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LUSITANIZATION VERSUS ASSERTION IN GOA: THE 1583 REVOLT IN ASSOLNA, VELIM, CUNCOLIM

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BRIEF SUMMARY

This paper entitled, “**Lusitanization versus Assertion in Goa: the 1583 Revolt in Assolna, Velim, Cuncolim**” is about the history of Goa and reflects how the Goan identity has been influenced and shaped by its history of Portuguese colonial rule in Goa from 1510 to 1961. The paper makes a case study of a revolt by the people of Goa in three sister villages of Assolna., Velim and Cuncolim in south Goa. This was a microcosmic representation of the assertion by the people of Goa against the policy of lusitanization carried on by the Church and supported by the Portuguese State throughout the colonial rule in Goa. The paper argues about the existence of a militant spirit that existed among certain sections of the Goan population which finally led to the liberation of the colonial rule on 19th December 1961.

Lusitanization is derived from the word Lusitanian; a term which has been often used to describe the Portuguese people. Mendonça explains that the Portuguese are a result of a long process of fusion of peoples and cultures. The earliest inhabitants that history could register were the *celtas* (Celts) and *iberos* (Iberians). The fusion of these two groups resulted in one of the biggest Iberian tribes, the *lusitanos* (Lusitanians).¹ Lusitanization is therefore the spread of colonial ideology by Portugal during their spread of colonialism. Conversion to Christianity gave a person Lusitanian citizenship, but not always Lusitanian rights and privileges. It in fact proscribed more Lusitanian duties.

In this paper, the author has done a micro study of three villages in South Goa, Assolna, Velim and Cuncolim (AVC), which were and are till today a part of Salcette, a territory under the Portuguese rule since 1542. AVC is a tri-conglomerate aptly

¹ Délio, de Mendonça. *Conversions and Citizenry Goa under Portugal 1510-1610*, XCHR Studies Series No.11, New Delhi: Concept Publishing Company, 2002, p. xv.

referred to as ‘the Punjab of Goa’². This phrase was coined by my late father, Luis Mendes. I do recall his oft repeated words ‘Our people are *Kshatriyas*’. This brand name associated with a warrior caste, motivated a number of people of these three villages to fight the colonizers. This study is also a microcosmic study of the Goa of that period.

Geographically, these villages are isolated from the rest of Goa and have lived an isolated existence from times immemorial. On the eastern and southern side, they are separated from the *Novas Conquistas*, the Western Ghats and the lofty Prabhat hill. On the northern side the river Sal forms a water barrier, with Veroda and Ambelim— the other two villages which also form a part of this so-called trinity.

Cuncolim is also referred to as the ‘land of freedom fighters’. They opposed everything that was Portuguese: the religion, language, dress and would deliberately wear a *kurta pyjama* with a Gandhi cap and the women would wear a sari with flowers in the hair and vermilion *kumkum* on the forehead. In Roman Catholic society this was considered rebellious behavior as per the *Alvará*³ and Edicts⁴ passed by the Church as a part of the lusitanization process. Being unconventional was a rule for these fighters during the Portuguese rule— they fearlessly wrote articles in the newspapers like *Gomantak*⁵ (edited by Dr. Julião Menezes⁶ from Assolna and later by my father) and the *Goan Tribune*.⁷

Some even refused to get married in the church as they identified the church as a handmaid of Portuguese colonialism. My parents got married in Gandhi’s ashram in Sabarmati⁸, an act that was condemned as ‘heretic behavior’ by the family as well by the society of the time but today the course of Goa’s history and that of our family history has changed attitudes. The same family today cherishes the piece of paper on which the father of the nation wrote his blessings for the union of my parents.

AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

1. To study and analyze the process of lusitanization in Assolna, Velim and Cuncolim.

²Luis, Mendes. “The Punjab of Goa: AVC, Veroda and Ambelim”, *Goan Tribune*, Tribune Private Ltd., Bombay: Onlooker Press, 23 March 1953.

³ *Alvará* of 1684, passed by Viceroy Francisco Távora, Count of Alvor, prohibited the use of Konkani for official purposes. A period of 3 years was assigned to learn Portuguese. In 1745, Portuguese was made a pre-requisite for catholic marriages.

⁴ Prabhakar, Angle. *Goa: Concepts and Misconcepts*, Goa: Bombay Hindu Association, 1994.

⁵ *Gomantak* was a fortnightly newspaper published from Bombay in English and Romi Konkani with news about the freedom struggle for Goa in the rest of the country for the period from 1936 till 1946. Copies of this paper are not available in libraries.

