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# Christians and Spices: A Critical Reflection on Indian Nationalist Discourses in Portuguese India

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## Dale Luis Menezes

### **Christians and Spices: A Critical Reflection on Indian Nationalist Discourses in Portuguese India**

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Indian nationalist discourses in Portuguese India have a direct relation with the political developments in British India. I use the terms 'British India' instead of 'India' and 'Portuguese India' instead of 'Goa' (and the territories of Daman and Diu on the coast of Gujarat), in order to critically re-think the writing of history from an Indian nationalist and post-colonialist perspectives. The post-colonial reality of Portuguese India under the Indian nation-state after 1961 does not readily fit into the imagination of Indian nationhood. Nor does it fit easily into the theoretical perspective emerging out of a reading of the British colonial archive. This is due to the fact that modes of colonialism of the Portuguese and the British differed from each other. Since the perspective of British India ultimately became the norm, there have been attempts to fit the ill-fitting history of Portuguese India into the British Indian mold. This has serious repercussions for understanding the history of Portuguese colonialism. It also has repercussions for understanding the political representation and identities of the various communities living in Portuguese India under Indian nationalism and the Indian nation-state.

Keywords: Goa, Indian nationalism, Portuguese Empire, colonialism.

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### **Cristãos e especiarias: uma reflexão crítica sobre os discursos nacionalistas indianos na Índia portuguesa**

Os discursos nacionalistas indianos na Índia portuguesa têm relação directa com os desenvolvimentos políticos na Índia britânica. Uso termos como 'Índia britânica' em vez de 'Índia' ou 'Índia portuguesa' em vez de 'Goa' (e os territórios de Damão e Diu, na costa de Gujarat), de forma a repensar criticamente a escrita da História segundo as perspectivas nacionalista indiana e pós colonial. A realidade pós-colonial da Índia portuguesa sob o Estado-nação indiano depois de 1961 não se encaixa de forma imediata no imaginário da nacionalidade indiana. Também não se encaixa facilmente na perspectiva teórica que emerge de uma leitura do arquivo colonial britânico. Isto deve-se ao facto de os tipos de colonialismo britânico e português diferirem um do outro. Desde o momento em que a perspectiva da Índia britânica se transformou em norma, houve tentativas de encaixar a história da Índia portuguesa no molde britânico. Isto tem sérias repercussões para a compreensão da história do colonialismo português. Também tem repercussões para a compreensão da representação política e das identidades das várias comunidades a viver na Índia portuguesa sob o nacionalismo indiano e sob o Estado-nação indiano.

Palavras-chave: Goa; Nacionalismo Indiano; Império Português; Colonialismo.

# Christians and Spices: A Critical Reflection on Indian Nationalist Discourses in Portuguese India

Dale Luis Menezes\*

## Introduction

The title of this paper draws from the famous (or infamous) phrase attributed to Vasco da Gama in 1498, when asked why he had sailed halfway across the world to the Malabar Coast. He is believed to have answered that he, along with his crew, had come in search of “Christians and spices”.<sup>1</sup> Vasco da Gama’s answer can be taken as an iconic template on which Indian nationalists based their own view of the subsequent history of the *Estado da Índia*. While Vasco da Gama’s successful journey from Lisbon to Calicut is understood as the commencement of European or Western dominance of trade in the Indian Ocean as well as the start of colonialism, the voyage is also implicitly understood to have started the process of Christianization in some parts of the Indian subcontinent, opening Indian or Asian souls to spiritual and cultural domination.<sup>2</sup> This is not to suggest that the Indian nationalist writers did not recognize the existence of Christian communities before

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1 Anonymous, *A Journal of the First Voyage of Vasco da Gama. 1497-1499*, ed. and trans. E. G. Ravenstein (London: Hakluyt Society, 1898), 48. It has been recently suggested that the anonymous text was possibly authored by Álvaro Velho, who was a member of Vasco da Gama’s crew on that voyage. However, the jury is still out on the question.

2 See for instance K. M. Pannikar, *Asia and Western Dominance: A Survey of the Vasco da Gama Epoch of Asian History, 1498-1945*, new edition (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1959), 13-15, 279-81; A. K. Priolkar, *The Printing Press in India: Its Beginnings and Early Development* (Bombay: Marathi Samshodhana Mandal, 1958), 2-3, 23; D. P. Singhal, “Goa - End of an Epoch,” *The Australian Quarterly* 34: 1 (1962): 77-89; Margaret W. Fisher, “Goa in Wider Perspective,” *Asian Survey* 2: 2 (1962): 3-10.

the arrival of Vasco da Gama. Indeed the difference that they drew between the pre-Portuguese and Portuguese periods was the interventions in the cultural lives of the “native[s]”. The Portuguese “Christianized” and “Westernized” the people, it was claimed.<sup>3</sup> Nationalist writers tried to demonstrate that Christianity had a claim to be Indian as the apostle St. Thomas had landed in Southern India long before Christianity could reach Europe. The incident wherein Vasco da Gama and his party mistook a Hindu temple for a church, led nationalist writers to argue that the pre-Portuguese Christianity could have developed from an earlier Hinduism and that the Christian religion flourished according to the culture and environment there,<sup>4</sup> unlike the one that came in the wake of the Portuguese conquest. In part the Indian nationalist writers also reacted to the histories that were written in Portugal that glorified the colonial and imperial enterprises.<sup>5</sup>

