

## C O N C L U S I O N

Before the arrival of the Portuguese, the people of Bassein were the Kolis, Agris, and the immigrants from the North like Samvedi Brahmins, Palshe Brahmins, Somavanshi Kshatriyas, Seshavan Kshatriyas and also some untouchables like Mahar, Mangelas etc.<sup>1</sup> When the Portuguese became the masters of this region, initially this social pattern was not disturbed but when they started religious conversion, the society reflected tremendous changes. There were a few Christians in Bassein called Nestorian Christians before the arrival of the Portuguese. But when the Portuguese started the conversion of the local people from the various castes and creeds, a new class of the converted Christians emerged from the existing social groups. This new class was well-supported by the Christian missionaries.<sup>2</sup> So the society was mainly divided into the two major groups Hindus and Christians. Some of the Hindu families left the place and went to settle in neighbouring Muslim and Maratha areas where they had religious freedom.<sup>3</sup>

Though the people changed their religion, they did not change their occupations. The Christians of Bassein remained mainly cultivators, managing their properties as they had been doing before the advent of the Portugual. The remaining

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1. Garcia da Orta, op.cit., p.342.

2. A.Silva Rego, Portuguese Colonization..., op.cit., p.23.

3. Mss. HAG. Manções, 42-fl.136.

Mss. AHU. India, Caixa 39 D.34.

Antonio Baião, op.cit., p.408.

groups did not change their occupations. The Sheshavanshi Kshatriyas kept their ancestral occupation as toddy tappers. Some of the Kolis who accepted Christianity, did not give up their profession. They never changed their locality. It is a surprising fact that the Kolis who accepted the Christian religion did not accept the Portuguese names like D'Silva, D'Mello, etc., but retained their original names, which generally were given after the peculiarity of their houses.

There were four castes, viz., Brahmins, Vaishyas, Kshatriyas and Shudras before the arrival of the Portuguese as these castes existed right from the ancient period in India. When the Portuguese came to this part, the caste system did not disintegrate. The non-Christian community retained the caste system. There were untouchables even after the Portuguese arrival, who were given localities outside the main villages.<sup>4</sup>

But the Portuguese tried to free the new converts from all kinds of caste distinctions. They made an attempt to abolish casteism among the Christians but they could not get cent per cent success in this direction. The converts retained casteism among themselves. A.K.Nairne is right to note that though the people of Bassein changed their religion, they did not give up the caste distinction because everybody knew which caste he belonged to before conversion.<sup>5</sup>

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4. Garcia da Orta, op.cit., Vol.II, p.342.

5. A.K.Nairne, op.cit., p.149.

Before the arrival of the Portuguese, every social group had a distinct dress of their people. For example, most of the Hindus including Brahmins wore dhoti,<sup>6</sup> Baniyas used a cord around their neck which was called Janave. But the Portuguese did not allow the new converts to continue their old dress. The use of the dhoti was prohibited.<sup>7</sup> They were given new dresses to distinguish them from members of their original castes.

The Portuguese had a tremendous impact on the food and eating habits of the local people especially the Catholics of Bassein. Due to the Portuguese contacts, they started having soup at the start of meals. Though the East Indians of Bombay enjoy soup daily at the start of a meal, the Basseinites have it rarely now, on Sundays, if they cook chicken. Or it is given to the sick person. They prefer mutton or chicken soup only. They cannot go in for a variety of soups. The local Catholics did not know of side dishes made out of vegetable mixed with vinegar. Even vinegar was introduced by the Portuguese. It is used for a variety of pork dishes. Pickles are made of mango, lemon, chillies, etc., mixed with specially made spices and vinegar.

Some Portuguese dishes, which became well-known and very popular among the Christians of Bassein. These are not the regular dishes in daily meals but they are especially prepared for weddings and feasts (festa) or some special

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6. Mss. AHU, India Caixa 39, D.34.

7. A.K.Pryolkar, Don Darvaje, op.cit., p.309-10.

celebrations like Baptisms, First Communions, etc. The first and the most important of these dishes is Vindello, which is made with pork pickled with spices and vinegar. This dish can be kept even for a week without fear of spoilage. It is indispensable at wedding feasts.

