

# **The Project Gutenberg eBook of Behind the News: Voices from Goa's Press, by Various**

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\*\*\* START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK BEHIND THE NEWS: VOICES FROM GOA'S PRESS \*\*\*

PRESS\*\*\*

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Behind The News: Voices From Goa's Press

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This book was collaboratively written between August 2003 and October 2003, through Goajourno, a cyber network of journalists and former journalists who have worked in Goa.

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## Introduction

If you believe in miracles, here is a small one. An e-book, written collaboratively by over a dozen-and-half journalists, many with amazing stories to tell. Their willingness to do so, says something.

For one, it indicates a generosity to convert memories into history, which would otherwise have been consigned to the dustbin of amnesia. This is particularly true, as the media seldom writes critically about themselves in Goa. More importantly, it also suggests that there are many in Goa who have a

story, and are willing to narrate it. If only they're given a chance. As mediapersons, we need to ask ourselves why these stories are not allowed (or encouraged) to surface in the first place. It's impossible to believe that there is such a drought of ideas and issues in Goa, and the general lack of debate in the media would make it seem.

October 10, 2003 marks the 20th anniversary of the Herald's English-language edition. Many of us journalists who contributed here are no longer, or perhaps never were, associated with that daily newspaper. But, the launch of this product undeniably opened up avenues for a generation of journalists in the state. In addition, it rewrote the rules of journalism for all of us here, for better or worse. Hence the choice of this date for the first release of this book.

What is being said along these e-pages refers to critical times in the history of post-1961 Goa. Needless to say, views voiced here stem from personal experiences, oftentimes are subjective, and likely to generate even more debate. But personal viewpoints are also important, in that these help to complete our understanding of particular events, episodes, and individuals. It is no coincidence perhaps that this series of essays is critical of some held up as icons of Goa's journalism over the past four decades. You might feel the criticism is unfair; but other versions do need to be heard.

This is, of course, not the last word on the subject. Nor does it claim to be a comprehensive account — what got included depended on who was willing to write their 'story' when the call for chapters went out.

This unusual work is humbly devoted to those who are not, or cannot, be with us, as we go down the corridors of time and look at the past decades. Journalists whom Goa has produced, but perhaps were never adequately recognised over the years. Like the innovative Ivan Fera, who died young along with the promise of immense talent and many bylines in journals like *The Illustrated Weekly*. Or, Norman Dantas, whose early death was at least in part triggered off by despair brought on by the unfair deal he got from journalism in Goa. We need to also remember the many who are not here with us, pushed out — both by limited opportunities, as also politics in the press — to migrate far and wide and earn a living on distant shores. To all of them, and the unsung heroes of journalism of the post-Liberation era, this e-book is devoted.

## **Chapter 1: Sixties' stories: Free Goa's first elections**

By Ben Antao Besides his stint referred to in this chapter, Benedito Martinho Herculano Antao (b, 1935) worked for the Indian Express in Bombay (1965-66). He then won a journalism award from the World Press Institute, moved to the US for a year's study, work and travel. Later, he spent 10 weeks at the Denver Post (1967), worked for a Catholic weekly in Toronto, and was a copy editor in the mid-seventies at a major Toronto daily. He also taught high school English, drama and religion for 22 years, before retiring in 1998, and qualified as a certified financial planner in 1988. Currently, he is involved in fiction writing, for which purpose he sees journalism as a "great training ground".

There is a truism in journalism that goes like this: facts are sacred; comment is free.

When I first read it in one of the books on journalism that I borrowed from the USIS library in Bombay in the late 'fifties, I was filled with such fervor as to consider the vocation in journalism that I was contemplating on, at the time, akin to the priesthood. The concept of 'freedom of the press' particularly attracted and engaged my young mind, burning with idealism to bring about genuine equality in Indian society and to see us as a truly "honorable people" as the Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru had said we were.

In other words, journalism would offer me a platform to make a difference.

After a season of doing freelance sports reporting for *The Indian Express* in the city now called Mumbai, I felt much like a lover. One who is not content with merely kissing but wants to explore the whole body. And as a follower of another truism, namely, he who seeks finds the way, lucky circumstance fell into my lap and I found myself doing freelance work for the *Goan Tribune*, a fortnightly published in Bombay to espouse the cause of Goa's political freedom from the Portuguese rule.

Here I got the opportunity not only to write about sports, but also to do general news reporting and profiles of prominent Goans. In little over a year, though, my budding love affair discovered a flaw in my inamorata — the lady fancied the use of hyperbole and propaganda as legitimate means to promote herself. My idealism received a jolt of reality when Lambert Mascarenhas, editor of the periodical then, engaged in propagandist campaigning, suggesting that such slanted writing was necessary to achieve the end. However, my burning desire to express myself in writing overruled my squeamishness.

After the Liberation of Goa in 1961, Lambert went to Goa and became joint editor of a new English-language daily, The Navhind Times, owned and published by the Dempo Brothers, who had become wealthy in the mining business. My fascination for the mistress of journalism remained still intact, not to mention the hidden agenda of my wanting to change the world.

So I went to Goa and joined the paper in June 1963.

Considering myself as a protege of Lambert, I enjoyed a special status at the paper, doing both reporting and sub-editing. It didn't take me long, though, to notice that Vassantrao Dempo, the elder brother, was keenly interested in the image of his newspaper and its editorials. He had hired two editors, a Catholic and a Hindu named T. V. Parvate from Maharashtra, ostensibly to give balance to the paper's news and views. Often at around 5:30 p.m., I would see Mr. Dempo carefully perusing the editorial that Lambert or Parvate had written before it came to the newsroom. The editors wrote on alternate days. I would know, for example, that Dempo had suggested a change in how a certain point of view was expressed in Lambert's editorial because Lambert often invited me to sit across his desk while he wrote an editorial that was based on my news report. Mr. Parvate, a fast and fluent writer, only occasionally asked me into his partitioned office to verify a fact or a figure.

Naturally, my curiosity propelled me to ask Lambert why it was necessary for him or Parvate to have their editorials okayed by the ultimate boss. After all, both of them were professionals who knew and understood the law of libel and defamation. Lambert, flashing his customary smile by way of indulging me, a novice in the game of politics, said it was a condition of his contract. Besides, what was the big deal? An editor could just as well express his own viewpoint as that of the owner. It wasn't a loss of freedom. We live and let live.

Reporters too

I thought about it and gradually came to the conclusion that reporters also indulged in self-censorship. Facts may appear to be sacred, but as a reporter I choose them to slant a 'story' in a particular way. Moreover, space in a newspaper is always limited, forcing me to write to a certain word count, in effect compelling me to sacrifice many 'facts'.

The above was true not only in Goa and Bombay where I worked as a general reporter for The Indian Express (1965-66) but also in Toronto where I worked as a copy editor on the foreign desk of The Globe and Mail in 1975-76. The foreign editor would throw at me reams of teletype copy from Reuters, Associated Press, Agence-France Presse, and The New York Times News Service on a current story, such as race riots in Johannesburg, or post-revolution democracy woes in Portugal or the Patty Hurst kidnapping by the Symbionese Liberation Army in San Francisco, and ask me for a 10-inch column story. This required that I cut out a lot of 'facts' from the 2000 words of wire copy and shape a news story in about 500 words.

Going back to Goa, I remember the one-sided coverage that Navhind Times carried during the month-long campaign for the historic, first general elections held on December 9, 1963. And I was part of it.

Now Vaikuntrao Dempo, younger brother of Vassantrao, was a Congress candidate in the Pernem constituency. The Dempo Brothers had made a substantial cash contribution to the national Congress Party, in effect buying a ticket for Vaikuntrao in the Goa elections. The local Goa Pradesh Congress Committee, headed by Purushottam Kakodkar, a freedom fighter and an apostle of Mahatma Gandhi, was deluged with names of suitable candidates. It was hard pressed to make a judicious choice, a key problem being the candidate's vision of the future of Goa.

At this time, after the 30-member Goa Legislative Consultative Council, headed by Maj.-Gen. Candeth, the mustachioed military governor, was dissolved and a writ for the first democratic elections was issued, two new political parties came into being and declared their election platforms. One was the United Goans, led by Dr. Jack de Sequeira, which stood for a separate state for Goa. The other was the Maharashtrawadi Gomantak Party, with Dayanand Bandodkar at its helm, which stood for Goa's merger with Maharashtra. The Congress, waffling in between, promised that Goans would be consulted about its future in the Indian union.

The elder Dempo let it be known that his paper would support the Congress in the elections and, therefore, all news coverage must be oriented towards Congress candidates. And as the chief reporter at the paper, it fell to my lot to deliver the news with this bias. On the campaign trail, I traveled the length and breadth of Goa, speaking to Congress candidates and often manufacturing 'news' that purported to show that people, by and large, were in favor of Congress candidates. Lambert and I even drove to Pernem one day to see how Vaikuntrao's campaign was coming along.

However, my one dependable contact was none other than the 50-year-old Purushottam Kakodkar.

His office in Panjim was open to me at any hour of the day. Knowing that our paper was solidly behind him, he was generous with his time and forthcoming, giving me full access to campaign reports sent to head office from the various constituencies. During the campaign, Lal Bahadur Shastri, the Indian Home Minister, visited Goa to lend his support to the Congress candidates. Kakodkar arranged for me an exclusive interview with the minister. In the interview, Shastri affirmed that a separate status for Goa was on the cards. A day after my story appeared on the front page, Kakodkar told me that Shastri was pleased with my report and had asked him to extend his congratulations to me. I was more than touched by this solicitude. I was feeling giddy, riding on the carousel of a mutual admiration society.

My friend Ben Saldanha of PTI in Panjim filed a report based on my interview; so did Joshi of The Times of India bureau. As a representative of a news agency, Saldanha, of course, had to be objective and he was. As a matter of fact, he would often feed me stories about the other two parties, based on the 'inside' information he had received. He himself couldn't use that information for his news agency, but I could. And whenever I mentioned this 'fact' to my editors, I was told to just let it pass.

Now, as the campaign was getting into high gear, another friend L. S. Bhandare, an architect by profession, who represented UNI (United News of India) told me that the United Goans' campaign (workers dashing about in open trucks with loud music and handing out campaign literature) reminded him of elections in London, England. He too drew my attention to how successfully the UG party was appealing to the voters.

Convinced

But having persuaded myself willfully with auto-suggestion, and having been on a one-track crusade, I remained convinced that Congress would win the day. On the eve of the election, a day of pause in electioneering, I wrote an upbeat story (about three takes) and handed it to Mr. Salkhade, the news editor from Maharashtra. He scanned the intro and set it in the tray of stories for the front page. Then he looked up and said to me, "You know, Kakodkar is going to be the chief minister of Goa."

It was about 4 p.m. Something in the tone of his voice gave me pause. Then a wild notion entered my head, a spur-of-the-moment impulse, with no rhyme or reason, a mad folly that sometimes seizes lovers at play. I phoned Kakodkar.

"Hello, Purushottam." Although only 28, I was now on first-name basis with him.

"Hello Ben."

"It's a day of rest for you today. Is everything okay?"

"Fine."

"I've just finished writing my lead story for the paper tomorrow. Looks like Congress will win with an overwhelming majority. You must be pleased with the campaign. What do you think?"

"We have to wait and see," he said in a voice devoid of any emotion, but not exhausted. In this respect, Kakodkar came across as cool and circumspect, a man in full control of his emotions.

Mr. Salkhade was busy editing copy at the other end of the newsroom, beyond earshot. That wild notion came rushing again, prompting me to make the pitch, even if it was only hypothetical.

"Purushottam, can I ask you something?"

"Sure, of course."

"You know our paper has been very good to you and the Congress. And I, more than anybody else, have been responsible for all the publicity you've received. Soon you'll become the chief minister of Goa. Now I want to ask you: what will you do for me?"

A pause and, "What do you mean?"

"What I mean is, if you become the chief minister, can I be your press secretary?"

"I can't answer that."

"Why not?"

"I can't do it."

"Listen, I know you're not the chief minister yet. But in the event that you do become the chief

minister, could you not at least tell me what your disposition will be?"

"No."

"You know, I can't believe you're saying this. I am not asking you for a job. I already have a job. All I am asking is, if you become the chief minister, what will you do for me? That's all."

"I can't do anything," he said.

"That's the answer I get after all that I have done for you? I am disappointed. Goodbye and good luck tomorrow."

"Thank you," he said and put the phone down first. I pictured him, in his customary white khadi bush shirt and pants, wearing a self-righteous expression on his face.

During this call, over the carriage of my Underwood typewriter, I was watching the news editor for my voice carried unusually far. But he was focused on his work and didn't look up in my direction.

I lit up a cigarette and hunched over the typewriter, dismayed beyond description. I had heard that Kakodkar was a highly principled man, and then with a sinking feeling in my gut, I realized I was being used, a means to the end. I shall never forget that moment.

Then I walked to my favorite bar to nurse my bruised ego.

Three days later, the election results came out. The Congress was wiped out without a single seat in Goa. The MG won 14 seats to the UG's 12, with two independents, plus an independent winning in Diu and a lone Congress victory in Daman.

I kept brooding about Kakodkar. Did he know something that I didn't? Was that why he said he couldn't do anything for me? I had no heart to ask him that. After that personal and private telephone conversation, the two of us carried on as if nothing had happened. And during the next year, my encounters with Kakodkar became strictly professional but cordial.

Echoes in Toronto

But the manipulation of news by newspaper proprietors was not limited to Goa. I heard a similar echo in Toronto in the nineties.

In the 1988 elections, the Progressive Conservative Party of Canada, led by Prime Minister Brian Mulroney, had won a second majority with 169 seats out of 295 in the House of Commons. The Liberals were in opposition with 83. In the ensuing five years, the Mulroney government brought in a new bill called Goods and Services Tax, a highly controversial measure that proved unpopular with the majority of Canadians. Still, the government went ahead and passed the tax bill — a 7% tax on all goods and services effective January 1990. During this term, Mr. Mulroney was also criticized for being too friendly with the Americans.

In the 1993 election, the public was fed up with the Tories (PC) as reflected in the opinion polls. But the press and media had no clear idea as to how deeply the people loathed the policies of the Tories. The shocker came on the night of the election-October 25. The fall from grace for the Tories was as stunning as it was deserved. They won only two seats in total, each in the province of New Brunswick and Quebec. The Liberals, led by Jean Chretien, returned with a huge majority of 177 seats. The Liberals are still in power, having won the next two elections in 1997 and 2000.

However, an interesting development regarding the power of the press took place in 1998. A wealthy Canadian newspaper mogul named Conrad Black financed a new daily in Toronto called The National Post. Black told readers that his paper would advance an alternative point of view, a far right conservative position on politics in Canada. As owner of London's Daily Telegraph, the Jerusalem Post, and Chicago's Sun-Times, Mr. Black hired top talent and spared no expense, at least for the first two years, to make the Post successful in creating and wooing the conservative voice in Canada. In the 2000 election, his paper became as one-sided as Navhind Times was in 1963. The paper supported a new party called Canadian Alliance, a highly conservative group drawn mostly from western Canada, and was hell-bent to destroy Prime Minister Jean Chretien and the Liberals. Alas, the people didn't buy it! And the Liberals forged ahead with a third majority win.

During this time, Mr. Black's personal agenda of wanting to be a peer in the House of Lords in England came out front and centre. The British Prime Minister Tony Blair recommended and the Queen accepted that Conrad Black be made a Lord. But sweet revenge raised its arms and Jean Chretien said Black couldn't be a Lord while being a Canadian citizen. Black was forced to renounce his Canadian citizenship. Not only that, but Black sold the National Post in 2001 for a tidy profit. He is now Lord

I started this article with the observation that facts are sacred and comment is free. Both elements of journalism, it seems to me, are flawed. Like beauty and sex, freedom of the press is in the eye of the beholder and in the loins of the performer. It's all relative, never absolute.

## **Chapter 2: Goan journalism: Views from near and far**

Eugene CorreiaCanada-based Eugene Correia has worked for a wide range of national-level newspapers published in India. Besides those listed below, he has also written for India Today, and a number of expat Indian publications published from overseas. What stands out is this journalist's sharp understanding of Goan issues and politics, and his memory for detail, all the more remarkable since he has been based outside Goa for virtually his entire working life.

I must admit I have no direct connection with journalism in Goa, in the sense of having worked in the state. However, I was involved in Goan journalism in Mumbai (then Bombay), but that too in a limited way. I wrote few pieces for the Konkani-language papers such as The Goa Times and Ave Maria and the English-Konkani weekly, The Goan Sports Weekly. After Goa's Liberation, and till I left India for Canada in late 1981, I took more than a cursory look at how journalism is practiced in Goa. I read The Navhind Times often, as the paper was available in Mumbai during the 1970s.

I was involved in mainstream journalism in Mumbai since my college days, first with The Indian Express and later with the Free Press Journal. I provided freelance services for both papers in the sports department. It was my dad's cousin, Felix Valois Rodrigues, who inspired me to take up journalism. A versatile writer in English, Konkani and Portuguese, he worked for the Indian Express in New Delhi till his retirement.

### Getting into the field

Felix Uncle, as I called him, introduced me to the news editor of Indian Express in Mumbai and I was given a chance to work in the sports department under CSA Swami . The news editor, S Krishnamoorthy, popularly known as SKM, who regarded by many as more powerful than the editor because of his close relationship with Ramnath Goenka, The Indian Express proprietor.

As a freedom fighter who served in jail for his anti-Portuguese activities, Rodrigues was well-connected in Goa. After my graduation, he gave me an introductory letter to Lamberto Mascarenhas, who was by then no longer the joint editor of The Navhind Times, Goa's first English-language daily.

Mascarenhas, in turn, gave me an introductory note to K.S.K. Menon, who had been co-editor with Mascarenhas, and later promoted to editor. I took the letter to Menon and, after reading it, said he would contact me if any position arose.

He gave me back the note. I read the Mascarenhas' scribbled note and was shocked. Mascarenhas had introduced me as a "chap" from "my village". It was true, we both came from Colva, but to a young man like me seeking a job it was horrifying to read a learned man like Mascarenhas call me a chap.

It's also true that Mascarenhas and I belong to different strata in Goa's caste system. I couldn't believe a man of his stature could introduce me in such a demeaning way. I think I have the note somewhere in my collection of memorabilia.

I never got a job at The Navhind Times. In later years, I met Mascarenhas in the office of Goa Today. From his days at The Navhind Times to owning Goa Today, Mascarenhas had become an icon in Goan journalism. He had also gained reputation as a novelist for his acclaimed book, Sorrowing Lies My Land. In subsequent years, I learnt a lot about Mascarenhas as a man and his role as a freedom fighter in the liberation struggle in Mumbai. One of his best friends, Professor Edward Mendonca taught me at St. Xavier's College. Mendonca and I came to know each other well after me finishing my graduation. Twice I saw him very drunk and I had to hail a taxi for him and drop him near his house in Colaba.

Mendonca reputation for booze is legendary as his mastery over the English language and his ability to teach. He and me spoke at times of Mascarenhas's reputed novel. Mendonca's hand can be seen throughout the book, and many English scholars have also been curious about it. Because of his alcoholism, it became easy for many to dismiss Mendonca's influence in Mascarenhas's book as a boast from a drunkard. Those like me who knew Mendonca reasonably well have reason to believe that Mendonca could be anything but a liar.

I held no grudge against Mascarenhas for calling me a "chap", but deep inside me I carried the wound. Even in Goa I would go to see him. On one such visit, I asked him if he would provide me with

an opportunity to write for his magazine. He dismissed me summarily saying he prefers reputed writers. I thought he would encourage a young journalist like me. I resolved never to write for the magazine and I have never written for it.

When I learnt the magazine was taken over by the Salgaocars, I felt happy. Happy not because the magazine no longer belonged to Mascarenhas, but happy because I felt the new owners and the new editor would give opportunities to new writers. As we now know, it has happened. Goa Today was no longer the domain of one man and his ego.

On another visit during summer, I was dressed in a suit. I was to meet the then Chief Minister Dayanand Bandodkar and later attend a wedding in the city. Since I had no personal means of transport, for me to travel from Bogmallo to Panaji and back twice would be difficult, so I had worn the suit and left home early morning. As soon as I told Mascarenhas that I was going to meet Bandodkar, Mascarenhas's face changed colour. He admonished me for wearing a suit to see the chief minister, saying that journalists must be dressed informally. I explained to Mascarenhas, but I could see that Mascarenhas bore some hatred for the late Bhausahab, as the chief minister was affectionately known.

That very same day, I met some journalists, including Michael Fernandes who, I believe, was The Indian Express correspondent in Goa. I told them that Mascarenhas seemed piqued at me for wearing a suit. If I remember correctly, Fernandes said that Mascarenhas has a personal bias against Bandodkar regarding the withdrawal of government advertisement. He told me that Mascarenhas and Bandodkar were once on a friendly basis, but both had fallen apart.

I think my second adventure in getting a job in Goa came when Erasmo de Sequeira launched his paper, Goa Monitor . I applied for a position but never got appointed. The paper lived for a brief time.

Some years later, my uncle told me that he has an offer from the Chowgules to start a Konkani daily. I came to Goa for a visit and went to see Rodrigues at his residence in Darbandora. He and I designed the logo for Uzvadd, though it may have been refined when the paper was launched. Rodrigues never took up the position as he was to be under the editorial supervision of Madhav Gadkari, the then editor of Gomantak. Gadkari was fiercely pro-Marathi and my uncle felt his efforts to promote Konkani journalism would be subverted by Gadkari. To my surprise, Evagrio Jorge, the noted freedom fighter and news reader at All-India Radio in Panaji, was its first editor. The paper was well received. As expected, Jorge and the owners or probably Gadkari had a difference of opinion. In a short time, Jorge was out and he launched his own paper, Novem Uzvadd.

#### Throwing light on Uzvadd

Without the financial muscles of the Chowgules that sustained Uzvadd, Jorge's paper suffered. I think it was also during this time that a group started another Konkani daily, Novem Goem. I am not sure why Uzvadd eventually folded up.

My friend, Cyril D'Cunha, started a sports weekly called Goal, and I was its Mumbai correspondent. I contributed many stories till the paper went under for reasons unknown to me. This was my direction connection to Goa's journalism. Later on, I was offered a job at the West Coast Times, a daily launched by the House of Timblos. At least two senior colleagues of mine at the Free Press Journal went to Goa to start the paper. One of them was Y.M. Hegde and the other, P.R. Menon.

Before going to Goa and even after the paper began publishing from Margao in South Goa, Hegde said it would be good for me to come to Goa. I forget the year it was launched and if I was still a freelancer at the Free Press Journal or on its staff. By then, I was not keen on settling down in Goa. To me, Goa was still in the backwaters of journalism. To leave a city like Mumbai where journalism made blood rush in one's veins, and go to Goa, where things moved at a snail's pace, was something I dreaded. When I wanted to come to Goa, I was found unwanted.

After leaving Free Press Journal and joining The Hindu, I met Raul Fernandes one day in Mumbai. He was scouting for talent for O Herald, then about to be turned into an English-language daily. I knew Fernandes, though not as well as his brother John and his dad, Antonio Caetano Fernandes.

The Fernandes family was close friends with my friends in Mumbai, the Ribeiros, owners of the Goan restaurant in Dhobitalao called Snowflake. When in Goa, my friend and I went to see AC, as he was popularly known, at the Casa JD Fernandes store in Panaji. And whenever John came to Mumbai to get supplies for their store, he would visit Snowflake where I hung out most of my time.

Raul Fernandes and I met at the Kyani Restaurant in Dhobitalao and he offered me to come to Goa as chief reporter. The offer was unattractive financially for me to leave The Hindu. I was given the impression that Erville Menezes, then with Indian Express in Mumbai, was joining as editor. Fernandes was in consultation with Menezes, I was told. At a second meeting, Fernandes informed me that Rajan

Narayan was chosen to be the editor. I was surprised. I never had any admiration for Narayan's journalism. I had heard some stories about his resignation from The Mirror, a monthly publication from the Eve's Weekly group. Even though the offer of chief reporter was not tempting, I was not keen on working under Narayan.

I knew Narayan on a hi-and-bye basis when I was at Free Press Journal and he was at Onlooker, a sister-publication from the Free Press Journal group. I forget what position he held at the Onlooker magazine, and whether Narayan was there when M.J. Akbar edited it or later when M. Rahman took over.

I once covered a function at the United States Information Services (USIS) office in Mumbai where Narayan was present. A well-known scholar of Black studies was visiting Mumbai from the United States. Narayan carried with him a book by this scholar. I found it very preposterous on Narayan's part to bring the heavy volume to the meeting.

In fairness to Narayan, he made O Herald what it's today. I also heard some allegations about his wheeling-dealing with powers-that-be in the government. Many journalists and some politicians told me that Narayan deserved the violent attack on him as his journalism was biased. No matter what his journalism is, the attack on him was a shameful incident in the history of Goan journalism.

I am told he's Goa's bravest journalist. Maybe true, as I am in no position to judge that from here in Canada. But I find his writing very weak. His editorials and columns have lot of spelling errors and the grammar is often flawed. His column, Stray Thoughts, is not well composed. Just a month or so ago, someone gave me old copies of O Herald. Going through his column, I found his thoughts not very cohesive. He writes in a disjointed way. One thing I will agree, he writes strongly, not sparing those whom he targets. If carving a well-written piece is his fault, then using strong language is his forte. I form my opinion not on just the few papers I read recently, but also from reading O Herald during my visits to Goa and from those at times posted on the Goanet email list (<http://www.goanet.org>).

On holiday

Just after a year's stay in Canada, I came to Goa on a holiday. One fine day, Fulgencio Rodrigues, once the leader of the toddy-tappers association and a candidate for the assembly, and a fellow-villager in Bogmallo, came to my house and told me that Umaji Chowgule wanted to meet with me.

I was taken aback as I didn't know Umaji personally. Rodrigues, who worked for the Chowgules, took me on his scooter to meet him Umaji at the Chowgule offices. To my surprise, he offered me a job as joint editor of a sports daily the Chowgules were then planning on launching. The other editor was to be Antonio Botelho, a former sports writer at The Navhind Times, who I knew well, both as writer and later as one of the office-bearers of the Goa Football Association.

I was a landed immigrant in Canada and my first experience in Canada was not very good. There was recession then on and I was finding it difficult to get a job in my field. I worked in a warehouse for sometime, making enough money to buy a ticket to India.

The offer came with a flat in the Sant Inez locality of Panaji and a car. I told Umaji that if I accept the position, I would forfeit my landed immigrant status in Canada. I asked if what would happen if the paper failed to fly. He said he would absorb me in the public relations department of the Chowgules. I went to Sant Inez with one of the Chowgule officers to select a flat. I picked one. After that I went to the Gomantak building to meet with Narayan Athawale, editor of Gomantak . Umaji had explained that Athawale would be the overall in charge of the new paper.

After speaking to Athawale, I met some workers. I noticed some tension among them regarding the launch of a new paper. The workers felt that profits from the Gomantak paper would be diverted to sustain the new sports daily. In other words, the workers would get lesser bonuses. The atmosphere in the press seemed vitiated. I was also aware of what happened to Evagrio Jorge. I was contemplating whether I should risk my Canadian immigration to remain in Goa. My heart and mind was divided, and so was my family. My dad said I should stay back as the job prospects in Canada very dim, but my mom said I should go back and see what the future holds.

At the same time I was engaged and in a week or two would get married. My future wife insisted that I forego the offer and return to Canada. I gave the whole thing a good thought and decided to tell Umaji that I was not interested. He had told me that if I decide to accept the offer, I should finally meet Ramesh Chowgule who, I think, was the managing director of the Chowgule group. I believe the paper was never launched. To this day, I am not sure how the Chowgules came to know about me. My hunch is that Prashant Joshi, former official of the Goa Cricket Association, whose family owns the Joshi and Sons Auto Center in Vasco, told Umaji about me. I had gone to visit Joshi in Vasco when I came to Goa.



During my next visit to Goa, I was happy to know that one of my colleagues at Free Press Journal, Padiyar, was editor of The Navhind Times with another former colleague, M.M. Mudaliar, as his associate. In fact, Mudaliar was passed over by the management after Bikram Vohra left to go to Khaleej Times in Dubai. Mudaliar and me had lunch one day in a Panaji restaurant and he seemed quite distraught. Padiyar, who joined The Navhind Times from The Times of India where he had moved from Free Press Journal, had a brief stint as editor as he passed away following a heart attack.

I knew the publisher of The Navhind Times, Vilas Sardesai, well because of his involvement with soccer. Once when I was in Goa, he, D'Cunha and I travelled in a car he borrowed from Vohra, as his own car was unavailable, all the way from Panaji to Margao to watch a soccer match. I never asked Sardesai for a favour to get me a job at The Navhind Times. I was content working in Mumbai where journalism flourished those days and continues to do so till today.

Grown since

When I check websites of Goan papers or when some friends and family bring Goan papers to Canada from their visits, I notice that Goan journalism has grown since I saw it first-hand. It behooves well for this field that Goa now enjoys many dailies and has correspondents of many leading Indian papers.

The quality of reporting and editing is still not very impressive. What is, however, impressive is that the new breed of journalists shows lot of guts and vitality. I once discussed the teaching of journalism with Fr. Planton Faria, who used to run the Diocesan Communication Centre at the Archbishop's House at Altinho in Panaji.

He showed me the student paper and I saw some good writing. I am not aware if the centre is still operating. Fr. Faria was editing a Konkani paper while also running the centre.

It has been my ambition to have a journalism college in Goa named after Frank Moraes, one of the finest editors in Indian journalism. There may be many who would dispute my suggestion on the basis that Moraes didn't do anything for Goan journalism per se, and I totally agree. No matter he did play a direct role in Goan journalism, but he was a Goan journalist of repute.

One may argue that during the Portuguese days there were many Goan journalists who played crucial roles in promoting Goan journalism. Some of these journalists, who were also leaders, were in the forefront of Goa's liberation struggle. Maybe so, Moraes too played a vital background role in Goa's liberation, largely because of his close friendship with Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru.

Whatever the case, a college of journalism, affiliated to the Goa University, is a dream that I cherish and hope it would be realized in my lifetime. Goa has a privileged status in the history of the written word in India with the publication of the first-ever book in the country. Journalism is part of the written word and, hence, a college that fosters the growth of journalism would be ideal in the serene surrounding of Goa's educational landscape. That's my thought to ponder for those in the decision-making positions.

### **Chapter 3: West Coast Times : A dream ruined**

Valmiki Faleiro One of Goa's own, home-grown prolific writers between the mid-seventies and mid-eighties, Faleiro worked his way through other professions too, before coming back to commit himself in writing once again, only to reveal a style that remains as readable as ever. Luckily for Goa, Faleiro doesn't rule out the possibility of taking to the pen — or should one say, the computer keyboard — sometime in the near future.

Summer, 1978. Whether Goa's only English daily hit newsstands in Margao at 9 or at 11 in the morning, mattered little. I was preparing for my final B.Com. exams due in a few weeks and had, in any case, tired myself of asking The Navhind Times' management to make it a newspaper (for us in South Goa) that went with breakfast, not brunch.

My association with The Navhind Times (NT) had begun precisely on February 23, 1975. NT carried an article penned jointly by D.M. Silveira and me. (Silveira was one of my two English lecturers at Margao's Damodar College and, with the other, B.G.Koshy, later turned to journalism: Silveira was Editor, ONLOOKER, of Mumbai's FPJ group and Koshy the Associate Ed. of The Current Weekly.)

Then on, the NT Editor, Dr. K.S.K. Menon, encouraged me to write. Off and on, he would also commission me to do Sunday features, sometimes full-page, on topics of prevailing reader interest. Between 1975 and 1978, I had some 45 by-lines at the NT, then a 6-pager (10 pages on Sunday.)

Sometime in between, Dr. K.S.K. asked me to join the NT desk — with free education at Dempo

College of Commerce and no-night-shifts baits. I ought to have grabbed the offer. The company was great: K.P. Nair (News Ed), the incredibly witty Balan (Chief Sub), my friend Patrick Michael (a gifted Malayalee who, with me, but surreptitiously, covered North Goa for The Current Weekly — together we had done the Siddharth Bandodkar shooting story, but who K.S.K. ensured stayed as Proof Reader without promotion at the NT!) Gabru and Cyril D'Cunha were at the desk and Gurudas R. ("Kaka") Singbal, Pramod Khandeparkar and Jovito Lopes on the field?

For reasons that will take me off this track, I declined the offer. Promising Dr. K.S.K., however, that I'd join the day I complete graduation — though I never really meant to take journalism as a career. I had set my sights on becoming a Company Secretary after B.Com. but while doing the correspondence course, thought I'd work — and earn pocket money.

The '70s were times of MRTP culture. There were monopolies and there were restrictive trade practices, and Commissions that could barely hold them in check. Even though Dr. K.S.K. to my sheer amazement once bragged that the Prime Minister's private secretary telephoned him while he was shaving just that morning (to compliment him on the day's "excellent" editorial), fact was that NT rarely traveled 35 kilometres to Margao before 8 or 9 in the morning. Times wouldn't change and the NT stood still. It was a proud monopoly, which, after all, had weathered challenges from the likes of Goa Monitor (Papa Baba Sequeira-owned, Jagdish Rao -published, Mario Cabral Sa-edited and Alfred De Tavares -chief reported.)

Back to the summer of 1978. As our 'unholy trinity' of Aleixo, Shekhar and me daily sat at the Govind Poy house on Abade Faria Road, Margao, preparing for our final B.Com. exams, I missed Kaka Singbal — a.k.a. Balsing, the Sunday columnist and Chief Reporter of NT — and Sripad P. Madkaikar, who at one time or the other published most of Goa's dailies. Both had called at home earlier in the day. Kaka left a note saying he had something "interesting" for me and would I kindly see him soon. I met him at his Patto quarters early next morning. He said he had quit NT and joined a newspaper that was going to be published — from Margao! He said the proprietor, Panduronga (Chalebab) Timblo — Papa to most of us — had made a blanket offer: whatever the NT offered me, he would offer more!

I immediately went to Navhind Bhavan. Dr. K.S.K. was seated with Fr. Lactancio Almeida, then Editor of Vauraddeancho Ixtt. I explained that it would help me cope with my Company Secretary studies from the comforts of my own home in Margao? The ex-Army man perennially dressed in cool white almost sprang from the chair, his neatly waxed whiskers bristling with rage: "Are you going to that W.C. s\*\*t Times?"

He tried a different line, "Are you going to join my competitor and stab me in the chest?" And yet another, "Remember I am the P.A.C. (Press Advisory Committee) chairman for another three years — and as long as I'm around, I'll ensure you don't get an accreditation!!"

