

## How to be garbage-free

In the spirit of Swachh Bharat Abhiyan, the Goan government promised to make the State garbage-free by 2020. With a population of 18.2 lakhs and an economy geared for tourists, is Goa prepared to reach this milestone? Quite possibly not. In Candolim beach, for example, plastic and glass bottles are ubiquitous. This shows that tourists and beachgoers lack basic civic sense. The apparent dichotomy between their desire to enjoy a beach and their garbage-related attitude can be explained in terms of people equating the beach to revelry and not to nature's beauty. Nevertheless, it is uncertain whether concern for nature would prevent littering. Perversely, tourists coming to imbibe the much-marketed carefree spirit of Goa have no qualms in pretending that waste disposal has nothing to do with collective enjoyment of this public good. Their ability to add to the litter and enjoy a dirty beach is something unique to this part of the world. Do foreigners, who may be more civic-minded in their home countries, consider this part of the much-vaunted Indian experience?

Litter on the beach also shows that there is no responsible waste management system. One reason why people abandon their garbage with such impunity may be the paucity of waste receptacles along the beach. There is also abdication of responsibility by the companies, distributors, restaurants and shopkeepers who manufacture, market and sell these products. Garbage on the beach also shows a lack of attention by authorities towards this issue though it concerns health, hygiene and protecting natural spaces — all of which are key to attracting tourists. There are no police or other such representatives on beaches who are empowered to enforce the law and hand out fines. Just as justice needs to be seen to be done, respect for the law arises from its implementation and the visible presence of an agency dedicated to deterrence and application of the law.

Behaviour change communication (BCC) could be the key to changing attitudes and behaviour patterns. India has seen success with this method regarding nutrition for expectant mothers. However, BCC on tourist-focussed waste management is non-existent in Goa. There is no mention of fines or the responsibilities of tourists. A critical element of BCC is having requisite infrastructure. In this case it would mean installation of waste receptacles, proper collection and management, and proper policing.

The situation at Candolim beach is a microcosm of the challenges that face Goa, if not the country. While technology such as clean composting can help, it is an insufficient response to an attitudinal issue. Lasting change may only come when people realise that their enjoyment of the beach is inextricably linked to keeping that beautiful environment garbage-free.

*The writer is the author of '1400 Bananas, 76 Towns & 1 Million People'*

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