

THE RIVER MHADEI: THE SCIENCE AND POLITICS OF DIVERSION

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EDITORS

PETER RONALD DESOUZA | SOLANO DA SILVA | LAKSHMI SUBRAMANIAN

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The Science and Politics of Diversion

Edited by

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Solano Da Silva
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*To
the people
of the Mhadei*

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16. Mhadei: “May the Great Mother Live Long in Letters and Spirit”

Narayan B. Desai

Abstract: *This chapter is an attempt to understand the intimate relationship of the river Mhadei, also called the Mandovi, with Goan literature as it has evolved over the past century. The river has received literary attention and depiction in four languages: Konkani, Marathi, English, and Hindi. The current work provides both a historical overview of Goan literature about the river through the period of Portuguese rule, the struggle for Liberation, the politics around the merger with Maharashtra, and contemporary environmental concerns in the wake of the water dispute with Karnataka. It also considers the impact of geography on the production of this literature, drawing distinctions between literary works produced in the more rural and forested Mhadei valley and those coming out of the more urban areas around the mouth of the Mandovi.*

THE story of human civilization can be compared to a river. Just as a small stream flows into a river, human settlements have grown into communities on river banks. Rivers such as the Tigris, Euphrates, Nile, Indus, Ganges, and Hwang Ho have given shape to the civilizations along their banks. Human life and progress find sustenance and support from river systems not only in the temporal and the material spheres but also in creative pursuits and imagination. Rivers symbolize both progress and nostalgia. As a river's flow expands, the activities in the human settlements along the banks multiply, enriching human lives and making community livelihoods a gift of the river.

The Indian idea of *jeevan sarita* (river or flow of life) is a term of common usage. Wisdom is shared in idioms and proverbs using the image of the river to articulate a philosophy of life:

“Life is a river; virtue is its bathing place; truth is water; moral convictions are its banks; mercy is its waves. In such a pure river, bathe.” (Sethi 1962, 5).

“A country deprived of its rivers is ruined.” (Sethi 1962, 10).

“Rivers do not drink their own water...” (Sethi 1962, 32).

In Indian culture, rivers have been worshipped as deities, by way of rituals and also by trekking/travelling on foot their entire courses along their banks as a form of pilgrimage. The Narmada Parikrama involves a circumambulation of Ma Narmada (Mother Narmada), spanning 3,000 km across three states in western India. Pilgrims, who undertake the *parikrama* for freedom, salvation, spiritual enlightenment, and personal development, complete it on foot, usually in around 120 days, rediscovering the *teerthas* (holy shrines) associated with the river as they walk its banks. In the Indian Vedic tradition, there are compositions mentioning rivers that are associated with worship and rituals. Among *Dwijas* (the twice-born or *Savarnas* in common parlance), the regular daily bath involves chanting the praise of rivers; in daily worship at home or at any ceremonial *pooja*, praises of rivers are uttered in the form of *mantras* that form a part of the Vedic literature. The symbolic *kalasha pooja* (worshipping the water pitcher) which forms a part of elaborate *upacharas* (rituals in the worship of deities), is seen as representing the water from all the major rivers of the Indian subcontinent.¹ This shows the intimate connection of rivers with living culture. With the progress of human society, rivers figured in creative pursuits such as literature, music, dance, visual art forms.

Mark Twain's *Life on the Mississippi* (1883), or Mikhail Sholokhov's epic novel *And Quiet Flows the Don* in four volumes (1925–1940) both make rivers their subject. *A Bend In the River* by V. S. Naipaul (1979) was shortlisted for the Booker Prize. Rabindranath Tagore's references to the Padma in his writing show how the creative spirit of the Nobel Laureate was nurtured during his childhood and youth by his relationship with the river. Many of his literary creations took shape in his abode on the riverbank or in the houseboat he used as a landlord. Celebrated Assamese singer Bhupen Hazarika's question to Ganga maiya: *Maa, tumi boichho keno?* (“O Mother, why do you flow?”) are well known to lovers of letters.

This chapter is an attempt to understand the intimate relationship of the river Mhadei with Goan literature as it has evolved over the past century. Goa

¹ The *kalasha* or pot is seen as containing water from the prominent holy rivers of India, i.e., the Ganga, Yamuna, Godavari, Saraswati, Narmada, Sindhu, and Kaveri.

is blessed with Mhadei or Mandovi, which serves as its lifeline. As such, it has received literary attention and depiction by Goans producing literature in four or more languages: Konkani, Marathi, English, and Hindi. During the centuries of Portuguese rule in Goa, and the flourishing of creative literature in that language by Goan writers, it is obvious that the river should have figured often. However, since the language itself was almost completely abandoned in the 1960s after Liberation, not much is known or spoken/written about it in the contemporary Goan context. But in the four languages mentioned above, one finds the river and its images reflected in the new era of Goan literature. This makes the exploration of Mhadei as represented by literary works from Goa relevant to our study. While the Mhadei has a relatively short run from its origin in Karnataka to Aguada-Sinquerim, where it meets the sea, the dependence and interface of the human clusters and communities inhabiting its banks is quite intense and intimate. The controversy that has come up as a result of water diversion has disturbed and shaken the population, producing a public anxiety and anguish that finds expression in writing and public mobilization through rallies, cultural events, debates and discussions in mass media.

How much of this public anxiety has its background in the literary imagination of the community and in cultural appreciation is the basis of this brief chapter. The Mandovi has been a part of public imagination as can be seen from the fact that the only sophisticated modern accommodation for tourists, businessmen, and visitors to the capital of the erstwhile *Estado da India* carried that name with pride, with a tagline: Think Goa—Think Hotel Mandovi. Literary, cultural, business and industry have found in the Mandovi a symbol of prestige, a sense of belonging, the spirit of Goa. A leading industrial house named its major project after the river (Mandovi Pellets Ltd.); a publisher of repute is named Mandovi Publications, the Indian naval base located beside the river was named after it (INS Mandovi). Innumerable establishments—in housing, transport, tours, and travels, including hatcheries and agro-based industries—all testify to importance of the river to the masses and classes alike. In that sense, the Mandovi stands for Goa. And rightly so.

This chapter looks at a few literary pieces that visit the Great Mother (*Mahad Ai*), the Great Goddess (*Mahadevi*), and the Great Giver (*Mahadayi*)² from twentieth-century Marathi and Konkani writings as well some in English and Hindi. Some texts written by younger authors in the first quarter of the 21st century are also covered here. The geographical area covered in the course of

² The human, the divine and the material images of the river come out in these three names.

the river's journey in Goa can be divided into two sections—the first from the entry point of the river from Karnataka into Goa—Kadval village—up to Ganjem, an erstwhile small port village that separates the Mhadei valley from the plains, and the second from Ganjem onward. Ganjem falls in the culturally prominent and politically vibrant taluka of Ponda as against the villages upstream, which are located in the remote and largely forested taluka of Sattari. It was a small port for the hinterland, navigable by small boats and canoes till the middle of the twentieth century. Ganjem is the point from where the upstream is sweet water flow. The two can be termed as the Mhadei or the valley section, and the Mandovi or the mainland section, when considering the literary contributions of Goans residing in or belonging to the areas along the riverbank. The literary productions in the two sections can also be divided according to the themes they address. The ones from the Mhadei deal with issues of livelihood and the sustaining of life whereas the ones from the Mandovi concern themselves with the pleasures and opportunities the river offers as a part of urban life or for the tourists visiting the state, such as river cruises, casinos, etc.

