Special Paper Section

Changing Dynamics of Goan Identity

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Abstract

The Goan identity is constantly in flux. The paper identifies three important dynamics influencing the evolution of Goan identity since liberation. The dynamics based on monolingualism shaped traditional Goan identity in post-colonial Goa. The paper highlights the fissures created by the multilingual history of Goa that formulate the Goan identity in monolingual framework. The inauguration of neo-liberal policies in India with the onset of globalisation in 90s has swapped the linguistic bases of defining Goan identity with a land-based identity. The regional identity of being a Goan clubbed with environmental activism has shaped the Goan identity after globalisation. The category of 'non-Goan' galvanised Goan identity. The paper explains the transformation of 'non-Goans' into the 'neo-Goans' as a result of the amalgamation of feudal, real-estate interest and the interests of the state. The paper examines the subaltern engagement with the Goan identity.

Keyword: Language, Goan Identity, Subaltern, Land, Lusophone, Tourism, Globalisation

Introduction

Goa is treated as 'unique space' due to its Portuguese background in academics. The ponderings in popular gatherings and academic discussions on 'Goan identity' generally begins with an anecdote of Jawaharlal Nehru's description about Goan people as '*Ajeeb hai ye Goa ke log'*. Rochelle Pinto (2007) describes the uniqueness of Goa by contextualizing its place as situated 'between the two empires' i.e. the Portuguese and the British empire. This geo-political location of Goa in history has produced a debate between the two ideas of Goa; as '*Goa Dourada*' and 'Goa Indica'. The former locates Goa under *Lusophone* identity whereas later connects its cultural origine to India. Though the scholars have attempted to challenge the employment of these two frames in analysing Goan identity, the academic debates on Goan identity oscillate between these two frames (Trichur 2000; de Souza 2000). The emphasis on *Goa Dourada* and *Goa Indica* frameworks have been used to argue for the peculiar case of Goan orientalism (Fernandes 2014). Such attempts radicalise one frame over the other. These radical binaries add to their complexities and further cause to change its composition.

Anant Kakba Priolkar (1983) highlights the complexities involved in defining the Goan identity by pondering upon the question of 'Who is Goan?' He highlights the constraints in defining Goan identity by evaluating historical data and comes up with a flexible definition of 'Goan' as 'anyone whose forefathers have been domiciled in Goa at any time in history and one who is aware about this connection, can be called as Goan' (Priolkar 1983, 270). Prilokar's flexibility in defining Goan stems from his caste location as Hindu upper caste as he narrates his meeting with Dr. R. G. Bhandarkar, having established in Poona did not fail to trace his origin to Goa by tracing link to the family deity '*Shantadurga*' located in a village in Goa (Priolkar 1983, 270). Priolkar was astonished by the attachment shown by Bhandarkar in rekindling the family tradition of worshiping the deity, as at the time, Bhandarkar has shown uncompromising advocacy towards the renouncement of the idol worship (Priolkar 1983, 270). Therefore, it is unsure whether the same flexibility in appropriating the Goan identity is available with a lower caste individual who may not have anything i.e. neither association with family deity, nor surnames of Goan village, to prove his belonging to Goa. Thus, the regional identities seem absurd as it privileges the powerful and marginalises the weak, but since the regional location in democratic polity of India emerged as a legitimised location of social justice, it is important to scrutinize the same. Pramod Kale (1994) describes the complexities involved in defining contemporary Goan identity through the 'paradise lost' syndrome characterised by the loss of communal harmony between the Hindus and Christians. Kale argues that being Goan is perceived in opposition to being an Indian, in which the perception about Indians is framed through the experiences of Indian tourist whom Goans perceive as 'cheap and messy' (Kale 1994, 911). Thus, he points out stigmatisation of Indian identity in Goa as opposed to Goan identity.

