

# **PORTUGUESE INFLUENCE ON THE SECULAR AND RELIGIOUS ARCHITECTURE OF GOA**

**by Joao Ramires Fernandes**

## **ABSTRACT**

In India there are some important nuclei where one can find remains of precious Heritage, born from the fortunate meeting of both the Indian and the Portuguese cultures for nearly five centuries.

This culture which vehiculates a life style of its own, discloses its own way of inhabiting cities and houses, of using its furniture, instruments and works of art.

### **URBAN DESIGN**

The Portuguese have developed two completely different ways of organizing urban settlements in India:

- the Medieval – organic city or village
- the Renaissance – geometric city

In the first case the spatial organization is an efflux of a diffuse popular urban culture. Hilly localizations were usually chosen and the agglomerates grew up in an organic way.

In the second type of settlement the "Ideal City of the Renaissance" was used as model when a city was built inside a fortress and from its very beginning.

## **RELIGIOUS ARCHITECTURE**

### **Churches and Convents**

It is in the "Old Conquests" (Velhas Conquistas) that the oldest and most important Churches and convents of Goa are located.

A description is made identifying the characteristics of the different periods of their construction in connection with other important religious buildings in places like Bassaim, Damao, Diu, Chaul, etc.

The mixture of the European grammars with the local decorative features is a new, rich and exuberant product, full of originality that brilliantly documents the encounter of two civilizations.

### **The Hindu Temples**

In Goa, when the new Temples were built, the decorative themes of the Renaissance, Manerism and Baroque are used together with typically occidental way of organizing the volumes.

There is a conciliatory agreement of style between the Hindu temples and the Christian Churches without similar anywhere else.

## **CIVIL ARCHITECTURE**

There are very few remaining civil buildings of Portuguese influence from the XVI and XVII centuries in India. Old Goa was abandoned in the end of the XVII century and the remains of the magnificent buildings that made the town so famous are very scarce.

In Bassaim the facades of the House of the Camara and the Senate which are still standing, are the best examples of civil architecture of classical style in the Indian space.

## **Residential Architecture**

The peculiar Goan social organization, based on special privileges granted to the converts to Christianity, reinforced the stabilization of the rural society around the owners of large properties that had their refined mansions build to fit luxurious standards in the villages where they lived. Although a few mansions in Goa date back to the XVI century, most of them were built in the late XVII and early XVIII centuries.

The spatial organization of the Goan House is usually made around a central court; here, the Hindu and the Mediterranean traditions coincide.

A high plinth raises the house from the ground giving it an imposing look.

The high-pitched roof of the Goan houses rests on a cornice formed by two to four rows of round traditional tiles together with the decorative moldings which surround doors and windows give these houses a great resemblance with those of southern Portugal.

Another typical characteristic is the way the masonry details are overscaled, identifying a clear mannerist approach.

The "East Indians" were primitive nominal Christians that were converted to Catholicism by the Portuguese. They lived in Bassaim, Chaul, Salcete and other places that nowadays belong to the Bombay area.

The districts where they live have, even today, a distinct character with the ambience of the traditional quarters of Goa.

## **THE SURVEY IN COURSE**

The research on the "Indo-Portuguese Buildings and Urban Spaces" that we are conducting in Goa, Damao and Diu, sponsored by the Institute Cultural de Macau, is the object of our present work.

Many grand ancestral houses require urgent attention. Some have been demolished and many invaluable buildings in towns and countryside alike are menaced by the construction boom that started some years ago.

The attraction of Goa's Mediterranean urban scape and of its charming houses is menaced by the destruction of the human scale of urban spaces and the demolition of the fine old houses.

The management of environmental changes must support the cultural continuity which generated the unique character of Goan culture in order to keep that culture alive.

Faro, October, 1990  
Joao Ramires Fernandes