

Cinema held hostage

Just how short-sighted can the Directorate of Film Festivals (DFF) be? The body that controls the International Film Festival of India (IFFI) has decided in its 'wisdom' that it will not show renowned artist M F Husain's award winning documentary 'Through the Eyes of a Painter' – an 18-minute film based on the artist's impressions about the beauty of Rajasthan – because an organisation called the Hindu Janajagruti Samiti has protested against it.

The Samiti claims that Husain has depicted Hindu Goddesses in the nude in his paintings, and that this is an insult to Hinduism, so his film should not be shown at IFFI. However, when this very issue came up before the Supreme Court of India in September this year, a bench of the apex court headed by Chief Justice K G Balakrishnan observed: "There are many such pictures, paintings and sculptures, and some of them are in temples also." The bench, also comprising Justices P Sathasivam and J M Panchal, was not impressed with the argument that Husain was taking advantage of his age and reputation to get away with the law by painting obscene pictures. It dismissed a petition filed by Maharashtra-based Dwaipayan Venkateshacharya Varkhedkar, challenging a judgment of the Delhi High Court quashing criminal proceedings initiated against the painter in Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh and Gujarat over these very paintings.

Is it that in the eyes of the DFF, the Hindu Janajagruti Samiti carries more weight than the Delhi High Court and the Supreme Court of India?

Let us take a closer look at the Hindu Janajagruti Samiti itself. It is an umbrella organisation comprising a number of Hindu fundamentalist groups, including the Sanathan Sanstha, the Bajrang Dal and the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS). The first two of these organisations are presently under the scanner for terrorist activities; the first because some of its members were held for setting off bomb blasts in Thane and Navi Mumbai, and the second because its activists were involved in accidental bomb explosions in Nanded in Maharashtra and Kanpur in UP!

Their objections might have made even the teeniest-weeniest bit of sense if the film that is at the centre of this controversy had anything at all to do with their complaint against the artist. But even this is not so. 'Through the Eyes of a Painter' is a film made more than 40 years ago, decades before any controversy on the issue came up. In fact, the film won the top prize – the Golden Bear – at the Berlin Film Festival in 1967. Withdrawing it from the festival is depriving film buffs the opportunity to see a classic.

In any case, one would assume that the final authority for deciding on whether a film is suitable for screening in India is the Central Board of Film Censors (CBFC). Husain's film has a certificate from the censor board. Then who are these 'super censors' whose verdict is taken by the DFF to be the last word on what can be shown at IFFI and what can't? Little wonder that the film fraternity has almost unanimously condemned the decision.

The DFF has several versions of why the film will not be shown. DFF director S M Khan told this newspaper that the film was not part of IFFI, but of the Framing Time section of the Films Division, which had decided to withdraw it. But he later said that Goa 'state authorities' had requested the organisers to defer the screening as it might create law and order problem in the state. *IBNLive.com*, the website of TV news channel *CNN-IBN*, has reported that the Chief Minister requested the screening to be deferred. But according to *The Hindu*, Chief Minister Digambar Kamat has denied having any hand in this entire exercise.

If the Hindu Janajagruti Samiti is aggrieved with the film, let it exercise the democratic rights guaranteed to it by the Constitution of India and peacefully demonstrate against the showing of the film, just as it did against the Hindi blockbuster 'Jodhaa-Akbar'. But it is nothing short of a scandal that the DFF is depriving other citizens of their Constitutional right to see the film owing to empty threats that have no justification.

Cursing the Parents, Cursing the Past

Cursing our history for all our woes is an irresponsible and destructive way forward, argues TEOTONIO R DE SOUZA

A Goan politician-writer wrote the following lines in a post to the popular mailgroup Goanet in a post sent on 10 November 2008: "I have said it before and I will say it again and again until I die. Our miserable freedom fighters have failed us. It was best if they did not do anything of that sort. They need to be cursed. Not praised. Fine, they liberated themselves. But they became slaves all over again. And got us into a worse mess than before. If they had to leave the liberating to us, we would have stayed independent."

How would the politician-writer of the above lines feel if his children or grandchildren were to say something as follows about their parents/grandparents: "We wish they were not foolish to bring us into this world to burden us with the consequences of their foolishness? They have begotten us into this mess!" I presume the parallel is not exaggerated. Blaming the ancestors for their frailties or even foolishness, whether they be dead or still alive, discredits anyone who considers himself or herself a responsible adult.

