

## Discovering the Temples of Goa

By

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### Abstract

I learnt about ‘Goa beyond beaches’ during the recent trip which took us on a pilgrimage across some of the most exquisite, yet lesser-known Devasthanams of India. I was unaware of the existence of such a large number of temples in Goa; the common perception being that Goa comprises only of BBC – Beaches, Bars and Churches. Surprisingly, not much information about Goan temples is available – even the government Tourism website does not mention many of them.

I have covered the history of Goa since ancient times in my previous article, which can be read at the link below.

### Keywords

Goa, temple, Shiva, deity

### Introduction

Temples are not just structures of stone or bricks, they are living institutions that ensure the survival of our traditions, customs, and communities associated with them. The importance of temples can be judged by the fact that our ancestors kept on reclaiming and rebuilding our temples despite repeated takeovers and destruction by invaders. Some temples have been rebuilt almost 20 times, with the process spread over centuries. It is only due to such undeterred spirit and strong resolve shown by our ancestors that Sanātana Dharma and Hindu civilization has survived while all other ancient (pagan) civilizations of the world have been erased.

## **Anatha Temple at Savoi Verem**

The first temple we visited was the famous Anatha Temple, the abode of Anatha (Vishnu), at Savai Verem in Ponda Taluka on the banks of River Mandovi. Savai Verem has been an ancient settlement for both spiritual and secular learning. In the 11th century, this land was granted to the teacher and mentor of Shasta Deva, one of the early Kadamba rulers, as a gift in respect for his wisdom.



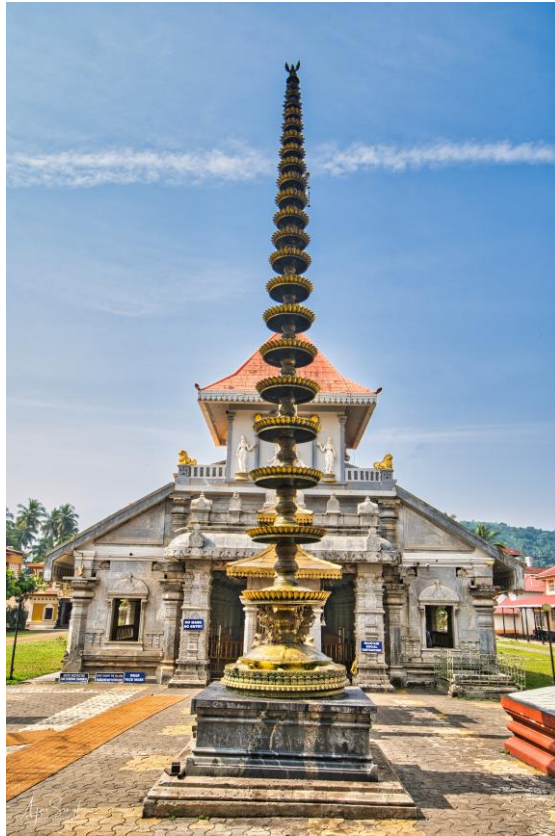
**Image 1: Anatha Shayanam Temple, Savoi Verem**

The murti is carved in black basalt and Vishnu is shown in his Anantashayya (sleeping position where He rests on the multi-headed Seshnaga). This temple has only a tiled pyramid roof and surprisingly no domes. The external walls are plain in stark contrast to the interiors where bright colors are showcased in the intricate wooden carvings. The current building is circa 1923.

## **Mahalasa Narayani Temple At Mardol**

Mahalasa is an important Shakti Devi and a very popular deity in Goa. The original shrine of this Goddess was at Verna in Salcate taluka. Mahalasa was one of the deities shifted to the Antruz Mahal in the wake of the reign of religious terror unleashed by Diego Fernandes, the Portuguese Captain of the Fort of Rachol that saw the demolition of over 280 Hindu

temples in Salcete taluka in 1567. This was the biggest temple of the times in South Goa. The present temple is situated near the Mardol market in Ponda taluka. The location of the temple, popularly known as Sthalakutumban, is rated as one of the most beautiful temple sites in Goa.



**Image 2: The Dnyanadeep**

To the right of the Mahalasa temple is a temple dedicated to Sateri, who is her elder sister and enjoys the honor of primacy.

