds for Bailancho Saad (Albertina).

My expertise was selling planners. I would hound people to the point that they would avoid me if they noticed me from a distance. I sold many planners for Saad (Ulka).
In the 1990s, Goa saw a growth in the number of ‘Exhibitions’ and ‘Sales’ in its towns, to market all sorts of consumables. Although Bailancho Saad was ideologically opposed to the consumerism promoted by exhibitions, it decided to use this crowd-puller event to send a message out against the ‘opening up our markets to multinational corporations an big business-houses which are appropriating peoples knowledge and resources and pushing the people out of the economy’ (Saad Flyer 1995). In May 1995, a unique ‘Exhibition-cum-Sale’ was organised by Bailancho Saad. In its flyer announcing the 3-day ‘Exhibition-cum-Sale’ it stated is this yet another Exhibition? ... Yes and No. Yes, in the sense that some of the products we are marketing are also exhibited and sold at other exhibitions. No…because our purpose is not profit, but giving value to people’s especially women’s labour, because we believe in creating space for local skills and traditional knowledge which is sustainable and environment-friendly…because we at the same time also believe that women can go and are going beyond papad making …

Another fundraiser was a ‘tiaetr’ (the local theatre form) commissioned to a well-known tiaetr group ‘Wilmix and Sharon’. The play was titled ‘Bailancho Saad’ and though the organisation found that parts of the play did not exactly conform to its ideology, it was publicised as ‘entertainment. Bailancho Saad was able to purchase the apartment through all the above and the individual donations received from supporters. The space SF 4 Goa Housing Board, Journalist Colony, Porvorim was inaugurated on 8 March 1997.

6.3.6. Paid Staff

Right up to the mid-1990s the organisation was very clear in its stand against paid employees and was committed to functioning purely on volunteered time by the participating members. However, the issue of introducing paid staff was frequently debated after the mid-1990s. Those opposing the idea of paid ‘employees’ did so as they felt that it would introduce a hierarchy in the organisation. Others felt that remuneration for the time, effort and transport would enable certain members to be more active; it would provide income to some women, thereby empowering them economically. The fear that the youth were moving away from activism in the new consumerist society that Goa was heading to and the need therefore to consider remuneration for work as the only
way to sustain Bailancho Saad’s activities was a reality as well that was considered. An article written in the mid-1990s as follows:

Since 1986, the organisation has grown noticeably… this has been an almost incidental outcome of the organisation’s processes rather than due to deliberate organisation efforts. However in the recent past, there has been a need for conscious and planned growth, which is more a planned response to the way the organisation seems to be headed. The organisation has decided to raise funds for an office and has included several, purely finance generating activities, like the sale of handmade products and the sponsoring of a tiatr (the local theatre). Office procedures like filing of letters have been made less tedious. Documentation and other information in the office have been made more accessible to women. The current debate on employing paid staff, also illustrates the organisation’s plans to cope with its increasing activities (Desouza 1998).

The above article was written before the institutionalisation of paid employees in the organisation. Today, with the registration of Saad Alashiro and undertaking targeted intervention projects for Goa State AIDS Control Organisation, the organisation has a team of paid staff. It is, however, not a very secure position for the staff, as projects are funded on an annual basis and have to be renewed every year. The staffing pattern also varies according to the project protocol.

The fact that paid positions change with projects assures that no permanent hierarchy is established. In the initial phase of the GSACS project there was a lump sum given for the organisation of awareness programmes, later there was the need for ‘peer educators’, still later the project shifted from target intervention to more broad-based awareness programmes and required a Coordinator, office and field staff. While separate meetings are held for Saad Alashiro work on the GSACS project, all the paid as well as unpaid members of Saad Alashiro and Bailancho Saad attend the Saturday ‘Bailancho Saad’ meetings.

The introduction of paid staff has affected the organisation both positively and negatively. On the more positive side, the organisation has been able to maintain an office and a reception centre open the whole day and on all working days of the week. This has been particularly beneficial to victims of domestic violence and to women in crisis situation. The fact that earlier the organisation met only once a week posed a problem for individual cases and for regular correspondence with the organisation.
Individual members of the organisation used to open their homes to cases and the personal risk taken was a lot greater. Moreover, voluntarism has its limits and paid staff fills the space that cannot be filled by voluntarism.

