

KONKANI LANGUAGE DIVIDE DEEPENS OVER ROMI SCRIPT RECOGNITION

The ongoing agitation by Roman script supporters continues to fuel heated debates in Goa, particularly surrounding two major issues: the demand for equal status for the Roman script in the Goa Official Language Act and the inclusion of all Konkani scripts in the Sahitya Akademi's literary awards. Despite opposition from other groups advocating for the Devanagari script, Roman script supporters remain unwavering in their pledge to fight for justice until their demands are met, reports **MARCOS GONSALVES**



The debate surrounding the Konkani script issue underscores a contentious discussion on the representation of the Konkani language. Roman script supporters argue that the exclusion of Roman script from the Official Language Act is a significant betrayal of the people's wishes.

The crux of the debate lies in whether the official recognition of Konkani should embrace both the Devanagari and Roman scripts, reflecting the language's diverse cultural and historical influences. Roman script supporters assert that the true essence of the language lies in its unity amid its diversity. By recognising both scripts, they believe that Konkani can better serve all its speakers and preserve its multifaceted heritage and Goan identity.

Tomazinho Cardozo, a prominent figure in the movement, argues that there is a pressing need for increased support from the Konkani-speaking community. He pointed out that the situation regarding the Konkani language has drastically changed in recent years, with Roman script users feeling marginalised, particularly as they are being forced to adopt Devanagari.

"We are not condemning any other script but merely demanding recognition for our own," he stated.

Roman script supporters feel that the brunt of the Global Konkani Forum's movement is visible in the State government's recent decision to make Konkani in Devanagari compulsory for government jobs. This move, they argue, further sidelines the minority Catholic community, which predominantly uses the Roman script in daily life. For the past 38 years, the government never considered making Konkani compulsory for government jobs, so the question arises: why is this decision being made now?

Cardozo also emphasized the lack of political support, particularly from the MLAs of Goa, for the Roman script cause. He reminded that 95% of the people who participated in the original Konkani language agitation were from the minority community, highlighting the strong Roman script connection among them.

The Global Romi Lipi Abhiyan expressed concern over the recent move by the government to hold exams for government

MULTIPLE SCRIPTS WILL DIVIDE PEOPLE SPEAKING THE SAME LANGUAGE: ADV UDAY BHEMBRE

Adv Uday Bhembre, a prominent leader in the historical Konkani agitation advocating for the official status of Konkani, says the demands put forth by the supporters of the Roman script are not entirely fair.

He specifically pointed out that the two main demands—equal status for the Roman script in the Goa Official Language Act and the recognition of all Konkani scripts in the Sahitya Akademi's literary awards—are problematic in his view.

Bhembre argues that the issue of multiple scripts for Konkani could ultimately lead to division within the community. He compared it to "many islands of the Konkani" that would result from the use of different scripts, which he believes could create further obstacles in the language's progress. "Multi-scripts result in division among the people of the same language," he asserted, pointing out that such a situation could hinder unity and the overall development of Konkani as a whole.

Regarding the Sahitya Akademi issue, Bhembre disagreed with the demand for the inclusion of all Konkani scripts for literary recognition. He emphasised that the Sahitya Akademi

has already decided to recognise only one official script for any language, including Konkani. He stated that similar concerns had been raised in the past, but after deliberation, it was resolved that literary works would be recognised in the Devanagari script, which has long been considered the official script for Konkani. Bhembre pointed out that literary works written in other scripts, along with Devanagari, had still been acknowledged by the Sahitya Akademi in the past.

On the matter of the Goa Official Language Act, Bhembre raised concerns about the implementation of the Act itself. He suggested that adding Roman script to the Act would only complicate an already challenging process of full implementation. He argued that the Act has yet to be fully realised and that further demands would only create confusion and hinder its success.

Lastly, Bhembre noted that the new generation of Konkani speakers has already accepted the Devanagari script, as it is taught at the school level. He believes that the younger generation's acceptance of Devanagari is vital for the continuity and progress of the language.

supporters who actively fought for Konkani's recognition. Fernandes argued that the beauty of Konkani lies in its diversity, and that Roman script, widely used in digital spaces, plays a crucial role in keeping the language alive.