The Mhadei section, hilly, forested, largely unexplored till recent times, exhibits traces of a rich past (Kerker 2019, 3). Bondir, near Caranzol in Sattari (just after the river's entry into Goa at Kadval) is said to have served as a navigable minor port, as its name suggests.³ Idols of deities in boats found in a few villages on the downward journey of the river add substance to this claim. The toiling masses in the area have stories to describe the river at different points in its descent, including the deep pool sections and the banks, even the rocks and stones midstream or on its sides. The role of the river, its basin and of the hills, forests, and villages in the long struggle for Goa's freedom from colonial rule await the attention of storytellers.

Such a rich area, with little or no access to modern education till the late 1970s, could not be expected to create modern literature reflecting the Mhadei in the early decades after Liberation in 1961. There were writers and storytellers from the upper castes whose association and relationship with the river were not as intimate as that of the masses. Individuals from the traditional priestly class had to migrate to the towns in neighbouring Maharashtra to pursue their traditional education where their literary and cultural aspirations were shaped. Pandit Mahadevshastri Joshi is a case in point. His short stories in Marathi for a primary readership from urban Maharashtra were based on the natural settings of his homeland but

³ In Goa, localities named Bondir (from the original *bandir*—meaning “port”) exist in different parts of Goa. Some examples include Santacruz in Tiswadi, Bandora in Ponda, and Cuncolim in Salcete.

focused more on social life and traditional value systems. His writings are seen as nurturing eternal values and human virtues (Kanolkar 1996, 23). His works could hardly reach and entertain the illiterate masses on the banks of Mhadei in the valley section. Another writer and journalist in Marathi was H. M. Marathe, who also came from a village on the riverbank but very little is seen of the river in his writings.

Scanty references to the river and its relationship with the people living on its banks are found in folklore and legends. In the region where *gaon* ("village") and *gaonkar* (the first settlers or traditional chieftains) have been sufficient as markers of terrestrial and power boundaries, mention of a river without specific name can be understood and accepted. There is a story that says that the very basis of the river turning eastward after originating in the west is a tussle between two sisters, Malaprabha and Mhadei. Hurt by an insult from her sister Malaprabha, Mhadei turned away and moved in the opposite direction. This also created an impression in the mind of the locals that the river Mhadei is untouchable. (Paryekar 2011, 147). They think so, perhaps, because the flow is not accessible and doesn't benefit them anymore during the dry months when they suffer acute shortage of water.

In the Mhadei valley in Goa, river worship is found in Jyeshthadevi celebrations. On the fifth and final day of the Dhalo festival, which is observed exclusively by women, married women bathe in the river. They pick up pebbles from the river and worship them by arranging them on the riverbank. In the rites associated with Dhalo, mention of the river appears after the local spatial deity, the village deity, and the nature deity.⁴ Similar rituals are followed by the men on the conclusion of Shigmo, the colourful harvest festival. Chorotsav (the festival of thieves), which is unique to this area, also features the same ritual and the *chorancho nalla* ("thieves' coconut") is broken on the riverbank. All these practices have been documented, yet they still await scholarly academic interpretation and explanation. The youth in the valley have taken up the challenge. With access to higher education and the spread of communication facilities, along with increasing state patronage of cultural events, they have acquired organizational skills, entered the sphere of mass media, and mastered communication skills. In the territory traversed by the river, there are new developments such as the state-

⁴ These *Devarambhas* are invoked in the sequence *Hya Jagyachi, Devachi, Saimachi* followed by *Mhadaychi*.

supported Zagor Festival⁵ and Ranmalem Festival,⁶ which explore, discuss, perform and analyse folk forms that are dear to residents in both the Mhadei and the Mandovi sections of the river. These events make locals feel empowered and recognized, adding to the strength in the call of the valley to protect the river and its intangible heritage. This is also an exercise in building the image of a community fed and bred by the Great Mother.

There are local protector gods named Devnchar, Siddha, Ajoba, Sakhalayo, and Vathari whose worship forms the mainstay of local life in the Mhadei section. Their prayers and rituals, festivals and performances form literary treasures in the local oral traditions of. Their folk-theatre forms and their literary contents are still being compiled. Works such as *Savoi Verenchcho Shigmo* (2016), *Fu... Fu... Fugadi* (2023), *Rannmalen* (2018), and recent developments such as the annual Ranmalem Festival and academic discussions on the folk forms hold promise of new learnings in the traditional oral literature of the valley region.

Deities such as Mahishasurmardini (destroyer of the Buffalo demon), Galakshmi (deity of wealth, prosperity and fertility, depicted with two elephants on either side), Mahadev (Lord Shiva), Santeri, Brahmani, Lairai, and Kelbai (a local protector deity with different names, some of which are included among those of the popularly recognized seven sisters)⁷ have their abodes in different villages dotting the banks. The deity Saptakoteshwar who became famous during the Kadamba rule has temples in two places: Khandepar in Ponda taluka, which is in ruins now, and Narve in Tiswadi. Both are on the riverbank, the first on the Khandepar—a tributary—and the other on the Mandovi itself. Devotees flock to the temples to celebrate the birth of Lord Krishna on Janmashtami or Gokulashtami (*Ashtam* in local parlance.)

Some researchers attribute the name Gomati to the river. It is sometime called Mahadevi (the Great Goddess) at its origin, Mahad Ai (the Great Mother) as it flows towards Goa, and Mahadayi (the Great Giver) as it is known in one section of the valley. Its tributaries bear names such as Panshiro in Pendhal; other branches joining from Nanoda and Satren, Vaingini and Harparo, and Velus in Sattari taluka all carry the names of the associated localities and villages of North Goa, for instance, Dudhsagar,

⁵ Zagor is a two-to-three-day event with traditional performances, modified presentations and discussions of the folk form that has been taking place for over a decade, mainly in the different villages in the Mandovi area.

⁶ This is in its fourteenth year and takes place in the Mhadei valley.

⁷ The Seven Sisters are a manifestation of Mother Earth, commonly seen as anthill, and worshipped in the past as *Santer* in almost every village in Goa.

Ragada, and Satpal in Sanguem taluka, Khandepar in Ponda taluka in South Goa, Bicholim and Valvanti in Bicholim taluka, Mapusa and Sinquerin in Bardez taluka in North Goa, all join the river at different points. Mandavi (supposedly derived from *Man-dabbi*, i.e., the fees charged in the ruler's honour, later termed as customs duty) finds mention in historical records. The current official name is the Portuguese version Mandovi, continued in English, while the name Mandavi continues in Indian languages.

