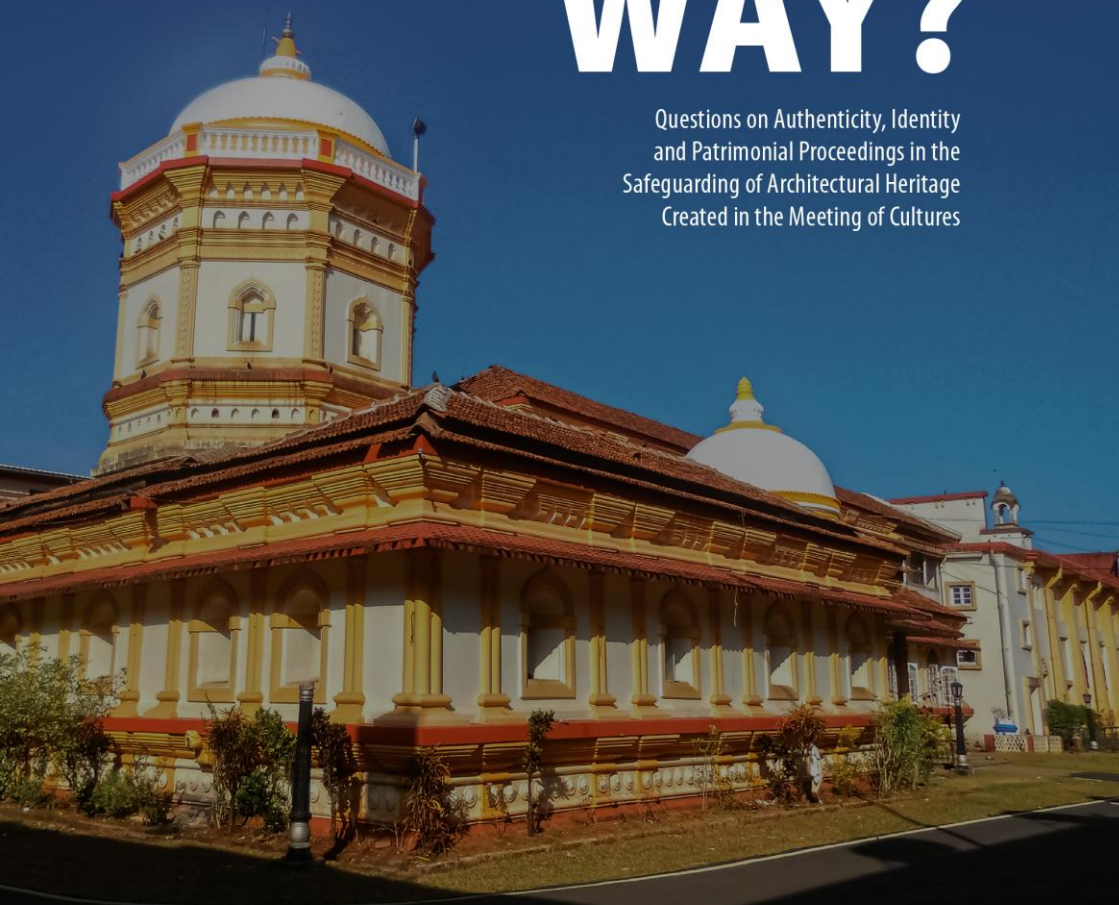


edited by Joaquim Rodrigues dos Santos

PRESERVING TRANSCULTURAL HERITAGE:

YOUR WAY OR MY WAY?

