

VIMALA DEVI'S *BHATCARS* AND THE *MUNDCARS*

Laborers, Landlords, and Culture in Goa

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Abstract

The master-servant, or broadly *bhatcar-mundcar*, relations are fundamental to Goan culture, history, and society. While the interaction of these two broad socio-economic groups, those who labor and those who do not, was and is fundamental to Goan politics, scholars have not yet evolved a methodological framework for understanding these relations. This absence, the paper claims, is a particularly serious problem for Goa studies, and one that can be tackled by thinking closely about categories such as *bhatcar* and *mundcar*. The terms *bhatcar* and *mundcar* are defined capaciously, making room for a range of servitudes and labor regimes as well as different ways in which the masters live as *bhatcars* and the servants as *mundcars*. This paper uses Vimala Devi's *Monsoon* to formulate broad generalizations about the master-servant relations in Goa. The paper engages with the historiography of labor and caste in South Asia as well as Goan historiography to deepen the understanding of labor relations and culture in Goan society.

Keywords

laborers; land relations; agrarian relations; tenants; landlords

About the Author

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INTRODUCTION

To speak of *bhatcar-mundcar* relations is to speak of Goan history, politics, and culture. The *bhatcar-mundcar* relations are a complex and ever-changing master-servant relationships between those who labor and those who do not. The master is the *bhatcar* while the servants are the *mundcars*, who labor for their master and mistress. The *bhatcar* (and *bhatcan*), broadly, is the one who possesses land, wealth, high social status, education, culture, and occupies the position of the 'first citizen' in the society. The *bhatcar*, as master, is a product of possessing some proprietary rights over land and agrarian production, bequeathed from previous generations. Though entrenched in economic production, a *bhatcar's* status as master is not necessarily dependent on his financial situation; a penniless *bhatcar*, too, is a master because his position is almost fixed in the social and cultural life by birth. Similarly, the *mundcar* is the servant who supplies the labor, largely in an agrarian setting, and is defined by servitude and a life of labor. Though the master-servant relations largely operate in an agrarian setting, non-agrarian occupations, like fishing, are part of the broad group of laborers in Goan society. The *mundcar's* servitude is also a condition of inheritance; *mundcars* cannot easily escape his servile status, though they try. The *mundcar's* cultural and social role is not dependent on his economic status; a *mundcar* who has gained economic mobility can still feel, or be made to feel, inferior vis-à-vis a *bhatcar*, even by a penniless *bhatcar*. As the relations between *bhatcars* and *mundcars*, or masters and servants, are not necessarily dependent on the economic structures of the society, affective bonds between these two groups—ranging from emotions of ill-will, jealousy, superiority-inferiority, benevolence, and compassion—play a vital role in giving sociological and historical coherence to the master-servant relations.

The representation of *bhatcars* and *mundcars* is ubiquitous in Goan literature in all languages. One of the earliest novels in South Asia, *Os Brahmanes* (1866) by the Goan polyglot Francisco Luís Gomes, describes a master-servant relationship, albeit in a North Indian context. It was written by a Goan who was attentive to the master-servant relationships in politics, no doubt after personally experiencing (as one of the *bhatcar* class) the labor relations in Goa. If one looks at some of the earliest Konkani theatrical works, the *tiatr*, by one of its founding members, João Agostinho Fernandes, one comes across titles such as *Batcara I* (1904), *Batcara II* (1911), and *Kunbi Jaki* (1934) (see A. R. Fernandes 82–99). Reginald Fernandes's novels, written between 1950s and early 1990s, depict love between the high and low, often the heroine is the daughter of a *bhatcar* and the hero from the *mundcarial* class. And recently, Maria Aurora Couto's memoir of her parents, *Filomena's Journeys* (2013), describes at length their relationship with the *mundcars*. So entrenched, then, is this relationship between those who labor and those who do not in Goan culture

and literature (and more broadly history) that it is surprising scholars have not yet paid any attention to this issue.

The master-servant relations receive scant attention in Goan historiography because scholars, especially those in the post-1961 era, largely devote themselves in writing Goan history as an Indian national history. From such an ideological point of view, scholars after decolonization, or 1961, believed that Goa is an integral part of India by virtue of sharing a contiguous geographical territory. It followed from such a nationalist logic that geographical contiguity was coterminous with political, cultural, and historical connections. Whatever happened in the period of colonial rule was then an unfortunate break from the rest of India (that is, India the nation-state). For instance, even as great an authority on Goan history as the late Teotónio de Souza viewed colonial history as a break from an 'Indian national' past. In 1979, when his landmark book *Medieval Goa* was published, he spoke in his preface of the "*re-introduction* [emphasis mine] of popular democratic institutions in Goa after nearly four and a half centuries of colonial rule," as if democratic institutions were present before colonial rule (De Souza 9)! This nationalist reading of Goan history is often referred to as *Goa Indica* and is a knee-jerk reaction to an earlier colonialist reading of Goan history termed as *Goa Dourada* (Trichur, "Politics of Goan Historiography"; Trichur, *Refiguring Goa*).¹

