

MOMENTS OF TRUTH AND LYRICAL MUSINGS ON GOA'S TRAUMATIC PROCESS OF DECOLONIZATION

A Reading of *Surya* and *Monsoon* by Vimala Devi¹

Cielo G. Festino
Universidade Paulista
cielofestino@gmail.com

Abstract:

The aim of this paper is to analyze in counterpoint a selection of short stories from *Monsoon* and poems from *Surya*, both collections written by Vimala Devi, in light of theories concerning the intersection of trauma, narrative, and the postcolonial. This approach permits an understanding of effects produced by colonialism such as dispossession, forced migration, diaspora, segregation, racism, and political violence (Craps and Buelens 3). My analysis is carried out from a culture-bound perspective (3), which considers each case of colonial and postcolonial trauma not only as having its own singularities, but also as producing effects on the colonized cultures at both a personal (Caruth) and collective level (Rothberg). Also, we consider some of the singularities of the colonial situation in Goa (Santos). For the contrastive analysis between poems and short stories, in terms of the condition of the Goan elite and subaltern (Fernandes, "Recovering"; *Citizenship*), we consider Devi's rendition of the pastoral (Alpers) as well as her use of some elements of Portuguese Neo-Realism (Lourenço; Gama). The article is divided into the following sections: "The End of an Era," about the trauma caused by the end of Portuguese presence in Goa; "Some Other Kind of Living," about the way in which Goans had to adapt to the new circumstances; "What Went Wrong?" on the condition of the Goan subalterns; and the last section, "Devi's Answer to Trauma," about Devi's way of dealing with the painful divisions at the heart of Goan society.

Keywords:

Surya; Monsoon; colonial; postcolonial trauma; pastoral; subaltern

Bionote:

Cielo G. Festino teaches English at Universidade Paulista, São Paulo, Brazil. She is a member of the thematic project Thinking Goa: A Singular Archive in Portuguese (2015–2019/ USP-FAPESP). She recently co-edited, with Paul Melo e Castro, *A House of Many Mansions: Goan Literature in Portuguese (An Anthology of Original Essays, Short Stories and Poems)* (2017), and with Paul Melo e Castro, Robert Newman, and Hélder Garmes, “Goans on the Move” (*Interdisciplinary Journal of Portuguese Diaspora Studies*, vol. 7, 2018). She has several publications on Indian and Goan literature.

Oh, my home on the Mandovi,
I anxiously look for you
In every house I enter!
(Vimala Devi, "Nowadays")

THE END OF AN ERA

Vimala Devi, born Teresa da Piedade de Baptista Almeida (b.1932), belonged to a family of landowners, members of the Goan Catholic gentry. As such, she was educated in the Catholic religion and the Portuguese language so much so that her most important literary works, in prose and verse, were written in Portuguese, while her family kept close ties with the Portuguese metropole. Her choice of pen name, once she had settled down in Portugal, was for Devi a way to harmonize her "markedly European culture" with her "authentically Luso-Indian personality" (Devi and Seabra 225).

Devi had been living in Lisbon since 1958 when she published *Surya*¹ [*Suria*] in 1962 and *Monsoon*² [*Monção*] in 1963. Though belonging to different genres—the first being a book of poems and the second a short-story cycle³ (a group of stories by the same author related by theme, locality, and time), both oeuvres deal with the same theme: the traumatic process of seeing the Goa of her childhood and youth receding into the past. That she published both books almost consecutively reveals how deeply affected she was by the transformations taking place in her native land. These transformations were due to the economic stagnation of the last years of the Portuguese regime, aggravated socially during António de Oliveira Salazar's Estado Novo by his Colonial Act of 1930—which redefined Goa as a colony and established an official distinction between European and Indians (Castro, "Em Torno")— and the eventual annexation of Goa by India in 1961. As she wonders in her poem "Defenseless," like many other Goans, she had to reinvent herself at a moment when her inherited Indo-Portuguese values might no longer make sense and Goa seemed poised to be engulfed by mainstream Indian culture: "*What will I do now with the ancestral concepts?/ Guard them like rubies? Get rid of them for good?*".

Nonetheless, in her fiction and in *A Literatura Indo-Portuguesa* [Indo-Portuguese Literature] (1971)—the groundbreaking critical work that she co-wrote with her husband Manuel de Seabra, Devi has no qualms about turning a harsh eye on her own class, the Goan Catholic gentry, and expressing her profound empathy with the Goan subaltern in matters related to social inequality, caste, religion, and gender issues. Such issues are the main subjects of her books of poetry and

fiction, though she is never openly anti-colonial and at times looks to the past with a certain nostalgia.

In this context, this paper's aim is to analyze in counterpoint a selection of short stories from *Monsoon* and poems from *Surya* in light of postcolonial trauma theory. This theory examines various issues at the intersection of trauma, narrative, and the postcolonial in order to understand recurrent effects of colonialism such as dispossession, forced migration, diaspora, segregation, racism, and political violence (Craps and Buelens 3). As the authors Stef Craps and Gert Buelens go on to write, this analysis must be performed from a "culture-bound perspective" (3), which considers each case of colonial and postcolonial trauma not only as having its own singularities, but also analyzes its effects on the colonized cultures both at a personal (Caruth) and collective level (Rothberg).

In the case of Goa as portrayed in Devi's literary works, this culture-bound model directly relates to the style of early Portuguese colonialism, which, according to Santos (574), in a very intense and particular way, determined the balance of social, political, and cultural power between the colonies and the metropole. Besides, the cycle of Portuguese colonialism was the longest when compared to other European colonialisms. For Goa, it lasted from 1510 to 1961. The specificity of Portuguese colonialism, Santos adds (578), manifested itself in the ways of sharing everyday life experiences, emotions and affections, feelings and ideologies, and in the manners of oppression and resistance, which materialized in different ways in the different colonies.