The linguistic assertion simplified the complexities of defining regional identity in post-independent India. In post-colonial Goa, the elites attempted to encapsulate the intricacies of Goan identity through a monolingual framework represented in the form of Konkani language. In contemporary political discourse, Goa is imagined as a Konkani land. The imagination of Goan identity in monolingual framework is contrary to its multilingual history. The following section discusses the counter currents of defining Goan identity in linguistic framework.

The linguistic assertion of Goan Identity

The traditional Goan identity is constructed through Konkani language. Jason Fernandes (2014) analyses the process of the formation of Goan identity through the Konkani language. Though Fernandes critique the construction of Konkani identity as stemming from the cultural superiority of Hindu upper caste

reflected in legitimizing the Nagari script as the authentic script for Konkani, it fails to capture the making of Goan identity from multilingual framework. Similarly, Narayan Desai (2002) unfolds the events in legitimizing the Nagari script as the legitimate script for Konkani but fails to capture the construction of Konkani as a symbol of Goan identity. Making of Konkani as a symbol of Goan identity is often juxtaposed with Marathi. Konkani and Marathi languages in contemporary Goa are seen in binaries and Konkani is stressed upon as a mark of the Goan identity as opposite to Marathi identity (Sardessai 2006; Pereira 1971). The projection of Goa and Goans as Konkani speaking territory hides the peculiarities associated with the Portuguese rule in Goa. The peculiarities of Portuguese rule impromptu produced multilingualism in Goa. Konkani along with Marathi, Portuguese, and English have played a key role in defining the Goan identity.

The peculiarities of Portuguese rule lie in the stages of Portuguese annexation of Goa. Portuguese first captured an island known as *Tiswadi* in 1510 followed by *Bardez* and *Salcete* in 1543. These three territories captured in sixteenth century are known as 'old conquest'. Technically Portuguese ruled only the areas of old conquests for four centuries. The Lusophone influences on Goan identity lie in these areas of Old Conquest. The remaining part of Goa, Portuguese captured in late 18th century which included Ponda, Sanguem, Quepem and Canacona in 1763-64, Bicholim, Sattari in 1781 and Pernem in 1788. These areas are known as 'new conquest. Marathi dominated the social sphere in new conquest. The genesis of 'Goa Dourada' and 'Goa Indica' narratives about the Goan identity lies in the division of the territory into the old and new conquest respectively. The old conquest is primarily Christian dominated areas while the new conquests are Hindu dominated territories. In 20th century with the rise of press, Konakni press remained limited to the areas of old conquest while Marathi press dominated the new conquest.

Portuguese, being the language of the Imperial power, remained a dominant language in Goa in both Old and New Conquests until the liberation. Similarly, the economic urgency brought the people of Goa, primarily from the old conquests, into contact with the English language. The local discourse in periodicals in the second half of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century discusses the mobility provided by the English language due to the griming economic situation in Goa (Raposo, 2008, p. 188). Portuguese opened the first state-run English language school in Goa as early as 1869 (Pinto, 2007, p. 98). Thus, despite Goa being a Portuguese controlled area, English shaped the local discourse in Goa as early as 19th century. English language provided a mobility to the lower caste Catholics from old conquests. Many of them took up education in English and left Goa to seek employment in Bombay and elsewhere in British India. This has enabled the lower caste and class Catholics to contest their marginalised identity and overcame the boundaries of caste. Caste remained a horrifying reality to even Goan Catholics as conversion did not

change their caste location. However, mobility provided by the English provided them with an opportunity to make the caste identity redundant. This is reflected in the form of discussion taking place in Konkani periodicals in colonial Goa. The marginality of Goan Catholics in old conquests were contested not through caste but through a class-based category of '*Durbol'* (D'Souza, 1930; Amcho Gao, 1932; Amcho Gao, 1932). Many lower caste Goan migrants in Bombay in British India could escape the clutches of castes through the profit they earned in their business. Thus, English shaped the Goan identity in empowering manner in old conquest.