Thus, for about the last four or five decades, and especially after Carolina Ifeka published her seminal essay in the 1980s, scholars have conceptualized Goa as an "Indian region." One of the results of such a narrow and nationalist view of Goan history is that scholars have been only concerned with demonstrating that Goan culture is more Indian than Portuguese or Western. Ifeka, for instance, argues that Goan domestic architecture was inspired by local and Indic forms and not Portuguese or Western ones. The anthropologist Robert Newman stresses that the non-European elements of Goan culture define Goan society more than European or colonial ones (cf. Gomes). The research agenda in such works was one driven by minimizing the influences of colonial history in the creation of modern Goan society. In other words, Goa was an Indian region because Western culture, or any practices that emerged out of the colonial period, hardly left an impression. Even if Indian historiography broke new ground by critiquing nationalist historiography, for instance, through the subaltern studies project, the same was never adopted or discussed by scholars of Goan studies to think of Goa as an Indian region.²

Ironically, the most serious consequence of viewing Goa as an Indian region is the omission of caste oppression and resistance in Goan historiography, before, during, and after the end of colonialism. The history of caste oppression and caste mobilization (or resistance) are important if one is to understand the *bhatcar-mundcar* relations, especially those represented in Konkani, Portuguese, and

Marathi literature. The deficit of any serious analysis of caste oppression in Goan historiography appears to be acute because much of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century writings in newspapers, especially Roman-scripted Konkani publications written by persons of the *mundcarial* class, discussed this problem of *bhatcarial* dominance over the *mundcars* frequently and at length. Nonetheless, because the *bhatcar-mundcar* relations are so ubiquitous in modernist literature, such as Devi's, scholars can start thinking of alternate research agenda that can include diverse genres of sources such as newsprint, literature, and archival material in several Goan languages.

There are, of course, a few noteworthy recent exceptions to the general trend of 'Indian nationalist' historiography in Goa studies. Rochelle Pinto and Anjali Arondekar look at the question of caste mobilization seriously, especially for the late colonial period, and thereby have jettisoned the ideological baggage of viewing Goa as an Indian region, focusing on other social process at work in Goan history. Pinto and Arondekar's works revolve around literature, colonialism, gender, and sexuality in Goan history, focusing either on the elite or subaltern subjectivities. While Pinto and Arondekar research the nineteenth century, Parag Parobo's work looks closely at the post-colonial mobilization of the *Bahujan samaj*, a loose, internally fractured, and ever shifting coalition of subaltern castes. In Parobo's narration of the rise of Dayanand Bandodkar, the first chief minister of Goa and his Maharashtrawadi Gomantak Party, who was instrumental in passing the tenancy act, the *mundcars* play a vital role. Parobo pitches Bandodkar's policies against Nehruvian (nationalist) ones, especially policies concerning education. More recently, Jason Keith Fernandes's work on the politics of scripts in the Konkani public sphere—the Nagri and Romi lipi—stresses, what he calls, the "citizenship experience" of Catholics, particularly the subaltern caste Catholics. Fernandes's work can be neatly read alongside Parobo's and it also makes a forceful argument against an Indian nationalist reading of Goan history and culture. As useful as these works are, and though these authors take caste and class mobilization seriously, the master-servant relationships in Goan history remain undertheorized or described only in passing.³

Within Indian historiography, scholars studying caste, agrarian, and labor relations have paid some attention to the master-servant relations, though not as satisfactorily or sufficiently as one might hope. These scholars have been led to the study of the complex relations and bonds that bring masters and servants together, especially in the villages of India, either due to the need to understand the caste system or to understand the role of the peasants in Indian history. The earliest scholar to discuss the problem of slavery or form of unfree servitude was the historian Dharma Kumar. Way back in the 1950s, her work argued that slavery, or slave-like conditions, or forms of unfreedom were prevalent in India before the 1800s.⁴ The

next important intervention in the scholarship on unfree labor or servitude was by the Dutch sociologist, Jan Breman. His statement on unfree labor in the context of the agrarian relations in Southern Gujarat is perhaps the best known and most useful in gaining a sense of the master-servant relations in South Asia. Breman studied the *hali* system and offered revisions to many established conclusions by sociologists of agrarian and caste relations in India. One of these conclusions, and directly relevant to the paper, is that a purely 'economist' explanation, that is the supply and demand in the labor markets, is untenable to understand free and unfree labor. Breman's work can be contrasted to Kumar's which analyzed a purely economic relations between servants and masters.

