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**GENDER AND SOCIAL ATTITUDES:
SOME INVESTIGATIONS INTO
KONKANI GENDER**

I. Gender classifies nouns. Traditionally linguistics distinguishes between natural and grammatical dimensions of gender. In the former, gender of a noun corresponds to some 'natural' or semantic feature like sex, animacy, size etc. In the latter, gender of a noun is determined by certain grammatical features associated with it by virtue of the grammatical relationships triggered between words in a sentence. Gender in English is largely a classification of nouns as male (Masculine), female (Feminine) or inanimate (Neuter) and thus is of the natural kind. Swahili, a Bantu language classifies nouns into about six classes according to the singular and plural prefixes attached to them. This could be given as a paradigm instance of grammatical gender. Natural and grammatical genders are not mutually exclusive. For, in languages with grammatical gender there also exists some natural basis in the classification of nouns. The degree of correspondence

between the classification of nouns by grammatical gender and that in keeping with some natural basis varies from one language to another. However, recognition of gender as a grammatical category rests purely on grammatical grounds and not on natural connection. Gender is grammatically significant in a language only when it determines certain grammatical choices like those of articles, concord or pronominal reference. Although observations made on Konkani gender in this paper mainly bear on my own dialect - the salcete Gauda - Saraswat Brahmin Konkani.

English classifies its nouns into three genders- Masculine, Feminine and Neuter, gender plays a very minor grammatical role in English : there is no gender-concord in English i.e. English verbs or adjectives do not agree with the gender of the noun. Further, the reference of the English pronouns he, she, it also rests on the 'natural' classification of the nouns. Considering this, English is often seen as having no gender.

II. Gender in Konkani

Konkani nouns show a three-way gender contrast- Masculine, Feminine and Neuter. Gender is grammatically significant in Konkani and plays an important role in the Konkani concord system to the choice of pronouns.

Examples :

1. dhaklo bhav aylo

"Younger brother came"

2. dhakli bhayn ayli

"Younger sister came"

3. higlo dhaklo bhav aylo , tigo aylo

"This one's younger brother came, that one's did not come."

II.1 Phonetic shape and gender

From an observation of the phonetic shape of the noun-vowels in the final syllable, Masculine and Feminine stand in opposition to the Neuter gender in Konkani. Neuter is characterized by the absence of vowels e, o, and t, t in the pre-consonantal final and the presence of nasalization in the word-final position:

Examples:

	M	F	N	
e/ec	der	per		x
	det	dhep	x	
o/oc	mor	fatod	x	
	pot	vot	x	
t/tc	ekvtt	ttvth	x	
	deavty	stvty		x

exception: pu (Ms)

Regarding identifying gender of the noun from its phonetic shape it should be said that consonant-ending nouns bear no formal mark of any gender. If the consonant ending nouns have e/e, o/o or t/t in the final syllable it only tell that they do not belong to the Neuter gender. But this leaves no position clue for guessing the gender of the noun. In nouns with vocalic endings, however, word final nasalization marks the neuter gender and word final indicates the masculine gender, i.e. all nouns that end in a nasalized vowel belong to the neuter gender and those that end in belong to the masculine gender. The feminine gender lacks its mark.

Word-final u represents the masculine in the pronominal, adjectival and verbal paradigms where the

neuter is represented by e and the feminine by i.

Examples :

1. tadzo bhav / to goya astalo
"his brother / he will be in Goa."
2. taji bayl / ti goya asttli
"his wife / she will be in Goa."
3. taje aka / te goya asttle
"his aunt / she will be in Goa."

Although the feminine gender is represented here by -i and although most i - ending nouns are feminine in gender, -i cannot be called as a mark of the feminine gender in the strict sense of the term. For, quite a number of i - ending nouns also belong to the masculine gender: where as motheli "the fat one", madi "arecanut.palm", stri "wire", supari "arecanut" are Feminine, padeli "coconut-feller", ghadi - "a witch doctor", htri - a Proper noun - wepari "businessman" are masculine.

II. 2. Natural associations in Konkani gender konkani gender throws up some associations with sex and size.

II. 2. 1. Sex and gender

There exists some phonetically related pairs of nouns in Konkani where masculine is male and feminine female.

