

Insight into Goa. An Attempt to Describe the Smallest State of India

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Abstract

Based on my readings about India and own experiences in that magnificent country, this article addresses geographical and historical issues concerning the Indian state of Goa. One must bear in mind that tiny Goa – let alone giant India itself – lies far beyond any description. Whatever the case, I must express my gratitude to Mr Carlos Noronha, my first Goan friend, who helped me to live each of my Goan days to the fullest. To him the following lines are dedicated.

Keywords: India; Goa; History; Geography; Reader

I find new heart each time I think upon that windy day. And if one day she comes to you, drink deeply from her words so wise. Take courage from her as your prize and say hello for me.

Ken Hensley

Figure 1: Ajanta Caves, c. 460 miles northeast of Goa.
(Photo taken by the Author)

Few places on Earth

Few places on Earth have made such a lasting impression on me as India. I was there again in 2016, quite a long time after my first experience in that country, which took place in 1994. Let us

talk about Goa, which I visited for the first time in 2016. Its modest 1,429 sq mi (more than 6 times larger than Bombay, the largest Indian city, and almost 900 times smaller than India) make of Goa the smallest of all Indian states. Located in the southwestern coast of India – itself a giant country, the seventh largest in world –, Goa can take pride in its GDP per capita, which is the highest among all Indian states, as well as in its quality of life, the best in the whole country [1]. In a word, Goa is the richest state of modern India [2]. A former fraction of the Portuguese Overseas Empire, one of the first geopolitical results of the Great European Navigations (roughly from the beginning of the 15th century until the end of the 18th century, which can also be considered the onset of what we now call “globalization”), Goa was annexed by the then young Republic of India (Bhārat Gaṇarājya) in 1961. Owing to its being located on the Western Ghats mountain range (aka Sahyadri = “Benevolent Mountains”, literally a hotspot in terms of biodiversity), Goa is the end of the rainbow for a thousand-and-one kinds of animals and plants [3]. A magnet for naturalists due to this fact, for international and domestic tourists thanks to its white sand beaches and night-

life, for Catholics of all over the world because St. Francis Xavier's – dubbed "the Apostle of the Indies" by ones and "the Apostle of Asia" by others – relics are held there (namely in the Basilica of Bom Jesus), as well as for art and architecture lovers, Goa is meritoriously included in the list of World Heritage Sites. In terms of art, the menu is really vast: it ranges from the so called "minor" arts (craftwork, for example) to the "major" ones; difficult would be not to find in Goa one of the multiple branches of what we usually call art.

mountains of Balochistan, and the jungles and swamps of Assam. However, notwithstanding the geographical obstacles, no other Asian country has influenced so deeply the culture of Asia as a whole, which is why India may well be called Greece of the East [6]. Annexed by several among the countless empires and kingdoms that ruled parts of what is now India (Maurya, Bhoja, Rashtrakuta, Muslim, Shilahara, Kadanmba, Vijayanagara, Portuguese and others) Goa survived to their rise and fall, remaining itself and assuming its unity in diversity in the best possible way.

Figure 2: Basilica of Bom Jesus. (Photo taken by the Author)

A long history

It is in Goa that were found the earliest vestiges of human presence in the Indian subcontinent, which are rock engravings from Upper Paleolithic and Mesolithic periods, that is to say 20,000-30,000 BC – notwithstanding the evidences of much earlier human occupation, namely from the Acheulian industry of stone tools (1.76 – 0.13 Mya) [4]. Roughly speaking early Goan society can be an amalgam of aboriginal locals with Indo-Arian and Dravidian migrants, not forgetting that no other Asian country is as isolated as India: separated from the rest of Asia by the Himalaya, "a sort of Maginot Line against invasions" [5], as well as by the deserts and

Figure 3: Mr Carlos Noronha and his Mother, at the entrance of their Goan house. (Photo taken by the Author)