I was painfully aware that I was reneging on a promise, that by joining a competitor, I'd hurt the hand that had, in good measure, groomed me. But Company Secretaryship was my object — not journalism — and I honestly imagined that studying the course material and sending out its Response Sheets would be better done from home and without working on shifts, as I'd at NT. [I was, eventually, recompensed with poetic justice. I hadn't reckoned that joining a fledgling — nay, nascent — publication as its Staff Reporter, with added responsibility of news-gathering in South Goa (which meant re-writing copy from mofussil correspondents who largely hailed from a vernacular background) would be so engrossing an affair that I ended up sending not a single Response Sheet to the Institute of Company Secretaries of India!]

The West Coast Times (WCT) began churning out dummies by late-June 1978. My die was cast on June 6, 1978, by way of acceptance of the appointment letter, personally signed by Papa (Panduronga Timblo) himself. One of the most promising publishing ventures in the history of Goa's print media was about to take off?

The mid-'70s witnessed a boom in Goa's mining industry, both in terms of productivity and profitability. Panduronga Timblo Industrias (PTI) had evidently also made pots of cash, particularly from its manganese mines in Rivona, Quepem. While brother, Gurudas' Timblo Private Limited (TPL) had during this time invested in some far-sighted (but alas, badly managed) industrial enterprises, including fertilizers, rubber footwear and collapsible tubes, youngest brother, Modu's Sociedade de Fomento Industrial (SFI) was consolidating its strengths in mining and diversifying into hospitality. PTI did not lag behind — with Parshuram Paper Mills at Chiplun, industrial gases in Bangalore and, to the surprise of many, an English-language newspaper from Margao!

A rival to Hobson's choice NT

The last comment may be off the mark. As I later learnt from Papa himself, the project was conceived

from a broader vision. Throughout the Konkan, from Ratnagiri district in Maharashtra to South Canara (now Dakshin Kannada) districts in Karnataka, no English-language daily was available before noon or afternoon those days. While the Mumbai dak editions of Times of India (ToI) and Indian Express (IE) did the honours in coastal Maharashtra, it was Bangalore's Deccan Herald in coastal Karnataka. Goa's NT, which took only a couple of hours less to reach Margao, could not be expected to travel beyond its borders on mass circulation basis — till WCT arrived, NT was in fact believed to have pegged its circulation (to avoid re-classification to a higher bracket, which implied higher minimum wages to staff and workers!)

It was Papa's dream to fill this void of a morning English-language daily for the entire Konkan, from Goa. Hence the West Coast in the newspaper's name. Competition to NT was only incidental. (I am not aware of any family feuds among Goa's mining magnates at the time and shall stand corrected if there was any such *raison d'etat*. If there really were any differences between the two families, they would be buried some years later: under blessings of the Partagal Swamiji, Papa's grand-daughter, Pallavi, was given in marriage to the Dempo headman, Vasantrao's son, Srinivas - current Chairman of the Dempo group.)

The infrastructure put into place to realize Papa's dream matched. A modern civil construction, meticulously designed, was put up at Davorlim, just beyond Margao's municipal boundary. Editorial, advertising and printing departments were housed under one roof for optimum synch. All sections of the newspaper's production process, from subbing to typesetting, from proof reading to optical processing, from plate-making to the final printing, were so located as to achieve maximum production speed. Attention was paid even to minor details, like sending galley proofs to the news desk in a jiffy. Such were the conveniences that the edition could go to bed by a leisurely 4.30am (the print run took barely half an hour.) Communication lines were made as reliable as possible, given frequent power interruptions. Both PTI and UNI ticker services were subscribed to (though only the PTI had a carrier station in Margao to cope with breakdowns.) A full-fledged bureau was set up in Panjim, connected to the editorial offices in Davorlim by teleprinter link.

The printing technology employed was said to be the best available in India — except in typesetting, where for some unknown reason, Lino machines were used instead of computers (maybe the value of lead scrap, in place of katchra bromides that computers generated those days, had something to do with it!) No more block-making for photographs and illustrations; these were optically processed directly to printing plates. A modern web offset printing machine was brought in (together with a Delhi-based Haryanvi operator who soon acquired fondness for palm feni from nearby Jose's bar and other unprintables from across the Rawanfond railway tracks!). The machine churned out, if I remember right, 50,000 copies/hour. Even the camera purchased for the Staff Photographer was a top-of-the-line German Leica, complete with an array of lenses and filters, worth a lakh of rupees of 1978. Krishna Kurwar managed the plant, under the GM-cum-Publisher, Madkaikar. The result was a refreshing, never-before-seen product on the landscape of Goa's print media.

To match, a high-profile editorial team was put together under the stewardship of Konkani-speaking M.G. Bailur and his Associate, Tulu-speaking Y.M. Hegde, both originally from South Canara. The backbone of the newspapers, the News Editor, was P.R. Menon, the old and revered FPJ warhorse. The complement of three Chief Subs and about a dozen Subs was picked from various national dailies — Goa could come up with only two pairs of hands on the news desk. Being unfamiliar with local affairs, this cast added onus on Kaka Singhal and me to mark the priority of our dispatches in the initial days!

The news-gathering team headed by Kaka (assisted by Dharmanand Kamat in Panjim and Karamchand Furtado on the TP link) was, of course, entirely home-bred. I rushed college-mate Leslie St. Anne thro' a crash course in typing to join me in Margao. In South Goa, we had Radharao Gracias and Joey Rodrigues (both law students then), Felicio Esteves (who went on to become a Ministerial P.A. and co-author of the infamous Marks Scandal subsequently scooped by me for the FPJ), John Carlos Aguiar in Ponda, Vallabh Dessai in Quepem, Minguel Mascarenhas in Sanguem, Kelly Furtado in Vasco, and half a dozen stringers across South Goa. Manikrao (brother of the award-winning ToI photographer, Prabhakar M. Shirodkar) was our lensman, assisted by Lloyd Coutinho in Margao and Lui Godinho in Vasco, excellent photographers all, who provided the memorable photo inputs that shot the WCT to instant fame.

WCT hit the newsstands in early-July 1978. We raced. In Margao, I concentrated on at least one off-beat, human-interest, interview-based or photo-story per day, carried usually boxed or in anchor position. Aware of our printing process strengths, I never lost an opportunity to get Manik shoot a good pic, including one that had to be clicked from a bubbling canoe in choppy waters off a rocky beach in Betul, South Goa. [This one was of a rotting human male corpse — sprawling, shocking and white on the dark rocks - which the cops had neglected to recover despite the local Sarpanch's days-long complaints. P.R. Menon splashed the pic in the lead-story position. I had to take Papa's reprimand the

following morning — it seems the Lt. Governor was taken so aback picking the morning's WCT that his P.A. personally called Papa to complain about bad taste. But I still considered the two-and-half Rupees paid to the canoe man for the ride a fine expense!]

Consciously, though, we shunned sensationalizing and Kaka firmly shot the idea of carrying the day's matka figures. We refrained from gimmicks like carrying dummy advertisements, especially in the Classified columns, barometer to a newspaper's popularity.

Instead, we went for innovative editorial content. [Including, at my instance, a SundayMag column on Sleight of Hand by the Salcete magician, Marco. When Marco didn't show up for a couple of weeks, leading to howls from eager readers of his column, Y.M. Hegde was so furious that I had to fill in with a piece on how Marco had performed the Vanishing Trick and restore YM's trademark smile!]

To further notch up circulation, I almost coerced Madkaikar into breaking the back of monopoly newspaper distributors in South Goa — by selling retail bundles to any willing vendor on an initial sell-or-return basis.

Results were evident. By month 6, we sold around 4,500 copies in and around Margao alone, compared to less than half that number by NT. Circulation problems, however, persisted in North Goa, including delayed deliveries to news stalls in the northern talukas. But then, we had just two vehicles to cover the entire territory. ("Penny wise, Pound foolish," P.R. Menon forever rued, he never carried much of an impression about the managerial abilities of Goan mineowners — all his life, after all, Menon had worked in a establishment owned by the Karnanis, Marwaris to the core!) Even then, overall, WCT's print order would be just about 2,000 copies short of the NT. And at the rate we were going, the gap would fast be closed and surpassed?

My heroes, of course, were Shivram Borkar and Babal Borkar, ace drivers who by day ferried the shift editorial staff to and from quarters in Margao to office in Davorlim . By night, the duo snoozed whatever time available, on heaps of 'raddi' in the press. And zipped their way with newspaper bundles to either end of Goa before the crack of dawn — in terribly overloaded, ramshackle, dieselized Ambassador cars that should have been a delight to Mario Miranda and Alexyz (we used a syndicated pocket cartoon, incidentally, since Mario was with the ToI group in Mumbai and Alexyz hadn't yet surfaced as a cartoonist.) Babal and Shivram, true heroes who virtually were at call, round the clock, round the year. [They of course made out-of-pocket money, ferrying passengers on the return. When this reached Papa's ears, he tailed one of the drivers one fine morning. When the unsuspecting fellow stopped to take in passengers, Papa is reported to have pulled alongside and advised the driver, "Bhara, bhara, taxi ti!" The man was often magnanimous. The driver did not lose his job.]

By the first year of publication, despite impressive circulation figures, there were no signs of advertising revenue picking up to reach the financial break-even point. To the sheer dismay of our well-knit editorial team, there were also no signs of implementation of the pan-Konkan Plan. The management, instead, began fighting shy to inject fresh investment in the enterprise. Corners started getting cut. Virgin plates came to used only for jacket pages, inside pages were processed on recycled plates. Papa's dream began to show signs of fatigue?

By the third month into the second year of publication, amid this uncertain scenario, arrived Nicholas ("Nicky") Rebello, a lino-typesetter and leader of the NT worker's union. I will not hedge a bet if Nicky was 'inspired' by his employers, but having been in touch with him much after his retirement from NT at his home in Betim, I can vouchsafe Nicky didn't travel to Davorlim by any 'political' inspiration. My best guess is that some restive workers of the WCT press, aware of wages being paid at NT, must have approached and invited Nicky to Davorlim. The workers of WCT press got unionized and Nicky soon served a Charter of Demands. The management stood its ground, often unreasonably in the opinion of the editorial team - which of course had no locus standi in the imbroglio. As the strike showed signs of protraction, P.R. Menon, known for leftist leanings from his fiery days at the FPJ, tried to intervene with the management. To no avail.

(P.R. Menon was forever of the conviction that managerial skills of Goan mine-owners were limited to blasting, transportation and shipping — and after the importer's cheque arrived, to distributing the proceeds to those who had blasted, transported and shipped. And, of course, to profits!) Papa, strangely, sometimes used queer management methods. There was this Chief Accountant, hired for the PTI group, on a then princely salary of Rs.4,000 a month. To get a feedback on the Chief Accountant, Papa assigned a peon drawing no more than Rs.250 a month. After office hours, the peon would report to Papa on the activities of the C.A. from which, inferences on the Chief Accountant were drawn!

But a man of immense experience and intuition he was. From the streets of native Assolna in Salcete, where as a child he hawked textiles, a wooden yard measure slung across his shoulder and a coolie with a headload of wares in tow, Papa must have surely post-graduated from the University of Experience. On occasions when I was seated in his chamber, his P.A., Sambari would buzz to announce a visitor. In a flash Papa knew why the man had come, what he would say, and had the replies even before the visitor entered! I personally saw flaming creditors leave his chamber smiling, even though not a paisa had yielded! He had that rare ability to disarm even the most irate visitor. But when it came to the WCT strike, I have always held the belief that a man of such calibre who could have easily placated the agitated workers and even broken their Union, was somehow carried away with the opinion of one trusted man, who was obviously misleading him — and since I've named names, I will exclude Madkaikar and Kurwar.]

With no end to the strike in sight, Bailur, Hegde, Kaka and me next met and virtually pleaded with Papa to concede some sops to the striking workmen and get the publication going. I think the establishment (may not have been Papa) thereafter regarded as being pro-Union!

The editorial team, bulk of which was from outstation, met frequently during those bekaar days and finally, the painful decision emerged that we tell the management to either settle the dispute with the Union or we quit en masse. The management was unmoved. We quit, but Papa's dispenser of bad advice insisted on serving 'dismissal' letters!

And thus a lofty dream to publish from Goa, the land of Banna Halli, an English daily serving the entire of Lord Parashuram's Konkan on the West Coast of India, went phut. A modern press and process, an excellent editorial team — path-breaking infrastructure in Goa's history of newspaper production — lay in waste.

The venerable Bailur returned to retirement, as did P.R. Menon. Y.M. Hegde joined Mumbai's Shipping Times as Editor. The Chief Subs and Subs returned to their original publications or to new jobs. A Goan Sub, Vincent Rangel, from Tivim-Bardez, went into business, as the Mumbai-end partner of Manvin Couriers. I joined the FPJ Group (Free Press Journal, its tabloid-evening Bulletin and fortnightly, Onlooker) as Goa Correspondent; moved in like capacity to IE when FPJ's Chief Editor, S. Krishnamurthy joined IE's Mumbai edition as Resident Editor; played a role in J.D. Fernandes' decision to start an English avatar of the near defunct Portuguese O Heraldo (including the hiring of its first editor) — and almost joined, but didn't quite — as that newspaper's Chief Reporter, for reasons that Rajan Narayan should know. And finally got into business. Without regrets.

#### **Chapter 4: Novem Goem: The Roof Caves In**

Paul J Fernandes Paul Fernandes, known to journalists in the state for his amiable nature, as also his ability and inclination to do off-beat and far-from-the-beaten-track stories, has published a vast amount on issues that concern rural Goa, archaeology and the average resident of Goa. He was recently winner of a Centre for Science and Environment (Delhi) fellowship to study water issues in Goa.

Konkani as the official language of Goa was then still a distant dream. And granting of statehood to the Union Territory, a remote possibility. A few Konkani protagonists casually discussing the issue felt that a medium was sorely needed to project the aspirations of true Goans. And only a "people's newspaper" free from the shackles of the capitalist could achieve that, they thought.

A few years earlier, Uzvadd, reincarnated as Novo Uzvadd and Novo Prakash, had become defunct after its editor Evagrio Jorge learnt a few bitter truths. The Herald — in its new English-language avatar as also in the much-touted role of a champion of Konkani — was yet to appear on the horizon.

It was then in 1980 on a dark night ... in Panjim ... that the idea of launching a Konkani daily was born. And talk about the requirement of funds for the mammoth project threw up a novel idea. The way out was a 'pad-iatra' (or, long march across Goa on foot) through the villages of the then union territory. At a follow-up meeting, the individuals involved formed a Trust — called the Novem Goem Pratishtan. They crowned the then young seminary-student turned trade union leader Christopher Fonseca, who floated the idea of a pad-iatra, as its general secretary.

Trustees were Sara Machado, Advocate Pandurang Mulgaonkar, Gurnath Kelekar, Dr F M Rebello, Advocate Antonio Lobo, and Gustav Clovis Costa. Mathany Saldanha and Fr Braz Faleiro played a stellar role in getting the idea through.

And so began an eventful, and an unforgettable, 70-day trudge through the nooks and corners of Goa. There were some 70-odd volunteers, which included a few women and two vivacious sisters, Tina and Colete Xavier, students at that time.

The pad-iatra started on October 26, 1980. Fonseca recalls that wherever they went, they received a good response. Money, small and big sums, was contributed. There were occasions too when — language being a sensitive issue in Goa — they were insulted. But they had decided not to retaliate in any way. A person spat on a young pad-iatri, Srikant Chodankar, when he knocked at his door for his contribution for the new paper. But he bravely said 'thank you' and stepped out with the others.

Two of the girls accompanying him burst into tears, as participants from that venture recall.

The eventful 'pad-iatra' ended on December 31, New Year's eve. By then, the volunteers had managed to collect around Rs 250,000, a tidy sum considering that this was just in the start of the 'eighties, when the rupee still had more value than now.

Needless to say, it took about six months to create the requisite infrastructure to launch the daily. Finding premises, purchasing machinery and recruiting the staff. When the Novem Goem first hit the stands in 1980, many naturally had great expectations that it would serve as a people's paper. Several dailies in the past had not survived for long, given the huge requirement of funds

Indeed, Novem Goem could not scale great heights; but it had many 'lows' during its span. The coverage could not be extensive, nay it was even below average. This is perhaps understandably because the publication could not engage a big team of reporters or set up a network of reporters in all corners of Goa. But it carried to work with few expectations and fewer rewards.

During the agitation, the tabloid served to keep the mass of Konkani lovers, specially in its heartland of Salcete, if it can be called that, posted of various developments. The paper served to forge a relationship and bridge the gap between the old Roman Konkani writers and those who had just started writing in the Devnagri script. Well-known poets, writers, such as Uday Bhembre, Dr Bhikaji Ganekar, Manoharrari Sardesai were among those who often contributed their writings to the paper.

The paper also sought to raise the standard of Konkani among its readers by often explaining difficult words, as compared to the poor quality of writing in most Roman script periodicals. I myself recall contributing to a column Aichim Don Utram (Today's Two Words), which gave the readers two new words to learn daily, with meanings in English and also illustrated by examples.

'Konkni uloi, Konkni boroi, Konknintlean sorkar cholo!' (Speak Konkani, Write Konkani, Administer The State In Konkani), the slogan coined by one of the trustees, Gurunath Kelekar, gained currency and set the mood among Konkani lovers.

While the paper finally closed down, coincidentally, it did so after Konkani was included in the Eight Schedule of the Constitution of India and Goa was granted statehood — two of the avowed objectives for which the Trust had launched the paper. Many may be skeptical about the contribution of this small paper to these two great and important causes. But having worked in this paper for just over three years as a sub-editor, I recall that Dr Rebello, as its editor, contributed significantly to the chorus for the twin demand.

DURING THE ENTIRE existence of the paper, its management had to face several struggles and even upheavals among the trustees.

Its problems started from the day the presses were set up. While an offset machine could have been bought, a Glockner machine owned by one of the Trustees was sold to the Trust. With that, it was only possible to print a tabloid paper. The machinery subsequently gave several problems. How a newspaper cannot survive without infusion of frequent doses of capital was best exemplified here. Advertising revenue was very low, though there were phases when its staff pooled their efforts to raise funds by canvassing for advertisements through their own initiative. There were managerial problems, too. With lack of experience in running a paper, and negligence by some of the Trustees at certain stages, the roof finally had to cave in.

A former trustee alleges that the quantum of advertisements released by the government to the paper was meagre, and the staff even led a morcha to the Secretariat, alleging shabby treatment. This continued even after Konkani was made the official language of the state.

If the paper survived for around a decade, it could be termed as a miracle of sorts. There were around 7,000 readers, who religiously read the daily. However, the poor coverage towards the end saw its readership go down sharply. The emergence of a slickly printed and produced Konkani-monthly Gulab also hastened its death.

However, there was no dearth of sympathisers. Gulf Goans contributed generously, and quite often,

to keep it afloat. But tiatrists were largely not among them as they showed apathy towards it vis-a-vis advertisements of their shows. They preferred an English-language daily and very few advertised in Novem Goem, if at all rarely.

The real heroes and the sufferers in the bargain were the Novem Goem workers, who toiled during its entire 10-year existence. Lack of revenue meant that they often received their salaries late. On the 10th of any month, it was not unusual for the management to announce they would give some advance on the salary. For one thing, the salary was being delayed; over and above, to be told that they would get it in installments was the ultimate affront. More so when these were people with families to feed. But this went on month after month, specially during the last few years.

They were entitled to a scale of salaries under Palekar Wage Award — the Central Government-notified standards then in force for minimum wages to be paid to journalists — but they accepted graciously whatever they were offered. This was, naturally, much below the Wage Board recommendations.

And the employees, having few options, hung on with commendable courage, though there was no hope of a turn around. Their toil and sacrifices were really something to think about. After the paper closed, they should have received their dues from what came in as the proceeds from the sale of machinery and the balance of a raffle draw, which had been floated to raise funds for the paper.

But they are yet to be given their due.

The paper finally went to bed for the last time some time in June 1988. And a novel experiment to offer a people's paper to the masses made a quiet and sad exit....

## **Chapter 5: The Herald of A New Ethos**

R.K. Nair R.K. Nair sees himself as a battle-scarred veteran too (adding, "though close friends in Goa may describe me as bottle-scarred"). He has 'seen action' in Kuwait and Iraq after his departure from Goa. Back in India after the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait, he worked for the Indian Express. He then went to Oman, returning again to take up an assignment with the Hindu, where he currently works.

So the Rajan era has finally come to an end at the Herald . Sad though it may seem in human terms, it is unlikely to surprise anyone who has at least a nodding acquaintance with his brand of journalism — especially his strident and sensational approach to contentious issues, such as the language agitation of the 'eighties.

By the time I arrived in Goa, the Herald (formerly O Heraldo ) had celebrated the third anniversary of its re-incarnation as an Englishman — but it was not yet out of the birth pangs. It often looked like a one-man show. The six-to-eight page broad-sheet was Rajan Narayan's play-field, and he played with gusto — solo at times, fast and loose frequently. His output was phenomenal. He wrote the lead story, the front-page anchor, the edit almost everyday, six days a week, for several years. Besides, there also was the long-winded 'Stray Thoughts', on Sundays.

Life at The Navhind Times was sedentary by comparison.

In keeping with the image of Goa being a land of laid-back lotus eaters, the NT staffers were under no pressure to perform. Being the dominant daily, news came naturally to the NT. In those days, it operated out of a small rented building, adjoining a bar and restaurant, on the outskirts of Panjim as the new building near the Panjim market was under construction. The bar and the building belonged to the then Mayor of Panjim, an affable man whose employees entertained the NT staffers on credit. The editorial staff got an off-day after two days of work — that's 10 offs a month, which was a luxury that journalists in other papers could not dream of.

The first thing that struck one about the English-language Press in Goa in those days was its utter lack of respect for the readers' intelligence. I'm sorry if this view offends anyone, but the small-town mentality, the self-serious posturing and the patronising editorialisation of news reports were all too obvious in both the NT and Herald.

But there ended the similarity. In other respects, the two papers were a study in contrast. Herald was technologically superior. Having introduced computers ahead of the NT, its printing was neater but the paper was replete with errors — typographical as well as factual. The NT too had its share of typos. But it made few factual errors, because, as critics would say, it seldom reported facts!

The NT used vintage Lino machines for composing and its antiquated printing machine broke down quite often. The morning paper hit the news-stands well after 10 am on such occasions. The printing

was awful — full of black patches, missing letters and blank spaces that challenged the imagination of the reader. Still it retained its readership, mainly because it was perceived as the more credible of the two.

Rajan Narayan failed to rise to the occasion and offer a credible alternative. Herald behaved like a spoilt brat throwing tantrums. It lacked a sense of proportion. Too often, it played to the gallery, fanned sectarian passions and threw norms to the wind. With its rabble-rousing shrillness, Herald managed to gain a foothold among a section of the Goan population, especially in South Goa where the NT was perennially late to arrive. But Herald was not taken seriously even by its ardent supporters. Journalist Devika Sequeira once summed up the situation neatly: Herald was laughable and the NT evoked tears!

All that changed with the arrival of the Gomantak Times . The NT Chief Reporter Pramod Khandeparker quit to join the GT. The NT was jolted out of its complacency — it was facing a challenge it had never faced before. Work on the new building was speeded up, and the relocation carried out in a hurry. Computers were installed and a new printing machine was ready.

But all that was not enough to ward off a threat from the rivals. Its content had to improve. Acting Editor M.M. Mudaliar was in a bad mood. His calm and composed disposition gave way to a brittle temper. He yelled at the management people, and threatened to have the editorial staff sacked.

One day, I diffidently approached him with a piece of writing and asked for permission to launch a column in the Sunday supplement. He was reluctant. I was new and untested. And I was not even a regular — I was on voucher payment. But he decided to give it a try and carried the piece on the front page of the Sunday Magazine. It was titled 'A peep into Goan psyche'. The column was called 'Small Talk' and it appeared under the pseudonym of R.K. Yen. The response to the first piece was incredibly good. Mudaliar readily published the second one and, when the third piece appeared, I got the appointment order.

By then Mudaliar had been confirmed as Editor and the paper was ready to face the world with new vigour. The editorial offs were curtailed to once a week. The printing improved and new features and columns were gradually introduced. The NT had arrived. The threat from GT looked feeble now. They had good journalists and better technology, but had forgotten to hire good proof-readers. The paper was full of typos, even in headlines.

The NT was relieved — at least temporarily.

The arrival of GT had a big impact on the Herald too. Rajan Narayan began to behave like one possessed. He blamed Chief Minister Pratapsing Rane and the NT for all the ills of the world. His frustration was beginning to show. He railed against the NT and Rane at the drop of a hat. Once, two people were killed in police-firing in Vasco following a group clash. It was the lead in the next day's NT, but the Herald completely missed the news.

A reader's letter was published in Herald a few days later: "Where was your reporter when the firing took place in Vasco? Had he gone to Baina for a quickie?" The Editor's reply: "We don't enjoy the patronage of Chief Minister Pratapsing Raoji Rane. So we missed the news." (As if Rane had called in the NT and given out the news!)

Rajan Narayan is essentially a rhetorician. He has a way with words and can argue his case convincingly. But his writings carried little conviction, which was the major reason for Herald's credibility crisis in those days. But the fact that he changed the media scene there cannot be disputed. In my view, the fundamental error he made was to plunge into the middle of things, rather than remaining a level-headed observer that a good journalist is supposed to be. He made an over-zealous effort to ingratiate himself with a section of the Goan society and failed miserably. The fact that even today his Goan credentials are questioned bears this out.

As everything has two sides, the Herald experiment (if one could call it that) too had its pros and cons. The single most significant achievement of Herald, in my opinion, was to raise a breed of bright young journalists who cut their teeth in journalism there. Most of them left disillusioned and bitter with the paper and its Editor, but they have done reasonably well elsewhere. But for Herald, they would not have come to this field.

And Herald did manage to provide some relief (comic relief, according to critics) from the tedious fare offered by the NT. It was sharp and pungent — too pungent for many. Almost every report packed a sting in its tail. Some of the fare dished out in the guise of investigative journalism was just gossip laced with outrageous bias. But all this lighted the scene up and served as a reminder to the NT to wake up and take notice.

Rajan Narayan never hesitated to name his rivals, especially the NT, while making disparaging



remarks. The NT, on the other hand, took a diametrically opposite stance: it skirted controversies altogether. Its unwritten policy was never to report or comment on anything controversial, let alone naming names!

But that had to change to keep pace with the changing times. I lampooned Rajan Narayan in my columns occasionally, which Mudaliar permitted reluctantly. It must be said to Rajan Narayan's credit that he not only took my pot-shots in good humour, but, according to Herald sources, also stopped a couple of juniors who wanted to hit back at me.

I met Rajan Narayan only once; but then it was hardly a meeting. Rather, I saw him from a distance at a midnight carnival in Panjim. After the edition was over, my NT colleague Anthony and I decided to take a round. We saw Rajan Narayan surrounded by a group of revellers. In a red T-shirt and bermudas, with a red ribbon around his head and a glass of feni in hand, a wobbly Rajan Narayan with bleary eyes was quite a spectacle. Anthony nudged me and asked, "Can you imagine Mudaliar in such a scene?"

Never. Mudaliar was, by comparison, dapper. In fact, his first advice to me when I called on him for a job interview was to be always mindful of my reputation. "It's a small place. Everybody knows everybody. And liquor is cheap here," he had said.

I left Goa rather bitterly.

I fell out with Mudaliar over an innocuous remark in my column. I used to report the traditional cricket match between the legislators and journalists in the column in a running commentary form. That year (1989), the Legislators XI led by Chief Minister Rane trounced the Press XI, led by Mudaliar. I made a passing remark that age was apparently catching up with Mudaliar. He deemed it too personal, and stopped talking to me. There were enough people around to fan the fire; and he refused to recommend me for a promotion. One thing led to another and I soon decided that my future lay elsewhere.

But I've no hard feelings about anything now. In fact, I recall my days in Goa with nostalgia and gratitude. It was a turning point in my career and I fondly remember my association with a wonderful people. I learned many things in Goa that stood me in good stead in later life and it will always remain etched in my memory as a part of my youth.

I wish all my friends and acquaintances over there, especially Rajan Narayan, good health and success in whatever they are engaged in now! I learnt of Mudaliar's death quite recently through an e-mail. I was saddened. I fondly recall my association with him. Despite the differences of opinion that resulted in our parting of ways, Mudaliar was a thorough gentleman and working with him was an enriching experience. I cherish his memories!

## **Chapter 6: oHERALDo: an untold chapter**

Valmiki FaleiroValmiki Faleiro, a Goa-based working journalist between 1975-83, covered Goa for national publications like The Current Weekly, the Free Press Journal group and the Indian Express. He was Staff Reporter with the West Coast Times and as a freelancer, contributed to various journals like The Navhind Times, Goa Today, The Sun Weekly, Newstrek, Detective Digest, Mirror, Newsmag.

The early 1980s. Happy days were here again for Goa's first English-language daily, The Navhind Times (NT). After a brief challenge to its other crucial attribute, that of being the only English-language daily, from Goa Monitor in the late 1960s, NT had just staved off another. West Coast Times, launched July-1978, blazed a luminous trail in quality journalism but, like a comet after a brief showing, vanished into oblivion.

NT was back to its snug-seat monopoly.

A slave of the economic thought of Adam Smith, David Ricardo and John Stuart Mill, or our own Nani Palkhivala, JRD Tata and M.R. Pai, I have been a votary of free enterprise and competition — and allergic to monopolies. A monopoly is bad for any consumer. And infinitely worse in a crucial commodity that helps form a society's opinion.

I had been speaking to some wealthier Goans, my idea of launching a broadsheet weekly, which would, over a period, be converted to a full-fledged daily. A tabloid (like Goa Monitor) did not appeal; and mere excellence in editorial content and quality printing (like West Coast Times) did not suffice. What mattered was the capacity to financially sustain a daily newspaper (by absorbing annual losses even while continuing to maintain quality) until the product turned round, which could take some years. That kind of money in Goa only mineowners had — like all of Goa's major dailies! So my idea was

start small, stay around till you built adequate advertising recognition and support, and only then convert to a daily — at a fraction of a daily's budgetary requirement and without having to own printing facilities from day one.

Even then, not many Goan businessmen I was in touch with were willing to risk any substantial venture capital.

It was around this time, June 1983, if I recall the month correctly, that a mutual friend in the printing business in Mumbai and Goa, told me that A.C. Fernandes, Patrao of the Panjim stationers Casa J.D. Fernandes, was toying with the idea of an English-language daily. The mutual friend suggested I discuss my ideas with Fernandes.

A.C. Fernandes wasn't a mineowner, not yet anyway, but I had heard he was a shrewd businessman. He purchased Goa's only extant Portuguese-language daily, O Heraldo, not so much for love of the language or its dwindling local readership, but evidently for the intrinsic value of its press and its centrally-located premises. It was said he took full advantage of the daily's lable, in those days of the Permit Raj, to import (from Italy?) a Lino typesetting machine, which actually was used for all and sundry job works of the business house — even as the major part of good ole O Heraldo continued to be composed by hand!

But what the heck! A shrewd and street-smart man, I reckoned, would any day be better than a cash-filled dumbbo. Moreover, what Patrao may have lacked by way of adequate resources was made up in having his priorities right. His love Goa and her way of life, his concern about increasing corruption in Goa's polity and aspiration for rightful honour to the mother tongue, were transparently genuine.

The mutual friend arranged our introductory meeting, over lunch at the A.C. Fernandes residence at Santa Cruz one rainy Sunday. The sharp-eyed (and, as I was later to discover, sharp-tempered) Patrao, his demure wife and sons, John, Raul and Oswald, with the mutual friend and I sat across a carefully laid table. I spoke about WCT and why it failed, my ideas for a successful daily and my business plan for such a venture. A.C. Fernandes (the sons, those days, played second fiddle), I think, was impressed. And thus began a relationship, where I did my best to midwife a second English-language daily for Goa — or almost.

The search was on for an Editor. Ads had been placed in the major national dailies. Surprisingly, about a dozen pros were willing to come to Goa! But the best were out of reckoning, they expected salaries the kind Patrao never figured existed! Ervelle Menezes was the best bet. When I covered Goa for the Indian Express a couple of years before, Ervelle was a Chief Sub at IE's Mumbai edition. After Bhat, the then News Editor, died in harness, Ervelle had taken over as the News Editor and was in that position at this point of time.

From deep within, I hoped that Ervelle it would be to launch the Herald as its founding editor. A professional and a Goan, he was a suitable choice. For me too: I had been, by now, ordained to be the to-be newspaper's Chief Reporter, on insistence of A.C. Fernandes and his son Raul. My own plan had been to be with them till the day the newspaper took off; I was, by this time, already getting into business, developing family-owned land at Fatorda, Margao.

I never met or spoke to Ervelle about this job. Raul had, and I gathered that Ervelle was indeed interested. I was aware that he had come to Goa to check things out. Ervelle, of course, is around and it would be for him to say why he declined. What I surmised at that time, though, was that Ervelle must have been put off by local opinion about A.C. Fernandes' financial capacity to sustain a daily newspaper to the stage it generated its own resources. Ervelle of course explained it had something to do with his mother's illness.

Ervelle's decision was a great setback to the plan — there was just one last application left in Raul's file of responses for the Editor's post. If I had not urged its consideration earlier, it was because the applicant lacked experience with a daily newspaper. The applicant's only exposure to a daily was a brief stint at the Financial Express — not a mainstream newspaper. His c.v. spoke of experience at Mirror. But then, magazine journalism is not the same as what goes into the making of a daily newspaper. Moreover, the applicant wasn't even into journalism for quite some time: he presently dwelt in the dreary world of advertising and public relations, at one of Mumbai's lesser-known firms. Such was the irony.

What the NT had been to Goa's English readers, a Hobson's choice, Rajan Narayan's application now was to Raul and me!

Fearing that Patrao may get discouraged enough to abandon the newspaper idea, my airflow changed

and I convinced A.C. Fernandes that we invite the man and take a closer look at his credentials. Rajan was lodged at Panjim's Hotel Mandovi (I wonder if he ever stayed there again, used as in later years he was to offered or obtained five-star hospitality across Goa's coast!) Patrao, Raul and I met him. The parleys went so long in the afternoon that there was no restaurant open for lunch. Rajan and I had to make do with puri bhaji at Cafe Real (I wonder, again, how he'd have raved and ranted in his latter-day popular Sunday column, *Stray Thoughts* . But beggars were not choosers, those days.)

To me, Rajan came out as a clever and crafty mind. But again, what the heck! At that point of time, the NT had a clever and resourceful skipper at its helm. I had known Bikram Vohra from my days at the Indian Express. When marched to Ahmedabad as Resident Editor of the IE's local edition, to fend off competition from the formidable Times of India, one could count on Bikram to come up with extremely off-beat ideas: he painted the town red with the slogan, Keen ahead of the times, read the Express! To compete, we would need a crafty mind and I thought Rajan fitted that bill pretty well. From me, Rajan wanted to learn more about Goa — its history, economy, religions, cultural mix the background of its English-language press and, of course, of the A.C. Fernandes clan.