Questions on Authenticity, Identity
and Patrimonial Proceedings in the
Safeguarding of Architectural Heritage
Created in the Meeting of Cultures



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Proceedings in the Safeguarding of Architectural
Heritage Created in the Meeting of Cultures

EDITOR

Joaquim Rodrigues dos Santos
(ARTIS – Institute of Art History, School of Arts
and Humanities, University of Lisbon)

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Telef.: (+351) 21 981 79 60 | Fax: (+351) 21 981 79 55
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THE POLITICS OF RENOVATION

THE DISAPPEARING ARCHITECTURE OF GOA'S OLD BRAHMANICAL TEMPLES

Amita Kanekar

The Al-Zulaij Collective

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ABSTRACT

The unique architecture of Goa's old Brahmanical shrines is under threat today, and one reason seems to be a perception that it is not Hindu enough. Goa's centuries-long Islamicate and Iberian connections have left behind a heterogeneous culture in many aspects, including architecture. The many Brahmanical temples built from the seventeenth century onwards are examples of this, their hybrid forms belonging as much to the Islamicate world and the European Renaissance as to local building traditions. But, while these temples still stand today and attract increasing numbers of worshippers, their original architecture is disappearing, to be replaced by forms and elements from outside Goa. This paper examines the attempts to erase these unique forms, and the relation of this to the social, political, and legal context.

KEYWORDS

heritage, preservation, Goa, Hindu temples, Brahmanical temples

Goa's history as an ancient Indian Ocean port, its ties to the Islamicate Deccan, and its half-millennium-long Portuguese connection have created a heterogeneous culture which is strikingly visible in its architecture. Examples of this include the many Brahmanical temples built from the seventeenth century onwards, which use a unique vocabulary inspired by the Bijapur Sultanate, the European Renaissance, the vernacular building of the Arabian Sea coast, and others. These temples are today, and have probably always been, centres of social discrimination and exclusion on the basis of caste, but their architecture is a different story, harking as it does to the multiple worlds that have gone to make up Goa's cosmopolitan culture. Though multi-referenced architecture does not necessarily proclaim a free society, it does mean a more diverse and extrovert one, open to influences and also opportunities. It is this heritage of Goa that was embodied in its temple architecture. But, while many of these institutions still stand today and are attracting increasing worship, their unique architecture is under threat, increasingly being replaced by forms from outside Goa. A great many temples have already disappeared, either completely torn down and rebuilt in a brand new avatar, or slowly but surely renovated out of all recognition. It will not be long before the Goan temple exists only in photographs.

The paper begins with a discussion of the origins of these buildings and a survey of their architecture, making a case for looking at the Goan temple as a distinct style or vocabulary of temple architecture. It then documents the current architectural developments, and finally discusses the possible reasons, including the legal, social, and political contexts, for the changes. The documentation and analysis is based on an examination of archival material, including old photographs and drawings, an examination also of the websites and publications of these institutions, and a first-hand survey of the sites today.

This paper uses the term Brahmanical to describe temples which have been described by others as Hindu (Pereira 1995; Kowal 2001; Landrus 2014; etc). This is because the Hinduism of today is very different in content and following from that in the past. Indeed, there are many scholars who hold that it was more or less invented in the nineteenth century (Frykenberg 1989; Thapar 1989; etc). It would be more historically accurate therefore to refer to the shrines of the past in terms of the communities to whom they belonged and the practices they followed. The word Brahmanical here refers to the dominant castes who owned these temples and also their caste-centric functioning.

Origin myths and realities

Contrary to popular opinion that sees today's Hindu temples as public institutions, these shrines have always belonged to specific castes. Many of the old and large ones in Goa belong to the Saraswat community. These owners, called *mahazans* (Konkani for 'great persons'), consider themselves the descendants of the temple-founders, and take all decisions about the temple and its properties today. They are the only worshippers permitted to enter the temple sanctum; they also enjoy various other '*maan*' or ritual privileges. The non-*mahazans* of the village in which the temple is located participate in most temple rituals and festivities, but always in a subordinate position that reflects their standing in the caste hierarchy (Kanekar 2016).

