For the Marathi original version see here.

The Konkani-Marathi dispute surfaces in Goa like clockwork. Those in favor of Konkani either outright deny the existence of Marathi in Goa, or make ahistorical claims that Marathi was never present in the territory. In response, Marathi partisans cite works like Father Thomas Stephens' *Kristapurana* and Father Étienne de la Croix's *Peter Purana*. Historical evidence is tossed back and forth like in a volleyball match. This time, the trigger is Damodar alias Bhai Mauzo's statement about the need to strike Marathi off from the Goa Official Language Act. While participating in this cyclical debate is fruitless, it is, nevertheless, imperative to critically examine some of the commonly held assumptions that are often invoked in this debate.

In 2022, the Marathi periodical *Yugvani* published a special issue on Goa that featured Bhai Mauzo's speech from the inauguration of the Akhil Marathi Sahitya Sammelan (All Marathi Literary Conference), where he was invited as a guest. Bhai's statements ranged from stating that the Marathi bhakti saint Namdev "is the first Konkani poet" to "Marathi should help Konkani." Bhai appears kind and favorable towards Marathi in this speech. One wonders, therefore, what happened in 2024 to cause such a reversal in his views on Marathi.

In the speech, he stated that the Portuguese state issued an order in 1684 banning Konkani and that this ban lasted for 225 years, until 1910. It was a rather strange thing to say. While I don't necessarily study 16th-17th century histories of Goa, I have read around this period for my doctoral work. Even with my relative unfamiliarity with this period, this claim of a ban on Konkani lasting 225 years seemed like an exaggeration. Mauzo's speech was not an academic essay, so it did not have citations. An online search revealed many articles mentioning the 1684 ban, but none specified the exact decree. I was able to finally locate the reference in Kyoko Matsukawa's essay on the politics of linguistic identity in Goa. The first reference to this decree was in an essay by Joaquim Cunha Rivara, *Ensaio Histórico da Língua Concani,* written in Portuguese in 1857. (It was later translated into English by Theophilus Lobo and published in A. K. Priolkar's book *The Printing Press in India*).

Upon reviewing Rivara's essay, it is clear that while a ban on Konkani was indeed imposed in 1684, this information is incomplete. Rivara describes several orders issued before 1684 emphasizing the importance of missionaries learning the local language to communicate effectively. The process involved various parties: the Diocesan authorities, the Portuguese Court, the Estado da Índia officials governing Goa, and missionaries from various orders present in Goa to propagate Christianity. To understand Goa's 16th- and 17th-century history, it is essential to grasp the internal power struggle between these entities. In reality, there was constant correspondence about language-related administrative issues and its

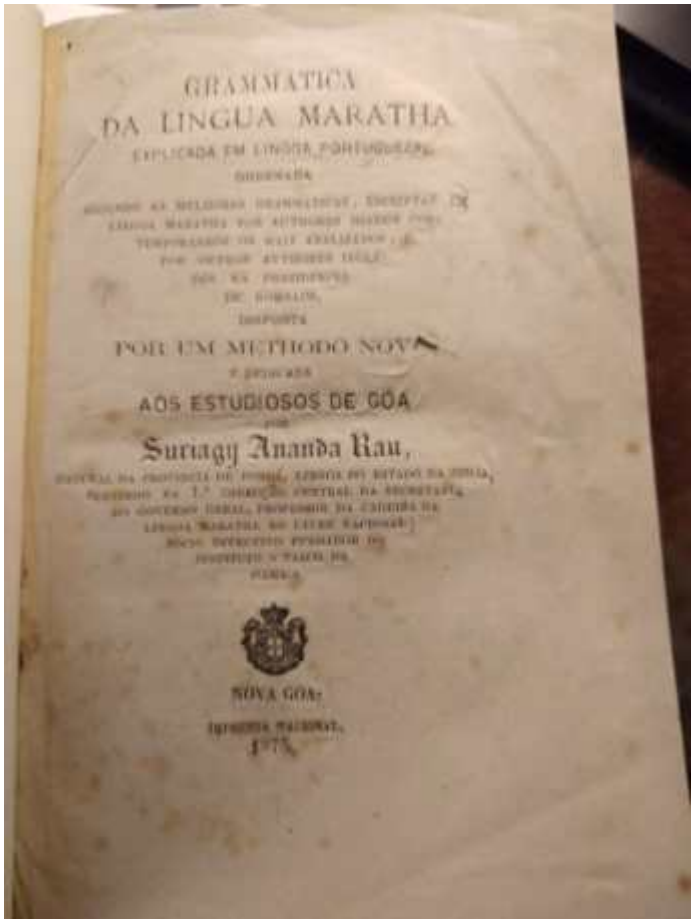
impediments in propagating the faith. The decision to ban local languages in the 17th century was rather exceptional and even surprising, considering that the Provincial Council, at least since the second half of the sixteenth century, had already recommended spreading Christianity in local languages. Production of texts like the *Kristapurana* was a part of this project In Dr. Ananya Chakravarti's essay titled *Between Bhakti and Pieta* (2017), she explains that 17th-century Christian Brahmins enthusiastically embraced and widely read such texts.

