

Reacting to a Transition

The Case of Goa

The reflections presented in this paper are not those of a historian, nor those of a political analyst. They are neither purely and constantly objective nor analytical. They are my own personal reactions and the responses of people who have been involved in this process of transition, as government officials, students and others. They are also the reflections of those of the generation above sixty who saw the major portion of their life take on a new turn towards a changed nationality and, in some cases an open avowal of an existing loyalty while for others, the happenings of December 1961, meant a new loyalty that had to be forged or nurtured, whichever the case might be.

I wish to emphasize that my reactions and points of view may reflect my identity which is that of a Goan who has always lived here and belongs to the Catholic community, for here we are very much conditioned by the community we belong to, not in any narrow sense of the term, but for the simple reason that our responses are anchored in our traditions.

To the people of my generation, the Liberation of Goa now seems a distant event gathered in the storehouse of childhood memories, but powerful by its everlasting impact. The memories are bitter-sweet, or rather they can be translated as fear at the outset followed by « wonder ». The fear related mainly to our safety, that of the whole family and to a child's mind it did not surpass the physical. Once the period of fear was over, life had to forcibly return to normal. This meant going back to school and there the time of « wonder » began.

Goa - Before 1961

Personally, pre-Liberation Goa is linked with my childhood, with the first best years of one's life. That is perhaps the reason why in my memory, this period is associated with a time of peace where all seemed well with the world. It was a time when eating and drinking never seemed to be a problem, where families were large and yet the struggle for a living did not lead to either suicide or murder. People seemed to be contented to work in the Portuguese bureaucracy where courtesy, respect and discipline were

essential. Others followed more liberal professions, the only ones existent at the time, being medicine, teaching and law. Apart from those engaged in active public functions, there was also the *batcar* class, or the landlords who earned their living from agriculture and farming. Maintaining large landed property was made easy by the *mundcar* class consisting of people who lived on the land belonging to the landlord for whom it worked.

Apparently, in most cases, the relationship between the *batcar* and the *mundcar* was an amiable one in spite of the positions of superiority versus subservience into which fitted those two groups. The *mundcar* was a trusted person, relied upon for every heavy as well as odd job. His life was very close to that of his *batcar*, he was a part of the family weddings and celebrations.

The Social Divide

This sort of relationship, did not however preclude a distinctly feudal set-up, and a rigid class system. The latter, has been ingrained in Goan society, even in the Catholic community, which though generally open and receptive to progress, has not yet broken completely free from the shackles of casteism when comes the time of arranging the marriages of their relatives. Strangely, today, the caste prejudice seems to surface only at the time of choosing life-partners through arranged marriages. The pre-liberation society was far more conscious of class differences. The social, even more than the economic gap between the serving and the served was present everywhere. The house servants were easily available, the master fed, clothed and provided basic health-care to his servant. The servant hardly asked for more and in turn offered to the master's family years of selfless and dedicated service. Class and caste consciousness was so strong that an individual from a so-called « high » caste would think twice before as much as even sitting next to an individual from a « low » caste whether in the House of God or in a public mode of transport.

Where did the Portuguese figure in this social social set-up ? There were surely people who were revolted by their very presence, but generally, the Portuguese seemed to maintain amiable relations with the Goans. A large section of opinion maintains that they were a friendly lot, without the typical attitudes of the colonizer, mingling with the local population. This interaction however took place at different levels. At the level of the masses, there were cases of intermarriages between the Portuguese soldiers and Goan girls belonging to the lower echelons of Goan society. Such a marriage seemed to redeem the family which was otherwise destined to remain in the lower rungs by fact of birth. Being married to a white man and producing children of a beautiful wheatish golden complexion with dark or light brown hair and exquisite eyes meant a welcome social upgrading of the family.

There was the social interaction between the Portuguese families and the Goans, but this was more restricted to the Goan social elite which entertained or mixed with the former at social functions. Yet another ground for interaction between colonizer and colonized was the work place. I gathered from various opinions that the Portuguese regime inculcated a sense of discipline, orderliness and that the deserving employees were officially lauded by the government. Goan officials were treated with respect and

courtesy by the white bosses.

