



The Indira Gandhi National Center for the Arts (IGNCA), based at New Delhi has been documenting and studying Indian culture since 1985. Recently, the IGNCA has embarked on an ambitious project of promoting the endangered culture and traditions of various tribes in India. As part of this initiative, the IGNCA has decided to establish three regional centers in Ranchi, Jharkhand, Pondicherry, and in Goa. Sachchidanand Joshi, Member Secretary of the IGNCA was quoted in the press explaining the general objectives of the project, “We do not have reliable database for various tribes including endangered tribes. These are changing and someone needs to document the change”.

Though the objective of this project seems to be oriented towards preserving marginalized groups and their endangered traditions, IGNCA’s view of Goan culture, tradition, and history seem to be lacking as far as Goans are concerned. In the first place, IGNCA understands Goan culture as one that is “dying”. An official from IGNCA was quoted in a prominent national daily, “...we have set up our regional centre in Goa and signed an MoU with Ravindra Bhawan to launch a massive hunt for the folklore artistes to take part in theatres, perform folk dance, sing folk songs and play various musical instruments which have nothing to do with Portuguese culture. The idea is to save the dying cultural heritage of Goa by reviving and recording them”. In other words, the IGNCA has already written the epitaph of a vibrant and living community and its culture.

Secondly, and perhaps more problematically, the IGNCA posits Goan culture, especially that of rural and Bahunan Goa, as being different from and untouched by Portuguese culture. To assume that rural cultures exist without any external influences is to essentialize them as cultures isolated from the rest. If they have been isolated from the rest it is largely because these traditions were limited to a particular caste or tribal group, and not part of the traditions of a wider and diverse community.

This is not the first time that cultural chauvinists – both from Goa and outside – have had a problem with Goa’s different culture; different, that is, from what is seen as “mainstream” Indian or Hindu culture. This Goan difference is not simply confined to the Christians of Goa.

Indeed, the temple architecture until very recently borrowed elements from Renaissance architecture as well as from Islamic art. That the IGCA is today leading this movement of reform or purification is not surprising given that one of the aims of the Centre is to “evolve models of research programmes and arts administrations more pertinent [pertinent] to the Indian ethos”.

India’s caste system ensures that tribal and Dalitbahujan communities remain backwards. Preserving cultural practices mired in casteist and discriminatory social relations could also mean that these people remain marginalized. Thus, the whole idea of preserving cultural practices – of creating essentially happy museumized cultures – necessarily must address the issue of how these very same practices allow for discrimination to persist.

And it is not like all kinds of Goan cultural traditions have not received the support and encouragement of state machinery – whether of the colonial or of the nation-state. And each of these states has promoted these cultural traditions for their own selfish ends. For instance, the late Portuguese colonial state, around the 1940s and 1950s, was responsible for the identification and promotion of several folk traditions from Goa – such as the *ghodde-moddnni* and dangar dances – as authentic Goan folk traditions. Ironically, this is the precise moment when many of folk traditions found in Goa come to be seen as *Goan* for the first time ever.

With Indian rule from 1961, the Indian and Goan government promoted many of these folkloric traditions for generating income from tourism from the 1970s. And now the present government with its narrow understanding of Indian and Goan culture seems to be promoting a ‘Goan culture’ or parts of Goan culture in order to purify the same from Portuguese influences.

So where does this leave Goan culture in contemporary times? Probably in a bad place because new efforts to define (or re-define) Goan culture possibly would rob it of its diversity and the various cultural influences in its history. For instance, if we say that we have to rid Goa of its Portuguese influences then an art form like the *mando* would have to disappear. Goa will be poorer because a classic *mando* like *Adeus Korcho Vellu Pavlo*, composed by

Torquato de Figueredo in 1905, will no longer be part of its cultural heritage. One could even say that *tiatr*, owing its origins to western opera can also be termed as foreign or un-Indian. The list, perhaps, will be quite long if we hold on to this thinking of 'cultural purity'.

Cultural purists in India and Goa miss a crucial point: the intervention of the Portuguese and the cultural practices that evolved in this long period are crucial in the creation of Goa or how Goa developed through time. There is no Goa outside of this history of myriad cultural influences converging to form its cultural characters, beginning from the time of the *Estado da Índia*. In a similar way it is also important to remember that many traditions fundamental to Indian culture, such as in food, developed as a result of Portuguese commercial policies. Chilies and potatoes, for instance, reached the shores of the Indian subcontinent some five centuries ago. Stated in a different way, there is no pure Goan culture - whether Portuguese or Indian.

To not recognize this fact would only mean that we will be hastening the process of fabricating our own history and promoting a general amnesia regarding the same.

(First published in *O Heraldo*, dt: 25th October, 2017)



Share this...



Facebook



Whatsapp



Print



Email



Twitter



Reddit



Culture Wars: Portuguese Heritage In Goa