



# The AALITRA Review

## A JOURNAL OF LITERARY TRANSLATION

### No. 3, May 2011

Website: <http://home.vicnet.net.au/~aalitra/>

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To cite this Article:

Paul Melo e Castro, "Job's Children ("Os Filhos de Job")  
by Vimala Devi", *The AALITRA Review: A Journal of Literary  
Translation*, No.3 (Melbourne: Monash University, 2011),  
pp.20-35.

*Published by*  
MONASH UNIVERSITY

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# Job's Children (“Os Filhos de Job”) by Vimala Devi

TRANSLATED BY PAUL MELO e CASTRO

Vimala Devi is the *nom-de-plume* of the Goan writer Teresa de Almeida. Born in 1932, in the then Portuguese colony of Goa, Devi left for Lisbon in 1958. There, over the course of the 1960s and early 1970s, under her pseudonym, she published a series of works related to her native land, which in 1961 had been liberated from colonial rule after invasion by the Indian army. Devi released a volume of poetry entitled *Súria* in 1962 and then, in 1963, a book of short stories entitled *Monção*. The latter collection, from which “Job’s Children” is drawn, is one of the most complete literary depictions we have of Goa at the tail end of the colonial period, a society caught between tradition and change, its population crosshatched by differences of language, religion, caste and class. In 1972, together with her husband Manuel de Seabra, Devi published *A Literatura Indo-Portuguesa*, two volumes of criticism and anthology crucial to anyone today taking an interest in Lusophone Goan writing.

“Job’s Children”, translated here, is drawn from *Monção*. I have chosen “Job’s Children” as the story features several themes that run through Devi’s short narratives. The plot revolves around a poor community of fishermen and their struggle to wrest a living from the sea. In line with the other stories in *Monção* that deal with the Goan subaltern, “Job’s Children” shows the constricted lives of those at the very bottom of Goan society, their entrapment within tradition and superstitious beliefs, yet also their courage, integrity and tremendous class solidarity across creeds, an important point in a Goa too often depicted, particularly in colonial discourse, as inexorably split between Catholics and Hindus. “Job’s Children” touches on the social tension between upper and lower castes, not expressed as outright revolt, but discernible in everyday forms of verbal resistance, the importance of which Partha Chatterjee, amongst others, has highlighted in the subcontinental context of rigid social hierarchies. This class/caste antagonism, perhaps more than any other dispute, would come to dominate Goan politics in the immediate post-liberation period in which “Os Filhos de Job” was written. A recurrent feature of Devi’s stories is the sensitive depiction of the hypotaxis in traditional Goan society of the lives of women to those of men, particularly amongst the lower orders. Though in “Job’s Children” the subordination of women does not take the overtly oppressive or exploitative form it does in other stories, the last scene leaves the reader in no doubt as to who, in the end, will bear the brunt of the suffering that the old fisherman’s illness will necessarily cause.

Common stereotyping would see Portuguese as a wordy language and English as more direct and to the point. This clichéd certainty could not be any less the case than with Devi, whose deceptively simple, pared-down style is fully evidenced in the opening paragraph of the story. The challenge, in rendering her work into English, is to match the economy and accuracy of her expression. Though my version is slighter longer than the original, I have, I hope, kept explication to the barest minimum. As in much postcolonial writing, and particularly the postcolonial short story, where lexical choice can suggest place with the necessary concision, Devi at times uses words and expressions drawn from the language native to the society she is depicting. In the case of Goa, this is Konkani, in which such figures as depicted in the story would certainly have expressed themselves, particularly given that all but the two Brahmins are described as speaking no Portuguese. I have more or less followed the author’s lead in dealing with these items of vocabulary. Sometimes these are directly glossed in the text by the narratorial voice, an option no doubt motivated by the site of original publication being Lisbon as opposed to Goa. At other times no explanation is given. In the cases where the vocable indicates a pan-Indian referent (such as the beedi) I have used the word most commonly found

in English, trusting that such terms have entered the international lexis of the Anglosphere. A short glossary explaining and specifically Goan vocabulary follows the story.

The translation of Portuguese-language works takes on a particular importance in the context of today's Goa. As in other decolonised spaces where the colonial language has been discarded, knowledge of the former colonial tongue has declined vertiginously in recent decades. Today's generation of Goans, even authors and those interested in literature, are often unaware that writers in Portuguese such as Devi exist and have certainly seldom read any of her stories, which in any case were never published in Goa and are long out of print in Portugal. It is my hope that this translation will be a small contribution to opening up this rich patrimony to a new readership.

*This translation was completed as part of an Early Career Fellowship from the Leverhulme Trust, whose support I acknowledge and appreciate.*

### **Os Filhos de Job**

by Vimala Devi (1963)

#### **I**

Se fosse dado a Bostião escolher entre o mar alto e o rio, optaria por este sem hesitação. Todas as madrugadas, na canoa, remando penosamente, ia até às estacas onde prendia as redes. Mas pesca de rio é pesca miúda, não rende. Não podia ficar assim, à mercê da sorte. Ganhar apenas para as despesas do dia não lhe bastava. A vida não tem piedade dos fracos. Nem a vida, nem os homens. Isso era lição velha, que o tempo ensinava cruelmente. Por isso, todos os anos, na época das cavalas, com os outros, afoitava-se ao largo, apesar dos anos e de muita canseira de corpo.

“Deixa-te estar em casa, homem. Tu já não agentas os rigores do mar”, dizia-lhe a mulher.

Era verdade. O seu corpo, magro, gasto por mais de dez lustres de lida fera, já fraquejava, já cedia ao esforço. Mas insistia, dando coragem por forças:

“Não te rales, Angelina! Bem sabes que não é por gosto. Noutros tempos ainda havia o isco da aventura... O mar é tentação para gente nova, mas para velhos como eu já não tem engodos.”

Depois da monção, quando os grandes cardumes começavam a aparecer, todos os dias esta cena se repetia. E todos os dias terminava com lágrimas e rogos.

“Pai, não vá... Fique-se pelo rio, pai!

### **Os Filhos de Job**

by Vimala Devi (1963)

#### **I**

Given a choice between the river and the open sea, Bostião would pick the former with no hesitation. At dawn each day, he would go forth in his canoe, rowing laboriously out to the stakes where he strung his nets. But river fish are puny, and give no profit. He could not go on at the mercy of chance; barely covering his daily expenses would no longer do. Life shows no mercy to the weak. Neither life, nor our fellow men. It was an old lesson, which time imparted pitilessly. As a result, each year, when the mackerel returned, he braved the open sea with the others, despite his age and the great weariness of his body.