The Colonial Regime and After

The move on the part of the Indian Government to take over Goa was rather sudden for some, particularly for those who were not closely involved in the political situation. Even if there were some who anxiously awaited the day of liberation, there were others who saw, at the dawn of a new day, changes as disturbing as a new citizenship, a different government, a changed set up at the workplace, a distinctly different way of life and why not, an often unheard of set of values.

The Early Days

The early years of the post-1961 period meant different things to different people. But to all living in Goa at that time, it surely meant a great change, an entire process of adaptation and « re-acculturation ». We were students of the First year of the Portuguese Lyceum in the year 1961, a class for the 10-11 year-old age group. Ahead of us were the older students in the last year of Lyceum and about to join University courses. It is a well known fact that there were no higher studies in Goa under the Portuguese regime, except in the field of law, medicine, teaching and religion. A good number of young people would leave for Portugal at the end of the 7th year of lyceum. The liberation of Goa took place on 18th December. The few months that remained of the academic year witnessed confusion and uncertainty as many teachers, both Portuguese and Goan left for Portugal.

The return to school was like walking into a new and different world. A good number of teachers had been replaced by new ones coming from the neighbouring states of India. The culture shock was tremendous. The language they spoke to us in was different. Portuguese had been replaced by English, and then there was Hindi. Both these languages were unheard of to us the younger students. The older ones had acquired only an elementary knowledge of English in the higher classes. Besides Portuguese, which was the official language and therefore known to all, French was the next most important language studied in the Lyceum. The sudden transition in the medium of instruction from Portuguese to English was no mean feat performed by the students, particularly the older ones. It was an overnight change of curriculum, examination pattern and teaching system. All these hurdles had to be faced by the student population.

The European teachers, most of them rather distant, authoritarian and imposing (although I remember little of their special teaching skills), were now replaced by a whole lot of non-Goan teachers. We, students, looked at them as one looks upon bizarre creatures. Their mode of dressing if not their taste in colour and style was different, their mannerisms were different from ours.

On the other hand, these teachers were not authoritarian, but mild in the exercise of discipline. They seemed to treat us with respect and seemed unwilling or incapable of exercising authority. Did they in turn look at us as strange creatures from another planet with a different culture and habits? Whatever the case, often, the students got the better of teachers, and resorted to pranks which were unheard of in the past. At the end of the

day, it must be said that we were more comfortable with our new teachers, who seemed a little intimidated by us. The one truth that I learnt from these teachers was that in spite of their unimpressive looks they were all well equipped in terms of educational and professional degrees, even more than their erstwhile Portuguese counterparts. I also learnt as I grew in age and experience that in our country there is a marked obsession for the quantity of certificates that one collects¹. True merit and honesty on the work field hardly matters.

Goa : Same/Other

It was during the initial years of post-liberation times that all the clichés, the easily formed opinions, and misconceptions about the Goan ethos were formed. We had been under foreign domination for 450 years and segreby political frontiers from the rest of the country. This made us surely different and this very difference was misused by many to pass questionable judgements on our personality, morals and what have you. Here people were more trusting, more friendly and less inhibited in the expression of emotions.

In Goa, a large number of us greet one another in a Western fashion. In society, men and women interact, at celebrations, western dancing has been a part of our traditions. This way of life has been avidly enjoyed by the onlookers (the non-Goans) and then Goans have been portrayed as a people having a loose moral code. A similar thought has been expressed by Carmo Noronha, who observes the transition and post-colonial Goa in some of his writings :

« We live today in a social milieu of which 40 % are non-Goans. This section of the people does not know of our ways, or habits and customs, finding it strange that men and women should interact in society. [...] Attitudes and manners which lend charm and beauty to our society are interpreted as a result of permissiveness and looseness of customs. To see a woman dancing with a man who is not her husband is for them the height of immorality, which in their opinion, can have its sweet ending in the bed. [...] It was after being present at a dance party in Goa, that a journalist said in his report, among other things, that in Goa no one knows who may sleep with whom... This says a lot, this says all what they think about us... » (Noronha 1991 : 137). [Translation mine].

