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Encountering Kali in the Margins, at the Centre, in the West by Rachell Fell McDermott;
Jeffrey Kirpal

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Encountering Kali in the Margins, at the Centre, in the West,

edited by Rachell Fell McDermott and
Jeffrey Kirpal;

University of California Press,

Berkeley, 2003;

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SUKALPA BHATTACHARJEE

Post-colonial studies for last two decades have focused on notions of hybridity and the voice of the marginalised. Re-emergence of the coloniser-colonised relationship in an era of globalisation has now fostered the creation of a reverse moment of dehybridisation, provincialisation and ontologised differences that transcodes and overcodes the East in the global supermarket.¹ The volume under discussion presents this dehybridisation of Kali by means of deciphering the transcoded messages that has come of age as a part of 'recognised western culture' in the form of convergences such as 'Goddess Kali Lunch Boxes', 'Tantric sex weekends' and in the form of divergence as for example, in television serials like *Xena, Warrior Princess* evoking protests from scholars of Hindu tradition. Although the editors see a cross-fertilisation of the idea of Kali, it sounds more like an a priori convergence of oriental difference with the west in futuristic semantic of convergence. The convergence assumes 'nature' in the form of essentialisation and 'culture' in the form of one's organic and immutable givenness that need to be preserved against the chaos of cross-hatching, promiscuous sharing, and mixing. Such an idea of convergence goes along with the preservation of an absolute territory of dominance based upon strict and universal specificity of the superior from the weaker in a global clash of civilisations.

Cross-cultural understanding at this moment of clash is a tool for establishing what Marx had characterised as a social relation between the fetishised form of value and the world of commodity² in which Kali appears as a powerful popular imagery. Such a popular imagery requires a distinction between the free play of creative imagination of Kali from the play of

predication of tantric, mystic and terrorist and so on established through the marketisation of tradition. A circulation of Kali image in the global supermarket requires the temporal a priori of its cosmopolitan bracketing that suppresses its otherness and gives it a standardised discursive label of diasporic, feminist, new age and so on in the idiom of post-pluralist western cultural studies. What is ironical in this whole project of displaying the locations of Kali in the margins, at the centre and in the west is not a politics of location, as Homi Bhabha would have called it; but a politics of a determinate centring that stands out over and against its own indigenous cultural location. Such a configured Kali produces simulacra through its global presence that exists as an analogy or supplement of its own location, a floating signifier, a false other. What stands in contrast to this mirror-play of location now arises only after representation that does not stand in contrast to its ontology, rather it appears to govern its own image. The editors draw 'a kind of radical response to those many limit-situations of human experience' in such simulacral forms of Kali 'encountered' by an equally diverse stock of people. Such multiplied visions of Kali break down into noumena that allow a mirror play of locations in order to reproduce the cross-cultural dehybridisation of representations: a reverse encounter with Kali from the standard and symptomatically global position of 'limits of reason'. Such an encounter is reverse as it reverts Kali to a repristinisation, only after it is represented through the concrete 'reflecting religion'. Such an encounter is reverse as it happens only after the east has recuperated itself from being Europe's other by locating a space for itself. Ironically enough such a space of one's own is now open to a mirror play in the dialogic discourse of reason and truth and thereby allowing the west to encounter it as an other in an exchange where Kali as a cultural symbol exchanges its own space with the space of cultural market provided by the west.

How does such an exchange take place? As Derrida contends prosthetics as the mode of othering,³ the western discourse of Kali takes it in all its manifest forms without exception. This establishes the

exceptional and extraordinary paradigm of symbolic reality of Kali that presents itself here and now so that the search for various interpretations and significations go on. This is precisely an act of historicisation of Kali through its forms of representation that creates its own narrative of meaning and truth. Such historicisation of Kali foregrounds a possibility of adding value to its already existing exterior with a discourse derived from some of its cultural roots. This is a kind of historicisation with a strategy of de-territorialisation.⁴ This mode of western historicisation of Kali overcomes the cultural distance by an as-if-true and authentic, euphemistically called, 'cross-cultural understanding' of those derivative discourses so that she comes from the margin to the centre and to the west. The volume brings Kali within its textual horizon, the limits of which are unwittingly drawn around a radical mixing of her femininity with the religiosity of one who is possessed with the goddess Kali, a mimetic representation of the core western cultural discourse of comparative religion, an analogical discourse that effaces the trace of the other.⁵

