
THE CONVENT OF SANTA MONICA

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Abstract: The Convent of Santa Monica was the first convent built in Portuguese Asia. The Archbishop Dom Aleixo de Menezes was instrumental in setting up this Convent, as he was of the opinion that a monastic way of life would prevent women from going astray and indulging in sin. Initially, admission was open only to European women especially of noble birth, but later the Convent even admitted girls of Jewish origin and newly converted Christians.

The nuns here, strictly followed the vows of chastity, poverty, obedience and led a cloistered life. Apart from religious life, they cultivated various skills such as stitching, embroidery, culinary art, and gardening. Their handicrafts were sold, and the profits from these sales were utilised for running the day to day expense of the Convent. Over the years, the Convent had a vast amount of resources and assets through various sources, but at the same time it also spent a huge amount on the maintenance of the building and infrastructure. At one point of time, it even became a status symbol for the Portuguese nobility to get their daughters admitted into the Convent.

The Convent of Santa Monica did face a setback in the mid 17th century, when the local authorities levelled accusations against them. Yet another blemish to this noble institution was when some of the nuns violated the vows of seclusion and left the Convent owing to Church politics.

During its existence of more than two and a half centuries, it has to be admitted that the Convent served to bring in high moral standards and strengthen the Christian faith without which the *Estado da India* (Portuguese possessions in the East called State of India) would not be able to survive.

Introduction: One of the well-known ecclesiastical institutions during the rule of the Portuguese was the Convent of Santa Monica; in fact the first convent built in Portuguese Asia, after much opposition from the Crown. In fact, when the Archbishop had recommended the setting up of a convent for women in Goa, the King wrote back that an institution of such type, would deter marriages, especially in a place where men outnumbered women, and would thus be a hindrance towards the progress of colonization in India. Hence, in his view it served no advantage to build a convent.

The Viceroy of India spoke on the same lines as the Archbishop, urging the Home Government in Portugal to sanction the establishment of such an institution, as a number of women of noble worth in India, sincerely desired to detach themselves from worldly affairs, dedicating themselves to the will of God. There were others of noble birth who came all the way from Portugal, undertaking risky journeys, with a firm decision to commit themselves to the service of God, in this place. Also leading a monastic way of life would avoid immorality and sinful living, and ensure that women led a life of dignity.

The *Senado de Goa* agreeing to the Viceroy's contention persisted in obtaining the King's assent for a convent and sent a letter to the Crown in 1595, to that effect. Opening such an institution would be of great use to women, increasing their faith in the Lord, as well as the convent in all its grandeur would become world famous.

In spite of the repeated letters and petitions on the part of the Viceroy, the *Misericordia de Goa* and the *Senado de Goa*, the Crown did not consent to their requests. But years later, king Phillip III changed his views and agreed to the setting up of a convent for women in Goa, in 1599. Probably, this could be because of the intervention of a very eminent personality Archbishop *Frei Aleixo de Menezes*, who commanded great respect in the Court of the King. This was a time when the Viceroy *Dom Martim Castro*, had to proceed to Malacca. In his absence, the Archbishop *Dom Aleixo de Menezes* was asked to

take over as the Portuguese Governor of the Portuguese settlements in India, during the period 1606-1609. The latter seized the opportunity to ensure that his plan materialised.

Founding of the Convent: Initially, this Convent was housed in a temporary building and then moved to a new premises, across the road of St. George in the City of Goa, close to the Augustinian monastery. The Archbishop Frei Aleixo de Menezes, immediately started the work of erecting this edifice. Its foundation was laid by the Archbishop himself on 2nd July 1606- the feast day of the Visitation. In the early stages, the Convent faced several difficulties, partly after the departure of Archbishop *Dom* Aleixo de Menezes to Portugal. Neither the authorities in the City of Goa, nor rich citizens gave financial help to the convent, as had been promised earlier, except for *Dona* Catarina Mendonca, who offered a large donation and there by came to the rescue of this institution.

The building was erected over a huge area, which the Archbishop was able to procure, covering three streets and 42 houses, worth about 6000 *xerafins* each. These had to be demolished to make place for the huge Convent. Indeed, the convent was one of the biggest in the Portuguese Empire, after the one at Odivelas in the outskirts of Lisbon. This huge building was completed after a long period of 21 years i.e. in 1627, at a cost of 2000 *cruzados*. Probably, the delay in completing the building was owing to financial problems.

Admission: The Convent was placed under the care of an Augustinian Spanish priest Juan Pinto, who fully dedicated himself to this service. It was occupied no sooner a part of it was completed, in the very year of its foundation. In the 17th century, the admission was given to European women, wanting to lead a religious life, especially to the daughters of the *fidalgos*, who died leaving them behind without any financial provision for their dowries.

A large number of girls joined the Convent at the very young age of six. At this stage, they were provided with elementary education and singing, while the novitiate began, only after the girls reached puberty. Soon orphan girls who had remained unmarried at the *Recolhimento de Serra*, were given accommodation at Santa Monica when the Serra was overcrowded. Infact 21 women from the *Recolhimento* joined the *Mosteiro de Santa Monica* (Convent of Santa Monica). Agostinho de Santa Maria- the first Augustinian chronicler, related the details of the ceremony that the new entrants were subject to. A solemn procession was organised, which was presided over by the Bishop, who presented a religious habit to each of the newcomers, as they reached the Church and recited their solemn vows.

