



DILEMMAS OF EUNICE DE SOUZA'S GOAN-CATHOLIC IDENTITY

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ABSTRACT

This paper probes how Eunice De Souza, from her triply marginalized position of being Goan, Catholic, and a woman, negotiates her sense of belonging in India. Encouraging Goan-Catholics to unite with the larger Indian Hindu community, De Souza, in her poetry, provides a new perspective to understanding the Goan-Catholic identity. The poet dismantles her community's assumption of being superiorly "different" from the rest of India by highlighting its flaws. Further, embracing compassion, a predominant trait of the Roman Catholic religion, De Souza in her poems seeks to find an answer to the sense of intolerance that Goan-Catholics exhibit towards followers of other religions in India, especially Hinduism. Further, this paper elucidates how De Souza's poetry sets an example for other Goan-Catholics by embracing and celebrating a "hybrid" identity that allows her to be a part of the heterogeneous yet coherent Indian nation.

KEYWORDS: Goan-Catholic, Identity, Hybridity, Nationalism, Portuguese colonization

INTRODUCTION

Born into a Goan-Catholic family in the year 1940 in Pune, Eunice De Souza uses the genre of poetry to examine and comment upon her unique background with keen sensitivity yet scathing wit. Like most Indian English poets of her generation, De Souza draws from her personal life and experiences successfully connecting these to a broader context of the cultural and political milieu of Goa. Consequently, her poetry also reflects the sense of identity crisis that marks Goan society. De Souza's ability to

think beyond the confines of the 'establishment' has earned her the reputation of an anti-establishment poet. Critiquing the role of tradition in reducing the individual to a set of cultural determinants, De Souza celebrates the ontological dimensions of identity. Breaking the fetters of conventions and propriety observed by early women poets of Indian origin, De Souza defines her poetic self by continually negotiating with identity markers such as gender, religion, language and nation. Deconstructing the fixity of these identity markers allows De Souza to overthrow her inherited Goan-Catholic cultural encumbrances. Refusing to define herself simply as Goan, Catholic, or even a woman, De Souza replaces the emptiness of these markers with the enigma of expressing a subjective reality that exceeds all cultural definitions. In other words, rather than basking in the assurance of a stable identity, De Souza's poetry undermines traditions to celebrate the loss of identity and the multiple possibilities associated with it.

HISTORY BEHIND THE EMERGENCE OF THE GOAN-CATHOLIC IDENTITY

In recent times, through postcolonialism and cultural studies western metropolitan academics have over-explored the legacy of British colonialism in India. Meanwhile, the history of Portuguese colonialism in India has scarcely received the scholarly attention it deserves. Significantly, scholars who tend to exclude colonialisms by other western powers besides Britain in their accounts of Indian or South Asian history have often overlooked how for centuries India's natural resources have attracted other European traders such as the Dutch, French, Danes, and the Portuguese. Seizing the opportunities presented by the decline of the Mughal Empire and weaker regional rajas, the European powers gradually took over the country. Even if some scholars briefly mention the Portuguese Empire, they tend to focus only on Vasco da Gama's arrival in Calicut (now in Kerala, India) on May 17, 1498, often implying the presence of the Portuguese as a trading power. However, it is essential to acknowledge the long four-hundred-and-fifty-years of history of the Portuguese colonial rule in Goa, not only because they were the first Europeans to establish colonial settlements in the Indian sub-continent and the last to leave, but also because of the way in which they reshaped the socio-cultural landscape of Goa giving it a unique history and culture distinguishing it from other Indian regions. It must be argued that because of this distinct past during which different cultural and religious traditions met, Goa acquired a unique Indo-Portuguese cultural identity. Termed the 'Goan Identity,' this

distinctiveness consists in the self-perception of Goans with respect to their inclusion in or exclusion from the Indian cultural, national, or religious contexts. Significantly, Portuguese authorities have often been blamed for supplanting the precolonial ethnic heterogeneity of the Goan people by creating a new imitative culture of Goan-Catholics.

For more than four and a half centuries, the Goans have fostered a distinct identity which is strikingly different from the rest of the Indian culture. A variety of opinions exist on the impact of the Portuguese regime on the Goan identity. Contemporary historians and sociologists have categorized these views into three schools of thought. On the one hand, historians such as T.R. De Souza, P.P. Shirodkar, and L.A. Correia have taken an Indo-centric approach to the Portuguese colonization suggesting that it had only a superficial impact on the Goans. To them, Goa is an extension of Maharashtra and similar to the rest of India. On the other hand, in advocating the Luso-centric approach K. Bhemró, M.A. Couto, and J.S.J. Correia-Afonso argue that the Portuguese culture has impacted Goa deeply and the Portuguese invasion forms the crux of the Goan identity (Chanda and Ghosh, 2012, p. 9). They posit that the lifestyle of Goans is strikingly different from the rest of India as can be observed in their ways of dealing with people, table manners, cuisine, music and dress codes. There is, however, the third school of opinion that assumes that the Portuguese culture has been able to influence only the Goans of higher social status and not the majority who occupy lower strata of society. Despite the multiple standpoints, historical events make it extremely difficult to deny that the disruptive experiences of the Portuguese colonization did cost the Goans their lands as well as their communal/ regional identity.

