O HERALDO
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Our Villages' Net Worth

The central government recently announced that Arambol and Cacra are the two Goan villages that have been chosen as Climate Resilient Coastal Fishermen Villages (CRCFV). It would, however, help to know what lies beneath the fancy title.

Under the Pradhan Mantri Matsya Sampada Yojana (PMMSY), each of the two villages will receive Rs 2 crore for development of essential fisheries-related facilities. The aim of the PMMSY, incidentally, is to integrate all fishermen with agricultural farmers and provide all the facilities available through various farmer welfare schemes to the fishermen.

So how will the CRCFV work? To start out, the facilities that are needed at each of the two fishing villages will be assessed. Thereafter, the cost for development of the facilities required will be deduced based on the local site conditions and the population of fisherfolk in the village. Under the policy, the cost of development will be divided into two - 70% towards setting up infrastructure and 30% towards boosting fisheries-related economic activities.

The activities on which thrust will be laid are the setting up of fish drying platforms, fish markets, ice plants, cold storages etc; and the creation of climate resilient and sustainable livelihood opportunities like seaweed farming, ornamental fish farming and other aquaculture activities. These interventions are aimed at supporting fisherfolk living in these villages.

Also, the policy is expected to promote the dovetailing of funds from other relevant sources for creation of the infrastructure required at the two villages, wherever feasible.

While the intention is noble, what remains to be seen is whether the government will follow through on its promises to enrich the lives of the local fisherfolk. Through the years, especially in the recent past, Goa's traditional fisherfolk have been at loggerheads with the government over a host of issues. Just last month, the fishing community of Benaulim submitted a memorandum to Chief Minister Pramod Sawant asking him to instruct the fisheries department to allot land to them to carry out their traditional fishing activities. Backed by Niz Ramponkarancho Ekvott, the Cana-Benaulim village panchayat,and local residents, they also came out strongly against the proposed leasing of Goa Tourism Development Corporation (GTDC) land for private development.

Last October, Velim's traditional fisherfolk protested against excessive fishing by enthusiasts at the Sal river in Betul. They argued that their livelihood depended on catching riverine fish and that the onslaught of hobbyists in the area had meant that there were fewer fish for them to catch and sell.

A month before that, a fleet of fishing trawlers from Karnataka took Goa's traditional fisherfolk by surprise when they began fishing extremely close to Goa's coast. Agitated, the latter approached fisheries minister Nilkanth Halarnkar and asked why there was no will on the government's part to protect not only Goa's marine wealth but also their livelihood.

Concerns were also raised about bull-trawling and LED fishing - two issues that have been a long-standing grouse of traditional fisherfolk all along the state's coast. Bull trawling involves two boats parallely towing a large fishing net through the water, with both boats maintaining a constant distance from each other to keep the net's mouth open. This controversial method scoops up entire schools of fish, creating a massive amount of bycatch. It also destroys the sea floor because the large nets tend to pull out marine habitation and burrows lying there when they are dragged across by the two boats.

LED fishing involves the use of light emitting diodes to attract fish and catch them. Traditional fisherfolk say these artificial illumination systems vacuum a wide range of marine species and rapidly deplete fish stock, as opposed to the more sustainable pole and line methods that the local fishing communities use.

The government should ensure that these illegalities are first done away with before coming up with lofty policies like the CRCFV. Else it will be all talk and no action on the ground while the state's traditional fishing community continues to struggle and fight for its basic rights and the marine resources in Goa's territorial waters are well and truly finished.

SAFEGUARDING OF IDENTITY & CULTURE FOR THE NEXT GENERATION

We celebrated *Asmitai dis* on the 16th January to commemorate our separate identity and culture when the people of Goa rejected merger and to be part of a Marathi speaking State. Thereafter we celebrated, when a pillar of our culture, Konkani was granted its due recognition on 4th February with the passing of the Goa, Daman & Diu Official Language Act, 1987. For this day to dawn, seven martyrs were killed in December 1986, *Konkani Projecho Awaz* was on the streets with motivation provided by the Konkani writers and tiatrists. Konkani was later recognised in the Eight Schedule of our Constitution on 22nd August 1992. However we are on a continuous hunt of safeguarding *Goenkarpon* as our geography is getting affected and the debate on culture and identity rages on.

