Abstract: The Legacy of the *Estado da India*

The Portuguese arrived in India in 1498; yet there are few apparent traces of their presence today, ‘colonialism’ being equated almost wholly with the English. Yet traces of Portugal linger ineradicably on the west coast; a possible basis for a cordial re-engagement between India and Portugal in a post-colonial world.

Key words: Portuguese, India, colonial legacy, British Empire in India, Estado da India, Goa.

**Mourning an Empire? Looking at the legacy of the *Estado da India*.**

- Dr. Dhara Anjaria

19 December 2011 will mark the fiftieth anniversary of Operation Vijay, a forty-eight hour offensive that ended the Estado da India, that oldest and most reviled of Europe’s ‘Indian Empires.’ This piece remembers and commemorates the five hundred year long Portuguese presence in India that broke off into total estrangement half a hundred years ago, and has only latterly recovered into something close to a detached disengagement.

The colonial legacy informs many aspects of life in the Indian subcontinent, and is always understood to mean the British, the English, legacy. The subcontinent’s encounter with the Portuguese does not permeate the consciousness of the average Indian on a daily basis. The British Empire is the medium through which the modern Indian navigates the world; he- or she-acknowledges an affiliation to the Commonwealth, assumes a familiarity with Australian mining towns, observes his access to a culturally remote North America made easy by a linguistic commonality, has family offering safe harbours (or increasingly, harbors) from Nairobi to Cape
Town, and probably watched the handover of Hong Kong with a proprietary feeling, just as though he had a stake in it; after all, it was also once a ‘British colony.’

To a lesser extent, but with no lesser fervour, does the Indian acknowledge the Gallicization of parts of the subcontinent. Pondicherry instantly strikes a chord with all Indians, its former Frenchness acknowledged, celebrated, debated, its endurance testified to by the fact of Gallic speaking be-turbaned schoolboys in Lille, actresses of French parentage declaiming their Indian-ness,\textsuperscript{ii} and sustained, also, by the fact of France being a sort of Continental Other to England, - and the fact that it was the French whom the British had to beat to gain the mastery of India.

The Portuguese, the first and the longest-staying colonial power in India, meet no such acknowledgement. They were in India before, and longer, than many honorary Indians- before the British, certainly, but also before that most celebrated of Indian dynasties, those symbols of Indian-ness, the Great Mughals.\textsuperscript{iii} Yet they are, very simply, overlooked, their legacy very often denied.

The World Heritage churches of Goa Velha are firmly classed as Goan in the Indian imagination; the ‘Portuguese’ has been transformed into the ‘Goan,’ made indigenous through the common links of faith, in a way that the ‘British’ has never been. Nobody would dream of calling Simla a town born out of the native genius of Kumaon, for instance; it is decidedly, proudly, emphatically ‘British-built.’ In a similar vein, the story of the dower of Bombay is always narrated with a degree of thankfulness; the Portuguese, it is implied, would never have bothered to develop these malarial islands into one of the foremost cities of the Empire, preferring as they did natural harbours.\textsuperscript{iv}
Christianity is, maybe, the most lasting legacy of the Portuguese in India; but then, as a religious group, ‘Christians’ are viewed in de-nationalised terms, and, very often, the situational context dictates that ‘English’ is often used interchangeably with Christian. The eclipse of the Portuguese as a colonial power was perhaps most evident in London last year. The screaming welcome accorded His Holiness the Pope saw crowds of former colonials lined up to welcome their spiritual head in a country determinedly protestant- it was the Portuguese who should have been thanked for this spreading of the word- but the Indian, the Hong Kong Chinese, the Sri Lankan and the Jamaican all hanging over the railings owed their presence in Hyde Park to the fact of the British Empire. The Estado da India had been very definitely superseded.

