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Equations

the beggaring of baga
(or tourism vs goans : a case study)

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EQUATIONS

**Equitable Tourism Options
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FOREWORD

Norman Dantas is Associate Editor of the monthly, Goa Today. He participated in the Workshop on the Future of Tourism in India and Its Implications in May 1986, where this article was distributed as background reading material. It has since been published in the June 1986 issue of Goa Today.

EQUATIONS staff accompanied Norman to Baga in early May, meeting among others, the Carvalho family who run St. Anthony's restaurant. This and similar situations are becoming all too familiar on the changing landscape of Indian tourism.

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Category

Pilgrimage Tourism

CIRCA 1885: Anjuna, a picturesque, bustling village All along its lovely shore men are at work each day, their glistening bodies bronzed by the sun, some harvesting the bountiful sea, others tapping and tending the verdant palms that sway above the golden silken sands. The womenfolk are busy too, some trotting fish away to nearby markets, others tending the hearth and to a thousand other household chores.

Some young men and women, recently married, are looking to setting up homes and raising families. Senhor Fialho and some other bhatkars have a suggestion: they have unutilized properties south of the hill in Baga and across the little creek, in Vaddol, Calangute; so why don't these strong young men take their wives over the hill, set up home and tend the land? Soon enough, a few couples, their meagre belongings trussed in pantlio and potlio, climb the hill out of Anjuna and make the descent through thick woods into Baga.

The grooming of Baga begins.

Over the years, they build their houses and tend the land. Wild shrubbery gives way to well kept coconut groves. Some of the settlers' children sail away to foreign shores in search of bigger earnings. They return and strengthen the houses and tend the land. Gradually, Baga and Vaddol become habitated, hospitable places. The charming creek beckons more and more of those who for years had thought that only Calangute, Queen of Goa's beaches, was worth holidaying at. It is only a short while before the foreign traveller too discovers Baga and it is firmly on the international tourist map.

FLIP TO 1986: The grandchildren of these first settlers are now married, and raising families. As their little children run around playfully or watch innocently the parents listen stoically to a minion of government declare : 'You will have to vacate this place.

The government has acquired it. We need it for tourism development and we cannot have shabby structures like yours cluttering the beachfront.' The response is not indignant. Trained by years when feudal bhatkar was sorkar, the people's tendency even today is to treat the minions of a democratically elected sorkar like their bhatkars of yore. So they plead humbly for human consideration and mercy. And servant of the people turned bhatkar-sorkar stamps around, officiously full of himself and "tourism development for Goa's development". And indeed, would happily stamp those sixty-odd hapless sons of the soil into the ground or kick them off it if only he could.

That he dare not is thanks to the quiet resolve that he knows lurks behind the facade of humility and more because of the popular support that he knows these people have. For it is this support which has given the people some spine and firmed their resolve to stand their ground: as sons of the soil and first claimants to the land their forefathers tilled. And tourism for tourists at the cost of Goans be damned.

However, though it has been heightened in recent months, the torment and anxiety of the tenants is not new. They have, in fact, been on the slow burner for the past thirteen years.

The grilling on the sands of Baga began on January 19, 1973 when Government issued a notification under Section 4 of the Land Acquisition Act expressing intent to acquire 25,600 square metres of prime beach frontage for "the development of Baga" as they put it. The bhatkar Jose Xavier Caridade de Jesus Silveira and wife Adelia Eudora Maria de Cruz Ribeiro being residents of another country, it was sometime before the then 45-odd tenants got wind of the tornado that could uproot them coming their way. By the time they did, however, a lawyer-architect combine building a 3-star beach resort on the idyllic bank of the creek at the northern extremity of the same property got their plot "sheltered" from the stormy threat of acquisition. The notification was modified to read 22,081 sq. mts. instead of the original 25,600 sq. mts.

Obviously, a solid one-sixth of the land to be acquired was adjudged inconsequential to Government's plan to develop Baga. Or was it more a sign of the times . . . that lawyers and architects know better how to shelter from government-unleashed tornadoes than fishermen and toddy-tappers more used to reading nature's signs in the clouds, the winds and the waves?

