

ROLE OF PANCHAYAT IN SUSTAINABLE TOURISM: INSIGHTS FROM GOA

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Abstract

Tourism industry is gaining a prominent role in socio-economic development of the regions, especially in developing countries. Today more and more countries are envisaging sustainable tourism. The pertinent question is how to promote tourism and ensure at the same time that it is a vehicle for growth and development, which is sustainable. In view of the fact that tourism is an economic activity which is deeply linked to a particular territory and to local variables, central governments may not always be able to manage the complexities of this industry and its impact on the economic and social environment. On the flip side, local governments can play an important role in tourism, as they seem to be in a better position to cope with issues related to the tourism industry. Could the Panchayats shoulder greater responsibility in this endeavour and play a proactive role in attaining the goal of sustainable tourism? The paper attempts to look into this possibility with a case study of Goa. The study is based on data collected through interviewing various stakeholders; the business community, the local residents, the elected leaders at the Panchayat level, Government officials, NGO members, tourists visiting the State, etc. Gram Sabha minutes of various Panchayats are reviewed to strengthen the present findings. The study reassures the fact that Panchayat, as a grassroots institution, can play a proactive role to ensure sustainable tourism in the state. Every Panchayat has to carry out dual function in this regards, the police function and that of a facilitator. It has the primary role of ensuring that the environment for both locals and the tourists is clean, safe, healthy, accessible and stimulating. It should mobilize the social, financial and natural capital of a place towards sustainable tourism which will benefit the local community.

Keywords: Sustainable, Tourism, Local Government, Panchayat, Goa

INTRODUCTION

Travelling is one of the favourite activities of mankind. Tourism industry is gaining a prominent role in socio-economic development of the regions, especially in developing countries. Tourism has to be beneficial to both, visitor as well as the host region, and this is possible so long as the visitor's needs are less than the environmental ability to cope with these needs. The moment this equation reverses, tourism poses a threat to the natural resources of the host region, and can have geographical, economic, social, and cultural implications, sometimes even creating identity crisis for the region. Any tourist activity is harmful if instead of creating wealth to the region it poses cost to the community (Grasso, 2014). To gauge the impact of tourism on host region, one needs to sought answers to array of questions such as how many employment opportunities are created by tourism, how much does the local businesses earn, how much has the households benefited, what are the repercussions of tourism for community, culture, gender etc. There are various stakeholders in this industry including the visitors, state, tour operators, transporters, eateries and restaurants owners, lodging and boarding providers, water

sports bodies, casino owners, amusement and retail traders, local businesses, and the general public at large. Tourism has to be beneficial to the economy and this benefit should trickle down to the society as a whole.

Today more and more countries are envisaging sustainable tourism. The United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO, 1996) defines sustainable tourism as tourism, which meets the needs of present visitors as well as of host regions while protecting and enhancing opportunity for the future. It focuses on equitable resource management – time, budget and environment – along with social awareness, quality of experience, involvement of local communities, desire for discovery, technology, sustainability, and knowledge and well-being as paths to reach a long term vision of tourism development (Gnoth, 2002; Quintiliani, 2009). It refers to management of all resources in such a way that economic, social and aesthetic needs are fulfilled and at the same time cultural integrity, essential ecological processes, biological diversity and life support systems are preserved and maintained. Thus sustainable tourism is one which takes full account of its current and future economic, social and environmental impacts, and addresses the needs of different stakeholders in the industry, the environment

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and host communities. It is built on three major dimensions; namely, environmental, economic and socio-cultural. Environmental dimension emphasizes preservation of both, the natural environment such as beaches, forests, waterways, and the built environment such as historic buildings and ruins; economic dimension focuses on increasing revenue to the state and incomes of the local people and socio-cultural aspect revolve round promoting cultural exchange along with preserving local traditions of the host region. Sustainable tourism is a continuous process and requires sincere involvement of all relevant stakeholders.

