

# Joao da Cruz, a Chetti, not a Nair

(Vide K. S. Papers I, pages 304-7)

The ambassador of the king of Calicut, *Dom Joao da Cruz*, whom Correa calls a relation of the Zamorin and a Nair, *was no Nair*. Correa was old when he wrote his *Lendas*, and often mixed up things. D. Joao da Cruz in a letter written probably 1515 in Lisbon and published in the *Cartas De Alonso de Albuquerque*, Lisboa 1903, Vol. 3, 208 says: "Dom Joham, ambassador of the king of Calicu, I tell Your Highness, that in the kingdom of Calicu there are certain classes and nations of men: brahmans and chatys, and Nairs and Guzarates and Mouros. Amongst these is the most honourable nation after the Brahmins that of the Chatys, that is to say, *the true Chatys*, for many to honour themselves call themselves Chatys [now he gives the privileges of the Chatys].....*Now I was Chatym* of this same nation and of the most noble ones of Calicu and without considering these privileges which the chatys have, I became Christian..... Therefore I beg the favour..... to create me knight....., and recommend me to the king of Calicu..... I can serve you with 400 men, all of the Chaty *caste*, and give me the jurisdiction over the Chatys and Naires who become Christians."

— G. Schurhammer, S. J.

(in his letter dated Rome, 24. xii. 1932).

Of Chettis in Calicut Barbosa (about 1515 A.D.) says as follows: (*Page 116*)..... "gentlemen, Chetres, Guzarates, Brabares, who are very honourable people;"

(*Page 144*). "Some of these are called Chetis, who are gentiles, natives of the province, of Cholmender," (Coromandel) ... "For the most part they are brown men, and

some of them are almost white; they are tall and stout. These people are considerable merchants and changers,.....they are rich and respected, and live very decently; they have very good [*Page 145*] houses in streets set apart for themselves; and also their temples and idols are different from those of the country. They go bare from the waist upwards, and have cotton cloths many cubits in length wrapped round them; on their heads they wear small caps, and very long hair gathered up inside the caps; their beards shaved, and a few pinches of ashes with sandal and saffron, on their heads, breasts, and arms. They have holes in their ears, so large that they would almost hold an egg, full of rings of gold and jewelry, and many gold rings with jewels on their fingers, and round their waists gold belts, some of them studded with precious stones.....They are great clerks and accountants, and make out all their accounts on their fingers: they are great usurers,.... They are very orderly people in their food and expenditure; they keep account of everything, and are very subtle in their dealings. Their language differs from that of the Malabars..... They marry in our fashion, and their children are their heirs: and if their wives become widows, they never marry again, however young they may be;.....When they die their bodies are burned. They eat all flesh except cow."

These Chettis were really Hindu immigrants from the East Coast, differing in language, manners and customs, dress and ornaments from the Nairs.

—T. K. Joseph

# Letters of D. Joao da Cruz

*in the National Archives of Lisbon.*

(By the Rev. G. Schurhammer, S. J.)

The *Indian Antiquary*, vol. 57 (1928), 157—159 published an article on a Nair ambassador to Portugal, the famous D. Joao da Cruz, who brought about the conversion of the Paravas of the Pearlfishery Coast to the Catholic religion before the arrival of Saint Francis Xavier. Perhaps it will interest his countrymen to know that several original

letters of his are still preserved in the Tombo do Tombo, the National Archives, in Lisbon.

As Gaspar Correa tells us in his *London da India*, the Zamorim of Calicut, ~~desires~~ to conclude a lasting peace with Portugal, determined in 1512 to send a young relation of his with two companions to Lisbon, ~~not~~ as ambassador, but only to see Portugal, ~~as~~

king and his things." The young man was 15 years old and left India in the beginning of 1513. King Manuel was very glad to see him and won him over to the Catholic Faith. He received the Christian name Dom Joao da Cruz, learned to read and write Portuguese, lived at the Court and got the habit of the order of Christ, which was connected with a life grant. After 5 years' stay in Portugal "he returned to Calicut with many presents of king Manuel (II, 331), October 1518." Correa calls him "the young Nair Joao da Cruz" (II, 556—558) and says that when the Governor landed in Calicut, January 1519, the Zamorim, who was pleased with the young man very much, as he told him many things about Portugal, sent him with a companion to visit his guest (II, 564). In 1525, we are told, D. Joao da Cruz on account of his health moved from Calicut to Cochin with his house (II, 895). Saint Francis Xavier informs us in 1542 that the Paravas were baptized 8 years before (*Monumenta Xaveriana*, Matriti, I, 273) and Manuel Teixeira, S. J., tells us how this was brought about by Joao da Cruz, who at that time was bringing horses to one of the kings of that country (*Monumenta Xaveriana* II, 847).

The following original letters of this D. Joao da Cruz are still preserved:

1. Ca. 1515. *Dom Joao da Cruz to king manuel of Portugal* (published in "*Cartas de Affonso de Albuquerque*" Lisboa, 1903, III, 208—209). The writer calls himself "Dom Joham, ambassador of the king of Calicut"; the letter must therefore have been written after his baptism. Besides, he asks for certain graces, amongst them for the Habit of Christ. As he got the Habit on 12th March 1515 (according to the MS. *B. Pimenta de Avellar, Livro dos Gavaelleiros de Cristo, Torre do Tombo, f. 213v*), the letter

must have been written before that date (*Cartas dos governadores de Africa etc.* No. 318).

