

Revival of Goan Temples through the Flight of Deities: An Historical Exploration

Dr. Devanand Mandrekar

Research Officer

Senior Officer, Dept. of Goa Gazetteer & Historical Records, Government of Goa

Chief Director of North Goa Human Rights Federation & National Member of the World Human Rights Protection Commission

Goan temples hold a significant place in the historical and cultural landscape of the region, serving not only as religious centres but also as repositories of heritage and tradition. The historical significance of these temples is deeply rooted in the rich tapestry of Goa's past, reflecting a blend of indigenous customs, colonial influences, and spiritual practices. These temples have played a crucial role in shaping the history of Goa, acting as focal points for community gatherings, religious ceremonies, and cultural celebrations. One intriguing aspect that differentiates Goan temples is the concept of the flight of deities, a phenomenon that has fascinated and influenced the local communities for centuries. The flight of deities in Goan temples is not merely a myth but a belief system that has impacted these sacred spaces' architecture, rituals, and social fabric. This phenomenon has sparked various beliefs and rituals, creating a unique spiritual aura around the temples. Despite the challenges these temples face due to neglect and changing societal dynamics, there have been concerted efforts to revive and preserve them. Through collaborative initiatives involving local communities, religious authorities, and government bodies, steps have been taken to ensure the continuity and restoration of these architectural marvels. However, reviving Goan temples through the flight of deities is challenging, as conservation, cultural appropriation, and modernization pose significant challenges. This research paper aims to delve into the historical significance of Goan temples, explore the concept of the flight of deities, and examine the revival efforts undertaken to preserve these cultural landmarks, shedding light on the intricate interplay between tradition, belief, and contemporary conservation practices.

Historical Significance of Goan Temples

What is the historical importance of Goan temples?

Goan temples hold significant historical importance and span over a millennium, witnessing the ebb and flow of empires and shaping the region's cultural landscape. The temples in Goa have played a pivotal

role in the state's evolution into the vibrant entity it is today, reflecting a chequered and turbulent history that dates back more than a thousand years (Everything You Need to Know About the Famous Temples in Goa, n.d.) (Hindu Temples & Shrines of Goa, n.d.). One such temple, the *Saptakoteshwar* temple, stands out for its revered Lingam, equated with the sacred relic of Kedarnath in the Puranas, bestowing upon Goa the title of Konkan Kashi and serving as the ancestral deity of the Kadambas of Goa (Hindu Temples & Shrines of Goa, n.d.). These temples are architectural marvels and cultural melting pots, blending indigenous Goan architectural styles with influences from Buddhism, Jainism, and South Indian temple designs (Everything You Need to Know About the Famous Temples in Goa, n.d.). The temples in Goa vary significantly in architectural style from north to South, showcasing a fusion of Mughal, European, and traditional Hindu temple design elements (Everything You Need to Know About the Famous Temples in Goa, n.d.) (THE TEMPLES OF GOA, n.d.). Furthermore, these temples were once the focal points of villages and cities, hosting a myriad of social, cultural, and economic activities and continuing to attract devotees and tourists alike with their unique charm and historical significance despite the passage of time (Goan temple, n.d.) (Everything You Need to Know About the Famous Temples in Goa, n.d.).

How have these temples contributed to the cultural heritage of the region?

The temples in Goa, particularly those in and around Ponda, have played a crucial role in enriching the region's cultural heritage through their unique architectural styles and historical significance. These temples act as a testament to the resilience and preservation of cultural practices in the face of adversities, such as religious persecution, as seen in the case of the Having Brahmins and their deity moving to Goa to protect their traditions (Hindu Temples & Shrines of Goa, n.d.). Additionally, the temples reflect a fusion of architectural influences, showcasing a blend of Mughal, Portuguese, European, Jain, Dravidian, Indo-Portuguese styles, and Chola architectural features, which highlight the cultural exchange between different architectural traditions in the region (THE TEMPLES OF GOA, n.d.). The presence of intricate carvings, lathe-turned pillars, and relief scenes depicting animals on the temple pillars add to the aesthetic value and enrich the region's cultural heritage by preserving traditional craftsmanship (Temples of Goa - RTF, n.d.). Furthermore, the temples' historical evolution, such as the transformation from mud shrines to grand temples, underscores the changing religious landscape and architectural development over the centuries, contributing significantly to the cultural fabric of Goa (Temples of Goa - RTF, n.d.). Overall, these temples stand as symbols of historical

continuity, religious beliefs, and architectural diversity, enhancing the cultural heritage of the region for generations to come.

