

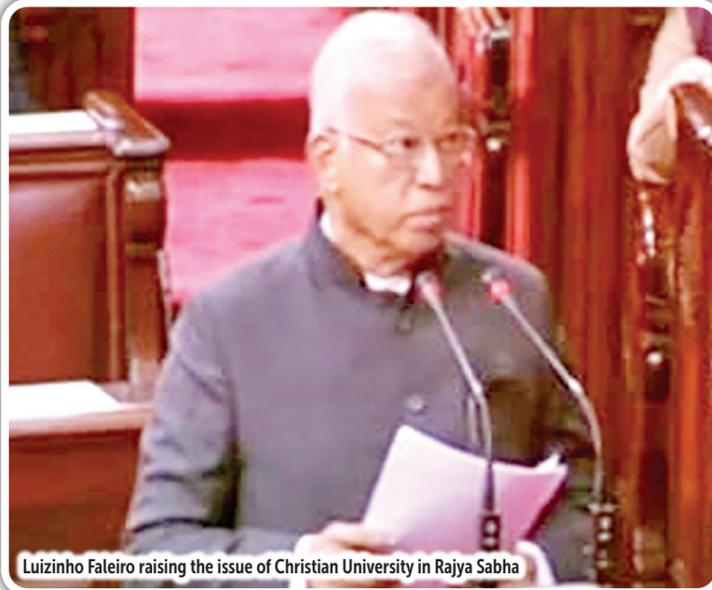
Proposal for a National Christian University

It was during my brief stint as a member of the Rajya Sabha, between 2021 and 2023 that I was able to raise the issue of a Central University for Goa with the Centre. Though representing West Bengal in the Upper House of Parliament, I proposed to the Union Minister for Education, during that stint as a member of the Rajya Sabha, the constitution of a National Christian University in Goa.

The proposal that was made for a National Christian in Goa is discussed in the following paragraphs, to provide a better understanding of why it was made.

India's religious majority is made up of Hindus comprising 82 percent of the population. Besides this, the Government of India perceives six distinctive religious minorities – Muslim (11%), Christians (2.32%), Jains (0.41%), Sikh (2%), Buddhist (0.77%) and Zoroastrians (0.006%). These communities, by numerical criteria are known as religious minorities and are permitted to establish and manage educational institutes. These are not only recognised minorities but the Constitution of India extends certain protection to Minority Educational Institutions.

Under Articles 29 and 30 of the Constitution there are certain protections for the cultural and educational rights of the



Luizinho Faleiro raising the issue of Christian University in Rajya Sabha



ARTICLE 29

Article 29 protects the interests of the minorities by making a provision that any citizen/section of citizens having a distinct language, script or culture have the right to conserve the same. Article 29 mandates that no discrimination would be done on the ground of religion, race, caste, language or any of them and no one will be denied admission into any educational institution on the same grounds.

up or establish and regulate educational institutions of their choice and that in giving aid, the State shall not segregate/discriminate against any educational institution run or administered by minorities. It further gives the choice to set up such an educational institution as will serve both the reason to be specific, the reason for conserving the religion, dialect or culture and the reason of giving an intensive standard education to their children as stated in the Kerala Education Bill 1957.

India also has a National Commission for Minorities, that is tasked with safeguarding religious minorities. This Commission, in its January 13, 2018 annual report, called for the establishment of a government-funded university primarily for Christians, justifying the recommendation by stating that such an initiative would be in keeping with existing state-funded universities such as Aligarh Muslim University and Jamia Millia Islamia Universities.

The reasons for a Christian university are many. Although Christians are a tiny minority in India's approximately 1.3 billion population, they are the second largest minority community after Mus-

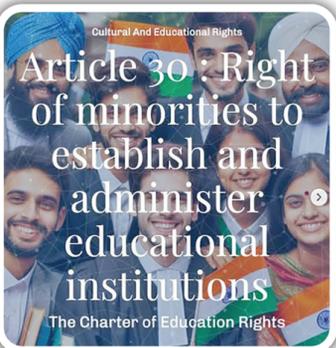
lims. We have in India today, about 27 million Christians and 60 percent of them are socially poor Dalits and hence, a university dedicated to the Christian minority could help the educational advancement of financially poor Christians.

Besides, a Christian University is also needed to preserve the Christian culture, script and language through institutions of higher education; to provide opportunities for members of the Christian community to excel in higher education; to help the Christian Community enter in and contribute to public services; to build a 'Christian Indian Nationalism' anchored in

Constitutional values and impart Christian value education and culture; to create the kind of education where a generation will think and behave independently; to create a strong basis of social sciences for the development of society.

