

ARTICLE

“I’m Goan Because I Eat Goan Food”: A Critical Look
at the History of Goan Canadians

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Abstract:

The conceptualization of identity around food is not new to Canadian historiography. Many contemporary historians have, by analyzing culinary narratives such as cookbooks and oral interviews, illustrated how food acts as an intellectual and emotional anchor for immigrant subjects and becomes a source of identity for them in their new country. This study, which examines menus from various Goan Canadian cultural events, finds that Goan Canadians have a complex relationship with traditional foods, and that food was not as important a boundary marker for their identity as the scholarship might suggest. Instead, Goans in Canada developed their own distinct sense of identity based on community, celebrations of holidays, village feasts, and other social events.

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South Asian. Indian. Pakistani. Christian. Hindu. Muslim. All different ways to describe people who identify themselves as Goans...but what about “coconuts”? “Coconuts” is the word most commonly used by Goan Canadians when they were asked to identify themselves by researcher Andrea D’Sylva. Many chose to use this word because they described themselves as being “brown on the outside and white on the inside.”¹ This is an interesting way to identify oneself. It seems clear that there are differences beyond skin colour that are important for Goans, and that it is through these differences that they distinguished themselves from other South Asians. These characteristics could have included their religion, because the many of them were Christian, but so were others in South Asia. It could have been the fact many Goans spoke Konkani as their mother tongue, but according to the 2011 census, so too did nearly 2.3 million Indians.² In the absence of a distinctive skin colour, religion, or language, it was Goan food that allowed Goans to have a unique identity in South Asia. This difference is most explicit in the Goan dish *sorpotel*, which is made from beef and pork.³ *Sorpotel* is one of many dishes that allow Goans to distinguish themselves from Hindus, who do not eat beef, and Muslims, who do not eat pork, making it possible for Goan Canadians to form a community around

¹ Andrea D’Sylva, “‘You Can’t Be a Goan and Not Eat Goan Food.’ The Intersection of Gender, Food and Identity: A Case Study of Goan Women in the Greater Toronto Area,” (master’s thesis, Mount Saint Vincent University, 2009), 72. <http://dc.msvu.ca:8080/xmlui/handle/10587/646>

² “Data on Language and Mother Tongue,” Office of the Registrar General & Census Commissioner, India, 2011.

http://www.censusindia.gov.in/2011Census/Language_MTs.html

³ “Sorpotel a Goan Delicacy,” Goan Food Recipes.

<http://www.goanfoodrecipes.com>

food. This is one of the conclusions that D’Sylva and Brenda Beagan, the only two scholars to write about Goan Canadians, arrive at in their exploration of the experience of thirteen Goan Canadian women, and the efforts those women made to conserve their dietary habits.⁴ While conducting their study they found that the cooking and eating of Goan food was central to Goan identity.

The conceptualization of an identity around food is not new to Canadian historiography. In her exploration of Mennonite cookbooks, Marlene Epp argues that the cookbook itself shaped knowledge about a Mennonite ethno-religious identity, and that this happened in specific sections of the cookbooks titled “ethnic foods.”⁵ Andrea Eidinger’s essay analyzes a popular Jewish cookbook that, for her, contains more than recipes in that it shares a discourse about a particular form of “Jewishness” that could be passed on to young, Jewish women in 1950s Montreal.⁶ In their discussions of Goan, Mennonite, and Jewish women, these authors reach similar conclusions while explicating the role that cooking and eating ethnic

⁴ Andrea D’Sylva is a Goan Canadian woman who conducted a case study of thirteen Goan women in the Greater Toronto Area exploring the intersection of gender, food, and identity for her master’s thesis. D’Sylva’s research was supervised by Brenda Beagan, a sociologist at Dalhousie University. Together, they published three journal articles on Goan Canadian women using D’Sylva’s research.

⁵ Marlene Epp, “More than ‘Just’ Recipes: Mennonite Cookbooks in Mid-Twentieth-Century North America,” in *Edible Histories, Cultural Politics: Towards a Canadian Food History*, ed. Franca Iacovetta, Valerie J. Korinek, and Marlene Epp, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2012), 180.

⁶ Andrea Eidinger, “Gefilte Fish and Roast Duck with Orange slices: *A Treasure for My Daughter* and the Creation of a Jewish Cultural Orthodoxy in Postwar Montreal,” in *Edible Histories, Cultural Politics: Towards a Canadian Food History*, ed. Franca Iacovetta, Valerie J. Korinek, and Marlene Epp, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2012), 203.

food plays in maintaining one's identity. They arrive at these conclusions by analyzing similar culinary narratives, using either cookbooks or oral interviews, to illustrate how these narratives act as "intellectual and emotional anchors" for immigrant subjects, and become a source of identity for them in their new countries.⁷ Ian Mosby, a food historian at Ryerson University, is less convinced. He states:

it is always difficult to write a truly national history in a country as linguistically, ethnically, culturally, and geographically fractured as Canada, and in many ways, this is doubly true of food history. Tastes, traditions, and practices differ not just among regions or ethnicities, but also within households and between individuals.⁸

The uniformity of the role cuisine plays in the construction of identity is precisely the idea that this paper seeks to explore, specifically in problematizing Beagan and D'Sylva's conclusions. In their exploration and interviews of Goan women, the narrative that they present seems to lack the complexity that Mosby alludes to. Instead of seeing differences within households and individuals, they argue that there is a common thread that unites the women's narratives. This paper seeks to complicate this understanding. In contrast to the authors previously mentioned who relied mainly on cookbooks and interviews, this paper will look at menus from various Goan Canadian cultural organizations that problematize the

⁷ Anita Mannur, *Culinary Fictions: Food in South Asian Diasporic Culture* (Temple University Press, 2010), 27. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt14btcd6>

⁸ Ian Mosby, *Food Will Win the War: The Politics, Culture, and Science of Food on Canada's Home Front* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2014), 17.

centrality of food in the Canadian context as it relates to immigrant communities. This source has been ignored in Canadian historiography and, when looked at, one sees a different argument emerging. This essay will establish the distinctiveness of Goan cuisine from all others in South Asia and the importance that various Goan women attached to the food they prepared. However, by comparing the interviews conducted by Beagan and D’Sylva with menus from various Goan religious and social events, and accounts from other Goan Canadians, this paper will argue that for the Goan diaspora, being “Goan” went beyond the food they ate and was not as important a boundary marker for their identity as the scholarship suggests. Instead, Goans in Canada developed their own distinct sense of identity around the celebrations of holidays, village feasts, and other social events, and around a community of people with whom they shared a common heritage.

