

VARIOUS

BEHIND THE NEWS:
VOICES FROM GOA'S
PRESS

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«Public Domain»

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Behind the News: Voices from Goa's Press

Introduction

If you believe in miracles, here is a small one. An e-book, written collaboratively by over a dozen-and-half journalists, many with amazing stories to tell. Their willingness to do so, says something.

For one, it indicates a generosity to convert memories into history, which would otherwise have been consigned to the dustbin of amnesia. This is particularly true, as the media seldom writes critically about themselves in Goa. More importantly, it also suggests that there are many in Goa who have a story, and are willing to narrate it. If only they're given a chance. As mediapersons, we need to ask ourselves why these stories are not allowed (or encouraged) to surface in the first place. It's impossible to believe that there is such a drought of ideas and issues in Goa, and the general lack of debate in the media would make it seem.

October 10, 2003 marks the 20th anniversary of the Herald's English-language edition. Many of us journalists who contributed here are no longer, or perhaps never were, associated with that daily newspaper. But, the launch of this product undeniably opened up avenues for a generation of journalists in the state. In addition, it rewrote the rules of journalism for all of us here, for better or worse. Hence the choice of this date for the first release of this book.

What is being said along these e-pages refers to critical times in the history of post-1961 Goa. Needless to say, views voiced here stem from personal experiences, oftentimes are subjective, and likely to generate even more debate. But personal viewpoints are also important, in that these help to complete our understanding of particular events, episodes, and individuals. It is no coincidence perhaps that this series of essays is critical of some held up as icons of Goa's journalism over the past four decades. You might feel the criticism is unfair; but other versions do need to be heard.

This is, of course, not the last word on the subject. Nor does it claim to be a comprehensive account – what got included depended on who was willing to write their 'story' when the call for chapters went out.

This unusual work is humbly devoted to those who are not, or cannot, be with us, as we go down the corridors of time and look at the past decades. Journalists whom Goa has produced, but perhaps were never adequately recognised over the years. Like the innovative Ivan Fera, who died young along with the promise of immense talent and many bylines in journals like *The Illustrated Weekly*. Or, Norman Dantas, whose early death was at least in part triggered off by despair brought on by the unfair deal he got from journalism in Goa. We need to also remember the many who are not here with us, pushed out – both by limited opportunities, as also politics in the press – to migrate far and wide and earn a living on distant shores. To all of them, and the unsung heroes of journalism of the post-Liberation era, this e-book is devoted.

Chapter 1: Sixties' stories: Free Goa's first elections

By Ben Antao

Besides his stint referred to in this chapter, Benedito Martinho Herculano Antao (b, 1935) worked for the Indian Express in Bombay (1965-66). He then won a journalism award from the World Press Institute, moved to the US for a year's study, work and travel. Later, he spent 10 weeks at the Denver Post (1967), worked for a Catholic weekly in Toronto, and was a copy editor in the mid-seventies at a major Toronto daily. He also taught high school English, drama and religion for 22 years, before retiring in 1998, and qualified as a certified financial planner in 1988. Currently, he is involved in fiction writing, for which purpose he sees journalism as a "great training ground".

There is a truism in journalism that goes like this: facts are sacred; comment is free.

When I first read it in one of the books on journalism that I borrowed from the USIS library in Bombay in the late 'fifties, I was filled with such fervor as to consider the vocation in journalism that I was contemplating on, at the time, akin to the priesthood. The concept of 'freedom of the press' particularly attracted and engaged my young mind, burning with idealism to bring about genuine equality in Indian society and to see us as a truly "honorable people" as the Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru had said we were.

In other words, journalism would offer me a platform to make a difference.

After a season of doing freelance sports reporting for The Indian Express in the city now called Mumbai, I felt much like a lover. One who is not content with merely kissing but wants to explore the whole body. And as a follower of another truism, namely, he who seeks finds the way, lucky circumstance fell into my lap and I found myself doing freelance work for the Goan Tribune, a fortnightly published in Bombay to espouse the cause of Goa's political freedom from the Portuguese rule.

Here I got the opportunity not only to write about sports, but also to do general news reporting and profiles of prominent Goans. In little over a year, though, my budding love affair discovered a flaw in my inamorata – the lady fancied the use of hyperbole and propaganda as legitimate means to promote herself. My idealism received a jolt of reality when Lambert Mascarenhas, editor of the periodical then, engaged in propagandist campaigning, suggesting that such slanted writing was necessary to achieve the end. However, my burning desire to express myself in writing overruled my squeamishness.

After the Liberation of Goa in 1961, Lambert went to Goa and became joint editor of a new English-language daily, The Navhind Times, owned and published by the Dempo Brothers, who had become wealthy in the mining business. My fascination for the mistress of journalism remained still intact, not to mention the hidden agenda of my wanting to change the world.

So I went to Goa and joined the paper in June 1963.

Considering myself as a protege of Lambert, I enjoyed a special status at the paper, doing both reporting and sub-editing. It didn't take me long, though, to notice that Vassantrao Dempo, the elder brother, was keenly interested in the image of his newspaper and its editorials. He had hired two editors, a Catholic and a Hindu named T. V. Parvate from Maharashtra, ostensibly to give balance to the paper's news and views. Often at around 5:30 p.m., I would see Mr. Dempo carefully perusing the editorial that Lambert or Parvate had written before it came to the newsroom. The editors wrote on alternate days. I would know, for example, that Dempo had suggested a change in how a certain point of view was expressed in Lambert's editorial because Lambert often invited me to sit across

his desk while he wrote an editorial that was based on my news report. Mr. Parvate, a fast and fluent writer, only occasionally asked me into his partitioned office to verify a fact or a figure.

Naturally, my curiosity propelled me to ask Lambert why it was necessary for him or Parvate to have their editorials okayed by the ultimate boss. After all, both of them were professionals who knew and understood the law of libel and defamation. Lambert, flashing his customary smile by way of indulging me, a novice in the game of politics, said it was a condition of his contract. Besides, what was the big deal? An editor could just as well express his own viewpoint as that of the owner. It wasn't a loss of freedom. We live and let live.

Reporters too

I thought about it and gradually came to the conclusion that reporters also indulged in self-censorship. Facts may appear to be sacred, but as a reporter I choose them to slant a 'story' in a particular way. Moreover, space in a newspaper is always limited, forcing me to write to a certain word count, in effect compelling me to sacrifice many 'facts'.

The above was true not only in Goa and Bombay where I worked as a general reporter for The Indian Express (1965-66) but also in Toronto where I worked as a copy editor on the foreign desk of The Globe and Mail in 1975-76. The foreign editor would throw at me reams of teletype copy from Reuters, Associated Press, Agence-France Presse, and The New York Times News Service on a current story, such as race riots in Johannesburg, or post-revolution democracy woes in Portugal or the Patty Hurst kidnapping by the Symbionese Liberation Army in San Francisco, and ask me for a 10-inch column story. This required that I cut out a lot of 'facts' from the 2000 words of wire copy and shape a news story in about 500 words.

Going back to Goa, I remember the one-sided coverage that Navhind Times carried during the month-long campaign for the historic, first general elections held on December 9, 1963. And I was part of it.

Now Vaikuntrao Dempo, younger brother of Vassantrao, was a Congress candidate in the Pernem constituency. The Dempo Brothers had made a substantial cash contribution to the national Congress Party, in effect buying a ticket for Vaikuntrao in the Goa elections. The local Goa Pradesh Congress Committee, headed by Purushottam Kakodkar, a freedom fighter and an apostle of Mahatma Gandhi, was deluged with names of suitable candidates. It was hard pressed to make a judicious choice, a key problem being the candidate's vision of the future of Goa.

At this time, after the 30-member Goa Legislative Consultative Council, headed by Maj.-Gen. Candeth, the mustachioed military governor, was dissolved and a writ for the first democratic elections was issued, two new political parties came into being and declared their election platforms. One was the United Goans, led by Dr. Jack de Sequeira, which stood for a separate state for Goa. The other was the Maharashtrawadi Gomantak Party, with Dayanand Bhandodkar at its helm, which stood for Goa's merger with Maharashtra. The Congress, waffling in between, promised that Goans would be consulted about its future in the Indian union.

The elder Dempo let it be known that his paper would support the Congress in the elections and, therefore, all news coverage must be oriented towards Congress candidates. And as the chief reporter at the paper, it fell to my lot to deliver the news with this bias. On the campaign trail, I traveled the length and breadth of Goa, speaking to Congress candidates and often manufacturing 'news' that purported to show that people, by and large, were in favor of Congress candidates. Lambert and I even drove to Pernem one day to see how Vaikuntrao's campaign was coming along.

