

## **GAUL IS IN THE EYE OF A STORM WILL IT SURVIVE?**

*By E. O. Mendes*

Gaul, a quaint coastal hamlet nestled within the picturesque state of Doya and is home to approximately 3,500 residents. This serene village, composed of nearly 800 dwellings, is on the cusp of a significant transformation.

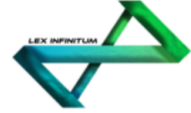
The village is connected to the main highway by a single, asphalted road, while the remaining roads are unpaved tracks. As these secondary roads fall outside the purview of major development initiatives, the Village Panchayat bears the responsibility for their construction and upkeep. However, the Panchayat is financially constrained, lacking the necessary resources to fulfil this obligation.

Indeed, the village panchayat's survival hinges on state government grants. However, as the state grapples with economic downturn, it has been compelled to curtail funding to local self-governing bodies, (panchayats). To mitigate expenses, the Village Panchayat has resorted to staff reductions. Consequently, the government has urged local governing bodies to become self-sufficient and augment their revenue streams by imposing higher local taxes on property, and water, and electricity consumption.

Gaul has no commercial establishments and its Village Panchayat has no source of revenue other than local taxes on houses and essential services. Gaul lacks educational institutions, hospitals, and commercial establishments. Many houses stand vacant as residents have emigrated to more prosperous cities or foreign countries in pursuit of better livelihoods and quality of life.

Traditionally, Gaul's inhabitants were small-scale fishermen who relied on modest, traditional canoes to harvest seafood from the sea and sell their daily catch. Lacking facilities for storage or freezing, they were compelled to sell their produce promptly. Consequently, the number of fishermen engaged in traditional fishing has dwindled to fewer than fifty.





Gaul's rugged coastline, devoid of sandy beaches, attracts only recreational anglers seeking solitude and personal sustenance. Gaul is in the eye of a storm will it survive?

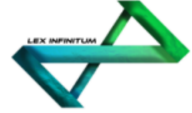
Last year, Mr. Sashi Kamat, the village head or Sarpanch, engaged in a dialogue with the state's Chief Minister to solicit support for the village's development. The Chief Minister proposed the establishment of a Marina Project in Gaul. The Village Panchayat enthusiastically endorsed the proposal, passing a unanimous resolution in both the Gram Sabha, the village's general assembly, and the Panchayat itself.

The Sarpanch anticipated that the Marina Project would generate substantial revenue for the Panchayat and potentially inceltivize Marina users to sponsor improved village roads. He envisioned a significant influx of employment opportunities, which would lure back former residents and transform Gaul into a flourishing community. M/s Ocean Bliss Ltd, a multinational corporation, emerged as the successful bidder for the Marina Project in Gaul.

Project directors visited the village and convened a special Panchayat meeting to elucidate the project's details. They outlined the anticipated benefits for the village, including the development of four major internal roads, the establishment of a small hospital and a fuel station, the provision of public transportation to four nearby metropolitan cities, and support for the establishment of a primary school. The villagers were elated at the prospect of their village's impending prosperity. A public hearing was conducted six months ago as a prerequisite for the project's environmental clearance. However, two non-governmental organisations (NGOs) from Prime Metro City raised concerns that the Marina Project would have detrimental ecological consequences. Additionally, another NGO representing two nearby villages objected to the project, arguing that it would disrupt the traditional livelihoods and cultural heritage of the local fishing community.

These objections received widespread publicity in the print and digital media and over on social media platforms and deeply polarised the villagers between those actually residing in the village and those who had migrated outside the village. All





the objections are spearheaded by a well known Social Activist Prem Anand. He is known to have filed several public interest petitions and has been successful in a few of his cases. M/s Ocean Bliss Ltd. has issued a threat to withdraw from the project. Given the extensive negative publicity, the company doubts whether any other entity would be willing to take on the project.

The Chief Minister feels humiliated and feels that he has lost face. He had hoped that the project would elevate the state's global profile, significantly boosting the local hotel and tourism industry. The Chief Minister is concerned that if the project fails, the neighbouring state may capitalize on the opportunity.

The Chief Minister has directed Sarpanch Sashi Kamat and Prem Anand to resolve their dispute amicably. Despite two previous attempts at negotiation, the parties have failed to reach a settlement. Sarpanch Kamat learned about the upcoming "Lex Infinitum" mediation competition in January 2025 and has requested the organization to appoint its most qualified mediator.

Lex Infinitum has selected Mr. Bill Will for this role. In response to Mr. Will's notification, Prem Anand will also attend along with his legal counsel.

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