



FORCE, a collective of parents of schoolchildren in Goa who want the state government to formalise the grants to English medium primary schools through an act of legislature, seems to be the target of misguided criticism in Goa for past couple of weeks. In response to their protests for demanding grants, the Bharti Bhasha Suraksha Manch (BBSM) organised a rally in Panjim to “show the strength of majority to the minority”. Given that the demands emanating from FORCE cuts across the lines of religion, caste and class, the vocabulary in which BBSM has been targeting the FORCE members has a disturbing communal tone.

There are certain fundamental issues pertaining to the Medium of Instruction (Mol) agitation that we often take for granted but need to be critically examined, the foremost being the idea of mother tongue itself. In their book, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (1987), French philosophers Gilles Deleuze & Felix Guttari argue that “*there is no mother tongue, only a power takeover by a dominant language within a political multiplicity*”. Now let us examine this statement in the context of Goa. The official language of Goa, according to the Official Language Act passed in 1987, is Konkani written in Devanagari script which asserts that it is the “mother tongue” of Goans. The other languages that Goans use are Romi Konkani, Marathi, Portuguese, Dakkhani Urdu, and English. In fact, the use of Romi Konkani and Marathi in Goa exceeds that of Nagari Konkani by a substantial margin. This argument could be validated by the recent shutdown of the only Nagari Konkani newspaper *Sunaparant*, which according to many, was struggling to sell even 300 copies a day. So, when you have these languages being used in a remarkable abundance, one must question why Nagari Konkani is made the sole official language of the state. Nagari Konkani has a distinct feature of being the dialect spoken primarily by the Saraswats in Goa. Thus the power takeover, as Deleuze & Guttari suggest, is that of this upper caste group which wants to assert their version of language as the official version, coercing the rest of the masses into believing that it’s a vehicle of Goan identity. Catholics in Goa do not use this Nagari version of Konkani, both in terms of writing and reading. Neither does the average Hindu bahujan who identifies more with Marathi because of their historic opposition to Nagari Konkani. This allows us to conclude that Nagari Konkani is more foreign to a large section of Goans than English, as far as usage is concerned.

while Hindus are all for regional languages. This is not entirely true. There's a sizeable population of Hindus (both Bahujans and elites) who want their wards to study not only in English medium schools, but in "Convent" schools specifically. Hence, giving it a communal angle is a desperate attempt by BBSM to gain political mileage. The desire to train one's child in an English medium school is a post-globalisation aspiration of the rising middle class so that they can grab the opportunities offered by the neo-liberal economy. Its validity or futility could vary depending on one's subjective opinion, but many see English as an egalitarian and neutral ground which would help them break away from their traditional class/caste backgrounds and claim space in the globalised world.

The Goan bahujan are not alone in this demand, Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar himself referred to English as the milk of the lioness and said that only those who drink it will roar. Contemporary dalit thinker, Chandrabhan Prasad too, relentlessly argues that English is the key for emancipation for the marginalised communities. The demand for grants to English medium schools comes from the dalit bahujan section of Goan society, both Catholic and Hindu, and hence the state must pay heed to them. Traditionally denied education by the dominant brahminical socio-political setup, it was only with the arrival of western modernity via colonialism that these marginalised sections could gain an access to education.

The elites in Goa on the other hand have had cultural and economic capital to send their wards to privately-run English medium schools for decades now and some of them are BBSM sympathisers today. In light of this ironic situation, one needs to ask why only bahujans must carry the burden of culture and nativism, while the elites can be as "western" as they wish to and still be regarded as guardians of culture.

Also, a closer look at the BBSM politics will indicate that though the BBSM members are mobilised under the banner of safeguarding *Bharati Bhasha*, they are, in fact, desperate to ensure the hegemony of Nagari Konkani in Goa. During the official language movement, the Nagari camp used Romi Konkani supporters as footsoldiers but eventually cheated them by denying any recognition to Romi Konkani. Now they have turned to Marathiwadis for help on communal and nationalist grounds, as they perfectly know mobilising Hindu masses solely for the cause of Nagari Konkani is nearly impossible. During the official language movement, people who supported Marathi were asked to leave Goa and settle in Maharashtra. Now, people who are demanding English as Mol are being asked to settle in Portugal. Unpacking

both the situations will tell us that, in either of the cases, interests of only one particular group are being safeguarded. Nagari Konkani is perennially on its deathbed and periodically requires bahun blood to revive itself. Sometimes Hindu, sometimes Catholic!

Hence, any alliance with the Nagari camp would sound a death knell for Goan Bahujans. We have witnessed that during the official language movement it was the Catholic bahun which suffered major amount of loss and marginalisation. In an ideal scenario, the brahminical coterie of Nagari Konkani should be kept at farthest distance possible as it is responsible for the systematic intellectual and cultural massacre of two generations of Goan Bahujans (both Catholics and Hindus). In a mission to impose Nagari Konkani over the next 50 years, Uday Bhembre, with a straight face will tell you that the further massacre of the subsequent generations of Bahujans will be a collateral damage. It is this nefarious project that FORCE is poised to challenge. Unlike the way it is being portrayed, FORCE does not represent only Catholics. But what it definitely represents are the aspirations of Goan bahun masses.

(A shorter version was first published in *The Goan Everyday*, dt: 16 August, 2015)



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