TOURISM IN GOA

Goa has always attracted tourists from all over the world for its scenic beaches and lush greenery. The main asset, the sandy wonders of Goa, has put the State on the world map as a perfect holiday destination and Goa's tourism scene cannot be complete without its silvery coastal belt divided into several luxurious beaches (Noronha, 2008). A small movement referred as 'flower children' which started in 1960's today has grown in to full fledged tourism industry in Goa. Munford M. (2009), a traveller and freelance writer, narrating a vivid eye witness account of his eight visits to Goa in the last 23 years, writes about how a trickle of westerners who travelled in 1980s is now turning into a metaphorical flood and the current trend is that conscientious westerners call Goa 'home' rather than a mere travel destination. The present position is that the inflow of both, domestic as well as foreign tourists in Goa is increasing leaps and bounds every succeeding year.

Tourism has its own advantages. Being service industry and most sector of tourism industry being labour-intensive it creates jobs on large scale. It is a composite sector, generating income in a large number of activities as sectors and sub sectors like, hotel and other accommodation units, travel agents and tour operators, transport services, tourist resorts and complexes, shopping facilities including sales outlets for handicrafts, souvenirs, and so on (Vethirajan & Nagavalli, 2014). Tourism in Goa is a mix bag of profits and pain. The state has benefited from tourism. Tourism has created large scale job opportunities and has increased revenue to the state as well as foreign exchange. It has created positive vibes for this tiny state, and people all over the world aspire to visit this state. However tourism is not properly controlled and managed which has begun to adversely affect the state. Uncontrolled tourism is posing a threat to the natural resources of the state. There is scarcity of drinking water in certain parts of Goa. It is observed that the tourism industry is overusing water resources for hotels, swimming pools, and water sports activities. This is resulting in water shortages and degradation of water supplies, as well as generating a greater volume of waste water. Increased construction of tourism and recreational

facilities has increased the pressure on land resources and on scenic landscapes. There is growing deforestation caused by land clearing. There is also growing problem of pollution due to increased traffic on roads resulting in air emissions and noise. There is solid waste and littering, releases of sewage, and other kinds of pollution increasing the threats to and pressures on ecosystem of the state. Overbuilding and extensive paving of shorelines have resulted in destruction of habitats and disruption of land-sea connections such as sea-turtle nesting spots in certain beach areas in Morjim in Pernem and Galgibag in Canaconataluka, which are famous for its turtle nesting ground.

The enormous pressure on land, beaches, marine life, khazan lands, mangroves, and increased pollution, discharges into the sea, strain on water resources, is forcing local population to compete with the tourists for the use of these critical resources. There is indirect cost involved too. The cost of living has increased and the prices of basic commodities such as food items, and prices of properties are soaring up. There is strain on existing infrastructure, especially roads and public transport. The traditional occupations have got a setback and occupations like traditional fishing, salt producing, and cultivation of khazan lands have declined. Mass tourism and package tourism have transformed the landscapes of Goa to the detriment of the local people. What we are witnessing now is the negative fallout of tourism. This current form of tourism is going to cause irreversible social and cultural damage (Pereira, 2010). The villages in the coastal belt are increasingly facing the problems of beach littering, proliferating drug trade, and mushrooming of massage and beauty parlours which have hastens illegal activities such as sex trade and increase in crimes. The image of women in Goa is adversely affected due to wrong projection of the state as destination for 'sun, sand and sex'. In fact where tourism is expected to assist the women from host regions to progress socially and increase employment opportunities, the reality is different. A study conducted by Centre for Responsible Tourism in Goa reflected that 31.3 % women working in state tourism sector are feeling unsafe at workplace (Arethwala, 2017). The above observations are pointers that the state has to rework on its tourism policy to make it sustainable. The pertinent question is how to promote tourism and ensure at the same time that it is a vehicle for growth and development, which is sustainable. Could the Panchayats shoulder greater responsibility in this endeavour and play a proactive role? The paper attempts to look into this possibility.