However, my one dependable contact was none other than the 50-year-old Purushottam Kakodkar. His office in Panjim was open to me at any hour of the day. Knowing that our paper was solidly behind him, he was generous with his time and forthcoming, giving me full access to campaign reports sent to head office from the various constituencies. During the campaign, Lal Bahadur Shastri, the Indian Home Minister, visited Goa to lend his support to the Congress candidates. Kakodkar arranged for me an exclusive interview with the minister. In the interview, Shastri affirmed that a separate status for Goa was on the cards. A day after my story appeared on the front page, Kakodkar told me that Shastri was pleased with my report and had asked him to extend his congratulations to me. I was more than touched by this solicitude. I was feeling giddy, riding on the carousel of a mutual admiration society.

My friend Ben Saldanha of PTI in Panjim filed a report based on my interview; so did Joshi of The Times of India bureau. As a representative of a news agency, Saldanha, of course, had to

be objective and he was. As a matter of fact, he would often feed me stories about the other two parties, based on the 'inside' information he had received. He himself couldn't use that information for his news agency, but I could. And whenever I mentioned this 'fact' to my editors, I was told to just let it pass.

Now, as the campaign was getting into high gear, another friend L. S. Bhandare, an architect by profession, who represented UNI (United News of India) told me that the United Goans' campaign (workers dashing about in open trucks with loud music and handing out campaign literature) reminded him of elections in London, England. He too drew my attention to how successfully the UG party was appealing to the voters.

Convinced

But having persuaded myself willfully with auto-suggestion, and having been on a one-track crusade, I remained convinced that Congress would win the day. On the eve of the election, a day of pause in electioneering, I wrote an upbeat story (about three takes) and handed it to Mr. Salkhade, the news editor from Maharashtra. He scanned the intro and set it in the tray of stories for the front page. Then he looked up and said to me, "You know, Kakodkar is going to be the chief minister of Goa."

It was about 4 p.m. Something in the tone of his voice gave me pause. Then a wild notion entered my head, a spur-of-the-moment impulse, with no rhyme or reason, a mad folly that sometimes seizes lovers at play. I phoned Kakodkar.

"Hello, Purushottam." Although only 28, I was now on first-name basis with him.

"Hello Ben."

"It's a day of rest for you today. Is everything okay?"

"Fine."

"I've just finished writing my lead story for the paper tomorrow. Looks like Congress will win with an overwhelming majority. You must be pleased with the campaign. What do you think?"

"We have to wait and see," he said in a voice devoid of any emotion, but not exhausted. In this respect, Kakodkar came across as cool and circumspect, a man in full control of his emotions.

Mr. Salkhade was busy editing copy at the other end of the newsroom, beyond earshot. That wild notion came rushing again, prompting me to make the pitch, even if it was only hypothetical.

"Purushottam, can I ask you something?"

"Sure, of course."

"You know our paper has been very good to you and the Congress. And I, more than anybody else, have been responsible for all the publicity you've received. Soon you'll become the chief minister of Goa. Now I want to ask you: what will you do for me?"

A pause and, "What do you mean?"

"What I mean is, if you become the chief minister, can I be your press secretary?"

"I can't answer that."

"Why not?"

"I can't do it."

"Listen, I know you're not the chief minister yet. But in the event that you do become the chief minister, could you not at least tell me what your disposition will be?"

"No."

"You know, I can't believe you're saying this. I am not asking you for a job. I already have a job. All I am asking is, if you become the chief minister, what will you do for me? That's all."

"I can't do anything," he said.

"That's the answer I get after all that I have done for you? I am disappointed. Goodbye and good luck tomorrow."

"Thank you," he said and put the phone down first. I pictured him, in his customary white khadi bush shirt and pants, wearing a self-righteous expression on his face.

During this call, over the carriage of my Underwood typewriter, I was watching the news editor for my voice carried unusually far. But he was focused on his work and didn't look up in my direction.

I lit up a cigarette and hunched over the typewriter, dismayed beyond description. I had heard that Kakodkar was a highly principled man, and then with a sinking feeling in my gut, I realized I was being used, a means to the end. I shall never forget that moment.

Then I walked to my favorite bar to nurse my bruised ego.

Three days later, the election results came out. The Congress was wiped out without a single seat in Goa. The MG won 14 seats to the UG's 12, with two independents, plus an independent winning in Diu and a lone Congress victory in Daman.

I kept brooding about Kakodkar. Did he know something that I didn't? Was that why he said he couldn't do anything for me? I had no heart to ask him that. After that personal and private telephone conversation, the two of us carried on as if nothing had happened. And during the next year, my encounters with Kakodkar became strictly professional but cordial.

Echoes in Toronto

But the manipulation of news by newspaper proprietors was not limited to Goa. I heard a similar echo in Toronto in the nineties.

In the 1988 elections, the Progressive Conservative Party of Canada, led by Prime Minister Brian Mulroney, had won a second majority with 169 seats out of 295 in the House of Commons. The Liberals were in opposition with 83. In the ensuing five years, the Mulroney government brought in a new bill called Goods and Services Tax, a highly controversial measure that proved unpopular with the majority of Canadians. Still, the government went ahead and passed the tax bill – a 7% tax on all goods and services effective January 1990. During this term, Mr. Mulroney was also criticized for being too friendly with the Americans.

In the 1993 election, the public was fed up with the Tories (PC) as reflected in the opinion polls. But the press and media had no clear idea as to how deeply the people loathed the policies of the Tories. The shocker came on the night of the election-October 25. The fall from grace for the Tories was as stunning as it was deserved. They won only two seats in total, each in the province of New Brunswick and Quebec. The Liberals, led by Jean Chretien, returned with a huge majority of 177 seats. The Liberals are still in power, having won the next two elections in 1997 and 2000.

However, an interesting development regarding the power of the press took place in 1998. A wealthy Canadian newspaper mogul named Conrad Black financed a new daily in Toronto called The National Post. Black told readers that his paper would advance an alternative point of view, a far right conservative position on politics in Canada. As owner of London's Daily Telegraph, the Jerusalem Post, and Chicago's Sun-Times, Mr. Black hired top talent and spared no expense, at least for the first two years, to make the Post successful in creating and wooing the conservative voice in Canada. In the 2000 election, his paper became as one-sided as Navhind Times was in 1963. The paper supported a new party called Canadian Alliance, a highly conservative group drawn mostly from western Canada, and was hell-bent to destroy Prime Minister Jean Chretien and the Liberals. Alas, the people didn't buy it! And the Liberals forged ahead with a third majority win.

During this time, Mr. Black's personal agenda of wanting to be a peer in the House of Lords in England came out front and centre. The British Prime Minister Tony Blair recommended and the Queen accepted that Conrad Black be made a Lord. But sweet revenge raised its arms and Jean Chretien said Black couldn't be a Lord while being a Canadian citizen. Black was forced to renounce his Canadian citizenship. Not only that, but Black sold the National Post in 2001 for a tidy profit. He is now Lord Black of Crossharbour in the House of Lords.

I started this article with the observation that facts are sacred and comment is free. Both elements of journalism, it seems to me, are flawed. Like beauty and sex, freedom of the press is in the eye of the beholder and in the loins of the performer. It's all relative, never absolute.

Chapter 2: Goan journalism: Views from near and far

Eugene Correia

Canada-based Eugene Correia has worked for a wide range of national-level newspapers published in India. Besides those listed below, he has also written for India Today, and a number of expat Indian publications published from overseas. What stands out is this journalist's sharp understanding of Goan issues and politics, and his memory for detail, all the more remarkable since he has been based outside Goa for virtually his entire working life.

I must admit I have no direct connection with journalism in Goa, in the sense of having worked in the state. However, I was involved in Goan journalism in Mumbai (then Bombay), but that too in a limited way. I wrote few pieces for the Konkani-language papers such as The Goa Times and Ave Maria and the English-Konkani weekly, The Goan Sports Weekly. After Goa's Liberation, and till I left India for Canada in late 1981, I took more than a cursory look at how journalism is practiced in Goa. I read The Navhind Times often, as the paper was available in Mumbai during the 1970s.

I was involved in mainstream journalism in Mumbai since my college days, first with The Indian Express and later with the Free Press Journal. I provided freelance services for both papers in the sports department. It was my dad's cousin, Felix Valois Rodrigues, who inspired me to take up journalism. A versatile writer in English, Konkani and Portuguese, he worked for the Indian Express in New Delhi till his retirement.

Getting into the field

Felix Uncle, as I called him, introduced me to the news editor of Indian Express in Mumbai and I was given a chance to work in the sports department under CSA Swami . The news editor, S Krishnamoorthy, popularly known as SKM, who regarded by many as more powerful than the editor because of his close relationship with Ramnath Goenka, The Indian Express proprietor.

As a freedom fighter who served in jail for his anti-Portuguese activities, Rodrigues was well-connected in Goa. After my graduation, he gave me an introductory letter to Lamberto Mascarenhas, who was by then no longer the joint editor of The Navhind Times, Goa's first English-language daily.

Mascarenhas, in turn, gave me an introductory note to K.S.K. Menon, who had been co-editor with Mascarenhas, and later promoted to editor. I took the letter to Menon and, after reading it, said he would contact me if any position arose.

