

A Very Influential Mombasa Goan Pioneer:

‘Diogo Luis Pereira’

(by Marci Pereira – Project: ‘Archiving Memories of Mombasa Goan School/Sacred Heart School’

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Bwana Kubwa: Diogo Luis Pereira

Introduction

Introduction: During my work on the ‘Archiving Memories of Mombasa Goan School/Sacred Heart School’ project, one key interest for me was to try and find out *when and which Goans*, first appeared on the ‘Mombasa scene’. As to the question: ‘*What brought Goans to Mombasa in the first place?*’ - the answer must invariably be the same as that, of our own forefathers – for decent earnings and occupational and business opportunities to sustain themselves and their families. I was also curious to know, *when the idea for a Goan school in Mombasa (or Kenya), was first mooted, and by whom.*

Although not related, my namesake, ‘***Diogo Luis Pereira***’ featured prominently a few times in my research, as a very influential pioneering Goan. As we will see herein, he was truly prominent in ***Mombasa Goan history***, being directly instrumental in establishing the Congregation of the ***Holy Ghost Fathers*** in Kenya and was also the founder of the ***Mombasa Goan Institute***. It was the ***Holy Ghost Fathers*** that built the ‘*Mombasa Diocese*’ and local ***Holy Ghost Church***, we all remember so well, during their expanding missionary activities. Furthermore, my research shows that the list of founders/benefactors /donors that helped to establish the ***Mombasa Goan Institute*** was almost the same, down to the last name, as those that helped to found the ***Mombasa Goan School***. So, by implication, our community is also indebted to ***Diogo Pereira***, for the establishment, indirectly may be, of the ***Mombasa Goan School*** too.

The above picture of ***Diogo Luis Pereira***, extracted from the ***Mombasa Goan Institute’s*** Centenary brochure (2001), certainly bears him out as being a dignified and distinguished gentleman and every bit the ‘***Bwana Kubwa***’ (***Big Shot***) that he was known to be addressed as. The following findings will bear out what an eminent role he played in our community history in Mombasa.

To me, the Catholic Church and Christian Goans, resemble the attraction of magnets. In my experience, whichever city one travels around the world, if you would like to know if there are Goans resident there, the first place to check out, is the local Catholic Church at Sunday Mass. Interestingly, as we shall see later, the Catholic Church in Zanzibar and Mombasa, appear to have gained a foothold there through having located and associated, with local Goans, in the first instance.

Those of us raised in Mombasa, will vividly remember the close political, administrative, cultural and religious links that existed between the ‘*Ten-Mile Coastal Strip*’ of Kenya and the ***Sultanate of Zanzibar***.

'Holy Ghost Fathers' & 'Holy Ghost Church' in Mombasa

Again, many of us will know of the 'Holy Ghost Church' and its affiliation to the *Holy Ghost White Fathers*, from Ireland. Our Spiritual Director at the school, during my time (1950s), was *Father William O'Neil*, of that congregation. Other names that come to my mind from my boyhood years are: *Bishop McCarthy*, *Bishop Eugene Butler*, *Fr James O'Brien*, *Fr Farrelly*, *Fr Connelly*, *Fr McVicar*, *Fr Patrick McCambridge* and *Fr Francis Comerford*. Having been an altar boy, we were usually the first to make acquaintance with these new arrivals by sea from Ireland, as they almost always celebrated their first Mass on Kenyan soil, at the *Holy Ghost Church*, in Mombasa, before taking up their postings inland.

The reason for drawing in these references to *Zanzibar* and the *Holy Ghost Fathers* is because of the rich source of information I encountered in my research, that derives from the history of the *Holy Ghost Fathers* in establishing missions, first in *Zanzibar* and later on, the Kenyan Coast, via Mombasa. Their *Journal*, entitled: **"Mombasa Mission 1888 – 1990" by Father Edward Corcoran** has yielded valuable documented historical information in this instance, in regard to the pioneering Goan community in Mombasa. It appears *Fr Edward Corcoran*, was a contemporary, although he may have surfaced after my term as an altar server. In all likelihood, the first time, readers would have come across his name, would have been in December 2018 when I released the research findings by him, entitled: *"Story of the Portuguese Cross in Malindi, Kenya"*, which made reference to *St Francis Xavier* having stopped over in Malindi, on his way to Goa, India, in 1542.

Further to the release of that piece, I was delighted to have received a response from ex-student *Yvette (née Faria) Pronk*, who finished school in 1961, now living in Australia, commenting as follows:

" As it so happens, Eddie Corcoran was a close friend of mine. He was Rector of a Boys Junior Seminary in Kwale which was some 12 kms away from Matuga Girls High School across the Likoni ferry where I cut my teeth as a young teacher. He was a wizard at converting a bunch of people into the most sonorous choir and did that with school choirs and adult groups. I sang in his choir for several years and was in close contact with him until I migrated to Australia in 1974 after which sadly contact with him petered out. I learned that he moved to Nairobi where he passed away."

How about that? One of our own ex-students having known *Fr Corcoran* personally and sharing a cheering insight into the illustrious man himself?

I am sure, like me, most ex-students would have assumed that the *Holy Ghost Fathers* (who incidentally, are now known as **'The Spiritans'**), had their headquarters in Ireland. I learned via this research, that they were indeed founded in Paris, France, where their motherhouse is based. Most of the priests we encountered in Mombasa, came from the *Irish Province* of that congregation, which made sense, as they were English-speaking and therefore assigned to English-speaking territories.

