

SOME CONTRASTING VISIONS OF LUSO-TROPICALISM IN INDIA

At the close of the Portuguese colonial regime in India, after a presence of nearly four and half centuries, barely 5% of the inhabitants of Goa, the capital of the « *Estado da Índia* », were capable of reading, writing and speaking in Portuguese, even though the census of 1960 indicated 18% literacy. These statistical figures included the Portuguese from Portugal, and who were on duty in Goa, and less than a hundred *mestiço* families (« *luso-descendentes* ») that opted for repatriation to Portugal even before the occupation of Goa by Indian forces had been completed. It cannot be concluded that most of the natives were illiterates. Most Hindus, who constituted nearly 61% of the population of Goa, provided primary education for their children at their own cost in Marathi language. Many boys of the higher caste Catholic families attended parish schools, where they learned the three « R » and the rudiments of music. There were also private secondary schools for English education. The official Portuguese school attendance did not exceed 4% in 1950, and with the introduction of compulsory primary schooling, Goa attained the privilege of having, as Dr Mariano Saldanha, one-time professor of Sanskrit at the Lisbon University, would write : « a rare breed in the history of education, a breed of illiterates who could read and write »¹. The main reason for the lack of native interest in Portuguese language was its limited utility value in the job market. The same factor explained the interest in English education which enabled the people to migrate to British India and to British Africa. This situation gave rise to a popular Goan saying : « *Chodd firngi bhas, haddank urta mas* », meaning « too many Portuguese speeches do not help to fill the belly ». When the first Goan Provincial Congress met in 1915, one of the speakers presented statistics of the unemployment : he mentioned 5,000 unemployed, 1,500 beggars, 150,000 idle bodies in Goa² ! There would be an additional 60 000 in the category of the « idle » if they had not migrated to Bombay before that date. One third of these were women, and several of them could eke out a living only as prostitutes. The second Provincial Council in 1917 paid more attention to the problems of emigration and came to the conclusion that this mass exodus – « *êxodo pavoroso* » – was a

1. M. SALDANHA, « A língua Concani : as suas conferências e a acção portuguesa na sua cultura », *Boletim do Instituto Vasco da Gama, Bastorá* (Goa), 1953, offprint.
2. A.M. da CUNHA, *Congresso provincial da Índia portuguesa : subsídios para a sua história*, Nova Goa, Casa luso-francesa, 1924, p. 97.

pathological phenomenon for which the Portuguese colonial administration ought to admit its responsibility³. For those who stayed behind there was relief in ever growing number of bars. Drunkenness was another serious malady under the Portuguese regime. The seventh Provincial Congress in 1927 regretted the lack of concern manifested by the administration in controlling this vice. Obviously, the licensing of more taverns brought more income to a revenue-starved administration⁴.

The native rural population was deeply rooted in traditions and vernacular culture, even though the spoken Conkani language of the Christians had become visibly corrupted with Portuguese lexical borrowings. We are told by Sebastião R. Dalgado, a Goan priest who excelled as a linguist at the close of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth century: « A tenth or more of the spoken language consists of Portuguese words or derived from them ». In his *Diccionario Portuguez-Komkani* published in Lisbon in 1905 he lists these vocables of Portuguese derivation much used by the people in their daily parlance, but concludes that many of those words were totally unnecessary as there were several equivalents in their mother-tongue⁵. It is important to note that the population by and large did not take up to the Portuguese language with enthusiasm. However, this did not prevent a good number of Goans from cultivating Portuguese language with noticeable success⁶. A saying in Conkani has registered the attitude of the common people towards the Portuguese idiom: « *Sermanvank gel'lim axên, sermanv zalo firngi bhaxên* ». It refers to an old woman who went to hear a sermon with much devotion, but was disillusioned, because the preaching was done in Portuguese. From my own personal experience, I studied Portuguese in the primary school and in the minor seminary of the archdiocese of Goa, but at home the language spoken was always Conkani. Neither my parents nor most of the other relatives had completed Portuguese primary education. However, their routine vocabulary included many Portuguese words and expressions, including such frequently used bad words as *fuj-da-put* (« *filho da puta* »), *fodrichem* (« *fodida* »), *bonku* (« *bom cú* »), *malcriad*, etc., have remained till our days as Portugal's lexical contribution to its cultural dialogue with Goa.