The cult of Mahalasa Narayani is scripturally rooted in the 8th and 9th Adhyayas of the Bhagwat Parana as the Mohini avatara of Vishnu who took the responsibility of distributing the amrit which emerged during the Samudra Manthan. Varunapuramahatmya of Sahiyadri khand mentions that Mahalasa was brought by Parashurama from Tiruhut (Bihar) and was consecrated in Verna in Salcete Taluka.

## Manguesh Temple

The main temple is dedicated to Manguesh, an incarnation of Shiva and a regional deity of Goa. The shrine was originally located in Kushasthali, which was known as Kutthali in Konkani, becoming Cortalim by the Portuguese. According to Manguesh Mahatmya, once Shiva and Parvati were playing chausar (dice) when Parvati won and she rebuked Shiva. This annoyed Shiva and he left for the Himalayas. Parvati then left home in search of Shiva. In the course of her search, she came to Kushasthali. When she was on her way to Aghanasini (River Zuari) for taking a bath, a ferocious tiger with a wide-open mouth appeared in front of her. She was frightened and uttered trahi-mahi-girish (please protect me from the tiger). No sooner had she uttered the words, Shiva appeared from the body of the tiger. It is believed that the word Manguesh has its origin in ma-hi-Girish.



**Image 3: The magnificent Manguesh Temple**

Gomanchalakshetra Mahatmyam (Adhyaya III, Shlokas 2 – 14) makes reference to the consecration of the Shiva linga on Mangirish Mountain at Trihotra in Bihar. The Saraswats then brought the vighraha to Goa.

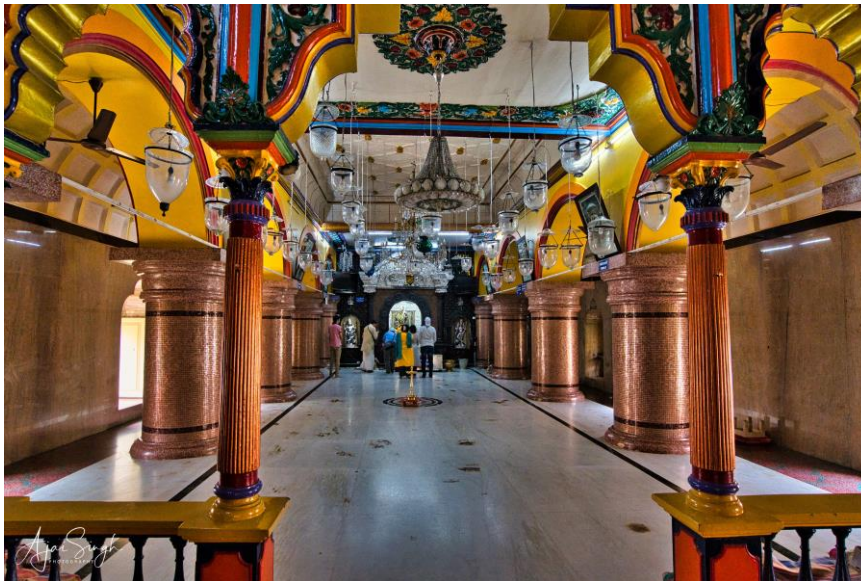
Manguesh is the first deity which was shifted from its original site at Kushasthali. The murti was smuggled and brought to Priol in the Antruz Mahal via Madkai. The original

temple was used to set up a temporary church and was subsequently demolished and a new church was built on the site in 1566.

A deepstambha adorns the northwest corner of the courtyard. A huge water tank with a Tulasi Vrindavan at the centre has been provided in front of the temple.

### **Ramnath Temple (Ramnathi)**

The ancient linga of Ramnath was consecrated in Loutulim in Salcete Taluka. In the 16th century, it was shifted to Bandivade due to religious persecution by the Portuguese. The linga of Ramnath had been brought from Rameswaram to spread the teachings of Rama.



**Image 4: The Sabhamandapam**

The temple has two female deities, Sateri and Kamakshi, on either side of Ramnath in their individual kutas (cells). These three kutas in a make it a trikuta temple.

The superstructures of all the three deities have conical tiled roofs. A three-fold kalasa adorns the domical superstructure of the main deity at the top. A deepstambha and water tank are located in front of the temple.

