

History from 3 Clubs to 1 How 3 Divided Clubs became 1 United Club of Utorda

As I saw it.....

J. Mario (Babit) Fernandes

I guess the thought was always there, residing in the minds of most villagers and well-wishers. That how can a small village of barely 4000 inhabitants have 3 social clubs, apparently working for the same purposes, albeit in different ways?

Having said that, the profile of at least one of those clubs was significantly different from the other two in so much so that its membership attracted both young boys and girls in their teens, which was highly conspicuous by the nature of their varied activities. And that club was the erstwhile Socio-Cultural Club, the predecessor of which was 'The Youngsters of Utorda', a hub that riveted around the church and which came closest to the latter day parish youth association.

In the later stages of the Club, of which I was fortunate to be a member, it really functioned as a well-oiled machine, closely knit--although not homogenous--entity conducting its affairs strictly adhering to a form of parliamentary procedures. That was a direct import from the then Jaycees, as some of us were also members of that Organisation. The very formal way of conducting meetings, maintaining decorum, organising projects, et al, would be an envy of some of the best-run clubs. Yes, discipline there was for sure. The president who was in the chair would demand and command it. Everyone had to address the chair and no cross-talking would be allowed. Then there were annual picnics and hikes, besides personal development courses conducted by an outside faculty. Very active club indeed.

The other two clubs, namely the Lourdes Association and the Central Club had their own strengths. The former was like an 'adult' club with many of its members in their late forties and fifties. Their best-known activity was the New Year's Eve dance which they successfully organised for a number of years.

The Central Club was more active in the field of sports. It had amongst its members some of the die-hard football and bull-fight aficionados.

Undoubtedly some of the other activities were common to all three. As such, this convergence would inevitably cause unpleasant scenes and invite crude taunts and remarks in a not-so-subtle game of one-upmanship.

Having noticed these under currents breeding strongly in amongst the villagers, uniting these forces actively occupied the minds of many, especially those from the Diaspora community who would come down on holiday only to 'feel' this disunity. But then it needed the wherewithal, the right amount of goodwill and a great deal of courage and conviction to carry such dream forward.

Fortunately, one such conscientious citizen, Mr. Lino Bap Dourado, who recently published his much-acclaimed '*Aitaracheo Katkutled*' happened to whisper his wish into the receptive ears of Fr. Jose Dias, our then Parish Priest, who is himself a torch-bearer of many a social struggle. Indeed, we were fortunate to have had him at the helm of the village affairs at that particular time. He had the sagacity, the authority and the respect of all. A towering personality of quiet and unassuming nature, he came to personify the wishes and aspirations of his flock.

The idea that was mooted by Lino was immediately seized upon by Fr. Jose Dias and there began the unprecedented unifying process of all three clubs. Like a thunderstorm, it promptly caught the imagination of the villagers.

Suddenly, people who were otherwise seldom seen in the public arena put their full weight behind such efforts. It was a highly edifying sight to see many senior and respected villagers pulling up their socks and giving their time and resources towards the realisation of such a dream.

Soon thereafter, an ad-hoc committee to carry forward and concretise the idea was formed of prominent citizens. Mr. Domnic Lacerda headed this committee of which teacher Philoo Soares was the secretary. Many others senior citizens were involved in this exercise.

The committee had the mandate to approach the 3 clubs (which had its representatives in it) resolve differences, if any and work out the modalities for the eventual unification.

But nevertheless as expected, it ran into rough weather as not everyone concurred with their decision. The most strident resistance (I am not very sure of the others) came from the Socio-Cultural Club, although not without genuine fears.

The most significant of these was the increasing apprehension that girls in their youth which formed a large part of the membership would shy away, given the new all-encompassing nature of the nascent club. In retrospect, I must admit the fears came true sooner than later.

Another of those grievances was that the discipline in the conduct of club affairs would be lost in the cacophony of new voices. However that turned out to be completely unfounded as one can see the club run on sound rules and regulations.

I frankly do not know about any reservations or opposition in the other two clubs.

No doubt, the ad-hoc committee had the brief and the mandate but what it apparently lacked was the persuasion abilities--the people skill, the human element-- in bringing together dissenting voices on to the negotiating table.

But this lacuna was more than made up by the presence of the indefatigable member Agnelo (Billy) Pereira who handled the emerging difficult situation bred by the intransigence of some members with great tact and diplomacy.

His role in reaching out to the warring factions and forging a consensual settlement cannot be discounted, for it paved the way for the ultimate smooth merger.

Having now decided and confirmed to disband the existing clubs and opt for their amalgamation, it was time to name the new club and have elections to its first Executive Committee.

At a meeting convened for the purpose, on 9th May 1993, I got elected as its President. The new club was christened as United Club of Utorda. (If I am not mistaken, it was on a proposal by Johnny Gomes and supported unanimously)

After the new committee took over at a glittering ceremony in the first week of June 1993, the village looked set to see a new landscape on the canvas of its socio-cultural and sports life. The Chief Guest at the Inauguration was the well-known educationist Mr. Oscar Gonsalves who in a sterling and spirited speech on the occasion eulogised the unprecedented collective efforts of the villagers that had the audience spell-bound.

I remember his speech vividly. Rev Fr, Jose Dias who was the Guest of Honour came in for his special praise and asked everyone present to build not a statue of stone but to carve a niche for Fr, Jose in every villager's heart. The whole function was executed with clock-work precision, with all the markers of pomp, pageantry and solemnity.

The club now had the benefit of the exuberance of the youth and the maturity and wiser counsel of the seniors .I can recall the active participation of some of the elder members like Roquezinho Pereira, late F. X. Pacheco, Antonio Pereira, J.M. Monteiro, Jaime Carvalho, Joaquim Santano Fernandes, etc, etc.

As a president, I had a bounden duty to not only do justice to the trust and confidence reposed in me, but to also lay down standards and parameters-that would perhaps take the effect of precedents. I hope I managed to do just that—carrying out the tasks to the best of my ability.

However, I did have my share of the problems and shortcomings-not being able to carry all the section of the membership with me on every decision we made at the club. Some close friends became overnight opponents taking me to task on every decision that sometimes one is forced to take at short notice without recourse to prior permission of the General Body.

However, that we were able to do a lot of activities in the first year of the new club speaks volumes of the calibre and pedigree of the members we had, some of whom are still actively engaged in running of the club. A tribute to them that neither age has dimmed their spirit nor fatigue has ebbed their love for the club and our beloved village. The spirit has lived on.....

Long live the United Club of Utorda.