Chapter 5

Conclusion

The description of the cultural discourse in Goa, presented here has, among other things, collapsed the distinctions between (i) The Great and the Little Traditions and (ii) Oral and Written modes. Stressing on the fact that they serve as inputs to each other, we have attempted to describe the so-called Folk Culture for what it is—a world very much in the mainstream, and not for what it is not— a faraway world, removed from the rest of the society. The attempt has been to break commonly held romantic notions about Folk Cultures particularly in Goa by attributing to them concerns and preoccupations common to the rest of the Goan society. There is an underlying purpose in this exercise. So far this culture has been slotted as romantic travels in a spiral world of myths and legends and as a result has been relegated to the periphery. Whereas in reality (and here we allude to Newman’s observation), it is perceived as possible threats to existing hegemony.
in a class and caste-based society. Moreover, in a hurry to characterize the Folk Culture as merely mythical, it is forgotten that myths and legends are a part of the literate cultures as well, as Barthes has so illuminatingly described. In the world of advertising for example, everything is a myth and the buyers are consumed by it. So, the mythical world is not just a world of ever-lasting fantasy, but has a function to perform. And it is far more justified to talk in generalized terms that subsume all such cultural discourses rather than to mark Folk Cultures out for their specificity alone. And this has been the direction of the thesis.

On these lines the myths can be said to constantly recreate and reemphasize the society's belief-systems. They are the cause behind which the society functions. These beliefs are structured in a narrative but not necessarily presented in it. The Poetic and the dramatic modes are as we have seen, some of the other forms which are used.

The specificity of a folk culture lies in these features, of orality, symbolisms, and most importantly, in the way social issues are treated at the level of a discourse. Thus, even if we state that the oral and the written tradition serve as inputs to each other in an intertextual manner, they have to be recognized also for characteristics specific to the mode. In Goa, the oral tradition has been highlighted for its general as well as specific characteristics. On a general level, it shares stylistic features with other similar oral cultures. But what is specific to Goa is its history. The 'langue' took its present form, we have noted due to a series of historical interventions. As the communities practising
the oral mode shifted to the written mode, the thoughts underwent a marked change, as writing enabled them to move out of common code and express themselves as individuals. The signs in a text can convey different meanings, but for a common code to arise both, the oral as well as the written tradition require complicity. In an oral tradition, this is achieved by the ontological reference like a dharma for example. In this sense we are in agreement with Kristeva's statement that a symbolic discourse like that in folktales and myths, is monologic and obeys the rule of god. As long as there is the strength of belief, the discourse will have a single reference. Complicity is also achieved by structuring the performance to suit the common code. In Chapter I of the thesis, we suggested that the Goan folk culture is an identity construct. This enabled the group's present status to be homogenized. Also, it was essential to describe the discourse according to the perceptions of the people. They are striving towards a different status altogether. So theirs is a shifting identity. Along with the identity we also described its accompanying constellation, like language, values, narratives etc. Having done this, the folk culture was presented as mobile and not as "once upon a time" world.

Chapter II of the thesis discussed and elaborated upon the major concepts which were to be used throughout, of language narrative performance and experience on the basis of discussions in various theories. The fact that we have attempted to show an underlying narrative life-script in the folk culture, is necessarily is followed by the discussions on these concepts. The aim was to give an overall survey of the direc-
tions the theories have taken as far as these concepts are concerned and not to claim a complete adherence to any one of these. For the present purposes we outlined a general definition of all of these.

In Chapter III, which essentially concentrated on establishing a structure of the narratives, we began by first tracing the socio-cultural history of the members of the Goan society who perpetuated the folk culture. We situated them in a dominant discourse of the larger Goan culture. They, on their part have carved out an identity for themselves by being constituted in the dominant religious discourse. Using Bakhtin's and later Krsteva's, notion of monologic discourse, we tried to show how there is a constant reassertion of a symbolic discourse in the oral tradition. But with the advent of literacy this discourse underwent a shift. In this context, we have raised two questions. One is, that even when we attribute an agency to the folk culture, can we speak of them as being able to exercise a freedom to transgress existing social status? For isn't the dominant narrative structure constituting their identity? Moreover, alluding to Kristeva's observations, the nature of symbolic discourse (which collapses all contradictions), despite the ambivalence of the discourse (Hindu / Christian, Upper Class / Lower Class), seeks a neutrality. Keeping this in mind, of being able to better themselves, we relied on Kristeva's notions about the nature of discourse. The people themselves (of Naveshim in particular) realize the impossibility of the existing situation and hence have attempted to evolve a new narrative which does not centre their class or social status. It centers on them as Nav-Hindus and exponents.
Retracing the steps of the community in Naveshim, described in detail in the chapters, in the form of a summary will give a general idea about the application of general theoretical discussions. We provide the summary with reference to Zagor where the structure indicates changes in interpretation. Zagor has for a long time relied on a mythical system. The community has a deep reverence for the supernatural. Hence, the Cross which was implanted during the conversion era was accepted under the existing belief about the power of the divine which, in the case of the villagers, was a given. And to contest a given, a symbolic, is next to committing a cardinal sin. What we see in this phase is a monologic discourse, where 'god' is law and is adhered to unquestioningly.

