

## **Position Of Women In Goa Under The Portuguese**

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The social history of Goa is very much interwoven with the church History of this territory. The Goan society in fact was essentially Hindu society with its rigid caste system, rituals and sacrifices. The Portuguese seems to have gathered some information about Goa, its strategic position and commercial importance, years before they conquered it. There is evidence that some Goan leaders and others invited Portuguese to capture it.<sup>i</sup> Finally on 3rd March 1510 Albuquerque took possession of old Goa from Ismail Adil Shah, the Sultan of Bijapur. Afonso de Albuquerque after his final assault on Goa island in 1510 laid a solid foundation to the Portuguese colonial structure by encouraging his soldiers to marry the local Muslim women. Each couple was gifted with a piece of land, a house, a horse, cattle and cash amounting to 1600 reis.<sup>ii</sup>

In this presentation an efforts have been made to focus on the position of women in Goa under Portuguese through inscriptions under the study. In the span of about thousand years, beginning from the ninth Century the rulers embellished Goa with temples, Mosque and Churches. Lot of public and private buildings were erected by the Portuguese. The wide moat was filled up and the city began to grow with beautiful churches, monuments and buildings. We can clearly see the impact of Renaissance movement on the construction in Goa.

I shall be discussing three inscriptions. First inscription under study is on the tomb of Dona Caterina, which is situated in the church of Our Lady of Rosary [Igreja da Nossa Senhora do Rlsario] The Church of Our Lady of Rosary also known as Church of St. Mary of Rosary, built in 1543, situated in the Holy mount in close vicinity of the Convents of St. Monica and St. Augustine. To the left in the apse we are confronted with the tomb of Catarina. She was the lady whom the Viceroy Garcia de Sa married. On the tomb we find following inscription<sup>iii</sup>

**Aqi Iaz Dona Catirina Mother De**

**Garcia Da Sa a Oval Pede A Ovem Isto Lek**

**Qve Peca Misericordia Adeus Pera Sva Alma**

Translation ; Here lies Lady Catherine wife of Garcia de Sa those who read this ask mercy of God for soul.

Other two inscriptions discussed here are from Se Cathedral, Goa. This Church was founded soon after the conquest of Goa by the Portuguese in 1510. These two inscriptions are engraved on the tomb of two Portuguese personalities which throw light on the position of women.

**CPELA DAL DO VISENTE ANRIVES**

**EPAZ DEZEMBA GADOP OVE**

**FOI DAP DESE ARCEBISPA DO**

**Q EALLECO. EM. 7 DEEZEMBRQ**

**D 632. OOVAL. DEIXOV. PENDA**

**HVA. MISSA. COTODIANADE**

**QIE. ADMINSTRADORA, SVA**

**VIOLHER. LEANOR. MAZ. EP**

**MORTE. OVEM. ELLA. ORDE**

**NAR. EHE. INSTITV DAPERA**

**ENTRRO. DELLA EDESEVS**

**HEREDEIROS<sup>iv</sup>**

Translation ---- Chapel of Vincent Herques who was the Judge of the High Court of the Archebishopic who died on 7th December 1632 who kept/left the income /proceeds wife Lenor Mascarnenhas ordered to the institute her burial and of her heirs. Another inscription on the left side of the chapel is as follows---

**VIST. A. SEI VLIVA. A. SOSSOSDEDOVI**

**ANOR. MASCARENHAS. SEGVND. L,IE**

**FR. DEMELLO DEC ASTRO GOVERNADO**

**FOI DO ESTADO DAINDIA TRES VEZWS SEA**

**SEIRA VES QVE FOVERNOV MAN DOVE**

**ESTA SEPVLTVRA PERA NELLA SEDEPVZ**

**REM OSSOSSO DADITA SVA MOLHER AQVAL**

## **LECEO EM8 DEMAIO DE 6S4 ETEM NES**

### **CAPELA HVMA MISSA QVT MISSA QVT IDIANA v**

Translation -- In this tomb lies the mortal remains of Dona Leanora Mascarenhs, second wife of Francisco De Mello Castro Governor of the state of India ordered this tomb during the third year of his reign he ordered this tomb for in it to be put the mortal remains of his said wife, who died on 8th may 1654 and has instituted in this chapel a mass everyday.

The inscription throws light on the social aspect and social customs of the Portuguese. The inscription under study itself is a source material of history of Goa. Though ample references are available in literary form one cannot neglect the importance of inscriptions since it is a primary source material of history. Secondly. Inscriptions especially at public place gives instant information to general public ho may not go to historical records about social history of Goa. The inscriptions under study on the tombs shows the importance the Portuguese gave for charities and recording of their names to be fresh in the memory of people. This indeed was a common form in which Hindus gave endowment and charities.

