

The History Of The Goan Overseas Association

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Goans have traditionally been a highly socialized community, forming socio-cultural clubs wherever we go. Our roots are social, emanating from our traditional village system of government (or "comunidades") in Goa that continued for over 1000 years - well after similar such systems were destroyed in the rest of India. In Ontario, this penchant for organized social lives has manifested itself in the Goan Overseas Association (GOA), which is celebrating 25 years since its inception. It is the vehicle through which Goans express their collective joys and aspirations. Hence, its activities tend to be all-encompassing: social, cultural, sporting and welfare (looking after the unique needs of its troubled). The GOA is highly democratic association with an elected Executive (through sometimes vigorous campaigns) and a strong tradition of accountability to its members.

Twenty-five years in the life of an association is a matter of pride and joy. Beginning as a defined body in 1970 with just a few members, the Goan Overseas Association has now grown into a full-fledged organization of more than 1100 members representing at least 4000 people - or over 40% of the Goan community in the Greater Toronto Area (GTA). This is one of the highest participation rates among non-religious cultural organizations in the country. And so it is hard to imagine its humble beginnings.

GENESIS

When the first Goan arrived in Ontario is unknown, but certainly, Goans began arriving in significant numbers in the early 1960s. The migration from East Africa followed the growing Independence movements that brought uncertainty for Goans - and speeded up with the Expulsion of Asians by Idi Amin of Uganda; the flow from Pakistan was a reaction to rising intolerance of Christians; from India, perhaps it was just adventure - as it was with Goans from the beginning.

Life was not easy for those early pioneers in the 60s. They had left places with well-established social scenes, for the adventure of a vast Toronto where they had not yet made friends among the local populace, and old familiar Goan faces were not close by, and not everybody had a car. Some recall landing here with no set place to go and ended up in a Hungarian boarding house at 1075 Yonge Street. Canadians especially in Church were ever willing to be helpful, but the way of life here was so different that there was an urge to find familiar faces before adapting to the new environment. It seemed life was lonely for most Goans in Toronto then! In order to cope socially, the few struggling, relatively new immigrant Goan families would visit each other at their homes, or meet for picnics in order to reminisce and support one another. However, there was no large social functions such as Christmas and New Year's Eve Dances, or support group in place.

In 1967 Mr. Joe De Souza - our future first President - put an ad in the Toronto Star and the now defunct Toronto Telegram calling on all people of Goan origin to come together with the purpose of forming a Goan community centre. His first respondents were officers of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP). The RCMP wanted to check out the antecedents of the advertiser, what "Goan" meant and the need and purpose of setting up such a centre. They left reassured that this was no revolutionary movement. The advertisement did not draw a favourable response from the small Goan community of less than 100 families at that time. The new immigrants were obviously devoting their time and energies in organizing their own lives instead of pooling in their efforts with those few set to work for the welfare of the community.

Later in 1967, when Canada was celebrating one hundred years as a Dominion, some people of Indo-Pakistani origin - including Goans - organized the Pioneers Club and held the first dance around Christmas time. The scope of the Pioneers was limited to a single dance during the Christmas Season and there were no formal elections. In 1968, Alvito Fernandes, Leo Lopes and Savio Barros started organizing a few dances for Goans to meet. Alvito also organized a "Bachelors versus Marrieds" sports day in 1969 (which he would repeat under the auspices of the GOA the following year). These occasions were primarily attended by Goans from East Africa.

Perhaps the strongest force that brought many Goans together was the desire to form a Goan hockey team. This may seem surprising to the uninitiated, but Hockey had acquired cultural overtones among diasporan Goans. It became the medium we chose to express ourselves, as colonial and third-world pressures once made political expression difficult. No wonder that we played it with such an intensity and hence are represented in numbers way beyond our proportions in countries like India, Kenya, Tanzania, Uganda (at one time), Pakistan, and now Canada. Back in Toronto in 1968, some like Leo Lopes would organize practices among friends; many played for various existing teams in the Toronto area. In 1969 it became obvious to Roque Barreto that there were sufficient Goans in other teams to form a formidable Goan team.

Roque (Rocky) Barreto came to Canada in 1968. Within a year and a half of being here he had already become a member of the Parish Council of the newly opened St Sebastian's Catholic Church at 20 Pauline Avenue, Toronto, and was President of its St Vincent de Paul Society. (This connection would serve the GOA well later.) He also became a regular umpire with the Ontario Field Hockey Association (OFHA) and joined its Executive. It is from this vantage point that Rocky was able to see the breadth of talent and the opportunity it presented.

