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IN THE SHADOW OF MARATHI: POLITICAL SOCIOLOGY OF KONKANI IN GOA

Joanna P. Coelho*

Linguistic hegemony is achieved when dominant groups create a consensus by convincing others to accept their language norms and usages as standard or paradigmatic. This research paper attempts to analyse the challenges faced by a language when it is exposed to the hegemonic influence of another language. Though Konkani has always been the language of Goa, as Goa was never under local rule, its development has always been overshadowed by the domination of the languages of the rulers of Goa. The history of Konkani is inextricably linked to the Marathi language, as it derives its identity in its vociferous attempts at distinguishing itself from Marathi. This research paper articulates the development of Konkani as it contested the dominance of Marathi.

This paper attempts to analyse the challenges faced by a language when it is exposed to the hegemonic influence of another language. While Kannada and Portuguese were predominant in Goa at some time or the other, being the language of the rulers, Marathi somehow managed to get itself entrenched as the dominant language, even when Goa was ruled by non-Marathi rulers. In fact, Konkani's history is a history of dominance and contestation- dominance of Marathivada and contestation by the Konkani vada. This research paper offers a political sociological account of Konkani, whose trajectory in Goa was always overshadowed by the linguistic hegemony of Marathi.

Politics of Language Use and Linguistic Hegemony

Though the idea of hegemony was in currency since long, its usage now to describe the intricacies of power relations in a variety of contexts is often associated with Gramsci. He used the term hegemony to mean

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intellectual and moral leadership through consent and persuasion (Gramsci 1988).

Bourdieu (1988) used the concept “symbolic domination” to refer to the ability of certain social groups to maintain control over others by establishing their view of reality and their cultural practices as the most valued and, perhaps more importantly, as the norm. For Gramsci, the ruling class is an intellectual stratum that refines and presents its world view and thus provides an important part of the apparatus whereby the ideological component of ruling class hegemony is preserved and transmitted (Abercrombie 1980: 14). This intellectual stratum influences all aspects of culture, especially language.

For Gramsci language is both an element in the exercise of power and a metaphor for how power operates. Linguistic hegemony is achieved when dominant groups create a consensus by convincing others to accept their language norms and usage as standard or paradigmatic. Hegemony is ensured when they can convince those who fail to meet those standards to view their failure as being the result of the inadequacy of their own language. Sometimes though, establishing linguistic hegemony is not the end of the process. Sustaining the hegemony remains a challenge. The politicisation of language ensures that dominance and contestations are perennial components of language use. In this paper, I have attempted to demonstrate how the history of the Konkani language in Goa is interwoven with the hegemonic domination of Marathi language.

Goa's Linguistic History

Language being intrinsic to territory, Konkani's history is linked to the history of the land of its speakers. The Konkani language is spoken throughout the narrow strip of land which is bounded on the north by Malvan, on the south by Karwar, on the east by the Western Ghats, and on the west by the Arabian sea (Da Cunha 1881:1).

Konkani: A Victim of Disinterested Patrons?

Very early in its history, official and religious status in Goa was accorded to the vernaculars of the more powerful adjacent territories, Karnataka and Maharashtra (Pereira 1992: 8). Unlike many other parts of India, Goa

was never under a local ruler at any period in history. Each ruler thus imposed his language and script in the public sphere in Goa. Konkani suffered at the cost of the neighbouring languages which because of political patronage increased its hold over the region, especially in the areas of administration and education.

When Goa was under the sway of Kannada-speaking dynasties, Kannada dominated over the local language. The Yadavas, the Bahamanis and the Sultan of Bijapur who ruled over portions of the Konkani for a time, gave Marathi official standing. The vacant places of the Konkani Brahmins, who migrated to the Vijayanagara Empire, were taken up by the less qualified Maratha Brahmin priests. These Maratha Brahmin priests raised their own vernacular to the position of Konkani (Pereira 1992).

The system of education in pre-Portuguese Goa was largely religious in nature. The formal education which was limited to the three upper castes was provided at *pathshalas* or *parishads* by schoolmasters or *aigals* in local languages (Bothelo 2007: 45). The teachers who were called *Sinai* or *Shennoy* or *Shenvi Mama* were actually Maharastrians who were employed in Goa usually as clerks. As these teachers came from Maharashtra, they taught in Marathi. Hence Marathi became the medium of instruction in schools in pre-Portuguese Goa.

