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Title of the Book: *Signet of Sardars* (A Play)

Translator: Stephen Quadros Permude (He translated it from Konkani into English)

Author: Shri. V. J. P. Saldanha (Khadaap)

Publisher: Sri. George Richard Sequeira, Edlil, Kuntikan Junction, Mangalore, 2010.

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As a representation of a version of history that claims that Tipu Sultan, the 18th century Mysore ruler had captured the Mangalorean Catholics or the Canara Christians in Mangalore from 1784 – 1799 and converted them forcibly into Muslims, this play shows the sufferings of the latter and their outrage towards a rebellion against the cruelty of Tipu Sultan's regime. It exposes the active rebellion of the Mangalorean Catholics with the help of the encapsulated fictional story. It projects the coalition of the group led by the characters in the play who are Christian compatriots like Dumga Peent and Jackulo Pai, coordinated by a brave young lady Veronica to rebel against the employees of Tipu who have been nefarious in inflicting pain to the innocent Catholics. They have determination and valour to fight against the hostility of Tipu Sultan's employees and to retain the faith of their religion.

But interestingly neither these heroes nor Tipu Sultan is the protagonist in the play, it is another character; Sardar Simanv Pedru Prabhu, one of the commanders of Sultan. He is loyal to Tipu Sultan but also supports the true cause of rebellion of the Mangalorean Catholics in a camouflaged manner. He helps them and makes them win their faith in the heroic style for example when the miscreant Agent O'berville Cardoza tries to rape Isabella Theresa whom he had entrapped by lying that he would marry her, Sardar reaches on time like a hero and wounds Cardoza in Scene -19. In another instance, while reprimanding publicly the followers of Dumga Peent, a astute Sardar announces the severe punishment to them but after some time he himself goes to the prison in disguise and releases out the prisoners like a hero. So, overall it is Sardar Simanv Pedru who assists the Catholics to surpass the cruelty inflicted upon them under the Sultan's regime.

The play imbibes the technique of Symbolism that keeps uniting the Sardar and Dumga Peent or Pinto's group. It indicates them of the victory of their faith in god and religion. The symbol is *the Signet* or medal which has two halves: one has the holy family carved on it and another Holy Cross. The whole play is built on the above symbolic interpretation of faith.

The play is also the medley or amalgamation of different types of emotions. It abounds in the anger of the Christians against the Sultanate regime, agony of the mother Rita who fears detachment to her son Dumga Pinto, empathetic attitude of Sardar for the obvious resentment of the Mangalorean Catholics, true and unspoken love of JackuloPai for Isabella, treacherous intention of Agent Cardoza and his messenger Kunjhikutti against the Catholics, disillusioned Christians when they presume that Tipu Sultan is criminal and is responsible for the travail, greed of the soldiers of Tipu Sultan and Agent Cardoza which provoke them to commit sin, and Tipu Sultan's presupposition that the Mangalorean Catholics are spying against him.

This play also gives a brief reference to show the secular perspective that may rise from a common man. Here, Hasan Mohammad adopts a Christian young girl whose parents were brutally slaughtered by the soldiers of Tipu Sultan. He keeps her name Miriam. This small example is applied as a satire on the fanatic people who in spite of educating secularism spread uncongenial atmosphere of orthodox fanaticism of a religion.

Ostensibly VJP Saldanha's play seems to get influenced by the historical version that blames Tipu Sultan for his forcible conversion of the Mangalorean Catholics into Muslims but actually Saldanha concludes that the character Tipu Sultan is not a criminal. In the Back Drop, Saldanha states the mind of Tipu Sultan who believes that the Christians of Mangalore are the espionage working for the Britishers against him and therefore he wants to punish them. In Scene -25, Tipu declares that 'he is furious only against those Christians who are spying against him besides he has no hatred against them' (82). The play also shows that Tipu's opprobrious officers have been taking advantage of Tipu's anger against the Christian spies. They are tormenting and plundering the innocent Christians and ironically the former is being informed about it when the torment has already reached on its verge. Tipu is shown annoyed on 'his weaklings and useless officers' (84) who have been flogging and whipping the innocent Christians and unnecessarily put his reputation on stake.

The play has a paradoxical motif of representing the Sultanate regime as it shows Tipu Sultan as a generous king but tyrant to those who try to deceive him. In spite of its dwindled motif and several scenes, the play is worth to be read as historical because it raises the issue of identity crisis of ethnic religious community of Roman Catholics from the Mangalore diocese in Southwest Karnataka whose ancestors had suffered the torments either by the local chiefs or by the hands of the rulers in India. And, it may also be read as a fascinating literary genre that imbibes the qualities of thoughts, fantasy, ideas, and proper use of symbolism: the signet as an allegorical symbol applied in the play proclaiming the justice to the truth and innocence.

About VJP Saldanha:

Vincent John Peter Saldanha (1925 – 2000) was born in Mangalore to the Mangalorean Catholics. Soon after his studies, he contributed to Konkani literature as a poet, dramatist, novelist, and a litterateur. His predominant themes in his compositions were the sufferings of the

Mangalorean Catholics during their 15 year captivity at Seringapatam imposed by the Mysore ruler Tipu Sultan who believed them to be British supporters. He also talked about the oppression of Goan Catholics during the Goa inquisition. He wrote various novels on the above themes like *By the Grace of God (Balthazar of Belthangadi)*, *Signet of Sardars (Sardarachi Sinol)*, and *The Gates of Hell (Infernachi Darem)*, etc. His *Signet of Sardars* was turned into a very successful play by Shri George Richard Sequeira who brought its concept into the play form and it was translated into English by Stephen Quadros Permude.