It is crucial to recognize the problematic manner in which the Portuguese period was understood as a spiritual and cultural destruction of the Indian nation. Given the manner in which the Portuguese Empire in Asia – and particularly in India – has been understood as an economic, political, and a spiritual conquest by Indian nationalist writers and scholars, ‘Christians and spices’ seems to be rather an apt metaphor in summarizing the historiography of five centuries of Portuguese presence in pockets of the Indian subcontinent. At the heart of the issue is cultural nationalism that imagined itself to be ancient and eternal, destroyed by colonialism, and one which eventually had to revive itself through the struggle for national liberation. Such a cultural

3 Bento Graciano D’Souza, *Goan Society in Transition: A Study in Social Change* (Bombay: Popular Prakashan, 1975), 344-45.

4 See Manohar H. Sardessai, *Gomantakiya Christian Samaj. Nirmiti va Karya* (Panjim-Goa: Department of Art and Culture, Goa Government, 2001), 24.

5 In this context, see the comments of Francisco Bethencourt and Diogo Ramada Curto, “Introduction,” in *Portuguese Oceanic Expansion, 1400-1800*, ed. Francisco Bethencourt and Diogo Ramada Curto, trans. Neil Safier (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 8-11; Francisco Bethencourt, “Political Configurations and Local Powers,” in *Portuguese Oceanic Expansion, 1400-1800*, ed. Francisco Bethencourt and Diogo Ramada Curto (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 197-98; R. Timothy Sieber, “Remembering Vasco da Gama: Contested Histories and the Cultural Politics of Contemporary Nation-Building in Lisbon, Portugal,” *Identities: Global Studies in Culture and Power* 8: 4 (2001): 553.

nationalism was not unique to the thinking of Indian nationalists. One can make the suggestion that the idea which held colonial oppression as responsible for the destruction of national culture was a global one. It was developed by several leaders and thinkers of the anti-colonial movements across the globe. I would like to refer to Franz Fanon and Amílcar Cabral in this context. Fanon and Cabral had argued that colonialism had suppressed the natural national cultures from emerging across the globe. For Fanon and Cabral, this national culture was not marked by any internal diversity and the place of this national culture in history was solely for the purpose of realizing national freedom from colonial oppression.<sup>6</sup> This view that locates ‘culture’ as central to national liberation, holds the cultural life of different communities that lived under colonial rule – whether oppressed or not – as having no internal diversity. Such a view erases the power dynamic between the colonial state, local elites and local subalterns.

This paper critiques this historiography by focusing on how Indian nationalism operated (and operates) within the territory of Portuguese India. Indian nationalism first entered the territory of Portuguese India as a counter to colonial rule. As such it had positioned itself against Portuguese colonial rule and culture. In post-colonial times Indian nationalism was (and is) used as a way to counter cultural practices antithetical to the Indian way of life. Rather than consolidating a ‘national community’, Indian nationalism in Portuguese India can be viewed as a disciplining force. Indian nationalism operated and operates within this terrain of ‘taming’ those outside its imagined idea of nationhood, which according to a recent study on the formation of the Indian nation-state was largely Hindu and upper-caste.<sup>7</sup> This oppositional nature of Indian nationalism that tried to end colonial rule and rectify Western cultural

6 See Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, trans. Charles Lam Markmann (London: Pluto Press, 2008), 9; Frantz Fanon, “On National Culture (1959),” in *Nations and Identities: Classic Readings*, ed. Vincent P. Pecora (Malden, Massachusetts and Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 2001), 267, 272-73; Amílcar Cabral, *Return to the Source: Selected Speeches*, ed. Africa Information Service (New York and London: Monthly Review Press and Africa Information Service, 1973), 42-43, 45.

7 See Shabnum Tejani, *Indian Secularism: A Social and Intellectual History, 1890-1950*, The “Opus 1” Series (Ranikhet: Permanent Black, 2007), 14-15.

practices produced a singular view of history tied solely to the Indian nation. Indian nationalist historiography ignored the fact that territories like Goa, Daman, and Diu could have a different history owing to the fact that they were formally under the *Estado da Índia* and not the British Raj.<sup>8</sup> In other words, the historiography emerging from Indian nationalism assumed that all regions of South Asia would (or should) fit the mold of Indian nationalism. This mold no doubt drew from the global anti-colonial discourse as well as the belief that the Indian subcontinent was essentially a cultural unit from times immemorial. That the Indian subcontinent was not one cultural unit is clearly seen if we consider the different visions that emerged for the political future of Portuguese India.

