

## **A Search for an Identity**

### **Catholic Goans – How they fit in a predominantly Hindu India.**

Ask a diasporic Catholic Goan where they are from and what they are and more often or not the reply will be “ I am from Goa” or “ I am Goan”. Rarely will you hear a Goan say, “ I am from India” or “ I am Indian”, and if they do they will clarify the statement, before being asked, by saying “ from Goa”. Yet Goa is part of India and Catholic Goans, once a sizeable majority, live in a predominantly Hindu state and nation. John Correia Afonso S.J., a Jesuit priest and a noted Goan historian stated, “ This sub-culture we call Christian Goan, if greatly influenced by the Portuguese, is manifestly also Indian”. (Correia, 1991:3) However Catholic Goans are always anxious to claim a separate identity from other Indians, including Hindu Goans. This claim has been a source of tension between some members of the Hindu community, who have not forgotten the discrimination that they were subject to under Catholic rule, and some members of the Catholic community. Goan society has changed and Catholic Goans in Goa are no longer recipients of the privileged status afforded to them by the Portuguese. Where does that leave them? Are Catholic Goans to give in to pressures from Hindu fundamentalists who say, “Hindus are the only true Indians” or hold strong to their rich syncretic heritage thereby contributing one more layer to the tapestry that is India? The aim of this paper is to investigate the nature of Christian Goans in Goa and their place in India through the examination of that “sub-culture we call Christian Goan” following three major themes: that of the Village (the focal point of Goan social structure), the caste system, and finally what Robert S. Newman called “the Indian nature of Goan culture that is the tradition of tolerance and syncretic practices.” (Newman, 2001:12)

Scholars, writers, travelers and anthropologists throughout the centuries have made note of the diverse “tribes” or “peoples” of India. Jawaharlal Nehru in “The Discovery of India” said, “ I am fully aware of the diversities and divisions of Indian life, of castes, religions and races” (J.Nehru, 1946: 59). In the same vein when referring to post-liberation Goa he was quoted as saying, “Goa has a distinct personality and we have recognized it. It would be a pity to destroy that individuality...”(R.D’Souza, 1973: 33) The distinct personality that Jawaharlal Nehru referred to applied to all Goans, whether they were Catholic, Hindu or Muslim, and it is a personality that developed as a result of nearly 450 years of Portuguese rule.

Like any society subject to colonialism, Goan society experienced a form of cultural imperialism at the hand of the Portuguese who imposed their culture on Goans modifying, replacing and at times destroying existing norms under the guise of religion. Goan society was divided into two major communities, those that converted to Catholicism and those who did not. This division manifested itself outwardly in the form of dress, language, food and even music, in what James Scott (Kottak, 2005:270) termed the” public transcript”, leading an uninformed observer to conclude that Catholic Goans had completely accepted their colonizers and their “new culture”. However, when examined more closely at the grass roots level, what Scott (270) termed the “hidden transcript”, there is evidence that even while Catholic Goans were learning new cultural

practices from the Portuguese they nevertheless retained many pre-Portuguese Hindu traditions, in effect, Indianizing their newly learned culture.

Bernard Cohn said to understand a society you must look at their past of which there are two. The traditional past and the historical past. “ The traditional past usually refers to matters religious and cultural and the historic to matters social and political.”(Cohn, 1987:89). Goa’s traditional and historic pasts are like pieces of a jigsaw puzzle that when put together form a clear, multidimensional picture of what Goa is today.

### **History:**

Goa is India’s smallest state in terms of area and population. It is located on the west coast of India in the region known as the Konkan and is bounded in the north by the state of Maharashtra, Karnataka in the south and east and the Arabian Sea to the west.

Goa’s history dates back to the 3<sup>rd</sup> century BC. It was part of the Mauryan Empire ruled by Ashoka the Great from northern India. The Mauryan Empire was considered one of the most significant periods in Indian history. The Lion Capital of Ashoka at Sarnath is the emblem of India. The Mauryan Empire dissolved in 185BC. From the 1<sup>st</sup> to the 15<sup>th</sup> centuries Goa was ruled by a succession of Hindu dynasties and kingdoms. In the 15<sup>th</sup> century Goa ruled by the Muslim Bahmani kingdom and later superseded by another Muslim sultanate, the Adil Shahis of Bijapur. The sultans of Adil Shahi were known for their tolerance towards the Hindu religion of the local population and practiced a policy of non-interference in religious matters. In 1498 Vasco da Gama, the first European to set foot in India, arrived in what is today called Old Goa via Kerala. A few years later in 1510, the Portuguese under Afonso de Albuquerque, with the help of Timaya a Hindu privateer, who claimed he was born in Goa but fled because of the ruling Muslims, defeated the ruling Adil Shahi. In revenge for an earlier failed attempt in to capture Goa, de Albuquerque ordered the massacre of all Muslims in the conquered area. The Portuguese initially came to India to expand their spice trade but on conquering Adil Shahi sultanate and by order of the King of Portugal they established a settlement in Goa that was to last 450 years. In 1543 the colonizers initiated what became known as “The Inquisition” whereby a great many of the local population were converted to Catholicism. The Inquisition lasted from approximately 1543 to 1812, reshaping the socio-cultural landscape of the new colony.

