

Tracing the Cultural Shift from Colonial Legacy to Creolized Identity in Michelle Mendonca Bambawale's
Becoming Goan: A Contemporary Coming-Home Story

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ABSTRACT

The present paper is an attempt to analyse the cultural transformations in Goan society through the lens of creolization. The memoir explores various dimensions of creolization, highlighting its impact on Goan culture and identity. Creolization is a major aspect of colonial and postcolonial literature as it refers to the process by which cultures blend to create new and hybrid forms. Creolization can be explored in both colonial and postcolonial literature, in terms of language, identity and cultural practices that emerge when

different groups coalesce with each other. In *Becoming Goan: A Contemporary Coming-Home Story*, Michelle Bambawale sheds light on the cultural transformation of Goan society, forged through centuries of Portuguese colonisation. Each chapter features personal or historical narratives that recount the cultural assimilation and resistance experienced by Goans during and after colonial rule. The paper concentrates on how creolization can be applied to analyse the cultural changes that occurred in Goan society because of colonisation.

Keywords: Colonial, Postcolonial, Creolization, Colonisation.

The word 'colonisation' refers to the process of establishing dominance over a foreign territory by settling and exploiting their people and resources. As stated in *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, "Colonialism is a practice of domination, which involves the subjugation of one people to another" ("Colonialism"). Colonisation is not a new phenomenon. It was a significant aspect of global history over the past centuries, with its impacts resonating even today. During ancient times, Greek, Roman and Egyptian empires extended their power to the surrounding areas, after consulting oracles. But during the Age of Discovery, the expansion of colonies depended on gaining the sympathy and sponsorship of wealthy monarchs. Motivated by their inquisitive nature and diplomatic approach, the Portuguese found new trade routes beyond Europe, leading to conquer indigenous lands in North Africa, America, India and Asia.

Colonisation is often associated with terms like oppression, suffering, slave trade and conversion. While these negative aspects are undeniably true, it also led to the creation of a hybrid society, through the amalgamation of diverse groups. The blending of cultures enriched new art forms, language, architecture and culinary practices. This amalgamation is very much evident in Goa, which was under the colonisation of Portuguese rule for an extended period, from 1510 to 1961. Portuguese introduced colonial architecture, rich cuisine, education, trade and commerce, new social hierarchy and various agricultural techniques to

enhance farming. The blend of these new influences with the already prevalent Goan culture contributed to the enrichment of Goan society.

Colonisation not only contributed to reshaping society but also left a profound psychological and cultural imprint that lingered long after the colonisers departed, evolving as central themes in postcolonial literature. Postcolonial literature broadly refers to literature originating from the formerly colonised countries. In the opinion of Major Ernesto Che Guevara, "Postcolonialism begins from its own knowledges, many of them more recently elaborated during the long course of the anti-colonial movements, and starts from the premise that those in the west, both within and outside the academy, should take such other knowledges, other perspectives, as seriously as the west" (Young 20). Postcolonialism often interrogates themes such as identity, displacement, cultural hybridity, migration, suppression and resistance. It strives to reclaim indigenous voices and reinterprets history from the perspective of the colonised. Post colonial writers find themselves navigating between traditional heritage and colonial influence.

Postcolonial literature is elaborately linked with postcolonial theory as both engage in evaluating the social, cultural and political consequences of colonialism. While postcolonial literature presents a narrative framework of colonised people, postcolonial theory offers critical tools for analysing these texts. Postcolonial theory emerged as a critical framework in the 1970s with Edward Said's book *Orientalism* being credited as the founding work. Several other theorists like Homi K. Baba, Gayatri Spivak, Frantz Fanon, Edouard Glissant and others have been credited for introducing key concepts in postcolonialism, such as hybridity, subaltern, resistance and creolization. Creolization theory emerged from the study of colonial and postcolonial societies where migration, trade and conquest brought diverse cultural elements together. While these interactions often took place under the conditions of inequality and domination, they have also produced rich and complex cultural forms that express the dynamic and adaptive character of human societies.

