

Boat Festivals : Documenting the Cultural Linkages Between Goa and Odisha

Prof. Pratima Kamat

“Even where new customs and beliefs fully replace the old in the course of change, the deeper premises and values of the traditional culture may continue to shape a people's world view and orientation to life.”

- Roger M. Keesing

Goa's cultural experience through the ages, shaped as it has been by the above quotation, has turned the tables on Rudyard Kipling's oft-quoted phrase, “Oh, East is East and West is West, and never the twain shall meet” because in Goa the twain have met to create a hybrid heritage.

It is not the East, as in Asia, and West, as in Europe, that is being referred to over here, rather it is the East Coast of India which has met the West Coast in remote, hilly, forested Sattari, the northeastern *taluka* of the coastal Indian state of Goa that is located at the foot of the Sahyadri mountains.

My ethnoarchaeological research into the Boat Deities of the Mhadei River Valley of the Sattari and Sanguem *talukas* of Goa² has revealed exciting new linkages between Goa and Odisha in the tenth to the twelfth centuries A.D., when the Kadambas and the Gangas ruled these lands, respectively. While scholars have written about Goa's cultural links with Bengal, expressly

in the context of the migration of the *Gaud Saraswat Brahmins* to Goa, its associations with Odisha, especially related to maritime traditions and heritage, is a topic to which scant scholarly attention has been paid so far.

In the present article, an attempt has been made to delineate certain cultural similarities that are visible in the ethnographical heritage of the two maritime societies, Goan and Odia, located on opposite coasts of the Indian peninsula etched in the early medieval times that are worthy of more intensive research. Unique votive as well as abandoned sculptures of the *Devi-in-a-boat* are located in the Sattari and Sanguem *talukas* of Goa. These may be compared with a similar *Devi-in-a-boat* found in some parts of coastal Odisha. Further, one may discern not just iconographical but also ethnographical comparisons between the Odia worship of Tara-Tarini/Tara in places like Ganjam, Ghatgaon and Ratnagiri in Odisha, and the votive traditions associated with the *Devi-in-a-boat* as 'Tarini' in the Sattari and Sanguem *talukas* of Goa. One of the find-spots of the Goan *Devi-in-a-boat* is Ganjam which had served as a riverine port in the past. Did it have any historical connection with the port of Ganjam, Odisha, where the Tara-Tarini is the principal deity? Further, the boat festival of Sanquelim, an erstwhile riverine port and

commercial centre of Goa, reminds one of the *Boita Bandana* and *Bali Yatra* of Cuttack, Odisha. Similarly, the Goan River Mhadei, which along with its tributaries hosts the *Devi-in-a-boat*, had played a culturally critical role in shaping the history and culture of Goa, just as the River Mahanadi influenced Odisha. In addition to this, both the states have historically experienced the influence of Buddhism and Jainism; have a votive tradition of supplicating the *Saptamatrika*; enjoy a *Shaktipitha* status; possess similar maritime traditions; and also gastronomic connections (for example, the Goan *patoli* and the Odia *enduri pitha*).

Maritime India: Situating Goa and Odisha historically

Peninsular India, with its long coastline watered by the Arabian Sea, in the west, and the Bay of Bengal, in the east, has given the country and its people an enduring maritime identity that has shaped its history and influenced its traditions. The Indian sub-continent had served as a “halfway-house” with peninsular India emerging as “the primary area of interest located within the wider ambit of the Indian Ocean extending from the Red Sea to the Indonesian archipelago.”³

In this regard, the Tamil and the Odia ventures into the Bay of Bengal and beyond during the ancient and early medieval periods have, indeed, been legendary. The *Sangam* literature abounds in references to the maritime activities of the Tamils. Besides South-East Asia, China, especially its port of Canton, was regularly visited by seafarers from the East coast of India. This is evidenced from the archaeological findings at Manikapatna, a port on the banks of the Chilika Lake, Odisha, dating back to the early historic period, which had close interactions with China and Ceylon.⁴ Further, Chinese coins have been unearthed from Khalkatapatna, and Chinese

ceramic shards from Ganjam, in Odisha.⁵ Interestingly, the Goan Ganjem, a port located along the banks of the River Mhadei that had witnessed flourishing trade in days gone by, is the abode of the *Devi Ganjeshwari* whose sculpture depicts a Chinese figure standing to the right of the *Devi*!⁶