WHY PANCHAYATS?

Panchayats are the grassroots institutions. Goa is a small state with 191 village Panchayats and 14 towns. Thus for the large area of the state, the governing body is the Panchayat. Also the coastal belts, where there is beach tourism (the honey pot areas), fall under the jurisdiction of the Panchayats.

Panchayats are best suited to deal with the challenges of tourism and to manage effectively local natural, financial and human resources, adequacy of infrastructure, basic services and the impact of tourism on community life. In view of the fact that tourism is an economic activity which is deeply linked to a particular territory and to local variables, central governments are not always suited to manage the complexities of this industry and its impact on the economic and social environment (Bertucci, 2002). According to Elliot (1997), local governments play an important role in tourism, as it is only governments, which have the power to provide the political stability, security, and the legal and financial framework which tourism requires. In many cases, local governments seem to be in a better position to cope with issues related to the tourist industry for a number of reasons. Some of the reasons why Panchayats are expected to play a proactive role could be summarized as follows:

- Panchayats are the custodians of natural resources of the area under its jurisdiction. The people are in the need of these resources for livelihood, and therefore the panchayats have to work towards resource conservation as it is in their interest to do so.
- They have direct knowledge of the strengths and weaknesses of the region and possess time and place specific knowledge, which can be best used for resource utilization.
- They are more aware of the opportunities and challenges of the business community.
- They are closer to the community and are able to respond in a timely manner to major changes or problems which affect the territory or its people.
- They can ensure greater representation and participation of all stakeholders in the decision-making process, as well as closer involvement of community in the policy process. People are attached to their land and have common territorial affiliation and communal bond with it. There are various customs, traditions, practices and guidelines evolved over a period of time and the local people are aware and abide by these practices and therefore are in better position to manage areas in a suitable manner. Active participation in deliberation, decision making and implementation process at the grass roots can pave way for benefit of many (Kothare, 1998). Community participation can also reduce administrative and management costs due to proximity of local participants (Ribot, 2004).
- Panchayats can also be instrumental in providing services that respond more closely to the needs of the local population, including the business community.
- There is constitutional authority granted to these bodies. Panchayats are democratically elected bodies. Panchayats can make necessary rules, implement them

smoothly and also can exercise adjudicative authority to settle the disputes that may arise. In fact Art. 243(G) of the Indian constitution have made it mandatory that Panchayats have to take the responsibility of 29 subjects, which include important natural resources like fisheries, water, forests, mining etc. There is provision through 73rd Amendment that interests of different marginalized sections are represented at Panchayat level. Panchayats can ensure outcomes of the decisions taken in Gram Sabhas. It can create data base which can help in mapping the achievements, and help in future decision making. Panchayats can ensure accountability through periodic meetings and more importantly promote access to resources and power.

RESEARCH METHOD

The study is based on data collected through interviewing various stakeholders; the business community, the local residents, the elected leaders at the Panchayat level, Government officials, NGO members, tourists visiting the State, etc. Data is also collected by referring to local newspapers, various Reports, and the on-going debates in the state. Gram Sabha minutes of various Panchayats are reviewed to strengthen the present findings.

FINDINGS

The study reassures the fact that Panchayat, as a grassroots institution, can play a proactive role to ensure sustainable tourism in the state. Every Panchayat has to carry out dual function in this regards, the police function and that of a facilitator.

Police Function

The Panchayat has to regulate strict implementation of laws and ensure that the rules are obeyed by all. The Panchayat authorities should study the matter at hand before giving NOC (No Objection Certificate) for any construction work in its jurisdiction, and should be vigilant and check that all the constructions conform to the existing rules before giving FOC (Final Occupancy Certificate). It should not allow any protrusions on public places by business communities, or any private body. The Panchayat should be strict with various other rules. Stringent measures should be adopted by the Panchayat to stop any kind of illegal cutting down of mountains or trees. The house owners who rent their premises should submit all the details of the tenants to the Police Department with a copy marked to the Panchayat. Loud and late night music parties should be checked by the Panchayat with proper vigil. Timely inspections to check littering of garbage by the eateries and hoteliers can ensure safe and clean environment. Along with the cooperation

from community and Police, Panchayat can check drug peddling and other related crimes.

