

# Remembering 18 June, 1946

By SHARMILA KAMAT and PRATIMA KAMAT

*Dhanya Lohia, Dhanya bhumi  
Dhi, Dhanya tiche putr,  
Dhanya tyancha tyaag - dekhite jan-  
tache netr.* These lines are from  
the revolutionary song, "Trivaar  
Margal vaar", composed by Bak-  
ab Borkar after witnessing the  
patriotic fervour generated by  
the events of 18 June, 1946, Goa  
Kranti Din.

It was on this day that the  
rebrand socialist leader, Dr  
Manohar Lohia defied the  
Portuguese government's ban  
on civil liberties by holding a  
public meeting at Margao and  
thus signalled the start of Goa's  
protracted struggle for Libera-  
tion.

At the time of Lohia's arrival  
in Goa, on 10 June, 1946, there  
were severe restrictions on civil  
liberties in Goa. Public meetings  
were banned, newspapers cen-  
sured and nationalist literature  
confiscated. India was then in  
the last stage of its freedom  
struggle and newspapers arriv-  
ing from there kept the Goans  
informed of the progress of the  
Indian National Movement.  
Newspapers like 'Kesari, Nava-  
mal and Free Press Journal' in par-  
ticular helped to stir nationalist  
feelings in the minds of the  
Goans. "Besides, in 1945, two  
activists of the Quit India  
Movement had come down to  
Goa, taken up teaching posts in  
a school in Panaji and were  
secretly propagating the mes-  
sage of Gandhian nationalism,"  
recalled freedom fighter,  
Narayan Naik.

As a result, the idea of launch-  
ing a similar mass-based strug-  
gle in Goa crystallised in the  
formation of nationalist bodies  
like the Goa Seva Sangh  
founded in 1943 by Purushot-  
tam Kakodkar, Dr Vinayak  
Mayenkar, Nilkanth Karapurkar  
and others. "We chose a rela-  
tively mild name, one that  
could give no clue of its activ-  
ity," explained Dr Mayenkar.  
Aimed at propagating Gand-  
hian nationalism, the Sangh  
organised spinning classes,  
rayer meetings and flag-  
hoisting sessions. Lalita  
Bhaskar-Velingkar, one of the  
participants in these sessions,  
reminded us that and over-  
whelming majority of the partic-

ipants, were teenage boys and  
girls. "Besides, the Sangh would  
depute its workers to move  
from village to village, propa-  
gating nationalist ideas,"  
remembered Madhav Bir. These  
house to house contacts were  
later to prove invaluable in har-  
nessing mass support for the  
satyagraha movement.

There were other organisa-  
tions like the Vidyarthi Con-  
gress which recruited young  
boys to spread political aware-  
ness in the countryside and the  
Rashtra Seva Dal, organised by  
Vishwanath Lawande, which  
aimed at instilling a sense of  
discipline in the youth through  
regular drills and parades.

On Lohia's arrival at Assolna,  
members of such organisations  
acquainted him with the ground  
realities in Goa. Following this,  
Lohia resolved to pursue a path  
of direct action to restore civil  
liberties in the territory. He con-  
tacted the president of the Goa  
Seva Sangh, Purushottam  
Kakodkar, and expressed keen-  
ness on initiating some action  
during his stay in Goa. Kakod-  
kar immediately convened a  
meeting of the Sangh to discuss  
the proposal. "Some members  
were reluctant to participate  
in action," recalled Vinayak May-  
enkar. "They wanted to first  
forward a list of demands to the  
Portuguese Government and  
wait its reply. But Kakodkar  
persisted and sixteen of us  
agreed to take part in the pro-  
posed programme," 18 June was  
chosen as the day and Margao  
as the venue of action. Lohia  
was subsequently informed of  
this decision.

Preparations were in full  
swing to give maximum public-  
ity, to the coming event. Mean-  
while, at a private meeting in  
Panaji on 16 June, Lohia  
apprised the gathering, consist-  
ing chiefly of students, of his  
plan of action.

On the 18th, people started  
gathering at the venue, now  
named Lohia Maidan, right  
from noon. Ravindra Pai Raitur-  
kar, then only fourteen years of  
age, recalled how swiftly word  
has spread in and around  
Margao that Lohia would be  
addressing a public meeting

there that afternoon. Despite a  
heavy downpour, a huge crowd,  
around five thousand strong,  
had assembled at the venue.  
"The people had come partly to  
extend support to Lohia and  
partly out of curiosity to see  
whether the Portuguese would  
carry out their much-touted  
threats of stern and swift repres-  
sion," explained Lawande. Vasant  
Molio, a participant in the day's  
events recalled how machine  
guns were placed all round the  
Municipal garden in a bid to  
evoke fear in the minds of the  
people.

