

## Is There One Goan Identity, Several or None ?\*

The subject – the Goan identity – is by its nature as much emotional as academic to a Goan like me, and therefore it requires a conscious effort on our part to keep our emotions in check. It requires that we be concise, and yet sufficiently clear. I shall try to introduce my presentation with a conceptual framework and then touch briefly on six points that refer directly and concretely to the Goan identity.

To start, I wish to sum up some relevant issues raised by a prominent Portuguese sociologist, Boaventura de Sousa Santos<sup>1</sup>. His critique and insights could be valuable for our comprehension of the issue in hands. He begins by stating that cultural identities are not dead realities, and as such are always undergoing change. Cultural identities are defined as transient phases of identification. Even those identities which appear well defined, presenting an appearance of permanency, are subject to changing shades of meanings and to gradual or fast transformations in their underlying contents. Besides their characteristic variety, identities have an obsession for difference and for hierarchical distinctions. When someone speaks about one's own identity, reactions to hegemonic relationships in a society are necessarily implied, or there is always an implied feeling of subordination. In fact, someone in a hegemonic position rarely cares to raise questions of self-identity. The questions arise from those who seek self-assurance and recognition from the hegemonic group or groups. From a successful response to the questionings results usually a foundational interpretation that transforms the limitations of self-image into a surplus of self-projection. Such foundational interpretations are produced by creative and inspired native figures that seek to represent their people. Tagore did it for India, and apparently also for Bangladesh, where also one of his poem was chosen to be the national anthem. Camões and Fernando Pessoa did it for Portugal. We in Goa could think of Varde Valaulikar (1877-1946)<sup>2</sup> or of T.B. Cunha

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1. B. de Sousa SANTOS, *Pela mão de Alice : O social e o político na pós-modernidade*, Porto, Afrontamento, 1997 : 119-137 (6<sup>th</sup> ed.).
2. J. PEREIRA, *Konkani : A Language*, Dharwar, Karnatak University, 1971 : 65-69. Varde Valaulikar helped the recovery of the self-dignity, or *asmitai*, of Konkani language and its speakers. His *Goenkaranchi Goyambhaili Vasmuk*, 1928, and *Konkni Bhaxechem Zoit*, 1930, contain his ideas about Goan cultural identity.

(1891-1958)<sup>3</sup> as representative figures of Goan identity builders. Their cultural creations seek to surpass time-limitations, absorbing the entire past and projecting the image into a limitless future. The resultant identity appears then as a solid construction with roots into mythical and undated past, and with an assurance of resisting challenges of the present and the future.

The new name for identity in modern times is *subjectivity*. It implies a twofold tension, namely between the individual and the communitarian, and between its concrete reality in time and space, and its universal concept extending beyond time and space. Modernity seeks to achieve a balance of these contending tensions through social regulations and social emancipation. The modern liberal politics favours the individual and the universal subjectivities, as against the community subjectivity. Portugal was partly responsible for the process that set rolling this historic transformation that would put an end to the traditional communities and their heritage, replacing them with a project of globalization of ideas and structures. A new era of fanaticism, racism and centro-centrism was brought into existence. The communities that did not correspond with the hegemonic model exported from Western Europe had no right to exist with dignity, or simply to exist. The western confections of legal discourse set the criteria for individual and collective subjectivities. In 1532, the legal brain of Salamanca, Francisco de Vitória (1486-1546), justified the conquest of the Aztecs and Incas for violating the basic natural law with their tyranny and practices of human sacrifices and cannibalism. Following upon the Reformation, a laicization of the natural law brought in the lay interests (which included the commercial expansion of Europe) to influence ever more the legal evolution<sup>4</sup>.

