



# People over profits

*Issues and perspectives for a people-centric tourism in Goa*



Compiled and edited by  
Ranjan Solomon





***Child Protection campaign***



***Tourism Monitoring Group***



***Stakeholders Meet***

# **PEOPLE OVER PROFITS**

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**ISSUES AND PERSPECTIVES FOR A  
PEOPLE-CENTRIC TOURISM IN GOA**

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# ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION IN TOURISM

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*Dr. Nandkumar M. Kamat\**

## Introduction

Suppose you are watching the Taj Mahal. Do you remember to pay a tribute to the white Marble quarries of Makrana in Nagaur district of Rajasthan? That marble made Taj Mahal the global tourist attraction possible. Greeks believed in creation of Cosmos from Chaos. There is a chaos in white marble quarries of Makrana. But it helped to create Emperor Shah Jahan's Taj Mahal. What would be thoughts of those who patronize cruises on River Mandovi or the dolphin tours on Arabian Sea close to coast? Do they think about the river and the sea, the estuarine and marine ecosystems as natural resources which made their recreation, tourist experience possible? Such thoughts are not easy because the marketing culture doesn't permit such insights.

### **Tourism as integral part of ecosystem goods and services**

Stripped of econometric computations, trade, business and management models; all tourism is basically subsidized by nature and ecosystem services. Ecological economists, Robert Costanza

and 14 others in 1997 showed that ecosystems of the world contribute \$16 to 54 trillion per year in terms of services which are outside the markets. But tourism planning in Goa or elsewhere is seldom done by engaging ecological economists, ecophiles or biophiles. The modern model of Tourism is actually a model of profit based management of natural goods and services. My topic is important and special and it touches me deep down and hard intellectually and spiritually because it talks about environmental protection. I thought initially that tourism automatically means ensuring environmental protection. Because common people, local residents don't see and experience what tourists see, feel and experience. The colonial rule can also be seen as rule of tyrant as well as benevolent tourists who preferred to stay a little longer - the Portuguese were the first to arrive and the last to leave. The benevolent colonial tourist rulers are today known as Indologists. As travelers and tourists they found tremendous natural and cultural wealth in this subcontinent, along and across the Western Ghats and the beautiful, scenic coastlines. Who discovered the scenic site at Dona Paula on a rocky island with a low hanging cliff, separated from Cabo or Cape of Goa's Governor by 80 meters? Whose idea was it to build a causeway, a flight of steps leading to a canopied pergola on top of the cliff for posterity? No tourist visiting Goa can go without ascending the steps and having a look at the western horizon. That small project of our colonial masters made Dona Paula world famous. A much more impressive spot on this planet is the Jesuit Retreat House at Baga. It is just perfect location for meditation and spiritual, intellectual contemplation. The same can be said about the location of major seminary of Pilar, Curca chapel or Conception church on Cansaulim hillock.

### **The material and spiritual dimensions of Tourism**

Tourism touches our lives both materially and spiritually. The story of human evolution is story of our travels through geographical space and various testing times. At some point of time

we discovered the spiritual dimension of travel and tourism together. After birth of religious beliefs, pilgrimages to various holy, sacred places emphasized the spiritual dimensions of tourism. I think, although violent, every medieval crusade was a project in tourism. After deep contemplation on this topic, I see the modern problem of tourism management from a different angle - it is basically a failure of the linear economic model, the private profit based business model which has managed to delink the material dimension of tourism from spiritual dimension. All our efforts to generate wealth and employment from tourism miss the spiritual and eco-spiritual dimensions. This is at the very roots of environmental crisis associated with tourism. A tourist keeps his house clean but pollutes the outdoor environment. So I suggest that we should neither accept nor support directly or indirectly any policy, plan, program or model of tourism which only looks at the material side and promotes hedonism. Besides, no discourse on environmental protection in tourism is possible without acknowledging the inviolable role of ethics - the dos and don'ts in tourism.

### **Tourism is man's spiritual covenant with nature**

Why people, tourists travel? What is so exciting in travelling, visiting places, experiencing something? Nature means novelty and diversity. All great prophets, saints travelled a lot - and never without a purpose and never without showing profound respect for nature.

