

A Sociological Study on Flower Business during *Lairai Devi Jatra*

Shirgao, North Goa

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DECLARATION BY STUDENT

I hereby declare that the data presented in this Dissertation report entitled, "A Sociological Study on Flower Business during *Lairai Devi Jatra* Shirgao, North Goa" is based on the results of investigation carried out by me in the MA Sociology Programme at the D. D. Kosambi School of Social Sciences and Behavioural Studies, Goa University under the Supervision of Ms. Ninotchka Mendes and the same has not been submitted elsewhere for the award of a degree or diploma by me. Further, I understand the Goa University or its authorities will not be responsible for the correctness of observation / experimental or other findings given the dissertation.

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This is to certify that the dissertation report "A Sociological Study on Flower Business during *Lairai Devi Jatra* Shirgao, North Goa" is a bonified work carried out by Ms. Riya Raju Naik under my supervision in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the award of the degree of Masters of Arts degree in the Discipline of Sociology at the D. D. Kosambi School of Social Sciences and Behavioural Studies, Goa University.

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PREFACE

I choose this topic because I have always found the traditions and rituals surrounding *Devi Lairai* during the Shirgao festival to be unique. Although a lot of research has already been done on the festival's larger themes, I have not seen much done to examine the mogra flower business and other relevant components. I was inspired to learn more about these lesser-known aspects by this absence in the literature because I think they provide important new perspectives on how culture, economy, and community dynamics interact. I intend to contribute to a more thorough comprehension of the festival's significance and its effects on regional customs and livelihoods by concentrating on the flower business.

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I would like to express my sincere gratitude to everyone who helped me finish my research project, “**A Sociological Study on Flower Business during *Lairai Devi Jatra* Shirgao, North Goa**”. This dissertation is a step towards fulfilling the requirements for my Masters degree in sociology at D.D. Kosambi School of Social Sciences and Behavioural Studies. My Guide, Ms. Ninotchka Mendes, has provided me with continuous support, direction, and competence throughout this research journey, for which I am incredibly thankful. Her guidance has been really helpful in determining the focus and capability of this research and I sincerely appreciate her commitment and support. My deepest gratitude goes out to the participants in this study who so kindly gave of their time and wisdom. Their willingness to take part and offer insightful information has been crucial to this research's success, and I really appreciate their contributions. I would want to thank our dean for his outstanding advice, leadership, and support. I am grateful for his ongoing support, since his guidance has been crucial in creating an atmosphere of academic brilliance and creativity. I would want to express my sincere gratitude to all my Teachers Dr. Joanna Coelho, Dr. Mozinha Fernandes, Dr. Arvind Haldankar, Ms. Sangeeta Tate, and Ms. Snehal Gaunkar for their assistance and guidance in this research. Their devotion to student success and their commitment to academic quality have been crucial to my development as a researcher. I am grateful to my parents for their constant love, support, and understanding. I am grateful that they are in my life and that they have given me courage and inspiration. I give thanks to God for his divine gift and the blessings of everyone who has helped and mentored me on my journey. Their steadfast faith and support have served as a continual source of motivation. I want to sincerely thank everyone who helped to see this study project through to its

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1 BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

The *Lairai Devi* Temple in Shirgao village, North Goa is a religious place in the coastal State of Goa. This Temple is dedicated to Goddess *Lairai*, she a spiritual goddess, is believed to have arrived in Goa over 500 years ago, accompanied by her seven siblings, riding on top of an elephant. Their journey is covered in mystery and legend but their impact on Goan culture and tradition is still visible today. She is considered as the fierce incarnation of Goddess *Parvati*, who according to the Hindu mythology is the wife of Lord Shiva. The Temple holds great significance for the local community and attracts devotees from all coastal State of India. It is believed that Goddess *Lairai* possesses special powers and can fulfil the wishes of her devotees. Many people visit this religious space to seek blessings, offer prayers, and perform various rituals and ceremonies. The architecture of the Temple is unique due to its intricate carvings and designs adorning the structure. Inside, there is a sanctum which in local language Konkani is it called *Gabharyat* where the idol of Goddess *Lairai* is placed. Devotees offer flowers, fruits, coconuts, and other items as offering. The Temple also organizes various festivals and events throughout the year, which add to its vibrancy and cultural significance. *Navratri*, *Diwali*, and *Mahashivratri* some of the festivals celebrated here with great enthusiasm. Of which the annual *Jatra* (involves religious and cultural events, often featuring processions, rituals, and festivities) popularly known as *Lairai Devi Jatra* or *Shirgavchi jatra*. The festival typically involves various rituals, processions, and performances that celebrate the

Goddess and her significance in the local culture. This study aims to investigate its historical origins, cultural importance, and the various rituals and practices associated with it (Goyal, 2021).

The *Lairai Devi Shirgao Jatra* is an annual religious festival that holds immense cultural and historical significance for the local community in Goa. The festival revolves around the worship of Goddess *Lairai*, who is considered a regional deity. The festival typically lasts for several days and involves various rituals, processions, and performances that showcase the rich cultural heritage of the region. One of the highlights of the festival is the traditional *dindi* procession, where devotees carry a palanquin containing the idol of Goddess *Lairai* through the streets of Shirgao. The procession is accompanied by beating of the drums, traditional *ghumat*, *tas* the local instruments, along with dancing, and chanting, creating a lively and joyous atmosphere. During the festival, devotees also perform a special dance known as the *romtamel*. This dance is a form of spiritual possession, with dancers embodying the divine energy of Goddess *Lairai*. It is a captivating sight to witness as devotees whirl and twirl in a trance-like state.

The *Lairai Devi Shirgao Jatra* is not only a religious event but also a celebration of community and togetherness. It brings people from different religious, caste backgrounds together to honor and pay homage to the deity. The festival's significance lies in its ability to strengthen the bonds within the community and instill a sense of belonging and pride in one's culture and traditions. It serves as a reminder of the importance of faith, devotion, and unity in navigating life's challenges. The *Lairai Devi Shirgao Jatra* is a deeply meaningful and vibrant festival that showcases the rich tapestry of Goan culture. It is a time of reverence, celebration, and communal harmony, making it a highly anticipated event in the coastal State of Goa.

1.2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The *Lairai Devi Jatra* in Shirgao, North Goa is an important socio-religious festival celebrated by the Hindu community of Goa. It draws a large number of devotees and tourists from different parts of Goa and beyond.

Religion is a set of beliefs, practices, and values that often involve a higher power or divine being. It provides a framework for understanding the world, answering existential questions, and guiding moral behaviour. Religion typically includes rituals, traditions, and a community of believers who share common beliefs and practices. It can play a significant role in shaping individuals' lives, cultures, and societies.

In Durkheim influential work "The Elementary Forms of Religious Life," Emile Durkheim aims to explain religion from a sociological perspective. Durkheim defines religion as a social phenomenon, focusing on its collective nature rather than individual beliefs. He argues that religion is a system of beliefs and practices centered on sacred symbols, representing society's shared consciousness. These symbols unite individuals, fostering social cohesion and solidarity. Durkheim emphasizes the importance of the distinction between the sacred and the profane, with rituals reinforcing this division. The concept of the "totem" is a key contribution, signifying symbols representing a group's identity and values. Totems hold symbolic meaning, serving as a unifying force for communities. Durkheim underscores the role of collective effervescence in religious rituals, creating unity and reinforcing social solidarity. Durkheim's notion of collective consciousness is crucial in understanding religion's societal role. It refers to shared beliefs forming the basis of social solidarity. Religious rituals and symbolism, like prayers and ceremonies, express and reaffirm this collective consciousness, reinforcing shared identity and values. Participation in

these practices fosters a sense of belonging and social integration within religious groups. The maintenance of collective consciousness contributes to social integration by fostering a sense of common purpose and belonging. Religious rituals provide a shared framework, helping individuals understand their place in society and their connection to the divine. This shared understanding offers moral guidance, reducing social tensions. Collective consciousness serves as a source of social support during crises, offering emotional comfort and reinforcing commitment to the group and its values (Durkheim, 1995).

Durkheim posits that the concept of ritual is pivotal in comprehending the maintenance of social order within a society. He contends that rituals extend beyond mere ceremonial acts, functioning as integral components of social life that reinforce and solidify societal norms and values. According to Durkheim, rituals give rise to a collective effervescence—a heightened emotional state during shared ceremonial activities. This phenomenon strengthens social bonds and cultivates a collective consciousness among group members. Through rituals, individuals unite, participating in prescribed actions accompanied by symbols, words, and gestures imbued with symbolic meaning. Collective performance of these rituals signifies individuals' commitment to the shared values and beliefs of the society. The repetition and adherence to rituals contribute to the preservation of social order by reinforcing expectations and behaviours essential for social cohesion (Durkheim, 1995). In the realm of religion, symbols are tangible representations within a religious context, encompassing objects, images, or actions carrying symbolic meaning. They serve as sensory or visual embodiments of abstract concepts, moral codes, and shared beliefs, playing a crucial role in reinforcing these elements within a society. Religious symbols, including sacred objects like crosses or statues and rituals such as baptism

or prayer, help individuals connect with the divine, evoke emotions, and reinforce social values and norms. Interaction with religious symbols serves as a constant reminder of the moral codes and shared beliefs of the community. For instance, the Christian symbol of the cross, representing the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, serves to prompt believers to reflect on central tenets such as forgiveness, selflessness, and love. Regular encounters with this symbol in religious contexts contribute to individuals internalizing and adhering to these moral codes in their daily lives (Durkheim, 1995).

In Keith's sociological perspective on religion, he delves into the dynamics of power within religious institutions. The chapter emphasizes how leaders and institutions in religion hold sway over followers, shaping beliefs and behaviours. Religious entities often wield significant influence in societies, impacting norms, values, and even political choices. They shape collective consciousness, affecting actions with potential implications for social inequality. Some religious beliefs may perpetuate inequalities, such as endorsing gender or caste hierarchies, leading to the marginalization of certain groups. Additionally, religious institutions may contribute to inequality by unevenly distributing resources like education and healthcare based on religious affiliation. Religious beliefs and practices play a nuanced role in social inequality, both reinforcing and challenging existing power structures. The outcome depends on factors like the interpretation of religious texts, actions of leaders, and cultural contexts. The relationship between religion, power, and social inequality is complex, with institutions either upholding or challenging existing disparities. Keith argues that worship experiences differentiate religion from magic, where belief in magic over religion involves seeking favourable supernatural forces, while religion centres on worshipping God as the ultimate value (McGovern, n.d.)

“Sacred Space” is an influential book that explores the concept and significance of sacred spaces in various religious traditions. It delves into the idea that certain physical locations or natural settings hold special meaning and are imbued with spiritual or divine qualities. Different cultures and religions have identified and designated specific sites as sacred. These sacred spaces may include Temples, churches, mosques, pilgrimage sites, or even natural landmarks. The rituals, practices, and beliefs associated with these spaces, as well as the social and cultural implications of their existence. One of the key aspects discussed in “Sacred Space” is the role of sacred spaces in personal and collective religious experiences. It explores how individuals and communities utilize these spaces to connect with the divine, seek spiritual solace, and participate in religious rituals and ceremonies. The cultural and historical backgrounds that influence the creation and upkeep of hallowed areas (Madan, 2008, p.142-148)

Rowena Robinson's offers valuable insights on the Shirgao *Lairai Devi Jatra*. Robinson examines how religious practices evolve over time in response to social, economic, and political shifts. Her work provides a framework to explore how the *Lairai Devi Jatra* has maintained its traditional roots while adapting to contemporary contexts. By studying the historical evolution and current expressions of the festival, Robinson's research helps uncover the dynamics of continuity and change (Robinson, 1998). Robinson's studies also investigate the social and cultural significance of religious festivals like the *Lairai Devi Jatra* in fostering community cohesion and addressing social issues. Her research highlights how religious festivals serve as sites for negotiation, conflict resolution, and the assertion of social power. Applying this lens to the *Lairai Devi Jatra* can reveal its role in social interaction, community

building, and power dynamics in Shirgao. Robinson's exploration of the impact of globalization, tourism, and commodification on religious practices is relevant to understanding how the *Lairai Devi Jatra's* popularity among tourists influences its organization, rituals, and economic aspects. This analysis can address issues of commercialization, impacts on local businesses, and potential tensions between tradition and the demands of the tourist industry (Robinson, 1998).

Rosa Maria Perez, challenges Dumont's concept of a hierarchical structure based on endogamous groups known as reversibility. She criticizes this idea and presents new data from fieldwork among *devadasis* (*kalvants*) in the Hindu Temple of *Manguesh* in Ponda, Goa. Perez argues that understanding caste remains relevant in anthropological research, particularly when focusing on groups like devadasis. Perez explores the gender roles of women in Temples, specifically those assigned to the *bailadeira* and *bhavin* castes. She discusses instances of discrimination against women in Goan Temples, their attire, and highlights the historical practice where devadasi women in Goa were only married to Brahman men, while *bhavin* could commit to men from lower castes for life. She examines the complexities of caste, gender roles, and discrimination in the context of Hindu Temples in Goa (Perez, 2013).

A totem often holds spiritual or symbolic significance within a community. It can represent a connection to ancestral spirits, nature, or divine forces. In some folk religions, communities may attribute special qualities or powers to specific totems, considering them sacred or protective. Totems in folk religion often play a role in rituals, ceremonies, and beliefs that are deeply rooted in the traditions and cultural practices of a particular community. They serve as tangible symbols that foster a

sense of identity, unity, and connection with the spiritual realm within the context of the folk belief system.

Durkheim suggested that totemism, which involves a symbolic connection to animals or objects, is a fundamental form of religion. In simple terms, he believed that the totemic principle, like a universal life force, actually symbolizes the moral and knowledge-based influence of society on its members (Northover, 2021, p.115-155)

Totemism involves people adopting the role of an animal helper or personal spirit within traditional tribal settings (Murugesan, 2014). This concept is also observed in the New Age and mythopoeia men's movements. Totemism includes respecting totemic animals and plants while prohibiting their harm. It is based on the belief that group members share a totemic progenitor, fostering a sense of kinship. The group may adopt a unifying symbol, serving as a protective emblem. These totems establish a magical connection between the tribe and the totemic sign, linking to a mythological past. The totemic group, identified by distinct totemic symbols, represents the collective practicing totemism (Murugesan, 2014).

