

Amoras and Amores:
The Ambiguities of Colonial Manhandling in
Sri Lanka under the Portuguese

Teotonio R de Souza

The title was inspired by the episode related by Fernão de Queiroz, wherein he refers to a gift of mulberries (*amoras*) the king of Kandy sent to the Portuguese General Manuel Mascarenhas Homem, implying his desire for peace with the Portuguese and a mark of love (*amores*) he entertained for them. Queiroz suggests that the circumstances did not convey the same feelings, and calls the circumstances the essence or 'the soul of History.' Obviously the 'circumstances' or historical context as viewed by Queiroz conveyed ambiguities of relationship, which suggested the subtitle for this essay.¹

João Ribeiro, who reached Ceylon when he was 18 with the new Captain-General of the Island, D Felipe Mascarenhas, and spent 18 years battling for the Portuguese survival in Ceylon did not also believe those who said that Rajasinha of Kandy was willing to welcome back the Portuguese when he began to understand better the Dutch behaviour. He remarked in his *The Historical Tragedy of the Island of Ceylon* that after the Portuguese had burnt and sacked Kandy several times "he would always live ill at ease with us there, whereas he does not have to suffer these punishments from the Hollanders."²

C Gaston Perera in his recent publication *The Portuguese Missionary in 16th and 17th Century Ceylon* (2009) takes up for analysis the contemporary Jesuit version of Fr Fernão de Queiroz and the more recent readings of Fr S G Perera and Fr V Perniola. He sees them as downplaying the implications of violence in repeated complaints of the natives of Ceylon against the ill-treatment they suffered at the hands of the religious, and particularly the Jesuits. These historians seem to see the accusations levelled against the religious as stage-managed by the Portuguese officials whom the religious, posing as protectors of the natives, denounced for their high-handed behaviour

in the villages controlled by them. Gaston Perera takes objection to the ecclesiastical historians, and Fr Perniola in particular, for minimising the missionary responsibility for violence as limited to a few cases. Gaston Perera is certainly not amused by Fr Perniola's logic of distinguishing temples from idols in the historical references to destruction of 'pagodas',³ on the basis of his selection of Portuguese documents.⁴

I have no intention of making this essay a review article of Gaston Perera's book, but I appreciate its merit of reviewing some of the past historiography on the issue of the Portuguese religious conversions in Ceylon and his feelings of revulsion about the colonial manhandling of the 'natives' of Sri Lanka.⁵ It raises the ever relevant issue of defining the key concepts of conversion and force, and conveys an implicit warning that the 16th-17th century colonial actors need not be defended by the modern apologists without taking into account the evolution of those concepts over time. Very interesting are also the questions about the subaltern role of the native clergy and the racial discrimination. Linked with these are the questions about the intellectual arrogance of the colonialists, including the white missionaries. These questions remain very relevant till date, because they continue to challenge the post-colonial studies. Even though the colonial flags have been lowered in most of the former colonies, the 'intellectual arrogance' has turned more subtle after the denunciation of 'orientalism' by Asian scholars like K N Panikkar, Jalal Al-i-Ahmad and Edward Said.⁶

Much of the discussion of the conflicting interests of the local Portuguese officials and the religious has regional parallels throughout the Portuguese colonial presence in Asia and elsewhere, and so is the Jesuit handling of that historical past, with some rare exceptions that confirm the rule and like few swallows do not make a summer. Had Gaston Perera glanced through the Jesuit apologetic literature produced in India till recent times, he would not engage in beating the dead horse and would classify his Sri Lankan clerical apologists as *déjà vue*.

There is the classic apology of Fr H Heras, an early representative of Jesuit historical studies in India, namely his *The Conversion Policy of the Jesuits in India* (1933).⁷ He was apparently provoked by the

accusations levelled against the Jesuits by Boies Penrose in his *Sea Fights in the East Indies in the Years 1602-1639*.⁸ Penrose wrote that “the Jesuits were fanatics, and like all fanatics they did irreparable harm” and that the date of the arrival of St Francis Xavier in India marked the beginning of the decline of the Portuguese power in the East. It was too blunt an accusation for the Jesuit historian Fr Heras to digest. This and other instances cited by Fr Heras in his Introduction, such as Richard Burton’s *Goa and the Blue Mountains*, he classifies as expressions of bigotry and lack of critical capacity for handling historical material. However, for Fr Heras “The Providence of God is a biblical dogma, besides being the first cause acknowledged by the Philosophy of History” (p 56). Among his other pious principles of research methodology, we read that “miracles wrought by St Francis Xavier himself, miracles which the impartial historian cannot but accept,” and “the protection of the State was a new means that God made use of for obtaining numerous conversions” (p 57).

