

Mojim Konknni Kolpona - devanagiri o romi?

(My Konknni thoughts – devanagiri or romi?)

Being about 25 years old then, I remember the Konkani language agitation well. There were road-bandhs, market shutdowns, various meetings, demonstrations, bhaxans etc. we had a family wedding too, and I was ded'do. The groom was from Kolongut (Calangute), and the bride from Suraulli (Seraulim) we had to send a bridal car from Kolongut to Suraulli. Recent murders in Kutt'thali (Cortalim) made the regular route from North to South Goa extremely dangerous. Coconut trees were felled and placed across the road so nobody could travel through Kutt'thali. The groom and his friends met in Kolongut, "should we call off the wedding?" after much worry and debate, the decision was that the wedding would go on. Nuptials and reception was to be in Panji. The groom and his party will find a way to get to Panji, but the bride and her party would have to face grave danger in getting there. We decided the bridal car would travel from Kolongut to Suraulli and back to Panji via Phomdem (Ponda). That was a safer route, but would take an additional two hours. That being settled, the wedding caterer and a close friend of the groom had to come in to Panji from Vasku. "I will bring the food and everything including my staff on a boat across the Zuari river" proclaimed the caterer. What? Vasco de Gama wouldn't dare do this! The mouth of the Zuari is always very rough and choppy. "People still cross it" he said, "yes but the crafts used are not at all safe and you have to carry multiple large pots of food, yourself, family and staff in one small boat!" we objected. "There is no other choice." he replied. "I am going to do it". Hours before the nuptials, the groom waited for the bride to arrive, while worrying if his friend would be able to overpower the Zuari.

The bride's brother appeared to tell us that the bride was safely in Panji. The groom and all of us were relieved for a moment, then images of a small boat fighting the fury of the Zuari while hanging on to all the gourmet wedding delicacies flashed. There were no cell phones then, and we had to wait for someone to see them at the dock and speed to us on a rajdoot motorcycle to let us know. The rajdoot finally arrived...yes they were all safe, some wet from the splashing waves, but safe thank God. The food was safe too! Fulloi! Let the celebrations begin!

Shortly after this, Goa was granted statehood, and Konknni became its official language. These and other memories of the Konknni language agitation increase my affection for Goa and Konknni. The current 'Romi Konknni Andolan' in Goa, is prompting me to express my kolpona (thoughts) on this andolan.

Language is a medium of communication and not communication itself. Mediums of communication have evolved as have human beings. Language is used to communicate with others, proving it has to be used by more than one - person, community, society or culture - to be of any use at all. Hence, every language had to be influenced by that of their neighbor, trading partner or invader. Therefore, no single culture or society can claim to be the exclusive crucible of a language. Languages, like all mediums of communication, need to be flexible, permitting evolvement to accommodate continuous communication with others. When I tune in to listen to the radio, do I care if the band is AM or FM? Or what is used to measure the frequency of the transmission? Those are measures of transmission. I want a good transmission to my ears. If I do not get that, I just switch to another frequency or band. Because the reception on FM is excellent, can the FM listener tell the AM listener that the message is wrong?

Archaeological evidence shows invaders and conquerors have forced languages to change and even be destroyed. The Portuguese were not the only invaders of Goa, others included: The Delhi Sultanate in 1300's, The Bahmani Sultanate in early 1400's, Sultan Yusuf Adil Shah in late 1400's and the Portuguese in early 1500's. There must have been more invaders; I have not researched that far. All these invaders forced changes in Goan culture and language. We must accept that before any invasion, Goa was definitely all Hindu, invaders and other powers forced changes and divisions in our culture for their own benefit. Under these influences, some Goans were forced to change to Jainism, Islam and Christianity (the Kadambas at one stage converted to Jainism). But, we are all Goans, made from the same fabric, the same dough if I may say so. If a fabric is used to tailor a dress and also a shirt, will the dress be superior to the shirt? Or is a unddo (bread) superior to a chapatti? Why does it matter if konknni is written in devanagiri or romi lippi? Don't we borrow words from other languages if we have difficulty finding the right konknni word? So if we borrow a script from another culture what is the problem? This has been happening for thousands of years. Konknni - like every language - is influenced by various other languages - Portuguese, English, Hindi, Marathi, and more.

It is beyond any doubt that the biggest attempt to annihilate Goan culture and Konknni was by the Portuguese Jesuit and Franciscan missionaries during the Goa Inquisition. Not only were Goans tortured and made to convert to Christianity, we were tortured for speaking our language too. Our hindu practices and the use of konknni was declared heretic, and in 1684 the lingua franca of us Goans was changed from konknni to portuguese. Across the world, all invading powers have done similar things, so Goans should feel neither under-privileged nor privileged by this.

