

# Syncretic Religious Practices and Cultural Agglomeration Amongst the Goan Catholics

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**Abstract:** Goa is the smallest and a popular state of India, situated on the Western Ghats between Maharashtra and Karnataka. It is well known for tourism, mining and fishing which are the substantial economic industries here. Konkani is the state language and Goa has population of 1.5 million of which 65 percent are Hindus, 27 percent are Christians and 6 percent are Muslims. It is part of Indian nation, however, its culture noticeably stands out from its neighbours. One can get some European glimpses caused by the Portuguese influence on its culture and topography. Goa remained a colony of the Portuguese reign between the years 1510 to 1961 which caused remarkable changes on its culture, especially religion, which transmitted the Catholicism along with the Portuguese. Goa then witnessed mass conversions of its people to Catholicism paving the way for interstate migration by Hindus and Muslim. While the present day Goan Catholics are embedded in Roman Catholic religion, the pre Portuguese Goans comprised mainly of Hindus bearing its cultural and religious influences that have managed to survive amongst the Goan Catholics till date. The syncretic practices thus clearly evident in many religious practices, making Goa rich in cultural heritage will be explored in this paper.

**Keywords:** Religion, Syncretism, Goa, Catholics

## 1. Introduction

Goa is a popular state of India, situated on the Western Ghats between Maharashtra and Karnataka. It is well known for tourism, mining and fishing. The Konkani speaking smallest state of India, Goa has population with 65% Hindus, 27% Christians and 6% Muslims. Goa is also a famous tourist destination. The tourists from all corners of the world are attracted to Goa's natural beauty of greenery, beaches and the European styled in fracture. The European glimpses that one can get in Goa are caused by the Portuguese influence on its culture and topography. In 1510 the Portuguese defeated the ruling sultan of Goa and brought Goa under its rule. Portuguese contributed in making great changes in Goan history. The geographical exploration, new sea routes, new trade and commerce option, migration contributed in bringing new era in Goa. In 1961 Goa was annexed by India and hence since then Goa celebrates 19th December as its Liberation Day.

## 2. Objectives

- To understand the historical basis of Christianity and

Hinduism in Goa.

- To find out the cultural trends that has been handed down from generation to generation, from the time of Portuguese reign to the current day.
- To analyze the Portuguese influences on Goans in general and on Christianity and Hinduism in Particular.

## 3. Methodology

- Descriptive analysis of secondary data using literature review of books, research articles, news articles and statistical data provided by government of Goa.

The Impact of Portuguese Colonialism in Goa and its Aftermath

Portuguese reigned in Goa from 1510-1961, they introduced Catholicism in Goa. The Portuguese are responsible for various changes in Goa. Ranging from architecture change to the Goan food style and cuisine, there has been complete cultural shift. It was not a smooth transition for Goans to change from Hinduism to Christianity. There was religious and cultural oppression during Portuguese rule which resulted in many Hindus accepting Christian faith and leading many other Hindus and Muslim to flee the state. New conquest (by mid-18th century) gave way to re-flourishing of Hindu culture in Goa. The new religious converts were introduced to 'New God' but it was difficult for Goans to give up their old habits of their religion. This created the new phenomenon of syncretic practices specifically between Hindu and Christians.

The Goddesses of Goa- India is the land of goddesses. People usually turn to female deities to receive spiritual and physical healing, prosperity and fertility. The Indian goddesses are the many forms of the great Indian mother goddess who takes the form of Kali, Durga, Laxmi, Sitala, Saraswati to name a few. In Goa she is known as Shanta Durga. 'Shanta' which means calm or serene. Shanta Durga is the form of goddess Durga. Her temples have existed for many years in Goa and to many Goans the various forms of Virgin Mary e.g. Our Lady of Miracles, Our Lady of Good Health, Our lady of Immaculate Conception is not qualitatively different. Story of the seven sisters goddesses- Both Hindu and Christian in Goa talk of the seven sisters or siblings that were once represented by the seven

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temples in Goa. The story told both by Hindus and Portuguese is that the Portuguese converted some of these sisters to catholic, e.g. Our Lady of Cures at Cansaulim and Our Lady of Miracles at Mapusa. This story of seven sister temples/goddesses remind Goans of their common origin and this validates their participation religious participation across communal lines.

The umbrella festival of Cuncolim- The festival of umbrella is represented by the 12 males each belonging to the 12 Kshatriya clans of Cuncolim. These 12 Kshatriya clan of Cuncolim are considered to be the warriors of Shanta Durga. The original temple was destroyed by Portuguese in 1507, however people succeeded in shifting the image of goddess Shanta Durga to Fatorpa. This led to open rebellion on Portuguese where 5 catholic priests were murdered. To avenge this many Hindus were killed causing them to flee beyond the Portuguese reach. Those left behind chose catholic faith causing them to become dominant forces in the church. In the month of March the image of Shanta Durga is brought back to Cuncolim (her original place) from Fatorpa. The image is brought back by Hindus and Catholics participating in Procession led by the 12 umbrellas, the symbolic representation of the 12 Chaddo (Kshatriya) clan of Cuncolim of which some are Hindus and some Christians. Music- two bands will play the music one of Hindus and the other of Catholics. A large number of catholics attend this festival, the natives that is Gaudi/Kunbi and kshatriys known as Chaddo/Chaddim

The Crosses and the Syncretic Practices- Catholics in Goa often have cross constructed in front of their houses. Such phenomenon is not visible amongst catholics anywhere else. The cross building practice amongst catholics is actually the age old practice of having Tulsi in front of the house practiced by Hindus. Fulamcho Khuris/Bambolim Cross- It was formerly a Hindu Shrine and now a place for catholic worshipping. Many Hindus continue to worship or pray to this cross. Coconut and Agarbati are offered by Hindus which is not a practice amongst Catholics. Barade Khuris Quepem; Popular amongst Catholics and also worshiped by Hindus. Many Hindus offer coconut, Kumkum, red sari, bengles etc.

#### 4. Conclusion

Portuguese made remarkable changes on Goa's culture. The

most evident area includes religion as Goa was introduced to Catholicism by Portuguese. The mass conversion mostly against the will of the people created a lot of resonance with their former religious belief system. The present day Goan catholic is rooted in Roman Catholic religion, however, the pre Portuguese Goans comprised mainly of Hindus bearing it's cultural and religious influences that have managed to survive amongst the Goan Catholics till date (Henn, 2014).

According to Newman (2014) syncretism developed in Goa as the people failed to understand the new gods and the reasons as to why they should have them in the first place. There was more or less no connect with the newly found gods and at the same time giving up on religious belief system which they were instituted in since their birth or at least since childhood was not less than impossible. They did however, managed to superficially replace their gods but changing just the idol or images and adopting new prayer system didn't make people forget their old practices completely. An example of this the presence of Christian cross in front of their houses which is an olden Hindu practice exclusive to Goan catholics. Crosses aren't just about worshipping, they remind the Goans of their common origin (Perez 2011).

Goa has a unique phenomenon of cultural and religious syncretism. These syncretic practices have added to the riches of Goan heritage. Although the state has presence of different religion yet there is religious harmony as people are often reminded of their common roots by these syncretic practices. For Goans, although, the gods were changed by force yet the habits, practices and sentiments mostly remained intact.

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