

# **Gender Dynamics of Dhondanchi Jatra:**

## **Annual Festival of Shirgaon, Goa.**



**Priti Damodar Parab**

Dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the

Degree of Master of Arts in Women's Studies

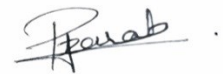
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## **DECLARATION**

I Priti Damodar Parab do hereby declare that the dissertation titled “*Gender Dynamics of Dhondanchi Jatra: Annual Festival of Shirgaon, Goa*” is the outcome of my own study undertaken under the guidance of Ms. Prachi Prabhu, Assistant Professor, Women’s studies, Manohar Parrikar School of Law, Governance and Public Policy, Goa university. This work has not previously formed the basis for the award of any degree, diploma or certificate of this institute or any other institute or University. I have duly acknowledged all the sources used by me in the preparation of my dissertation.



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## **CERTIFICATE**

This to certify that the dissertation titled “*Gender Dynamics of Dhondanchi Jatra: Annual Festival of Shirgaon, Goa*” is the record of the original work done by Priti Parab under my guidance. The results of the research presented in this dissertation have not previously formed the basis for the award of any degree, diploma or certificate of this Institute or any other Institute or University.

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I am extending my heartfelt thanks to my parents. They have given me unequivocal support throughout the dissertation. All of the above, this dissertation would have not been possible without the help, academic support and unsurpassed knowledge of my Research Guide Ms. Prachi Prabhu, Assistant Professor M.A. Women's Studies Manohar Parrikar School of Law, Governance & Public Policy, Goa University.

## **EPIGRAPH**

I would like to dedicate this piece of my research work to all the Dhonds, who have followed this tradition. The Dhonds follow all the restrictions with regards to this Jatra, and on the day of the Jatra walk through the fire. This Jatra has been particularly important to all the devotees of Shri Devi Lairai.

The sacred bonfire is an attraction of this Jatra, and the Dhonds who walk through this fire making vow ask Devi Lairai's blessing. A month long restrictions on food and five days fasting the Dhonds must follow with regards to space, food, menstruation, pregnancy, physical intimacy, death rituals and widowhood are detailed in this study.

My intention is not to hurt any ones religious beliefs or of any community, the findings of this are the personal experiences of the respondents with no intention of hurting any religion and community.

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## **CHAPTER 1**

### **INTRODUCTION**

The state of Goa covers an area of 3,702 sq. km. Goa's population is 14.57 lakhs with 7.4 lakh males and 7.17 lakh females. The sex ratio (number of females per thousand males) in Goa is 960 in 2011. The density of population per sq. km in Goa is 394 in 2011 as compared to 361 in 2001 is a summary of the 2011 census.

Goa, being a state of India, is home to several Hindu temples. Like other Hindu temples in India, these temples are even dedicated to an individual deity. Goan temples are built in the form of traditional buildings giving it a local look. Most of these temples are featured with "Deepmal" or "Deepa Stambha", which is a kind of 2 to 6 storied Lamp Tower. In the case of a few village deities, the water tank existed in almost all temple precincts and they were known as "Deva Talli". (Priolkar July 2014)

Every temple celebrates its annual festival; it may be Jatra, Yatra (palkhi), or Vaddis (birthday). Each temple has one of these celebrations or might have all this. Deities have their vahans (vehicles) including palakis (a round-shaped, covered palaki) and rathas(vehicles) which are used for processions during festivals and at the annual Yatra or Jatra. This Jatra (annual festival) is being celebrated once a year following a particular tithi (date) according to the Hindu calendar. (Mankekar 2004)

#### **1.1 Shirgaon Jatra**

One such Jatra is also being celebrated at Shirgaon to honor Goddess Lairai. There are a couple of folklores about goddess Lairai. It was said that Lairai along with her other six siblings was going for pilgrimage through the Western Ghats and happened to reach the land of Goa.



Lairai is also called saibin by her devotees. She had seven siblings one of them is Devi Kelbai from Mulgaon, Devi Mabai or Mahamaya from Maya, Devi Mirabai who is Our Lady of Miracles from Mapusa, Devi Morjai from Morjim, Devi Mahalsai from Mardol, Devi Adideepa from Colva Beach Island and their brother Dev Khetoba from Vaigainem. Devi Lairai was the youngest among them and wished to stay in Shirgaon, other siblings chose the places of their choice and went and stayed there. (Naik 2012)

Another most believed folklore was that one's Lairai asked Dev Khetoba to get some firewood, he went to get firewood and on his way he saw some children playing he also started to play with them and completely forgot about the firewood, he was so engrossed into playing, on the other hand Lairai and other sister were waiting for Khetoba so he would get the wood and then would start cooking, it was getting darker, as the day was sinking. Lairai was angry and went searching for Khetoba, she found him playing with other children and busted out of anger and kicked him on his waist. Khetoba got hurt, after that Lairai realized, that she should have not kicked him, she realised that they had fought over the firewood and then decided to punish herself by walking through fire along with 500 Dhonds, she took that vow, as after that fight all the siblings went and stayed in different places. The vow that Lairai took was said "Agnidivya" or "Agnitun-chalne" (fire walkin). (Rodrigues 2004)

Another folklore that is associated with this Fire walking is that once there was an attempt by Demons (Danavas) to seduce Lairai but they failed. After which Devi Lairai began to protect the village girls. Enraged by Lairai, Demons set Shirgaon on fire. But in her dream higher force intervened and talked about the fire that will be set by the Demons. Lairai walked over the fire and extinguished it along with her devotees. After which there was this Annual celebration held. This

Jatra is held every year in the month of April or May. (Rodrigues 2004)

This fire walking is being continued till date and every year around 600-700 new Dhonds take part in this Jatra. In this Jatra tons of wood is set making a “Homkand” (bonfire) on which Dhonds (fire walking Devotees) walk through. (Khedekar 2003)

## **1.2 A Dhond**

A Dhond can be anybody of any Caste, Sex, and region. Many become Dhond following their family tradition, one becomes Dhond because they have made a wish or vow with regards to their health, wealth, or job. One can also become a Dhond because they wish just to serve goddess Lairai. They must follow strict rules with regards to food and space. Male Dhonds wear Dhoti and White vest, colorful beth (sticks) in their hands, female Dhonds wear a Navari saree, or some wear a dhoti and white T-shirt, colorful beth in the hand, both female and male Dhonds have mogra (jasmine) and chafa (Anona Hexapetala) garlands around their neck. (Rodrigues 2004) (Naik 2012)

The Dhonds have to stop eating chicken, eggs, alcohol, and also some stop eating fish from the Gudi Padwa (New Year according to the Hindu calendar). Five days before the jatra Dhonds start fasting and staying in a Temple, Pandal or some stay separately from others at home. On the day of jatra Dhonds dress in their attires and go for the jatra at Shirgaon, there at midnight they walk through the fire.

## **1.3 A visit to Shirgaon**

I visited Shirgaon in the month of February on 23 at around 11:00 am. I visited the main temple and met the pujari and the secretary of the temple Shubhash Gaonkar. I asked him a few questions with regards to the Jatra.

I had a look at the main temple and happened to meet my classmate Harshal Gaonkar. He helped me to visit different places in Shirgaon



**Figure 1: The Shirgaon Temple. Photo clicked: Priti Parab on 23<sup>rd</sup> Feb 2021**

This is the main temple of Goddess Lairai, where all the major rituals take place and also the Dhonds dance with their beths in this temple on the beats of the dhol.



**Figure 2: Dhonds Dancing with beths. Source: Saiely Shirvankar**



**Figure 3: Adisthan Muddi photo clicked by Priti Parab**

Then we went to the Adisthan Muddi where the goddess is said to be residing earlier. On the day of the Jatra all the Dhonds visit there, especially new Dhonds who take blessings and are given Koul (mogra bud) which the Dhonds are supposed to keep in their mouth till they cross the sacred fire and then eat it .

Then visited the holy lake that has been used by the Dhonds to bathe themselves on the day of the Jatra. It has two sides, one side for the Dhonds who play dhol during the Jatra and the other side is for the other Dhonds and chowgules. As the Dhonds who play the dhol belonged the Schedule Caste.



**Figure 4: One Side of the lake where Dhonds and chowgules have bath. Photo clicked by Priti Parab on 23<sup>rd</sup> Feb 2021**



**Figure 5: Other side of the lake where the Dhonds who play the Dhols. Photo clicked by Priti Parab on 23<sup>rd</sup> Feb 2021**

At the end of the visit, I went to the temple of Homkhandeshvar (God of the bonfire), and also saw the place where the fire wood for bonfire is been arranged during the time of the jatra.



