Chapter V

RELIGIOUS PRACTICES
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Religion: The Keynote of Indian Culture

In the scheme of culture the place of religion is pivotal particularly in the case of India where history has been so intricately woven with mythology. There are writers according to whom religion and culture are contradictory terms. Agreeing with Croce, Matthew Arnold held that religion can be substituted by culture forgetting that “the place of religion must be considered in the scheme of culture as a complete satisfaction of highly derived needs….in its dogmatics it supplies with strong cohesive forces. It grows of every culture…. The cultural call for religion is highly derived and indirect but is finally rooted in the way in which the primary needs of man are satisfied in culture.”1 Culture and religion are so much interdependent on one another that religious reformation or decay may coincide with the cultural efflorescence or degeneration. History is full of such instances where culture has advanced or derogated from the path of progress due to religious revival or degradation. Like a great redeemer, religion has instilled new life in the dead bones of culture. Probably, considering this, Arnold Toynbee has predicted a new role for religion: “Religion is likely to be the plane on which this coming centrepetal counter movement will first declare itself; and this probability offers us a further hint for the revision of our traditional western methods of studying history as a whole should be to relegate economic and political history to a subordinate plane and give religious history the primacy for religion, after all, is the serious age
religion continues to satisfy uneasy questionings of searching mind and diverts it towards the real and ultimate. Today when the world is sitting over an atomic volcano and the integrity of human mind is doubtful the need for religion has become more inviting and urgent. In this context it may be asked that Goa’s culture is dominated by religious factor, as such religious practices have a very important role in the Goan Society.

**Worship of Deities**

Worship of Deities is an integral part of Hindu religious practices in Goa. Bicholim taluka is no exception to the said phenomenon. The Worship includes Puranic, Folk and semi divine deities which exist in villages and towns of Bicholim.

**Folk Deities**

**Ravalnath**

Ravalnath worship is mainly found in Goa, the Sindhudurg district of Maharashtra and the border areas of Belgaum and Uttar Kanada districts of Karnataka. The worship of Shiva is often found in the form of a linga or as a Soumya Bhairava. His human form, i.e with four arms each having a sword, a trisula, a kettle – drum and a bowl is common with that of the folk – god Ravalnath who is worshipped largely by devotees of all castes in Goa.

Ravalnath image is four handed and is shown standing (Sthanakmurti) with his left leg slightly bent. In his right hand, he holds the sword and in his left hand he carries Amritapatra (Nectar bowl). In the rear right hand, he is seen holding trisul (trident) and in the rear left, a
damru (kettle drum)\(^3\). He wears a mukuta and is draped in dhoti. He wears skull garland in addition to other garlands. He looks straight. His long moustaches with curls give him fearful look. Sometimes, he is accompanied by Chouri (fly whisks) bearing Dasis (female servants) and at times a horse is carved on his right side. The Pujari (priest) of Ravalnath temples normally are Gurav or Raul\(^4\) i.e. non- brahmin priest. At several places in Goa, he is also considered as a Kshetrapal of independent status. Wherever he does not occupy a place as independent deity, he is venerated as an affiliate deity. During Adilshahi Period, Ravalnath was venerated by the Gosavis of Nath Panth\(^5\).

Ravalnath worship is very popular in Bicholim Taluka. There are temples of the deity originally hailing from the taluka and some have been shifted form neighbouring Tiswadi and Bardez talukas during inquisition and oppressive religious policy period of the Portuguese colonial rule. The reason for such shifting was that the Bicholim taluka was under Hindu rule of Sawantawadikara Bhosales and they extended every patronage in religious matters.

The worship of the deity is found in villages of Amona, Nhaveli (Navelim), Cudne, Pale, Latambarcem, Sirigao (Shirgao), Dhumacem, Mulgao, Narve, Virdi, Borde, Bicholim, Mayem, Carapur, Sal and Cansarpale. Often the worship is also found associated alongwith Santeri or Mahalaxmi goddess who is projected as consort of the deity.

**Vetal / Betal**

Vetal or Betal is another popular folk deity which holds the position of Gramdevata in many villages of Goa and Konkan. The Vetal /
Betal images are tall and two handed. Right hand is seen holding a Sword and and the left hand holds a Patra (bowl). The images were made of either wood or stone.  

Vetal is also considered as king of ghosts or goblins, Pishach. There is a view of Sumerian origin of the word Vetal and accordingly, the word Betal consists of ‘Bel’ and ‘Tal’ which means a warrior in Sumerian language. The animal sacrifices to the deity confirms that Goan Vetal / Betal is Maharashtra’s Vetalla or Mhasoba or Mhaskoba (to become Bahiroba, Bhairava and Virabhadra, Shiva’s ugra or fierce aspect in affiliation). Vetal is also known as Agio – Vetal (the fiery Vetal) and Gorakha Vetal. The latter name suggests his appropriation in the Nath Pantheon. The term Vetal is of Austic origin and thus is a loan word in Sanskrit.

Vetal or Betal figures are mostly in nude form. However, wherever such images are in worship in the temples, he is seen adorned with a ‘dhoti’ or ‘dhotar’ as is called in local language. His priests are non-Brahmins belonging to Gurav, Raval and Bhagat class of pujaris or priests. Vetal or Betal is considered as the Protector deity of the village.

Vetal / Betal images are found in worship in temples and also lying outside temple precincts as archaeological remains in sculptural form in Bicholim taluka. These include images at Amona, Nhaveli, Cudne, Usap, Kharpal, Advalpale, Mulgao, Cotambi, Maye, Dhumacem, Nanoda and Sal (Salem).
Santeri

As the Goddess of Peace, Santeri or Shantadurga is the Gramdevi (village goddess) of a great number of villages in Goa. The word ‘Santeri’ might have originated from Sanskrit version ‘Shantikari’ - the word which appears in one of the copper plates of Kadambas. Peace, fertility and protection are the connotations of this goddess. Her worship began in the form of ant-hill, but when temples gave her shrine, the builders became new Mahajans. Though many Shantadurgas are Santeri renamed, tradition in many places of Goa keeps her memory by naming her after their village. Thus the Santeri of village Pilerne, now at Narve, is known as Shantadurga Pilarnkarin. Shantadurga appears to be her puranic name.

The ant-hills locally known as ‘Roenn’ in Konkani symbolically represent mother earth as they are made of earth itself. Folk legend and tradition believes that Santeri worship has been established by Sage Parshurama in Goa and Konkan area. The aborigines of Goa, Gauda’s are known to be sons of this soil. It is, but logically natural that in ant-hill worship of the goddess, Gaudas are the prominent worshippers of the deity and hold certain rights by tradition.

Bicholim taluka has ant-hills and also images of Santeri in Shantadurga, Mahishmardini, Bhumika, Durgadevi form.

In Bicholim, the goddess, in ant-hill form is worshipped at Amona, Naveli, Cotombi, Virdi, Mayem, Carapur, Bordem, Piligao, Bicholim etc. and in Sculptural image forms at Cudne, Usap, Pale, Nanoda, Dhumacem, Narve, Maye, Latambarcem, Surla, Bicholim, Lamgao, Sirigao (Shirgao) etc. The ant-hill in the temple of Santeri in
Kumbharwada area of Mayem village is the tallest almost touching the roof of the Sanctum Sanctorum.

**Gajalaxmi as Bhauka and Kelbai**

Gajalaxmi is the goddess of wealth and prosperity. The sculptures found in Goa have a ancient tradition. The Gajalaxmi sculptures are normally depicted on a semicircular schist stone with the goddess Laxmi in a sitting posture and holding lotus in each of her hand, and two elephants holding pitchers at the tip of their trunks and pouring water on the goddess. The depiction of goddess Laxmi in the Gajalaxmi form might have commenced during the period of Shunga Dynasty in the Northern India. Gajalaxmi is one of the most popular images (Roopa) of goddess Laxmi.

Some scholars have inferred that earth and rain clouds have been symbolized by Laxmi and Elephants respectively. Accordingly the showering of the earth with rain water have found symbolic expression depicted in images of Gajalaxmi. Though the images of Gajalaxmi are worshipped by the people of Goa, they never call them Gajalaxmi but always designate them as Kelbai or Bhauka.

The flowers of Bhauka tree (Cassia Fistula) are golden in colour and goddess Laxmi is associated with yellow golden coloured garments. This may be the reason why the devotees have associated Gajalaxmi with Bhauka. Most of the Gajalaxmi sculpture’s, are placed at the left side of the image or shrine of Betal. Such an arrangement is either along with Vetal /Betal sculpture or it may have been an independent shrine.
Therefore, the Bhauka has element of ferocity being associated with Betal who is also considered a folk deity of ferocious nature.

Kelbai is considered a mother goddess and deity of peace and prosperity. Kelbai is worshipped as independent village deity in many villages of Bicholim taluka. Gajalaxmi being venerated as Kelbai is found in Mayem, Kudnem, Usap, Vadaval, Kharpal, Cudchire, Maulingem, Gavthan (Cudne) whereas at Amona, Navelim, Narve, Sal and Dhumacem the images are worshipped as Bhauka or Bhaukadevi.

**Brahmanimaya**

Brahmanimaya is a folk deity that is mostly worshipped in Bicholim and Sattari taluka of Goa. The image of this goddess is depicted normally in standing posture (sthanak murti) and she is seen holding two serpents in her both hands. Local tradition believes that Brahmanimaya is Adimaya or Adishakti and the two serpents in her hand symbolically represent Shiva and Vishnu. The depiction of serpents in her hand is supposed to show her superiority as all powerful supreme goddess. The goddess also represents fertility concept and female power. Brahmanimaya is found worshipped in temples at Usap, Cudchire, Narve, Maulingem, Vadawal, Kharpal and Dhumacem villages of Bicholim.

**Other folk deities**

Among other minor folk deities, Purmar, Ghodeshwar and Purvas are prominent in worship in some of the villages in Bicholim Taluka. Purmar images are depicted horse ridden and holding Sword and shield in both the hands. Yadnyopavit (sacred thread) also adorns the
sculpture of Purmar deity.\textsuperscript{21} Purmar images are in worship in Nanoda, Dhumacem whereas Purvas (Amona) and Ghodeshwar (Usap, Mencurem) images are in worship in the Bicholim taluka. Purmar image at Nanoda is very peculiar. It shows deity riding on a tiger instead of a horse.

**Puranic Deities**

**Shiva**

Shiva is the most venerated God in Goa.\textsuperscript{22} The veneration of this God of Dravidian origin, can be traced back to times immemorial. Shiva is one of the influential deities of the triad of Hindu Gods. He is specially associated with the act of Samhara (destruction) or Pralaya or absorption in the concept of the trinity. He is also described in Puranic texts as the originator and the best exponent of various arts and accomplishments such as those of deep concentration (Yoga), expounding (Vyakhyana), the Shastras, music, dancing etc.\textsuperscript{23} The Amarkhosha gives a list of his 48 names.\textsuperscript{24}

Shiva is generally worshipped in the form of the phallus or linga fixed on a pedestal. Various forms of linga are worshipped, from the crude uncut conical genesis usually believed to be self – born (Swayambhu) to the highly polished and handmade shafts. The lingas having facets are known as dharalinga. When a human face is carved on it, it is called mukhalinga and this type of linga is considered very sacred.\textsuperscript{25} Phallic worship existed in all ancient civilizations.\textsuperscript{26} Shiva sculptures in human form can be assigned back to Maurya period on the basis of references of Patanjali and Arthashastra.\textsuperscript{27}
Shiva worship in Goa was patronized and encouraged by all Hindu rulers. However, the Kadamba kings were ardent devotees of Shiva and encouraged the worship in region under their control including the Saptakoteshwar, presently at Narve Village in Bicholim taluka.

A great number of temples of Shiva are under invocation of Ishwara, as for example, the Saptakoteshwar (Narve), Kudneshwar (Cudne), Rudreshwar (Arvalem), Nagreshwar (Narve), Amruteshwar (Amona), Siddheshwar (Surla and Vadawal), Chandreshwar (Cotombi) etc. Besides above names, Shiva is venerated as Mallikarjun at Surla and Pale and as Mahadev at Piligao, Velguem, Sal villages of Bicholim taluka.

Umamaheshmurti are in worship at Cudne and Mayem villages and on archaeologically important image recovered from Cudne village is now in the collection of Archaeological Survey of India Museum at Old Goa.

Vishnu

Vishnu is the God who occupies the second place in public veneration in Goa. The word ‘Vishnu’ literally means all pervading. The Chalukyas of Badami ruled Goa from Revatidvipa or the modern Redi in Sindhudurg district of Maharashtra from 580 to 750 A.D. They revived the worship of Vishnu and styled themselves as ‘Parambhagvatas’ or great devotees of the god Vishnu Narayana.

There are 10 incarnations and 24 epithets of the deity. All of these 24 variety names of God Vishnu are met within the Mahabharata epic, though not according to any iconographical pattern. In Goa, most of
the Vishnu Sculptures are locally called as Narayandev clearly showing the influence of Dravidian (Southern) impact.

In Bicholim taluka, veneration of Vishnu deity is found in the epithets of Vasudev (Amona) Narayan (Mulgao, Maye, Pale, Nanoda and Narve), Janardan (Nanoda and Navelim), Keshav (Mulgao, Narve, Surla, Nanoda) and Trivikrama (Nanoda). The deity is worshipped in other forms as Srinivas (Nanoda), Venkatesh (Nanoda), Gopalkrishna (Narve, Advalpale) Radhakrishna (Sankhali), Ram (Nanonda, Piligao, Narve), Laxmi Narayan (Bicholim town). One abraded sculpture of Vishnu as keshav epithet found at Sankhali and is presently displayed in the Goa State Museum.

Vitthal considered as one of the incarnations of Vishnu in Maharashtra and Karnataka, is being venerated at historic temple of Pandurang at Vitthalapur – Carapur, Nanoda and Narve.

Kalbhairav

Kalbhairav worship is found in Bicholim taluka. He is considered both as a Shivgana and also as an incarnation of Shiva. Bhairava is closely associated with Nath Cult and Shakti cult also. He is kalbhairav, because even Kala - the God of Death shudders before him. There is a belief that by seeing Kalbhairav, all sins committed during the period of hundreds of generations are wiped off.

The images of Kalbhairav are depicted holding trident, damru, human head, and sword. Sometimes a mace and a bowl are also depicted in his sculptures a dog is also depicted side by feet of Kalbhairav. He is
worshipped as an independent temple at Narve and as an affiliate deity, is found worshipped at Sankhali and Cudne.

**Surya**

Surya (sun) was an important solar deity in the early vedic period. The Vedas refer him as Savitra, Pusan, Bhaga, Vivasvat, Mitra, Aryaman and Vishnu.\(^{36}\) The worship of Surya, the sun god is very ancient in India.

In the iconographic representations, Surya stands on a lotus pedestal, holding two full – blow lotus in two hands and his feet and part of the two legs are covered by high boots, a peculiar feature only of the sun – god. As per Matsya – Purana, there are two attendants of Surya namely Danda and Pingal. In some sculptures, he is shown riding on a chariot with Arun the Cherioteer of the sun holds the reigns of the horses. The houses are seven in number and the chariot of moves on a single wheel.

In Cudnem village, a Surya image and remnants of a sun temple were found. This image of 7\(^{th}\) or 8\(^{th}\) Century period \(^{37}\) is a remarkable sculpture and which testifies worship of sun during Chalukyan period. Sun images with Cherioteer Arun are recently in worship as Panchayatan deities in two temples at Nanoda.

**Hanuman / Maruti**

Scholars and Researchers believe that Hanuman or Maruti belongs to Yaksha tradition and he was later assimilated in both Shaiva as well as Vaishnava Sampradaya.\(^{38}\) He was, therefore, in earlier times referred to as ‘Kapiyaksha.\(^{39}\) He has names as ‘Mahavir’ and ‘Adbhut’
which identify themselves with Yakshas. Shaivite’s consider him as 11th Rudra whereas the Vaishnavite sect followers worship him as Ram – Dasa’ i.e the servant of Rama.40

Hanuman images have been noticed at Advalpale, Sankhali, Nanoda and Narve in Bicholim taluka. The image of Hanuman at Nanoda is depicted crushing the Apasmar under his feet. The image at Sanquelim (Sankhali) depicts the deity crushing apasmar purusha under its feet and is shown in side posture and Chapetdan mudra. The image at Narve may be of 100 yrs. old. In this temple, he is shown holding a big bunch of Bananas. The sculpture at Advalpale is unique as instead of Apasmara Purush a female demon is depicted crushed under the feet of Hanuman who also holds the Dronagiri in his hands. The depiction of the female demon symbolizes ‘Panauti’ (saade sati).41 The local devotees make it a point to visit Hanuman devata on Saturday42 as they believe that by worshipping Hanuman, they will be able to get relief from the ‘saade sati or Panauti’.

