The Becoming of Goa

Space and Culture in the Emergence of a Multicultural Lifeworld

In the becoming of Goa, the Goan space played a role not only as a geographical site within which different cultural and religious traditions met, but also as a cultural construction which itself became crucial in shaping and negotiating the cultural and religious differences. By chiefly focusing on the latter aspect of space, I will attempt to reconstruct in this presentation the becoming of Goa as a gradual broadening of identificatory spatial frameworks and as a process of contestation, reconciliation and invention of spatial images, from the early modern to the modern period.

Goa and the Portuguese Conquest of Asian Space in the Early Modern Period

It was Caroline Ifeka (1985) who draw critical attention to the widespread tendency in European writing to condense the description of the scenic beauty and natural resourcefullness, the cosmopolitan life and mercantile prosperity of the early modern Portuguese headquarters in India into the image of *« Goa Dourada »,* or Golden Goa. As Ifeka rightly pointed out, this image was not only a literary, but also an elitist construction which rather obscured the social and racial inequalities, cultural and religious differences prevailing in Goa at that time. More than that, it is to be recalled that, in the period at stake, Goa was not a current designation for the whole of the territories which the Portuguese had brought under their control in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries on the Konkan coast. Instead, the terminology used in the contemporary records clearly indicates that, well up to the eighteenth century, the name of Goa marked only a small part of the Portuguese conquest and, for that matter, was mostly specified as the « island of Goa », i.e. the island in the river Mandovi on which the capital of the Portuguese *Estado da India* was situated. Thus, next to Bardes and Salcete, the administrative notion for Goa designated for long but one of the districts (*talukas)*[1] which the Portuguese had brought under their control.

---

1. For reasons of convenience, diacritical marks are ommitted in this paper.

The advise to search on a smaller scale than the ones alluded to in the literary and administrative concepts, in order to explore the relationship between culture and space in the early modern period, holds true also with respect to the religious communities who lived in the territories which eventually were to become Goa. Without belabouring this point, it is significant that, although the notion of « Christians » was current in contemporary clerical scriptures and discourses, in social praxis this notion was thoroughly differentiated and qualified. Hence, we find a complex classification of the Christian population of Goa which, on a scale of descending social status, distinguished so called *reinoes,* i.e. Christians born from Portuguese parents in Portugal, from *castiços,* i.e. Christians born from Portuguese parents in Asia, from *mestiços,* i.e. Christians born from a mixed European and Asian parenthood, and eventually from *Indiacos,* i.e. the native Christians of Goa (Pearson 1987 : 95). Likewise, the notion of « Hindu » was not a unifying label in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Instead, there is evidence that the various religious traditions and practices that were followed by the different ethnic groups, sects and castes were subsumed only much later under the generic notions of « Hindu », respectively « Hinduism » which gained their currency above all in the orientalist discourse of British colonialism (Thapar 1989).

This notwithstanding, there were modes of the construction of spaces and places which did reflect the encounter between the diverse cultures and religions in the early modern period in western India. By judging from the historical and ethnographical evidence, what had been important at the time were long standing religious concepts which associated spaces and places with various types of sacred and spiritual beings. Hence, while the uninhabited and uncultivated land *(ran)* was seen as the realm of demonic beings *(bhutavali),* as well as the territory to which the spirits of people were transferred who had died an inauspicious death (*khetri, alvantin, samand,* etc.) ; the various types and sections of the inhabited and cultivated territories of the villages (*vade, khazan, vaingan,* etc.) were considered the domain of the spirits of ancestors *(purusha)* and a specified set of divine and semi-divine beings. Central among the latter were and still are the *gramadevatas,* or village deities who are seen as the spiritual founders and protectors of the villages. Usually represented by anthropomorphic icons and often embellished by a mythology which tells about their emergence from the village ground, these *gramadevatas* have their abodes in the central village temples. Subordinated to them is a group of semi-divine beings whose often aniconic shrines are situated at various liminal sites, such as way crosses, dams, river banks, sea shores and above all the boundaries of the village territories, something that is reflected in the generic denomination of these subordinated beings as *jageveile,* a name which refers to the Konkani word for « spot » or « locality », or *shimeveile,* which relates to the Konkani word for « border ». All together, these sacred and spiritual beings form local pantheons which clearly structure and demarcate the places and territories of each village, any significant transgression of which requires particular border-crossing rituals.