He gave me back the note. I read the Mascarenhas' scribbled note and was shocked. Mascarenhas had introduced me as a "chap" from "my village". It was true, we both came from Colva, but to a young man like me seeking a job it was horrifying to read a learned man like Mascarenhas call me a chap.

It's also true that Mascarenhas and I belong to different strata in Goa's caste system. I couldn't believe a man of his stature could introduce me in such a demeaning way. I think I have the note somewhere in my collection of memorabilia.

I never got a job at The Navhind Times. In later years, I met Mascarenhas in the office of Goa Today. From his days at The Navhind Times to owning Goa Today, Mascarenhas had become an icon in Goan journalism. He had also gained reputation as a novelist for his acclaimed book, *Sorrowing Lies My Land*. In subsequent years, I learnt a lot about Mascarenhas as a man and his role as a freedom fighter in the liberation struggle in Mumbai. One of his best friends, Professor Edward Mendonca taught me at St. Xavier's College. Mendonca and I came to know each other well after me finishing my graduation. Twice I saw him very drunk and I had to hail a taxi for him and drop him near his house in Colaba.

Mendonca reputation for booze is legendary as his mastery over the English language and his ability to teach. He and me spoke at times of Mascarenhas's reputed novel. Mendonca's hand can be seen throughout the book, and many English scholars have also been curious about it. Because of his alcoholism, it became easy for many to dismiss Mendonca's influence in Mascarenhas's book as a boast from a drunkard. Those like me who knew Mendonca reasonably well have reason to believe that Mendonca could be anything but a liar.

I held no grudge against Mascarenhas for calling me a "chap", but deep inside me I carried the wound. Even in Goa I would go to see him. On one such visit, I asked him if he would provide me with an opportunity to write for his magazine. He dismissed me summarily saying he prefers reputed writers. I thought he would encourage a young journalist like me. I resolved never to write for the magazine and I have never written for it.

When I learnt the magazine was taken over by the Salgaocars, I felt happy. Happy not because the magazine no longer belonged to Mascarenhas, but happy because I felt the new owners and the new editor would give opportunities to new writers. As we now know, it has happened. Goa Today was no longer the domain of one man and his ego.

On another visit during summer, I was dressed in a suit. I was to meet the then Chief Minister Dayanand Bandodkar and later attend a wedding in the city. Since I had no personal means of transport, for me to travel from Bogmallo to Panaji and back twice would be difficult, so I had worn the suit and left home early morning. As soon as I told Mascarenhas that I was going to meet Bandodkar, Mascarenhas's face changed colour. He admonished me for wearing a suit to see the chief minister, saying that journalists must be dressed informally. I explained to Mascarenhas, but

I could see that Mascarenhas bore some hatred for the late Bhausahab, as the chief minister was affectionately known.

That very same day, I met some journalists, including Michael Fernandes who, I believe, was The Indian Express correspondent in Goa. I told them that Mascarenhas seemed piqued at me for wearing a suit. If I remember correctly, Fernandes said that Mascarenhas has a personal bias against Bandodkar regarding the withdrawal of government advertisement. He told me that Mascarenhas and Bandodkar were once on a friendly basis, but both had fallen apart.

I think my second adventure in getting a job in Goa came when Erasmo de Sequeira launched his paper, Goa Monitor . I applied for a position but never got appointed. The paper lived for a brief time.

Some years later, my uncle told me that he has an offer from the Chowgules to start a Konkani daily. I came to Goa for a visit and went to see Rodrigues at his residence in Darbandora. He and I designed the logo for Uzvadd, though it may have been refined when the paper was launched. Rodrigues never took up the position as he was to be under the editorial supervision of Madhav Gadkari, the then editor of Gomantak. Gadkari was fiercely pro-Marathi and my uncle felt his efforts to promote Konkani journalism would be subverted by Gadkari. To my surprise, Evagrio Jorge, the noted freedom fighter and news reader at All-India Radio in Panaji, was its first editor. The paper was well received. As expected, Jorge and the owners or probably Gadkari had a difference of opinion. In a short time, Jorge was out and he launched his own paper, Novem Uzvadd.

Throwing light on Uzvadd

Without the financial muscles of the Chowgules that sustained Uzvadd, Jorge's paper suffered. I think it was also during this time that a group started another Konkani daily, *Novem Goem*. I am not sure why Uzvadd eventually folded up.

My friend, Cyril D'Cunha, started a sports weekly called *Goal*, and I was its Mumbai correspondent. I contributed many stories till the paper went under for reasons unknown to me. This was my direction connection to Goa's journalism. Later on, I was offered a job at the *West Coast Times*, a daily launched by the House of Timblos. At least two senior colleagues of mine at the *Free Press Journal* went to Goa to start the paper. One of them was Y.M. Hegde and the other, P.R. Menon.

Before going to Goa and even after the paper began publishing from Margao in South Goa, Hegde said it would be good for me to come to Goa. I forget the year it was launched and if I was still a freelancer at the *Free Press Journal* or on its staff. By then, I was not keen on settling down in Goa. To me, Goa was still in the backwaters of journalism. To leave a city like Mumbai where journalism made blood rush in one's veins, and go to Goa, where things moved at a snail's pace, was something I dreaded. When I wanted to come to Goa, I was found unwanted.

After leaving *Free Press Journal* and joining *The Hindu*, I met Raul Fernandes one day in Mumbai. He was scouting for talent for *O Heraldo*, then about to be turned into an English-language daily. I knew Fernandes, though not as well as his brother John and his dad, Antonio Caetano Fernandes.

The Fernandes family was close friends with my friends in Mumbai, the Ribeiros, owners of the Goan restaurant in Dhobitalao called *Snowflake*. When in Goa, my friend and I went to see AC, as he was popularly known, at the Casa JD Fernandes store in Panaji. And whenever John came to Mumbai to get supplies for their store, he would visit *Snowflake* where I hung out most of my time.

Raul Fernandes and I met at the Kyani Restaurant in Dhobitalao and he offered me to come to Goa as chief reporter. The offer was unattractive financially for me to leave *The Hindu*. I was given the impression that Erville Menezes, then with *Indian Express* in Mumbai, was joining as editor. Fernandes was in consultation with Menezes, I was told. At a second meeting, Fernandes informed me that Rajan Narayan was chosen to be the editor. I was surprised. I never had any admiration for Narayan's journalism. I had heard some stories about his resignation from *The Mirror*, a monthly publication from the *Eve's Weekly* group. Even though the offer of chief reporter was not tempting, I was not keen on working under Narayan.

I knew Narayan on a hi-and-bye basis when I was at *Free Press Journal* and he was at *Onlooker*, a sister-publication from the *Free Press Journal* group. I forget what position he held at the *Onlooker* magazine, and whether Narayan was there when M.J. Akbar edited it or later when M. Rahman took over.

I once covered a function at the United States Information Services (USIS) office in Mumbai where Narayan was present. A well-known scholar of Black studies was visiting Mumbai from the United States. Narayan carried with him a book by this scholar. I found it very preposterous on Narayan's part to bring the heavy volume to the meeting.

In fairness to Narayan, he made *O Heraldo* what it's today. I also heard some allegations about his wheeling-dealing with powers-that-be in the government. Many journalists and some politicians told me that Narayan deserved the violent attack on him as his journalism was biased. No matter what his journalism is, the attack on him was a shameful incident in the history of Goan journalism.

I am told he's Goa's bravest journalist. Maybe true, as I am in no position to judge that from here in Canada. But I find his writing very weak. His editorials and columns have lot of spelling errors and the grammar is often flawed. His column, *Stray Thoughts*, is not well composed. Just a month or so ago, someone gave me old copies of *O Heraldo*. Going through his column, I found his

thoughts not very cohesive. He writes in a disjointed way. One thing I will agree, he writes strongly, not sparing those whom he targets. If carving a well-written piece is his fault, then using strong language is his forte. I form my opinion not on just the few papers I read recently, but also from reading O Heraldo during my visits to Goa and from those at times posted on the Goanet email list (<http://www.goanet.org>).

On holiday

Just after a year's stay in Canada, I came to Goa on a holiday. One fine day, Fulgencio Rodrigues, once the leader of the toddy-tappers association and a candidate for the assembly, and a fellow-villager in Bogmallo, came to my house and told me that Umaji Chowgule wanted to meet with me.

I was taken aback as I didn't know Umaji personally. Rodrigues, who worked for the Chowgules, took me on his scooter to meet him Umaji at the Chowgule offices. To my surprise, he offered me a job as joint editor of a sports daily the Chowgules were then planning on launching. The other editor was to be Antonio Botelho, a former sports writer at The Navhind Times, who I knew well, both as writer and later as one of the office-bearers of the Goa Football Association.