The Kalinga coast was studded with ports which prospered from the lucrative overseas trade that they commanded, as has been testified by foreign travellers and indigenous sources.⁷ Ancient Odisha had enjoyed flourishing overseas commercial contacts with both South-East Asia and the western world, especially with the Roman Empire.⁸ Kalinga, with its strategic ports, mercantile community (the *sadhabas*), their *boitas* (sea-faring vessels), protector deities and rich maritime traditions, had served as a “gateway for overseas expansion to South-East Asian countries from early time to late medieval period.”⁹ The people of Kalinga had preceded the Pallavas of Kanchi in laying the foundations of an India “beyond the moving seas.”¹⁰ Kalinga's historical commercial and cultural linkages with South-East Asia have been immortalised, amongst other things, in the form of the *Orang Kling* community of the Malay Archipelago.¹¹

Likewise, western India, with its ports and towns, both those that dotted its long, unbroken coastline, and the riverine ones, was active in the maritime trade of the Indian Ocean since time immemorial and “played a dominant part in promoting trade and commerce with the Græco-Roman world in the early centuries of the Christian era”. The political and cultural unity provided by the Satavahanas, as also the Shakas and the Kushanas, served as an enabling factor in this commercial expansion. The Puranic and Buddhist literature, archaeological, sculptural, numismatic and epigraphic evidences and testimonies of

foreign travellers provide valuable clues about the commercial expansion that the ports of western India experienced from the first century B.C. to the fourth century A.D. largely on account of the thriving trade with the ports of the Mediterranean, Greece, Rome, the coast of Egypt and Arabia.¹²

Ensnconced on the foothills of the Sahyadris and lapped by the blue expanse of the Arabian Sea along a palm-fringed coast interrupted at places by the sparkling estuaries of the Mandovi, Zuari and other rivers, tiny, pictorial Goa was known, since time immemorial, to the rest of the Indian sub-continent as well as abroad, as an entrepôt of renown. Goa, with its strategic location mid-way along the western seaboard of India, had served as an commercial centre in the Indian Ocean littoral, enjoying thriving trade relations with ancient Egyptians, Phoenicians, Romans, Greeks, Persians, East Asians, Jews and Arabs as indicated by epigraphic, literary, sculptural and archaeological evidences.

Consequently, Goa's ancient and early medieval port-capitals of Chandrapur, Gopakapattana, Ballipattana or Vallipattana, Raibandar-Ella and the later Portuguese City of Goa, have over the centuries not only served as emporia of coastal and intra-Indian Oceanic trade and thriving inland commerce, but have attracted migrations, witnessed social interactions and experienced a wide variety of cultural transformations.¹³

Geographical and historical factors have crafted a maritime identity for Goa that is visible from the coast to the sub-*Ghat* region. Goa possesses a rich lore which is an invaluable repository of information on the maritime history of the state. Be it etymological roots, legends, iconographical representations, speciality, deities, feasts and festivals, religious precepts and practices, rituals and customs, communities,

indigenous knowledge and technology systems, tales and traditions, proverbs, folk life and foodways, the Goan cultural repertoire is a veritable storehouse of all things maritime.

The *Devi-in-a-boat*: Connecting the Coasts

The religious lore of Goa contains references galore to maritime festivals and deities. It is said, "While contemporary beliefs and religious practices mould attitudes towards seafaring, at the same time expanding channels of trade and communication provide the means for the expansion of religious and cultural influences."¹⁴ This has, indeed, been the reality of the Goan cultural experience down the centuries and is exemplified by the Maritime. Mahishasuramarddini of the Mhadei, the exclusive Boat Deity of the Mhadei River Valley of Goa, the 'Tarini', a unique component of the maritime cultural legacy of Goa which may be traced to the early medieval period when the Kadamba dynasty was ruling this region.

The forested *taluka* of Sattari, which plays host to the sparkling waters of the River Mhadei and its tributaries in a serene setting, is located in the north-eastern part of Goa, between 15° 26. N to 15° 42. N and 74° 3. E and 74° 21. E¹⁵ surrounded by the Western *Ghats* in the north and east, the *talukas* of Sanguem to the south and Bicholim in the west. Sattari is a veritable storehouse of invaluable ecological and cultural resources which includes exclusive deities, such as the Boat Deities, the Tarini and the Tar-Vir, that are rooted in its hoary past and allude to a cultural connection with the Odisha coast.