Portuguese rule of Goa was not entirely uninterrupted. The Dutch attacked Goa twice, in 1603 and 1640. In 1787, inspired by the French Revolution, several Goan priests, unhappy with the process of promotion within the church and other discriminatory practices of the Portuguese, organized an unsuccessful revolt against the Portuguese. Known as The Pinto Revolt, it was the first open revolt against the Portuguese from within Goa. Britain gained control of Goa twice, the first time in 1797 – 1798 and for the second time from 1802-1813. In 1843 the capital was moved to Panjim and by the mid 18<sup>th</sup> century the area under occupation expanded to Goa’s present day limits. By this time the Portuguese Empire had begun its decline and further resistance to

their continued occupation in Goa started gaining momentum. After the rest of India gained independence in 1947 Portugal refused to relinquish control of Goa. On December 12<sup>th</sup>, 1961 India moved in with troops and after a fight that lasted twenty-six hours Portugal surrendered Goa. On May 30<sup>th</sup>, 1987 Goa was elevated as India's 25<sup>th</sup> state.

**Note:** Above historical facts taken from various books and websites. See Bibliography.

## **The Village**

Villages in India have been of interest to anthropologists for decades. The study of village life was a way to study the social structure of a small society, to understand their rituals and customs from the point of view of the villagers themselves. In the 1950s village studies abounded. Studies in India of what were called "little communities" were being undertaken with a view to understanding and how these little communities related to the greater communities. As noted by McKim Marriott "villages are the little communities of India and may be conceived as relative structural nexuses, as subsystems within greater systems, and as foci for individual identification within a greater field."(Marriott, 1955:191). Villages that were once thought to be self-sufficient, autonomous isolated units were found to be part of a greater whole and to be understood, Marriott further noted, little communities and greater communities had to be studied in relation to each other. "Little communities and greater communities are mutually necessary conditions for each other's existence..."(191).

*Gaum* is village, *Gaunkar* was its freeholder and *Gaunkari*, his associations, cooperatives. (Pereira, 1981: IV). The "little communities" in Goa were called *Gaunkaris*. The Portuguese called them *Comunidades*. Village communities in Goa existed prior to the arrival of the Portuguese in Goa and are thought to have been founded by the original settlers of the region, the aboriginals or Kunbis. Over the centuries the villages survived changes in dynasties, kingdoms, devastations and pestilence. Some of the villages that exist today have existed since the beginning, demarcated just as they were at the time of their foundation."(Pereira, 1981:4). Each village consisted of a cluster of houses and surrounding lands with local names and known limits. Each village also included a temple or shrine where the village deity was worshipped. The *gaunkares* were the landowners who were responsible for the administration of the land and the village. *Gaunkares* were either *Brahmins* or *Kshatriyas*(Catholic *Kshatriyas* are called *Chaddo* in Goa) and the dominant caste in a village would usually belong to one of these castes with other members of the village belonging to the castes of farm labourers, village servants and artisans (D'Souza, 1975:27), in various combinations.

The first areas to be conquered by the Portuguese were the districts or *talukas* of Ilhas, Bardez and Salcete. These areas grouped together were known as "*Velhas Conquistas*" or Old Conquests and each *taluka* consisted of a number of villages communities. It was in these districts that the Portuguese undertook their most zealous efforts to convert the "local pagans" to Christianity and where the majority of Goa's Catholic community is to be found. Hindu temples were destroyed and replaced by Catholic churches. To avoid conversion many Hindus fled with their deities to neighbouring villages outside of Portuguese control. Some years later Portugal

expanded their conquests in Goa to include ten more *talukas* and these grouped together were known as “*Novas Conquistas*” or New Conquests. (Pereira, 1981:12) However, at the time of the conquest of the *Novas Conquistas* the fervour of the Inquisition in Goa had waned and the Portuguese, although they continued their missionary work, their attempts at conversion had subsided. Many Hindu Goans that fled earlier returned to their villages and reestablished their temples making the *Novas Conquistas* the area with the greatest concentration of Hindus.

