



Our lifestyles are already at stake, they are further threatened. The cultural setting, to which the outmigrating Goans hope to return to in their old age, will be erased. Goans will be a museum piece like Native Americans are in the United States, to dance '*hanv saiba poltodi vetam*' on the tourist boats. Reduced in numbers, robbed of lands, relocated, governed by governing systems that are not in conformity with their way of being. Sometimes through the propping up of sold-out individuals who claim to 'represent' the same communities.

There are four temples within a premises at Ibrampur, but the signboards talk of just three temples, and conveniently omit the Maringann temple. 'They are trying not just to erase from view our temples, but our very existence itself', says a resident of Shahunagar, in the village of Ibrampur, Pernem. Shahunagar is not the official name of the ward. The move of the residents to officially rename it as Shahunagar instead of the old Harijanvaddo lies in cold storage. 'We are denied our land rights. We are denied the amenities available in the other wards of the village even though Ibrampur has been declared an *adarsh gram* (model village) under the *Sansad Adarsh Gram Yojana*. Nothing has changed.' Ibrampur is one of two villages declared as model villages in Goa under the Member of Parliament Model Village Scheme.

'I went abroad because I was paying through my nose to meet the requirements for running my taxi. People think taxi drivers fleece customers. But you have no idea what the Government expects of us: the taxis are expected to be of a particular size, have to provide air-condition, and meet very high standards; not to speak of all kinds of taxes we have to pay. Now I live in very cramped conditions abroad, but I am making do. Otherwise, how will I give my children a decent future? But I would like to come back to Goa in my old age. Will that be possible? Already my right to vote has been snatched away from me', says a former taxi driver from Agaçaim.

'People from all over Goa come to us, for local remedies for their ailments. We have a store of medicinal herbs around our lake. Now they are telling us that they are going to set up a park there. That park will destroy our forest, our waters, our fresh water sources. We will no longer get our medicines.' says a traditional *voijinn* (traditional female doctor) from Chimbél,



'The Government hasn't filled jobs for a long time now. Every time I go and talk to the local politician to ensure that my son gets a job, and every time he says, "I will see." The previous MLA has given people some people jobs before, without paying anything - only his influence, but for the few jobs the present Government created, they/their agents have been taking a bribe to get a job', says a young man.

'We came to Goa some forty years ago from Karnataka. My wife, and now also my daughters, work in people's houses and earn a livelihood. My sons work as drivers. But Goans still call us migrants. We even speak Konkani better than many Goans do', says a Muslim septuagenarian from Moti Dongor at Margao.

'When mining stopped, my husband lost his job. He had bought two trucks and was driving one of them and we had a good life with those earnings. Before that, we used to cultivate our fields. Now the fields are gone because of the mining ore dumped there, and the mining has stopped. And we have loans to repay. They are not restarting the mines. They are not recovering the monies from the mine owners for illegal iron ore extraction activities, and giving us either', says a woman from Onda in the northern Satari taluka.

'My daughter constantly has asthma problems, probably because of coal pollution, and now they are talking of increasing the volume of coal imports and transportation through Vasco and Goa. We do not have any other house anywhere other than Vasco. We cannot afford the prices of even the flats, leave alone a house. Where do we go? What do we do?' A resident of Vasco is anxious.

'Goa's population growth has fallen below replacement level. And the Census data indicates that the migrant population exceeds the native population of Goa', says a demographer.

'These bridges and highways are built by killing our fields. They threw mud on our vegetables

as they began work on the highways and the bridges,' a woman from Cortalim weeps.



So what are Goans aspiring for?

One can go on and on with the statements of Goans who are literally being traumatized by the policies of this government. Looming large are the issues of casteism, lack of employment, loss of productive traditional livelihoods, corruption, lack of accountability in governance and banking sectors, disrespect for migrants, privatization, loss of citizenship, population politics, a profit-centric development model, co-optation exercises, veering of debates into choosing between binaries – such as between environment and employment – when both are and must be possible. Apart from the traditional violences of caste and gender, which this Government has shown no interest in countering.

The State looks at those who expose these concerns as nay-sayers. They say we oppose everything that the Government proposes. Maybe we do, but how can we accept anything that will destroy us, destroy Goa, and that will erase our existence from this earth, is what Goa's activists are asking.