Breman was one of the first sociologists to assert that non-economic aspects, such as patronage and affective bonds, were crucial in structuring the master-servant relations in India's countryside. Breman intervened in the debates over the nature of agrarian relations, whether they were free, unfree, or one of voluntary servitude. In these agrarian relations, the lower caste and tribal landless laborers were in an unequal and exploitative relationship with their upper-caste landlords. In *Patronage and Exploitation*, Breman asserted that the exploitative relationship was a fact of Indian agrarian life, but he also stressed that exploitation was mitigated to a limited extent by the patronage provided by the landlords. The bonds of unfree servitude, according to Breman, were undercut by the mutual affective ties between masters and servants (12, 15–16, 21–22, 67, 239).⁵

Gyan Prakash, a historian, followed Breman in understanding agrarian relations as essentially mediated by affective and mutual bonds of expectations and patronage. His analysis of the discursive and juridical strategies of the British colonial state in defining master-servant relations in parts of Bihar, especially southern Bihar, aimed to historicize the changing relations between the *kamias* (laborers) and their *maliks* (landlords). Prakash conceptualizes a dynamic give-and-take relationship between masters and servants, and suggests that dependence of the masters on their servants (and vice versa) was mediated through mutual expectations: the master expects the servant to accept a servile status, and the servant, in return, expects generosity and mercy from the master in times of crisis (180). Both Prakash and Breman hint at the affective bonds at play in the master-servant relations in India, a dynamic that is as important as economic processes like loans and commercialization. However, they did not explain the manner in which these affective bonds manifested in the daily lives of masters and servants (another example is Sahai).

Vimala Devi's *Monção* (1963), recently translated as *Monsoon* (2019), offers scope for broad generalizations of the *bhatcar-mundcar* relations in its social, economic, and affective dimensions. Devi describes the master-servant relations as they manifested in an agrarian context, but her broader point about the exploitation

of the underclass and mutual dependence is not limited to agrarian laborers. She invokes the servitude of the underclasses in Goa, "The life of the old bhatcars remains the same—unvarying, inalterable, centuries old, our daily rice wrested from the land by the sweat of our downtrodden mundcars' brows" (Devi, *Monsoon* 34).

In a recent interview, she reveals her need to "denounce" Goan society for its "tremendous inequality." Devi refers to her experiences of growing up in a *bhatcar* family, Brahmin by caste, who owned the land and oversaw the *mundcars* who provided labor and services. These *mundcars*, as Devi recognizes, were a kind of "servos" or servants—and at times in Portuguese can also mean slave, bondman, or serfs. This system had many "contradictions," as she astutely observes. Devi's fiction contains a rich description of these contradictions (see her recent interview in Spina and Devi 339–40).

Set in mid-twentieth-century Goa and using autobiographical experiences, *Monsoon* thus gives students of Goan and Indian literature, as well as history, a chance to consider unequal power relations under the colonial state and the postcolonial nation-state. *Monsoon*, therefore, reflects the social and economic conditions in the Goa of the 1950s and 1960s. Understanding the temporal context of Devi's descriptions of the *bhatcars* and *mundcars* is crucial as I wish to avoid reading her work outside its historical context. Soon after Devi published *Monção*, the first government in postcolonial Goa, under Dayanand Bandodkar, enacted *The Goa, Daman, and Diu Agricultural Tenancy Act* in 1964, altering land relations henceforth. So, I view the *bhatcar-mundcar* relations reflected in Devi's fiction as a condition existing in Goan society prior to the author's expatriation in 1958. Thus, I collect and collate such descriptions of *bhatcars* and *mundcars* in *Monsoon*, depicting economic and affective bonds, to create a portrait of the *bhatcars* and *mundcars* and the relations between them.

VIMALA DEVI'S MUNCARS AND BHATCARS: GOA AT 1958

We begin with Devi's *mundcars*. Her *mundcars* reveal a deep-seated aspiration for education and socio-economic mobility. At a moment of tumultuous political change in Goa from Portuguese to Indian administration, Devi recognized that the Goan underclass, too, waged their own battles for liberation. Liberation for the *mundcars* was not 'national' as it was for the elite classes in South Asia. The *mundcars* wanted a change in the existing socio-economic relations, especially access to land and education. They also negotiated their emotional relationships and mutual expectations, or norms of patronage, with the masters. As Goan

literature, political pamphlets, and newsprint bear witness much of the mundcarial population was far removed from nationalist and anti-colonial politics. In this sense, one can juxtapose Devi's *mundcars* with the Indian native elites leading the anti-colonial freedom movements, though for different purposes (cf. Tejani).