The Portuguese sought to consolidate their rule in Goa by endorsing mixed marriages and proselytizing Goans. In order to create a population for the tropical climates who would replace Portuguese personnel in the work of empire in India, Governor Alfonso de Albuquerque advocated procreation and adopted a Catholic policy known as *Politica dos Casamentos* (Borges and Feldmann, 1997, p. 47). This policy promoted inter-racial marriage alliances between Portuguese men and native Indian women. Native women who married Portuguese men were expected to speak Portuguese, embrace the Christian religion and follow Portuguese customs and traditions. Noted for its fusion of Indian and western sensibility, Goa's complex social matrix that owes

its existence to this process of miscegenation soon gave rise to debates over the Indian-ness or Western-ness of the Goan identity.

The arrival of the Jesuit priest St. Francis Xavier in 1542 in India laid the foundations of the ecclesiastical supremacy of the Portuguese in Goa. In order to consolidate their possessions and spread the Catholic faith, the Portuguese resorted to mass conversion. Once converted Goan Christians had to make a clean break with their Hindu past and conform to the European lifestyle. The mass conversion campaigns conducted by the Portuguese missionaries were accompanied by extensive destruction of temples and mosques, an account chronicled in Alexander Henn's book *Hindu-Catholic Encounters in Goa: Religion, Colonialism and Modernity* (2014). Those who voluntarily converted to Christianity were exempted from land taxes for fifteen years. The religious intolerance of the Portuguese also devitalized the Konkani language in being prohibited both officially and publicly (Rao, 1963, p. 47). The upper-class Goan-Catholics' adoption of Portuguese language, dress, food habits, music, arts and architectural styles gave Goa its distinct European character.

The larger Indian society has always viewed the conversion of Goans to Christianity through the lenses of purity and pollution. Specifically, the larger Hindu populations in India subject the Goan-Catholics to what Victor Ferrao (2011) terms as "the politics of 'outsidering'" designating the Portuguese colonial period as an era of corruption and the converted Goans as the polluted (p. 33). Racially mixed due to interbreeding, religiously ambivalent owing to conversion and, linguistically divided because of the suppression of their mother-tongue, Goan-Catholics are thought to constitute a hybrid or transitional community that is neither fully Indian nor entirely alien. Noted for their inherent trait of flexibility, Goan-Catholics have often been commended for being intermediaries or buffers between the European colonizers and the colonized Indians.

One must note that the enactment and maintenance of a unified national identity is a prerequisite to the development of a discourse of Indian nationalist modernity. The Indian anti-colonial nationalism that promoted a uniform Indian identity based on laudable ideals of social justice, sovereignty, and unity conceived both the colonial and the native culture as homogeneous categories ignoring the individuality of communities that would prefer to exist beyond the colonial binaries. Asserting that

such shaping of a nation requires a simultaneous forging and fracturing of cultural bonds, Ania Loomba (1998) defines nationhood in terms of “not merely [...] invoking and remembering certain versions of the past, but making sure that others are forgotten or repressed” (p. 202). The Subaltern Studies project also dislodges the universality of nationalist discourse and its attendant politics by outlining experiences and representations that do not fit comfortably within the domain of nationalism. Much like subalterns who pose opposition to modernity by refusing to be assimilated both by the state and the dominant articulations of nationalism, hybrid figures like Goan-Catholics are stuck somewhere in between the discourses of European and Indian nationalist modernity. Therefore, instead of projecting Goan-Catholics as role-models of India's secularism and religious syncretism, it is necessary to recognize the lack of agency and historical dislocation associated with their hybrid existence.

It is necessary to remember while discussing Portuguese colonial history, as Rochelle Pinto (2007) suggests, that Portugal itself constitutes an Other for Europe despite it being a part. The history of Portugal as a constituent of European and world history, she asserts, was repeatedly over-written by the dominance of Anglo-American historiography. Portugal's position within the history of capitalism, colonialism, nationalism, as well as modernity, was undermined by the risk of being represented as “the Other of Europe, within Europe” (Pinto, 2007, p. 7). Consequently, the question of Portuguese colonial modernity posed within the context of Goa was for a long time dependent on Portugal's dilemmas regarding its modernity emerging from the European centre. For Goans, the experience of Portuguese colonialism gave rise to racial and cultural ambiguities resulting from an interchange of position between the colonizer and the colonized. Whereas the state of hybridity dislodged the Anglo-Saxon polarization of identity between the colonized and colonizer, the resulting condition of hybridity was a historical fact that caused a crisis of identity for the Portuguese. Therefore, identity attendant on Portuguese colonialism carried the burden of both the colonizer and the colonized. Although Portugal portrayed its production of hybrid identities as anti-racist and benevolent, other racist European powers endowed such identities with a “double ambivalence of representation” that required constant negotiation (Pinto, 2007, p. 22). Portuguese colonizers who were themselves colonized at some level were better equipped to understand the dilemmas of the process of identity formation among the colonized. Being colonized by the Portuguese,

Goans therefore, were forced to locate their identity not only in relation to their immediate colonizer but also their indirect or secondary colonizer, the British colonial empire.

