

A Study of J.A. Fernandes' *Tiatr Tandulamchem Kestaum (1944-45)*

Remy Dias

Abstract

Among the numerous tiatrs of J.A. Fernandes, his work *Tandulamchem Kestaum* which he writes during the last years of World War II, that is, 1944 and 1945 records the collaboration of the *Famad Goencho Trio* the *Batcar-Xettcar-Possorcar* in making scarce rice available only to the rich sections of the society and at a higher price. *Tandulamchem Kestaum* sensationalizes how the poor especially the kunbi die in the countryside. The tiatr shows what the contemporary Konkani periodical *Ave Maria* published from Bombay also attests about the famine ravaging Goa during 1944 and 1945. The local production of rice for each of these years is suffice for just 3 to 4 months. Imports from British India are negligible. Introduction of the Portuguese currency the *escudo* as legal tender, shortage of low denomination coins, and the high exchange rate for the British Indian currency in Goa all contribute to destabilize the economy. The rich become richer and the poor perish for want of adequate food. Rice, the staple diet is scarce. The Portuguese government introduces rationing but there is no supply of stock for several months. The public distribution system is highly erratic. Prices of all essential commodities shoot up and trade in the black market is the order of the day. The Portuguese government stipulates equitable distribution of rice but have no storage facilities whatsoever to stock rice. *Tandulamchem Kestaum* when read along with the essays of T.B. Cunha and the numerous articles and write-ups appearing in *Ave Maria* point to the reality of the raging famine and how it sings the people especially the poor and the kunbi. With little or no food supplies many emigrate to distant lands especially to Bombay and other areas in British India in search of employment opportunities and to avoid death and destruction in the land of their birth.

Key words: Tiatr, J.A. Fernandes, *Tandulamchem Kestaum*, Rice Problem, Famine, *Kunbi*

Saranx

João Agostinho Fernandes hanchea sabar tiatrantlo, dusrea mhazhuzachea nimneea kallar mhunnlear 1944 ani 1945 vorsamni boroil'lo '**Tandulamchem Kestaum**' ho tiatr khub famad asa. Hatunt adinch durmill axil'le tandull fokot girest somazak chodd molan uplobdh korun divpi bhattkar-xetkar-posrokar oxa trimiti ghottkanchea sohokaryachem chitronn korta. '**Tandulamchem Kestaum**' tiatrant ganvgirea vattharant gorib lok khas korun kunnbi somaz koso bhukek lagun bolli zata hachem sonvedonatmok chitronn kelam. Hea tiatrant 1944-1945 vorsa Gõyant poddil'lea duxkallachem jem chitronn ailam teach duxkallachi Mumboi saun prokaxit zavpi 'Ave Maria' nanvachem somkalin Konknni satallem-i govai dita. Hatunt dor vorsa thollavem

tandllanchem utpadon fokot 3 te 4 mhoinech puro astalem. Bharotantlean zavpi ayata sondorbhant durlokx zatalem. Purtugez 'escudo' cholnacho vapor, unnea molachea nanneancho unnav, Brittix Bharotiya cholnachi chodd vinimoi (*exchange*) dor hankam lagun Göychi orthvevostha osthir zata. Girest odik girest zata ani gorib favo tem on'n mellonk naxil'lean bolli zata.

Purtugez sorkar rexon vevostha suru korta punn kitlexech mhoine dhan'neachi purvonn zainam. Bhouxik vitronnant axil'li onixchitotai sogllea gorjechea vostunchi dorvadd haka lagun kallo bazar choddttta. Purtugez sorkaran tandull vanttpachi vevostha kelia punn tanche koddem tandllancho santtho korun dovorpachi koslich vevostha nam. T.B. Cunha hanche nibond ani *Ave Maria*-nt prokaxit zavpi sabar lekh vachtokoch, duxkallachi vastoviktai ani lokank khas korun gorib ani kunnbi somazak koxe tras zale hem spoxtt zata. On'nachi purvonn samki unni axil'lean vo samkich naxil'lean choddxe lok kamanchea nimtan ani aplichech zolm-bhuim-ient zavpi mon'xacho vidhvons ttallpa khatir porki vattharamni khas korun Mumboi ani Bharotantlea her vattharamni rozgar sond sodpak ani zolmachie bhuim-ier moronn ani nax zauncho nhoi mhonn stholantor (*migration*) kortat.

Biz utram: Tiatr, J.A. Fernandes, Tandulamchem Kestaum, Tandllanchem unneponn, Duxkall, Kunnbi.

सारांश

जे. ए. फेर्नांडीस हांच्या साबार तियात्रांतलो, दुसऱ्या म्हाझुजाच्या निमण्या काळार म्हणल्यार 1944 आनी 1945 वर्सांनी बरयल्लो 'तांदळांचें केस्तांव' हो तियात्र खूब फामाद आसा. हातूंत आदींच दुर्मीळ आशिल्ले तांदूळ फकत गिरेस्त समाजाक चड मोलान उपलब्ध करून दिवपी भाटकार-शेतकार-पसरकार अशा त्रिमिती घटकांच्या सहकार्यांचें चित्रण करता. 'तांदळांचें केस्तांव' तियात्रांत गांवगिऱ्या वाठारांत गरीब लोक खास करून कुणबी समाज कसो भुकेक लागून बळी वता हाचें संवेदनात्मक चित्रण केलां. ह्या तियात्रांत 1944-1945 वर्सा गोंयांत पडिल्ल्या दुकळाचें जें चित्रण आयलां, त्याच दुकळाची मुंबय सावन प्रकाशीत जावपी 'आवे मारिया' नांवाचें समकालीन कोंकणी नेमाळेंय गवाय दिता. हातूंत दर वर्सा थळावें तांदळांचें उत्पादन फकत 3 ते 4 म्हयन्यां खातीर पुरक आसतालें. भारतांतल्यान जावपी आयाता संदर्भांत दुर्लक्ष जातालें. पुर्तुगेज 'एस्कुडो' चलनाचो वापर, उण्या मोलाच्या नाण्यांचो उणाव, भारतीय चलनाचो वाडपी वापर हांकां लागून गोंयची अर्थवेवस्था अस्थीर जाता. गिरेस्त आनीक गिरेस्त जाता आनी गरीब फाव तें अन्न मेळूंक नाशिल्ल्यान बळी वता. पुर्तुगेज सरकार रेशन वेवस्था सुरू करता पूण कितलेशेच म्हयने धान्याची पुरवण जायना. भौशीक वितरणांत आशिल्ली अनिश्चीतताय. सगळ्या गरजेच्या वस्तूंची दरवाड हांकां लागून काळ्या बाजाराक येवपी ओतो सामान्य जावपाक लागता. पुर्तुगेज सरकारान तांदूळ वांटपाची वेवस्था केल्या पूण तांचे कडेन तांदळांचो सांठो करून दवरपाची कसलीच वेवस्था ना. टी.बी. कुन्हा हांचो निबंद आनी आवे मारियांत प्रकाशीत जावपी साबार लेख वाचतकच, दुकळाची वास्तविकताय आनी ते लोकांक खास करून गरीब आनी कुणबी समाजाक कशे त्रास दिताले हें स्पश्ट जाता. अन्नाची पुरवण सामकी उणी आशिल्ल्यान वा सामकीच नाशिल्ल्यान चडशे लोक कामांच्या निमतान आनी आपलेच जल्मभुंयेंत जावपी मनशाचो विध्वंस टाळपा खातीर परकी वाठारांनी खास करून मुंबय आनी भारतांतल्या हेर भागांनी स्थलांतरणां करतात.

बीज उतरां: तियात्र, जुआंव आगोस्तीन फेर्नांडीस, तांदळांचें केस्तांव, तांदळाची समस्या, दुकळ, कुणबी

Introduction

This essay attempts to sketch a picture of the dismal conditions of hunger, deprivation and death during 1944-45 due to the famine.

The tiatr *Tandulamchem Kestaum* of J.A. Fernandes is written in roman script Konkani and is available in the manuscript form at the Central Library, Panjim, dramatizing the issues of hunger, deprivation and the resultant deaths occurring during World War II in the Goan countryside especially among the Kunbis. The tiatr is interspersed with numerous creolized Portuguese and English words. Besides, the language of the kunbis – as used by J.A. Fernandes, perhaps for entertaining the spectators – is different from that of other sections of Goan society. All this makes it quite challenging to read and use the tiatr as a source for piecing the history of famine, in 1944-45.

Most of the contemporary writers sing praises of Portugal's dictator Salazar for keeping off the Portuguese nation and its empire from the Great War (1939-45) and thus saving people from its ravages. However, is J.A. Fernandes' tiatr *Tandulamchem Kestaum* then just a work of fiction or does it expose the reality in the periphery (hinterland) of the Periphery (Goa) of the Portuguese empire. The tiatr discusses the destruction that the War causes in the Goan villages, and, the hardships which people have to endure to avoid the trickery of the elites, with the officialdom either remaining silent or at times conspiring against the poor. The thought provoking essays of T.B. Cunha '*The Rice Problem in Goa (An Analysis of the Government's Extortionist Policy)*' and '*The Basic Problem an Appeal for a Customs 'Modus Vivendi' with Neighbouring India,*' analyses the situation from the pre-War period which situation only becomes worse in the subsequent years. As stated above, the pages of *Ave Maria* contain abundant information about the famine devastating Goa in 1944 and 1945.