Kali's Transition

The essays in the volume are divided in two sections, namely, "Kali in the texts and contexts of South Asia" and "Kali in Western Settings, Western Discourses", creating a clear backdrop for an east-west encounter. Kali as the mother goddess appears as a source of visible and invisible character of post-colonial fantasy presented through how the goddess, the mother signifier is venerated across spaces of ritual and war ranging from Kalighat to Varanasi to the LTTE-dominated north-eastern Sri Lanka. Kali's existence is made ontologically contingent upon the pristine form of 'tests' that Kali signifies in order to break through the father-daughter and husband-wife relationship. Such an ontology of Kali gets multiplied in the ideological changes of Kali: from a tantric goddess to her vaishnavite incarnation in Kalighat; from a demon destructive tantric icon to an apologetic Kali ashamed of transgression of the patriarchal order; from a stereotypical goddess of war and terror to a goddess with oracular powers in healing the victims of state repression; from a fierce, transgressive aghora goddess to a subject of 'participant observation' in Varanasi (Banaras). In fact, the

presence of Kali is narrativised to produce continuity between discrete notions of Kali featured between Kalighat and Varanasi on the one hand and the west on the other. In the light of western enlightenment and canons of representing the other in western anthropology, Kali is looked upon as mystic and uncanny to the extent that her 'image' simultaneously detaches itself from the root and re-attaches itself to the dehybridised predicates of her western representation. It is only after the representation of Kali in a concrete modality of femininity and religiosity, that there is a return to the roots, tantric, vaishnavite and aghora and so on. This is how a represented Kali as a simulacra of her own attributes 'encounters' her own roots and in the process gets engaged in a double movement of detachment and attachment to the logos, to its mythic and puranic origins. This return to roots re-employs selective aspects of the antecedent Oriental discourse of Kali as it is transmitted to the west.⁶

This double movement of Kali is a movement from Kali as a pre-capitalist symbol to market-determined mythologisation of Kali icon on the one hand and a movement from a patricidal maternal presence to carnage of the mother herself in the symbolic exchange between the east and the west on the other. The volume celebrates the maternal figure of Kali of the east to enact the existence of the maternal as the other within the self-representation of the west, while it re-enacts the more fundamental matricide⁷ that could be deciphered within the self-representation of eastern cultures. This movement from patricide to matricide through self-representation of a perspective constitutes Kali as a performative medium through which Kali, a given a priori, is reflected upon. This move to constitute Kali by a reflective discourse assumes that Kali, constituted by the reflective discourse is also determined by that discourse and thereby conflates constitution of Kali with Shakti, the agency of Kali. It presumes that beyond the symbolic exchange of the maternal figure of the goddess, Kali is the way it is constituted. In a paper entitled, 'Margins at the Centre' (Chapter 11), Sarah Caldwell states about the goddess Bhagavati,

Dramatic possession performances, still an important part of South Indian goddess worship clearly developed from these ancient practices, which stressed the passionate and violent nature of

supernatural energy. This power,⁸ because it inherited in the physical landscape as well as in the bodies of women, was essential for the nourishment of life and society and yet always threatened to get out of control, destroying life (p 254).

