

FOREWORD

Tuesday, 18th June 1946 was a red-letter day for Goa. Thousands of people of all ages and backgrounds thronged Madgao to listen to socialist leader Ram Manohar Lohia speak in defiance of the Portuguese regime's ban on civil liberties. This was followed by more than two months of intense political activity and unrest, to the shock of a complacent Portuguese colonial regime.

This remarkable event is celebrated each year by a state holiday. Panaji's main shopping street is named '18 June Road'. However, not much is known about the aftermath of this remarkable day in Goa's history. This has been painstakingly chronicled by Sandesh Prabhudesai in this book, "64 Days".

The book goes beyond being a chronicle, as it examines an issue that continues to baffle historians. The civil disobedience movement in Goa occurred in June 1946. India attained independence in August 1947. Why did it take 14 more years for Goa to be liberated from the Portuguese? Prabhudesai's narration and analysis look into possible answers to this question.

The book goes far beyond its 64-day remit, giving a comprehensive account of the different phases of colonisation in Goa and how different regimes in Portugal had varied impacts on the people. It examines how the period of the Republic, starting in 1910, resulted in the rapid spread of English and Marathi education, women being gradually freed from the Devdasi system, as well as the rise of independent-minded thinkers like Luis de Menezes Braganza, Govind Pundalik 'Bharatkar' Hegde Desai and others, how it gave rise to a large number of local periodicals and

publications; and how these developments generated debates, public discussions and aspirations for autonomy and freedom among the people.

On the other hand, the military dictatorship headed by António Oliveira Salazar imposed severe restrictions on freedom of expression. The passing of the infamous Acto Colonial institutionalised inequality, sanctioning legal discrimination and differentiating the residents of the colonies from the metropolitan Portuguese people. It disavowed Goa's people of any notions they had of being full 'Portuguese citizens'.

Prabhudesai identifies the setting up of the Goa Congress Committee (GCC) by prominent freedom fighter Dr Tristao Braganza Cunha¹ in 1928 as "the solid foundation for the independence struggle". It was affiliated with the Indian National Congress. Cunha and fellow freedom fighters believed Goa was an indivisible part of India and hoped that once India was freed from British colonial rule, Goa's liberation would automatically follow. Their slogan was "A Free Goa in a Free India". It clearly differentiated the Goa Congress Committee from other leaders, who sought autonomy for Goa, not independence.

However, in 1934, all the 'overseas branch committees' of the Indian National Congress – in areas not under British rule – were disaffiliated, crashing hopes of securing freedom from the Portuguese. After Lohia's call for civil liberties on 18th June 1946, these hopes were renewed.

The freedom struggle in Goa followed a different trajectory from the independence movement in the rest of India. Cunha was of the opinion that, "In the whole of India, no people is so denationalised as Goans" (1961: 59). Cunha's contention was that, "Mental enslavement is incompatible with liberation". (1961:371) He attributed the denationalisation of Goans to the nature of Portuguese colonial rule, which used the process of Lusitanisation to alienate Goans from their sense of belonging to India.

The denationalisation of Goans may also be linked to the sheer length of colonial rule over Goa. The Portuguese captured the 'Island of Goa' (present Tiswadi taluka) as early as 25th November 1510, even

1 Dr T B Cunha was popularly referred to as the 'Father of Goan Nationalism'

before Babar, founder of the Mughal dynasty, conquered Delhi on 21st April 1526. They were driven out by the Indian Army in 'Operation Vijay' only in 1961, more than 450 years later. In contrast, the British annexation of India began as late as 1757, after their victory in the Battle of Plassey, and ended within 200 years, in 1947. The combined period of the rule of the Mughal Empire, the Maratha Empire and the British Empire over the rest of India combined is shorter than the period of Portuguese rule over parts of Goa. The colonisation process of the Europeans over India began with the Portuguese, and they were the last of the European powers to leave India

Could Goa have been liberated earlier, given the intensity of the Civil Disobedience movement? Was this movement a result of the economic hardships faced by the people of Goa as portrayed by T. B. Cunha in pamphlets and articles, or was it a movement for civil liberties as Ram Manohar Lohia contended? How is it that there have been massive upsurges in Goa almost every 20 years – which appear to herald a revolution – but why did no revolution take place? Did the leadership fail to have a finger on the pulse of the people? The book sifts through events during the period in an attempt to answer these questions. Perhaps there is one more question that could be looked at: Was the denationalisation of Goans one of the key factors responsible for delaying Goa's liberation?

Prabhudesai does not whitewash any of the leaders. He looks at the issue of leadership itself, casting light on the differences between leaders in Goa as well as at the national level. He contrasts the maturity of certain leaders with the pettiness of others. The book highlights the roles of Ram Manohar Lohia, M K Gandhi, Jawaharlal Nehru, and Peter Alvares. It looks at the influence of the nationalist movement in India on the freedom struggle in Goa from several angles.

For Prabhudesai, this book is also an exercise in introspection. Both his mother and his father were freedom fighters. From a very young age, he was directly exposed to the ethos of Goa's struggle for freedom. He was a leader of the student movement that rocked Goa in the 1970s and '80s. Later, he became a hard-nosed investigative journalist. These experiences enable him to grasp the dynamics of the movement in a

way that no detached observer can.

The book cites authentic sources in order to build a credible chronicle of one of the most fascinating periods in Goa's history. Prabhudesai has accessed newspapers and pamphlets, interviews and articles of freedom fighters, rare books, archival material and gazetteers. This book will be of special use to students and scholars of history, as well as individuals who would like to know more about Goa.

Most people know about Panaji's 18 June Road. But they are completely unaware of the significance of its name. Hopefully, this book will fill vital gaps and raise awareness of Goa's long road to freedom.

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