Since we have touched on cultural dialogue, the Portuguese presence in India did not vanish without leaving strong traces. Little may have remained of the lusophony, and with the passing of time even less will probably be left. Few families in Goa hold on to the use of Portuguese language as their home language. Portuguese is taught as optional subject in the schools and even at the college and university levels, at times with a ratio of teachers superior to that of the students. With the exception of international tourism, and the usefulness of Portuguese language for

3. *Ibid.*, pp. 235-265.

4. 7^o Congresso provincial da Índia portuguesa : relatório, Nova Goa, 1927, pp. 2-3.

5. Mons. S. R. DALGADO, *Diccionario Portuguez-Komkani*, Lisboa, Imprensa Nacional, 1905, p. xvii. The Academia das Ciências de Lisboa published in 1913 his book *Influência do vocabulário português em linguas asiáticas* and in 1916 yet another one entitled *Contribuições para a lexicologia luso-oriental* in which the author studied the infiltration of the Asiatic vocables in the Portuguese language and through the Portuguese into other European languages. Mons. Dalgado published yet another set of two volumes of his classic *Glossário Luso-Asiático* (Coimbra, 1919-1921), which has been reedited in recent years.

6. T.R. de SOUZA, *Goa : roteiro histórico-cultural*, Lisboa, Grupo de trabalho do ministério da Educação para as comemorações dos descobrimentos portugueses, 1996, p. 87.

consulting old documents of historical nature, there is hardly any further advantage to be derived through learning the language. Hence, what has remained of the Portuguese cultural influence could be better termed as « *Christianotopia romana* » than « *Lusotopia* ». It is a Western influence to which Portugal opened the doors for the Goans very early in the history of India. This did not affect only those who were converted to Christianity, but also the Hindu population, even though some of the latter may seek to deny and denounce it. Recently appeared a publication authored by Prabhakar S. Angle, a Goan Saraswat Brahmin *hmane saraswat*. The caste belonging is important, because it continues to be a strong reference in the Indian and Goan society, and has its political and economic implications. Without knowing this social context well, a foreigner would miss the point or arrive at wrong conclusions after reading the book in question or other similar productions. It is useful to know that Saraswat Brahmins of « Shenvi » (Sinay) subcaste have a long cultural tradition in Goa. The 17th century Jesuit author of the *Oriente conquistado a Jesu Christo pelos Padres da companhia de Jesus em Goa* affirms: « There are no other more wicked people, or more perverse than these », and quotes the Prophet-King David to express his dislike for those Brahmins: « *De gente non sancta, ab homine iniquo et doloso eripe me* »⁷.

Sinay Brahmins were well versed in scriptures and accounts, and they functioned as village clerks all over Goa and even in the surrounding regions. The French Jesuit in Goa Étienne de la Croix composed a « *Purana de S. Pedro* » in the mid-17th century and therein he translated « Master » with « Shenay », in a verse which refers to the initial reluctance of Peter to let Jesus wash his feet, but then ends by asking him to wash him all over: *He majea Xenay/Tum korta tem tunch zannai/Nhoich moji tokli/Mhaka soglloch nhannoi*⁸ (« Master/You know what you are doing/Not my head only/Wash me entirely »). These Brahmins resisted the conversion drive of the Portuguese in the 15th and 17th centuries, but when they saw the futility of the resistance many accepted Christianity and others opted to migrate. But some of those who fixed their abode outside the Portuguese jurisdiction continued to function in Goa as State interpreters, tax farmers, and businessmen. Gradually many of them succeeded in regaining land properties and lost rights in Goa, even before the proclamation of the Republic which inaugurated a new era of religious tolerance and even of privileged treatment to the Hindus of Goa. The well known archivist in Goa since the thirties of this century, Panduranga Sakharam Sinay Pissurlencar, was one of these Saraswat Sinay Brahmins who benefitted from the political change. He published much archival documentation that confirmed the collaboration of the Sinay Brahmins as agents of Portuguese diplomacy in India⁹. It was his way of telling the Portuguese administration that it could rely on them. However, he ended his career in a curious manner and playing a strange game: when Portugal referred the « Right of Passage »

