

# AGRICULTURE IN CURTORIM

## Through the Lens of Caste

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### Abstract

In this article, I examine a collection of short stories, drama and, a form of digital media — three different modes of knowledge production and distribution—to look at the ways in which agrarian relationships and the role of caste in structuring the agrarian relationships have been portrayed in these three media. The article critically analyzes how agriculture in the village of Curtorim is portrayed in *Saxtticho Koddo –Granary of Salcete*, a documentary on agriculture in Curtorim by Vince Costa, and tries to bring in the missing voices by using the text *Monção* by Vimala Devi and *Tiatrs* (Konkani Dramas) *Kunnbi Jaki*, and *Batcara I-II* by João Agostinho Fernandes.

Aum jano, mogal Vachpea, tuca mujo ‘Batcara’ boro mandchak na mun ani khoroch na zori thor tum zati potant dorun vachit zalear; pun upcaran aum magtam tuje codde zati pois corun vach mun, ani maguir sang maca tujo ani mujo opinião ekuch num zalear team Goencha Batcaram voir.

João Agostinho Fernandes (1909)

“Dear readers, I know that you all won’t like my ‘Batcara’ and you really won’t if you read it keeping your castes in mind, but I request you all to read it keeping aside your caste identities and then tell me if your opinion about the bhatcars (landlords) of Goa isn’t the same as mine” (my translation).<sup>1</sup>

**Keywords**

land relations; Goa; knowledge production; dominant discourse; internalization; romanticization

**About the Author**

Favita Rochelle Dias is an Assistant Professor at the Department of Sociology, Goa University. Her area of interest is the different ways in which inequalities and stereotypes are reproduced and normalized against the tribals and Dalits in Goa, especially within educational institutions. Her first article “To Gawda or not to Gawda,” which is about her discovery of her tribal identity and the conflicts within about embracing this identity, was published on Savari in 2015.<sup>2</sup> A story scripted by her was turned by an artist into a graphic narrative titled “Trucked” and was published in the journal *Periferias*, where it is available in French, Portuguese, Spanish, and English.<sup>3</sup> She has been closely associated with the blog *Hanv Konn*,<sup>4</sup> now published into a book, a pedagogical exploration of seeking the self through classroom learning at Goa University. She has likewise written a foreword for the same blog.<sup>5</sup>

## INTRODUCTION

There is always a kind of neglect and blindness towards engaging with the concept of caste in Goa. In this article, I examine three different modes of knowledge production and distribution to demonstrate how their representation of agrarian relations have dealt with caste: *Monção* (2019), a collection of short stories by Vimala Devi; *Kunnbi Jaki* (1941) and *Batcara I-II*—two *tiatr*, a Konkani language drama—by João Agostinho Fernandes; and a documentary film *Saxtticho Koddo – Granary of Salcete* (2017) by Vince Costa. The documentary is an ideal example of how caste within agricultural relations is occluded, given that it speaks of agriculture and its decline in the Goan village without talking about the caste hierarchy that structures agrarian relations. This essay will highlight these gaps through reference to various short stories from *Monção* and the *tiatr* *Kunnbi Jaki* and *Bhatcara I-II*. I shall supplement my reading with interviews I conducted with *bhatcars* and *mundcars* from the village of Curtorim and from neighboring villages in the year 2020, between May to July.

## GOAN AGRARIAN RELATIONS WITHOUT CASTE

The village of Curtorim, located 11kms from the commercial capital of Margao in South Goa, is often referred to as ‘the Granary of Salcete’<sup>6</sup> because of its lush green fields. Popular oral history suggests that it was originally called *Kudd-tari* or *Kudd-toddi* because of the rooms (*kudd*) constructed to store the grains produced from these fields along the bank (*toddir*) of the river, Zuari. The villagers take pride in the way their village is presented. One of the unique features of the village is its water bodies. There are five big lakes and sixteen small ponds. This received image of Curtorim, however, can lead to its ‘museumizing,’ a process that is exemplified in *Saxtticho Koddo*.

The film presents Curtorim as an agrarian space and documents the challenges faced by the farming community that are leading to a decline in agriculture in the village of Curtorim. This short documentary has won Best Short Documentary at Asia Independent Film Award 2018. It has been shown at Royal Anthropological Institute’s Film Festival in Bristol in March 2019 as well as the Ethnografilm Festival in Paris in April 2019. It has been screened in different places in Goa to glowing reviews (“Culinary conversations”; Das). The film appears to be motivated by good intentions—Costa indicated that he was “recording it for his children to show them how the village was, how people dressed up and how life was basically” (“Culinary conversations”; Das)—but these intentions do not save the film from offering a ‘casteist’ vision of the world of agrarian relations in Curtorim. On the contrary, it is precisely these intentions and the consequent framing of the village that renders its vision casteist.

