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## Impact of the West on Goan music

—Mira Mascarenhas

Being on the west coast of India, and ideally situated on the shipping lanes of the ancient world, Goa has always been open to the Western influences coming to it across the Indian Ocean. The old Konkan legend<sup>1</sup> imputing Chitpavan Brahmin origin to Arab seamen, even if historically unprovable, points to a considerable infusion of ethnic and cultural elements into the primitive populations of the Konkan. How far this affected the ancient music of Goa has necessarily to remain a matter of conjecture, since we have no records on the subject.

Goan music, as we know it today, can be divided broadly into two bodies, according to the usage of the two major Goan communities, Hindu and Christian. The first is at least ten centuries old, and is foremost among the musical traditions of the Konkan<sup>2</sup>. It is solidly based on the Indian classical moulds, namely those which developed from Vedic beginning. When, however, we speak of the 'impact of the West,' we immediately think of the second body of Goan music, i.e. that which is sung, played or danced to by the Christians and which is not more than 459 years old. The early history of this music is certainly bound up with the history of conversion to Christianity after the Portuguese conquest of Goa and the music of the church has played a decisive part in shaping and influencing it. But the folkloric outcome of the old Indian and newer Western influences has been an entirely Goan creation. Being an ingenious blend of both, it pleases both the Eastern and Western ear. In fact, since the other body of music has no prominent features to distinguish it from similar bodies of Indian music, it has come to be regarded as the music of Goa. This was brought home very vividly to me at an all-India folkloric festival in New Delhi when a *Dhalo*<sup>3</sup> was presented as the Goan entry; several persons in the audience began questioning, 'Is this Goan folklore?' They were expecting Goan Christian folklore!

In order to unravel the different elements that have gone into the 'subtle blend of East and West'<sup>4</sup> that is *Goan* music, properly speaking, we have to delve into the musical history of both India and the West. First of all, let us take our basic Indian musical heritage. All Indian music has derived from the *Samans*, the simple Vedic chants of our earliest records. That a rich musical tradition existed even earlier, there is no doubt, since musical instruments like the seven-keyed flute and the *Veena* have been found among the artifacts of the Mohenjodaro and Harappa excavations. When the remnants of those populations moved south after the Aryan invasions, their traditions would have moved south as well. But to return to recorded history, the *Samaveda* tells us that both vocal and instrumental music formed part of sacrificial worship.<sup>5</sup> Goa, which was the Benaras of the west coast for many centuries, was certainly conversant with both.<sup>6</sup>

By the end of the second musical period, the initial *Svaras* or notes of the *Samans* had developed into seven unalterable melody modes (*Jatis*) of the Gandharva or Marga sacred music. Brahma himself was supposed to have composed these Saivite songs which Goa, stronghold of devotion to Shiva, must have used. The next period brought in *Desi* or regional music, which was permitted to vary in different parts of the country, while the *Marga* or celestial music remained immutable. The freedom given to *Desi* music resulted in a wealth of melodic forms known as *ragas* or delight-producing music. Still later, with the gradual fusion of Hindu and Persian cultures after successive foreign invasions, Indian classical music divided into two streams: the *Hindustani* of the North and the *Karnatak* of the South. It is interesting to note that Goa opted for the Hindustani system, although geographically it belonged to the South.<sup>7</sup>

The choice, of course, was culturally consistent, if we remember that those who set the cultural trends in Goa were Brahmins of northern extraction. Its relevance to our subject is far-reaching and highly significant. For one thing, Goan Christian music has had a precedent on a much larger scale, when Hindustani music assimilated the inevitable influence brought about by foreign invasions, but 'never lost its unique basic

identity', while 'it undoubtedly enriched itself enormously'<sup>8</sup>. Secondly, the art of harmony was not only known but was well developed by the old Indian masters of raga composition. The *svara laya*, *ansha laya* and *anyonya laya* were three stages of harmonisation that approximate to what Western musicians call 'counterpoint'. They were a natural development from the family grouping of *ragas*, *raginis*, etc., which was in vogue even in the 16th century, as can be seen from a treatise called *Ragamala*, written by Karana in 1570. For some reason, the art of harmonisation fell into disuse, and later became altogether incompatible with the changes and development of Indian music.<sup>9</sup> However, it explains why Goans were able to adopt to the Western evolution of harmony and incorporate it into their own music.