The multilingual past of Goa gets personified in present times whenever the threat to the multilingualism appears. In 1990, when the Congress government announced the suspension of grants to the English medium schools, people protested on ground forcing government to stall its decision. The support to English in Goa has much more than economic basis. In a way, it has become a part of identity of a section of Goans owing to its empowering role in history and also in present. The opposition to English stems from the danger to the traditional culture embodied in vernacular languages. In 2011, Konkani and Marathi supporters protested against the decision of Congress government led by Chief Minister Digambar Kamat's announcement of the grants to the English medium schools. To oppose the alliance of Konkani-Marathi supporters, a Forum of Rights of Children to Education (FORCE) was launched. Such initiatives by civil society reflect the deep entrenched multilingual landscape of Goa.

An attempt to make the Konkani as official language of Goa met with an opposition from the Marathi supporters. *Marathi Rajbhasha Prasthapan Samiti* is an organisation fighting for the official status for Marathi in Goa. This organisation doesn't belong to Maharashtra but has roots in Goa due to the historical roots of Marathi in new conquests. Therefore, the incorporation of Marathi and English in the Official Language Act adhered to the multilingualism of Goan society. These three languages together shape Goan identity.

The contestation over linguistic framework is at the heart of the formation of Goan identity. The projection of Konkani as the symbol of Goan identity has undergone linguistic claims and counter-claims. The genesis of this debate goes back to its history. The downtrodden sections from old conquests expressed Goanenss through the Konkani written in Roman script. The employment of Roman script by the church provided a fillip to the projection of Goan identity. The role of Marathi in preserving the sanctity of Hindu religion in new conquests provided a firm bases for Marathi in new conquests areas. Marathi also provided a voice for the lower castes Hindus in challenging the caste oppression. The lower castes belonging to artist communuty challenged the exploitation of Devadasis through the Marathi periodical '*Pragati'*. The Hindu

assertion in Konkani entered through the Vaman Valualikar known as the modern revivor of Konkani movement. Goan identity in the works of Valaulikar emerges in the form of Konkani assertions built on the narrative of the antithesis to Marathi (Varde Valaulikar 2003). The Konkani movement built on the basis of anti-Marathi sentiments found sympathizers during the demand for making Konkani as the official language of the state. During the anti-merger agitation, Goa's history as the Portuguese colony dominated the public discourse in favour of retaining the status of Goa as a union territory. At the time of the official language agitation, Konkani language formed the text of Goan identity, and the unique status of Goa as a Portuguese colony formed its sub-text. Thus, the traditional Goan identity came to be defined in linguistic framework. The passing of official language act legitimizing the use of Nagari as the authentic script for Konkani language created the fissures in monolingual definition of Goan identity. The migration of Catholic community in gulf and Europe has spread the linguistic assertion abroad. The Konkani in Roman script plays a key role in defining and sustaining the Goan identity among the overseas Catholic population. The emergence of globalization challenged the linguistic framework of Goan identity. The neo-liberal policies replaced the linguistic framework of influencing the Goan identity. The response to the neo-liberal policies have changed over the period of time. From its denial to co-option since 90s, neoliberalism added multiple layers to the composition of Goan identity. The following section traces the transformation of Goan identity from 'non-Goans' to the 'neo-Goans' in the wake of neo-liberal policies.

Neo-liberalism and Goan identity

In the initial decades of Goa's liberation, the arrival of hippies largely transformed Goa's image as 'Europe of India'. The neo-liberalism sought to exploit the image of Goa as an international tourism destination leading to the introduction of several land conversion projects for industrial and tourism purposes. The Goan identity further channelised to preserve the demographic composition of Goa which was seen at a threat as a result of the influx of migrants from neighbouring states. The threat to environmental landscape in the form of Konkan Railway Project and Nylon 6'6 aggravated concerns around Goan Identity. The environmental movement of 90s were basically feudal movements initiated to protect the land belonging to Bhatcars (feudal). The regional identity of being a Goan clubbed with environmental activism has shaped the Goan identity at the onset of globalisation. The neo-liberalism primarily concentrated on the control of land. The unchecked tourism is seen as a threat to the Goan identity and culture (Noronha 1997). The tourism policy is critiqued for promoting the commodification of Goa as a space of consumption (Routledge 2000). This policy fostered the real estate interests in land conversion challenging the existing feudal

structure. The Goan identity during the liberalisation phase moulded through the contestation between the state-business nexus, and feudal over the control of land.