The down side of paid workers is that there is often (though not necessarily) a difference in the commitment levels and involvement with issues between the voluntary workers and paid staff. Often, paid staff, strictly adhere to office timings and need to leave sometimes in the middle of the meetings. There is a subtle hierarchy between paid and unpaid workers. This is more so with those paid workers who did not originally start off as volunteers with Saad. These paid workers, for example, refer to some of the older members as ‘Madam’. There are also less obvious differences with paid workers and that can best be articulated as a change in the ‘energy’ within the organisation.

6.4. A Sketch of Some Programmes and Activities of Saad 1986–2009

The organisation has not made much effort at documenting its activities. In the initial years there was no fixed office space and, while efforts were made to file letters, press notes and press clippings, there has been no consistency or system in this regard. Documentation was never seen as a priority. Further, the monsoons in Goa have caused much damage to the Bailancho Saad material such as posters, photographs etc. When the office space was purchased, Bailancho Saad bought a cupboard from a street fair which collected moisture during the monsoon months and spoilt a large collection of photographs.

Then, in early 2000, Zubaan (New Delhi) were preparing a Visual History of the Women’s Movement in India through posters collected from all over the country prepared by women’s activist organisations. The project was called Poster Women. Bailancho Saad made an effort to gather together posters that had been prepared for its campaigns, large paintings that had been commissioned, but, one evening when a window had been left ajar, much of the material got damaged. In transporting the same to Delhi to be photographed a lot more was damaged. From what remains, a chronological listing of activities is mentioned with a clarification that this is not exhaustive of the work and involvement of Bailancho Saad from 1986 to 2009.
There are no photographs to document Bailancho Saad’s work prior to 1994. However, information has been culled out from minute books, press-notes, press reports in the local dailies and letters of the organisation, photographs and observation. We do not cover here the regular case handling or meetings held.

In the year 1987, some of the issues and concerns were organised protest against the Master Plan for Tourism, and campaigning against the increasing dowry deaths, molestations, rape and obscene advertisements. These included a Bailancho Saad delegation approaching the MLA with a memorandum. An open letter was also sent to Margaret Alva, the then Union Minister of State for Women, Government of India, with their concerns about the ill effects of tourism on women in Goa. Bailancho Saad collaborated with the Jagrut Goenkaranchi Fauz (Vigilant Goans Army or JGF) for its Anti-Tourism Expansion Week which included meetings with MLAs to get the issue heard in the Assembly, a signature campaign and ended in a hunger strike. In 1987, the organisation also joined the national protest for the Banning of Estrogen Progesterone drugs and wrote a letter to the Drug Controller of India. Meetings were also held with the Goa Police over handling of crimes against women particularly the rape of ‘Sumitra Govandi’ (at this time the organisation had not realized the political incorrectness of mentioning victims names). Collaboration with a national struggle was on the issue of Amniocentesis or sex determination tests which were freely available in the 1980s. A discussion was planned around the issue together with the Women’s Centre, Mumbai (then Bombay) and the National Forum against Sex Determination and Sex Pre-selection which was set up in March 1986.

In the year 1988 a letter was sent to Shri Rajiv Gandhi, the then Prime Minister, in support of the national struggles against sex determination and sex pre-selection. On the subject of indecent representation of women, a delegation from Bailancho Saad met with the Inspector General of Goa Police with memorandum to implement the Indecent Representation (Prohibition) Act (IRPA) of October 1987 and appealed to the Under Secretary (Home) to appoint an authorized gazetted officer as required under the IRPA. A public call was made to women to boycott the Carnival parade as women were indecently being represented on the carnival floats. During this year the organisation initiated its demand for a special cell to deal with Crimes against Women and organized
on March 8 (International Women’s Day) a poster exhibition in Panaji. During this yearour members of Bailancho Saad participated in the Nari Mukti Sangharsh Sammelan in
Patna. During this year the issue of sex determination tests and female foeticide was also
taken up as a campaign.

