

Temples: Probing the Possibilities of Economic Regeneration of the Local Communities in Goa

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Abstract

Temples of Goa have played a very vital role as symbols of cultural resistance to the Portuguese hegemony. In the post-liberation era, these temples have been integrated into the national pilgrimage networks and as such receive a large inflow of not only the Goan diaspora, spread far and wide in the country, but also tourists. Some of these temples have also found their way onto the international tourist circuit. Owing to this dimension, most of the major temples of the state have registered immense financial growth and their net yearly incomes exceed 10 million INR. Managements of some temples have been proactive in exploring new avenues of income generation for their respective temples, while others have not shown any substantial inclination towards amplifying their sources of income. However, there is a dearth of organized efforts, on the part of the temple management and the state government, to evolve a strategic plan to use the religious and cultural phenomena associated with these temples to ensure economic regeneration of the local communities and thereby facilitate economic and cultural enrichment of the state. This paper probes the possibility of temples playing a key role, along with the state government, in generating sustainable growth and development of local communities that are slowly losing their livelihoods in this age of modernization.

Keywords: temple, cultural resources, income regeneration, sustainable growth

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Introduction

Located on the west coast of India and in the proximity of the Western Ghats, Goa is one of the youngest and the smallest state of the Indian Union, with an area of only 3700 sq. km. Goa offers a cultural montage as it is inhabited by different ethnic and religious communities. Owing to the 450 years long Portuguese colonial occupation that lasted till 1961, the 'Old Conquest' areas of Ilhas, Bardez and Salcete project the latinized panorama, while the 'New Conquest' areas are characterized by the predominant Hindu landscape that is accentuated by the serene local temples. Though these temples were created and maintained by the village communities originally, they were patronized by the different royal dynasties that shaped Goa's destiny from time to time. Among these, the Kadamba dynasty needs a special mention (Fleet, 1898; Moraes, 1990). The Ponda taluka with a pronounced saturation of temples entailed by forced shifting of cults from the 'Old Conquest' areas, owing to the policy of religious persecution followed by the Portuguese, stands testimony to the largess shown by the royals towards the Hindu temples and their functionaries, as a numerous land grant charters cast in stone and copper plates are found in and around this taluka (Wagle, 1913; Mitragotri, 1999).

Taking note of the fact that these temples were the key symbols that dominated the popular psyche of Goa, the Portuguese Govt. attempted to regulate the administration of the temples by passing a law known as the *Regulamento* of 1886. It was superseded by another *Regulamento* in 1933. The constitution and management of the Hindu temples is conducted under the provisions of the Act of 1933 which reiterated that the *Mamlatdar* of the Taluka is the Administrator of the temples of his area (Devasthan Regulation, 2010). The temples bound by the *Regulamento* continue to be under his tutelage even at present, though nominally (Kamat, 2011). The existing scenario alludes to the fact that if these key cultural symbols of the local communities are to be explored for creating facilities to develop sustainable tourism program, both the Managing Committees of these institutions and the Govt. agencies have to work in tandem and need to make concerted efforts to harness these cultural resources and also to devise an action plan for ensuring economic growth of the local peoples.

Research Questions

- How to utilize the tangibles of Goa's rich cultural heritage, existing in the form of Hindu temples?
- How to harness the intangibles of Goa's heritage associated with temples, to act as drivers for the state's sustainable tourism program?

Literature Review

Many Western scholars have probed the economic dimension of the Economy of Temples in South India. Temple has been seen as a prime agent for redistribution of economic resources (Stein, 1960; Stein, 1978; Spencer, 1968). Some scholars have harped upon the role played by the temples in bringing about political and economic integration of a region (Dirks, 1976; Ludden, 1979; Heitzman, 1987a; Hietzman, 1987; Hietzman, 1991; Branfoot, 2008). With respect to Goa, the economic aspect of the Goan temples had hitherto remained a mystery since the hereditary temple managers were indifferent to research and systematic investigation (Kamat, 2013a). It

was only in the recent times that the Temple Economy could be taken up as the focal point of a serious study (Kamat, 2013b).