For example, which people, and whose dress and life is Costa documenting? The film focuses only on the dress, food, and life of the farmers. He doesn’t talk about the *susegad* (relaxed) lifestyles of the *bhatcars*. In *Saxtticho Koddo*, Costa interviews three farmers, Glorio De Melo, Rita Pereira Rebello, and Jose Antonio Barbosa who share their farming experience and reveal that they have been working in the fields since their childhood. He filmed the farmers while they are working in the fields, having tea and food in the fields. The romanticized image of Curtorim presented in *Saxtticho Koddo* celebrates the stereotypical images of farmers, women with bent backs, and men caked in mud. There is a pernicious romanticism at work here, where only one aspect of these farmers’ lives is documented, rather than the totality of their lives. However, this perspective is not unique to Costa alone, rather this romanticization of the lives of the Goan farmers is common to much nostalgia about the Goan past (Menezes).

What is also significant is that Costa refers to these persons as farmers, that is to say, he focuses on their profession without recognizing that these persons hold

these professions because of their class position, that of being *mundcars*, or tenants of the *bhatcars* (landlords), and their location in the village's caste hierarchy. All too often, the *bhatcars* come from the dominant castes in the village, while the *mundcars* belong to the lower castes of the space. By focusing solely on profession, Costa completely erases the operation of caste.

But what these images do to the *mundcars* is perhaps more interesting. Glorio De Melo, for example, takes pride in being called a *Curtorkar*, especially because of the regard for farmers and farming in the village. Thus, this romanticization of farming and the labor of farmers gives, in my opinion, a false sense of prestige to the *mundcars* as they have internalized this popular image of farmers. It has become so normalized that they use it to understand themselves and their community and fail to question the larger structure within which they are placed.

In addition to showcasing this stereotyped image of farmers and their life, the film then goes on to show how the education and migration of the younger generation affected farming. For example, it features the anger and frustration of Jose Antonio Barbosa, one of the farmers, towards the younger generation abandoning farming.

Elsewhere, Costa suggests that access to education is at the root of the agrarian crisis in Goa:

Farming was community driven thing... families, neighbors worked together. There was no overhead cost. So, the concept of daily wage laborer actually didn't exist. But when family members got educated and started moving out of Goa, for better economic opportunities, you needed to bring in labor. That's where the viability [of agriculture] started to change. (Das)

Located in this analysis of the problem, and the lament for the breakdown of the agrarian community is a romanticization of the entire arrangement of labor relations. In the film, Glorio explains how the agricultural duties would be divided among the members of the family, some attending to them in the morning and others in the afternoon. What is not discussed, however, is the fact that all members of the *mundcar* family worked for the *bhatcar*. Men worked in the fields, and women did the household chores. They were ill-paid and sometimes even had to work for free. This is visible in *Bhatcara* and "Arms of Venus" in *Monção*, which I discuss in the later section. Focused exclusively on recuperating an imagined golden agrarian past, the documentary fails to capture the exploitation faced by the *mundcars* and instead naively celebrates that Glorio and other farmers had to work in the fields from the age of ten or sometimes even younger.

In the course of my fieldwork for this essay, when I asked a *bhatcar* about what according to him were the reasons for the decline in agriculture in Curtorim, he said: “It is because the *mundcar* families got educated and their children stopped working in the fields. They started to feel ashamed and abandoned farming.” Attention to nuances within the film clearly demonstrates the reason for the shame associated with agriculture.

For example, while Glorio, says he would continue farming for as long as he is able, his wife, Basilica De Melo, said she would not want her children to work in the fields. She further said, “*Tege daddyn kelem, tennem kelem, puro... Sodham teshem raupak naka... titunu raupa naka*” (His father did, he [Glorio] did, enough... don’t want to live like that forever). Similarly, my father, a *mundcar* himself said to me; “*Aye tumka xinkoilya kitya mhak naka tumi xetant, votant, chiklant kaam kelole mhuj bashen. Mhak jai tumi vhad jaloli*” (I have educated you so that you don’t have to work in the fields, in the hot sun and the dirt like I have. I want you to be someone successful in life).

