
Reviewed by Cibele Aldrovandi
University of São Paulo

‘Prisoner, tell me, who was it that bound you’
‘It was my master,’ said the prisoner. (…)
‘Prisoner, tell me who was it that wrought this unbreakable chain?’
‘It was I,’ said the prisoner, ‘who forged this chain very carefully’. (…) —R. Tagore [*Gitanjali*, 31]

*A Senda do Dever* is a recent Portuguese translation of Mohan Ranade’s book *Satiche Vaan* [सतीचे वाण - *Satiche Vāṇa*] published originally in Marathi in 1969. Born in 1930 in Sangli, Maharashtra, India, Manohar Apte, later known as Mohan Ranade [Mohana Rānaḍe], was a freedom fighter in the Liberation Movement in Goa. Ranade’s book is an autobiography and provides a detailed description of his years as an activist in Goa until he was arrested by the Portuguese police in 1955 and had to spend the next fourteen years in prison in Goa and in exile in Portugal.

Ave Cleto Afonso’s translation (2014) initially relied on the English version of the book entitled *Struggle Unfinished* (Goa: Vimal Publications, 1988), but as Afonso points out in his introduction, “Como se Julga o Herói”, the English translation presents some divergences from the Marathi original, *Satiche Vāṇa*. He then undertook the meticulous task of comparison so that the Portuguese version would be closer to the Marathi original. This can be noted right from the title of the book in Portuguese, *A Senda do Dever [Path of Duty]*, much closer to the Marathi expression *Satiche Vāṇa*, which he explains as “the obligation of an assumed commitment” (Afonso 15). The meaning of *Satiche Vāṇa* is associated with a “sincere pledge”, or else a “gift from Satī”, as a vow fulfilled by a widow at her husband’s funeral pyre, and which presupposes her death. In this manner the title of Ranade’s book provides multiple layers of meaning and cultural nuances which one might interpret as the readiness of the hero to accept any sacrifice, even death, for something he believes in: his nation’s freedom. As we shall note, this oath is also directly connected to the *Bhagavadgītā*, one of the sacred books of Hindus, in which Lord Kṛṣṇa explains to the hero Arjuna the duty of a warrior, selfless action and righteousness (see Van Buitenen) and was a
source of inspiration to many leaders of the Indian independence movement. However, the English title, *Struggle Unfinished*, even though it might draw more “attention” than the original one, can also lead the reader to believe that Ranade’s mission remained “incomplete”. Although one may read the book from this point of view—and believe that this was true at a personal level due to his premature arrest—one must also consider that Goa’s liberation was accomplished and that in spite of his involuntary “unfinished” participation, independence could only happen due to the individual battles each one of these heroes and heroines bravely fought.

Written from the point of view of one of the freedom fighters himself, this translation into Portuguese of *Satiche Vaan* is essential reading for those interested in Goa’s liberation movement. As such, it now provides extensive and detailed information to a broader Lusophone audience about the lives of the heroes who fought against Portuguese domination in India.

The book begins at the Fort Caxias prison in Portugal as news of the impending liberation of Goa is spreading, the exact day *Operation Vijaya* (Victory) started and the Indian Army entered Goa and marched to its capital Panjim. Written in the same year Mohan Ranade was released from prison and could finally go back to his motherland, the book combines historical facts with very personal memoirs spanning the period from the years prior to Goa Independence up until his return to India in 1969, eight long years after Goa was liberated from Colonial rule on the 19th of December 1961. Ranade’s narrative then moves retrospectively to his youth in Maharashtra as a student during India’s struggle against the British Empire. From 1946 onwards, the impact of the Indian national movement was strongly felt in Goa and other Portuguese territories, in particular the *Satyagraha* activities based on Gandhian non-violent resistance, which directly influenced young nationalists to fight against the Portuguese regime. As noted by Risbud (103): “Indian leaders also supported the action and considered Goa’s struggle as a part of India’s struggle for independence from colonialism”, this is supported by declarations of Pandit Nehru as president of the Indian National Congress.

