

How to make Feni uniquely Goan

Learning from the masters

Seeking India's first liquor Geographical Indication

All photos by Dr Dwijen Rangnekar



How do *Scotch* and *Tequila* manage their GIs? *Scotch* is controlled by the Scotch Whisky Order of 1990 (see accompanying box). It is a relatively low standard. Apart from distilling and maturing in Scotland, it establishes only a three-year period of maturing. A look at a bottle of *Scotch* informs the consumer of the liquor's heritage, the distillery – and most importantly – the type of *Scotch*.

What are the lessons for *Feni*? By specifying a requirement for bottling in Goa, the chances of ensuring greater local economic control in the future is higher. Single malt *Scotch* distillers, for example, are presently considering introducing a revision to the Scotch Whisky Order of 1990.

The bigger lesson is for a relatively low minimum standard. This will allow many different distilling techniques and types of *Feni* to



flourish. But maintaining the cultural and traditional integrity of *Feni* means that certain developments may best not be permitted. For instance, industrialised single-batch and continuous distilling chamber is best excluded from the *Feni* GI-club.

Like in *Mezcal* and *Scotch*, the label becomes ever more important in product differentiation and segmenting the market. The label should mention the main ingredient (*caju* or palm), the distilling technique (*launi*, semi-traditional), the *grau*, and any other specifications that may help in differentiating it on the shop shelf (year of distilling and/or bottling, etc).

From March through May, anyone who moves into the interiors of Goa, away from the tourist trap of the beaches, is met by the distinct aroma of fermenting *caju* apples. This is the season for *Urrack*, the people's favoured tippie during these hot months, and *neero* – the last dregs of the crushed and squeezed *caju* apples. Little else can quench the thirst as effectively.

But it is *Feni* that is Goa's most famous drink. The association between *Feni* and Goa is known through guide books and even the efforts of the Goa Tourism Department, with its fish, football and *Feni* campaign. It is the search for a good *caju feni* that most aficionados discuss and debate.

Yet, it is in the literary and oral tradition that enduring elements of the association are found. Novels and essays wax lyrical; Lambert Mascarenhas's sacristan unremittently demands a glass of *Feni* from the miser... Frank Simoes stands up to answer all questions about *Feni*. Dominic, in his eponymous collection takes a nostalgic journey into childhood and the summer foot-crushing of *caju* apples. Anita Desai speaks of a "poison called *Feni*" in Baumgartner's Bombay. And I am yet to say a single word about Palm *Feni* – the 'other' *Feni* which seems destined for a step-brotherly treatment.

For quite some years now the government of Goa has been working on applying for a geographical indication (GI) to protect *Feni*. These efforts have witnessed many meetings and the establishment of an internal, cross-departmental body with wide ranging expertise to look at various aspects of *caju* – its historical antecedents, the excise system, and chemical analysis. In recent years, the Goa Cashew Feni Distillers and Bottlers Association, has been pursuing the GI application for *caju*. After a number of meetings with distillers and bottlers, the association and the Goa government's Department for Science and Technology submitted an application for *Goan Cashew Feni*.

If this application gets registered, then it will not only be the first GI from Goa but also first GI in India for an alcohol. This is somewhat surprising since there are many products from Goa that qualify for a GI, like *Bebinca*,

Scotch can only be made in Scotland; Champagne only in the district that bears its name in France. Tequila can only be made in Mexico. Now, a unique initiative seeks a Geographical Indication (GI) for *Feni*. This will mean that only cashew and coconut liquor made in Goa can bear that unique name. Dr Dwijen Rangnekar reports

Dodol and the *Mancuvad* mango, to name a few. It is equally surprising that no other indigenous alcohol has come forward to claim a GI. This may be because of the huge organisational process required. Not only does the law require the applicant to be representative of the interests of producers, but it is desirable that the interests of different individuals and firms are accommodated in a GI. With over 2,500 licensed distillers, over 110 wholesalers and bottlers and some 6,500 retailers – in *caju* alone – this is a logistical challenge.

There are other reasons for proceeding with caution. The registration process has a period of public review. If segments of the *Feni* trade, including aficionados, find something amiss in the application, they could raise an objection, substantially delaying the registration process. Moving to a GI-registration system also requires generating awareness of new codes and systems, to ensure that the new licensing system is easily adopted by distillers, bottlers and drinkers.

These issues were discussed at a

A feni still (above). Crushing the fruits (down). Separating the nuts from the fruits (below right).



recent stakeholders' meeting in April 2008 at the Majestic Hotel, Porvorim. The meeting was part of a research project conducted by a team that includes academics from India, the UK and Mexico, intellectual property lawyers, and senior bureaucrats from the Indian government. At the meeting, there was wide consensus and support for using GIs for *Feni* and appreciative recognition of the efforts by the newly-formed Association and the government of Goa. But there were also some questions and recommendations on how to proceed.

