

## A Historian's Reading of Konkani Proverbs Related to Conflict Management Down the Ages in Goa

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*This essay attempts analysis of numerous proverbs and popular sayings in Konkani language which is spoken in Goa and Konkan, a region where the Portuguese controlled pockets on West Coast of India like Goa until 1961 and held sway as its exclusive sphere of influence prior to the rise of the British in Indian subcontinent. Oft repeated Konkani proverb zhogddeachim mullam tin: bail, zomin ani duddu (three, the roots of all conflicts - women, property and money) indicates plainly what people valued economically and ethically and their associated power games. Content analysis of colonial and post-colonial press indicates that friction and associated tension among villagers in Goa is indeed largely because of women, land and money. It is hypothesised that Konkani community's preference down the ages was for an 'avoiding' mode of conflict management as indicated by a host of proverbs.*

**Key words:** proverb, women, property, money, conflict management

The essay discusses the vast and rich repertoire of Konkani community's intangible cultural heritage in form of proverbs that have aided conflict management amongst villagers down the millennia. Konkani language is opulent in proverbs, maxims, axioms, sayings, etc. and is spoken largely in Goa and Konkan, a region of India where the Portuguese influence held sway from the early sixteenth century until the rise of the Marathas.<sup>1</sup> There are three thousand known Konkani proverbs of which about a fifth deal with conflict and its management. Even when Konkani speakers in Goa are largely typified as 'sussegad' (corruption of Portuguese *sossegado*) i.e. contented people, the intense and associated competition for jobs, resources, power, recognition and security has been a reality for agrarian community producing stress and conflict. Conflicts are part of human consciousness in all facets of life and this is very succinctly captured in an enigmatic konkani proverb *oxiem mhonnchem nhoi, toxiem mhonnchem nhoi, divalleche dive-re puta* (neither this is true, nor that's false, like Diwali lamps).<sup>2</sup> The oft repeated quote indicates that 'truth' is relative and reality is conditioned by limitations of people's perception.

Moreover, society's mores are varied, complex and complicated as indicated by the cliché *zanno zaleleak Göy, nokllo zaleleak pōy* (to those that understand Goa is a city, to others it's a labyrinth). Conflict was but natural leading to social strain and tension. The disputationist and litigious nature of the people which led to destruction and desolation of many families is captured in the saying *goyuchi neai tea ghorar poddum* (may the house be cursed with Goa's litigation). People have an opinion of anything and about everything which dialectical nature is expressed pithily in oft repeated quote *dhukor posunkoi vhelear roddta, marunkoi vhelear roddta* (pig grunts, whether you take it to rear or slaughter). Conflict occurs when people steadfastly cling to opinions and viewpoints to the extent that as the line '*apleo budheo hikmoteo, dusreancheo chukeo*' (one's advices are wondrous that of other's fallacious) indicates, leaders from amongst

the haves' denigrate others, especially those amongst the 'have-nots' whom they perceive as potential challengers. Noted journalist and publisher Frederick Noronha, pens in his recent article *When bad-mouthing becomes a fine art*, 'as a society, we (Goans) are quick to criticize, belittle, malign, find fault, run down, tear to pieces or even slander'. Further, Patrice Riemens, a Dutch campaigner who has been interested in Goa society comments that '...it seems to be a feature to have ten Goans, twelve opinions, and sixteen enemies.'<sup>3</sup>

## 1. Introduction

Humans were first grouped in family, extended to tribes and later into communities and larger societies that have had large degree of concern and collaboration. Later, population increase and decline of face-to-face relationships in decision-making, competitive territorial acquisition and conflicts of interest, inevitably conditioned social relationships.<sup>4</sup> Conflict can stem from poor communication, dissatisfaction with leaders' running style, yearning to get hold of 'absolute' power, ineffective headship, lack of sincerity, etc. Investigators have discerned that conflict might result from interpersonal or inter-group influences.

Conflict, which is an ever present process in human relations, is regarded as presence of discord that occurs when goals, interests or values of individuals or groups are incompatible and frustrate each other's attempts to achieve few or all the objectives.<sup>5</sup> In every society, causes and forms of conflict are varied, such as, personal, racial, class, communal and non-communal, ethnic, ideological, cultural, political, economic and social conflicts, conflict of values interests, etc. In Indian set up caste is an additional dimension adding to the complexity of the situation. Conflict emerges when people are exploited and marginalized or 'othered' socially, economically, politically and through other means.<sup>6</sup>

The aim of this essay is to investigate, if Konkani community endeavored to minimize affective conflicts at all levels, attain and maintain a moderate amount of substantive conflict? What are the appropriate conflict management strategies adopted to minimize affective conflict and maintain substantive conflict at moderate levels? What was done to match the status and concerns of parties in conflict? What are the factors and issues resulting into conflict in society? And how have they been managed? What have been the pinpricks of the caste-laden and feudalistic society for marginalized sections? How did women deal with male chauvinism and dominance in a patriarchal society? Did acquisitive tendencies among people affect personal and societal relations? These and other important issues make it imperative to study and comprehend thinking and behavior of people.

An attempt is made in this paper to study the six hundred odd proverbs related to nature of everyday conflict and its management. As indicated by the maxim *dantoi aple, onthoi aple, tondd bandhun dhorun ogem raunk zai* (both teeth and lips are ours, control tongue and keep mouth shut) this essay hypothesizes Konkani community's preference down the ages for an 'avoiding' mode of conflict management strategy for 'harmonious' living in society.

The current paper is divided into six sections. While section one is an introduction, part two deals with review of literature concerning Konkani proverbs and their study. The third section, attempts to provide a conceptual framework for understanding of conflict, its causes and management.

Families have been the building blocks of communities and societies. Even when this has been a reality much stress, tension and conflict in societies has been evidenced and recorded at micro level among and between families. Inter- and intra-family level conflict is discussed in section four. Innumerable difficulties which people faced during transition to moneyed economy, leading to emergence of acquisitive tendencies, is debated in the sections that follow. The next section deliberates on proverbs connected to conflict management strategies and concluding remarks.

## 2. Review of Literature

Proverbs are as old as civilization. In India, from the Vedic period down to the holy books of Christians and Muslims, proverbs have influenced social interactions and thinking.<sup>7</sup> A proverb spreads with authority and forces its acceptance by its very truth. They may be culled from riddles or may be summed up as a quintessence of a well-known fable, folktale, short-story, anecdote, and other lore of the people. They could very well have been either the unwritten titles of fables, folktales or the other possibility is that they were the moral of the stories i.e. their value laden conclusion, a beacon for guiding social interaction.

