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Circling the End of the Line in Vimala Devi's *Monção*

ABSTRACT: In this article I analyse Vimala Devi's *Monção* (1963) as a short-story cycle, a genre that differs as much from the traditional novel as from non-integrated collections of short narratives in its "tension between variety and unity, separateness and interconnectedness, fragmentation and continuity, openness and closure" (Lundén 12). It is this generic quality I argue, that makes possible Devi's particular portrait of late-colonial Goa. Drawing on various theorizations of the short-story cycle genre, I scrutinize the interconnections and breaks present across and between the fourteen short stories that comprise *Monção* and conclude that the oscillation between centripetal and centrifugal forces enables its representation of a polity sutured together along its divisions. *Monção*, I conclude, proposing a new figure for the short-story cycle, works like a gem in which the stone of context is cut to form a set of planes at angles to one another and where each individual face constitutes a side of Goa's pre-1961 social formation. The beauty of Devi's narratives is that each aspect yields new glints of significance as we regard them in light of other stories. In each character we find a new metaphor for certain conditions of life in bygone Goa, the overall effect of these depictions of truncation and discontent being cumulative and mutually illuminating.

KEYWORDS: Goan Literature, Post-Colonial Literature in Portuguese, Indian Literature, Short-story Cycle, Vimala Devi, Monsoon

BIONOTE: Paul Melo e Castro lectures in Portuguese and Comparative Literature at the University of Glasgow. He has research interests in literature, film and photography from all over the Portuguese-speaking world, though much of his recent work has concerned Goa, with a particularly focus on the post-colonial short stories of Vimala Devi, Epiácio Pais, Maria Elsa da Rocha and Augusto do Rosário Rodrigues. He has worked extensively as a literary translator, with the short story again predominating. *Monsoon* by Vimala Devi (Seagull, 2020) is his latest book-length translation.

In no way a novel, much less yet a random collection of tales held together by cover alone, Vimala Devi's *Monção* (entitled *Monsoon* in its English translation, to which I shall refer here) belongs to a paradoxical genre often known as the short-story cycle¹. I write "often" for critics disagree by and large on the most appropriate term to apply. Rolf Lundén, who has produced the most exacting discussion of the genre to date, counts more than a dozen designations, almost all of which he rejects for binding this form too tightly to the novel or to the unlinked collection (8). In his view, such critical moves disavow the essence of the short-story cycle, which is to create "tension between variety and unity, separateness and interconnectedness, fragmentation and continuity, openness and closure" (Lundén 12). Lundén goes on to argue that the most fitting term for the genre is the *composite*, and that terms such as cycle or sequence best describe subgenres thereof (8), a thought-provoking argument to which I shall revert in due course but one that rather shuts the terminological barn door after the horse of criticism has bolted. As Jennifer M. Smith explains, "cycle" is now firmly established as the go-to term and, though imperfect, successfully captures the key attributes of the genre (4).

¹ See Luscher; Mann; Dunn and Morris; Kennedy; Lundén; Nagel; Ferguson; and Smith for the main points of discussion regarding the genre. All these works are heavily inclined towards North American literature.

Indeed, for all we might argue over nomenclature, the foundational definition offered by Forrest L. Ingram, of the cycle as “a book of short stories so linked to each other by their author that the reader’s successive experience on different levels of the pattern of the whole significantly modifies his experience of each of its component parts” (19), is generally upheld for identifying the genre’s basic characteristics. Short-story cycles swap the forward-driving, telic, causal chain of the novel for a digressive sense of time and place and a recursive design that prompts an *ex post facto* ordering of inter-story relations. Such relations may take the form of intratextual associations or recurrences, topographic or psychological propinquity, or echoes of theme, symbol and motif, allowing the cycle as a whole to exceed the narrow limits of the single story and to forge a multiplex network of significance. Kennedy—in a point taken up and broadened by Lundén—reminds us that it ill behoves critics to ignore the formal and thematic markers of separation found in a given cycle in the search for an overarching unity (Kennedy 196/7 and Lundén 8). Indeed, the way in which stories remain disjointed can be one of the most powerful and significant aspects of a cycle. Here—mindful of the need to account for the balance of forces at work— I shall analyse the main “centrifugal” and “centripetal” forces at work in *Monção*, by which I mean the way characters, storylines and situations are pushed apart and experiences, plights and places align, and argue that the short-story cycle genre is a singularly appropriate vehicle for Devi’s vision of Goa in the terminal years of Portuguese administration. The proximal and distal relations between elements in a single story, the way in which matches and contrasts are immediate between different stories or looser over the course of the cycle, will be reflected in my analysis.

Situating *Monção*

The epoch *Monção* represents is that of Devi’s youth in Goa, Vimala Devi being the pseudonym of Teresa da Baptista Almeida. Born in 1932 to an elite Catholic family of Britona, a riverside village opposite Goa’s capital Panjim, Devi left for Europe in 1958, where she would begin a richly idiosyncratic literary career. Settling first in Lisbon, where she met her husband Manuel de Seabra, she moved subsequently to London, before setting up residence in Barcelona. Over the course of the 1960s and 1970s, as a poet and short-story writer, and as a critic in tandem with Seabra, Devi would produce some of the most enduring works in Goan letters. In 1962 she published the poetry collection *Súria*, which critic Clive Willis rated among the best of twentieth-century Portuguese verse (2000: 60). The short-story cycle *Monção* followed soon after, in 1963, and met with warm praise from metropolitan critics (as well as in Catalunya and the Esperanto community, reflecting the cycle’s fascinatingly offbeat history of circulation and reception, see Devi cxlvi-clii). The original edition contained thirteen stories (where the 2019 translation differs the alternative title is given in square brackets): “Nâttak”; “O genro-comensal” [The Househusband]; “Dhruva”; Ocaso [Decline]; “Esperança” [Hope]; Padmini; “O Futuro e o Passado” [The Future and the Past]; “Fidelidade” [Fidelity]; “Os filhos de Job” [Job’s Children]; “Recordação de Tio Salú” [Memory of Tio Salu]; “A droga” [The Cure]; “A subvenção” [The Supplement]; and “Vénus e os seus braços” [The Arms of Venus]. The second edition of 2003 included three unpublished stories, originally written immediately after *Monção* for a possible new collection: “Incerteza” [Uncertainty]; “Tyâtr” [Tiatr] and “Regresso” [Returning]. In 1971, with Seabra, Devi co-authored *A Literatura Indo-Portuguesa*, a two-part critical monograph and anthology that has arguably done more than any other

work to preserve and pass on Goa's centuries-old heritage of Portuguese-language creative writing.

Throughout the 1970s, 1980s and 1990s, Devi continued to write poetry and stories, but would never revisit themes of her homeland, the vast postcolonial transformations of which she was not present to witness. Indeed, after her expatriation, Devi never returned to Goa (see Spina 337). In this light, one might consider *Monção* the author's creative valediction to her native turf; the short story—the basic unit of which cycles are composed—offered a powerful way to configure this farewell. In a classic study, Mary Louise Pratt argues that over the twentieth century the short form came to define itself by contrast with the novel: where the longer form showed life in the round, the short story revealed a fragment; where the novel tracked development over time, the short story revolved around a critical moment; where the novel presented a concatenation of events, the short story homed in on a single occurrence. Cycles like *Monção* partially deconstruct this opposition, forming chains of metonymic scraps, poignant moments and unfulfilled turning points. Charles May argues that this particularly modern short story form, with its glancing, elliptical force, its emphasis on middles over ends and its tendency to the fragmented and inconclusive—all characteristics of *Monção*—thrives in fractured societies (13). If the appetency of the short story with its limiting frame is to represent frustration, defeat, loneliness and dead ends (O'Connor), then the short story cycle marshals these qualities in the service of a broader representation of diffuse collectivity. The cycle *represents* fragmented societies in a cumulative but non-totalising form. At heart, in *Monção*, Devi uses the narrative possibilities of the genre to represent a society that appeared stagnant, but which was in fact racked by deep-seated transformations. It is this thematization of stasis and frustration that has, in my view, earned *Monção* its comparisons with Joyce's *Dubliners* (see Seabra viii), a prototype of the cycle set also in a peripheral colonial space on the cusp of overwhelming metamorphosis and equally focussed on moments of loss, ambivalence and disillusion.

