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A READING OF FOUR SHORT STORIES FROM GOA: ACROSS THE LINGUISTIC AND RELIGIOUS DIVIDE

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Abstract

The aim of this article is to consider the literature of Goa, former Portuguese colony in India (1510-1961), where four main languages are spoken: Konkani; Marathi; Portuguese, and English. This plurilingual society not only deconstruct the monolingual national literary canon but also call for a different way of approaching and reading literary narratives, in terms of literary clusters (Mohanty 2011) that belong to the same "Significant Geography" (Orsini 2015; Laachir at al. 2018). In this context, I will consider four Goan short stories that criticize the religious divide in Goa: "Shiva, at Play" [Shiva brincando] (2022), written in Portuguese by Maria Elsa da Rocha; "The Crucifix on the Chain" [Gallyantulo khuris] (2015), in Konkani by Prakesh Parienkar; "Says Kabira" [Kahat Kabira] (2018), in Marathi by Vithal L. Gawas; "Saibinn" (2008), in English by José Lourenço.

Keywords: Goa; Significant geographies; Multilingual culture; Literary clusters; Reading together.

A Cluster of Goan Writers

According to Maria Timocko (2019), as background to their literary works, post-colonial writers translate a culture for their national and international audiences. Not only that but, in the case of some former colonies, there may be even more than one language that stands behind their work, through which

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different aspects of the same deeply heterogeneous culture are voiced. This is the case of Goa, former Portuguese colony in India (1510-1961), in which there are four main languages: Konkani, Marathi, Portuguese, and English. All of them should be understood in a relational but also hierarchical manner. There are four main literary traditions in these languages associated to different segments of Goa's community. This plurilingual society and literary canon not only deconstruct the one language national literary canon but also call for a different way of approaching and reading literary narratives, in terms of literary clusters (Mohanty 2011) that belong to the same "significant geography" (Orsini The Multilingual Local 2015; Laachir et al 2018), i.e., a group of narratives in different languages related to one topic, which goes beyond the East-West and center-periphery comparison as they focus on other types of "traffic and lateral literary contacts" (The Multilingual Local; Laachir et al.) among local languages. By going beyond the dominant-dominated, centre-periphery paradigm of cultures and languages (Bourdieu 1999, in The Multilingual Local), this way of approaching literary narratives helps to view former colonial societies as "a sphere of coexisiting heterogeneity" (Massey, 2005) in which narratives rewrite each other in an endless palimpsest.

In this context, I will apply the methodology of "reading together" (Laachir et al. 2018, 4) to study four Goan short stories and see how their authors try to knit Goa together through literature: "Shiva, at Play" [Shiva brincando] (2022), written in Portuguese, by Maria Elsa da Rocha; "The Crucifix on the Chain" [Gallyantulo khuris] (2015), written in, Konkani by Prakesh Parienkar; "Says Kabira" [Kahat Kabira] (2018), in Marathi, by Vithal L. Gawas; "Saibinn" (2008), in English, by José Lourenço.

"Shiva at Play" [Shiva brincando] (2022) is a short story by the Goan writer Maria Elsa da Rocha, written in Portuguese and translated into English by Paul Melo e Castro. Maria Elsa da Rocha (1924-2007), born in one of the great houses of Goa and belonging to a *boa família*, had a degree in Pharmacy and became a primary school teacher in Goa and Damao. In the 1960s, her short stories were published in the Margao based newspaper, *A Vida*, and also read by the author herself in the Portuguese-language programme *Renascença,* broadcasted by All India Radio. She collected those stories in the book *Vivências Partilhadas* [Shared lives] (2005). Recently, Paul Melo e Castro translated all of them into English in the book *Life Stories. The Short Stories of Maria Elsa da Rocha* (2022), which also includes some of Rocha´s unpublished works. "Shiva at play" was published in 1963.

"Says Kabira" [Kahat Kabira] (2018) was written by Vithal L. Gawas in Marathi and translated into English by Damodar K. Ghanekar. It won the Albano Couto Prize at the Fundação Oriente Short Story Competition, in 2017, and was included in the anthology *Under the Mango Tree* (2018) also published by Fundação Oriente. Gawas lives in Desterro, Vasco da Gama, Goa. His writing has been included in the Goa University postgraduate syllabus (MA, Marathi) and he has also been deputy chairman of the Gomantak Marathi Academy.

"The Crucifix on the Chain" [Gallyantulo khuris] (2015) was written by Prakash Parienkar in Konkani and translated into English by Vydia Pai. Parienkar teaches at Goa University and heads the Department of Konkani. He writes short stories and poetry. His poetry volume, *Aamche Aami*, was published in 2013.

"Saibinn" (2008) was written by José Lourenço in Konkani and in English, revealing how Goan, as well as Indian authors, write in more than one language to the point that the difference between original and translation gets blurred. José Lourenço's short fiction, poetry, translations and essays in Konkani and English have appeared in various publications. He is the author of *The Parish Churches of Goa: A Study of Façade Architecture* (2005). Lourenço is also a founder-member of the Goa Writers group. By bringing together all these stories, on a related topic but in different languages and from different Goan communities, I intend to show that these authors all claim Goa, their "significant geography", as a place for all.