All of these temples are located in the Novas Conquistas, i.e. the region which became a part of Goa only in the eighteenth century. Many appear to have been founded in the period

when the Marathas were in control of the Pernem, Bicholim, and Ponda regions. The Marathas were by then ruled by the Brahmin Peshwas, which may explain the support for new Brahmanical symbols. The Peshwas also employed many Saraswats at their courts, some of whom were apparently leading spirits behind these new temple foundations (Kowal, 2009). Over the eighteenth century, the Marathas and their allies were driven out of this region by the Estado da Índia, but this does not seem to have affected the development, prosperity, and proliferation of these shrines. This points not only to the changed approach of the Estado regarding non-Catholic shrines, but also to the prosperity of temple-patrons within Goa; Saraswats were an affluent and influential section of Estado society (Carreira 2014; Pereira 1978).

Many of these temples propagate an origin story of relocation of deities, from temples destroyed in the sixteenth-century Velhas Conquistas (Dhume 2015), the older region of Goa. The idols were saved, so the story goes, and secreted to neighbouring Bijapur where they were preserved in small shrines; the latter were replaced by large ones in the seventeenth-eighteenth centuries. Repeated ad nauseum, these stories have become 'common knowledge', and cited by even academics (Axelrod and Feurch 1996), but without any historical proof. One wonders, for example, how these idols managed to survive not only the destruction of their temples, but two whole centuries more, before they were installed in new temples. And how it is that these Brahmanical deities find their worship so interwoven with local Bahujan worship even today (Kanekar 2016). Questions also arise about the choice of sites. One of the biggest, Kavlem's Shantadurga, is said to have been built on land formerly occupied by a Mahar settlement. The possibility of other reasons for the new temples, like land takeovers, thus need to be looked into.

These stories of peaceful relocation are facing challenges today. In the village of Marcaim, Bahujan residents claim that the idol of the Navdurga temple was a local one belonging to the indigenous community, whose shrine and worship was usurped by the Saraswats. This take-over, according to them, was formalized by a new nineteenth-century law, the *Lei das Mazanias*, under which the Saraswats got themselves registered as *mahazan*, and thus got control over the temple (Kanekar 2016). Priol's Mangueshi temple, another prominent Saraswat-owned shrine, faces similar accusations (Kerkar 2014). Rui Gomes Pereira also refers to a takeover of local temples and deities in the Novas Conquistas by Brahmins from the Velhas Conquistas (1978, p. 18).

The foundation dates of these temples are also difficult to confirm. An example is that of the Saptakoteshvar, Naroa, widely believed to have been founded in 1668 thanks to an inscription on the edifice. But the date and day on the inscription do not match (Shirodkar 1991); he believes, going by its palaeography, that the inscription was added later, perhaps in the nineteenth century. Also, while Shirodkar continually uses the term 'reconstruction' in his discussion (harking to the demolition of a Saptakoteshvar temple in Divar), the inscription itself actually says '*devalayasya prarambha*', i.e. 'start of the temple'.

That the Saptakoteshvar inscription may belong to the nineteenth century is significant, for this was a big time for myth-making in Goa, among almost all ambitious communities (Parobo 2015, pp. 23-49). It was then that the Saraswats were manufacturing their own Brahminical status and history; it is very possible that all these stories about ancient deities were also spun with the same ambitions of high status and heroic past.

'But they don't look like temples!'

Temple architecture in the region that became Goa seems to have been fairly rudimentary before the early modern era. There is mention of some temples of stone or laterite, but most of those destroyed in the sixteenth century appear to have been constructed of light materials going by the ease of their destruction, e.g. it is reported that all the temples of Salcete were destroyed in just the one year of 1567, which included 280 big temples and innumerable small ones, according to the Jesuit records (Xavier and Zupanov 2015, p.126). The method of destruction – burning, followed by dismantling of masonry, if any – also implies materials like wood and thatch. Even nineteenth-century images show thatched roofs and wooden pillars in smaller temples (Lopes Mendes 1886).