There have been in the recent history of Europe romantic attempts at recovering the individual subjectivity with its ethnic, religious and environmental linkages. There was also the marxist struggle towards social utopia. Curiously, Marxism replaced the state with class, keeping individual subjectivity helpless. Neither of these two attempts succeeded in providing a viable alternative to the liberal nation-state which has been able to manipulate in its favour the rival strategies. The aborigines were classed as natives, after nature was reduced by Descartes to *res extensa*, which together with the western juridical concept of *terra nullius*, justified the process of divesting

3. T.B. CUNHA, *Goa's Freedom Struggle*, ed., Bombay, 1961. In a report to the world assembly for peace, gathered at Helsinki in 1955, T.B. Cunha wrote : « Portuguese propaganda claims that the people of Goa are different from the other Indians because most of them are Christians and not Hindus [...] In fact, the last official census states that the Christian population is 234,275 whereas the Hindus number 388,488. [...] Efforts are also made to suggest that the Christians of Goa are almost Portuguese in their ways or habits and customs and behave as such. In this way they seek to convince the world that Portugal has succeeded in creating in its own image a perfect miniature of the ruling country several thousand miles away from Europe. [...] If Goans have Portuguese names, it is solely due to the well-known fact that in the 16<sup>th</sup> century they were converted en masse to the Catholic religion by forceful methods, by which they were compelled to change their Indian names to Portuguese names. But although they bear Portuguese names, according to the official census of population, more than 95 % of them neither speak Portuguese nor understand it. [...] The Portuguese mix-blood are less than 1,000 in the total population of 650,000. [...] For more than two centuries, the Goa Inquisition, the fiercest of all Inquisitions, endeavoured to change the habits and customs of our people by threat of excommunication and other punishments, but in spite of all these sectarian measures the Goan Christians remained fundamentally Indian. Only a tiny minority, labouring under dependance on the masters of the country, sought to imitate the Portuguese » (pp. 331-338).
4. A.M. HESPANHA, *Panorama histórico da cultural jurídica europeia*, Mem Martins, Publ. Europa-América, 1997 : 143 sq.

the aborigenes from their lands as a sequel of the European Discoveries. The native subjectivity would henceforth survive only as a concern of the ethnologists. The working-class interests were appropriated by the nation-states by adopting a façade of social security concerns. Its latest variant is the « Third Way » as branded by the United Kingdom socialist liberals. The modern capitalism has succeeded in wiping out the rival alternatives to loyalty towards state. The social scientists have contributed to this process. We know how Durkheim invented « society » as a valid unit of social analysis, integrating all possible subunits, such as the Church, the family or the local communities. For him, the earlier social formations were all primitive attempts at arriving at the modern phase of social organization. Max Weber did not state the superiority of the modern European social construction, but saw it as unique or exceptional, characterised progressively by rationality, secularism, bureaucracy, jurisprudence, democracy, urbanism, globalisation, etc. However, Weber's uniqueness soon turned into a master model against which all others would have to measure their identities, or limitations. The distinction between sociology (studying « us », or civilized) and anthropology (studying « them », or natives) promoted this change. Lévi-Strauss would denounce the epistemological asymmetry of this approach with his chiding remark : we can make them « our savages », they cannot make us « their savages »<sup>5</sup>.

More recently there has been a come-back of identity questionings in search of roots, both ethnic and religious. Corresponding fundamentalisms are on the rise, demanding political recognition of traditional cultures, religious and of languages. The politics of ethnic multiculturalism, or gender politics, seem to be tentative responses of the nation-states. According to Étienne Balibar and Immanuel Wallerstein, there is a subtle strategy of the neo-liberal capitalism to ethnicize labour market at a global level, diluting race differences into larger immigrant cheap-labour blocks. These are then subordinated to the dominant majorities in the nation-states. It is a transformation of biological racism of colonial times into a cultural racism of post-colonial times, a neo-racism of the modern European states. This seems to be the change required by the neo-liberal transnational capitalism. Its strategy of globalisation of capital and localisation of labour is aimed at making it nearly impossible for the local identities to fight back. The multiplicity of inter-dependencies created by globalisation multiplies the oppositions that the localised identities will be unable to overcome with ease. It also makes it difficult to identify the real enemy, who appears to be everywhere, including within every subjective community<sup>6</sup>.