Rajan was obviously impressed with my views on how the newspaper should be. He said he was immensely happy to have me around, that things would be difficult talking to A.C. Fernandes and Raul alone. He was also glad I would be the newspaper's Chief Staff Reporter. He pleaded that I stay back in Panjim that day, so we could discuss in greater detail. The kid that Raul then was, also decided to stay back. We sat in Rajan's Mandovi room, drinking his favourite Old Monk (not Raul, then a teetotaler, I don't know if he's still one.)

We were immersed in plans and strategy, more than in the rum.

It was well past 9 p.m. and there was a knock on the door. Being closer, I rose to answer, but obsequious as Raul was, insisted on doing that himself. Raul had barely opened the door when we heard the sonics of a resounding slap across the face. A furious A.C. Fernandes hollered, "Mama and I were so worried about you." (It seems those days the Fernandes household was being terrorized by another Fernandes household in the Santa Cruz neighbourhood, so much that no member of the former went home unaccompanied after dusk; if late, a group of employees from the shop or press escorted them home.) That was among Rajan's first personal impressions of his future employers!

Twenty years is a long enough span for perceptions to change. But I believe my opinion carried the weight of near finality with the Patrao. Rajan Narayan would edit the to-be Herald.

Next morning, we met with the Fernandes, again to work out a blueprint for the newspaper's editorial requirements, right down to a list of furniture! From the way bare essentials were being economized, Rajan privately kept asking me whether these guys could really run a newspaper. I kept assuring him they would. We agreed that together we would keep prodding them if they wavered. On the way back to the hotel (he was returning to Mumbai that day), Rajan said I was the only person he could trust and would I please mail him on a weekly basis on the progress of implementation of the agreed blueprint.

This was essential, he explained, because as discussed and agreed, he would be asking some friends in Mumbai to quit their secure jobs to join the Herald and he didn't want to put people in trouble if the paper was, after all, not going to take off. During the period to the run up, I wrote and kept Rajan informed of the progress and, in reply, he kept reminding me to press the management on the tasks that remained unfulfilled. Quite a balancing act, for me!

In the course of such weekly back and forth postal exchanges, Rajan asked for my reiteration that I would stand with them as one — if ever the management acted funny with any of them in future. I presumed he was concerned with risking his Mumbai team's future. I had mentioned to Rajan earlier in Goa how the entire well-knit editorial team at WCT had quit en bloc in the face of a stubborn management vis-a-vis the workers' strike. Till now, I had no reason whatever to doubt the man's integrity. I wrote back, naively in retrospect, that I was committed to being one with the team and should one be touched, all would go — or something to that effect.

Rajan obviously didn't throw away that letter, as I had routinely done his.

In time, Rajan returned to Goa — bag and baggage. His Mumbai team was to follow once we were staffed and ready to run dummies. At the wooden-floored 1st storey Herald office opposite Panjim's Municipal Garden, work was on at a feverish pace. Rajan and I conducted interviews for 'subs', reporters and correspondents. We bagged some gifted hands — Frederick Noronha, Bosco Souza Eremita.

On the field, Devika Sequeira was to assist me with Mumbai's Sushil Silvano on the local crime beat,

together with school chum Nelson Fernandes to cover sports and Lui Godinho on the camera. I roped in some old field hands from my WCT days, down to the last detail of Nandu Zambaulikar, to ferry newspaper bundles south of the Zuari!

Ticker lines were installed, typewriters and telephones put in place, and the Mumbai team arrived (I recall only S. Vaidyanathan on the newsdesk, though). The machine, finally, began to crank. It was decided we give readers a preview. One Sunday (or was it another public holiday?), a few weeks ahead of the formal launch on October 10, 1983, a special edition was given out gratis to English-language newspaper readers in Goa. The edition was packed with features, and news of the day. I wrote something on bus transport woes of the Goan commuter, if I recall right.

Dummies began rolling. Agonizingly, I began to see the penny-wise-pound-foolish dictum again at work (as I had, in the later stages, of WCT's short life.) Expensive computers had been brought in but A.C. Fernandes cribbed on appointing experienced hands as compositors. A daughter-in-law came in after her own regular office hours to help at computer keyboards. John's wife worked late into the nights.

Result was a delightful melange of howlers — which continued for a good while after launch of the newspaper. Every expense, however trivial, had to get Patrao's direct approval. If Rajan wanted a chair cushion, he'd have to convince the old man why his posterior ached! But the good news was, the rumble and stumble continued without interruption. We were close to D-day.

That was when one fine sunny morning, as I was about to cross from the Panjim Municipal Garden pavement to the Herald office across the street, Raul emerged from the stationery shop, as if casually, and waved me to hold back. He crossed the street and invited me for a cup of tea at a nearby cafe at Jesuit House, Jasmal or Jesema. Once seated, Raul developed an unusual countenance and began vaguely referring to the salary that had been offered to me (Rs.4,000 per mensem.) I imagined there must have been a family council the previous night. I reminded him that I had not asked the figure, that I had merely accepted what was offered — and that I was with them in this not for the money, but for a dream to break a monopoly. I suggested the figure could be revised.

That's when the bombshell broke. "It's not about the amount of salary," Raul stated, "it's..."

"You mean I'm not wanted here anymore?" I butted in, in disbelief. "You can take it as something like that," Raul said. I was too shocked to even ask why. Having known Rajan fairly well by now, I instinctively felt his hand in this. Didn't even feel like meeting the others at the office or the Patrao at the shop downstairs. Over the previous several months, I had worked to virtually midwife the Herald and however much I may have been, I did not wish to upset the scene when the baby's umbilical cord was about to go.

I just took the next bus home.

And on that very unpleasant note ended my brief association with a newspaper that over the last 20 years, tottered, steadied and thrived — even if in large measure on the guile and brilliance of one crafty man, Rajan Narayan.

Without doubt, the oHeraldo marked a new chapter in English-language journalism in Goa. A lot of latent young talent found expression. Investigative journalism got its fair image. Above all, the average Goan reader now had a choice, and the inherent benefits of competition. Happily for Goa, the combination at the right time of the Proprietors and of Rajan Narayan and some excellent members in the editorial team, clicked. Despite shoestring budgets and lack of official advertising patronage in the initial years, the newspaper survived, cracked a monopoly in a vital area, and will now shortly enter its 21st year of publication.

I lived and worked in Goa (for myself, of course!) during these 20 years and saw the manner in which this one man notched circulation and endeared himself to the average English-language newspaper reader, especially of the minority community. Rajan, a crafty non-practicing politico, in no time had comprehended the Goan mindset, particularly of the Cristao, as he is fond of referring.

And the brightest star in his horoscope also arrived in good time, in the form of the Konkani official language issue.

While other editors dithered, Rajan lost no time in recognizing the scope of the issue (he had the genuine backing of his Patrao of course) and almost went overboard with his undying love for Konkani, Goa and Cristaos liberally splashed all over the place, for months without end. With a 'sympathy and empathy' never before seen, the Mai Bhas formula worked magic for Rajan — as it did, I must concede in fairness, to a couple of other politicians, some with a degree of merit, like Luizinho (my namesake) and Churchill Alemao. The true heroes, however, have almost been forgotten!

In fairness, again, it must be conceded that to have run a newspaper with all of Herald's infrastructural deficiencies, was no mean feat. There must have been, in the initial stages, a lot of pain and personal sacrifice — but let's also not forget that Rajan was, those days, without the responsibilities of a family and with only a pint of Old Monk for company, and the option to return to Mumbai's drab world of advertising! He slogged, manipulated, and was rewarded with success.

What, however, happened after such undreamt success hit the head sooner than Old Monk did, is a story I must leave best to be told by many a gifted journalist, who worked with Rajan. At least one such is alas no more in our midst — Norman Dantas, son of a former publisher-partner of Goa Today. Rajan marginalized many a gifted Goan journo because he perceived them as threats to his position!

Back to my 1983 story.

It was some seven or eight months after that uncivilized Cafe Jesema or Jesmal episode that the mutual friend who had introduced me to the Fernandes revealed the truth. Rajan Narayan, my trusted senior colleague, days before the oHeraldo could hit the newsstands, showed my letter to him on the editorial team standing as one — and quitting as one if need arose — and convinced the Patrao that here was a snake already scheming to kill the newspaper before it was even born! How the intrinsic illogic of this premise — since the Fernandeses were well aware of my commitment to the newspaper — did not strike them, I shall never know. Rajan had successfully weeded out what he imagined would be future threat to his position (in this case, entirely imaginary, since he at the time knew that I was sooner or later getting into my own business).

That was the first case. Many were to follow.

Other than weeding out rivals — real or imagined — Rajan is believed to have done some pretty nasty things on the side. He played his reporters one against the other, to fetch desired coverage of stories that suited him the most. He is alleged to have killed many a good story. And all this from behind the mask of being the self-appointed keeper of Goa's conscience and probity in her public life. The powerful Stray Thoughts (which, incidentally, started off with Bolshoi the dog, borrowed from the celebrated ToI columnist and later owner/editor of Mumbai's Afternoon Despatch & Courier, Behram Contractor a.k.a. Busybee) came in handy here. I know the legion of Goa's five-star hotel GMs, practicing and aspiring politicians, or even the occasional industrialist locally mired in controversy (like Dr. Jindal, of Meta Strips, the day after some crude bombs went off at Vasco's St. Andrew's Church) will not publicly admit the manner in which they rubbed shoulders with St. Rajan!

I hear that the editor who brought a refreshing change to the English-language print scene in Goa, has finally been paid in the same coin he had paid many a subordinate — by making the subordinate's life so miserable that there was no option but to resign. Having known Rajan Narayan the way I did 20 years ago, I have my doubts whether he will leave on his own. Of course, he has already announced plans to publish a weekly in Goa — owned by the readers!! He knows the Goan mindset all too well, and has already started drumming up support via the Herald editorial columns with typical (even if more virulent) anti-Hindutva, pro-Cristao/Church writings that may border on the dangerous.

Of course, if and when Rajan Narayan does launch his weekly, he will be infinitely better placed than the Patrao, A.C. Fernandes was in the monsoon 1983. Let's wish him luck!

## **Chapter 7: The banyan tree: working under Rajan**

Frederick Noronha Frederick Noronha was part of the original batch of trainees with the Herald during its re-launch in 1983. In 1987, he became Goa correspondent for the Deccan Herald. Since 1995, he has been a full-time freelance journalist, writing mainly for the outstation media, including the Indo-Asian News Service. He has an active presence on the Internet, and has been for journalism training to Germany and Sweden. He is founder of the Goajourno, India-EJ and ThirdWorld-EJ mailing lists, that seek to build collaborative networks among journalists.

Reports or features critical of large companies are to be avoided by and large. No report on a corporate situation, however much it may be considered in the public interest, shall be sent to the press without prior clearance from the editor. We cannot afford to antagonise potential advertisers. — Editorial guidelines, from Rajan Narayan, May 3, 1984.

Denying journalists the right to express his or her views is like denying oxygen to a human being. — Stray Thoughts, by Rajan Narayan, September 2003, [www.rajannarayan.com](http://www.rajannarayan.com)

AN ACTIVIST friend argues vehemently that this editor single-handedly opens up space more than any other in Goa. Some staff who worked under him have a sneering you-don't-know-the-inside-story attitude. Others credit the man with making them what they are. For the average Goan Catholic, Rajan

Narayan is virtually a hero in real life, if not the newspaper equivalent of a patron saint.

Undeniably, this is the man who has shaped Goan journalism for at least two decades, and has big plans for more. Any venture to understand the contemporary media in this small state would be incomplete without a chapter on Rajan Narayan, who at the time of writing (end-September 2003) has just announced his decision to resign from the Herald.

This writer epitomises the love-hate relationship many a journalist in Goa would share with someone who suddenly descended on the Goan scene sometime in 1983. Someone who has critically shaped the understanding of Goa, including how we see ourselves and what are the issues we define as important.

Clearly, Rajan — by design or default — has contributed in significant manner to the Goa debate over the past two decades. If one has to name the five positive aspects of his legacy, it would be his ability to extend the debate (by saying things no editor would say); heading an organisation that, by design or otherwise, actually gave a chance to many youngsters to enter the profession; building up a till-now sustainable alternative to the once arrogant lone English-language daily in the state; giving space for speedy growth to youngsters entering the profession (even if, ironically, blocking that very growth later on); and for taking on some of Goa's most sacred of cows.

But Rajan's ability to cast himself in the 'anti-Establishment' mould is equalled by his skills in brokering deals (the recent track of contentious and fast-confused charges over the Rs 300,000 government sponsorship of the SARS campaign at Remo Fernandes' 50th birthday is a case in point, as are the willingness to propose projects to a government that are otherwise blasted from the editorial pulpit). This rather personalised essay, obviously biased and clouded by a string of personal experiences, seeks to narrate one person's run-ins into Goa's most long-serving editor. Perhaps from it could emerge a few snapshots outlining how things really work in the Goa media.

ONE'S FIRST impressions of Rajan was meeting up with a long-sleeve and tie-clad middle-aged 'uncle' during an interview a month or two before the launch of the English-language Herald in 1983. The location was in the old balcony (now demolished) that stood almost over today's Cafe Shanbhag, near the Panjim Municipal Garden. Besides Rajan, also sitting in on the interview was Valmiki Faleiro, who was egged on by the recent public debate to tell his side of the story in another chapter. (Devika Sequeira, then still in her 'twenties but quite in command of the situation, willing to spend extremely long hours and clear about what she expected to bring out a thoroughly-worked on feature page or front-page report as we later saw, had interviewed me in an earlier round. Being quite thick-skinned, one went in once again for another interview when advertised subsequently, only to be told that it was just as well one had returned, as the earlier applications had got misplaced!)

In the second round of interviews, my first encounter with Rajan, it took this then raw third-year college kid quite some to gauge some clues about the identity of this man shooting across the questions. Only a syllable or two gave hint of his South Indian origins, and with his formal clothes, he could have easily passed off as a scion of a landed Goan family. Rajan did seem a bit embarrassed to make the offer of Rs 300 as the payment for a trainee sub-editor. But money didn't matter, and the joy of becoming a journalist while still in college more than sufficed. In any case, this princely sum was thrice what one then irregularly earned as an articulated clerk to a chartered accountant. This offer was made on the spot, and accepted as instantaneously.

In no time, we got that that telegram calling on us to join 'immediately'.

One recalls rushing into the colonial styled offices of what was to become the Herald — we then didn't even know what the paper was to be called, whether it would survive, who owned it, or whom we were working for. Within minutes of each other, Bosco Souza Eremita of Santa Cruz, Flavio Raposo of Carezalem, Oswald Pinto of Aldona and myself took up our seats on the bare sub-editor's table, learning the basics of a profession that some continued in. Bosco seemed to be disillusioned that journalism offered so little scope for creative writing; but he stayed on and worked his way through Goa Today, Gomantak Times, the Portuguese Lusa news agency, and the Jesuit-run UCAN, apart from The Week and others publications. Flavio opted for a life in academics. Oswald Pinto went across from one form of reporting to another, and stuck with working at the less-insecure 'reporting' section of the state legislature. Reminiscing old times still brings back a smile. We remain friends.

But this was not always the situation. You could argue whether it's a Rajan-influenced legacy, but at our time the staff would often be at loggerheads with one another. It could have just been a faulty manner of encouraging subordinates to improve in their performance, but promises of promotions to more than one candidate, and repeated if unfair comparisons with one another, sometimes did leave strained relationships among the staff that otherwise worked together fairly peacefully.

But there were the plusses for working in a fresh new paper too. In the initial days, Rajan was almost

a godfather. "How much are the \$%#@\$\$s paying you?" he would sometimes ask juniors. Often, a recommendation from him actually got translated into a raise.

He had his style of encouraging juniors. This, coupled with the acute staff shortage at the Herald then and frequent resignations from staff, meant a junior sub-editor could get enough of an ego-boost to do the front-page layout within a year or so of joining!

Talking about resignations, in the first four years of its operation, the Rajan-edited Herald listings showed that at least 30 journalists had left its rolls. Part of this could have been due to the poor and unsatisfactory compensation offered by a paper which drew an infinitesimally tiny number of adverts compared to today. Some left for better prospects; but opportunities were few and far between anyway, then as now. A few went on to continue their education; Alvis Fernandes, one of the young men recruited through the informal Miramar boys' network that proved to be a useful feeder channel, was halfway through aeronautical engineering anyway. But at least part of the resignations were accounted for by the intrigue that dominated the place, the growing curbs on free expression that could keep the spark of idealism alive and politics enkindled among the staff.

Among those who quit in the first four years were Sushil Silvano (Deputy Editor), S. Vaidyanathan (News Editor), Devika Sequeira (Assistant Editor/Chief Reporter), Oswald Pinto, Bosco Souza Eremita, Flavio Raposo, myself, Alvis Fernandes, Edward Rodrigues, Lovino Gomes, George, Francis Ribeiro, Elston Soares, Lionel Lynn Fernandes, Derek Almeida, the brothers Francis and Agnel Fernandes, Goldwyn Figueira, Agnel Rodrigues (sub-editors/chief sub editors), Perves De Souza, Cheryl DeSouza, Anna Mendes, Valentino Fernandes, Armenia Fernandes, Sharmila Kamat, Babacier Gonsalves (all reporters), Alexyz Fernandes (cartoonist), Lui Godinho and Menino Afonso (photographers), the other Francis Ribeiro and John Aguiar among others (correspondents) and trainees including Sinha, and Shanti Maria, now an advocate in Panjim. This list would obviously be incomplete, having missed out some names.

In 1987-88, at the time of the launch of the Gomantak Times, a number of journalists left hoping for a better work environment. At that time, when asked for his comment, Rajan told the Goa Today something to the effect that the paper he was editor was "better off after the opportunistic and mercenary people have left us" for jobs elsewhere.

Grabbing an opportunity to claim our right to reply, four of us who had just left took the opportunity to make a point. The anger and irritation felt at that time comes out in the note then written, to which the signatories were myself (listing the donkey first, so as not to deny the fact that one felt strongly about this then as now), Armenia Fernandes, Valentino Fernandes, and Francis Ribeiro. It's worth recalling, to put the issue in context:

"Since October 1987 (that is, till mid-February 1988), one chief sub-editor, one sports sub-editor, two reporters, a cartoonist and a correspondent resigned from the Herald. Instead of deceiving oneself by calling these people 'opportunistic and mercenary', it would be more profitable for Mr Narayan to be honest — at least to himself — over why such a number of journalists resigned from the paper.

May we point out that under Mr Narayan's stewardship itself, not a single journalist involved in launching the English-language Herald a little over four years ago is still with the paper today, except for Mr Narayan himself.

And, would Mr Narayan care to explain why it is only in his paper that 'opportunistic and mercenary people' (including us, by his definition) are found in such large numbers when it comes to looking for jobs elsewhere?

To us who know, Mr Narayan is hardly convincing when he says that 'some junior people may have left' but Herald's 'top is still intact'. It calls for deep soul-searching on the part of Mr Narayan to find out why scores of journalists have resigned from the Herald since October 10, 1983 — the date which the paper was launched...

ON THE FLIP side, Rajan — at least in his early phase — had the ability of encouraging his staff. After a great job done in covering the Commonwealth Retreat, the reward was not just a good word but also a meal at the nearby Hotel Aroma. (For the CHOGM, Devika Sequeira and Lui Godinho sneaked into the area, and anyone would have thought they were just a couple of Indian tourists; Perviz teamed up with Rajan himself to chase the then-admired now-infamous Robert Mugabe to a church in Chimbel where the once-charismatic leader had gone to trace his ancestors from an empire that once ruled central Africa and part of current-day Zimbabwe. S Vaidyanathan, the former Financial Express chief-sub who's role in stabilising the Herald desk often goes largely unmentioned today, did his usual thorough job on the desk, and we trainees simply joined in the fun with our prank calls what not.)

Rajan can also be an ideal boss, if he so chooses and if he trusts your work. Of course, it can also be difficult to fathom the logic on which this trust is based, in an editor who has strong, if unexplained, likes and dislikes. But his you-manage-things attitude did occasionally help. At one point, we convinced Rajan that the long and difficult night-shifts of those days were stressful, and asked for a five-nights, three-day schedule. This meant that we got two off-days in every ten days, or six in a month. Rajan's response was something to the effect that this was fine, provided we at the news-desk managed things among ourselves and didn't then make a case for more staff. We did. It worked. Any desk-man taking off during the crucial night-shift, made sure to get in a mutual replacement. In a word, this system probably worked better than system of policing shifts. The point here is that if he so chooses, Rajan's style of avoiding micro-controls could actually make for a workable management strategy.

But this phase seems to have ended nearly exactly one year after the launch of the English-language Herald, when the staff got the drift their their editor was unable or unwilling to take their issues into account, and almost all jointly formed a union. When Rajan learnt of this, his reaction was one of a man betrayed.

**Part of the problem could have been that Rajan also perceived the insecurity of his tenure. One got the feeling that the paper was not being improved beyond a point, as this could make those at the editorial top dispensable.**

Over the next few years, the fetters started coming on. Rather quickly. To the staff, it was pretty clear who Rajan's own sacred cows were, even if the editor posited himself as the paragon of a free press. From industrial groups lacking their own mouthpiece in print, to some of the dissidents then harassing the man whom Rajan got into mutually-arrogant ego-clashes with, Pratapsing Raoji Rane.

Rajan also had a perchance to hob-nob with politicians. One of our colleagues always attributes his survival in journalism to then political bigwig Dr Wilfred de Souza . How so? Obviously Rajan had flung across a copy to the sub concerned with a 'Find the mistake in it, or get sacked' threat. Just that time, Dr W's car pulled up alongside the newspaper entrance. Rajan was gone, and so vanished the threat of a loss of the job.

(As anyone who worked on the desk would concede, finding errors on paper, when under pressure, can be the most difficult task. Specially if they are your own errors. Everything looks correct. This writer too has made the stupidest of errors, notwithstanding the reputation of being a fairly careful and concerned desk-person.)

In our early days at the Herald, some of us college-kids who were blessed with two-wheelers — even if we needed two jobs and a loan to manage these — doubled up as 'pilots' to the seniors. It came as a shock to one's post-teenage idealism to hear Rajan argue after being ferried to a lengthy confabulation with a Congress dissident: "XYZ is a good politician. The problem is just that he is so bloody corrupt." Or words to that effect.

If the early freedom was quick to vanish, it didn't take much time to realise that every new paper goes through this honeymoon with truth — extended only as long as the time required to build up its credibility. For the CHOGM, Rajan allowed this writer to report on protests from a citizens' group concerned about the pouring of crores down the drain in the name of building infrastructure. If one recalls right, the figure was around Rs 50 crore (Rs 500 million), a huge sum by early 'eighties standards. Another issue that was a concern then was the manner in which the event was being used as an excuse by luxury hotels to expand their properties. At this time, Rajan's diktat was clear: let the criticism go before the event, but once the CHOGM Retreat starts, no more of it.

Such attitudes, and this was surely not the only case, meant the stifling of a crucial voice at an important time of Goan history. Resultantly, the outstation media, for instance, didn't get a clue that such questions were at all being asked in Goan society. When it comes to recording the history of the 'eighties, there will likewise be many gaps or black holes... and many could be led into believing that these events simply didn't occur.

Rajan's role in the Konkani movement would be another interesting issue for research. Many a Catholic from Goa, both here and among the diaspora, tends to read him as being a "hero for Konkani". (Dr Teotonio De Souza, historian, commented on Goanet on September 18, 2003: "I have known Rajan Narayan while still in Goa and admired his contribution to the Konkani cause.")

But the issue is more complex. Needless to say, Goa's media adopts a dog-does-not-eat-dog approach, and for most of the time avoids criticising each other. Rajan's role in the language agitation is yet to be adequately evaluated. The Week magazine, in an article written by the journalist Ashok Row Kavi (who went on to become a prominent gay activist, but that's not particularly relevant here) did a critical piece on the role played by Rajan and the other Narayan, Athawale:



It's titled 'The two Narayans' and says:

THE three worlds in Hindu mythology always shuddered when the chant 'Narayan, Narayan' echoed in the cosmos. It meant that Narada, the roving rishi, was making his petty-fogging presence felt.

Goa has two Narayans and there is internal trouble there. One is Narayan Athavle, editor of the Marathi daily Gomantak, and the other Rajan Narayan, editor of O Herald an English daily from Panaji. They are fighting each other claiming that they are fighting for two languages, Marathi and Konkani.

Their credentials can be questioned, though no one bothers to do that. Athavle is an outsider: a Maharashtrian Chitpawan Brahmin; Rajan Narayan is from South India and is fighting for Konkani in English.

Athavle's editorials are pure petrol on Goa's red hot embers. Starting with Ooth Marathe Ooth (Wake up Marathas, wake up), Athavle, who supports Rane, has carried on a relentless battle to show that Konkani is a 'boli' (dialect) and not a 'bhasha' (language). Athavle has published some 25 eminently forgettable novels, and has had a lackluster career in Lok Satta, the Marathi daily of the Express group.

Athavle gets quite alarmed when someone mentions 'Vishal Gomantak' (Greater Goa), which to him means 'expansionism'. But he has no qualms at all when he says that Goa should finally merge with Maharashtra because "their cultures are the same".

In his zeal to propagate the interest of Marathi, he has even neglected the success of his newspaper which has been falling in circulation. Tarun Bharat, published from Belgaum in Karnataka, has taken away 6,000 out of the 18,000-odd Gomantak circulation. Yet Athavle has such a strong grip over the owners, the Chowgules, that he even oversees recruitment. No Christians are employed in that daily.

Apart from editing O Herald, Rajan Narayan, a former editor of Imprint, now speaks from political platforms. Narayan has become more a pamphleteer than a journalist. He often attends the strategy sessions of the KPA. He has at times tried to maintain a balance but has failed because he is viewed suspiciously by the Hindus and because the Christians patronise him.

Rajan Narayan is a professional doing a job and taken up with a cause which he would just as well drop like a hot brick if he got a better challenge somewhere else. However, the turn he has given to the O Herald has taken its circulation to 12,000 from the 4,000-odd it was selling before he took over its editorship. "I don't make any pretensions that I'm being objective," says he. "I'm here to fight for Konkani."

Come what may, the two Narayans, both non-Goans, are slugging it out through reams of newsprint. And both are accused of polarising Goa's good people as never before. (The Week, Jan 18-24, 1987)

The figures noted above of the Herald's circulation don't seem to be very accurate. It was more like a few hundred in its Portuguese days — specially towards the fag end of playing the role of being the "only Portuguese language daily published in Asia". But Row Kavi raises a point long back which probably didn't get the attention it deserved.

By the time the 1985-87 language agitation was drawing to a close, this writer was a chief sub-editor at the Herald. Perhaps the cynical games visible all round convinced one about not getting caught up in the meaningless emotionalism that was ruling both linguistic camps. Basic questions were not being raised. What primarily was a caste-fuelled war being fought out along linguistic lines. Many of those who took up these issues — as subsequent events showed — were more keen on cornering a share of the spoils for themselves and their kin, rather than really empowering the commonman (and woman) to utilise a language they could be more at home in. Rajan's own role was critical in shaping the language issue the way it worked out. The average Catholic became a hard-core, if later disillusioned by the subsequent twist of events, supporter of the Konkani camp, without quite understanding the unstated issues involved.

On the language front, like many other controversies in the state, this one too polarised journalists. The United News of India news agency, though its then Goa correspondent Jagdish Wagh, then put out a 10-take article which echoed the Marathi side of the arguments. Rajan's first response was to dump it in the waste-paper basket. To one's mind, it made sense that both 'camps' knew each other's positions on the issue. Specially because this was one issue where the average Catholic reader — who hardly reads Marathi — was largely unable to keep abreast with the thoughts of one side of the debate. To Rajan's credit, he was quick to accept a suggestion from a junior, and decided that the article be carried on the edit page. But if one thought he did this because of the need for a diversity of voices, that was simply untrue. Some days later, a gleeful Rajan informed that it was just as well he had taken up that suggestion, since the UNI write-up had, in turn, provoked a series of lengthy polemical

responses from the Panjim-based Konkani hardline supporter Datta Naik written to project the Konkani cause. It was a point-by-point attempted refutation, and more. A whole lot of more grist to the linguistic mill that ultimately served to build circulation, allowing Rajan to boost his bargaining power on this basis.

If Rajan played a crucial role in stoking the language controversy, he was also vital in bringing it to an abrupt and unexpected end. On the day the language bill was passed in the Goa assembly, an angry Churchill Alemao stomped into the Herald office. He demanded to know how the screaming headline read something to the effect: 'Konkani made official language'. Alemao's criticism (with some validity, even if ironical in the backdrop of his own exclusivist approach which sought completely illegitimise the Marathi demand, in what was in is more of a caste-defined battle) was that the headline was not justified when the dialect and script used by a small minority had been given official acceptance.

Later realities also elaborately demonstrated that the Rane-Khalap drafted official language bill was extremely ambivalent, if not wholly unimplementable. Nobody knows for certain whether Goa has one or two official languages, or almost-official languages. Each official purpose for which it is to be used would have to be specifically notified, leading to further bickerings. Besides, almost everyone would like to leave the act unimplemented, since it would open up a can of worms and endless more problems if anyone went ahead implementing it. The official invitation cards, now printed in four languages — English, Hindi, and Konkani and Marathi — are enough of an indication of what a joke this has become.

Nonetheless, the Konkani experience did not stop Rajan from subsequently claiming that the paper under his steering had "demonstrated dramatically its influence by succeeding to get more than 75,000 people for the Konkani language". Of this, he tried to make a case for better terms — service conditions, allowances and possibly commissions on advertisements "generated" for the paper.

EVEN AS HE ANNOUNCED recently his decision to quit the Herald and launch his own weekend paper, Rajan is back to donning his role as a 'protector of the minorities'. But even as he stokes fears here, a genuine question could be whether this is anything more than a marketing strategy. His claims of being committed to secularism could be dismissed by critics as little more than a cynical strategy of stoking minority fears, to build a potent constituency, just as some politicians in Goa have done — to convert into a permanent votebank of sorts a large segment of the Catholic electorate. In July 1987, Rajan told his staff, this writer then being one of them: "Our basic constituency are the Catholics, whether we like it or not. So much so, anything on the Pope or developments in Christianity should be interesting to our readers."

Rajan was however quick to understand — unlike most of the other editors brought into Goa to head papers here, who sometimes take years just to understand that this small state doesn't need a scaled-down version of a national newspaper — that local news was of vital importance. To cite a Rajanism, in the form of a blunt directive to the news-desk: "The Rajya Sabha election in Goa is of much greater consequence to use than a peaceful Yath Ratra (sic) in Ahmedabad. In Punjab, for instance, I do not think we should take cognisance unless the death toll is above 10." (This was in times when the Punjab violence was as Kashmir today.)

Rajan was quick to argue that a new paper in Goa should address those segments which are significant in size. One can question his obvious strategy of playing on minority fears and building up a minority psychosis. Even when viewed from a very narrow sense, this could be damaging to the interest of the minorities themselves.

But Rajan's ability to convince the reader still holds.

In September 2003, some Goan expats across cyberspace were carefully watching the unfolding drama as Rajan hurriedly launched his <http://www.rajannarayan.com> site. Making his an issue of freedom of expression, and indicting the man who weeks back graced Rajan's birthday — Manoharbab Parrikar — was bound to strike a chord. Afterall, haven't we in the Press in Goa been complaining about increasing pressures from the BJP government?

On September 16, 2003, one expat suggested that "perhaps the only way to overcome the muzzling of the press is for Non-Resident Goans to fund an alternative newspaper, where the journalists can do what they do best without their livelihood being threatened." He went on to suggest: "Now is the time for Non-Resident Goans who care, to come to the assistance of journalists in Goa. As an alternative, we could support Rajan Narayan's new venture and give him the freedom to speak out. Democracy and freedom are at stake in Goa. It is time for all Goans who love their motherland, to put their money where their mouths are, and do something for Goa."

To quite some extent the problem with contemporary Goa's journalism is governments who don't like criticism and therefore target certain newspapers or journalists. But this is not the entire story.

Managements who seek to use their papers to get undue favours, licences, or whatever are another part of the problem. So are us journalists who don't carry on our job neutrally and without quid-pro-quo motives. But the editors who have long been acting as censors, and implement the agendas of the first two categories above, are also part of the problem. Unlike in the 'eighties, you can hardly expect an editor to stand up for you in today's Goa.

Journalists in Goa are facing a situation where space to write the truth is increasingly shrinking; and editors, including Rajan, have also played their role in making this happen. At another level, the State is working overtime to incorporate journalists, promote 'friendly' publications and thus indulge in other means to control opinion. While Rajan Narayan has undeniably been one editor who was willing to say the things others were simply not willing to say, this was done not very consistently. Quite a few who worked under Rajan would probably have their own story to tell. It would really help if the average Goan was less gullible and didn't judge issues along emotional lines alone.

The plus side also needs to be taken into the equation.

It was Rajan who pointed out to the importance of the readership of government employees and pensioners; to the fact that international news needed to be focussed on countries which Goa had long links with, or had large Goan expat populations. He told his staff something that seems to be beyond the comprehension of many Goan editors: "There is also considerable interest in Portugal. An election is scheduled in Portugal soon. Let us keep track of the election and other developments in Portugal."

(But one should not get misled into thinking that those working under Rajan always had clear policy guidelines to work under. Most of our time at least, policies were based on whims and fancies, to gauge the rationale of which often left one bewildered.)

He was also among those to try and shift out of the protocol reporting — an attitude which says 'this report has to be there, because it has to be there' — that journalism in a Navhind-defined Goa was notorious for.

But then, implementing this vision was a problem. For one, Rajan himself didn't consistently follow up on it. Secondly, he didn't seem to believe in having competent persons around him and preferred to work with someone who was less likely to pose a challenge in the years to come. In addition, a considerable time was spent in politicking, both within the organisation and beyond.

Working under Rajan meant coping with the unpredictable.

In many cases, Rajan didn't quite give other journalists the impression that they were welcome to contribute to the Herald. (As an aside, one of those asked to contribute a chapter in this book, a senior Goan journalist who has written for a number of national and international publications, misunderstood that the invite was to write for the Herald. The journo simply wrote back a two-liner to declining saying that apart from the lack of time, "Rajan won't accept my name in his paper.")