The same is the case with social drinking, a custom to which the rest of the Indian urbanized folks are not totally new. Yet, since the liberation, Goans, particularly the catholic community, is depicted in Hindi films, till today, as the epitome of drunkenness. Interestingly though, whenever people were seen drinking at private social gatherings, the boisterous guests, were not among the Goans but among their non-Goan invitees. Yet, the mistaken notion that Goans are an inebriated lot has found favour with the rest of our countrymen.

The clichés concerning the manners and morals of this region continue. As far as clichés go, it is only since the last three decades, that we have read, seen and heard *ad nauseum*, of ourselves being described as *sossegado* (peaceful) (*ibid.* : 154), Goa, as *the land of fish, fenim and fun* and various other platitudes, which distort the image of Goa and the Goans. For we are not

1. The same observation is made by PINHO 1998 : 4.

more « laid back or lazy » (for that is the wrong translation authored by the self-styled social observers) than many of our countrymen, nor do people in Goa consume alcohol instead of water.

Even after the thirty-eight years that followed the liberation, people have not really cared to understand the cultural background of the state of Goa, and the simple fact that 450 years of history and acculturation to a very different way of living cannot be erased in a hurry. For the rest of the country, we will always be the Other, represented as a different society, a part and parcel of the mother country, linked with it on the historical and largely on the cultural plane and yet viewed as a somewhat alien group. In this position the Otherness of the catholic community of Goa has been observed with interest, while at the same time our fellow countrymen have judged us at times, with the superiority of « colonizers », who faced with the « difference » considered it inferior and charged us with the burden of our inheritance.

Goans speak, write and think a lot about themselves. Should we be blamed for chauvinism? Here too we are the product of history, somewhere its beneficiaries, and everywhere its victims. Goans have asked themselves and others the question « who is a Goan »? Somewhere, someone has said after a futile attempt at demarcating the exact limits of « Goanness » that they could well be those whose ancestors are of Goan origin.

It is a well known fact that we are migratory birds. We have been so since the early decades of this century and we will continue to be until other pastures change from green to brown. Goans migrated during the Portuguese regime in search of jobs. Thirty-eight years after the liberation, we still have not found our El-Dorado in our own land. And the story of our exile continues with more and more seeking other shores.

The fear of an uncertain future within India, of integration within a country which now seemed culturally distant to some Goans, drove them to choose to settle either in Portugal or in North America, in search of more congenial milieux and economically more prosperous avenues. But those who remained after 1961, underwent their own transformations, willingly, or conforming to the need for adaptation, for integration, and as a hangover of the old colonial mentality, the need to please the new « rulers » was irresistible for some. What followed was almost a case of a « counter-cultural amnesia » (Dewy 1992 : 50). Those, forgot their spoken Portuguese, their food preferences and even their friends, and adopted a neo-colonial stance wherein, in a determined attempt to feign ignorance of Portuguese, they spoke in English.

It is interesting to note that after about 35 years of linguistic amnesia, the flux of scholarships given by Portuguese institutions and the easy flow of Portuguese people coming to Goa, the forgotten language seems to be coming alive, and fathers and grandfathers seem to have known the language all along. The post-liberation era brought about a general change of attitude in the Goan psyche. From the meek and mild colonized lot that we were, incapable of admitting, leave alone voicing our pride to belong to an ancient civilization, we became proud, and deep within us disdainful of those who came from across the frontiers of Goa. In a moment of anger, when Goa became a witness to thefts, murders and bribes – things unheard of earlier – they were attributed to the influx of people coming into Goa,

who were branded with the dubious appellation of *ghantis*, which originally meant « from across the Ghats », but eventually acquired a derogatory connotation to mean « outsiders ».

Mixed Responses

Goans reacted differently to the Liberation. It is quite true that the opinion of Goans was never asked, neither before nor after 1961. People were too frightened to voice their sentiments if it meant opposing the ruling power and this is true of pre- as well as post-liberation times. In spite of the newly acquired freedom, the dissatisfied voices, if any, were stifled by the fear of being branded as « pro-Portuguese ». There is no doubt that any Goan with a vision, whether living in Goa, in other parts of India or abroad, would have welcomed the return of Goa to India. The situation in which it was for 450 years was one of the many aberrations of history, the origin of which may fit into the context of the times and the imperialistic craze in Europe.