I was a landed immigrant in Canada and my first experience in Canada was not very good. There was recession then on and I was finding it difficult to get a job in my field. I worked in a warehouse for sometime, making enough money to buy a ticket to India.

The offer came with a flat in the Sant Inez locality of Panaji and a car. I told Umaji that if I accept the position, I would forfeit my landed immigrant status in Canada. I asked if what would happen if the paper failed to fly. He said he would absorb me in the public relations department of the Chowgules. I went to Sant Inez with one of the Chowgule officers to select a flat. I picked one. After that I went to the Gomantak building to meet with Narayan Athawale, editor of Gomantak . Umaji had explained that Athawale would be the overall in charge of the new paper.

After speaking to Athawale, I met some workers. I noticed some tension among them regarding the launch of a new paper. The workers felt that profits from the Gomantak paper would be diverted to sustain the new sports daily. In other words, the workers would get lesser bonuses. The atmosphere in the press seemed vitiated. I was also aware of what happened to Evagrio Jorge. I was contemplating whether I should risk my Canadian immigration to remain in Goa. My heart and mind was divided, and so was my family. My dad said I should stay back as the job prospects in Canada very dim, but my mom said I should go back and see what the future holds.

At the same time I was engaged and in a week or two would get married. My future wife insisted that I forego the offer and return to Canada. I gave the whole thing a good thought and decided to tell Umaji that I was not interested. He had told me that if I decide to accept the offer, I should finally meet Ramesh Chowgule who, I think, was the managing director of the Chowgule group. I believe the paper was never launched. To this day, I am not sure how the Chowgules came to know about me. My hunch is that Prashant Joshi, former official of the Goa Cricket Association, whose family owns the Joshi and Sons Auto Center in Vasco, told Umaji about me. I had gone to visit Joshi in Vasco when I came to Goa.

During my next visit to Goa, I was happy to know that one of my colleagues at Free Press Journal, Padiyar, was editor of The Navhind Times with another former colleague, M.M. Mudaliar, as his associate. In fact, Mudaliar was passed over by the management after Bikram Vohra left to go to Khaleej Times in Dubai. Mudaliar and me had lunch one day in a Panaji restaurant and he seemed quite distraught. Padiyar, who joined The Navhind Times from The Times of India where he had moved from Free Press Journal, had a brief stint as editor as he passed away following a heart attack.

I knew the publisher of The Navhind Times, Vilas Sardesai, well because of his involvement with soccer. Once when I was in Goa, he, D'Cunha and I travelled in a car he borrowed from Vohra, as his own car was unavailable, all the way from Panaji to Margao to watch a soccer match. I never asked Sardesai for a favour to get me a job at The Navhind Times. I was content working in Mumbai where journalism flourished those days and continues to do so till today.

Grown since

When I check websites of Goan papers or when some friends and family bring Goan papers to Canada from their visits, I notice that Goan journalism has grown since I saw it first-hand. It behooves well for this field that Goa now enjoys many dailies and has correspondents of many leading Indian papers.

The quality of reporting and editing is still not very impressive. What is, however, impressive is that the new breed of journalists shows lot of guts and vitality. I once discussed the teaching of journalism with Fr. Planton Faria, who used to run the Diocesan Communication Centre at the Archbishop's House at Altinho in Panaji.

He showed me the student paper and I saw some good writing. I am not aware if the centre is still operating. Fr. Faria was editing a Konkani paper while also running the centre.

It has been my ambition to have a journalism college in Goa named after Frank Moraes, one of the finest editors in Indian journalism. There may be many who would dispute my suggestion on the basis that Moraes didn't do anything for Goan journalism per se, and I totally agree. No matter he did play a direct role in Goan journalism, but he was a Goan journalist of repute.

One may argue that during the Portuguese days there were many Goan journalists who played crucial roles in promoting Goan journalism. Some of these journalists, who were also leaders, were in the forefront of Goa's liberation struggle. Maybe so, Moraes too played a vital background role in Goa's liberation, largely because of his close friendship with Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru.

Whatever the case, a college of journalism, affiliated to the Goa University, is a dream that I cherish and hope it would be realized in my lifetime. Goa has a privileged status in the history of the written word in India with the publication of the first-ever book in the country. Journalism is part of the written word and, hence, a college that fosters the growth of journalism would be ideal in the serene surrounding of Goa's educational landscape. That's my thought to ponder for those in the decision-making positions.

Chapter 3: West Coast Times : A dream ruined

Valmiki Faleiro

One of Goa's own, home-grown prolific writers between the mid-seventies and mid-eighties, Faleiro worked his way through other professions too, before coming back to commit himself in writing once again, only to reveal a style that remains as readable as ever. Luckily for Goa, Faleiro doesn't rule out the possibility of taking to the pen – or should one say, the computer keyboard – sometime in the near future.

Summer, 1978. Whether Goa's only English daily hit newsstands in Margao at 9 or at 11 in the morning, mattered little. I was preparing for my final B.Com. exams due in a few weeks and had, in any case, tired myself of asking The Navhind Times' management to make it a newspaper (for us in South Goa) that went with breakfast, not brunch.

My association with The Navhind Times (NT) had begun precisely on February 23, 1975. NT carried an article penned jointly by D.M. Silveira and me. (Silveira was one of my two English lecturers at Margao's Damodar College and, with the other, B.G.Koshy, later turned to journalism: Silveira was Editor, ONLOOKER, of Mumbai's FPJ group and Koshy the Associate Ed. of The Current Weekly.)

Then on, the NT Editor, Dr. K.S.K. Menon, encouraged me to write. Off and on, he would also commission me to do Sunday features, sometimes full-page, on topics of prevailing reader interest. Between 1975 and 1978, I had some 45 by-lines at the NT, then a 6-pager (10 pages on Sunday.)

Sometime in between, Dr. K.S.K. asked me to join the NT desk – with free education at Dempo College of Commerce and no-night-shifts baits. I ought to have grabbed the offer. The company was great: K.P. Nair (News Ed), the incredibly witty Balan (Chief Sub), my friend Patrick Michael (a gifted Malayalee who, with me, but surreptitiously, covered North Goa for The Current Weekly – together we had done the Siddarth Bandodkar shooting story, but who K.S.K. ensured stayed as Proof Reader without promotion at the NT!) Gabru and Cyril D'Cunha were at the desk and Gurudas R. ("Kaka") Singbal, Pramod Khandeparkar and Jovito Lopes on the field?

For reasons that will take me off this track, I declined the offer. Promising Dr. K.S.K., however, that I'd join the day I complete graduation – though I never really meant to take journalism as a career. I had set my sights on becoming a Company Secretary after B.Com. but while doing the correspondence course, thought I'd work – and earn pocket money.

The '70s were times of MRTP culture. There were monopolies and there were restrictive trade practices, and Commissions that could barely hold them in check. Even though Dr. K.S.K. to my sheer amazement once bragged that the Prime Minister's private secretary telephoned him while he was shaving just that morning (to compliment him on the day's "excellent" editorial), fact was that NT rarely traveled 35 kilometres to Margao before 8 or 9 in the morning. Times wouldn't change and the NT stood still. It was a proud monopoly, which, after all, had weathered challenges from the likes of Goa Monitor (Papa Baba Sequeira-owned, Jagdish Rao -published, Mario Cabral Sa-edited and Alfred De Tavares -chief reported.)

Back to the summer of 1978. As our 'unholy trinity' of Aleixo, Shekhar and me daily sat at the Govind Poy house on Abade Faria Road, Margao, preparing for our final B.Com. exams, I missed Kaka Singbal – a.k.a. Balsing, the Sunday columnist and Chief Reporter of NT – and Sripad P. Madkaikar, who at one time or the other published most of Goa's dailies. Both had called at home earlier in the day. Kaka left a note saying he had something "interesting" for me and would I kindly see him soon. I met him at his Patto quarters early next morning. He said he had quit NT and joined

a newspaper that was going to be published – from Margao! He said the proprietor, Panduronga (Chalebab) Timblo – Papa to most of us – had made a blanket offer: whatever the NT offered me, he would offer more!

I immediately went to Navhind Bhavan. Dr. K.S.K. was seated with Fr. Lactancio Almeida, then Editor of Vauraddeancho Ixtt. I explained that it would help me cope with my Company Secretary studies from the comforts of my own home in Margao? The ex-Army man perennially dressed in cool white almost sprang from the chair, his neatly waxed whiskers bristling with rage: "Are you going to that W.C. s**t Times?"

He tried a different line, "Are you going to join my competitor and stab me in the chest?" And yet another, "Remember I am the P.A.C. (Press Advisory Committee) chairman for another three years – and as long as I'm around, I'll ensure you don't get an accreditation!!"

