
RACIAL BASED SOCIAL HIERARCHY IN PORTUGUESE GOA

Leila Ribeiro

Associate Professor, Head, Department of History,
Carmel College for Women, Nuvem, Goa
Email: leilaribeiro365@gmail.com

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Abstract: A social classification of the inhabitants of Goa during the period of the Portuguese, reveals the presence of a hierarchy based on colour considerations. Some of the historians of the twentieth century are of the opinion that the Portuguese rulers were free from the malady of racism that affected other imperialist European powers. But the reality is that the Portuguese empire was characterized by a strong and deep set colour bar.

The Christian population increased in size and adopted the Lusitanian lifestyle believing that the Portuguese would then allow the converts to avail of the concessions accorded to those Portuguese residing in Goa. However they were disillusioned, eventually leading to a lot of revolts on the part of native Christians against the Portuguese.

Introduction: Social stratification of the 16th century Goa, can be analyzed from different dimensions- racial compositions, caste system, religious groups, linguistic groups.

To begin with, we have to understand the social hierarchy that existed prior to the arrival of the Portuguese in Goa and then analyze the changes which took place in Goan society under the influence of the Portuguese. The Portuguese not only introduced changes in the political and economic scenario of Goa, but brought about a cultural transformation as well.

Racial Composition of Goa Prior to the Coming in of the Portuguese: The Mhadei and Kushawati River Valley Civilizations have shed light on the pre-historic man that existed in Goa, some of these being the Kols who are said to be the first Proto-Austroloid immigrants to have come and settled down in Goa. Some other pre-historic tribes were Mundas, Kharwas, Shabhars etc, who resorted to fishing and hunting as their primary occupation and then later took up to a primitive form of agriculture as their secondary occupation.

Besides, there were other Proto-Austroloids like the Kunbis and the Gaudes. It is believed that the Kunbis of Goa had their beginnings in the Harappan civilization, and then gradually merged with the local Mundas in Goa, while the Gaudes were the agricultural tribe, supposed to have come down from South-East Asia to Assam, Orissa, Bengal, Kerala and Goa.

The Proto-Austroloids of Goa were followed by the Dravidians. In Goa, they were called Kannadigas, the influence of which is well seen in the local Goan language.

Then came a wave of Aryans. According to R.G. Bhandarkar, the Aryans migrated into Western India in the 7th century BC and advanced into South Konkan approximately between the 7th and 3rd centuries BC. Some of them came from the region of the River Saraswati in the north

and were known as the Saraswats. They then moved to Bengal and migrated to Goa around the 4th century AD and were called the Gaud Saraswats. The areas they chose to settle in Goa were Bardez, Tiswadi and Salcete, because these were the areas through which two major rivers of Goa flowed- the Mandovi and the Zuari. It is even probable that the Aryans had earlier named the River Mandovi as Gomati, from which the name Gomantachala must have been derived for Goa.

The Dravidian settlers in Goa mingled with the Aryan settlers, took up to cultivation, had settlements, which in course of time led to the establishment of village communities.

Dhume emphasized on the influx of Sumerian settlers in Goa. According to him, the Padhye Brahmins - a well known high caste- are of Sumerian origin and built temples in Goa, similar to those in Sumeria.

With the spread of Muslim power between the 7th and 10th centuries AD, a number of Arabs came down to Goa as merchants, soldiers, sailors and they gradually settled here. Kadamba inscriptions are replete with instances of Arab settlements in Goa. They constructed mosques and served the Kadambas in administrative and military posts. During the rule of the Bahamanis and AdilShahis in Goa, there was an increase in the demand for Arab soldiers. The Arabs freely mingled with the people of Goa and other western areas, and so we have a new racial group of Arabs coming into existence.

The Kadambas who ruled in Goa, between CE 1000-1310AD, themselves, were Kannadigas. The Vijayanagara rule here (1366-1472AD) also witnessed a large number Kannada speaking people migrating into Goa. They used the Kannada language especially to write inscriptions.

Then came the Yadavas of Devagiri. They were Marathas and when they became overlords of the Goa Kadambas, they used Marathi as their official language. Marathi became a more popular language than Kannada and was in vogue among the people of Pernem, Bicholim, Sattari, Sanguem, Canacona (New Conquests), as these areas were under Maratha rule from the time of Shivaji.

