

Silva Gratas da, Fatima.

1997.

The Impact of Portuguese Culture in Goa: A Myth or Reality.

In:

Borges, Charles J. (ed.), Goa and Portugal. Their cultural Links. Pp. 41-51.

Concept Publishing House. A/115-116, Commercial Block, Mohan Garden,
New Delhi 110059.

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THE IMPACT OF PORTUGUESE CULTURE ON GOA A Myth or A Reality?

FÁTIMA DA SILVA GRACIAS

The pre-Portuguese culture of Goa was a product of her long interesting history; the result of being under the sway of various Muslim and Hindu dynasties. The pre-Portuguese culture of Goa was a fusion of Jain, Buddhist, Muslim and Hindu influences. It was different from the western culture and in some ways superseded the culture of the west.

The Portuguese when they conquered Goa from Adilshah of Bijapur, brought along their own culture which was also a blend of cultures mainly Latin and Moorish. We imbibed some elements of the Portuguese culture but at the same time maintained many existing elements of our rich culture. B. B. Borkar, Goan poet and writer referring to Goan culture says, "The virility and vitality of this quiet, soft-mannered and peace loving society's culture were tested and proved beyond doubt when in the sixteenth century the Portuguese conquerors of Goa tried fanatically to uproot it completely. Though partially impaired under the onslaught of superior arms and administrative machinery, it not only outlived it but even absorbed some good and progressive features of their Latin culture".¹

¹ By culture, we mean human creations that is all that man has made in the form of material goods, all that man has elaborated in the way of attitudes, beliefs, ideas and judgements, codes, institutions, arts, sciences, religion and philosophy.

The unique Goan identity or non-identity has been in focus in recent years and has been subject of much discussions. The opinions or views have differed regarding the impact of the

Portuguese rule on Goa.

These views could be divided in three categories: that which believes that the Portuguese rule left no impact or rather a superficial impact, second view is of those who feel that the Portuguese culture left a powerful impress on Goa and yet a third view that points out that the Portuguese culture only touched a particular community and that too only people of higher social status and not the majority of Goans.

Those who hold the first view feel that over 450 years of Portuguese rule were in vain and that there was only a superficial impact of Portuguese culture on Goa. According to them Goa is like the rest of India. One has remarked, "Goa is an extension of Maharashtra (a large neighbouring state) — an extension of the rest of India minus its grinding poverty, illiteracy and teeming population. The differences if any are only superficial. The core of Goa is very Maharashtrian — except for the Portuguese rule and its adverse consequences".²

However, a Brazilian architect-visitor to India, Ana Cristina Santos Parreiras, refutes this view. She says, "Goa is more like Brazil rather than rest of India. The lifestyle differs between Goa and rest of India specially when it comes to the ways of dealing with the people, table manners, clothing and more so Goans have a great sense of humour not found, for instance, in south of India".

Manohar Malgonkar remarks, "Goans are markedly different from other Indians. In part, of course, it is the legacy of their language Konkani but to greater extent, it is the influence of the convivial and informal ways of the Portuguese national character that has taken root and grown strong in the soil of Goa".³ The statement that Goan ethos owes little to the Portuguese influence might not sound convincing to those who feel that Goa's unique character sets them apart from rest of India. Among those who believe that the Portuguese culture left a significant impact on Goa is the Goan architect Lucio Miranda. Saryu Doshi writes, "The Portuguese have left their impress on the attitude and the life styles of the people of Goa and given the place a definite, identity of its own".⁴ Among those who hold the third view is Prabhakar Angle. Angle writes that "with exception of *descendentes* and a very small section of affluent Christians who adopted European habits, the rest of the population of Goa is not different from rest of India. Hindus and Muslims did not suffer any modifications in their lifestyles by

their contact with the Portuguese".⁵

Some of my Hindu colleagues do not accept the view — that the Hindus have not been influenced by the Portuguese culture. They state they have been touched by the Portuguese culture. The Konkani language they speak at home has many Portuguese words. In addition, they say that the Portuguese influence has made them in some ways more liberal and sophisticated than their counterparts of same social status elsewhere in India.