“Leave yourself be at home, man. The sea is too much for you now”, his wife would say to him.

It was true. His scrawny body, worn out by over six decades of hard graft, was growing weak, faltering under the strain. Yet he kept on, screwing up his courage into strength:

“Don't get yourself het up, Angelina! You know I'd rather not go. Once there was the lure of adventure... But the sea only entices the young, for old-timers like me it holds no attraction.”

After the monsoon, when the large shoals began to appear, this scene would recur each day. And each day it would end in tears and entreaties.

“Don't go, father... Stay in the river!

Com camarão também se ganha dinheiro...”, pedia a filha com a ternura dos seus vinte anos, lembrando-se de outros pescadores, que um dia lá ficaram.

Bostião tentava explicar, de todos os feitios, o seu lugar na sociedade sudra a que pertencia. E os seus deveres, a que não podia fugir, que o faziam escravo. Bem via que todas as raparigas da aldeia com a idade da Carminha se iam casando. Pelo bairro, comentava-se já, à boca fechada: “Quando será que o Bostião casa a filha?” E abanavam a cabeça, contristados, com maus presságios. E Bostião sabia isso. Ouvia. Sentia. Doía-lhe. Mas que podia fazer? Ele é que sabia as linhas com que se cosia. Mas era certo. Havia uma censura velada nas falas dos companheiros. Exigiam-lhe que desse de casar à filha. Faziam-no sem se lembrarem de que era velho e mal podia já ir todas as manhãs até às estacas do rio levantar as redes. Mas era assim. Sempre fora assim, desde tempos remotos. Bostião sabia. E tinham razão. Que as raparigas, em passando da idade... E não seria o primeiro caso! “O corpo é mau conselheiro, e há que colocar as raparigas logo que começam a despertar”, diziam, com uma sabedoria de milénios.

“A vender camarões não conseguirei amearhar para o teu dote”, murmurou. “Julgas que morrerei tranquilo sem te ver arrumada? É um peso que trago cá dentro, e já me sinto tão velho!”

“Se não fosse a doença do *sâpây*...”, exclamou a mulher, referindo-se ao sogro. “Gastámos o que tínhamos e o que não tínhamos! E nem ao menos ele se salvou daquela maldita malária...”

“Não foi malária, Angelina! Nós é que julgávamos mas o médico sempre disse que era dos pulmões. Se lhe tivéssemos dado ouvidos logo de começo, talvez o pai se salvasse...”

Não tinham relógio em casa. Regulavam-se pelo nascer e pôr do Sol, pelo abrir e fechar das lojas, pela chegada e partida das lanchas e, por fim, pelo sino da

We can make money with shrimp too...”, his daughter would plead with all the tenderness of her twenty years, remembering other fishermen who had set out one day and never returned.

Bostião tried to explain, every which way he could, the place he held in shudra society. The duties he could not shirk, that enslaved him. He was well aware that in the village all the girls Carminha’s age were getting married. In the neighbourhood, whispered comments passed from mouth to mouth: “When will Bostião marry off his daughter?” they asked, shaking their heads sadly, filled with apprehension. Bostião knew this. Heard this. Felt this. It pained him. But what could he do? He alone knew how hard it was to make ends meet. But one thing was certain. In the words of the other fishermen was a veiled reproach. They expected him to earn enough for his daughter to marry. They expected this even though he was old and could barely row out to the stakes each morning to collect his nets. But that was the way it was, and had been since time immemorial, Bostião well knew. And they were right. If girls go past the age... And it would not be the first time it happened! “The body gives poor counsel, arrangements must be made as soon as girls begin to awaken”, they said, with the wisdom of the ages.

“I’ll never scrape your dowry together selling shrimp”, Bostião muttered. “Do you think I can die in peace without seeing you right? It’s like a weight inside me, and I feel so old!”

“If only *sâpây* hadn’t fallen ill...”, exclaimed his wife, referring to her father-in-law. “We spent everything we had and more besides! And even then he didn’t recover from that damned malaria.”

“It wasn’t malaria, Angelina! We thought it was, but the doctor said lung trouble all along. If we had listened to him from the start, perhaps Father could have been saved...”

Their house had no clock. They measured time by the rising and setting of the sun, by the opening and closing of the shops, by the arrival and departure of the

igreja de Penha de França.

Depois do jantar, rezaram o terço. A seguir Bostião acendeu um *viddi* e saiu, deixando a mulher e a filha a lavarem os cobres e os barrois.

Foi sentar-se à entrada, cimentada havia pouco, antes da doença do *sâpây*, quando as coisas ainda corriam menos mal e havia umas rupias de lado. E ficou a olhar rio, mais adiante, o rio tranquilo que era pai.

Costumava passar assim muitas horas, sorvendo o fumo lentamente, sozinho consigo. Umis vezes ficava só a olhar, sem pensar em nada. Outras, deixava o pensamento escorrer em liberdade. E sempre ia acabar na Carminha. Como naquele dia. Pensava nela e no pouco tempo que tinha, como estava velho. “Rapariga sem dote, quem quer?”, pensava. “Quem quer rapariga sem dote?”, repetia. E ficou de olhos abertos, imóvel, até ouvir a voz de Gustin, do cais.

“Bostião! Eh, Bostião, vamos embora!”

Custava-lhe largar o aconchego da casa, a protecção das olas tecidas, o calor do fogão, lá dentro, onde as brasas não se tinham apagado do todo, para passar toda a noite no mar, numa luta que já não era para ele. E depois, aquele frio, o relento e o terral que lhe punham todo o corpo a tiritar...

Esticou as pernas, preguiçoso, chupando mais uma fumaça do *viddi* e esfregou as mãos. Mas não tardou a ouvir também Vitobá:

“Eh, Bostião, vamos embora!”

“É só um bocadinho...”

“Temos que aproveitar a maré!”

Bostião levantou-se com energia. Havia determinação nos seus gestos. Carminha veio entregar-lhe o *cambolim*, sorridente. Bostião lançou-o sobre os ombros e afastou-se lentamente ao encontro dos companheiros.

boats, and, lastly, by the bells of the village church in Penha de França.

After dinner, the family said its prayers. Following that, Bostião went out, lighting a *beedi* and leaving his wife and daughter to wash the copper plates and earthen vessels.

He sat down in the doorway. It had been concreted over not long previously, before *sâpây* had fallen ill, when things had been less desperate and they had some rupees put aside. He gazed out at the river ahead, the tranquil, paternal river.