The *mundcar* is of a low-caste status or origin and does not possess the educational opportunities to escape this low social status. Devi uses the term "*casta humilde*," low or humble caste, to describe the subordinate condition of the *mundcar* (Devi, *Monção. Contos* 20). Devi suggests that educational opportunities allowing *mundcars* to follow their passion is one way, perhaps the most crucial way, by which the *mundcars* can access upward social mobility. Even if there are some exceptions of servants being educated, Devi suggests that merely being educated is not enough for social mobility. Pedru in "Hope" is educated yet he cannot climb the ladder of social mobility easily. Devi alerts us to the importance of social structures and networks of patronage—both tipped against Pedru's birth—obstructing him from realizing his ambitions. The point, as it appears in Devi's work, is that a *mundcar* must not be condemned by the accident of birth to a low station but rather nurtured by education to flourish and spread his wings. She uses the metaphor of the seed and the dung beetle—because seeds flourish if allowed to and dung beetles never stay in the dung forever—as a message to the Goan elites, Devi's own social circle, to be more proactive in helping the *mundcars* achieve upward social mobility (Devi, *Monsoon* 10–11).

The lack of educational opportunities is the core of the short story, "Nattak." The protagonist, Tukaram, is passionate about theater. He participates in a local production and aspires to artistic brilliance and personal glory. But he is unable to develop his talents as there are no drama schools in Goa. Thus, the only option that a *mundcar* like Tukaram has is to emigrate to metropolitan cities like Bombay. The option of remaining in Goa does not strike Tukaram as promising. He has big dreams that can only be fulfilled in a metropolitan city. Tukaram understands, as Devi no doubt did, that his condition is not a result of his personal failures or a lack of talent but due to the social structure. By availing himself of educational opportunities through out-migration, the *mundcars* or persons of the "*casta humilde*" can aspire to white collar occupations or even pursue a life of the mind (Devi, *Monsoon* 12).

The *mundcar's* aspiration for education is no different from the *bhatcar's*. Perhaps, the *mundcar's* aspiration emulates that of the *bhatcar's*. The *bhatcars* also want access to higher education for their children, especially for their sons. Because the *bhatcars* can, they send their children to British India or Portugal for higher education. Devi writes about such a bhatcarial aspiration in "Dhruva," a story about a Hindu Dessai *bhatcar* family. This Dessai family sends its son to Portugal

to study medicine. The patriarch of the family observes, "It's a great honour for us all. When Chandracanta [the son] returns from Portugal, he will be a doctor!" The *bhatcars* think of higher education, as in this case, as a route to gain more social and economic capital (Devi, *Monsoon* 40, 125).

Despite the common aspiration for higher education—granted, for different ends—the *bhatcars* are unable to recognize that the *mundcars* want education for equality and upward mobility. In "Hope," Devi describes how Pedru's mother, the same Pedru who aspires for a government job, urges her son to speak to the "bhatcan," the wife of the *bhatcar* (and in general, a mistress) as "she's a good bhatcan." The *mundcars* hope that the *bhatcars* will have some mercy on their plight and help them out. The *bhatcars* want their *mundcars* to remain at a lowly social position and the *mundcars* expect goodwill in return for recognizing the high position of the *bhatcar*, even if the *bhatcar* is financially weak (Devi, *Monsoon* 49–51). The *mundcars* are keenly aware of the fact that their aspiration for education and social mobility tie them further to their masters. The *mundcars* have to depend on the patronage and goodwill of the *bhatcars* as they already have access to social capital in the form of education, high culture, and state employment. The *bhatcars*, in fact, want to deny *mundcars* access to these networks; access to educations and jobs in the civil administration is jealously guarded by the masters. Devi's reasoning is clear in this context as she suggests that given access to education and allowed upward mobility, the *mundcars* will surely overturn the existing order.

The dependence of the *mundcars* on the *bhatcar's* benevolence and largesse in order to access education and social mobility calls for a comment on the affective bonds between the two social groups. Affect is the result of the two groups being mutually dependent and this mutual dependence leads to a *mundcar* to expect their *bhatcar* to be considerate, benevolent, and compassionate, even if the *mundcar* knows that a *bhatcar's* interest are best served by the *mundcars* remaining in a servile position. Pedru's mother believes, or hopes, that the "bhatcan" will recognize their common humanity and aid Pedru to get a job in the civil administration. Pedru's mother expects that a *bhatcar's* sense of honor, an ancient sense of honor marked by benevolence and goodwill, will come through. Though the *bhatcars* are poor now, they were considerably wealthy in the past and as generous too: "There was rice and coconuts for everyone. [The] godown was open to anyone in need," Pedru's mother recollects. Pedru and his mother both know very well that the *bhatcars* they are attached to are not wealthy anymore and hence would not be able to help them financially. But the memory of a generous and benevolent *bhatcar* leads Pedru's mother to hope for some help, after all, as Brahmins, they have the influence and social networks. She says, "Poor or not it does not matter." Because what really matters is the social networks, their *bhatcars* know all the "top people of Pangim... Their relatives work in the government. Cousins of all the

important people, people with influence." Thus, Pedru's mother hopes that their *bhatcars* will do the honorable act of being benevolent and compassionate to their *mundcars* (Devi, *Monsoon* 50–51).

