

Portuguese India, the Politics of Print and a Questionable Modernity

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This book is a result of research undertaken for a PhD. Publishers however, usually impose restrictions of space and in such situations the author is often forced to make difficult choices and bear the responsibility of facing the consequences of those choices. Rochelle Pinto tells us that she seeks to explore print production in Goa, locating it within similar studies of print production in colonial India. Contrary to her own expectations, the evidence she gathered seemed to point to dissimilar processes in Goa and in colonial India. What could explain the difference? Her answer is: The different nature and guiding principles of the two colonial systems and the relations between the colonial states and their colonial elites.

The two colonialisms are seen as historically and conceptually different. Print production in Goa had been generally

Between Empires: Print and Politics in Goa
by Rochelle Pinto; *Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2007; pp 209, Rs 645.*

identified with the Catholic elite, and that is where it stops in most histories of Goa. Pinto admits that her study too remains very far from an exhaustive representation of the responses to colonialism in 19th century Goa. She also makes a substantial listing of “omissions from what would be a more complete or adequate picture of politics or (sic) print”. Whatever the acknowledged shortcomings (and other not acknowledged ones) of this study, Pinto has cast her print-net pretty wide and brilliantly, focusing upon the 19th century print as a tool used in Goa by the state, by the traditional Catholic elites, and by the non-elites (particularly non-brahmin Catholics and Hindus) in Goa and Bombay to mark their respective

positions and to affirm their gains in a new modernity.

Freedom from Borrowed Models

In the acknowledgements in the book we are told that the research was conducted at the School of Oriental and African Studies (soAs) (London), and was funded by various UK trusts. The result is presented in this book by the Oxford University Press (oup), New Delhi. Such privileged associations have their financial and marketing benefits, but for truly dedicated researchers on subalterns, they imply some unpleasant costs, starting with the need to pepper the beginnings and the ends of every chapter with a range of “authorities” drawn preferentially from the catalogues of oup publications or other western denizens. It is the same old 19th century orientalist trend whereby soAs and their western partners and third world counterparts or “peers” train their young researchers to step into their shoes! Post-structuralism (and/as after-orientalism) is presented here as a new form of validating research with conceptualisations/contextualisations borrowed from a Benedict, a Habermas, a Bourdieu or a

Columbia-based Vishwanathan. Please Rochelle, and all young scholars, by all means acknowledge all the fountain-heads of western scholarship and register them reverentially in the footnotes, observing thereby the rules of ethics and methodological requirements. But it is time creative scholars freed themselves from borrowed models and academic verbosity, even if that means risking being excluded from the "peer club" in the ever powerful world of neoliberal academia. Western scholarship often tries to compensate with theories its little grasp of the distant reality. Goan scholarship can definitely benefit from a wide exposure to theoretical models from outside, but such a benefit needs to be a long-term gain, and for that to become a reality scholars-authors need to fight for open access to print, and not fall prey to financial allurements of the distribution barons like JSTOR (Journal Storage) and some others.

As Pinto rightly points out, the 19th century of extended printing services, implying larger production of documentation, is the century that is least present in Goan historiography. The reasons cited refer to the over-importance given by the colonial historiography to initial centuries of its glories, and by the native historiography to the closing century of its successful victory of liberation. As a result the intervening 18th and 19th centuries remained largely ignored, or at least comparatively less scrutinised. This could also be the result of the limited capacity of the colonial state machinery to trace, control and analyse locally, or even to make available to home government, all the print information produced locally or in neighbouring colonial India. It tried doing it with limited success in the final phase of the native struggle for liberation. From what was revealed by some participants on the occasion of a oral history seminar organised by me at the Xavier Centre of Historical Research (Porvorim, Goa) with most veteran freedom fighters of varying hues still alive in 1986, to mark the silver jubilee of Goa's liberation, the Portuguese intelligence agencies had great difficulties in following the clandestine press in the

Devanagari script. It was a boon for the freedom struggle.

Modernity and the Colonial Elite

One basic issue that pervades the whole study is about defining modernity. It is believed that propagation of print gave a major impetus to modernity, even though the press in many countries today is not proof of modernity. In the present study, a distinction is borrowed from Anthony Pagden about the nature of Iberian modernity (shared by the Portuguese colonial empire) vis-à-vis the British colonial modernity. The Goa case is framed as a case of Christian universalism, wherein the Goan Catholics were the intended subjects of the colonial rule, while pragmatic adjustments were made towards the Hindus as unassimilated subjects of the empire. That seems to fit into Pagden's model of Romanist conception of empire. We are also told, quoting Miguel Vale de Almeida, that modern Portuguese colonialism only began in 1910 by lifting the discriminations against the Hindus. We cannot conclude from this that the previous 80 years of the printing press in Goa had not helped the process of modernity, providing a weapon for the colonial elite, caste-based native Catholic elite and the Hindu elite to contest each other in the changing political, economic and social scenario that had emerged from the dominant and unrivalled British colonial presence and the growing economic dependence of Goa upon it. Unfortunately, the present study does not correlate sufficiently the Portuguese republican modernity with the developments on the ground in Portuguese India in the context of the Anglo-Portuguese treaty, the railway link, the telegraph link and the educational, judicial, social and political changes that were put in place in the wake of the 1857 rebellion in British India.

