

GOAN OR INDIAN?

A View From The Diaspora

The following excerpts are taken from a political memoir, **Brown Man, Black Country**, by a



John Maximian Nazareth

prominent Kenyan Goan, **John Maximian Nazareth**, edited by his daughter, **Jeanne Maxine Hromnik**, for publication as an e-book by **Goa 1556**. The chosen excerpts reflect the complexities of the Goan identity in Kenya, where Goans were classified

separately from Indians by the colonial administration.

Brown Man, Black Country was first published in 1981 by Tidings Publications, New Delhi. This edition is virtually out of print although copies are still available.

Until 1944, while keenly interested in politics, I had remained a passive spectator ... I had no narrow tendencies to regard myself as a Goan and not a part of the Indian community. In England the Goan in me had receded into the background and the Indian had come to the fore. I could identify myself only as an Indian, for Goa was an unknown, an almost invisible, speck in the vast maze of India. So it had become natural to me to think of myself as an Indian. I was proud of and devoted to India, with all its blots and stains, a subject country then, and I shared the hope that its future would be worthy of its great past.

When Africans criticise Indians for having one foot in India and call on them to integrate (what "integrate" means I have yet to learn) they forget the deep attachment Indians have to India. Though economic necessities or attractions may take him elsewhere, this sentimental, mystic, almost religious attachment makes the Indian forget his present woes or weaknesses in hugging to himself the glories of his past. And so one lingers upon passages such as this by Max Muller speaking before the University of Cambridge in 1882:

If we were to look over the whole world to find out the country most richly endowed with all the wealth, power and beauty that nature can bestow – in some parts a very paradise on earth – I should

point to India. If I were asked under what sky the human mind has most fully developed some of its choicest gifts, has most deeply pondered over the greatest problems of life, and has found solution of some of them which will deserve the attention of those who have studied Plato and Kant, I should point to India. And if I were to ask myself from which literature we here in Europe, we who have been nurtured almost exclusively on the thoughts of Greeks and Romans, and of one Semitic race, the Jewish, may draw the corrective which is most wanted in order to make our inner-life more perfect, more comprehensive, more universal, in fact more truly human a life, not for this life only, but a transfigured and eternal life – again I should point to India.

And the Indian, however critical he may be of India when she pays no heed to his needs, when she renders no help to him in his distress, yet fondly lingers on this tribute of Romain Rolland nearly half a century later: "If there is one place on the face of the earth where all the dreams of living man have found a home from the very earliest days when man began the dream of existence, it is India." Thus it is that Jawaharlal Nehru testifies to the love that India's children abroad bear her, though they may give their full allegiance to the lands where they have made their homes: "For she is very lovable, and none of her children can forget her wherever they go or whatever strange fate befalls them."

I, too, shared in this attachment to India and regarded myself as identified with the Indian people.

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I was born in the heart of Indian Nairobi, on River Road, in a wood and iron house, on February 21, 1908. I retain but a dim recollection of life in that house, mainly of being dangerously ill with typhoid in a one-room upper storey and of having a European nurse to tend me. I was the third son, the fourth child. Of the eight of us, only my eldest sister was born in Goa. The rest of us were born in Nairobi.

My father, Joaquim Antonio Nazareth, had come out to what was then called the East Africa Protectorate in about 1900, being brought out by his younger brother, who was a Railways clerk. By 1908, I believe, my father and my uncle, R.A. Nazareth, had attained considerable prosperity. They had a well-known firm, J.A. Nazareth & Bro. or Nazareth Bros. They owned in their days of affluence a shop, a bar, a hotel, and they had also the Railways catering contract. What else they had I do not know; much of the little I know about such things I have learned from my eldest sister in later years.

In, or soon after, the First World War my father and my uncle lost their money and ended up bankrupt. Earlier, my uncle was a member of the Nairobi Town Council, defeating in the election Dr. R.A. Ribeiro, who was then, I believe, Nairobi's only Goan doctor. In 1917, my uncle moved to Mombasa, my father remaining in Nairobi. The causes of their bankruptcy were the large amount of bad debts they accumulated of British officers and soldiers, pilfering by staff, borrowing from money-lenders who charged exorbitant interest (probably on promissory notes signed in blank and, possibly, at times when the signatories were the worse off for drink) and poor attention to detail. My father was a gifted organiser and a strong personality. Lack of education in English, however, was a handicap.