The same applies to those Goans who curse the past, be they those who curse the Portuguese colonial past, or those who seek scapegoats for the ills of the more recent past since Liberation. Finding scapegoats is a pastime of cowards and opportunist politicians. I am not sure if there exist non-opportunist politicians or politicians-to-be. At least Machiavelli in modern times and our much older home-grown Kautilya have perceived the reality of a good professional politician. If Aristotle defined all humans as political animals, the cowardly tendency is within all of us! It is important to be conscious of it to avoid or minimize social damage.

What we often fail to understand is that all change implies ruptures with the past. These ruptures can be light or profound, affecting some positively, others negatively. Some beneficiaries of the past dispensation have seen themselves outdone by those who had to kowtow to them. Some social classes that were socially and economically marginalized in the past may have found new opportunities of recovering their self-respect. When we talk of historical changes we imply usually radical changes.

Goa has witnessed such changes since 1961. It is obvious that those affected negatively will see no Liberation in this process, while those who are making the best of the new dispensation will see themselves as freed from colonial oppression, and will repudiate



The memory of the Portuguese dictator António de Oliveira Salazar survives in his birthplace, Santa Comba Dão, where a statue of him once stood and was blown up in the course of the 1974 revolution

the pretensions of the earlier group to define what was good for them under colonial regime as being good for all. One such pretension of the colonial defenders is that Goa was peaceful and crime-free! Obviously, the colonial machinery, both through law-enforcement and soul control, protected the few collaborators against any or all discontented elements.

Democracy means many things to different people. Each one defines it to suit their own interests. While it generally implies freedom of expression, laws are enacted to silence some forms of expression. There are taboos in democracy too. Some influential persons in Goan society have voiced their disapproval of the freedom fighters for expressing their bitterness against the Portuguese past and for denouncing the attempts at recovering cultural contacts with Portugal. Who gives the bourgeois opinion-makers the right to silence the hurt feelings of a section of the society, even if there be only 72 as a Goa-based Portuguese foundation seems to have declared in a press interview reported internationally?

Would 72 votes count only at the time of elections? It is this type of ambiguity in respecting individuals

when convenient and ignoring them when inconvenient that discredits ever more the democracy that pretends to uphold the dignity of individual citizens. Incidentally, I am reminded of a Biblical passage (the modern Portuguese have generally forgotten the Bible which their colonial ancestors taught to our ancestors) in Luke 10 where we are told that Jesus sent out 72 disciples (some versions say 70) to preach his message! Were they not too few for such a daunting mission? At least the Goan freedom fighters rely on the power of their convictions, not on their numbers. They do well in leaving the numbers to banks and foundations that we see now foundering as a result of their speculations and miscalculations.

Do the opinion-makers in Goa know that some of the left-wing and pretentious freedom-fighters of Portugal are opposing an initiative of the locals for creating a Salazar-museum in Santa Comba Dão, the home town of the erstwhile dictator, three-and-a-half decades after his fall? The local municipality is convinced that it could be a world attraction and consequently a marvelous source of income for the region from national and international tourism.

Portugal too has its hard-headed freedom-fighters. Would the Goa University or some Foundation care to fund a research project to study what makes the Portuguese freedom-fighters different from, or more enlightened than, their Goan counterparts? It can be an interesting project in preparation for the forthcoming fifth centenary of the Portuguese conquest of Goa in 2010, or completion of 50 years of Goa's Liberation in 2011. But the post-colonial bourgeoisie will prefer to organize some more innocuous exercises or singing competitions of the type "*Vem Cantar*" for the unwary youth looking towards the Portuguese door to Europe. Good for the kids. Sinaris and Karmalis should present them with better outlets if they do not wish to suffer more sleepless nights.

Both Goans and Portuguese will need an Obama effect to face their past in a more engaged and constructive manner. Portugal has had Alfredo Bruto da Costa, Armando Gonçalves Pereira, Narana Coissoró and António Costa in the political limelight at different times and at various levels of national governance. They have done well for themselves, but they were never seen as representing any interests of the communities to which they ethnically belong. Some even shy away from demonstrating publicly any association with the Goan/Indian communities in Portugal. This is even presented as a virtue of a successful integration of the minorities into the national mainstream. The great majority of the ethnic Asians and Africans in Portugal will have a different story to tell.