The aspiration of the *mundcars* for education and mobility is gendered. The *mundcars* preferred and were compelled to educate the male child, and the whole family makes sacrifices to save the meagre financial resources for the education of the male child. The *mundcars* want their male child to get employment in the administrative system which they view as a step up on the social and economic ladder. The *mundcars* are aware that one needs caste and class networks to get such a job. They also know that it is important to have an education that makes one eligible for such a job, even if these networks are jealously guarded by the masters. The result is that the female members of the family, particularly daughters, and the younger male members make way for the education of the eldest male member. In "Hope," the daughter Morgorit complains that her brother, Pedru, does not help with the work either at home or in the rice fields. The mother responds indignantly to Morgorit's complaints. As Morgorit's mother believes, Pedru was poised to fulfil their social and economic aspirations by getting a job in the administration. But Morgorit has a different point of view:

I've been working haven't I, Mother? I worked from dawn till dusk so that Pedru could study at the Liceu. I've worked for years without complaint so that Pedru could be someone important like Robert-bab [their *bhatcar*]. But now Pedru can't get a job and I am still working because he can't come to the paddy. Is that fair, Mother? Ay, kata-kata! I've no dowry and have to go on working so that Pedru can stay at home smoking bidis. How much longer, Mother? (Devi, *Monsoon* 48–50)

The mother understands Morgorit's point of view, but she realizes that it is of no use to let go of the aspiration of making Pedru a civil servant.

Devi's *mundcars* also undermine the authority of the *bhatcars*; they assert equality, or something close to it. Their quotidian resistance then must be viewed alongside their dependence on a *bhatcar*'s benevolence and patronage. The *bhatcar-mundcar* relations are structured according to everyday rituals, honors, and traditions. Devi does not speak about a violent overthrow of the master's authority but of subtle and quotidian attempts, where the *mundcars* do not behave according to the expectations of the *bhatcars*. It could be as simple as the *mundcars* ignoring the customary right of the master to prime seats at a public gathering. The *mundcars* are expected to honor the *bhatcars* with prominence, to wait on the *bhatcars* as guests of honor. If the *mundcars* do not conform to such an expectation, whether willingly or not, the *bhatcars* experience humiliation. In "Decline," Devi suggests a subtle subversion of the established and traditional

labor-caste order. The *bhatcar's* household is in mourning because the matriarch, the *bhatcan*, has died. These *bhatcars*, already experiencing dire financial straits, are plunged in further existential chaos when the *mundcars* who come to pay their respects sit on chairs in the *bhatcar's* house: "The *mundcars* sat on chairs!" One of the members of the household remarks with horror and indignation. Similarly, in "Tiatr," the *bhatcar* Inácio Dias and his wife Dona Serafina are left embarrassed when no arrangement of front row seats, befitting their honor and status, is made at the village theater performance. Inácio demands proper chairs, and his *mundcar* can only manage to get a bench, leaving Inácio even more humiliated than earlier (Devi, *Monsoon* 46, 69–74). The *mundcars* subvert the norms of expected behavior, and thereby produce new emotional responses from the *bhatcars*.

The *bhatcars* are also invested in the ritual and quotidian aspects of the system, though arguably to maintain the status quo. This system of honor is not necessarily dependent on the economic status of the *bhatcar*. Devi's *bhatcars* are well-born, but some have fallen on hard days. Most of the *bhatcars* that Devi describes are not wealthy, but they still retain their social privileges. Pedru's mother in "Hope," as discussed earlier, recognizes that their *bhatcars* though poor are 'well-born' ancient Brahmins. It is not surprising that Devi characterizes her *bhatcars* as such because in the economic context of 1950s and 1960s Goa, the *bhatcars*, especially the Catholic gentry, experienced financial strain. It is important to recognize that the economic condition of the *bhatcars* was the result of low agrarian productivity and anti-colonial politics that increasingly pushed the *bhatcars* out of political and economic prominence, though not the social one. Around the 1950s and 1960s, as Devi's writings testify, the *bhatcars* still held onto their social privileges.