Part 1: Food and Identity

Goa is tiny state on the southwestern coast of India that was one of several Asian ports that were taken control of by the Portuguese in the sixteenth century. While India achieved independence in 1947, Goa was not liberated until 1961, meaning that the state was under Portuguese rule for 450 years.⁹ During this time, Goans were heavily impacted by a cultural imperialism that saw one-third of the population convert to Roman Catholicism.¹⁰ Many

⁹ Stella Mascarenhas-Keyes, “Catholic Goan Food,” in *The Anthropologists’ Cookbook*, ed. Jessica Kuper (London: Routledge, 1997 [1977]), 207.
<http://doi.org/10.4324/9780203038857>

¹⁰ D’Sylva, “You Can’t Be a Goan and Not Eat Goan Food,” 21.

Goans adopted Portuguese names, and many to this day persist with Western practices related to their dress, the language they speak, and the music they listen to. One other important impact of colonialism occurred by way of the Columbian Exchange, a network of Portuguese and Spanish trading posts which facilitated the introduction of many new foodstuffs to India through Goan ports.¹¹ The Portuguese brought potatoes, chillies, okra, papayas, pineapples, cashews, peanuts, maize, sapodilla, custard apples, guavas, and tobacco.¹² Chili pepper was also introduced and would later be indigenized and become an important component of Indian cooking. Along with chillies, the white potato became an indispensable vegetable in the Indian diet, and today, “potatoes are valued by all classes, especially the Hindus on days when [they are] forbidden the use of grain.”¹³ Despite the influx of new crops into India, Goan cuisine would become famous for its meat dishes, especially those made from beef, pork, and seafood. This is interesting because despite 66 percent of the population being Hindu, meat and fish is consumed by nearly all Goans.¹⁴ Brahmins are the highest caste in the Hindu hierarchy and are strict vegetarians in most of India, but in Goa, they regularly consume fish.¹⁵ Furthermore, pork, which is forbidden in Islam, tends to be eaten by Goan Muslims, who make up 8 percent of

¹¹ Colleen Taylor Sen, *Feasts and Fasts: A History of Food in India* (London: Reaktion Books, 2015), 211.

¹² Sen, *Feasts and Fasts*, 212.

¹³ George Watt, *The Commercial Products of India* [...] (London: John Murray, 1908), 1030. <http://n2t.net/ark:/13960/t1tf54m51>

¹⁴ “Goa Population,” <http://www.populationu.com/in/goa-population>

¹⁵ Stella Mascarenhas-Keyes, “Catholic Goan Food,” in *The Anthropologists’ Cookbook*, ed. Jessica Kuper (Routledge, 1997 [1977]), 207. <http://doi.org/10.4324/9780203038857>

the Goan population.¹⁶ As such, one can see that one major impact of colonialism was that it saw a shift in the ideologies of what food was permissible to eat for people of different religious backgrounds.

The other major impact was the dispersal, beginning in the mid-nineteenth century, of Goans to various parts of the globe. In the 1960s and 1970s, an estimated twenty-three thousand Goans emigrated to Canada, 90 percent of whom arrived from East Africa and Pakistan.¹⁷ However, according to the 2016 census there were only 6,070 Goans in Canada.¹⁸ Why are these numbers so different? While Statistics Canada may not consider the immigrants from East Africa and Pakistan to be Goan, it is clear that they themselves do. The estimated total population of twenty-three thousand that was cited previously is calculated based on the 1995 membership numbers of the Toronto-based Goan Overseas Association (GOA), the Montreal-based Canorient Christian Association (CCA), and Goan associations and clubs in the cities of Hamilton, Ottawa, Winnipeg, Edmonton, Calgary, and Vancouver.¹⁹ This number would presumably be higher in 2021 with an increasing number of Goan immigrants arriving in Canada from the aforementioned regions, as well as from other parts of the world. However, despite not coming

¹⁶ “Goa Population,” <http://www.populationu.com/in/goa-population>

¹⁷ Brenda L. Beagan and Andrea D’Sylva, “Occupational Meanings of Food Preparation for Goan Canadian Women,” *Journal of Occupational Science* vol. 18, no. 3 (August 2011): 213. <http://doi.org/10.1080/14427591.2011.586326>; Goan Overseas Association 25th Anniversary Booklet, 6, box 2, folder 8, Goan Archives Canada fonds, Peel Art Gallery Museum and Archives, Brampton, Ontario, Canada.

¹⁸ Statistics Canada, Census Profile, 2016 Census.

<http://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2016/dp-pd/index-eng.cfm>

¹⁹ Goan Overseas Association 25th Anniversary Booklet, 6.

directly from Goa, or, never having resided in Goa and being generations removed from Goa, the immigrants and their descendants born in Canada identified as Goans. One such Goan Canadian is Andrea D'Sylva, whose family immigrated to Canada in 1970 from Karachi, Pakistan.²⁰ Neither of D'Sylva's parents was born in Goa, but she identified as Goan based on her maternal grandparents.²¹ Her adopted Goan identity was reinforced by her grandmother and mother who routinely cooked Goan food, and this was the common thread that tied together Goans regardless of where in the world they migrated from. In D'Sylva's case, she would not be identified as Goan in the Canadian census based on her birthplace, her native tongue (English), or her religion at birth (Roman Catholic), and this was true for most of the Goan Canadians that she interviewed as part of her own dissertation. According to D'Sylva, food was an "emblem of ethnic identity" that differentiated Goans from Indians and serves to maintain their connection to their colonized past.²² One of her interviewees said, "I'm Goan because of the foods we eat [...] the traditions we celebrate."²³ Another woman stated that, "You can't be a Goan and not eat Goan food. You have to eat Goan food. Whether it's the curries or it's the sweets, you have to eat. No, everything revolves around food for Goans."²⁴ Because of their varied origins, eating Goan food linked immigrants not to their

²⁰ Three of D'Sylva's articles, co-authored with Dr. Beagan, are referenced in this paper. D'Sylva currently resides in Halifax, Nova Scotia and was gracious enough to take out the time to help me gain a better understanding of Goan food.

