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Dismantling the Tourism Mirage in Maria Aurora Couto's *Goa: A Daughter's Story*

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The present paper, titled "Dismantling the Tourism Mirage in Maria Aurora Couto's *Goa: A Daughter's Story*", tries to unpick the darker landscapes of tourism, by exploring its effects. The memoir describes in detail, the destruction caused by tourism on the society of Goa, and the deteriorating living conditions. Sustainable tourism in literature means the critique and evaluation of tourism practises, in texts, in terms of their cultural, socioeconomic, environmental impact and the motive for practising sustainable tourism. It is based on principles of sustainability, like minimising damage to the environment, preserving local culture, and promoting equity. In Maria Aurora Couto's, *Goa: A Daughter's Story*, the environmental and cultural erosion resulting from unbridled tourism is depicted with a description of how it has affected the identity and socio-economic fabric of Goa. The paper discusses how sustainable tourism theory can be applied, to inform and highlight adverse effects of tourism, while suggesting sustainable practices that can be considered.

Keywords: Tourism, Sustainable tourism, Environmental damage, Pollution, Cultural erosion.

Tourism refers to the activity of traveling to and staying in places other than one's usual environment, for leisure, business or other purposes for a limited period. Professor Wahab (1977, as cited in Tribe, 2007) defines tourism as,

A human intentional activity that serves as a mean of communication and as a link of interaction between the peoples, inside a country or even beyond its geographical demarcations. It involves the temporary displacement of people from one region to another, country or even continent, with the objective of satisfying necessities and not the realization of remunerated activity. For the visited country, tourism is an industry whose products are consumed in loco, producing invisible exports. (P. 45)

Tourism consists of various activities like, sightseeing, recreational experiences, cultural exchanges, and professional engagements. People involve in tourism for varied reasons, such as experiencing new cultures, exploring new places and taking part in different events. Tourism services include both domestic travel within one's own country, and international travel to foreign destinations.

Initially, hunters and gatherers moved from one place to another in search of new land and wildlife resources. Their actions were synchronised with the season, implying that they knew how delicate earth is. Such travel corresponded to the need, unlike today's travel for leisure, which is a direct result of higher incomes and paid vacations, a concept that has been realised only in the recent years. Tourism can be traced back to biblical passes and conquests by crusaders, inquisitions, and merchants, whose only objective was to get their supplies. In the seventeenth century, young elites travelled for the purpose of education and enrichment of their cultures. In the later part of the nineteenth century, Europeans travelled to discover different terrains and people.

The shift from rural to industrial society paved way for the development of modern tourism. This situation corresponded to developments in the automobile industry and the building of roads and highways. At first, air travel was confined to Europe and United States, but in the 1960s technological advancement in aircraft opened up travel to all part of the world. The development of Commercial airlines enabled to travel quickly and cheaply. Now, most of the countries can host airlines and welcome tourists who want to go to pristine countries to spend their vacations.

Tourism has evolved into the world's largest industry in the modern times. It has become a vast enterprise, incorporating numerous sectors like, transportation, hospitality, food services, recreational agencies and other services. As noted by the World Tourism organisation (WTO), "Tourism is currently the world's largest industry" (McLaren, 2006, p. 13). The speed and convenience of financial transactions achieved by advances in global financial systems has greatly benefited travellers. At the same time, the rapid expansion of global media has been a contributing factor to tourism, and has enabled spreading of destinations and shaping travel on a large variety of platforms.

Tourism on the one hand offers travellers assorted pleasures, and on the other hand gives the host communities an opportunity to pursue their means of livelihoods. However, the increase in the number of travellers, and exploitation of unexplored places has caused the destruction in ecosystems and to the culture bearing communities. The environmental impact includes, loss of forest, elimination of biodiversity, pollution, and the strain of natural resources. On the contrary, the host communities are usually exposed to cultural degeneration, population density, inflation in cost of living, and change of source of livelihood from traditional sectors to the growing tourism-related sector. Furthermore, unrestricted tourism can lead to imbalance in the relation between guests and the hosts. Thus, there is an urgent need of transition from the current tourism practices, towards a more sustainable and responsible approach for a positive change.