**Figure 6: Homkhandeshvar Temple Photo clicked by Priti Parab on 23<sup>rd</sup> Feb 2021**



**Figure 7: Place of Homkhand Photo clicked by Priti Parab on 23<sup>rd</sup> Feb 2021**



**Figure 8: The burning Homkhand. Source by Sneha Parwar**

## CHAPTER 2

### LITERATURE REVIEW

#### 2.1 Jatra, temple festival

The article titled Patronage and ‘Community’: The Role of a Tamil ‘Village’ Festival in the Integration of a Town is authored by Geert De Neve. The article Focuses on the festival of ‘village’ goddesses in two small towns in Tamil Nadu, South India, the article tries to find how the urban organization of temples and festivals reflects characteristics of the organization of similar festivals in villages, while at the same time the ‘acts of patronage’ of wealthy local industrialists increasingly shape the nature of the ‘community’ generated at festival and other times. It is argued that the formation of community boundaries cannot be understood outside the context of the wider social and economic relationships and, in this case, the labor relations which lie at the heart of South Indian textile industries. In many South Indian villages, the tutelary deity of the locality is a goddess who is celebrated in an annual festival which brings the various social segments of the village together. The role of these village goddesses and their annual festivals in the creation of a symbolic village unity has been emphasized. (Neve 2000)

In the summary, ‘it is through division of ritual labor that an “organic solidarity”, is generated among the different castes and families within the village, as focused on and organized by the headmen. Moreover, the generation of village unity in temple festivals seems to follow a particular pattern. First, it focuses on a ritual division of labor in which all caste groups fulfill a particular task, usually on a hereditary basis and in a hierarchically complementary way. Second, sponsorship of the festival is often met by collecting money or provisions from the different participating groups (especially castes). Third, each group

enjoys specific 'rights' and 'honors', such as receiving the holy ashes (vibuti) or the right to pull the car of the goddess through the village streets. Finally, the festival is usually presided over by a local chieftain or village headman, whose role and authority is modeled on that of the great king. (Neve 2000)

The article in Orissa Review is authored by Dr. Chitrasen Pasayat, titled "Bali Jatra of Sonapur". Bali Jatra is an annual fair of Sonapur related to Shakti worship. It is celebrated in Hindu month of Aswina (September/October) from Amavasya Tithi or Mahalaya (New moon day) to Purnami Tithi (Full moon day). It continues for 16 days. It is a folk religious festival where various nitis are thoughtfully planned and prescribed for different Tithis (days). On this occasion, Barua represents the deity to whom the people worship. He moves from temple to temple and from place-to-place dancing vigorously with the beating of Dhol, Nisan and Ghant. (Pasayat 2010)

The meaning of Jatra is travelling. Different deities leave their temples during Bali Jatra and make journeys to various places to be worshipped by the people as per the prevailing tradition. This is the reason that this festival is called Jatra. Every year, common people believe it a proud privilege to be linked with this significant traditional event of Sonapur. Nowadays, this yearly Bali Jatra has not only established itself as an accepted folk festival in its native land but also known as one of the appealing and attractive festivals in the neighboring areas including Sambalpur, Bolangir and Boudh. (Pasayat 2010)

Bali Jatra is replete with stories of persons whose work has created and established Bali Jatra as an institution and furthered the growth and popularity of this Jatra. After the Amabasya ritual, Bali Jatra of Pratipada (first day), Dwitiya Tithi (second day) and Trutiya Tithi (third day) is called Nisa-Bali, because it is performed at midnight. Nisha implies mid-night. In these three days, Samaleswari ascends the



body of the Barua and visits the palace to be worshipped and returns thereafter at midnight. At this time, a lot of curd is poured over the head of the Barua, who is found in a state of ecstasy. There is no denying the fact that, today it is simply difficult to organize Bali Jatra in Sonapur without public support and their patronage. Barua is an important character of Bali Jatra in Sonapur. His most impressive feat is perhaps his balancing act. Besides being the hero of Bali Jatra, he is also the mouthpiece of the deity. It is an instrument of social harmony in a bigger and larger society. Bali Jatra creates an environment by facilitating people of all castes and tribes to develop emotional attachment. (Pasayat 2010)

This article titled Travelling through the Night: Living Mothers and Divine Daughters at an Orissan Goddess Festival, authored by Beatrix Hauser. This article highlights nocturnal processions at Thakurani Jatra, a biennial Hindu festival in southern Orissa (India). The festival takes place in honor of goddess Budhi Thakurani and signifies her visit to her natal home, symbolized by transfer of the deity to a temporary shrine. The important ceremonies of this festival take place during night and require participation of women in public processions. While most of their roles are confined to a few selected members of the community, each female devotee might join final the procession of the festival and proceed through streets of the town as a representative of the goddess herself.

Thakurani Jatra is the main religious event in southern Orissa. It is celebrated in honor of Budhi Thakurani, the goddess of Berhampur, the commercial Centre of Ganjam District. Its tradition is linked with the hybrid Oriya and Telugu culture in this region, which resulted from the migration of Telugu weavers from Andhra to the local Mahuri kingdom in the eighteenth century. Their economic success finally led to the rise of Berhampur as a 'silk city' and was attributed to the village goddess of the place. Thus, it is the hereditary headman of the Telugu

weaver community (Oriya: Dera, Telugu: Devangi) who directs the performance of the festival. According to a leg- end {katha) he was so pious and virtuous that he became the adopted father of the goddess. His biennial invitation to Thakurani to visit her 'natal' place is celebrated with great pomp and splendor. In recent years, this festival lasted for about three weeks in April and included not only an elaborate set of rituals, but also entertainment, decorative constructions, and a large fair. It attracted more than a hundred thousand devotees until Thakurani finally returned to her main temple, to her 'in-laws', who belong to the Oriya barber caste. (Hauser 2005)

## **2.2 Article related to “Purity, Impurity,**

The article titled “Purity, Impurity, Untouchability: Then and Now” by A.M. Shah. This article discusses the relation between purity/impurity and untouchability and the decline in both in the modern times. It entails a discussion of division and hierarchy among the Untouchable castes and the line separating them from rest of the society. The Ideas of purity and impurity were present in Hindu society for centuries: in personal as well as public life, in exchange of food and water, in practicing occupations, kinship, marriage, religious norms, belief, and in temples. These ideas played a role in segregating one caste from another, placing them into hierarchical order. (Shah 2007)

## **CHAPTER 3**

### **METHODOLOGY**

#### **3.1 Rationale for study**

The Shirgaonchi Jatra has been an unexplored area of research, though we might find a lot of articles, newspaper content and video content on this Jatra however not many have researched about Dhonds, who are said to be the devotees of goddess Lairai. Much of the folklore about goddess Lairai and her siblings are often narrated among Dhonds, residents of Shirgaon and people who believe in Lairai.

This Jatra is celebrated a month after the Hindu festival of Gudi Padwa. Around 25000-30000 Dhonds and other devotees take part. As a child I Once went for this Jatra with my grandparents and my uncle is a Dhond for almost 27 years. I remember seeing him as Dhond since I was a child. I was so fascinated with everything that seemed so colorful there. The Dhonds wearing different colorful attire participating in large numbers every year is a site to witness.

Now as student of Master in Women's Studies was being introduced to the courses of "Fieldwork Skill and Practices" and "Feminist Research" broadened my perspective on this area. Looking at in the Feminist Research point of view, something that caught my attention was these Dhonds are not just Men, but a considerable number of Women are also part takers in this Jatra. Further I was interested in understanding the Gender Dynamics of these Dhonds.

As a researcher I had the opportunity to look at this area in broader way trying to learn about Female and Male Dhonds, restrictions they have as Dhonds with regards to food, space, menstrual exclusion, caste-based exclusion, and exclusion due to death in the family also

study the significance of the Zatra. The notion of purity and impurity among the Dhonds were major areas of my concern.

With the personal reasons for research to me the beneficial nature of practitioner and reflective educational research, but it is hoped that it too has enhanced my chance of career progression.

### **3.2 Objective of the study**

- To study the significance of Shirgaon Jatra and proceedings before and on the day of jatra.
- To study the social exclusion practices faced by the Dhonds
- To study the gender dynamics among Dhonds

### **3.3 Sample Size**

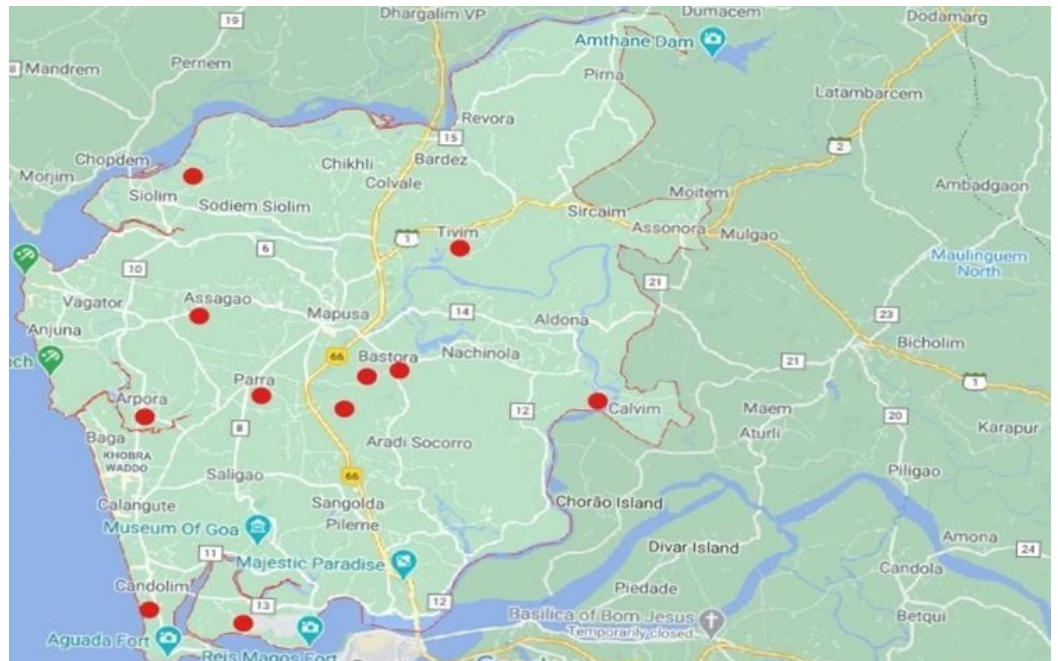
To answer the research questions, it is difficult that researchers should be able to collect data from all people. So, there is a need to select a sample. The whole set of cases from which the researcher's sample is drawn is called the population. Since, researchers neither have time nor the resources to analyze the entire population; they apply sampling techniques to reduce the number of cases.