Ganesh

Ganesh worship is the most popular worship in India. Ganesh pooja might have come into existence in 5th – 6th century A.D.43 However, scholars from the west date this back to 1000 B.C. In the Maitrayani Samhita, reference is made to Ganapatyas i.e worshippers of Ganapati.44

Till liberation of Goa i.e 1961 A.D. there were no shrines in Bicholim taluka having Ganesh as the main deity. However, sculptures of Ganesh found in worship as affiliate deity and of archaeological importance are at Cudne, Nanoda, Mayem and Narve. Post – Liberation
period has seen erection of independent shrines at Bordem (Bicholim), Sankhali, Amona village where Ganesh Worship is in existence.

**Semi Divine Deities and Spirits**

Bicholim taluka abounds in worship of semi-divine deities and spirits like Devchar, Rashtroli Brahman, Dadd etc.

**Devchar**

Devchar is considered as the protector of village boundaries. In Konkani, some times he is referred to as ‘Shime vaylo’ i.e residing on the boundary of the village. Devchar is offered peafowl (cock) and animal (goat/sheep) sacrifice in fulfillment of a vow. He is also offered ‘Rot’ i.e a pancake made of rice flour, jaggery and also bananas by the devotees. There are no images as such barring exceptional cases of recent times. It is believed that they reside on Banyan (Ficus Benghelensis) or Sacred Fig / peepal (Ficus Religiosa) trees.

The local tradition believes that Devchar help the estranged commuters by leading them safely to their destination places. Devchars exist in almost all villages of Bicholim.

The prominent Devchar’s in worship in Bicholim are Jagekar (Virdi), Gode Amreshwar (Nanoda) Nirankari (Ona / van) Barazan (Mencure) Tamarnayak (Kharpal) Kalsapedcha Ajoba (Cudne) Sakhaleshwar (Maulingem), Madya vaylo (Sal), Pavlar (Navelim), Ghoglyo (Usap), Nirankari (Sarvan), Kumar Khanitlo Ajoba (Cudne), Taleshwar (Mulgao & Vhalsi) and Konivaylo (Amona) and they are venerated by devotees. 45
Dadd

Dadd have a inferior status to that of Devchar and they are both benevolent as well as malevolent. In order to appease the malevolent, people worship them so that they do not cause any harm to them. In Amona village, there is place of ‘Dadd’ in worship. Local tradition believes that the ‘Dadd’ spirit harassed the locals in the past as such they prayed to local goddess to do away with the harm of this ‘Dadd’. The goddess in turn requested the Lairai goddess of Shirgaon village to find the solution. The goddess Lairai then entrusted the job to Devchar of Shirgao who invited the ‘Dadd’ to Shirgao and asked him to stay atop on a ‘Kajro’ tree till he returns to bring him a ‘red’ means meat. It is said that the Devchar of Shirgao never returned to that place and the ‘Dadd’ had to stay there as he still awaits the fulfillment of the promise. It is said that the ‘Dad’ obstructs the Goddess Lairai on her way during zatra procession and to divert his attention, the goddess throws away a Red Aboli flower garland on that tree and sleekly passes away from the tree. Local tradition also believes that this ‘Dadd’ will never forgive the villagers of Amona and therefore not a single villager, from Amona joins the Shirgao zatra procession for walk on fire proceedings as a ‘Dhon’ or devotee of Lairai. If he becomes a ‘Dhon’, then the ‘Dadd’ spirit is sure to take revenge on the person/s from Amona village. Such folklores passed on from generation to generation become local tradition and beliefs over a considerable period of time. Cultural history of a region is partly constituted of such legends and beliefs of local tradition.
Chavath - the Goan Way of celebration

The celebrations of most loved Hindu festivals of Goa is Chavath which takes place at the family level and Shigmo is more on the community level. Goa celebrates Chavath with the greatest fanfare and an atmosphere of gaiety and festivity pervades every nook and corner. The family members wherever they may be, proceed towards their ancestral houses in the villages. All the members of the family join the various preparations like, cleaning the house using fresh cow dung, arranging the Makar, its decoration, collecting the natural items for the Matoli, as well as in the cuisine preparing auspicious sweets like Nevryo. They come and work together, worship together, eat together and enjoy decorations of the Matoli, fireworks, singing Aarti, making music on the Ghumat – Shamell, Fugdi dance and so on. Incidentally, the sweet dish Nevryo is even important at Christmas for the Christian fold of the society.

Almost every Goan village has at least one artist, who is an expert in making clay idols of Lord Ganesh. They begin their work well in advance by bringing a special kind of clay and then making it suitable to produce the idols, which are made manually using moulds and finally painting them with attractive colours. Even during earlier time’s only natural colours where used, chemical colours were avoided. For each family, the size, even colour of the body of the idol was usually determined by tradition. The idol was draped in costumes according to different mythological legends. Of late, however, one finds some variations in the traditional costumes of the Lord Ganesh reflecting the current trends.
Whatever the form of the idol, a small clay mouse, the vehicle of Lord Ganesh, is always seen near the idol.

In the village houses, a portion known as Padvi at the main entrance and inside hall is called Vosri. This is a place for the installation of Ganpati. At the beginning this portion is painted using lime. Due to the absence of a table a temporary platform is erected either by using wooden planks or pieces of betel nut palm. The houses situated near the forest are compelled to use the sticks of Karanv or Hudo, even wooden logs and the idol was installed either facing the east or west.

Traditionally, a significant aspect of the Chavath is the Matoli (Fig. 5.1); for which the frame of the bamboo or beetle nut palm was used; it is hung in front of Lord Ganesh. Bunches of cultivated and wild fruits are hung on this Matoli, all along with interspersed bunches of mango leaves, Convention is observed particularly in the villages that not thread, other than the local plant known as Kevni vaye is used to tie the fruits. The items like cucumbers, chibud, dudi, torand (papanus), nirphanas – bread fruit, etc, and bunches of local fruits like ambade, coconuts, shiptem (beetle nut), banana and wild fruit bunches like Kanglam, phaglam, mattam, etc are the traditional adornments of the Matoli. While plucking fruits, even ambya talle – care is taken that nothing should fall on the ground.

It is interesting to note that a family that is childless will take Aangwan – a vow to Ganesh that if their wish is fulfilled, they will title the new born to the Matoli. The baby is tied by wrapping it in a piece of cloth for a short time.
On the occasion of Chavath, many people host musical programmes like Bhajans and Sunvari singing at their homes. Family members who are well versed in the art of dance and music perform before the idol. All this gaiety makes Chavath a visual treat for the onlooker.

**Diwali - Colourful five day festivities**

‘Diwali or Deepawali’ is the festival of lights. It symbolizes the human urge and desire to move towards light. The term Diwali is derived from the Sanskrit word Deepawali, which means a cluster or strings of lamps.

Light is the universal symbol of divinity and spirituality. After the primeval chaos of darkness, light flooded the universe and bade obscurity to be gone.

In Hinduism, light is a metaphor for wisdom, for grasping spiritually the divine part of the atman (personality) and manifestation of Krishna, the Lord of Light.

Diwali is also known as Naraka Chaturdashi. It is celebrated on the 14th day of the dark fortnight in the month of Ashwin. This day is marked to commemorate the destruction of Asura King Naraka by Lord Krishna. Narakasura is the giant of filth born of goddess Earth. On the day of Naraka Chaturdashi, the ancient custom was to collect dung heaps and manure and remove it far from the house. However, this heap was worshipped by offering a burning lamp. It was done prior to pre dawn bath taken after anointing the bodies with oil.

In fact, the five days Diwali festivities begin on the 13th day of the dark half of Ashwin month and continues till the second day of Kartik.
On this day women bathe after applying unguents and fragrant oils. The water containers are cleaned and decorated with garlands of flowers and leaves. The water-pitchers are applied with coloured mud and vermillion and made ready for early bath the next day.

After the pre-dawn bath, the households are illuminated with oil lamps. The married women wave the oil lamps and water mixed with vermillion around the face of each male. Then the male crush the ‘karit’, the fruit of cucurbitous plant symbolizing the killing of Narakasura. After this ritual all relish the sweetmeats, the special variety of ‘fov’ (flattened rice).

In Goa, on the eve of Diwali, houses are cleared of unwanted terms. People make huge effigies of Narakasura in almost all the villages and towns and they are burnt at pre-dawn hours after the Asura is symbolically killed by Lord Krishna.

The next day of Naraka Chaturdashi is marked for Laxmipujan or Pedhipujan. This marks the end of Vikram or Samvat era. Hence traders close their old accouts and new accounts are opened.47

The first day of Kartik month which is considered as the holiest month of the Hindu calendar, is celebrated as Bali-Pratipada. According to the Hindu mythology, King Bali was made to abdicate and sent to nether world by Lord Vishnu. Bali was a demon but was known so much for his generosity that he excelled the Gods in merit. This very character became a cause of danger to the Gods. Hence Lord Vishnu in his incarnation of Vaman (dwarf) pushed him to the nether world. However, Bali prayed to the Lord to permit him to visit the earth once a year. It is believed that Bali visits the Earth on this day.
In Goa this first day is also celebrated as ‘Gorawam-Padvo’ (festival of cattle worship). These are the cultural and ritualistic traditions of pastoral tribes.\(^{48}\) As per Vishnu Purana, people of Gokul started worshipping Mount Govardan instead of Lord Indra. Offended, Indra send a deluge to Gokul. But Krishna saved the people and their cattle by lifting the Govardhan Mountain serving it as an umbrella. Hence cows and bulls are also decorated and Worshipped on this day.

The second day of Kartik is popularly known as Bhau-Bij or Yama Dwitiya. As per the mythological references, on this day Yama, the god of Death visited his sister Yama and was treated with love, hospitality and affection. On the day of Bhau-Bij, the sister invites brothers and honours them. The sisters apply tilak and wave arati to their brothers. In return, brother’s offer presents to sisters. It is one of the most sentimental and touching occasion of the Indian rituals.

The five day festivities are marked with decorative lamps tied to lamp poles in addition to the house illumination with decorative lights. Fire works become the focus point for children and adults. Festive meals and gifts exchange takes place on large scale. The festivities of Diwali become the most beautiful and grandest festival of jubilation.

**Dussehra and Navratri Celebrations**

This is a ten-day festival in which nine nights (hence Navaratri or 'nine nights,' another name of the festival) are spent in worship, and the tenth day in celebrations in honour of Devi, the goddess of the Hindu pantheon. Devi is all things to all men. As *Sakti* or primordial energy, she represents cosmic dynamics, and animates all things.\(^{49}\) In this aspect even
Shiva, otherwise conceived as her husband, is Shava (corpse) to her. As Durga she is the war-goddess of the pantheon, perpetually at war with Evil, represented by demons of which the most formidable was Mahisha who attacked her in the form of a snorting buffalo. As Kali she devoured all devouring Kal (time) itself. As Jagadamba she is the All-merciful Mother nourishing the universe. As Parvati she is a dutiful housewife enjoying domestic felicity with her husband Shiva and their two children, Ganesha and Kartikeya. As Sati she is the devoted wife who burnt herself to death to avenge a slight on her husband by her father. As Raktadanti (of bloody teeth), she is the presiding deity of blood and carnage. As Kumari, she is the Virgin, most pure. As Lalita, she is a resplendent beauty capable of, in the words of the philosopher Sankara, vitalising even the impotent with virility. As Uma she is an ascetic. The goddess has thus an aspect to suit every human mood, and her worship during Dussera is just as varied.

The festival starts on the first night of the Hindu month of Asvin (September-October). It is also known as Durga Puja (worship of Durga) or Durgotsava (feast of Durga), Durga being the presiding deity of the celebrations. The Saktas, who consider the goddess as the Supreme Deity, worship a manifestation of the goddess on each of the Navaratri nights. The manifestations generally worshipped are, Mahakali or the great Kali who killed the demons Madhu and Kaithabha against whom Vishnu fought unsuccessfully for five thousand years; Mahishasuramardhini or conqueror of the demon Mahisha; Chamunda, the destroyer of the demons Chanda and Munda; Kali, who killed the vampire Raktabija; Nanda who predicted the destruction of the evil Kansa, the mortal enemy of Krishna; Raktadanti who bit to death a demon who had obtained immunity from death by
natural causes and weapons; Sakhambari, who protected the world from a famine that lasted a hundred years; Durga, who killed a demon named Durga; and Labhramari, who destroyed the demon Aruna.

Durga Puja celebrations are not, however, confined to the Saktas. Orthodox Hindu conceptions are essentially pantheistic, and the functions and personality of one god or goddess cannot be entirely separated from those of another. It is easy for a Vaishnava to conceive Durga as a manifestation of his favourite goddess Lakshmi and for a Sakta to identify any god or goddess of the pantheon with Sakti. So in certain parts of India, all the three principal goddesses of the pantheon are worshipped during Navaratri, Durga during the first three nights, Lakshmi, the next three, and Sarasvati the last three nights. Sarasvati being the goddess of the cultural arts, books and quills are kept at her altar for the three days sacred to her, and scholars abstain from all literary activities. Musicians and even artisans in certain regions dedicate their instruments and tools to Sarasvati in this manner.

Durga was propitiated by prayers and sacrifices (in which a buffalo, symbolising the buffalo demon, was the main victim) before a military expedition started. Chhatrapati Shivaji, who revitalised Hindu militarism by his Wars against Aurangzeb, was an ardent devotee of Durga.

The Vaishnavas find in Durgotsava a particular occasion for celebration in honour of Rama. When the battle of Lanka was raging and as the fortunes of war swayed, Rama is reputed to have propitiated Durga and obtained victory by her favour. The hero is said to have prayed and fasted for seven days; as a result, on the eighth day he was able to kill the
demon Ravana; on the ninth day he performed a sacrifice as thanksgiving to the goddess, and on the tenth he started with Sita and his entourage on his memorable return journey home to Ayodhya. To commemorate these events, in regions where the worship of Rama is popular, Durgotsava is often celebrated more in honour of Rama than Durga, and recitations from the Ramayana and stage shows depicting the exploits of Rama assume greater importance than the worship of the goddess. In Bicholim taluka, Navratrotsav is mostly a holy affair. Kirtans are performed in almost all the temples dedicated to female deities like sateri, Navdurga, Mahalaxmi, shantadurgao Chamundeshwari and also in the temples of Gramdev or Gramdevata (village deity) for nine nights and it culminates in celebration of Dussehra. In many temples of folk deities Ravalnath and Betal, a person from a particular community hits the sword on his forehead in a trance performance to offer his own blood to the deity during the Dussera rituals. This ritual performance is locally called as ‘Khetra Vidhi’.

**The Mahashivratri**

As the name suggest (Shiva’s great night), the feast / festival is celebrated by Hindus in the name of Shiva, one of the gods of Hindu Trinity.\(^{51}\) It falls on Shiva Chaturdashi of Phalguna, that is on the fourteenth day of the dark half of Magha (February-March). To keep vigil on the night is reckoned so meritorious that every orthodox Hindu keeps awake by engaging himself or herself in pious exercises and Shivaratri in common parlance means a sleepless night.\(^{52}\) Not only the night but the whole day is kept for Shiva worship by devouts. To keep awake
throughout night the katha (Stories) expounding the greatness of Shiva are organised.

Lord Shiva is worshiped in the form of a Linga (Phallus). The top portion is called ‘Pindi’ and base portion as ‘Yonipith’. It also symbolises the male and female fertility cult. Worshiping the Linga was common amongst the non-aryans who were the earliest settler in India.\textsuperscript{53}

On the day of the Mahashivratri the orthodox Hindu rises early in the morning, baths and attends most devotedly to his prayers. In Bicholim taluka, the day of the devotees starts with a bath in a river or spring or a well at home or near Shiva temple which is followed by Pooja abhishek. Raw milk is poured on the Pindi for the abhishek and it is followed by putting the levels of Bel or Indian Bael / Bengal Quince tree (Aegle Marmelos) on the Pindika of the Linga which are considered sacred and dear to Shiva. Flowers of white coloured Hibiscus, dronpushpa and parijat are also offered to Shiva.

