

Impressum

Klaus Bung: Goa Constrictor

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EDITORIAL INTRODUCTION

The author comes across a holiday brochure trying to attract Westerners to India (Goa in particular) and is appalled by the primitive and un-Indian mentality and expectations to which it is trying to appeal. He responds by writing a story which quotes strikingly silly phrases from the brochure.

**Klaus Bung:
Goa Constrictor****On reading a travel brochure for India**

If there is anything sure to turn me off from wanting to travel, it is travel brochures. They depict the hotels in which I do not want to stay. They attract and assemble the people to whom I do not want to talk and in whose company I do not want to be seen by "the natives", for whose sake I would want to travel, whom I would want to meet and associate with. I do not want to share my experiences with my compatriots (whose function is to reinforce my cultural prejudices) and I do not want to have experiences together with them. Let me be seen with such "friends" and the "natives" will always remain natives, and I will never be their friend.

Such an off-putting place is the Hotel La Dolce Vita, "located in the heart of the village of Calangute" (Goa, India) and causing the thrombosis and angina pectoris of that village. Natives do not enter that hotel except as servants. That also applies to the Manager, Afonso Pereira, who to me stands in the relation of servant, not of equal or of friend. "As your apartment is cool and spacious, there's room to invite friends before dinner for a drink or two." These friends will not be "natives" but

uncomprehending tourists together with whom I will gape at the spectacle that "local country folk" will provide to me by their ordinary exotic existence. I will be marked as an outsider, even if I go patronisingly to the "local market" ("local market" sounds so much more exotic than simply "market!"), where "bartering for colourful local souvenirs is great fun" (yes, let's go slumming and play-acting; in England, bartering is ill-mannered). For the natives, both buyers and sellers, it is a matter of survival.

Outside the hotel gates, left and right of the driveway, two beggars have their pitch. On my day of departure I found that I had bought so many souvenirs that I would have had to pay for excess baggage if I had not left my worn-out jeans and a few other items behind. They were worth less than that excess charge. I decided to give them to one of the beggars with whom I had learnt to exchange a daily greeting. He was reluctant to accept them. I could not understand why. A passer-by helped by translating his concerns into English. The beggar was afraid of being accused of theft by the police, who would never believe that he could have obtained my worn-out jeans, far too good by his standards, by honest means. As he requested, I wrote him a note in English confirming that I had given him my jeans as a present and without duress. Now he had "Certified Jeans".

A few streets from the hotel is the wooden, neo-gothic structure of St Thomas's church, daily filled with dhoti-clad men and sari-clad women, offering their devotions to the saints who replaced their deities when the Portuguese colonised this part of India and converted it from a profound mystic religion to the naïvely arrogant hotchpotch of Judaic, Greek and Roman theological, philosophical and legal notions which is called Christianity, of which we are all so proud, and which has brought so much fighting, destruction and divinely ordained misery into this world. I am still looking for the Hindu mandir (1) - there must be one somewhere, for the few wise people who did not convert, who did not become rice-Christians, who could not be bribed by rice, jobs and status.



"Afterwards you might want to stroll into the village for some entertainment or wander down to the beach to watch the sun set over the Arabian Sea. ... The nearest beach is one kilometre away." I have not made it to the beach yet since this afternoon I discovered, in the hotel bookshop, a tattered paperback published 20 years ago (1974), which has kept me in its thrall: "Hippie Dharma", by Captain F D Colaabavala, Published by Hind Pocket Books in Delhi. It describes the shocking life the Hippies brought to the beaches of Goa, seeking to shed the hang-ups of their social and religious background. It starts its section of photographs with the picture of a 20-year-old American girl in full-frontal nudity, stunningly beautiful in her sexual openness and innocence: "Look!", says the Captain, "And look again! A lissom lass dancing a voluptuous nautch (2) around a man who stands bewildered and helpless!" I prefer to stay in my hotel room reading rather than go to the beach from which these scenes have surely by now disappeared. I do not want to watch the sunset among the Ohs and Ahs of my compatriots.

Foreign places do not exist to be "consumed", even by the eyes, the brain or the heart. You can experience them only if you give up your own identity and prejudices, not if you reinforce them by the hotels you live in, and the friends with whom you come to digest, interpret and classify what you see.

I go to the beach after all. I pass a sari-clad woman, facing the blood-red sky, the setting sun, absorbed, saying her evening prayers with folded hands. I hear Sanskrit snatches of her evening prayer: "May we meditate on the supreme light. From it the whole universe has issued. It exists in the hearts of all and unto it will all go back. It is the intelligence in all beings. It is the guide of all intelligence. In it do we take refuge."

FOOTNOTES:

1. mandir: temple

2. nautch: dance

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