The Kenya in which I was born had already been infected by the virus of racial prejudice and had already become the scene of racial conflict, with which I was later to become intimately connected. As Marjorie Ruth Dilley tells us in that excellent book of hers, *British Policy in Kenya Colony*, "Even before there was a concerted attempt to colonize East Africa, an organisation, the Colonists Association, was formed in 1902 to save the Highlands for White Settlement (p.36). She continues:

Their policy led to Indian demands for equality of treatment. In April, 1906, a mass meeting of Indians, called by Mr. A.M. Jeevanjee, was held in Mombasa, to consider their rights and to protest against discrimination. [...] It was decided about that time "that land outside the municipal limits roughly lying between Kiu and F. Ternan, can be

only given to white settlers." [...] Once secure in the Highlands, the Europeans objected to Indian landholding in any part of the country. The Land Board in 1907 resolved against allowing Indians to take Government land. (Dilley 1937:142)

About 1913, our whole family, except my father, left for India. That was felt to be necessary as schools here were almost primitive. My elder brothers were put into St. Mary's High School in Bombay, a Jesuit school, where I joined them two years later, in 1916. For part of those two years I attended a Portuguese primary school in my village, Moira, in Bardez, Goa. People imagine that all or most Goans know Portuguese. Very few do. I myself acquired none. The only Portuguese I can remember being taught was to read Portuguese words, each word longer than the one before, without the slightest inkling of their meaning. Konkanim, the native language of Goa, I learnt from my mother. I have not forgotten the Konkanim I learnt then.

Our house in Goa was one of the largest and best in our village. Goans abroad made it a point of honour to build the best house they could afford in their village. Goa was sprinkled with uninhabited houses or ones whose sole occupant was often an aged mother or aunt of the owner. Now, in the 1970s, with the Asians being squeezed or kicked out of East Africa, life has been returning to many of these forlorn homes. Earlier, there was no question of getting rent for them. Rather, you had to pay people to live in them. Goa was then living largely on earnings of her sons abroad, driven to leave Goa for lack of opportunities at home. My father and uncle followed the general example, and my grandmother, their mother, lived in that house, all alone, till she died.

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In a PhD thesis, *Caste and Club: A Study of Goan Politics in Nairobi*, which has received, I believe, considerable circulation, and which has been seen by people who can easily identify me though I am not mentioned by name, and in which my career in Indian politics has been briefly described, it is said:

In his career as a Goan politician, within Indian communal organisations, this man, like any outsider, had no permanent political following upon which he could depend for election to the various offices in which he was interested. He achieved elective office in these organisations due to divisions within the Indian community. For example, he became an office bearer in the Indian Congress as a result of divisions between Muslims and Hindus

...

This is unfair to the Indian community and betrays a complete misunderstanding of my rise in Indian politics and of my dissociation from Goan politics. In fairness to the Indian community and myself, I must correct this misunderstanding.

My friend and benefactor Thome Emar De Souza, when I arrived in Kenya in 1934, had advised me, on account of the bitter quarrels then rife in the Goan Institute between Dr. A.C.L. De Sousa and his opponents, to steer clear of Goan politics. I felt this was good advice and I faithfully followed it until 1946, when I felt forced to come forward after Dr. De Sousa's exit from Indian politics in 1945 to oppose his campaign to form an East African inter-territorial organisation for Goans alone, taking the Goans out of the Indian community, so that Dr. De Sousa could thus get appointed by the High Commission to represent the Goans on the Central Legislative Assembly proposed to be constituted under Colonial No. 191.

When I was elected honorary general secretary of the Congress [the East African Indian Congress] at the 18th session in September 1946 it was not as a compromise candidate between Hindu and Muslim competitors for the office. I believe I was chosen simply because I was regarded as the most suitable man for the job. Several Muslims were elected at that session: Dr. A.H. Ismail (vice-president, central area), Haroon Ahamed, (honorary assistant secretary), G.K. Ishani (honorary assistant treasurer), F.K. Sethi (on the executive, from Nairobi) and K.R. Paroo (on the executive, from Mombasa).

By the time of the 19th session, in August, 1948, after the partition of India and the division of the

sub-continent into India and Pakistan, the Muslims were already out of the Congress. There was not a single Muslim elected as an office bearer to the executive. There were no Muslim aspirants for these places. So when I was elected vice-president for the Central Area, I was not a compromise candidate between Hindu and Muslim aspirants for the place. In fact I was the only Goan, the only Christian, who was an office-bearer or on the executive committee. But I did not feel out of place at all, the only non-Hindu out of 21 office-bearers and executive committee members.

And when I was elected president, it was an unopposed election with no question of the Congress having to choose between a Hindu and a Muslim. There were no Muslims who sought to be chosen. They had left the Congress by 1948. I felt myself entirely one with the other Indians in my political approach. It was in England as a student that I had come to identify myself with the general body of the Indian community and to regard the Goans as a part of it, like the Gujaratis, Punjabis, etc. but not so fully integrated in it.

Nor did I feel it at all necessary to disassociate myself from or keep out of Goan politics because of my connection with and active participation in Indian politics. I had right from the day of my return to Kenya kept far away from Goan politics, for the reasons I have mentioned. Even when the Goan Gymkhana was founded in 1937, although the great majority of my friends or associates were in that club, I refused to join it as a founder member and only became a member a year or more after its foundation. And from first to last I kept out of its meetings and refused to stand for office, though I did, when asked, give such advice or help as I could as an advocate.

... And when I stood for election to the Legislative Council in 1956 my position as a member of the executive committee of the Congress did not lead me to increase or decrease my dissociation from Goan politics. I felt it unwise to increase my association with the Goans during the elections (to allow a false image of me to develop as being narrowly identified with the Goan community would have been unwise), but I did not move away from Goans either. I just stayed put. END