One was the pro-Government and wanted the continuance of Portuguese rule. Another demanded complete autonomy, in which power would be absolutely transferred from the Portuguese State to the natives, read as the landed elites, and lastly, there were those that demanded that Goa, Daman, and Diu be merged into the newly-formed Indian Union, as they believed that Goa shared primordial ties with India that were supposedly broken by the intervention of the Portuguese five centuries ago. The latter two were both opposed to the Portuguese State, but had very different ideas for the political future of Portuguese India. Needless to say, as we have observed in the decades that followed the incorporation of Goa, Daman, and Diu in the Indian Union, the vision of the pro-Indian Goan nationalists won, with due help from the armed annexation by the Indian army in December 1961.

But even if Indian nationalists – both in British India and in Portuguese India – believed that Portuguese India shared primordial ties with India, Portuguese India had to be constantly ‘made’ into an Indian region, by highlighting that not just its past but also its future, was best served through Indian interests.<sup>9</sup> The argument of primordial ties was

8 See Rochelle Pinto, *Between Empires: Print and Politics in Goa*, SOAS Studies on South Asia (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2007), 3-7.

9 See Robert S. Newman, “Goa: The Transformation of an Indian Region,” *Pacific Affairs* 57: 3 (1984): 449.

itself not enough to incorporate Portuguese India seamlessly into India. The press in Portuguese India immediately after the Indian army's action reported that people in Portuguese India were dissatisfied with the changes effected by the Indian administration, and were anxious about their political future.<sup>10</sup> Recently, new studies have been published that have analyzed the operation of political economy in post-colonial Goa in relation to the Indian nation-state. On the political and economic level, Raghuraman S. Trichur's argument is crucial to consider. Trichur argues that it was only from the 1980s that Goa was truly integrated into the Indian economy with the rise of the tourism industry.<sup>11</sup> The tourism industry in post-colonial Goa is based on the European-ness, and the Southern European and Latinate character of the culture of Goa.<sup>12</sup> Trichur's argument exposes the contradictions in the Indian nationalist position. While Indian nationalists had asserted the illegitimacy of Portuguese rule owing to the primordial ties with India, in post-colonial Goa the Indian nation-state could only make inroads (its armed aggression notwithstanding) into Goa by recognizing its Portuguese and European cultural make-up. The irony might strike only a few in post-colonial Goa as it was precisely the Portuguese and European cultural heritage that the Indian nationalists had sought to reform, ostensibly to overcome the debilitating effects of colonialism on Goan culture.

In Portuguese India, Indian nationalism had to deal with the history of Portuguese colonialism which included a history of Christianization. This, as stated before, was understood to be Westernization as well. Both Western culture and the Christian religion were heavily attacked by those who were against the Portuguese State, especially since the Christian religion was seen as a tool to enslave and impose Western culture and dominance on the people of Portuguese India. A culture inflected by the Roman Catholicism, as practiced by many in Goa, was therefore seen as alien to the soil, and one that needed to be discarded.

10 Editor, "Goeam Asleleanchho Vhodd Usko," *Ave Maria*, March 25, 1962, 1, 8.

11 See Raghuraman S. Trichur, *Refiguring Goa: From Trading Post to Tourism Destination* (Saligao, Goa: Goa 1556, 2013), 160-61.

12 *Ibid.*, 12, 16.

While there are works that view the history of Portuguese India outside the framework of Indian nationalism, much of the recent scholarship on the history of Portuguese India, unfortunately, falls in the trap of Indian nationalism (not necessarily consciously). These works hasten to fit Goa within an Indian nationalist landscape and assert categorically that Goa is Indian despite its long history of Portuguese rule. “Goa is thus thoroughly embedded into the Indian nation”, asserts Alexander Henn even while acknowledging that Goa’s culture has elements of European or Portuguese culture. In keeping with the Indian nationalist idea that colonial policies destroyed culture absolutely, Henn asserts that the Portuguese or European element in the Goan culture emerged against the “historical background...[of] Goa’s early and long-lasting colonial domination, which subdued the region for almost half a millennium...under Portuguese rule and Catholic hegemony”.<sup>13</sup> On the other hand there are academics who while trying to view the history of Portuguese India outside the framework of Portuguese nationalism, which glorified empire and conquest, also end up affirming the worldview of Indian nationalism. Rosa Maria Perez’s study of the encounter of the Catholic and Hindu communities in Goa claims that the “lack of systematic ethnographical research favored the reiteration of stereotypes that chose to ignore that Goa is dominantly Hindu (as it always has been, even in the more ‘golden periods’ of conversion to Catholicism) and that Goan Hinduism merges into a larger Indian background prior to the Portuguese rule of the territory and subsequent to its end”.<sup>14</sup>

Both Henn and Perez, and indeed many contemporary scholars recognize that Portuguese colonialism produced a ‘difference’ – a difference between the historical trajectory of Portuguese India and that of British India. Yet recognizing this ‘difference’ many scholars would insist on using anachronistic frames of ‘Indian nationalism’ and ‘Hindu

<sup>13</sup> Alexander Henn, *Hindu-Catholic Engagements in Goa: Religion, Colonialism, and Modernity* (New Delhi: Orient Blackswan Private Limited, 2014), 1; cf. Trichur, *Refiguring Goa: From Trading Post to Tourism Destination*.

