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Chapter Two

ENCOUNTER AND ENGAGEMENT: THE SOCIO-POLITICAL CONTEXT OF CONVERSION

> Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost.
>
> (Matthew 28: 19, *The Holy Bible*)

The Anthropological Study of Conversion

Recent decades have witnessed fresh perspectives in the anthropological study of conversion. Earlier, 'intellectualist' or 'theological' explanations of conversion saw it primarily as a transformation in the religious beliefs of individuals that came about as a result of social developments that led them to compare contending sets of belief and choose one on the grounds of its superior explanatory force (Horton 1975). Conversion was thus a result of the 'reasonable' adjustment made by people on the basis of this evaluation of rival religious beliefs.

Other explanations of conversion have chosen to emphasize its 'psychological' elements (Nock 1933). Hefner (1993a: 4) argues that 'studies of conversion have traditionally privileged psychology'. In the latter perspective, conversion is looked at in terms of a change in the individual's psychological disposition. The decision to convert is seen as arising out of the re-orientation of the individual's inner self, 'his deliberate turning from indifference or from an earlier form of piety to another, a turning which implies a consciousness that a great change is involved, that the old was wrong and the new is right' (Nock 1933: 7).

These 'intellectual' and 'psychological' explanations of conversion focus on the individual and do not come to terms with the social and

political contexts which shape the process of conversion. As Oddie (1977a) maintains about psychological explanations of conversion, it is difficult to peer into the recesses of a man's mind, particularly when one is dealing with people who lived far back in history. However, one can 'identify some of those external empirical factors which have led to the changes in the life of individuals and groups and which help to explain why some people have opted out of one religious community and joined another' (ibid.: 5). For Durkheim (1982: 110) has shown us, an explanation of a social fact must be 'sought among the social facts preceding it and not among the states of the individual consciousness'.

A more comprehensive and convincing analysis requires that conversion be placed within its social and historical contexts. This is particularly true of the phenomenon of mass conversions, where there is a need to reconstruct the social, political, religious and historical conditions which underpinned and informed the decisions to convert (Ifeka-Moller 1974, Houtart and Lemercinier 1981).

This chapter explores issues of conversion in Goa. It begins by discussing the social, historical and religious dynamics and complexities of the region before the entry of the Portuguese. The second section focuses on the Portuguese entry into Goa, their strategies of conversion and the wider implications of the processes of conversion with regard to the indigenous society and local culture. It is seen that conversion did not lead to a complete breakdown of the existing social structure. Catholicism could, in certain ways, be adapted to existing social needs and the converts incorporated the church, which came as a destructive and threatening force, into their own social order.

Indigenous Society of Goa

Here I attempt to delineate aspects of the indigenous 'Hindu' society of the Goa region.[1] This is the society that the Portuguese found in the villages of Goa when they entered in 1510. Muslims were also there in the region. Their population was, however, seriously decimated by the Portuguese.[2] What is meant here by 'Hindu'? As Bayly (1989) has argued, one should be chary of portraying Hinduism in essentialist or rigid terms. Here an effort shall therefore be made to show the slow establishment of caste society in Goa and to bring out how the different groups related to each other.

Many writers have pointed out that it is necessary to take into account the many varied elements within Hinduism. Thus, we shall see that, as Babb (1975) points out for central India, even within an overarching Hindu pattern there could be marked differences and variety. For instance, different caste groups could have different rituals and customs, different marriage practices and even access to different deities. In general, the ritual practices of the higher castes tend to have a greater Brahmanical content than those of the lower castes. In other words, there are both Sanskritic or 'high' and non-Sanskritic or 'low' elements in Hinduism. When we speak of the 'Hindu' in our description of Goa, we shall include all these diverse elements.

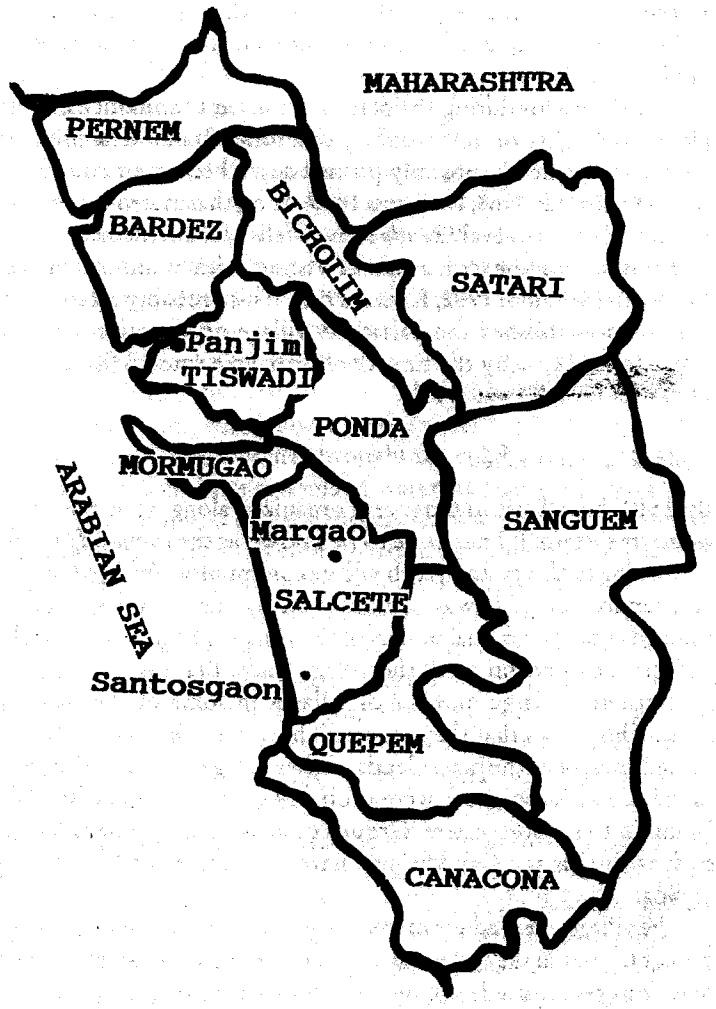
Geographically, the region referred to here as Goa included both the 'Old Conquests' taken over by the Portuguese in 1510 and the 'New Conquests' taken over by them in the eighteenth century (see Map 2.1). It is believed to have been known as Gomantak or Gove much before the Portuguese took it over, and was certainly known as Goa by the fourteenth century (Government of Goa, Daman and Diu 1979, Kamat 1990). By the sixteenth century, Goa had its own caste structure and had developed its own patterns of village organization and ritual (D'Costa 1962, 1964, Derrett 1977, De Souza 1990). As Srinivas says, within a small geographical 'spread', the 'number of ritual and cultural forms shared in common' are greater (1965: 213).

A similar line is taken by Fuller (1976: 67). He argues that Hinduism is more a system of orthopraxy than one of orthodoxy or dogma.[3] Many authors, however, tend to see this as being in very sharp contrast to Catholicism which, unlike Hinduism, is defined in terms of an orthodox set of dogmas. Certainly Catholicism has certain set practices and church ceremonies associated with its annual calendar and life-cycle events. Even so, as we shall see later, its very teachings were developed and defined in accordance with particular social, geographical and institutional needs and patterns. Moreover, as it was applied in Goa, to some extent, Catholicism adapted itself to local traditions. The missionaries themselves did not discourage the hierarchical principles of caste and the local people adapted Catholic rituals and practices to accommodate indigenous ideas.

Historical Reconstruction

Archaeological evidence in the form of stone axes seems to suggest that the first settlement of Goa was around 2000 B.C. by various groups

MAP 2.1: **The Districts of Goa Showing Areas of 'Old Conquests' and 'New Conquests'**



SOURCE: Government of Goa, Daman and Diu 1979

(Kosambi 1956, De Souza 1990) practising slash and burn cultivation or fishing. However, it is difficult to confirm these suggestions in the absence of adequate data. According to Kosambi (1956) an important phase in the history of the region came around the eighth or ninth century A.D., when a number of Brahmin families from the north cleared some land and settled here.