During its more than four-hundred-year presence in Goa, Portuguese colonialism materialized in its policy of mass conversion and integration, which ended up producing a new society. This new society was marked not only by a Portuguese-speaking Catholic gentry, but also by a lower class that was Catholic and "lusitanized" to varying degrees. Then, post-colonialism also marked Goan society with its transition from being a Portuguese colony to a state of India, a shift that implies, according to Sousa Santos (581), the replacement of the colonial practices and discourses for a new set of narratives, which, in the case of Goa, would be determined not only by Goans but by the new Indian power. As suggested, when the Portuguese were forced to leave Goa and the Indian state took over, these historical events had a traumatic effect on many Goans, like Vimala Devi, who were left wondering what to do with the values and beliefs that had become the norm after centuries of Portuguese presence in Goa.

I contend that each one of the "moments of truth" (Pratt) around which the plots of the short stories in *Monsoon* are built, and which Melo e Castro ("Snapshots") has called the last snapshots of colonial Goa, when put side by side through the

short story-cycle, present a collective vision of the trauma produced by the entropy experienced in the last years of the Portuguese regime as well as the process of decolonization. Consequently, when coupled with the more individualistic and subjective musings of Devi's lyrical poetry in *Surya*, these narratives become spaces for the author to reflect on the Indo-Portuguese world that was fading away, meditate on it from a critical perspective, and look for new ways to deal with her own cultural identity that is divided, once again, between two worlds: her present in Portugal and her past in Goa. Finally, both the short stories and the poems can be read as a critical rather than a bucolic rendering of the pastoral (Alpers) in the context of Portuguese Neo-Realism—though without its implicit Marxist connotations (Lourenço; Gama).

SOME OTHER KIND OF LIVING

Following Freud, Cathy Caruth (3-4) uses the parable of “the wound and the voice” to define trauma firstly as a wound, an injury, originally inflicted on a body, and secondly as a wound inflicted also upon the mind. She problematizes the latter by pointing out that if the wound of the body can be healed, the wound of the mind is more difficult to cure as it is an experience that is not fully assimilated and, therefore, always returns in some form of narrative that articulates “the nightmares of the survivor” (4). Trauma can thus be defined as the story of a wound that speaks about a reality or a truth that is not possible to access otherwise (4). For this reason, traumatic experiences can only make sense to us through their telling and retelling. As Caruth (5) also remarks, these narratives on trauma question what it means to come to terms with a crisis that demands but also defies our understanding. From a postcolonial perspective, Rothberg (230) complements Caruth's explanation by drawing attention to the collective character of these narratives as, though in a different manner, the colonial experience affects whole communities.

Many Goans saw the arrival of the Portuguese in the Konkan as a traumatic experience (Cunha; Bragança; Trichur) because it involved the mass conversion of local groups to a new religion, Catholicism, the choice between giving up their ancestral beliefs or being forced to depart the territory (Aldrovandi) as well as the adoption of the Portuguese language and European social manners. Therefore, for some Nationalists, like the thinker and activist T. B. Cunha (1944⁴) among others, decolonization as well as the union with India was welcome because they felt that the Portuguese had separated Goans from their cultural roots and made them adopt a cultural model not their own.

Nonetheless, those like Cunha's niece, Berta Menezes Bragança (1911-1993), who lived to see the dream of the Goan Nationalists come true, it first provoked a great happiness, and then a certain disappointment when Goa did not become what she, like many other Freedom Fighters, had expected due to the political, social, and economic direction that Goa took (Bragança). For others yet, it provoked anguish as it meant the end of an era. Such was the case of Vimala Devi who, together with her husband Manuel de Seabra, in their seminal book *A Literatura Indo-Portuguesa [Indo-Portuguese Literature]* (18-21), define Goa as having its own distinctive culture, which is the result of a confluence between the Indian and the Portuguese. In a recent interview with Daniela Spina (336), Devi observes that the Portuguese had a good rapport with the people of Goa. Referencing Gilberto Freyre's theory of Lusotropicalism (1940), she contends that there was a process of assimilation on both parts, Goans and Portuguese. In her words, it was a "give and take" more than a politics of domination, and the end of Portuguese regime in Goa, was mainly due to Salazar's wrong-headed views on colonialism (Spina 343). Nonetheless, in both her short stories and poems, Devi problematizes the flaws that she perceived were at the core of Goan society and that she would also present as the outcome of colonial rule.

What was at risk, when Devi wrote her stories, was the end of a cultural identity that had taken shape over centuries of Portuguese presence in Goa. As Rothberg (231) points out, "trauma implies some other kind of living," which often means giving up totally or partially the world of our ancestors, as we have known it since infancy. Thus, Joana Passos (46) argues that the feeling of loss Devi experiences does not necessarily have to do with imperial nostalgia. Rather, as Devi was writing from Portugal, what she evokes are the childhood memories of her motherland. This nostalgia would be the result of feeling dislocated in such historical circumstances, as she fears losing her cultural references. Significantly, the word "ancestral" crops up twice in *Surya*⁵. In the poem "Goa," the Poetic I hears the agonizing appeal of the land: "*An aching, ancestral appeal/Comes from you to me*" as if demanding loyalty to the old order. In the poem "Defenseless," the Poetic I wonders what to do with those ancestral values: "*Get rid of them for good?*" in order to adapt to the new conditions in which the way of life associated with them had become endangered? As no definite answer is reached, in each poem, this traumatic experience is considered from different angles that both complement and contradict each other. Likewise, though the focus of various poems in *Surya* is on the Poetic I, the different tones conferred to the verses, which range from despair to forceful determination, convey a strong feeling of disorientation. If in "Goa" Devi muses on the grief caused by the end of an era, lending to the verses a melancholic tone—"In the early hours of tears and hope/Your mourning is my mourning," in "Defenseless" she decides to reinvent herself in order to adapt to the new circumstances. The free verse style, which reproduces the whirlwind in her mind, as she tries to find

a solution to her dilemma, as well as the choice of words, like “heart of steel,” give force to her determination:

The way I am, I shouldn't survive.
I need to become someone else: have a heart of steel
And wash the distant dreams from my brain...