Rocky enlisted the help of his friends Aloysius (Al) Vaz and Wilfred (Willy) Monteiro to see the need and organize an all Goan field hockey team in Ontario and a Goan association to promote sports by generating funds from social functions. Many known Goan hockey players that played in the OFHA League emanating from various parts of the world were contacted with the idea of forming a new all Goan field hockey team for the 1970 summer season. Several meetings were held by the trio in St. Sebastian's Church, but the turnout was poor. A meeting was held in December 1969 at St. Sebastian Church, but of all the players that agreed to play, only seven attended, namely Roque Barreto, Al Vaz, Willy Monteiro, Tony D'Souza, Tony Fernandes (Brunswick), Alcino Rodrigues and Armando Rodrigues. Another meeting was called on 8 February 1970, but this time only 5 attended. As time was closing in on the 1970 hockey season, the five elected Roque Barreto as Chairman, Al Vaz As Secretary/Treasurer and Willy Monteiro as a Coordinator. The interim name "EAGLES" was suggested by Tony D'Souza and adopted. Rocky vigorously promoted the Goan team notwithstanding the absence of a full and proper squad, securing an entry into the OFHA with a personal guarantee and entrance fee.

The lack of a critical mass for the several meetings so far and inability of the new immigrant players to pay membership dues was disheartening. Undaunted, Rocky, Al and Willy arranged the St. Sebastian Hall for a meeting on the fateful date of 5 April 1970, this time with an open invitations to all Goans in Ontario. For a myriad of reasons, this meeting would be more successful, as we shall see.

Neves Menezes, who had come to Canada in 1964, had been also been pondering about a Goan association, having played such a large part in the Nairobi Goan community, and had been discussing the issue with friends, though with no particular sense of urgency. However, he recalls reading a disturbing story in the newspapers in February 1970 when Canada was going through a recession which convinced him that the time had arrived. A young Goan immigrant to Toronto had found himself without a job and with no money. Despondent and homesick., he decided to stow away on a plane at Toronto International Airport bound for his homeland, but only got as far as Dorval International Airport in Montreal when he was discovered in the

baggage compartment of the plane by the ground crew. In the ensuing trial the judge upbraided the young man, but noting his sad plight, dismissed his case with an appeal to his people - the Goans - to try and help others in similar situations within their community. This spurred Neves on to redouble his efforts, and when he heard of Rocky's call he hit the telephone lines to round up people.

Coincidentally the other trio of Al Fernandes, Savio Barros and Leo Lopes had organized a dance at the Royal York Hotel on 4 April 1970. Many of the attendees spread the word about the next day.

And word had also got around that the Eagles team had been registered for the 1970 hockey season which added to the excitement.

At 3.00 pm on 5 April 1970, in the basement of St. Sebastian Church, the meeting opened with Roque Barreto at the Chair, flanked by Al Vaz and Willy Monteiro. The attendance was a heart-warming 24(1), namely: Roque Barreto, Savio Barros, Arthur D'Costa, Rui & Sylvia D'Cunha, Dr. A.J. D'Mello, Anthony D'Souza, Augustine D'Souza, Joe De Souza, Peter & Henrietta D'Souza, Walter D'Souza, Romero Dias, Anthony Fernandes, Orlando Fernandes, Michael Lobo, Leo Lopes, Placido Madeira, Neves Menezes, Wilfred Monteiro, Alcino Rodrigues, Jules Sequeira, Melinda Sequeira, and Aloysius Vaz(1).

Rocky opened the meeting and Willy led off by explaining how the Eagles field hockey team came to be registered for the 1970 season. He expressed the desire to form an association to promote sports, but opened the floors for debate. In the ensuing discussion the scope was broadened to encompass a general association addressing all of the concerns of the Goan community. This expanded scope became the mandate of the new-born association. A "Caretaker Committee" was then elected to form a constitution for the association. Rocky was unanimously nominated to be the first president, but he declined. The majority present then elected Joe De Souza as first President of the association. However, the mandate of this new Committee included breathing immediate life into the Goan community and so the members included a comprehensive set of portfolios. An association was born, soon to be the most dynamic Goan Association in the world, the child of the village comunidades, the Catholic Gymkhana and kudds of Bombay, the Goan Institutes of India and East Africa, the Goan Association and Goan Union of Karachi, the St Francis Xavier Associations around the world, and Canada.

THE NAME

At the 5 April Meeting, the name Goan Ontario Association was proposed and accepted. However, at the meeting of 26 April, when the Constitution was tabled for discussion, the name Goan Overseas Association was proposed by Ladis DaSilva, seconded by Neves Menezes and accepted by the majority after hard politicking by Rocky and Lazarus Fernandes. At this latter meeting the steering committee's Aims and Objectives and Rules and By-Laws were accepted and approved. On 25 October 1970, at a General Body meeting of the GOA, Lazarus Fernandes and Martin A.C. Rodrigues proposed that all those Goans joining the association between 5 April 1970 and 31 October 1970 be registered as Founder Members of the G.O.A. Ontario. The proposal was carried unanimously.

THE EARLY YEARS

Rocky continued to be a guardian-angel to the GOA in those early years when the financial status of the association and its members was precarious. Through his close association with St Sebastian's Church, he obtained at no charge for the next three years the use of the Church Basement Hall or Parochial Hall for all General Body meetings, constitutional committee meetings, all executive meetings, sports meetings, St. Francis Xavier's Feast, Children's Xmas Tree etc.. Indeed, in gratitude to the Pastor of St Sebastian's, Rev Fr Peter Borgi was made the first Honorary Member of the GOA.