Among the 21 ladies were *Dona* Fillipa Ferreira- widow of *Dom* Gaspar de Louzado de Sa, who was earlier in charge of the Serra- a rich widow from Thana, near Bombay, who gave up her wealth and joined the convent with her daughter *Dona* Maria de Sa. *Dona* Fillipa became the first *Prioreza*- the Prioress of the convent, while her daughter became her assistant. Young Portuguese girls and girls from other parts of Asia, also joined the Convent. In course of time, the Convent even admitted *Novas Cristas* i.e. girls of Jewish origin and newly converted Christians . eg. Two daughters of the King of Jafnapatan (Ceylon) – *Dona* Margarita de Austria and *Dona* Clara de Austria. Thus those girls and women who wished to devote themselves to God, following the teachings of the Gospel and live a life of celibacy were admitted in this Convent.

By the second half of the 17th century, the reputation of this Convent was enhanced, when the news that one of the nuns by the name of Sr. Mary of Jesus (*Dona* Maria de Crom)- daughter of a German nobleman and widow of *Dom* Manuel de Souza- had died in this Convent on 2nd January 1863, at the age of 78, with scars of stigmata on her hands and breast too, resembling those of Jesus Christ. Her body was dug out on the very next day of her burial, and investigation was conducted by Dr. S. De Azavedo and other medical experts. The portrait of this nun, lying in the coffin, has been framed and is presently exhibited in a passage, which leads from the Convent to the Church.

Now the Convent became well known in a short span of time. According to C. R. Boxer 'it became a kind of status symbol into which, some of the best families of Goa , tried to get one or more of their

daughters accepted as novices.' During the second half of the 17th century, there were about 100 nuns, besides the young girls who were educated by them.

Vows and Attire of the Nuns: The nuns of the *Mosteiro* (Convent) took the three customary vows of chastity, poverty and obedience. In addition, they observed the fourth vow to permanently have a cloistered life. The nuns wore a white habit of rough cotton material in the form of a tunic (a loose dress gathered at the waist with a leather belt). They also wore a scapular.

Initially the Convent admitted exclusively European nuns. They were of noble birth and so they wore the black veil over a cap made of white cloth, covering their hair and neck. They were called *Madres* or 'Mothers' or 'Choir-sisters'. At the beginning of the 18th century, when non-European or local women were admitted, they wore the white veil and were called *Sorores* or 'Sisters'. Any suggestion to put an end to the differences were all in vain.

Way of Life: The day of the nuns was well organised, methodical and systematic, beginning very early at 3 am with one hour of prayers, followed by tea. After this, the nuns took care of their personal needs, until the mass, which was held in the chapel of the Convent at 7am.

After the mass, the nuns were busy with their studies and other responsible tasks assigned to them. They also educated the other young girls in the Convent. It has to be noted that female education in the early centuries of the Portuguese rule, was restricted to the nuns of the *Convento de Santa Monica* and the girls of the *Recolhimento da Serra*.

The nuns also engaged themselves in other tasks allotted to them, such as the cultivation of vegetables, flower-gardening, needle-work, embroidery, making handicraft items, rosaries and pastries. The nuns of the Convent were specialised in many Indo-Portuguese confectionaries.

At noon lunch was served, which comprised of rice, curry, fish twice a week and meat occasionally. On feast days, such as the feast of Santa Monica, St. Augustine, St. Anthony, Christmas, Easter etc, a special menu was cooked. There were many female cooks, along with their assistants who prepared the meals.

After lunch, until 2 o'clock, complete silence was maintained. Even life in the kitchen came to a halt, with the servants retiring to their quarters. At 2 o'clock, the bell would ring for two hours of prayer. After prayer, until the 'Angelus' (a Roman Catholic devotion commemorating the incarnation, said in the morning, noon and at sunset), the nuns continued their work. At 7 in the evening, the nuns took a stroll in their garden, enjoying the cool breeze and refreshing themselves, before retiring to their rooms. At night, they would meet at the chapel for night prayers. On feast days, the nuns sang the vespers in the Convent chapel, to the accompaniment of the organ, violin and guitar. Dinner was served at 8 o'clock, followed by community meeting. The nuns fasted twice a week and more often, during the Lenten and Advent seasons.

According to the rules, the nuns had to confess and receive the Eucharist twice a week. During illness they would confess every day, including on feast days of saints and festivals like Christmas and Easter. The nuns also entertained themselves occasionally. For eg. On Christmas day, they even danced, but all fun was modest and decent. Some nuns spent their time composing verses that were very sentimental and graceful.