The Mandovi formed a significant part of the socio-cultural milieu of Goans in general and more particularly of those residing along its banks. Mentions of river, sea and *Dudhsagar* ("sea of milk"—named possibly after the milky white-water falls) are common in Goan Marathi poetry in the early twentieth century. Poet D.A. Kare (1909–1985) in his poem "Gomanta-Devi" (The Goddess Goa) describes the Dudhsagar waterfall as offering milk on her head, while B.B. Borkar (1910–1986) named one of his poetry collections *Dudhsagar*. In the Mandovi/mainland section mentioned above, writers such as Vyankatesh Anant Pai Raikar (1912–), a novelist, translator, and short story writer in Marathi; Laxmanrao Sardesai (1903–1986), a novelist, essayist, short story writer and a poet in three languages including Portuguese; Ganadhish Khandeparkar (1925–), a translator, a teacher, and a short story writer in Marathi; and B.D. Satoskar (1909–2000), a journalist, publisher, writer and translator are prominent names in the Marathi literature of yesteryear. Their short stories and novels present the river as an integral part of locals' lives. While they all came from the villages on the banks of the river, their association with the river was restricted to its use as a waterway and as a source of fish, a staple food for Goans. The socio-political changes, their associated movements, and the inter-generational turbulence of the first half of the twentieth century are reflected in the writing of Laxmanrao Sardesai, making the river a mirror of social and cultural life and political and economic aspirations. The title of his maiden novel in Marathi, *Mandavi! Tu Aattalees?* ("O Mandovi, have you dried up?"), published 1947, was the first attempt to make the river a symbol of the overall transformation and its reflection in literature.

This theme has been explored in the second half of the twentieth century, over the course of major changes in the land, which was liberated from Portuguese rule and integrated with the Indian nation in December 1961. There are several memoirs that describe the significant role of the river in the authors' anti-Portuguese actions. *Satiche vaann* ("A Sincere Pledge"), the prison memoirs of Mohan Ranade (1930–2019), who led a group of youth who believed in armed struggle against Portuguese rule; *Gomanta Mukti*

Dhyas (“Yearning for Goa Liberation”) by Ramdas Chafadkar (1935–2022) who was Mr. Ranade’s student and associate in armed conflict against the Portuguese rule; *Darkness to Dawn: A First Person Account of the Militant Struggle to Liberate Goa from Portuguese Colonialism* by Prabhakar Sinari (1928–); and *Salazarer Jele Unis Maas* (“Nineteen months in Salazar’s Jail”—originally written in Bengali) by Indian parliamentarian Tridib Choudhury all chronicle direct armed action and *satyagraha* and make the river a part of their experiences.

Post-Liberation, during the interim period of uncertain status within the larger Indian setting, which turned into existential conflict for Goa for a while, Goans used the Mandovi and Zuari rivers as symbols of fire and unrest in their bid to save Goa for Goans, making even a writer known for his romantic novels address the river as the burning Mandovi. His novel *Mandavi, Tu Petalees* (“O Mandovi, You Have Flared Up”) depicts a post-Liberation Goa looking forward to a transformation in land relations (through the land-to-the-tiller policy thanks to the Tenancy Act and Land Ceiling legislation), social mobility and a life of dignity for the distressed and the marginalized thanks to the merger proposed with Maharashtra, which was pushed as a “nationalist” goal and was countered by the clarion call of Goa for Goans (*Amchem Goem Amkam Zai* “We want our Goa.”) The turbulence and turmoil in Goa of the 1960s caused Chandrakant Kakodkar to describe the river as burning. The name Mandovi in the title of Laxmanrao’s aforementioned novel of 1947 “stands for the river no doubt, but it also symbolizes a harmony of incessant flow of time, cultural movement, life, history, geography, philosophy, world view, civilization, architecture, visual art, development and joy” (D’Souza 2003, 28). The critical issue of honouring unique Goan identity finally settled with the results of the historic Opinion Poll of 1967 ending up in favour of the United Goans Party, which had demanded “Goa for Goans” and had started singing its own song, *Gomten Goen* (“Pretty Goa”).⁸ The mandolins of Mandovi enchanted the Indian mind in the early decades after Liberation. In the political fight for the survival of golden Goa, Laxmanrao sang the praises of the rivers big and small that shaped the motherland. His Portuguese poems in two local newspapers *A Vida* and *O Herald* in the mid-1960s when the state patronage for the erstwhile colonial language was gone, would be read only by a small Lusophone readership in post-colonial Goa. Yet, his enthusiasm

⁸ In the political struggle against the merger of the newly liberated territory of Goa with the neighbouring state of Maharashtra, a cultural group formed to counter the propaganda issued by the mergerists, which produced songs such as these, appealing to Goans to appreciate their own strengths.

is evident from the poems he continued to publish during that period of political flux. His poem "Os nossos rios" ("Our Rivers") in *A Vida* (Smith 2017, 234), reads as follows, in English translation:

*Let me sing, friends, these rivers
Vast and deep
Like currents of love
That flows from maternal hearts,
Rivers that contain the fish that is
Everyday sustenance
Rivers, abundant and generous
As divine hands.*

...

*Rivers that transport us
To the world of dreams and illusions
And give to their shores
The eternal freshness that feeds
Our delicate palm trees
Let me sing, friend, these rivers
Where in our childhood we bathed,
And, seated in canoes, we sang...
Casting nets and hooks.
Rivers that run
In our hearts and veins.
Rivers deep and wide
Always lined with graceful plants.*

...

*Friend, let me sing these rivers
Whose soul I feel growing...
Growing... within me!*

The poem is about the local rivers, as the target readership was Goa-based. Most of these poems published between 1964 and 1966 were focussed on Goa and Goans, their past and their future. Describing the land and its vegetation, men and their matters, the poet speaks of the dreams and a vision.

In the years that followed, statehood—the status of a full-fledged constitutional unit in the Indian Union—became the wish of Goans. Konkani Porjecho Avaz ("The Voice of Konkani People") spearheaded the movement to get three demands fulfilled, bringing the two sections of the river in

Goa—the Mhadei and Mandovi sections—closer together with a unified voice. Konkani, the lingua franca of Goa, with its newfound recognition and prestige as a modern literary language, achieved political gains as a state and national language and made an entrance into administrative and constitutional functions. And yet, to show that nothing much had changed on the ground in society in terms of patriarchal domination, male chauvinism and the attitude of taking women for granted, senior writer and journalist Chandrakant Keni made the Mandovi a symbol of the complex undercurrents of mutual relationships in family life in the title *Mandavi ashich Vhavntaa*, i.e., “The Mandovi Flows the Same Way (Keni 1982, 81). Using the Mandovi as a part of life has continued further into 21st-century writings as well. N. Shivadas titled his book of essays in Marathi as *Laataa Mandavichyaa* (“Waves of the Mandovi”) in 2012.