The new association wasted no time in getting down to business. The first social event organized was the Inaugural Sundowner Dance held on Saturday, 6 June 1970 at the International Institute in Toronto, a hall

obtained through Ladis DaSilva. Romero Dias and his wife donated the cost of the first bulletin and postage, Rui and Sylvia Da Cunha donated the bar, Neves and Mabel Menezes donated the music, and the dance was catered by Mabel Menezes, Anna Menezes, Flora Sequeira, Melinda Sequeira, Loretta Sequeira, Joyce Barros and Henrietta De Souza. The Inaugural Dance was followed by socials every two months: the Sports Dance on 1 August 1970; the Thanksgiving Dance on 3 October; St. Francis Xavier's Feast on 5 December; the Children's Christmas Tree Party on 12 December; the Christmas Dance on 19 December at the Lord Simcoe Hotel; the Carnival Dance on 27 February 1971, and the First Anniversary Dance on 17 April 1971 at St. Joseph's Hall.

In the 1970 season the hockey team played under the previously registered name of Eagles, but this was changed to GOA thereafter. The introduction of the Gold Cup Hockey Tournament into the OFHA Tournament Schedule in 1971 was a major coup of the young GOA. Again, Rocky's position in the executive of the Umpires' Association was instrumental (and as Sports Secretary of the GOA at the time, he organized the inaugural tournament). The trophy was named the Norbert Menezes Memorial Gold Cup after the father of the donor, Neves Menezes - the then President of the GOA. The tournament was won by the Tringos, with the GOA as runner-up. The Association's coat-of-arms was selected on 28 May 1972 through a contest, the winning design being produced by Anita Lopes. The same day a letterhead designed by John Fernandes was selected, and a flag proposed by Lazarus Fernandes. The Blue/Yellow colours of the association had been chosen in 1970 as follows - Blue by Rocky as Sports Secretary and Yellow by Al Vaz as Hockey Captain. The Goan Overseas Association was officially registered as a non-profit corporation in the Province of Ontario on 11 May 1972. The Charter was issued by the Hon. Eric A. Wrinkler, Minister of Consumer and Commercial Relations. The letters patent for the Charter was issued to Neves Menezes, Roque Barreto, Eddie D'Souza, Romero Dias, Norbert Lamas, Abilio De Souza, Alvito Fernandes, Pascal Gomes, Hubert Pereira and Placido Madeira.

EXPANSION

Within two years of striking roots on Canadian soil, the GOA was put to the test when the Canadian government accepted more than 7000 Asians, including 800 Goans, expelled from Uganda in 1972. The GOA worked closely with federal agencies, sponsoring many families and helping some families settle in Toronto. Alvaro (Al) Saldanha, who was the then Treasurer of the GOA attended meetings of the government's Toronto Uganda Committee regularly, made numerous calls to Neru Rodrigues, President of the Kampala [Goan > Institute, to collect names of people who were having difficulty getting visas, and arrange letters of sponsorship through the Immigration Ministry. Many arriving Goans will attest to the joy of being met by Al's friendly face at the airport. This influx of Goans increased the numerical strength of GOA.

The influx of Goans from Uganda in 1972 turned out to be part of a major movement of Goans in response to liberalization of Canadian immigration policy in the 70s. Between 1970 and 1975 the total population of Goans in the GTA increased from approximately 800 to 5000, with many Goans coming from Burma, India, Kenya, Malaysia, Malawi, the Middle East, Mozambique, Pakistan, Tanzania, Uganda and Zambia among others. Today the population in the GTA stands at around 10000.

PARADIGM SHIFT

At the very founding meeting of the association, there was a hint that the Goans here wanted to move away from the sports-dominated associations of their former countries. The 1976 financial statements showed that over 50% of the funds raised by the GOA was being used to promote sports and the proposed budgets by the sports members was increasing exponentially with every year. The sports members felt that this attested to the popularity of especially hockey and the publicity that the hockey team was offering the Goans. However, others believed that the GOA should emphasize diverse community issues. In 1976 a heated debate began at the Annual General Meeting that in hindsight signaled a paradigm shift in the thinking of Goans. The verbal duel persisted at General Body Meetings through several years between those for the status quo and those

who wished to change direction, until in 1979 agreement was reached whereby the profits from the annual Gold Cup Dance would become the maximum overall sports budget for the following year. Concurrently, the individual sports teams had been organizing private social fund-raisers under the GOA name, but not informing the GOA. The feud over the issue was settled also in 1979 by the direction that 1) if the funds raised were flowed through the GOA, then the funds would be held in trust specifically for the use of the specific teams, 2) the occasions must have the blessing of the Sports Secretary to ensure no conflict with regular GOA fund-raising events. The GOA had changed its priorities from sports to cultural and welfare.

The shift was no accident. It probably reflected the many changes that Goan society had undergone around the world. The ferment started as a consequence of the liberation of Goa from the yoke of Portuguese colonialism in 1961 (a liberation that was both physical and mental), the liberation from British colonialism of host countries of the Goan Diaspora - be it India, Pakistan, Burma, East Africa, and the awakening of Catholics through Vatican II (Goans in Toronto are predominantly Catholic). This ferment mirrored the period of introspection that Canadians were going through - the same doubts, fears, and the joys of discovery; we were captured by the new Canadian spirit of Multiculturalism. This change was later reflected in the improved intellectual quality of the GOA newsletter that has served as a model for Goan organizations around the world.

