

# **Tradition, Continuity & Change**

## **Goan Society in Transition(s)**

Edited by  
**Nina Caldeira**

## **Tradition, Continuity & Change Goan Society in Transition(s)**

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# By way of introduction

Nina Caldeira<sup>1</sup>

In the Republic of India, the state of Goa is perhaps the best exemplar of the early European contacts with India. This contact impacted the Goan traditional-feudal society which witnessed a transition to modernity through the agency of Portuguese colonialism. Of all the four Imperial forces that ruled India, namely the Portuguese, the Dutch, the French and the British, Portugal has greatly impacted the colony through its forceful policies of evangelization, acculturation and proselytization. Portuguese colonialism lasted for 450 years while the British rule lasted for 200 years. Therefore, its political and socio-cultural impact has had a lasting effect which is perhaps much more than that of any other colonizer. Consequently, the Goan society provides a fascinating forum for an inquiry of a society in multiple transitions: from tradition to colonial modernity and from colonial modernity to postcoloniality.

However, neither was the society completely modernized nor was it left uninfluenced. Undoubtedly, the new Portuguese systems impacted the traditional Pre-Portuguese society but the forces of modernity failed at a total erasure of pre-colonial tradition. In the post-modern sense, modernity reinvents tradition. It is only the uncritical modernist who has no space for tradition. This continuity of tradition into modernity created a typical postcolonial space. A curious blend of tradition and modernity was formed, a new kind of Indo-Portuguese hybridity of mind and manners. Modernity and tradition, therefore, entered into a dialectical relationship visible in syncretic and semiotic forms.

Interestingly, modernity being a prime issue under nation building, it became the precondition for independence and for

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<sup>1</sup> Professor of English, Discipline of English, Shenoai Goemab School of Languages & Literature, Goa University & Former Dean, Faculty of Languages & Literature, Goa University. Taleigao-Goa. [nina@unigoa.ac.in](mailto:nina@unigoa.ac.in)

building nationhood. Again, after independence, the psyche of the Goan could not resort to the nativist indigenous position. Nor would such a position be desirable as it would amount to cultural nationalism. Reverting to a puristic indigenous position after independence, would mean a second phase of psychological trauma caused by transition. The transition from Portuguese nationhood to the Indian after the liberation, was as painful as the uprooting of the native Goan from his indigenous set-up. In the Goan context, decolonization does not fall under pre-colonial culture. The hybrid nature of postcolonial society in question offers a different model for resistance. As identity is a discursive product there is always scope for rearticulation, change and agency.

It is precisely this discursive nature of identity that each of the contributors to this collection engages with, with each of them shedding light on the various aspects on the palimpsest of Goan cultural identity, building on tradition and its continuity.

Discussing on how Goa is traditionally modern, Oscar Noronha ruminates on how Goan identity is multi-layered. It is a conglomeration of multiple cultural identities with the Buddhist influences in the first millennium as well as the influences of the Jains, the Hindus, the Mughals and the Portuguese. Conquerors and statesmen, scholars and saints, crusaders and traders, men of science and of letters lived in the magnificent city, alongside natives of all stations: Shipbuilders, carpenters, goldsmiths, spinners, weavers and farmers, physicians, accountants, interpreters and diplomats, Noronha adds.

Critiquing tradition, continuity and change in the folk practice of ‘Sontreo,’ Susheela Mendes reveals how Goan cultural spaces are filled with multiple colours of the ‘colonial past’ and the ‘post liberation present.’ Modernity and tradition enter into a conjoint relationship and tradition continues in syncretic forms, as witnessed in the festival of ‘sontrios,’ Mendes asserts.

Isabel Vas speaks about the practice of adopting a child in Goa as noted in the writings of some Goan writers and the social attitudes and changing practices and the inherent ambiguities involved, as

Goan society grappled with modernity. While traditionally, adopting a child was more for the security of the foster parents, with the changing currents of modernity, attitudes to adoption have changed and adopted children are treated at par with biological children.

Maria de Lourdes Bravo da Costa focuses on the traditional catholic wedding, making use of the social columns in the local newspapers. The Portuguese Press in Goa was keenly interested in carrying social columns devoted to happenings in the society, she states. Interwoven with oral tradition and her own memories of the past, Bravo da Costa highlights the lavish traditional menu at the catholic wedding, the customs then and the changes now, in her personal observations.

Xavier Martins writes on tradition and modernity in the historical monuments. He makes a case study of chapels and their revenue. Martins focuses on the traditional method of revenue called *caixinha* (treasury), one of the means of generating income to the chapel. Deepa Prajith captures tradition from the memories of Diasporic writers. Goans in Diaspora carry their traditions in their cultural baggage. They carry their roots in the routes they traverse. Oscillating between time past and time present are wedged the narrations of tradition, continuity and change.

In reviewing the colonial periodical press, Brenda Coutinho throws light on the contribution of Goan colonial women towards social and economic freedom in *Estado da India*. Glenis Mendonsa reflects on how the multicultural ethos of the lives of the people of Goa is best manifested through their celebration of feasts and festivals. They embrace the plurality of Goan culture and promise its continuity, she opines.

Irene Silveira researches on the re-making of the *Casa Portuguesa* in Goa. Silveira examines the physical building of the Goan dwelling space and its transformation over time into an entity that moves beyond structural spaces into domains of the heart and the mind. She contends that the domestic architectural landscape in Goa has been marked by its chequered history in an original fashion that considers tradition as ever-evolving and modernity as ever rooted in the past.

Analyzing Uddhar Manohar Sawkar's editorial cartoons, Natasha Maria Gomes reveals how pictorial representations powerfully chronicle the pulse of the common man. Gomes attempts to scrutinise Uddhar Manohar Sawkar's pocket cartoons published in two Goan English newspapers: 'Gomantak Times' and 'Herald', in the last few decades. Nafisa Oliveira questions progressivism and reflects on the activist strain in Konkani writings in translation. These writings oscillate between the vicissitudes of tradition and modernity. In the face of change, the Konkani writers have had a continual tradition of literature for a social cause, Oliveira concludes.

Svetlana Fernandes critiques Tradition and Modernity as reflected in the cartoons of Mario Miranda, the famous illustrator and cartoonist of Goa. Modernity cannot be seen as eradication of tradition but as a reinvention and alteration of tradition to suit the changing times and needs of the people, opines Svetlana. She analyzes how the cartoons of Mario Miranda have captured the changing fabric of the Goan society through the ages.

In present times, many have been lamenting the erosion of a glorious civilization caused by the onslaught of modernity. This book is a passionate attempt at rooting the present in the past with a vision to see the continuity but more ardently, with a hope that modernity would never erase tradition.

**Nina Caldeira**  
**Editor**