V.P. Chavan who researched extensively on Konkani proverbs holds the view that rough-hewn proverbs go on adding lustre and polish as they travel from one language to another. Konkani speakers are largely bi-lingual and it is possible that they may have adopted proverbs from other languages, either Indian or foreign (especially Portuguese).<sup>8</sup> Chavan states that proverbs, including those in Konkani, have necessarily four qualities: brevity or conciseness, sense, piquancy and popularity. Although piquancy is its chief characteristics, these short pithy sayings in Konkani do manage to convey serious thoughts about conflict and its resolution/management.<sup>9</sup> They show peculiar characteristics of people whose mother tongue it has been, presenting their ideal of life and day to day conduct. Konkani proverbs are full of pungent criticism of daily social life with an eye to establish the best way with which to manage worries and tensions of mundane existence. In that sense proverbs were an unwritten code of law for the society.

Richard C. Trench a very influential nineteenth century theorist mentioned three characteristics that go to constitute a proverb, i. e. shortness, sense, and salt. According to Trench,

‘Proverb must have shortness; it must be succinct, (and) utterable in a breath; it must have sense, not being, that is, the mere small talk of conversation, slight and trivial, else it would perish as soon as born, no one taking the trouble to keep it alive; it must have salt, that is besides its good sense, it must in its manner and outward form be pointed and pungent, having a sting in it, a barb which shall not suffer it to drop lightly from the memory’.

Elaborating further, Trench argues that,

‘Essential quality of a proverb is popularity, acceptance and adoption on part of the people. Without this popularity, without these suffrages, and this consent of the many, no saying, however brief, however wise, however seasoned with salt, however worthy of all these accounts to have become a proverb, however fulfilling all other its conditions, can yet be estimated as such’.<sup>10</sup>

Undoubtedly, a large number of Konkani proverbs are full of wit without which these sayings

would have ceased to exist from users' lexicon. They not only abound in certain figures of speech but are quite impressive as well. The hyper-bole and paradox are to be found in them. These proverbs have got a local form and colour which add to their popularity and potent influence. Their very influence on general mass of people make them trustworthy witnesses of the religious, social, and even political ideals of the peoples who use them.

Prolific Konkani writer Pundalik Naik says that following Grimm brother's (Jacob and Wilhelm) writings on folktales of Germany, in 1812, there was a worldwide interest on folk life and literature. In India this led to publication of panchtantra, kathasaritsagar, hitopadesh, etc.<sup>11</sup> Research and compilation was also as a result of interest in folk-life, culture and wisdom. The difficulties, of collecting sayings and proverbs of Konkani which has been a spoken language for large part of history, were but immense. People have to recall proverbs from memory as also perhaps from the subconscious mind. Chavan holds view that economic factor was responsible for greatest rot in life-history of Konkani language. That Konkani speaking people have largely been a subject population during the historical period has also added to the difficulty in no small measure. Chavan himself persisted against all odds to publish his well-researched work *The Konkani Proverbs* (Bombay, 1923).

First known attempt, however, at documenting Konkani proverbs is by Jesuit priest Diogo Ribeiro (1560-1633) who in his celebrated work *Vocabulario da Lingoa Canarim, 1626* (A Vocabulary of Konkani Language) a Konkani-Portuguese and Portuguese-Konkani dictionary, provides over 250 Konkani proverbs in usage then. Antonio Pereira writes in his book (*Konkani Oparinchem Bhandar*, 1985)<sup>12</sup> that he referred to proverbs quoted by Portuguese historian J.H. da Cunha Rivara.<sup>13</sup> Antonio Pereira testifies to a booklet gifted to him by Fr. Lagrange Fernandes containing Konkani proverbs in vogue during the sixteenth century. Lourdino A. Rodrigues has also written a research article on sixteenth century Konkani idioms and proverbs.<sup>14</sup> In early twentieth century Domingos Joao Mendes collected and published a book on Konkani proverbs titled *Purvileo Munneom* (Bombay, 1904).<sup>15</sup> World famous linguist Sebastiao Rodolfo Dalgado published his famous work *Florilegio dos Proverbios Concanis* (1922) containing 2177 Konkani proverbs.<sup>16</sup> Important contribution to this field is made by S.S. Talmiki who published two volumes, *Konkani Proverbs and Idioms* (Bombay, 1932 and 1936).<sup>17</sup>

Chavan elaborates on very serious hardship faced by Konkani paremiologists who often find it difficult to decide with authority the particular shade of the meaning attached to individual proverbs, in the absence of standard books and writers, which alone are now considered the final authorities to accord a definite place to a definite saying. Instances also abound when one hears a proverb quoted very effectively to clinch a thoroughly unsound argument. He testifies that often it is the ladies that have successfully elaborated on the true meaning of proverbs unintelligible to men.<sup>18</sup> Antonio Pereira not only attests this view but goes much further to attribute the authorship of most proverbs to the womenfolk when he says that '*opari kuzn'nat rochleat*' (proverbs birth near hearth). Fire has regenerative powers and the intellect of the women might have been at their best when stoking embers in fireplace during trying times to understand complex situations – when faced with ridicule in paternalistic and feudal society – by innovating and birthing new proverbs.<sup>19</sup>

This is rather grudgingly accepted in a Konkani proverb *bailechem xanneponn chuli kodde* (women's expertise at hearth), demonstrating in addition the pin-pricks they endured in patriarchal society.