After thirty-eight years, Goan society is well weaned away from Portugal, or is there some lingering of the previously lived experience? Pre-liberation society was small, stable and stagnant, where colonizer and colonized seemed to blend well. But obviously, all is not well that blends well. There was inevitably another side to the coin.

Reading those who dared to write and talking to the others leaves one in a state of bewilderment. Recently, one of our local newspapers interviewed a number of people belonging to the so-called « old guard ». Interestingly, while some strongly welcomed going back to the mother nation, others went on nostalgic trips to the past. The element of nostalgia, more than anything else, is what marks the reaction of many of the Goans. Could it be pining for the « departed colonizer » or « hankering for the lost master », as suggests an emigrant Goan, João da Veiga Coutinho (1997) ?

It would be in the fitness of things to mention that due to my own familiarity with the opinion of Goan Catholics who lived in Goa before 1961, I decided to discuss with a few people belonging to different social strata, almost all of them Hindus. Although it is a well-known fact that the first popular government of the MGP (Maharashtrawadi Gomantak Party) and the populist policies of its leader, gave the downtrodden masses a sense of importance in relation to the élite classes, many of them today, look back at the days before 1961 and long for the « peace » and the « easy life ». These same people, had the colonial regime prevailed, would perhaps still be illiterate and in the lowest rung of the social ladder.

Among the bureaucrats of the « ancien regime », opinions differed. It appears that at least in the last days of the colonial power, some of the key posts in the bureaucracy were given to Hindus, such as : the Directors of the Public Works Department, Education, Economy, Civil Administration, Finance, Post and Telegraph. The Finance and Statistics departments were headed by Catholics.

While it is said that among the « well off » were the bureaucrats working

2. Refer to H. SCHOLBERG'S, « Freedom in Words », *O Heraldo (Mirror)*, Sunday, June 14, 1998 : 10. « No one ever asked the people of Goa what they wanted. There were no plebiscites, no opinion surveys, no free elections. There were many Goans who wanted the Portuguese to depart and some who wanted them to stay... »

under the Portuguese regime, some of these former government officials agree that they were a privileged class, well treated by the colonizers, and yet the craving for freedom from a foreign yoke never left them. One particular official³ feels that the transition was well planned by Nehru and that Goans quickly adapted themselves to the change. He admits that the transition from one regime to another brought about a few realisations as well as teething problems with the new administrators. Goans were respected for their discipline and good behaviour and, most important of all, they could be taken as role models of honesty and integrity by the new administrators.

More than one former bureaucrat has expressed the initial culture shock of having to deal with officials who were unabashedly corrupt, demanding and expecting monetary benefits in the pursuit of the daily running of the administration. They had never before confronted such situations in their dealings with Portuguese officials. Goan government officials had also to turn a linguistic somersault in order to face the transition. Almost overnight, the official language changed from Portuguese to English, a language hardly known to some of them. The effort to understand, speak and write in a language fairly new to men already in their forties was no mean task.

Another Goan working as an Officer Grade 1 in the Administration, resented the fact that the group of deputationists, that is, officials from the Indian government sent on duty to Goa, took advantage of the fact that local officers were not well versed in the new rules and thus misled them. More than one former officer having worked in the Portuguese regime claimed that the « white » colonizer had been replaced by the « brown » colonizer in the shape of the Indian Administrative Service officer who ruled the roost in the early post-liberation days.

A defiant patriotism motivated the Goans residing elsewhere in India or abroad as is witnessed by the numerous accounts of Goan history. When questioned today, their views are unchanged. The once backward state of Goa has now made tremendous progress in all spheres, even if it has regressed in terms of human values. However, it is felt that those who fought and sacrificed for the liberation of Goa did not come to power. The twists and turns of Goan post-liberation history brought to power a businessman, with no formal education nor involvement in politics who turned out to be the redeemer of the masses, while another businessman sat in the benches of the opposition. As it turned out to be, to the first, we owe a fierce campaign to wipe out the culture and traditions of Goa by fighting to merge it into Maharashtra, while the second, proved his mettle once and once only, as he was instrumental in mobilising Goan votes against merger (D'Sousa 1975).

