



Good afternoon, ladies and gentlemen. It is a great pleasure for me to release *A Shortcut to Tipperary* this evening.

There is an interesting set of dynamics between the person who releases a book and the event of a book release. In some cases, it is the person who brings honour to the event, and in others it is the event that brings honour to the person invited to release the book. This afternoon is an example of the latter case and I thank Doutor Radharao for the opportunity. I could think of many others, some present in this gathering, who are more worthy of this task, but I am nevertheless delighted to be able to release the book and share with you my thoughts on the novel.

I have to confess that I agreed to release the book without having read it. But then, how could I refuse Dr. Radharao? And having been witness to his provocations in social media over the years, and thanks to our conversations I knew that subsequent to accepting I would not be placed in an awkward position. And to be honest, the author exceeded all expectations. For this, my congratulations Doutor.

When he invited me, Doutor Radharao had indicated that his intention had been to preserve a record of the Goa of his youth, a Goa that is fast disappearing, or indeed has already disappeared. This is not an uncommon desire among Goans of a certain age, and yet, oftentimes the result is disastrous. The narrative labours under the weight of an activist's frenzied desire and one must deal with tedious explanations of the minutiae of the local life that the activist author wishes to capture, down to the most boring detail. And then there is the question of the language placed in the mouths of the characters – either it seeks to mimic the native tongue of these characters and is often a hideous pidgin, or it is a form of English that is so removed as to be unrealistic. I am happy to report that *A Shortcut to Tipperary* suffers from neither of these shortcomings. Doutor Radharao says all that he has to say, and he has much to say, but with a hand that is as light as a merengue! I wish I had such skill. Indeed, as a friend and I were discussing the other day, at times teaching is best done indirectly, through parables. On this score the Doutor has done very well indeed!

But what exactly is our Doutor preaching? In a nutshell I believe he is, like many of us, concerned with the question of Goan difference. In his telling, and I am in agreement with him, the difference is Catholicism. What makes Goa Goan to Advocate Radharao Gracias is the Goan Catholic. "Without us," he argues through the figure of Alberto, "Goa will never be Goa." Catholicism, and to some extent language – and on this latter point I disagree with him partially, but I will return to this point later – are what make Goa. What makes, or to be

honest, what made, the Goan different, honest, hospitable, is Catholicism. This is the ingredient of an earthly paradise. Our author recognises that not all Goans fulfil this norm, indeed *A Shortcut* contains a wonderful example of a dastardly Goan Catholic, but as the narrator points out there are always a few bad apples. Nevertheless, bad apples notwithstanding, the norm still holds, or held, and these general features of the Goan resulted from Catholicism.

Underlying the entire narrative, is the suggestion that the anti-thesis of this Goan-ness, is Indian-ness. At one point there is the query whether this morphing of the Goan spirit is a result of being incorporated into the Indian mainstream. There is one particular point in the narrative when our attention is drawn to the fact that the Indian courts are not courts of justice, but courts of law. Justice is not a virtue that the Indian state, through its courts, is able to deliver. Indeed, there are other points in the narrative when the reader is cautioned against litigation. Instead, the reader is offered that biblical counsel which helps in building community – make peace with your brother, your neighbour, resolve your differences among yourselves. What Gracias is offering for Goa is a vision of an organic polity, and I will return to the question of the future in a while.

Resolving some of the crises in *A Shortcut to Tipperaray* is the figure of the *bhatcar*. The *bhatcar* is a contested figure in Goan literature. Whereas some present the *bhatcar* as the figure of oppression, and I have no doubt that there were many who were, Gracias while not denying that there were some – perhaps many – evil *bhatcar*, proffers an example of the benevolent, wise and kind *bhatcar*. Is he being reactionary in this option? I think not, for a couple of reasons. To begin with, I suspect that the *bhatcar* in *A Shortcut* is the way Doutor Gracias would like to think of himself. The second reason, however, I think is more important; Gracias is offering us a model of the ideal leader for this organic polity that will stand up to the rot represented by Indian influence. In this position his project is similar to that of the late Maria Aurora Couto, who wrote histories of the landed aristocracy of Goa, not to blindly glorify them, but to offer us, who are their political and cultural heirs, models of emulation, and ways forward. Most of us may have been *mundcars* or members of other service groups, but today many of us have the fiscal capacities formerly available to the *bhatcars*. How do we wield these capacities? The noble *bhatcar* is the model that Gracias, rightly in my opinion, offers to us.

