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Joaquim Rodrigues dos Santos (ed.)

HERITAGE AT THE CROSSROADS

Preservation of Goa's Architectural Treasures



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Joaquim Rodrigues dos Santos (ed.)

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**Preservation of
Goa's Architectural Treasures**



Title **Heritage at the Crossroads:**
Preservation of Goa's Architectural Treasures

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In honour of Percival Noronha,
a great protector of the Goan heritage.

FOREWORD

Goa is a special place with a unique culture that, among other things, produced a very peculiar heritage. Situated on a cross-road of cultures enhanced by commercial, cultural, religious and human exchanges, this small territory became the holder of a transcultural heritage clearly distinguished from the rest of the world. One part of this amazing inheritance is architectural heritage, some of it classified as World Heritage by UNESCO, and consisting of not just the great monuments, but even small structures and integrated art pieces with huge historic, artistic and memorative value, which can easily be found across the territory of Goa. Even a little serious attention, when paid to one's surroundings at any moment, can result in pleasant surprises, not just for foreigners but also for locals themselves. Culture is perhaps the most resilient human product, lasting centuries after we cease to exist, and built heritage is the most visible of all. By recognising, preserving, and understanding this heritage, we can find our own roots, the history of the land, and also the efforts of our ancestors to leave something valuable for their descendants, in order to remember and make us proud of the past.

The intention of this book is to present various writings (essays, stories, studies, advice, and thoughts) by scholars, technicians, heritage lovers, and other people concerned about the fabulous built heritage of Goa. Through several texts from various authors, one can realise and appreciate the value of the Goan architectural heritage, as well as the challenges facing it. But, above all, this book is focused on the procedures to preserve this heritage for posterity. More than merely the documentation of facts, it also aims to raise awareness about the importance of safeguarding Goan heritage, and, by extension, that of the world.

Joaquim Rodrigues dos Santos

PREFACE

Rahul Mehrotra

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Architectural Heritage and Goa's Identity

The Identity of an individual, region, or nation emerges from what they identify with – the values and rules by which a society relates to each other creating its specific culture. In Goa this clear identity evolved through an incredible fusion of Portuguese and local Goan culture which made the region distinct from the larger landscape of India. Today, this sense of a clear identity is in fact blurring as the demographic make of the state and region is rapidly becoming more diverse, complex and integrated, rightly so, within the larger sense of an Indian identity.

What role does architecture then play in asserting or reinventing this sense of the Goa's identity? The built environment (and architecture in particular) is perhaps the single most important symbol of the aspirations of a society – what they collectively identify with. Be it a desire to connect to the icons of globalization through the curtain-glazed (hot house) office box or a caricatured Goa's Portuguese past! In these two images lies the great confusion of choices that Goa experiences today. So, while downtown Panjim aspires to look to the rest of the world with cloned corporate office towers and hotels (pitifully third-hand in expression, articulation, and finish), the *nouveau riche* from around the country supports and patronizes a caricatured version of their imagination of Goa!

An illusionary past where architecture is used to evoke images that otherwise lie in pickled archival records – that show Goa as it used to be. A phenomenon where change is discussed in terms of the loss of something (and thus the quest to regain it) rather than looking for new possibilities and inventing new identities. An unfortunate situation where the potent possibilities of constructing new identities slips into the facile exercise of “discovery” – and what better way to reconstruct the past than through creating caricatures of its (lost) images?

So, today the great challenge for Goa is how to invent a new identity, building on the old but not being subsumed by it. And in its architecture, represent a new identity that, while founded on the past, represents the aspirations of contemporary society in Goa? It is here that the notion of Cultural Significance is of importance. This notion where “culture” and “place” seminally influence the production of architecture especially in the face of globalization. In fact, in the discussion of architecture, popular notions such as context, genius loci, sense of place, vernacularism, regionalism, and heritage preservation have all intersected in some way into this all-encompassing notion of “cultural significance”. When viewed from this perspective, architecture is perceived to be culturally significant in so far as it embodies a definable difference – typically the product of a distinct society, history, and geographic condition. In short, representative of a particular culture.