Examples

M F

- | | | |
|------------|----------|---------------------------------------|
| 1. maktd | makdin | he monkey / she monkey |
| 2. duktr | duktrin | boar / sow |
| 3. ranpi | ranpin | cook (male) / cook (female) |
| 4. mastt | masttrin | teacher (male) / teacher (female) |
| 5. sedzari | sedzann | neighbour (male) / neighbour (female) |

- | | | |
|----------|------------|----------------------------------|
| 6. mama | mami | uncle (maternal)/aunt (maternal) |
| 7. kaka | | kaki |
| | (paternal) | uncle (paternal)/aunt |
| 8. adzo | aji | grand father/grand mother |
| 9. bokdi | bokdi | billy goat/nanny goat |
| 10. komo | komi | cock/hen |

However, all males and females in nature do not correspond to pairs of masculine and feminine nouns in the language. The pair treatment is reserved only for those nouns that are higher up on the scale of animacy and is a regular feature in common nouns for human beings which are highest on this scale. Male/female does not linguistically seem to matter far pal wall lizard, gothan millipede, ghon kite vell:- a fish - all feminine nouns, dzallo-cocroach humlo an ant- viswen king fish, kastw tortoise - all masculine nouns, sugot prawn, yewal - a snake mane crocodile malun a snake - all neuter nouns, as these are lower on the scale of animacy.

II. 2.2. Size and gender

Where Konkani gender shows associations of size, masculine usually represents the "big", neuter the "small" and Feminine sometimes "big", sometimes "small", depending upon the other terms of the opposition.

Examples:

M	F	
sewt	shewtali	a fish
bagdo	bagduli	a fish
kido	kid	"worm"
kalso	ktlsuli	"pitcher"

talo	tali	"branch"
potlo	potli	"bundle"

Here the masculine animate nouns are not necessarily male in sex. Sewto, bagdo and kido are only bigger in comparison with sewtali, bagduli and kid which could be either male or female like the former. This fact is best demonstrated by the three phonetically related words for frog in the three genders: bebo (M), bebki (F) and bebuk (N). Here gender corresponds to the size of the creature which diminishes in the order M, F and N.

Also see the following pairs of nouns that show semantic associations with size:

F	N	
Koyti	Koytul	
Pet	Petul	"box"
Pal	Palut	"lizard"
Ptnts	Ptnsul	"jackfruit"
Fon	Fonkul	"hole"
Waro	Ware	"wind"
Ghtd	ghodawle	"banana bunch"

-ul and -ut in the neuter nouns above are diminutive suffixes and all diminutive noun forms are neuter in Konkani.

III. tstli, bayl and the gender-shift

tstli which means both "girl" and "daughter" functions in Konkani both as a feminine and a neuter noun. A close scrutiny of the phonetic form of the word together with its semantic content would assign tstli to the feminine :

Phonetically being an I - ending noun *tstli* should belong either to masculine or to feminine gender, and semantically being a female human being, a noun very high up on the scale of animacy, it cannot belong to the masculine gender. Thus feminine seems to be the gender of *tstli*. But other considerations that are crucial in determining the gender of a noun reveal that *tstli* is both a feminine and a neuter noun: *he mhahe tstli* or *hi mhthi tstli* "this is my daughter"; *mhaje tstli watile* or *mhaji tstli wttli* "my daughter will go" are all grammatical sentences. This, however, does not hold true for the plural of *tstli* - *tstlyo*. All the three formal considerations of phonetic shape, pronominal choice and concord show that *tstlyo* belongs only to the feminine gender: it has the feminine plural suffix - o and the grammatical relationships of concord and pronominal choice associated with *tstlyo* are also of the feminine type eg. - *mhtjyo tstlyo aylyo/tyo aylyo* "my daughter came/they came" alone is grammatical. *mhtji tstlyo ayli* is an ill-formed sentence. Thus we have here a queer case of a noun whose singular and plural forms are not fully grammatically congruent.

The complexity of *tstli* does not end with this. Although the Common Noun *tstli* has two genders, all Proper Nouns for *tstli* belong to only one gender- the neuter. Whereas *mhaje tstli ayle* and *mhtji tstli ayli* are both grammatical and appropriate the same does not hold when the Common Noun *tstli* is replaced by a Proper Noun. eg. *gayatri ayle* and *gayatri ayli* are both grammatically correct but *gayatri ayle* alone is appropriate in the context of *tstli*. This convention not in any way less grammatical or "grammatically inferior" to the convention that associates gender with the phonetic form of the noun, introduces a flexibility in the gender system of the language by allowing

nouns feminine in form to take on the neuter gender without altering their form. kallyani, gayatri, ltksimi, radha, savita, pramila etc. turn neuter when referring to tstli.