Given the fact that eastern and western cultures parleyed for a considerable length of time in Goa, it is but natural that Goan culture should be influenced by the culture of the rulers. Goa has a distinctive culture and it can be certainly attributed to the Portuguese to some extent. Although the Portuguese influence is more pronounced on the Christians, the Hindus are nonetheless influenced by Portuguese way of life. Goa is perhaps the first place in this globe where the East met the West — where there has been mingling of both cultures for the first time. This cultural encounter had both positive and negative impact. In many ways it has contributed to enrich our culture.

Several major factors have contributed to the formation of Goan identity and spread of Portuguese culture in Goa. The most important, it is the Catholic Church. The Catholic Church played a significant role in Goa not only in spreading a new belief but also in shaping the Goan identity and spreading the Portuguese culture. Therefore, naturally the Christians were more influenced than other communities.

Goan intellectuals contributed to the spread of the Portuguese culture too. In the early centuries of Portuguese rule, the intellectual life in Goa was dominated by European clergy and it was church-oriented. As result Goan intellectuals were influenced by European thought and models of the day. In the later period, education became more secular. Goans were brought in contact with liberal ideas which made them conscious of their rights.

The Impact of Portuguese Culture

The Portuguese culture has left its impress on the attitude and general life style of the Goans. The impact of the Portuguese culture was felt in different fields and more prominently in architecture, arts and crafts, education, music, religion and cuisine.

The influence of Portugal is seen in art and crafts. Some of these works of art were brought from Portugal, while others were inspired or copied from models brought from Portugal by receptive Goan artisans. They were made for the local use and for the courts of Indian rulers. In course of time Hindu, Mughal and other oriental designs and elements were incorporated. Our artisans made beautiful objects using gold, silver, brass, mother-of-pearl, stone, wood, ivory, bone, copper and similar material. Diogo Couto, the first archivist-historian of Portuguese India, has left a scathing account of the works produced at the time. Describing the home of the *Vedor* after his retirement he writes: "If you should walk into one of their houses you will find the verandah full of tailors, some making mantles of silk and satin, others rich quilts. Inside, craftsmen hammered out silver carafes, Chinese style tankards, chains and bracelets for wives and daughters, other men trimmed caskets with tortoise shells, silver and coconut from the island. Below, in the courtyard, turners and carpenters were busy at orders for pleasure boats of all varieties, desks in marquetry work and wardrobes for commercial use."⁶

Many of the objects made right from early period are still seen in Goan churches, temples, and private homes as well as in other parts of India and museums abroad. Goan artisans evolved a new art which came to be known as Indo-Portuguese art — an art that incorporated elements of Portuguese and Indian art.⁷ The Portuguese brought European architecture to Goa — including the Renaissance architecture. They built grand churches and convents. The churches of Goa, specially the churches of Old Goa represent a fusion of Indo-European elements. European architectural influence can be seen not only in religious architecture but also in military and civil architecture. The Portuguese were responsible in teaching our masons this architecture which still exists in Goa. The progeny of the masons who were artistic and trained to build churches and grand monuments in different European styles, used these styles for domestic houses and produced beautiful houses for both Christians and Hindus. The art was passed from generation to generations of masons.

Today, we have about 200 grand houses from the Portuguese period depicting various aspects of the architecture brought by the rulers.⁸ These houses and many big churches are characteristic of Goa. One does not see them in other parts of India — the result of

the western influence, which resulted in a special kind of architecture known as Indo-Portuguese architecture. Lucio Miranda is of the opinion that modern architecture of Goa is making marks based on Indo-Portuguese architecture such as arches, tiled roofs, verandahs and other decorative elements. However, architect Dean de Cruz feels that the Indo-Portuguese architecture is slowly disappearing because it is not being incorporated in modern architecture of Goa. Further he says that unlike Indo-Portuguese architecture, modern Goan architecture does not have sense of space and details.⁹ Some temples of Goa are unique with beautiful architecture. It is true a considerable number of the Goan temples were erased by the Portuguese rulers but some were rebuilt in the 18th century. The rebuilt temples mainly of Ponda have many aspects of counter-Reformation church architectural style.¹⁰

A look at the paintings in many of our convents and churches scattered all over Goa, specially the Convent of St. Francis of Assisi and Convent of St. Monica at Old Goa, provides information about the impact of the western culture in this field. In modern times Goan artists Angelo Fonseca, Newton de Souza, Gaitonde and Laxaman Pai have shown the capacity to synthesize eastern and western styles.