Bostião spent many hours here, smoking in long draws, alone with his thoughts. Sometimes he would sit and stare, his mind a blank. At others, he would let his thoughts run free. But they always returned to Carminha, as they did that day. He thought of her and the little time he had left, how he had grown old. “Who wants a girl without a dowry?” he thought. “A girl without a dowry, who would want her?” he repeated. He stared on, wide-eyed, immobile, until he heard Gustin’s voice from the quay.

“Bostião! Hey Bostião, let’s go!”

It was a wrench to leave the comfort of his home, the protection of its palm-leaf roof, the warmth of the stove inside, in which the coals were not quite spent, to pass the whole night at sea, locked in a struggle he no longer wanted any part of. And then, that cold, the wet night air, and the sea wind that set his whole body shivering...

Lazily he stretched out his legs, took one more puff on his *beedi* and rubbed his hands. But before long he heard Vitobá:

“Hey, Bostião, let’s go!”

“Just a moment...”

“We’ve got to leave with the tide!”

Bostião sprang to his feet, determination showing through in his movements. Carminha came out to hand him his *cambolim* with a smile. Bostião slung it round his shoulders and walked off slowly to meet his companions.

Carminha ficou a olhá-lo em silêncio até que o pai se virou. Então sorriu-lhe de novo.

Mais do que nunca, precisava de inculcar-lhe coragem. Estava em jogo a sua condição de solteira. Estava nas mãos dele o seu destino de mulher. Muitas vezes se perguntava por quanto tempo iria continuar exposta aos olhares dos vizinhos, dos parentes, das más-línguas. Além disso, de vez em quando, aqueles ardores, aqueles sobressaltos que a punham fora de si e quase a faziam gritar... No fundo, porém, não se preocupava muito. Havia nela uma simplicidade natural que a não deixava perder o norte. Talvez se o pai não tivesse falado tão claramente, talvez iludida pelo sabor da juventude, levasse muito mais tempo a compreender a verdadeira natureza do problema. Sentia-se feliz em ir vender no mercado o peixe que o pai apanhava. Só isso, já por si, constituía uma pequena e sedutora aventura social. No mercado de Mapuçá tinha oportunidade de conversar com os rapazes que vinham de Bombaim e de outros sítios a passar a licença a Goa, gabando-se de coisas que tinham visto lá por fora, talvez exagerando, ela sabia, para espantar os aldeões. Carminha gostava deles. Eram elegantes. Tinham outras maneiras, usavam muita brilhantina no cabelo e apareciam no mercado sempre de pijama, ao contrário dos pescadores que, quase sempre, só usavam langotim.

No umbral, de olhos fechados, Carminha sorvia a aragem fresca que vinha do rio. E recordava um a um os rostos morenos dos rapazes que apareciam todos os anos na aldeia, de cabelo lúcido e horizontes abertos no olhar. E, pensando neles, adormeceu sobre o cimento, enquanto o velho Bostião, fazendo bofe das tripas, mourejava no mar.

## II

Na manhã seguinte, muito cedo, as mulheres juntaram-se no cais, ansiosas, olhando para a foz. Pousaram os cestos e sentaram-se ao lado, no chão, insensíveis ao sol já ardente. No rio, começava o

Carminha stood and watched in silence. When her father turned back towards her, she smiled once again.

More than ever it was necessary to instil courage in her father. Her chances of getting married were at stake. Her future prospects as a woman were in his hands. She often asked herself how long she would remain prey to the watchful eyes of neighbours, family members and local muckrakers. What's more, from time to time, she had these burning urges, disturbances that left her beside herself, and almost made her shout out loud... At heart, however, she was not greatly troubled. Within Carminha was a natural simplicity of spirit that kept her on an even keel. Had her father not spoken so candidly maybe she would have remained caught up in the headiness of youth, and taken far longer to realise the true nature of her predicament. She was happy going to market to sell her father's catch. This trip alone represented a small yet seductive adventure into society. At Mapuçá market she could chat with the young men who came back from Bombay, or further afield, to spend their holidays in Goa. They would show off about sights seen abroad, perhaps exaggerating, she knew, in order to impress the locals. Carminha liked them. They were stylish. They had a different way about them, wore lots of brilliantine in their hair and always came to market in pyjama trousers, unlike the fishermen, who almost only dressed in dhotis.

Carminha crouched in the doorway, eyes closed, and breathed in the fresh breeze coming from the river. She recalled one by one the young men with brown faces who appeared each year in the village, their glistening hair and eyes filled with wide horizons. And, turning them over in her mind, she fell asleep on the cement floor, while old Bostião, stretched to the limit, slogged his guts out at sea.

## II

The next morning, very early, the women gathered anxiously on the wharf and peered out towards the mouth of the river. Placing their baskets on the floor, they sat down beside them, unfazed by the

movimento e as tonas de transporte cruzavam-no, carregadas de gente que ia para os empregos em Pangim. As mulheres ficaram a olhar, paradas, na esperança de que a tona grande surgisse, a tona grande e sem toldo, carregada de bom peixe.

E, de súbito, as mulheres sorriram. Sorriram ao mesmo tempo, porque era como se todas elas fossem uma só mulher. Sentiam em uníssono. Porque eram os maridos de todas que voltavam na tona grande que já se aproximava. As mulheres sorriam, ao lado dos cestos, que depressa se encheriam de grandes cavalas prateadas.

“Hoje os nossos homens veem a remar em silêncio. Se calhar não tiveram sorte...”, murmurou uma.

“Não. Talvez não. A época é boa!”, disse outra.

“Eu não distingo o Bostião no grupo!”, exclamou uma terceira.

E ficaram suspensas. Acotovelaram-se, caladas, até que a tona se aproximou e os homens se curvaram mais, erguendo o corpo de Bostião nos braços.

As mulheres estremeceram e fitaram Angelina, de olhos muito abertos, a bainha do *capodd* amarrotada entre os dedos.

E, de súbito, o grito saiu-lhe das entranhas, com angústia e revolta:

“Ai, *Devá, Devá*, meu Bostião! *Devá!*”

As outras rodearam-na, tapando-lhe a vista, enquanto os homens conduziam Bostião para casa.

Angelina seguiu-os, soluçando todo o caminho, num queixume:

“Ai, *Devá, Devá*, como me trouxeram o Bostião!”

Quando chegaram, as mulheres deixaram-na chegar ao pé do marido estendido na esteira.

“Ai, Bostião!”, gritou ela, caindo de joelhos.

already scorching sun. On the river the traffic was just getting started. Boats ferrying people over to their jobs in Panjim crossed to and fro. The women sat and stared, motionless, hoping that the big boat would appear, the big boat with no tarpaulin cover, filled with a fine catch.