2. 1516, 18th Jan. *Diogo de Moraes to the king, from Calicut.* Writes, how he came with D. Joao da Cruz from Lisbon to Calicut by order of the King (D. Manuel) and that D. Joao is going to build a church for his use (*Corpo Chronologico*, I, 19-75). So Correa is wrong in saying, that he returned only in 1518.

3. 1518, 15th Jan. *D. Joao da Cruz to the Secretary of State Antonio Garneiro, from Calicut.* Thanks him for his letter and the grant, which the king of Portugal gave him and asks for an "alvara", making this grant for life (*Corpo Chron.*, I, 23-7.)

4. 1520, 22nd Jan. *The same to the king from Calicut.* Informs him of a Mahometan, who smuggles pepper, etc., together with the king's officials (*Corpo Chron.*, I, 25-108).

5. 1521, 18th Nov. *The same to the king, from Calicut.* Recommends to the king Lopo Diaz, who is living in his house (*Corpo Chron.*, I, 27-72).

6. 1521, 20th Dec. *The same to king John III, from Cochin.* Tells him, how his father king Manuel made him a Christian and knight of the order of Christ and fidalgos of his house, and lent him from his factory of Calicut 7400 pardaos to trade with them and so earn his living; and how he lost the ship at sea and was ruined, and how the factor Duarte Fernandez proceeded against him and took from him all he had left; and that he owed the king still 5000 pardaos. He had got license to send a certain amount of pepper and ginger to Portugal for 3 years, which were now over. He asks to allow him to send them in the future to Cambay, so as to gain wherewith to pay off his debts (*Corpo Chron.*, I, 27-78).

7. 1533, 20th Dec. *The same to king John III from Cochin.* He says he got the king's letter of 1524, but no answer to his answer arrived. Since that time he has been maltreated, put in irons together with "black people" against his privileges of the Habit. He owes still 3-4000 pardaos. He lost over 60,000 pardaos in the king's service when Calicut was besieged, and was several times wounded on this occasion. Dom Anrique gave him a ship to bring his wife & children with him, which sank in front of Calicut with all his goods. Only he with his family was saved on a plank. He asks to cancel his debt or to have patience. Through his imprisonment he lost much of his credit with the kings of the country, and more than 1000 people ready to become Christians were now afraid to follow his example. He asks to be made captain and factor of Quilon for life, and promises to stop the pepper smuggling to Bisnaga (Vijayanagar). Besides he asks for the monopoly of selling horses to the Rey Grande (of Cape Comorin), the king of Travancore, the kingdom of Chymbechenaque, and the kingdom of the Beteperemal and the neighbouring kingdoms, which are at war with Bisnaga and the Idalcao. Besides, he asks for the office of collecting the tribute of the Pearlfishery which belongs to the Rey Grande—Through two 'alvaras' of 1518 (24th February), and 1525 (4th March) sent by king Manuel, (which he copies), he was allowed to send annually 100 quintals of pepper to Cambay, (resp. 50 quintals of pepper) and 30 quintals of ginger. But for 12 years he had not been able to do it. The name of the Pepper-King is Chempenecoy, the names of the other kings are: Lerta Morte Treberery, Teque Cuta Nayre, Chera-bacoy, Yreme Treberery, Yrama Treberery, Unyque Treberery, Ylamana Lambratry. These are the names of the kings through

whose lands the pepper goes to the side of the Rey Grande (of Cape Comorin). If he had the monopoly of selling horses there, he would stop the pepper going there to Narsinga and Bengal (*Corpo Chron.*, 1-52-25). (See *Kerala Society Papers*, Series 4, pp. 221, 223 for the above kings.—T. K. J.)

8. 1537, 15th Dec. *The same to king John III from Cochin.* In 1535 he got a letter from the king and an 'alvara', allowing him 2 years' time to pay his debt of 6000 pardaos to the king. Repeats how his ship sank and he was ruined by it. To regain his fortune he went to Cape Comorin with a dozen horses, which he gave to the king there, without however receiving any payment. Going there to receive his money, he persuaded that whole coast to become Christians. He went then to Cochin with about 20 of their principal men to the 'vedor' Pero Vaz and the Vicar General and the Governor, who sent him back with the Vicar General Miguel Vaz & 4 clerics, & at once 50,000 were baptized; and after them countless people followed their example so that there are now 80,000 Christians. He asks as reward for his many expenses the pearl-fishery for 4-5 years, as he hopes in this case to get 200,000 Christians. The king of Calicut took from him 35,000 pardaos, because he had become a Christian in Portugal, and would have taken his wife and children, had he not sought refuge in the fortress of Calicut, besides many other possessions, which he took. Going from Cape Comorin to Cochin, in Sept. or Oct. 1537, he came through Travancore to speak with the king of that country, how useful it would be for him and his men to become Christians, and how the Portuguese would then sell him horses, which he needed so much for his wars with his neighbour, the Rey Grande.

He at once allowed those on the coast to become Christians, and sent ambassadors to Cochin, who were waiting for the Governor and the Vicar General to send clerics to baptize them, as they did at Cape Comorin (*Corpo Chron.*, 1—50—44).

So far the letters of D. Joao da Cruz. From an entry in the "*Livro das mercês que fez o senhór Dom Joao de Castro*"

(Ajuda, Lisboa, 51—8—46, f. 140), August 1547, we see that the rich Mahometan merchant Khoja Shems-ud-Din got in emphyteusis a piece of land in Cochin, which formerly had belonged to Joao da Cruz, who had had to hand it over to the king on account of his debts, which in this way seem to have been finally paid.

—G. S.