Another thought provoking and interesting interpretation based on the inscription on the tomb of Dona Catalina throw light on the position of women vies-a vies the traditional Hindu customs. Lady the word itself used for a woman with respect, this speaks of high position of women. The tomb of Lady Catarina got the place in prestigious church of the said times. Now the question comes was a high status was given to her because she was a wife of Viceroy Gracia de Sa ? If it is so one cannot state that during Portuguese period women in general were placed at high position. Like Hindu way of life in those days and even today status comes to a woman from the position of her husband and family in the society. Chances of geting self-identity to women were remote. There may be some exception, but it general it is observed that women who were married to a authoritative personalities like Governors, Judges, Viceroy's lead a higher status in a society and obviously there tombs were erected in well established churches in Goa. This throws a light on the degree of male domination in Portuguese social life.

Another two inscriptions throw light on two distinctive points, namely Dona Leonara was married twice, first to Visente Heriques, the judge of the High Court [Relasao de Goa], who died in 1632. Upon his death she married Francisco Demllo Castro, Governor, for the

second time. She died on 8th May 1654.<sup>vi</sup> The inscription throws light on the social custom of remarriage since Dona Leonara was married twice. Yet her status remained intact. She found a place in the religious institute after her death speaks volumes of the high position of women.

One can argue that inscriptions under study speaks only about the Christian women in Goa but surprisingly it is observed that the church, it is advocated abolition of the practice of sati on humanitarian grounds. The inhuman practice of sati that prevailed in Goa was abolished by Albuquerque.<sup>vii</sup> And even after him first three councils not only condemned sati system but also passed resolution to allow the young widow to marry again if they so desired. The councils through their various decrees not only tried to rejuvenate the women but also tried to rehabilitate the widows under their protection. Positive encouragement was given to young widows to remarry and by this way property laws were made to benefit women. Yet the fact remains that their place was at home.<sup>viii</sup>

Can we say that Portuguese has elevated the position of women in Goa? Or they had humanitarian attitude towards women. To some extent it is true, but the church had ulterior motives in advocating abolition of sati. It is a Hindu practice and therefore the church wanted it abolished. Secondly widows belonging to rich families could inherit properties if converted and the church could get a portion of the properties from the converted widows<sup>ix</sup>. Hence Hindu widows in Goa were communicated directly or indirectly that they stood to gain immensely by becoming Christians: that they could inherit properties of their husbands or near relatives under Portuguese [Christians] law and they could even remarry men of their choices. Therefore argument over here is that pure humanitarianism of the church appears to be imaginary.

The churches in Goa had regulated the life of women in several ways. It enforced number of decrees regarding marriage, inheritance, widowhood, dress etc. it has affected the life of women converts immensely. One can say that the main purpose of these decrees was to prevent the converts from continuing their pre-conversion ways of life. For example by an order 14 April 1736 it banned Christian women from wearing the 'Cholli' a common garment of Hindu women. The same order laid down that no Christians women should participate in any religious Procession, Festivity ECT. They were even directed not to wear the nose-stud. There were many more restrictions on the personal life of women converts.<sup>x</sup> It must have been

very difficult for the converted women to fit themselves in totally new lifestyle and forget their past. The church took undue advantage of the women's inferior social status, economic dependence and ignorance.

Whatever must be the intension of church one should not under the impression that church merely exploited women. It must be indicated here that the church did help them, particularly the helpless ones in several ways. Some of the policies of church directly or indirectly move the society of Goa in the path of modernity. Granting of the rights of inheritance and ownership of property to women, providing for widow remarriage, introducing certain other measures to improved the socio-economic status of women in under Portuguese. We can conclude by saying that with the coming of Portuguese and Goan culture there has become amalgam of much that is best in the culture of the west and east. Inscription depending upon the nature of the information we seek every line or even word of the inscription tests, be invocatory, genealogical, operative or imprecatory can be made to yield hidden facts of history<sup>xi</sup>.

## REFERENCES

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<sup>iii</sup> Nwer Julia, *The Monuments in Old Goa*, New Delhi, 1979, p.33

<sup>iv</sup> Inscription in se Cathedral de Goa

<sup>v</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>vi</sup> Martin. F. *Coronica da Vice Rei E Governadores de India*, Hiprensa Nacimal, Nova Goa, 1919, p.305.

<sup>vii</sup> Shirodkar P. P. [ed], *Goa: Cultural Trends*, Govt. of Goa, 1988. p.117.

<sup>viii</sup> Kamath, P., *Some legal aspects of the socio-economic life of women in Portuguese Goa*, New Delhi, 1987, pp. 93-103.

<sup>ix</sup> *Ibid*, p. 117.

<sup>x</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 119-120.

<sup>xi</sup> K. V. Ramesh., *Presidential Address, Vol XXII, Epigraphical society Congress.*