



## GOANS AND ANGLO-INDIANS: AN ESSAY

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### INTRODUCTION

This essay is an attempt to analyze and compare the history and culture of Goans with that of Anglo-Indians. Both cultures are the product of interaction with European colonial authorities. However, while they share some similarities, there are also many differences between the two cultures.

### HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

It is well known that India became a part of British colonial enterprise during the 18<sup>th</sup> century. British rule led to the creation of important and significant changes in Indian society. Christian missionaries, encouraged by the political domination of the English over Indians, tried to achieve the same domination in the religious field as well. Their endeavours produced a new category of Indians, Christianized and westernized. Both elite as well as not so elite sections of population were converted to Christianity. However, it should be noted that the British government was careful not to antagonize the local population. The British government in India only indirectly encouraged the process of Christianization because they feared another popular revolt along the lines of the great freedom movement of 1857 – known to British historians as the Indian Mutiny.

### ADVENT OF THE PORTUGUESE IN GOA

Goa is a very small state of India. It was one of the earliest regions of India to be exposed to European influence. The Portuguese established themselves in Goa as early as 1510, while the English did not follow with their East India Company until 1600. Before the Portuguese arrived, Goa was ruled by Indian overlords such as Bhojas, the Mauryas of Konkan, Kadambas, the Vijayanagara rulers and the

Bahamanis. There existed an indigenous tradition of administration and social organization in Goa. The advent of the Portuguese, however, introduced several significant changes in its history. The Portuguese established so-called factories, or trading centers, in different regions of the west coast of India. Through these factories, the Portuguese could interfere in the political, social, religious and cultural life of the people of the region. Their factories were to be found in Goa, Bhatkal, Honnavar, Basrur, Mangalore, Malabar and various ports in Kerala. While they developed a close amity with certain communities, their relations with others – such as Muslims, for instance – were not at all cordial. This led to the creation of political problems along the western coast. Some political powers, such as the Keladi rulers of the Kanara coast, disapproved of the Portuguese policy, and waged war against them, weakening their political power. Consequently, the Portuguese were forced to concentrate on the tiny region of Goa.

#### BRITISH COLONIALISM AND PORTUGUESE COLONIALISM

On the other hand, the British proved stronger and established their domination over a large part of India, building a huge empire. There are major differences between British colonial rule and that of the Portuguese. Firstly, the Portuguese entered the political scene when it was not suitable for them to establish a strong colonial empire. They also had to contend with the power of the Hindu empire, Vijayanagara, and the Muslim dynasty of Bahamanis. Later they faced the aggression of the Keladi rulers, the successors of Vijayanagara on the western coast. Moreover, the Portuguese were unable to exploit the mutual enmity between the Vijayanagara and the Bahamanis. The British, on the other hand, while last to enter the colonial scene in India, were the first to establish a dominant grasp on the country. Through their policy of “divide and rule”, their success at empire building in India remained a source of pride and strength for decades.

There are also major differences between the political and religious policies of the British and the Portuguese. While the latter pursued an anti-Islamic policy, particularly in the coastal regions of Kerala, the British never took the risk of mixing religion with politics, although there are certain instances of the British giving encouragement to Christian missionaries in their evangelical work. Particularly after the 1857 movement, we can discern distinct modifications of the British attitude

towards native religions and literature. In fact, the English administrators made a study of language, literature, art, architecture, culture, and religion of the people whom they ruled. The English tried to introduce new types of governance by establishing colleges and universities and educating the Indians in the art of self-rule. This kind of advancement is not seen in the case of the Portuguese, although they did establish certain educational institutions.

Both the English and the Portuguese succeeded in modernization and westernization of traditional Indian social and political institutions. Both were responsible for the construction and maintenance of several churches. This aspect is an important development in the history of modern India because, through it, Indians encountered the west, its philosophy, religion and cultural practices. Due to the colonizers' evangelical work, there emerged a new cultural group of people who were Christianized and westernized. Perhaps we can compare them with the Métis (mixed-race, Aboriginal and European) population of Canada before and after the emergence of Canadian Confederation. In the case of British India, the best example of westernization is the Coorg region, then a part of Mysore State. Coorg as a region has, over generations, contributed a large number of senior army officers, soldiers and sportspeople, particularly hockey players, to the national scene in India.

#### WESTERNIZATION OF GOA

Similarly, the Goans also imbibed several western practices, including religion. The Portuguese, it is said, pursued a very vigorous and aggressive religious policy which led to the forced migration of many Goans to neighbouring regions of India, particularly the Kanara coast and modern Kerala state. In Goa, the Portuguese established Christianity as an important religion. Many impressive churches and buildings were constructed. The most famous are in the locality known as Old Goa. The art and architecture of this place truly represents the Indo-Portuguese culture of this region. In the Portuguese records preserved in old Goa, there are references to many Goan trading communities which had Portuguese ancestry. In these settlements, traders led a typical Christian life that is found even today in remote Goan villages.

## GOA AND THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE

Now the major question that attracts our attention is, after so many centuries of rule by the Portuguese, why is it that English has emerged as the major language of the people of this region? It is true that there are many Goan families which maintain a strong bond of relations with Portugal, and that the Portuguese welcome Goans to their homes due to the longstanding connection between Goa and Portugal. But what is surprising is that the number of people who understand and/or speak Portuguese is declining day by day in Goa. At present, there are only a few who could read and translate the Portuguese documents in the Goa Archives. Why is this so?

We can say that this is partly due to the educational institutions that have emerged in the post-Liberation era (Indian troops ended Portuguese control of Goa in 1961) and partly due to the policy of the Portuguese themselves. Perhaps the Portuguese gave so much importance to political and economic matters that they neglected the field of education. It is true that they had established the Goa Medical College (GMC) and some other colleges. However, they did not establish a sufficient number of educational institutions to satisfy the needs of the people of the state. Goans went to neighbouring regions like Bombay (now Mumbai) in Maharashtra, and Belgaum and Dharwad in what is now Karnataka state. It is in these regions that Goans obtained inspiration to participate in Goa's freedom movement. Those who returned to Goa with that spirit took a leading part in the liberation movement of Goa. After all, the Portuguese did not have many problems with the English, signing many treaties with them which permitted the Portuguese to retain control of Goa and Daman and Diu. It is possible the interest which Goans had in the English language gained support after Goa's liberation.

There is also an economic factor: Goa has emerged as a major tourist destination of India, and a knowledge of English is useful, even essential, when dealing with foreign tourists. It is a favourite destination not only for increasing numbers of British tourists but also others, such as Germans or Scandinavians, many of whom are comfortable conversing in English but are totally ignorant of local vernaculars. So it is not surprising that English is gaining ground while Portuguese is disappearing, to the detriment of Goa's unique cultural complexity.

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