Women's contribution to the study of Konkani paremiology has indeed been enormous. A recent well-documented study on Konkani proverbs is by Dr. L. Suneeta Bai, *Socio-Cultural Background of the Gowda Saraswat Brahmin Community as Reflected in the Konkani Proverbs* (Kerala, 2013).<sup>20</sup> Suneeta Bai emphasizes that '(conducive) family atmosphere is a determinant of life.' And while the prime need for affection and security can only be best provided in early stages of life in a family setting, she accentuates that 'lack of which may eventually lead to unhealthy conditions of life, family feud, mental diseases like hysteria, etc.'<sup>21</sup> Her well-researched work on Konkani proverbs has given English and Malayalam equivalents too wherever possible, thus indicating for readers shared (universal) values of Konkani speakers. Suneeta Bai's position of attributing authorship of Konkani proverbs to Gowda Saraswat Brahmins (GSBs), has to be accepted with a pinch of salt though. The author seems to be appropriating and assigning authorship of Konkani proverbs exclusively to GSBs. While it is true that GSBs devotedly preserved these proverbs outside Goa, they migrated to these lands not earlier than five-six centuries ago. Their earliest migration to Goa was around 1100 AD though some scholars have attributed it to beginning of Christian era. And Goa was inhabited much earlier.<sup>22</sup> Number of non-GSB Konkani speakers is more anywhere in Konkani region. Besides Konkani has over a dozen proverbs highly critical of this section of the society which find no mention in Suneeta Bai's work though.<sup>23</sup> These proverbs explain the evolving socio-economic dynamics with the entry of Brahmins in rural economy and the strains resulting from it. Parameiology

Valuable contribution to parameiology is made by Santha S. Sukhtankar whose book *Konkani Mhaniyo* (1995) is rather a treasure trove of Konkani proverbs.<sup>24</sup> Kamladevi Rao Deshpande's *Mhanni Fattli Kanni* (Proverbial Tales, Margao, 1998, Vol. I & II) offers insight to a reader to understand folktales, fables as also the scientific knowledge encapsulated in proverbs of the Konkani speaking people.<sup>25</sup> Undoubtedly women's contribution to study of Konkani proverbs is phenomenal. It is worth noting that a large number of Konkani proverbs are also on and about women, and indicate that they were not held in high esteem by patriarchal society. Trials and tribulations which womenfolk suffered have been fossilized for posterity in form of interesting proverbs. According to traditional wisdom, warp and woof of history is succession of human and social conflicts. In viewing and reviewing thousands of years of recorded history, what strikes the eye of the casual beholder and thus the great majority of humankind is the omnipresence of conflict.

According to Hossein Khanaki the three distinct main drivers of conflict are Power, Value and Economic, whether substantive or affective and interpersonal or inter-group. Power conflict ensues, when each party or individual is struggling to obtain more power and influence on others, demanding less power and influence of latter. Value conflict is a result of inconsistency in people's culture and way of life. It gets affected by how people define appropriateness and involves ethical issues as well. Economic conflict originates in people's struggle for control of resources that are scarce.<sup>26</sup> Analysis of Konkani proverbs indicates that power, value and economic were invariably a cause of conflict.

### 3. Theoretical framework

Conflict is inevitable in everyday life for families, at workplace, amongst communities and society at large. Popular sayings like, *hennem gelear hennem poddlim, tennem gelear tennem poddlim* (went one side and fell down, went the other way and slipped too); *hennem gelear nhoi, tennem gelear nhoi, modhem raum khoim?* (One side is the river and on the other side is the brook, where do I stand in the middle?); *hoi mhonnlear ghor veta, nhoi mhonnlear bail veta* (if I say 'yes' the house is lost, say 'no' then the wife); *sokol dovorlear mui vhorot, voir dovorlear kavillo vhorot* (keep on the floor ants take it away, kept up on the tiles and the crow will swoop), etc. amply demonstrate the ongoing conflicting situations in day to day life of people.

In India, the socio-economic-cultural-religious, patriarchal, feudal and spiritual factors have a major influence, often debilitating, on work ethics and attitudes towards conflict. Conflict is a process of social interaction and a social situation, where interests and activities of participants (individuals or groups) actually, or apparently, confront, block and disable realization of one or other party's objectives. Perceived differences and opposition evolve around either work and task related issues, or around socio-emotional and relationship issues.<sup>27</sup> The adage *aplem asa thoim sasonn, na thoim mosonn* (what's ours is eternal, that of others is mortal) indicates concisely people's self-seeking behaviour. Feelings, emotions and sentiments are very important attributes of Indian socio-cultural milieu and cannot be overlooked while addressing conflicts.

Rahim conceptualizes conflict as an interactive process manifested in incompatibility, disagreement, or dissonance within or between social entities (individual groups, organizations, etc).<sup>28</sup> Similarly, Bercovitch views conflict as a 'situation which generates incompatible goals or values among different parties.'<sup>29</sup> Fisher while conceptualizing conflict as an incongruity of desires, goals or values between individuals or groups, adds that it also includes attempts to prove one's own position by parties with accompanying mutual antagonistic feelings.<sup>30</sup> *Apleo budheo hikmoteo, dusreancheo chukeo* (one's advices are 'superb', that of others a 'letdown') surmises this rather brilliantly. For sociologist Lewis Coser, conflict is 'clash of values and interests, (rather) the tension between what is and what some people feel ought to be.'<sup>31</sup>

In social life, conflicts do occur but family members, friends and relatives manage them in varied ways and proverbs as 'capsules of self-truth' indicate how these might have been addressed. Conflict is a normal part of any social change and can have positive and negative effects. Positive effects lead towards required social changes, development of creative ideas and innovations, presenting important problems, making quality decisions and solving problems, organizational and social re-engineering, developing solidarity and group cohesion. Negative effects are similar to bad cooperation, as festering and unresolved conflicts lead to waste of time that can otherwise be utilized productively.<sup>32</sup> Challenge is not to avoid conflict other than in learning how to deal with it effectively as traditionally averred *hirachi porikxa tutia vinnem zaina* (to test diamond use hammer). Common saying *dukhovlo paim kurddo* (wounded leg is blind) suggests that conflict will likely aggravate only to grow into antipathy, create withdrawal or cause infighting. Addressed properly, conflict can lead to change, innovation, personal and professional growth, and countless other items that often end-up as missed opportunities,<sup>33</sup> as indicated by the aphorism *sadhli tor*

*xikar, na tor bhikar* (if you succeed its game or else misery).