For a historian, articulating the Goan colonial history is a challenging task because Goans have always been forced to negotiate with the historiographical anomaly of being part of a long Iberian colonial history, but geographically adjacent to British India. Therefore, the end of Portuguese rule in 1961 held equal significance for the history of the recently decolonized Indian state in whose proximity Goa existed and the more extensive world history. Both the Goans from Goa and the Hindu nationalists from outside conducted the two-fold struggle for Goa's liberty. However, the liberation of Goa from the Portuguese colonial regime did not mend Goa's ambiguous relationship with India. Following Goa's independence, a new problem emerged about the province's emotional and national integration with the rest of India. Questions of identity for Goan-Catholics, argues Rochelle Pinto (2007), hinge on Goa's specific encounter with the multiple narratives of Portuguese invasion, British colonialism, and Indian nationalism. Authors, especially Goan literati writing from such liminal spaces, usually offer invaluable insights into the incongruous production of Goan-Catholic subjectivity.

LOCATING EUNICE DE SOUZA'S GOAN-CATHOLIC IDENTITY IN HISTORY

Eunice De Souza belongs to the category of Goan-Catholic writers who since the time of Portuguese colonialism have been troubled by their inability to claim a history of their own. Consequently, they have remained uncertain about their location within the parameters of Indianness despite being geographically a part of India. Right from the beginning of Portuguese colonization, Goans were forced to participate in a discourse of race operating outside Goa. The process of miscegenation, also termed *Portugalidade*, that formed Goa's complex social matrix, produced three social categories of Goans, namely the *Goeses* or the natives who saw themselves as individuals of Goan origin, irrespective of their religion, the *Descendentes* of the Portuguese who were born in Goa, and finally the *Portugueses* who were born in Portugal and were supposed to return to their country once their tenure was over (Rosales, 2010, p. 223). Though divided into broader divisions such as the "white" and "negro," in the initial phase of the Portuguese colonization, racial and religious

differences in Goa due to the intense political rivalries that the colonial Portuguese had developed with the metropolitan centre as well as the native Goan-Catholics grew sharply during the nineteenth century (Pinto, 2007, p.19). Significantly, in Goa, the native or indigenous Goan-Catholics constituted a subordinate group occupying a secondary position when compared to the 'Descendentes' who were equated with the white creoles of Spanish American colonies and hence were considered superior. Consequently, realizing the necessity of approximating whiteness for their upliftment, the Goan-Catholics repeatedly reasserted their loyalty to the Portuguese colonizers. Concurrently, within the internal stratification of Goan society, the Goan-Catholics were also representatives of their caste groups. While negotiating political conflicts around caste and land like the rest of India, they also simultaneously maintained their identity as colonized subjects of the Portuguese. Focussing on this point, De Souza draws a connection between Goa and other parts of India by identifying the areas that the Goan-Catholic community shares with the rest of India. Through her poetic attempts, De Souza deconstructs the Goan-Catholics' assumption of superiority emerging from their proximity to the Portuguese colonizers and also motivates them to join hands with the rest of India in fighting social evils. Simply put, De Souza claims that the national identity of being an Indian does not necessarily delegitimize the communal identity of being a Goan-Catholic. Instead, the Goan-Catholic community can use its distinctive cultural strength to alleviate the problems of the nation without a loss of its identity.

The colonial past of Goa and its social, political and religious affiliations with the rest of India has been one of De Souza's signature preoccupations. Governed by a different colonizer and removed from the fervour of Indian nationalism, the parochial community of Goa has always found itself alienated from its own nation. In other words, despite its diversity, India continues to be a cultural 'other' for the Goan community. Having inherited two cultural legacies, De Souza, like other Goans of her generation, wishes to define her identity within the broader framework of Indian nationality. De Souza contextualizes her identity in the larger national order by establishing a connection between India and her community based on common problems and shared world views. Beginning with the depiction of the similar multi-layered subjugation, discrimination, and unjust treatment of women in the Catholic community as in the rest of India, De Souza goes on to portray the hypocrisies that

the value system of the catholic community shares with that of the nation. Comparing the religious perspective of the Goan-Catholics with that of mainstream Hindus in her poems lets De Souza appreciate the dynamism of Indian spirituality. Lastly, De Souza's negative portrayal of Goan history or past reflects her attempt to underscore the traumatic experience of colonialism that Goa shares with the rest of India and thereby resolve the problematic relationship that her community has with the Indian nation.

DE SOUZA'S PROTEST AGAINST THE SUBJUGATION OF GOAN-CATHOLIC WOMEN

Writing from her triply marginalized position of being a Goan, Catholic, and a woman, De Souza employs her poems to expose the Goan-Catholic community's unjust treatment of women. Many of her early poems not only launch satirical attacks on both the Hindu and Catholic religions for being repressive or exploitative towards Goan-Catholic women but also register how they resist or respond to such oppressive structures. Thus, quite naturally, her poems frequently refer to Goan-Catholic women who are either parodied for their naiveté or admired for their forbearance. Being aware of the pitfall of using a univocal voice of feminism that does not take into account the class, caste, creed of oppressed and marginalized women, Eunice De Souza takes upon herself the task of addressing the multi-layered marginalization of the Goan-Catholic women in India.