By this time, however, given the massive churches and forts erected in the sixteenth and seventeenth century, Goa had developed a reputation for building well. Goans are said to have been invited to build the Sindhudurg sea-fort in the seventeenth century, and to repair the Aghoreshvara temple in Ikkeri in the early nineteenth (Buchanan 1807). The new masonry temples of the Novas Conquistas were also apparently the work of Goan builders and artisans (Kowal 2001), some of them second- and third-generation Catholics, both before and after the region became a part of Goa.

The most striking thing about these temples for today's viewers is that they don't look like temples. This is because they not only lack the dominant forms found in Brahmanical temples in South Asia, but also incorporate forms identified today with the religious architecture of other faiths. But this is actually not uncommon for the time, which saw a great many temples of unusually heterogeneous inspiration in the subcontinent (Michell 2015), many unique to their region, at once cosmopolitan as well as local. A common tendency was the incorporation of Sultanate and Mughal ideas, probably first seen in the temples of the Ikkeri Nayakas (Kanekar 2010); they shared a border, also a long and often acrimonious trading relationship, with the Estado. The Rajput kingdoms and the Marathas followed suit. Certain elements however remained common to many of these shrines, like the axial layout and the hierarchy of access based on caste.

The Goan temples too followed an axial layout and caste-based access. But their distinctive hybridity saw the coming together of ideas from the European Renaissance, the Bijapur sultanate, the Mughal world (Kowal 2001, Pereira 1995), and the Arabian Sea coast (Shokoohy 2010). Some Ikkeri Nayaka influence can also be seen, especially in Canacona. The result is that even familiar elements take novel forms.

The basic layout of a Goan temple seems to be a square unventilated *garba-kud* (sanctum), fronted by a porch. The large temples have a front porch with sweeping entrance steps, leading into a pillared hall with stout circular pillars holding up an ornate wooden ceiling, and thence – via a grand doorway in a decorated wall – to the anteroom (or two) before the sanctum. The latter may have an ambulatory corridor around it. There are usually prominent side porches, resulting in a basilican church-like plan. Festive occasions found a temporary pavilion set up before the porch; by the late twentieth century many temples had made this a permanent and very large semi-open hall built in reinforced cement concrete (RCC).

The temples were built in plastered laterite, brightly painted, and picked out with pilasters, cornices, balustrades, and window forms from Renaissance Italy. Archways for entrances, windows and niches may be round-headed Renaissance ones, ogee Bijapuri ones, or foliated Mughal ones. The sanctum tower is topped by a Classical dome and lantern, or a Bijapuri

dome and finial. The tower itself is usually octagonal and treated with arched niches and a balustrade railing below the springing of the dome. The rest of the roofscape consists of sloping and tiled roofs for the halls, and sometimes smaller domes for porches.

Around the big temples are found various ancillary structures. One is a large stepped tank, reminiscent of the two Adilshahi mosques of Safa and Surla-Tar, located not far away. The lamp tower is common to temples along the south-western coast, but is here reminiscent of Goan church towers which themselves hark to the corner towers of the Gol Gumbaz in Bijapur (Kowal 2001, Gomes 2011). The *tulas* (holy basil) plant is set in a large planter that resembles the church *cruzeiros*. The entrance gateway takes the form of the Bijapuri *nagarkhana*, or drumhouse. And there is the *agrashala*, or the pilgrims' quarters and offices, which edged the complex. The smaller temples were similar in layout, but adopted a simple Goan house form, with thick laterite walls, rounded arches, and pitched tiled roofs.

This hybridity did not happen all at once, according to José Pereira (1995). The earliest influence was of the European Renaissance, clearly via the churches of Goa. Bijapuri and Mughal forms enter in the eighteenth century, probably via the Marathas. A sophisticated combination of the two was achieved by the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, in which the temple comes to resemble a grand Goan manor house.