## Shri Naguesh Maharudra Temple At Bandivade Ponda

The term Naga means snake and Isha means Shiva implying the adorning of a snake by Shiva around his neck. The temple of Naguesh is situated at Bandivade in Ponda taluka. The Skanda purana mentions that like Mahalasa, which was brought from Tiruhut, Naguesh too was brought from there.



**Image 5: The Naguesh Maharudra Temple, Bandivade**

Unlike other deities, Nagesh Maharudra found a safe abode since its consecration. Antruj Mahal was not under the control of the Portuguese and this facilitated the migration even of other Saraswat deities like Shanta Durga, Ganapati, etc to Antruj.

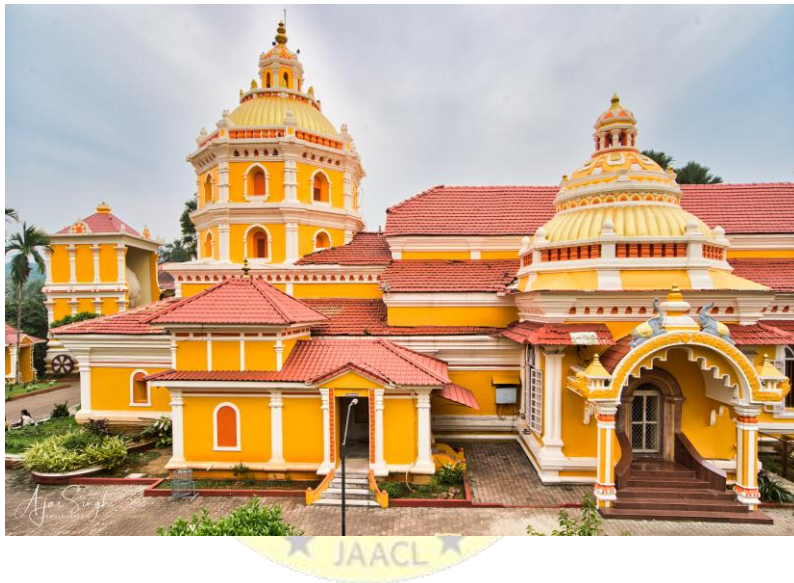
There is an inscription in the temple premises recording the gift of land to the deities in 1413 during the rule of King Veer Pratap Devaraya of Vijayanagar Dynasty. The present building has been renovated around 1880.

The Naguesh murti has Ganapati on the right is and Laxmi Narayan on the left. The ceiling and walls are decorated portraying events from the Ramayana on one side and images of Astadikpal and Gandharva on the other. A decorated deepstambh is located on one side.

A large water tank (pushkar) built with huge laterite walls is located in front of the temple providing a serene and meditative environment.

### **Sri Mahalakshmi Temple At Bandoda Ponda**

Sri Mahalakshmi temple is situated at Bandoda in Ponda Taluka. The Sahyadri kanda mentions Mahalaxmi as one of the deities that were brought by the Brahmins. The peaceful or Satvika form of the Devi at this temple has a unique feature – she wears a linga on her head.



**Image 6: The grand Sri Mahalakshmi Temple, Bandoda**

Portuguese records mention Mahalaxmi (Malcumi) temple among those destroyed in 1567. The original utsav vigraha at Colva was shifted to the temple of Mahalaxmi at Bandora during the Portuguese inquisition by two fishermen who travelled by boat along the Arabian Sea, crossed the Rasai River, and reached Atruja.

The sabhamandapa has an art gallery with twenty two woodcarvings of Vyuha. This gallery is considered to be one of the rare ones in the whole of the Indian sub-continent.

A monolithic deepastamba erected in front of the temple dates back to the medieval period.  
Lakshmi Narasimha Temple Veling

Dedicated to Narsimha, this temple was moved from Sankhaveli (Sancoale) to Ponda in 1567 to save them from destruction by the Portuguese. Vishnu, in his form of Narasimha, the 4th incarnation, is worshipped here along with his consort Lakshmi.



**Image 7: The Lakshmi Narasimha Temple, Veling**

The current temple was built in the 18th century. The carvings, especially the ones depicting tales from Narsimha Purana are beautifully executed.

A stepped pushkar (water tank) is surrounded with coconut palms which help shading the area, it provides a serene environment.

