



By ALBERTINA ALMEIDA

The Bismarque Moment

The death of Bismarque Dias in suspicious circumstances, is signalling different things to different people that can all be woven together in what can be called a Moment. The Dead Bismarque is more dangerous than a living Bismarque, a poster reads. Indeed an activist like him committed to a vision and a cause is invincible, even in death, or more so in death. Repression begets revolt. The premature malicious feeding by the State through the media, about how Bismarque's death came about, has inspired community investigations, speculation and reflection.

It is the Bismarque Moment. Sprouting from a mysterious death that has taken away someone who would steadfastly mobilise and stand by people as they inched forward with their concerns. A Moment that has therefore caused mass mobilisation of people and triggered debates on contemporary people's concerns to counter this move of suppressing Bismarque in death. A Moment that can weave a beautiful tapestry of Bismarque's qualities of compassionate engaging, thinking, provoking, empathising, innovating, of unassuming abandon.

This Moment emerges at a time when the world is weathering the commodification of people and nature, and suffering assaults on land, culture and ideas. It is a moment where there is no space for blind presumptions and assumptions, no canards, no room for State manicuring. It is a moment of community mobilisation and inquiry and speculation and reflection.

The visual image of Fr. Bismarque that stays with me, is that of him in a T-Shirt and three-quarter trousers in front of the statue of Cristo Rei at Santo Estevam, with open arms signifying, it would seem, a gesture of unassuming abandon and adoration of nature. In envisioning there is need for such abandon. As has rightly been said: if sometimes we don't get lost, we may never find our way.

The Bismarque Moment unravels unique weapons in our collective struggle against the

assault on land and ecological rights, and the mission for special status from a peoples' perspective. Bismarque's weapons were those of mass instruction and construction. They included a guitar, lyrics and renderings of song, books of law and history, a *Kindness Manifesto*, nostalgic engagements with nature, visions of justice. It is quite clear that his weapons are substantially different from the weapons of mass destruction that destroy both the weapons' users and the people they target. The battle grounds? Various courts, and tribunals such as the Administrative Tribunal, the National Green Tribunal, church pulpits, church steps, public open spaces, elections.

At a time when thoughts and ideas are under assault, these weapons were a hard-hitting way of fighting back. "What will you do, if the rivers stop flowing for you? What will you do, if the birds stop singing for you? What will you do, if the trees stop breathing for you? What will you do? What will you do? What will you do?" he implored the world around to think, through song and guitar accompaniment. What will you do? An imploring moment that is intertwined with the glocal moment. Bismarque's *Kindness Manifesto* released prior to the 2012 elections, which he contested from the Cumbharjua constituency, tells you that he believed in being glocal, that is, thinking globally from the local, and acting locally. There is not a single mention of Goa in the central text. It is a global vision, but a political statement to be acted on locally.

Bismarque's *Kindness* was not without its share of protest. The Khariwado residents' houses were under threat of demolition in 2011. The State hung provisions from Criminal Procedure Code on their heads, much like Section 144 recently. Bismarque consulted and was their guide. The Khariwado residents simply blocked the traffic into the Mormugão Port Trust harbour, by strategically positioning their trawlers, and most importantly circumventing the law as it is perceived by the State. This was a classic Bismarque moment. Strategic positioning, that could foreground both the threatened homelessness and consequent loss of livelihoods of the fisher people at Khariwado, and the mighty forces of globalisation operating through the Mormugão Port Trust, and challenge them.

The Bismarque Moment has therefore also transitioned into a moment about questioning the propriety of introducing section 144 of the CrPC, or still having it on the statute book, in this day and age, in the name of 'public order' and 'war against terror' So public order in the eyes of the State is so clearly a seeming peace with the turmoil sought to be swept under the

red carpet of IFFI. Terror is about people 'conspiring' to get together and raise their voices against injustice and for Justice for Bismarque,

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In the mean time, allegations of 'drawing political mileage' have been floating around, with different kinds of people seen associated with Justice for Bismarque or singing paeans to him. But drawing political mileage was in fact Bismarque's political strategy. Not seen as a problem when drawn for transformational politics of Goa, only a problem when drawn for personal profiteering.

Bismarque may not have grappled with some complexities of society . But he wasn't superhuman, he was human and being human means a person cannot fit into your image of the ideal. That is a Bismarque moment too. His life and death throw up diverse takes on what a priest should be, should not be, what a politician should be, should not be, what secularism should be, should not be.

One can only say that this is the Bismarque Moment. It is a moment that needs to be seized. For Goa, for India, for the world, and with all the complexities of the time.

See also 'Reading *The Kindness Manifesto*: Politics and Fr. Bismarque' [here](#); 'Fr. Bismaque Dias: Martyr of our Times' [here](#); and 'Policing in the time of Terror and Loot' [here](#).

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