Western education introduced by the colonial rulers helped the Goans in course of time to master several European languages. Learning of Latin made the Goans better prepared to think in Latin based scientific terms, rational thinking and to adjust better to the western world. It opened new avenues for Goans outside their land when they started migrating in large numbers to British India and Africa. Goans who migrated returned home for holidays every few years. They brought along new ideas, new things and outlook as result of contact with other cultures. In addition contacts with Portugal and her colonies such as Brazil, Mozambique, Macau and others made it possible the transfer of ideas, technology and goods which enriched the material culture of the people and strengthened their sense of identity.

The Portuguese established in Goa, the first Medical School of western medicine in Asia.¹¹ The graduates of this school have carried pioneering work in different parts of the world. They were able to blend the eastern and western medicine.¹² The first printing press in India was brought by the Portuguese in Goa. It helped the dissemination of culture through the printed word.

The use of Roman script to write Konkani created bigger

interaction between languages of the East and the West. The Portuguese language had its impact on Konkani — the mother tongue of the Goans. The Konkani spoken both by Christians and non-Christians has many Portuguese words. Even today one finds Portuguese words in the Konkani texts (devanagri script) prescribed in Goan schools for instance words such as *herdeiros*, *carreira*, *escola*, *calção*, *codigo*, *bolsa*, *sabão* and *passeio*. In many cases the last syllable has been dropped as for example in case of *janel*, *codel*, *mez*, *vestid* or *cop*. The Portuguese language also left its impact on Marathi language in Goa and words such as *saban* (*sabão*), *chavi* (*chave*) and *Mez* (*meza*) are not unusual in this language.

One of the lasting Portuguese influences was on Goan cuisine. The dietary habits of the Goans changed when they converted to Christianity. Beef and pork became a part of their diet cherished of upper and middle classes. The Portuguese not only introduced some of their food habits but also brought along Chinese food habits from Macau and Malacca.¹³ Several Portuguese dishes became a part of Goan Christian cuisine which is a blend of eastern and western cuisine. Some of the Portuguese dishes in Goan cuisine were modified to suit our needs, tastes and availability of ingredients.¹⁴ Apparently, western cuisine, did not leave its impact on cuisine of non-Christian Goans.

Before the Portuguese conquest of Goa, the dress of the inhabitants was to a great extent uniform but soon after the conquest, the natives who embraced Christianity were required to use European style clothes to distinguish them from non-Christian. In course of time Hindus began to wear western style clothes.

The Portuguese introduced the Civil Code which benefited Goans of all communities including women. Today efforts are being to extend a similar code to other parts of the country. The Portuguese issued a considerable volume of legislation to prevent gender discrimination and improve the conditions of women.¹⁵ In some instances conversion was the motive.

The church in Goa played an important role in popularization of western music even to the lowest village level. In most parishes in Goa village children were taught rudiments of western music in the church or schools attached to the church. They were taught solfaggio, to play violin and to sing hymns, psalms and *ladainhas*. Singing of *ladainhas* is still done in Latin with hymns in Konkani

and Portuguese languages. Church music in its turn influenced secular music in Goa. Parish schools were the nurseries of a number of Goan musicians and music teachers of Goa. Goans learnt to play various western instruments which helped them to find employment as musicians in different parts of the world and mainly in British India or on board of passenger liners.

Methods Used to Spread Culture

How did the Portuguese go about spreading their culture? The Portuguese used various methods to spread their culture. Soon after the conquest of Goa, Albuquerque introduced a policy known as *Politica dos Casamentos*. This was marriage alliances between his countrymen and native women. This policy helped to spread the Portuguese culture among a section of Goan population. Native women who married Portuguese men learnt to speak Portuguese, embraced the Christian religion and many of their customs and traditions. Culture was also spread through a series of legislation enacted by the state. The Portuguese government issued decrees banning people from following their cult, customs and other practices, for example in the 16th century, the Hindus were forbidden to move about on horses or palanquins.¹⁶ They were also forbidden to have their weddings celebrated in public specially in the presence of Christians.

Force as well as incentives were used to introduce the new culture of the rulers.¹⁷ For example in the 17th century the State issued an order to all native Christians not to observe Hindu customs regarding festivities to be performed after the birth of a child.¹⁸ Those who refused were humiliated, harassed and punished. The punishment prescribed often was the confiscation of their property. At other times they were forced to leave their ancestral home and go in exile elsewhere.