Despite the isolation of Konkani in the political, religious and educational spheres, Konkani continued as the language of the private sphere. It developed a script of its own, the *Kandvi* or *GoymKannadi* (Gomes 2000: 21). Gradually, it was given visibility in the public domain. Since the twelfth century, a number of inscriptions in Konkani language began appearing during the reign of various rulers. Konkani was also incorporated into classical Marathi literature.

Thus works in Konkani prose and poetry were part of the native Goan contribution to the language. Though not given official recognition, Konkani did form part of the public sphere in Goa. This is because successive rulers of Goa did not impose any restrictions on the use of the language. But because of the lack of a cohesive community feeling and assertiveness among Konkani speakers and the rule by outsiders,

the growth and development .of the Konkani public sphere was limited.

Konkani Under Portuguese Regime

The early Portuguese: From Ignorance to Dominance

When the Portuguese set sail for India, they had a twofold aim: control of the spice trade based in South India and look for Christians. When they realised that there were no Christians in Goa, they set about converting the locals to Christianity.

Though living in the age of the Renaissance, the conquerors of Konkani's heartland were mediaeval minded; for them Church and State were one with interests linked. They equated religion with culture. The Inquisition was got to Goa in the seventeenth century which aimed at keeping the converted Christians *lusitanised*.

With the arrival of the Portuguese policy of Lusitanisation, the public sphere in Goa saw an interplay of a variety of forces and agents: religious conversion, political expediency, the dominance of Portuguese, the counter-dominance of Marathi and attempts at Konkani perseverance and eventual resurgence.

Lusitanisation and Language: From Destruction to Development

In the first ardour of conquest, temples were demolished, all emblems of the Hindu cult were destroyed, and books written in the vernacular tongue, containing or suspected of containing idolatrous precepts and doctrines, were burnt (Cunha Rivara 2006: 16).

But, after some time, the Portuguese realised that if they wanted to gain a large number of converts, they could not ignore the local language. The very zeal for the propagation of the Christian faith, the needs of the Government for the lands conquered, or feudatories and the necessities of commercial dealings made evident to the conquerors the need for the knowledge of vernacular languages and for securing assistance from the natives, even in the priestly ministry itself (Cunha Rivara 1991: 22). As all Konkani literature had already been destroyed by then, the Portuguese had no guide to written Konkani. Hence they wrote Konkani in a script that they were familiar with. This gave rise to Konkani being written in the Roman script.

Thus we can see that the decline of Konkani continued under the policies of the State and the Church. The Inquisition not only had a harmful effect on the development of Konkani language and literature, it also resulted in emigration of Goans to other regions, where the language was spoken. The history of Konkani created the geography of Konkani (Sardessai 2000: 66).

The Formation of The Public Sphere: Language And Symbolic Power In The 19th Century

The Rise of Marathi and the Conflicting Public Spheres in Goa

In the eighteenth century, the Portuguese conquered the areas known as the New Conquests. Unlike the old conquests, the Portuguese did not follow an aggressive conversion policy in the areas of the new conquests.

In the areas of the new conquest, the overbearing influence of Marathi was very much present. It was so because these regions till their transfer to the Portuguese were under the domains of the Sawants of Sawantwadi who played a feudatory role of the Satara Crown where Marathi was spoken as well as written (Shirodkar 2002: 36). Thus the influence of Marathi grew in the nineteenth century.

The beginnings of the Konkani-Marathi controversy can be traced to an essay on Indian languages written by John Leyden in 1807. In this essay, Leyden chalks out a hierarchy of languages in which he places Konkani as a dialect of Marathi. A colleague of Leyden's, William Carey, disagreed with Leyden (Pereira 1977: 7). The views of these two scholars gave rise to two distinct ideological camps: Marathism and Konkanism.

This rise of Marathi at the cost of Konkani was further consolidated by the Portuguese colonial policies. It suited the Portuguese Government to encourage this state of affairs as no other language posed as big a threat to lusophone identity than Konkani. In 1812 the Archbishop Galdino prohibited the use of Konkani in primary schools as a medium for both teaching and conversation in order to further the spread of Portuguese. But this policy was directed only towards Konkani.