Basilica’s response is best understood in the context of other observations gleaned from the documentary. For example, Abhijit Prabhudesai, an environmental activist, recounts the way in which teachers in schools often shame students into studying harder, “*Shink na jalyar paiche bashen zatolo*” (study or else you will become like your father). This statement clearly shows that despite the romanticization of agriculture in the representation of Goa, cultivation is not in fact seen as a valuable job or a profession for the educated. A similar insight is obtained from a statement by Sandra Fernandes, an organic farmer and educator in the documentary: “I asked my parents, how would they take it. From a professor of English to coming back to farming.” Through her phrasing, Fernandes demonstrates how agriculture is seen as being a lower profession than teaching. These episodes from the documentary were borne out by my interview with Ramakant Gaunkar<sup>8</sup>, a *mundcar*. While discussing the reasons for the decline in agriculture, he said:

When our children go to school, they are bullied for coming from agricultural families. Teachers say to them, ‘study or else you will become like your father’ or sometimes some teachers even say ‘what will you achieve by studying? In the end you have to work in the fields like your father. This discourages our children from coming to work with us in the fields. They feel ashamed. (Interview with Ramakant Gaunkar, 4 July 2020)

Surprisingly, in the documentary, despite the obviously fraught social relations there is no mention of the *bhatcar-mundcar* relationship. One of the songs in the documentary contains lyrics indicating “we weed the fields of the Curtorim landlords// they give us food on the leaves of the teak tree.” In another song, the women express their need to work in the fields, as they require food to survive and

cannot rely on their husband's salary. They sing about a blanket keeping them dry and warm while working in the fields in heavy rains.

The lyrics to these songs captured quotidian events in their lives and testify to the difficulties faced by the women from *mundcar* families. Such songs were one of the ways in which they could keep themselves entertained while they worked in the roasting heat or heavy rains. Despite the inclusions of these songs, there is no mention of the *bhatcar* and their role in village agriculture. What is even more problematic is that the women in the documentary are made to sing these songs without questioning the meaning behind the lyrics. While I was conducting interviews with the women from the *mundcar* families, I observed that many women preferred not to recollect anything from the past. They avoided questions about the relationship between them and the family of the *bhatcar*. One of them said:

We did not have toilets. We would look for a quiet place in the fields and urinate standing. The *bhatcar*'s way of looking at us would make us feel uncomfortable. Anyway, now there is no point in talking about it. (Maria9, 25 June 2020)

What the memories captured above indicate is that women from *mundcar* families were the most vulnerable of the village population. Maria's recollections demonstrate that these memories are still raw. This compounds the problematic way in which these songs have been used in the documentary, in which the songs documenting the lives of these vulnerable women are used to romanticize life in the agrarian village.

In sum, all these statements and songs speak about the role played by caste in structuring the agrarian relations, yet the documentary seems to demonstrate a "wilful ignorance" (Weiland 2) of the presence of caste. The discussion thus far demonstrates the kind of attitude that people have towards farming as an occupation, even as they lament the loss of an agrarian Goa and romanticize farming. There is no doubt, and it is worth appreciating the fact, that the director seeks to recognize the dignity of agricultural labor. To address this question, however, one should ask who the agricultural laborer is and what their caste background is, which means the caste question must necessarily be attended to.

## CASTE AND LAND-RELATIONS IN GOA

One of the central omissions of the director is whether the farmers interviewed own the land that they cultivate. This brings us to the crux of agrarian relations entirely based on caste. The *Bhatcar-mundcar* relationship was the basis that formed land

and production relations. According to the *Report of the Committee of the Problems of the Mundcars of Goa, Daman and Diu* (1966; henceforth *Report*), it is difficult to trace the history of *Mundcarism*, as there are no records to show how this system was first introduced in Goa. The *Report* suggests that “the agriculturist community;” those groups that are recognized as tribal communities in Goa, must have been the first to settle on the land that later came into government ownership. Later some private parties must have applied for and obtained personal titles to the land. These private parties were different from the agriculturalists. Thus, the original settlers continued with their occupation and became the *mundcars* of the *bhatcars* who have become the new owners of the land, converting whole settlements into *mundcars* as the *bhatcars* came into the picture. So, if we accept this Committee’s report, it can reasonably be surmised that the *mundcars* were the original settlers of the land and the *bhatcars* only came later.

This understanding is, however, contested by members of the dominant castes, such as Ralph Da Costa,<sup>10</sup> a Catholic *bhatcar* from Curtorim. In an interview with me, he affirmed that: “We, the Sarawat Brahmins were the first ones to settle and we are the first ones to set up the village and village community.” He was unable, however, to respond to my subsequent query as to the origin of the *mundcars*, or how some of the people in the village became *mundcars*.

