

Looking closely at Goa

TEXT AND PICS: FREDERICK NORONHA

HISTORIANS in Goa themselves concede that it's a pity -- if not a tragedy -- that the rich local archive is rarely referred to by local scholars. Five centuries of history, and hardly anyone to look at it.

We could have some alibis and excuses for that state of affairs: Few people manage to keep up with their Portuguese language skills these days. Everybody wants instant gratification and quick returns; Portuguese passports, not Portuguese history. Goa's look back at its colourful and history-laden past is hardly as active as it should be, anyway....

Excuses apart, the fact is that we treat the past shoddily here.

In contrast, the interest in studying Goa among foreign scholars (and a few from the rest of India too) continues with quite some determination. Serious scholarship continues in distant Portugal, which shares a long past with Goa. Even if that was not always pleasant.

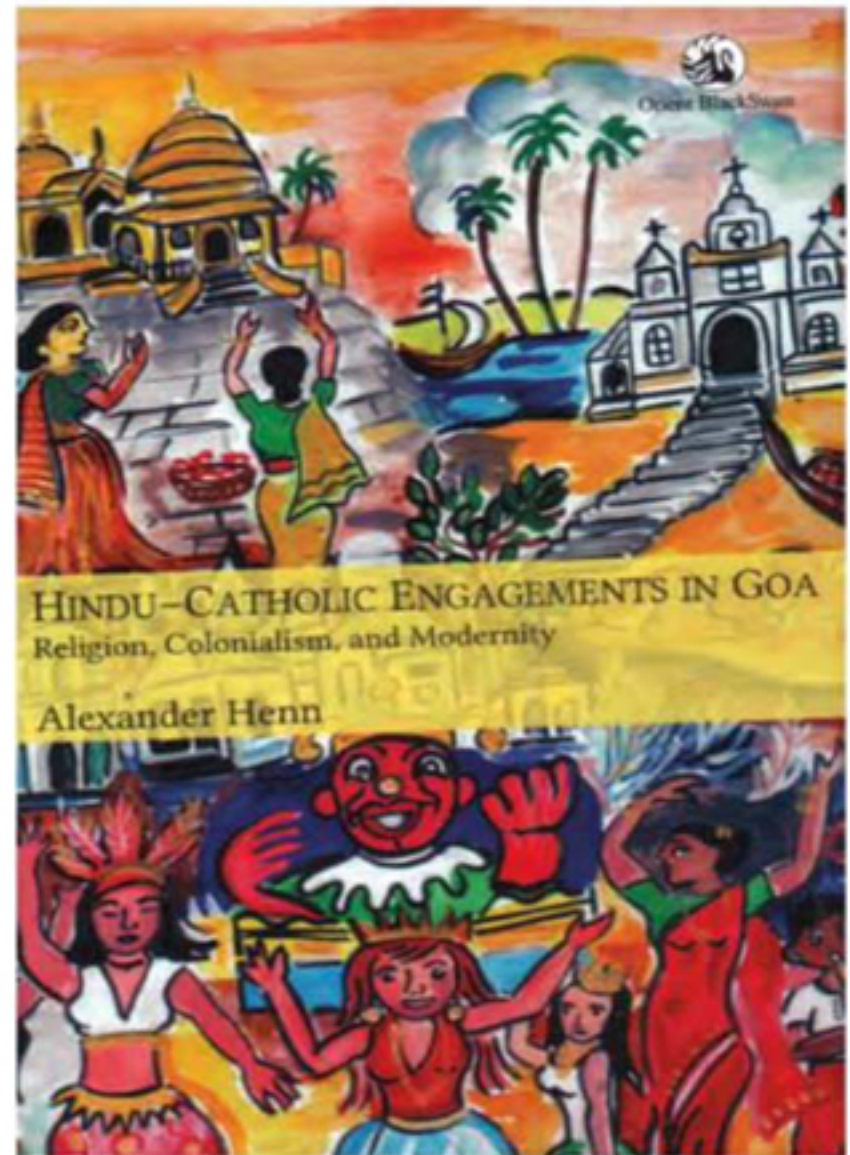
Dr Sandra Ataide Lobo, of Portuguese-Goan origins, has recently completed her PhD on a topic linked to the intellectual history of Goa in the early 20th century. It contains so many details, names of people and publications, and ideas, that many locals would not know what she is talking about.

Lisbon-based Goan scholar Dr Teotonio R de Souza drew attention to the research of Paulo Emanuel Leote Estanislau, who worked on the roads named after Goans in Lisbon. These are yet-to-be published works, but such works do tell us something.

Today, the part-Goan descent Antonio da Costa is even the prime minister of Portugal. Unlike British rule in giant India, Portuguese colonialism was a strange affair in Goa.

Yet another scholar, the German Alexander Henn recently came out with his book on Goa, published by Orient BlackSwan a little after it first came out in the West. His work is titled 'Hindu-Catholic Engagements in Goa: Religion, Colonialism, and Modernity'.

It looks at changing religious practices in Goa, over the centuries. While there have been



moments of bitterness and violent clashes, Henn argues that "Hindu village gods and Catholic patron saints commonly attract veneration from people of the respective 'Other' religious community and, yet, do not create confusion between the distinct identities of Hindus and Catholics." Other foreign scholars like Robert S Newman have also studied syncretism (or the sharing of religion, to put it crudely) here.

Henn's book is an interesting read when religious infighting is clearly on the rise across South Asia, for both political and other reasons. Only, at some points, one is vary the biases of the past could unintentionally slip in here. This has been both colonial and nationalistic biases.

Whatever the case, Goa remains a place that holds the interest of the scholar too, offering as it does a very interesting field for study and research of all sorts. If only the local society could study their own issues in more depth and concern....



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