I was painfully aware that I was reneging on a promise, that by joining a competitor, I'd hurt the hand that had, in good measure, groomed me. But Company Secretaryship was my object – not journalism – and I honestly imagined that studying the course material and sending out its Response Sheets would be better done from home and without working on shifts, as I'd at NT. [I was, eventually, recompensed with poetic justice. I hadn't reckoned that joining a fledgling – nay, nascent – publication as its Staff Reporter, with added responsibility of news-gathering in South Goa (which meant re-writing copy from mofussil correspondents who largely hailed from a vernacular background) would be so engrossing an affair that I ended up sending not a single Response Sheet to the Institute of Company Secretaries of India!]

The West Coast Times (WCT) began churning out dummies by late-June 1978. My die was cast on June 6, 1978, by way of acceptance of the appointment letter, personally signed by Papa (Panduronga Timblo) himself. One of the most promising publishing ventures in the history of Goa's print media was about to take off?

The mid-'70s witnessed a boom in Goa's mining industry, both in terms of productivity and profitability. Panduronga Timblo Industrias (PTI) had evidently also made pots of cash, particularly from its manganese mines in Rivona, Quepem. While brother, Gurudas' Timblo Private Limited (TPL) had during this time invested in some far-sighted (but alas, badly managed) industrial enterprises, including fertilizers, rubber footwear and collapsible tubes, youngest brother, Modu's Sociedade de Fomento Industrial (SFI) was consolidating its strengths in mining and diversifying into hospitality. PTI did not lag behind – with Parshuram Paper Mills at Chiplun, industrial gases in Bangalore and, to the surprise of many, an English-language newspaper from Margao!

A rival to Hobson's choice NT

The last comment may be off the mark. As I later learnt from Papa himself, the project was conceived from a broader vision. Throughout the Konkan, from Ratnagiri district in Maharashtra to South Canara (now Dakshin Kannada) districts in Karnataka, no English-language daily was available before noon or afternoon those days. While the Mumbai dak editions of Times of India (ToI) and Indian Express (IE) did the honours in coastal Maharashtra, it was Bangalore's Deccan Herald in coastal Karnataka. Goa's NT, which took only a couple of hours less to reach Margao, could not be expected to travel beyond its borders on mass circulation basis – till WCT arrived, NT was in fact believed to have pegged its circulation (to avoid re-classification to a higher bracket, which implied higher minimum wages to staff and workers!)

It was Papa's dream to fill this void of a morning English-language daily for the entire Konkan, from Goa. Hence the West Coast in the newspaper's name. Competition to NT was only incidental. (I am not aware of any family feuds among Goa's mining magnates at the time and shall stand corrected if there was any such *raison d'etat*. If there really were any differences between the two families, they would be buried some years later: under blessings of the Partagal Swamiji, Papa's grand-daughter, Pallavi, was given in marriage to the Dempo headman, Vasantrao's son, Srinivas – current Chairman of the Dempo group.)

The infrastructure put into place to realize Papa's dream matched. A modern civil construction, meticulously designed, was put up at Davorlim, just beyond Margao's municipal boundary. Editorial, advertising and printing departments were housed under one roof for optimum synchrony. All sections of the newspaper's production process, from subbing to typesetting, from proof reading to optical processing, from plate-making to the final printing, were so located as to achieve maximum production speed. Attention was paid even to minor details, like sending galley proofs to the news desk in a jiffy. Such were the conveniences that the edition could go to bed by a leisurely 4.30am (the print run took barely half an hour.) Communication lines were made as reliable as possible, given frequent power interruptions. Both PTI and UNI ticker services were subscribed to (though only the PTI had a carrier station in Margao to cope with breakdowns.) A full-fledged bureau was set up in Panjim, connected to the editorial offices in Davorlim by teleprinter link.

The printing technology employed was said to be the best available in India – except in typesetting, where for some unknown reason, Lino machines were used instead of computers (maybe the value of lead scrap, in place of katchra bromides that computers generated those days, had something to do with it!) No more block-making for photographs and illustrations; these were optically processed directly to printing plates. A modern web offset printing machine was brought in (together with a Delhi-based Haryanvi operator who soon acquired fondness for palm feni from nearby Jose's bar and other unprintables from across the Rawanfong railway tracks!). The machine churned out, if I remember right, 50,000 copies/hour. Even the camera purchased for the Staff Photographer was a top-of-the-line German Leica, complete with an array of lenses and filters, worth a lakh of rupees of 1978. Krishna Kurwar managed the plant, under the GM-cum-Publisher, Madkaikar. The result was a refreshing, never-before-seen product on the landscape of Goa's print media.

To match, a high-profile editorial team was put together under the stewardship of Konkani-speaking M.G. Bailur and his Associate, Tulu-speaking Y.M. Hegde, both originally from South Canara. The backbone of the newspapers, the News Editor, was P.R. Menon, the old and revered FJP warhorse. The complement of three Chief Subs and about a dozen Subs was picked from various national dailies – Goa could come up with only two pairs of hands on the news desk. Being unfamiliar with local affairs, this cast added onus on Kaka Singbal and me to mark the priority of our dispatches in the initial days!

The news-gathering team headed by Kaka (assisted by Dharmanand Kamat in Panjim and Karamchand Furtado on the TP link) was, of course, entirely home-bred. I rushed college-mate Leslie St. Anne thro' a crash course in typing to join me in Margao. In South Goa, we had Radharao Gracias and Joey Rodrigues (both law students then), Felicio Esteves (who went on to become a Ministerial P.A. and co-author of the infamous Marks Scandal subsequently scooped by me for the FPJ), John Carlos Aguiar in Ponda, Vallabh Dessai in Quepem, Minguel Mascarenhas in Sanguem, Kelly Furtado in Vasco, and half a dozen stringers across South Goa. Manikrao (brother of the award-winning ToI photographer, Prabhakar M. Shirodkar) was our lensman, assisted by Lloyd Coutinho in Margao and Lui Godinho in Vasco, excellent photographers all, who provided the memorable photo inputs that shot the WCT to instant fame.

WCT hit the newsstands in early-July 1978. We raced. In Margao, I concentrated on at least one off-beat, human-interest, interview-based or photo-story per day, carried usually boxed or in anchor position. Aware of our printing process strengths, I never lost an opportunity to get Manik shoot a good pic, including one that had to be clicked from a bubbling canoe in choppy waters off a rocky beach in Betul, South Goa. [This one was of a rotting human male corpse – sprawling, shocking and white on the dark rocks – which the cops had neglected to recover despite the local Sarpanch's days-long complaints. P.R. Menon splashed the pic in the lead-story position. I had to take Papa's reprimand the following morning – it seems the Lt. Governor was taken so aback picking the morning's WCT that his P.A. personally called Papa to complain about bad taste. But I still considered the two-and-half Rupees paid to the canoe man for the ride a fine expense!]

Consciously, though, we shunned sensationalizing and Kaka firmly shot the idea of carrying the day's matka figures. We refrained from gimmicks like carrying dummy advertisements, especially in the Classified columns, barometer to a newspaper's popularity.

Instead, we went for innovative editorial content. [Including, at my instance, a SundayMag column on Sleight of Hand by the Salcete magician, Marco. When Marco didn't show up for a couple of weeks, leading to howls from eager readers of his column, Y.M. Hegde was so furious that I had to fill in with a piece on how Marco had performed the Vanishing Trick and restore YM's trademark smile!]

To further notch up circulation, I almost coerced Madkaikar into breaking the back of monopoly newspaper distributors in South Goa – by selling retail bundles to any willing vendor on an initial sell-or-return basis.

Results were evident. By month 6, we sold around 4,500 copies in and around Margao alone, compared to less than half that number by NT. Circulation problems, however, persisted in North Goa, including delayed deliveries to news stalls in the northern talukas. But then, we had just two vehicles to cover the entire territory. ("Penny wise, Pound foolish," P.R. Menon forever rued, he never carried much of an impression about the managerial abilities of Goan mineowners – all his life, after all, Menon had worked in a establishment owned by the Karnanis, Marwaris to the core!) Even then, overall, WCT's print order would be just about 2,000 copies short of the NT. And at the rate we were going, the gap would fast be closed and surpassed?

My heroes, of course, were Shivram Borkar and Babal Borkar, ace drivers who by day ferried the shift editorial staff to and from quarters in Margao to office in Davorlim . By night, the duo snoozed whatever time available, on heaps of 'raddi' in the press. And zipped their way with newspaper bundles to either end of Goa before the crack of dawn – in terribly overloaded, ramshackle, dieselized Ambassador cars that should have been a delight to Mario Miranda and Alexyz (we used a syndicated pocket cartoon, incidentally, since Mario was with the ToI group in Mumbai and Alexyz hadn't yet surfaced as a cartoonist.) Babal and Shivram, true heroes who virtually were at call, round the clock, round the year. [They of course made out-of-pocket money, ferrying passengers on the return. When this reached Papa's ears, he tailed one of the drivers one fine morning. When the unsuspecting fellow stopped to take in passengers, Papa is reported to have pulled alongside and

advised the driver, "Bhara, bhara, taxi ti!" The man was often magnanimous. The driver did not lose his job.]

