

Spokes of Ethos in Wheels of Progress

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Goa is a land of fascinating and nauseating contradictions. Here one will find a causeway (Ponte de Linhares) with 41 arches built with technology of the 17th century, next to the monument of Goa's institutional corruption - the debris of the old Mandovi bridge. Even if one relies upon the official facts and figures, the developmental contradictions are striking. The heavily inflated figures of registered unemployed do not match with the spurt in consumer demand, rapid growth of the service sector, people's increasing purchasing power and several other standard indicators of a 'booming' economy.

The small state of Goa is a poor case study for the macroeconomists of India and the World Bank. However, going by the well-established principles of environmental and natural resource economics, the micro-economists are likely to conclude that the superficial affluence and 'growth' of the economy has been achieved at the expense of massive, unaccounted, direct and indirect environmental, energy, resource and fiscal subsidies. Such affluence and growth is bound to be unsustainable.

Development should be intimately linked to enhancement of quality of life of an individual on a sustainable basis within the carrying capacity of a specific region. Goa, unlike many overpopulated low-wage areas, is already enjoying a relatively better quality of life, thanks to a manageable population density and comparatively well-conserved traditional natural resource management system. This system was developed by the 'Gaunkaris' or 'Comunidades', and if today, despite the haphazard development and land conversions and increasing air, water and soil pollution, our life-support systems are still intact,

the credit should go exclusively to the comunidades and not to any post-Liberation government policies.

Having been a cosmopolitan trade emporium of the East for hundreds of years, Goa has very rarely seen manufacturing and industrial activity. Industrial development models of megastates which create a typical industrial ecology and culture are incompatible with Goa's economic ethos. The Goans are more comfortable in service sector. Their approach to employment is highly selective. Much of our educated unemployment is "acquired". The migration tables for 1991 census are not yet published. However, a study of the causes of migration in the 1971-81 decade shows that about 85,000 people migrated to Goa from neighbourhood states to fill the labour vacuum in a 'developing' state. The word 'development' in Goa is unfortunately synonymous with construction or earth-engineering related activity. The mindset of the government leaders is also influenced by such misconceptions. The end result is uncontrolled urbanisation and heavy pressure on public utilities.

Very simple practical steps are necessary to check the artificial or "acquired" unemployment and provide guaranteed employment to the genuinely needy people. The political parties should realise that there are fundamental limits to growth of the Goan economy within the present carrying capacity and richness of natural resources. The Regional Plan of Goa was a good policy document. But its sanctity and spirit has been destroyed by the politicians and vested interests such as builders and land developers. Expert advice and scientific judgements have been overlooked in changing land-use, siting new industrial estates or inviting industries at random to Goa. Blanket and haphazard industrialisation without matching local educated and skilled manpower is not the answer to control unemployment. The answer lies in eradicating unemployment. The answer lies in eradicating rampant, socially and politically sanctified corruption in government offices and corporations. Institutionalised, socially sanctified and government sponsored corruption is the biggest hurdle for Goa's sustainable and healthy economic growth. Besides corruption, deliberate artificial barriers have been erected by private employers to keep out Goan unemployed. Banking, insurance, allied financial institutions can absorb hundreds of local

unemployed if only knowledge of Konkani / Marathi is made compulsory. Ruling politicians pay only lip service to official language. But this language has not yet become an 'economic shield' for the Goan unemployed because there is no political will to use it as such. Such inaction will not be tolerated in Karnataka, Tamil Nadu or Kerala where every idea within the constitutional framework has been exploited to the hilt by the politicians to maximize employment opportunities for Kannadigas, Tamilians or Malyalis.

Since there is no statutory contract with Konkan Railway authorities, the state government will not be able to create employment for the locals in railway related services. There is a massive dearth of ideas at the government level. Goa has not persuaded the Japanese to invest in its eco-restoration efforts such as dredging the heavily silted inland waterways. There is no official effort to aggressively push for rapid completion and Goa's rightful share in Southern gas grid, nor is there any dynamism to tour Gulf states, European Union, Canada, Brazil, Kenya, South Africa to open markets for Goan commodities. The idea of formation of a common trade bloc of Indian Ocean rim countries is a welcome development for Goa because our state could be an ideal choice for this trade bloc's eastern headquarters. This will amplify financial services and boost MPT trade.

There needs to be a carefully worked out, positive list of type of industries suited to identified, specified, community approved locations. The economic, social and environmental costs and benefits of such industries need to be worked out in detail before any development is permitted. Industries, a few of which I think are generally suitable for Goa, may include machine tools, scientific instruments assembly, defence equipment, non-hazardous pharmaceuticals, printing and packaging, software engineering, industrial robot design and manufacture, two-wheeler assembly units, medium-sized food processing plants, biotechnologicals, perfumes, flavours, cosmetics; units manufacturing satellite components, telecommunications equipments, dish-antennae, solar photovoltaics, windmills etc. It would be highly beneficial to set up a technology park with emphasis on electronics and bio technology, which will give a lead to Goa. Such ideas interfaced with healthy growth of tourism

will take care of a large section of our educated unemployed.

Existing sustainable employment in primary sector needs to be protected by giving special incentives, appropriate technologies and minimum price guarantee. A ten year package for technological upgradation, resource recycling, ecological restoration and agro-economic rehabilitation should be prepared for the entire mining belt with local, central and international funding. A real, sustainable development of Goa is impossible with consistent compromising of the land use policy and with diluting of standards of environmental quality. There should be a cybernatic link between state's educational, employment, industrial, environmental and natural resource management policies, if and when these are formulated. Until then the inflated figures of unemployed will continue to remind us of our own failure in coming to terms with the development contradictions in Goa.