

APPENDIX - VBASSEIN FOLKLORE RELATING TO PORTUGUESE RULE

The tales, traditions, beliefs, folklore and folk songs are a collection, by no means complete, of strange or simple beliefs of a simple people. Portuguese rule in Bassein for more than two centuries completely transformed the way of life and the line of thinking of the people of this area. Many important personalities and events are connected with this period. Generally folklore is attached to such people and events. They are jotted down as they were received or heard whilst being narrated by the elderly people. They are carried on from generation to generation. Most of the time there is no documentary evidence to prove historical truth regarding these events or they are devoid of literary padding. The following are some of the important Bassein folk tales which are directly or indirectly connected with Portuguese rule in Bassein.

1. How Bassein was captured by Portuguese.

When the Portuguese arrived at the coast of Bassein and wished to settle down, they resorted to a trick. They approached the king and begged for a present of land "as much as a cow hide". The king was really amused by the novelty of the request and granted their petition. He permitted them to choose a spot. The Portuguese then cut the hide into thin strips and measured the ground. As a result, they acquired the portion of land now occupied by the Bassein fort. The king was so overwhelmed with the ingenuity of the Portuguese, that he made over to them the entire district of Bassein.

2. Welcome of Portuguese by local people.

When the Portuguese disembarked on the shores of the Bassein, the local people were delighted because they had never seen these white people with reddish cheeks. They came to the shore with different kinds of presents. The villagers gave them the famous green bananas of Bassein. In this way, the people of Bassein welcomed the foreigners who later on became their rulers.

3. St. Francis Xavier and the handkerchief.

St. Francis Xavier visited Bassein twice (There is a controversy regarding his second visit). It was during one of these visits that he went to Utan. The Portuguese called this place Dongri. But he met with resistance from the local people and was forced to leave the place. When he reached the shore, there was no vessel going to the Bassein Fort. So he spread his handkerchief on the waters and blessed the elements and the floating piece of cloth, sat on it and reached the fort safely.

4. Lost rosary of St. Francis Xavier.

It was during one of these voyages that St. Francis was praying on the ship with his rosary. All of sudden it fell into the water. There was no possibility of retrieving it. When he reached Bassein he noticed that a crab had already carried the rosary to the shore on his back. Henceforward, crabs in this area are marked with a sign of the cross and rosary beads on their shells.

5. The water Nymph called Herlin.

An evil spirit called Herlin in form of a young woman lives in isolated wells and tanks. She comes out at midday to play on

swings which she is very much fond of. If there is a banyan tree, she prefers to swing on its hanging roots, leaving her long hair loose. The spirit is said to take temporary possession of young people who may encounter with her while she is swinging and makes them boisterous for a time.

6. The story of Geera

The tale of Geera or Zoting, is well known in this area. This evil spirit haunts the outskirts of the villages and marshy places. It appears in the form of a man but with the feet pointing backwards. It takes pleasures in annoying lonely travellers by assuming fantastic shapes. But sometimes it is helpful to persons who are in difficulties. But the person, who is being helped should not doubt the integrity of the spirit. If it senses suspicion, it resorts to punishment.

7. The tale of Barmya.

The story of Barmya, who is also called Bramhadeva is quite familiar in Bassein. The eating of pork and wine was introduced by the Portuguese in Bassein. This was resented by the Hindus. This tale is connected with eating of pork.

In fact Barmya is the heavenly guard of the villages. He wears white dress and marches across the villages on his white horse at midnight. Generally, he does not trouble anyone but if he happens to meet any person who has eaten pork and drunk liquor, he punishes him severely. Mostly, the people who are drowned in wells and ponds at the time of wedding seasons are believed to be victims of Barmya's wrath.

8. Underground tunnel to Bassein from the Fort.

There is a saying that the Portuguese had constructed an underground tunnel from the Bassein fort to Hira-dongri near

Nirmal to escape at the time of emergency. This place is on a high hill but it has no connection with the fort. The minor fortification was erected by the Marathas before their final assault on the Bassein Fort. Sometimes people notice the type of cellars starting from the fort which are underground storehouses for ammunition and food provisions but not tunnels as such. No genuine tunnel has been detected by anyone.

9. Chimaji Appa's head and cannon

The Bassein campaign of the Marathas under the command of Chimaji Appa lasted nearly for two years (1737-1739). The fort was besieged for several months. But all the efforts to capture it from the Portuguese were in vain. The frustrated Chimaji Appa is supposed to have said that if they failed to capture this fort, they would blow up his head at the mouth of cannon, which would be thrown inside the fort. The inspired soldiers furiously launched the final attack on the fort and captured it ultimately.

10. Saying about the fall of Bassein

It is said it was a bangle seller from Marol, near Andheri in Bombay who played an important role as a spy and promised to disclose to Chimaji Appa, the Maratha leader, the plight of the Portuguese who were defending the fort. It is said that the ladies inside the fort were very fond of bangles. So the bangle sellers were permitted to visit the city without much hindrance. The said bangle seller took undue advantage of his freedom to enter the city. When he came out of the fort he secretly disclosed to Chimaji Appa that the Portuguese were starving. The Maratha leader leader who was about to give up the siege and return to Poona asked his commander to press the siege and attack with more vigour. Ultimately, the starving Portuguese could not hold out any longer, and they decided to surrender.

Phonetic Table to read Marathi ⑥

.अ a	.क k	.ठ th	.ब b	.ळ l
.आ ā	.ख kh	.ड d	.भ bh	.क्ष ks
.इ i	.ग g	.ढ dh	.म m	.ज्ञ jñ
.ई ī	.घ gh	.ण ṇ	.य y	
.उ u	.ङ ṅ	.त t	.र r	
.ऊ ū	.च c	.थ th	.ल l	
.ऋ ṛ	.छ ch	.व d	.व v	
.ए e	.ज j	.ध dh	.श ś	
.ऐ ai	.झ jh	.न n	.ष ṣ	
.ओ o	.ञ ñ	.प p	.स s	
.औ au	.ट ṭ	.फ ph	.ह h	

-- m̐ (anusvar)

ah̐ (visarg)

NOTE: medial 'a' (अ) and ending 'a' (अ) will be dropped; e.g., Karamarakara (करमरकर) - Karmarkar.

- ⑥ Felix A. Machado, Jñānesvara's Theology of the Three Paths to Liberation, An unpublished Thesis submitted to the Fordham University, New York, 1985
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