In the early 16th century, when the first converts to Christianity were exposed to its church music, they could not have found it very strange to the ear, for the sacred music current at that time was the traditional plainsong or Gregorian chant, which dominated European music for well over a thousand years. It had descended and developed from Hebrew and Graeco-Roman model ritual music, the singing followed a single melodic line, free-flowing in its continuity and unhampered by rigid rhythmic patterns.<sup>10</sup> The primitive *ovi* metre of our simple devotional invocations gives one a good idea of this kind of melodic line. We must note that vocal music was of primary importance in both systems, instruments being mainly to support and enhance the effect.<sup>11</sup>

As the art developed, the singer was allowed considerable freedom to embellish the melody with grace-notes or ornaments, all accompanying instruments remaining subservient to his/her artistry. Like the seven modes or *Jatis* of *Marga* music already described, Gregorian music had eight modes, which later increased to twelve. All the ritual music of the Church was composed in these modes, and both solo and choral singing in the church was done strictly by men.<sup>12</sup>

The first to learn Western music were those in the educational institutions of Old Goa, the first Portuguese capital. We learn that

in the famous Jesuit College of St. Paul, students were taught not only the regular curriculum of European grammar schools but also singing, instrumental music and dancing.<sup>13</sup> It was, however, the parish schools that replaced the old *pathshalas* attached to village temples which really laid a solid and wide-based foundation for Western musical training in Goa. Young boys (first 'Brahmins' only and later, those of other castes as well) were taught the three R's singing, and the violin or organ. The purpose of the last two subjects was to enable them to take part in the liturgical services of the church, and we can be sure that they were the first composers of Goan Christian music.<sup>14</sup> Both church and State patronised and fostered these schools, which had the loyal backing and financial support of the village *comunidades* or communities, for not only it made a sizable proportion of the population literate, but gave it a sound elementary musical training as well. Nineteenth and twentieth century episcopal decrees earnestly urge parish priests to maintain a good standard of instruction and use the schools as nurseries of vocal and instrumental religious music. Even before Pope Pius X initiated musical reform for the liturgy of all Christendom in 1903, the Archbishop of Goa had already introduced similar ideal standards for church music in his diocese.<sup>15</sup> Single-melody plainsong or Gregorian chant was still the favoured tradition, but polyphony, which had already made its appearance in the secular world, was cautiously introduced. A special Sacred Music Committee was appointed to monitor the polyphony entries in Goa.<sup>16</sup>

Polyphony is 'many-sounded' or 'many-voiced' music, in which two or more melodies are sung or played together with a pleasing, harmonious effect. Also called 'counterpoint', it had its European beginnings somewhere in the 9th century, and reached its high water mark towards the end of 16th century, when composers like Palestrina pushed the old model period into the background with their new (often unaccompanied) masses and motets in church singing. With the decay of single melody or model singing, the major and minor scales rose in prominence.<sup>17</sup> And these are the scales on which most Goan Christian music have been composed, both in the secular and sacred fields.

Private collectors and Goan churches possess a host of masses,

*motets*, litanies and hymns composed by Goan masters. The authors, for the most part, remain unknown. Not only did copyists not bother to keep the names of the composers, but many collections have been destroyed by the passage of time, humidity and insects, or have yet to be catalogued.<sup>18</sup> The masses, *motets* and litanies are in Latin, the only language allowed for ritualistic purposes by the church till about twenty years ago.<sup>19</sup> The hymns are in Latin, Portuguese and Konkani. All have a distinctive Goan stamp, deeply religious in character and content and most are sung in a two-voice harmony, with the oriental emphasis on melody.<sup>20</sup> Till today, older hymn melodies differ in interpretation from one place of worship to another, because of the freedom taken in 'ornaments' of the melodic line or variants of it. Timing is rarely strict, and accompanying musical instruments make full allowance for this traditional use of *tala*, the rhythmic pulsation of Indian music.<sup>21</sup> As singing becomes more congregational and dependent on chordal harmony, however, greater attention has to be given to regular rhythmic beats, if only to avoid chaos.