Suddenly the women broke into smiles. They smiled in unison because it was as if they were but one woman. Their hearts leapt in unison, as it was all their men who were returning on the big boat, which now approached. The women smiled, at their sides stood baskets that would soon be filled with large silvery mackerel.

“Our men are rowing in silence today. Perhaps they didn’t have any luck...”, one of them murmured.

“No. Maybe you’re wrong. It’s the right season!” said another.

“I don’t see Bostião amongst them!” exclaimed a third.

They stopped short, nudging one another in silence until the boat drew in. The men stooped low, lifting Bostião up in their arms.

The women shivered and turned to stare at Angelina. Her eyes were wide-open, the hem of her *capodd* twisted between her fingers.

Then, suddenly, she let out a raw cry of anguish and dismay.

“Oh, *Devá, Devá*, my Bostião! *Devá!*”

The other women formed a circle around Angelina, blocking her view, while the men carried Bostião home.

Angelina followed behind, sobbing all the way and wailing:

“Oh, *Devá, Devá*, look how they’ve brought me back Bostião!”

When they arrived the women allowed her to approach her husband, who was stretched out on a mat.

“Oh, Bostião!” she cried, falling to her knees.

Mas os homens começaram a falar.

“Tragam-lhe um caldo de canja”, ordenou Salvador, impondo silêncio.

Em casos de desmaio, Gustin recomendava que se cheirasse uma cebola e aguardente.

“Uma dose de fenim para reanimá-lo!”

Carminha regressava do poço com duas bilhas de água. Ao ver toda aquela gente, estremeceu. A bilha que trazia à cabeça tombou, encharcando o embostado.

“Meu pai!”, soluçou.

“Já mandei chamar a *distican*”, disse alguém. E esta palavra dizia tudo sobre a suposta causa do sucedido.

Angelina friccionava com óleo de coco os braços e o peito do marido com toda a energia. Pouco a pouco, Bostião ia voltando a si, abrindo os olhos e ingerindo canja de arroz que uma vizinha lhe metia na boca à força.

“Coma, Bostião, para ficar bom!”, dizia-lhe, insistindo.

Mas nesse momento chegou a *distican* a correr, ofegando.

Era uma mulher com perto de cinquenta anos, enérgica, segura de si. Trazia o cabelo empastado com óleo de coco e enrolado na nuca. Olhou para o doente com perspicácia e franziu o nariz. Depois deu uma volta, agachou-se junto da esteira e passou-lhe a mão em frente do rosto. Bostião, fatigado, fechou os olhos.

“Preciso de sal e três pimentas!”, gritou, com voz rouca, a *distican*, sem desfitar o pescador e rezando alto, cadencialmente:

*Satmântâm*

*Devá bapá sarvhukumdâr...*

Uma das mulheres estendeu-lhe as pimentas e o sal. E a velha, curvando-se,

The men had already begun to speak up.

“Bring some chicken broth”, Salvador ordered, imposing silence.

To bring someone round from a faint, Gustin recommended wafting an onion in firewater under their nose.

“Some feni to revive him!”

Carminha was on her way back from the well with two pitchers of water. When she saw the crowd, she shuddered. One pitcher dropped from her head, drenching the cow-dung floor.

“Father!” she sobbed.

“I’ve already sent for the *distican*”, someone said. This word alone expressed what they thought had caused Bostião’s affliction.

Angelina rubbed coconut oil into the chest and arms of her husband with all her energy. Little by little, Bostião came to his senses. He opened his eyes and swallowed the chicken broth one of his neighbours was spooning into his mouth.

“Eat up, Bostião, so you get well again!” she said, not taking no for an answer.

At that moment the *distican* arrived. She rushed in, huffing and puffing.

A small woman around fifty years old, she was brisk and full of self-assurance. Her hair, thick with coconut oil, was tied up in a bun. She gave the patient an astute look and wrinkled her nose. Walking round to the far side of the mat, she crouched down in front of Bostião and waved her hand across his face. He shut his eyes, exhausted.

“I need some salt and three peppers!” the *distican* shouted hoarsely. Without taking her eyes off the fisherman she began to pray, loudly and rhythmically:

*Satmântâm*

*Devá bapá sarvhukumdâr...*

One of the women passed her the peppers and the salt. The old woman leant



passou-os três vezes pelo corpo do doente, repetindo:

*Satmântâm*

*Devá bapá sarvhukumdâr...*

*Sorguincho âni samsâracho rachnar...*

A seguir, entre o silêncio geral, levantou-se e foi lançar as pimentas ao fogo. Ergueu-se uma labareda mais viva e ouviu-se um estalido forte. Angelina virou-se para as outras mulheres:

“Já viram? Eu não tinha dito que era mau olhado?”

“Não admira!”, apoiou Florinda. “Ultimamente todos diziam: ‘O velho Bostião ainda aguenta muito bem a pesca das cavalas.’ Eu logo vi. Deviam ter chamado a *distican* mesmo antes dele ir para o mar!”

“Na quarta-feira ele ficará completamente bom. Quarta-feira é o dia de tirar o mau-olhado”, garantiu a velha, da porta.

Angelina estendeu a mão e entregou-lhe quatro tangas, que a velha se apressou a meter no bolso. E, virando as costas, voltou para casa, satisfeita.

Logo que a *distican* saiu, na barraca de Bostião as pessoas começaram a retirar-se.

“Se precisarem de alguma coisa, mandem chamar-me”, disse Tomsó.

“E se for preciso dinheiro... Não sou rico, mas há-de arranjar-se qualquer coisa”, murmurou Gustin.

“Não chore, Carminha!”, disse VencTexa, que viera comprar peixe e entrara ao saber do sucedido. “Vá a minha casa e a minha mulher dá-lhe uma raiz que, esfregada numa pedra com água e posta na testa de seu pai, o põe logo bom. Vai ver como se levanta logo”, garantiu.

over and trailed them three times across the ill man’s body, repeating:

*Satmântâm*

*Devá bapá sarvhukumdâr...*

*Sorguincho âni samsâracho rachnar...*

Afterwards, amidst the silence around her, she got to her feet and threw the peppers into the fire. A tongue of brighter flame flashed up and a crackling sound was heard. Angelina turned to the other women:

“Did you see? Didn’t I say it was down to the evil-eye?”

“It’s no surprise!” Florinda chipped in. “Lately everyone has been saying: ‘Old Bostião still has what it takes to go mackerel fishing’. I knew it then. They should have called in the *distican* even before he set out to sea!”