Another popular Portuguese dish served at wedding meals is Serpotel. It is made out of the fat of the pig (Toucinho) mixed with its lungs, liver, etc. Even this dish is prepared with vinegar and a special masala, so it lasts for days together. One more Portuguese dish prepared for the Christian wedding in Bassein is Temparato. It is made of the legs, heads and other parts of the pig, mixed with special masala and vinegar. There were two more Portuguese dishes called Moilas and Abafados. The first is made of mutton and potatoes mixed with vinegar and the second is not a special dish but it is prepared for ordinary meals. Though the names of these Portuguese dishes are retained even today, they are spicier than the normal Portuguese food of today.

It is interesting to note that the Bassein Catholics have yet retained the names of the meals of certain celebrations especially wedding. If the people are to be invited for the lunch, they are called for Ceiar meaning the mid-day meal and if they are to be invited for dinner, they are called for Jantar. Both names are of Portuguese origin. The persons who help to serve the food are called Cuidars. The relatives, who participate actively in the wedding are invited for a special treat dinner the day following wedding when they greet

each other. This is called Saudi, the word comes from the Portuguese word saudar. These persons collect a small sum of money from each relative to celebrate this day as the host of the wedding is relieved from the expenditure of this particular celebration. The contribution is collected right from the bride and bridegroom who make the largest contribution. This collection is called Poste and is also an old Portuguese practice.

The people of Bassein wore indigenous dress before the Portuguese rule. But when the missionaries started religious conversions, they wanted to wean away the new converts from their original caste. We have already seen how these new converts were given typical clothes at the time of baptism. The Portuguese completely changed the dress of the converts. The men were prohibited to use the dhoti, which was a symbol of Hindu culture. They started to wear Patalona (Pants) and Camisa (Shirts), Casçaco (long coat) and Calção (shorts). The well-to-do or the rich started wearing Jaqueta (Jacket). The women were given the red Lugade (Sari) and Blusa (Choli). The male used Bota (Shoes) and women Sapato (Sandals). Like real Europeans, the people started to use Meias (socks).

In this way, the people of Bassein accepted European dress. But they were not accepted totally because Portuguese rule in Bassein did not last as long as it did in Goa. Once again when it came under Maratha control, the older people reverted to the dhoti. But they did not forget the red cap given by the Portuguese. Similarly, the woman of Bassein did

not accept the European dresses like Goan women did. They continued with their red lugade (sari) which is retained even today. The portuguese influence in dress continued to a certain extent during the British period but it started disintegrating after Independence. Though the bridegroom and bride wear Portuguese dresses at the time of wedding, they go for local dress after the marriage. We can compare this influence with Goan women. The educated women in Bassein prefer sarees while educated women in Goa prefer European dress. One should not be surprised to see an educated woman in Bassein wearing a Mangal Sutra and Tika which are purely Hindu customs.

Housing in Bassein was not affected even after the arrival of the Portuguese except in the Portuguese fort city of Bassein. There were no storeyed buildings in rural Bassein. The people generally stayed in huts covered with palm leaves and constructed with wood and bamboos. The rich people lived in big houses constructed with stone, lime, wood, etc. There were no church buildings earlier but the Portuguese constructed nine churches<sup>8</sup> outside the fort wall in different places of Bassein. The Christian converts constructed their houses in the vicinity of these churches and the new Christian colonies came into existence. These Christian colonies always had crosses at the entrance of the village, which can be noticed even today.

The Portuguese did not touch the functioning of the village administration. There were village functionaries like Patil, Kulkarni, Deshmukh, Deshpande, etc., who looked after the

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8. R.D. D'Silva, Khristamandire, op.cit., p.132.

day-to-day life of the village. The village Panchayat was the supreme authority in the village administration, as it had been during the pre-Portuguese period. This practice is retained even today.

There were several reasons behind this policy. Bassein was far away from their eastern capital, Goa. Secondly, it was surrounded by the powerful Maratha and Mughal empires and the Portuguese could not risk spoiling their relations with the rising might of Shivaji or the Mughals. Moreover, the Portuguese and Shivaji were quite busy fighting against their enemies. Shivaji was fighting against the Muslims and the Portuguese were fighting against their European rivals.

The village Panchayat sought the help of the government only in the case of revenue collection, justice to a certain level and maintenance of law and order. Though the Sarpanch was the administrative head of the village, the Patil looked after the major problems like law and order. His office was hereditary. Even after the departure of the Portuguese, the office of the Patil retained its importance. But, in independent India, it has lost its importance and the village administration is totally controlled by the Sarpanch and his Panchayat members who are elected from among the people for a period of five years.

