



Some years ago, while crafting the curatorial note for an exhibition of the works of Goan artists put together by the Goan printmaker Viiraj Naik, and amazed by the breadth of works represented, I was inspired to title the note, and thereby the exhibition, “Goa não é um país pequeno” (Goa is not a small place). The title was derived from the slogan coined by the Portuguese Estado Novo in the face of the anti-imperial nationalist movements that were breaking out throughout the pluri-continental Portuguese State to assert that Portugal was not simply continental Portugal, but all of the Portuguese territories spread throughout the world. The wildly decolonising world did not buy the argument then, but a curious incident about a month or so ago recently revived the memory of the Estado Novo slogan, my reuse in the Goan context, and what it could mean for the Goan’s place in the world.

More than a month ago, the seminary where I was until recently resident played host at lunch to several priests who were rectors, or vice-rectors, of seminaries in various parts of the world. They had come to Rome for a course organised by the Dicastery for Evangelization, formerly known as the Propaganda Fide. There were, among these priests, some from South Asia as well, and seeing people who looked at me, I naturally went to greet them. After a while I realised, however, that the group contained not just Anglophones, but members of other linguistic groups as well. Out of curiosity I asked one of the South Asian priests, “any Portuguese-speaking priests?” I was told that indeed there was one and directed toward him.

I walked toward the visibly ‘African’ priest, and asked him, somewhat timidly if he spoke Portuguese, “*O senhor Padre fala Português?*” He responded in the affirmative, and almost instantly detached himself from the priests he was speaking with me. I realised that the poor man did not speak Italian and had been subject to a course for months now, while barely comprehending what was going on. He spoke French, and no English, and had not had the opportunity to speak in Portuguese for weeks now. It was little wonder then, I thought, that he was so delighted to speak with another Lusophone.

I realised later, however, that this was not the only reason for his delight in meeting with me. The priest, Padre Nito, was Angolan, and currently worked in Moçambique. It turned out that he had not been born Catholic, but had converted to the faith as a young man through an encounter with a Goan priest by the name of Mário Furtado, who had travelled to Angola in the company of another Goan, Dom Altino Ribeiro de Santana, who in July 1955 was nominated the Bishop of the diocese of Sá de Bandeira (now called Lubango) in Angola where he presided as Prelate until he was made Bishop of Beira in Moçambique in 1972. Padre Nito’s conversion to Catholicism, motivated by the shining example of the life, and friendship, of Padre Mário Furtado was not the end of the story; Padre Nito’s parents too converted to the faith and were received into the Catholic Church.

So great was Padre Nito's gratitude to the man who brought him to the faith, that he told me that he had always been on the lookout for a Goan priest in his travels, and had until the day he met me not met a single Goan cleric. That he was able to meet a Goan and speak about his mentor clearly brought great joy to Padre Nito which was palpable.

But there was something in addition to Catholicism that joined the two of us, and this was most certainly the Portuguese language, and culture, that we shared. Speaking animatedly with Fr Nito over lunch, I realised that there were times when our mutual understanding was greater than the camaraderie I might share with a South Asian. This is not to say that I, or other Goans, do not share anything with our fellow South Asians, but that in addition to being South Asian, we clearly *also* share something with the larger Lusophone world which is, unfortunately, a fact that is not sufficiently appreciated.

And so, what do we understand about the Goan-s place in the world from this brief account of my encounter with a Angolan priest ministering in Moçambique? First, while there is no doubt that the Goan is rooted in his South Asian context, he is also very much part of a larger Lusophone world – a world which stretches from Brasil to Macão, places where he might meet people who might share similar experiences with him, or indeed know similar people, and most certainly share a similar history. To return to the theme on which I initiated this reflection, *Goa não é um país pequeno!* Second, the Goan does not exist as some minor subject on the world stage. No! The Goan is a significant player on the global stage, striding as he does the entire canvas of the globe, and with a significant mission; a mission so ably accomplished by Dom Altino, Pé Mário Furtado, and others – let us not forget the saintly José Vaz. In other words, the Goan's place in the world is the bring the light of Christ to all corners of the world. As the motto for the on-going pastoral year of the Archdiocese urges us: Go(a), proclaim the Good News!

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