²¹ Andrea D'Sylva, interview with the author, 9 March 2020.

²² D'Sylva, "You Can't Be a Goan and Not Eat Goan Food," 32.

²³ D'Sylva, "You Can't Be a Goan and Not Eat Goan Food," 51.

²⁴ D'Sylva, "You Can't Be a Goan and Not Eat Goan Food," 112.

birth country, but an ancestral homeland that they identified with.²⁵ Even for those participants who would have never been to Goa, who originated from Pakistan, Africa, Britain, or grew up in Canada, there was a sense that they belonged to an imagined community, and it was food that gave them the sense of belonging to that community. Therefore, Goans lacking strong cultural markers place particular “salience” in Goan food and even emphasized that aspect of their identity.²⁶ The importance of this identity to Goans could also be seen in how some participants in D’Sylva’s study chose to self-identify. One stated: “I say I am from the Indian subcontinent or I am South Asian. I don’t usually identify myself as a Pakistani because Pakistanis are generally Muslim and I am not from a Muslim background.”²⁷ Another woman expressed a similar hesitancy in revealing her Pakistani background because “[she did not] want to be identified as a Pakistani because that means [people] immediately think Muslim.”²⁸ Other Goan women identified themselves as being Indian, but quickly added that they were Catholic, because that for them was a distinguishing and important part of their identity.²⁹

Part 2: What is Goan Cuisine?

²⁵ Andrea D’Sylva and Brenda L. Beagan, “Food is culture, but it’s also power’: the role of food in ethnic and gender identity construction among Goan Canadian women,” *Journal of Gender Studies* vol. 20, no. 3 (September 2011): 284. <http://doi.org/10.1080/09589236.2011.593326>

²⁶ Beagan and D’Sylva, “Occupational Meanings of Food Preparation,” 215.

²⁷ D’Sylva, “You Can’t Be a Goan and Not Eat Goan Food,” 55.

²⁸ D’Sylva, “You Can’t Be a Goan and Not Eat Goan Food,” 55.

²⁹ Andrea D’Sylva, interview with the author, 9 March 2020.

Goan cuisine is unique from all the rest in South Asia and can be broken down into two major styles. The first is similar in preparation to classic Portuguese dishes that are enlivened by aromatic spices. These dishes include: *chorizo*, a garlicky pork sausage; *caldo verde*, a chicken and spinach soup flavoured with pork pie, pork sausages, ginger, and black pepper; *sopa de camrao*, shrimp soup; and *feni*, a local liquor made from the fruit of the cashew tree.³⁰ Desserts consist of pastries and layered cakes like *bebinca*, a cake made from stacking layers of pancakes that have been prepared using egg yolk, flour, and a coconut milk batter, and *boliho de coco*, little coconut cakes.³¹

The second style of cooking is hotter and spicier and includes several famous Goan dishes: *vindaloo* (from the Portuguese *carne de vinha d'alhos*, meat in wine and garlic), which is a hot pork curry made with coconut, vinegar, spices and red chillies; *sorpotel*, a stew made with pork, pig's liver, heart, and brain with a sauce made using pig's blood which has been seasoned with various spices and vinegar; *arroz regado*, a *pulao* of rice that uses piquant Goan sausages; and *xacuti*, which is a sautéed chicken dish made using roasted coconut, spices, ginger, garlic, and vinegar.³² Though sausages are eaten in many European and American countries, the Goan sausage is unlike any other because it requires the meat to be preserved in a freezer

³⁰ Olivia Mesquita, "Caldo Verde (Portuguese Green Soup)," Olivia's Cuisine. <http://www.oliviascuisine.com/caldo-verde>; Colleen Taylor Sen, *Food Culture in India* (Greenwood Publishing Group, 2004), 105.

³¹ Kishore Reddy, "Bebinca Recipe," NDTV Food. <http://food.ndtv.com/recipe-bebinca-218328>; Sen, *Feasts and Fasts*, 256.

³² Michelle Peters-Jones, "Indian Classics - Vindalho de Galinha (Chicken Vindaloo)," The Tiffin Box. <http://www.thetiffinbox.ca/2011/11/vindalho-de-galinha-chicken-vindaloo.html>; Sen, *Food Culture in India*, 105.

after being thoroughly marinated in spices and vinegar. Biting into the sausage also provides a different texture because one should be able to taste pieces of red chili and cinnamon within the casing.³³ These dishes are unique in that they are born out of a marriage of Indian and Portuguese cuisine, and that is evident from the start in not only the names of the dishes, but also their preparation. They are not prepared as such anywhere else in India, and are seldom eaten in Portugal even today.