Chronological markers establishing the temporal boundaries of Devi's stories are carefully stitched into the narratives. In "The Supplement", the central *descendente* family has been reclassified as European by changes in official statutes, placing the narrative in 1938. It is a realignment only possible in the wake of the invidious 1930 Colonial Act. This legislation—introduced by the then minister of colonies António de Oliveira Salazar, subsequently dictator of Portugal between 1932 and 1968—redefined Goa as a colony and drew a legal distinction between ethnic Europeans and Indians for the first time since the premiership of the Marquis of Pombal (1756-1777), decisively shifting the attitudes of Goa's elites to their political and cultural identity (Ribeiro 120). In "The Househusband" the newly-weds honeymoon in British India, which places the story before 1947; in "Padmini", notably the only Goa-set tale to feature a metropolitan protagonist, the celebrations of Ganesh Chaturthi are described as attracting believers in droves from the Indian Union, locating events after British Indian independence but before the blockade of Goa's land borders in 1955 (though the soldiers filling the bows of the ship that will take João Fidalgo to India signals its imminence). All monetary references are to rupees and tangas, not the escudos and centavos introduced after Devi's expatriation. The stories of *Monsoon* are thus all roughly situated in late colonial Goa, the fascistic New State, the period between the extinction of the egalitarian hopes of the First Republic (1910-1926), during which "a general optimism

surrounded the Portuguese province of Goa” (Larsen 153), and the Indian military intervention which cut the Gordian knot of Salazarist rule.

***Monção* between Nation and Locality**

Goa’s situation between the rock of Salazar-era imperialism and the hard place of Indian irredentist ambitions brings us to the issue of nationality. Benedict Anderson’s idea that the (nineteenth-century, realist, omnisciently narrated in the third person) novel is a precise analogue to the nation it helped imagine (1983) is well known. In his view, both novel and nation are forms that picture disparate lives evolving together in a common place and time and indissolubly bind them together. Partha Chatterjee’s response is no less influential, that in fact the imposed forms of both the nation and the novel were re-imagined in diverse ways—cultural and spiritual, as well as political—by different constituencies, in India and elsewhere (1993). Commenting on the role of English-language short-story cycles in contemporary India, Dirk Wiemann ponders whether the genre enables “a political imaginary that may possibly foster a ‘thinking beyond the nation state’” (159). The idea is as suggestive as the spatial preposition vague. This relation of the short-story cycle to the nation is particularly important as regards Goa, which both the Portuguese and Indian governments proclaimed an inalienable part of their nation spaces but whose particularities neither was fully invested in accommodating. The beginning of an answer lies in the recurrent propensities of the short-story and novel forms. If the novel, in its high European model, concentrates on at most a handful of key central figures as they intersect through historical time, then the short-story cycle as set out here circles in epoch, enacting a parade of minor figures. Such sundry protagonists display a tendency to pointillist type over representative individuality, and their ordinary differences and disputes frame and constitute their social environment, which is thus presented in cross-section. Rather than a narrow, privileged view of Goa, *Monsoon* attempts to present a broad series of limited perspectives in a form that is asymmetrical and, in terms of narrative architecture, weakly hierarchised.

This brings us back to Wiemann’s idea that the short-story cycle operates at a different level to the novel. The fraught and contested notion of Goan nationality allows us to nuance and extend an idea of the particular appetencies of the short-story cycle. *Monção*, and perhaps the sort of literature it represents, is not so much *beyond* the nation state as *before* it. Its bailiwick is the local: Goa’s towns, villages, neighbourhoods, families and peer groups. Devi’s cycle performs a peripatetic exploration of topography (understood in terms of the socio-political as well as the geographical) yet largely restricted to what Smith calls a “limited locality” (2018: 14). Through the play of interdependence and conflict *Monção* performs the key function of the cycle described by Kennedy as the gauging of the reach and stakes of community (1995: 194). What the reader is given to glimpse in *Monção* is the bounded ambiguity of colonial Goa, its narrow situations, broad horizons and dwindling contingencies. It is a vision of Goa that is neither uniquely Portuguese nor simply Indian, one that never attempts to integrate Goa into a larger space, even if at all times it remains cognisant of the web of relations that connect Goa to the outside world and which have so contributed to the shaping of the territory. If India is a site where exist “several levels at which ‘non’, ‘sub’ and ‘cross’ national identities manifest themselves” (Menon 326), *Monção*, and Goa through it, allows us to consider a highly specific instance of those cohabiting and equivocally ordered echelons.

The “centrifugal” and “centripetal” forces at work in a cycle are, essentially, the associative and dissociative impulses within theme, character, event, locale and motif. At which points do narratives converge or run parallel? Where do character arcs sheer off into contrast? Ingram compares the short-story cycle to the mobile (13), in that as the individual stories circle around, their interrelations evolve and they enter different configurations of meaning and suggestion depending on angle of regard. Since by comparison with the novel, shifts in character, place, time and viewpoint are more abrupt, the impression of rifts within a shared context can be built up with particular efficiency. In *A Literatura-Indo Portuguesa*, Devi and Seabra describe the Goan as an “self-seeker outside his socio-religious group, and inside his socio-religious group outside his clan, and inside his clan, outside his immediate family”, a pattern of unaltruistic behaviour intensified by Goa’s “semi-feudalism aggravated by caste structures” (70; translated). Building on these insights, *Monção* shuttles back and forth between the cascaded victims of that hierarchical mindset and the nominal beneficiaries of this social system. It uses the integrative momentum of the cycle to switch between characters, points of view and social locations in each narrative, ultimately representing Goa in all its fissility yet revealing the common milieu for its inner divisions.

Yet this is not to say that the *whole* of Goa is in *Monção*. In his introduction to the second edition, Manuel de Seabra claims Devi’s principal achievement to be an unvarnished representation of all Goa’s social groups (vi). Though Seabra’s verdict does have some purchase—there is no other contemporaneous work of Goan fiction that features metropolitans, native Catholics, *descendentes* and Hindus from across classes—it is only the Velhas Conquistas that are portrayed, the space equating to Albuquerque’s initial tidewater possessions. And while there are stories set in Lisbon and Rio de Janeiro, Pangim and Margão, the vast majority take place in the fictional riparian Orlim², which seems to be Devi’s natal Britona thinly veiled behind the name of a settlement in Salsete. Devi never crosses what Alexandre Moniz Barbosa calls “the invisible wall” (5) dividing the Velhas from the Novas Conquistas, the hinterland regions of Goa only aggregated to the territory in the late eighteenth century and whose history has been significantly different. Their exclusion, even in reference alone, perhaps indicates in absentia the difficulty of articulating a coherent narrative of identity for the entire region that today bears the name Goa³. Here it is noticeable that the great shaping force of the Goan mid-century, the mining industry, concentrated in the New Conquests and which looms so large in the work of Devi’s peer Epiácio Pais (see Castro) is entirely absent, as are the phenomena caused in part by Indian blockade such as the consumerism and smuggling driven by the Portuguese government’s coping strategy of allowing tariff-free imports. The focus of *Monção* is Goa as it emerged from its long nineteenth century and the dynamics internal to its traditional society and its divisions of caste, religion, class, gender and race that cannot be attributed to Portuguese colonialism alone, not more recent shifts that—we can now see in retrospect—were also priming a Goa to come.