The article by Leanne Lewis in that Newman explores and distinguishes about the spirituality, religion, and faith, acknowledging that some authors in the issue use them synonymously. Love and Talbot (1999) discuss spirituality and its overarching theme in spiritual development but don't provide a clear distinction from faith. However, the article argues that these concepts are distinctly different, especially in light of the presented model. Defining religion is acknowledged as challenging, but Smith (1995) suggests that religions involve specific beliefs and practices related to superhuman beings, known for miraculous deeds. Religion, within the scope of the model, is limited to the reverence of a superhuman in "radical monotheistic" terms

(Fowler, 1981). It encompasses a set of beliefs and practices expressing worship and reverence, emphasizing a state of doing. Spirituality, on the other hand, is defined as “of the spirit or the soul” (Guralnik, 1984), and spiritual character is the nature or quality of this state. From a Christian perspective, spirituality is an existence before God, guided by the Holy Spirit, and involves believers seeking communion (Wainwright, 1987). Spirituality is portrayed as a state of being, influencing individuals to live guided by the spirit of their faith through practices such as meditation, prayer, and conscious decision-making (Newman, 1998).

Religious festivals play a pivotal role in fostering social cohesion within communities around the world. These cultural celebrations serve as powerful agents for creating a sense of togetherness and shared identity among individuals, contributing to the overall fabric of society. One of the fundamental ways in which religious festivals promote social cohesion is through the establishment of shared rituals and traditions. These events often include ceremonies, prayers, and practices that are familiar to the community members, creating a sense of unity and collective participation. For example, during religious festivals, people may come together to perform specific rituals or engage in communal activities, reinforcing a shared cultural heritage.

Social cohesion refers to the strong connections between people in a society. Factors like individualization, where individuals become detached and live alone, can weaken these bonds. In modern societies, driven by capitalism, the focus on material wealth and consumption can lead to less time with family. Social cohesion involves various aspects, including its dynamic and emotional nature, contrasting with individualism that prioritizes personal interests. Urbanization has changed social interactions, replacing traditional ties with anonymity and competition. Initially,

social cohesion arises from a common need for safety, but it can weaken once these needs are fulfilled. A study aims to explore social cohesion within the Muslim community by focusing on how people interact within this community (Kasmo, 2015).

Myths and rituals are integral to human culture, shaping beliefs, societal norms, and providing a framework for understanding existence. Myths, rooted in ancient narratives, symbolically explain mysteries, origins, and human roles, influencing morality and cultural values. Both sacred and secular, myths reflect diverse human experiences. Rituals, ceremonial acts with prescribed sequences, express and reinforce cultural beliefs, forge social bonds, and connect the mundane to the sacred. Whether religious ceremonies or daily routines, rituals affirm identity, foster belonging, and create a shared experiential framework. Myths provide narrative foundations, while rituals offer practical expressions, forming a symbiotic relationship that sustains cultural traditions, shapes collective consciousness, and provides purpose and connection.

Elise Roberts illustrates the relationship between myths and rituals in his book *Religion in Sociological Perspective*. He claims that rituals and myths are closely related to one another, citing instances from his research where rituals were expressed very differently from myths about the same rituals. According to a sociological standpoint, each community's interpretation of rituals and myths varies (Keith, 2016). He argues that, based on his research, rituals and associated myths can be expressed differently within a community. From a sociological perspective, each community interprets rituals and myths in its own unique way (Varney *et al.*, 2024).

Berger in his work explores two key notions of myth: one portraying it as falsehood and the other as an explanatory concept. Initially, it highlights that myths,

commonly accepted untrue beliefs, can obstruct efforts to establish a stable world, especially in the realm of American foreign policy. Senator Fulbright argues that as the world evolves, beliefs that were once valid may become falsehoods, creating a gap between perception and reality. This divergence, caused by human imperfections, can lead to irrational actions when perceptions lag behind actual events. He says myths extend beyond mere illusions in culture. It acknowledges that myths play a more intricate role, with various perspectives on their treatment agreeing on certain general areas while emphasizing different aspects. It underscores the impact of myths on beliefs, actions, and cultural narratives, urging a nuanced understanding of their role in shaping societies (Berger, 2016).

Martin Grotjahn and Freud provide insights into the connection between ritual, myth, and religion. Grotjahn suggests that rituals stem from a collective or generic unconscious, containing historical remnants expressed in magical-mystic gestures to address conflicts or cosmic questions. The Cambridge School argues that rituals precede myths, but others contend they evolve together. Regardless, both are interrelated. Rituals, structurally organized and repeated acts, are central to ancient religions, often emphasizing the relation of man to nature. Freud draws parallels between neurotic acts and religious rites, noting that both involve fixed, meaningful activities. He sees neurotic ceremonies as a private, variable expression of unconscious motives, serving to repress impulses and make forbidden activities permissible. Freud suggests a striking resemblance between neurotic ceremonies and religion, proposing that neurosis is a pathological counterpart to religion. Both involve renunciation of instinctual satisfaction, with the key difference lying in the nature of these instincts – sexual in neurosis, and egoistic in religion. While Freud's comparison may be seen as a stretch, his insights into the unconscious dimensions of

ritual highlight the fundamental role of repression and symbolism in religious practices (Berger, 2016).

Priti Damodar Parab, she has worked on Gender Dynamics of *Dhondanchi Jatra*: Annual Festival of Shirgao, Goa. In this she has talked about the *jatra*, a study is based on the *dhonds*. She says *Dhonds*, regardless of caste, gender, or region, become so through family tradition, vows for health, wealth, or jobs, or a desire to serve goddess *Lairai*. They adhere to strict food and space rules, with males wearing dhoti and white vests, and females donning Navari sarees or dhotis with white T-shirts. Both wear colourful *beth* and garlands. Before Gudi Padwa, they abstain from chicken, eggs, alcohol, and, for some, fish. Five days pre-jatra, they fast in Temples or homes. During the jatra at Shirgao, they walk through fire at midnight (Parab, 2021).

By examining existing research conducted by sociologists, this literature review intends to provide a holistic understanding of the socio-economic dimensions of the Shirgao *Lairai Devi Jatra*. The festival's impact on social relations, cultural identity, and economic development will be highlighted to emphasize its relevance within the context of the local community and wider society. This review aims to contribute to the existing body of knowledge regarding the interplay between religious traditions, society, and the economy.

1.3. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The *Lairai Devi Jatra* attracts thousands of devotees from different regions, making it a unique opportunity to know the intersection of religion, culture, and society. By examining the socio-economic aspects, we can explore the impact of the festival on the local community, such as its influence on livelihoods, beliefs, food habits and overall economic development. Conducting this study will require interacting with

community members and understanding their experiences, perspectives, and practices associated with the festival. This engagement can provide valuable insights into the social dynamics and traditions of the region. Selection of this topic suggests a genuine curiosity about the social, cultural, and economic dimensions of the *Lairai Devi Jatra*, coupled with the intention to make a meaningful contribution to the existing body of knowledge on this topic.

1. What is the history of the Shirgao *Lairai Devi* Temple in North Goa? When it began as an annual festival?
2. What are the rituals and practices associated with the worship of *Lairai Devi* at the Temple, and how do they reflect local traditions and beliefs?
3. How has the Shirgao *Lairai Devi* Temple contributed to the social-cultural and, economy of the local community?
4. To know the continuity and change with reference to Shirgao *Lairai Devi jatra*?

1.4. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

For the above research questions, the specific objectives of the study are:

1. To study the customs and practices associated with the Shirgao *Lairai Devi Jatra*
2. To know about the flower business associated with the Shirgao *Lairai Devi Jatra*
3. To know the social significance of ritual *Lairai Devi Jatra*

1.5. METHODOLOGY AND METHODS OF THE STUDY

In this research, I have employed different methods combining ethnographic studies, descriptive research, participant observation, and have conducted interviews with devotees. The goal was to thoroughly explore the socio-religious dynamics. Historical research and cultural significance contribute to a comprehensive backdrop. This

interdisciplinary approach allowed a precise exploration of religious rituals and societal context, leading to a holistic understanding of this unique cultural phenomenon. Ethnographic research involves actively participating in and observing the religious procession, interviewing participants, and documenting rituals. The aim was to understand the cultural nuances, social interactions, and religious significance embedded in the Shirgao *Lairai Devi jatra*. This method has provided a holistic understanding by exploring the lived experiences of community members involved. Ethnographic data I have included participant observations, interviews, field notes, and artifacts, uncovering social dynamics, belief systems, and symbolic meanings. Descriptive research aims to provide a detailed account of the Walk of Faith, involving systematic documentation of characteristics and features through surveys, interviews, and observations. Unstructured interviews which have helped me to capture in-depth insights, allowing flexibility for participants to share personal experiences, beliefs, and emotions. I have used narrative method to write my findings. This qualitative approach enhances comprehension of cultural relevance and social dynamics. An interview plan, a pre-written list of structured questions, guides the interviewer and ensures coverage of important topics. Interview guides provide instructions for consistent and systematic interviews, including rapport-building tips. Interviews and structured schedules are common tools for collecting primary data in social research. Qualitative interviews aim to understand respondents' perspectives on a particular topic. Interview plans increase the likelihood of accurate data collection, offering flexibility for follow-up questions. Comprehensive preparations with open-ended inquiries and organized plans for in-person exchanges that record responses are the two primary categories of interview plans. A purposive sampling method will be used to select participants based on their relevance to the study's objectives.

Respondents of the study include *dhonds*, women, and men engaging in business activities during the Jatra, with elders and devotees providing diverse perspectives on different aspects of the event.

CHAPTERISATION SCHEME

- Chapter I of the study discusses the *Lairai Devi* Temple in Shirgao village, Goa, its cultural and religious significance, and its annual Lairai Devi Jatra festival. It explores the story of Goddess Lairai's arrival and her influence on Goan traditions. The review of literature provides insights into religious practices, symbols, myths, and rituals, and the socio-cultural dynamics of religious festivals in Goa. The introduction also outlines the research questions, objectives, and methodology for further exploration.
- Chapter II delves into the sacred traditions surrounding *Lairai Devi*, presenting a comprehensive exploration of various aspects of worship and rituals associated with the deity. The chapter begins with legends of *Lairai Devi*, recounting the mythical origins and foundational stories of Lairai and her siblings. It then proceeds to discuss the historical significance of *mudder* (Goddess Lairai's First Temple) and the transition to the Shirgao Temple, highlighting the cultural importance of these sacred sites. Then the arrival story of *Devi Lairai* in Shirgao Village. The chapter also explores the annual Shirgao *Jatra*, covering the commencement of the festival, preparations, and rituals leading up to the event.
- Chapter III delves into the intricate tapestry of Shirgao village, situated in the heart of Bicholim Taluka, North Goa district. This chapter unveils the village's

geographical essence, showcasing its lush greenery and diverse terrain. It sheds light on the demographic composition, revealing population statistics and governance structures like the Village Panchayat, offering insights into the educational and healthcare facilities accessible to its residents. Moreover, it unveils the socioeconomic landscape, elucidating major economic activities, religious institutions' cultural significance, and the village's sociocultural dynamics, including traditional practices and social stratification. The chapter delves into the rich tapestry of cultural events and traditions, highlighting the annual celebrations like the *Shirgavchi Jatra* and the revered Goddess *Lairai Devi* Temple. Furthermore, it shows the environmental challenges emerging from mining activities, narrating the community's responses and legal interventions aimed at restoration. Culminating with reflections on the village's multifaceted dynamics, the chapter underscores the imperative of understanding and addressing its challenges for sustainable development.

- Chapter IV, titled "*Shirgao Lairai Devi Jatra* and Mogra Business," is a comprehensive exploration of the interwoven traditions, beliefs, and economic activities centered around the annual Jatra festival and the mogra flower trade in Shirgao village. The chapter begins by elucidating the significance of Devi Lairai and the festival's roots in Hindu mythology, emphasizing the reverence for mogra buds as offerings to the deity. It then delves into the economic dynamics of the mogra business, detailing its importance for the livelihoods of villagers, particularly during the Jatra season. Through vivid narratives and profiles of individuals like Lakshmi, Raju, Sneha, Maya, Vijay, Suman, Priya, and Flita, the chapter brings to life the experiences and perspectives of those

involved in the flower-selling trade. These profiles offer insights into the deep-rooted traditions, resilience, and devotion of community members, highlighting the integral role of the mogra business in sustaining cultural practices and economic stability. Additionally, the chapter explores the spiritual and healing aspects associated with mogra buds, as evidenced by the rituals performed during the Jatra. Through photographs and scholarly reflections, the chapter provides a rich tapestry of narratives, anecdotes, and analysis, offering readers a comprehensive understanding of the complex interplay between tradition, commerce, and spirituality in the context of the Shirgao *Lairai Devi Jatra* and Mogra business.

- Chapter V includes Analyses of data and Conclusion consists of the multifaceted dynamics of community participation and social order during the Shirgao *Jatra* is explored. Different families and groups, such as the Chowgules and dhonds, are examined in relation to their roles in coordinating rituals and maintaining social order. It examines how people of different religious backgrounds support group endeavors by selling flowers and taking part in the jatra, for example, strengthening cohesiveness and unity. The ramifications of such interfaith dialogue and group involvement for promoting social stability in Goan society are also covered in this chapter. Caste dynamics, religious rituals, and community engagement are analyzed in relation to purity and pollution notions, and their combined effects on cultural transmission, identity preservation, and social stability are explained within the context of the Shirgao *Jatra*.

CHAPTER II

THE SACRED TRADITIONS OF *LAIRAI DEVI*

The *Lairai Devi* Temple in Shirgao is a sacred place. The *Lairai Devi* Temple in Shirgao has an architecture of the Temple is unique, with a dome and a tall pyramid-like tower adorning the top. This Temple is a combination of northern and southern art and design of Temples. The Temple architecture follows a traditional Goan style, featuring beautiful wooden carvings, colourful paintings, and intricate designs. The sanctum sanctorum (*Garbagriha*) enshrines the idols of the deities, and the Temple complex is surrounded by a serene ambiance, making it an ideal place for spiritual contemplation. *Lairai Devi* has two Temples one at *mudder* and other one in Shirgao. *Devi Lairai* first Temple that is at *mudder* is now being raised but the anthill is still there inside that Temple.

2.1. LEGENDS OF *LAIRAI DEVI*

Once upon a time, a group of eight siblings, seven sisters, and their younger brother, arrived in Goa riding an elephant from the Karnataka region. They initially stopped in Mayem village in Bicholim Taluka of North Goa, and the elephant they rode can be observed near Mayem village, close to the Temple of *Devi Kelbai*. Upon their arrival, *Mhamai*, the eldest sister, sent her brother *Khetoba* to fetch fire from a nearby market to cook for all of them. However, *Khetoba* got lost in the bustling market. *Mhamai* then instructed *Lairai* and *Kelbai* to find out what was causing the delay. After finding *Khetoba*, engrossed in watching children play, *Lairai* became furious and kicked him, resulting in a permanent bend in his waist. Feeling guilty, *Lairai* vowed to make up for her actions by walking through fire, while *Kelbai*, who had silently

witnessed the incident, vowed to carry fire on her head as self-punishment. Eventually, the siblings dispersed to various villages in Goa. *Lairai* to Shirgao, *Mhamai* to Mayem, *Kelbai* to *Mulgaon*, *Mhalsa* to *Parye* in Sattari District, *Mirai* to Mapusa (later known as Milagres during the spread of Christianity), *Morjai* to Morjem, and the brother *Khetoba* to *Vaingini* village. *Ajidipachose* went to *Anjidipa*, an island close to Karwar, while *Shitalai* decided to leave the earth and enter the underworld (*Pataal*).

