

THE FIGHT FOR KONKANI ISN'T OVER

Giving Konkani its due is still Goa's big, unfinished project

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The Liberation of Goa from the Portuguese regime, did not mean liberation of the people's language – Konkani. Just as the language was suppressed under colonial rule, it continued to be denied its rightful place after Liberation by the first elected government of the Maharashtra Gomantak Party (MGP). Although the members of the MGP were Goans and spoke Konkani in their homes, they espoused Marathi as their mother tongue.

The MGP led by the first Chief Minister Dayanand Bhandarkar was constituted on the fear that Hindu Brahmins and Catholics would continue to dominate the polity after Liberation, as they did under the Portuguese regime, since some of Hindu Brahmins and Catholics were in the Portuguese Governor's Council. Based on this fear, to their vote base called the Bahujan Samaj, an agglomeration of non-Brahmin castes, they projected Marathi as the mother tongue of Goans (based on the linguistic formation of States in India) and argued that since Maharashtra and Goa's mother tongue was Marathi, Goa should be merged with Maharashtra.

The MGP MLAs themselves could not speak proper Marathi and had written books praising Konkani. So when they espoused Marathi as the mother tongue, the Leader of the Opposition Jack de Sequeira and the MLAs of the United Goans showed books in the Assembly written by MGP MLAs praising Konkani and exposed the MGP's hollow stance. Then MGP claimed that Konkani was a dialect of Marathi. There were regular clashes in the Goa, Daman and Diu (GDD) Assembly over language between the MGP and UGP MLAs, where the UGP waged a dogged battle to defend Konkani as the mother tongue of Goans.

The defining moment when the tide turned in favour of Konkani was at the Opinion Poll. When the results showed that the majority of Goans, especially South Goa rejected Merg-er (and its corollary Marathi), half the battle for Konkani was already won. After the Marathi and Merger issues ran out of currency and out of political expediency, then CM Dayanand Bhandarkar realised his blunder and started working for the development of Goa.

LANGUAGE BATTLE OVER THE DECADES

Significant dates leading to the hard fought, long drawn victory of Konkani as the mother tongue and official language of Goans:

- **August 23, 1970:** Bhandarkar declared that Konkani in Devanagari script would be the State language along with Marathi
- **April 23, 1971:** UGP resolution to include Konkani in the Eighth Schedule of the Constitution, defeated by 13 to 11 votes
- **January 26, 1975:** Sahitya Akademi declares Konkani as an independent language
- **1980 elections:** Congress party includes declaring Konkani as the Official Language and Statehood for Goa in its manifesto
- **1980:** Indira Gandhi tells a delegation of Congress MLA that if you settle your official language issue, she would grant Statehood to Goans
- **February 20, 1980:** Congress party passes Luizinho Faleiro's resolution that the party supports bestowing Official Language status on Konkani
- **March 31, 1982:** A resolution unanimously passed in the GDD Assembly ratifying that Konkani as mother tongue & to declare it as the Official Language
- **1985:** The history defining Konkani Agitation starts under the leadership

of the Luizinho Faleiro, Konkani writers, tiatrists and Konkani Porjecho Avaz

- **November 10, 1985:** A huge rally at the historic Lohia Maidan at Margao to demand Official Language status for Konkani
- **1985:** Congress MLA Francisco Monte Cruz's Private Member's Official Language Bill rejected by Goa Assembly
- **November 14, 1985:** Second major meeting held at Azad Maidan, Panjim to demand Official Language status for Konkani
- **By January 1986:** The Konkani movement had spread to all corners of Goa
- **July 29 1986:** Another meeting called at Azad Maidan, Panjim, to demand Official Language status for Konkani
- **December 18, 1986:** A massive meeting held in Panjim to demand the resignation of the Rane Government since it had failed to keep its promise to make Konkani the Official Language
- **December 20, 1986:** Florian Vaz, a youth killed by police bullet, becomes the first Konkani martyr amid the large scale violence which erupted in Goa
- **December 22, 1986:** Six Martyrs killed in Mandur during language agitation

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PANJIM: Nearly 38 years after Konkani in the Devanagari script was declared the official language of Goa, it's presence in government communication remains limited. While Goa boasts 194 government departments, including semi-government corporations and autonomous bodies, only 32 of them have official websites in Konkani.

Limited Online Presence in Konkani

As of January 2023, a mere 12 government departments had websites in Konkani. Although some progress has been made, there is no legal provision under the Official Language Act to enforce the use of Konkani, nor to penalize departments that fail to comply. The lack of accountability has led to slow implementation.

Prashant Shirodkar, Director of the Official Language Department, confirmed that 32 government department websites are now available in Konkani. He added that of these, 29 are already live, with the remaining three expected to go online soon. "We have been sending reminders to various departments, but some are quick in submitting their details/ contents for translation, while others are taking longer," Shirodkar said.

Opposition Raises Concern

The issue of non-compliance with Konkani was raised by opposition members in January 2023. At the time, Chief Minister Pramod Sawant acknowledged that only 12 government websites were in Konkani and assured that



(Above and top) File images of O Herald's coverage of the language agitation in Goa over the years

steps would be taken to ensure more departments adopted the language. Despite these assurances, the lack of enforcement mechanisms remains a significant hurdle.

Standardisation of Konkani: A Work in Progress

While the presence of Konkani on government boards and signage is common, inaccuracies in spelling and inconsistent use due to regional accents have raised concerns. In response, the Directorate of Official Language is working towards standardizing the Konkani language for official use. "We are in the process of standardization, and we are actively work-

ing on it," Shirodkar said.