I have documented and analysed fifteen sculptures in which a female deity, who is worshipped locally as Santeri/Shantadurga, Jogeshwari, Navadurga, or as an anonymous *parivar devata*, is depicted either seated atop or standing in a boat (with one of them being

seated on a boat shaped like a fish); two images of Gajalakshmi with howdahs in the shape of a boat; three sculptures of Brahmanimaya with a boat carved on the pedestal, and six sculptures of male deities/*Vir* who are shown either standing fully armed, with an etching of a boat on the pedestal, or riding a horse which is positioned above the boat-like pedestal.¹⁶

Most sculptures of the *Devi-in-a-boat* are votive, being worshipped as Sateri/Shantadurga/Brahmanimaya/Jogeshwari/Navadurga/Kelbai or as an anonymous *parivar devata*. In the absence of a distinct local epithet for these deities, I have referred to the Boat *Devi* as Tarini and the Boat *Dev* as Tar-*Vir*, alluding to the cultural and iconographical similarities with the Goddess Tara-Tarini of the Odisha coast.

The Tara-Tarini shrine, located along the banks of the river Rushikulya, near Purushottampur in Ganjam district, is an ancient *Shaktipitha* of Odisha. Tara was not only the object of veneration for the Buddhists, she was also invoked by the maritime merchants and sailors before the commencement of a sea voyage. Was the Boat *Devi* of Ganjam, Goa, inspired by Tara-Tarini of Ganjam, Odisha? The excavations at Ratnagiri have revealed images of Tara, including one which portrays a boatman, in a sinking boat, invoking the aid of Tara, South India, too, had a popular worship culture of Tara, as testified by Hieun Tsang.

Tara is the female counterpart of the Boddhisatva, Avalokiteshwar, who is worshipped by sailors for safety and success at sea, especially along the coast of Odisha. The worship of the Buddhist Tara was very popular in both, western Deccan and the Odisha coast where Tara-Tarini of Ganjam District, Tarini of Ghatgaon and the Ashtamahabhaya Tara of Ratnagiri¹⁷ serve as

patron deities of sailors and merchants. For example, a Tara of Ratnagiri, Odisha, is represented as one who saves her devotees from the “eight great fears,”¹⁸ one of which was being shipwrecked. While this sculpture provides a graphic description of the *ashtamahabhaya* (the great eight fears), another is a similar rendering of the theme of *jalarnavabhaya* or the fear of drowning in a sinking vessel. Yet another sculptural representation of this deity, the Bhrkuti Tara from Nalanda, contains two *makaras* (crocodiles) carved on its pedestal.¹⁹

The Tarini of the Mhadei Basin of Goa does depict a close connection with the saviour goddess, Tara. For example, the Mahishasuramarddini-in-a-boat venerated next to the Sateri temple at Shayll-Melauli has a *makara* or crocodile, the *vahana* of Ganga, supporting the boat on which the goddess is standing.²⁰

Besides Goa, the only other place in India where sculptures of the *Devi-in-a-boat* are found is coastal Odisha. The Boat *Devis* of Odisha include an eight-armed Mahishasuramarddini (ninth century A.D.) at Bhubaneswar, found lying under a banyan tree near the Brahmeshwar temple, with a boat carved below its pedestal, depicting the goddess in a sea-battle against *mahishasura*, a rarity in Hindu art.²¹ Another image, found in the Lingaraj Temple of Bhubaneswar (eleventh century A.D.), shows a woman steering a boat with an oar. At Deokund, in the Mayurbhanj district of Odisha, goddess Ambika's shown seated over a boat, which is significant because of Ambika's association with the boat.²² Further, in the temple of Dariya Rama Chandi, located on the Jambhu island, near the port of Paradeep, at the mouth of the River Mahanadi, the Goddess Rama Chandi, who is evoked for a safe journey by the local sailors, is depicted as seated in a boat.²³

