

THE LANGUAGE MOVEMENT OF GOA: PAROCHIAL UNDERPINNING AND INSTRUMENTAL CONCERNS

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Abstract:

One of the first challenges that threatened the unity of the newly formed Indian nation state was language. With a record of more than 1600 languages, questions of language dominance and contestations were a natural consequence. The situation got heightened with the administrative decision of the Indian State in 1957, to redraw the territorial boundaries of the Indian State on linguistic lines. This opened the floodgates for a series of language movements. The language movement in Goa was one such movement.

This paper provides the trajectory of the Konkani language movement in Goa. Based on secondary sources got form books and newspaper accounts, as well as personal interviews with the various players of the Konkani movement this paper attempts to articulate the confluence of language, caste, religion and politics that converged in the language movement in Goa.

Keywords: Language, language movement, public sphere, parochial

Goa was liberated from Portuguese colonial rule on 19 December 1961. Immediately after Liberation, Goa began the process of integrating with the mainland, from which it had been cut off for over four hundred and fifty years. Goa, like any other unit of the Indian Union, had to experience the process of nation building which was couched in religious, ethnic, and linguistic nuances. While in the early years of Independence, religion posed a grave threat to the making of 'India', issues pertaining to language soon became a major challenge for nation building. The centrality of language to the functioning and formation of the Union was acknowledged in the politico-administrative decision, taken in 1957, of redrawing the territorial boundaries of the Indian Union on linguistic lines. Accordingly, once liberated, Goa too had to comply with the norm of linguistic states. And as with the other states of India, the movement and formation of linguistic states saw the emergence of language movements. A language movement may be defined as 'an organised and persistent effort of a speech community to influence the development of language, and the policy and planning of the government with regard to language' (Chaklader 1990). The language movement in Goa which began after Liberation

brought back into focus the key role that language has played in articulating the public sphere in Goa right from its inception during Portuguese colonial rule.

Even though ever since Goa's recorded history language has played a defining role in determining the social, political as well as religious sphere of Goa, the Konkani movement began in earnest in the twentieth century. The foundations of modern Konkani literature were to a large extent laid by Vaman Raghunath Varde Valaulikar alias *Shennoi Goembab*. At a time when Marathi was the dominant language of literature in Goa, *Goembab* ventured to contribute prolifically to the development of Konkani. The first generation of language activists inspired by *Goembab* included Shri Ravindra Kelekar, Dr. Manohar Rai Sardessai and Shri Uday Bhembre. These Konkani stalwarts began their literary journey in the public sphere in Bombay. They had gone to Bombay either as students or young professionals. And it was in the contradictory environment of freedom (India was a free country at that time), and the hegemony of Marathi, that Goans discovered their Konkani identity and felt the need to spread this awareness.

But after Liberation, the primary arena of the Konkani public sphere shifted to Goa. In post-colonial Goa, language has come to play a dominant role in defining Goa's political and cultural identity. At the time of Liberation, the language scenario was as follows: All Goans irrespective of caste or religion, spoke Konkani. The Hindus of Goa used Marathi for their written communication, while the upper caste Catholics used Portuguese. The lower caste Catholics used Konkani in roman script for their written communication.

LIBERATION AND A CHANGE IN THE STATUS OF VARIOUS LANGUAGES IN GOA

In 1947, when India became independent, and began the process of nation building, the Portuguese under the dictatorship of Salazar pretended as if Goa was unaffected. But certain changes, though subtle, occurred. One, the Portuguese whose policy towards non Catholic Goans was so far exclusionist, now tried to change things. Entry into Portuguese schools and public service jobs, which were so far denied to them, were now made available. Also, satyagrahis from outside Goa started entering in droves but the Portuguese Government dealt with them ferociously. A number of Goans formed a number of groups like the Goa People's Party, Azad Gomantak Dal, Goa Ashram and the Goa Liberation Council. A large number of those in the forefront of the liberation movement were Catholics, many of whom spoke Portuguese or had been educated in Portugal. But given the complexity of Goa's socio-political history, the discourses being played out in the public sphere were varied. Though most favoured Liberation, there were a number of Goans who were pro-Portuguese. 'Given the lusitanised cultural and religious perceptions, the economic advantages of Goa's duty free import policy in the 1950s, the new opportunities for education, employment, and pensions.....if many Catholics wished for a freer political atmosphere they did not necessarily burn with desire to give up their privileges and share the economic fortunes of India, which at that time, were not bright' (Newman 2001: 61)

