

REFLECTIONS ON THE OPINION POLL: DEFENDING GOA'S IDENTITY AND FUTURE

As Goa commemorates the 58th Opinion Poll, prominent voices share concerns about the erosion of the State's unique identity. From land conversions to cultural assimilation, they emphasise the urgent need for government action, youth involvement, and collective responsibility to safeguard Goa's heritage, language, and way of life. **Team Herald reports**

We would have been a part of the State of Maharashtra if not for our Opinion Poll. Shockingly, today, the Goa University, for which we fought so strongly, has turned into an institution for outsiders. It feels as though there is no place left for Goans. At every level, including land ownership, our identity is being eroded. Land is being sold to outsiders, and this threatens our future. There is an urgent need to protect our land and preserve our identity.

There were those who fought for Goa, including many of us who stood firm during the Opinion Poll. However, looking at the present scenario, it has been a source of great disappointment. Goa could have been a modern, progressive state, and that should have been the vision of our government. Unfortunately, there is no such vision, and the current State of affairs is concerning.

The government's policies should prioritize the rights of Goans, but sadly, this is not happening. We need the government to take concrete action to protect Goa's unique identity, something that is increasingly at risk. On one hand, land grabbing is taking place on a massive scale, with no significant efforts to protect our land. Moreover, despite Konkani being the official language of Goa, the implementation of the



Official Language Act remains ineffective, further threatening our identity. There also needs to be a policy that ensures students studying in Goa have the opportunity to build their careers within the State itself, but this is not happening due to the absence of a clear framework. Politics should have been about serving society, but today it has turned into a business. It is also alarming that voters continue to re-elect leaders who are known for their corruption, ignoring the facts. What Goa needs now is for our youth to awaken and take charge in protecting our identity. The youth must unite and raise their voices, collectively standing against the wrongdoings of the government.

— Adv Uday Bhembre, writer and former MLA



The government has failed to protect the Mhadei, the lifeline of Goa, and it is now up to the youth and student community of Goa to rise and take charge in protecting our beloved State.

— Prashant Naik, former Konkani Bhasha Mandal president

All land protection laws be strictly implemented in the State. Amendments after amendments is not a proper planning and it is greed for money. Goa should be developed for all not for select individuals. In the direction that we are going, we are just catering to a few people for personal greed and we have to work towards common good. Influx of people will dilute Goan culture. We have to study the carrying capacity and work within that framework.

— Dr Sabina Martins, Bailancho Saad convenor



File photo of protest march in favour of Opinion Poll

Instead of what should be done, the entire focus should be on 'who' should save the land, language, identity and culture of Goa. There can be a laundry list of things to be done. Unless Goans--Niz and nouveau make Konkani their home language and majority of Goans understand its value in nurturing cognitive skills and creativity of children in their formative years thereby making Konkani, their medium at primary level, the language cannot flower and be saved. It is Goans who will take their Konkani and the associated culture to the next generation or preside over its funeral. If Goans shed crocodile tears for Konkani with no positive involvement, then we will only sing the glory of Konkani in English in the years to come. We have already lost the lands, not only because of greedy politicians but also because of Goans selling their ancestral properties. We need



to revive agriculture and restrict transfer of lands to locals through appropriate legislation. A Goan's identity is in values that Goans have espoused traditionally. Our identity is in social harmony, celebration of diversity and liberal mindsets. We are passing through a difficult phase as Goa is affected by the thunders of communalism and lashed by the drizzle of religious fanaticism coming from the national mainstream. Goans need to be on guard as this onslaught on our core identity."

— Prabhaakar Timble, educationist and constitutional expert

There should have been a regional party to safeguard our unique identity and culture. After liberation erstwhile United Goans Party tried to protect Goa while M G Party attempted to merge Goa with Maharashtra. But people of Goa fought to protect its separate identity. But today there is influx of outsiders in Goa. We tried in the past to



run regional party to protect our regional aspirations. Culturally we have two cultural streams — one Catholic culture which is a fusion of Goan and Western culture and Hindu culture which is essentially Indian culture. We are unable to save both - Goan Hindu culture and Goan Catholic culture. Now nobody speaks Marathi in Goa and a few years later Marathi language will disappear. Konkani will survive because we speak it. But in future there will be two languages - Hindi spoken by labour class and English used by educated class."

— Adv Radharao Gracias, former MLA

Opinion Poll of 16th January 1967 is a landmark historic movement in Goa's history. First and foremost it has to be celebrated at the State-level because it saved our Goa from her merger into Maharashtra. If not for the Goans that voted for 'Two Leaves' we would have been a small part of Maharashtra. It saved our identity and entity as Goans. However today we find once again our identity threatened due to massive influx of people from outside the State, large scale land conversions, hill cuttings. Our Goan identity and culture is being diluted due to this. Goans are selling off their land to the highest bidders from Delhi or Mumbai. Our mother tongue Konkani is threatened as Goan parents take great pride in speaking to their children in English. They feel ashamed to speak to them in



our language to our Mhadei river to our hills etc. Every aspect of Goa is under threat. We are Goans and let us be proud of it."