A small country lacking in the manpower necessary to hold on to an overseas empire, is how Indian textbooks caricaturise Portugal and its failure to hold onto its Indian Empire; but they fail to mention that miscegenation was supposed to create a class of Indians bound to the colonial power, a Luso version of Rudyard Kipling’s much mocked “University educated native;” but clearly the invasion (or, to use the academic’s term of choice, colonisation) of the body had less impact than the invasion of the mind, and thus it is that the modern Indian from the west coast, the stomping ground of Alfonso de Albuquerque, turns not to Lisbon but to London for spiritual sustenance. Five hundred years of engagement and an unparalleled offer of citizenship to all colonials have resulted in only seventy thousand persons of Indian origin in Portugal, and of these, as the local Indian embassy notes, those with no former colonial connections arrived only once ‘the EU funds started flowing in.’ As to the Portuguese presence in the subcontinent, Indian constitutional procedure reserves two seats in the national Parliament for people of Eurasian descent; tellingly, they are referred to as ‘Anglo-Indians.’ Village communities of the Konkan, that narrow strip of coast on India’s west wedged between the Sahyadri Mountains and
the Arabian Sea, often derived their nomenclatures – but just the nomenclatures- from those of the missionaries responsible for their conversion to Catholicism – ‘Luso-Indian’ is an appellation thus rejected by most Goans.\textsuperscript{x} The two hundred million Portuguese speakers strike no emphatic chord with the modern Indian, except in the context of South-South engagement with Brazil- many more Indians can read Babur or Philip Mason in the original than can read Joao de Barros.\textsuperscript{xi}

This lack of engagement may, of course, be explained away, in the post-colonial context at least, by the acrimonious ejection of the Portuguese from what was after all only a coastal toehold; perhaps to do with the fact that modern Portugal is not a ‘Great Power’ or even a ‘Great Power in Decline,’ the ascendency and the –comparative- decline having run their course a couple of centuries ago. In the Indian defence the ‘Inquisition’ is cited, as are the auto da fe, but the logic that colonial atrocities (on either side) of necessity perpetuate post-colonial bitterness has not held good when it has come to an exegesis of Kanpur (1857) and Jallianwala (1919),\textsuperscript{xii} and there is no reason why it should persist in the Portuguese context.

Part of the problem, is, of course, the comparatively localised presence of the Portuguese in India. It might have taken them almost two hundred and fifty years, but the British established themselves over all India, from Kashmir to Cape Comorin, as they called it; and then some way beyond. Yet while Portuguese non-state actors managed to penetrate the gilded fastnesses of the court of that most powerful of the Great Mughals, Akbar,\textsuperscript{xiii} the Estado da India preferred to maintain a coastal presence. Portuguese ships ranged up and down the coast from Gujarat to Arakan, and were effectively the gatekeepers to all coastal approaches into mediaeval India, but their heyday in India coincided with a time when its focus was turning increasingly towards its land frontiers and peoples and cultures therein.\textsuperscript{xiv} This has largely continued to be the case since,
but *prima facie* this is no explanation for the non-resonance of the Portuguese legacy across the Indian hinterlands; many sites embodying an iconic importance for the Indian living perhaps a thousand miles from the sea are on the coast; Bombay, Dwarka, Kanyakumari for choice.

The most tragic paean to the Portuguese presence is their dismissal in Salman Rushdie’s *Moor’s Last Sigh*. Spain is substituted as the ‘mother country,’ the destination of choice for the escapist Goan Vasco Miranda, over Portugal, because Portugal is finished. The Spanish, however, as a result of the 1494 Treaty of Tordesillas, never set foot on the Indian subcontinent. But this substitution is essential for the novel to work; to obtain a stage foreign yet analogous to that of India’s west coast for all the myriad religious, national, personal and cultural identities evolving throughout the novel. To reconcile Vasco with the larger narratives of Jewish and Muslim India, he has to go to the Alhambra. Moorish Spain is that romantic, globalised setting, the Portuguese, a leitmotif for intolerance. Simply put, the Portuguese were too insignificant to figure as a crucial determinant of identity in this sweeping epic.\textsuperscript{xv}