A puranic parable goes that a hunter waiting for a pray spent an entire night preceding the Shivratri Day seated on a bel tree and unknowingly kept throwing the leaves on the shivling at the bottom of the tree. The hunters’s worship though performed unwittingly, highly pleased Lord Shiva and the after his death, got a place in the blissful abode of Lord Shiva i.e. ‘Kailasa’.\textsuperscript{54}

Shaivism has a rich historical past in Goa. The inscription on the plate of Bhoja ruler Asankita Varman of 700 A.D. mentions that he was a devotee of Maheshwar i.e. Shiva. Shiva in the Sapteshwar form was the family deity of the Kadamba rulers of Goa.\textsuperscript{55}
Although the Shrines of Shiva are found in almost all villages and towns of Bicholim Taluka, the two 1) The Rudreshwar at Arvalem and 2) The Saptakoteshwar at Narve are prominent where devotees prefer to go for Mahashivratri celebrations as both these places are considered holy Tirtha site and special fairs take place here which are thronged by thousands of devotees from all parts of Goa. It is particularly meritorious to hold fairs on riverbeds or some other waterfront during Shivaratri.\(^{56}\) Arvalem has a waterfall nearby the temple and holy pond ‘Bhimkund’ for holy dip in the water where as the Panchganga river nearby Saptakoteshwar temple and a Deva Tali (Holy tank) opposite the shrine make it meritorious for the devotees to worship Shiva at these places on the day of Mahashivratri.

**Gokulashtmi**

The eighth day of the dark half of the month of Bhadrapada (August-September) is celebrated as the birth of Lord Srikrishna.\(^{57}\) Lord Shrikrishna or Krishna is the eighth incarnation of Vishnu. It is also celebrated as Srijayanti or Krishnashtami and is the popular festival in whole of India. These two are the names by which this festival is called by the Vaishnavas, while among the smartras, it is known a Gokulashtami and in Northen India as Janmashtami.\(^{58}\)

It is also considered as one of the Hindu fasts and festivals. The day preceding Janmashtami is observed as a fast, terminating at midnight, at which time Krishna was born. According to Puranic tradition, Krishna was born on 8th lunar day (Ashtami) of the waning month of Sravana at midnight. The fast is broken as usual by a feast on the following day. The
observance of the fast varies with different sects. The followers of the Smriti-Smartas commence their fast with the commencement of the lunation wherever that takes place; the Vaishnavas and the Madhvas regulate their fast by the moons passage through the asterism of Rohini.

Goa has a mythological connection with Srikrishna. As per the tradition, it was in Goa, that a fierce battle between Srikrishna and the Magadha king Jarasandha had taken place which resulted in Shrikrishna’s victory. His mother, Devaki had followed him from Mathura and in pursuit, the two met at Choodmani Island (present Chodan village) in Tiswadi taluka where Devki breast fed Srikrishna in the form of a baby - Balkrishna. One of the rarest temples in India of Devki Krishna existed in chodan which was later shifted to Marcel during Portuguese regime.

In Bicholim taluka, the Gokulashtami or Janmashtami is celebrated with traditional fervour. There is also family tradition amongst many of the Hindu families in this taluka of observing the fast. The celebrations start early morning in villages with every one taking a holy bath and singing lullabies to the just born Krishna. Scenes depicting the life of Krishna in Gokul are also displayed in public places. In many temples including Radhakrishna Murlidhar Sausthan, Sanquelim (Sankhali), Gopalkrishna Temple, Advalpale, the Lord is put in a decorated cradle to commemorate the occasion of his birth on the said day. The Gujarati community celebrates Krishnashtami with pomp in the same way the Goans celebrate Ganesh Chaturthi. In their temple at Narve (Bicholim), celebrations are held on Janmashtami, where a big fair is put up. In family tradition Pujas are performed and prasad and other sweets are offered. People believe that they will have a happy and prosperous life by
observing the fast on that day. Bhajans and hymns are also recited on the occasion. After Janmashtami, popular ‘Dahi-handi’ programmes are also organised in the street and village level by local youths depicting the childhood of Lord Krishna. Earlier, such ‘Dahi-handi’ was organised only at the temples.

A superstitious belief prevailed amongst older generations in the past that as Krishna, who was born in the asterism of Rohini which was the cause of the death of his maternal uncle Kansa, the birth of a male child in that asterism forbodes evil to the maternal uncle of that child. But this superstitious belief is fast dying out.

Rama Navami

The ninth day of the first fortnight of the month of Chaitra is celebrated as the birthday of Sri Rama, the seventh incarnation of Lord Vishnu. As it is believed that he was born at midday, the main worship also takes place at noon time. The devotees observe fast throughout the day.

In all vaishnava temples of Rama or Vishnu, a coconut is placed in a cradle at the time of sunrise and at midday, the priest announces the birth of Rama.

Rama is considered as the ideal king of legendary India; he was the ideal in fraternal and filial duties too. Because of the devotional nature and popularity of the Hindu epic Ramayana, Rama remains perhaps the most dearly loved of the hero gods of the pantheon, and his birthday is an important date for every Hindu, irrespective of sect or cast. It is for this reason, we find the main celebrations of Rama Navami are held in the Ram
Mandir at Gimone Wada of Piligao village in Bicholim, which belongs to the Chari / Mest Samaj (Class of Ironsmiths / Black Smiths and Carpenters) who incidently identify themselves as Vishwakarma Manumay Brahmins class. This temple has image of Rama, Laxman and Sita. This temple has historic importance too. Prince Shahalam of Moghul army during his expedition against Chhatrapati Sambhaji in Goa, had destroyed the Ram mandir and the images of the idols in January 1684. The present temple is built near the destroyed site of the original temple.

The festivities begin in the early morning with recitation of Puranas (Scriptures), pooja and kirtans. At noon an infant of Rama idol is put into decorated cradle to mark his birth and lullabies praising the deeds of Rama are sung on the occasion. Cultural and religious activities are also held in the temple of Rama at Murdiwada-Narve, Nanoda, Pale, Vyasashram Math-Bordem (Bicholim), and Vishnu / Narayana Temples in other villages of Bicholim.

The Ram Bhakti tradition in Goa is prevalent since the arrival of Madhavacharya, a well known spiritual leader of south India belonging to the Vaishnavite sect, in the 12th century A.D.

**Hanuman Jayanti**

Hanuman Jayanti is observed on the full moon day of the month of chaitra as it is the birth anniversary of the God Hanuman. Hanuman holds a peculiarly exalted position in the Hindu Pantheon. He is the God of Muscular strength, wisdom, knowledge and valour.

Hanuman is said to have been born of an Apsara (Celestial Dancer) Anjani who was transformed into a monkey by a curse, and of the
wind - God Marut (Hence Hanuman’s other name Maruti). He owes his honored place in the Pantheon to the signal service he rendered Lord Rama in his search for Sita and in the battle of Lanka. He was a celibate and his great strength is attributed to strict celibacy.

Hinduism has many zoomorphic deities and Hanuman is one such popular deity in the Pantheon. As a leader of the Vanara’s (Monkey’s), he served a noble cause and as such living monkeys are regarded as his representatives or lineage descendants. Many temples are swarmed with them and it is considered a meritorious act to feed them and a sacrilegious act to injure or cause any harm to them.

Goa has many temples dedicated to Lord Hnuman. In Bicholim Taluka, worship of Hanuman is found in the shrines at Sankhali (Sanquelim), Pale, Nanoda, Advalpale, Paira, Bordem, Piligao, Narve and Carapur village. The deity is also worshipped below Banyan tree (Ficus benghalensis) or sacred fig, Peepal (Ficus religiosa) trees which has been noticed at Amona village. His shrines are established on border of two villages or on the top of a hill to get rid of evil spirits. The credit for popularising cult of Hanuman worship goes to Saint Ramdas in Maharashtra.

The Goa Kadamba rulers banner (Dhvaja) bore a picture of Hanuman.64

Holi

Holi is the most colourful of Hindu festivals. It is a spring festival celebrated on the Full Moon day of the month of Phalgun (February- March). The festival is probably older than the current legends
that explain its origin; for it has many elements of primitive fertility orgies that have defied civilisation and prudery and during the three days of Holi practically the whole country-villages, towns and cities goes gay with merrymakers. Streets, parks and public places are crowded with people daubed in diverse colours, and the spirit of Holi is to make, people ridiculous. The festival is something of an All Fools Day.

In many parts of India, Kama, the god of pleasure, is the presiding deity of Holi. Kama is the Indian Cupid whose bow is the sugarcane and its string a line of humming bees; his arrows are flower shafts tipped with passion and wound the heart. He is most active in spring and roves woodlands and dales, relentlessly hunting for his victims among birds, beasts and men. In South India the songs sung during Holi include the lamentations of Rati (‘passion’), Kama's wife, on the death of the love-god, burnt to ashes by Shiva when he tried to tempt the ascetic god. 65

Krishna (the eighth incarnation of Vishnu) too is an important deity worshipped during Holi. According to certain legends the festival of Holi was instituted to commemorate the destruction by Krishna of a female demon called Putana. Those who attribute the origin of all festivals to seasonal cycles maintain that Putana represents winter and her death and cremation, the cessation of winter. In Goa and in Bicholim taluka villages, ‘Holi’ is ever led infront of the local temples of local deities and coconuts are broken and the installed holi s cut after the bon fire.

**Nagpanchmi – The Festival of Snake Worship**

This is the festival of serpents celebrated on the fifth day (hence Panchami, meaning fifth) of the Hindu month of Shravan (July August).
The Naga culture was fairly widespread in India before the Aryan conquest and in several regions snake-worship even now forms an important part of popular religion. The Indo-Aryans themselves, when Naga culture was incorporated into Hinduism, accepted many of the snake-deities of the Nagas in their pantheon and some of them enjoy a high place in puranic Hinduism. The thousand-headed hydra-‘Ananta’ (symbolising eternity) is the couch of Vishnu. Shiva wears several snakes as ornaments on his person. Because of its habit of sloughing the skin, the serpent is believed to be immortal by the Hindus, and eternity is often represented as a serpent eating its tail.

On Naga Panchami, live cobras or their images are worshipped. While snake-worship is fairly common in South India and Maharatha countries, Bengal is its stronghold at present. Here Manasa is worshipped as the goddess of snakes. Goa too, is not an exception as regard’s Naga culture in the rush.

There are snake-shrines in several parts of India where there are not only the images but where live cobras are also reared. During Naga Panchami it is meritorious to feed snakes in their shrines and elsewhere, and the pious, especially in Maharashtra and Goa keep milk at places frequented by snakes. In many Hindu houses, clay Naga (Cobra) is worshipped and the feast is enjoyed. Operations like digging and ploughing which are believed to hurt snakes are particularly suspended on the day especially in rural areas.

Nagpanchmi is celebrated in Goa as in the other parts of the country on the fifth day of the waxing moon during Shravana. Snake worship has its own significance in Hindu religion. The two festivals
connected with snake worship are Anant Chaturdashi and Nag Panchmi. The Brahmin community worships the snake God on the day of Anant Chaturdashi—the fourteenth day of Bhadrapad.

Among venomous snakes, a cobra has religious and cultural significance. On the day of Nag Panchmi, women in rural areas from Bicholim taluka offer milk to the snake God, which is normally placed near a termite mounds as there is a belief that cobras live there.

The Sheshnag or Anant is represented as the reclining couch and the roofing canopy of Lord Vishnu. He is regarded as the king of snakes and believed to rule the patala (netherworld). Lord Anant means infinity and is timeless.

During Nag Panchami, a large number of Hindu devotees throng temples of Anant, besides Shiva temples. In many sculptures, the cobra forms a special jewel around the neck of Lord Shiva. It also forms a belt around the stomach of Lord Ganesh.

Hindus consider a cobra as symbol of fertility and it is worshipped by all including childless couples. The long and sinuous body of the snake also signifies the continuity of birth and death cycle.

On the occasion of Nag Panchami, the snake god is worshipped in the form of an idol while in some places in the form of a picture. The worship of cobra evolves from the tradition of expressing gratitude to the cobra that protects agricultural fields by exercising a check on the population of major pests and rodents.

The festival of Nag panchami is not celebrated by all the Hindu communities. In Virdi, a village 4 km away from Sanquelim does not worship the cobra as it is believed that their forefathers ate this reptile
made out of kneaded flour. 67

It’s the one in day the year when cobras, feared and often harmed, are worshipped. Among the lore behind the festival, one holds that a farmer destroyed a snake’s nest while tilling the soil. Seeking revenge, the angered female cobra spared the farmer’s life after he worshipped a drawing of the snake in his home.

In Goa, City-based Hindus offer milk, fruits, flowers and incense to a clay idol of the cobra at home. In villages, the same offering is made at the anthill closest to home. After reciting folk songs at the anthill, the married Hindu woman performs a special puja before snake’s clay idol at home.

The cobra is considered by Hindus to be the bearer of ancestors’ souls. Folk tradition so holds that snakes protect the locality they are found in. The devout avoid digging the soil, cutting vegetables and frying on the day. Specially preparations of the sweet patolleo (a pancake of wheat or rice flour stuffed with lentils and jaggery and steam wrapped in turmeric leaves).

Among other religions, Buddhists respect the cobra as the snakes Nanda and Upananda performed the ritual bath of baby Buddha, while the Jain Tirthankar Parshavanath is shown iconographically with a seven- hooded cobra over the head. It is noted that Nagpanchami is celebrated in villages like Lamgaon (Bicholim), Narve, Sural, Cotombi (Kothambi) and Cudne where traces of Buddhism and Jainism have been found.

A sculpture of Nagdevata of 15th-16th Century A.D. found at Cudne village gives evidence of Snake Worship in Bicholim taluka during earlier period.
Tulsi Vivah – Occasion For Onset of Marriage Season

On Tulsi Vivah Day, Hindu homes in Bicholim and other talukas of Goa stage the marriage of the tulsi (basil) plant, sparking off the community’s marriage season.

Tulsi vivah, also known as vodli (big) Diwali in Goa, is held on kartik shukla dwadashi—the twelfth day of the second half of the eighth month of the Hindu calendar.

The marriage season among Goan Hindus begins almost immediately after the ceremony which, incidentally, dates back several centuries.

On the day, the tulsi vrundavan (the pedestal with a hollowed centre where the plant is grown) is cleaned, painted and decorated with rangoli (powdered decorations) and flowers. In days of yore, women would build the clay pedestal on their own. Clay vrundavans are built and after plastering it with cow dung would decorate it with wild and locally available flowers. In recent times, few follow this tradition just as fewer women today start their working day only after a bath followed by the watering of the basil plant.

Nonetheless, on this day, Hindus light earthen lamps to mark Dev Diwali, as the vivah is also called, as it is believed that Lord Vishnu, after a slumber of four months, awakens on this day and meets with his consort Lakshmi, symbolized by the tulsi. The ritualistic marriage ceremony is between the basil plant and the well-decorated and artistically-carved stick of dino (Lelea indica or Bandicoot berry). The plant is offered sugarcane, twigs of tamarind tree (tamarindus indica) and anvalle (fruits of phyllentus emblica). Part of this ritual involves married women lighting
the wicks attached to the pseudo stem of the banana plant and placing them before the tulsi vrundavan. It’s symbolic of them asking for a long, healthy and prosperous life for their husbands.

Interestingly, the tradition of worshiping the tulsi vrundavan can be found in the 1889-published work of Lopes Mendes ‘India Portuguesa’ where a picture shows many such pedestals in rows along the road.

While a vrundavan in front of the house is still an integral part of Hindu homes, many sacred water tanks in front of temples in Goa too have such pedestals.

In Amona, the temple of *Ravalnath Mahalaxmi* which has tulsi vrundavan in front of the sanctum sees the vivah (marriage) celebrated at the pedestal before tulsi-vivah begins in houses of the people from the village.

Gawada community concludes the eco-feministic festival of *Katyo* on the day of tulsi vivah by performing colourful folk dances and folk songs.

For the formerly forest-dwelling Velip community, the eco-feministic festival known locally as *Dhillo* is observed from the period after Dussshera till tulsi vivah. It is marked with folk dances and folk songs. Today however, only a few Velip villages observe the tradition of Dhillo. Meanwhile, the day before tulsi vivah is celebrated as kartik ekadashi. Sweet dishes are relished and devotees visit the temple of Shri Vithal.

**Vadachi Punav (Vat Pournima)**

This is not exactly a festival, but a day observed as holy by married women. During the middle Ages, widowhood had been the most
dreaded misfortune for a Hindu woman, and even now an orthodox Hindu woman hopes to die before her husband. On Vat Savitri day, community worship is performed by married women for the health and longevity of their husbands.

Vat Savitri falls on the Full Moon day in the month of Jyeshta (May-June) and it is so called because the Banyan tree (Vat) and Savitri form the main objects of worship. Savitri is a deified heroine who is believed to have reclaimed her husband from the hands of the grim Yama (god of death) by her devotion and loyalty.

The Banyan is worshipped by women by offering it flowers and rice flour and by circumambulation of the trunk; the motive for the worship is the longevity of their husbands, as the tree is a symbol of immortality. Tree worship is an integral part of Indian culture. Right from the days of the Indus valley civilization, there are references to tree worship. The Vat-Pournima symbolizes the worship of the banyan (ficus bengalhensis) tree. Jyeshta is the third month of the Hindu calendar.