Olvinho F.J. Gomes said, “ To understand and appreciate Goan culture in its proper perspective one has to study intimately the social structure of a Goan village...”(Gomes, 1987:8). He further noted, “it is in the village that real Goa lives”(7). The church has been an important part of village life for Catholic Goans as temples have been for Hindu Goans. Churches and temples are the focal point of the villages and where all social activities take place, including local and intra-village sporting events. Each village is a community and not just in the economic sense as inferred when the Portuguese named them *comunidades*. The village is a small community where, more often than not, everyone knows everyone else and if not personally then by family or kin association. Villages, as noted above, are made up of several castes and the make-up varies from one village to the next. This makes it possible for members of any village to determine with a great degree of accuracy the caste of an individual from his association with a particular village. It is also possible for a villager to determine another’s natal village from that individual’s last name. A question often heard when two Goans meet for the first time is “ Which village are you from?” the response providing not just a geographical location but also the individual’s family background. “Village identifications are not subjective matters they are essential to the inclusive fictional kinship system by which a person’s village must be known...”(Marriott, 1955:177). Today the economics and politics of the village in Goa may have changed but socio-culturally the village is what it has always been, a place where all Goans, Hindu and Catholic, go back to even after generations of absence, a place where old traditions are still kept and upheld. M.N.Srinivas on returning to his village to write an ethnographic account of village life said, “It was only in the village that I realized how far I (and my family) had traveled from tradition (Srinivas, 1980:13)

## **Caste**

Early village studies showed villages to be isolated, self-sufficient units where the concept of communal land ownership was evidence of an egalitarian society. Spears noted, “...the classes which, locked by economic, social and religious ties into an intimate interdependence, made up the village community:”(Spears as quoted in Srinivas, 1987:44). However Srinivas argued that India has always been an inegalitarian society, the idea of hierarchy has always existed and it is this hierarchy that makes the society work as a whole. (Srinivas, 1980, 64). This principle of hierarchy is based on the caste system and is not about power or authority but it is based on religiosity and spirituality.

In India there are two systems of hierarchy: caste hierarchy based on labour distribution or occupation and the *Varna* system. The *Varnas* are arranged in order of rising status from service to priesthood and is a model that is universal in India. There are four categories in the Varna system: the *Brahmins* (priests, religious teachers), *Kshatriyas* (kings, warriors), *Vaishyas* (merchants) and *Sudras* (servants). The Untouchables, today called *dalits*, are not ranked in the Varna system. The Varna system was a way to sublimate power to religion, that is to say that although the priests had to obey the kings and do their bidding they could not be made inferior to them. Religion still had to be at the top. To accommodate this reality, the *Brahmins* and *Kshatriyas* were grouped together, along with the *Vaiyshas* into the category known as the twice born. The first birth is physical birth from the mother; the second is a ritual birth in which men only undergo to become caste members. The *Vaishyas* were included in this category because they were vegetarian and therefore technically purer than the *Kshatriyas* who ate meat, but they could not be made superior to kings who held power. *Sudras*, the lowest caste, were considered once born because they were born of the feet of the deity Purusa and therefore born to serve others.

Pre-Portuguese Goan society was mainly Hindu and as such society was organized on the basis of the caste system. *Sudras* and the Untouchables being of the lower castes were not allowed into the Temples. Hindu religious teachings at the time also generated female illiteracy and dependence. Widow marriages were not allowed and *Sati* was practiced. There were also restrictions on commensality and marriage (D'Souza 1975:152). I would add that Catholic religious teaching of that time were not very different with respect to women's literacy and dependence than that of the Hindus as noted above by D'Souza, however, the teachings did differ with respect to the other points. Given the above it is of no wonder that when the Portuguese arrived in Goa with a mandate to convert the local population to Christianity they found a section of the population who saw conversion as a way to improve their status and way of life. Christianity did not recognize caste so it appeared to offer women and people of the lower castes the opportunity of an egalitarian society. However because conversion was done en masse the caste system found its way into the newly formed Christian community. In Catholic Goa, three castes exist, the *Brahmin*, the *Chaddo* and the *Sudra*. The *Kunbis*, the aboriginals, are not part of the caste system but are the landless labourers and servants, ranking below the *Sudra* but above the *dalits*. Rev. Dr. Leopold da Roche noted, "The attachment to caste is more persevering than any other (tradition) as caste prejudices are deeply imbedded in the mentality and behaviour of the Hindu.." The egalitarian Christian order had to adapt to the social structure of the Hindu. (Gomes, 1987:82). Therefore, opportunities available to the new converts fell short of expectations, the egalitarianism promised did not materialize and caste still determined a person's upward mobility and social status. The majority of the *Sudras* and *Kunbis* today still retain their traditional caste occupations as menial labourers and servants to the community even though, in some cases, their financial positions have improved. The traditional definition of the *Brahmin* and *Kshatriya* (*Chaddo*) do not hold in contemporary Catholic Goa. There are no more kings and warriors and priests may be from any caste. Catholicism does not recognize caste and many Catholic Goans deny the existence of caste prejudice, however observation of daily life in Goa will provide a

