

Pereira, José / Martins, Micael.

1984.

Goa and its Music. No. 1.

In:

Boletim do Instituto Menezes Bragança, No. 144, pp. 75-82. Panaji, Goa.

(Refer also to No. 145, pp. 19-112, No. 153, pp. 89-108, No. 154, pp. 41-48, No. 155, pp. 41-72, No. 156, pp. 25-40, No. 169, pp. 67-77.)

GOA & ITS MUSIC

José Pereira
&
Micael Martins

INTRODUCTION,

The vague and disturbed popular image of Goa hangs as a pall over the depths of its real interest. A smallness of size deceptively masks its character as a crucial turning point in history. ⁽¹⁾ On it as hinge Asia's ponderous swing towards Europe began. Not long after Constantinople had fallen ⁽²⁾, the domain of an immemorial and senescent Tropical Old World was punctured by a chain of eruptions. A hot flood of the political and cultural energy of a Europe still fully alive broke through and cascaded on a dying landscape. Goa was the scene of the first blast and from there the storm passed over to other parts of the eastern world.

There too, the lava first cooled into a new layer of fertile soil that became embedded in the older environment. Never since has so harmonious a fusion of the two worlds been achieved. ⁽³⁾ Today, submerged in oblivion, this little cultural crater of India's west coast still preserves its characteristics of embryo, repository, miniature world and channel. It is, to begin with, a Latin Asia in embryo ; a full picture, on a minute scale, of what the continent would have been like had the Portuguese expansion there been as successful as the Spanish in Latin America was to be.

In the second place, it is the repository of some of the old ideas and forms of living of India and Europe. The basic concepts of Indian civilization there preserve a freshness belonging to the period of their first formulation, without the bitter maturity they acquired in most parts of the subcontinent. ⁽⁴⁾ There too some of the devotions and mystery plays of mediaeval Europe survive. ⁽⁵⁾ Musical forms prevalent in Renaissance Europe are still popular ⁽⁶⁾; and the blaze of Baroque courts has an afterglow in the stately ceremonial dances of the Brahmin aristocracy. A music with the sadness of old India is accompanied by dance steps and pageantry that reflect the glamour and gilding of the court of Louis XIV. ⁽⁷⁾

Thirdly, it is a *miniature world* — one of those outlying areas which, though small in their geographical context, seem complete worlds in themselves, surrounded by a rim of darkness. Some other examples are Bali, Ethiopia, Armenia and Japan. In the center of the Goan cosmogony is the body of Xavier, shrivelling in its tomb of silver and jewels. Around it, the vaults and towers of the *Rome of the East* have collapsed in ruin. Circling the desolation is a phalanx of white churches in an undulating landscape — emblazoned with fields and lakes and revealed under a vivid sky. Beyond this, a deepening wilderness woos the Baroque of the Hindu temples and then breaks in dense waves on a sheer mountain wall. In this domain, at once sparkling and gloomy, the ghosts of Old India and Europe live their twilight existence. The outer darkness, however, has two luminous gaps of remote and mystical vision; the monasteries and palaces of Lisbon rising above a cluster of caravels and Rome's constellation of cupolas — crowned by Dome poised in glory over Peter's tomb.

Lastly, it is a *channel* through which European cultural

forms passed into India. Music was among the most important and the musicological value of Goa to Europe and India is considerable. Students of European music will find in Goan Song an unusual handling of mediaeval and early polyphonic forms ; a discovery of possibilities in them unsuspected in the land of their origin. These insights were brought into being mainly through the influence and challenge of traditional Indian music, vestiges of which remain in the works of Goan composers. (*) Scrutiny of their work for purely European elements would thus whet the appetite for more integrally Indian fare, found best in India's classical tradition.

On the other hand, a systematic examination of Goan Song can be a great help to students of Indian music, particularly Indian folk music. This is a vast and uncharted area and very little of its material has been organized. The science of folklore, European in origin, has familiarized itself more with European material than with the non-European. A good place to start systematic research would thus be a part of India having strong cultural links with Europe, such as Goa.

As we mentioned above, Goa is a miniature world ; a tiny image, in its own way, of both India and Latin Europe. The smallness of its size and its clearly defined cultural characteristics are welcome from the point of view of relative simplicity of scope and easy manageability of material. Work on the musical tradition of this diminutive India will enable one to take in hand, with greater confidence, the immensely complex task of defining and coordinating the output of the rest of the macrocosmic subcontinent lying beyond its mountains.

However, this book is mainly concerned not with Goa's Folk Song, but with its Art Song, and in just one of its forms, the Mando. A niche that is its own by right has thus to be

found for the Mando in the edifice of Indian Music. At the same time, it is of great relevance to the history of folk song as well. Art music is often a sublimation of much that is best in a tradition of folk music; the Mando stands at the end of a long history of evolving song types, nearly all of which have strands woven into its texture. The contribution which this book has to make to Indian music will consist in applying a systematic method to define, classify and describe the unfolding of the folk song types found in one part of India (Goa) and to show their link with the art music of that area in its chief song form.