This representation also transcodes Kali as "a paradoxical nature embracing all opposites" (p 139) that is the ground realised as the truth of its ultimate signification. In her western incarnation on the internet as *Tantra*: The magazine or the goddess of neo-tantra, she is the theoretical, cultural and political rhizome of the west's new understanding of the east in terms of key elements of sexuality, healing, faith and so on. These are the received meanings of Kali in mainstream western: cultural appropriation of Kali, beyond which her agency is merely 'subaltern'. The post-colonial critique of western appropriation of Kali gets caught in this plural representation of Kali: both traditional Kali and the Kali in the western setting are two exclusivities, assigned from a position of performativity. This is in contrast to an archaic and ancient position of Kali being the primal goddess of creation and destruction. Such a contrast between the performative and primal finds its reflective justification in constructing immanence of Kali in mainstream representations of Kali in the language of her subjects to whom she stands in a relationship of mother.⁸ This is a partitioning of Kali, the so-called 'India's darkest heart' into a cult of castration complex, the 'dark side of femininity and sexuality'. This is also a celebration of historicity distilled through devotion beyond the phallic function of her representation. Isn't it the colonial and post-colonial historicity of an affinity and dislocation to a cult that is transcoded in western representation of the fierce and the sublime in Kali? The volume gives an answer by affirming the notion of Kali as a correspondence between the icon and the devotee that erases traces of its own representation in a complex hermeneutic of the western culture industry. Kali picks out the symbols in the figures of our lives that constitutes the reflection and experience of Kali in the religious life. This is a transformation of Kali into a figure for an interpretive perspective on life that changes the referents and sources of religious discourse into symbols of contemporary concerns, threats and wishes of a community.⁹ How is such an interpretive

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community constituted with reference to the renewed understanding of Kali?

Market in Kali

This requires prosthesis of Kali, reconstructed and redeemed from the exceptionalist oriental discourse and the objectivistic and phantasmic western discourse of anxiety, dread and fear around the symbolic universe of Kali. This is a prosthetic Kali supplementing the lacks and absences imagined in her. The prosthesis merely draws elements of devotion in order to serenade a divine image (as available in Ram Proshad's songs) along with a blend of her powers that include representation and interpretation of her feminine self. This is a 'conceptual blending' between diverse, symbolic and unconscious elements that are discretely available in the broad field of western culture industry. Further it is an existential analytic of those of her traits that suits images in the market. Images of Kali embody and disclose her being in a peculiar way, the presentation is affective and not theoretical. It is grounded in the western consciousness of an other goddess and projected in the world.¹⁰ Here, Kali is one among other fetishes and the interpretation that it receives constitutes the contemporaneity of the figure of Kali. Historicity in the form of contemporary constitution of western religious positivism and pluralism invokes that "there is always the possibility of relating things differently" as Lyotard would have explained the contemporary paganism of western cultural discourse. The pagan is both a principle of change, revision, variation, possibly revolution and a principle of tradition, social unity, belonging and cultural history.¹¹ Kali as a pagan element borrowed from the eastern culture transgresses the sexuality and the body and relays herself in the ruse of something that is not 'classical', totally undetermined by anything prior. This rise of neo-paganism in the west and imaging Kali as transgressive of the 'classical' eastern culture share historically constituted notions of de-territorialising each other. In consonance with this grafting of Kali's body as the pagan goddess upon the shibboleths of western culture, she appears in the male cycle of symbols as 'pure mother' or as 'psycho-physiological response to a symbolically incestuous dilemma' (p 207). She is revered for the western scheme of overcoming the dilemmas of incest, horror

