

O HERALDO

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Pre-monsoon flooding: A wake-up call for Goa

For two consecutive days, Goa has been caught in the grip of a natural disaster so intense it defies comprehension. From Canacona to Pernem, landslides have scarred the land, vehicles have been swept away in full view of helpless onlookers, homes have drowned, and trees have collapsed like matchsticks.

And this, shockingly, is just the beginning. The rains aren't even in full swing yet. These are only pre-monsoon showers. Yet the damage is so widespread, so ruthless, that it has exposed the complete unpreparedness of our disaster management systems and the dangerous complacency of those in power. Trees have fallen in Pernem, Morjim, Sattari, Ponda, and Bicholim; homes lie in ruin in Ponda and Reis Magos. Roads have vanished under murky waters. Goa, once a symbol of calm and natural beauty, now finds itself gasping under nature's fury.

But before we point fingers at the skies, we must look inward. This is not nature gone rogue. It is nature retaliating.

The truth is stark and undeniable: we have wounded nature. And now, nature is showing us what happens when we break the delicate balance. The excessive concretisation, unchecked land conversions, unplanned urban sprawl, and rampant deforestation have turned Goa into a tinderbox of ecological instability.

But the most tragic irony is this: those who suffer most are the ones least responsible. The common citizen, already burdened by inflation and daily hardships, must now also bear the brunt of poor planning and environmental mismanagement. It is not the builders or the policymakers wading through knee-deep water in flooded lanes. It is the daily wage worker, the small shopkeeper, the family in a one-room home whose dreams have been washed away

Khazan lands, once natural buffers against flooding, are being filled up in the name of development. Even local officials stand accused of aiding this destruction. When the natural pathways of water are obstructed, is it any wonder that floods follow?

Tuesday's rainfall was not an act of God. It was a mirror held up to our own recklessness. Drainage systems failed not because the rains were heavy, but because they were ignored. Water entered buildings because the land could no longer absorb what was once welcome. Roads were flooded not by nature's design, but by man's disruption.

We speak often of "development," but what kind of progress turns rain into a source of destruction?

Even now, there is no clarity, no accountability. Pre-monsoon works, which should have been completed by mid-May, are still dragging on, incomplete in several regions. Engineers prohibit road-digging one day and forget about it the next. Disaster preparedness meetings are held only after the waters rise.

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This culture of procrastination, denial, and blame-shifting must end.

The rains did not come suddenly. Nature has been warning us for years. With rising temperatures, failing crops, and erratic weather patterns. But every time, we chose to look away. Every tree cut, every hill flattened, every wetland filled was a warning ignored. And now, even a mild pre-monsoon downpour is enough to paralyze an entire state.

It's not too late to change course, but time is slipping. Our disaster management plans need a complete overhaul. Pre-monsoon work must start on time and finish before the first drop falls. Urban planning must prioritise sustainability, not profit. Encroachments must be removed. Drainage systems must be restored, and our forests must be protected like the life-giving shields they are.

Above all, we must begin to respect the natural world; not as something to conquer, but as something to live in harmony with.

The rain once brought with it the earthy perfume of fresh soil and the promise of new life. Today, it carries the stench of open drains and broken promises. It floods streets, not fields. It brings sorrow, not celebration.

But the rain has not changed. We have. Let this disaster be a wake-up call. Let it rain awareness, rain accountability, and rain action. If we continue to exploit nature, the downpour we fear today will seem like a drizzle compared to the storms of tomorrow.

The time to act is not tomorrow. It is now.



JOHN DAYAL

Religious minorities and caste census

The 2025 Census is still some time away, but some unusual groups are looking at it with very mixed feelings. For Dalit Christians and Pasmada Muslims, the question is if the Census, which this time will also enumerate the caste affiliations of citizens, will count them on its rolls with their double identity, or ignore their very existence.

The absence of official Scheduled Caste status for Dalit Muslims and Christians since 1950 has sparked legal and political debates. Petitions before the Supreme Court seek to extend SC benefits to these groups, arguing that their exclusion is discriminatory.