In terms of literary expression, choice of language had a bearing on how people associated themselves with the motherland Goa, which formed a part of the larger Konkani region, covering the western coast of India along with three other linguistic states: Maharashtra to the north of Goa and Karnataka and Kerala to its south. Konkani was commonly used in Goa for social communication but the Hindu elite generally adopted Marathi for cultural expression. Goans looked to Marathi-speaking urban centres such as Poona (now Pune) and Bombay (now Mumbai), and also to the smaller towns of Dharwad and Belgaum (now Belagavi)—both in erstwhile Bombay state and now in the state of Karnataka—for their educational and career advancements. However, there was a section of youth influenced by the pioneer of modern Konkani literature V.R. Varde Valavalikar (1873–1946), commonly known as Shenoi Goembab, who started writing in Konkani. Prominent among these youth were B.B. Borkar (1910–1984), a.k.a. Bakibab Borkar, and Professor Laxmanrao Sardesai (1903–1986). In their support for Goa’s liberation struggle, they used Konkani in creating awareness through public addresses as well as their writings. Their creative writing continued in both Marathi and Konkani. There were others such as Pandurang Bhangi who had a very personal interaction with the Mandovi and called ardently for her to wake up (Bhangi 2006, 5). In 1945, before Indian Independence, the writer was asking the river about the kind of slumber she was experiencing, and poured out his heart in prose, urging the mother river to regain her lost glory through sacredness and freedom. Starting with a pain in heart, this *tête-à-tête* mentions:

when I see you in the wee hours, cuddling the town of Panaji on
your left side, sleeping under the blue cover of the sky and in

the quiet all around, when the stars are still observing their own faces in you, there is no disturbance of any kind in your waters... when I hear the sad sighs released from your heart, my eyes get flooded.

The piece addressing the Mandovi as seen in the wee hours, as penned in personal diary is a reflection of the popular mind in the middle of the twentieth century. Bhangi also produced a manuscript weekly *Mandavi* in Marathi which served as a bridge between the colonized territory and the diaspora. Though short-lived, its copies were sent to Mumbai-based readers for limited circulation who returned them after reading. Renowned poet B.B. Borkar's poetry collection *Dudhsagar* published in 1947 also shows how creative minds reflected the images of their natural heritage as symbols of pride and their literary identity. The famous Dudhsagar waterfall on the river of the same name, a tributary that proceeds from the south of Goa to become a part of river Mandovi, is a recurring image in Goan writings in different languages.

In that era of awakening of Goans through their mother tongue, many of the young writers in Konkani opted for poetry as their form. A leading voice among them was the famous poet and Laxmanrao's son, Dr. Manoharrao Sardesai (1925–2006). Having spent his childhood on the banks of the Mandovi, he developed an emotional bond with the river, which surfaced in his poems. He wrote a poem in Paris in the mid-1950s, asking himself "*Kenna Gonyan, Kenna Gonyan*" ("When will I be in Goa?"), speaking of things he wished to enjoy on *Mandaviche panchve deger* ("on the lush green bank of the Mandovi.") Here Goa as his motherland comes alive as the riverbank through the title of the poem. In another poem, while planning his return to India in 1958, the poet spoke of how he remembered the banana tree in the backyard, his grandmother's stories in the evening, the garden and hills, fun with children and finally of his love for the Mandovi. Many of these poems penned in faraway Paris were first published in the Konkani monthly *Pra-jecho Avaz* ("People's Voice"), edited by poet and teacher-turned-freedom fighter Bakibab Borkar. Another poem of Manoharrao addresses the Mandovi as his first love ("*Mandavi, Tum Mhaji Payli Preet.*") In his early writing in Marathi, he says:

*Mangeshi hi mazi Kashi, Santha Mandavi Ganga
Tribhuvana taraka Ambabai mazi Shantadurga*

He calls the famous Mangeshi (the abode of Lord Mangesh) as his own Kashi (Kashi is another name for Benaras—the holy pilgrimage centre), equating

the river Mandovi with the sacred Ganges. (Tadkodkar 2006, 24). This poet's association with the Mandovi is aptly described by another celebrated Konkani poet in his twelve poems of elegy on Manoharrai, of which one goes:

*Mandavichen lhar babden tuka sodit ravlen
Utor tujem sodit sodit, Fransak legit paavlen*

("Poor wave of Mandovi kept looking out for you,
in search of your word, it even reached France.")

These are the instances of the leading Goan literateurs who had the Mandovi in their heart and soul.

It was around the same time that the Mandovi played its role in the historic anti-colonial struggle. The major centres of armed resistance were on the banks of the Mandovi and its tributaries. The armed actions by local political activists against the Portuguese police at the posts such as Banastari and at police stations at Aldona and Betim used the waterway to their advantage. Attacks on the godowns at mining sites such as Shirgao and Pale in Bicholim taluka for mining explosives to use in armed struggle against colonial establishments are chronicled in the memoirs of the freedom fighters and also in the Marathi state publication *Goa, Daman ani Diu Swatantrya ladhyacha Itihas* or "History of Liberation Struggle of Goa, Daman and Diu" (Sardesai 1986). The role of the Mandovi in all such episodes is irrefutable. Carrying the haul of explosives across the river, hiding it in canoes afloat on the riverbanks before finding a safe storage site, and the planning involved could certainly form the basis of stories and chronicles yet to find their rightful literary space. Research in the modern history of this tiny state has seen Mandovi as a major player, whether in trade and commerce, transport, or political actions over the centuries. The valiant Ranes, as local chieftains, used the river Mhadei in their guerrilla conflict against the Portuguese, forming a part of the rich history yet to appear in textbooks for the benefit of the young Goans today.

In the 1960s, poets and writers had the freedom of expression offered by the liberation of Goa from colonial rule in December 1961. Newspapers and periodicals were filled with the young writers' creative and informative writings about the land and the river, about life nurtured by the lifeline and about sociocultural developments in the heartland of Goa. Padmashri R.V. Pandit (1917–1990), poet and freedom fighter, was a record maker of sorts, whose five collections of Konkani poetry (*Mhajen Utar Gavydyachen, Chandravall,*

Urtalen Ten Roop Dhartalen, Aaylen Tashen Gaylen, Dhartarechen Kavan)—later translated into English—were released on 26 January 1963. He adored his homeland Goa, describing it as a lady “decked with necklace of Mandovi and the waist girdle of Zuari.” His allusions to the river—“Those dimples in thy cheek are the Tiswadi islets” and “the dazzling white Dudhsagar fall is the *moghra* chaplet in the knot of thy hair”—in his poem “As a bride bedecked art, thou, my Goa” demonstrate the place Mandovi holds in Goans’ hearts (Newman 2019, 64).

This inaugural decade of liberated Goa brought to the fore the issue of the status of the small territory in the Indian Union, with the neighbouring state of Maharashtra (literally “Great Nation”) claiming Goa as culturally attached and geographically contiguous territory. This led to a Goan movement for over five years to resist the move of incorporating the newly liberated territory into a larger Marathi state. Claiming for the Konkani language the status of lingua franca, Goan leadership succeeded in getting the only post-Independence plebiscite in India in the form of the historic Opinion Poll in Goa to decide Goa’s future. In the course of this high-voltage conflict between the two sides, the Mandovi figured in public discussion, speeches, and songs along with famous temples, churches, farms and fields, traditions, and practices unique to Goa and Goans. The 1960s while witnessing the spread of elementary education in Marathi among the masses, awakened the self-respect and free expression of Goan youth in their tongue Konkani, which had yet to receive its rightful status as an official language.