<sup>14</sup> Rosa Maria Perez, *The Tulsi and the Cross: Anthropology and the Colonial Encounter in Goa*, Reprint (New Delhi: Orient Blackswan Private Limited and RCS Publishers, 2013), 1.



culture'.<sup>15</sup> That terms like 'Hindu' and 'Hinduism' are related to recent historical processes is not an argument that influences scholars like Henn and Perez.<sup>16</sup> If indeed Hinduism is a recent invention that emerged in various parts of British India, as scholars like Romila Thapar have argued then what kind of religiosities other than Christianity and Islam existed in Portuguese India?<sup>17</sup> From an Indian nationalist perspective the territory that the Portuguese ruled is marked as 'Hindu' before it was conquered by the Portuguese, and also is viewed as a place that needs to re-claim its pre-Portuguese 'Hindu' past. While such a view is politically problematic, it is also historically inaccurate.

### **Religion, Culture, and Nationalism in Portuguese India**

T. B. Cunha is a central figure in understanding the influence of Indian nationalism on the political discourses and historiography of Portuguese India as his ideas and writings had a large circulation within the lay and academic circles. Much before the ouster of the Portuguese from Goa, Daman, and Diu the Indian nation-state had promoted his writings in order to further the cause of Indian nationalism in Portuguese India. Post-1961, the state in Goa also repeatedly published some of his writings through its official press. His ideas had a deeper impact than any other pro-India nationalist in Portuguese India. Moreover, being fluent in English and living most of his life in Bombay Cunha became the bridge between Indian nationalist thought (chiefly Gandhian thought) and Portuguese India.

Cunha's effort was an attempt to fit the people and history of Portuguese India within the nationalist views of British India.<sup>18</sup> Cunha

15 See Paul Axelrod and Michelle A. Fuerch, "Flight of the Deities: Hindu Resistance in Portuguese Goa," *Modern Asian Studies* 30: 2 (1996): 387-421.

16 See Romila Thapar, "Imagined Religious Communities? Ancient History and the Modern Search for a Hindu Identity," *Modern Asian Studies* 23: 2 (1989): 209-31; David N. Lorenzen, "Who Invented Hinduism?," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 41: 4 (1999): 630-59.

17 See Romila Thapar, "Syndicated Hinduism," in *Hinduism Reconsidered*, ed. Gunther-Dietz Sontheimer and Hermann Kulke (New Delhi: Manohar, 2001), 54-81.

18 See Parag D. Porobo, "Tristão Bragança Cunha and Nationalism in Colonial Goa: Mediating Difference and Essentialising Nationhood," *Economic and Political Weekly* 50: 31 (2015): 62.

could not recognize – or did not want to recognize – that Portuguese India had historical trajectories that were different from British India, and that Portuguese India and British India were not a unified cultural and political unit if one subtracted colonial rule. Cunha was against the Portuguese State and preferred a political future under the rule of the Indian nation-state. His most biting critique of the Portuguese State was published in the form of a pamphlet entitled *Denationalisation of Goans* in 1944.<sup>19</sup> Cunha argued that under the rule of the Portuguese State, the Goan in Portuguese India was politically, culturally, and mentally enslaved, and that the Christian religion was the tool by which the State effected this enslavement. In his pamphlet, Cunha made clear that he was not against the Christian religion but against the “exploitation of religion for the benefit of foreign rulers and to the disadvantage of India’s unity”.<sup>20</sup>

As is evident, Cunha did make a separation between faith and its mis-use by the Portuguese State. In fact, this was his position long before he wrote his pamphlet *Denationalisation of Goans*. Writing in 1929, Cunha argued that it was not Catholic bigotry or “doctrinal intolerance” that bestowed upon Catholicism a privileged position in Portuguese India, but a “political order” that was hypocritical in terms of religion. Cunha wrote that even when Portuguese government officials did not profess the Catholic faith when living in Portugal, they afforded all respect and ceremony to the religion once in Goa as it was a tool of political dominance. Against this ‘Catholic’ bigotry of the Portuguese State in India, Cunha argued, the Hindu religion “being the native religion of this country [bore] the seed to *national resurgence*, which constitute[d] a danger to foreign dominance”.<sup>21</sup> While Cunha may be justified to view the Christian religion as aiding the Portuguese State in political, cultural, economic, and spiritual domination,

19 T. B. Cunha, *Denationalisation of Goans* (Panaji-Goa: Goa Gazetteer Department, Government of Goa, n.d.).

20 Ibid., 2. Cunha was not a practicing Christian and throughout his life he had conflicts with the Catholic Church in Goa and Bombay.

21 T. B. Cunha, *Goa’s Freedom Struggle (Selected Writings of T. B. Cunha)* (Bombay: Dr. T. B. Cunha Memorial Committee, 1961), 277-79.

his positing of the Hindu religion as a bulwark against foreign domination was problematic. It is the same as saying that the ‘Hindu’ kings of India were a bulwark against the ‘Muslim’ rulers, effectively making the entire community – with its internal diversity – responsible for the actions of a few.