The three years of debates resulted in a number of changes: 1) the mandate of the GOA was expanded to include cultural activities and to undertake programs for the welfare and betterment of not only its members but of all Goans in Ontario. 2) the term "Goan" was broadened to emphasize people with origins are in Goa. Thus, those people who have at least one ancestor who was domiciled in Goa would be eligible for voting membership. (This was resolved at the AGM of 1978 when Eric De Souza proposed and John Nazareth seconded that if a person claims to be of Goan origin in the Membership Application Form, that claim would not be challenged by the Executive Committee.)

Constitutional changes in 1978 also introduced the Board of Trustees whose main purpose was to safeguard the surplus funds to the GOA. The passage on this change was slow until news reached us of a significant misappropriation of funds by the Executive of a sister Goan organization. Since then the Board has evolved to take on other functions; for example, it became a convenient body for the Executive Committee to seek advice. Also in 1988 it took on the role of running the Goan Charitable Organization.

Yet another change that would have a major impact on the Association was incorporated with other constitutional changes in 1981. Under the Chairmanship of Neves Menezes the Rules & Revisions Subcommittee proposed that the spouse and dependents over the age of 18 years of a member be accorded full membership privileges. The prime purpose was to seek a greater participation of women in the running of the Association. The proposal was passed without any of the great debates that had become customary with significant changes and this signaled the growing maturity of the Goan community with respect to the contemporary issues of equity. The change had the desired effect and indeed benefited the GOA immensely in that it brought in the services of talents that otherwise would have been excluded.

Most of these changes resulted in constitutional amendments after heated debates over many contentious issues, sometimes continuing over several General Body Meetings. The result was that a strong democratic foundation came to be laid which has remained unshaken to this day and one that appears to reflect our Canadian heritage.

CULTURAL AWAKENING

The Goa started with variety concerts in late 1971 organized by Olga Madeira, Anita Lopes and Alvito Fernandes. But with the paradigm shift came an explosion of cultural unfolding. The Goa staged its first Konkani Tiatr in 1976, thanks to [the late > Richard Fernandes. Later, members of the GOA spawned two Konkani performing arts groups: the Goan Theatrical Group in 1978 and the Goan Konkani Troupe. The

GOA gave its wholehearted support to these two groups which proceeded to establish an enviable record of Konkani Theatre and Goan dance. In May 1978 a one-day Goan Festival was held in at Toronto's Harbourfront. A debt is owed to [the late > Ladis Da Silva, artist and writer, who through his involvement with the Canadian arts community introduced Goans to the facilities of Harbourfront - Toronto's cultural playground. Ladis not only introduced the idea but steered the effort as Cultural Secretary in the Neves Menezes Presidency. The event was a major step in giving the GOA and Goans public exposure. This day-long cultural fest not only met its desired objective but it also gave the younger generation of Goans an opportunity to experience the Goan heritage through dance, food, art and literature. The success of this show gave further impetus for the GOA to launch a two-day festival at the same venue in August 1982. This made a deeper impact on the Canadian multicultural landscape. The Goan image was further enhanced and GOA earned notice at the government, provincial and municipal levels.

[Exposure does have its down side. At a special General Body Meeting held in early 1977 the President, Norbert Lamas read a letter he had received from the Nazi Party of Canada. The letter gave the GOA until 15 June 1977 to close the association, failing which the whole committee and their families would be assassinated. The letter was forward to the Police, who reassured the Executive they had seen similar letters and that it was intended as a scare tactic.>

INTERNATIONAL GOAN CONVENTION

These two experiments in cultural festivals provided the springboard for the International Goan Convention, the brainchild of then President Zulema De Souza, held in Toronto in August 1988. Spread over two weeks, the convention was an organizational highpoint. The conference part covered academic and business-related workshops, presentation of papers on Goan history, literature and architecture.

On the performing-arts side, a show with some top Goan singers, both local and foreign, well-known musicians Braz Gonsalves and a folk troupe, the Gavana Group from Goa, was held at Toronto's prestigious Roy Thompson Hall, with a concluding two-day cultural program at Harbourfront. During the hectic fortnight, there was a gala dance and other minor events. This extravaganza was the first of its kind in Goan history. Favourable media coverage in Canada and elsewhere, particularly Goa, put GOA (Ontario) on top of the Goan world. Delegates and visitors were amazed at the way the event was planned and successfully carried out. Herculan Dourado, an ex-member of Goa's legislative assembly felt compelled to remark, "Perhaps Goa is where Goans are."