Franjoão, an ageing bachelor in "The House Husband," is facing financial problems. He is the quintessential 'well-born but poor' *bhatcar*. Franjoão is offered an alliance with the Fonseca household with unmarried daughters and large properties across Goa. Franjoão warms up to the prospect of a hefty dowry and thus improves his financial situation. However, the Fonseca family is unsure of Franjoão as they do not want their family wealth to go to a person who is penniless, even if he is of the same caste. One of the Fonseca sisters received a proposal from Joaquim Menezes, "A good Chardó family. Ancient and noble," but they choose Franjoão as even with the financial problems, his family is in fact "of good people"—or, "*de boa gente*" (Devi, *Monsoon* 22–24; Devi, *Monção. Contos* 38).

Devi's portrayal of Franjoão also suggests that if well-born *bhatcars* fall on hard days, they migrated to greener pastures. Until the first couple of decades in the twentieth century, these places were the British and Portuguese colonies in Africa (on this point of migration, see Carvalho). While Franjoão migrated to Africa, his brother Franxavier had stayed in Goa to look after the family estates. Devi makes

a distinction between the *bhatcars* who stayed and those who migrated for work: the *bhatcar* who stays appears to cling to tradition and not change according to the demands of altered circumstances; he clings to his ancestral land and inheritance and lives a life that is devoid of any dynamism. The low yield from the rice fields and coconut orchards creates more problems: the *bhatcars* are unable to keep up an ostentatious lifestyle, their houses—grand symbols of their status—slowly crumble for lack of repairs. Even the money remitted from family members abroad is insufficient to maintain the bhatcarial lifestyle (Devi, *Monsoon* 25).⁶

Nonetheless, rich or poor, the *bhatcar* needs to stay true to his social and public role. The *bhatcars* are supervisors and this is their public role. The *bhatcars* visit their lands and orchards in person to oversee the cultivation and running of the enterprise. These visits are typically scheduled around sowing and harvests. It is essential for the *bhatcar* to inspect his lands, or the lands owned by his family. In the Goan socio-economic system, and as Devi recognized it, if the *bhatcar* was unable to perform this public role, the *bhatcar* faced an identity crisis: the *bhatcar*, then, was not really a *bhatcar*. Franjoão faces such an identity or existential crisis being a *ghor-zanvoim*, a house husband.⁷ As a house husband in the Fonseca household, he cannot publicly perform his role as a *bhatcar*, only to be told by his sister-in-law, the actual head of the household, that everything has been taken care off: “Don’t trouble yourself, Franjoão. Everything is in hand. I was there not three days ago,” says Soledade, Franjoão’s sister-in-law (Devi, *Monsoon* 30–36). The case of Franjoão and Bhatcar Dias provides a crucial contrast. While Franjoão was not allowed to publicly perform his bhatcarial duties by his sister-in-law, Bhatcar Dias in “The Arms of Venus” has no such problems. Bhatcar Dias supervises his field while a heavy monsoon shower threatens the newly sprouted rice saplings. He oversees the work of his *mundcars*, urging them to drain the fields. In so doing, he is *seen* by the servants overseeing the agrarian production. The *mundcars* can also engage in a conversation with their master about what they owe him, and if there is any charity that they can expect from their *bhatcar* (Devi, *Monsoon* 116).

The *bhatcars* need to feel valued and respected by their *mundcars*. Devi stresses that the public performance of the role of the *bhatcar* in being the *bhatcar* is the quotidian aspect of the system which keeps it as is. In other words, the *bhatcars* need recognition from their *mundcars*. Devi highlights this need for public recognition in *Tiatr*, where the *bhatcars* show up late as a way of asserting their status. They expect the front row seats to be reserved for them and even interrupt the theatrical performance to get their presence honored. The *bhatcars* also need their servants to perform everyday symbolic acts that maintain the *bhatcars*’ privileges. Thus, quotidian acts such as sitting on chairs in the *bhatcar*’s household creates problems as the *mundcars* tacitly refuse to recognize the *bhatcar* and acknowledge his prestige and privileges. The *mundcar*’s subtle resistance to these codes of honor

and expectations is the other side of the *bhatcar-mundcar* relations that infuse the history of master-servant relations with historical and sociological dynamism (Devi, *Monsoon* 47, 69).

The public role of the *bhatcar* is the primary site where affect plays a central role. The *bhatcars*, therefore, are always careful about how the *mundcars* perceive them. Especially in the context of the *bhatcars* facing economic hardships, they are acutely aware that the *mundcars* know about their financial problems, or any other happenings in their houses. To maintain their prestige in the village and among the *mundcars*, it is important that they *bhatcars* behave according to the high culture they claim as their own. Devi narrates a very revealing episode concerning Franjoão in the Fonseca household. Franjoão wishes to eat a ripe, juicy mango with his bare hands to the horror of his sisters-in-law. In the Fonseca household, Franjoão is told, mangoes are eaten with knives and forks. Franjoão is obviously not pleased. His wife, Teodolina explains that eating mangoes with cutlery is a way to keep up appearances. She says, "You know what the servants are like. Terrible gossips. Everyone would hear that we eat mangoes with our hands. We must keep our good name, don't you see?" (Devi, *Monsoon* 31).