different picture. Goans in the diaspora returning to their natal family village may wish to show the same deference to anyone, regardless of caste but within the village sphere there are rules to be obeyed and customs to be followed. For example, if one tries to help with chores such as sweeping the veranda or cleaning the yard, it is not unusual to have someone say, “ don’t do that, what will the neighbours think – that is for the Kunbi to do!” Cast prejudice amongst Catholic Goans is still in existence, as it is among Hindus, evidence of which can also be seen the personal section of Goan newspapers and Goan websites where one often sees matrimonial adverts that read “ Goan Roman Catholic Brahmin bachelor (or spinster), looking for..... to marry”. Some adverts do not mention caste specifically, but will advertise for a boy or girl of “wheatish colour”. Many earlier studies of the peoples and castes in India noted that people of the lower castes, i.e. the *Sudras*, *Dalits*, *Kunbis* were of a darker complexion than the higher castes, and as can be seen by the above-noted comment, caste discrimination although subtle is still part of the Goan psyche.

### **Pluralism and Syncretism in Goa**

Diversity of caste, religion and languages as noted by Nehru, is a reality in India. Put another way, Indian society is pluralistic in nature. It is a nation where peoples of many differing religions from Christianity to Zoroastrianism co-exist. Religious pluralism in India refers to tolerance of religions other than one’s own and the appreciation of all religious traditions that go into the make-up of a multicultural Indian identity. In 1976 the concept of Indian secularism was defined as “*sarva dharma sambhava*” or “ equal respect for all religions”. (Boletim No.170, 1994:77). Gayatri Reddy in writing about religious pluralism in the Indian context noted “Over the years Muslim traditions evolved markedly pluralistic forms to co-exist peacefully with Hindu and Jain religio-cultural beliefs and practices in different parts of the country. (Reddy, 2005:110) However, parts of India today are marked by communal violence between Hindus and Muslims and Hindus and Sikhs. Such violence is said to have been constructed during British colonial rule who, in order to rule India, divided it into little groups they could control. Tensions between the Hindu and Muslim communities were and continue to be exacerbated by politics however for the most part “ *sarva dharma sambhava*” is still very much a part of Indian tradition.

Prior to the colonization of Goa in 1510 Goa was ruled by several Hindu and Muslim dynasties and kingdoms. The majority of the Goan population was Hindu. In the first few years of colonization the Portuguese, while tending to their economic interests, showed considerable tolerance towards the Hindu population and their customs.

There were few conversions to Catholicism and those were mainly of widows and dancing girls who wished to marry Portuguese soldiers. (Rubinoff, 1995:166). Conversion of the local population accelerated after 1540 and coincided with the arrival of St. Francis Xavier and other Jesuits in 1542. Catholicism was made the official religion of Goa. In 1555 at the Augsburg Convention in Europe it was declared, “the ruler and the ruled should share the same faith” (167). That declaration marked the end of the Portuguese policy of tolerance towards the Hindu people and their traditions and began a period of mass conversions known as the Inquisition. The mass conversions were carried