The year 1989 saw the first ever rift within the organisation when Caroline
Collasso, a member of Bailancho Saad, started having separate meetings under the banner
of Bailancho Saad but in Mapuca and on Wednesdays and not Saturdays. Further a
Women’s Day programme was organized by her as Bailancho Saad (Mapuca Unit).
Lobbying for amendments to different laws took a prominent place in the activities of
Bailancho Saad in 1989. A meeting was held with the Minister for Social Welfare with a
memorandum for the extension of Dowry Prohibition Act 1961 to Goa. Following the
cases of sexual harassment and molestation at the Secretariat and at the Department of
Mathematics, Goa University a collaborative meeting with other women’s groups and
NGOs was held to discuss the amendments to the law on molestation (this was before the
Vishaka Judgement). In this year the first issue of the SAAD Newsletter was brought out
(timed with the Women’s Day celebrations on 8 March) which included a collage of
various issues that the organisation was concerned about. This will be dealt with in
greater detail in the following chapter.

Various women’s issues were taken up in the year 1990 and poster exhibitions
and book displays were held in the city. One of the biggest campaigns of the organisation
during this year was against the promotion of the product Ms Cigarettes of the Golden
Tobacco Company. The organisation felt that it was a gross misuse of the feminist title
Ms to promote cigarettes and an image of the so called ‘liberated women’. The
advertisements had anorexic figured women smoking these thin long cigarettes, which
image the organisation was opposed to as well. This year marked the beginning of what
was to be a long battle against Goa’s first identified pedophile Freddy Peats.

In 1991, there was a case of molestation wherein the then Finance Secretary was
the offender. The organisation took up this case with the then Chief Secretary. This was a
year of protests against the commercialization of Carnival, nuclear power projects, the
enforcement of the National Security Act in Goa, the sale of children through adoption
and police brutality in lock-ups. The organisation staged a dharna outside the
Government of India Tourism Office, organized a talk and slide show on nuclear energy, and wrote in the press condemning police brutality and atrocities. At the national level, representatives of Bailancho Saad attended the 4th National Conference on Women’s Movement in Calicut, Kerala and prepared a critique of the employment policy. A solidarity protest march was also held in the city over the Amina Begum case. Amina Begum was an 11 year old from Hyderabad who was married off to a 70-year-old Arab. Women’s organisations all over the country raised the alarm about the racket of illegal marriages, prostitution and sale of children that was evident from such cases and there was much press coverage of this case.

In 1992, various issues were showcased in a variety entertainment and awareness programme organized by Bailancho Saad on Women’s Day. Small spaces were used for Women’s day celebrations as the organisation’s membership and supporters list was still small. The programme was held in TB Cunha Hall in the city of Panaji. This period in the life of Bailancho Saad is marked by much negative publicity about women’s organisations (see section on Make or Break Role of the Press). Bailancho Ekvott was started in October of 1992 and Bailancho Manch on March 8 of 1993.

Once again, in 1993, the Carnival issue was taken up as now Central Government funding for the Carnival was announced as part of its tourism promotion package. Bailancho Saad collaborated with Anumukti (Journal for Nuclear Free India) and organized a week-long awareness about where nuclear will take us. This was done through an innovative Cycle Yatra all over Goa and a seminar-cum-workshop along with scientists. The Cycle Yatra went through North and South Goa villages such as: Pernem, Agarwado, Siolim, Mapuca, Parra Ponda, Margao, Utorda, Madkai, Chaudi Canacona, Cuncolim, Mashem. A poster exhibition was also organized in protest against the Kaiga Nuclear Plant in Goa on Hiroshima Day (August 6). Other environmental issues were also of concern to the organisation at this time such as golf courses, the konkan railway, ill-effects of bauxite mining in Goa and the plan for a free port. These issues and more were raised during their programme on World Environment Day (June 5) and a critique of the Konkan Railway was also submitted to the Oza Commission. It may be noteworthy here to mention that the Konkan Railway saw much opposition in Goan Society from several quarters, but the protest did not meet with much success apart from a few
diversions in the route planned at that time. In 1993, Bailancho Saad began collaborating
with colleges and organized a programme on Amniocentesis and Sex Determination in
collaboration with the NSS unit of the S.S. Dempo College, Panaji. The Centre for
Women’s Studies also collaborates with Bailancho Saad on several issues particularly the
setting up of a Special Cell to deal with Crimes against Women at the Police
headquarters. During this year publications were also brought out by Bailancho Saad on
particular topics such as *In the Name of a Game: The Stakes in Golf* and *Culture
Vultures: A Critique of the Commercialization of carnival in Goa*. On 13 August 1993,
Bailancho Saad petitioned the Goa Bench of the Bombay High Court for speedy trials in
cases of Rape. On 20 April 1994, Bailancho Saad received a reply informing that the
Chief Justice of the Bombay High Court had issued directions to the District and Sessions
Judges of North and South Goa to dispose of the remaining rape trials in their respective
courts as expeditiously as possible.