There is no doubt that the Global Konkani Forum (GKF) has reignited the movement for justice for the Roman script in the Goa Official Language Act (OLA) after many years of struggle. As Fernandes pointed out, despite attempts over 38 years by various individuals and associations, the movement had struggled to make headway due to various obstacles. However, in the last nine months, the movement has gained renewed momentum. "Although for 38 years this movement was trying to find its way through different people and associations, it could not go forward because of various reasons, but now for the last nine months, the movement has been going forward in earnest," said Fernandes.

To further advance the movement, the Global Konkani Forum has ramped up its

efforts over the last three to four months, meeting with around 12 representatives from different political parties. They presented their demand to include Roman script in the OLA during the last Assembly session. However, as Fernandes expressed, "But as usual, no representative supported us, proving that they are not interested in solving the issue of more than 30% of people who have been discriminated against based on script in the state. Moreover, they have also proved that they are good at misusing the issue of Roman script to garner votes only during elections."

Roman script supporters feel that the brunt of the Global Konkani Forum's movement is visible in the State government's recent decision to make Konkani in Devanagari compulsory for government jobs. This move, they argue, further sidelines the minority Catholic community, which predominantly uses the Roman script in daily life. For the past 38 years, the government never considered making Konkani compulsory for government jobs, so the question arises: why is this decision being made now?

The movement is no stranger to the villages of Goa. By now, most people in the state are aware of the Global Konkani Forum's battle to demand justice for the Roman script. The movement has already sparked a wave of support, particularly in the rural areas. To further spread awareness and engage the village communities, the Global Konkani Forum has taken immediate steps, including organizing the 'Zomnivele Khell' events, which are being staged primarily in Salcete taluka. These events serve as a platform for the forum to reach out to the public.

During these Khells, representatives of the Global Konkani Forum approach the Khell directors and request them to allow time for a brief address to the audience. The representatives use this opportunity to highlight the injustice done to the Roman script and emphasize the importance of unity in securing its rightful place in the Goa Official Language Act. The forum believes that bringing awareness through such community-centered events will galvanize the support needed to advance the cause for Roman script recognition.

Prof Antonio Alvares, President of GKF, criticized the government's inaction on promoting Roman script Konkani. He pointed out that despite promises made in the past, including by former Chief Minister Manohar Parrikar in 2012 to introduce Roman script in schools, no significant steps have been taken. The GKF is now calling on the BJP government to fulfil this long-standing promise and introduce Roman script Konkani in schools starting from the next academic year.

QUOTEROOM

“The 1987 Official Language Act explicitly states that Konkani must be written in Devanagari. This is a betrayal of the 95% Roman script supporters who actively fought for Konkani's recognition. The beauty of Konkani lies in its diversity, and Roman script, widely used in digital spaces, plays a crucial role in keeping the language alive

— Jose Salvador Fernandes, Secretary, Global Konkani Forum

“We are not condemning any other script but merely demanding recognition for our own

—Tomazinho Cardozo, Romi script activist

“The Sahitya Akademi has already decided to recognise only one official script for any language, including Konkani. The new generation of Konkani speakers has already accepted the Devanagari script, as it is taught at the school level. The younger generation's acceptance of Devanagari is vital for the continuity and progress of the language

—Adv Uday Bhembre, former MLA and writer

Recently, at least 33 village panchayats have resolved at their gram sabhas to demand equal status for the Roman script in the Official Language Act, introducing a new dimension to the ongoing script debate.

The situation remains fluid, with both sides continuing to push for their respective causes. While some demand equal status for the Roman script, others stand firm in their advocacy for Devanagari. The future of Konkani in Goa may ultimately depend on finding a balance that respects the language's diverse cultural and historical context.

Roman script supporters feel that achieving a balanced solution that incorporates the diverse needs of the Konkani-speaking community would not only resolve the current conflict but also help unite different factions. Such an approach would promote a sense of shared ownership of the language, helping to strengthen its presence and future. Ultimately, it is about creating a space where all Konkani speakers—whether they prefer the Roman or Devanagari script—can work together to ensure the language's continued vibrancy and growth.

