

## Restrict ration cards to fair price shops

Can a 32-year-old Goan man and his 30-year-old Goan wife have a 73-year-old son and a 65-year-old daughter; both foreigners? Jose Pereira's new ration card has his British neighbours as his children. It may sound like a small thing, but it points to a big scam. Thankfully, Bardez Mamlatdar Gaurish Shankhwalker and Porvorim Police Inspector Devendra Gad have launched an enquiry into Pereira's complaint.

Bardez mamlatdar Sankhwalker said by way of explanation that applications for addition of names on ration cards are accepted by his department and forwarded to the concerned section. It is the talathi, he says, who has to check the facts before issuing the ration card.

The mamlatdar is right. The procedure prescribed by the Goa government for new ration cards, for transfer of cards or for addition of names is by an application on plain paper along with the prescribed declaration form and all required documents, at the office of the taluka mamlatdar. The application is then endorsed to the concerned talathi for inquiry and report. On receipt of a satisfactory report, the card is issued.

Nerul panchayat talathi Veronica Rodrigues, who issued ration card, says that she received the application through the civil supplies section of the Bardez mamlatdar's office to issue a duplicate card to the family, as they had lost their old card. The new card, she says, was made as per the declaration submitted by the 'family'. But she has no explanation when asked how she did not notice the discrepancy in ages, except to say that she "cannot change what is said in the declaration". Then what prevented her from reporting the discrepancy to her superiors?

Goans complain that while it is easy for migrants (including foreigners?) to get ration cards, they are badly harassed for what is only their right. The difference in treatment, we are told, owes to political patronage and cash under the table. Be that as it may, there are far too many lapses in this case. Only persons staying in the same house can be added in a ration card. In the case of children, birth certificates are required. What happened in the case of these Britishers? Did no one notice that their birth certificates were British, or did they submit fake Goan birth certificates? A full inquiry is absolutely necessary.

The episode throws up a much bigger question. Had it not been for the fact that ration cards can be used as proof of identity and proof of residence, these two Britishers would never have been anxious to commit this kind of fraud.

What is a ration card? It is a document that enables a family to buy its quota of grains, kerosene and other essential commodities under the Public Distribution Scheme (PDS) from a fair price shop. That is the beginning and end of its real function. If a family does not buy grains from the ration shop or subsidised kerosene from an authorised dealer, then there should be no need to have a ration card at all.

But this is easier said than done. The Road Transport Authority (RTO), banks, and sundry government offices, including the mamlatdar offices, all demand ration cards as proof of residence and identity. Why? The ration card does not even have the photographs of the cardholders. It is often issued fraudulently. Why not restrict its use to the PDS? That will prevent its misuse.

But administrations in India thrive by creating uncertainty. There can be no other reason for the authorities to insist on the ration card as proof. For example, ration cards can be used as 'proof' of identity to vote. But since they have no photographs, impersonation by furnishing someone else's card is a very real possibility, which can be used by politicians to increase their vote banks. Opportunities for fraud are endless. It is best, therefore, that the function of this document be restricted to what its name indicates.

# Inquisition, Jesuits and Archbishops

TEOTÓNIO R DE SOUZA on turf wars and caste politics in the Church, and the Inquisition in 18th century Goa