There is mythological story associated with the ceremony of Vat-Pournima which tells that Savitri, by worshipping the banyan tree on the Jyeshta Porunima, brought back to life her dead husband by the grace of Yama, the god of death.

In Goa, Hindu married women observe a whole day of fasting and perform pooja of the banyan tree, urging the tree to grant a long, healthy and happy life to their husbands. The banyan tree has the ability to support its ever growing branches by the development of adventitious roots from its branches. These root, which hang down and act as props over on ever widening circle, represent eternal life and are regarded as a
symbol of long life. The banyan tree is considered as sacred by various tribal communities. As Gautam Buddha sat under this tree for seven days it is regarded as holy Buddhists. The first Tirthankara of Jainism, Rishabhanath received perfect knowledge under the banyan tree. Thus, it is sacred to the Jains. The leaves of the banyan tree are used as fodder for elephants and for making leadplants. The fruits are eaten by birds, monkeys and bats. The aerial roots are used to make tent-poles and cart-yokes. Different parts of the banyan tree have been used as medicine for the treatment of several ailments.

The Goan culture has given importance to the banyan tree and throughout Goa there are some huge banyan trees including Bicholim Taluka. In the name folk deities like Vathari, Mharingan, Brahman and others, these trees are considered as holy, worshipped and thus protected.

By protecting a banyan tree, cool shade is available to commuters and it helps by providing a large quantity of oxygen. In city areas, Hindu women go to the market and fetch a twig as an alternative for a tree. However, traditional women consider it a false practice. Planting a banyan tree in the locality and worshipping it is the need of the hour according to rural women folk. As this festival comes in the monsoon season, during the rains women enjoy the fresh and cool atmosphere under the banyan tree. Besides, in the leaf-cup, women distribute Prasad consisting of pieces of different juicy fruits.

This is not exactly a festival, but a day observed as holy by married women. Savitri is a deified heroine by her devotion and loyalty. The Banyan is worshipped by women by offering it flowers and rice flour
and by circumambulation of the trunk; the motive for the worship is the longevity of their husbands, as the tree is a symbol of immortality.

**Rathsaptami- Thanks Giving To The Sun God**

A crowd of devotees annually throng to Aturli (Haturli), hamlet of Maye village in Bicholim for celebration of Rathsaptami.

The festival, celebrated every year on the seventh day of the first half of the bright fortnight of Magh (the 11th month of the Hindu calendar), allows locals to express their gratitude and devotion to the sun for blessing the earth with light and energy.

The families in Bicholim and nearby talukas make it a point to take part in the Rathsaptami festivities in Haturli every year.

Accompanied with prayers to the Sun god, is also good food. According to tradition, some families cook a certain type of sweet dish. Cooked in a clay pot on fire generated from cow dung, this dish is then eaten by all the members of the family. For the sun god, seven leaves of *Calotrophis gigants* are offered. The day ends with a variety of religious and cultural activities and rituals in the temples.

While women celebrate Haldi Kumkum to pray for the long prosperous and healthy life of their husbands, the Sun is worshipped on Rathsaptami to pray for good health.

Worshipping the sun is a tradition popular in Indian culture. Even during the pre-Portuguese period, Goa had two temples dedicated to the Sun god at Margao and at Cudne in Bicholim.
Though the Sun is stationary, according to Indian tradition, it moves. On the 10\textsuperscript{th} day Of Paush (the month after Magh), the sun is believed to enter the \textit{Uttarayana-a} period considered auspicious.

\textbf{Vasanta Panchami}

During Diwali, as we have seen, the main deity worshipped is Lakshmi, and during Dussera, Durga, Vasanta Panchami is the festival celebrated in honour of Sarasvati.\textsuperscript{71} Being essentially the goddess of scholars, intellectuals and the cultured, books, musical instruments and brushes are kept at her shrine on Vasanta Panchami day which falls on the fifth of Magha (January February). Neither indulging in heroics like Durga, nor delighting in wealth like Lakshmi; Sarasvati - a charming refined goddess delights in playing on the Vina, the famous Indian musical instrument which she is fabled to have invented.

In keeping with her fame for restraint and refinement, she is, as a rule, quietly worshipped by her devotees in their homes. Sarasvati has no important temples dedicated to her. She is now mainly a deity of personal worship and not of community adoration. That is why Vasant Panchami celebrations are generally free from those boisterous processions and street scenes usually associated with a Hindu festival, during Vasant Panchami, people make it a point to pay a visit to be local temple and offer fruits and other sweet meats to the presiding deity. Temples having female deity in villages of Bicholim Taluka celebrate Vasant Panchami.
Akshaya Tritiya - A Day of Auspicious Moments

Falling on 3rd day of the bright half of Vaishakha, the day is considered as half of the three and half (Saade-tin) muhuratas, on which any new work or ceremony can be undertaken without referring to an almanac. Vaishakha is the second month of the Hindu calendar (April-May). On Akshaya Tritiya day, the Sun and the Moon are in exaltation and simultaneously at their peaks of brightness.

In Sanskrit, Akshay means imperishable, eternal or sometimes that can never diminish. Hindus in Bicholim Taluka like other Hindu community find it fit to begin their new ventures on this day as there is a popular belief that things brought on this auspicious occasion will never diminish. The new projects include the Grihpravesh (entering of new house), opening of new business, shops, establishment, purchase of new vehicles etc., buying gold is a popular activity on Akshaya Tritiya, as it is the ultimate symbol of wealth and prosperity. It is a belief that the activity began on this day, gives rich returns.

Many Hindus believe that people born during this time shine bright in life. They also opine that who ever donates money to the poor on this day will receive proportionate rise in their wealth.

As per the mythological tradition, Akshaya Tritiya marks the birthday of Lord Parashurama - an incarnation of Lord Vishnu who is supposed to have reclaimed the land of Goa from sea by shooting arrow from his bow. The puranic legend recalls the bestowing of the ‘Akshaya patra’ - an inexhaustible vessel by Sun God to the elder Pandava Dharamaraj alias Yudhishtir on this day which helped the Pandavas a great deal in their living in ‘Vanvasa’(exile) period of 14 years by providing
meals to them and their guests. In the Holy Scriptures, there is a mention that on this day sage Vyas, along with Lord Ganesha, started writing the great epic Mahabharata.\textsuperscript{74}

The people in Bicholim taluka, like other Goans, take early morning bath, perform puja’s in the household and visit the Shrines and temples in their native villages to seek blessing of the local deities - Gramdevatas and also of their kuldevatas (Clan deities) for happiness and prosperity in their lives. The day is also considered as a day of commemorating one’s dead ancestors by making to them offering of til (sesame), water and cooked food.\textsuperscript{75}

\textbf{Shravan – Holy Month of the Hindus}

Shravan, the fifth month of the Hindu calendar, has a special religious and cultural significance among the Hindu community in Goa.

The four-month period of Chaturmas – beginning from the fourth month (Ashadh) to the seventh month (Ashwin) is regarded sacred by devotees who believe that Lord Vishnu went into deep slumber during the time.

Shravan, the second month of Chaturmas, is regarded most auspicious by the Hindu community in Goa and the konkan region. During the period, Hindus go on a vegetarian diet and engross themselves in religious and spiritual affairs.

During Shravan, the Hindu community celebrates several festivals like Nagpanchami, Gokulashtami, Narali Pournima and Raksha
Bandhan. Besides, each day of the week, barring Wednesdays in most cases, is dedicated to a god or goddess.  

On Monday, dedicated to Lord Shiva, a Brahmanical ritual called ‘Shiva Muth’ is carried out where a handful of rice is worshipped. On Tuesday, the day of Mangalagaur, newly wed Brahmin girls worship goddess Parvati, while Thursday is dedicated to Dattatray, the trinity god. Devotees worship goddess Laxmi on Fridays while Saturdays are dedicated to god Shani (Saturn). On Sundays, non-Brahmin married women worship the sun god.  

Most Hindu temples and shrines around the state organize various fairs, bhajans and kirtans that attract large number of followers. Devotees specially worship god Satyanarayan during Shravan. The Shravan month is fully observed with all ritualistic traditions by the Hindu community in Bicholim Taluka.

**Aitar Pujan – Seeking the Sun’s Blessings**

The Sundays during Shravan month hold a special significance for married women in Bicholim taluka as they collect wild leaves and flowers from the forest near their homes to perform the Aitar Pujan (literally, Sunday worship).  

This pujan is performed for the longevity of the husbands, as the women folk have faith that the sun god will bless their husband with a healthy life and prosperity.  

It isn’t the recently wed who look forward to this day, though. Non-Brahmin married women in villages of Goa perform Aitar Pujan to
consolidate their marital bond. Prayers though directed to the sun god, it is believed that the puja is between women and nature.

Aitar Pujan is not only the symbolic worship of the rich creation of Mother Nature; it is also a way for women to familiarize themselves with the names of wild flowers and leaves.

On the day, women wake up early and visit forested areas nearby to collect leaves and flowers for the puja. Not all plants used in the worship have food or medicinal properties. Many are used for their aroma.

Interestingly, many of these wild plants and herbs are named after Lord Ram and Sita. For example: Soshyache kan, Siteche Kajal-kukum, Ghodyachi pavala, Mhatarechi bondra, Ramachi bota, Tubkadi.

The collected leaves are placed on an arum leaf which is in turn kept on a wooden plank. This is placed before the sketch of the sun drawn in lime paste on a wall plastered with cow dung.

Each of the four Sundays features a different leaf ‘cup’. Edible betel leaves are used on the first Sunday, turmeric leaves on the second, tuber leaves on the fourth and mussaenda leaves on the fourth.

In some families the sun is drawn with horizontal lines. A small copper pitcher filled with water and topped with a coconut and mango leaves is worshipped. The puja is celebrated for two Sundays at the groom’s place and for two Sunday’s at the bride’s parent home.

Each Sunday is also marked with a specially prepared sweet made from soaked rice, jaggery, copra and other ingredients. For each of the first Sundays, there is one specialisation such as the patolleo, mutali, sanna and pole.”

While vegetables available in the markets are consumed, many
strive to stick to the tradition of cooking those found growing wild during this pujan. These veggies include, *taikalo* (cassia tora), *kudduk* (amaranthus), *chavany* (wild banana), and the tender leaves of *nano* (naked woman tree). In the past, women would recite folk songs in which the intimate bond between husband and wife is expressed. All the pujan’s leaves and flowers are immersed in the tulsi vrindavan after sunset. Incidentally, among Brahmins there is a tradition of worshipping the sun god during Shravan. But rather than by women, it is married men who pray for their own health and prosperity.

**The Sweetness of Makar Sankranti**

‘*Tilgul ghya god god bola*’

‘Have tilgul (Sesame seed coated with sugar) and sweetness will fill your words.’ - This beautiful line is an oft heard greeting at the time of Makar Sankranti. Makar Sankranti is the festival that marks the beginning of the harvest season and is celebrated in the month of Pausha when the Sun enters the zodiacal sign of Capricorn (maker)\(^78\). In North India it is called ‘*lohri*’, and is celebrated with people distributing sugarcane juice and sesame sweets. In South India, the celebrations are known as ‘*pongal*’ and are celebrated in a rather interesting manner with people dressing up their live stock and cooking the rice of the first harvest in different ways. In some parts of India, Sankranti is celebrated by flying kites.

Sankranti is considered a deity. According to a legend, Sankranti killed a demon named Sankarasur. The day followed by Makar Sankrant is called Kinkrant or Karidin. On this day, the female deity (goddess) killed the demon kinkarasur.
In Goa, celebrations begin with people preparing and distributing sweets, laddoos made of sesame and jaggery, and ‘tilgul’, which is a sugar-coated sesame seed and has become synonymous with the festival celebrations of Sankranti. Married women in Goa observe the ritual of ‘*haldi kumkum*’ on this day. The ‘*haldi kumkum*’ lasts till the period of Ratha Saptami.

On this day, women dress up in their best jewellery and clothes. The ritual of exchanging gifts in the form of household articles like grocery items or even sweets like tilgul and sesame laddoos is followed. Haldi – kumkum is applied onto the forehead of a ‘*suvasini*’ (a married woman whose husband is alive).

Goan Hindus have different customs as per their caste and community. In Daivdnya Brahmin community, ladies apply *haldi kumkum* on the forehead, put flowers on the head of the woman, distribute tilgul with grams and offer ‘*vain*’ (any item) with an edible leaf along with arecanut.

A newly married woman practice the ritual of going to her maternal home and offer “*sughad*” which is a small mud pot tied with thread that has black beads strung onto it. Vermilion and turmeric powder is applied to the pot which is filled with paddy grains, wheat, chickpea, grams, lentil, sesame seeds with jaggery, vermilion, turmeric, etc. Five pots are placed on a wooden seat, and a rangoli is drawn around the seat. The pots are offered to the deity with leaves and areca nuts which is followed by performing ‘*aratis*’. After the first year of their marriage, the women can perform this ritual at their husbands place.
The “Sughad” contains five types of food grains which are harvested during this period. Children too have moments of enjoyment during the festival as laddoos, sweets and candies are distributed to them.

Haldi Kumkum has become commercialized today. The nature of the gifts has become more market driven. It is believed that this festival was celebrated to give women an opportunity to interact and exchange their thoughts with other ladies, thus contributing to a congenial atmosphere in the neighbourhood.

Rakshabandhan-Sutachi Punav

(A day of worship and sibling bonding)

The first full moon of the holy month of Shravan is of great significance for Goan Hindus. While those whose lives are governed by the ocean's tides will offer coconuts (Narali Purnima) to the sea god, those who wear the sacred thread (Shravani and Sutachi Punav) will change it on this auspicious day. The day is celebrated by worshipping threads prepared of cotton yarn. These threads are worn like the sacred thread worn by Brahmins.

However, the festival most celebrated is Rakshabandhan, in honour of the sacred bond between brothers and sisters.

On Narali Purnima, the sabbatical from venturing into the sea to earn their livelihood - on account of the monsoon - comes to an end for traditional fishermen.

Prior to this day, the rain-fuelled sea is furious. It is believed that the tides turn peaceful after Narali Purnima as the intensity of the monsoon gradually decreases. On the auspicious day, fishermen and their families
assemble along the coast and offer coconuts and flowers to the sea god.

Narali Purnima is the fishing community expressing its gratitude to the god of the sea for the bounty of fish bestowed on the fisher folk. This tradition has come down to them through generations and they ensure that they uphold it.

Apart from Narali Pournima, the day is also celebrated as Shravani among Brahmins and Sutachi Punav among non-brahmins. It stands for the changing of the sacred thread. On the day, men from the Brahmin caste, performing the mandatory rites, replace the old thread with a new one blessed during a puja at home. They will wear the thread across their chests till it's time to change it again.

However, some Brahmin families do not perform this ritual. They do not change the thread unless it wears out and they have to.

Meanwhile, non-brahmin men wear the new thread for only a few days after the festival. Apart from showing the thread to the deity at home, it is shown to the village deity and at pujas held at sacred groves in the village before it is worn.

However, the most popular celebration on this day is Rakshabandhan. As a sister ties a rakhi (a thread) on her brother's wrist, she seeks his protection while wishing him prosperity, happiness and success in life.

Makharotsav – A Unique Celebration of Goan Navraatri

Through the name of the festival of Navraatri reminds every one of Gujarati ‘Garbhaa’ and ‘Daandia’, many Goans are oblivious of the grand Navraatri celebrations which take place in the Goan temples. This
festival is also celebrated with great pomp and gaiety all over Goa. As the name suggests Navraatri means “Nine Nights”. The festival culminates on the 10th day which is called as the Dasro or Dasraa.

Each of this night is unique for the temples of Ponda, Kepem and Bicholim taluka. A traditional mega wooden swing called the ‘Makhar’ is suspended by fat chains of iron from the roof in the temple ‘Sabhaamandap’. This swing is made to look like a small shrine. The colours used to paint this swing are very striking. It is decorated very attractively with coloured paper, flowers and lights. The central position of the swing is occupied by the Goddess. After the traditional ‘kirtans’ or ‘Bhajans’ in the night, the huge mega swing is swayed, turned and rotated on the heart throbbing beats of ‘Dhol’, ‘Taaso’, ‘cymbals’, ‘gong’, ‘Shehnai’ etc.

The nine forms of Goddess Durga or the female divine power are venerated on these days. Though Durga is a fierce form of the goddess; in Goa we also have her calm and serene form called the Shaanta – Durga.

The temples of Shri Navdurga in Bori, Shri Mahalsa at Mardol, Shri Navdurga at Madkari, Shri Chamundeshwari in Vargao, Bicholim, Shri Mahalakshmi at Bandoda, Shri Kamakshi in Shiroda, Shri Devki Krishn and Shri Shantadurga Kumbharjuvekarin in Mashel, Shri Shantadurga of Kavlem and Veling and Shri Kalika in Cansarpale are some of the important temples in which this Makharotsav takes place.