It was observed that Panchayat though willing to undertake these functions was crippled due to shortage of staff to perform these functions. The best option could be to involve the Gram Sabha members, by constituting various committees and assigning different works to them. The Gram Sabha members are residents of that village and as such are likely to devote their time and energies for this purpose. The studies have reflected that common experiences often give rise to concept of common good. Individuals give up some of their individuality to behave as a single entity to accomplish goals (Kiss, 1990). Common sharing of problems can result in awareness that problems are not personal/private but affecting the whole community (Miller, 1987). After all Gram Sabhas are described as ‘watch dogs’ and ‘a force to reckon with’ (Kothare 1998). Collective interaction creates incentives for individual to participate in collective actions. Initially there is every possibility that subjective/personal interest may motivate and direct behaviour when people respond, but over a period of time one cannot deny the possibility that they may be guided by substantive ends regarding justice and public good (Salgaonkar, 2013). In fact, in Goa, the Gram Sabha members have even formed

associations and are working towards this cause, such as *Pilerne Citizen Forum*, *CavremAdivasiBachaoSamiti* (CABS), *Benaulim Villagers Action Committee* (BVAC), *Mayem Bu-VimochanNagrikKrutiSamiti* etc. To cite an example as to how involvement of people from the locality can be effective, is where people from Colva area agitated for cleaner and greener Colva, and forced a big resort which had closed down the traditional access to beach to the locals to open the access to the people and also to carry out their traditional fishing activity. In a classic case of Ingo at Assagao, Mapusa, a foreign national named Ingo, who wanted to set up a flea market in this area by clearing the mountains, villagers on seeing that their village hills were brought down with bull dozers got together and opposed this project tooth and nail till the project was shelved.

Role of a Facilitator

The Panchayat, as a facilitator, has to perform fourfold function. They can be summarized as four ‘Ps’ viz., Provision of infrastructure, Protection of resources, Promotion of socio-economic development, and Partake the role of coordination agency to establish synergy between the various stake holders. These functions are explained in Table 1.

Table 1: Tourism related Role of the Panchayat

Sr. No.	Sub Heads	Tasks to be Undertaken
1.	Provision of Infrastructure	Maintenance of roads, bus-stops, running tap water, shade, parking slots, sign boards, rest places, gardens, recreation places, open spaces, other amenities like toilets, street lights, garbage disposal provisions, primary health aid, etc.
2.	Protection of Resources	Protection, preservation and maintenance of natural resources like land including the agricultural and khazan lands, water bodies – rivers, ponds, lakes, springs, salt pans, beaches, and forest areas. Preservation of heritage sights, monuments, ruins etc.
3.	Promotion of socio-economic development	Promotion of small businesses, traditional occupations, art, folk, culture, and ensure safety to both tourists as well as local residents, both to their lives and properties. Empower women by promoting SHGs and small entrepreneurship and also work towards positive image building for women, which is getting a beating due to increasing crimes, drug menace and wrong projection of the state as destination for sex tourism.
4.	Partake in co-ordination	Panchayat should play the role of facilitator and coordinating agency to ensure partnership between various stakeholders. Promote partnership between state, private sector and civil society and thus establish synergy for sustainable tourism.

CHALLENGES TO THE PANCHAYAT

While assigning an important role to the Panchayat to attain the goal of sustainable tourism, it is also necessary to understand various challenges that may crop up in its smooth functioning. These challenges have to be deciphered and suitable measures should be adopted in this direction.