These communities hope the Census will provide them additional arguments before the court in support of their call for the same constitutional rights, and protection, as given to Dalits from among the Hindu, Sikh and Buddhist communities.

[The Registrar General and Census Commissioner of India in 2015 released the data on Population by Religious Communities of the Census 2011 which counted a total population of 121.09 crores with Hindu at 96.63 crores (79.8%); Muslim at 17.22 crores (14.2%); Christians at 2.78 crores (2.3%); Sikh at 2.08 crores (1.7%); Buddhist at 0.84 crores (0.7%); Jain at 0.45 crores (0.4%), "Other Religions & Persuasions" (ORP) at 0.79 crores (0.7%) and Religion Not Stated 0.29 crores (0.2%).]

The 2025 Census will include comprehensive caste data for the first time since 1931, potentially reshaping affirmative action policies. This move, driven by demands for updated data on OBCs and other castes, could influence political representation and resource allocation, particularly in states like Bihar, where caste is a key electoral issue.

The inclusion of caste across religions in 1931 was also driven by the recognition that social hierarchies akin to caste existed in other religious communities



The 1950 Presidential Order, among the very first amendments to the Constitution, explicitly states, "No person who professes a religion different from the Hindu religion shall be deemed to be a member of a Scheduled Caste," a clause later amended to include Sikhs and Buddhists among Hindus, but not Muslims or Christians.

This exclusion forces many Dalit converts, largely in the Telugu states of Telangana and Andhra, Pradesh, as also Tamil

Nadu, Karnataka and Punjab, to possibly hide their faith to retain benefits, undermining religious freedom.

The 1931 census by the colonial British government did in a way count caste across all religions, though with varying degrees of consistency and clarity. It seems it recorded over 4,147 distinct castes, including over 300 castes identified among Christians and more than 500 among Muslims.

The British initially presumed caste was immutable and applied only to Hindus (by 1911, they began recording caste for Christians and Muslims if respondents provided such information. Identity was to be self-defined by the person and was not imposed by the state through the enumerator's questions.

The basic presumption remains the name. A citizen has to speak out his parameters, data as it is now called, including name, age, gender, which is ordinarily but not always visible to the naked eye, religion, faith or belief, caste and presumably sub caste, or jati or whatever is the local name.

Expectedly, it is a complicated exercise, involving perhaps even more people than are involved in a general election - barring the security personnel which are such an essential part of the national polling. The Census is a peaceful process.

The homework done by the Census Commissioner decides how accurate the census will be in various cultural or ethnic blocks in India with myriad regional names even for well-known communities such as Rajputs or Vaisyas, and the many other backward groups.

Errors in enumeration, many because of the ill trained staff, usually recruited from government school teachers and government employees who can be spared for such work, beset the 1911 census, as in fact they have in all the census operations carried out meticulously like clockwork once every ten years till the rhythm was shattered by Covid, and then delayed inexplicably by the central government.

The inclusion of caste across religions in 1931 was also driven by the recognition that social hierarchies akin to caste existed in other religious communities.

For example, among Muslims, distinctions such as Ashraf (noble or upper-caste Muslims) and Ajlaf / Arzal (backward or Dalit Muslims) were noted, reflecting social stratification based on descent and occupation irrespective of religion.

Similarly, Christians, converts from 'Hindu' castes, often retained their caste identities, or suffered in society from the same atrocities and discrimination despite their new faith. Over 300 Christian castes recorded.

Sikhism, despite its theological rejection of caste hierarchy,

exhibited caste-like practices through endogamy and social stratification.

In the 1911 census, the number of Buddhists counted in British India (excluding Burma) was approximately 336,000, which represented roughly 0.1% of the total population. The numbers increased radically after the 1956 mass conversion to Navayana Buddhism by B.R. Ambedkar in Nagpur, which continues.

All these were noted by the Chief Justice Rangnath Misra Commission, which noted that caste crosses religious divides and is a reality in many parts of India. The Narendra Modi government has set up another commission under retired Chief Justice of India Balakrishnan to reconsider the matter.