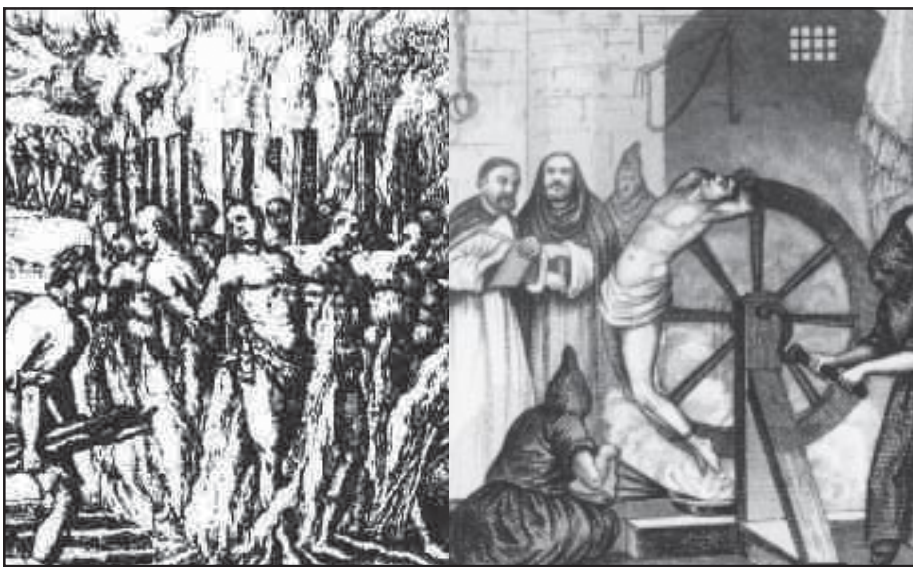
It was December 1736. Far from looking forward to a joyful Christmas, Fr Constantino, a Diocesan priest, was arraigned for a last time before the Board of the Goa Inquisitors to hear the sentence of the Holy Office. He was declared a hardened heretic and apostate, pretender, falsifier, dissimulator, guilty of praying to Hindu deities, etc, etc. He was given a last chance to admit the veracity of the accusations and to reconcile himself to God! Fr Constantino was born in Raçaim, in Salcete. He was 28 years old. The Portuguese had been in Goa for 225 years, and the Jesuits were convinced they had done a good job of turning Salcete into the most Christian province of Goa.

Salcete was under threat of Maratha invasion, even though it was a diversionary tactic of the canny Maratha general Chimaji Appa, whose main objective was to occupy Vasai, which he did in 1739; after which the Portuguese settlers lost the mainstay of their sustenance in India, and the Jesuits lost the farms and plantations that sustained their missions in India, China and Japan.

Placed against this perspective, one can understand better why the Holy Office was particularly concerned, and accused Fr Constantino of participating in "gentile" festivities and paying homage to "gentile" deities. Fr Constantino had confessed that he had travelled with some friends to a non-Portuguese territory, had met a Hindu *bhatt* (priest), had shaved his head, had taken a ritual bath, had drunk cow's urine and made an offering to *Betal*. After his return to Goa, he had remained faithful to his new commitments.

He had also confessed that he acknowledged and revered four Hindu deities: Mhamay, Ram, Betal and Narayan. The Holy Office deprecated Fr Constantino's mix of Christianity and Hinduism, more so while he continued to perform as ordained Catholic priest. Fr Constantino had confessed that he had invoked Hindu gods to bless him when he celebrated his first mass!

In the above mentioned year of 1736, in the week following Christmas; or more precisely, on 30 December, the *Auto da Fé* condemned to death five accused, including three priests who had been brought up by the Jesuits since their youth. They belonged to the Shudra caste. Fr George Pereira dos Remédios was from Cortalim, and his father had served the Jesuits in the pharmacy of St Rock in the capital city. He was later made caretaker of the Jesuit properties at Quelossim.



HISTORICAL EXPLORATIONS

The other priest was our Constantino Rodrigues, also of Shudra caste. He was a brother-in-law of Fr George, and was also involved in the running of the Jesuit estates in Salcete. A third Goan priest to be convicted was Fr Bartolomeu Dias, another Shudra aged 50, from the island village of Sao Matias. He was not present to hear his sentence. He had served in the Jesuit parishes of Kamataka, and had lately been recommended to the parish of St Thomas in Salcete.

This outcome was not entirely in consonance with the Jesuit claim at the time that such a regrettable situation was the result of their being forced to give up the Salcete parishes and hand them over to the Diocesan clergy. The accused and others – all from Shudra Kelxy (Cavelossim) to distinguish it from Bamonn Kelxy (Quelossim) – continued to be closely associated with the Jesuits.

The Jesuit politics of survival seems to have led them to depend upon the services of the lower castes to counter the upper castes that dominated the ranks of the native clergy, which had by then grown in numbers and pressurised the ecclesiastical authorities to transfer to them the parishes that had been, until then, a jealously guarded preserve of the white religious orders.

In the late 17<sup>th</sup> century, Archbishop António Brandão had had immense difficulties in reining in the Jesuits, who did not take well the visitations of the prelate to their parishes, under the Jesuit claim of being an exempt order. They only admitted the authority of the crown as the Master of the Order of Christ to which Church patronage was affected.

They even threatened to quit their parishes in protest, rather than submit to the Archbishop's demand to show him their parish accounts and property title deeds. As a result of that friction, the parish priests of Majorda and Navelim were excommunicated, and their regional superior, the Rector of Rachol, was also threatened with excommunication.