The European *motet* was a composition woven around a Biblical or ecclesiastical text, and often sung without accompaniment so as to give more importance to the vocal polyphony. By the 16th century it had become a great medium of musical expression and classical exercise of considerable intricacy and many of its later *masses* are composed on *motet* themes.<sup>22</sup> Palestrina, for instance wrote 180 *motets*. Goan *motets* are very distinct from the European, except for the fact that scriptural passages form their text. Deeply-moving compositions of relatively classic simplicity, they are only sung in the penitential season of Lent, and particularly at the *Santos Passos* scenes and processions depicting Christ's suffering and death. Its 'ethos is of the towering compositions of all times in this sector of passion music. Here precisely lies its greatness: greatest effect with simplest structure'.<sup>23</sup> From 18th century records we know that *motets* were a major item in the repertoire of church musicians. They played so important a part in Christian life that the Pope gave special permission to Goans to use string instruments (the usual accompaniment to *motets* during the three days of deepest church mourning, when the use of musical instruments was not allowed elsewhere).

Secular music was inevitably influenced by the different stages of church music, since it was the only music Christians were encouraged to learn. As those responsible for christianisation began to take defensive measures to protect new converts, old Hindu cultural forms were banned, imbued as they were with religious practice and symbolism.<sup>25</sup> Goan Christians, who had already experimented with the new forms they were being exposed to in composing sacred music, turned their talent to secular music, as well. As we saw, the inherent possibilities of harmony were already in the musical consciousness of the people and the West's progressive mastery in that line came to be accepted by without difficulty by the music loving Goan. The fact remains, however, that the Goan's instinctive preference is for melody. The simple harmonisation of his folksongs remains on the level of the ancient Indian master's progression of concordant sounds or notes sung along with the main melody.<sup>26</sup> Many of these families of song, such as the lullabies (*palnnam*), children's songs, *ovi* and *vers*, story songs, work songs, nuptial chants and dirges are still of the single melodic line tradition, with a good deal of scope for improvisation and ornamentation. Others, like the *Deknnis* and Kunbi songs with more sharply defined rhythms because of the accompanying dances, are usually sung in unison, harmonisation being provided by the Indian drone method (*tambura* or *mridanga*) or by instrumental accompaniment. Hymns, *motets*, *mande* and *dulpodam* are always sung in harmony, mostly two-part harmony sung at musical intervals of a third (major or minor) or sixth apart. Melody still reigns supreme, but a rhythmic beat is necessary for a perfect combination, particularly when there are quick changes as in a *dulpod* sequence after a *mando*. The slow-paced *mando* has the essence and spirit of a *raga*, if authentically sung, together with rhythm (accent on the fifth of six beats) not used in the West. Like the *raga*, the *mando* begins slow, soft and solemn and then — like a normal *raga* progression — picks up tone and rhythm in the *dulpod* sequence, till the end is unrecognisably different from the beginning.<sup>27</sup>

Regular, unvarying rhythms have obviously come to Goa from the West, since they are necessary for harmonic progression. But Goan melody has also assimilated melodic influence from the West. Besides church music, Goan Christians had opportunities

to listen to the native songs of the missionaries who taught them. These were mainly Portuguese, Spanish and Italian.<sup>28</sup> Curiously enough, of the three, it was not the Portuguese but the Italian songs of the south that seem to have most caught the Goan fancy. Neapolitan songs are popular all over the world today, thanks to tourism and mass media, but Goans took to them many centuries ago. The tuneful melodies are easy to remember, but it is the simple two-voice harmonisation that we are most indebted to. The best-known streams of Goan folksong are sung that way.

Of the Spanish genres, Basque songs appear to have left a distinctive trait. It will be recalled that St. Francis Xavier came from that province on the French-Spanish border. We are told that he used simple tunes to teach the Christian truths to his young converts in Goa; and also that the students of St Paul's College which he founded often went through the streets of Old Goa singing the catechism or *Credo*. With the bishop's decree his tunes were preserved as precious heirlooms by future Catholic families.<sup>29</sup> What is certain is that Goan Christian folksongs strike a respective chord in Basque listeners.<sup>30</sup>

That Portuguese music should influence ours was but natural. One finds a decided affinity in the songs of Alentejo, a province on the eastern border of Portugal. If we reflect that the Iberian Peninsula was dominated by the Moors for several centuries, and what Alentejo was close to the Caliph's seat in Cordova, southern Spain, we can understand the Moorish traces in their sad, dreamily-unhurried *modas*, whose spirit and love themes find an interesting parallel, if not echo, in our *mãde*.<sup>31</sup>