The Portuguese policy of enticing Goans was never backed with sufficient educational facilities. While the Brahmin elite among both Hindus and Catholics learnt Portuguese, the

common people learnt Marathi if they went to school at all. When the last Governor General Vassal e Silva, toured rural Goa, he was dismayed to find large number of English-language primary schools affiliated to the Bombay Board of Education, while Portuguese primary schools were scarce (Newman 2001: 61).

When Liberation came, it was unexpected. The ‘suddenness’ of Operation Vijay¹², that was sent to liberate Goa, left many perplexed. Some were confounded on even how to view this event: Liberation or Invasion. Fr. Athaide, a Konkani protagonist recalls helicopters flying over Goan villages, dropping pamphlets in Portuguese and Konkani in Roman Script, assuring the people that the Indian army had come to liberate them and not to impose its will on the people. While the spontaneous reaction of the people was happiness and relief, the attitude of the new Government and the situation in the weaning period, which lacked sensitivity, made the Goans unsure. Overnight they had to switch to not just a new administration and government, but a whole new lifestyle including language as well. It was a chaotic time. But finally it was Nehru’s observation when he visited Goa in 1962, *yeh Goa ke log bahut ajeeb ha*, and his promise of not disturbing Goa’s unique character that reassured the people.

Goa’s self-perception also underwent yet another change in this phase of transition. As mentioned earlier, having languished for centuries under Portuguese colonial domination, a large number of Goans migrated or were forced into exile. Migration and exile for thousands of families and more than thousands of single men created and sustained a nostalgic longing for a beautiful, golden but perhaps imaginary Goa that was talked about from Kampala to Macau (Newman 2001: 57). This image was also shared by the Portuguese, many of whom genuinely fell in love with this place. Up to the time of Indian independence, the Portuguese perception of Goa reigned supreme, in which anything not in sync with lusitanised Portugal was excluded from the public gaze. In such a perception, Goa was distinct from India and no assimilation would ever be possible. But this same policy of exclusion and discrimination drove the Hindus towards Marathi and mainland India, thus giving rise to an identity with what came to be known as Goa *Indica*. But the majority of Goans, Catholics and Hindus, remained untouched by questions of language and Westernisation. They simply lived in their traditional way, speaking Konkani, within a common socio-economic system, with similar and overlapping religious beliefs and world view (Newman 2001: 59).

These perceptions and sense of identity underwent further changes in post liberation Goa. After 451 years of Portuguese colonial domination, Goa began to experience the process of democratisation of socio-political institutions. Language has played a vital role in Goa’s post-liberation socio political history. Goa’s politics, intrinsically linked with language as it were, represented both primordial and instrumental identities.

Goa is usually considered as a ‘cultural zone’ (Singh 1992: 53 and Singh 2000: 46), for the people of Goa shared a common ethos and folklore. Notwithstanding the plural religious and caste background, the people of Goa put up a unified protest against the colonial masters. Because of the prolonged colonial rule in Goa even after the rest to the subcontinent achieved independence the image of the place and the people in Goa, for the ‘other Indians’ is that of a

highly 'westernised cultural zone.' The people of Goa do not share this image and argue that they are as much Indians as the 'other Indians' are Indians. They consider themselves as part and parcel of the Indian civilisational flow.