Conclusion: Submerged Goa

Having been several times in Portugal, in India before, and lived in Brazil (an ex-Portuguese colony) most of my life so far, I could never say Goa looked totally unfamiliar for me; with some Goans, I could even speak Portuguese (of Konkani, the mainly spoken language of Goa, I do not know a single word), my native language [7]. But those are all superficial impressions; the same can be said about the attempts of describing them, such as this article, which draws to a close. Genuine Goa lies far beyond appearances; it is part

of what I once called “submerged India”. I wish I could say of Goa the same I said many years ago of Gorakhpur, a northern Indian city located more than one thousand miles away, after having spent twelve transcendental hours of a windy winter day: “I saw Gorakhpur submerged, as if she had been swallowed by the dust brought by the wintry wind of late afternoon” [8]. I also wish I had found the goddess-like Hindu woman I met in 1994 on my way to Agra, who made me temporarily forget bad memories from the war-torn Kashmiri city of Srinagar, where I did my first job as journalist. But I cannot: Goa is neither Srinagar nor Gorakhpur (still less Agra), and 1994 is not 2016 – which, by its turn, is not 2019, the year I write these lines in a day that is neither windy nor wintry. Whether or not my insight into Goa was deep enough is not for me, but for you, dear reader, to decide.

Figure 4: Goan beach. (Photo taken by the Author)

Bibliography

1. The land away from the coast is rich in minerals and ores, and mining forms the second largest industry. Iron, bauxite, manganese, clays, limestone and silica are mined. (...) Agriculture, while of shrinking importance to the economy over the past four decades, offers part-time employment to a sizeable portion of the populace. Rice is the main agricultural crop, followed by areca, cashew and coconut. Fishing employs about 40,000 people, though recent official figures indicate a decline of the importance of this sector and also a fall in catch, due perhaps, to traditional fishing giving way to large-scale mechanised trawling. Medium scale industries include the manufacturing of pesticides, fertilisers, tyres, tubes, footwear, chemicals, pharmaceuticals, wheat products, steel rolling, fruits and fish canning, cashew nuts, textiles, brewery products. (...) The state of Goa is famous for its excellent beaches, churches, and temples. The Bom Jesus Cathedral, Fort Aguada and a new wax museum on Indian history, culture and heritage in Old Goa are other tourism destinations. (Prajal Sakhardande et alii. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Goa> [2019]).
2. Historians consider India’s modern age to have begun sometime between 1848 and 1885. The appointment in 1848 of Lord Dalhousie as Governor General of the East India Company set the stage for changes essential to a modern state. These included the consolidation and demarcation of sovereignty, the surveillance of the population, and the education of citizens. Technological changes – among them, railways, canals, and the telegraph – were introduced not long after their introduction in Europe. (D. Michael Petraglia et alii. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/India> [2019]).
3. Goa has been compared with the Amazon and the Congo basins for its rich tropical biodiversity. Goa’s wildlife sanctuaries boast of more than 1.512 documented species of plants, over 275 species of birds, over 48 kinds of animals and over 60 genera of reptiles. (Prajal Sakhardande et alii. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Goa> [2019]).
4. See for instance, SN. Rajaguru, Book Review. “Acheulian Culture in Peninsular India”. in *Journal of the Geological Society of India*. 59 (2002): 595-596.
5. Ralph Linton. *The Tree of Culture*, New York, Alfred A. Knopf (1959): 467.
6. See João Vicente Ganzarolli de Oliveira. *Índia, Grécia do Oriente in Cultura e fé*, Porto Alegre (Brazil), 142 (2013): 275-299.
7. Over 450 years of Portuguese rule and the influence of the Portuguese culture present to visitors to Goa a cultural environment that is not found elsewhere in India. Goa is often described as a fusion between Eastern and Western culture with Portuguese culture having a dominant position in the state be it in its architectural, cultural or social settings. (Prajal Sakhardande et alii. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Goa> [2019]).
8. *Índia submersa*, Rio de Janeiro, Letra Capital (2004): 109.

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