Similarly, of the two sets of vocative particles ago....go and age....ge available for female human nouns, ago....go alone is used for tstli and the Proper Nouns for tstli. age....ge is used only to refer to a bayl "woman, wife".

A bayl is defined both in terms of age and the marital status, more in terms of the latter. Socially, a tstli on marrying overnight becomes a bayl and becomes eligible for age....ge. Whereas a young unmarried girl cannot be addressed with age....ge a middle aged or an old spinster is generally so addressed. A bayl can also be addressed with ago....go. And, the Proper Nouns for bayl alternate between feminine and neuter genders. (However, Proper Nouns like sewte, mogre abole dure ktsture that are neuter phonetically, belong only to the neuter gender.)

The factor of distance whether in a relationship or in age or that between social groups governs the feminine/neuter alternation in the gender of the Proper Nouns for bayl. Neuter implies less personal distance i.e. informality or intimacy in a relationship or juniority in age (of the addressed) or low social status (attributed to the addressed). Feminine implies more personal distance. Formality or respect in a relationship or, seniority in age (of the addressed) or a higher social status (attributed to the addressed.)

A husband usually addresses the wife in the neuter which conveys both, an intimacy and an informal nature of the relationship and also juniority (of the addressed). A 'traditional' husband, however, addresses the wife in the feminine which implies a certain degree of formality in the

relationship and also a certain status, awareness. This address pattern which was more common in the former times is prevalent today only in the older generations. Husbands of the new generations almost invariably address their wives in the neuter.

A married daughter although she is socially entitled for femininity is addressed by her parents always in the neuter. To a certain extent this also holds true today in the case of a daughter-in-law who was traditionally addressed in the feminine by her parents-in-law. In this instance and also in the one given above we see a change in the mode of relatedness mirrored in a linguistic change : choice of gender.

A child usually addresses her/his mother in the feminine which conveys seniority of the addressed. Some children address their mothers in the neuter which conveys an informality and intimacy in the relationship.

Neuter is the gender of address among peers. Here again it indicates informality and intimacy.

Female prostitutes are always addressed in the neuter. Neuter in this case indicates a taken-for-granted informality and intimacy that is socially linked with low status.

Bayl also has a neuter plural associated with it - bayla "woman" besides its regular feminine plural baylo. Bayla is a collective plural which by definition is a plural form referring generally to a particular class of animate beings. Collective plurals are generally understood a being sex neutral like mhtsra "buffaloes", gorwa "cattle", pora "children", kutri "dogs", bhurgi "children", mtntsa "human beings" etc. bayla seems to be the only collective plural that has a single sex-specific non-neutral correlate.

The gender alternation around *tstli* and *bayl* could be charted as below :

<i>tstli</i>		<i>bayl</i>		Nature of Alternation
Common	sg	F,N	F	Freely Varying
Noun	pc	F	FN	
Proper		N	FN	Conditioned
Noun				

The neuter gender often conveys derogation and abuse. Words like *dztddul*, *ranul*, *gawdul*, *kalkut* which are neuterized diminutive forms of *dztddi* "old", *ran* "widow", *gawdi* "a *gawsa* woman" and *Kali* "dark" are abusives used for women. Neuter works like *sune*, *ratn saweg ajagol pisat*, *bhtyrup* are abusives that are used both for women and men.

The masculine, feminine vs. the neuter opposition could once again be read as "big" vs. "small" opposition where neuter represents "smallness" in size, distance and esteem. The extreme case of low esteem would be derogation.

IV. These observations on Konkani gender- those bearing on *tstli*, *bayl* and the feminine/Neuter gender shift in particular, suggest that gender within a human context does not function merely as a singular 'class-label.' It unfolds a structure of social meanings and personal attitudes. The choice of gender especially in the context of female humans reveals who relates and is allowed to relate to whom and in what way. Neuter seems to be the paradoxical gender here in that it may mean opposites : a respectful inclusion and also a disrespectful exclusion

depending upon the social made of relatedness and the attitudes of the speaker.

Note:-

Although the word *tstli* exists only in the Brahmin dialects of Konkani, other dialects are not devoid of the feminine/neuter gender alternation in the feminine context. Each Konkani dialect seems to have its own specific gender code while referring to women. This in itself should be a fascinating subject for an elaborate and a comparative semio-grammatical study.

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