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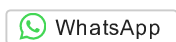
## UNEASY LIES RIVARA'S CHAIR

By **GOAN OBSERVER TEAM** 🕒 NOVEMBER 27, 2016

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**SEPOY MUTINY: This memorial to the martyrs of Jallianwala Bagh, where Indians were shot and killed in cold blood, provoked the Sepoy Mutiny or the first Indian war of Independence**

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As Goa University sets up a Chair in memory of Portuguese historian J H da Cunha Rivara, we feature a critical review of his writing and questions over his neutrality

**By Teotónio R de Souza**

**At the XIV International Seminar on Indo-Portuguese History at Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi on February 11-13, 2013, I had an opportunity to review the performance of J H da Cunha Rivara, the administrator-historian of Portuguese India during little over two decades (1855-1877).**

In the wake of his death centenary, Prof George M Moraes reviewed his contribution to Indian historiography during the II International Indo-Portuguese History seminar in Lisbon in 1980. George Moraes was an unquestioning admirer of Cunha Rivara, largely because some of the issues documented and defended by Cunha Rivara were dear to his own heart, such as those of caste, language and religion in Goa.

## **PORTUGAL MISSION**

PROF George Moraes belonged to a generation of Indo-Portuguese historians who believed in Portugal's civilising mission, which he sought to emphatically distinguish from the colonial performance of the English and the Dutch, "who were bent solely on trade and wars". Prof Moraes added that it should not be forgotten that it was the Goan priest and the Goan doctor who assisted Portugal in its civilising mission in Portuguese Africa.

Concluding his paper, Prof Moraes added a wish: "It would indeed be a fitting tribute to his memory and grateful acknowledgement of his services to Indian history if a group of scholars would come forward to prepare a centenary memorial edition of his works which are very rare but of whose immense usefulness there can be no two opinions."

We saw the death centenary and also the birth bicentenary of Cunha Rivara pass away a few years ago. I had the privilege of speaking at a memorial event organised by the Municipality of Arraiolos on June

20, 2009, and to deliver a commemorative lecture at the Public Library of Evora that same week. A summary of those lectures may be read on the Ciberdúvidas da Língua Portuguesa website.

The National Library of Portugal promoted a small exhibition of Cunha Rivara's publications and produced a 74 pp brochure with a catalogue of 83 entries of books by and on Cunha Rivara, plus a couple of introductory bio-bibliographical essays. Perhaps a most complete listing of his writings was produced by his Goan disciple Miguel Vicente de Abreu in his *Noção de Alguns Filhos Distinctos da India Portuguesa* (1874).

## RIVARA CHAIR

**THE Conspiracy of 1787 in the light of 1857:** As the Goa University is set to inaugurate the Cunha Rivara Chair, it may be relevant to revisit and review his standpoints on two issues that engaged much of his attention and efforts as historian and administrator. One is about the so-called Conspiracy of Pintos and linkage of the French through their proxy Tipu Sultan in 1787.

All the evidence that Cunha Rivara put together in his *A Conjuração de 1787 em Goa e várias cousas desse tempo: Memória Histórica*, he claimed to be accurate data, but admitting that he had no access to the originals of the vital evidence collected by the Chancellor José Joaquim de Sequeira Magalhães e Lanções. He depended on a version published in a manifesto issued in 1835 by a group of rebels that deposed the Goan native Prefect Bernardo Peres da Silva.

## SEPOY MUTINY

THE centenary of the Conspiracy coincided with the Sepoy Mutiny that shook the British East India Company's rule. Goan writer Jacinto Caetano Barreto Miranda (1842-79) condemned the gory barbarity of

the Portuguese response to the Conspiracy as a “juridical murder of the martyrs of freedom and despotism in Bardez”. Cunha Rivara was irked by these qualifications and refers to them on p. 110 of *Conjuração* as expressions of native subtlety and Machiavellianism, pseudo-patriotism of ignorant masses (p. 115).

The sepoy mutiny had shaken the British rule in India and was causing jitters to the Portuguese authorities in Goa, and certainly to Cunha Rivara, who knew that Kolhapur rebels maintained contacts with Jojee Jokepeet Saheb (José Joaquim Pinto) from Candolim. The police revolts of Volvoy and Marcela (1870-71) were part of the inner convulsions in Goa. The abolition of the local militia in November 1871 marked the death-knell of a bitter rivalry between the descendents who controlled it and the Goan natives, who had not seen Pombal’s decree of April 2, 1761 that ordered the end of racial discrimination put into practice.