### **What is Portuguese Culture ?**

What are the challenges of the new/old identities ? No identities are limited to State boundaries, nor is any culture indiscriminately open. However, no community is free from cultural exchanges with other historic partners in the process of its evolution. Goan culture, is not coterminous with the

5. B. de Sousa SANTOS, *op. cit.* : 126.

6. Authors cited by B. de Sousa SANTOS, *op. cit.*, : 128. Cf. also I. WALLERSTEIN, *O capitalismo histórico e a civilização capitalista*, Vila Nova de Gaia, Estratégias criativas, 1998 ; I. WALLERSTEIN & E. BALIBAR, *Race, Nation, Class : Ambiguous Identities*, London, Verso, 1991.

present state borders, neither is it exclusively made by long-term residents of Goa, because it contains and continues to benefit from many borrowings and influences, from Goa and elsewhere, from India and the world at large. The origins of the Goan identity precede the arrival of the Portuguese, but four and half centuries of colonial rule have left their marks. We shall come to this later. But could we ask now what is Portuguese culture ? An answer to this question could reduce many misunderstandings regarding its influence in Goa. The Portuguese sociologist, whom we have quoted here quite extensively, considers the Portuguese culture as a frontier-culture, with some shape but with no definite contents. Hence, the Portuguese culture is not very distinct from other national cultures, but it has always maintained a strong internal heterogeneity. While Portugal looked at its colonial populations as primitive and backward, it was in turn looked as backward by the north European colonial powers. The Portuguese were both colonizers and emigrants in their colonies, at least in Brazil and in Africa. In Asia they merged into local societies in the so-called « shadow-empire », shedding perhaps more sperm than blood ! They were too close to the colonies to be considered fully Europeans, and too distant from Europe to be regarded as serious colonizers. The Portuguese culture shifted between the local and the translocal, bypassing the national. The peculiarity of the Portuguese frontier is that it does not look for emptiness beyond it, but finds the emptiness on its own side. Portuguese cosmopolitanism is made up of a multiplicity of local cultures. The Portuguese universalism has no universe with Portugal as its centre. It acted as a pseudo-centre for its colonies, because it was always peripheral in European politics. As a result of this « ex-centric » (Boaventura de Sousa Santos prefers the term « a-centric ») cosmopolitanism, the Portuguese cultural mix tends to assume a « carnivalistic » make-up, truly entertaining, not threatening the vernacular cultural forms which it appropriates. This feature was transmitted by the Portuguese to its former colonies. It is because of this Portuguese « mediation », and with some reservations towards a somewhat patriotic analysis of the Portuguese sociologist<sup>7</sup>, that I am more inclined to see « Christianotopia romana » rather than « Lusotopia » left behind in Goa by the Portuguese colonial presence<sup>8</sup>.

Our Portuguese sociologist does not avoid explaining some of my reservations : If direct Portuguese administrative impositions were felt in the colonies, such forms of violence are seen by him as an expression of the Portuguese cultural marginality, and not as an expression of genuine cultural power. Portugal was functioning as cultural broker of the West. It is only very recently that Portugal has begun evolving a politics of culture, aimed at cultural homogeneity and looking at Portugal as an equal and respectable partner in the European Union. A measure of cultural arrogance is implied in this new political consciousness. This again is motivated, explains the sociologist, by the growing awareness that Portugal is being reduced to a regional identity within the European Union, condemned to play the role of a joker in the carnival of cultures. I believe that the role played by the Portuguese in Asia was more complex. They imposed

7. B. de Sousa SANTOS, *op. cit.* : 132-136.

8. T.R. DE SOUZA, « Some Contrasting Visions of Luso-Tropicalism in India », in *Lusotropicalisme : Ideologies coloniales et identités nationales dans les mondes lusophones*, Paris, Karthala, 1997 : 377-387.

themselves where they could, and tried to combine it with doing business with compromise where unavoidable. The nature of the social composition of those who came to Asia explains this situation : Most were « unwanted » elements of the home society and sought compensations on reaching Asia. Hence, the false claims of nobility and other sorts of pretensions, which Pyrard de Laval described well in his XVII century travel account<sup>9</sup>.

### Did They Learn from the Portuguese to Sing, Dance and Drink ?

This was confirmed by an eminent Portuguese geographer who led a team of scholars to study Goan society in 1956. Orlando Ribeiro submitted a scientific report of his findings to Salazar, but it did not arouse the dictator's interest. The report had to wait until this year to be made available to the public<sup>10</sup>. It is a masterly description of Goan cultural identity in 1956. A translation of it into English would be worthwhile for making it more accessible to the Goan public. After having visited most of the Portuguese colonies overseas, he admits with sadness in his heart that he found Goa to be *the least Portuguese* in its cultural expressions, even less than Guiné-Bissau<sup>11</sup> ! He has also the moral courage to admit that he found intelligent persons in Goa everywhere, with no trace of rudeness that was so common among the rural folks of Portugal<sup>12</sup> !

