

LATIN INDIANITY
Elements for an Analysis of Latinity in Goa



ACADÉMIE DE LA LATINITÉ

TEXTES DE REFERENCE

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With an area of 3,701 sq. km. and a population of approximately 1.5 million people, Goa is the smallest state of the Republic of India. Part of the western coast of the Indian subcontinent, Goa claims a distinctive charm of its own due to the landscape bestowed by nature with its whitish sands and palm fringes. Before the arrival of the Portuguese in the beginning of the 16th century, Goa was ruled by various hindu and muslim dynasties. After a period of 450 years of Portuguese rule over one fifth of the territory (the *old conquests*) and less than 200 years over the remaining part (the *new conquests*), Goa attained its liberation in 1961 following the military occupation by the Indian army. The territory was reintegrated into the Republic of India as a Union Territory together with the territories of Damão and Diu. In 1987, a plebiscite decided for the constitution of a separate state while Damão and Diu remained as Union Territories. Konkani, the ancient language of Sanskrit origin, acquired the status of official language of the state. The Portuguese language which was spoken by approximately 10% in 1961, does not account today for more than 3% to 5% of the population. With a relatively high level of literacy (77%), the population of Goa includes 64% of Hindus and 31% of Christians while

the remaining part are Muslims and others. The Christian community which flourished as a result of the missionary activities during the colonial period, has witnessed a decline since liberation (from 38% to 31%).

To assess the present status of the Portuguese cultural heritage in Goa, I will resort to an anthropological frame which suits the fundamentals of human cultural encounters. In my opinion, cultural encounters may produce impacts of four different orders: (i) the emergence of a new cultural entity as a result of the fusion between guest and host cultures; (ii) the emergence of a complex cultural entity as a result of the coalescence between guest and host cultures, where the original identity of both is retained; (iii) the assimilation of the host culture by the guest culture, where the original identity of the former is erased; (iv) the incorporation by the host culture of supplementary attributes from the guest culture, where the original identity of the former is retained.

According to the symbolic and *lato sensu* interpretation given by K. M. Panikkar to Vasco da Gama's maritime feat, the impact of European overseas discoveries in India — the so-called "Vasco da Gama era" — comprehends the idiosyncrasies of the trip, the establishment of trade centres and the colonial enterprises by British, Portuguese and French peoples. Accordingly, the investigation of the Portuguese impact in Goa should be preceded by a general view on the overall developments which have taken place in the subcontinent. This preliminary task is guided by the following basic parameters: (i) it should envisage models

of historical interpretation of cultural exchanges which are genetically related to the receptive group; (ii) it should be cultural inclusive, i.e., it should give a meaningful account of the definitive incorporation of European elements and their relative visibility; (iii) it should take into consideration the conflictive nature of those encounters, i.e., it should envisage models of cultural resistance.

There seems to exist little controversy among Indian and other scholars about the fact that the greater one might conceive the cultural impact of European colonization in India, one can hardly classify it as *foundational*, if this word is meant to qualify events which affect, in a way or another, the cultural essence or identity of the host culture. Despite the assimilatory and discriminatory policies, the overall exchanges of more than four centuries were not able to shaken the foundations of Indian identity(ies). Indians did not become — whether *in totum* or in coalescence — “tropical or dark Europeans”, nor were given as sacrificial offerings for the emergence of a new synthetic identity. As S. Radhakrishnan remarks, nobody would ever think of tracing, in oral memory or in the books of history, the origins of contemporary India to the European overseas discoveries or the European *rajs*, as one does in the case of Latin American formations. The resilient resistance of Indian culture led, instead, to the reassurance of the multivalent potentialities of its traditional sources which go back to the Aryanization of the subcontinent in ancient times.

That assertion is not unaware of the delicate phase of adjustments and compromises which characterizes

modern India. Important transformations took place objectively as a result of colonial encounters. For instance, juridical codes and procedures, political and administrative institutions, linguistic paradigms, ideologies and values were definitely incorporated into the cultural corpus. However, those transformations present the character of *qualified additions* rather than excluding substitutes. A qualified addition implies the cultural appropriation of an alien element according to the requirements and within the scope of a given indigenous personality. The alien element, while shifting from one system to another, undergoes an hermeneutic renovation that ensures it new meaning and permanence. Oswaldo de Andrade used to refer to this phenomenon as *cultural anthropophagy*: an act of devouring the enemy's excellences in order to sharpen one's own essence.