7. F. de SOUZA, *Oriente Conquistado, Bombaim*, Typ. Examiner, 1881, p. 37.

8. The original unpublished manuscript is preserved in the Central Library at Panjim, Goa.

9. Pissurlencar, P.S.S., *Agentes da Diplomacia portuguesa na Índia*, Bastorá, 1952. After all the good-will and benefits drawn from the Portuguese administration, Pissurlencar remained a nationalist Hindu at heart, and is known to have cooperated with the Indian authorities and against the Portuguese interests in the case of the « Right of Passage » at the International Court of Hague.

case against India to the International Court of Hague in 1954¹⁰, Pissurlencar did not back the Portuguese interests. He preferred to assist the other party, and transmitted documentation of vital importance from the Goa Archives to buttress the Indian argument. It is said that his feelings had been hurt when the Portuguese chose a Portuguese historian, namely Alexandre Lobato, to collate the documentation that would back the Portuguese case. Pissurlencar was certainly more competent to read the documentation needed in Marathi (Modi script) language and had already published much documentation on the subject of the Portuguese relations with the Marathas. He realised that the Portuguese preferred to trust a white Portuguese. Hence, he reacted as he did. He also symbolises in some sense the political-cultural resistance which the Sinays sustained in India against lusotropicalism despite all the concessions made to them by the Portuguese¹¹. The Goan Hindu Association has functioned in Bombay for over a hundred years with the financial support of the Saraswat Brahmins, and the book of Prabhakar Angle is one of the many publications of this Association with a strong communal bend.

Prabhakar S. Angle vents his anger against the journalism and studies that he considers as responsible for conveying a false image of Goa, namely as « India with a Portuguese accent », as reported in the *Reader's Digest* of July 1990. He goes on to cite various authors and publications who have committed such abuses. Among them figures Manohar Malgonkar and his book *Inside Goa* (1982), which was ordered by the Information Department of the Goa Government. Prabhakar Ange chooses to hit harder two Goan Christians, namely José Rangel and Percival Noronha. The former, owner of a century-old printing press in Goa, is charged of having told in an interview with the *Reader's Digest*: « We are Indians by blood, but our culture is Indo-Portuguese. This mixed culture was created over centuries. It cannot and must not disappear ». Percival Noronha had been an officer in the Department of Information and Tourism under the Portuguese regime, and continued in administration after political change. He is quoted as having told the American *Taveller* magazine in 1993:

« We were ruled from Portugal for four hundred and fifty years and twenty-three days. The result of this is that we are completely different from other Indians, completely different, I say! We Goans have a different mentality, a different language, a different culture. Although we are now under Indian occupation, I feel awkward when I cross the old border into India, suddenly everything changes: the food, the landscape, the buildings, the people, the way of life ».

Prabhakar Angle corrects him in his calculation of the duration of the Portuguese rule in Goa, and concludes that Percival's figure would be valid only for the Old Conquests which constitute only one-fifth of Goa's territory today – forget to consider the population figures, which would force an opposite conclusion! He regards this mistake of Percival unpardonable in an officer who was responsible for a Department of Information. Prabhakar Angle does not forget the « *mestiços* » who dance « *corredinho* » in Goa to entertain the foreign tourists, who are left with a

10. Cour internationale de Justice : affaire du droit de passage sur le territoire indien (Portugal c. Inde), arrêt du 12 avril 1960 [Printed in the Netherlands].

11. P. AXELROD & M.A. FUERCH, « Flight of the Deities : Hindu Resistance in Portuguese Goa », *Modern Asian Studies* 30 (2), 1996, pp. 387-421.

false image of Goan culture. He then cites a former American ambassador in India, Mr. John Dean Gunther, for remarking during a visit to Goa by way of an advice to the locals : « You must give the tourists what you have ! Not what he wants »¹².

Obviously Prabhakar Angle is on a war-path against « lusotropicalism » and exudes strong prejudices against the style of living and behaving of the Goan Christians. Such an attitude takes him to easy generalisations, and to close his eyes to obvious realities, even though they may affect only a minority of the Goan population, namely about 35 % Goans who profess Christianity and had closer cultural-religious contact with the Portuguese. I wish to classify this type of writings as « Priolkar-Angle literature ». A.K. Priolkar was a Bombay-based Goan Saraswat Brahmin who produced literary output as linguist and historian in the 1960s. His research served to buttress pro-Marathi and pro-Hindu interests. He emphasized the excesses of Inquisition and the cultural backwardness of Goan Christians and their Konkani « dialect ». He reserved to Marathi the distinction of being the true literary and cultural language of Goa¹³.