By the first year of publication, despite impressive circulation figures, there were no signs of advertising revenue picking up to reach the financial break-even point. To the sheer dismay of our well-knit editorial team, there were also no signs of implementation of the pan-Konkan Plan. The management, instead, began fighting shy to inject fresh investment in the enterprise. Corners started getting cut. Virgin plates came to be used only for jacket pages, inside pages were processed on recycled plates. Papa's dream began to show signs of fatigue?

By the third month into the second year of publication, amid this uncertain scenario, arrived Nicholas ("Nicky") Rebello, a lino-typesetter and leader of the NT worker's union. I will not hedge a bet if Nicky was 'inspired' by his employers, but having been in touch with him much after his retirement from NT at his home in Betim, I can vouchsafe Nicky didn't travel to Davorlim by any 'political' inspiration. My best guess is that some restive workers of the WCT press, aware of wages being paid at NT, must have approached and invited Nicky to Davorlim. The workers of WCT press got unionized and Nicky soon served a Charter of Demands. The management stood its ground, often unreasonably in the opinion of the editorial team – which of course had no locus standi in the imbroglio. As the strike showed signs of protraction, P.R. Menon, known for leftist leanings from his fiery days at the FPJ, tried to intervene with the management. To no avail.

(P.R. Menon was forever of the conviction that managerial skills of Goan mine-owners were limited to blasting, transportation and shipping – and after the importer's cheque arrived, to distributing the proceeds to those who had blasted, transported and shipped. And, of course, to profits!) Papa, strangely, sometimes used queer management methods. There was this Chief Accountant, hired for the PTI group, on a then princely salary of Rs.4,000 a month. To get a feedback on the Chief Accountant, Papa assigned a peon drawing no more than Rs.250 a month. After office hours, the peon would report to Papa on the activities of the C.A. from which, inferences on the Chief Accountant were drawn!

But a man of immense experience and intuition he was. From the streets of native Assolna in Salcete, where as a child he hawked textiles, a wooden yard measure slung across his shoulder and a coolie with a headload of wares in tow, Papa must have surely post-graduated from the University of Experience. On occasions when I was seated in his chamber, his P.A., Sambari would buzz to announce a visitor. In a flash Papa knew why the man had come, what he would say, and had the replies even before the visitor entered! I personally saw flaming creditors leave his chamber smiling, even though not a paisa had yielded! He had that rare ability to disarm even the most irate visitor. But when it came to the WCT strike, I have always held the belief that a man of such calibre who could have easily placated the agitated workers and even broken their Union, was somehow carried away with the opinion of one trusted man, who was obviously misleading him – and since I've named names, I will exclude Madkaikar and Kurwar.]

With no end to the strike in sight, Bailur, Hegde, Kaka and me next met and virtually pleaded with Papa to concede some sops to the striking workmen and get the publication going. I think the establishment (may not have been Papa) thereafter regarded as being pro-Union!

The editorial team, bulk of which was from outstation, met frequently during those bekaar days and finally, the painful decision emerged that we tell the management to either settle the dispute with the Union or we quit en masse. The management was unmoved. We quit, but Papa's dispenser of bad advice insisted on serving 'dismissal' letters!

And thus a lofty dream to publish from Goa, the land of Banna Halli, an English daily serving the entire of Lord Parashuram's Konkan on the West Coast of India, went phut. A modern press and process, an excellent editorial team – path-breaking infrastructure in Goa's history of newspaper production – lay in waste.

The venerable Bailur returned to retirement, as did P.R. Menon. Y.M. Hegde joined Mumbai's Shipping Times as Editor. The Chief Subs and Subs returned to their original publications or to new jobs. A Goan Sub, Vincent Rangel, from Tivim-Bardez, went into business, as the Mumbai-end partner of Manvin Couriers. I joined the FPJ Group (Free Press Journal, its tabloid-evening Bulletin and fortnightly, Onlooker) as Goa Correspondent; moved in like capacity to IE when FPJ's Chief Editor, S. Krishnamurty joined IE's Mumbai edition as Resident Editor; played a role in J.D. Fernandes' decision to start an English avatar of the near defunct Portuguese O Herald (including the hiring of its first editor) – and almost joined, but didn't quite – as that newspaper's Chief Reporter, for reasons that Rajan Narayan should know. And finally got into business. Without regrets.

Chapter 4: Novem Goem: The Roof Caves In

Paul J Fernandes

Paul Fernandes, known to journalists in the state for his amiable nature, as also his ability and inclination to do off-beat and far-from-the-beaten-track stories, has published a vast amount on issues that concern rural Goa, archaeology and the average resident of Goa. He was recently winner of a Centre for Science and Environment (Delhi) fellowship to study water issues in Goa.

Konkani as the official language of Goa was then still a distant dream. And granting of statehood to the Union Territory, a remote possibility. A few Konkani protagonists casually discussing the issue felt that a medium was sorely needed to project the aspirations of true Goans. And only a "people's newspaper" free from the shackles of the capitalist could achieve that, they thought.

A few years earlier, Uzvadd, reincarnated as Novo Uzvadd and Novo Prakash, had become defunct after its editor Evagrio Jorge learnt a few bitter truths. The Herald – in its new English-language avatar as also in the much-touted role of a champion of Konkani – was yet to appear on the horizon.

It was then in 1980 on a dark night ... in Panjim ... that the idea of launching a Konkani daily was born. And talk about the requirement of funds for the mammoth project threw up a novel idea. The way out was a 'pad-iatra' (or, long march across Goa on foot) through the villages of the then union territory. At a follow-up meeting, the individuals involved formed a Trust – called the Novem Goem Pratishthan. They crowned the then young seminary-student turned trade union leader Christopher Fonseca, who floated the idea of a pad-iatra, as its general secretary.

Trustees were Sara Machado, Advocate Pandurang Mulgaonkar, Gurunath Kelekar, Dr F M Rebello, Advocate Antonio Lobo, and Gustav Clovis Costa. Mathany Saldanha and Fr Braz Faleiro played a stellar role in getting the idea through.

And so began an eventful, and an unforgettable, 70-day trudge through the nooks and corners of Goa. There were some 70-odd volunteers, which included a few women and two vivacious sisters, Tina and Colete Xavier, students at that time.

The pad-iatra started on October 26, 1980. Fonseca recalls that wherever they went, they received a good response. Money, small and big sums, was contributed. There were occasions too when – language being a sensitive issue in Goa – they were insulted. But they had decided not to retaliate in any way. A person spat on a young pad-iatri, Srikant Chodankar, when he knocked at his door for his contribution for the new paper. But he bravely said 'thank you' and stepped out with the others.

Two of the girls accompanying him burst into tears, as participants from that venture recall.

The eventful 'pad-iatra' ended on December 31, New Year's eve. By then, the volunteers had managed to collect around Rs 250,000, a tidy sum considering that this was just in the start of the 'eighties, when the rupee still had more value than now.

Needless to say, it took about six months to create the requisite infrastructure to launch the daily. Finding premises, purchasing machinery and recruiting the staff. When the Novem Goem first hit the stands in 1980, many naturally had great expectations that it would serve as a people's paper. Several dailies in the past had not survived for long, given the huge requirement of funds.

Indeed, Novem Goem could not scale great heights; but it had many 'lows' during its span. The coverage could not be extensive, nay it was even below average. This is perhaps understandably because the publication could not engage a big team of reporters or set up a network of reporters in all corners of Goa. But it carried to work with few expectations and fewer rewards.

During the agitation, the tabloid served to keep the mass of Konkani lovers, specially in its heartland of Salcete, if it can be called that, posted of various developments. The paper served to forge a relationship and bridge the gap between the old Roman Konkani writers and those who had just started writing in the Devnagri script. Well-known poets, writers, such as Uday Bhembre, Dr Bhikaji Ganekar, Manoharrari Sardesai were among those who often contributed their writings to the paper.

The paper also sought to raise the standard of Konkani among its readers by often explaining difficult words, as compared to the poor quality of writing in most Roman script periodicals. I myself recall contributing to a column Aichim Don Utram (Today's Two Words), which gave the readers two new words to learn daily, with meanings in English and also illustrated by examples.

'Konkni uloi, Konkni boroi, Konkknintlean sorkar choloi' (Speak Konkani, Write Konkani, Administer The State In Konkani), the slogan coined by one of the trustees, Gurunath Kelekar, gained currency and set the mood among Konkani lovers.

While the paper finally closed down, coincidentally, it did so after Konkani was included in the Eight Schedule of the Constitution of India and Goa was granted statehood – two of the avowed objectives for which the Trust had launched the paper. Many may be skeptical about the contribution of this small paper to these two great and important causes. But having worked in this paper for just over three years as a sub-editor, I recall that Dr Rebello, as its editor, contributed significantly to the chorus for the twin demand.

DURING THE ENTIRE existence of the paper, its management had to face several struggles and even upheavals among the trustees.