In what ways have the temples played a role in the history of Goa?

Temples in Goa have long been intertwined with the region's rich mythology and history, profoundly shaping the cultural landscape. For instance, the tale of Lord Parashuram's divine intervention in creating the land of Goa underscores temples' significant role in local mythology and lore (THE TEMPLES OF GOA, n.d.). The Skanda Purana further solidifies this connection by emphasizing Lord Parashuram's association with the land he shaped, highlighting the pivotal role of temples and religious figures in Goa's history (THE TEMPLES OF GOA, n.d.). Despite the challenges faced by Goa's temples over the centuries, such as the conversion of artisan classes to Christianity during Portuguese rule and destruction by Muslim and Portuguese monarchs, some temples have managed to endure. The Mahadev Temple, dating back to the 12th century, is a testament to this resilience, maintaining its original form amidst changing tides (Temples of Goa - RTF, n.d.).

Additionally, the Shanta Durga Temple, dedicated to Goddess Shanta Durga and symbolizing serenity and harmony, is significant in Goa's religious landscape. This temple, with prominent locations in *Kavalem* and Ponda, is a focal point for the region's spiritual devotion and cultural heritage (Everything You Need to Know About the Famous Temples in Goa, n.d.). The enduring presence and symbolic importance of these temples underscore their lasting impact on the history and identity of Goa.

Flight of Deities in Goan Temples

What is the concept of the flight of deities in Goan temples?

The flight of deities in Goan temples during the 16th century due to Portuguese destruction is a significant historical event that resonates through time. Nearly fifty temples in the New Conquests house principal deities originally from regions like Ilhas, Bardez, or Salcete, emphasizing the widespread impact of this event on temple locations and traditions (Hindu Temples & Shrines of Goa, n.d.). To safeguard these revered idols, devoted individuals from various backgrounds, including *Mahajans* and *Kharvis*, undertook daring missions under the cloak of darkness to shift the deities to safer havens across the river, preserving their cultural and religious heritage at significant personal risk (Hindu Temples &

Shrines of Goa, n.d.). The annual celebration of *Sangod* at emigre temples is a testament to these individuals' bravery and dedication, marking the successful rescue of idols during the tumultuous period of temple destruction by the Portuguese (Hindu Temples & Shrines of Goa, n.d.). The intricate process of moving the idols involved using logs of wood or canoes known as '*Sangod*,' underscoring the ingenuity and resourcefulness of the devotees in safeguarding their religious artefacts (Hindu Temples & Shrines of Goa, n.d.). Despite the challenges faced, the temples in Goa, classified into *Kuladevata* Temples, community-specific temples, and newer temples without historical backgrounds, continue to thrive and serve as focal points of cultural and spiritual significance, embodying the resilience and enduring legacy of the people and traditions of the region (Hindu Temples & Shrines of Goa, n.d.).

How has the phenomenon of the flight of deities affected the temples?

The flight of deities has left a lasting impact on the temples, influencing the physical structures and the societal and cultural fabric surrounding them. In times of crisis or invasion, anxious devotees swiftly removed or buried temple images to protect them, leading to the loss or damage of these sacred objects during the flight of deities (Flight of Deities and Rebirth of Temples: Episodes from Indian History, n.d.). Temples that could not be safeguarded saw memories persisting through centuries, with shrines being reconstructed and new images consecrated in more peaceful times (Flight of Deities and Rebirth of Temples: Episodes from Indian History, n.d.). The flight of deities affected not only the physical aspects of temples but also the societal response, with countless ordinary men sacrificing their lives to protect and preserve these sacred sites (Flight of Deities and Rebirth of Temples: Episodes from Indian History, n.d.). Moreover, the phenomenon led to the reconstruction of temples on a smaller scale. Baroque Christian church designs sometimes influence it, showcasing the resilience and adaptability of the Hindu community in the face of adversity (Flight of Deities and Rebirth of Temples: Episodes from Indian History, n.d.) (Hindu Temples & Shrines of Goa, n.d.). The flight of deities, coupled with external influences like Portuguese proselytization, resulted in the destruction of Hindu temples in certain regions, with idols being hidden in fields and wells to prevent desecration (Hindu Temples & Shrines of Goa, n.d.). Despite these challenges, the efforts made by forefathers to save Dharma and deities from harm underscore the deep-rooted significance of temples in the cultural and religious landscape of Goa (Flight of Deities and Rebirth of Temples: Episodes from Indian History, n.d.).

What beliefs surround the flight of deities and its impact on the local communities?