In my case there is no definite organization that looks at the population size of entire Dhonds, but when I visited the Shirgaon temple the president Mr. Mahadev Gaonkar told me that there are more than 25,000 Dhonds. As a researcher I had a major constraint of resources and time to analyze such a big number.

So, I chose 14 as a sample size. Furthermore, I broke down the sample into two categories as 7 male and 7 Female Dhonds. I also concentrated only on Bardez Taluka of the North District. I visited a few villages of this Taluka.

### **3.4 Sample Area**

The villages included are Arpora, Parra, Bastora, Corjuvem, Paliem, Tivim, Candolim, Siolim, Assoagao, Betim, and Guirim.



**Figure 9; Map of Bardez Taluka. Source (Census 2011)**

This is the map of Bardez Taluka. I have marked the villages where I have conducted the interview.

### **3.5 Methods**

The research has been done after adapting and reading about different analytical techniques to achieve the objective of the research that have been set. The study was conducted in 10 different villages using qualitative aspects that have been taken into consideration for the study. The methodology followed as a questionnaire was made based on in-depth interviews having 19 items seeking in detailed information from the selected sample size.

An interview is an important qualitative research method in which the researcher collects data directly from the participants. Interviews are

significant in unfolding opinions, experiences, values, and various other aspects of the sample under study.

To be specific the In-depth interviewing is a qualitative research technique that involves conducting intensive individual interviews with a small number of respondents to explore their perspectives on a particular idea, program, or situation. In this study also in-depth interviews had its significance as in-depth interviews are used to explore concepts for further investigation and descriptive analysis. As an Interviewer, I need to develop a relation with the respondent to achieve a complete understanding of my perspective to achieve through this research tool.

As a student researcher I had a lot of constraints so while choosing the same sample size firstly I had to clearly define my target sample, choose my sample size, and then choose the sampling technique. (Anita Acharya 2014)

Sampling is broadly classified into two categories: Probability and Non-Probability sampling or Random sampling. Probability sampling means that every item in the population has an equal chance of being included in the sample. Non-probability sampling is often attached with case study research design and qualitative research. They include the most used convenience, purposive sampling, quota sampling and snowball sampling. (Taherdoost 2020)

I particularly have done my research using convenience sampling and snowball sampling. Convenience sampling is selecting participants because they are often readily and easily available. This is the most used sampling method. The sample is chosen based on the convenience of the investigator. Often the respondents are selected because they are at the right place at the right time.

Typically, convenience sampling tends to be a favored sampling technique among students as it is inexpensive, and an easy option compared to other sampling techniques.

Snow-ball sampling in this sampling process the initial respondents are chosen by probability or non-probability methods and then, additional respondents are obtained by information provided by the initial respondents.

This method uses a person to help encourage other people to take part in the study, thereby increasing sample size. This approach is most applicable in small populations that are difficult to access due to their closed nature.

### **3.6 Limitations**

- There are more than 25000 thousand Dhonds in Goa

Every year 600-700 new Dhonds take part in the Jatra and are spread all over Goa. The scattered location of the Dhonds made it difficult to go interview such a huge number.

- The unviability of a formal structure

There is no formal system that keeps the record of Dhonds; the temple committee does not have any form of written registration of these Dhonds, so it is nearly impossible to get the exact number of the Dhonds and their details to get in touch with them.

- Due to rising covid-19 cases the sample size got limited.

Since 2020 we are battling with COVID-19 and to prevent its spread social distancing is a must. Due to the rising number of cases, meeting each other was not possible, so without my choice I had to restrict myself from taking interviews and meeting other Dhonds due to corona.

- Some respondents did not give interviews as they said they are not supposed to take goddess Lairai's name, they only can talk about the goddess 5 days before, when they are following the fast. As they believe that if they take the goddess Lairai's name before that as if they are committing a sin.



## CHAPTER 4

### **Content Analysis of News Articles**

Shirgaonchi Jatra is a huge event in Goa but less explored as a research area, so I was not able to find academic books, book sections, Journal Articles, or Periodical Articles. Those which were available were mostly written in Konkani or Marathi. So, I went through five Newspaper articles. An article dated 14 April 2017 was printed in the Local Newspaper "The Navhind Times" with the headline "Shirgaon Lairai Jatra Tomorrow". The newspaper article articulates the preparations for Shirgaon Jatra; it also states that this Jatra is popularly known as Dhondanchi Jatra or Homkhanachi Jatra. Thousands of people go to Shirgaon to witness the walking of Dhonds through the fire.

The article also describes the proceeding of Jatra, the celebration starts with the invocation of Lord Ganesha on Chitra Amavasya. One day before the Jatra in the afternoon after taking the blessing of goddess Lairai, People proceed to Muddi on the boundary of Shirgaon Village and clean it, Muddi is Adisthan (place of earlier residence) of Lairai. On the day of Jatra (vaisha Shudha Panchami) in the early morning, the Pandit brings out the Kalash (sacred pot) and distributes the tirth (holy water) from the sacred pot to the villagers.

The golden idol of goddess Lairai, is kept at Pandit Joshi is taken by the Chowgules (People from Shirgaon having an authoritative position in the procession of the Jatra) in peth (box) the idol is brought to the temple and then the idol is taken out that the peth and is placed in the paatlo (a basket made from bamboo) then the idol has been covered with cloth.

After which the idol is taken to the temple on Muddi by the Pujari, Chowgules, musicians, Dhonds, some villagers and devotees. New

Dhonds take the blessing at Muddi temple from around 2:00 pm to 8:00 pm. After the blessing program the idol is taken back to the main temple, the chowgules and the Pujari then go to the Sateri temple to offer raw food to Aaba Brahman (is said to be the first Brahman), So he does not create any problems during the celebration.

After returning to the temple other rituals take place, after which the kalash is decorated with patkoli and kudo flowers. The Chowgule brings the Kalash to the mandap (courtyard) and the kalash is taken by the Pujari on his head, and he makes his walk to Vadakade (near a banyan tree where the bonfire takes place.) and lights the homkhand (Bonfire). The goddess walks forward from there to the Dhonachi Talli (tank). Thousands of Dhonds from 2:00 am to 5:30 am go to the talli, have a bath, take blessing from the goddess and walk barefoot through the sacred fire. If any Dhond gets hurt from that fire he seeks blessing from the goddess and is said to be cured after a few days. In the end after all the Dhonds have finished walking through the fire goddess Lairai walks through it. After which there starts the Koul utsav. (Navhind Times News Network 2017)

An article dated 21 April 2018 appeared on Navhind Times with the headline “Lairai Jatrotsav Today”. The article says that it is the popular Jatra celebrated in Bicholim Taluka. According to the article walking barefoot on the Agnidivya (amber) by the thousands of Dhonds is a feature of the Jatra; various rituals are performed at the temple and at the Adisthan (Muddi temple) of the deity. Police forces are also on duty in Shirgaon during the Jatra so there is no law-and-order situation. More than 10,000 Dhonds walk through the Agnidivya (sacred fire) at midnight after having a bath at the sacred lake. They walk on the fire barefoot wearing colorful and special attire; they chant “Shri Lairai Mata ki Jai, Har Har Mahadev”. The jatrotsav concludes with koul utsav. (Navhind Times News Network 2018)

Article dated 09 May 2019 appeared on Marathi local Newspaper “Lokmat” with the headline “Jatrotsav of Lairai Devi from today in Shirgaon”. The article talks about the fair of Shri Lairai Devi at Shirgaon, a place of worship for millions of devotees, starts from Thursday 9<sup>th</sup> May 2019. In the next five days, there will be a flood of devotees at this place.

Thousands of Vratastha (fasting) Dhonds have been prepared for the morning fire and the Shirgaon area has been decorated for this festival. Shirgaon Panchayat's focus is on plastic-free festival and Sarpanch Sadanand Gavkar has asked to focus on discipline and cleanliness. The Devasthan Samiti and the administration have decided to ensure that the festival is celebrated properly so that the devotees are not disturbed. The planning has been done under the guidance of Bicholim Mamlatdar Praveenjai Pandit. Devasthan president Mahadev Gaonkar has requested the devotees as well as Vratastha Dhonds to cooperate.

There is a happy atmosphere everywhere for the Shirgaon fair. The Dhonds from different villages, who have been fasting for five days, will cross the Agnidivya (sacred fire) at midnight after taking a holy bath in the pond on Thursday. Sweet shops and other shops are set up for the fair, for about three kilometers. After the fire on Thursday, the Kaul festival of the Goddess will start on Friday. Millions of devotees visit the Kaul festival for four days. Goa, Maharashtra, Karnataka, and many others from other parts of the country participate in this festival. For the next five days of the festival, the smell of Mogara buds and flowers is lingering and millions of rupees are spent on Mogara buds.