The Caste Census in 1931 which recorded 4,147 castes, a significant increase from 1,646 in 1901, faced resistance due to cultural objections. Some communities viewed questions about caste as intrusive, while others, particularly marginalized groups including nomads, feared further stigmatization or discrimination. Police forces even in Delhi still often characterise some people groups as former "criminal tribes", as they were defined by the British in the Criminal Tribes Act, though they were denotified in Independent India.

After 1931, independent India ceased comprehensive caste enumeration, citing concerns that it would exacerbate social divisions. The 1951 Census, the first post-independence census, limited caste data to SCs and STs, excluding other castes "to promote national unity".

This decision left policymakers reliant on outdated 1931 data, as seen in the Mandal Commission's 1980 estimate of OBCs based on assumptions of uniform population growth. The 2011 Socio Economic and Caste Census (SECC) attempted to revive caste enumeration but was marred by errors.

To come back to the confusion, and angst among Dalit Christians, and Pasmada Muslims, is a very basic one: should they specify their caste identity which can be recorded only if they remain silent on their religious one. There are no indications from the office of the Census commissioner that they will accept hyphenated caste and religious identities, other than in states such as Tamil Nadu where some fishermen communities are listed as Backward or Most Backward caste or class.

For the present, only the Scheduled Tribes can list both their tribal status and their religious one, though even they are facing a push back from extreme right-wing groups, some backed by powerful political groups.

(John Dayal is an author, Editor, occasional documentary film maker and activist.)

people'sedit

DO GOANS LOVE FISH?

PRADEEP LAWANDE

Recently an organisation - People for the ethical treatment of animals (PETA) has appealed to Goans that the latter should give up eating fish. The above 'people' argued that since Goans are lovers of fish, they should abstain themselves from eating them and thus save their lives.

The aforesaid appeal prompted me to examine the relation between Goans and fish. Many maintain that just as fish cannot live without water, Goans cannot live without fish. Rice and fish is the staple food of our beloved land. 'Kate ani gote' is a humble requirement of any true Goan. Kate stands for fish and gote stands for rice. Every morning, the first thought that occurs in the mind of any Goan housewife is that of fish. This is because without the entry of these water creatures in the kitchen, the routine process of cooking would not start. Besides, fish tops the list of topics that are discussed daily in our golden Goa. Perhaps politics is the next one.

Fish can be broadly classified into two: Saltwater fish and freshwater fish. In our Konkani language, there are numerous figures of speech over this cold blooded animal. For example, an unfortunate or unlucky person is often compared to 'dodyaro' - a lowly fish that has three stones in its head! There is mention of fish in our ancient puranas. In Mahabharata, there is one character named Satyawati, mother of sage Vyasa. She was born to a fish and possessed a distinct fishy odour. Therefore she was called "Matsyagandha" in Sanskrit meaning fish smelling. Also the first of many incarnations of lord Vishnu was of fish. Reference to fish is also found in the sacred Bible. Lord Jesus used to call his four disciples namely Simon, Andrew, James and John as fishermen!

Goans in general are fish enthusiasts. They cannot live without fish. Hindus here are required to remain sans fish during their religious ceremonies.

Together with Goa, Tripura, Kerala, West Bengal, Assam and Manipur have the highest percentage of people eating fish. In West Bengal, people eat fish also for breakfast. Fish is even offered to Gods and Goddesses! Dolphin is the National Fish of India. It is called 'susu' in Hindi and it lives in freshwater. The state fish of Goa is striped grey mullet and is called 'Shevto' in local language. Shevto is very tasty. But Goa's most popular fish is mackerel. It is called 'bangdo' in Konkani and it is a saltwater fish.

Numerous proverbs have been formed on this aquatic being. I would like to cite here five of them.

1. Give a man a fish and you feed him for a day, teach a man to fish and you feed him for a lifetime.
2. Guests like fish begin to smell after three days.
3. Big fish eat small fish
4. Be patient and calm for no one can catch fish in anger.
5. There are plenty of other fish in the sea.

Now let us come back to our fundamental point. As PETA asserts, do Goans really love fish? The answer to this question is an emphatic 'no'. Goans do not love fish. They love only to eat fish!

