

# Goa Wins Freedom

Reflections and Reminiscences



PROF. B. SHEIK ALI

*Vice-Chancellor*

# Role of Women In Goan freedom Struggle-I

Archana A. Kakodkar

**I**T is exactly four hundred and seventy five years since Afonso Albuquerque wrote to his Sovereign "... I then burnt the city and put everything to sword."<sup>1</sup>

This was the beginning of the Portuguese conquest of Goa for full four and a half centuries, but the fact is that the people of this beautiful territory never gave up their fight for freedom, and the return to the motherland.

Francisco Luis Gomes was the first patriot who preached the theory of Indian Nationalism. Luis de Menezes Bragança followed in his footsteps, to become the destroyer of false values and the apostle of liberty and dignity. T. B. Cunha, his cousin and brother-in-law brought the Goans in contact for the first time with the Indian National Congress. Now let us take a note of women's participation in freedom struggle. (Till 1946, Goan women took indirect part in freedom struggle, while men fought with guns for nearly four centuries, women of the house encouraged their husbands, brothers and sons and had their share in freedom struggle. Their participation was behind the screen.)

(Women's participation in the liberation movement was not a major force in the history of this period. This, however, does not suggest that their participation was not significant or negate the individual woman's merit or achievement. The nature of extent of female participation can be categorized at three levels<sup>2</sup>.

The first category consist of a very small number of women who participated in all aspects of nationalist activity. This was an elite group of women whose alliance was not limited to the politics of a particular province, but was attracted to the movement in its entirety. The sole example of this type is Miss Berta Menezes Bragança (later Mrs. Berta Antonio Furtado).

Secondly, a small group of women were committed to one particular aspect associated with the nationalist struggle. This would include women who took part in social reform activity allied with Gandhian politics, such as being involved in a campaign for Khadi and Village industry or upliftment of the down-trodden. Their involvement was limited in terms of issue and geographical locale. The best examples of this category are the late Mrs. Premilatai Zambaulikar, and Mrs. Sarubai Vaidya

And lastly women as part of the general mass of people who being influenced by the mass movement after June 18 1946, participated in the political meetings and *prabhat pheris*, or became *satyagrahis*. A large proportion of women who participated in the liberation movement were simply part of the general crowds, but one cannot ignore their contribution to the freedom struggle. They belonged to various castes and communities and gave expression to their spirit of freedom, be they in Goa or Bombay, or elsewhere in India.)

Of course, the number of women who were totally committed to liberation movement was not in equal proportion to men politicians) or even to the total female population. But their impact was telling. To name the women who displayed qualities of leadership were Miss Berta Menezes Bragança, Miss Libia Lobo, (later Mrs. Libia Lobo Sardesai) and Miss Laura D'Souza (later Mrs. Lucio Rodrigues).

The literature of this period provides ample evidence about the active role played by Goan women in freedom struggle.) Nationalism had stimulated change and intellectual activity and involved women in roles that were new and

diverse<sup>3</sup>. (Before the actual movement started on the 18th June 1946, Mrs. Sarubai Vaidya started a Marathi-Portuguese monthly called '*Haladikumkum*', in 1910 for women, of women and by women. Mrs. Vaidya belonged to the family of Dr. Dada Vaidya. She wanted to awaken Goan women through her writing and instill in them courage and bravery<sup>4</sup>.) Her intention was also to educate Portuguese rulers by making them acquainted with the rich cultural traditions of Indian society.) It was printed and published from Belgaum, due to strict censorship regulations. This magazine was discontinued after few issues in 1912.) It is indeed unfortunate that this magazine suffered the same fate as other magazines of that period and thus her individual effort went unnoticed.