Renovation and Rebuilding

A study of contemporary temple architecture in Goa by Leanne Alcasoas (2013) concluded that there were two distinct periods of post-1961 building of new temples: immediately post-1961 and from the late 1990s onwards. A preliminary survey of Goa's old brahmanical temples carried out for this paper shows that the same periodisation can be applied for their renovation and rebuilding as well, i.e. these two periods saw intensive renovation and complete rebuilding of old temples. Of the period before 1961, it is clear that many temples were rebuilt or renovated, partially or fully, continually over the centuries, though it is difficult to understand the scope of the changes. An attempt is however made below.

Pre-1961

Although there is little data available on the nature of changes in this vast period, it is clear, from the engravings and photographs of the time, that there was a fair amount of renovation and even some rebuilding. An example is Priol's Mangueshi temple which was apparently rebuilt twice during Maratha rule, again in 1890, and then in 1973 (Dhume, 2016). Its earliest recorded image shows a roofscape limited to steeply-pitched tiled roofs; the domes that dominate the scene today were built in the 1890s. This latter period, i.e. the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century, saw much rebuilding, like that of Nagueshi at the end of the nineteenth century, and Bandora's Ramnathi in 1905. This may have some link to the new *Lei das Mazanias* law, which formalised the control and management of the temples.

Pre-1961 renovations and rebuildings developed what could be called the Goan language of temple architecture, with the large temples adopting the Islamicate-European Renaissance-western coast vocabulary, the smaller ones more the Goan house form, at times with a metal finial or a small dome over the sanctum.

By the middle of the century, RCC construction starts to be seen in the photographs, used especially for the new semi-open halls and expanded *agrashalas*.

1961-1990

The immediate post-1961 period saw a burst of temple renovation, expansion and re-building, e.g. Kavlem's Shantadurga was renovated in 1966 and Priol's Mangueshi in 1973. New halls, *nagarkhanas* and *agrashalas* came up in many temples. Timber roofs and timber eaves were replaced by RCC ones.

Radical rebuilding was also seen, inspired by temple forms from outside Goa, like the latina tower (the parabolic tower form common in north India), seen for the first time in Goa. Some temples were altered out of all recognition, like Zambaulim's Damodar, which used to have a Goan house form in the nineteenth century; it was rebuilt in 1970 into a semi-Modernist building in RCC with a latina tower over the sanctum (images 1, 2, 3). Panjim's Mahalaxmi, founded in 1818, was similarly transformed in 1983 into an RCC building with a latina tower.

Even in the cases where complete rebuilding has not happened, the changes are substantial. Temples like Priol's Mangueshi, Kavlem's Shantadurga (Images 4, 5), and Marcaim's Navdurga retained some of their old forms, including basilican plans, arched windows, pitched roofs, and Renaissance domes over the sanctum, but the rebuilding in concrete altered things, either subtly (like the roofs), or crudely (like the boxy window-eaves), or completely (like the *agrashalas*).

1990s onwards

The second wave began around the early 1990s, and is still on, with much renovation and rebuilding of old temples, but a more nuanced approach to Indianisation. Expansion is still a major objective and on a gigantic scale, especially of the front halls, the number of halls and secondary buildings, also of the sanctum tower height. The use of more expensive contemporary materials is another objective, with the application of copper sheeting to roofs, and silver and gold leaf to pinnacles and internal walls, besides expensive granites and marbles for floors. Along with this is complete rebuilding, either of small shrines, like the Mulkeshvar shrine at Mangueshi temple (Images 6, 7) and the Saptakoteshvar at Fatorpa (Image 12), or of the entire temple.

In the case of rebuilding, the popularity of Indian forms like the Nagara latina and the Dravida pyramidal towers are waning, though not dead. The choice is increasingly between south coastal or Malabar-style pitched roof compositions, as at the Mulkeshvar at Priol's Mangueshi, or elaborate domical compositions using elements from the Goan repertoire along with Indian ones, but without the understanding of proportions and scale visible in the earlier designs.