Caste distinctions did not change even during Portuguese rule. The Hindu community could not survive without four castes viz., Brahmins, Kshatriyas, Vaishas and Shudras. The Christian converts also did not forget their caste distinctions. The Portuguese could not wipe out the superstition prevalent among the

people. The Hindus worshipped the Pancha Mahabutas while the Parsees worshipped fire. But most of the Parsees ran to Bombay after 1665 when it came under British control, The people always believed in local Bhagats who performed rituals to drive away evil spirits which took possession.

The social interaction among the various local groups was greatly affected by the Portuguese rule. The Portuguese deliberately kept the converts away from the general population. The converts were not allowed to keep any contact with their original community. Moreover, the Hindus started to despise converts as if they had committed a great sin by accepting the Christian religion. The Christian wadis were socially separated from the Hindu wadis.

But the people from different religions did not forget the earlier influence. The Hindus sometimes venerated the Virgin Mary. They regularly attended the yearly festas at some places. The Christians also attended Hindu Yatras. In this way the people were detached religiously but continued their old habits for a very long time. Before the Portuguese, the king or the local authorities did not pay attention to social welfare. But during Portuguese rule, a semi-government body known as Misericordia came into existence. It continued even after 1640, till the Portuguese left Bassein in 1739. But this organisation looked after only the Christians. The non-Christian people could not avail themselves of the facilities provided by the House if Misericordia.

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9. OP. (BP), op.cit., p.160.  
APO, (CR), op.cit., Fasc.III, p.413.
  10. Diogo de Couto, Decada IV, op.cit., p.316.



Slavery in Bassein was the important feature of Portuguese rule. There was no slavery in pre-Portuguese times. But as the Portuguese Fidalgos started to live in Bassein, they needed slaves for their daily routine work. So a new community of slaves came into existence during Portuguese rule. This was a novel thing in Bassein.

The economic impact of the Portuguese rule was quite noticeable. During the pre-Portuguese rule, the landlords were only Muslims and Hindus, and all were local. There were no Christian or foreign landlords. But Portuguese rule in Bassein introduced the foreign landlords in Bassein. The ownership of the land completely changed. During the Muslim rule though the Sultan of Gujarat was the owner of the land and many local chiefs dominated the area, they did not bother to pay anything to their ruler. In fact, the king was not interested in the land. But after the treaty of 1534, when the Portuguese king became the owner of the land, he distributed the villages in Bassein to the Portuguese Fidalgos. Formerly the villages were owned by the Watandars and Mirasdars but these Watandars lost their rights over their Watans as they had been given to them by the kings who were the sole owners of the land. The Watan-dari was abolished during Portuguese rule. The Watandars were changed to Fidalgos who were only Portuguese. In this way, the local landlordships were abolished and a new western system was introduced in Bassein.

Earlier the landlords cultivated the land themselves, employing workers available in the villages and paying them in

advance to work during the monsoon. Now the Portuguese landlords or the Fidalgos were not interested in the cultivation of their lands. They needed only revenue from their properties. So they did not bother to come to their estates and cultivate the land. They handed over the cultivation to the local people who could not work upto the mark. This kind of absentee landlordship had an adverse impact on agricultural produce.

There was no major change in the agricultural products of Bassein when it came under the Portuguese control. Rice remained the main crop. It was produced in abundance that not only was it sent to other Portuguese colonies in India like Goa but also to Africa and other colonies.<sup>11</sup> But the Portuguese did not make systematic attempts to increase the production of rice, even though the sale of rice was the main income source of the farmer. Besides rice, Bassein also cultivated betel leaves and sugarcane.<sup>12</sup> The betel leaves were used for chewing and the sugarcane for producing sugar and jaggery which were important indigenous industries. But the Portuguese introduced certain new fruits to Bassein. They brought varieties of mangoes, custard apples, pineapples, jackfruits, etc., from different parts of the world. Before, these fruits were unknown to Bassein.

When the Portuguese took the possession of Bassein, initially they collected the revenue as fixed in the earlier

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11. Bocarro, Livro, op.cit., p.243-48.

Manuel Godinho, op.cit., p.12.

12. John Fryer, op.cit., p.192.

regime. They did not impose new rules and regulations in the revenue system but tried to introduce certain reforms at different stages,<sup>13</sup> even though they could not abolish the lifelong system of village taxation. During the Portuguese period, village taxation remained same as in earlier regime.<sup>14</sup> Though the Portuguese minted coins in India, the villages could not make the use of them. Village revenue was paid mostly in kind.