India needs more wolf sanctuaries

A wildlife enthusiast is said to have spotted an Indian grey wolf along the Yamuna floodplains near Delhi. Though hybridisation with a feral dog is a possibility, and without genetic testing one cannot be sure, the sighted animal's external features reportedly point towards an Indian wolf, a subspecies of grey wolf.

Since grasslands, deciduous forests and deserts are the usual habitats of grey wolf, the spotting of "grey wolf" in an urban area should evoke curiosity and encourage research. Similar to wolves of other species, the Indian wolves live in packs but, unlike their counterparts, not to their full strength.

The Wildlife Protection Act places the Indian wolf in the endangered species list. Widely found in states of Gujarat, Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh, Maharashtra, Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh, they number up to 2500 to 3000, although there are only two dedicated wolf sanctuaries in India.

The man-wolf conflict is quite rare; may happen when wolves venture into human settlements in search of goats and sheep.

Ganapathi Bhat, Akola

letterstotheeditor

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All letters must contain correct postal address and telephone number. Letters are liable to be edited for brevity.

Is this the way to promote monsoon tourism?

Amid concerns over disruption in domestic travel following the Pahalgam attack, Goa Tourism Ministry has reportedly urged the airline and hospitality industries to roll out special monsoon packages to attract middle and upper-middle-class travellers to Goa. It is learnt that the goal is not just to revive Goa's footfalls but to ensure Goa doesn't lose ground to international competitors like Vietnam, Sri Lanka, or Indonesia while at the same time boosting arrival of domestic travellers.

However, the question that arises is whether Goa is ready for monsoon tourism. Heavy showers lashed Goa resulting in water-logging and a flood-like situation in low lying areas. Parts of Panaji and Miramar bore the brunt of the heavy showers as water accumulation brought traffic to a standstill. And these are only the pre-monsoon showers.

The entire monsoon season is in front of us. The unseasonal showers threw normal life out of gear, laying bare the glaring gaps in the state government's claim of being monsoon ready. This was the situation in several parts

of Goa underscoring just how unprepared the state is for even moderate rainfall. In all this turmoil, not clearing the drains in time and improper drainage system, the government is counting on monsoon tourism in order to attract tourists. It is hoped that average tourists extend their stay in the state. In the present situation tourists may be forced to extend their stay probably only when they miss the flight since their cab could not reach the airport in time due to bad road conditions.

Adelmo Fernandes, Vasco

Apex Court sends clear and strong message

The Supreme Court did well to order for constituting a three-member Special Investigation Team to probe the FIR against Madhya Pradesh minister Vijay Shah for his disparaging remarks against the senior woman Army Officer Colonel Sofiya Qureshi.

The Apex Court's intervention sends a clear and strong message about the responsibility

public figures hold and the consequences of making slanderous comments, particularly against top officials and members of our armed forces.

The SC's decision to initiate a probe underscores its commitment to upholding the dignity of armed forces personnel and ensuring that public officials are held accountable for their statements. Despite the minister's apologies, the controversy remains a significant issue, reflecting the sensitivity of communal and gender-related discourse in India's political and social landscape.

Ranganathan Sivakumar, Chennai

Why forewarn contractor of Kala Academy?

The Kala Academy would be closed in view of rectification works, which as per the Chief Minister will be done free of cost by the contractor by October, as per the original agreement. Subsequently, the contract would be terminated and the contractor will be blacklisted (O Herald, May 17). This brings to the fore

the questions as to whether in the first place the Kala Academy really required renovations costing more than Rs 60 crore. At this price, a new one could have been constructed.

Having given the contract, presumably without an open tender, was the contractor capable to have carried out the work, by checking the credentials and earlier works? What was the consultant doing while the renovations were in progress? There are allegations of inferior workmanships as borne out by collapse of a part of the open air-auditorium, water leakages in the main auditorium, poor sound quality and air-conditioners and so forth. The 'free' rectifications may not be up to the mark because the contractor is already forewarned of being blacklisted! Anyway, blacklisting may not stop the contractor to return in another avatar - as a partner in a new firm or open a new company with someone else as the face of the business while he/ she may be in the background.

Sridhar D'Yer, Caranzalem