In response to the urgent need for change in tourism practices, eco friendlier concepts such as eco-tourism and sustainable tourism have emerged. Both attempts to protect the environment from impacts of tourism that cause disruption, but sustainable tourism goes further. It attempts to minimise ecological impacts, supports local communities, and protects cultural heritage. The Mohonk Agreement noted, "Sustainable tourism with a natural area focus, which benefits the environment and communities visited, and fosters environmental and cultural understanding, appreciation, and awareness" (GSTC, n.d.). Its focus is on tourism that enhances host communities and visiting tourists, and does not harm the environment and the cultural heritage.

Sustainable tourism ensures that tourism is helping the local economy and the conservation effort, while also promoting meaningful cross-cultural interactions.

The concept of sustainable tourism is widely applied by scholars to examine effects of tourism on natural and cultural contexts, and propose ways of changing tourism practices. It has become a necessity to embrace Sustainable tourism, with the increase in the environmental degradation, dwindling cultural diversity, and negative economic and societal impacts of arising tourism. The revival of tourism after the COVID-19 disruptions proved the unsustainability of reverting to pre-pandemic practices, which often harmed ecosystems and communities. Therefore, this is the right time, sustainable tourism can provide a transformative path, advocating for responsible practices, that minimise environmental harm, like lowering carbon emissions, using only what nature can tolerate, or shielding biodiversity from harm. It also draws attention to the importance of historical heritage and sociocultural significance, and denounces the outcome from globalization of cultures. As more emphasis is placed on Sustainable tourism, more can be put into other goals of the society, with reference to United Nations Sustainable Development Goals.

Sustainable tourism theory helps to interpret how narratives influence and shape perceptions of tourism and its consequences. Literature usually presents characters and places as ideal destinations to attract tourism development, or as areas that should be protected from adverse effects. Through these representations, literature tends to illustrate the positive aspects of tourism on the society, and the environment, but at the same time identifying its challenges. By doing this, literature captures the readers' interest and informs them regarding the challenges associated with developing sustainable tourism industry. Thus, in literature, sustainable tourism theory acts both as a tool of critique and an inspiration for reimaging tourism in a more responsible and consensual form.

Sustainable Tourism theory was developed from the general concept of sustainable development that took root from the Brundtland Commission in 1987. The World Tourism Organization defines sustainable tourism as "Tourism that takes full account of its current

and future economic, social and environmental impacts, addressing the needs of visitors, the industry, the environment and the host communities" (The United Nations, n.d.). Arising from this idea both the scholars and the practitioners worked further and developed the framework of sustainable tourism, based on the integration of these ideas into the studies of tourism. Notable authors in this field of study include, Richard Butler, David Weaver, John Swarbrooke and Deborah McLaren. Deborah McLaren is a well-established theorist, specialising in the area of sustainable tourism, and has authored *Rethinking Tourism and Ecotravel*, published in 1998. She promotes ecologically and culturally sustainable tourism, that provides benefits to host communities. Her role in redefining the framework for sustainable tourism discourse, has particularly been centred on responsible tourism and how that impacts tourism.

Maria Aurora Couto was one of India's most distinguished writers, cultural historians and educators, whose work stood out in Goan literature and heritage. Born in Goa, she spent most of her life scrutinising the region's rich history, tradition and post-colonial change. Her seminal work*, Goa: A Daughter's Story*, a personal memoir, situated within the field of historical narrative, sheds deep light on the cultural and social history of Goa. Couto was also passionate to promote education, community empowerment and to maintain Goa's identity, when Goa was being rapidly globalised and transformed by tourism. Her bold and thoughtful pieces still shape any conversation about culture, sustainability, and heritage. Couto's work, *Goa: A Daughter's Story* is a rich narrative that blends, personal memoir with cultural history that makes profound observations on the transformation of Goa by the influence of colonialism, globalisation and tourism. Couto investigates tourism's dual role, as increasing the local economy and also as commodifying Goan culture, and traditional practises. She shows the process of erosion of Goa's original identity, as tourism promotes superficial representation of its heritage to attract visitors. The book delves on the impacts of unchecked tourism on the environment, the traditional livelihood and local community.