The elites who control the bureaucracy, and land owning institutions like the *comunidades* (village communities), *confrarias* (confraternities) and *mazanias* (temple trusts) often collaborate with the colonizers increasing manifold the burden of the commoners. These institutions are collectively the biggest land owning institutions in the early twentieth century. The average Goan villager, especially the landless labourers and the kunbis groan under the impact of Portuguese colonialism. So, this essay titled '*A Study of J.A. Fernandes' Tiatr Tandulamchem Kestaum (1944-45)*,' attempts to write the story of the destruction in the Goan countryside and fill a gap in the history of Goa during the latter part of the war period 1944-45, offering a commentary of the raging famine.

Some important research questions that the essay investigates are: Who is J.A. Fernandes and what compels him to write the tiatr *Tandulamchem Kestaum*? What is the storyline of the drama? How does J.A. Fernandes contrast life of the elites and the well-to-do in the urban areas with that of the poor sections struggling to make both ends meet? How does the story of *Tandulamchem Kestaum* resonate with the reality that T.B. Cunha's writings in the late 1930s expose? What is the picture that can be drawn about the grimaced life in the Goan countryside by reading and analyzing the news in

the contemporary Konkani periodicals? Do the periodicals attest the reality which J.A. Fernandes tries to portray or is the picture dissimilar? How do the batcars (landlords) and cultivators combine with the traders and shopkeepers to defraud the marginalized? Is Goa facing a famine during the World War II and how is this pushing the daily wage workers including the kunbis to migrate in large numbers to distant lands? What is the overall impact of the scarcity of rice on the households?

The above research questions are sought to be analysed with a historical perspective in four sections. The first part, deals with the life and writings of J.A. Fernandes, and the story of Tandulamchem Kestaum. The second sections analyses the writings of T.B. Cunha – the father of Goan nationalism – depicting the misdeeds of the Portuguese government in handling the rice problem and exposing the insensitive manner the issue is handled. Section three uncovers the reality regarding the availability or rather the scarcity of rice by making a study of the periodical Ave Maria from 1944 to 1945. The fourth section, deliberates on the daily struggle of the commoners in the villages and shows how the kunbis and other sections of Goa respond to the challenging conditions by migrating en masse to British India 'in search of the daily bread' rather than 'die of hunger in Goa'. This is followed by some concluding remarks.

J.A. Fernandes and ‘Tandulamchem Kestaum’

The famine prevalent in Goa during the war period, especially from 1944 and 1945, with the landless labourers and kunbis experiencing extreme hardships to procure one square meal for the day, prompts J.A. Fernandes to write Tandulamchem Kestaum. The cast includes Minglu Ferreiro (Batcar) his devout wife Virgin and Phillip (spoilt son and an alcoholic); Cosma (Xettcar) a hardworking cultivator specializing in taking *comunidade* (village community) rice fields on rent, hoping to make a living so that he could marry-off his three daughters and save enough to buy additional two plots of land at Dormapura, Salcete; Sitaram (Possorcar) a retailer who is an expert in mixing-fixing and making a fast buck through hook and crook; Salvador (Bomboicar) an emigrant exasperated with the day light looting of the masses and the extortionate cost of living in Goa; Juzze, Nujjar, Foranchik, Nujjad, Izbel (all kunbis) resigned to a fate of misery but willing to change the course of destiny; and, Lieutenant Faria, Gaspar and Cab (policeman) who are the local elements representing the long arm of the coloniser.

J.A. Fernandes is a skillful writer and dramatizes life at the *possro* (shop) in the commercial city of Margao in the following manner:

Sitaram possorea boson sakkor anic petrol vinktan, bailean voddli line, asson bailo ani dadelea ani burguim, kunbi, cab, etc Sitaram poilo voddla locac sakkor dita ani maguir locachi lutt chodd zatastanam vantat tednam soldad temcam bond corunc sangtat kiteac carandai kestamvam zatanam mandar sorxim. Possorear choriam Petrol ani Sakkor vinkta. (Act I, Scene IV)

Sitaram is sitting at the shop-counter and sells sugar and kerosene, outside is a long queue, there being women, men and children, kunbi, policeman, etc. etc. Sitaram first sells sugar to the well-to-do, and then as the crowd swells and as the hullabaloo rises the soldier asks him to close (the shop) for haggling and fights flare up at the counter. It is seen that Petrol and Sugar is sold in black. (All translations of excerpts from Tandulamchem Kestaum in this essay are of the author)

In few words, J.A. Fernandes cleverly describes the downside of the local trade and commercial activities. In the first half of the twentieth century, trade is largely controlled by the Hindus and so the shop owner is depicted in the tiatr as a Hindu by name Sitaram Bombi. He trades in sugar and kerosene which is sold first to the rich, undoubtedly, for a higher price. The commoners, especially the kunbi who are also in queue cannot obviously afford to buy at the inflated price and there is much confusion. This is usually a repeat story everyday fraying tempers. The Cab present at the scene orders Sitaram to close the shop. This makes matters worse. For, what follows is the underhand sale of sugar and kerosene for a higher price. The poor and the kunbi who obviously cannot pay the high rates, and are overwhelmed by the over-bearing behaviour of the policeman, go home empty handed, frustrated and completely dejected.

Tandulamchem Kestaum is not just about the sale of sugar and kerosene in the black market. It's a more painful story of the reality in the countryside. J.A. Fernandes depicts in the tiatr how the 'Famad Goencho Trio,' (famous Goan troika) of the *Batcar-Xettcar-Possorcar* (Landlord-Cultivator-Shopkeeper) conspire to raise the price of paddy/rice in order to make a fast buck. This is when in fact the villagers are facing extreme shortage of rice. During the year 1944 and 1945 the production of rice in Goa is so less as to meet the needs of the populace for just 3 to 4 months. Imports from British India and Burma are negligible. The opening scene of the tiatr, offers a peep into the behind the scene dealings of the producers and traders of rice, backed by the feudal elements, to jack up prices during World War II. The discussion between Minglu, Cosma and Sitaram is an indicator of this cruel reality:

Minglu *(Laughs aloud ha ha) the three of us are fortunate to earn in thousands on rice, we will profit from this war (to Cosma) you take as many rice fields like me – Am ready to take all your produce at a good price – what say you it's ok.*

Cosma *I cannot sell at the old rate to you.*

Minglu *Tell at what price you want to sell – remember that I too have to profit.*

Cosma *80 rupees per handi (and) cannot sell for less. For, I have three daughters whom I wish to marry... besides, two plots at Dormapura (which I want to buy).*

- Minglu* *80 rupees is just too much – If bought at that price then we would have to sell (at retail) for 100 rupees and at that rate it will be difficult – You sell it (to me) for 60 rupees and I will re-sell at 75 rupees for a profit margin of 15 rupees per handi.*
- Sitaram* *(And) I will then sell it (to the people) for 85 rupees per handi. I need to earn (profit) at least 10 rupees per handi.*
- Minglu* *We won't allow any imports till all our harvested rice is sold – what's needed is unity of all the Goan landlords, cultivators and traders. This is the best time for us to make money, buy cars and build bigger cottages. All laugh ha.*

Before the start of the war, the price of rice is not high and is sold directly to the consumers by either the batcar or xettcar and at their respective residences. Perhaps, with the trader missing from the scene people got rice in retail at a rate they could afford to buy, directly from the producers. From the above discussion, it is clear that when the xettcar Cosma sells his produce to Minglu batcar the latter jacks up the price by Rs. 15 per handi as he unloads the produce to the shopkeeper Sitaram. And Sitaram tells directly that he is looking for a profit of Rs. 10 per handi as well. The truth is much bitter. In reality, the profit which Sitaram is earning is enormous. He sells rice in retail at Rs. 3.50 per paili. A handi of rice is equal to 20 cuddos or 40 pailis (which is the measure of rice in Goa). Thus, when Sitaram sells 40 pailis of rice at Rs. 3.50 he earns about Rs. 140 per handi and his profit margin is in the range 40 to 50 per cent or more. The tiatr shows Sitaram selling tens of handis every season.