One or two months before the fairs, the congregation works hard and raises money for the special fair by selling cashews. Bhikaji Arolkar and Rajan Parsekar informed that this fair is a lifeline for these people. There is a big turnover in the market due to the fair. Dhonds also shop

along with the other devotees, as a result, various household items, sweets, clothes and other items are traded for crores of rupees.

The special attraction of the fair is the magnificent Homkhand (bonfire). Preparations for this Homkhand have been completed and devotees have brought a large amount of wood to the Homkhand site. Devotees pay homage to Homkhand by carrying a load of wood on their head. This magnificent Homkhand was completed on Wednesday night. The Dhonds need all the materials beforehand and they buy new clothes, slippers, mats, and other items. (Lokmat News Network 2019)

On 24 April 2020, an article was printed on Local Marathi newspaper “Lokmat”, with the headline that says “Lairai Dhond will have to fast from today at home”. The article also says that the Dhonds will fast for five days from Tuesday for the Shri Lairai Devi Jatra celebrations in Shirgaon, the largest fair in Goa, a place of worship for millions of devotees. Dhonds will stay at home and fast as the state has imposed lockdown, fasting and staying together is not allowed.

One should cleanse themselves while fasting by bathing again and again. Therefore, devotees stay in groups somewhere far from home and observe the necessary chastity. But this year, there is an unprecedented break in this tradition. Shri Lairai Devi's Chowgule's fast has started, and they have also started fasting by following all the rules, informed President Mahadev Gaonkar. Mogara buds are sold for lakhs of rupees and sweets and other shops are set up but this year will not be sold because of rising COVID-19 cases.

Due to the curfew this year, devotees will not be able to perform their vow in groups. A devotee of Goddess Lairai, Navnath Naik said that they will fast from their homes as they will not be able to take darshan. This year, Gomantakiya devotees will fast for five or three days and serve the Goddess wherever they are. Meanwhile, devotees will stay at home and worship the Goddess when there will be no celebration of

the Goddess due to curfew this year. One should not come to the temple, and one should fast at home without fasting in groups. Mahadev Gaonkar, president of Lairai Sanstha and the committee have requested to cooperate fully with the administration. (Lokmat News Networks 2020)

An article printed on Lokmat Newspaper recently on 27 April 2021 with the headline “Shirgaon Larai Jatrotsav is also limited this year”.

The article says that Due to the increasing number of corona cases, the festival of Lairai in Shirgaon, a place of worship for millions of devotees, should be celebrated in a limited manner and religious ceremonies should be performed. Devotees will not be able to crowd such an order was given by Bicholim’s officer Praveenjai Pandit in a meeting of temple committee and government officials held on Monday. Praveenjai Pandit said that the temple committee has instructed all devotees with the information regarding the application of section 144 due to corona. He has also warned that outsiders will not be allowed to enter Shirgaon from May 12 to 17 due to the Jatra festival.

Thousands of devotees come for the festival for five days, so outsiders will have limited access to Shirgaon. He also instructed the traffic police and other government officials to make all arrangements in this regard. The festival was cancelled due to Corona last year, devotees will not be able to participate in the festival again this year due to the cases of the corona. In this meeting, the office bearers of the committee of Lairai temple Sarpanch as well as Police, transport department officials were present. (Lokmat News Network 2021)

While analyzing the newspaper articles from 2017 to 2021, the articles have been speaking only about the rituals that will happen during the Jatra. The article in 2017 gives a detailed description of the proceedings of the jatra. It also talks about the homkhand and the

Dhonds in general in this article the gender aspect about the female Dhonds is majorly missing.

Also, the article that appeared in 2018 on Navhind Times talks about the jatra which is popular in Bicholim taluka. It talks about the bonfire and Dhonds walking through the bonfire; it gives an approximate figure of the Dhonds that walk through the fire.

The article that appeared in 2019 on the Lokmat newspaper talks about how the thousands of Dhonds fast during the five days before the Jatra it also talks about how the village institutions like the sarpanch and the temple committee focus on the discipline and cleanliness of the area. It highlights the business fair that is carried out during the festival.

The article dated 24 April 2020; it talks about how that year we must celebrate at home due to the COVID 19 pandemic. Also, the article that appeared in 2021 speaks about the rising pandemic and how the celebration has been cancelled due to which many local businesses will suffer. The trend in all the articles shows that it completely neglects the gender aspect as none of the articles speak about the female Dhond, or there are no words like female, women or any Marathi word that is used for females.

According to my understanding the reason for not talking about the female Dhonds may be because they are small in number or may be because, no one thought about gender aspect related to Dhonds. I have gone through articles from 2017 to 2021, articles about this Jatra appears every year may be because, its considered to be one of the most popular and the Dhonds are from different parts of Goa, so that they are aware about the jatra through the newspaper.

Most of the articles talk about mogra flowers, as they are sold during this jatra. Mogra flower is an offering made to goddess Lairai, so

maybe it is being sold by many of the local as well as vendors from other villages of Goa, because I have witnessed temple festivals in my village too, and the vendor's selling flowers are from different villages. The number of flowers used during this Jatra cannot be counted as there are more than 30000 Dhonds who offer these flowers to the goddess.

## CHAPTER 5

### **Gender Analysis of Dhonds and Shirgaonchi Jatra**

These respondents are Dhonds, who have been participating in the jatra from many years. They belong to different caste and are of different age, sex and are being Dhonds from many years. The common thread among them is that they are Dhonds, devotees of goddess Lairai and are residents of Bardez Taluka.

According to all my fourteen respondents the preparation of the jatra starts one month prior, from the Gudi Padwa (Hindu New Year) as the Dhonds must stop eating chicken, eggs, and the consumption of alcohol is also stopped. Some Dhonds don't even eat fish and remain complete vegetarian. Five days before the jatra the Dhonds stay in the Temple, pandal or stay separately at home. On the day of the jatra all the Dhonds cannot have food like rice-dal or chapatti- veggies; they have to fast by just eating fruits.

The female Dhonds wear a Navari saree, take beth and tie colourful cloth to their waist or some wear a dhoti and white T-shirt, colorful beth in the hand. Male Dhonds wear Dhoti and White vest, colorful beth (sticks) in their hands, and both female and male Dhonds have mogra (jasmine) garlands around their neck.

According to all 14 respondents, walking through the sacred fire gives them immense happiness. It is like their fast has been successful after crossing the homkhand. They said it is like a miracle that around 25000 Dhonds walk through the Agnidivya, but very few get boils or hurt on their foots but all them successfully walk through the fire. It also shows the faith that the Dhonds have in the goddess.

I have written down 4 in-depth interviews of two male Dhonds and two female Dhonds. The interviews are of Dhonds from the Bardez Taluka



but they are residents of different villages. Also they are from different age group and their experience is also different.

### **5.1 Case Narrative 1**

I am Sundar Banulikar aged 67 from Candolim village. I have been a Dhond since the age of 15. As the Dhond the proceeding of Jatra for us begin a month before the Jatra that is from the Gudi pawda which is said to the Hindu New year, from that day all Dhonds do not have Chicken and egg some don't even have Fish and decide to remain vegetarian for a month, but in case of someone who is a Dhond for the first time has to remain complete vegetarian for the next consecutive five years. Five days before the Jatra all the Dhonds must stay away from their house to maintain complete cleanliness, but some remain at house but don't touch anybody, if at all they happen to touch someone even if they are Dhonds they have to have bath again.

On the eve of the Jatra they all have some fruits while their wet, get dressed where the men Dhond wear a dhoti and white vest, with colorful cloth tied on the waist, holding a beth (staffs) in their hand and putting Mogra garlands around the neck and unmarried girls also dress similarly, married women wear a Navari saree. They go to their respective houses and take blessings from the elders in the house; the other family members give the Dhonds some money to buy Mogra flowers to offer goddess Lairai.

After which the Dhond Say a Shlokh "Bola Pundalik varde Hari Vithal, Parvati Pate har har Mahadev, Satikant Smaranam jai jai Ram, Shree Gurudev Datta,, Shree Lairai Mata ki Jai", and leave from their homes to Shirgaon and there we go and take a bath in the pond in the pond water then go to the Shirgaon temple and Dance on the beat of the Drums. The Main Pujari takes the Goddess Lairai's golden idol on his head and goes to the Adisthan Muddi, where the new Dhond are

taken and a garane (Special prayer) is said and the Dhond is given mogra flowers as Prasad.

Some Dhonds who stay together from one of them go to the Adasthan the temple on Muddi and get Mogra Flowers and give them each one of us, we have to take one mogra flower and keep it in the mouth until we run through the fire. Then we go around the village barefoot, then around midnight all the Dhonds walk through the fire. At last Goddess Lairai walks through the fire along the Chowgule (these are the Goankars of Shirgaon village). After that the Dhonds eat the mogra flower that is in their mouth.

According to me Jatra is very important to me as Dhond I am able to serve Lairai. That one-month diet is also beneficial and keeps me healthy. Devi Lairai has always helped me in my tough times and fulfilled my wishes.

To be a Dhond there is nothing specific, one can be Dhond out of choice, one can follow the legacy of family, and one can be Dhond because of the vow they have taken. I became a Dhond out of my choice, I saw my father was Dhond and then I also became one along with my father. When one becomes a Dhond for the first time they remain completely vegetarian for one month and they have to stay in a Temple or Pandal for five days before Jatra.