In 1853, Marathi types were introduced in the national press. Court verdicts relating to land rights were printed in both Portuguese and Marathi. In 1871, when all schools in the New Conquests were converted into bilingual schools teaching in both Marathi and Portuguese, the sphere of Marathi widened to become the spoken and official language of the new conquest.

From *Lingua Brahmana* to *ALingua das-criades*: The Decline of Konkani

Apart from the early phase of the Inquisition, the only edicts against language were directed against Konkani. This is because no other language posed as much a threat to identity and loyalty to the Crown than Konkani. Konkani was that one language that united all Goans irrespective of religion, caste and ancestry. While those in power actively sought to increase the dominance and spread of Marathi and English, almost all interested groups were either indifferent or actively opposed to the development of the Konkani language. With no state backing, nor a popular campaign around the language, nor a dominant indigenous group to argue for a place for Konkani within the educational system, its speakers were excluded from those circuits of power to which Marathi, Portuguese and English were granted access (Pinto 2007: 96). In such a situation Marathi and Portuguese occupied the discursive spaces that Konkani could have had. The upper castes that moved to town for professional reasons participated entirely in Luso-Indian culture and spoke mainly in Portuguese. In their efforts to assume Western identity, Konkani became a liability that they were ashamed of. Christian families began to call Portuguese their mother tongue and speak it even at home, something which had not happened earlier.

While the Christians, especially the upper caste urban inhabitants (the rural still clung to Konkani) dissociated themselves from Konkani, the situation was even more pronounced with the Hindus. Tormented by the Inquisition and the Portuguese policies of discrimination, Hindus sought refuge in the devotional verses of the neighbouring Marathi literature. The association of a language with a religious community

helped construct a Hindu identity within Goa and prepared the ground for the formation of specifically Hindu associations (Pinto 2007: 109).

From the above discussion it appears that its status having been shunned by both Hindus and Catholics, Konkani entered a phase of decline. Once associated with prestige and called *Lingua Brahmana*, it was reduced by the nineteenth century to being the “language of servants”.

The linguistic repertoires of the nineteenth century Goans were finely stratified. Elite Catholics and many elite Hindus were literate in Portuguese and Konkani while elite Hindus were also literate in Marathi. Konkani was not employed in any official or elite public realm. This linguistic stratification coupled with an active printing press led to the emergence of multiple public spheres.

While the Marathi public sphere was busy consolidating itself, the Konkani public was still staggering in the dark. The large-scale migration of Goans since the sixteenth century gave rise to a multiplicity of dialects and scripts thus fracturing the Konkani public sphere even further. Nevertheless a beginning was made in the nineteenth century which acted as a precursor to the Konkani renaissance in the twentieth century.

Konkanivada and Marathivada in the Twentieth Century

The foundations of modern Konkani literature were to a large extent laid by Vaman Raghunath Varde Valaulikar alias Shennoi Goembab. Taking a vow to revive the lost pride of Konkani, he devoted his entire life to explore what he believed to be the innate strength and beauty of his language. He sought to prove that Konkani is an independent language and not a dialect of Marathi.

Bombay, being part of British India and later independent India, provided the environment to nurture the cause of Konkani. Not just politically, but socially and intellectually as well, Bombay provided the ideal environs for the development of the Konkani renaissance. Due to the poor economic and educational opportunities prevalent in Goa, an increasing number of Goans began migrating to Bombay for the purpose of employment and education. Most of today’s Konkani stalwarts began

their literary journey in the public sphere in Bombay. They strived hard to make people, very often their own people, understand that Goan identity is distinct from Marathi identity.

Linguistic Potrait of Post- Colonial Goa: Plurality, Polarity And Contestation

After Goa got incorporated with the Indian Union, like any region in a state of transition, Goa underwent many changes. A lot of people came from outside Goa on account of work. Hence the number of languages spoken in Goa increased. The majority of Goans speak Konkani and Marathi, though English, Hindi and Kannada are also widely spoken. Konkani and Marathi are the majority languages not only in terms of number, but also for continued contestation for cultural and political dominance. The post liberation history of Goa is thus replete with linguistic articulations in the public sphere.