Goa as a Significant Geography

Francesca Orsini (The Multilingual Local), and Laachir et al. (2018) approach plurilingual and multicultural contexts, such as the case of Goa, using the concept of Significant Geographies: "real, conceptual and imaginative geographies, which are inhabited and produced by narratives, authors in specific linguistic communities". (Laachir et al. 2018, 5). The Significant Geography is the standpoint from which authors imagine, through their literature, their own world. Laachir et al. propose a multilingual and locally ground-up model because it is inherently comparative and relativizing, highlighting different authors and archives, which help to think about the local and the "global" in more complex and precise ways. Regarding place, the Significant Geographies study the literary constellations, their genres and narratives, taking into account the geographic and historical factors of the region, as well as the intellectual, philosophical and local literary debates; imagine the time and space relationship of literary narratives in a non-linear way, but multiple, relational, fragmentary and discontinuous; study the trajectory, circulation, reception and signifying process of these literary works in terms of the characteristics of local literary narratives. In other words, as Orsini (The Multilingual Local) points out, challenging the model of World Literature as a single world literary map, with the centre in Europe and the periphery in Asia, Africa and Latin America, and a single measure of what literary value is, the Significant Geographies propose to create regional maps that can have their centre anywhere. This helps understand the relationship between the local and the global (Massey 2005), as would be the case of the relationship among the different literatures of Goa, or the relationship of these literatures with other Indian literatures or literatures around the world in the same or in different languages.

Although Goa is a small territory, geographically speaking, it has received immigrants from different parts of the world, while the Goan diaspora is considerable as there are Goans living in Europe, Africa, and the Americas. From a cultural perspective, Goa is recognized mainly for its Portuguese language and Catholic religion, heritage of 450 years of Portuguese presence on the subcontinent. Therefore, Goa has a local and cosmopolitan flavour. It went through a period of decolonization that was welcomed by those who wanted to reaffirm Goa´s Indian roots (Lobo 2013) and contested by others who saw Goa as part of the Lusitanian world.

Robert Newman (2019, 193) observes that "in Goa class, caste and gender as well as religion determine what language you speak and when". Rather than multilingual, Goa, like the rest of India, is a plurilingual place. Canagarajah and Ashraf (2013) establish a difference between multilingualism and plurilingualism: "While *multilingualism* treats the different languages as having their separate systems, enjoying autonomy, plurilingualism perceives these languages as *meshing* with each other to form a hybrid grammatical and communicative practice" (276, my emphasis). About Goa, Newman (193-194) goes on to explain that Hindus use Marathi for education, in popular religion and to read classical literature. In turn, the Catholic elite used Portuguese as the language of knowledge and to communicate at home, while they used Konkani to communicate with Hindus and Catholics from a lower class. During colonial times, not only Catholics but also educated Hindus communicated in Portuguese; later, specially after decolonization, they communicated in English, and in Konkani. Only Catholics who had lived for extended periods in places like Mumbai would speak Hindi. Muslims spoke Urdu among themselves and Konkani or English to speak to non-Muslims. Lower class people spoke Konkani and a bit of Marathi. If working within Catholic families, they would have picked up Portuguese in the past but today English has replaced Portuguese. The many Goans who emigrated or worked on ships speak good English (Newman 194).

During the 450 years that Goa was a colony of Portugal, Portuguese was its official language, displacing Konkani, its mother tongue, to the margins. In the 16th century, the Jesuits had made a point of translating religious books into Konkani to aid in their policy of mass conversion (Miranda 2019). In Goa, literature in Portuguese was restricted mainly to the Catholic gentry, that followed European literary standards, despite the Indian roots. In colonial times, this literary tradition was dubbed "Indo-Portuguese". More recently, in the Academia, rather than in other Goan cultural and intellectual circles, it has been renamed as Goan literature in Portuguese by different scholars (Garmes and Castro 2019; Passos 2012), considering, firstly, that it is a local literature that gives Goan reality a literary form detached from its colonial past—when Portuguese was its official language—and, secondly, that this designation already implies that Goa is a plurilingual territory and there are literary traditions in other languages, as would be the case of Konkani, Marathi and English.