Yet on the west coast at least, the influence of this other, older empire lingers. The Portuguese presence in the subcontinent is rather more pervasive than the austere facade of Lutyens’ Delhi suggests.\textsuperscript{xvi} Let us enumerate, then, the myriad ways in which the Portuguese presence continues in India. The culinary imports, the staples of contemporary Indian cuisine, are well known, though these may justifiably be classed as inter-colony imports, with the Portuguese having played no more than an intermediary role- that of a *mensageiro*, or what would now be contemptuously styled a *peon* in Indian offices.\textsuperscript{xvii} More deeply absorbed are ideas to do with linguistics and identity; an Indian would recognise unfailingly an English loanword- a book is distinct, from, say, the Hindustani *kitab*, but gifting one to an avid reader for *Natal* to celebrate the birth of the baby Jesus does not occasion any such linguistic pangs; and Indians on the west
coast still struggle to apply the foreign sounding ‘bread’ to their daily pao. And while William Johnson might reasonably be called upon to clarify his ethnicity; Jose Alfonso Correira would in all probability be assumed to be an indigene. Religion, family, the contemptuous ordering about of people- these intimate fields, as opposed to the stiff upper lip business of running an administration, are where the Portuguese left their mark. It would be presumptuous to maintain that people across the world value personal, familial and cultural markers over those of the impersonal, overarching, sometimes even hostile, greater unit of the state and therefore that the nature of the Portuguese legacy in India hints that they were rather more assimilated or accepted than the British. But it is significant that despite never controlling large swathes of contiguous territory, and with a heyday more than three hundred years past, Portugal’s cultural legacy is so assimilated as to be often unrecognised as distinct from the native Indian.

Perhaps the Portuguese came too soon; perhaps they left too late. They had not – nor did anyone else in those days- the wherewithal to make a deep cultural imprint on the subcontinent, the printing presses, the fast P & O ships, the telegraph lines all lying more than a quarter of a millennium in the future, and were confronted by more than a single land based power in its prime, powers whose decadent scions the British were so ruthless in supplanting. They left after the very idea of Empire had been disowned by its most successful practitioners on the Indian subcontinent and elsewhere, and were in fact the last of the powers to leave – to be made to leave, as opposed to at least the semblance of a voluntary withdrawal, a heroic, stubborn- even mulish- last stand which understandably rankled with British India’s successor state. And even this withdrawal, so traumatic for Portugal, was brought about by a concerted offensive lasting all of two days –never mind that it involved an all out push by every branch of the Indian armed forces- for Indians, then, their longest, and most monumental battle against colonialism
had been long fought and won against the power that occupied most of the subcontinent.\textsuperscript{xx} The hegemonic fact of British India impinges ineradicably on any analysis of the \textit{Estado da India}; at the height of their influence the Portuguese controlled merely a string –admittedly defended by a fine fleet- of ports along the coastal strip of western India, barred from advancing inland, even had they so wished, by the scarps edging the Deccan plateau.

In writing this piece too, I have been hampered by my Empire, my frame of reference must always be the British. So this is then an apologia, a call for greater engagement. The post-colonial reconciliation between the former rulers and the ruled has come to pass; what is now needed is the sort of nostalgic appraisal so commonly applied to the Raj, for the \textit{Estado da India} to be accorded the popular recognition due India’s first, most zealous, and most tenacious European colonisers.

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\item Vasco da Gama landed at Calicut in May 1498, and in 1505 Francisco de Almeida was appointed the first in an unbroken line of Viceroy s of India stretching down to 1961. By contrast, it was only in 1526 that Babur conquered Delhi from the reigning Lodi sultans, and 1556 before his grandson firmly established the rule of the House of Timur in Delhi. For a history of mediaeval India, see Percival Spear, \textit{A History of India}, Vol. 2. New Delhi: Penguin, 2001.
\item See, for example, V. K. Agnihotri, \textit{Indian History} (New Delhi: Allied Publishers, 2009), B-277.
\item Rudyard Kipling, \textit{Plain Tales From the Hills} (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), 149.
\item Indian Embassy in Portugal, available at \url{http://www.indembassy-lisbon.org/uk/ind-personorigin.html/} accessed 10 March 2011.
\item Ibid.
\item John Keay, \textit{Into India} (New Delhi: Books Today, 1999), 88.
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The first of the House of Timur to conquer north India, Babur’s autobiographical *Baburnama* is considered a Turki classic; an edition, translated and edited by Wheeler M. Thackston, was put out by the Modern Library, New York, in 2002. Philip Mason served in the Indian Civil Service between 1928 and 1948; *The Men Who Ruled India* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1985[1954]) is an almost lyrical exegesis of the Raj in India, and has been reprinted many times over in independent India. A profile of Mason may be found in the Oxford DNB; http://www.oxforddnb.com/index/71/101071993/, accessed 12 March 2011. The Portuguese historian João de Barros produced the *Décadas da Ásia*, published between 1552 and 1615, a history of the Portuguese in India. A recent edition in electronic form is has been made available by the Comissão Nacional para as Comemorações dos Descobrimentos Portugueses (Lisboa, 1998).