It was perhaps during the period of Silahara suzerainty over the region in the eighth or ninth century that some Brahmin families came to Goa from the north, possibly pushed down because of Arab invasions there (Figueiredo 1963, De Souza 1990). A myth narrated in the 'Sahyadri Khand' of the Medieval *Skanda Purana* tells of the settlement of the land by Parashurama, the sixth *avatar* of Vishnu, with Brahmin families from the north (Kosambi 1962, Kamat 1990). This probably refers to the settlers who established the particular village organization pattern that characterized Goa by the time the Portuguese entered (Kosambi 1962, De Souza 1990, Kamat 1990).

Village Communities

By 1510 the villages in Goa were organized along what was called the *gauncari* system. It later came to be known as the *comunidade* system.[4] According to this system, each village community consisted of *gauncars* and service castes. It was administered by the *gauncars*, people who claimed to be the original settlers of the village. The *gauncars* also claimed collective ownership of all the village lands. Brahmins controlled and administered a large number of villages in some of the more fertile areas. This shows that they may well have been the first settlers and so gained control of the better lands. Other village communities too, such as the one at Santosgaon, were probably controlled by particular non-Brahmin twice-born castes. Groups of artisans and some tribal groups such as Kunbis and Gauddis may have also entered and settled in parts of Goa.

The villages were administered by *gauncars* and, despite many changes brought about in the system by the intervention of the Portuguese, some of its features survived even till this century in both Catholic and Hindu areas (D'Souza 1975, De Souza 1990). It is probable that in the past village communities developed under the influence of the Brahmins spread through the region. This is seen from the fact that most of the communities had cults of mythical ancestors such as Purusha, Gramapurusha or Ektovir (the brave one). Such cults are, according to Kosambi (1962),

Brahminic in origin. Moreover, the Brahmins also controlled the general assembly of each province. This was an assembly of representatives of the village communities of each province to which certain communities had the right to elect representatives. It dealt with such matters as revenue and judicial administration (D'Souza 1975).

Hence it appears that while the Brahmins were not *gauncars* in every village, their influence got slowly established all over the region (De Souza 1990). In contrast to Dumont (1980), who stresses the radical separation of 'status' and 'power', the material suggests that in this region the higher, twice-born castes had both the highest social status and the greatest access to economic and political resources.[5]

The region was gradually knit together under a caste system with a common base in rice cultivation from the eighth or ninth century onwards. The cultivation of rice required a stable central authority—a position claimed here by the landowners—and a strict discipline revolving around a fixed agricultural calendar. The best use had to be made of the monsoon months, which provided the water resources for the main crop of the year. Those who had brought the cultivation of rice to this region also established the systems of water storage (ponds and wells) and drainage required to make it successful. With its success came the production of surplus and its appropriation by those who laid claim to clearing the land and providing the technology for production.

A system gradually developed by which village land was claimed in common ownership by clans of *gauncars,* who were the male descendants, in the patriline, of the original clearers of the land (Baden-Powell 1900, 1908). They were mostly from the higher castes. The *gauncars* claimed hereditary rights to the land. Theirs was a kind of landed oligarchy organized into *vangors* (clans) of the original settlers of the village (De Souza 1990).

Each village community consisting of the *gauncars* and the service castes attached to them came to be administered by the former. Those who cultivated the soil provided only the labour; the *gauncars* held and maintained the means of production. They had responsibility for protecting the fields from inundation by sea water, for opening and maintaining public roads, for demarcating places for common use and wards for servants and artisans. They also looked into the digging of wells, to the allocation of rights of use of waterways and to the maintenance of irrigation facilities (D'Costa 1964).

While the soil and tropical, monsoon climate were ideal for the cultivation of paddy, in the areas near the sea, where the villages such as the

one under study are located, the land close to the sea was sandy and its yield fairly poor. On the other side, though, where the river flows, the lands could give yields up to sixty-fold (Kosambi 1962). In such coastal areas, moreover, another important source of income was coconuts and these, in the same way as certain other items such as salt, formed an item of exchange from early on, the profits of which accrued mainly to the *gauncars* who could hold plantation lands as individual owners (Kosambi 1956).

The *gauncars* held the land in common but they conducted auctions to lease separate fields among themselves individually for cultivation. Paddy fields were leased for three years. However, the lands near the rivers and creeks, which were called *khazan* lands, were leased out for nine years at a time. Resident non-*gauncars* of the village could not bid in these auctions (De Souza 1990). The *gauncars* paid the taxes owed to the rulers, administered village expenses and then shared the surplus among themselves.

The villages were not isolated and self-contained (Shah and Srinivas 1960). As De Souza (1990) records, various forms of trade were common. Goan villages had their weekly markets and seasonal fairs that enabled villagers to dispose of their surplus produce, whether of agriculture or domestic crafts, and to procure in exchange other provisions that they needed. Salt, coconuts and areca nuts were probably traded for cloth, sugar, cotton thread and a variety of other products. Goa itself was not isolated. It was a trade centre of some dimension. From the main city of Goa, Muslims and Saraswats handled much of Goan trade, probably coming in contact with Arabs, Persians, Gujarati *vanias* (traders) and other mercantile groups both from India and outside.

Caste Organization

Historians generally agree that in the regional social organization of the sixteenth century the Brahmins were at the top of the caste hierarchy and there were different sub-castes among them.[6] Particular groups such as goldsmiths may have claimed Brahmin status (Pereira 1978). The Brahmins were generally characterized by higher learning and education, and some sub-castes followed the priestly occupation. Yet, Brahmins were also landlords and, in many cases, involved in trade, craft and mercantile activities (D'Souza 1975). The Saraswat Brahmins were an important mercantile group in the region.

There is a considerable lack of consensus on which groups constituted the middle ranges of the caste structure. Below the Brahmin sub-groups,

there were probably a number of other high-status groups. We have little historical information about these caste groups. Various writers hold the view that they would have included some warrior and trading (*vania*) groups (D'Souza 1975, Pereira 1978, Gomes 1987).

The appellation 'Chatim', used by traders, has been found in the early church accounts of conversion in a few villages where such non-Brahmin groups were dominant (Pissurlencar 1934). Some writers speak of the existence of a warrior caste known as the Tssaddis, who are said to have come from the north with or following the Brahmins. After conversion to Catholicism these groups seem to have merged into the Chardo (a distorted form of Tssaddi?) caste. Some authors argue that Hindu warrior groups, on the other hand, adopted the appellation Maratha after the seventeenth century, with the rise of this caste in the political arena under Shivaji in the western Indian region (Gomes 1987). While there is no evidence, it has been found that contemporary Chardos and Marathas do refer to each other as groups of similar order.

After these groups came the artisan and service castes such as the washermen, fishermen, carpenters, ironsmiths, barbers, leather-workers, tinsmiths, tailors, toddy-tappers, agricultural workers, weavers and potters. Mahars (basket-weavers) and Chamars (leather-workers) were among those who came at the bottom of the hierarchy (De Souza 1990) as being the most polluted, untouchable groups. The Mahars removed and cleaned dead animals, while the leather-workers dealt with dead animals' skins.

The different castes and sub-castes functioned as endogamous groups. Certain castes had commensal relations with each other, not always reciprocal. The Brahmins would not eat at the houses of the lower castes (D'Souza 1975). The tinsmiths and the tailors would eat in the houses of the higher Brahmin and non-Brahmin castes but the latter would not eat with them. In general, eating with castes lower than one's own in the hierarchy was believed to cause ritual pollution and in some cases—eating with the very lowest castes or with non-Hindus—a pollution so great that the person involved might be ostracized by his caste (D'Costa 1964). However, it is likely that various modes of re-entry into the caste were also possible.

It is possible that a few of the service castes migrated to Goa at various points of time. In fact some of them might have been brought by the Brahmins and other incoming groups to work for them. This is certainly the case reported by Gough (1981) in her study of Brahmin migrations in south India. This possibility would be consistent with the fact that these

groups were found serving the village communities in the sixteenth century.

Many of them worked as *mundcars* (tenants) in the fields of the *gauncars*. They were also involved in other agricultural and non-agricultural occupations. One found groups such as the Mahars, Kumbhars (potters), Cansars (tinsmiths) and Chamars in the villages (De Souza 1990). The various castes of the village were linked together in a system of patron–client or *jajmani* relationships, whereby the lower groups provided hereditary craft services or ritual pollution-removing services to their higher-caste patrons in return for a share in the harvest.