Such a university can also cater to higher standards of teaching-learning, integrity and focus on newer disciplines with international collaborations. Besides, it can prepare students for competitive government examinations and for Christians to get into civil services and contribute towards administration and policy making, since there are just a few Christians in the civil services. It can also help create a think-tank to contribute by way of alternative policies in important sectors and plan and anticipate for the future, while creating a support system of Catholic doctors, lawyers, planners, social scientists, administrators, strategists and citizens to help in nation building.

What is important is that the National Commission for Minorities has sought a seven year financial assistance programme to establish new universities for Christian communities, who already run their own educational and health care facilities. The Commission recommended that the government-funded universities could prioritise the education of Christians while also admitting students of other faiths and said that the government should collaborate with the Catholic Church in India which runs some 400 colleges and 15,000 or 36,000 Christian-managed schools.



that if they choose to establish an educational institution which will serve their religion, language and culture and also the purpose of giving a thorough and good education to their children, to become eligible for higher university education and go out in the world, fully equipped with such intellectual attainments as will make them fit for entering the public services, educational institutions of their choice will necessarily include institution imparting general secular education.

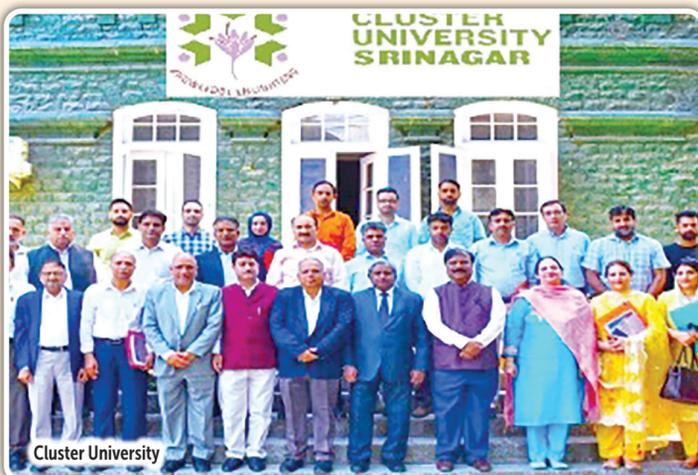
The objectives behind the provisions of Art 29 and 30 of the Constitution are to preserve the integrity and unity of the country so that the minority communities do not feel isolated and separated; to create a feeling of belongingness such that they never feel overwhelmed by the majority; so that minorities can best conserve their culture, script, language through educational institutions and to instil certainty among minorities.

The rights granted to minorities under Art 30 include the explicit right to set

minorities. While Article 29 provides for general protection to the minorities to conserve their language etc, Article 30 explicitly gives minorities the right to establish and administer an educational institution of their choice. What this signifies is



Goa as the site for a National Christian University



Cluster University

largest group after the Hindus in the State, with the number estimated at 6,55,400 of a total population of 14.59 lakh. Besides, Goa has a highly literate population and the 2021 National Census put the literacy rate of Goa at 88.70 percent, with the government now looking at attaining 100 percent literacy by December 19, 2024. In the wake of the high literacy rate, its students require more avenues and a competitive edge to excel in higher education. Also, a substantial number of colleges in Goa are Christian minority colleges and these have formed the backbone of the educational system in Goa, not just in current times but even during the colonial rule.

The Archdiocese of Goa and Daman has 144 high schools that are spread out in almost every village, besides the Archdiocese runs 25 higher secondary schools and 12 colleges. Of the latter, the St Xavier College, Mapusa and the Fr Agnel Institute of Technology and Design, Assagao, in North Goa and the Rosary College, Navelim, the Don Bosco College of Engineering, Fatorda and the Padre Conceicao College of Engineering, Verna in South Goa, are some of the most reputed Christian Institutions of higher education in Goa, drawing students not only from across the State but even from beyond the State's borders.

The proposed Goa Christian University is aimed at being a national institution



St Xavier College Mapusa

that will offer progressive, multicultural, state of the art, skill-based education, entrenched in the Goan nationalist ethos and nationalist ideals of the Indian Constitution makers and will be open to students from all communities, irrespective of any denominations. Its mission will be

to prepare students with a philosophy of life rooted in the Indian and Goan tradition, with life skills that will brace them to meet the challenges of a resurgent India, while remaining a non-affiliating university.

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