For Devi, at the end of the day, the *bhatcars* are not heartless. They are capable of empathy and humanity. The mutual expectations and affective bonds allow *bhatcars* and *mundcars* to recognize each other's humanity, even if in rare and exceptional cases. Devi imagines the recognition of mutual humanity through the device of 'change of heart.' In "Job's Children," Devi describes two *bhatcars* who have a change of heart: Dona Lavínia, who feels sorry for a *mundcar* due to an illness, and the other, Dr. Amoncar, who educated as a doctor and exposed to the liberal ideas then wants to uplift the servant class and treat them as his equal. He is an enlightened *bhatcar*. The enlightened and modern *bhatcar* wants to feel kinship with the *mundcar* while still retaining an older, clientelist relationship with the *mundcar*. To better the lot of the *mundcars*, the enlightened *bhatcar* realizes that he needs the authority of his *bhatcar* location to influence the lives of the *mundcars*. The *bhatcar* encounters a *mundcar* steeped in tradition and superstition, and one who is not easily receptive to new ideas; the *mundcar*, in other words, lacks the consciousness to understand his subordination. In such a context, the *bhatcar*, Dr. Amoncar, feels that he has to take the lead to effect change and, at the same, time also change his *bhatcar* outlook to recognize the humanity of the *mundcars* (Devi, *Monsoon* 89).

Dr. Amoncar is indifferent to pleas of caste or class solidarity across religions, and admonishes Dona Lavínia, in "Job's Children," for her discriminatory attitude towards the *mundcars*. Dr. Amoncar protests, "You're wrong, Dona Lavínia. These people [*mundcars*] aren't riffraff, and you'd do well not to confuse dignity with

arrogance!" It is ironic to note that though Dr. Amoncar believes in radical equality, he still thinks that the *mundcars* are backward, due to their superstitions. He seeks to solve the project of abject poverty and backwardness of the *mundcars* through a top-down approach. As a member of the *bhatcar* class, Dr. Amoncar arrogates to himself the burden of 'civilizing' the *mundcars*. Dr. Amoncar does not realize, although Devi does, that the power still rests with the *bhatcars* through this top-down approach. Dr. Amoncar is still the benevolent *bhatcar* even if he claims, or tries to act, otherwise (Devi, *Monsoon* 91–92).

Nonetheless, Devi suggests that the indifference of the *bhatcar* class can give away to fellowship and community by the recognition of common humanity. Such a humanity is realized especially in times of crisis wherein a *bhatcar* is moved by compassion and acts in a benevolent manner. In sickness, the expectation from the servant is that the *bhatcar* will help out—and in "Job's Children," Devi describes a situation where the stony heart of a mistress softens in front of a suffering *mundcar*. The community that Devi has in mind is one forged by the annihilation of caste and class boundaries. Dona Lavínia, who displays remarkable insensitivity and indifference to the health crisis of her *mundcars* throughout "Job's Children" has a change of heart at the end of the story. In the story, one of the *mundcars* suffers from life-threatening tuberculosis. Dona Lavínia's change of heart coupled with the pathos of the *mundcars* of the village create bonds of community. In Devi's words, "Angelina, Carminha, Savitri [the *mundcars*] and Dona Lavínia wept as if there, before such pain, they were equal, no longer divided by caste until their dying day" (Devi, *Monsoon* 97).

BHATCARS AND MUNDCARS: A FEW GENERALIZATIONS

Devi's *mundcars* and *bhatcars* are dependent on each other. Economic and affective bonds tie them together in a system not based solely on their economic relationships. Devi's *mundcars* aspire for education and social mobility, for which they have to depend, more often than not, on the *bhatcars* and the cultural capital that the *bhatcars* possess. The aspiration for social mobility through education is gendered, as by and large, upward mobility was tied to the success of the eldest male child in the *mundcar*'s family. For these reasons, the *mundcar*'s aspirations are never easily fulfilled, so the *mundcars* resort to subtle and everyday acts of resistance by not recognizing the honorable position, for instance, of the *bhatcars*. Devi's *bhatcars*, by contrast, remain *bhatcars* even if they are poor. They remain as *bhatcars* because of birth. Nonetheless, they depend on the *mundcars* to recognize them as *bhatcars* on an everyday basis. Devi's *bhatcars* gain this recognition from their *mundcar* while discharging their public role as supervisors and owners. In the

end, the *bhatcars* and *mundcars* can forge a common community, the onus though as Devi suggests, lies with the *bhatcars* in recognizing the common humanity of the servant class, especially in recognizing that the *mundcars* dream of social mobility and desire to better their lot.

