

The Goan 'Jalianwala Bagh'

ELECTION fever in Goa had shot to a high pitch. 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 party opposed to it. In a fit of nervous reaction to the commotion that resulted in the surging mass of the people that seemed to make known their intention of supporting the opposition party, the Government troops that had been amassed 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 by an unfeeling soldiery. It was the bloodiest 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 Goa rose in revolt against official repression, the 'Goan 'Jalianwala Bagh', that happened exactly one hundred years ago, a day celebrated and enshrined for posterity in the famous Konkani political 'Mando' entitled 'Setemache Ekvisaveri'.

The Charter of 1822 proclaimed Portugal had extended the right of franchise (though of a restricted character, available only to those who paid taxes and could speak some 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 to become the Prefect or Governor of Goa for some time, Constançio Roque da Costa and Dr. Antonio Jose da Lima Leitao, all of them of the Liberal persuasion.

These first Goan 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 wrested power from 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 Goan parliamentarians, Dr. Francisco Luis

Gomes, who was the first to demand independence for India in the famous letter he wrote later to the French poet-statesman Alphonse de Lamartine, was elected to the opposition Indian Party (Partido Indiano) 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 pure economic theory brought laurels to him and membership of several international learned societies and earned him the friendship of men like J.S. Mill of England and Michel Chevalier of France.

This was the most fruitful period in the political and intellectual life of Goa. It was an age of electoral battles, political parties powered by the intensity of the public weal and personal animosities. It was also a new vigorous era of political journalism that revolved mainly around the two major Goan periodicals, the 'Ultramar' (Overseas) of the Ultramarino party of the Costa family of Margao, a pro-government outfit, and the 'A India Portuguesa' of the 'Partido Indiano' (Indian Party) led by the redoubtable Dr. Jose Inacio de Loyola of Orlim, which latter party aggregated to itself all the then intellectuals of the leading groups of Goa, like Roque Correia Afonso of Benaolim, Jacinto Barreto Miranda and Salvador Costa Alvares of Margao, besides those of the Furtados and Loyolas of Chinchinim and Orlim respectively.

The most prominent member to be elected to the Portuguese Parliament from Goa after Dr. F.L. Gomes was Cristovam Pinto, another stalwart of the Indian Party and a famous publicist, who even took up cudgels for Konkani and its instruction and development in the devanagari script incidentally. But the pro-government 'Ultramarino' party had manipulated the polls in such a way that one Mr. Brandao, a white Portuguese, was declared elected officially. But Cristovam Pinto had been elected by a majority of votes cast by the people of the constituency. On the results of the election being contested in the Supreme Court in Lisbon, the poll was declared null and void in respect of Brandao and fresh elections ordered in which later Cristovam Pinto was elected.

Along with fresh elections to Parliament, the Municipalities were also dissolved and elections ordered for them to be held simultaneously. Elections to the biggest of the Goan

Municipal Corporations, that of the Salcete Taluka, then comprising today's Salcete and Mormugao talukas were to be held on 21st September, 1890. There were several polling booths in the region. But, without assigning any reasons, the government announced of a sudden that voting would take place in only one place in Margao. Hence all the voters of the Taluka were ordered to gather in Margao to cast their vote for the party of their choice.

Voters from all over the sprawling and densely populated Salcete district of the time began pouring into Margao city right from the early hours of the morning of the twenty-first of September, 1890, though the actual polling was scheduled to begin only at 10 a.m. They waited patiently outside the Municipality Building then situated in today's Old Market of Margao, which had been appointed for the purpose. Most of them appeared to be supporters of the Indian Party, as could be gathered from their which has as its ally the 'Ultramarino' party could muster around two hundred voters only in their favour. As the time for voting drew near, people began to be restive and gathered around the voting hall at the Municipality Building before the scheduled time. The Administrator of the district drove in a little before ten a.m. in his carriage, accompanied by his nominee and another gentleman known to be a partisan of the government, Joao Manuel Pacheco, ironically the father-in-law of Roque Correia Afonso, a leader of the Indian Party.

These three worthies were accompanied by police constables. While they were getting into the hall some people who were waiting outside, tried to follow them. But they were determinedly repulsed by the Administrator. In the altercation and the melee that ensued the Administrator is reported to have brandished his whip, shouting at the people and insulting them to their faces. When the pressure of the crowd became unbearable the door of the hall was slammed upon the people and they were shut out of it. But the people would not budge, and in a determined effort to press into the hall to exercise their right of franchise, started pushing the door which gave way at their pressure. The crowd then rushed into the hall while the Administrator had his moved into the inner rooms of the building. Agitated voices were overheard saying through the din and bustle of the 'fugiu...fugiu' meaning 'he has run away...he has fled'.

The people were now frustrated in their attempts to exercise their right to vote and they were indignant at the affront hurled at them. They felt that there would be no free and fair election. It was no use being there. They moved out of the building and on to the Church Square in a highly excited and belligerent mood, shouting and gesticulating that they had been cheated out of their birthright. They spread around the Square, furious frowning.

In the meantime the contingent of troops that had been brought from Panjim and had stood by, marched into the Square to the beat of drums as if it was taking a flag march and took up positions along the western side of the Holy Spirit Church grounds. The people had meanwhile assembled at the other end, near the Church, and higher authorities protesting against the apparent rigging and lock-out of genuine voters. The leaders entered the house of Salvador Alvares that is situated on the southern side of the Church grounds, with a view to draft the protest note. As this was being drafted, after which it would be read out to the assemblage for its approval, the crowd relaxed, spread all over and set to gossiping and having their snacks or tiffin they had carried from home.

There was a photographer with his old-fashioned tripod camera installed in front of the house of Salvador Alvares, incidentally one of the leaders of the Indian Party as mentioned earlier, to snap the scenes which were of momentous importance. He saw the Administrator coming out of the Municipal Hall after what he thought was an election carried out by him according to his Master's wishes. The Administrator surveyed the scene before him. The people in large number gathered near the Alvares house preparing the protest memorandum and spread over the Square and the military contingent on the premises would all be recorded on the celluloid and there could be queries about the sparse voting that had taken place, when there was such a large crowd assembled near the polling booth.

The Administrator, realising the enormity of the situation he was placed in, turned panicky and ordered the troops to fire on the people who were moving about agitatedly, in all directions. Many were hit fatally. One Ponciano Albuquerque from Loutulim was enjoying his cake on the balcony of the Alvares house; a shot pierced through his heart, a piece of cake still in his hand and another stuck in his ratt-

ling throat. A woman standing by a dispensary close by, collapsed dead, struck by another shot. A young boy watching the scene from his house was knocked off by another bullet. Many a faithful who had taken refuge into the sacred precincts of the Church found themselves also the target of bullets.

Fire directed at the house of Alvares, where the leaders were mostly assembled, achieved its target too. The memorandum was drafted and was about to be read out to the assemblage when shots sent everyone scurrying for cover. An English teacher of Margao was shot through the arm while other bullets hit the walls of the house and the Church. These tell-tale holes are still there as mute yet eloquent testimony to that fateful day. A total of twenty-seven people lay dead and more than fifty grievously wounded by the firing. 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 Gonsalves, who fled to Bombay. 'A India Portuguesa' edited by Loyala and 'Ortigas' of Barreto Miranda were closed down by the government. Their houses were raided and their privacy assaulted. 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. It was a great victory for the people of Goa.

The Government had, however, filed cases of treason against the leaders of the Indian Party in the Goa High Court, which, considering the evidence on record, acquitted them in 1892.

That 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 Jalianwala 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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