A Rome-based German Jesuit Historian, Fr George Schurhammer, one-time member of the Bombay Province of the Jesuits wrote his masterly 4-volumes on *Francis Xavier: His Life, His Times* filled with erudition and archival information from all quarters, correcting many mistakes of old chroniclers and past histories, but seemed unable to let go the crawling crustaceous that miraculously recovered the crucifix of his saintly hero!⁹

Getting back to the apologetic tradition of the Heras Institute of Indian History and Culture, another Jesuit director of that Institute, namely Anthony D’Costa wrote *The Christianisation of the Goa Islands* (Bombay, 1965) wherein he legitimises whatever violence was involved in the conversion methods as ‘the rigour of mercy,’ a reference to the parable of the Wedding Banquet in the New Testament (Mt. 22), but he prefers to attribute it to Francisco Paes, a treasury official in sixteenth century Portuguese India.

My personal reflections about Jesuit historiography and suggestions for its re-writing may be read in the published proceedings of a seminar that took place in Madurai in 1988 to mark 150th anniversary of the New Madurai Mission of the Jesuits.¹⁰ Therein I had referred to a covert Jesuit ‘superiority complex,’ despite the frequent call of the *Spiritual Exercises* calling for ‘third degree of humility’ from the ‘third

class of men.' I quoted Fr Julio Cesare Cordara, S.J. the last official historian of the old Society and who had witnessed the suppression. The Order "was dearer to him than his eyes," and when he heard the sentence against it he almost fainted, but recovered to write his impressions and analyse the possible causes. He was accused by the Jesuits themselves of exaggerations, of childishness and of being an *enfant terrible*. But the late Jesuit General Janssens cited him in 1946 as 'no ordinary man,' and as well-grounded in the Society's history. Cordara had found two types of causes for the suppression: natural (human hatred and malice) and supernatural (God's will). He believed that the Almighty had permitted it as a punishment for the Jesuit sin, namely the "subtle vice of pride, from which God shrank back." Cordara believed that one day the Society would be revived, but not until "our pride has vanished."¹¹

We feel relieved by Fr John Correia-Afonso, S.J., one of the recent and prominent Jesuit historians and ex-director of the Heras Institute, who published before he died a brief history of the Jesuits in India till the suppression in 1773. He did not fail to admit that the chequered history of the Jesuits in India was characterised by sharp contrast of bright lights and deep shadows. He interprets it as the fate of pioneers who faced new situations and challenges. He concludes his book saying: "Like other pioneers, they have splendid achievements to their credit as well as tragic failures."¹² More honest and radical is one of the former directors of the Xavier Centre of Historical Research in Goa, Charles Borges, S.J. who concludes the Preface to his published doctoral thesis with: "The pages ahead have probed their (Jesuit) story, a story that had its flashes of brilliance, yet one that ended in failure."¹³

To get back to the main theme of this essay, the Jesuit Annual Letter of 1643 referred to the cupidity of the Portuguese of the Mannar fort and the Christians of the country resulting in many tyrannies, wrongs and violence against the native Christians, many of whom wished to leave their lands. It continues by saying that the situation was worse in Jafnapatam where the people preferred to migrate to the lands of the enemy king of Kandy. A Jesuit priest is said to have gone to Colombo to report the situation to Captain-General D Felipe Mascarenhas and asked for redress.¹⁴ The Jesuits also had complaints against the Captain-General who had taken away the revenues that

were payable by the State for the residences in Kalpitiya island. We know that a royal decree dated 10 March 1644 confirmed the grant of villages in the *Disava* of Seven Corlas (to north and east of Colombo and assigned to Jesuit pastoral care) for a period of nine years, plus an additional village of Muncerao (Muneswaram) in the same district, in compensation of four hundred xerafins that were paid to the College of Columbo (Colombo) from the revenues of island of Calpeti (Kalpitiya) that were taken away by the Captain General D Felipe Mascarenhas. The Kalpeti island, located north of Chilaw along the seashore had two Jesuit residences with two resident Jesuits. Between the two they looked after one thousand and odd Christians dispersed in twenty villages in 1644.¹⁵