By and large, the nuns were not allowed to speak privately with one another, except with their Superior. Visitors were permitted once a month, except during Advent, Lent, Sundays and holy days. These visits were restricted only to parents and immediate family members and that too they could speak only through a small *locutorio* (visiting space) known among the nuns as *purgatorio* (purgatory). Another nun would stand close by and listen to the conversation. Other outsiders were not allowed, except for doctors in times of illness -and that too in the presence of the Superior- and the priest for confessions

and to administer the Sacrament to the sick. The Archbishop would visit the Convent every year, along with two or more priests.

Women too, were not easily given entry into the Convent with the exception of female helpers, who were allotted two dormitories. The *Dormitorio das Africanas* was the dormitory for negro servants, while the *Dormitorio de S.Tome* was the dormitory for Indian maids. There was yet another dormitory, the *Dormitorio de S. Guilherme*, reserved for lay nuns, who were yet to take their vows. Whenever the nuns wrote letters, they were thoroughly checked by the Superior, to make sure that the same did not contain information that went against the Convent.

The cells of the nuns were plain and had the bare minimum, a bed, a crucifix on the wall or a statue of the Virgin Mary, a table and chair and a container of holy water. So it was a modest room, without much comfort.

A unique system of naming of the nuns, prevailed in the Convent, in accordance to the positions that they held. Eg. The Prioress was named as *pavão* (peacock); the choir in- charge as *chamariz* (stool pigeon); the Head of the novices was *pintasilgo* (goldfinch), in-charge of confessions was the *pardal* (sparrow), the Sacristian was called *rouxinal* (nightingale), the doorkeeper as *galo* (cock), the book-keeper was the *pega* (magpie), the granary in- charge *rola* (turtle-dove), the in- charge of provisions as *ganso* (goose) the refectorian as *cegonha* (stork) and the clothes-keeper as *coruja* (owl).

Regardless of the routine and monotony of convent life, yet a number of women were inspired to join the Convent and gave up their worldly life. The Convent of Santa Monica provided them with an honest alternative to marriage. Hence the number of women wishing to dedicate their life to God, went on increasing, and it was difficult to accommodate them in the said Convent.

Now letters were sent to the local authorities, requesting to establish yet another Convent. Even rich people were ready to erect convents dedicated to Santa Clara or St. Francis Xavier, because of their intense devotion to these saints, and in the belief that this would save their souls. One such lady was *Dona Catarina de Mendonca*, baptised in the Church of Our Lady of Light, married to a nobleman. She became a widow at a young age. Her only child- a daughter expired at the age of ten. She then renounced the worldly glamour and channelized her wealth towards the construction of the convent. Her aim now on, was to dedicate her life to Jesus Christ, whose love she believed was true and unconditional.

Racial Discrimination: Throughout the period, racial discrimination continued to be a problem in the Convent. Examples of racial discrimination: A native girl paid double the amount paid by a white girl for admission. With regard to the veil, there were the European nuns using the *veu preto* (black veil), indicating noble birth. They were then addressed as *Madres*/ 'Mothers'/ 'Choir-Sisters', while the non-Europeans wore the *veu- branco* (white veil), denoting inferiority in status and were called 'Sisters' or *Sorores*.

During the rule of Marquez de Pombal, several liberal measures were passed, including the abolition of racial discrimination which existed in Goa. Accordingly, the then Secretary of State Martinho de Melo e Castro, abolished the discrimination in the sphere of veils, that existed in the Convent of Santa Monica. Further, again in 1779, a royal decree was issued to end this discrimination and the nuns with the *veu branco* were requested to start using the *veu preto*.

Distinction was also made between the Portuguese and the local women, regarding dowry. While the white nuns were asked to pay 3000 *xerafins*, the native nuns had to pay a dowry of 5000 *xerafins*. Hence, in 1779, the Archbishop was requested by the Court of Goa, to ensure that equal dowry be brought by both the European and native nuns. Eventually, the proposal was not adhered to, since it was detrimental to their colonial policy.

Work of Art and Skills: The nuns at Santa Monica had a busy day, always occupied in the various tasks assigned to them. Apart from their religious life, they engaged themselves in stitching and embroidery. Intricate designs were embroidered on altar cloths and church vestments. Infact, at one point of time, when the Viceroy Joao da Silva Telo de Menezes urged the nuns to pray in a special way, to safeguard the Portuguese against the Dutch, who had invaded the harbour of Mormugao in 1643, the nuns not only offered prayers, but artistically stitched a banner with the symbol of Portugal, and the portrait of *Immaculade Conceicao* (Our Lady of Immaculate Conception) on one side and the miraculous cross on the other side. This banner was hoisted on the Mormugao fort, which gave courage to the soldiers, and emboldened them to fight the enemy and win their cause. The nuns thus served as a driving force towards the entrenchment of the Portuguese rule in Goa.

Yet some other specializations of the nuns were making artificial flowers, rosaries, scapulars, colours from dyes and ink from black pigments called carbon blocks and black soot. A pointed wooden pen called stylus was dipped in this ink for writing purpose.