Social Hierarchy in Portuguese Goa: Now that we know the composition of the population of Goa, we will examine the new social hierarchy that came up in Portuguese Goa, based on colour differences and racial discrimination. Top of the social ladder were the *Reinois*. They were the blue blooded Portuguese nationals, born in Portugal. They came to India and held high posts such as Governors, Viceroys, Archbishops, Bishops, Captains, Judges etc. Having completed their term of office, they returned to Portugal, having no intention to stay longer or settle down here by marrying local women.

Among the *Reinois*, there were two categories- the *Fidalgos* (Higher Nobility) and the *Nobres* (Lesser Nobility). The dukes, *marquis*, counts belonged to the higher nobility. While the *cavaleiros* (knights), *escudeiros* (squires), heads of forts, captains came under the fold of the *nobres*. The former considered themselves superior to the latter.

Next in rank came the *Casticos*, who were also pure bred Portuguese-Portuguese parentage, but they resided in Goa.

The *Inditicos* were those Portuguese born in India.

The *Casados* were Portuguese nationals, who married local women and settled down in Goa or elsewhere in a Portuguese colony. This policy of mixed marriages was started by Afonso de Albuquerque- the Portuguese Governor to serve the needs of the Portuguese.

Most of the privileges offered by the *Senado de Camara* (Municipal Council) were reserved for the *Casticos* and the *Casados*. They were granted land, houses and a number of concessions. They were exempted from military service, they could hold municipal offices and take up profitable contracts.

The policy of miscegenation resulted in the formation of a new group of *Mesticos* (mixed breeds) who were the offspring of Portuguese fathers and Indian mothers. On the other hand, the *Mulattos* were born of Portuguese and African parentage, the Africans here being the negro slaves. The *Mesticos* and *Mulattos* were not entitled to privileges that were enjoyed by the *Casticos* and the *Casados*. The *Reinois* looked down upon the rest of the groups.

Gameli Careri- the Italian doctor travelling to Goa in 1695, found here a huge population of *Mulattos*, comprising of at least quarter of the population.

Below the *Mesticos* and the *Mulattos* were the *Naturais* (natives), who were further divided into two broad groups namely the *Canarins* (Christian converts) and the *Gentios* (gentiles)- the Hindus, Muslims and non-believers.

Class friction existed not only between Europeans and Indians, but also between the various sub-groups. The *Reinois* looked down upon the *Casticos* because they were born and brought up in India and had been suckled by local wet nurses, which was believed to have contaminated their blood and made them ill-behaved and not to be trusted.

The *Mesticos* on their part were proud of their European ancestry. In their turn, they looked upon with disdain the *Canarins* and sought matrimonial alliances for their daughters, even those of ordinary strata, low birth, preferring them to the Indians.

Thus the Portuguese social hierarchy was as follows: Ecclesiastics, Nobility and the Common people. The ecclesiastics wielded more power than the nobility as they had both spiritual and temporal powers. The nobility too was a privileged class enjoying privileges and concessions such as immunity from taxation and imprisonment.

Policy of Miscegenation: This was the policy of mixed marriages which had a far-reaching impact on the social and cultural life of Goa. Although it was maintained by the Portuguese that the main objective of such marriages was to promote the merging of eastern and western culture, the real aim no doubt was to make up for the shortage of loyal personnel. K.M.Panikkar observes that to counteract the shortage in manpower, they tried to make up for it, by having mixed unions between the Portuguese and the Indians. So a sincere work force could be locally raised. The locals could not be fully relied upon. Hence the importance of the *Casados* and their progeny. Also till the second half of the 16th century, there was a dearth of Portuguese women, the journey being cumbersome. So if the Portuguese had to be induced to remain here, they would have to get married to local converted women.

The fact remains that Albuquerque had captured and killed a number of Muslim officers during the first conquest of Goa from March to May 1510. But had spared the lives of their young good-looking wives and daughters, keeping in mind that someday they could be given

in marriage to Portuguese soldiers settled here. Probably during the second conquest of Goa in November 1510, he may have done the same. So by and large, Albuquerque was keen on getting Portuguese men married to fair-skinned beautiful Muslim women, so that the end result would be having a progeny totally dedicated and loyal to the Portuguese society.