In view of this I am questioning Fr. Pratap Naik's recent statement '*if one goes back to the pre-portuguese era then one can trace the written material in Marathi as well as Romi Konknni belonging to that era, but cannot find even a page written in Devanagiri Konkani*'. I respectfully ask you father to please show us where the romi script came from. Through my humble study, I understand romi lippi is a latin/roman script from Europe. The only way romi lippi could have come to Goa is through the Portuguese or Europeans. Devanagiri is a Brahmic script which archaeology dates back to about the 3 century BC. Father, could it be that from the pre-portuguese era, not a single page can be found written in devanagiri because konknni religious texts, and literature was burnt during the inquisition? They burnt humans alive, what could stop them from burning literature? Just because there is no proof of this burning cannot mean it did not happen. The Portuguese were the oppressors; they controlled everything and had the military might to enforce whatever they wanted to. Would such an oppressive government archive evidence that would incriminate itself? I had this discussion with a catholic high priest a few years ago when I brought the Goa inquisition to his attention. His answer to me was that there is no evidence that the inquisition caused any deaths in Goa. Really? Well, allow me to find a murderer who places all the evidence of his crime in a safe place with a sign saying "no murder evidence hidden here". Romi lippi is from Rome, there is no way Konknni and Goan culture was influenced by it in the pre-portuguese era. We gratefully accept that romi lippi was used to help konknni survive when it was banned by the Portuguese. This does not make romi lippi a Konknni savior, it is the ingenuity of the community, the speakers and the writers that used romi and caused an evolution of Konknni to ensure its survival. Sheno Goenbab and others including my uncle Swami Anant Aguiar have written in romi lippi. Moje Nomoskar tankam (my respects to them) the Portuguese invaded Goa in 1510, Goenbab was born in 1877 and died in 1946, Swami Anant lived and died in the 20th century. How can they be used to prove romi lippi being pre-portuguese? First the invaders influenced us for their own interest who is influencing us now? What has changed? Who's interest is being served? Chint Goemcara.

Finally Father, the survival of religions should be on their own wisdom, strength and divinity. Hinduism and Christianity are practiced in many languages other than Marathi and Konknni. Why will the sidelining of either language cause the end of a religion? Latin was the official language of Christianity, did its sidelining end Christianity? Has religion become so weak that it needs language to prop it? Religion is a way of life and language is a medium of communication. No language can be accused of destroying a religion. Rather, too often religions have ferociously destroyed languages.

Saying that sidelining a language will end a religion exposes a great weakness in that religion. Rather than blame a language, it is this weakness that needs to be addressed. Shifting blame is like running away from the sun; your shadow will be in front of you and the further you go the bigger it will get. If one faces the sun, the shadow falls behind. Amchi bhas-Konknni can do no such murderous thing as end any religion. Konknni is a gentle and kind language. Dev bore m korum, dev boro dis deium, mojea ixtta, mojea bhava and nomoskar sound heavenly whether spoken by hindu, muslim, jain or christian. Isn't that enough? Konknni is a medium of communication. If it serves to communicate, love, understanding, harmony and kindness among its speakers where is the need to agitate?

*Konkn'no Vijay Naik
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Marathi and Romi protagonists join hands against Devanagari Konkani

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Story Summary:

Marathi Rajbhasha Andolan convener Pradeep Ghadi Amonkar and Romi Konknni Andolan convener Fr Pratap Naik address a press conference in Panaji on Tuesday.

PANAJI: The protagonists of Marathi as well as Konkani in Roman script on Tuesday demanded that the state government should change the official language act 1987 and enact a new bill, which declares Marathi and Romi Konkani as the official languages of Goa.

Marathi Rajbhasha Andolan convener Pradeep Ghadi Amonkar and Romi Konknni Andolan convener Fr Pratap Naik in a joint press conference held in the city demanded that the government must pass a language bill in the winter session of the state legislative assembly or call a special session of the assembly, and once and for all should settle the issue of official languages of Goa before the Lok Sabha election 2014.

"The official language act 1987 has played havoc in Goa and divided Goans, and created hatred towards the native languages," they maintained.

RKA convener said that Konkani language in Devanagari script is not the real Konkani language and hence does not deserve a place in the official language act. "It is not a mainstream language but a sidetracked language," Fr Naik argued, stating that if one goes back to the pre-Portuguese era then one can trace the written material in Marathi as well as in Romi Konkani belonging to that era, but cannot find even a page written in

Devanagari Konkani.

"In fact, the 'Father of Devanagari Konkani' Shenoi Goembab had written 13 books in Romi Konkani before moving on to his literature written in Devanagari Konkani,"

he quipped.

Fr Naik maintained that the Catholic community in Goa have no problem if Marathi as well as Konkani in Roman script, are made joint official languages of Goa. He also predicted that if Marathi is sidelined in Goa, it would be the end of Hindu religion here, just as if Romi Konkani is sidelined in Goa, it would be the end of the Christian religion in the state.

RKA convener lamented that the government has given the status of first class citizens to a small group of Devanagari Konkani supporters with personal interests at stake, while Marathi supporters are second class citizens, and those supporting Romi Konkani are treated as no citizens.

"We don't want alms, we want our rights," he asserted.

Amonkar observed that a handful of people belonging to Saraswat Samaj have formed a coterie, and are dominating the so-called official state language of Goa - Devanagari Konkani - by totally forgetting the overwhelming support of the Catholic community to the 1986 Konkani language agitation, which rocked the state.

The Marathi Rajbhasha Andolan and Romi Konknni Andolan finally resolved to work together, instead of fighting for the respective languages, separately.