(In 1936, Goa was under the dictatorial rule of Salazar. Therefore there was hardly any scope for any political activity.) In view of the then political situation nobody could think of starting a political party or organization. (But Purushottam Kakodkar) a disciple of Mahatma Gandhi, and (popularly known as 'Bhau' determined to initiate organizational political activity in Goa.) He of course took due precaution to camouflage it under the cover of apparent non-political programme. (Thus Goa Seva Sangh came into being.<sup>5</sup> It marked the collective political activity in Goa. Their collective activity included spinning, sale of Khadi and collective praying. The late Mrs. Pramila Bai Zambaulikar, was the first woman who enthusiastically supported the cause and activity and participated in various programmes of the Sangh. Her house at Aquem-Margao, was a centre of all political activity.) Besides collective spinning, Goa Seva Sangh used to conduct *Zenda-Vandan* (ceremonial flag hoisting ceremony) in the early morning. Thus (under the non-political cover the political purpose of nationalism was taught. Mrs. Zambaulikar installed handloom spinning factory and charkhas at her residence. The basement of this house was used for hiding freedom fighters who were wanted by the Police,) or were served with warrants. She ran a great risk. When Purushottam Kakodkar was arrested he was staying in Mrs. Zambaulikar's house. She had the courage and conviction and told him not to shift his stay elsewhere.<sup>6</sup>

¶Pramilabai Zambaulikar was the wife of landlord Kanta Zambaulikar, and their two children were brought up in this atmosphere of freedom struggle. Hence the impact on them was evident. ¶Thus her daughter followed the foot-steps of her mother and entered politics. She is Mrs. Sulochana R. Katkar, at present President of Goa Pradesh Congress (I) and a nominated Member of Goa Assembly since 1985. She is an active social worker like her mother. Mrs. Zambaulikar was influenced by Mahatma Gandhi's resolution passed at the A.I.C.C. Session of 1921, to make Khadi an integrated part of the fight for Swaraj.<sup>7</sup> She mobilized the wives and daughters to promote the use of Khadi and actively popularized the idea in Goa. ¶She was perhaps the first woman to participate in public meetings wearing a Khadi sari. Her community experience gained at the local level made her self confident. She believed that Khadi was a source of supplementing income for village women. She was firm believer in Swadeshi and till her death she only wore Khadi. Mrs. Zambaulikar actively participated in Satyagrahas and was imprisoned on several occasions. After liberation she dedicated her life for the cause of Khadi and uplifting the down-trodden. ¶

¶At Dr. Lohia's rally at Margao, women were present in large numbers and were shouting slogans like 'Jai Hind' and 'Dr. Lohia Zindabad'. Police attacked the demonstrators, there were beatings and brutalities. ¶Several people were arrested including a brave girl Vatsala Kirtany. When Vatsala was arrested, a group of forty women marched to the Margao Police station and demanded immediate release of Vatsala. This group was led by Mrs. Pramilabai Zambaulikar. ¶The news of the 18th June and the arrest of Dr. T. B. Cunha, spread like wild fire throughout Goa and thereafter there was daily defiance, at some place or the other. ¶(in Goa,) 19th June was observed as a total hartal in Goa, the first ever observed in Goa's history. While Dr. Lohia was interned on the Goa's border, rallies and demonstrations took place at Margao and Panjim. ¶At the rally in Panjim even teenage girls like Shashi Bhandodkar and Ratan Khaunte were assaulted. On the 21st June, there was a public meeting at Margao, addressed by Mr. Purushottam Kakodkar and

Mrs. Umabai Shirali. On the 22nd June there was a procession of Satyagrahis starting from Jaihind Maidan (Tilak Maidan) and large number of women participated.

The Satyagraha movement brought out the heroic personality and spiritual courage of Goan women of all castes and creeds. They rose like their sisters of the civil disobedience movement of India, to their full spiritual status. Women used to join Prabhat-pheris in great numbers and used to shout 'Jai Hind' which was an element of instigation or provocation for rebellion.