Many questioned the decision to focus exclusively on *caju Feni*, excluding the 'other' *Feni*. This also raises strategic questions about legally appropriate terminology. Everybody knows that *Feni* is a particular alcohol distilled in Goa from either *caju* or palm sap, even popular guide books like *Lonely Planet*. The Chambers Dictionary says that *Feni* is "an alcoholic spirit produced in Goa from coconuts or cashew nuts". It may have mistaken

(Continued on page 23)



Scotch Saga

The Scotch Whisky Order of 1990 defines Scotch as:

- Produced at a distillery in Scotland from water and malted barley (fermented only by the addition of yeast), to which no substance other than water and spirit caramel has been added

- Distilled to an alcoholic strength by volume of less than 94.8%

- Has been matured in an excise warehouse in Scotland in oak casks of a capacity not exceeding 700 litres for a period not less than 3 years

Yet, within these rules there are actually five types of Scotch – single malt, single grain, blended, blended malt and blended grain – that have only recently been codified into laws following well-acknowledged conventions.

Goa's heritage



Goa is blessed with abundant archaeological heritage. From the ancient, to that of the Muslim and Portuguese eras! Not much is promoted for tourism. Worse, an insensitive government, down decades, allowed some of the priceless heritage to be vandalized.

Last year, I was with a journalist-friend (now with a national newspaper), near Old Goa, the former capital city. It was once the principal trading port of Asia, a city that travelers compared to Lisbon and Rome. It was protected by rivers and manmade moats on all sides. And double fortification walls, the outer and inner one.

We went to see extant vestiges of the outer fortification. This huge wall, constructed in oversized laterite stones of that bygone era, had a width of seven to eight metres and a height of

four to five metres. It took 17 years to build. It housed the seven entry arches to the city, matching its number of over-looking hills, where visitors were stamped on the shoulder after paying the entry toll. One such, a beautiful archway at the Sao Bras quay, was demolished in the early 1990s – so trucks could ferry across the Cumbarjua canal! Remnants of another, by which Albuquerque stormed into the city in 1510, lie in shambles across the St. Catherine Chapel.

From the point the outer fortification intersected the Raj Bidi (a 65-foot wide, eight kms. long, paved 'Royal Road' between the old capital Govapuri – Pilar/Goa Velha – and the emerging one), the wall proceeded westward through St. Simao (Gancim/'Gausni') and Ribandar, thence along the Mandovi to the docks of the city. Lore says it encom-

passed Moulem, Santana (Talaulum), Curca, Bolmear, Bambolim, right up to the 'Cabo' of the Dona Paula plateau. This western part of the wall, sadly, was long extinct.

Parts of its eastern side from the Raj Bidi intersection exist. The fortification ran from Goalim Moula through "Antonio Estevam" (sprawling private properties, the most famous perhaps of some Antonio Estevam!), the Carambolim hill and habitation zone, its vast expanse of 'Savat' paddy fields – Petier, Gudier, Panch Manos, Kolva Kator and Daddo.

Then along the riverbank to the Banastarim bridges. Thence to Corlim, Gandaulim, Daujim, to join its other end at the city's docks ... at the "Mandvi" or "Casa de Alfandiga" (Customs House), near the Arch of Conception on "Rua de Mandovi" – the river Mhadei, some say, that was rechristened after the Bijapuri "Mandvi."

Parts of the wall exist in the Carambolim paddies at 'Panch Manos,' even if its original height is down to a fraction. Three waterways punctured the wall on this stretch. Over the waterways, the wall rose into massive arches. Their height, as 60-year-old local Menino Melo

recalls from his childhood (when the arches were still reminiscent of their old splendour), was some eight metres above the water level. Higher arches meant better visual cover at these susceptible points. Panch Manos has a dozen dwellings.

The wall then proceeded eastwards to Manguairal ("mango orchard") and Daddo. In the expanse of Carambolim's flat paddies, Manguairal and

were carted from Daddo to Dona Paula, for the bay's breakwaters! A piece was leveled for a ferry-crossing road.

The city entry arch at Daddo, though, mercifully exists. "That would have also gone," says Kuttikar, "but nobody dared touch it, not even Bandodkar."

When pressed, Kuttikar whispered the arch was the abode of the 'Kot-a denvchar,' demon god of the fort. Whether demon or god helped save that vestige of our heritage, sheer neglect will ensure its early demise. Trees now thrive on it. Once the roots get to the keystone, the arch will be gone. Of the City's seven arches, only Daddo's survives in some semblance of shape. It's a picture-perfect setting for a 'son-et-lumiere' show on Goa's history.

