

The Denationalisation of Goans

An Insight into the Construction of Cultural Identity*

Tristao de Braganza Cunha (1891-1958)¹, henceforth referred to as Cunha, authored an essay, *The Denationalization of Goans*, published in 1944 as a booklet². This essay gives a sharp critique of the psychological dominance of Portuguese culture over the educated people of Goa. It gives an insight into the construction of identities in the context of Portuguese colonial rule from the standpoint of an Indian nationalist. This is the subject matter of this presentation. Cunha, constructed a thesis of denationalisation, identifying it as the main obstacle for the development of nationalism in Goa. As a result of this essay, the term « denationalisation » entered the vocabulary of almost every freedom fighter in Goa.

The Use of the Term « Denationalisation »

It is not clear how Cunha came to use the term « denationalisation ». It was not a popularly used term, but one has come across being used in two different ways. Keshab Chandra Sen and Aurobindo Ghose have used the term to describe the efforts of the British to alienate the Indian people from their own culture³. The Portuguese state used it to denote those who expressed any dissent against it. In 1914, arguing in favour of imparting primary education in the mother-tongue, konkani, rather than Portuguese, Menezes Braganza asserted that it was the perceived « danger of

* This paper contains ideas from my doctoral thesis, Tombat, Nishtha (alias Nishtha Desai), *Tristao de Braganza-Cunha (1891-1958) and the Rise of Nationalist Consciousness in Goa*, Dept of Sociology, Goa University, February 1995.

1. Tristao de Braganza-Cunha (1891-1958) is popularly known as the *Father of Goan nationalism*. He established the Goa Congress Committee in Goa in 1928 which represented the first organised attempt to achieve Goa's liberation from Portuguese colonialism.
2. See T.B. Cunha, *Goa's Freedom Struggle*, Bombay, Dr T.B. Cunha Memorial Committee, 1961 : 55-98.
3. In the mid-1870s Keshab Chandra Sen remarked : « Truth is not European, and it would be a mistake to force European institutions upon the Hindus, who would resist any attempt to denationalise them » (P. CHATTERJEE & P. GYANENDRA, *Subaltern Studies. VII : Writings on South Asian History and Society*, New Delhi, Oxford University Press, 1993 : 40). Around 1910, Aurobindo Ghose in an editorial in *Karmayogin* lamented on how Indian intellectuals were unfamiliar with the « deep knowledge » of their forefathers : « ... so well has British education done its total denationalising work in India » (V. GROVER, *Political Thinkers of India. Vol II : Sri Aurobindo Ghose*, New Delhi, Deep and Deep Publications, 1992).

denationalisation » with which Portuguese officialdom was so preoccupied, which prevented it from encouraging konkani⁴. In the *satyagraha* of 1955 hundreds of Indians marched into Goa to demonstrate against the artificiality of the border separating Goa from India. Salazar referred to the Goans who took part in this action as « denationalised Goans »⁵. One cannot say whether Cunha's use of the term was inspired by earlier nationalists or whether he adopted its usage in a paradoxical manner reacting to the Portuguese officialdom's usage of it.

A Brief Summary of *The Denationalization of Goans*

At the outset it is worth noting that Cunha's discourse in general, and his thesis of the denationalisation of Goans in particular are a product of the divided society in which he lived and attempted to generate national consciousness. He tried to unite the people by appealing to their identity as Indians. His discourse is meaningful because it addresses the fact of the communal divide without attempting to hide its existence. According to Cunha, Hindus and Catholics were both denationalised, however because of the use of the Church by the Portuguese state the denationalisation of the Catholic Goans was more pronounced.

Cunha argues that the Portuguese state had achieved the alienation of the people from their motherland through various agencies such as the Portuguese system of education, the press which was under the rigid control of the state and the Church which functioned as an arm of the Portuguese state.

A major premise in Cunha's essay was that Goans had lost their Indianness and their pride of race. National consciousness was absent. In place of their own culture the people of Goa, particularly the Catholic elite, had adopted a culture that was imitative of the west. The process of denationalisation had reduced Goans to being strangers in their own land⁶. He identified the denationalisation of Goans as the main obstacle for the development of nationalism in Goa.

He asserted that the Portuguese created myths which dominated the historiography of their rule over Goa. The result of this was that Goans who had received Portuguese education grew up believing Afonso de Albuquerque to be tolerant and in favour of racial integration, and nurtured the belief that Francis Xavier had effected conversions miraculously. Portuguese historiography chose to ignore the fact that the former was responsible for the massacre of thousands of Muslims, while the latter had played a vital role in introducing the inquisition in Goa. Anything pertaining to India was excluded from the curriculum. Fed on myths such as these most Goans were in awe of the Portuguese.

Denationalised Goans had lost their national dignity, he argued. They had lost their traditional culture and were deprived of the use of their mother-tongue, Konkani. They held the belief that by aping the culture of the rulers, their status was superior to their fellow countrymen.

