

# **Evangelisation in Asia: Row over Relics of in Goa**

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## **Introduction**

The Constitution of India provides the right to freedom of religion to every citizen and educational and cultural rights to conserve the distinct language, script and culture. The freedom of religion is incompatible with the right to conserve the district language, script and culture. The attempts were made at falsification of the native history, denigration of social, cultural, linguistic, religious, spiritual heritage by Portuguese in Asia. They resorted to loot and plunder of wealth in Sri Lanka and Goa. Portuguese labelled Goa as Estado da India to derive international mileage. Goa is the classic case of 'self-deception' in the post-liberation Goa.

## **Portuguese Inquisition in Goa (1560-1812 ACE)**

Portuguese destroyed temples in Old Conquest areas of Goa and interfered with Gaokary system (comunidades) which were autonomous, powerful, self-sufficient bodies in the entire Konkani region of India. The members of Gaokary system managed agricultural land and simultaneously were vested with municipal, judicial, fiscal functions and discharged public welfare activities. 'The Gaokars were the earliest settlers of Goa and included, Gauda, Kunbi and Jalmi communities. They nursed 'Gaokary system and were Mahajans (Mazanias), which existed before 1054 BCE in Goa' (Pereira, 1978:2). The temples were the centres of teaching and learning, art and culture, libraries were full with the religious texts on liturgy, philosophy and mythology. The temples were the places of prayers and meditation. The temples and deities attracted devotees from far and wide, since ancient times.

Portuguese destroyed 556 temples and spared none— 116 temples in Ilhas, 176 in Bardez and 264 in Salcete. Vicar, Miguel Vaz, took active part in persecuting Hindus in Ilhas to the extent of forcing them to destroy their own temples with their own hands. The Jesuits known for their fanaticism inflicted the worst atrocities on the native people in the world. Portuguese imprisoned, persecuted Jesuits and their properties were confiscated after decline of ecclesiastical power in 1580s. The Inquisition Tribunal established in 1560 was finally abolished in 1812 excluding intervening period of 1774-1778. The sword and cross were only option before the native people. Portuguese first chose Hindu Brahmins for conversions followed by other communities.

The demand for establishment of Inquisition was made by St. Francis Xavier on May 16, 1545. The letter was addressed from Amboina (Moluccas) to D. Joao III, king of Portugal. He wrote: "The second necessity for Christians is that your majesty establish the Holy Inquisition, because there are many who live according to Jewish law, and according to the Mohemmedan sect, without any fear of God or shame of the world. And since there are many who are spread all over the fortresses, there is the need of the Holy Inquisition and of many preachers. Your majesty should provide such necessary things for your loyal and faithful subjects in India."

In another letter on January 15, 1551, P. M. Nunes Barreto, a Jesuit priest urged to Father General in Rome wrote: "This is to inform Your Paternity that the Inquisition is more necessary in in these parts than anywhere else, since all Christians have to live together with the Muslims, the Jews, the Hindus and, also the largeness of the country itself causes laxness of conscience in persons residing therein..."

The Inquisition (1560-1820) inflicted the worst atrocities on Hindus. They were forced to seek shelter in neighbouring states. The threat of force and material rewards did not deter the spirit of Hindus. The spirit that guided the activities of Inquisition are not entirely extinct, today.

### **Portuguese Genocide in Sri Lanka**

In Sri Lanka, Thotagamuwe Sri Rahula Thera was born on June 9, 1409 ACE in Dematana village, Kegalle district in the island of Sri Lanka. Ten years later, he was ordained as Bhikku under the tutelage of Venerable Weedagama Maithree Thera, according to the Buddhist traditional rituals. He was named at birth as Vijayabahu Wijesundera. He was 'Shada Bhasha Parmeshawara' (Scholar of Six Special Languages)— Sanskrit, Pali, Sinhala, and the Indian languages Apabransa (variations of Prakrit), Telugu and Magadhi. The titles 'Shad Bhasa Parameshwara' and 'Vaageewara', were conferred on him by the King of Sri Jayewardenepura Kotte. Thotagamuwe Sri Rahula Thera was Ayurveda scholar, astrologer and learnt sorcery and exorcism. The Kotte period (1415-1565 ACE) is known as Golden Era of Sinhala Literature of Sri Lanka.