Apart from the above mentioned attitudes and trends towards 'cultural universalisation', the people of Goa have been experiencing trends of 'cultural parochialisation.' In this respect, they share the concerns being experienced by local and regional cultures of other cultural zones in India in the wake of de-colonisation. The question of parochialising concerns could emerge fully in the post-colonial condition, for until then the universalising currents were very strong. In the colonial condition, 'the other' to be encountered was the categorically defined 'alien' who is different in race and civilisational background. The democratisation process in the post-colonial condition, by providing opportunities for people to articulate and express their ideas and ideologies, has been a catalyst in concretising the parochialising concerns.

The parochialising trend in post-colonial Goa has taken a linguistic turn as it was generic of the process of State-formation in India. The issues have emerged not because of the prevalence of multiple language varieties- but because of formal and conscious attempts at parochialisation in the post-colonial context. Every major milestone that the State has encountered has been cloaked, either overtly or covertly, in the garb of language.

LINGUISTIC POTRAIT OF POST- COLONIAL GOA: PLURALITY, POLARITY AND CONTESTATION

Linguistically, Goa is located precisely on the dividing line which separates the Indo-European languages of North India from the Dravidian languages of the South (Bradnock: 1977). As already discussed, at the time of Liberation, Konkani, Marathi, Portuguese and English were the major languages of India.

After India got incorporated with the Indian Union, like any region in a state of transition, Goa underwent many changes. As mentioned earlier, under the Portuguese, Goa remained underdeveloped. After integrating with India, economic developmental activities were initiated in Goa on a large scale. Bridges, roads, buildings etc. had to be commissioned. All this required tremendous human resources. Labour was required for construction works. As Goans generally do not like to associate themselves with manual work, labourers were got from the neighbouring states.

Also as the colonial Government did not lay much emphasis on education, qualified persons to fill the many vacant posts had to be got from outside Goa. Many Goans who had migrated to other parts of India also returned to their motherland.

One result of this large scale in-migration was that Goa became a mosaic of different languages. This fact is highlighted in the first census data on the mother tongue spoken by people residing in Goa. This information is tabulated in table 1

TABLE 1
LIST OF LANGUAGES RECORDED IN THE 1971 CENSUS OF GOA

Language	No. of Speakers	Language	No. of Speakers
Marathi	1,69,260	Urdu	19,205
Oriya	153	Assamese	97
Punjabi	1370	Bengali	712
Sanskrit	20	Gujarati	60687
Sindhi	254	Hindi	10701
Tamil	3,347	Kannada	16537
Telugu	4,114	Kashmiri	11
Malyalam	5,656		

Source: Gune 1979.

Konkani is not mentioned in table 1 as at time it was not included in the Eight Schedule of the Constitution.

Though Goa is linguistically plural, the majority of Goans speak Konkani and Marathi, though English, Hindi and Kannada are also widely spoken., Konkani and Marathi are the majority languages not only in terms of number, but also for continued contestation for cultural and political dominance. The post liberation history of Goa is thus replete with linguistic articulations in the public sphere.

POLITICAL SOCIOLOGICAL ISSUES IN THE PUBLIC SPHERE IN GOA

The primary problem facing Goa immediately after Liberation was the status of the Portuguese-medium schools. Overnight, these schools were converted into Konkani- medium schools. In order to ensure smooth functioning of these schools, text books had to be prepared in Konkani, in addition to training the teachers in Konkani. The Konkani protagonists, mainly under the banner of the KBM (which is based in Goa and had no connection with the Bombay KBM), undertook this task. At that time, Shri Ravindra Kelekar and some others, including members of Christian schools, met to discuss matters pertaining to the preparation of text books. During the course of the meeting, Shri Kelekar suggested that the Catholic schools could adopt Konkani in Romi script as it was traditionally the script used by Catholics. The priests from Loyola school strongly rejected this move as they felt that it would divide the two religious communities. They were of the opinion that as Devanagari was the natural script for Konkani, it should be the sole script to be used in schools.