One of the salient linguistic characteristics that has also helped define Goa as a significant geography in this work was, precisely, the linguistic contest related to Goan identity. With the annexation of the Goan territory to India in 1961, there was a struggle going on between Goans about what the official language would be. There were those who defended Konkani, one of the mother tongues of Goa[1], and a language associated with the Catholic community, and those who defended Marathi, the language of the Hindu community and the neighbouring state of Maharashtra. If Marathi were chosen, Goa would become part of the state of Maharashtra and its cultural identity, marked by the Portuguese language and Catholicism, would be endangered. The feud was fierce and lasted for several years, revealing the complex relationship of the different linguistic, religious, and cultural communities in Goa. Among the arguments defended by the Goan community, mainly Hindu, to make Marathi the language of the state of Goa, was that Konkani was a language dispersed among several dialects and written in different alphabets, including Devanagari and Roman (Miranda 17). They also argued that, more than a language, Konkani was a dialect of Marathi and, although it had a rich tradition of oral folkloric narratives (Naik 2019), it did not have a solid written literature. Unlike Konkani, Marathi was a language formally taught in schools and was also the language of instruction in primary schools, with a long literary tradition, as Marathi, as already mentioned, is the official language of the neighboring state of Maharashtra, and one of the languages with the highest number of speakers in India. However, in 1967, there was a referendum, and, with the support of the Portuguese-speaking Goan Catholic elite, Goa voted in favor of Konkani. Nonetheless, Konkani in the Devangari script was considered as Goa's official language, marginalizing those who wrote Konkani in the Roman script. This rift is deeper as Devanagari is associated with the Hindu community and Roman with the Catholic community (See Fernandes 2020). In 1976, Sahitya Akademi recognized Konkani as one of the literary languages of India, thus giving great impetus to literature in that language. Finally, in 1987, Konkani was accepted as the official language of Goa, and in 1992, it was included in the Indian Constitution.

As for English, it has become a vehicular language in Goa and the rest of India, used across communities. There are many translations of literary works from vernacular languages into English. Nonetheless, and in the spirit of the Significant Geographies, nowadays there are many translations intra *bashas*, i.e., from and to vernacular languages, of different hierarchies within India, rather than from and to European languages. This type of translations is more meaningful than translations into English because though different and even written in different alphabets, all Indian languages belong within the same political and cultural domain (Chandran 2016). Many of the authors translated are only locally known and, at times, the subject matter of their stories calls for a greater contextualization when meant for a foreign public. Still, translation into English helps to a wider circulation of a literary work at both an intraregional and international levels.

In the case of Goa, Prakesh Parienkar's short story was originally written in Konkani, spoken not only in Goa but also in the neighbouring states of Kerala and Karnataka among the Goan diaspora. Its translation into English was published in *Muse India*, a digital magazine specialized in Indian literature in all the *bhashas*, including English, which circulates, mainly, within India and, at an international level, among scholars specialized in Indian literature. Hence, this magazine contributes to giving transregional visibility to the different authors published in its pages and a certain degree of visibility abroad. Gawas' short story was originally written in Marathi. Its translation into English was published in the yearly collection of Goan short stories by Fundação Oriente – an international association based in Macao with a Goan branch – together with other stories in English, and in Konkani and Portuguese, translated into English. This is a publication in hard copy that circulates principally in Goa. As for the translations from Portuguese into English, they have become foremost as only very few Goans speak Portuguese today and can only access this branch of their own literary tradition through translations into English or the other Goan languages. This would be the case of the short stories by Maria Elsa da Rocha translated into English by Paul Melo e Castro, an English translator and professor of Portuguese Studies (Glasgow University), a fact that, as Orsini and Zecchini (2019) point out, might give more visibility to the translation. It was also published by a Goan publishing house and its circulation is mainly in Goa and the Goan diaspora in the Anglophone communities, most of whose members today do not speak Portuguese but are still attached to the land of their ancestors. Also, Goan short stories, originally in Portuguese, are quite unusual to the point that Castro's translations have been published in several Indian magazines as well[2].

Goa: A Place for All

The complex linguistic scenario in Goa is not the only trait that marks the region as a Significant Geography. Goa is a singular place within India: "Goa is a special place", thus begins Alexander Henn, in his book *Encounters in Goa. Religion, Colonialism, and Modernity* (2014, p. 1), in which he discusses the close relationship between Hindus and Catholics in everyday life. "To be Goan [...] means to be different", says Rosa Maria Perez (2011, p. 4) in her book significantly entitled *The Tulsi and The Cross*, due to the proximity of both religious communities in Goa. "Goans have an abiding strong (primordial) love of their beautiful little region of India", says Robert Newman (2019, p. 39) in his *Goan Anthropology. Mothers, Miracles and Mythology* in which he affirms the idea of Goa as a "composite culture".

Although the language contest shows a division among communities, one of the most conspicuous attributes of this region of India, as conveyed by these authors is that, even if it does not form an indivisible unity, Goa has been less affected by communalism than the rest of India. According to Henn (*Encounters*

in Goa p. 5), even today there is an intersection "between Hindu and Catholic practices and expressions in contemporary popular religion" that resonates with Portuguese colonization and its policy of integration to better control the area. Hence, the differences between the Lusitanized vision of *Goa Dourada* – "an elitist construction which obscured the social and racial inequalities and religious differences in Goa" (Henn 2000, 333) – and *Goa Indica* – that emphasizes the Indian roots of Goan identity – should not be a chasm among Goan Catholics, Hindus and Muslims of different classes and castes, impossible to be bridged. For Newman, "[Goan] culture extends in greater or lesser degree over all Goans, irrespective of caste or religion" (12).