It may also be mentioned that as a part of the festivities of *Khudurukuni Osha*, the sea goddess, Mangala, is worshipped by Odia girls who make a drawing of her in a sea-going vessel.²⁴ The genesis of the Odia worship of Goddess Mangala has been traced to the period of the Kalinga-Sinhalese commercial contacts when the deity, originally believed to be the Buddhist goddess, Tara, was brought to Odisha from Sri Lanka and later absorbed into the Hindu pantheon as a saviour deity.²⁵

The unique Goan Boat Deity, both Tarini and Tar-Vir, is found away from the coast, in the sub-*Ghat talukas* of Sattari and Sanguem, against the backdrop of the towering Sahyadri mountains, in the remote villages of Keri, Bhuipal, Nagvem, Zarme, Sonal, Sanvarde, Bhironda, Dhamshre, Guleli, Shayll-Melauli, Malpann in Sattari; Ganjem in the Ponda *taluka*; and Barabhumli, Surla and Talldem villages of Sanguem *taluka*.

The find-spots are invariably located along the banks of the River Mhadei and its tributaries, lying either inside a temple or in the open, weather-beaten, exposed to the vagaries of nature, amidst lush greenery, in the vicinity of a stream, and often at the periphery of the *devarai* or the sacred grove, and, in one instance, the Bondla wildlife sanctuary.

Almost all the images have been carved out of schist stone, locally known as *pashaan*, and exhibit a strong local influence. Local temple architects and sculptors, the Charis of Nanus (Ponda *taluka*) in particular, were engaged in carving these images. Hence, the iconography of sculptures found in the Mhadei Valley sports a local influence which does not necessarily always adhere to the classical forms but, instead, introduces a Sattari special flavour that seeks to amalgamate various artistic forms and

iconographies from different belief-systems, folk, Brahmanical, as well as Jaina and Buddhist.

The *Devi-in-a-boat*: A Syncretic Saviour Deity

The *Devi-in-a-boat* is, thus, a unique product, crafted by the local artisans as a saviour deity for those who sailed in the Mhadei River, and its tributaries, and depended on it for their sustenance. In the *Devi Mahatmya*, the *Devi* is hailed as: “You are Durga, the boat that takes men across the difficult ocean of worldly existence, devoid of attachments.” Further, she is projected as a saviour of he who is “tossed about in his boat by a tempest in the vast sea ...” Tarini and Tarita are names of Durga. Tarani, which means a boat, is the Sanskrit for a saviour. The goddess is hailed as Tarini in Arjuna’s *Hymn to Durga* in the *Mahabharata*. Gayatri, the primal form of Tara or Bhavatarini, is hailed as “*Bhaya Haarini Bhava Taarini Anaghay*”, “*Tum Samartha Saba Bhanti Tarini*” in the *Maa Gayatri Aarti*. The only maritime reference for Mahishasuramarddini is the epithet of Daughter of the Ocean, in the *Mahishasuramarddini Stotram*.

The Goan Boat Deities, the Tarini and Tar-Vir, not only provide valuable clues about the Western *Ghats*-Arabian Sea trade, of which Goa (Sattari, in particular) had served as an important conduit in the past, but serve as an amalgam of folk, Sanskritic, Buddhist and Jaina traditions, as locally crafted syncretic saviour deities for the river traders and boatsmen who depended on the River Mhadei for their sustenance. As is well-known, in eastern Deccan, the Krishna-Godavari Valleys and the deltaic regions played host to several Buddhist sites. Amravati and Nagarjunakonda were important cultural centres on the banks of the Krishna. Odisha, too, was noted for both Buddhist and Jaina establishments at places such

as Ratnagiri, Udaygiri, Lalitgiri and Khandagiri.²⁶ Similarly, in Goa, too, the main hubs of Buddhism were situated in close proximity to land and riverine trade routes.

The *talukas* of Sattari and Bicholim, through which the vital trade routes passed, contributed to the cultural ethos of Goa by hosting not just Hindu shrines, but also Buddhist and Jain settlements. Buddhism and Jainism were flourishing in this region during the ancient and early medieval periods with neighbouring Kothambi, Kudnem, where a Jain temple stands till today as a proud testament of this fact, the caves of Lamgaon, and a slightly more distant Colvale being important centres of Buddhism and Jainism. Hence, elements of the saviour Tara and the Jain *Yakshi*, Ambika, found their way into the conceptualisation, and at times, the artistic execution, of the maritime Mahishasuramardini of the Mhadei. While we discovered an image of a Buddhist/Jain monk in close proximity to the Sanvarde Tarini, the Tarini of Shayll-Melauli displays the image of a *bhikshu/muni* on its base.