Goa, cradled in the western coast of India, is a vibrant tourist spot, renowned for its beaches, popular nightlife and the amalgamation

of Indian and Portuguese culture. Apart from these the land boasts of its historical landmarks like Basilica of Bom Jesus and Fort Aguada, scenic water falls like Dudhsagar and the lush spice plantations. From being lured by its native cuisine and bustling markets to its culinary and cultural enthusiast, the state attracts tourists for festivals like, Goa Carnival and Sunburn Festival which is celebrated with pomp and grandeur.

All these factors have contributed to the growth of tourism to an extent, that has caused the deterioration of state's culture and ecosystem. During peak seasons, local resources become strained. Unregulated construction and waste disposal negatively impact on Goa's fragile ecosystems. Coastal erosion, pollution of water, and loss of biodiversity has become major problems. Moreover, the population of tourists and outsiders settling in Goa is almost about to exceed the population of natives. In her memoir *Goa: A Daughter's Story*, Couto, poignantly highlights the growing concern, over the changing demographic landscape, with the inflow of outsiders. She observes, "But Goa's open doors since 1961 have meant that the visitor- tourist, pilgrim, homecomer—creates a floating population every year of another million and there are fears that visitors will soon exceed the local population" (p. 2).

Goa's picturesque landscape, laid back lifestyle, rushing development induced by tourism, and variety of employment opportunities has attracted many to relocate permanently. Many visitors who get attracted by the charm, purchase property and settle in the state. This demographic shift has caused in driving up the price of property, and housing less affordable for locals. Moreover, the onslaught of outsiders has pushed stiff competition on the job market, making it difficult for the local youth to get employed. This has resulted in the concept called 'Goans first', as mentioned in memoir by Couto (2004):

> The cry for employment, specially of the 30,000 educated professionals emerging from institutions every year has promoted an agitation—Goans First—to assert their identity and rights over resources, land, culture, jobs, industry, ecology and the future. The

young Goan feels threatened by a collusion of invasive interests and powers that are weighted heavily against local youth. (p. 406)

Goans often express concern that individuals from other states dominate the job market, being employed in various sectors across Goa. They also highlight a growing trend of Delhification, where the cultural and social fabric of Goa is increasingly influenced by outsiders. This shift has led to fears of losing Goan traditions and identity, as well as resentment over locals being overlooked for job opportunities.

Social media platforms play a heavy role influencing people to travel. People are heavily influenced to pack their bags and travel through the advertisements in magazines, blogs, vlogs and many such social media platforms. In McLaren's words, "Tourism's corporate advertisers and marketers weave magical dreams, illusions of paradise in the same countries that other factions of the media and foreign aid and development authorities consider destitute" (McLaren, 2006, p. 28). Couto's description of modern Goa in her memoir, *Goa: A Daughter's Story*, is very vivid, with beaches crowded by tourists who spend their time basking in the sun, least bothered about the local people and their culture. They remain confined within the notion of Goa that they perceived in the advertisements. This perspective is captured in Couto's words as:

Natural beauty and wealth drew travellers and traders whose descriptions of Goa and its population also created stereotypes. Accretions over the centuries in accounts of Goa have added to misconceptions about our culture and misrepresentation of the very nature of Goan society and landscape. The tourist brochure of the past few decades created to tantalize clients has only added to our exasperation" (2004, p. 89)

Such advertisements offer highly enhancing representations in order to sell a destination, but in doing so, they allow tendencies towards consumerism, to eclipse the desire to get immersed in the genuine culture and geography of a place.