Underscoring, like an anchor, such a receptive disposition and vitality, lies the polysemous concept of *dharma* (the transcendent-immanent principle/law) which enables the essence to express itself through means of ethological variants, hierarchically arranged, each one tending to reproduce within itself the basic pattern by unfolding itself into further subsystems. The sociological expression of this principle is represented by the traditional concepts of *varna/jati* (caste system) which organise social stratification, both vertically and horizontally, in the form of cultural subsystems or subcultures. As a consequence, the Indian "anthropophagy" assumes the caricature of a *counter-assimilation* whereby adventitious ele-

ments of the guest culture find a definite place in a formal order which constitutes itself the unifying principle of a relatively broad diversity of subcultural components. Different from assimilation by homogenization, the Indian method allows a relative autonomy of adventitious elements, though at the same time entrusting them with low mobility and interdependence. As Max Weber noted, whereas the former ensures individual mobility through exogenicity, the latter ensures collective continuity through endogenicity.

Thus, from an anthropological perspective, it would be more appropriate to classify India as a *unity without uniformity* rather than an unqualified multicultural society, i.e., a loose superimposition of ethoses misconstrued as civilization. The success of an artificiality such as the formation of a nation-state in the post-independence scenario, seems itself conditioned by this subtle principle of unity which enables the different subsystems to reassert themselves in the midst of historical surgeries at the “gross” level of politics. Democracy proved to be a functional addition to an existing cultural persona because it was able to fulfil the historical need for political unity and stability without compromising with an order characterised by the autonomy and interdependence of multiple subcultures.

Considering the above, one could safely place India among the countries belonging to the fourth category of our classification, i.e., countries whose cultural encounters under evaluation — viz., the overall colonial develop-

ments which followed the inaugural journey of Vasco da Gama — led to an incorporation of supplementary attributes to its cultural identity. There would be no foundationality involved in that event. Could this assumption stand for India in general but not for Goa in particular, considering the differences in nature and duration of the Portuguese colonial system? In other words, would modern Goan ethos owe *foundationally* to Vasco da Gama's trip?

Bearing in mind the phenomenon of subcultures which characterises unities without uniformity such as India, it would be appropriate to distinguish two levels of meaning in the concept of "regional subcultural ethos": (i) the region's *primary ethos* as a variant-expression of Indian cultural identity, and (ii) the region's *secondary ethos* as a sum of peculiar features distinguishing it from other Indian subcultures. Regional literature of self-evaluation in Goa is overwhelmingly prone to deny any foundationality to the colonial event while assessing the primary ethos of Goan society: the Portuguese project of cultural assimilation failed in its attempts to subvert the indianity of Goans, or to use a well-know expression of Goan freedom fighter T. B. Cunha, to *denationalize* Goan collectivity. On the other hand, the excluding character of that project, i.e., its absolute lack of compatibility with the "open" order of Indian society which it looked upon as spurious, also denied lusitanianity the possibility of becoming a major distinguishing feature of Goan secondary ethos. Accordingly, the latter is consistently traced

back to pre-colonial times as either as an autonomous development in the Konkani region, or as a branch of the subculture of neighbouring state of Maharashtra.

Those pre-colonial sources of Goan ethos were responsible for enhancing local resistance against the assimilatory practices during the Portuguese rule. Subcultural endogeneity with its intermarriage rules and firm adherence to Konkani language, ruled out the occurrence of any meaningful process of miscegenation and denied the Portuguese language cultural functionality and dissemination. A dramatic side effect of a long-term resistance was the cultural disease of *insularity* that adhered to the Goan subsystem as a result of the gap of communication with other Indian subsystems. However, the relatively smooth process of re-connection in the post-liberation period, marked by the active participation of both the Hindu and Christian communities in the freedom struggle and the absence of any call for the formation of an independent political entity, reflected the remarkable continuity and restorative capability of the Goan subsystem.

