The Goan Patient (or the Impatient Goan): A Cultural Speculation

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Abstract. Intentionally blurring lines between fiction, biography and autobiography, this article maybe 'narrative' proposes a narrativized 'cultural speculation' on Goan-ness in the experience of diaspora.

Keywords: Goan-ness; diaspora; identity; memory; narrative

Dr. Roberto wasn’t the kind to gaze out of the wall-to-wall glass window of his 23rd floor contemporary designer-furnished surgery, but this afternoon something cast the middle-aged neurologist into one of his rare pensive states. In spite of his gaze, the Brazilian sun reflecting off the mirrored windows of the neighbouring buildings went unacknowledged, as did the intense hum of the afternoon traffic of metropolitan São Paulo. His gaze seemed to be focussed inwards, flipping in his mind through the case histories of his twenty-year experience as a specialist in the rehabilitation of patients who had undergone brain surgery or who had suffered strokes, and who were often debilitated by dementia and loss of memory. For the first time in his career, a patient who had undergone surgery to remove a life-threatening brain tumour faced him; moreover, soon after his surgery, this patient had suffered a massive, near lethal, haemorrhagic stroke. The neurosurgeon who operated on the patient and referred the case to Dr. Roberto had warned him that the case defied the clear-cut categories most of their colleagues were accustomed to. The patient was sent to Dr. Roberto because of his reputation of delving into the complexities of neurological cases that most of his colleagues would not touch. He was also known to question previous diagnoses of dementia and turn such cases into academic papers at international conferences where his paper sessions famously drew crowds.

Now hearing the patient and his wife entering his room and politely accommodating themselves in the over-stuffed leather arm-chairs on the other side of his table, Dr. Roberto adjusted his glasses, sat up straight, put on his well-worn understanding smile and slowly swung his chair to face the elderly couple,
catching the anxious eye of the wife. The patient himself seemed oblivious to his presence.

“Thank you, Senhora, for all the information you gave me over the phone about your husband’s brain surgery and stroke. So, recapitulating, you were sent to me because your husband seems to be having problems with his memory and a certain mental confusion. As you know I am a specialist in post-stroke memory and dementia rehabilitation. We know that your husband’s surgery and stroke were located in his frontal lobe. As I already mentioned to you, this may cause certain bouts of confusion, sometimes even an apparent change in personality. Now, if you don’t mind, I’d like to spend the rest of the time of this consultation talking to him directly.”

“Doutor, as I said, my husband’s memory has been severely impaired and he tends to get very confused. He confuses languages, loses himself in details . . . sometimes he doesn’t make sense and I often wonder if he knows who he is. But, demented? No, no!”

“Yes, Senhora, you told me. How are you feeling, Doutor Trindade?”

“Doutor, please don’t call me doutor. I’m an academic. In this country, it’s people who don’t have PhDs who like to be called doutor: you know, lawyers, engineers and so on . . .

“My apologies, senhoria! In fact, I also have a doctorate! Mine was in post-traumatic memory disorders, but let’s go on. So, tell me a little bit about yourself. You’re Indian, I believe?”

The well-dressed elderly lady accompanying (or was it guarding?) the patient was quick to interrupt. “Doutor, my husband isn’t Brazilian. He’s a Goan. If you don’t mind, they don’t like to be called Indian.”

“Sorry, Senhora. I wasn’t aware there was a country called Goa.”

“There isn’t. It’s India,” she answered trying to hide her now increasing impatience. She was at the stage where the suspicion of the dementia of her husband had irritated her to the extent that she became acutely aware of symptoms of possible dementia in all those that crossed her path.

Dr. Roberto turned to the grey-haired elderly gentleman looking distractedly at the medical volumes in the glass-fronted bookcase beside him. On meeting a new patient, he had the habit of looking out for an adjective that immediately came to his mind and using it as a coordinate for the stance he would adopt in his chosen line of treatment; the word that came to him as he crossed gazes with the patient was surprisingly wise. A patient with suspected dementia, and the word was wise! Containing his own surprise, he continued: “Ah, senhora so he doesn’t like to be called Indian because he’s now Brazilian?”

“No, Doutor, he’s in fact British.”

“Ah! Born in London, by any chance?” said the doctor to the gentleman, trying to be pleasant and catch his attention. “I did my PhD at King’s in London!” He tried to stake out the common ground between them as academics.

The man turned away from the bookcase and gave a tired, almost blasé, smile at the doctor. “Doutor, my wife simplifies things. I’m Goan, but I’m also British,
Yemeni and Portuguese. I could be Indian, but India requires me to abandon my other nationalities to be an Indian citizen and if I do that, I will no longer be Goan. After forty years here, I could also be Brazilian, but why have a fourth passport that doesn’t tell me who I am?”

“I’m sorry? I’m not sure I understood . . .” That word wise now bothered the doctor.

The patient’s wife hurried to his rescue. “Doutor, my husband is part of the Goan diaspora. They have moved around the globe quite a bit.” The lady was now fidgeting with her mobile phone trying to pretend that she was going to let the two men get on with their conversation.

“Goan diaspora, Senhora? I’ve heard of the Jewish diaspora and the African diaspora that we have here in the Americas due to slavery. In fact, my grandfather came from Lebanon and he sometimes talked about a Lebanese diaspora; but a Goan diaspora is new to me.”

The patient’s wife was once more sure he needed rescuing again. She put her mobile phone down, sat back in her chair and took a deep breath. “It was new to me as well, Doutor. I mean when I met my husband. In fact, we met forty years ago as colleagues lecturing at the same university. He had just arrived from Mozambique, where his family still lived. Some time later, when we started dating and I took him home to meet my family (you see I had told them I was dating someone from Mozambique), they expected to see a black African. He introduced himself as a Goan. I tried to tell them he was actually British but he said he was also Portuguese and Yemeni and that confused them. He made no effort to explain. One of my brothers even said “Ah, feel at home, we Brazilians, especially here in São Paulo, are also a mixture of Portuguese, Germans, Spanish, Italians . . .” but my husband cut him short saying “it’s not at all the same thing! Goans are not mixed.” So my brothers have since referred to him, when they speak to me, as “sen negrinho”—“your little darkie.” She settled into her chair and went back to pretending to concentrate on her mobile. “Negrinho indeed! Such ignorance!”

“So, Doutor Trindade . . .” said the doctor, raising his voice a little as if to guarantee catching the attention of the patient whose gaze was now slowly scanning the horizon through the large glass window behind the doctor.

“Doutor, please call me by my first name, Evelyn.” The patient spoke keeping his gaze fixed on the horizon.

“Oh, sorry! Of course! You know, I once had a spinster aunt called Evelyn! I didn’t know it was a man’s name.”