“He’ll be all better by Wednesday. I guarantee Wednesday’s the day to lift the evil eye”, said the old woman, standing in the doorway.

Angelina reached out her hand and gave the old woman four *tanga* coins, which she hurriedly shoved in her pocket. She turned away, satisfied, and set off for home.

As soon as the *distican* had left, people started to file out of Bostião’s shack.

“Send for me if you need anything”, said Tomsó.

“If you need any money... I’m not rich, but I can scrape something together”, Gustin said, quietly.

“Don’t cry, Carminha”, said VencTexa, who had made his way over to buy fish and had come in after learning what happened. “Go to my house. My wife has this root. Rub it on a stone with some water then place it on your father’s forehead. He’ll get better straight away, you’ll see. Up and about in no time”, he guaranteed.

## III

Curvado sobre o doente, o Dr. Amoncar tinha uma certa dificuldade em auscultá-lo.

“Sempre a mesma coisa, sempre a mesma coisa!”, resmungou. “Porque não me mandaram chamar há mais tempo? Primeiro a *distican*, não é?, depois o *gaddi*, e eu só no último caso! Quantas vezes já lhes disse que não tomem paliativos!”

Gustin, Tomsó, Vitobá, Franxavier e Savitri estavam aos pés de Bostião, cujas costelas salientes parecia que lhe rasgavam a pele seca. As palavras do médico fizeram-nos baixar a cabeça. Em todos os rostos se podia ler uma grande angústia.

O Dr. Amoncar estava habituado a falar assim. Fazia parte da sua rotina. Aquilo tornara-se-lhe já uma coisa mecânica. Estava calejado. Não tinha ilusões de pretender que lhe obedecessem, isso era outra verdade. Aquela gente tinha a sua *distican*, em que acreditava. Tirar-lhe podia talvez fazer-lhes mais mal do que bem. O que achava mais urgente era livrá-los daquela ignorância, daquele desprezo íntimo pelo progresso, que, ao fim e ao cabo, reconhecia-o, lhes permitia ser felizes à sua maneira, mas que, por outro lado, os tornava vítimas indefesas de todos os males.

“Se é questão de dinheiro, doutor...”

Gustin não chegou a completar a sua ideia, pois o médico interrompeu-o:

“Qual dinheiro, homem! Vocês bem sabem que eu nunca me importei com o dinheiro dos doentes e, tratando-se de gente pobre, nem um poicá recebo. Interesse-me é pela vossa vida, percebem?” Custava-lhe ser mais uma vez ríspido, mas tinha consciência de cumprir um dever. É que a sua principal tarefa não era assistir aos doentes, mas influenciá-los. Tinha que penetrar no espírito daqueles pescadores drávidas, que tão bem conhecia e que por isso mesmo estimava como verdadeiros homens que eram. Sabia que se deixavam guiar apenas pelo instinto, que a sua vida era toda feita de pressentimento... Por isso

## III

Hunched low, Dr Amoncar was having a difficult time checking his patient’s heartbeat.

“It’s always the same old story, the same old story!” he grumbled. “Why did you not send for me before? First you call the *distican*, then the *gaddi*, and then me only as a last resort. How many times have I told you not to take palliatives!”

Gustin, Tomsó, Vitobá, Franxavier and Savitri stood at Bostião’s feet. Sharp ribs seemed to pierce right through his desiccated skin. At the doctor’s words the group bowed their heads, great anguish clearly etched on every face.

Dr Amoncar had grown accustomed to expressing himself bluntly. It was part of his routine, a mechanical response. He had become hardened and was under no illusion that the fishermen would obey; this also was true. These people had their *distican*, in whom they had faith. To take that away would perhaps do more harm than good. To Amoncar what was more urgent was to lift them from their ignorance, their inner disdain for progress. Admittedly, when all was said and done, it was this ignorance that allowed them a happiness of sorts, yet it was also what left them powerless, prey to each and every misfortune.

“If it’s a matter of your fee, Doctor...”

Before Gustin could finish his sentence, the doctor interrupted:

“Fee! You know I’ve never cared a fig about my patients’ money, man. I treat the poor without receiving a paisa in return. I’m interested in the way you live your lives, don’t you understand?” It pained him to speak harshly once more, but he was conscious of fulfilling a duty. The main task he faced was not to attend to patients, but to exert his influence over them. He had to enter the minds of these Dravidian fishermen, whom he knew so well and whom, as a consequence, he esteemed as the true men they were. He knew that they allowed themselves to be governed by their instincts, and that their lives were ruled by

procurava, sempre que possível, ensinar-lhes as regras mais elementares para o tratamento dos seus males. “Antes deles, milhões de homens foram ignorantes”, pensou. “Estes também aprenderão um dia.” E sorria, mansamente, ao reflectir no inconcebível progresso do homem, esse triste macaco sábio.

Acabou de passar a recita e hesitou. Depois estendeu-a a um dos homens.

“Vá a minha casa buscar alguns destes remédios. Outras terão que comprar.”

Vitobá avançou com humildade:

“Obrigado, doutor. Diga-nos o que devemos fazer para vermos o Bostião livre desta doença.”

“Ele não pode continuar a dormir no chão. Vocês não têm pelo menos um colchão?”, perguntou.

“Colchão?... Não, doutor”, titubeou Carminha.

Mas D. Lavínia, acabava de entrar. Ninguém dera pela sua presença, mas ela apressou-se a fazer-se notada, intervindo:

“Se é questão de cama, posso emprestá-la, mas sem colchão. Como é de tábuas, basta pôr uma esteira por cima e fica boa.”

Os pescadores ficaram a olhar para ela, espantados. Devia ser um rebate de consciência porque, embora fizesse frequentemente “vistas de caridade”, D. Lavínia era incapaz de emprestar, e muito menos dar, fosse o que fosse. Ante qualquer desgraça premente, respondia piedosamente: “Deus o ajude!”, acrescentando: “Deus sabe bem as linhas com que me coso.” Mas ninguém ignorava que era tudo mentira, que o marido lhe deixara farta herança com propriedades de arroz e coco, e que os dois filhos estavam bem colocados no Golfo Pérsico, donde lhe mandavam mesadas chorudas.

Gustin não podia perdoar a D. Lavínia ter-lhe recusado um punhado de arroz fino que pedira emprestado para a filha, quando estivera doente e proibida

omens... So he sought, whenever possible, to impart to them the most elementary rules for the treatment of their ills. “Before them, millions of men lived in ignorance”, he thought. “These men too will learn one day.” He smiled gently, reflecting on the incalculable progress made by man, that sad yet clever ape.