Nonetheless, Vitor Ferrao (2011) warns that today Goan society raises many questions to every thoughtful Goan due to "…the growing communal divide, the suspicion of the outsider, thoughtless sale of land, moral degradation: these among other issues are raising their hydra heads threatening to fragment the fabric of our society" (6). Ferrao adds that if peace among the different religious communities in Goa has become fragile, because "the communal virus is growing steadily in our state, […] the need of dialogue among the various religious communities has become more urgent than ever before" (Ferrao 19). It is also in this light that Damodar Mauzo, in his book *Inks of Dissent* (2019), makes a point of affirming that for all the dissent among Goans and Indians, "though divided, [they] should stand as one" (88), while in other essays of the same book he proposes that "India can be knit together through Literature" (144) and with this aim in mind he reminds his fellow writers that "writers must be fighters" (31).

Precisely, this is the same image of Goa that all the Goan writers taken into consideration by this study abide by, disrobing community differences in their narratives, appealing to a longstanding policy of conviviality in Goa, hence proclaiming the possibility of "a composite Goa" (Newman 12). As Ferrao remarks, if the coming of the Portuguese and imposition of Catholicism provoked a divide in Goan society along religious lines, "communal harmony was somehow retained on the basis of Goan identity derived from the communal development of agriculture since ancient time" (21). This is the trait that has made of Goa a unique place, as the critics above contend, and the authors studied in this paper evoke in their short stories.

The plot in Maria Elsa da Rocha's "Shiva at Play" develops shortly after India's take over of Goa in 1961. "The Crucifix on the Cross" by Prakesh Parienkar describes the moment when many Gawdas, Goan Adivasis, who had converted to Catholicism way back, decide to reconvert to Hinduism, when they realize that they have become a minority in their village and might become isolated. Although there are no time references in the story, the process of reconversion among Gawdas started in Goa as early as the 1920s (See Fernandes and Desouza, 2022). These two short stories depict the encounter between Christianity and Hinduism and their main characters are Hindus and Christians belonging to different castes and class, while the narratives move from one religious community

to the other. As for "Says Kabira", by Vithal Gawas, unlike the other two stories, it depicts the moment when Hindus and Muslims – a minority in Goa – come up against each other, giving way to a very rare disencounter in Goa. Though there are no time references in the story, it might be placed at some point during the period of decolonization when, as Newman observes, the winds of communalism had started to blow in the territory. Jose Lourenço's "Saibinn" also unfolds in the present time, when many Indian workers from beyond the Ghats go to Goa looking for work[3].

Massey (4-5) defines spaces like Goa not as a "surface", but as the "meeting up of histories", since "there is not a single narrative of space, but a multiplicity of trajectories" (4-5). In the case of Goa, these trajectories are constituted by all the people from all social strata, because whether they have inhabited the same locale from times immemorial, are newcomers or living abroad, they keep connected to Goa. Their paths keep crossing and re-crossing. Both "Shiva at play" and "The Crucifix on the Cross" are set against the rich landscape of the Goan village whose apparent *sossegado* life is being ruffled by the changes brought about by the process of Goa's Integration into India and Portuguese decolonization. In Maria Elsa da Rocha's short story, Vatsol, a beautiful Hindu girl, is sent by her grandmother, Kaú, to warn the Catholic *bhatcar*, the landlord, about the impending assault to his house led by her own grandson, and Vatsol's brother, Sauló: "The workers from the estate are going to raid the *bhatcar's* house tonight. They say they're going to clean *them* out… they say the land belongs to *them* no longer, that it's ours, ours… all ours" (2022, 124). This is the moment when the Portuguese left Goa and, getting inspiration from the Indians, from beyond the Ghats, who came to free them, the *mundkars*, the land tillers, who had lived oppressed by the *bhatcars* for centuries, wanted their wrongs to be redressed.

To deliver her message, Valtsol is taken across the river to the Catholic *bhatcar's* Great House by Suria, a young man who is in love with her. What calls the attention of the reader is that Kaú, a Hindu woman, even risks the life of her beloved granddaughter to save the life and property of the Catholic landowner from her own grandson's assault. Perhaps, what moved her to such action, more than fear of the *bhatcar*'s rage, who had been protective of her family in the past, was fear of such a radical change in the Goan society, and how helpless they might become in-between the old and new regimes.

At another level, the characters' behaviour somehow reveals Maria Elsa da Rocha's attitude towards post-colonial Goa. As many members of the Catholic elite, who fought for the end of the colonial regime, she believed in the need to affirm Goa's Indian roots. At the same time, however, as a true daughter of the *Casa Grande*, as she repeatedly alludes in her short stories, she also abided by the paternalistic figure of the *bhatcar*. For her, the Indian and the Lusitanian, the Hindu and the Christian were inextricable.