The real motives for D Felipe Mascarenhas taking away that island from the Jesuits may need further research. Defence considerations could be involved, but some connection with his private business or to favour some business partners may not be ruled out. We know that he was able to win active cooperation of the rulers of Bijapur and Cochin to build galleons for the Portuguese in India, which could be hardly possible without good business links. There are also recorded impressions of the French jewel trader, Jean-Baptiste Tavernier, who reported that he knew no other viceroy half as rich as D Felipe Mascarenhas, who owned some of the best diamonds. Prof Boxer remarks that while Captain-General of Ceylon (1640-45) he was known to friend and foe alike as the *Rei de Ouro* or 'King of Gold.'¹⁶

D Felipe Mascarenhas, who started his term as Viceroy of the *Estado da Índia* while still in Ceylon ordered on 17 July 1645 an inquiry into the complaints of the local populations against the oppressive treatment they received from the hands of the lay and religious Portuguese. The Captain Major Francisco de Seixas de Cabreira was authorised to conduct a six-points inquiry seeking to find out the identity of those responsible for the oppressions, the nature of the oppressions, be it through demanding unwarranted services or fines under threats of physical punishments and private prisons.¹⁷ Incidentally, the viceroy had ordered an investigation in all the land assets of the Jesuits and had found them guilty of misappropriation. They owned about 100 villages in Ceylon, and D Felipe Mascarenhas believed that they put more effort into their fund-raising than into soul-winning.¹⁸ The king thanked the viceroy for the information, but

mentioned that the law against the religious acquiring more properties need not apply to the Jesuits, because they were continuing to do excellent work for the conversion of the people.¹⁹

I do not wish to either contradict or concur with Fr Perniola's comment in a footnote of his Volume III of documents on the *Catholic Church in Sri Lanka* (2nd ed., 2003, p 3666, n.1) expressing his suspicion about the complaints as focusing almost entirely against the religious and hardly any against the Government Officials! (*The exclamation mark is not mine*). This is not entirely true because the very first witness who responded to the inquiry denounced four collectors known to him as exacting more from the natives than was customary, and more such cases follow. As regards the complaints against the parish priests who exacted forced labour and enforced it with private prisons through their beadles, this sort of complaints are not a novelty or exclusive to Sri Lanka. All such types of abuses and others can be read in the documentation related to Goa, the capital of the Portuguese *Estado da Índia*, where strategic conditions permitted a firmer grip and imposition of colonial structures.

I prefer a comparative approach to call the attention of the Sri Lankan historians to the need of contextualising their studies in the wider scenario, rather than considering their colonial experience as unique. By adopting such an approach there will be no reason for exaggerated offensive or defensive postures. The comparative analysis could be then more usefully shifted to the pattern of colonial disciplining, be it through civil or religious institutions, or through a joint-control like that exercised by the Inquisition. The regional variants in different parts of the *Estado da Índia* need certainly to be studied carefully, and Sri Lanka scholars need to do their part, because only the micro-studies can permit us to understand the adaptations that the colonial State and the religious multi-nationals resorted to in different situations.

It is important to take into account that much abuse and misbehaviour of the Portuguese can be explained by the fact that many of those sent to Ceylon were sent in punishment for the misbehaviour in India or elsewhere. Also many of the religious were former soldiers who sought entry into convents for lack of means of sustenance.²⁰ The well-known Jesuit, Gonçalo Fernandes Trancoso,

who denounced De Nobili to the Goa Inquisition was one such case. He took part in the fleet of D Constantino de Bragança in 1560 in the expedition against Jaffna. He entered the Society of Jesus around 1563 in Goa, after passing through the Colleges of Mannar and Cochin. He was later assigned to the Madurai mission of the Jesuits.²¹

