

The Kandahar conundrum

By constantly contradicting itself on its then government's infamous decision to free terrorists—including the high-profile Maulana Masood Azhar and Ahmed Omar Saeed Sheikh, later involved in the kidnapping and murder of *Wall Street Journal* reporter Daniel Pearl—in exchange for the passengers of an Indian Airlines flight hijacked and flown to Kandahar, Afghanistan, in 1999, the BJP is certainly not doing itself a service.

Combating terrorism and the nation's security is one of the cornerstones of the party's poll programme for 2009. But the BJP's leaders, one after the other, are putting their feet in their mouths over an issue on which they should have evolved a common, coherent stand, almost as soon as they decided to make terrorism a central election issue for 2009.

National Security was supposed to be the BJP's battering ram in this election, thanks to the recent Mumbai terrorist attack, which is still so fresh in public memory. But, far from being on the offensive, the BJP has been repeatedly forced onto the defensive on this sensitive issue.

The basic reason for this lies with the indecision surrounding the actual role of the 'decisive' leader the party is offering to the electorate, in the Kandahar episode. BJP prime ministerial candidate L K Advani has claimed that he wasn't briefed on that decision, and was unaware that then External Affairs Minister Jaswant Singh was to accompany the freed terrorists to Kandahar.

The claim raised a lot of eyebrows, considering he was not only the country's Home Minister at the time, but a member of the high-profile Cabinet Committee on Security. But, Advani claims, the committee didn't decide on the issue. Any statement like that is bound to raise suspicion. Naturally, it came under withering attack from the Congress.

In response, BJP spokesman Prakash Javadekar further compounded matters by claiming that present Prime Minister Dr Manmohan Singh—then Leader of the Opposition in the Rajya Sabha—had backed then Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee's hostage release plan. It didn't make sense; why would Vajpayee consult Dr Singh, but not his own Home Minister—Advani? In fact, George Fernandes, then Defence Minister and NDA chairperson, when asked, categorically said that all cabinet members were present when the decision was taken.

Then Farooq Abdullah—who was then Chief Minister of Jammu & Kashmir, whose National Conference was a key BJP ally and whose son Omar Abdullah was a union minister—said that he was personally dead against the release of the terrorists, but L K Advani had persuaded him to set them free, saying him it was a Union Cabinet decision. This cast a very dark cloud on Advani's denials.

And now, then External Affairs Minister Jaswant Singh—who accompanied the freed terrorists to Kandahar—has said that L K Advani and Arun Shourie were the two NDA Ministers in the cabinet who "opposed" the decision to release the terrorists, and it was he who "persuaded" Advani to agree. Singh has also confirmed that Farooq Abdullah was opposed to the decision.

Maintaining that he was "sharing this [information] for the first time", Singh said: "L K Advani, like a loyal and devoted party member, responded and deferred to the collective wishes of the Cabinet." He also admitted that L K Advani had persuaded Farooq Abdullah to agree to the release of the terrorists. Jaswant Singh may think he is setting the record straight by offering his head in the noose to save his leader. But the fact is that he is only making matters worse. Now, sections of the media are calling for an inquiry to find out what actually happened in the Kandahar episode...

The point is, the BJP's claim to fight terrorism more effectively than the Congress is not borne out by events. The record of the Congress in the five years since it came to power in 2004 is not much better than the BJP's, but it certainly isn't worse. During Congress rule, authorities have at least managed to track down and disable two significant terrorist networks—the so-called Indian Mujahideen that engineered serial blasts in half a dozen locations, and the Hindu terrorist network that is charged with planting bombs in Malegaon and other Muslim-dominated areas.

Playing games of one-upmanship on issues like terrorism is risky at best. At worst, it can be plain foolhardy.