Cosma the cultivator sells 150 sacks of rice to his overlord Minglu which is equivalent to about 100 handis. This, indicates the batcar Minglu earning about 1500 rupees, at harvest, and without any investment or meaningful effort on land. The feudal lords are also not known to contribute towards the improvement of cultivable lands in the twentieth century. Yet, it is the feudal position which enables the batcar to extract his pound of flesh at each and every harvesting season. Cosma does not or cannot sell his produce, directly to the shop-keeper Sitaram, bypassing the authority of the former's overlord Minglu. He has to sell it to the batcar who will then re-sell it to the local retailer. The words of Minglu point to his machinations '*Kitem munn anvem khup dudu kela battacher he zinsan – zadd batcaranim zolmanc kelonam Sitaram ha ha ha*' (I have earned a lot through rice – [and says to] Sitaram, no batcar ever earned so much in their lifetime like this ha ha ha). The profit margin which Sitaram then makes vending rice in retail is already indicated above. The rice that Sitaram sells is also mixed with stones and other foreign material affecting adversely the health of the consumers. But, Sitaram is least concerned about the welfare of the people and says '*Amcho cosso guneaum corunc zata...*' (How am I to be blamed...?), adding jocularly that 'people are simpletons.'

Master story-teller that he is, the brilliance of J.A. Fernandes is evident in the way he shows how the

Famad Goencho Trio are making a killing (money) at the cost of the kumbis who either die due to deprivation or emigrate in large numbers to avoid the pangs of hunger, turning their back, to the land of their birth and ancestors, and cursing the exploitative *Famad Goencho Trio*. The tiatr also portrays the *Bomboicar* (Goans working in British Bombay) as a concerned villager eager to challenge the maneuvers of the *Famad Goencho Trio*. *Salvador*, a *Bomboicar*, comes calling on them (*Batcar-Xettcar-Possorcar*) to convey the hardships which people face. He asks for the price of rice and following is the dialogue:

Salvad *...You'll are selling (rice) at too high rate.*

Minglu *You are saying it's costly, however, are you not aware that these days everything is dearer. In olden days, 12 mackerels were sold for 1 paisa (1/100th of a rupee) while today for 1 rupee it is just 3 or 4... besides, loafs, cashew, everything is expensive. If there is no import of rice how are we to be blamed mister.*

Salvad *You'll are not allowing import of rice for it is advantageous to you. You are telling that cashew, mackerels, loafs, etc are costly – why won't it be. You are selling rice at the rate of 3.5 rupees per paili in the black market. You'll are to be blamed – keep the rate at 1.5 rupees (per paili) and everything will be cheaper – at this rate of rice Goans would not emigrate to distant lands by forsaking their villages.*

Minglu *How do you know that we stop imports (ofrice)? It's all lies.*

Salvad *There is no one to report to the government about the true picture of rice. Authorities are clueless and are not remedying the situation. Today, with vast numbers emigrating, (there is) much loss to the villages, to the exchequer and to the government.*

Cosma *We are not much concerned about the loss.*

Salvad *What do you know – who will tell you about the poor and the kumbis – venture out of Margao city and go the bordering villages and wards and you'll will witness how many people are dying of hunger.*

The argument of *Salvador* – who arrives from Bombay for three-month vacation in Goa – with the *Famad Trio* shows plainly the extent of price rise in the first half of the twentieth century. For instance, in a life time the price of mackerels which are earlier sold at the rate of 12 mackerels for 1 paisa (1/100th of a rupee), now cost exorbitantly high during the War, that is, 1 rupee can fetch only 3 or 4 mackerels. Fish along with rice and curry is the staple diet of the people. The price of mackerels

rises alarmingly by 300 to 400 times in the years 1944 and 1945. And the poor and kunbis who just cannot afford to buy fresh fish, consume only a small piece of salted fish (*harrea bangddo*) along with *ambil* (gruel made of nachnni or millets) instead of fish-curry-rice or *pej* (canjee made of rice). Many survive on *chiringue* (*moong* or green gram) which, however, they detest to consume.

Nuzad, an elderly *kunbin*, for instance, complains to her son in the tiatr '*tea chirinjeane muj pottam chabbot murre – mac borea podnaim chirnjache pej*' (I get stomach ache consuming green gram – I just don't like the broth). To this her son Foranchik replies that '*Eileai diss cadcha podile. Baca(ram) codde – Xettcaram codde, Possorcaram codde tandul custai tenje gorant pun ek pod negun dinaim magonc jeleari dudu jeun*' (We have to endure the [bad] days. The Batcars, Cultivators (and) Shopkeepers have rice in abundance but if we ask they don't give even a podd of rice.' It may be noted that a podd of rice is equivalent to quarter of a paili. That is why, Salvador hits the nail on the head when he utters: “You (Sitaram) are selling rice at the rate of 3.5 rupees per paili in the black market. You'll are to be squarely blamed – keep the rate at 1.5 rupees and everything will be cheaper – at this (lower) rate of rice Goans would not emigrate to distant lands, forsaking their villages”.

When the *Famad Goencho* Trio refuse to acknowledge the prevalence of famine in Goa, Salvador points that most people are frail and skeletal '*tenchim addam distipoddat*' (their bones are visible) and says: “*Coitat – Tumchem Batcar, Xettcar, possorcarachem cont guetolo con nam so dista – karan tumi zalea atam duduvancar – duple poicha custar*” (Wretched – there is none to make you'll Batcar, Xettcar, Possorcar accountable – you'll have become rich at the expense of the poor). Salvador brings forth another truth. It is about his lack of adequate knowledge of the Portuguese language (the official language of Goa) which is a stumbling block to report about the nefarious activities of the rice producers, traders and feudal lords to the concerned authorities (*Firinghi bhass noco decun patti sortam*).

The parting remarks of Salvador paints a grim picture of the reality in Goa for the poor and the Kunbi. Read:

Tumi batcar, xettcar, Possorcar, dudu corunc bhair sorlea mun Bomboicaranc khobor assa. Aum Bomboicar ek 3 muineachem licens gueun eilolom Goeam ravonc punn maca chodd marecar podlem – poile suater Inglez nottam vattau dilo 10% tandul 3/8 paili Goun 2/12 paili. Bestoch eilom dista – sogli nagoun, nagoun – Te dudu tumcam bogsonant caran te dudu dukkam galoum ditole...

That you batcar, xettcar, Possorcar, are out to make a fast buck, all the Bomboicar (emigrants) are aware. Am a Bomboicar who came for 3 months holidays to Goa but have had a bad experience – first of all had to pay 10 per cent exchange rate on foreign currency, rice costs 3.5 rupees per paili, wheat 2.75 rupees per paili. Unnecessarily I came here –

everywhere there is cheating, cheating – the money (you make) will cost you dearly for (we) are earning through our sweat...

The common refrain in the first half of the twentieth century is that there are hardly any opportunities for gainful employment in Goa. The educated sections and others prefer migrating to British India for work sending remittances to relatives. And, when they return to Goa either for holidays or after retirement with their life savings the emigrants have to pay 10 per cent exchange rate to convert the Indian currency to the Portuguese Escudos. It may be noted that suddenly the Portuguese made escudo the only legal tender in Goa during the War inconveniencing people largely. This is one of the major reason the poor could not buy rice for they did not possess Portuguese escudos and low denomination coins required to make purchases which are in short supply. Besides, rice and wheat are costlier in Goa as compared to British India.

It seems, the migrants like the character of Salvador in Tandulamchem Kestaum are a catalyst rooting for positive change in Goa. The following words of Salvador to the Famad Trio are thought provoking:

...funkot tandul dubol loc magona. Kestaum muntai tem tumim chodda pressac te vinktai decun. Bomboi girestanc ani dubleanc ekuch pres, sogleo jeunacheo vostu sovai ani sogle assat dadosi.

...the poor are not asking for free rice. Problem is you'll are selling at too high a rate. In Bombay both the rich and poor pay the same price, all food items are cheap and everyone is happy.

Is J.A. Fernandes who is likewise an emigrant employed in Bombay trying to speak his mind through the character of the *bomboicar* Salvador in the tiatr? This seems so, however, it would require a thorough analysis of the life and his vast volume of tiatrs and other writings. J.A. Fernandes, is a Konkani playwright and theatre artist, born on 21 December, 1871, in Margao, Salcete. He migrates and is employed for long in the firm Philipps & Co., in Bombay, where he died at little less than age 75 years on 29 August, 1947.

J.A. Fernandes wrote a number of tiatrs. These tiatrs are acquired by the Goa Konkani Akademi, Panjim from his son Anthony Fernandes and later on transferred to the Central Library, Panjim where they are currently available, in manuscript form, for public viewing/reading. Some of the tiatrs include: Belle of Cavel (1893), *Cazar Matarponnar* (1897), *Revolt de Satari* (1897), *Bebdo* (1901), *Batcara – Part I* (1904), *Batcara – Part II* (1905), *Pandurang Kusmoncar* (1910), Professor Leitao (1914), Geraldina (1925), Rukmibai (1926), *Noureamcho Bazar* (1927), Josefina (1932), *Vauraddi* (1933), *Kunbi Jaki* (1934), *Muzo Khapri Chakor* (1939), *Goan Ponch* (1941), etc. *Tandulamchem Kestaum* (1944-45) is perhaps the last tiatr composed by him. J.A. Fernandes is also a contributor of stimulating articles on Konkani language and culture, caste, migration and other

prickly issues, to a number of contemporary Konkani periodicals, published from either Goa or British India.