The basis of the master-servant relations in Goa, and consequently its representation in literature, is economic, social, and affective. Fertile lands had to be tilled for the rice crop, the staple in Goa; fertile orchards, largely coconut and mango, had to be tended to as these two were the main cash crops of Goa. Rice cultivation and care of coconut and mango plantations are labor-intensive activities, even in this technologically advanced day and age. These economic activities need labor the whole year round and led to an economy where the vast majority were merely laborers. Those who owned the land seldom worked on it. Rather than view the subaltern sections apart from the elite sections, a reading of Goan literature, as Devi's writing suggests, demands scholarly innovation to describe a history of two unequal sections of society contributing unequally to make Goan culture and literature. These affective and economic bonds are not just a subject of representation or literary description but are lived experiences. These lived experiences are recorded in the ownership of land, the rise and fall of agrarian productivity, who supplied labor, and who writes literature.

The affective bonds between masters and servants are harder to capture as they are mostly unspoken expectations. Devi's writings, and other such literary productions, help in understanding these unwritten codes. Devi perhaps is more direct about the operation of affective bonds than other writers of Goan literature, in Portuguese, Marathi, or Konkani. Devi uses the interiority of her characters to reflect on how affect exists in a master-servant relationship. For Devi, this interiority is not just a static experience but a change of heart—one where an individual realizes the ill-effects of a socio-economic system.

Our observations of the actions and thoughts of the *bhatcars* and *mundcars*, which Devi so lovingly describes, suggest that Goan literature emerges out of the master-servant relations. One can assert that Goan literature takes its inspiration from processes of labor, caste, and class relations in an agrarian economy and way of life. In Devi's case, literature tries to subvert this system in favor of a more humane community. It also makes a sincere effort to understand the tangible and intangible constituent parts of the system that lead to the persistence of that very system.

Notes

1. I have also dealt with this theme previously, see Menezes.
2. D'Souza; Robert S. Newman, "Goa: The Transformation of an Indian Region"; see also Ifeka who is the earliest to provide a formal statement urging scholars to shift methodologically to the "Goa Indica" frame; R. S. Newman "Konkani Mai"; Robert S. Newman, *Goan Anthropology: Mothers, Miracles and Mythology*; Robert S. Newman, *Goan Anthropology: Festivals, Films and Fish* are works that can be considered to substantiate Ifeka's argument by attempting to demonstrate the "Indianness" of Goa.
3. In this context, one can also look at a useful study of the Comunidade system in Goa from the late eighteenth century (Dias).
4. Recent writings on slavery in South Asia and the wider Indian Ocean World can also be read alongside works on agrarian servitude and forms of unfree labor (see Chatterjee and Eaton; Campbell; Machado).
5. See also Breman, "The Hali System in South Gujarat". It is interesting to note that Bremen's doctoral dissertation in Dutch, preceding his publications in English, was titled, "*Meester en Knechts: Een Onderzoek naar de Sociale Veranderingen in de Betrekkingen tussen Landheren en Landarbeiders in Zuid Gujarat*," or "Master and Servants: An Inquiry into the Social Changes in the Relations between Landlords and Farm Workers in South Gujarat."
6. Being 'well-born but poor' in a high caste appears to be an issue of internal class differentiation. Members of a particular high caste may use education, profession, manners or etiquette, and culture to distinguish themselves internally. Rowena Robinson's description of high and low class Chardos in a fictitiously named village of Sontosgaon is instructive here. She asserts that the internal class distinctions are not economic *per se* but one of "status distinction." In Sontosgaon, there were high and low class Chardos, the latter until recently indistinguishable from the Sudras. In other words, both high class Chardos, who were more educated, wealthier, landowners, and indulged in high culture, and low class Chardos, who worked with their hands, did not own land, and did not indulge in sophistication, were nonetheless Chardos. Once the low class Chardos of Sontosgaon gained education, jobs outside the village, stopped practicing agriculture, and became wealthy they quickly adopted the manners and culture of the high class Chardos to distinguish themselves from the Sudra, the other agrarian labor caste, of the village. The low class Chardos always retained a sense of superiority even if they were laboring in the fields, effectively as *mundcars*, of their high class fraters (see Robinson 80–81).
7. A house husband is a man who takes the residence of his wife's natal home immediately after marriage. He relinquishes his right to bequeath his name to the children resulting out of the marriage. Effectively, all children inherit the mother's or the father-in-law's name and as a consequence, the estate is inherited through the paternal line of the father-in-law, not the father.

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