The only woman poet to be included in Arvind Krishna Mehrotra's *The Oxford India Anthology of Twelve Modern Indian Poets*, Eunice de Souza exhibits a rich autobiographical strain which speaks to the larger cultural and political milieu around her. The first poem of her collection *Fix* (1979) titled "Catholic Mother," draws out the figure of a devout Catholic named Francis X. D' Souza, who is considered to be a "pillar of the Church" by the parish priest (De Souza, 2009, p. 3). Having produced seven children in seven years "by the Grace of God," he has turned into the "father of the year" (De Souza, 2009, p. 3). Eunice De Souza is a master of satiric phrases that are short and terse on the surface, but explosive on the inside. While the father and the husband, Francis X. D' Souza, is praised for the big and lovely Catholic family by the parish priest and the Mother Superior of the Church, the "Catholic Mother," who has taken the pain of giving birth to seven children is completely ignored. The silent

figure of the “Catholic Mother” once again portrays that ‘Speech’ is always associated with the male spaces, while women are always confined to the private realm of silence. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (1988), who dwells on the “subalternity” of women rendered silent by patriarchal subjugation postulates that

Within the effaced itinerary of the subaltern subject, the track of sexual difference is doubly effected [...] the ideological construction of gender keeps the male dominant. If in the context of colonial production, the subaltern has no history and cannot speak, the subaltern as female is even more deeply in shadow. (p. 84)

De Souza's poem “Catholic Mother” speaks for the suppressed voices of all those Goan-Catholic women who have been forced to suffer the glorified burden of motherhood which is considered the essence of femininity and the most precious gift from God. De Souza exposes the patriarchal discourse's reluctance to engage with the pain of the mother who has to endure the trauma of pregnancy repeatedly, often at the cost of her life. In fact, it is ironic that Francis X. D' Souza who accuses India of “her wicked ways” and the Hindus of being unethical, is himself guilty of poor ethical conduct in being unmindful of his wife's health whom he repeatedly impregnates without her consent (De Souza, 2009, p. 3).

If within the private sphere of the household, Goan-Catholic women do not have a voice of their own, their situation is no better in the public realm where they are no less victimized by feudalism and patriarchy of the post-Independent Indian society. Through her poems, De Souza dramatizes the relationship between the institutional church and Western cultural imperialism guided by patriarchy. In the poem “At St. Anthony's Shrine,” De Souza portrays the hierarchical nature of the church where the parish priest is as sexist as a common man, and the bishop's opinion of a parishioner is dependent on the donations he receives from the parishioner. By taking over the parish priest's responsibility of running St. Anthony's Shrine, Alleluia D' Souza, a woman, challenges the stereotypical and socially-determined roles of women. Though on reading the poem superficially, Alleluia D' Souza might appear to be betraying people's faith but on a deeper reading the Bishop and the parish priests are revealed as real culprits. Alleluia D' Souza's act of baking the bread with her own hands and offering it to the needy in the name of St. Anthony reminds one of the Eucharist and conjures an image of generosity, if not of holiness. Contrarily, the profanity of the priest, who indignantly states “May the bread turn to scorpions,” indicates that when

their self-interests are wounded, even religious men like the Catholic priest can become uncharitable in their remarks (De Souza, 2009, p. 11). Locating God even in his absence, De Souza in this poem suggests the existence of compassion and benevolence beyond the narrow clerical duties and calculations of the church. Such poems of De Souza reflect the ongoing debates in the Indian Catholic Churches on the "improved" social status of Catholic women and also in the Church's hierarchy which is male-dominated.

In "Marriages are Made" De Souza criticizes the institution of arranged marriage and the prenuptial preparations associated with it and also the caste-based prejudices of feudal India that Goan-Catholics fail to disregard despite being followers of Christianity that professes equality. Focusing on the socially determined role for women, De Souza depicts how Goan-Catholic women, like most of the other Indian women, are vulgarly scrutinized and measured to judge their suitability as brides. Protesting against the caste and class-based arrangement of marriage in Catholic families, De Souza in "Marriages are Made" focuses on the physical and psychic violations suffered by the bride. The poet describes her cousin, Elena, being examined physically for "TB" "madness," "solvency," "squints," "cavities," and even any "possible non-Brahmin worm" in her "stools" (De Souza, 2009, p. 4). Although Elena meets all the said requirements, her fiancé's family still complains that she is "not quite tall enough, and not quite full enough" (De Souza, 2009, p. 4). De Souza seems to imply here that notwithstanding all the calculations that go into the arranged marriages, there is no guarantee that these will turn out to be long-lasting and happy as proverbial made-in-heaven marriages. Thus, she stops short of repeating the stereotypical remark and instead claims that "Marriages are made" (De Souza, 2009, p. 4). The crux of the poem lies in the last line that shows De Souza mocking the groom who despite projecting himself as a "good son of Mother Church," is devoid of love and compassion expected of a Christian who needs to treat his bride as a fellow human being and not as an object (De Souza, 2009, p. 4). De Souza mainly critiques the social propriety that masks itself as divine dispensation letting calculation and doubt thrive in place of compassion and faith.