The concept of creolization was introduced by the Martinican thinker, poet and critic Edouard Glissant. His ideas were shaped from his lived experiences in the Caribbean, which were subjected to colonialism, the blending of cultures and the quest for self. He argued that cultures are not self-sufficient entities but are constantly interacting with one another, resulting in the creation of new forms. Apart from Glissant, there are several other theorists including Ulf Hannerz, Sidney Mintz, Françoise Lionnet and Shu-mei Shih, who have contributed to the development of creolization theory. As stated by Françoise Lionnet and Shu-mei Shih in their work, *The Creolization of Theory*:

Creolization commonly refers to a historical process specific to particular colonial sites and moments of world history, especially in the Caribbean and the Indian Ocean. Today, however, it is increasingly being used to describe many forms of cultural contact, including both reciprocal and asymmetrical exchanges across a wide range of cultural formations (1).

Creolization held different meanings in different places and times. It was derived from the Spanish word “Criollo” (Lionnet and Shih 22) and the Portuguese word “crioulo” (22). From the sixteenth century the term originally referred to children born to European settlers in the colonies. However, by the first half of eighteenth century it encompassed both whites and colonised people born in colonies. Later, in the nineteenth century it connoted specific language forms, while today it is understood as the blending of cultures.

The creolization of postcolonial literature frequently questions colonial histories and their legacy. Creolization theory examines how different cultures interrelate, merge and create new hybrid cultural forms. In the perspective of Robert Baron and Ana C. Cara in their work *Creolization as Cultural Creativity*, “Creolization is cultural creativity in process. When cultures come into contact, expressive forms and performances emerge their encounter, embodying the sources that shape them yet constituting new and different entities” (3). This is an integrative process that involves blending of languages, traditions, and

social practices among people from diverse cultural groups, ultimately leading to the formation of unique, syncretic cultures.

Michelle Mendonca Bambawale herself embodies a creolized identity, born as a Goan in Pune, studying in Mumbai, working and traveling in different parts of the world and finally settling in Goa. Having lived both within and outside of Goa, Bambawale offers a dual perspective, viewing Goa both as an insider and an outsider. She feels a deep sense of belonging to Goa and a strong affinity for Konkani language, which reverberates through each page of her memoir *Becoming Goan: A Contemporary Coming-Home Story*. The memoir explores the author's personal journey of reconnecting with her Goan roots. The memoir ponders on the themes of belonging, cultural creolization and her evolving relationship with her homeland. Through lively storytelling, Bambawale conveys the complexities of homecoming and cultural identity in a globalised world.

Creolization basically refers to the blending of cultures and languages in parts of the colonial world. As stated by Lionnet and Shih in their work *The Creolization of Theory* "...The Creolization model is used when referring to the mixing of cultures and languages in parts of the early colonial world. It describes a straightforward empirical reality in which cultural and ideological entanglements abound" (2). In this context, culture serves as an umbrella term that encompasses traditions, customs, cuisine, architecture, music, clothing, and more. Goa, having been conquered by several invaders, has experienced a rich tapestry of cultural influences, with the Portuguese influence being the most significant, due to their extended rule over the region.

The Portuguese have influenced Goa across all domains, including architecture, cuisine, language, social customs and governance, shaping the region's unique cultural identity. Goan architecture is characterised by Portuguese influence, evident in the region's magnificent churches and distinctive homes. Goan homes are adorned with vibrant colours, ornate balconies, elaborate tile works and rooster motifs,

representing the region's ties with Portuguese tradition. Rooster serves as the national symbol of Portugal symbolising honesty, integrity, trust and honour. It is customary for every Portuguese to have this emblem on their roofs to bring them good luck. Michelle Bambawale's memoir *Becoming Goan: A Contemporary Coming-Home Story*, expounds this feature as, "The roosters or the cockerel, the national bird of Portugal was supposedly a popular addition to the Catholic houses during the Portuguese era while the soldado played the protector as soldiers symbolize protection. You may also spot dogs, gargoyles, birds and angels on gateposts" (48).

The Portuguese influence in music is equally significant. Fado and Mando, were musical genres that were introduced to Goa by the Portuguese in 1820s, that have become an integral part of Goa's cultural heritage today. While Fado is a pure reflection of Portuguese style, Mando represents an amalgamation of Portuguese and Goan musical styles. Additionally, the Portuguese introduced several musical instruments such as violin, piano and mandolin, further enriching Goa's musical heritage. Bambawale's memoir beautifully pictures the essence of a cultural venue that celebrates the traditional music genres of Fado and Mando.

The charming Madragoa is the world's first house of Fado and Mando. A small but dramatically designed space in Panjim (ironically right across from the building casino lights), it is working hard to preserve and propagate Luso-Goan culture with its enchanting fado-mando nights, delicious snacks and drinks. It is a must-visit. I loved listening to and learning from Goa's nightingale, the talented always charming and smiling Sonia Shirsat (247-248).