The flight of deities holds profound significance in local communities, uniquely shaping their beliefs and practices. One particular belief entails the willingness of locals to sacrifice themselves to protect their deities from external threats, such as iconoclastic hordes and invasions (Flight of Deities and Rebirth of Temples: Episodes from Indian History, n.d.). This act of sacrifice is not merely a historical event but a sacred occurrence deeply entrenched in the community's ethos, as evidenced by the numerous stories detailing such sacrifices that have been passed down through generations (Flight of Deities and Rebirth of Temples: Episodes from Indian History, n.d.). The impact of the flight of deities on these communities is palpable, especially in instances where the deities were relocated due to the destruction of Hindu temples by the Portuguese (Hindu Temples & Shrines of Goa, n.d.). For example, the main *Kuladevatas*, considered emigre deities, were shifted from the Old Conquests to the territories of the Sonda kingdom in Antruz Mahal during the Portuguese's destructive spree of Hindu temples, preserving the traditions of the Saraswat community through their worship (Hindu Temples & Shrines of Goa, n.d.). Notably, Dr Meenakshi Jain's documentation sheds light on how significant temples and deities were safeguarded from oppression faced by *Bharatvarsha* starting from 1000 A.D., underscoring the enduring impact of these beliefs and practices on the local communities (Flight of Deities and Rebirth of Temples: Episodes from Indian History, n.d.). Ultimately, the flight of deities not only symbolizes resilience and protection but also serves as a beacon of hope for these communities, saving them from the ravages of invaders and preserving their cultural heritage (Flight of Deities and Rebirth of Temples: Episodes from Indian History, n.d.).

Revival Efforts of Goan Temples

What initiatives have been taken to revive the Goan temples?

The restoration efforts to revive Goan temples have been multifaceted, aiming to preserve the cultural and architectural heritage of the region. Efforts have been made to illuminate the temples after restoration, creating a visually appealing and spiritually uplifting environment for devotees (Restoration complete, Saptakoteshwar temple to open doors to devotees on Feb 11, n.d.). Additionally, steps have been taken to revive and conserve Kaavi art, a traditional mural art form in Goa, ensuring that the intricate cultural elements of the temples are retained (Restoration complete, Saptakoteshwar temple to open doors to devotees on Feb 11, n.d.). Information panels strategically placed at various locations educate visitors and devotees about the conservation efforts undertaken, fostering appreciation and awareness for the restoration projects (Restoration complete, *Saptakoteshwar* temple to open doors to

devotees on Feb 11, n.d.). The Goa government has played a pivotal role in the restoration process by deciding to undertake the rebuilding of temples that were destroyed during the Portuguese rule, indicating a commitment to preserving the historical and religious significance of these sites (Goa's glorious Hindu history and brutal Inquisition: A long forgotten and rarely discussed saga, n.d.). Preservation efforts have also focused on maintaining traditional architectural elements, such as preserving the *Deepstambh* at the temple using traditional materials and applying lime coatings to the wall surfaces, ensuring that the original aesthetic and structural integrity of the temples are upheld (Restoration complete, *Saptakoteshwar* temple to open doors to devotees on Feb 11, n.d.). Despite challenges related to caste and political connotations that have limited some rebuilding projects, initiatives to revive Goan temples have made significant strides in connecting these sacred sites to their followers, disseminating local beliefs, rituals, and cultural essence seamlessly throughout the restoration process (Cookie policy, n.d.) (Goa signs MOU with Temple Connect to boost spiritual tourism in the state, n.d.).

How have local communities and authorities come together to preserve these temples?

Preservation efforts for Goan temples have seen a surge in collaboration and joint initiatives between local communities and government authorities. Notably, the Rural Development Agency has allocated a significant portion of its projects towards the temple and *Visarjan* area works, underlining a growing commitment to temple preservation (Cookie Policy, n.d.). However, there are challenges faced by modest local communities, such as limited influence over temple design due to reliance on government funding and contractors needing historical insight (Cookie Policy, n.d.). To initiate preservation efforts, a pilot project focusing on the conservation of five temples has been proposed, with plans for joint implementation of initiatives to ensure proper maintenance and upkeep of these sacred sites (Goa govt signs pact with Temple Connect for revival, development of temple eco-system, n.d.). A Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) has been established between local communities and authorities to collaborate on identifying, prioritizing, and preserving temples in need of restoration, aiming to enhance appreciation and understanding of these historical sites in Goa (Goa govt signs pact with Temple Connect for revival, development of temple eco-system, n.d.). Moreover, the MoU seeks to promote joint initiatives for documenting and researching the cultural and historical significance of Goan temples, with a focus on enhancing temple infrastructure, including accessibility, parking facilities,

visitor amenities, and signage improvements (Goa govt signs pact with Temple Connect for revival, development of temple eco-system, n.d.). Notably, efforts to preserve these temples have also led to the harmonious blending of elements from Muslim and Christian cultures in temple architecture, showcasing a unique fusion of diverse influences in the preservation endeavours (Cookie Policy, n.d.).