Goan cuisine occupies a unique place in South Asian cooking. All of the dishes described above incorporate various Indian spices, but also often have the addition of a special vinegar, and use many coconut-based ingredients that distinguish them from other regions in India. The vinegar that Goans use is called toddy vinegar, which is made from coconut sap that is retrieved from stems, and is then left to ferment for four to six months.³⁴ Prahlad Sukhtankar, owner of The Black Sheep Bistro, in Panjim, Goa, says that “Goan delicacies with European roots – specifically Portuguese – traditionally include cooking with coconut vinegar.”³⁵ Goan dishes also distinguish themselves by not using tomato in their sauces, unlike other regions of South Asia. Many Goan dishes are described as being time consuming and labour intensive to prepare because the sauces tend

³³ Minu Ittype, “Goa Delights,” *Hindu* (Chennai, India), 25 October 2004. <http://web.archive.org/web/20071009055032/http://www.hinduonnet.com/thehindu/mp/2004/10/25/stories/2004102500930300.htm>

³⁴ Bindiya Chari, “The Versatility of VINEGAR,” *Times of India*, 23 May 2016. <http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/goa/The-versatility-of-VINEGAR/articleshow/52403417.cms>

³⁵ Sparshita Saxena, “A Secret Ingredient That Makes Goan Food Taste So Good,” NDTV Food. <http://food.ndtv.com/food-drinks/a-secret-ingredient-that-makes-goan-food-taste-so-good-757485>

to be thicker, and have to be slow cooked to allow for meats to release their juices and make a natural stock and spice-based gravy.³⁶ In addition, grated coconut is used to garnish many dishes and desserts, whereas, in other parts of South Asia, the garnishing would be done using primarily coriander.

There is a misconception that Goan cuisine consists mainly of fish and pork, or food that is cooked with only spices and vinegar. However, there are plenty of vegetarian dishes that cater to the majority Hindu Goan population. Though Goan Hindus do consume fish, they also eat dishes such as: *bhaji*, *shaak*, *usal*, *tondak*, and *ross* (coconut-based dishes); *hoomans* (curries); *karams* (salads); and the “queen of Goan vegetable dishes,” *khatkhatem* (mixed vegetable curry).³⁷ These dishes are usually be eaten with *sannas*, steamed savoury rice cakes, which are served with fermented palm wine. Rice is consumed all across India and is a staple component of most Indians’ diet. However, Goans treat the rice that is used to make *sannas* differently than others by incorporating salt into its preparation.³⁸ Furthermore, the way Goans make pickled vegetables is unique. Goans use vinegar, while other Indians use something called *achar*, which consists of lemon, limes and tamarind.³⁹ Interestingly though, most of these dishes are only found in households and would not be available in restaurants. Along with food, the Portuguese introduced Goa to techniques for distilling

³⁶ Michelle Peters-Jones, “Indian Classics - Vindalho de Galinha (Chicken Vindaloo).

³⁷ Sulekha Nair, “Goan Delight,” Financial Express.

<http://www.financialexpress.com/archive/goan-delight/412024>

³⁸ Mascarenhas-Keyes, “Catholic Goan Food,” 207.

³⁹ Mascarenhas-Keyes, “Catholic Goan Food,” 207.

alcohol and now the Goans make their own distinct form of it called *feni*. There are two main types of *feni*. The first, *madachi*, is made from the fermentation of palm toddy while the second, *katchi*, is produced by fermenting the juice of the cashew fruit.⁴⁰ Another popular drink is called *solkadi*. This is a blend of kokum (a native fruit that grows primarily in Goa) and coconut milk, which is a renowned cure for indigestion.⁴¹ Thus, Goan food is a unique amalgamation of two diverse cultures, Portuguese and Indian.

Part 3: “You Can’t Be Goan and not Eat Goan Food”

Anthropologists Helen Vallianatos and Kim Raines note that “migration to a new country often results in a variety of social and economic challenges, often reflected in foodways,” and this was true for Goan families who tried to preserve their culture in Canada.⁴² Food is important for most immigrant societies that wish to maintain connections to the homeland and display their ethnic identity. Losing one’s traditional culinary practices can be equated with the “abandonment of community, family, and religion.”⁴³ Having established how Goans can distinguish themselves from other South Asians through their cuisine, it is important here to assess the role of Goan women because it is they who were doing the cooking and therefore reproducing a significant symbol of Goan cultural identity.

⁴⁰ Mascarenhas-Keyes, “Catholic Goan Food,” 208.

⁴¹ Ittyipe, “Goa Delights.”

⁴² Helen Vallianatos and Kim Raine, “Consuming Food and Constructing Identities among Arabic and South Asian Immigrant Women,” *Food, Culture, and Society* vol. 11, no. 3 (2008): 357. <http://doi.org/10.2752/175174408X347900>

⁴³ Donna R. Gabaccia, *We Are What We Eat: Ethnic Food and the Making of Americans* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998), 54.

Despite an expanding role for men, women were primarily responsible for preparing meals, and they were responsible for deciding what to cook.⁴⁴ Goan women's decision-making power over the menu seems to be unique because, as Vallianatos and Raine learned while interviewing Indian women, in other South Asian cultures women were responsible for all food related duties, but power over food choices was found to lie with their children and husband. Most women interviewed privileged the tastes of their family members over their own. One woman said, "I don't like seafood, but my husband loves it so I have to cook it. I don't even like the smell of it, and my kids love it too, so I have to."⁴⁵ Other women mentioned how from the moment they were married, they tried to adapt their cooking style to their husband's palette. However, Goan women felt powerful in their role as cooks in the household, and as holders of a specific knowledge that was tied to their identity. The power gained from cooking food acted as "culinary capital" for these women who had mastered a technical skill and were better equipped to transfer a food-based culture to their families and especially children. This culture originated in places they "had come from but never been."⁴⁶ According to D'Sylva, power over Goan food was doubly important because in the absence of other cultural signifiers, food was a unifying aspect of being Goan – "you can't be a Goan and not eat Goan food."⁴⁷ As such, it was through food that Goan culture would be passed down to the subsequent generation, and it would be

⁴⁴ Beagan and D'Sylva, "Occupational Meanings of Food Preparation," 216.

⁴⁵ Vallianatos and Raine, "Consuming Food and Constructing Identities," 362.