METRO CARAVAN

The GOA became the cynosure of Canadian cultural agencies. The organizers of the Caravan, a ten-day multicultural festival spread around Metro Toronto, invited GOA to put up a pavilion. The GOA first accepted the challenge during the John Noronha Presidency, and spearheaded by the Vice-President, Alpoim (Al) Andrade, the Executive galvanized whole strata of the Goan community to stage the maiden appearance of the Panjim Pavilion" in 1990. Al led the repeat performances in 1991 and 1994. Visitors were treated to a delightful array of traditional dances such as the Dekhni, Mando, Phugdi, Kunbi Dance, Fisherfolk Dance, Carnival, Lances, Portuguese Dances; Book Exhibitions, bazaars, and good old Goan hospitality. The pavilion won awards for hospitality and choreography in 1990, the Staging Award in 1991, and awards for food and hospitality in 1994. These awards were no mean achievements as many pavilions have competed for 20 years without winning a single award.

STRUCTURAL CHANGE

Although the GOA has expanded from a small membership to over 1000, many felt that it was time to recognize that the GOA was primarily a Toronto organization, and steps should be taken use our experience to assist other Goans in Ontario form associations. This became apparent in 1981 with the formation of the Hamilton Goan Association (HGA). In 1985 the new President, John Nazareth, initiated a process, with the approval of the General Body, to change the GOA Constitution to permit the formation of chapters in

different parts of Ontario. He also persuaded the HGA to buy into the process with a view to becoming a chapter of the GOA. In 1986 the proposed Constitution was approved by the HGA, but rejected by the GOA General Body because it introduced the concept of allowing limited voting privileges for non-Goans. Although, the General Body asked the following Committees to come up with a revised Constitution, the process has died.

The International Goan Convention in 1988 had two sets of working sections, one on National Networking, and another on International Networking. This was made possible by the attendance of at least a dozen representatives of Goan organizations from other parts of Canadian and the world. After fruitful discussions the Canadian associations gave a mandate to the GOA to draw up a format and a draft constitution for a federation of Goan associations and circulate them to each association for approval. However, after some sporadic attempts the whole idea slipped away from the consciousness of all and the Goan associations in Canada remain a loose confederation with no joint course of action on national issues.

The International Networking had a somewhat better fate. The associations likewise gave the GOA the mandate to formulate rules for circulation to the attendant associations for an umbrella organization that would reflect the collective will of the Goan associations around the world. The International Goan Organization (IGO) was born. To date the IGO has held an Academic Conference in Toronto in 1990, and a Youth Convention in Goa in 1990. However, it has still to formulate an acceptable constitution for approval by the world-wide Goan associations and its status remains unclear.

UNITY

In the early days of the GOA Goans from outside East Africa did not feel a complete sense of belonging; indeed, many truly believed that GOA stood for "Goans of Africa". It was never clear how this alienation took place, but some speculation associated it with the sudden influx of Goans from Uganda. Each successive Executive Committee tried to foster unity with varying degrees of success. In the last decade the presidents made a conscious effort to ensure that the Executive had representation from all regions: Kenya, Bombay, Uganda, Karachi and Tanzania. (Today this is becoming harder to maintain, because the longer we stay here, the more we are identified as "Canadian" Goans, and perhaps therein lies the solution.) The push met with significant success epitomized in the much closer working relationship developed with the Canorient Christian Association (an association of pre-dominantly Goans from Pakistan). Indeed, since 1986 the Goan youth of both associations have been organizing social occasions jointly, and several debates have been organized jointly. There exists a strong desire on the part of the membership of both organizations that some unifying relationship be worked out. It is truly gratifying to see the GOA arrive at its twenty-fifth anniversary with all Goans more united than ever before.

THE NEWSLETTER

One of the most observable signs of progress of the GOA has been the newsletter, which has evolved from a few typewritten sheets in the early years to the newsmagazine we have today. At one time the newsletter used to be published monthly, but as a result of the quantum increase in postal rates in the early 1980s and the increase in cost due to the improvements in the printing quality, the frequency of the newsletter has been reduced to quarterly.

The editors who shepherded the biggest changes to the newsletter over the years have been Armand Rodrigues and Eugene Correa. An honourable mention is due to Michael Sequeira, whose printing quality in 1975 was more than a decade ahead of its time. In 1984 Bonny Andrade recognized that the transformation of the newsletter called for name; through a contest he organized that year the name "The Pulse of the GOA" was selected. The young team currently producing the Pulse headed by Christine Gomes also deserve to be commended for their excellence. The Pulse has become a model to emulate for Goan associations around the globe.

SOCIAL FUNCTIONS

Goans fill their lives with ballroom dances, family days, picnics, plays and special functions for their youth, young adults etc.. The most popular functions for the general membership are the Carnival Dance, Anniversary Dance, Sports Dance, Gold Cup Dance, St Francis Xavier's Feast, Christmas Dance, and the New Year's Eve Ball. These occasions are attended by the whole strata of Goan society and the turnout is normally between 400 to 1000. The dances started out being held at various locations around Toronto, but after the mid-1970s, most of them came to be held at the Queensway Lions Club of Etobicoke. The trust developed by our two organizations has significantly alleviated the burden on the GOA Executives. The Lions Club management has come to know us so well that indeed Bruce Chandler, the Manager, and Sergio Viglione, the Chef, have become as important to the GOA as members of the Executive.

