

PAULISTAS OR DIONYSIAN STATUES



During the last century or earlier, several community wells in Salcete that never dried during the summer months were attributed to Paulistas. The villagers believed that these were dug overnight by the legendary super humans or aliens! The kunbis of Cuelim, even in modern times, believe that Paulistas also erected the megaliths overnight. The three statues in the village of Siridao (seen above), a village at the estuary of River Zuari, are also believed to have been placed by the legendary Paulistas or, to be Paulistas!

The statues at Siridao are male individuals with long hair and beards – two of these appear to be westerners - all holding musical instruments and with legs across an animal, resembling a tiger, leopard or a panther. (Note the long tails and facial features of the animals). The statues appear to be carved out from a single granite or sandstone, painted and mounted on a pedestal.

Dionysius (Roman Bacchus) is normally depicted as a handsome young man, usually associated with a thyrsus (a wooden stick wrapped with ivy leaves and a pine cone on its top) and a flute. His sacred animals are the panther and the tiger. As a mythical figure he is also believed to have travelled to India.

Foreign traders, sailors and pirates (Greeks, Romans, Phoenicians and others) who, during the monsoons, to avoid sailing through rough seas, dropped

anchor, sojourned and perhaps entertained themselves in saturnalia/bacchanalia, in the vicinity of the port town of Gopakapattana. The findings of amphorae shards and Roman coins (now at Pilar Museum) attest to the fact that the neighboring village of Siridao might have been an active port city.

Siridao is a fascinating village with a unique city-like plan. There is a main street leading up to the iconic Chapel of the Nazarene with a dome (resembling churches on Greek islands) and a side road to the beach. Two huge columns are on either side at the edge of the shore and an old retaining wall. Reportedly, there is a cave at the foot of the mountain and river's edge that has yet to be archaeologically explored. Two of the carved statues (shown in color) are on either side of the main street, equidistant from the road to the beach. (The unpainted statue is out in the open space). The village has all the markings of a port city.

So, who were the Paulistas? The reputation of first imposing college/seminary of St. Paul, built by the Jesuits in Old Goa was widely recognized as the important center of learning. The builders/educators were nicknamed as Paulistas.

When the Jesuits were expelled in 1759 and, until their return to Goa after nearly 200 years, the relationship of the Jesuits as Paulistas was most likely forgotten, but the legend of Paulistas as super humans and as extra-terrestrial aliens have persisted.

The Jesuits were an industrious Order of priests who, in the early years after their arrival, might have helped the locals to select sites for wells to be dug with nearby aquifers. There is no documented evidence in support of this local story. They introduced the first printing press in 1556; taught the locals how to bake the famous Goa pao (leavened bread); to ferment coconut toddy into vinegar, and most importantly grafting techniques that produced new varieties of mangoes, unique to Goa, and a book - *Arte Palmarica*, for improving the yield of coconuts. Their lasting contribution is in the field of education.

Themistocles D'Silva, (2023)