National and international politics made it possible for the Goans to find themselves relieved of yet another phase of their historical evolution and to acquire a certain degree of political, economic and cultural freedom within the Indian Union. The change did not come about as a result of any large-scale and united efforts of the Goans themselves. Several Indians from all parts of the country gave their lives to achieve the freedom for Goa through their participation in the *satyagraha* movement, and facing the Portuguese jails and machine guns, while some Goans residing abroad and calling themselves the Goa Freedom Movement sought to turn the clock back in 1963 at the UN<sup>13</sup>. António dos Mártires Lopes, a full-blooded Goan, a Portuguese state employee before and after 1961, also worked hard in the same direction, seeking to debunk Goa's « liberation » through his speeches and writings published with the backing of the official Portuguese counter-information services<sup>14</sup>. In reality, few Goans fought vigorously or died for Goa's liberation, just as few Goans had fought to bring the Portuguese to

9. Pyrard de LAVAL, *Viagem*, II, Nova Goa, ed. J.H. Cunha Rivara, 1862 : 104. Cf. T.R. de SOUZA, « As relações culturais luso-indianas em Goa : Um balanço crítico », *Encontro sobre Portugal e a Índia*, Lisbon, Fundação Oriente/Liv. Horizonte, 1999 : 207-215.

10. O. RIBEIRO, *Goa em 1956: Relatório ao Governo*, Lisbon, Comissão nacional para as Comemorações dos Descobrimentos portugueses (CNCDP), 2000.

11. *Ibid.* : 64.

12. *Ibid.* : 94 : « Mas pessoas inteligentes encontram-se a cada passo e a boçalidade, traço frequente da gente do povo entre nós, não existe ».

13. *Goan Petitioners in the United Nations*, s.l., 1964. A Goa Freedom Movement Publication edited by its self-styled Secretary General, António da Fonseca, resident in Portugal.

14. T.R. de SOUZA, « De Ceuta a Timor », *Santa Barbara Portuguese Studies*, 1996, III (10) : 319. I identified him mistakenly as « descendente ». He was a genuine Goan *chardó* and was teacher at Instituto de Instrução in Panjim, before taking up his job in the Department of Information and Statistics. A Goan freedom-fighter and doctor by profession, José Francisco Martins, has published recently his memoirs, entitled *In search of Self-Fulfilment* (Panjim, 1997), in which he has more than one reference to his teacher António dos Mártires Lopes.

Goa in the first place<sup>15</sup>. Then they were all Hindus, now a mix of Hindus and Christians. To solve their internal feuds, Goans had more than once in their history welcomed foreign rulers, but these « friends » had almost always overstayed. Hence, Goan *friendliness* needs to be studied better as a trait of their long-term identity. It may be too simplistic to see in it a trait acquired from the Portuguese. And is it true that they learned from the Portuguese to sing, dance and drink ? We have sufficient documentary proofs that Goans were paying tax on toddy-tapping when the Portuguese arrived, and quite a few Goans joined the military band of Afonso de Albuquerque soon after he conquered Goa. They could not have learnt overnight<sup>16</sup>.

### **A State Among Other States ?**

We could now turn to some reflections about the identity-related issues that bother the Goans today :

As I understand it, the identity of any community is basically made up of its cultural uniqueness, including the environmental characteristics of the land of one's ancestors. The mother-tongue and the *historical* experiences of one's ancestral community are important constituents of that cultural heritage. In a recent issue of *Goa Today*, Chandrakant Keni, a leading Goan journalist and Konkani writer, suggests that Goans are those whose ancestors were born in Goa before 1961. What happens if parents or grandparents were of Goan origin and were born outside Goa before 1961 ? Was not the large-scale emigration of Goans a part of Goa's historical experience ? If Konkani language and love of the Goan soil are considered two essential components of Goan identity, cannot these other groups have them ? I believe that Goans in diaspora generally have more concern and anxiety about preserving more accurately the Goan traditions that are changing or disappearing in Goa. It is no surprise if some old Goans in diaspora find that Goa of their childhood has disappeared ! If he had continued to live and Goa and accompanied the change, the loss may not have been felt so poignantly as did<sup>17</sup>.

