

1 FROM HERITAGE SPIRIT TO GLOBAL PALATES: NAVIGATING THE DYNAMICS
2 OF FENI INDUSTRY IN GOA
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4

5 **Abstract**
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7 This research paper delves into the intricate landscape of the Feni industry in Goa, India,
8 exploring its historical roots, contemporary challenges, and potential avenues for sustainable
9 growth, with a specific focus on its integration into the tourism narrative. Recognized with a
10 Geographical Indication (GI) status and titled as a 'Heritage Spirit,' Feni symbolizes centuries
11 of heritage and craftsmanship, embodying a unique blend of Eastern and Western influences.
12 Employing a qualitative methodology, the study conducted site visits and in-depth interviews
13 across various stages of Feni production, uncovering challenges in cultivation, processing,
14 and marketing, both for cashew and coconut Feni. Findings highlight the industry's dynamic
15 evolution, from the resistance to standardization to the untapped potential in maturation
16 practices and waste disposal. The study emphasizes the need for standardized practices,
17 branding strategies, and policy initiatives for sustainable development. Furthermore, it
18 explores the decline in coconut Feni production and proposes strategies for promoting Goa as
19 an Alcohol Tourism destination, intertwining cultural experiences with Feni consumption.
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21 **Keywords:** *Feni Industry, Goa, Geographical Indication, Alcohol Tourism, Heritage Spirit*

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Introduction

The attraction of tourism lies not only in picturesque landscapes and historical landmarks but also in the distinct flavors that encapsulate the essence of a destination (Stone et al., 2018). Goa, nestled along the Arabian Sea, beckons travelers with its sun-kissed beaches, vibrant culture, and a hidden gem in its local spirits – Feni. As we navigate the crossroads of tradition and modernity, this paper embarks on an exploration of the journey to popularize Feni, a traditional Goan alcoholic beverage, within the dynamic realm of touristic experiences.

Feni, a testament to Goa's rich cultural tapestry, emerges as more than just a drink; it encapsulates centuries of heritage, craftsmanship, and a unique blending of Eastern and Western influences (D'souza, 2021). Recognized with a Geographical Indication (GI) status and bestowed the title of 'Heritage Spirit,' Feni stands at the intersection of tradition and innovation, presenting an opportunity to enhance its prominence within the vibrant tourism landscape of Goa.

In the evolving narrative of global travel, tourists seek not only scenic vistas but also immersive encounters with local culture, and what better way to encapsulate Goa's spirit than through its indigenous beverage – Feni. This paper aims to unravel the potential avenues and challenges in the quest to popularize Feni as a quintessential part of the Goan experience for tourists.

As we delve into this exploration, we navigate through the historical roots of Feni, examining its evolution from a traditional elixir in social and religious ceremonies to a nuanced expression of Goan identity. The economic landscape of the Feni industry, once confined to cottage production, has expanded to face the dual challenge of preserving tradition while adapting to the changing preferences of a globalized market (Furtado & Velho-Pereira, 2020). The Geographical Indication bestowed upon Feni in 2009 acts as both a protective shield and a catalyst for its recognition on the world stage. The subsequent acknowledgment of Feni as a 'Heritage Spirit' in 2016 opens avenues for its integration into the tourism narrative, enticing visitors with a sip of Goan history and craftsmanship. However, this journey is not without its obstacles – the modern palate's inclination toward Indian Made Foreign Liquor (IMFL), the shifting perceptions of Feni among the younger generation, and the overshadowing allure of global alcoholic beverages.

54 Feni, as a local indigenous alcoholic beverage in Goa, shares commonalities with traditional
55 drinks found in various parts of the world. Drawing parallels with other regional spirits, such
56 as Mezcal in Mexico, Sake in Japan, or Arrack in Southeast Asia, Feni represents a cultural
57 and historical connection to its roots. These beverages often embody the essence of local
58 ingredients and traditional production methods, contributing to the unique identity of the
59 regions they originate from. In this dynamic landscape, the paper sheds light on initiatives
60 like 'The Cashew Trail' and 'The Spirit of Goa Festival,' which strategically position Feni as a
61 cultural and artisanal treasure for tourists. The potential lies not only in marketing Feni as a
62 beverage but in crafting an authentic and memorable experience for visitors, fostering a
63 connection between the drink and the vibrant tapestry of Goan life.