The most popular dance in the Association is the New Year's Eve bash and its growth over the years has presented a real challenge to the various Executives. In the early 1980s tables had to be numbered to be able to accommodate the maximum number of people in the main hall. But in 1986 when the full contingent of 1000 tickets were sold out in a week the GOA had to think yet again. (The Executive of the day recalls receiving 200 telephone calls from enraged members.) The Executive managed to persuade the Lions Club to rent us the adjoining "Bingo" hall for the next year resulting in a record attendance of 1300 in 1987 - which was exceeded the following year with 1600. Due to the recession the number has dropped to a still respectable 1200 in 1994.

Incredibly, the Goan attachment to the villages of their ancestors is still strong several generations away from the motherland, and in recent years the following village feasts were celebrated: Aldona, Anjuna, AVC, Candolim, Cortalim, Mapusa, Moira, Navelim, Parra, Saligao, Salcete, Siolim and Tivim. Although these occasions are not organized by the GOA, they have been nurtured by our Association and it is predominantly our members that manage them. Religion plays an important part in Goan life and indeed, every "Village Feast" is associated with a Catholic Saint. However, for regular worship, Goans choose to join with the society at large and support their local parishes with the same boundless energy.

POPE'S VISIT

Pope John-Paul's visit on 14 September 1984 was a highlight in the life of the GOA. Under the Presidency of Savio Barros and spearheaded by the Vice-President Danny Gomes, the GOA organized a group at a spot along the Papal Motorcade. The eclectic group of a hundred singers and musician (trumpets, saxophones and violins) enthralled the crowds and led 600 or so pilgrims into the singing of hymns from morning to evening - to the delight of the TV crews around. Hazel Fernandes, the Cultural Secretary, was assigned the honour of being a member of the Offertory Procession, on behalf of the Goan community, at the Papal Mass held at the Downview airstrip. The Pope thrilled Goans around the world with his words "... and I bless the people of Goa...".

YOUTH WING

In most of the countries that we had come from, the Goan community were blessed with clubhouses that were used by our youth to interact with each other. Furthermore, in the years before 1960 the races/religions did not mix as freely as we do today. In either case, our youth got a chance to meet each other and absorb our culture. In Canada, this changed on both counts. Thus it was now important to find ways to get our children to meet each other or else they would soon meet all others but our own, that they would shed our Goan culture not because of any bad aspects, but because of a lack of opportunity to learn.

The inaugural "Teenagers Dance" was organized by Armand Rodrigues on 29 May 1975 during the Presidency of Martin J.C. Rodrigues. In 1978 a youth wing was started, and in 1982 it was formalized under a Youth Development Secretary. Within a short time of taking flight, the youths showed remarkable progress - during the first two years the average attendance for its social functions rose to 300. The success of the

youths set off another stream in 1986 - the Young Adults committee. Both groups have grown from strength to strength.

In 1985, the youths organized a fashion show. The show was so impressive that a wonder-struck Mayor Jackson of Vaughan remarked: "How do you manage to get your youths to work together so well!". In 1987, they put up Tonight at Eight, an entertainment programme featuring dances, music and a famous musical. In 1988 they presented several features at the International Goan Convention. In 1989 Warren Lobo spearheaded a performing arts group, under the wings of the GOA, called Goans On Stage that has put on three successful shows at Markham Theatre: "The King and I", "The Sound of Music", and the most recent (1994) "Jesus Christ Superstar".

Senior's Group

The GOA has been holding the annual Ladainhas for the Seniors for years. But the impact of the GOA is much deeper than is apparent at first glance. The GOA nurtured the activities of the Seniors to the extent that, together with the Canorient, it was responsible for the formation of the East and West End Seniors. The strength of these associations can be attested to by the seniors. However, the achievement is a mixed blessing as it has resulted in the GOA's loss of the services of some brilliant organizers; the names of Frank De Souza and Theo Gomes in particular come to mind.

WELFARE

Expounding the activities of the GOA in this field is difficult as the details have always remained discreet for obvious reasons. Suffice it to say that the association started regularly providing help for the needy and/or troubled in the Goan community (be they members of the GOA or not) from the mid-1970s. The help has taken the form of financial/personal support/mental. The program is particularly helpful in cases where people fall between the cracks in the public system. In one instance a widowed mother of two children approached the GOA for help to assist her buy a typewriter to keep herself employed. The GOA worked with her and she ended up seeing her children through university. Today she is a strong supporter of the GOA. In another instance when a couple was in trouble, several members of the Executive and their spouses took turns cooking meals for the family for weeks until all was well. Every Executive could give similar examples.

In 1988 thanks to the efforts of the then Vice-President, Al Matthias, the association finally managed to register a charitable foundation with Revenue Canada called the Goan Charitable Organization (GCO). Today the GCO is the main body for providing financial assistance to the needy in the Goan community. The GCO is headed by the Board of Trustees of the GOA.