Portuguese India was not immune to these factors. How far did print reflect the changing reality and how far was it its cause? Rochelle could read in one of the early Goa-related novels in Portuguese, *Beatriz* (Lisboa, 1885), the description of a dance party organised in Panjim to welcome the royal prince D Augusto of

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Portugal: *As damas nativas eram ainda inferiores em número às descendentes, e se não puderam vencer estas em elegância e coquetismo, deslustraram-nas na riqueza dos toiles confectionados em Bombaim com o maximo esmero e riqueza* ("The native ladies were inferior in number to the white descendants and did not excel them in elegance and coquetry, but surpassed them in quality and wealth of their make-up acquired in Bombay", p 156). It should not be forgotten that the Portuguese Republic of 1910 was a direct consequence of the British ultimatum of 1890 to Portuguese pretensions to thwart British plans in Africa by linking Angola and Mozambique internally. Political modernity was forced upon Portugal, just as England had forced the start of a cultural and constitutional modernity by pressing for the closure of the inquisition and the introduction of a constitutional monarchy at the end of its occupation of Portugal during Napoleonic invasions.

The concept of "subalterns", made fashionable through OUP since the not-so-recent past, is brought in as a key concept to emphasise the role that print played in giving voice to the Hindus as well as the non-elite (non-brahmin and non-Chardó) castes among Goan Catholics. Pinto points out to the relatively limited extent of the press impact in the 19th century outside the capital and major towns of Goa, pointing to disparities of client markets and printing costs in Goa and Bombay. Two incidents that have been analysed at greater length to claim the impact of the press upon the rural and non-elite groups, both Hindu and Catholic, are related to a rebellion of native soldiers of Satari in 1895 and a clash between brahmin and shudra 'ganvkars' (villagers) in Aldona. In both cases, the point sought to be made is that literacy was no longer an elite preserve, and non-elites had learnt to link and manipulate documentation as legal evidence. In these cases, as well as elsewhere in this book, there is much that remains to be documented, such as the chains of subalternities and their interdependence or mutual exploitation, and the need to provide statistics and identification of the so-called non-elites that are said to be the great winners in the print age, be it in Goa or in Bombay. This I see

as the Achilles' heel of this study. It is consequently presumed that a great majority of the poor Goan Catholic migrants living in Bombay clubs (kudd) were non-brahmin or non-Chardo Catholics. There is no evidence adduced to identify who were the producers and major clients of the newspapers, novels, or cook books produced in Bombay and listed in this study. No amount of 'high falutin' conceptual models and theorisations that characterise many west-imitating scholarship can compensate for the lack of a painstaking checking of historical evidence.

Pros and Cons

We came across some questionable statements: On p 11 it is stated that Christian priests were tried, persecuted and "killed", or on p 122 that "No printing press was allowed to function in Goa" (during 1754-1821). I have yet to know of any priest killed by the Portuguese administration in Goa, unless they were Hindu priests. There were also many decrees issued by the Marquis of Pombal, but hardly any were really enforced, excepting one expelling the Jesuits. Is there any proof that an order of 1754 about the printing press was really enforced? Particularly after 1759, when there were no Jesuits in Goa who could be feared for using it? Is Pinto's statement drawn from A K Priolkar without any critical checking?

Between Empires: Print and Politics in Goa is one book where a reader can gulp in a wealth of information about the various genres of print production by Goans in Portuguese, Konkani and Marathi. It includes a detailed analysis of a couple of novels in Portuguese (*Os Brahmanes* and *Jacob e Dulce*) and one in Konkani (*Battcara*), revealing the impact of the print as an aid to self-representation and social contestation by different social groups. The author is a promising scholar of her generation in Goa, writing both in the mainstream press and academic journals. No criticism in this review, however harsh it may sound, takes away any merit from this young scholar who has shown extraordinary ability to absorb so much in so many languages in such a short span of time.

The book would need a much more detailed commentary than it has been

possible within the space limitations of this present review. Forced to conclude, I shall refer back to the "omissions" that were so honestly admitted by the author in the preface. One major omission is the 'padroado' (the privilege of patronage extended by the Pope to the king of Portuguese over three episcopal jurisdictions in India) issue. If it was a conscious omission it deserved a justification, because it is central to the Portuguese empire which has been classified in the study, by adopting Pagden's Romanist model of empire, as characterised by Christian universalism. Even after Portugal handed over Bombay to the English East India Company in 1661-65, the strong link of Portuguese Christianity continued, for a couple of centuries before the Goan emigration enhanced its church connection to that region. In the absence of its political influence, the Portuguese tried to sustain its cultural presence through padroado in British India, in an attempt to hang on to its Romanist model of empire within the British colonial empire. If much print was involved in the 19th century in Goa-related issues, it was in the war of pamphleteering for and against padroado, before and after the papal brief *Multa Praeclara* of 1838, involving Goan elites and non-elites from Goa and Bombay in acrimonious debates till about the Concordat of 1950. Beneath the cover of ecclesiastical jurisdiction the real issues were of a cultural-political nature. It is a complex and challenging issue of 19th century print and politics related to Goa, and Goans beyond Goa, drawing in castes, classes and nationalities, elites and non-elites. On that and on the 'East Indians' (also a silenced group in Rochelle's "omissions") we could look forward to further treats from Rochelle Pinto in the very near future.

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