



DR. TRISTAO DE BRAGANCA CUNHA

A photograph of the Lok Sabha Secretariat building in New Delhi, India. The building is a large, circular structure with a prominent portico supported by many columns. The sky is blue with some clouds.

**LOK SABHA SECRETARIAT
NEW DELHI**

DR. TRISTAO DE BRAGANCA CUNHA

Dr. Tristao de Braganca Cunha, an illustrious son of modern India is revered as the Father of the Goa Liberation Movement. A visionary and a nationalist, he was instrumental in giving identity, substance and purpose to the anti-colonial aspirations of the people of Goa, who were then under Portuguese rule. As an indomitable freedom fighter, he laid the foundation of an organized struggle against the colonial government of Goa.

Dr. T.B. Cunha was born on 2 April 1891 at Chandor village in Salcete Taluka of Goa. His father, Dr. Ligorio da Cunha was a medical practitioner and his mother, D. Filomena de Braganca was the aunt of the famous freedom fighter of Goa, Luis de Menezes Braganca.

Dr. Cunha completed his school education at Panaji and thereafter, went to a French College in Pondicherry*. After obtaining his *Baccalaureate* (B.A.) degree, he proceeded to Paris for higher studies at the Sorbonne University, where he qualified as an electrical engineer and started working as an engineer in France. While in Paris, he came in contact with eminent French intellectuals and humanists like Romain Rolland and Henri Barbusse.

This was the period when the First World War was over and there was unrest in Russia. In India, Mahatma Gandhi was leading a mass movement against the imperial rule. The Bolshevik Revolution of 1917 and the vision of a new socialist world order and happenings in India left an indelible impression on him. He became a vocal advocate of political freedom for all colonies under European powers.

The anti-imperialist wave in India and the mass awakening under the leadership of Mahatma Gandhi stirred his dormant nationalist feelings. He started contributing regularly to two French newspapers,

*Now known as Puducherry.

La Clarte and *L 'Humanite*, pleading the cause of India's independence. Through his forceful writings, he could enlighten the French people with India's points of view and bring to light events like *Jallianwala Bagh* massacre. He also wrote a biographical study of Mahatma Gandhi. His efforts at publicising the national movement were widely appreciated. Dr. K.M. Pannicker, the famous historian and diplomat described him as:—

....nationalist India's first ambassador to that country, utilizing every opportunity he had or could create to explain the Indian point of view to the French public....

In 1926, Dr. Cunha returned to India, fully determined to strive for the liberation of Goa. Convinced that Portuguese Goa could not be left isolated from the national freedom movement in British India, he founded the Goa Congress Committee and got it affiliated to the Indian National Congress at its Forty-third Session in Calcutta*, in 1928. Highlighting this, Dr. Pannickar wrote:—

...Tristao Braganca Cunha...was an Indian Nationalist who realized early in his life that Goa could have freedom only in unity with India...

He further commented:—

....It is a measure of his greatness and an evidence of the clarity of his vision that his activities were not directed towards the creation of a separate Goan nationalist movement, but towards the identification of Goa's interests with those of India. He did not recognize a Goan feeling separate from that of India...

Meanwhile, Antonio Salazar had established his dictatorial regime in Portugal. The right of the Indian colony to represent in the Parliament at Lisbon was abolished. By the passing of the Colonial Act of 1930, further restrictions were imposed. The people of Goa were subjected to repression and degrading slavery. Dr. Cunha was compelled to shift to Bombay** and carry out his struggle for the freedom of Goa from there. He wrote a number of articles, pamphlets and books

* Now known as Kolkata.

** Now known as Mumbai.

denouncing Portuguese rule. His publication titled *Denationalization of Goans*, intended to sensitize the people of Goa about their identity, is of immense historical value.

In 1945, the Goan Youth League was organized in Bombay under the guidance of Dr. Cunha to awaken the political consciousness of the Goans settled in Bombay and elsewhere. On 18 June 1946, when Dr. Ram Manohar Lohia addressed a public meeting at Madgaon, calling for the Civil Liberties Movement, thousands of people responded challenging the Portuguese rule. Following the meeting, Dr. Cunha was subjected to Portuguese atrocities and political persecution. He was arrested in July 1946, court-martialled and sentenced to eight years imprisonment. Confined to the Fortress of Peniche in Portugal, he was released in 1950 after a general amnesty, but was forced to stay in that country. However, he escaped from Portugal and returned to India in 1953.

On reaching India, Dr. Cunha restarted his political activities to free Goa. He was appointed the Chairman of the Goa Action Committee in Bombay, which ultimately led to the liberation of the Portuguese districts of Nagar Haveli and Dadra in 1954. During this period, Dr. Cunha published a Konkani paper *Azad Goem* to carry the message of freedom to the common people in vernacular. He also took up the editorship of *Free Goa*, a fortnightly, then published from Belgaum, which carried his campaign till he breathed his last.

Dr. Cunha was a great thinker, writer, socialist and humanist. A champion of the poor, his articles, *what is Imperialism?* and *Nationalism and Elementary Rights*, describe the conditions prevailing in Goa at that time. His article *Camouflaged Slavery* gives a vivid picture of the exploitation of the poor labourers sent to British tea plantations in Assam under the pretext of providing them better wages.

Another aspect of Dr. Cunha's versatile personality was his keen interest in art, music and literature. A fine amateur painter, to his credit goes the choice of the valuable collection of modern paintings and sculptures in the Art Gallery of the Institute of Menezes Braganca at Panaji in Goa.

Dr. Cunha fought relentlessly for the freedom of Goa but was not alive to witness Goa's freedom. He passed away on 26 September and buried on 28 September 1958, three years before the liberation of Goa, which came on 19 December 1961. In a message appreciating Dr. Cunha, Pt. Jawaharlal Nehru had written:—

The story of Goa's fight for freedom is one that all of us should remember. The struggle, of course, goes on and will go on till success comes to it. What is worth remembering is that this small territory has produced a relatively large number of men and women who have sacrificed much in this struggle. Among them a name that stands out is that of Dr. T.B. Cunha.

The World Peace Council at its session in Stockholm, 1959 posthumously awarded him the gold medal for peace in recognition of his *eminent contribution to the cause of peace and friendship among peoples.*

[The Portrait of Dr. Tristao de Braganca Cunha, painted by Ms. Harshada Kerkar Sonak, will be unveiled by the Speaker, Lok Sabha, Smt. Meira Kumar. The Portrait has been donated by the Government of Goa]