"Shiva at Play" depicts the moment in Goa's history when a section of the Catholic gentry, which had been close to the colonial regime, had lost much of its power and place in society after the departure of the Portuguese. Due to the

"Land-to-the-Tiller-Laws", which allowed the subaltern class of the *mandukars* to become the new owners of the land they had rented for generations from the *bhatcars*, they could now avoid being evicted from the land for not paying their taxes to their landlords. Eventually, these laws were declared unconstitutional and overdue rent could be demanded by the landlords. While the private property owners lost much of their power, other sectors of the Catholic and Hindu communities, which had been in favour of Goa's annexation to India, gained new visibility (See Trichur 2013; Melo and Castro, 2023).

Prakesh Parienkar's story, "The Crucifix and the Cross", depicts the reconversion of a family of a Goan Adivasi community, Gawdas, from Catholicism into Hinduism. There are four Adivasi groups in Goa: Gawdas, Kunbis, Velips and Dhangars. Gawdas consider themselves the original inhabitants and first settlers of Goa who founded the villages. The word "Gawda" itself means in Konkani: "the one who establishes the village and administers it towards prosperity"[4]. Nonetheless, more than being recognized as the first inhabitants of Goa, what they nowadays want is to be integrated into Goa's mainstream culture. Initially a Hindu community, the Gawda divided themselves when, with the arrival of the Portuguese, some of them converted to Catholicism. Eventually, those who reconverted to Hinduism are nowadays known as Neo-Hindus (Pereira 2009, 1). Precisely, the short story "The Crucifix on the Chain" takes place when a dismayed Caetano, the last Catholic in the village who has not yet reconverted to Hinduism, is asked by his only living relative, his uncle Simão, to become a *Konkno*o, a Hindu:

> This was something new. He couldn't come to terms with the thought that they were Konkani Hindus in the past. I am a Christian. I've been baptized by the Priest, in Church. I wear this crucifix on a chain around my neck. I go to Mass every Sunday. I recite the Rosary without fail, every evening. How can I be a Hindu, then? What does he mean when he talks of becoming a *Konknno* all over again? (Parienkar 2015).

Caetano and his family belonged in a village of nineteen Hindu families and two Christian ones. If he did not reconvert into the old faith, he would be excluded from the community, in the same way that at the time of the conversion to Christianity in the 16th century, those Hindus who had refused to convert had had to flee the land (See Aldrovandi 2020). Caetano's desolation is portrayed in the story through the symbolic image of the Cowherd Cross at the top of the village hill which in the past had been the place of worship and reunion of the villagers, nowadays overgrown with wild grass. As if trying to preserve the order that gave sense to his life since childhood, with his scythe, Caetano cleared the place of unrelentlessly growing weeds and cut the branches that blocked the path to the Cross. He was just one single man fighting against an unruly nature and a scornful community that insisted on othering him.

Likewise, in "Says Kabira" (2018), Vithal L. Gawas tells the story of a Goan Muslim who, since his childhood, spent with the other children of the

vaddo [neighbourhood], indifferent to their religious beliefs, has been enchanted by the *bhajans* sung at the Hindu temple, so much so that, at the time of the narration, like a true artist, he earns his living by singing at Hindu festivals and religious ceremonies at the Mahadev temple:

> The notes of last night's *bhajan* were still resounding in his ears. The *bhajan* had kept people engrossed. He had sung beyond his comfort level. Listeners were seen swinging their heads to his singing. When the *bhajan* ended people had been taken to a heavenly level. Everyone praised him. They were appreciating the way he had come down slowly after raising the highest pitch. (Gawas 69).

In fact, Hindu and Urdu, as Aamir Mufti (2016) explains, "emerged out of the single but diverse and diffuse corpus of writing in the vernaculars of the North of India" (142). Eventually, their division by the Orientalists, in their desire to codify Indian languages and literatures, became "a language field constituted as polemic" (Mufti 120). On the one hand, Mufti goes on to argue, Orientalism helped construe "a pan-subcontinental" Indian class as Indians were brought together through literature from a Sanskrit source, and a common language, Hindi. On the other hand, this provoked a rupture between Hindu and Urdu, or Hindoostani, as spoken by the common person unaware of their differences. This is why for the character in the story singing in one language is like singing in the other. However, while Hindi was associated by the Orientalists with a Sanskrit source, Urdu was associated with a Persian source respectively, thus provoking a rupture not only at linguistic and literary level but also cultural and religious. On top of that, Orsini (*East of Delhi* 2023) claims that this interchange between languages and styles is typical of oral literature in plurilingual and multicultural spaces which are crisscrossed by different songs and performances. Hence, as in the case of the Muslim who identifies with the Hindu *bhajans*, there is a push and pull between ideologies and aesthetics.

As in the case of Vatsol and Caetano, the *sossegado* pace of his life is altered when Communalism seems to have reached his village. *Gorakshawallahs* [Cow protection vigilants] stoned a Muslim butcher shop, thrashed their owners and customers, and freed a truck full of cows, after also beating the truck driver. As a result, this man, who might miss the Namaz at the mosque but never a festivity at the Hindu temple, is forbidden to enter the Hindu temple by the Hindus who had vibrated with his singing, as well as by his Moulana.

