

# Goa: a history of many liberations



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## historical explorations



**The Portuguese will not to be the last in the series of strangers who sought to make Goa their home.**

**A**s Goa prepares to commemorate 50 years of its liberation from Portuguese colonial rule, we need to reflect more calmly from this distance in time, on what Goa has gained from the many strangers that arrived in Goa, stayed in Goa, left Goa or died in Goa.

In a recent intervention at King's College in London, where an international conference was held to study the Asian Ports of Europe, I availed of the opportunity to present the case of Goa as a home for strangers and where strangers felt at home.

Goa was sought since distant past by different groups of foreigners as a strategic port of call, where ships picked up supplies, fuel, etc., a sort of entrepôt for storage of goods in transit and distribution centre. It obviously needed an administrative set-up to ensure the efficient and smooth running of services, to earn the confidence of all parties, and to make all feel safe

and 'at home'.

That is what Goa had been under several pre-Portuguese rulers- It has a distant past, probably leading way back to the early human diasporas that moved out of East Africa and reached India via the North-Western mountain passes. My own DNA analysis, shows how my ancestors followed this path before reaching Goa nearly 2000 years before the Portuguese (B.P).

This applies to the deep ancestry of all who claim to be 'niz Goenkar' today and tend to question the pretensions of the more recent arrivals.

The Romans, the Sassanids and the Arabs followed the trade routes which the Goa Kadambas exploited well for own their political gains. The early Christian presence in Western India, including Goa, dates back to this period.

Under Vijayanagara, Gove is mentioned as the capital of the Banavasi and other neighbouring regions, including across

Ghats in the Deccan. The Muslim presence in Goa was relatively short lived, but contributed to the expansion of a new social-economic base at Ela, somewhat distant from the previous commercial centre of Goa.

Two decades after the Portuguese takeover, Goa was raised to the status of being administrative headquarter of the Estado da Índia, to control the Portuguese "shoe-string empire", as Professor Boxer named it, and which extended from East Africa unto the Far East.

The Portuguese will not to be the last in the series of strangers who sought to make Goa their home. The developments of the past 50 years need to be observed and analysed to understand the trend that will make the so-called 'post-liberation' history of Goa.

Goa's history should be more dispassionately viewed as made up of many 'liberations' and more may follow.

We need to adopt the episte-

mological principle formulated by our Goan savant D.D. Kosambi in interpreting Goan past. It should not be handled by the historians or any social scientists as a string of chapters of the national histories of those dominant groups that passed through Goa.

The history of Goa needs to be studied as a continuity of efforts made, by successive waves of its inhabitants, to make Goa what it is today. The Goa of today is the net result of the dynamism and conflicting interests of many agents.

I see the announcement made by Mr. Eduardo Faleiro, Goa's Minister for NRI Affairs, that Goa University will soon have a Chair for Diaspora Studies, as the most welcome and timely development that could give a fillip to Goan historiography along the lines suggested by D.D. Kosambi. Only such a perspective can permit us to commemorate 50 years of liberation from the last colonial regime with an historical wisdom.