

Let me clarify at the outset, in case the title of this article sounds like a cricket match, that what is being referred to is the recent clash between Goa's Health Minister and Goa's doctors. **KINGS versus GODS?**

The Health Minister caused widespread shock, across Goa and outside, with his public tongue-lashing and humiliation of a doctor, the Chief Medical Officer (CMO) at the Goa Medical College (GMC), for apparently only following the hospital's own rules. But there was actually little to be surprised about. Because there was nothing new in the Minister's behaviour or attitude. Who can forget him once asking a member of the public "Talk properly - do you think I am a labourer?" In other words, according to him, it's fine if people are rude to labourers. This is what our government is made of. Ministers who imagine themselves as kings, or at least feudal lords - and expecting slavish respect from citizens - rather than the public servants and people's representatives that they are supposed to be.

But people do not seem to have a problem with this kind of arrogance in the past. In fact, the whole horror over the recent incident seemed to be, not because he was rude and insulting, but because he was rude and insulting to a doctor. How could he treat a doctor like that, I heard people asking. Or, to tweak his own words: 'Talk properly - you are talking to a doctor!'

Not surprisingly, the doctor fraternity of Goa receive tremendous support when they decided to go on strike in protest. But their demands were very limited, related only to the public humiliation of one of their members. And the withdrawal of the protest after an apology, not by the concerned minister and not to the concerned doctor, but by various doctors to 'the CMO's chair', was - to put it mildly - bizarre. Finally, there was their lack of response to the gushing declarations from various persons, including the BJP's state president, that doctors are "gods" (*dev*). What all of this clearly and ironically reveals is another side of the same problem of extreme elitism, witnessed with the Minister's behaviour.

The belief that respect is only due to certain persons, not all, is an old but still strong idea in caste society. And this respect is based on the caste location of the person and, also to the caste location of the various professions in the world. So, a doctor (earlier always a member of the dominant castes, though this is changing today) will be respected MUCH more than a nurse (most often a member of the middle castes), and the latter MUCH more than a member of the cleaning staff (most often a member of the castes considered low). How then could the Minister - even if operating like a feudal lord - have publicly insulted a doctor? But wait, perhaps his vituperation was based on the fact that this particular doctor was not of the dominant castes? While his friend, the journalist who started the fracas - by complaining that he was refused special treatment by this CMO - was? And could these caste locations also explain why the demanded apology was finally offered to a chair, not to the doctor in

question, and not by the Minister?



The clash between the minister and the doctors saw a great many anecdotes posted on social media about how honest doctors struggle to survive in government employment, and how they are harassed by the authorities, viz. Goa's health minister and ministry, who prefer to employ people who turn a blind eye to the rampant corruption that prevails all around. There is no question that there are many excellent and selfless doctors in Goa, who indeed suffer precisely because of their sincerity and commitment to their profession. But there are also many excellent and selfless nurses, technicians, helpers, cleaning staff, etc. Yet, we only hear the expression "selfless doctor", and never selfless nurse or selfless sweeper or cleaner. Can a medical establishment survive for a day without cleaning staff? Then why is a sincere doctor celebrated so much, even referred to *dev*, and never others in the medical world, though they are all as vital for the successful functioning of their workplace?

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My family has been the beneficiary of excellent medical care by GMC doctors and other staff. But I have also seen some doctors - and nurses - refusing to help even in situations when patients and their attendants are desperately in need of a hand - because it's not "their" job. The most that such doctors and nurses will do is to shout "Servant!" to summon the multitasking staff (MTS) because it's "their" job; after which they continue to ignore the problem, even when the MTS does not show up. I do know that doctors, nurses, paramedics, and MTS have a specific role to play in a hospital set-up and they cannot be leaving their designated roles to take up others. But surely, when you are free, when you are chatting, when the problem is right in front of you, isn't it possible to just lend a helping hand?

No. For many, it just isn't possible. Because ingrained is the casteist idea of superiority and inferiority in positions and jobs. That's why the protest rings slightly hollow. If the doctors were really bothered about respect as a right of all, they would not use the term 'servant' to address MTS staffers who, as fellow government employees, are actually their colleagues. If everybody employed in the GMC is a government servant, why is it that only the MTS are addressed as "servant"?

We can't expect change to come from the top. Not with ministers like these, lacking even basic manners despite belonging to a relatively urbane environment like Goa's. Those in power, all the way up to Delhi, foster this feudal and kingly manner of functioning. It can be different, though, if one starts at the bottom. And it is the responsibility of the people in the medical profession to change this offensively casteist and hierarchical way of functioning. Especially the doctors, since they are at the top of the hierarchy.



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