Zanzibar – First 'Holy Ghost Fathers Mission' in East Africa

A brief prelude into the *Holy Ghost Fathers* and how they came to establish themselves in East Africa, will be useful at this stage, in seeing how their missions unfold first in *Zanzibar* and later in Mombasa. Being a French order, they were already well established in the French island of **Reunion**, in the Indian Ocean. The following extracts from the *Journal: "Mombasa Mission 1888 – 1990" by Fr. Eddie Corcoran*, will thread together a meaningful picture in this context.

Extract 1:

“...In 1860, Monsignor Armand Maupont, Bishop of the Diocese of St. Denis on the island of Reunion in the southern waters of the Indian Ocean, which was entrusted to the Holy Ghost Fathers, was to spearhead the missionary movement northwards to the island of Zanzibar off the East Coast of Africa. At this time Zanzibar was a sovereign state ruled by an independent Arab Sultan, Said Majid. The Sultan was both civil and religious ruler whose authority extended far into the mainland. Zanzibar as well as Bagamoyo, and to a lesser extent, Mombasa, further north, was the end of the road for the notorious slave caravans from the interior.

News of the dreadful conditions of the poor, emaciated and half-dead slaves who managed to survive the dreadful journey reached Reunion. Monsignor Maupont decided he must do something to help them. He sent his Vicar General, Fr Armand Fava, to investigate the situation in Zanzibar with a view to opening a mission there. Fr Fava was a diocesan priest, who, along with other priests of the time destined to work in the French colonies, had followed his studies for the priesthood at the Holy Ghost Seminary in Paris.

Fr Fava arrived in Zanzibar on Christmas Eve, 1860 accompanied by two other diocesan priests, six Sisters of the Congregation of the Daughters of Mary and a naval doctor. The only Catholics to be found, at quick notice at least, were five Goans!!!. Fr Fava celebrated Midnight Mass with this little flock, setting in motion a missionary movement which over the years was to take on major proportions resulting in the flourishing Church of present-day East Africa.”

Holy Ghost Fathers’ Missionary Attention on Mombasa

With their mission in Zanzibar, called “*Providence*”, proving a huge success (ask anyone raised in Zanzibar about *St Joseph’s Cathedral* or *St Joseph’s School*) it would be a full 25 years later, that the *Holy Ghost Fathers* in Zanzibar, set their sights to evangelising in Mombasa. Mombasa, with its large harbour and its strategic coastal position along with its rise to power as “the second part of Zanzibar” as one writer put it, also presented itself as an obvious site for a mission.

In 1885, *Monsignor Raoul de Courmont* sent out *Fr Alexander Le Roy*, on an exploratory expedition. Then in 1887, he decided to see Mombasa for himself.

Mombasa, then, came under the sovereignty of the *Sultanate of Zanzibar* and through a special agreement, was being administered by the ***Imperial British East Africa Company (IBEAC)***, whose Managing Director in Mombasa, was ***George McKinnon***. I vaguely remember his imposing statue in the park just in front of the old Mombasa Post Office, beside the Cable & Wireless Office, during my time there, in the period 1941 to 1963. I recall too that the Mombasa vegetable and fruit market was known as ‘*McKinnon Market*’ then, probably named in honour of this Managing Director of IBEAC.

Monsignor de Courmont’s interest in starting a mission in Mombasa got a massive boost in the form of an introductory reference letter from *Colonel C. B. Euan Smith*, British Consul and Agent for IBEAC in Zanzibar. This letter provides a fascinating insight into the impressive accomplishments of the *Holy Ghost Fathers* in Zanzibar. In his letter of recommendation, *Euan Smith* requests that every assistance possible be given to the “*French Fathers*” who wished to open “*a branch of their Zanzibar hospital that has been productive of such great and extended good*”. He lavished praise on the missionaries as follows:

Extract 2:

“... I recommend this project to your hearty good will and practical support with the utmost confidence ... The tact, wisdom and practical good sense which have always characterised the administration of the French Mission; the care taken by them to keep absolutely aloof from politics or political entanglement of any description; the excellent and cordial relations which they never fail to establish and maintain with all classes of the native community; the real practical good which has always resulted from their labours – all these considerations render it, in my opinion, certain that the I.B.E.A. Company and the native communities now committed to their charge cannot fail to reap the greatest present and future benefit by the establishment in their midst of this mission whose efforts hitherto have met with so signal and so well merited success.”

Unmoved by this outpouring of lavish praise for the proposed project, *George McKinnon* replied that the *I.B.E.A. Company* intended establishing its own hospital in Mombasa for their employees. Unperturbed, *Monsignor de Courmont* thereupon suggested that he provide Sisters as nurses to assist the Company’s doctors.

1887: First Reference of a School for Goans in Mombasa (or Kenya)

Having used the thin end of the wedge, in his response to *Mr McKinnon*, *Monsignor de Courmont* then went on to say that he could also provide:

Extract 3:

“...a church or a chapel and a little school which would be appreciated by the Company’s employees”. He mentions Goans working for the company in Mombasa, pointing out that the Goan population in Zanzibar had increased from less than ten in 1860 to between three to four hundred in the eighties – precisely because they knew of the presence of a Catholic Church and school there.”

[• **Noteworthy Observation:** This is the first documented reference I found that makes specific reference of a **‘School for Goans’**, anywhere in Kenya. **Bear in mind, that was in 1887!!!** Note too, the founders of the first Goan school in Kenya– **‘Dr Ribeiro Goan School, Nairobi’**, which opened in 1931 – namely, *Dr Rosendo Ribeiro* and *Dr ACL De Souza*, were not even in Kenya in 1887. *Dr Ribeiro* arrived in 1899 and *Dr ACL De Souza* in 1915. To get to Nairobi, they would have passed through Mombasa and most certainly become acquainted with the early Mombasa Goan community and learnt of their accomplishments and ambitions, then. In all probability, they would have learnt of the proposition forwarded by *Monsignor Raoul de Courmont* to build a chapel/church, a clinic/hospital **and a school**, for the growing Goan community.