De Souza's keen awareness of the patriarchal oppression and the stifling communal and familial mores to which both Hindu and Goan-Catholic women are subjected

makes her express a desire to unite them against such oppression (King, 2001, p. 157). In poems such as "Sweet Sixteen," "My Students," and "Eunice," De Souza employs high doses of sarcasm to protest against the suppression of women's sexuality, capability, and language. Her poem "Sweet Sixteen" launches a scathing attack on the Catholic system of indoctrination that forces a girl child to disregard the immediate reality of her body: "Mamas never mentioned menses. / A nun screamed: you vulgar girl / don't say brassieres / say bracelets" (De Souza, 2009, p. 6). She criticizes the rigidities of nuns and priests about a girl following her biological instincts. According to De Souza, such acts of suppression driven by the Christian notion of sinful carnality not only subject Goan-Catholic girls and women to unwarranted shame but also rob them of their individuality and identity. Believing that "even the young must live," De Souza urges the girls of her community to join hands with the youth of India in their fight against sexual repression and ignorance, and claim their right to enjoy the age of "sweet sixteen" without the surveillance and oppression of prudery, hypocrisy, and dissimulation (De Souza, 2009, p. 60).

In the poem "Eunice," named after herself, De Souza goes one step further by contesting the stipulated roles and language the patriarchal Goan-Catholic community prescribes for women. In an attempt to protest against a culture that often restricts the profession of women to needlework or embroidery, De Souza cuts and stitches for herself a petticoat that seems ridiculously large. On being pulled up by her supervising sister, De Souza feeling piqued uses expletives that violate the linguistic sensibility of the patriarchal Goan-Catholic community. Rather than the authentic language of a woman's heart, expressions that finally squeeze out of this societal scrutiny appears to De Souza, as handicapped as "flopping" limbs (De Souza, 2009, p. 53). By demanding a new language for women that would be strikingly different from the unyielding, rationalistic, masculinized parlance of men, De Souza encourages the practice of what is called *Écriture féminine*. Pointing out the inseparability of a woman's experience from her writings, De Souza elsewhere states that:

what I am as a poet is a result of what I am in all the aspects of my life [...] women's experience and socialization as a whole is different. So it is expected that what they write will be different. The battle is to validate the material lives, women's experience, not to transcend being a woman. (qtd. in Zide, "Introduction," 1993, p. xix)

Written almost in the same vein, De Souza's "My Students" provides a fitting reply to those who think that native people, especially women, are incapable of writing poetry that expresses their sexuality with the sophistication of English poets: "My students think it funny / That Daruwallas and de Souzas / should write poetry. / Poetry is faery lands forlorn. / Women writers Miss Austen. / Only foreign men air their crotches" (De Souza, 2009, p. 17).

Being one of "the most combative women poet[s] after Kamala Das," De Souza not only sympathizes with Goan-Catholic women but also speaks with conviction as in her "Return," for women belonging to the other religious communities of India who are often scapegoated for resisting patriarchal structures (Prasad and Sarkar, 2008, p. 31). She sympathizes with the "Sarla Devi(s), Kusum Bala(s) and Rani Devi(s)" of India who gather "ill-fame" and tolerate "catcalls in the street" for refusing to "wear ankle bells / worn for generations" (De Souza, 2009, p. 79). Knowing "something of how they feel," De Souza entreats the women of her community to identify with other Indian women who put up with ignominy and insult to lead a life of self-dependence.

DE SOUZA'S CRITIQUE OF THE RELIGIOUS HYPOCRISIES OF THE GOAN-CATHOLIC COMMUNITY

In her early poems, De Souza appears almost as a nationalist rebelling against the parochial and doctrinaire views of her community and simultaneously "identifying with the poor, the Hindus and India" (King, 2001, p. 157). Brought up in a Roman Catholic family amid Hindus of Pune, De Souza has always suffered from a sense of homelessness and cultural ambiguity. Alienated from the Hindu religion, De Souza, whose "family [had] converted from Hinduism to Catholicism and adopted the Portuguese name in the seventeenth century," finds herself confronted with a Christianity that is equally perplexing (Papke, 2008, p. 66). Thus, resembling the poetry of "confessional" poets such as Kamala Das, Sylvia Plath and Anne Sexton, De Souza's poems are not only intensely personal, but also deal with familiar problems of faith and doubt. On several occasions, her poems have been denounced by the Church authorities and orthodox Catholic circles (D' Souza, 2016; Menezes, 2017). Further, her act of exposing the colonial mentalities and religious hypocrisies of her community has been looked upon as an act of "betrayal."

De Souza's poems such as "Feeding the Poor at Christmas," "St. Anthony's Shrine," and "Varca, 1942" illustrate the moral pretensions of Catholic clergymen and the mock charity practised by affluent Goan-Catholics. In the poem, "Feeding the Poor at Christmas," De Souza mocks the piety of the Christian community that assumes its superiority based on its small acts of charity. Adopting a self-critical stance in using the pronoun "we," De Souza derides the Goan-Catholics who distribute insufficient resources and even humiliate the deprived in the guise of aiding them (De Souza, 2009, p. 5). In the first four lines of the poem, De Souza mocks the mechanical and empty rituals of conventional Christians who feed the poor to pay tribute to God, though they often fail in being compassionate. The poor are made to wait, denied if they turn up for the second time, discouraged to take a share back home for their families, often shamed, and even reminded to say "thank you" and pray for the affluent in return. The poem chastises the hypocrisy of those affluent Christians, who, in reality, are completely severed from the God they profess to serve.