In order to describe a situation as conflicting, four elements must be present. One is previous conditions for conflict appearance such as lack of resources, wrong policy, inappropriate rewarding system, mistaken perception of groups, etc. Two, is the affective state of individuals and groups like stress, tension, hostility, anxiety, etc. Three, cognitive state of individuals and groups: belief, consciousness, knowledge that conflict exists, that another side could endanger, or has already endangered the subject's interest. Last element is the resultant conflict behavior i.e., from passive resistance to aggression towards other party.<sup>34</sup>

In rural areas, primarily there are two types of conflict cases: personal and societal.<sup>35</sup> Personal causes can be summed up into four categories. These include: improper judgment of other parties or individuals, inaccurate communication, misgivings among people and also due to personal characteristics. Communication errors appear from people's inability to listen to each other. This is despite the fact that people have been forewarned in no uncertain terms that *dolleachem tem khorem, kanachem tem fottkirem* (what's seen is true, what's heard is untrue). The cacophony which is endemic to many developing societies perhaps makes people hear more and listen less. In addition, errors come from information lost in upward and downward communication, due to inadequate understanding, or from one's emotional state at the time of communication. Integrity, competence, consistency, loyalty, and openness are very essential for developing trust among people. Dishonesty, mistrust, reticence, deviousness, etc., create a good foundation for potential conflict situation to occur. When people with completely different personality traits are required to work together then it is difficult to avoid conflict, for some people fire up because of personal likes and dislikes.<sup>36</sup>

Workplace conflict which is a common feature of today's post-modern societies can broadly be considered to fit into two categories, the first 'when people's ideas, decisions or actions relating directly to work are in opposition,' and second in situations where people just don't get along. The latter, often referred to as clash of personalities, can be most difficult to address, because strong emotions get mobilized based on negative perceptions about others. Workplace consists of individuals who have their own perspective of the world. Conflict also occurs when people decide to pursue personal goals, without regard for community goals and its well being, and, this in turn result in strife. Moreover, as the sayings *panchanche panch prokar* (five individuals of five kinds) and *murteo titleo prokriteo* (as many characters as there are individuals) indicate, no two persons are alike and so personality clashes are unavoidable (*gorvant gorvam aslear, xingam adolltat*, i.e. where cattle herd together, there is crackling of horns).

Resources in an organization and society are related to power and influence, with people competing to obtain a larger share. These resources are not only financial, but are also related to human resources, redistribution of workforce, etc. The insufficiency of resources can also affect compensation system and has a direct influence on people's behavior, their satisfaction and feeling for justice and equality. Unclear organization of work or delegation of authority can cause conflict. Societal conflicts are categorised into vertical and horizontal conflicts. Vertical conflicts basically result from generational gaps following elders attempt at micro-managing day to day affairs and

resisted by the youth in innumerable ways. Horizontal conflicts are basically inter-caste/group conflicts. These conflicts can manifest themselves for many reasons, such as diverse interests and ideas related to distribution of resources.<sup>37</sup>

Overall it would not be wrong to say that Konkani speakers view conflict as detrimental for personal and societal well being, since tolerance, forbearance, restraint, patience, moderation, assimilation and synthesis are virtues enshrined in Indian wisdom literature. Observers have argued that Indian managerial conflict resolution tendencies reflect Hindu norms of seeking a solution that pleases everyone, as well as British norms of active, mutual problem solving.<sup>38</sup>

The challenge of conflict lies in how one chooses to deal with it. It is best handled quickly and openly. The most important and consistent element in dealing with conflict is open, honest and clear communication. It is vital that people are assured of freedom from recrimination for speaking the truth.<sup>39</sup> Conflict will likely fester only to grow into antipathy, create withdrawal or cause factional infighting in society. Addressed properly, conflict can lead to change, innovation, personal and professional growth, and countless other items that often end-up as missed opportunities. Conflict is constructive when it improves the quality of decisions, stimulates creativity and innovation, encourages interest and curiosity among group members, provides the medium through which problems can be aired and tensions released, and fosters an environment of self-evaluation and change.<sup>40</sup>

It is important for marginalised section to be assured that their voices will be heard, and leaders will respond promptly and reasonably to address their concerns. It is vital to give all parties to a conflict an equal voice, regardless of their position or political influence. When mediating a conflict, one should go beyond simply giving everyone an equal chance to speak, and instead give an equal weight to arguments of conflict parties. *Kelolo Gones, zalo makodd* (I wished - to sculpt – Lord Ganesh, it turned out to be a monkey) warns about the frayed outcomes of conflict management devoid of open, honest and clear communication. The proverb *zhogddeachim mullam tin: bail, zomin ani duddu* (three, the roots of all conflicts - women, property and money) indicates plainly what people valued economically and ethically and their associated power games. Content analysis of colonial and post-colonial press indicates that friction and associated tension among villagers in Goa is indeed largely because of women, land and money.

#### **4. Cringed life for Konkani women**

Women have been as vital in the history of human development, as men have been in the making of history; nonetheless, in traditional societies the former's role was limited to mostly household and domestic issues.<sup>41</sup> Konkani society was male-dominated, chauvinistic, and patriarchal in essence with patrilineal succession, and women were at the receiving end since birth. The stress and tensions which women were made to bear is varied. It is indeed peculiar that the communal order was drawn in such a manner as not to view with equanimity a happy woman or a crying man (*hanste bailek ani roddtea dadleak patieum noie*, trust not a smiling woman and a crying man). This has been the essence of the Konkani community for major part of history.

Oft repeated quote *cheddo maddavori, cheddum kellivori* (boy a coconut tree, girl a plantain tree) suggests people had a stated and obvious preference for the male child. Prior to Goa's liberation



in 1961, it was only the dominant feudal sections of society i.e. *bhatkars* who owned coconut plantations (*bhatt*). Coconut and areca nut were vital cash crops that helped *bhatkars* acquire wealth and dominate society. Just like how coconut-trees were prized possession society looked with presumptuous pride towards birth of son as one who would assist acquisition of family wealth. Plantains, on the other hand did not have the same economic value. Goa did not have any such plantations. It being just like any other plant in the kitchen garden, banana was consumed occasionally. As of today it is customary among villagers to distribute among neighbours bananas rather than sell for a price. A girl child was symbolically equated with banana-sapling, for having very less economic value to her parents, as she would eventually leave - rather forced to forsake - her 'own' home for that of the husband.

The symbolism of relating woman to a bunch of bananas should also not be lost. Long back, to a poser of mine to undergraduate students: 'how some villagers in Goa have village deity name instead of family name?' a girl-student narrated her grandmother's version that in any household whenever 'bunch of bananas ripened in the kitchen garden' that family was ostracized and ridiculed by fellow villagers and their progeny then had to assume village deity name. Perhaps, likening bunch of bananas to ovaries students opined that traditional Goan society looked down on promiscuous behaviour of the youth and that pre-marital sex was but proscribed. Girls who became pregnant prior to solemnization of marriage as per religious rites were driven out of their homes for bringing disrepute to families. Their progeny would then become 'children of god' or *devadasis*. The proverb *kurddi udkak geli, ghagor foddun ghara aili* (blind woman went to fetch water and came home with broken vessel) indicates tersely life for naive rural womenfolk.