The Church through Church Councils, pastoral letters and Holy Inquisition issued wide ranging prohibitions, injunctions and restrictions covering various aspects of life styles of the people.¹⁹ Decrees were issued to prevent the Christians from following non-Christian customs and prevent Hindus from following many of their customs and traditions.²⁰ After the conversion Goan Christians were expected to make a clean break with their Hindu past. The personal names, food habits, customs and the dress had to conform to the

ways of the Europeans. In their attempts to introduce their culture the rulers tried many times to destroy the existing culture specially in the field of art, literature, religion and architecture.²¹ Various measures were introduced to separate the Christians from others. For example, the first provincial council held in 1567 prevented Christian women from seeking help of non-Christian *dai* at the time of delivery because they used non-Christian rituals and witchcraft.²²

The Holy Inquisition imposed a variety of restrictions on both Christians and non-Christians making it difficult for them to practice many of their customs and traditions including customs observed at time of birth, marriage and death. For instance in 1736 the Holy Inquisition banned several practices including the practice of massaging the bridal couple with oil, ground saffron, coconut milk, rice flour and powder of abolim leaves.²³ The same decree forbade Christians from eating boiled rice without salt as done by the Hindus. Furthermore, the same tribunal banned Christian men from wearing *pudvem* and women from wearing *choli* as was done by *gentios*.

Throughout their rule in India, the Portuguese issued decrees banning some practices and introducing new ones. In the fourth decade of the 20th century, the State ordered that Goans should appear wearing pants in all towns of Goa, in headquarters of the New Conquests and ferry wharfs of Betim, Durbate, Rachol, Sanvordem, Dona Paula and Piligação.²⁴ However, non-Christians were allowed to wear a coat along with *pudvem* instead of pants.²⁵ This was a symbol of amalgamation of two cultures.

Bans were imposed to alienate the natives from their culture and bring about a change. The natives often resisted these changes.²⁶ Despite restrictions and all kinds of punitive measures the Goans were able to maintain many aspects of their culture.

Bans and punitive measures were not the only means used by the rulers to bring about changes. At times incentives were provided for the people to embrace the new religion and customs of the rulers. In early centuries of Portuguese rule in Goa widows and orphans who converted to Christianity were entitled to their husband's and father's property.

The colonial policy succeeded to certain extent. The impact of the Portuguese culture had a mixed impact on Goans. Although there was a phase of ruthless oppression caused by the Holy Inquisition and policy of the State there was also a great deal of

interaction as we have seen between native and alien culture which is reflected in art, literature, language and various aspects of culture. This strengthened the cultural traditions of Goans. There is no doubt that Portuguese culture has left an impress on Goan culture. We admit that the impact was felt more by one community than the other but one cannot accept the view that the impact was superficial and that it touched only a particular community.

Today, Goa is a part of Indian Union. Attempts were made to merge Goa with a larger neighbouring state or to form a new state incorporating other Konkani speaking areas in dispute. Attempts were also made to subvert the Goan culture and identity.

Are we losing our identity and culture today? Ms. Parreiras says that Goa is unique and Goa will never be like the rest of the country.

Contacts with rest of India, tourism and the globalization of the world into a big village has led to greater interaction between Goa and rest of the world. As result Goan cultural life has assimilated new and fresh elements from other cultural patterns including the rich cultural heritage of rest of India. This has further enriched Goan culture. But many Goans today are disturbed about the influxes of various ethnic groups in their State who have come with their services looking for job opportunities. They fear that their culture may be invaded by varied cultural patterns. The speedy industrialization, the starting of Konkan railway — a coastal railroad passing through Goa linking it with Maharashtra, Karnataka and Kerala and plans for a free port are likely to attract more people to this tiny State. This is the price Goans have to pay for development. Given these circumstances it may not be easy for Goans to maintain their identity but as poet Borkar says: "To face them tactfully and draw the best out of them without letting our culture suffer in its essentials shall be our task of the tomorrow".

NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. *Goa, Then and Now 1961-1981*, Goa, Information Depart., 1981.
2. Patrick Ferdinand, "Drama a social reality in Goa" (seminar on "Drama as Social Reality", Goa Univ. , 22 September 1995).
3. *Inside Goa*, Goa, 1982, p. 18.
4. *Goa: Cultural Patterns*, Mumbai, Marg Publications, 1983, p. 1.
5. *Goa — Concepts and Misconcepts*, Goa, 1994, pp. 31, 57.

6. *O Soldado Pratico*, Portugal, Publicações Europa-America, p. 52.
7. This impact is also seen on exquisite embroidery work executed on bedspread and liturgical vestments in churches and convents of Goa.
8. These houses are spread over 45 large villages of Bardez, Ilhas, Salcete and Murmugão. There are also some houses in New Conquests.
9. This could be due to lack of awareness, lack of craftsmanship and the builders desire to economize in the cost of construction.
10. The temples depict a blend of east-west such as arches, graffito techniques, the tripartite division of mandappa, Venetian chandeliers and lamps. The lamp towers in some Goan temples are inspired by the Portuguese Christian Art (Gritli Mitterwallner, "The Hindu Past — Sculpture and Architecture" in *Goa Cultural Patterns*, ed. Saryu Doshi, p. 38).
11. F. da Silva Gracias, *Health and Hygiene in Colonial Goa 1510-1961*, New Delhi, 1994, p. 175.
12. *Ibid.*, p. 209. Both these systems were practised in the Royal Hospital and others in Goa.
13. Many of our popular dishes such as *Vindalho*, *balchão*, *caldeirada*, *cabidel*, *feijoada*, *sorapatel*, *guisados* was introduced in our land by the Portuguese. In addition they brought a number of sweet dishes such as *dedos de damas*, *pasteis de Santa Clara*, *bolo podre* to name a few.
14. *Vindalho* was modified version of *Vinho de Alhos*, *sorapatel* is modified version of Portuguese dish *Sarabulho*. It is believed that *Balchão* came from Burma and Malacca. In Macau this dish is known as *Balichão*. The Portuguese also brought to Goa new ingredients and fruits from other parts of the globe including their colony Brazil.
15. F. da Silva Gracias, *Kaleidoscope of Women in Goa*, New Delhi, Concept, 1996. The Portuguese issued a number of legislation to improve the condition of women. They banned the practice of sati, child marriages, polygamy, practice of tonsuring the widow. They also encouraged widow remarriages.
16. Historical Archives of Goa (HAG): Ms. 9529 - *Provisões a favor de Cristandade*, fl. 1; HAG: Ms. 93 - *Monções do Reino*, fl. 363.
17. HAG: Ms. 7795 — *Livro das Posturas*, fl. 25.
18. It was a custom among the Goans to celebrate the birth for eight days with entertainment and lots of food. Those going against the order had to pay a fine of 100 *xerafins* for the first time. Second violation invited exile either to China or to Mozambique.
19. Arquivo Nacional da Torre do Tombo (ANTT): *Conselho Geral do Santo Officio (Inquisição de Goa)*, *Maço* - 33, no. 18.
20. HAG: Ms. 9529.
21. J. Wicki (ed.), *Documenta Indica*, Rome, 1969, pp. 387-396. A Jesuit report of the 16th century says that the Portuguese erased temples *emblemas do cultu gentilico* and burnt books in vernacular languages because they contained non-Christian doctrines.
22. V. de Paiva Manso, (ed.), *Bullarium Patronatus in ecclesiis Africae, Asiae atque Oceaniae*, Tomo 1, Lisbon, 1889, p. 69; Gracias, *Health and*

Hygiene in Colonial Goa 1510-1961, p. 155. The same Council decreed that Christians should not ask non-Christians to paint their idols neither ask Hindu goldsmiths to make candlesticks, crosses and other Church requirements.

23. ANTT: CGSO-IG: 36/23; Gracias, *Kaleidoscope of Women in Goa*, p. 62. The inhabitants of Ilhas, Bardez and Salcete were also forbidden from using mouth organ at the time of marriage and from singing *vovios*.
24. Persons disobeying the order were required to pay fines.
25. *Legislação Relativa ao Estado da India, 1934*, Panaji, 1936, pp. 136-137.
26. For example during the time of Viceroy Dom Constantino, Hindus were banned to perform certain rituals at the time of their weddings. The Hindus protested, the merchants closed their shops, some sent their families to the kingdom of Adilshah and farmers opened *valados* causing floods.