

By DALE LUIS MENEZES



Season of Plenty?: Tourism and the Locals in Goa

In most discussions on the impact of tourism on Goa, the issues that locals face as a result of the tourism do not enjoy much attention. With charter flights landing from the beginning of October, there was quite a buzz in the media speculating a successful tourist season. The buzz, perhaps, was created because the industry is in such dire straits and much of Goa's economy is believed to depend on the footfalls of tourists. In all these reports, there was an image that stuck in my mind, which I think is symbolic of the misguided way in which tourism is conducted in Goa.

Those who arrived on the first charter flight were given a warm welcome with roses, and a brass band belting out some tunes in the background. These were scenes of happy and hospitable Goans. Apart from drawing on the stereotype of Goans being ever open to tourists and tourism-related activities, the welcome given to the charter tourists looked like an attempt by the Tourism department to remedy the image of Goa's tourism industry which has taken a hit due to reports of mismanagement, environmental degradation, the rising rate of crime, and the destruction of Goan resources through an unsustainable increase in the number of tourists.

The aforementioned image seems to be a part of a pattern: a history of tourism policy-making that has only viewed the average Goan as a happy-go-lucky person who does nothing but enjoys and entertains. One can access this history of the creation and implementation (or the lack of proper implementation) of tourism policies in Goa through two documents: the "Master Plan for Tourism Development in Goa", July 1987 and the recent "Tourism Master Plan", 2016. These documents tell us how the policy-makers conceptualized Goa as a tourist destination, and how, through the implementation of this policy, the successive governments failed to take account of the problems that were identified in these documents. For instance, the 'master plans' recognized that there are limits to the number of tourists a place can accommodate; yet, we see that successive governments have tried to increase the number of tourists in Goa. More tourists require more people to service them and this has led to large-scale migration of labor into Goa. While the absence of proper labor laws and regulatory mechanisms have led to the influx of a large number of migrant labor and consequently their exploitation as well, the high influx also indicates that tourism as an industry has failed to provide gainful and dignified employment to local Goans as one can observe Goans migrating

elsewhere for better job opportunities. So, how has all this tourism benefitted Goa and



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During the 1980s when the Indian state and the Goan government were trying to promote tourism, they created the image of Goa as a timeless paradise. Goa was marketed as a blend of the East and the West, a slice of Southern Europe in India that tourists could afford for a fraction of the price. As Paul Routledge writes in his essay, “Consuming Goa: Tourist Site as Dispensable Space” in the *Economic and Political Weekly* (2000), the tourism industry was driven by the logic of consumption; nothing could stand in the middle of ‘Goa the paradise’ and the leisure consumption of the incoming tourists.

In such a scenario of Goan resources being offered for the consumption of tourists, what happens of the local Goan? The problem is that the local Goan is only included in the planning of tourism development as a service-provider, or worse, as someone who has to endure the mismanagement of public infrastructure because the tourism industry requires that Goa’s resources – roads, water, land, etc – be pressed in the service of the tourists. Thus, a lot of Goa’s economic planning today is oriented to serve the tourists, not the locals. The casinos in the Mandovi are a great example of this kind of development. Even the viral e-petition that demanded the introduction of app-based taxi services in Goa argued that the main reason why Goa needs such alternate transport services is because “[t]ourism is the backbone of Goa’s economy and tourists across the world & India are used to services like OLA/UBER, it’s [*sic*] time to allow them to operate in Goa”. The first benefit of such a move, the petition suggests, is – not surprisingly – a “boost to tourism”.

Could this e-petition, like much of Goa’s tourism policy-decisions, be oriented in a different direction? Could the locals be privileged over the tourists? Could the petition have said that because of the increase in Goa’s population and the abysmal public transport system, the locals need to be provided with alternate and affordable modes of transportation?

While governmental policy has favored tourists over locals, the response from Goa’s civil society, too, seems to be trapped within the same logic. At the end of the day, Goans giving into the logic of leisure consumption or of understanding Goa as a pleasure periphery

(especially of India), effectively means that local Goans - us - have very little say in our own collective economic and cultural future. Even if the economy is in a bad state and the state coffers are almost empty, one must find better ways to rejuvenate Goa's economic situation. Such a scenario would be always better than selling away our say in our collective future for a few pieces of silver.

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