4. Menezes Braganza Memorial Committee, *Biographical Sketch – Menezes Braganza*, Panaji, self published, 1972 : 58.

5. *Salazar Says – The Question of Goa*, Statement from the Presidency of the Council of Ministers, Secretariado nacional da informação, Lisbon, 1955 : 5.

6. T.B. CUNHA, *op. cit.* : 59.

The Denationalisation of Goans is often seen as an indictment of Catholic Goans. This is not true. Highlighting the nexus between the church and the state Cunha asserts :

« We do not fight religion but we expose the exploitation of religion for the benefit of the foreign rulers and to the disadvantage of India's unity »⁷.

Cunha remarks that, more than any other imperialist rulers, « the Portuguese used religion as a weapon of political exploitation », and urges the Goan Catholic, to « be conscious of and think over the role assigned to religion by imperialistic politics »⁸. However, he clearly states that Goan Catholics Hindus had been denationalised and observes : « In the name of religion, the Hindus were robbed and the Catholics enslaved. *Both* were terrorised for the greater security of the usurpers »⁹. He attributed to their denationalisation the failure of Goans to protest against the colonial rulers. He states in no uncertain terms :

« The regime of permanent violence of the people's convictions produced a debasement of moral qualities. And it affected both the Hindus and Christians [...] It destroyed their self-respect and enslaved them to the point of rendering them incapable of reacting to the tyranny of their rulers »¹⁰.

It is worth noting that in this essay, when Cunha has a specific point to make about Goan Catholics, he refers to « the Catholic population » or « Goan Christians ». The more frequent reference is to « Goans », inclusive of Hindus and Catholics.

By targeting denationalisation, rather than the tangible enemy, the imperial state, Cunha showed an understanding of complexities involved in advancing the nationalist idea. « Nationalism » could only exist in the absence of psychological and cultural enslavement.

Significance of Thesis of Denationalisation

According to Cunha's thesis, the expression of nationalism necessarily implied an assertion of culture on the part of the colonised. Ashis Nandy has cited Frantz Fanon (1926-1961), psychiatrist and social philosopher, involved in Algeria's liberation struggle, to be one of the first to realise the psychological dominance of European middle-class cultures in the colonies¹¹. However, Cunha's essay, which emphasises the mental enslavement of Goans by the Portuguese, was written two decades prior to Fanon's first published work¹². Cunha and Fanon both believed that the educated elites of their respective countries had been subjected to a process of mental enslavement, enabling the colonial rulers to sustain their rule over the colonised with their consent.

7. *Ibid.* : 57.

8. *Ibid.* : 77.

9. *Ibid.* : 76.

10. *Ibid.* : 96.

11. A. NANDY, *The Intimate Enemy: Loss and Recovery of Self Under Colonialism*, New Delhi, Oxford University Press, 1983 : 4.

12. Fanon's noted works are *Black Skins, White Masks* and *Wretched of the Earth*, published in 1952 and 1961 respectively.

Nandy is concerned with the colonisation of minds that persists after the departure of the colonisers which results in the generalisation of « the concept of the modern west from a geographical and temporal entity to a psychological category »¹³. Cunha's concern was with the strength, persistence and even seeming popularity of ongoing colonial domination because the mind of the people had been enslaved.

This concern is also reflected in the language of Amílcar Cabral, a thinker-revolutionary fighting for Guinea Bissau's liberation from Portuguese colonial rule. He asserted « Liberation is an act of culture ». He believed it necessary to penetrate the « wall of silence » built around the colonised people by the Portuguese colonisers and to bare the attempt of the Portuguese to project the colonised Africans as « happy Portuguese of colour. » Cabral referred to « the infaceable marks of colonialism » on the minds and bodies of the people¹⁴.

Cunha asserted the necessity of Goans to affirm their endogenous culture. This would facilitate the growth of nationalism. « Forced westernisation » had resulted in the creation of « submissive servants »¹⁵ and their denationalised culture had made the Goans « the tools of their own enslavement »¹⁶. Consequently for nationalist consciousness to develop in Goans it was necessary for them to identify with the « Great India » from which the origins of Goa could be traced. For Cunha, acceptance of the « Great India » is not just a political concept but a cultural concept implying a rejection of the superiority of the west and a vigorous reaction against the colonial rulers in the « political, ideological, social and economic fields, and even in the most everyday habits of our life »¹⁷.

Popular Perception of the « Denationalised Goan »

In the course of research for my doctoral thesis, a number of freedom fighters were interviewed. For them, Cunha was best remembered for his formulation of the thesis of *The Denationalisation of Goans*. However it became clear in the course of the interviews that their understanding of his essay was informed by their practical experiences or their biases and they had selectively appropriated parts of Cunha's thesis in keeping with their own world view.