Dr S M Khatre (Director, Deccan College Post-Graduate and Research Institute, Poona) in his Presidential address at the sixth session of the Konkani Conference, in Podar College Hall, Bombay in 1957, organised by the Konkani Bhasha Mandal had advised that, "those quarrelling over the relative superiority of scripts ought to be educated in the growth of our scripts" and that "a language lives on the tongues of its people; but it is immortalized in literature which is recorded". He emphasized the need of moving forward in unity in the development of a satisfying literature and that folk literature, folk tales and proverbs are an expression of the culture of the people.

Spanish-language Peruvian novelist, 2010 Nobel laureate in literature Mario Vargas Llosa and the author of over two dozen previous books in his "*Notes on death of a culture: Essays on Spectacle and Society*", wrote that we're living in an age without culture or conviction, that culture, at least as we used to understand it is now officially "dead." It may have survived in some "small social enclaves, without influence on the mainstream, but everywhere else it has been replaced with mere entertainment".

This happens when speakers seek to learn a more-prestigious language in order to gain social and economic advantages or avoid discrimination. The gradual disappearance of *Coptic* (liturgical language of the *Coptic* Catholic and orthodox Church) as a spoken language in Egypt following the rise of Arabic in the 7th century is one example of this type of transition. Modernity and globalization have strengthened these forces, and people around the world now face unprecedented pressure to adopt the common languages used in government, commerce, technology, entertainment and diplomacy. Many indigenous languages are disappearing as a result of the (non) transmission between generations, political issues or lack of legal recognition.

The resulting migration of people, causes linguistic communities to fragment and mingle with other languages. Languages have become extinct as a result of this cultural process leading to language shift, and the gradual disappearance of a native language in favor of a more acceptable foreign language. Linguists estimate that of the world's approximately 6,900 languages, more than half are at risk of dying out by the end of the 21st century. With every language and script that disappears, thinking, culture, tradition and the vast knowledge it encompasses is lost! Willfully permitting it to disappear is like burning books or bombing art repositories in wartime. Thus when a language and its script disappears, we say goodbye to an important piece of our lives, its history and way of understanding the world – disappears forever.

"With indigenous languages, inevitably a collection of environmental, technological, social, economic and cultural knowledge disappears that its speakers have accumulated and codified over millennia," explains German Freire, specialist in social development at the World Bank and author of the report, 'Indigenous Latin America in the 21st Century'. Attempting to slow down the loss of these languages, the UN launched the Indigenous Languages Decade (2022-2032). The aim is to guarantee the rights of indigenous peoples to preserve, revitalize and promote their languages and scripts and integrate aspects of linguistic diversity and multilingualism in sustainable development efforts.

A subordinate population may shift to the dominant language, leaving the native language to a sudden linguistic death and this gradual process may occur over several generations. Institutions such as the education system, as well as forms of media such as the internet, television, and print media play a significant role in the process of language loss. For example, when people migrate to a new country, their children often attend school in the majority language rather than their parents language. My generation is a witness to schools enforcing a fine on students who spoke in Konkani instead of English especially in the village schools in Goa.

In '*Notes toward the Definition of Culture*,' T S Eliot defines culture as existing in, and through, three different spheres: that of the individual, the group or class, and the rest of society. As for what forms the individual, it's the family, and family, in turn is formed by the community and society. That group proceeds to exercise its idea of culture on society as a whole, with the elites, the educated and artists ¬ channelizing their access to the media and academia to influence the tastes of the average citizens, and of the next ¬ generation too. To complain about the death of culture is to complain about dying ¬ yourself. Language revival is the attempt to re-introduce an extinct language by a new generation of native speakers.