In more recent decades, the castes within the Hindu community have been affected by changes in the economy. Lower castes have started leaving their traditional occupations and many have taken up jobs in the cities. Second, they have also started making attempts at social mobility by imitating the higher castes. For instance, the giving of dowries, which was not common among the lower castes, is slowly becoming prevalent among them. On the whole, then, while caste distinctions are still very important, the system is today not as rigid as it may have been in the past.

Religious Organization

In almost every village in Goa, the main temple had been established by the *gauncars* and they were its *mahajans*.[7] The *gauncars* retained some of the best land in the village for the maintenance of the temple and paid for its servants such as the *bhats* (priests) and the *kolvonts* (dancing-girls) (D'Costa 1964). The high-caste *mahajans* controlled the main temple cult and the lowest castes such as the barbers or Mahars would have no access to the priest's services (Azavedo 1890). The main agricultural festivals and the *zatras* (festivals of the deity) were celebrated in the temple. In every village, the *gauncars* enjoyed certain ritual honours and privileges in these festivities (Baden-Powell 1900). In other words, ritual enacted hierarchy and inequality.

Important deities in Goa were Shiva, Krishna, Ganesh and Vishnu. Lakshmi and Parvati were important female deities. Other deities were specific to the west coast region. Shantadurga, Mahadeva and Maruti were important village deities. To these deities, vegetable offerings were made. Usually Brahmins mediated between the ordinary people and these deities. In some cases, perhaps, other *gauncar* castes may have acted as priests for the village deities. Betall and Ravalnatha were popular

deities who were said to preside over ruins and other vulnerable areas of the village (Pereira 1978). Lower castes could act as priests for these deities and animal sacrifices could be offered to them.

There were deities such as Purusha who was regarded as being either the ancestor of an important lineage in a village or a mythical ancestor who was supposed to have established the village (Pereira 1978). There were also *mharus* (evil spirits), such as those of dead persons and demons, who inhabited certain vulnerable areas in the village. The low-caste *gaddhi* (shaman) mediated between men and such supernatural beings.

Access to the central village deity and other higher deities was controlled by the *mahajans.* The lower castes probably had some role to play in temple rituals but it would, in all likelihood, have been a small one. Even so, they probably had access to deities such as Betall and the *mharus* or spirit deities whom they worshipped separately, and to religious specialists such as the *gaddhi* who cured illnesses and gave protection from evil spirits and demons. To all these deities animal sacrifices could be offered.

There appears to have been a hierarchy of deities, each with specific powers and areas of jurisdiction. Access to the highest deities was controlled by the high castes (Gune 1965) and these deities were seen as representing the highest social values. Yet the pantheon had a fairly loose structure, incorporating various lower deities and spirits patronized largely by the lower castes, as different authors describe for other regions in India (see Mandelbaum 1966, Babb 1975, Fuller 1992).

This pattern of religious organization can be seen among Hindus in Goa today as well. After the Portuguese took over the 'New Conquests', they demanded that the *mahajans* record with the government all the assets and expenses of the temples. This remains the rule till today. However, on the whole, the temples continue to retain their autonomy and their festivals follow a pattern similar to that which existed in the past.

Once rice had established itself as the major crop in Goa, social life organized itself around its cultivation. The major crop was grown during the monsoon months, but there may also have been a winter crop given that reserves of water were available. The coconut palm provided the *jaggery* (unrefined sugar) to make the sweets for any kind of celebration. It also provided the fronds used to construct shelters or fishing boats (Kosambi 1956) and tents. Ritual celebrations too at the village level were linked closely to the cycle of agricultural activities. A certain harmony seems to have been established between the ritual cycle and those of material and social production and reproduction.

Political Relations

It is necessary to talk about the relationship of the village communities with the rulers of the region. While various caste groups were dominant in particular villages, they did not rule Goa as such. It came under the suzerainty of various dynasties at different points of time and to these the local communities paid taxes for military protection. The political situation was characterized by a degree of fluidity. The rulers collected revenues in return for protecting the area from invaders. They did not generally intervene in the life of the local communities.

Little is known of the early political history of Goa. From the eighth to the tenth centuries it is said to have come under the suzerainty of the Silaharas (Kamat 1990) and possibly some tax was paid for military protection. The area came under the Kadambas from the tenth to the fourteenth centuries. Under their rule, the *gauncars* of a number of village communities had been forced to divide their income into shares that were issued in return for loans given by those who bought them. The money obtained for the shares was paid in taxes. The need to sell shares was created because the villages had to bear a great deal of expense in the form of taxes due to the wars between their rulers and Muslim invaders. The sale of shares, however, was restricted to *gauncars* and to those resident in a village. Non-*gauncars* who bought shares obtained the privilege of participation in the income of the village communities but not in their administration.

Under the Vijayanagar empire's century-long rule (late fourteenth to fifteenth centuries), land revenue was imposed on the rice-growing communities. It amounted to one-fifth of the gross income of the village (Kosambi 1956, T.R. De Souza 1979). For palm groves, revenue was assessed at the rate of 5 *tangas*[8] per year per hundred trees (T.R. De Souza 1979). From about 1489, Goa came under the rule of the Adil Shah dynasty. Under these Muslims, two new taxes were introduced. The *godde varado* was a tax imposed to support the Muslim cavalry. Further, an additional land revenue called the *khoshi varado* specifically taxing grasslands and forests was imposed (ibid.). These additional taxes placed a heavy burden on the village communities.

The Adil Shahi rulers attempted to appropriate communal land from the villages. Their military men made frequent marches into the villages attempting to take over communal land as their own. They also forcibly took away people to work as menials in their households (Kosambi 1962). This aggravated relations between the local Hindus,

particularly the higher-caste *gauncars,* and the rulers because it threatened the former's position in the village communities. Perhaps because of this the Hindus, particularly the *gauncars,* welcomed the Portuguese invaders and supported them against the Muslims.

The Portuguese themselves used this situation to their advantage. At first, while they kept the taxes of the earlier rulers, they agreed to preserve all local institutions, such as the *gauncari* system. Later, after 1540, when conversion started on a large scale, *gauncars* who converted were, in principle, allowed to retain their rights in the village communities. The lands and rights of those who refused to convert, however, were taken from them by force (Kosambi 1962).

Portuguese Entry into Goa: The 'Why' of Conversion

By the sixteenth century, thus, a particular village organization characterized Goa, which was largely a Hindu region. The Muslim population of the region which was concentrated especially in and around its main city was to suffer significant losses because of a Portuguese massacre. On the eve of the Portuguese entry into Goa, relations in the village communities were being changed by the policies followed by the Adil Shah dynasty.

In particular, the position of the higher-caste *gauncars* was being undermined. It is therefore possible that they supported the Portuguese against the Muslims in 1510 and converted to align themselves with the former (Pereira 1978). But why did the lowest castes convert? I shall try to find answers to such questions later. For the moment, let me describe the conversion process and try and examine why the Portuguese set out to make converts.

In the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries, Europe was undergoing a phase of transition and great changes were taking place. Portugal's maritime ventures show an advance towards mercantile capitalism. But, as Anderson masterfully argues (1980: 36), mercantilism in this period in Europe retained the 'tell-tale' Medieval 'fusion of political and economic orders'. 'Mercantilism was precisely a theory of the coherent intervention of the political State into the workings of the economy'. The State 'sponsored colonial enterprises and trading companies' (ibid.: 40–41) and was itself founded on the ' social supremacy of the aristocracy and confined by the imperatives of landed property'. In fact it was the noble class and within it particular lines or families that held maritime trade and overseas military activity within their grip.

This is but part of the story. For the Portuguese viewed theirs as a mercantile and maritime empire cast in a military and ecclesiastical mould. Every male Portuguese who went out to the East did so in the service of the Crown or that of the Church (Boxer 1963). In other words, religious 'mission' was never separate from mercantilism, conversion from commerce. This emerges clearly from the *Bull Romanus Pontifex* in which Pope Nicholas V acknowledged the extensive overseas domains that the Portuguese has acquired and the fact that they were

> anxious to retain the monopoly of navigation, trade and fishing in those regions; lest others should come to reap where the Portuguese had sown, or should try to hinder the culmination of their work. Since this work is one which forwards the interests of God and of Christendom, the Pope, Nicholas V, here decrees and declares motu proprio, that this monopoly does in fact apply not only to Ceuta and to all the present Portuguese conquests but likewise to any that may be made in the future, southward of Cape Bojadar and Nun, and as far as the Indies (Boxer 1969: 21).