Investing as less as possible in the growth and development of the girl-child the parents married girls at the earliest considering *vaddhloli choli kusloli ponvlli* (grown-up daughter is like areca-tree's rotten spathe). Taboos associated with menstruation made life difficult for girls after puberty.<sup>42</sup> Child marriage and the ills associated with it were common. And so, parents steadfastly endeavoured to mould daughters to be very compliant, dutiful, submissive, subservient, obedient and docile, for society otherwise questioned *soxi astanam bagnetoll'li, rukh zatoch bagotgo?* (If as sapling it does not bend, will it do so as a tree?).

Even when upbringing of the girl child was viewed as yoke since *kazar korche adim cheddum zodd, kazar kortoch god* (before marriage girl child is a burden, after marriage is sweet) parents made superlative effort to souk their daughters for best proposals as specified by the proverb *aplem cheddum neketr, pelealem cheddum mharam por* (One's daughter is star, neighbour's an outcaste). However, mothers flattering virtuousness of their daughters hiding sometimes the bitter reality made people utter *avoi morta dhuvekodden, dhuv morta ganvchea minddakodden* (mother loves her daughter, but latter her paramour). The not so oft-repeated line *eki bail nikllonk ravot tor apxim, na tor nidot bapaixim* (if woman remain chaste, it will be of own accord, or she'll sleep with her father) points to the fact, of society emphasizing that daughters remain unblemished and immaculate before marriage. For the saying *kanka cheddvachea lognak zaiteo addkholleo* (there are many difficulties for the marriage of the one eyed girl) is a sign that any blemish – physical or moral – acted as insurmountable hindrances for getting prospective partners to girls.

It was often said that *dhuvechem borem sodhta zalear, zanveanchem vornnon kor* (parents wishing for daughter's happiness ought to praise son-in-law). Yet what was the reality? What ruled the roost was the capacity of the parents to offer hefty dowry for their daughters. Where dowry offered was less than expected the son-in-law's family would comment contemptuously *dali vholdlim saguvat thoddi* (big basket, small presents). This is despite the fact that men who craved and demanded hefty dowry were forewarned *dotik bhulun kazar zalo, bailecho chakor zalo* (he that marries for dowry, sells his liberty). Marriage was never seen as a union of equals between husband and his spouse. While arranging marriages what was weighed consciously was the eventual dominance of the male partner. Pairing which would lead to a contrarian situations challenging status quo of male dominated society were avoided and detested (*ghova poros bail motti, musoll gheun dhanvta fatthi*, i.e. calmest husbands make stormiest wives).

Society did emphasize that for marriage to succeed there has to be perfect harmony between husband and wife *ghov-bailechem ek chit, moddkent zata xit* (if husband and wife are of one accord, then rice in cooking pot), warning couples against pitfalls of persistent discord *ghov-bail koddsortit, bhik magtit* (if husband and wife are separated they will be obliged to beg). Nonetheless, partners in civil relationship were never considered as equals. Women's role was largely confined to performing no more than daily domestic chores (*bailechem xanneponn chulikodde* i.e., women's expertise is near the hearth) in an age characterised by shared poverty for large part of history. In times of crop failures and meager farm production women had to put to good use their ingenuity to keep the fire burning. It is perhaps due to this that the wise would utter *dublleachi morum-noie bail, giresthicho morum-noie ghov* (expire not poor man's wife or husband of rich woman). However, in times of abject poverty rather than wail '*pancham usurpiancho ghovlo kitloso ge, maim, togtolo*' (Oh mother! how long will two-pence husband last), there was no escape from cruel fate.

How did men react in times of hunger, deprivation, etc? The quote *penthek gelear rinnkarachi dons, ghara gelear bailechi dons* (If I go to the bazaar then I fear the creditors, if I go home then have to hear from the wife) illustrates that men folk preferred escapist way of life in times of hardship. However, role of women in managing the household making both ends meet was hardly given due importance as it was commonly averred that *bailank ordhea gaddvachem ginean* implying women have brain of half-a-donkey. Worst, was that even in times of difficulty women's advice was looked down upon by the society (*bailechi nadd devchara poros padd*, woman's temptation is worse than that of the devil). Moreover, demise of a wife was hardly a emotional loss that mattered much for the husband, as the proverb *ghov melo, konnso ailo, bail meli komprachi dukh bhogli* (husband's death is grievous while demise of the wife is little sorrowful).

It so happened that women had to beg in the neighbourhood for the daily bread. It is possible that in doing so they might have faced lot of hardship and indignation as the popular quote goes *dublleachi bail desachi* (wife of the poor man belongs to the people). It was also maintained that wifedom is safe cover for adultery (*chuddo tantunt lipta muddo*). In instances where women were sexually exploited and molested they had to live with the blemish for the lifetime. The society questioned: Can a harlot be called chaste when she becomes old? (*Cheddi mhatari zaleari, potivrata*

*zata?*) Poverty was not the only hurdle that women had to negotiate. Those married to the rich suffered equally or more (*lamb till naikanche, ghorant hal bailanchem*, bigger the signs on lord's forehead greater the hardships of the wives).

Successful marriages were ascribed to heavenly bodies otherwise the matchmakers were blamed (*Borem zalear hokol-novreachem, vaitt zalear maleachem*, if marriage is a success it is the luck of the bride and groom, otherwise the blame is of the matchmaker). Women faced many difficulties in traditional and conservative society. They were denied any formal education. Opportunities to learn and practice music, dance and theatre were completely denied to them (*bail nachli, loz ogddaili*, i.e. dancing woman loses respect). Society was fully aware of the struggles that women endured during childbirth (*ballonterache chottke ani mornnache attevritte eksarke*, i.e. throes of childbirth and agonies of death are alike) and yet marriage was to produce children (*ghovachi bail sodanch gorbest*, i.e. man's wife is always pregnant), the more the merrier. The saying *gai ani mai sarki* (cow and mother are alike) is evocative when viewed from this perspective. Bereft of this, it was a life of denial and abject suffering for it was often uttered *boddkek kukum ani vanzak kattboll kiteak* (vermillion for the head-shaven/widow and food to the barren, but why?).