The reactions of Priolkar, Angle and several others need to be understood as part of the cultural resistance against the disturbing effect of the Portuguese colonial and missionary policies, and as such they are not without foundation. But it would be ridiculous to close one's eyes to the reality and refuse to admit that the Portuguese presence did not leave deep traces in India for good and for bad. It is a different issue altogether to assess this impact as positive or negative from the Goan point of view, and not necessarily consuming assessments imported from outside. If Goa today witnesses a heavy influx of people from elsewhere with the intention of settling down there, it is generally because they look on Goans as pleasantly westernised and with a style of living that distinguishes them from other people of the country. They are referring certainly to traits acquired by the Goans through colonial contact, through practices of West-directed Christianity, and through emigration on a big scale. All these factors have had their cultural impact upon the Goan society, including the Hindu society. Almost all the visitors to Goa unfailingly register the difference they feel when they are in Goa and when they cross the borders. Goa is seen as a cultural island and somewhat exotic in the cultural ocean of the surrounding subcontinent. I have known many European visitors who return repeatedly to Goa during their long sojourns in India considering it a good base for physical and cultural recuperation. All this goes to confirm that some « lusotropicalism » or « *Christianotopia romana* » has made its home in Goa and with positive results.

I cannot resist recording here an incident that left me baffled some years ago. It was a statement that came from the mouth of an orthodox Brahmin from Poona, and a known historian of the Marathas. Dr V. T. Gune had been Director of Goa Historical Archives for nearly twenty years soon after the political change. During that phase of administrative transition Goa witnessed hordes of imported administrative officials of all grades, because

12. P. S. ANGLE, *Goa : Concepts & Misconcepts*, Bombay, The Goa Hindu Association, 1994, pp. 19-26.

13. A. K. PRIOLKAR, *The Goa Inquisition*, Bombay, 1961 ; *Goa Re-Discovered*, Bombay, 1967. The Portuguese tried to humiliate Konkani by branding it as a language of servants, or « *língua dos criados* ».

Goa did not have its own cadre. That was how Dr Gune landed in Goa. Many of these officials opted to settle down in Goa after retirement. Dr Gune too had taken a similar decision and had acquired a house in the neighbourhood of the Mangueshi temple in Ponda. He had some knowledge of astrology and numerology, and had decided to perform as a part-time « *vyotishi* » or horoscope reader. I met Dr Gune three years later, and he surprised me with his announcement about leaving Goa for good and returning to Poona. Why so? –I asked. These Goan Hindus are different, was his reply. They did not satisfy his requirements of orthodoxy. It was a revelation to me, because I was used to noticing only the differences between the Goan Christians and Hindus, not the similarities. I needed a Hindu from outside to notice this similarity produced by the Portuguese colonial presence. If the Saraswat Brahmins tend to exaggerate their cultural differences, it is intended for exploiting the post-liberation politics and deriving economic benefits from it. The Saraswats and the Catholics are the two leading political rivals in Goa today. The former pretend to represent the interests of the Hindu community as a whole and be the keepers of the precolonial culture of the ancestors. They tend to present the image of Christians as cultural renegades. Fortunately, during the first two decades following the political liberation, the State administration passed into the hands of a political group (« Bhaujan Samaj ») dominated by the social castes and groups that had been marginalised by the colonial regime with a silent consent of the dominant Christians and Saraswat Goans. It was a transition that proved to be ideal for the phase of transition. It gave the poor and marginalised a real taste of political freedom, and freedom from the prevailing quasi-feudal mentality. Unfortunately, this did not happen in all the ex-colonies, which saw a substitution of foreign colonials with the local ones. The former dominant social groups in Goa are still dreaming of the possibility of making a comeback. Any assessment of the colonial past has to take into account these various class interests within Goan society, and there cannot be any objective or scientific conclusions valid for all.