“Evelyn Waugh!” said the patient with a slight hint of irritation in his voice, still without averting his gaze from the now more interesting horizon.

Disguisedly, on watchdog duty next to her husband, eyes still on her mobile, and convinced she was being discreet, the wife quipped: “Doutor, my husband is referring to a famous male English author, Evelyn Waugh.”

“I see . . . so, uhm . . .” The doctor coughed, almost choking. “Yes, Yemeni you said, Senhor Evelyn? We may be cousins! As I said, my family came from the Lebanon. Beirut, in fact.”
The patient kept his still unaverted gaze on the view out of the window behind the doctor. He had been through this so often. All this confusion about Goans. In fact, Goan authors of the diaspora had repeatedly presented the dilemma. You can google Goa, he thought, but you can’t google a Goan; at least not a diaspora Goan. Google refers to Goans as those born in Goa, an identification that many Goans in Goa would have a problem with, vis-à-vis the heterogeneity of caste, religion and language, not to speak of the recent influx of non-Goan migrants. The patient shook his head visibly as he silently remembered a novel he had just read—Mr Iyer Goes to War—by Ryan Lobo, a young Bangalore-born Goan. Intentionally or not (who can say if the intention, after all, is the author’s or something the reader reads into the text), Lobo seemed to cleverly portray the in-betweeness of Goan-ness, and the difficulty to place a Goan, through the protagonist Mr. Iyer: a Tamil, English-speaking Brahmin who feels constantly in touch with his “other-worldly origins—ever present but just beyond that which is visible—like knowledge gained in a dream and lost on waking up.”

The patient saw Goan-ness in the protagonist’s choice to be a brahmacharya, a pilgrim-novice moved by a certainty that is yet to be known. This lack of facile fixity and locatability leads to him being constantly seen as demented or as a misfit.

The patient had seen a similar portrayal of intangible Goan-ness also in the novel Pears from the Willow Tree by another Goan writer of the diaspora within India, Violet Dias Lannoy. Her protagonist Sebastian, a Catholic Gandhian political activist in India, caught in-between established cultural categories, is also moved by an immaterial certainty, beyond the reach of visibility. To his friends and colleagues, he seemed like one of those “pilgrims to the Ganges. They’ve got to discard their old clothes even if the water they’re going to plunge into is as filthy as sin.”

Like a wave, the next memory rapidly and successively came to a crest in his mind. He pondered on how he identified with Goan-ness portrayed as ineffable, transcendental, even; perhaps a matter of faith. Like faith, Goan-ness can either be confessed, and then judged by one’s interlocutors, or be indirectly, fleetingly, visible on one’s face, in one’s actions; judged by the non-comprehending as neither-here-nor there: dementia. He also remembered the indirect Goan-ness of the protagonist of the novel Crossroads written by the Goan Ricardo Siqueira. Like Mr. Iyer of Lobo’s novel, Father Jean-Luc, Siqueira’s protagonist, is not Goan; he’s Belgian and a missionary Catholic priest who doesn’t fit well into the established category of priesthood and its demands, but a priest nonetheless; one moved strongly and ironically by his faith—a source of alternating certainty and doubt, one motivating the other. The patient pondered on this particular thought: Goan-ness as certainty and doubt; this very combination opening it up to being judged as dementia by the unsuspecting (or would it be the uninitiated?)

The patient’s musings were abruptly interrupted by the need he felt to respond to the patiently waiting doctor. “Yemeni? Lebanon? Beirut? Doutor, all that takes me back to when I was at university in England in the seventies . . . I was involved in student demonstrations and anti-imperialist politics . . . I felt I needed to reinforce my non-western identity. I decided to renew my Yemeni passport that
was due to expire shortly. So, I took a flight from London to the Yemen via Beirut. A Middle East Airlines flight; it was the Lebanese airline at the time, you know.”

“And, Senhor Evelyn, they say Beirut was a beautiful city at the time.” The doctor felt a distant but lingering need to probe further the issue of the patient’s existing diagnosis of possible dementia.

The patient looked at the doctor’s face for the first time. It was a look that he used when he spoke to his doctoral students. A look that whispered we may be equals but not quite. “Doutor, I didn’t stop over at Beirut. I only changed flights there. The civil war was raging in Beirut back then. The worst bit is that when I got to the Yemen, the Immigration officials didn’t let me in, even on a Yemeni passport! They said I was persona non grata in the Yemen, because my grandmother had collaborated with the ‘racist British colonizers’ and with the Zionists. They said my family was pro-Israeli and an enemy of the nation. You see, the South Yemen was a kind of Marxist dictatorship at the time. They told me to use the last few days that my Yemeni passport was valid to return to London immediately. They put me on the flight back to Beirut a few hours later.”

“Collaboration with the British and the Zionists, Senhor Evelyn? What on earth did your family do?” Dr Roberto started taking notes frantically. Wisdom or dementia?

“Doutor, it’s a long story. You see, as educated and professional Goans, my mother’s family, on her father’s side, went to the Yemen from British India in the mid-nineteenth century to help run the British colonial bureaucracy. The then colony of Aden in southern Yemen was administered from Bombay in British India. Those ancestors of mine! Colonial bureaucrats and bootlickers they were! My grandmother’s father was an officer in the British Indian army and was asked to set up the Police Force in what was then the British Colony of Aden in the Yemen. My mother’s father was a bank-manager for a British colonial bank. Doutor, speaking of your family’s Lebanon, which was also part of the Ottoman Empire, did you know that when the Ottomans invaded the British Colony of Aden in 1915 they were held back and repulsed by Indian troops from British India, with a Goan officer among them? How’s that for Goan-ness! A Goan fighting Turks on Yemeni soil for the British!”

Another rescue needed, thought the patient’s watchful wife. She softly leaned forward towards the doctor. “Doutor, my husband’s father was a doctor in the Yemen,” she chirped, happy to get a word in.

“Querida, that came later!” said the patient husband, holding her arm as if to keep his watchdog at bay and allowing the doctor time to make sense of it all.

Flipping through his notes, Dr. Roberto continued as if the dialogue between the couple had not taken place: “I see . . . but what was Zionist about all that, Senhor Evelyn? Why did the Yemeni authorities call your family Zionist?”

The patient released his hold on his wife’s arm, sat back and took another long breath, looking the doctor in the eye. “Well, you see, Doutor, as a bank manager’s wife in that south Arabian colony, my grandmother did a lot of social work. My grandparents rubbed shoulders with the white British colonizers.
Unlike my grandfather, my grandmother (perhaps because she was a woman?) knew quite well where she stood as a Goan in the lower echelons of the local British colonial elite. She knew that in the eyes of the local Yemenis, she seemed to belong to the colonial elite but in fact, to the white British, she and our family, as Yemeni Goans, were no more than useful brown native collaborators. We facilitated the labour of colonisation; like a shoe-horn to the imperial boot. My grandmother had an acute sense of irony, Doutor, about being and not being at the same time. She said it was what made us Goans.”