Missionary activity under the Portuguese must therefore be seen as being linked very closely to the establishment of military and political rule in Goa and in the other regions taken over by them.

The Portuguese king functioned as the Grand Master of the Order of Christ and the *Padroado* which came into force as a result of the series of Papal Bulls (such as that quoted from above) passed between 1452 and 1456 gave him the authority to conquer, subdue and convert all pagan territories. In fact, he was the effective head of the Catholic church within the limits of his overseas territories. He nominated bishops, endowed religious institutions with funds from the royal revenues, licensed the religious orders and the individual clergy who sought passage to the colonies, and often refused to permit them to stay on if they incurred his displeasure or had made their entry illegally (Diffie and Winius 1977).

Therefore, though not all the missionaries who came to Goa were Portuguese, they functioned under and by the orders of the king of Portugal. What Diffie and Winius have to say about Jesuit missionaries applies equally to the other orders which worked under Portuguese rule in this period.

> Xavier was a Navarrese, Valignano an Italian, and Frois a Portuguese and so the Society's dream was not primarily a Portuguese one. But

> Portugal was the patron, the transporter, the financier, and the licensing agent of the Society in Asia, and it backed Jesuit projects with its money, its personnel, and its prestige. Xavier's mummy lies today in a silver tomb in Goa. The Apostle of the Indies and his men, if not all Portuguese, thoroughly represented the Portuguese cause and became its spiritual mercenaries (Diffie and Winius 1977: 405).

There were four major orders which functioned in Goa during this period. The Franciscans arrived in 1517 and their work was limited to Bardez. The Jesuits who arrived in 1542 were responsible for the conversion of Tiswadi and Salcete.[9] The two other orders of significance were the Dominicans, who came in 1548, and the Augustinians, who came a few years later. The orders were not without their differences, but it may be said with some assurance that in their missionary activities in this period they functioned in similar ways.[10]

Portugal's Asian ventures may, in certain ways, be viewed as an extension of the Crusades. From the eleventh century onwards, the history of the Iberian Peninsula was in large measure one of confrontation between Muslim and Christian forces. With the First Crusade in 1095, Christians launched a series of attacks on Muslim to wrest from them the control of the eastern Mediterranean (Diffie and Winius 1977). Subrahmanyam (1993) points out that the conflict against Islamic forces shaped the mentality of the Medieval Portuguese. It entered into the creation of the nation itself, which took its most definite shape by 1250, and involved the defeat of the Muslims who had been ruling the area since the eighth century.

The fourteenth century saw the creation of the Order of Christ. Portugal was charged with the responsibility of defending Christians from the Muslims whether in Europe or overseas. The sixteenth century also saw the rise of the Counter-Reformation in Europe. In the mid-sixteenth century, with the Council of Trent, the church codified its laws and strengthened itself against the Reformation (Boxer 1969). By this time therefore, Portugal like the rest of Catholic Europe, according to Weinstein and Bell (1982), was involved both in the Counter-Reformation at home and in the conversion of the people found in the new-found territories of Asia, Africa and America.

It was with this complex of influences that the Portuguese went forth on their Asian ventures. The Muslims controlled the spice trade with Asia and the battle to wrest control of it almost inevitably assumed religious dimensions for the Portuguese. With such ideas Vasco da Gama

entered the waters of the Indian Ocean. He was on a search for 'Christians and spices' (Boxer 1969: 18). Fed on vague notions that Prester John ruled India and that Indians were Christians, it is no wonder that he and his men paid homage to what they thought was the image of 'Mary' in Hindu temples.[11]

To gain complete control of the Asian trade routes, the Portuguese found that they needed certain key posts where they could establish political and military rule. Goa was one of these posts and the Portuguese were keen to capture it. Boxer (1963, 1969) and Pearson (1981, 1987) argue that the Portuguese had a 'mixed motivation', involving religious, political and economic aspects.

It was in 1510 that the city of Goa and its surrounding islands of Tiswadi, Chorão, Vamsi, Jua and Diwar were taken over by Afonso de Albuquerque and his troops from its Muslim rulers. It is not surprising that Albuquerque's first act on entering the city was to massacre the Muslims. This is described in a letter he wrote to his king, Manuel I: 'I set fire to the city and put them all to the sword, and for four whole days your soldiers caused carnage among them; no Moor was left alive wherever he happened to be found; the mosques were filled with them and set fire to' (quoted in D'Costa 1962: 162).

Against the background described here, it is not surprising to find that the Europeans of the sixteenth century appear to have divided the world into two halves: Christians and infidels/heretics or pagans. The Portuguese treatment of the Muslims in Goa shows how clearly they identified with this world-view. It also explains their handling of the Hindu population of Goa. While they were not traditional enemies to be killed they were nevertheless 'pagans'.

Yet the Portuguese needed the help and support of the Hindus if they were to rule for any length of time in Goa. Given that they identified themselves primarily in religious terms, their method of incorporating the local population into their political body and ensuring its support necessarily involved converting it to their own religion—Catholicism. Mass conversions, then, were a fundamental part of their charter, given the need to create a body of social allies (Houtart and Lemercinier 1981). Conversion and the establishment of Portuguese rule in a foreign land came to be closely linked together.

Conversion: Modes and Motivation

We have now seen why the Portuguese set out to convert. Though few in number,[12] they had at their command superior weaponry in terms of guns and canons on their ships (Pearson 1987) and a body of soldiers who, according to Diffie and Winius (1977), proved themselves fearless in battle against the Muslim rulers. Their forces were, thus, superior to those of the Muslim rulers they fought. The local Hindus were on occasion also threatened with this force. However, in the early stages, as we noted, they supported the Portuguese against the Muslims. In fact, it is likely that many groups accepted conversion to align themselves with the Portuguese.

While the methods of conversion were often destructive, Catholicism was in certain ways adaptable to local social needs. Moreover, it cannot be said that the people who got converted were completely passive or helpless. Why, then, did they convert? Various writers on Goa have addressed this question. Heras (1935) and Anthony D'Costa (1965) argue that the conversions were genuine in that they arose out of true commitment to the faith, not out of force or out of a desire to gain material benefits. Both write self-consciously from the perspective of the converting missionaries. Both hold that the missionaries were humanist in their approach, attempting to come to terms with the belief system of the people and converting only when there was a genuine desire on the part of the person to be converted to turn to Christ. D'Costa (1965) tries to demonstrate, using the available evidence, that people 'asked' to be converted. He interprets this to mean that the conversions were completely voluntary in character. In doing so he closes his mind to the social and political circumstances within which the conversions took place.

Certain other writers, such as Priolkar (1961), Rao (1963) and Pereira (1978) emphasize the opposite: that the conversions were based on force, with the local population helpless in the face of the missionaries. They argue that though in theory it was enjoined that conversions should be based on free consent, in practice the instruments used were the lure of material rewards and the threat of violence. The choice, it is argued, was between the cross and the sword.

Such debates between the temporal or spiritual motivations for conversion raise a false problem. As various writers have shown (Guiart 1962, Caplan 1987), for the converts the two were inseparable; they saw the missionaries' offerings as an undifferentiated 'package deal'. The

same is true for the missionaries, who set out with a clutch of motives wherein the religious was not separable from the economic or the political. Further, whereas the element of force was not absent, the local population itself accepted conversion out of a variety of motives. What I would like to suggest is that an exclusive emphasis on either constraint and coercion or election and intent gives an incomplete picture of the conversions. While the Portuguese closed in upon the Hindu world, choice was exercised by those tracked down, if only within the limits of the given situation.

Generally, at first, the Portuguese used two methods of conversion: taking over the care of orphans and using a system of privileges to attract adherents to the faith.[13] According to the first system, girls under the age of twelve and boys below fourteen whose fathers were no longer alive had to be given over to Christian guardians who would bring them up according to Christian principles. They received Portuguese education and were available for incorporation into Portuguese service. It may be said that by taking over the care of orphans, the missionaries would have secured control over the property they inherited. This may have been one reason for the choice of this method.

