

By DALE LUIS MENEZES



The end of a calendar year often makes us reflect on the 'old' that we leave behind and the 'new' that we hope for. When most of the economic, social, and political problems that Goa faced last year, or even over the last few years, remain firmly in place, it makes little sense to hope for a better 2021. The pandemic, of course, gives us reasons to be even more pessimistic. We really do not know how 2021 will unfold, especially because the government everyday reinforces its spectacular inefficiency in handling the pandemic. It is for this reason that, rather than offering the usual clichés about a new calendar year, it might be better to reflect on some of the positive changes over the last six months.

I am referring especially to the massive participation of college students and other youth in environmental protests since, at least, June 2020. While youth have always participated in protests and agitations before, and have been as vocal and well-informed, this time around youth participation is marked by a clever social media savviness. Additionally, they believe in confronting their elected leaders directly, especially through social media, not kowtowing to them as if they were feudal lords. At the height of the pandemic, many college students started mobilizing public opinion on Whatsapp and Twitter. Soon, these mobilizations developed into letter-writing campaigns, as well as creating public awareness through hashtags (#savemollem), artworks, and Instagram stories.

The main issue in the recent participation of the youth in Goa is intergenerational equity. In other words, the future of Goa and young Goans. But there is a conceptual difference as the 'future' in the recent protests takes the environment as its basis, and not culture or politics. Intergenerational equity is rather an old concept in economics but one that has been gaining increasing traction in debates about the environment, especially climate change. Intergenerational equity here means that the environment is the basis of life, and any livelihood must be based on conserving and protecting the environment.

The demands are strikingly different from what one generally assumes would be made by the youth. The youth are simply asking the authorities to protect and conserve the environment, and not necessarily create economic opportunity—or development—so that more jobs are available in the future. The old ways of pacifying youth unrest through government jobs do not seem to be working these days because the demands are not about the economy but about the ecology.

There are some urgent reasons why the environment needs to be protected and conserved from predatory development. For one, as the pandemic has taught us, destroying forests will only lead to more diseases being released onto human habitation. Secondly, it is about having a place to call home, so that one can live and make a living by accessing basics like

clean water, air, and food. Without ecology, as it is getting clearer to almost everyone, no employment, cultural life, or society is ever possible.



Intergenerational Equity: The Old and the New

Today, we are concerned about our future because successive waves of development in Goa have destroyed the intergenerational equity for the Goan youth. Goa's history of destructive development shows that those most affected by it are the youth from the subaltern classes. Take the example of the tourism industry. When the industry started booming from the 1980s, many young people in the coastal areas dropped out of schools. One can also think of the mining boom which, while creating deep scars on the environment in those regions, also left the people living there little or no facilities. An environmental crisis only deepens a preexisting social one.

The most important political change that environmental and intergeneration equity activism needs to deliver is rather in the social sphere. While the social media blitz has turned the tides against developmentalist policies, Goa is yet to create equitable stakeholders, the young and the old of all social background, within a vision of intergenerational equity. Intergenerational equity is throttled if there is no vision for how communities will interact and use the land in the future. To put it in another way, we are yet to create a vision where Goa's rich ecology is preserved and handed over to the next generation irrespective of caste, creed, or religion.

The big question is this: Who will benefit from the Goan environment that we want to protect today? Because, over the years, resources that one generation can hand over to the next have been steadily depleting. There is less land, for instance, that a new generation of Goans can inherit, or even purchase, for the building boom fostered as development has taken it out of common Goans' reach. Despite the so-called development that successive governments are proud of and constantly promote, more and more Goans are forced to migrate for decent jobs. Thus, it is not surprising that young Goans in their 20s and 30s find it better to opt for Portuguese citizenship. So, we need to protect the Goan environment to create a better and more cohesive Goan community.

The idea of intergenerational equity is rightly driving many to question the benefits of development for this and the next generations. The answers that the youth are giving us align with the destructive history of development in Goa: We don't need more development! On a deeper reflection, the demands of the youth today are not really 'new' but by fulfilling it Goans can find better ways to regain the best aspects of the 'old' life they have lost through rampant development since the 1970s. That is what we need in the years to come.

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