64 As we embark on this exploration, we navigate through the nuances of Feni's journey,
65 weaving together history, culture, and the contemporary demands of the tourism industry.
66 The intoxicating aroma of Feni is not merely confined to glasses but echoes as a symphony of
67 Goan heritage, waiting to be discovered by those seeking a taste of authenticity in the heart of
68 a touristic paradise.

69 This study aims to comprehensively explore the Feni industry in Goa, encompassing various
70 facets such as cultivation practices, production processes, challenges, and financial
71 considerations. By focusing on distinct stages of Feni production, including cultivation,
72 plucking, juice extraction, fermentation, distillation, and post-production processes for both
73 cashew and coconut Feni, we seek to gain a nuanced understanding of the industry. Our
74 objective is to analyze the qualitative data gathered from these methods to identify recurring
75 themes, challenges, and potential areas for improvement. Key areas of investigation include
76 bottling and labeling practices, exploration of maturation practices, waste disposal and its
77 environmental impact, challenges in coconut Feni production, and discussions on the
78 cannibalization effect from alternative products. Additionally, we aim to propose solutions to
79 financial complexities, address policy and government initiatives in safeguarding Feni's
80 geographical indication status, and highlight collaborative efforts that have propelled Feni's
81 popularity internationally. The study also seeks to outline strategies for promoting Goa as an
82 Alcohol Tourism destination, considering diversified experiences, themed museums, culinary
83 integration, strategic partnerships, and leveraging digital platforms for effective promotion.

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Literature Review

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87 Feni, a traditional spirit from Goa, has a rich history deeply intertwined with Portuguese
88 colonization and the introduction of cashew along the Malabar Coast in the 16th century
89 (Smith, 2007; D'Cunha, 2013). Initially, coconut Feni predates Portuguese influence, while
90 cashew Feni is believed to have emerged during colonization (Xavier, 1993). The Portuguese,
91 aiming at soil conservation, brought cashew to Goa, and records indicate its cultivation in
92 Porvorim dating back to the 1770s (Lobo, 1971; Rangnekar, 2009). The liquor industry,
93 rooted in cottage practices, played a significant role in Goa's pre-liberation economy, with
94 toddy tappers contributing to treasury through a "rend" (tax) system (Fernandes, 2015). Feni
95 varieties included coconut and cashew, with the latter considered superior and exported since
96 1789 (Pinto, 1994).

97 Alcohol consumption in Goa, documented by Rangnekar (2011), showcased sura and toddy
98 as common drinks. The Portuguese later introduced Western wines, whisky, and brandy post
99 the 1878 Anglo-Portuguese treaty, influencing Goan culture (Rodrigues, 2007). Feni became
100 a pivotal element in social and religious functions, reflecting Portuguese practices
101 (Rangnekar, 2011). Even as Feni played a part in these traditions, imported wines gained
102 prominence among the wealthy (Pereira, 1995). The Portuguese cultural influence extended
103 to Goan cuisine, substituting wine with locally available Feni and vinegar (Rodrigues, 2000).
104 Apart from its role in celebrations, Feni found use in traditional remedies for various ailments
105 and cultural practices. However, with the disintegration of joint families and advancements in
106 science, its medicinal usage declined. Changes in societal structures and lifestyles, driven by
107 factors like liberalization and tourism, transformed alcohol consumption patterns in Goa
108 (Pereira, 2007; 2015). The younger generation embraced modern recreational activities,
109 leading to a shift from traditional drinking spaces to pubs, discotheques, and gaming clubs.
110 Society's attitude towards alcohol consumption became more lenient, with alcohol being
111 viewed as a means of relaxation (Pereira, 2015).

