'Island-ness' of Hindu Temples

Building Cultures of Exclusion and Exclusivity in 19th-Century Goa, India

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Citation:

Kulkarni, Nirmal. "'Island-Ness' of Hindu Temples : Building Cultures of Exclusion and Exclusivity in 19th-Century Goa, India." In *Proceedings of the Society of Architectural Historians, Australia and New Zealand: 40, Islands*, edited by Ashley Paine and Kirsty Volz, 39-40. Brisbane, Australia: SAHANZ, 2025.

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The 40th Annual SAHANZ Conference

SAHANZ

Society of Architectural Historians Australia & New Zealand

THE UNIVERSITY OF QUEENSLAND AUSTRALIA

QUT

December 2-4 2024

Brisbane, Australia

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Nineteenth-century Hindu temples on mainland Goa were once located on estuarine islands facing the Arabian Sea. Since being relocated to the interior mainland, they have emerged as metaphorical "islands" amidst a sea of green on Goa's regional geography, while their architecture presents a spatio-visual enigma. This essay critically examines their unique phenomena of "island-ness" through two contextual case studies. I ask, "What kind of societies and habitats do dispossessed Goan Hindu elites produce, upon losing their 'island-ness'?" The study applies broad theoretical strokes of "structural functionalism" to interpret their built environment, reimagining its principal elements to invent a conceptual frame.

Nissology studies and extant literature on islands focus on psychological, physical, geographical, biological, touristic, and socio-culturality of island states.[1] Alternatively, "island phenomena" has developed in philosophy, syntactic literature, and studies of "heat-and-cool-islands" in urban environments. Scholarly literature on the Goa islands mostly overlooks communal and settlement dynamics from island perspectives. Positioned at

the intersection of religious and habitat studies, I discuss the architectural history of the Goan Hindu Temples [GHT/s]. This research narrativises contested histories, dispossessed geographies, and transformed communities. Methods of archival research, ethnographic fieldwork, oral histories, spatial mapping, historical cartographies, and architectural drawings are used to contextualise the study.

The Portuguese conquest in the 16th century and related policies of Christianisation ostracised the Hindu cultural landscape, displacing Hindu deities and communities.[2] Medieval-Hindu islands were converted to Early-Modern Christian islands, creating three structural rifts in existing societies. First, conversion to Christianity; second, migration across rivers; and third, distant migrations. Focusing on the second, I argue that despite their dispossession of the islands of Tiswadi, Bardez, and Salcette, the relocated temples dot the forests of Ponda mainland, reinterpreting island qualities in unique ways.[3] The GHTs belong to the Gaud Saraswat Brahmin [GSB/s] community. Since the 18th century, the GSBs established their dominance in the Goan societal hierarchy, with financial support from Maratha-

Hindu rulers, and political help from Portuguese rulers who valued their skill in trade and commerce.[4]

Case studies of Shree Manguesh temple and Shree Shantadurga temple, which are located roughly eight kilometres apart, examine indicators of island-ness through the socio-spatiality of temple architectural landscapes. Both GHTs are prominent tourist attractions in Goa's sacred geography and in aerial views they resemble islands tucked within forest clearings. The temple complexes are located at the foothills, where the earth was flattened to create a single platform oriented towards the northeast, and the architecture is axially symmetrical. The main temple is in the centre and is surrounded by a C-shaped *agrashala* (devotee housing), with an open space between the two buildings for ritualistic events and religious festivals. A main gateway serves as the grand entrance. The holy water tank for ablutions, one of GHT's main features, is situated on a platform that is lower than the temple by 5 metres, and is enclosed by semicircular arches and exposed laterite walls and a pathway. Architectural features on temple exteriors exhibit syncretic elements

synthesised from early modern Portuguese churches from *Velha* Goa.[5]

I use strands of Emile Durkhiem's earlier principles of solidarity, blending them with his later work on religion as a theoretical framework.[6] Exploring the manifest and latent functions (Robert Merton) of Goan Hindu temples, I construct a conceptual framework that balances its strengths and weaknesses.[7] Metaphorical island-ness is evident in most Goan Hindu temples because of the infinite possibilities and freedom that the Hindu religious tenets offer for reinterpretation within the religion's defined positions; this helped negotiate latent functions for the site plan. However, the architecture of every new GHT (since the 1860s) emerged with incredible innovations to its facade while maintaining solidarity with the manifest function of ritualistic space, and helped to foster social cohesion in the once fragmented GSBs.

Findings confirm that traditional beliefs reshape societies despite disruptions caused by colonialism, building socio-spatial boundaries, restructuring "discipline, cohesion, transmission and euphoric conditions."[8] Relocated deities settle in mainland villages, which become regional socio-political centres in Goa's cultural landscape. Temple settlements, inserted into existing villages, display insular forms, with temples at the centre and residential C-shaped rings enclosing them, almost holding the temples in a protective embrace. The same form, however, demonstrates aspects of societal inequalities with its immediate environs. "Temples as islands" therefore become pivotal sites for critical architectural research, offering a lens to explore histories of the built environment. Finally, the paper concludes that memories of metaphorical island habitats warrant deeper explorations of their theoretical frameworks. Furthermore, the research design employed here illustrates how ideation from disparate disciplines might be encompassed and processed in the future, thus blurring boundaries to encompass multidisciplinarity.

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