Wilmix Wilson Mazarello (*100 years of Konkani Tiatro*, Panjim, Directorate of Art & Culture, 2000, 15-21) writes, what is most note-worthy about J.A. Fernandes' writing is that his tiatrs have a moral background, are decent, and have no vulgarity whatsoever. Wilmix also emphasizes the fact that J.A. Fernandes endeavours to improve the quality of tiatrs, strives to give good direction to the actors and gives equal importance to the music aspect in his tiatrs.

In the Tiatr *Tandulamchem Kestaum* the authorities are doing little to correct the anomaly of lack of rice. Exasperated Juzze, Nujjar, Foranchik, Nujjad, Izbel catch hold of the *Famad Goencho* Trio, tie them all together with a rope, beating them mercilessly. They cry aloud in pain and realizing their folly agree to give rice to the poor at an affordable rate. But none listen to their wailing. The *Bomboicar's* parting words as the tiatr ends on a disastrous note are poignant:

... Ho castig favo tumcam connam tumche churchure naim – Tumche osso munxini ho caiboro Goencho gaum padd gailo – Goencar guele gaum sandun ani ghatti, melbari bitor sorle tenche suater. Tumim tegui vortoutai guneaucari – Goencha locac daundaicha. Aumvui vetam mujem gor ani gaum sandun. Adeus tegaim, Batcar, Xettcar ani Possorcar. Tegui eka mekachi bori ubb gueat, duduvanichi, guetat tessi – xettant vaur corrat ani atant tumi gueat tenchi suat and sinkat ani corat temcho vaur zaiat vauraddi ani nuim Batcar, Xettcar ani Possorcar adeus...

... You'll deserve this punishment (,) none pity you'll. Wicked people like you have destroyed Goan villages – Goans have left their villages and ghattis and malabaris have taken their place here. You'll three are to be blamed – to drive away the Goans. I am also leaving my house and village. Adeus to you three Batcar, Xettcar and Possorcar. Give each other company as you'll hanker after money – work in the rice fields and take the place of the landless labourers, learn to do their (kunbi) work, become workers and not Batcar, Xettcar ani Possorcar adeus...

Goans especially from among the catholic community have been migrating to distant lands in search of work. J.A. Fernandes suggests that it is the exploitative feudal relations which is responsible for the hordes of villagers deserting their houses and villages. And, others 'ghattis (those from across the Western Ghats) and Malabaris' are entering Goa. He exhorts the *Famad* Trio to be workers and not be exploitative 'Batcar, Xettcar ani Possorcar.' In pronouncing these words J.F. Fernandes seems to prophesize that the day is not far when the rice fields will be abandoned, the batcars will lose their prominence, agriculture will no longer be profitable, and shopkeepers will suffer losses. And this is exactly what happens in Goa in the second half of the twentieth century.

J.A. Fernandes is a master story teller and for his stellar role in promoting tiatr he is fondly

remembered today as *Pai Tiatr* (Father of Tiatr) by fellow Goans. It may be noted that unlike his other tiatrs, *Tandulamchem Kestaum* is not interspersed with songs for entertainment. Is this just a coincidence or is it that in order to portray the reality of hunger, deprivation and death in the Goan countryside during the war period that the dramatist thought it appropriate not to entertain the spectators with songs and lively music. In the following section an attempt is made to examine if the said tiatr is just a piece of fiction or if it showcases the reality by attempting to analyse the writings of T.B. Cunha who is a contemporary of J.A. Fernandes.

T.B. Cunha, 'The Rice Problem...' and 'The Basic Problem...'

The issue of rice and its scarcity dominates the debate among the intelligentsia as well not just during World War II but even earlier as the Great Depression (1929-33) causes havoc to the local economy. The writings of T.B. Cunha are a testimony to this fact. A volume titled *Goa's Freedom Struggle (Selected Writings of T.B. Cunha)* is published by Antonio da Cruz (Bombay, Dr. T.B. Cunha Memorial Committee, 1961) where in, Jawaharlal Nehru, Prime Minister of India, describes T.B. Cunha (1891-1958) as 'a brave fighter for the freedom of Goa', who struggles 'in this movement (of freedom struggle) till death took him away.'

T.B. Cunha has written extensively on the impact of the Portuguese policies on Goa's economy and its people. Detailing his role as an activist, K.M. Panikkar, historian and former Ambassador to China and France writes about T.B. Cunha as, 'the father of Goan nationalism... an Indian Nationalist who realized early in life that Goa could have freedom only in unity with India.' Panikkar elaborates:

No tribute to the work of Tristao Cunha would be complete without a mention of the great and historic fight which he conducted against a system of indentured labour under which *Kunbi* labourers from Goa were recruited and sent to the plantations in Assam. It was almost a single handed fight but he was able to awaken the conscience of his countrymen both in India and in Goa to the injustices of this system and to get it abolished.

T.B. Cunha is well known for his struggles to protect the rights of the poor and lowly especially the *kunbis* sent as indentured labourers to the Assam tea plantations. He was a writer of merit and his works indicate careful study of the problem at hand. Two of his outstanding works include: *Portuguese India (1939) A Survey of Four Hundred Years of Foreign Colonial Rule*; and his famous thesis, *The Denationalisation of the Goans*. Commenting on public finance in the essay *Portuguese India (1939) ...* T.B. Cunha writes that the accounts of revenue and expenditure of clearly show that the government treasury is full whereas 'the country(side) is growing poorer.'

Explaining about the problematic situation, T.B. Cunha inscribes that the price of rice, is twice or even more than the prevailing rate in British India in the pre-War period. The situation only becomes worse thereafter as the Great War begins in 1939. This is also what the subalterns reiterate

in Tandulamchem Kestaum. This section, draws on two other essays which T.B. Cunha penned: The Rice Problem in Goa, and, The Basic Problem which expose the economic policies of the Portuguese and their devastating effects.

T.B. Cunha writes that the majority of Goans are extremely poor and survive on little rice. He highlights the backwardness of the agricultural sector and the insufficient local production necessitating imports of one-third to one-half of the annual requirements. Agricultural operations are largely dependent on the vagaries of monsoons with negligible artificial irrigation facilities. This accounts for the large scale shortage of rice despite centuries of Portuguese rule in Goa. Besides, the colonial administration misreads the situation as the Great Depression starts affecting the economy. Prices of essential commodities decline drastically in the early 1930s and the government on the pretext of protecting the market for the locally produced rice imposes super-tax on rice imports from British India and other areas. The following table indicates the tax collection by the Portuguese government in Goa in the pre-War period:

Year	Super-tax in Rupees	Ordinary tax in Rupees
1931	71,181	1,77,460
1932	4,03,286	1,93,030
1933	4,88,779	2,34,704
1934	5,87,684	1,84,644
1935	68,850	2,10,000
1936	1,05,519	1,15,800
1937	1,05,438	1,24,561
Total	18,30,737	12,41,119

Source: T.B. Cunha, 'The Rice Problem in Goa', in *Goa's Freedom Struggle*, Bombay, Dr. T.B. Cunha Memorial Committee, 1961, p. 124.

Evidently rice is heavily taxed even when its local production is insufficient to meet the consumption requirements. At the beginning of the twentieth century taxes on rice and rice production are in the range of 12-15%. With the addition of super tax on imported rice the taxes on rice increase to more than double making it difficult for the average consumer to make both ends meet. The spike in price of rice is responsible for destabilizing the economy and causing much 'consternation and despair' in the words of T.B. Cunha. The government also effectuates enhancement of rents of the comunidade lands which are taken on lease by cultivators for rice cultivation. High rents lead to rise in the price of rice and vice versa every succeeding year. The auctioning of the rice fields causes much disquiet among the cultivators. By 1961, the rents rise to over 50 per cent of the cost of cultivation.

T.B. Cunha emphasizes that the prohibitive rents affect both the landless labourers and the small and marginal farmers who take the rice-fields on lease for cultivation. Usually, the small and

marginal farmers cultivate with the hired labourers. The rice production of the small and fragmented strips is hardly enough to meet the yearly requirements. The cost of cultivation is also relatively high affecting adversely the income of the small and marginal farmers. T.B. Cunha says that the prohibitive increase in rents causes ruin to all except the big landowners (batcars), shareholders of comunidades and the government which exacts large revenue by taxing agriculture.

T.B. Cunha opines that the prohibitive rents show the failure of the government to solve the problem. The 'rice problem' is primarily result of the financial policy doggedly pursued by Portuguese to derive as much revenue even as people suffered hunger and death. He says, that the rent of rice fields is so high that actually the same would have been left uncultivated but for fear of shortage of rice due to the war crisis which compel cultivators to till the lands unwillingly.