² One interpretation is that the name consists of ‘Orla’ (or ‘waterside’ in Portuguese) and the nasalised suffix so common in Goan toponymy.

³ Another population group that does not feature are Muslims. Jason K. Fernandes suggests this absence may be due to the long shadow of British Indian nationalism, with its stigmatization of Muslim communities (x). A further possibility is the relative absence of this population group from Britona.

Centripetal and Centrifugal Details

It is, then, village Goa that predominates, and the issue of caste that recurs most often. Caste issues are threaded through the stories and provide thematic continuity via the dramatization of social partitioning. The tales about Catholics shuffle through the main caste groups of Brahmins, Chardos, Shudras, taking in the tribal Curumbins and the “untouchable” Farazes (with a nod to the Hindu caste system in the three Chandracanta stories). In “the House Husband”, set in Margão where “the old ways are obeyed, pride is maintained and arrogance preens itself” (Devi 34), an ironic link is made between the *boas famílias* (the “good families” George Menezes discusses in an essay of the same name [74]) and the Goan mango, the various noble varieties of which (Xavier, Fernandina, etc) stand in contrast to the poor *chupadeiras* or sucking mangoes, presumably to the *mangifera indica* what the Shudras, Curumbins and Farazes are to Margão’s elite, the inferiors serving equally to be sucked dry and discarded. The way in which caste is played out in everyday behaviour snakes through the collection. The “cadeira Voltaire”—a sort of armchair with long footrests named for the French enlightenment thinker, seen as emblematic of a certain privileged Goan lifestyle—recurs in privileged households (Devi 52 and 92). In less affluent abodes, Catholic characters simply squat (Devi 48 and 82). In the wealthy Hindu Dessai household, by way of contrast, one sits on the floor for meals, indicating allegiance to a different social etiquette that discomfits the Europe-returned scion of the family.

Sitting is but one example of how the social world of this period is metonymised in a plethora of behaviours, objects and gestures. Characters are described as being “well aware” of something (Devi 29 and 53) or remind one another that they “well know” something (Devi 22 and 81), highlighting the tightly rule-bound nature of traditional hierarchies and interactions and their fundamental dependence on appearance and convention. Here we might recall two moments of shared cultural understanding between dominant-caste Catholics. In “The Househusband”, Franjoão is galled when his sister-in-law imperiously forbids him to eat a mango with his hands, but when his wife later remonstrates with him, pointing out that the servants might gossip and imperil the family’s good name, he is at first taken aback but then admits that she might be right (Devi 31). In “Tiatr”, Dona Serafina is desperate to see the performance even though the unruly mundkars fail to show due deference to her and Bhatcar Dias. Yet she cannot but agree with her husband that withdrawing is preferable to risking further humiliation (Devi 71). In general, behaviour is represented as socially monitored and enforced. In another parallel, albeit at very different levels, both Mitzi-bai, the young Brahmin woman in “Hope”, and Carminha, the young fishwife in “Job’s Children”, realise that the prying eyes of their communities are trained upon them (Devi 53 and 83). What is *seen* to be done is key.

Bhatcars and Mundcars

Devi’s depiction of caste as a social phenomenon that binds subjects together in an unequal hierarchy is amplified by the genre chosen. Unlike the novel, in which a confluence of storylines eventually produces a single narrative flow, short-story cycles preserve what Lundén terms “character breaks”, gaps between discontinuous viewpoints indicating social difference and psychological distance, cracks that cannot be papered over by any rosy notion of togetherness. Devi’s individual narratives partake of a general trend in modern short fiction, favouring minor figures, brief moments, a focus on mood over plot. Their collection

into a loose, contrapuntal structure enables a disparate vision of Goa as a hierarchical society teetering on the brink of change. Nowhere is this more evident than in Devi's portrayal of the relationship between the land-controlling bhatcars and the land-tilling mundcars. The term bhatcar, normally written *batecar* in Portuguese, comes from the Konkani *bhat* meaning 'land' and the suffix *car*, derived from a Sanskritic root indicating the acts of "making, doing, lordship". It is a telling coincidence that *bhat*⁴, meaning land, is practically homophonous with the Portuguese word *bate*, itself derived from Konkani and meaning unhusked rice, for in Goa they who control the land, control the rice, as we see in "The Arms of Venus". The word mundcar, normally spelt *manducar* in Portuguese, comes from the Konkani *mund* (thought to refer to a sort of interest-free loan made by the landlord) and *car*. These were hereditary labourers allowed to live on their landlord's estate in return for agricultural and domestic duties, plus a share of the harvest.

Raghumaran S. Trichur argues that the historiography of Goa tends to laud the *comunidade* system, while the bhatcar-mundcar connection "is seldom mentioned, let alone discussed at length" (49). The same cannot be said for Goan literature in Portuguese. If the *comunidade*—the other principal system of land ownership, of ancient origin, in which the *gauncars*, supposedly descendants of the first inhabitants of a village hold the land in common (Kamat 114)—symbolises "Golden Goa", or the celebratory reading of the territory's Portuguese history, the *batecarato* has been a target of acerbic literary critique in Portuguese from Leopoldo Dias's *Os Maharatas* (1894) to Orlando da Costa's *O Signo da Ira* (1961). It is in its critical depiction of the bhatcar-mundcar relationship that Devi fulfils Seabra's judgement that *Monção* "interferes directly in the interests of her class" (viii). And if we accept Pratima Kamat's view that there was in Goa "a nexus between landowner and foreign ruler" (137), perhaps we can also see in this portrayal an "interference" in the interests of colonialism.

In *A Literatura Indo-Portuguesa*, Devi and Seabra describe the twentieth century in Portuguese India as marked by "the decadence of great landowners" accompanied by "the growing refusal of the mundcars to continue submissively in their role as serfs" (29). Following a pattern whereby various stories in *Monção* form pairs in oppositional relationships, creating the cycle's recursive effect, there are two prominent sets of bhatcar/mundcar juxtapositions. The first is "Decline" which illustrates the two halves of Devi and Seabra's point regarding the general decline of bhatcar dominance, and "Hope", which shows how heavy the past continued to weigh. The latter story portrays a landowning family seemingly in terminal abatement, whose nadir is marked when, at the wake of the clan's matriarch, their mundcars dare take seats. The former thematises the first frustrated stirrings of social mobility. Pedrú is the first mundcar of Orlim to have attended the *liceu*, after much sacrifice on his family's part in the hope he will find white-collar employment. Ultimately, and somewhat ironically, "Hope" shows how the cards continued to be stacked in the bhatcars' favour, despite their relative financial enfeeblement. Though schooled, Pedrú enjoys none of their connections and so has no means of accession to the colonial bureaucracy, practically the only source of good employment in pre-1961 Goa and the apanage of the Indo-Portuguese elite. It is notable

⁴ Dalgado gives the etymology of *bhatcar* as deriving from 'bhat', which he translates as 'palmar' (1919: 102). In Portuguese the latter can refer either to a palm grove or a farm situated amid the same. *Bate*, for the same author, derives from the homophonous 'bhat', which he gives as a Konkani-Marathi word meaning rice either unhusked or still grass (1919: 102).

that Pedrú's family's ambitions are little more than a second-hand reflection of the *empregomania*—or obsession with obtaining bureaucratic positions—that Maria Aurora Couto diagnosed in generations of *bhatcars* (330) and which she sees as having had a deadening effect on Goan enterprise and individual initiative. Here the “non-players” (Nandy xiv) in colonialism are yet unable to enter the game; in *Monção*, there is no scope for subaltern entelechy.