2.2. MUDDER (GODDESS LAIRAI'S FIRST TEMPLE)

Lairai Devi initially arrived at a location known as *mudder*, situated on the outskirts of Shirgao village, approximately one kilometre away from the Assonora market. At that time, her presence was the sole point of reference in that area. Subsequently, the Temple in Shirgao was constructed, succeeding the one at *mudder*. The origins of this transition are recounted by an elderly resident of Shirgaovillage. According to local lore, a thief once attempted to steal from *Devi Lairai*, unaware of her divine nature. *Lairai Devi* kept the thief in a well near the Temple and communicated the incident to *Mukheli* that village in his dreams. She instructed him not to harm the thief but to escort him beyond the village borders. Following this event, *Lairai Devi* transformed herself into an anthill, and she remains at her original location in *mudder*. Now they have built a big Temple at *mudder* where she is in the form of an anthill.



Figure 2.1: *Lairai Devi* First Temple at *mudder*

Source: Photograph by the researcher

2.3. *DEVI LAIRAI* ARRIVAL STORY IN SHIRGAO VILLAGE

The villagers requested her to take up residence within the village, and she agreed under certain conditions. Upon relocating to Shirgao, *Devi Lairai* imposed several restrictions on the villagers, including the prohibition of keeping hens, refraining from alcohol consumption, banning animal sacrifices as offerings to the deity, and ensuring cleanliness throughout the village. The villagers permit these terms, which have been upheld since then. While there are general stores in the village, they refrain from selling eggs in adherence to the established norms. Following this, the villagers constructed a Temple where *Devi Lairai* is presently there which is *Lairai Devi* Temple in Shirgao village. Her idol is only unveiled during selected festivals such as *Jatra*, *Navratra*, *Vardhapan* (the Temple's foundation day), and on Mondays during the month of *Shravan*. Otherwise, the idol remains secured in a locker, and *Devi Lairai* is worshipped symbolically in the form of a *kalash*.



Figure 2.2 : *Lairai Devi* Temple in Shirgao

Source: Photograph by Respondent

2.4. SHIRGAO JATRA

The Shirgao *Jatra* commences in the month of *Vaishakh* on *Shukla Panchami*. However, preparations for the *Jatra* begin a month in advance, involving fasting and the creation of *humkand*. On the day of the *Jatra*, rituals commence in the morning, creating a joyful atmosphere within the Temple premises. The role of the priest is hereditary, passed down through generations within the Joshi family, who undertake all priestly duties. The hereditary role of the priest within the Joshi family highlights a form of social stratification based on lineage. This shows social hierarchy and reinforces the importance of traditional familial roles within the community. Five days before the event, the Chowgules from Shirgao arrive at the Temple to initiate traditional rituals alongside the bhats and *mahajan*. After the Temple rituals conclude, the priest distributes sacred water from the *kalash* all households in Shirgao village. During the *Jatra*, the goddess is escorted to a sacred spring for a ceremonial bath, with water and mogra buds placed in the *kalash*. Villagers attest to the phenomenon of the

kalash supernaturally filling up with fresh water and fragrant mogra buds each year, dismissing any notions of myth. Following the rituals, the deity is carried in a palanquin (*palkhi*) to her designated location at *mudder*, accompanied by *dhonds* and the rhythmic beats of dhol. After all the *dhonds* walk on fire, it's already midnight when the goddess comes to walk on fire. The *kalash* taken out of the *Gabharyat* and given to the head of *mod* (the one person from the Temple who carries the *kalash* on his head during jatra). They start chanting, and at that time, the moderator gets possessed by the goddess Lairai. She encircles five rounds there and starts going towards the *humkand*. When the goddess comes out of the Temple, the *dhonds* start dancing more energetically than before. It is said that when the goddess goes from her Temple to the sacred lake, many hidden energies try to stop her, and they do not allow her to move forward. The hidden energies are *Homkandi*, *Mharingan*, *Khalnath*, *Sankhavaylo Devchar*, *Kajryavaylo Devchar*, *Kegdevoylo Devchar*, and *Khetrapalachi Devli*. When the goddess reaches the *humkand* she leaves the *Chandrajyot* (from which the *humkand* is illuminated) from her hand in the *humkand*, and after that, from that small jyot, the whole *humkand* wood gets fire. The tree that is there near the *humkand*, the banyan tree in that place, is known as *VadachoVado*. Once she takes the sacred bath in the sacred spring, she goes to her Temple in *mudder*, where they take *koul*. Two types of *koul* are given during the jatra. One is for the *dhonds* who will walk on fire without that *koul*, the *dhonds* cannot walk on fire and the other is for all people, which is called *kankanicho koul* which is given for their well-being and protection.

When *dhonds* are given *koul* the priest says this 'Saibini Aagin, Hunn' say this to the goddess and take the *koul*. They keep that *koul* in their mouth, and during this event the *dhonds* feel chill in their bodies, which indicate them that they are ready

to walk in the fire. It is a mogra bud which is given to *dhonds* as a *koul*. After all this is done, all the wood from *humkand* is completely burned, and a huge pile of burned coal is formed. The authority of the priest and the reverence for the deity play a significant role in shaping social dynamics within the community. The priest's role as a mediator between the divine and the community members reinforces his authority and influence over religious matters.

The work is given to different people from the village. The *humkand* work is given to one family and they are known as the *homkandi* family. They make way for the *dhonds* to walk on the fire. Till all this happens, it's already early morning, and at that time all *dhonds* come near the *humkand*. Once they get permission to walk into the fire by holding that *bethkathi* in their hand, they start chanting "*Bola Pundalik Varda Hari vital... Lairai Mata Ki Jai*" and they start walking from that *humkand*. After the *koul* of the *dhonds* is over, the moderator comes and takes a rest. The *mod* is the main priest of the Temple, the one who takes the *kalash* on his head for all five days during the *jatra*. He is possessed when he carries the *kalash* on his head. When he takes a rest near that *Brahma nacho Sopo* (a bench), he cannot keep that *kalash* down from his head. While he is resting, the *kalash* is supported by the Chowgules so that it should not fall. Once all *dhonds* are gone from the *humkand*, after that, goddess *Lairai* walks through the fire with the sound of drums, flute, and tashe, and one person from '*perni*' house from Shirgao village chants the mantra. That is

“पाताळांत गेली सीता सये!

हातीं लागली लयरायवा लसये!!

अगीन काश्टाखायतसे!

मयेची केळवायसये!

आकटे माथ्यार नाचसये!!

(This is the mantra which is chanted by one person from the perni house in Shirgao village when goddess *Lairai* walk on fire)

Goddess *Lairai* is the last one to walk in the fire; after that, no one can walk from there.

The passing down of traditions and rituals through generations reflects the process of cultural transmission within the community. The continuity of these practices reinforces cultural cohesion and ensures the preservation of cultural identity over time.



Figure 2.3: *Lairai Devi* walking on fire

Source: Photograph by respondent

2.5. HUMKAND

Humkand is the ritual that is observed among the Hindus where devotees walk barefoot on hot embers as an act of devotion to a particular deity which is also called *Satva Pariksha*. The people who walk on this are called the *dhonds*.

After the flames have died down, the devotees take turns walking across the blazing embers, and this is when the main portion of the *Jatra* begins. The ritual starts

at about four in the morning when worshippers walk over the hot coals holding sticks with *Devi Lairai*'s name. It is said that individuals who move through the embers with devotion and calmness escape unhurt by the fire, but those who move quickly and with unfair motives risk suffering consequences (Golden Goa, nd)

The *humkand* should be of same height and size every year, so that it should get burnt within two hours. Before the people who have made *Aangvan* (vows) used to bring wood from their place. But now the *devasthan* people bring the wood and the people have to give the money and take wood from them.



Figure 2.4: Preparation of *humkand*

Source: Photograph clicked by respondent



Figure 2.5: Burning of *humkand*

Source: Photograph by respondent



Figure 2.6: Sacred *humkand* space has been secured.

Source: Photo clicked by researcher

2.6. THE IMPACT OF COVID -19 PANDEMIC ON THE *LAIRAI DEVI JATRA*

During the lockdown phase of COVID-19, there were so many restrictions on people and were not allowed to move out of their houses. At that time the construction of the *humkand* was reduce in size which was till the length of the persons knee. People were not allowed to come and visit the Temple. Also, the *dhonds* were not allowed to walk in the fire. Only the *Chowgules* walked in the fire. One *dhond* respondent from outside the village said that they were not happy with this. So they all remain vegetarian for one month by following the rituals. They were staying in the Temple near their place. In that period, they cannot touch anyone. They were eating food or drinking water on wet bodies only. They were also following the COVID-19 protocols of wearing masks and sanitizing. They requested other devotes outside the

village to get them mogra buds, which were later made into strings and wore by the *dhonds*.

2.7. DHONDS: RITUALS AND PRACTICES

Dhonds, individuals who devote themselves to the worship of the goddess *Lairai*, come from diverse backgrounds irrespective of caste, gender, or region. Many inherit the tradition of becoming *dhonds* from their families, while others do so by making vows related to health, wealth, or employment. The role of *dhonds* transcends caste, gender, and region, emphasizing a sense of belonging to a community united by devotion to the goddess *Lairai*. Despite diverse backgrounds, *Dhonds* share a common identity rooted in their spiritual journey and adherence to shared rituals and practices. Some individuals choose to become *dhonds* out of a desire to serve the goddess *Lairai* exclusively. Regardless of their motivations, *dhonds* adhere to strict rules regarding dietary habits and personal space. Male *dhonds* typically attire themselves in *dhotis* paired with white *vests*, while female *dhonds* wear *navari* sarees or *dhotis* along with white T-shirts. Both genders carry colourful sticks known as ‘*bethkathi*’ and adorn themselves with garlands of mogra (jasmine) and *chafe* (Anona Hexapetala) around their necks. The attire, dietary restrictions, and rituals associated with *dhonds* serve as symbols through which individuals interact and communicate their devotion to the goddess and their commitment to the community. The central ritual for *dhonds* involves walking barefoot through a fire, known as the ‘*humkand*,’ which is specially prepared for them. This ceremony, known as ‘*Satva Pariksha*,’ takes place at midnight after the *dhonds* have bathed in a sacred spring. The journey towards becoming a *dhond* commences a month before the main event, starting from Gudi Padwa, the Hindu New Year. From this day onwards, *dhonds* abstain from

consuming non-vegetarian food for a month leading up to the next *amavasya*. Newcomer's *dhond* have tradition and are required to maintain a complete vegetarian diet for the subsequent five years. Five days before the main event, *dhonds* are required to maintain strict cleanliness, with some opting to stay away from their homes entirely. Those who remain at home refrain from physical contact with others and undergo ritual bathing if accidental contact occurs. During the *jatra*, male *dhonds* whose wives are pregnant, or have recently given birth are allowed to attend but cannot participate in the fire-walking ceremony. Marriage outside one's caste does not disqualify an individual from becoming a *dhond*, as there are no caste-based restrictions associated with the tradition (Parab, 2021).

Becoming a *dhond* in Shirgao is considered a deeply spiritual journey, rooted in personal faith and adherence to rigorous fasting rituals. Fasting practices involve abstaining from food and in some cases water, in the morning without bathing. The prescribed diet during this period is strictly vegetarian, excluding onions and garlic. All *dhonds* have to eat food on a wet body, their clothes and body have to be wet when they consume something during that time when they are following the rituals and practices of *dhonds*. The priest carrying the sacred pot (*kalash*) adheres to an even more stringent fasting regimen lasting for a month. Participants believe that the fire-walking ceremony purges them of past mistakes, marking a profound moment of spiritual purification. Records from the *Lairai Devi* Temple indicate a steady influx of new *dhonds*, with over 500 individuals embracing the tradition annually. Eligibility for becoming a *dhond* extends to individuals aged 10 to 60, emphasizing the inclusive nature of this revered spiritual practice.

At *mudder*, the *dhonds* take part in rituals to be accepted by *Devi Lairai* for becoming *dhond*, after completing the rituals they come in a vibrant procession back

to the village, chanting “*Bola Pundalik Varda Hari Vithal*” and dancing with *vetachi kathi*. Preceding the *jatra*, a substantial wood pile is arranged near a banyan tree, the wood pile should be of the same height every year so it takes almost two hours to burn completely. The *dhonds* perform a sacred dip in the lake, offer prayers, and present jasmine flowers to the deity. *Devi Lairai*, a fierce incarnation of *Devi Parvati*, is associated with mogra buds, a symbol of fresh spring beginnings. They subsequently encircle the burning wood heap five times. Adorned in traditional attire, the *dhonds*, white dhoti and red *feats*, *vetachi kathi* as they dance to *dhhol* and *tashe* rhythms near the Temple. Lighting the wood heap in sync with the deity’s idol, they spread glowing embers on the ground for the midnight fire walk. During the ‘*Agnidivya*’ ritual, *dhonds* traverse the hot embers, chanting praises to the deity, signifying profound devotion. Witnessing this demonstration of faith offers insight into a culturally rich and enduring tradition passed down through generations. This *jatra* is also known as *dhondanchi jatra*. Presently, certain *dhonds* consume fish but not meat or eggs. However, they terminate it prior to the five-day *jatra* festival.

2.8. BETH KATHI

The *bethkathi* is the stick which *dhonds* have to carry with them while walking in fire. People from outside the state mostly from Maharashtra come to sell this during the *jatra*. People from Shirgao who are *dhonds* do not carry *bethkathi* with them, the respondent said that it is kind of identity that they are from that village only. One women respondent from said that when she was coming from Siolem to walk in fire she used to carry *bethkathi* in her hand ,but when she got married in Shirgao she does not have to use it. The person’s family member has to carry that same stick

(*bethkathi*) throughout. If the *dhond* dies then that stick they have keep near the burning *humkand* or they can be also used by other members of the family.



Figure 2.7: *Beth Kathi*

Source: Picture clicked by researcher.

2.9. DHONDANCHI TALI

In Shirgao, there are single *dhondanchi tali* where the *dhonds* are required to take a holy bath. During the *jatra*, *Devi Lairai* is also brought there for her sacred bath. From that *tali*, *Devi Lairai kalash* water is filled. The *dhonds* eat only after having a holy bath at their homes, at sacred locations, or on the Temple grounds during the fasting period. They perform the walking on embers rite, and known as “*Agnidivya*,” on the day of *Jatra* after taking a sacred bath in Shirgao “*dhondanchi tali*,” a lake designated for the *dhonds* (The Times of India, 2023).



