

By ALBERINA ALMEIDA



Will they? Or Will they not?: Questions as Goa goes to the polls
Goa will shortly hold elections for three of its legislative assembly seats, one of which has fallen vacant on the death of a legislator and two of which have fallen vacant because the legislators have decided to switch parties.

Will we let politics of numbers and 'purity' defined in casteist and sexist terms, rather than one that centres around life and dignity determine the fate of Goa and India in the coming elections? In other words, will we let the real development of Goa - the land and its people determine the future of Goa?

When Governments frame their policies, and enact laws, repeal or amend laws, what will their consultative processes look like? Will they ensure institutionalization of participatory processes that particularly ensure the representation of marginalized sections of society? When Governments enter into trade agreements with other countries, *which means* their corporates and multi-national corporates, which have a bearing on the access to resources for the people of our land, what will the consultative processes and the participation of the people look like, before drawing up and then finalizing such agreements? Will it involve no participation, or will it involve only the participation of a select section of society? Will they ensure that 'model villages' and 'smart cities' are not built on the backs of marginalized people, and by reinforcing caste? Will we have model villages and smart cities that will prioritize people's needs and requirements, and ensure the structural changes necessary for the same, with the involvement of people from the marginalized sections of society?

Will the Constitutional amendments be honoured and existing laws such as the Town and Country Planning Act appropriately amended in sync with the 73rd and 74th amendments? Will they take away the wool they think they are placing in our eyes with the 'transferable development rights' notion that they have introduced in the law? Will the Constitutional Amendment that recognizes people's cooperatives be pro-actively enforced? Will the Unlawful Activities Prevention Act and all such draconian laws that facilitate unfounded detention of political dissenters and those fighting for people's rights be repealed? Will there be a synchronization of laws that will ensure that rights guaranteed under the Family laws are not taken away by the laws enacted post 1961 or Indian laws extended to Goa, such as the Mundkar Act, the Tenancy Act, the Companies Act, the Partnership Act?

Will the marginalised sections of society have a say in decision making and planning at all levels, with appropriate affirmative provisions to enable the process? Will the marginalized sections be appropriately consulted and involved in the monitoring and evaluation processes pertaining to Government schemes? Will there be a gender audit and a caste-sensitive audit

of all government programs and schemes be put in place? Will there be gender audits, social audits and environment audits institutionalized for any policies or mega projects that are set up, even if these projects are introduced piece-meal? Will decisions and their reasons at all levels of decision making be duly documented and publicized and also made accessible on the internet? Surely the image of Goa as the best e-governance state must not just be a mirage?

Will the Government cry poverty for budget allocation for welfare and protection measures for the sections of society that most need it – ‘for the last person’ as the present Chief Minister of Goa, Dr. Pramod Sawant calls it — or will this be yet another stunt of not putting the money where the mouth is? Will we still have a large component of the budget being allocated for defence deals and being a chowkidar to a ‘nation’ that does not recognize the citizenship of its citizens, except as statistics or cards? Or will there be due budget allocation and utilization for health, education, and for enabling basic resources and amenities for *all* people? Will there be allocation of budgets to ensure steady and continuous electricity and water supply?

What will land rights and land control look like under the governance they promise? Will it translate into swift enabling of mutation (land transfer documentation) by due process, or will it mean selective overnight mutation of land records, for the dominant politicians that be, and their sons, and the corporates they are associated with? Will provisions in the laws that enable Governments to take over or acquire land be conditioned by whom they directly benefit? Will the Government make an inventory of land use and the skills people have, so that any development policy will base itself on this? Will they decommission the Mopa Airport and such other projects opposed by the people, and apply the land acquired for income generation for the socially and economically marginalized sections of society? Will the documentation of bio-diversity and equitable conservation practices be utilized to ensure that people’s knowledges –traditional and present – and people’s land uses are not (mis)appropriated from them? Will they ensure that the simple demand of people for community spaces or retention of existing spaces is honoured? And that all communities and especially marginalized communities have priority of access to these spaces? Will the Government as the financier of the University ensure that the University which is located in a tribal area actually specially ensures jobs for people whose livelihood was taken away with the acquisition of land for the University? Will also the Government follow a similar policy with projects or any inevitable infrastructure?

