



By JASON KEITH FERNANDES

Why don't you see Fascism?

The bye-elections to select the representative for the city of Panjim are being seen as critical given that it will determine if the BJP-led coalition will continue to govern Goa, and will also determine the career of the BJP candidate Manohar Parrikar. It is for this reason, therefore, that most people are on edge and apprehensive about the outcome. Some of the tensions involved in this election were made evident in the article written by advocate F. E. Noronha and published in *Renovação*, the newsletter and magazine of the Archdiocese of Goa. In this article, Noronha all but urged the electorate to reject Parrikar at the polls, arguing that a Nazi-like atmosphere had arisen in Goa.

A newspaper article reported that Vijay Sardesai, leader of the Goa Forward party which is a member of the ruling coalition, dismissed this article as “hyperbole”. Sardesai is reported to have indicated that he thought the argument “a clear cut case of exaggeration. In Goa, where is the fascism? Which community is being discriminated or acted against by the state, through the state machinery?”

This report confirmed my own evaluation of the problems with the Indian polity, and the inability of elected representatives and politicians to either appreciate the nature of what exactly is at stake at this particular moment in Indian politics, or to ignore the implications in their drive to obtain political power.

Hyperbole

/hɑɪˈpɔːbəlɪ/

exaggerated statements or claims not meant to be taken literally.



To begin with is the sheer arrogance with which Sardesai dismisses Noronha's argument. As a member of a Hindu dominant caste, Sardesai is in no position to idly dismiss others' concerns. How would he, who is under no threat - of life, or culture - be able to determine what is hyperbole or not? Rather than dismissing the concerns of a member of a minoritized group, he ought to have said, "yes, I hear you, and I will see what I can do to resolve this matter". This dismissal is particularly callous given that Sardesai rose to power through the support of the many Catholic groups.

It appears that Sardesai has either no idea how fascism actually operates, or is being disingenuous given that he has pledged his support to Manohar Parrikar's election bid from Panjim. In any case, since Sardesai reportedly inquired which community is being discriminated against by the State, let us take him seriously and provide a response. This response will demonstrate the manner in which fascism has been growing, systematically pushing groups out of power and minoritizing them.

It needs to be noted that fascism does not emerge fully-grown, like some Athena from the head of Zeus. On the contrary, fascism grows through small, deliberate steps. One need only look at the discrimination against the Roman script of the Konkani language. Ever since 1981, when the Official Language Act (OLA) was legislated by the Congress party, the Roman script has been the target of hostility by the state-supported Nagri Konkani lobby. Not only have

literary works in the Roman script been ignored for awards, these works have not even been admitted to competitions on the grounds that the Roman script is not an officially recognised script. This is the face of creeping fascism where the chief tool through which a social group, viz. that of the Bahujan Catholics, expresses itself is systematically and deliberately sidelined and suffocated. Indeed, given Sardesai's claims of representing Goemkarponn, or Goanness, one would have expected him to take up the long-standing demand of such groups as the Dalgado Konknni Akademi, and the Romi Lipi Action Front to ensure that the Roman script is officially recognised. But this is not the only example of systematic minoritization and threat. There has been a stream of anti-Catholic abuse by persons not just from outside of Goa, like Sadhvi Saraswati, but persons within Goa such as Subash Velingkar, Uday Bhembre, with people like Naguesh Karmali having actually participated in the destruction of property as in Fontainhas in 2002. In all of these events, state governments of varying parties have literally looked on passively. One should also not forget the effective suffocation of the production of beef in the state a process initiated by the MGP in 1978.

One would have hoped that Sardesai would use his position in the ruling coalition to push forward agendas, like the official recognition of the Roman script, that will halt the systematic minoritization of various groups within Goa. However, Sardesai's rhetoric demonstrates a troubling similarity with Hindu nationalists. Take, for example, that not only has Sardesai reportedly dismissed Noronha's argument as hyperbole he has also dismissed "certain sections of Goan people" as being irrational. He suggests that such concerns are the result of "scepticism, pessimism among certain sections of Goan people" rather than rational opinion articulated after careful study and observation. Given that these comments were made in the context of Noronha's article, one can safely assume that Sardesai means Catholics when he refers to "certain sections of Goan people."

As should be obvious from the discussion above, fascism in our state is not limited to the actions of the BJP alone. Rather, it has had a long gestation period. Nevertheless, it is also true that the presence of the BJP, especially at the Centre, has allowed for the animosity towards non-Hindu groups to be asserted viciously. In this context we should take into consideration the words of the economist and former finance minister of Greece, Yanis Varoufakis. Speaking in the context of the recently concluded French presidential elections Varoufakis pointed out that it was important to rally around the problematic figure of Emmanuel Macron precisely because it was critical that the racist and right-wing Marie Le Pen be defeated. Speaking to those who did not see a difference between these two

problematic figures he pointed out that one needed to be aware of the implications of what happens when a “fascist, racist party” gets its “hands on the levers of the deep state, the levers of the police, and of the army.” This article will appear too late for it to have any impact on the outcome of the election to the Panjim legislative seat. However, the larger point that needs to be made is to underline how fascism operates, and how it is, in fact, very much a threat in Goa.

(Illustration by Angela Ferrao. A version of this text was first published in *O Herald*, dt: August 24, 2017)



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