In 1722, the pressure upon the Jesuits grew under the prelate of Archbishop Ignacio de Santa Theresa, whom the Jesuits accused of using his pastoral visits to get false statements from women parishioners against their Jesuit parish priests. The Jesuits referred the case to the mediation of the Governor and his council, but in vain.

The Governor himself had problems with the Archbishop, whom he accused of faulty accounting with regard to the *fábricas*. In that con-

text, the Governor and the Overseas Council concurred with the decision of the Jesuits to abandon their Salcete parishes. But that was not really what the Jesuits wished to hear.

The Jesuits chose to return to their Salcete parish 'resorts' after convincing the Crown that in the context of the Maratha invasion and continued threats, their presence was vital for the safety of the state. They reinstalled themselves forcefully, with police assistance where required, including in the Margão parish, where some villagers complained that they had not suffered as much under the Marathas in 1739 as under the Jesuits.

The Jesuits complained to their superiors in Rome and authorities in Lisbon that the dark-skinned Brahmin priests were unworthy of any respect, and that even the Brahmin women usually preferred to confess to white Religious. They claimed that this hurt the ego of the native Brahmin priests. Against this background, it is not surprising – as expressed frankly by Jesuit historians Fr John Correia-Afonso and Fr Charles Borges – that when the bells tolled for the Society of Jesus in 1759, few or none shed tears among the native clergy and leading (high caste?) faithful.

And what was the end of Fr Constantino? Constantino refused to accept any of the accusations levelled against him and denounced the verdict, saying that his past confessions were extorted from him under threats and tortures. Obviously, that was not what authorities of the Holy Office wished to hear. They handed him over to the secular justice establishment for the execution of the sentence. He was condemned to be taken by the customary route to the Mandovi grounds, there to be strangled to death. His corpse was to be cremated and the ashes thrown into the sea, so as to wash away for ever Fr Constantino's memory! The reconvert to Hinduism may not have wished for a better way of laying to rest his bodily remains...

The Goa Inquisition remains an ambiguous chapter of Goa's past. But fortunately, there is a research project afoot to make available to general public the primary sources that could help understanding better how that institution functioned. We hope that the results of that project will help to counter the political distortions or misuse of secondary sources about the history of the Inquisition by those who love cheap controversies or are moved by fundamentalist sentiments to promote communal conflicts.

## Tongue in Cheek

The other day, the Goa Sampark Kranti Express en route to Delhi slammed right into a stationary train. The reason was that some one decided to pull the chain on the other train, which brought it to a halt. As a chain reaction to chain-pulling, the Goa Express rammed it.

Thankfully, train accidents are few and far between, given the fact that India has the greatest length of railway line in the world. Accidents happen, accidentally. That is the reason why they are called accidents. Accidents have become an integral part of our lives. So much so, that we profusely thank Almighty God if we are spared from encountering an accident. That we can meet with an accident anywhere only goes to show that there is no place on earth that can be considered completely safe.

It's an old saying: "As safe as houses." You think your home is the safest place on earth? Think again. Probably more accidents take place within the four walls of houses than anywhere else. One reason could be that we spent most of our lives indoors. In any home, the most accident-prone room is probably the bathroom. Many bones have been broken and joints dislocated by a fall in the innocuous-looking bathroom. That is probably because of the slippery nature of the floor, as a result of all the foam that soap creates. Some unfortu-

nate falls in the bathroom have even proved to be fatal.

You will probably feel that the bedroom is the safest place in the house. Not necessarily. A fall from the bed can leave you with a bump on the head. Accidents in the office are also a common occurrence. It all depends on your job profile. Accidents are more common when you work on the shop floor of a factory, as compared to working in an office.

Probably the one accident that most of us would be most worried about in the office is bumping into the boss when one is late for work. Another nerve-wracking experience could be getting an electric shock while you put on the PC. But, quite unsurprisingly, probably the one place where there are the most chances of meeting with an accident is when one is on the road. You do not need to be behind the steering wheel of a four-wheeler or the handlebars of a two-wheeler to meet with an accident. Just being a pedestrian could turn out to be a very dangerous proposition! Crossing the road at the zebra-crossing does not guarantee anyone's safety. It seems that motorists feel that pedestrians have no rights on the road. One reason for this could be the fact that pedestrians do not pay road tax. So, they have to cross the road at their own risk. Of course, accidents are synonymous with vehicles; be it any vehicle. Accidents have taken place on land, in the sea, in the air and even in outer space.