### **Buddha's travels**

The Tipiṭaka records some of the Buddha's itineraries. For example, in the 12 months after his enlightenment he went from Uruvelā to Sārnāth, back to Uruvelā and from there to Rājagaha via Gayā, a distance of about 315 kilometres. One of the longest journeys mentioned in the Tipiṭaka has him going from Rājagaha to Sāvatti via Vesāli, and then back to Rājagaha on the alternative route by way of Kīṭāgiri and Ālavī, about 920 kilometres altogether.

His final journey took him from Rājagaha to Patna, Vesāli and eventually to Kusinārā, a 275-kilometre trek. The Buddha once said to his monks, 'Go forth for the good of the many, for the happiness of the many, out of compassion for the world, for the welfare, the good and the happiness of gods and humans. Teach the Dhamma which is beautiful in the beginning, beautiful in the middle and beautiful in the end. Explain both the letter and the spirit of the holy life, completely fulfilled and perfectly pure.' (Vin.I, 20). In saying this, the Buddha was expressing his own reason for undertaking the many long and arduous journeys he did, out of compassion for the world.

### **Fascinating ministry of Jesus**

I was just glancing into the realm of biblical studies and found to my amazement the stupendous journeys undertaken by Jesus Christ. In all those journeys for his ministry you find the local environment, ecosystems, topography, landscape, flora and fauna so well and naturally integrated that Jesus comes before eyes as a traveler with an ecospiritual purpose. Thirty years old Jesus, traveled from his home-town of Nazareth in Galilee to Bethany-across-the-Jordan, where he was baptized by John the Baptist. Then he goes in to the Judean Desert, Bethabara, returns north to Galilee, Cana, continues on to Capernaum, travels south to Jerusalem, leaves for the countryside of Judea, continue northwards from Judea passing through the territory of Samaria, visits Sychar, reaches Galilee, returns to Cana and visits Capernaum then his home-town of Nazareth, moves to Capernaum, travels from Galilee south to Jerusalem, visits Bethesda, returns north to Galilee, delivers the Sermon on the Mount, then returns to Capernaum, continues his second Galilee tour, sails across the Sea of Galilee, lands at Gerasenes, sails back across the Sea of Galilee and lands at Capernaum. Jesus then travels from Capernaum to Nazareth, continues through Galilee. With the twelve apostles from Capernaum, they go off by boat with Jesus to Bethsaida then return

across the Sea of Galilee and land near Gennesaret and make their way back to Capernaum. Jesus then retires from Galilee to the region of Tyre and Sidon in Syrian-Phoenicia, then leaves Syrian-Phoenicia via Sidon for Galilee and travels through the Decapolis. Reaching the Sea of Galilee, He crosses by boat to the Magadan / Dalmanutha region. Then he continues on to Bethsaida, travels from Galilee, north to Caesarea Philippi in Iturea and Trachonitis, continuing on from Caesarea Philippi possibly further north towards Mount Hermon. Jesus leaves Capernaum and Galilee for the last earthly time and heads for Jerusalem travelling by Samaria, then withdraws to Bethany-across-the-Jordan (or Bethabara) and into the province of Perea, returns to Bethany near Jerusalem, then crosses the River Jordan and works in Perea. Jesus now travels towards Jerusalem for the last time passing through Jericho and reaches Bethany. During the Easter week, Jesus returns to Jerusalem each day after staying overnight in Bethany on the Mount of Olives.

The intensity seen in journeys of Buddha and Jesus is sufficient to tell us what we miss in our business model - humility towards nature. Without humility it is difficult to impose any plan to protect environment.