⁴⁶ Christine Choo et al., "Being Eurasian: transculturality or transcultural reality?" *Life Writing* vol. 1, no. 1 (2004): 89. <http://doi.org/10.1080/10408340308518243>

⁴⁷ D'Sylva, "You Can't Be a Goan and Not Eat Goan Food," 112.

food that would continue to allow Goans to foster a unique Goan identity, one that distinguished them from all other South Asians.

Despite having this “culinary capital,” Goan food and culture does not seem to be reproduced in the household or be given as much importance as is being emphasized by the various women interviewed. Members of the Goan Overseas Association (GOA) spoke of how Goan culture was dying because “people are not showing their kids how to [cook Goan food] it’s tiring.”⁴⁸ D’Sylva herself said, “I don’t make certain dishes because honestly they’re so time consuming and labour intensive, I’m not even going there. *Sorpotel* is way too much work. I’d much rather prepare something like a fish curry, which I can whip up relatively quickly.”⁴⁹ She was not the only one for whom time was a key factor in the decreased consumption of Goan food at home. Another woman stated that she would rather “do a stir fry which is much faster and healthier [...] I mean talk about *xacuti*. Look at all the coconut going into that.”⁵⁰ Therefore, there exists a contradiction between the stated importance of Goan food and the amount Goan Canadians actually eat themselves, or feed their children. For someone like D’Sylva, who lives in Halifax, Nova Scotia, it was difficult to prepare Goan meals on a regular basis not only due to time constraints, but because the ingredients she required were not available in stores in Halifax. The Toronto-based women D’Sylva interviewed, however, did have access to the necessary ingredients, but still chose not to prepare Goan food.

⁴⁸ D’Sylva, “You Can’t Be a Goan and Not Eat Goan Food,” 109.

⁴⁹ Andrea D’Sylva, interview with the author, 9 March 2020.

⁵⁰ D’Sylva, “You Can’t Be a Goan and Not Eat Goan Food,” 121.

Along with the challenges that existed outside of the household, there were other unique challenges at home. Migration sees a shift in identity when old foodways encounter new food elements and consumption patterns and it is often women who act as gatekeepers in balancing traditional foods and cuisines with foodways in a country like Canada. As mentioned above, this was no different for Goan women, for whom food held a particular symbolic importance for Goans within the household, and it provided them with a sense of accomplishment, especially when it came to passing down their culture to their children. However, herein lay another contradiction in terms of what was being said, and what was being practiced. Goan women believed that cultural transmission was their primary role and responsibility. This was described to D'Sylva as being of crucial importance for Goan women, because it would be the cooking of Goan food that would continue to foster a Goan identity in the diaspora, and there was a fear that many women had that if their children rejected Goan cuisine, it would be a rejection of their entire identity. One woman expressed her fear that:

[Goan culture] seems to be something that is going to die out with the next generation. It is important to me and to my generation. I have a lot of Goan friends, and they love Goan food...But their kids, I think without exception, are like mine...very Canadian. They don't like the curry thing...all these traditions that we bring along with us will probably die out with our generation. Or weaken at least.⁵¹

⁵¹ D'Sylva, "You Can't Be a Goan and Not Eat Goan Food," 109.

This concern from Goan women also seemed to be true for other South Asian mothers who discussed how their children were “picky eaters” and were developing tastes for non-traditional foods.⁵² Children began to describe Indian food as pungent, disturbing, and unhealthy. Here women expressed concerns that their children’s rejection of traditional cuisine would result in a rejection of their values. South Asian women found that their children liked eating pizza and spaghetti and began to incorporate “Indianized” versions of these meals into their household cooking.⁵³ By changing the toppings, sauces, and spices to make Western foods less foreign to the palate, immigrant women tried to continue to evoke and connect with the homeland for a sense of belonging through the passing down of culinary practices. As such, Indian mothers faced increasing challenges while trying to continue to serve as gatekeepers by balancing their traditional cuisine with the new tastes being developed by their children. Similarly, for many Goan households, despite the importance and “culinary capital” placed on Goan food, time pressures and health concerns, amongst other things, hinder the transmittance of Goan culture. Many Goan mothers found themselves having to adapt to their children’s changing palates, similar to other South Asian women. While the husband and wife still ate Goan food, many Goan families mentioned that they would have to serve their kids Western meals like burgers or baked chicken instead of *sorpotel*.

D’Sylva also mentioned how some women that she interviewed would remove the seasoning or additional spices from the food before

⁵² Vallianatos and Raine, “Consuming Food and Constructing Identities,” 367.

⁵³ Vallianatos and Raine, “Consuming Food and Constructing Identities,” 368.

feeding their children, in order to better suit their milder palates. This trend persisted even on holidays, which were of great importance for Goans. During Christmas or Easter, Goan food like *vindaloo*, *sorpotel*, and *xacuti* would be prepared, but would be served along with a “Canadian’ food like turkey or ham.”⁵⁴ The turkey and ham that is being described as “Canadian” food would likely be to accommodate the younger generation who would be described as not having any interest in Goan food as compared to their parents’ generation. This was true for D’Sylva’s household where her Christmas feasts include Canadian dishes, but “everybody wants to make sure there’s *pulao* and *sorpotel* - you can do all the other add-ons, but the *pulao* and *sorpotel* has to be there.”⁵⁵ One may be able to excuse Goan women from not preparing dishes like *sorpotel* or *xacuti* on a regular basis, but Goan Canadians do not seem to be consuming other traditional dishes, such as fish curry and rice, which is consumed twice a day by many Goans in Goa.⁵⁶ Thus, one can see that Goan mothers face increasing challenges while trying to continue to serve as gatekeepers in balancing their traditional cuisine with the new tastes being developed by their children, but as suggested by the evidence, they themselves have partially abandoned their duties as self-described gatekeepers in favour of preparing convenient and quicker meals. Instead of cooking traditional Goan cuisine, dishes such as stir-fry, pizza, and baked chicken have been preferred. If the saying, “you can’t be a Goan and not eat Goan food,” holds true, then Goan mothers are allowing an entire generation to lose what some scholarship suggests

⁵⁴ Andrea D’Sylva, interview with the author, 9 March 2020.