Regarding promotion of tourism as an important sector of the economy, it has been suggested that immense care has to be taken to protect the local cultures from the abrasive impacts of too many visitations (Steele-Prohaska, 1996). A study has been conducted to verify whether the enhancement of intangible heritage attractors, could be a driver for the sustainability of tourism (Guidici et al., 2013). The need to integrate tourism research with cultural heritage studies in order to develop a shared value system has been duly noted (Pocock, 2008). Dangers involved in commodification of a cultural resource to secure economic goals have been pointed out systematically. It has also been accepted that investment in heritage can generate social and economic growth for local people (Dümcke, C. and Gnedovsky, M., 2013). With respect to the Goan context of tourism, studies have been conducted which have identified the factors responsible for the rise in domestic tourism as well as international tourism (Patel, M. and Shah, P., 2013; De Abreu, 2008). The urgency with which the Govt. of Goa has to address the issue of protection of its cultural and historical assets has been pointed out with genuine concern (Ransely, 2012). Regional imbalances created by the faulty tourism promotional practices and their mal-effects have been painstakingly documented (Sawkar et al., 1998).

Methodology

The case study research design was chosen since according to Yin (2003), the case study is most suitable to answer exploratory research questions, where the investigator has no control over behavioral events and the focus of the study is contemporary. Many other scholars support the case study model (Weirisma, 2000; Thies, 2002, Hennick, Hutter and Baily, 2011) as it is capable of projecting human side of the issue and is effective in identifying abstract aspects like socio-economic status, etc. Multiple holistic case study design was utilized since different cases may have slightly different contexts and literal replication in such cases would improve the external validity of the study (Yin, 2003). Multiple case designs are chosen since the research outcomes are likely to be more robust (Rowley, 2002). The unit of analysis was a single temple. Three cases were chosen namely, the Shantadurga Temple of village Kavle, the Mangesh Temple and the Mahalasa Temple located in the village Priol, for literal replication, i.e. provide similar results as suggested by Yin (2003). These temples have huge economic resources, a large stake in the economy of their respective villages at the micro level and as a group, to a considerable extent in the state economy on macro level (Kamat, 2011). Their domination on tourist circuit is significant (Kamat, 2015). The focus groups for collection of data through interviews, have been the small business owners at the temple sites, street vendors, cab owners, tour guides, members of the Women's Self-Help Groups and amateur actors operating at the aforementioned localities.

Findings

Tangible cultural heritage of Hindu temples in Goa offers a rich resource that can attract tourists from abroad and the intangible cultural heritage associated with these temples in the form of oral histories, legends, ritual practices and festive observances provides additional avenues that can be tapped to magnify the tourist inflow.

Discussion

The United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) promotes responsible, sustainable and universally accessible tourism. It acknowledges tourism as a driver of economic growth, inclusive development and environmental sustainability (UNWTO, 2015). Its press release has estimated that over 1.1 billion people have travelled the world in year 2014, with India registering best growth trend in Asia and Pacific region with 7% increase in international tourist arrivals (UNWTO, 2014). Cultural Heritage Tourism has been recognized as one of the 5 key segments in tourism markets. UNESCO has been promoting cultural tourism since 2005. The modern dynamics involving growth and deepening diversification has proved tourism to be a key driver for advancement, since it entails socio-economic development of host communities, promotes cross-cultural exchanges, and generates much needed resources for heritage conservation. No doubt, cultural tourism serves the purpose of mitigating the sinister effects of poverty and limits rural migration. In its preview of findings tagged as Tourism Towards 2030, 45 million people are expected to travel every year and the emerging economies are supposed to be surpassing the advanced economies in making substantial gains through their schemes related to tourism (UNWTO, 2012). The recently concluded UNWTO/UNESCO World Conference on Tourism and Culture in Siem Reap, Cambodia, ventured to explore and advance new partnership models between tourism and culture underscoring the importance of cultural tourism in nurturing a sense of pride and self-esteem among host communities (UNWTO/UNESCO, 2015).