### **Modern Tourist and Modern Tourism**

The World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) defines Tourism as travel for recreational, leisure or business purposes and tourists as people who "travel to and stay in places outside their usual environment for more than twenty-four hours and not more than one consecutive year for leisure, business and other purposes not related to the exercise of an activity remunerated from within the place visited." This definition is more concerned about economic and employment issues. Loosely we can distinguish three categories of tourists and tourism-

1. Emphasis on material aspects
2. Emphasis on spiritual aspects



### 3. Emphasis on both material and spiritual aspects.

Modern tourism promotes the first category. The second category is very restricted. The third category would cause problems for tourism management because secular governments do not believe in spiritual dimensions of anything. But it is precisely the third category which is most suitable and appropriate for a small and ecologically vulnerable state of Goa. If we dismiss spiritual dimension of tourism and accept everything else then we automatically enter into the booby trap of vicious market forces. These don't permit luxury of environmental protection.

#### **The Goa material-spiritual (GOMASPI) knowledge based model for environmental protection (Kamat, 2013)**

Environment is a very complex entity. So environmental protection in tourism raises two issues- what protection and whose protection? If we follow the ecosystem specific approach then we need to begin from the marine ecosystem, then move to our bays, continental shelf, the estuaries, marine islands, the mangroves, the khazans and salt pans, the rich plateaus, rivers and river banks, wetlands, lakes, rivulets, streams, ponds, springs, fountains, hillocks, mountains, forests, waterfalls, cliffs, caves. Then there is another area of cultural assets - the built or manmade heritage. Goa's only world heritage monuments exist in Old Goa. But what's the present environmental status of the place and its' environs within a radius of a few kms.? Massive concretization and drastic land use change is impacting the perimeter of this once great city. If any tourism product is based on whole ecosystems, habitats, natural or cultural resources then there have to be built in provision for conservation and protection. There are adequate powers with the local authorities, the village Panchayats and municipalities to discipline tourists and manage tourism products and services. But these powers are seldom used. So, environmental protection remains a mere academic issue at the ground level, village level, and micro-level. There are specific cases which highlight the real crisis -

in first incident people of Gaudongari resolved to prohibit nuisance by visitors near the Ambeghat waterfalls by banning their entry. In second incident youth volunteers from Yuva Kumbhar, the traditional potter community of Goa collected truckloads of solid waste created by picnickers at seasonal waterfalls on Sanquelim Belgaum via Chorlem road. In third incident the shack owners at Morjim clashed with forest department officials over the Oliver Ridley turtle conservation project. These three incidents clearly indicate that tourism in Goa has lost ethical and spiritual principles. If fun and moneymaking are the only objectives of tourism promotion then it would make Goa homologous to other heavily developed destinations.

### **Towards simplification and monoculture**

The real fear from the forthcoming tourism products is of 'rapid simplification and monoculture'. These products would be imposed at heavy environmental costs. Goa had prepared a tourism master plan and policy at the end of 20th century. Very soon the work of preparing a fresh master plan on tourism may be outsourced to a foreign or multinational agency. Advisors may be needed for mega projects but not for planning sustainable or community based tourism in a small state. We can predict what business model these expensive advisors would recommend. The ideas need to flow from bottom and from stakeholders willing to share diverse ideas. Neither the forest department nor the tourism department follows any ecotourism guidelines. A set of ecotourism guidelines sent to the chief minister of Goa was not accepted by forest department. White water rafting in Sattari was introduced without any guidelines and by keeping local community ignorant. Besides natural ecosystems, the air and water resources are precious. Tourism means heavy consumption of energy. So how Goa would reduce the Carbon footprint?

How complex is the issue of environmental protection in tourism? It is just a matter of knowledge and perception. There are

macro and micro issues like aesthetic pollution and elevation controls. In a small campus of our university spread over just 1.7 square kilometers in the island of Tiswadi we have more than 100 different habitats and about 5000 different species which include 600 species of plants and 110 species of birds. During monsoon we see highest number and density of peafowls in this area. But such plateaus often get classified as unproductive barren lands. The 105 kms long beach belt of Goa has a complex ecology. It is natural habitat of ant eaters or pangolins which are now threatened. Sea grasses like *Spinifex* have been eliminated by tourism activity. A single rocky outcrop, the beautiful intertidal stretch of Anjuna harbours a record number of marine algae. Some of Goa's oldest rocks are found at Palolem - visit this place the end of monsoon at low tides and you would be amazed to see carpets of *Enteromorpha* - the velvety green alga covering the monoliths. The ecotones in the capital city of Panaji are so smooth that it is difficult to identify the mosaic of various ecosystems which makes the layout of the city. If one descends from Dona Paula plateau there is a smooth transition from grassland to sand dunes and coastal ecosystem which faces a rich semicircular Caranzalem bay and furthers an estuary and zone of mangroves girdled by khazan lands. Sustainable tourism in Panaji or centred around Panaji is impossible without integrating these ecosystem resources and their services. The planning needs to begin from higher ground at Altinho which is major watershed in Tiswadi Island. Panaji's urban tourist assets are totally at mercy of nature and natural forces. The Mandovi River is heavily polluted. Cruises and casinos choke the life of the river.