The second way of gaining adherents involved setting aside jobs and offices for those who converted, while denying them to those who refused to do so. This contributed to the building up of a force of administrative workers loyal to the Portuguese. This would have been important because, as we have noted earlier, the Portuguese were never numerically a very large force in Goa. Both methods succeeded only in small measure though, and even in the late 1540s the pace of conversions was essentially quite slow (D'Costa 1965).

It was around this time that the methods of conversion underwent a change. A stronger attack was launched against Hinduism, which involved the destruction of all places of worship and idols, the prohibition of religious practices and the activities of priests, and the manipulation, in a variety of ways, of the kinds of socio-economic and kin relationships by means of which society was organized. It was just before this change in method that the Portuguese had consolidated their political position in Goa. Mormugao and the islands of Bardez and Salcete had come under their control in 1543. This area, consisting of Tiswadi, Salcete, Mormugao and Bardez, referred to in the literature as the 'Old Conquests', was to constitute their colony until 1960.

Given that earlier, less forceful attempts at drawing people to their faith had not brought great success, perhaps the new, more destructive

approach owed something to the recent strengthening of the hold of the Portuguese on Goa. At around this time (mid-sixteenth century), further, the Counter-Reformation had grown in strength in Europe and, consequently, the attitude towards non-Christian faiths had begun to harden (Subrahmanyam 1990). It was also during this period that missionary orders such as the Dominicans, Jesuits and Augustinians had begun to arrive in Goa to take control of the conversion effort.

The area of the 'New Conquests', consisting of Pernem, Ponda, Bicholim, Canacona, Sanguem, Quepem and Satari, came under their control in the late 1700s. The fact that large-scale conversions were not undertaken in these areas may also have had something to do with the new political realities facing the Portuguese. Despite threats from indigenous rulers, Goa remained under Portuguese control and power till 1961, and it is with this territory that I am mainly concerned. However, as Subrahmanyam (1990, 1993) points out, the overall power of the Portuguese in Asia underwent shifts even between the sixteenth and eighteenth centuries. Hence, the conversion policies of the Portuguese in Goa may be viewed in the context of the changing nature of their power relations, both with Indian states and other European countries.

By the 1700s, the Portuguese were living in a different political environment. In India, they had entered into situations of 'contained conflict' (Subrahmanyam 1990) with the Mappilas of Malabar and other trading and local ruling groups in the south in the late sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Goa and the Konkan territories themselves had to be defended against the military threats of the Bijapur rulers, the Bhonsles and the Mughals. Portuguese possessions in Asia were threatened by the Dutch and the English (Subrahmanyam 1993). The confidence of the earlier period (1500s) therefore, which may have spurred the Portuguese to 'conquer and convert', had given way to a quieter mood (Boxer 1969). Perhaps because of this, when the new territories came into their possession, conversion was not undertaken on a massive scale. While some missions were set up, the scale was smaller. By and large, in these areas, Hindus were left to their own practices.

To return to the initial phase of conversions. In the 1540s, a number of laws were enacted against the Hindus, particularly against those with socio-economic and religious dominance—the higher-caste *gauncars* and the priests. These laws included the banishment of Hindus from the 'Old Conquests' if they did not convert (in which case they lost their property), the banning of the performance of Hindu religious rites,

festivals and ceremonies, and the prohibition of the religious activities of Hindu priests.

Hindu *gauncars* were forbidden, on pain of payment of a fine, from convening a general council unless the *gauncars* who had converted to Christianity were present. It was declared that if they did so, their decisions in such a council would be considered null and void. In villages where there were more Christian than Hindu *gauncars*, the latter were not permitted to enter the assembly and when the decisions were recorded, the names of all the Christian *gauncars* had to be written first (Wicki 1940–72: Volume 9). Artisans who had served the village *gauncars* and fashioned the objects of worship required in temple rituals could not be employed to produce any objects of Christian worship unless they converted.

Those who converted were to be governed by new rules of inheritance on the lines of those which then existed in Portugal. Under Portuguese laws, and now in Goa too, women were permitted to inherit if they converted. Under Hindu laws, on the other hand, property passed down the male line. While the Portuguese laws on inheritance which were applied to the converts were part of the civil code, they were substantially affected by the Catholic church's ecclesiastical or canon law regarding marriage and kinship relations (see Chapter Five in this book). It is probable therefore that by intervening in kinship relations, the church could hope to gain control over inheritance patterns and property, even if the latter did not come directly under their regulation.

For instance, women who received the right to inherit might, in some cases at least, be encouraged to contribute a part of this inheritance to the church. In this regard, we may mention Goody's (1983) account of the church's intervention in inheritance patterns in Europe for comparative purposes.[14] Again, where male lineal descendants were absent, the church's prohibition on marriage among close kin would prevent a man from marrying his daughter to a close lineal relative, thus ensuring that his property remained within the kin group. It is true that the church in Goa rapidly accumulated vast amounts of property. This was due, primarily, to the fact that they took over the land of the destroyed temples, but perhaps also owed something to the control they managed to acquire over inheritance patterns.

Finally, the Inquisition which, as we shall see, was instituted in Goa in the sixteenth century to prevent recourse to non-Christian practices among converts, could also be used against the Hindus if it was proved that they had tried to prevent persons from converting (T `l 1984).[15]

The Inquisition was established in 1560 in Goa and completely withdrawn in 1812. It must have been quite effective (Subrahmanyam 1993), for novices of various religious orders kept an eye on the people and state forces and prisons were used to detain those who disobeyed the laws. They could be fined or faced jail sentences (Neill 1984). While death at the stake was the most severe punishment possible, it appears to have been rarely enforced. It is possible, though, that a number of people died imprisoned without ever having had their cases come up for trial (ibid.).

The various methods used by the Portuguese effectively cut off the Hindus' access to their old laws and placed severe limitations on the options they could exercise. Yet, ways could be found to get around these measures. Violent resistance to conversion came in the form of attacks on missionaries. In 1583, five Jesuits were killed in Cuncolim village (De Souza 1990). Though the response was swift and repressive, such acts of resistance make it difficult for us to view the Hindus as completely passive. Even when people were converted, some means of purification and re-entry into Hindu society may have been possible. Kulkarni (1992) records that the situation of mass conversion called for hasty measures.

The Brahmins of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries devised various simple methods of purification, such as bathing in the sea on the occasion of particular festivals or being sprinkled with water from the sacred River Ganga. According to him, the Christian missionaries retaliated against these moves by erecting crosses at various places along the seashore. As a counter-move, the Brahmins arranged the mass bathing ceremonies elsewhere along the coast.

The success of Catholicism, witnessed by the fact that by the turn of the sixteenth century the entire area of the 'Old Conquests' had been converted (D'Costa 1965), makes it probable, however, that people accepted conversion in many cases. We should try to understand the motives of the converts. Let us see how the *gauncars* of Carambolim discuss in 1560 the situation arising out of the increasing influence of Christianity.

> One spoke up and argued thus: 'We are caught at a tough time because what we have is sown and cast into the land. If we go to the mainland, the Muslim land on the other side, we have to leave our property and if we stay we will be forced to become Christians. We should take mature counsel and give thought to the future to prevent what might

> happen. We should go with our families to the mainland and live under our law because...it seems to me that it is better to lose our property than our souls'. Another responded thus: 'I do not think that the fervour of Christianity will last beyond the reign of this viceroy because it is his zeal that has led to all this. It appears to me that we should wait till he leaves and in the meanwhile sustain ourselves as best as we can in Goa'. Finally, the seniormost, to whom the rest gave great due, raised himself and said: 'I do not think it good to calculate when the viceroy Dom Constantino is going to leave for Portugal but rather when the fathers of the Company of Jesus are going to leave. And it is clear that they will never leave or stop making Christians. It will not end with this viceroy but will carry on with all the others. Therefore, let us commend ourselves to God and become Christians'. As a result of this resolution, fourteen *gauncars* with their families became Christians (Wicki 1940–72: Volume 4, 658–59, emphasis in original).

