

By ALBERTINA ALMEIDA



What made 'Goemkarponn' so Manoeuvrable?

From the get go, there was no sign of *Goem*, *Goemkar*, *Goemkarponn* at all. Not even when the 2017 Goa Legislative Assembly election results were beginning to trickle in. One would have thought that small is beautiful and manageable and that the smallness of *Goem* affords a unique opportunity to better and more expeditiously manage. But despite EVM machines as in other states, which should have seen the results pouring in rather than trickling in, Goa's results took a longer time than those of UP with ten times the number of seats. Indeed Goa's counting in relation to that of the rest of India's states that went to the polls was *ajeeb* (strange).

Given Goa's small size, it is possible to reach every voter in the constituency without spending money or having people descend here who have no sense of Goa's ethos. But that was not to be, it seems. There was talk of distribution of money on the one hand, by the two leading national political parties, and then there was the AAP which had brought in who it called 'volunteers' from elsewhere in India and who were standing at various corners and waving AAP flags to disgusted passers-by. Neither the *topis* nor the topics that they raised, nor the flags they waved, had political traction or any semblance of *Goemkarponn*. If anything, the *topis* are symbolic of 'politicians' in the narrow sense of self-centred species, who the average Goan despises. The 'high command' politics sans *Goemkarponn*, that people had tired of in the prevailing politics, was not absent with AAP either. Therefore, when AAP beat the drums of *Goemkarponn*, it did not resonate for *Goemkars*.

On the other hand, the effort by AAP at not throwing money to voters, which can fit into the small-is-manageable Goa model, did shake the BJP, for what this can portend if such an ethic entrenches itself. Therefore, although the AAP did not open its account in Goa, the frisson of *schadenfreude* that was manifest by the BJP cheer leaders about AAP was palpable.

Otherwise, this reaction of the BJP should be strange, considering that their joy should have been emanating from the Congress not winning a clear majority to the Assembly, which ultimately enabled them (the BJP) to manoeuvre and get to power.

The Goa Forward Party on its part, flaunting the slogan of *Goem*, *Goemkar*, *Goemkarponn*, | 1

did succeed in deceiving. They managed to cash in on the vulnerabilities of *Goemkars* who feel overwhelmed numerically as well as culturally. The Goa Forward Party, it must be remembered, was not extolling the virtues of integrity, holistic approaches, or a serious engagement with the fields, the salt pans, the cashew hills and the seas, and the song and dance that comes with it. They were not extolling the repairs of natural embankments, and local levels of disaster prevention and management that comes together, or the development of the indigenous communities who have created and who sustain this landscape, that is projected as *Goemkarponn*.

They were extolling the palm-waving, singing and dancing *Goemkarponn*. This narrative of *Goemkarponn* has suited both the political parties who capitalize on the Goan nostalgia (nostalgia for the past in relation to the present) and the corporate business interests for whom this is a happy tourism and real estate economic model, in keeping with the advancing corporate interests of the times. That is where the peaceful, restful Goa ('aaram' to use Prime Minister Modi's words in his pre-2017 Assembly election speech in Goa) image-mongering comes from.

This business model of political parties was therefore a natural precursor to the coalition that emerged where *Goemkarponn* then got integrated even in the Hindutva nationalist party. It must make us think about how Indian and Goan nationalism colludes in an endeavor to destroy the people and the local people's economies. What is it about the projection of *Goemkarponn* that makes it so vulnerable to be appropriated by the Hindutva ideology is something we must ponder about.

Clearly, what has been paraded is the *Goemkarponn* characterized by the cementing of caste and economic interests. We fail to see the writing on the wall, as to how our stated vulnerabilities as *Goemkars*, are channelized to forge an identity politics, that is problematic for us as a people within this geographic space of *Goem* and lets the status quo of caste and class dominance prevail, without questioning the structural causes of the problems that are besetting Goa.

The Congress was different from the BJP only to the point of claiming secularism and not

subscribing, as a party, to the Hindutva ideology, but there were other ways of forging unity between BJP and Congress and also the regional party that called itself Goa Forward. To reiterate, there were the common caste and economic interests to cement the relations and give it the brand of *Goemkarponn*. There was also the fact that there are hardly any Congresspersons who have not played footsie with the BJP or any other party. Many candidates in the last elections have been wanderers from one political party to another, in a journey towards egotropic power.

If one looks closely, there isn't much of a difference between this kind of *Goemkarponn* – a sort of Goan authoritarian nationalist ideology, and Hindutva – a fascist nationalist ideology that does not see politics as a 'power-with' but a 'power-over' others. So this brand emphasises the unity, strength and preservation of the geographical space, but the nature of this unity, strength and preservation is defined with upper caste/class coloured lens. Therefore while determining how these spaces are to be preserved, they do not focus on basics of people's lives and their engagement with nature.

They focus, for instance, on the coconut tree in isolation, or the green fields in isolation, or the mineral wealth in isolation. The coconut trees are not seen for the coconuts which go in the making of people's curry or for the mode of production as to who controls the coconut trees and how power is required to be diffused, so that it can cease to be oppressive and exploitative. The coconut tree becomes the reference point for height of buildings in regional plans, and for aesthetics in isolation from what makes it a part of the lives of Goan people. No wonder therefore that the coconut tree was de-notified as a tree under the Preservation of Trees Act, so as to enable the owners of the proposed liquor factory at Amdai, Sanguem, to cut all those coconut trees, and then we can so easily look to it being notified as a tree when the job is done.

Or they focus on the green fields with no measure of concern about who controls these green fields and how the real estate business does a walk over, over these green fields, without offering any solutions to the employment, spatial, or cultural concerns of the populace. So ultimately the real estate interests benefit with this kind of imagery of *Goemkarponn* – some green fields can surely enhance the value of their real estate business. But they are not looking at how the green fields, and the cultivation on them and our food security too, can be sustained. Or at measures that people can take without an assault on their rights and

controls as a people, such as in the maintenance of bunds, in a say on what development comes to bear in the vicinity and may affect the cultivation of the fields, in what kind of respect is given to the people who are actually cultivating the fields.

The other quaint similarity between this style of *Goemkarponn* and Hindutva is the fascist idolization of a leader (a führer). Such a *Goemkarponn* calls for one person to be idolized as a leader, and suddenly that mask of Goa's camaraderie and *joie de vivre* drops. It is not about doing things together, enjoying life together, or pulling someone down if anyone advances too much leaving others behind (a la the crab). It is about insisting on a particular leader who has a convergence of all the traits that the sullied isolationist *Goemkarponn* they were talking about embodies. Hindutva is also the same: one leader, one voice. Its external ideological face may be different, and the local version may even pretend to be different from the national version. But this style of leadership bodes authoritarianism, arrogance and intolerance for those perceived as 'the other'.

The führer is then seen as delivering the people from all the mess that the place has landed in, never mind if the mess is the outcome of the very brand of *Goemkarponn* which they are propagating. So the führer emerges with an image as a person who will put Goa's economy back on the rails again. Never mind if it is with an illusion of an abundant budget, never mind if formal regular jobs are far from available, never mind if employment opportunities even for self-employment, are few and far between, and encouragement of start-ups will be restricted to those terrains that are required as ancillaries to the capital interests and will provide contracts to the small satraps.

Thus we see how fragile the definitions of *Goemkarponn* determined by a certain upper caste - class elite of Goa are in alignment with Hindutva, and bear no reflection of the *Goemkarponn* of *Goemkars* and of *Goem* as a whole. The proof of the coconut pudding is in fact in the politics we are now eating.

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