The nuns excelled in culinary art. Their recipes combined both, the Indian and the Portuguese cuisines. They made excellent fruit preserves, syrups, pastries and sweets, to name a few *bebinca* (layered cake), *bolinhas*, *dedos de damas* ladies fingers), *doce-bhaji* made of wheat and coconut, *fios de ovos*, *petas das freira*, *queijadinhas de conde* etc. The recipes of these delicacies were well guarded secrets with the nuns. In addition to the above activities, the nuns could get their stock of fruits and vegetables, from their very own vast gardens and orchards, which contained beautiful flowers, fruit- trees and vegetable plantations. The gardens were well irrigated with water from the tanks and the twelve wells in the Convent campus. The wells were given biblical names such as Jacob's well, the Good Samaritan well etc. The surplus produce, handicrafts and confectionaries produced by the nuns were sold in the market by the slaves. The profits acquired from these sales, were utilised for the day to day expenses of the Convent. The Viceroy- Count of Linhares, by his letter dated 4th February 1630, approved of such sales.

The nuns were assisted by the servants and slaves, because there was always enough work to be done at the Convent of Santa Monica, which required extra hands. The male labour would often do the outside work in the compound. The Convent had a work force of 120 servants and slaves. Historical records mention that the nuns of Santa Monica lamented about the shortage of slaves for such a huge Convent, when there were some others who owned a huge number of slaves including the *Juiz Ordinario* who had 85 slaves, while an average lawyer of the King – the *Disembargador*, owned over 60 slaves.

Education: The Convent of Santa Monica was a very important institution imparting education, though it was restricted only for the nuns here, who were leading a secluded life- *voto perpetuo da clausura*. However, there were occasions when the nuns were offered opportunities to display their talents to outsiders, and this won for them the admiration of one and all.

Novices at Santa Monica were taught to read and write in Portuguese, as well as the Latin language. Further, they were taught needle-work and to sing and play a musical instrument. Most often, the nuns were good in reciting poetry.

There were educational institutions affiliated to this Convent. To the west, there was the School of the Saviour- *Aula do Salvador*, also very close to it were the School of Mother of God- *Aula de Madre de Deus* and School of Santa Clara- *Aula de Santa Clara*. Different subjects were taught in these schools for different age levels. But all said and done, the education was restricted to the residents of the nunnery. Through this education, the nuns were far from ignorance and superstition, which dominated the 16th and 17th centuries.

Sources of Revenue: Over the years the Convent of Santa Monica, had accumulated vast amounts of resources and assets, both movable and immovable. The building housing the Convent was due to the efforts of Archbishop Aleixo de Menezes who had acquired three streets, and demolished 42 houses,

in order to acquire land to construct this mighty nunnery. The building had cost him approximately 260 *cruzados* i.e. about 20,000\$. The compound wall was very strong.

Records indicate that the annual income of the Convent of Santa Monica in the very first decade of its existence was 4000 *pardaos*. Therefore the *Senado xerafins* commented in 1635, that the Convent possessed 'the lion's share of the patrimonies of the City', which at that time was subjected to the Dutch blockade.

The King sanctioned to the Convent of Santa Monica, a yearly grant of 8000 *cruzados*. Besides, European entrants to the Convent would also pay a dowry of 2000 *xerafins*, while the local entrants would pay 5000 *xerafins* or they could also pay a dowry in kind. In addition, the Convent had movable assets which included intricately carved church furniture such as the main altar, small altars, cupboards, chairs, tables, benches, kneelers, candle stands, richly decorated ceilings, chandeliers, artistically sculptured statues, valuable paintings, wooden and metal crosses, vases, railings, holy water font of metal and marble. And heavily embroidered vestments for priests.

The main sources of revenue were:

1. **Agricultural Income:** the Convent possessed a number of rich-yielding paddy fields in Bardez taluka, in the areas of Mapusa-Corlim, Ucassaim, Nachinola, Aldona, Assnora, Guirim, Sangolda, Calangute. Besides, it also received income from the palm-groves in the City of Goa, island of Chorao, Siolim, Marna, Verem and Malim.

The Convent also owned land in the *Pracas do Norte* such as two villages- Daince and Nelegi in Bassein, the village of Balleao near Thana; lands on the island of Varoa earned the Convent an income of 300 *patacoes* every year, of which a part of the Varoa lands had been acquired by the Convent, as the dowry received by Sr. Isabella de Jesus.

In 1639, Sr. Ursula da Encarnacao who was the Prioress of the Convent, brought several additional lands with coconut trees, adding to the property already earned by the Convent.

2. **Rental Properties, Shops as Dowries:** The Convent received rent in silver, from the villages of Marvor and Dalvora, situated in Daman. Rent amounting to \$60,000, was received from the estate of Cruvinel in Lisbon, in the early years. However around 1874, this was discontinued.

During the second half of the 17th century, there were about 100 girls at the Convent, who carried a large dowry. When a girl joined the Convent, she brought along *dote* (dowry) in cash and kind. It was meant for her maintenance. For eg. Sr. Ilena da Madre de Deus was given as dowry, five rental properties on the Rua de Cedas. Sr. Catarina de Jesus received as dowry, rent from three shops in Chorao, four shops in Diwar and one shop in Jua. Rent from a commercial building on the Rua de Baneanes was the dowry acquired by Sr. Maria do Salvador.