The KBM also organised the first Konkani Conference in Goa under the banner of the All India Konkani Parishad in 1962. The Konkani protagonists were a minority and they were ridiculed by the Marathi majority. Dr Manohar Rai Sardesai gave a fiery speech at the VIIth All India Konkani Conference, which was well received and which angered the Marathivadis. From that point onwards, the Konkani movement began in earnest. The Konkani protagonists, under the banner of the KBM, travelled from village to village enlightening people about Konkani language and persuading them to write in that language.

One particular incident stands out in Dr Sardessai's mind regarding those early years. In 1962, a meeting was organised by the Marathivadis at Pharmacy College. Dr. Sardessai and some other Konkani protagonists attended the meeting. After the meeting, as Dr. Sardessai and the others were leaving the hall, one Marathivadi passed a remark that 11 mosquitoes have left the hall. Dr Sardessai retorted by composing an inspiring poem in which he clarified that those 11 mosquitoes were equivalent to the 11 talukas of Goa.

The next day itself, there was one of the largest meetings held at Azad Maidan, Panjim, organised by the Konkanivadis. It was called Ekchar Sabha and was attended by over 10,000 people. The speeches were made both in Konkani and in Marathi. Through these speeches, protagonists slowly attempted to convert the masses to Konkani. Impressed by the meeting, eminent politician Dr. Jack Sequeira invited Dr. Sardessai and Shri. Kelekar to form the 'Goencho Poksh'. Dr. Sequeira was the President and Dr Sardessai was the Secretary. This party was the forerunner to the major political party of post- Liberation India, the United Goans Party (UGP).

The story of Goa's politics reflected both primordial and instrumental identities (Newman2001: 64). Goan political parties and politicians were largely concerned with whether Goa should remain a separate entity or merge with Maharashtra. This issue took centre stage over the neglect of everything else. And in keeping with the policy of linguistic states in India, the merger non-merger issue in India was linked to the Konkani-Marathi dispute.

Formation of local Political Parties

In 1962, the Maharastravadi Gomantak Party (MGP) was formed. Shri Dayanand Bandodkar, a rich and influential businessman approached the Congress Party for a ticket but was rejected. He was then advised by the Maharashtra leadership to form the MGP in Goa. The MGP was formed June 1963. Existentially, this party denied the existence of a Goan regional culture. It echoed the Portuguese claim that Konkani was a non-language, a dialect of fishermen, toddy tappers, etc. The MGP claimed to represent the oppressed Hindu votes and attacked the Hindu Brahmin and Catholic community.

With the MGP taking an anti-Konkani, caste and religious based mergerist position, designed to wipe Goa from the cultural and political map, it is not surprising that the main opposition party was also not formed on ideological lines (Newman 2001:66). The UGP took the stand that Goa had its own identity, which was based on the independent language Konkani.

Shri Bhembre asserts that the underlying current of both these parties were religious and casteist. In the 1963 general elections, out the 28 seats allotted to Goa, MGP won 16 and UGP won 12 seats. Because the elections were primarily communal and casteist, the Congress, which was comprised of freedom fighters did not win any seat. Though a pro mergerist party won the elections, the issue was not settled.

The Opinion Poll: The Politics of Language Use

In 1963, a Marathi newspaper, the *Rashtramrat* was formed. This newspaper published in Marathi as a matter of strategy, but its focus was Konkani. It was felt that as the population, especially Hindus, read Marathi, it would be better to use the same language to promote Konkani. It actively worked to promote Konkani till the end of the Opinion Poll. Many Konkani stalwarts worked for the *Rashtramrat*. Shri Kare was the editor. Shri Bhembre recalls that during the day, they would campaign for the Konkani movement and at night they would work at the paper. Most of the staff was inexperienced. He wrote a daily column *Brahmast* which became very popular. Shri Bhembre explains the need for his column:

“Many people were writing many things. They had to be countered. Initially our tone was ‘attacking’; later it was ‘conciliatory and urging’. When we saw that a large number of people were genuinely confused, we evolved a change in strategy. For instance, in Usgao, when a large number of people, mostly illiterate had gathered at 11 pm at night, we realised that they were genuinely confused.”