According to Cunha, the Portuguese State together with the Christian religion had exploited the people by imposing violent policies, hindering their authentic cultural progress. Such violent cultural policies were the forced mass conversions, the destruction of temples and mosques, and the prohibition of local customs. For Cunha, the Portuguese State and its propaganda extolling heroic seafarers and western culture was responsible in creating a “denationalised” Goan. This person born and raised in Portuguese India was someone who was removed from her Indian roots. This person was moreover incapable of fighting either the imposition of Western culture or the propaganda of the Portuguese State, which according to Cunha had created a Goan subjectivity that aped Western culture, and therefore their alien masters.<sup>22</sup>

Having lost their national dignity, our countrymen are fond of aping the ways and manners of the rulers in the firm belief that they must strictly follow them in order to enter the ranks of the civilized and be their equals. The false idea that the conventions of European social life are the essential and indispensable characteristics of progress has created an inferiority complex from which Goans suffer. It has reduced Goan society to a grotesque caricature of the West and deprived it of qualities of originality and invention which are essential for real progress. It hinders all original thinking and initiative in them, having suppressed the genius of the race. Hence the decadence and stagnation of their social life.<sup>23</sup>

<sup>22</sup> See Porobo, “Tristão Bragança Cunha,” 65.

<sup>23</sup> Cunha, *Denationalisation*, 29.

The problem lies in Cunha's acceptance of Indian nationalism as being de facto based on the Hindu religion. Thus, along with Western practices the Christian religion was held to be suspect under the nationalism that Cunha championed, as the Christian religion was positioned as the 'other' to the Hindu one.<sup>24</sup> Thus, the violence of colonialism and the many ill-effects that it had brought on the suppressed national culture of the people of Portuguese India could only be remedied "by going back to the Indian tradition", Cunha argued.<sup>25</sup> One had to follow the example of India and participate in the struggle against colonialism and imperialism to "share in the material and moral benefits of National Independence". More pragmatically, Cunha suggested that it is only by aligning with the Indian national movement that Goans or the people of Portuguese India could "claim equal rights in a Free India".<sup>26</sup> The 'denationalized' Goan was an obstacle in the realization of a national life – specifically an Indian national life.<sup>27</sup>

Though Cunha was the most important political activist propagating the 'denationalization' thesis, he was not the only one. At the heart of the 'denationalization' thesis was a belief that the authentic national culture was lost due to colonial policies and history. In this context, reference can also be made to another pro-India nationalist who wrote in favor of Indian culture as a defense against Western colonialism in Portuguese. Evagrio Jorge wrote a short pamphlet *A Reforma do Vestuário* in 1942.<sup>28</sup> Jorge headed a pro-India political party Liga Regional (the Regional League), and promoted the *khadi* cloth, championed by M. K. Gandhi in neighboring British India during this time. Jorge proposed in his pamphlet that those who joined his Liga Regional should start using the *khadi* cloth as a way to switch to Indian nationalist culture.

24 See Victor Ferrao, *Being a Goan Christian: The Politics of Identity, Rift and Synthesis* (Panjim: Broadway Publishing House, 2011), 41, 44.

25 Cunha, *Denationalisation*, 25.

26 *Ibid.*, 34.

27 Ideas like those of Cunha also found its ways in discussions in the popular press. See Editor, "Gone West," *The Goan World*, October 1940, 5.

28 Evagrio Jorge, *A Reforma do Vestuário* (Margão: Tipografia Central, 1942).

Jorge had to deal with the fact that both the Hindus and the Christians in Portuguese India not only wore, what he termed, “Western” clothes, but the cloth itself was of a non-Indian manufacture. Jorge recognized that Western and/or European culture had touched all communities in Portuguese India – including those that practiced the Hindu religion. While Cunha’s project was entirely focused on ‘nationalizing’ the Goan Christian, Jorge identified the Hindu, along with the Christian, of Portuguese India as needing reform. The solution that was prescribed to the Hindus and well as the Christians was a return to a pristine ‘Indian’ or ‘Hindu’ culture. Accordingly, Jorge addressed the Hindus and exhorted them to reform their ways and refrain from Western manners and customs. He said:

To the Hindus of Goa who, perhaps carried by a supposed superiority [of the European], leave the ancestral habits of their land and adopt those of the foreigners, as there is no greater inferiority than to accept all that is imposed on us, without the slightest reflection and criticism! Also there is no reason to be ashamed of the dress and the traditions of the country, which are admired all over the world.<sup>29</sup>

In dealing with a material basis of culture – such as cloth or dress – Jorge’s writing testifies to the fact that culture in colonial times was diverse and it was the aim of nationalist politics to straightjacket it with a singular national way of being. Jorge not only tried to reform the dress or clothing but also the mentality of the Goan. In order to suggest this reform Jorge made similar arguments like Cunha. He too treated the Catholic Church as an instrument in the hands of the Portuguese State that imposed “Western (*occidentais*) dressing and customs”. Jorge also believed that five centuries of Portuguese rule had promoted the destruction of culture by prohibiting “the manners and customs of the land, burning books in the vernacular language, and

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 11.

preventing the use of regional dress and the speaking of the mother tongue...”<sup>30</sup> Change of clothing was therefore the first step at recovering the cultural progress of Portuguese India.