Where in these two stories we meet a landlord family symbolically deprived of its *pater familias* (as, it seems, is its tenant counterpart), two other stories revolve around Bhatcar Dias, a patriarch of the old guard: “Tiatr” and “The Arms of Venus”, the first of which stresses the smouldering conflict between classes and shows the *mundcars*' refusal to bend to his will, the second of which features a moment of communion amid systemic exploitation and injustice. Here the depiction of class relations invites comparisons with Orlando da Costa's 1961 *O Signo da Ira*, which Devi would surely have read by the time she composed her stories (and for which she shows a surprising lack of appreciation in *A Literatura Indo-Portuguesa*). There are nuanced parallels and divergences between the two pairs of stories. The *mundcars* are far more truculent in “Tiatr” than “Decline”. When Dias and his wife arrive late at the eponymous performance—as “the great and the good suit themselves” (Devi 69)—the landlord is piqued to discover no reserved seating has been set aside for them. What is more, when he tries to assert his authority, he is subjected to boos and catcalls from the undifferentiated subaltern audience, examples of the “weapons of the weak” that James Scott has called “Brechtian forms of class struggle” (cited in Chatterjee 21). It is noticeable, in “Tiatr” as in “Decline”, that the tenants are described as acting *en bloc*, more as historical movement than purposive individuals, though in “Hope” and in “Tiatr” the portrayal of ongoing disadvantage is—as we shall see—also represented in de-anonymised instances.

The social event at which the story unfolds has its own role in the drama. Couto describes this largely Christian theatrical as linking “performer and viewer in a shared identity” drawing on “a secret code often comprehensible only to residents of the village” (277). According to Rafael André Fernandes, the overwhelming majority of *tiatrs* explore social, political and religious problems, with caste and class conspicuous themes (50-51), while – as also in Devi's story – the heritage of the *zapor* – a form of traditional drama – can be felt in a certain salacity. Here, however, the story switches focus from the stage to the audience, from the circumscribed space of performance to the diegetic life of those spectating, with events amplified by the above features of the *tiatr* dramatic form, its “caustic spirit, insinuations and veiled satire” (Noronha 21) threatening to overspill the artificial space of the *tiatr* and contaminate the “real” world. Eventually Dias manages to corner Gustin, the head *mundcar*, and browbeats him into fetching chairs and thereby missing his own entrance on stage. Though Dias's power totters, it is still operational, for the moment (the meaning of taking a seat here might be contrasted with that in “Decline”). The story ends with Paulú, the *polkist*, coming on stage to repeat as every year his story of suffering and abandonment, a correlative for the yet ongoing plight of the *mundcar*. All of Devi's stories about *batecarato* are paradoxical, in that, while depicting great inequality, they also portray instances of shared feeling – principally in “Tiatr”, the fascination for the performance that crosses social class – and co-participation in a common context, a pattern of shared separation that holds for the cycle as a whole and, as it suggests, the Goan society of that time.

Spatial Relations of Hierarchy Across Stories

Spatial relations within stories are as crucial as juxtapositions between narratives. Where “Tiatr” shows class friction, “The Arms of Venus” shows a day-to-day in which the mundcar is dominated and harshly exploited. As the name of the story implies, despite the narrator-protagonist’s fascination for the eponymous labourer’s beauty, what is really at stake is her labour, which ensures rice for all and profit for the powerful. Where “Tiatr” is organised spatially around stage and public (and the bhatcars are forced to mix in and so find themselves in an ambiguous predicament), “The Arms of Venus” takes place out at the paddyfield, where the respective positions of the characters clearly establish their class locations: the mundcars are bent low, shivering with cold as they try to save the seeds from the downpour while Bhatcar Dias barks out orders from the embankment, sheltered by his “vast umbrella” (Devi 116). “Tiatr” is one of the new stories from the 2003 edition. Its inclusion creates a juxtaposition not only with “Decline” but with the opener “Nattak”, which uses similar narrative strategies. Where “Tiatr” takes place in a largely Christian set-up, “Nattak” treats Hindu experience against a backdrop of mythology. Like “Tiatr” it shifts its focus to the spectators yet makes intertextual use of the performance. This opening embedment in an explicitly Hindu space is significant.

For Duarte D. Braga, the critical reception of Devi’s work in Portugal—especially the poetry collection *Súria*—tried to reduce her complex position on Goa’s Portuguese and Indian identity to a simple defence of the territory’s lusotropicality (127). Perhaps, given her initial reception, the choice of beginning the cycle with the most “alien” scenario—the audience at a *nattak*—might be read as an attempt to thrust the metropolitan reader into a space apparently unmarked by Portuguese-ness, the cultural and experiential unfamiliarity of setting intensified by its focalisation through the very antithesis of European, masculinist colonial privilege, in the figure of an inexperienced Hindu girl accumulating every disfavour thematized in *Monção*. Rather than creating an exotic locale for metropolitan fantasy, the story further obstructs the European reader with unexplained cultural references. The most important among them is the intertextual relation between the story “Nattak” and the *nattak* being performed. The Sanskrit poet Jayadeva’s *Gita Govinda* ironises the story for an informed reader. In the embedded performed play, after his infidelity Krishna returns to the milkmaid Radha, who is portrayed by the poet as more noble than the god; in the diegetic ending of ‘Nattak’ there is no such romantic dénouement, Tukaram abandons Durga—who might well be his sister—to her fate without so much as a farewell. Even the evident Orientalism of the “heavy aroma of chandor-vatt, bidis, spices” (Devi 3) might take on a different light in this context. Perhaps there is strategy in her stereotyping, with Devi distancing herself from the excesses of Salazarist discourses of Goa as an exclusively Catholic, Lusophone outpost, the mythic Indian Portugal Orlando Ribeiro failed to encounter when he visited Goa in 1956 and described it as “the least Portuguese”⁵ part of the Empire (64). In

⁵ Ribeiro is often selectively quoted on this score. Just as he later found in the great houses of Salsete the more “familiar” Goa he initially expected (81), *Monção* moves swifly on from “Nattak” to “The House Husband” and the Catholic Goan elite.

consequence, any Eurocentric approach to this story inevitably misses a good deal of its meaning⁶.

Apart from Home, Apart in the Home: Migration and Gender

“Nattak” raises two key issues that traverse *Monção*, connecting and separating figures, conditions and attitudes: migration and the condition of women, two subjects that might not seem directly linked to colonialism at first glance but represent endemic problems the Portuguese administration did not effectively alleviate. No discussion of Goa can ignore that its borders far from delimit the space of its people and that its history, society and culture has been constituted by a dense network of relations and movements abroad. In various stories themes of proximity and distance, the here and there that frame the terms of migrant identity, come to the fore. For characters as disparate as Chandracanta, Siqueira and João Fidalgo, wherever they find themselves, their thoughts and memories are elsewhere, even as these mental processes colour their experience and perception of their current location. In “Job’s Children”, Dona Lavínia’s children have returned from the Persian Gulf, where their well-remunerated employment keeps their mother in the style to which she is accustomed. Other stories mention Africa or feature Africa-returned characters, departure for higher studies in Europe or economic relocation within the Indian subcontinent itself. Indeed, such migration appears proleptically in “Nattak”, which appears to end with Tukaram leaving once more to seek his fortune elsewhere. In Devi’s late colonial Goa, the only option for self-realisation, it seems, is to leave.