Through their stories, what these authors try to remind Goans is that traditionally all Goan villagers have come together for joint celebrations despite belonging to different communities. Henn (*Encounters in Goa* 123) describes this form of religious practice as "not a matter of domains, that is, functional interactions among the social, economic and religious, but of semiotic representation, material embodiment and practical action". As Gawas's

characters mumbles to himself: "Even in poverty, the people were happy. There was no bitterness among religions. Muslims used to participate in the Diwali and Chaturthi celebrations. Sweets would be sent to their homes and Hindus would partake in *sheer korma*" (2018, 73). Likewise, in his story, Parienkar has his character Caetano wonder: "We dance, along with the Hindus, when they celebrate the jagor, and they light wicks at the Cowherd's Cross…What is the difference between Mother Mary and the Hindu goddess Santeri? Aren't they the same? Then why should we give up our faith?" (2008). What Caetano mourns is what Henn describes as the historical "connection and affinity between Hindu village gods and Catholic patron saints, a significant trait of the Goan village, for the religious coexistence between Catholic and Hindus" (*Encounters in Goa* 5).

If there is a profusion of crosses strewn all over the villages, which mark places of devotion for the Catholics, there are Tulsis for the devotion of the Hindus. As these examples attest, the life of the villagers of any religious denomination is marked by pious and devotional practices that merge with socio-cultural life. In many Goan villages and towns there are spaces in which shrines, symbols of Hindu deities and Christian saints, are occasionally seen side by side, under the same roof, and play pray together. As a result, the norms laid down by both the Christian and the Hindu faiths influence people from one or the other religious denomination indistinctly. For Henn (The becoming of Goa 334), these practices demonstrate that "belonging to a particular space", like the Goan village, "overrules the affiliation to a particular religious community".

Rocha, Parienkar and Gawas all abide by this principle in their stories. In "The Crucifix on the Chain", Caetano refuses to dismantle his Christian altar, as requested by his uncle, and to convert into the old faith. Rather, in a simple ecumenical gesture, he kisses the Crucifix which he has worn around his neck since his father died, set the picture of the goddess Santeri beside the image of Mother Mary in his home altar, put an oil lamp in front of the Hindu Goddess, as Hindus do, and a candle before the image of Mother Mary, as Catholics do, and lights them both. If he refuses to reconvert to Hinduism, he also decides to practice the Catholic religion in his own way: "I shall not remove the picture of goddess Santeri even if the Priest comes here and bids me to do so, he thought. He made the sign of the Cross on his forehead and joined his palms before the picture of the goddess" (Parienkar). Though feeling ostracized by his community, he refuses to conform to communalism.

In the same spirit, reversing the Orientalist nomenclature of languages and literatures, and crossing linguistic, literary and religious borders, the Muslim singer in "Says Kabira" likens the Hindu singing to a Muslim prayer, to remind Goans of both religious denominations of the great teachings of Kabir, the poet-philosopher:

> 'Fools…! If God is one, isn't singing *bhajan* like paying obeisance of *namaz* to Allah? Very many Muslims saints have penned *abhangs.* They are

> sung with devotion in temples. I purposely sing the *abhang* like "Sheikh Mohammed Khavind, in his heart Govind" (2018, 79).

Like Caetano, from this day on, he will not be able to live freely in the community and sing in the temple, but within himself, he will hold both religions together. Hence, when sitting in his own *balcao*, he heard the *abhang* being sung at the temple and he started to sing along. The lyrics proclaimed the great teachings of Kabir, who was against any form of communalism and criticized the unethical practices of both Hinduism and Islamism – so much so that at his death, his body was reclaimed by Hindus and Muslims alike. He sees the same divine principle in the deities of all religions: "*Kahat Kabira suno bhai sadhu, Ram Rahim ek hai dono…*" [Kabir says listen my pious brothers, Ram and Rahim are the one and same] (2018, 79).

If Caetano and his Muslim counterpart cannot express their religious views in public, at least they will do so at home, either in the *balcao* of their houses, for all the neighbours to watch, or by having an ecumenical altar at home for the Catholic priest to see and spread among the community, thus indirectly serving as examples for the villagers. Their behaviour aims at establishing a sense of community across community borders in a world invaded by the fear of being othered and isolated. This practice, as carried out by these two men of different religious denominations "…involves the negotiation of the other, or the heterodox. It occupies an overlapping space and seems to accept a multiple 'self' or even contest the notion of 'otherness' and reassert the status of a denigrated or marginalized self" (Ferrao 23).

