

CHRISTMAS IN GOA

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On Christmas Day in all the churches are represented the mysteries of the Nativity, with divers characters and animals introduced speaking; also marionettes and large rocks, and men within who make these figures act and speak as they will; everyone goes to see it. Even in most of the houses and at the cross streets they do the same; all along the streets, throughout the squares and wards, are tables laid with fine white napery, and covered with all manner of sugar-plums, dry comfits, marzipan, fashioned in a thousand ways, whereof everyone buys to give away in presents. It is like a fair and lasts until after Twelfth Night. By night they go and affix large bills inscribed with an Ano Bom, that is to say "Happy New Year", accompanying the same with instruments of music.

Editor's Note: Our ancestors it seemed, cared little for posterity. The above account of Francois Pyrard, who visited Goa and the East, is taken from a book of his travels published in Paris, 1615.

in 1973

In Goa today the approach of Christmas is heralded months in advance when villagers start white washing their homes in and out. Here and there a lone shoemaker and tailor gather advance X'mas orders and the village pig is being fattened. The Post Office depicts posters for people to send their Christmas cards more economically by sea mail.

Gradually brighter articles appear in Cities, buntings, white-kite-paper; flickering bulbs; crackers, presentable articles and last-minute greeting cards. A day or two prior to the 25th day of December, every village hears the sound of barking dogs, which are drowned by the continuous crying of a pig. For the last night of existence, the fatted-pig is bound hand and feet, only to be relieved of breathing at day-break. Rationing of grain is no barrier for the requirements of Christmas-day food-preparations. Every Christian home and locality is decorated with a white home-made star hanging near the main entrance door. Thus every Catholic is awaiting for the midnight bell to peal.

To Goa and the rest of the Christian world, the 24th night is a sleepless night. People crowd the churches, till the Church Ministers announce the birth of Christ, or suddenly the image of Infant-Baby is exposed, and immediately every bell sounds with joy, crackers burst, and Gloria-In-Excelsis-Deo is in the air. Prostrating themselves, all pay their humble respects, while senior-men take an extra dose at the bar, to warm themselves for the home-ward march.

Most women are engrossed in the day's thoughts. By day-break, few groups are hanging here and there, most take a couple of hours sleep. The bright sun of the 25th is up, and the best is every house is shining, a smile, interior-decorations, bottle and glass on the table, the kitchen is the busiest. All waiting to welcome one another. A visit by a Goan coming from overseas to one of these houses, could crown the day's extra joy. You will be greeted with "Boas Festas de Natal" or "Joyful Christmas" if you happen to return from Portuguese or British territories. 'Naurea, cal-cal' and a variety of home made sweets and cake with 'Cajel & Mardel' will be served to you. If you happen to stay for the afternoon, the dishes on the table will be appetizing, 'Sarne & Vore' 'Sorpatel, buch, baked-leitao' and pulao with plantains will be some of the rich delicacies.

The heavy meal will be followed by ease and 40-winks. The younger generation will be getting ready to get to the dance hall, where finally they will tune to "good-morning, good-morning....." Some, on the street will be softly singing "Holy Night" thus the Christmas day will vanish. The festive feeling will linger on for a week or two, till the seasoned sorpatel is completely wiped-off the toulí and New Year makes its appearance. The white-star will now be dismantled from its hangings, indicating the end of the festive season.

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