In one of my freelance stints there, a curious case pertained to a curious firm selling mattresses at the price of Rs 60,000 to a 100,000 and more. They claimed all kinds of near-miraculous properties went along with the mattresses. Concerned citizens drew one's attention to this issue, and after researching the issue, one wrote one's report on the issue. Rajan was furious. He accused this journalist of "not checking the other side of the story". In reality, the firm refused to let anyone come to their demos, unless they were duly introduced by someone already caught in the costly-mattress trap. It later turned out that the persons running the operations in Goa were linked to the family of the publisher that brought out a magazine Rajan had earlier worked for! When this issue was raised during a recent journalist debate, Rajan side-stepped it by raising the issue of whether one was a staffer or freelancer while writing for the paper. He generally confused the issue in some barely-relevant detail, ignoring the questions of there was a clash of interest in his role as editor here, as in many other issues he has faced questions over.

Perhaps the most curious experience for this writer was the one related to "Raul Gonsalves".

Sometime in the late 'nineties, a number of prominent editors in Goa decided to impose a private 'ban' on the writings of that abrasive but persistent letter-writer M.K.Jos . Jos had the style of targetting editors and journalists, which was obviously earning him influential enemies. One may not be a fan of Jos, but clearly a blanket ban on an individual is something very unbecoming of a supposedly democratic society. This writer's feature, focussing Jos with his plusses and minuses, appeared in the weekend magazine section of Herald, then looked after by Ethel da Costa. Retribution was quick to come. A long piece was published, in the same columns which this writer was a contributor to, trying to drag this writer into a fictitious controversy. It also sought to give a veiled 'warning' that anyone mentioning Jos could himself lend in trouble. It later emerged that the article itself was

pseudonymously written by the editor of a rival newspaper, claiming to be 'Raul Gonsalves'. Editorial staff of the section confirmed that the contentious article had been published at the behest of Rajan himself.

It could be argued that if Rajan has built a larger-than-life image of himself, that has been premises on the blocking out of a generation of young journalists, whom he himself ironically had a hand in creating. Today, Rajan's indispensibility to the Herald stems from both a perception, not wholly true, that he single-handedly built the paper, and the fact that virtually nobody else in the organisation has been trained or encouraged to write editorials.

To some measure, everyone who shares the above grouse with this writer must be thankful to Rajan. Being pushed out of local opportunity has helped many to get access to wider fields. Today, Goan journalists are employed in a number of places — scattered across the Gulf, to Singapore, Australia, Canada and beyond! Even for those of us opting to remain back home, the hard work involving in 'proving oneself' has helped to open up new doors. Had it not been for such 'push' factors, this writer would have probably been doing a boring job just as a deputy news editor in some local newspaper.

Working in a Rajan-headed establishment also can cure you of ambition. It was simply not worth the heart-burn and infighting to rise to the level of a humble chief-sub. This has helped convince this writer that it's probably worth staying a humble correspondent — possibly even freelance — the rest of one's career, rather than succumb to an ambition that takes bitterness, rancour, cutthroat competition and so much energy just to get a post in which one has to act more as politician or manager rather than an effective journalist?

Needless to say, on the other hand the younger generation of journalists can indeed learn from some of Rajan's good points. In many cases — though not all — he would be quick to highlight criticism of himself, in the paper he headed. His ability to bestow confidence on his juniors helped some to grow. (But, this was upto a point. Also, his criticism and barrage of memos seemed to be more linked to whether he liked someone or not, rather than one's qualities and abilities to put in hard work as a journalist.)

As for the writer of this chapter, one carried on writing... and enjoying it immensely. But for most of the past 20 years, that has been for an audience largely outside the Herald. By some quirk of fate, one managed to leave the Herald exactly after four years, as planned. (Thanks to statehood, the Deccan Herald decided to have it's first full-time staff correspondent in Goa. Work on the news-desk was fast ceasing to be a challenge, and the politics on the job also made life difficult, even if the team that worked there had a good team spirit and a youthful have-fun attitude towards life.) Also, as planned, one put in a two-line resignation letter.

As anticipated, my absence there was not viewed as a loss; anyone who stayed on too long got the feeling he or she was becoming a liability — or that the law of diminishing returns were applying. Whatever may have been my failings, some of my colleagues pointed to the fact that this writer was one of the few who had been around from Day One, and was known for his attempts to bring out a good product. Paste-up artists would comment, "The day you leave, there will be a lot of disappointment." I suffered from no such delusions. In part, because nobody is indispensable. In greater part, because one was aware of the attitude of Rajan Narayan towards anyone who might one-day be competition.

Right I was. When I told Rajan of my decision, he had just one question in mind: where are you going? On being told that it was the Deccan Herald, a visible sign of relief appeared on his brow. Not only was one not joining the Gomantak Times, then viewed as the looming-on-the horizon competition, but also another journo was getting out of the way. Or at least, that was how one intepreted it.

Perhaps one was not wrong. Since then, one was at Deccan Herald for the first seven years, a period during which staffers were not officially allowed to write for other publications. But, since 1995, when one went into full-time freelancing, never did one feel welcome to write for the Herald, whenever Rajan Narayan was around. On the contrary, doing this would make one feel like an encroacher or illegal alien overstaying his welcome at a place not wanted.

At one stage, Rajan Narayan went for his lengthy treatment, leaving behind no editorials for the paper. Having never apparently encouraged anyone to rise to the task of writing editorials, he apparently often used this as his bargaining chip (as has happened recently). Unlike in other papers, where the middle-level journalists write the editorial, here the space was very much Rajan's fiefdom. Being into freelancing, and wanting to take up the challenge, one wrote a set of 50 or so editorials during one of his periods of extended absences during the 'nineties. This was done at the request of the newspaper management, and the staff apparently appreciated the move. Yet, on his return, and probably realising that churning out this many pieces — that too, all on issues related to Goa — could be done by someone else too, Rajan went on to write his editorial which claimed "friends in Goa and

Bombay are eager to bury me..." . Or something to that effect. The "friend" in Bombay was, one guesses, Alwyn Fernandes, a former Times of India journalist, who at one stage was actively considering taking over the editorship of the Herald.

(At a later tenure, after the Herald faced a crisis when chief reporter Julio Da Silva suddenly opted for contesting an assembly election on a BJP ticket, rather than staying on in journalism. Since one had turned to freelancing, contributing to a local daily sounded a good idea. This continued for some time, till, again, Rajan Narayan's return resulted in getting the feeling of being unwanted.)

At the end of the day — though nobody should try to write a premature obit for his influence on Goan journalism — Rajan will probably be known for what he has written. Not for what he made sure didn't surface. In this context, it is perhaps important to put down these perspectives on the record, so that the future could have other views from which to judge contemporary journalism in Goa.

## **Chapter 8: Rural Goa, unheard, unsung...**

Melvyn S. MisquitaMelvyn S Misquita represents a trend among some of the younger journalists — well-educated (he holds two M.A. degrees), Net-savvy, and eager to extend the boundaries of journalism in Goa should be looking at, apart from just the Secretariat. Recently, his work made it to the news in a major way, when the Indian Express carried a large spread in its national-edition on how Misquita had traced the strange story of the sinking of a World War II British passenger liner, BritanniaIII, which had dozens of Goans (including one of Misquita's grand-uncle's) on board.

If my entry into journalism was accidental, working with rural correspondents in Goa was equally unexpected. One morning of May 1998, then editor of the Gomantak Times, Ashwin Tombat, asked me to handle local correspondents who were contributing to the newspaper. He assured me that correspondents were an integral part of the newspaper and, that, a strong network would play a vital role in strengthening the newspaper.

While Tombat's ability to put forth persuasive arguments eventually convinced me to accept this task, I was determined not to remain 'stuck' with correspondents for long. There were many reasons for this. Firstly, working with correspondents invariably meant that one would end up merely re-writing their stories and would not have much time to work on my own stories. And with barely two years of journalism under my belt, there was no way I would allow my ambition be condemned to the mere restoration of correspondents' news items.

Secondly, co-ordinating with correspondents involved vast amounts of patience, as each correspondent had to be handled differently. Moreover, since most were part-time correspondents and could devote only a few hours to the profession, I could only expect them to function for a brief part of the day. Then again, these correspondents were based in different parts of the state and my interaction with them was largely dependent on telephones and other means of remote communication.

The correspondents were certainly happy to have me around, as till then their complaints seemed endless. "Our stories don't appear promptly in the newspaper and, sometimes, they don't appear at all. People in our locality then get upset and complain that we are not sending in their stories," was a commonly echoed grievance. "No one attends to our telephone calls and, when they do, they keep transferring our calls from one person to another and they finally disconnect the phone," was another general complaint.

Their complaints certainly had some degree of legitimacy.

It is a common perception — especially among English-language newspapers in the state — that correspondents are third-class passengers, who deserve little or no decent treatment. Let me cite two instances to prove this point. In one English-language newspaper, a correspondent sent me a crime report, which, under normal circumstances, should have been carried the next day. To my surprise, the report was not published for the next two days. The correspondent called me and sought an explanation for the delay. Unable to give him a suitable reply, I transferred the call to the concerned sub-editor, who simply snapped back and insisted that the correspondent need not bother about his report and, that, the report would appear only when there space was available in the paper!

Some time ago, a Vasco-based couple died in a road mishap in Porvorim and the correspondent promptly sent in the report. The next morning, I was taken aback to find the item in a single column, virtually hidden in the section for continued items on Page 4. Incidentally, the distribution of saplings by an MLA not only merited a double-column spread, but also a decent photograph — ironically, just alongside the news item reporting the tragic deaths. The sub-editor's reply, like his news sense, left me baffled. "So what? So many people die almost everyday. What was so special about these deaths?"

Unfortunately, the sub-editor failed to acknowledge the fact that the same news item was prominently displayed in the other two English-language newspapers.

A former colleague once aptly described such an attitude as "'news sense' value which gets transformed into 'nuisance value'."

In most cases, those serving on the news desk in English-language papers have never worked as rural correspondents and are, hence, unable, or in some cases unwilling, to understand the intricacies of collecting and sending news items. Confined to the four walls of the newspaper office, some members of the news desk play a role similar to that of a cook in the kitchen; while rural correspondents are the waiters who have to constantly interact either with an unhappy customer or, in some cases, a satisfied customer. The news desk essentially plays a vital role in the making or breaking of a story sent by rural correspondents.

But then, the news desk is faced with pressures of a different kind, which are not always understood by rural correspondents, based as they are in remote corners of Goa, who rarely witnessed the hectic activity at the news desk, moments before the deadline. On numerous occasions, news items placed on the page had to be removed at the last moment to accommodate late advertisements. As such, rural reports, no matter how essential, simply couldn't find the space in newspaper.

Moreover, many correspondents are convinced that their news items are more important than the others, so much so that they cannot bear to find their reports delayed even by a day. Quite often, their unhappiness over the delay in printing their reports would become more vocal with each passing day and, invariably, I became their punching bag. This was largely because some of the rural correspondents are considered important members of the public in their locality and, at times, their prestige and financial gains in journalism would often be at stake with a delayed publication of their reports.

It must be admitted that over the years, journalism has been turned into a prestigious and lucrative part-time option for many of the rural correspondents. A few years ago, a former editor mentioned to me that he was on a trip to a remote village in Goa, when he decided to attend a function in the locality. The place was packed to capacity and he was forced to stand behind occupied chairs. To his surprise, the chief guest happened to be the local correspondent of his own newspaper!

This enthusiasm towards 'extra-curricular' activities sometimes translates into political affiliation. In a recent event which established the BJP-journo nexus in Sanguem, a correspondent with a Marathi newspaper and member of the Sanguem Patrakar Sangh was been unanimously elected president of the Sanguem Unit of the BJP. Similarly, the president of the Sanguem Patrakar Sangh and a correspondent with an English-language newspaper, was appointed the BJP booth president of Tarimol-Sanguem. In most cases, reports sent by correspondents to the news desk, in the past, specially when there was no one in particular to look after this responsibility, simply lacked form and content. Illegible words either scribbled on scraps of paper or sent as distorted faxed messages were among the most popular methods deployed to communicate their reports. In some cases, only a skilled pharmacist could decipher the words used by some correspondents. Under such conditions, the sub-editor assigned to such reports had the arduous task of converting them into decent stories. Quite often, the easiest way out would be to forward the raw report to the dust bin. A sub-editor flooded with such reports and working under pressure would invariably exercise this option with considerable frequency.

Then in June 1998, it was my turn to handle the correspondent network under the fancy and wordy designation of "Chief of News Bureau". In reality, I had to play God in the laboratory. This meant subjecting numerous correspondent reports to various quality control tests each day and, in some cases, creating sense from nonsense, before they were ready to be read by thousands of readers in and around Goa. Under such circumstances, I had anticipated that my association with correspondents would not to last long, that is, if I wanted to maintain my sanity in the profession.

But this was not meant to be.

The days turned to weeks, months and eventually years. And, before I knew it, my interaction with rural correspondents went on to complete half a decade. I have since handled thousands of reports either sent to me through post, fax, emails or even dictated over the phone. In most cases, the reports may have initially appeared trivial or insignificant, but a little refinement and some cut-paste commands have succeeded in giving a new look to the report. And with encouraging results.

In a recent case, the Pernem correspondent sent me a report on action initiated by the local health authorities, in view of the outbreak of viral hepatitis in the state. In the second last paragraph of his report was a mention that the authorities had decided to shut down the Pernem police station canteen for operating under 'unhygienic conditions'. In my view, this was most significant and I refined the

story with this angle as the lead. Taking cue from the news item, the Director General of Police issued a memo to the Pernem police inspector, seeking an explanation for the unhygienic conditions in the police canteen. Incidentally, Herald was the only English-language daily to carry this report.

Over the years, I have not only succeeded in building up my tolerance level to the specific demands of correspondents, I have also learnt to appreciate the crucial role of those eyes and ears spread all over the state. This experience has led me to believe that a local newspaper which ignores rural news content will be as effective as an orchestra playing music before a deaf audience.

While there is consensus on the value of local news content, the importance of rural correspondents has not always been appreciated by the powers that be in the newspaper. A correspondent is often treated like the spare wheel of a vehicle, detachable and to be ignored under normal circumstances. The merit is only recognised in times of emergency, when a big story breaks out in areas represented by correspondents. Then too, it is a common trend that newspapers would prefer to send its full-fledged staffers, often from Panjim, instead of relying on part-time rural correspondents, to cover the event. This is not to suggest that full-fledged staffers have no right to trespass on the territory of correspondents, as it were. Rather, a staffer would benefit a great deal by utilising the expertise and local knowledge of a rural correspondent to ensure an effective story.

To cite an example, a staffer was recently asked to interview noted people in connection with a prominent cultural festival in a village. The staffer was unaware that the same festival is celebrated separately by two groups in the village and, that, the article would need to carry the comments of people from both groups. Instead of seeking the assistance of a correspondent from the area, the staffer went ahead and interviewed five persons from the village. Eventually, the staffer realised that four persons interviewed represented one group, while the sole personality interviewed from the other group went on to criticise his own group! The article was published and the damage was done. Organisers of the second group were aggrieved and threatened to withdraw advertisements to the newspaper. The issue was finally resolved when the local correspondent carried a series of reports to clarify the position of the organisers of the second group. Had the staffer sought the assistance of the local correspondent, the issue would never have been blown out of proportion.

Then again, the 'who-has-written' preference over the 'what-has-been-written' has plagued many English-language newspapers and this has largely contributed to the 'City-Centric Syndrome'. There have been instances to suggest that a news report filed by a staffer has been accorded more prominence — both in space and display — than a report sent by a rural correspondent. Recently, tension flared up along the Tuyem -Camurlim ferry route, after the river navigation department wanted to shift the lone ferry to Tar-Siolim for the five-day Ganesh immersion ceremony. An MLA, sarpanchas of two village panchayats and over angry 200 people prevented the movement of the ferry. The correspondent promptly sent the report and the item could only find place in the lower portion of page 7, normally reserved for routine and unimportant news items.

The controversy then erupted again for the nine-day Ganesh immersion ceremony, when authorities finally shifted the lone ferry from the Tuyem-Camurlim route to Siolim. Commuters were unhappy to travel by the free canoe service, while those travelling in vehicles were forced to take a lengthy detour. On the other hand, people in Siolim had the luxury of a ferry to assist them in a religious ceremony. The correspondent sent me the report but, this time, the item was published on page 4, normally reserved for stories which have been continued from page 1. Incidentally, six of the eight news items which appeared on page 3 — the most popular 'inside' page for Goa news — were Margao-based news items. "At least, you people carried the ferry story. I sent the same story to my newspaper. But I did not find my story anywhere in the paper the next day," remarked an unhappy correspondent of another newspaper.

Newspaper authorities tend to justify this 'City-Centric Syndrome' by claiming that their readers are concentrated in and around cities and towns and, hence, an urban-based report would generate more interest than a remote village-based story. To accept this argument would be similar to assume that a nutritional and tasty meal is possible merely with a generous portion of rice, minus the curry, vegetables and other side dishes.

Reports by rural correspondents add spice, flavour and variety to a newspaper. It is no wonder that the popularity of vernacular papers in Goa has been largely due to the quality and quantity of local stories, both from urban and rural areas.

Different standards adopted with rural correspondents can be quite effective to confuse and demoralise them. In one incident, a rural correspondent sent me a report stating that a building constructed by a firm and owned by an MLA, was being built barely metres from a high tension pole. A labourer while at work accidentally came in contact with the live wires and was seriously injured. Though a police complaint was filed against the firm and not the MLA, the correspondent was keen to

establish the link since since the MLA was largely responsible for the negligence. However, the editor pulled up the correspondent for attempting to introduce the MLA into the story, when the police complaint did not specify the direct involvement of the MLA.

Sometime later, the sister of a minister fatally stabbed her husband to death. Though the minister was not involved as he was abroad at the time of the incident, the same editor called up the news desk, asking them to insert the statement that the alleged murderer is the sister of the minister. The minister's identity was not specified in the police complaint and, yet, the editor wanted to establish the link between the minister and his sister.

The problems faced by rural correspondents are fairly common and are not restricted to any one newspaper and it has become a common trend for local correspondents to pool in stories and resources. This in turn has led to the creation of local level associations, commonly known as "Patrakar Sangh" in most talukas of the State. These associations have, in turn, branched out into constituency-level associations. At present, the numerous "Patrakar Sanghs" in Goa include the Sanguem-Quepem Patrakar Sangh, Sanguem Patrakar Sangh, Murgao Patrakar Sangh, Pernem Patrakar Sangh, Mandrem Patrakar Sangh, Bicholim Patrakar Sangh and the Bardez-based Zunzar Gramin Patrakar Sangh. Besides safeguarding the interests of rural correspondents, these associations provide support to its members and also promote interactions with society by organising various contests and cultural programmes.

Having served correspondents across two newspapers for over half a decade, I have grown to appreciate and respect their enthusiasm to the profession, despite the difficulties that engulf them on a regular basis. If my efforts have paid rich dividends, it is largely based on my recipe called T.R.U.S.T, which includes the key ingredients of Talent, Reliability, Usefulness, Sincerity and Tenacity.

**TALENT:** Rural correspondents have often been judged by their talent in the collection of news from their respective areas. It is this talent that has enthused many correspondents to remain in journalism for many years, even though in most cases, monetary benefits have been too meagre to justify their interest.

I have often worked with rural correspondents who have little knowledge of English and, yet, they have communicated to me stories which have turned out to be impressive reports. There have been some correspondents who have developed such strong contacts, that they are easily identified by the masses in different parts of the taluka represented by the correspondent. These correspondents are the true representatives of the newspaper in their areas.

Correspondents with remarkable talent have always remained the prized possession of a newspaper and, in many cases, have gone on to become full-fledged reporters.

**RELIABILITY:** By and large, rural correspondents have been a reliable lot and have stood by the paper in good times and in bad. These correspondents have sent in their reports all year round, without taking into account their weekly holidays, public holidays or annual leave. In one newspaper, correspondents were not paid for a number of months due to acute financial difficulties and, yet, that didn't retard the flow of their reports and they continued to serve the newspaper with the same level of enthusiasm. This level of commitment and reliability of correspondents will always be an asset to any newspaper.

I had a correspondent who happened to fly to Bombay in the morning, but that didn't stop him from sending me a news item over the phone. Beyond doubt, this correspondent, despite his busy schedule in Vasco, has been one of my most enterprising correspondents and a crucial component in my network of correspondents.

Correspondents located in remote areas usually cover a huge geographical area and in most cases, travel many kilometres to either collect or send a report to the newspaper. Yet, this rarely deters them from sending their reports.

**USEFULNESS:** While rural correspondents are primarily responsible for covering events in their localities, they are extremely beneficial to newspapers in a number of ways. They can be of invaluable help in the promotion of newspaper, be it circulation, generation of advertisements or other areas of interest to a newspaper. In fact, some correspondents have even started advertising agencies of their own.

**SINCERITY:** This ingredient distinguishes rural correspondents who pursue journalism as an end from those who manipulate the profession as a means to an end.

Over the years, I have learnt to respect the large number of rural correspondents, who have been sincere to the journalism. This is not to say that rural correspondents are insulated from pressures



while discharging their part-time duties. On the contrary, they are most prone to influences within their locality and hence, their ability to withstand the gravitational forces of politics and economics has to be appreciated.

**TENACITY:** Another hallmark of most rural correspondents is the persistent determination which has been the driving force over the years. News items on a series of issues filed by rural correspondents have prompted authorities to initiate action. Recently, a correspondent persistently highlighted the illegal felling of trees in the taluka, inviting the wrath of timber smugglers. Ignoring numerous threats to his life, his efforts eventually paid off when arrests were effected, lethargic local authorities transferred and brakes applied on the illegal activities in the area.

My association with the Herald is yet to complete two years, but I am glad that the Herald News Bureau has developed a team of talented, reliable, useful, sincere and tenacious correspondents. And I am grateful to have been involved in this process.

## **Chapter 9: A year apart... journalism and leaving home**

Daryl Pereira Daryl Pereira came to Goa as a lost young member of the widespread Goan diaspora. He promptly won many friends by his friendly ways and have-fun attitude. In turn, he not just discovered his roots more deeply (Daryl recently chose to have his wedding in Goa), but also earned for himself a profession. Besides opting for Media Studies back in the UK, he currently works for a search-engine promotion agency (or, put in plain language, an initiative that skews search-engine results, to allow you to be listed first, if you can afford to pay).

A lot has happened since my time as writer and sub-editor for The Herald's international edition. But a brief stint in the mid-90's has left an indelible mark on my psyche. Having said that, the Herald for me is largely synonymous with India, journalism and leaving home, so discussing it in isolation isn't easy. Also, there was no clearly defined plan — it was something I more or less stumbled on by chance.

It turned to be a chance encounter of which I still feel the repercussions.

I arrived in Goa from the UK early in 1995, after scrapping a potentially lucrative yet un-inviting career in accountancy, originally no more than another faceless backpacker with meagre funds hoping to enjoy the chilled hazy life of a shack-wallah. Shame I didn't check the weather forecast. The small matter of a monsoon put paid to any chances of beachside employment.

Offices filled with ledgers piled to the roofs were enough to put me off venturing into the world of Indian accountancy and, not wanting to follow the aimless road back home, I desperately cast the net out wide. An answer to an advert for a 'Person Required for English Publication' — one of the more ambiguous ads to grace the career opportunity pages — led to an interview and my first trip to the Herald offices.

Finding the office more energetic and boisterous than previous working environments I had experienced, a barrage of writing tests and interviews left me feeling like I had been through a whirlwind. The whirlwind moved quickly. That very same day I found out I was the new sub-editor for the Herald International Review, a paper intended to serve the Goan diaspora.

Well, what this role meant in reality was that I would read the articles awaiting publication, picking up the odd grammatical error, but more importantly I was the lowest common denominator litmus test — if the pages didn't stand up to my paltry knowledge of the Goan political system then (the argument goes) it would not be understood by Goans in the furthest-flung corners of the globe.

Day in day out, I would take the long dusty climb up to the top floor — at the time we were sharing office space with accounts. Not quite the close separation of duty to which I'd become accustomed. And although their elaborate entries in ledgers never became any less cryptic, it did give me the opportunity to mingle with those outside the editorial department.

During the early weeks of my tenure in May, the heat soared. Then early in June the rains broke — with a fanfare of grumbles from most of the populace for the three-day delay. Funny for me, as in the North European climes to which I was accustomed, rain pretty much randomly came and went. The ferocity of the storms also came as a shock. Days heavily punctuated with storms. The power cuts that ensued, hobbling our much needed computers, led to a greedy lunge for the last drips of juice out of the backup generator in order to crunch out a few extra words. Once that dried up, we would have little more to do than meditatively stare at the elements.

In the English political system, the summer is the silly system. It's the time for stories of twins joined at birth and how a routine trip to the hospital to have a wart removed leads to three-years

incarceration. Falling over the same months, the monsoon season in Goa seems to have a similar effect. The supply of news is low, but the column-inches keep up their incessant demand. Ministers with long-shot pleas for 'raindrop tourism' (to wake up a beachside industry all but dried up over the period) is enough to make front page news.

Perhaps that is the reason that it was felt pushing me out into the midst of Goa on the hunt for fresh stories couldn't do too much harm. It was only later that I saw this as one of the perks of working in a small team (there were only three full-timers bringing out a 24-page tabloid weekly edition). Feeling like a young bird pushed from its nest way before time I was forced out, between showers, onto the streets of Panjim, to interact with the local populace. Quite early on, I was struck by the stony faces of small-league civil servants. The UK broadcast journalist Jeremy Paxman claims the relationship between a politician and a journalist is like that between "a dog and a lamp post". I could relate.

However, a useful mentor, T helped me through my first real interview. This got off to a bad start when, after biking it through sheets of rain, we knocked on the door — only to be greeted with the merest slither of a gap with a voice behind it. I could almost smell the fear as the middle-aged housewife exclaimed 'naka, naka', as T tried to negotiate us into the flat. Her son, a bright student looking for entrance into engineering college, had come up against a wall of resistance — communal motivations were suspected.

Eventually, after agreeing to keep the article as vague as possible, she succumbed and we entered the flat. Once in, hot chai and samosas were thrust upon us as we sat on the main (and only) sofa in a clean and basic flat. Seems like hospitality begins at the sacred entrance — perhaps the reason why we were kept out for so long. Antagonism and Indian snacks don't sit that comfortably together.

Well, for my first time, all seems to be going well. However, looking down as I rapidly scribble, I start to notice a puddle emerging around me on the stone floor. Early on in the rains and I haven't yet made the connection between downpours and sandals. The puddle grows and I feel like my shoes are slowly turning into the source of the Mandovi. I have little option other than to come clean. What followed was an episode with me apologising, receiving a maternal smile and a towel and a level of empathy I'm not sure could have been reached any other way. As it happened, the article created few ripples and the power of the press didn't have quite the force the lady had anticipated.

My confidence grew, and, as the rainy season drew on, I ventured out more and more.

Towards the end of August, the rains finally showed signs of letting up. However there was talk in the market place — the fish didn't return. At street level housewives were struggling to find the plump shimmering mackerals with which they normally populated their spicy yellow curries. In the areas surrounding the big resorts, blame was laid on the proliferation of hotels with their ever-growing need for the freshest produce. Out at sea, traditional fishermen blamed the trawlers. The National Institute of Oceanography, which is responsible for monitoring the seas, observed from the fence. Whatever the cause, changes were afoot on this rural coastal land — the once abundance of resources strained as its popularity started to mushroom.

As the clouds melted away for good, shacks started to spring up like primroses in May. The hoteliers grumbled — their 'multi-cuisine' menus just weren't being read. Politicians took sides with either faction. Some framing the fight in favour of the shack-owning under-dogs, others pointing to their lack of civic responsibility with their spliced electricity wires and overflowing rubbish out of the backs of the flimsy beach side establishments.

On the backs of the tourists and travellers flocking to Goa came the stories of the parties, drug deaths, Anjuna hot-spots that managed openly flout local licences and throb on till the early hours of the morning. Crime also increased — the mugging of tourists, either on desolate stretches of beach or in their insecure dwellings, became more and more widespread. The hotels brought problems of their own. This being a time of huge growth, water was sapped up beyond the limits of the local ecology and the coastal regulation zone (the area demarcated on the beach up to where the hotels could be built) was debated and apparently ignored in many instances.

The international ramifications of a sordid paedophile ring is exposed, following the conviction of Freddy Peats, a German national involved in the abuse and traffic of Goa's under-age. As the grim facts unfold, including naive support by the Catholic church, the society looks on in repugnance, wanting to distance itself from such heinous activities. Once again, Goa's flirtation with other cultures in a bid to make the most of its picturesque rural ideal is put into question.

One of the major benefits of such a small team bringing out fortnightly publication is that we had the opportunity to experience each of the many ingredients that make up a well-rounded news magazine.

Towards Christmas, to lighten the load of the heavy political wrangling, I took to the fields. The paddy fields that is. As a Goan urban dweller, I am familiar with the white side of rice — as it appears in all its culinary simplicity and elegance on the plate. I am however completely ignorant of the involved process of getting to that stage. An 'expose' on the inner workings of the paddy harvest — the cutting, thrashing, pounding and milling — gives me the chance to wade through the paddy, chase frogs, and be generally mocked by good-tempered field workers. Not quite sure if this is in the general job descriptions of most journalism openings.

As the season starts to draw to a close, like a hungry tiger the news machine goes in search of whatever morsels are on offer. Once again the rains come and Panjim is filled with the sight of sodden journalists speeding around in reversed raincoats.

For personal reasons, it's time for me to head home.

On return, an enthusiasm for media leads into trendy multimedia and somehow I end up dumped in full-blown information technology, where I am today. As such, I'm not in the perfect position to be able to compare the practice of journalism in Goa with that of elsewhere, although the peculiarities of the working environment do stand out.

From the original office on the dusty top floor, we are eventually reshuffled into the air conditioned first floor vault. The cool air brings a much needed respite from the heat and dust, and the environment is definitely less makeshift. The room does have another feature — low hanging beams at the end and (particularly hazardously) in the middle of the room level out the worst excesses of pomposity with a short sharp shock. I'm not sure if they are part of a larger shrewd plan of management, but over the years they have cracked the head of a number of prominent Goan journalists and contributors. Exactly quite how this has affected the quality of output, I'm unsure.

And then there was the technology. Aside from the hardcore printing machines, large metal plates and dangerous chemicals lying around, the computers that sponged up our picture and prose were actually more contemporary than the ones I had left behind as a Liverpoolian accountant. As the adoption of the computer had come in here at a much later stage, the Herald machines tended to be newer, faster and bigger. There were just fewer of them. Working under such limited resources would at time inevitably lead to fractures. Although we worked on the computers feverishly in the morning to make way for the daily staff (whose strict deadline gave them precedence), as deadline approached tempers could occasionally erupt.

This thing called the Internet had been kicking around for a few years but towards the end of my tenure was finally picked up by a journalist fraternity that had viewed the Internet with scepticism and suspicion (as did many other people at the time). For us it was just a dial-up modem taking about two minutes for a standard sized email, as long as nothing happened to the fragile connection. As our publication was aimed squarely at the Goan living abroad, this was an excellent resource for finding out what the Goan diaspora was up to and how Goa was perceived on the world stage (especially important in the area of covering tourism). As an aside, it also meant that I no longer had to write all the letters to the editor. Other resources such as the Goacom website appeared, with intentions sturdy enough to keep it valid to this day (I can heartily recommend the recipes!). I think it is safe to say that the Internet has irrevocably changed the face of researching, collecting and distributing news. The availability of this service in The Herald and other Goan papers marks Goa out as one of the more fortunate areas of the developing world.

I often wondered how powerful the pen we were wielding actually was. Beyond the massage of ego of seeing a by-line in print, it was hard to work out if our columns of verbiage could actually make a positive meaningful difference. Covering the depletion of fish stocks after the rains did, to my surprise, seem to create a few ripples.

Liquor (hard and soft), was often present in the world of Goan journalism. Anecdotal evidence from the UK and US suggests that this is common throughout many other parts of the world. As with many stereotypes, the one of the hack at the bar does contain some truth. There is a quite widely held belief that alcohol gets the mind churning and the pen moving. A pint at lunchtime can help be a bit more assertive and searching when the proud owner of the new enterprise slips into pompous conceit.

There was one ritual we adhered to quite regularly — once a fortnight, after we had put the paper to bed, we took to the city to celebrate. A restaurant would inevitably mean a few pegs of rum. Then onto one of the few late night drinking establishments: a seedy corrugated bunker alive with the chatter of civil servants, cops and journalists. Indian rum formed the cohesive force — the basis for a number of nefarious deals in shady corners. Being not so familiar with the more subtle political machinations I felt largely sidelined.

I did get a glimpse of the more unsavoury effect if taken to excess — seeing the image of older journalists whose idealism had turned to advanced alcoholism. Exactly what were the causes remained unclear, but it wasn't pleasant to see.

But how politically unbiased were we allowed to be? The advertising versus editorial debate in the press is a perennial one. Over the year I was with The Herald, there were a few lapses where there would be direct influence from commercial interests to have articles in their favour. Being asked to give the owner of a prominent luxury hotel a mouthpiece through an extensive interview did give me the sense of being in the pockets of big business. However, I had the authority to go to press with quotes throwing into question the viability of luxury tourism in a land where the season lasts little over four months — slightly dampening the gushing tone of the article.

Rather than being downright manipulative, in hindsight I would describe the management style as slightly neurotic, characteristically protecting its own interests. This led to occasional grumbles, back-talk and skirmishes among the editorial team; however they say the best relationships flourish under tension. Perhaps this was the cohesion needed to keep together the tribe of English-language hacks who refer to themselves as 'ex-Herald'.

Being a Goan born and raised in the West, interested in keeping contact and learning about my more distant roots, the attempts of The Herald to reach out to the Goan across the globe was admirable, and I was honoured to be a part of it. The edition has since folded and it is a shame that the paper doesn't do more at the international level now, perhaps utilising new technologies available to streamline the whole process.

All in all, I feel my tenure at The Herald was a fruitful one. That is not to deny that the paper has its troubles, but to an extent newspapers (like politicians) are merely mirrors of the society they serve. The fact that it has been a part of the Goan social and political landscape for the last twenty years is, if nothing more, testament to its success within the community.

## **Chapter 10: Growing up with the Herald...**

Visvas Paul D KarraVPDK was an outspoken sub-editor at the Herald, where he also covered sports for the daily's special supplement. Subsequently, he has shifted to working at the prominent Bangalore-based daily, Deccan Herald.

After the Herald, journalism seemed to me like a dress rehearsal. Always a bridesmaid, never quite the bride.

Surviving months of introductory sessions with Francis Ribeiro, I was firmly convinced that I had a role in nation building. I started behaving my age and silently promised to skip rum the next Saturday night. And on moon-less nights, I stayed awake thinking about the burden of the Fourth Estate, lying face down on my leased estate. At the office there were daily hunting trips, as I went on poaching for angles and words from the alphabet forest.