So, it is the customs tariff policy which increases the cost of living in Goa and consequently the cost of production of rice. People are unable to produce rice at the same cost as in British India, for the labourers wages are relatively higher; besides the cost of tilling, transportation of manure, and cost of seed, is likewise expensive. This is all a result of the high customs duties imposed by the government on rice. The so called 'protectionist policy' of the government is a total failure. In short, under the pretext of protecting and increasing the local production of rice, government raises the price of imported rice in order to 'secure a higher price' to the local farmers. In reality, the higher price of imported rice leads to rise in the cost of cultivation. The high customs duties on goods of primary necessity under the pretext of protection, raised the cost of living to point of affecting cost of local production, both of agricultural and industrial articles, of decreasing the country's productivity and of impoverishing the people. What is the result? Thus, according to T.B. Cunha, people facing food scarcity, desert Goa. Goans migrating en masse to British India and other countries is also what J.A. Fernandes emphasizes in 'Tandulamchem Kestaum'.

J.A. Fernandes, 'Ave Maria' and *Dukou/Dukoll* (Famine) in Goa

J.A. Fernandes is not just a tiatrist (drama writer) but a reader and contributor of several articles to various Konkani periodicals published from Goa and Bombay in the twentieth century. By chance, I happen to read an incisive essay written by him in the periodical *Ave Maria*. This article of his tells how and why he writes tiatr which are staged for public viewing, especially in Bombay where there is a huge population of Goan origin, about a lakh in number. In the article titled 'Goan Ponch – Christmas Cake,' (*Ave Maria*, 7 January, 1945, 2) he emphatically writes, 'the youth need to be told the truth about my tiatrs, I do not *tell* lies in my tiatrs... have never done it and will never do it. I know my value (in history), others cannot judge me and I too cannot judge others. My place (in history) is secured and none can dislodge me from the high pedestal, (and) the modern day tiatrists must realize it.' [stress mine] (Heam burgueanc sangchem poddta thodisi khobor mojea theatranchi, carann aum mojea theatran bopko xapinam vhooddleam letranim. Toslem cam haven

corunc nam ani corcho nam. Mojo valor avunch zanam, dusrean to corunc nozo zoxe porim mojean dusreacho corunc nozo. Mozo zago assa segur ani thuincho maca connem alounc nozo ani dolounc nozo, he borem zanna zaiat theatrist burgueandu).

In 'Goan *Ponch* – Christmas Cake,' J.A. Fernandes writes about his comedy Tiatr *Sociedade de Rom Tom* (1893) which he composes to correct the bad practice of forming societies/clubs and promising payment of rupees one-thousand to the members on various occasions as, for instance, when they marry or when they die (to their families). He says that forming societies/clubs, seeking monthly payments from members and promising large sums on festive occasions is in reality a hogwash to fool the gullible Goans. The tiatr shows that there are at least 50 such societies in the name of Christian saints, formed by the emigrants in Bombay in the late nineteenth century and which all disappear sooner or later, defrauding Goans of their hard earned money. J.A. Fernandes writes that he too lost his subscription of Rs. 250/- to one such duplicitous society. After staging his comedy Tiatr *Sociedade de Rom Tom* the subscription to these societies decline drastically as Fernandes highlights the racket. This is the reason why Fernandes says that he has a place in history of exposing wrongdoings and writing tiatrs to correct the situation.

The article 'Goan *Ponch* – Christmas Cake' appeared in *Ave Maria* at the time when the famine is raging in Goa and about which Fernandes decides to write his last tiatr *Tandulamchem Kestaum* and leave for posterity for making historical analysis. This article convinced me of the need to go through each and every issue of *Ave Maria* to investigate if Goa really faced famine during the period 1944 and 1945. The answer is in the affirmative indicating in clear terms that what J.A. Fernandes portrays in his tiatr *Tandulamchem Kestaum* is a reality which happens at the time when the tiatr is composed, that is 1944-45. The initial version of *Tandulamchem Kestaum* is written by July, 1944 and the final piece is ready in mid-March, 1945. The various articles, write-ups, editorials, letters to the editor and news briefs as published in *Ave Maria* clearly specify that the famine spread its tentacles in Goa.

What causes scarcity of food in Goa, in 1944-45? There is an essay titled 'Ek Lutt Goeant – Vattau to Cosso Ailo ani Cosso Cholta' by Evagrio Jorge (*Ave Maria*, 2 April, 1944, 4) which articulates about the deplorable economic conditions prevalent in Goa. Evagrio Jorge pens that trade and commerce is limited and most people emigrate for better prospects, thereafter sending remittances for their families' survival. He says that those who reside in Goa – perhaps referring to the *Famad Goencho Trio* – devise ways and means to defraud the emigrants and their families. Further, Evagrio Jorge observes that the *batcar* thrives on the hard work of others (cultivators); bureaucrats do little work for the benefit of the common man; and, the shop-keeper wants to make a fast buck. All three, the *batcar*, bureaucrat and the shop-keeper are parasites.

Evagrio Jorge cites an example of how prior to 1939, the Indian rupee is in free circulation in Goa and that it commands a good exchange rate. However, as World War II starts the Portuguese government suddenly stops circulation of the Indian rupee. In a flash, the economy is flush with the

Portuguese currency, the escudo, and an exchange rate is introduced. Employees at the end of every month go with their salaries (they are paid in escudos) to the traders and exchange it with Indian silver rupees by paying 9 to 10 per cent premium. The traders also acquire Indian rupees from the emigrants and their families at a discount of 14-15 per cent. What is the end result? There is an acute shortage of low denomination coins and currency which causes havoc among consumers especially the poor. People are unable to buy sugar and kerosene with the Indian rupees as they are obliged to pay for the purchases only in the legal tender, that is, the escudo. A news item titled '*Nasavanchem Confuzaum: Goanchi Exchange*' (Ave Maria, 19 March, 1944, 1-2) exposes that everybody is involved in this task of defrauding the commoners following the introduction of exchange rate on Indian currency (*soglem mellun luttunchem cam chalu zalam Goeant, hantun cominad assat te lan ani vhold, motte ani baric ani gauncar ani batcar*). The result is spurt in prices. For instance, the price of all varieties of meat (beef, pork, mutton) increase by 1 *anna*. What is alarming, is that the price of rice, for instance, rises four times over a period of 2 years from 1944 to 1945.

The shortage of low denomination Portuguese coins inconveniences people wanting to buy their fortnightly ration. As stated earlier the Indian rupee is accepted by traders only at a discount of 14-15 per cent. However, low denomination Indian coins are traded at a hefty discount of 20 per cent or above. An article '*Portuguese Dudu Moddic*' (Ave Maria, 31 December, 1944, 3) brings to light the bitter truth that the shopkeepers and traders earn a substantial amount of Rs. 25 lakhs from the Goan populace only through the 'unauthorized' and 'unjustified' exchange system. The shortage of rice and other items of consumption is used as a strategy to make a fast buck by the authorities, feudal lords, and the shopkeepers.

Shortages of various kind starts early in the year 1944. An essay '*Gorvanc ani Dukranc Pidda*' (Ave Maria, 6 February, 1944, 6) brings to light that cattle and pigs are dying in large numbers due to epidemic affecting availability of beef and pork. This affects the farming community's daily consumption and earnings. Earlier, it is the coconut trees which are affected causing a dip in coconut production. Small pox and other illnesses are also rampant during this period. Rumours play a vital role in spreading false news that authorities will take away rice from the cultivators (Ave Maria, 6 February, 1944, 6) leading to panic among farmers and the general public. This may be the reason why the cultivator is shown in the tiatr *Tandulamchem Kestaum* as hiding his produce at an isolated place (Colleam dongrar, Sante moddar, Raia, Salcete). Similarly, the *batcar* Minglu confides to his associates that he has hidden all the rice at Patiapur, Nuvem. The two places which Sitaram uses, to hide his stock to later trade in the black market, he does not wish to disclose to anybody in order to avoid the prying eyes of the authorities. Ave Maria reports about several shopkeepers being arrested by the authorities for hoarding rice. In the meantime, the authorities prepare list of households so as to streamline distribution of sugar and kerosene. Ration to the poor households is fixed at 5 podds of rice per person for every fortnight (Ration, Ave Maria, 12 March, 1944, 7). Lists are prepared but no rice is available.

What is shocking is to read an account of the true reality in the countryside in the form of a broadside titled '*Tandul Nant ani Rationing Coslem?*' (Ave Maria, 2 April, 1944, 6). The author accepts that rationing of rice is introduced recently in Goa. However, unfortunately there is no rice for distribution. And so the big question is: What sort of rationing when there is *no rice at all?*' There are other issues too. For instance, it is pointed out that if anybody fails to lift the fortnightly quota for whatever reason, like being unable to pay for it, then that person forfeits his ration. Similarly, if the trader has no stock then too the consumers got nothing for the respective fortnight. Moreover, the author highlights the fact that many of the ration cards are found to be duplicate. This led to the scarce stock of rice being diverted to the black market. Authorities are, however, albeit belatedly making an attempt to verify the authenticity of the ration cards.

