

1571 – A year of calamities

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According to the book 'Oriente Conquistado A Jesu Christo Pelos Padres Da Companhia de Jesus', many big calamities of hunger, disease and war afflicted the 'Estado da India' in the year 1571; particularly in Goa. "It began with the siege of the city of Goa in the beginning of January by Adil Shah, the king of Balagata [Sultan of Bijapur] with 10,000 footsoldiers 35,000 horsemen, 2,100 elephants and 35 artillery guns. The troop formation was so large that it was two leagues long and two leagues broad. The intimidation continued till the end of August when the Moor, amazed at the courage and the military prudence of the Viceroy, decided to lift the siege; having suffered a loss of 12,000 men, 300 elephants, and 4,000 horses. While the siege lasted, the guarding of the city and the gunpowder dump was entrusted to the Dominican clergy and religious. From among the Jesuits, two priests always kept guard on the steps of the fort above the water level, with Dom Castro de Pedro and the other two with the Viceroy; of which one celebrated Mass for the soldiers on the frontline and the other guarded on the roof above the rooms of the Church of the College."

I have deliberately not skipped the above paragraph from the book ('Oriente Conquistado...' i.e. 'East Conquered for Jesus Christ...'), though it is mainly of political nature; just to draw attention to the fact that the 'conquest' of Goa was not just for 'Jesu' but also for the King of Portugal. In fact, it was primarily for the second purpose. That in fact was the primary motive of Afonso de Albuquerque, who believed that a people torn from their religion and their language, and left 'rootless', would be loyal subjects of the king. In fact, the Christian missionaries were like mercenaries who were used for the glory of the empire. It was for this reason that Francis Xavier preferred to get away from Portuguese Goa to find his 'mission' in Far East. Writing



The Rachol Seminary today

about De Nobili, we had said: "Like Francis Xavier, the first Jesuit missionary in India half a century earlier, Nobili was eager to escape church hierarchies, bishops, and competing missionary groups that restricted one's breathing space in the colonial setting." And José Vaz escaped to Sri Lanka on a difficult and dangerous but an apolitical mission, steering clear of the Padroado and Propaganda. Unfortunately, Afonso de Albuquerque died before his dream was realised.

"Soon the misfortunes of the war reached Salcete. Moors entered Salcete and burnt down all the churches, which at that time were all made of rammed earth and covered with palm leaves. Fr. Pero Colaço was coming from Bassein, and halted in

Chaul as that was more secure than Goa. Having come out leaving the shelter of the fort, leading a group of our soldiers, he was hit by a bullet and breathed his last within eight days, after having received all the sacraments. He was one of the first missionaries in Salcete; his memory is preserved today in the name of a Bramhan Gaonkar of Margão whom he baptised and gave his own name and surname. When he came to India he had already completed 17 years as a Jesuit."

"After the siege of Goa ended, people returned to their villages and restarted their life.... This year, there was a considerable increase in the Christian flock. 250 persons were baptised in the College of Goa; another 320 in the church of Cortalim; another

570 in Mormugao; more than 700 in Margao; another 400 in Verna. There were many more catechumens [waiting to be baptised] whose baptism was postponed for not being dressed in 'Portuguese' costume or because they did not want to be baptised in the native attire."

"This year expired Fr. Pedro de Diniz, who in the previous year converted a neighbourhood of 500 in Salcete; they were so deeply touched by his death that they lamented for three days and three nights."

"The College of Salcete was started in Margao on March 17, 1574. On that day, the fathers took official possession of the paddy fields belonging to the destroyed temples in Salcete which king Dom Sebastiao, offered to the Jesuits in his capacity

as the founder of the college. The fields yielded an income of a thousand cruzados [a 16th-17th century Portuguese gold coin], which the king considered to be a sufficient endowment, to be first informed to Archbishop Primate Dom Gaspar and Provincial Manoel Teyxeyra. Fr. Belchior Dias, the Rector of the College received the endowment in the name of the Jesuits. Before the foundation of this college, the Jesuits lived in a Residence for the missionaries in Salcete under the Rector of Sao Paulo de Goa [based in Old Goa] which was sustained by a grant of 500 gold paradaos, from the revenue of the destroyed temples that became the property of the king in 1572."

"In 1579 the moors burnt down this college, and therefore the next year the college was transferred back to Rachol; where we already had the residence named Our Lady of Snows, below the artillery of the fortress. Later the College was transferred back to Margao; as it is more spacious and more suitable for our missionary work"

"However, since Margao is undefended from enemy attacks, as against Rachol, which is well protected within fort walls, the foundation for the presently existing Rachol college was laid by Fr. Gaspar Soares on the day of All Saints in year 1606; the first mass was celebrated there on All Saints Day in year 1609. The next year, that is 1610, the priests moved from the old College in Margao to the new college in Rachol, which was dedicated to our founder St Ignatius of Loyola."

"This college has under its care a hospital for the poor, a Seminary for poor boys, a house of catechumens, and a school where poor boys are taught to read and write, and arithmetic. Initially it also had a school of Moral Theology and a school of Canarina [Konkani] language for our priests working in Salcete mission; the latter has existed intermittently subject to the needs from time to time."