In 1857, at the height of the “Sepoy Mutiny,” the Indian prince Nana Saheb allegedly gave orders to slaughter British women and children whom he had earlier given a promise of safe passage. In April 1919, Brigadier-General Reginald Dyer opened fire on an unarmed crowd assembled for a protest meeting in contravention of a curfew in the Punjab city of Amritsar; estimates of casualties range from 250 to a thousand. It is telling, however, that the last British Viceroy, Louis Mountbatten, was asked to, and did, stay on as the first Governor-General of the Indian republic. A recent, readable account of India’s freedom movement is Biplan Chandra *et al., India’s Struggle for Independence: 1857-1947* (New Delhi: Penguin, 1989).

Frs. Antonio Monserrate, Rudulpho Acquaviva and Francisco Henriques were the three Jesuit priests who were sent to Akbar’s (r. 1556-1605) court at his request. See, for instance, Pierre du Jarric, *Akbar and the Jesuits: an account of the Jesuit missions to the court of Akbar*, translated with introduction and notes by C.H. Payne (London: RoutledgeCurzon, 2005).

Ancient India’s strongest and most influential links were with what is now South East Asia. Following the decline of the southern Indian Chola empire in the thirteenth century, however, India’s centres of reference shifted steadily northward, as attempts to colonise, and well as colonisers, all channelled themselves through the passes in the Hindukush mountains. This focus on Central Asia has been touted as one of the main reasons the Mughals were unprepared to meet the challenges of the seaborne European powers; they had no navy worth the name.

Edwin Lutyens and Herbert Baker were the architects commissioned to design the capital city of New Delhi, after the decision was taken to transfer the capital from Calcutta in 1912. The neo-classical edifices that comprised the capital were completed in 1931. See Jane Ridley, “Edwin Lutyens, New Delhi and the architecture of Imperialism,” in David Kenneth Fieldhouse, Peter Burroughs and A.J. Stockwell, eds., *Managing the business of Empire: Essays in honour of David Fieldhouse* (London: Frank Cass, 1998), 67-83.


The French pulled out voluntarily after the British withdrawal, ceding Chandernagore to the Indian Republic in 1950 and the more extensive enclaves, including Pondicherry, in 1954. The Dutch and the Danish had withdrawn from India in 1825 and 1869; both ceded or sold their territories to the British. For an analysis of the French colonial legacy, see William F.S. Miles, *Imperial Burdens: Countercolonialism in Former French India* (Boulder and London: Lynne Rienner, 1995).

See, for example, P.N. Khera, *Operation Vijay: the liberation of Goa and other Portuguese colonies in India, 1961* (New Delhi: Ministry of Defence, Government of India, 1974). For a Portuguese account, see Francisco Cabral Couto, *Fim do Estado Portugues da India* (Lisbon: Tribuna, n.d.).

The Uprising(s) of 1857 are held by many historians of India to have been akin to a ‘First War of Independence;’ even failing that, the Indian National Congress, the organization at the forefront of most of the freedom movement, was formed in 1885. See, for instance, Vinayak Damodar Savarkar, *The Indian War of Independence* (New Delhi: Rajdhani Granthnagar, 1970 [1908]).