**Much of the circumstantial evidence and conjectures of Cunha Rivara based upon it concluded that the Goan priests hoped to expel the Portuguese with Tipu Sultan’s support and allow his French allies to take over the Padroado rights that would permit Goan native clerics to exercise jobs of authority.**

## **POLITICAL PHOBIA**

MUCH of his research needs to be seen as an effort of a colonial administrator-historian to build a case to back the prevailing fears of the descendents in Goa, a political phobia studied by Roberto Bruto da Costa in his *A Hidra do Nativismo*. Cunha Rivara’s erudition catered for the white residents of Goa and was acclaimed in the editorials of their organ *Nova-Goa* in the issues of June 28 and July 12, 1876. Frederico Diniz d’Ayalla and Fernando da Costa Leal, a poet turned historian, were two white publicists in Goa at the time and hailed his conclusions.

The authority of Cunha Rivara has remained unquestioned, because of his impressive output of documentation, but his analysis of *Conjuração* and some other issues discussed here need to be reviewed for his biased and partisan views. *Conjuração* in its original Portuguese version was not widely accessible to readers until the Xavier Centre of Historical Research put out an English edition in 1996. It carried an introduction by me raising doubts about Cunha Rivara's historical neutrality.

**The election campaigns in Goa had revealed acute white-native rivalry and in the context of the rebellions in the British territory and Maratha natives serving in the Goan militia, Cunha Rivara had good reasons to imagine the worst.** There are nearly 30 letters in his collection at Evora Library, letters that he exchanged with A A Bruto da Costa over the election disputes in Bardez and Salcette. Bruto da Costa refers in them to illegalities in favour of the government-backed white candidates.

We must recall that Cunha Rivara was born during the period of French occupation of Portugal and the British efforts at ending it. The trauma of the Portuguese people during those times were surely fresh in his mind, just like the political disturbances of the liberal civil wars which followed and forced him to interrupt his university studies during a period of three years.

## **ENGLISH MOTIVES**

**WE need to remember too that the English had motives to worry about the Portuguese impotence to deal with the cross-border incursions of rebels associated with the Sepoy Mutiny in 1857.** There is evidence in the Goa archives to prove this, and Cunha Rivara admits it in internal notes to his police department. The ghost of the Pintos of Candolim involved in the Conspiracy of 1787 must have

surged again among the high cadre of Peshwa's military involved in the Maratha resistance to the British.

A note from the political department of the Bombay Presidency and issued by Elphinstone, requested the Goa Governor, Viscount of Torres Novas, to cooperate with Captain Schneider in hot pursuit of Sawant Desais, who had committed sundry excesses in the neighbouring British districts. It refers to Portuguese irregular troops called Sunud Kurree sepoys, of the Pedne division; requests their collaboration in the jungles and specifies the need of Portuguese assistance to capture Baba Dessai and other sons of Phond Sawant. The prize money for the capture of Baba Dessai was raised to RS 10,000 on April 13, 1858.

Further correspondence with Goa authorities requests that the refugees be exiled to Timor and Solor and promises to send the steamer Prince Arthur by January 24 for effecting the transportation of the exiles. The Magistrate Registrar of Canara, Fisher Esq writes to the Portuguese Secretary of State thanking his good collaboration with Capt Schneider in checking the movements of the Sawant brothers, and reports that the principal offender had escaped, while his nephew Dipu Rane was captured.

Another note from G A Ballard Esq, Special Commissioner North Canara to Col Alves, the commander of forces in Goa, clarifies that there was no inactivity about the Portuguese collaboration, and some complaints had resulted from faulty translations. However, there seems to have been some lapses on the part of the Portuguese, beyond faulty translations!