In this light, it is significant in “Nattak” that Sirvoicar urges the young man to depart for Bombay. In Portuguese-language Goan literature, the cosmopolitanism and energy of Bombay is often contrasted with the sleepy provinciality of Goa. At times, this comparison serves to indict colonialism, an implicit rebuke to a stuttering Portuguese imperial project unable to rival the economic might of the British Raj or the perceived dynamism of its successor state; at others, Goa is portrayed in contradistinction to the devouring metropolis as a *locus amoenus*, a space of rooted community and stable selfhood. Devi and *Monção*, by and large, belong to the first camp. Two stories refer to the opportunities that this city offered Goans of all social classes. In “Nattak”, Sirvoicar insists that the Tukaram should leave Goa for the big city, where he could study the dramatic arts, develop his talents and perhaps make his name in Bollywood. Leaving, for Tukaram, offers the possibility of becoming a serious actor, not just an amateur player idling his life away behind the counter of a *posro*, the Goan term for a general store, a frustrated shopkeeper like this father before him. The difference between Goa and Bombay is figured in the difference between the locally meaningful, but artistically rough-and-ready *nattaken* and the industrial film production so emblematic of a modernity associated with the city. Where Bombay is supposedly vibrant, forward-looking, an economically prosperous pole of attraction, Goa stands in contrast as stagnating and

⁶ The same might be said about “Padmini”. The festivities which form the backdrop to the story are in celebration of Ganesh, venerated in India as the “remover of obstacles”. An awareness of this context reveals irony in the irani, the tea shop from which “the dirty walls of Sirvoicar’s house” looked to Fidalgo like “a quiet and unassailable fortress” (Devi 57). The barriers separating Fidalgo from the eponymous object of his affections remain insurmountable.

abandoned. While Devi never overtly articulates an anti-Salazarist message, throughout *Monção* one is always subtly implied, as here.

What successful migration can offer is represented in “Job’s Children”: Carminha, the young fishwife dreams of the returning *bomoicares*, migrants to Bombay, “the young men with brown faces who appeared in the village each year, their glistening hair, the wide horizons in their eyes” (2019: 84). It is precisely these “wide horizons” that are denied to the subaltern in Devi’s Goa. The threat that this mobility abroad poses for the stability of established hierarchies (and which often underlies any representation of the territory as a *locus amoenus*) is suggested by the deep resentment of Bhatcar Dias towards migrants who return to Goa “and strut around like bigwigs. He, Inácio Dias, the greatest bhatcar in Orlim, was having none of it. No matter how much brilliantine they put in their hair, for him they were still his mundcars, or the sons of his mundcars, Severin, Xaiér, Antu...” (Devi 70). The crucial point of the story is that these mundcars are no longer simply “his” to command. The change migration has produced in the bhatcar-mundcar relations cannot be simply washed out like a grooming product.

The sweep of Goan migration makes itself felt in “The Future and the Past”. Its protagonist Siqueira has travelled the Goan world in search of wealth and success, from Kenya to Mozambique, to the USA before finally settling in Brazil. Yet, where in “Nattak” Tukaram looks ahead to what leaving home might bring, Siqueira’s story is about what can be lost in the process. The village life that Tukaram finds so stifling can now hardly be called to mind by a Siqueira desperate to remember who has forfeited not just his identity but also the principles that endowed it with meaning. Material prosperity is not everything. The story concerns the final spasm of his attachment to home, the old house, ancestral village and undowered sisters he can barely recollect (and whose like take centre stage in “The House Husband”). He feels that “his future, his here and now, had nothing to do with the future of the Carlos Siqueira who’d left Goa over forty years ago, with a bundle of clearly defined ambitions. Deep down inside, he felt that he’d failed, that he’d sold out his old hopes for nothing at all... He had forsaken everything, his past, even his own future” (Devi 62). In the end, however, his poignant but ultimately idle nostalgia for his native turf is cast aside for the possibility of a gainful real estate deal in Jacarepaguá, on the western fringes of Rio de Janeiro. The future trumps the past. All the same, given Siqueira’s manifest age as he toils up the stairs to his Copacabana apartment, the suggestion is that as wealthy as he may be, there is not much future left for him in a land “that was not his own, with no one there he’d played with as a child” (Devi 62). His ultimate unconcern for home contrasts with that of the author’s alter ego—manifestly a migrant remembering the past—in ‘Memory of Uncle Salu’.

The long-forgotten marriage arrangements that flicker unfulfilled in Siqueira’s mind are the be-all and end-all for those female characters in *Monção* that remain at home. Marriage in Goa, traditionally, was arranged, “a strategic alliance between two families, a union of patrimonies and a fusion, yes, but between socially and culturally similar partners” (Portas e Gonçalves 133; translated). Devi makes no outright rejection of arranged marriages in principle. In “Dhruva”, for instance, happiness and communion of outlook, even amid the pressures of the joint family, appear possible for the young Hindu newlyweds. In “Padmini”, seen through the eyes of metropolitan Lieutenant Gama, such unions are part of “roots and customs we must accept... and respect”, even if it prevents his suit to the object of his

affections. Here we might ask ourselves how Gama's complaisant attitude, which allows for different weights and measures, compares to that of Luísa and her orientalisising dismissal of Chandracanta's culture and even with Dr Amoncar, the most overtly progressive figure in the collection, the selfless medico of "Job's Children" with his ultimate belief in the convergent progress of man, that "sad yet clever ape" (Devi 90). Any answer is necessarily ambiguous.

Devi instead reserves her criticism of arranged unions for the Catholic community, especially its wealthier upper echelons for whom dynastic benefit outweighs personal concern. It is "Uncertainty", another add-on to the second edition, that best embodies her reproof. In this brief tale, whose three male characters bear the Goan Catholic everyman names of Mello, Souza and Silva, the marriageable girl in question, Angélica, is an immaterial as her name, appearing only as the object of their discourse, a good to haggle over to greater or lesser advantage. Souza's fear of being taken in by a greedy suitor is echoed in the grasping attitudes of characters as disparate as Siqueira, Bhatcar Dias, and Franjoão. Perhaps this depiction deliberately flouts a colonial-era stereotype associating the vice of financial greed with the Hindu community. Throughout *Monção*, whatever the characters' caste, arranged marriages are depicted as fraught, even if the stakes and risks vary significantly: in both "Uncertainty", where the dominant-caste Souza is trying to minimise his monetary outlay and maximise his pay-off in terms of status, and "Job's Children", where the penniless shudra fisherman Bostião slogs his guts out in the desperate hope of raising a dowry, both fathers are described as unable to rest easy until their daughters are married off—even if the import and probability of any ease are extremely disparate.