of sexualised femininity and the fantasy of matricide. Kali reverses the fundamental matricide of western patriarchy by offering an apology to the male world in her tongue in cheek held-in-shame gesture. Yet, her 'darkness' images more than an abject body of the mother in shame, simultaneously ashamed of her symbolic patricide and embodying the shame of the matricide that the society commits on the body of the mother. She is discovered as different in her body as abject and yet energetic, as mere touching the body by the pilgrim gives a sensual and sexual 'bolt of electricity', as Rachel Fell Macdermott quotes from a poem written on Kali (p 278, n 24). But the problem is that Kali as different and a symbol of self-overcoming of the west is exchanged in the economy of gratification that cannot be accommodated within the genealogical and historical constitution of power of the west. Hence within the limits of reason, she could only be projected as virtual, hardwired and generative, both outside the genealogical constitution of history and economy of desire, with which the western media and the market could identify itself.¹² This is not an identification of Kali with the market but a reverse identification of existing consumerist traits with Kali that turns itself into an object of pleasure for the abject body of Kali. As a ploy and device of identification, the west turns Kali's image into a virtual figure that seeks the west in her drive for sexuality and pleasure. But this is a contrast with the real, historical and cultural figure of Kali. As the newest fantasy, Kali's seeking of the west merges the sacred and the market, the dread and the pleasure, the devotion and the passion, a synaesthesia that finds its signification in the difference of perceiving Kali between the east and the west. Devotion and sexuality is mutable and interchangeable into each other, as the signifier Kali, Laxmi and other Indian gods and goddesses currently adorn the undergarments made for men and women in the US and Europe. The rapacious and raunchy consumerist signification of garments, ironically enough is a reproduction of female labour on the bodies of the wearers.¹³ In such representations of body embodying the body of the goddess blur the line between the consumer and the consumed as both are parts of an imaging of extended reproduction of their images. In consonance with this strategy of foregrounding the female sexuality, a spectral Kali embodying all her transmuted qualities

adorned by devotees is situated in their social and cultural contexts across the globe. Reproduction of Kali's sexuality in the west is therefore neutralised in the production of devotion in the east making the binary opposites of the market and the margin grafted onto each other in a cross-cultural transaction. The volume concurs this imagination of Kali by figuring her as an act of 'presencing' or as being there in pre-symbolic space of devotee's knowledge.

Gothic in the Margins

The volume engages itself in substituting the centrality of Kali by the marginality of her devotees and projects Kali as reconstructing the diminished world of her devotees. This is a Gothic recreation of Kali by the socially marginalised and the distressed.¹⁴ The essay on domestication of the goddess by the vaishnavite cult (Chapter 3) presents the transformation of the control of the Kalighat temple from one lineage to another that had simultaneously affected the figure of the goddess. Kali herself acts as a therapeutic symbol of being mellowed down, a quality that comes through the change of priestly order. Contrastingly, Mayi as the devotee possessed by Kali in Varanasi presents an autonomous role of the mother. Mayi, being the mother of the goddess Kali, in Roxanne Kamayani Gupta's interpretation has sacrificed herself for her child. Mayi's unbecoming of a normal woman in her possessed state is substituted by her Gothic invocation of mother-daughter relationship in Kali. Quite differently, the tortured bodies of the LTTE fighters become the site for Kali's oracular healing power, an investment of power in the subjugated and the victims that comes through mediations by a devotee (Chapter 5). In a different way, the colonial imagination of Kali as the goddess of the underworld criminal or revolutionary activities compounded with the Victorian imagination of virile in the 'untamed savagery, sexuality and animal violence' (p 182) embodied in the colonised is an 'exotic other' untamable and uncontrollable. Kali as the goddess of the colonised appears as the suppressed desire for liberation and release of social energy of the colonised which the colonisers are afraid of. Here Kali acts as a Gothic for the colonised, while she appears as the symbol of guilt to the coloniser displaced onto the imagination of the virile. In a sense, while devotees reconstitute their

world through the Gothic powers of Kali, the power of the coloniser deflects the Gothic onto a margin of their subjects. The way devotees can make use of the Gothic powers of Kali, the coloniser-colonised relationship turns it into a mimetic image of the relationship. But this colonial mimesis cannot fully subvert Kali's power as they stand in a relationship of a displaced subject of agony of the colonised. The transformation of Kali from Gothic imaginary of the devotee to instrumental relationship of power goes on through the self-other relationship historicised in social and cultural identities at various locations.