Incidentally the collection of land from these properties was entrusted to Hindu renters-*arrendatarios* Guiba S. Virlicar and Purisrama Sinai, who would then hand over the rent to the Convent.

From the property in St. Estevam, the Convent received income by way of *jonos*. The bakers from the City of Goa, would pay an annual rent to the Convent for utilising the shops of the Convent.

3. **Houses- Bought, Gifted or Received as Dowries:**

The Convent purchased a number of houses in the City of Goa. Eg. Three houses on the Rua dos Xerrefos, three double-storeyed houses on the Rua dos Chapeleiros and elsewhere in the City, some more houses. Houses were not only bought, but also built by the Convent on the land that it purchased from the sons of George de Lemos.

Other houses were acquired by it, as a dowry given to the nuns. Sr. Catherina de Jesus received as part of her dowry, two small houses behind the Casa de Bom Jesus, while Sr. Jeromina of Jesus handed over to the Convent her dowry, which comprised of two storeyed houses on the Rua dos Carregados, which ultimately became a possession of the convent. The Convent became the owner of several double storeyed houses on the Rua Sao Paulo in the City of Goa, which were a part of the inheritance of Sr. Catarina de Santa Monica. Some houses located near the College of St. Augustine, which were a share of the property of Maria de Resurreicao, were transferred in the name of the Convent, no sooner the latter became a nun.

Some two storeyed houses behind Bom Jesus were gifted by people, in exchange for prayers and masses, to be recited for the departed members of the donors.

4. **Other Sources of Income:**

The nuns sold in the market their handicrafts- such as embroideries, artificial flowers, rosaries, scapulars, colours, ink toys, bead necklaces, pastries, preservatives, sweets, syrups, fruits and vegetables from their kitchen- garden. The income that they acquired from the sale, was used for their sustenance. Yet another source of income was the donations and gifts in cash or kind, for the prayers offered by the nuns.

In addition to the above, those who held responsible offices in the Convent were given a grant of forty-four *xerafins*. Further, they were provided with seven and a half *candis* of paddy, eleven hands (the unit of measure 10.16 cms.) of wheat, seventy-five *xerafins* for their clothes, forty *xerafins* towards feast expenses and seventy-five *xerafins* for other miscellaneous expenses. This was utilised for the upkeep and maintenance of the Convent, as well as the wages of the domestic workers.

With all this dowry, as well as its own assets, the Convent acquired a large *cabedal* (funds). Hence very often, it played the role of money-lender, lending substantial sums to private traders. There were some occasions however, when the Convent refused loans to the State, portraying itself as poor.

Expenses Incurred: The nuns residing in the Convent were to be maintained from the income that the Convent obtained from the various sources. Persons residing outside the cloister, who rendered service to the Convent were paid for their services. These included the members of the Board of Administrative Commission, the clerk and other employees such as the laundry man- *mainato*, who washed the church linen and the sacristian who brought candles, incense and oil required for the church services. Infact, every month, around five gallons of oil were used.

Besides, the Chaplain who assisted the nuns in their spiritual life, celebrating daily mass for the nuns, the musician who played at mass, forty masses offered every month to ward off evil, the doctor's visits twice a month, medication for the nuns amounting to approximately fifteen *xerafins* every month, constituted another source of expense.

The Convent also spent huge amounts on the maintenance of the building and infrastructure. The walls, ceiling, flooring, the internal and external facade had to be renovated and restored time to time. Besides, the huge gardens, orchards and palm-groves had to be well- maintained, irrigated and manured. Money was spent on these works as well as on the payment of workers, who went to those places, where Convent properties were located and maintained the same.

A big portion of the budget was allocated towards the celebration of feasts of their patron Santa Monica, St. Augustine and the feast of the Sacred Heart. These feasts were celebrated on a grand scale.

In 1880, the total income of the Convent was 15,884 *xerafins*, 3 *tangas*, and 29 *reis*. And the total expense was 12,026 *xerafins*, 1 *tanga* and 6 *reis*.

The Augustinian records of 1696, had mentioned that the *Senado* resented the affluence and extravagance that prevailed at the Convent and so it did not provide anything toward the maintenance of the Convent. Incidentally, these very members of the *Senado* were the ones who wished to accommodate their unsettled daughters in the Convent.

Allegations by Local Authorities against the Convent of Santa Monica: In 1644, the local authorities accused the Convent on two counts- on the one hand, the decline in the number of married Portuguese men, due to the existence of the Convent of Santa Monica and on the other hand, the amassing of wealth of the Convent.

The Prioress of the Convent answered the accusation regarding the exorbitant wealth of the Convent by stating, that it was a myth that the Convent was wealthy. On the contrary, since it was difficult to sustain too many nuns, their number was now restricted to hundred, who could pay the required dowry, because it was so happening that some parents would not even make the slightest effort to get their

daughters married. Instead, they would send their daughters to the Convent, without even giving the inheritance due to them. For instance Luis de Brito and *Dona Catarina de Vilhena* paid only two hundred *xerafins* as dowry to their daughter who joined the Convent. Their daughter was not given any share of their landed property. In this way, parents deceived their daughters joining nunhood, thereby causing loss to the Convent.