Transparency and Accountability

The Panchayats have to be effective and transparent political institutions. They have to be accountable, allow for political

participation and representation, and should be responsive to people’s needs and demands. There are Grey areas for corruption at Panchayat level and there are various acts of misconduct on part of Panchayat functionaries. These include appropriating lands, embezzling subsidies, taking advantage of local businesses, misappropriating money which flows in the form of state/centrally sponsored schemes, spending unnecessarily on events, abusing their power or influence to gain benefit for their relatives, etc. (Salgaonkar 2012). These unfair activities and corrupt practices of the Panchayat functionaries need to be curbed, and they have to behaviour in a more responsible manner.

Inadequate Funds

It is observed that with the many responsibilities of local government in service delivery, tourism often falls low on the list of priorities with little funding allocated. The Central or State Government may not allocate funds to the Panchayat for tourism related matters. In such cases, the Panchayat should raise its own revenue by systematically tapping potentials in tourism sector. Application of minimal fees and charges, and in return providing quality services to the tourists will fetch adequate funds in the Panchayat exchequer.

Fractured Partnership

All spheres of government have a constitutional mandate to address tourism, and within these departments there is debate as to where one's sphere of responsibilities end and another's begins. There is confusion over shouldering responsibilities between different departments and organizations such as Public Work Department, Tourism Department, Electricity Department, Sports Department, Police Department etc. and this results in 'everybody's responsibility becoming nobody's responsibility'. The lack of coordination between these departments results in inconvenience to the tourists as well to local people. The Panchayat authorities often find themselves tossed between these departments whenever they want to carry out some development work in their locality. It is therefore vital that the different levels of government departments, both hierarchical as well horizontal, work together. There also has to be partnerships between the State, the private sector and the civil society. These partnerships are important because the tourist industry affects many dimensions of the economic and social life of a community and no single actor, either public or private, can solve on its own all the diverse problems related to tourism. The Panchayat has to perform the herculean task of bringing together all the actors involved, and mediate for discussion, negotiation and constructive collaboration for fruitful outcomes.

Need for Community Involvement

Since the negative impacts are worse felt by the host community, it is absolutely necessary that there is active community involvement in achieving the goal of sustainable tourism. The people from the locality have to cooperate with the Panchayat authorities to promote tourism, and at the same time have to keep a check on these authorities that they don't misuse their powers to fulfil their selfish gains. People should be alert and ask information about the functioning of the Panchayat. They should seek information on various matters like how many NOCs (No Objection Certificates) are given to multi dwelling units, to hotels, tourist resorts,

sports complexes, how much have been the revenue and the expenditure of the Panchayat for tourism etc. People should not hesitate to seek information by resorting to RTI (Right to Information) where ever necessary. The villagers should warn the village authorities to keep their vested interest aside, and act in accordance to law. Finally the community should cooperate with the Panchayat to ensure that there is no damage caused to the demography, tranquillity, ecology and environment of the village.

TO CONCLUDE

Local Government, that is the Panchayat, has to play a proactive role to fulfil the aim of sustainable tourism. It has the primary role of ensuring that the environment for both locals and the tourists is clean, safe, healthy, accessible and stimulating. It should aim at mobilizing the social, financial and natural capital of a place towards sustainable tourism which will benefit the local community. It has to play both the roles, that of a police as well as a facilitator. This is no small task, but this role of the Panchayat is imperative. It also has to be a coordinating agency and should bring in coordination between various stakeholders in the tourism sector with the ultimate end of promoting interests in such a way it benefits society as a whole. Panchayat should emphasize on community involvement for direction. Community's collective wisdom is required to best understand competitive advantage of their location, what makes it unique and what will make people come to visit their locality. What works for one area may not work for another and therefore 'one size fit all' formula cannot be applied. No doubt tourism has negative implications, but it would not be wise to throw the baby along with the bath water. Also tourism, if sustainable, can be enriching for the state, financially, socio-economically as well as in cultural arenas. The need of the hour is a coherent and consistent set of policies and a regulatory framework, which addresses the diverse aspects of tourism in a more systematic manner.

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