Toeing the line of UNWTO, India has designed a detailed scheme to showcase her rich natural and cultural heritage by developing the brand called 'Incredible India' (Ministry of Tourism, Govt. of India, 2002). Taking a clue from the national govt., the Govt. of Goa too has come up with an avowed intention of upholding the human, social, economic and cultural values of tourism (NRI Commission, Govt. of Goa, 2015). It enlists preservation and enrichment of our cultural heritage, hinterland development and ensuring involvement of the local communities as participants and beneficiaries of tourism related endeavours, as some of its objectives. The cherished goal is of sustainable tourism as it has high potential to create white-collared jobs for a population with high literacy rate (Sawkar et al., 1998).

Within a few years of its liberation from the Portuguese colonial regime, the trend of tourism began in Goa around 1965. Pristine purity of the natural surroundings coupled with congenial population to make Goa, a much-cherished destination (Alvares, ed., 1993). Back-packers were the first to arrive to Goa and the charter tourists followed them. Sporadic rise of Hippie culture owing to the promotion of Beach Tourism was considered to be the chief factor responsible for drug abuse and prostitution (Lalnumwala, 2015). Today tourism is the fastest growing economic sector of Goan economy with a 30% rise in tourist flow in 2014, having received 40.58 lakhs of tourists as compared to 31.21 lakhs in the previous year, which is the highest among all states of the country (Goa Economic Survey, 2015).

The following table depicts the details of tourist arrivals in recent years to Goa:

Year	Domestic	Foreign	Total	Increase in %
2011	2,225,002	445,935	2,670,937	0.98
2012	2,337,499	450,530	2,788,029	4.20
2013	2,629,151	492,322	3,121,473	10.68
2014	3,544,634	513,592	4,058,226	30.01
2015(up to March)	629,199	191,379	820,578	

Source: <http://www.goatourism.gov.in/statistics/225>

The following table shows year-wise inflow of tourist from top 3 source countries:

Year	Russia	U. K.	Germany
2012	140,100	119,891	31,842
2013	162,746	145,431	46,472
2014	149,684	146,380	55,932

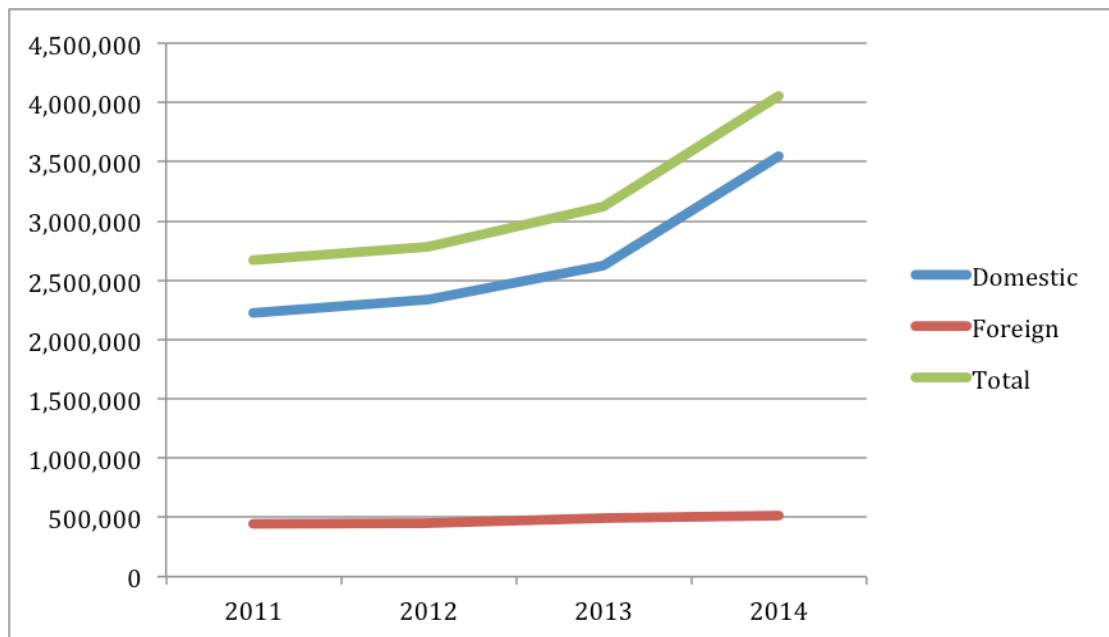
Source: <http://www.goatourism.gov.in/statistics/247>