Whatever, even as the tenants garnered details as best as they could, the hotel was completed and opened its doors to tourists.

One tenant, Antonio Carvalho a master chef in the Gulf countries for the best years of his life, had opened a restaurant adjoining his house seven years earlier, in 1966. Named after his patron saint, St. Anthony's had become an institution of sorts by 1973 when the notification was issued. It counted among its clientele prominent Goan and other Indian industrialists and leading lights of the silver screen. Carvalho was shocked and pained by the developments in the name of tourism, the trade he'd been catering to so ably. But as all good mundkars, he took a while to gather his wits and then rally his neighbours. It was a full eighteen months after the notification that they found their voice - though even then not to protest, but only to "humbly request" that Chief Minister Shashikala Kakodkar reconsider the decision. Even as the tenants waited anxiously for merciful word from her, Mrs. Kakodkar responded with silence.

All through 1975 the tenants pursued their cause diligently. They petitioned the sarpanch, the chief minister, the Legislative Assembly of Goa, Daman and Diu and, through Member of Parliament Purushottam Kakodkar, the Lok Sabha. The sarpanch was sympathetic, even going on record to say that "the village needs no progress at the cost of the bread and shelter of the people." Mrs Kakodkar again responded with silence, as she was to continue to as long as she was in power. The Legislative Assembly promised to hear the tenants on X'mas eve of 1975 but eventually never did. Only the Lok Sabha, it seems, was interested with Purushottam Kakodkar informing the tenants that the Secretary

General had received the petition and that it would come up before the Committee on Petitions in due course.

1976 opened on a deceptive note of promise for the threatend people. The Mundkar Act protecting tenants' rights came onto force on March 12 that year. The people heaved a sigh of relief, believing that as their tenancy was clearly established in the Record of Rights, they would be left untouched. Little did they realise the when Government acquires land the Mundkar Act is inoperative and the only claim tenants have is to compensation. As it happened, the 'respite' was short. On April 17, the Award of the Land Acquisition Officer (LAO) was posted on their doors. The sums offered as compensation were shocking: five of the seven houses were valued at between Rs. 3,163 and Rs. 5,175; Antonio Carvalho's residence and St Anthony's Restaurant, then worth upwards of Rs. 15 lakh at market rates, fetched the highest compensation:Rs. 28,750. (The bhatkar were awarded Rs. 9.5 lakh) Worse, the notice declared that the houses would be taken possession of in two days flat.

Anxiety gave way to rage. And on 19th April when the arm of the Law was supposed to evict the tenants and take possession, most of Calangute's people ware ready to resist it, with force if necessary, On the same day the tenants wrote to the LAO stating non-acceptance of the award as the compensation offered was insufficient even to buy alternative house site. They said however, that despite the great inconvenience it would cause them they were prepared to shift "in the national interest", but only if Government rehabilitated them in houses of equal plinth at an alternate site or if they were fully compensated for both plot and house. Four days later, they prayed the LAO to refer the case to the District Court as his court had not done them justice. For reasons that were never explained this was not done.

A fresh round of petitioning was resorted to V. R. Shirodkar, the Sarpanch (and Congress-I candidate at the last assembly election) was again sympathetic. He wrote to the LAO. (simultaneously the Deputy Collector), that the proposed eviction was unfair and more, that Government's developmental effort would be

counter-productive as they would destroy the natural beauty of the place. "Calangute beach has been a natural attraction for local and foreign tourists for centuries—it needs no development!" he asserted. The letter evoked no response. Neither did yet another petition to Mrs. Kakodkar nor one to Sanjay Gandhi, than at the height of his rampaging career. Reassurance finally came six months later, from the Lok Sabha's Committee on Petitions. Taking note of the various aspects of the case, the committee recommended that "the affected persons be rehabilitated by the Administration of Goa, Daman and Diu in a nearby area on the seashore."