I became a Dhond at the age of 15, now I am 67 years old so it's been almost 52 years that I have been a Dhond. There is no enrollment process, I remembered at my time I just took a vow that I will be a Dhond and remained vegetarian after Gudi Padwa, followed by five days of fasting. During these five days one has to follow strict rules and maintain purity of one's own self, should not touch anything or anyone, before having food or even if drinking water one has to bathe themselves and eat or drink.

While eating we have to see that we don't even touch the ground. We have to use a little cow dung and cow's urine to purify ourselves and also the place where we stay. On the day of the Jatra as a new Dhonds have to go to the Adisthan Muddi, evoke Lairai's blessing. They give Mogra buds, one of them is to be kept in the mouth and after walking through the fire we have to eat that.

I became a Dhond out of my choice one can be Dhond out of choice, one can be Dhond because they had asked for wish that was completed, one can be Dhond because their father was Dhond this is mostly the case for sons, daughter don't follow this tradition, but however it's not necessary for the son to become a Dhond if they don't wish to, they have to take the beth (staff) put it in the homkhand (bonfire) in the morning on the day of the Jatra. Then that beth is burnt in the homkhand.

One from the Gudi Padwa all the Dhonds stop eating chicken and egg, some also don't eat fish. Consumption of alcohol is also stopped. Just five days before the Jatra they eat complete veg food; some don't have onion, ginger, garlic, or potatoes. The food should be a very simple diet with some fruits. Five days before the Jatra, we all are supposed to stay in a temple or a Pandal, often have to take bath before everything we eat, as soon as we touch someone we have to take bath again.

Our movement is restricted, if at all we move out of the temple or pandal we have to take bath. Outside the temple we are often supposed to wear new footwear. Also we should wear new clothes. Five days before the Jatra we cannot ever touch our spouse so that means physical intimacy is not allowed at all.

I used to walk through the fire every year until this pandemic. It is not compulsory for all the Dhonds to walk through the fire, due to some health issues one cannot walk through fire, but if you want to walk

through the fire one has to become a Dhond. I lost my wife five years ago I still can be a Dhond.

There is no such rule with regards to widowhood. Once during the Jatra my wife had got her menstrual cycle so I was not able to attend the Jatra, I wore the clothes that Dhonds are supposed to wear, but I could not offer Lairai the flowers, enter the temple and also could not walk through the fire that year. Also if any Dhond's wife is pregnant or delivered a baby he can attend the Jatra but cannot walk through the fire for that particular year because it is considered impure.

With regards to marriage if a Dhond marries outside the caste they still can be Dhonds. There is no such restriction for caste. Schedule castes Dhonds do not stay with the Dhonds from other castes, the Schedule caste put a different pandal and stay with their own community in their particular ward. However during the day of the Jatra we all wear the same attire so we don't even know each other's caste there and walk through the same fire. For so many years I have been a part of this Jatra. People from the Bhandari samaj (other backward caste) are Dhond in majority.

For the male Dhonds if they marry outside the religion they can still be Dhonds after the Shudhikar (purification) but for female Dhonds if they marry outside it depends on them if they want to continue with being a Dhond many often don't follow the tradition and their maternal families just burn the beth in the homkhand. Even if there was death in the family, we cannot walk through the fire for a year, but we can attend the Jatra.

## **5.2 Case Narrative 2**

My name is Rajan Mandrekar, aged 34 and I am a resident of Guirim. I have been a Dhond since 2000, for almost 21 years also my wife is a Dhond. The proceeding of Jatra starts from Gudi Padwa from this day

we have to start with eating veg food for a month till the next Amavasya. Actually we are not supposed to have eaten fish, but some Dhonds have fish after five years of being Dhond. According to me, that is not right. The consumption of alcohol, eggs, chicken, and fish is not allowed.

According to me the importance of Jatra is I am able to serve the goddess Lairai being her devotee. Being a Dhond keeps us in good health. Some also take a vow to become a Dhond, and ask Lairai to keep them in better health or fulfill his wish, or also ask Lairai to bless them in their work and education.

My mother also took a vow of making me Dhond because I was not well when I was child, I would frequently remain ill. I didn't become a Dhond for a couple of years, but then my mom asked me to and I had to become a Dhond. After which my health is in a good condition. Lairai has always blessed her devotees and fulfilled their wishes.

Some became Dhond because they had taken a vow. Some become Dhonds out of excitement of being a Dhond, which according to me is wrong. During this time from Gudi Padwa one who becomes a Dhond should not have bad thoughts and their deeds should be appropriate, like some Dhonds Play Cards or for that matter even uttering a bad word is not right during those five days before Jatra the Dhonds have stay in a temple or set up pandal and have to have food after bathing, even if they touch any one may it be Dhond also they have bath again while they are wet. Some become Dhond out of choice and their willingness to serve Lairai. Some become Dhond for leading a healthy life. Some become Dhonds following the father's legacy. Others become a Dhond because they have taken vow.

There is no formal structure as such for enrollment, so as new Dhond we just have to keep the fast for five days and from Gudi padwa we have to remain completely vegetarian. On the day of the Jatra the new

Dhonds have to compulsorily go to the temple at Muddi to take the blessing and mogra buds are given as Prasad.

I have been a Dhond since the year 2000 for almost 21 years. My father was not Dhond, and it is also not compulsory for my son to follow it after my death, if my son doesn't want to be a Dhond after me, he can surrender the beth in the homkhand. With regards to daughters following the tradition I am unaware about this. But it is not compulsory for a son to follow the tradition.

We have to follow vegetarian diet before the five days of the Jatra. We also have to cook our own food where we stay, while cooking we have to remain wet and cook the food, use of onion is not allowed. The food is often cooked only by the Dhonds for that five days fast, if at all non Dhond want to help us they also have to bathe themselves and remain wet while cooking. So the cooking is mostly done by the Dhonds and also the number of female Dhonds is very less, there are mostly one or two female Dhonds who stay with us. So the food is prepared by all the Dhonds. The work load is distributed among all.

We are not supposed to move outside the pandal or temple without new footwear. We are supposed to keep our bodies clean so we have to bathe frequently. Touching each other is also not allowed. We have to take a bath, remain wet and have food for those five days. Some don't have physical intimacy with their partners from Gudi Padwa or some don't have contact just before the five days of the Jatra.

It's not compulsory for all the Dhonds to walk through the fire. Sometimes if there is death in the family or wife is having her menstrual cycle or Pregnant, or if has delivered a baby, or also due to a medical condition. We cannot or are not allowed to walk through the fire. After the death of the wife or husband, we are not allowed to attend the Jatra for a year, but after a year we can participate in and also walk through the fire

My wife is pregnant this year. I will be able to go for the Jatra but will not be able to walk through the fire, if at all the Jatra would have been celebrated. Also I had observed the fast even when we have not had a celebration from last two year.

Even if the wife's menstrual cycle is during the five days before the Jatra or on the day of the Jatra, we can stay with the other Dhonds but have to maintain distance from them, and we are not supposed to cook food during that time. On the day of the Jatra we can attend the Jatra but are not allowed to walk through the homkhand. Similarly with regards the delivery of the baby, if the wife of any Dhond delivers a female baby 3 months before Jatra, the Dhond can participate in the Jatra. If male child is born 6 month before the Jatra then the Dhond can participate and walk through the fire.

There are more than 30000 Dhonds and it is not possible to know which caste they belong to. If any Dhond marries outside the caste they can still be Dhond. With regards to inter-religious marriage the male Dhonds are allowed to be Dhonds and female Dhonds are not allowed to take part. Any death in close family then the Dhond's are not allowed walking through the bonfire for almost a year but they can go for the Jatra. Jatra concludes with the Koul utsav.

### **5.3 Case Narrative 3**

I am Neha Parwar and I have been a Dhond for 7 years. I belong to scheduled caste and my father, brother and uncle have been Dhonds for many years now. I stay in Podwal, so all the Dhonds from my community we all stay together by building a pandal. There is no other Dhond from other community who stays with us.

The proceedings of Jatra start from Gudi Padwa which is the New Year according to the Hindu calendar. From this day onwards all the Dhonds have to stop eating chicken eggs those who were new Dhonds also

remain complete vegetarian throughout Jatra till the koul Utsav. The celebration of the jatra starts with the invocation of Lord Ganesha on chitra amavasya. On the day of Jatra which is vaisha Shudha Panchami, in the morning the panditji brings the sacred pot and distribute the holy water to the villagers which is in the pot. On this day all the Dhonds Do not have rice, that day they just have fruits and some sweet dish. They have to dress up wearing the different attire of a Dhond. Take the blessings of the elders in the family and make a move towards Shirgaon, where they first have to have bath in the holy pond and then move towards Adisthan Muddi. Where the Dhonds are given a mogra buds which we are supposed to keep in our mouth till the time we don't cross the sacred bonfire.

After that we move to the main temple of goddess Lairai where the Dhonds dance with their beths on the beats of the dhols. After that at around 12:00 we move towards the bonfire and all the Dhonds walk through the homkhand.

I had a serious leg injury when I was in 10<sup>th</sup> standard so my uncle prayed to Lairai for my recovery; he said that if I recover and get well soon then he will make me a Dhond. I recovered as soon as I asked for the blessing from the goddess. I became a Dhond from the next year onwards. So for me the goddess has saved my life, so the Jatra is very important for the Dhonds like me.