Apart from the temples of goddesses, the temples dedicated to various gods like Shri Mangesh at Mangeshi, Shri Nagesh at Nageshi, Shri Shivnath at Shivnathi, Shri Ramnath at Ramnathi also celebrate the makhars in a grand way.
Each night of this Navraatri, the deities are positioned in different manners and styles in the Makhara. In the temple of Shri Devki Krishna at Mashel the mother of Krishn; Devki is shown seated with baby Krishna on her lap. The images of Shri Devki and the baby Krishna are decorated with ornaments and rare beads. In this temple along with the pulsating beats of the traditional instruments one can also hear the conch blown.

Normally, during the initial nights the goddess is shown in a calm and serene form. During the last few nights of the festival the goddess changes her form from calm to the fierce one in which she killing the demon Mahishaasur.

Normally the ‘Makhars’ are celebrated only on the nine nights of Navraatri. But in case one misses a Makhar celebration then one can still witness it on the tenth night. Apart from the local zatra, Navratri is the only other time in the year when the artistic leanings of the residents of an area are prominently on display in the village temple.

For the nine nights of celebration, the deity – in this case a form of the mother goddess is made to sit in a well decorated, multi coloured makhar (a type of swing). Tied to the ceiling of the main hall of the temple with iron chains, the makhar is swung by devotees to the chanting and singing of prayer songs. While some temples organize Makharotsav for all nine nights, some hold a five – day celebration.

Makharotsav is marked by youngsters from the village using their artistic talents to decorate the square shaped wooden framework of the swing with multi – coloured, glitter paper. In the middle of this frame
is a seat on which the idol of the goddess is placed. The swing is then tied to the ceiling near the temple’s sanctum sanctorum.

In some temples, the tradition of Puran Vachan i.e reading of mythological stories from religious scriptures is followed during Navratri. This is followed by the singing of the eulogy, the Mahaaarti which is accompanied by the ringing of temple bells and the waving of lighted lamps before the deity. Devotees assembled in large numbers voluntarily come forward to push the swing in different directions. Sometimes the makhar is even swung in a circle. The idol of the goddess used for this festive occasion is garlanded with fresh flowers and dressed in various golden ornaments.

At Cansarpale’s Kalika temple, the community of gold smiths, scattered across Goa, attend at least one of the five nights of Makharotsav. Along with the tolling temple bells, folk musical instruments such as the dhol and taso are used while the swinging of the makhar (Fig. 5.2) is on.

As soon as the Makharotsav is over, the devotees feast on Samaradhana, a lipsmacking spread of vegetarian foods.

Witnessing the Makharotsav of goddess Kalika at Cansarpale during the last five nights of Navratri is both, memorable and exciting. The families of the devotees make it a point not to miss the enthralling ceremony.

The Unique Mahalaxmi Vratosav Celebrations

In the nine days of Navratrotsav, there are various festivals like Shri Shardotsav and Mahalaxmi vratosav which are celebrated in Goa. The Mahalaxmi vratosav is celebrated by the women from the Hindu
Chitpawan Brahmin community. They worship the deity by offering flowers, prayers, perform aarati, bhajans and hold a fast which they break after consuming ‘tirth’ and ‘Prasad’.

In Bicholim taluka Mahalaxmi Vratosav is celebrated at the Yogeshwari temple at Kulan – Bicholim. This is the only temple of Kuldevi of the Hindu Chitpawan Brahmin community in Goa. Devotees from konkan, Karawar, and other neighbouring places also visit this temple.

Mahalaxmi Vrata is performed by married women who have been married for more than 5 years. Such women are known as ‘Vasheras’ or ‘Vashilas’. Various religious rituals are held from Ashatami tithi till the sunrise of the next day. The women keep vigil at night by performing folk dances to the rhythm of the ‘Ghagar’ (pots of brass or other metals) (Fig. 5.3). Earlier women perform a pooja of “Tulshi” and dress the Mahalaxmi idol with wet fine rice flour and gold ornaments on the idol.

Women perform aarati with 16 special lamps made of fine rice flour. A special pooja is performed in the evening at ‘Pradosh’ time. The face of the idol Mahalaxmi is attired with fine rice flour nodules, turmeric and Pinjar which all hold symbolic importance.

The women blow the “Ghagar Funkane’ that is they blow into a brass spot, through out the night.

Mahalaxmi vratosav is celebrated in the houses of the newly married Chitpawan Brahmin women with the women from the neighbouring houses coming together. The deity Yogeshwari is the
‘kuldevi’ of all Chitpawan or konkan Brahmin from Goa, and Konkan, who make it a point to pay a visit to the temple.

### Celebrating the Goddess of Forests - Vandevi

Paush, the tenth month of the Hindu calendar, has special significance for Hindu women ryots in Goa including those in villages of Bichloim Taluka.

Over five nights—with full moon of Malani Purnima being the grandest—they express their love and respect for the forest deity popularly called Vandevi. The celebration is called *Dhalo*.

Once upon a time, there were many places in Goa where the goddess of the forest was respected by those living in and around the forests.

Mulgao in Bicholim taluka, in fact, has two temples dedicated to *Vandevi-Dhakti Vandevi* (young goddess) and *Vhodli Vandevi* (elder goddess).

The temples were originally in Bardez taluka's Shiroda, known today as Serula or Salvador do Mundo. Under the erstwhile Portuguese rule, however, the devotees fled Serula along with the idols and reached Mulgao, then under Sawantwadkar Bhonsle's rule.

Forests, which are today the habitats of various forms of biodiversity alone, were once also the homes of humans who lived, hunted and collected fruits, roots, shoots, tubers, nuts, etc. In order to express gratitude to the forest for supporting their lives in many ways, the ancestors might have begun the festival of *Dhalo*.

During the festival of *Dhalo*, women decorate and worship the
tulsi vrindavan (basil plant in a pedestal) as the symbolic representation of the forest goddess.

The women, in the past, would invoke the forest goddess for blessings of health and prosperity on their families. Till date, this tradition continues with the women singing folksongs and urging the goddess, Vandevimaya, to participate in the traditional folk dance.

The sacred place-maand where Dhalo performances are presented every year is near a forest or around old, towering trees with large canopies. These sacred trees are protected till date as they are believed to be the abodes of the spirit and semi-divine deity like 'Rashtroli'84.

As part of the Dhalo celebrations, women-married, single, widowed-perform the folksongs that sing of forests, fields, flora and fauna. As soon as the work of Vaigan or rabi cultivation is over, women celebrate the festival for five nights.

The last night of Dhalo has special significance as it is marked by numerous cultural and religious rituals. An auction of various items is also organized to generate funds for the next festival.

Women who are otherwise always busy with the day-to-day chores of their lives find a chance to unwind during Dhalo, as they sing, dance and participate in traditional games.

They derive a lot of pleasure while participating in the songs, dances, games, dramas and rituals that are a part of the Dhalo celebrations.

Though some of the folk songs are monotonous, their rhythm makes them forget the sorrows and sufferings in their day-to-day lives.
Vandevi – The Worship of the Goddess of Forest

The Indian culture allows worship of almost all the living beings and creatures in this world. Stress is seen mostly laid on the worship of living beings found especially in India. Some elements similar to the ones worshipped in other civilizations are also found on the walls of Indian temples as decorative motifs. But they might have been incorporated due to the influence of trade or exchange which took place between the Indians and the other civilizations.

The ancient Vedic culture laid stress on worship of nature. Same was also found in the case of the aboriginal tribes. Apart from nature worship the tribes also emphasised on the worship of local spirits, protector deities, guardian deities and also ancestor worships.

In Goa the worship of the deity called Vandevi is prominent in a few villages. Vandevi literally means the Goddess of the forest in the Indian context. In fact the temples of Dhaakti Vandevi and Vhadli Vandevi existed in the village of “Shiroda” of the Bardez taluka. 18th century records mention that these goddesses were highly venerated in this village. With the advent of the Portuguese and their iconoclastic laws these goddesses were shifted to Mulgao village of the Bicholim taluka. Shiroda was later transformed to Serula by the Portuguese.

It is still not known how these worships began in Goa. But in thickly forested areas these deities must have been worshipped. A tour of the Serula village today tells us why this worship must have existed there once upon a time. Even today the area of Serula has green verdant pockets filled with huge trees and rare vegetation. Under the pretext to development a lot of this forest is mercilessly being cut today.
A “Wild’ Tradition

With chaturthi just around the corner, there’s a frenzy of activity among youngsters in Goa’s villages as they forage for wild fruits, vegetables and flowers that will adorn the matoli. The pandal within which Lord Ganesh is housed, is traditionally made of such ingredients. However, urbanization and the loss of biodiversity today have led to matolis featuring market – brought veggies and fruits, as well as wooden alternatives.

Worship of Nature

Chaturthi is considered the most enchanting of all festivals celebrated by Goan Hindus, particularly because it symbolizes the worship of nature.

The farming communities worship Lord Ganesh as a symbol of gratitude to the earth. This is because of his parents; Parvati symbolizes the earth holding the hills, while Mahadev means Girish, one who symbolizes the hills. During the monsoon, silt from the hills settles to make the soil fertile.

Similarly, farmers tie the ears of paddy to their home’s entrance way or to the matoli (pandal) housing the idol. It’s a custom that’s come down from the time when paddy fields were destroyed by wild elephants and rats. The worship of Lord Ganesh, and his mount, the rat, is believed to garner protection. There are several customs observed during Chaturthi that show the relationship of Ganesh with nature.\(^{86}\)

Even in the matoli celebrations the pandal is made of rare wild flowers, wild flowers, fruits, roots, shoots and leaves found mostly in forested areas.
Nave: Prayers for Overflowing Granaries

The tradition of offering newly – grown paddy to the village deity before the onset of the harvesting season is a much celebrated affair in most Goan villages. While Catholic farmers observe this tradition as the Konsachem Fest, the Hindus observe it as 'Nave' or 'Nebe'.

Traditionally celebrated on the second day of Ganesh Chaturthi, Nave is observed collectively by the villagers of Amona, Navelim, Mayem, Bicholim – Gaonkarwada and Vainguinim. As part of Nave’s celebration, Hindu men from the village visit their paddy fields and offer betel nuts, betel leaves and coins to the earth before cutting the new ears of the grain. This is then placed on a wooden plank near the idol of Ganpati and after the puja, is tied to the door frame of each villager’s home.

It is believed that tying the panicles of paddy will grant the blessings of the lord of plenty and the granaries will overflow. In Mayem, villagers of the village, Bicholim – Gaonkarwada and Vainguinim assemble at the local sacred tank called Narayandevachem Tolle, ceremoniously cut the paddy (Fig. 5.4) and place it before the idol of goddess Mahamaya at the village temple.\textsuperscript{87}

The villagers then take the panicles to place before the deity in each home. Khichdi made by cooking rice husked out of the new paddy, grated coconut and jaggery together is then served as Prasad to the members of each family.

In almost all villages of Bicholim Taluka, this tradition is followed People celebrate Nave to seek the blessings of Mother Earth, and righting the ‘Nave’ is a sort of nature worship practiced from ancient times.
‘Baras’ - Festival Linked to Goa’s Agricultural Heritage

Several festivals and rituals organized by the Hindu and Christian community of Goa are related to agricultural heritage of the hoary past.

The festivals throw light on the fact that agriculture was the backbone of Goa’s economy. Chovoth or Ganesh Chaturthi is the festival which is celebrated to express gratitude to the agricultural deity Lord Ganesh.

On the ninth day of Chovoth, villages of Surla, Naveli, Kudne and Amona celebrate a festival locally known as ‘Baras.’ Villagers in Navelim assemble at the ancestral house of Gawas community situated at Choukir in order to celebrate Baras. A bamboo basket with a small opening is covered with leaves of karmal (dillenia pentagyna) and decorated with a variety of flowers. After the performance of puja, a married man and woman fill the basket with different food items, which include five different traditional vegetables, pancakes of par-boiled rice, a dish called ‘pithi’ which is prepared form horse-gram and cooked rice. Effigies of tortoise, crocodile and a pair of oxen along with a farmer are also prepared from kneaded rice flour and placed in the ‘Baras.’ A local ‘ghadi,’ associated with rituals, invokes blessings form the deities Sateri and Ravalnath and seeks happiness for all the members of the community.

Accompanied by the beating of a drum, the ‘Baras’ is later carried on the head in a procession by the villagers to the field known as ‘patin’ (Fig. 5.5). The procession proceeds to a sluice gate and member of Ghadi community relish the food items which are stored in the ‘Baras’.

The tradition of ‘baras’ is inherited from their forefathers to
mark the beginning of agriculture season, which starts from the second day of ‘Baras’.\textsuperscript{88}

**Masanadevi and Ashtamichi Jaatra’s of Narve**

Gokulashtami is celebrated as the birth anniversary of Shrikrishna, considered to be the eighth incarnation of Lord Vishnu. In Narve village, however, this day is observed as the ‘Ashtamichi Jaatra’ i.e. the jaatra held on the day of Ashami, and in stark contrast it has no connection whatsoever with Krishna.

The third Tuesday of the fifth month of shravana of the Hindu calendar has special significance for the villages of Narve as a this day a unique fair locally known as Masanadevichi Jaatra is celebrated by them at Talewada locality of the village.\textsuperscript{89}

‘Masanadevi’ literally means goddess of crematorium or graveyard and the temple lies near the confluence of five rivers - Zuari, Mhadei, Khandepar, Bicholim and Valvanti and known as Panchganga or Panchnadi. The goddess is in the form of anthill. Just outside the temple, there is a small sculpture of a tiger called ‘Vaghro’ is facing the Masanadevi. On the day of Jaatra, the anthill is decorated with silver mask at the face side and adored with flowers. The temple area is considered as auspicious to bury the dead especially women. Hindus generally cremate the dead. However Alvantin - a woman died in childbirth while her child survived and Augat \textsuperscript{90} - a woman who died during menstruation; the spirit of which makes weak women hysterical, and disturbs males with erotic dreams and nocturnal emissions, are normally buried in graveyards along the border of their villages. There is a tradition, however of burying such
dead bodies in the vicinity of Masanadevi’s temple at Narve. Women committing homicide or meeting accidental death are also buried here. It is believed that the deity grants eternal peace to such souls. Once the corpse is buried, the bereaved enter the Kazro (strychnosnux vomica) tree. The bereaved have the faith that by doing so, the departed soul will remain with Masanadevi and will peacefully settle on the kazro tree.

The origin of the Masanadevi has an interesting folklore. It is believed that on one Sunday, a Gauda woman sent her son to bring Patri from the forest and was killed by the attack from tiger. The dog accompanying the son could not save him from the tiger but he managed to bring the mother to the spot. The mother in sheer sorrow ended her life and dog too followed her. The tiger realising his folly committed suicide as an act of penance by hitting his head against the stone. Three days after this incident, a shepherd saw three mortal remains changing their form. The mother turned in to an anthill who then became Masanadevi - the protector of souls, while her son attained the form of a snake so that he could remain with his mother in the anthill form. The dog changed himself into the Kaajro tree outside the temple and the tiger turned in to a stone. Since the day happened to be the third Tuesday of shravana, it is observed since then to mark the occasion of Jaatra of Masanadevi deity.91

The folklore tradition also states that on the jaatra night, the goddess is believed to release these nailed souls just for one night. It is for this reason the fair is also called as Bhutanchi Jaatra - the fair of ghosts and spirits. After dusk, no human is seen around and the bustling once is vacated by everybody present. Lo holds that the goddess serves food to the spirits of the dead and the place therefore swarms with ghosts after sunset.
For the jaatra, devotees make offering of goats and spoons made from coconut. A dish locally known as ambil prepared from ragi (millet) is served on this day. Anthills clay is offered as prasad to the devotees and it is to be smeared on the forehead in times of crisis or difficulties in the life of the devotees. Devotees especially the couples seeking male child, wish to the deity for fulfilment of their desire and those blessed with a male child by the grace of goddess tie a cradle made from bamboo to the kazaro tree.

Interestingly, Christians also turn up for this Jaatra which is an example of communal harmony prevalent among the Goan society at large. It may also be a remembrance to their original religion and the deities by the Hindu converts of the Portuguese regime of oppressive religious fanaticism.

In spite of the folklore tradition, one is inclined to attribute this worship of anthill, Kazro tree, to the nature worship so deeply rooted in the Hindu society in one form or the other.

Ashtamichi Zatra falls on Gokulashtami and is celebrated just one kilometer away from the Masanadevi temple on the banks of Panchganga River. In this day devotees bath in the sacred waters and perform the annual ritual of offering flowers to their sprits of ancestors.