The Buddhist influence in the conceptualisation of the Tarini is undeniable and since similar images of a female deity in a boat are also found along the Odisha coast, one wonders whether they can be dated to the Satavahana rule which had linked both the coasts. Sartorially, the two human figures sculpted on the *chaturbhuj* Mahishasuramardini of Shayll-Melauli, Goa, suggest a Satavahana influence. Further, the *bhikshu/muni* shown seated under the stern and the two human heads with distinct Buddhist/Jaina features inside the boat makes one wonder whether the concept of the Tarini was executed in Sattari under the influence of the Amravati school or the Udaygiri-Lalitgiri-Ratnagiri tradition, influenced as it was by Buddhism? Then again, the facial features of the *chaturbhuj*

Mahishasuramardini of Shayll-Melauli bear a distinct Odia-Bangla touch *a la* the Jaina Hoysala sculptures.

It may also be mentioned that the image of the Buddha discovered at Rivona, in South Goa, has a *simha peet* or a pedestal sporting three carvings of the lion motif that resembles the emblem of the Kadambas. Similar sculptures of the Buddha have been found at Lalitgiri and Ratnagiri in Odisha. The Rivona Buddha resembles images of the Buddha housed in the Ratnagiri Museum and found at Lalitgiri, Odisha.

To return to the narrative of the Tarini, the Boat *Devi* generally possesses the attributes of an *ashtabhuj* Mahishasuramardini, though a couple of sculptures that contain interesting maritime information are those of a *chaturbhuj* Mahishasuramardini. She is either seated on an *asana* in a boat, or on the boat itself, or is depicted standing in the boat. Almost all these sculptures exhibit human heads in the boat, with boatmen on either side of it, and in the Nagvem sculpture, the oarsmen are actually shown in the act of rowing the vessel.

In addition to the boat, most of these *murtis* contain related nautical and marine motifs such as oars, an anchor, a mast, a sail, a pennant, fish and a crocodile.

Influenced by the play of varied cultural elements, the Mhadei River Valley had served as the crucible of the syncretic Tarini or the maritime Mahishasuramardini, that is, the *Devi* who is depicted either standing or seated in a boat, a rarity in Indian art. The commercial worthiness of the Mhadei, the Buddhist and Jain settlements that dotted the trade routes in the sub-*Ghat* region, the presence of the local Chari community as divine sculptors, all this contributed to produce the unique representation of the *Devi-in-a-boat* who is worshipped locally as Santeri/Shantadurga,

Jogeshwari, Navadurga, Brahmanimaya, Kelbai, or as an anonymous *parivar devata*.

As Santeri, Brahmanimaya, Kelbai, the Goan *Devi*-in-a-boat comes to be included in the local pantheon of the *Saptamatrika*. Like Odisha, Goa, too, has a tradition of supplicating the *Saptamatrika*, especially in the northern *talukas* of Sattari, Bicholim and Pernem where they are worshipped as *Saat Bahniyo* (Seven Sisters) akin to the *Sapta Bhagini* (Seven Sisters) of Odisha. In India, the *Saptamatrika* also appear in the “Jain garb.”²⁷ One such Jain representation of the *Saptamatrika*, that includes Padmavati and Ambika, is found in the Satghara cave of the Khandagiri group at Bhubaneswar. Interestingly enough, Padmavati is associated with snakes²⁸ and, in Goa, one of the *Saptamatrika*, Brahmanimaya, who is devoid of the attributes of Brahmani, is depicted with snakes in her hands and is the object of popular veneration, along with Sateri and Gajalakshmi. Similarly, we come across a lot of images of female deities – *Saptamatrika*, Sateri as Mahishasuramardhini, Kelbai as Gajalakshmi, Brahmanimaya and also the 'Boat Deity', 'Tarini' – which are cast in the *Yakshi* mould, indicative of a strong influence of both nature/vegetation worship and of Jainism.