Kuttikar swears oral traditions in his humble hamlet hold that doorways of the outer fort wall were "bigger than those of the churches in the city." Those doors, doorways, even large parts of the wall lie vandalized. Its ancient stones were used to build houses. The former city's churches are now World Heritage. The sentinel that protected them is forlorn and forgotten. Who lights candles to a broken cross?

ALL 'N' SUNDRY

By Valmiki Faleiro

Daddo appear manmade marvels of high ground, like isles in an ocean. Daddo is idyllic, bordered by myriad water bodies – as yet undiscovered by Bollywood, 5-star hoteliers, and casino operators. It has 11 houses. The inner fortification joined this wall at Daddo, an important S-E point in the city's defense. On raised ground at its turret was barracks for 100 soldiers. The barracks disappeared over time, as did most of the wall. Local resident, Krishna Kuttikar, also about 60, says Goa's first Chief Minister, DB Bandodkar, vandalized the wall. It seems its huge stones

How to make Feni uniquely Goan

(Continued from page 17)

the cashew nut for the caju apple, but even if a GI were to be granted for 'Goan Cashew Feni', the continued use of the term by those making palm feni would dilute the economic benefits of the caju feni GI.

as a stronger consensus – though possibly harder to achieve – might be more cohesive and long-lasting.

Besides, the use of adjectives, prefixes or suffixes suggests that the term Feni is possibly semi-generic or has lost its specificity. The adjectives also allow others

are qualified by adjectives identifying location or ingredient.

Feni must look at practices in other alcohol GIs for guidance. Lessons can be drawn from the Mexican Mezcal where labels are used to differentiate within a GI. Mezcal is distilled from the leaves of the maguey plant of the Agavaceae family, which grows across Mexico. Of the over 100 species, just a few are used for distilling Mezcal. Type I Mezcal is from juice containing only agave sugars (100 per cent Agave). Type II Mezcal allows needs at least 80 per cent of agave sugars and 20 per cent of non-agave sugars. There is further diversity of the different species used and locations of distilling. It's through intelligent and informative labelling that the consumer knows about the Mezcal (s)he is drinking; species of agave, location, name of master distiller, etc.

What are the lessons for Feni? With a GI registration using the term Feni, the label would identify whether it is caju or palm; the distilling process (double or triple), the grau or alcohol content,

the location, and any other feature that the distiller (or bottler) considers significant.

A second issue was the new rules that will define Feni. A GI application requires elaborate information about the product, including a map of the territory, details of the production process, specifications of raw materials, (caju apple and palm), and details of the producers. These define the relationship between the product and the identified geographical territory of origin. In the future, this will define the rules of membership to the Feni 'GI-club'. Only those who distil Feni according to the specifications and have their units in the designated territory will be allowed to use the term. Those who don't would be excluded from the 'club' and prohibited from using the term Feni.

The writer is Assistant Professor of Law, Centre for the Study of Globalisation and Regionalisation & the School of Law, University of Warwick, UK. He is the principal investigator for the research project on Geographical Indications and Feni that is funded by the Economic and Social Research Council. Further details about the research are available at www.warwick.ac.uk/go/feni



The semi traditional coil method (above) and the traditional launi method of distillation (left).

Savouring the flavours of Feni

There are differences in the equipment used in distilling and even in the process, which creates variations in the grau – as seen in the accompanying table from the Baseline Survey of the caju sector conducted by Pranab Mukhopadhyay of Goa University and the South Asian Network for Development and Environmental Economic, which produced some useful insights.

Personal experience – which any other aficionado would vouchsafe – establishes a magnificent diversity. There is masala feni, lemon grass feni and, among other less popular mixes, there's even garlic feni!

Direct sale by distiller to consumer is the leading mar-

ket segment. Over 75 per cent of bars and taverns directly source their feni from distillers. The bottled and branded segment of the market is quite small and there is little integration between distillers and bottlers.

What do these patterns mean for the GI application? Can any of the existing techniques of distilling (launi, semi-traditional with coil and industrialised, single-batch continuous condensing chamber) be disqualified from using the term in the future? Or, to reverse the question: what specifications should be mentioned in the GI-application? This would also determine whether in the future the liquor could be exported in bulk for bottling outside Goa.

Looking back, looking forward

Where does the Feni GI story move from here on? Legal professionals pointed out that as the application was already submitted, there are some, but limited, ways to amend and correct an application. If the issues raised at the meeting are considered relevant, then it becomes incumbent on the Association and the government to make the amendments; if necessary, to

draw the application for the revision.