**Gadyachi Zatra, a Tribute to Ghosts and Holy Spirits**

Though science does not believe in the existence of life after death, many cultures in the world have a lot of rituals dedicated to ghosts and spirits. In many parts of Goa various cultural and religious ceremonies are performed to appease ghosts and holy spirits.
Shigmo is considered the most appropriate occasion to express gratitude to ghosts and spirits in Goa. The Gadyachi zatra of Sal, Borde – Bicholim, Pilgao, Cudne, Amona, are about ghosts (bhuta) and holy spirits (devchar).

Sal in Bicholim is famous for ‘Gadyachi zatra’ which attracts a large crowd from Goa and the border areas of Maharashtra and Karnataka. On the day of holi pournima, a wooden trunk of a mango tree which is decorated with mango leaves is erected near the Mahadev temple.

As per the Hindu tradition, Mahadev is believed to be the god of ghosts. On the second night of holi the persons dressed in the white dhoti assemble at the sacred place called ‘maand’. As soon as a crowd (romat) comes to the ‘mand’ dancing to the beats of dhol and also, the villagers invoke blessings of all the deities of the village.

Elderly people sit nearby singing non-stop folk songs called ‘naman’ to the beats of dhol. Fifty two persons also known as ‘gade’ belonging to Raut, Parab, Naik, Ghure, Mhale, Mesta communities dressed in dhotis move around the pole which is eracted on the mand. It is believed that under the trance they all run in the direction of the hill wherein they are taken into the forest by a mysterious torch shown by the spirit called ‘devchar’. Sometimes he lights the torch on the top of the tree, then suddenly on the ground. The lighting and extinguishing process of the torch mesmerizes the people who come specially to witness this phenomenon. “In the past, all together 64 gades took part in the Gadyanchi zatra but now only 52 participate in the three night fair.

For the three nights the “devchar” shows chudti or torch. He also hides a few gades on trees or inside the temple. On these nights the hidden
gades who are unconscious are handed over by the devchar to other gades by lighting the torch. Afterward they are brought to the sacred place. The unconscious gades return to their senses when sacred water is poured into their mouth. During the whole night these gades go to all the places where the holy spirits reside. They also visit the crematorium and carry remnants of burnt dead bodies in their hands for some time along with the votive clay figures.

The Cudne Gadyanchi zatra is held for three nights without lighting any type of lamp\(^2\), whereas in Sal lighting of lamps is allowed. In Amona, ‘Gade’ is a three night affair. On the first night, the Gade’s start the performance at Betal temple and the next two days it is performed at the ‘Maand’ in front of Ravalnath Mahalaxmi temple. No lights or illumination is allowed once the beating of drums starts and invocation, ‘Naman’ is sung. The Gade’s are of two types – the first having trance performance and the remaining as ‘Sade’ (Plain) Gade who watch the proceedings and help the ‘Gades’ in their trance performances\(^3\).

A ritualistic form called ‘Gade’ is practiced annually in a number of villages in Goa, as part of Shigmo festival. The members from particular families either as their wish or due to a vow taken joins together at the secret place called Gadyaam Maand, a particular spot marked for this purpose. A musician playing only one instrument called the Dhol accompanies these Gades. After assembling at the Gadyaam Maand, an invocation ceremony is performed manner and rhythm. The narrative singing of Naman is sung by the main Mandkari. Slowly the standing Gade get possessed by the divine spirit and start creating a noise like “kuie kuie” by their mouth. This follows the Gade dancing individually where they are,
in the standing posture. They twirl their body clockwise and anticlockwise directions, with typical foot work and hand gesture – Mudraa. It is believed that once the Gade are possessed by the supernatural power their dance becomes more vigorous. Being a ritual form of dance no variations are seen here. In the local language this form is called as Gade padap. After few minutes the Gade start moving towards crematorium to perform other rituals connected with this form. In Bicholim, Pilgao, Carapur (Fig. 5.6), Cudnem, Amona, Bordem, this tradition continues since times immemorial.

**Pethechi Zatra - Reflection of Cultural Heritage of Mulgao Village**

Mulgao, a village situated three kilometres from Bicholim, is home to fifty temples and shrines. Deities originally from Moira, Pomburpa, Serula of Bardez were shifted to Mulgao during the Portuguese regime.

Besides the existing temples, the village also has temples, with deities like Kelbai, Sateri, which were founded by the comunidade of Mulgao. On the fifth day of the first fortnight of Chaitra, the first month of Hindu calendar, the unique *Pethechi Zatra* is celebrated in the temple of Kelbai.

It is learnt that seven sisters, namely Lairai of Shirgao, Morjai of Morji, Kelbai of Mulgao, Mahamaya of Maye, Mirabai or Milagres of Mapusa, Ajadipa of Anjadiv and Shitala of Patala, along with their lone brother Khetoba of Vaingan, came from the Ghats and settled in different parts of Goa.

All these seven sisters and their brother maintained a cordial
relationship which is prevalent during fairs and festivals. It is said that on account of the terror created by gods Betal and Vetal in the region, goddess Mahamaya was not ready to reside in Mayem. It was goddess Kelbai who accompanied goddess Mahamaya and created favourable atmosphere for her to reside permanently in Mayem.

From Chaitra Shuddha Panchami till Chaitra Shuddha Ashtami (eighth day) Kelbai deity is kept in Mayem. From Mulgao she is taken in a procession in a cane basket, locally known as the peth, to Mayem. The cane basket with insignia of Kelbai, are kept in the village for worship. The wooden masks of various deities carried in the cane basket are unique and reflect the rich cultural heritage of Mulgao (Fig. 5.7).

Enroute to Mayem, the Kelbai deity is taken via Vhalshi, Borde Bicholim, Pazwada, but is brought back via the old route which passes from Mhatarghati, a hillock. On the Chaitra Shuddha Ashtami, Malyachi jatra is held in Mayem, wherein a lamp is lit and held on the head by the devotee.

Devotees participating in the zatra are known as the Dhonds. Their attire includes a white dhoti, a coloured piece of cloth on their shoulders and an entwined cane (beth kathi) in their hands. Before entering in the temple, the devotees bathe in a water tank and thereafter dance in the temple.

At midnight, the devotees accompanying the cane basket (Peth) proceed to Mayem (Fig. 5.8). Devotees observe a fast for nine days, beginning from Gudi Padwa, the Hindu New Year day, and eat only vegetarian food items. The Pethechi jatra is one of the biggest religious and cultural events of Mulgaon village, which attracts big crowd.
Shirgao Zatra of Goddess Lairai

Shirgaon, a village in Bicholim is famous for the Zatra of deity Shri Lairai (also known as Saybeen). It has its own aspects which makes it unique from the rest of the zatras. The Vratratsh dhons (holy men) walk bare feet on fire. Large crowds come to witness this ritualistic performance which is called ‘Agnidivya’.

Shirgaon zatra is celebrated on Panchami tithi of Vaishakh Shukla Pakhsha.

Lairai is one of the most popular deities among the farmers besides those involved in traditional occupations. It is believed to be the incarnation of goddess Parvati, the consort of Shiva.

The original temple of Lairai is situated at Mudder. While proceeding to Shirgao from Assonora, one will find this temple on the small hillock to the left. This deity is symbolic in the form of an ant-hill.

Though Sateri is the presiding deity of Shirgao, goddess Lairai gained popularity when it was brought to Shirgao. There are around 14 deities being worshipped in Shirgao.

Mahamaya, Kelbai, Lairai, Mirabai, Morjai, Shitalaa and Ajadipaa are the seven legendary sister-goddesses of Goa who came to this land with their brother Khetoba. These seven sister goddesses and their relationships with each other is yet another example of communal harmony in Goa as one of the seven sisters was converted to Christianity. From Mirbai she was turned to Milagres. The Zaatraa of Lairai in shirgao and the Feast of Milagres in Mapusa are
celebrated with normally a gap of two of three days, But sometimes, it occurs on the same day. It is said that If these two celebrations coincide on the same day then something bad happens.

Every year on the fifth day of Vaishakha, Lairai’s zatra is held. The devotees from the Konkan region of Maharashtra and various parts of Goa come to Shirgao and take part in the fair.

Dhons attired in traditional costumes and carrying a coloured piece of cloth on their back, besides a stick of entwined cane (bethkathi) in their hands is the integral part of the fair. More than 25,000 dhons take part in the zatra. Every year more than 2,000 devotees are added.

There are around 22 persons belonging to various castes and sub-castes who actively participate in the fair and contribute to its success. They are called as Chowgule and they observe fast for nine days. Vasudev Mukund Joshi and Shripad Mukund Joshi, priests, hold the sacred pot called kolos of Lairai\textsuperscript{96}. They observe fast for one month, whereas the ‘dhons’ (devotees) observe it only for five days.

The Zaatra of Lairai includes the lighting of the *Homkhand* which is a pile of logs of wood. Lairai is not worshipped in statue form but a *Kollos* in the temple represents the Goddess. A Kollos is pot made up of five metals containing water and a bud of ‘Pitkuli’ flower. The bud remains in the Kollos throughout the year and is changed only once a year during the annual Zaatra. Local tradition and belief states that the bud remains intact even after remaining in the water for one year.\textsuperscript{97}
A gigantic pile of wood is placed near the banyan tree. The main Zatra is celebrated on Vaishakh shudh Panchami, which follows the four day long Kaulotsav. On the day of Zatra, the priest takes out the kollos (Sacred pot) early in the morning and distributes tirth (holy water) to the villagers. The idol of Shri Lairai is taken in a ‘peth’ (cane basket) carried by 22 Chougules (villagers who have the privilege to carry the ‘peth’). After a prayer, the decorated ‘peth’ is taken to the place where the old temple of Shri Lairai exists. The Chougules, villagers and Vratasth dhons seek blessings of the deity throughout the day by offerring prayers. The ‘peth’ is taken back to the main temple by the Chowgules. The Naivaidya in the form of raw food is offered to Aaba Brahmin at the Santeri temple. Once they return back to temple, various religious rituals are performed in the temple. The kollos is decorated with flowers called ‘pitkoli’ and ‘kudo’, and is then placed in the mandap. The priest takes the kollos to the venue of Agnidivya (Vadakaden) and lights the ‘Homkund’. The idol of the goddess is then taken to the Dhonachi Tali (lake). The water from the kollos is poured into the lake three times.

The Vrathash dhons , dressed in a special attire take a dip in Dhonachi Tali and then walk through the sacred fire without any footwear chanting ‘Lairai Mata Ki Jai’, ‘Pundalika Varde Hari Vithal’, ‘Sitakant Smaran Jai Jai Ram’

The devotee carrying the kollos of goddess Lairai is the last to go through this sacred fire. The Kaul is given to villagers for the next four days. Later the kollos is taken back to the main temple.
On the Zaatra day, this Kollos placed on a person is taken out in a grand procession from the main temple. On the way it ignites the piled wood and proceeds to an ancient site called Mudder which is said to be the original site where goddess Lairai showed her presence to the people of Shirgao. By morning the piled wood burns to cinders and the ‘Dhons’ of Lairai walk through burning coals (Fig 5.9). The Dhons are devotees who maintain a special diet and stay away from their houses 8 days or even prior to Zaatra. In the wee hours of the morning, the person carrying the Kollos walks through the red hot coals.

Five days from the Kollos is taken house to house in the Shirgao village. The Kollos is kept in the courtyard of each house. The family members and the villagers assemble in front to receive the ‘Koul’. The ‘Gaaraane’ is invoked by requesting the deity and flowers are given to the family members. On the last day the kollos is brought back to the temple. People flock to the temple to see this event. The procession includes the person carrying the kollos on his head, the four Chougule (representatives), the Ghadi (village shaman priest) and a group of drummers. This procession leads a huge number of devotees who dance in the praise of the goddess. On reaching the Sabhaamandap of the temple, the Ghadi invokes the Gaaraane again and the Kollos is taken inside the temple. This culminates the famous Lairai Zaatra of Shirgao.
Vhodlya Devachi Zatra, Narve

Narvem village in Bicholim celebrate the unique fair locally known as *Vhodlya Devachi Zatra*. Devotees from across Goa throng to the village as it celebrated after a gap of certain years.

Folklore holds that the fair is not to be celebrated annually, but requires the deity to express the desire for the fair through the mouth of a devotee under trance.

The original name of the village was Hindole. It came to be popularly called *Narvem* after the temple of Saptakoteshwar originally from *Narao* on Diwar Island in Tiswadi taluka was relocated here to avoid religious persecution during Portuguese rule.

In 1668, Chattrapati Shivaji renovated the temple of Saptakoteshwar, a fact noted in the stone inscription at the temple's entrance. During the zatra devotees unfurl a saffron-coloured flag which is believed to have been given by Shivaji.

Shantadurga is the presiding deity of this village, whereas Bhavakadevi, Ravalnath, Kanakeshwari and Nagareshwar are associated with the temple. On the day of the zatra the mood in the village turns festive.

Early in the morning, the 12 representatives of ganvkaris assemble in the temple of Kanakeshwari where a symbolic image of *Kokodev* or *Vhodlodev*, in the form of a ‘Patchitra’ (Cloth painting) concealed in a secret box, is taken out and dressed in aboli flowers (Fig. 5.10). It is kept under wraps and nobody except the 12 gaonkars and the priest is allowed to have a view of if.  

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Derived from the Sanskrit words Patta (a piece of cloth) Chitra (Painting or picture), Patchitra is a folk art form drawn on a piece of silk, cotton or any other fabric portraying traditional motifs of religion and society is called “Pata” art. As an art form ‘Pata’ may be traced back to ancient times.

Pata art is of two kinds - art on a broad sheet of folded cloth and miniscule art on a short piece of fabric. The fabric in fact forms the base for pata art. Clay, cowdung and some sticky elements are skillfully added to the fabric. When dried, the fabric becomes tough but mellow enough to sustain the stroke of the artist’s brush. When completely dried, the artist draw on it religious motifs including deities, puranic anecdotes and slokas (Chants).

From the 8th century onward, the Pata tradition was monopolised by the Hindus – Yadu (Krishna’s Clan), Yama (God of Death), Chandi (a manifestation of Shakti/female power), the ten incarnations of Vishnu, deeds of Rama, love life of Krishna are the predominant themes of Hindu Patta Art.

The Patachitra of ‘Vhodlo dev’ depicts the scene of Ram and Bharat reunion from epic Ramayan and is painted in the typical style of Pinguli art from neighbouring Sindhudurg District of Maharashtra. The Depiction of Sun and Moon motif on the painted cum embroidered cloth suggests its value as a memorable gift received in the past.

Chavadeshwar from Hindolewada, Shantadurga Pilarnekarin from Gaonkarwada, Khapro-Ravalnath from Konatiwada and Shri Ram from Murdiwada send the baskets full of aboli to Vhodlodev.

The flowers are used to decorate Vhodlodev who is believed to
represent 33 crores of gods and goddesses.

Around 12 representatives run with the palkhi of *Vhodlodev* to Saptakoteshwari temple and then to Panchganga tirth where the waters of five rivers "Zuari, Mhadei, Valvant, Bicholim and Khandepar mingle. Then the palkhi returns to the temple of Kankeshwari.

Holding decorated canes and dancing to the beats of the *dhohl* and *taso*, devotees wearing traditional costumes, transform the entire mood in front of Kankeshwari temple into one of trance.

This fair was last held in 2010 and before that in 1978 and 1995. It is one of the unique moments in Narve village which attracts a large number of devotees. It is believed to bring prosperity and health to those who attend it and to the village.

Unique village festivals which take place in Goa give the state a unique identity. Goa is one of the few states in Goa where inscriptions on cloth are carried out in a grand procession. Some of these processions include reading out of these cloth inscriptions ceremoniously in every ward of the village. *Taka* is one such procession which takes place in the village of Paingini where a cloth inscription of the medieval period is read out once in three years.

Some of the festivities taking place in Goa happen once in three years or sometimes even more than that. Similarly this unique procession of Thorle Dev in the village of Narve takes place once in three years or sometimes even once in 15 years. This time this procession was taken out exactly after a gap of 17 years.

On the way, the 'Vhodlo Dev' is taken to the ferry point which is called as ‘Taarir’ in Konkani. It is said that the *Vhodlo Dev* intends visiting
the neighbouring island of Diwar by crossing the river. But the devotees prevent their beloved deity from doing so. Cool water kept in decorated copper pots is poured on the person (Mod) carrying the Vhodlo Dev.

**Tripurari Poornima Festival at Vithalapur, Carapur**

Tripurari Poornima, is the festival of Hindu people celebrated in most of the states of our country. In Goa it is celebrated as state level festival at Carapur by the Department of Art and Culture in collaboration with information and Publicity department, Goa Tourism Development Corporation, Goa tourism department and local saumstha – Deepavali Utsav Samiti, Vithalapur, Carapur.

