

More about the chieftains of Cuncolim

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The plaque at the site of massacre of the 'chieftains' at Tollieband, Cuncolim mentions the names of 16 chieftains: Jay Naik, Bozno Naik, Emu Naik, Vithoba Naik, Jivlo Naik, Guno Naik, Shabu Naik, Calgo Naik, Polputo Naik, Topi Naik, and Shanta Shet. [Sawant Mendes, 2020; 'Lusitanization Versus Assertion In Goa - The 1583 Revolt In Assolna, Velim, Cuncolim', Palarch's Journal Of Archaeology Of Egypt/Egyptology, 17(7), 9597] We have already found one of these names in the Jesuit sources quoted earlier: Calgo Nalque. Oral history talks about how he jumped into the nearby River Sal and swam to safety and thus lived to tell the tale.

Sontreo festival celebrates the martial spirit of Cuncolim, which lay at the root of the resistance to the Portuguese excesses. The colourful procession carrying the 'palki' of Shri Kunkal-likarinn wends its way through the same route by which the deity was brought to Fatorpa centuries ago by the Hindus fleeing to safety. On the occasion of Sontreo festival, on Pan-chami day in the month of Phalguna, the idol of the goddess is taken back to the original site at Cuncolim; thus re-enacting the migration of the goddess and many Hindu families who fled Salcete to preserve their faith.

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The festival is known as the Sontreo because it is led by 12 colourful umbrellas atop tall poles of metal or carved wood. Each umbrella is different and stands for one of the 12 'vangodds' (clans) of the Cuncolim gamvkari. These are carried by youths who jump and prance about during the entire length of the procession, while carrying the umbrellas. All males participating in this festival are smeared with red powder, handfuls of which are tossed into the air around the advancing palanquin. The procession passes through the vaddos of Molanguinim, Biunsa, Voddy, Tolliebhatt, Markutt, and Demani; from Molangini it goes back to Fatorpa. Cuncolim was the original site of the Shri Shantadurga Temple. Before it was demolished by the Portuguese; the idol of



Sontreo Festival
Cuncolim

Shri Shantadurga was taken to Fatorpa where the new temple of Shri Shantadurga Kunkal-likarinn stands today.

I wish to draw your attention to the surname Naik; or Nalque in its Portuguese rendering; in Kannada context it is written as: Nayaka. It is the same Nayaka as in Nayakas of Keladi. The territory administered by the Nayakas, first from Keladi and later from Ikkeri (c. 1499-1763 CE), first on behalf of the Vijayanagara rulers and then in their own name, was the western strip of Karnataka, known as Kanara-Malnad. After the battle of Talikota in 1565, the importance of the Vijayanagar Kingdom declined and its territories reduced. Some of the warrior lords, previously appointed as nayakas over certain districts or provinces with clearly defined privileges and responsibilities towards Vijayanagar monarchs, declared their independence. This was also the story of the Nayakas of this locality, who first established their capital at Keladi and then at Ikkeri. The story of Nayakas of Keladi illustrates the beginnings of the 'chieftains' of Cuncolim; the difference is their rise was stunted by circumstances.

Veluthat provides us a far stronger evidence of existence of gamvkari like institutions in the Deccan and the adjoining Tamil country, in his 'Landed Magnates As State Agents: The Gavudas Under The Hoysalas In Karnataka'

(1989) The words 'gaud', 'gavud' and 'gavumd' figure in several inscriptions in ancient and early medieval Karnataka. Epigraphists and historians have taken these words to mean 'a village headman' or 'an officer of the state' or 'the chief executive of the village assembly'. [Veluthat, 1989: 'Landed Magnates As State Agents: The Gavudas Under The Hoysalas In Karnataka', in Proceedings Of The Indian History Congress, Vol. 50, 118]. The roots of gamvkari go deep in the past. In his second The Sankara-Parvati Lecture, 1944, Sathy-anathayer discusses the mahasabha, 'the rural self-governing institutions' under the later Pallavas and the Cholas, based on the Pallav and Chola inscriptions of eight to the 13th century CE. Pallavas are known to be of kurumbar origin; that is the same as the kumbi or velip. So, the origin of the Cuncolim chieftains and their claim of suzerainty lies deep into the past; the administration of the territories that the community occupied was very likely entrusted to them by the subsequent sovereigns who came and went.

Sometime around 1763, King Savaivir Immodi Sadasiv Rajendra Vodeyar of Somdem or the Saumdekar Raja fled from his capital after being attacked by Hyder Ali and sought asylum from the Portuguese. In exchange he ceded to the Portuguese the territories ruled by him:

Amtruz (Ponda), Zambauli (Zambaulim) or Pancmahal (current Sanguem and Quepem talukas), Canacona (Advota), and the port of Cabo de Rama. The Portuguese took the definitive possession of the territories in 1795. The Somdem rulers were feudatories of the Vijayanagar, Marathas and the Bijapur Sultanate at different times. These acquisitions by the Portuguese were the first four of the total seven Novas Conquistas. Later, between 1783 and 1788, the Savant Bhosle of Sawant-wadi, seeking help to fight the Kolhapur chief, one of the offshoots of the Maratha Dynasty, ceded Pernem, Bicholim, and Sattari to the Portuguese; these were the remaining three Novas Conquistas.

By this time the Portuguese were already constrained for manpower coming from overseas, and were finding it difficult to administer the new conquests, which were not only vast, but also greatly different from the Velhas Conquistas: 'que tem hum regimen de administração diferente das outras' (which have a different system of administration). To fully understand how the Portuguese tried to cope with this difficulty, we need to look at another institution that the Portuguese created, or rather 'continued': the 'dessaido' - the hierarchy of 'desais' and 'sardesais'. The change to the designation of desai and sardesai seems to have happened in the territories that passed into the hands of the Maratha rulers in the 15th century; the nomenclature was retained by the Portuguese. ['Codigo dos Usos e Costumes dos Habitantes das Novas-Conquistas' (1861)]

As against what happened in the Novas Conquistas, the villages Ambelim, Velim, Assolna, Veroda and Cuncolim, which revolted, were a part of the Portuguese Estado by right of conquest. So there could be no attenuating circumstances for them; it was simply a war between the old state and the new state; so an armed conflict was natural.

But if, as they did in the Novas Conquistas, the Portuguese had entrusted the administration of these villages to the 'chieftains', [Xavier, 1840: 'Collecção De Bandos E Outras Diferentes Providencias Que Servem De Leis Regulamentares Para O Governo Economico E Judicial Das Provincias Denominadas Das Novas Conquistas', I] their power and prestige would have been restored; and perhaps it would have pacified them. And Fr. Aquaviva's 'adaptation' model would have taken care of the 'religion' aspect of the conflict as well.