112 The advent of Indian Made Foreign Liquor (IMFL) and the shift towards mechanized large-
113 scale production affected traditional Feni production. IMFL gained popularity due to factors
114 like affordability and availability, impacting the preferences of the modern Goan society
115 (Greenfield et al., 2010). Despite Feni's decline in popularity among the younger generation,
116 efforts were made to promote it as a tourism product. Initiatives like 'The Cashew Trail' and
117 'The Spirit of Goa Festival' aimed to highlight Feni's unique characteristics, including its
118 Geographical Indication (GI) status attained in 2009 (Rangnekar, 2009). The GI status

119 protects Feni's identity, ensuring that only products originating from Goa can be labeled as
120 Feni.

121 In recent times, Feni producers have made efforts to rejuvenate its appeal. Events like the
122 'Spirit of Goa Festival' showcase Feni in various products, cuisine, and handicrafts, fostering
123 a connection with tradition. Feni's export market has also grown, with tourists becoming
124 patrons and bottlers capitalizing on the souvenir appeal (Rangnekar, 2009). Despite
125 challenges, Feni's heritage status, GI protection, and its role in cultural practices position it
126 uniquely in the global alcohol market. However, sustaining and enhancing this unique spirit's
127 legacy requires collaborative efforts from stakeholders, including the Tourism and Excise
128 departments, to market Feni as a tourism product effectively.

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Methodology

131 In a qualitative exploration of the Feni industry in Goa, The methodology employed for the
132 comprehensive study of the Feni industry in Goa involved a multifaceted approach aimed at
133 gaining insights into various aspects, including cultivation practices, production processes,
134 challenges, and financial considerations. We conducted extensive site visits to different units
135 involved in Feni production, ranging from small family-run enterprises to larger,
136 commercialized setups. These visits facilitated a firsthand understanding of the industry from
137 the cultivation of cashew to the marketing of Feni. In-depth interviews were conducted with
138 industry experts, stakeholders, and producers to gather qualitative data on their experiences,
139 observations, and concerns. The study focused on distinct stages of Feni production, namely
140 cultivation, plucking, juice extraction, fermentation, distillation, and post-production
141 processes. Attention was given to both cashew and coconut Feni, recognizing the unique
142 characteristics and challenges associated with each. The qualitative data gathered from these
143 methods were then analyzed to identify recurring themes, challenges, and potential areas for
144 improvement in the Feni industry.

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Findings

147 The study commenced by spotlighting the significance of cashew nuts over cashew apples,
148 influencing harvesting practices and raising questions about the potential impact on
149 agricultural norms. The collection of fully ripe fruits proved to be a formidable challenge,
150 contributing to substantial wastage, particularly in inaccessible, hilly terrains where cashew
151 trees thrive. Mechanization emerged as a trend in juice extraction, attributed to labor

152 shortages and cost considerations, signaling a shift from traditional stomping methods.
153 However, the study underscored that while modernization can enhance efficiency, the
154 industry must balance this with preserving traditional flavors to maintain consumer
155 acceptance.

156 The fermentation practices within the Feni industry underscored a clear inclination towards
157 natural processes, as opposed to artificial interventions such as the addition of sugar. This
158 preference was rooted in concerns about the potential compromise of taste and the extended
159 duration required for natural fermentation. Moving to the distillation phase, a critical
160 component in Feni production, a harmonious integration of traditional methods and
161 contemporary elements was observed. While some producers adhered to conventional copper
162 'bhan,' others embraced modernity with the incorporation of copper coils and the utilization
163 of alternative fuel sources, including steam, gas, or electricity.

164 An intriguing aspect that surfaced during the study was the resistance to standardization in
165 the distillation process. Producers staunchly defended the uniqueness of their methods,
166 considering it a core competency and resisting attempts to homogenize proportions and
167 mixtures. This resistance raised questions about the potential challenges and benefits of
168 standardization in the industry.

169 Bottling and labeling practices within the Feni market were found to lack uniformity, with
170 various materials used for bottling, including glass and, surprisingly, plastic. The absence of
171 standardization in this realm raised concerns about consumer information and the need for
172 industry-wide regulations to provide transparency and prevent misleading claims on labels.
173 This finding underscores the importance of establishing guidelines to protect consumers and
174 foster fair competition among Feni producers.

