THE TALE OF CHIMBEL’S NOSSA SENHORA DO CARMO...

AND WHY WE SHOULD CARE

After much persuasion by locals and activists alike, the TCP department finally initiated the process of giving the ruins of the Convent and Church of Our Lady of Mount Carmel (Nossa Senhora do Carmo) in Chimbel the heritage tag.

ALTAR ABUSED
PARADE

Last week, the Town and Country Planning (TCP) Department initiated the process of giving the ruins of the Convent and Church of Our Lady of Mount Carmel (Nossa Senhora do Carmo) in Chimbel a “heritage tag.”

The decision was taken at a board meeting of the conservation committee, TCP-Minister Vinod Tawde said. The decision led to resulting across many sections of the community from former residents of Chimbel to religious orders of the Church and even a section of the general public joining in the rejoicing.

The Tertiary Carmelites

In conversation with “The Goan” correspondent Velho said the history of what is now the ruins of Nossa Senhora do Carmo.

The church was built over 250 years ago, and was home to the “Tertiary Carmelites”, a tenet from religious order.

Prior to the order, high-profile in the church were occupied first by the Portuguese, and then by Goa “bhakti” priests, with those of “bhakti” language being addressed.

“Nossa Senhora do Carmo” became the first exception to the rule, when Goa’s Bhakti priests of other castes formed a community and have a sense of community. Kutchi Pardhan Sardar Nachda emphasizes the importance of the once-existing church saying “It was the first church built by Goans, which housed the first Goa order of priests...”...with the blessings, of course, of the Portuguese, the priests of the time.

The Tertiary Carmelites inhabited the church a good 88 years, before being moved out of there in 1819.

A refuge for children and ‘fallen women’

Nossa Senhora do Carmo had two separate retreats, the left wing “Recolhimento de Nossa Senhora do Serra” housed “white girls of old Christian Stock”.

The right wing, “Recolhimento de Maria Madalena” also known as “Casa das Penitentes, Arrependidas e Convertidas” was an “institution for women of doubtful character who had repented”.

The movement which eventually led to Nossa Senhora do Carmo being discussed by the TCP Department last week, didn’t actually start as a movement.

When architect, Fernando Velho and Dr Sudha Lokapantidatta decided to document the history of Nossa Senhora do Carmo, they did so because the ruins were on the verge of completely disappearing.

“We decided to at least document the structure and its history in text,” says Velho. Meanwhile, Velho, who is a lecturer at the Goa College of Architecture, also started making presentations about Nossa Senhora do Carmo at different places in different audiences. But he received no response from important stakeholders, like the government or the Church.

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In Fontainhas, where architect Tahir Noronha, researcher at the Foundation was keen to help the ruins get the ‘heritage’ tag.

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At one of the presentations made by Velho, Dr Sudha Porey, a renowned architect-founder of ASCEND and former dean of the Goa Institute of Management, took a deep interest in the site.

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This gave birth to the Mount Carmel Restoration Forum which then started writing to the TCP Department asking that the ruins be given heritage status.

The long journey towards achieving heritage status

Goa’s first mental healthcare institute

S
omehow in the 1950s, the Portuguese government decided to set up a mental health institute at Nossa Senhora do Carmo.

Prior to this, patients who suffered from mental health diseases were either sent to jail, or for treatment to Portugal, which they could not afford. “It was the most expensive,” says Gracias.

Eventually, the social order, the Santa Casa da Misericórdia which was quite large in managing the hospital, saw the history of the hospital.

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In 1994, the Goa government demolished two of the wings of the structure and later only the chapel standing, went Yeola. But little by little, the chapel was also razed with the same implements the batsmen that stood in Chimbel today.

Orphans at the Serra Chimbel, 1914

Resident and archivist of Chimbel

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Church and convent of N. S. Do Carmo, 1900.