In the year 1994 Bailancho Saad was involved in critiquing the impacts of the
New Economic Policy on women and appealed to the Goa Government for the
introduction of special safeguards for women. They were also involved in the Consumer
Rights Movement and with the Consumer Dispute Redressal Forum which was set up in
August 1989. In the same year, members of Bailancho Saad attended the 5th National
Women’s conference in Tirupati, Andhra Pradesh and got the opportunity to discuss at
the national level their concerns about tourism, the commercialization of the Carnival, the
need for a special cell to deal with crimes against women and their campaign against
alcohol. It was in this year that Bailancho Saad wrote songs on their campaigns which are
sung even today (see Appendix 1).

Other demands and memorandums put up to the government in this year include
(a) to the Law Minister for speedy trials in rape cases (b) to the Home Minister for a
Special Cell to deal with Crimes against women, and (c) to the Tourism Minister saying
‘No to Golf Courses’.

Hearing of the work of Bailancho Saad against alcoholism, a group of women
from Tivrem, Ponda Taluka in North Goa sought its support for their struggle against the
setting up of a bar in their village. Together with Bailancho Saad they were successful in
getting the bar license revoked, the group stayed linked with Bailancho Saad for other
issues as well. In 1994, the Tivrem group took part in the Women’s Day celebrations in the Municipal Gardens in Panaji city and organized a workshop on sterilization and family planning in the village. It may be pertinent to note here that at this time I was working on an ICMR project attached to the Goa Medical College Department of Obstetrics and Gynecology and left the project in 1992 as there were clinical trials that were being conducted through the project. Particularly disturbing was a trial of a drug called ‘Centchroman’ that was found to have a high failure rate and was subsequently discontinued with no follow up commitment to the persons who were already registered with the trial. This matter was reported to Bailancho Saad of which I was a member. In a newsletter in 1994 I had written about my experiences (SAAD Vol. 1, No. 3: 6) and subsequently the whole organisation took up the issue of family planning and sterilization. This period also marked the beginning of Bailancho Saad’s planned work in rural villages of Goa particularly in Pernem and Bardez talukas of North Goa and Bailancho Saad launched a critique of the government schemes available for women.

Bailancho Saad also strengthened its links with the national and international women’s movement with solidarity building in (a) the case of ‘Budhiben’, the Narmada Bachao Andolan worker who was gang raped in the village Antras in Baroda; (b) the workers of Bal Kalyan Nagari, Bombay (now Mumbai) in their demand for equal pay for equal work and service conditions without gender discrimination, (c) the Tibetan women who were fighting for their rights to their land after the Chinese occupation of Tibet in 1959, (d) in protest against the religious fundamentalist attack on Taslima Nasreen, the Bangladeshi author of ‘Lajja’, (e) disseminating copies of the CEDAW (UN Convention on Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women) ratified by India on 9 July 1993, and (f) networking with the ‘Women’s Center’, University of Washington.

While the organisation’s protest against the Kaiga Nuclear plant was heightened with a public meeting held on 2 October 1994 following the collapse of Dome 1, the Nylon 66 Plant of Thappar and Dupont was another development project that Bailancho Saad protested against for the probable ill effects it would have on the environment.

In 1994, publicity of Bailancho Saad’s work seemed to be a priority along with the long list of issues taken up and the challenge of the intensified struggles in this year as five issues of SAAD Newsletter were published in this year. The year, 1994 was also
the Year of the Girl Child, so Bailancho Saad organized poster exhibitions on the Girl Child.

While the organisation was still battling against the commercialization of the Carnival even in 1994, it was in this year that the Dowry Prohibition Act was extended to Goa and the PNDT Act was passed. The organisation also engaged with reform of laws relating to other aspects of women’s lives such as rape and personal laws. The organisation held a variety of seminars, protests, programmes in schools and colleges, talks, poster exhibitions, overnight workshops, meetings in villages, orientation programmes for police and also for priests (see Chapter 5 for more details regarding activities in 1994). On October 8 1994, Bailancho Saad was instrumental in rescuing 31 women from bonded labour at a food processing plant in Goa.