He finished writing out the prescription then hesitated, before passing it to one of the men.

“You can fetch some of these medicines from my house. The others you will have to buy yourselves.”

Vitobá edged meekly forward:

“Thank you, doctor. Tell us what we have to do to help rid Bostião of this sickness.”

“He can’t go on sleeping on the floor. Don’t you at least have a mattress?”, he asked.

“A mattress...? No, doctor”, Carminha stammered.

By this time Dona Lavínia had come in. She had entered unseen, but lost no time making herself noticed. She chimed in:

“If it’s a bed you need, I can lend you one, but without a mattress. It’s got boards underneath, all you need to do is put a mat on top and it’s fine.”

The fishermen stared in surprise. Her conscience must have been pricked. Despite frequent “charity visits”, Dona Lavínia was incapable of lending - much less giving - anything to anyone. Faced with a pressing misfortune she would say: “May God help you!” and add: “God knows I struggle to make ends meet.” Everybody knew this to be a lie. Her husband had left her a fat inheritance, including lands rich in rice and coconuts, and her two sons had found comfortable positions in the Persian Gulf, from where they sent home a generous allowance.

Gustin had not forgiven Dona Lavínia for refusing to lend him a handful of fine rice when his daughter had been ill and the doctor had forbidden her to eat

pelo médico de comer o corangute. Quis, portanto, dar-lhe uma lição e respondeu com arrogância:

“Não vale a pena, Lavin bai. Nós podemos ser pobres, mas uma cama sempre se há-de arranjar.”

Os outros sorriram levemente, aprovando. Angelina aproveitou também para se desforrar da humilhação sofrida por ocasião da ladainha da Cruz, quando D. Lavínia recusara vender-lhe alguns cocos para o doce que tinha que oferecer aos convidados. E disse, com ironia:

“Não queremos a sua cama, Lavin bai. Em último caso podemos sobrepor umas tábuas com uma manta por cima...”

“Que cambada!”, exclamou D. Lavínia em português para o médico. “Esta gente é pobre e mal agradecida. Que soberba!”

Não ocultava o seu desprezo por certas atitudes da “gente do povo”. O que lhe valeu naquele momento foi a desforra de poder exhibir o seu português no meio da “cambada”, que só falava concaninim.

O Dr. Amoncar assistia a uma cena que só o fazia admirar ainda mais aqueles sudras humildes e tisonados. No fundo do coração, detestava aquela mulherinha irritante e presunçosa, hipócrita consumada, exploradora de manducares. E retorquiu:

“Não tem razão, D. Lavínia. Esta gente não é cambada e é bom não confundirmos dignidade com soberba! Diante de tanta coisa de que o doente precisa, que faz a senhora? Empresta-lhe uma cama. Nem sequer dá: empresta. E o resto? O Bostião precisa de mais: remédios, injeções, boa alimentação, tónicos... E onde vai arranjar dinheiro para tudo isso? Eu, pela parte que me toca, não receberei nem um poiçá e vou ver se lhe arranjo os medicamentos de graça.”

D. Lavínia enrubesceu e contra-atacou:

*corangute*. Wanting to teach Dona Lavínia a lesson, he retorted:

“There’s no need, Lavin bai. Poor we may be, but we can always make do for a bed.”

The others gave thin smiles of approval. Angelina took advantage of the situation to avenge the humiliation she had felt when, at the time of the litany of the Cross, Dona Lavínia had refused to sell her coconuts to make a sweet for her guests. She added ironically:

“We don’t want your bed, Lavin bai. If the worst comes to the worst we can always lay a mat out across a few boards...”

“What rifferaff!” Dona Lavínia exclaimed in Portuguese to the doctor. “Miserable ingrates the lot of them. What arrogance!”

She did not hide her disdain for the behaviour of the “common herd”. The only thing that allowed her to save face, and gain a measure of revenge, was the opportunity to show off her Portuguese to the “rifferaff”, who could only speak Konkani.

This exchange only increased Dr Amoncar’s admiration for these humble, dark-skinned shudras. At heart he detested this silly little woman who was so tiresome and presumptuous, this consummate hypocrite who exploited her *mundkars*. He replied angrily:

“You’re wrong, Dona Lavínia. These people are not rifferaff, and you would do well not to confuse dignity with arrogance! There are so many things that this invalid obviously needs and what do you do? Offer to lend him a bed. Not even give, just lend. What about the rest? Bostião needs more: medicines, injections, a good diet, tonics... Where on earth is he going to get the money for all that? For my part, I’ll not receive a single paisa for my work and I’ll try to see if I can get him his medicine for free.”

Dona Lavínia blushed red, before hitting back:

“Defende a dignidade desta gente, esquecendo-se da minha, que é superior. Repare que sou brâmane, como o doutor! Quanto a isso de dar, cada um faz o que pode. Cada qual sabe de si e Deus sabe de todos, doutor.”

O médico encolheu os ombros, desinteressado. D. Lavínia fez uma careta de desagrado e passou a mão pelo rosto. Depois, bruscamente, erguendo-se da única cadeira existente no compartimento escuro, pretextou pressa em voltar a casa.

“Como boa cristã, não podia deixar de cumprir este dever de visitar um doente”, disse, estendendo a mão ao médico. “Mas não posso demorar-me, vocês compreendem... Meus filhos chegaram ontem do Golfo Pérsico e os preparativos para a festa ainda não terminaram, vocês compreendem...”

No caminho de volta, sentiu-se melhor: “Que cambada!”, resmungou, arrependida de lá ter ido. “Juntos como formigas num quarto tão miserável e pequeno, só com uma janelinha por onde mal entra a luz do dia, uf! Que falta de ar!”

Logo que chegou a casa foi estender-se numa cadeira *voltaire* e começou a abanar-se nervosamente com uma ventarola comprada na feira da festa da Senhora da Conceição. Aquele gesto queria dizer que estava indisposta.

Ao vê-la, Robin, o filho mais velho, indagou:

“Mamã, não se sente bem?”  
 “Nada”, respondeu D. Lavínia, furiosa, “É que esta gente do povo está cada vez mais altanada. Estive agora mesmo em casa do pescador Bostião e fiquei furiosa com aquela cambada. O pior foi o médico. Anda feito com eles.”

Robin achou a oportunidade boa para espantar a mãe com os seus conhecimentos angariados em terras longínquas:

“Se calhar o médico é comunista!”

“You defend the dignity of these people, yet forget mine, which is of a higher order. Like you, I too am a Brahmin. As for handouts, each of us gives what we can. Our consciences are known only to ourselves and to God, doctor.”