Its problems started from the day the presses were set up. While an offset machine could have been bought, a Glockner machine owned by one of the Trustees was sold to the Trust. With that, it was only possible to print a tabloid paper. The machinery subsequently gave several problems. How a newspaper cannot survive without infusion of frequent doses of capital was best exemplified here. Advertising revenue was very low, though there were phases when its staff pooled their efforts to raise funds by canvassing for advertisements through their own initiative. There were managerial problems, too. With lack of experience in running a paper, and negligence by some of the Trustees at certain stages, the roof finally had to cave in.

A former trustee alleges that the quantum of advertisements released by the government to the paper was meagre, and the staff even led a morcha to the Secretariat, alleging shabby treatment. This continued even after Konkani was made the official language of the state.

If the paper survived for around a decade, it could be termed as a miracle of sorts. There were around 7,000 readers, who religiously read the daily. However, the poor coverage towards the end saw its readership go down sharply. The emergence of a slickly printed and produced Konkani-monthly Gulab also hastened its death.

However, there was no dearth of sympathisers. Gulf Goans contributed generously, and quite often, to keep it afloat. But tiatrists were largely not among them as they showed apathy towards it vis-a-vis advertisements of their shows. They preferred an English-language daily and very few advertised in Novem Goem, if at all rarely.

The real heroes and the sufferers in the bargain were the Novem Goem workers, who toiled during its entire 10-year existence. Lack of revenue meant that they often received their salaries late. On the 10th of any month, it was not unusual for the management to announce they would give some advance on the salary. For one thing, the salary was being delayed; over and above, to be told that they would get it in installments was the ultimate affront. More so when these were people with families to feed. But this went on month after month, specially during the last few years.

They were entitled to a scale of salaries under Palekar Wage Award – the Central Government-notified standards then in force for minimum wages to be paid to journalists – but they accepted graciously whatever they were offered. This was, naturally, much below the Wage Board recommendations.

And the employees, having few options, hung on with commendable courage, though there was no hope of a turn around. Their toil and sacrifices were really something to think about. After the paper closed, they should have received their dues from what came in as the proceeds from the sale of machinery and the balance of a raffle draw, which had been floated to raise funds for the paper.

But they are yet to be given their due.

The paper finally went to bed for the last time some time in June 1988. And a novel experiment to offer a people's paper to the masses made a quiet and sad exit....

Chapter 5: The Herald of A New Ethos

R.K. Nair

R.K. Nair sees himself as a battle-scarred veteran too (adding, "though close friends in Goa may describe me as bottle-scarred"). He has 'seen action' in Kuwait and Iraq after his departure from Goa. Back in India after the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait, he worked for the Indian Express. He then went to Oman, returning again to take up an assignment with the Hindu, where he currently works.

So the Rajan era has finally come to an end at the Herald . Sad though it may seem in human terms, it is unlikely to surprise anyone who has at least a nodding acquaintance with his brand of journalism – especially his strident and sensational approach to contentious issues, such as the language agitation of the 'eighties.

By the time I arrived in Goa, the Herald (formerly O Heraldo) had celebrated the third anniversary of its re-incarnation as an Englishman – but it was not yet out of the birth pangs. It often looked like a one-man show. The six-to-eight page broad-sheet was Rajan Narayan's play-field, and he played with gusto – solo at times, fast and loose frequently. His output was phenomenal. He wrote the lead story, the front-page anchor, the edit almost everyday, six days a week, for several years. Besides, there also was the long-winded 'Stray Thoughts', on Sundays.

Life at The Navhind Times was sedentary by comparison.

In keeping with the image of Goa being a land of laid-back lotus eaters, the NT staffers were under no pressure to perform. Being the dominant daily, news came naturally to the NT. In those days, it operated out of a small rented building, adjoining a bar and restaurant, on the outskirts of Panjim as the new building near the Panjim market was under construction. The bar and the building belonged to the then Mayor of Panjim, an affable man whose employees entertained the NT staffers on credit. The editorial staff got an off-day after two days of work – that's 10 offs a month, which was a luxury that journalists in other papers could not dream of.

The first thing that struck one about the English-language Press in Goa in those days was its utter lack of respect for the readers' intelligence. I'm sorry if this view offends anyone, but the small-town mentality, the self-serious posturing and the patronising editorialisation of news reports were all too obvious in both the NT and Herald.

But there ended the similarity. In other respects, the two papers were a study in contrast. Herald was technologically superior. Having introduced computers ahead of the NT, its printing was neater but the paper was replete with errors – typographical as well as factual. The NT too had its share of typos. But it made few factual errors, because, as critics would say, it seldom reported facts!

The NT used vintage Lino machines for composing and its antiquated printing machine broke down quite often. The morning paper hit the news-stands well after 10 am on such occasions. The printing was awful – full of black patches, missing letters and blank spaces that challenged the imagination of the reader. Still it retained its readership, mainly because it was perceived as the more credible of the two.

Rajan Narayan failed to rise to the occasion and offer a credible alternative. Herald behaved like a spoilt brat throwing tantrums. It lacked a sense of proportion. Too often, it played to the gallery, fanned sectarian passions and threw norms to the wind. With its rabble-rousing shrillness, Herald managed to gain a foothold among a section of the Goan population, especially in South Goa where the NT was perennially late to arrive. But Herald was not taken seriously even by its ardent supporters. Journalist Devika Sequeira once summed up the situation neatly: Herald was laughable and the NT evoked tears!

All that changed with the arrival of the Gomantak Times . The NT Chief Reporter Pramod Khandeparker quit to join the GT. The NT was jolted out of its complacency – it was facing a challenge it had never faced before. Work on the new building was speeded up, and the relocation carried out in a hurry. Computers were installed and a new printing machine was ready.

But all that was not enough to ward off a threat from the rivals. Its content had to improve. Acting Editor M.M. Mudaliar was in a bad mood. His calm and composed disposition gave way to a brittle temper. He yelled at the management people, and threatened to have the editorial staff sacked.

One day, I diffidently approached him with a piece of writing and asked for permission to launch a column in the Sunday supplement. He was reluctant. I was new and untested. And I was not even a regular – I was on voucher payment. But he decided to give it a try and carried the piece on the front page of the Sunday Magazine. It was titled 'A peep into Goan psyche'. The column was called 'Small Talk' and it appeared under the pseudonym of R.K. Yen. The response to the first piece was incredibly good. Mudaliar readily published the second one and, when the third piece appeared, I got the appointment order.

By then Mudaliar had been confirmed as Editor and the paper was ready to face the world with new vigour. The editorial offs were curtailed to once a week. The printing improved and new features and columns were gradually introduced. The NT had arrived. The threat from GT looked feeble now. They had good journalists and better technology, but had forgotten to hire good proof-readers. The paper was full of typos, even in headlines.

The NT was relieved – at least temporarily.

The arrival of GT had a big impact on the Herald too. Rajan Narayan began to behave like one possessed. He blamed Chief Minister Pratapsing Rane and the NT for all the ills of the world. His frustration was beginning to show. He railed against the NT and Rane at the drop of a hat. Once, two people were killed in police-firing in Vasco following a group clash. It was the lead in the next day's NT, but the Herald completely missed the news.

A reader's letter was published in Herald a few days later: "Where was your reporter when the firing took place in Vasco? Had he gone to Baina for a quickie?" The Editor's reply: "We don't enjoy the patronage of Chief Minister Pratapsing Raoji Rane. So we missed the news." (As if Rane had called in the NT and given out the news!)

Rajan Narayan is essentially a rhetorician. He has a way with words and can argue his case convincingly. But his writings carried little conviction, which was the major reason for Herald's credibility crisis in those days. But the fact that he changed the media scene there cannot be disputed. In my view, the fundamental error he made was to plunge into the middle of things, rather than remaining a level-headed observer that a good journalist is supposed to be. He made an over-zealous effort to ingratiate himself with a section of the Goan society and failed miserably. The fact that even today his Goan credentials are questioned bears this out.

As everything has two sides, the Herald experiment (if one could call it that) too had its pros and cons. The single most significant achievement of Herald, in my opinion, was to raise a breed of bright young journalists who cut their teeth in journalism there. Most of them left disillusioned and bitter with the paper and its Editor, but they have done reasonably well elsewhere. But for Herald, they would not have come to this field.

And Herald did manage to provide some relief (comic relief, according to critics) from the tedious fare offered by the NT. It was sharp and pungent – too pungent for many. Almost every report packed a sting in its tail. Some of the fare dished out in the guise of investigative journalism was just gossip laced with outrageous bias. But all this lighted the scene up and served as a reminder to the NT to wake up and take notice.

Rajan Narayan never hesitated to name his rivals, especially the NT, while making disparaging remarks. The NT, on the other hand, took a diametrically opposite stance: it skirted controversies

altogether. Its unwritten policy was never to report or comment on anything controversial, let alone naming names!

