

Property disputes in Goa

Property disputes among Catholic families in Goa

Breakdown of extended families has fatal consequences



A man stabs his mother and sister over a family property dispute. Another bludgeons his brother and sister-in-law with a spade. Yet another kills his younger brother while arguing over property.

In another case this month, an obituary announcement asked family members who had opposed inventory proceedings of the deceased, not to attend the funeral.

Such incidents in this former Portuguese colony, now a western Indian state, indicate the growing divide among Catholic families who, because of close historical ties to colonial authorities, have large ancestral agricultural properties.

Goa, a Catholic stronghold and India's smallest state, is known for its white sand beaches and palm-fringed villages and is an attraction for both national and international tourists. As people migrated to Goa from across India in the past two decades, land prices have soared and become preferred investments.

This has led to a disturbing trend in recent times, with siblings alleging partiality of parents in sharing land and fighting for a better, "rightful share" in ancestral property.

These rifts are primarily because traditionally large extended families have split into smaller units, says Elvis Gomes, a civil servant who was also earlier director of panchayats, or village councils. He suggests that the Goa archbishop should start special courts to resolve such issues in a Catholic spirit.

"In the past, it was community living, where one brother would reach out to the other, and one's wealth was seen as common wealth. This no longer holds true in present society," said Gomes, who is now Inspector General of Prisons in Goa.

'An equal share'

Empowerment of women, too, has contributed to the problem, according to Antonio Fernandes, a social scientist.

Over the years, women who were married off with a dowry signed a document surrendering all rights to family property. But women are now challenging such documents following legal advice that they are entitled for an equal share of ancestral property, Fernandes said.

If a sibling has converted ancestral land to a commercial complex or apartment complex, "then the daughters too ought to be given a share in the commercial profits," he said.

Moreover, "the daughters are seeking an equal share, often at the behest of their husbands," Fernandes said.

Pilar Father Valente Azavedo, a counselor, attributed jealousy to the discord as nuclear families want more than what they have or received.

"There are cases where parents show more affinity to a particular sibling and allot a greater share to the favorite," he said.

Father Simon Diniz, a clinical psychologist and principal of Rosary College in South Goa district, said people have forgotten the purpose of life.

"People have become slaves to money ... They are not bothered about heaven or hell, and are ready to do any jugglery, forgery, fabrication and concoction to attain wealth," he said. "Spouses as well as children do not respect each other. People live as if they have come to here to live forever."

"Envy has grown so much because we have no God in life today. Everybody is qualified, but not educated," the priest said.

About a quarter of the state's 1.8 million people are Christians, almost all of them Catholic.

Bosco de Sousa Eremita, Panaji. UCAnews