On the one hand, this decision to convert by the *gauncars* was totally pragmatic: they did so to avoid losing their property. Yet, there may have been other reasons. By aligning themselves with the new rulers through conversion, the *gauncars* could hope to re-establish their position, which had recently been encroached upon by the Muslim military. Again, the *gauncars*, like other Hindus, faced the realization that since the missionaries would not leave, access to their own deities would remain cut off by the destruction of temples and idols and the prohibitions mentioned earlier. In such a situation, they had *little choice but to adopt the new religion.* It may be possible that some time later such converts began to perceive that the new religion could be adapted to their own social and religious needs.[16]

According to Silva Rego (1947–58), in 1543 in the village of Daugim in Tiswadi, a church was built on the site where a temple had previously stood. The latter was pulled down by the Hindus themselves who asked for a church in its stead. We know that the Portuguese had already decided to destroy the temples around the time and that their destruction has already commenced. Images were being destroyed and laws had come into force making the open practice of Hinduism virtually impossible. Under such circumstances, how might we understand the suggestion in the literature that the Hindus 'asked' for a church; volunteered, as it were, for conversion?

We have other instances of Hindus themselves asking to be converted. For example, Wicki (1940–72: Volume 4, 342–43) tells us:

> Near the church of St John...dwelt an honest pagan man who out of fear of shaming himself in front of his relatives could not say that he wanted to become a Christian. He knew that one of the provisions of the king was the prohibition of the celebration of Hindu festivals under the threat of punishment. One of these was the festival of Shigmo. The man contrived to make it appear as if he was celebrating the festival, and then went to Father André Vaz and asked the latter to behold his action and, accordingly, arrest him and give him the punishment he merited. He asked Father Vaz to charge him before the Vicar General for his breaking of the law, so that he could then become Christian without fear of his relatives.

What does such an incident tell us? Similar stories are to be found about the celebration of other festivals such as Ganesh Chaturthi and of ceremonies such as marriage. Those who had attempted to perform such ceremonies or to celebrate such festivals in hiding, proclaimed their desire to be converted when caught in these prohibited acts. Why? Of course, there is an easy explanation: they wished to escape punishment. But our examination should go deeper than providing merely pragmatic answers.

We must locate such stories within the context of the prohibitions placed on the practice of Hinduism. The option to convert can be appreciated against the increasing furtiveness that had to accompany any attempts at maintaining prohibited rites, which, in their original form, were being rendered less and less *available,* less recoverable. In parenthesis, I would like to suggest that the only mode of recovery, if partial, to become possible was within the context of the new religion and, perhaps, soon enough the converts were to realize this. The expediency that appears to underlie the simulated celebration of Shigmo must also be viewed in the light of this fact that the fitting modes of ritual observance were already increasingly inaccessible. I would argue, therefore, that the Hindus did not act either solely out of pragmatism or completely out of a sense of helplessness. A choice was clearly being made to adopt Catholicism. Let us try and comprehend why.

It would appear that the Portuguese had gained some idea of the centrality of the temple in the life of a village community. They were aware that lands were kept aside for those who served in the temple and

of the link between agricultural processes and religious celebrations. In this respect, the predominantly agricultural societies of Europe and India were similar. Indeed, wherever agriculture is important in Europe today, the same similarities are found. Local churches played and still play an important role in village life in Portugal, as in other countries of Europe.

Fairs are celebrated around the feasts of local patron saints and agricultural festivals are a part of the local church calendar (Marques 1971). In fact, the Catholic calendar moves in harmony with the seasonal changes in Europe, as we shall see in a later chapter. Of course, Goa's indigenous seasonal changes are very different from the European ones, but all these factors do seem to suggest reasons why the Hindus may not have perceived Catholicism as a completely alien religious tradition. Further, the missionaries also soon tried to learn Konkani, the local language, in order to communicate their religion to the local people.

The missionaries encouraged the celebration of the feasts of various saints and the higher and lower social groups hosted these celebrations. In the Hindu pattern, the lower castes had access to their own deities within the pantheon, but in temple-centred ritual where the higher castes were privileged they probably had a more peripheral role. That with conversion the higher castes, particularly the *gauncars*, did not lose their ritual privileges may give some inkling as to why they may have asked to be converted. For the lowest castes, conversion promised a more positive position in that while they were still not as privileged as the higher castes, they now had a particular saint's feast to celebrate.

Clearly the Portuguese missionaries were not at all ill-disposed to the privileges of social rank. Many came from the top ranks of a hierarchically organized society themselves. This explains why they made considerable efforts to convert the higher castes such as Brahmins (D'Costa 1965), why they incorporated Brahmins into the priesthood and why they granted administrative posts and offices principally to the higher castes. They also allowed the converted high-caste *gauncars* a variety of honours and privileges in the church-centred Catholic ritual cycle that came to exist in the villages where the new religion was established. In a variety of ways, the missionaries and the local people, especially the higher social groups, seem to have colluded in a process whereby the church itself could become a medium to express relations of hierarchy.

There is another important aspect to the acceptance of conversion by the Hindus. The Portuguese required conversion as a basis for

recognizing various groups within their political body. Accepting the new religion signified the willingness on the part of the converts to come to terms with them and negotiate with them within the changed environment. It opened the way, particularly for the higher castes, to gain access to the new administrative jobs and offices generated by the Portuguese regime. As some writers point out (Ifeka-Moller 1974, Arasaratnam 1977), Christianity was the religion of the rulers, and conversion was often viewed as the first step towards acquiring some of the superiority of their position.

Let us now turn to look at the ways in which the Portuguese intervened in the socio-economic and kin relations of the local Hindus. We begin with the example of commensal relations between castes. The Portuguese were aware that eating food with strangers defiled the Hindu. It involved a pollution so great that the person found guilty of it was rendered an outcaste and no social relationships could be entered into with him (D'Costa 1964). In a letter to King Sebastian in 1561, Provincial Quadros wrote:

> [A]mong other ceremonies which the devil taught this people, there is one according to which they can in no way either eat in our company or of our food.... For those who eat from our hand cannot be Hindus any more nor mix with Hindus nor the Hindus with them. When on being arrested they are brought to this house because of their asking to be received as Christians, we give them hospitality in order to instruct them in things of our Faith.... Once they experience our hospitality, those who eat our food and in our plates are incapable of being Hindus any more and lose all hope of re-entering their caste, and have necessarily to accept some other law, since they have lost the one they had... (D'Costa 1965: 87–88).

The *Documenta Indica* (Wicki 1940–72: Volume 4, 345–46) tells us the following story of a woman who, when she found that her son had eaten beef at a Christian's house, went to a priest and told him that she wanted to be converted because her son had eaten beef and already become a Christian.

> Two women were going to the town to buy rice. One of them had brought her young son with her. He soon tired with the long walk and she stopped to allow him to rest on the doorsteps of a house. The mother then asked her companion if she would stay with the lad,

> while she herself went into town to purchase rice for both of them. The other was a woman with few scruples. She knocked on the door of the house at which they were seated and asked the woman who answered (who was a sister of one of the Jesuit missionaries) whether she would like to purchase the boy, naming a price. The woman of the house asked her how she could have so little compassion and feeling as to sell her own son. Perturbed by these words, the 'gentile' woman quickly left, saying that she would come for the money later. The lady of the house asked the little boy if he would like to become a Christian. He answered, 'Yes'. To confirm his response, she gave him some beef to eat. Eating beef is an abomination in the eyes of the Hindus and whosoever is guilty of it loses caste. The boy's mother soon returned and found her son and the companion absent. She thought she heard her son's voice from within the house. When she found out what had happened, she went to the market-place where Pedro d'Almeida was buying clothes for the baptism of the neophytes and, with tears, she said to him that she wished to become a Christian because her son had consumed beef and already become one.

A boy who had eaten food at a Christian's house had, in effect, lost his caste and his place in the circle of kinship. For his mother, then, little remained but to follow suit. In this way, not just individuals but whole families, kin groups or local caste groups could be converted.[17]

We do have evidence that meat-eating was not taboo among the lowest Hindu castes (Azavedo 1890). Their deities were often honoured with animal sacrifices (ibid.). For them, the adoption of a meat-centred diet would not have been a wrench. This may have been another reason why the idea of conversion might have appealed to them. In this story, however, we are probably meeting with a Brahmin woman or one from some other high caste.