Figure 2.8: *Dhondanchi tali*

Source: Photograph by the respondent.

2.10. KALASH

In Hindu Temples, a *kalash* is a ceremonial metal pot often made of copper, brass, or silver. It symbolizes purity and auspiciousness. The *kalash* is filled with water and topped with mango leaves and a coconut, representing the deity's presence and blessings. It is an essential component in various rituals and ceremonies performed in Temples. *Devi Lairai* is revered in the form of a *kalash* or a pot. Within the sanctum sanctorum (*Gabharyat*), a decorated pot symbolizing *Devi* is positioned, representing the womb and the source of all creation. The presiding priest, known as *purohit Ji*, elucidates that the *kalash* embodies the *Trigunatmatka Adishakti roop* of *Devi*, signifying her as the unmanifest energy from which all phenomena arise. Once a year, water is drawn from a spring and ceremoniously poured into the *kalash*. This consecrated water is then distributed to every household in the village on the occasion of the annual *Jatra*. In the morning, the priest distributes the sacred water. Family members consume the blessed water and sprinkle it within their homes, believing it purifies and safeguards their surroundings. It is widely held within the community

that the village as a whole remains secure, joyful, and protected due to the divine powers attributed to *Devi Lairai*. The distribution of consecrated water from the *kalash* to every household in the village during the annual jatra reinforces community cohesion and collective identity. Belief in the protective and purifying powers of *Devi Lairai* strengthens social bonds and fosters a sense of mutual support within the community. The goddess *kalash* goes to the *Khalnath* Temple and then to the *Sateri* Temple. After that, she comes back to the village and starts going to every house. The people decorate the house. They put rangoli near the Tulsi. They light one big diya and keep one plate in which they keep one cloth piece (खण) and coconut and fruits to offer the goddess. The mod with that *kalash* enters the house, then the *Chowgules* take that *kalash* and keep it down in front of the Tulsi, and the elder member of the family does the *Pooja* of that *kalash*, and then all the family members go and take the blessings of the mod. When *mod* is caring for the *kalash*, he is fully possessed.



Figure2. 9: The *mod* carrying *kalash*. He is the priest of the Temple

Source: Photograph by respondent

2.11. MOD

Mod is the person who carries the *Lairai Devi kalash* on his head for all five days during the jatra. He is the priest from the Temple. He does the fasting for all five days, just by having milk and fruits.

2.12. WOMEN DHOND

A woman *dhond* from Shirgao village said “I wanted to become *dhond* but my family first did not allow me. Then at the age of twenty-three years, I decided to become *dhond* no matter what. Then she convinced her family. We are all together some women from the village as *dhonds* others are from outside the village. When I first time walked in the fire it was a very different feeling. I got a small burn on my feet, as I might have touched the dirt during the *dhond* ritual period. We do not feel any heat while walking in the fire. It is a great feeling”.



Figure 2.10: Attire of Women dhond

Source: Photograph by the respondent

2.13. KOUL

There are two types of *koul* which are given in *Lairai Devi Temple*. One is *kankanicho koul* and the other one is the mogra bud which is given to the *dhonds* to keep in mouth before walking on fire. On the other, after all the other rituals in the Temple are carried out, the process of giving *kankanicho koul* starts. This *koul* is first given to the Chowgules and then to others who have come from far away to take the *koul*. The role of the Chowgules in distributing *koul* and facilitating rituals reflects a form of social stratification based on religious hierarchy and community leadership. The respect and authority accorded to certain individuals within the community highlight the dynamics of social status and prestige. The *koul* process continues for five days because it is not possible to complete it in one day, and many people come on different days to take *koul*.



Figure 2.11: *Kankanicho koul*

Source: Photograph clicked by respondent

2.14. GADDAV BHALLE (A STORY RELATED TO KOUL)

One incident related to this *koul* is that there is one place called *Manshevado*. There was one big house there. Now there is nothing over there. It is all the darkness in front

of that house. In that house, one very rich person was staying. He was having helpers do the work at their home. He had too much attitude because of his richness. Once, the goddess went to give *koul* to that house. All the family members were there inside the house, knowing they hadn't come outside. His wife saw the *kalash* on their balcony but they did not come out. After some time, they sent their helper to do the *pooja* of the *kalash*. After seeing this, the goddess got angry, and she threw away that *pooja* plate and cursed them for their disrespectful behaviour. That house is called 'Gaddav bhalle' and before next year jatra they were left with nothing. They had nothing. Now in that place, there is nothing left, it is only an open space where villagers park their cars. Villagers said that after that incident no one could build their home there. Now, when the Goddess passes in front of that house, she closes her eyes and runs fast without even seeing that house means the priest who carries the *kalash*. He goes and directly stops near the next house to give *koul*.



Figure 2.12: *GaddavBhalle*

Source: Picture clicked by researcher.

2.15. THE *SHLOK* OF *DEVI LAIRAI*

Songs serve as important cultural artefacts that reflect the values, beliefs, and norms of a society. In the context of *Devi Lairai's* arrival story, songs have played a

significant role in narrating and preserving the folklore associated with the deity and her impact on the community. These songs can serve as a means of transmitting social norms, rituals, and religious practices from one generation to another, reinforcing the collective identity and solidarity of the community. These songs are also used during religious ceremonies and festivals to invoke the presence of the deity and express devotion and reverence towards her.

A *shloka* verse or stanza in classical Sanskrit poetry. It is often chanted in Temples as a form of devotion and to invoke blessings. People who chant *shlokas* in Temples include priests, devotees, or anyone who wants to connect with the divine through recitation. *Shlokas* usually contain prayers, hymns, or teachings from religious texts like the *Vedas*, *Upanishads*, *Bhagavad Gita*, or other scriptures. The prayers serve as rituals that reinforce communal identity and values.

श्रीलइराईदेवीचेअष्टक (श्लोक)

सच्चित्सुखात्मकतुझेनिजरूपसत्य। सृष्टिस्थितिप्रलयतूंकरितेसिनित्य॥ तूं पूज्य सर्वमुनिसंतसुरासुरांसी।

लइराईदेवी / तवमीनमितोपदांसी॥ १॥

शक्तीअनादिअससीजशिवैष्णवीतूं। ब्राह्मीतशीवरविऐन्द्रिहिशांभवीतूं॥

त्वन्नामसाधनभवाब्धितरावयासी। लइराईदेवी / तवमीनमितोपदांसी॥ २॥

द्रव्यार्थलोकतुजअर्चितिजेभलेगे। तेद्रव्यवंतअतिसत्वरहोतिपैगे॥ आरोग्यदेसीपरिपूर्णरोगियांसी।

लइराईदेवी / तवमीनमितोपदांसी॥ ३॥

तूंचित्कलाकलशरुपिराउळांत। भक्तांप्रतीसुखविसीकरूनीतमान्त॥ तूं सर्वदाहरिसिसेवकसंकटासी।

लइराईदेवी / तवमीनमितोपदांसी॥ ४॥

वैशाखमासंसुविशुद्धचीपंचमिसी।यात्रातुझीभरतसेबहुउत्सवेसी।।
अग्नीतुनीभजकचालतिसौख्यराशी।लइराईदेवी !तवमीनमितोपदांसी॥५॥

होईजयाप्रतिसमंधिकगांजणूक।पायींतुझ्याचतरिहोयहिथारणूक।।मोठेपिशाच्चबळहीनचालेतुझ्याशी।
लइराईदेवी !तवमीनमितोपदांसी॥६॥

ग्रामीतूझ्यानवधितीजनकुक्कुटादि।चौर्याकृतादिकरितांतवकोपबाधी।।
चालेनकोणीहयवाहनिगर्वराशी।लइराईदेवी !तवमीनमितोपदांसी॥७॥

सद्वर्तनासिचधराव्यभिचारसोडा।पाळोनियाममवचाबहूभाग्यजोडा।
ऐसेस्वयेकथिसीनित्यचितूजनासि।लइराईदेवी !तवमीनमितोपदांसी॥८॥

तूतेसहाभगिनीबंधूहिण्कसाचा।लोकीप्रसिध्दमहिमाहिवरवातयांचा।।अत्यंततूंसदयनिश्चयहाजनासी।
लइराईदेवी !तवमीनमितोपदांसी॥९॥

हेस्तोत्रजेपठतिमानवभावमुक्त।प्रेमेअहर्निशतयाकरिदुःखमुक्त।।धर्मीप्रवृत्तिधनधान्यहिसंततीदे।
भेटीतुझीनिजदिगंबरदासहीदे॥१०॥

This is the literal translation of the Shlok

Ashtaka (Verses) of Shri Lairai Devi

True happiness is your own form of truth. You are always doing creation, maintenance and annihilation. You are worshiped by all sages, saints, demigods and demons. Lairai Devi! I bow down at your feet.

Shakti Anadi Asasi Jashi Vaishnavi Tu. Brahma tashi baravi aidrihi shambhavi tu. Your name is the means of crossing the ocean of death. Lairai Devi! I bow down at your feet.

Material people worship you who are good. They became rich very quickly. Arogya Desi Perfect Patients. Lairai Devi! I bow at your feet.

You are Chitkala in the form of an urn in Raul. Sukh visikaruni tamantam towards his devotees. You are always in trouble, servant of Hari. Lairai Devi! I bow at your feet.

The month of Vaishakh is the fifth day of the month of Suvishuddha. Yatra tujhi bharatse bahu utsavesi. The devotee of Agnituni moves the sign of happiness. Lairai Devi! I bow down at your feet.

Hoi Jayaprati Samandhik Ganjnuk. At your feet, however, this is the determination. Even the great devils cannot walk with you. Lairai Devi! I bow down at your feet.

Grammy, you don't kill people, chickens, etc. Your anger is bound by theft and other crimes. No horse-drawn carriage moves proudly. Lairai Devi! I bow down at your feet.

Sadvartana asichdha ravyabhichar soda. Palonia added a lot of luck to my skin. Aise svayekathisinityachitujanasi. Lairai Devi! I bow down at your feet.

You are six sisters and brothers, one true. Loki prasiddhamahi-mahibaravatayancha|| you will know the utmost kindness and certainty. Lairai Devi! I bow down at your feet.

O stotra, who recites it, human beings are freed from emotion. Love her every day and free her from suffering. Righteous instinct gives wealth and grain to children. Bheti Tujhi Nij Digambardas Hi De

The words honor Shri Lairai Devi, who is revered by all creatures as the universe's supreme creator, preserver, and destroyer. It is said of her that she grants prosperity and health upon those who worship her and is the source of both immediate and spiritual wealth. Her name is considered sacred because it can help one transcend the life-death cycle. The hymn highlights her goodness and the gifts she gives to anyone who ask for her mercy.

श्रीदेवीलइराईस्तवन (on kalash)

होप्रसन्नदेवते।लइराईतुंमाते॥

करितातेतुझेस्तवनभरुनींयेईअंतर्मन।

कसेकरुतुझेकवनवाणीहीनापुरते।होप्रसन्नदेवते॥ १॥

तूचिजगस्वामिनीतुंओकारस्वरुपिणीगुणमयिगुणाश्रयीजगदंबेमाते।होप्रसन्नदेवते॥ २॥

कलशामधिधातुचंचभासतसेसोनंसाचचकचकतपरिसंततनयननहालूशकते।होप्रसन्नदेवते॥ ३॥

जरिअससिकलशासनिअवतरसीमनोमनीकृपाकरीभक्तापरीदीनदयाळाअंबिके।होप्रसन्नदेवते॥ ४॥

This is the literal translation of Stavan on *Devi Lairai kalash*

Shree Devi Lairai Stavan (on Kalash)

Yes, please God. Lairai you are a mother.

They are filled with your praises.

How can I do it, your Kavan Vani is not enough. Yes please God

You are Jagaswamini; you are Okar Swaroopini Gunamayi Gunashrayi Jagadamba
Mate. Yes pleased God

As the metal of Kalashamadhi looks like gold, it may not always look like gold. Yes
pleased gods

Even if we are Kalashasani, the avatars are kind to the devotees. Yes, please God.

In honoring Shri Lairai Devi as the ultimate heavenly mother and the wellspring of all strengths and qualities, these verses offer an honest plea and devotion to her. The speaker realizes that there are not enough words to properly honor her and asks for her grace and blessings, expressing belief in her unending kindness and empathy toward followers, whatever of their present situations.

The transmission of Shlok and Stavan from generation to generation represents the cultural continuity and transmission of religious beliefs and practices within the community. Through oral tradition and communal rituals, cultural values and religious teachings are passed down and preserved over time.

CHAPTER III

SOCIAL AND DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE OF SHIRGAO VILLAGE

The location code or village code of Shirgao village is 626746. Shirgao village is located in Bicholim Taluka of North Goa district in Goa, India. It is situated 8km away from sub-district headquarter Bicholim (tehsildar office) and 26km away from district headquarter Panjim. The total geographical area of village is 286.91 hectares. Shirgao is a village in the state of Goa, India. It is located in the North Goa district. The geographical coordinates of Shirgao are approximately 15.4989° N latitude and 73.9425° E longitude. As for the topography, Shirgao is situated in a region characterized by lush greenery, as is typical of many areas in Goa. The village likely features a mix of coastal plains and hilly terrain, typical of the landscape in the region. The Village Panchayat of Shirgao is situated in the Bicholim Taluka of North Goa District. It has a Population of 1970 as per 2011 census. The Panchayat consists of five wards and has five elected representatives. The Panchayat has one primary school with an enrolment of twenty nine students. There is one high school with an enrolment of sixty six students. There are two primary schools with twenty four students. There are several Temples such as the Mahadev and *Dattatray* Temples. There is a small healthcare facility and an RBL Bank. There are no restaurants or alcohol bars in the village. The major source of income for the Panchayat is the house tax, fees, and grant in aid and other grants. Shirgao village has higher literacy rate compared to Goa. In 2011, literacy rate of Shirgao village was 91.79 % compared to 88.70 % of Goa. In Shirgao Male literacy stands at 97.02 % while female literacy rate

was 86.36 %. As per constitution of India and Panchyati Raaj Act, Shirgao village is administrated by Sarpanch (Head of Village) who is elected representative of village.