"Job's Children" ends with Bostião being diagnosed with tuberculosis and leaving for a sanatorium. It is important for an understanding of the emotional tone of *Monção* as a whole to note that divisions between characters *within* stories are often more accentuated than those between characters *across* stories. Here, as in many of Devi's stories, the narrative ends in loneliness: while Bostião's life may be saved, he will never raise Carminha's dowry, scuppering her life chances and leaving her frozen on the quay "like a statue of resignation" (Devi 97). The shudra community of Orlim has come together behind Bostião, but in the process Carminha has joined the ranks of Devi's forsaken, frustrated women: Carminha, Durga, Morgorit, Dhruva. The lives of these marginalised characters seem a world away from the piano lessons and prenuptial contracts of "Uncertainty", tropes that date back at least to Francisco João da Costa's novel *Jacob e Dulce* (originally published in 1896), though the suggestion in the story is that the negotiations around the unnamed marriageable daughter will conduce to a similarly unhappy outcome (for her, at least).

Carminha's dismal fate exemplifies the manner in which, in a colonial, internally hierarchised, patriarchal society, the brunt of suffering falls upon women. A common theme in short-story criticism, most memorably articulated by Ricardo Piglia, is the idea that such narratives always spin a second, unvoiced tale (63). Given the imperative brevity of short stories, the limitations on viewpoint and the shimmering resonance of incidental detail such as concision creates, the genre incites the reader to think beyond the immediate plot and consider biographies that remain unarticulated. "Nattak" begins as Durga's story, but she is quickly sidelined by the actor Tukaram's protagonism. As her romantic idol pedals away towards a new life at the close, innocent Durga is abandoned to a dark night filled with snakes and uncertainty, once more confined to her home. This emotive separation, and the contrast

between characters, is subtly augmented by the suggestion that, given the chronology of the affair between Babú the grocer and Zayu the *bailadeira*, it is perhaps not merely in loneliness that Durga is sister to Tukaram.

In general, as in “Nattak”, where movement and self-reinvention are a possibility for male characters, the female subaltern in *Monção* has no such leeway. At the close of “Job’s Children”, as the fishermen row her father away, Carminha is left looking out over the river, just as Zayu’s daughter gazes into the darkness, despairing of her own impotence. As for Morgorit in “Hope”, her life has been sacrificed for her brother’s advancement. She laboured in the fields while he swotted at school. Now, without a dowry, she must continue to work as her brother twiddles his thumbs, waiting for an opportunity that might never materialise. In the patriarchal world of *Monção*, as shown in the dead-end lives of these three characters, the fate of women depends on the decisions of others, generally older men.

(Un)Coupledom

Where Devi’s depiction of patriarchal society gains in nuance is in the way women act as its guarantors. “The House Husband”, one of Devi’s most comic, satirical narratives, pushes this idea to its extreme. Newly returned from Mozambique, Franjoão is middle-aged, unsuccessful and disillusioned. When he receives an offer of marriage from the old and ill-favoured, but rich and Brahmin Fonseca sisters, the stagnating bachelor leaps at the chance. Wedding a younger, less unattractive sister, Franjoão thinks he has it made. Yet, as a mere *ghor-zavoim*, a husband that joins his wife’s family, he is not in practice the head of the household, which continues to be the eldest sister Soledade, whose name combines the idea of lone burden with a commanding touch of heliocentrism. It is she who runs the estates, rules the roost, and—notably—smokes the *dhumtis* Franjoão is peremptorily ordered to roll. *Contra* Freud, sometimes a cigar does indeed carry a deeper significance. When Franjoão learns that his wife has fallen pregnant, he is overjoyed, and immediately resolves to name the child after his grandfather. Soledade quashes this idea immediately: the boy—and nobody is in any doubt about its sex—will be a Fonseca, not a Barreto. Franjoão’s paternity is merely biological. Patricarchy, as Devi subtly insinuates, privileges manhood and the male principle but does not always automatically benefit individual men. Franjoão is there merely to ensure that patriarchic norms, materialised in the storied Fonseca mansion, can span the gap in the spear side of the family.

If marriage brings frustration to the down-at-heel but Brahmin Franjoão, it is the prevention of union that thwarts a range of other figures. Two stories appear to refute any simple application to Goa of Lusotropicalism simplified as miscegenation. In “Padmini”, the metropolitan Fidalgo and eponymous Hindu girl never even exchange words, while the Lisbon-set love affair between Luísa and Chandracanta is doomed to failure in “Fidelity”. For its part, “The Cure” treats the vertical religious divide in Goan society. João da Veiga Coutinho (61) writes that, in everyday Konkani, “Goenkar” (lit. Goan) refers to the Catholics of the territory, whereas Hindus were frequently, often pejoratively, referred to as “Konknnos” (lit. from the Konkani), a linguistic practice that shows a telling mix of separation, confluence and ambiguity that is mirrored in Devi’s story. “The Cure” repeats some of the gestural vocabulary and social seclusion of “Fidelity”—in both stories, women straighten their clothes, one partner takes the other by the arms, the two central encounters take place away from prying

eyes in village and city—as if to say that while divisions might be multiple and varied, the underlying urges that drive people to cross them are universal. The split between the two dominant religious communities of Goa—whose adherents found themselves cast on opposing sides, policed their own division yet were acutely aware of shared origins and underlying bonds—echoes the paradox of the short-story cycle, the way in which each and every partition works as a juxtaposition and, as such, contributes to a mutual context. Indeed, throughout *Monção*, Devi alternates between Hindu and Catholic stories and viewpoints, thus merging these two communities and the divides that constitute them into a shared scene. The commonality in “The Cure” juxtaposes with “Fidelity” and “Padmini”, where Luísa, and to a lesser extent Fidalgo are bemused by social obstructions barring them from their objects of desire. In “Fidelity”, when Chandracanta tells Luísa that she does not understand, she truly does not; in “The Cure”, when Rosú tells Caxinata that he does not understand, he in fact understands only too well. Though Caxinata and Rosú are able to give free rein to their emotions away from the constraints of society—and here their secluded hillside parallels the hotel room in “Fidelity”—there is no immediate cure for their condition, only termination awaiting any pregnancy, which makes plain the ineludibly dead-end nature of their relationship at that historical juncture.

A Divided Self? Nostalgia and Critique

The focus on caste and gender over other structural inequalities indicates *Monção*'s ambiguous fit with postcolonial literature *qua* anti-colonial resistance. A brief comparison with *Sorrowing Lies My Land* by Lambert Mascarenhas is elucidative, the latter English-language novel being written in 1955 and largely set in the same space and time as Devi's tales. Whereas Mascarenhas, writing in Bombay, devotes little space to anything beyond his Manichean anti-colonial message, Devi, writing in Lisbon, leaves any reservations about Portuguese rule implicit, in the poverty, injustice and lack of opportunity that characterise subaltern lives in *Monção*. Here it is also worth reflecting on the pseudonym adopted by the author, a gesture that risks misunderstanding. In today's Goa, integrated into India and negotiating its identity within that vast nation, the idea of a Catholic writer adopting a Hindu penname might seem jejune, inappropriate or just self-defeating. Certainly, there was a tortuous self-exoticism in the way Devi crafted her image in 1960s Portugal. Yet in the context of what Perry Anderson called Portugal's ultracolonialism (1961) and the pervasive bad faith of a Salazarist-era Lusotropicalist discourse that drew on the ideas of Brazil's Gilberto Freyre to exalt Portugal's special mission to “fuse with the tropics” (Freyre 51; translation mine), tactically proclaiming a utopia of amalgamation and equality yet disavowing an ongoing reality of overlay, division and bias, Devi's gesture did have a particular situated meaning.