⁶ Dr. Juliao Menezes was the editor of *Gomantak*. He started the *Club Juvenal* in Assolna in 1936, a Youth Club to galvanize support for the ant-colonial cause.

⁷ *Goan Tribune* was a fortnightly started on 15 July 1956 and continued till May 1962. It identified itself as ‘the voice and expression of the Goan people’.

⁸ It was Gandhi’s *Maun vrat* (A day of silence) he wrote his blessings behind a used paper and signed it. This is a prized possession in our family today.

2. To understand the struggle for assertion by the people of AVC with reference to the Revolt of 1583 as a microcosm for the study of anti-colonialism in Goa.

METHODOLOGY

This study has made use of the corroboratory approach, in relation to the use of data and their use. It is based on various types of sources like interviews as well as oral history in the form of recorded cassettes and other documentary evidence collected from the various archives in Goa, New Delhi, Madrid, Lisbon and the United Kingdom. The author is a resident of Assolna, her marital home and Velim, her parental home; this however is not a hagiographic study. Though the theme of this work belongs to a small region like Goa, it is approached within a larger historical framework, by drawing information from works on colonialism and nationalism in India and abroad. Colonialism as a challenge and nationalism as a response is the paradigm used in this historical investigation.

SOURCES

Portuguese sources like the codices stored in the repositories in Portugal: *Biblioteca do Palácio de Ajuda*⁹, and *Biblioteca de Évora*¹⁰ *Biblioteca Nacional de Lisboa*,¹¹ are all in Portugal. The *Biblioteca Nacional de Madrid* in Spain¹² and the United Kingdom do have documentary evidences on the history of Goa but not on AVC in particular. Refer to essay by the author on, 'Goa in the repositories of Portugal, Spain and the United Kingdom'.¹³ The King's College Library; School of Oriental and African Studies and the Foyle's Special collection all in London. The university libraries in Cambridge and Oxford were also visited by the author. Bishops Palace, Panaji, Goa has letters posted by Parish priests to the Bishop, referring to the nationalists as 'Communists'.¹⁴

Some villages of Goa rightly or wrongly have acquired dubious reputations. Idiocy is attributed to a *Moiddecar*, people from Benaullim are attributed with the quality of 'madness'¹⁵ some other villages as murderers and likewise the people of AVC are famous as ruffians or fighters in the eyes of the others in Goa.

A *Cuncolkar* is synonymous with rowdyism. This may have its links to the 1583 Revolt and may also be one of the historical reasons that have earned them this ill

⁹ *Codice*: 54 xi-37, VII 1 60a (1724) Petition of the people of AVC to the King of Portugal to protest against the burning of their temples by the Jesuit Priests (*Pagoda de Phatorpa* in Cuncolim).

¹⁰ *Codice* no: xvi 1-36, 1736: 281-491. The rules for the new converts.

¹¹ *Reservados*, *Codice* nos. 59,175-177,580.866. These are some manuscripts of the Inquisition in Goa.

¹² Charles, Dellon. *Relatim de L'inquisita de Goa (texto impress)* 1812 No. V/9386.

¹³ Sushila, Mendes. "Goa in the repositories of Portugal, Spain and the United Kingdom", *Sources for the Study of Goan History (Seminar Papers)*, ed., M.L.Dicholkar, Panaji: Directorate of Archives and Archaeology, pp. 86-102.

¹⁴ Has complaints sent by the Parishes to the Archbishop of the East Indies. There are letters from the Assolna Church complaining about the desecration of wayside crosses, by 'Communist' members of the *Club Juvenal*.

¹⁵ Personal interview, late Rev.Fr. Ivo de Souza on 2 January 1912.

repute. In my readings the people of these three villages are also known as “a proud and war like race of men”.

Lusitanization meets resistance

Much before the advent of the Portuguese, the *gauncars* had served in Adil Shah’s army and had risen to high positions as they had distinguished themselves for their bravery and courage. According to historian Ermelinda dos Stuarts Gomes, in her book *Sumário da História Geral da Índia – Portugueses na Índia* (1926) “army of Goa at that time was predominantly recruited from the villages of AVC and Canacona.”¹⁶