3.1. DESCRIPTION OF THE FIELD AREA

Bicholim is a town and Taluka in the North Goa District of Goa. There are about 24 villages in Bicholim Taluka. In the village of Shirgao in Bicholim Taluka lies the Temple of Goddess *Lairai*. The Temple of *Shri Lairai Devi* is located at Shirgao in Bicholim Taluka, at a distance of 25 km from Panjim. Shirgao is a small village with only about 300 families and maybe around 3000 people. The architecture of the Temple is unique, with a dome (a round roof on a building) and a tall pyramid like tower decorating the top. *Shri Lairai Devi* Saunasthan is well known Devasthan in Goa (Goyal, 2023) Shirgavchi *Jatra*, called in local vernacular is an annual event held in the month of April and May depending upon Shudh *Panchami* day of Vaishakh Hindu calendar month. The *jatra* brings joy and vigour to the villagers and the whole village of Shirgao wears a new look. The houses are painted, decorated with lights and mattovs (temporary shade) in front of every house and Kamanis build at the entrance of Shirgao village and at the Temple place (Talents, 2014). *Mudder* is home to *Lairai's* first Temple. This Temple is located on the little hillside on the left as one travels from Assonora to Shirgao. This goddess is represented with a symbolic anthill.

The *Jatra* starts in the Temple on the day of *Shudh Panchami* with a variety of religious rites. The devotees come here first thing in the morning to receive *Lairai's* darshan, present flowers, and give prayers in hopes of receiving her blessings. Mogra flowers are offered to *Devi Lairai*. Devoted to *Lairai*, a group of them walk barefoot over hot coals as part of a strange ceremony. These people are referred to as *dhonds*, are required to observe discipline and take ritual baths for a

predetermined number of days before the ceremony. These *dhonds* wear traditional attire, carry a colourful cloth on their backs, and grip a cane stick known as a *bethkathi* during the Jatra. In the afternoon, *dhonds* from all across Goa, Konkan, and Belgaum come to Shirgao. They visit the Temple and do five laps around it after first taking a dip in Shirgao holy lake. Then a big pile of sandalwood is set up beneath a revered papal tree. They follow different religious traditions after receiving *Lairai's* darshan at *mudder* (Talents, 2014).

3.2. CASTE FACTOR

There is no population of Schedule Caste (SC) and Schedule Tribe (ST) in Shirgao village of North Goa district. The population consists solely of Hindus without any migrants or individuals from other religions.

The sociological idea of caste and tribe based marginalization and discrimination is the foundation for the Indian concepts of Scheduled Castes (SC) and Scheduled Tribes (ST). In order to rectify past injustices and offer affirmative action to improve these communities, the Indian government officially recognized these phrases. According to sociologists like B.R. Ambedkar, the concept of caste relates to India's hierarchical social structure, in which people are divided into many castes according to their place of birth. Ambedkar, a well-known Indian sociologist and the man behind the Indian Constitution, emphasized the harsh effects of caste prejudice and fought for the rights and advancement of oppressed castes, especially the Dalits, commonly referred to as "untouchables." According to scholars like M.N. Srinivas, a tribe is a collection of people who live in a same area and have similar linguistic, cultural, and ancestral traits. The distinct social and cultural identities of tribal tribes, as well as their battles against marginalization and exploitation, were highlighted by

Srinivas. Shirgao village in North Goa appears to have a homogeneous Hindu population with little variation in caste and tribal connections due to the absence of Schedule Caste and Schedule Tribe communities. Through the prism of sociological ideas like social stratification, the idea that some groups are privileged or marginalized according to their social status, this situation can be understood.

3.3. ARCHITECTURE OF THE TEMPLE

The Temples of Goa are in essence like most Hindu Temples in India, based around a deity which is worshipped. The architecture of Goan Temples is a little different mostly because of historical reasons. The fundamental design of any Hindu Temple is organized around the central shrine or the “*Garbagriha*” or the “sanctum sanctorum” that houses the main deity. A tower or “*Shikara*” arises from the main shrine and is traditionally pyramidal shaped. There is always a surrounding free area or a passage around the Garbagriha that is kept free for an essential Pooja ritual known as *Pradakshina* (encircle) performed by almost every devotee. The “*Garbagriha*” is accessed via a large hall with pillars and walls either carved with religious motifs or scenes from the mythology pertaining to the deity. This hall is usually known as the “*Mandapa*”. The “*Mandapa*” opens to the outer courtyard or “*Prakara*” where usually a statue of a mythical animal or Vehicle of the deity is placed. There may also be a sacred plant the “*Tulsi*” or one of the sacred trees usually either a Peepal or a Banyan tree. The *Lairai Devi* Temple in Shirgao has an architecture of the Temple is unique, with a dome and a tall pyramid like tower adorning the top. This Temple is a combination of northern and southern art and design of Temples.

The Temple architecture follows a traditional Goan style, featuring beautiful wooden carvings, colourful paintings, and intricate designs. The sanctum sanctorum

(*Garbagriha*) enshrines the idols of the deities, and the Temple complex is surrounded by a serene ambiance, making it an ideal place for spiritual contemplation.

Devi Lairai first Temple that is at *mudder* is now being raised but the anthill is still there inside that Temple.

3.4. OCCUPATION STRUCTURE

According to the 2011 census, of the entire population living in Shirgao Village, 530 were employed. A total of 86.42% of workers identify their work as main work, meaning they are employed or earn more than six months, while 13.58% engage in marginal activities, meaning they earn less than six months' worth of income. 38 cultivators (either owners or co-owners) and 2 agricultural labourers made up the 530 workers involved in the main work (Census, 2011).

3.5. MINING

The destruction caused by mining prompted the people of Shirgao village to request similar assistance back in 2008. Their village suffered greatly as a result of the three mining companies M/s Bandekar, M/s Chowgules, and M/s Sesa Goa (later Vedanta) whose deep mining holes encircled their farms. The damage caused by mining activities in their village was described in a letter petition to the Bombay High Court. They stated that all 70 of the village's wells had dried up and that their fields were covered with mining silt, which caused tall, obstructive weeds to grow and made it impossible for them to cultivate the rich crops they once did. It was impossible to live in the hamlet because of the barren fruit trees, the dead fronds on the coconut trees, and the terrible dust pollution caused by the trucks that sped through the lanes every

few seconds. They had chosen to remain in their hamlet, though, because a Temple had been erected in its centre in honor of the Goddess Lairai, who lived there. The village's doors were open to all *dhonds* (pilgrims) and other guests who had travelled great distances to worship the goddess during this week-long celebration held in her honor each May, which attracted lakhs of devotees every year. The high court was moved by this brief letter and the suffering of the villagers, and it ordered a five-day ban on mining activities. In addition, it appointed the National Environmental Engineering Research Institute (NEERI) to investigate whether mining activity was the cause of the village's declining water supplies and the deterioration of the agricultural fields, and if so, what corrective measures should be implemented. A number of remedial steps, totalling around ₹150 lakhs for agricultural land regeneration and ₹500 lakhs for water recharge, were suggested in the NEERI report, which also confirmed these accusations. The restoration of the village's 80 hectares of paddy fields is expected to cost ₹4 crore, according to the District Mineral Foundation. The state government's position was made evident by the Goa Advocate General: the mining corporations ought to pay the restoration costs in accordance with the polluter pays theory. The three mining companies will each contribute ₹65 lakhs, and the District Mineral Foundation will bear half of the costs of the restoration work that the high court ordered the government to start in December 2021. It was impossible to live in the hamlet because of the barren fruit trees, the dead fronds on the coconut trees, and the terrible dust pollution caused by the trucks that sped through the lanes every few seconds. With a one-year deadline for completion, the restoration of the Shirgao fields got underway on January 30, 2021. The restoration of the Kharat Kazan fields was completed by March 2022, despite a number of challenges along the way, including the COVID-19-related lockdown. For

the first time in almost twenty years, the villagers replanted the Kharat fields in June of last year. After the Sawat Kazan fields were finished in January of this year, the boundary stones designating each farmer's land holdings were re-established by the Directorate of Land Survey. The contractor agency also finished desalting the entire 2.2 square kilometre pond and erected a new sluice gate to control the tidal water flow. The locals excitedly informed me that they intended to cultivate all of their fields this monsoon and hoped that they would once again relive their past glory of a great crop when I visited the hamlet for the Lairai celebration. Other mining-affected villages should draw encouragement from the persistence and initiative shown by the people of Pissurlem and Shirgao. These incidents highlight how, with unity and a commitment to change, villages can recover their lands, improve their surroundings, and become self-sufficient again. The Shirgao village residents detailed the harm that the mining operations in their community had caused in a letter petition to the Bombay High Court (Environment/Animal Rights Leaflet Specials World Environment Day 2023 et al., 2023).

The mining belt of North Goa includes Shirgao as well. About 90% of SRL's total estimated iron ore reserves as of March 31, 2016, were found on 11 mining leases totalling 980 hectares (2,400 acres) in Bicholim and Surla in Goa. The iron ore is extracted by the Vedanta-owned SRL, Goa and its subsidiary Sesa Mining Corporation Limited. The Surla mine includes the Pale-Velguem-Bicholim-Shirgao iron ore belt.

Three Public Interest Litigations (PILs) contesting the Goa government's decision to proceed with the mineral auctions for Mining Blocks I, II, and III in Shirgao village, Bicholim Taluka, were given notice by a division bench of the Bombay High Court in Goa today. The Letters of Intent given to the three new

winning bidders—Vedanta Ltd., Salgaonkar Shipping Co. Pvt.Ltd., and M/s Raja ram Bandekar (Shirgao) Mines Pvt Ltd.—are also contested in the cases. Previous lessees under these leases have also been rendered respondents. The first petition was submitted on behalf of the village and the people of Shirgao by the major deity of the Shri *Devi Lairai* Temple, acting through the President of the Shri *Devi Lairai* Temple trust. Among the locals are Ganesha Chandra Kant Gaonkar, Krishna Raya Gaonkar, Dinanath Shamba Gaonkar, Vijay Ravalnath Gaonkar, and Suresh Govind Gaonkar, who are all from Shirgaovillage. The Supreme Court stopped mining in the village environment in October 2012, although the *Devi Lairai* deity and the Shirgao villagers maintain that the mining activities continued for more than 50 years. The Portuguese issued a manifest devoid of any Survey Nos. in order to grant the previous leases to Resp. No. 4, which ended in 2007. The authorities then learned about the mining leases' status in relation to the *Devi Lairai* Temple and the Shirgao hamlet settlement. The petitioners' main complaint is that the village settlement, which includes the *Devi Lairai* Temple, homes, schools, and fields, is included in the boundaries of the mining blocks that are up for auction. They further allege that the government did not apply its judgment or take into account the absolute destruction caused by mining operations on the former mining leases during their previous existence, nor the fact that none of it had been remedied, when deciding on the boundaries of the mining blocks. According to the NEERI (National Environmental Engineering Research Institute) report, the three lease holders destroyed all of the village's grazing areas, bankrupted the village's entire water supply, and left the village with just one water tank (dhondanchi tali), which is used by locals who come for the Shirgao *jatra*. Over 80 ha of agricultural land were also permanently damaged. Therefore, the department's decision to grant a new mining block for the same region

is the height of irresponsibility. The PILs (Public Interest Litigation) seek that the three mining blocks not include the entire population of Shirgao, including its seventeen Temples, and that no mining be permitted to resume until the village's environment damaged over fifty years ago is restored (*Shirgao-Bicholim Mining Block Challenged in HC*, 2023)

In response to community concerns about mining activities in Shirgao village, Chief Minister Pramod Sawant announced the exclusion of *Devi Lairai* Temple from the mining lease area. He assured that if the land belongs to the government, it could be transferred to the Temple trust. This decision comes as a PIL has been filed in court, arguing that the Temple and village settlement are within the mining area. Sawant encouraged dialogue rather than protests. The court has issued notices to the government and successful bidders, with petitioners requesting the exclusion of the settlement and Temples from mining activities until environmental concerns are addressed (The Goan Everyday, 2023).



Figure 3.1: Mining in Shirgao near *Lairai Devi* Temple

Sources: <https://images.app.goo.gl/AGGG7q3xBW7Praq28>

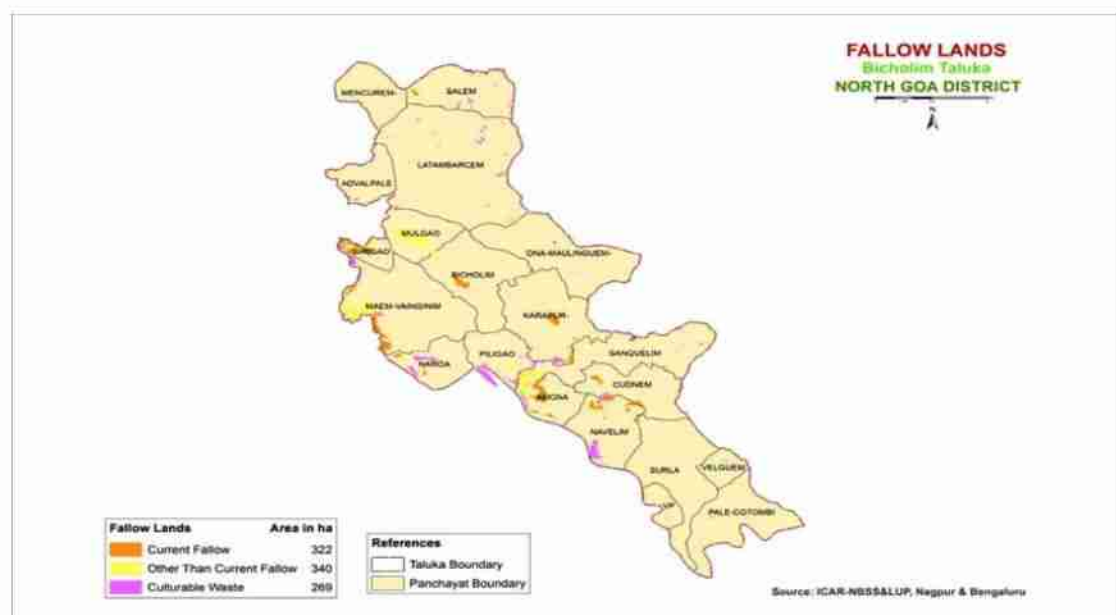


Figure 3.2: Map of Bicholim Taluka

Source: <https://encrypted-tbn0.gstatic.com/images?q=tbm>

CHAPTER IV

SHIRGAO LAIRAI DEVI JATRA AND MOGRA

BUSINESS

It is believed that *Devi Lairai* loves mogra buds. *Devi Lairai* is considered the fierce incarnation of *Devi Parvati*, the wife of God *Shiva*. On *Kailash parvat*, the *vasant rutu* (the spring season symbolizes starting fresh and new beginnings), is the biggest festival celebrated. It is believed that there is a significance of *Brahmand rupi shwet vastra* (white cloth) on *Kailash parvat* in the month of *Chaitra-Vaishakh* in the Hindu calendar. When she came on earth, the *shwet vastra* was symbolized by white flower buds; nowhere is it said that only mogra flowers. Mogra flower blooms in the same months, *Chaitra and Vaishakh* (March–June) and on the *Vaishakh Shukla Panchami*, the annual festival of *Jatra* also takes place. So people started offering mogra flowers to *Devi Lairai* during the *jatra*, and it became like a tradition or belief that they had to offer only mogra flowers to *Devi Lairai*. One flower-selling woman from Shirgao said that most of them from that village are not able to sell flowers during *jatra* because many people and relatives visit their homes during *jatra* and they are busy. Their preparations start ten to fifteen days before the *jatra*, so they cannot engage in the flower selling, and most of the flower sellers are from outside the village. There is a lot of demand for mogra buds during the *jatra*. People make strings and garlands of unopened mogra. It is sold at 100 rupees per string. Many people are dependent on this flower business during the *jatra* for their livelihood.