Berta Menezes Bragança was nurtured from the childhood in one of the best schools of political thought and acquainted with the peculiar problems of Goa and of its evolution for the great battle for political and intellectual emancipation which her father Luis de Menezes Bragança fought right from his youth, and the revolutionary philosophy of life which her uncle Dr. T. B. Cunha preached and practised in Goa. On the 30th June 1946, she addressed a huge rally which was organised at Margao. Full preparation was made by the authorities. Berta greeted the gathering with 'Jai Hind' and 'Inquilab Zindabad'. Armed forces surrounded her, and her uncle T. B. Cunha was assaulted. Huge crowd of men and women were lathi charged. In her speech she appealed to the youth of the land not to allow this civil disobedience movement to weaken, and to freely carry it on till the goal is reached and to start with the elementary civil liberties that have been denied to the people. 'With those attained', she said, 'we shall have paved our way towards that final goal of complete freedom from all foreign yoke, of free Goa in free India'.<sup>9</sup>

This powerful and courageous speech of Berta is to be appreciated because India was also not free at that time. Then onward the virus of defiance spread to Mapusa, Bicholim, Mardol, Quepem, Cuncolim, Sanvordem, Canacona, Carmona, Zambaulim, Chandor and number of other places. From then onwards many women actively participated in the struggle which they considered as very sacred. On the 18th July a group of women took out a prabhat pheri and on 21st July Lalita Kantak was leading the Prabhatpheri, with a national tri-

colour in her hand for flag hoisting ceremony, when she was stopped and physically assaulted by the police. Krishna Hegde, Vitha Hegde and Mrs. Zambaulikar were also beaten and Mrs. Zambaulikar was arrested and later released. During this period some of the prominent heroines, filled with patriotic fervour were Smt. Shah, Lalita Kantak, Suryakanti Naik, Karapurkar and the Menezes Bragança sisters.

When later, along with her husband Dr. Antonio Furtado, another political refugee Berta sought political asylum in Belgaum and later in Bombay she edited "Free Goa" which was started by her uncle Tristao Bragança Cunha. The conference of Afro-Asian Women's Solidarity invited a Goan delegate to participate in the conference. Accordingly Berta joined the Indian delegation to Cairo, led by Smt. Rameshwari Nehru<sup>10</sup>. The presence of a Goan delegate evoked great interest in the Goan freedom movement. She was accorded special privilege of addressing the Plenary Session and her speech was listened to with rapt attention. From Cairo they were invited by the Soviet Women's Committee to the Soviet Union. Both in Moscow and Leningrad, the Goa's problem roused keen interest.<sup>11</sup> In spite of her poor health, she travelled East to West, North to South, and addressed meetings from dawn to dusk.

(When on 15th August, 1954, mass Satyagraha was launched in which people from all parts of India participated, Smt. Sudha Joshi, under the auspices of Goa National Congress (Goa) made a revolutionary speech. She was arrested and put into Aguada Jail<sup>12</sup>. People of Goa and India were very angry. After the arrest of Mrs. Joshi, the movement intensified in India. Satyagrahis were enlisted in Poona, and men and women from Maharashtra, Punjab, Uttar Pradesh, Bihar and other parts of India came to Poona to join Goa's freedom struggle. Women of Poona took the responsibility of providing food for the Satyagrahis.) Satyagrahis were given warm send off at Shaniwarwado, the historical place<sup>13</sup>. (Batches of men and women started heading for Goa, via Belgaum, Sawantwadi, Kankavali. Satyagrahis tried to enter Goa via Patradevi, Doda-marg, Terekhol, Castlerock and other places. They were carrying national tricolour. From Aronda came a batch of women, comprising Mandakini Yalgi, Kamala Upasani, Prabha Sathe,

Shanta Rao, Sharayu Diwekar, and they were shouting slogans like 'Goa Bharat Ek Hai'<sup>14</sup>. Police started firing on Satyagrahis, many of them fell. Mrs. Sahoderadevi was hit by a bullet on the hand when she was carrying national tricolour. All the wounded Satyagrahis and Mrs. Sahodaradevi, were brought back into the Indian territory by a lady Kamalabai Bhagwat. She lifted them bodily, and seeing her courage, two foreign correspondents who were covering the satyagraha came to her rescue and helped her to carry Sahodaradevi. The international press took serious note of these brutalities and helped arouse world opinion against the Portuguese colonialism in India.