In the case of the inhabitants of Goa, or descendants of Goan ancestry, the Indian matrix of the heritage is always present in a more or less diluted form. Four hundred and fifty years of the Portuguese rule did not fail to leave its impress, be they positive marks or scars, not just upon the converted section of the population, but also upon the majority Hindu component of Goa's population. Had it not been for this historic input, would Goa have a chance to achieve the status of a state among other states of India ? The fact that Goan Christians and Hindus are aware of their differences is no reason to deny what they share in common. Differences also exist among the different generations of Goans, among Goans of different caste and gender groups, among Goans who lived always in Goa and Goan expatriates, or those who have adopted Goa as their home in the very recent past, among Goans with different economic standards, etc.

15. G. BOUCHON, « Timoji, un corsaire indien », in *Portugal e o Oriente*, Lisbon, Fundação Oriente, 1994 : 9-25.

16. A.B. de Bragança PEREIRA, *Arquivo Portugues Oriental*, T. IV, Vol. I, P. I, Bastorá, 1937 : 843-844 : Ten goans played trumpets, *tabaques*, *sestros*, and drums.

17. J. da Veiga COUTINHO, *A Kind of Absence*, Stamford, Yuganta Press : 73.

Besides the component of inherited cultural tradition, there are features which others attribute to Goans. This is the case of non-Goan Indians or foreigners who visit Goa. There are bound to result varying shades of « identity », and the emphasis is not always placed on the same components of it. Identity images are quite often engineered by interested groups, such as the images that were propagated by the Salazar regime, or are by the tourism industry today. They are also invented by some Indian bureaucrats and professionals who want to teach Goans to be less easy-going or less un-Indian ! I was amused to read in the first issue of *Govapuri* (the review that succeeded the *Boletim do Instituto Menezes Braganza*) that Goans are largely a T-shirt wearing population ! (p. 18) The same writer, Arun Sinha, editor of the Goan daily newspaper *The Navhind Times*, seems upset that there are Goans who would fight for the recognition of Goa's « foreignness » (p. 20) ! It appears to me most undemocratic and un-Indian on his part that Goans who wish to think that way should have the freedom to do so. It is also said of them that « they would refuse to accept Goa was wholly Indian ». I wonder if the use of the past tense « was » wholly Indian is deliberate or a Freudian slip. One wonders if to be wholly Indian one has to chew pan and spit it all around, or replace T-shirts or G-shorts with kurta-pajama or safari suit. Identity does not have a closed definition and is open to changes brought about by ongoing historical processes. But at any given time there can be different in-group and out-group perceptions of identity. These perceptions develop with reference to experiences of integration or exclusion within the group or by an outside group. There will be those who include only the virtues or positive features in the definition of identity. Similarly, there will be others who will give preference to negative features by way of a taunt !<sup>18</sup>

Language and soil are other essential components of identity. Have not the Muslim and Portuguese rulers of Goa in the recent past contributed to the enrichment of the Goan Konkani ? What happens to Goans in Goa, speaking the same language and attached to the soil, but with little or no concern, except during the election campaigns, for the serious disabilities suffered by various social groups, including women ? Are such Goan rulers very different from the Muslim or Portuguese rulers only for being local and capable of using Konkani to insult the Goans ? While trying to provoke reflection on these situations, I am convinced that the decisive battles for the survival of Goa's distinctiveness will always be fought on the Goan soil, with or without support of the Goans in diaspora. Let us not hide the fact that the distinctiveness or identity issue is meant to serve as a rallying-point against those who may threaten the survival of the community, or some dominant interest group or groups of the community.

