

By AMITA KANEKAR



The Chief Minister recently made a surprising announcement: that he will build a memorial for the 'thousand temples destroyed by the Portuguese' and also rebuild the 'huge structure' of the Saptakoteshwar temple that was allegedly destroyed at Diwar. Let us remember actual destruction, not alleged ones

Now, we understand that he must regularly bring up this issue of destroyed temples, for, as explained before, it is the best one to distract from all the current disasters under his government - whether it is the literally collapsing roads, or vast land scams, or increasing violent crimes, or everything else that Goa is becoming infamous for - while also pumping up Hindutva sentiment.

But didn't he himself reveal, less than a year ago, that his own government had found no proof of temples destroyed by the Portuguese? This fact was clearly mentioned on the floor of the Goa Assembly, that, after setting aside Rs 20 crores for rebuilding destroyed temples in the last budget, and then giving the Goa Directorate of Archives and Archaeology (DAA) the job of making a list of such destroyed temples, the latter had revealed that they could find no such information. The DAA, in October 2022, even invited citizens, NGOs, Associations, and all working in related fields to give their input regarding historical or religious sites destroyed either by Portuguese rulers, or during their rule in Goa. But even that did not produce results.

So, from where has Sawant found a thousand destroyed temples now, include a huge structure that was 'also destroyed by the Portuguese' at Diwar? Or is it just that he imagines, given the flood of scams and scandals under his government, not to mention the nightmarish conditions of civic infrastructure, Goans would have forgotten whatever happened around this issue last year?

Instead of talking of destruction without proof, how about the destruction which can be easily proved? How about building a memorial to all the indigenous shrines destroyed in your tenure, Mr Sawant? Not to mention the thousands of livelihoods also lost? And the thousands of fields built over, the lakhs of trees cut and wildlife decimated, by all your grand projects? Not possible, we know. Some destruction is meant to be remembered centuries later - even invented as required - while others are to be completely ignored, however recent or even current.

Sawant, of course, will not admit that his announcements are aimed at disturbing the communal peace of Goa. No, his government, he says, is working to develop 'spiritual tourism'. So, is he going to end Goa's casino tourism, drug tourism, alcohol tourism, and prostitution tourism, and focus only on spiritual tourism? Or is this just one more thrill for the bored tourist, on top of all the other attractions on offer? No prizes for guessing. Visit Goa and

indulge in every kind of vice, then wash away your sins at a grand shrine!



But we should be happy, right? What do Goans need in life but more tourists? In fact, forget Goans – long forgotten by Sawant et al — who else does Goa exist for, but tourists?

Just to give you an example: a few days before his temple talk, the CM made another announcement – that Goa would soon be launching the long-promised but sadly-delayed Helicopter Commutes to take luxury tourists to and from the two airports and all the major tourist destinations of Goa. Because, we surely don't want these elites to navigate – or even see – the chaos of dug-up and collapsing roads in Goa's Extra-Smart Cities, right? The cost of this helicopter commute is only Rs 8000 per head per ride, surely crumbs for the people whose convenience and comfort the CM is worried about.

The helicopters are only the latest facility soon to be added at the airports, where there are already 42 different car models on offer as taxis for exiting travelers, plus airconditioned Kadamba buses. The authorities, meanwhile, actually removed one of the only two ferry-boats plying the Panjim-Betim run across the Mandovi river. They removed the boat – to give it to the casinos. So, a commuter wanting to cross the river by ferry might need to wait for around an hour – for the single boat to cross the river, pick up passengers on the other side, and cross back – before she could start her trip. This is not unusual at any of the ferry points in Goa, which are all seeing a shortage of boats and inordinate delays, which have made this relatively cheap and sustainable method of travel increasingly tiresome.

And, please note, the issue is not money. Coming up in Panjim, not far from the crowd waiting impatiently for the ferry boat, is a new bridge. So, a reader might ask – instead of waiting for the ferry, you can use this new bridge? No. This nearly-complete construction just straddles the mouth of the St. Inez creek where it empties into the Mandovi, and leads from the Municipal market of Panjim to the Campal Park. One problem is, thus, that it is clearly in violation of the environmental guidelines for the river and creek. Two is that, tiny in size and restricted to pedestrians and cyclists, this is clearly just a recreational bridge for the use of tourists. Three, it has apparently cost this cash-strapped government, around Rs 5 crores. In other words, the government, which has no money or interest in improving the ferry service for Panjim's working population, is willing to spend a whopping 5 crores, and also willing to further destroy the natural environment, just for tourists to take selfies.

So, don't be surprised if you soon see CM Sawant emulating our beloved PM and even-more-beloved luxury tourist, and taking a helicopter to inaugurate his memorial to the allegedly destroyed temples. Airways for the crème-de-la-crème to hop from point to point; flyovers slicing through the villages for the SUVs of the lesser bigshots; and us below, swallowing their fairytales along with their dust.

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