In 1995, the issue of sexual harassment and women’s rights at the workplace gained importance. Bailancho Saad also began observing internationally declared days to mark struggle such as the Human Rights Day on 10 December and the End Violence against Women Day on 25 November and these become annual features. The year 1995 also marked the 4th World Conference on Women in Beijing for which Ms Sabina Martins of Bailancho Saad was deputed to attend as part of the ‘official’ NGO delegation from Goa. We now see a change in the format of the SAAD Newsletter. It moves from being a collage of different issues taken up by the organisation to a whole newsletter dedicated to a specific theme or issue such as the Fourth United Nations World Conference on Women, Beijing, China, September 4–15, 1995, Equality, Development and Peace, and the Uniform Civil Code.

Once again, in Tivrem, the organisation organized a programme unrelated to the earlier issue, namely, ‘bars in the village’. This time it was a discussion of the life and struggles of Savitri Bai and Jyothiba Phule, how they rebelled against the society of their time and promoted education for girls. An innovative programme in this year were Exhibition-cum-Sales both as part of its fund raising and its search for a ‘new economic model’ where for the first time Bailancho Saad got involved in sale of products made by women in an attempt to offer a small-scale economic opportunity for women.

An observation during this time is that publications of the organisation, particularly handouts printed from 1995 onwards are no longer only in the English
language but have the matter printed both in English and Marathi. This demonstrates the dramatic change in the audience that the organisation hoped to extend its reach to.

Another Exhibition-cum-Sale was held in May 1996. In the year 1996 there was much debate within Bailancho Saad about the planned Miss World 1996 beauty pageant that was to be held in Goa. Some within the organisations felt that it was the free choice of girls, others felt it was an abuse by companies to market their products, and still others talked of the commodification of the woman’s body. There was, however, no consensus within the organisation about the issue and since the matter was unresolved the organisation did not take any public stand on the issue. It raised some of these concerns, however, in the form of a discussion in its newsletter. Another landmark programme in this year was the Rally Against Rape in January 1996 along with the demands for an effective cell to deal with crimes against women, a forensic laboratory for speedy investigation, the gender sensitization of police and the judiciary, rape trials to be expedited and for the stringent punishment for rapists. In this year, the landmark judgment was passed against the UK national and pedophile Freddy Peats (15 March 1996).

It may have been the reason why the subject of the SAAD in 1997 the Sexual Abuse of Children. In this year Bailancho Saad began more concerted efforts to raise funds for the office space it required and commissioned a well-known Tiatr Company (the local theatre form of the Christians particularly), Jacint Vaz Productions, to stage a production titled Bailancho Saad. The play was staged also in celebration of the anniversary of Bailancho Saad, on 11 and 12 October, 1997 and the proceeds went towards establishing the office in which it functions today.

In 1997, the attempts by the Goa Government to evict people living in and around Baina, Vasco (Goa’s largest red-light areas) began. Bailancho Saad began its involvement with organising a Fact-Finding Team to study the plans and the impact on human lives and the rights violations involved. In July 1997, the National Human Rights Commission were also involved in staying the evictions. However, other attempts including raids, demolition, and arrests continued. Bailancho Saad published and circulated its detailed 28-page report of the Fact-Finding Team titled ‘Evictions in Goa: Case Study of Baina’ (November 1997). The organisation was also involved in the protest
against the government’s decision to replace locally produced salt with factory processed and packaged iodized salt and called for a *Salt Satyagraha* on Independence Day (15 August 1997).

In this year, Sabina Martins of Bailancho Saad was appointed as a Member of the Goa State Commission for Women (GSCW). Following this, several collaborative programmes funded by the GSCW were organized. Collaborative workshops and seminars continued through 1998 and in 1999 on a variety of issues such as crimes against women, policy, gender budgeting, sexual harassment at the workplace, health, bigamy, domestic violence, declining sex ratio, family laws and inheritance and the venues were varied: interior rural areas, city hotels, conference halls, etc. The kinds of programmes also varied at this time and included, protest demonstrations, workshops and seminars, sensitization and awareness programmes, medical camps in rural areas, etc. The programme for the International Women’s Day (8 March 1998) was a mock women’s court which was both awareness building and supportive to women to bring to the ‘Bailancho Court’ real issues in the presence of Supreme Court lawyer Adv. Nandita Haksar. The collaborating agencies now were not only the GSCW but others such as UNIFEM, National Commission for Women, other local and national NGO’s, Centre for Women’s Studies (Goa University) and Lawyers Collective. The target audience also varied from students, police, women and youth (including boys).