Perhaps, even some Hindu women may have been converted and married to Portuguese nationals, but these may have been done, up to a certain limit.

There was yet another reason- Since the mortality rate among the Portuguese in the east was very high, it was felt that creating a hybrid group of people would be able to withstand the tropical climatic conditions.

Thus although Albuquerque was hailed as a statesman who did not resort to racial discrimination, the case was not so if we carefully analyze his policy of miscegenation. Thus Albuquerque's policy of creating a Luso-Indian progeny was eventually unmasked.

Social Status of Portuguese Men Marrying Indian Women: Those Portuguese men marrying Indian women, most often came from the lower strata of the Portuguese society such as soldiers, sailors, convicts, exiles etc. and married good looking young wives and daughters of the slain Muslim officers. These local Muslim women were helpless and whether they liked it or not, they converted themselves and married these Portuguese men. If they refrained from getting married, they ran the risk of being sold as slaves or put to death. Infact their security lay in converting themselves to Christianity and marrying Portuguese nationals.

Yet others believe that it was not only Muslim women, but also native women of lower castes, dancing girls, widows, slave-girls and a few Brahmin women, who would marry Portuguese men. As the native girls were reluctant to marry the Portuguese or white men, the Viceroy Count of Alvor Francisco de Tavora had issued an edict that Brahmin widows should be given every incentive to marry white men. Yet another edict encouraged Portuguese men to marry women of any caste including widows.

Although these Portuguese men did marry the native women, it was only to preserve, the declining white population, who they believed the progeny of which would be loyal to the Portuguese. The fact of the story remains that these Portuguese men were not happy to marry coloured women, but to satisfy human desires were inclined towards maintaining concubines.

High ranking Portuguese authorities and officers practiced concubinage and as such it became very difficult to curb this practice or pass legal measures against it.

On his part, Albuquerque favored mixed marriages rather than mere flitting affairs, as the former would lead to the consolidation of the Portuguese empire in the east. Hence the King of Portugal sent a letter dated 9th April 1765, advising the Count of Lousa- Viceroy of India, to promote such marriages, which were declining by the end of the 17th century, perhaps due to the lack of encouragement and indifference of these high Portuguese officials.

At one point of time in the mid-16th century, Portuguese women particularly orphan girls- *Orfaos del Rei* were encouraged to marry Portuguese men living in the colonies. These girls were given huge incentives and dowries in the form of money, land grants, lucrative government posts for their husbands.

The King wrote to the Viceroy Conde de Linhares, to deposit money coming from the proceeds of their lands towards dowry funds, to be kept in the coffers of the *Casa de Misericordia*, with strict instructions that this money should not be diverted elsewhere.

As regards the view of the Church, no doubt it encouraged the conversion of the locals, but it was against Portuguese nationals marrying local women. The clergy paid scant respect to the noble principles of Christianity i.e. social equality and condemned such inter-racial alliances. A Dominican friar condemned the weddings of the *Casados*, stating that they were not married by him according to the prescribed church rites. He threatened them with excommunication unless they paid a fine of one *ducat* or more each. Albuquerque took stern action against the Dominican Vicar, sending him back home to Portugal. In yet another instance, when Albuquerque's own chaplain objected to such weddings on the pretext that the *Casados* were not married in accordance with the rites of the Church, Albuquerque firmly reiterated that as long as they were married according to the norms laid down by Albuquerque. The Church thus had to succumb to the opposition of this powerful Governor.

Such inter-racial marriages lead one to think that the Portuguese were devoid of the colour bar, but the truth is that there existed a strong and tenacious colour bar.

Reports of Foreign Travellers: Convinced of their racial superiority, the Portuguese despised all Asiatic races. Contemporary travelers speak highly of the intellectual capabilities and business acumen of the Goans. On the other hand the Portuguese not only assigned defamatory tags like 'nigger' to the Indians, but also denounced them as base and cowardly.

