



By DALE LUIS MENEZES

India's bid to be a superpower, or at least economically dominate the region of Asia has guided many policy decisions in the last decade or so. The Mopa airport is part of this scheme. Ever since the airport was proposed, *circa* 2000, India's economic policy has consistently promoted airports and projected them as a way to allow small cities or towns, and rural areas to partake of the economic benefits of a surging economy, while also opening up these spaces for the investment of global capital and infrastructure development. The brunt of this 'development', as is all too familiar for Goans, has to be borne by the people on whom it is forced - especially the marginalized ones. The idea that smaller undeveloped areas can be included in the circuits of a surging economy - in turn benefiting the people of these regions - by massive injection of infrastructure investment simply does not hold water.

This neoliberal model of development has also met its opposition. In recent times we are familiar with the opposition to mega projects at Tiracol, Sancoale, Mopa, and Vasco as defining the political discourse in Goa. The massive, and hitherto unprecedented, public hearing in Vasco demonstrated that spirited public debate poses a challenge to governmental inefficiency and generally misguided policy making. The resistance that is shaping up in Vasco in comparison with other recent cases can help us identify the forces that are crucial in the success and failure of people's resistance against development. Simply put, why did a public hearing this effective take place in Vasco and not in Mopa?

To begin with, one has to look at what is being opposed. Coal pollution is visible, its effects felt immediately through respiratory disorders, whereas clearing large chunks of forests

changes the climate and ecology slowly, at times almost imperceptibly. This perhaps impacts the urgency with which people mobilize. The literacy rate and the access to higher education also have an impact on the protest and resistance for a particular place. Even if the literacy rate stands at 83.63% at Mopa, there is an absence of professionals such as lawyers, whose skills and clout come in handy in times of crises. Vasco on the other hand has a good number of such professionals - lawyers, teachers, doctors - who can contribute to the fight. Moreover, while Vasco contains a diverse population of people - diverse in terms of education and social background, Mopa's villages largely have farming and pastoral communities, or communities belonging to the bahujan samaj. The **2011 Census reports** that there are about 70 persons belonging to the Scheduled Castes communities. These communities are rather scattered from each other, while the area that is marked for the Greenfield airport is a lush green plateau that is largely forested.

If the fight for Goa's identity and environment must go on and won in the favor of its people, it needs the active support of diverse sections of the society. In the same way, one can think of how certain pockets of Goa which contain small communities need the support from outside resources to make their voices heard. These 'outside resources' could be access to higher education or professional education to its members, access to centers of judicial and executive power, and access to media platforms so that grievances once articulated reach the widest possible people. Linked to the issue of internal collaboration is the ability to understand that local mobilizations are connected to other struggles elsewhere in the world. Thus, activists in Vasco were able to include the struggle of people in Carmichael, Australia as part of their own discourse of protest. The same, however, is not observed in Mopa despite the fact that there are **global movements against aerotropolises**, and many places in Poland, South Korea, Taiwan, and Nepal are fighting against the development of mega airports.

However, the most crucial factor that affects the success or failure of protest is the social background of the communities that are fighting to protect their rights and/or the environment. Many of these developmental projects are situated on lands that subaltern communities use for their sustenance. Further, marginalized communities are deliberately divided amongst themselves by selective offers of jobs, or some other largesse which is denied to other marginalized communities within the same area.

We can also think of the importance of literacy and education as being crucial in understanding the policies formulated by the government. Many of the families living in Mopa had received notices informing them of the government's plan of acquiring the land. However, these notices were in English which resulted in most of the people having very little clue of what was happening. In this context, it was heartening to note that activists during the Vasco hearing demanding that all material pertaining to the project, including the minutes of the public hearing, be made available in other local languages – a procedure which the government machinery had failed to follow.

Thus, it would appear that the way a society is structured and the way this very society treats its subaltern members directly impacts its ability to resist power and annihilation. Moreover, if governmental policies and private capital is constantly able to move ahead despite the express wish of the people then it is an indication of how democratic processes have failed many communities within a particular society. And in the final analysis, how there isn't equality amongst all Goans.

(First published in *O Heraldo*, dt: 22 November, 2017)



Share this:

- [Click to share on Twitter \(Opens in new window\)](#)
- [Click to share on Facebook \(Opens in new window\)](#)
- [Click to share on Google+ \(Opens in new window\)](#)