A decree of D Francisco da Gama, count-admiral, dated 10 March 1623 referred to repeated cases of unruly militia that showed disrespect to their captains. He confirmed an order issued by the High Court of Goa sanctioning capital punishment for those who were involved in physical brawls and wounding, while all other cases were marked for deportation to Ceylon. This order was made applicable with retrospective effect of ten years.²² But the abuses extended to the higher ranks, including the Generals. A royal order of 6 March 1622 warned the Generals against granting any villages by their decrees or depriving any existing grantee in the same manner. All grants and changes had to be proposed to the viceroy of India and his approval obtained.²³

The increased rate of deportation to Sri Lanka from the early seventeenth century can be understood in the light of the administrative policies that subordinated all the sentences of the High Court or the Inquisition to the political-military needs of the empire. If one looks at the common destination of exiles or punishment to those condemned, it becomes clear that the bulk of the convicted were sent to regions where war-emergencies caused acute need of manpower. The internal wars and the entry of the Dutch into the fray made Sri Lanka one such points of destination from the start of the seventeenth century. Viceroy Aires de Saldanha issued an order in July 1601 warning all the customs officers not to harass the merchants, announcing six-monthly inquiries and threatening those found guilty with exile to Ceylon.²⁴ The sentences of the Goa High Court provide abundant illustrations of this as it can be checked in the volumes of *Arquivo de Relação de Goa* (Nova Goa, 1872-74) edited by José Ignacio Abranches Garcia.

The main reason that had led me to choose 'Goa in the 17th century' as topic for my PhD research was the fact that the Portuguese *casados* had left rural Goa in relative peace until the beginning of the seventeenth century. The white religious had the field day all

throughout the sixteenth century in exploiting the rural resources for their pastoral and other needs. But following the new challenges to the Portuguese maritime trade with the arrival of the Dutch and the English, who emboldened the native rulers too to challenge the Portuguese supremacy, many of the Portuguese *casados* started investing their savings into the rural lands. That is when Goan villagers begin expressing their discontent ever loudly, and were greatly helped in this by some religious pastors, who too begin denouncing the white lay rivals to their exclusive control of rural Goa till then. K M de Silva has some pointers in this direction as regards the situation in Sri Lanka, but it needs further exploration along the lines followed by me in *Medieval Goa*.²⁵

By way of conclusion to this brief essay, I would repeat my suggestion to Sri Lankan historians to contextualise their history into the larger perspective of the colonial experiences of the Asian people, without succumbing to the methodologies of the colonial historiography that sought to reduce the regional histories to episodes of their national-metropolitan histories. The study of Goa under the Portuguese permits to take pulse of what was happening to the Portuguese anywhere in their 'shoe-string empire' (to use an expression of Prof C R Boxer). A look at the complaints registered against the Portuguese *casados* and white religious for their violence against the native populations would no longer shock those who read the results of the inquiry order by the D Felipe Mascarenhas in Sri Lanka. Unlike Sri Lanka and some other colonial spaces, Goa had a regular system of pastoral visitations at work and the Goa Inquisition complemented it to throw light upon the abuses that prevailed all over the Portuguese colonial presence in Asia. Their surviving records provide sufficient sampling for responding to questions raised by Gaston Perera, myself and many others.

The visitations to the Jesuit parishes by Archbishops Brandão and Santa Teresa in the late sixteenth and eighteenth centuries respectively roused hornet's nests when they sought to inspect the title deeds in some of their parishes. Fernão de Queiroz served as provincial in the first case. In the second case the Archbishop favoured replacing the Jesuits with native priests in Salcete parishes. The Jesuits feigned agreement, arguing that parish work was not in keeping with their Institute, but they quickly declined when the State

authorities too were quick to accept their argument. They then referred the defence of their rights to the King, as the Grand Master of the Order of Christ and ultimately responsible for the Padroado.²⁶