Of course, not everyone agreed with Cunha. There were, as I mentioned earlier, different political visions and discourses pertaining to the political future of the territories of Portuguese India. Amongst one of them was Leo Lawrence, an official in the Portuguese administration who protested the armed annexation by India and argued that the territory of Portuguese India had a right to self-determination. Lawrence viewed the history of Portuguese India and its European/Western/Portuguese culture as not opposed to the cultural lives of the local people. Chiefly reacting to the sharp attacks against the Portuguese State, Lawrence argued that it was Afonso de Albuquerque who had aligned with the native Hindus against “the tyranny of the Saracens”. This was essentially a partnership of the Portuguese with the local Goans or Hindus in order to “build a greater Portugal because they [the Portuguese] had proved themselves true friends in their [the Hindu Goans’] distress”.<sup>31</sup> One cannot help but notice that the defense against the views of the Indian nationalists had to also view the Portuguese past as constituted by a monolithic ‘Hindu’ culture. The history of the Portuguese presence in the Indian subcontinent was considered to be legitimate based on the treatment given to this imagined and monolithic ‘Hindu’ culture.<sup>32</sup>

While for Cunha, Albuquerque’s conquest of the City of Goa against the Bijapuris was essentially a display of religious intolerance against the native Hindus – especially the Muslim women whom Cunha believed Albuquerque had forcibly converted and married off to his soldiers – and an act of barbarism and violence directed at the helpless natives in Portuguese India,<sup>33</sup> Lawrence provided a cultural argument from the perspective of the Portuguese State arguing that “the impact

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

<sup>31</sup> Leo Lawrence, *Nehru Seizes Goa* (New York: Pageant Press, 1963), 19, 20.

<sup>32</sup> See also D’Souza, *Goan Society in Transition*, 151.

<sup>33</sup> See Cunha, *Denationalisation*, 5-11.

of Portuguese culture on the Goan soul has brought about a perfect synthesis of cultures of east and west, preserving the best in both and rejecting the dross that weighs down other populations across the barrier of the Ghats [in British India]”.<sup>34</sup> Moreover, he also argued that having lived under Portuguese laws, institutions, and administration there was no denying that the people in Portuguese India had acquired a way of life that was Portuguese as well as a distinct political status due to the five centuries of history.<sup>35</sup> Against the view of Cunha, Lawrence did not feel that Portuguese rule or colonialism had produced a deracinated Goan, even if he argued for a political future of Goa either as continuing with Portugal or as a separate country.<sup>36</sup>

The argument that Portuguese colonialism had produced an enslaved and a mimic man had a fall-out in Portuguese India, especially post-colonial Goa. Identifying the Christian religion with the State, the pro-India nationalists had reduced the Church as an agent of colonial and imperial rule. With the formation of the secular Indian nation-state such an understanding did not cease.<sup>37</sup> The fall-out was clearly visible in the case of Christians in Goa who were the ‘other’ to Indian or Hindu nationalism, and were expected to reform and change their ways of being and living in order to suit those of Indian culture, nationalism,

34 Lawrence, *Nehru*, 19.

35 See *ibid.*, Introduction.

36 Lawrence was not the only one to hold a view that Goans were Portuguese in terms of culture and citizenship. One might think, and perhaps rightly so, that Lawrence’s closeness to the Portuguese administration may have influenced his views on culture and citizenship. However, new work on Goan migrant communities in East Africa highlight how many of them viewed themselves as being Portuguese, not least due to the fact that they traveled to British colonies in Africa using their Portuguese passports. See Margaret Frenz, “Global Goans. Migration Movements and Identity in a Historical Perspective,” *Lusotopie* 15: 1 (2008): 193; Margret Frenz, “Migration, Identity and Post-Colonial Change in Uganda: A Goan Perspective,” *Immigrants & Minorities* 31: 1 (2013): 57-58, 63; Margaret Frenz, “Representing the Portuguese Empire: Goan Consuls in British East Africa, C. 1910-1963,” in *Imperial Migrations: Colonial Communities and Diaspora in the Portuguese World*, ed. Eric Morier-Genoud and Michel Cahen, Migration, Diasporas and Citizenship (Hampshire and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 194, 196, 200; Pamila Gupta, “The Disquieting of History: Portuguese (De)colonization and Goan Migration in the India Ocean,” *Journal of Asian and African Studies* 44: 1 (2009): 19-47.

37 Felix Alfred Plattner, *The Catholic Church in India: Yesterday and Today* (Allahabad: St. Paul’s Publications, 1964), 2-3, 13; Arun Shourie, “Missionaries in India,” in *Paths of Mission in India Today*, ed. Augustine Kanjamala svd (Mumbai: St. Paul’s Publications, 1997), 65-92.

and patriotism. It seemed to be a logical step that the enslaved and westernized Christian was identified as the ‘other’ under Indian nationalism<sup>38</sup> as such a person was precisely the problem that the pro-India nationalists had identified and tried to reform.