“Irony, Senhor Trindade?” asked the doctor flipping back and forth through his notes.

“Yes, irony, Doutor. My grandmother said irony made us Goans who we were, and it helped us survive. In fact, her words echoed back to me years later when I lived in Mozambique. In that recently independent former Portuguese African colony, the Marxist government referred to Goans as camaleões—chameleons. They said that when it was to their advantage, Goans either blended in with the white Portuguese colonizers or identified with the black natives. They said one never knew with Goans. One couldn’t trust a Goan.” Another memory flash-flooded the patient’s mind: his recent experience at U.S. immigration on an invited lecture visit to a U.S. university. On his arrival, from Brazil, the immigration official perused his U.K. passport, then looked at his face, looked back at his passport and asked him to step aside for further questioning in a detention room. During interrogation, he was told his passport was suspicious. He asked why? They told him “you have a U.K. passport issued in Rio de Janeiro; it says you were born in the Yemen. You have a Spanish name (they never know the difference!) and you look Indian!” The patient remembered thinking he had to try really hard to restrict the impulse welling up from deep within him to shout. Instead he calmly said, in an almost murmur: “I’m Goan.” Uninterested, his interrogators responded: “No, Sir, you’re goin’ nowhere until we’ve finished.” Like a Goan, given the circumstances, he quickly changed course and decided instead to say to his interrogators “but isn’t all that too suspicious to be suspicious?” “That’s exactly what you may want us to think, Sir! But we are prepared for this. You see we are trained in racial profiling.” Racial profiling a Goan of the diaspora doesn’t work, the patient remembered thinking to himself. But given his certainty that they wouldn’t understand, he did what he normally did in such circumstances. He remained silent. The Goan thing to do, he was sure.

The doctor was now trying to mentally piece his notes together. “You were saying about your grandmother, senhor?”

“Ah, yes, doutor! My grandmother! I remember, as a child in the British colony in Yemen. Portraits of the British queen sitting regally on a horse were present in all public places.” The patient was now studying the lines on his left palm as he spoke. Like his memories, the lines ran parallel but occasionally crossed each other, sometimes one line ending in another. “I remember what my grandmother used to say. You see, doutor, you may not know, but in those ceremonial portraits of Queen Elizabeth on the horse, she appeared sitting erect but only waist-up. My grandmother, in her sharp irony, used to say to us as kids: “children, when you
look at that picture of the queen, always remember that she may look superior and important waist-up, but what the picture doesn’t show is that she may be sitting on the toilet waist-down, and that makes her just like you or me!”

The patient looked up at the now smiling doctor and mischievously glanced across at his disapproving wife. “Doutor, every time after that when us kids saw that portrait of the Queen, we used to hold our noses. It was our private joke.”

“What a grandmother! Senhor Evelyn!” The doctor tried to restrain a chuckle.

“Just Goan, doutor!” said the patient, convinced that those words explained it all.

“Doutor, you see how my husband gets lost in detail? I’m sorry if he doesn’t make sense to you. But it can’t be dementia!” The wife was now alert, worried and anxious for the doctor’s final diagnosis.

“Senhora, please be patient. I know what he’s saying and I know what I’m doing. You see, I follow the neurological line of memory rehabilitation of Dr. Barbara Wilson (Wilson). We believe that memory has to be treated holistically. Patients have to learn to identify all kinds of prompts and external stimuli that can aid them in remembering, rather than contenting themselves with lamenting their loss of memory. Memory or the loss of it has a lot to do with a common-sense idea of dementia. If you have watched what I’ve been doing, senhora, I’ve been prodding his memory. We can later talk about how you, yourself, can aid your husband in remembering, tudo bem? Focus on what is there; not on what is not there.”

Hearing the doctor’s words, the patient silently mused: if only people would approach Goans like that! By focussing on what is there and not on what is lacking . . .

As the wife settled back into her chair, the doctor turned again to the patient and calmly went on. “Então, senhor Evelyn, so where does the pro-Israeli Zionism come into the portrait? In the picture, I mean.” Dr. Roberto held his nose jokingly.

The patient smiled. “Doutor, have you ever heard of Operation Magic Carpet?” (“Immigration to Israel”). It was the airlift of Yemeni Jews to Israel between 1949 and 1950. Well, my grandmother with her social standing as the bank manager’s wife organized and took part in a lot of social work in the Colony. Some of it was done with the local poor Yemeni Jewish community. After the creation of the State of Israel, things got bad for Jews in the Arab world. Fearing a massacre, she helped organize the airlift of the local Jews to Israel. As a matter of fact, for her participation in this she was awarded the Order of the British Empire medal by the British King George VI. Quite a feat for a Goan lady at the time.”

“Ah, Senhor Evelyn! For me, as a descendant of the Lebanese, it seems she did indeed collaborate with the Zionists! She helped populate Israel with more Jews! Wouldn’t you agree?”

The patient mustered a tired smile. “Collaboration is not the word, Doutor. Maybe it was her particular Goan brand of humanitarianism, moved by what she called Goan irony. She used to say that those Yemeni Jews were like us Goans. They looked Yemeni and they were part of the Yemeni community, but because of their
religion, when push came to shove, they were shoved into a corner. Unlike the richer European Jews, they didn’t have the means to emigrate. And unlike their fellow poor Yemenis, they were Jewish and easy scapegoats for the violent anti-Israeli sentiment that was then rampant all over the Middle East. So as a Goan, using her prominent status vis-à-vis the local British colonial elite, she helped liaison between the poor Jewish community and the British authorities. It was the British that in turn liaised with the Israelis, not her; but who was to know? It was all secretive at the time.”

“Interesting how your grandmother as a Yemeni played a role in this!” The doctor was now visibly captivated by the story.

“Doutor, my grandmother was Goan. In point of fact she wasn’t a born Yemeni. My grandfather was. She was born in British India in the region that is now Pakistan.”

“Senhor Evelyn, I thought you said she was Goan!” said the doctor with a provocative smirk.

“And so she was, doutor!” said the patient taking another exaggeratedly long breath.

“But Senhor Evelyn, here in Brazil, your nationality depends on your place of birth. We say that if you are born in Brazil, you are Brazilian. If you are born in India, you are Indian. How can she be Goan if she wasn’t born in Goa?”