In "Varca, 1942," De Souza again condemns the poverty of benevolence and compassion among the Christians who discriminate against one another on the basis of wealth and status. Thus, despite the Archbishop's suggestion, the wealthy landlords of Varca do not allow the humble peasants to join them for worship in a common church. Soon, a matter of civil rights and public concern turns into an ego clash between the revered Archbishop and the affluent landlords. Finally, though both the parties are forced to enter into a truce, the distinction between the rich and the poor remains unchanged as is evident from De Souza's conclusion: "And the landlords were landlords / and the peasants peasants / ever after" (De Souza, 2009, p. 13).

In De Souza's "Conversation Piece" that shows her "Portuguese-bred aunt" mistaking "a clay shivalingam" for an ashtray, the sense of alienation felt by many Goan-Catholics towards Hindu India is evident: My Portuguese-bred Aunt / picked up a clay shivalingam / one day and said / Is this an ash tray? / No, said the salesman, / This is our God (De Souza, 2009, p. 14). Perhaps none of De Souza's poems depicts so vividly the limited understanding of God as implied in both her aunt's question and the salesman's reply. They are conditioned to perceive God superficially and do not even attempt to seek the truth of God beyond their sense perception and cultural conditioning. Neither is De Souza's aunt interested in understanding the symbolic

significance of a Hindu God, nor is the salesman interested in explaining it to a Catholic woman. Having defined God their own ways, the Goan-Catholics and the Hindus are estranged from each other, despite being residents of the same country.

One must realize that De Souza's primary purpose in exposing the shortcomings of her community is to dismantle its assumed perfection that compels Goan-Catholics to harbour feelings of intolerance or even disdain towards practitioners of other religions in India, especially Hinduism. By depicting institutions associated with Christianity to be as hierarchized, intolerant and self-centred as any other religion in India, De Souza makes a plea to her community to venture beyond its sense of false superiority and identify with Indian humanity as a whole.

In her poem "Return" hoping for salvation, De Souza turns not to the sermons of Christian saints but to the "pithy verses" of Tukaram, a seventeenth-century poet saint associated with the Bhakti Movement in Maharashtra whose fight for social justice was based on the abolition of the caste system (De Souza, 2009, p. 80). The appreciation of Tukaram's poetry by a French priest assumed to be mad stands in contrast to the benign earlier days, when certain elements of the *Bhakti* tradition and customs informed the practice of Catholicism without much disapproval (Pearson, 1987, p. 128). By reminding her fellow Goan-Catholics of their past religious inclusivity, De Souza hopes to rid them of their narrow-mindedness and help them mend their relationship with fellow Indians. De Souza's vision of developing a sense of acceptance for other religions has its roots in the pre-Portuguese culture of Goa which was a fusion of various influences including those of the Muslim and Hindu dynasties that ruled it before the arrival of the Portuguese. Therefore, one must note that the principles of syncretism by which Goa operates today have their roots in an age that precedes the later modern doctrinal distinction between religions. This fact challenges the notion widely accepted in anthropology, that syncretism and its various forms is an achievement or result of modernity. In support of this viewpoint, Alexander Henn (2014) states that "Goan syncretism evades modernity's ubiquitous claim of universality and relies instead on rather parochial yet existential human concerns" (p. 18). Moreover, even during the Portuguese colonialization, economic privileges, administrative control, and religious doctrines were channelized mostly through caste structures. The Church's intervention into traditional cultural practices led to these

becoming gradually incorporated into the form of Catholicism that the colony practised. Significantly, at one point of time, caste and gender discriminations became so severe in the Catholic Church that only Hindu Brahmin converts could operate as church priests. Pertinently, often Christian teachings and rituals were modified to suit indigenous traditions while the behaviour of converts continued to reflect the outlook of caste, rank, ritual, and colour preferences shared by the Indian society at large (Henn, 2014, pp. 5–10). This syncretism, argues Henn, is reflected in the “*Jagar*” ritual during which the Christian Trinity and an array of Hindu Gods are worshipped simultaneously under one roof thereby attracting worshippers from both the communities (Henn, 2014, p. 5).

DE SOUZA'S STANCE ON THE GOAN-CATHOLICS' PREOCCUPATION WITH A GLORIOUS PAST

In poems such as “Idyll” and “Songs of Innocence,” De Souza establishes the folly of Goan-Catholics trying to locate a sense of “home” in their colonial past. Addressing the Goan-Catholic community's ambivalences regarding home and belongingness, these poems criticize its practice of visualizing the colonial past of Goa as an idyllic space. “Idyll” is a highly ironic poem that envisages the colonial past of Goa as an ideal world, although, in reality, it aims to convey an entirely opposite image. The poet shows her grandfather reminiscing about the idyllic past of Goa where even “bandits came over the mountain [...] only to splash in cool springs” (De Souza, 2009, p. 15). De Souza's grandfather describes a society so safe and peaceful that even “the snakes bit / only to break the monotony” (De Souza, 2009, p. 15). De Souza cynically expresses that the colonial past of Goa was never as tranquil as her grandfather depicts through images that are clearly part of his nostalgia. Indeed, the pre-Portuguese Goa that was under the sway of various Muslim and Hindu dynasties has a long history of war and violence.