GOAN CULTURAL CENTRE

Since the beginning of the GOA, members were keen on having their own community centre. The first actual proposal for a Centre was made by Dr Tony Lopes at the 1973 AGM and enthusiastically approved. A Building Committee was formed and studies begun. In 1978 a detailed study was produced by the Chairman, Percy De Souza. In 1983-84 a pledge campaign was begun, and offers started being placed on prospective properties. Finally in late a 9500 sq ft building was purchased at Canmotor Avenue in Etobicoke. An extensive campaign was launched to convert the pledges to cash; today about 64% of the membership has contributed by the purchase of bonds or donations. The building generated a lot of excitement, but zoning difficulties resulted in the building being sold (at a profit) in 1987.

For the next two years the project became stalled again. Then in 1989 a 10-acre parcel of land with a 2000-sq ft house on it was purchased at Kirby Side Road, a short distance away from the famous amusement park, Canada's Wonderland. However, in 1992 the Provincial Government exploded a bombshell by proposing a Dumpsite close to the location. This, together with the severe recession since 1990, put a freeze on the GOA's development plans. Under the circumstances the GOA has done a valiant job in maintaining the

financial strength of the association in trying times. The dumpsite plans are expected to be finalized in the near future and this will allow the GOA to progress with the project.

The GOA is indebted to many who have served in the Building Committees through trying times, and in particular Darrell Carvalho, Osmond Remedios and Ralph De Souza.

THE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

It is a common misconception that the Executive Committee (EC) consists of a ruling clique, and yet nothing could be further from the truth. Indeed, over the last ten years, over 60% of each EC elected had never served in the EC prior to election. This is a strength and a weakness: a strength in that it has involved a large segment of the community in the running of the Association, a weakness in that inexperience results in more errors made. The large number of people involved with the EC also attests to the desire on the part of the Goan community to perform volunteer service, and the experience gained has been used in Canadian society at large, whether it be in local church parishes, at work, or in charitable organizations.

The GOA has encouraged the participation of the Youth in all parts of the organization over the years. It has also encouraged the involvement of women, no doubt influenced by the women's revolution in Canada. These changes were embodied in the rule-change in 1981 whereby dependants over 18 years and spouses of members were accorded equal voting privileges. These changes had an exhilarating impact on the make-up of the EC. For example, prior to 1981, the proportion of women in the EC was on average less than 5%; in the last decade this proportion has risen to 45%! Likewise the proportion of Youth in the EC has risen from 10% to over 30% in the same period.

From this large group of volunteers the membership, and indeed the Goan community at large, has received an immeasurable benefit. A special thanks is due to a number of individuals for their years of service: [the late > Victor Abreu - Treasurer, Lydia Nazareth - Social Secretary, Alvito Fernandes and Anthony Mascarenhas - several portfolios. Thanks to Anthony the primary records of the GOA - the minutes of the General Body Meetings - are in good order, and this was invaluable in producing the history of the Association.

THE PRESIDENTS

When the GOA was first started, the Founder Members wanted to emphasize that this was an association for all Goans. This was reflected in the choice of the first five presidents: Joe De Souza hailed from Pakistan, Neves Menezes - from Kenya, Martin A. Rodrigues - from India, Romero Dias - from Tanzania, and Martin J. Rodrigues - from Uganda. It is these first five Presidents that we thank for the survival and growth of the Association.

Joe De Souza (1st & 2nd President): Joe came to Canada in 1966 and soon established a Driving School that he runs to this day. He also has been a disc-jockey and hence is known affectionately as "Jitterbug Joe". His daring outlook (going into private business was extremely rare for Goans in those days), is perhaps what those founder members felt the nascent GOA needed.

Neves Menezes (3rd & 9th President): Neves had a major impact on the general direction of the GOA in the first dozen years, being instrumental in several changes to the Constitution. In his tenures the emblems of the Association were chosen, the first cultural festival at Harbourfront was held, and thanks to him, spouses and dependent members have been able to take part in the Committees.

Martin A. Rodrigues (4th President): Martin's Executive was tested with having to respond to the Uganda crisis. That the young association was able to help many, a couple of whom immediately joined his Sports Committee, is a testimony to the tenacity of his Executive.

Romero Dias (5th & 6th President): Romero was the guiding light in the drafting of the first constitution of the GOA. He also established the formats of the General Body Meetings and Executive Committee Meetings, much of which have remained to this day.

Martin J. Rodrigues (7th President): In an unassuming way Martin's tenure ushered in two important events: the staging of the first Youth Dance, and the first Konkani Thiatr.

Norbert Lamas (8th President): Norbert was renowned as the Law and Order president; in his presidency the affairs of the GOA were put in good stead. He has been the only one to rent an office for the GOA, and for a while it was easy to manage the affairs of the association. This was an important achievement as the phenomenal growth in the GOA (from 140 in 1970 to 700 in 1976) put strains on the administrative abilities of the young organization.

Savio Barros (10th, 11th, 15th & 19th President): Savio has been elected president more often than any other person in the first 25 years; whenever the GOA has been in dire need, Savio was always there to offer his services. His Executive was the first to begin the pledge campaign for the Building, and the first to start putting offers for buildings (in 1984) after years of discussions at meetings.