Portuguese committed the worst atrocities on Buddhists people of Sri Lanka even before taking control of maritime trade in 1505 ACE. The genocide committed by Portuguese on the Sinhala people in Sri Lanka emboldened Jesuit Padre Francis Xavier at whose behest later Goa was declared as a fit case for establishment of Inquisition (1560 to 1882). The inhuman atrocities forced Buddhist monk Thotagamuwe Sri Rahula Thera to go into hiding in a rock cave at Ambana Indurugiri, Elpitiya, Galle district of Sri Lanka for safety and security. But, he passed away on September 27, 1491 in a secluded rock cave when Portuguese were plundering the wealth of Buddhist temples, forcing native people to renounce Buddhism and killing them. The 'Flag and Cross' representing the Portuguese rulers and Roman Catholic Church resorted to conversions of the native people by force fraud and inducement and looted their wealth in Sri Lanka and Goa.

### **Buddhist View on Relics in Goa**

Francis Xavier set sail for Cape Comorin in October 1542. He learnt the native language to spread christianity in Sri Lanka. The Roman Catholic Church still continues with its demand for the official status to Konkani in Roman script in Goa to keep its flock together. St. Francis Xavier died in 1552 due to fever and was first buried on a beach at Shangchuan Island in Malacca. His corpse was taken from Shangchuan Island in February 1553 and he was temporarily buried in St. Paul's Church in Portuguese Malacca on March 22, 1553. An open grave in the Church indicates Xavier's burial but body is missing. St. Francis Xavier did not die in Sri Lanka. Portuguese mistakenly thought that Thotagamuwe Sri Rahula Thera's incorrupt body as that of St. Francis Xavier. The secret of incorrupt body of Thotagamuwe Sri Rahula Thera is attributed to Saraswathi oil (Ayurvedic herbal oil) which monk had mistakenly consumed in the past. The effect of Saraswathie oil still keeps his body intact and not due to any sanctity attributed to the relics in Goa.

A Portuguese official called Pereira in 1553 removed Thotagamuwe Sri Rahula Thera's body (incorrupt remains) from a rock cave in Sri Lanka. Pereira came back from Goa, removed the corpse shortly after April 15, 1553. He moved Buddhist monk's body to his house in Theldeniya in Kandy, Sri Lanka. On December 11, 1553, Thotagamuwe Sri Rahula Thera's corpse was sent to Goa. On December 2 1637, the relics were placed in a glass container encased in a silver casket in Basilica of Bom Jesus in Goa. 'Roman Catholic community in Goa pay respects to the remains of Buddhist monk Thotagamuwe Sri Rahula Thera of Sri Lanka, under the misguided belief that these are the remains of St. Francis Xavier, a Spanish saint of the Roman Catholic Church', according to the Buddhist followers. The right arm is kept in the Church of Gesu in Rome, today. The folk songs of Sri Lanka depicts the episodes of the removal of corpse of Thotagamuwe Sri Rahula Thera in 1553. Similarly, Dekhni dance depicts the reminiscences of the infamous Institution of Inquisition in Goa, too.