How then do architects, scholars, and society more generally respond to these challenges? How do designers, in the face of globalization, create a landscape that, while rooted in deep traditions, responds to contemporary needs? What will become the basis or set of rules that will determine the emerging culture of Goa’s landscape?

So, today the great challenge for Goa is how to invent a new identity, building on the old but not being subsumed by it. And it is here where conservation in its most rigorous dimensions becomes critical in defining the clear difference between past and present, and not confusing the authenticity of history with caricatures of the past. It is in this context that this book is an important contribution to this debate of both the very identity of Goa as well the preservation of its architectural heritage. For it contains multiple perspectives and is perhaps the most nuanced discussion on the subject to date. Goa has a particularly challenging task in terms of the preservation of its architectural heritage largely on account of its fading patronage or most often the complete lack of it. In fact,

interestingly enough the most significant preservation projects that have occurred in Goa are through support from cultural organizations and foundation that have European origins. Clearly the governments in Goa over the last two decades or more have not have any interest in safeguarding what they see as a colonial import. While the relationship with Portuguese colonialization was in some ways more complex than that with British colonialization, it was a much longer period of colonization, resulting in a far more synthesized culture as well as equation with the local population. In spite of this special history, why are British monuments in India seemingly revered much more than Portuguese monument? Five hundred years of cultural presence, albeit a superimposition, is still intrinsically part of the heritage of Goa, and the challenge is how to construct the narratives that allow this history to be told and appreciated. For it is a history of architecture and planning traditions that go all the way from the territorial scale involving the management of the *Khazan* lands, to the artifact of the Goan House with all its magnificent details such as the *balcao*, trellis, roof forms, etc. Similarly, entire towns build on this tradition through their particular urban form of shaded streets and arcades that create an urban tradition unique to India.

In fact, if we just take Old Goa as a case in point, we realize how this asset, although recognized in all the international listings as World Heritage, is so completely neglected. A World Heritage Site assessment carried out in August 1998 had made a series of critical recommendations, to not only safeguard the existing assets but also surface a host of evidence currently buried under the lawns that separate the great churches of Old Goa. The recommendations also clearly articulated the adverse impacts that the compound walls as well as other paraphernalia, and most importantly the road that intersects the site, have had on the very perception of the site itself, completely altering its understanding as well as severely compromising its integrity! Naturally, these were in addition to many other more obvious recommendations such as the urgent need for a visitors' management plan, with a special focus on pilgrim seasons where the intensity of use of the site is dramatically altered. In fact, one of the critical issues which the site faces is that, while this rich concentration of architectural heritage existed, there is no attempt in managing the site to surface and make explicit the networks that existed between these monuments (the churches and convents) historically. At the time of the 1998 assessment, no Site Management

Rahul Mehrotra

Plan existed. Unfortunately, to date none of these recommendations have been discussed or seriously acted upon. Clearly an indicator of the lack of interest and perhaps even antagonism towards the site?

In this context, this book is a timely and a critical reminder to society in Goa, as well as India and the international community more broadly, about the inherent beauty and value of Goa's architectural heritage as well as the obvious dangers this rich building culture faces. Finally, Preservation or Conservation (as perhaps a broader rubric) can never contain change completely. But it is an important planning instrument in every society that helps it modulate the rate of change. In that sense, a robust preservation strategy is beneficial to the imagination of new architecture and settlements more broadly. For our heritage allows a society, and by extension settlements, to make that transition from the past to the future more easily and gently. This book will serve as an excellent guide through this process of preservation and change, for Goa's identity as well.



Goa is a special place with a unique culture that has produced a very peculiar heritage. Situated in a cross-road of cultures – enhanced by commercial, cultural, religious and people exchanges – this small territory became the holder of a transcultural heritage clearly distinguished from the rest of the World. Besides its architectural heritage, some classified as World Heritage by the UNESCO, across the Goan territory one can easily find even small structures and integrated art pieces with huge historic, artistic and memorative value.

Heritage at the Crossroads collates essays produced by scholars, technicians, heritage lovers and others working to protect heritage of Goa. These texts can help one to appreciate the value of the Goan architectural heritage, the inherent risks it faces, and what it would take to preserve this wealth for posterity.