Alcino Rodrigues (12th & 13th President): Alcino, a renowned athlete, had been responsible for enhancing the stature of the Track & Field competition in the GOA prior to his presidency. He represents the first sports person of the Association to take the reins of running the general affairs of the GOA; others have followed in his footsteps. His Executive was responsible for enhancing the Scholarship and Welfare Funds.

Zulema De Souza (14th & 17th President): Zulema, the first [and sole > female president to date, has been the most dynamic president the GOA has had in its first twenty-five years. It is through her energies that the first International Goan Convention was held. In her tenure youth activities were increased substantially. Her Executive was responsible for registering the Goan Charitable Organization and fostering the birth of the International Goan Organization.

John Nazareth (16th President): John encouraged the youth to get involved . This encouragement was the beginning of a driving force which saw our youth take an active interest in the Association. In his tenure the GOA and Canorient started the tradition of hosting joint Youth functions. His Executive was also instrumental in purchasing the GOA's first building and starting the major drive of collecting funds for the project.

John Noronha (18th President): John's Executive spearheaded the first entry of the GOA into Caravan. In his tenure the current building at Kirby Side Road was purchased and his Executive was responsible for reviving the fund-raising drive. He has also been instrumental in re-negotiating the Building mortgages on several occasions to lower the carrying costs.

Errol Francis (19th President): Errol, the current president, is a person with a flair and this has been reflected in all the occasions arranged by his Executive. The major achievement of his tenure has been raising sufficient funds to keep our building project afloat during a severe recession.

SPORTS

As borne by the fact that the seed for the GOA was sown on the playground of field hockey, sports continue to play an important role in the social milieu of Goans. Every time we think that's it for hockey. A new group of young players get interested. The GOA has perhaps contributed more players to the Ontario provincial teams than any other organization.

A special mention to a few people Leo Lopes for encouraging young people to play, Charlie De Souza who has trained several teams to produce national class players, Astrid De Souza and Philandro Fernandes for years of time contributed to hockey, Donat De Souza and Edwin Fernandes for remaining in the premier GOA team from 1970 to today, Rocky Barretto (mentioned before), and David Nazareth for enhancing the standing of the GOA through his refereeing.

Denis Pereira (then VP Sports) and Anthony Braganza (Sports Secretary) are remembered with awe for producing the most memorable Gold Cup Tournament ever in 1986. The excitement was generated by the presence of two teams from Bombay (Tata Sports Club, and Catholic Gymkhana) that included several India National Team players, and Mombasa Institute, which was here on a Sports Visit. The tournament attracted the largest number of spectators (over 2000 watched the finals) of any field hockey tournament in Ontario to date and the associated Gold Cup Dance was also attended by a record 1500 people.

THE FUTURE

In his novel Flight to Canada, the American writer Ishmael Reed alludes to Canada as the Promised Land to many fleeing slaves in the last century. As we reflect on the a quarter-century of the association, we Goans can earnestly say that Canada has indeed been the promised land to us. This is so because it provides the opportunities and ideals that we as a community hold dear to ourselves. On perusing the book The 49th Paradox - a book on the Canadian psyche by Richard Gwyn - it becomes obvious that Canadians and Goans share an uncanny number of strengths, weaknesses, convictions and aspirations resulting from our respective historical legacies. Consequently, it is not surprising that we have joined the Canadian mainstream in most ways so quickly. We have in our numbers doctors, lawyers, accountants, nurses, teachers, engineers, policemen and proprietors of whom over 40% are in management or the professions - a statistic above the national average. In 1985 the Executive conferred Honorary Membership on Lata Mangueshkar who had just performed a charity concert to raise funds for the United Way. The award was in recognition of a great Goan(1) performing an important charitable function for Ontario. All this, and we have been here for just 25 years.

The GOA is shepherding the rise of a confident and aggressive community, and the years ahead will see us participating more vigorously in the last frontier - politics. The GOA has encouraged its members to involve themselves in all levels of politics. We have among our models Keith Vaz, MP in the UK Parliament, and Norberto D'Costa, former Prime Minister of Portugal in the late 1970s, who have shown us what Goans can accomplish in their adopted countries. The seeds of the future tree are apparent when we see people like Milu Rodrigues - who is Assistant Mayor in Amherst NS, Prof. Emile Carasco - who was the NDP candidate in Windsor in the last Federal Election, Len Cardozo - who is the President of the Federal Liberal Association in the riding of Sergio Marchi, the Federal Minister, and some of our members have joined with members of the Canorient to form the CAN-GO Liberals, an association to assist various Liberal candidates on an organized basis.

So what lies ahead for Goans and the GOA? Like Canadians at large, we are trying to increase the awareness of our heritage, secure in the knowledge that this will make us good Canadians. The GOA will continue to grow as long as it continues to serve the needs of its community. The current severe recession has hit our community and the GOA Building Project hard. But, when we see the number of our youth draw from the association the strength to serve the nation we know that we have succeeded in our primary quest. In this light these struggles are only a setback, and perhaps the harder the adversity, the sweeter will be the fruits of success.

May God bless the GOA - and Canada for giving us a place to grow.