What could the fears be? A political repudiation by the Portuguese electorate? Are the Portuguese prepared to question what would their importance be in the world scenario without historic links with India? Will they be pleased to know that they would have no *Lusiads* without a Vasco da Gama in India? Is Portugal prepared to vote for an Indo-African president? This question was raised recently in the columns of an important Lisbon daily by a Muslim lady-writer of Indian origin.

Nothing much will probably change for another generation at least. My close observation of Portuguese society leads me to conclude that notwithstanding the good nature of the rural Portuguese, there is always a section of urban political elite of clever Johnnies (Joões/Manuéis) that has manipulated the Portuguese natives across centuries to serve their own interests and of their next of kin (*primos*) by bamboozling the rank and file into submission. Only the methods have changed over time.

Cheers Dears

Micky's Party to Save Goa

By Augusto Pinto

Jagadamba the Saffronite was walking on the road, head buried in his Marathi paper, when he almost stepped into my dog Laskar, whom I was taking for a walk. Laskar snapped at Jaggu for he has a congenital dislike of saffronites. Luckily Jaggu got out of the way in time.

Quickly trying to make amends for my bad-tempered German Shepherd, I said, "Jaggubab, how are you? And what's the news this morning?" Jaggu was in a good mood, for he did not seem to mind Laskar's violent outburst. He replied, "Good news, Gusto! Micky is the best Minister in Goa!" I was puzzled, as saffronites are not known to shower praise on Christians and certainly not on the likes of Micky.

"Er...could you explain, Jaggu?" "It's all here, Gusto," he said, thrusting his Marathi daily at me. "I don't read Marathi, Jaggu – just tell me what it says." "It says that Micky told Digu that he had better give justice to the German mom, or else he's going to show him what's what." "Ah yes, that's a nice gesture on Micky's part, after the poor dear was abandoned by her liar, Aires."

"Gusto, there's more to the man than just seeking justice for German minor girls. He is going to get rid of the *River Princess*!" "What!!!" I was in shock. "You can't be serious, Jaggu. Nobody, but nobody, can rid the Aguada waters of the *River Princess*. Not Anil,

not Willy, not Parrikar, not..." Just then Laskar began to wag his tail, as Big Ben the American happened along. Ben spends six months of the year in Goa, and knows all the high and mighty of the land as he supplies them with Coke for their parties.

"Hello Jaggu! Hello Gusto! Have you heard the latest?" he said, as he patted Laskar's head. "Whazzup, Ben?" I asked. "Micky's going to get rid of the *River Princess*." I said, "Really? Jaggu here was telling me the same thing a moment ago. I really cannot believe that anyone can get rid of her. Her hull is 3 metres deep in the sand and it's breaking up. There is no way it can actually be removed. Great for the five-stars though, as their guests have to sit by their pools and not swim in the sea which can be deadly because of the hag's metal debris lurking around. So they must patronise the five-stars' in-house restaurants and not go to cheap shacks after their swim. And it's a cash cow for every Tourism Minister who awards hefty contracts to quack salvage companies for no commission whatsoever."

Ben quietly said, "It will be removed." Jaggu was curious, "Ben, please explain." Said Ben, "Well, you must know American politics to understand. These are the last few days of the Bush administration. He is going out a loser. The economy is in a shambles. He made a mess in Iraq and he never got Bin Laden. Bush desperately needs to

do something spectacular in the next few days to be remembered as a great President. Well, Micky is going to capitalise on this."

Neither Jaggu nor I had a clue as to what Ben was getting at, so we just listened. "You guys know how much Micky wants the Chief Minister's chair. Well, he's hit on a great plan to get it. He's throwing a huge party on the *River Princess*. The boat's going to be decked up like a fairy tale, with the best food, drink and music. Everyone who's anyone will be invited."

"The 39 *Chors* will be specially flown onto the *River Princess* by helicopter. But after all his guests are on board, Micky – from the shore – will call up President Bush and tell him that Osama Bin Laden has been spotted partying on board the *River Princess*. Bush is just like Micky. He acts first and thinks later. So he'll tell the US Air Force to bomb the boat to smithereens. And they'll do it with pinpoint accuracy – BOOM!"

