

# GOA: CULTURAL TRENDS

(SEMINAR PAPERS)

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## Inaugural Address

**Prof. B. Sheik All,**  
*Vice-Chancellor, Goa University*

Doyen of historians, my esteemed colleague Dr. George Moraes, Dr. Shastri, Dr. Shirodkar, delegates and friends.

The Department of History of Goa University and the Directorate of State Archives, Government of Goa, Daman and Diu, deserve our very sincere thanks, for launching every year a very useful Seminar. It was on socio-economic history of Goa last year, and it is on the cultural history of this region this year. Our main job is first to excite interest in the history, art, culture, life and conditions of the people of this region, secondly, to prompt our scholars to take up meaningful themes to pursue their research, thirdly, to apprise them of the latest trends in historical writings so that our young budding researchers could be put on the right track, and finally, to make known to all what a rich treasure of historical material lies unutilised in the repositories of State Archives.

Goa, which can justly be proud of limitless bounties of nature, is also a treasure-house of unimaginably large collection of historical records which run into tens of thousands accumulated over the centuries in diverse languages, which need a band of competent, industrious and devoted scholars to unravel what exciting dramas have taken place in several walks of life. It needs hardly any repetition that a nation that forgets the past will have no future. Many, many of our problems are because of the wrong diagnosis of our ills, and this wrong diagnosis is because of our -either ignorance of the past, or the wrong notions of the past, or our refusal to learn from the past, or our failure to link how the present is the outcome of the past. If we correctly analyse the factors as to what contributes to success, what leads to failure, what have we inherited, and what is its worth, we would certainly gain searching light to scan the entire panorama for building a bright future. It is in this context that the latest computer science has become relevant to historians, who should intelligently feed

the data first into their own mental computer to come out with meaningful analysis not only to reconstruct the past but also to help build future.

These are some of the objectives which have prompted our new University with its scarce resources to launch on a series of Seminars, which hopefully would sow the tiny seeds of consciousness in our young scholars that we owe it to ourselves that pursuit of excellence which transformed Prussia into a resurgent Germany in that new University of Berlin early in the 19th century, when a band of historians like Hegel, Ranke, Mommsen and others created sensation in the scholarly world. Historical comparisons may be questioned but there is nothing wrong in setting a standard and exciting our youth to follow a healthy model. Historical scholarship in our country in general and in the South in particular has to go a long way to catch up with the vigorous trends now in vogue in the West. Interest-wise, quality-wise, technique-wise, we should all struggle to move up inch by inch in the greasy pole of exacting high standards to match the creative out-put which has become normal practice in advanced countries of the world. We do hope this Seminar will set a high standard in respect of papers read and discussed, and that it will lay the foundation of a healthy trend that Goa University though young is never satisfied with anything but the best.

With these preliminary remarks, may I say a word or two on the theme now proposed for this Seminar. Normally, the subjects of the Seminars hinge on a specialised or specific area of research, but our University, still at the lower rung of the ladder, prefers to have general and broad topics, such as the socio-economic history or cultural history. This we have deliberately done knowing our position that one has to learn walking before one takes to running. But cultural history is more broad-based than socio-economic history and we have chosen this to make the base still broader so that the fundamentals are well-grasped before we go to more complicated topics.

Culture is of interest to every one, and culture happens to be the quintessence of man's knowledge, skill and wisdom. It pertains to whatever is finest, best, solid and refined, everlasting in character,

useful in nature and attractive and graceful in design. It belongs to the realm of art, faith, belief, literature, religion, philosophy, music, dance, drama and all other capabilities which man acquires in his journey towards progress. It is the product of his higher thought, when in his reflective mood he becomes creative. He looks at the Universe and the nature, and tries to comprehend the phenomena in his own way. He imitates God's creation of the Universe on a canvas, and there emerges through his brush the paintings of a hill, a dale, a valley, a landscape more pleasing to the eye than what actually exists in reality. He sees a beautiful figure, and his imagination comes out with *Mona Lisa* so jealously guarded, and more highly prized than real human beings whom he so callously ignores, or who become the victims of his terror. He takes a piece of marble or granite, and carves an image, which he installs as a God or a Goddess in a temple. His mind, his hands and his tools attempt to rival instinctively and rationally what he finds in the world of nature, and thus results are, painting, sculpture and a host of other cultural crafts. Art is the oldest instinct in man. Even the savages had the instinct to scratch something in the caves, and the first attempt of the child is to respond unknowingly to something exciting, a quality in the direction of art and culture.

Art is a gift of God to man. Every one is not a painter, or a sculptor, or a dancer, or a musician or a poet, or a litterateur or a philosopher. All artists are not equally endowed or gifted. All ages have not equally contributed to art and culture. All regions or countries do not possess the same potentiality or are similarly productive. Therefore, art is distinct from science which is subject to an organic law of behaviour. It is the speciality of art that it is selective, arbitrary, capricious and unimitative. Raphael, Michelangelo, Christopher Wren, Picassc are all a class by themselves. Belur, Halebid, Agra, Bhubaneshwar, Old Goa, Tanjore and Madurai are all unique in themselves. Euripedes, Kalidasa, Shakespeare, Milton, Bernard Shaw and Tagore have no rival in the world. Confucius, Buddha, Jesus, Muhammad, Guru Nanak and Ramakrishna Paramahamsa hold each a different torch to teaching which is inimitable. Therefore, art and culture are a very difficult and complicated phenomenon which is as old as man himself.