“Ah, doutor!” The patient was now upright again on the edge of the armchair, which was gradually becoming less comfortable. He felt the restrictive weight of social mores bearing down on him: how to behave as a patient patient; moreover, a Goan patient patient when his Goan-ness was at stake. He continued “the answer to that question (or, more appropriately, the lack of it) is what perhaps defines us Goans. Technically my grandmother was “born” in Goa. But she was also “born” in what later became Pakistan. You see, whereas the British (like you Brazilians) had “birth certificates” that attested to one’s place of birth, the authorities in Goa (then Portuguese) had a “certificate of registration of birth” which attested to the fact of a birth. Parents could register the birth of a child in Goa. No questions were asked where the child was actually born. Many of these registrations actually occurred years after the birth of the child. So, you see, we could in a way be “born” in Goa and somewhere else at the same time!” The patient now sat back, preparing himself for what he considered to be a more complex explanation and made an effort to be didactic without being insultingly simplistic. He remembered his undergraduate classes and switched to student mode.

“Doutor,” he continued, “as an academic, if you’ve read the work of the French philosopher, Jacques Derrida, he talks about something called hauntology (Specters of Marx). It refers to the figure of the ghost, which is something neither present, nor absent. You see, when people talk about things as existing and true, they think they are basing themselves on what philosophers call ‘ontology,’ the actual existence of things. But, doutor, Derrida shows us that what supposedly exists is always based on un-provable presuppositions on the part of whoever claims the existence of something. So, Derrida says things that are believed to exist, and are
held as truths, are like ghosts. They exist for some but not for others. So, things like ‘truth,’ ‘identity’ and so on actually function like ghosts - entities that neither exist nor not exist. So if ontology refers to what exists, and if, as he shows, these things are like ghosts and don’t have a simple positive universal existence for everyone, then rather than ‘ontology,’ he coins the word hauntology.

The patient now looked first at his wife and then at the doctor before going on contentedly lost in his abstract reasoning. Student mode. “I believe that Goans, like ghosts, can be this and that; we can be from here and also from there. So, I like to say that as Goans, ours is not an ontology nor a hauntology but a goahauntology.” Here the patient silently mused on his invention—’goahauntology’. It always struck him that Goan-ness was like an aura that irradiated from Goans and, like auras, could only be perceived by the sensitive or the initiated. He also remembered thinking how, in his experience of diaspora, Goan-ness actually descended on one at certain key moments like a sacred halo. He had in mind the memories of family reunions worldwide—Toronto, London, Lisbon, São Paulo, Maputo, Sydney. Certain differences between Goan family members diasporeically born in these different global locations vanished the moment everyone gathered around traditional Goan food prepared especially for the reunion: xacuti, sorpotel, Goan chouriço and of course bebinca. He remembered, with a sudden tingle that it was here that the intangible Goan-ness quietly descended like a mantle on all those present.

“Interessante!” exclaimed the excited doctor. “Tell me more of your goahauntology, Senhor!”

“Doutor, it’s about what makes one Goan. It’s about my grandmother’s sense of Goan irony. Being and not being. You see, what makes one Goan in my family is being born of Goan parents. It’s liking Goan food.”

The doctor looked up from his notes and into the lively eyes of his now attentive patient. “Now I’m curious Senhor Evelyn. Your grandfather was a Yemeni-born Goan and your grandmother was, as you say, a Goan born in British India, or what is now Pakistan. How did they meet? How did she end up in the Yemen?”

“That’s what my wife called the ‘diaspora’, Doutor.” The patient nodded in his wife’s direction. She looked up and nodded approvingly back at him. She liked this story.

“Ah, so you mean your grandmother emigrated from India to the Yemen, senhor?”

“No, doutor, not ‘emigrated,’” said the patient, trying to hide the mounting impatience in his voice and trying hard to break out of his didactic student mode, but finding it increasingly difficult. “Emigrate is the wrong word for us Goans. You see, my grandmother’s father, as an officer of the British Indian Army in British India, was transferred to British Yemen to set up the local Police Force, as I said before. My grandmother went as a child with her parents from British India to the British colony in the Yemen. They moved back to the Yemen. Though her ancestors had been there previously for generations, they never felt as if they had emigrated. To emigrate would be to cut links with Goa. And they never did that.”
The doctor glanced at the patient’s wife and the thought crossed his mind that she might no longer be pretending not to pay attention. She looked as if she was well and truly entertained by her mobile phone. “Senhora, stay with me. See how I prompt your husband’s memory. As I said, it’s important for his rehabilitation.”

The wife looked up startled, not pleased at all to have been caught unawares, and nodded.

“So Senhor Evelyn, your grandparents met as youngsters in the Yemen and got married? Is that it?”

“No, doutor” The patient was now totally alert and seemed to revel in each word he uttered. “My grandparents didn’t actually know each other before they married. You see, my grandfather’s family knew my grandmother’s family in the Yemen. In fact, they were distant cousins. But they didn’t know each other personally. They knew of each other. As I said, my grandmother went to the Yemen as a child with her parents; later, they sent her back to British India for her education. She only returned to the Yemen after she graduated, to marry my grandfather.”

“So, your grandmother was educated in India. In Goa?”

“No, doutor, not in Goa. She was educated in India. British India. At the time there was no ‘India’, as we now know it. For that matter, Goa was technically part of Portugal. India Portuguesa if you like. Education in Goa was limited and mainly in Portuguese. Her parents, having lived in British India and then having moved back to British Yemen, wanted her to have an English education. So they sent her to Bombay in British Indian for her studies. There were good women’s colleges in Bombay. They followed the British system.”

“I’m lost Senhor Evelyn. If Goa was Portuguese and your grandmother’s family was Goan, didn’t they speak Portuguese? Wouldn’t a Portuguese education have been better?”

“Yes, doutor, they did speak Portuguese, but only at home and within the family. They had a library at home of Portuguese literature and books in Portuguese which everyone was encouraged to read; but in terms of a formal education, English was preferred.”

The doctor, needing a break to connect his thoughts, offered his patient and his wife a glass of mineral water. The wife seemed grateful for the respite in the intense rhythm of what to her seemed an unnecessary interrogation. She had after all, in a few words, told the doctor what was wrong with her husband. But she felt outnumbered. The two men appeared to be enjoying their conversation.

“Where were we, senhor Evelyn?” The doctor picked up his notes again, detached the pages and spread them carefully on his table, as if he were arranging the parts of a jigsaw puzzle. “Ah, you were saying you spoke two languages in your family! I wish my Lebanese grandparents had spoken Arabic to us.”

The patient refilled his glass with water from the bottle on the table and sipped slowly, trying to expand both his patience and the intervals between each sip. “Doutor, in fact we spoke more than two languages. Besides Portuguese and
English, Konkani, the language of Goa, was also spoken at home, and of course Arabic was the local language in Yemen. And as our families had also moved around India, some Hindustani was also spoken.”