We are now better prepared to understand the myth of lusotropicalism propagated by Gilberto Freyre. It was a myth which the « New State » of Salazar sought to broadcast as a weapon to neutralise the wave of anticolonialism. Nowadays we have the language of « lusofonia », « lusotopia », and other variants, which Portugal seeks to exploit for drawing benefits of what is presented as virtues of the Portuguese colonial past in Asia, Africa and Brazil. In the context of the challenges faced by Portugal as a weak partner of the European Union, the strategy of promoting « lusofonia » is directed towards ensuring easy, if not necessarily captive markets. A greater interest in the PALOP or Portuguese-speaking African countries is understandable. The underdevelopment of these former colonies makes them easier targets for the operations of the underdeveloped Portuguese capital and industry. Portugal has limited capacity to compete with the more developed member-States of the European Union, or even with the sophisticated markets of Brasil or of India. Since Brazil also shares the language link with the Portuguese ex-colonies and is exploiting it to the full to promote its own national interests, Portugal is under pressure to compete in cultivating closer contacts with its former

African colonies. The creation of CPLP in July of 1996 is one such instance of rivalry and competition. More may be in the wings of the future¹⁴.

When we hear of « lusofonia » in Asia, it is the great economic potential of Asia that is under consideration. The attention of the West and capitalism are focused in that direction. Since the 16th century, and since the Indies have entered the Portuguese national identity, it is but natural that Portugal should seek to capitalise on the forthcoming commemorations of Vasco da Gama's voyage to India five hundred years ago. The Expo-98 in Lisbon is expected to be a big show. In the diplomatic area Portugal already has a Consulate General in Goa, and more are likely to be created in the near future in Singapore, Macau and the Philippines. It is important, however, that this diplomatic-commercial drive does not imply a return to a mentality of little regard for the Asian cultures. If « lusofonia » has had little success in Asia, it cannot be explained as being due only to the limited numbers of the metropolitan Portuguese who went thither, never exceeding 20,000 at any one stage¹⁵. With rare exceptions and aborted efforts, such as the policy of miscigenation adopted by Afonso de Albuquerque, the Portuguese were quick to initiate a show of force rather than a cultural dialogue in the East. Obviously, they did not see an easier alternative to penetrate the commercial network of the Indian ocean. The Arabs and the Indians were not prepared to let them have their way so very easily, losing the benefits of the network that they had built up over time. The Portuguese too would not behave differently when others sought to challenge their claims for monopoly over the Ocean lanes. The so-called « free-trade » (« *grande soltura* ») of the Portuguese in the Bay of Bengal and Southeast Asia after the Albuquerquean phase of command economy led to the emergence of a « shadow empire »¹⁶ and some diluted vestiges of lusotropicalism in Asia may be traced to this development that led many Portuguese to mix more freely with the natives and cooperate with them at all levels, including marriage alliances.

The official interest in Vasco da Gama commemorations in Portugal seems to be directed to creating « jobs for the boys » of the ruling party, taking advantage of the generous monetary subsidies of the European Union. This can be noticed in the priorities of the Portuguese National Commission for Commemorating Portuguese Discoveries. Much is made of mechanically scanning some published documentation and presenting it in CD-Rom. It is a small-scale industry that provides some jobs for low-grade technicians. There is hardly any serious interest in historical reassessment that would admit collaboration of Indian or Asian historians with different or even contradictory ways of looking at the past and the « Discoveries ». One lone project in this direction, namely that of writing a history of the Portuguese in India, was ceremoniously scuttled and laid to rest. It was contrived by gathering expert opinions of friendly scholars, including a reputed Paris-based Indian historian – a way of convincing a naive public

14. *Política internacional*, I (13), 1996. The whole issue is dedicated to the CPLP.

15. S. SUBRAHMANYAM, *O império asiático português, 1500-1700*, Lisbon, Diffel, 1993, pp. 306-307; V. Magalhães Godinho, *Estrutura da antiga sociedade portuguesa*, Lisbon, Arcádia, 1980, pp. 58-69. In the 18th and 19th centuries Brasil absorbed the emigration flux of Portugal and the Atlantic islands.

16. L.F. THOMAZ, *De Ceuta a Timor*, Lisbon, Diffel, 1994, pp. 429 sq.

that purely academic and scientific criteria had guided the decision¹⁷. Incidentally, the program of commemorations includes an anthropological-ethnological exhibition of cultures of the Indian Ocean littoral contacted by the first Portuguese voyagers. The visitors to this exhibition in Lisbon are likely to leave with their mental images of the « discovered » cultures further reinforced, despite the slogans utilised in publicising the project as aimed at « breaking the lusocentrism and eurocentrism that usually marks the Portuguese and the European works about the Indian Ocean zone »¹⁸. It has become a propaganda stunt adopted quite systematically to cut the edge and take away the sting of the third-world protests. It is not an encouraging prospect for those who would like to see a reduction in the superiority complexes that accompanied colonialism¹⁹. It should not surprise anyone if various groups of Indian intellectuals are planning symbolic protests against the subtle continuation of the same old cultural prejudices²⁰.