As a diasporic goddess of people of Indian origin in the Caribbean islands, she is an integral part of a totality of transformed pantheon of Hindu gods and goddesses. The essay entitled, 'Doing the Mother's Caribbean Work' (Chapter 10) reflects upon the delicate interrelationship between 'deotas' and 'mata' and traces the metaphysical conceptualisation of 'Shakti as the goddess of bondage as well as liberation. Although the notions of all these gods and goddesses undergo some semantic transformation because of migration of the communities from their place of origin, yet they are able to continue the basic belief structure and the sacredness attached to such belief is never abandoned. Therefore the instrumentality of the colonial imagination of Kali is transformed into pristine imagery of Shakti recollected through the travails of migration and displacement. As the goddess of the displaced, Kali is not displaced from her origin, representing cultural and unconscious resistance to displacement by the colonisers in the Caribbean. In a postcolonial rediscovery of origins, migration reveals the otherwise suppressed divinity of the goddess Kali tampered by several inquisitions of cultural and historical factors and actors, whereby her divine stature is transformed into the closure of devotee's imagination of her own roots. The volume builds up the social identity of the devotee as an essentialising marginalised identity, tortured or colonised. This promotes a backward movement of those local roots of Kali and resists a new and different conceptualisation of Kali. This is a neo-revivalist strategy of colonial power to regress the migrant and the hybrid communities into the pristine past, undifferentiated from the present. This de-differentiation is carried out in the name of land, territory and authenticity, another

form of dehybridisation as mentioned in the beginning of this essay.

Analytical Silences

The volume is silent about the meeting of neo-Paganism of the west and the neo-revivalism of the east in an era of globalisation. An absence of analysis of new forms of commodification and making of global capital out of cultural symbols makes it difficult for the reader to understand why Kali is marketed. That marketing of Kali is more than what meets the sensual and the visual and that it has a metaphysical component of generating cultural vitality by overcoming the patriarchal lack of the west is just not mentioned in the volume. Another important lacunae lies in contextualising Kali studies within the rubric of the post-colonial and the post-modern understanding of religion as reflected and attempted at, in recent writings of Indian philosophy and religion, by scholars like J N Mohanty or Bimal Krishna Matilal.¹⁵ Especially the reversal of the post-colonial critique of western reason by an act of de-differentiation and dehybridisation in the neo-colonial appropriation of the third world is not presented from a critical standpoint. The volume remains one-sided in presenting the prosthesis of Kali by the west along with the typical anthropological perspective on the belief structure of Kali cult as practised in the east. In both cases the west emerges as the observer and the consumer-devotee that helps establish a large global panopticon, that could be called a reproduction of colonial knowledge relationship within 'neo-liberal' academic discourses. The metaphor of encounter does not fully grasp the hidden dominance of western representation of Kali in which it produces the cultural Kali of the east as a simulacrum. The so-called cross-cultural understanding of Kali from a western point of view misses the structure of intrinsic belief that is culturally rooted in the east, as it escapes naturalising moves¹⁶ of western representation. The volume very subtly also produces a difference between the global reception of Kali with its local content making a way for blending the Kali stereotypes of the east and the west. The volume accords a silent consent to the cultural logic of postmodernism by the peculiarity of cross-cultural appropriation of the third world or the east, whereby the agency of the east is made a surrogate essence to the logic of the market of images.¹⁷ Where do we go from

this abyss of representation is an open question.

However, the volume has indeed succeeded in its "collaboration between many peoples across many shores" as claimed by one of the editors, in representing "the goddess's innumerable ritual, iconographic, and mythological forms: street art, poetry and song, iconic image, hagiographic text" (p xiii), which create a context for Kali Studies and situate it within the divergent genres of postcolonial cultural studies. [27]

