

Black Tape over Portuguese Possessions -1 (revised)

In this, and the next article, we discuss the Portuguese intransigence, as well as India's reluctance to 'merge' the Portuguese territories by force, even though there was much popular ferment in Goa for integration with India.

The next change on the map was a piece of 'black tape' on wherever Goa, Daman & Diu and Dadra & Nagar Haveli were shown on the map of India. The map of 1961 had been printed much before Goa was liberated in a fairly smooth operation (Ops Vijay , led by Gen JN Chaudhuri) which lasted for less than a day and a half , starting from the morning of 18th December . The instrument of surrender was signed at 2pm on the 19th December by Portuguese Governor General Manuel Antonio Vassalo e Silva at Vasco da Gama, the then capital of Goa.

However the big question about the liberation of Goa is not about what happened in December 1961, but why it took India so long to settle the Goan question especially because the freedom movement in Goa had taken roots as early as 1928 when T B Cunha founded the Goa Congress Committee. Just as India was protesting against the visit of Simon Commission, the Goans were agitating against the 1930 Colonial Act of Portugal which made clear distinction between Portugal and the overseas territories. Meanwhile, the Congress played an important role in getting back the Kunbi workers from Goa who were working in 'miserable, and slave like conditions in the British

plantations in Assam. During his Presidency in 1938, Subhash Bose established the Provisional Goa Congress Committee in Bombay to work with the parent body in Goa for restoration of civil liberties and to agitate for responsible government in Goa. In March 1946, the resolution of the Goa Congress read 'The Goa Congress committee adheres to the national call of Quit India demand of the INC and call upon the Portuguese to leave the shores of Goa, Daman and Diu , so that we can achieve our destiny in common with the rest of India.

In 1946, the first civil disobedience movement against the Portuguese rule was launched in Goa under the leadership of Dr Lohia, and for the first time the Goan nationalists and Indian freedom fighters held hands to break the artificial divide between Goans and Indians. Mahatma Gandhi wrote in the Harijan 'He (Lohia) has thereby rendered a service to the cause of civil liberty and specially to the Goans The small Portuguese settlement , which merely exists on the sufferance of the British government ,can ill afford to ape its bad manners'. However, according to Durga Das, a contemporary chronicler of history, there was some difference of opinion among the Indian leaders about the timing for liberating the foreign possessions of India. Patel wanted immediate action, but Nehru and Gandhi were willing to enter into diplomatic parleys with the French and the Portuguese.

However , much to the consternation of the Goan nationalists the Foreign office of India was taking a 'legalistic view '.It was obvious that while the nationalists looked at Goa as an internal issue, Prime Minister Nehru and the Foreign Ministry were quite fine with seeking international mediation on this. Much was made of our opposition to Portugal's membership of the UN, but finally Portugal did secure a

place in the UN, and promptly filed a case against India in the International court of Justice about their 'right of passage' to Dadra & Nagar Haveli in 1955 .Both India and Portugal claimed victory, for while the ICJ upheld the Portugese claim, it denied them the right of passage to their territory!

The case is interesting , for it also shows that while the MEA was engaged in diplomatic niceties, Goanese activists under the banner of Azad Gomantak Dal from Bombay marched to Dadra in the midnight of 21st July ,1954, took over the police station and hoisted the tricolor . Later they were joined by the volunteers of the RSS and Goa Peoples Party and the India's flag was unfurled at Silvassa from August 2, 1954. From 1954 to 1961, the 'Varishta Panchayat of Free Dadra and Nagar Haveli' held sway. The Varishta Panchayat, having already voted to join India that June appointed the Administrator, KG Badlani, a member of the IAS as the Prime Minister, putting him on par with Nehru, and a legal signatory to the document of accession to India on 11 August 1961!