The wife, refreshed by her glass of water, grabbed the chance to butt into the conversation again. “Ah, doutor, the thing about languages reminds me! The day after my husband’s stroke, in the hospital, he was getting his languages confused. We couldn’t understand him. Maybe that’s what happens when you speak too many!”

“Now that’s interesting, Senhora!” The doctor did not take his eyes off his patient. He noticed the man’s discomfort with his wife’s intervention. “Senhora Evelyn, would you like to tell me more about that?”

“What do you want to know, doutor? Language is simple and complex for us Goans. It’s that ghostly, ghastly, goahantology thing. We have a language and we don’t. Goans in Goa fought to have their language, Konkani, recognised as the official language, and now spend their energies on two things: firstly, fighting over the right form of Konkani (you see, doutor, the language, ghost-like, varies according to what region, caste and religion you belong to); secondly, they fight to have English and not Konkani as the medium of instruction for schools in Goa! Doutor, we Goans love to think of Konkani as our language, but we treat it as a family jewel, only to be used on special occasions, and then something for our heirs to fight over when we’re dead and gone . . .” The patient looked across the table and refilled his glass with water from his wife’s bottle.

The doctor gathered the sheets of notes on the table and rearranged them as if he was about to do a tarot reading. “Ah, Senhora Evelyn, my ancestors, the Arabs do something similar! But tell me what actually happened the day after your stroke? Neurology textbooks say that after a stroke it is common for bilingual patients to revert back to their mother tongues, or their first language. Is that what happened?”

The patient moved his gaze from the note-sheets on the table to the doctor’s curious face. “There you go, doutor! I wouldn’t know what my first language or mother tongue was! As a Goan, I would love to say Konkani, but that would be goahantology: my desire for an original language that I don’t have! In fact, doutor, speaking of the philosopher, Derrida, as a French Jew born in Algeria, he referred to his relationship with French, the only language he spoke, as a monolingualism of the other (Derrida, Monolingualism). It was the only language he spoke but he did not feel it was his language. As a Goan, I identify with that; we Goans inhabit languages that are not ours. They become our languages even when they aren’t. Like the spaces we move across and inhabit in the world, we adapt to them well. As I said before, we don’t emigrate, we move. We do the same with languages.”

“Senhora Evelyn, you were going to tell me about your problem with language the day after your stroke in the hospital . . .” said the doctor, gently nudging his patient verbally.
“Ah, yes, doutor! You see, I had no problem understanding what people said to me that day, but when I responded, I noticed I could not control what language came out of my mouth. It’s as if I was no longer speaking a language; it was as if the language was speaking me!” The patient paused; he was engrossed in the weight of the words he had just spoken. A thought again crossed his mind: he might have been an academic for too long! He continued, nonetheless. “I remember one particular incident on that occasion. At 5.00 am on the morning after my stroke, a nurse woke me up, put me into a wheelchair and wheeled me across miles of hospital corridors to the MRI room for a brain scan. At that early hour of the morning, there was only myself and another patient—an old lady—in the waiting room. The two nurses at the reception desk asked us to wait. They were busy filling in forms on their computers. Remember, doutor, it was 5.00 a.m. and that nurse had woken me up and put me into the wheelchair. I had difficulty coordinating my movements and I had no wish to speak. I was very self-consciously wearing that hospital gown and nothing else. Stuck in that wheelchair, I couldn’t move enough to adjust the gown to protect my modesty, which I suspected was on display, if you know what I mean. And worse, at that time of the morning, with all the drips I was given overnight, my bladder was bursting. My wheelchair had been parked opposite the wheelchair of the old lady, who seemed to be unabashedly scrutinising me head-to-toe. Maybe she knew I was Goan and was trying to fit me into some category she had in mind, as people usually do with us . . . but nature was pressing. I needed desperately to relieve myself. I found I couldn’t stand up, call for help nor make a sign to the nurses. So, I started to shake my body in the wheelchair hoping the movement would attract the attention of the nurses. The old lady stared at me, bewildered, and held on stronger to her own wheelchair as if my movements would knock it over. As I shook the wheelchair, doutor, I felt my gown moving higher up my thighs and the old lady’s bewilderment appeared to increase accordingly. But it was too late, I had to shake further. I had to get their attention. Finally, as the wheelchair was about to topple over, I caught the nurses’ attention. Both came over running, held the chair, and started firing questions at me. “Está tudo bem, senhor?” “Is everything alright, sir?” one of them asked. And then it happened . . .”

“What happened senhor Evelyn? You fell over?” asked the doctor, concerned.

“Doutor, I answered her question, but what came out of my mouth was lab, which is no in Arabic. She was asking me in Portuguese and it was Arabic that was coming out of my mouth. Arabic! The language of my childhood in the Yemen. A language I hadn’t spoken for decades. Now, as if in vengeance for neglect, it was speaking me! When the nurse asked me if all was well, I answered lab! No! But to her monolingual Brazilian ears it sounded like lá, ‘there’ in Portuguese.

As I repeated lab to indicate that no, all was not well, both nurses responded in unison lá, onde? Where?! Where?! Then one of them, now apparently enlightened, progressed to the next question Quer ir ao banheiro, senhor? Would you like to go to the toilet, sir? Relieved with my apparent communicative success, I shouted Yes! Yes! But the word came out in Arabic: Nahm! Nahm! To the monolingual years of
the Brazilian nurses the word sounded like the Portuguese _não_, ‘no’! Though I was answering _yes_ they were hearing _no_. To them, it appeared that they were asking me if I wanted to go to the toilet and I was saying _no_!

The exasperated old lady, sitting silent and still hanging on to her wheelchair until now, suddenly shouted at the nurses. It was _obvious_ I wanted to go to the toilet, she shouted to them. They finally took me. As I relieved myself two things came to my mind. Firstly, embarrassed, I wondered how the old lady thought it was _obvious_. Secondly, I couldn’t help feeling more Goan than ever: _goahauntologically_, I mean; being _neither here nor there but definitely somewhere_. Whatever language I used, it was never my language. However proficient I was in that language, I felt I merely inhabited it; a tenant renting it on an undated contract.

“One [Senhor Evelyn,] that is something I am going to make a note of. The medical literature would say if Arabic came to you after the stroke, it would have to be your first language! You did say you were Yemeni, didn’t you?” He smiled mischievously.

“Doutor, I am Goan. Maybe _also_ Yemeni, _also_ British and _also_ Portuguese, but unquestionably _Goan_. It is not _language_ that defines us! Maybe Konkani could also define us, but it depends on whom we are speaking to and where: as I said there are so many Konkanis.”