In part IV of the “Songs of Innocence,” De Souza shows herself “searching for roots” and revisiting her childhood days, only to “find the caretaker dead” and “white ants burrowing” the portrait of a “grand-aunt clothed in cobwebs” (De Souza, 2009, p. 67). The poet soon realizes that the place from where her grandfather had departed long ago “never was home” (De Souza, 2009, p. 67). By stating that her grandfather had a “well of sand,” De Souza parodies the commonly used phrase “castle of sand” to

indicate the regression associated with revisiting the past that is based on either imagination or some grand-narrative (De Souza, 2009, p. 67). By depicting the futility of her own backward glance, De Souza hopes to discourage Goan-Catholics from continually relating themselves to the colonial past in their quest for stability and heritage. One must understand that De Souza's primary motive behind demystifying history is to ensure that Goan-Catholics do not divorce themselves from the present Indian moment.

The diminished historical significance of Goa, a place that once had a prominent position within the global history of colonization, is for many Goan-Catholics an unfortunate reality that they find difficult to accept. Often compared to Rome, Goa was of considerable significance to the Portuguese empire. For a long time, Goan historiography harked back to this privileged representation and a desire to restore Goa to its former glory. However, Portugal's inability to transform its expropriations from its early colonies into industrial capital shattered this hope of a revival and placed its later colonial dependencies in a doubly marginalized position. For De Souza, keeping this illusion of Portuguese pride and presence alive in the face of the fast dwindling economic condition of Goa is meaningless. De Souza exploits Goa's proximity to the intellectual and political currents of British Indian territories to represent the colonial experience of Goan-Catholics, much like the rest of India, through a narrative of progressive decline from a glorious past. Drawing such a comparison allows De Souza to deconstruct the myth associated with the Goan past, and also establish a sense of fealty among Goan-Catholics for other Indians.

NEGOTIATING GOAN-CATHOLIC IDENTITY

De Souza's writings belong to those strands of postcolonial studies that besides articulating the contradictions inherent in the discourses of Indian nationalism and history, address the crisis of English studies in India. Her poetic endeavour contributes to the gamut of literature produced by lecturers in the English departments of various colleges in India during the late 1980s and early 1990s to indicate how the dominant narratives of the colonising empire and the nation frame the literary domain. In her poems, De Souza emphasises the need to depart from exclusively nationalists frameworks in order to envisage a modern literary history of India. If on the one hand, De Souza asserts the need to view the history of Portuguese India outside the

paradigm of cultural and religious nationalism, on the other, she also discourages attempts made to understand it based on imagined primordial ties to a pre-Portuguese 'culture.'

De Souza reasserts the importance of contemplating an existence beyond such narrow boundaries of belongingness in an autobiographical poem, "de Souza Prabhu." The poet attributes her estrangement from the Goan culture to certain conditions, inhering in her Portuguese surname and her use of the English language. Such adoptions date back to the period of Portuguese colonization when converted Indians adopted Christian names and Konkani was suppressed to privilege European languages such as Latin and Portuguese (Rao, 1963, p. 53). Stella Mascarenhas-Keyes (1994) claims Goan-Catholic women played a significant role in marginalizing the mother tongue, Konkani, and simultaneously promoted the dominant western languages, Portuguese and English. The legacy of Portuguese colonialism combined with the contemporary emphasis on women's empowerment has propelled career women to act more favourably towards the prestigious Western languages. These women were shaping the linguistic face of the Goan-Catholic community by promoting English and other non-Indian languages often at the expense of the minority regional Indian languages. Paradoxically, De Souza's adoption of the English language to evade the marginalization suffered by the regional poets of India and also to reach a global readership leads to her alienation from the Goan-Catholic community even though it may be true that having lived outside Goa for most of her life she hardly knew Konkani.

By refusing to abide by such identity markers and discover whether she is "really de Souza Prabhu," i.e., a "Catholic Brahmin," De Souza turns down the nostalgic and narrow affiliations to a particular community, even though it might allow her as an Indian to enjoy "the best of both worlds" (De Souza, 2009, p. 26). It no longer matters to her whether her "name is Greek," her "surname Portuguese," or her "language alien" as she now knows the bitter truth that she is at best tolerated for being a woman (De Souza, 2009, p. 3): "I heard it said / my parents wanted a boy. / I've done my best to qualify. / I hid the bloodstains / on my clothes / and let my breasts sag. / Words the weapon / to crucify" (De Souza, 2009, p. 26). Soon, De Souza realizes that in India prejudices against girls are not limited to a particular community or race. If the Hindus

prefer a son who can carry forward the family's legacy and perform the last rites of his parents, the Christians, too, wish for a male child who can continue their lineage. She also understands that the only way to lead a life without encumbrances is by being impervious to the history behind it. Victimised equally by the Portuguese colonization and the Goan-Catholic sexism, De Souza decides to court the power of "words" to deconstruct such oppressive categories and promote an unclassified existence.