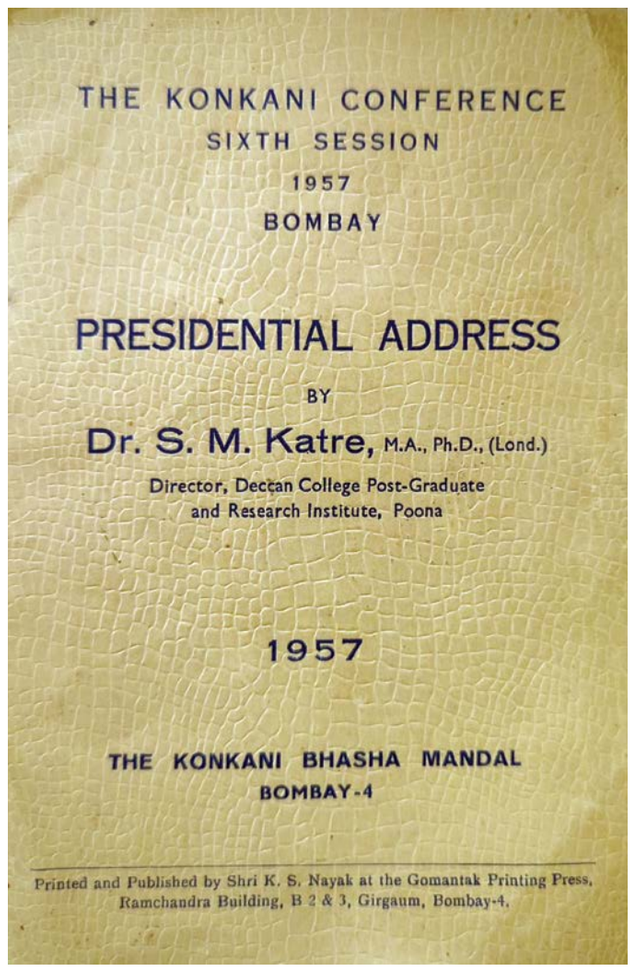
All the people of Goa fought the language issue shoulder to shoulder to make Konkani Goa's official language in 1987.This agitation was fought for Konkani and the script issue was not raised then. Today all other scripts in Konkani face discrimination, as their publications are excluded from Sahitya Academy Awards and these writers are either not appointed or are a minority to bodies and departments that can enrich the Konkani language like, The Goa Konkani Academy, Official Language Cell, Art & Culture Dept., even the Kala Academy stopped awards to Konkani writers in this script.

Tomazinho Cardozo has pointed out that majority of the members of the Goa Konkani Academy were from the Devnagari sympathetic group and the same was seen in the constitution of Advisory Board of Sahitya Academy. Now to add fuel to fire, written examinations are made mandatory in the Devnagari script for recruitment. Are our youth whose mother-tongue has been Konkani for generations, but cannot write in a particular script, not Goan and do they deserve to be denied jobs? Is there no future for them in their homeland and the land of their fore-fathers? I often have mindful conversations with my late father and his friend Gomant Vibhushan Lambert Mascarenhas, another freedom fighter to understand if this was the Goa that they envisaged?

Tiatr has been successful in making Konkani a part of Goa's culture. Konkani is spoken for almost three hours in tiatrs and many Goans, have grown up reading the Konkani 'Romances' and thus both have played a role in preserving the spoken and written language of Goa.

To safeguard our identity and culture for our next generation there is need of inclusiveness. No group should get the feeling of being let down and excluded. We are after all from the same *modki*, as the popular Konkani saying defines our inclusive Goan identity as one family.

(The writer is a Professor in History, Author and an Independent Researcher)



Konkani conference sixth session

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BY INVITATION
Sushila Sawant Mendes

Do we see injustice and stay silent? It's time to dial for change

PETER BORGES

UPFRONT

The power to create change lies in our hands. Goa is our home, and its people deserve better. It's time to rise above indifference and take responsibility for the injustices we see around us

How often have we walked past a child begging on the streets of Panjim or Margao, or seen a young girl selling trinkets at the beach in Calangute, or even noticed a mother carrying a seemingly drugged infant, pleading for money? Did we stop to think about their stories, struggles and safety? And more importantly, did it occur to us that we could do something to change their lives with a simple call to 1098, the Childline number?

Have we, as a society, become too indifferent to the suffering around us? Or is it that we don't trust the system enough to act when we see injustice? These are hard questions, but they must be asked. Goa is home to a variety of helplines meant to address social issues, yet these services remain underused. Why are we not dialling the numbers that can help change lives?

A beacon of hope: Tele-Manas' early success

One helpline that stands out for its progress is Tele-Manas, introduced in mid-2023 to address mental health concerns. With over 12,350 calls received in its first year, the service has proven to be a critical resource for people seeking mental health support. Teenagers and young adults aged 18 to 45 years have emerged as the most frequent users, accounting for 70.9% of all calls, signalling a significant shift in help-seeking behavior among youth.