What is interesting to note is that among Catholics today, beef, and even more particularly pork, are the festive food par excellence. Moreover, the consumption of these are a sign of social status. To cut a pig for a feast is a matter of pride and invokes the admiration of others. It is possible only for the wealthy, who are usually of high caste, to do so. Yet, even the lowliest Catholic will try to purchase at least a kilogram of pork for a feast day. It is clear that the consumption of beef and pork are associated with the Portuguese. It is said that they brought the mass and meat *(mis ani mas).* No wonder that mass and the feast centred around *mas* (meat) are the principal activities of a festive celebration.

It is probable that in the period of conversions accepting *mas* was a crucial way of aligning oneself with those who now ruled. Fiddes (1991) argues that in Medieval and late Medieval Europe, meat was the food of the rulers and the wealthy and powerful. Their diet was heavily meat-centred. Beef and pork, along with goat and mutton, were staple foods. Vegetables were the food of the poorer folk (Marques 1971). According to Fiddes (1991), meat has, in western thought, always been associated with ideas of power, control of status.

Braudel (1981) mentions that the Europeans attempted to establish meat-eating civilizations in the new territories taken over by them. In these regions, as the food of the rulers and the rich, meat was clearly associated with status, power and authority (Braudel 1973, 1981). As he says, 'the European, true to his long-established tastes, regularly and promptly demanded that they be catered for when he was overseas. Abroad, the lords and masters ate meat' (Braudel 1981: 105). It is, therefore, possible to argue that the converts, who associated meat with the Portuguese rulers, may have adopted their meat-eating habits as a means of aligning themselves with them and gaining access to some of their superior power.

In some cases, the network of social relations in the village communities may have been used to bring about conversions. The *Documenta Indica* (Wicki 1940–72: Volume 4, 753) tells us of a priest who came to a village to pray over a Christian.

> This Christian was bedridden with paralysis and his recovery was not expected. When he had finished praying, the priest asked the man, since he was their *gauncars* and leader, to call together the Christians of the village who numbered about forty in all so that he could talk to them about God. When they had come together he gave them a lecture which pleased them very much. He then told them to go and gather together all the '*gentios*' so he could talk to them and make them Christians (emphasis in original).

The priest initially uses the man to approach the people of the village because, according to him, he is their 'leader'. Does this speak of a missionary policy to convert the lower castes through their leaders, the landowners of the village? It may be so, because there are other cases where the missionaries first persuaded the 'elders' or leaders of the village to convert, followed by other caste groups (D'Costa 1965). The vertical ties of socio-economic dependence which bound the lower-

caste groups to their higher-caste landowning patrons may have been utilized in order to convert them.

This is a phenomenon similar to the 'downward percolation' technique of conversion that Forrester (1977: 36) and Oddie (1977b: 94) refer to as being used in later periods by missionaries in other parts of India. Those who did not convert could, in any case, not be employed by the Christian *gauncars* and landowners. From the point of view of these groups, taking on Catholicism was probably both a way of aligning themselves with the new rulers and re-establishing, within the terms of the new regime, their relationship with their patrons in the village communities.

Conversion of the lower castes may however have come about in a different way; one which undermined rather than re-established the village patron–client relationships. The entry of the Portuguese and the establishment of the church in Goa gave rise to certain new occupations such as wine selling and baking. Their products would have been essential to Catholicism because they are used in the sacrament of the mass. It is probable that many of the lower castes converted because they saw as distinctly positive the option of taking up such occupations associated with the Portuguese regime in comparison to their position in Hindu caste society. It is true that the extent of such mobility was not very great. The groups remained at the bottom of the social hierarchy, only losing their 'polluting' occupations. However, the expectation of change may have been an important factor in their conversion.

Sustained Evangelization

As we have seen, affiliation with Catholicism through conversion had its dramatic phase. Over the next two centuries-and-a-half the Portuguese made concerted efforts to firmly establish the faith among the new converts. Recourse to Hindu sacred rites and modes of worship was sought to be prohibited. A multitude of indigenous cultural practices came to be viewed with suspicion and the Inquisition was used to eradicate them. An edict of the Inquisition published in 1736 gives us an indication of the practices that the missionaries wished to forbid.

These included ceremonies in honour of ancestral shades; the maintenance of Hindu sacred rites, festivals, fasts and holy days, and the use of the *tullshi* plant or of rice-flour, oil, flowers or leaves for ceremonial or ornamental purposes. The use of betel leaves and areca nuts in ritual exchanges, such as on the occasion of marriages or as marks of social precedence, was also prohibited. The singing of celebratory verses at

marriages and other festive occasions and the employment of traditional musical instruments were forbidden. The use of garments such as the *dhoti* and the *choli* was frowned upon. The maintenance of particular pollution beliefs and practices considered inimical to Christian principles was prohibited (Priolkar 1961, D'Souza 1975).

Among the converts, therefore, Hindu religious rites and symbols came to be replaced by Catholic liturgical celebrations, feasts of Christian saints, church-centred solemnization of life-cycle rites, and Christian symbols and prayers. Hence, the church and its missionaries clearly also influenced people through the slow process of teaching them about such religious practices (Comaroff and Comaroff 1986).[18] Those who learnt about Catholicism became familiar with it through the liturgy of the mass and practices associated with various stages in the life-cycle of the individual and elaborated in the annual calendar of the church.

At first the missionaries attempted to stifle the local language and impose Portuguese on all classes of people (Priolkar 1961). They soon realized, however, that learning and teaching in the local language, Konkani, was essential to propagating the faith. Catechism lessons were instituted for both adults and children in each village to spread knowledge of Catholicism (D'Costa 1965). Villages constituted parishes and had their priests and church in which the community worshipped. Various kinds of religious literature had come out by the early seventeenth century in Konkani, including stories about Christ and the lives of saints. These might have been read out to the faithful in the churches regularly on Sundays and days of devotion (Stephens 1907).

In this way, then, Catholicism came to be established in the 'Old Conquests' area of Goa. The community was brought together under a particular set of church practices, ceremonies and beliefs, and came under the ecclesiastical direction of a hierarchy of priests. The Catholics remain a major religious community in what is today a territory within the Indian union.

Certain important questions are raised by the discussion in the section, which should be addressed. Why did the missionaries try to change practices which on the face of it seem to have nothing to do with religion and are purely cultural? In this respect, is Goa different from other parts of India or the world where conversion took place under colonial rule? Is this difference to be traced, as is popularly believed, to the presence of the Inquisition, which is regarded as having rendered conversion here more forceful than in other regions?

In part, the answer to the last two questions must be in the affirmative. But we must explore the issues much more sensitively and deeply. Visvanathan (1993b), speaking of Protestant missionaries effecting conversions in south India, says that they

> were earnest that there must be outward symbols of this change of beliefs. The missionaries wanted their Tamil converts to shave the *kudumi*, that tuft of hair which signified high status, and separated them from Muslims, Christians and low castes. The missionaries believed that this was a symbol of idolatry... . There were other customs which the missionaries abhorred, some examples being, the celebration of puberty among Tamil Christian girls, the use of cowdung and rice flour for decorative purpose, oil baths on Saturdays and Wednesdays, chewing betel, [and] expressing relationships of honour through the use of sandalwood, flowers and betel (ibid.: 12–13, emphasis in original).

It is interesting that these prohibitions bear a startling resemblance to those we found instituted in the case of Goa. And there is no Inquisition to which one could attribute them. On the other hand, among colonial territories, the Inquisition was not unique to Goa. It functioned in many areas under Portuguese and Spanish rule. It was used in Africa and South America to eradicate a number of so-called 'pagan' customs, including menstruation rituals and ancestral rites. It was applied to Portuguese pockets in south India. With the Synod of Diamper, Portuguese missionaries in Kerala tried not only to bring about changes in the liturgy of the Syrian Christians but also to eliminate all traces of Hindu belief and socio-ritual practice found among them.

Across regional, temporal and denominational boundaries, missionaries seem consistently to seek visible signs of religious change from their converts.[19] The various historical examples reveal to us that conversion as a sociological phenomenon is rarely limited only to a transformation in religious beliefs. Social and cultural changes always accompany it. There is accommodation and negotiation though, rather than an elimination of indigenous ways.

In Goa, despite the Inquisition and various prohibitions, we find mention, even in the colonial period, of visits by Catholics to Hindu religious specialists. One finds evidence of a continuing familiarity with Hindu religious customs, as the songs recorded in the Introduction show us. There are therefore 'limits', as Mills (1994: 84) puts it, to coercive

evangelical methods. The similarity in Hindu and Catholic social patterns and ritual practices revealed by my data, which I examine over the next four chapters, suggests that the missionaries did forge links with local practice and people themselves adjusted to the limitations placed on them without completely giving up their own cultural modes.