But that had to change to keep pace with the changing times. I lampooned Rajan Narayan in my columns occasionally, which Mudaliar permitted reluctantly. It must be said to Rajan Narayan's credit that he not only took my pot-shots in good humour, but, according to Herald sources, also stopped a couple of juniors who wanted to hit back at me.

I met Rajan Narayan only once; but then it was hardly a meeting. Rather, I saw him from a distance at a midnight carnival in Panjim. After the edition was over, my NT colleague Anthony and I decided to take a round. We saw Rajan Narayan surrounded by a group of revellers. In a red T-shirt and bermudas, with a red ribbon around his head and a glass of feni in hand, a wobbly Rajan Narayan with bleary eyes was quite a spectacle. Anthony nudged me and asked, "Can you imagine Mudaliar in such a scene?"

Never. Mudaliar was, by comparison, dapper. In fact, his first advice to me when I called on him for a job interview was to be always mindful of my reputation. "It's a small place. Everybody knows everybody. And liquor is cheap here," he had said.

I left Goa rather bitterly.

I fell out with Mudaliar over an innocuous remark in my column. I used to report the traditional cricket match between the legislators and journalists in the column in a running commentary form. That year (1989), the Legislators XI led by Chief Minister Rane trounced the Press XI, led by Mudaliar. I made a passing remark that age was apparently catching up with Mudaliar. He deemed it too personal, and stopped talking to me. There were enough people around to fan the fire; and he refused to recommend me for a promotion. One thing led to another and I soon decided that my future lay elsewhere.

But I've no hard feelings about anything now. In fact, I recall my days in Goa with nostalgia and gratitude. It was a turning point in my career and I fondly remember my association with a wonderful people. I learned many things in Goa that stood me in good stead in later life and it will always remain etched in my memory as a part of my youth.

I wish all my friends and acquaintances over there, especially Rajan Narayan, good health and success in whatever they are engaged in now! I learnt of Mudaliar's death quite recently through an e-mail. I was saddened. I fondly recall my association with him. Despite the differences of opinion that resulted in our parting of ways, Mudaliar was a thorough gentleman and working with him was an enriching experience. I cherish his memories!

Chapter 6: O HERALDo: an untold chapter

Valmiki Faleiro

Valmiki Faleiro, a Goa-based working journalist between 1975-83, covered Goa for national publications like The Current Weekly, the Free Press Journal group and the Indian Express. He was Staff Reporter with the West Coast Times and as a freelancer, contributed to various journals like The Navhind Times, Goa Today, The Sun Weekly, Newstrek, Detective Digest, Mirror, Newsmag.

The early 1980s. Happy days were here again for Goa's first English-language daily, The Navhind Times (NT). After a brief challenge to its other crucial attribute, that of being the only English-language daily, from Goa Monitor in the late 1960s, NT had just staved off another. West Coast Times, launched July-1978, blazed a luminous trail in quality journalism but, like a comet after a brief showing, vanished into oblivion.

NT was back to its snug-seat monopoly.

A slave of the economic thought of Adam Smith, David Ricardo and John Stuart Mill, or our own Nani Palkhivala, JRD Tata and M.R. Pai, I have been a votary of free enterprise and competition – and allergic to monopolies. A monopoly is bad for any consumer. And infinitely worse in a crucial commodity that helps form a society's opinion.

I had been speaking to some wealthier Goans, my idea of launching a broadsheet weekly, which would, over a period, be converted to a full-fledged daily. A tabloid (like Goa Monitor) did not appeal; and mere excellence in editorial content and quality printing (like West Coast Times) did not suffice. What mattered was the capacity to financially sustain a daily newspaper (by absorbing annual losses even while continuing to maintain quality) until the product turned round, which could take some years. That kind of money in Goa only mineowners had – like all of Goa's major dailies! So my idea was start small, stay around till you built adequate advertising recognition and support, and only then convert to a daily – at a fraction of a daily's budgetary requirement and without having to own printing facilities from day one.

Even then, not many Goan businessmen I was in touch with were willing to risk any substantial venture capital.

It was around this time, June 1983, if I recall the month correctly, that a mutual friend in the printing business in Mumbai and Goa, told me that A.C. Fernandes, Patrao of the Panjim stationers Casa J.D. Fernandes, was toying with the idea of an English-language daily. The mutual friend suggested I discuss my ideas with Fernandes.

A.C. Fernandes wasn't a mineowner, not yet anyway, but I had heard he was a shrewd businessman. He purchased Goa's only extant Portuguese-language daily, O Herald, not so much for love of the language or its dwindling local readership, but evidently for the intrinsic value of its press and its centrally-located premises. It was said he took full advantage of the daily's lable, in those days of the Permit Raj, to import (from Italy?) a Lino typesetting machine, which actually was used for all and sundry job works of the business house – even as the major part of good ole O Herald continued to be composed by hand!

But what the heck! A shrewd and street-smart man, I reckoned, would any day be better than a cash-filled dumbo. Moreover, what Patrao may have lacked by way of adequate resources was made up in having his priorities right. His love Goa and her way of life, his concern about increasing corruption in Goa's polity and aspiration for rightful honour to the mother tongue, were transparently genuine.

The mutual friend arranged our introductory meeting, over lunch at the A.C. Fernandes residence at Santa Cruz one rainy Sunday. The sharp-eyed (and, as I was later to discover, sharp-tempered) Patrao, his demure wife and sons, John, Raul and Oswald, with the mutual friend and I sat across a carefully laid table. I spoke about WCT and why it failed, my ideas for a successful daily and my business plan for such a venture. A.C. Fernandes (the sons, those days, played second fiddle), I think, was impressed. And thus began a relationship, where I did my best to midwife a second English-language daily for Goa – or almost.

The search was on for an Editor. Ads had been placed in the major national dailies. Surprisingly, about a dozen pros were willing to come to Goa! But the best were out of reckoning, they expected salaries the kind Patrao never figured existed! Ervelle Menezes was the best bet. When I covered Goa for the Indian Express a couple of years before, Ervelle was a Chief Sub at IE's Mumbai edition. After Bhat, the then News Editor, died in harness, Ervelle had taken over as the News Editor and was in that position at this point of time.

From deep within, I hoped that Ervelle it would be to launch the Herald as its founding editor. A professional and a Goan, he was a suitable choice. For me too: I had been, by now, ordained to be the to-be newspaper's Chief Reporter, on insistence of A.C. Fernandes and his son Raul. My own plan had been to be with them till the day the newspaper took off; I was, by this time, already getting into business, developing family-owned land at Fatorda, Margao.

I never met or spoke to Ervelle about this job. Raul had, and I gathered that Ervelle was indeed interested. I was aware that he had come to Goa to check things out. Ervelle, of course, is around and it would be for him to say why he declined. What I surmised at that time, though, was that Ervelle must have been put off by local opinion about A.C. Fernandes' financial capacity to sustain a daily newspaper to the stage it generated its own resources. Ervelle of course explained it had something to do with his mother's illness.

Ervelle's decision was a great setback to the plan – there was just one last application left in Raul's file of responses for the Editor's post. If I had not urged its consideration earlier, it was because the applicant lacked experience with a daily newspaper. The applicant's only exposure to a daily was a brief stint at the Financial Express – not a mainstream newspaper. His c.v. spoke of experience at Mirror. But then, magazine journalism is not the same as what goes into the making of a daily newspaper. Moreover, the applicant wasn't even into journalism for quite some time: he presently dwelt in the dreary world of advertising and public relations, at one of Mumbai's lesser-known firms. Such was the irony.

What the NT had been to Goa's English readers, a Hobson's choice, Rajan Narayan's application now was to Raul and me!

Fearing that Patrao may get discouraged enough to abandon the newspaper idea, my airflow changed and I convinced A.C. Fernandes that we invite the man and take a closer look at his credentials. Rajan was lodged at Panjim's Hotel Mandovi (I wonder if he ever stayed there again, used as in later years he was to offered or obtained five-star hospitality across Goa's coast!) Patrao, Raul and I met him. The parleys went so long in the afternoon that there was no restaurant open for lunch. Rajan and I had to make do with puri bhaji at Cafe Real (I wonder, again, how he'd have raved and ranted in his latter-day popular Sunday column, Stray Thoughts . But beggars were not choosers, those days.)

To me, Rajan came out as a clever and crafty mind. But again, what the heck! At that point of time, the NT had a clever and resourceful skipper at its helm. I had known Bikram Vohra from my days at the Indian Express. When marched to Ahmedabad as Resident Editor of the IE's local edition, to fend off competition from the formidable Times of India, one could count on Bikram to come up with extremely off-beat ideas: he painted the town red with the slogan, Keen ahead of the times, read the Express! To compete, we would need a crafty mind and I though Rajan fitted that

bill pretty well. From me, Rajan wanted to learn more about Goa – its history, economy, religions, cultural mix the background of its English-language press and, of course, of the A.C. Fernandes clan.

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