Manohar Apte crossed the border and reached Goa in 1948, one year after India’s Independence, and started his activities as a teacher in Marathi schools. As he points out, a teacher was a central figure highly revered and much respected in the village. In this way nationalists could raise political awareness among the youngsters, establishing links with the villagers and organizing the freedom fight (Risbud 190, 373). After being denounced as an anti-Portuguese agitator, he had to flee Goa and later returned with a new identity: Mohan Ranade. His experience among the underprivileged made a deep and lasting impression on his personality, raising his own political awareness as he came to realize how many landowners were nothing but “lackeys of the Portuguese”, exploiting the people of Goa. He also discusses caste discrimination as he lived for some years among the destitute. Dalits and tribals were not allowed to enter the temples so they could not study, and Ranade decided to build schools to change that. The teachers started to set up societies for village development which would also disguise political activities.
Mohan Ranade’s patriotic reverence towards the Indian Nation as well as his day to day activities vividly reveal to the reader his unrestricted disposition to fight for a higher cause—Goa’s Independence—no matter what the consequences.

While some freedom fighters were against an armed struggle to achieve justice, others were quite skeptical regarding the political effect of *Satyagraha* on the existing dictatorial regime: “Nehru very strongly believed that there was no lasting solution to the problems of the people through recourse to arms. He was of the opinion that with the use of violent methods there would be no lasting peace in the world” (Risbud 179). In 1953 Mohan Ranade became an activist of the Azad Gomantak Dal (Goa Independent Force) a revolutionary organization founded by people from the *Satyagraha* Movement (Risbud 162, 190), but unlike the *satyagrahis* they adopted armed combat as a means for liberation: “AGD members took the oath in the Durgā temple. They consciously chose this venue as it coincided with their ideology of the mother nation as Śāntādurgā, one of forms of the Ādiśakti worshipped in Goa” (Risbud 187).

Throughout the pages of *A Senda do Dever* the reader will also find peculiar episodes retold in a captivating manner. Ranade’s lack of faith in religion is implied by a curious incident he narrates about the destruction of a large anthill in an old dilapidated temple in Morlem. As in many parts of India, people from this Goan village also believed in the sacred anthill as being “of the gods”. Nevertheless, as Ranade and one of the farmers were “not believers”, they apparently decided to clean up the place to set up a school, completely ignoring and destroying the main object of worship of what probably had been an ancient Sateri–Śāntādurgā temple.

As pointed out by Risbud (495), the Azad Gomantak Dal used violent means so it “had to face challenge on two fronts, one against Portuguese authoritarian regime, and the other the Government of India”. Ranade emphasizes that in Goa the activists could not count on the support of the Indian Government and could not carry guns or even cross the frontier with ease. The Azad Gomantak Dal had no weapons or ammunition and decided to attack police stations, and mines in order to get explosives and detonators: “In those days there was a trend in India to claim that Indian independence was achieved only through non-violent methods. These forces would definitely not extend any support to such an organization that based its struggle on militant revolutionary ideology” (Ranade’s interview with Risbud 192). Nevertheless, Goa’s liberation was achieved through armed combat.

While the first ten chapters of the book are dedicated to Ranade’s participation in Goa’s struggle for freedom, the next twelve chapters are devoted to his long years in prison. In 1955 when the *satyagrahis* from all over India marched to the Goan frontier crossing the borders in Patradevi, they were met with a burst of bullets and hundreds were killed. A few months later, Mohan Ranade’s life reached its turning point as he was arrested during an attack on Betim police station. He was shot but, much to his regret, he did not die as a martyr as he had always desired.
Ranade’s description of the brutal repression and recurring tortures suffered in jail abound from this point on. They include the stories of many prisoners, some innocent, who were not activists but were arrested, of women who were also in prison, as well as people from other Portuguese colonies, and militants from Portugal, some of these prisoners ended up mad, with broken bones or even dead. The years in jail are depicted in a very realistic way, and his criticism of the Portuguese regime, as representative of “civilization and culture”, is stressed through the contrast of the treatment officers dispensed to different kinds of prisoners, some going through terrible torture while others were enjoying privileges depending on their caste or profession and were soon released. Ranade was given particularly atrocious treatment by the notorious police officer Casmiro Monteiro, and he was kept in solitary confinement during all the years he was imprisoned in Goa. After trial, he was sentenced to 28 years in prison and declared a terrorist, but instead of incarceration at Aguada Fort as were other political prisoners, he was detained at the police headquarters in Panjim, and unfairly treated.