( Inside Goa Portuguese violence on the one hand and India's peaceful policy on the other hand were resulting in a serious setback to the movement. ) Something had to be done. ( It was at this time that an underground radio station ) to boost the morale of the people of Goa was established across the borders of Goa in the Indian territory<sup>15</sup>. It was ( called "Voice of Freedom". It was set up in a jungle, and was manned by three people, Mr. Vaman Sardesai, Miss Libia Lobo and Mr. Nicolau Menezes. Mis Lobo used to broadcast every day at 7 a. m. and 8 p. m. The station turned out to be an effective and powerful weapon to hammer at the Portuguese colonial rule. )

On December 12, 1961, when the border situation became explosive the station was shifted to Belgaum and started functioning from the 13th December 1961, with the increasing frequency to almost every one hour. When the Indian army entered Goa, "Voice of Freedom" monitored the progress of the army on all fronts and kept listeners informed of their triumphant march by the hour.

( There were also some women in the freedom movement of Bombay, the most prominent of them being Miss Laura D'Souza. The others were Mrs. Irene Heredia, Mrs. Mussolini Menezes and Mrs. Aida Mendes Rodrigues, who attended political meetings and helped in the various activities of the struggle. )

Thus the successful participation of women definitely dramatized the effective and important role of women in the political movement. ( The participation of women in liberation movement created a tradition of female involvement in politics in Goa. The freedom movement had enabled women



to evolve from an oppressed and subordinate position to an enlightened and equal position in social and political affairs of the territory. The liberation struggle made it possible for women, wives and mothers, to identify themselves with public life and secure fulfilment in their personal life.)

It called for no reorganization of family life or responsibilities. The women who were arrested or detained accommodated to their new roles. They visualized their political involvement within a definite time period and could easily make adjustments in the flexible nature of the Goan joint family.

Women participation in politics accentuated the spirit of liberation and egalitarianism which was evident during the liberation movement. Goan women increasingly felt assured that they could use the available opportunity and identify themselves with the social economic and political affairs of the territory, and lastly, their involvement in politics emphasized the spirit of cooperation and not competition with men.

*References:*

1. *Goan Age*, Monthly, Vol. 1, No. 5. (1954), p. 3.
2. Agnew, Vijay, *Elite Women in Indian Politics*, New Delhi, Vikas, 1979, p. 10-11.
3. *Ibid.*, P. 6.
4. Kakodkar Archana — Bibliography of P.S.S. PISSURLENKAR Periodical articles from C.H.S. Library Paper presented at the 2nd Indo-Portuguese History Seminar organised by XCHR, 1982.
5. Samarth, Anil, Shri Purushottam Kakodkar — Profile of a Septuagenarian Satyagrahi — (pages not numbered), p. 3. Goa, Purushottam Kakodkar Satkar (70) Samiti.
6. *Ibid.*, p. 5.
7. Agnew, Vijay, *Elite Women in Indian Politics*, New Delhi, Vikas, 1979, p. 37.
8. Menezes, Juliao — Goa Freedom Struggle 1947. PP 70-71
9. *Ibid.*, PP 82-83.
10. National Convention for the liberation of Goa, Daman and Diu, against Portuguese Colonialism and Fascism, National Campaign Committee for Goa, 1961, p. 3.
11. *Ibid.*, p. 4.
12. *Kirloskar*, Monthly, Pune, June 1966.  
Special issue on Goa Liberation Movement.
13. *Ibid.*
14. *Ibid.*
15. Lobo Sardesai, Libia — *Goenchem Sodvonecho Avaz*, Goa Today, Dec. 1985, p. 33-34.