I said, "Whew! So there goes *The River Princess*!" Jaggu said, "And there go the 39 *Chors*!" Ben said, "And Micky becomes the CM of Goa!"

Jaggu said, "But how do you know all this, Ben?" "Heh! Heh!" Ben replied, "I sold the idea to Micky myself." By now, Laskar was fed up of the politics, and began dragging me home. Till next time then...

Letters to the Editor

Mapusa building horrors

Sandhya Bhawe, Mapusa

Many buildings in Mapusa are not built according to approved plans. All the stilts are converted into shops and garages and there is no authority under the sun to put an end to this and save poor buyers from being cheated. Some Bombay builders even collect thousands of rupees with a promise to form a society and transfer their share of land but nothing is done for years together and there is no government agency to check this.

People are reluctant to approach the court for waste of time. All builders swindle the maintenance money collected by force from the buyers. As long as there is a strong builder lobby in the government, Town Planning Department and Municipality, and as long as those prominent people are offered a shop, flat or garage free of charge, and as long as the vigilance agency and the criminal branch of the police continue to

sleep, no change will come, and flat and shop buyers will continue to be cheated.

Many buildings in Mapusa are built on dangerous slopes where people cannot even walk. It is high time the High Court take notice of this injustice done to the buyer by the builders. An inquiry committee should be formed to inspect and investigate how the buildings are built, since such wrong constructions affect the entire town due to congestion and also dirty water being let out in the open drains which creates a dirty smell.

IFFI excise blockbuster

Jude Vaz, Colvale

IFFI has at least one reason to be appreciated this year: it has put some common sense into the thick heads of the Excise Department. An earlier notification to shut down all liquor outlets in the entire North Goa District for four days was withdrawn, and restricted to only Bicholim Taluka, and to Panjim City on the counting day.

All directives given by the Election Commission were thrown to the winds for this long awaited change, which inconvenienced us every election time. The probable reason for this change of heart by the Excise Department was pressure by multinational liquor companies and a certain liquor baron who has the major share of the liquor trade. Four dry days would have affected the sales of the outlets which had set up shop for the IFFI, and which came under the purview of North Goa District.

Keep it up, Excise Department! Let this also be a precedent for future elections, to brush up your outdated views in deciding dry days. Liquor/alcohol are not the only stimulants in today's world. There is a range of psychotropic drugs freely available at every nook and corner. Also remember that if someone closes the front/main doors, God always opens the windows and the back doors to quench one's genuine thirst – at least for Goans!

Tiatrist's birth date

Rafael Fernandes, by email

It is commendable that tiatrists have decided to commemorate Pai Tiatrist's birth anniversary. João Agostinho was born on 14 December 1871 at Margao, Goa, and baptised a week later on 21 December. Though the Tiatrists have decided to honour him on 21 December, they may please

Letter of the Day

Equal Opportunity Commission

Avadhut T Pokle, Mapusa

I make it a point to watch various debates on television, because there you can see various experts expressing their valuable views on a variety of topics of public concern.

I recently watched a debate on NDTV 24x7 on the topic of "Terror", which named a certain community as being involved in such acts. It remains to be seen if this is a myth or a fact.

Now the most worrisome aspect of the whole matter is that an armed forces officer's name figured in the investigations (though his guilt is yet to be proved) and if more armed forces personnel are found to be involved later, this will be very dangerous.

Some panelists even expressed the view that over the decades people in our country have been discriminated against on religious grounds, which results in some reactions/ change in behaviour, which can be dangerous for the peace and security of our society.

At the end of the debate, in their final comments a lady panelist and distinguished journalist expressed the view that we should have, instead of a minority commission, an equal opportunity commission to ensure equality of opportunity and protection against discrimination.

Our country has lots of income from various taxes and a part of this should be utilized towards giving facilities to each and every person on an equal opportunity basis. Just in case the funds are not sufficient, then we should curtail expensive facilities provided to politicians and let them be provided with facilities enough to run their posts. Let them live a simple lifestyle like our great leaders Mahatma Gandhi and Loknayak Jayprakash Narayan.

A politician remarked during the discussion that a country cannot run without politicians. Over the years our politicians have been behaving like owners rather than servants once they get elected and get hold of power. We can have a system where we can have CEOs for various ministries and elected leaders could just supervise and give suggestions.