The following table shows year-wise inflow of tourists by charter flights:

Year	No. of Flights	Passengers
2011-12	910	169,006
2012-13	996	215,304
2013-14	1,128	261,452
2-14-15 (up to May 30, 2015)	895	161,316

Source: <http://www.goatourism.gov.in/statistics/228>

Following is the graphical depiction of tourist inflows from 2011-14



Though the data about the yearly tourist inflow in to the state is provided by the official documents released, the Economic Survey report (Goa Economic Survey 2014-15, 2015) is pretty vague as it does not provide figures regarding how many of the total visitors were actually the pilgrim tourists or cultural heritage tourists, neither does it furnish the percentage of the domestic and the foreign tourists who visited the cultural heritage sites. This difficulty makes precision in observations about the topic, impossible.

It is beyond doubt that the state of Goa is going to continue to be one of the oft-desired tourist destinations despite a slump in the Russian visitations owing to the Ruble crisis (Economic Times, 2015). A saturation point was expected to be reached long back in the Beach Tourism' (Ransley, 2012), but the State Tourism Dept. is still in the stage of brand development (Times of India, 2015). Considering the fact that the majority of domestic tourists visiting Goa come from the middle class, and the foreign tourists do possess a higher spending tendency, the state has to promote both Budget Tourism and Up-Market Tourism simultaneously. It has to attract both – the Back-packers and the Charter Tourists.

Goa's cultural heritage tourism needs to be promoted with the focus it deserves as an enriching connection between the visitor and the host community and the potential it carries of inclusive growth. Temples need to be looked at as immense cultural resources with a tremendous appeal not only for the pilgrims but also for all those who have interest in sacred spaces, spirituality, history, architecture and aesthetics. Owing to the centuries long saga of colonial creed related discrimination and repression, a majority of temples that had to be relocated are invariably associated with rich history that needs to be narrated to the visitor in an effective and captivating manner. For this purpose some of the major temples of the state ought to be developed as heritage hubs provided with visitor centers, mini theatres for screening the orientation films produced by local film companies in collaboration with the professional technicians, that would brief the visitors about the vicissitudes the local population had to suffer in the course of their history. Dramatic religious encounters of the 16th century and agonies of the forced migration of the natives could be captured in breathtaking cinematography. Goa's cultural hybridity and religious syncretism (Henn, 2014) does offer an immense potential for documentation on celluloid. Such an endeavor can provide job opportunities to the local actors trained in acting skills along with the amateurs for the purpose. Vocal and instrumental music, dance and folk theater that have been developed and conserved within the temple precincts can be effectively projected in the mini theater to engage the tourists with artistic inclinations. Religious observances like *Ratkalo*, *Gaulankalo*, *Perni Jagor*, etc., folk observances like *Dhalo* and *Fugdi*, robust festivals like *Shigmo* and *Ghode Modni*, and rustic *Gavda Jagor* need not remain only the seasonal attractions to the tourists. Devotional performances like *Kirtan* and *Bhajan* and Temple Music involving *Chaughudo* and *Panchavadya* need to be explored as tourist attractions. The Govt. should make it a point to make not the capital city but the temple sites, the hosts of the cultural events *Bhakti Mahotsava*, *Kirtan Mahotsava* showcasing devotional music and *Sangeet Natak Mahotsava*. All such ventures will entail a major gain – the revival of Goan cultural traditions and at the same time generate employment opportunities for the locals.