Most freedom fighters, including veteran freedom fighters, Catholic by birth, saw the denationalised Goan as synonymous with the Catholic Goan. As we have already observed, Cunha's essay reveals that he did not view Hindus as being exempt from the process of denationalisation. Why then is the Catholic Goan viewed as the denationalised Goan? If this perception existed only among the Hindu freedom fighters one could attribute this view to bias. But this is not the case. Catholic freedom fighters also shared it. Perhaps the answer in part lies in understanding the relationship between religion and nationalism. It is relevant to look at what one freedom fighter had to say in this regard :

13. A. NANDY, *op. cit.* : xi.

14. B. DAVIDSON, *The Liberation of Guinea-Bissau and Cape Verde, Aspects of an African Revolution*, London, Zed Press, 1981 : 3.

15. T.B. CUNHA, *op. cit.* : 96.

16. *Ibid.* : 90.

17. *Ibid.* : 97.

« The basis of nationalism for Hindus differed from the basis of Nationalism for Christians. The nationalist sentiments of Hindus were often inspired by religion. Many Hindus derived their nationalism from nationalists like Veer Savarkar and Lokmanya Tilak, who were exponents of Hindu nationalism »¹⁸.

According to him, Christians first had to develop an « anti-church » consciousness. This did not necessarily mean the giving up of Christianity, but it was part of the process of developing an anti-Portuguese consciousness. He also stated that many nationalists were compelled to look westward for their nationalist inspiration, as conversions had served to sever their connection with their « Indian heritage » ; Western thought, as epitomised by the French revolution, contributed to the shaping, of the nationalist consciousness of many Goans.

In the case of Christians there was a direct relationship between religion and denationalisation resulting in the perception of the Christian as the denationalised Goan. In the case of Hindus the relationship between religion and the process of denationalisation could not be easily established. All Goans, Hindu and Christian had been denationalised. They were deprived of the educational, literary or cultural use of their language – a point that Cunha stresses time and again. However, to fill the vacuum created by the state of « inculture » to which Hindus were reduced, unlike the Christians, they did not have to look westward. Instead they appropriated the culture that was most accessible to them, this being the dominant culture of the neighbouring province later to become the state of Maharashtra. Probably because the Marathi culture with which the Hindu identified was a part of the « Great Indian Culture » which Cunha viewed as the ideal, he is not as critical of the Hindu Goan as he is of the Christian Goan, who imitated the culture of the colonisers.

This being the case, one would have expected to find few nationalists who were Christian by birth. However, when asked whether the numerical strength of Christians in the freedom struggle was significantly smaller than that of Hindus, most freedom fighters felt that the relationship between religion and nationalist consciousness could not be quantified in such definite terms¹⁹, although many felt that sympathy for the movement was greater among the Hindus than the Christians. Christian nationalists also narrated the initial difficulties they faced convincing fellow Christians to join, but stated that as the movement progressed more Christians participated in it.

The Difficulties Involved in Defining a Nationalist

There are also cases of individuals whose nationalism was spurred on by their religious belief. In the case of Cunha's predecessor Francisco Luis Gomes (1829-1869), one finds that his nationalism is constructed on the framework of his Christian religious belief and his faith in the superiority of western civilisation. Gomes states : « The most powerful instruments of

18. Personal communication, Panaji, Flaviano Dias, 1990.

19. Aside from religion, caste also appeared to be a factor influencing the participation of Goans in the nationalist movement. Christian freedom fighters believed that *chardos* were more receptive to nationalist thinking than were the *bamonns*.

civilisation are two : the Christian religion, and education »²⁰. He goes on to discuss how conversions could be achieved in British India. He gives importance to the use of tact and suggests that Britain learn from Portugal :

« Portugal converted a portion of India to the Catholic religion with the arms of her soldiers, with the blood of her martyrs, with the miracles of her saints, and with the fires of her Inquisition. Those who were vanquished in this struggle became Christians and Portuguese. England might imitate the example, except as regards force... »²¹.

Gomes, in a similar vein to Jyotiba Phule in Maharashtra, was acutely aware of the social evils of his time and saw European civilisation as a possible panacea for these evils. He comments : « Cholera and the Thug were born in the same country and in the same year. India is their native land... »

All impartial men desired « India for India » according to Gomes. At the same time he asserts : « To men of liberal principles and to mankind it is perfectly indifferent whether India is called English or Brahmanical ; what they cannot consent to is that the domination be exploitation instead of paternal tutelage ».

He believed that because India was ridden with rivalries of different dynasties, caste hatred and religious antagonisms, it had been possible for England to conquer her ; « With only one religion, only one dynasty, only one caste, India would have been invincible »²².

