By ALBERTINA ALMEIDA

# With Different Gratitude, Honour and Hope…

2019 needs to start as ideally expected on the note of gratitude, honour and hope, but before we proceed we need to recognize that it needs to be a different gratitude, honour, and hope, than that which is being thrust on us.

We need to welcome the New Year with gratitude to those who have stood up against injustice in Goa, those who have made whatever effort it takes to help realize people's aspirations, those on account of whom Goa is not yet completely destroyed in terms of its resources and the laborious nature-engaging work-styles of its people.

With gratitude to those who have cared and shared and made continuance of life possible. Broadly speaking, they are the ones who have spoken up, stood out there with a banner, marched through the streets, organized or attended meetings, participated in intensive discussions, carefully listened to people around, drafted right-to-information applications, followed up on them, worked on documentation, silently did back-up work like organizational housekeeping and housekeeping for activists.

We need to be grateful also to those who have raised pertinent questions. Goa is small. It takes courage to stand up  considering that amidst our relatives, dear ones and acquaintances itself, there will be so many who have been complicit in what is happening and on account of which taking a position would mean getting on the wrong side of them.

Gratitude is not 'You scratch my back, I scratch yours in return.' Is it ethical to scratch your back? Is your backscratch ethical at all? I should be able to say, "your back doesn't need scratching, but someone else's does. And that maybe mine doesn't need scratching either."

Presently the tone of gratitude goes like this: You appoint some of my people in jobs that come within your portfolio, and I appoint some of your people in jobs that come within my

portfolio. You or your folks get to acquire land or get some contracts for works in my constituency, and I and my folks get to acquire land or get some contracts for works in your constituency. All thanks to Private Public Partnership models that are conveniently floated for this very reason.  It is the gratitude that is borne out of a politician-capitalist nexus. This is gratitude of the most decadent order, and, in this New Year, may a different politics rise like a phoenix from the reduction of this kind of politics to ashes.

We also need to say we carried ourselves with honour in the New Year. Not the honour that comes from sweeping our faults under the carpet to present a false sheen. Not the honour that comes from saying we had a glorious past – a glorious Vedic past or a glorious Portuguese past, even though we know that certain sections of society were treated then with disregard and dishonor – different sections under different regimes and different feudatories.

No, we do not want to make Goa great again, the way Trump wants to make America great again. There has always been a dark underbelly during all past regimes. And how this could continue if we became hero-worshippers was well captured by B R Ambedkar in his last address to the Constituent Assembly, where he quoted John Stuart Mill in calling upon all who are interested in the maintenance of democracy, not “to lay their liberties at the feet of even a great man, or to trust him with power which enables him to subvert their institutions”.

It is important to seek for honour where one can hold one’s head high in defiance of oppressive and exploitative norms, the honour that comes from speaking truth to power, from listening with an intent ear to what someone else or a community is saying, even if they are dismissed by everyone else as ‘*pixim*’ (mad). We need to acquit ourselves with honour, by engaging with every section of society.

Goa has seen governance hopelessly crumbling in 2018 with a free for all for those in power to grab, loot and plunder, even as the Chief Minister will unconscientiously not give up his power, despite his medical condition. Goa has seen its institutions that are supposed to be the checks and balances being crippled, including bodies like Goa State Police Complaints Authority and the Goa State Human Rights Commission, with no chairperson or adequate

members.



Yes, it is overwhelming for Goa. When one sees the highways, bridges and big roads, which seem to be leading nowhere, but are in fact tearing us apart. When one sees the demographic turn that is taking place with Goans being hopelessly outnumbered, and forced to migrate, thanks to the misfitting employment policies of those that Goa brings to power. When one sees the accentuating of discrimination and dishonouring of the mandates of the Constitution of India by way of liberty, substantive equality, reservations, and secularism.

It is equally overwhelming when one sees the gross intolerance towards migrants, who, many of whom, like Goan migrants to other locations, are turning to Goa for want of appropriate livelihood options in their own land. When one sees the gross intolerance to the minoritised Muslim communities, where a woman wearing a hijab is turned away at a competitive exam.

But, as we enter the New Year, we certainly need to enter it with hope rather than resignation to fate, saying we cannot do anything about it and it is too big to handle, and letting the powerful take and keep the floor. We still need to enter with hope that we can make a just and equitable transition from a mining- or tourism- or alcohol-dependent economy, to a sustainable one, where ALL people have a place under the sun, and where people who have been marginalized, minoritized and discriminated against for generations have a special place.

Fr. Bismarque's Kindness Manifesto rings: "…When you wanted a cool atmosphere, instead of providing shade, we cut trees and gave you air conditioners…… When you sought your right to live freely, instead of a home and land, we put you in concrete boxes….When you were dreaming of a bright future, instead of a healthy life, we cut the earth into pieces and converted it into paper called money and gave you false security….. I am sorry, extremely sorry. I believe the cry of the earth is also the cry of our beautiful children." Perhaps, if he were alive, he would say, when you want to connect with your folks and friends from another end of Goa, instead of seeking public transport, we gave you cars, bridges, broad roads and highways.

Indeed, we need to aim and work and hope for every city and village to be a smart city and model village that is rights-upholding, that is kind to both ourselves and to others. We need to enter with hope that we can organize, despite the obstacles to such visions, posed by those who fear the loss of the kickbacks and commissions they were used to.

We see some signs of hope. People speaking truth to power.  People resisting the onslaught of maldevelopment. Aspiring school teachers fighting the Government's deliberate oversight of reservations. People speaking out about experiences of sexual harassment over the years with #MeToo.

At a recent meeting organized by Goa Sudharop and Goanet, there were people who shared their anxieties as well as initiatives against the status quo. Something that Goans are always associated with, the *'pão'* (Goan bread), and which needs to be celebrated for both itself and the people who make it, is now being captured in a film on the subject. A Konkani wiktionary is being worked on, and the good thing about this wiktionary is its recognition of Romi Concanim which is officially discriminated against.

Hence, with gratitude, honour and hope...2019, here we come.

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