Lohia arrived at around 4.15  
pm and was immediately wel-  
comed with cries of "Dr Lohia ki  
jai" and "Bharat mata ki jai" from  
the enthusiastic crowd. People  
rushed forward to garland him.  
Lohia alighted from carriage  
and started reading his prepared  
speech. The Portuguese author-  
ities immediately arrested him  
and took him to the police sta-  
tion. "Just before his forced  
departure, Lohia thrust his  
speech in my hands and asked  
me to continue. I immediately  
stood up and started reading it  
till a police officer snatched the  
script from my hands and  
arrested me," remembered Law-  
ande. More arrests followed in  
quick succession. Perturbed, the  
crowd moved on to the police  
station and demanded the  
release of Dr Lohia. The Portu-  
guese authorities, panicking at  
the size of the crowd, requested  
their prisoner to appeal to the  
people to disperse. Lohia took  
this opportunity to urge the  
people to continue with their  
struggle. Lohia was subse-  
quently transferred to the Panaji  
police station and later taken to  
the border and released.

"He (Lohia) has lighted a  
torch which the inhabitants of  
Goa cannot, except at their peril,  
allow to be extinguished," wrote  
Mahatma Gandhi in the wake of  
18 June. This flame burnt  
brightly throughout 1946 with  
Gandhiji's blessings to spur it  
on, the establishment of the  
Interim Government in India to  
inspire it, and the formation of  
the National Congress (Goa) to  
give it direction. An immediate  
fallout of the 18 June meeting

was the rally organised in Panaji  
on the very next day. "It was a  
totally spontaneous reaction,"  
recalled Narayan Naik. "Hun-  
dreds of people, including a  
group of women led by Mrs  
Shah, participated in the rally.  
They were severely beaten and  
some of them had their heads  
shaved. The residents of Panaji  
expressed their solidarity with  
the protestors, the youth by ton-  
suring their heads and the bus-  
inessman by drowning their  
shutters."

Lohia's clarion call soon  
reverberated all over Goa.  
Prabhat-faris were taken out, sat-  
yagrahas offered, pamphlets  
secretly circulated and the tri-  
colour was also hoisted on sev-  
eral occasions. "At the  
prabhat-faris we would chant slo-  
gans like 'Inquilab Zindabad' and  
sing revolutionary songs like  
Vande Mataram and Kadam  
Kadam Badaye Ja," remembered  
Lalita Katak, then just 17 years  
of age. "On the 25th of June, I  
was marching at the head of a  
procession, holding aloft the  
Indian tricolour. A Portuguese  
officer tried to snatch the flag  
from my hand. I was pushed to  
the ground, beaten, yet I refused  
to let go. It was if a new strength  
had come to me," she continued.

Thousands of people were  
arrested, some were flogged,  
some sentenced to long terms of  
imprisonment, yet others  
deported. "After 18 June,  
Aguada Jail was never empty of  
political prisoners," pronounced  
Mayenkar. Narayan Naik, who  
had offered satyagraha in  
December, 1946, at Quepem  
emotionally recounted to us  
how following his arrest, he was  
repeatedly dunked in the river  
by the police.

However this tempo did not  
last for long. The movement  
tapered off after the initial  
enthusiasm had been dampened  
following police brutalities and  
the imprisonment of the top  
leadership. Nevertheless, 18  
June, 1946, laid the foundations  
of Goa's freedom struggle that  
was to follow, till its Liberation  
1961.

Contd on page 6



# Remembering 18 June, 1946

Contd from pg 5

Has Liberated Goa lived upto the ideals of the freedom fighters? Not to a great extent, opined most of the freedom fighters, we interviewed. Twenty-eight years after Liberation, disruptive forces of corruption, communalism and linguistic chauvinism had dealt a body blow to their dreams of "transforming small Goa into a model state," as Madhav Bir preferred to put it. "This is not the Goa we fought for," was the constant refrain. Raiturkar regretted that there was still a long way to go to fulfill their ideals. Mayenkar, while acknowledging the material progress achieved by Goa, was pained to note that "we have not grown much mentally." However, Lawande was of the opinion that a quarter of a century was too short a period to achieve the aims in a democracy. Regarding the youth of today, Molio was saddened to note that the present generation had forgotten its duties towards the country, while Lawande lamented the absence of a sense of sacrifice in these children of Liberation. Mayenkar attributed this sorry state of affairs to the absence of an ideal leadership for the youth to emulate.

Despite their disillusionment with the present state of affairs, in Goa, the freedom fighters still had hopes of a better future. They were of the opinion that, sometime soon, the people of Goa, and more specifically the youth, would boldly tackle the challenges facing society and help build "a free, happy and prosperous Goa, a Ram Rajya where all sections of the society were content." The sacrifices of the freedom fighters would then have not gone in vain.