Under Portuguese sovereignty, “there were only four owners of the land in Goa, that is, the government, the *comunidades* (a form of land association in Goa), the churches and temples and the *bhatcars*” (Parobo 156). Of these, the *comunidade* is the most important because this institution continues to determine the current socio-economic relations in village Goa. Remy Dias states that one of the most significant socio-economic institutions of Goa that experienced a radical transformation under Portuguese rule was the *comunidade* system or the *Gauncaria* as it was called before the arrival of the Portuguese (1). The *gauncaria* has been represented as an indigenous ancient socio-agro-economic institution of villages in Goa established for harmonious co-existence and was composed by *gãocars*, i.e. men descended from the first settlers or inhabitants of villages in Goa (Pereira, *Aspects*; R. Dias, *The Socio-Economic*). *Comunidades* “owned land collectively through *gãocars* and earned profits by auctioning agrarian land” (Parobo 155). Initially, only the *gãocars* were allowed to bid during these auctions, and later it was opened to all. *Gãocars* had full control over the village and its resources. The *gãocars* were also entitled to *zon* —a share in the surplus produced by the village distributed after the *comunidade* had met all its financial obligations. “Only the *gauncars* could own land collectively, administer, and participate in the village meetings and distribute *zon*” (Parobo 152). Indeed, the *zon* was a symbol of prestige, power, and status. Prior to the Christianization of the Velhas Conquistas, the best lands of the villages were reserved for temples by the *comunidades*. These *gauncars*



were socially and culturally powerful and hence it was difficult to remove them from office, even if they were at fault. They were hardly engaged in agriculture at a practical level and their rights were hereditary. Using the skills of the actual tiller they developed the land they owned. They enjoyed the most privileged location in the social life of the village. Thus, Pereira, in *Aspects of the Mundar Law*, concludes that the *gãocaria/ comunidade* is an institution of the *gauncars* by the *gauncars* and for the *gauncars* and thus, the code of *comunidades* is a law of *gauncars*, by *gauncars* and for *gauncars*.

After analyzing the land rules in Goa, discussed in the *Report* (1966), (see also Dias (2004) and Parobo (2015)) it can safely be concluded that the *mundcars* were not the owners of the land and hence were never members of the *comunidades*. This means that they were never involved in the decision-making and never got the *zon*; all they did was work as unpaid laborers. From this, I learned that the *mundcars* were never directly involved in the functioning of the *comunidade* and yet this is the very system that is glorified by many, including in *Saxtticho Koddo*. For example, in the documentary, Maria de Lourdes Bravo da Costa speaks of how there was governance with the *comunidade* and that the roads, temples, churches, markets, and everything else was managed by the *comunidades*. However, da Costa did not speak of how these *comunidades* maintained the power to take major decisions about the village in the hands of the upper castes.

*Bhatcar* denotes the owner of a *bhat* (orchard), that is to say, of productive properties and was a title of respect, status, and power. The word *mundcar*, on the other hand, is reported to have emerged from the word '*mundd*' which denoted a loan free of interest, a certain amount in cash or kind. A *mundcar* was given a property for watch and ward purposes called a "Tolluk"; for this, he was then given a share of the yield for his services called a "boll" (*Report* 5; Parobo 159). Since the rural property was predominantly of coconut groves, if coconuts were missing as could be seen from the stem of the coconut bunch, they had to pay the '*dent*'—a fine—for every empty stem. As Pedro Dias<sup>11</sup> notes in an interview:

If one coconut was missing then the *bhatcar* would punish us by cutting down our share of the produce. If our children had to pluck mangoes from the tree, that we watered and took care of, without *bhatcan* (wife of a *bhatcar*) permission then the *bhatcan* would tie our children to the same mango tree and let the ants bite them.

A *mundcar* could not address a *bhatcar* or his family members by name (Parobo 159). Such traditions continue to influence social relations within the village today. Even though the *mundcars* are no more under the obligation of the *bhatcar*, they still do not call them by name and have to present themselves whenever the *bhatcar* calls them for some work. For example, when I was leaving after the interview with

Ralph, one of the *bhatcars* living opposite Ralph's house called out to a man walking on the road. He said to him, 'Arre! Bor jalem tum mhaka hanga mello to. Amger falya kamak euchak zai. Amghe Kunkdage ghud sarkem karchak zai. Falya koshei bashen yo ani anik doga ghen yo. Kuzhina nolle sarke korcha jaye.' (Arre! Good that I met you here. Tomorrow anyhow you have to come to work at my house. Our chicken coop has to be repaired and get some men along with you because our kitchen roof tiles also have to be repaired.) The man obliged immediately. Now, it is possible that this man was not a *mundcar* to Ralph's neighbor, and merely a handyman who offered his services for payment. Nevertheless, what was clear was that Ralph's neighbor belonged to the *bhatcar* class and the handyman to the *mundcar* order. Witnessing this conversation, I was particularly reminded of the figure of Casiano *bhatcar* in Fernandes' *tiatr 'Bhatcara'* who asked João to go to his farm with ten other *mundcars* to pluck coconuts and other fruits (Fernandes 4). What was striking was the similarity in tone and structure between the command given in this conversation between Ralph's neighbor and the handyman and that of Casiano in Fernandes' *Bhatcara*.