In 1966, Krishnachandra Sharma-Bhikkhu in his Hindi novel *Astangata* is said to have commented on culture of Goa, and in the next decade, in 1977, Professor Aravinda Pandey published a novel that referred to colonialism, freedom, disillusionment, the common man, agriculture, cultural harmony, the pollution of Mandovi, industrial issues, human conflicts, the political mess, and change of power, giving it the title *Aur Mandavi Bahati Rahi* (“And the Mandovi Kept Flowing”). The territory that joined the Indian Union was welcomed through the medium of the Mandovi as can be seen from the title of the latter work. This love for the Mandovi has continued even in later Hindi writings on Goa, as evinced by the poems on the river by B.K. Rohitashva Sharma, Konkani translations of which were published with the title *Mandavi Nhayek* i.e., “To the River Mandovi” in 2004. (Karmali 2004, 140)

Konkani made its youthful literary appearance through new writers in Konkani from among the working masses, soon after Goa’s liberation. An ecological novel about mining operations on the banks of the Mandovi brought out the cultural and social turmoil experienced by the local

community. The riverbank acted as the scene of changing work culture, disturbing social change, and blatant exploitation of people. Terminology, images, and expressions which were still out of the range of Goan literature came out forcefully in this work. While imagining a village Kolamb introduced to mining activity, the writer Pundalik Naik in *Achchhev*⁹ describes it as “a filled pot (pitcher) on the waist-side of the Mandovi,” thereby personifying the river. While narrating the story of this unique village, the writer presents the river as “moving with bends and in style. She saw the immensely attractive small *Kolamb* on the way. She didn’t spare a moment. Lifted it like a child and held on her waist-side, with mother’s love. *Kolamb* is like a water pot on the waist-side of the river. Totally full. For round the year.” (Naik 1977)

The 1970s marked the beginning of the literary rise of Konkani youth from the Bahujan Samaj (the sections of the working class from predominantly the agricultural sector). Pundalik Naik led this literary movement with his seniors such as N. Shivdas and Tanaji Halarnkar. The Mandovi section of Goa made its mark in poetry, short stories, and dramas in Konkani. The latter literary form was traditionally associated with Salcete area, patronized in the Zuari and the Sal river basins, and often identified with Roman Catholic writers, actors, artists, musicians. With the appearance of Pundalik Naik as a dramatist, the Mandovi mainland not only shaped Konkani drama on modern lines, but also awakened the youth’s energy in the Mandovi basin, strengthening literary output over the following decades. This new Konkani literary movement grew on the banks of the river with a large number of budding writers finding their own voices. Tukaram Rama Shet, Bhiku Bomi Naik and many others from the mainland villages represented this phase. By the turn of the second decade after Liberation, the literary movement in Goa broadened with Konkani and Marathi sharing the growing literary harvest in Goa, mainly on the banks of the Mandovi.

While we find literature on Goa written in Portuguese, “the output and quality of fiction in Portuguese relating to Goa and Portugal is surprisingly thin,” possibly because there is an “absence of courses in literature or in any other subject in the humanities” or because “in more recent times, the oppressive Salazar regime imposed such severe censorship that writers in Portugal and its colonies would have had to resort to a magician’s wizardry to escape its noose.” As a result, fiction relating to Goa, either by Goan or Portuguese writers, “barely entered the picture.” (Shetty 1998, xvi). An example of Goan

⁹ The novel appeared in English translation in 2002 with the title *Upheaval*, translated by Vidya Pai, published by Oxford University Press.

writing in Portuguese is Francisco Luis Gomes' *Os Brahamanes*, written in 1866, "undoubtedly the first novel by a Goan" (Machado 2018, 39) which spoke "Against British Rule and Indian Castes," though its story was set in Faisalabad in North India during the Indian Mutiny, not in Goa.

Writings in English on Goa by native Goans as well as the Goan diaspora present their socioeconomic and politico-cultural life both in their homeland and the lands of opportunities they have found over the centuries. Nostalgia and recollections of sociocultural life find place in such works. Early works on Goa by native Goans like *Sorrowing Lies My Land* (1955) by Lambert Mascarenhas speaks of political revolt by landed gentry but the locale it presents is from a South Goan village. In *Tivolem* (1998), US-based Victor Rangel Ribeiro (1925–) created an imaginary village of the same name. *Ferry Crossings* (1998), a collection of translated short stories from Goa, brings about a shift, as the title suggests. The relationship between Goa and the Mandovi can be better understood from the very title of the book. The numerous islands in Goa still served by ferry services and ferry Crossings—as village boundaries and also as links to the islands—carry a lot of significance for the islanders. This collection makes a connection with the past through translations of stories from the original Portuguese—a language in decline in the Goan context—and also from the two contesting vernaculars, Marathi and Konkani, in modern Goan life and tourism. A collection like *Stray Mango Branches* (Noronha 2013) conjures images of the river and the human life it supported, the culture and history that unfolded on its banks, watered by its flow. Issues such as the sighting of tigers—and the proposed Tiger Reserve stalled by political interests, such as of those in the ruling dispensation—that are closely linked to the Mhadei valley, the Mhadei Wildlife Sanctuary and the rich biodiversity under threat from so-called development plans find a place in this book. Prose as well as poetry present the Mandovi as a living entity bringing life to the villages and communities on its banks. English novel *Rescuing a River Breeze* by Mrinalini Harchandrai set in Goa at the point of its liberation and written from the perspective of the teenager daughter of a Portuguese officer) was published in 2017 with a poem of tribute "to the river that etched itself in the title," making it amply clear how the land and the river are inseparable.¹⁰

As Goa, the last of the colonial posts to be integrated with India, moved for-

¹⁰ The poem titled "Mandovi" speaks of the river as an "illusionist walking among the people wearing sunrises in her lambent eyes"... "a time traveller through parchment ages, a conjurer of bridges from ferries, and casinos from Arabian dhows"... "An alchemist of silt and salt courting open-mouthed kisses from the ocean"... "juggling old and new cidades with super natural sleight you have to look closely or you can miss a seasoned shapeshifter."

