



While large numbers of its members are no doubt motivated by a genuine interest in redressing the many ills that plague Goan electoral democracy, the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) in Goa could in fact be seen as antithetical to the pressing needs of Goans, pushing an agenda that other national parties, operating from Delhi have done before. If the traditional national parties like the Congress and the BJP had helped, with the help of local elites, to usher in forces of unbridled capitalism in the guise of development and Hindu nationalism in Goa, AAP seems to be operating within this same model. The only difference is that AAP promises that it will deliver Goa from rampant corruption. And yet, when examined from the perspective of the nexus between New Delhi and local dominant caste landed elites AAP's claims of difference and salvation fall flat on its face.

To examine the claim of this Delhi-Goa colonial nexus we need to explore the case of the much-vaunted Goa Bachao Abhiyan (GBA) or Save Goa Movement. While it was spurred on by the genuine concerns of many Goans as to the way Goa was being destroyed, one could also see in it the operation of colonial power. The GBA appeared at a particular moment in Goan history, when land in Goa came to be eyed by external, i.e. Indian, realtors. Thus, the existing concerns of the larger populace were whipped to frenzy by the local elite to ensure that it was the interests of the local land-owning classes and construction firms that was secured. After an initial amount of muscle-flexing, that demonstrated to external realtors the power of the local elite the movement was effectively killed, when the representatives of the GBA on the Task Force for the Regional Plan (RP) 2021 resigned their positions.

As a result of this regrettable history, nothing emerged out of the GBA except for a paralysis of the Regional Plan process, even as the real-estate business continues as usual. Indeed, the lesson that if foreign capital wants to enter Goa it would have to be in partnership with the local elite seems to have been learned admirably in case of the usurping of Tiracol by Leading Hotels. This unfortunate outcome, however, is very much in keeping with the history of popular movements in Goa since 1961, where the manipulation of the Goan population, and especially the bahunjan Catholic populations of the Old Conquests, by dominant caste elites has been a standard. The manner in which bahunjan Catholics are manipulated deserves reflection all by itself. At this point I need only point to the manner in which bahunjan Catholic

leaders are criminalized and dismissed, leaving these groups leaderless, even as the upper-caste interests that control the media offer empty promises to these groups. In every movement, one sees that the upper caste elites gain greater autonomy for unaccountable behavior, while the masses that agitate receive no benefit at all.

These forms of Goan politics seem to be repeating themselves under the AAP. To begin with, as many have pointed out, the way the AAP is operating, by focusing on the fears of the populations in the Old Conquests suggests that it is repeating this old formula of merely harnessing Old Conquest fears to ensure the success of the upper-caste and elite class leadership. While one need not be immediately suspect if one is upper-caste, the fact that the leadership of AAP, both in Goa, as well as in Delhi is almost exclusively upper-caste is a matter of grave concern.

What is also interesting about AAP Goa is that one can deduce in it the desire of well-meaning non-Goans who have settled in Goa to influence local politics. This desire to participate is welcome, indeed many of them come with exciting ideas that we can benefit from. But one nevertheless needs to question the balance of power under which this happens. A number of Goa's problems are in part the result of Indian desires to settle here, as well as the manner in which Goa has been hitched to India. As individuals, we are very often also unconscious representatives of large structural powers. As such, the fact that the articulation of so much of AAP's outreach is in compliance with a national culture, manifest through the Gandhi *topi*, the Hindi sloganeering, even the Hindi language outreach of the leaders, makes one question which structural interests are being served, the nationalist designs of the AAP, or those of the average Goan? Is Delhi, or the desires of the national elites, dictating what happens in Goa, or do Goans dictate what happens in Goa? The dominance of Hindi in the outreach of AAP Goa seems to suggest that it is formulating an agenda that wishes to be in sync with the assumptions of the Delhi outfit. In such a context, especially where Kejriwal chose to holler *Bharat Mata ki Jai*, what is the position of AAP on Special Status for Goa?

Further, AAP Goa has the grandiose scheme of contesting all 40 seats, with the apparently single point agenda of combating corruption. But is there really a lack of critical issues in Goa that one must focus solely on corruption? In this context, it should be noted that in a rather long interview with the Indian Express, Valmiki Naik secretary of AAP Goa, noticeably skirts

issues critical to the bahujan and marginalized groups, such as that of the vexed Medium of Instruction issue. Besides, it can argue that corruption narrowly conceived as economic corruption alone is the most important agenda only when one is speaking from an upper-caste position. Viewed from a bahujan perspective, whether Hindu or Catholic, it is the destruction of the twin evils of Brahmanism and Hindutva that emerges as the priority. While not an insignificant issue, dealing with corruption *can* come later. A failure to realize this priority, once again because it is the local dominant castes that are in control of AAP Goa, will ensure that the placing of 40 candidates in the fray will only result in the splitting of the anti-BJP vote, and the BJP's eventual success. A refusal to heed this reality will suggest that AAP's designs are geared more towards local dominant caste assertion, as well as towards the desire of AAP Delhi to make a national mark, rather than addressing critical Goan needs.

A leaf from Goan history should offer good reason why AAP Goa should heed this caution. In the run-up to the first elections in Goa under Indian rule the Indian National Congress (INC) was extremely confident of a sweeping INC victory in the 1963 elections. Such was its confidence, that as Parag Parobo has pointed out in his book on early post-colonial Goa, the All India Congress General Secretary K. K. Shah announced that the INC did not require any special manifesto for Goa. All of this while tickets were given almost exclusively to individuals from dominant castes. Just as supporters of AAP today dismiss the need for a regional party, so too in 63 the INC was also confident of success because of its national location. And yet the INC experienced a crushing defeat at the polls. Not only did they not gain a single seat from Goa, but in many locations the candidates lost their deposits. The moral of that election was that local issues, not national were critical to electioneering, and secondly that issues of caste justice cannot be ignored and simply dismissed. The result of that election should offer sobering advice for AAP Goa that in many ways could be said to be repeating those mistakes.

This is not, however, necessarily the end. Merely because it currently threatens to operate as an agent of colonial rule, there is no reason, especially given the genuine concerns of large numbers of its members, that the AAP in Goa cannot reinvent itself. The question is, will it?

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AAP Goa as Colonial Agent?