In the latter, Casiano asked João to get his wife and children to work with him if he failed to get more male *mundcars*. The *mundcar's* wife and children normally worked at the *bhatcar's* house and helped their husbands in the fields as well. The relationship between the *bhatcar* and the *mundcar* was not merely economic, but also social, and one of subservience and service, and invariably a relationship between a person from a dominant caste and a marginalized caste.

This caste-based agrarian relation is missing in the documentary while it forms the crux of *Kunbi Jaki*, *Bhatcara*, and *Monção* which will be discussed further. They show the exploitation faced by the *mundcars*, the dependent relationship between the *bhatcar-mundcar*, and the intensity of caste discrimination.

In Portuguese Goa, the lower castes neither owned agricultural land nor the land where their dwellings stood. The service castes of the village were often provided land for cultivation in exchange for services provided to the *comunidades*. This provision of land did not, however, equate to ownership of the land. The *Lei do Mundcarato* of 1959, failed to provide adequate protection to the *mundcars*. Instead of protecting them from eviction, it stated the grounds on which the *bhatcar* could evict the *mundcar* which led to large-scale eviction of the *mundcars* by the *bhatcars*. The *Mundcars Act* (1976) abolished the system of free labor at the service of a *bhatcar*.

The *Goa, Daman and Diu (Protection from Eviction) Act*, 1975 that came into force in 1976 radically altered the *bhatcar-mundcar* relationship (*Report* 9). It destroyed the monopoly of the *gauncars* over the land. In the early twentieth

century, as is illustrated in several short stories in *Monsoon*, many of the *gāocars* left their villages to settle in urban areas and some of them went overseas whether to Portuguese or British colonies, becoming in the process absentee landlords. To remedy this problem, the Act allowed the *bhatcars* to recover their land for personal cultivation only if they resided in the village or within seven kilometers of it, which benefitted the *mundcars*/tenants immensely. The rights of the *mundcars* were made inheritable. They became deemed owners of the land, having the right to repair, maintain, and improve their dwellings. The *mundcars* for the first time received their permanent dwellings, could engage in new economic opportunities, and more importantly, could stand with dignity before a *bhatcar*. The Act provided flexibility to the *mundcars* to move out of agriculture without surrendering their land rights and engage with new opportunities and markets. They could now look towards education and opportunities for employment.

The response of one of the *bhatcars* from Curtorim during conversation with me captured the response of the *bhatcar* class:

I had 40 families of mundcars working in the fields. After the Land to the Tiller Act, all of them grabbed my land, some sold it and some have kept the land barren. If it was with me then I would have seen to it that the land was being cultivated. It is all because of education of these mundcars that they have abandoned farming.

(Da Costa, 28 June 2020)

When people start losing their power to dominate, they feel there is injustice done to them, as is evident in Da Costa's statement above. There is a strong opposition to the law by the *bhatcars*. One of the strong oppositional reactions to the law could be seen in the joint minute of dissent on the *Bhatcar-Mundcar Report* (1966) by Mazarelo and Orlando A. J. de Sequeira Lobo. The Land Reforms Commission submitted its report in 1964 but had left out of consideration a very important problem, namely the relationship between *bhatcar* and *mundcar*. Thus, there was a committee appointed in April 1964 under the chairmanship of the then Minister of Agriculture, Tony Fernandes, to study the relationship between the *bhatcars* and the *mundcars*. The committee was asked to make suitable recommendations for putting the relationship between these two groups on a more rational or permanent footing. The committee found that after Goa's integration into India, when the land reforms activities were taken up by the government, especially about the enactment of the Land Tenancy Legislation, the relations between the *bhatcar* and *mundcar* were strained greatly in one way or another as the *bhatcars* started to lose their monopoly over the land and the tenants.

Yes, the Land to the Tiller Act and the Protection from Eviction benefitted some mundcars. But there were mundcars, and still are, who are fighting to purchase land.

Not many could afford to buy land when the law was introduced and many *mundcars* were evicted forcefully [...]. Some cases are still pending and some files are even burnt (Gaunkar).