The loss of biodiversity is another significant threat resulting from tourism. The corporate companies aim at building resorts and luxury hotels in places that have rich biodiversity, prioritising money instead of preserving the environment. This development marginalises

delicate ecosystem and destroys them. McLaren states, "Ultimately, developers re-create the environment and culture on top of the real thing" (McLaren, 2006, p. 13). Goa, sandwiched between India's western coastline, is a biodiversity hotspot with lush forests, vibrant wetlands, and pristine beaches. It is home to diverse flora and fauna, including endemic species, in its rich ecosystems such as Western Ghats and unique mangrove habitats. The biodiversity of Goa supports local livelihood, culture and traditions, that constitute a delicate and fragile balance between nature and culture. This rich ecosystem is very vulnerable to mass tourism, coupled with other developmental activities. Construction, pollution and habitat destruction from uncontrolled tourism has caused the total drain of natural resources, and the wastage of fragile ecosystems. Couto's memoir, *Goa: A Daughter's Story* precisely captures the deterioration caused by tourism and other subsequent development as:

> Around Old Goa, the past has made way for contemporary urban sprawl where modern apartments jostle with cheap accommodation for low budget tourists to enjoy a view of the river without the luxury of a beach. Ancient ramparts protect hill slopes where condominiums rise in defiance of master plans designed to protect heritage and environment. These changes are more clearly visible along the land route: a narrow snaking stretch of road bordered by ramparts of the Old City. (2004, p. 11)

Pollution caused by beach shacks and restaurants continue to be another pressing issue in Goa. These establishments rarely meet environmental regulations, causing beach erosion, water and plastic pollution. Often, waste is improperly disposed and discharged directly into the water, which further degrades marine ecosystems and coastal water quality. Couto's memoir sheds light on this issue stating, "The Nerul creek nearby is a lyrical counterpoint to the aggressive image in stone rising above, and the endless stream of shacks, food and clothes stalls, antique and modern, cheap hotels and shabby motels that litter this popular northern coastal belt" (2004, p. 17). This not only pollutes beaches and takes away the natural beauty, but also puts local ecosystems and marine life at risk. As tourism plays an important role in Goa's economy, adopting a balanced approach involving

sustainable tourism practises would be imperative to protect coastal environment.

The growth of other sectors like hospitality, real estate, mining and retail is driven by tourism which has created many jobs. As McLaren (2006) points out, "The new infrastructure makes the region more desirable for other industries besides tourism" (p. 72). When a place is exposed to tourism, it will be gradually modernised. Couto, who has seen the region prior to its development and lived through its changes, is deeply saddened and worried about Goa. She is sad about the hills being destroyed, rivers being polluted, and the deforestation on daily basis. Her sorrow is evident in the following passage:

> The rot began with the degradation of Goa's priceless and unique asset: land, the physical and spiritual landscape that has been part created and part nurtured, a delicate balance of hill, river, soil, forest, irrigation and agriculture…Permissions given indiscriminately to set up polluting industries and ugly structures, a flow of carpetbaggers from outside Goa and fast track development have led to wells that have run dry, forests mowed down, sand dunes bulldozed, toxic fumes in the air, and effluents in streams and rivers. (2004, p. 402)

Unless this pace of development is stopped right now the future of Goa will be worse than what anyone can even think of. Further deterioration to the environment as well the people of this region will occur as a result of the uncontrolled use of natural resources. Moreover, the region will become ever more prone to climate change, and other ecological shocks because of increased pressure placed on infrastructure and ecosystems.

Tourism destinations celebrated for their nightlife, are prominent in the use of alcohol and drugs. The party centric environment in places like Goa leads to the surge of visitors that tide into alcohol and drug consumption. According to McLaren (2006), "Parts of Asia and South America are now popular with a particularly lethal visitor, the drug tourist" (p. 85). With higher rates of addiction, health problems, and a drain on public services, can harm local communities. Illegal markets are formed, due to the need for the substance, which further adds to the social impact of tourism. Couto

(2004), sheds her view on this issue as, "Goans have little control over these developments. Drug traffic and paedophilia have arrived, corrupted, and are being fought" (p. 24). Local youth are becoming victims of drug use, brought by the tourists. The youth, who are addicted to drugs, discontinue their education, abandon job opportunities and turn to criminal activities. This issue has led to a severe strain in the local health service, making recovery and rehabilitation difficult. According to the report in *The Goan*, "'Our own children are getting addicted to drugs and that too hard drugs. This is something very serious,' a doctor said pointing out the worry about free availability of this substance" (*Goans Falling Prey to Drugs and Alcohol: Data*, n.d.). Although Goan authorities have had a difficult time managing the residue of this drug culture, they did not succeed. The drug mafia is too strong to tackle and the bribes they can pay is too tantalising. Drugs, therefore are still rampant in Goa's clubs and beaches despite the many attempts by the few honest police officers to crack down on them.