In short, Herald was the 'journalism school' where I learnt all the elementary tricks of the trade. But what set apart this journalism school was its sense of applied practical nightmares. None wanted you to come up with a neat circle. If it got a reader's attention, rhombus would do, this I learned from the Herald.

The continuous slogging on the desk, day in and day out, soon scratched away the sheen off a 'oh-you-are a journalist' comment and introduced me to a world of words. This wordy world consisted of stories and stories, each of them carrying a life of their own, each one clamouring for attention. The more attention a story deserved, the higher in the page it appeared. The less attention the story received, down in the scale you go.

My 'studies' did not end with desk itself. I did my internship on the field as 'unofficial special stories reporter'. The love for writing prompted me to scan the paper for interesting news and do follow-up on these. This in the long run gave me the rich experience of a deskie as well as reporting, something which no journalism school would probably offer.

But I was not prepared for all this when I applied for the job of a sub-editor. Neither was I prepared for a question like 'Do you know English?', when I came for the interview. Asking a question like this to someone who has applied for a job in an English-language daily does seem to be a strange question. But the interviewer was Rajan Narayan, the editor of Goa's oldest daily. I was almost in a stupor after meeting the man whom I had admired for over a decade. But this was an interview and I stumbled out an answer. Thankfully, the interview was very short and soon Rajan introduced me to the then Deputy News Editor of Herald, Francis Ribeiro, who after initial hiccups became my friend and mentor. Francis

Ribeiro's hand was in a crepe bandage when I first shook hands with him: Later on I came to know that he broke his hand in an unsuccessful attempt to jump over a bull while riding his scooter on the road to Saligao at night.

Not even in my nightmares had I ever seen myself sitting in the office of the Herald happily churning out copies or giving headlines to stories which thousands of readers would read the next day. But this happened on December 31, 1996. Since then, my innings in the Herald was full of excitement. Not even one single unnecessary off, as Francis would put it.

My tryst with the Herald began as a reader though. Those were my school days in Don Bosco, Panjim. Coming to think of it now, it does seem to be a strange coincidence that I joined Don Bosco school in 1983 as a fifth standard student, a few months before the Herald was launched as an English-language daily.

Don Bosco is such a fine school because, as one realised later in life, this was a school which awakened the latent talent in every student. Here my appetite for news (and, or course, lunch) grew day by day. Every morning, just before classes began, snippets of important news used to be read out over the school loudspeakers. One fine morning, it was announced that a newspaper has been launched in town called the Herald, and that the front-page and sports-page of this newspaper would be displayed daily on one of the ground-floor notice boards. A crowd of boys used to gather around this newspaper board during the 11 am interval, snacking on every word. I used to be part of this crowd. It became a ritual, to read the front-page and sports-page of the Herald in school.

In my higher classes, one enterprising fellow used to buy the whole newspaper and bring it to class, inevitably triggering a mad scramble for the eight pages. It was in my eighth standard, when one of the then Salesian fathers, Jude Borges, who taught moral science, brought copies of the Herald into the class and asked us to count the number of advertisements and the number of news items on each page. The verdict: There was more news than advertisements. The moral that day for us kids was: read the Herald newspaper, it enriches your knowledge because it has got more news than advertisements compared to the other leading daily. Father Jude left us behind with one moral. I felt like crying.

Meanwhile, Rajan Narayan's editorials and Stray Thoughts rose to dizzying heights, and so did my reading interest in the Herald. So finally when I met the man himself, I was in a kind of daze.

Of course, the man never ceased to amaze me.

Much water has flowed under the Mandovi bridge carrying with it the angst, dismay, despair, frustration of many people who worked with me in the Herald into the Arabian sea over my style of functioning. Call it what you want, my stars, fate, karma, foolishness, anything, but I have this knack of raising the hackles of people. This inherent nature was actually a boon for me as it was a kind of weeding out process through which I landed in the company of those who mattered most. Because, for a rookie like me, who had no formal training in journalism, getting trained or learning the nuances of journalism was of utmost importance. If I need to tweak my brothers for that, a little 'mea culpa'.

My innings in the Herald was a kaleidoscope of events both inside and outside the news-room. But, Goa being what it is, with sports and politics dominating the news-pages, I kept myself out of the politics and devoted myself to sports. Among other things, some months after I joined, the Herald launched the Sportswatch, the only sports supplement in Goa at that time. Francis Ribeiro, affectionately called Choppy, given charge to bring out the supplement every Friday, was running short of hands. So I got an opportunity to help in layout and editing of stories. This was really an exiting break for me because, being a sportsman myself, having played competitive judo, and with keen interest in football, I naturally took to Sportswatch like a fish to water.

My first big story was an interview with cricketer Arjuna Ranatunga, the then captain of the Sri Lanka team, which came to play in Goa. The highlight was not my interview with Ranatunga but the startling discoveries we made of some of the murky path in which the cricketing world travels. Aravinda de Silva asked us to speak his manager for permission to do a write up on him. To our chagrin, we realised that his manager was in Sri Lanka and this was an excuse by Aravinda de Silva. This came amidst reports of some cricketers expecting to be paid a fee — or extract money, depending on how you see it — for an interview. The standard rate then it seems was Rs 10,000! Sunil Gavaskar too behaved oddly with us when we asked him to talk to us. This was much before the match-fixing scandal broke out.

Thanks to Choppy, even though I started by helping him out on the desk, I also got to do many stories for Sportswatch. This taught me many lessons in writing, meeting deadlines, and building up a nose for news. One incident I remember is the disbanding of the Sesa Goa football team. Somehow, Choppy got wind of this. So we went to the Sesa management, which denied plans for any such move. We ran a

story to this effect in Sportswatch . By the next week, things took a dramatic turn and the news became official. The Sesa Goa football team was indeed disbanded.

On the day when the decision was announced, both Choppy and me did not even have time for lunch. We grabbed some samosas and straightaway landed at the team manager Joe Vaz's office in Miramar. Here we collided with a collage of emotions from the coach to the manager and the players all in a stupor. This was a unique experience. One which provoked us to criticise the management strongly; but journalistic ethics reined us in. It taught me not to be emotional when dealing with a profession.

It seems that Alvito D'Cunha, one of the dashing forwards for East Bengal today, was one among a group of Sesa Goa players who ditched the club midway in the Second Division league and came back to Goa from Bangalore during the players transfers period. Shorn of its cream players, the team was left high and dry without any strength, nullifying its chances of qualifying for the Big League. Peter Lima Leitao, who was the corporate manager for the team, is on record saying that if Sesa Goa had qualified for the National League, then perhaps the decision to disband the team would have been put off.

Of course, it was not all hunky dory for me on the Sportswatch desk. Neither could I boast that I had become a full-fledged writer with hardly two years of experience. When Brahmanand Shankhwalkar won the Arjuna Award, Choppy asked me to go to Fatorda for a profile of this great football player. But I almost chickened out as I did not have the guts to meet such a famous personality like Brahmanand. Help came in the form of Ashley do Rosario, into his second innings in Herald by then, who offered to accompany me. In Fatorda, I found out that some great people like Brahmanand, who win laurels for the country and win accolades for themselves, have no airs about themselves. This Arjuna awardee was just an ordinary person who performed extraordinarily. Sheer grit, determination, hard work and humbleness were his only tools of success.

My passion for all things football sometimes landed me in trouble too.

Officially, my job at the Herald, by this time, was being part of the Goa desk. On a few occasions, the news editor and the editor discovered that I was going all the way to Fatorda, 40 Kms from Panjim, to watch the National Football League. Soon enough, I got a 'goonish absurdism' from the editor asking why action should not be taken against Mr Visvas Paul for 'subsidising' work. There were two or three points with which I was accused, one among those was that I had defied the News Editor Sergio Caldeira. I denied everything in a written reply. What they did not reckon was that I would sincerely come back from the football match, and complete my day's work, which was doing the Goa page. But seniors later did not have any qualms about accompanying Choppy and me for an important match during working hours. What's more, after coming back from the match, he even helped me complete the page!

Doing a Goa page was the dreariest thing on the desk, because, of the kind of stories that landed in from the correspondents.

Stringers used to send three or four pages of hand-written foolscap papers, which, when edited, turned out to be just single column stories. I wonder how the scene is now. In those days, there was no re-writing desk and the sub-editors had to do all the dirty work of re-writing, editing and making a page. It was a tough job but it improved one's editing skills and my patience and perseverance too. So how could one be blamed for opting to take a few hours for a harmless passion like watching a football match? I footed hefty petrol bills for this by the way, but could not claim the travelling allowance.

One's desk job also threw up some funny situations.

For one, there was the traditional rivalry between sub-editors and reporters — an unpalatable and unacknowledgeable fact to many. In the Herald, we had another kind of rivalry. This running feud was between compositors and sub-editors on the Goa desk. The intensity of this feud became more pronounced during the night shifts. It used to turn into a bitter fight complete with the usage of the choicest abuses available.

Department of Information press notes (trust the politicians and their wise words of wisdom to have a hand in any kind of fight) and hard copies sent by stringers were the cause. The compositors used to concentrate on composing advertisement, after reporting to work regularly irregular, while we sub-editors breathed down on their necks to type our stories which were our life-line to fill the page. I think that Herald was the only place which recruited an assortment of a government servant, wannabe-advocate and a shoe-shop vendor as compositors.

In short, Herald became their heart break club.

Mehboob was one of the finest composer we had, although he could not discern the difference between bail and jail. One night shift, I gave him a faxed copy from Margao bureau filed by Minoo

Fernandes. It was a court case and Radharao Gracias was the advocate for a defendant. Our man, Mehboob, usually is deadpan on the keyboard but that particular day, he finished it on time. When I opened the copy, suddenly, the story seemed to be different from what I had read earlier. Wondering whether I got my story wrong, I rechecked the hard copy and found that apparently, Mehboob misread the surname of Radharao wrongly and so it read like Advocate Radharao Greasiness instead of Gracias. From that day onwards, I opened a new file called 'MTV Enjoy' and stored all the bloomers of composed copies, courtesy Mehboob.

This same guy, during the Lent season, decided to skip work on Maundy Thursday, because someone told him that Good Friday fell on Thursday that particular year. All said and done, Mehboob was a sweet guy because he would come with delicious beef kebabs for all of us during Ramzan evenings.

Talking of bloomers, readers of the Herald newspaper would have had an early morning wire trip one morning if this one hadn't been detected just in time. The edition was put to bed, and the customary good-nights were done with. At that time, there was a process known as spooling, in which Page 1 was printed on a film paper to do away with the 'hazards' of cut and paste process. The Linotype operator was an apology of a man, most of the time reeking of a combination of the local urrak or feni and ghutka. The chief sub sent the page for spooling and left. Before I signed off from the office, I just happened to go to the plate making section to see how my page was shaping up and just glanced at Page 1 which was spooled and ready for plate-making. Lo and behold, yesterday's front page was gloriously laid out on the pasting grid and ready for plate-making. Even the pasters did not realise the mistake as the advertisement for that particular day was the same size as the previous days. Our Linotype operator spooled yesterday's page and sent it for plate-making. I gave him a big dressing down but did not report it to anybody as he begged me not to do so.

Talking of the pasters, Umesh, a big bull of a guy was my 'best friend' as he always liked to trouble me by going to sleep just as I finished page 3 and brought it up for cut pasting on the grid. Somehow, our animosity made us wary of each other and we developed a mutual respect. Despite numerous complaints by the chief subs about his behaviour, he remained non-chalant as he did not expect the powers that be to take any action on him.

I guess that this attitude for disregard towards people in power is all prevalent and all pervasive in society. It is an universal truth that any law is meant to be broken. As a corollary, frozen laws are enacted by the government only in order to freeze some people, though these laws are hardly taken out of the freezer and defrosted. A case in point is the anti-smoking and anti-spitting law decreed in Goa with much fanfare and welcomed by many quarters. One aspect which was raised by noted anti-tobacco activist Dr Sharad Vaidya, was how effectively would the anti-smoking law be enforced in the State. A valid point which I had raised with the then Chief Minister Francisco Sardinha. He said on record that it was difficult to implement. He also admitted that there are always those who want to defy the law.

Rules are there on which the government seems to suffer from selective amnesia, because they are unable to implement in the right spirit as they have no clue as to how to go about it. When the High Court gave an order banning loud music after 10 pm based on a complaint by the environmentalists, Choppy and me wrote a series of articles for Insight analysing in depth, the pros and cons.

One point that had us puzzled was from ought the sound to be measured. At its source, or from the point where the complaint was made. Obviously, the authorities could not place their sound-metres at the mouth of a 10,000 watt music speaker and say the decibel level were high. When pointed out, the Secretary of the Goa State Pollution Control Board talked greek. For that matter, we discovered that the pollution control board was not even equipped with proper sound-metres. Neither could the government come in defence of the music industry and allied activities like the night clubs which depended on music and entertainment to draw tourists to Goa.

After the much touted and much publicised millennium rave party by Mumbai tycoon Jay Wadia was banned by the High Court in December 1999, I was witness to two rave parties in January 2000, though on a smaller scale, but where the corruption by the police was displayed in its full naked glory nonetheless. At one rave party at Bamboo Forest in Anjuna, instead of stopping the party, the police arrived, collected their share and left the place as unobtrusively as they came. They were blind to the open sale of drugs and were deaf to the raves' sound pollution which carried on well past midnight into the wee hours of the morning.

Another rave party also organised near Anjuna was completely insulated against police harassment. Such was the extent of influence asserted by the organisers of this rave party that the police just turned a deaf ear to phone calls made by Choppy and me just to check how much the police is interested in enforcing the law. We do not know whether money had changed hands but when we did not get any response to the repeated phone calls we made to the nearest police station we personally went to speak to the police officer on duty — but to our horror found the police station was closed, lock stock and

barrel, as deserted as a place hit by a typhoon. But our labour was not in vain. Next day, this was in February 2000, Ashley ran an exclusive report on the front page based on our first hand account. But the surprising part was the way the DySP North Goa denied everything, including our calls and visit to the police station.

My days in Herald are truly memorable. Along the way I did trample on a few toes inadvertently, but my well wishers and the learning tips they provided me are invaluable. Any memories I carry of Herald must be painted with the pictures of Choppy, Rico and Ashley, who contributed greatly to my development as a journalist. I can safely include this trio into the list of the other great people like Devika Sequeira, Pamela, Derek Almeida about whom I have heard a lot.

I guess, the journalistic calibre of the above mentioned people and their attitude of being go-getters rubbed off onto people like me. The excitement of running after news, rather than waiting for news to land in the form of press notes or government hand-outs, is a different ball-game altogether. It was a question of being there first which I liked most in Herald. During the police firing incident at Cortalim on the anti-Meta Strips agitationists, when two or three people were grievously injured, I know it was we from Herald who reached the hospital first. I fail to recollect whether it was Choppy or Ashley with whom I landed at Goa Medical College where the injured were brought.

Although the photographer had gone missing during this crucial hour, we were nevertheless armed with our dictaphones to record the first hand accounts of how the police firing started in Cortalim. We managed to elicit the names of injured, right from the horse's mouth so to speak, got reactions of the people who accompanied the injured and were back in the office in front of our computers.

Even as the day's incidents took shape in the form of a lead story for the edition, our faces were somber and anger welled up in us as we could not forget the gory images of the body parts of one injured youth. He was shot through his genitals. But we were journalists and were supposed to objective in our reports. That was Herald, getting it right the first time and all the time.

In a sentence, I stitched my cloak and bought my dagger, from Herald.

## **Chapter 11: In black & white... newsdesk nuggets**

Derek Almeida

----- Derek Almeida, besides being one of Goa's finest and most aesthetically-balanced deskmen, steals time to write humour columns whenever possible. This product of Goan journalism has won the respect of his juniors by his honesty at work, his ability to stand by his subordinates, as well as his considerable if under-appreciated talent. Memorable headings like 'Sirsat elected, Tomazinho selected' (after a controversial election to the Goa Speaker's post) are credited to Derek, as every self-respecting deskman of that era in this state would recall. -----

When I joined the Herald in 1985, the news desk consisted of two unvarnished desks and three very uncomfortable chairs. The chief-sub's chair was distinguishable from the others because it had wheels. It also had a back-rest and seat fashioned from woven plastic which had given way due to continuous use by Anthony Fernandes alias Anton, Frederick Noronha alias Rico and sometimes Francis Rebeiro alias Choppy. I was one of those who did not have an alias.

Those were the days when the PTI and UNI machines were hardly two metres away from the news-desk and Rico had invented an ingenious way of preventing the clatter from getting to him. He used to stuff paper in his ears, because it was cheaper than cotton.

I also remember Anton completing his work before dinner on the night shift and reading a novel while waiting for galley-proofs. How nice it was to be chief-sub back then. I thought, one day when I reach that post I too would read novels. When I finally made it, the system had changed and there was no time to read novels. So I do have some regrets.

Rico, by the way, was very possessive of the TV which projected black-and-white images of the news. He never let us watch anything more than the news and, if I remember well, used to take out the 'on-off' knob and stash it in his pocket till the end of the shift. He was, and still is, a work-is-worship chap. Rico was also the only man on the news-desk who could type with the speed of a steno.

We also had a thin wiry fellow named Madhu who made tea and did some odd jobs like taking edited to the composing room on the mezzanine floor and oiling the A4 paper print-outs to make them transparent. Every time he bunked work he would return the next day with a mournful look and announce that some relative had died. Five days later he would conveniently kill another member and



disappear for another two days. This never stopped because he had an extended family of relatives comprising several aunts, uncles, aunts-in-law, uncles-in-law, cousins and god knows what. He never followed any pattern and killed them at random. Some of his relatives died several times. By the time he left, I am told, he had bumped off almost all the members of his family.

I can't remember if Madhu made good tea or not. To me, a cup of tea at work was a welcome luxury, especially because it was free. I say this because Herald was then paying trainee-sub Rs 400 per month. Not enough to keep body and soul together. So, when I was confirmed and my salary jumped to Rs 750, I moved into a new economic bracket of professionals who could afford to buy Maggie two-minute noodles. The Rs 750 put an extra bounce in my walk and the chin went a notch higher, even though I still had to depend on my Dad for clothes.

The only reporter we had was Rajesh Singh who was very good at chess and devoted a great deal of his time playing Rajan Narayan, the editor. Apart from his writing skills, he was adept in getting other subs to buy him cups of tea.

It was at the Herald that I first met Elston Soares alias Paku (some years later, we met again at Newslink, the Belgaum-published English-language sister publication of Tarun Bharat). He had a huge grin, wrote with his left hand, ate with his left hand and edited copy with his left hand. In short, he was a 'leftie'. He had an interesting sense of humour. I am told he coined the term 'Romi-Marathi' for the language written by some correspondents.

Apart from the tea, another luxury enjoyed by sub-editors living in and around Panjim was a home drop at night in the office jeep. On one or two occasions I remember being dropped in the Patrao's black Mercedes to the Don Bosco Hostel. This luxury was withdrawn after we formed an employees union several years later.

This was also the time when I met Alexyz, the cartoonist. He came across as a very friendly person with a benign face covered with a lot of hair, mostly black; a very hearty laugh and a penchant for practical jokes. I remember him standing on St Tome street and directing all passersby to the Herald. The poor souls would enter the office with blank looks not knowing what had hit them.

Those were the days when the post office was a bigger landmark and Herald was referred to as 'behind the post office'. So Alexyz once sent us a cartoon enclosed in an envelope. It said: 'To Rajan Narayan, behind the post office; From Alexyz, behind the bars.' That was Alexyz.

A few weeks after I was formally accepted at trainee-sub-editor a local farmer, this was before the advent of progressive farmers, or whatever they call them these days, horticulturists and what not... So, a local farmer came to the office with a very long snake-gourd. Since volunteers were hard to come by, I was ordered to pose with the vegetable. The next day my photo was published on the inside page of the Herald. I did not know whether to feel proud or embarrassed. Today, I still don't know.

After a year, I returned to Belgaum and two years later when I returned the Herald had changed. Rajan had a bigger cabin. Norman Dantas had a smaller cabin and Gustav Fernandes the manager had a cabin of intermediate size. The News Desk had morphed from two unvarnished desks to a large one with a sunmica top. Now it looked more like a cheap dining table from the Holy Spirit Church fair. It was positioned between Rajan's and Norman's cabins and under the altar.

Rico had left and Anton had become a reporter. The others had left too. Wilfred Pereira, who was a stringer from Margao, had become chief-sub. Willy, as he was known, was a very organized man. His drawer, which was located at one end of the news-desk, was neatly kept and contained almost everything like pens, scales, soap. It was like a mini-stationery shop. I always suspected Willy also had a tin-can opener and a Swiss army knife stashed somewhere in that drawer. Willy also had a lovely handwriting.

It was during this second stint that I met Ivo Vaz from Varca. He was blessed with cat feet and always walked into the office with an old airline bag without making a sound. Ivo looked dead serious all the time, even during picnics. He once organized a picnic for Herald staffers at Varca, where he sat in one chair throughout the day. When we left, he was fast asleep. Ivo also had a strange way of editing copy which reminded me of an automobile assembly line. After editing each news story he would attach a rectangular piece of blank paper with a pin to the left-hand corner and keep it aside. After piling up several copies in this manner he would start giving each story a heading. Ivo had an antique olive green Morris Minor, which he treasured, and a daughter whom he loved. Everytime his daughter recovered from some ailment he would treat all of us to ice cream, with our peon Jose acting a facilitator in the whole process. Jose would do anything for a free cake, ice cream or anything edible.

Then there was Bone-Crusher Agnel who took pleasure in squeezing the life out of anyone who made

the mistake of shaking hands with him. My hand somehow survived Agnel's vice-like grip.

Another sub-editor who caught my attention was Cornelius Gomes who worked on the sports desk with Nelson Dias. Cornelius always sported a beard and mustache which covered most of his face and gave him a Ringo Starr look. Cornelius also played football for the Herald team and had this 'queer' technique of tackling rough players. Whenever he encountered a player leaning on him to head the ball or digging an elbow in his ribs, he would tickle the chap's backside. This technique proved to be more effective than the ref's whistle.

By the time Herald completed its tenth year we had a formidable team with players like Tulsidas, Jason, Alaric, Jose, Domnic, Pradeep, our platemaker, and Vilas Sarang who never made it to the team. Umesh alias Umi, our sleepy paster, was a live wire in the goal. With Choppy as manager we were willing to take on anyone.

On one of our anniversaries Choppy set up a match with the Navhind Times. Two or three days prior to the match we were shocked to discover that NT would be fielding a few first division players from the Dempo team. We nearly suffered a stroke. But then Choppy always had this never-say-die attitude. In a crisis he would take two deep inhalations from an anti-asthma pump which he always carried in his pocket, and, in seconds go from Bruce Banner to The Hulk. In a day, Choppy's never-say-die attitude spread to everyone and off we marched to the Don Bosco school ground in our new uniforms for the slaughter.

Guess what? We won.

That was not all. Choppy loved ceremonies and had arranged an elaborate function with a chief guest, prizes and speeches. After the speeches the Herald team captained by Tulsidas (I think) went up and received their medals. Everyone who had adorned the Herald colours got a medal. Next was the turn of the Navhind Times team to collect their medals. Half way through this process Choppy realized that he had bought less medals. We hit the panic buttons. But then, in the Herald you have to be resourceful to survive. We quickly formed a human chain and started passing medals presented to the Herald team back to the chief guest. It was a smooth operation. Months later, when the time came for Navhind Times to celebrate its anniversary, they did not dare play a football match with us.

I also remember playing a football match on the beach during a picnic at Candolim. Our team had earned a penalty and Pamela D'Mello decided to take it. (Yes, she played football). By the way, picnic matches are scaled down versions of the world cup. The goals are tiny, the playing field is small and there's no ref. Before the penalty could be taken, a dispute broke out between us and Ashley do Rosario over how the penalty should be taken. Ashley grabbed the ball and insisted that the spot kick should be taken with the heel and with the player facing his back to the goal. I don't know where Ashley found this rule, but we were aware of Pamela's prowess as football player, and hence, objected. Those were pre-mobile phone days, so there was no way of contacting FIFA for their take on the rule. Finally after much cajoling and arm twisting, Ashley relented and allowed Pamela to take the kick. The ball was placed five feet from the goal which was one-and-a-half foot wide. Tulsidas, our captain, who was desperate for a goal gave Pamela a thorough briefing on how to take the kick. Next he drew a line in the sand starting from the ball to the center of the goal line to make it easier for Pamela. Ashley did not object. We all stood back and waited. Pamela positioned herself behind the ball, lifted her right foot and kicked with all her might. The ball missed the goal by three feet. That was how Pamela missed her chance to enter the Herald football hall of fame. She went on to be a very good reporter.

This was also the picnic when Ashley drove from Candolim to Betim in his Fiat without releasing the handbrakes.

Somewhere during the eight years I lived and worked in the Herald, a fellow villager named Lirio Vasconsales found employ as a sub-editor. This wiry chap had a face full of hair and was a die hard Navhind Times fan. He used to fold the NT and stuff it into his trouser pocket, to be retrieved for leisure reading on the last bus to Margao. This habit earned him a sobriquet — pocket Navhind Times. Lirio also possessed a matter-of-fact sense of humour. One day Lirio was feverishly editing copy with a ball pen refill even though he had an empty ball pen in his pocket. Sports editor Nelson Dias, who happened to pass by, asked Lirio: "Arre baba, why don't you put the refill in the pen and use it?" Lirio looked up at him through his glasses and said: "No time". This was the one and only time I saw Nelson hit for a six.

In those days before the laser printer was perfected by HP the A4 sized `butter` paper used to get `jammed` inside the machine very often. During one such occasion Lirio who had been observing the machine for over half-an-hour in the composing department turned to me and said: "We insert butter paper in the machine, so how do we get paper jam?"

My first encounter with Rajan Narayan was not awe-inspiring. Rajan was never a dresser and, on the few occasions when he managed to get into a long sleeved shirt and ironed trousers, he looked quite smart. The first time I saw him for one of the anniversaries when he came with a slightly over-sized navy blue coat. The next occasion was when he returned from Dubai on the first Air-India direct flight from the Gulf. His attire never bothered him or any of the staff.

Rajan had two indulgencies — smoking and chewing `Halls' sweets. And the smoking nearly burnt him out one day. I was in the office that day when a couple arrived to see Rajan. As usual he lit a cigarette and was puffing away when the couple noticed smoke under the table. It didn't take long for Rajan to realize that his trouser pocket was smouldering. He thrust his hand into the pocket to put out the fire and in the process burnt his fingers. After a little slapping here and there the fire was put out. I was quickly summoned and told to buy a tube of Burnol. Rajan never believed in moderation. He squeezed half the tube on his fingers and continued conversation with the couple with the yellow paste all over his hands. I don't know how his pocket caught fire, but I think Rajan absent mindedly shoved the match in his pocket instead of the ashtray.

There were a lot of other interesting incidents that happened in the Herald, some nice, some not so nice. Like how we played mandicot all night in the composing room or how we celebrated on Independence eve with a bottle of whiskey and nearly got caught or the formation of the Union, or the time when the electrical system short circuited and Pamela, Alaric and Paul filed stories in candle light, or Rico's hoi-te.

Perhaps some other time? Perhaps, for the twenty-fifth anniversary e-book.

## **Chapter 12: The proof of it all...**

Tony Martin Tony Martin, the better-known pen-name of Anthony Barretto, worked his way through Goa's English-language newspapers, before shifting to education. He has gone into self-publishing, and, in his own modest and low-profile manner, has managed to put out books with a print-run of 5000 copies (amazing by Goa's standards). Currently, he is working on a website on Canacona.

Just an out-of-school teenager that I was, life then posed a 'Catch 22' situation when one first landed in Panjim. Without any experience, it was difficult to get work. Yet, at the same time, it was difficult to get experience because I couldn't get any work.

So one fine day armed with a recommendation from the late music maestro-priest Fr Lourdinho Barreto, who hailed from my village of Galgibaga in the southern extreme of Goa, to Fr Freddy for the post of proof reader I arrived at the Gulab office. This got an I'll-let-you-know from the editor.

Well at least I knew what job I was looking for.

Then, with a fantastic helping of luck I got a job with the Herald — oops actually it was with Norlic India, the firm shown as the employer of those doing the proof-reading of the Herald, in those days.

The job was as a proof reader, and the date was August 12, 1985.

To us, whether it was Norlic India or Herald did not then matter, I was getting my bread, so there was no point complaining about missing the cake.

But along with my bread, I also got a taste and a first-hand glimpse of what I had only heard of earlier — exploitation. Obviously the Norlic India tag was meant to deny us the applicable scales for proof-readers. We were almost like daily wage factory workers. Accept it or leave it. With pressing financial constraints, and at that time there wasn't even a functional union in the Herald (it came sometime later, and have worked in fits and starts) the option was clear: shut up and do your work or speak up and get kicked out.

All said just-enough-to-survive Rs 400 a month was still a luxury.

So I got myself testing the waters in the novitiate of journalism. For a tender 'naal' (coconut) like myself the sub-editors of the time — Anthony, Rico, Godwin Figueira and sports editor Nelson, to name a few — were exceptionally good. If I had peanuts for salary, I had gems for seniors.

For most people proofreading is basically checking spellings and omissions by the typesetter. It was not much different here. On the few occasions we, the humble proof-readers, particularly Jack, ventured to show our mastery in punctuation and grammar, the concerned sub-editor would get furious, of course in a playful way. Often we would end up exposing our ignorance to the world.

Ignorant or well-informed, those two years in the

Herald were years of youthful exuberance and bliss.

And there was this noble soul Caetano. Well I call him a noble soul because even as the foreman of the composing section, he never gave me an opportunity to see him angry although we proof readers (which, of course, includes me) used to give him a chance to be angry almost every day.

One day when 'penis' became 'mightier than the sword', he laughed at it together with the subs, and then, after they had left, politely warned us to be careful. He had no special training in people-management; he had surely not attended any hi-fi seminars now conducted by self-proclaimed management gurus. Yet, if there was one thing he knew other than typing at an incredible speed, it was to keep his juniors motivated. We owed our productivity and effectiveness to him. He would challenge the Subs to a rupee for a mistake in a report or an article. On that count we didn't let him down, at least not often, even considering that overlooking errors in a straight read-through — without the luxury of checking print-outs, but doing the proofreading on the flickering screen itself — was a distinct possibility.

Ironically, on the few occasions, the editor, Rajan Narayan — he was not yet the super-man of the Herald then; he acquired almost that status during and after the language agitation — entered the composing room, we were just logs of dead wood for him. Not a side glance even to acknowledge our greeting. My view: perhaps all these years Mr Narayan was soaring too high on the pedestal the management had seated him on, after granting him a free hand. And as is the rule of nature, every thing that goes up comes down. And he came down with quite a bang.

But that was just a stray cloud in the silver lining the Herald offered. That indifference apart, our Herald innings is something to look back and laugh about. I can still sense the taste of the first sip of urak at an after-work session. Not long later, Remy and I crashing into a cow with my rickety cycle on our way to the Don Bosco Hostel. Time: around 3 a.m.

Another party we had in the office was a chicken party. Nice dry fried chicken. Courtesy Jack. Everybody had and there was still more to go around, much like in the Biblical parable of loaves-and-fishes. But nobody except Jack knew, until the next day, from where the chicken came. The next day a notorious looking man walked into the Herald office. To make bad matters worse he happened to meet the 'patrao', the publisher and then patriarch A. C. Fernandes. They talked a while and he left. The next moment the old man came charging and thundered, "Kal kombeo konnem adleo re?" (Who brought in the chicken yesterday?) "Aayem Patrao, mhaka rostear podlo mevlolo," (I, boss. I found it fallen on the road) Jack confessed not unlike a frightened rabbit. "Faleamson kamank enaka," (You're fired). And Patrao left. Of course all those who had enjoyed the chicken the previous day came to Jack's rescue.

In the good old days, the pace was leisurely, stresses fewer and everything was rosy. But the pay packet was not growing significantly heavier even after two years. I was stuck at Rs 500. We were free to ask the then Manager Gustavo Fernandes for anything except a raise. Asking for a raise was invariably met with a simply question, 'Do you want to continue?'

There was no choice. Choice came knocking with the arrival of Gomantak Times. And some of the more enterprising journos left their training ground and joined GT. But, to this day, Herald remains an enriching and fond experience.

### **Chapter 13: Birth pangs at Sant Inez**

Elston Soares

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Elston Soares, a veteran of the desk, has worked at the Herald, Newslink and Gomantak Times. Since moving out of Goa, he has worked in publications in the Gulf and Singapore.

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February 15, 1987 marked a watershed in the history of English-language journalism in Goa. That date marked the launch of Goa's fifth English-language daily to be launched in the union territory-turned-state.

Fifth, that is, if one includes the now defunct West Coast Times and Newslink, an English-language newspaper launched by the Tarun Bharat Group, and targeted at Goa, though like the Tarun Bharat in Marathi earlier, it too was printed from the neighbouring city of Belgaum.

This writer spent two months with Newslink in late 1986 in Belgaum, together with Haseeb Shakoor and Derek Almeida, bringing out the newspaper in very trying and primitive conditions.

Strangely, the Tarun Bharat group then thought that they could do another Tarun Bharat with Newslink, that is, to produce a newspaper for the Goa market from Belgaum. But with one significant difference.

We did not have the wide correspondent network of Tarun Bharat. We were, instead, expected to translate the stories from Marathi — something we did rather more successfully in Gomantak Times a few years later.

But then, at Belgaum, this was a task easier said than done. And as anyone who has tried translating stories from Goa's Marathi press will testify, most stories contain enormous amount of comment and a large number of them are un-sourced.

Our plight could therefore be well imagined. Things I guess have become somewhat better in the last few years; but then it was a nightmare. Trying to fill up six broad-sheet pages with material translated from Tarun Bharat was way too optimistic a goal, to put it mildly. So at best you managed a couple of pages. The rest of the paper was trusty old teleprinter copy, courtesy UNI (United News of India) and PTI (Press Trust of India).

And as for our own reporting resources, there was Lionel Messias who slaved all alone in the Panaji office. This couldn't last. So in early December 1986, when the Gomantak Group advertised for staff, I jumped at the opportunity and applied. Besides being a good opportunity to return home from Belgaum — anyway one used to travel home every week — the adventure of being there as a newspaper was being born was too good to miss.

Not that I was totally unfamiliar with the birth pangs of newspapers — having joined the Herald as a trainee when it was a few months old and Newslink when it was in a similar position. But, birth pangs or whatever, there's nothing like competition to add a little excitement. It shakes up established players, and all the poaching for staff only pushes up salaries and gives hitherto ignored journalists their day in the sun.