The history of Goa is not unique in relation to that of the country. This tiny state was colonized and so was the rest of the country. The difference lies in the ethos of the colonizer, the duration of the colonial period and the type of personal exchange between colonizer and colonized. In the case of Goa and in the case of the rest of India, the difference could not have been wider. Thus, while the rest of India earned its freedom and came away almost intact in its cultural traditions, Goa, be it as a result of the conversions carried out by the Portuguese, its strategies towards the

3. Names of people who have been interviewed are withheld on request.

acculturation of Goans or/and the negligible social and human gap between the white man and the local people, evolved differently. Today, the youth of Goa thinks very little of our past history and knows even less about it. But somewhere, the cultural imprint persists. People sing and play Portuguese music, Portuguese dances have slipped into our folklore, even if they are twice removed from the original, and the people of Goa in general have no ill feeling towards the Portuguese. Neither do we harbour any secret longing for the Portuguese regime, as the malicious tongues would have it. Today, there are neither dreamers nor visionaries. Everyone knows that the Portuguese presence in Goa was an aberration. But many, including the freedom fighters, agree as they say : « The Portuguese people were nice, but the regime was bad ». While the colonization of India evinces an interest of a different kind, that of Goa has been the object of research and introspection.

The Conflict

Why do we introspect ? and do all Goans introspect ? The twists and turns of history seem to have affected mainly the Catholic section of the Goan population. Our destinies were shaped the moment we were given a Catholic identity by virtue of which we became a « minority » and « different » in our own land. As a colonized people, we did enjoy a privileged position, by virtue of having assimilated the culture of the colonizer. But even a high assimilating capacity encounters an imperviousness beyond which the essential human being cannot be entirely moulded on the « perverted logic » and the « devaluation of pre-colonial history » on the part of the colonizer⁴.

Thousands of Goans have settled in Portugal and elsewhere in the world both before and after the Liberation. But for all their feeling of being « at home », they have never really been able to call their country of adoption their home. Many of us, have always lived here, we still speak the Portuguese language, but we are well aware that we are different from the Portuguese, we think differently and on many accounts feel differently. We can never feel Portuguese. But yet, many of us may feel closer to the Portuguese people than to any other European.

In spite of various affinities, the long years of colonization have not wiped out the essence of our original selves which links us to the land where we have our roots. On the other hand, colonization has definitely shaped and moulded us into what we are today. Much has been said about Goan identity. Wherever this concept has been discussed, I have been convinced that it is the Catholic population of Goa that is being thought of. And since it is this particular group that I have in mind, I would say that being the product of a composite culture, we have both lost and gained by this. Most of all we have been criticised in our own state and country for « aping the West », and worse still, of being Un-Indian. Our loss has been not to be able to relate totally to one single cultural group, be it Indian or Western. Our gain is the wide window to the world left open to us by our predominantly western upbringing. It is true that we cannot be identified as

4. F. FANON, « On National Culture », in ASHCROFT, GRIFFITHS & TIFFIN 1995 : 154.

a single very representative cultural group as a Gujarati or a Malayalee or an Assamese would be. It is true that when the Goan travels outside his state, he feels the difference even in the streets of the other states.

In a larger context, Goan emigrants never cease to be pained by their feeling of rootlessness. Indians from other states too have emigrated in large numbers, but coming from states with a very strong cultural background, they have managed to preserve their identity and their sense of belonging. Goan emigrants, already the product of an Indo-European heritage, settle very well in the new country, but their quest for something undefined does not seem to be fulfilled. Deep within, the Goan, particularly, the first generation of Goan emigrants, is dissatisfied, nostalgic, his children too may soon awake to a feeling of rootlessness. When the emigrant comes back to Goa on a holiday, he and his family resent the crowds, the dirt on the streets, the unrefined manners, the cows rambling amidst the traffic and the amplifiers blaring out Hindi film music. This is not his land, his culture. This is not the way it was three or four decades ago. Where then does the Goan go from here ? He no longer feels « at home » and much less do his children. He then leaves again to pursue his dream of a prosperous present away from home and a romanticized past and future in Goa. In fact not many Goans settled abroad come back to their land of birth. Goa, thus, remains symbolic of an unaccomplished quest.

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