175 Maturation, a facet often overshadowed by concerns about evaporation losses, emerged as an
176 untapped area with significant potential. While many producers opted to forego maturation to
177 avoid losses, those who engaged in this practice found it to be lucrative, particularly among
178 larger manufacturers. The choice of maturation vessels varied widely, ranging from glass
179 garrafaos to oak barrels. This diversity highlighted the need for further exploration into the
180 impact of maturation vessels on the final product, including aspects like color and flavor.

181 The study extended its focus to waste disposal, revealing underutilization of by-products
182 from juice extraction, posing both environmental and economic challenges. Seasonality and
183 associated issues, such as annual licensing requirements and fragmented plantations, were
184 identified as inhibitors to the industry's growth.

185 Shifting gears to coconut Feni, the study uncovered a decline in pure coconut Feni
186 production, primarily attributed to challenges in toddy tapping. Safety hazards, health issues,
187 and a lack of social security for toddy tappers emerged as critical concerns, impacting the
188 industry's ability to attract and retain skilled labor. Social stigma surrounding toddy tapping
189 further compounded challenges, deterring the younger generation from entering the
190 profession.

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Discussion and Conclusion

193 The qualitative exploration of the Feni industry in Goa offers a comprehensive understanding
194 of the intricate challenges and potential solutions across various stages of production, from
195 cultivation to market dynamics. The study detects a cannibalization effect from alternative
196 products, emphasizing the need for standardized containers, labeling practices, and branding
197 strategies to ensure clarity and legitimacy in the market that has been highlighted in the Goa
198 Feni Policy 2021. One of the primary challenges highlighted is the terrain of cashew
199 plantations, which often poses difficulties in harvesting fully ripe cashew fruits due to
200 inaccessible and hilly landscapes. Similarly, coconut Feni production faces safety concerns
201 during toddy tapping, with issues such as accidents and health hazards for laborers. These
202 challenges necessitate systematic approaches, including the development of safety protocols,
203 infrastructure improvements, and the adoption of innovative practices like netting to prevent
204 spoilage of fallen cashew fruits and the cultivation of shorter coconut tree varieties to reduce
205 labor intensity and improve efficiency during plucking and extraction.

206 Moreover, the study identifies opportunities for mechanization in juice extraction and
207 fermentation processes, which not only enhance efficiency but also allow for better utilization
208 of waste products generated during production. However, this shift towards mechanization
209 raises concerns about maintaining traditional flavors and processes, highlighting the delicate
210 balance between modernization and preservation of cultural heritage within the industry.

211 In the distillation phase, the harmonious integration of traditional and modern methods is
212 observed, with producers employing a variety of techniques ranging from traditional copper
213 'bhan' to modern copper coils and alternative fuel sources like steam, gas, or electricity.
214 Nonetheless, challenges such as wood scarcity and the seasonal nature of Feni production
215 persist, calling for innovative solutions and sustainable practices to ensure continuity and
216 quality in production.

217 Market dynamics also pose significant challenges, with the emergence of alternative products
218 threatening to cannibalize the Feni market. To address this, standardized packaging, labeling
219 practices, and branding strategies are proposed to provide clarity, legitimacy, and
220 differentiation in the market. Additionally, financial complexities, including labor costs and
221 seasonality, necessitate interventions such as mechanization subsidies and the exploration of
222 cost-effective packaging alternatives to improve profitability and sustainability for producers.
223 By addressing these challenges comprehensively and implementing thoughtful solutions, the
224 Feni industry in Goa can navigate towards sustainable growth, ensuring the preservation of
225 cultural heritage, economic viability, and competitiveness in the market.

226 The traditional Goan cashew liquor, is the result of concerted efforts by both the Goa
227 government and local stakeholders. The government has taken proactive measures such as
228 organizing an annual Feni festival, featuring competitions and workshops on Feni making.
229 Additionally, the safeguarding of Feni's geographical indication (GI) status ensures that only
230 authentic Goan Feni carries the label. Feni tourism is actively encouraged through dedicated
231 circuits, tasting tours, Feni museums and collaboration with hospitality establishments. Local
232 stakeholders, including dedicated producers, enthusiasts, and the hospitality sector, contribute
233 significantly. Feni producers focus on enhancing product quality and exploring new flavors.
234 Enthusiasts organize events and educational workshops, while restaurants and bars
235 increasingly incorporate Feni into their menus, expanding its reach.