A marginal note handwritten by Rivara with a blue pencil on the document sent by Ballard to the Goa governor informed him that Hanumant Sawant had surrendered to the Portuguese officer commanding Koolar Station, and should not be granted any concessions without consulting the British authorities. **The note in**

**Portuguese warns the Portuguese defence personnel to avoid being shamed by the British who were following closely and effectively the rebels inside the Portuguese jurisdiction.**

## **TIPU ASSAULT**

MY suspicion turns upon the English, in times when they were doing their utmost to dislodge the French and take over the Maratha lands, including those that served them for refuge. We need not be surprised if Goa authorities were deliberately misled by the English sources, fuelling suspicions about the French and Tipu, to prepare the ground for the occupation of Goa, on the eve of a final assault on Tipu. Cunha Rivara's research and conclusions about 1787 event were certainly influenced by his political worries of 1857.

### **Anglo-Maratha conflict, the key for understanding Goa situation:**

At the ISIPH-II in Lisbon in 1980, I had presented the Mhamai House papers to the world of scholars for the first time. During ISIPH-III in Goa in 1983, I drew information from those papers to present Rogério Faria's role in the opium trade and in the liberal politics of Goa. At the ISIPH held at Aix-en-Provence (France), I presented some Modi documents of Mahadji Shinde, a dominant figure of the Maratha politics in 1727-1794. He was the last great Maratha chieftain who sustained the Maratha prestige in North India.

I am inclined to see Cunha Rivara's account of the Pinto Conspiracy as a British-inspired reading aimed at driving a wedge between Tipu and the French. The Mhamai papers need to be studied better to fill in more details into the native politics and Anglo-French intrigues at the time. We need to explore Maratha-French intrigues, rather than the French-Tipu connection, to make sense of the 1787 Goa Conspiracy.

## **PANIPAT BATTLE**

THE battle of Panipat in 1761 saw the annihilation of Peshwa's army. Balaji Rav Peshwa died of shock, and during a civil war between his minor son Madhav Rav and his brother Raghoba, several neighbours seized large territories. The end of Anglo-French struggle in January 1761 had also given greater leverage to the British. The control over the Nawab of Bengal and the seizure of *diwani* had given the British financial power to back their growing political ambitions.

Raghoba, based at Nasik, was negotiating support of the Bombay Council offering them Salsette and Bassein, which would provide security to Bombay. **This background and what follows can help to conjecture that the British were keen to check the Portuguese in India, despite apparent friendship and neutrality.**

Mahadji Shinde had succeeded in placing Shah Alam on the throne in Delhi, ending his dependence as pensioner of the British after the battle of Buxar. The new dependence of the Mughal emperor upon the Marathas led him to name Mahadji Shinde Vakil or deputy of the Emperor, combining the offices of Vazir, Diwan and Bakshi, but the only territories left for the emperor were Delhi ad Agra. In this capacity Mahadji Shinde opened negotiations with Sikh sardars and a treaty was signed in May 1785. Mahadji got 500 Sikhs to serve in his army. Following the death of Madhav Rav in 1772 and murder of his younger brother Narayan Rav, there were coups and counter coups in Poona.

## **NANA PHADNIS**

**NANA Phadnis had put down the faction with Mahadji's aid that also permitted setting 50,000 troops against the British. The British force was forced to surrender Raghoba after signing the convention of Vadganv on January 17, 1779. Also Salsette and all territories acquired after 1772 were to be returned to the Marathas.**



The British joined forces to regain their prestige. Nana Phadnis too formed a grand coalition, including Haidar Ali, who had become aware of the designs of the British. Goddard's troops with better artillery were harassed by the Maratha cavalry. Around Mavals, the Marathas gave no relief to Goddard who had to retire with heavy losses in men and stores. In the north, Hastings took Shinde's strategic fort at Gwalior, but Mahadji recaptured it three years later, in July 1783. Over time, Col Camac's forces were unable to push forward and retreated with losses.

Under pressure of Haider in Karnataka and the naval support of French squadron under Suffren on the Coromandel Coast, Hastings had to appeal to Shinde for peace, which was concluded by Col Muir on October 13, 1781, and a treaty was signed at Salbye on May 17, 1782. Shinde was given Broach and stood guarantee for the fulfilment of the terms of the treaty which would exclude all Europeans, except the English and the Portuguese from the Maratha dominions. Nana Phadnis had won, and the British failed to put their nominee as Peshwa.

Nothing of this complex picture of British machinations to capture power from the native rulers and French rivals is evident from Cunha Rivara's abundant writings and documentation preserved in his collection at the Evora Public Library. I presume that he accompanied the developments with keen interest, but was either discreet in keeping a diplomatic silence, or had really no time to digest the full implications of the constantly changing strategies of the neighbouring powers in the face of his manifold occupations and priorities.