Anybody can be Dhond, but now they are making different rules. If a girl wishes to become a Dhond she should be a Dhond before she gets her menstrual cycle. Some become Dhond because Devi fulfilled their wishes. Some become Dhonds out of choice. I remember when I first became Dhond I had to remain completely veg for a month and then remain in the pandal with other Dhonds for five days following the fast. On the day of the Jatra I was given new beth and new clothes and then I was taken to the Muddi temple where the Chowgules made a



prayer asking for Lairai's blessing on me. I was given mogra buds as prasad.

I became Dhonds when I was in 11<sup>th</sup> standard and now I am 23 years old, this is the 7<sup>th</sup> year that I have been a Dhond. It's not necessary for sons to follow their father and be Dhond like now my brother is already a Dhond even when my father is alive. It's up to the son whether he wants to continue, but if doesn't wish to then he can has to burn the beth in fire on the day of the Jatra. Daughters however don't follow it after their father's death.

For one month and five days of fast, food which we have is very simple food with no onion, garlic, ginger; even the utensils should not be used for any other event. These utensils are only to be used during the Jatra. We are not allowed to go to work during the five days before the Jatra.

During the five days of fast and stay in a pandal there are no proper bathrooms for me and some other female Dhonds who stay with me. There is a small temporary bathroom set up for us, as we are not staying in a house we don't even have a room to change our clothes, we surround ourselves with clothes that are then changed. Also going out is not allowed as the elders say that we have to remain pure during this time.

It is not compulsory for all the Dhonds to walk through the fire during their family problems or due to health and old age many Dhonds don't walk through the fire. The number of female Dhonds is much lesser than the male Dhonds. Both a widowed male and female who are Dhonds can participate in the Jatra and also walk through the fire, but after one year of their partner's death.

If my menstrual cycle date is around the Jatra or is during the five days before the fast, I often use some home remedies to get my

menstruation early and if it cannot be pre-pounded then, I take tablets to postpone my menstrual cycle. Even if we get menstruation during those five days or on the day of the Jatra we observe the fast at home but remain completely separate and have to take bath and remain wet while having food. With regard to pregnancy I am not aware if they have to observe the fast but they cannot attend the Jatra. In case of delivery if the female child is born then the mother who is a Dhond cannot attend or take part before the newborn is three month, and in case of male child it should be six months.

There is no formal structure during the Jatra that looks at the Dhonds, who they are, where they are from, which community they belong to cannot be understood because during the time of the Jatra everyone is dressed similarly. So the caste of them is unknown, except the Dhonds who play the dhols they belong to the schedule caste community and the chowgules who are the main at Jatra are the Goankar from Shirgaon.

As Dhonds can be from any caste, so if the Dhonds marry inter-caste can still participate in the Jatra. With regards to Dhonds who have had inter religion marriages I am not aware.

If there is a death in the family, the female Dhonds who have lost their husband cannot even attend the Jatra for a year after her husband's death. But if a male Dhond loses his wife he can go for Jatra but cannot walk through the fire. Other Dhonds who lost their fathers or mothers can still attend the Jatra but cannot walk through the bonfire.

#### **5.4 Case Narrative 4**

My name is Aarti Pal, I am 60 years old and I am a resident of Arpora. I lost my husband ten years back and I have been Dhond for 34 years. I actually became a Dhond when I got married.

My husband was a Dhond and my elder son is also a Dhond. Usually widow women are not allowed in any ceremonies or celebrations. But for Shirgaon Jatra, widow Dhonds are allowed to take part.

The proceeding of Jatra starts from the Gudi Padwa. We are supposed to remain vegetarian from Gudi Padwa till the koul utsav. I use separate utensils from Gudi Padwa, and then five days before the Jatra we stay at the temple for the five day Vrath (fast). On the day of the Jatra we are not supposed to have food grains but have to eat only fruits and then we go to Shirgaon. Visit the main temple and then the temple at Muddi. Then at midnight we all have to walk through the fire.

Goddess Lairai has always helped me and saved me from the problems and Jatra is the time where I can serve my Saibin. She gives me strength and power and has been my guiding Spirit.

According to me anybody who wishes to serve the goddess can willingly become a Dhond. One wish to be a Dhond has invoked Devi's blessing and remains vegetarian from Gudi Padwa. And on the day of the jatra the new door has to go to the Muddi temple and invoke goddesses' blessing by praying and is give koul (mogra).

I have been a Dhond for 34 years, as a child I grew up watching my maternal family serving Devi Lairai, but then I never had the thought of becoming a Dhond. When I got married I saw my husband as a Dhond so I told my husband that I also wish to become a Dhond my husband immediately agreed. Looking at us our elder son also became a Dhond. I always wanted my younger son to become one but he never wished or showed any interest so we couldn't force him.

Ten years back when I lost my husband I thought my younger son would take up his father's Beth in the hand but he didn't so we had to burn my husband's Beth in the homkhand. It's not necessary for a son to follow the tradition after the father's death, but in case of a daughter they can't follow it even if they want to follow.

The food which we have during the five days of the fast, doesn't have salt, much oil, ginger, garlic, potatoes and onions are not supposed to be in the diet. Utensils should be separate.

Some stay in the temples, some stay in a pandal, others might stay in their homes. But they have follow properly should not touch anyone if they did then they are supposed to have bath again, if they decide to stay home then they should see that no menstruating women's voice or shadow falls on them, if something like this happens there are chances of them getting boils on their foot while walking through the homkhand.

We have to wear new footwear, because if our feet touch some dirt or even someone's saliva then, we might get boils as that is impure. We have baths while we are having food or even for drinking water. We cleanse ourselves when we go for urination and we pass our stools.

We are not supposed to have physical contact with our partners those five days before the Jatra even if the couple is Dhond. If there are some health issues or due to some problem like, pregnancy and delivery of the baby, many Dhonds don't walk through the bonfire.

As I am a widow myself, for one year after my husband's death I didn't attend the Jatra but after that I have always been attending the Jatra and also walking through the fire. Although there are much fewer women compared to men who become Dhonds, the young girls are now being part of this Jatra by becoming Dhonds. I remembered once during the time of the Jatra I had got my menstrual cycle so I was asked to remain completely out of my husband's sight, but had to follow the fast.

During the pregnancy if that woman is Dhond she cannot attend the Jatra. If the husband is also a Dhond he can observe the fast, stay with the other Dhonds and can also attend the Jatra but cannot walk through the fire; the wife and husband are considered impure during this time.

After delivery of male child, female Dhond becomes ritually clean after 6 month and when a female child is born the mother becomes

ritually clean after 3 month. Also the husband has to follow this if he is Dhond

It's impossible to find the caste of the Dhonds because they are all from different parts of Goa.

With regards to inter-caste marriage of Dhonds they can still take part in the Jatra. If inter- religious marriage the women Dhond are not allowed to continue as they are considered converted.

When there is a death in the family then they are allowed to attend the Jatra but cannot walk through the fire. But if a woman lost her husband or son she is not supposed to attend the Jatra even as she is in Sorrow

## **5.5 Discussion**

I interviewed 7 male and 7 female Dhonds all of different age and different experience years of being a Dhond. The men I interviewed said they also have to follow certain rules like not walking through when their wife is pregnant, or when their mensuration, or when they have delivered or some death in family. During this time men can attend the jatra but cannot walk through the fire. But in case of women they cannot attend the jatra even. But common thread was everyone felt that menstruation or after delivery women is impure.

With regards to coking the food all male and female Dhonds cook food together. Also with regards to staying in pandal, these Dhonds stay with their other family members who are Dhonds or in their own community, or along with the Dhonds from the same village.

### **Menstruation**

During all the interviews, all the 14 respondents with regards to menstruation always used words likes Bhashtakar (impure), Ashudh (impure), not just the woman who is menstruating is considered impure but also her voice and shadow are considered impure. Also, the male Dhonds whose wives are menstruating cannot see their wives during

the fast and jatra, they are allowed to go and stay in the temple or where they stay for their five days fast but are not allowed to cook food with the others.

As a researcher I am not allowed to be biased for anybody, but as student of women's studies I knew that it is not right as menstruation is natural process and it is not impure or dirty, but often menstruation is considered as a taboo to keep women away from all the religious celebrations. As a researcher was not able to say anything to the respondents as it is ethically not right.

#### Pregnancy and Delivery of the baby

Although during the interviews none of the respondent said it's impure, but the rules with regards to pregnancy and delivery excluded women from being part of this jatra. However men could go attend the jatra, women were asked to pray at home.

I felt that it's excluding women and keeping them at the subordinate position. The pregnant women Dhonds are not allowed to visit or see the goddess during their pregnancy as they are considered ritually uncleaned because of their pregnancy and their husband who are Dhonds are allowed to visit the temple and attend the jatra, but cannot walk through the fire.

#### Marriage

With regards to inter-religious marriages the perspective of the respondent was that they have not accepted this marriages among the daughter who are Dhond as they are not to be Dhonds again, they are considered converted where as the male Dhonds are able to perform the rituals after the purification process. The holy priests are been called and they perform the sudhikaran (purification) process.

As a researcher I could analyse this situation as women considered bringing dishonor to the family by getting married into different faith, but the men are included in the family and in the jatra with a purification process.