These new historical circumstances had brought Goa to a dramatic halt. In order not to be marginalized in the new society, one needs to find a “new kind of living,” as well as a new identity, which would have to either be wrenched from the same locale or found from outside of Goa, as is dramatically stated in the following lines: “*I need to tear open the earth/Or search the forest for lions to be my comrades!*” (“Defenseless”) [unpaginated]. If not, just as with many Goans who had chosen to stay rather than leave their native land, the Poetic I might be forced to deny its identity—“*I remained, always fleeing myself*”, seeing the childhood world reduced to mere fantasy—“*Dolls and fairies died/Like fragile rainbows*”; and the ancestral values useless to face the present circumstances—“*Mother! Before you'd give me weapons:/anything but toys!*” (“Defenseless”). In this last verse, full of drama and despair, the appeal to the mother figure goes beyond the familial to imply Goa as a society.

This dilemma about leaving the old world behind is reprised in the poem “Burying the Myths.” It describes old values as having dematerialized into myths, which, as such, no longer belong to the real world of the present. They are the remnant of some culture already past. If in “Defenseless” the Poetic I deplores its condition, in this poem, the first line, which starts *in medias res*, conveys a firm resolution to accept the new world for what it is: “*Today I decided to bury the myths /I shed no tears; only the stones wept.*” In the second stanza, however, the resolution of the Poetic I again wavers under the reproving gaze of patricians who have remained loyal to the old order and see this anguish as a woman's flaw. This poetic ambiguity points to both the political and cultural conflict lived by Goans in the face of decolonization:

But men, impenetrable rocks,
Looked at me with words of disdain:
“Crazy woman! You'll end up burying yourself too!”

Rothberg (226) states that one of the outcomes of colonization is “the intergenerational transmission of trauma” directly related either to the denial of the old world or to the difficulty of the integration into the new order. This explains why its victims find themselves trapped in the same recurring stories. To be precise, Devi’s desire to grapple with the violence and incomprehensibility of the trauma caused by seeing her world disappear leads her to repeatedly narrate the same story of decline and despair in the stories of *Monsoon*. Hence, the proud mother figure with which she invests Goa in the poem “Defenseless”: “*And what of the pride I sucked from your breasts?*” comes to life once and again in the figure of “Grandmother” in the short story “Decline.”

As the verse attests, the pride that the Poetic I had sucked from Goa’s breast is associated with Goan lifestyle and beliefs. On the one hand, these values, which Devi had learnt to respect and treasure, had made the Goan gentry unique within India. On the other hand, as Cunha contended (1944), they had distanced them from their Indian roots. If this prerogative had given them a place of privilege within Goan society, it was also fragile as it was based on the semi-feudal and bureaucratic system imposed by the Portuguese (Devi and Seabra 31) that limited the development of the territory and led many Goans to leave for the diaspora, as some stories in *Monsoon* also narrate (Castro, “Three Fleeting Voices”; Passos; Festino, “Women without Men”)⁶.

In “Decline,” both the members of a Goan traditional family as well as their *mundcars* (land-tillers) attend the funeral of the family’s old matriarch who had run their estate for years because her son had moved to and then died in Africa. Grandmother is the proud mother figure that symbolizes the old order of the Goan Catholic gentry, the once powerful *bhatcars* (landowners). Like the *mundcars*, such figures knew that their daily bread came from agricultural toil, albeit a toil that they supervised in comfort, watching from the tall windows of the *Casa Grande* [Great House] as the *mundcars* worked the land from dawn to dusk. Maria Aurora Couto (241) observes that if the ladies from the *Casa Grande* cultivated the “arts and the social graces,” they also considered “working the land a sacred duty” and “combined the vitality of rural experience with the elegance of their *salas* and their social life”:

Grandmother had become a symbol. In life, she’d been respected by the whole family. The *mundcars* had worshipped her as a providential idol, as a protector. Even after her death, she continued to influence our every action. It was she, always she, who from even beyond the grave would continue to direct our lives. (43)

Grandmother’s death symbolizes not only the decline of her own family, as her widowed daughter-in-law and inexperienced grandchildren lack the strength and

the skills to keep the family status, but also of her class that had been one of the most important pillars of Goan rural society.

As if sensing the beginning of a new order, the mundcars, who had worked the land of the bhatcars for a handful of rice for generations, dare sit on chairs during the funeral of the old lady, rather than squatting on the floor as was their custom: "One by one, shy yet emboldened, they started to occupy the chairs ranged before the bier" (45). As in many other stories in *Monsoon*, which echo Devi's views on Portuguese colonialism, this complex situation is told from an ambivalent perspective. On the one hand, a recognition of the need to redress social injustice, and, on the other, anguish for the old order that is dying.

This *saudade*, or nostalgia, for a vanishing world is even more acute in the poem "Memory of Goa" and the short story "Memory of Uncle Salú." In them, fine verses and rich prose become the only way of perpetuating the past. Significantly, these affective memories are brought back to life not in Portuguese but in Konkani. In "Memory of Goa," which is actually written in Konkani unlike the rest of the poems in *Surya*, Devi, as if to better express her Goan *saudade*, resorts to the language of the Goan people. On the other hand, the story "Memory of Uncle Salú" is dotted with quotations from everyday conversation as well as Catholic prayers in Konkani as if to make the memory even more vivid.

Devi's evocation of Goa is highly lyrical. Through the precise choice of words, memories are transformed into stirring scents and sounds that keep Goa alive: "*The sweetest perfume/Within me/Is your memory...*" [...] "*Now, your songs/Disappear into the night/Like dreams...*" ("Memory of Goa"). This strong evocative feeling reappears in "Memory of Uncle Salú," a story narrated in the first-person singular and in retrospect, in which the narrator tries to recover the images of the home country reduced to a reminiscence:

You could say that everything I carry inside forms a temple of *saudade*. Around me now, in a painful gyre, swirls my entire childhood in that old village by the Mandovi. Back then, time seemed to stand still and we lived as we did a thousand years ago, as we always had. (98).