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Notes

- 1 Mark Driscoll, 'Reverse Postcoloniality', *Social Text*, 22:1 (2004), 59-84.
- 2 Cf Ibid, note 8, where Driscoll quotes Marx from an appendix to the first version of Capital I called "The Value Form," where he writes that the fetishising form of value allows each commodity to stand in social relation to the "world of commodities.... As a commodity it is a citizen of this world".
- 3 Jacques Derrida, *Monolingualism of the Other; or, The Prosthesis of Origin*, translated by Patrick Mensah, Stanford, California, Stanford University Press, 1998, p 40, where he comments, "We only speak one language... since it returns to the other, it exists asymmetrically, always for the other, from the other, kept by the other."
- 4 Historicisation involves an investment of meaning in practices of transforming the subjects of history into an artefact of representation. Althusser considered such move as transcending the limits of subject-object relationship. See, Louis Althusser, *The Humanist Controversy and Other Writings*, edited by Francois Matheron; translated by G M Goshgarian, Verso, London and New York, 2003, pp 256-57. Deterritorialisation means an act of turning the representation into something virtual, which is reverted back to the original. See, Alain Badiou, *Deleuze: The Clamour of Being*, translated by Lousie Burchill, University of Minnesota Press, Minnesota, 1999, pp 82-91. Deterritorialisation of Kali as part of a symbolic practice of transforming her into a 'form' invested with a virtual existence beyond its cultural origins is reverted as an icon transcendent of culturally given meanings.
- 5 Jacques Derrida argued that the trace of the other is effaced between the analogy of God as 'wholly other' and God as 'every other'. The infinite alterity of God that can't be reduced to singularity of religious shibboleths. See Derrida, *The Gift of Death*, translated by David Willis, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1995, pp 77-78, n 6.
- 6 Encounter is sought to be understood within recourse to experience itself, which is a passage to the other that is irreducible to the experience. See, Jacques Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, translated by Alan Bass, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1978, p 83.
- 7 In *Speculum*, Irigaray, the feminist philosopher talks about the constitutive absence of the

- female from the interior of the patriarchal language, which she calls matricide. According to her, maternal presence into language is always through the death of the mother. See, Luce Irigaray, *Speculum of the Other Woman*, translated by Gillian C Gill Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985.
- 8 Immanence is constituted by language in its relationship with the other. See, Derrida, *Monolingualism*, op cit, p 4, where Derrida says "(Monolingualism) constitutes me, it dictates the ipseity of all things to me..." Derrida also says, "There is no maternity that does not appear subject to substitution, within the logic or threat of substitution", p 88.
 - 9 Jacques Derrida and Gianni Vattimo (eds), *Religion*, Stanford University Press, Stanford, 1998, pp 61-63, where Derrida argues that immanence of belief in an already pre-existing language constitutes the condition of *Mitsein* or *being-in-the-midst-of-other beings*.
 - 10 Aldo Gargani, 'Religious Experience as Event and Interpretation' in Derrida, *Religion*, op cit, pp 116-18.
 - 11 J F Lyotard, *Just Gaming*, University of Minnesota Press, Minnesota, 1985, pp 33-34, 40.
 - 12 Gayatri Chakraborty Spivak, *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason: Toward a History of the Vanishing Present*, Harvard University Press, Harvard, 1999, pp 14-15.
 - 13 J F Lyotard, "One of the Things at Stake in Women's Struggles" (translated by Deborah J Clarke, Winifred Woodhull and John Mowitt) in Andrew Benjamin (ed), *The Lyotard Reader*, Oxford and Cambridge, Mass: Blackwell, 1989, pp 111-22.
 - 14 For a discussion on Gothic art forms and the function of Gothic, see William Veeder, 'Ideology and Its Discontents or the Nurture of the Gothic or How Can a Text be Both Popular and Subversive' in Sukhbir Singh (ed), *Ideology and the American Novel*, B R Publishing Company, New Delhi, pp 1-19.
 - 15 For example, J N Mohanty, *Explorations in Philosophy*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, pp 75-82.
 - 16 Moves of naturalisation is conceived as picking out references from the external world for any idea or mental image. See, Satya P Mohanty, *Literary Theory and the Claims of History: Postmodernism, Objectivity, Multi-cultural Politics*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca, 1997.
 - 17 Ajit Choudhury, Dipankar Das and Anjan Chakraborty, *Margin of Margins: Profile of an Unrepentant Postcolonial Collaborator*, Anustup, Kolkata, 2000.

Goa: An 'Aurorised' Story

Goa: A Daughter's Story,

by Maria Aurora Couto;
Penguin Books, New Delhi, 2005;
pp 436, Rs 350, (pb).