Before ending this essay we wish to present some recorded historical testimonies about the Portuguese colonial attitudes in India, and in Asia in general. This is essential for a more informed assessment of lusotropicalism in those regions. I shall cite two instances which could be considered as characteristic : A French traveller in Portuguese India at the beginning of the 17th century, François Pyrard de Laval, tells us that the Portuguese would consider themselves noble and tried to hide their social differences as soon as they crossed the Cape, and that they cherished greatly being Portuguese and from Portugal. They were also keen to be known as white people (« *homens brancos* »). Pyrard also states :

« They look down upon all these poor Indians, whom they tread underfoot. The Indians would be greatly shocked when we told them that these Portuguese were sons of fisherfolk, cobblers, washermen, and other lowly professions »²¹.

We also have the testimony of the Brazilian Jesuit priest Francisco de Souza, an experienced missionary in India in the second half of the same century who is the author of *Oriente Conquistado a Jesu Christo pelos Padres the Companhia de Jesus da Provincia de Goa*. He was Superior of the Professed House of Bom Jesus in Goa and occupied other posts of responsibility in the Society of Jesus for many years in Goa. He describes the conflict between the Jesuit Visitor Alexandre Valignano and the Portuguese Jesuit Francisco Cabral over the policy of admitting the Japanese to the Society of Jesus. Valignano felt the need to relieve the Portuguese Jesuit from his post of Mission Superior in Japan. Francisco de Souza provides us with his commentary : « This is understandable because of the tendency of the Portuguese to despise all these oriental peoples »²².

17. R. AMARAL, « Passagem para a Índia : fundações rompem com Comissão dos descobrimentos », *O Independente* (Lisbon), 14th March 1997, p. 54.

18. « Exposição « Culturas do indico » em Junho de 1998 : um olhar antropológico sobre Vasco da Gama », *Público*, 15th March 1997.

19. E. LOURENÇO, *O labirinto da saudade : psicanálise mítica do destino português*, Lisbon, Dom Quixote, 1992, p. 21.

20. « Protest calls against Vasco da Gama for "openin" colonial rule », *The Indian Express* (New Delhi), 6th April 1996.

21. F. PYRARD de LAVAL, « Viagem », trad. J.H. de Cunha Rivara, Porto, Liv. Civilização, 1944, vol. II, pp. 93 et 153. Cf. a very useful assessment of Pyrard by G. Bouchon, « A French Traveller in Portuguese India », *Studia*, Lisbon, 1989, 49, pp. 301-313.

22. F. de SOUSA, *Oriente Conquistado*, op. cit., p. 1279.

In case the above two citations are considered biased as coming from non-Portuguese, one could quote Eduardo Lourenço's *O Labirinto da saudade*. In his analysis of the Portuguese national psyche the writer castigates the Portuguese habit of making loud patriotic noises. He considers it as keeping in line with the tradition of « Lusiads ». The author has been a winner of the Camões prize for Portuguese literature, but does not hesitate to describe that epic poem as heroically sad and sadly heroic, as a symphony and a requiem, while the meanness of attitudes in the reality of daily life conveyed a denial of the grandeurs of that glorious piece of fiction. He further affirms :

« The Portuguese are always acting, and so obsessive is in them the feeling of inner fragility and the corresponding desire of compensating it by playing to the gallery, both at the personal and collective level [...] that in the day-to-day life the Portuguese do not co-exist, they spy on each other, seek to control one another [...] and hardly ever a Portuguese will admit that he or she learnt anything from anyone, not even from one's own father or mother »²³.

João de Barros, the Portuguese chronicler of Asian expansion in the 16th century had already referred to this characteristic trait of the Portuguese people in his *Décadas*. He says that a Portuguese does not mind being forgotten, but cannot bear someone else being praised²⁴.