‘Mombasa Goan School’, on the other hand, was founded a year later after the *Dr Ribeiro Goan School*, in 1932. **Why did it take Mombasa Goans, 45 long years, after that proposition by Monsignor de Courmont in 1887, to have its own school for Goans and other Catholics? That is an intriguing story in itself, which is reserved for a subsequent release.]**

From the foregoing history of the *Holy Ghost Fathers*, we see that they had clear plans of replicating their Zanzibar success, in Mombasa, in acknowledgement of a fast-growing Catholic population there. Furthermore, we see, that they were well acquainted with the Goan community in Zanzibar already. In keeping with their accomplishments in Zanzibar, their plans for Mombasa included: a) Opening a hospital b) Supplying Missionary Nurses c) Opening a church/chapel d) Establishing a school.

Historical Records of Holy Ghost Fathers' encounters with 'Diogo Luis Pereira'

Extract 4:

*"Armed with formidable support from Protestant British, Muslim Arab and Hindu (Baniani) businessmen", Monsignor de Courmont was ready for Mombasa. **The year 1889 saw the beginnings of Mombasa's first Catholic Mission in town.** It began with the driving force of **Father Alexander Le Roy** described as "... one of the greatest Holy Ghost missionaries of both East and West Africa".*

"In June 1889 Fr Le Roy came to Mombasa and stayed for five months, making as his base the home of Mr Nurubhoy Adamjee. He found about fifty Catholics in the town, mostly Goans, Malabars and Bangalores, employees of I.B.E.A. Company. During his stay, he travelled extensively for lookout for possible future mission sites: 'Malindi - which seems to have a future', and where he bought two houses, both of which were later burnt down – by accident or intent we are not told....."

It was during this period that the first baptism in Mombasa was recorded. On August 14th 1889, Fr Le Roy baptised Maria, the infant daughter of Diogo and Natalia Pereira – a couple who figure a lot in the later pages of the Mombasa Journal....."

*"..... After all this scouting around, Fr Le Roy finally came to settle in Mombasa in September 1891, accompanied by Brother Simplicien Dubat, to establish the mission. His devotion to Our Lady has already been noted, and in his journal he takes pains to point out that they left Zanzibar on September the 8th, the feast of Our Lady's Birthday, and arrived at Mombasa on September 12th, the Feast of her Holy Name. **They took up residence in a house on Njia Kuu, bought from Mr Pereira whom we have already met, which had a little piece of land attached to it 'which could eventually become a garden'.***

*"There is a story that he came disguised as an Ethiopian to allay fears of a Christian take over in the Old Town but there is no documentation to substantiate it. **The first Mass was said the following day. Most of the Goans, hurriedly alerted, attended with great joy, and Le Roy notes in the Journal - The Mission of Mombasa appears to have started"**.*

*"The first week was spent '... visiting the Catholics and local authorities, and we received a perfect welcome from all'. Fr Le Roy, Brother Simplicien, and two Children of the Mission from Bagamoyo, Angelo and Marcel, set out getting the house into shape – no easy job as they soon discovered: 'Our house is in a miserable state. To find a chapel and living quarters which would be more or less passable, everything must be remade, arranged or done away with – walls, doors, windows, rooms etc'. **While these renovations were going on Mass was offered in Pereira's house.**"*

“What was the Mombasa of Le Roy’s time like? It was part of the Sultan of Zanzibar’s Ten Mile Strip leased to the British and managed on their behalf (until 1895) by I.B.E.A. Company. It was an almost completely Arab town. Apart from English Protestant missionaries of the Church Missionary Society (CMS) and the employees of the Company, there were no other Europeans on the island. A number of Indian and Goan traders had shops and residences on Njia Kuu, such as Mr Pereira and a Mr M.R. do Souza whose grocery store became a meeting place for the Europeans and which became known as ‘The Club’. The other inhabitants were Africans of various tribes, Swahilis and Baluchis (mercenaries employed by the Sultan to man Fort Jesus) ..”

Marci Pereira’s Observations and Commentary

1) The first mention of **Diogo Luis Pereira** in the *Holy Ghost Fathers Journal*, appears at the christening of his infant daughter “***Maria***”, on 14th August 1889, by *Fr Alexander Le Roy*. Note, we learnt of *Fr Le Roy*’s deep devotion to the *Blessed Virgin Mary*. Hence, the choice of the *Feast of the Assumption* for baptising *Maria*, is no sheer coincidence I feel. Furthermore, the choice of the name ‘*Maria*’ for the infant, would have certainly cheered him in this regard.

There is no mention of where this baptism was held. Judging by the foregoing, in all likelihood, it must have been at the home of ***Diogo Pereira*** in ‘Njia Kuu’, as there was no chapel or church in Mombasa in 1889.

2) *Fr Le Roy* is said to have spent 5 months in Mombasa in 1889, scouting around the ‘Ten-Mile Strip of the Kenyan Coast’ for the best location to start their mission. They looked at Malindi, Lamu, a stretch along the banks of the Tana River, amongst others and eventually settled for Mombasa, **where they purchased a house from Diogo Pereira, in Njia Kuu. This purchase will probably have taken place between his exploratory visit in 1889 and 1891, when Fr Le Roy is reported to have finally returned to settle in Mombasa on 12th September 1891 and took up immediate residence of the house on arrival.**

We see too, that the newly acquired house was in no state for immediate occupation for it required major reconstruction and refurbishment as described by *Fr Le Roy*. In the meantime, it would appear that they depended on the benevolence of ***Diogo Pereira***, who offered his home for the celebration of Mass whilst that renovation was going on.

