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The Hypocrisy of Goa's Protesting Awardees

In the context of a number of Sahitya Akademi awardees across India returning their respective awards in protest against the growing intolerance in India, in Goa around fourteen Sahitya Akademi awardees together with Padmashri awardees Maria Aurora Couto and Amitav Ghosh came together and issued a joint statement on 15 October, 2015. One would be struck by the hypocrisy contained in their press note released were it not for the fact that their politics of intolerance is so blatantly displayed all over the same note.

In their statement these local notables condemn “the rising trend of intolerance in the country which threatens freedom of expression...[and] the age-old liberal and all-encompassing philosophical traditions of this country.” One would take this concern seriously were it not for the fact many of these notables have been complicit not only in acts of intolerance themselves, but also physical violence.

For some years now there have been demands from many quarters that Konkani literature written in the Roman script also be given governmental recognition. But Sahitya Akademi awardees like Pundalik Naik and N. Shivdas, who have presided over the Goa Konkani Academy, have not felt it necessary to take up this cause and ensure that a Konkani tradition with a longer history than that in the Nagari script one is recognised. On the contrary, all of these protesting Sahitya Akademi awardees and Padmashri Couto have watched silently while Roman-script Konkani has been officially ignored and excluded from all kind of state recognition, including awards and grants.

In addition, these persons have maintained a studious silence while their associates, such as Uday Bhembre and Nagesh Karmali, have engaged in the most vicious hate speech against the Catholic community in the course of the Medium of Instruction controversy (that has raged from 2011), when Goan parents demanded the right to determine the manner in which their children are educated. Where was their concern for the alleged liberal traditions, and traditional bonhomie, of Goa then?



To make matters worse, these same notables watched silently when in 2005 Naguesh Karmali, a member of this very group of protestors, led a violent mob in destroying public and private property on the grounds that such property was encouraging Portuguese (read as Catholic) culture in Goa. Given that Goa has had a long and historical relationship with Portugal, doesn't the violent smashing of manifestations of this relationship amount to an act of the very same rabid communalism that these worthies profess to protest against?

In light of these inconsistencies, and the equally amusing announcement that they will hold on to their awards until the meeting of the executive committee of the Sahitya Akademi, it appears that these awardees seem more interested on jumping onto the bandwagon of political trendiness, than for any desire to stand against the growing intolerance in the country, and indeed, Goa itself.

We would like to stress that while it is true that the government of Mr. Modi has definitely presided over a rise in intolerance in the country, the roots of this intolerance lie deeper in the country's history. As we have already pointed out, a number, if not all, of these Goan awardees are complicit in this intolerance. Their complicity is further evident in the manner in which they phrase their protest within the language of Hindutva. Why, for example, are the recent acts compared to 'talibanism', instead of calling them Hindutva, or Hindu nationalism? Talibanism is a phenomenon situated outside the country, when Hindutva is the problem actually at hand, given that Kalbargi, Pansare and Dabholkar lost their lives as a result of their opposition to this ideology. Indeed, Hindu nationalism has been a problem since before Indian independence. In referencing the Taliban, these awardees continue the refusal to recognize Hindu nationalism as the single greatest cause of concern in this country since 1947.

In conclusion, we would be more convinced of the genuine concerns of these state awardees from Goa if we heard them also protest the exclusion of Konkani in the Roman script from legislative recognition, also the violent condemnation of the Goans who are simply asking for English as a state-supported medium of instruction for their children, and also the lack of implementation of constitutional guarantees for education and jobs to historically discriminated-against Goan communities. Such protests would go further in establishing

norms for the respect of fundamental rights, and the establishment of law and order in our state and country.



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