




If it isn't naked Hindutva, the government seems to be hell-bent in promoting vicious neo-liberalism. In a joint policy-decision by the Ministry of Tourism, the Ministry of Culture, and the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI), the government envisages corporate participation in the maintenance of India's heritage sites, including natural heritage sites like Assam's Kaziranga National Park. Many iconic world heritage monuments in India will be put up for 'adoption'. Private companies and individuals, and public sector undertakings now will be able to manage particular monuments through the 'Adopt a Heritage' scheme.

As claimed by the government, the 'Adopt a Heritage' scheme is designed for increasing tourism revenue. All heritage sites currently under the scheme are ostensibly selected on the basis of "tourist footfalls and visibility". Indeed, the vision of the scheme gives prime importance to the development of "tourist amenities", like toilet facilities, drinking water, and flow of traffic as its main objectives. The government claims that the revenues generated will be ploughed back for the upkeep of the same monuments. This is a rather bizarre claim as most of these monuments are already generating large revenues from tourist footfalls - such as the Red Fort in Delhi - and there seems to be no reason to increase the popularity of these sites amongst the tourist. One can surmise, therefore, that the reasons for promoting this scheme lie elsewhere: to increase the privatization of heritage tourism.

Being in Goa and suffering from the excessive and unregulated tourist footfalls should make us see red when a scheme like 'Adopt a Heritage' is promoted. Goa doesn't need more tourist footfalls, but less. Moreover, the idea that generating more income from increased footfalls would help in the restoration/conservation efforts is self-destructive. More tourist footfalls mean that there is an increasing pressure on old monuments leading to faster deterioration. One cannot fix the present condition of deterioration by creating a situation in the future that will deteriorate the monument further. Similar to what is happening with the rest of Goa, schemes like 'Adopt a Heritage' will only accelerate the destruction of Goa's natural and built heritage and Goans will lose access to their heritage and history.



scheme seems not to be in consonance with the existing heritage laws that regulate and protect monuments and sites. What I particularly refer to is the legal aspect of how the ASI has to interface with the local bodies and owners in not only maintaining monuments but also displaying them as world heritage sites or sites of national importance. The Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Sites and Remains Act, 1958, empower the ASI to control and conserve monuments, such as the Basilica of Bom Jesus under their care. This law provides for two parties to enter into a contractual guardianship – the owner(s) and ASI. The nature of this guardianship is such that the control of the ASI is not absolute; the guardianship is formed on such a basis that the original owner is entitled to all rights and privileges as an owner as if the guardianship was never constituted with the ASI. Add to this is the fact that churches in Old Goa are also UNESCO world heritage sites.

In itself this provision, as it is framed, creates a legal grey area: who has control over what aspects of the monument? This was clearly visible in 2011 when the ASI and the Archdiocese sparred over whether or not to impose dress code for the visiting tourists. Both sides claimed that they had the right to the monument – the ASI asserted its role as a care-taker authorized by the central government and the Archdiocese argued from its position as the owner of the monument. In any case, the abovementioned Act provides for non-obstruction in religious worship; the dress code is imposed to maintain the sanctity of the church as it is a place where Catholics worship. And yet there was friction between the parties, whether born out of ignorance of the law/rules or plain arrogance is a story for another day.

And now to add a third party – private corporates/individuals and public sector companies – without any clarity of how all these three parties will interface with each other is to create more confusion. Imagine if the corporate company feels that the Basilica of Bom Jesus should be ticketed, since it will generate good revenue for its upkeep – perhaps one would have to purchase a ticket to attend mass! For the problem with involving private companies is that these are driven by profit and the vision and aims of the private companies more often than not are detrimental for public good.

Specifically in relation to the Goan scenario when the legal and contractual basis of the partnership is not clear, the Goa government, the ASI, and the Archdiocese has to first clarify what is the legal basis for this move and not make hasty decisions – whether opting for the scheme or not. That the government is seeking private partnership for providing such *basic*

facilities as toilets and safe drinking water reflects badly on the ASI – the institution set up to do just this and many other important things. More than generating revenue out of the tangible heritage, it is imperative that these structures and sites are conserved and/or preserved for their historical and cultural value.

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