Ancient Names for 'Goa'

Goa earned many designations from the most ancient times. This is indeed little surprising when we witness nowadays how for political or sentimental considerations names of countries are metamorphosed: Zambia for Northern Rodhesia, Malawi for Nyassaland, Malagasy for Madagascar, Ghana for Gold Coast, Taiwan for Formosa etc. Originally Goa which enclosed a larger slice of Konkan, was known as *Kalyan*, meaning happy because, unlike some interior regions where droughts and food scarcity struck the land, it was blessed with bountiful rainfall. So happiness was where rain was. Hence the name *Kalyan*. Her capital was *Kalyanpuri*, puri signifying city, which still survives as *Kalafura* — *Kalyanpura*, named Santa- -Cruz by the Portuguese.

Mahabharata, the great Epic of epics, refers to Goa as *Goparashtra*, 'a nation of cowherds or of nomadic tribes'. Parshuram, the Hindu god, according to legend, flung his arrow on the coast and made the waters recede, thus founding the Konkan. The Southern Konkan was called *Govarashtra*. In ancient Indian texts in Sanskrit she is also known as *Gopakapuri* or *Gapakapattana*. This only corroborates the idea that Goa was a very prosperous State, since cattle was the criterion of wealth. The name *Gomant* for Goa also occurs in the said Indian epic Mahabharata and in the sacred Hindu texts like Harivansa and Skanda as well. In the latter, Goa is even known as *Gomanchala*. They equally refer to her as

Govapuri. Suta Sanhita, an Indian classic, for instance, has a revealing passage: "To the north of Gokarn is a 'kshetra' with seven 'yojanas' in circumference: therein is situated *Govapuri,* which destroys all sins. By the sight of *Govapuri* the sin committed in a previous existence is destroyed, as at sunrise darkness disappears. Even by making up his mind to bathe once in *Govapuri* one attains a high place (in the next world). Certainly there is no 'kshetra' equal to *Govapuri.*"

The old Greek geographical name roughly corresponding to Goa was *Ariake.* In the 2nd. century A. D., Pliny and Ptolomy called her *Nekanidon* and *Melinda* respectively. In the map drawn by the self-same Ptolomy *Kouba* and *Mur-uri* are marked for Goa and Mormugaon, *uri* being *ganv* or village. The general toponymy of Goa makes indeed a fascinating study. Students interested in tracing the origin of names of various places, will find that Goa had relations from the most ancient times with foreign countries, particularly with West Asia around the Arabian Sea. Those countries found that Goa was of strategic importance to establish their centres of trade and commerce. For example, the wealthy merchants from Palestine had a flourishing city in their homeland, called *Beitim,* which name they gave to their settlement in Goa today merely a village near Panjim. *Saxtti,* a name for Salcete district in Konkani, the regional language, means sixty. This conglomeration of 60 villages is apparently the direct influence of Chaldean civilization in which 60 was a standard measurement like 10 in the present decimal coinage.

As from the 7th. century and during most of the Middle Ages, Goa was known to the spirited Arabs and Persians as *Kawa* or *Kawe* corresponding to *Gova* or *Gove.* It is a phenomenon of linguistics to change g into k and vice-versa, e. g., Kafur into Gafur. In *Gova* too *v* is half-vowel, and as such it is almost non-extant. Old Kannada inscriptions of this time called her *Gove.* During the earliest Kadamba rule, however, the ancient term was still popular and the appellation of Goa was *Kalyana-gudi,* 'abode of Happiness'. The name still survives with the village Kalangutt, the well known

sea-resort in Bardez district. Not a few Arab, Persian and other writers, like the celebrated Ibn Batuta in the 14th. century, are all praises for *Sindabur*, another name for Goa. An old Turkish book of navigation, Mohit, the translations of which have appeared in the Journal of Asiatic Society of Bengal, speaks of the "24th. voyage from Kuvai Sindabur to Aden".

During the first centuries of foreign domination some Portuguese historians tried to establish the meaning and ethymology of the word 'Goa'. Diogo Couto traces it to the term *Goe-moat* which, according to him, signifies 'refreshing land'. Fr. Francisco Sousa avers that the word 'Goa' descended from the name of a local deity *Goubat*. Such explanations appear to have been based merely on hearsay and conjecture. They do not have the stamp of authority.

The present appellation 'GOA' was, in fact, already widely current some centuries before the arrival of the Portuguese in India.