⁵⁵ Andrea D’Sylva, interview with the author, 9 March 2020.

⁵⁶ Andrew Marshall, “The World on a Plate,” *Vancouver Sun*, 15 February 2020, G3.

is a significant part of their ethnic identity. Moreover, if that culinary tradition is not being passed down, and Goan food is being consumed less, what does it mean for the identities of the children of Goan Canadians?

Part 4: Cracks in the Façade

It may be true that Goan mothers were not cooking Goan food at home on a regular basis, but Goan food was definitely being prepared during Christmas and other holiday feasts. For one Goan mother, cooking dishes that were a must, like *pulao* and *sorpotel*, during Christmas strengthened and reinforced her Goan identity. For her, making Goan food at Christmas was part of being Goan and she described how, “we get together [...] and we make...all the Goan sweets...the *nankatis* and the *neuries* and the whole *kulkuls*...And that is what I thought was [being] Goan.”⁵⁷ Similar importance was given to Christmas and Easter in the D’Sylva household. These were holidays that were important to all Catholics, but that had to be quietly celebrated in Karachi because Pakistan was a Muslim-majority country. As such, for her own family, because they could not go out to eat Goan food in Karachi, where “there were no Goan restaurants you could go to,” special food being prepared at home was significant, and this was a tradition that continued in Canada.⁵⁸ The one big change for her family upon arriving to Canada was that they had access to other Goans upon becoming members of the Goan Overseas Association (GOA). The GOA was the first Goan cultural organization in Canada, and continues to have a presence today,

⁵⁷ D’Sylva and Beagan, “Food is culture,” 283.

⁵⁸ Andrea D’Sylva, interview with the author, 9 March 2020.

celebrating its 50th anniversary in 2020. Not only did organizations like this provide Goans a space to meet people from a common background, they also prioritized the preservation of Goan culture. In attempting to preserve Goan culture, the GOA organized many social events throughout the year that included balls, dances, and charitable fundraisers. The Panjim Pavilion was one such fundraiser that would revolve around a beauty pageant. Traditional foodstuffs, sweetmeats, household items, clothes and Goan art would be sold during this pageant that could see upwards of one thousand people attending.⁵⁹ The GOA, realizing that many Goans held sentimental attachments to their ancestral villages, hosted special feasts that celebrated various villages in Goa. These villages were diverse, and celebrated their own Catholic patron or patroness, but they all had Goan food in common.

Thus far, this paper has acknowledged the importance of Goan cuisine in allowing Goans to identify themselves as being distinct from other South Asians, and has argued that Goan families, especially the women in the household, saw food-related knowledge as the way to pass on their cultural and ethnic heritage to the next generation. However, despite the importance that the Goan Canadians placed on food, they were not cooking it as regularly as one would assume. Given the importance of holidays and feasts in Goan culture, and the presence of food at places like the GOA, one would expect that Goan food would be ever-present at all social events and village feasts. However, the menus from various feasts, religious festivals, and social events held by Goan Canadian cultural associations between 1992 and 2008 tell a different story.

⁵⁹ Goan Overseas Association 25th Anniversary Booklet, 11.

One of the most significant feasts for Goans happens in the village of Navelim, Goa, and consists of an extensive celebration beginning with traditional processions and novenas that celebrate Our Lady of the Rosary every third Wednesday in November. It began when the Portuguese built the Church of Our Lady in Navelim in 1597.⁶⁰ The event begins on the third Wednesday in November at three in the morning, and continues for ten days.⁶¹ On the third day of the feast, the villagers invite their families and friends over to celebrate in their own homes, and guests show their gratitude by bringing trays of traditional Goan sweets for all to eat. The final three days of celebration include large feasts involving the whole village. This method of celebrating feasts was taken directly from the Portuguese, and is a tradition that continues today. In Canada, this annual feast was organized by the Union of Navelim Toronto (UNT), with the very first having taken place in 1975. Despite being an annual feast, records for only four are available, all of which took place at the Claireport Banquet and Convention Centre in Etobicoke, Ontario. The menu for the 1992 feast includes chicken rice soup, steak, potatoes and vegetables, and baked Alaska. There was a separate children’s menu which offered chicken rice soup, hamburgers, French fries, and soft drinks.⁶² There was a surprising absence of not just Goan food, but any South Asian dishes. This would change for the twentieth anniversary of the feast in 1995. That year’s menu presented a variety of South Asian dishes including *pakor*as, *tandoori* chicken, chicken *makhanwalla*, *pulao*, *sorpotel*, and

⁶⁰ Navelim Feast, 22 November 1992, box 10, folder 1, Goan Archives Canada fonds, Peel Art Gallery Museum and Archives, Brampton, Ontario, Canada.

⁶¹ Navelim Feast, 1992, Goan Archives Canada fonds.

⁶² Navelim Feast, 1992, Goan Archives Canada fonds.

daal. Again, there was a separate children's menu, which consisted of lasagna, green peas, *pulao*, and *pakorras*.⁶³ There was a stark change in three years between the two menus listed above, and a clear shift away from Western to South Asian cuisine. However, despite the change, there was still only one traditional Goan dish on the menu - *sorpotel*. One may put this down to the lack of availability of Goan ingredients, or restrictions from the banquet hall. However, in the same booklet in which the 1995 feast was advertised, there was an advertisement for Sadroo's Grocery Supplies, an East Indian Food and Spices store that was advertised as not only carrying spices, but also takeout options such as shrimp *balchao*, *vindaloo*, *sorpotel*, sausages, and *kebabs*, only one of which was served at the feast.⁶⁴ In addition, Sadroo's was not the only store which offered South Asian food. Kohinoor Foods, which was the first store in Ontario to sell East Indian groceries, opened in Toronto in 1978.⁶⁵ This means that the UNT could have offered Goan food at their events had they chosen to do so.