Polygamy was not uncommon. Women were blamed for ills of the household and fault finding was order of the day. The proverb *vhoddli vaitt mhonn dakhti keli, tichea paiank tini* (as the first wife was bad, married a second one but she had three defects) indicates this in no uncertain terms. Likewise, wife beating was common and justified, saying *ghovan bailek marlear demand na* (husband beats the wife and there is no court case). Physical and emotional pain of flogging at the hands of husbands had to be borne silently and trivialized to such an extent that *pavsan bhizlem, ani ghovan marlem sarkem* (being soaked in rain or beaten by husband is alike). In such situations women were condemned to a fatalistic life with no escape whatsoever as indicated by the adage *ghovachea bhoian ghetlem ran, thoim mell'lo musolman, tannem khatrun vhelem nak* (out of fear of the husband, I ran onto a ridge of a mountain, where I met a musolman, he cut my nose). In Konkani, 'cut the nose' (*nak khatorlem*) connotes being put to shame. So, to abandon husband's household under any circumstances was considered as highly disrespectful to all concerned.

Daughter-in-laws had to suffer a lot at the hand of mother-in-laws and the diktat was *sunechi sotea mainche khala* (authority of daughter-in-law is under supervision of mother-in-law). Husbands conveniently used their mothers to dominate over their wives (*put mhonnit ai, sun mhonnit mai*, son calls his mother and daughter-in-law her own). Not only did the mother-in-laws dish unequal treatment by being extraordinarily good to their own daughters than to daughter-in-laws as encapsulated by the proverb *dhuvek tel amaxe-punvek, sunek divalleche divallek* (mother oils daughters head every fortnight and that of daughter-in-law once a year), but, they also meted cruel treatment to the latter (*dhuvek marun sunek bhenkddaunk* beating daughter to frighten the daughter-in-law).

Villages reverberate till date with talk of conflict between mother-in-law and daughter-in-law so much that it was often said that *maincheo kornneo xinkear, sunecheo kornneo tinttear* (the actions of the mother-in-law are hidden in the kitchen sling while the daughter-in-laws defects are

known in the bazaar). Utterances like *sunarddem, chamarddem ani mharddem sarkem* (daughter-in-law, shoe-maker's and mahar's wives are equal) and *sunnem hoi, pun sun nhoi* (dog better than daughter-in-law) show the inferior position that daughter-in-laws endure at their husband's place. For a society where hypocritical practices are not uncommon, pilgrimages undertaken to atone for life's misgivings are not rare, yet, things hardly changed in households as it was often muttered about the elderly women *kaxi geli, varanaxi geli, kormachi khottkhott geli na*, (she went on pilgrimage to Kasi.. to Varanasi, however, the qualms do not disappear).

Further, common refrain that *aponn randd xinallem, bhava bailek patiena* (she herself is a prostitute and does not trust her sister-in-law) showed that relations among daughter-in-laws in the same family was also not very good. Jealousy, tittle-tattle, name-calling, etc. is common in villages among women till date. Only solace sometimes for the hapless newlyweds was some consideration shown towards their plight by father-in-laws (*manvak mog sunecho, sasuk mog zanvoiancho*, father-in-law loves daughter-in-law while mother-in-law adores son-in-law). The bad blood between daughter-in-laws and mother-in-laws was to such an extent that on demise of the latter there was little remorse (*sasu melear bara mhoine zale atam dukhamnim bhorleat suneche dolle*, mother-in-law expires and a year is over, now the daughter-in-law weeps). Lamentation was perhaps due to the fact that there were no escapes from the day to day drudgery for the women folks considered no more than mere chattels in a patriarchal society.

### **5. Scarce farm produce and disquiet in countryside**

Goa has been an agrarian society for major part of historical period. However, notwithstanding mass of information available on agriculture and agrarian issues in various libraries and archives it's a fact that researchers have faced problem of absence of reliable data relating to land and cultivation, such as the crops raised, acreage and yield, nature of tenure, details of estate owners and actual tillers of soil, precise relationship which between the owner (batkar) and the tenant (mundkar), distribution and size of holdings, sources of irrigation, etc. for the pre-liberation period. This might be on purpose or by design and is aptly surmised in proverb *zanno zaleleak Göy, nokllo zaleleak pōy* referring to the complexity of agrarian issue, requiring knowledge of traditions, customs, day-to-day habits, besides biases and prejudices too associated with practice of agriculture. The lore of the people, hitherto largely untapped, aids in drawing panorama of village Goa.

Two proverbs indicate the stark reality for multitudes of have-nots. One, *bhagacho masso vorlent kusso* (fish of many rots in basket) and other *battkarak ek batt, mundkarak xembor batt'am* (landlord possesses one estate, the tenant has many to tend to). The first indicates 'tragedy of commons' i.e. the decline of village communities (*comunidades*) following four and half centuries of Portuguese colonial rule which invariably led to rise of landed gentry in the countryside. The second specifies that for multitude of actual tillers of soil, life has been really hard. Tenants and tillers of soil have found it difficult to eke a living and forced to take up labour to supplement meager earnings.<sup>43</sup> The quote *sangleli chakri, dilolo muxaro* (serve as ordered, and receive payment) attests to the fact that subalterns had to do odd jobs for daily bread. The adage *thoddeank katlli, thoddeank kortti* (while for few the coconut kernel, to others the coconut shell), captures the reality of class distinctions. Coconut shell is symbolic of poverty and begging in Konkani literature.

At Liberation in 1961, of the total area covering agricultural and tree crops, forests and cultivable waste, private owners (bhatkars) held about 54 per cent of the total area whilst government and the *comunidades* hold 32 per cent and 11 per cent, respectively. Earlier in 1649 the Portuguese government declared itself as the owner of all lands in Goa and actual tillers of soil as tenants of *comunidades*. The *comunidades* were taxed heavily and also encumbered with discharge of welfare activities at the village level by the colonial regime. The Portuguese agents did not allow produce from being lifted from threshing floors until all state dues were paid making tillers groan *onnveam lunvlear xidav chukona* (by harvesting with body bent, one cannot escape the taxes). State taxes, besides other host of factors were responsible for the decline of *comunidades*, prior to 1961.

Even when Goa was classified an agrarian economy, the number of people engaged wholly or partly in agriculture, in relation to the total population, gives a startling picture. The population of Goa, as per the Census of 1960 was 589997, of which only about 142096 were involved in agriculture as their main activity distributed as cultivators (104139) and agricultural labourers (37,957).<sup>44</sup> Up to liberation of Goa in 1961, a large section of population ranging anywhere between one-fourth to one third were classified in Census Reports as 'having no occupation'.<sup>45</sup> How did people survival?