Tripoorari Poornima, which comes on the last day of first fortnight (Shukla paksha) of Kartik month is celebrated to mark the victory of good over evil by killing a effigy of demon Tripurasur who was killed by God Shiva according to the legend from Hindu pooranas. Thousands of Hindu devotees take a dip in holy rivers at various places on the occasion of Kartik Purnima festival or the full moon day in the auspicious ‘Kartik’ month of the Hindu calendar. The festival is also called “Deva Diwali”.

According to Puranic tradition, the demon tripoor after Tapascharya for one lakh years at Holy thirth place ‘Prayag’ got the blessings of Lord Brahmadeva who gave him “Var” (boon) that deities, men, women, devils and diseases would not be able to take away his life. After getting blessings from Brahmadeva, Tripoor became mighty and
began troubling God, Goddesses, from the trilokas. He had three puras (Nagar i.e celestial cities).

The Gods and deities went to Lord Shiva and prayed for their survival from the mighty demon Tripoorasur who was later killed by Lord Shiva on the day of Kartik Poornima, which is celebrated with gaiety by performing Shiv poojna and lighting the traditional lamps.

It is a custom to take darshan of Kartik Swami, God kartikeya also known as Kartinath and lit the “Tripoor Vati” (lamps) at late evening in the temples and by Hindu people in their houses.

In Goa “Tripoorari Poornima” is celebrated by performing pooja of the deities like Vithal, Krishna and other Goddesses in their temples respectively by the devotees. The Deepamalas are lit to mark the happiness and gaiety on the occasion of killing demon Tripoorasur.

In Northern parts of the county, especially in Uttar Pradesh, the Tripoorari Poornima is celebrated as the birth anniversary of Skandh (Skundh Jayanti). The people worship the idol of deity Skandh and lit lamps. While in southern India, this day is celebrated as Kruttika Mahostav. The devotees perform Shiv pooja, lit lamps and also perform “Agni Prajwalan” (lit fire) on high Stambh (Pole).

The Tripoorari Poornima is also the concluding day of Tulsi marriage – Tulasivivah or Lagan. The Hindu people perform the Vivah of Tulasiv Holy Basil or ocimum Sanctum plant which is planted in the Tulsi Vrundavan with Lord Krisna (Balkrishna). The Tulasiv Vivah celebration is also known as ‘Vodli Diwali’ by the people in Goa state.
The Deepostav begin in the wee hours of the Narak Chaturdashi after burning the effigies of demon Narkasur, the Deepavali festivities conclude on Tripoorari Poornima.

The Tripoorari Poornima is celebrated with variety of religious and cultural programmness at Vithalpur – Carapur. The Hindus festivals have adopted traditional cum modern form of celebration to enrich its features. On this occasion, procession of Lord Shrikrishna is taken out, followed by sailing of lamps in the Valvanti River to mark the deepostsav. Musical performances as well as other cultural programmes are also held.

The Palanquin procession of Vithal – Rakhumai idols is also held. The main feature of Tripoorari Poornima is killing of demon Tripoorasur at mid night followed by release of ‘Saranga’ (Special type of fire crackers) in the sky, marking the profound happiness due to victory of good over evil. At 12:00 am midnight, the most attractive part of the festival takes place, the sailing of different types of decorated boats in the Valvanti river water and boat competition followed by prize distribution ceremony.

In most of the temples in Bicholim, deepas of the high deepasthambh and deepamalas are lit to mark the celebration of Tripoorari Poornima in late evening hours of this poornima. Besides religious rituals like abhishek, pooja, aarati, palanquin procession of the respective deity are also held as the part of this festival which is celebrated with gaiety, pomp and religious and traditional fervour.

The Indian autumn called Sharad Ritu is when festivities reach their peak and in Goa too the full moon night in itself an auspicious day in
the eight month of the Hindu calendar (kartik) holds special significance. While Hindus celebrate Tripurari Poornima on the said day, Sikhs observe it as Guru Parab.

Similarly, the Shri Vithal temple at Vithalapur, Carapur attracts a large number of devotees and tourists who witness the colourful cultural performances that are held on the banks of the Valvonti river.

The procession of the idol of Shri Krishna, the palkhi of Shri Vithal and the boat festival are the main attractions of this festival.100

Chaitri Utsav at Goemchem Pandharpur –Vithhalapur (Carapur)

The Pandurang temple of Vithalapur, Sanquelim is famously known as the ‘Pandharpur of Goa’. This temple, which celebrated its 500th installation anniversary in recent years, is rich in history. The devotees of Vithal and Rakhumai of Pandharpur used to travel to Pandharpur twice a year on foot, once for Ashadi and the other for Kartiki Ekadashi Vari. These devotees had brought the idol of Vithal and Rakhumai to Sanquelim and later installed it at Vithalapur, which is located on the bank of River Valvanti.

Various festivals are celebrated at the Pandurang temple of Sanquelim, the main being the Chaitri Utsav celebrated during the Hindu month of Chaitra, from dashmi tithi of Shukla Pakhsha to poornima (full moon day) for it was on this day that the idols brought from Pandharpur were installed at Sanquelim.

The six day festival attracts devotees from the neighbouring
states of Maharashtra and Karnataka. Various religious rituals mark the celebrations that are held from morning till noon, on all six days. At night the deities – Lord Vithal and Goddess Rakhumai – are taken in a palanquin procession. The Rane family of Sanquelim enjoys the right of carrying the palanquin. And finally as a culmination to the day’s activities, the dashavtari drama is presented by the Mama Mochemadkar Dashavatari Natya Company on all six nights. A big fair organized in the temple premises is also a feature of festival celebration.

The first day of festivities begin with Vithal-Pundalik Bhet Sohala (meeting of Vitthal and Pundarik) at Valvanti, near the temple premises. In the wee hours of the day after Poornima, a Virbhadra procession is held around the temple which is followed by a rathotsav (chariot procession) that marks the concluding of festivities. Once again the Rane family of Sanquelim enjoys the right of pulling the chariot during the rathotsav, which is celebrated as victory of good over evil.

According to Hindu mythology, King Daksha had performed the Daksha yagya for which he invited his daughter Sati but not his son-in-law, Sati’s husband, the Lord Shiva. However, Sati attended the yagya along with Shiva, who was insulted on the occasion. The irate Lord Shiva created his Manas Putra (son of will) Virbhadra from his ‘jattas’ (matted hair locks). Virbhadra battled King Daksha’s forces and destroyed the yagya.

To celebrate this victory, the Virbhadra procession is held. The traditions associated with these festivities been has been followed here since pre-liberation times. The celebrations take place in the temple of Lord Vithal, an incarnation of Shrikrishna, on a hillock. The hillock and surrounding areas became known as Vithalpur after the establishment of
the temple.

On the last day, a special folk dance of Virbhadra, a disciple of Lord Shiva, is performed by a local folk artist in traditional costume and holding two swords in two hands. It is followed by a chariot procession pulled by members of the Rane family which has the idol of Lord Vithal.

The annual six-day festivities attract not only members of the Rane family scattered in various parts of Goa, but also other devotees of Lord Vithal make it a point to visit the temple.

Though the temple of Lord Vithal is in Vithalapur of Carapur, the town of Sanquelim is traditionally associated with the celebration of Chaitra in which members of various communities have a role.

According to tradition, the image of Lord Vithal was brought from Pandharpur in Maharashtra by Vataba Dulba Rane Morlekar along with other devotees who annually visited the temple of Lord Vithal during the occasion of Ashadi and Kartik Ekadashi fairs.

The earliest reference to this temple is found in a grant of 1488 AD made by Jaitaji, Dipaji and Satroji Rane for the worship of the Lord Vithal. In 1712, Hiru Prabhu Solkar helped in the construction of the temple in fulfillment of a vow he made when his merchant fleet which was caught in a violent storm was saved by the grace of Lord Vithal. Salubai, a daughter of the house of Ranes, then married in the house of the Scindias of Gwalior and reconstructed the temple in 1942.

Ranes of Sattari, who launched repeated revolts against the Portuguese regime, strongly believe that they enjoy the blessings of Lord Vithal.
Maikee for a Visit

In Mencurem village the place called Daboshem, a dense undergrowth, has an ancient temple. This is the temple of ‘Vodli Mauli’, where Sateri was worshipped in the form of an ant hill. Originally, the people were settled around here as the village originally inhabited in this place. Nearby was a pond. Anyone who had a bath in the ‘Nhavan’ (Pond) and drank this water was considered cleansed from outside and within.

However, the place was abandoned after a plague epidemic. The goddess was transferred to the current settlement. They people dug a well, carried the holy navan from the pond of Navan and transferred it to the well at Mencurem with a religious ceremony. Since then the well is known as Devachi Bain. (Well of the gods)

The water is considered holy and with medical properties as well. Before the availability of anti venoms in villages like Mencurem in remote Bicholim, the navan (holy water) from this well was the only cure as per the belief of the people. Snake bite victims were made to sit on special seats near the well and were given bath (nhavan). Soon the victim would shudder and vomit and the vish (venom) would be ejected from the body.

Even now people from far and wide come to the well for the navan to be healed from skin ailments. One has to have strong faith and no other medicines should be taken. Both the person, the one receiving and the one giving the navan should take a strict vegetarian diet, should abstain from physical relationships and be free from alcohol as per the custom observed by the locals.

In fact the well has such a holy aura that no one dares to climb it
or even look into it. In testimony, the village is free from liquor serving bars. Though Mencurem abounds in cashew plantation, not a single liquor distillery is set up there. One attempt in recent years saw the distillery explode. The cashew apple juice is extracted but the distillation is done in the neighboring villages. The gaonkars are very particular to abstain from alcohol.

Recently, the well (Devachi Bai) was completely rebuilt with small shrine attached. The goddess Mauli, which was established in a temple nearby albeit in a different ward, comes to visit her well on the day of the annual Malani Punavechi Zatra celebrated on full moon day of the tenth month, Paush. With pomp, the goddess seated in her palkhi (palanquin), is ceremoniously carried to the shrine on the well. Roads are decorated with brilliant lighting and radiantly coloured sparklers illuminated the way.

The villagers call this the event ‘the visit of the goddess to her ‘maikee’- the maternal place. All the girls from the village who are married of far and wide come to meet her and they are also thrilled to meet their village childhood friends. They come attired in their best silk saree and gold ornaments, their hair adorned with fragrant flowers. They meet their goddess with flowers and bananas. A traditional fair is set up around the well. Hugging the well periphery, sit the vendors who sell the required flowers and bananas. The offerings continue through the night and go on the next day. When the last woman has made her offering the deity goes back to her temple, with a promise to return next year! Devotees from various parts of Goa thronged to witness the ceremony near the well. The sacred well has immense cultural and religious importance in lives of the
villagers. The village is known for its rich and varied agricultural produce and villagers believe the yearly good harvest is due to Maul's blessings.

**Sacred Water Tanks – Deva Tali**

As part of religious traditions, in the past people took care of the sacred tanks. These tanks are located in the vicinity of temples and were specially constructed to store holy water, which is used for a ritual bath of the temple daity.

The sacred tanks were sources of drinking water for the pilgrims in the past and were well protected by the temple authorities. In the past springs and tanks played an important role in attracting human population around them.

In Goa, many of the Hindu temples are associated with sacred tanks which were protected for sustainable use for generations. Some tanks are also used to supply water for agricultural purposes.

The outlet of this tank are kept open during the rains and closed at the fag end of the monsoons, which helps water to be collected in the tank.

This storage charges the springs below and enables villagers to grow paddy and kulagars (horticulture). The villagers call the tank their mother.

Except in the case of a few village deities, the water tank existed in majority of temples precincts and they are known as Deva Tali.

Some of the deities were shifted due to religious torture of the Portuguese in the 16th century, but the water tanks still exist in such temple precincts. Some of them are in a bad condition. The Porne Teerth at
Diwadi Island and others have disappeared altogether. These water tanks are kept free from any nuisances and squalor. It is commonly believed that some of the temple water tanks claim a casualty of human life every three years.

A few of them have ritualistic significance. The ritualistic bath in the sanctified water tanks took place in the old regime. In the Devdasi community the marriage of a young girl was known as Shensvidhi. It took place without a male companion for which a ceremonial bath in the temple tank was mandatory for the girl.

One practice that is followed in a number of temples is known as Ganthwal. When a newly married couple visits the temple for the first time, their clothes are tied together in a knot and they walk in a procession, accompanied with traditional music, to the temple for Darshan. Prior to that, it is obligatory for both of them to have ceremonial bath in the temple tank. If the ritualistic bathing in not possible for whatever reason take for example the condition of water, is the reason, then a symbolic bath is given by the priest by sprinkling a few drops of that holy water on the couple.

The water is stagnant in most of other temple water tanks after the monsoon. At some places a stone built Tulsi Vrindavan occupies the central space of the water tank.

At the time of the annual festival, a procession of the image of the deity in Sangod is a typical character in a number of temples, especially in Chamundeshwari temple at Vargaon in Piligaon. Sangod is an exclusive tradition in Goa’s temple heritage for which two canoes are brought to the temple water tank from a distance, they are joined and a Makhar-altar is erected on it. The entire water tank area is innovated by
traditional lights - *Panntya* with firecrackers and other conventional fire work. The image of the deity is taken in a procession to the water tank and the deity placed in this Makhar.

In the famous *Lairaichi Zatra*, the devotees (Dhon) take a holy bath at the tank of the deity before walking an fire.

In Mulgaon, there is a temple complex of Shantadurga Pombhurfekarin. Behind this temple, there is a small tank which is maintained well and is it quenches peoples thirst with its sweet and tasty water.

Several factors have transformed the physical and ecological status of tanks badly affecting them. Also the advent and spread of irrigation by canal system and pumping of ground water have led to the degradation of these water bodies.

**Urus In Memory Of Sharif Hazrat Abdul Shah Baba - Bicholim**

Amongst the Muslim community a saint involved in humanitarian services for better of mankind and preaching of gospel of truth and love is given the title of ‘Pir’. They are also human with a special name ‘Wali’¹⁰³.

On the left bank of the Bicholim river, there is a Durgah dedicated to Sharif Hazarat Abdul Shah Baba. The Muslim community in Bicholim every year celebrates the Sandhal Ceremony to mark Urus in the memory of the pious saint Sharif Hazarat Abdul Shah Baba. A fair is organised where in devotees visit the durgah and pay their homeage to the Pir. The Sandhal ceremony attracts a long number of devotees from the
Muslim as well as Hindu communities and glorifies the example of communal harmony so rich in the Goan society. The Urus is held on the death anniversary of the departed saint.\(^{104}\)

The shrine lays in cool shade of Chinch (Tamarind) tree, Saver (Bombay Ceiba), Amo (Magnafora Indica) and Kumyo (Cereya arborea) trees.

In the evening, sweet meats are offered by children and people are treated to drink of Sherbat (Squash). On the day of Urus, both the tombstones of the Pir and his Guru are washed with rosewater and dressed with new carpets. In the afternoon, special vegetarian and non-vegetarian food known as Niyaz is served. Hindus and Christians in Bicholim along with Muslims enjoy the delicious food. The food is cooked in traditional ovens in huge utensils under the cool shade of the trees.

Those Muslims of Bicholim who stay in outer parts of state or outside celebrate it as a Pious or holy day at their residing places. People from Muslim community make wishes or vows on the occasion and those whose vows have been fulfilled make it a point to personally visit the Durgah (Tomb) and offer cash money and a green coloured carpet cloth called ‘Gilaf’ to cover the tomb of the saint.\(^{105}\)

In recent times, Quawwali programmes are also arranged as an entertainment to console the day long holy activity.

**Eid – ul – Fitr fosters joy, family re-union and thanksgiving**

Muslims celebrate *Eid-ul-Fitr* on the first day of *Shawal*—the tenth month of the Islamic calendar, with the sighting of the new crescent, following the month of Ramzan.
Eid-ul-Fitr is a festival of joy, family reunion and thanksgiving, it being one of the two great Islamic festivals, the other being Eid-ul-Azha. Eid-ul-Fitr’s importance can be judged from the fact that Allah himself ordered the believers to celebrate it. Prophet Muhammad established the Islamic egalitarian society, free of all kinds of exploitation and corruption, and maintaining the sanctity of society was made obligatory of all believers in every age.

The month of fasting (Ramzan) was selected to help prepare believers for this responsibility. During the specific fasting periods, believers are required to refrain from enjoying such things which are otherwise allowed. To restrain from lawful things consistently for a month helps a great deal in building willpower to refrain from unlawfulness. Usually festivals are celebrated to mark the change of seasons or on the establishment of monument or for recollecting a historic event.

The Eid is the monument of the revelation of the Quran, the living and lasting Book of Allah, who is the living and the everlasting. To celebrate Eid, preparations are made all through Ramzan.