### **Mahadev Temple at Tambdi Surla**

Kadamba architecture with the influence of Hoysala and Kalyani Chalukyas is seen in the Mahadev temple at Tambdi Surla, a village in Sanguem taluka near Anmod Ghat. The temple is dedicated to Shiva and dates to the 12th century. It is the region's oldest shrine.





**Image 8: The Mahadev Temple, Tambdi Surla**

The temple was built from grey-black basalt, carried across the mountains from the Deccan plateau. The temple faces east and the rays of the rising sun fall on the deity at the crack of dawn.



**Image 9: The Temple Interior**

The roof of the mandapa is sloping (gable-shape) while the superstructure of antarala and garbhagriha is Kadamba-Nagara (stepped pyramidal) style. Though the temple is simple

but carvings in the mandapa pillars, lotus medallion in the ceilings and carvings on the external walls are excellent.

A linga with panavatta is enshrined in the temple. Bas-relief figures of Shiva, Vishnu and Brahma appear on panels on the sides of the temple. River Surla flows nearby.

The Mahadev temple survived Muslim invasions and Portuguese persecution due to its remote location deep in the forests.

### **Shanta Durga Temple of Kavle**

Shantadurga was among the deities the Saraswat Brahmins brought with them when they came to Goa at the call of Parashurama. She is a form of Parvati specific to the Konkan belt and also called ‘Santeri’ colloquially.



**Image 10: Shanta Durga Temple, Kavle**

In the Ambika khanda of Skanda purana Shantadurga is mentioned as the goddess who pacified Shiva and Vishnu who were engaged in a cataclysmic battle with each other for several aeons, at the behest of Brahma. The murti is shown holding two serpents, one in each hand, representing Vishnu and Shiva.

The 12th century original temple was located at Quelossim (Keloshi) in Salcete and destroyed by the Portuguese in 1564. The vighraya was however, smuggled to Kavale. The present temple was completed in 1738 during the reign of Maratha ruler Chattrapati Shahu, grandson of Shivaji Maharaj.

The temple is a fine example of amalgamation of architectural styles with its pyramidal shikharas, sloping roofs, multi-arched Roman windows with stained-glass windows and chandeliers.

### **Shri Navadurga Temple Madkai**

Shri Navdurga temple at Madkai in Ponda Taluka is dedicated to Navadurga or Mahishasuramardini, a fierce avatar of Durga. The grant for the original temple was made in the year 1128 CE in village Gaumshi in Tiswadi by the Saraswats. It was however, demolished by the Portuguese and the temple properties were handed over to the College of St Paul.



**Image 11: The Elaborately Carved Entrance to the Garbhgrihya**

The present temple is almost 500 years old and was renovated in 1603 CE.

The 4-foot tall murti of the Devi is placed on a raised platform in a standing position. The peculiarity of this image is that the head of the Devi is tilted to the left. A unique attraction of the temple is the wooden carvings of the Vedic Devtas with their consorts and vahanas, adorning the walls.

### **Devaki Krishna Temple of Marcel**

The commitment that Mashelkars have shown of offering shelter and protection to the endangered Hindu deities during the terrible saga of temple destruction in the 16th century is exemplary. Numerous deities made Marcel their abode in that dark period. Marcel has temples of more than 15 deities. It is also here that I first heard the term “Refuge Temple” – temples that had been shifted due to persecution.



**Image 12: Devaki Krishna Temple, Marcel**

The story of Devaki Krishna temple is mentioned in the Harivamsha. The 18th battle between Krishna and Jarasandha, the King of Magadh, was fought at the foot of Gomant Parvat. Worried about Krishna, Devaki traveled to the island of Chodamani (Chorao island) to meet him. Relieved, Devaki expressed her unfulfilled desire to hold Krishna and bestow motherly love on him, which had been denied to her after birth. Krishna assumed the form