The variety in programmes is also a reflection of the cross section of the society that Bailancho Saad represented not only in terms of its member profile but also in terms of the audience it wished to extend its reach to. In the year 1999 a solidarity swim was held to celebrate women’s day.

Apart from continuing the struggle on issues that had been taken up earlier and had not yet been resolved, the two new concerns that the organisation had taken on in the year 2000, apart from numerous individual cases, was the protest against Casinos in Goa and the networking with the Lawyers Collective, Mumbai on consultative meetings to draft the Domestic Violence Bill and collaborating with other local women’s organisations like the Bailancho Ekvott and All India Women’s Conference over the issue of the daylight murder of Merciana Colaco in Vasco. By the year 2000, the number of cases of crimes against women being handled by the organisation had increased.
manifold and it was the trigger for Bailancho Saad and Goa State Commission Member Sabina Martins to take up the challenge to put together a monograph titled *Cognisance of Non-Cognisance: Report on Registered Crimes Against Women in Goa* (GSCW July 2000).

International Women’s Day (8 March) in the year 2000 was celebrated in the Menezes Braganza Hall and the lead message was ‘All Issues are Women’s Issues’. On 8 March 2001, the theme ‘End Violence against Women’ took a predominant place at the function at the TB Cunha Hall and on 8 March 2002 a Carnival like Parade with floats or decorated vehicles carrying messages on a variety of issues, plays being performed, etc. followed by a public programme at Azad Maidan. This was in collaboration with other NGOs and women’s groups. In 2002, Bailancho Saad also organized a massive solidarity march in support of the victims of the Gujarat riots, to promote secularism and tolerance and against communal forces in Goa.

In the year 2003 Afroze Sheikh, a member of Bailancho Saad, who has never had any formal education but has been committed to working for the cause of women received the Sudarop award for her contribution to Goan Society. This year was a major achievement year for the whole of Bailancho Saad in terms of the programmes and activities it undertook. A State Level Workshop on the declining sex ratio titled ‘Locating Missing Girls’ was organized in collaboration with the Centre for Women’s Development Studies, New Delhi and a booklet on the subject was published which included information on the Pre-Conception and Pre-Natal Diagnostic Techniques (Prohibition of Sex Selection) Act, 2003.

In commemorating Women’s Day (8 March 2003), programmes were organised together with the Goa State Commission for Women and included a Women’s Film Festival as well as consultative workshops all over Goa on a collage of issues including (a) Towards Healthy Women, (b) Engendering Women’s Education, (c) Whither Self Help Groups, (d) Women’s Reservation Bill, and (e) Detoxifying the Alcohol Policy. A State Level Consultation was also held to discuss the role of the Complaints Committee in tackling sexual harassment at the workplace. The year 2003 was a year of workshops and seminars and among the other issues around which workshops and seminars were organized the following subjects were important: (a) The review of Family Laws, (b) Self
defense workshops, (c) Capacity building for women in local self government, (d) Gender sensitization, (e) Gender analysis of the Goa Budget 2003–2004, (f) Implementation of the Children’s Act which led to the publishing of a poster on the Campaign Against Child Trafficking (CACT) in India which was launched on December 19, 2003, and (g) Amending Goa Public Gambling Act. A fortnight of programmes on the theme ‘End Violence against Women’ was also organized. Apart from workshops, street plays were planned, and visits were made to study the condition of homes for women. In 2004 an educational programme was held for the women inmates of one of the homes (Provedoria de Assistencia Publica) on women’s day which included a film and entertainment for them.

8 March 2004 was commemorated with a public programme focused on a variety of different issues and the depiction of issues through different cultural forms such as dance, drama, poetry and song. Also, the same year, posters were published on the theme of ‘sexual harassment at the workplace’ and disseminated at a minimal cost of Rs.10 each and a year planner on the subject ‘Another World is Possible’.

On the 14 June 2004, the red light area and other surrounding areas in Baina, Vasco were demolished by the then Government of Goa, leaving 1,500 families and 5,000 people homeless (Desouza 2004). Albertina Almeida of Bailancho Saad was among those who had gone to the area to provide immediate relief to the victims such as food and drink and she was arrested along with a few others. Bailancho Saad was subsequently also involved in demanding rehabilitation for the victims.