But either the Lok Sabha Committee counts for little with Goa's bureaucrats or the notion of rehabilitation is too big for petty minds. For eight months later, a letter from Director of Tourism, V. A. P. Mahajan offered only an "alternate site on or near by the shore of Calangute-Baga beach".

Mahajan was back in print three week later, this time even more painfully explicit. "The Department has acquired land at Baga-Vaddol for putting up the (sic) Tourist Complex" he declared and clarified that the offer of an alternate site was "subject to the condition that (the) compensation (earlier) awarded is adjusted against (the) cost of land (offered) and the difference is paid (by the tenants)." A clue to the petty machinations of the Directorate of Tourism is provided by a letter written the same day (August 8, 1977), but posted four days later fixing rents for the tenants houses and asking them to pay "arrears" dating back to April 19, 1976!

Mercifully for the tenants however, the vicissitudes of politics overtook the Kakodkar Ministry and there were no further tidings, good or bad, till the 1979 elections.

The victory of the Congress(S) which became the Congress(I) ministry brought new hope to the besieged people. They fervently petitioned their MLA and Ministry for Tourism, Dr. Wilfred D'Souza

Willy-bab was all solicitous concern and assured them that their interests would be safeguarded. However, he demurely desisted from committing himself in writing. On June 7, 1982 with Willy still in the saddle and the monsoons threatening to break any minute, the tenants received a notice from the Deputy Collector, North Goa. It told them to vacate the houses within three days, failing which they would be evicted. Hectic scurrying between Baga and Panjim and Mapuca prevented action and defused an explosive situation. And the tenants were left languishing in the limbo they'd been in for a decade.

No governmental missives or threats were received after that. But a dozen years of uncertainty had worn the patience of the tenants thin. So, when Lt Governor Gopal Singh inspected Baga October last, they petitioned him pleading for a quick final resolution of the problem. Receiving them at Cabo Paj Niwas a few days later, he assured them with aplomb that he would look into the matter and that their interests would be safeguarded.

The wheels of bureaucracy are now turning again. But the cogs being the same old ones, scarce would they churn out something new. Rehabilitation apparently is still too big a concept to get their worn teeth around and Mahajan and his aides are still mumbling about alternate sites which the tenants would have to pay for, even whilst facetiously telling them how grateful they should be for not having been thrown out all these years!

Minister for Tourism Proto Barbosa has visited the place twice in the past six months and the people say that he is sympathetic and optimistic about a just solution being found. They are however very suspicious of the bureaucrats and openly sceptical of Government's ability to compensate them fully for the houses and the land. "I recently spent Rs. 3,000 to repair only part of my roof, says 74-year old Eliza Cardozo who was awarded Rs. 3,152 for her house "and it will cost at least Rs. 50,000 to build just the

the house anew, leave alone the cost of land! Do you think government will pay me that much?"

One bureaucrat argues: "They were never owners of the land. Why should we pay them for it? It is they who have to pay... "The tenants' logic is simple and strong. Says one young man speaking for the rest: "As mundkars we would have a right to buy the land at only twenty per cent of the market price. Will Government make us that offer? And, of course, these houses are ours—we have built them with our sweat and toil. If government wants them it should pay us the full market value!" Adds matronly 60 year old Telca Carvalho intones: "And if government cannot give us the same kind of houses and space, then they should just let us be where we are—and give us our suseg!"

Following the last visit of the Minister for Tourism and consequent deliberations the tenants have drafted a fresh petition with the help of local lawyers who are supporters of their cause and also active members of Congress(1). The six point charter of demands is quite specific: (1) Allotment of alternative plots; (2) Area of the plots allotted to be the choice of tenant concerned; (3) Built-up area not to be restricted by prevailing laws; (4) Compensation to be proper or alternatively, new residences to be built by the government; (5) Time-limit for the payment for the land to be as per the Mundkar Act; and (6) A time-limit to be fixed for the purpose of shifting. These demands, however, do not take into account the losses tenants will incur after shifting. St. Anthony's which completes twenty years this year is by far the most popular restaurant at Baga and ideally situated on the beachfront. Shifting to the plot now being offered by Government would deny it its unhindered view of the sea and logically, much of its custom. Besides, what of the goodwill built up painstakingly over twenty years by parents and children, sometimes slogging eighteen hours a day to appease the appetites of gourmets and often less appreciative hogs?