Goans quickly gained political maturity after Liberation, mastering the tomfoolery of elections, says TEOTÓNIO R DE SOUZA

Elections are in the news these days in most world and national/regional televisions and other media channels. We hear on BBC World News about the ongoing Indian elections as a democratic exercise on a planetary scale. News is coming in of a relatively comfortable majority assured to the ANC in the fourth general elections since the end of apartheid. Closer to my home in Portugal, the ruling PS (Socialist Party) is confronted by several alleged scandals of corruption and manipulation of judiciary, and hopes to win the forthcoming elections largely because of the opposition parties in disarray or lack of credible lies! But in a debate on the Portuguese national TV channel last week, one well-known union leader wished that Portugal would not follow the Indian democratic model where the majority of its citizens would be condemned to survive democratically with less than a dollar per day!

Closer to my native home (Goa), the elections seem to be causing no less expectations and disillusion. I have known and accompanied personally Matanhy Saldanha and Cristopher Fonseca during my years of PhD research in early 1970s. Both have shown their mettle over decades of involvement in the causes of the marginalized. I had to provide a pain killer once to Mathany when he was beaten up at the entrance of the Jesuit House during a Ramponkar protest march in Panjim in 1975! I wonder if he remembers that minor incident in his life of many agitations and beatings, both physical and political.

Florianio Lobo, my fellow Moidekar since the days of parish catechism, has also been consistent with the political ideals of his political invention, the Su-Raj party, a quixotic exercise according to some political analysts. Whatever such rival or critical political opinions, I consider Florianio's sincerity and love for the land beyond question, and knowing his creative talents of a genuine Moidekar, he is probably beyond harm as long as he entertains himself with his political desires to save Goans from the vile politics that is destroying systematically what is left of the virgin forests cleared (early destruction or early development?) by the mythical Parashurama who introduced the Goans to the iron age. But Florianio is watching and refuses to fall in line with the silent majority of Goans who vote and then retire to their *sossegado* routine, which Florianio characterizes with the Konkani expression "*Ankam kiteak poddlam?*" (Why should we bother?)

The elections provide a democratic legitimacy to clever politicians. But even their cleverness is not always sufficient to guarantee an easy ride to political power. Much depends upon the level of dissatisfaction

The Mirage of Elections



HISTORICAL EXPLORATIONS

among the general public or some sections of it that can be exploited and mobilized for political gains. The strategies of mobilization often need financial grease, actual or promised. Hence, it is within the reach of all good politicians. Some have the talent of rhetoric to convert their electoral demagoguery into credible promissory notes. This is what generally goes under the designation of Machiavellian politics or the unethical side of realpolitik.

Many pious Goans turned politicians may find it difficult to get used to the modern political ethic, but we have exemplary exceptions too. All of us who are familiar with Goan post-Liberation political scenario

know these illustrations. Florianio cites one in the Moira-net (<http://tinyurl.com/c58j34>). But Catholic Goans could find inspiration in an erstwhile head of the Vatican Bank, Cardinal Marcinkus, who once told his interviewer from *Time* magazine that the Church is not run only on Hail Marys! That was when that eminence was on the wanted list of Interpol for international money laundering.

The theme and reality of democratic elections provides a good opportunity for me to comment on the political maturity gained by Goans so quickly after centuries of colonial rule, including half a century of dictatorial rule of Salazar. Whatever the nature of

Portuguese liberalism since 1820s, it did provide the Goans a fair training in the art of tomfoolery of elections. The pro-native party of *regeneradores* in Goa did not follow the same political programme as the *regeneradores* in Portugal, and it reminds me of the modern parallel of PSD in Portugal and the PSD of Alberto João Jardim in Madeira!

Constâncio Roque da Costa (grandson of his namesake elected in the very first batch of Goan MPs for the Portuguese Parliament) in the 1890s could win elections in Bardez for representation in Portuguese parliament and get away with lots of political intrigues and accusations of fomenting anti-Portuguese rebellions in Goa at that time. He ran his newspaper *Universal* in Portugal and with his political clout provided high-ranking jobs in Goa for the Portuguese nationals! The appointment of one of the Norton de Matos brothers as Crown Attorney in Goa was one such case. There is much scope for historical research in this area of liberal politics of Goa in the 19th century.