In 2000, Sabina Martins, as already mentioned, worked on a monograph on crimes against women and then, in 2004, Bailancho Saad once again collected statistics from the Goa Police to ‘take stock’ of the increase in reported crime. Also on the issue of Violence against Women and the PNDT Act 2003, a workshop was held at the Dempo College. As part of its campaign to end violence against women, Bailancho Saad organized a Public Memorial Service in the centre of the city capital, Panaji ‘Remembering the Women we lost to Violence’. In November 2004 a State Level Workshop ‘Towards Engendering the Health Policy’ was organized and one of the members was selected to attend a workshop on ‘Dalit Feminism’ at the Tata Institute of Social Sciences, Mumbai.
Women’s Day (8 March) 2005 was commemorated with a Rally from the Panaji bus stand (Dr Ambedkar Gardens) to the centre of the city (Azad Maidan) for a public programme on the theme ‘Our Steps…Our Paths’. Bailancho Saad also organized a Peace Rally as part of the Indian Association for Women’s Studies Conference that was held in Goa in May 2005. Participants in the conference from all over the country joined Bailancho Saad in a silent morcha through the city of Panaji. In 2005 discussions were held around the new Children’s Act. Discussions were also held on the Domestic Violence Bill, health, schemes for the economic empowerment of women as well as the proposed beach management plan of the Government of Goa.

On the 4 March 2006, Goa saw communal riots that it had not witnessed for a long time which was a jolt to the seemingly peace-loving community. Bailancho Saad issued a public statement condemning the violence and called for peace and dedicated an issue of the SAAD to the issue of communalization in Goa. Its members also visited the site to extend their solidarity to the affected people and it resulted in the formation of the Citizens’s Initiatives for Communal Harmony (CICH). Bailancho Saad got together women from all walks of life at a public meeting in Panaji under the banner of Women’s Initiative for Peace. At this meeting it was decided that a door-to-door campaign should be started with the prime objective of bringing the community together as one unit on any issue that was not controversial. International Women’s Day 2006 (March 8) was held a few days after the communal riots of 4 March 2006. As is expected, the issue of communal harmony played central to other concerns although there was a conscious effort not to allow women’s concerns to get drowned due to the communal violence. However, the focus was the impact of all this recent violence on women in particular.

Albertina Almeida, one of the oldest members of Bailancho Saad, decided to focus on the CICH and informed her contacts that she would no longer represent Bailancho Saad. She also said that she wanted to move over for younger members to take the initiative as older members, she felt, brought a unspoken hierarchy into the group. Many other members of Bailancho Saad moved over to other organisations as well such as to Saad Angaan. This period marks a historic moment of change for the organisation but despite the departure of many members from regular meetings of Bailancho Saad many continue their association and support for public programmes and larger
campaigns. A Resolution was signed changing for the first time the names of those operating the Bailancho Saad Account at the Syndicate bank to Sabina Martins, Seema Naik and Afroze Sheikh.

14 October 2006 marked 20 years of Bailancho Saad’s existence and a celebration was held in the Menezes Braganza hall which was attended by old and new members. Another landmark in this year was the setting up of the Goa Bachao Abhiyan and a collaborative meeting held in Morjim to discuss the Regional Plan 2011 together with not only Bailancho Saad but also a Morjim based women’s group, Bhushan Kala Mahila Mandal. This began a different chapter in Bailancho Saad’s collaboration with other organisations and the involvement in issues that were not seen by the general public as ‘women’s issues’. Bailancho Saad now moved into more broad based issues such as the impacts of development on women. The organisation has been very involved with critiquing the Regional Plan for Goa. One of the members in particular has been the Co-Convenor of the state agitation against the Regional Plan, namely, the Goa Bachao Abhiyan (GBA), the peoples movement which for the first time in the history of liberated Goa and since the language agitation in the mid 1980s saw masses coming out onto the streets in support of the cause. The demands of the organisation are for participatory planning and decision making from a bottom-up, top-down approach. It has demanded the equal participation of women in the decision-making process and a clear process outlined for implementation. Although Bailancho Saad has been very involved with the issue of the Regional plan through its member who is the Co-convenor much work for the GBA and the cause has been done by Sabina Martins who informs the group of the events that have taken place and the decisions of the GBA.