Depression, the most common complaint, reflects the increasing mental health burden on young people. Issues surrounding personal relationships, anxiety, and stress were other leading reasons for calls, revealing a wide spectrum of challenges faced by individuals. Encouragingly, children and teenagers are also beginning to use the service, with 272 calls from 13–17-year-olds and 469 calls from children up to 12 years.

This success is a testament to the growing awareness of mental health and the importance of accessible support. However, with such promising beginnings, there is still a long way to go.

Why don't we act on other helplines?

While Tele-Manas shows progress, other helplines like 1098 (Childline), 1091 (Women's Helpline), 14446 (Nasha Mukt Bharat Abhiyan) and 1097 (HIV/AIDS Helpline) often remain underutilised. Why don't we, as citizens, report when we see a child being exploited or an individual in distress? Are we too busy, or do we simply think someone else will act? Perhaps we hesitate because we fear getting involved or doubt the system's ability to respond.

These doubts are valid, but they also perpetuate the problem. Every time we fail to report a child begging, a woman in distress, or a case of substance abuse, we allow the cycle of suffering to continue.

What could happen if we acted?

Imagine the change we could bring if every Goan chose to act.

- **Children on the streets:** When we report children begging, selling items, or being exploited by their families, we set the wheels in motion for their rescue and rehabilitation. A call to 1098 could ensure that these children are placed in safe environments and given opportunities to thrive.
- **Women in danger:** A call to 1091 could connect a woman to shelter, counselling and legal aid, breaking the cycle of abuse.
- **Mental health support:** Recommending Tele-Manas (14416) to someone battling anxiety or depression could be a life-saving act.
- **Substance abuse:** Reporting drug abuse through 14446 could help individuals seek rehabilitation and disrupt illegal trafficking networks.
- **Senior citizens and vulnerable groups:** Sharing these helplines with our elderly neighbors or marginalized communities could restore dignity and safety to those often overlooked.

Each call is a step toward justice and change.

Are the helplines ready to respond?

While helplines are a critical first step, they are not enough on their own. The government and associated organizations must ensure that these numbers lead to real, timely action. Are the systems in place to respond to every call? Are there enough trained personnel to handle the volume? Are cases being followed up and resolved?

Citizens have every right to demand answers to these questions. But it starts with us using these helplines. If we don't report, how can we expect the system to improve?

Tele-Manas shows the way, but there's more to be done

Tele-Manas has demonstrated what is possible when helplines are accessible and responsive. However, as highlighted by Dr Pokle, stigma remains a barrier that prevents many from reaching out. Misconceptions about seeking mental health support, fear of judgment, and a lack of awareness about the helpline's services continue to hold people back.

To address this, Goa needs demand-generation activities to promote not just Tele-Manas but all helplines. Awareness campaigns in schools, colleges, workplaces, and public spaces can help normalize help-seeking behavior.

How can we create a movement?

The power to transform Goa lies in our hands. Here's how you can make a difference:

1. Save These Numbers:

Start by saving these helplines on your phone:

- 1098 – Childline
- 1091 – Women's Helpline
- 14416 or 1-800-891-4416 – Tele-Manas
- 14446 – Nasha Mukt Bharat Abhiyan
- 1097 – HIV/AIDS Helpline
- Pink Force (1091, 100, 101, WhatsApp 7875756177)

2. Make the Call:

Whether you witness a child in distress, someone struggling with addiction, or a woman in danger, don't hesitate—make the call.

3. Spread awareness:

Talk about these numbers with your family, friends, and community. Use social media, posters, and public forums to educate others.

4. Demand accountability:

If your call goes unanswered or no action is taken, follow up. Share your experiences and push for improvement.

Will you answer the call?

The power to create change lies in our hands. Goa is our home, and its people deserve better. It's time to rise above indifference and take responsibility for the injustices we see around us.

So, the next time you walk past a child on the streets, hear of someone in distress, or see a sign of abuse, don't just walk away. Pick up your phone and make the call. Together, we can turn these helplines into the lifelines they were meant to be. Let Tele-Manas inspire us all to act—not just for mental health but for every social issue.

Will you take the first step? Will you answer the call?

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