## **SOCIAL HISTORY**

**CUNHA Rivara as Orientalist and defender of Padroado:** In a preface to a re-edition of Cunha Rivara's *Memórias da Villa de Arrayolos*, his native town, which he wrote during the three years

when he had to interrupt his university studies due to political disturbances caused by the civil wars, Prof Francisco Martins Ramos writes that an important facet of Cunha Rivara was his interest in social history, interested in the present. He also states that Cunha Rivara reveals some traits of ethnocentrism (Prefácio, xv), but forgives him for being a child of his times, an ethnocentric era par excellence (“*época etnocêntrica por excelência*”).

Vol. III of the *Memórias* was published by the Municipal Council of Arrayolos only in 1991, and the same preface writer calls the attention of the readers to the Indian documentation of Rivara's collection, suggesting that it could open new vistas about the Portuguese presence in India. We do need a critical assessment of his Indian perception. Hopefully the Cunha Rivara Chair will provide opportunities for this. There is no doubt that, unlike the first two volumes of *Memórias* written earlier, the last volume written after his return from long sojourn in India, he fills with information of an ecclesiastical nature, a clear influence of his long battles for the Padroado in India.

It must be said in favour of Cunha Rivara that unlike the common run of the colonial-minded thinkers, including the British of Macaulay's fame, Cunha Rivara believed that Portuguese language would gain better acceptance by promoting the vernacular languages of Goa, meaning Konkani and Marathi. He demonstrated this interest by publishing *Ensaio da Língua Concani*, which A K Priolkar included in its English version as Part II of his *The Printing Press in Índia* to commemorate the fourth centenary of the introduction of the Gutenberg press in Goa. Cunha Rivara reprinted various dictionaries and grammars of the old missionaries, and commented that unfortunately much of their zeal, or “*cheiro da santidade*” (the scent of holiness) had been lost since the 17th century.

Cunha Rivara was familiar with the Iberian cultural background and was inclined to respect the similarity and difference between Castillian and Portuguese languages. However, Priolkar's interest in reprinting the *Ensaio* was aimed at using Rivara's influence and authority as a neutral voice to back his own views about Konkani as a dialect of Marathi. The opinions of the orientalist Robert X Murphy and of the Italian Carmelite Francis Xavier, cited in the *Ensaio*, were favourable to Priolkar's stand. **A footnote to Cunha Rivara's translated essay also made a controversial suggestion of ethnological nature, like throwing a cat among the pigeons, referring to the Chardo caste of Goa as a Catholic version of the Brahmin subcaste of Karadhe in the Maharashtra-Karnataka region.**

## ROLE OF THE CHURCH

IT MUST be said in favour of the English rulers of India that they sought to stay out of the religious conflicts, including the Padroado-Propaganda rivalries. Contrarily, Cunha Rivara showed a compulsive interest in translating and commenting in the unofficial section of the Government Gazette the reports published in newspapers of British India and pastoral letters of the Vicars Apostolic of Agra, Bengal, Bombay and Madras, using often a very excited tone, denouncing a lack of calm expected from a good historian.

The contribution of Cunha Rivara in this area may be regarded as significant and meritorious, even though it could be labelled as political journalism, in defence of the Portuguese rights. Owing to his position in the Portuguese administration, his informed contribution played an important role in conditioning the evolution of the events, though it failed to help towards a more peaceful development for a long-term solution and beneficial for the local people.

We remain indebted to Cunha Rivara for the archival and epigraphic documentation he made available to scholars, complementing the contribution of others who followed him, like P S S Pissurlencar, Josef Wicki, A da Silva Rego, to mention only some. George Moraes had thanked Cunha Rivara for not writing elaborate introductions to his volumes of *Arquivo Portuguez Oriental*, leaving the readers free to savour the documentation for themselves.

**Cunha Rivara did influence his readers as we have illustrated in this brief essay, confirming the judgement of the editor of his *Memórias* whom we quoted above. We can find umpteen illustrations of his ethnocentric views in the *Conjuração*, *Ensaio*, and sundry writings about the Padroado-propaganda conflict.**

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This article was written by Goan Observer Team

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