Maria Elsa da Rocha finishes her story "Shiva at Play" in a happy mood of reconciliation among people of different cast, class and religion that denounces her belief in the old Portuguese order, for all her Indian fervor. When Sauló had tried to assault the *bhatecar's* house, the God Shiva, in the shape of a giant cobra that guarded the great house, had descended from a pimpol tree frightening Sauló to death and provoking his fall from the branch where he had been hiding. His shouts had alerted the people of the house, who came to his rescue, all of them, even the *bhatcar*, whose benign character and generosity not only had saved Vatsol in the past, from dying at her birth, but now, innocently, comes to the rescue of her brother Sauló. As a result, the assault is aborted and Sauló becomes the new *mukadem* [supervisor] for the kind *bhatcar* of the great house, contented with his new position. Still a subaltern, as Melo e Castro (2023) argue. Vatsol and Suriá get married, in a Hindu ceremony, with the blessings of both the Catholic *bhatcar* and the Hindu grandmother, and the doings of the God Shiva, who protects the abode of all Goans, irrespective of their religion:

> As the brightly coloured group of bride, groom and guests made their way down along the winding bund, with its side walls of dry mud, they say Shiva advanced majestically to the sky's zenith, and tore back the curtain

> of dark clouds, crushing them in his powerful hands, so that the Sun above could see the beauty of the Earth below… (Rocha 2022, 132).

In Maria Elsa da Rocha's "Ideal Goa", the God Shiva, the encarnation of the warring powers of India and the deity of destruction and creation, actually creates a new Goa in which both religions, Christianity and Hinduism as well as Goa Dourada and Goa Indica can reconcile. At another level, Maria Elsa da Rocha rewrites the concept of "Indianness" because it includes Goans, and of "Goanness" because it includes Indians.

Unlike Maria Elsa da Rocha, José Lourenço turns a more critical eye on the Goan Catholic community. The title of his story, "Saibinn" (2008), already points to religious synchretism between Hindus and Catholics. According to Henn:

> All over Goa, the Catholic Mary in her multiple incorporations as Our Lady of the Rosary, Our Lady of the Mount, Our Lady of Good Guidance, Our Lady of Miracles, and so on, is thus addressed and worshipped under the same title of Saibini Mai that is used to call upon and pay homage to the Hindu Devi under her multiple manifestations as Sateri, Bhumika, Kelbai, Shanta Durga, and so forth. (*Encounters in Goa* 106).

The shortcomings in Goan society that Lourenço points out in the story are not only of a religious kind but also of class and caste. He points to the moment in Goan history when there was "an influx of other Indians into Goa in search of labour or a home away from home" (Ferrao 26), which intensified the debate across communities. Like Rocha's story, "Saibinn" also takes place once Goa has been integrated into India and many Indians have come to Goa to work and settle down. Migration is not strange to Goans. Unable to make a living in Goa, due to economic stagnation in colonial times, Francis, Lourenço's main character, had made his money working on a cruise ship. With his newly acquired wealth, he had been able to build a big and showy bungalow for the family and open a tavern. The story unfolds the day when the *Saibinn*, the ceremony honouring the Peregrin Virgin, was taking place at his house. Though he was not from one of the elite families, *boas familias*, as he had attended primary school at the Lyceum, spoke a little Portuguese, had done well abroad and earned the respect of the community, the celebration at the gate of his house had gathered not only the neighbours but also some of the most prominent members of the Portuguese community: the local *bhatcar*, the teacher and even the Catholic priest. The mood was one of fraternity and devotion, marked by the reciting of the prayers that resonated in the house throughout the ceremony: "How did it come to be … O Heavenly Lady … that you have come … to the home … of such a humble … family like ours …" (Lourenço). To Francis's dismay, this singing that expressed their gratitude to the Virgin for visiting their humble house, had also attracted some *Ghanttis,* Indians from beyond the Ghats, who were working in the village:

"The bloody government should have thrashed all these fellows and sent them back to their *ghantti* villages,' Francis thought darkly. 'Today they will enter the house on the pretext of kissing Our Lady's statue and tomorrow they will rape our wives and slit our children's throats'" (Lourenço). Like many Goans, who felt that their little, beautiful, *sossegado* land was being desecrated, he saw these "foreigners" as intruders, rapists, and murderers.

As the story develops, Francis is chastised as he becomes aware not of any kind of evil in these poor men, but of his own prejudices. Although they spoke in an "alien language" (Lourenço), ironically, another *bhasha*, and did not have refined manners – they were spitting and scratching their backs – two of the men made the sign of the cross, as the recital of the rosary began, while the others left the compound. Evidently, had they been Muslims or Hindus they would not have joined the ceremony, Francis mumbles to himself. This made him feel worse: he could not ask them to leave, on religious grounds, but also if he let them enter his house after the *Saibinn*, the neighbours would say his house was full of *ghanttis*. He imagines the teacher telling him in Portuguese, "*Que é isto, Senhor Francisco! Porque é que esta merde está em sua casa!"* [How come, Senhor Francisco? Why is this shitty people at your place?] (Lourenço). A nouveau riche, Francis had become prejudiced against people outside his circle.