Can we stop saying we do not want an IT Park in Chimbél, but let the IT Park be relocated to Socorro or Taleigao? We do need employment, and we do need connectivity for generating employment in the Information Technology world. But we don't need Parks. We don't need IT Parks, Biotechnology Parks, and any other Parks. The concept of parks goes hand in hand with infrastructure weighted anti people townships and gated communities whose decisions have a huge bearing for all of us, without any of us having a say in them. Our IT and biotechnology policies are all about parks which are like SEZs. Did we drive the SEZs out of Goa only to have them back in another avatar through these policies?

We say that Goa is a peaceful place. But violence against women in the home, in the workplace, and anywhere is pervasive. Safety is a big issue for any person, in fact. Women face not only physical and verbal emotional abuse. But their economies are badly shattered by a model of development that takes women's work for granted and does not recognize it. For example, the value and worth of the *oijjins* (traditional medicine women) is not recognized. The State does not consider this as a displacement from livelihood that the IT Park at Chimbél will cause.



So what are Goans aspiring for? Crony capitalism results in huge profits for the cronies and for the politicians-turned-capitalists or capitalists turned politicians. The infrastructure development brings with it a possibility of graft that will finance the elections, never mind if that infrastructure is not sustainable and is no development at all for the local people and is not giving them any jobs befitting their skills or the local resources and their sustainable use.

We are even killing the goose on whom and with whom we lived, worked and strengthened and got strengthened, by forcing it to lay golden eggs that it simply cannot lay, and will leave it unable to reproduce any further.

Corruption is seizing us all. The case of the ICICI Bank Executive Chanda Kochchar (who used to be much celebrated by the mainstream media as an icon for women) is not surprising. There are many Chanda Kochchars waiting to be exposed in Goa. If a serious perusal is done of the basis of loans to builders or to the holders of units that these real estate developers build, while lay folks struggle to get loans or get loans at a high rate, one will find plenty of Chanda Kochchars. And of course, we already had a Vijay Mallya in our midst.

So do we resign ourselves to this reality? Or do we get our act together and show the world that a small place like Goa has the potential to get the governance its people deserve, by organizing effectively and not sporadically and opportunistically?

We are offered sops by way of MoU's (Memorandum of Understanding) ostensibly to keep our control, but they are sham MoUs in the face of laws that enable an erasure of our communities, our resources, our beings. Remember the MoU that was supposed to have been signed with regard to the waterways? Remember the MoU that the coastal fisherpeople of Vasco were expected to sign and relocate their fishing jetty in the name of getting a world class fishing jetty in the new place?

Now the State is creating an environment where we possibly have world class infrastructure

projects, but the projects are bound to be like white elephants, when our fish resources are gone because of those very projects and other projects which made the relocation a necessity. So what are Goans aspiring for? Are fish to breed in waters full of soot? Are fish going to last with the coal berth expansion activity? We know the answer is a big No, but the State goes ahead for obvious reasons. When all is done, what will we eat? We have to rephrase that Malaysian poet who wrote, 'When my son grows up what will he eat— tourists, transistors or stones?'

The development the State talks about, takes the sources of livelihood of certain populations for granted. The feudal condition prompted many people to find employment in the tourism industry, because wages in traditional occupations were bad and the work terms were appalling. But the tourism industry is a fickle industry that uses and throws people. And many who transitioned from being farm hands to living on tourism, today live sedated aimless lives after having got seduced into drug consumption and peddled for themselves and the tourists, in the course of engaging with the tourists.

The expectation of assimilating into India is not helping, because assimilation in India is expected to mean erasing one's religious or atheist or agnostic beliefs in support of a Hindu rashtra, to mean erasing our culture and our lifestyles, which are so intertwined with our livelihoods and our locations. Our songs are around the seas, the trees, the forests, our lands, our engagements with nature and with people. Assimilation has come to mean erasing ourselves and being like 'them' or being what others expect us to be. Whatever happened to our right to self determination? Why cannot we be us, with our diversity, even as a small state?

It is in the face of these myriad concerns that Goa is soon going to go to the polls. The Lok Sabha polls, for which it just has two seats.

Goa's problems result from a semi-feudal, semi-capitalist, neo-liberal State. All may seem well on the surface. I started with Ibrampur, I end with Ibrampur. Why, people from Ibrampur say they have heard that it has even been ranked as the fifth best model village. No prizes for guessing what are the indicators of a model village that our rulers envision, and how they do this ranking. The waters seem to be still, but still waters run deep. The State says that

there is no casteism in Goa, that the State deeply respects the environment, and everybody is equal and has to compete on an equal footing. But the State's policies and practices reflect deeply entrenched gendered, casteist and classist mindsets, the challenging of which results in invocation of draconian laws to suppress the challengers.

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