This ancient spatio-religious system gained a special significance in the conquest of Goa, when the foreign invaders made it an effort to destroy all

the temples and shrines of the local deities and to construct churches, chapels and crosses dedicated to Catholic saints in their place. The superimposition of religious sites in the context of conquest, one may add, was not a rare thing in the medieval and early modern world. In a similar way, Turkish Moslems had transformed the Byzantine Hagia Sophia of Constantinople into a mosque, Spanish Reconquistadores had implanted a Christian cathedral into the Muslim Mesquita in Cordoba, the Portuguese King had made the largest Jewish synagogue of Lisbon into a Christian church – to name but a few prominent examples. Noteworthy, however, in Goa, this kind of religious conquest gained a special effect by becoming a space-filling project. Thus, consciously or unconsciously, the systematic superimposition of existing religious sites, and the substitution of local deities by Christian monuments and saints not only replicated the ancient spatio-religious system of the Hindus, but also prepared the ground for its eventual duplication and synthesis.

Crucial here was the fact that Goan Hindus, though fleeing the Portuguese territories in large numbers in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, did not abandon their village deities. Instead, the fleeing Hindus managed to salvage many divine images and icons from destruction by the Christian missionaries to reinstall them in temples outside the Portuguese control. Remarkably, many of the new temples emerging in this process not only brought together a whole series of « escaped deities » under one roof, but often also became more sumptuous and gained a greater significance, than the old temples ever had. More important yet, the « escaped deities » became central symbols in a Hindu « diaspora culture », which, through temple histories, legends and rituals, kept alive a distinct memory of its original terrain and, in due time, provided important incentives to reclaim it (Axelrod & Fuerch 1996). Hence, when changing circumstances, such as a growing economic crisis causing a mass emigration of Goan Catholics to British India and elsewhere, and the considerable restriction of the power of the Catholic orders led to a gradual political liberalisation in Goa in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the return of Hindus, the re-erection of Hindu temples and shrines, and the formal relocation of once displaced deities brought about a revival of Hindu culture in the former core-areas of Portuguese and Catholic domination (Henn 2000).

Given the historical replication of the ancient spatio-religious system by the Christian conquerors, this relocation of Hindu gods led to the peculiar consequence of a widespread religious double-occupancy of Goan spaces and places. Hence, not only do we find today every village and town in the former core-area of Portuguese domination represented by Hindu *gramadevatas* and Catholic patron saints, at once. Very commonly, also many of the subordinated and liminal spaces and localities are guarded by both, Hindu *jageveile* and Christian saints whose shrines and symbols, not rarely, are situated side-by-side, or back-to-back and, occasionally, even under one roof.

More than that, there is evidence, that the multi-religious occupation and representation of space, also provided for occasions to cross the formal boundaries drawn between the communities of Christians and Hindus. Hence, in quite a number of cases, Hindu *gramadevatas* and Catholic patron saints became the object of veneration by believers from the respective

« other » religious community. Though, certainly, not going as far as Axelrod & Fuerch (1996 : 396), who, faced with such practices, talk of a « merging of Hindu and Catholic identities », I would hold, however, that these pratices demonstrate that, at times, the belonging to a particular space may so-to-say overrule the affiliation to a particular religious community.