Ponda taluka is renowned for its artistic human resources that are awaiting systematic and meaningful tapings. Living History Museums could be created in the vicinity of temples where the role players with whom an engaging dialogue can be initiated can tell the visitors the compelling narrative of local history, making history an experiential phenomenon. Its relevance to present times is obvious since it makes discernible to the visitors, the evolution of the local society and also permits reflection on their lives at present. The media centers therein may be equipped with cafés with the lawn courtyards that would serve ethnic cuisine as well as modern meals. Handicrafts shops may be set up in the complex selling holy souvenirs. This will realize the Tourism Dept.'s scheme of '*Hunar se Rojgar*' designed for the engaging the skilled labor of the locality. Enclosures could be created for educational programs, workshops, exhibitions and academic conventions. The Plimoth Plantation, USA (Plimoth Plantation, 2015), the Sydney Living Museum, Australia (Sydney Living Museum, 2015) and Black Country Living Museum, UK (Black Country Living Museum, 2015) can be looked upon as sources for inspiration in this regard to produce a historical recreation of 16th Century Goan village.

Goa has won the prestigious Pacific Area Travel Writers Association (PATWA) Award for the 'Best Wedding and Honeymoon Destination' at the *Internationale Tourismus-Börse* (ITB) Berlin 2015. The world famous wedding planners have already engaged themselves in developing the state as a wedding destination for high-end wedding celebrations (Desai, 2015). Almost all major temples in Goa have multi-purpose halls, which are given on hire for private ceremonies, thereby generating sizable revenues for the temple. The possibility of developing temple sites as wedding destinations for mid-end celebrations at least should be probed in the right earnest. That will provide income avenues for the catering agencies that have mushroomed in the neighborhoods of the temples and are either run by the women entrepreneurs or they have a key role in their management. Similarly there are many Women's Self Help Groups and Women's Associations (*Mahila Mandals*) that can be roped in to make vital contributions in the said business (Govt. of Goa, 2015). The dream of economic empowerment of women will come true as a result. The state govt. has already launched the Women's Taxi Service for the women passengers and driven by women (Govt. of Goa, 2014). That facility should not be restricted to the capital city but should be extended to temple cities and the drivers also need to be trained as tourist guides. Of course training in self-defense and equipping the vehicles with GPS system are highly recommended to take care of their security. Local women can also be encouraged to develop their residences as Guest Houses and for Homestays in order to meet their financial needs.

However it has to be agreed that such plans to empower the local communities and the women specially, can be possible only if the state financial agencies, co-operative banks and NGOs provide credit facilities for micro-enterprises in the rural areas in the tourism sector.

Above all, the main temples of Goa, which are privately owned to a large extent and administered according to their private statutes (*Compromissos*) and are managed using their independent funds, have to cooperate in working out such a futuristic development scheme. A major concern is that all three temples studied for this academic exercise do not permit people outside the fold of their constituent members to interfere with the administration of these institutions (*Compromisso* of Mangesh

Temple, 1909; *Compromisso* of Shantadurga Temple, 1909; *Compromisso* of Mahalasa Temple, 1911). Two of the temples from the village Priol dedicated to deities Mangesh and Mahalasa respectively, have stiffened their approach towards tourists, the first having imposed a dress code and the second having banned the foreign tourists from temple entry in order to enforce discipline and protect the sanctity of those sacred institutions (NDTV, 2011). The onus is on the Govt. negotiate a truce between the temple managers and the tourists so that income avenues for the local communities are not made hazardous. The temple authorities need to be prodded to join hands with the Govt. agencies to promote cultural tourism as a feasible and sustainable endeavor.

Conclusions

There could be a debate about what should be the volume of tourists that Goa can sustain but the fact cannot be ignored that tourism can substantially generate political and financial support for management and conservation of the rich temple heritage of the state. Precaution needs to be taken so that unbridled tourism does not eat upon the vitals of ecology of the locality and commodification of performing arts does not cause diminution of the cultural fabric of the state. The environmental and cultural impacts ought to be measured regularly to monitor and manage any untoward consequences. Goa's think tank has to engage itself in envisaging a business model to make tourism an adorable venture for the state.

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