3) Note, it is that ***Diogo Pereira***’s gesture of selling a property to the *Holy Ghost Fathers*, that historically laid the foundation of their “Mombasa Mission” in 1891. In reading the *Journal*, one cannot escape the massive impact made by ***Diogo Pereira*** to the *Holy Ghost Fathers Mission* in Mombasa. As with the Goan community, he was a key figure to the Catholic community of the day. That acquisition of a humble house, proved to be ‘***The Acorn***’ that produced a gigantic ‘***Oak Tree***’ in the history annals of the *Holy Ghost Fathers* in Kenya.

For me, it was the Baptism of ‘***Maria***’, the infant daughter of ***Diogo Pereira*** in 1889, that symbolised the beginning of the *Holy Ghost Fathers Mission* in Mombasa.

4) It was providential that the *Holy Ghost Fathers* discovered ***Diogo Pereira*** in Mombasa. As they were all men of the Catholic faith, there would have been some rapport and understanding between them. Also, apart from purchasing the property from him, his very status and stature in Mombasa society, would have provided an impetus to their wider plans for ‘The Mission’. As an established businessman and property owner in Mombasa, he would have been the ideal ‘consultant and advisor’ to the *Holy Ghost Fathers* on all manner of important matters: engagement of builders/constructors, supplies of provisions and other essentials like building materials, planning issues, financial advice, liaising with local authorities, etc.

5) We are informed in the *Journal* that there was a small Catholic community of about fifty or so, in 1891 in Mombasa, mainly: “Goans, Malabars and Bangalores”, who were generally employees of IBEAC. Assuming at least half of these were Goans, that puts into perspective just how small our community was at that time. Historically, these employees were single menfolk, recruited by the Company and expected to leave their wives and families back in India. It is noteworthy that **Diogo Pereira** had his wife **Natalia** with him and they gave birth to **Maria**. Presumably, being a successful independent businessman, he had the ‘liberty, choice and means’ of having his family with him. This would also make them one of the first Goan families in Mombasa.

6) The *Journal* graphically illustrates the immense hardships, frustrations and near despair these early missionaries encountered in establishing a mission in Mombasa. The *Holy Ghost Fathers* record deep despair at the lack of true evangelisation of the “Native Population”, be they liberated slaves or locals. It took several years before they began to reap the harvest of their hard work. They reckon their fortune changed, on the establishment of the **Makupa Parish** (*Our Lady of Perpetual Help*) in **1930!!**. Do we know Makupa? By heck, half our schoolmates were from Makupa during my time, bussed to and from the school located in Ganjoni.

7) It is comforting to note however, that despite all the challenges and obstacles they confronted in building their *Mission*, they succeeded in developing a truly vibrant and solid local church that served as a springboard for evangelisation all along the Kenyan coast and the hinterland. As *Fr Corcoran* put it: “...it is their deep faith and trust in God’s providence which kept them going.”

8) That *Journal* by *Fr Corcoran*, was published in 1997. It was written to chart and document the 100-year plus history (1888 to 1990) of the *Holy Ghost Fathers* in the ‘**Mombasa Diocese**’. Much of *Fr Corcoran*’s research material was derived from the archives of their mother-house in Paris, which comprised of documented correspondence, diaries, journals, records, etc of the missionaries themselves. That is why I found their research evidence so much more meaningful and easier to assimilate, for we were close to the *Holy Ghost Fathers* ourselves, and they to us, during my time in Mombasa.

9) We saw how when *Fr Le Roy* arrived in Mombasa in June 1889 there were only fifty or so Catholics: “mostly Goans, Malabars and Bangalores, employees of I.B.E.A. Company.” *Fr Corcoran* proudly notes that by **1990** the “**Mombasa Diocese: Coast Province**” had a Catholic Population of 120,000 (approximately 10%) out of a total population of 1,300,000 people and 35 parishes.

He cheerfully adds: “From being a tiny speck in the original ecclesiastical map of East Africa, Mombasa was now able to boast of its own territory of 38,000 sq. miles corresponding to the civil Coast Province with a population of 1,300,000 people.”

I researched into what recent population figures show. *Wikipedia* has an entry for **2015** as follows, for the “**Mombasa Diocese**”: The Catholic Population had risen to 347,000, (approximately 15%) out of a total population of 2,375,000 people and 52 parishes!!!!

10) *Imagine, this ‘explosion’ of Catholic faith on the Kenyan coast, emerged following the purchase of that humble dwelling in ‘Njia Kuu’, Mombasa, by the Holy Ghost Fathers from Diogo Luis Pereira. He has to be credited in giving them that foothold in Mombasa in the first place. Being a fellow Catholic, there must have been that mutual reverence and respect, in doing all he can, in helping to establish the church in Mombasa.*

11) Apart from **Diogo Pereira**, the 114-page *Journal*, records ample praise, time and again, throughout, to the nucleus of pioneering Goans in Mombasa, who through their active support and attendance at services, proved a mainstay to their early missionary activities, as they did in Zanzibar. They acknowledge the help received from the community in keeping their morale and drive going, even during the challenging times. The *Holy Ghost Fathers* record their gratitude to the Goans in the *Journal*. Our fellow Goan, *Fr John Correa*, currently serving in the *Mombasa Diocese*, is also mentioned in the publication.

