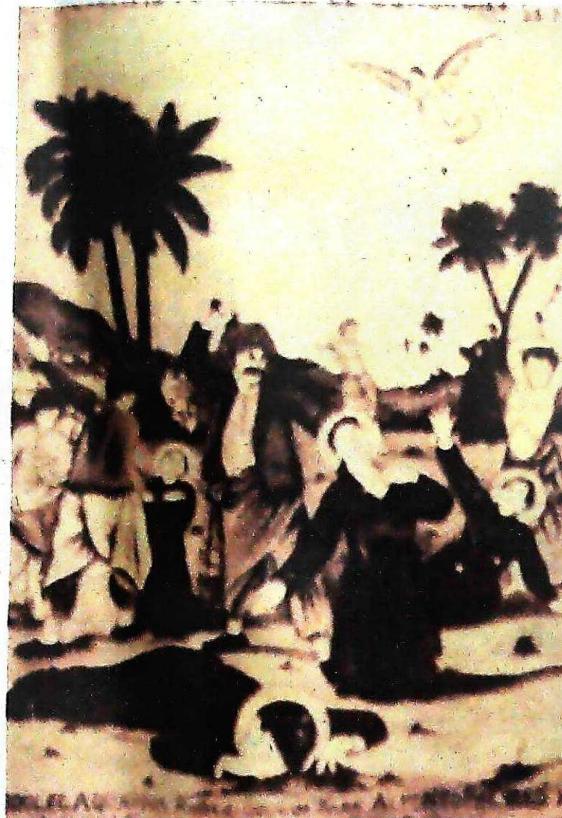


Assault on Assolna and Cuncolim – Part 2

TENSING RODRIGUES

The Portuguese sent a word to Calgo Naique and Santu Chatim, the chieftains who stayed close by, to come and see them. When the two chieftains came, fathers asked them why the other chieftains did not come to see them as promised earlier. But they gave all evasive answers."

Perhaps the word 'chieftains' requires explanation. As said earlier in the main text, "At the southern extremity of Salcete, lie the villages of Cuncolim and Assolna". They are part of a group of adjoining villages that includes also Velim, Sarzora, and Veroda. They are away from the sea (except Velim which is on the coast, where River Sal joins the sea) their terrain is also hilly. They are inhabited by people who carry traces of Velp ancestry to differing extents. Velp are believed to be descendants of some of the first AMH (Anatomically Modern Humans) who remained behind when others crossed over to Oceania. Over time they interbred with subsequent arrivals of AMH, and with ksatriyas who came in historical times. We do not know when they came down the Sahyadri, after the coast became inhabitable. The inhabitants of these villages are now counted among the ksatriyas; therefore, now these are predominantly ksatriya villages. Perhaps because of their velp ancestry, they are martial in nature; and probably this is the cause of their refusal to accept the suzerainty of the Portuguese and pay taxes to them. They behaved as an independent republic governed by their 'chieftains'. As said in the main text "fathers asked them why the other chieftains did not come to see them as promised earlier." This suggests that there was an understanding that the chieftains would have a meeting with fathers, including Father Rector Rodolfo Aquaviva.



This was probably Fr. Aquaviva's idea; for we do not find something similar throughout the earlier campaign of Christianisation in Salcete, which was ruthless, to put it mildly. See the demolition of Mahalsa temple in Mardol, Verna, for instance. And probably it was this that kept Fr. Aquaviva awake on the previous night. "Here Fr. Rector decided to go immediately to Cuncolim to

appease the people who were furious with us for destroying their temples, and choose a place for a church; with this he expected peace to return, and an increase in faith." Now an excerpt from the letter of Fr. Gomes Vaz: "Today, being in my residence at 3.00 clock after midnight, not being able to sleep due to many preoccupations that disturbed me, I decided to preach 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."

Fr. Aquaviva's strategy seems to have been to get the 'chieftains' for an amicable talk and get their consent for the construction of a church in Cuncolim. After all they were sovereigns there. And once Cuncolim consents, the adjoining villages would most likely consent for erection of churches. Then the most difficult and a large part of Salcete would be conquered for 'Jesu Cristo'.

But that was not to be. For the political, administrative and military authorities were least interested in such a conquest; for those possessed by 'padroado' mentality Fr. Aquaviva's logic of 'adaptation' made no sense. Therefore Fr. Aquaviva paid for his miscalculation by his life; and with him some more fathers, lay companions and Cuncolim chieftains.

With that the dialogue between Calgo Naique and Santu Chatim, the chieftains, and the fathers broke down, for sheer reason of mutual distrust; and, of course, discord within. Fr. Aquaviva tried to pacify them with an assurance that they could find a peaceful solution to the dispute. Let us continue with Fr. Francisco de Sousa's narrative of the encounter.

"According to Calgo Nayque, and Santu Chatim the failure of the chieftains to turn up was due to the discord among the gaunkars. When asked what the strange shouts and actions of the sorcerer meant, they replied that he was calling the people to come to kill the fathers. Attorney Rodriguez did well to deter that man, for he suspected treachery. But he could not talk him down, and he feared to use force. Meanwhile the sorcerer continued his antics and his shouts. It was clear that he intended to work up a frenzy."

"Not being sure what to do, we decided to return to Orlim across the

river. But soon it began to rain and there was no one to ferry us across. Everybody made excuses, of having to go for lunch or of having to go to the market. In the meantime, the crowd was surging at the site of the proposed church. Suddenly there arose a very loud sound of music from the temple, and a great crowd came rushing to the fathers brandishing swords, spears and bows and arrows, and shouting 'kill the sorcerers, disturbers of peace and enemies of our gods'. The people, including those who had come from Orlim, tried to stop them, trying to tell them that the fathers were innocent. But the furious crowd seemed to be targeting only the fathers. The response was a rain of stones. Attorney Gonçalo Rodriguez raised his rifle to his shoulders in defense, but Fr. Afonso Pacheco desisted him by saying "Ok, Ok, Senhor Gonçalo Rodriguez; We have not come to fight." And turning to the people said in native language: "Bieum nakat." ["Do not fear!"]

"But on the other side of the road by which the fathers had to go, the idol worshippers gave another loud cry; and two young men with loose hair advanced, with lot of people following them. These were the first to come charging on the fathers. They seemed to know which one of them was Fr. Aquaviva; for they picked him to be attacked first all. And gave him a deep slash with a sword in his upper legs. With the hit, Fr. Aquaviva landed on his knees. And turning his eyes heavenwards, unbuttoned his collar and offered his neck to his assailants. Not satisfied with what they had done the barbarians gave another hit on his left shoulder and severed it from his body. So wounded Fr. Aquaviva breathed his last." [de Sousa, 1710: 'Oriente Conquistado A Jesu Christopelos Padres da Companhia de Jesu Da Provincia De Goa', Part 2, p. 191]



Tensing Rodrigues is engaged in research on Konkani language and people