The Fatorpa-Balli region has many examples of all of these. The Shantadurga Fatorpakarin temple at Fatorpa, the rebuilding of which began in 1988-89, has kept to the Goan manner, though larger and grander. The Shantadurga Cuncolkarin, also in Fatorpa, where work began in 1991, is however an Indianised extravaganza, with monumental scale, pitched roofs, a dome (not a Goan one) on a tower, multiple attached shrine niches (again, not in the Goan manner) on the walls, and a giant *khambo* in the form of a Rajasthani victory tower (images 8, 9, 10). In Balli, the rebuilding of the Shantadurga, begun in 2013, sees a Goan house form replaced by a grand mingling, in exposed laterite, of Buddhist chaitya with Tamil Dravida

temple, incorporating a dome on a Sanchi-stupa-like railing, a chaitya-like barrel vault for the hall, horseshoe arches and pillars that hark to Buddhist rock-cut architecture as well as Tamil temples, Tamil cornices, and a Tamil prakara-like setting (image 11). Finally, the Saptakotesvar shrine in the Shantadurga Fatorpacarin complex sees another small house form being replaced by a monumental cross between the Tambdi Surla Mahadev and the Karnata Dravida tradition (Image 12).

Contexts and Conclusions

Thus, there seem to have been four important moments or periods in building and rebuilding of the old temples: the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, when many existing Brahmanical temples claim to have been founded; the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, when many were apparently rebuilt or renovated, resulting in the maturity and spread of what might be called a 'Goan temple style', on par with the Goan church style noted by Paulo Varela Gomes (2011); the immediate post-1961 period, which saw expansion and even complete rebuilding using Modernistic materials, and the introduction of Indian temple forms; and finally from the 1990s to today, where transformations are rampant and self-conscious.

The Goan temple is clearly disappearing fast. The primary reason is that the architecture of these temples, although centuries old, is not protected under any heritage or conservation laws. Even where such protection existed, as at Mangueshi, the *mahazans* were able to get it removed and thus became the sole authorities over the sites (Kerkar, 2014).

But the manner in which these buildings are changing is not random. The enlargement of temples and the choice of recognizably Indian forms in the immediate post-1961 period has to do with both the nationalist environment that prevailed in Goa following the Indian annexation, and with the nature of Indian nationalism. As G. Aloysius has pointed out, Indian nationalism is cultural nationalism, less about political rights than about celebrating culture and traditions; the culture that is celebrated is that of the dominant castes, i.e. it is the caste system and all its traditions (1998). In this vision of the nation, to be Indian is to be Hindu and Brahmanical, while everything European and Islamicate is foreign.

What this means is that Brahmanical temples are symbols of nationalism. Rebuilding them, to a bigger scale and with recognizably Indian forms, is a political and nationalist statement about Goa being Indian. Erasing the proof of Goa's heterogeneous past, like its heterogeneous architecture, makes this even more convincing. If Goa's Konkani language had to remove Portuguese words and incorporate Sanskrit ones in order to be considered worthy of nationalist respect (Fernandes 2013, pp. 79-131), Nagara and Dravida elements were required in temple architecture for the same reason.

With the rise of the BJP from the late 1980s, this equating of Brahmanical Hinduism as nationalism is blatant, no longer hidden behind an apparently secular discourse. The rise of the BJP has, not surprisingly, also meant more political support for temple construction, the bigger the better, along with a greater self-consciousness in the designs. The result is temple as spectacle, i.e. Indianisation along with monumentality and showiness.

But this architectural erasure has been complicated by the rise of Indian tourism in Goa from the late 1980s, and the packaging of Goa as a European holiday paradise for Indians.

Goa's Portuguese and Catholic culture are now selling points, and with them its so-called 'In-do-Portuguese' architecture. The result is a recovery of some old Goan architectural elements like pitched and tiled roofs, *balcões*, and the grand manorial composition, along with the introduction of new ones like exposed laterite. Domes may be included, but they are often not Goan ones. Along with this is monumental size and various Indian elements, but rarely an understanding of the proportions and scale that went into the original compositions.