# Living with accidents

By Adelmo Fernandes

So one is still haunted by that all-important question: which is the safest mode of travel?

Many may say that travelling by air is the safest. Not any longer. Didn't we hear recently that instead of keeping their hands on the controls of the aircraft, pilots indulge in molestation of pretty air-hostesses and engage in fisticuffs with pursers? On that occasion, it ended in a free-for-all between the cabin crew and the pilots, while the plane was in mid air. The pilots probably put the plane on autopilot when they lost control over their emotions!

It may not be possible to stop a plane that has already started moving on the runway, just as one would stop a train by pulling the chain. For this, the omnipresent (and omnipotent?) mobile could come in handy. It was reported that when one would-be passenger found to his horror that the plane was already taxiing out to the runway without him, he hit upon a 'brilliant' idea. From his cell-phone, he called Air-Traffic Control (ATC) and said that a bomb has been planted on the plane. Naturally, the plane was brought to a screeching stop. When the prank came to light, the passenger had to spend the night in a prison cell instead of being on the plane. Thankfully, no very plane that meets with turbulence – natural or man-made – crash lands. Otherwise, flying could be the most unsafe way to travel.

## Letters to the Editor

### Land of freedom fighters

Melwyn Dias, Cuncolim

Recently, I visited a friend in North Goa. When I told his mother I was from Cuncolim, she made a sour face.

I have experienced this earlier several times, mostly from North Goans. Is it wrong to fight against the injustice done to you, your motherland or your *gavn bhav*?

The people who write in this column, blame either politicians or outsiders for destroying our state. Why shouldn't the Cuncolkar fight against them?

Was it wrong to agitate against the housing complex being built in Panzorcone? Was it incorrect to stop the industry that was polluting our ground water? Was it inappropriate to support Elvis Gomes when he was suspended for doing his job on the ship 'River

Princess'? Was it unfair to help the NUSI hospital employees?

Finally, was it wrong to free Goa from Portuguese rule? United we stand, divided we fall!

### Tax for what?

Vishnu Joshi, Panjim

The authorities are getting away with increasing taxation while not performing their civic duties. Money is wasted; amenities are not improved, nor the existing ones maintained. In fact, they are neglected! One picture speaks a thousand words.

### Stop alienating tribals

Maj (Retd) Mathew Oommen, Pune

Prime Minister Manmohan Singh's warning that "alienation of tribals is taking a dangerous turn" is very relevant. It calls for serious introspection.

The positive discrimination policy has improved the economic status of India's scheduled castes and OBCs. Scheduled tribes, called 'Adivasi', meaning original residents, remain low in the social order even after six decades of 'independence'.

They lived in isolation for centuries. This seclusion is responsible for their plight. Scheduled tribes form 8 per cent of India's population. They live mostly in three enclaves: the North East (15 per cent), Western India (30 per cent) and Central India (60 per cent).

Their socio-economic backwardness and inability to integrate with mainstream society / economy poses a serious threat to India's security, therefore, tribal areas merit urgent attention. Poverty and landlessness must be addressed effectively and in a time bound manner.

Despite abolition of 'Zamindari', feudal remnants are still powerful in our country. Social injustice, discrimination, lack of livelihood, oppression, etc, are the main reasons for the spread of Naxalism in tribal areas.

The reservation system, too, need to be streamlined. Social justice should be improved through sensitisation of target groups. Our country is rapidly moving forward in economic liberalisation, privatisation and creation of

### Letter of the Day

## Cricket and country

Mauro Fernandes, Anjuna

The 5th one-day international (ODI) between Australia and India at Hyderabad was truly a classic match. It was very disappointing that India finished on the losing side. Chasing a mammoth total of 350, India came within striking distance, only to fall short by three runs.

Sachin Tendulkar played probably the best one-day innings of his career. But what use is this great innings if it doesn't help the team win? Cricket is a team sport, and what matters most is the team's victory, not how many runs one scores or how many wickets one takes.

In 1999, against Pakistan at Chepaik in Chennai, on a difficult wicket with Saqlain Mushtaq bowling at his peak, Sachin played another classic knock. But, with only a few runs to get, he played a rash shot and got out. It resulted in a famous collapse, and Pakistan pulled off a famous victory.