The extant records of pastoral visits for Goa in the eighteenth century and later are full of complaints such as those recorded in the 1645 episode in Sri Lanka. In 1755 the parish priest of Chandor (Salcete) is denounced for refusing to attend to the burial of the daughter of a widow who did not have four *xerafins* to pay as burial fee. The funeral was delayed until a charitable person of the village offered to pay the amount on behalf of the widow. The same parish priest is accused for refusing to baptise the child of a poor *kunby* (land labourer caste) until he pawned his hoe to borrow half *xerafim* to pay to the priest. Another priest was accused of drawing up a list of chickens and piglings the parishioners owned on the occasion of the Easter blessing of houses. One parish priest was accused of having beaten up a ganvkar Andre Afonso for refusing to use his plough on the fields belonging to the parish. He had done so because the Fathers paid less than usual rates. These samples should suffice.²⁷

There are also a wide variety of other official records that permit us to have an idea of the intensity of the native annoyance and anger against the treatment they received at the hands of the religious. For instance, the representatives of the village communities of Salcete in Goa, sent a list of complaints to King John IV of Portugal. In it they identified three enemies of the people. Firstly, the viceroys who always require more money for the needs of the State. Secondly, the Ministers of the Treasury, who send the helpless tax-payers from one court to another. Finally, the Fathers of the Society of Jesus are "the toughest of the lot" and even the viceroys do not dare to take them to task.²⁸

As a corollary to my concluding remarks, I wish to suggest to the Sri Lanka historians to look for the *Confessionários*, or the manuals to make a good confession, produced by the early missionaries in Portuguese Asia to instruct their converts.²⁹ Even though till recently none were said to have survived, I chanced upon a few of them in the British Museum Library a decade or so ago. Similar findings for the Portuguese missionary activities in Sri Lanka could provide material for answering some of the issues raised by Gaston Perera and others.

Notes and References

- ¹ Fernão de Queyroz, *The Temporal and Spiritual Conquest of Ceylon*, trans. S G Perera, Vol. I, New Delhi, AES Reprint, 1992, p 945.
- ² C R Boxer (ed.) *Opera Minora*, II, Diogo Ramada Curto, Lisboa, Fundação Oriente, 2002, p 98.
- ³ Gaston Perera, *The Portuguese Missionary in 16th and 17th Century Ceylon: The Spiritual Conquest*, Colombo, Vijitha Yapa Publications, 2009, pp 146-48; Cf. C R Boxer, "A note on Portuguese missionary methods in the East," *Ceylon Historical Journal*, X, 1-4 (July 1960-April 1961), pp 77-90.
- ⁴ V Perniola, *The Catholic Church in Sri Lanka*, III, Dehiwala, Tisara Press, 2003, pp 360-65. Henceforth VP III.
- ⁵ Gaston Perera, like many other former colonial subjects may heartily denounce the colonial vocabulary, but I support the idea of continuing its use and extend it to the former colonial masters so as to give them a taste of their own medicine.
- ⁶ Teotonio R de Souza, "Orientalism, Occidentosis and Other Viral Strains: Historical Objectivity and Social Responsibilities" in *The Portuguese, Indian Ocean and European Bridgeheads* (Festschrift in Honour of Prof K S Mathew), Pius Malekandathil and T Jamal Mohammed (eds), Tellicherry, MESHAR/Fundação Oriente, 2001, pp 452-79.
- ⁷ H Heras, *The Conversion Policy of the Jesuits in India*, Bombay, Indian Historical Institute, 1933.
- ⁸ Boies Penrose, *Sea Fights in the East Indies in the Years 1602-1639*, Cambridge, Massachussets, Harvard University Press, 1931.
- ⁹ I have used the more recent and updated Castillian edition *Francisco Javier: Si vida y su tiempo*, Navarra, Compañia de Jesús-Arzobispado de Pamplona, 1992. Whatever the ideological limitations of the ecclesiastical historians, some of them, including Schurhammer, S G Perera and V Perniola, have done a laudable contribution by providing us with source material that would be otherwise difficult to access. Several modern historians of Sri Lanka, both natives of Sri Lanka and former colonial powers, like Chandra R de Silva, Jorge Flores etc. have followed the clues provided some of these

precursors, even though at times to contradict them. Jorge Flores, in particular, has provided a more extended picture of the Portuguese adventurers which were identified long back by Fr Schurhammer, though not always acknowledging fairly this debt.