The Portuguese policy of conquest and evangelization met with success in some parts of Salcette. These advances were resisted by the people of AVC. The people refused cooperation with the Portuguese but cooperated with the Adil Shah of Bijapur and the Nizam Shah of Ahmednagar. Flaviano Dias has written that the people of AVC fought together and suffered together, even when a campaign was launched by the Jesuits during the time of Viceroy Don. António de Noronha to destroy their holy shrines, the chieftains of this place would meet at a central place in Murida, Cuncolim known as, *mand* which meant that the brave soldiers defended their village.¹⁷ Dr. Verissimo Coutinho, who had access to the letters of the Jesuits mentions that a Jesuit Priest Sebastião Gonsalves, in his letter to the Superior General, had observed that the inhabitants of Cuncolim were all Hindus and they were very attached to their temples. He also wrote that these villagers were very suspicious of the Portuguese and rebelled often against the State.¹⁸

Mendonça mentions in his book that one of the reasons for the war in Salcette in 1577 was the ban on Hindu ceremonies and on building their temples. Perhaps it is this stubborn resistance which was compounded with the wrath of the missionaries in their enthusiasm to spread Christianity in Salcete.¹⁹ Fr. Gomes Vaz was a priest who conducted the operation of destruction and setting fire to the temples. He has stated that the temple priest would cry loudly as though somebody very close or the king had died.²⁰ For a Jesuit of the 16th century, the very existence of a different religion in a State, subject to a Christian ruler other than the Christian religion were ‘pagan religions’ which needed to be destroyed and replaced by Christianity which to them was a true religion. The missionaries practiced extreme acts of fanaticism like killing of cows, smearing temples with their blood and polluting the water tank with the carcass, amongst other acts of fanaticism.

¹⁶ Maria Ermelinda, dos Stuarts Gomes. *Sumário da História Geral da Índia-Portugueses na Índia*, Nova Goa: Imp. Gonçalves, 1926.

¹⁷ Flaviano, Dias. “Velim’s Glorious Patriotic History”, *O Cuncolim*, Cuncolim Chieftains Memorial Souvenir, Goa Freedom Fighters Association : Efan Creations, 1999, p.10.

¹⁸ *ibid.* Verissimo, Coutinho. “Cuncolim the Land of Freedom Fighters”, p.7.

¹⁹ Wicki, Josef. (ed) *Documenta Indica*, Vol. X, 892, 964, Roma, Monumenta Historica Societatis Jesu. Vols, 1-XVIII-1948-88.

Gomantak Times. Luis, Asiss Correia. “Rebellion of AVC Gauncars (1575-1583)”, Series of 9 articles all in 2004, 29/30. April; 1/6/7/8/13/14/15, May 2004.

²⁰ *ibid.* 7/5/2004.

Luis de Guzman mentions that after the destruction of the temples, during the time of Viceroy D. António de Noronha (1571-1573), the Hindus offered a big amount of money to obtain permission to rebuild their temples. The Jesuit priests objected to this, and these were the same priests whom the Hindus held responsible for the conversions and the destruction of their temples.²¹ In 1578-79 there was a war between the Portuguese and the Muslims. After the war, the conversion policy continued. The people of AVC refused to pay taxes and rebuilt their temples and conducted their rituals and festivals publically without permission. The Viceroy Francisco Mascarenhas (1581-1584) in turn ordered the destruction of all their temples. Fr. Pedro Berno, a Jesuit was a participant in this wanton destruction. In retaliation, a courier from Cochin carrying letters to the Viceroy was beaten and the letters taken away from him. The Jesuits tried persuasive methods as well, that Our Lady of Health was one of the seven sisters of *Mhamai Saibin* or the Goddess Shantadurga.²²

The Viceroy ordered the Captain Major of the Coast of Malabar, Captain Gilliane Mascarenhas along with the Captain of Rachol, Gomes Eanes de Figueiredo to attack the village of Assolna and Cuncolim. Accordingly, temples were burnt but some were rebuilt by the local people. Frs. Manuel Texeira, Pedro Berno, Afonso Pacheco, Chaplains to the soldiers motivated the troops to pull down the newly constructed temples.²³

Therefore, it was the people of AVC who led ‘a people’s war of independence’ or an armed action, between the period from 1559 to 1583 and a struggle of non-cooperation with the Portuguese and the church combine. Continuous struggles were launched to stop the Portuguese attempts to break temples. This struggle took a very ugly turn on 15th July 1583, when the people believed that some priests had come to destroy more temples. This skirmish resulted in the death of five missionaries – Rodolfo Aquaviva, Afonso Pacheco, António Francisco from Coimbra, Pedro Berno and Francisco Aranha. Three lay people also died with them, namely Alphonso da Costa, Francisco Rodrigues and Domingos Aguiar. Rowena Robinson discusses the fury of the chieftains in the attack wherein the locals cut the testicles and put them in the mouth of the priests.²⁴