Fr. Diego de Santa Ana- an Augustinian friar disapproved the criticism levelled against this prestigious institution by stating that the Convent did not really accommodate a big number of women, as was commonly believed. Initially, when the Convent was founded, there were only twenty-one women and by 1613, there were 114 members.

The very existence of the Convent served to bring in high moral standards and strengthening of faith without which the state of India, would not be able to survive.

In spite of the refutations of Fr. Diego de Santa Ana, the strong belief was that many white girls joined the Convent, thereby spoiling the marriage chances of a number of Portuguese bachelors, who now began leaving the City of Goa. A similar situation existed at Macao and Cochin, as seen from one of the letters of Viceroy *Dom Diogo Coutinho* to the Portuguese sovereign stating that ‘Cochin weeps for the lack of its nobility’. Hence the Viceroy requested his sovereign to pass an order limiting the number of entrants to the Santa Monica Convent.

Contrary to the instructions issued by the State, the Convent continued to admit a large number of girls. Hence many Portuguese noblemen, deserted the City of Goa, as they could not find girls of the same social background to marry. This sentiment found its way in a letter which *Dom Minguel de Noronha-Conde de Linhares*, has mentioned about, in his diary dated 1632.

Initiative by Crown to Reduce Entries: Conde de Linhares requested the Crown to reduce the number of girls to be admitted, and to fix the amount of dowry that each girl should carry. Ultimately the Crown restricted the number to 100. Now the novices could be admitted, only to make up that number. Further, a document was signed between the Superior of the Convent and the Municipal Council, permitting the girls to bring a dowry of only 1000 *xerafins*. The State would compensate the Convent, so as to make up the loss in dowry with a grant of 8000 *xerafins*. It has to be mentioned however, that in reality, several of the girls were accepted as novices without any dowry.

The Portuguese Crown accepted the ‘Padroado de Santa Monica’ in 1636. It was now styled as ‘Royal Convent of Santa Monica’/ *Real Convento de Santa Monica* / *Real Mosteiro de Santa Monica*. Simultaneously, the King limited the number of admissions to forty.

Sixty years later, the Superior of the Convent complained in a letter, about the government’s failure to release the grant of 8000 *xerafins*. Infact, in the same letter, she spoke of the need to raise the subsidy to 1600 *xerafins*, keeping in mind the soaring prices of the foodstock.

Reasons that led some of the Nuns to vacate Santa Monica: In the 17th century, the nuns of the Convent of Santa Monica, vacated the building on several occasions, thereby violating one of their vows of seclusion. The first time they vacated this institution was on 24th December 1636, owing to a fire that broke out on the first floor of the eastern wing. The fire was caused by a little candle that accidentally fell into a hay crib. At this time, the nuns took shelter in the nearby College of St. Augustine for a period of two years and returned after the Convent was repaired by Fr. Diogo de Santa Ana- the Administrator of the Convent.

The nuns of Santa Monica were not above Church politics. In 1731 and 1735, the nuns left the Convent. This time, the issue was more serious. There was a clash between the regular clergy led by the Bishop of Malacca on the one hand, and the Archbishop Primate of Goa- *Dom Frei Inacio de Santa Teresa*, on the other side. Some of the nuns of the Convent of Santa Monica were against the Archbishop, because he

frequently visited the Convent, much against the cloister rules. The reason behind these visits was his fascination and secret affection towards the Assistant Superior Sr. Ignacia de Assuncao. This invited a lot of contempt for the Archbishop from most of the nuns, with the Superior Sr. Magdalene complaining that there was none who could admonish or prevent the Archbishop, from dominating over the nuns of the Convent.

Thus, there came to exist two factions of nuns in the Convent of Santa Monica. One group including the Superior Sr. Magdalena de Santa Agostinho supported the Bishop of Malacca, who had issued a Pastoral notice of excommunication against the Archbishop of Goa, and it was fixed on the door of the Convent. On the other hand, the Archbishop sided by Assistant Superior Sr. Ignacia fixed another Pastoral notice of excommunication against the Bishop of Malacca. This was done in the absence of the Superior.

With the return of the then Viceroy Joao Saldanha de Gama to Portugal, the Archbishop became a very powerful personality, occupying a very important position in the State Government. Using his executive powers, he called in troops to control the so called 'rebel' group of the nuns. They were threatened that they would be exiled to a far off place i.e Macao.

Mustering courage, and supported by the Augustinian friars and Jesuits, the rebel nuns, sixty-three in number, moved out of the Convent, holding a cross and proceeded to the residence of the Governor Dom Christovao de Mello, to safeguard them. But the Governor did not approve of the decision taken by the rebel nuns to leave the Convent and advised them to return to the Convent, wherein an agreement would be drafted. The Governor felt it necessary to allot two different areas in the Convent to the two groups of nuns. The so called rebel nuns were upset with the fact that the lower choir and its railings were allotted to the Archbishop's supporters and denounced it as the height of partiality.