From the perspective of the child she once was, Devi's narrator reviews the old village on the Mandovi river, where life had continued at the same pace since time immemorial, even before the coming of the Portuguese, a thousand years back, thus mixing in the sands of time the colonial and precolonial worlds, and establishing a firm sense of cultural stability and continuity. The symbol of this remote world, in which time seemed not to pass, is, paradoxically, a very old man, the aristocratic Uncle Salú, the last member of an ancestral family, who is about

to die alone in a decrepit *Casa Grande* on a Christmas Day. Like Grandmother in "Decline," Uncle Salú's passing indirectly signals the end of an era. The story ends with the narrator stating its desire that this world, metaphorically represented by the childhood village—the "Surya" of the poem: "*Contemplating Surya, / I discover your image / In a brief meditation...*"—should not end. As suggested, it is significant that this wish is articulated around a Catholic prayer in Konkani, thus reinforcing the bond between the local and the European, and the fact that both cultures and worlds were inextricably bound together:

Even today, I close my eyes on occasion and see my old village, the fishermen, the tranquil waters of the Mandovi, and I repeat under my breath: '*Noman Morie, curpen bolele...*' a prayer that my homeland, my countrymen and the language of my forebears never wither inside me. (102)

At a certain point in "Memory of Uncle Salú," nonetheless, the paradisiacal, timeless world becomes a society of fossilized customs. The children who once all played together grew up to be divided by class and caste, "the future mundcars and bhatcars" (99), an apparently unbridgeable gap in Goan society. Along the same lines, the ephemeral quality of Devi's dreamlike evocation of Goa, in the poem "Memory of Goa," is again marred in the poem "Nowadays" when news on her native land after its integration into India reaches her. In "Nowadays," the anguish of the narrative comes, in Caruth's terms (7), from the oscillation between "the unbearable nature of a [traumatic] event"—"*They tell me sad stories about you: / Your abandonment / To the monsoon winds*"—and the "unbearable nature of the victim's survival to such historical circumstances" (7)—"*With this harsh reality / Burning up inside me*" / "*Nowadays / All that's left for me is to dream*". As Caruth explains, trauma narratives go beyond the representation of the shock produced by the catastrophe (6), which in Devi's case is the anguish of losing one's ancestral culture, to convey the "impact of its very incomprehensibility," (6), as shown by Devi's going back to the same events, once and again, in different genres and from different angles and perspectives as if, unable to remedy what happened, she narrates it repeatedly to understand what went wrong.

About the *mando*, a popular and native Goan musical genre, which depicts Goa's life and customs, Devi and Seabra (29-33) observe that though realistic and satirical, it is, to a certain extent, conformist as it does not deal in depth with the problems that affected Goan society, in particular the different forms of discrimination. Devi's literature, on the other hand, as will be discussed in the next section, for all her saudade for the old world, can be read as a desire to find corrective measures to deal with what she understood as Goa's flaws, which, rather than arbitrary and contingent, were the result of a stagnant economic system and the fossilized aspects of its culture.

WHAT WENT WRONG?

Castro (19) observes that the short story cycle, as would be the case with *Monsoon*, multiple fragments of life, as well as characters from different walks of life that are all part of the same context. When considered all together they come to represent the major processes of the society in analysis. To be precise, if the stories and poems that were just analyzed focus mainly on the life of the Goan gentry, Devi—like another contemporary Goan writer, Epitácio Pais (1924-2009), and in the wake of Portuguese Neo-Realism, a literary style which aimed to recreate the life of the downtrodden (Lourenço; Margato; Gama)—wrote many other poems and short stories that deal with the opposite side of Goan society, the life of the subaltern. Here, as reflected in these narratives, the term “subalternity” refers to the relationship established between the subaltern and power (Castro, “Other Half” 122) rather than to an essential, fixed location of subordination. Fernandes (“Recovering the Republic” 40) nuances this concept of subalternity by recommending that we see it “not as a relationship between a discrete elite and a defining subaltern group, but as a scale or a web.” The metaphor of the web helps visualize how complex subalternity is in Goa since “one could be subaltern in a particular set of relations [...] while in others find space for movement” (Fernandes, *Citizenship* 40), as would be the case of the Goan Catholic gentry, with respect to Portugal, or even among the different subalternized communities of Goa.

Castro (“Em Torno”) also observes that the theme of caste is not only one of the most recurrent themes in *Monsoon* but also provides a continuity among the different stories of the cycle. Unlike previous Goan literature, all castes are represented in *Monsoon*: Brahmins, Chardos, Shudras, and what Parag Parobo has defined as the Bahujan Samaj, “a conglomeration of low-caste people, more than a monolithic group” (3). This group includes the mundcars, the farazes or untouchables, and the Curumbins, term used by the Catholic elite to refer to the communities of Gawdas or Kunbis, who are today identified as Tribals or Adivasi and who are said to be the first inhabitants of Goa (Pereira). Nowadays, as Priyanka Velip affirms, narratives of inclusion rather than narratives of origin are of greater importance for the Adivasis: “Today it does not matter whether we are the original settlers of Goa or not, which is also debatable, but what we want is the inclusion of our own into the mainstream of society so that there are fewer chances of ‘othering.’”

As Fernandes argues in “After the Monsoon,” his introduction to Devi’s *Monsoon*, though agency is denied to the subaltern in Devi’s literature, the presence of such characters at the center of the narrative meant an open criticism of the establishment that, according to Castro (“Em Torno”), was rather new in Goan literature. Besides, her nuanced and sensitive depiction of the Goan poor in the different short stories and poem challenges established perceptions of the Goan

subaltern and raises further questions on their condition. If Devi is unable to cope with them in *Monsoon*, these questions might eventually be answered in other Goan literary texts. And this is one of the most salient aspects of Devi's literature. Though timidly, perhaps, that Devi's literary texts become a stage on which social injustices are addressed aims at correcting what Fernandes criticizes in particular of Goan nationalists, namely, that the Goan subaltern "must eternally be mute actors in a script defined by savarna leaders" as the Bahujans were considered as not having "the intellectual capacity to inform or to lead" ("Recovering" 18). So much so that in her interview with Daniela Spina (340), Devi says that she could make these observations on Goan society because she was already in Portugal. Had she still been living in Goa, she would have been harshly censured.⁷

A motif is one of the most recurrent characteristics of trauma literature. Caruth (5) calls them key figures and observes that they are central to such narratives due to their rhetorical quality as well as resonance, which contribute to bringing back to life a forgotten wound. In the case of Devi's oeuvre, these motifs have to do with what she saw as the main faults in Goan society that eventually caused its downfall: different forms of prejudices that haunt her to this day. As Devi points out: "I grew up seeing those people [the mundcars] around and had the opportunity to observe the whole life of these poor people and I saw that the system in Goa was very unfair, a semi-feudal system: a tremendous inequality between [bhatcars and mundcars]" (qtd. in Spina 339).⁸