TEOTONIO R DE SOUZA

Salman Rushdie's *The Moor's Last Sigh* (Vintage, 1994) depicts Aurora, as the last of the Gamas and a daughter of Camões, playing the perfect granddaughter to Epifânia da Gama, whom she wishes to murder. We are told that Epifânia had developed a healthy respect for the British, but her heart belonged to Portugal, as she dreamt of walking beside the Tagus, the Douro, sashaying through the streets of Lisbon on the arm of a grandee. Aurora's grandfather, Francisco da Gama, had fallen prey to Annie Besant's theosophy and propounded a theory of 'transformational fields of conscience', but his playing with Gama rays finished him off, after provoking cruel and satirical editorial comments in *The Hindu*. Those who are familiar with this "Aurorised" version of Rushdie's novel (do not miss Chapter 13 of the novel) will find in the present book, another Aurorised version, Chico's daughter and Alban Couto's wife, a soulful, or to use her

father's "alma"-discourse, a passionate and emotion-charged reconstruction of Goa. 'The Sunday Magazine' of *The Hindu* of April 4, 2004 had reviewed this book under the caption 'Apparent Divide, Actual Bridges', relating Goa to south Asia's macro-level processes, without leaving it isolated as a dazzling but inexplicable pendant on Asia's hippie and tourist routes. It should not surprise the reader if a large part of the book is devoted to the Goan musical tradition, which serves to link and also bind the Bhakti cult with Goan Christianity, Goan "kudds" with Bollywood, a lawyer-politician-freedom fighter of Orlim with a Souza lady born to a music merchant in Karachi and trained by an Italian maestro in Bombay and speaking English at home in a predominantly Portuguese influenced Salcete subculture. Even a rat frequented occasionally (p 270) the music classes of Father Philip Soares in the Dharwar parish of Aurora. Perhaps, he mistook the Goan music for the "laddus" of Lord Ganesha.

A New Approach

Couto follows neither the tourist brochure approach that goes little beyond describing the sun and sands of Goa, nor

does she take up the stance of the academic historian, who in this book will have to bear with absence of their preference for footnoted erudition. Aurora prefers rather to "imagine and interpret" the process of conversion, subversion and compromise (pp 240-49) to which the population and the land were subjected since its occupation by Afonso de Albuquerque in 1510. She prefers to build her "story of Goa" on the basis of her own choice of sources, giving the pride of place to family reminiscences and other kinds of oral traditions and F N Souza's canvases, but above all to the two major rivers of Goa. Maria Aurora believes that the "view from the river is dramatically different". This river-borne perspective would certainly make Herman Hesse's Siddhartha keen to come to Goa, even though Aurora does not extend her view to the Buddhist or any other phase of pre-Portuguese Goa. Unlike Rushdie's Epifânia, his Aurora's grandmother, here we find an Aurora who reveals a sound respect for the Portuguese, but whose heart belongs to a greater India. The Portuguese get almost off the hook of most academic historians: they are presented as non-aggressive as a rule and without delusions of superiority. We are told that their coercion did not mean violence against human person, but only the violation of right to practise Hinduism, or that the citizenship granted to Goans was not matched with the right to highest positions of power, particularly in the church hierarchy and during the dictatorship of Salazar.

I cannot but feel deep empathy for the exercise performed by Maria Aurora Couto. My own *Goa to Me* (Concept Publishers, Delhi, 1994) was a somewhat similar exercise of weaving the history of Goa with my own lived experience of situations of anguish and opportunities, not very different from what Couto and most other sons and daughters of Goa have gone through at different periods and contexts of Goa's history. I see *Goa - A Daughter's Story* as yet another worthy attempt to piece together one's own lived experience with the help of the life-performances of many others, at all levels of the Goan community, whose common umbilical bond with Goa makes them all, individually and collectively, the makers of Goan history. Couto does not hide her belief in the role of the elite, but also presents history in tune with Pareto's "cemetery of elite". The book seems to have provided an opportunity for catharsis by seeking to unveil the main causes of