What challenges are faced in reviving the temples through the flight of deities?

Reviving temples through the flight of deities poses a unique set of challenges, particularly in the context of contemporary temple design in Goa. While modern temple designs are being eschewed in favour of historicist styles from various regions of India, the renovations are maintaining the intrinsic elements of a typical Goan temple design internally. However, significant departures are being made in terms of the shikhara or steeples and facades to mirror historical Indian temples located outside of Goa. As a result, one of the primary obstacles encountered in the process of temple revitalization is the divergence towards replicating historical Indian temple architectures outside of Goa rather than adhering to the traditional Goan temple structures that have their unique cultural significance (Cookie Policy, n.d.). This shift not only presents a challenge in preserving the authenticity and heritage of Goan temple architecture but also raises questions about the cultural identity and legacy these temples embody within the region.

The research paper delves into the historical exploration of Goan temples and their revival through the flight of deities, shedding light on the region's rich cultural and architectural heritage. The temples in Goa, particularly the *Saptakoteshwar* temple and the Shanta Durga Temple, play a pivotal role in shaping the area's cultural landscape, reflecting a history over a millennium. These temples exhibit a unique blend of architectural styles, incorporating influences from Mughal, European, Jain, Dravidian, and Indo-Portuguese designs, showcasing the cultural exchange between different traditions. Despite facing challenges such as destruction by foreign rulers and religious persecution, efforts to revive and preserve these temples have been multifaceted, involving collaboration between local communities and government authorities. The flight of deities during the 16th century due to Portuguese destruction is a significant historical event, emphasizing the resilience and continuity of cultural practices in the face of adversity. The temple restoration endeavours not only aim to maintain architectural integrity but also preserve traditional craftsmanship, contributing to enriching the region's cultural heritage. However, there are concerns regarding replicating historical Indian temple architectures outside of Goa, which may lead to a departure from the traditional Goan temple structures. Future research could focus on the

sustainable preservation of these temples, ensuring their historical significance and cultural value endure for generations to come. The discussion underscores the importance of recognizing the unique cultural significance of Goan temples and the need to balance preservation efforts with the evolving landscape of contemporary temple design.

References

1. *Everything You Need to Know About the Famous Temples in Goa!*. (n.d.) Retrieved April 5, 2024, from www.soultravelling.in/blog/famous-temples-of-go/
2. *Hindu Temples & Shrines of Goa*. (n.d.) Retrieved April 5, 2024, from theflightofgods.wordpress.com/tag/history-of-go-temples/
3. *THE TEMPLES OF GOA*. (n.d.) Retrieved April 5, 2024, from shanthaprabhu.in/2023/01/20/the-temples-of-go/
4. *Goan temple*. (n.d.) Retrieved April 5, 2024, from en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Goan_temple
5. *Temples of Goa - RTF | Rethinking The Future RTF*. (n.d.) Retrieved April 5, 2024, from www.re-thinkingthefuture.com
6. *Hindu Temples & Shrines of Goa*. (n.d.) Retrieved April 5, 2024, from theflightofgods.wordpress.com
7. *Hindu Temples & Shrines of Goa*. (n.d.) Retrieved April 5, 2024, from theflightofgods.wordpress.com
8. *Flight of Deities and Rebirth of Temples: Episodes from Indian History*. (n.d.) Retrieved April 5, 2024, from www.goodreads.com/en/book/show/44141651
9. *Restoration complete, Saptakoteshwar temple to open doors to devotees on Feb 11*. (n.d.) Retrieved April 5, 2024, from timesofindia.indiatimes.com
10. *Goa's glorious Hindu history and brutal Inquisition: A long forgotten and rarely discussed saga*. (n.d.) Retrieved April 5, 2024, from www.firstpost.com
11. *Cookie policy*. (n.d.) Retrieved April 5, 2024, from scroll.in
12. *Goa signs MOU with Temple Connect to boost spiritual tourism in the state*. (n.d.) Retrieved April 5, 2024, from travel.economictimes.indiatimes.com



13. *Goa govt signs pact with Temple Connect for revival, development of temple eco-system.*
(n.d.) Retrieved April 5, 2024, from theprint.in