For her depiction of the Goan subaltern, Devi makes use of elements of the pastoral in some of her short stories and poems because the main figure that recurrently emerges in both is that of a Goan rural peasant amid the Goan landscape. The pastoral has been defined as a genre that comes in a variety of forms and is mainly characterized by its concern with country life (Beckson and Ganz 193). Alpers historicizes and problematizes this definition when he claims that each author of the pastoral articulates this genre through what he calls "a representative anecdote" (440), the form that the pastoral assumes depending on the story being told. For this reason, Alpers (456) explains that the pastoral is not unique but has been diversified and transformed over history. Alpers (449) also observes that there are two ways of characterizing the pastoral: as a portrayal of the landscape, and in terms of the peasant's interaction with his surroundings. In turn, the depiction of the peasants, rather than following the typified convention of a life in harmony with nature, may be modified to give them representative force according to the tenor of the story narrated or the landscape being portrayed, as is the case of Devi's literature. The beauty of the Goan landscape, presented in rich metaphors, acquires a discordant tone when the almost starved peasant is pictured bent over, toiling in the lush fields at midday. At this point, the rich aesthetic quality of Devi's verse and prose goes beyond the lyrical and, in the style of Neo-Realism, becomes

“useful and necessary” (Gama 10) to denounce an unfair social situation in which the Goan subaltern is conditioned by his natural and social environment.

These rustic characters are often not only simply peasants—such as the mundcars, Curumbins, and farazes in *Devi*—who worked the land in exchange for shelter and a share of the crop without any type of money transaction, but also other people from the lower rungs of society, such as fishermen, who are the seagoing equivalents of the landbound peasantry (Alpers 456). In some poems, particularly those which express her *saudade* for her native land, *Devi* resorts to elements of the pastoral to idealize the Goan countryside. These poems replicate the image of what has been defined as *Goa Dourada* or Golden Goa and is associated with images of prosperity and leisure (Trichur 19), as in the poem “Tenderness,” which is characterized by its pathos:

Tenderness!
In the crowns woven by flower-sellers,
In the green of rice stalks
And in the coconut palm's sway!

Lush on misty mornings...

This feeling of tenderness is provoked by the Poetic I's evocation of a pastoral Goa represented by two of its main rural symbols, the paddy fields and the coconut groves. In others, however, the Goan subaltern, peasant or fisherman, is at the centre of the scene. Rarely do *Devi*'s characters enjoy pastoral wellbeing in the latter. Rather, her rich metaphors aestheticize the suffering and dispossession of the poor to hint at a larger political and social reality, and exploitation repeatedly becomes the main trope of the short stories and poems as it is made clear that paddy fields and coconut groves are the *bhatcar*'s chief source of capital. In this second case, *Devi*'s socially critical use of the pastoral can be coupled with the theory of trauma because rather than using it to fantasize or escape reality, she resorts to it as a means to affirm that the life of leisure and prosperity, many times associated with the rural, is based on “the appropriation of surplus from rural labor force under the protection of the Portuguese colonizers and their institutions” (Trichur 19), and is thus limited to the *bhatcars*.

In these poems, with overtones of Neo-Realism, rather than dealing with its own feelings of loss or uncertainty, or recalling the end of Indo-Portuguese Goa, the Poetic I focuses upon the life of the Goan subaltern and, consequently, there is a change from a first person to a third person narrative focus. One of *Devi*'s

most lyrical yet also critical poems about the Goan poor is “Chamdrîm.” Therein through rich visual metaphors, the Poetic I repeatedly appeals to the moon—which is Chamdrîm in Konkani—to cover with its silver light the poverty of Goa’s rural landscape, in particular the huts where the farazes, the Goan Untouchables, live. The silver light adds to the poor farazes’s solitude in their predicament:

Come, Chamdrîm, sorcerer, with your solid light,
Turn palm-thatched houses into houses of silver,
And let the farazes go into the hills
In search of bamboo with which to weave survival!

The use of the oxymoron throughout the different stanzas, gives unity to the poem. The first verses highlight the fragility of the worker’s huts. These huts are made of palm tree leaves, their only protection against the elements, like the monsoon. Their vulnerability is paradoxically contrasted to the solidity of the moonlight whose silver light both dresses their naked misery and protects them from the scorching sun under whose cruel rays both fishermen and mundcars work. This is a landscape in which there is no harmony between nature and the Goan poor. Rather, the ugliness of the subaltern’s extreme poverty stands out amidst the beauty of the landscape. The poor farazes who inhabit these huts, though godlike figures, are dark and poor, thus pointing to their class and caste. Some make their living by fishing. As they often return home empty handed, the fear of hunger, implied in the mournful tone of each line of the poem, makes them fill the Mandovi and Zuari rivers, marks of the Goan landscape, with their own tears:

The Mandovi and the Zuari, streams of salty tears,
Shelter blackened and humble gods,
Who on dark nights dolefully return
With jellyfish in their nets and their boats empty.

It is the misery of the fishermen conflated with that of the peasants, as suggested in the fourth stanza of the poem, that is causing the death of the Goan village. In his seminal work on the Goan village, Filipe Nery Xavier (66-67) states that in a place where everything changes, the indestructible union of the Goan village has contributed more than any other institution to the preservation of the Goan community. If the villages die, as Devi’s poem suggests, then Goa dies. Hence, in the next stanza, creating dramatic expectancy, the Poetic I once again commands the moon to reveal the real reasons for the poor man’s suffering as only death,

in the shape of a venomous serpent lurking in the darkness, awaits him when he returns from the fields. The tremendous heat, implied by the dust which in covering his body has even deprived him of his own sweat:

Come tear away the mystery from the dying villages
Where venomous serpents bite at night.
Death watches the peasants as they return from the fields,
Bathed in the sweat of the soil— its eyes on their feet!