Tourism leads to the aforementioned factors which greatly influence the environment and local community. If this continues, Goa's cultural integrity and ecological balance will continue to degrade further. In conclusion, while tourism can stimulate local economies, the negative impacts ranging from cultural commodification and biodiversity loss due to infrastructure, to social issues like cultural homogenization and imbalance between locals and tourists, demand attention for sustainable development. The effects of these needs must be balanced with a model of sustainable tourism that is based on responsible travel and community-based policies.

Since tourism is an integral part of Goa's economy, simply doing away with it is not a possibility. Rather, its negative effects can be reduced through sustainable tourism practices. Social media, which is marketing Goa as a party destination, and is helping to popularise lesser-known locations, must change gears and bring into vogue Goa as a treasure of culture and ecology for sustainable living. Media platforms collaborating with writers, historians and artists can be helpful for a better representation of Goa. Media should focus more on the cultures and traditions of the region instead of highlighting beaches

and night life. The writings of Maria Aurora Couto itself acts a strong narrative that portrays the cultural uniqueness of Goa.

In order to preserve biodiversity, a policy should be enacted that restricts large-scale construction in ecologically sensitive areas such as beaches, mangroves and forests. Homestays and guesthouses that are based on using existing buildings will promote locally owned tourism instead of the large resorts and beach shacks, thus helping both sustainable tourism and conserving the natural and cultural heritage of the region. Similarly, there are heritage trails and village tourism that focus on immersing visitors in authentic Goan lifestyles that should take priority over water sports and casinos. To further empower local community, cooperatives can be strengthened to promote Goan handicrafts, music and traditional occupations like fishing and farming. Tax incentives and subsidising small, locally owned tourism businesses will encourage participation of locals in the tourism industry. Moreover, the state must start supporting farm-to-table restaurants and the local farmers who supply the ingredients, which in turn will strengthen Goa's agriculture sector. Modules for sustainable tourism management and planning should be started, such that the Goan youth is equipped with the skill to plan and conserve the environment along with economic development. Such initiatives not only minimize the loss of biodiversity but also generate jobs for local people, and discourage the abandonment of traditional occupations in favour of tourism-based jobs.

Sustainable urban and coastal planning should be enforced to prevent environmental degradation and preserve Goa's unique landscape. Controlling high-rise construction and restricting overcrowding in tourist centres like Calangute and Baga are necessary to preserve ecological balance. Zoning laws should be enforced to impede the conversion of agricultural land into hotels and resorts for tourism development, ensuring food security and limiting over commercialisation. Investing in public transport and cycling infrastructure can help mitigate traffic and promoting eco-friendly mobility. Additionally, strict waste management policies should be implemented for both tourists and businesses to minimize environmental impact. Hotels and resorts should adopt sustainable practices such as solar energy utilisation and rain water harvesting.

Land ownership laws must be tightened, and the land ceiling act must be strictly implemented to tackle soaring land prices and the unaffordability of housing for locals. Residency proof and the imposition of higher property taxes on outsiders who buy Goan land, along with a regulated land purchase registry, will help to monitor and control the acquisition of land by outsiders. Government-backed housing schemes and subsidized loans for the Goan population would allow them to buy, and not sell, their properties, thus ensuring local ownership. Policies regulating tourism and imposing stricter nightlife norms and responsible tourist campaigns can also help in preventing the image of Goa from deteriorating into drug culture.

A more robust local governance in tourism planning aims to make sure that economic benefits are not obtained through social and cultural degradation. Furthermore, investing in community-driven initiatives, such as cooperative housing projects and land trusts, will provide long-term solutions to the housing crisis. Maria Aurora Couto also emphasizes the need for educational reforms that integrate Goan history and identity into curricula, fostering cultural pride and discouraging escapism through drug use. A holistic approach that combines policy reforms, community engagement, and sustainable tourism management can help protect Goa's social fabric while ensuring economic stability.

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