The absence of Goan cuisine, and the inclusion of separate children's menus which consisted of "Canadian" food, continued at the feasts in 2005 and 2008. There were, however, an increased number of South Asian dishes including *naan*, basmati rice, *tandoori* chicken, *daal*, *aloo palak*, shrimp *masala*, mutton *qorma*, shish kebab,

⁶³ Navelim Feast 20th Anniversary, 19 November 1995, box 10, folder 1, Goan Archives Canada fonds, Peel Art Gallery Museum and Archives, Brampton, Ontario, Canada.

⁶⁴ Navelim Feast, 1995, Goan Archives Canada fonds.

⁶⁵ Navelim Feast, 1995, Goan Archives Canada fonds.

pulao, and chicken *makhanwalla*.⁶⁶ There was no Goan dish in 2005, but *sorpotel* found its way on the menu in 2008.⁶⁷ Another interesting aspect of the four menus was that there was no mention of a Goan dessert. The desserts consisted of ice creams, fruit trays, puddings, and pastries. It’s possible that no Goan desserts were included due the difficulty of obtaining ingredients. However, traditional desserts like *bebinca* and *bolihó de coco* rely on coconut, which was readily available.

The lack of Goan cuisine at the Navelim Feasts is made more surprising when one reviews the menus of two events organized by the GOA as part of their 25th Anniversary celebrations. On 16 April 1995, the GOA celebrated Family Day and the menu included many Goan dishes such as Goan sausages, *bebinca*, *pulao*, roast chicken, and *vindaloo*.⁶⁸ The second event was the GOA’s Gala Ball held on 22 April 1995. Advertising promoting the ball featured a “surprise Goan traditional dish.”⁶⁹ The menu also listed Cornish hen with periguex sauce, French string beans, Parisienne potatoes, and a variety of midnight snacks including sandwiches. During this week of festivities, one can see that sausages, *vindaloo*, and *bebinca*, being amongst the most popular Goan dishes, were served as part of these events. This shows that these dishes were available in Toronto and that there was likely a desire to consume them. Nevertheless, alternatives to Goan cuisine were also offered. The children’s menu for both GOA events consisted of only hamburger and fries. When

⁶⁶ 33rd Navelim Feast, 22 November 2008, box 10, folder 1, Goan Archives Canada fonds, Peel Art Gallery Museum and Archives, Brampton, Ontario, Canada.

⁶⁷ Navelim Feast, 2008, Goan Archives Canada fonds.

⁶⁸ Goan Overseas Association 25th Anniversary Booklet, 24.

⁶⁹ Goan Overseas Association 25th Anniversary Booklet, 25.

asked about this peculiarity, D'Sylva simply stated that, "None of the children like Goan food. I moved to Canada in my teens and even my generation adapted to Canadian cuisine. It was only later that I wanted to cook more 'culturally appropriate food.'"⁷⁰ The inclusion of children's menus is a signifier that not only were Goan parents seeing a loss of culture amongst their children at home, as reported by the various Goan women interviewed, but also at Goan cultural centres where one would expect to see Goan culture be put on full display. Thus, as it relates to food, there were clearly adjustments made to accommodate the changing tastes of the younger generation, rather than keeping a distinctive Goan menu and having the children eat the food that has been reported as being a key component of their identity. More surprising than this was the overall lack of Goan cuisine present on the menus at the events organized by the UNT and GOA, even for the adults.

The Calangute Association of Canada (TCAC), whose membership catered to Goans with a connection to the village of Calangute, Goa, also held annual village feasts in Canada. The TCAC celebrated the patron saint Alex, and these feasts were seen as being an important component of maintaining their culture and heritage. This was reflected in the menus for the 1996 and 1997 events. In 1996 celebrants were offered goat *rogan josh*, *pulao*, *vindaloo*, *sorpotel*, and *sannas*.⁷¹ The 1997 feast advertised a "buffet lunch including Goan

⁷⁰ Andrea D'Sylva, interview with the author, 9 March 2020.

⁷¹ Calangute Association Canada Feast, 20 October 1996, box 10, folder 6, Goan Archives Canada fonds, Peel Art Gallery Museum and Archives, Brampton, Ontario, Canada.

traditional dishes.”⁷² Neither of these feasts included a children’s menu or listed any “Canadian dishes,” and this sets them apart from all the other Goan organizations that were analyzed. For the villagers from Calangute, eating Goan food may well have been tied to being ethnically Goan for them. These Goan menu items are what one would have expected to see reflected in the menus at events hosted by all Goan cultural organizations if food was the core cultural signifier as suggested by Beagan, D’Sylva, and other scholars.

The last organisation that this paper will discuss is also the newest. The 55 Plus Goan Seniors Group (55PGA) was formed in 2005 and held their first social event, a Christmas dinner dance, on 21 December 2005. More than 250 members attended.⁷³ By 2015, the 55PGA consisted of over 600 members and hosted various holiday and other social events.⁷⁴ The menu for the first Christmas dinner dance consisted of soup, roast beef, grilled chicken breast, Parisienne potatoes, and mixed vegetables. For dessert, there was tartufo ice cream, crepes, and fruit.⁷⁵ The menu for the Christmas event in 2006 was almost the same, with the only difference being that there was tiramisu for dessert. The menu from an Easter Brunch that took place on 16 April 2006 is also available. Guests were offered an assortment of Western dishes including baked ham, salmon, scalloped potatoes,

⁷² Calangute Social Brochure, 21 September 1997, box 10, folder 6, Goan Archives Canada fonds, Peel Art Gallery Museum and Archives, Brampton, Ontario, Canada.

⁷³ 55PGA, *CELEBRATION*, 2015, 5.

<http://home.55pga.com/content/4-community/celebration10.5-lr.pdf>

⁷⁴ 55PGA, *CELEBRATION*, 10.