I too was offered more money — more than double my last salary drawn in the Herald — which I had quit a few months earlier in less than happy circumstances. Meanwhile, just as Gomantak Times was about to be launched, Rajan Narayan in his inimitable style launched a broadside against the to-be-launched newspaper. For days, he wrote about how the Maharashtrawadis were planning take over Goa's English-language media. Never mind that most of the to-be-launched paper's staff were old Herald hands.

However, GT — as the paper was later referred to — seemed on to making great progress as we neared launch date. For the first time in the history of Goa's English-language media, we had newspaper designers working on what the paper would look like. A two-man team from what was then Bombay was paid a princely sum of Rs 25,000 to come up with the new design.

But that was where the good news stopped. The company which had sold the Chowgules the desk-top publishing equipment for the new newspaper had amazingly been able to convince the management that there was no need for paste-up artists. So there we were, trying to put together a newspaper without artists or computer operators or journalists who could do screen-based page layout.

There were no dummy runs; in fact, on the night before the first edition, I was forced to call one Herald's former paste-up artists to come in and help produce the paper. Today, all this may sound strange — given the technological innovations of the last decade — but then it was crazy, particularly given that the Chowgules had a fully functioning newspaper Gomantak and should have known better.

Then to the issue of staff recruitment, and one of my pet peeves.

Goan newspaper managements have always hired journalists from outside the state — at exorbitant salaries — believing them to be better than local talent. And so was the case with GT, where my then chief-sub colleague, a sub from the Times of India, was paid twice as much as I was. But just because they are imported, foreign talent isn't always good or suitable for the job at hand. This Bombay veteran was such a miserable creature that on launch night, with editor Mohan Rao shouting his head off, one was forced take charge and ensure that we got the paper to the press.

But no mention of this paper's launch can be complete without a mention of the role Gomantak editor Narayan Athawale played. While generally supportive of the idea of the newspaper in the early days, including recommending the hiring of staff whose knowledge of the language was less than adequate, he almost knocked the paper off its feet before it was launched.

For this the late Mr Rao was to blame; but it was an innocent mistake. A few days before the launch, Mr Rao asked Mr Athawale to write a piece for the new newspaper — it remains the only one he ever

did.

And with good reason.

In it, he proceeded to say that the new newspaper would convey the views of the Marathi Gomantak in English. It was a ridiculous claim; but something that the new newspaper took years to live down. This proved to be a real gift to the paper's rivals, which they exploited to good effect.

The early days with GT were fun, because most people didn't give us much of a chance. Our staff resources too were meagre. There was Pramod Khandeparker, who was the Assistant Editor but was more of a chief reporter; and a retired English professor M.N. Pal as news editor — who spent a few months with us — and G.K. Mohan Nair, the ToI sub.

Ex-Herald colleagues included Francis Ribeiro. And among the trainees was my good friend Vidya Heble. But most of the staff were raw and we stumbled along in those early days. The first year passed with GT barely making a dent. I believe that the paper's circulation barely exceeded a few hundred copies. And as the second anniversary approached, Mr Mohan Rao was preparing to say his goodbye. He original brief was to set up the paper and leave after two years.

This set the stage for Ashwin Tombat to take charge of the paper. And immediately we began to see a dramatic change in the paper's fortunes. Of course, we were helped along by the Narvekar molestation scandal. But to be fair, it's not the issue that matters, but how you handle it. If we did manage to raise our circulation it was because of our reporting. Some in media, did take exception to the fact that we named the girl.

But I feel it was needed then, specially if you have are up against a powerful political figure. For those who still doubt this view, I can only point to the way the Miramar sex scandal died down without the guilty being brought to book. However, one is not suggesting that the victim in sex abuse cases should be named. The only reason I have raised this issue is to explain why the girl was named.

Sorry for digressing; but another turning point in the history of paper came in 1993 when we were faced with a contempt notice from the Supreme Court. Sadly, this proved to me that whatever a management tells you, if you get into trouble you face it alone. In the case in question, we were hauled up for what was taken to be a suggestion, in a cartoon, that a Supreme Court judge was being bribed to adjourn a hearing in a case related to the disqualification of then chief minister Ravi Naik.

How I got involved in the matter — even though it was my day off — is another matter. But the real icing on the cake was that what the court claimed we had suggested in the cartoon apparently was the truth. Unknown to us then, a colleague in our sister newspaper had apparently tried to bribe a judge. But the deal had fallen through because the judge wanted more money than the politician was willing to pay. The story came out when the journalist apparently did not return all the money that he was given by politician and claimed he had incurred "expenses".

Ravi Naik ultimately resigned, ironically after himself losing an appeal against his disqualification in the Supreme Court; and I was cleared of contempt charges.

Two years later I left GT.

But the memories remain.

## **Chapter 14: An era of free sheeters**

Miguel Braganza Having an educated father with a flair for speaking and writing helps : Miguel's is a typical case study. As a school student of St.Britto, his contributions to the school magazine were like a celebrity column — ghost written by his father! His first original contribution to the printed word was in a tabloid, bilingual 'free sheeter' of sorts called the 'Vanguard' ('O Vanguardo') in the mid 1970s. While at the University of Agricultural Sciences,Bangalore, he was a founder-member of the "Writers' Club" and one-time Editor of the FYM: the Farm Yard Manure..oops...Magazine. Since then, Miguel has been Goa University's first and only Garden Superintendent. He took to writing more seriously after getting in touch with journos in local newsrooms. He became the first Consulting Editor of the Mapusa Plus free-sheeter in July 2001.

Just imagine a user-driven economy in which the user has to only pay attention; absolutely nothing else. This improbable scenario has arrived in an increasingly consumerist society with the birth of the 'free sheeter ', now making their presence felt in Goa too.

Unlike the mainstream broad-sheet and tabloid newspapers, the user can take home a free-sheeter free of cost and with no obligation, save the ethical one to read it. There is no fine print to this free

offer. The offer does not read 'Do not pay anything for it now' nor 'Nothing free'. The reader obtains a copy of the free sheeter absolutely free of any financial consideration, present or future.

There is also a greater freedom of expression in a free sheeter since the publication is not tied to the apron strings of a business house or interest group with vested interests. The degree of freedom available to the editor is almost boundless, though within the limits of decency, propriety and libel laws. The editor cannot be allowed to declare freedom from good sense and decency. This is possible only because of the multifaceted funding base that finances the free sheeter and, often, the dedication of the editorial team. A free-sheeter does not have to toe a line that many of its bigger cousins make their way of life.

What is a free-sheeter?

A simple description of a free-sheeter is a periodical (daily, weekly, fortnightly or monthly) that is made available to its readers at no financial consideration whatsoever in terms of price, subscription, membership or donation. (I will attempt no further definition and I do not know if a proper definition exists for a free-sheeter.)

The lowest frequency expected of a free-sheeter is an issue a month. Frequencies less than that tend to render a free-sheeter irrelevant and it cannot sustain its readership. It is the readership that justifies the existence of a free sheeter and helps to draw funds to finance its publication. The existence of the readership is the *raison d'être* of a free-sheeter.

News Content: People do not lose interest in issues just because the mainstream newspapers and tabloids do not carry them on their front-pages. There is always an interest in the 'positive' things happening around us. There is as much interest in the fisherman who saved six persons from drowning as there is in the one person that drowned while swimming at a beach side resort. The drowning hogs the headlines in the mainstream newspapers and tabloids. There is 'space' in the free-sheeter to portray the hero of the event, the humble fisherman who saved six lives. People want to read about him even if he saved them simply because of an impulse, or just because he could not bear to see them die! Bravery and courage do not need to be pre-qualified or rationalized. Brave deeds have a readership in the land of Rana Pratap, Rani of Jhansi and Shivaji, just as in the land of Napoleon Bonaparte or George Washington or Nelson Mandela or Winston Churchill.

Local news is another 'blind spot' in mainstream newspapers. This is often the result of the need to make the newspaper meaningful to a wider readership. You cannot focus on details when using a wide-angle lens in your camera. The same holds good for a newspaper. The free-sheeter, on the other hand, can be like the 'camera lucida' and put local issues under the microscope and draw out all the minute details.

While the newspaper only sees a fine air-conditioned restaurant with a fantastic menu, the free-sheeter can note that the cook uses the same broom to sweep the floor and also to dispense oil on the king-sized hot plate for making your favorite 'dosa'. A good free-sheeter can give you the details that most newspapers have no access to. In the local context, a free-sheeter has an advantage.

The editorial team of a free-sheeter normally comprises of local people. It is, thus, in a better position to understand local nuances, culture and tradition. For example, a woman who is topless may cause a riot in our metropolitan cities; in some tribal areas, remote Polynesian communities or the beach-front from Hawaii to the Riviera, a topless woman may not even cause anyone to raise an eyebrow, except if she is exceedingly beautiful! The local perspective makes a free-sheeter interesting to the local readership because they can identify with it.

Local issues are of great interest to local readership. What is being done about the water pipeline leak is important to those living on the first floor of buildings in the locality. Poor pressure in the pipeline means that the water will have to go to a sump and then be pumped up. Besides the cost, time and effort, this could also lead to increased contamination of water. A small pipeline leak in a neighbourhood has no news value to a mainstream newspaper. It means the world to the people in the locality that is affected. Such issues have local news value and, hence, the justification of a greater emphasis on local readership. This is where a free-sheeter can step in.

Editorial Content: The right place to express one's views is in the editorial and in the feed-back column. It may be regarding the news or current issues or some other matter of importance to the readers at that point of time. The fact that a significant section of the readership skips reading the editorial should make the editors sit up and assess the relevance of the editorials they write, or get written on their behalf. Just as the front page is the 'face' of the periodical, the editorial should be its 'heart', not a vestigial organ like the appendix.

In the free-sheets context, it would be appropriate to put the editorial through the 'Four Way Test': "1. Is it the truth? 2. Is it fair to all concerned? 3. Will it built goodwill and better friendship? 4. Will it be beneficial to all concerned?" The editorial is about opinions. The editor's views should not create ill-will between possible groups in the local milieu. It can have disastrous consequences for both, the readers and the publishers.

**Advertorial Content:** The term 'advertorial' is fairly new to me. It is the presentation of an advertisement 'outside the box'. The advertorial content of many periodicals, both free and paid, has evolved so rapidly that it is sometimes difficult it to separate it from the news items. The 'lakshman rekha' (sacrosanct dividing line) between the two has even blurred further and some journalists palm off advertorials as 'news'. The 'line of control' may have to be redefined before newspapers become like the souvenirs issued at various social events — comprising almost entirely of advertisements. This is specially true for a free-sheets that depends solely on advertising to finance its publication. The temptation is great. Yield to it with open arms and you will perish.

**Advertisements:** Front page advertisements vie with the news items for space. Sometimes, the fascination with the ear panels diminishes the prominence of even the mast-head, the very name of the publication. Since the cost of a front page advertisement is double (or more) that of one on the inside pages, the temptation is to accept maximum number of front page advertisements. It is a constant battle between funds and readability, between wealth and credibility. It is not rare to see Mammon win the battle and it shows on the 'face' of the free-sheets that has two-thirds advertisements and just one-third news content on page one.

**Mast-head:** The mast-head is the name-plate of the periodical. Unlike the name of a person, whose traits we do not know at birth, the name of a newspaper is indicative of its purpose or focus. (For example, the O Heraldo was the harbinger of news in Goa during the pre-Liberation era and continues to this day with a Goan accent; the Navhind Times brought in more national level — and nationalist — news after 1961 ,while the Gomantak Times has more of a state level flavor.)

Among the free-sheets published in Goa, Vasco Watch keeps a watchful eye on the happenings in Vasco while the Plus group sheds 'positive light' on Mapusa, Panaji, Margao and Ponda. A lot of thought goes into condensing of the 'mission statement' of a newspaper or periodical into two or three, easy-to-remember words. The name seems easy in hindsight, but requires considerable foresight and thinking to arrive at.

The mast-head must not only be good, it must look good, too.

Proper designing of the mast-head, including the selection of the font, is imperative. Ideally, the mast-head should not be changed during the lifetime of the periodical, even if the page design and layout is changed to increase its visual appeal. The mast-head must be the single-most prominent item on page one. All attributes of the publication must be associated with its mast-head. Once you see it, you must remember its worth, its credibility and its readability.

**Footer:** The footer of a newspaper or free-sheets comes in fine print at the bottom of the last page. It is inconspicuous to the casual reader. It gives the details of the publisher, editor(s) and printer. This is mandatory by law. In libel and defamation cases, these names become the 'defendants' along with the correspondent under whose by-line the news was published. The Advertisements Standards Council of India (ASCI) also knows who, besides the advertiser, to go after for violation of the law. The footer also gives the registration number of the newspaper with the Registrar of Newspapers (RNI). Every free-sheets has to apply for registration through the District Collector. The organization distributing and issuing the free-sheets is not free from responsibilities. The footer is an acknowledgment that it knows its business and how to mind it.

**Organization:** A free-sheets is not like a free-wheeling collection of articles and news reports. Like any periodical it has to be organized into sections like current news, issues, campus and club news, entertainment, competitions, brain teasers, and the like. Such a grouping of information makes it easier to find the item one is looking for. A person will first glance through the page that is likely to contain information of interest to him or her. If it is interesting, the copy will be picked up. Free-sheets are generally not 'delivered' at home; so each issue has to pass the clinical test of reader's interest.

**Layout:** A tasty dish that is not presented well may be left untouched on the buffet table. The same is the case with a free-sheets at the news stands or distribution counter. It is not a monopoly. People who have a choice exercise it. A good blend of visuals (photos, illustration, and the like) and text makes a copy appealing. Even advertisements can be used to achieve this. If the publication has access to a layout artist, it helps.

Advent of Free sheets in Goa



Perhaps the first free-sheeter to hit Goa was Vasco Watch, edited by Cmdr (Retd) A. Narayanan who is associated with the group Citizen's Watch. His attempt at Margao News was not half as successful, basically because there was no significant local involvement and input in Margao. Local involvement is the essence of a free-sheeter. Perhaps, the Salcete News spread the 'local' context too wide and did not do too well, either.

Coming to North Goa, the pioneer was Panjim Pulse. In my opinion it did not place its finger properly on the pulse of the citizens in this thriving town and its municipal council (now corporation). Its readership should have crossed the ten thousand copies mark by now, but the Panjim Pulse is nowhere to be seen. It does not have a 'presence' that is so important for survival. More than a year later came Panjim Plus, which is doing reasonably well as a monthly newsmagazine. Obviously, it could do better. Panaji is such a 'happening' place that a weekly free-sheeter could grow comfortably covering the cultural events, exhibitions, sales, educational scene, etc. Perhaps, the would-be journalists from the non-formal courses in journalism at the Mushtifund Institute and elsewhere will 'jam-up' to fill this void sooner rather than later.

The Plus series began with the Mapusa Plus on July 04, 2001, first as a fortnightly and later, after crossing the quarter-century mark, as a monthly newsmagazine. The trigger for this paper was a college student, Rohini Swamy, who made a foray into journalism like a meteor. She did so, before moving off as quickly, after moving through a couple of local newsrooms. (Rohini is back reporting for an outstation TV network, posted in Goa.) It was Sapna Sardesai who sustained Mapusa Plus production, while her co-directors in Wordsworth Communications Ltd. led by Lester Fernandes generated the revenues by 'marketing' advertisement space. This writer have been associated with this free-sheeter as its consultant editor and mid-wife from the very first issue. Two years and a little restructuring later, the labour pains are visible in Mapusa Plus, but, after 35 odd issues, I do not know whether the issue will be delivered or aborted. There is little that a midwife can do if there is a congenital complication.

The Plus group also entered the Margao area simultaneously with Panjim in December 2001. The Margao Plus is as robust as its publisher, Roque Fernandes. From August 2003, he has fathered the Ponda Plus through a new partner, Diamond Publications. The Ponda Plus is the first free-sheeter to start off with glossy art paper and colour printing, not the humble black printing on grey newsprint paper of all its forerunners. It has got no competitors in its class in Goa. The Ponda Plus has raised the ante. It has got class, it has got good readership and it is still free. Hard work pays, hard sell pays better. Roque is doing both: hard work and hard sell. The results are visible in black and white — and in colour! The challenge now is to do better than that and still be free.

What makes a free-sheeter tick: Ask any good physician and he (or, as per the recent trend in MBBS graduation, she) will tell you that one's circulation must be good. Whether it is blood, air or free-sheeter, your health depends on its 'circulation'. There is no other way. A well produced free-sheeter is easier to circulate because it is free. Once it has attracted the attention and reached the hands of a potential reader, it will be glanced through even if it is not read in detail.

That is a wonderful way to deliver a well-designed advertisement to a potential buyer of any goods or services. It makes more sense for a local shopkeeper or institution to advertise in a 'local' free-sheeter than a state-wide newspaper with ten times bigger circulation (and, subsequently, far higher advertising rates). Most free-sheeters have a circulation of 3,000 to 5,000 copies, a figure which ranks better than some mainstream newspapers in Goa. A free-sheeter is a better vehicle, less expensive and less bothersome to handle than a 'flier' inserted in a newspaper for local distribution. A flier is often discarded unread. Not so with a free-sheeter. It pays to advertise in a free-sheeter. The advertisements pay to keep the free-sheeter alive and free.

Miguel Braganza Consultant Editor & Horticulturist,  
Mapusa Goa.

## **Chapter 15: Journalism in Goa: An outsider looks in**

Shiv Kumar Shiv Kumar is a Mumbai-based journalist who occasionally para-drops into Goa for some sun, sea and opportunities to tilt at a few windmills there. A journalist, a freelance and subsequently as a full-timer since 1992, Shiv Kumar was the Goa correspondent of The Indian Express from 1998 to 2000. After moving back to Mumbai, he is with the Indo-Asian News Service (IANS).

Today, happily there is a vast talent pool of journalists among the Goan Diaspora that is making its mark in news media across the world. The movement of journalists from Goa to newsrooms across the globe is perennial. The Middle East and the West are popular destinations but then so is Mumbai: a popular stepping stone to this peripatetic breed. Reporters, deskies, the butterflies flitting through the

features pages... one can count first generation migrant Goans everywhere.

As a rookie reporter in Mumbai in the 1990s, lesson one was about Goan journos fresh off the boat (the Bombay-Goa steamer was a recent memory then) gladly beginning at the bottom despite having done duty in one of Goa's three English-language newspapers. Editors marveled at the 'material' coming out of Goa with well-rounded exposure in a city where people are quickly slotted into different 'beats'.

At first, one wondered why someone with several years' experience in the profession was willing to take the bullshit dished out by preppies all for a measly six grand gross monthly. And just when we got used to seeing their bylines, off to the Gulf the Goenkars went.

The penny dropped much later when one moved to Goa on assignment. Poor pay and lousy working environments surely could not make up for Goa's fabled joys of life. But then Mumbai's charms too quickly faded in the face of the daily grind one had to endure. So it was only a matter of time before the Goans pulled up their posts and set sail Westwards, to the Middle East and to other uncharted territories.

One doesn't have to go too far — only till the Goajourno Mailing List (<http://indialists.org/mailman/listinfo/goajourno>) — to figure out how far the hack pack from Goa go. They are out there in Bangkok bringing out a jumbo newspaper for a community that can barely read English. In Fiji, from where the Indian population flees after every coup d'etat, journos of Goan origin move in the reverse direction. In Stockholm, it was a Goan journalist who found himself on the headlines while trailing the killers of a Swedish Prime Minister.

So why do journalists from Goa bloom only on alien terrain?

A conversation I had with the venerable Lambert Mascarenhas comes to mind. Just settling in for a long chat at someone's house at Dona Paula, Mascarenhas asked me why I was not trying my luck outside. I told him about the variety of experience I enjoyed as a journalist, the wide range of stories I could do and the opportunities to travel though the profession paid only slightly more than my earlier employer, the government.

Free Goa's first English-language editor sighed, nodded his head wisely and told me no newspaper in Goa would ever send out a reporter even to cover a major event. "And the money is so much better... the Gulf newspapers pay so much more," Mascarenhas told me. Perhaps Mascarenhas would have thought differently had newspaper owners in Goa exhibited more commitment to professionalism. Just browsing through the back issues of Goa Today edited by Manohar Shetty proved to be an eye-opener on what could have been.

With Devika Sequiera and others, the old Goa Today turned out to be a delightful surprise. Well researched and crisply written stories like the ones on the protests against charter tourism in the early 1990s were a joy to read long after the magazine became a pale shadow of itself.

One saw similar flashes of the classic fire in the belly kind of journalism during the agitation against Meta Strips metal recycling plant four years ago. But matters have since slipped back into the safe routine of old. While mediapersons elsewhere in the country are agitated over the loss of substance to the infusion of style and gloss in the age of colour, it's prolonged siesta time in Goa.

The English-language newspaper market ensures that the readership is carved equally among both the players. Just 2000 copies separate the number one daily oHeraldo and the runner-up Navhind Times as per the latest Audit Bureau of Circulation survey. But with neither of them aiming to break out for total dominance there is little investment either in editorial or in printing technologies.

Though tourism is major contributor to Goa's revenues, the newspapers offer little to a visitor. The colour and vitality of the tiny state simply does not reflect in its English-language newspapers. Though it is the beach belt that draws all the tourists, there is very little coverage from these areas in the local newspapers. As one senior journalist remarked to me, Goa moves simultaneously on two parallel lines. And the beach belt is a whole world away from the hinterland that provides all of Goa's journalists. So the hotels and the party scene appear rarely on their radar, and that too only when disgruntled politicians in the area rake up environmental or other issues.

There is a thriving party scene on the beach belt that could have been happening on some other planet going strictly by the newspapers in Goa. Purely as a marketing play, newspapers here should be allocating resources to ensure adequate coverage of the tourism sector. There are any number of marketers eager to tap the floating tourist population and the newspapers here missing out on big opportunities.

But then even the coverage of day to day issues in Goa's English-language newspapers leaves much to be desired. During the two years I spent in Goa, I can remember barely three or four memorable stories from the state's three English-language newspapers. The regional language newspapers, on the other hand, have stolen a march over their English-language counterparts as publications of record. A comprehensive coverage of Goa, aided by a network of stringers spread all over the state, ensured that the Marathi Tarun Bharat was a newspaper of choice for anyone looking for a bird's eye-view of Goa every morning.

Tarun Bharat's strategy to topple existing market leader Gomantak by investing in people and technology makes an interesting case study in the newspaper business. With very little marketing muscle on the lines of the Times group or Dainik Bhaskar to speak of, the newspaper simply worked at reporting from the grassroots to capture a leadership position in the market. That Tarun Bharat has still not found favour among Goa's Marathi-speaking intelligentsia is another story.

On the other hand, Goa's English-language newspapers have sold out to petty politicians and the mining lobbies as weightier examples from other contributors to this e-book indicate. Lethargy runs so deep that there is little coverage of even the staples like society, courts, crime and health that form the backbone of newspapers all over the world. Owners of English-language newspapers here are so indifferent that the photographers on the rolls have to bring their own cameras to work — something unheard of in the mainstream media.

So the big stories in Goa are buried in two-para dispatches from the mofussils. I still cannot figure out why the dispute between a section of gaunkars in Cuncolim and the Catholic Church received poor display in Goan newspapers. Here was a big story of unresolved caste conflicts that transcended religious conversion and economic prosperity spread over half a millenium. Let alone dwell on the academic angles in the edit pages, Goa's English-language newspapers, barring the Herald, downplayed the story. Even Herald's reportage consisted of allegations and counter allegations from interested parties with out any indepth coverage. I am happy to say that my then newspaper, The Indian Express played up my stories on the episode prominently as the anchor on the front page nationally. Unfortunately even after the national and international media picked it up, there was little improvement in the coverage by the local press.

Another story played out as a farce in Goa's English-language newspapers: when former chief minister Shashikala Kakodkar's estranged husband passed away, the news received prominent display in all the major English-language newspapers. Only the lady's relationship with the deceased was suppressed in the obit!

With complete censorship, voluntary or otherwise, Goan journalists seem to exist in a blissful state of non-competitiveness. Trained to break stories and score one on the competition, I was amazed at the unofficial news pool system that operates at the Press Room at the Panjim Secretariat. The twice-daily 'edit meets' at the Adil Shahi palace ensures that only the very junior reporters intimidated by the Press Room circle break stories of any importance. One could depend on the juniors at The Herald and Gomantak Times (under Ashwin Tombat ) to put out at least one readable story a day.

Understandably, Goa's newspapers survive on a staple of political verbiage all generated from the safe confines of the Press Room. Unverified allegations that would not pass muster with even a trainee in a national newspaper find play on the front pages. With no facility to train journalists in the state, trainees here look towards the Press Room as some kind of a finishing school!

Over the years, the Press Room crowd have attached themselves to the camps of different politicians. It's a temptation common to journalists in every small town and Goan journalists have fallen neck deep in it. With nothing exciting enough, politics becomes the all-consuming passion for 'senior journalists'. So the current storm over journalists accused of obtaining favours from the current BJP-run dispensation comes as no surprise.

It has always been easy for journalists to be sucked into different political camps considering the proliferation of politicians in the state. There are 40 MLAs, three MPs — including one in the Rajya Sabha — and scores of municipal/panchayat level 'leaders' for a population of less than 1.4 million which includes the Gulfies and shippies).

Even junior reporters easily manage to invite a minister or two for family functions. Journalists are also not above seeking the help of politicians to solve problems even in their workplaces. Many of them even grow to depend on the ruling politicians for basics like accommodation in the capital because of inadequate remuneration from their employers.

It's the same story everywhere in the country, but the sheer number of journalists in a big city like Mumbai or Delhi helps mask the dilution of ethics among a select few. Like everywhere else in the

world a few journalists in Goa too happily combine their jobs and elective roles as fixers for politicians. The icing on the cake is however to inveigle into a chief minister's coterie thereby ensuring government contracts for self or family members.

Under the chief ministership of Manohar Parrikar, the issue has hit the headlines especially after Rajan Narayan announced his resignation from the Herald (in September 2003). But during his days in the opposition, Parrikar slogged at wooing the media. As leader of the Opposition, Parrikar could be depended upon to come up with all sorts of files to put the then Congress government on the mat. Journalists looking for a juicy story never returned disappointed. To be fair to Parrikar he did not even hint about the need for a quid pro quo from the journalists tapping him for information on the then Congress government.

Journalists who are now accused of obtaining favours from the incumbent chief minister were even then known to be part of Parrikar's coterie, though a large number of journalists sought out the former leader of the opposition. However with the media eating out of his hands, Parrikar had the mantle of Mr Clean wrapped on his shoulders — either by design or by default. One now gets the feeling that a small group of journalists probably played a part in building Parrikar's reputation with the expectations of being paid back at an appropriate time. Agreed, there is genuine admiration for the man — IIT Bombay alumni, quick acting, with a vision for the middle class, etc. But the cause of good journalism is compromised.

Today, there is very little criticism coming up against the ruling BJP government in Goan newspapers. For instance, there has been very muted coverage of some elements in Parrikar's cabinet — like a minister who is rumoured to be pushing illegals into Europe. Another worthy has a reputation of being a ruthless moneylender whose rumored 'sex scandals' could even put Jalgaon to shame, as the BJP leadership is itself known to have once argued.

The kid-glove treatment meted out to the BJP government has also been extended to the extend Sangh parivar, despite the ideological opposition to it in many sections of the Goan society. Parrikar's handing over government schools to unregistered groups of alleged RSS-linked activists barely registers a presence in local discourse even among members of the minority Christian community traditionally opposed to right-wing Hindu politics.

While the reluctance of local newspapers to rattle the ruling politicians is understandable, there is really no reason for correspondents of outstation newspapers to follow suit. But for a couple of honorable exceptions, correspondents with outstation publications too have decided to toe the government line. Unfortunately for Goa, the market is too small to attract the attention of any national or international investor in the media scene.

Most of the quarter-million or so households in Goa who can afford to do so, already buy a newspaper and a new investor can only hope to net a marginal increase in circulation. The failure of The Times of India to penetrate the Goan market is a case in point. With its financial muscle, the Times was best placed to shake up the Goan market. Even while skirting controversial issues, the newspaper could have made an impact with a comprehensive coverage of Goa. But the newspaper clearly did not see it worthwhile to continue and pulled out after a four-year long presence, and 'Goa edition' plans, in the state.

Even the Sakal group, the other outside group to enter Goa, has not been able to figure out the English-language newspaper market here. Having bought over the Gomantak from the Chowgules, the Sakal group does not seem to be interested in making big-ticket investments in the English-language Gomantak Times. As Goa's third English-language daily continues to bleed, there is a very strong possibility that there would be one less player in the English language market in the near future.

One can only hope that increased competition following the entry of foreign publications in India provides enough incentives for future players to dig their heels deeper into the Goan market. Hopefully, national players in the media business and expatriate Goans will see a market in selling quality journalism in Goa.

## **Chapter 16: An accidental Bhailo**

Rahul GoswamiRahul Goswami, one of Goa's most hardworking and innovative outstation correspondent, covered this state for the Business Standard, in the mid-nineties. He is today based in Singapore. On a lighter note, RG says he was offered, several times during his stint in Goa, bribes by various colleagues envious of his posting as inducement to trade places with them. Instead, he went to Bombay to quarrel with newspaper vendors, went to the Gulf to start up a dot-bomb, went to Singapore to learn Mandarin, and is now wondering if those bribes are still on offer.

Arriving to live and work in 'aparanta' — a place beyond the end, as the Sanskrit texts would have us believe, where time stands still — was always going to be a challenge for the conscientious newspaper correspondent. Even when one does not do so blind, as I comforted myself in 1993.

It was Goa Dourada, Golden Goa, Perola do Oriente, Pearl of the East, Roma do Oriente, and other such colourfulness that I was being assigned to. The imagery was breath-taking — corsairs, corruption and conversions. There were heart-warming tales of gruff compassion — whether from the dashing Marathas or their debonair Portuguese rivals. There were edgy accounts of the rivalries of contentious nationalisms, delicious stories of grand thievery, fabulous stories of immoral profligacy, of debauched viceroys who equalled in pomp and splendour the Asian potentates they dealt with.

This was, I thought to myself, the stuff of a hundred feature stories, the mother-lode of post-colonial memorabilia, the gateway to phantasmagorical explorations. Indeed they were, but in no way that I had imagined at the outset, overcome then by the cultural fecundity of 'aparanta'. Imaging Goa, as a curious ingenue, as a journalist, as an informed participant, has never been an easy task and indeed is one that has grown more onerous over the years.

Indeed the provenance of such a view is a curious one, and yet one that is well-known. The widespread tendency in Western writing of India — and, by extension, of Goa — has been to condense the description of the scenic beauty and natural resourcefulness, the cosmopolitan life and the imagined mercantile prosperity of the early colonial period, into pastel-coloured, palatable images. So it is too with Goa Dourada, or Golden Goa.

The Goa that has been perpetuated in the newsrooms of the media conglomerates of urban India — an English construction, I would like to emphasise — has even now more in common with the hazy feel-good miasma that occulted the communal perceptions of the dharma bum generation that made its way from the West, in a slow and tortuous ganja-laden, booze-sodden crawl, through the tolerant places of the 'Third World'. The difference was, and is, that the dharma bums smoked and drank and blissfully fornicated under the moonlight that bathed the silvery beaches of 'aparanta' and dreamt of equality and human emancipation (to be fair to many of them).

The news editors and feature editors and editors-in-chief and numberless marketing imbeciles who chose to imagine Goa, within the narrow and noisome worlds that defined their own existences in the megapolis of their choosing, had on the other hand no such overarching humaneness, despite generous applications of all that is narcotic and alcoholic. 'Aparanta', I found, may welcome all comers, but it also encourages those processes that sift out the unbelievers.

How, I asked myself, is one to distinguish? What is the Goan-ness that one is seeking to understand and, if possible, to give substance to in a 1,200-word report (under the illiterate regimes that run newsrooms these days, that is a torrent of words)? Can one encapsulate all that seeks to be distilled by this multitude of experiences, of personal encounters, by listening to the narratives of the histories of Goa? And when one does become an ideological sympathiser of the dharma that is 'aparanta', how can one convey it to the hard-eyed stewards who rule over the column centimetres in Bombay or Delhi?

It was a question that had no simple answer. My own method was to attempt to blend in with the rhythms of the village in which I lived, Betim, which lies across the river Mandovi, opposite Panaji. The river is like a slow-moving artery that expresses Goa — the rusting, elderly ferries of the River Navigation Department chug across the gap with a ponderous regularity, and in doing so determine the schedules of legions of Goans who live within a short bus ride of the water — 'aparanta' tends not to respect time-pieces worn on one's wrist.

In this I was marginally successful. Mahadeo was one of my neighbours — a generously-bellied Betim elder who with surprising agility climbed into his canoe and laid his meagre nets along the river shallows. Mahadeo was also adept at catching river crabs, and when one morning I found a pair — neatly trussed and no more than two hours old — squirming outside my front door I realised with a thrill that I was accepted by the Betim-kars.

Mahadeo — despite his belly a very handsome man with a tanned visage crowned by a mop of white curls, with a commanding presence and possessing an enviable facility with a little skiff barely a foot across — was only one of a series of revelations. There were the nearby family Bhosale, whom I had been warned "were trouble", the "rowdy boys" of the village who tended to be destructive, the crooked 'possorkars' from whom I would be forced to purchase my groceries. The roll-call of potential villains was long indeed.

All unfounded. The rhythms of 'aparanta', as they found this 'bhailo' in Betim, ensured harmony. My dilemma was, how might I convey this to urban-bred news editors who have little tolerance for a mofussil correspondent's rural romanticism, as they saw it? Sometimes, fortune intervenes. In my case,

while reporting for Business Standard, it came in the form of C P Kuruvilla, to my mind the most super-aware news editor of the last two decades.

Kuru, as we called him, was (he has voluntarily withdrawn from the circus that is print media, hence 'was') a maverick before the term found fashion, and was so within the relatively severe environs of the Ananda Bazar Patrika. Kuru provided the intellectual get-up-and-go that impelled a legion of correspondents to hit the road in search of stories that were to become memorable ones, and even more remarkable, was able to do so in the context of a mainstream business newspaper.

Will you find a Kuru nowadays? No, is the likely answer. Editors, sad to say, tend to be almost uniformly useless. It is left to the greater community of journalists to provide the context, the space, the encouragement, and the means. The encouragement, context and professional support has perforce now to come from within. This working alternative has not only become desirable, it has become imperative for for the non-sarkari journalists.

The problem is a systemic one today; there should have been manuals passed on, but system administrators have deleted them. Where binaries perish, we must turn to mnemonics. There was a time when some of us in The Sunday Observer successfully ran a tactical media counter-insurgency within the framework.