Let us ensure that we build a system where not a single person will think that he/she is being discriminated against.

note that his correct date of birth is 14 December.

Unaccountable delegations

John Eric Gomes, Porvorim

The Revenue Minister has criticised government policies because the NCP member sent to Cannes to study film festival has been kept out of IFFI Programme Committee. I wonder if he contributed anything worthwhile at all from what he learned!

A sports delegation (including Chief Secretary and TCP boss) recently went to Dubai to study sports. Delegations have gone hither and thither to study garbage, traffic, etc. What is the result, besides waste of scarce public funds?

Every delegation must be interviewed by the media to let the public know just what they will learn/have learnt, and how they intend to utilise

their knowledge here in a fixed time frame for positive results. On their return, excerpts from their official report should be made public by the government information department. I trust the Governor, CM, and all concerned will heed public's strong views on this subject.

Fire hazards ignored

Pachu Menon, Margao

Reports of fire engulfing two shops in the Panjim city market should not be brushed aside just as another one of those unfortunate incidents.

Intermittent cases of fire breaking out due to faulty planning and shortcomings in the infrastructure of the marketing complexes vindicates the stand taken by the Director of Fire and Emergency Services that the safety aspect is never given due importance by the authorities concerned. In spite of repeated warnings, when

trade licenses are issued without verifying the safety protocol of the shops and establishment under consideration, the civic administration is playing with the lives of the public at large. Often the timely intervention by the fire brigade averts any major mishap.

If the merchants and traders were to be a bit more circumspect and comply by the safety norms prescribed, they would be doing themselves a big favour. It is quite ludicrous to observe that fire hazards never seem to feature on their list of priorities. Alleys within alleys, cluttered with shops, with hardly any free space, make one claustrophobic. The crowd, the milieu and the improperly planned interiors that welcome a customer in any of the municipal markets in the state is evidence enough that apprehensions of a stampede would not be misplaced in such a scenario in case of emergencies. Paying heed to the timely implorations of the disaster management services, the business community can ensure that 'towering infernos' are not the order of the day.

HCN exposes misdeeds

Francisco Fernandes, by email

My congratulations to *Herald* and HCN for doing a wonderful job these days. Kudos to HCN staff for capturing the policemen accepting the hafta at Vasco.

Also, the news in *Herald* Secondly today's new regarding the birth and deaths records at the sub-registrar's office at Margao will do wonders for the poor citizens of Goa who were forced to pay bribes in different offices all over Goa, especially at the Panjim sub-registrar's office at Junta House where one or two government staff have to struggle with hundreds of citizens who were trying to find out their births or marriage certificates of their near and dear ones for more than two months. This is a matter that needs to be exposed.

Letters should be 150 words or less in length, and should have the writer's name, address and telephone number. The editor reserves the right to edit letters for size and readability, and to delete any personal attacks or libellous/objectionable matter.

Words of Wisdom

Teachings of Swami Vivekananda

My ideal, indeed, can be put into a few words, and that is: to preach unto mankind their divinity, and how to make it manifest in every movement of life.

Education is the manifestation of the perfection already in man.

We want that education by which character is formed, strength of mind is increased, the intellect is expanded, and by which one can stand on one's own feet.

So long as the millions live in hunger and ignorance, I hold every man a traitor who, having been educated at their expense, pays not the least heed to them.

Whatever you think, that you will be. If you think yourselves weak, weak you will be; if you think yourselves strong, strong you will be.

If you have faith in all the three hundred and thirty millions of your mythological gods, ... and still have no faith in yourselves, there is no salvation for you. Have faith in yourselves, and stand up on that faith and be strong; that is what we need.

Strength, strength it is that we want so much in this life, for what we call sin and sorrow have all one cause, and that is our weakness. With weakness comes ignorance, and with ignorance comes misery.

Purity, patience, and perseverance are the three essentials to success, and above all, love.

Teach yourselves, teach everyone his real nature, call upon the sleeping soul and see how it awakes. Power will come, glory will come, goodness will come, purity will come, and everything that is excellent will come when this sleeping soul is roused to self-conscious activity.

They alone live who live for others, the rest are more dead than alive.

This is the gist of all worship – to be pure and to do good to others.

It is love and love alone that I preach, and I base my teaching on the great Vedantic truth of the sameness and omnipresence of the Soul of the Universe.