One final reflection in these *Historical Explorations*: it is often believed that the missionary strategies belong to the distant past of Goa's colonial history. Why have Goan Catholics of Salcete done relatively well in Goan politics of post-Liberation era with dozen of representatives in the Legislative Assembly and several representatives in Delhi? Why did Bardez produce only Jack Siqueira, Orlando Siqueira and Wilfred de Souza? It is the militancy of the Jesuit missionary methods that did a thorough job of converting Salcete to Christianity that continues to be reflected in the behavioural pattern of the Salcete Catholics till today. Bardez was entrusted to the "good" Franciscans, lovers of mother Earth and sister Moon! Their level of tolerance did not produce similar results in terms of conversions in Bardez. Without some degree of militancy—call it political determination or fanaticism—it is left largely to Goan Catholics of Salcete to play the historic roles in the defence of the Konkani language and other struggles for Goan identity in post-colonial politics.

The Catholics of Goa are fortunately enriching Goan democratic politics and have refused to be reduced to an impotent minority. We cannot forget that Goa is rooted in its pre-colonial heritage and my village Moira is a distinctive reminder of the Mauryan links of Goa's past. We cannot recall the Mauryan past without thinking of the master politician Kautliya who brought them to power! Maquiavel was a relatively recent newcomer in the field of politics nearly twenty centuries later!

Tongue in Cheek

Elections – Then And Now

By Adelmo Fernandes

Elections are now over, at least in Goa, and having exercised our franchise in the worlds largest Democracy, it is time to carry on with our life. By casting our vote we have carried out the most sacred of duties as citizens of this great country. Now we can breath free. We have got a heavy burden off our chest. The ball is now in the court of the politician. But then it is now the turn of the politicians to be tensed up. Their fate is sealed in the small devices called the EVMs (Electronic Voting Machines). The front-runners will probably be spending some sleepless nights, while non-serious candidates will be quite content for having taken part in the electoral process as candidates.

An ordinary citizen like me will have gone through the task of voting several times in his/her lifetime. Some could even consider voting as a necessary evil. Elections are absolutely necessary in a democracy, even though the process could mean a lot of money from the exchequer being spent. Over the years elections have gone a sea change. Thanks to the Election Commission and the Model Code of Conduct for the candidates, elections, especially the propaganda part, have now become quite tolerable.

There was a time when election time could be compared to a mini carnival. Campaigning would take place at full volume and large cut-outs of party symbols playing the role of floats in a carnival. There was havoc on

the roads with rallies by the various political parties in the fray, with public meetings and even street plays being the order of the day. There used to be banners, party flags and large cut-outs of the candidates all over the place. It looked more like a circus coming to town, with all the candidates as the circus clowns.

We should be grateful to the Model Code of Conduct for bringing all this to naught. Now the propaganda is restricted to a few public meetings and door-to-door campaigning by the candidates. All the loud music and slogan shouting, which resulted in a lot of noise-pollution, is conspicuously absent in the modern-day elections. Even what is spoken at the election meetings is being monitored by the EC. Candidates are now conscious of the Model Code of Conduct dangling over their heads like the proverbial Sword of Damocles.

But then it must be said that the Election Commission is playing spoilsport by taking out all the fun from the elections. Several years ago, dry days were unheard of during elections. Most of the bars were wide open with the party workers having a party before and after the elections. Now of course elections are synonymous with dry days which continue till the election results are declared. So even the victory celebrations after the results are declared has to be a 'dry' affair. During these elections the wholesale liquor business was shut down for a record number of days,

making one wonder how the bridegroom served the drinks at the marriage reception held during the dry days.

Now even the way the ink is applied to the finger after casting the vote has undergone a change. In the past it was just a black dot on the finger just below the nail. Now it is a long line across the nail which looks quite ugly, especially on the pretty fingers of the ladies. Some of the ladies may probably even avoid casting their votes to avoid messing their pretty fingers with that indelible black ink.