The committee also determined that while some lived under the domination of their *bhatcar* many *mundcars* got land freely out of compassion (*Report 23*). The committee reported that the very fact that several cases were registered in the administrator's offices for eviction and that many were evicted is because of the law which did not only keep open the doors for litigations but failed to give protection to the *mundcars*. There were many *bhatcars* who did not even resort to the proper procedure for eviction as is laid down in the law but straightaway took measures to evict the *mundcars* from their houses, challenging them to go to court and seek justice. There were cases where the poor had to pack their bags and leave, as they could not afford to contest the case in the court (*Report 30*). The helplessness was such that, though there was a law, there was no real protection from eviction. Only those cases where the *mundcars* could put up a fight against the *bhatcar* were ever heard before the administrator, while the rest were closed. Given that there had never been a written contract between the *bhatcar* and the *mundcar*, the first difficulty before the *mundcar* was to prove that he was in fact a *mundcar*. Delay in the hearing of the cases was another difficulty, such that many preferred to abandon the fight. Reported cases reveal that *bhatcars* lock *mundcar's* houses while in other instances some houses are demolished (*Report 9-11*).

Mazarelo and Lobo consider the law as unjust to the *bhatcars* and that the report of the committee on the problems faced by the *mundcars* was favoring the *mundcars* only. Mazarelo and Lobo believed that no person could be forced into becoming a *mundcar*. That this action is a person's choice, to settle on the *bhatcar's* property and work for the *bhatcar* in return for *mundd*.

No. *Bhatcars* never treated *mundcars* as slaves. They were provided everything by the *bhatcar*. We took care of the *mundcars* and their family. They were never forced to work. There was no written contract for them. (Da Costa)

Mazarelo and Lobo questioned the findings of the committee and asked why no *mundcars* complained of being forced to work for the *bhatcar*. They further argued that the *mundcars* were paid or given remuneration for services rendered to the *bhatcar*. Additionally, they also said that the evictions of the *mundcars* were lawful and not forceful and that it was the responsibility of the government and not of the *bhatcars* or any private owners to provide land for building houses. The *mundcars* are a liability to the *bhatcar*. Meanwhile, the state government should provide them with shelter, food, and clothing. *Bhatcars* should not shoulder these responsibilities as reiterated by Mazarelo and Lobo. In essence, the *mundcar*

worked for the *bhatcar* but it is the government who should be responsible for them.

There were criticisms towards the law that came from other parts of the state too. It could be seen in “The Gaunkaries of Goa” (2007) and “Aspects of The Mundkar Law” (2006) by Adv. Andre A. Pereira and “The Charter of Demands of the Gaunkars of Goa” prepared by Savio Herman D’Souza (2000 and 2007). All of them state that Mundkarial Law of 1975 had led to the death of the *comunidade* system and eventually created insecurity for the native Goans (Gaunkars). In “The Charter of Demands by the Gaunkars of Goa” (2000 and 2007), Pereira and D’Souza put forth twelve demands. Their ninth demand was “to declare the gaunkars of Goa oppressed and endangered indigenous/ Adivasi communities,” their tenth was “to declare *comunidades* of Goa a national heritage of India.” Number 11 was “to provide a minimum 25-year window for the gaunkars of Goa to re-establish their institutions and number 12 was ‘to provide scope and opportunity for gaunkars to re-establish the *comunidades* wherever abolished in Goa.’ They also launched The Goan Gaunkary Movement.

This brief history should provide some idea of the caste-based socio-economic structure that existed in Goa and which has shaped the current socio-economic structure. It offers us, to some extent, the opportunity to appreciate why *mundcars* abandoned farming: to get away from caste-based exploitation and discrimination and to live a life of dignity. Those who continued in agriculture preferred to educate their children so that the next generation could have a ‘better life.’

The *bhatcars*, as is the case with privileged groups elsewhere, are trained not to acknowledge their privileges (McIntosh 1). Costa, the director, hailing from a landowning family, perhaps, unconsciously upheld his caste privilege while documenting the film, which is why these aspects of agrarian relations seem to be missing in the documentary. While the documentary has attempted to capture every aspect of agriculture, it has failed to capture the most critical dimension of agriculture—the caste-based *bhatcar-mundcar* relationship—and, in consequence, has ended up romanticizing agriculture and farming. That he has given due credit to the *mundcars* in his documentary doesn’t make him any less of a *bhatcar*. *Bhatcarponn* (Menezes), or *bhatcar-ness*, which is the ability to effectively be and act like a *bhatcar*, is linked to caste privilege; however wealthy some *mundcars* or lower-caste individuals become, they will never be considered equal to upper-caste individuals.