This brings me to the touchy issue of Goans and non-Goans, often referred to as *ghanti* or *bhaile* ! First of all, I shall rule out quick Orwellian type of generalizations and would not consider all *bhaile* as Goa's enemies. There are certainly several *bhaile* who have adopted Goa and could give

18. R. de SOUZA, *Goa and the Continent of Circe*, Bombay, Wilco Publ. 1973, is a spirited response to N.C. Chaudhuri's *Continent of Circe*, which treated Goan Christians disparagingly. But N.C. Chaudhuri was not the only one to have such a negative picture of the Goans. One could cite several other recent and not so recent authors. For example, G. TINDALL, *City of Gold : The Biography of Bombay*, London, 1982 : 182-183, dismisses the Goans in Bombay with a passing comment, amounting to a taunt : « they are known for their sallow countenance, slovenly gait, and a mimicry of European fashions ». One could consult R. BURTON's *Goa and the Blue Mountains*, London, 1851, or the more recent S. RUSHDIE's *The Moor's Last Sigh*, Reading, Vintage Books, 1995, for more derisive comments and epithets.

lessons on Goan identity to many Goans. I read a letter sent to the editor of *Goa Today* in a recent issue complaining about the lethargy and corruption that have become a way of life in Goa. The writer of that letter could be taken as representing many others who think the same way. Are the Indian politicians outside Goa less lethargic and corrupt, leading us to conclude that Goan identity has been further enriched in this direction? Incidentally, I fail to understand how lethargy and corruption go together. Those who are corrupt are generally very active citizens of our country. The switching of party alliances and the rate of changes of chief ministers and governments in this Goa of the so-called *sossegado* people may soon require electronic machines to keep the count. That would make another Goan first in this country, after the first use of electronic machines in the recent Goan elections.

Tourism, we are told, brings nearly as many people as the total of resident Goans into Goa during some months of the year. Goa benefits from it and depends on it? It is but natural that it has to pay some price for it. If they have negative cultural impact, or impact on environment, it is up to the conscientious Goan politicians to check these negative influences. We should not forget at the same time, that perhaps more than the total number of resident Goans or tourists coming to Goa are the Goan expatriates or emigrants. Don't they absorb and transmit to Goa influences that could be considered contrary to traditional Goan identity? But are not the remittances of emigrants vital? Are not the expatriates beneficial to the good name of Goa internationally? Or at least a source of reduction of additional pressure on the limited or non-existent resources of Goa? Fortunately, Goa has been exposed early to globalization, and the high degree of consciousness and resistance to its impact is a sign of its preparedness to resist its less positive impact.

### **How do Goans Perceive Themselves in Portugal !**

Finally, while living now in Portugal for the past five years, I had occasions to observe the perceptions of Goan identity there. One has to distinguish the perceptions of Goans who have arrived in Portugal at different times, and of Goans belonging to different social strata or levels of social and economic integration in the host country. The visibility of a high level performance and integration of a few Goans tends to overshadow the differences or low levels of performance of most others (c. 15,000). Goans are generally viewed favourably by the Portuguese society. This is made possible by religious affinities, educational levels, widespread participation in liberal professions and administrative jobs. The same can be said of the few Goan Hindus in Portugal, whose intermarriage with Portuguese women and active involvement in the public and political life of Portugal, distinguish them from the thousands of Hindus (c. 12,000) and Muslims (c. 11,000) of non-Goan origin, who arrived in Portugal via Mozambique after 1975. How do Goans perceive themselves in Portugal? Caste prejudices are ever present. More than one cultural associations of Goans are based on subtle caste rivalries. Goans who have performed well and distinguished themselves do not show great interest in associating themselves with the *hoi-polloi* Goans (mob). These in turn may hate this superiority complex of their country-cousins. But such behavioural patterns are not unknown in Goa



itself. The expatriates feel it differently due to expectations they often entertain in a different life contexts in their countries of adoption. But despite such and other in-group and out-group perceptions and reactions, no Goan would miss an opportunity to visit Goa, or taste a favourite Goan dish, or feel proud of what are perceived as the positive features of the Goan identity. Hence, the old Konkani proverb *Ghor-mogreak pormoll na* (« The home jasmine has no fragrance »), or another one which states : *Pott bhorta thum ghor* (« Where one fills one's belly, there is one's country ») in no way deny the identity of Goans or their special feelings for Goa.

To conclude, there are as many facets of Goan identity as individuals who associate themselves with Goa, whatever the intensity of involvement, whatever the length of time, whether from inside or outside its geographical borders. The multi-faceted Goan identity accompanies the myriads of hearts and minds with their myriad talents and potentialities to keep Goa ever young, ever new.

*February, 1999 and August, 2000*

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*[Les sous-titres sont de la rédaction]*