The Lisbon *fado*, a native of the poorer quarters of that city, has all the heartbreak and *saudade* or nostalgia of a people who gave their best, and often lost their all, to Portugal's maritime exploits. In these sentiments it resembles the large group of *mando* which sings of the heartache and separation of emigration imposed by economic necessity. But types are impressive, emotion-filled. But the fatalistic undercurrent of the *fado* is sublimated into a much more Christian attitude in the *mando* and musically, the two genres are very different. There is no justification for claiming that the *mando* descended from the *fado*,

since both developed and had their 'golden ages' simultaneously and apart.<sup>32</sup> Musicologists in Portugal rather think that the overseas influenced the *fado* and not the other way around.<sup>33</sup>

Besides, *mando* is social folklore, not only group-sung, but danced. *Fado* is always sung solo, even when accompanied by a large group of musicians, as in the *fado* of Coimbra, a different genre, but whose lyrical love poetry could be intellectually compared to that of *mando*.

Of the many branches of Goan folklore, the *tiatr* songs show that Western influence, since its tunes are rarely original and borrow unashamedly from the light music of the West, as well as from other sources. Being the progeny of the older *khells*, *tiatrs* are not really bothered about what tune is used so long as the all-important lyrics are clear enough to convey their social criticism, political satire or philosophy of life. There are a few exceptions among the composers, of course, but the rule is a hash of popular Western rhythms and tunes.<sup>34</sup>

All Goan folksongs, whether Hindu or Christian, are in the mother-tongue, Konkani. Different regions in Goa have, however, been influenced by the proximity of other languages. Thus northern talukas are heavily influenced by Marathi, while the 'Old Conquests' sing a Konkani interspersed with plenty of Portuguese words, particularly in the religious songs that had no local translation for certain concepts or objects. The philologist Dalgado lists scores of Arab, Latin, Portuguese and other Indian language words that have become part of the Konkani language.<sup>35</sup> The Portuguese words are usually 'Konkanised' by dropping syllables, lengthening sounds, etc. In a song of about 100 words, one finds at least four of Portuguese extraction, sometimes double that number.<sup>36</sup>

Besides the Portuguese language, which every educated Goan was obliged to learn prior to Liberation, current musical fads and fashions from the West were also brought along into Goa by the foreign masters. Alongwith classical, sacred and secular music, light songs from European and American countries were picked up. No cultural session was complete without classical music on the violin, piano or other Western musical instruments. No variety

entertainment programme failed to include a Portuguese folkloric number like the *Vira* or *Corridinho*.<sup>37</sup> Many urban Goans were more familiar with Portuguese songs than their own. For instance, *serenatas* or serenades became quite the fashion with students of the Lyceum in Panjim. Armed with Portuguese and Spanish guitars or violins, they would form a group, on a moonlight night, near the home of some pretty damsel or very valued friend who would be treated to a veritable concert of European melodies, Portuguese *fados* and the like, in honour of his/her birthday throw open windows and enjoy the music, while the elders of the family concerned opened the main door and invited the serenaders to a hot cup of midnight coffee. Serenading is a popular Latin custom,<sup>38</sup> particularly among students, and its romantic implications have found echoes in *mando* love-songs. These would serve the romantic purpose of serenades in the village, when young people gathered at the *balcão* of a stately home, or enjoyed the cool evening breeze together on a hilltop, riverside or golden beach.<sup>39</sup>

The Vedas mention three classes of musical instruments: stringed, percussion and wind.<sup>40</sup> Goans must have been familiar with a number of Indian instruments, for they took to Western instruments with comparative ease. The 'string' family — Violin, viola, cello and double-bass — would be the first to arrive, since they are easily portable. We learn that Krishnadevaraya of Vijayanagar was presented 'many musical instruments' by Christovam de Figueiredo, the Portuguese envoy, 'with which the king was greatly delighted.'<sup>41</sup> These stringed instruments were used to accompany church music in the 16th century and continue to do so still today, particularly in chapels and churches which do not possess an organ or harmonium. The ubiquitous guitar, of course, is now ousting the violin in popularity.