There was a drastic change in the commercial activities of Bassein after the arrival of the Portuguese. The new sea routes were open to the markets of Bassein. Formerly the goods purchased by the Arab traders from Bassein were carried to Venice markets and from there they were supplied to the European markets but the introduction of the new Mediterranean route made it possible for the merchants to carry their goods directly to Europe.<sup>15</sup> Earlier the sea routes to the East and Africa were known to the traders of this area but now they could proceed to any part of the World through this new sea route.

The commercial articles also changed with the added voyages of the ships to the Western countries. The exports and the imports automatically increased. The commercial atmosphere of Bassein changed as it became the important centre for issuing Cartazes. Incoming and outgoing ships from the coast of Gujārat

13. Simão Botelho, Tombo, op.cit., p.154.

14. Mss. ANTT, Cod.280, Livraria, 805, op.cit.

15. Louis Philip Thomas, op.cit., p.10.

frequently visited Bassein to get the Cartazes or to pay their dues.<sup>16</sup>

Though timber was available in abundance, it was not used properly. But the arrival of the Portuguese in Bassein completely changed the atmosphere. The timber trade began to flourish very soon. Bassein provided timber to most of the Portuguese colonies in India and it also exported timber to Mecca where the ships were built for the Muslims.<sup>17</sup>

As the result, a great ship-building yard came into existence in Bassein at Agashi. This yard built the ships not only for the Portuguese but also for the British and other people.<sup>18</sup> Bassein became a famous centre for timber and ship-building. But it could not remain as a flourishing centre for long because the Captains of Bassein misused their monopoly of the timber trade and extracted fabulous amounts even from their rulers. So it disintegrated very soon. Ship-building was the only industry which was patronised by the Portuguese in Bassein for some time.

During the pre-Portuguese period, the northern rulers did not take much interest in their distant possessions like Bassein and Thane. So there was no definite system of exchange. Though the Sultan minted coins, they were used in the commercial transactions at the big trading centres and ports. In the villages of Bassein, almost all the commercial transactions were

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16. A.K. Disney, op.cit., p.24.

17. Gaspar Correa, op.cit., p.449.

18. William Foster, op.cit., p.226.

carried out not in cash but in kind. When the Portuguese took over charge of Bassein, they were very interested in minting coins. They even minted coins in Bassein itself for some time.<sup>19</sup> But the coins were not sufficient for all the transactions. The people paid their taxes in kind. There is documentary evidence<sup>20</sup> to show how even in 1570 the people of Bassein paid different types of taxes in kind.

Formerly, there was no organized guild system in Bassein. The artisans were scattered all over the distant villages. They were not known to each other. They saw each other only at the weekly village market. But the Portuguese tried to organise them into guilds. There were no urban markets during the pre-Portuguese period but when the Portuguese developed the fort city of Bassein, they organised a huge market inside the city where the merchants of different nationalities came. The people who lived outside the fort wall also visited this market. The weekly markets of the village continued even during Portuguese rule. In fact, that was the only day for the villagers to buy the articles of day-to-day use and to sell their products to merchants coming from other localities.

There was no drastic change in the system of transportation. The people used bulls to carry their goods to the market. The use of horses and elephants was not so common but camels were used for caravans. Inside the city, the Portuguese

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19. Narayan Bhaskar, op.cit. p.21.

20. Mss. ANTT. Cod.280, Livraria 805, op.cit.

21. Irfan Habib, op.cit., pp.61-62.

used palanquins to move from one place to other but outside they used horses. New sea routes to Western countries as well as links by water to the neighbouring ports like Surat, Cambay, Dabhul, Chaul, Goa, Cochin, etc., were introduced by the Portuguese. Earlier these sea routes were dominated only by Arab merchants and pirates. Now they were open for free commercial activities. There was constant trade among all these commercial centres during the Portuguese regime.

Similarly, private trade was a complete novelty during the Portuguese period. Earlier landlords obtained watan as a token of gratitude for their service to the state. The Portuguese abolished this system. Such persons were promoted as Fidalgos. They were given certain concessions. The government officials like captains and others were appointed only for a limited period. As the Portuguese king was not able to pay their full salaries, they were allowed to have some kind of private trade. This facility was misused by most of the officials which affected the Portuguese trade adversely. This kind of private trade would not have affected the state during the earlier period because the king had no monopoly over the private trade which was absolutely the private affair of the merchants. But the Portuguese king had the monopoly over the trade. So the involvement of his own officials in all sorts of private enterprises proved disastrous to the trade and commerce of the Portuguese Estado da India which resulted in their eventual downfall.