ward to seek its rightful place as a full-fledged state in the Indian Union, the younger generation of writers looked to their past and future with a greater sense of belonging. The third decade after liberation (the 1980s) marked a new awakening through the spread of education and expansion of road network and communication connecting the Mhadei section to the relatively developed main towns of Goa in the Mandovi section. This also marks a shift in this overview of literary output from the Mandovi section to the Mhadei section, with developments such as the Anjune dam on the Costi, a tributary of the Valvanti river in the Mhadei basin, and the growing use of the Chorla Ghat to connect Goa to Karnataka and Maharashtra. Greater communication and education facilities led to more awareness and social mobilization brought real-life issues to the fore. The proposal of the hydroelectric power project at the origin of the Mhadei by the Karnataka government in the early 1970s, followed by the proposed water diversion from the Dudhsagar in the late 1980s were issues that hardly figured in public discussions. But a new consciousness about the environment and culture was developed by the Swami Vivekanand Smriti Sangh formed in 1986 at Keri-Sattari in the Mhadei section. Literary activities started as a means of socio-cultural awakening and environmental awareness. The daily *Tarun Bharat* published a series of informative articles by Rajendra Kerkar on the Mhadei and its importance, the proposed project for water diversion, and its serious ill effects on Goa for over a year. This became a crusade led by Rajendra Kerkar, who drew the attention of the scholars, academics, researchers and politicians towards the imminent dangers posed by the Karnataka proposals. Pournima Kerkar contributed immensely by her writings on local culture, festivals, and rituals, linking them with the environment. There were expeditions through the valley to the point of the origin of the river, and the volunteers and participants expressed their views and emotions experienced during their repeated visits. *Mhadei Maye* ("O Mother Mhadei"), a column in a Konkani newspaper running from 2002 to 2003 brought out the sentiments of a creative writer (Paryekar 2011, XIII). Many young writers and nature lovers started writing about the river and the human life, flora and fauna, cultural and economic aspects shaped by it. This inspired a few others from the Mandovi section—artists, writers, social activists and journalists—to visit the valley, trek the terrain, experience its natural grandeur and explore its wonders over the last 25 years.

Karnataka's plans to divert water from the Dudhsagar came to light in 1990 and were strongly objected to by the Goa state government. A communication war ensued for the next five years, culminating in the assignment

given to NEERI to study the issue and submit an Environmental Impact Assessment report. The locals were made aware of the issue by the youth from the valley with facts and figures. Realizing the importance of organized intervention and conservation of the rivers in Goa, a body called Goa River Conservation Network was formed in 1997. In this decade, self-exploration and assertion in literary form gained momentum in the Mhadei section (Kerker 1996, 54). A workshop on the Mhadei to discuss multiple aspects of the river followed the formation of the aforementioned Network. Writings on the topic in the local press before and after this brainstorming event continued and extended to the wider coverage of the issue by the local and national press. Then came the *Mhadei Bachao Abhiyan* ("Save the Mhadei Campaign") in which politicians, scientists, social activists and conservationists joined hands to save the river. Literary figures and associations gained insights on the issue and young budding writers expressed their love and respect for the river through their works.¹¹ "In ancient times, the local flora had their green life with the elixir of the Mhadei which still runs in their tissues.... Sons of the soil from Sattari have taken a leap to progress thanks to the river Mhadei. It is not merely a promoter of agricultural development but also the mother of the ancient culture of Goa.... A number of battles were fought, won and lost in this valley. Sattari never experienced the rule of a glorious empire and yet the flow of Mhadei stands witness to the history that Sattari experienced and created" (Kerker 1996, 57). These writings also gave voice to the local communities and their issues. Prakash Paryekar depicts marginalized sections of society including Dalits, Dhangars (a cattle and goat breeding nomadic tribe), a monkey hunter nomadic tribe, nomadic tribes selling animal products, as well as the emotional turmoil of a Catholic family in a Hindu village. (Paryekar 2021, 9)

The new generation of writers in local languages from the Mhadei section delve deeper into specific elements of the river and the ecosystem in both their academic and creative literary productions. *Mhadei Nadeeteel Doha* ("Plunge Pools in Mhadei River"), *Tallvacha Sadda* (the Laterite plateau in Chorla Ghat), *Mhadei Vadda* (a hamlet called Mhadei), *Vazrapoya* (the grand waterfall acting as the main source of Mhadei), and *Ghotelichi Deurai* (the sacred grove at Ghoteli) form the subject of short essays by young creative writers, illustrating this trend. Poets call the river the saviour of the world (as it provides irrigation, crops, fodder, drinking water, livelihoods and life values) on the one hand, and also seek strength from this mother in their struggle

¹¹ Poets like Shaba Kudtarkar, Gopinath Gauns and Prakash Paryekar contributed to this in Konkani. There are also other young writers from the Mhadei section who write in Marathi.

to protect her from evil eyes (coming in the form of the proposed diversion) on the other (Gavde 2011, 7). Konkani poets have made the Mhadei a part of their lives as can be seen from a number of verses presented in the biennial rural literary conferences (Barve 2019, 71–72, 74–76, 79), starting in 2018.

The Mhadei is Mahadevi to those who reside near its origin. They worship the deity by that name. In the lower parts of the stream, after it crosses the hills and forests, it becomes Mahad Ai (“the Great Mother”). The river feeds the people and breeds their generations. In the Mhadei section of the river, first generation learners with their newfound voice respect and revere the mother in the festivals and rituals, family occasions and social celebrations. They see their local deities Santer mai, Kelbai, Brahmani maya, Sasnachi maya or Mauli (“the mother”) as different forms of the Mhadei. Temples in the Mhadei section feature *kalash* worship in which pitchers containing the water from Mhadei are considered divine. The strong belief that “only those who worshipped Mhadei river sincerely have managed to survive in the area, others had to run away from the village” has now taken literary form. (Paryekar 2022, 42).

Author Prakash Paryekar has spent a few days every year for twelve years in a row trekking and hiking to be in the lap of his Great Mother in recurring seasonal visits, with halts and stays, observing, understanding, enjoying the journey, and finally coming out with a volume that can claim to be the only one of its kind, dedicated to the river in all its aspects. And still, as he says, “shrubs and grasses, insects and life forms, stones and rocks” need to be studied systematically and scientifically to unearth the past of the Mhadei valley. A river’s life story of this kind is not so common. Dr. Nandkumar Kamat in his insightful foreword to this *magnum opus* on the Mhadei wonders whether it is “a monograph on Mhadei or an encyclopedia.” One can also cite Tim Butcher’s work (2007) as coming close to this. Prakash Paryekar, as a leading writer in the Mhadei section has tried to look at the issues of Mhadei in all his writings—poems, short stories, novels. His short stories talk about the wonders in the stream, the dependence of people on the river. They address the conflicts between tradition and modernity in the state scheme of road construction, the abandonment of local traditional water sources dependent on the Mhadei, the damming of the river leading to total annihilation of a unique seasonal agricultural practice in the bends of the river called *Puran sheti* that has been feeding the toiling masses for centuries, many with no land of their own. Over 500 families practise this type of farming and the average annual yield touches almost four tonnes of rice; proof enough to justify the love and devotion of the local masses to the

Great Mother. Paryekar's latest novel *Puran* (2022) has vividly described the cultivators' life in the Mhadei basin. In his comment on the river's response to human actions, an elderly character in the novel says "The river gets furious when man errs/misbehaves, and a married woman has to pacify her (it) with ceremonial offerings and respect" (Bhave 2022, 23). The narrator in the novel says "River's nature is to flow, and man? He often stops at a point, becomes a puddle and then rots there" (Bhave 2022, 23).

