

Assault on Assolna and Cuncolim

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Now let us return to the narrative of Christianisation of Goa in 'Oriente Conquistado' A Jesu Christo pelos Padres da Companhia de Jesu Da Provincia De Goa' by Fr. Francisco de Sousa.

'At the southern extremity of Salcete, which is 'terra firme' [that is, not a part of the island], lie the villages of Cuncolim and Assolna. All the residents of these villages were pagan at that point of time; they were very much attached to their temples and were extremely rebellious towards the king. They built their own temples, celebrated feasts of their gods, made human sacrifices and committed several such abominations. As for the taxes payable to the king, they did it at their own whims and fancies; consulting the devil [their god: this refers to a practice of taking 'kaul' - a verdict from God] before paying and acting accordingly. When a courier from Cochim was proceeding to the Viceroy, and was passing through Cuncolim, they beat him up and seized his mail. The presence of these rebels and the pagan temples in close neighbourhood, emboldened the neophytes to resist our efforts to evangelise.'

'Intending to give them an exemplary punishment, the Viceroy wrote to his nephew Captain Gillianez Mascarenhas, the captain of the Malabar coast, inviting him to Goa. And requested him to come in through the mouth of River Sal accompanied by his armed fleet. [Strategically this was a good strategy as these villages can be accessed through River Sal without arousing much suspicion.] Simultaneously, he ordered Gornizanes de Figueyredo, the Captain of the Rachol Fortress, to come by land to his aid with arms and soldiers.'

'Captain Gillianez Mascarenhas entered the river in the dark of night, and disembarking at the break of dawn, he smashed and set ablaze all he could see; thereby devastating Assolna village and all the temples in it. [Sailing in through the river, one lands in Assolna first, before moving to Cuncolim on foot.] Fr. Antonio Francisco, the parish priest of Orlim



soon joined the marauding force to hear confessions and help the injured. The Captain of Rachol soon marched on Cuncolim with Fr. Pero Bruno, and set on fire the big temple and the smaller ones.'

'The people of both the villages fled, leaving behind their houses and farms utterly destroyed. When our people turned back, the villagers returned to rebuild the temples. Captain Dom Gillianez Mascarenhas attacked them again, with a greater fury.'

'Captain Gillianez Mascarenhas, cut down the palm trees of Cuncolim, ransacked the vegetable gardens and the cattle sheds; and for the enemies to understand what he is up to, he made a junkyard for the people. Fathers Manoel Teyxeyra, Pero Berno, and Affonso Pacheco, Chaplains of the Army, tore down the freshly built temples, and destroyed a large anthill, which was worshipped by the people. At the same spot, they killed a cow to make it even more abominable for them. A boy from our Seminary named Domingos, a native from the same village, was the guide, who went around showing the priests the little chapels of the

pagan idols, of which there were so many. This led the most of the gentiles to flee to Goa [Old Goa] and throw themselves at the feet of Count Viceroy, who received them with benevolence, and after absolving them of the crime, honoured them with brocade cabayas. The Captain mór too rushed to Goa, and the gentiles came running to him with their petitions; because they were afraid that the Fathers will construct a Church in Cuncolim, and prevent them from carrying out their ceremonies publicly.'

'In May 1583, Father Rector Rodolfo Aquaviva came to Goa, and was received with great joy. On Thursday, the 11th July, all the priests went to sleep in the Holy Cross Church of Verna, along with Fr. Aquaviva. That night they decided among themselves how to go about the conversion of the unfaithful to our Holy Faith. Here Father Rector decided to immediately go to Cuncolim to change the mind of those people who were furious for destroying their temples, and to select a place for the church, which could increase the faith and bring peace. Having taken this decision, Father Rector ordered

all the priests who were to accompany him, to gather next Sunday morning at the St. Michael Church in Orlim. Having given this order, he proceeded to The Our Lady of Snobs Church in Rachol, which at that time functioned as the College.'

'On Sunday morning having preached at the mass, he left for Orlim, taking with him Bro. Francisco Aranha and three respectable Bramhans; one of them was the 'Recebedor de Rendas dos Pagodes' [treasurer of the revenue of the temples] named Francisco Rodriguez, and the other João da Silva, his 'escrivão' [accountant] and a third Paulo de Costa, the 'guardian' and attorney for new Christians, and two bramhan boys, Domingos and Antonio. Another two priests, Fr. Rodolfo Gonsalves and Fr. Domingos de Aguiar, both Portuguese gave them company. Fr. Affonso Pacheco of Margao and Fr. Pero Berno came to Orlim on Sunday night. Including some more persons from the house there were altogether more than 50 people who had gathered for going to Assolna and Cuncolim. Fr. Antonio Francisco had in the meanwhile sent a message to the people

of Cuncolim about the peaceful mission of the fathers, requesting that they be received with due goodwill. But the response was terse, befitting the people who were determined to do what happened subsequently. They responded that they were not inclined to receive the fathers; but that the latter may come if wished to since the villages belonged to the king of Portugal.'

'The fathers discussed the response among themselves. Taking into account the fact that some time before the villages had sworn their subjection to the Crown, and the peace in which they lived thereafter, the assurance with which they came to Goa for their business, the courtesy with which they treated the royal officers, the favours that they owed to the Count the Viceroy, they agreed that there was no reason to fear any mishap, leave alone a danger to life.'

'Thus assured, on Monday, the 15th of July, by about seven or eight in the morning all the fathers ordered to prepare a palm leaves shelter in the village. Because it had begun to rain. In the meanwhile, rumours had spread that the fathers were coming to not just mark the place for a church but to erect a church forthwith. Therefore, the people of the village resolved to wait for and resist the fathers, and take revenge on those who had destroyed their idols. As the villagers were arming themselves for the encounter, as decreed by their gaunkars [headmen of the village], our men crossed the river [at Orlim] to enter the villages on the other bank.'

'As they entered Cuncolim, a prominent villager came out and greeted them, as respectable guests. And said that after lunch the gaunkars shall meet the fathers to sort out the matter. But the fathers waited in vain in their palm leaf shelter; as no one turned up. But some gaunkars spied on them. Some fathers overheard them talking about the plans of the fathers to erect a church. And with that the spies disappeared. Apparently, they went to alert the rest of the villagers about what they had heard and seen.'

[Continued next week]