What will remunerative employment of the people look like? Will they continue to have the security of employment, or will contractualisation of labour, that limits unionization, engulf the employment scene like wildfire? Will Government jobs also be continuously on contract

basis, making the bureaucracy compliant or rather submissive to the dominant politicians? Will small and medium and cooperative enterprises be encouraged and nurtured? Will they? Or Will they not?: Questions as Goa goes to the polls



Will they make our public primary schools bustling centres of learning instead of the withering wilted institutions that they have been reduced to today? Will we have public schools beholden to corporates who do their CSR to whitewash their sins of omission and commission, or will their debt to the community be duly redeemed through appropriate payments that constitute revenue to the exchequer? Will we have curricula that recognize the existence, contribution and challenges faced by marginalized sections of society? Will language policies and practices duly recognize all spoken languages and dialects in Goa and not impose dialects alien to traditionally marginalized communities?

What will universal health services look like with aspirational governance? Will it mean making health facilities accessible to all, or will it mean siphoning of monies to private hospitals and organisations even as the public Government hospital is or can be equipped with the best of facilities and amenities and all this in the name of universal health care? Will the nutrition division in the health department be restored so that people are not driven to contracting lifestyle diseases via food styles and life styles imposed on them? Will they ensure affordable healthy food, including milk, vegetable, fruits, fish and beef for economically marginalised communities? Will they ensure that formalin in fish, pesticide on vegetables, and ingestibles in fruits and any food processing that jeopardises people's health is strictly prohibited/ not within permissible limits? And that prohibition is strictly enforced?

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Will the politicians play divide and rule and deprive the people who most need burial and cremation grounds, of their spaces for a decent integration into the earth from which we have come in the first place? Will politicians play divide and rule in the location/construction of temples and religious places, and incite citizens or play on their phobias, such as Islamophobia? Or will they take a leaf from the way New Zealand Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern has addressed the problem?

Will there be a revision of spatial allocation and design, to make it accessible and appropriate for all sections of people that live within and use the spaces in question? Or will builders and developers with high buying capacity and scant regard for the law determine the character and design of Goa and further accentuate the exclusion of communities who have been marginalized for generations now? Will there be attention paid for the creation of garbage free zones in areas that do not have habitation on either side of the road?

Will we have regular public transport and such that is available for early and extended hours

along various routes, specially routes from the village to the administrative capital of the taluka? Will we have adequate public transport that is eco-conscious and accessible both physically and socially? Or will we encourage car dealers and the car manufacturing companies with loan facilities through banks? Will we have the present coal transportation permissions biting the dust, instead of the coal literally biting the dust and getting embedded in the soil and the seas?

Talking of banks, what will loan facilities look like? Will they continue to be builder and corporate friendly where Mallyas and Modis can get loans on plastic chairs and simple people rooted here cannot get loans? Or will there be policies for lending facilities that are people friendly? Will they repeal the SEZ (Special Economic Zone) law in India so SEZs (in India) and SEZ like spaces be a thing of the past? After all, who wants foreign country within the country, and why should people's right to decide at local levels be snatched away?

And yes, family is important. But what is that which is called family? Is family only the single model of husband wife and children, or joint family comprising of extended family and members across two or more generations? Or can family also be family as different from the heterosexual family norm, which may also include transgenders, may include homosexuals? The Supreme Court has led with its judgements on transgender and on decriminalization of homosexuality. Will the legislators follow with corresponding legislation in family law? And talking of family, can we look for a development model that will factor work time and governance time in a way that can accommodate the realities of mothers? Will women have access to child care, by way of crèches on demand, or will the State provide child care allowance which is different from Griha Adhar which is housework allowance? After all, aren't women producing the future citizens?

Will they ensure that all institutions and bodies that are meant to realize and uphold human rights are actively supported and not crippled by inappropriate allocation of budgets, lack of infrastructure and personnel, and laxity in appointments? Can we forget what has been happening, for instance, with the Goa Human Rights Commission or the Goa State Police Complaints Authority or the Goa State Commission for Women? Will they ensure that manual scavenging is confined to memories of recognition of historical caste based social discrimination?

Will citizenship blues for the people of Goa who have obtained Portuguese passports, or for citizens affected by NRC Registers, be a thing of the past? Will the State look with new lens at the concept of citizenship that must ensure rights to life, equality and dignity for all citizens, and especially ensure dual citizenship for Goans?

Will they insist on the realization of common but differentiated responsibilities from first

world countries?



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These are but some of the many questions that are churning in the minds of the Goan public.

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