AFTERMATH

The chieftains were then called to the then fortress of the Church of Regina Martyrs for peace talks. The monument inaugurated in November 1999 at the site of the revolt in Tolleiband, Cuncolim mentions the name of 16 tribal chieftains: Jay Naik, Bozno Naik, Emu Naik, Vithoba Naik, Jivlo Naik, Guno Naik, Shabu Naik, Calgo Naik, Polputo Naik, Topi Naik and Shanta Shet among others²⁵ The peace talks resulted in a

²¹ Luis, de Guzman. *Historia de las Misiones de la Compania de Jesus en la India Oriental en la China y Japan 1540-1600*. Bilbao:Administracion de El Mensajero del Corazon de Jesus, 1891. p. 62.

²² Oral tradition still believes that the Hindu Goddess and the Catholic Mother Mary are sisters.

²³ Carmo, Azavedo. “Towards a balanced view” – II, *Goa Today*, August 1983.

²⁴ Rowena, Robinson. “Cuncolim weaving a tale of resistance”, *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol.32, Issue no.7, 15th February, 1997, pp.334-340.

²⁵ Inscription on the monument of the Chieftains Memorial, inaugurated on 29 November, 1999.

blood bath and a betrayal of the tribal chiefs. Oral history talks about how one of the chiefs Calgo Naik, jumped in the nearby river Sal and swam to safety and thus lived to tell the tale.

What followed was a military action under the leadership of Captain João D'Silva. A flotilla was sent through the river Sal to bombard the land on either side. The guerilla tactics of the locals could not match the powerful Portuguese forces and in self-defense they hid in the hills and the mountains. Gomes Yanaz de Figueiredo, the Commander of Rachol Fort was also dispatched to punish the people. It is believed that the bodies of the chieftains were thrown to the wild animals instead of being given a decent cremation. Following this rebellion, all the community lands were confiscated and granted to the Portuguese João D'Silva.²⁶

In 1776 these villages were bequeathed to Count Francis Mascarenhas. Velim, Ambelim and Assolna were given to Don Pedro de Crasto and then acquired by the Jesuits.²⁷

LUSITANIZATION AND SYNCRETISM

These three villages are not only geographically and historically linked together but are also socio culturally bound together. It is difficult to write about one village without entering into the socio-cultural history of the other sister villages. A feeling of oneness and a spirit of brotherhood is evident among the people of these villages till today, irrespective of their religion. This is seen during the time of feasts, weddings, festivals and *zattras*.

This spirit of belonging is carried with them wherever they go. There are about 18 clubs or *cudds*²⁸ in Bombay and in case of the death of any person an invitation is sent to all the *cudds*. Other places that the people of AVC have emigrated to are Bombay, Calcutta, Madras, British East Africa, Canada and England where they have till date maintained their AVC clubs. The spirit of fearlessness and adventure has led to a number of people from AVC not only immigrating to faraway lands but also working on ships and the more recent trend of seeking employment in the Gulf countries.²⁹

The old surnames in Assolna were Naik and Kudau while in Ambelim it was Gaad and Naik and in Velim, Prabhu and Naik, while in Veroda the surnames were Poll and Porto. The people of Cuncolim had surnames like Naik and Prabhu. Till today some of the people of these villages have retained their original surnames. My siblings and me are baptized by both the ancestral and the Portuguese surname—Sawant Mendes, complete lusitanization was not possible in AVC. The people of AVC have maintained

²⁶ Lingu, Dalvi. *História de Cuncolim*, 1908, Harishchandra Nagvenkar (Trans.) *History of Cuncolim*, Margao: Adv.Dattaramn Lingu Dalvi Memorial Trust, 2007, p.55.

²⁷ Sushila, Mendes. *Luis de Menezes Braganza- Nationalism, Secularism and Free thought in Portuguese Goa*, Panaji: Directorate of Art & Culture, Govt. of Goa, 2011, p.41.

²⁸ *Cuddo*: means a room ('o'is silent) these are clubs in Bombay, organised by each village, where members/seafarers who went to the city/ports to work could stay.