This can be seen in the debates in the Konkani language press after the incorporation of Goa in the Indian Union. Interestingly we have a case of Jorge’s *A Reforma do Vestuário* being discussed in the 1970s, which allows us to gauge the effect of Jorge’s views long after he wrote his pamphlet. Fr. Martinho Noronha in his weekly column made a reference to Jorge in the context of Goan Christians finding appropriate place in Indian culture. Being a Christian priest, Fr. Noronha obviously was concerned about the effect of Jorge’s writings on Christian faith and the faithful. The author recalls how Jorge as a young student (both of them attended the same school) was inspired by the anti-colonial movement in British India.

Fr. Noronha argued that Jorge conflated colonialism and the Christian religion to the extent that this history was viewed by Jorge not through “historical” but through a “nationalist” lens. He wrote that Jorge had “thrown the baby [Christian faith] out with the bath water [Portuguese colonialism]” and admitted that the writings of Jorge pertaining to the change in dress, names, food habits, and other such customs and manners were important for the Church in India, as it too was thinking of the same issues that Jorge had written about some decades ago.<sup>39</sup> Fr. Noronha was not against Indian culture and the project of Indianizing the Christian religion, but was an advocate of caution.<sup>40</sup> Convinced that Indian clothes (and therefore Indian culture) were not necessarily Hindu and that the Christian religion could be made compatible to the ways of being and living of Indian culture and nationalism, Fr. Noronha’s views reveal the implications of the Indian

38 See Ferrao, *Being a Goan Christian*, 38-57.

39 Martinho Noronha, “Renver Borovp - 5: Vosnmukponn Ani Dhorm’,” *Vavraddeancho Ixtt*, September 2, 1978, 5.

40 See Martinho Noronha, “Renver Borovp - 7: Vachpiank Zobab,” *Vavraddeancho Ixtt*, September 23, 1978, 5.



nationalist project on the Christians of Goa. He observed that if the Christians of Goa had tried to make themselves ‘Indian’ through a change of dress and other customs and habits, Indians would not have viewed them as the “other”.<sup>41</sup>

It would be quite erroneous to assume that Fr. Noronha was only reacting to the writings and ideas of Jorge. In fact to say that the Christian religion needs to be reconciled to Indian culture owing to its close association with Portuguese colonialism, even with caveats, is to still work within the framework of Cunha’s “denationalisation” thesis. It is to admit that the colonized subjectivity can escape the violence of colonialism only through the redemption offered by Indian culture – as in fact suggested by Cunha.<sup>42</sup>

Cunha’s ideas, with their potential of neatly fitting into the agenda of Hindu nationalism, were precisely used for this purpose by later writers. We will look at some prominent Marathi intellectuals in Goa in the 1980s and 1990s, who based their ideas about Portuguese colonialism and Goan history in the writings of Cunha. These later writers viewed the history of Portuguese presence from the standpoint of conquest and religious conversions as the two main events. Many of these later writers argued that the demand for freedom had a logical explanation in the history of the Portuguese conquest and religious conversions. Jagannath S. Sukthankar noted, “All in all the history of Goa after 1510 is a history of the destruction of a thousand year old culture, and similarly it is also a history of a brave people who opposed and resisted religious persecution and oppressive government of the Portuguese”.<sup>43</sup>

If Sukthankar felt that 1510 marked the date when seeds of national dissatisfaction and resistance were sown, another well-known Marathi writer, Manohar H. Sardesai argued that the commencement

41 Martinho Noronha, “Renver Borovp - 12: Kaim Ghoddnio,” *Vavraddeancho Ixtt*, October 28, 1978, 5.

42 See Cunha, *Denationalisation*, 34.

43 Jagannath Sukthankar, *Portugez Rajvatitil Svatantrya Ladhayachi Pane* (Panaji-Goa: Gomanak Marathi Akademi, 1992), 1, 3.

of the Pinto Rebellion of 1787, led by a few disgruntled local Catholic priests was the commencement of the freedom struggle.<sup>44</sup> Sardessai's invocation of the Pinto Rebellion of 1787 was to demonstrate that the Christians had also demanded freedom as early as 1787, and was not always a comprador class of the Portuguese State.

Sardessai believed that the commencement of the Portuguese rule and Christian proselytization marked a destruction of primordial cultural ties with India and 'Hindu' culture. But Sardessai also held a contradictory position vis-à-vis Christian proselytization. He argued that even if some had converted to Christianity these people did not lose contact with their primordial 'Hindu' culture:

Those who had been shaped by Hindu culture for thousands of years could not change themselves just by changing the name of the religion and the image of God. That is why the Portuguese Government introduced the Inquisition, for those who had become Christians... But even doing so, the Government could not destroy the Hindu culture in their minds and blood.<sup>45</sup>

That Sardessai's Indian nationalist position was also a de facto Hindu nationalist one is indicated by the fact that he argued that the Hindus considered it an "insult to society" that some had sacrificed their own religion to embrace the Christian one.<sup>46</sup> Cunha also could not separate Hindu culture and Indian nationalism – or in other words these entities were one and the same in Cunha's nationalism. Sardessai's opposition to Portuguese colonialism and the Portuguese State manifested in the understanding that the Christian and Hindu religions were pitted against each other due to the religious and political policies of the Portuguese State, an understanding that we have constantly observed as part of Indian na-

<sup>44</sup> Sardessai, *Gomantakiya Christian Samaj*, 253.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 278.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 279.

tionalist views of the history of Portuguese India. Which is why even if Sardessai invoked the rebellion of some local Catholics priests in 1787 as evidence of the anti-colonial feeling amongst the Christians of Goa, it was done within the understanding that the fight was to recover a political and cultural Hindu unity, or alternately an Indian cultural and political unity.