For Phule, the advent of the British signified a freedom for the people from the tyrannies of the cruel Brahmanical rule of the Peshwas. It gave the people a chance to organise themselves and struggle for their betterment. While Gomes bemoaned the loss of India's great cultural heritage he believed that colonial rule offered the people an opportunity for civilisation. An oft-quoted letter to French poet, Lamartine, is illustrative of his mode of thought :

« I was born in the East Indies, once the cradle of poetry, philosophy and history and *now their tomb*. I belong to that race which composed the Mahabharata and invented chess... But this nation which made codes of its poems and formulated politics in a game is no longer alive ! It survives imprisoned in its own country [...] I ask for India liberty and light ; as for myself, more happy than my countrymen, I am free - *civis sum* »²³.

Perhaps because of the desire to project Gomes as a nationalist the last line is often not quoted²⁴. This line clearly reveals Gomes's perception of himself as « free » on account of his being able to live in Portugal as a Portuguese citizen and consequently better of than his fellow countrymen. Does this mean that he was not a nationalist ? There is a need to realise the varying modes of nationalist thought. Just as some nationalists sought to strengthen India, the nation, with the help of Hinduism, Gomes envisioned the building of an invincible nation with the help of Christianity and the liberal values of « enlightened » Europe. Acutely aware of the enemy within he, sought help from the pater who would leave once his period of tutelage

20. F.L. GOMES, *Selected Works of Francisco Luis Gomes, Memorial Volume*, Bombay, The Centenary Committee, 1931 : 147.

21. *Op. cit.* : 148.

22. *Ibid.* : 147.

23. *Ibid.* : 368.

24. A.K. PRIOLKAR, *Goa Re-discovered*, Bombay, self published, 1967 : 4 ; A. Da CRUZ, *Men and Matters*, Vasco da Gama (Goa), Ashok Printing Press, 1974 : 1-2.

was over to achieve progress for the nation. Acutely aware of the enemy without, Cunha sought to galvanise a divided people into a nation.

The Denationalised Goan and the Identity of Goa as Distinct from India

Four hundred and fifty years of Portuguese rule served to distinguish the position of Goa from the rest of India, that position was further distinguished in a number of ways. In 1928, the Goa Congress Committee (GCC) was formed and represented the first attempt made to forge an organisational link between the interests of the people of Goa and the Indian independence movement as it sought and gained affiliation to the Indian National Congress (INC). In 1934 as part of its decision to derecognise branch committees of the functioning in foreign territories like London and New York, the GCC was treated in the same category²⁵. This act of derecognition by the INC further contributed to distinguishing the position of Goa from the rest of India.

Goa's liberation came fourteen years after India's independence due to the intervention of the Indian army. At the time of Goa's liberation, America and many countries of Europe termed the action of the Indian army as an act of invasion. Within Goa, there was a multiplicity of responses. The majority of Goans probably welcomed Goa's union with India and the prospect of development in the form of electrification of villages and more opportunities for higher education. Communal tensions prevailing in India possibly caused some anxiety in a section of the Christian population. Nationalists believed Goa's liberation was long overdue and some were critical of the Indian government for dragging its feet over removing the remnants of imperialism from India. A small section comprising Hindus and Christians which had prospered under Portuguese rule were concerned about the fate of their fortunes and was now keen on currying favour with the new rulers and demonstrating their loyalty to them. Three years after Goa was liberated, the Goa Freedom Movement was established with the objective of ending Indian « imperialist » rule over Goa. Although this organisation was formed in Paris, mainly by non-resident Goans, it would be wrong to assume that this trend of thought enjoyed absolutely no sympathy within Goa. The historiography of the nationalist movement seeks to deny the existence of the affinal feelings towards Portugal that exist in a small section of Goans. The Christian content of Gomes's nationalist discourse receives little space when tracing the development of the nationalist idea in Goa. The voice of the lusitanised Goan is seen as a source of embarrassment. A more honest historiography which gives validity to the different trends of thought will enable us to grapple better with the enigmatic phenomenon of Goan identity.

Almost four decades after Goa's liberation, people in the rest of India believe Goa to be westernised with Christians in the majority. Actually 65 per cent of the population comprises Hindus and 30 per cent Christians. The Indian government has in part been responsible for feeding these myths in its tourism promotion publications. In popular representations,

25. A.M. ZAIDI & S.G. ZAIDI, eds, *The Encyclopaedia of the Indian National Congress*. Vol 10 : 1930-1935, *The Battle for Swaraj*, New Delhi, S. Chand & Co., 1980 : 400.

Goa continues to be represented as the Rome of the Orient. In Hindi films, the Goan man is usually a Robert or an Albert inseparable from his bottle of booze, while the Goan girl is bold and westernised. Even the floats approved of for the Republic Day Parade often feature youth exclusively in western attire. Goa, land of the Shigmo and Narkasuras, the toiling peasant women and the *kashti* clad men remains unrepresented. The image of the denationalised Goan persists.

March 1999

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