Organs were being used in European churches from the 15th century, and were considered the accompaniment, *par excellence*, to sacred music. These were the grand old pipe-organs, whose sound depends on the pumping of bellows while the organist manipulates the keyboard and air stops. We know that the great monasteries in Old Goa possessed them, for when the religious Orders were suppressed in 1835, the Archbishop gifted many of

them to churches in other parts of Goa, so as to save them from ruin.<sup>42</sup> Their rich tones can still be heard on the rare occasions when they are played, as for instance, during the visit of the Commonwealth Heads of Government to the Cathedral in Old Goa in 1983, and of Pope John Paul II in 1986.<sup>43</sup> The average church in Goa could not afford more than the small harmonium, built in the 19th century also on a pneumatic principle, and operated by foot-pedals.<sup>44</sup> Within the last decade, however, the electrophonic organ has been rapidly asserting its advantages of size, space, portability and range of sound, not only with church-choirs but also orchestras, dance-bands and affluent homes.

Wind instruments like the flute, trumpet and cornet have long been known in Goa. Even earlier are the drums, cymbals, gongs, etc. of the percussion family, which accompanied ritual and festive occasions. We even have our own distinctive drum, the *gumott*, used in every branch of Goan folklore. Historical documents after the Portuguese conquest mention the traditional musicians and dancers who accompanied victory processions and receptions to viceroys, ambassadors, etc.<sup>45</sup> Most of the Western wood-wind instruments (flutes, clarinets, oboes, bassoons) and brass-winds (horns, bugles, trumpets, trombones, tuba) were imported into Goa during the 19th century.<sup>46</sup> They were used by orchestras and bands in the territory, and wherever musical Goans emigrated in search of a living. His elementary training in the parish primary school combined with natural talent to give many a Christian Goan a living in British controlled India and Africa, the Portuguese dominions, and international ships. They were much in demand in orchestras and bands that played for theatres, hotels and the early 'silent-film' cinema-halls. Several made the grade to classical orchestras, symphonic and philharmonic from Los Angeles to Hong Kong. Some recent young Goans to win international repute are Patricia Rosario (singing), Gavin Martin and Noel Flores (pianists), Ralph D'Souza (violin) and Remo Fernandes (guitarist, singer and composer).<sup>47</sup>

Every year, for several decades now, professors from two Music Colleges in the U.K. have been visiting India annually, to examine candidates of various grades (up to the Fellowship diploma) in vocal and instrumental music.<sup>48</sup> The Goa Centre of

the Trinity College has been functioning since the 'fifties, and other centres in India send up a higher percentage of Goan students than any other community except the Parsis. An increasing number of Hindu Goans are successfully taking this training in recent years.<sup>49</sup>

The wholesale 20th century importation of Western 'beat' largely inspired by African rhythms and composers or 'pop' dance music by the erstwhile colonial masters has affected Indians of every age and class, thanks to its popularisation by Indian films. Cinema, radio, cassette tapes and T.V. have combined to spread its phenomenal appeal among the masses so that despite the disgust of purists and classicists, its impact on Indians of all creeds cannot be denied today. And that includes Goans. Everywhere one goes, one hears these hybrid 'Indian' film tunes, set to undeniably Western rhythms, being played, sung, hummed or whistled. For the majority, it is the only music they know. Every renowned film composer now makes use of an Indian or 'Western' chorus to highlight or support the solo singing of playback artistes. I once visited a film music studio in Tardeo, Bombay, during such a 'take',<sup>50</sup> and was surprised to see just one lone *tabla* being used alongside violins (held upside down by the seated musicians), Spanish guitars, electric guitars, electrophonic organ, and a full 'beat-group' set of drums, cymbals, triangles, etc. India's most typical instruments had been set aside like museum pieces.

After witnessing such 'casualties,' one is thankful that Goan musicians have had the time and talent to evolve a distinctive body of music which, while preserving the beauty of Indian melody, has absorbed just that degree of harmony from the West that does not destroy its tradition and ethos. There are musicians in India who would be glad of such an achievement.<sup>51</sup>

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Trinity College of Music, Miss Odette Colaço, Church Square, Margão.

50. Colloquial word for 'the Indian session,' used by the artists concerned.

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