Popular sayings *ami tumi iekam, xitan kelim lokam* (one we are, divided though by rice) which specifies that gaunkars took control of rice producing areas, and *xitam aslear, bhutam zaitim* (ghosts throng where there is much rice/feasting), point to the churnings in Konkani society centered on rice, and, its production and distribution. Aphorisms like *xezara ghor ani merek xet aslear bogor, monxeache porikxechi kollona khobor* (with a house in and rice-field in neighbourhood, you know people's character) and *ximer kovato kiteak roita* (why plant coconut sapling on the boundary), indicate that agricultural operations were not without wrangle among villagers. Agricultural operations hinged on monsoons and natural sources of water. Clashes over water sharing were not uncommon, making the wise forewarn '*boddi katrun kuddke korum-iet, udok katrun korum iet gi?*' (One can cut stick into two, not water), accentuating on need to conserve water bodies as commons and equitable sharing of resources.

Rice is the staple diet of locals and Goans savour *xít-coddi* (rice and fish-curry), wherever they may be. Rice cultivation comprised two-thirds of the area under food crops and its distribution during the monsoon (sorod) and winter (Vangana) crops in 1960s was follows:

| Paddy cultivation              | Area (ha.) | Per cent |
|--------------------------------|------------|----------|
| Monsoon or Kharif crop (Sorod) | 38629      | 86       |
| Winter or Rabi (Vangana)       | 468        | 1        |
| Double crop                    | 56028      | 13       |
| Total                          | 446998     | 100      |

(Government of Goa, Daman and Diu, *Report of the Goa Land Reforms Commission*, Panjim)

Evidently not more than 13 per cent of the total cultivated area in paddy was being utilized twice a year; the remaining 87 per cent was tilled only once a year, a telling commentary of the *sossegado* locals. In Goa, two crops of rice in a year depending on whether water facilities were available after October. Since area under double crops was small, poor folks had to resort to

consumption of millets and pulses for survival. The important millet was *nachni* which was staple cereal in the consumption of poorer sections of the community. Similarly, pulses – mostly kulith and beans – were also grown in hilly areas not suitable for rice cultivation. The yield which were generally low largely depended on timely rainfall and careful cultivation. The adage *bhazleleo vorio biak upkarona* (roasted millet are unusable for sowing), indicates that those on margins led parsimonious existence.

Records indicate that annual production of rice was constantly in short supply for anywhere between one-third to two-thirds of a year during Portuguese occupation of Goa. At liberation in 1961, the total area under food crop cultivation was just 21 per cent while that under cash crops was 18 per cent. This caused enormous conflict and stress in countryside for additional land could have been brought under plough. For instance, cultivable wastes were massive and comprised about 28 per cent besides Goa as a whole having a forest cover of about 32 per cent. In the coastal areas of *Velhas Conquistas* the forest cover was negligible while in the interior areas i.e., *Novas Conquistas* forests covered a large area with upshot that over two hundred years of Portuguese occupation latter areas hardly made any significant difference regarding development parameters for the teeming marginalized sections. (Un)popular Konkani proverbs like *pondle moddkent nis na, voile moddkent xit na* (vessel below has no broth, that above has no cooked-rice), *aslo vorov khelo ghima, pavsa nach-re ddumdduma* (all grain consumed in summer, now dance during monsoons), *gireshth koddo kaddhta mhonor, dubleacho morta cheddo* (while *batkar* dithers to open granary, poor man's child expires), *kaddtam oddi, kiteak chulint na xirputtachi boddi* (am troubled for there're no embers in hearth), etc., point to the grim economic situation in Portuguese Goa dominated by *comunidades* (village communities) and *bhatkars* (land-owners), forcing hordes of locals to emigrate to distant lands to earn daily bread, against all odds.<sup>46</sup>

Similarly, the adage *voddeavoilem tel vaingear* (make rice-purees and use burnt oil to fry brinjals), is a sign of how poor villagers led a thrifty way of life to make both ends meet. With rice (staple diet perennially 'kept' in short supply and taxed 'heavily') producing areas controlled by significant and socio-economically dominant minority sections (*gãocars*); cash crops owned by semi-feudal *bhatkars*; 'bloated' administration in vice-like grip of local elites, insensitive to needs and aspirations of have-nots, impassioned calls for socio-economic reforms hardly materialized.<sup>47</sup> Elites controlled production and wealth distribution through structured dominance of various institutions.<sup>48</sup> That poverty, deprivation and hunger were rampant can be gauged from the fact that these issues resonate prominently in people's lore. Numerous *dulpod* and *mando* songs, folk stories, etc., reverberate with discussion on the haggling that goes on at village level and which depict poor conditions in the countryside.<sup>49</sup> Moreover, it would not be way off the mark to state that poverty and deprivation is either the main theme or at least the sub-plot of most novels in Portuguese and local vernacular languages (Marathi and Konkani) in early twentieth century. Census reports of late nineteenth and early twentieth century also indicate decline in population for quite a few villages and point towards the frailty of the economic (and health) systems.<sup>50</sup>

## **6. Conflict management strategies of Konkani speakers**

The most direct way to manage conflict is to deal with the problem and resolve it quickly and

openly as the proverb *taplelea tovear bhakri bhaza* (fry roti when pan is hot) seems to suggest. This is easier said than done and elders from Konkani community cautioned *chintlea bogor paim ghalcho nhoi* (reflect and step forward). Conflict management suggests solving conflicts involving an approach that utterly reduces depressing effects of conflicts, instead of reducing, eliminating or just limiting their duration for *dhanvtoloi-khorxeta ani path dhortoloi-khorxeta* (both, one who escapes and the one who chases, get tired).

