

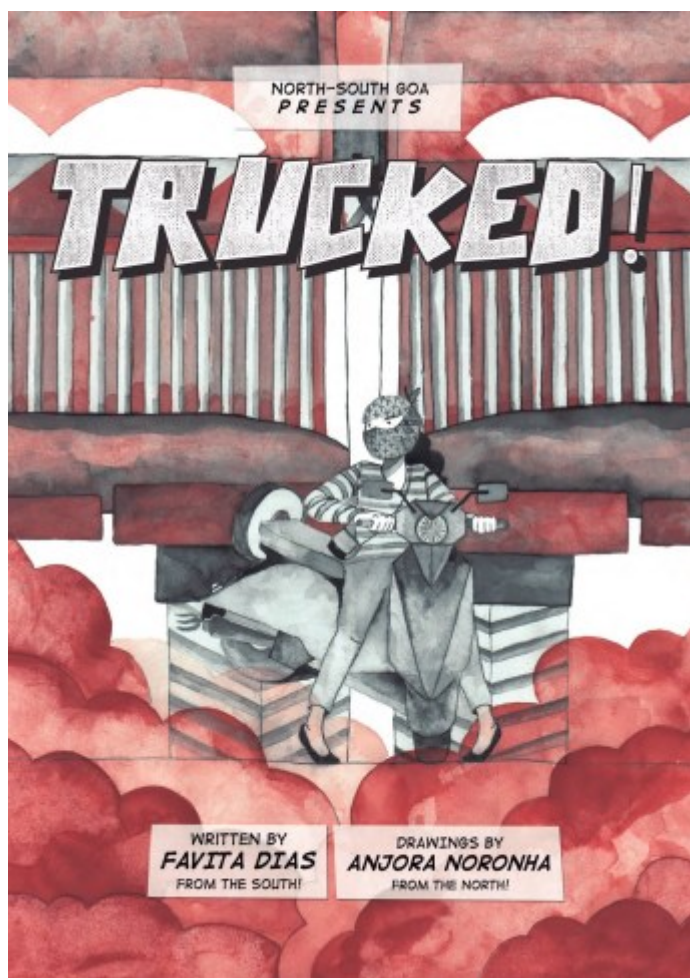


By DALE LUIS MENEZES

Trucked! Mining Dust and Protest in Goa

With the Sadhana Multipurpose Cooperative Society (SMCS) being allowed a legal existence as a cooperative society, the debate on how Goa should deal with its mineral resources is moving forward in a direction that holds much promise. The initiative of the setting up of the cooperative was led by the villagers of Caurem, particularly by Ravindra Velip. The villagers of Caurem had to fight for almost three years before the authorities agreed to recognize Sadhana as a cooperative society. That Sadhana was made to wait for so long is not surprising considering that their objectives is to enter the mining business whereby they will operate leases, extract ore, transport the extracted ore, sell and export it, cutting across the interests of giant corporates. This three year period, therefore, was not one of idle wait for the villagers of Caurem, but one marked by numerous protests as well as attacks on the villagers.

One of such protests had led to the arrest of some villagers in Caurem, including an assault on them while in jail. Ravindra Velip was then the panch of Caurem. A new graphic novel, released online for free circulation about a month ago, uses the assault on Velip and his comrades as a backdrop to reflect on the struggles of people against the destruction of lives and ecology. *Trucked!* is a joint effort by Favita Dias, a lecturer in sociology, and the illustrator Anjora Noronha. The title of the graphic novel draws from the image of a thousand trucks that transported iron ore from the mines of Caurem to the docks in Sanvordem. The graphic novel is about Dias' personal experience of attending a protest meet and standing in solidarity with the villagers of Caurem.



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Dias recounts her experience of negotiating her way to Caurem, where the trucks are lined bumper-to-bumper. “Follow the trucks,” Dias is told, when she asked for directions to Caurem; the empty ones, of course. *Trucked!* in this sense not only serves as a metaphor for negotiating the bumper-to-bumper traffic on the road from Caurem to Sanvordem, but also helps to bring attention to the most visible aspect of mining: the trucks that transport the ore. In fact those who live in the mining areas and on the route through which the ore is transported would largely agree with Dias’ characterization of the trucks as “monsters”. These vehicles speed down the roads, kicking a storm of dust and mowing down whatever comes in their path – even other human beings.

The graphic aesthetic also tries to capture the problems that rampant mining has brought about. The colour red – the colour of the Goan soil and of large-scale mining as well – jumps out of the pages. The powdery texture that the illustrator has managed to produce gives us an impression that it is actually the mining dust that is on the pages of the graphic novel. Much of the internal reflection or the inner thoughts and past memories of the author are depicted using shades of gray. This alternates between the red, dusty-texture of scenes involving iron ore. Thus, the graphic novel offers us a stark contrast between two worlds: the internal world whereby one tends to reflect deeply about finding solutions to problems; and

the external world that witnesses a senseless and unabated destruction of lives and ecology.



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It is important to recognize how this interiority or internal reflections can help in thinking about the problems related to mining, or for that matter any other problem that confronts Goa. Dias offers a reflection on where an individual should place herself in the larger scheme of things; how one can relate to the struggles of others. It is also about keeping faith, and gaining hope and strength from the battles waged by others, that ultimately would bring about positive changes in our own lives. Dias reflects on the manner in which the villagers of Caurem were waging their protest and resisting the assault of mining corporations and how Ravindra Velip, calm and composed, was handling all sorts of allegations against him in the fight for justice. *Trucked!* teaches us a way to think and feel about the problems and protests that we are witness to.

In fact, this ability to express the internal condition of the mind to a problem widespread in society was also seen when Dias wrote an essay on her personal experiences in encountering casteism; her coming to terms with her identity as a woman from the Gauda community (published in *O Heraldo*, 24 January 2016). The personal and emotional conflicts that one goes through and how one can think of these conflicts and pressures in a wider social universe is the way in which Dias structures her work.

It is also essential to recognize the importance of various types or modes of representations that discuss problems faced by the society. Thus, our resistance to the problems becomes stronger if, along with newspaper reports, op-eds and books, we also have other forms of representation like *tiatr*, songs, and graphic novels such as *Trucked!* Such efforts would go a long way to build a corpus of texts that record history of Goa's struggles against destructive so-called development.

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