The situation worsens as the year 1944 progresses. An exhaustive commentary titled '*Setkar Battkaranc Somzonni*' appears (Ave Maria, 3 September, 1944, 2) painting a dismal picture of the reality in the countryside. It is written that the authorities have fixed every person's requirement of rice at just 1 *handi* and 3 *cuddou* per annum. This is a clear indication of the widespread scarcity. For, in the nineteenth century the yearly requirement is 3 handis per person and people consumed rice four times a day: for breakfast, at 10 o'clock in the form of *pez* (rice gruel), for lunch and dinner. As population expands in the early twentieth century while production of rice is stagnant, the requirement is fixed at 2 *handis* of rice per person, and, it is assumed that people will substitute the consumption needs with wheat products like *pão* (bread) and vegetables. Now, in 1944 the authorities fix the yearly requirement of each person at just 1 *handi* and 3 *cuddou* per annum, not suffice for people to survive. *Pão* is in short supply as import of wheat from British India is quite irregular. The cultivators and the feudal lords are, however, allowed to keep aside 25 per cent over and above their yearly requirement of rice as seed for future cultivation.

The author of the article '*Setkar Battkaranc Somzonni*' states another unpleasant reality. Farm labourers are allowed to be paid in kind (through the medium of rice for their daily work) only if there is an explicit agreement in this regard. Otherwise, they are to be paid in cash at the rate at which the cultivators are selling rice in the open market. For the daily wage labourers and *kunbis* this is a great setback as they are paid very low wages ($\frac{3}{4}$ th of a rupee per day) or often not paid for weeks by the *batcars*. Besides, for their consumption needs the daily wage labourers and *kunbis* are at the mercy of the traders who detest selling anything to them and rather shoo them away. The policemen present at the ration shops beat them unnecessarily. The article also highlights that hoarding of rice by traders is rampant in Margao and that some have been apprehended and their stock confiscated by the authorities. J.A. Fernandes also emphasizes on hoarding in his tiatr.

The police intervene to streamline distribution of rice to the ration card-holders in Panjim (*Rationache Nove Caide*, Ave Maria, 10 September, 1944, 2). It is stipulated that each person will get 12 *cuddou* for 6 months and that the distribution of rice can be done only in the presence of the policeman. The shopkeepers also have to inform authorities daily the details of their un-sold stock.

Police are to also inspect the premises of the rice-mills to note the quantity of paddy brought for de-husking every day. This improves the situation marginally. The reality is that it is impossible to know who gets the ration and who does not. For, few eat while many go hungry (*jeuta te jeuta ani upas caddta te upaxim assa*) states the author. The shopkeepers make a show of distributing to 10 persons and then hide 5 sacks of rice to sell in black market for a higher price (*10 locac ration dilem-sem corun dacoitat ani 5 sak tandull nanch corun soddtat, apleac zai taca diun, chorieam ani odic duddu meutat thuum*). Looks like J.A. Fernandes is absolutely right in exposing the intrigues of the *Famad Goencho* Trio.

There is a letter to the editor written by someone who identifies himself as a villager from Calangute, Bardez (Ave Maria, 1 October, 1944, 2) hiding his true identity. In similar manner most of the writings in Ave Maria are by anonymous authors. The villager from Calangute writes that for purpose of rationing three categories are identified. The first comprises of the elites like the *batcars*, doctors, priests and advocates who enjoy preferential treatment in the public distribution system. The second category is of those who pay taxes of Rs. 10 to Rs. 50 per annum. These people too receive higher portion of sugar and oil. The poor in the villages including the daily wage workers are clubbed with those paying less than Rs. 10 as taxes. Most elite families of *batcars* in the villages are those paying less than Rs. 10 as taxes and jostle with the poor for preferential treatment at the ration shops. The same issue of Ave Maria has an article titled '*Goeant Rationac Tandull Nant*' (Ave Maria, 1 October, 1944, 2) which states that rationing of rice in Goa is highly problematic. For, first of all the rice is distributed to the high officials, military men and other civil servants and that from 15 July till mid-September, 1944, none has received any ration in Goa. Pensioners which includes ex-servicemen and those who served in the military also get preferential treatment. The writer calls upon people to agitate against the unjust system wherein the officials and other powerful people have first claim in the public distribution system.

Goa is then under the dictatorial regime and if policemen and military officials have preferential claim then how can the poor people expect a fair deal from the guardians of law. This is the reason why J.A. Fernandes shows in *Tandulamchem Kestaum* how all the nefarious activities are carried out by the possorcar Sitaram in the presence of the police. The police even beat up the *kunbis* who gather at the shops to get their ration.

The article '*Setam Piktat*' (Ave Maria, 8 October, 1944, 2) makes some interesting observation. It points that the rice fields are ripening but the excessive rainfall in early October 1944 (north-eastern rains) affects production dashing hopes of the cultivators. Further, many rice fields are robbed of the standing crops in the dead of night before they are harvested by the actual cultivators. In view of this, the author suggests that policemen and soldiers should not be monitoring the public distribution system. Instead, he emphasizes that it is the standing crops that need to be protected from being robbed. He also writes that there is a rumour that when the crops are harvested each household will be allowed to lift rice only as per their requirement, that is 1 *handi* and 3 *cuddou* or

rice per person. Anxiously, many cultivators start writing letters to their emigrant sons and husbands to return home for being present on the harvest day so that their respective families can claim higher portion of the yearly produce. Cultivators and batcars always want higher portion and are least bothered about the starvation of daily wage workers and *kumbis*.

In the same issue there is an important news item captioned 'Important *Khobro – Bhaile Tandull*' (Ave Maria, 8 October, 1944, 3), which carries the deliberations of the Governor General's Governing Council. The government acknowledges that the production of rice is much lesser for the year 1944. Further, the Governor General informs the Governing Council that earlier Goa used to receive 75,000 sacks of rice from Quetta every year. In 1943, only 50,000 sacks of rice are imported, whereas in 1944 there are no imports at all. Facing grim situation in the land of their birth, many locals abandon their villages to proceed to Bombay, to avoid starvation. People do take steps to face the adverse reality that year by cultivating *nachnni* (millets) on the hillsides. However, due to irregular and scanty rains the *nachnni* crops wither. This is a double whammy, neither rice at affordable price in the market nor any *nachnni* at home.

It is reported on the front page in November, 1944 that no serious attempt is made to ensure food supplies in Goa '*Goeant Cainch Bondabost Nam Orou Haddchi*' (Ave Maria, 5 November, 1944, 1) and that supplies from British India have declined substantially. The news item exposes that the famine is rampant in Goa and the government is mute to the people's woes. It also informs that the periodicals of Goa are not reporting that ryots are dying due to famine. Instead, everybody is saying that people are dying due to malnutrition (*Roit upaxi morta mhunnon Goenchim potram legun sangonam. Bhuken melet mhunn sangtat, ani he moronc cosloch dubau nam*). The situation persists for a long time as in the next issue there is an article titled 'Goeant Mal British Indientlo Nam' (Ave Maria, 12 November, 1944, 3) discussing at length about the miserable picture of famine in the countryside.

People face a tough time as one reads the issues of Ave Maria for the months of November and December, 1944. The write-up '*Tandull Sarke Vanttinam Goeant*' (Ave Maria, 19 November, 1944, 2) claims absolute shortage of rice (*Goeant tandull nanch te nant*). It publishes, a very depressing fact that at some places people get ration of rice, sprinkled with water and mixed with foreign material. Rice sprinkled with water leads to growth of mold and which consumption is harmful. Could people have died due to this? It is possible. The author also informs that weights and measures are neither standard nor uniform and people get less portion than what is earmarked. However, none complain about the nefarious activities to the authorities. It is also brought to light that a shopkeeper is arrested at Neura, Ilhas, for carrying out illegal activities. The author concludes by suggesting that distribution of rice, sugar and kerosene to the needy should instead be done at the church square in order to ensure fairness. There is another report in the same issue indicating that that food is scarce in Goa (*Goeant Jeunna-Khannacheo Vostu Falt*, Ave Maria, 19 November, 1944, 3).

The newsflash '*Amchem Jevonn*' (Ave Maria, 3 December, 1944, 1) cries out aloud that 'famine is rampant in Goa' and that 'people have died of hunger in large numbers.' It states in unequivocal terms that although rice is the staple diet in Goa people cannot have it even once a day, for that year the local production is meagre. This issue of Ave Maria carries more bitter news. For instance, the report '*Goeant Ration System Boldung Goroz*' (3 December, 1944, 3) brings to light the fact that the poor have no money to buy rice and as such are unable to avail their ration. On the same page, the article '*Bat Setkaranc*' shows that government has no storage facilities to store rice and so the cultivators and *batcars* are allowed to store at their own places all the stock making a mockery of government's efforts to carry out 'any sort of fair distribution'. Attesting to what J.A. Fernandes' tiatr *Tandulamchem Kestaum* exposes, the article brings forth the fact that rice is sold in the black market at the rate of Rs. 1.25 per *podd*; paddy is sold at the rate of Rs. 75 per *handi* and Rs. 5 per *paili* which is three times the rate fixed by the authorities; and wheat is likewise sold at Rs. 2.50 per *paili* when it's rate in Bombay is just Re. 1. These rates are still higher for most parts of the year 1945 only to decline by the end of that year. Little that is available to the poor is in the form of *Bajra* and *Jowhar* sold instead of rice, at the rate of 7 *podds* per household for those who can afford to buy.