#### Death in the family

When the close one of the female Dhond dies she has to remain at home and cannot participate in the jatra for one year, but male Dhonds can attend the jatra but cannot walk through the fire after 6 month. This are the patricidal beliefs that keep female as a second sex and men are considered powerful, or the heads of family especially the husband .

## **5.6 Gender Analysis**

With regard to the gender dynamics of this Jatra, the major difference is in the population of the male female Dhonds.

When I asked my respondent about the number of female and male Dhonds, all of them were not able to give the exact number of the Dhonds as there is no institution that keeps a check on the number of Dhond and their personal details. So the 14 Dhonds informed me during the interview that the number of female Dhonds is much less compared to the male Dhonds.

The female Dhonds if they are menstruating during the time of the jatra they are not allowed to attend the jatra only after seven days of menstruation they can visit Shirgaon, with regards male Dhonds who are been married, if their wives are menstruating during the Jatra or five days before the Jatra, they are allowed to stay with other Dhonds, is not allowed to cook but he can attend the jatra. He cannot walk through the fire. This is not applicable for the males who are not married or widowed. The shadow or voice of the menstruating woman should not fall on the Dhond even if the woman is his mother, sister, or a friend. This is applicable for all the Dhonds irrespective of their age

With regards to pregnancy and delivery, the female Dhond who is pregnant cannot attend the jatra, doesn't stay in temple or pandal, and has to remain home should not also follow the fast, but male Dhond can go and stay with the other Dhonds also attend the jatra observe the fast; only thing is he cannot walk through the fire.

In case of women Dhond delivers a baby boy then they are considered ritually un-cleaned for 6 months after delivery. If she gives birth to a female child it's considered ritually unclean for 3 month and cannot attend the jatra or cannot even walk through the fire.

In the pandal women Dhonds do not have proper bathrooms, toilets or even a room where they can change, they are quite uncomfortable during this time.

With regards to the death rituals, if there is any death in the family of the husband or the son or daughter of female Dhond she is not allowed to stay with the others and cannot attend so thus cannot walk through the fire for one year.

With regards to male Dhonds within 6 months after the death of father, son or wife or daughter can observe the fast with other Dhonds and can attend Jatra, the only thing they cannot do is walk to the homkhand. The tradition of being a Dhond after the father's death is not necessary for the son but he can be a Dhond but in case of a daughter they can't follow it even if they want to follow. This is also a form of gender discrimination as a son is considered to follow the legacy of the father, but a daughter is not considered for it.

Also with regards to inter-religious marriage, if the male Dhond get married inter faith then he still can be a Dhond after purification of the couple, but with regards to female Dhonds who marry in a different faith are not supposed to be Dhonds, as considered converted.



## CHAPTER 6

### **Social Practices Related to Dhonds**

I have taken in-depth interviews of 14 respondents with the help of convenience sampling and snowball sampling. Although in my case narrative chapter I have included 4 detailed and descriptive interviews rest of the answers and opinions I will elaborate in my finding chapter.

This Jatra is popularly known as Dhondanchi Jatra or Homkhanachi Jatra; because the Dhonds are the Devotee that walks through the fire and the homkhand (bonfire) is set up for thee fire walking Dhonds. Different rituals are performed at the temple and at the Adisthan (Muddi temple) of the deity. Dhonds walk through the Agnidivya at midnight after having a bath at the sacred lake. They walk on the fire barefoot wearing colorful and special attire; they chant “Bola Pundalik varde Hari Vithal, Parvati Pate har har Mahadev, Satikant Smaranam jai jai Ram, Shree Gurudev Datta Shree Lairai Mata ki Jai”. As the Dhond the proceeding of Jatra for them begin a month before the Jatra that is from the Gudi Pawda which is said to the Hindu New year, from that day all Dhonds don’t have Chicken and egg some don’t even have Fish and they decide to remain vegetarian for a month, but in case of someone who is a Dhond for the first time has to remain complete vegetarian for the next consecutive five years. Five days before the Jatra all the Dhonds have to stay away from their house in order to maintain complete cleanliness, but some remain at homes but don’t touch anybody, if at all they happen to touch someone who is also even then Dhonds have to have bath again. This was the response of 8 Dhonds.

Three of them said this about the proceeding of Jatra. The proceeding of Jatra starts from Gudi Padwa from this day they have to start with eating veg food for a month till the next Amavasya. Actually, they are not supposed to have eaten fish, but some Dhonds have fish after five

years of being Dhond. According to them, that is not right. The consumption of alcohol, eggs, chicken, and fish is not allowed.

The proceedings of Jatra start from Gudi Padwa which is the New Year according to the Hindu calendar. From this day onwards all the Dhonds have to stop eating chicken eggs those who were new Dhonds have to also remain complete vegetarian throughout Jatra till the koul Utsav. The celebration of the jatra starts with the invocation of Lord Ganesha on chitra amavasya. On the day of Jatra which is vaisha Shudha Panchami, in the morning the panditji brings the sacred pot and distribute the holy water to the villagers which is in the pot. On this day all the Dhonds do not have rice they just have fruits and some sweet dish. They have to dress up wearing the different attire of a Dhond. Take the blessings of the elders in the family and make a move towards Shirgaon, where they first have to have bath in the holy pond and then move towards Adisthan Muddi. Where the Dhonds are given a mogra buds which we are supposed to keep in our mouth till the time we don't cross the sacred bonfire.

After that we move to the main temple of goddess Lairai where the Dhonds dance with their beths on the beats of the dhols. After that at around 12:00 we move towards the bonfire and all the Dhonds walk through the homkhand. This was said by three other respondents.

With regards to the significance of the Jatra 9 of them said they are able to serve the goddess Lairai being her devotee. Three of the respondents said being a Dhond keeps them in good health. Two the respondent said that the Lairai guides them and help them in their difficult time to being a Dhond they are able to invoke her blessings.

Ten of my respondents said that one can be Dhond out of choice, one can be Dhond because they had asked for wish that was completed, one can be Dhond because their father was Dhond this is mostly the

case for sons and four of them said that some become Dhonds as they have taken a vow.

With regards to enrollment of Dhond nine of them said that there no formal structure as such for enrollment, so as new Dhond they just have to keep the fast for five days and from Gudi padwa we have to remain completely vegetarian. On the day of the Jatra the new Dhonds have to compulsorily go to the temple at Muddi to take the blessing and mogra buds are given as Prasad. Six of the respondents said that there is no enrollment process. The Dhonds take vows that they will be a Dhonds and remain vegetarian after Gudi Padwa, followed by five days of fasting. During these five days one has to follow strict rules and maintain purity of one's own self, should not touch anything like someone's saliva, dirt or anyone, before having food or even if drinking water one has to bathe themselves and eat or drink.

While eating they have to see that they don't even touch the ground. They have to use little cow dung and cow's urine to purify ourselves and also the place where we stay. On the day of the Jatra as a new Dhonds they have to go to the Adisthan Muddi, to evoke Lairai's blessing. They give Mogra buds, one of them is to be kept in the mouth and after walking through the fire we have to eat that. My entire 14 respondents have been Dhonds for different years.

Ten of the respondents said that it's not compulsory for sons to follow, being a Dhond after the father's death, and four respondents have followed the trend after their father.

The food which they have during the five days of the fast, doesn't have salt, much oil, ginger, garlic, potatoes and onions are not supposed to be in their diet. Utensils should be separate. This was a response from seven Dhonds.

For one month and five days of fast, food which they have is very simple food with no onion, garlic, ginger even the utensils should not

be used for any other event. These utensils are only to be used during the Jatra. This response was given by six Dhonds.

We have to remain complete veg just before the five days of the Jatra. We also have to cook our own food where we stay, while cooking we have to remain wet and cook the food, use of onion is not allowed. The food is often cooked only by the Dhonds for that five days fast, if at all non-Dhond want to help us they also have to bathe themselves and remain wet while cooking. So the cooking is mostly done by the Dhonds and also the number of female Dhonds is very less, there are mostly one or two female Dhonds who stay with us. So the food is prepared by all the Dhonds. This was the response of one Dhond.

Their movement is restricted; if at all they move out of the temple or pandal they have to take bath. Outside the temple they are often supposed to wear new footwear. Also they should wear new clothes; this is the response by five respondents.

They are not supposed to move outside the pandal or temple without new footwear. They are supposed to keep their bodies clean so they must bathe frequently. Touching each other is also not allowed. They have to take baths, remain wet and have food for those five days. Some don't have physical intimacy with their partners from Gudi Padwa or some don't have contact just before the five days of the Jatra. This was the response given by 7 respondents.

During the five days of fasting and staying in a pandal there are no proper bathrooms for Neha and some other female Dhonds who stay with her. There is a small temporary bathroom set up for them, as they are not staying in a house, they don't even have a room to change their clothes, and they surround themselves with clothes that are then changed. Also going out is not allowed as the elders say that they must remain pure during this time. This was the response of one Dhond

Some stay in the temples, some stay in a pandal, others might stay in their homes. But they have follow properly should not touch anyone if they did then they are supposed to have bath again, if they decide to

stay home then they should see that no menstruating women's voice or shadow falls on them, if something like this happens there are chances of them getting boils on their foot while walking through the homkhand.