The community passes through a phase of religious revival. They become the Nav-Hindus, or reconverts to Hinduism. There is a new set of understandings about their religious status. A new text is created bringing in a new consciousness. There are strong undercurrents, questioning their 'Christian' past. But the mythical system governs as yet and they fear to tread on unknown ground which is strewn with suspicions. Significantly, however, there are increasing murmurings about how their Christian status was imposed and they were not born as Christians. Jesus continues to be the divine power on special liminal days. But their day-to-day worship has changed. They no longer pray to Jesus, or the Holy Cross, but to the Gods of the Hindu pantheon, like Ganesh or Vishnu apart from their local deities and nature worship. The Christian symbols, collectively owned so far,
become part of a life-cycle ritual. The new status gives them a sense of power, a new identity. The villagers now speak of chanting the *gayatri mantra*, wear the sacred thread, and talk of the *Gita*. All these changes are laden with a new kind of hope. Interestingly, there seems to be a continuation of the Portuguese legacy of religion being closely associated with socio-economic benefits.

This phase marks a new kind of liminality—it seeks to raise myriad issues regarding religion, their new status in relation to the old, etc. It is significant because it opens up the discourse to a new set of possibilities transforming the monologic discourse. And this creates space for a possible ambivalent articulation of desires. The community, which has been divided due to the process of reconversions (the Nav-Hindus versus the Catholics), witness a new kind of hierarchy with the new converts wanting to be at the top. At the level of the text this tension is articulated and the symbols of Christianity are appropriated by the Nav-Hindus. The Catholics, as we have seen are left out of the main celebrations on the day of Zagor. The mythical system becomes a contested ground thus hinting towards perceptions of an alternative reality.

The liminal space gives rise to a shifting recourse between the Mythical and the Historical. As a result the articulation of desires is on a neutral plane unlike intense one expressions noted in the written texts. The concern underlying this is that they are unsure about the narrative or the ritual being able to express their desires. For it has always been noted that when taking recourse to the mythical
leads the text away from intended expressions. For even if myths are narrativized, there is this belief that something “essential” remains and the myth is privileged.

Once the myths gained a narrative status, on the basis of which people communicated, the final reinforcements took place through a characterization. Thus, there appeared dreams in which Shanta Durga blesses, or visions of mother Mary are seen frequently. The Hindu and the Catholic symbols are worshipped as Newman has observed, because it is a common Goan character to do so. Constructing an identity around a character signifying religious adherence who masks all the other differences was the most important requirement.

The Gawada in this liminal drama, is an individual with a strong sense of identity. He is capable of a dialogue, where he questions social laws within his village, but is tamed into monologic, unquestioning adherence to the religious law. This is done by the condensation produced by the character traits. Condensation is an imaginary and non-logical fusion of often contradicting elements of signification or it picks up its force from a cluster of signifying elements.

The Gawadas are caught up in a pull from both the symbolic world, which has so far signified a unity, and the world of new identities. The narrative behind the shared identity was constructed in relation to the past history of an ‘other’. All the marginal groups were one in relation to a common divine energy. Religion, God is the law as well as the power. The common identity was fostered around the characterization of those believers. Thus, across villages, cities
and classes, a common character emerged in the myths which masked the different social and economic conditions under which people were born. It placed a common character of an all-encompassing Goan beneath the superficial differences. It served a purpose for the fragmented sense of belonging in the colonial and post-colonial phase. It brought the people together on one common ground.

Goa, as has been pointed out by several observers, like any other colonized, class-based society has various fragmented constructs of identity. Kale (1994), drawing from Gramsci’s (1971) notion of an ‘Organic Intellectual’, discusses the class-based construction of identities. For the lower classes (Sudirs), he has this to say: "The sudir community shows some characteristics of the subaltern group. The intellectuals amongst this subaltern population seems to have a different worldview and different sense of identity than the elite intellectuals have. Their literature, their theatre as well as their politics reflect a distinct worldview which seems to be a convergence of three elements. At the very bottom is the traditional (Indian) belief in a strict hierarchical ordering within the family and the society which is based on perspective rather than ascriptive norms of relationship between its members. The second one is provided by religion, a belief in the sanctity of the Church and the clergy, of suffering and martyrdom, of humility and poverty, in divine intervention and miracles wrought through prayers, rituals and penance. The third is acceptance of the western way of life a nostalgia for the symbols of European colonial rule.” (ibid.; 911)
In this quest for an anchored identity, we believe that the interpretation of the cultural and religious discourse in the Folk Culture is political. And as Kristeva says, "to give a political meaning to something is perhaps only the ultimate consequence of the epistemological attitude which consists, simply of the desire to 'give meaning'. This attitude is not innocent, but rather, is rooted in the speaking subject's need to reassure himself of his image and his identity faced with an object. Political interpretation is thus the apogee of the obsessive quest for 'A Meaning'.”¹ Interpretation in itself, being a plural, it cannot be closed as a self-sufficient totality. It is a spiral, but it has to be taken for what it guarantees at a given moment. And this is what we have attempted to do. We have looked at all possible interpretations by the marginal groups, who ironically have been implicated (due to their narrative lifescripts and poetic language) in a connection of a presupposed object. They have already been interpreted in the symbolic discourse. In their quest for an identity, they have travelled, and so have we.

¹Cited in Moi, 1986