²⁹ Sushila, Mendes. "Emigration and Saudades: A case study of Assolna village", *Goan Diaspora through the Ages & Gramdevata worship in Goa*, Panaji : Directorate of Archives and Archaeology, Govt. of Goa, 2016, p.80.

their links to their ancestral past. The *bairos* or wards are still known as Naik Vaddo, Porobos Vaddo, Milleia Vaddo etc. Disputes were settled by the *dhazaan* (village chiefs; literal translation being ‘the ten persons’) and they were proud of not entering the Portuguese courts. *Gauponns* and *reazaums* (decisions) were held in the assembly in the village itself and the most severe punishment was ostracism or ‘throwing out of the village’.

Each *bairo* had a *confre* where in a needy member would be given a loan up to a certain amount without any security. The Portuguese considered these funds as illegal. In the early 1950’s when the *confre* wanted to change its name to Naika Vaddo instead of Caira Vaddo ‘from the surname Caeiros’ their fund of Rs. 25,000/- was confiscated and the community elders were arrested.³⁰ Gold kept as security by the Portuguese Government, just before 1961 was shipped to Portugal.³¹

The old tradition and customs are ritualistically continued by the villagers. Lusitanization has not discontinued the *Bicareachea jevonn* (community lunch) and *Ross* ceremony (coconut juice and saffron smear) at the time of the weddings. The Velim *Mell*³² and the Cuncolim *Sotrios* in which the Catholics still maintain their rights to participate and hold the ceremonial umbrellas are examples of syncretism. Surprisingly the *Mells* are often led with a tri-colour flag and each ward would light a big brass lamp accompanied by the sound of *dhols* and cymbals to welcome the members of the *Mell* from other wards into their ward. The villages of Assolna, Velim, Ambelim have maintained this tradition of the *Mell* which follows a particular route and then converges on the hillock at Baradi. Mysteriously a saffron flag of the Marathas appears on the top of the Pillar Cross on these days. The *gauncars* of Cuncolim comprise of the Catholic *Chaddos* and the Hindu *Dessais*.

The *Sotrios* is festival of umbrellas by the twelve *vangodds* (clans) of Cuncolim comprising of both communities. Though there has been a change of religion, the Christians participate in the throwing of the vermillion *kumkum* and the rose petals in the procession. The idol of Shanta Durga returns to her village and is worshipped by the Catholics en route. The Aguiars of Cuncolim have built a special platform to rest the palanquin of the deity to allow the people to worship with agarbattis. Ten *vangodds* have Catholics and till today a priest of the Fatorpa temple collects coconuts from the houses of the *gauncars* in Cuncolim and he is called the *Chakor*.

This attitude of the people to cling to their Hindu past almost fearlessly, even though the church had tried to stop the Catholics from participating in the *Sotrios*, is something that the people of AVC are proud of. The Portuguese of course used this attitude to their advantage by recruiting these villagers in their army and later the British recruited the people of AVC to their navy. During World War I and World War II it is said that the bells never stopped tolling in these three villages as sometimes, two to three members passed away in a single family.

³⁰Op.cit. Luis Mendes.

³¹Personal interview, Antonette Almeida, Caeiro Vaddo, 4th May 2018.

³² *Mell* in Konkani means a gathering, this is a procession just before Carnival of each ward and finally the meeting point is a cross, on top of a hill in Baradi, Velim, Goa.

The role of the people of AVC in the freedom struggle is legendary. As one enters Cuncolim there is a board with the words 'Welcome to Cuncolim the land of freedom fighters'. The *Club Juvenal* was started by Dr. Julião Menezes, as a forum for young people to come and join the struggle though the activities conducted were related to sports. This club was declared as illegal by the Portuguese. The *Gomantak Praja Mandal* was founded by Menezes on the basis of the philosophy of Luis de Menezes Bragança. Its fortnightly organ *Gomantak* was clandestinely distributed among the people in AVC. In 1946 Menezes invited Dr. Ram Monohar Lohia to Goa and lit the flame for the last phase of the freedom struggle against the Portuguese. Many people were imprisoned after this movement in these three villages.

Today it is evident that this marshal spirit still binds the people. On 27th Nov. 1999 this spirit came to the fore when the Chieftain's Memorial was erected at the site of the 1583 massacre in Cuncolim. This was in open defiance against the Catholic Church from whose perspective, the priests were declared as martyrs but the local chieftains who were massacred thereafter are unheard of in Goan historiography. Every 15th July, a commemorative meeting organized at the location of the revolt and a demand is made that their history be included in the school textbooks. This martial spirit is etched in the minds of the people of AVC and is sometimes visible on the sports field even today during football matches when the sports ground is raided by the *Cuncolkars*, when defeat is imminent.