Abbe Carre a traveller believes that it was because of their intelligence and sharp wit that everybody endeavours to have some of them as their servants. Tavernier very shrewdly analyses the superior intellect of the Goans as the reason that the Portuguese kept them under subjugation. Dr. Fryer was yet another witness to the degraded status of the sons of the soil.

John Huighen van Linscothen a Dutchman who reached Goa in the 16th century comments on the Portuguese insolence and arrogance, vying to be the Lords and masters of the local Goans, much to the contempt of the latter. Yet another 17th century European visitor to Goa, Fr. Ardizzone Spinonala writes thus that the Portuguese looked down upon the Indians, as members of a contaminated race, intrinsically inferior to the Europeans. Such denouncing statements gave a feeling of superiority to the Portuguese.

Racial Discrimination in Religious Sphere: Throughout the 17th century, the higher positions in the army, navy, civil administration, judiciary, and municipality and even in the church hierarchy were always reserved for the white men from Portugal or other parts of Europe. The Vicars of Parishes, Vicar-General, the Theologians, Canonists, Bishops, Arch-Bishops consisted of white men. On the other hand, the lower clergy was composed of the Goan or native priests by and large. Thus though the Catholic Church had categorically stated that all men were equal in the eyes of God and that all were His children, but in practice, both the State and the Church indulged in racial discrimination. This second class treatment soon evoked strong resentment on the part of the Goan clergy.

In spite of the fact that the converts to Christianity, had been given lofty promises of employment in government and church offices, they had to remain content with only the

lower cadre posts. Even when the Crown did decide to give high posts to Goans, especially the clergy, Viceroys would protest stating that such posts were the prerogative of only the Portuguese. A pointer in hand is that of Viceroy Conde de Sandomil, who expressed his displeasure to the King, for having conferred on a Goan Christian the Habit of the Order of Jesus Christ, as this would give a Goan an upper edge over an European born Portuguese, thereby lowering the self-esteem of the latter. Following this, His Majesty demoted the Goans to the lesser known Order of St. James.

Fr. Joseph Vaz had to encounter several difficulties of a racist nature, before establishing an Asian Order. Some of the Religious Orders did not even permit Goans to join their Order, for eg. The Theatines who believed that if they admitted Goans into their fold, it would lower the prestige of their Order. The Jesuits too thought on the same lines, as seen from the observation of a Jesuit Alexandre Valignano. He passed uncomplimentary remarks that the Goans are a savage race lacking moral values. The Portuguese would not confess to a native or *mestico* priest. Fr. Salvatore Gallo, a Theatine had written to his General, that the Portuguese, would not even offer a seat to Goan priests when the latter visited them.

Color Bar Differences in Other Institutions: Racial discrimination raised its ugly head in the various other social welfare institutions and educational institutions, set up by the Portuguese such as the *confrarias* (confraternities), the *Santa Casa de Misericordia* (the Holy House of Mercy) and the *Hospicio Real* (Royal Hospital). For e.g. In the 17th century, two *confrarias* were set up in the *Casa Professa de Bom Jesus*- one for the Portuguese noblemen and army officers and the other for Goans. As regards the *Misericordia*, European membership was meticulously maintained, and it was only much later that the first Indian Christian was admitted as brother of the *Misericordia* and here too his European colleagues were entitled to a whole lot of benefits, in comparison to the Indian.

The Royal Hospital of Goa witnessed racial discrimination, with the said hospital being the prerogative of only the Europeans, while the Goans worked here in low-grade jobs. The Goans were treated in a hospital set up exclusively for coloured people.

The prison of the Goa Inquisition was also a party to colour bar considerations, with the inmates being served a meal on the basis of race. While the Goans were served a paltry meal, the Europeans were given a far better spread.

In the College of St. Paul, the Portuguese and Indian boys were lodged separately, with the former living close to the main premises, while the latter were housed much further.

Conclusion: This indicates how deep- rooted racial prejudice was. Obviously, this discontentment created a lot of rift between the privileged Portuguese Christians and the native Christians and led to a number of revolts among the natives. As can be discerned from this hierarchical classification of the Goan society, the darker the colour of one's skin, the lower was the position, one was accorded in the society.

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