The fact of not being *foundational* to the genealogy of Goan subculture, does not however deprive the colonial event from its due share and relevance in a process of cultural exchange wherein a multitude of elements of Portuguese origin found a definitive place in Goan society. The permeability of those elements was enhanced by an spontaneous two-way process of cultural osmosis between two peoples, which run parallel to the harsh commandments of an official project of assimilation which did not

contemplate an educational policy (particularly in higher education where Medicine remained as the only graduate course available at the time of liberation), which discriminated against the Hindu community and whose relaxation after the proclamation of Republic in Portugal in 1910 was soon frustrated by the rise of dictator Antonio Salazar two decades later. The sociological accommodation of the elements of Portuguese origin did not take place under the coalescence of two cultures, cultural syncretism (though *topical events of syncretism* did occur) or cultural assimilation — the three first categories of our anthropological classification. It took the form of a subsumption to the inclusive character of counter-assimilation that peculiarly distinguishes Indian “anthropophagy”. And yet those elements gained in visibility, dissemination and dignity. They assumed, in many respects, the character of *additional distinguishing features* (the qualified additions of a subculture) of Goan ethos. They present two different modalities of manifestation, suiting the twofold implication of the concept of subculture,

The first modality accounts for a relatively homogeneous dispersion of juridical, ideological and linguistic elements of Portuguese society, among all compartments of Goan subculture. The unified civil code (particularly the family laws), a more extrovert attitude towards life and the incorporation of several Portuguese words and expressions in Konkani language could be listed, among others, as corroborative instances. The second modality accounts for the creation of an additional

subsystem in Goan subculture, viz., the Christian community which emerged as a result of the missionary work of conversion. It constitutes as an integral yet relatively autonomous new social compartment which enables great visibility to its various components. Among these, one could mention the adoption of Portuguese names and surnames, a marked tendency of women to use western clothes, the incorporation of tunes in folk dance and music (*mando*, *dhulpod* and others), the development of stage performances oriented towards the social critique of customs (*tiatr*), the commemoration of specific religious and non-religious festivals such as the carnival, the adoption of specific food habits (*sorpatel*, *xacuti* etc., with a widespread consumption of pork and beef in normal diet) and the incorporation of architectonic motifs in house construction.

The internal reproduction of the Indian stratified structure of subsystematization — viz., the survival of caste reference among the converts (*brahmin catholic*, *chardo catholic* etc.) — is, perhaps, the most important indicator of the cultural indianization of Christianity. This is particularly active at the time of marriages. While lending a semantics of collective enterprise marked by original traditions, customs, traits, faiths, superstitions and language (Konkani) to an alien individualistic approach, it was able to preserve the pre-existing organic relations within the group, and between the newly constituted Christianity and other Goan and non-Goan subsystems. It also favoured the development of different degrees and forms of appropriation of the Portuguese ele-

ments, generally marked by a conspicuous sense of communal ritualism, iconophilism and conservatism.

In sum, Indian traditional socio-cultural structure, both on account of its inclusiveness as well as rigidity, lent the assimilation of Latinity in Goa a very peculiar semantics — the semantics of Indianity. Accordingly, anthropological rigor and honesty presses for the preferential use of the expression “Latin Indianity” (or “Luso-Indianity”), instead of “Indo-Latinity” (or “Indo-Lusitanity”), to describe that phenomenon. If in Brazil and other Hispano-American formations, Latinity claims legitimate rights of paternity of the new cultural entities, in the case of Goa it claims non-less-dignified merits of enriching an already rich and complex cultural formation such as India. Instead of submitting this diversity of situations to dubious quantitative assessments, one should look at them as definitive expressions of a remarkable capacity of Latinity to adjust itself to different cultural environments and perpetrate itself *pluralistically*, i.e., in accordance with local needs and aspirations. Latinity assumes, then, an historical sense of dignity, universality and plurality, much beyond the hegemonic and imperialistic leanings of the past.