Political Sociological Issues In The Public Sphere In Goa

The story of Goa's politics reflected both primordial and instrumental identities (Newman 2001). Goan political parties and politicians were largely concerned with whether Goa should remain a separate entity or merge with Maharashtra. And in keeping with the policy of linguistic states in India, the merger non-merger issue in India was linked to the Konkani-Marathi dispute.

Formation of local Political Parties

In 1962, the Maharashtra Gomantak Party (MGP) was formed. Existentially, this party denied the existence of a Goan regional culture. It echoed the Portuguese claim that Konkani was a non-language, a dialect of fishermen, toddy tappers, etc. The MGP claimed to represent the oppressed Hindu votes and attacked the Hindu Brahmin and Catholic community.

The main opposition, the United Goans Party (UGP) took the stand that Goa had its own identity, which was based on the independent language Konkani. The underlying current of both these parties were religious and casteist. The MGP won the elections. Though a pro mergerist party won the elections, the issue was not settled.

The Opinion Poll: The Politics of Language Use

In 1963, a Marathi newspaper, the *Rashtramat* was formed. This newspaper published in Marathi as a matter of strategy, but its focus was Konkani. It was felt that as the population, especially Hindus, read Marathi, it would be better to use the same language to promote Konkani. It actively worked to promote Konkani till the end of the Opinion Poll. Many Konkani stalwarts worked for the *Rashtramat*.

People were confused about the role of Marathi in defining the identity of Goa. This confusion stemmed from the traditional role that Marathi had occupied in the public sphere in Goa for centuries. Hence majority of the Hindus, except for a few who mostly belonged to the Brahmin community, were pro-Marathi.

In the Opinion Poll which was held over three days, voters had to choose between merger and non-merger. On 16 January 1967, 54 percent of the people voted to remain a union territory. With this, Goa had just passed her first language-related political milestone. Though the Opinion Poll had an impact on the Konkani cause, the purpose of the Opinion Poll was simply to decide the political status of Goa. The language-dialect debate continued. As Goa was still a Union territory, the Marathivadis harboured hopes that Goa could still be merged with Maharashtra. Hence the language dynamics continued to occupy centre stage in the public sphere in Goa. It was instrumental in defining the next milestone of Goa- the passing of the Official Language Act and the granting of Statehood.

The Official Language Issue

On 19 July 1985, an MLA of the Goa Congress submitted a Private Member's Bill demanding that Konkani be made the Official Language of Goa. The Government rejected the bill without even introducing it. They also made some disparaging remarks about Konkani while doing so.

This apathy of the Government incensed the Konkani protagonists and within ten days the *Konkani Porjecho Awaz* was formed. It had a threefold goal: to make Konkani the Official Language; to see that Goa is granted statehood and to see that Konkani is included in the

Eighth Schedule of the Constitution. The Marathi camp started their own organisation, the *Marathi Rashtra Bhasha Prastapan Samiti*. In this movement as well, some sort of casteism, communalism, and chauvinism played a key role in the language protests.

After a virulent conflict, on 4 February 1987 the Official Language Act (OLA) of Goa was passed. Konkani in Devanagiri script was declared Official Language of Goa, and Marathi was given the status of an Associate Language. Goa was granted Statehood on 30 May of the same year.

With the achievement of this third milestone, for many, a number of hurdles had been overcome. But language is not static. They grow just as the imagined community that speaks it. After more than two centuries, Konkani finally appeared to have come out of the shadow of Marathi, with the declaration of Konkani as the Official Language of Goa. But the vague reference to Marathi in the Official Language meant that Konkani had to still struggle to come out fully of the shadow of Marathi. The specific mention of only Devanagiri script gave rise to a Konkani script controversy thus fracturing the Konkani community.

Conclusion

While primarily a medium of expression and communication, language is inundated with symbolic power. Though it often serves as a vital instrument of integration, it can also act as a powerful divisive force. Questions relating to language, especially linguistic hegemony of one language over the other through the issue of language-dialect dichotomy, have evoked strong emotions and have led to various language movements in India. Linguistic mobilisations for political purposes are implicated in the very nature of modern democratic processes. As Kaviraj (1992) conceptualises, they are an accompaniment to the arrival of modernity and the associated transition from fuzzy to enumerated communities. The dominance and contestations surrounding Marathi and Konkani at the turn of modernity is a case in point.

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