Figure 4.1 *Devi Lairai kalash* with mogra buds

Source: Photograph by Respondent

4.1. BELIEFS

It is not a myth but a story narrated by many villagers and people who have witnessed it. *Dhonds* do the fasting before the Jatra begins. But some fail to do that, and some have doubts in their minds. So while walking in the fire, they fall and even get some burns on their bodies. The *dhonds* that get burned are treated in the *Khalnath* Temple. They are directly taken to that Temple, and they are given the sacred water. The mogra buds are also touched on their skin, and they get relief from that. Their burns are almost cured, and they are ready to go back home. The goddess is also taken to the *Khalnath* Temple once she has passed from the fire. There, the *mod* keeps the *kalash* down and takes a rest.

The mogra bud is also given to the *dhonds* after they take a sacred bath in the lake. It is said as *koul* to the *dhonds*, to keep in mouth, and they have to hold it until

they walk on fire. After keeping that mogra bud in the mouth, they feel cold, and after that, they can walk on fire without feeling heat.

Lairai Devi Temple generates livelihoods for many people during the *jatra*. The main business during the *jatra* is the mogra flower business. People from outside the village and villagers also participate in this mogra bud sale. Mogra flower business and other flower sales on other days is only the livelihood of some of the flower sellers from the village. The demand for mogra buds during the *Jatra* is substantial, with people crafting strings and garlands sold at Rupees 100 per string. The flower business during the *Jatra* serves as a crucial livelihood for many individuals in the community

Various humanities and social science areas use the term “narrative” in different ways, and it has multiple meanings. The term is commonly used interchangeably with “storytelling,” yet some scholars distinguish between narrative which is an individual’s account of their own experience and storytelling, which is the telling of another person’s story. Understanding, describing, and acting within the framework of the storyteller’s experiences are made possible by narrative research; stories help us make sense of the world (Clandinin and Connelly 2000).

It is simple to persuade individuals to share their stories, it collects detailed data, participants are open to self-reflection and account disclosure, the truth is revealed, and participants are given a voice (Creswell 2012; Newby 2014). Since most people are happy to share a tale about themselves and one wants to report their story, it is quite straightforward to encourage people to relate stories when utilizing narrative research. Since this frequently happens with ease in recounted events, it is possible to obtain in-depth information (thick description). Researchers can access numerous layers of information by presenting their findings using a narrative

technique, which allows them to gain a deeper knowledge of the details of the participants' perspectives (Ntinda, 2020).

Choosing the narrative method for my dissertation interviews is related to crafting a story. Rather than just telling out facts and figures, it allows me to intricately intertwine the experiences, perspectives, and emotions of my interviewees into an integrated narrative. This approach injects depth and richness into my dissertation, making it more captivating and memorable for readers. One convincing reason for opting for the narrative method is its ability to humanize my research. By incorporating real-life stories and incidents, I can establish a personal connection with my audience. This facilitates empathy and understanding, particularly when tackling complex or sensitive issues within my chosen topic. The narrative method affords me the opportunity to delve into the complexities of my subject matter in a nuanced manner. Rather than presenting a flat, one-dimensional view, I can capture the multifaceted nature of people's experiences and viewpoints. This enables me to uncover deeper insights and develop a more comprehensive understanding of my research area. Employing the narrative method gives voice to my interviewees. Instead of merely serving as passive subjects, they actively participate in shaping the narrative. This empowerment allows them to share their stories authentically, fostering a sense of ownership and authenticity in the research process. This is particularly valuable when seeking to reach audiences beyond academia or those outside my field of study. The narrative method serves as a potent tool for advocacy and driving social change.

PROFILE ONE: LAKSHMI

In the village of Shirgao lived Lakshmi, a woman known for her expertise in selling flowers. As spring approached, so did the excitement for the annual Jatra festival, celebrating *Devi Lairai*. Lakshmi days leading up to the festival were so tiring. With relatives and friends coming to her home, she found herself suffering from the responsibilities of hosting guests and preparing for the festival. Among the chaos, one thing remained constant her dedication to the flower-selling business. Mogra buds held a special place in Lakshmi heart, symbolizing purity and devotion to *Devi Lairai*. As the festival came nearer, she ensured she had a plentiful supply of fresh mogra buds, arranging them into strings and garlands to be offered to the deity. During the Jatra, the demand for mogra buds increases. Lakshmi, along with other flower sellers, stood near the Temple, ready to satisfy the needs of worshippers. The air was filled with the sweet fragrance of mogra, and the atmosphere was alive with devotional songs and prayers. For Lakshmi, selling mogra buds was not just a business; it was a sacred duty passed down through generations. As worshippers offered the mogra buds to *Devi Lairai* with devotion, Lakshmi felt a deep sense of fulfilment, knowing that her contributions played a vital role in keeping the tradition alive. As the festival came to a close and the last mogra buds were sold, Lakshmi looked back on the past few weeks with gratitude. Despite the challenges of balancing her responsibilities as a host and a businesswoman, she wouldn't have it any other way. The Jatra festival not only sustained her financially but also strengthened her bonds with her community. With a smile on her face and a heart full of contentment, Lakshmi looked forward to another year of celebrating *Devi Lairai* and serving her community with devotion and joy.

PROFILE TWO: RAJU

Raju is a humble man known for his quiet behaviour and unwavering devotion to his community. As the annual Jatra festival approached, Raju prepared himself for his sacred duty – providing mogra buds for the rituals performed by the *dhonds*. Raju's role in the flower business revolved around selling mogra buds. Despite not growing the flowers himself, Raju ensured a steady supply of fresh mogra buds, sourced from nearby cultivators. As the festival came nearer, Raju could be found near the Temple, quietly offering mogra buds to worshippers and *dhonds*. His behaviour may have been understated, but his commitment to his role in the community was constant. For Raju, providing mogra buds was not just a job; it was a sacred duty passed down through generations. As he watched the *dhonds* perform their rituals with reverence, Raju felt a deep sense of fulfilment, knowing that his contributions played a crucial part in ensuring their safety and well-being. Beyond the Jatra season, Raju's involvement in the flower business continued year-round. While mogra buds may have been in high demand during the festival, Raju also offered other flowers like marigolds, Shevati, and Aboli to worshippers visiting the Temple on regular days. As the festival came to a close and the last mogra buds were sold, Raju reflected on the significance of his role in the community. Whether it was providing mogra buds for the Jatra festival or other floral offerings for daily worship, Raju remained persistent in his commitment to serving his community with humility and devotion.

PROFILE THREE: SNEHA

Sneha's commitment to her flower-selling business near the *LairaiDevi* Temple was unwavering. Every morning, she woke up early to carefully select the freshest flowers from her collection. Whether it was the golden marigolds, the delicate Shevati blossoms, or the vibrant Aboli flowers, Sneha ensured that her customers always had

a wide variety to choose from. Her small stall near the Temple became a familiar sight for worshippers and visitors alike. Sneha greeted everyone with a warm smile and a genuine interest in fulfilling their floral needs. She understood that each customer had their preferences and she was always ready to tailor her offerings accordingly. During the bustling days of the Jatra festival, Sneha's stall was adorned with displays of mogra bud strings, attracting the attention of worshippers seeking to make special offerings to *Devi Lairai*. However, even during quieter times, Sneha's dedication remained steadfast as she continued to provide high-quality flowers to those who sought them for daily worship. She used to take flowers from a flower vendor. As the seasons changed and the Temple grounds transitioned from the lively atmosphere of the festival to the serene tranquillity of everyday devotion, Sneha adapted her offerings accordingly. She understood the flow of demand for different types of flowers and ensured that her inventory remained well-stocked to meet the needs of her diverse customers. Through her hard work and dedication, Sneha became not only a respected businesswoman but also a beloved member of the community. Her stall near the *Lairai Devi* Temple was not just a place to buy flowers; it was a symbol of trust, reliability, and devotion. With each passing year, Sneha's business continued to flourish, fuelled by her passion for flowers and her commitment to serving her community. As she looked ahead to the future, Sneha knew that her journey as a flower seller near the Temple was far from over, and she embraced the opportunity to continue spreading joy and spirituality through her floral offerings.

PROFILE FOUR: MAYA

In the village of Shirgao, there lived a woman named Maya. She was known throughout the village for her vibrant personality and her beautiful flower-selling business. During the annual Jatra festival, Maya's stall near the Temple was a bustling hub of activity. Worshippers and visitors from far and wide flocked to admire her exquisite floral arrangements and select offerings for their prayers. The sweet scent of mogra and the vibrant colours of marigolds filled the air, creating an atmosphere of joy and reverence. As the days of the festival passed, Maya's business thrived, and her infectious smile never wavered. She greeted each customer with warmth and kindness, eager to share the beauty of her flowers with all who crossed her path. But Maya's dedication didn't end with the *Jatra* festival. Throughout the year, she travelled to different Temples across the region, setting up her stall during the Jatra. But whenever there was any other festival in *Lairai* Temple she would come back and set up her stall near the Temple, whether it was *Navratri* or *Vardhapan* day. Maya was there; ready to offer her flowers to worshippers seeking blessings. In each new Temple, Maya found a sense of belonging and purpose. She cherished the opportunity to connect with different communities and share her love of flowers with people from all walks of life. As the seasons changed and the years passed, Maya's flower-selling business continued to flourish. Her reputation as a skilled florist and a kind-hearted soul spread far and wide, earning her the admiration and respect of all who knew her. Through her unwavering dedication and boundless compassion, Maya became not just a flower seller, but a cherished member of the community. She was a comfort, a joy, and a touch of beauty to everyone she came into contact with, both within and outside the *Lairai Devi* Temple. As she looked out over the village she

called home, Maya knew that she was exactly where she was meant to be, surrounded by the love of her flowers and the blessings of the gods.



Figure 4.2: Flower selling people outside the Temple

Source: Photograph clicked by researcher



Figure4.3: Flower seller near Lairai Temple

Source: <https://www.gomantaktimes.com/ampstories/web-stories/an-atmosphere-of-festivity-and-fervour-at-the-lairai-zatra-in-shirgao>



Figure4.4: Mogra strings selling man

Source: <https://www.gomantaktimes.com/ampstories/web-stories/an-atmosphere-of-festivity-and-fervour-at-the-lairai-zatra-in-shirgao>

PROFILE FIVE: VIJAY AND SUMAN

In the heart of Shirgao village, next to the *Lairai Devi* Temple, lived Vijay and Suman, a dedicated couple deeply involved in the flower-selling business. Their livelihood relied entirely on their joint business near the Temple, where they served the floral needs of worshippers and visitors. Realizing the importance of working together, Vijay and Suman combined their strengths to ensure a steady supply of mogra buds for the upcoming Jatra festival. Instead of growing the flowers themselves, they used to get them from flower sellers outside the village, just like everyone else did. When the festival finally came, Vijay and Suman's teamwork paid off as their mogra flowers business bloomed beautifully. Together, they made strings

and garlands of mogra buds, ready to be offered to *Devi Lairai* and sold to worshippers. Throughout the festival, the couple stood side by side near the Temple, proudly showing off their fresh mogra blooms to a steady stream of customers. As the festival ended and the last mogra buds were sold, Vijay and Suman looked back on their successful collaboration. By working together and getting flowers from outside sellers. With grateful hearts and hopeful spirits, Vijay and Suman looked ahead, knowing that their teamwork would continue to flourish, supporting their livelihood and adding to the village's spiritual richness for years to come.

PROFILE SIX: PRIYA

In the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic, Priya, a resilient and adaptable woman from Shirgao village, faced unexpected challenges in sustaining her flower-selling business near the *Lairai Devi* Temple. With restrictions and safety concerns disrupting daily life, Priya knew she needed to find alternative ways to support herself and her family. Unwavering by the challenges posed by the pandemic, Priya drew upon her creativity and resourcefulness to adapt her business model. She reached out to worshippers in nearby villages, offering to deliver mogra buds and other floral offerings directly to their homes. Through word of mouth and social media, Priya spread the word about her services, highlighting the importance of continuing the tradition of offering mogra flowers to *Devi Lairai*, even in challenging times. Her efforts paid off as worshippers from far and wide reached out to her, eager to purchase mogra buds for the upcoming Jatra festival. Despite the absence of large gatherings and festivities, Priya's business remained strong, supported by the unwavering devotion of her customers. As the festival approached, Priya worked tirelessly to fulfil orders, she offered mogra buds on behalf of her customers and they paid her money through online payment. As the festival unfolded, Priya witnessed the power of community and resilience in the face

of adversity. Despite the challenges posed by the pandemic, worshippers continued to express their devotion to *Devi Lairai* through offerings of mogra flowers, reaffirming the enduring significance of tradition and faith. With a sense of pride and gratitude, Priya looked back on her experience with the pandemic, knowing that she had overcome adversity and emerged stronger than ever before. Through innovation and determination, she had not only sustained her livelihood but also strengthened her connection to her community and her faith. With renewed hope and optimism for the future, Priya looked forward to the next Jatra festival, knowing that she could weather any storm with grace and perseverance.

PROFILE SEVEN: FLITA

In the village of Assonora, a homemaker and flower-selling woman, has been a familiar face in the bustling markets of Mapusa and the vibrant festivities of Shirgao *Jatra* for as long as she can remember. Born and raised in Flita, she has inherited a tradition deeply rooted in her Catholic upbringing. Each year, since her childhood, Flita and her mother made their pilgrimage to Shirgao *Jatra*, where they would set up shop and sell delicate mogra buds, offerings to the revered goddess Lairai. Her connection to the land and the flowers runs deep, as she meticulously tends to her mogra plants, which she leases a piece of land to grow. The cultivation process begins a month before the jatra, with careful cleaning, sunbathing, and attentive watering. Flita takes pride in her work, finding joy in both the cultivation process and the livelihood it provides. Despite the challenges that life brings, Flita faces them with resilience. COVID-19 brought unprecedented difficulties, with dwindling sales and uncertainty looming over her livelihood. As she gracefully ages, she grapples with health issues like leg pain from standing for long hours and strains in her neck and back muscles, reminders of the toll her trade has taken on her body. Yet, through it

all, Flita's faith remains unwavering. She finds solace and strength in her belief in the goddess *Lairai*, trusting in her guidance and providence. For Flita, selling flowers isn't just a means of income; it's a sacred tradition, a testament to her resilience, and a source of connection to her community and her faith.