### **Church View on Relics in Goa**

The Roman Catholic Church claim that Francis Xavier was born to a Basque family in Spain on April 7, 1506. He met Ignatius of Loyola, the founder of Society of Jesus (Jesuits) at Paris University. He arrived in Goa in 1542 and worked for the spread of christianity in Asia. He died at Shangchuan Island, off-coast China on December 3, 1552. His body was covered with quicklime and believed to be well preserved. Subsequently, in December 1553 decision was made to move body to Goa. Early 1554 body was kept in Basilica of Bomb Jesus, Old Goa, Goa. 'His body shows minimum signs of decay, which is attributed to his sanctity, attracting pilgrims for the exposition from 1554 ', according to Fr. Henry Falcao (In an interview to 'The Navhind Times', Goa: 13/10/2024). The Exposition-2024 is expected to attract eight million devotees in Goa. Government of India is funding the religious event to the tune of 400 crore rupees. Goa government is set to

provide infrastructure, healthcare, digital platforms, safety measures and other resources to what is called a spiritual event. The Roman Catholic Church in Goa has not requested for funds to the Vatican City.

The Pope appoints cardinals in 18 nations and out of 235 cardinals of global Catholic Church, 121 elect the Pope who is the head of the state. China, Russia rejects the authority of the Pope. The secular state in India woos the Church and not ever thought of nationalising the Roman Catholic Church. In 1986, the UNESCO accorded the world heritage status to seven churches in Goa to illustrate evangelisation of Asia. And re-cast Goa as the Rome of Oriente. These churches include, Basilica of Bom Jesus refurbished in 1605, Se Cathedral (1652), Chapel of St. Catherine (1510), Church and Convent of St. Francis of Assisi (1517), Church of Our Lady of Rosary (1549), Church of St. Augustine (1602) and Chapel of St. Cajetan in 1661 ACE.

Estado da India released postal stamps in 1871 but first postal stamp on St. Francis Xavier was released in 1931 and in following years 1946, 1948, and 1952. After Liberation of Goa in 1961, Government of India issued special postal stamps, envelopes, memorabilia in 1974, 1984, 2014 and 2020 on St. Francis Xavier. (Gomantak, Goa: 09/10/2024). Curiously, Archbishop Cardinal Filipe Neri Ferrao has invited Anil Couto, Archbishop of Delhi, a native of Bardez, as the main celebrant of Exposition-2024 in Goa. The decennial Exposition of St. Francis Xavier is the part of evangelisation movement of Christianity (spreading message of good news of Jesus) in Asia.

## **Conclusion**

The Roman Catholic Church continues to have its stronghold over the laity in Goa. The demand for DNA-testing of relics is brushed aside by the Church as it hurts religion, identity and belief of Christian community in Goa. Article 49 of the directive principles of the state policy of Indian Constitution states that the state is obligated to protect monuments, places and objects of national importance. Inevitably, a belief is pitted against a counter-belief in Goa. The DNA-testing is not a new demand but done in other parts of the world. The DNA-testing, in fact, would unite and not divide the Goans. The DNA-testing of relics is not a matter of hurting religious sentiments of any community— Christians or Hindus or Buddhists in Goa and elsewhere

The Government of India and Goa are spending crores of rupees for the decennial expositions in Goa. The Roman Catholic Church depends entirely on the state government for logistic support, security arrangements, digital platforms and so on. Article 25 of Indian Constitution provides for freedom of religion with restrictions. One is free to worship a stone, a monster or a God. ere. It is a matter of fundamental duty of citizens to develop the scientific temper, humanism and spirit of enquiry and reform. The Roman Catholic Church is perpetuating false belief

in view of lack of any scientific evidence and government is lavishly funding the religious event to promote tourism and derive political mileage. The freedom of religion is not absolute, but it is a restricted right. Inquisition started in Portugal in 1541. Padre Francis Xavier first demanded Inquisition in Goa way back in 1545. The Institution of Inquisition was later established in Goa in 1560 and finally abolished in 1820.

The absolute religious freedom nowhere exists. All religions are equally defective. No religion is perfect. The interference of the state in property matters linked with any religion or to insulate cultural identities of tribal forest dwelling communities or to enforce fundamental duties of citizens is complementary to religious freedom and not a matter hurting sentiments of any religious community in a secular state.

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