The Portuguese travel literature reveals the sharp contradictions within the Portuguese culture in an Oriental ambience, rather than the signs of a meeting of cultures²⁵. There are frequent cases of criticism of pilots and sailors as a veritable plague, as grave disturbers of peace, as selfish, inhuman pilferers, who would not hesitate to lay their hands on anything valuable, whatever the sufferings of those around them. The great majority of the participants in the colonial enterprise were adventurers and jail birds. The Jesuit Gaspar Afonso has left a description of his experience in the shipwreck of the carrack *São Francisco* (1596). He wrote :

« If someone asks me if I saw in Portuguese India many pilgrimages and relics and bodies of saints, and if they are curious to know if I have gained merits and turned holier, I would not hesitate to state that India and the saints have little in common, and are almost opposed to each other ».

Before him Saint Francis Xavier had expressed his frank feelings to king João III of Portugal. He wrote about the bad life-example of the Portuguese in the East. He saw in it an obstacle to the missionary efforts of the Jesuits. Francis Xavier also wrote that the Portuguese learned to conjugate the verb « *rapio* » in all its tenses and moods as soon as they arrived in India. A sarcastic picture of this permissive life-style may be found also in the *Peregrinação* of Fernão Mendes Pinto. And Camões has not failed to touch on the national problem in the words of the old man of Restelo at the moment of the departure of Indiamen : « *Ó glória de mandar, ó vã cobiça... que promessas de reinos e de minas/de ouro, que lhe farás facilmente ?* » translated the real motivation for the discoveries. Whatever came in the way of this objective of the « discoverers » was not seen very favourably by them. The cultural « other » was also an object of suspicion, and there were other

23. E. LOURENÇO, *O Labirinto da saudade...*, op. cit., p. 76.

24. J. de BARROS, *Décadas da Ásia*, Lisbon, Liv. Sam Carlos, 1973, vol. I, p. 558.

25. M. Alzira SEIXO & A. CARVALHO, *A história trágico-marítima : análises e perspectivas*, Lisbon, Cosmos, 1996, pp. 72, 85, 88-89, 142, 211-212.

reasons as well for rough and quick judgements about the Oriental cultures. If the travel literature aroused curiosity about the Eastern cultures, it also contributed to cheapen the cultural wealth of the East and create ridiculous stereotypes that block the minds to a more positive meeting of cultures.

Before concluding, I wish to touch briefly upon Salman Rushdie's recent novel, *The Moor's Last Sigh*, which already has its Portuguese version²⁶. I shall only quote an extract and point to some descriptions which I regard as relevant to the theme of the present essay :

«I repeat: the pepper, if you please; for if it had not been for peppercorns, then what is ending now in East and West might never had begun. Pepper it was that brought Vasco da Gama's tall ships across the ocean, from Lisbon's Tower of Belém to the Malabar Coast: first to Calicut and later, for its lagoony harbour, to Cochin. English and French sailed in the wake of that first-arrived Portugee, so that in the period called Discovery-of-India –but how could we be discovered when we were not covered before? – we were "not so much sub-continent as sub-condiment", as my distinguished mother had it. "From the beginning, what the world wanted from bloody mother India was daylight-clear", she'd say. "They came for the hot stuff, just like any man calling on a tart" ».

That is how Salman Rushdie opens his novel. The Portuguese do not seem to have sensed that the novelist has made his contribution to the commemoration of the voyage of Vasco da Gama. Despite an early Portuguese edition of the novel, there has been no serious Portuguese reaction to Rushdie's darts of ridicule at the Portuguese cultural vestiges represented by the Gama-Zogoiby family of the novel. The family has a member whose name the author helps to pronounce as « Camonsh », passing it through the nose! This character is a pseudo-intellectual who discovered Gama-rays of theophysical spirituality, was a funny admirer of Lenine in a State of India where Communism has always been popular, and a quixotic champion of the Indian nationalism without knowing what it was all about. His brother Aires is presented as a fetichist and homosexual. Rushdie names him Prince Henry, the Navigator, for venturing out on the lake on his wedding night with another man and leaving the bride alone, naked and frustrated on the bed. There are more images of mental, moral and genetic degradation of the Indo-Portuguese culture or « lusotropicalism » in India.

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26. S. RUSHDIE, *O último suspiro do mouro*, Lisbon, Dom Quixote, 1995.