This confusion stemmed from the traditional role that Marathi had occupied in the public sphere in Goa for centuries. Hence majority of the Hindus, except for a few who mostly belonged to the Brahmin community, were pro-Marathi. Such circumstances among members of the same community sometimes led to situations wherein family members were divided on the basis of language. For example, while Shri Uday Bhembre was a Konkani protagonist, his father, a freedom fighter, who was jailed in Portugal since Shri Bhembre was seven, was strongly embedded in Marathi culture.

The Konkani protagonists cited non-linguistic reasons for merger. They attempted to impress upon the people that if Goa remains a separate political entity then it can benefit Goans, politically, administratively and economically. They also tried to sway the minds of the Marathi supporters by capitalising on Shri Bhandodkar’s popularity. Their appeal to them was ‘even if you think that Marathi is the language of Goa, you stand to gain if there is no merger, as then Shri Bhandodkar will remain your chief minister.’

Over three days of high drama, voters had to choose between merger and non merger in an Opinion Poll. On 16 January 1967, 54 percent of the people voted to remain a union territory. With this, Goa had just passed her first language-related political milestone. Though the Opinion Poll had an impact on the Konkani cause, the purpose of the Opinion Poll was simply to decide the political status of Goa. The language-dialect debate continued. Some felt that the verdict was not final as Goa was still a Union Territory. Hence they harboured hopes that Goa could still be merged with Maharashtra. Hence the language dynamics continued to occupy centre stage in the public sphere in Goa.

To get legitimacy on this centuries old issue and in an attempt to finally put this matter to rest, the Konkani protagonists began the process of deciding the language dialect issue by approaching the Sahitya Akademi.

Sahitya Akademi Status: An End to the Language Dialect Dilemma?

The 1962 All India Konkani Parishad urged the Sahitya Akademi to recognise Konkani as an independent language. In 1963, Konkani Bhasha Praja Samaj was formed in Kerala. The Samaj wrote to the Prime Minister and Linguistic Minorities Commission to decide the issue. Accordingly, letters were sent to the Sahitya Akademi. The Sahitya Akademi was headed by Dr. Sunithi Kumar Chatterjee. Dr Chatterjee toured the entire Konkani region. He met with the illustrious Pai family from Udipi who had migrated from Goa centuries ago. Impressed by what he saw, he said that ‘a community that is so culturally advanced cannot speak a variety that is considered a dialect’.

So Sahitya Akademi constituted a committee of five experts in linguistics to study the matter. These five philologists had to also decide on Bhojpuri, Khasi and Nepali. Dr. Jack Sequeira represented Konkani. This committee unanimously agreed that Konkani was an independent philological language. Once this was done, Sahitya Akademi wrote to all the seventy nine members to enquire into their views. They also wrote to the thirteen Governments dealing with the various languages under consideration. Konkani itself concerned the Governments of four states. Out of the thirteen Governments, only the Government of Karnataka responded in favour of Konkani. Only fifteen out of the seventy nine members sent their reply. Five members were not in favour of granting independent status to any language. One interesting point to be noted is that Dr Mahalse from Maharashtra was in favour of independent recognition for Konkani.

This whole process took ten years. In 1974, the Executive Board decided that Konkani should be granted Sahitya Akademi recognition. But because Maharashtra asked the Sahitya Akademi to reconsider its decision, the issue was kept on hold for a year. Before the next general council meeting in 1975, the chairperson of the KBM, Shri Chandrakant Keni called for a meeting. At that meeting, Dr. Sardesai was requested to prepare a booklet on Konkani language and literature. Then getting the names and addresses of all members of the General Council, the KBM posted the booklets to each member.

