

# Churches in Verna and Orlim

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In the year 1568, two churches were founded in Salcete: Verna and Orlim. In Verna, the first mass was celebrated on the Septuagesima Sunday [the ninth Sunday before Easter, the third before Ash Wednesday] It was dedicated to Holy Cross. When the famous temple at Verna was destroyed, the people pleaded that they be permitted to at least venerate the remnant thereof, and they conspired with a Portuguese to buy that land from the crown, and that they would buy the same from him for double the price. But this stratagem was not allowed to succeed.

The viceroy got to know of the deceit, and so that the land may not go back to the gentiles, he ordered that a cross be consecrated at the very same spot where stood the temple. It was a very beautiful site to which one climbed by several steps. And since the village was already under the protection of the Holy Cross, it was deemed appropriate to dedicate the church to the same. Soon on the feast of the patron on May 3, 60 persons were baptised with great pomp. With trumpets and much dancing, two crosses were raised; one in front of the church and the other on the rotunda of well chiseled stones where the superstitious people worshipped. [Fr. Francisco de Sousa, Oriente Conquistado A Jesu Christo pelos Padres da Companhia de Jesu Da Provincia De Goa, 1710, Part2, p. 32]

The first church of Verna, a mud structure, was built where once stood the temple of Goddess Santeri; but as that site was considered improper ('shameful') the church was then shifted to another place, a burial place of gentiles. And then a third was built with stones and mortar, a hundred strides away from the first. In the year 1612, when Fr Manoel Correa was the parish priest, the first mass was celebrated there.

This is the first church in Salcete, other than in Rachol college, which had a clock on the tower. When the Portuguese entered the country for the first time in 1519, Diogo Lopes de Sequeyra being the Governor and Ruy de Mello the Captain of Goa, they rested in the temple of Mardol [Verna]



which was built in the form of a fortress. And below a rampart they set up an altar and celebrated a mass offering the land to God. This was the first mass celebrated in Salcete. As Mardol is a ward of Verna, one should praise the noble village for being honoured with this unique privilege.

Verna, as we call it, or Urunna as the locals call it, signifies 'dawn'. Which is an excellent metaphor for the freshness and coolness of the village; the village is indeed very cool and fresh as it has a lot of springs and tanks which enliven and refresh it. This character of the village, as one of them told me, stands for its bramhan residents who are robust for work, steady in their steps, still noted for their meekness. As it is thickly forested and has many springs, several tigers roam there. One day a villager all in tears, approached

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the parish priest Fr. Gaspar Ozouro accompanied by a catechumen, crying for urgent help as a tiger had run away with his son. The parish priest, taking with him some people and the sacristan, who knew the formula for baptising, sent them with the holy water to baptise the child, if the tiger let

it go from its hold. The youngsters ran howling after the tiger, which scared by the shouts left the child and escaped. The child was still alive. But was so injured that it breathed its last while being baptised, and thus went to heaven straight from the mouth of the tiger.

Holy Mass was celebrated for the first time in Orlim in the church dedicated to Archangel Michael on May 8. On the same day, there was a very solemn baptism. Orlim is a village of charados [ksatriyas], a caste different from the bramhans; those of this village were the first to accept Christianity. This year, that is in 1575 we shall talk only about the charados of Orlim. In this same year, the hospital founded by Venerable Fr. Paulo Camerte, the companion of St. Francis Xavier, now under the care of Bro. Pedro Af-

fonso shifted from Goa [Old Goa] to Margão. Here were received and cured with the same care Christians and gentiles, which became an efficacious means for conversion of Salcete. Today this hospital is in the compound of our College of Rachol. And has its own chapel in which a mass is celebrated for poor patients on all Sundays and Holy Days.

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[Now, a brief note on the relative location of Jesuit College of Rachol and the villages of Loutolim and Verna; for the purpose of understanding the logistics of this missionary venture. At this time, it was from the College of Rachol that the Christianisation campaign was directed and executed. Rachol is on the bank of the River Zuari. Village of Loutolim is about 5 km to its north east, along the river but not on the bank of river; it is a little away from the river at the foot of the hill. Verna is straight up at the top of that hill; there was an ancient cobbled path up the hill connecting Loutolim and Verna that was used by people on foot and on horseback; the new asphalted road more or less follows that path. The path went more or less to the Mahalsa temple in Mardol ward of Verna, which was at a height, before one descended to the inhabitation, and the River Sal plain. The church was built on a lower ground, just before the River Sal bank plain begins.]

KONKANAPURANA



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