“Now I am beginning to understand that thing about Goan ‘hauntology’ or _goahauntology_ as you called it. You are _neither_ here nor there but _also_ here and _also_ there . . . Shall we go on with where we left off about your grandmother?

So, you were saying that your grandmother _did_ then emigrate to the Yemen after she graduated in British India?”

“Doutor, as I said we don’t use the term ‘emigrate’ in our family.” The patient found himself adopting his didactic tone again. “Emigrate is too final and un-Goan. You see, as I said before, as Goans, we move. We don’t _emigrate_. Maybe that’s why, wherever we are, we are still Goans. My grandmother _moved_ from British India to the Yemen as a child and then _moved_ back to Bombay to study and back to the Yemen to marry my grandfather. As I was saying, she did not actually _know_ my grandfather before she married him. She knew _of_ him. You see, it was normal in our family for marriages to be arranged by one’s parents. It was believed that they knew what was best for their children. My grandfather was sixteen years older than my grandmother when they married. He was already advanced in his career at the colonial bank in British Yemen, and with the social prestige that went with his post in those times, he was seen to be an extremely desirable candidate for the recently graduated young lady that my grandmother was. From his family’s point of view, as a British-educated young Goan lady also of a family of local prestige, she was well suited to be a future colonial bank manager’s wife. She was someone who would be at ease in colonial social circles, would be able to entertain and impress his colleagues and superiors and guarantee advances in his career. But they knew nothing of her sense of irony. So, _doutor_, rather than _emigrating_ to the Yemen, she _moved_ back to the Yemen to marry. In fact, later, she and my grandfather _moved_ from
the Yemen to Britain, from there to Canada and they finally moved back to Goa where they are buried."

“That’s curious, Senhor Evelyn, you say they moved; but then you say they moved back to Goa. You had said that neither of them was born (in the conventional sense of course) in Goa and you said they hadn’t spent much of their lives in Goa. How could they move back to where they had never lived?”

The patient smiled. “It must sound strange to Brazilian ears, I know. But you see, doutor, Goan families have their ancestral homes in Goa. Wherever they had moved to in the world, our family would always and regularly spend holidays in the ancestral home in Goa. We called this going down to Goa. In whichever part of the world they had been born in or wherever they lived, children in our family grew up regularly going down to Goa every other year. When the elderly retired, they retired to the ancestral home in Goa. Hence, my grandparents indeed went back to Goa at the end of their lives, even if they had never actually lived there before. Maybe it’s a characteristic of diaspora. You may move away from your supposed origin, but you never cut links with it. That’s why you can always move back.”

“Ok, Senhor Evelyn, it’s not you that’s not making sense, it’s just that all this about Goa and Goans is new to me.”

“New, Doutor? Wait till you hear about their Goan caste issues!” The patient’s wife, with a sense of delight, felt like she had dropped a bomb. And she had.

Irritated, the patient always hated when the caste issue was brought up. Few people outside India understood the intricacies, privileges and injustices of the concept. It got worse when it came to explaining how one could have caste and be Christian. He had long given up even trying to explain it. He glared at his wife and muttered to the doctor. “Let’s not go down that road today, doutor.”

“As you wish, senhor. Let’s move on. You were telling me about when you went to the Yemen to renew your Yemeni passport and they deported you . . .”

“Doutor, they did not deport me from the Yemen. I was a Yemeni passport holder. My passport was valid for a short time more. They did worse. They refused my entry into the country and refused to renew my passport. Remember the story that my grandmother was supposedly Zionist because she helped organize the airlift of Yemeni Jews to Israel? As I said, she got the MBE medal from the British but was condemned for her actions by the Yemenis. They were convinced it made her pro-Israel and Zionist. Okay, so, Beirut . . . The story goes like this. The Yemeni officials declared me a persona non grata and put me on the flight back to Beirut. On board, I desperately tried to process this rejection of an identity I so much desired; an identity that was founded on family history going back more than a century. Suddenly the pilot announced an emergency change of route. You see, doutor, due to the civil war, Beirut airport was under attack on that day and the flight had be diverted to the nearest airport—Tel Aviv—until Beirut airport reopened. So, we landed at Tel-Aviv airport and I discovered that among the handful of passengers on board, I was the only Yemeni passport holder. To my surprise, at gunpoint, the Israeli authorities told me that as a Yemeni, I was unwelcome on
Israeli soil; but as it was an emergency and temporary, I was to be detained in a room on my own until the flight was able to take off again for Beirut. The crew and the rest of the passengers were allowed to use the transit lounge. Doutor, my wish was to shout at them “I’m Yemeni, but I’m also Goan! The also is important! I’m not just Yemeni!” But what was the use? It was my Goan-ness that was the problem. I was Zionist for the Yemenis, Yemeni for the Israelis and Goan for no one!”

“Senhor Evelyn, that’s terrible! I can understand when you say you are neither here nor there but always somewhere!”

“Doutor, maybe what was really terrible was that no one called me Goan! You remember what I said about hauntology, ghosts and origins? It’s my grandmother’s irony all over again. As Goans, we are and we aren’t. Some see us some don’t. And you know something? I think as Goans, maybe especially us Goans of the diaspora, we are often ghosts of ourselves to ourselves. I often wonder if there is an ourself.”

The doctor felt he was finally getting somewhere. Now he was almost certain. More wise than dementia. But he still had to make sure. “Senhor Evelyn, you are talking about your family in the Yemen and in India. You mentioned London. You also mentioned Mozambique. What’s the connection between all this and Brazil?”