Again, at least one room in each of the other houses is let out to traders or holiday-makers whilst the tenant family huddles in the remainder, thankful for the income thus gained.

But quite apart from the rupees and paise of adequate compensation, the case raises other questions that must worry most Goans. For as it's been said often enough, tourism is like the camel which looks for a place to park its snout and ends up taking over the whole tent. And indeed, if this Baga case is any indicator, one cannot but wonder whether our tourism policy protects the tenants' interests or ensures the camel's ultimate hegemony. For, why should any so called "tourism development" result in the eviction of Goans from homes they have built over centuries? And on what basis is it decided that the grandiose plans of bureaucrats are of great public and touristic benefit than the live and responsive human-scale systems that grow out of the interaction between tourist and Goan in situ? And, perhaps most importantly, why should tourism development mean government arrogating to itself the task of building and managing accommodation rather than assisting the local Goan to be a better equipped host?

The threatened tenants ("read original tourism developers") of Baga have much to say about these questions. They are beside themselves with indignation at the charge levelled by one pompous bureaucrat that is they who are hindering the development of tourism. "If Baga is so popular today it is thanks to us!" exclaims a middle-aged man with a job in the defence forces. "And," he elaborates, "it is for the Goan ambience and hospitality that we offer here that tourist would rather walk all the way here from (the Taj complex at) Sinquerim than stop at (Government-dominated) Calangute." A young man who lost his job in the Gulf and is back to fishing demands: "If Government takes over this place what jobs will we get? As cooks and waiters? Why can't Government assist us to built cottages, etc? We will treat tourist much better than government servants do!"

Joe, Antonio Carvalho's son agrees, and adds: "Our restaurant is a favourite with tourists from all over the world. Yet the government wants to push us out in the name of tourism development! At this rate, all local people will be pushed out of tourism and Government and outsiders will run the whole show!" That statement draws loud murmurs of agreement from the motley group. But brother Peter gets the hearty approval of all when he declares: "If these houses had belonged to ministers or government officers they would not be touched. It is only because we are poor and powerless that we face eviction!"

The bureaucrats' response to all this is defensive and fuzzy. The only thing they seem clear about is that the tenants must get off the land. Rehabilitation not being among the things they consider, however, the possibility of an amicable solution being found seems remote. And as has happened in several cases elsewhere, if the use of strong-arm methods were to be attempted, the tenants are prepared. They have adopted "aiz mhaka, falea tuka" (today it's my turn, tomorrow yours) that ominous slogan found in Goan cemeteries. And they are confident that if it comes to brute force, every Goan on the beach will rally to their call. In the meanwhile, they continue parleys and are starting up a signature campaign to prove that they have the tourists and the people on their side.

The weirdest aspect of the whole case, however, is the fact that after its twelve year long crusade "in the public interest", the Directorate of Tourism can build nothing on the property to be vacated. The rule banning new constructions within 90 metres of the high water mark put paid to the plans for a tourist complex that Mahajan spoke about in 1977. But the cussedness of bureaucracy can never quite be underestimated.

Yet, bureaucratic cussedness notwithstanding, in this fact seems to lie the solution to Minister Proto Barbosa's dilemma. If,

following the principle of mundkarial rights, Government agreed to sell the plots on which their houses stand to the tenants, the vexing problem would vanish in a trice. Besides, huge amounts would not have to be paid out as compensation in return for property that cannot be used, Government would recover some of the money paid to the bhatkars, and most importantly, Baga would retain the colour and flavour by which thousands have known it.

All its needs is a bold decision is cut through the bureaucratic red tape!

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Rs 5/-

GLOSSARY

bhatkar : landlord

pantlio/potlio : cloth bundles/bags

sorkar : ruler (government)

mundkar : tenant

suseg : peace of mind (describes a feeling, no precise translation possible)