The Goa Bachao Abhiyan launched in 2006 is an important movement channelising the Goan identity through the contestation over the land. The movement was backed by the civil society comprising of professionals such as Professors, Writers, Lawyers, Doctors, Journalist, etc. The movement opposed the 'Regional Plan 2011'. The plan was accused for seeking the land conversion through rapid development of urban centres (EPW 2006, 5205). The unaccountability and impartiality in planning process was one of the main reasons for opposing the regional planning process (Da Silva, Nielsen and Bedi 2020). The protestors against the regional plan came from upper caste and class backgrounds. The Goan identity galvanised through the construction of 'non-Goans' category. The 'non-Goans' were the real estate lobby from the other states and also foreign nationals. In fact, the foreign nationals particularly hippies were welcomed in Goa in pre-liberalisation period. Many hippies have settled in the village known as Anjuna in North Goa (Saldanha 2009, 70). The liberalisation marked the entry of other foreign nationals which includes Israelis, Russians, Britons, Africans, etc. The entry of these foreign nationals and their engagement into drug cartels and other illegal businesses created an 'anti-foreign national' attitude among the Goans (Chari 2013) (Times News Network 2011). Along with Indians, these foreign nationals are categorised as 'non-Goans' seeking to possess land ownership in Goa.

Goa provides an access to the amenities of urban life in a picturesque village environment. This unique synthesis of city and village attracts the claimants for Goan identity from the metropolitan locations of India. The rich Indian class wants to make Goa as their abode. The desire to own a home in Goa has transformed Goa from 'holiday destination' to a 'second home destination' (Faizan 2023). The rise in private investment in building 'second home' in Goa is a testimony to the shift in market strategy from making Goa a tourism destination to a permanent residence. The rich class especially from the Delhi-NCR region are investing in properties located in Goa (Faizan 2023). This class has invested in all kinds of tourism related businesses including night clubs, pubs, restaurants, shacks, villas providing an access to second homes, and all other plethora of tourism related businesses. The prospects of luxury lifestyle in Goa attracts these classes to permanently settle here. From initial unwelcome to accepting the cream from the parts of India to Goa, have given rise to the new category of 'neo-Goans' in public discourse (Kamat 2024). They are the newly settled population in Goa from different parts of India claiming the Goan identity. The ownership over the land defines the new category of 'neo-Goans'. The amalgamation of the interests of feudal with the real estate business interests has transformed the once identified 'non-Goans' into the 'neo-

Goans' identity. Therefore, the state once known for staging a civil protest against the commercialisation of land has not seen any big movement on the lines of Goa Bachao Abhiyan in the recent times. The real estate lobby has been vociferously campaigning for the land conversion in the form of aggressive advertisements. For instance, in Bicholim- Goa, the advertisement hoardings installed by a private real-estate firm with a caption 'Delhi capture Goa' goes unnoticed as a mainstream media are now reluctant to address such issues. This indicates the alliance between elites comprises of state, feudal, and real-estate lobbies in land conversion. In this context, the Subaltern Goan's engagement with issues of Goan identity deserves attention.