out through the exertion of political and economic pressure. Temples were destroyed, later to be replaced by Catholic churches. Hindus were denied their traditional rites, religious festivals, life cycle rituals and ceremonies, marriages and public worship were prohibited. The mass conversions however resulted in a newly baptized population with no working knowledge of their new religion and they therefore continued to practice their traditional Hindu rituals and social affiliations along caste lines. Another result of the conversion was the loss of family and other kin, as well as affiliations with other caste members who did not convert. Converts were ostracized because caste rules such as commensality rules had been broken and they were now considered “impure”. The Catholic Church in an attempt to erase any trace of Hindu in the converts instituted a number of changes. Contact between the newly converted Catholic community and the Hindu community was prohibited. Converts had their names changed (they were given Christian names), their language (Portuguese became the official language), dress (European style dress was introduced), diet (meat and fish were added. The Franciscan friars even taught the locals to distill toddy converting it to *feni*, Goa’s alcoholic beverage), inheritance practices (where before only male heirs could inherit land, women were now also able to do so) and marriage rules. Other changes made included changes in music, art, drama and rituals. (Rubinoff, 1995:170). Catholic converts were given jobs in the Portuguese administration and overall experienced a better way of life than the non-converts leading to tensions between the two communities. The Portuguese attempted to completely lusitanize the converts and on the surface it would appear that they succeeded, but what the church discovered was that in spite of all these changes the one thing they could not erase was the notion of caste. The Church soon realized that caste was how the local people, regardless of religious affiliation, identified themselves within their social structure, so as stated by Janet Rubinoff “ ultimately although the church was able to impose a separate religious and cultural identification on the converts from their Hindu counterparts they could only do it within the context of the indigenous social system,”(173).

At the time of the Inquisition in Goa, the *Novas Conquistas*, or new conquests, did not fall under Portuguese rule; they were conquered towards the end of the Inquisition. As a result the people in these districts were spared the full force of the Portuguese conversion strategies. By the early 19<sup>th</sup> century the power of the Portuguese empire had begun to decline globally and conversion of the locals was no longer an important issue. In fact the Portuguese Governor issued a proclamation guaranteeing the people of the *Novas Conquistas* the right to follow their own rules and customs. (D’Souza, 1975: 97). Hence, the majority of the population in the districts of the *Novas Conquistas* are Hindu while Catholics are to be found mainly in the *Velhas Conquistas*.

The syncretic nature of Goan culture today is a direct result of these events. Catholic and Hindu Goans in Goa have developed a pluralistic society, they have learned to co-exist since the end of the Portuguese rule and the tradition of tolerance learned from years of being ruled by dynasties of differing religions has resurfaced. Today Hindu and Catholic Goans partake in some of each other’s feasts and festivals. The important festivals celebrated are the birthday of the Hindu Lord Ganesh, the festival of Dussera, (the mother goddess), *Diwali*, (the festival of light), the birthday of Lord Krishna. *Gokul*

*Ashthami* marks the beginning of Goa's harvest festivals. Christmas, New Years and Easter are the big Catholic celebrations. At the village level, all villages in Goa are connected to their own specific deity or saint and the villages celebrate the birthdays of these deities or saints. Hindus will sometimes attend Catholic churches, for example on the day of the feast celebrating the village saint or the novena prayers at the church of St. Francis Xavier and Catholics will attend Hindu temples for example during the feast of Dussera. After initial tensions following conversion, Goan Catholics and Hindus have learned to accept and recognize each other's different religious beliefs and rituals. Through the process of acculturation overtime, some religious rituals came to blend and be shared. A good example of this would be the *Jagar* Festival that is celebrated on the first of January each year. The *Jagar* festival is a dance-drama accompanied by a narrative that is celebrated in the village of Siolim, in the *Velhas Conquistas* district of Bardez. Celebrated jointly by both Hindus and Catholics it is a symbolic representation of harmony that exists between the two communities of the village. (Axelrod /Fuerch, 1998, 465).

Goa to date has escaped the communal violence prevalent in some parts of India today. Perhaps this is precisely because Goa was and is a place where people of different castes, religions and languages co-exist in practice of "*sarva dharma sambhava*". Goa's tradition of tolerance, openness and acceptance of others and its syncretism has led to an enrichment of Goan culture, a culture that extends to all Goans irrespective of caste or religion.

### **Conclusion:**

This paper resulted from a detailed examination, including historical events, of the path that led Catholic Goans to where they are today. I undertook to write this paper because I realized while studying the Anthropology of South East Asia, in particular India, I knew very little about India and even less about Goa and belonging to what J. Correia Afonso S.J. noted as "this sub-culture called Christian Goan" it was something I thought I should explore. I was also curious to find out what place a Catholic Goan had in a Hindu state and nation. What was / is the connection?