Goan Song, composed in the Konkani language, is only one facet of the larger tradition of Konkani Song. The habitat of the language extends for a considerable distance on both sides of Goa, especially to the South. Studies on Goan Song—the most intensively examined branch of Konkani Song—are abundant, more so perhaps than any other musical tradition in the whole subcontinent. (9) This fact increases in significance if we take into account the small size of Konkani-speaking territory. From this angle, it is doubtful if any Indian song tradition possesses a body of appreciative analysis proportionately equalling ours in quantity of studies and the frequency of their appearance. Much of their content is speculative, a fair amount amateurish and hardly any organized. Our work aims at remedying these defects.

Counterbalancing the fruitfulness in production is a quality of evanescence—effecting most things on Konkani soil—that blights its preservation. A process of rapid growth, blossoming and decay seems to control research in this body of song. The books where studies of it appear soon become very rare, for the vicious damp and the crawling white menace of termites have

destroyed whole libraries. As regards the usually obscure periodicals in whose pages they have appeared, when stray numbers have not found their way into unsuspected private hands, surviving copies are almost impossible to trace. Manuscript studies of great value have been either lost or destroyed. The only way out of this unfortunate situation is the systematic examination of private collections. We hope that some investigator with zeal will undertake this task soon.

There is also a wealth of manuscript and printed sources about Goa, widely scattered over libraries in India and Europe. ⁽¹⁰⁾ While it is unlikely that they may contain examples of Konkani Song, a not inconsiderable portion of them comprises works of early Konkani literature. All these sources throw light on life as it was lived in the villages of Goa — the cradle and nucleus of Konkani Song. When this material comes to be examined, we shall know more about the land's social conditions, economic life, administrative organization, legal institutions, folk habits and modes of religious behaviour. An inexhaustible fund of information on these factors as existing in the nineteenth century—period of the apogee of Goan Song—are the Goan newspapers ⁽¹¹⁾ and local literature. One important novel, Francisco João da Costa's (or "Gip's") *Jacob e Dulce* ⁽¹²⁾ is priceless in this regard. All these works depict the conditions of living in a settled, agricultural Goa — valid for most of its history before the coming of industrialization.

We have only picked up the nuggets on the surface of this mine. As an exploration of Goan Song in all its dimensions, therefore, our work is inadequate. Yet, from another angle it is quite ambitious, for it sets out to synthesize what has so far been said about Goan Song. In other words, it aims at encompassing the subject's length, without endeavouring to scale its

heights or plumb its depths: it aspires to an integrated work, which will render tractile and pliable, in a coordinated fashion, the diffuse and hitherto unrelated material of Goan Song.

Our quest has taken us to unthought-of places. We have passed from the sunlight of the Konkan to grim monastic libraries. Problems arising on the fringes of the jungle have led us for their solution to the dark and smelly ghetto-like flats in Bombay where so many Goan families live. Had we ourselves not originated from the area where most of Goan Song derived its origin, Saxty (Salcete), many of its treasures might have remained hidden to us and thus forever lost.⁽¹³⁾ However, the places one least thinks of as being likely treasure spots reveal bright veins of ore to stubborn miners. It will be the privilege of those who belong there to unearth these riches and pile them in the thesaurus of Konkani Song—before it is too late and the fairy gold disappears.

This tantalizing but often only apparent scarcity of material is not the only difficulty. Many researchers — like ourselves in the early stages of our exploration—must also have experienced frustration at the chaos of known forms and types in the repertoire of Konkani Song. If one does not buckle under this challenge, one is driven to resolve that the recalcitrance of the subject shall be humble. Difficulties involving field work will always remain; nonetheless, we can confidently say that some paths have been cut through the knotted jungle. We thus hope that our work will be a useful contribution, on the one hand towards promoting a study in depth of Konkani Song, on the other, beginning the systematic mapping out of the territory of local Indian musical traditions.

Goan Song, especially the Mando, is the highest expression of the Konkani spirit⁽¹⁴⁾, imprisoned in melancholy but

obsessionally drawn to the stars. ⁽¹⁵⁾ Its intrinsic value is for us an ultimate, and its sympathetic interpretation is our finality. For this end it is imperative that some of its fine examples be made known. While its music has an irresistible appeal, it is unlikely that Goan Song, on its poetic side, will ever become popular in a large way outside the Konkan. Unremittingly suppressed by aggressors and powerful neighbours, the language of its expression, Konkani, has shown a vitality and a core of adamant that one would not have thought possible in a language so inadequately protected against such massive attack. Its resilience has few parallels anywhere. The smallness of its territory and population, and its lack of cultural selfconsciousness are factors which in any language can easily be exploited for its dissolution. If mere efficiency could ensure death, the organization and resolve of its usually unscrupulous enemies would long ago have mowed down the sweet tongue — were it not for the steel and fire of its hidden sinews of resistance. ⁽¹⁶⁾

It was the subconscious apprehension of its own uniqueness at its highest level — Konkani Song — that repelled these lethal forces. It will be our greatest reward if our book can help this subconscious to grow into a reflexive awareness of the Konkan's cultural riches. It is possible to do this in our days more than before, when adverse historical factors were arrayed against it in even denser serried strength. That such an awareness will grow is beyond question, as few song traditions,

have been upheld so enthusiastically as Konkani Song by the Konkanis. Its realization and official acceptance will be a vindication of the immemorial Indian cultural genius for allowing varied and maturing cultural modalities free play within the expanse of its oneness.
