The Goan 'Jalianwala Bagh'

There was a fearful tension in the emotion-charged atmosphere. The local Government had openly sided with one of the parties to the polls while the bulk of the electorate appeared to favour the other. In a fit of nervousness to the commotion that resulted in the surging mass of the people that seemed to make them uninterested in supporting the Government party, the Government troops that had been massed at the polling booth in Margao were ordered to fire upon the defenceless assemblage.

 Shots rang resonantly through the Church Square of Margao, as innocent men, women and even children fell victim to the bullets that were showered on them indiscriminately and ruthlessly. It was the blackest day in the history of Goa's constant resistance against foreign oppression. That was September 21, 1890, the Goa Revolution Day, when the people of the town rose in full force against official repression, the 'Jalianwala Bhag', that happened exactly one hundred years ago, a day celebrated and enshrined in the memory of the famous Konkan political 'Mando' entitled 'Setenache Ekvisaveri.'

The Charter of 1822 proclaimed Portugal had extended the right of franchise (though of a restricted nature, available only to those who paid taxes and could speak one Portuguese) to all the people of the realm, they had to vote to send their representatives to the Portuguese Parliament. Goa had sent to it its first representatives who were Dr. Bernardo Peres da Silva, later became the Prefect of Governor of Goa for some time, Constacio Roque da Costa and Dr. Antonio Jose da Lima Leitao, all of them of the Liberal persuasion.

These first Goa Members of the Portuguese Parliament reached Lisbon in 1823 and the first Constitutional Parliament was formed. It was, however, soon dissolved owing to the machinations of the Absolutists who were the more powerful party. The Liberals, however, came back to power in 1827 and in the same year their party government was formed in Goa too. But once again the Absolutists restored power form them and their King D. Miguel was enthroned.

Finally in 1833 the Liberals won a great victory in Portugal and constitutional reforms were established on a firm footing.

One of the foremost of Goa parliamentarians, Dr. Francisco Luis Gomes, who was the first to demand independence for India was in the famous letter he wrote later to the French poet-statesman Alphonse de Lamartine, was elected to the opposition Indian Nationalist (Partido Indio) ticket, defeating the Government-sponsored candidate, and was re-elected twice, from Goa. His excellent work in parliament for the next eight years is too well-known to need elaboration here, and his original work on the economics of cotton, and particularly on public economics, became a standard work in a determined effort to press into the hall to exercise their right of franchise. It was a frightful massacre of men and women never witnessed before.

Horrendous screams rent the air as the crowd dispersed. Orders of arrest were issued against the leaders of the Indian Party, its chief, Dr. J. I. de Loyala, his associates, R. Correia Afonso, Salvador Alvares, Barreto Miranda, Jacinto Afonso and J. L. da Cunha Goncalves, who fled to Bombay. A 'India Portuguesa' edited by Loyala and 'Ortigas' of Barreto Miranda were closed down by the government. Their houses were ransacked and their privacy invaded. People sent telegrams to the King of Portugal about this outrage. Goans in Bombay gathered in full force at the Cowasji Jehangir Hall there to register their protest to the Portuguese King. It is reported that the King responded by recalling the Governor.

This was the great Goan Revolution Day of Twenty-first September, 1890, when Goans suffered the fate of their fellow across the border at Amritsar in Punjab in the Jallianwala Bagh massacre at the hands of General Dyer. A Red letter day in the history of Goa, preserved in the 'Mando' by the folk-poet, but which has been forgotten by our own people and the powers that be that batten on them.

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