The department routinely checks the official boards and signage to ensure they follow the correct order of Konkani, Marathi, and English, as well as the right colour specifications. When errors are found, the department sends out notices to correct them, providing necessary guidance.

Bhasha Bhavan Project Stalled

In a bid to further promote the use of Konkani, the government had proposed the construction of a Bhasha Bhavan, a dedicated centre for the language. However, the project has been delayed due to the lack of available land. Initially planned for Panjim,

where the Goa Konkani Akademi was once located, the project has stalled due to land availability issues. The department is now in the process of identifying alternative sites.

Konkani Translations of Legal Judgments

In an effort to make legal information accessible in Konkani, the Directorate of Official Language has successfully translated 20 landmark judgments from the Bombay High Court in Goa, as well as Supreme Court's website. Additionally, the Directorate has also translated Constitutional amendments made since 1985 in collaboration with the National Translation Mission, Central Institute of Indian Languages, Mysore, Karnataka.

TIATR FRATERNITY GRAPPLING WITH MULTIPLE CHALLENGES TO PRESERVE KONKANI ART FORM

Lack of dedicated auditoriums, govt support for aged tiatrists are a bane

Team Herald

MARGAO: Despite Konkani being the official language of Goa and tiatr being an integral part of the State's culture, the tiatr fraternity is grappling with several challenges in promoting and preserving the art form for the betterment of the language.

Pascal de Chicalim, a renowned tiatr writer and director, said that there are still no dedicated auditoriums in Goa exclusively for the tiatr community.

"The Ravindra Bhavans are often prematurely booked for other art, such as natak, functions, and events. As a result, the tiatr community has to fight for space, often through a lottery system, to get the main Pai Tiatr Joao Agostinho Fernandes Auditorium of Ravindra Bhavan, Margao," he said.



He highlighted the lack of government schemes or pensions for aged tiatr artists, leaving them to fend for themselves.

"Tiatr is the only form of art where Konkani is spoken continuously for three hours. If you go to the markets or bus stands in

Goa, Konkani is slowly dying," said Pascoal.

He stressed the need for special vacancies in the Directorate of Art and Culture for tiatrists, selection based on merit, and suggested the provision of special passes for tiatr artists to avail public transport and access other facilities.

"Tiatr is an art that promotes Konkani, and tiatrists should be invited by the government for any function that promotes the language," he added.

Expressing frustration over the lack of recognition for tiatrists, despite their lifelong dedication to the Konkani tiatr stage, Carmo Fernandes, another tiatr, said, "No one can deny that tiatrists have played a major role in preserving and promoting Konkani in their own way. Just imagine, if tiatrists had stopped presenting their shows, what would have happened to the future of spoken Konkani?"

The tiatr fraternity believes that their contribution to sustaining the language deserves more recognition and support from the government.



HAS KONKANI AS AN OFFICIAL LANGUAGE BEEN PROTECTED BY GOA AND GOANS?

It is 38 years since Konkani was declared as the official language of Goa. What have the successive Congress, PDF and BJP governments and people done to preserve and protect the language. On the eve of the historic day, February 4, when the Goa Daman and Diu Assembly passed the historic bill to make Konkani the Official Language of Goa, we asked opinion makers one question: Has Konkani as an Official Language been protected by Goa and Goans?

“In the last 38 years Konkani has not got the justice from the government as it deserves. Not from any government. In a democracy, the government is by the people, of the people and for the people. Because it has to work according to the wishes of the people, the people's language is made the official language. It has happened in all the States. The government should ensure that there should be maximum use of the language. Here there is nothing in the hands of the public, but everything is in the hands of the government. There is no speed in the implementation of the language, even as other States use it in administration and even in courts

– Uday Bhembre, Sahitya Akademi Award Winner

“After attaining Statehood on the basis of language, we have forgotten about Konkani. We have cultural ties with Konkani, due to the language we have our identity as Goenkars. It is the foundation of our unity. That the language should be promoted is the right of every Goan. The Goa government has now made it mandatory that knowledge of Konkani is compulsory. Why is this necessary? We cannot discriminate against anyone from India getting a job in Goa as per the Supreme Court judgment, but language can be used as a means to protect our livelihood with jobs

– Anant Agni, author and activist

“To ensure widespread use of the Konkani language in administration, all the government servants will have to be taught to type in Devanagari. Only then will there be widespread use of the language. The Konkani Bhasha Mandal and the All India Konkani Parishad will help the government in this. A circular will have to go to all government departments that they should file the notings in Konkani. Only then can there be widespread use of Konkani as a language

– Chetan Acharya, Working President, All India Konkani Parishad

“With the passing of the Official Language Bill, the inclusion of Konkani in the Eight Schedule and recognition by Sahitya Akademi the interests of Konkani are well protected. But whether Goans have protected Konkani is a big question mark. After the Official Language Bill was passed, there is only one Konkani newspaper. However, surprisingly there are six Marathi papers, which have quite a good circulation. Who is responsible for this? Though we, I, proclaim that Konkani is my mother tongue, how much do I use it? How many people correspond with the government in Konkani? Goans have gone to hibernate after it was passed as Official Language and it is not being used

– Trajano D'Mello, Political commentator

“If Konkani as Official Language has to be protected and saved, we have to understand that Goa itself is diverse. All communities live in Goa as one. If Konkani is to be saved, its dialects and scripts – Devanagari and Romi have to be incorporated. Those who are supporting only Devanagari have destroyed our language. I don't understand what hassles and allergies they have for Romi. If Konkani has to flourish, it will flourish only and only with Romi Lipi

– Anthony D'Silva, Konkani supporter

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