### **Christians and Spices in Our Times**

This critical reflection on nationalist politics in Portuguese India started with an incident involving Vasco da Gama, who was believed to have said that his sea voyage was a search for “Christians and spices”. I have argued that, seen from an Indian nationalist perspective, much of the history of the Portuguese presence in India takes it for granted that the period was marked by violence, exploitation, persecution of the body, body-politic, and the soul. It also takes for granted that the Indian freedom-struggle emerging in British India was the culmination of the history of colonialism – both British and Portuguese. The works discussed above suggest that Vasco da Gama’s (in)famous statement could have a different meaning and significance, as recent works on the early modern Portuguese presence has demonstrated.<sup>47</sup> Contemporary conflicts of communalism and casteism in India have forced many nationalist writers to re-think the Portuguese past in Goa. Such a re-look has made these authors acknowledge that the period of Portuguese presence in India was not always marked by violence and that the elites or upper-castes at least had received a better treatment from the Portuguese State in certain periods of its history.<sup>48</sup> Yet the understanding that the Portuguese period was a fundamental rupture with one’s native culture due to conversions to Christianity is a persistent one.

47 Ângela Barreto Xavier, “Disquiet on the Island: Conversion, Conflicts and Conformity in Sixteenth-Century Goa,” *Indian Economic & Social History Review* 44: 3 (2007): 269-95; Joy L. K. Pachua, “The Spiritual Concerns of a Mercantilist Empire: Church-State Relations in Sixteenth- and Seventeenth-Century Portuguese India,” *Studies in History* 20: 1 (2004): 31-58; Ângela Barreto Xavier and Ines G. Županov, *Catholic Orientalism: Portuguese Empire, Indian Knowledge (16th-18th Centuries)* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2015).

48 See Maria Aurora Couto, *Goa, A Daughter’s Story* (New Delhi: Penguin Books, 2004), 195. Perez, *Tulsi*, 36-83 also acknowledges such conflicts within a colonial set up but retains a singular power-relation between the “colonizer” and the “colonized” in that colonial setup.

Maria Aurora Couto writing about Goa's history from the commencement of Portuguese rule in 1510, together with her personal reflections of Goa's identity crisis and culture, makes an attempt to explore different identities and subjectivities with a sensitivity that nationalist histories lack. Yet the cultural personality of Goa that she describes is one that is Hindu and upper-caste, searching for a culturally pristine past pre-dating the Portuguese.<sup>49</sup> Couto says, "Truth must prevail. Conversion with state power was effected with extreme pressure and inducement, not with violence against the human person but with violation of freedom and violence against the symbols that continued to draw the converted population back to their old faith".<sup>50</sup> Even if one recognizes that the history of the Portuguese State and the history of Christian conversion in Portuguese India was not an endless episode of violence and dominance, seen from an Indian nationalist perspective, the essential cultural unity of India was still believed to have been violated and destroyed.

The nationalist discourses in Portuguese India had (and have) a common thread running through them: the destruction of primordial culture by colonialism and its subsequent recovery through nationalist politics. This paper presented a variety of views and debates on the history of Portuguese presence written in English, Portuguese, Marathi, and Konkani. These writings in various languages represented the myriad public spheres and the communities associated with them in Portuguese India. By observing similar ideas of cultural and religious nationalism being debated over the decades starting from the 1940s, it can be argued that dogmas of Indian nationalism has a pervasive hold on how the history of Portuguese India or the Portuguese empire has been viewed thus far.

Indian nationalist historiography assumes that India was also a unified religious unit in the form of the Hindu culture. It assumes that this history will only be legible within the frameworks of Hindu cul-

<sup>49</sup> See Couto, *Goa*, 121-23.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, 97.

ture. Such a historiographical understanding has masked the conflicts of caste and gender that pre-dated the Portuguese rule,<sup>51</sup> and indeed persisted during the Portuguese rule, only to erect a cultural conflict between the Catholic and Hindu religions, and between the Christians of all castes and classes with the Hindus of all castes and classes. Such a historiography not only obscures our view of the past marked by the interventions of diverse historical processes such as empire, trade, missionary activity, European culture, Westernization, but also runs into the risk of anachronism. One needs to view the history of Portuguese India outside the paradigm of cultural and religious nationalism – Indian or otherwise. Portuguese India cannot be viewed as a monolithic culture, and neither can Portuguese India be understood by placing the pre-Portuguese ‘culture’ and imagined primordial ties at the center of our analyses.

51 See Xavier, “Disquiet on the Island.”

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