It is in this background that we have to examine the history of art and culture in Goa. If the present is the minor of the past, then Goa could justly be proud of the rich past. Its music, dance, drama, literature, art, architecture, sculpture, painting, faith, beliefs, morals and religion, currently so much appreciated all over the world, all are the products of love, religion and taste over the ages. They have all been jealously cultivated, eagerly sought and carefully preserved and passed on from generation to generation, which enriched the main stream by its own skill and talent. Religion in our country is the main motivating force for culture, which manifests itself in the form of temples, churches, mosques, sculpture, painting, music and so on. God in the east is always the *Chief Guest* at every function from birth to death. This *Chief Guest* prompts man to remember Him in various forms, sometimes as an idol, sometimes as an icon or devotional songs or beautiful paintings or enchanting music or captivating sculpture and so on. In Goa, as in other parts of the country, cultural grandeur reached new heights only under religious inspiration, may be a temple or a church, where all ingenuity was used to come out with works of rarest art. Take for example the Goan Christian iconography which revolves around the mysteries of nativity; the St. Francis de Assissi Church, Old Goa, which is rated as Goa's richest church from the point of view of its interior, the image of Immaculate Conception, and so on. The same thing is true of Hindu art, where temple is the centre of all creative art. It has generated the finest sculpture, the exquisite decoration and the superb architecture.

Religion is also the source for profound philosophy, where man begins to wonder at the mysteries of the universe and attempts to find an answer. Perhaps no country could excel India in the profundity of higher thought from the Rig-Vedic Age to Gandhiji's time. I am sure this Seminar would throw some light on the Goan contribution to the realm of higher thought, which need not necessarily be in the form of adding spectacular systems of philosophy. I am sure there must have been quite a few saints and savants, more so if the Bhakti Cult, who must have spread the message of love, service and devotion. It is high time our scholars should try to probe deep into the literature of the past to unearth the message of love and concord which this region must have fostered in the past.

It is in the realm of music, both Eastern and Western, that Goa has touched the pinnacle of glory, and it should be our endeavour to splash the contribution of this region, so as to carve out the rightful place for Goa in the realm of this popular art. Music is indeed the food for soul, and the music sprouting in devotional songs, excites spiritual bliss, which is the main purpose of all religious pursuits. Music has indeed been the medium in bringing man closer to God. We are proud of the fact that in this essential sector, Goa has played a very significant part.

Literature, whether it is fiction, drama, poetry or prose, whether it is in Konkani, Marathi, Portuguese or English, whether it is for religious or secular purpose, has always been the yardstick to measure the height of a society's culture. A good book is the life-spirit of a master mind, and the art of good writing is the most precious gift of God to man. The contribution of Goans in this area to the main stream of Indian literature must be immense, but is not well-known. It is our duty to make it known. A critical evaluation of the literary output of the Goans would perhaps be attempted in this Seminar.

Painting is yet another area where Goa could justly claim a high place. Painting draws inspiration both from secular and religious source. A visit to Menezes Braganza or to any chapel in Goa would amply bring to our mind the quality of painting that emerged in Goa. Goa became the Sangam or the confluence of the Eastern and Western style. Indian flora and fauna under the spell of Western technique of painting assumed a new garb which was at once bewitching, and at the same time quite real. Indian speciality is always to idealize everything and the Western trend is to depict it as true as real. Indian fauna like Madonna on crocodile and floral elements like Madonna holding a flower, the Indian celestial symbols like moon phases, the Indian garments in bright red, blue and green colours and the Indian techniques and styles mixed with those of the West gifted a rich harvest of paintings in Goa, which was indeed a welcome addition to Indian painting. I am sure this Seminar would throw significant light on this aspect.

Studies in art and culture many a time ignore the popular exuberance in such areas of consumerism as textiles, woodcraft,

ivory-craft, China-ware, earthenware, metal-carving, toy-making, embroidery and so on. Perhaps it is not so well-known what exquisite articles of furniture Goans could make. They excel the Kashmiris in the rich and delicate carving of the wood to present pieces of rare art. The Western contact of Goa for a long time, the inherent taste of Goans for good things of life, the innate capacity of Goans to bring forth their latent skills to fulfilment stage, and the rich market available for their sale, all made Goa a nerve-centre for the production of artistic goods. I do hope this Seminar will have something to say on this important subject.

In conclusion, I have once again only to thank the organisers of this Seminar, the dual entity, the History Department and the State Archives, for their labour, which is so noble and laudable, and wish them all success. I have one request to make. Unless the proceedings of the Seminar are published, ninety percent of its value will be lost. We would listen to the debates, discussions and papers through one ear and blow it off through the other. I wonder whether their utility would even last the duration of going down the steps of this hall. Hence, my very earnest, sincere and pressing appeal to you is that having taken so much trouble to organise this Seminar, please do us one more favour in order to make it more permanent. It could be done only through publishing the proceedings, or else you will be only squeezing a lime in the Arabian Sea. Please do it in a tumbler and preserve it in a bottle so that it could be of use to any one who wants it. I know publication is a difficult task, but nothing is impossible. Goans are known for performing difficult tasks. They are known for their tenacity and perseverance. I am glad that the proceedings of last year are being published. I congratulate the organisers for doing this excellent job. Let them adopt one more policy measure. Now that you want these Seminars to be a permanent feature every year, please see to it that the proceedings of the preceding Seminar be released on the day of inauguration of every new Seminar. If you bind yourselves under these constraints, you will be propelled to act with greater vigour, and who knows our dream may come true. With these words I have great pleasure in inaugurating this Seminar.