An immediate provocation at the time was a faux editorial regime presided over by an imposter named Pritish Nandy. Every Friday (dak edition) and every Saturday (city edition) we would have to redefine and re-take our territory and remind the insurgents that they had no place in it. It was hard work — outright threats and go-slows, files full of protest notes and minutes of meetings, and the halting evolution of a code that cut across the barriers that traditionally define a functioning news organism. I think it worked well at the time — the guerrillas who did this are still here.

Our questions were basic — why can sanitation not be "sold"? Why can education not be? Labour not be? Health not be? The elderly not be? That this not only assumes but reflects the dreadful significance of "sold" indicates why we still need guerrillas in the newsroom. These guerrillas, if they still exist and can still be drafted, will come up against some formidable mantras. "All things are more or less of equal import: all are only daily" is one. If you ask one of the system administrators she will reply: "All data are equal, but some are more equal than others."

That is why, we are reminded by those who give the system administrators their wages, the media have produced their own heroines and myths, which can compete with the traditional ones and moreover happily embroider over them. I was once advised that "journalism asks us to invest in the stock-market of momentary sensation". After such sexualist reduction, what forgiveness?

The difficulty lies in the accepted impermanence of our art, our skill, and the relentless transformation of today's news feature into tomorrow's newsprint into the day after tomorrow's wrapping paper for pakodas. The media that we construct (from the point of view of the consumer, and the brokers who interpose themselves between writer and audience) offers titillating speculations on danger, scandal, death, nightmare, opportunity.

Like a television talk-show host tripping loquaciously on industrial-strength amphetamines, it rattles noisily on, uncaring of the quiet interjections about sanitation, infant mortality, unreported police atrocities, tribal communities flooded out of their homes. And that is so both in an India that has reclaimed 'aparanta' without caring to know the topography of Goa, as it is in the desolate urban scapes that seek to define the middle classes who — reliable sources say — are the new India that seeks to spend.

The rules of the game have changed and we do need a new set of guerrillas. Newsroom disobedience is not what it used to be (is it at all what it was?). Who is willing to explore the new paradigm? It is so easy to stay in the bunker of assurances. No conclusions, no certainty; only performance analyses, management matrices, and practical wagers. We really do need a bunch of newsroom narkasurs here.

Can one seek for and hope for such a dimension in Goa? Will 'aparanta' provide it? Not readily. Early in my apprenticeship as a correspondent in Goa I ran into the local brand of sarkari thought. It was one of those endless afternoons in the old press room, the one in the corner of the Idalcao. A minion from one of the chambers above clattered in through the swing doors and muttered something. He was half asleep and so were the occupants of the press room, those who were not wrestling with the typewriters.

We all streamed out, following the minion. Through the wooden security gate we filed, the one that is supposed to detect the presence of suspicious metal objects on one's person, and up the stairs we climbed. Across a landing whose timbers had been scuffed shiny by the passage of tired footwear, then

down a verandah over which hung tattered pieces of plastic in an ugly and half-hearted attempt to keep out the rain. And finally into some functionary's room.

It turned out to be occupied by some minister, who lolled indulgently behind a desk. He was Luizinho Faleiro, before he became a big wheel, but who was even at the time odious. We chose seats. Greasy khitmutgars passed amongst us, proffering cups of tea and soggy biscuits. Luizinho grinned a sepulchral grin, as if privately awaiting the demise of one or another of those who had just seated themselves. Then, as if disappointed by the absence of such drama, he coughed and began.

"I have called you here," he announced brusquely, "to comment on..." and there followed some dull government programme or the other. Luizinho, with another graveyard grin, then collected his belly, cleared his throat and barked: "Take down!". And then proceeded to provide what I can only call dictation. To the credit of about a third of his audience, they did not whip out a notebook to scribble. The rest, shamefully, played the part of stenographers. It was my first encounter with the Establishment's view of the Press, and of the willingness of that part of the state's press to permit such a relationship.

Luizinho was merely following tradition, just as surely as the passage of the full barges bearing iron ore, which announced themselves with a dull throb as the red mineral made its way to the mouth of the Zuari and the hungry ore carriers berthed there. For they were — and are — one and the same. Government functionary and river vessel — both vehicles of the powers that seek to control 'aparanta'. Does it work? Should it?

It does in fact work. Teotonio de Souza, before he departed from the Xavier Centre of Historical Research, had chatted with me on a few occasions. He had been, then, as critical of the Church as he was of the gradual change he saw in Goa's politics and middle-class political consciousness. He had told me, up there in the haze of one Porvorim afternoon, how he had been amused to read that "Goans are largely a T-shirt wearing population".

That comment came from one Arun Sinha, who was then, and as far as I know continues to be, editor of The Navhind Times. Teotonio seemed at first mildly intrigued by this person's interpretation of the Goanness of Goans. But then the historian also revealed a resigned bitterness about what else he perceived in the journalist's prose. "One wonders," he wrote later, "if to be wholly Indian one has to chew 'paan' and spit it all around, or replace T-shirts or G-shorts with kurta-pajama or safari suit."

It is part of a misguided mission which propagates itself apparently tirelessly and without mercy — that there are caricatures which continue to be attributed to Goans. Very often, they are invented by bureaucrats and self-styled "professionals" who want to teach Goans to be less easy-going or less un-Indian. I suspect that one Manohar Parrikar, the current Big Wheel in the circus that is Goa's government of the day, is just as keen to socially re-engineer the Goan masses. Nor is he the first, nor most zealous of those who have wished to do so.

The trouble for the correspondent in Goa — zealous or cantankerous or otherwise — is that one never seems to escape the impression that, in a certain way, de-colonisation has not yet been digested. It is not that the departure of the Portuguese is regretted (there are exceptions, of course) but the question of why, Portuguese colonisation remains so strenuously berated. How is one to internalise this truth, seek to convey to our readers the paradoxes that abound in our reading of this beautiful, bewitching 'aparanta'? How can one negotiate for oneself the editorial space to do so?

I do not mean this to be a disheartening preface for the hapless correspondent who finds herself deposited in Goa, without the benefit of an immediate acquaintance with Peter's (St Inez), Joao's (opposite the now notorious Hotel Neptune), or Martin's (whose staff has long since relapsed into slumber). Given the dismal state of the print media in India today, the days of the full-time state correspondent seem to be distant memories (my friend and comrade Prakash Kamat has on the other hand proven to be remarkably resilient!).

The simple truth is that the "Goan culture" that is so venally peddled aboard the tourist boats that shamelessly and noisily ply the Mandovi off Panaji (how I wish they would cease) is far from easily definable. Cultures never do remain isolated or static, and certainly not the seaborne cultures of which Goa, Govapuri, Gopakapatnam, became a part.

And it is indeed true that the mechanism which supported the 'Estado de India' nourished a very unique place, one which internalised the life-affirming concept behind a word redolent of the very essence of Goan-ness, a word that resounds with wisdom — sussegado.

## **Chapter 17: Why Konkani failed its readers...**

Raju NayakRaju Nayak, one of the home-grown products in journalism that Goa can take pride in, has worked on the newsdesks of mainstream Marathi newspapers in the media-capital of Mumbai, has edited the Sunaparant in a tumultuous period (as this essays shows) and today tells the story through the Indian Express to the ire of politicians who would like a more flattering image to be put out. Together with Devika Sequeira, he is behind the recently launched and yet-unnamed forum that meets monthly to discuss issues of relevance and concern to the media profession.

If I am told to evaluate Marathi and Konkani journalism in Goa, I would surely rank the Marathi media ahead of its Konkani counterparts.

Despite of it being accused of creating a rift between Hindu and Catholic masses over the issue of Goa's merger with Maharashtra in the 1960s and 1970s, the Marathi press has managed better to maintain the standards of journalism. The Marathi media in Goa has all along borne the torch of social activism, by backing the cause of the 'bahujan samaj' or the backward communities, and also fought hard to expose corruption in Goa's polity.

In comparison, the Konkani press hopelessly failed to live up to people's expectations. The only Konkani daily, Sunaparant failed to instill journalistic values in the Konkani media. The newspaper, which was originally set up to promote Konkani, never became a complete newspaper in its own right. Rather it has become, in recent years, a platform for sections of the Konkani language activists in Goa. The Konkani press in general abjured professionalism in order to cosy up with the political party in power.

On the other hand, the Marathi press was infused with a new vitality following the launching of several new publications at regular intervals. Gomantak, Tarun Bharat, Navaprabha and Rashtramat have been product of Marathi journalism flourishing in this Konkani-dominated state.

A glance at the circulation figures of these dailies unearth the story behind the real tastes of Goan readers. It is estimated that Marathi newspapers collectively sell more than 50,000 copies per day. In comparison, the sole Konkani daily sells less than 500 copies per day.

The Goan newspaper reader's search for quality has resulted in Tarun Bharat, for long published from Belgaum, becoming the state's highest-read daily, pushing even the market leader Gomantak to second place.

The success of Tarun Bharat stems from its management's professional approach to journalism. With a wide network of young stringers without any ideological orientation spread across the state, Tarun Bharat provides comprehensive coverage of Goa like no other newspaper sold in the state. Tarun Bharat also ushered in winds of change in the Goan media with supplements and booklets to cater to popular tastes. While cannibalising a large chunk of Gomantak readers, Tarun Bharat also attracted new readers from among the youth and women, thereby revolutionising Marathi journalism.

Gomantak's management never realised the threat posed by Tarun Bharat till it was too late. In my opinion, the Gomantak management's lackadaisical attitude towards its readers worked in favour of Tarun Bharat. For instance, Gomantak's staff strength is higher than Tarun Bharat's, but most of them are concentrated only in Panaji.

Tarun Bharat also invested heavily in news gathering operations. Apart from widening its correspondents' network, the newspaper also equipped them with amenities like fax machines and cameras. Tarun Bharat also set up district-level bureaus and local offices all over the state as a strategy to source local content.

(Tarun Bharat then managed to steam-roll even smaller newspapers like Rashtramat which lost its readership base. Despite the backing of powerful industrialists in Goa, Rashtramat lost out despite its history. The newspaper, which swayed Goan thinkers during the Opinion Poll, failed to instill a sense of professionalism. Rashtramat is now trying to capture lost ground with hard hitting editorials by Sitaram Tengse, besides addition of supplements.)

Gomantak's failure in the face of Tarun Bharat's onslaught is an example of how a market leader can fail by sitting on its laurels. The Gomantak was originally started in Goa to advocate the state's merger with Maharashtra and furthering the cause of the Marathi language. Gomantak owed much of its success to its former editor, Madhav Gadkari. By the own admission, Gadkari gave Gomantak a Hindu face and supported the cause of Marathi through his speeches. Mr Gadkari's enthusiasm, foresight and hard work were instrumental in the growth of Gomantak. The newspaper's circulation shot up from 3000 copies per day to 15,000 copies per day and kept growing. His successor, Narayan Athavale, known for his inimitable style of writing, kept up Gadkari's legacy.

Madhav Gadkari has been always accused of fostering pro-Maharashtra sentiments, fueling the



language controversy and creating disharmony between Goa's main Hindu and Catholic communities. Konkani protagonists continue to level these allegations and suspect that Gomantak is still aiming to merge Goa with Maharashtra. Gadkari admitted that he had come to Goa to campaign during 1967 elections. Though initially he was not the editor, he used to write regularly for Gomantak. In all Gadkari spent ten years in Goa.

Despite being labelled an outsider, the Marathi press in Goa owes its professionalism to Gadkari. He turned Gomantak into a platform for the Goan bahun community. He started the Shiv Jayanti celebrations in Goa and, in his tenure of 10 years, he fought several intellectual and political battles.

To begin with Gadkari was very close to Goa's first chief minister, Dayanand Bandodkar. The relationship proved profitable, with Bandodkar leaking several stories to Gadkari that were published prominently in Gomantak. Later on, the two fell out, and Bandodkar stopped government advertisements to Gomantak. Bandodkar went on to accuse Gadkari and the Gomantak of vitiating communal harmony in Goa, in a complaint to the Press Council of India.

Gadkari believed that in the Vishal Gomantak (a 'greater Goa' state that included within Goa areas outside its current boundaries) he envisaged, the rift between Hindu and Catholic communities in Goa would be solved peacefully.

Gomantak has played a big role in the development of Marathi in Goa, by creating two generations of writers and journalists in the state. In contrast, the Konkani media failed to create an intellectual constituency in the state.

#### In Sunaparant

During my tenure as editor of Sunaparant, between 1989 and 1995, I strived to inject some amount of professionalism in the newspaper. Unfortunately, I did not receive the needed support from the stalwarts of the Konkani movement. They never wanted the Sunaparant to become a professionally-run publication. My efforts faced severe opposition and I personally went through acute stress.

Purshottam Kakodkar, Uday Bhembre and his group led the movement against me. With the help of Congress politician, and former chief minister, Ravi Naik, they managed to have Uday Bhembre installed as Chief Editor of the daily. Unfortunately, Uday Bhembre never had the time for this newspaper. He just concentrated on how to sabotage my attempts to professionalise the newspaper.

During my tenure, Sunaparant had the best of supplements on Diwali and other occasions. We even managed to bring out special evening editions during Iran-Iraq war. Sunaparant's campaigns during the agitations against the Konkani Railway and Nylon 6,6 projects was followed up by other newspapers in Goa.

We even started a fund raising drive during the 1990 Shiroda canoe disaster and helped restart the ferry service. In addition, more than 20 books compiling different articles, investigative series, fiction and a dictionary was published during my tenure.

Only readers will tell whether during his eight years tenure Uday Bhembre had taken up even a single issue and fought it out till the end. Readers acutely felt the non-professionalism of the product during Bhembre's period.

Bhembre held the position as Chief Editor for eight years later when the newspaper had but lost all its base. Sunaparant is owned by a mine owner and hence protection of corporate interests, rather than the fostering of Konkani, has played a big role in Bhembre's continuation as Chief Editor at Sunaparant.

In the end, Bhembre had to go after running a series of editorials against Chief Minister Manohar Parrikar. Until then, the owners of Sunaparant were oblivious of Bhembre's lethargy, inefficiency and inactivity that took an immense toll on the newspaper. An example: during his tenure, Bhembre failed to call even a single meeting of staff reporters, let alone stringers.

Once again, Dattaraj Salgaocar, owner of Sunaparant, has recently made up his mind to re-build and re-launch the newspaper on a commercial basis. This is a welcome step. Whatever may be the language of newspaper — the language is merely a tool for communication — its success depends on the information provided, in-depth analysis and its commitment to important issues.

In an effort to make Sunaparant a 'mouthpiece' for Konkani, Bhembre seems to have overlooked all these issues. This is precisely why Bhembre had to seek the support of a newspaper like The Navhind Times to counter the likes of Jaisingrao Rane, despite heading Sunaparant himself.

Needless to add, such incidents have proved detrimental to the cause of Konkani. Almost 45 years

ago, Konkani protagonists had to depend on the crutches of Marathi newspapers to enhance their cause. The situation is no better today, largely due to the apathetic nature of the leaders of the Konkani movement.

### Vital ingredients

In my opinion, the major requirements for a successful daily newspaper are: a state-of-the-art establishment, a steadfast commitment to the reader, comprehensive coverage of all sections of the society, and the ultimate aim of becoming the voice of the Goan populace.

Sadly, all these factors remained low on the priority of Konkani protagonists. Professionalism was never on their agenda. With an eye on the leadership of the Konkani movement, the likes of Bhembre used the newspaper to carry out attacks against all his opponents during the elections to the Konkani Bhasha Mandal

Bhembre has still not given up. He is now on the advisory board of the soon-to-be-revamped Sunaparant. This move obviously suggests the intention of halting the progress of the restructured newspaper.

When I took over as an Editor of Sunaparant, Uday Bhembre, then editor, was asked to vacate his post. Not surprisingly, this angered Bhembre. Some of his friends, who had been pampered with free publicity, continuously worked against me.

To illustrate how this worked, one can cite here the example of columnist Dilip Borkar whose satirical column "Borkari", on various ills plaguing Goa, gained all-round popularity. Borkar had even even taken humorous digs at me through his writings. But, that apart the column was a masterpiece as regards its content and the lucidity of the language was concerned.

But it hurt a number of people, and added them to my list of enemies. Uday Bhembre, on taking charge as the Editor, stopped this column and replaced it with another one penned by one of his supporters. However it did not find favor with the reader and failed miserably.

Much of my work at Sunaparant — like a supplement on business, in-depth analysis of important events, expert views and analysis by experts in relation to important events, a well compiled Sunday edition — continues with little change.

Dattaraj Salgaocar himself admitted that Sunaparant had become popular with readers, but reactions from politicians made him restless. It may be recalled that Sunaparant had mercilessly attacked Ravi Naik for usurping the chief ministerial gaddi (throne).

Dattaraj, being close to Naik, could not digest this criticism. What seems to have irked Salgaocar was Sunaparant's highlighting, on its front-page, the news of the nomination of Vasant Pilgaonkar (a family friend and close aide-cum-adviser of Ravi Naik) as the Goa Public Service Commission chief.

Strongly retaliating against this, Dattaraj called for a meeting at Pilgaonkar's residence. And Pilgaonkar, at this meeting, lectured me on journalism. A decision to name Uday Bhembre as the Chief Editor was finalised. Interestingly, Bhembre is a relative of Pilgaonkar and close to Ravi Naik.

Bhembre got a dose of his own medicine when Manohar Parrikar took over as chief minister. On realizing that Bhembre refused to toe his line, Parrikar publicly blasted him, and, in turn, Sunaparant. The age-old tradition of industrialists supporting the government came into play here. By the same token, Salgaocar unsurprisingly supported Parrikar.

Most importantly, the group of journalists close to Parrikar is now getting attracted to Sunaparant. According to the grapevine, the government is doling out a largesse of Rs 50 lakhs (five million rupees) by way of advertisement revenue to Sunaparant. How can a newspaper which expects revenue in the form of advertisements from any incumbent government remain loyal to its reader?

I believe, a Konkani daily has to follow an independent line to succeed. It has to protect the interests and self-respect of all Goans. In the process, a newspaper like Sunaparant should not hesitate in stepping on the toes of a section of the Konkani protagonists. Whoever edits the newspaper should realise that a news item killed by Sunaparant would be grabbed by the Marathi and English-language press.

Any sort of defalcation, even if it pertains to the darling of Konkaniwadis meaning the Goa Konkani Academy or Asmitai Pratisthan, should necessarily find an important place in the pages of this newspaper. And that too, before any rival publication vigorously pursues the issue. Various issues like the efficiency of the teaching community, the state of education institutions, or the pathetic condition of

Konkani in schools, have to be taken up with missionary zeal. Only a relentless pursuit of such issues will take Sunaparant to the masses.

#### Lessons to be learnt

It could probably draw on the lessons from the Marathi press . It holds Marathi dear to its heart, without in any way making reference to the Marathi movement. At a time when veteran journalists like Gadhari and Athavale forcefully argued the cause of Marathi, it was done without prejudice to other issues of social and political importance which continued to find place in their newspaper.

Gomantak was always on the forefront in fighting alongside Goans on vital issues that cropped up from time to time. In my opinion, although Tarun Bharat has a greater circulation than its immediate rival Gomantak, I would still give full marks to the latter for its vigorous fighting spirit.

During my involvement in the student agitation, despite it being ideologically oriented towards our policy and mindset, Rashtramat did not entertain us. On the contrary, Gomantak, while holding diametrically opposite views, gave us wide publicity. Further support was found in the editorials. It has been the policy of Rashtramat and Sunaparant to always be on the side of the Establishment.

The roots of the decline of Sunaparant lies precisely in this same policy. It has always given a wide berth to any agitation. Given the fact that Sunaparant is a Konkani daily, it does not necessarily mean that all literature pertaining to and written by Konkani litterateurs has to find a mention in it.

Sunaparant has to nurture, cultivate and discover new journalistic talent. I was instrumental in encouraging Marathi protagonists to write for Sunaparant. As a resultantly, Sunaparant found readers among the supporters of Marathi as well. Such efforts have to be repeated.

To live long, Sunaparant has to sell. The issues highlighted by the newspaper have to be discussed, and a conducive atmosphere in favor of the newspaper needs to be created. Is this too much to expect?

### **Chapter 18: Romi Konkani, hanging on a cliff**

Peter RaposoPeter Rapose considers himself "just a five-year-old priest" given the responsibility of editing a seventy-year-old Konkani weekly. Says he modestly: "The only thing I have besides my priestly studies is a Diploma in Journalism from Xavier's Mumbai and a lot of enthusiasm to do the best I can." The enthusiasm shows; recently the publication he edits put up its website (something other larger publications in Goa don't take seriously) at <http://www.v-ixtt.com>. He has earlier worked for three years in Bombay Archdiocese.

To say that Roman-script Konknni journalism did not make a mark would be a fallacy. However, that it did not maintain and live up to the challenges of modern day journalism is a fact that caused its very decline.

The total number of Konknni-speaking people spread in India (Maharashtra, Goa, Karnataka and Kerala) and scattered across smaller pockets across the world is five million (or, 50 lakh). This population of Konknni-speaking people is further divided between people who write the language and read it in four different scripts: Devnagri, Roman, Kannada, and the Malayalam script. While the Konknni people of Kerala use the Malayalam script and Konknni people of Karnataka use the Kannada script, the Devanagiri and Roman divides the Konknni people of Goa and coastal Maharashtra.

Among the four scripts, the population that understands or follows Roman script (RS) Konknni would be around 300,000 to 400,000 approximately. (This is a rough calculation based on the 1991 census.) However, going by facts and figures of Konknni journalism on the whole, we could definitely put Roman script Konknni journalism as the fore runner.

#### A Brief History of Roman Konknni Journalism

The first Konknni weekly Udenticem Sallok was published in Pune by Edward Bruno D'Souza in 1899. It started as a monthly periodical which later became fortnightly. In 1894 it was closed down. It came out in Konknni-Portuguese. In 1891, O Luzo-Concanim was published. It was a bilingual weekly in Konknni-Portuguese. Aleixo Caitano Jose Francisco was its editor.

From 1892 to 1897, A Luz, O Bombaim Esse, A Luo, O Intra Jijent, O Opiniaio Nacional Konknni-Portuguese weeklies were published. In 1907 Sanjechem Nokhetr was born. B F Cabral was the editor of this paper. Since it was published from Mumbai, this paper carried Mumbai (then called Bombay) news in detail. We can say that this periodical is the first newspaper in Konknni.

Soon after this Roldao Noronha started a monthly named Katolik Sovostkai, which later became a

fortnightly and then ceased publication. In 1907, Honarato Furtado and Francis Xavier Furtado published a weekly named O Goano from Mumbai. This weekly was independently divided into three parts: Portuguese, Konknni and English. In 1912 Konknan Magazine a monthly magazine was started by Joaquim Campose. In 1914, a monthly named Dor Mhoineachi Rotti came into existence in Karachi. Fr. Vincent Lobo and Fr. Ludovic Pereira were instrumental in starting this magazine and it had a circulation of 8,000 subscribers. Today, the same Rotti is published and printed in Goa; Fr. Moreno de Souza is the present editor.

In 1916, Sebastiao Xavier Vaz started Amigo do Povo, a Konknni-English weekly. In 1919 O Goano and O Amigo do Povo were combined and named O Amigo do Povo Goano, which continued as a Konknni-English weekly. Manuel Fernandes was the editor. It stopped in 1926. In 1919, three more periodicals were started in Mumbai — Ave Maria (Konknni-English-Portuguese), edited by Antonio D'Cruz, Goa Mail, a Konknni-English periodical edited by Dr. Vasco da Gama and F X Afonso, and Popular Magazine (first as monthly and then as fortnightly) which was edited by Joaquim Jose Silvestre.

Amcho Sonvsar, a weekly, was started in 1927 by Jose Caitan Francis De Souza. It was purely in Konknni. In 1930 Agnus Dei, a Konknni-English monthly was started and went on being published for 13 years. Fr. Alarich Pereira and Joaquim Felix Pereira looked after this periodical. In the same year, Respecio Alfonso and Roque Pereira started a weekly called Goa Times. It came out first in Konknni-English and, then, only in Konknni. Dr Simon C Fernandes was the editor of Goa Times.

In 1932 Antonio Vincente D'Cruz started a small-sized daily named Konknni Bulletin. This was published from Mumbai and it too continued for 13 years. In 1933, Joao Lazarus De Souza started the Goan Observer, a Konknni-English daily. In 1934 Inacio Caitano Carvalho started Emigrant, a weekly which later on turned to a daily.

In 1930, Luis de Menezes started a weekly from Goa named Amcho Ganv. In 1932, two other Portuguese-Konknni periodicals came into existence: Porjecho Adhar, which was started by Jose Baptist Vaz, lasted for 30 years and Padri Jose Vaz, which was started by Francis Xavier D'Costa.

In 1933 Vauraddeancho Ixtt, a Konknni weekly was started by Fr. Arsencio Fernandes and Fr. Graciano Moraes. It is still run by the Pilar Society till date. This writer is its present editor. In 1934 Gova Nova, a Konknni-English-Portuguese weekly, was started by Venktesh Alvekar.

From 1936-50 Mhojem Magazin, Catholic Indian, Amcho Sonvsar, Novem Jivit, Goenkrancho Ixtt, Gova Kamgar, Gomantak, Porjecho Ulas, Gova, Chabuk, Golden Goa, Konknan Times, Sontos, Aitarachem Vachop, O Herald, Konknni Journal, Tujem Raj Amkam Ieum, all from Mumbai were in existence. Besides these, Udentechem Nekhetr, Niz Goa, Jai Gomantak, Gomant Bharti, Voice of Goa, Azad Goem, Sot Uloi, Porjecho Avaz, Ghe Uzvadd, all in Mumbai, and Uzvadd from Africa were published.

After the Liberation of Goa, Felicio Cardoso started a weekly named Goencho Sad and later changed it to Sot. 1963 saw a weekly named Uzvadd started by Ameterio Pais. In 1967, the two weeklies Sot and A Vida were combined and Divtti, a daily, was brought into existence by Felicio Cardoso. Hugo Souza was the managing director of Divtti. Later, Felicio Cardozo turned Divtti into a weekly called Loksad. During this period, Goa saw a lots of other periodicals like Gomant Suria, Goencho Fuddari, and the like. During the same period, Mumbai witnessed the birth of Goan Express, Goan Sports Weekly, Porjecho Ixtt, Vavraddi, and Cine Times. Today none of these publications are in existence.

In 1970, Gomantak Private Limited Society started a daily called Uzvadd. Evagrio George was the editor of this paper. Later he started two of his own weeklies and named Novo Uzvadd and Prokas.

In 1970, periodicals such as The Blade, Goencho Mog and Goenkar were started. In 1980, Fr. Planton Faria started Goencho Avaz which was later changed to Goenchim Kirnnam. In the same year, Dionisio D'Souza started a monthly and called it Goenchem Ful.

In 1982, following a people's initiative, a Konknni daily called Novem Goem was born. Gurnath Kelekar, Dr F M Rebello and Felicio Cardoso served as its editors. In the same year, Prabhakar Tendulkar started his own publication called Goenkar. In 1983, Fr. Freddy J da Costa started a Konknni colour-printed magazine named Gulab, which still continues. In 1989 Fr. Freddy Da Costa also started a daily called Goencho Avaz which became a fortnightly after one and a half year. However, it had to be

stopped due to financial burdens. Today he comes out with occasional issues of Goencho Avaz.

Currently, the Goan Review is the only Konknni-English bi-monthly magazine published from Mumbai. It is edited by Fausto V. da Costa. In 1996 an English-Konknni fortnightly called the Konknan Mail was started from Panjim. Cyril D'Cunha and Jose Salvador Fernandes edited the English and Konknni section respectively.

The past of Roman Konknni Journalism is perhaps unprecedented in the history of vernacular languages of India, where umpteen numbers of periodicals — not proportionate to size of the population of speakers and readers of the language mushroomed to meet the needs of the readers in Roman Konknni. At the same time, it is equally disheartening to note the sharp decline it underwent. Today Vauraddeancho Ixtt is the only weekly and Gulab is the only monthly that exists as complete periodicals in Roman Konknni journalism.

Several reasons could be pointed out for having contributed to this downfall:

- \* Publishers failed to unite and join forces to meet the wider scope and greater market they could have realised.
- \* Publications failed to exploit the then existing journalistic demand of the people in a systematic and collective way.
- \* Publications failed to meet the demands of modern-day journalism.
- \* Many of the publications didn't work because of internal bickering and lack of patronage.
- \* Financial problems were a common factor of most of these publications.
- \* Elders failed to inculcate of love for reading Konknni among the younger generations.
- \* The western influence, along with the popularization of the English language in Goa, was highly detrimental to the growth of Konknni.
- \* After Devnagri script was granted official status, Roman script was looked down upon.

The Why of Roman script Konknni

Goa consists of two major religious communities, the Hindus and the Christians. Due to historical developments, especially after the religious persecution and the destruction of Konknni literature by the Portuguese, the Hindu community had to depend on the neighboring Marathi speaking areas to meet the needs of their cultural, social and religious life. Marathi, which is akin to the Konknni language, was adopted by the Hindu community as a medium of their expression or communication and fulfillment of spiritual, cultural and educational needs.

The Catholic community, however, had to face bitter experiences. At first the Portuguese ruler imposed Portuguese as their medium of communication. In the course of time, the Portuguese Bishops of Goa and the Portuguese missionaries realized that this was not viable. And so in order to educate the Christians and strengthen their faith, the Church authorities had to take recourse to Konknni, which was spoken by the people.

Due to the existing political situation, under which the Church of Goa lived, it was unthinkable to have religious literature in Devnagri Konknni. Already the medium of education was the Portuguese. The Goan clergy was being trained in the seminaries through an extensive use of Latin, Portuguese and other Western languages. Therefore the only solution to impart the Christian Doctrinal teachings to the masses in Konknni was by using the Roman script.. It was against this background that Roman (or Romi) script made inroads in Konknni literature.

In the course of time, the Portuguese language could not meet the bare economic needs of the people and gradually they had to learn English in order to get access to jobs outside Goa. Thus the Catholic community was completely cut off from the Devnagri roots.

With the advent of Liberation and after the official status was granted to Konknni with Devnagri as its official script, the younger generation is now coming in increasing touch with the Devanagiri script. If

the trend continues successfully, we hope that after 25 to 40 years or so, we will have a new generation to whom reading Konknni in the Devanagiri script will be easy. Till then, the present generation will need the services of Roman script Konknni for at least another 30 to 40 years. This is a foregone conclusion.

However this is not to water down the bright chances Romi Konknni journalism has in the future. If, in the course of coming 25 years it makes large strides in terms of excellent literary, scientific and religious publications and keeps abreast with modern journalistic trends, then Romi Konknni will not easily die but will survive for a long time to come.

#### Present-day Romi Konknni media

The weekly Vavraddeanchi Ixtt and the monthly, Gulab are the only complete Romi Konknni publications of Goa today. Recently, in early October 2003, Ixtt celebrated its 70th annual day and Gulab has completed 20 years of existence. Today Vauraddeancho Ixtt (Worker's Friend) is the only weekly that has survived (since 1933) and is thriving to meet the present day challenges of the fast moving media. Started in 1933 in the backdrop of the spread of Communism, the weekly was to reach out the working class and people at the grassroots to educate, inform and educate them on Communism vis-a-vis religion. However, over the years, and as it gained wider popularity, the scope extended to the coverage of social, political, cultural and religious themes. Ixtt can boast of a glorious past as one weekly that provided news and views that satisfied the reading appetite of a large readership in Goa and Mumbai. Having run by priests and the Society of Pilar, its credibility and respect always remained consistent.

Ixtt's contribution to the freedom movement of Goa is worth the mention. Ixtt under the aegis of the Society of Pilar followed a line of thought closer to the aspiration of the freedom movement of our Motherland India and Goa. It was on the Vespers of the independence of India that Ixtt began to publish from the precincts of the old Monastery of Pilar, where its editorial office and press was housed.

The weekly enjoyed quite good freedom to express itself without rigorous Portuguese censorship upto the early 50's. However, the picture started changing after the Liberation of Dadra and Nagar Haveli and the freedom struggle movement to liberate Goa from the clutches of the Portuguese. During this period, the Press buckled under the pressures of rigorous Portuguese censorship. Nothing could be published in Goa without getting it censored by the Portuguese Police with the rubber-stamp of approval that read 'Visado pela censura' (Seen by the Censor).

Ixtt, under the editorship first of Fr. Conceicao Rodrigues (1944-54) and later of Fr. Jeronimo Pereira (1954-69), had to face insurmountable pressures to toe the Portuguese line. In order to survive most of the times, Ixtt maintained silence towards the policies of Salazar the Portuguese dictator without however openly criticizing the Portuguese Government, which would be suicidal. But this silence was construed as opposition to the Portuguese Sovereignty in Goa.

On August 12, 1961, three months before the liberation of Goa, the Governor Vassalo da Silva, by his decree, suspended the publication of Ixtt for 90 days as a punishment for not being patriotic towards Portugal and showing pro-India tendencies. Thus Ixtt was the only paper of Goa which remained firm and suffered for its nationalistic aspirations.

Today Ixtt still continues to be popular. Since more than a year, Ixtt has seen lot of changes in content and presentation. In keeping with modern trends in journalism and the needs of readers, Ixtt is slowly but steadily progressing. At present Ixtt has almost 7000 regular subscribers and in fact this number is increasing at an unexpected rate. After a systematic campaign started recently, Ixtt hopes to cross the 10,000 figure before 2004. While Ixtt was online since 1999 sharing a link on Goacom.com, today it has its own website (<http://www.v-ixtt.com>).

Gulab is another magazine, which is on the lips of every Romi Konknni reader in Goa and even abroad. Started in 1983 by Fr. Freddy D'Costa, who continues to be its editor, Gulab has maintained a certain standard in its language and has strived to keep up the tempo of advancing journalism.

This monthly is printed in a magazine format, with an attractive glossy and coloured cover. Writings of interests to the young, old, children and women and on literature are included, besides covering news on films, Konknni language and culture. Sports and tiatr have projected this monthly as a popular family magazine. Gulab is also online with its own website (<http://www.gulabonline.com>). By running this magazine single handedly since the last 20 years, Fr. Freddy D'Costa will surely go down in the annals of Roman Konknni journalism. If the Gulab (literally meaning 'rose') is still blooming it is because of the support of its founder and his Press — New Age Printers.

## Scope & Challenges?

A large section of the Konknni-speaking people still reads Roman Konknni. This section reads neither English nor the Devnagri and is totally dependent on Roman Konknni literature. Besides there are a lot of people who read English as well as Roman Konknni, who want to read in the vernacular and get a different slant in coverage. Therefore, to say that the demand for Roman Konknni will go for another 25 to 40 years will not be inaccurate. This is strongly complimented by the Church factor. Meaning, till the Church transliterates its entire set of Roman-script liturgical, ritual and other holy books to Devanagiri, the use of Roman Script will not die.