12) The *Holy Ghost Church* in Mombasa, in my time, was packed with Goans. It is now conferred the status of the *Holy Ghost Cathedral*. How then did that purchase of a dwelling from **Diogo Pereira** transpire to the *Holy Ghost Church*? Here is what the *Journal* documented:

*“The year 1897 was a turning point in the history of the hitherto unfortunate and somewhat miserable Mombasa Mission. Although the house in Njia Kuu had been enlarged by the purchase of the house next door, the Fathers realised that they would need a bigger plot eventually and so negotiations began with the Government. These dragged on and on and the *Journal* registers frustration after frustration as obstacles arose, permissions withdrawn and so on until finally on November 17 we read..... agreement was reached about the concession of land to be ceded to the mission. The plot was 5 acres and was purchased for thirty pounds an acre.Appeals were made for donations for a new church and work was speeded up day by day to get the building ready for **Easter Sunday 1898**.*

.....Easter Sunday was a triumph.things began to brighten up for the little flock at Mombasa.....Our Goans who grow in numbers are very pleased with the change of locale (the chapel of Kilindini).This new church situated no more than fifty or sixty yards from the site of the present cathedral.....”

Those of us, who knew the *Holy Ghost Church* grounds well, will recognise that the “**new church**” being referred to, was in fact the ‘**Rafiki Yetu Press**’ chapel-like building, in the ‘Church/Cathedral’ grounds of my time, just behind St Anthony’s shrine. What is now the “*Holy Ghost Church/Cathedral*” was consecrated in **1923**. Some story this, of the *Mombasa Mission*.

Diogo Luis Pereira’s Business Ventures

We saw earlier, *Fr Corcoran* record in his *Journal*, the presence of two Goan grocery stores in ‘Njia Kuu’ in Mombasa in those early days, namely: **D L Pereira’s Store** and **M R De Souza’s Store**, which was also known as ‘*The Club*’ by members of the European community.

Based on the research findings recorded in her book, entitled: *Goans of British East Africa, 1865-1980 ~ “A Railway Runs Through”*, *Selma Carvalho* writes as follows:

*“Some of the major business players from Zanzibar moved their operations to what was clearly a more lucrative location (Kenya). Being Portuguese subjects, Goans owed little allegiance to any particular colonial government. ‘**A&D Pereira**’, operating from Salisbury Street, claimed an establishment dating back to 1887. Initially a partnership between Augusto Francisco Pereira and Diogo Luis Pereira, it was dissolved in 1897, but **Diogo Luis** continued the business on his own. As a commercial soldier of fortune, he was contractor to the British government as well as supplier to the German, Italian, Austrian, French and Portuguese navies, hardly an incongruous arrangement at a time when all these naval ships called at Mombasa. Among the services **Pereira** offered were tailoring, bakery, confectionery and as a commission agent. The modest Goan traders in Zanzibar who supplied ‘beef and bread’ to ships, in Mombasa became formidable ship chandlers and contractors. Goans had in Mombasa the same success they enjoyed in Zanzibar.”*

[Marci Pereira’s Observation: The reference made to the business “**A&D Pereira** operating in Salisbury Street”, suggests to me that the business was in Zanzibar, where the partnership between Augusto Francisco Pereira and **Diogo Luis Pereira**, “was dissolved in 1897” as per the ‘*Zanzibar Gazette* dated 29th September 1897’. Further it states that **Diogo Pereira** continued the business on his own. If that is so, this is the first hint that **Diogo Luis Pereira** probably arrived in Mombasa

following a business stint in Zanzibar. In that case, in all probability, the *Holy Ghost Fathers* would have known him or of him, before their encounter in Mombasa. It is not known whether Augusto and **Diogo** were related.]

1901 – ‘Mombasa Goan Reading Room’ & ‘Goan Institute’

This is yet another most interesting development in *Mombasa Goan* history involving **Diogo Luis Pereira**. We saw earlier, the *Holy Ghost Fathers* record the existence of the two Goan grocery stores in Mombasa, namely: *M R De Souza* (known as ‘*The Club*’) and **D L Pereira**. We must remember, in those very early days, our forebears in Mombasa, were in the main, single. Most were employed by IBEAC and did not have the luxury of returning ‘home’ to their families after a day’s work. Neither was there any form of leisure, sport or social activities available to them, apart from a couple of stores and bars offering liquor. For those who were literate, there would have been a penchant for a reading library of a kind. Here are interesting extracts from three different research sources of how, why and where, the ‘**Mombasa Goan Reading Room**’ came about in 1901.

Source 1: Mombasa Institute Centenary Brochure (1901-2001)

*“Towards the end of the 19th century there were already a number of Goan merchants as well as clerks in the British Administration and in mercantile service. Out of these, a few enthusiastic men founded at Mombasa, on the 1st of November 1901 the Goan Institute, the fore-runner of similar social and sporting institutes throughout Kenya, Uganda, Tanganyika and Zanzibar. It was named the **Goan Reading Room**, and was housed in hired premises in Ndia Kuu where the building still exists, paying a monthly rent of Rupees 20/-. The name chosen suggests that the members were keen to spend their leisure hours, after a hard day’s work in reading as a past-time and a source of adding to their stock of knowledge.”*

Source 2: The Goan School Mombasa – 75th Anniversary Souvenir Brochure (1932-2007)

*“The Goans settled in Mombasa had received an enviable education in Goa or India under the ruling Portuguese or British governments. They had an insatiable appetite for knowledge and classical literature. The first Goan Club opened in 1901 was known as **The Goan Reading Room**. It was literally a room in the house of the **first president – D L Pereira in Ndia Kuu**. Later when the Goan Institute was formed, it contained a library whose contents exceeded in variety and quality those of the schools.”*

Source 3: “Goans of East Africa, 1865-1980 ‘A Railway Runs Through’ by Selma Carvalho

*“The regular high-spirited gatherings at M R De Souza’s store became the nucleus of the (European) Mombasa Club. Meanwhile, Goan Protectorate staff meeting at a ‘godown’ near the Customs House, in 1901, formed their own **Goan Reading Room**. For their gatherings, they were generously allowed the use of the top-floor in a building owned by **D. L. Pereira** on Ndia Kuu, at a monthly rent of Rs 20/-.”*

Marci Pereira's Observations & Commentary:

The **Goan Reading Room** brought literary enrichment to the 'elite' of the community. *Selma Carvalho*, in another of her rigorously researched work on East African Goans, states: "It was during this period, as the name of the association implied, a culture of reading spread. Colonial papers and books in various languages were donated and made available to members. Within a decade, the association came to 'possess a very valuable library'. However, the bulk of Goans fell outside the ambit of this exclusivist elite culture. Membership of the **Goan Reading Room** remained small (64 members by 1903) and restricted by status, occupation or caste."