Thus, the 'Tarini' is a syncretic vision of the *Shakti* of the Mhadei River Valley, a saviour Goddess of the Mhadei, epitomising the “shared faith” that characterised cosmopolitan Sattari in the early medieval period. She is an amalgam of local, Sanskritic, Buddhist and Jaina traditions. She is Santeri/Shantadurga, the earth goddess, symbolising fertility; Ganga, the river goddess representing the Mhadei; Tara, the saviour goddess who ships her devotees to safety and salvation; and of course, Mahishasuramardhini, the protector deity, the slayer of the enemies of the local sailors and of the merchants.

The 'maritime' Mahishasuramardhini of the Mhadei is, indeed, a Tarani who ferries her devotees from troubled waters to a safe harbour. She is associated with the boat to signify her status as the rescuer of the shipwrecked sailors, the protector of the riverine traders and others who sailed in the Mhadei and, spiritually, to denote a deity who assists souls to 'cross to the other shore': the Goan version of Tara-Tarini of Odisha, perhaps ?

The Mhadei River Valley: Hosting the 'Boat Deity'

The 'Boat Deities' of Goa are located along the banks of the River Mhadei and its tributaries. In times of yore the Mhadei Valley sustained a thriving commerce and served as a cradle of Goan culture and civilization. The River Mandovi, which flows past the capital city of Goa to meet the Arabian Sea, is known as Mhadei in its upper reaches. The interstate Mhadei traverses a distance of 87 kilometres, 35 kilometres in Karnataka and the remaining 52 kilometres in Goa. Its total catchment area in the state is estimated at 1580 square kilometres.²⁹

The Mhadei has contributed in no mean measure to the economic sustenance and cultural ethos of Sattari through which it flows after it descends into Goa from its source streams located in the remote villages of Degão and Gawali, near Khanapur, in Karnataka. It not only promoted agriculture and cultural interactions, but also sustained trade with the up-*Ghat* country and the Konkan coastal ports of Chandrapur, Gopakapattana, Ella, Reddi, Vengurla and Ballipatana.

The River Mhadei, thus, serves as the *Maha Nadi* or the 'Great River' and the *Jivandayini Maha Ai* or the life-giving 'Great Mother' of this region. Similarly, the Odia River

Mahanadi, too, functions as a commercial and cultural conduit and is associated, at places, with the 'Boat Deity' and the boat festival.

Like the River Mhadei, the River Valvanti, too, constituted a crucial commercial conduit linking the West coast of India with the Western Ghats via the *talukas* of Sattari and Bicholim, through which the vital trade routes passed. In the last century, the River Valvanti was navigable for big country crafts downstream from Vithalपुरi, at Sanquelim, up to Panaji, the coastal capital city of Goa. Realising the revenue potential of Sanquelim, the erstwhile Portuguese rulers of Goa had set up a customs check post at this port.³⁰

As I have argued in my book on these unique 'Boat Deities' of Goa, the 'Tarini' and 'Tar-Vir' sculptures of the Mhadei, Ragada and Valvanti River Valleys, provide valuable clues about the trade, the manufacturing centres, riverine ports, types of water crafts used, boat-building traditions and locations, trading communities and the cultural interactions that took place as a consequence of the thriving commerce.

The discovery and analysis of these sculptures has helped me give visibility to the hitherto largely undocumented contribution of the *talukas* of Sattari, Bicholim, Sanguem and Ponda to the commerce of ancient and early medieval Goa and the Konkan coast. Further, linkages may be established between the East and the West coasts of India for the Goan 'Tarini' does possess strong ties with the Tara-Tarini worship of the Odisha coast. These similarities are not restricted to the concept of a saviour Tarini, the iconography of a *Devi-in-a-boat* and hark at a riverine connect between the Goan Mhadei and the Odia Mahanadi rivers alone, they suggest other forms of cultural parallels such as a boat festival, and related toponyms.

Boat Festivals of Sanquelim and Cuttack

The culturescape of Goa is replete with festivals and rituals that venerate rivers and water bodies such as the boat festival held on the occasion of *Tripurari Purnima* at Sanquelim in the Bicholim *taluka*.

Sanquelim, along the banks of the Valvanti, was a significant port in times of yore and continues to be an important market even today. A celebration of the commercial-worthiness of Sanquelim, of the bygone days, is inherent in its annual boat festival held on the banks of the River Valvanti, by the side of the Vithal Temple, on the occasion of *Tripurari Purnima*.