In the past, voters did not carry anything with them to prove their identity. Now it seems that there is a problem of identity crisis as voters need to carry either a Voter's Identity Card or any of the thirteen documents as specified by the EC. In the past, elections meant a lot of paperwork. With the number of candidates on the rise, the ballot paper only got bigger and bigger, so much so that the voters had a hectic time looking for the symbol of their choice on which to put the stamp. Now of course everything is done with the press of a button of the EVM. Counting too was a laborious task and it would take anything from two to three days for the final results to be out. Now of course, who is in and who is out is known within a matter of a couple of hours. Though there has been a tremendous improvement in the entire electoral process, unfortunately the same cannot be said of the candidates we elect every election.

Letters to the Editor

Letter of the Day

Change electoral laws

Eusebio Carvalho, Fatorda

After going through 'Voters' Code of Conduct' by Adelmo Fernandes (*Herald*, 28 March), I found it quite puzzling and not acceptable. The Government/Parliament/Election Commission of India should immediately bring in the following constitutional/electoral changes in the interest of the general public and of voters:

1. Immediate withdrawal of all 'reservations', as our Constitution bestows equal rights to all its citizens, irrespective of cast, religion, sex, etc. Only one has to compete along with others.
2. Prescribe minimum compulsory educational qualifications for candidates contesting elections for Parliament/Assemblies/ZPs/Municipalities and Panchayats.
 - a) For Parliament and Assemblies, any recognised university degree, besides LLB
 - b) For ZPs/Municipalities, any recognised university degree
 - c) For Panchayats, Std XII passed from Higher Secondary Board
3. Persons having criminal background of any type, leave alone conviction by a court, should not be allowed to contest any election.
4. The person, once elected for Parliament/Assembly on a particular symbol for a particular party, should not be allowed to resign for 5 years or, till the Parliament or Assembly completes its term. If he/she does so, he/she should be debarred for contesting elections for such institutions, at least for 20 years.
5. There should be mandatory provisions in the law for Parliamentary/Assembly Speakers to decide disqualification cases within a period of 8 months from the date of receiving such complaints/cases.
6. No person should be allowed to contest elections for more than two terms for the same institution/body.
7. No person should be allowed to contest any election after he/she attains the age of 68 years.
8. No funds should be earmarked to any MP/MLA, in the name of development of their constituency, so as to avoid likely misuse and misappropriation of the same.
9. Pensions may be considered to the MPs/MLAs only after successful completion of two terms and not one term, as at present.
10. Any elected person violating the Constitution should be dismissed/disqualified forthwith by the concerned authority, empowered to this effect, after holding a summary trial.
11. No MLA should be allowed to head any Board/Corporation and PDA.
12. Only 10 per cent of the total strength of MPs/MLAs in a Parliament/Assembly, should be allowed to become ministers, including PM/CM.

After bringing the above reforms/changes in the system, into practice, the Voter's Code clauses suggested by Adelmo Fernandes can be enforced. Then more and more voters will throng to the election booths, to cast their votes and you can be sure that the voting percentage will definitely go to 99 per cent.

the past—somewhere between 13 July 1917 and 25 March 1984.

I would like to inform the author that the Late Pope John Paul II consecrated the whole world, especially Russia, to the Immaculate Heart of Mary on 25 March 1984. At the time, the last surviving visionary of Fatima, Sister Lucia, confirmed that the act of consecration corresponded to what Our Lady wished.

Mary's wish is the Pope's command. Our Lady did not suggest an option.

So I would request Mr Rodrigues to please bring himself up to date on what is going on in the Catholic Church, instead of coming out of hibernation after a quarter of a century and telling the Pope what to do.

Maligning the Nano

S Kamat, Alto Betim

There seems to be a deliberate attempt to create bad publicity for the Nano and to malign it even before it is released to the public.

We should be proud that Tata, an Indian company, has come out with an innovative and low-cost car which has attracted worldwide attention for keeping the price to Rs 1 lakh. In addition it gives you better mileage and meets international and Indian non-polluting standards, but the talk that we hear about it is the congestion in traffic and parking space that it will cause.