In 2007, Bailancho Saad collaborated with Mahila Mandals, self-help groups and village level women’s groups on a variety of subjects including awareness programmes on the Regional Plan 2011 and the new Domestic Violence Act 2005. During the IFFI (International Film Festival in India) held in Goa, Bailancho Saad took the lead in the protest against the serving and sale of liquor in the INOX Cinema and the Kingfisher lounge that was opened during the festival. A collaborative organisation to protest this issue was formed together with other groups and organisations called the CAAT (Campaign Against Alcohol in Theatres). This campaign met with some success as it
managed to get the license No. FCL/978 issued to the INOX Leisure Ltd for the consumption of IMFL (Indian made foreign liquor) and CL (country liquor) in their premises (HN 13/99) cancelled by the Commissioner of Excise on 14 June 2007. It was also successful in getting the license for the sale of alcohol in the INOX courtyard cancelled.

The Regional Plan 2011 was also cancelled and the Government of Goa set up a Special Task Force for the formulation of the Regional Plan 2021. However, women were excluded from this Task Force and the Bailancho Saad publicly objected to this.

In this year Sabina Martins was chosen by the Office of the Commissioner of NRI Affairs to accompany the delegation from Goa that went to Kuwait and Qatar to assist in working out a mechanism to help women in distress in Gulf countries. During the visit the team visited women from Goa in the Gulf as well as women’s organisations like Indian NGOs, Kuwaiti NGOs, UNIFEM, ILO, Embassy Officials, etc.

The year 2007 also marked the beginning of a series of workshops and public programmes in which Bailancho Saad collaborated with the Goa State Commission for Women and the State Legal Services Authority on the Domestic Violence Act. The issue of domestic violence took a prominent place in its programme to ‘End Violence’ on 25 November, but, its March 8 programme comprised of awareness and entertainment on a variety of issues.

In 2008, Bailancho Saad joined a Mobile Campaign against Gambling (in a van) and collaborated with Mahila Shakti Abhiyan for the Women’s Day programme. This year the Domestic Violence Act took a prominent place as the organisation was already active in case handling and it struggled to have cases implemented through the government appointed Protection Officers (PO). In Goa, the Block Development Officers (BDOs) are appointed as the POs under the Act, but Bailancho Saad, in this year, struggled to ensure that the Act is implemented in letter and spirit.

In 2009, Bailancho Saad tied up with AAAG (Aam Aadmi Aurat for Gambling) against the increasing number of Casinos in Goa. Besides the success of 2007 has been undone as the Wine Festival was held in the INOX courtyard and liquor was served during the IFFI. Bailancho Saad, however, continues its protest against government promotion of alcohol. Collaborations of Bailancho Saad with other organisations such as
with Goa Bachao Abhiyan over the Goa Regional Plan 2021, the Citizen Initiative for Communal Harmony (CICH) and the Goa State Commission for Women on the issue of Domestic Violence in terms of referral of cases, the Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act (PWDV Act 2005) over public awareness programmes take precedence.

We have seen through this chapter the growth, evolution and transformations that have taken place within the organisation from its beginnings in July 1986 to 2009. In the next chapter we will look more closely at issues, priorities and responses of the group from the focus given in its newsletters (SAAD). It may be pertinent to note here that there was no permanent editorial team for its newsletter and the list of contributors and editors changed with each issue of the SAAD. The choice of issues that would be focused on in the newsletter was decided on at the weekly meetings. The content and lay out of the newsletters was also discussed at in the meeting and a consensus arrived at before the material was sent to the press. This time-consuming consensus process followed for each issue of the SAAD, might explain why only 17 issues have been printed in the 23 years of Bailancho Saad’s existence.

1 The words ‘collective’, ‘organisation’ and ‘group’ are used interchangeably throughout the discussion on Bailancho Saad.

2 Manushi: A Journal about Women and Society is printed, published and edited by Madhu Kishwar on behalf of Manushi Trust, C/202 Lajpat Nagar -1, New Delhi.

3 The contribution of women in Goa’s freedom struggle has rarely been acknowledged, but women’s active participation was evident from the narrated experiences of those involved at the ‘Tribute to Women Freedom Fighters’ conference organised by the Centre for Women’s Studies, Goa University on the 8th March 1993.