## REPRESENTING CASTE IN GOAN AGRARIAN RELATIONS

Fortunately, *Saxtticho Koddô* and the popular romanticization of agriculture in Goa do not exhaust the representation of agrarian life. On the other hand, there is Vimala Devi's *Monção* and the *tiatrs*, *Kunnbi Jaki* and *Batcara I-II* by João Agostinho Fernandes that boldly speak of how caste has shaped Goan society's socio-economic relations. I shall first discuss *Kunnbi Jaki* and *Batcara I-II*. The titles themselves suggest that the dramas are about *mundcars* and *bhatcars*. *Kunnbi Jaki* (1941) is about the lives of the *kunnbis* (one of the lower castes). In this *tiatr*, João Agostinho shows how despite his education Jaki—the son of a *mundcar*—struggles for a job, is humiliated by the *bhatcar*, and is finally left with no option other than to work in the fields. Similarly, in Devi's short story "Hope," Mitzi *bhatcan* refuses her help when Pedru goes to her seeking support in finding a job. In *Kunnbi Jaki*, Kostanv, one of the *mundcars* goes to get some of his documents checked and signed in a government office. Here, Rok, an upper-caste government official makes him wait for hours in the office and attends to an upper-caste Hindu individual first. Additionally, he humiliates Kostanv by saying, "*mhojea oslya empregadak despez bhogsona. Dha zannam modem hanv bhonvtam dekhun mhoji dignidad havem samballecheak zai. Tumkam kunnbeank koxeim ravcheak cholota*" (An officer like me has a lot of expenses to bear. I must maintain my dignity since I am always in the company of tens of people. For *kunnbis* like you it's fine to live/ dress anyhow). In another scene, when Inas, Jaki's father, goes to Rok to seek a job for his son, Rok says,

*Kunnbi eskriyanv zalear amge lokan kudoll ani forem handar marunk poddtolem. Nam, nam... tenkam eskriyanvponn nim. Kitlei te xikom. Kunnbi sosial nim ani amche baxen sivilizad zalonaim. Te sudarponnar ievchak anik cheallis vorsam lagtolim* (No matter how educated the *Kunnbis* are they are not deserving and are not even to work as clerks. If they start working in offices then our children will have to take the agricultural work. They are not civilized like us yet and it will take them at least another 40 years to get civilised).

Rok prefers to give the job to an unqualified relative of a Hindu *bhatcar*.

It is a bold presentation of how the *bhatcars* would never want their *mundcars* to rise above their social status. Towards the end of the play, Fernandes offers a literary option to settle social accounts. Taking advantage of Jaki's need for money, *bhatcar* Airus gives him a loan of seven thousand rupees on the condition that if Jaki fails to repay the loan, then he and his wife will have to be Airus' slaves. Airus makes Jaki sign a document, which testifies to this condition. Jaki, however, gets Rok's signatures on the documents, which Airus prepared. In this way, Jaki can outwit both the *bhatcars*, Airus, who seeks to make them his slaves, and Rok who

refuses to give Jaki a job despite his qualification. In stressing Jaki's capabilities, Fernandes suggests education as a way forward for realizing *mundcar* dignity, an option, which is repeatedly deprecated in *Saxtticho Koddo*.

In another drama, *Bhatcara I (1909)-II (1916)*, Agostinho boldly tries to show the attitude of the *bhatcars* and the strong caste biases present in Goan society. In this drama, Joao Agostinho has brought out the evil of the caste system, through which the *bhatcars* are exploiting the *mundcars*. The landlord of Panzari asks his *mundcar*, Joao, to hire other *mundcars* to work on his farms; however, he refuses to pay them their daily wages as per the rate and instead offers them some liquor. He asks Joao to get his wife and children to work too and says he would pay the women  $\frac{1}{2}$  *tang* and the men 2 *tangam*, whereas they are actually supposed to receive 4 *tangam* in total. The *mundcar* along with his whole family had to work for the *bhatcar* and were at his mercy.

The "Arms of Venus" by Vimala Devi shows the intensity of the exploitation and harassment that the *mundcars* faced at the hands of the *bhatcars*. The *mundcar* leaves their eight-year-old child at home to look after her younger siblings and work in the fields despite the presence of heavy showers and gusty winds. The *bhatcar* uses the arms of the *mundcars* to cultivate his fields and reap the paddy but pays no heed to the cry of the hunger-stricken *mundcars*.

Vimala Devi may have belonged to an upper-caste Catholic *bhatcar* family yet in her short stories we can see deep-rooted caste, class, and religious differences between Goans. She writes short stories about Goan society during colonial times, but she focuses on the enemy within and concentrates on the deeper structural problems that existed in Goan society. *Monção* is the first work of Goan literature to look at caste within Goa from the top-down and the bottomup (Castro, "Vimala Devi's 'Monção'" 57). Her stories give us a glimpse of Hindu as well as Catholic Goans, of upper-caste women and lower caste women, of upper-caste men and lower caste men. We can see life stories of people coming from different communities as well, like fishing, farming, landowners, actors, and even those who migrated outside Goa. One of the key themes in *Monção* is, in fact, the dynamics of the relations between *bhatcar* and *mundcar*.