Ironically, Francis himself belongs, as also Gawas observes in "Says Kabira", to a new kind of Goan citizen who had had to migrate and, with the money earned in other areas of India, Africa and the Gulf, could buy the lands they had previously worked on as tenants, as well as build new bungalows to replace the old mud houses. As Gawas also observes in "Says Kabira",

> Due to abundant salaries, the village has transformed. The mud houses with tiled roofs are being demolished. Their place has been taken by colourful cement concrete houses. Young people have built a shining new masjid in place of the old one. Muslims in all their finery have begun to say *namaz* there. With money, thoughts have also transformed. They think they are different. *And that some people from outside the state have begun to incite them to violence.* (74; my emphasis).

Both stories, by Lourenço and Gawas, criticize Goans' attitudes towards the new migrants never turning a critical eye on themselves. In "Saibinn", after the ceremony is over, Francis goes to his tavern and realizes what had happened. When they had finished their day's work, these *Ghanttis* had gone to his tavern for their regular drink. As the place was unattended, because of the festivities, they had joined the neighbours in the celebration at the front of the house.

Realizing that he was losing "good business", Francis asks his wife to go to the tavern and serve the *Ghanttis*: though not welcome at his house, they were perfectly welcome as patrons at the tavern. Perhaps feeling guilty for the way he had misjudged the men, or the Scotch he had imbibed with his friends, or

afraid of losing business, he offered them some *gram* [the food of the gods]: "The workers had consumed almost two bottles of feni and they were quite sozzled. They staggered to their feet and stood there swaying. And then they bowed their heads and accepted the gram of the Saibinn with folded hands" (Lourenço.). Below their dirt and uncouth manners, they were respectful and had a real devout heart while Francis' was mere pretense.

The moral of the story is that Goans should not feel threatened by the advance of people from other Indian states. Rather, as Newman points out, problematizing the image of Golden Goa, "the future is anything but golden unless they [Goans] can develop an identity that can include 'all sons of the soil'", the soil being not only Goa, but also India.

Final Words

The stories by Maria Elsa da Rocha, Prakesh Parienkar, Vithal L. Gawas and José Lourenço although written in different languages, styles and from the perspective of different communities, all seem to imply that for all the changes Goa has gone through its history – the arrival of the Portuguese and their policy of conversion, the reconversion of Catholics to Hinduism, the relationship between Muslim and Hindus, the arrival of people from abroad and, recently, from behind the Ghats – in this "Significant Geography", people from different religious denominations, class and caste have always tried to coexist. As Claire Williams (2019) has pointed out about Maria Elsa da Rocha's book *Vivências Partilhadas*, this was a society of *vivência* (living alongside), rather than *convivência* (sharing experiences); nonetheless, convivial rather than violent. This because, as Henn observes, "Even conquest and superimposition […] can happen only at the cost *of reasserting the intrinsically religious character of what it conquers*" (*Encounters in Goa* 107; my emphasis). And for Goa to continue being what it has always been, present day Goans must overcome their fear of change and difference by dessentializing community markers like religion, caste and ethnicity. If assimilative religious methods might have met with serious objections by the leaders of the established religions, in the practice, Goans have traditionally gone beyond the idea of religion as a marker of cultural difference by spontaneously creating practices which reveal a composite culture (*Encounters in Goa*; Perez 2011): the culture that Maria Elsa da Rocha depicts as part of the life of the great house, Prakash Parienkar sees as the distinctive quality of the Goan village, Vithal L. Gawas remembers as being the mark of his childhood in the *vaddo*, and Lourenço wants to bring back to Goa. This sense of a unified community despite disruption and change is what has traditionally made of Goa "a Significant Geography", which these authors strive to reenact in their stories, and make full sense when read in counterpart.

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1. According to Lynn Mario Menezes de Souza, in a plurilingual community its members can have more than one mother tongue. "Kshetra and the nurturing of a plurilingual ethos: Family plurilingualism and coloniality" In Journal of Multilingual Theories and Practicies. vol 4.2 2023 223–243.
2. See "Nattak" by Vimala Devi in Metamorphoses, vol. 18, no. 1, 2023, pp. 44–58; José de Silva Coelho, "Half-Chewed Counselors and Statesmen" by José de Silva Coelho in Contemporary Literary Review India, 2023; "Smugglers" by Epitácio Pais in Out of Print, 50 India, 2023; "Dom Teotonio" by Maria Elsa da Rocha", in "Out of Print", 38, India, 2020. Melo e Castro also translated into English and published in India one of Goa's most important literary works in the Portuguese language, Monsoon by Vimala Devi, 2020.
3. In Goa, the expression "Ghats" refers to a mountain range that runs along the western coast of India, crossing the states of Maharashtra, Goa, Karnataka and Kerala, and dividing Goa, geographically, from the rest of India. Thus "beyond the Ghats" alludes to the Indians who lived outside Goa and started flooding into Goa once it had been annexed to India. This internal migration of Indians, mostly Hindus, implied a radical change of Goa´s culture after 450 years of Portuguese presence.
4. Available at (http://mandogoa.blogspot.com.br/2008/02/our-point-of-view-tribal-voices-from.html; Access on May 2nd, 2019).

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