Other communities in Mombasa, soon saw the cultural value of the 'Reading Room'. *Selma* discovered that, here again, **Diogo Pereira** stepped in to help: "In 1903, **D. L. Pereira** who had so generously fostered the '**Goan Reading Room**', offered his premises for hosting the founding committee meeting of the '**Mombasa Public Library**'. That library was opened on 11th January 1904. "..... Its collection of books, perhaps modest, contained papers and magazines from India, Goa, Lisbon, England, South Africa and Zanzibar. Once the public library became accessible, it was at times, used as a venue for **Goan Reading Room** meetings."

The afore-mentioned '**Goan Reading Room**' remained a key part of the *Mombasa Goan Institute*, as far as I can remember, up to the time I left Kenya, in 1963. My research picked up on the educational impact that the "**Goan Reading Room**" had on two of our school ex-student *Luminaries: Angelo Faria* and *Hartman De Souza*.

Angelo, now retired, served as an *Economist*, first with the *United Nations Development Program (Zambia)* and then with the *International Monetary Fund (Washington DC)*. He finished school in 1952. His family was well known in Mombasa during my time. I recall, his elder brother *Joe*, also an ex-student, who apart from being a class hockey player, having graduated from the *Teachers Training College* in Mombasa, taking up his first appointment as our *Physical Education (PE) Teacher* at the *Mombasa Goan School*, just before I finished 1957/58. The earlier mentioned *Yvette (nee Faria) Pronk*, is their sister.

Hartman was born in Mombasa in 1950 and had his early schooling at the *Mombasa Goan School/Sacred Heart School*, up to the age of 13, when his family moved to Embu. Professionally, he is a well-established *Theatre Director/Journalist/Writer*, based in India. He is the author of the book entitled: "*Eat Dust: Greed and Mining in Goa*" that was launched in 2015. I don't remember him, but I remember his father - *Peter De Souza* – a prominent, qualified, football referee during my time. His all-black referee's kit, size, physique, authoritative bespectacled posture and that whistle in his mouth, cut an intimidating figure in my mind.

I thought it fascinating to note in both these cases, the roles their mothers played, in getting them engaged with the '**Goan Reading Room**', in the first instance. The following extracts reveal the impact the **Goan Reading Room** made on them.

**a) Extracts from Angelo Faria's submission that featured in the
"Goan School Mombasa – 75th Anniversary Souvenir Brochure (1932-2007).**

"My mother who was the decisive earlier influence, initially spoke Portuguese only, but then learned English through speaking with my brother and me; from her stems my lifelong interest in reading, as together we (using her subscription) regularly raided the better stocked Goan Institute (not Goan School) library to take out the Penguin Golden Classics texts which we read aloud together so as to also improve through mutual interaction our comprehension and spoken accent.

My father was deeply involved with organizing community activities, culminating in his presidency of the Goan Community (1946-48) at the time of the famous first and only Goan Conference in Mombasa at Christmas 1946 and later in the Mombasa Dock Strike of late 1948. From him, I

acquired a deep interest in, and consciousness of, socio-political developments in the world outside Mombasa, through regularly reading of newspapers again in the Goan Institute reading room as well as in innumerable discussions at home with him at the dinner table about the future of Goa ...”

b) Extracts from Hartman De Souza’s Essay: “Growing up with the Cup”

“I only knew there was something called the World Cup courtesy an eccentric mother who kick-started a thick scrap book dedicated to football, to get me to start reading the newspaper. I was ten years old, and lived in Mombasa, on the coast of Kenya.

In it, my mother had gummed various newspaper and magazine articles and features on football. In 1960 when she handed it to me to continue, the last entry was her exhaustive coverage of the World Cup in Sweden in 1958, with reports of every one of the qualifying rounds and all the international friendly matches leading up to it. The very last clippings were news-items and commentaries talking about the next World Cup in Chile, in just two years time

I spent days and nights reading and re-reading my scrap book. I replayed countless matches in my head so that I could tinker with them and change the results. I always changed the results in my head, so logically the teams I supported always won.

I kept that scrap book going with gummed clippings denoting anything and everything to do with football in Kenya and anywhere else in the world if it appeared in print and caught my beady eye. No magazine or newspaper was safe from me. The executive committee of the library and reading room at the Goan Institute, Mombasa, for instance, was never to find out who mysteriously cut out articles and news reports on football from the local papers – and then, to cap impudence, chop up the football-related pages of papers and magazines from England that came a good week or so later ...

That scrap book was duly pasted and updated and read and analyzed until 1963 ended, and I was uprooted from Mombasa and moved to a small town called Embu.....”

Diogo Luis Pereira – First President of the ‘Mombasa Goan Institute’

We already encountered the mention earlier, of how the **Goan Reading Room**, founded in 1901, was the ‘forerunner’ of the *Mombasa Goan Institute* and **Diogo Luis Pereira** was effectively honoured as the first President of the *Institute*.