CHAPTER V

ANALYSIS AND CONCLUSION

The passing down of traditions and rituals through generations, as seen in the Shirgao *Jatra*, reflects the process of cultural transmission within the community. This continuity ensures the preservation of cultural identity over time, reinforcing a sense of shared heritage among community members and contributing to social stability and cohesion. The passing down of traditions and rituals contributes to cultural transmission, reinforcing social stability and a sense of shared identity within the Goan society.

The restrictions imposed by *Devi Lairai* upon the villagers, such as abstaining from alcohol consumption and animal sacrifices, signify mechanisms of social control and the establishment of norms within the community. The case of the siblings' dispersal to different villages reflects the organic solidarity within Goan society, where individuals maintain connections despite physical dispersal, highlighting the interconnectedness of villages. The restrictions imposed by *Devi Lairai* can be interpreted as forms of discipline aimed at regulating behaviour and maintaining social order within the community. These restrictions serve as a mechanism of social control, ensuring conformity to established norms. The hereditary role of the priest within the Joshi family signifies a form of social stratification based on lineage, where certain families hold privileged positions and inherit responsibilities over generations.

The *dhond* tradition transcends caste, gender, and regional boundaries, emphasizing a sense of belonging to a community united by devotion to the goddess

Lairai. Regardless of their backgrounds, *dhonds* share a common identity rooted in their spiritual journey and adherence to shared rituals and practices. It focuses on how individuals interpret and create meaning through symbols and interactions. The attire, dietary restrictions, and rituals associated with *dhonds* serve as symbols through which individuals express their devotion to the goddess and their commitment to the community. The central ritual of walking barefoot through fire symbolizes purification, spiritual growth, and transformation. The process of becoming a *dhond* involves rigorous fasting rituals and adherence to strict dietary and cleanliness practices, reflecting a process of socialization into the community's norms and values.

Through these rituals, individuals undergo a transformational journey rooted in personal faith and spiritual discipline, shaping their sense of identity and belonging within the community. The steady influx of new *dhonds* and the tradition's adherence to ancient rituals reflect a process of cultural continuity and adaptation within the community. Despite modern influences and changing social dynamics, the *dhond* tradition remains deeply rooted in traditional practices and beliefs, ensuring the preservation of cultural heritage and identity over time.

The role of the Chowgules in distributing *koul* and facilitating rituals reflects a form of social stratification based on religious hierarchy and community leadership. The respect and authority accorded to certain individuals within the community highlight the dynamics of social status and prestige. The distribution of *koul* and the rituals associated with the deity's visit to each household symbolize communal solidarity and the reaffirmation of collective faith. Through these practices, individuals express their devotion to the goddess and reinforce their sense of belonging to the community. The rituals of decorating homes, creating rangoli designs, and offering fruits and cloth pieces serve as symbolic gestures of reverence

and hospitality towards the deity. The beliefs and practices surrounding the distribution of *koul* and the incidents related to the *Khalnath* Temple demonstrate how religion serves as a central institution for shaping social norms, fostering community cohesion, and reinforcing collective identity within the context of Goan society.

In the case of the Chowgules, their role in distributing *koul* and facilitating rituals reflects a form of social stratification based on religious hierarchy and community leadership. The respect and authority accorded to them highlight the dynamics of social status and prestige within the community.

The distribution of *koul* and the rituals associated with the deity's visit to each household symbolize communal solidarity and the reaffirmation of collective faith. Through these practices, individuals express their devotion to the goddess and reinforce their sense of belonging to the community. The rituals of decorating homes, creating rangoli designs, and offering fruits and cloth pieces serve as symbolic gestures of reverence and hospitality towards the deity. The beliefs and practices surrounding the distribution of *koul* and the incidents related to the *Khalnath* Temple demonstrate how religion serves as a central institution for shaping social norms, fostering community cohesion, and reinforcing collective identity within the context of Goan society.

The chanting of *shlokas* and *stavan* reflects the cultural continuity and preservation of religious traditions within the community. These verses have been passed down through generations, serving as a link to the community's past and reinforcing its collective identity. The transmission and recitation of *shlokas* and *stavan* dedicated to *Devi Lairai* play a central role in shaping the religious and

cultural fabric of the community. These sacred verses serve as powerful symbols of communal identity, social cohesion, and spiritual guidance, reinforcing the shared values and beliefs that bind the community together across generations.

The participation of different families and groups, such as the Chowgules and *dhonds*, in organizing and performing rituals during the Shirgao *Jatra* and people of different religions taking part in flower selling business and also attending the *jatra* reflects the importance of community cohesion and collective effort in maintaining social order and stability. The passing down of traditions and rituals through generations, as seen in the Shirgao *Jatra*, reflects the process of cultural transmission within the community. This continuity ensures the preservation of cultural identity over time, reinforcing a sense of shared heritage among community members and contributing to social stability and cohesion.

The passing down of traditions and rituals contributes to cultural transmission, reinforcing social stability and a sense of shared identity within the Goan society. The *dhond* tradition transcends caste, gender, and regional boundaries, emphasizing a sense of belonging to a community united by devotion to the goddess *Lairai*. Regardless of their backgrounds, *dhonds* share a common identity rooted in their spiritual journey and adherence to shared rituals and practices.

The attire, dietary restrictions, and rituals associated with *dhonds* serve as symbols through which individuals express their devotion to the goddess and their commitment to the community. The central ritual of walking barefoot through fire symbolizes purification, spiritual growth, and transformation.

The process of becoming a *Dhond* involves rigorous fasting rituals and adherence to strict dietary and cleanliness practices, reflecting a process of

socialization into the community's norms and values. Through these rituals, individuals undergo a transformational journey rooted in personal faith and spiritual discipline, shaping their sense of identity and belonging within the community. The steady influx of new *Dhonds* and the tradition's adherence to ancient rituals reflect a process of cultural continuity and adaptation within the community. Despite modern influences and changing social dynamics, the *dhond* tradition remains deeply rooted in traditional practices and beliefs, ensuring the preservation of cultural heritage and identity over time.

The role of the Chowgules in distributing *koul* and facilitating rituals reflects a form of social stratification based on religious hierarchy and community leadership. The respect and authority accorded to certain individuals within the community has dynamics of social status and prestige. The distribution of *koul* and the rituals associated with the deity's visit to each household symbolize communal solidarity and the reaffirmation of collective faith. Through these practices, individuals express their devotion to the goddess and reinforce their sense of belonging to the community. The rituals of decorating homes, creating rangoli designs, and offering fruits and cloth pieces serve as symbolic gestures of reverence and hospitality towards the deity. The beliefs and practices surrounding the distribution of *koul* and the incidents related to the *Khalnath* Temple demonstrate how religion serves as a central institution for shaping social norms, fostering community cohesion, and reinforcing collective identity within the context of Goan society.

In the case of the Chowgules, their role in distributing *koul* and facilitating rituals reflects a form of social stratification based on religious hierarchy and community leadership. The respect and authority accorded to them highlight the dynamics of social status and prestige within the community. The distribution of *koul*

and the rituals associated with the deity's visit to each household symbolize communal harmony and the reaffirmation of collective faith. Through these practices, individuals express their devotion to the goddess and reinforce their sense of belonging to the community. The rituals of decorating homes, creating rangoli designs, and offering fruits and cloth pieces serve as symbolic gestures of reverence and hospitality towards the deity. The beliefs and practices surrounding the distribution of *koul* and the incidents related to the *Khalnath* Temple demonstrate how religion serves as a central institution for shaping social norms, fostering community cohesion, and reinforcing collective identity within the context of Goan society.

The chanting of *shlokas* and *stavan* reflects the cultural continuity and preservation of religious traditions within the community. These verses have been passed down through generations, serving as a link to the community's past and reinforcing its collective identity. The transmission and recitation of *shlokas* and *stavan* dedicated to *Devi Lairai* play a central role in shaping the religious and cultural fabric of the community. These sacred verses serve as powerful symbols of communal identity, social cohesion, and spiritual guidance, reinforcing the shared values and beliefs that bind the community together across generations. The yearly Jatra festival In Shirgao, a village tucked away in India's cultural tapestry, is a colourful celebration of customs, spirituality, and communal harmony. The celebration, which has its origins in Hinduism, is centered on the worship of *Devi Lairai*, a holy figure who is thought to appreciate offerings of mogra buds. The villagers' deep meaning and significance for the act of offering mogra buds during the festival is an example of the principles of Symbolic Interactionism, as demonstrated by their symbolic devotion to *Devi Lairai*. The villagers' love for the deity and their cultural legacy is represented in the mogra buds, which are emblematic of purity and

devotion. The social stratification that exists in the hamlet, where people's economic livelihoods are directly correlated with their involvement in the flower-selling business, emphasizes the cultural significance of this phenomenon even more. The villagers, who are divided into different social strata according to their income and vocation, work together to source, arrange, and sell mogra buds for the Jatra festival. This labour divide illustrates the interdependence of community members in maintaining festival customs as well as economic inequities. A stronger sense of social cohesiveness and togetherness is there amid the celebrations and business ventures. The people of the hamlet come together to make the flower-selling business and the jatra festival successful, and this brings the village to life. The villagers' strong bonds and sense of belonging are reinforced by this sense of community, which is based on shared values and customs. The stories of the flower sellers, who derive joy and meaning from their contributions to the group celebration

The knowledge, abilities, and customs related to choosing, arranging, and selling flowers have been passed down through the years and constitute a type of cultural capital that influences people's social and economic standing in the community. This cultural capital is essential to maintaining the village's social structures and identities in addition to supporting the flower-selling industry.

The villages' adaptation and resilience are also evident, especially in the face of outside difficulties like the COVID-19 pandemic. The tale of Priya serves as an example of how the peasants can be resourceful and modify their methods of subsistence in response to shifting conditions. Priya manages the pandemic's uncertainty with ingenuity and resourcefulness by providing mogra buds for home delivery, which helps her business thrive and the festival customs endure.

5.1. THE NOTION OF PURITY AND POLLUTION

Sociologist Louis Dumont has given the concept of purity and pollution. Caste hierarchy must be defined and understood in relation to the concepts of impurity and purity. These ideas place Shudras at the bottom of the caste ladder and Brahmins at the top. Brahmins, Kshatriyas, Vaisyas, and Shudras are the four Varna's that make up the Varna System, which is a social stratification. The Shudras held the lowest position on the social hierarchy and were responsible for serving the three Varna's. The upper castes made an effort to preserve the ceremonial chastity. According to Dumont, untouchability and the caste system are connected to cleanliness and contamination. The degree of filth and purity determines the caste order. It is essential to preserving the necessary space between various castes. However, the distance caused by pollution differs between castes and locations. Dipankar Gupta notes that the institution of untouchability is inextricably tied to Dumont's observations regarding purity and defilement. However, the idea of filth and cleanliness is likewise a historical accretion, unlike untouchability. With time, this idea became less relevant to its initial purpose of distinguishing untouchables from others and started to function at various levels of the caste hierarchy. The concept of purity and pollution plays a very crucial role in maintaining the required distance between different castes. But the pollution distance varies from caste to caste and from place to place (Sociology guide, n.d)

Persistent open defecation remains a major public health challenge in rural India despite government efforts to construct toilets over decades. One critical barrier is the rejection of affordable pit latrines, particularly the emptying of pits, as it is considered ritually polluting (Gupta *et al.*, 2019). These beliefs stem from the

centuries-old caste system and notions of purity and pollution deeply rooted in Indian society. The stigma surrounding handling human waste is driven by concepts of untouchability within the caste hierarchy (Coffey *et al.*, 2017).

Devi Lairai's arrival in Shirgao village and the restrictions she imposed, such as prohibition of keeping hens, abstaining from alcohol consumption, banning animal sacrifices, and ensuring cleanliness, that can be related to the notion of purity and pollution. These restrictions are meant to maintain the purity of the village environment and its inhabitants, both spiritually and physically. *Devi Lairai's* conditions align with the idea that certain actions or substances, like alcohol or animal sacrifices, are considered impure or polluting in Hindu culture. By imposing these restrictions, she aims to create a spiritually pure environment in the village. The villagers, by following to these conditions and abstaining from selling eggs in their stores, show their commitment to upholding these purity norms as said by *Devi Lairai* before entering Shirgao.

5.1.1. Ritual and Practices Associated with *Dhonds*

The dietary restrictions observed by the *dhonds* serve as a means of maintaining purity. By abstaining from non-vegetarian food, which is often associated with impurity in Hindu tradition, *dhonds* aim to keep their bodies and minds spiritually clean. This practice aligns with the belief that consuming certain foods can affect one's spiritual state and relation with the divine. The requirement for newcomers to maintain a strict vegetarian diet for five years underscores the importance of prolonged purity as a requirement for deeper spiritual involvement within the society. Cleanliness is supreme in Hinduism as it is believed to promote physical, mental, and spiritual well-being. Before participating in sacred rituals like the fire-walking

ceremony, *dhonds* undergo ritual bathing and maintain strict cleanliness standards. This practice symbolizes the purification of the body and mind, ensuring that participants approach the divine with reverence and respect. Staying away from home and refraining from physical contact with others further emphasizes the need for individual purity before engaging in communal worship. The fire-walking ceremony or “*humkand*,” is a profound demonstration of faith and devotion. The fire symbolizes both destruction and purification, and those who walk through it do so as an act of surrender to the divine spirit. The belief associated with the ceremony, individuals who approach the fire with devotion and calmness are protected from harm, while those who have impure intentions may suffer consequences. By getting burnt from the fire, participants undergo a symbolic purification process, shedding their past mistakes and impurities to emerge spiritually renewed. The *dhond* tradition in Shirgao emphasizes inclusivity, transcending barriers of caste, gender, and region. Regardless of their backgrounds, individuals can become *dhonds*, emphasizing a shared spiritual identity rooted in devotion to the goddess Lairai. This inclusivity reinforces the notion that spiritual purity is accessible to all, irrespective of societal distinctions. The attire and adornments worn by *dhonds* during rituals serve as symbolic representations of purity and devotion. Male *dhonds* typically wear dhotis paired with white vests, while female *dhonds* don navari sarees or dhotis with white T-shirts. Adornments such as garlands of mogra (jasmine) and *chafe* (*Anona Hexapetala*) symbolize purity and are offered to the deity as expressions of reverence. Fasting is a common practice among *dhonds*, undertaken to purify the body and mind in preparation for sacred rituals. The prescribed fasting routine, which may include abstaining from food and water without taking bath, reflects a commitment to spiritual discipline and self-purification. Fasting is believed to cleanse the body of impurities and enhance one’s spiritual connection

with the deity. The steady arrival of new *dhonds*, with over 500 individuals embracing the tradition annually, highlights the enduring nature of the practice. This generational transmission of the Dhond tradition reinforces its significance and relevance in contemporary society. It also underscores the continued adherence to purity norms and rituals among successive generations, ensuring the preservation of sacred traditions over time. The rituals and practices of the *dhonds* hold deep cultural significance, following centuries-old traditions passed down through generations. The fire-walking ceremony, in particular, is rich in symbolism, representing the journey of spiritual transformation and purification. Through participation in these rituals, *dhonds* confirm their commitment to upholding purity norms and honoring the divine presence of the goddess Lairai in their lives.