Subaltern Goan Identity

The category of Subaltern Goans comprises of lower caste-class Christians and Hindus. The subaltern Goan in the earlier phases of Goa's liberation contested the monolingual projection of Goan identity by emphasizing upon the multilingual character of Goa. They invoked assertion of English and Marathi, and Konkani written in Roman script. The leadership of Dayanand Bandodkar, the first chief minister of Goa, consolidated the lower castes under the lose conglomeration of Bahujan identity. However, the subaltern Goan groups remain divided into various sections and have employed Goan identity differently. For instance, one of the earliest manifestations of Subaltern Goan identity employed by some groups within the subaltern includes the identity of 'Original Goan' or 'Original settler' to the land, referred in Konkani as '*mul genkar'.* It is important to note that the groups referred as tribes of Goa in contemporary times were once categorised under OBC category. This group include Gawada, Kunbi, Velip and Dhangars. This groups during their struggle for the inclusion in the list of Goan Scheduled Tribes have reinvented the Goan identity as the original settler of Goa. In 2003, the Government of India accorded tribal status to the three communities of *Gawada, Kunbi*, and *Velip.* The act excludes the inclusion of *Dhangar* community. The Dhangar community status as Goan is contested as they are believed to belong to Maharashtra. Thus, the Goan ST identity is limited to three groups, and Dhangar continues to fight for their inclusion in ST quota. Recently, Prakash Velip, the leader of the tribal movement has opposed the inclusion of Dhangar in the Goan ST category, on the grounds that the inclusion of Dhangar in the list would amount to the reduction of quota to the existing ST community (Team Herald 2024). The clash of interests has divided the subaltern Goans.

Amidst the division among the subaltern Goans, the political assertion of subaltern Goan identity emerged in the form of Revolutionary Goans Party (RGP). The party established in the year 2022, by Catholic and

Hindu Bahujan youths. The party built sentiments among the Goans by opposing 'non-Goans'. It initially channelised anger against the lower-class migrants especially from Karnataka engaged in small and medium scale businesses in Goa. The party raises concerns due to the change in demography of Goa as a result of migration from neighbouring states. It received enormous support from the oversees Catholic Bahujan population in the form of financial grants. The overwhelming support RGP received indicates the sentiments towards preservation of Goan identity among the oversees Goan population. The party contested the state assembly election in 2022, winning third position after BJP and Congress and more vote share than AAP and Trinamool Congress, with almost 9.5% of vote share and one seat (Janwalkar 2022). The main issue of the party which attracted the attention of the people is the 'People of Goan Origin' or POGO bill. It promised to introduce the POGO bill in assembly if voted to power. As per POGO, all person's or their forefathers born in Portuguese territory of Goa before December 20, 1961 are Goans. The cutoff date seeks to determine who the Goan is. Though the attempt to introduce the POGO bill in the assembly by the sitting MLA Viresh Borkar got rejected on the ground of challenging the Constitution, the wide support the party received in the 2022 Assembly elections from subaltern classes marks the assertion of Subaltern Goan identity. It foregrounds subaltern contestations over the land management and its use in coming years.

This political assertion of Subaltern Goan clashes with the neo-Goans. The stakeholders in state government promotes the sale of coastal land to the rich classes from across the parts of India. After the unsuccessful attempt to introduce the POGO bill in the assembly, RGP is trying to remain relevant by constantly highlighting the issue of selling of land to the outsiders. Thus, the core of Goan identity has remained aligned to the land interests. The land ownership in Goa has enabled the rich class from other states to claim a share in the Goan identity. The land ownership remained an intricate issue in Goa as many subaltern Goans do not own the land where they have been residing for years. The non-ownership of land is an outcome of the historical injustice as the land in the Portuguese Goa was a private property of landlord, temple, church, and the comunidade (collective land ownership belonging to village heads from upper caste). Though the passing of tenancy act resulted in the partial transfer of land title to the tenants, most of these cases remains unresolved. As a result, Subaltern Goans faces a threat of being subjected to the status of 'non-Goans' due to the absence of land ownership. RGP shifts Subaltern Goan from linguistic identity to livelihood centric identity.

Conclusion

The Goan identity has undergone a significant shift over the course of history. Once expressed in linguistic terms, the land relations continue to dominate its composition in present-day Goa. The control over land consolidates the claims of 'neo-Goans' to the Goan identity, while the lack of it marginalises the Subaltern Goans accessing it. In present day Goa, subaltern Goans are from realising Goan identity that native Goans (Bhatcars) and Neo- Goans access.

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