

From the letter of Fr. Gomes Vaz

KONKANAPURANA



Tensing Rodrigues is engaged in research on Konkani language and people

TENSING RODRIGUES

Today let us depart from the narrative of Christianisation of Goans in 'Oriente Conquistado A Jesu Christo pelos Padres da Companhia de Jesu Da Provincia De Goa' by Fr. Francisco de Sousa, and look at the letter of Fr. Gomes Vaz in 'Documenta Indica'.

"When a priest, who lived in the church of Rachol, went to a certain village with some Christians to visit a gentile who was about to die, to talk to him about God and see if he could convert him, the village rose up against the priest and they followed him a part of the way with stones and arrows, and on the same day they killed a little boy from the village, who happened to pass through that village after the altercation with the Fathers. When the Viceroy came to know of this, he ordered that all the temples in the village be burned. The same thing was done to the temples in another village, because the Gentile residents there rose up against a Brother who went there to make a list of the Christians who were residing there. And they strangled him so badly that, having no more than a neo convert with him, he had to take refuge in the house of a Christian, where they laid siege to him, until he secretly escaped." ['Documenta Indica VII', (1566-1569), Fr. Gomes Vaz S. I., Goa 12 Decembris 1567, p. 388]

"As a punishment for this crime, the captain, advised by the Viceroy, destroyed all the temples in the village, threatening anyone who dared to rebuild them with a death penalty; this way they believed, results will be accomplished more quickly; because, with the temples standing, they found the Gentiles more intractable."

"Then a provision was passed by which the viceroy ordered the Gentiles not to build pagodas again nor to repair the ones that were broken. But the provision was observed only in default. Many temples were destroyed with the great winters and rains of this land. This month was long and difficult; the need to destroy the temples grew all the more as the number of Christians became greater; furthermore, it seemed as if the whole thing would boomerang."

"The archbishop and our fathers represented to the Viceroy on a few occasions, that it seems to be a good idea to destroy all the temples at a go.... Let me mention here some things from a letter that late Fr. Luis de Gois, wrote to Fr. Rector when he resided in one of the churches in those lands. The letter reads as follows: 'This was also greatly helped by the request that the captains of the lands of Salcete made to the Viceroy, facilitating the deal and offering to execute it. They pointed out the need that His Royal Highness had for wood for the repairs of his artillery, and

that in some main temples there was a plenty of wood that was very good for this purpose; so, it made eminent sense to tear down as many temples as possible."

"The captain knew this and immediately, without further delay, he went to burn them down to the foundations so that the gentiles would lose the hope they had of still worshipping the devil in them. This was the beginning of the total destruction that took place this year of the temples that were in the lands of His Majesty. Some were burned, others were razed to the ground, so that from the greatest to the least not one was left standing. There were more than two hundred and eighty large ones, some of them very sumptuous and of superb workmanship. They were in cool and pleasant places, surrounded by many shady trees, with their tanks."

The main person in this destruction was Diogo Fernandez, who was then captain of Salcete, who, in addition to reminding the Viceroy many times, as zealous for the honour of God, with

great fervour and hard work reduced them to dust. And after he learned from the Viceroy that it was his will to destroy them, he did not rest until they were finished. The part he played in this are in two letters that he wrote, among others, to Fr. Francisco Rodrigues and to another priest of this college, who was then in one of the churches of Salcete.

"Today, being in my residence at 3 o'clock after midnight, not being able to sleep due to many preoccupations that disturbed me, I decided to preach the next day so that in the next life I would not be asked to account for my idleness. Next day I embarked with determination to see the Viceroy. The great temple of Sancoale has good wood and is close to the sea; His Lordship can give it to the St. Lawrence church."

"Yesterday, which was the fifth day of April, I left this fortress at noon, commending my departure to Our Lord God, not knowing where I would go, praying that I would have a well-spent journey. I went to Sarzora, where I burned two

houses of the demons and burned their idols, and then to the village of Veroda where I burned another. And as it was necessary for me to pass through the temple of Cuncolim, the main place of this land, I went with him and everything was set ablaze. The person who takes care of cleaning and sweeping the tank and its surroundings, planting branches at the right time and adorning the idols made such a lamentation, as could only be made for the death of a good king, and so I came with my army, taking measured steps, and burned another one in the village of Ambelim, which burned to dust. From there I crossed the Sal River on one side and came to burn another in the village of Chinchinim, which was very large in size and smashed it into tiny bits."

Here I end the story of the destruction of the temples as recounted in the letter of Fr. Gomes Vaz; and go back to continue the narrative in 'Oriente Conquistado A Jesu Christo pelos Padres da Companhia de Jesu Da Provincia De Goa' by Fr. Francisco de Sousa.

