



Sateri temple that villagers worry will be dwarfed by the proposed flyover



Homes likely to be razed

PICS: UPNDRA NAIK



Religious structures the villagers fear will be in the flyover's path

# BHOMA AT A CROSSROADS: WILL THE FLYOVER ERASE THE VILLAGE'S CULTURAL IDENTITY?

In Bhoma, a battle is brewing between modern development and the preservation of tradition. The government's plan to build a four-lane flyover, sanctioned with Rs 1,060.2 crore, has sparked strong opposition from villagers who demand a bypass to protect their homes, temples and culture. **VITHALDAS HEGDE** and **SANTOSH NAIK** bring you voices from the ground

In a controversial move, the Union Minister for Road Transport and Highways, Nitin Gadkari, recently sanctioned an ambitious Rs 1,060.2 crore project for the four-laning of a seven-kilometre stretch of National Highway 748 from Bhoma to Old Goa. However, the plan has faced vehement opposition from the villagers of Bhoma, who have voiced strong concerns about the potential impact on their homes, culture, and the environment. The villagers' primary demand is the construction of a bypass to ease traffic congestion without disturbing their longstanding village life.

The proposed flyover, which aims to address severe traffic congestion and limited Right of Way (RoW) issues in the areas of Bhoma, Corlim, and Ella, has sparked a deep divide between the government and the local community. The government maintains that the construction of the four-lane road will significantly improve the ease of travel and boost business transportation, with a focus on improving connectivity for both passenger and freight traffic. On the other hand, the villagers are adamant that the project will lead to the destruction of their homes, shops, and temples, and threaten their cultural heritage.

## Concerns over demolition and cultural impact

The villagers are particularly concerned that the flyover's construction will result in the demolition of several residential structures, shops, and sacred temples. The government has reassured the community that only four roadside structures will be demolished and that these structures, along with 16 shops, will be relocated. However, many villagers are not satisfied with these assurances, arguing that the project will still have an irreversible impact on their village culture, particularly religious practices tied to local shrines and temples.

Suresh Gaude, a 70-year-old villager from Gauthanwada, Bhoma, shared his personal distress about the project. Gaude, who built his house 12 years ago after purchasing land based on the promise of a bypass road, is now facing the reality of having his property marked for demolition. According to Gaude, he was informed in 2010 by the then government that a bypass would be constructed, and based on this information, he made the decision to build his home. However, with the new proposal for the flyover, Gaude finds himself in a precarious situation, and his plans have been dashed. "The government had promised us a bypass, but now, we are facing demolition," Gaude lamented. "This is not just about my house; it's about our entire village, our temples, and our traditions. A bypass was the solution, not a flyover."

Gaude's situation is far from unique. Several other villagers are in the same predicament, with their properties marked for demolition to make way for

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– Pramod Sawant, Chief Minister

"The Sateri and Mahadev temples, along with other shrines in Bhoma, are not mere monuments—they are living parts of our culture. We cannot let them be destroyed for the sake of a flyover"

– Sanjay Naik, local and protest leader

The four-lane road. Some of these properties are adjacent to important cultural landmarks, such as the Sateri Temple and other shrines, raising concerns that these sacred sites could be damaged or destroyed.

## The need for a bypass: A village's united stand

For many Bhoma villagers, the crux of the issue lies in the demand for a bypass, rather than a flyover. Sanjay Naik, one of the key figures leading the villagers' protests, argued that the village's culture and spiritual identity are tied to the local temples, which have been present for centuries. He emphasized that these temples are not just structures but are the very essence of the village's heritage. "The Sateri and Mahadev temples, and other shrines in Bhoma, are not just monuments, they are living parts of our culture. We cannot let them be destroyed for the sake of a flyover. A bypass would protect our traditions, our homes, and our land," Naik stated.

Similarly, Pramod Bhomkar, another villager, highlighted the cultural and social importance of the annual festivals and rituals celebrated in Bhoma. "Bhoma has a tradition that dates back over a thousand years. The festivals, the rituals, and the

In 2010, the then government came out with a solution and we were told that a bypass will be built. The proposed bypass is also shown in the Regional Plan. We were happy that a bypass will be built to ease traffic congestion. Based on this, I purchased a plot of land and built a new house 12 years ago. But now the government authorities have demarcated my land including house for demolition

– Suresh Gaude, Bhoma elder

"We've been protesting for over two and a half years, yet not a single official from NHAI or PWD has visited to understand our concerns. We want a permanent solution that doesn't destroy our homes or cultural landmarks"

– Putu Gaude, Bhoma villager

deities are part of the fabric of our lives. A flyover will disrupt everything. The proposed bypass was shelved a few years ago, but it is the only solution that respects the villagers' wishes and preserves our way of life," Bhomkar said.

Even Bhoma's elderly residents, such as Putu Gaude, have voiced their frustration with the ongoing issue. Gaude, who remembers the time when the late Chief Minister Manohar Parrikar had assured the villagers that a bypass would be constructed, expressed his disappointment over the government's apparent disregard for their long-standing request. "We have been protesting for over two and a half years, and yet, not a single official from the National Highways Authority of India (NHAI) or the Public Works Department (PWD) has visited us to understand our concerns," Gaude said. "We want a permanent solution that will not destroy our homes or our cultural landmarks."