To conclude, it is thus not surprising at all to note how, despite this rampant architectural innovation, the functioning of these temples remains conservative and brahmanical. Rituals, practices, occupations, and access in all old temples remain caste-dictated to this day. At least one, Ibampur's Sateri temple, denies entry to the village Dalits even into the temple hall to this day (Kanekar 2016). There is no contradiction in this formal innovation amidst social stagnation, when the architectural innovation is itself driven by a celebration of Brahmanism.

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Glossary

Bahujan: The so-called lower castes in the Hindu caste hierarchy, literally the majority

Balcão: Porch in a Goan house

Cruzeiro: The free-standing cross located in front of the Goan church

Dravida: Popular forms of the Brahmanical temple, with a pyramidal stepped tower over the sanctum, mostly found in peninsular South Asia

Saraswat, Mahar: Two castes of Goa, the first dominant, the second discriminated-against

Nagara: Popular forms of the Brahmanical temple, with a variety of curved towers over the sanctum, mostly found in the north, centre, and west of South Asia

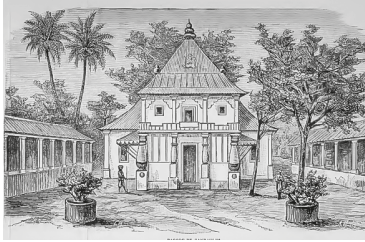


Image 1 – Damodar of Zambaulim, late nineteenth century (source: Lopes Mendes, "A Índia Portuguesa")

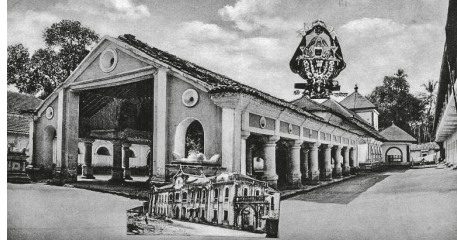


Image 2 – The temple in the 1940s (source: *Memórias da Índia Portuguesa*)



Image 3 – The temple today (source: author)



Image 4 – Kavlem's Shantadurga, undated but probably mid-twentieth century (source: *Fundo – DTC – Documentos Mário e Alice Chicó – Sílvia Chicó*)



Image 5 – The temple today (source: author)



Image 6 – Mangueshi's Mulkeshwar shrine after 1973 renovation (source: author)



Image 7 – The shrine today (source: author)



Image 8 – Shantadurga Cuncolcarin, Fatorpa, 1970s (source: Prasad Hotel, Fatorpa)



Image 9 – Shantadurga Cuncolcarin, Fatorpa, today, side view (source: author)



Image 10 – Today, front view with new lamp tower (source: author)

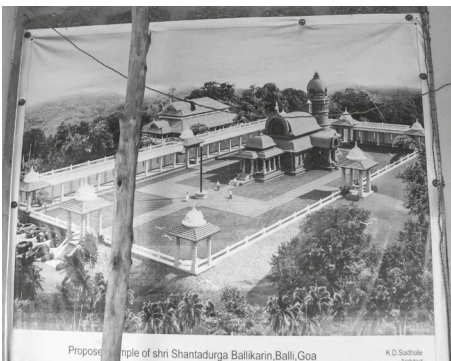


Image 11 – Banner showing the proposed Shantadurga Ballikarin complex, presently under construction (source: author)

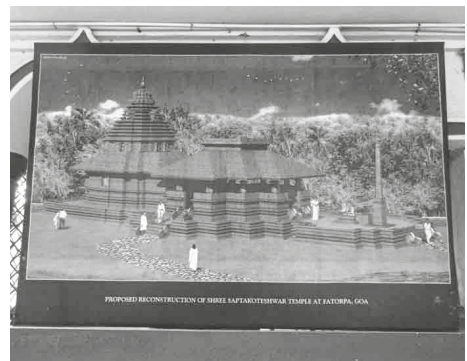


Image 12 – Poster showing the proposed new Saptakoteswari temple at Fatorpa, presently under construction (source: author)