Dr Amoncar shrugged, showing no interest. Dona Lavínia grimaced with displeasure and wiped her face with her hand. Rising abruptly from the only chair in the ill-lit room, she invented a pretext to rush back to her house.

“As a good Christian, I had to fulfill my duty to visit the patient”, she said, holding her hand out to the doctor. “But I cannot stay, you must understand, my sons arrived back from the Persian Gulf yesterday, and the preparations for their welcome reception are not yet complete, you must understand...”

She felt much better on the way home. “What ruffraff!” she grumbled, regretting ever having come. “Heaped up like ants in that wretched little room, with that slit of a window that hardly lets in any light. Phew! How close the air was in there!”

No sooner had she arrived back than she stretched out on her chaise longue and began cooling herself nervously with a fan she had bought at the fair at the feast of Our Lady of the Immaculate Conception. This gesture signalled that she was not in a good mood.

Coming in, her eldest son Robin asked her:

“Mama, are you feeling poorly?”  
 “I’m fine”, Dona Lavínia snapped. “It’s just that those people in the village are getting airs above their station. I’ve just been to that fisherman Bostião’s house, I was livid with those ruffraff. The worst of it was that doctor. He’s in cahoots with them all.”

Robin saw a good opportunity to impress his mother with the knowledge he had acquired in far-off lands:

“That doctor is probably a Communist!”

“Ora essa!”, murmurou D. Lavínia. “Eu cá não compreendo esses novos termos... O que disseste?”

#### IV

Em casa do Bostião travava-se uma verdadeira luta entre os pescadores e o médico. O Dr. Amoncar esforçava-se por explicar que um tuberculoso tem que ser internado no sanatório. Mas ninguém se deixava convencer.

“Não, doutor, não vou para o hospital! Deixe-me estar aqui entre os meus! Prefiro morrer na minha aldeia, na minha casa, com Gustin, Vitobá, Tomsó e todos deste bairro. Não... não, doutor, hospital nunca!”

Estas palavras fracas do doente foram abafadas pela voz aguda de Angelina:

“Se o doutor não quer tratar do meu marido, seja franco. Havemos de chamar outro médico. Se for preciso, até empenhamos os cobres e as redes!”

“Pode contar comigo, Angelina. Não sou rico, mas dinheiro para Bostião arranjar-se!”, interveio Gustin.

“Comigo, também podem contar! Coragem, Carminha, seu pai não sairá daqui!”, garantiu Vitobá.

O Dr Amoncar quase se deu por vencido. Achava-se num estranho campo de batalha, onde os sentimentos e as tradições eram mais fortes do que a razão e onde não tinha possibilidades de triunfar. Por isso mudou de tática. Encarou o doente com sinceridade:

“O Bostião, esqueça-se de que sou doutor e vamos falar de homem para homem. Está bem? Ora diga-me uma coisa, você lembra-se de como morreu seu pai?”

“Sim senhor, não foi malária... foi dos pulmões...”, virou-se para o lado direito, para encarar o médico, fazendo ranger as tábuas da improvisada cama. “O doutor queria que o pai fosse também para

“Heavens above!” murmured Dona Lavínia. “These new-fangled terms are too much for me... What did you say again?”

#### IV

At Bostião’s house a veritable battle was being waged between the fishermen and the doctor. Dr Amoncar was striving to explain that the patient had tuberculosis and needed to be admitted to the sanatorium. Nobody would listen.

“No, doctor, I won’t go to hospital! Leave me be here with my people! I’d prefer to die in my own village, in my own house, surrounded by Gustin, Vitobá, Tomsó and my other neighbours. No, doctor... no hospital. Never!”

The patient’s feeble words were drowned out by Angelina’s shrill voice:

“Dr Amoncar, if you don’t want to treat my husband just be upfront about it. We’ll call in another doctor. If we have to we’ll even pawn our fishing nets and copperware!”

“You can count on me, Angelina. I’m not rich, but I can always find some money somewhere for Bostião!” Gustin chipped in.

“You can count on me too! Chin up, Carminha. Your father’ll not leave this house!”, Vitobá added.

Dr Amoncar was on the verge of giving in. He found himself on a strange field of war, where feelings and traditions outfought reason, and where he had no hope of triumph. He decided to switch tactics. He turned to the patient and spoke sincerely:

“Look Bostião, forget that I’m a doctor. Let’s talk man-to-man, OK? Tell me something, do you remember how it was your father died?”

“Yes, sir, it wasn’t malaria... It was lung trouble...” He turned over onto his side to face the doctor, making the boards of the improvised bed groan in the process. “You wanted him to go into hospital too. I

o hospital, lembro-me bem.”

“Agora escute-me: você tem a doença de seu pai. Compreendeu? E portanto tem que ir para o tal hospital... Se não for, o mal é para si e para os outros porque você pode pegar a doença a outras pessoas. Se for, ficará bom e dentro de pouco tempo pode voltar para casa!”

Bostião ficou a olhar, parado, pensativo. Fitava o médico de frente, nos olhos, para tentar saber se não estaria a querer enganá-lo. Mas abanou a cabeça, convencido. O médico era pessoa séria. Não enganava ninguém. Já dissera o mesmo do *sâpây* e não tinham querido dar-lhe ouvidos. E *sâpây* morreu. D doutor tinha razão. O *sâpây* morreria porque não tinha ido para o hospital. Encarou o médico, decidido:

“Doutor, minha doença pode pegar aos outros? Então vou... Não quero desgraçar ninguém por minha causa. Vou ao tal hospital...”

Nos semblantes dravídicos, um misto de culpa e admiração marcava a derrota aceite com dignidade... Quanto ao Dr. Amoncar, podia-se considerar vencedor, mas, em vez disso, experimentava uma sensação dolorosa. A fala ficou-lhe presa na garganta.

Nesse momento, muito contra sua vontade, D. Lavínia surgiu no cubículo impregnado de odor a drogas e incenso. Tivera o propósito de nunca mais lá pôr os pés, mas a maldita consciência acusara-a e não a deixava em descanso. Para reaver a paz, teve que se ir confessar. E o padre dera-lhe por penitência uma humilhação: “Volte a casa do Bostião e leve algum auxílio. A senhora não tem o direito de se revoltar contra eles, de lhes desprezar. Eles são sudras. A senhora herdou a riqueza e a casta de seus antepassados, portanto sem mérito... E lembre-se de que Deus disse: *E mais fácil a um camelo passar pelo buraco de uma agulha do que um rico entrar no Céu.*” E não tivera outro remédio. Mas ia contrariada. Que não se podia ser mole com aquela gente. Depois

remember it well, Dr Amoncar.”