### **Respect for ecological history and concern for climate change**

Ecology and environment was never same in Goa's geological or historical period. Millions of years old petrified forests in Sattari and six to eight thousand years old marine fossils in Bardez and Tiswadi show how natural forces have impacted Goa. A west coast tsunami or Megatsunami can wipe out the coastline of Goa. With

climate changes looming large there is greater danger from natural calamities. Sea level rise would engulf the coastal land assets and all the estuarine islands. Tourism development in past 40 years has heavily impacted the ecosystems, habitats and species in Goa. NIO's scientist Antonio Mascarenhas had prepared status report on sand dunes of Goa. But we have not seen any micro level plan with any village Panchayat to conserve and protect any sand dune. The government doesn't even have an atlas of the surviving sand dunes indicating their location on cadastral level plans with area, elevation and contours.

**Community creativity, humility and spirituality to be integral components**

GOMASPI model would be based on a new eco-ethical charter. I envisage ten central dogmas /tenets/ beliefs of the charter

1. Tourism is for Goa - Goa is not for Tourism
2. Tourism without ethical foundation is exploitation and sin
3. Material dimension of tourism can't be separated from spiritual obligations
4. Centralized model of tourism planning destroys ecology and environment
5. Decentralized, people oriented micro level planning promotes sustainable tourism
6. All tourism products are sourced and are subsidized by nature-directly or indirectly
7. Tourists are to be treated as participants and partners not as just passive consumers, guests and travelers in ensuring environmental protection
8. Communities are creative and are entitled to project, promote this potential in planning tourism products and services
9. Sustainability is built in traditional lifestyle of Goans and it can ensure sustainability of participatory, ethical tourism and

environmental conservation.

10. Surplus wealth creation from tourism for private profits is less important than work, food, shelter, employment and justice for all

The charter would be binding on all followers who would get necessary ethical accreditation if they are in tourist business. It would first demand total humility before nature. It is envisaged that at micro level each inhabitant of Goa is self aware or made aware of the natural resource endowments in his or her own backyards. The real crisis in villages is knowledge crisis. People are not still ecologically literate. All the tools and techniques need to be made available and accessible for this purpose. This needs prolonged and widespread community sensitization movement. It may be considered as a new mission of the church for sustained and meaningful ecological evangelization in Goa.

GOMASPI model would borrow deeply ingrained values of ecosophy and eco-spirituality for micro level, village level tourism product formulation and management. All natural assets would be considered inviolable and to be kept free from degradation and pollution. Gram Sabhas and municipal councils would consult independent experts, non-governmental organizations, educational institutions, social activists, spiritual leaders to discuss and prepare their plans for tourism development and environmental protection. Heavy fines and penalties would be fixed for environmental violators like those who are found chronically and habitually polluting Sal river or Colva creek. Once drivers and forces of environmental changes are identified – it is possible to suggest specific mitigative, preventive measures.

**Ecological decay is offshoot of moral, ethical, spiritual  
decadence**

Having observed the general moral decay and economic, social and cultural transformation over past 40 years- I have reached the conclusion that environmental protection in tourism ( in other

sectors as well) is impossible at any level – from people to politicians, merely by belief in instrument of laws, rules etc. without unquestionable acknowledgement of our ethical and spiritual duties. Bring back ethics and spirituality in tourism in Goa without any compromise and then see how our state becomes much better than Bhutan on the west coast of India.

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*Views presented in this paper are those of the author and in no way connected to Goa University*

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