Sr. Magdalena- the Superior, reports in her account, that on 28th September 1732, the Archbishop believing that the new Viceroy was arriving to Goa, decided to hastily elect a new Prioress for the Convent. Usually, the Prioress was elected for a period of three years. But the Archbishop held elections before the completion of three years with the nineteen nuns who were in the Convent. The new Prioress elected was Sr. Brites do Sacramento.

In May 1732, when the opposing nuns came to know about the imminent visit of the Archbishop to the Convent, they, led by the Superior of the Convent, left the place. When the new Viceroy Count of Sandomil, arrived in Goa on 17th October 1732, he learnt about the revolt prevailing in the Convent of Santa Monica and informed King Dom Joao V about the same, in his letter dated 11th January 1733, which read as follows: 'I am communicating to you about the happenings in the Convent of Santa Monica. The partialities caused the rebellion in the Convent and a majority of the nuns, throwing away the yoke of obedience due to their Prelate, violated the vow of the cloister, and lived in the palace of the fortress of this city, from May till my arrival. This case has been so scandalous, that it affected my sentiments'.

The third occasion when the nuns left the nunnery was in March 1739, when the Marathas invaded the lands of Bardez and Salcete. They shifted to Mormugao, where they were first sheltered in a fort, and thereafter to a place, where they spent nearly two months. As a matter of fact, the nuns were well familiar with Mormugao, because when the Dutch had earlier bombarded this port, the nuns had embroidered a banner that was hoisted on the Mormugao fort, which was a source of great encouragement to the Portuguese soldiers to fight the enemy, who eventually fled away.

Life of the Rebels in the Palace of the Fortress: In May 1732, the rebel nuns left the Convent of Santa Monica and took shelter in the palace of the fortress. Infact, this was earlier the fortress of the Viceroy; indeed a beautiful palace to be reckoned with. Located at the very entrance of the City, next to the famous Arch of Viceroys, where the ships docked, Marquez de Pombal had referred to it as a magnificent palace, where not only courts and councils met, but also here, ambassadors of various countries were entertained.

However, from 1695, it ceased to be the residence of the Viceroys, when the Count of Vilaverde, shifted his residence to Panelim, on account of the epidemic. By residing in this fortress, the nuns were violating the rules of the cloister, as they were subject to all sorts of distractions and temptations. Sr. Brites the newly elected Prioress of the Archbishop's group writes that the rebels enjoyed the support of the Augustinian friars and the Jesuits. Gradually, they began mingling with the neighbouring people and sought their assistance to find work and earn a living. They made many handicraft items such as jewellery items like earrings, necklaces of pearls, embroidery. Nodoubt their work was good, according to Sr. Brites, yet she did not approve of it, because it was not done in the convent premises.

The new Viceroy- Count of Sandomil was determined to end the rebellion and ensure that the nuns return to the Convent. Accordingly, he requested the Archbishop to withdraw the ex-communication order against the Bishop of Malacca, which was promptly done by the Archbishop; in addition other acts of kindness and goodwill gestures, were displayed by the latter. Further, the sudden death of the Bishop of Malacca, within three days of his illness, left the rebel nuns deserted, without their patron and they then returned to the Convent of Santa Monica.

Tension at Santa Monica upon the Return of the Rebel Nuns: The sixty-three rebel nuns returned to the Convent of Santa Monica. They were a majority, compared to the nineteen nuns who had remained behind at the Convent. The latter had supported the Archbishop.

At the Convent, the rebel nuns would not follow the norms of the Convent. Acts of worship which were to be done as a community, were separately conducted, thereby causing unbearable discord. Because of the anarchy that prevailed, the Archbishop prohibited the rebel nuns from all acts of worship, which required the mediation of a priest. The Archbishop believed that by meting out such a canonical punishment to the rebel nuns, they could be brought into submission. But this step proved a failure.

As seen from a letter written by the Prioress Sr. Brites do Sacramento-who belonged to the Archbishop's group- to the Viceroy on 9th December 1732, she stated that the Convent could not be regarded as a house of God. On the contrary, this had been converted into a hell, where there were continuous heated arguments, shouting and loud cries. Thus a tense atmosphere prevailed at the Convent of Santa Monica, which she deeply regretted.

Now even the Archbishop stopped visiting the Convent, although at his palace in Panelim, he felt a sense of restlessness, owing to the rebellion in the Convent. So Sr. Brites once again complained to the Viceroy that it seemed as if their Prelate i.e. the Archbishop had abandoned them, ever since the rebel nuns had returned to the Convent. She expressed regret that as Prelate, the Archbishop did not exercise his authority, to reduce the hostility that continued in the Convent.

Further, the Prioress claimed that the rebels were forceful, disobedient and acting as they pleased, regardless of all norms. They led a sinful life, disregarding confession and communion, fearless of the Lord. She compared them to the furious mad dogs, pouncing in anger on the submissive nuns. Sr. Brites expressed her utter helplessness in such a situation where she could not even depend on the Archbishop, because at the very mention of his name, the rebel nuns would become furious, hurling insults and using obscene language.