I had always argued that Catholic Goans did not have a unique culture, in the sense defined by noted anthropologist, E.B.Tylor, that culture is something that ".....includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law customs and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society" (Daniels, 1996: 194). I believe that tradition and culture are not the same thing but are often spoke of as being one and the same. Traditions are practices that are passed down from generation to generation and they may change in certain aspects through the course of time but the foundation will always remain the same, much like a Christmas tree which may be decorated differently every year, but the tree, the foundation, is still the same. Culture on the other hand is not something fixed. It is always evolving and changing as new ideas, influences and experiences are introduced to a society. For example, a Catholic Goan in Goa has a different "culture" from a Catholic Goan in Bombay as a Catholic Goan in England has a different "culture" from Catholic Goan in Uganda, because all of them have been



exposed to different influences in their respective social environments. The socio-cultural environment of each will determine their behaviours and practices and no two will be exactly alike. Daniels said culture has a dialogic aspect, it is not a given, but something that is co-created between peoples in close contact. (198).

It was not enough to start this paper with the conquest by Portugal in 1510 because Goa and its people existed long before that. In order to answer the questions I had with respect to Catholic Goans in Goa and their relation to Hindu Goans and the rest of India, where they came from and their “unique culture” I had to examine Goa’s history from the beginning. O.J.F Gomez noted that there is a “woeful lack of information regarding Goa”. This lack of information has also led to a lack of knowledge amongst Goans in the diaspora about their own heritage. Not too long ago most people did not know where Goa was and, if they did, it was often known as a Portuguese outpost or a place where the hippies of the 60s went to party and obtain cheap drugs. Today it is famous for its beaches, a very popular tourist destination. Robert S. Newman once said that he “...realized that Goa, as in such places as Mexico and Mauritius (just to name a couple), contact between two civilizations had created a fascinating synthesis, one that had been steadfastly slighted by anthropologists, who wanted to study “pure” India...”(Peace Corp website, 2003). South Asian studies have on the whole ignored Goa for reasons unknown to me. However, I submit that the study of Goa would add another interesting dimension to an already diverse India. Goa has endured many conquests has been under foreign rule for a longer period of time than any other state in India. If anthropology is the study of the human condition and socio-anthropology is the study of human society and behaviours, then Goa has a wealth of as yet unexplored avenues to offer for study. One such example would be the effect of liberation on Goan society from Portuguese rule. Was it liberation or just an exchange of masters? Another interesting study would be the effects of the increased tourism and development on the local population.

For 450 years Catholic Goans lived in a relatively stable society. Outside influences, other than that of the Portuguese, were minimal. The early 20<sup>th</sup> century saw an increase in emigration of Goans, Catholic and Hindu, to other parts of India, British Africa, and the Middle East. When they returned to Goa they brought with them new habits, practices and ideas but their effect was minimal on the local culture. Since 1961, with liberation, Goa has undergone many changes and Catholic Goans are increasingly becoming a very small minority. Urbanization and development continues to cause the displacement of local people from their natal villages and has brought an influx of people from other Indian states looking for work in the expanding tourist trade. Tourism has also brought in non-Indian investors and retirees looking for “holiday homes”, all at the expense of the indigenous Goan population.

Hindu influence in Goa has increased, religiously, politically and economically. Catholic Goans are no longer “the privileged” they were under Portuguese rule and they co-exist relatively peacefully with their fellow Goans, be they Hindu or Muslim. Today Catholicism is still very much a part of Goa and therefore, by extension, India. However, if Catholic Goans in Goa are to continue to enjoy religious freedom and the rich syncretic

heritage they have developed, traditions and histories should be passed on from one generation to the next, not just in India but all over the world. They must also continue to be open to new peoples, growing and changing as the world around them changes, but with a view to preserving and protecting their heritage, their traditions and values in the face of those who would deny them their rightful place in Goa, India and hence their identity.

As I noted before, before I started this paper I was happy thinking I knew a lot about Goa and who Goans were because my family is Goan and I have visited Goa a few times. I soon came to realize I knew as little as, and in some cases much less, than those people I spoke to, those to whom I proclaimed myself a “proud Goan”. I have learned much, not just from other Goans who were kind enough to guide me but also non-Goans who educated me on who Goans are and what it means to be a Goan. I can now say with justifiable pride that I am a Goan with a rich history and heritage and I belong to an ancient civilization, not unlike that of the Chinese. Goa is part of the Indian civilization that has lasted centuries while other, so called “Great Civilizations” like that of the Romans and Greeks, crumbled. To quote a friend “ A Goan is an Indian, but like no other Indian”. The writing of this paper has not only helped me understand and place my ethnicity in India but it has also helped me discover an identity.

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Toronto, Ontario  
Canada. May 2007.

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