This is a difficult decision; however, the transition from existing practices to a GI-regulated Feni sector is neither simple nor quick. The new rules for Feni – caju and palm – must necessarily be reasonable and responsive to the diversity. Otherwise, what gets into the bottle will not be accepted as Feni – and that won't be funny anymore.

Know your Feni

Value of Grau	Distillers (%)	Bottlers (%)
Under 19	9.6	28.6
19	2.1	28.6
20	24.3	0.0
21	26.3	28.6
22	16.7	0.0
23	1.7	0.0
Above 23	0.3	14.5
Total Number	300	19

Source: Mukhopadhyay, Maurya and Mourya (2008) Baseline Survey of the Feni Sector. Report for the ESRC Project on Geographical Indications and Feni



professionals at the meeting said that the historical use of the term in trade cannot be automatically prohibited by the acquisition of a recent intellectual property right like a GI. To avoid intra-trade conflicts, it was suggested that palm feni be incorporated into an umbrella Feni GI. There is wisdom in this approach

to enter the market with a liquor using the term Feni, but differentiated by other adjectives. For example, Malwani Cashew Feni or Canara Cashew Feni. This gives the impression that there is more than one Feni! Consider the iconic GIs of Champagne, Tequila, and Scotch; none of the terms

SPOT THE BALL



Spain's Fernando Torres fights for the ball with Italy's Christian Panucci during a friendly at Elche, Spain, but we have hidden the ball. Mark an 'X' where you think the ball is, write your name, address and telephone number, cut it out along the dotted line, put it in an envelope and hand it in at any Herald office or post it to 'Herald Spot-the-ball Contest, Rua Sao Tome, Panjim-403001' by THURSDAY 22 May. Two winners get cool Budweiser T-shirts.*

*All entries must come in clippings from the Herald. Xerox copies not allowed. In case there is more than one correct entry, the winner will be decided by a draw of lots.

WINNERS

1. FRANCIS ALPHONSO, ST. ESTEVAM
2. VAILANCIO FERNANDES, SALEM



Name _____
Address _____
Tel: _____

LAST WEEK'S SOLUTION



Bonding thru train travel

Actually until I discovered AC III a few years ago, the second class sleeper was a regular mode of travel for me especially when my kids were growing up. And they loved train travel.

Nothing can beat the fun of train travel, second class, sleeper. Travelling by air-conditioned coach is more comfortable, cleaner, quieter, but it does not have the warmth and camaraderie that the second class sleeper has. Booking my reservation even a month beforehand I was informed that no AC reservation would be available that I would have to travel to Chennai by Second Class. The route is hot and muggy and I will sweat, I told the booking clerk. Window will be open modom, not to worry, she said.

Actually until I discovered AC III a few years ago, the second class sleeper was a regular mode of travel for me especially when my kids were growing up. And they loved train travel. You could eat, you could move around, you had moving scenery outside any window, they found the toilets wildly adventurous, the people were interesting and all sorts of goodies could be bought and consumed without any hassles. A startling amount of cucumbers, raw mango, sukha bhel, monkey nuts and wada pao made their way into normally fussy tummies.

Kids serve a purpose. They are a passport to

fun times and allow you to lose yourself in the magic of childhood especially when traveling. During this trip to Chennai however, I was doing it alone. The kids had grown up and left and I solemnly checked out my compartment and found two foreign women sitting opposite me.

I hate the way my countrymen and women fawn on white skinned and fair-haired people,

U jus' gotta laugh

BY BEVINDA COLLACO

so I lean the opposite way to maintain some sort of balance I guess. I gave them both a disinterested look, but kept them firmly in my peripheral vision. The younger woman, sturdy in an orange kurta and black salwar had finished her orange drink and was making ready to throw the plastic bottle out of the train window on to the tracks at Vasco.

Why I did it, I'll never know, but I gave her a frosty look and said, please don't throw that bottle out, put it in the bin near the wash basin.

Her jaw dropped but she picked it up and her bottle and moved towards the washbasin area saying, Wow, this is the first place in India there are rules against littering.

Everywhere else, it's throw it outta da window. She came back a good ten minutes later huffing and puffing. There was no bin near the wash basin she said and she had to gallop down the platform to find a bin to throw the bottle away and gallop back to the train. I felt bad but laughed instead and was laughing the other side of my face when I found that I could not throw my empties outta da window, but had to practise what I preached and keep them neatly in my bag until I reached Chennai.

It took an hour to discover that all prejudices disappear with train travel. A Tamil family using the bunks next to ours, the two foreign women, a man from Karnataka who knew facts about everything and myself bonded in a camaraderie that was warm, funny and alive with laughter. Especially when we all emptied out our collection of empty coffee cups, wafer and wada packets into a bin at Chennai Central rail station.