The giving to a special charity on this occasion is obligatory. This is known as zakat. It is also a time to give to those who can’t afford to participate in Eid and during the last few days of Ramzan, Muslim families give a determined amount as a donation to the poor.

This donation is in terms of food – rice, sugar, dates, vermicelli – to ensure that the needy can have a holiday meal and participate in the celebration. This donation is known as sadaqah al-fitr (charity of fast-breaking). Eid preparations begin at least a week before Ramzan. The entire family usually shops together. Clothes, household decorative
articles, rice, vermicelli, dryfruits, are purchased and ladies draw mehendi designs on their hands. On Eid, Muslims gather early in the morning to pray the Eid prayer preferably in outdoor locations (Idgah) outside the city as the Prophet would pray the two Eids on the outskirts of Madinah and he never prayed it in his mosque, except once when it was raining. In Bicholim, the Muslims go to ‘Namazgah’ before offering the Eid prayer Muslims breakfast with dates.

The Imam delivers a sermon followed by a short congregational prayer after which Muslims usually scatter to wish family and friends and exchange gifts. Greetings of “Eid Mubarak” or “blessed Eid” are exchanged.

The speciality of the Eid meal is biryani and sheerkorma. Recreation and amusement, if they stay within the moral bounds, are permissible on Eid. All these activities traditionally continue for three days.

Eid - u1-Fitr, popularly known as the ‘Festival of Breaking of the Fast’, occurs as soon as the new moon is sighted at the end of the month of fasting, namely Ramazan. The is festival which celebrates the end of Ramzan, the Muslim month of fasting. It is an occasion of feasting and rejoicing.

Fitr is derived from the word ‘fatar’ meaning breaking. Fitr has another meaning derived from other word fitrah meaning ‘alms’. Special food and delicacies are prepared for the day and distributed among Neighbours and friends.

The devotees gather the mosques to pray, friends and relatives meet and exchange greetings.
Prayers, family get togethers and feasts are the major highlights of the festival. Unlike most festivals, Ramadan doesn’t fall on any particular day. Ramadan is the ninth month of the Islamic year. It is usually a time for increased religious devotion and self examination.

The Idgah is a large place especially set aside for the large congregation who attend the special Eid prayer early in the morning and can be an open field or flat piece of ground.

On this festival the people, having previously distributed the alms, assemble in the vast Idgah, and, being led by the Imam, recite prayers.

It is only used as such on festival days for congregational prayers, the proper place always being the mosque on other occasions. During the holy month of Ramazan, Allah gave Prophet Muhammad the Holy Quran. One day, Muhammad had a vision in which the angel Jibril told him how Allah wanted people to live. Allah’s words were revealed to Muhammad through the angel over a period of 23 years, and the words were written down to form the Quran. Ramdan is celebrated to remember this very special month.

Islam follows a unique approach in celebrating Eid. After the namaz, Muslims are supposed to celebrate the day in a responsible manner, greeting one another at home and in the neighbourhood. Children receive gifts and sweets on this special occasion.

Everyone begins their day by taking a bath in the morning, wearing new clothes and eating dates before to the mosque. Men usually wear white clothes symbolizing purity and austerity. Alms are distributed
to the poor. The Id special prayer ‘*Do Rakat Namaz*’ is performed in the morning in the mosque.

This month is not only religiously significant to Muslims but is a life learning lesson to them as well. It includes the practice of self-restriction which teaches patience, tolerance to human beings and is very crucial to live a happy life.

On the last day of Ramzan, people break their month-long fast and celebrate with great enthusiasm and show. Before breaking the fast people observe moon and greet each other with “Id mubarak” to start the festivities of Eid. ¹⁰⁶

Most of the Muslim festivals including the start and end of Ramzan, the festival of Eid are all based on actual sighting of the crescent of the new moon.

This crescent if is less than 12 hours old cannot be seen with naked eyes, only when 20-30 hours old it is visible with naked eyes. That’s the reason why many of the Muslim communities appoint a ‘Hilal’, which is a crescent sighting community especially for this purpose and to calculate the dates of Islamic calendar. Eid is also celebrated in Muslim populated villages of Sanquelim, Piligao and Surla and in the Bicholim Town.

**Muharram**

The tenth day of the first Muslim month, Muharram (the observance also is called Muharram) is a day of mourning as it commemorates what is considered the greatest tragedy in the history of Islam: the martyrdom of the Prophet's grandson Hussein. The long Muharram
processions with their Taziahs (gorgeous replicas of the martyr’s tomb), masked dancers and colorful crowds, give the observance the appearance of a gay festival, but in reality the apparent pageant is an expression of grief and distress.

After the death of the Prophet, the question of succession arose. As the spiritual head of the Muslims, there could be no successor to the Prophet, for Islam believes in the finality of Muhammad in the prophetic tradition. After him there were to be no Prophets, the Koran Was considered the final Word in revelation and any dispute about doctrine and practice Was to be settled by a reference to this book of books, which Was comprehensive in all respects. But the question of temporal succession to the position of the Caliph or the Commander of the Faithful had to be decided by the Prophet’s followers. Muhammad himself named no successor. He had no sons but only a daughter named Fatima who was married to Ali, a paternal cousin of his, and of this union were born Hasan and Hussein.

Among the Arabs, clan loyalties were generally stronger than heredity and after the Prophet's death, disputes arose as to who should succeed him as the Caliph. One faction maintained that succession could remain only in the Prophet's family while another faction rejected this. In the end, however, Abu Bakr, who had been a staunch ally of the Prophet during the early days of his mission and had enjoyed his confidence, was elected Caliph. He was an able man. During his reign and that of his successors Umar and Uthman, both of whom died by the assassin's dagger, there was no serious trouble about succession, but when Ali was elected the fourth Caliph, there was open rebellion. Ali too was assassinated. His son Hasan, who succeeded him, was poisoned. Now the war of succession
assumed serious proportions. After protracted trouble Hussein, Ali's other son, was killed in action in very tragic circumstances at the battle of Karbela, where his followers were hopelessly outnumbered.

This, for the time being, settled the question of succession, but it left a bitterness that divided the Muslim world into two: Sunnis and Shiahs. The latter accept validity of succession by heredity alone, and consider Ali, Hasan, Hussein and their descendants the rightful Caliphs, and some of those who reigned in their life-time and after as usurpers, which contention the Sunnis reject.

While all sections of Muslims mourn the murder of the martyrs, the Shiahs consider the killing of Hussein at Karbela a particularly heinous crime and give themselves up to public lamentations during Muharram.

Hussein was martyred on the tenth day of Muharram, and the first ten days of the month are spent in fasting, prayer and mourning. A procession is taken out on the tenth day, and mourners give themselves over to frenzied expressions of grief. A horse is led in the procession, along with Taziahs, in memory of Hussein's horse Dul Dul, and in some parts of India masked dancers lead the procession. After the procession, the Taziahs are buried or sunk in tanks, rivers or the sea.

Passion plays enacting the ancient tragedy also form a part of Muharram observances.

The Muslims in Goa including Bicholim town, Piligao, Surla and Sanquelim observe Muharram as per the tradition.
Id-Ul-Azha or Id-Ul-Zuha (Bakr Id)

This is one of the festivals the celebration of which is enjoined in the Koran. It commemorates Abraham's sacrifice of his son in obedience to a command of God. The Islamic version is slightly different from the story given in the Old Testament. Abraham, according to Muslims, was asked by God, who wished to test the faith of the Patriarch, to take his son Ishmael and offer him as a sacrifice to God, at Mina, near Mecca. The Patriarch, whose implicit faith in God permitted of no hesitation, decided to offer the sacrifice. Lest his paternal affection should interfere with his duty, Abraham blindfolded himself and sacrificed his son. On his removing the bandage from his eyes, Abraham found his son standing before him, with a slain ram at the altar!

For Bakr Id, the wealthy are expected to sacrifice one animal per member of the family and distribute two-thirds of the meat among the poor. Those who cannot afford it are to sacrifice one animal per family; among the very poor, seven families or even seventy are jointly permitted to offer one animal. A full grown Cow goat or sheep, free from disease, is considered the best offering. The sacrifice is offered with a short prayer, absolutely surrendering the soul and acknowledging the greatness of Allah.

For Muslims, it must be remembered, killing an animal for meat is something of a sacrifice on all occasions, and a short formula is always repeated while its throat is slowly cut; the meat of an animal not so killed is forbidden food to the Muslim. However, Muslims in Goa who live among the Hindus refrain from sacrificing the cow, out of respect for the Hindus to whom the cow is sacred.
Bakr Id (Bakr means sheep) is a day for feasting, visiting friends, and exchanging of greetings. All are expected to don new clothes for the feast; women take particular care to apply Henna (Mehndi) and deck themselves out in their finest ornaments. The day is celebrated by Muslim community in Bicholim, Sanquelim, Piligaon and Surla.

Christmas

Christmas, celebrating the Nativity of Christ, is easily the gayest festival of the Christians. Since the Portuguese rule, it is an important festival in Goa. The ten days from Christmas Eve till after the New Year, were public holidays and December was the busiest shopping season of the year. Christmas is still considered not only by Christians but by other communities too as the season of goodwill, greetings and shopping. Businessmen are particularly interested in the people continuing to celebrate Christmas. During Christmas, Christians turn out in their best clothes to visit friends and relatives. The streets and markets go gay with festal wares.

Among those Catholics who follow European customs, dances, carols, Christmas trees, arrival of Santa Claus and other familiar features of Christmas form the main celebrations; both children and adults take infinite pains in the construction of cribs, sheep and shepherds, old Joseph, the young virgin, child Jesus nestling in the cradle of hay, angels floating on invisible threads in the star-studded sky and the three wise men at the fringe of the horizon, one, an Arab on a camel, another a Persian on a steed, and the third, an Indian Rajah on an elephant. The night is enlivened by carols, dances and the midnight mass, and preparation of dishes for the
Christmas feast. The day is spent in visiting friends and relatives, and in feasting. Sending Christmas cards has become almost a religious duty for Indian Christians too.

These are generally the customs introduced by Europeans and followed by Christians practically all over Goa.

Among early Christians, the Nativity was not celebrated. Christianity had grown up in blood and tears and the early Christians in the Roman Empire were a hunted sect who had to perforce practice their religion in secret. To publicly profess Christianity was a hazardous venture attended with grave risks, even death. Under these conditions, events connected with the life of Christ were commemorated by fasts, prayers and pacificator rites and not public gaiety.

After the conversion of Emperor Constantine to Christianity in the fourth century of the Christian era, the creed professed by a few secret groups of zealots in different parts of the Roman Empire was transformed into the religion of vast masses of humanity in Europe, Western Asia and North Africa, and with this the need for popular festivals arose. It was then decided to annually celebrate the birth of Christ in a fitting manner, but it was found that different congregations had observed the day on different dates. The 6th of January, 19th of April, 20th of May, 17th of November and 25th of December, were all advanced as the dates of the birth of Christ.

By the fifth century of the Christian era, however, the 25th of December came to be accepted as the date of the Nativity in the Western world and slowly the Eastern Churches fell into line with the West. Further, the winter solstice was from time immemorial a festal season for
the peoples of northern Europe and when these were converted to 
Christianity, the Popes, appreciating the partiality of the folk for their 
anient festivals, allowed them to continue their winter celebrations though 
care was taken to substitute Christian legends in place of non-Christian 
religious traditions. This was possibly the main reason for fixing the date 
of the Nativity as 25th December. In A.D. 1582, the Gregorian calendar 
superseded the Julian, and those who follow the latter celebrate Christmas 
on the 7th of January, which date in the present century corresponds to the 
25th December of Julian reckoning. The Catholic Christians in Bicholim 
and Sanquelim town come together to celebrate the Christmas.

**Easter - From darkness to light**

Goa becomes alive during Easter time and the period till 
Pentecost is rightly called Easter tide, it being the high tide of celebrations 
in Goa.

The feast of Easter for the Christian community signifies a 
joyous celebration of Jesus rising from the dead. Christianity is deeply 
rooted in the mystery of the resurrection of Jesus. The encounter with the 
risen Lord provides every Christian the necessary energy (grace) to move 
along the same path as that of Jesus.

At midnight the faithful gather outside churches for the Easter 
vigil service that begins in darkness. The main celebrant begins in 
darkness. The main celebrant begins by praying and blessing the fire. He 
then lights the Easter candle which is subsequently carried in procession to 
the church proclaiming that Jesus is the Light of the world. Lights are then 
switched on.
Selected passages from the Bible are read recalling the presence of God in history. The chiming of church bells at midnight ushers in joy with the singing of the Alleluia, which is not sung during Lent.

The bright lights are complemented by the joyous singing bringing alive the festive occasion. Another part of the vigil service is the blessing of water and the sprinkling of it on the faithful. Like the light, this is another reminder of new life.

Goa, is known to make every event special, and Easter is no different as it is celebrated with dance, music and drama (tiatr). Naturally, after 40 days of penance, there is excitement.

Catholics, profess that Easter is like a new year which allows them to make a fresh start as did Jesus. They add that as the 40 day period of Lent being a low key affair, the entire world comes alive.

Easter eggs, popularly associated with the feast, are becoming quite popular in Goa, replacing the sanna-vodde mas (the first two are toddy based delicacies, the last meat) on the Goan table. Family get-togethers are also turning out to be common.

All the churches are normally packed for Easter celebrations which are rarely seen during other times.

It is time also for the Christian wedding season, and there are marriages solemnized at every weekend following Easter. However, although this is the greatest Christian feast, Christmas festivities enjoy more glamour. In Bicholim too, there are more sweets and events associated with Christmas rather than with Easter.

Since Easter and the summer holidays coincide, people working away from Goa return home to be with family and friends.
All Souls Day

A number of popular traditions connected with religious beliefs abound in Goa. One such is the devotion to the souls of the departed. While the Catholic Church has chosen November 1 – All Saints Day – to honour the saints, November 2 is dedicated to the souls – All Souls Day.

The devotion to the departed is, in fact, a prominent part of Goan spirituality. The Konkani phrase ‘mhaka khoincho otmo pavlo?’ denotes the commonly held belief that the departed have the power to intercede with God on behalf of the living. All souls Day, therefore, sees special prayers offered by Catholic families for their departed members.

The efforts, in fact, start the day before. At noon on All Saints Day church bells start to toll for the dead. This continues till noon the next day, that is, All Souls Day. Other traditions have, however, changed.

People would congregate the church and accompanied by a priest would chant prayers all the way to the cemetery. At the cemetery there would be prayers said for the dead.

Those who had family and relatives buried in the cemetery would individually pray at the respective graves. People carry flowers and once at the cemetery, light candles at the graves.

At home, late in the evening, the family would say no less than three rosaries – one each for the dead family members, for the wandering souls and for those souls in purgatory (between heaven and hell) awaiting redemption.
It is believed that the latter two required the rosaries far more than the former. The decades of the rosary would be recited without the mysteries. The next morning the family had to go for mass to pray for the souls of the dead. Here too, they had to hear three masses which were said consecutively by a single priest.

Today, the system of three consecutive masses has made way for only one mass said by the priest. Appeasing souls through the food of their choice, however, has remained. Special food, such as the sweet dish goddxem, is prepared in honour of the departed on All Souls Day.

_Goddxem_, also called _onn_, has as its basic ingredient jaggery, usually palm jaggery, and coconut, grated, ground or juiced. It can also include gram dal. In some villages a large festal meal is put together on the day and sannas, sorpatel, pumpkin mergulho and beef assado adorn the table. In those families where a death has occurred recently the poor are fed on behalf of the departed. Foklore holds that the food prepared on All Souls Day should be finished on the day itself as if any leftovers remain, wandering souls may be tempted to visit the house.

Yet another tradition that still has a fair share of partakers is that of mischief mongering. On the night prior to All Souls Day, pranksters strike. From flower pots to clothes kept to dry, to utensils, anything that can be laid hands on, is taken away and arranged near the chapel, church or the area’s prominent place. There are, however, also those who use this day to steal things, including fruits, with the hope that it would appear as if the departed had returned home on All Souls Day.
It is for this reason that on the previous day, people, especially in villages, can be seen bringing down Banana bunch, Papayas or hiding them under bags, so that pranksters aren’t able to get their hands on them. Meanwhile, back at the cemeteries, families start to clean the graves and the surroundings right from the evening of All Saints Day. The graves are beautifully decorated with flowers and candles.

The Zaatras, the traditional feasts of churches and the festivities of the ‘Pir’ speak volumes about the harmonious blend existing in Goan society.
Fig. 5.1

Plate No. 36

398
Fig. 5.5

Fig. 5.6

Plate No. 38

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Fig. 5.7

Fig. 5.8

Plate No. 39

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Fig. 5.9

Fig. 5.10

Plate No. 40

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