Boats made of thermocol, cardboard and such material are set afloat in the waters of the River Valvanti at Vithalपुरi in continuation with the earlier ritual of *deep dana* when clay lamps used to be lit and offered to the river.

While this festival celebrates the slaying of the demon, Tripurasura, by Lord Vishnu, with the boats being looked upon as a modified version of the traditional *deep dana*, devoid of any commercial significance, one cannot help but wonder whether the thermocol aqua crafts are, in fact, a time-tested testimony to the riverine trade that was carried out by boats docked in front of the fort of Sanquelim in times gone by.

The boat festival of Sanquelim reminds one of a similar celebration that is held on the East coast of India, in Odisha. Here, on the occasion of *Kartik Purnima* (the full moon day in October-November), as a part of the *Boita Bandana* festivities, the people offer miniature boats, made of cork, coloured paper and banana tree stems and leaves, to the sea, rivers, tanks, undoubtedly, in the memory of the sailors and seafaring merchants of ancient Kalinga.³¹

The *Bali Yatra*³² (Voyage to Bali) of Cuttack, which commemorates Odisha's ancient maritime legacy, is an occasion for the local people to bathe in the Mahanadi and then sail tiny boats made of *shole* or bark of plantain tree (*kadalipatua*) with a lamp lit in it, throughout the day till late in the evening. Cuttack, like Sanquelim, is not situated along the coast but some sixty kilometres inland in the upper deltaic region of the River Mahanadi. It had, nevertheless, participated in the maritime ventures of ancient Odisha.³³

This festival is characterised by the ritual of *deep dana*, known in Cuttack as *boita bandana*. As in Goa, lamps are lit and placed in the hollow of the tiny paper boats that are set sail in the waters of the River Mahanadi. This 'boat' ritual commemorates the traditional date of commencement of sea voyages of the *sadhabas* (sea traders) to Bali and other places in South-East Asia that was scheduled for *Kartik Purnima* in ancient and early medieval times.

Just as the *Narali Purnima* celebrations provide a green signal to the fishermen of the west coast to return to the sea, after the monsoonal ban on their activities, the time-honoured *boita bandana* (worship of the boats) helps keep alive, in collective memory, the traditional commencement of seafaring activities on *Kartik Purnima* day by the ancient Kalingas.

The maritime mercantile voyages to Ceylon and South-East Asia, used to leave the Odisha shores in October/November-February every year, and return in June-September.³⁴ Hence, the legend of *Taapoi* and the related ritual of the *Khudurukuni Osha*³⁵ is another maritime celebration in which young unmarried girls propitiate the goddess Durga as Bhalukuni, for the safe return of their seafaring brothers.³⁶

Celebrated in the month of September, it alludes to the ancient custom of young girls of coastal Kalinga eagerly awaiting the return of their brothers from across the seas.

The historical memory of the seafaring and transoceanic commercial activities of the people of Kalinga is kept alive in the form of the festivals of *Boita Bandana* of *Kartika Purnima*, along with the *Bali Yatra*, the *Akasadipa* festival,³⁷ the rituals of *Bada Osha* and *Dalkhai Osha*,³⁸ *Khudurukuni Osha* and the *Taapoi* legend which serve as commemorative traditions, celebrating the glorious maritime heritage of ancient and medieval Odisha.³⁹

The boat in the 'Tarini' sculptures of Goa: A depiction of the *masula* of the Odisha coast?

The boat depicted in the Sanvarde (Sattari, Goa) sculpture appears to be a river craft, flatbottomed with curved sides and a tub-like appearance that reminds one of the *vaddem*, the log boat of the Goan waters. Its prow and stern are in line with the sheer line, with the prow being marginally higher. Two oars are plainly visible, one on each side. Running parallel to the sheer line are two thick lines of an interlocked chain, indicating sewing, while the rest of the exposed side of the vessel is decorated with vertical lines which may indicate the ribs of the vessel, suggesting the presence of a boat-building industry in this area. The stitching appears to be in the web pattern that characterises the *masulas* of the East coast, especially those of Odisha which have an inner rail sewn onto the washstrake.⁴⁰

The boat depicted in the sculpture of the Goan 'Boat *Devi*' of Shayll-Melauli has rollers underneath it, which suggests construction/repair of boats. It may be recalled that timber from the Konkan belt was imported into West Asia where it was used in ship-building. Since the Mhadei

Valley was rich in timber that was exported, especially from Ganjem, the Ganjem-Shayll-Melauli sector may have been a centre for the construction/repair of boats, such as the *ghanjah*, which would account for not only the place-name Ganjem but also the unique local 'Boat *Devi*.'