The poem has an authority about it that seems to come from the Poetic I's deep knowledge of the subaltern's circumstances. Every verse is like an open wound. In order to provide insights into the condition of the Goan subaltern, she portrays their poverty in elaborate metaphors that produce empathy in the reader. As Rita Felski observes:

The significance of a text is not exhausted by what it reveals or conceals about the social conditions that surround it. Rather, it is also a matter of what it makes possible in the viewer or reader—what kind of emotions it elicits, what perceptual changes it triggers, what affective bonds it calls into being their own. (585)

Hence, the harmony of Devi's verses or the richness of her prose never aim at concealing the poor man's suffering, but at depicting it in an expressive and dignified manner in order to uncover their humanity, which is almost deformed by their extreme misery, and at indirectly denouncing the shortcomings of the social and political regime.

To adapt the pastoral to her socially critical interpretation of the Goan landscape and the Goan subaltern, Devi also loads each verse with realistic contours that lend themselves to be read as a deconstruction of the image of Golden Goa. Though it might be argued that the theme of Devi's poetry in *Surya* is mostly restricted to political issues such as the disorientation produced by the end of the Indo-Portuguese period as well as social issues such as the condition of the Goan poor, the expressive quality of her poetry never loses force as Devi knows how to balance content and form.

The fishermen in "Chamdrim" become the main characters of the story "Job's Children" in *Monsoon*. In the story, Devi gives another reason for the Goan's poverty as its subject matter relates the fishermen's poor conditions to that of fossilized customs and gender discrimination like the payment of a dowry to marry a daughter, which is another recurrent theme in several of the stories in *Monsoon*

among both Catholic and Hindu communities (Gracias).⁹ Devi observes that the practices of arranged marriages and the dowry system continued in the second half of the twentieth century, when these customs had long disappeared in Europe (Spina 341).

Bostião, an old and infirm Shudra fisherman, who has exhausted his physical strength, leaves the river to fish in the open sea in order to earn money to pay the dowry for his daughter Carminha, although his wife and even his daughter beg him not to. Nonetheless, he does so because he feels social pressure. It is the duty of a good father, independent of his economic circumstances or caste, to marry his daughter:

Bostião tried to explain, every way he could, his position in Shudra society. The duties he couldn't shirk that enslaved him. He was well aware that in the village all the girls Carminha's age were getting married. Around the neighbourhood, whispered comments passed from mouth to mouth: 'Just when will Bostião marry off his daughter?' [...] He alone knew how hard it was to make ends meet. But one thing was certain. In the words of the other fishermen was a veiled reproach. They expected him to earn enough for his daughter to marry. (81)

In turn, the poor peasants in "Chamdrim" are recreated in the short story "The Arms of Venus" in which the monsoon that has arrived with all its fury has reduced the huts of the Curumbins to mud, bringing on a collective catastrophe. The tone of social urgency, the implied references to the desperate condition of the people, and the unfair possession of the land all reflect a certain "Neo-realist mythology" (Lourenço 161). The narrator of the story, who bears witness to the tragic events, might be considered as an alter ego of Devi herself, as in the narrative, she is addressed as *bai*, a term of respect for women of higher caste. This narrator focuses on the Curumbins to tell how, waist deep in the water, but "loyal to the land [strived] to rescue the seeds, their only food source for the coming year" (116, emphasis added). As if to show that though meek they are not blind to the power of those who possess the land, it is said that the Curumbins are loyal to the land, which is "the central reason for their existence" (120), rather than to its owner, bhatcar Dias, "...who oversaw their efforts [in] his pyjamas and sandals, sheltering under a vast umbrella" (116). While the almost starved Curumbins fight against the elements, the peremptory and callous bhatcar Dias, protecting himself from the rain under his huge umbrella, is portrayed as being only interested in hoarding rice for his own benefit. If for the Curumbins rice means food, for him it also means profit. He even threatens them that, if they do not save the seeds and the harvest was poor, they will go hungry because he will not give up his share of the crop. Though exerting themselves to the limit, the Curumbins' poverty is extreme as they are "deprived of the basic capabilities" (Sen 87); in other words, their misery

is not a question of being limited by a low income, as Sen goes on to explain, but of not having the minimum to sustain themselves. This is not a pastoral landscape of wellbeing, but one in which the elements have allied with an unfair social system, personified in the figure of the bhatcar, to bring about the peasant's death. Thus, the story seems to unveil the mystery posed in the poem "Chamdrim" which, adding dramatic suspense, had been left unresolved, as it provides a concrete referent for the metaphorical venomous serpent that was causing the death of most villages in Goa.

Amid this scene of despair, a Curumbin woman, Mogrem, whose beauty is—significantly—only noted by the narrator of the story, timidly appeals to Dias: "But bhatcar, you might lend us some paddy..." (118), to which the bhatcar, with one eye on a "tidy profit from the high market prices" (118) refuses her request: "Lend you paddy? [...] what about last year's debt?" (118). The reference to the peasant's debt to the bhatcar, not in currency but in rice, affirms what Devi and Seabra (1971) had defined as the feudal-like quality of Goa's rural system based on the possession of the land by a few and the exploitation of the many.

Mogrem is no other than the Venus of the title, the armless goddess of beauty. Like her, Mogrem is the supreme example of Goan native comeliness but battered by poverty. In an indirect allusion to the title of the story, and a direct reference to their own condition as mundcars, throughout the narrative, she and her family are paradoxically represented through the metonymy of the arms: beautiful in the case of Mogrem; virile but almost deformed in the case of her husband; blessed in the case of their six children, believes Mogrem who sees their children joining in the future their fight against hunger; for the narrator, however, these young arms meant only more gain for the bhatcar.

Exhausted and half-starved, she falls ill and dies. The narrator laments being now deprived of her beauty, "her Venus-like figure" (121) as if it were the last remnant of some idealized pastoral Goa. She even laments "not having captured her sweet expression on canvas, the elegant melody of her body" (121). This image of the Curumbin woman, whose beauty surpasses her misery, is also portrayed in the poem, "Dravidian Venuses." In it, as in the short story, the Roman goddess, symbol of Western beauty, is associated with the Curumbins, addressed in this case as Dravidians, alluding to the theory of the Aryan invasion of India, thus bringing together Western and Eastern culture. Devi, the poet, pays tribute to these women by depicting them, as in the case of Mogrem, as goddesses, but not on a day of despair as it was the case of the poor Curumbin woman in the short story. Following the tenets of pastoral poetry, they are portrayed in an idyllic landscape, the setting for songs and an atmosphere of *otium* [leisure] (Alpers 448), among the rich paddy fields, in harmony with nature:

Their clothes, playful, light,
Seem to flee from the wind,
Baring round breasts
Shaped by the hands of dreams!

