



By JASON KEITH FERNANDES

AAP: Clear and Present Danger?

With the elections to the state legislature in the not so distant future the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) in Goa has begun its campaigning in earnest. As is well known, AAP has been projecting itself as a credible choice on the basis of its promise to deliver good, i.e. corruption free, governance. The question, however, is whether the AAP should be judged merely by its rhetoric, or should it be examined against a broader canvas?

Recent history demonstrates that electoral decisions determined solely by the theme of corruption have ensured that we have moved from the frying pan into the fire largely because we have failed to examine the politics that these electoral options practice. Take the example of the Modi government now wreaking havoc across India. Modi was elected into power because so many people, rightly fed up with the Congress, decided that the man was a good administrator and deserved a right to govern the country. Closer home in Goa, fatigue of the never-ending corruption scandals presided over by the Congress enabled the BJP to come to power.

We now realize that in addition to merely continuing the corrupt practices of the Congress, the BJP is also committed to a kind of fascist agenda that is difficult to undo even after they have been removed from power. This is a kind of moral corruption that is difficult to undo largely because, as I will go on to show, Hindu nationalism itself is never challenged. As such, when evaluating AAP in Goa it is imperative that their proximity to the agents and logics of Hindu nationalism must be strictly evaluated.

An evaluation of the AAP along this axis must begin with a statement by Dr. Dattaram Desai, the AAP candidate for North Goa in the previous Lok Sabha elections in 2014. At that time, Desai indicated in a local newspaper along the lines that he saw no problem with the RSS and that it was just another nationalist organization. When Desai was confronted on this matter at a public meeting conducted by the AAP he denied that he was a part of the RSS, and denounced the RSS as a communal organization. However, it seemed that he did so largely because he had been hounded into that position after being asked a series of leading questions. Desai had been asked at that meeting to issue a public statement to the effect

that he did not approve of the RSS, something he agreed to, but one that, to the best of my knowledge, was not issued. Desai continues to be a leading member of AAP in Goa, and in light of his past comments, this fact should be a cause for concern.

At the above mentioned meeting Dr. Oscar Rebello, also a prominent member of the AAP in Goa, sought to clarify issues regarding the links between the RSS and AAP. Using characteristically simplistic logic, Rebello pointed out that he had friends in the RSS, but that did not necessarily make him a member of the RSS. Rebello's logic may be simplistic, but it is often winning in its presentation. Of course one cannot, especially in a small place like Goa, deny people entry into a party because they were once members of the BJP. Perhaps they may have, as is suggested in the case of Desai, realized that the BJP will not deliver. But the problem with the RSS, and more importantly Hindu nationalism, lies in the logics that we internalize owing to a lifetime of being immersed in it. If these logics are not actively challenged we too become part of the Hindutva machine.

In this context, the decision of the AAP in Goa to name its outreach program the Goa *Jodo* campaign is quite disturbing. Why privilege Hindi in a state with no lack of local languages? Because a non-Hindi Goan-ness is suspect? How is this position different from that of most Hindu nationalists and the implicit understanding that it is primarily Hindi and Hindu culture that defines Indian nationalism? One should bear in mind that Hindi nationalism, as one can surmise from the old slogan "Hindi-Hindu-Hindustan" has never been far away from Hindu nationalism. This desire to run with the Hindi-wallahs can also be seen in the video of Desai's response discussed earlier, where it appears that Rebello refers to Desai as Dr. Desaiji. Now one is entirely at liberty to add honorifics to people's name. The problem emerges when one realizes that the *ji* has become popular in Goa with the rise of Hindu nationalism in the past couple of years. The question emerges therefore, can we rely on such a group to assert the rights of Goans which necessarily runs against Hindi and Hindu nationalism, such as the demand of Special Status, and assert our right to be different within India?

But it is not merely the local AAP that has disturbing connections with the RSS or is blasé about Hindu nationalism. Pamela D'Mello writing for an on-line magazine pointed to the disturbing relationship of Dinesh Waghela to Hindu rightist outfits. Waghela was charged with setting up AAP in Goa, and at that point just like Desai went on record, to suggest that he did not see what was wrong with people from the RSS joining the party.



What also needs to be pointed out is that AAP's insistence on its promised good-governance as a central reason for being a choice in the upcoming elections partakes in the Hindu Right's pushing of strong administrators, whether Modi or our very own Parrikar. This is not to suggest that good governance is not an important issue. It is. However, we need to recognize that a limited understanding of corruption, and governance emerges from the very upper-caste and middle-class reasonings that have generated the Hindutva upsurge in the country. It is this kind of unthinking of, and challenge to Hindutva logics that is critical and necessary if AAP in Goa should emerge as a safer option than it currently seems to be.

Most disturbing of all, however, are the actions of the party supremo, Arvind Kejriwal. Kejriwal has had no problem in the past drawing such Hindu spiritual leaders like Sri Sri Ravi Shankar and Baba Ramdev into his movement. Right from the get go therefore, Kejriwal has violated secularism by mingling the Hindu religion with his politics. More recently, despite the livelihood and environmental violations involved in setting up the venue for the World Culture Festival on the banks of the river Yamuna, and in contravention of his own position on corruption, Kejriwal saw it fit to attend the event, and kowtow before Ravi Shankar. As distasteful as this may be to some, it is not necessarily out of character for unprincipled political leaders who need to engage in populist measures if they are to stay in power. It is, therefore, precisely because AAP Goa will have to play by established rules of the game once it is in power, that we need to evaluate them stringently *before* they get into power. In light of this, AAP Goa's connections to soft Hindu nationalism present a clear and present danger.

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