



I was unaware
Of their technique
To sniff people’s caste

One day, visiting a friend’s house
Encountered his uncle,
Lounging on the balcão
And we began conversing

“Wagh? You’re one of us,”
Uncle smirked.
I felt a pang of anxiety.

Yet, he sought absolute certainty.
So he inquired,
“The Kamat Waghs of Ribandar, kin to you?”

“No,” I replied.

“Hailing from Karwar?”

“No, I’m from Goa.”



“Indeed? Which part?”

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“From Dongri? Perhaps the Mahajans of the Rama temple?”

“No. Our goddess is Sati^[1].”

Still unable to deduce,

He probed once more.

“Who is your family deity?”

“Shivnath,” I offered.

“From Shiroda?”

“Yes.”

“So...so you are not a GSB.”

“No, uncle, we are Bhandaris.”

A chuckle escaped him.

“Don’t take offense! I asked out of curiosity.

We renounce caste.

Come, have tea.

Caste system has marred Goa.

Who is Baman? Who is Shudra? Who cares?

These divisions hold no meaning.

We should be secular.

We must have a casteless society, you know?”

Uncle waited, anticipation in the air,

I merely nodded

Sipping tea

My gaze, firm on his sacred thread’s descent

Translated by Kaustubh Naik. Illustration by Siddhesh Gautam.

[1] Not to be confused with the practice of Sati. Sati (with a retroflex) is worshiped across

southern Konkan and is believed to be a goddess that writes the destiny of newborns on the night of their birth.

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