The appropriateness of this model is one that derives from a certain kind of Catholic politics; one that is not tied to conflict between economic classes, the famous class war, but directed by a notion of justice. It is my belief that so much of so-called “progressive politics” ever since the French revolution is inspired not by an indignation over the unjust exercise of privilege, but by envy – why do they; i.e. the elite, have what we don’t, if we don’t have it,

neither must they. As Doutor Gracias points out to us, once again through the voice of the *bhatcar*, “The poor take vicarious pleasure in the ruins of the richman’s house” (p. 195).
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This model of Catholic politics is not simply directed by a notion of justice, it is further animated by the individual’s pursuit of the virtues. Each of the protagonists of the narrative is a virtuous figure, and urges others to be virtuous. Let us return once again to the scenario I just referred to from the narrative. After suggesting that the poor not take vicarious pleasure in the ruins of the homes of the rich, the *bhatcar* points out to how the very persons who claim that their tenants are not vacating the property, are themselves refusing to vacate properties in Bombay where they are tenants of another landlord. Forgive me for what I am about to say, but I have often had reason to be scandalised when I see Goans who have accumulated substantial property, refuse to abandon properties where they are tenants, and insist on paying miniscule rents that do neither correspond to the market value, nor are they sufficient to support the landlord. And then we wonder why Goan properties are falling to pieces.

Unlike these contemporary Goans, when, as in the case of the narrator, he fails to do justice, or do the virtuous act, his conscience – guided conveniently enough by the Sunday sermon – is sufficiently pricked so that he returns to doing the right thing. There is place also, in this model of Catholic politics for suffering. More than once in this novel we read that “through suffering comes salvation”. I think that this would be a good mantra to hold on to as we suffer through the trials and travails that is our lot in contemporary Goa. So long as we suffer in the course of our pursuit of justice, there is salvation at the end. Not just for us individually, but for all Goans.

And this is where I would like to return to the future that Dr. Radharao offers us in his novel. He has made his peace with the generations of Goans who have emigrated, and continue to emigrate. But, as he suggests via the words of Alberto, “You have a duty to your mother land to come back” (p. 228). This is all very well, but I am also concerned with the question of what do we do while we are away? I would argue that we do exactly what we have been doing earlier, and has been portrayed in the book. The late nineteenth century and the early to mid-twentieth century were marked by the institution of the *kudd*. The *kudd* embodied the networks of family, caste, and village that supported Goans in the city of Bombay. The *kudd* stood at the centre of Goan success in the metropole. I propose that we return to this principle of associationism, with one difference; every Goan is a brother who is in need of our support; not simply those from our family, caste or village network. We should learn to see the outmigration of this century not as a burden, to be lamented, but as an option to create a new Goan century. A century when Goans across the world join hands to reject the mediocrity of middle-class values and aim for the excellence that was a hallmark of the Goan



not a couple of generations ago. I have to point out that this is already happening in some places. Speaking recently with Dr. Stella Mascarenhas-Keyes I realised that she is engaged with the issue of the impoverishment of Goans in the UK both in her current role as Patron of the Goan Welfare Association, and her earlier presence on the the Goan Association committee for welfare and immigration. We have here a wonderful example of individual *and* association engaged in community focussed philanthropy. The new Goan century will be built on the back of this sort of fraternal camaraderie, and not merely on the repetition of old songs, dances.

If we are to attain this vision, we have to necessarily embrace and love our past, as Dr. Radharao has done and transmitted to us. There are a couple of points, however, with which I disagree with him. First, at some points in the narrative, the author seems to display a utilitarian understanding of Christianity – our Lord Jesus Christ did not found a religion, he was a teacher. If Christ were not the Son of God, then to paraphrase the apostle Paul all of our Christianity is pointless. What makes Catholicism tick is not a set of mundane virtues, but the fact that it is animated by the transcendent. This fact is important to acknowledge because too often we Catholics assume that simply having the cultural markers of Catholicism is enough – both for us, and for our Goan difference. I beg to differ. Catholicism is so, only if linked with a recognition of, and love for, Jesus Christ, recognised as the Son of God. Doutor, I will have to turn you over to the Inquisition for this!

The second point on which I disagree, was the egregious lack of accents in words that have come to us via Portuguese. This is a common practice, and one, which I believe, compromises our cultural health. We need to embrace the discipline of the accents, because it is through this discipline that we are able to remain a viable, healthy cultural entity. As the Goan mango breeds will demonstrate, and indeed as the Catholic faith asserts, by ourselves we are nothing, it is when we draw from the traditions of others, that we grow sweeter, and better. On this note, and to return to a point I promised I would, Goa is not only the home of Konkani, it is also the home of Portuguese. A Konkani that is impoverished by cutting its links with Portuguese, is no Konkani at all. It is as the history of the Konkani language shows, some variant of proto-Marathi. It is through Portuguese that our Konkani was born, and became a universal tongue. Were it not for this, there would be no Konkani but a variety of dialects of different castes and sects.

I conclude on this point, thanking you Doutor for this opportunity, not only to present your book to the Goan audience, but for the opportunity to read this book. Thank you and God bless you.



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