Interestingly, the Tara-Tarini temple of Odisha is located in the Ganjam district. Could there possibly have been any connection between the two?

The Goan and Odishan Ports

The Goan port of Ganjem was well known for its commercial transactions in timber, salt and other commodities.⁴¹ Located on the Mhadei, a little downstream from where the River Ragada joins it, Ganjem catered to the trade carried by both the rivers, emanating from Sattari and Sanguem. Since the tidal effect of the Mandovi is felt a little above Ganjem, which is located at the head of the estuary of Mandovi,⁴² this place was the last port of call for boats that carried trade downstream along the Mandovi and upstream on the Mhadei. Below Ganjem the flow of the river is seaward and above it, the water is fresh. In the nineteenth century, the Mhadei was navigable for small country crafts and rafts from Sonal to Ganjem from where bigger country crafts plied downstream to Usgão, which received the *patamarins* that sailed up from the coast.

Ganjem was famous for trade in timber down the River Mhadei. The Bhartu family of Ganjem, for example, traded in fire-wood and the Marathes of Dhamshe had a *gur* processing unit. Ganjem also traded in salt which was brought from the coastal areas, through the riverine route, to be sold in the interiors and in the up-*Ghat* country. Salt was stocked in huge heaps at a place called *mithacho mallo*.⁴³

Ganje/Ganjam is also the name of an ancient port located on the coast of Odisha,

identified by Ptolemy and visited by Hieun Tsang.⁴⁴ Further, the Ganjam district, in which the temple of Tara-Tarini is located, owes its name to Ganjamuhana which literally means a trading place at the confluence of a river with the sea, with the word *ganja* standing for a market or trading place and *muhana* referring to the mouth of a river at sea.⁴⁵ Could this be an etymological root for the Goan Ganjem as well, considering the fact that Ganjem is located at the head of the estuary of Mandovi, at the place where the freshwater of the River Mhadei meets the 'sea', brought in upstream all the way from the coast by the tide ?

Incidentally, the Odisha district of Ganjam, named after its famous ancient port, situated on the banks of the Rushikulya River, derived its name from the Persian *gunj-i-am*⁴⁶ which means "granary of the world", alluding to the prosperity that it commanded once upon a time. Yet another etymological root for the Odia Ganjam is *gunj*,⁴⁷ or market, for just like the Goan Ganjem, its counterpart on the East coast was a thriving port that traded in a number of commodities including foodgrains.

An interesting link between the Goan Ganjem and its Odia counterpart is that when the Kadambas (10th to 14th centuries A.D.) were ruling Goa, a minor branch of the Kadamba dynasty, the Kalinga Kadambas, were chieftains under the Ganga rulers of Kalinga. The territory that they held under their feudal sway, that is, Panchavishaya or Panchapatravishaya, corresponded with a part of the Mandasa Zamindari located in the Ganjam district.⁴⁸

To conclude, it may be stated that this article has made a preliminary attempt at documenting the cultural linkages between Goa and Odisha, through the medium of the unique *Devi*-in-a boat, a rarity in Indian art that is exclusive to Goa and Odisha. In the process, the

commonality of traditions emanating from the *Shaktipitha* status of these lands, the veneration of the *Saptamatrika*, and pertaining to the commemorative boat festival, the Mhadei-Mahanadi connect as well as the Ganjem-Ganjam links, have been discussed. And, finally, it may be mentioned that not only do archaeological finds, iconographical motifs, ethnographical parallels and toponymical similarities constitute the many hues of the Goa-Odisha historico-cultural palette, but there are gastronomical delights like the Goan *patoli* and its Odia country cousin, the *endura pitha*, that tickle the palate as well !

“Do Thou, Whose countenance is turned to all sides, send off our adversaries as if in a ship, to the opposite shore: do Thou convey us in a ship across the sea for our welfare.”

—*Rig Veda*. 1, 97, 7 and 8

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Prof. Pratima Kamat, Head, Department of History, Goa University, Goa.