“Doutor, it’s the moving that moves us Goans of the diaspora, remember? As we are neither here nor there, and always somewhere, we can be anywhere!” The patient remembered again the protagonists of the Goan novels he had thought of. The Goan-ness that he saw in those protagonists was not only their displacement between categories but also their determination and urge to move ahead, like pilgrims. Each move was based on a certain uncertainty. The move was always certain but the final destination was what escaped them. “Doutor, my father was a doctor born in Goa, and educated in Goa and Portugal. As a university student in Portugal in the forties he was involved in anti-dictatorship and anti-colonial activities. He was imported to the Yemen to marry my mother. Remember the tradition I mentioned about spouses being chosen by the families? Having militated against Portuguese colonial policy in Portugal, he came to colonial Yemen a doctor. He sent us, his children, to the U.K. to English boarding schools for an English education. My brothers and myself moved as children to England at the height of British colonialism, but motivated, like pilgrims, by the anti-colonial mission he gave us before we left: “My sons, these people—the British—rule the world at the moment. Learn how they think, so you don’t become like them!” Once again, a kind of hauntology—he like them but don’t be like them. “Just be Goan” was what he probably meant. So, we grew up in Britain, doutor. I hated it, perhaps because it brought out the Goan in me. I hated being told, “you speak such good English!” when I was speaking my language. Okay, one of my languages, but still my language too! I could never get myself to say in response to my English inquisitors “but you don’t speak a word of Portuguese, Konkani, Arabic, Hindi.” I hated being asked, “where are you from?” What could I say? Goa? But I wasn’t just from Goa. I was also from there—England—where I grew up! But they liked to classify me as an immigrant. Remember, doutor, as Goans, we don’t emigrate, we move. But, it apparently helped
them fit me into their categories; by doing so they felt less threatened by my difference. Ah, doutor, years later, when I had already moved to Brazil I was involved as an academic in educational research projects with British Universities. Often on work visits at an English university I would bump into a friendly English academic at the coffee machine in the staff Common Room who, upon seeing my Goan face, would utter the damning question, “Where are you from? You speak such good English?” With the innocence of my youth long lost, I would respond, smiling, from the top of my Goan-ness, “Hi! I’m from Education. Where are you from? Your English is quite good too!” The penny-dropped look in the face of the once friendly inquisitor signalled that the end of the conversation was nigh.

It was the doctor’s turn to show impatience. “I see, senhor Evelyn, but tell me more about the moves to Mozambique and Brazil.” The doctor emphasized ‘moves’.

The patient looked at his wife fidgeting with her watch and making discreet signs that they might have overstayed their welcome. The normal consultation period had long passed. As a Goan, he felt familiar with the sensation of having overstayed his welcome. It was that feeling present in those words so often addressed to him in Britain, that “where are you from?” that told him he had to be from somewhere else. It forced him to feel a sensation of not belonging. But Goans don’t feel like that, he thought. We always adapt, we make ourselves at home wherever we are. Maybe that’s what bothers our hosts. Maybe that’s the source of the overstaying-your-welcome-reaction. We make ourselves at home too readily.

“Ah, the move to Mozambique, doutor? That came after my graduation in England. Remember I said my father, as a medical student in Portugal was involved in anti-colonial activism? Well, there he met other Portuguese students from other Portuguese colonies, some of them from Mozambique who, like him, were involved in anti-colonial activism. You see, doutor, even during his time in the British colony in the Yemen, my father sympathised with the local Yemeni anti-colonial movement, much to the irritation of my mother’s pro-British family; his in-laws. Unlike my mother’s family, he felt no allegiance with the colonial elite, white or brown, but he played both. After all, there, he was Portuguese. Neither British nor Yemeni. Portuguese but also Goan. Like the Mozambicans would say, a chameleon. Well then, after the fall of Portuguese colonialism and the independence of Mozambique, some of his previous activist university colleagues in Portugal now became part of the governing party in independent Mozambique. As he had maintained contact with them throughout the years after their graduation and, in the case of some of them, during their participation in the armed anti-colonial struggle in Mozambique, they invited him to practice as a doctor in the newly independent African nation. My father unhesitatingly moved the family to the Mozambican capital Maputo. A year later I graduated. Jobless, all I knew was I didn’t want to live in Britain. Remember what I said about the overstaying-your-welcome feeling? So, my father called me to Mozambique to make myself useful by contributing to the Mozambican process of nation-building. I had the option of going as a Portuguese citizen or as a British citizen, doutor, but I couldn’t go as a
Goan. So, I thought, why go as a Portuguese when they had just got rid of the Portuguese? I went as a Brit. Goan of course, but also with a British passport. I went because I didn’t feel at home in England, but being British outside Britain was a different story. A bit like being Goan away from Goa. You hold on to the good bits only. Idealization, some would say. But, remembering Derrida, and his belief that things like truth and identity are more like ghosts than substances, fluid and floating, appearing to some and not to others, I moved to Mozambique as a spectral Brit. When I got there, the local postcolonial mix was complex and conflictual. A new Mozambican national identity was being constructed; race and culture seemed irrelevant. I soon discovered that the underlying reality was a confrontation, less between races than between competing histories. Former British colonialism surrounded Mozambique on all sides and was seen as positive. You see, doutor, it was prestigious to be British there. Whiteness was an indication of being Portuguese, and there were two kinds of Portuguese: those who were against independence and those were in favour; the latter kind now sat on the fence between remaining Portuguese and becoming Mozambican. Then there were the Goans. As Portuguese citizens, the Goans could also occupy the positions in favour of or against independence. However, given the racist history of the previous Portuguese colony, in which few native Africans could accede to Portuguese citizenship, this predicament never applied to the Goans. Though, like the native Africans they were often the victims of de facto racism, unlike the native Africans, Goans had the undeniable legal right to Portuguese citizenship. During the Portuguese colonial regime, they could simultaneously be victims of white racism and perpetrators of racism against native Africans. They could play it both ways. Hence chameleons, the Mozambican term of contempt for Goans.”

“What did this have to do with you, senhor? You went there as British!” The doctor was wondering where the conversation was leading to.

“I’ll cut a long story short, doutor, so you get the picture. You see, I worked as a university lecturer there in Mozambique. Remember it was a one-party Marxist state. I was a naïve young man, enthused in participating in a socialist dream. My enthusiasm led me to get so involved in university politics that I forgot I was a foreigner. My appearance as a Goan and my command of Portuguese helped me blend in. I felt and behaved as a native Mozambican. On a certain occasion, I unwittingly questioned a party policy decision. On being verbally reprimanded, I responded, arguing and justifying my point of view. I mistook single-party politics with deliberative politics. The party was not going to tolerate my questioning; even less so as a foreigner. They needed to make an example out of me. One night I was kidnapped by the secret police and taken for questioning. The “questioning” turned out to be three days of detention, but there were no questions asked. It was the reminder that I had overstayed my welcome . . .”

“They let you out after three days and that was it, senhor Evelyn?” The doctor felt a pang of excitement. There was suspense in this story!

“Here’s the point, doutor: they detained me because they thought I was a Portuguese citizen criticising Mozambican policy. In fact, as you now know, I
was also Portuguese, but I had chosen to enter Mozambique as British, remember? After rummaging through my documents, which they had confiscated when I was detained, they discovered I was technically British. They wanted no diplomatic incident with the British government, which was being generous to the new government. One morning the detention cell door opened and a voice screamed “Who is the f*** camaleão who confused us?” My cell colleagues reminded me that I was the only Goan—the ‘chameleon’—there. I was dragged out and told that they thought I was Portuguese. Why didn’t I tell them? It was all a big mistake; I shouldn’t have been detained. They don’t detain British citizens etc. Under their breaths they cursed me for being Goan. They wanted to treat me as a victim of theirs but found themselves having to treat me as a superior, or at least despicably, as an equal. You see, doutor, being Goan, and the histories that this involved and which made me who I am, in this case they acted to my advantage. Temporarily. I was released, made persona non grata for the second time in my Goan existence and told to leave the country. I had literally, albeit unwittingly, overstayed my welcome. I had perhaps been too Goan. I had adapted too well. I overstepped my limits as an outsider.”