There is also an increasingly felt demand among the Diaspora population of Romi Konknni-speaking people who are migrating to other countries over the globe. This population will also take more than a generation to assimilate the language or culture of the residing countries. Further, if care is taken to make these papers or periodicals at the same time competitive, attractive, people-friendly and useful, then the scope and longevity of Roman Konknni journalism will be ensured.

Roman Konknni journalism needs to be more aggressive in their marketing strategies. Over the years, it has relied more on well wishers and only subscribers. Many times huge loses have incurred and had to be borne by publishers. It cannot afford to rely on donors, individual persons or trusts for its existence. Without shedding its principles, it needs to look to adapting to new trends, being more competitive, and delivering the needs of the readers. These are some of the serious challenges that needs immediate attention. At this given period of time, there are a few Roman Konknni writers. However that there is huge potential is a fact that needs to be exploited and utilized.

## Conclusion

With just two periodicals around, Roman Konknni journalism hangs on a cliff.

Even if there still continues an awareness of the importance and love for Konknni, yet the chances of Roman Konknni journalism gradually fading away are also visible. The odds are in the same measure as hope. Enthusiasm seen at the recently held 70th annual day of Vauraddeancho Ixtt and its increasing number of subscribers, the 20th annual day of Gulab, the existence of 65 parish bulletins and other literature in Roman Konknni is a proof of the huge potential and clear hope that has to be cultivated and exploited. Can we rise to the opportunity?

## **Chapter 19: Comrades in crime: Police reporting**

Mayabhushan Nagvenkar

----- This young journalist has repeatedly shown his ability to come up with that unusual story that everybody else overlooked, only to cause ripples in Goa and beyond. His hard work, uncharacteristic honesty in telling the story as-it-is, and young-man-in-a-hurry quality stand out strongly. These approach have won him the respect of readers in as much measure as the ire of those who would not like the media to tell the whole truth. -----

This chapter is being written much after the deadline set. My apologies. But generally deadlines have traditionally slipped by in the place of employment many of us earlier used to share. At present, I am dispensing my duties as a reporter at the Herald. So here, I make it amply clear, that my licence for unbridled freedom is at present indebted to the firm, where I draw a salary from. Anyway without delving more time and space on Utopian and impractical ideals as freedom of the press, I shall proceed further.

My few years of covering the crime-beat in Goa, have been marked a considerably easy tenure. And press freedom, rather the lack of it, has been one of the reasons for my being fairly successful at the beat.

With reporters from newspapers like The Navhind Times (manned by any editor) and The Gomantak Times, recently under Pramod Khandeparkar, as rivals, it has been rather easy to come up with exclusives. Especially because, the two competing newspapers do not seem to carry news which scalds. And when they do manage to rustle up some exclusives, it is more often in form of some sort of a balm to cover the wounds of the Establishment. Or a day or two late.

A few aspects of this deduction could be explained by interactions I have had amongst journalists from both the newspapers. Press freedom and ideals in most newspaper organizations take a back-seat. In The Navhind Times especially, that's way back.

Editors and crime — what's the connection?

With the death of former Director General of Police Rajinder Singh Sahaye, Goan editors (most of them, anyway) have lost a great patron. Let me illustrate the extent of the warm hold late Mr Sahaye had over our enlightened mandarins.

I was in the employ of The Navhind Times some years back. Press notes handed out to newspaper offices are meant for lowly hacks to tackle. Lowly hacks meaning, either sub-editors or reporters, who generally gloss over them.

Following a press conference addressed by DGP Sahaye, I came back to office one evening and filed the story. I was then told that a press note, which had been issued at the conference, had already been composed by the editor and that I need not file the story.

Surprising? Not so.

The DGP had made a few important comments, other than those, which had been mentioned in the press-note. So I altered the already composed press note, to fit in these changes. The next day, an irked Mr Sinha, who is anyway a man of few words, did not have very pleasant words to say about this. The press note, one should note, had been composed to ensure the inclusion of some adulatory phrases in the first paragraph.

Later, Sahaye was controversially transferred from Goa and he expired after a few months. Think that was his last press conference I had attended before he was transferred out of Goa. His transfer was followed by attempts made by a section of the editors to portray that the state's top cop was transferred due to his crusade against the 'matka' lobby. Whether he hated matka or not I have not been able to ascertain....

(More information on this issue can be sourced from DIG Karnal Singh or then DIG and presently Joint Commissioner Crime Branch Delhi Qamar Ahmed, both whom were then going hammer and tongs against DGP Sahaye.)

Then, take the case of Deputy Inspector General of Police Karnal Singh. This man cannot be called an enigma. That is because his intentions are so very articulate. For example, this man wanted the Bharatiya Janata Party to win the last assembly elections. Forget the leverage of the Dayanand Social Security Scheme, it was Karnal Singh's khaki force which was largely responsible for the BJP ride to power.

Until recently, Karnal Singh, the chief ministers point-man in the police department, was normally the one-stop shop for journos for daily information. In comparison to Karnal Singh's clout in the police department over the past few years, the last two Directors General of Police were mere senior officers biding their time until retirement, holding their hands over a soft fire in their respective offices to keep warm.

Karnal Singh may be responsible for a lot of not-so-pleasant issues. But the alleged instance of insensitiveness, where Mr Singh categorically stated that a recent much-publicised rape victim's hymen was intact, but possibility of a two-finger insertion was possible, was actually an issue that Mr Singh was wrongly lynched for. This writer was present at the press conference then. It was only after persistent questioning by reporters, that Mr Singh to come out with an in verbatim response, reading it out from the medical report.

This was quite unlike the press conference of an unabashedly media savvy cop Superintendent of Police Inder Dev Shukla, involving the sexuality of star athlete Pratima Gaonkar who had committed suicide in mysterious circumstances.

There are other issues that come up repeatedly in the contentious relationship between police and journalists.

Today, a journalist inadvertently narrated to me a story from the Jataka tales, with a moral vis a vis a peculiar situation in his office, a local English-language newspaper. Endless hours have been consumed by journalists especially at Cafe Prakash as to how an editor could allow his dupester reporter to carry on, despite complaints of cheating filed against the reporter at the local police station. It is another story that the officer Police Sub Inspector Raut Dessai, who was handling the complaint, was also duped off a few thousand rupees by the same journo.

Sorry, I have digressed. This is how the story goes....



A she-monkey is trapped in the middle of the flooding river. As the water level rises, she keeps pushing her little one upwards away from the watery jaws of death. But as soon as the water reaches her nose, and keeps swelling further, the mother shoves her little one below the water on the bed, and stands on it, in order to gain additional height that could possibly allow her to survive.

The story's original moral is the survival of the fittest. But I think one should give the listener some liberty enough to alter it a bit. The moral which fits the bill here, I think, is survival of the canniest. And Goa is no more alien to such philosophies, which generally appear to have a genetic similarity with Bihar and the other cow-belt states, where the motto of survival is, Jiski lathi uski bhais (He who wields the stick, own the buffalo).

(For more information on this issue, one could contact just about any journo from The Navhind Times)

We could shift to the equation between the Police Press Relations Officer (PRO) and the media.

If a layman is of the opinion that this is a source where the news from the police department actually flows from, it is a very incorrect assumption. For, in the Goa Police, the office of the PRO is that of a sorting department. The juiciest morsels extracted from the reams of wireless messages and kept under lock and key, while the unwanted and sanitized thrash is offered to media representatives.

No complaints there. That is the PROs brief.

But if there was one PRO a few years back who managed this with elan, it was Deputy Superintendent of Police Apa Teli. This man had generated such goodwill amongst mediamen, that the police department should really offer him a police medal, solely for ensuring that the image of the police in the media remained somber for half a decade or so.

Evenings at Mr Teli's office comprised of the invariable cup of tea and on several occasions pakodas from Cafe Real. Mr Teli's strategy was to ensure that discussions over such sessions never focused around any crime-related events for the day. And he ensured that his agenda stuck. And then there was also the annual get-together at one of the city hotels where liquor-happy journos abounded. Almost no journo could say no to Mr Teli. The same was the case with the liquor.

Things they say were even better during Umesh Gaonkar's tenure as the officer in charge of the Panjim town police station, with several weekend outings for journalists covering crime. Umesh, who is now promoted as a Deputy Superintendent of Police, has kept up his press management tactics in Margao. Correspondents often walk up to him and complain that they had lost their purse and Umesh readily obliges, not with the purse, but at least with some money. (For more information please contact the late 'eighties and early 'nineties language-loving journo clique and primitive Margao based correspondents-cum-teachers)

This uneasy equation also has its own kind of 'freak shows'.

A journo attached to a Marathi newspaper, who belongs to the Somnath Zuwarkar school of thought — one of those few loyal sycophants who refused to turn sides in favour of Babush Monserrate — was involved in an embarrassing incident a couple of years ago. Shopping in the departmental store in the capital run by the Goa Marketing Federation, he tried flicking a tooth-paste and slipped it inside his pocket. His sleight of the hand was noticed by an employee, and was promptly reported to the manager, who hauled him up and informed the Panjim police about the incident.

When the reporter revealed his professional identity and explained that he too owed obeisance to Somnath Zuwarkar, the complaint was duly withdrawn. Another of Mr Zuwarkar's cronies was in charge of running the marketing federation then. The journo is now dubbed as "Colgate" and he really does not bristle with joy when he is called by the name. (For more information on this please contact Police Inspector Mahesh Gaonkar)

But that's not all. Journalists pimping for the police is also not very uncommon. Pardon the word pimping, but there are times when the lines between both the professions blur.

Only recently, a South Goa correspondent for an English-language local newspaper, who also manages a newspaper agency in the region, was the force who thwarted Police Sub Inspector Jivba Dalvi's likely suspension after the latter had played 'funny' while investigating a theft case. Incidentally, the complainant in this case was Vithaldas Hegde, a popular persona amongst journalists and policemen alike.

The Baina police outpost is one of the more lucrative postings for police officers and a few select

journalists. Lucrative in terms of the hafta streaming in from the bars and brothels in the area. A journalist attached to Goa's largest-selling Marathi daily, did a one-up on the police sub inspector in-charge posted there. The journo 'enforced' a system where he would collect a regular hafta from the Baina police outpost, in return for blanking out any damaging news emanating from Baina.

One more nugget about Baina: a few hard-core journos based there have some commercial sex workers on call, just the way some cops do. The second most assured source of income for cops is the hafta from matka agents. Here too a few journos have not lagged too far behind. A long-standing correspondent for an English-language newspaper, who has been mentioned earlier in this chapter, runs two such gaddas located opposite the Margao police station, where matka bets are accepted, even amidst the worst of police crack-downs on gambling outlets.

While writing this, I may appear to be very partial to the Margao journos and cops. But reality is that the place is just so colourful. Here's another one. A journalist's spouse posted as a head constable at the Margao police station is audacious enough to accept matka bets in the police station building.

QUOTE UNCOUTH: One of SP Shukla's latest pursuits is philosophy. Once upon a time, it was English. A Deputy Superintendent of Police never tires of this tale. Mr Shukla, who loves positive interactions with the media and issuing press notes, had just typed out one such press note and called the DySP in. "Maine press note draft kiya hai. Aap jara isme grammer bhar do" (I have drafted a press note. Could you please fit the grammar in?)

## **chapter 20: Of sports... and sports journalism**

Cyril D'Cunha Cyril D'Cunha is a figure hardly anybody in post-1961 Goa journalism would not know. While editors came and went, he stayed on at the desk, at the Navhind Times — and contributing to many outstation journals, as outlined towards the end of this essay. Earlier, he began his journalistic career in Bombay. He is highly rated for his knowledge on Goan sports, as also acknowledged by a recent book on Goan football.

It has been such a long while and so much that has happened since, that it has become difficult to recollect everything in the sports that one has been connected with in Goa chronologically. In fact, in what follows, I have mentioned a few dates, which I can connect as correctly as per my records and memory. But in many cases, I've avoided being date-specific, only because I'm not sure of them.

The events were of different hues; but they all stamped their mark on the Goa scene in many ways and only the mean-spirited will fail to appreciate this cross-section of happenings. Agreed, we are not living in a state of hedonists, strictly speaking; yet criticisms, in any form, generally do hurt. It's an universal phenomena and Goa is no exception to that. But then, that's no reason to cringe, as after all, nobody is picture perfect.

Mind you, I'm tracing a period when TV in Goa was an unknown quotient, in the early 1960s. When the cliched few Goan icons were confined only to football players and its organisers. Athlete mates did an occasional whizz in mention, mainly those of past glory. Hockey, cricket and such other sports, as we see today, were yet to establish their mark in the state, though hockey on roller skates was played before Goa's liberation in 1961. The court at Circuit House in Panaji is still there, even if fallen into disuse.

My account is more personal and allied to sports activities I associated with, though I've touched on a few others with less authenticity.

Hockey: If there is a definite whiff of the yesteryear, particularly to my initial attention to field hockey, I have to be excused. More memorable for me, as I captained the first Goa hockey team at the Nationals at Madurai and I'm proud of it.

In 1964-65, a suitable surface to play hockey was at a premium, especially in Panaji. But there were a dedicated lot of persons, who were not deterred by this fact. I recollect carrying goal-posts and nets to the mini football stadium at Caranzalem, which unfortunately today is non-existent. This was carried on a hand-cart, with me walking alongside, all the way from the city to the ground there, a distance of almost eight kilometres.

There was a lot of enthusiasm among those wanting to play the game, with a few teams showing interest too, especially the Navy. The late Aniceto Fernandes, one of the foremost organisers of Goan hockey and football in Bombay, was mainly instrumental in giving shape to tournaments in Goa, with the help of the then Chief Minister, Dayanand Bhandarkar. He also got the Goa Hockey Association affiliated to the All India Hockey Federation and even succeeded in getting a representation for Goa on the apex body.

The Dempo-Souza group in the 'sixties, decided to have a team of their own, and we all joined in. During this time, I also coached a number of women hockey players. Many of my colleagues on the Dempo-Souza team are no longer alive, but for me, they have left behind some pleasant memories. In February 1967, Aniceto conducted the Bhandodkar Hockey Tournament and I was put in charge of running it on behalf of the Goa Hockey Association. Then two months later, from April 15 to 23, came the big hockey tournament for women for the Shantilal Cup, with me in charge of the north zone as the selector-cum-manager. Several players who had represented India, especially from Mysore and Bombay, were seen in action. Bhandodkar must also be credited with creating a separate Directorate of Sports and Youth Affairs, in 1973.

The Sports Journalists Association of Goa, founded in 1982, of which I was the founder president, did organise a road roller-skating competition on May 8, 1983, which was a great success, as was the bullock cart race organised at Peddem grounds in Mapusa.

Presently, hockey is in a lamentable state, with little or no activity being held and it is more tragic because in the past, Goans elsewhere have represented India. Players like Leo Pinto, Walter D'Souza, Maxie Vaz, Lawrie Fernandes, Reggie Rodrigues, John Mascarenhas and many women internationals.

Football: Thanks to the centuries-old legacy, starting with the presence of the British troops in Goa and the Portuguese, both of whom had a passion for the game, football still remained the craze in the state and it prospered with players using the paddy fields to hone their skills. These details I have mentioned in the book I later published titled Soccer and Goa, on behalf of the Government of Goa.

This enthusiasm was carried forward by leaps and bounds, making Goa one of the most feared of states in the country, throwing up players of repute. Both the clubs and the Goa teams, won tournaments all over the country, with professionalism coming in. No less credit to the founder members of the newly constituted Goa Football Association, which was created after disbanding the erstwhile Association that existed before Liberation and 1961.

Of particular note was the staging of a football match, featuring a team of women, during the Carnival season, on March 4, 1973, at the Police ground in Panaji, between Eves and Adams. This was organised by us members of the Clube Vasco da Gama, and I will stick out my neck to say that it was the first time a match was played with a women's team. Unless, somebody can prove to the contrary.

Athletics: This universally acclaimed discipline as the 'mother of all games and sports', did not progress as desired. On August 1, 1969, Prabhakar Sinari, Francisco Braganza, Rui Carvalho, Domnic Fernandes and myself, got together and formed the Goa Amateur Athletic Association, which functions till today, though with mixed results.

We did win plenty of medals at the National level, but nothing at the international level. Among the main drawbacks were, and still are, finance, lack of infrastructural facilities, including grounds and a suitable running track and of course trained officials. The situation today is much improved, with the government providing coaching facilities and other incentives, especially at the school and college level.

Yet, apart from football, athletics, swimming and taekwondo, which have brought a lot of honours to the state in the past few years, there is little to shout about in the other disciplines. There are a lot of pontification made by the governments, often with political considerations, and these have not been good for the progress of sporting activity in Goa.

As for me, my stint in Goa has been rewarding. Being bestowed with the prestigious and highest state award, the Jivbadada Kerkar Award for Best Organiser for the year 1984-85. Reporting two Olympic Games, at Montreal and Los Angeles, the World Cup hockey at Sydney, the World Amateur Boxing Championships in Bombay, where I also shared the mike for the English commentary, the Asian Games, Permit meets and Nationals in the country, in the capacity of an official, have all been a great experience, besides allowing me the opportunity to globe trot.

One also produced and edited Goa's first sports weekly titled Goal, in 1976-77, and later in 1996, I edited the bilingual fortnightly Konkani Mail, both having to be discontinued due to lack of support.

There were different reasons and circumstances for the starting of these two publications. I had been working as a correspondent for Sportsweek of Bombay, and the idea of starting the Goal came from there.

With sports picking up, one felt there was scope for a weekly focussing mainly on local sports affairs. I was aware that in a venture of this type, I would be requiring a lot of money, which I did not have. But what weighed in my favour was the fact that in partnership with a friend of mine, we had taken the Diario da Noite press, owned by Luis de Menezes, on a contract basis, to print a full-fledged paper the

Goa Monitor, owned by Erasmo Sequeira in 1977, under the name of Polygot Publication, Campal.

The Goal, therefore, could be a by-product, as the infrastructure for producing it, including the printing staff, was in place. The only cost involved would be the news-print for the tabloid. As for the writing part, I was going to do most of it, while a few friends of mine promised to write gratis. Unfortunately for us, the Goa Monitor was forced to fold up, as Sequeira's press staff went on strike. It also meant the premature death of "Goal", on which one had pinned high hopes, as it was steadily picking up in sales and, surprisingly, even getting a few advertisements from big industrial houses.

In the case of Konkani Mail, the whole concept was born out of a missionary zeal.

When I approached Mathias Vaz, owner of the Maureen Printing Press, and P.M. Vaz, proprietor of Manvins Courier Service and Manvins Hotel, with the idea of bringing out a bilingual paper, which would contain news catering to both English-language and Roman Konkani readers, they immediately agreed.

Papers which published general news in Konkani, were in Devnagri script, which many of the Catholics, specially those in the 30+ age group, could simply not read. It was for this section that the Konkani Mail would cater to. While Mathias handled the entire printing, P.M.Vaz would take care of the distribution and couriering part, besides providing office space and the use of his computers in his hotel, while I would handle the editing.

The soft launch of the first copy of 18 pages, costing Rs. 2, was done by the Member of Parliament Eduardo Faleiro, in the city, where a few prominent citizens were the invitees.

For the nearly four years the paper was regularly published, there was great enthusiasm shown by the readers. But this in itself is not enough for the success of a paper, as any publisher will vouch, without advertisements, which is the main revenue provider. And that is exactly what we lacked. This could be because of a variety of factors, including perhaps, bad management. After several appeals to the readers via the editorials for such revenue support bore no results, we decided to suspend publication, as we could no longer continue suffering losses. We still hope to restart, provided the finance is available; but for the moment we haven't a clue of where this money is going to come from.

Though sports has been my first love, reporting on sports has been an add on. Except for a brief stint on the sports desk of the Free Press Journal, my main grounding on the news and reporting desk was with the Times of India, Bombay, and then on The Navhind Times and back to the Goa page of the Times of India, Bangalore edition, as a stringer, where I also did a lot of sports reporting. I believe that sports journalism helps a lot in the shaping of a good all-round writer, simply because it gives one a free reign to use descriptive language and a variety of verbiage, ordinarily not suited for general reporting.

Be that as it may, I was fortunate enough to work as a correspondent for many publications. Of particular mention was the Indian Post, run by the Singhanias in Bombay and edited by that time by S. Nihal Singh. The paper was to run into trouble later on and later had to close down. By this time, Vinod Mehta had taken charge as the Editor, and subsequently quit, to start The Independent, belonging to the Times of India group. Many of us with the Indian Post joined the editorial team under his leadership in 1989. Incidentally, the Executive Editor, Dina Vakil, who left The Independent to join the Times of India, thanked me in a letter dated May 4, 1990 for my support to the newspaper. I have my utmost regard for all these three, Nihal Singh, Vinod Mehta and Dina Vakil, for their personal gestures.

Among the other major papers where I served as correspondent, were the Financial Express for nine years, the Afternoon, the Tribuna of then Portuguese Macau, a news agency from Lisbon Noticias de Portugal and the NCWC News Service, Massachusetts, USA. It was hard work, and when I look back at those times, I am amazed how I was able to keep to my schedules and enjoy doing it.

Such challenges apart, it has been a great party always and I had a wow of a time.

## **Chapter 21: From journalist... to publisher**

Niraj NaikNiraj Naik, known for his coverage of rural and remote Goa in the 'nineties, is today publisher and editor of the Digital Goa. This fortnightly, the only specialist publication of its kind in Goa — covers the IT industry in the state. He has worked in the Delhi media, and was located for some time in Malaysia.

Without doubt, one owes one's career in journalism to the emergence of Konknni (Devnagari) journalism with the launch of Sunaparant. One was then still a college-going lad, having very strong views on the number of issues. The Konknni agitation was at its peak and I was a staunch Konknni

supporter. On a parallel track, one had also started questioning not only the obvious excesses flowing from religious fundamentalism but also ritualism and, subsequently, the very concept of God.

It was a time when I was also leaning towards socialism. Contrary to the projected image, life around you in Goa can tend to get suffocating. Given my rural background, I wouldn't have had confidence to write in the English-language newspapers, and the bitterness generated in those days over the language issue prevented me to opt for Marathi.

So, the launch of first Devnagari-Konknni daily Sunaparant gave me the much needed platform to express myself. There was no looking back after that, and I wrote hundreds of articles in Sunaparant to make a vent to my inner feelings. Gradually, I switched my interest towards current affairs and hard news. In the meantime, one had a short stint as an activist, working on the number of socio-economic and environmental issues confronting Goa. But, my temperament did not allow me to stay there for long and I decided to come back to active journalism.

Herald was my obvious choice, given its image as the 'activist' newspaper and, at that time, being the only paper which had escaped from the clutches of all-pervading mining lobby, which till recently controlled most of the Goa press. My first pieces were a series on the socio-environmental impact of iron ore transportation in the village of remote Sanvordem, a problem that is otherwise very seldom noticed in distant Panaji, more so in the world of the English-language press.

It was one of the first comprehensive documentation of the explosive situation prevailing in this part of Sanguem Taluka, due to the unbridled ore transportation by over 500 trucks on a small stretch cutting across barely 17 kilometres, and passing through the densely populated village of Sanvordem.

Derek Almeida was the News Editor of Herald then. He was the one who encouraged me to do another series on the also-distant Canacona taluka, which was in the news in those days for opposing number of larger tourism projects. I actually spent a week in the different localities of Canacona, including a over-night stay at Cotigao wildlife sanctuary. This was followed by number of stories on the developmental and environmental issues in Goa.

Herald was going through a transition when I joined the paper. Diedre Sampayo-Fernandes had just taken over as the publisher of the Herald and was taking keen interest in the affairs of the paper. She made an unsuccessful attempt to streamline the functioning of organization. On the editorial front, Rajan Narayan had become almost defunct due to his deteriorating health. Devika Sequeira and Pamela D'Mello had just quit and Julio D'Silva (who, in the ever-so-political world of newspaper politics, was perceived as being close to Rajan Narayan) was brought into Panaji as the Chief Reporter, on shifting Alaric Gomes to Margao. Franky Fernandes of Vasco joined, shortly followed by Rupesh Samant. It was an entirely a fresh team.

For some reason, the reporting desk was given the lowest priority. I had to handle the reporting-desk single handedly for months together. Besides, also perceptible was the same instability at the top during those couple of years, around the mid-nineties. We saw as many as four to five mainly outstation deputy editors come and go. Hardly anybody could withstand the internal politics and rivalry. We were grappling in darkness in the absence of the required guidance. There wasn't any motivating force. Meanwhile, Julian also made her foray into reporting after working in the magazine section for couple of years.

The post of Chief Reporter was vacant for quite sometime following the resignation of Julio Da Silva. His perceived closeness with BJP had probably started long before he joined BJP, to contest Cuncolim constituency on that party's ticket in the 1998 Goa assembly elections. But ambition cost him both a career and a (political) seat. Meanwhile, Ashley do Rosario rejoined the Herald after a stint with The Navhind Times ended. After keeping him without designation for awhile, Ashley was finally given the post of Deputy Chief Reporter. To some of us, this trend — of using designations as carrots or baits, and apparently handed out in a manner far from fair — was demoralising, specially since we had run the show when nobody was around. Personally, one was never comfortable with mainstream reporting. My biggest 'weakness' was politics, or rather, a healthy skepticism about it. I always hated politics, more so the superficial level at which it gets reported in newspapers. Unfortunately, politics has long been the mainstay for our newspapers. This lopsided stress on politics in the media, especially in the Goan media, has not only undermined other genuine and more critical issues, but also given undue encouragement to petty politics and crooks.

One always wanted to focus on the more real issues of the people. But routine stories prevented devoting time to such a venture. Special stories of such a nature would usually imply going out of Panaji to the villages. Pressure of covering routine events prevented me to leave Panaji to chase these stories. Instead we had to cover some insignificant press conference of politician X or Y, or somebody else.

There were other beats like the police and courts, which had to be covered on daily basis. There was no appreciation for special or exclusive stories done, but missing of a routine story was taken note of, how-so-ever insignificant it may be. Leave aside incentives on exclusive stories but working in the Goa press can also mean that even travel bill were not reimbursed. This was a general trend in most of the newspapers. All this resulted into many a Panaji-based reporter turning into mere stenographers, ready for the next round of dictation. There seems to be unanimity amongst the desk staff and reporters that whatever words are uttered by a minister constitute the gospel truth, and that is the hot news worthy of wide coverage. This has resulted in ministers getting unwarranted prominent displays on front pages for the various announcements they make, but which more often than not never see the light of the day. I recollect a practice one reporter was engaged in. He would arrive at the Secretariat late afternoon, and would visit ministerial cabins to hunt for stories. There would be literally a begging for stories. Some ministers used to oblige, and needless to say, the story would get a prominent position in the next day's edition. The entire spectrum of Goa-based newspapers could be categorized on the basis of their political affiliations, stand on the language issue and the lobby they belong to. Though most of the papers shift their policies in favour of the ruling party of the day, the papers were strongly divided on the lines of language. All the Marathi newspapers, with the exception of the Rashtramat, supported Marathi. On the other hand, Sunaparant, Rashtramat and Herald supported Konknni, and some papers remained neutral or avoided a clear stand on this issue.

However, the major difference was the lobby they belong to. At that time, all the significant Goa-based papers, with the exception of Herald and Tarun Bharat, were owned by mining corporations. Needless to say, that there was a total blackout of all mining-related stories which showed the industry in poor light. This embargo exists till now. Only one difference has crept in; the Gomantak group, which publishes Gomantak (Marathi) and Gomantak Times, has been taken over by the Sakal group of Maharashtra. It is the worst kind of self censorship by a section of Goan press which deprives a voice to the thousands of people living in the mining belt in miserable conditions due to pollution of air, water and land. My discontent was growing as a journalist in a Goan newspaper. I was looking out for an opportunity to move out from here. And at the first opportunity, we — meaning, my wife and myself — descended in Delhi for the more enriching experience which completely changed my outlook towards life and helped to change the course of my career.

Taking on new roles...

I was back to Goa after a gap of two years. My stay in Delhi and a short stint in Malaysia was an enriching experience. It was a new life altogether. There was no question of joining any local paper for the very reason I had decided to quit it. The dream was to start something of my own; something different. The meteoric rise of IT had thrown up lots of opportunities. Goa too had made foray in the area of IT, and it had big plans. Goa had an edge over its counterparts due to her peculiar socio-economic conditions.

IT was nothing new for someone in the area of journalism, since we had been dealing with information all along. Having realized the power of information, it was my endeavour to harness the technology to make it an instrument of change.

With this objective in mind, I decided to set up a small company and named it Aparant Infomedia, (after the historical name for Goa). The basic objective of this venture was to bring the fruits of IT to the masses and use it to bring about a positive change amongst the lives of thousands of people, especially for the underprivileged.

An IT newspaper or magazine for Goa was just one idea amongst the many which the company aimed at. There were some innovative ideas to capitalize on the potential thrown up by the Internet, and particularly by e-mail, for the benefit of the common men. The paper got priority over other things simply because there was a need to create awareness amongst the masses.

There were a number of efforts underway in Goa in the area of IT by the government, industry, NGOs and the like . But there was a lack of co-ordination and hardly anybody knew what was going on in the other camp. Opportunity came calling, indicating that there was an urgent need to create a common forum for the discussion of IT-related issues and cost effective solutions.

This was priority Number One. Thus Goa's first IT fortnightly was born in the beginning of the year 2002. It was appropriately named Digital Goa, to encompass not only computer specific issues but the whole gamut of information technology even beyond computers.

Initially, this idea evoked a cautious response from both media stalwarts and IT professionals, some of whom even outright dismissed the idea as non-workable. Two individuals were exceptions to this rule, and they jumped onto the idea and have been a constant motivating factor all throughout i.e. GCCI President and D-Link General Manager Nitin Kunkolienkar and our own colleague Frederick

Noronha.

One was aware of the average Goan's apathy towards reading, leaving aside few daily newspapers. This explains the fact that no periodical worth its name, and with a widespread readership, could be established in Goa, despite factors like Goa's high literacy, and relatively higher affluence levels. In the past one decade, a number of family-oriented and political magazines have hit the stands, only to disappear without making their mark. Those existing are struggling for their survival or are backed by big corporate houses. Then there was a new trend of free-sheeters that gripped Goa for a while. That too seems to be slowly fading away.

On this backdrop, it was really a risky attempt to start a specialized magazine, leave alone the general magazine. Number one, there was no corporate house backing this effort nor did one have any savings to run it without any expected returns for the initial period. Most importantly, I did not have any other source of income since this was my full time activity.

One had to run the show all alone, which meant which meant facing demands of 12 hours or so of time each day. One must put it on record here that without the financial and moral support of my wife, Sangeeta, it would not have been possible for me to take this major risk.

It could be argued that most of the magazines which were closed down did not have a professional approach, consistency and utility value. These are critical factors for any publication's success. More so in a place like Goa. You need to study the mind of the reader, and his or her likes and dislikes. How a story is displayed is as important as the choice of the story itself. Readers should get something refreshing to read, and not just a rehash of stories already appeared in the daily newspapers.

For a product to succeed, it should also have some utility value to the readers. People are bombarded from all sides with knowledge and information in this information era. The job of the media is to screen and customize this information for the benefit of their readers. This is the role especially of the niche magazines, and it is the secret behind Digital Goa. The first issue of Digital Goa rolled out in the first week of April after a three months of running around. But very soon the initial enthusiasm was over and I had to face the stark reality. Publication is the capital-intensive business. You have to go on pumping money for years before the product starts yielding fruits. So you need tremendous sustaining power.

Many times, one was confronted with existentialist dilemmas — whether or not to continue to invest money without any signs of returns. The returns were almost commensurate to the investments, and one point of time my investing power was almost exhausted. But I did not give up and the result is before the reader to judge.

It was only after a year that things started changing. The IT businesses who had earlier adopted a cautious wait-and-watch policy, realized that this was not a fly-by-night kind of venture, but a serious publication. Though one had some kind of a hi-and-bye relationship with a few players in the IT circuit, most of the people were unknown to me.

Secondly, this was my maiden experience of conducting business deals with the business class, being a journalist for all of my earlier years. It was a different experience altogether dealing with all types of people, including some who could be safely classified as crooks of the first degree.. But one passed this agni-pariksha (test by fire).

Being behind a small time publication, one had to be an all-rounder — looking after all areas of publication — editorial, circulation, advertising, printing, accounts, and whatever work was left to be done. One could obviously not appoint professionals and sufficient staff to look after all these departments, simply because overheads had to remain in check.

To prevent this venture going into the red, I managed the show mostly with one staff-member, and by deploying my Mercedes flat as the office. The first one year was really tough, as one could hardly recover the printing charges leave alone my salary.

It was a great eye opener; before starting, I had set a target of some 1000 subscribers within a couple of months at a subscription-fee of a fairly reasonable Rs 120 per year. But it did not take me long to come in terms with the harsh reality. Even my close friends did not bother to pay subscription as a support to my efforts. Those in the thick of IT sector of Goa also did not care to subscribe it too. One got the feeling that people were scared that with their single subscription I may get rich or Digital Goa could overnight grow into a big publication.

I experienced the much spoken-of Goan crab mentality very closely during this time. One thing that can be said with certainty is that Goans are very hostile towards those who make a new beginning. They would waste lots of their energies to discourage you from aiming higher, or pull you down, instead

of supporting enterprising people. It is only when they feel that one has survived their onslaught and have made a mark, that they would be sympathetic to you.

This is precisely the reason why the average Goan youth doesn't take a risk and avoids aiming higher. To succeed in Goa, one should either have money-power or a godfather or extraordinary perseverance. Most of my energies still goes into Digital Goa, though today it has grown into a professional, self-sustaining magazine. It has not only gained acceptance but even attained popularity within industry, IT businesses, students and general IT users alike.

There is no dearth of advertisement and, most importantly, our advertisers do not part with their ads as a measure of their generosity, but rather on account of the mileage they get in advertising in Digital Goa. This, for us, is the biggest recognition that Digital Goa is treated as a professional periodical. In fact, one could argue that it is the fastest growing publication and one could venture a bold forecast here that, touch wood, it could have a bright future.

But, there is much to be done to make it really a good quality magazine, both in terms of content and layout and printing. We need to dream of publications on par with any national-level magazine. My preoccupation with the Digital Goa magazine has made me neglect the other projects of Aparant Infomedia. However, we could still complete a comprehensive directory of IT related businesses, including a database of around a thousand firms, with the help of Goa Chamber of Commerce and Industry . Also, we are in the final stages of completing a Website and e-mail directory for Goa, one of the first of kinds in the country. Hopefully other interesting projects on the lists will get to see the light of the day, so that it can be proudly said that journalists can themselves re-invent themselves into good publishers too!

\*\*\* END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK BEHIND THE NEWS: VOICES FROM GOA'S PRESS  
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