“Now listen to me: you’ve got your father’s illness. Do you get that? You have to be admitted to hospital. If you don’t go, it’ll be bad for you and bad for the others, they could catch your illness. If you do go, you’ll get better and be home in no time!”

Bostião stopped and stared, thinking it over. He looked the doctor straight in the eyes, trying to work out whether he was telling the truth, and then shook his head, convinced. Dr Amoncar was an honest man, and never misled anybody. He had said the same thing about *sâpây* and nobody had wanted to listen. And *sâpây* had died. Dr Amoncar was right: *sâpây* had died because he had not gone to hospital. He looked at the doctor, his mind made up:

“The others can catch my illness, Doctor? I’ll go then... I don’t want to be the cause of anyone else’s ruin. I’ll go to your hospital...”

On the faces of the Dravidians a mixture of guilt and admiration marked their dignified acceptance of defeat... As for Dr Amoncar, he could consider himself the victor. Yet, instead of triumph, all he experienced was a painful sensation. He had a lump in his throat, and could not speak.

At that moment, and against her own wishes, Dona Lavínia entered the room, which reeked of medicaments and incense. She had decided never again to cross that threshold, but her damn conscience had rounded on her and would not leave her alone. She had gone to confession to regain some peace of mind, and the priest had ordered that she humble herself in penitence: “Go back to Bostião’s house and take him succour. You have no right to curse or despise those people. They are shudras. You inherited your wealth and caste from your forbears, and thus have done nothing to deserve either. Remember the words of God: *it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God.*” So she had no choice but to go. She

abusavam. Olhou para Bostião e avançou até meio da casa. Depois, lentamente, para que todos vissem bem como era generosa, tirou uma rupia da mala e colocou-a na mão do doente:

“É para leite!”, disse. E vincou bem a palavra ‘leite’, que eles nunca bebiam. “Vá, fique bom. Pedirei por si a Deus”, acrescentou, comovida com a sua própria piedade.

“Obrigada, Lavin bai” murmurou Angelina. “Peça também por Carminha, que agora precisa mais do pai... e peça também pelos pescadores de Orlim.”

Mentalmente, o Dr. Amoncar pôs-se a fazer o cálculo do tempo necessário para transportar o doente até ao hospital. Não podia deixar passar nem mais uma noite, não acabassem por desistir.

“Bem, é bom aprontarem uma tona para levarem Bostião”, exclamou. “Já falei no hospital. Basta entregarem lá uma carta minha.”

Tirou a carta do bolso e estendeu-a a Gustin, que era o maioral.

“Não se esqueça de a entregar no hospital. O resto já está tratado.”

VencTexa fez sinal aos outros para que o seguissem. Só Gustin ficou atento às instruções do médico.

“Vamos ver se a tona se prendeu no lodo. A maré é vazante.”

E logo a seguir, a *distican* apareceu. Vinha cansada, a correr. Soubera da notícia no mercado. Furou por entre as mulheres e ofereceu-se para fazer qualquer coisa. Mas não havia nada em que pudesse ser útil. Angelina já tinha feito uma pequena trouxa com roupa e chorava, enxugando as lágrimas com a ponta do *capodd*. Quando os pescadores voltaram, com os pés sujos de lodo, o seu choro aumentou, transformando-se num lamento animal.

went unwillingly, however. One could not be soft on these people, or they would take advantage. Looking directly at Bostião she walked to the centre of the room. Then, slowly, so that everyone could see her generosity, she took a rupee from her bag and placed it in the patient’s hand:

“This is for milk!” she said, stressing the word “milk”, which those people never drank. “God speed your recovery. I shall pray for you”, she added, moved by her own piety.

“Thank you, Lavin bai”, Angelina murmured. “Pray also for Carminha, who now needs her father more than ever, and for all the fisherfolk of Orlim.”

In his head, Dr Amoncar calculated the time it would take to transfer the patient to hospital. He could not let another night pass, for fear they might change their minds.

“Right, you’d better get a boat ready to transport Bostião”, he exclaimed. “I’ve already spoken to the hospital. All you have to do is show them this letter.”

He took a letter from his coat pocket and handed it to Gustin, the head of the group.

“Don’t forget to show it at the hospital. The rest is already taken care of.”

VencTexa made a sign for the others to follow him out. Only Gustin stayed behind, listening attentively to the doctor’s instructions.

“Let’s go and see if our boat has got stuck in the soft mud. The tide is on its way out.”

The next moment, the *distican* appeared. She had run all the way from the market, where she had heard the news, and was exhausted. She squeezed her way past the women and offered her help, only there was nothing left to do. Angelina had made up a little bundle of clothes and was now crying, wiping away her tears with the hem of her *capodd*. When the fishermen returned, their feet dark with mud, her crying increased until it became an animal-like keening.



“Por que esperam? É melhor levarem-no...”, murmurou o Dr. Amoncar num tom seco que não lhe pertencia.

Angelina, Carminha, Savitri, D. Lavínia choravam como se ali, perante a dor, fossem todas iguais e as castas não separassem até à morte.

Num breve relance, Bostião colheu as últimas imagens da sua velha aldeia; a casa com telhado de churtas, a mulher e a filha, todas as pessoas que não abandonaram até ao fim. Ao longe, a Igreja de Nossa Senhora da Penha de França reflectindo-se no Mandovi, surgia-lhe como uma esperança.

No cais, apenas o ruído dos remos contra a água. E Carminha, hirta come uma estátua de resignação.

“What are you waiting for? You’d better take him...”, Dr Amoncar muttered in a harsh tone that did not belong to him.

Angelina, Carminha, Savitri, and Dona Lavínia wept as if they were all equal before such pain, no longer divided by caste until their dying day.

Bostião glanced up one last time at his old village: his house with its palm-leaf-covered roof, his wife and daughter, the friends who until the end had not abandoned him. In the distance, the church of Our Lady of Penha de França, mirrored in the Mandovi river, rose up like a last hope.

On the wharf there was nothing but the sound of the oars against the water. And Carminha, frozen like a statue of resignation.

### **Glossary of Goan Terms**

Cambolim	- woollen cloak
Cappod	- sari used by married women
Corangute	- type of coarse grained rice
<i>Devá!</i>	- My God!
Distican	- faith healer, woman who can remove evil eye
Gaddi	- sorcerer
Mundkar	- sort of Goan serf
Sâpây	- father-in-law
<i>Satmântâm</i> etc	- lines from the Apostles’ Creed in Konkani