Notes

1. This picture draws upon a variety of sources. Some writers gave me an idea of the political and economic contours of pre-Portuguese Goa (Figueiredo 1963; Kosambi 1947, 1956, 1962; Kamat 1990; Pereira 1981; De Souza 1979, 1990). These authors have drawn their data from the available administrative records of the pre-Portuguese rulers of Goa. The writings of D'Souza (1975), Pereira (1978), Gomes (1987), De Souza (1990) and Bragança Pereira (1991), help us to understand caste relations, and social and religious practices. They also rely on archival sources dating from 1510 onwards and collected together in *Grammatica da Lingua Concani* (Estevão 1857), *As Comunidades de Goa* (Azavedo 1890), *Arquivo Português Oriental* (Bragança Pereira 1936–40), *Documenta Indica* (Wicki 1940–72), *Documentação para a Historia das Missões do Padroado Portuguese do Oriente* (Silva Rego 1947–58) and *Archivo Portuguez-Oriental* (Cunha Rivara 1992). These collections contain accounts and letters written by administrators and missionaries. In them one also finds stories and verbal accounts recorded by missionaries in the sixteenth century or later periods. The charter drawn up by the Portuguese in 1526 recording the customs of the region, called the *Foral de usos e costumes dos Gancares e Lavradores da Ilha de Goa, e outras anexas a ela* was also used as a source. While all these documents provide details about indigenous society, there is a possibility of some bias in the accounts because they are written by the converters. It is possible that they used the information to formulate strategies for conversion. For instance, why did they choose to use beef and pork to convert, or intervene in inheritance patterns? They clearly also used the knowledge of local practices to prohibit converts from retaining those that were considered incompatible with Christianity. On the other hand, they may also have tried to adapt Catholic feasts in terms of the indigenous festivals that they knew of. All in all, such accounts are not false. The presence today of practices similar to those described then shows this.
2. There were small numbers of tribals in Goa who were probably Hinduized over time (Kosambi 1956). This means that they were absorbed into Hindu society and adopted its customs and practices. Some writers like to view these tribes as being autochthonous to Goa (Azavedo 1890).
3. As Fuller (1992) says, it is true that the term Hinduism is not a traditional concept but only gradually came to denote someone who adhered to the indigenous religion of India (Hindustan). However, that does not nullify 'an analysis that demonstrates that Hinduism is a relatively coherent and distinctive religious system...' (ibid.: 10).

4. *Comunidade* is a Portuguese term. The word was also used for the indigenous *gauncari* system (a term similarly deriving from *gaun* or village) that they found in the village communities whereby all village lands were collectively owned and managed by the original settlers of the village—the *gauncars*. Hence, the Portuguese word refers to the already existing *gauncari* system in Goa.
5. In many places in Goa, the Brahmins were *gauncars* and, as such, landowners. While among them there were divisions between lineages or sub-castes which followed the priestly occupation and those which farmed the land or traded (Pereira 1978), Brahmins as a whole had both the highest ritual position and a great deal of secular power—as members of the general assembly of the *comunidades* for instance—and hence Dumont's rigid division is not really acceptable.
6. None of the literature unfortunately gives any glimpse of caste mobility. Perhaps we can accept the basic picture described here, always reminding ourselves that flexibility and mobility, even if unrecorded, must have been possible (Srinivas 1969).
7. *Mahajan* is the title used by members of *mazanias* which are religious associations consisting of the founders of temples and their descendants (Pereira 1978).
8. The *tanga* was a local silver coin, equal in value to about Rs 3 of today.
9. The order of the Jesuits was disbanded in 1773 (Bayly 1989) and most of their missions handed over to the Franciscans or others. They returned to Goa some sixty years later.
10. See Warner (1976) for examples of theological differences. Weinstein and Bell (1982), on the other hand, point to the growing conformity of the orders in this period, particularly after the Council of Trent and with the growth of the Counter-Reformation.
11. When the mistake was realized, the Portuguese attitude towards the Hindus changed. When the ruler of Calicut refused to expel the Muslims who came to trade there, Vasco da Gama opened fire on the city's streets and killed several hundred fishermen pursuing their work along the coast (Diffie and Winius 1977).
12. According to Diffie and Winius (1977), there were never more than 6,000–7,000 Portuguese in or subject to military service in the Orient at any one time during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, and if one adds to this a figure of about as many clerics, European dependents, servants and half-bloods who came under European law, the figure comes to 14,000 at most. And these were scattered from Mozambique to Macau.
13. There was also Albuquerque's policy of mixed marriages in the first few years after the Portuguese entry in 1510 (D'Souza 1975). The Portuguese soldiers who married the few remaining widows or daughters of the Muslim soldiers killed in battle were given pieces of land to help them settle down. Nothing is more erroneous than the common conception that Catholics in Goa are of mixed blood like the Anglo-Indians. The *mestiço* (racially mixed) population even in 1866 totalled only 2,240 (Boxer 1969, Pearson 1987).
14. Possibly, the church used some methods of persuasion. Where a woman of wealth had no close kin to inherit, the church could persuade her to donate money to it on the grounds that the money was going to the Christian community—her 'spiritual' kin. More likely, though, the church may hav[illegible] frequently

received money or land in return for providing dispensations from its marriage regulations (see Chapter Five).

15. The Goan Inquisition was styled on that which then existed in Spain and Portugal to control apostasy among converts to Christianity from Judaism. The establishment of the Inquisition in Portugal took place in 1531 and in Goa, where it had jurisdiction over converts from Judaism (who had come from Portugal) and Hinduism, it took place in 1561 (Subrahmanyam 1993).
16. Certainly I cannot prove this, but as I show in Chapter Four, the annual cycle of the church has over time been clearly adapted to suit the Catholics' own needs. This process may have been helped along by the missionaries. Through the use of the Inquisition, the converters prohibited access to Hindu deities and temples, the celebration of Hindu festivals and the use of Hindu forms and items of worship among the converts (Priolkar 1961). Yet, adaptation was also possible. The converters were apparently prepared to allow church rituals to be adapted to local custom, as long as the object and means of worship were Christian in content. The *Documenta Indica* (Wicki 1940–72: Volume 4), for instance, gives us an example of how the harvest festival might have come to be incorporated into the Catholic calendar in Goa. The people and *gauncars* of the village of Diwar in north Goa requested the priest to come and bless their harvest as in the past the Hindu priest had done. They went to the field carrying a banner with the name of Jesus and St. Paul on it. The priest came carrying his stole and surplice. When they reached the field, the priest blessed them with holy water and blessed the sheaves. These were carried back to the church, where the priest laid his on the altar-steps first, followed by all the others. The people of other villages such as Navelim, Malar and Goltim did the same. One might argue that it is from beginnings such as this that the Catholic calendar came to be adapted to indigenous social and religious needs. I am not saying that conversion came about because people immediately saw the possibility of such adaptations, but after taking over the religion they may quite soon have found that they could adapt it to their needs. The missionaries may have been amenable to such adjustments because the incorporation of agricultural festivals was not unknown in the European Catholic calendar of that period.
17. Braudel makes the statement that Europeans populated the New World with 'herds from the Old' (1981: 105). There is no evidence that the Portuguese brought pigs to Goa. Wild and domesticated pigs were found in both north and south India. While all Hindu castes in Goa, including Brahmins, except on ritual occasions always ate fish (Mascarenhas-Keyes 1988), the meat of pigs may have been consumed only by the lower castes. In south India, swine-herding was the occupation of certain very low castes (Srinivas 1965). Muslims in the region would not have touched pig meat because of the Islamic injunction against it.
18. Though exact numbers varied, there were about 500–600 missionaries to attend to the Catholics at any one point of time in Goa (Subrahmanyam 1993).
19. Nonetheless, the missionary acceptance of particular indigenous modes, despite the stance of intolerance articulated most dramatically through the Inquisition, may not raise surprise. Here are reverberations of an ancient Catholic attitude (see also Chapter 4). Incidentally, in practice, Protestants often proved less accommodating (see Comaroff 1985, Dube 1992).