The fear of the KBM was what if the majority that was for Konkani kept quiet. They knew that the opposition, though a minority would be vociferous. So the organisation made eighty packets of some selected Konkani books. They went to Delhi on the eve of the meeting and lobbied hard through Dr Kashinath Mahale, especially with the Hindi group which was the largest in number. On the day of the conference, some KBM members stood at the main door and gave the packets to those they assumed to be members. They then waited in the garden for the verdict. At the meeting, Konkani was given recognition by a majority.

There was a huge hue and cry in Maharashtra. They put pressure on the Sahitya Akademi to de-recognise Konkani. One Sahitya Akademi member from Maharashtra, at a meeting, even threw the packet of books, raised his voice and said that these are the only books available in Konkani’. Angered by what they saw as his arrogant behaviour, the committee said that they had come to a decision after a lot of consideration and they could not de recognise it now.

The Sahitya Akademi was the first recognition for Konkani and it opened the door for its development. Shri Bhembre says that unlike the common assumption, the Opinion Poll did not decide anything for Konkani, it only served as a platform for the language.

He also feels that:

“After Sahitya Akademi recognition, for us the language dialect issue had been resolved. Once Sahitya Akademi accepted Konkani as an independent language, for us the matter ended there. Even if provoked, we did not enter into any discussion regarding the language dialect status of Konkani.”

The third milestone was the passing of the Official Language Act and the granting of Statehood.

The Official Language Issue

In 1985, Luizinho Faleiro, an MLA of the Goa Congress brought a resolution for the creation of a Konkani Akademi. The Legislative Assembly accepted this resolution. This gave him the courage to submit on 19 July 1985, a Private Member’s Bill demanding that Konkani be made the Official Language of Goa. The Government rejected the bill without even introducing it. They also made some disparaging remarks about Konkani while doing so.

Reading about this incident Shri Babli Naik a journalist working for the Sunaparant got incensed. He approached Konkani protagonists and within ten days the *Konkani Porjecho Awaz* was formed. It had a three fold goal: to make Konkani the Official Language; to see that Goa is granted statehood and to see that Konkani is included in the Eighth Schedule of the Constitution. The Marathi camp started their own organisation, the *Marathi Rashtra Bhasha Prastapan Samiti*. Noronha (cited in Dantes 1999: 47) points to some hidden issues in the Official Language conflict. He says that some sort of casteism, communalism, and chauvinism played a key role in the language protests.

After a virulent conflict, Konkani was finally made Official Language on 4 February 1987, and Goa was granted Statehood on 30 May of the same year.

With the achievement of this third milestone, for many, a number of hurdles had been overcome. But language is not static. They grow just as the imagined community that speaks it. After the passing of the Official Language Act, the language movement in Goa has reached a phase of institutionalisation. This phase is characterised by various challenges like implementation of the OLA, the split in the Konkani speaking community on the basis of the two dominant scripts- Romi and Devanagiri, and the threat to both Konkani and Marathi from the globalising influence of English.

CONCLUSION

Language is primarily a medium of expression and communication. But what it expresses and communicates goes beyond simple speech. It is inundated with symbolic power. Both primordial and instrumental components such as our identity, culture, social position, and education are all manifested in language. Languages can be a unifying, mobilising and as well as a disintegrating force. If a given language in its positive role serves as a vital instrument of

social, cultural, and national integration, then conversely in its negative role, it can serve as a powerful divisive tool (Prasad 1979: 9 cited in Rodrigues 2002: 43). Language can be a source of public discontent, a pawn in the tug of domestic politics.

In this paper, I have discussed how both the primordial as well as the instrumental components of language have played a role in shaping the language movement in Goa. Though this movement has reached the phase of institutionalisation, the language situation in Goa still retains its dynamic, and at times, polemical, nature.

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