

SECRETARIAT MOLESTATION SCANDAL

Lessons of the uprising

By M.J.AUDI

The alleged molestation of a woman employee of Government of Goa by the Speaker of the state assembly within sacred precincts of the Vidhan Sabha shook Goa. For thirty-nine days, Goa witnessed a commotion, the like of which was not known in Goa's history, before or after liberation. Ironically, this sorry spectacle will go down in Goa's history as a first step towards India's resurgence. It exploded many myths about Goa and Goans. It ended with the forcible resignation of the Speaker, but opened bright vistas for Goa.

Goa's image in the world is full of misconceptions. People are made to believe that east of Suez, only Goan society is a permissive society of the western type. The pictorial advertisements of the Government of Goa to attract tourists merely strengthen this erroneous belief. Hence, those who cannot go to the west flock to Goa and furiously try to make their dreams of lust a reality. When reality knocks sense into them, they feel cheated. The public reaction to the molestation scandal dispelled such misconceptions once and for all. Molestation was condemned by all Goans regardless of their religion, caste or creed. It also showed that the standards of morality of Goans are second to none. Further, that their moral standards have deep roots in Indian culture. That Goa is not a replica of the west.

All alleged molestation was brought to the public notice by political parties in the opposition. The ruling party accused them of trying to extract political mileage out of it. But the people of Goa pushed all political parties to the back-stage. The leaders, who advertise themselves as the guardians of public interest and as the destiny-makers of Goa, were literally humiliated by the people. Some said that the leaders were cut to size. The molestation scandal showed that leaders in Goa, like leaders elsewhere, have no size of their own. They wax and wane according to the whims of their masters.

The molestation scandal confirmed the concern of Goans for a value-based public life. The people felt that the alleged molestation was not an isolated issue and the alleged molester was not the only one of his kind. They openly said that public life in India is dominated by vultures, some big, some small. When money and power are combined to a dangerous degree in the hands of persons not at all dedicated to public good, their natural pastime is wine and women. They strive to whet their appetites by hook or by crook. Women in India need protection against men holding high positions, not only in politics but also in business and civil service. What we know about the harassment of women is just the tip of an ice-berg.

Tragically, despite forty years of freedom, employment is not within the reach of every Indian. Hence, the moment one gets a job, his or her prime concern is confirmation. Those who hold the strings of appointment and confirmation demand money from men and sexual favours from women. The need for a value-based public life in India is too obvious to need any elaboration. Morality is the bedrock of any sane and sound society. As Gandhiji put it: "Politics bereft of morality is absolute dirt."

The indifference with which high society women and the top brass in women's organisations in India treated the molestation case reminded one of Karl Marx's regret that money-culture degrades bourgeois women beyond redemption. The less we

speak about high society women the better, because Indian culture reveres women. As Swami Vivekanand pointed out, Indian culture asserts that woman is superior to man. Like high society women, highbrow intellectuals clung to their reputations as fence-sitters. When others were acting, these arm-chair philosophers were rationalising their fence-sitting. Perhaps, the molestation of intellectuals is a problem as grave as the molestation of women.

The rule of law was found wanting. It began with an exercise in lexicography for the meaning of the word "molestation". It was followed by procedural wranglings and technicalities. The exercise was unfair to all involved in the episode. As the substance of the problem was systematically ignored, the public was puzzled. When the powers that be seemed to evade action, the people emerged on the scene and asserted that legal justice goes to the fattest purse. It was widely reported that people very roughly treated the man who held the office of Speaker. What compelled them to register their disapproval in such a direct manner? Perhaps it was their conviction that the rule of law is incapable of enforcing rectitude in public life. It is time for the makers, interpreters and enforcers of law to establish their credibility in the public eye.

The Press in Goa rose to the occasion. For the first time, the Fourth Estate discharged its rightful function in right earnest in the

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interests of open society. By and large, the Press supplied matter-of-fact information. But for the Press, the people of Goa would not have been able to chart their course of action and shape their strategy. Investigative journalism is an indispensable organ for a clean public life. The student movement was another vital force. None can deny that but for the student intervention, there would not have been gyrations in the inner circles of political bigwigs. The credit for exposing major scandals in Goa goes exclusively to the students. Goan students have proved that they can act as sentinels of a clean public life. The only danger they confront is their subtle exploitation by political parties for partisan purposes. In India today, political parties look at the students only as a segment of muscle-force to win elections. If the Press and the students in Goa continue to show this same zeal over the problem of corruption, corruption in all walks of life would be definitely exposed and eliminated.

The brightest spot of public action on the question of molestation was the decision of a school-girl of 15, a teacher of 25 and a freedom-fighter of 70 to go on a fast-unto-death till the resignation of the Speaker. In the rating of sacrifice, the sacrifice of life is the highest and those who make it for public good are truly the greatest. Those who dared it in Goa were not the so-called pillars of society. They were not the prominent citi-

zens who parade their prominence at the drop of a hat. They were common people committed to the purity of public life. We have not come across such fasts-unto-death in India during forty years of freedom. There has never been such a fast in Goa ever before. In *Swaraj* India, Goa is the first state where purity of public life was demanded at the cost of one's own life. These three noble souls have earned the gratitude of India for all time. In the history of *Swaraj* India's resurgence, they have carved a niche for themselves.

Direct action of the people is the essence of democracy. As matters stand in India, the only effective remedy for all diseases afflicting Indian public life is direct action. The molestation scandal proved the Goan grasp of one of the basic principles of democracy. Democracy rejects leader-worship because no leader is indispensable. Leader-oriented society is a fake democracy. It is nothing but an oligarchy. Oligarchy is always accompanied by privileges and perquisites. Oligarchs and their sycophants never give the good things of life to the people they rule. If the people sustain their interest in public affairs and keep a strict watch on the performance of persons in high places, in politics, business, civil service, the judiciary and the defence forces, they will give to themselves not only a real democracy but also a clean administration.

That public issues cannot be discussed and decided in the streets without violence and disorder is only indoctrination by vested interests who get their things done only in the secrecy of the chambers and cabins of the rulers. The fact of the matter is that the masses intensely dislike and detest violence and hate disorder. Violence and disorder in the streets in the work of *agent provocateurs* of the vested interests to malign the masses. The empirical evidence shows that assemblies and parliaments are the enemies of public interest in true sense of the term.

In the streets, there is absolutely no room for secrecy. Hence, there is no scope for intrigues, machinations and manipulations. All viewpoints naturally balance each other and the decision that emerges always guarantees public interest. On the other hand, the decisions on the floor of the assembly are secretly managed by the wire-pullers. The formal approval by vote is only the endorsement of decisions taken behind-the-scenes. This is the lesson of history and the French Revolution is an excellent example. The revolution was marching forward so long as it was in the streets; when it entered the National Assembly, the revolution became the plaything of intriguers and ended in the rise of Napoleon Bonaparte and the subsequent return of the Bourbons.

The powers that be warn the people against taking the law into their own hands. The people cannot take the law into their own hands because they are not masters in the art of quibbling. The people must always take the enforcement of values in their own hands because they alone are the final masters of public good. Therefore, the people must always insist upon complete information on all actions of their rulers and verify the accuracy of such information. The people of Goa have proved their ability to exercise such vigilance. They have shown that this tiny territory is capable of being the torch-bearer for this great country. Goans can be pace-setters for India. The question is, will they?