Goa and the Contest of Luso and Indian Space in the Modern Period

By turning towards the nineteenth century, the name of Goa had become not only a current political designation for the whole of the territories which the Portuguese controlled on the Konkan coast, but also a cultural framework within and through which Goans began to reflect their cultural and religious identities in a new way. Had religious identities in the six-teenth and seventeenth centuries, as I suggested, been shaped in the context of spaces, which were constructed by the face-to-face relations of people and represented by the icons of local gods and saints, they now increasingly became attached to spaces whose reaches were beyond personal contact and whose representations were of a much broader religious and cultural symbolism. As Benedict Anderson (1983) elaborated in a different context, this broadening of identificatory frameworks had, of course, been effected by a series of interrelated developments, among which, in Goa, the gradual increase in literacy, the growing significance of Portuguese and Marathi, the (re)emergence of printed religious literature and newspapers and, last but not least, new dimensions of communication and travelling, to which Goans became accustomed, above all, through a strongly intensifying labour migration, played a role.

For the cultural construction of Goa itself, this implicated the emergence of new, respectively the reinterpretation of old spatial images which, compared with the early modern period, differed in their contents and ranges. Hence, it was now that, beyond the glorification of the relatively brief heyday of the historical capital of the *Estado da India,* the literary image of *« Goa Dourada »* could become an identificatory focus for a considerable part of educated Goan Catholics. As such, Goa was associated with a Lusitan world whose history was related with the heroic deeds of Portu-guese seafarers, kings and governors, whose language was Portuguese, whose cultural idols were, among others, Camões and Pessoa, and whose day-to-day life was characterised by « *fado,* football and Fatima », as Robert Newman (1988 : 3) once put it, all of which became, if not the norm, at least, the aspiration of the life-styles adopted by the Catholic elite. With respect to religion, *« Goa Dourada »* found its parallel, or rather extension in the formula of Goa as the « Rome of the Orient ». This formula was, of course, once more, a literary image, which had been coined by the French novelist Gilbert Renault-Roulier, better known under his pseudonym Remy, in 1956 (Scholberg 1982) and is often used by historians today as the descriptive essence of the early modern period, when Goa became the archiepiscopal centre of Christian missionism in Asia (Thomaz 1982 ; Chandeigne 1996). This notwithstanding, I would argue, the image of Goa as the « Rome of the Orient » rather presents a modern self-perception of Goan Christians. More than clearly stating the affiliation with the centre of Catholicism in Rome, which, as one may recall, not always had been so clear in the days of the historical conflict between the Portuguese *padroado* and the Roman *propaganda fide* (Costa 1997), this image implicitly overcame the old, racist

discrimination between Asian and European Christians and signalled the claim of a genuinely Indian identity of Goan Christians.

At about the same time, parts of the Hindu elite began to shape an image of Goa that was intrinsically Indian. The general context of this was the gradual restrengthening of Hindu culture in the former core-areas of Christian domination which, since the mid-eighteenth century, was fostered by a continuous increase of the Hindu population of Goa, equalling the number of Christians in about 1910 or 1920 and, from then onwards, forming a growing Hindu majority2. The construction, or rather re-construction, as its protagonists would hold, of an image of « Goa Indica » (Ifeka 1985) was shaped by affiliating Goa with the culture and history of the neighbouring Maharashtra. Hence, by holding that Konkani was but a dialect of Marathi, by recalling the historical influences which Maharashtrian kings, such as Shivaji, once had in the region, and by reviving religious traditions related with Maharashtrian saints, like Ramdas and Tukaram, part of the Hindu elite would claim that, culturally, Goa was to be seen as a part of Maharashtra (Newman 1988 : 4). Yet, as with « Goa Dourada », also the image of the Maharashtrian Goa reached out for a larger ground. Inspired by the activities of the Hindu reform movement, Arya Samaj, in other parts of India, Goan Hindus launched a religious campaign, through which a considerable part of the « tribal » group of Goan Gauda, who had adopted the Christian faith in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, was « reconverted » to Hinduism in 1928 (Kulkarni 1994). By drawing on archaeological and historical evidences, scholars began to trace the name of Goa back to Gomantak, Govapuri or Gopakapattam which had been the names of the region, respectively of some of its famous cities in the times of the Silahara, Kadamba and Vijanayagar kingdoms. Historical chronicles and holy texts, such as the Konkanakhya and the Skanda Purana, were used to reconstruct the historical immigration and settlement of Brahman clans in Goa, and to recall the mythology of Parashurama, the martial *avatara* of the great Hindu god Vishnu, who, according to the legend, once claimed the land of Goa from the sea by shooting his arrow into the ocean (Priolkar 1967 ; Figueiredo 1963 ; Wagle 1970). All this, eventually, found its condensation in the image of Goa as a « Konkan Kashi », through which Hindu nationalists, in the post-liberation time, attempted to equal the religious significance of the history of Hindu Goa with that of historical Benares.