- ¹⁰ Anand Amaladass (ed.), *Jesuit Presence in Indian History*, Anand, Gujarat Sahitya Prakash, 1988, pp 14-23.
- ¹¹ J S Cummins, "The Suppression of the Jesuits, 1773," *History Today*, 1973, pp 839-48.
- ¹² John Correia-Afonso, S.J., *The Jesuits in India, 1542-1773*, Anand, Gujarat Sahitya Prakash, 1997, pp 271-72.
- ¹³ Charles J Borges, *The Economics of the Goa Jesuits: An Explanation of their Rise and Fall, 1542-1759*, Delhi, Concept Publishing Company, 1994, p 16.
- ¹⁴ VP III (2nd edition), pp 344-45, 356.
- ¹⁵ *Ibid.*, pp 348-49. Cf. Queiroz, III, 803: The fleet carrying D Felipe Mascarenhas to Goa to take over as new viceroy wrecked on the coast of Kalpitiya, killing several and with the loss of wealth. D Felipe Mascarenhas had to winter in Jaffna and wait for another fleet to arrive. Queiroz mentions that Kalpitiya had a stockade with 10 gun pieces and 30 soldiers (p 1195). He arrived in Goa on Christmas Day of 1645 and entered solemnly the capital city of Goa on the new year day.
- ¹⁶ C R Boxer, *Portuguese India in the Mid-Seventeenth Century*, Delhi, OUP, 1980, pp 28, 40.
- ¹⁷ VP III, pp 365-67. I had the privilege of transcribing and translating the documents from pp 365-451 published in this volume from the original manuscript in the National Archives in Lisbon. It is also my privilege now to comment on those in this brief essay.
- ¹⁸ Tikiri Abeyasinghe, "History as Polemics and Propaganda. Some Aspects of Fernão de Queiroz's *Conquista*," *II Seminário Internacional de História Indo-Portuguesa*, Lisboa, 1985, pp 792-93.
- ¹⁹ José Ignácio de Abranches Garcia, *Arquivo da Relação de Goa*, II, Nova, Goa, Imprensa Nacional, 1874, pp 493-94. The viceroy had given an island claimed by the Jesuits of Rachol to D João Manuel. He also

contested their claim to Assolna, Velim and Ambelim, which were later given to his family man that became Marquês da Fronteira and Count of Cuncolim. It is not surprising if the viceroy gained many enemies and his statue appeared hanged in the public square of Mandovi in March 1648 with a hoarding which declared it to be by royal order.

- 20 Teotonio R de Souza, *Medieval Goa: A Socio-economic History*, Goa, Goa 1556 & Broadway Book Centre, 2009 (2nd revised edition), p 87.
- 21 J Wicki, *Tratado do Pe. Gonçalo Fernandes Trancoso sobre o Hinduísmo* (Maduré 1616), Lisboa, CEHU, 1973. Provides biodata of Pe. Gonçalo Fernandes in the Introduction.
- 22 Abranches Garcia, *Arquivo da Relação de Goa*, I, pp 364-65.
- 23 *Ibid.*, p 296.
- 24 Teotonio R de Souza, "Carreira, escalas e o serviço penal ao serviço do Império," Artur Teodoro de Matos and Luis Filipe dos Reis Thomaz (eds), *A Carreira da Índia e as Rotas dos Estreitos*, Angra do Heroísmo, 1998, pp 597-609.
- 25 Teotonio R de Souza, *Medieval Goa*, p xi; Cf. K M de Silva, *A History of Sri Lanka*, Berkeley, University of California Press, p 125: refers to sudden rush of the *pangu* owners to sell their title deeds. The Government had to intervene to forbid the *salagamas* to sell their lands.
- 26 Charles J Borges, *op.cit.*, pp 95-97.
- 27 Teotonio R de Souza, "The Voiceless in Goan Historiography," John Correia-Afonso (ed.), *Indo-Portuguese History: Sources and Problems*, Bombay, OUP, 1981, pp 114-31.
- 28 Teotonio R de Souza, *Medieval Goa*, App. A-8, p 196.
- 29 Teotonio R de Souza, "Confessionários" or "Manuals of Confession: Missionary tools and their Colonial Uses: The Case Study of Goa," *Goa, Sod: Konkani Research Bulletin*, 9, pp 20-40. Confession was used as an instrument to enforce colonial legislation. Violations were listed as sins to be confessed!