The adage *till ghanneant ghalea bogor tel iena* (unless sesame is squeezed there is no oil) accentuates importance of an effective conflict management strategy, while filibustering and beating round the bush is to be avoided as the saying *bhorpeache lag zhuzak upkarona* (juggler's tricks are of no use for war and conflict) accentuates. Societies have handled conflict in myriad ways down the ages. Management gurus now agree that there is no *one* best strategy like one-size-fits-all type of style to handle conflict. Mary P. Follett found three main ways of dealing with conflict: domination, compromise and integration.<sup>51</sup> She also found other ways of handling conflict in such as avoidance and suppression. Blake and Moulton said that conflict can be handled in five ways: forcing, withdrawing, smoothing, compromising and problem solving.<sup>52</sup> Later, Pruitt (1983) suggested that there are four styles of handling conflict: yielding, problem solving, inaction and contending.<sup>53</sup> Rahim and Bonoma (1979) differentiated the styles of handling conflict on two basic dimensions: concern for self and concern for others.<sup>54</sup> [54]

Although labelling differs across theories, there are five basic ways of managing conflict. These include the strategy of avoiding, compromising, collaborating, dominating, and obliging. These strategies are assessed along two principles of assertiveness and cooperativeness. Assertiveness attributes the quality in which person attempts to settle his or her own concerns, whereas cooperativeness addresses to some extent whether a person is concerned about satisfying needs of others.

Konkani language is replete with at least a dozen proverbs indicating that protagonist followed avoiding type of strategy in times of conflict. This may probably be a consequence of the fact that the speakers have been subject people for centuries. Down the ages when often imperial masters changed commoners ere at the receiving end which reality is expressed in following terms *redde-padde zoghoddtat, zhaddancher kall ieta* (buffaloes and bulls fight, and the trees have to suffer). And so proverbs, such as, *unnem ulounchem ani dunnem gheunchem* (talk less and gain more), *ekan gai marli mhonn dusrean vasrum marum-noie* (for one killed a cow, other should not slaughter a calf), *mui zaxi sakor khaxi, vagh zaxi lakudd khaxi* (be an ant and eat sugar, become a tiger consume wood), *ximer kovato kiteak roita* (why plant coconut sapling on the boundary), *kurddea sorxem nhoi nachop, bherea sovem nhoi vazop* (dance not before the blind, nor sing to the deaf), *chodd oddta thoim tutt'ta* (stretch too much and it snaps), *aplea tonddan morta maslli* (by its own mouth the fish dies), etc. impressed upon the commoners to avoid conflict, especially with powers that be.

Virtues like patience, tolerance, fortitude, serenity, etc., were to be cultivated as indicated by the sayings *lohu gill'lear kanttoi gillum iet* (unhurriedly even fish-bone might be swallowed) and *sovksaien chollear, adollna* (in walking slowly one does not trip). Impatience and imprudence

was detested as highlighted by proverbs *daru ani uzo ekttaim sambhallum nozo* (gunpowder and fire cannot go together), *dudhak virzonn kitlem zai, ghorak uzo kitlo zai* (How much ferment does milk need, and how much fire does a house require?), *torvaricho gai pekta, jibhecho gai pekona* (cut inflicted by sword heals, not that of words), *zhankun pott bhorona* (words don't fill stomach), *dant koroilear, pott bhorona* (grinding teeth does not fill stomach), etc.

Avoiding is highly unassertive and uncooperative strategy and is a passive stance aimed at reducing and downplaying the importance of the conflict issues, and at suppressing thinking about them. And so those at the receiving end would lament *kuddeant tondd ghalun liplo* (he hid, putting head in hay-stack). Avoiding is ignoring the problem in hopes that it will go away. This style may be used to deal with trivial matters. However, it is inappropriate to use this strategy when the parties are unwilling to wait or when prompt action is required.

Conflict management does not aim at elimination of conflicts, which is both impossible and undesirable. Realizing that no situation is potentially non-explosive *kidda vinnem bhangar na* (there is no gold without alloy), the endeavour and crucial objective is to transform actual or potentially violent situation into peaceful process. People have wanted, as long as there has been conflict, to handle conflict effectively, by containing or reducing its negative cost. And in managing conflict effectively the satisfaction of everyone's basic human needs can be ensured.

One of the major objectives of managing conflict is to enhance learning that would result in *knowledge acquisition* and preserving valuable information for future access and use. Realizing the ineffectiveness of avoiding strategy (*omtea kollxear udok* i.e. pouring water on pot that's wrong side up) which results in ignoring the problem in hopes that it will go away, Konkani speakers have been forewarned sufficiently about *mangeachim dukham* (crocodile tears). In avoiding style there is little acquisition of knowledge making commoners cry *divea tolla kallok* (darkness under the lamp). As the not so common proverb *murkhak ghalo palo, thonddso zalo, anik ghalo, morun ghelo* (applied country medicine to the mad fellow and he calmed down, applied more and he died) states that withdrawal, buck-pushing and side-stepping situations as is the wont among konkani speakers is not effective remedy to deal with more pressing conflicting situation.

Learning other more effective strategies like collaborating style which is geared towards achieving an agreement that satisfies conflicting parties' aspirations as much as possible, and involves an exchange of information about priorities and preferences, showing insights, and making tradeoffs between important and unimportant issues may be more effective. Cross-cultural exchanges may help Konkani speakers acquire and practice better more effective conflict management strategies.

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- boballar, deull nagoum-ia* (god in peril, lets rob the temple); *devte zor, songrama pez* (temple goddess gets fever, temple servants are given canjee); *vagh na, xinv na, kholio korum-ia* (neither lion nor tiger, let's gather dried leaves); *dhorma pormannem vorton* (behaviour according to the religion); *xastram sangta and porlant agta* (recites scriptures but befouls his own heart) *xaxtra vinnem jinnem nhoi, vere vinnem hoddem nhoi* (no life without scriptures, no boat without rudder); *gai marun bamnnak vhamn* (kill a cow to give sandal to the Brahmin); *dhorm kelear dubllo zaina, chori kelear giresth zaina, sompot xanno korina* (following religion makes one no poor, and neither robbery one rich nor wealth clever); *dhormache gaiek dant na daddi* (never look a gift horse's mouth); *dhormak dilem, sasnnak urlem* (donate to god it remains forever); *doulot tuka aili, dusreachi doia korchhi poddli* (the rich has to share); *jiv rakhun dhorm korcho* (protect life follow religion); *mulleachem pan dhormak lagum* (raddish leaf for charity); *pan velichea dhorman moxingak udok* (water to the xegtti-tree (moringa tregospherma) in the name of the betel creeper); *adim dev, magir jev* (first adore god then one's stomach); *dev salamot tor pogddio ozar* (thousand turbans where god is propitious); *eka devak sotra navam* (god represented in many ways); *manlear dev na zalear fator* (for one who believes it is god or else stone), etc.
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