In the short story "Tiatr" in *Monção*, Gustin, a *mundcar* is one of the main organizers of *tiatr*. His *bhatcar* Dias and his wife Dona arrive late for the *tiatr*. The *bhatcar* expects Gustin to keep separate chairs for them, which did not happen. His wife wanted to come early to listen to the gossip while Dias chose to come late to flaunt his rank. When they arrived, people started yelling at them for causing a disturbance. This was possible because the number of people in the audience offered the anonymity of the crowd against the *bhatcar*. He furiously called Gustin

and demanded that he arrange chairs for them. Gustin could not say anything as he was alone and had to rush to get chairs while missing his performance. *Bhatcar* Dias said to his wife “no matter what all the actors were his *mundcars* and shall remain so.” Similarly, in “Hope” Pedru, an educated *mundcar* goes to seek the help of his *bhatcan* Mitzi to get a job. But she doesn’t consider Pedru to be deserving only because he is the son of a *mundcar*. In “Decline” the grandmother dies leaving the mother alone with her children and the *mundcars* come to visit her. The members of the family are aghast when they see *mundcars* sitting on the chairs. Here, despite the ‘fall’ of their might, their caste arrogance is still intact. Even in “Job’s Children” when Bostiao falls ill and *bhatcan* Dona Lavinia comes to visit him, the ‘help’ she offers is rather a belittling charity and so is refused by the *mundcars*.

There are strong women characters from the upper-caste families in Devi’s stories. In “Job’s Children,” both *bhatcan* Dona Lavinia and in “Hope,” *bhatcan* Mitzi, despite having lost their fortune continue to uphold the caste pride before the *mundcars*. Devi has not only shown strong upper-caste women in relation to *mundcars* but she has also shown how upper-caste women would be in a dominating position even if the man belonged to the upper-caste community, as in “The House Husband.” In “The House Husband,” to have an heir to their property the brahmin Fonseca sisters marry their younger sister to middle-aged bachelor Franjoão. But Franjoão, though upper caste, doesn’t have any right to the Fonseca *bhatcan’s* property. Even in the intimacy of the family, agrarian relations, therefore, were clearly marked by caste and transcended gender differences. Rather, what seems to have mattered most was caste identity.

## CONCLUSION

Vince Costa and Vimala Devi both come from a Catholic *bhatcar* family. Nevertheless, they offer contrasting perspectives about village life in general, possibly due to the nature of their politicization. Devi seems to be clearly influenced by the Marxian movement sweeping the world at the time. Costa, on the other hand, is representative of the contemporary moment, which seems focused on identities rather than structural issues. *Saxtticho Koddô* identifies the neglect of farming by the younger generation of the *mundcar* families as the reason for the decline in farming, thus putting the onus of preserving farming and agrarian lands on the *mundcars*. When it comes to showing ‘farming’ in the fields, the farmers are interviewed; when it comes to explaining the building of bunds and the importance of rice, it’s the *bhatcars* who are interviewed. But *Monção*, *Kunnbi Jaki*, and *Bhatcara I-II* show the other, unexposed side of the coin, the caste attitudes of the



*bhatcars* that have been a major reason why agriculture has declined, as there was no dignity of labor for the *mundcars* and so they chose better options.

Literature that considers the perspective of marginalized communities is very rare. Even when the literature comes from the marginalized communities, the views expressed are often driven by the dominant discourse. The internalization of the dominant discourse serves to normalize it. The discourses of the privileged come across as neutral and impartial. Our worldview is shaped depending on our social position and awareness of it. Such awareness of their social position has shaped Vimala Devi's and João Agostinho Fernandes's literary works and Vince Costa's documentary.

## Notes

1. All translations from Konkani to English are done by this article's author.
2. See <http://www.dalitweb.org/?p=2963> for the article "To Gawda or not to Gawda."
3. See the publication in <https://revistaperiferias.org/en/materia/trucked/>.
4. The link to the blog mentioned is <https://hanvkonn.wordpress.com/>.
5. See <https://hanvkonn.wordpress.com/> for the foreword.
6. See <https://www.curtorimpanchayat.com/curtorim-village/> for details.
7. See <https://www.curtorimpanchayat.com/curtorim-village/> for details.
8. Name changed to protect the person's identity.
9. Name changed to protect the person's identity.
10. Name changed to protect the person's identity.
11. Name changed to protect the person's identity.

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