Are we not being elitist in such talk? Do we want to drive around in big cars which guzzle scarce carbon fuels and also pollute the atmosphere more? When we park, particularly in cities, do we need to hog all the available space at the cost of other car owners? Do we want to deprive our poorer friends from owning cars like the Nano so that we can continue our hegemony

over parking space and in congesting road traffic?

Cities and roads belong to everybody and are not the prerogative of the rich and influential. While the Nano will allow more vehicles per unit of road surface, it will also facilitate better traffic flow because of its small size and increased maneuverability. As the Nano will allow more vehicles to be parked per unit area parking space, it is more people and city friendly. Municipalities and city corporations will welcome the revenue they will generate from parking fees.

Why are we unable to look through motivated criticism, and welcome new developments like the Nano which are environment and society friendly?

Pawar politics

Franco Fernandes, Mapusa

Sharad Pawar is a shrewd politician. He is out to get maximum number of seats for the NCP so that it can be a bargaining chip for important ministerial berths for his partymen or even a Prime Ministerial position for himself at the centre. He has shrewdly kept all political parties as his friends. He has even befriended the Shiv Sena and there are strong signals that he even clandestinely maintained a friendly relationship with the BJP in Maharashtra to ensure that at least his and his daughter's victory chances are not jeopardised, if not his party's.

Here is a man who has kept both his feet on different boats and is still managing to keep afloat. He is known to be a consensus man and a thorough democrat compared to other party leaders in the country. He has also been managing the BCCI affairs wonderfully. He thus commands a lot of respect and goodwill among all parties. It will not surprise anyone if he is elected prime minister by different parties after elections. Yes, he has been accused of being associated with corrupt and anti-social elements in the past. But that is past. After all, who is a clean in Indian politics and do we have a credible choice under the prevailing circumstances?

Living in the past

Bernard Simoes, Dona Paula

In his letter to the editor (*Herald*, 18 Apr), Milagrio Rodrigues, has alleged that the Pope hasn't yet consecrated Russia to the Immaculate Heart of Mary. Mr Rodrigues is quite obviously living in

Paths of Wisdom



Science and Religion

Albert Einstein

"When one views the matter historically, one is inclined to look upon science and religion as irreconcilable antagonists, and for a very obvious reason. The man who is thoroughly convinced of the universal operation of the law of causation cannot for a moment entertain the idea of a being who interferes in the course of events—provided, of course, that he takes the hypothesis of causality really seriously. He has no use for the religion of fear and equally little for social or moral religion. A God who rewards and punishes is inconceivable to him for the simple reason that a man's actions are determined by necessity, external and internal, so that in God's eyes he cannot be responsible, any more than an inanimate object is responsible for the motions it undergoes. Science has therefore been charged with undermining morality, but the charge is unjust. A man's ethical behavior should be based effectually on sympathy, education, and social ties and needs; no religious basis is necessary. Man would indeed be in a poor way if he had to be restrained by fear of punishment and hopes of reward after death.

"On the other hand, I maintain that the cosmic religious feeling is the strongest and noblest motive for scientific research. Only those who realize the immense efforts and, above all, the devotion without which pioneer work in theoretical science cannot be achieved are able to grasp the strength of the emotion out of which alone such work, remote as it is from the immediate realities of life, can issue."

(From an article written by Albert Einstein in 1930)

100 Years Ago

O Herald

PRIMEIRO DIARIO NAS COLONIAS PORTUGUEZAS

25 April 1909

Betim quay blocked
The coal being unloaded at the quay bridge at Betim is causing hindrances to passengers and pedestrians alike.

Mapusa Feast tomorrow
Tomorrow the solemnities of the Feast in honour of Our Lady of Miracles will take place at Mapusa.

Murder most foul in Gaya
In a sensational case in Gaya, a mahout in the service of the Zamindar was killed by his own master.

Dangerous prank
It is rumoured that the iron pole found on the railway lines on the 10th of the current month was kept by the some miscreants out for fun while returning home drunk.