



This article is about the temple of one of the most widespread and important deities of Goan village society, which is also however almost invisible as well as unknown to many Goans. The deity is Maharingan, and the reason for the invisibilisation is because Maharingan is a Mahar deity, and Mahars are a community that would be openly called 'untouchable' in the past. Today, although such terminology and behaviour are banned by law, they are still treated as outsiders in not just many Goan villages but also in urban Goa. And their temple is a witness of this unspoken but persisting discrimination.

Maharingan shrines appear to be present in all village temples of Goa. In fact, there is a belief that that you cannot have a Hindu temple in Goa without a Maharingan shrine nearby, and the only reason why you may not find one is because they could now be called Rashtroli or Mulpurush shrines, or because the main temple itself was once a Maharingan shrine.

Such is the importance of the Maharingan deity that it receives the first honours in any Brahmanical temple ritual, and no ritual can proceed without this first step. Despite this importance, however, the shrine itself is practically invisible. Although the Maharingan shrines are located in the vicinity of the main Brahmanical shrines, most of them are not even recognised or noticed by the non-Mahar temple visitor because they are usually very small – although some are little buildings with a porch, sanctum and tiled roof above, many are just a tiny 'gomti' (a dome-like shelter on the ground), and some are just a small idol without a shelter. Along with this small size, they are simple in design – Omkar Govekar calls them 'temples without kalash', i.e. without the metallic pot-shaped finial that most Goan shrines – and located to the side and at a distance from the Brahmanical temples.

If this sounds like untouchability to you, that's because it is. The treatment of the Maharingan shrine is one with the design of the talem (temple tanks) in many of these Brahmanical temples, where there are two tanks, one tiny one for the Mahar community adjoining a large one for the rest of the village community. Most of these tanks are regularly repaired and renovated, as indeed the main temples are, with lavish amounts of money poured into expansion, new forms, and richer materials, and with the involvement of all local political

representatives, but the segregated design remains the same. It is also a reflection of how the Brahmanised temples are the chief institutions of caste in Goan and South Asian society.



The Case of the Missing Temple

This column has earlier pointed out some of the caste atrocities taking place in the villages of Pernem and Sattari. More than a year on, nothing has changed, despite many complaints by the victims. The Ibrampur village, chosen to be developed as a Model Village under the central government's Sansad Adarsh Gram Yojana scheme, is still segregated on the basis of caste, with the vaddo where only Dalits live known to the authorities as 'Mahar Wado' or 'Harijan Wado' despite the long-standing application from the residents to change the name to Shahu Nagar. Although the residents have lived here for generations, the land - except for the houses - is still not in their names. The Mahars still do not enter the village temples except for the Maharingan shrine; while other villagers do not enter the latter.

When the Model Village scheme was announced, each vaddo of the village had been asked to come up with their development requirements, but when the scheme was launched, on 26 January 2015, the residents found that many of their demands had been deleted. But even those that remained have not been fulfilled. No development has been done in this vaddo, while the rest of the village has new roads, gutters, taps, retention walls, and toilets. When the Mahars complained, they were told that they were allowed to stay in the village only because of their traditional duties of beating drums in the village temple, which they have now stopped. So, if they wanted development, they would have to do their traditional - i.e. caste - duties again.

If this isn't a caste atrocity, what is? But complaints to political representatives and media reports (a few) notwithstanding, nothing has changed. And the village's Deulwado (temple vaddo) reflects this atrocious neglect. The smallest of the four temples in the Deulwado, the Maharingan shrine is absent on the signboard which lists only three temples. While the other three temples gleam with new paint and ambitious renovation, it remains unrenovated and apart. Even the banners showing the proposed renovated temples leave this one out. There is little doubt that it is seen as an outsider to the Deulwado.

Ibrampur is one of the few places in Goa where Mahars have stopped playing the drums; in

most other villages they still do, even though they have other jobs. The result is that there is an apparent 'harmony' in those villages, reflected sometimes in slightly renovated Manangan shrines, as at Casarvorem (Pernem), though even these are smaller and simpler than the other shrines. But for the most part, the shrine remains an invisibilised outsider - either pushed to the side as at Shigonem (Sattari), or far from the temples as at Poirá (Bicholim), or like a dilapidated shack as at Alorna (Pernem), or without any shelter as at Mulgao (Bicholim), or without a shelter and with the idol in broken pieces as at Veluz (Sattari) - its condition reflecting the rejection and atrocities faced by the community. Reports of 'Harijanwadós' like Ibrampur, without toilets or land in their own name or even worse, abound in Pernem, Bicholim and Sattari in north Goa. Despite all this, Ibrampur is now one of India's model villages. All in all, it is a good revelation of the casteist model the nation follows.

*(With thanks to Omkar Govekar, Avinash Jadhav and Paresh Parwar)*

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