5.1.2. Chowgules

Chowgules are the first settlers of Shirgao village. They take the bath first in *dhondanchi tali* and then followed by others. They are Gaonkar. They are the ones who go with *Devi Lairai kalash* when the *mod* goes to give *koul* to every house. Chowgules are the first ones who take the *koul* and then it is given to the others.

5.1.3. Dhondanchi Tali

In Shirgao village there are two types of springs one for the *mhar* and the other for the rest of the *dhonds*. The springs and bathing rituals in Shirgao village can be related to the theory of purity and pollution. The requirement for *dhonds* to take a holy bath before participating in sacred rituals, such as the fire-walking ceremony, reflects the importance of physical purity in Hindu tradition. Bathing is seen as a means of cleansing oneself of impurities and preparing the body and mind for spiritual practices. By bathing in the designated springs, *dhonds* purify themselves before

engaging in acts of devotion to *Devi Lairai*. The existence of separate springs for different groups, such as the *mhar* and other *dhonds*, might have been stem from traditional beliefs about purity and pollution associated with different communities or castes. This differentiation ensures that each group maintains its purity according to their respective customs and traditions. It reflects the cultural practices and sensitivities surrounding purity practices within the community. The use of *dhondanchi tali* water to fill the *Devi Lairai kalash* signifies its sanctity and purity. Water from natural springs is often considered pure and imbued with spiritual significance in Hinduism. By utilizing this water for sacred purposes, such as filling the *kalash*, devotees symbolically raise the divine presence and blessings of *Devi Lairai*, reinforcing the concept of spiritual purity.

5.1.4. *Kalash*

The *kalash* holds deep symbolic significance in Hindu rituals and ceremonies. It represents purity, auspiciousness, and the divine presence. *Devi Lairai's kalash* symbolizes her divine energy and blessings. The annual ritual of pouring water from *dhondanchi tali* into the *kalash* is a solemn ceremony that imbues the vessel with divine energy and sanctity. This consecration process signifies the purification and sanctification of the *kalash*, making it a strong symbol of spiritual power and protection. The consecrated water is believed to carry the blessings of *Devi Lairai* and is revered as a source of spiritual purity and strength. During the annual *jatra*, the consecrated water from the *kalash* is distributed to every household in the village. This act symbolizes the sharing of divine blessings and the collective purification of the community. By consuming and sprinkling the blessed water, devotees seek to cleanse their surroundings and safeguard their homes from negative energies. This

ritual reinforces the belief in the protective and purifying powers attributed to *Devi Lairai* and strengthens social bonds within the community. When the *kalash* is brought to each household, involved rituals are performed to honor *Devi Lairai*. This includes decorating the house with auspicious symbols, lighting lamps, and offering fruits and coconut as a token of gratitude and devotion. These rituals not only demonstrate reverence for the deity but also serve to purify the home and invite divine blessings into the household. The presence of the *kalash* and the performance of these rituals create a sacred atmosphere, reinforcing the connection between the divine and the devotees.

It is believed that *Devi Lairai* loves Mogra buds. It is offered to her as it symbolizes purity, freshness, and new beginnings, particularly during the spring season. The association of mogra buds with *Devi Lairai's* worship during the *Jatra* reflects the community's worship for the deity and their desire to offer symbols of purity and auspiciousness. The practice of offering mogra buds to the *dhonds* after their sacred bath in the lake, known as *koul*, illustrates their role in ritual purification and protection. Keeping the mogra buds in their mouths before walking on fire is believed to impart a sense of coolness, enabling the *dhonds* to bear the heat without harm. This ritual use of mogra buds highlights their perceived purifying and protective qualities within the religious context. The burns which they get during the fire-walking ceremony, mogra buds are used for their purported healing properties. Only mogra buds from *Devi Lairai* are believed to effectively soothe and heal the burns, emphasizing their sacredness and association with the deity's divine blessings. This ritual application of mogra buds underscores their role in mitigating physical impurities or harm and restoring spiritual well-being. Beyond their religious significance, mogra buds also hold economic importance during the *Jatra*. The

demand for mogra buds is substantial, with strings and garlands sold at a significant price. This economic activity provides livelihoods for many individuals in the community, highlighting the interconnectedness of religious practices, economic opportunities, and community well-being.

5.1.6. Mogra flower

It is believed that *Devi Lairai* loves Mogra buds. It is offered to her as it symbolizes purity, freshness, and new beginnings, particularly during the spring season. The association of mogra buds with *Devi Lairai*'s worship during the Jatra reflects the community's worship for the deity and their desire to offer symbols of purity and auspiciousness. The practice of offering mogra buds to the *dhonds* after their sacred bath in the lake, known as *koul*, illustrates their role in ritual purification and protection. Keeping the mogra buds in their mouths before walking on fire is believed to impart a sense of coolness, enabling the *dhonds* to bear the heat without harm. This ritual use of mogra buds highlights their perceived purifying and protective qualities within the religious context. The burns which they get during the fire-walking ceremony, mogra buds are used for their purported healing properties. Only mogra buds from *Devi Lairai* are believed to effectively soothe and heal the burns, emphasizing their sacredness and association with the deity's divine blessings. This ritual application of mogra buds underscores their role in mitigating physical impurities or harm and restoring spiritual well-being. Beyond their religious significance, mogra buds also hold economic importance during the Jatra. The demand for mogra buds is substantial, with strings and garlands sold at a significant price. This economic activity provides livelihoods for many individuals in the

community, highlighting the interconnectedness of religious practices, economic opportunities, and community well-being

5.1.7. Comparison between all flower sellers

Lakshmi is specialized in selling flowers, particularly mogra buds, during the Jatra festival. Her focus is on ensuring a plentiful supply of fresh mogra buds for worshippers and visitors. Raju's primary responsibility revolves around providing mogra buds for rituals performed by the *dhonds* during the festival. He ensures a steady supply of fresh mogra buds, sourced from nearby cultivators, to meet the demands of the rituals. He approaches flower selling with humility and dedication, considering it a significant aspect of their livelihood and connection to their faith. Sneha offers a wide variety of flowers throughout the year, including mogra buds, for daily worship and special occasions. She caters to the diverse needs of her customers by providing personalized service and high-quality flowers. Maya is known for her vibrant personality and beautiful flower arrangements; Maya sells flowers near the Temple during festivals and regular days. She takes pride in her work and strives to create visually appealing displays to attract customers. Vijay and Suman this couple operates a joint flower-selling business, with a particular emphasis on providing mogra buds for the Jatra festival. They work together to ensure a consistent supply of fresh mogra buds and other flowers to meet the demands of worshippers. They view flower selling as a sacred duty passed down through generations, emphasizing the importance of providing fresh mogra buds for the festival rituals. Priya adapts her flower-selling business during the COVID-19 pandemic to offer home delivery services for mogra buds and other floral offerings. She demonstrates flexibility and innovation in response to challenging circumstances. Priya demonstrates adaptability

and resilience by modifying her business model during challenging times, ensuring continuity in serving her customers and maintaining her livelihood. It demonstrates flexibility and innovation in response to external circumstances. The women from Assonora, A homemaker deeply connected to her Catholic upbringing, she cultivates and sells mogra buds for the Jatra festival. She views flower selling as a sacred tradition and an integral aspect of her livelihood. Flita Despite facing challenges such as health issues and economic uncertainties, Assonora navigates them with resilience, remaining steadfast in her devotion to her faith and her flower-selling tradition.

They all play an integral role in the community's spiritual and cultural life by providing flowers for worship and rituals, fostering a sense of connection and unity among worshippers and visitors. Flower selling is a primary source of livelihood for all of them. It supports them and their family through their flower selling business. All of them contribute uniquely to the flower selling business near the *Lairai Devi* Temple.

5.1.8 *Mhar*

Mhar is a caste-cluster or group of many endogamous castes, living mostly in Maharashtra state, India, and in adjoining states. They mostly speak Marathi, the official language of Maharashtra. In the early 1980s the *mhar* community was believed to constitute about nine percent of the total population of Maharashtra by far the largest, most widespread, and most important of all the region's officially designated Scheduled Castes (people of the lowest social class, who had been branded "untouchable" before the Constitution of 1949 outlawed discrimination against them).Traditionally, the *mhar* lived on the outskirts of villages and performed a number of duties for the entire village. Their duties included those of village

watchman, messenger, and wall mender, adjudicator of boundary disputes, street sweeper, and remover of carcasses. They also worked as agricultural labourers and held some land, though they were not primarily farmers. In the mid-20th century, the *mhar* began to migrate in large numbers to urban centres (e.g., Mumbai [Bombay], Nagpur, Pune [Poona], and Sholapur), where they were employed as masons, industrial labourers, railway workers, mechanics, and bus and truck drivers. The *mhar* were unified by the eminent 20th-century leader Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar, who urged them to militant political consciousness and to great educational improvement. Before his death in 1956, Ambedkar and hundreds of thousands of his *mhar* followers converted to Buddhism in protest against their Hindu caste status (Britannica, n.d).

In Shirgao *mhar* people are the ones who play the drums. At *mudder* all the new *dhonds* have to be accepted by the *Devi Lairai* for becoming *dhonds*. And they are taken to her Temple to do the rituals. But the *mhar* Dhond or any other *mhar* people are not allowed to enter the Temple. They are kept outside the Temple. Every year all the *dhonds* have to offer rice, coconut and some other things to *Devi Lairai* (*huti*). *Mhars* are not allowed to go inside for that also. Their *huti* is collected in one bamboo basket kept. They are the last ones who walk on fire; they carry the drums with them when they are walking in the fire. After them *Devi Lairai* walks in the fire.

5.2. CONCLUSION

The *Lairai Devi* Temple in Shirgao stands as a testament to the unique blend of architectural styles, incorporating elements from both northern and southern Indian Temple designs. This architectural fusion creates a visually stunning and spiritually uplifting environment for visitors seeking solace and contemplation. Legend has it that *Lairai Devi*, accompanied by her siblings, arrived in Goa from Karnataka and settled in various villages across the region. The transition from *Lairai's* original Temple in *mudder* to the current one in Shirgao is steeped in mythology, with tales of divine intervention and sacred occurrences shaping the narrative.

The annual Shirgao *Jatra* is the highlight of the Temple's calendar, marked by elaborate preparations and vibrant festivities. The rituals, processions, and the *humkand* ceremony, where devotees walk on hot embers as a demonstration of their devotion, all contribute to the grandeur of the event. Central to the Temple's traditions are the *dhonds*, devotees of *Lairai Devi*, who come from diverse backgrounds and undergo rigorous fasting and purification rituals. Becoming a *dhond* is not merely a ritual but a deeply spiritual journey, symbolizing personal faith and dedication to tradition. The distribution of consecrated water from the *kalash* during the Jatra serves as a powerful symbol of community cohesion and collective identity. This act of sharing blessings among all households reinforces the bond between the devotees and the deity, fostering a sense of unity and protection within the community.

The story of *Gaddav bhalle* serves as a cautionary tale, highlighting the consequences of disrespecting the deity's offerings. It underscores the importance of reverence and humility in the face of divine presence, reminding believers of the need

for genuine devotion and respect. The traditions and rituals associated with *Lairai Devi* not only reflect the cultural heritage of the region but also serve as a living testament to the enduring spiritual connection between the deity and her devotees. The narrative portrays the integral role of the Shirgao *Lairai Devi* Temple and the annual *jatra* festival in sustaining the livelihoods of individuals involved in the flower-selling business. The significance of mogra buds in the worship of *Devi Lairai* is highlighted, with devotees offering these flowers as a symbol of purity and devotion. The *jatra* festival, occurring during the months of *Chaitra* and *Vaishakh*, sees a substantial demand for mogra buds, with strings and garlands sold at Rupees 100 per string. This business serves as a crucial source of income for many individuals, supporting them financially and spiritually.

Through these profiles, we see a diverse range of individuals, from Lakshmi, Raju, Neha, Maya, Vijay, Suman, Priya, to Flita, each with their unique experiences and contributions to the flower-selling business near the Temple. Despite facing challenges such as hosting guests, sourcing fresh flowers, adapting to the COVID-19 pandemic, or grappling with health issues, these individuals demonstrate resilience, dedication, and a deep connection to their community and faith.

The narrative method employed in the profiles adds depth and richness to the understanding of the subject matter, allowing readers to empathize with the experiences, perspectives, and emotions of the individuals involved. By humanizing the research through storytelling, the profiles not only shed light on the economic aspects of the flower-selling business but also capture the cultural, social, and spiritual significance of the *jatra* festival in the lives of the people of Shirgaovillage. The narrative emphasizes the interconnectedness of tradition, livelihood, and community, illustrating how the devotion to *Devi Lairai* transcends mere business

transactions, fostering a sense of unity, purpose, and spiritual fulfilment among worshippers and flower sellers alike.

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APPENDIX - I

GLOSSARY

Aboli – Crossandra in fundibuliformis

Agnidivya – Walking on the hot embers

Amavasya – New moon day

Aangvan – Vows

Beth Kathi – A stick which is carried by the fire walkers

Brahmandacho Sopo – A bench

Brahmand Rupi Shwet Vastra – White Cloth

Chafe – Anona Hexapetala

Chandrajyot – A small fire from which the humkand is illuminated

Dhonds – Fire Walkers

Dhondanchi Tali – A spring where dhonds take sacred bath

Gabharyat – Sanctum Sanctorum

Humkand – A Fire Pit

Huti – It have a small cloth piece, rice, coconut, flowers and some fruits

Jatra – Annual festival of Hindu Temples

Kalash – Sacred Pot

Kankanichokoul – Some orange colour flowers are given for their safety

Koul- It is a mogra bud which is given to dhonds

Mandapa – A Hall

Mod – The person carrying sacred pot on his head

Pradakshina – To Encircle

Satva Pariksha – Walking barefoot on hot embers

Shlok – Verses

Shikara – Tower

Shevati – Chrysanthemum multiform

Vasant Rutu – spring season