The year 1945 is worse. The essay '*Bate Caddunchim Maknam*' (Ave Maria, 11 March, 1945, 3) tells that paddy taken to the rice-mills for processing is confiscated by the authorities and none is aware 'where it has all disappeared.' Many households are now instead pounding rice at home rather than take it to the rice mill. The author brings out another unpleasant reality, of the fields having been left largely uncultivated in the dry season, since the water bodies have dried up. An eye-catching news '*Goenchi Khobor – Tandullanchem Vantop*' (Ave Maria, 18 March, 1945, 5) carries a note:

Sobar pautt Ponje and Ilhascheam ganvcheam ration tandullanchem kednam ditelet te gomlelem asta, punn heach jinsan Bardez, Sastti ani dusream ganvanim ditat tem kiteac te porgottun dinam? Kedi vhoaddi bob poddlea locachi, apleac cainch tandull mellonam mhunon, punn Black-markitant zaitech tantull meutat khuim, ek Rupoi podd, ani 100 rupoi khanddi batt, 18 rupoi gasleticho dobo, ani 12 annem ek rat sakor. Heo vostu Black markitant khuincheo pautat tiki Xerkaran sud gheunc nozo asli.

Often in Panjim and villages of Ilhas it is notified in advance the day on which ration of rice will be distributed. Why is it similarly not done so in Bardez and Salcete? Everyone is clamouring that they have not received any rice but it is available in the black market at the rate of 1 rupee per *podd*, and Rs. 100 per *handi*. Similarly, kerosene is sold at Rs. 18 per gallon and sugar at 75 paise per half kilogram. Authorities should investigate how these items are traded in the black market.

It is abundantly clear that the situation in 1945 is worse with prices rising by 30 per cent over and

above the previous year's rates. The announcement 'Bajri and Zonvo Meutolo' (Ave Maria, 8 April, 1945, 2) informs that people are hungry as the ration of rice for the month of January is not distributed till end of March. This situation continues till end of October. After the rice fields are harvested that year the situation improves marginally from November-December, 1945. Rice is available at a much more affordable rate of Rs. 35-40 per handi in November and people hope that the price may still fall to Rs. 26, the rate stipulated by the government. Although most people consume rice just once a day their health has improved as they are consuming other things like greens, beans and sweet potatoes. Indeed, the years of 1944 and 1945 have been of widespread famine and many died of hunger and starvation which J.A. Fernandes has shown in *Tandulamchem Kestaum*.

Kunbi in Tandulamchem Kestaum

The rice problem affects drastically the poor, especially the *kunbis* and their households. I bring here the discussion between a *Kunbi* mother-in-law and daughter-in-law for a better understanding of what is happening in the countryside. Following is the loud conversation between Nuzad and Izbel (sassumae ani sun vodlean uloitat):

*Nuzad Tum sun astonam, mac voch munta petrul addunco tuc gorac kutea addilam
bacram baxen bossonco amcam matteranc tessio nuttint chiddunc och
munta. Noz dissonam tuc sangonco – Oi mulleari nespert negun dinam maca
– (cuxin) Ai Shaiba hi kessio Sun addilea goraco mujea cheddeano, ani chodvan
nasil mista gavantum – voi mulleari mae maudda cotta – aum con sunnem them
aiconco*

*Izbel Tem chimtaiche datt mista maca – noz dissnam tuc torne (dakle) dachile sunnig
ek tessio nuttnio darunco – kali sakre jeleari, mac chirddun chimmte cadile, aiz
negun muj angachi duk jeleanam – te cab assai bailanc pavoch suateri borech
cacadd galtai ani amcheo feblai cottai Hem tum zano zain kutea nen jat je*

*Nuzad Unoit borem Combantu netrada baxen. Con tuca xincoil go Sassu codde
jogodchaco, cheddeanu? Choddoi kelear dogaicu jorantulim bair galtolim. Tum
petrol adcha vosnam jaleari cheddea dattolim Gora eindi teca aum sangtolim
tum mujem caim kiskut aicnam mun ani voddle dolle con mac choit mun*

The argument between a *Kunbi* mother-in-law and daughter-in-law makes it crystal clear that the community is harassed and hassled by others as a strategy so that they do not come to the village shops to buy kerosene, sugar and rice. The young daughter-in-law Izbel is pinched hard when she goes to buy sugar. She says that her pain still persists. Is Izbel's pain just physical or is she feeling emotionally devastated? Is J.A. Fernandes trying to suggest that the *kunbi* women are molested at the village shops in order to prevent them from coming to buy provisions? It seems so. Izbel tells

that the *Cab* (policeman) instead of protecting the women actually makes fun of the poor and passes snide remarks (*te cab assai bailanc pavoch suateri borech cacadd galtai ani amcheo feblai cottai*). Even the elderly *kunbi* women are not spared as aged mother-in-law Nuzad recounts her own experience of her old sari being torn likewise when she went to the shop (*te par podle bolleran illoso capda cudko caddilo tedus*). Why is her sari torn? It seems that the dominant sections at the village level are using sexual assault as a strategy to dominate over and isolate the *kunbi* sections so as to prevent them from claiming their ration. The distressing utterances of Foransik, the son of Nuzad are a clear indication of this:

Foransik *Sakkor, petrel, kunbi nocac sarki dinaim – tea Possorcar ani Cab negun amchi nocachi porva cornaim amim sunim zalea baxen. Kunbi bailo pinzlolem cagdam zalear angar ani linem raulea tecam daudoitai – te bacar nocac ani borem nestai tencam sakkor, petrol, tandul, passun rocde meltai – amch osso auradiachi conek fobbor jeinai passun*

Foransik says that neither the shopkeepers nor the policemen are bothered about the welfare of the poor *kunbis* who are not given their due share of sugar and petrol. He says that all cater to and give preference to the feudal lords and their families. Jujje, another *kunbi* recounts, how he is mercilessly beaten by the policeman in the market for no fault of his, whatsoever (*Mac jaleari tea sollolea gorea cabanum muj kutacheru foppraum dilo guneaum nastonam*). How do the *kunbi* react to this situation when they are being deprived of sugar, kerosene and rice? Let's follow the discussion between the *kunbi* mother, her son and daughter-in-law:

Nuzad *Ing ravon bukken moronco conn gorojo – amim dusrea gavant vochea tandul mettai tinga – jaito noc disan dis vota aminch kutea ingac moronco – niz Shaiba*

Foransik *Amvuim tench chintilam – Ing melle poros jim haim bail gavant melleari odic borem – kut munt tum Izbel*

Izbel *Macai borem dissota...*

It is Nuzad the old mother of Foransik who suggests that the time is come for them to migrate for a living. This is interesting as J.A. Fernandes seems to suggest that the urge to migrate to distant lands among Goans initiates from the older generation. Nuzad, the mother of Foransik asks 'Why stay here and die of hunger?' And, her son and daughter-in-law agree to move out of Goa in search of greener pastures.

What is the alternative for those daily wage workers and *kunbis* who stay back in Goa? Miserable and wretched life. They have to beg at other people's houses for daily alms with a coconut shell in hand. There is a famous dulpod: *Ami bikari fore / rozra bore / bikream tandull pot-ttai thodde* (we

are beggars really / good at saying prayers / we beggars get less rice). The next verse of the same dulpod is an eye-opener: *Tandull amkam / poddtai bore / Modgavam oddlea gorankodde* (rice for us / we get / at the big houses in Margao). This would apparently mean that the rich are generous to the poor beggars. However, it as well points out that only the barns of the rich and wealthy families in Margao are overflowing with stock of rice.

In the tiatr *Tandulamchem Kestaum*, J.A. Fernandes shows how the three kunbis Nuzzar, Jujje and Nuzad come with folded hands to Minglu (*batcar*) for some rice. Nuzad pleads for two pailis of rice (*mac 2 paili tandur zai bacra – chod goroz maca*), informing that people in her house are starving (*maje loc bukken ass decun eilaim tum maje bacar decunn*), and that her husband is with high fever requiring to be served *pej* for early recovery (*mujel gou chod duent ass decun eileam*). The 'heartless' *batcar* Minglu refuses to part with any rice stating that his primary concern is feeding 'his own family and children' (*mocco zainaim – Tuzo gou bukken aslear mac kit cor munta go Muji ani Muje bail burgeamchi buk aiem poili choicha zai – dusream mac podnam*). The concluding discussion between the kunbi and Minglu *batcar* is what shapes the history. It's as follows:

Nuzad *Jobbor mun go baccara matres pun churchure naim tuca. Hem raj
battcarachem anim xettcarachem. Amim Bomboi jelear odic borem ing
melle poros*

Minglu *Vochai Bomboi ani tarvotti zaiat*

Jujje *Pott boronco coslei chakri cholot amcam*

Nuzad *Kunbi nocachem nogot picha bair sollear sogle. Borem zainaca (cuxin
bottam modta). Gotton jaum tumchem – Te dudu hacha paunaca – melle
ainje rogta dudu*

In the face of the *Minglu batcar* point blank refusing to give any rice to the *kunbi*, old Nuzad spurts that Goa is only of the *batcars and xettcars* and that it is time for them to emigrate to Bombay instead of dying here (of hunger). When the *batcar* tells them to go to Bombay and become seamen, Nuzad cries aloud 'All are out to suck the blood of the *kunbi*. Woe to you. May you face destruction – Never enjoy the money you make (fraudulently) – it's our blood money.'

