



The Chief Minister, Pramod Sawant, has gathered enough ridicule for his statement that he wishes to rid Goa of all signs of Portuguese rule, but not enough. Indeed, he actually needs to be prosecuted for attempting to vitiate the state of law and order (or what remains of it) in otherwise peaceful Goa.

Sawant argued that all signs of Portuguese rule must be erased because they destroyed temples. This statement should be reason enough for any right-thinking political party or citizens' group to file a police complaint against him. There are multiple reasons why a complaint should be filed, and registered. First, because Sawant's statement is in fact a 'dog-whistle'. Referring to ultrasonic dog whistles which are audible only to dogs and not human ears, the term implies the use of coded or suggestive language in political messaging to mobilize support from a particular group without provoking opposition, or attracting prosecution. What Sawant is doing, and the statement about Portuguese erasure is not his first such statement, is to ratchet up the rhetoric against Catholics in the state, who are seen as the living embodiment of Portuguese culture in the state. The intention to target Catholics through these statements is not hard to perceive: Sawant repeatedly raises the cry of temples being destroyed in Goa, while promising to rebuild the same temples, knowing that, in popular imagination, many churches are assumed to have been built over destroyed temples – an impossibility that I will demonstrate in other discussions in the future. Sawant's strategy is not dissimilar to the famous experiment of slowly raising the temperature of the water in which a frog swims, until the frog has been boiled to death.

Another reason for filing, and registering, a complaint against Sawant, is that this statement, and other similar statements, are in fact crimes against the Constitution which establishes a secular republic. By making destruction of temples (that too in the past) the reason for current actions that will eventually prejudice contemporary citizens, what he is doing is openly proclaiming the priority of Hinduism over all other faiths and ideologies in the country, and working to establish the RSS's Hindu Rashtra. To be sure, he is not the only one making a reference to Hinduism as the basis for legal or state action. The recent claim that the finding of a statue of a goddess is evidence of her desire to be established in a village is another example of how some strand of Hindu beliefs is being presented as basis for legal action. To be sure, Sawant's statements, given his occupying the weighty office of the Chief Minister of the state, in fact embolden the elements that makes such legally untenable claims.

Sawant's desire to erase signs of the Portuguese is also a manifestation of the nature of the Hindu Rashtra he, and the powers he serves, seek to establish; a society based on the laws of Manu. The laws of Manu, as we well know, do not recognise the fundamental equality of all

persons. On the contrary, this code recognises distinctions between humans, and prescribes a legal treatment which is grossly unequal.



The Eraser: The dangers of wiping out the Portuguese

In fact, the arrival and the establishment of the power of the Portuguese Crown in the regions that came to be known as Goa was welcomed by many of the groups that did not, hitherto, receive egalitarian treatment. Many of the first converts to Christianity were lower caste groups, and also widows from upper caste groups. The lower caste groups saw the arrival of the Portuguese, and in their religion which recognised the dignity of each individual, as a godsend. Upper-caste widows who would ordinarily have been potential victims of dispossession also saw in the arrival of the Portuguese an opportunity to save themselves, and their orphaned children, from a life of penury.

Of course, upper-caste widows had more to fear than dispossession. Given that widows were routinely subject to the practice of Sati, where they were burned with the corpse of their husband, the Portuguese government's banning of the inhuman practice was cause for celebration. It was only after Christian sensibilities took firm root in British India that the practice of Sati was eventually banned and the cruelty of it recognised by the upper-caste activists as they assembled a reformed Hindu religion in the nineteenth century from a variety of practices in the subcontinent. One imagines that while erasing the traces of Portuguese rule Sawant would also like a return to the practice of Sati? One more reason to file a criminal complaint. He should at the very least be called in for questioning.

The arrival of the Portuguese in Goa, and with them the European missionaries, in fact contributed wealth not just to Goa, but to the entire subcontinent. The varieties of fruits and vegetables that we enjoy today, in fact, the foods that constitute the staple of food in the subcontinent (what is otherwise known as Indian food) are all the result of introductions via the Portuguese. Would the Chief Minister also induce famine in the state as well as the country in his ostensible pursuit of Hindu Rashtra?

The Chief Minister is also wrong on fact. While some officials of the Portuguese crown did destroy shrines, the fact is that a number of temples were voluntarily dismembered by their very owners, the *gãocars* of the villages. These members then used the same resources to support the Catholic cult that they now subscribed to. This would not have been unusual for them, given that just about a century before the Portuguese crown established itself, some of the groups that claimed brahmin status had switched from the Smarta sampradaya to the Vaishnava sampradaya. This switch caused a huge amount of upset and violence, conflicts that were not yet resolved when the Portuguese crown established itself in the sixteenth century, and were being referred to the Portuguese crown even in the seventeenth century!

The Chief Minister also needs to remember, as Adv. Radharao Gracias recently reminded us,

that temples in the pre-Portuguese period, and subsequently, were, and still are not public establishments. No, they belonged to the *gãocars* who established them to worship their tutelary deities. The rest of the village were not citizens either, most of the residents in different grades of bondage and servitude to these *gãocars*. Remember that these temples operated under the code of Manu. The idea of equal citizenship is an idea unnatural to the subcontinent, introduced through European entities such as the Portuguese and the British. As such, when rebuilding temples, not only is it to these *gãocars* that the Chief Minister must turn, but we must also inquire what is to be the relationship between the *gãocars* and the rest of the village population. Does the Chief Minister intend to reinstitute the bonds of servitude between the *gãocars* and the other villagers?

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