## Government's response: Denials, assurances and clarifications

On the other side of the debate, the government has consistently stated that the construction of the four-lane road will bring numerous benefits to the region, including reduced traffic congestion and

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– Pramod Bhomkar, Bhoma villager

enhanced connectivity. PWD Executive Engineer Satendra Bhobe, who is overseeing the project, clarified that the elevated flyover will be constructed within land already acquired at Bhoma. Bhobe assured that only four roadside houses and 16 shops would be affected by the construction, and these structures would be relocated or compensated. "We are taking all necessary precautions to ensure that no harm comes to the temples," Bhobe emphasized. "The Sateri Temple and other shrines will remain intact, and the lake near the temple will be preserved by constructing a flyover pillar away from it."

However, some villagers remain skeptical of these claims. Suresh Gaude, who lives near the lake, expressed concerns that the proposed flyover construction would encroach upon his land and the sacred water body. "My house is situated near the lake, and both have been marked for construction of the flyover. How can they say nothing will be affected?" Gaude questioned. He also pointed out that the villagers had previously used the lake for religious practices, such as immersing Ganesha idols, but had stopped doing so due to water pollution in recent years.

Another point of contention is the Sati Ghumati shrine, which is located on the

edge of the existing road. While PWD Assistant Engineer Chandra Parwar claimed that the shrine would be retained and possibly relocated only if necessary, villagers expressed concerns that the shrine's removal was still a possibility. "A marking has already been made near the shrine, indicating that it could be razed. We want to be sure that our religious landmarks will not be destroyed," said Gaude.

## Political involvement and dialogue

Despite the ongoing protests, the state government has attempted to reassure the villagers that their concerns will be addressed. Chief Minister Pramod Sawant met with the villagers to discuss the project and promised to find a solution that would be acceptable to all parties involved. Sawant also expressed his gratitude to Union Minister Nitin Gadkari for the funding allocation for the highway expansion and assured the villagers that the government was committed to dialogue.

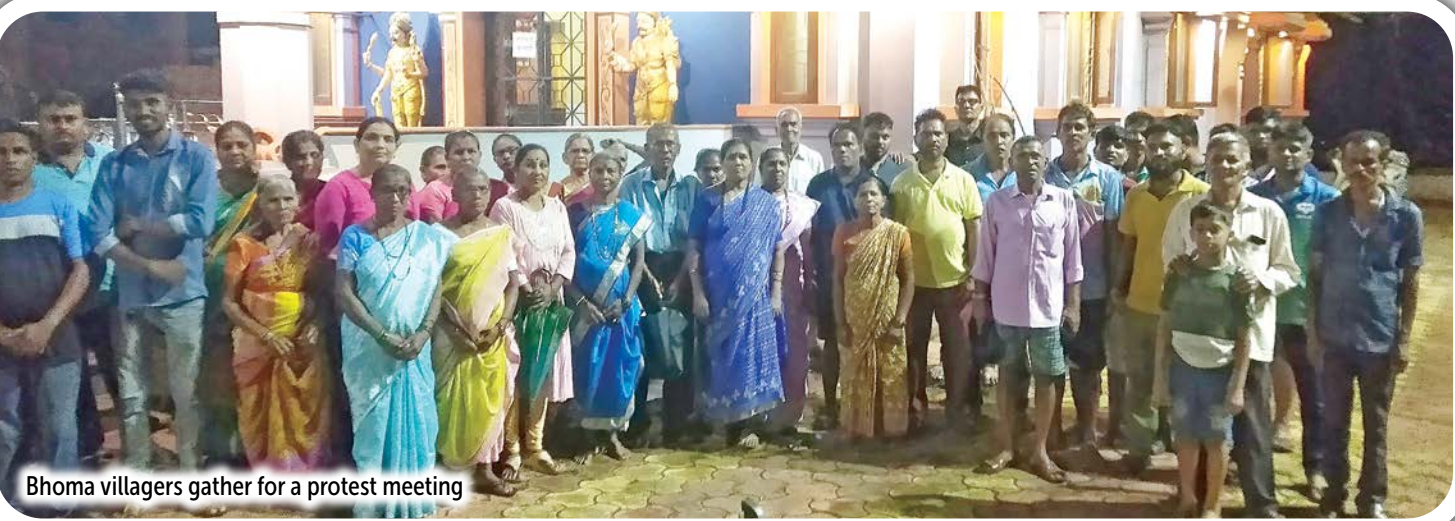
"We are open to discussions with the villagers and will find a way to resolve the issue to their satisfaction," Sawant said. "I can assure them that no temples will be demolished, and we will take all steps to ensure their concerns are addressed." The Chief Minister's statement has provided some hope to the villagers, who now hope that Sawant will visit Bhoma to inspect the proposed alignment and hear their grievances in person.

## A conflict between development and preservation

As the deadline for the construction of the flyover draws nearer, the tension between the villagers and the government remains high. While the government continues to push for the four-laning of National Highway 748, the villagers remain resolute in their demand for a bypass that would protect their homes, culture, and religious practices. The situation at Bhoma reflects a larger dilemma facing many rural communities in India – the need for development and infrastructure improvements often comes at the expense of local traditions and livelihoods.

The villagers of Bhoma are not opposed to progress; rather, they seek a solution that balances development with the preservation of their way of life. For them, the construction of a bypass is not just a matter of convenience, but a means to safeguard their heritage, their homes, and their future. As the government and the villagers continue to negotiate, it is clear that the final decision will have lasting implications for both the community and the region as a whole.

The coming months will likely see further discussions, but the question remains: Will the voices of Bhoma's residents be heard in the corridors of power, or will the drive for development overshadow their legitimate concerns? Only time will tell.



Bhoma villagers gather for a protest meeting

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