— Prof Prajal Sakhardande, historian

Goa's land has to be saved by discouraging Goa from becoming a second home for the rich and the elite of the other parts of the country. Goa has to have a policy where the tourists shall be in the hotels and building of apartments and villas only for the purposes of renting out has to be discouraged by proper planning policies. Though Goa is dependent on tourism it cannot be overrun by tourists. The tourism policy should be such which understands that a tourism place is a place where locals live. The second home syndrome has pushed real estate to such a level that Goa is getting disfigured and even though it remains as an independent state, it is getting overwhelmed by the amount of construction that is going on in the cities and the villages. The



successive governments have only facilitated change of zones and conversions of land. Destroying Goa as it existed. On the language front though Konkani is the official language there is a demand from a section to recognise Roman script for Konkani which would not cause any damage to any section of society but will be in aid of diversity. The identity and culture is bound to undergo changes as society changes but our culture of tolerance and secularism has to be safeguarded at all costs. Political bug which seeks to inject divisive elements into our society has to be rejected. On this Asmitai dis, we have to take a pledge to save the idea of Goa."

— Cleofato Almeida Coutinho, senior advocate and political commentator

In order to protect the identity of Goa, the foremost priority must be to give preference to Goans first. Currently, it seems that Goa is not only merging into Maharashtra but is being absorbed into the broader fabric of India. Government machinery is seen supporting outsiders, rather than protecting the interests



of Goa and its people. There are no clear priorities in place when it comes to job opportunities in industries, which should have been addressed by requiring industries to submit a blueprint that aligns with the needs of Goa. It is high time that the youth of Goa raise their voices and take a stand to protect the identity of our state."

— Mohandas Lolienkar, former student leader

Most important is to change the mindset of people because Goans are selling their lands. Are we thinking of next generation. The mindset of seller has to change. Politicians are not thinking of the people and either of the State; they are thinking of themselves, selfish to the last and their only aim is to make money. Laws are changed blatantly. We fought to maintain our own identity. Special Status should have been asked soon after liberation. Then Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru had promised Special Status but it was not asked. Land is converted in connivance with authorities and land grabbing happened in connivance with government officers."

— Maria Lourdes Bravo Da Costa, former assistant State librarian



Benaulim Block Congress opposes construction of jetties on River Sal

Warn it will lead to environmental degradation; state lifeline of fishing communities at stake

Team Herald

MARGAO: The Benaulim Block Congress has strongly opposed the proposed construction of jetties on the River Sal, citing concerns over the detrimental impact on local communities.

A delegation led by Keith Gracias, the Block President, along with Savio D'Silva, South Goa district President and others presented a memorandum to South Goa Member of Parliament Captain Viriato Fernandes



on Wednesday, urging him to take the issue to the central government.

This move comes after the Inland Waterways Development Council an-

nounced plans to develop jetties on various rivers in Goa, including River Sal. Local communities, especially those residing in the constituencies of Benaulim, Navelim, and Velim, have raised growing concerns about these developments, as they rely on the river for their livelihood, particularly through fishing.

Keith Gracias emphasized that River Sal is a lifeline for traditional fishing communities, with small canoes and larger vessels used daily for fishing. Are-

as like Cutbana and Mobor serve as key centres for fish unloading. He warned that the introduction of industrial activities, particularly coal transportation, would have a severe impact on the environment and the fishing industry.

"The river is already grappling with pollution, particularly from sewage discharge, and is considered one of the most polluted rivers in Goa. Any further pollution would devastate the local fishing industry," Gracias stated.

Navelim farmers want defunct WRD canals removed from fields

Say they serve no practical purpose; want them demolished and land returned to original status

Team Herald

MARGAO: The farmers of Navelim who recently successfully recultivated Salpem lake fields that were fallow for decades, have demanded that the Water Resources Department (WRD) remove the abandoned canals that pass through their fields and are presently serving as an impediment to the movement of tractors and other farming equipment.

A meeting had been fixed in this regard with the WRD Executive Engi-

neer on Tuesday, but the official was not present. Nonetheless, the farmers held a meeting where they discussed various solutions they can pursue.

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One of the farmers added that they had been given misleading information by the local MLA about the WRD's plans for the canals, where they found out that it was not connected to their fields but to some beautification plans. However, the farmers, who

pointed out that the canal had not transported any water and has stopped being functional for years now, needs to be demolished and removed so that the area where the canals are at the moment can be returned to the original owners, the farmers, who can then take up that area too under cultivation.

Given that there is an ongoing Public Interest Litigation (PIL) regarding the pollution of River Sal, there were suggestions that the WRD could be made a party to that PIL.