In contrast, this idyllic landscape and dreamlike vision of the Curumbins is transformed in the next stanza when complex social realities are brought into the poem. The Curumbin men are depicted not as gods, but as tillers of the land. Nonetheless, they are strong, not fragile figures, who tirelessly work the endless fields. If in the previous stanza their women are light as fairies, and disport themselves in a timeless realm, the men live in a real world, which carries with it a sense of real time and real circumstances (Alpers 351) in line with the social urgency of Neo-Realism. Unlike the idyllic pastoral in which shepherds sing or play the flute, these men have no voice. However, as suggested by the verses in which alliteration marks the rhythm of the scythe, they silently work, clinging to the land. It is their attitudes that speak volumes as they only seem to wait for a future time when Goa will go back to the rightful owners, the Curumbins:

Like coconut palms clinging to the soil,
The curumbim men are building tomorrow,
Barefoot in the long fields
Of Goa-curumbina, like an act of possession...

This contrast between the almost supernatural and the commonplace in the two stanzas, rather than being merely ornamental, is loaded with social and political significance. When read in counterpoint, they seem to say that Golden Goa can only exist in dreams, but not in a real world since the peasants' wellbeing depends on a larger and more complex reality that is directly related to the ownership of the land in Goa (Pinto). Devi's poem implies that, in the present circumstances, only in an unreal world could the Goan peasant be free of his hard life. Nonetheless, the last lines of the poem affirm her hope in a future when this social injustice will be redressed and the Curumbins will be in command. In this sense, through the depiction of the fierce land-tillers in the poem, the daring mundcars in "Decline," or the indefatigable Curumbina woman in "The Arms of Venus," Devi aims at positioning her narrative from the perspective of the Bahujan to correct what Fernandes ("Recovering" 20) saw as one of the great faults of the Goan intellectuals, namely, that the making of history was only granted to the elites. Devi's are not stock characters who are part of a cliché plot taking place in the many-times-told

tale of transition from colonial to postcolonial times, but courageous and dignified Goans who, each in their own way, fight to make a living and who love their land in spite of their predicament.

Devi's twice-told tales of the Curumbina women, through prose and through verse, indicate the open wound left by the trauma of Goa's decline. Devi's exaltation of these women's beauty, as Caruth (7) would have it in trauma theory, is an affirmation of the endless impact their lives had on her. So much so that in "The Arms of Venus," it is Vitol, Mogrem's husband, and not the narrator, who has the last word. If the Curumbins do not have the power to change their condition, they can at least, though timidly, word their angst. Mogrem dies because, as she is unable to impose herself upon unfair circumstances, these circumstances end up destroying her. For Vitol, there seems to be no more tomorrow now that his wife has died. It is not Mogrem's beauty that he will miss – aesthetic matters are the concerns of those who, like the narrator, have their basic needs covered – but "... her two strong arms, [his] best allies in the struggle against hunger!" (122). As in the case of Venus, if the narrator only laments not having depicted her beauty, Vitol laments the lack of her arms. Such a contrast in their views can be read as Devi's critique of the Goan gentry, her own class, that even when trying to sympathize with the downtrodden are still to be held accountable for such an unequal system. This is the case of her character, bhatcar Dias. Like Vitol, more than the woman, he also mourns the lack of her arms: "Nothing but her arms, which symbolized toil. Bread for the mundcar as for the bhatcar" (122). But as the story shows, if for Vitol the arms were his companions in the relentless fight against starvation, for the bhatcar, they meant bread and profit.

Devi's strong feelings for the Curumbins as well as her critique of their situation, when seen in counterpoint with narratives like "Memory of Uncle Salú," show how her attitude towards Goa's colonial past wavers between depicting it, in the words of Fernandes, as "a dark interlude" or "a period whose loss we must now lament" ("Recovering"). In any case, in her depiction of Goa, Devi brings together the aesthetic—as in her portrayal of the Curumbina women and the Goan landscape, the moral—as she passes judgment on the failures of her fellow Goans, and even the political—as, by putting the Goan subalterns in the centre of her narrative and presenting them in an ordinary day leading their ordinary lives, she aims to raise her readers' awareness about their condition.

DEVI'S ANSWER TO TRAUMA

As if trying to cope with the trauma caused by Goa being in danger of losing its cultural identity once integrated into Indian territory, in *A Literatura Indo-Portuguesa* [*Indo-Portuguese Literature*], Devi and Seabra (17) meditate on the divisions in Goan society and question whether it is Indian, Portuguese, Indo-Portuguese, or Goan. Then they add that this society is painfully divided not only into castes but also into religious communities. As suggested in this paper, these theoretical reflections are expanded both in *Monsoon* and *Surya* in which, through the rhetorical strategies offered by the discourse of literature, with its moments of truth and lyrical musings, Devi looks in depth at some of the fractures in Goan society. As such, narrating the trauma in twice-told metaphors seems to be one of the ways to deal with the changes brought about by colonialism and postcolonialism, as suggested by Caruth (8).

One of the last scenes of the short story "Job's Children" shows the old fisherman, Bostião, laid low by illness, about to be taken to a hospital in the city. Only in this extreme situation, when confronted with death, do all the members of the community, including his wife and daughter, the Shudra fishermen as well as the Brahmin bhatcarina, come together indifferent to class or caste: "Angelina, Carminha, Savitri and Dona Lavínia wept as if there, before such pain, they were equal, no longer divided by caste until their dying day" (106). What can be read in between the lines of the story is Devi's lament that, perhaps, if this coming together of all as well as the affluent tending a hand to those in need had been a common practice in Goa, its history might have taken a different tack.