As the Tiatr proceeds, J.A. Fernandes shows the *Famad* Trio suffering ill health and loss of money. For instance, Cosma is afflicted with leprosy, Sitaram is suffering bouts of dysentery, rheumatism and is diabetic, *Minglu batcar's* wife Virgin has severe liver malfunction and is advised to proceed to Miraj (British India) for an operation. Virgin wails aloud suffering in pain (*soglech vattanim suseg nam maca*) as her son Phillip is an alcoholic causing wanton destruction at home when denied cash to buy booze. Their elder son who is in Portugal for higher studies gets married to a Portuguese

women and is arriving soon in Goa. Minglu batcar and Virgin see this as going to be highly expensive as 'foreign wives are not for people like us,' she says (*Ti Firingi sun etoch kitulo despez to choi – Sardin, Solmaum, Kej, Perjunt, Vac, Trut, Branc, sodanch mezar... Firingi chedvam amcha osleanc nuim*). Seeing the dark clouds and no silver lining Virgin sighs, 'truly this year we have no peace whatsoever – the curses of the poor seem to afflict us as we did not give them rice. The curse of the kunbi are not good' (*Forench he vorsa amcam suseg mullolo nam soglech vattanim – Xirap lagot zatole durboleancho amim tencam tandul diunc nam munn. Te kunbeanch sirrap borenuim*). It may be noted that many in Goa to this day believe in curses and karma.

However, J.A. Fernandes demonstrates in his tiatr that this is new Goa and the kunbi are no longer ready to suffer in silence. They not only tie-up and beat the Famad Trio black and blue but as Jujje says, 'pott boronco coslei chakri cholot amcam' (to fill our tummies we are ready to do any work), desert Goa in large numbers with a heavy heart and with eyes welled proceed to Bombay, to earn a livelihood.

Conclusion

It is abundantly clear that J.A. Fernandes wrote his famous tiatr *Tandulamchem Kestaum*, in order to expose the machinations of the *Famad Goencho Trio: Batcar-Xettcar-Possorcar* at a time when Goa faced one of its worst famines in the twentieth century during the last years of World War II, that is, from 1944-45. Whereas the production of rice in Goa during the two-year period is not suffice for 3 to 4 months a year the problem of scarcity is aggravated with restricted imports from British India. The Portuguese regime ensures that the rich and the government servants, both those in service and the retired personnel, have access to food. Those who suffer are the marginalized, the poor landless labourers and the kunbi.

The imposition of the exchange rate on British Indian currency for commercial transaction causes enormous hardships. Making the Portuguese *escudo* the legal tender and the shortage of low denomination coins contributes enormously to the people's hardship. J.A. Fernandes writes in clear terms that many people die during this famine period. Similarly, writings in the periodical *Ave Maria* also indicate that people perished in large numbers due to the famine in Goa, 1944-45. It would be interesting to investigate the church death registers of the parishes especially in Salcete and other areas of Goa to know how badly the famine affects the countryside. This would provide additional corroborative evidence about the extent of deaths in the villages of Goa. This essay, shows that Konkani tiatrs are a rich source for reconstructing the history of the region when read along with other contemporary writings.

References

- Cunha, T.B., *Goenkarachem ddhesboxtteponn*, edited by Evagrio Jorge, Antonio Fernandes, Bombay, 1944.
- Cunha, T.B., “Portuguese India (A Survey of Conditions after 400 years of Foreign Colonial Rule – 1939,” in *Goa's Freedom Struggle*, edited by Antonio da Cruz, Dr. T.B. Cunha Memorial Committee, Bombay, 1961, pp. 3-54.
- Cunha, T.B., “The Basic Problem (1936),” in *Goa's Freedom Struggle*, edited by Antonio da Cruz, Dr. T.B. Cunha Memorial Committee, Bombay, 1961, pp. 111-120.
- Cunha, T.B., “The Rice Problem in Goa,” in *Goa's Freedom Struggle*, edited by Antonio da Cruz, Dr. T.B. Cunha Memorial Committee, Bombay, 1961, pp. 121-128.
- Cunha, T.B., “The Denationalisation of Goans (1944)” in *Goa's Freedom Struggle*, edited by Antonio da Cruz, Dr. T.B. Cunha Memorial Committee, Bombay, 1961, pp. 55-98.
- Dias, Remy, “Consumption History of the Estado da India, 1850-1950,” in *Towards a History of Consumption in South Asia* edited by Haynes, Douglas E., Abigail McGowan, Tirthankar Roy and Haruka Yanagisawa, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2010, pp. 76-107.
- Dias, Remy, “Modernity as Crisis: Migrants 'Writing Back' in the Colonial Goan Konkani Newspaper Amchó Gão (1929-1933), in *The Colonial Periodical Press in the Indian and Pacific Ocean Regions* edited by Lobo, Sandra Ataíde, Jessica Falconi, Remy Dias and Dave A. Smith, Routledge, London, 2024, pp. 277-301.
- Fernandes, J.A., *Tandulamchem Kestaum, Famad Goencho Trio: Batcar-Xettcar-Possorcar*, Margao, 1945, p. 1-16.
- Fernandes, J.A., “Goan Ponch – Christmas Cake,” *Ave Maria*, 7 January, 1945, p. 2.
- Jorge, Evagrio, “Goeant – Vattau to Cosso Ailo ani Cosso Cholta,” *Ave Maria*, 2 April, 1944, p. 4.
- Mazarello, Wilmix Wilson, *100 years of Konkani Tiatro*, Directorate of Art & Culture, Panjim, 2000.
- Nehru, Jawaharlal, “Message,” in *Goa's Freedom Struggle*, edited by Antonio da Cruz, Dr. T.B. Cunha Memorial Committee, Bombay, 1961, pp. III.
- Panikkar, K.M., “Preface” in *Goa's Freedom Struggle*, edited by Antonio da Cruz, Dr. T.B. Cunha Memorial Committee, Bombay, 1961, pp. IV-V.
- Pereira, José, Micael Martins and António da Costa, *Undra Muja Mama – Folk Songs of Goa an Anthology of Dulpods*, Goa 1556, Saligao, 2011.
- Pereira, José, Micael Martins and António da Costa, *Songs of Goa – Crown of Mandos*, Goa 1556, Saligao, 2010.

Pinto, Celsa, “Between Two World Wars: 'Normalcy in Goan Economy',” in *Indo-Portuguese History – Global Trends* edited by Gracias, Fátima da Silva, Celsa Pinto and Charles Borges, Goa, 2005, pp. 21-30.

“Nasavanchem Confuzaum: Goanchi Exchange,” *Ave Maria*, 19 March, 1944, pp. 1-2.

“Portuguese Dudu Moddic,” *Ave Maria*, 31 December, 1944, p. 3.

“Gorvanc ani Dukranc Pidda,” *Ave Maria*, 6 February, 1944, p. 6.

“Ration,” *Ave Maria*, 12 March, 1944, p. 7.

“Tandul Nant ani Rationing Coslem?” *Ave Maria*, 2 April, 1944, p. 6.

“Setkar Battkaranc Somzonni,” *Ave Maria*, 3 September, 1944, p. 2.

“Rationache Nove Caide,” *Ave Maria*, 10 September, 1944, p. 2.

Ave Maria, 1 October, 1944, p. 2.

“Goeant Rationac Tandull Nant,” *Ave Maria*, 1 October, 1944, p. 2.

“Setam Piktat,” *Ave Maria*, 8 October, 1944, p. 2.

“Important Khobro – Bhairle Tandull,” *Ave Maria*, 8 October, 1944, p. 3.

“Goeant Cainch Bondabost Nam Orou Haddchi,” *Ave Maria*, 5 November, 1944, p. 1.

“Goeant Mal British Indientlo Nam,” *Ave Maria*, 12 November, 1944, p. 3.

“Tandull Sarke Vanttinam Goeant,” *Ave Maria*, 19 November, 1944, p. 2.

“Amchem Jevonn,” *Ave Maria*, 3 December, 1944, p. 1.

“Goeant Ration System Boldung Goroz,” *Ave Maria*, 3 December, 1944, p. 3.

“Bat Setkaranc,” *Ave Maria*, 3 December, 1944, p. 3.

“Bate Caddunchim Maknam,” *Ave Maria*, 11 March, 1945, p. 3.

“Goenchi Khobor – Tandullanchem Vantop,” *Ave Maria*, 18 March, 1945, p. 5.

“Bajri and Zonvo Meutolo,” *Ave Maria*, 8 April, 1945, p. 2.