



The political developments in the last 30 days may have surely given Goans a sense of *deja vu*. With BJP's Laxmikant Parsekar appearing to revolt, and two Congress MLAs joining the BJP, Goans may have remembered the decades of political instability from the 1970s. The logical question to ask, therefore, is why has Goa witnessed such fragile political regimes? Is there something deeper than merely opportunism and avarice in Goan politics?

If one looks at the earliest elections held in Goa under Indian rule, primordial ties of caste and sub-castes determined the outcomes of elections. They still do, of course. Religion played a part too in the propaganda, but underlying the religious propaganda were the intricate tentacles of caste and sub-caste alliances. Goa's first chief minister, Dayanand Bandodkar and his MGP came to power by routing a largely Saraswat caste-led Indian National Congress. While the defeat was humiliating for the Congress, for Bandodkar and his MGP, the victory heralded a new configuration of political power and reforms. Bandodkar's regime was made up of a conglomeration of bahun castes positioned against upper caste interests, which in due course of time, as Goa University's Parag Porobo writes in *India's First Democratic Revolution* (2015), started disintegrating as the alliance partners, sub-castes within a larger bahun class, vied for power with each other.

The manner in which Bandodkar's MGP fragmented due to internal schisms and how politics was structured post-Bandodkar teaches us a thing or two about Goan politics. Recent events suggest that the age-old pattern of fragile political alliances is firmly in place. One can suggest that the fragmented nature of the society allows dominant caste groups to form strategic alliances with one or two of these bahun sub-castes, in the absence of a consolidated bahun class. 'Catholics' and 'Muslims' can also work in a similar way in certain circumstances. For a small state like Goa, within the Indian electoral system of simple majorities, this caste and sub-caste alliances mean that governments can be toppled with one or two 'rebel' MLAs.

The rot goes deeper as the social, economic, and political power is concentrated in the hands of a few. Those who already have money and social privilege have been the most successful in capturing political power and also concentrating it in the hands of their coteries. After all,

even Bandodkar could mobilize such support because he had the means to; he was an established businessman in the mining sector. Essentially, if we are to understand the role of economic capital, or money, plays in elections one should not simply think of it as “greed” but the ability of various groups to pool their resources together.

While Bandodkar’s regime was the only one that can be considered to push for social justice by extending land and education rights to sections of society that were hitherto denied these, successive government seem to be undoing these reforms. There is no need to look any further than the politicking over the Medium of Instruction controversy and the massive land grabs in recent times. Arguably, such a political and social setup does little to bring about positive change. The voters have to depend on a strong leader, i.e. an autocrat-like ruler, largely to ensure that they get government jobs and their “work” gets done. The voters here are not equal citizens, whose right it is to enjoy the benefits of democracy, but they are clients to, and supplicants before, the leader who is the patron.

Wasn’t it a short time ago, February 2017 to be precise, that the office of the Election Commission, through its Chief Electoral Officer, launched a media campaign encouraging the citizens of Goa to vote in large numbers? Given how the current BJP government was formed and the current chaos, the campaign by the election commission, in hindsight, appears to be a cruel joke on the people of Goa. One could argue that the brief of the Election Commission does not go beyond ensuring free and fair elections. But who is to be held responsible for the chaos and uncertainty into which Goa descends after the elections? While elections appear to be a good start towards the control of our own destiny, the unaccountability and shameless backtracking from campaign promises would suggest otherwise. Moreover, short-term and strategic political alliances – all beneficial to the political class and their small coterie of supporters – give us cause to believe that our votes in reality are not valuable at all.

I do not want to suggest that all is lost. As *O Herald* columnist Amita Kanekar suggested a while ago, fragile alliances, leading to fragile governments, are actually useful in stopping the complete annihilation of the Goan people and landscape that the ruling establishment seems currently bent on. One could agree or disagree on the usefulness of fragile alliances for safeguarding Goa. The reasons for such alliances emerging are complex, fragmented social condition being the chief amongst them. At the end of the day, most people in Goa feel cheated with the political situation and the succeeding generations will bear the cost of

damages created by the recent governments.



(First published in *O Heraldo*, dt: 7 November, 2018)



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