Mohan Ranade also openly criticizes the ambiguous role of the Indian Government in the events concerning the freedom struggle in the Portuguese colonies in India, saying they missed many opportunities to set them free. He also considers the economic blockade imposed on Goa a hypocrisy as nationalist supporters were the ones who suffered the most due to India’s harsh policy towards Goa. For many decades, he has been regarded from opposing perspectives, if for some people he was nothing but a terrorist, to many others he was viewed as a freedom fighter, “even if he chose to carry guns and undergo bloody battles, his purpose has always been to free his land and his people from oppression and restore human dignity to those who had lost it to colonial rule and dictatorship”, as Afonso (11–12) observes.

Nevertheless, an intriguing point that strikes the reader of A Senda do Dever is that when Ranade realizes how completely neglected he was by the Indian Government as he languished in prison so many years after Goa’s liberation, something that could not be justified solely on the grounds of his armed activities. While all satyagrahis were released, he remained in prison, and as the freedom struggle increased, so did the torture of the prisoners. Hated by the Portuguese and forsaken by his own Government, during almost six years Ranade was kept in isolation and had no contact with other prisoners or his family, enduring torture and rigorous surveillance.

Perhaps one of the most touching episodes of his memoirs is the visit of his mother and brother in 1958. Although his mother did not cry while there, he remembers she had moist eyes the whole time, and one of the books she brought him was the Bhagavadgītā, which he came to know by heart in prison (see Van Buitenen). In his interview to Risbud (187), Ranade remarks on the role of the Gītā as a source of inspiration to all revolutionaries, and how Lord Kṛṣṇa’s insistence on the value of dharma (duty) and karma (action) in the sense of one’s duty in life, stimulated them to take up arms against the Portuguese. As later pointed by Risbud (387), “these revolutionaries adopted violence but considered
it an expression of their ‘righteous anger’ always referring to the Gītā to justify the killing for a worthy cause’.

Visited by a few diplomats and representatives of foreign institutions, Ranade was never released; instead he was sent to Portugal in 1960, one year before the struggle in Goa came to a close. In his memoirs, he remembers the better treatment he received from the ship’s crew as they were crossing the ocean. Their attitude came as a surprise after the insults and rudeness he had been used to for so long. At the same time, the long days in the ship made him anxious as he started questioning himself about how the “white men” would treat him once in Portugal, for he recalled how much the British hated Indian nationalists. But after his arrival, and again to his surprise, he came into contact with many Portuguese prisoners who were fighting against the dictatorship of Salazar and who supported the liberation of Portuguese colonies. Through the window of the Aljube prison, Ranade was also able to see the poverty of the working class, a reality he had not heard of before in Goa as the imperialists only spoke of prosperous Portugal. Looking at the poor, he could not but sympathize with them since they were not much different from Indian families. In fact, the working class of Portugal was according to him “in the avant-garde of the struggle against fascism, fighting against both injustice and dictatorship”. As he puts it, once in Portugal he discovered a much different European reality, which opened his eyes.

In Lisbon, he again faced cruelty and sickness. Although in Portugal officers were politer, and they managed to hide the tortures more than in the colonies, he and other prisoners were continuously treated with arrogance and prejudice. Racism was widespread among the officers in charge. He remembers an incident in 1968, in which a Goan lady married to an anti-fascist Portuguese used to visit Ranade in prison. She was reprimanded by the guard while greeting Ranade in Konkani and was told “to speak their language and not savage languages”.

One of the most terrifying kinds of torture Ranade narrates was called “statue”; the prisoner had to stand saluting for days, weeks or even a month without sleep. They would get so exhausted they would end up signing any confession. Ranade even describes a Portuguese prisoner who cut and swallowed his own tongue as not to be able to confess anything (Ranade, A Senda 328). He also recurrently mentions the unequal and unfair treatment the Portuguese government gave the Indian prisoners despite the fact that the Portuguese prisoners in Goa were set free by the Indian Government and sent back to Portugal after Goa’s Liberation, while Ranade and many others still remained in jail for many years.