De Souza's poetic counter-readings which are framed within a broader theorisation of colonial modernities also implicitly question Eurocentric accounts of colonialism. In *The Nation and its Fragments*, Partha Chatterjee claims that the responsibility of fashioning colonial modernity lies primarily on elites like De Souza who not only negotiate the bi-lingual world of English and the vernacular to produce writings in print but also arrange for its dissemination and circulation thereby contributing to urban modernity (Chatterjee, 1993, pp. 35–37). Further, the Subaltern Studies project dismantles the significance of nationalist preoccupation and its associated politics by addressing domains of experience and representation that the discourse of nationalism fails to incorporate. The central challenge posed by Subalternists to the character of Indian nationalist modernity was their explanation that some subaltern groups such as the Goan-Catholics could be assimilated neither by the state nor by the dominant articulations of nationalism.

Thus, be it biological, communal or linguistic, De Souza wants to sidestep a sense of category altogether. Protesting against the random practice of defining and hence categorizing the Indian culture, De Souza claims in an interview with Anjali Nerlekar (2017), "Indian doesn't exclude me [...] My blood boils when I hear an Indian talking about 'Indian culture.' This is a primitive impulse, finding something coherent and limited and saying, 'This is Indian culture,' and everybody else is excluded" (p. 252). In focusing on the drawbacks the Goan-Catholic community shares with the rest of India and imploring it to look beyond its stifling perspectives, De Souza in no way professes an absolute dissolution of the Goan-Catholic identity. The sliding of a distinct Goan-Catholic identity into the larger Hindu outlook of the nation seems neither feasible nor desirable to De Souza. Instead, she advocates for the development of a hybrid identity that would allow Goan-Catholics to tap their cultural distinctiveness in bringing harmony to the divisive society of India.

De Souza's poems depict that although politically and economically, Goa is an integral part of India, a barrier seems to separate Goa from the mother nation due to which Goan Catholics find themselves in a strange situation. Goan-Catholics who are motivated to maintain a distinct Goan identity associated with the Portuguese past of their territory, are simultaneously made to feel that this identity is incompatible with their Indian self. This intermediate and hybrid positionality of Goan-Catholics emerges from the postcolonial reality of Portuguese India which despite Goa's independence in 1961 comfortably fit neither into the imagination of Indian nationhood nor into the theoretical framework of British colonialism. Despite the difference in the modes of Portuguese and British colonialism, there has been a constant effort to accommodate the ill-fitting history of Portuguese India into the British Indian perspective. A global anti-colonial discourse that imagines the Indian subcontinent to be a singular cultural unit since antiquity is a vital driving force behind such attempts. Such a historiographical representation leaves its mark not only on the understanding of the history of Portuguese colonialism but also on the identities of Goan-Catholics living within the Indian nation-state.

Despite imploring Goan-Catholics to maintain the uniqueness of their communal identity, De Souza dreams for them a future secured by religious plurality and cultural relativism. To return to the question of modernity, one might say that De Souza belongs to the class of Goan elites who act as harbingers of modernity by undermining the universalist historiography of nationalism that overshadows the specific historical position of Portugal within world history. Simultaneously Goan elites who view Goa as a colony of a failed and backward European power believe and profess that Goa's future can be best secured through its association with the rest of India. Finding Goa to be a casteist and creolised realm like the rest of India, Goan-elites like De Souza craft modernity for not only Goa but the whole of India based on cultural and religious syncretism.

De Souza argues that Goan Catholics should view their hybrid positionality, not as a split that divides but as a bridge that connects them to the rest of India. For instance, the ethics of compassion associated with Christianity might instil Goan-Catholics with a sense of empathy and understanding towards Hindus who have been equally

wounded by the British colonial rule. Rejecting the claim that the hybridity of the Goan-Catholic identity is non-negotiable, De Souza sees it as a source of empowerment that “reverses the effects of [...] disavowal” practised by the dominant Hindu culture “so that other ‘denied’ knowledges enter upon the dominant discourse and estrange the basis of its authority – its rules of recognition” (Bhabha, 1994, p. 163). Again, the disavowed Goan-Catholic cultural forms do not “return to be acknowledged as counter-authorities,” but compels “the revaluation of the symbol of national authority” (Bhabha, 1994, p. 163). Simply put, with a large section of the Indian population identifying predominantly with Hinduism, minorities like the Goan-Catholic community are unable to claim an indigenous history of their own. As an alternative, several members of the Goan-Catholic community internalize the colonial framework of racializing identities in their attempts to defend as well as preserve their historical connection with the Portuguese colonizers for gaining a sense of power. However, De Souza rejects such valorization and posits that the only antidote to the Indian politics of marginalization stemming from the principles of purity and pollution consists in the Christian ethics of compassion based on the principle of love. Using their unique cultural hybridity as a tool of integration, so argues De Souza, Goan-Catholics can simultaneously maintain their cultural identity as well as overcome their marginal status by rearticulating the essence of India.

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