The rebels acted independently, having instituted their own Prioress Sr Magdalena do Santo Agostinho. At one point of time, Sr. Brites recounts that some of the rebel nuns demanded of her, the key to the Novitiate. Having refused them, they rushed and broke the door announcing that henceforth, the novices and other young students, would be mentored by a new Novice Mistress. This order was passed by the Prioress of the rebels- Sr. Magdalena. Under such circumstances, the rebels could not even be asked to introspect, and Sr. Brites was greatly concerned about their influence on the lives of the novices, who were yet to mature in religious life.

To add to this the rebels often consulted the priests of two Orders namely the Augustinians and the Jesuits, as both the Convent of Augustine and the College of St. Paul, were located near the Convent of Santa Monica. Although the Archbishop had ordered that the window facing these two institutions be closed, yet they opened it and communicated with the friars.

Sr. Brites finally urged of the Viceroy through her letter, to find them another place, so that they could live their cloistered lives conscientiously, away from the trouble makers, whom she compared with 'fire and war'. She went on to add that since they were in a minority, they had no courage to deal with the rebel nuns, who seemed to be possessed by the devil.

His Majesty, the King of Portugal Dom Joao V sent a letter to the Viceroy Count of Sandomil on 5th April 1736, requesting him to initiate appropriate measures, to effect a reconciliation between the two factions. The Archbishop too, was ordered to work towards minimizing the hostility that existed in the Convent.

Following the instructions of the King, a pastoral letter dated 9th October 1737, was sent to the Convent of Santa Monica, wherein the Archbishop advised the rebel nuns to accept his authority, and that in exchange, he would comply with their demand of arranging for a free and fair election to the post of Prioress. Eventually, the rebels were victorious, their candidate having won the elections not only to the post of Prioress, but they were also able to appoint their Procurator -free from the interference of the Archbishop- by following the rules of the constitution of the Convent, which had been penned by the famous Augustinian friar Diogo de Santa Ana.

Now that the demands of the opposing nuns had been fulfilled, they were ready to oblige the Archbishop and live in peace and harmony with the rest of the nuns at Santa Monica.

The new Prioress Sr. Catarina do Sacramento addressed a letter of gratitude -on behalf of the community- to the Count of Sandomil, for overseeing the smooth functioning of the election, which had taken place peacefully, without any untoward incident.

On his part the Count of Sandomil informed the King through his letter dated 29th January 1738, about the smooth conduct of election to the post Prioress in the Convent, free of violence, and that the Archbishop who had been very cooperative, was therefore worthy of royal praise.

Thus ended the great rebellion and once again, peace prevailed in the Convent of Santa Monica.

The Fading Away of the Glorious Santa Monica: With the decline of the City of Goa, the Convent of Santa Monica began to lose its prominence. The City faced its decline, as it was plagued with epidemics, which occurred as a result of sewage water seeping into the wells of drinkable water, including the wells in the premises of the Convent.

In 1606, when the Convent was founded, it had 661 nuns, coming from different parts of the world including Portugal, Macau, Mozambique, Mombasa, Malacca, Ormuz, Ceylon and India. Out of these 661, 494 nuns who were considered of higher rank wore the black veil, while the rest 167 nuns used the white veil.

In 1804, the Convent had sixty-one nuns and four novices. By 1827, the number of nuns came down to thirty, and by 1834, the Convent had only six nuns. The following year 1835, the Religious Orders were banned by the order of the government, as a result of which, all the convents were closed down in Goa, with the exception of the Convent of Santa Monica. Hence now, the Convent decided not to admit anymore novices, so the number of nuns dwindled to four. The last nun to die in the Convent was Soror Maria do Espirito Santo, daughter of Aires Jose Gomes, from Cavelossim Salcete, Goa, on 20th March 1885.

Thus the parting words of Archbishop Frei Aleixo de Menezes –while leaving Goa- to the first Prioress Dona Filipa regarding the future of the Convent, had come true. He had said at the time ‘ Sister, the roots of the Convent are in heaven.

Conclusion: During the 276 years of its existence, about 661 nuns had taken vows in the Convent. It has to be admitted that the Convent of Santa Monica had helped many women to realize their aspirations through the monastic way of life, in order to attain the more noble values of life, where their dignity and worth could well be upheld. The Royal Ordinance of 29th December 1873, stipulated that the Convent of Santa Monica together with its properties, be handed over to the Archdiocese of Goa.

On 19th December 1961, the Portuguese left the Convent and the Indian army overtook it. By the end of the year, the Indian army vacated the Convent premises. At the same time, there was a need to have a Formation House, to conduct courses for young nuns. The Internuncio of India (representative of the Pope in India) Archbishop Monsignor J. R. Knox, chose the Convent of Santa Monica for the purpose. It was in a miserable condition, in ruins and uninhabitable. But no one had the heart to raze down this once upon a time grandiose structure.

Now funds had to be acquired to undertake its renovation. Fortunately, a generous donation was sanctioned from the German Bishop's Fund, which was well utilised towards the cause. The Santa Monica Convent, now renamed as Institute Mater Dei, was ready on 5th June 1964, as the country's pioneering Sister Formation Centre.

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