Some interesting photographs and newspaper reports concerning the characters and places where he spent many years of his life can be found in the appendix, an added appeal to his memoirs. Through his narrative, one is also aware of the prominent role of Indian newspapers during the years he spent fighting and later on in prison. After he was transferred to Caxias Fort in 1961, he was allowed to stay with other prisoners who shared his views opposing colonialism and fascism, and they managed to organize a web of communication inside and outside
the jail. Through Portuguese newspapers, which were mainly government propaganda, he came to know of the major changes in the Catholic colonial world due to the National Liberation Movements in Africa and Asia.

His long years of isolation and silence ended and he was not alone anymore, but prison cells were overcrowded and conditions were still very difficult. From his analysis of the elections farce in Portugal to his interesting political critique of the use of fado (a Portuguese musical style), football and religion by the fascist government (Ranade, *A Senda* 253–254), Ranade provides a very interesting view of Portugal politics. *Fado*, as he points out, implies a fatalistic acceptance of existential anguish, and therefore a lack of faith in people’s ability to take care of their own destiny. This is why he considered it as a reactionary instrument of dictatorship and a way of intentionally distracting people from the political situation in Portugal.

Even though Goa was liberated in 1961, Mohan Ranade’s release took much longer. Many letters to friends and to prominent people and politicians had to be written, a great number of visits from ambassadors, lawyers and other officials were undertaken, petitions had to be presented, until finally a Chief Minister and the Pope set him free. Only an unflagging personal strength could enable him to endure this painful ordeal.

Considering how often oppressive regimes act against the people’s will, we choose to conclude with an equally moving excerpt from Ranade’s fascinating book, the letter written by some prisoners in Caxias Fort asking Indians to distinguish the Portuguese government from the Portuguese people:

We know of the hardship suffered by the Indian people for four hundred and fifty years. It was your sweat and blood that brought fruitful harvest to the Portuguese dominant classes. Indian people were burned alive in the name of religious purification. Their culture was destroyed. Their protest was smashed by iron hands. But the Portuguese people have no part in these crimes. They were exploited by the rich rulers of this country for their own aggrandizement, and they did not share the booty. There was no national prosperity as in England and France. In Portugal the dominant class used religion to cover the atrocities that were committed in Goa . . . We are confident that one day we will break the chain of servitude, put down dictatorship and extend our hand of friendship to the People of India. (272–273)

Note
1 This work was carried out with the support of CNPq—National Council for Scientific and Technological Development; and as part of the FAPESP thematic project “Pensando Goa” (proc. 2014/15657-8). The opinions, hypotheses and conclusions or recommendations expressed herein are my sole responsibility and do not necessarily reflect the ideas of FAPESP.

Works Cited


**Mohan Ranade** was born in Sangli, Maharashtra, on December 25th, 1930. He studied at the University of Bombay before joining the anti-colonialist campaign in 1948. He participated on the armed fight against the Portuguese. After being arrested, he served time in Portugal for fourteen years, and returned to Goa in 1969. In retribution for his participation in the liberation of Goa, he was decorated by the Prime Minister of India with the Padma Shri commendation in 2001. At present, he lives in Pune, Maharashtra, and leads a charitable organization that sponsors education of students from economically disadvantaged backgrounds.

**Ave Cleto Afonso** was born in 1943. He was a professor of Philosophy at the Universities of Bombay and Goa. He is also a journalist and publishes in Portuguese and Konkani. He has published several books. One of his most renowned works is *O Vaticínio de Swarga (O que Os Lusíadas não canta)* (2013), a rewriting of *Os Lusíadas*.

**Cibele Aldrovandi** is an archaeologist and art historian, with a PhD from the University of Sao Paulo. She is currently a Post-Doctoral Senior Fellow at the University of Sao Paulo, and an Associate Researcher of the Project “Pensando Goa”, FAPESP, working in the field of South Asian Archaeology and Languages. She has conducted research in renowned foreign institutions as the Huntington Archive of Buddhist and Asian Arts at Ohio State University, USA; Deccan College Post-Graduate and Research Institute, Pune, India; and Maison de l’Asie, EFEO - École Française D’Extrême Orient, Paris France.