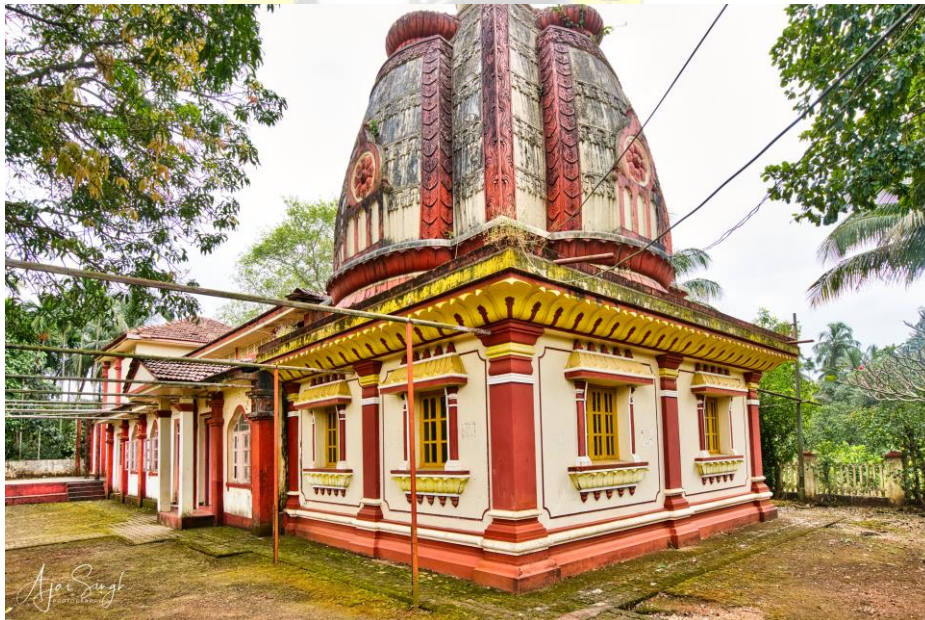
of a baby to fulfill her desire and this magical moment that is immortalized in the murti of Devaki Krishna.

This is the only temple in India where Lord Krishna is worshipped alongside mother Devaki.

The temple was initially located at Chudamani. The murti was shifted to Maye village in the taluka of Dicholi. When Portuguese targeted that region, the murti was taken to Marcel in the Antruz Mahal which was under the control of the Desais. The Shilalekha mentions that the existing temple was inaugurated in 1842 CE.

### **Brahma Temple At Brahma Karmali In Sattari**

The Brahma temple is situated at Brahma Karmali near Nagar village in Sattari Taluka. The idol of Brahma was shifted in 1541 from Carambolim in Ilhas (Tiswadi) Taluka to this place to escape destruction by the Portuguese.



**Image 13: The Brahma Temple, Sattari**

The garbhagriha is plain and houses a 1.5-metre high beautifully carved murti of Brahma, sporting a beard, along with his consorts, Sarasvati and Gayatri who are shown in

a tribanga pose. It is a chaturmukhi murti, with one face visible behind. The murti of Brahma is dated to the Kadamba period from the 12th century.

### **Shaiva Cave Temple at Harvalem**

The name Harvalem is derived from Hara – Shiva and Haiti – village, Harahalli. From this it took the colloquial form, Aravalem (or Harvalem). It has taken an important place in the archaeological world map through the world-famous rock-cut caves in laterite.



**Image 14: The Shaiva Cave Temple, Harvalem**

The rock-cut caves are the first-ever and largest cave excavations in laterite rock in India. These caves are situated in Sanquelim village, Bicholim taluka. There are altogether five shrine chambers and one room in the caves. Local tradition associates these caves to the five Pandava brothers of Mahabharata and their wife Draupadi.

The chambers contain linga shrines made of greenish schist stone in different shapes. Two lingas are inscribed with Parasva Sutras developed during 5th century CE.

It is assumed that the caves belong to pre-Chalukyan period.

## Conclusion

The “Goa Beyond Beaches” tour showcased the vibrant interiors of Goa, which are steeped in history, culture and tradition. Indeed, Goa provides a perfect example of a community on the brink of being wiped out, reviving its roots and ancient traditions through unshakeable faith and unbelievable acts of courage through an ecosystem in which the temple played a central role. The temple is not just a physical structure, but a living and breathing institution, which became the catalyst.

## About the Author

Brig A. P. Singh had served in the Indian Army and after retirement, he has been following up on his interests in India’s heritage and history. He is also an avid traveler, photographer and blogger. He is the Editor of a strategic affairs journal, AGNI, which is published by the Forum for Strategic and Security Studies. Many of his articles have been published in various online portals, including the India Foundation.