They have to wear new footwear, because if our feet touch some dirt or even someone's saliva then, they might get boils as that is impure. They have baths while we are having food or even for drinking water. They have to cleanse when they go for urination and they pass our stools. This was the response given by one Dhond.

With regards to physical intimacy four respondents said they are unaware, six Dhonds said couples should not have physical intimacy for months from Gudi padwa, and four other respondents said they should not have physical intimacy from five days before the Jatra.

All the respondents said that it is not compulsory for all the Dhonds to walk to the fire, sometimes due to old-age or due to medical reasons they can choose not to walk. Some don't walk through the fire because of death in the family. If a female Dhond is menstruating or is pregnant or has delivered a baby she cannot walk through the fire nor attend the jatra

In the case of male Dhond's wife is menstruating or is pregnant or has delivered a baby can attend the Jatra but cannot walk the fire.

With regards to marriage, if a Dhond marries outside the caste they still can be Dhonds. There is no such restriction for caste. This response was given by all the 14 Dhonds. With regards to inter-religious marriages all the 10 respondents gave the response saying inter-religious marriage the women Dhond are not allowed to continue as they are considered converted. Two response were that the male Dhonds if they marry outside the religion they can still be Dhonds after the Shudhikar (purification) but for female Dhonds if they marry outside it depends on them if they want to continue with being a Dhond many often don't follow the tradition and their maternal

families just burn the beth in the homkhand, and two said that they aren't aware.

With regards to the majority of Dhonds belonging to which caste, thirteen respondents said there is no formal structure to know the caste of 30000 Dhonds, three of the respondents said the majority of the Dhonds belong to Bhandari Samaj (other backward class).

With regards to 14 of them, if there is death in the family the male Dhond is allowed to attend the Jatra but cannot walk through the fire. With regards to female Dhonds if they lost their husband or son they are not supposed to attend the Jatra, for one year.

### **6.1 Caste-based Analysis**

When I first started with this research work, I thought there is no caste based discrimination but as I moved ahead with the study I found that there does exist caste based discrimination. Yes, Dhonds from all castes are allowed to participate in the Jatra. But when I visited Shirgaon I saw a sacred lake which had two partitions, one side of the lake was for Chowgules and rest all the Dhonds from different parts. Another half was for the Dhonds who played dhols and are from Shirgaon, it was for them to take bath.

Even when they stay in a temple or in the pandal they stay with their own communities. The higher caste stay together and the scheduled caste Dhonds are not allowed to stay with them. When I visited one of my respondents and her family members who are from schedule caste, she told me that all members from schedule caste community have their own ward and they build a pandal and stay along with their own community. Other community members don't even visit the ward.

While taking another interview with a Dhond from a higher caste, I asked whether Dhonds from Schedule caste are allowed to stay with you'll so the respondent said no even if a non Dhond from schedule

caste visit us we give them food to eat and then clean the place where that person was sitting with cows urine and cow dung. So I asked whether you practice this irrespective of this fast of yours. So the respondent said no we follow this during the time of the Jatra.

## **CHAPTER 7**

### **Conclusion**

The objective of my study was to study the significance of the Jatra, the proceeding before jatra and on the day of jatra, to study the social exclusion faced by the Dhonds and to study the gender dynamics of Dhonds. I have managed to understand the Gender Dynamics of the Dhonds, and was also able to study the objectives of my study. The fact that is been covered by newspapers every years shows that is one of the popular jatra and the Dhonds I interviewed have a stronger faith in the goddess, it is an important and huge festival for the people of Shirgaon and for the Dhonds because they belief they have in the goddess is very deeply rooted. It is been a celebration all over Goa as the Dhonds are from different parts of Goa. It is difficult to say that the majority of Dhonds belong to a specific caste as they are not asked for any personal information by the temple authorities. As Dhonds are from different caste and region it is equally for important to all the castes in Goa.

In most of the Hindu festival widow women are not included but in this festival, widow women can be Dhonds. The number of women as Dhonds is lesser compared to men, but women are not participating as equal member as they are small in the participation number and the restriction to attend the jatra are more compared to men, even during any restriction men are allowed to attend but cannot walk through the fire were as women are not allowed to attend the jatra even.

In my introduction chapter I have tried to establish the concept of Jatra, also introduced the Shirgaon's Jatra and the concept of Dhond is explained. As this topic of research is less explored, I managed to go through several newspaper articles. However the books and the article I managed to read did not include the gender perspective of the Dhonds. The newspaper articles talk about the proceedings, the



businesses and trade that have been carried out during the Jatra. I have analyzed its trend and the gender aspect in those articles

The significance, the proceedings and the social exclusion faced by the female Dhonds all this has included in my findings, caste-based analysis and gender analysis. Also there is no formal enrollment process of Dhonds which makes it difficult for researchers or students like me to get some information. The notion of purity and impurity is rampant in the practice. It also has the concept of untouchability as the Dhonds are not allowed to touch anyone if they do touch they have to have a bath again.

The social exclusion is faced by both male and female Dhonds face, but the rules and restriction for female Dhonds with regards to menstruation, marriage, pregnancy, delivery of the baby and death in the family are stricter as compared to male Dhonds, there also the power dynamics and the patriarchal hierarchy can be seen.

The rules with regards to menstruation, marriage, pregnancy, delivery of the baby and death rituals seem neutral as an outsider but when I looked at it through the lens of gender perspective, it seemed to me like restriction rather than rules which to some extent are gender biased in nature.

## **APPENDIX**

### **Glossary**

- Deepmal Or Deepa Stambha - Lamp Tower
- Jatra - Annual Festival
- Yatra - Pilgrimage
- Vaddis - Birthday
- Vahans - Vehicles
- Palakis - Palanquin
- Rathas - Chariots
- Tithi - Date
- Agnidivya Or Agnitun-Chalne - Walking through the fire
- Danavas - Demons
- Homkhand - Bonfire
- Dhonds- Devotes of Lairai who walk through fire during jatra
- Beth -A stick having colorful woolen balls attached
- Shudhikar -Purification
- Bhandari Samaj -Other Backward Class
- Koul -Mogra.
- Ashudh - Impure
- Bhashtakar –Impure
- Mogra - Jasmine

## **Questionnaire**

- Name of the respondent
  - Age of the respondent
  - Sex of the respondent
  - Residence of the respondent
1. What are the proceedings of Jatra?
  2. Significance of Jatra, according to you?
  3. Who can be a Dhond?
  4. How does one enroll as a Dhond?
  5. How many years have you been a Dhond?
  6. Is it necessary if the father was Dhond, the son or a daughter has to follow this tradition?
  7. What are the rules you have to follow before the Jatra as Dhond?
    - With regard to Food
    - Space
    - Physical intimacy with the partner
  8. Do all Dhonds walk through the fire? Is it compulsory?
  9. Can a widow be a Dhonds?
  10. Can a widower be a Dhond?
  11. During menstruation can women be a Dhond?
  12. During pregnancy can women be a Dhond?
  13. Can women be Dhond after she delivers the baby?
  14. During a wife's menstrual cycle can men be Dhond?
  15. During a wife's pregnancy can men be Dhond?
  16. Which caste do the majority of Dhonds belong to?
  17. If a Dhond marries outside the caste can they participate in the Jatra?
  18. If a Dhond marries outside the religion can participate in the Jatra?

19. If any death in the family does that restrict the participation of you as Dhond?

### **Consent to participate in research**

“Gender Dynamics of Dhondanchi Jatra: Annual Festival of Shirgaon”.

I \_\_\_\_\_ have been informed that this study is being conducted by Priti Parab, Student of Women’s Studies, Goa University for her MA dissertation.

I voluntarily agree to participate in this research study.

I agree with my interview being Audio-recorded, video-recorded.

Signature of research participant with Date

"धोंडांच्या जात्रेतल्ली लिंग अस्थीरताय: शिरगांवचो वर्सुकी उत्सव".

सोंदप्रक्रियेंत वाटेकार जावपाखातीर मान्यताय

हांव \_\_\_\_\_ जी सोंदप्रक्रिया, प्रिती दामोदर परब, अस्तूरी अभ्यास, गोंय विद्यापीठाचें विद्यार्थी आपल्या पदव्युत्तर शिक्षणाचो प्रकल्प घडोवन हाडटा त्याबद्दल ताणें, म्हाका पुराय माहिती दिल्या. हांव आपखोशेन ह्या प्रकल्पांत वाटेकार जावपाक हयकार दिता. हाव म्हजी मुलाखतीची, ध्वनी( ऑडिओ) वा चित्रीकरण( व्हिडिओ) करपाक मान्यताय दिता.

सोध प्रकल्पांत वाटेकार जातल्याची

सय आणि तारीख। \_\_\_\_\_.



**Figure 10 The Beth. Source Saiely Shirvankar**



**Figure 11: Dhonds on the day of the Jatra. Source Shwetang Naik**



**Figure 12: Dhonds following the five fast days Source Shwetang Naik**



**Figure 13: During the five days before the jatra. Source Shwetang Naik**





**Figure 14: Dhonds cooking food five days before the Jatra. Source: Sneha Parwar**



**Figure 15 The Homkhand. Source: Saiely Shirvankar.**



**Figure 15: Dhonds celebrating the jatra at home, due to COVID-19 pandemic. Source by Shwetang Naik**



**Figure 16: dhonds From Guirim that stay together in the temple. Source by Shubham Korgaonkar**

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