If the metropolitan reader is at least partly challenged by her pseudonym—and in the opening story ‘Nattak’ as I argued earlier—aspects of two stories appear to contain a modicum of self-criticism. “The Arms of Venus” and “Memory of Tio Salu” are the only narratives told in the first person, by a voice that seems to belong to the author. Does the abject death of Mogrém in the former allow for a certain implicit reproof of the callow aestheticism of the narrator, who regrets not having “captured her sweet expression on canvas” (Devi 121)? As mentioned, various pairs of stories show a single phenomenon from two angles. In “Job's Children” we are shown the arduous life of the shudra fisherfolk who set out for the high seas while *gasolinas*—motor launches—ply between Bardez and Pangim. In

“Memory of Tio Salu”, we see the same scene from the point of view of the narrator herself, who returns from Pangim each afternoon by ferry, presumably from work or study, and for whom these perceived shudra figures form the human backdrop for her youth, as they did for the author. The naïvely romantic *bhatcarina*-eye view of the fishermen in “Memory of Tio Salu” contrasts with the harsh life of Bostião (and the fate of Carminha) as seen in “Job’s Children”, which story provides the critical vision missing from the former. Smith argues that, in rejecting the idea that a single voice or character should dominate the text, “[t]he short story cycle’s form enables a radical challenge to singularity in point of view” and “promotes the idea that no single individual has a monopoly on knowledge and experience” (6). In the case of *Monção*, with its critique of the author’s social class and apparent questioning of her alter ego’s ability to remember and understand Goan society, the cycle tells stories of Goa without recourse to a unifying, authority-claiming vision.

Interlinks, Echoes, Callbacks and Reprises

This juxtaposition between “Job’s Children” and “Memory of Tio Salu”, and between the latter and “The Arms of Venus”, is an example of the complex interlinks, echoes, callbacks and reprises across the cycle. Some stories contain cross-referencing, establishing Orlim as a composite space, such as when the mundcar mother in “Hope” mentions Bhatcar Dias, Roginbai (the kindly *bhatcarina* also remembered in “Tiatr”), Vithol and Mogrém or when Rosú in “The Cure” recalls the illness of Bostião in “Job’s Children”, inter alia. These sorts of reference, entirely superfluous to the individual narratives, contravene the economy typical of the modern short story, a fact that alerts us to their subtle importance. Where the “character breaks” (Lundén 90), or splits between individualised stories, reflect the divisions in Goan society, the intratextual references function within the compass of the cycle to establish an impression of continuum in space and time. The expression “the dung beetle never stays in the dung” recurs twice, each time exemplifying divergent attitudes to social mobility. It first crops up in “Nattak”, when Naraina is exhorting Tukaram to leave Goa for Bombay, to make something of himself, to seize the chance to thrive in a more conducive environment. The second instance is in “Tiatr”, when Bhatcar Dias sneers at the migrant mundcars, who in his view live miserably in their Bombay *cudds*⁷ only to strut about with ideas above their station when they return home. Here we have a further example of the contrastive binary structure that runs throughout *Monção*.

This Konkani turn of phrase⁸, rendered in Portuguese, reflects how the issue of hierarchy, social immobility and interpersonal division in colonial Goa is explicitly linked to language by Devi. In “Nattak”, Chandracanta deplors the way in which his lack of Portuguese hinders him. His father’s friend Naraina echoes his complaint. Yet whereas Naraina sent his children to Mr Fernandes’s English classes, making migration possible, Chandracanta remained trapped in Konkani. English, Devi suggests, was the means by which the “dung beetles” escaped to Bombay and beyond. Portuguese, for such characters, is something remote, merely the language of distant social superiors, or the tongue of Portugal, that country “so far off, so foreign” in comparison to Bombay, in the mind of Dhruva in her eponymous story (and an attitude that then contrasts with Chandracanta’s nostalgia for home

⁷ Village-based migrant chummeries.

⁸ ‘Xendantlo kido’ in Konkani. I am indebted to Jason K. Fernandes for this etymology.

in “Fidelity” and for Portugal in “Returning”). The lack of Portuguese-language competency returns, viewed this time through bhatcar eyes, in “Os Filhos de Job”, where the reader’s sympathy is nonetheless firmly with the humble fishermen. Dona Lavínia, a member of the same class to which Devi belonged, and which spoke Portuguese “natively”, is faced with a challenge to her authority as a gauncar and to her caste pride as a Brahmin. She turns to Dr Amoncar (Hindu, a fellow Brahmin and presumably a graduate of the Escola Médica⁹) and comments in Portuguese “what riff-raff!” (Devi 91), using the villagers’ ignorance of the language to flaunt her position and privilege. Needless to say, when reflecting on the subtle anti-Salazarism that runs through *Monção*, this was not an image of colonial-era social relations the dictatorship was keen to divulge.

Dona Lavínia’s deprecatory reference to the shudras—motivated by their restiveness—links into a recurrent trope in *Monção*’s representation of superordinates and subordination, that of disempowered subjects bowing their head. This image occurs in “Dhruva”, when the young bride dismisses her longing for her family home and resigns herself to her generally recognised good fortune, the advantageous match that is the optimal outcome, for her family, of her social position, and when Dhruva serves food to the menfolk of her new family, sitting in natural expectation that *she* should serve *them*, an indication of her new duties and position. The gesture is repeated twice in “Decline”, when the narrator recalls the mundcars obediently filling with coconuts the godown of the landowner family and when little Roberto is overwhelmed by “the weight of his inheritance” (Devi 47), though the personal consequences of their disempowerment vary greatly. In “Tiatr”, despite the collective resistance of the audience to the presence of the bhatcar, when Dias corners Gustin the mundcar bows his head and does his master’s bidding. Similar kinesics are at stake in “Job’s Children”, when the stubborn but deferential fisherman suffer the doctor’s remonstrations for their attitude to his medical advice. In “The Cure”, Rosú briefly bows her head before reaching an understanding with Caxinata, though the suggestion is that their idyll will be just as fleeting. The motif becomes a way of thinking through, and linking up, the chain of social relations depicted in Devi’s stories.

The image of dung recurs throughout the story. It is present not just in the apocryphal saying analysed, but also in the dung floors that punctuate *Monção* not simply as a part of a bygone everyday reality but as a metonym for the simplicity and primitiveness of a Goa quickly transformed post 1961. This use of cow excrement is for the simple abode what the *cadeira Voltaire* is for the *Casa Grande*. Arguably, the overall position regarding the potential (at the time the stories were written) disappearance of this Goa of engrained wretchedness and wretched privilege is ambivalent. Its manifold injustices are patent at all times, its entrenched divisions of race, class, caste, gender and religion, its social stagnation and economic enfeeblement inform each and every story. Even at moments of seeming communion, such as when Bhatcar Dias and Vitol are joined in mourning at the tragic death of Mogrém or when the womenfolk in “Job’s Children” weep before Bostião’s misfortune “as if [...] they were equal, no longer divided by caste until their dying day” (Devi 97), any solidarity is transient and limited. In the second example, for instance, the counterfactual subjective is as important as the emotion the women display. Yet, for the characters, as for the author, the Goa depicted is—or was—home, with all the emotional resonance that word conveys. In

⁹ Escola Médica-Cirúrgica de Goa, one of the oldest in Asia, founded in 1842.

“Memory of Tio Salu”, the narrator acknowledges the “temple of saudade” she carries inside, the construct of remembrance formed by all the elements of “her childhood in that old village by the Mandovi” (Devi 98) and which found creative registry in *Monção* at the moment when the past was being definitively swept away.