⁷⁵ Christmas Dinner Dance, 21 December 2005, box 4, folder 7, Goan Archives Canada fonds, Peel Art Gallery Museum and Archives, Brampton, Ontario, Canada.

and a variety of salads and pastries.⁷⁶ The lack of Goan dishes is surprising, and what is more surprising is that unlike other Goan events, there was also a complete omission of any South Asian cuisine. Since the 55PGA catered to an older generation of Goans, one would expect that they would prefer to eat *sorpotel*, *xacuti*, and *vindaloo* at these cultural events, especially considering how difficult and labour-intensive it is to prepare these dishes at home. Interestingly enough, this was also the demographic of people interviewed by D'Sylva, and the ones who expressed a strong desire to eat Goan food. It is difficult to know exactly why the members of 55PGA made the menu choices they did without asking them, but it is clear that for many Goan Canadians, Goan food was not necessarily an important part of events held to celebrate Goan culture and community.

Conclusion

Historically, two potent markers of identity for Indians have been language and food. This was certainly true for the Sikhs who began settling in Victoria and Vancouver as early as 1903.⁷⁷ This group faced a great deal of hostility. Historian Julie Mehta writes that these immigrants were confronted with concerns that they would pollute the “clean’ Canadian cultural landscape,” adding that white Canadians did not want these “supposedly ‘un-assimilable’ settlers

⁷⁶ Easter Brunch flyer, 16 April 2006, box 4, folder 7, Goan Archives Canada fonds, Peel Art Gallery Museum and Archives, Brampton, Ontario, Canada.

⁷⁷ Helen Ralson, “Canadian Immigration Policy in the Twentieth Century: Its Impact on South Asian Women,” *Canadian Woman Studies* vol. 19, no. 3 (1999): 33. <http://cws.journals.yorku.ca/index.php/cws/article/view/7872>

with their ‘smelly cuisines’ [and] strange modes of dress and habit” to settle in Canada.⁷⁸ For these Sikh immigrants, “food [was] a marker of belonging and identity” amongst their imagined community.⁷⁹ However, it may also be the case that what one generation deems to be an important part of their cultural identity may not be understood in the same way by another. Beagan, who in her earlier articles with D’Sylva argued that food was a significant marker of ethnic identity for Goans, shifts her opinion in her later works. According to a 2013 article written by Beagan and Gwen Chapman, “the relationship between food and identity is much more complex than simply being a marker of ethnicity.”⁸⁰ Food practices are also bound by other facets of identity including gender, social class, and age, all of which are constantly evolving and changing. This idea is complicated further in a book co-authored by Beagan titled *Acquired Tastes: Why Families Eat the Way Do*, which makes the argument that shifts in identity can also come as a result of social pressures. Some people may undergo dietary changes as a result of “overt social pressures” while others “may eat in differing ways in varying social settings because they want to be seen in a certain light by those around them.”⁸¹ Geographer Francis Collins, whose research focuses on international migration, adds that

⁷⁸ Julie Mehta, “Toronto’s Multicultural Tongues: Stories of South Asian Cuisines,” in *Edible Histories, Cultural Politics: Towards a Canadian Food History*, ed. Franca Iacovetta, Valerie J. Korinek, and Marlene Epp, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2012), 156.

⁷⁹ Mehta, “Toronto’s Multicultural Tongues,” 159.

⁸⁰ Gwen E. Chapman and Brenda L. Beagan, “Food Practices and Transnational Identities,” *Food, Culture & Society* vol. 16, no. 3 (September 2013): 368. <http://doi.org/10.2752/175174413X13673466711688>

⁸¹ Brenda L. Beagan et al., *Acquired Tastes: Why Families Eat the Way They Do* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2014) 16-17.

while “food and drink provide one way to bridge the sensual gap between ‘here’ and ‘there,’” food “there” does not remain static.⁸² It changes as it is affected by globalization and this complicates the process of identity construction for transnational migrants. As India increasingly gains access to processed foods and American fast-food chains, its own foodways are changing. Ironically, for Indo-Canadians who migrated prior to this process of globalization taking place in India, the traditional foodways that Indian mothers are trying to impart are evolving in their own homelands. Thus, it begs the question as to what tradition these women are trying to protect and also problematizes the idea of tying the creation of identity to the food one cooks and eats.

Yet, for many of the Goans discussed in this paper, the continued consumption of “Goan food” was integral to maintaining a connection to an imagined homeland and for preserving a sense of “Goan identity.” Further research will be needed to fully understand why the Goan Canadians discussed in this paper made the food choices that they did. One would have to ask the various event organizers about their menu decisions. One might even ask the venues where the events were held about the catering services available to them. Perhaps the members of the GOA, UNT, TCAC, and the 55PGA consumed Goan cuisine at home on a regular basis, and did not want to eat the same types of food during festive occasions. This paper has taken a critical look at the existent scholarship on Goan Canadian food history and has raised questions

⁸² Francis Leo Collins, “Of *kimchi* and coffee: globalisation, transnationalism and familiarity in culinary consumption,” *Social & Cultural Geography* vol. 9, no. 2 (March 2008): 155. <http://doi.org/10.1080/14649360701856094>

about the importance of Goan food for the identify of Goan Canadians. By examining the menus for events held by various Goan cultural organizations and noting the lack of Goan foods listed on those menus, it becomes clear that the construction of a Goan identity in Canada is as complicated as the histories of the various migrations that Goan Canadians have made throughout their lives, and not as simple as the conclusions that Beagan and D’Sylva arrived at in their research. It also becomes clear that there was a clear shift away from Goan cuisine to a more “Canadian” menu at the Goan Canadian events examined. There is more that has to be uncovered about how Goan Canadians construct their identity in order to determine whether or not food holds the same significance for them today as it did for D’Sylva, and the thirteen women that she interviewed as part of her own study. Furthermore, there is also a lacuna that needs to be filled in Canadian food historiography as a whole, and this paper demonstrates that in filling that void, future scholars need to go beyond cookbooks and interviews to arrive at conclusions about any immigrant community, and one place to start may be the cultural organizations who exist to celebrate ethnic identity.

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