This literary work has depicted the destruction of a system as a result of the modern approach of obstructing the natural journey of the river through bunding and damming. More noteworthy is the attempt to revive *puran sheti* on one of the sites by involving the students in the university system in the entire process from preparing the plot to harvesting the crop. The Mhadei is at the centre of this novel action by the youth under the guidance of academic fraternity, acting as a preserver of indigenous knowledge system in a practical way, doubling as a demonstration in sustainable development efforts in the face of climate change concerns. In this, a writer's role as a role model and a motivator for his community and the society at large comes out clearly, with Mhadei as a mediator and a catalyst.

Alongside this community initiative, Prakash Paryekar's fiction has come on celluloid with a National Award winning film *Kajro*,¹² where a river and the bridge present a painful social reality. The two banks represent two social worlds.

As the Mhadei calls its sons and daughters to know, see, and live with the times, the appeal is no less for those who are on their mission to explore. There are many who have a similar bond with the river. A traveller and blogger Anil Purohit says:

"Each time I take the ferry from Piedade to Diwar and disembark on the island, I stay close to the Mandovi, hearing her waffle lazily beyond the thick wall of mangroves that hides a narrow bund hewn from the earth and baked hard by an unrelenting sun.

The bund keeps the river at bay separating the paddy fields inland from the estuary where the Mandovi empties into the Arabian sea. Were the river to breach the bund at high tide and flood the fields inland, it would leave salt deposits behind and render the fields unfit for cultivation for a long time.

On the stretch of bunds that leads me to Chora, there's little or no sign of an opening though I am hard pressed to account for

¹² Award for Best Konkani Feature Film in 2019

the still water on the other side of the bund in the direction of paddy fields with the churches of Old Goa as the backdrop. I can see their outlines faintly in the distance. From where I now stand for a glimpse of the churches above the head high vegetation lining the bund, it is difficult to imagine, I am on an island. Behind me, I hear (the) slapping sound of the mangroves as the Mandovi laps at the vegetation. Kites circle lazily overhead, riding invisible thermals.

In wide open spaces, a sense of silence is had from a lack of movement, accentuated by the stillness of the landscape.

And it is only in the breaks in the vegetation, where the Mandovi glints silver from the sun glancing of its surface, that one feels there's life beyond the confines of space one is currently navigating." (Purohit 2013, 101)

The picture in words cited above is poetry, painting, reportage and travelogue all rolled into one; that is the magic the Mandovi offers to those who care and dare. Goa as a home to an estuarine ecosystem has many such wonders thanks to the Great Mother. Within its relatively short length, the Mhadei/Mandovi allows the khazan ecosystem, the sluice gates called *manos* operating in the natural movements of tides, and a unique agricultural setting that produces rare and special varieties of rice, while also allowing fishing activities to occur in unison. Along the route of the river, villages were visited by boats carrying agricultural products and spices in the olden days. Today, this estuarine ecosystem invites young researchers and film makers to look for otters, which are reliable bioindicators, and educate the world about the necessity of their survival and protection, producing captivating stories of human-wildlife coexistence at the brink of environmental degradation.¹³

Literary activities during the past decade or so have seen the use of newer media such as videos on YouTube or street plays all over Goa, presented by students and youth to make an appeal to the Goan masses to save the Mhadei. The Vivekananda Environmental Awareness Brigade inspired and guided by Mr. Rajendra Kerkar was in the forefront of this activity (Prabhudessai 2018, 120). Earthivist Collective made efforts to mobilize people for the river through their YouTube channel. Ace theatre person Rajdeep Naik

¹³ Nitya Navelkar, a student of National Institute of Design, produced and premiered a short film *Kharvan* in Konkani, which was premiered in 55th International Film Festival of India in Panaji in November 2024. Her short film on sand bubbler crabs—*Sand Laddoo*—made it to the Manila Film Festival.

has been in action to wake up Goans everywhere with his latest production in Konkani *Ganv Jaalaa Janntto* which has reached out to the audiences as far as Mumbai and London, in its march to a double century of live shows. The group wants to create a world record with seven shows in a day on 18th May 2025. The video channels from Goa have made their contribution to the Mhadei awareness campaign and poured out immense love and attachment to the river. Amateurs, budding artists, and expert musicians including renowned playback singer Hema Sardesai have been adding to this flow of sentiments with their own emotional appeals.

As the search for the essence of the Mhadei progresses, we find the folk forms reappearing in literature reflecting authors' innermost feelings for the Great Mother (Gauns 2012, 41, 43, 59, 95).¹⁴ The creative community and ecosystem have a symphony to offer the world. The poem by Salil Chaturvedi (Earthivist Collective 2023) is a measure of the environmental concerns and worries shared by people who have recently chosen to make the Mandovi riverbank their home. "Living in the tidal tapestry of the Mhadei, intimate with the stretches on her belly," the poet, speaks of the fear lurching in his mind when he asks how the river will treat him. Will it hold him "like pink petals of a wild flower" or will its "waters swirl around" him, "letting oil shimmer" on his skin?" Will the river "utter meandering tales or will it be a dialect stuttering in dams?"

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¹⁴ Gauns pens *Jat* and *Sokarat*—the two forms of lyrics in the folklore—on the Mhadei.

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Lakshmi Subramanian is retired Professor of History, Centre for Studies in Social Sciences, Calcutta, and BITS Pilani, Goa. She has had a long and distinguished research and teaching career and is credited with making major contributions to the fields of Indian business history and music history. She has many publications to her credit, the latest ones being *Singing Gandhi's India: Music and Sonic Nationalism* (2020) and *India Before the Ambanis: A History of Indian Business, Market and Economy* (2024). She has been the recipient of several international fellowships including the prestigious Mellon fellowship and Adam Smith fellowship.

Rajendra P. Kerkar is involved in environment education, protection, and conservation in Goa for the last three decades. He has been instrumental in initiating the movement for notifying the Mhadei and Netravali Wildlife Sanctuaries. He serves as the General Secretary of the Mhadei Bachao Abhiyan, as a member of the National Board of Wildlife, Goa State Biodiversity Board and other organizations involved in protecting the history, heritage, ecology, and wildlife of the Western Ghats.

Parineeta Dandekar is an environmental advocate and Associate Coordinator for the South Asia Network on Dams, Rivers, and People (SANDRP), where she works to ensure that India's last free-flowing rivers remain protected. Her research uncovers the failures of large-scale water projects while amplifying the voices of communities, cultures, and ecosystems that depend on these rivers. She is pushing for policies that prioritize both people and the planet, ensuring a future where rivers continue to sustain life.

Meera Mohanty is Editor at *The Economic Times*. A financial journalist with twenty years of experience, she covers politics, business, and closely covers the business of mining.

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Rishikesh Bahadur Desai is an award-winning Senior Assistant Editor at *The Hindu*, covering northwestern Karnataka. With experience at *The Times of India*, *Vijay Times*, and *The Asian Age*, he reports on governance, decentralization, agriculture, and social welfare. His 2024 Karnataka State Media Academy award highlights the impact of his journalism. Some of his best regarded stories include a series on the Siddi African tribe getting ST certification, an inquiry into the alleged sale of a poor widow, and restoration of the Surang Bavi Karez, an ancient heritage structure in Bidar. He has extensively covered Hyderabad-Karnataka's backwardness, farmer distress, and infras-

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Vaishali Kashyap is a doctoral research scholar at the Department of Humanities and Social Sciences, BITS Pilani K.K. Birla Goa Campus. Her ongoing research explores factors behind livelihood change in a traditional fishing community in Assam. She holds a post-graduate degree in Water Policy and Governance from TISS, Mumbai. In the past, she has been a part of organizations like Tata Trusts and INREM Foundation, engaging with the development space with a particular focus on public health, nutrition, and water quality.