Earlier, we saw, how the *M R De Souza Store* was frequented by Europeans and was known as “*The Club*”. Before the **Goan Reading Room** was established, and after, it is reported that the Goan Protectorate staff used to meet “at a Godown near the Customs House”.

Selma’s research offers interesting insight into how the ‘**Goan Reading Room**’ morphed into the ‘**Mombasa Goan Institute**’ as follows:

“The godown continued to be used for the plays the Reading Room performed. These were looked forward to by the entertainment-deprived Goans and Europeans alike. Their audiences included leading merchants and officials of the protectorate.”

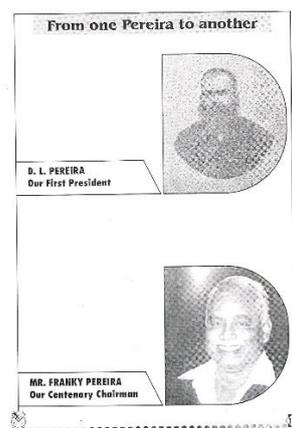
“In 1911, dismissed members of the Goan Reading Room proposed setting up a ‘Goan Institute’ amidst protests and fears that such a move would ‘damage the status of the community and only serve to satisfy the selfish ends of a few dissatisfied individuals’. Protest notwithstanding, the **Goan Reading Room** did, in **1914** become the **Goan Institute, Mombasa.**”

I was pleased to see the *Mombasa Institute Centenary Brochure (1901-2001)* celebrate that memorable milestone with the page, as shown herein below, depicting the two *Presidents* in 1901 and 2001 as : “**D. L. Pereira – Our First President**” and **Mr Franky Pereira – Our Centenary Chairman**”. Many of us are already familiar with that sensational Mombasa hockey-player with marvellous wrist-action dribbling skills – **Franklyn Pereira**. Yet another one of *Mombasa Goan School*’s outstanding ex-student, sporting heroes, during my time. Like **Diogo Luis Pereira**, another latter-day *Goan Institute* President and similarly, a successful and influential Mombasa Goan businessman and a *Bwana Kubwa* too, in his day.

Franklyn was much loved and respected by the community. He was often referred to as the ‘*Godfather*’ to the community. He helped many, financially and practically, in their times of need and support. From a personal perspective, my family owe him and his wife *Euphemia*, a huge debt of gratitude. In need of a medical assistant, *Euphemia*, a qualified senior nurse at the *Pandya Hospital*, came to our aid. She accompanied my late brother *Albert*, who had sustained a swimming-related spinal injury, and myself, when he was flown out for emergency treatment in Lisbon, Portugal, in June 1963.

Sadly, **Franklyn** passed away in April 2018. He is still fondly remembered by all those that knew him.

Page from ‘Mombasa Goan Institute Centenary Celebration Brochure (1901-2001)’ showing the ‘First President’ and the ‘Centenary Chairman’



Diogo Pereira’s Home used as a ‘hospital’ too

Hitherto, we have seen how influential **Diogo Luis Pereira** was to the Mombasa Goan and Catholic communities. That is not all. In the course of this work, I got to learn that his home also served as a *home-based ‘hospital’* for the early Mombasa Goan community!!!

We saw earlier, how *Monsignor Courmont* of the *Holy Ghost Fathers* proposed to *Mr George McKinnon*, the Managing Director of IBEAC, that the missionaries can help build a hospital for their employees. When the riposte was that IBEAC were planning building their own hospital, *Monsignor Courmont* put it to him diplomatically, in that case, he could provide their trained nursing Sisters from the ‘*Daughters of Mary Order*’. This communication is a clear indication that Mombasa severely lacked medical and care facilities for its growing population at that time.

In this scenario, **Diogo Luis Pereira** it appears, once again played a pivotal role to our community and others, before any hospital was built in Mombasa. The late **Mr Eddie Pereira** (am not sure if they were related), father of **Benegal Pereira**, who many readers will know, is the moderator of the online forum: *Africana Orientalia* (AO), quoted the following in his memoirs:

“I was born in the old town (old port) of Mombasaonce upon a time, far away and long ago. No,.....that would not do,there is no getting away from the date. I was born in Baba Mkubwa Pereira’s house, in a dense mango grove area, on October 14th: 1908, not in a hospital, there were no hospitals, no doctors and no nurses at that time Mombasa was just the wilderness”.

I found the above lines in **Mr Eddie Pereira’s** memoirs, thought provoking. First of all, his observations in those lines resonate with the communication we picked up earlier, between **Monsignor Courmont** and **Mr George McKinnon** of IBEAC discussing the need for a hospital in Mombasa. Having been born in Mombasa in 1908, **Eddie Pereira** too, would fall in that category of ‘one of the first Goan children born in Mombasa’, after **Maria**, the daughter of **Diogo** and **Natalia Pereira**. (Even in my young years - 1940s/50s, I recall several Goans giving birth, in small private maternity homes dotted around Mombasa, run by Goan/Seychellois midwives). I am curious to want to know a little about **Eddie Pereira’s** parents too – what brought them to Mombasa and when did they arrive? His reference to “**Baba Mkubwa Pereira**” reveals that apart from being acknowledged as *Bwana Kubwa* (*Big Shot*), which we saw earlier, **Diego Pereira** was also very much endeared as a ‘*father figure*’ in the community. Hence, that other respectful Swahili address of: **Baba Mkubwa** (*Grandfather?*)”.

What was Mombasa like in those days?

Latching on to **Eddie Pereira’s** statement: “ *Mombasa was just the wilderness*” - by all accounts, Mombasa was still very much a jungle then. Here are two further extracts from the *Holy Ghost Fathers Journal* - (*Mombasa Mission: 1888-1990*) that give some insight into what Mombasa was like, in those early days.