Also, like Goans from different class and caste, Goans of different religious denominations, such as Catholics, Hindus, and Muslims, might live side by side but they were severely penalized if they transgressed certain internal barriers. One of the short stories in *Monsoon* that best portrays this division is "The Cure," which recounts the ill-starred story of two lovers who belong to different religions: the girl, Rosu, is a Catholic while the young man, Caxinata, is a Hindu. This is, significantly, the only real love story in the book. The narrative focus wavers from one to the other as if to indicate that their forbidden love is equally condemned in both communities and that both of them would become outsiders if their love were consummated. These lovers can only meet in the secluded countryside, outside their neighbourhoods, away from the village. Their love has no future, as the name of the story suggests, "If anything happens, the distican can give you a cure... 'A cure again! Love between a Catholic and a Hindu always ends with a cure. Why can't it be different, legal, without shame or cures?" (109-110). The "cure," as Devi sadly implies in the title of the story, is nothing but a medicine to provoke an abortion if their love prospers. These scenes recount another traumatic story about

Goa. As Claire Williams observes after the title of Maria Elsa da Rocha's short story book *Vivências Partilhadas* [*Sharing Lives*], Goa was a society of "vivência [living alongside], rather than *convivência* [sharing experiences]" (236).

To these divisions Devi added yet another traumatic narrative: the seemingly unbridgeable distance between Goa and Portugal that she tries to contest in her literature. As she states in the poem "Goa": "*In my thoughts you will always be/ The eternal Lusitanian dream/—The communion of monasteries and temples*" [unpaginated]. The hopeful tone of the verses reveals that Devi envisioned a Goa in which the Portuguese roots would not be wrenched from its soil because they had become one with the Goan.

In Devi's literature, the metaphor of the cure can thus be extended to encompass all the communities that make up Goan society as if, through her narratives, she not only tried to identify what provoked Goa's decline but also find possible ways to heal its ills, urging her fellow Goans to both redress social injustices as well respect differences so that they might not just live alongside one another but actually share experiences. Only in this way would they be able to stick to their cultural identity in spite of their new *status quo* as an Indian state. In this sense, Devi's appeal is no different from that of those who were in favour of putting an end to the Portuguese regime in Goa, like Berta Menezes Bragança, who in "My Call to the Goan Youth" (1990) expresses her discontent with the turn things had taken in Goa after its integration into India.

Devi's literature thus assumes a dialogical as well as performative status. This intent is already encoded in the epigraphs that she chose for *Monsoon* and *Surya*. For *Monsoon*, some verses by the poet and dramatist Kalidasa, originally written in Sanskrit: "*The tree's shadow stretches away at sundown/Without ever splitting from it.*" What can be read in this intertextual reference is that Goa might have apparently strayed away from its Indian roots when it embraced a religion, culture, and language that were European. Nonetheless, the bonds had never been severed and they were all branches of the same tree.

Likewise in *Surya*, Devi chooses for her epigraph some devotional verses by Narahari, in Kannada:

...This is why I've become, oh Brother,
an eccentric baul¹⁰:
I have no meddling masters, I do not bend to
commandments, canons or customs,
Nor do I subject myself to specious distinctions,

invented by human fantasy;
I reveal myself only in the happiness that
pours from my own flowing love...
In love there is no possible separation,
but indissoluble and eternal union;
This is why I rejoice, singing and dancing.¹¹

Like the minstrel in Narahari's verses, Devi has also become an eccentric poet as she refuses any form of communalism and sees dogmas as human fantasy. According to Caruth and Rothberg, the story of one's own trauma is not only the story of the individual, as would be Devi's case, but it is intertwined with the trauma of the Others of one's own community. This means integrating into our story "the plea by another who is asking to be seen and heard" (Caruth 8), like each one of the characters in Devi's stories and poems from the different social strata of Goan society, independent of their class, caste, religion, or ancestry. It is because of this imperative call that Devi, like Narahari, at least in her art, her own singing and dancing, offers a way to heal the wounds provoked by both the decline of the last years of Portuguese regime and the process of decolonization: "*I will be the voice of conscience/The voice of two worlds*" ("Goa"). Her literary conscience thus encompasses the different people from the different worlds that had given rise to one: Goa. And this is her answer to colonial and post-colonial trauma in Goa.

Notes

1. In this paper, *Surya* will be quoted from Dave A. Smith's unpublished translation.
2. As the aim of this section of *Kritika Kultura* is to provide a contextualization for the translation of *Monção* into English by Paul Melo e Castro, all quotations will be from the English version of the book, *Monsoon*.
3. For a full discussion of Monsoon as a short story cycle, see Paul Melo e Castro, "Em torno do fim: Goa Tardo-Colonial no Ciclo de Contos Monção (1963) de Vimala Devi." *Via Atlântica*, no. 36, 15-41, 2019, pp. 15-41.
4. See Sandra Ataíde Lobo "The Return to Indianness. Goa Nationalism in the 1920s." *Goa 2011. Reviewing and Recovering 50 Years Later*. Edited by Savio Abreu & Rudolf C. Heredia, Concept, 2014; Marcello Felisberto Morais de Assunção "Uma analítica goesa da colonialidade no ensaio The Denationalisation of Goans' (1944) de Tristão Bragança Cunha." *Historiografia crítica: ensaios, analítica e hermenêutica da história*, Edited by Luiz Carlos Bento, Godoi Rodrigo Tavares, Antônio Passos, Editora Milfontes, 2020.
5. All the quotations from *Surya* are from the unpublished manuscript by Dave A. Smith
6. See the short stories "Nattak," "The House Husband," "Dhruva," "Fidelity," "Return," "Decline," and "The Future and the Past."
7. Later writers like Berta Menezes Bragança in *Tales from Goa*, Epitácio Pais in *Os Javalis de Codval*, and Maria Elsa da Rocha in *Vivências Partilhadas* also offered a critical view of colonial and post-colonial Goan society.
8. My translation
9. The theme of arranged marriages is also discussed in "Across community barriers: female characters in Vimala Devi's short stories." In *Acta Scientiarum: Language and Culture*, vol. 41, 2019, pp. 1-11.
10. Poet
11. Translated into English by Dave A. Smith

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