History repeated itself at Hyderabad. With only 20-odd runs to get in three overs, and only tailenders to follow him, Sachin played a rash shot... The rest is history.

Sachin is undoubtedly one of the greatest batsmen ever to play the game. But I reckon he lacks in mental strength compared to his contemporaries like Brian Lara, Inzamam ul Haq and Ricky Ponting. These great batsmen have played great innings when it mattered the most, and led their countries to victory. If Sachin, after doing all the hard work, had just held his nerve and played sensibly, victory would have been India's. After a few years, no one will remember this fantastic innings. What will be on the record is that Australia beat India by three runs...

economic zones. Let us re-think how to integrate scheduled tribes in the mainstream of development.

### Shift Vasco oil tanks

Jose Maria Miranda, Margao

Congratulations to the Collector of South Goa for convening a meeting of oil companies to ensure that safety measures are in place at the oil tanks in Vasco. These meetings must be regular; in this country, governments lock the stables only after the horses have bolted. This is because there is no value for human life. Dogs have better protection than humans in India.

The news that the oil tanks may be shifted from Vasco is even more encouraging. But this one of the most corrupt states in the country, and I have serious doubts whether it will ever happen.

It is well over five years then Dy Collector of South Goa Sanjit Rodrigues mooted the

idea of shifting petrol pumps from the heart of the Margao. Nothing has happened. On the contrary, the footpaths next to the petrol pumps were audaciously done away with for easy access to vehicles! Any guesses why they are not being reconstructed, Mr Savio Coutinho?

Oil tanks and petrol pumps should be located away from human settlements. It is providential that no major calamities have taken place in Vasco so far. Goa is certainly not prepared for a major disaster. *Herald* has a photograph of welding work right next to chemical tanks!

The citizens of Vasco need to unite and demand that the oil tanks be shifted with the least possible delay. Or else, money will speak louder...

### Koda's ghodas

Robert Castellino, Mumbai

The amount of black money that ex-CM of

Jharkhand Madhu Koda has allegedly amassed can be gauged just from the fact that four money-counting machines were found in his Ranchi house! What we see seems only the tip of an iceberg. Names of politicians linked to Koda are cropping up; many more will probably surface.

There will be the usual outcry, but later things will cool down and interminable court cases will follow. Koda may get a year or two behind bars, half of which he will spend in five star hospitals. All his cronies will go scot-free. IT officials will get back to catching small fish and harassing the common man for peanuts.

Everything will be forgotten, but the legacy of Koda will remain. *Petis* and *Khokas* will be passé. Unaccounted money may henceforth be counted in *Kodas*; one *Koda* being Rs100 crore!

### Unwanted sea link

Vimlesh Rivonkar, Merces

The Vasco-Dona Paula sea link is an unnecessary expenditure that will not ease the traffic of Goa. The huge investment required – around Rs2,500 crore (probably more by the time of completion) – will hopelessly burden the financial position of the state.

The factual geographical positions of the entry and exit points fall at the end of both sides and will further congest both towns, as there is no link to the highway on either side.

Instead, if the government puts efforts for the completion of the much-awaited and much-needed four-lane highway and a new bridge over the Zuari at a speedy pace, people will see the traffic congestion disappear and realise that there is no need of a new white elephant called a sea link to further waste taxpayers' money.

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.

### Paths of Wisdom



### Toda religion

The Todas are a small pastoral tribal community living on the 7,000 Nilgiri hills in South India. They believe in 1,600 or 1,800 superior godlike beings, the two most important being 'On' and 'Teikirzi'.

'On' is the male god of Amnadr, the realm of the dead. He created the Todas and their buffaloes. He was himself a dairymen. 'Teikirzi' is a female deity and more important with the people, whom she once ruled when she lived in the Nilgiris and established Toda social and ceremonial laws.

Most other deities are hill gods, each associated with a particular hill. There are also two river gods, belonging to the two main rivers. Toda religion is based on buffaloes and their milk. Their temples are the dairies.

The origin of the Todas has been much speculated on and it has even been suggested that they came from ancient Sumer. There are many stone circles and other megalithic monuments on the Nilgiri Hills, in which the Todas now take little interest, though they may have been erected by the older Teivaliol strata of the people, who have been superseded by the pastoral Tartharol.

Until fairly recently, Toda women were tattooed in patterns of dots and circles as a sign of adulthood. A small scar or scars on a boy's wrist, elbow or under the shoulder showed that he had the status of milking buffaloes.