Extract 5(a)

“*A Guide to Mombasa and Surroundings*” by **Charles Hobley** (**1890**)
compiled for the *Mombasa Times*.

“Mombasa was a curious place in those days. Its extent was very limited. There was a town wall. The Fort was garrisoned by about a hundred wild Hadramathis who were commanded by a venerable old Arab gentleman. Once outside the narrow lanes of the native town, no roads other than narrow footpaths existed; even the path leading to Kilindini was only about four-foot wide and passed through the jungle the whole way. It is wonderful how clearing the cultivation have in recent years well nigh abolished snakes from the island. The jungle was infested with puff adders and one invariably saw several in the course of an evening walk. Leopards roamed around the town at night snatching the odd goat here and there, and one morning the news came that one was asleep in the big fig tree at the southern extremity of the main street; it however vanished into the bush before we could get our rifles”.

Extract 5(b)

The following description is by *Dr Chanel*, a Frenchman and a friend of the *Holy Ghost Fathers* in Paris, who visited Mombasa in 1894 and left a vivid account of a foot safari from Mombasa to Kilimanjaro, passing by the Bura Mission. Of Mombasa he says:

“..... where the mission is situated, the only buildings worth the name are the mission itself and a mosque. The others are mud houses with makuti roofs, inhabited by Arabs, Indians and Swahilis. The alleyways between these houses become rivers during the rains, and the perfumes emanating from them are very varied and anything but fragrant. In the evening we go up on the roof of the mission house. From here a beautiful panorama unfolds itself before our eyes and we can see an arm of the sea bordered with greenery”. (Chanel estimated the population of Mombasa at the time to be around 1000 people).

Picking up from *Charles Hopley's* observation of how wild Mombasa was then and that elusive leopard, remarking “...before we could get our rifles”, I learnt that the pioneering community, including Goans, owned licenced firearms (and not just for hunting). *Selma Carvalho*, in her research for another of her books, entitled: “*Goan Pioneers of East Africa – Baker, Butcher, Doctor, Diplomat*” discovered the following:

*“In 1896, Acting Commissioner Clifford H. Craufurd proposed a volunteer corps which would equip men with cursory military training to protect the ‘safety of the lives and property of the people of Mombasa’.Sudden ‘outbreaks of hostility’ left Mombasa vulnerable, if the regular troops were engaged elsewhere. Of the 121 men who signed up by November 1896, at least 20 Goans were amongst those who enlisted.There was a real sense of the East Africa protectorate being frontier land and Goans were part of the rough-hewn culture that went with it. As registered gun owners, they owned a long double-barrelled 12 bore shotgun and were not averse to carrying a pistol.**Businessman D. L. Pereira owned an array of firearms; one double barrelled shot gun, one Webley revolver and one Winchester rifle.**”*

[**Marci Pereira's Comment:** That observation of *D. L. Pereira* owning a double-barrelled shot gun, fascinated me for a specific reason. I vividly remember my maternal grandfather – *Pascoal De Souza* – who was also a pioneer, and lived in Ganjoni, alongside the Mombasa Tusks, owned a double-barrelled gun, which he hid under his bed. I always wondered why and how he came to own that. Leave alone touch it, we dare not speak about it, as children - there was an absolute hush and total secrecy about it. To date, neither my Mum, nor her sisters, could throw any light on it for me. That curiosity always remained with me and having left Kenya in 1963, sadly, I never got to see my dear grandfather again, to fill me in. I wonder whatever happened to it. With *Selma's* research findings and working on this chapter, I am a little wiser now as to why, how and when he would have acquired it. Being also from Mombasa, I trust my grandfather would have known ***Diogo Pereira*** personally.]

In Conclusion

I am indeed so pleased to have researched into this truly remarkable gentleman: '***Bwana Kubwa: Diogo Luis Pereira***'. He was a 'pioneering giant' in the Mombasa Goan community and in Mombasa society, without doubt. His contribution and connections were far reaching. I hardly knew anything about him, when I first started. There is so much more I would like to find out about this important man in our history. Should any of his family members read this chapter, I should be grateful if they could help furnish me with answers to the following queries, for the sake of the *Mombasa Goan School/Sacred Heart School* archives.

I would like to know when exactly and how Diogo Pereira arrived in Mombasa. The first reference to him by the Holy Ghost Fathers was the 'Baptism of Maria' in 1889. I suspect he would have arrived in Mombasa long before then, because it is reported he already owned a grocery store when the Fathers arrived. Also, to be a property-owner then, would suggest he was already established in Mombasa. Confirmation that he arrived in Mombasa, after a stint in Zanzibar? Did he marry and bring Natalia over from Goa or was Natalia an offspring of an established Zanzibar family? Did they have other children apart from Maria and if so, was she the eldest? Where did Maria and her siblings go to school? What were his dates of birth/death? Where was he born? Where in Goa did his family hail from? How many siblings did he have? Was he in Mombasa up to the end? What was his/his family background? Are there any family members in Mombasa/Kenya still? Does the family still own any business or property in Kenya? What happened to the grocery store in Mombasa and his dwelling in Ndia Kuu? Are there any photographs of this distinguished man in the family collection? Perhaps, surviving members of the family, will be able to help me with my curiosity for the sake of these archives. I perceive this as important historical information for someone so influential to the Mombasa Goan community and worthy of doing his eminence, due justice, in recording his life history. After all, his life history is entwined with our own history in Mombasa.

From the above, I genuinely feel, ***Diogo Luis Pereira***'s story is worthy of a book which will interest the Goan community and others from Mombasa.

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Project: "*Archiving Memories of Mombasa Goan School/Sacred Heart School*

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