

By DALE LUIS MENEZES

The Chief Minister Manohar Parrikar's **comments** on employment on the floor of the assembly during the 2017 winter session highlighted the serious issue of unemployment prevailing in Goa. Mr. Parrikar said that reserving 80% of the jobs for locals was a pre-condition for granting permissions to set up shop in Goa for various companies and industries.

For some months now, the issue of Goans being gainfully employed within Goa itself **has been raised** not only with a view to tackle unemployment, but to also safeguard Goan identity. This issue has been articulated by spokespersons of political parties, and ministers within the current government, as best tackled by reserving jobs for Goan youth, particularly in the private sector. There is a sense that the government can no longer be the chief locus of employment for Goan youth and hence the need for employment in private sectors. This would also expose young Goans to the **highly competitive** world of private corporations, as opposed to government employment that seemingly does not require high performance. In all **these statements from various quarters**, one cannot help but observe a subtle assumption running through: that there is a problem of unemployment in Goa because Goans do not want to work hard, or are not good enough.

Even if all these statements are well intentioned and the subtle assumption that Goans are not hard-working an unconscious one, it drives us to focus on the issue of the various stages leading to employment: education, training, and finally the entry into the job market. One needs to take a step back and think about training or the acquisition of skills through education in a broader sense. Education, in this regard, should not only prepare a young

person for the existing job market, but should also open up an individual's horizons to a wide range of opportunities beyond the services demanded by a neo-liberal economy - where the market is believed to regulate economic relations and the profit is earned by the corporations leaving the risks and losses for the government - as is the case with our current economic setup in India.

Time and again, it has been emphasized by many writers and commentators in Goa that the basic structure of education has serious flaws in it. The **Medium of Instruction** issue, whereby the preferred choice of language for a child's education was not actively supported by successive governments, indicated that quality education - but most importantly, equal education - is not available to all members of Goan society. Rather than allowing English education that would help the poorer sections in getting jobs, the government wanted to saddle these very groups with the burden of 'mother tongue'. In terms of higher education and the proposed plans for expanding its scope, the government wanted to promote technical education, rather than a holistic approach that promotes the sciences and humanities. This we saw in the manner in which a new **IIT was proposed in Canacona in 2016**, and the various arguments that were put forth for the setting up of such an institution.

When there is talk of reserving jobs for Goans or positively discriminating in favor of Goans, one should also think about how existing reservations for discriminated-against communities, i.e. caste-based reservations, in educational institutions - both in terms of seats for students and jobs for teachers - **are scuttled on a regular basis in Goa**. In terms of education/training leading eventually to jobs, such discriminatory practices in the universities contribute to the unemployment of members of these communities. So, the system creates disadvantages for certain students right at the beginning, during their education, and those who somehow overcome these hurdles are denied the jobs reserved for

them, despite having the necessary qualifications. Perhaps there is an irony here considering the current debate. Young students are disadvantaged as far as their education is concerned, while one expects them to somehow possess skills that would prepare them for the job market.

The view expressed in the assembly and the press suggesting that Goans should consider settling for lesser pay and difficult working conditions (even as a way of gaining experience and exposure) means that there is an acknowledgement that poor salaries are also a problem along with unemployment. Even if jobs are reserved, the government's policy does not deal with the fact that Goan youth need to be shielded from poor salaries. If such a step is ensured through policy and law, it would be against the neo-liberal setup and thus discourage investment in Goa. Even if jobs are assured, good working conditions are not.

One thing should be clear from the foregoing: reserving jobs for Goans is not enough if Goan identity is to be fostered. It needs to be ensured whether the steps taken by the government, in fact, promote the interests of Goans, and improve the living conditions inside Goa. If unemployment is to be tackled then one needs to take into consideration related areas such as education, which eventually has a bearing on identity as well.

Contrary to popular belief in sections of the media and the political establishment, Goans are seeking work and not sloth, as can be seen with Goans migrating in droves. Thus, there is no dearth of persons who are determined to do the hard work. In order to tackle unemployment as well the problems with Goan identity, decent working conditions must prevail in Goa. If the internal situation - be it political, economic, social, and infrastructural - is poor, then out-migration will always remain a better option.



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