The key image threaded through *Monção*, which reflects the different graduations of ambiguity at work in the cycle, is the titular rain. The various stages of the annual weather system contribute to the overall tone of the cycle, with the great downpour announced in “The House Husband”, mentioned in “Decline”, about to arrive in “Hope”, starting to fall in “Uncertainty” and just over in “Job’s Children”. The monsoon thus provides a sort of shifting backdrop to the whole collection, at different moments connoting incommensurable ideas, such as the transformative nature of the deluge and the cyclicity of precipitation, two images that are perhaps not so mutually opposed as might first appear. In “Hope”, for instance, the monsoon is described as forcing “everyone to stay inside” (Devi 49), a pointed scenario given the story’s theme of social limitation. Yet the rains always stop and eventually allow the residents to emerge. Might the title link to the cycle’s regionalism “before” the nation, where though throughout history regimes come and go like the rains, the land and its people, even if transformed, follow their own destiny? Perhaps. All the same, at two points in *Monção*, the image of an ill-starred figure looking out at water recurs (Devi 48 and 82), suggesting individual powerlessness before the untameable forces of the world. As a symbol, the monsoon rains have no clear referent but instead refract the complexity of the multi-faceted whole.

Centripetal and Centrifugal Force in the Chandracanta Cycle

The question of transformation concerns *Monção* at both world-historical and generic-narrative levels. In the typical short story, characters may change but there is little scope for gradual evolution, for which reason the genre usually features broad-brush types rather than intricate, rounded simulacra of individuals. On this account, as Susan Garland Mann argues, there is in the short story less focus on the agency of the protagonist compared to other genres of fiction (xii). Certainly in *Monção*, for the most part, protagonism is either shared or the prominent individual characterised by stasis and powerlessness. Yet there is one figure in the cycle that appears to shake off this logic, evincing a certain development over three different stories, at least in the second edition. This character is Chandracanta, whose progress forms a sort of synecdochic sub-sequence within the whole and with whose character arc I shall conclude here. In the 1963 edition he features in only two stories—“Dhruva” and “Fidelity”—which thus form one of the cycle’s contrastive pairs. The former is told from the point of view of the eponymous Hindu girl and explores her experience as she joins Chandracanta’s family following their wedding and her disorientation at the news her husband is shortly leaving to study medicine in Portugal. As the narration proceeds, her story shades into his story, in a way similar to “Nattak”. “Dhruva” ends with a declaration of faithfulness from Chandracanta and the possibility of contentment within tradition. “Fidelity”, however, seems to begin in the wake of an adulterous act. It recounts the end of the young Goan’s affair with Luísa, a classmate at the medical school in Lisbon (presumably also where João Fidalgo’s uncle is a lecturer) and goes on to conclude with a reaffirmation of fidelity, after a fashion: “this is how we are in the East. The man might stray, but the husband is always faithful” (Devi 79). Throughout the story Luísa attempts to make her own strategic use of

Orientalism—disparaging his name, religion and unwestern marriage—to sunder the young Hindu from his identity, but her strategy is turned against her at the close to ironic effect. Needless to say, these two characters' Orientalism contrasts entirely with the author's own.

The addition of a third Chandracanta story to the second edition of *Monção* introduces dramatic progression to his character arc. Yet the overall effect of "Returning" is to bring him to an impasse and change the cumulative tone of the cycle. To return to Lundén's terms—if not quite following his definitions—the first edition of *Monção* is much more *cyclical*, in that the chain of stories reaches no semblance of culmination, while the second is more *sequential*, snaking round from "Nattak", which ends with the hopeful departure of Tukaram for Bombay, to "Returning", which begins with Chandracanta's homecoming from Lisbon and concludes on a note of ambiguity. Is Chandracanta trapped or about to leave? It is this inconclusive *dénouement*, so common in the short story, that I shall address in my coda. Both "Nattak" and "Returning" treat questions of identity, community and individual fulfilment, setting these issues up as overriding concerns of the cycle. Upon our interpretation of this new final story hangs our overall understanding of *Monção* as a cycle.

If in "Dhruva", Chandracanta is the young newlywed who treats his young spouse with surprising kindness, and in "Fidelity" he is the adulterous husband who discovers in the metropole a fresh connection to his roots, in "Returning" we find him a newly qualified doctor back in Panjim, disillusioned with the staidness of Goa and pining for his footloose days in Europe. It is notable that, while his nostalgia for Goa in "Fidelity" is articulated as he stands before a window looking down at a cobblestone street so typical of Lisbon, his feelings of alienation from his family and their values are expressed before "a little iron-barred window" (Devi 123), an image of proximal constraint rather than distance. Later he sets out for a walk to clear his head. *En route* he meets his former Marathi teacher, Caxinata Sirvodcar, who upbraids the young man and his generation for their defeatist attitudes: "you, the children of Goa", the old man laments, "you refuse... to make this place any better" (Devi 127), a painful brickbat imagined by an author making her life far from her native land.

Following this encounter, Chandracanta appears to take heart, to recover his bond with family and heritage. Arriving home, "timorous yet full of hope" (Devi 128), he finds that the small candle inside illumines not his wakeful loved ones, but an image of the goddess Lakshmi. Where in "Dhruva", Chandracanta could orient himself by the light of a *divtti*, here candlelight no longer fulfils this function. Rather than comfort, good fortune or beauty, all he feels is that "deep inside everything had been laid to waste" (Devi 129). The last line of the story, and of the cycle, reads that "[h]e now knew that he had to depart once more—to return to the twentieth century, to today" (Devi 129).

If the diegetic present is the Goa of the 1950s, how might a twenty-first century reader interpret this ending? In a forthright reading of Devi's work, Gitika Gupta sees this moment as the resolution of Chandracanta's personal sense of alienation, symbolised by what she reads as the young man's reconnection to Lakshmi, taken as a symbol of irenic reconciliation and submission to an essentialised inheritance (306). Yet a diametrically opposed reading is possible, that Sirvodcar's complaint has gone unredeemed and Chandracanta now realises he has no alternative but to depart anew. On this view, the young man's re-encounter with dyed-in-the-wool attitudes, rather than the family he had just pictured in ideal form, crushes his

enthusiasm and triggers a sudden awareness of estrangement from everything his past represents, a culminating figure of isolation in a cycle where forlornness abounds.

That such irreconcilable interpretations are possible highlights the ambiguity of *Monção's* deceptively simple short stories, an ambiguity deepened by the cycle's complex play of centripetal and centrifugal forces. A critical axiom stresses the genre's ability to create a fulgurating apex, routinely in the form of an epiphany. If we consider this ending to be a moment of realisation, it is worth dwelling on the contents of this new awareness. One way to do so is to return to the juxtaposition of Chandracanta and Tukaram from "Nattak": how are the experiences of language, identity and community described by the former lived differently by the latter? Both young men negotiate the risk of snakes along their paths (Devi 16 and 124) and both, emerging unscathed, choose to leave. Yet a final comparison is always in abeyance. These short stories only tell a *facet* of the life. A supplementary image for the short story cycle, suggested by this gemmological metaphor, might be the jewel, in which the stone of context is cut to form a set of planes at angles to one another and where each individual face constitutes a side of a social formation. The beauty of "Returning", as of Devi's other narratives, is that each aspect yields new glints of significance as we regard them in different lights. In each character we find a new metaphor for certain conditions of life in bygone Goa, the overall effect of these depictions of truncation and discontent being cumulative and mutually illuminating. In this way, and in many others, Devi's *Monção* truly is a jewel of Portuguese-language Goan literature.

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