236 These collaborative initiatives have propelled Feni's popularity, leading to exports beyond
237 Goa and international recognition. The shared commitment of the government and
238 stakeholders reflects the belief in Feni's intrinsic value to Goan culture and its potential for
239 global success.

240 To further promote Goa as an Alcohol Tourism destination, drawing inspiration from
241 indigenous alcoholic beverages worldwide and recognizing their role in enhancing the
242 destinationscape, several strategies can be considered. First and foremost, the diversification
243 of alcohol-related tourism experiences can be explored. This could include curated tours that
244 not only showcase the production of Feni but also delve into the rich cultural and historical
245 aspects of its making, providing tourists with a holistic understanding of the drink's
246 significance in Goan heritage. Creating themed Feni museums and immersive visitor centers
247 can add an educational and interactive dimension to the tourism experience. These spaces can
248 offer insights into the traditional methods of Feni production, its evolution over time, and its

249 impact on the local community. Moreover, collaborating with local artisans to craft unique,
250 alcohol-related souvenirs can contribute to the overall tourism appeal.

251 Culinary tourism can be intertwined with alcohol tourism by promoting the pairing of Feni
252 with authentic Goan cuisine. Specialized Feni tasting events and festivals, featuring local
253 chefs and mixologists, can attract connoisseurs and enthusiasts alike. This approach aligns
254 with the global trend of experiential tourism, offering visitors a chance to engage with the
255 destination through their taste buds. Strategic partnerships with the hospitality sector can
256 further elevate Goa's status as an Alcohol Tourism destination. Establishing Feni bars, where
257 visitors can savor diverse Feni varieties and cocktails, would provide a unique and
258 memorable experience. Additionally, collaborating with travel agencies to incorporate
259 alcohol-themed itineraries, including visits to Feni distilleries and cultural events, can attract
260 a broader audience. Furthermore, leveraging digital platforms and social media to promote
261 Goa's alcohol tourism can enhance visibility and reach a global audience. Engaging
262 storytelling, virtual tours, and online workshops can create anticipation and interest,
263 encouraging potential visitors to include Goa in their travel plans. By embracing these
264 multifaceted approaches, Goa can position itself not only as a destination for Feni enthusiasts
265 but also as a hub for alcohol tourism, celebrating the diverse and culturally rich world of
266 indigenous alcoholic beverages.

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268 **Suggestions**

269 This study presents a few limitations that warrant consideration in the interpretation of its
270 findings. The study's sample size, although diverse, may not encapsulate the full spectrum of
271 the industry, potentially overlooking nuances in smaller or larger-scale operations. The
272 subjectivity inherent in in-depth interviews introduces the possibility of individual biases,
273 influencing the outcomes of the study. Furthermore, the dynamic nature of the Feni industry
274 especially with the implementation of Goa Feni Policy 2021 poses a challenge, as findings
275 may become outdated over time, emphasizing the need for ongoing research to capture and
276 understand industry changes post implementation.

277 Despite the aforementioned limitations, this study opens avenues for future research that can
278 enrich our understanding of the Feni industry and guide its sustainable development.
279 Longitudinal studies tracking changes in Feni production practices over time would
280 contribute valuable insights into industry evolution and adaptation to emerging trends.
281 Exploring tourists' perspectives on Feni as a Tourism product could offer insights into market

282 dynamics and aid in shaping industry strategies. Investigating the impact of policies, such as
283 the Goa Feni Policy 2021, on industry dynamics and proposing potential improvements or
284 adaptations for policy frameworks would be crucial. Comparative studies with other countries
285 renowned for traditional alcoholic beverages can offer insights into global trends, fostering
286 cross-cultural learning and collaboration. Addressing these research opportunities will
287 undoubtedly contribute to the knowledge base surrounding Feni production and support the
288 industry's sustainable evolution.

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UNDER PEER REVIEW IN IJAR

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