However, the modern period also saw the emergence of a third position which went beyond the polarisation of a Lusitan against an Indian Goa. They were scholars who cut across the line drawn between the more conservative minded parts of the Goan elite. Hence, while Catholic scholars, such as Gerson de Cunha and Tristão de Bragança Cunha began to take an interest into the Indian and Hindu past of Goa, thereby relativising, if not criticising the generalisation of the Lusitan image ; Hindu scholars, such as Pandurang Pissurlenkar and, somewhat later, Anant Kakba Priolkar, contributed to the historical study of Portuguese Goa and

---

2. In the eighteenth century, this increase of the Hindu population was effected by the incorporation of seven new districts, hitherto called the New Conquests, into Portuguese Goa, something that added more than 100 000 Hindus to the enlarged Goa (Srivastava 1990 : 66 *sq.*). From about the mid-nineteenth century onwards, it was, above all, the strongly intensifying emigration of Goan Christians which changed the demographical relationship in favour of the Hindus (Angle 1994 : 17)

formulated their appreciation of the contribution which Catholic missionaries had made to the development of Konkani or Marathi language and literature. Yet others, like Philippe Nery Xavier and Sebastião Rudolpho Dalgado began to acknowledge the Indo-Lusitan constitution of Goa by drawing on both, Indian and Portuguese sources and influences in exploring Goan history, society and language (Priolkar 1967).

Still going beyond these approaches, in the early twentieth century, an image of Goa began to develop which now was truly multicultural and cosmopolitan. Crucial became here, above all, the work of Shennoi Vahman Ragunat Varde Valaulikar, the Goan Brahman who had migrated to Bombay and became renown there within an intellectual circle of Goan migrants. The central concern of Valaulikar was to claim a genuine Konkan culture, something which soon brought him the epithet of Goembab, i.e. « Father of Goa ». In doing so, Goembab defended, in prolific historical and linguistic research and literary writing, Konkani language and Goan history and culture, not only against the idea that this was but a dialect of Marathi and a derivate of Maharashtrian culture, but also against the competing idea, that Goa was but a cultural province of Portugal. Hence, Goembab so-to-say outdated the Maharashtrian and outreached the Portuguese claim on Goa by pretending for what he called a Konkanrashtra, whose roots traced back till Vedic times, when, as he pointedly put it, Maharashtra was not even born, and by referring to far away places and cultures where Goans had settled and nativized, but which the Portuguese had never reached (Valaulikar 1977). More than that, Goembab produced a literary opus which, in content and style, presented Konkani versions of such eminent pieces of world literature, as the *Upanishads,* the story of the Biblical Flood, the stories of *One Thousand and One Nights,* and Molière's *L'Avare,* to name but a few of his writings, which all together were apt to illustrate that Konkani language was not only able to adapt themes and styles but in fact to compete with literary standards from all over the world.

* * *

I would like to conclude by pointing out that the becoming of Goa not only shows a process in which different cultural and religious constructions of the Goan space were, at times, polarised and contrasted, at times, reconciliated and fused. More than that, the becoming of Goa exemplifies the generation of a space which both exceeded and undermined the cultural and religious identities at stake by placing them, as in Goembab's vision, into a much broader multicultural world, or by cutting them back, as in the localistic village religion which became the focus of inter-religious communities. Hence, not only by cutting across the boundaries, but also by shaping scales, at once larger and smaller than the ones implied in the colonialist, nationalist or orthodox religious constructions, Goa invites us to rethink the idea of space, as well as of culture in a multicultural world.