Bambawale also mentions few other venues where concerts of traditional music are performed. 'Sounds From Goa' is one such initiative which hosts heritage concerts featuring traditional music, folk dances, authentic cuisine and beverages in heritage homes located in Benaulim in the south and Assagao in the north. It provides a setting to experience Indo-Portuguese culture in its entirety.

The colonial impacts of the Portuguese have been implanted in Goan cuisine as well, incorporating a diverse array of ingredients and cooking techniques. As stated by artist Kerkar and Naik in the *Gomantak Times*, “The Portuguese influence has completely changed the food habits of India, and labels them ‘culinary imperialists, rather than political imperialists’” (Kerkar and Naik). The inclusion of vinegar and spices is one of the key contributions. Evolving from the Portuguese dish, “carne de vinha d’alhos” (Bambawale 235), the pork delicacy known as vindaloo has become a Goan favourite. Vinegar, traditionally fermented from palm toddy, adds to the unique flavour of Vindaloo. Some other notable additions by Portuguese in Goan cuisine include Balchao, a spicy seafood pickle and Xacuti, a curry prepared with roasted coconut and spices. New food ingredients such as potatoes, tomatoes, cashews, pumpkins guava, pineapple, papaya and many others made their way from Portugal and have become staples in Goan food.

Goan meat dishes are no exception to the Portuguese influence. In fact, beef and pork were forcefully introduced by them and among Catholics there is a notable affinity for pork, with pigs often roaming freely in the yards of Catholic homes. Moreover, fresh pig blood is used to prepare Cabidela, a popular and highly regarded pork dish. Similarly, feni, a traditional alcoholic beverage, holds a special place among Goans. Goans often consider feni a remedy to cure both physical and mental ailments.

Bambawale’s memoir exquisitely captures the transformation involved in the making of feni:

...there are two types of feni: coconut and cashew. History suggests that feni was originally made from coconuts. The toddy sap was fermented to become liquor. Today, toddy tapping is a dying trade so we get very little of this coconut feni called *Maddel or Maddachim feni*. There are many popular Konkani songs still sung in praise of our original *maddachim soro*. Siolim was famous for its coconut feni. After the Portuguese brought cashews to Goa, feni started being made by fermenting cashew juice. This cashew feni is now more widely available (195).

While feni was not originally introduced by Portuguese, they brought cashews to Goa, which eventually replaced coconuts in its production, giving the drink a unique and distinct flavour.

With the introduction of bread, known as Pao in Portuguese, Goans wake up to the sound of the poder, the bread seller, blowing the horn as he cycles through the streets every morning and evening. The art of bread making is a tradition passed down to Goa by the Portuguese. Since their arrival, pao has become an integral part of Goan cuisine, serving as a versatile accompaniment to everything from tea to nearly every Goan curry. It also comes in various shapes and designs, each bringing its own distinct taste. As stated in the article by Rachel Fernandes, editor of *Times of India*, "In fact it was Goans who set up the first bakeries in then Bombay and introduced bread to the rest of India. Goa still has the largest variety of bread as compared to the rest of the country" (Fernandes).

The transformations in Goan architecture, music and cuisine clearly illustrate that Goa has experienced profound creolization, merging local tradition with Portuguese. Goan society and its culture would have evolved in an entirely different way, without its creolization with the Portuguese culture. The presence of various creolized elements not only reflects the lasting impact of colonisation on daily life but also signifies the fusion that defines Goa's unique culture. Bambawale's memoir *Becoming Goan: A Contemporary Coming-Home Story*, clearly sketches the uniqueness of Goa's creolization:

Goa is some sort of strange east-west hybrid, where Goans choose to define themselves as different people linguistically and culturally. Estranged from the rest of India because of its longer Portuguese colonization, Goan Catholics assimilated through social norms and adapted to westernized dress and food habits after converting. Over the centuries, there was a synthesis with the Latin culture and Goa got the 'eat, drink, sing, dance, and be merry' stereotype that we still have today. With its wine, women and songs, Goa is seen as more Western than the rest of India and is the exotic East for those from the West (35).

Despite the challenges of the colonial past, creolization has enriched and diversified the cultural identity of the region. It exemplifies the Goan population's welcoming nature to new influences and their ability to assimilate various features from other cultures, as their unique identity. As Goa continues to evolve in a globalised world, its creolized culture remains a vital and enduring legacy.

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