



Pride and shame, it appears, are two sides of the same coin. Invariably, pride seems to be a logical solution when an individual recognizes that s/he is being shamed by political institutions and establishments. In the past few weeks we have had occasions to discuss the operation of shame and humiliation within Konkani language politics. The discussion initially focused on a song by Alfred Rose and made some observations about the type of politics in which the man and his work were entrenched.

Since Alfred Rose did not invent the type of politics that he often propagated, the question is: who did? I believe that issues related to the shaming and humiliation within Konkani language politics will become clearer once we scrutinize the life and writings of Vaman Raghunath Varde Valaulikar. If there was one individual on whose shoulders Konkani activists, until fairly recently, placed the burden of single-handedly rescuing the Konkani language from untold miseries, it has to be Valaulikar. No person, we have been made to believe, worked as hard as Valaulikar for the cause of Konkani language and thus the Goan identity. The attempts to celebrate the 125th birth anniversary of Valaulikar as ‘Konkani asmitai year’ in 2002, exemplify this.

Valaulikar’s written output was (or is) considered to be seminal in Konkani literature. This he did, we are told, by not only producing Konkani literature of high standard but also by stepping up to the challenge posed by Marathi-supporters; in fact demolishing their every argument. What is important for our purpose is to focus on the manner in which Valaulikar tackled the issue of shame felt by the Catholic and Hindu communities in colonial Bombay, thanks to the accusation of Marathi-supporters that Konkani was a form of ‘impure Marathi’.

In his text, *Konknni Bhaxechem Zoit* or *The Triumph of Konkani*, Valaulikar tells us that Konkani was derogatorily referred to as ‘impure Marathi’ by Marathi-speakers and -supporters (p.47). ‘Impure’ obviously because, unlike Marathi at that time, Konkani language had not yet incorporated Sanskrit inflections, prior to Valaulikar’s project. While Valaulikar may have felt shamed and humiliated because of his ‘impure Marathi’, it becomes quite a different story when one considers that persons using the Roman-scripted Konkani had to bear a greater

brunt of such shaming – with repeated call for standardized orthography – because the language that they used was not a Sanskrit-inflected one, like the ‘proper’ Marathi. Not surprisingly, Valaulikar’s response did not reveal the underlying aspiration of his caste politics in which the brahmin groups like his were trying to gain power and privilege in colonial Bombay. On the contrary he suggested that Konkani-speakers needed to work for the development of the language to give it world recognition (see *Konkani Bhaxechem Zoit*, Ed. K. S. Nayak, Bombay, 1930). In other words, one had to take-on to the challenge of Marathi-supporters by feeling pride in a Sanskritized Konkani by speaking and writing in the Antruzi variant, rather than ask why Konkani was referred to as ‘impure Marathi’. Or indeed ask why Hindus and Catholics in Bombay felt ashamed of their own types of Konkanis.

That he wrote in and championed the cause of the Nagri *lipi* and the Antruzi *boli* was not a problem for Valaulikar. Neither was it a problem for him that the Konkani in which he wrote his books was a new fabrication. As one of Valaulikar’s interlocutors Balkrishna Waman Sawardekar quite rightly and cheekily noted, “Shanai Goebab has, in his books, clothed Konkani in sacred robes and as such it has assumed a very beautiful and chaste form. His is a completely Konkani diction (*sic*) no doubt but this is what has made it very unintelligible” (p. 19). Sawardekar further asserted that this has resulted in Valaulikar producing a “fossilized Konkani” (p. 22) (see *The Language of Goa*, Panaji, 1971; originally published in the Portuguese in 1939).

Though Valaulikar’s project responded to the derogatory attitude of the Marathi-supporters and the Marathi language establishment in Bombay, it was a project of consolidating Saraswat caste identity against the backdrop of many other brahmin groups in colonial Bombay. The misguided ideas that Konkani is the natural mother-tongue of Goans and that it is in the blood of Goans emerged and consolidated with this project of Valaulikar.

While there is no doubt that persons like Valaulikar and likes may have faced a few instances of shame and humiliation of speaking Konkani, the non-upper caste and working class groups of Goans must have felt unimaginably more. With the rise of Nagri script (and by extension the Antruzi *boli*) as the sole official script of Konkani in Goa in recent times this shame and humiliation for persons who do not embody the ways and manners of being of the Nagri/Antruzi Konkani can only be said to have increased manifold. Thus, the project initiated by Valaulikar and carried forward by his ardent *bhakts* of creating and imposing a singular



Valaulikar’s career and the history of the nagri-scripted Konkani suggests that shaming has been present in Konkani language politics for well over a century, if not more. In such a grim scenario it is quite logical that Goans - who cherish their respective forms of Konkani - also make a demand for English. Though the possibility of him being sarcastic is eminently plausible, Valaulikar advised his antagonists - the Marathi-supporters - that rather than their obsession with Marathi, they should “at least select a language which will give them the maximum gains... [and they should] assiduously and diligently study the powerful English language” (p. 35) (see *Triumph of Konkani: A Translation of Shenoy Goembab’s Konkani Bhasechem Zoit*, Tran. Sebastian M. Borges, Margao, 2003). Sarcasm or not, access to the “powerful English” is no doubt a sensible strategy out of the sorry mess that is the linguistic politics of Goa.

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