August 2000
Alexander HENN
University of Heidelberg

South Asia Institute
Heidelberg, Germany

BIBLIOGRAPHY

ANDERSON, B. 1983, *Imagined Communities. Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism,* London, Verso, 160 p.

ANGLE, S. Prabhakar 1994**,** *Goa. Concepts and Misconcepts,* Bombay, The Goa Hindu Association*,* 97 p.

AXELROD, P. & FUERCH, M.A. 1996, « The Flight of the Deities : Hindu Resistance in Portuguese Goa », *Modern Asian Studies* (Cambridge, UK), XXX (2) : 387-421.

CHANDEIGNE, M., ed. 1996, *Goa 1510-1685. L'Inde portugaise, apostolique et commerciale,* Paris, Autrement, 212 p.

COSTA, J. Cosme 1997, *A Missiological Conflict Between Padroado and Propaganda in the East,* Panjim, Pilar Publications, 111 p.

FIGUEIREDO, J.M. Pacheco de 1963, « Goa pré-portuguesa », *Studia (*Lisbon), 12 : 139-259.

GUPTA, A. & FERGUSON J. 1992, « Beyond "Culture" : Space, Identity, and the Politics of Difference », *Cultural Anthropology* (Arlington, US), 7 : 6-23.

HENN, A. 2000, « Exercitium – Mimesis – Interpretatio : Ritual und Bedeutung in Goa », *in* K.P. KÖPPING & U. RAO (eds), Münster, LIT : 125-138.

IFEKA, C. 1985, « The Image of Goa » : 181-196, *in* T. De SOUZA (ed.), *Indo-Portuguese History. Old Issues, New Questions,* New Delhi, Concept Publishing Company, 235 p.

KÖPPING, K.P. & RAO, U. 2000, *Im Rausch des Rituals. Gestaltung und Transformation der Wirklichkeit in körperlicher Performanz,* Münster, LIT, 247 p.

KULKARNI, A.R. 1994, « The Proselytization and Purification Movement in Goa and Konkan », pp. 91-105, *in* T. De SOUZA (ed.), *Discoveries, Missionary Expansion and Asian Cultures,* New Delhi, Concept Publishing Company, 215 p.

Newman, R.S. 1988, « Konkani Mai Ascends the Throne : The Cultural Basis of Goan Statehood », *South Asia* (Nedlands, Australia), XI (1) : 1-24.

PEARSON, M.N. 1987, *The Portuguese in India,* Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 178 p.

PRIOLKAR, A.K. 1967, *Goa Rediscovered,* Bombay, [n.p.] 137 p.

SCHOLBERG, H. 1982, *Bibliography of Goa and the Portuguese in India,* New Delhi, Promilla & Co. Publishers, 413 p.

SRIVASTAVA, C. Harish 1990, « Demographic History and Human Ressources » : 55-78 *in* T. De SOUZA (ed.), *Goa Through the Ages* II, New Delhi, Concepts Publishing Company, 316 p.

THAPAR, R. 1989, « Imagined Religious Communities ? Ancient History and the Modern Search for a Hindu Identity », *Modern Asian Studies* (Cambridge, UK), XXIII (2) : 209-231.

THOMAZ, L.F. 1982, « Goa. Une société luso-indienne », *Bulletin des Études portguaises et brésiliennes* (Paris)*,* LXXXII (42-43) : 15-44.

VALAULIKAR, S.V. 1977, *Aine Velar (At the Hick of Time), in* VAJRALIKHNI (ed.), Margão : Konkani Basha Mandal, 254 p. [1st ed. 1946]

WAGLE, N.K. 1970, « The History and Social Organisation of the Gaud Saraswat Brahmans of the West Coast of India *», Journal of Indian History* (Trivandrum, India), 142 : 7-25.