Vasudha Sawaiker trained in law at V.M. Salgaoncar College of Law, Goa University and has a post-graduate degree in social work from the Tata Institute of Social Sciences (TISS), Mumbai. At TISS, she was awarded the prize and shield for being the best student in Dalit and Tribal Social Work. As a lawyer, she represented clients in cases on social justice and inclusion in public employment. Her legal research encompasses diverse areas such as organ donation, forest rights, and construction workers. She was awarded the UGC-JRF Fellowship in Social Work in 2016 and is presently a research scholar at the School of Sanskrit, Philosophy and Indic Studies, Goa University.

A. G. Chachadi, former Professor, Goa University, Goa completed his M.Tech. and PhD from IIT Roorkee. Before joining Goa University as teaching faculty, he served as a scientist at the National Institute of Hydrology, Government of India for seven years. His research interests and works are related to the fields of hydrogeology and water resources management, environmental science and exploration geophysics. He has published several research publications in national and international journals and has worked as a consulting hydrogeologist for several mining companies.

Nirmal U. Kulkarni is a herpetologist and nature photographer with over two decades of experience in conservation science and field herpetology in tropical forests of Western Ghats and North East India. He has served as an Expert Member of the Goa State Biodiversity Board and Goa State Wildlife Advisory Board for two terms, besides being part of various state and national committees on wildlife and research. Nirmal is currently Chairman

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Vidyadhar Atkore is a freshwater ecologist by training, interested in quantifying the anthropogenic and environmental factors on freshwater biodiversity across different scales. Currently he is a faculty member at the Salim Ali Centre for Ornithology and Natural History (SACON), South India Centre, Wildlife Institute of India, Coimbatore. He teaches wetland ecology and management, ichthyology, landscape ecology, GIS, human ecology and ecohydrology.

Nandini Velho is a wildlife biologist working on the human-dimensions of forest management. She has completed her PhD from James Cook University and was an Earth Institute Fellow at Columbia University. She has worked as a Policy Fellow with the Minister of Environment and Forests, and with multiple forest departments and communities across India. She is interested in the intersection of art, science and action.

Helga do Rosario Gomes is a Research Scientist at Lamont-Doherty Earth Observatory, Columbia Climate School. She graduated with a PhD in Biological Oceanography from University of Bombay and has held research positions in Japan and Maine. Dr. Gomes is interested in large-scale climatic questions such as the impacts of the new and unusual planktonic blooms in the Arabian Sea, the effect of Arctic warming and ice melt on the American lobster, the impact of urbanization on wetland systems, and ocean acidification and deoxygenation of waters from harmful algal blooms. With her colleagues she has been developing ocean monitoring and decision support systems tailored to meet needs for sustainable management of coastal resources in tropical countries experiencing climate change. She mentors postdoctoral, graduate, and undergraduate students, but her passion lies in providing guidance and support to high school students, some of whom have won national and international awards. She is a trustee and Science Advisor for Goa Chitra, an anthropological museum in Benaulim, Goa that preserves and showcases the culture and lifestyle of the people of the west coast of India.

Dhirendra M. Deshpande has nearly four decades of experience in Indian higher education, starting as a Lecturer in a degree college in Goa, working in various capacities in reputed institutions such as Symbiosis, Pune, KLE Society, Bengaluru, as Faculty, Principal, Director and finally retiring as the Vice Chancellor of ISBM University in Chhattisgarh. As a columnist for a leading daily newspaper in Goa, he has rich experience in writing on a range of economic and policy issues such as budgets, monetary policy, reforms and liberalization. As a faculty in Symbiosis, he was associated with guiding and evaluating various finance-related projects that included building economic models for producing hydroelectricity, long-range demand and sales forecasting.

Leon Morenas is the Principal of the Goa College of Architecture. He was Associate Professor of Architecture at the School of Planning and Architecture, Delhi. He was also a Fellow at the Indian Institute of Advanced Study, Shimla where he worked on a project entitled “Mohallas and Smart Cities: Post-Colonial Development in Delhi.” He was a World Social Sciences Fellow in Sustainable Urbanization (2014) and Programme Coordinator of the Masters in Social Design at Ambedkar University, Delhi (2013). He is an architect with a Master’s in Urban Design from the School of Planning and Architecture, Delhi and a PhD in Architectural Sciences—with a specialization in Informatics—from Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute, Troy, New York. Professor Morenas’s research uses the disciplinary lens of Science and Technology Studies (STS) to understand the relationship of technology with contemporary design, architecture and urban planning. His most recent writings have focused on urban governance through technology with a focus on smart cities and their command centres. He is also working on a set of essays that attempt to answer the question: “Is there an Indian way of thinking about technology?” using the foils of history, metaphysics and literature.

Manisha Rodrigues is an architect based in Goa. She holds a Bachelor’s degree from the Goa College of Architecture and a Master’s in Architecture with a specialization in architectural conservation from CEPT University, Ahmedabad. With over a decade of experience in practice and more than three years as an assistant professor at her alma mater, the Goa College of Architecture, her work often explores the intersections of water, heritage, and the built environment. She was part of projects like the Serampore Initiative led by the National Museum of Denmark, which documented Indo-Danish heritage along the Hooghly River. Her academic and professional work reflects a deep connection to water and cultural landscapes—from the Sabarmati and Hooghly to the Sal and Mandovi rivers in Goa. As a fellow of the Goa Wa-

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Sujata Noronha is an educator specializing in early literacy and enjoys working with children and books. She is deeply interested in the power of the printed word and the pathways to access and growth emerging from it. In Goa, she works out of her organization called Bookworm, that provides resources and facilitates libraries and reading within the community of Panjim and in schools around the state. She consults with the Tata Trusts within the education portfolio.

Maya de Souza has an inter-disciplinary background with over twenty years’ experience in public policy and the law. She graduated from Oxford University in Philosophy, Politics and Economics before studying and practising law. After an L.L.M. (London), graduating with distinction, she joined the Department for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs in the UK Government Legal Services and later moved to policymaking. She headed various teams on better institutional structures for flood risk and integrated water management where she led a project on holistic approaches to water management in the climate risk context. She has also headed the Business Environment Council Hong Kong’s Policy and Research Team, leading projects on climate resilience; and served on the BITC–UK Circular Economy team as Co-Director, Environment. Maya has been an elected Green Party councillor in London, playing an active role in town and country planning and scrutiny of the environment among other policy areas. Currently, Maya lives and works in Goa, and is a co-director of Act for Goa, co-founder of Materia Verde (a new biomaterials industry accelerator powered by Quicksand). She was previously with Bangalore-based think tank, CSTEP. She also works with various consultancies on future-proofing and strategic insight.