



Sometime in the morning of 25 October, I received an SMS from a friend. The SMS contained the word ‘traitor’, followed by a link to an article in that day’s *Times of India* titled ‘Goan with the wind’. The article, authored by Lisa Monteiro and Andrew Pereira, offered figures and comments on the phenomenon of scores of persons from the former Portuguese State in India (Goans, for the sake of brevity) ‘migrating’ after claiming Portuguese passports. The article itself made no suggestion of traitorous behaviour on the part of these persons, leading to the conclusion that it was not the *facts* that were problematic but their interpretation. Such an interpretation requires that we supplement our analysis with additional information.

There is a suggestion that the migration of Goans holding a Portuguese passport is a unidirectional movement outside of Goa. This is not necessarily true. Goans have been migrating for centuries, whether to East Africa, to other parts of Asia or, more recently, to the Persian Gulf and Europe. Most of these migrations have been marked by a return of these Goans’ earnings to erect the beautiful homes that are today mistakenly marketed as ‘Portuguese’. This is to say that Goan migrations have not traditionally been unidirectional. Rather, they have been marked by a back and forth between the two territories. If contemporary migrations with the Portuguese passport seem to have changed something—and, in fact, it is still too early to judge whether this is the case—then, we need to inquire as to the circumstances that might have led to this change.

What is often overlooked is that the legal landscape that impinges on Goan migration has changed substantially. Yes, Goans have awoken to the fact that they can obtain a Portuguese passport and benefit from the status of the European Union, but the other fact that is rarely commented on is that Indian law has deprived them of their traditional rights. The rush to acquire a Portuguese passport may be a new, decade old, phenomenon; however, at least since the first quarter of the nineteenth century, *all* Goans were formally recognised as Portuguese citizens. Predating this date, too, varying sections of the Goan population were recognised as Portuguese citizens. For example, from the mid-1800s, those paying property taxes were able to vote in the elections to determine who would represent Goa in the Portuguese Parliament. When the Indian army marched into Portuguese India in 1961, the ability to assert this right was lost, and India unilaterally imposed not only its own citizenship

on these Portuguese citizens but also the restriction that they could have only one nationality. This is an odd action for a state that claims to be a liberator. Logically, a liberator only adds to existing rights; it does not take them away. Not Going, Merely Coming

Further, the Overseas Citizen of India (OCI) regime is not really an option for persons who wish to have a continuing relationship with their country. We are often misinformed when told that the OCI card allows for 'multiple entry, multipurpose life-long visa to India, granting...exemption from reporting to the police for any length of stay in India', and that the only restrictions are voting in elections and the purchase of agricultural land. Recent events have highlighted that this is, in fact, not the case. Regardless of OCI status, persons engaged in research in India need a research visa. Further, one needs a business visa to work in India as an OCI. And finally, there is the social life of the law—the manner in which rules are actually implemented. Take the case of Christine Mehta, who, despite possessing a valid research visa, was recently deported from the country, or the case closer home of Saturnino Rodrigues, who in February 2014 claimed that he was prevented by the state administration from carrying out mutation of a property sold to him by an OCI.

Thus, if Goan migration seems to be turning into a one-way exit, it is because of the oppressive legal regime that the Indian state insists on. Goans are not obtaining Portuguese passports; they are merely *reclaiming* the Portuguese citizenship that they have always enjoyed. This is not a situation that most Indians would appreciate, because the British Raj never allowed for natives to enjoy British citizenship. Natives were always subjects, never citizens. A legal regime honest about history would undoubtedly allow for a more dynamic movement of Goans between Goa and other places. Indeed, the ongoing movement for Special Status for Goa should take cognizance of this fact and demand dual citizenship for Goans as an integral part of the Special Status demand.

Subsequent to pointing to the way the legal landscape has changed and impacted Goan migration, it is also necessary to point out the changed social landscape. The TOI article suggested that Goan migration was pushed by 'rising unemployment and an uncertain economy'. This is only part of the equation. Left unsaid is the increasing intolerance in the country, initiated well before the current rise of the BJP, which has made Goans, and especially Catholics, scramble for alternatives, where they will not be made to feel like minorities. Indeed, the fact that the TOI article found it necessary to provide data regarding

the religious make-up of those reclaiming their Portuguese citizenship and forced to give up their Indian citizenship speaks to the vitiated manner in which the matter is being debated.

Not Going, Merely Coming



Nevertheless, what most encounters with those migrating indicate is that the choice to migrate with a Portuguese passport is, in fact, economic. The problem, however, lies not in a lack of employment but in a lack of decent employment. The fact is that in India, and this includes Goa, the salaries for blue collar jobs do not allow for middle class lifestyles and options. While Goans migrating to Europe may be forced to work in sweatshops and live in slums today, the existence of a welfare state in the West, no matter how much under threat, will ensure that their children will have options that they could never imagine in Goa and India.

To conclude, the Goan migration via a Portuguese passport should not be seen as evidence of a traitorous relationship with India. On the contrary, Goans are merely asserting a pre-existing birthright first obtained by their ancestors. Further, if Goans are renouncing Indian citizenship, it is under the duress of the Indian state that refuses to recognise Goa's peculiar legal history. A number of South Asian languages proscribe 'going'—a word that indicates no return—preferring instead, as in Konkani, *yetam* (coming). Given a more accepting socio-legal regime, when migrating abroad Goans would very well be saying 'I'm coming [back]', rather than 'going'.

(A version of this post was first published in the *Times of India*, dt: 3 November, 2015)



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