“So, you were sent back to England, senhor?”

The patient could not help laughing out loud at the doctor’s words. The doctor looked bewildered. “Doutor,” the patient said in an exaggerated tone of irony, “You have been listening to me this far. How, as a Goan, could I go back to England? I am not from England. I can only go back to Goa. Even though I was not born there. It’s part of being Goan, remember?”

“I’m sorry! So, from Mozambique, you went back to Goa.” The doctor smiled, sure that now he had finally said the right thing.

“No, doutor, I didn’t go back to Goa. I moved to Brazil.” The patient had a triumphant look on his face. He felt he was getting nearer to making the predicament of his Goan-ness understood. “You see, I had visited Brazil earlier that year and I had received a job offer at a university. I hadn’t yet refused it. So, a couple of telegrams later, and the offer was indeed confirmed, as was my acceptance. And here I am.”

“So, all that confusion about being Goan ended then?” The doctor felt a pang of disappointment with the sensation that the story was coming to an end. He also felt the weight of having to make a judgement about all he heard. After all, a diagnosis was called for.

“As Goans, doutor we move. Nothing ends. Remember what I said about us Goans being like pilgrims, seeking the unsought? That is why I am not Brazilian even after forty years here. But first let me tell you about one more twist in this series of twists. I arrived in Brazil during the time that one’s race was named on one’s identity card. When the day came, I got home pleased with my very own identity card and sat down to study it detail. To my utter horror, in the space where race was indicated, it said branco, ‘white’. Me, a Goan, white?! I who had fought against racism and injustice during my student days participating in Black British movements? You see, doutor, in Britain, I grew up being called black. In
that scheme of things, they saw me and I saw myself as black. Here in Brazil, when I complained to my colleagues at the university, wanting to have the word *branco* on my card corrected, the unanimous response was “No! Don’t change it! In this country, it’s to your advantage to be white!” To my horror I realised they were right. The Mozambicans were right. We Goans can have it both ways. Maybe we are indeed chameleons. And that may be what defines us. *Saudades* for my grandmother’s irony, *doutor*! So, what defines us as diaspora Goans, what marks our Goan-ness, may be the very fact that we challenge all attempts at definition! The patient, unruffled, and strangely satisfied, was now resigned to expecting the doctor’s certain diagnosis of dementia.

The doctor looked at his notes, sat back, swivelled his chair backwards towards the view from his window—it was a sunny afternoon in São Paulo! The familiar view comforted him and gave him the reassurance he needed for his diagnosis. He slowly swivelled his chair back to face the couple.

The patient’s wife was alert and curious. She looked ready to stand up and leave with the refutation of the previous diagnosis: progressive post-stroke dementia. Now her husband would get the medication he really needed, she thought, relieved. “Então, doutor, what is your diagnosis?” she offered, tentatively.

The doctor appeared to ignore her. “Senhor Evelyn, as I mentioned at the start, I follow the theory that post-stroke rehabilitation requires memory recuperation. As I said, memory loss is often seen as a sign of dementia. It is commonly believed that identity is built on one’s life narratives—one’s memories. The belief is that if memory is lost, then identity is lost and dementia sets in. However, memory is not about a fixed substance of narratives, like a box full of an established number of blocks, and when some blocks go missing, all that is left is an empty box. Memory, *senhor* Evelyn, is indeed the basis of one’s identity. But there is no box and there is no fixed number of blocks in it. Memory is complex and fluid. It doesn’t lie still. It moves, it reacts, it adapts, and it is ever changing. Just like identity. In my line of rehabilitation practice, we believe that when memory has suffered post-stroke trauma, as in your case, it can be rehabilitated by external stimuli. That’s what we have been doing here, *senhor* Evelyn. You have responded to my questions, which were in turn responses to your narratives. If you look back at our conversation here, what do you see? A whole complex network of narratives, interconnected and endless, apparently pointless, even. But the point is that memory, like identity does not need to have a point, a justification. Like a pilgrim, it only needs to have a motive to go on. And, also like a pilgrim, that motive is intangible. As I said, we are ever-changing adaptable beings. Some may call it dementia but I call it being alive!” The doctor remembered, to his satisfaction, that the line between dementia and wisdom was a fine one. He was not disappointed with his strategy of looking for a word to describe a patient at the beginning of the session. The word he had identified—*wise*, once again in his clinical experience proved to be correct. After all, he mused, to be *wise* is not necessarily *to know*, but definitely refers to those who *provoke and stimulate knowledge* in others. He felt more
knowledgeable before his patient now than he had when the session began. “I call it being alive” he repeated, almost to himself, tasting and relishing each word.

“I call it being Goan, doutor!” said the patient in a conclusive tone, knowing only too well that his conclusions, like his idea of Goan-ness, were only and always precursors to other conclusions.

Notes
1 This text, like Goan-ness, does not intend to fit comfortably into any pre-established category or genre. It may be fiction but also biography, autobiography or critique. If the reader feels a need for a category, ‘cultural speculation’ may, like the Goan-ness of the topic, be sufficiently vague but functional. In this, I take inspiration from Gayatri Spivak (167–168) who said: “I am no longer beset by the need to occlude the traces of the irreducibly autobiographical in cultural speculation.” Paraphrasing Spivak, you may find many Goans in this narrative, but none of them resembles me as I wander from “careless participant to uneasy observer.” Secondly, the topic of Goan-ness in diaspora that permeates this narrative is set against the dilemma currently confronting identity in the context of globalization (and I would add, also in the contexts of the waves of colonisation that preceded it). This conflictual dilemma is defined by Trifonas (205–206) as caught between “on the one hand the demise of the autotelic subject, a subject defined in, of and by itself, [which] is fuelled by a global vision of a shared community running rampant today [and] on the other hand, the idea of global citizenship as the seat of human hybridity [which] nurtures the impetus towards a communal proclivity of the autotelic Subject as a shared identity and produces the call for a levelling of difference . . .” Hence in this narrative the reader will find a tension between being Goan (a proper noun, representing a shared characteristic existing in substantive positive terms – an essence) and being goan (a common noun, representing a shared characteristic existing in non-substantive negativity, a fluid non-essence masquerading as an essence, but fulfilling nonetheless an important pragmatic social function).
2 Adapted, poetically, from Rogan.
4 See Botelho.

Work Cited
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