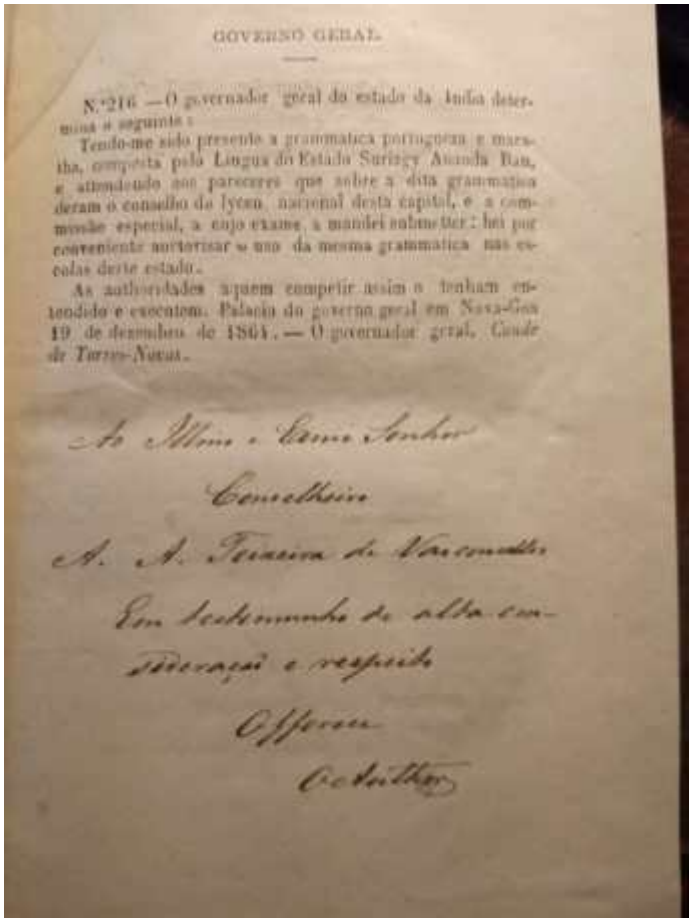
So what happened in 1684 to prompt the ban on proselytizing in Konkani? The circumstances propelling this ban were rather local. By the latter half of the 17th century, Christian missionaries had lost interest in learning local languages. The Viceroy, frustrated by the missionaries' reluctance to learn local languages, eventually decided that it would be easier to teach Portuguese to the locals than to force missionaries to learn the local language. This is what Rivara states in his essay. The period between 1510 to 1684 computes to 174 years and that's a lot of time in a region's history. We don't know the position of Konkani in the Portuguese court during this period, and thus it would be difficult to ascertain the exact impact of this decree on Konkani's development. Thus, it would be historically inaccurate to claim that this one decree stunted Konkani's growth, which is why, I for one would not do so.

But for our convenience, let us assume that the 1684 decree forbade the use of Konkani in Goa once and for all; if so, a logical question arises. Until 1684, and for the 79 years thereafter, the Portuguese controlled only the regions of Bardez, Tiswadi, Murgao, and Salcete, known as the Old Conquests. If Konkani was the language of all of Goa as we know it today, the language should have at least continued in what would eventually become the ew Conquests, where there were no such decrees against Konkani. In fact, administrative transactions in the New Conquests were conducted in Marathi. The records of the communidades in this region were maintained in Marathi written in the Modi script. The Portuguese ordered that the practice continue in a decree issued in 1766. These records continued to exist in Marathi in the archives until the 19th century. So why didn't Konkani find its way into the New Conquests? Instead, the Portuguese granted official status to Marathi in order to address the administrative complexities that arose after incorporating the New Conquests, as referenced in Dr. Rochelle Pinto's book *Between Empires* (2009) Pinto writes that the urgency of establishing Marathi schools was also tied to land use policies and the caste hierarchy within them. Many Gaunkars from the New Conquests were uneducated, and since the Kulkarnis (village accountants) were usually literate, they often manipulated the Gaunkars by altering records to their advantage and getting them to sign without understanding. When the Gaunkars eventually realized they had been deceived, they would lodge complaints, which became a burden for the government to address. Additionally, there was growing resentment in these regions against the Kulkarnis and the ways in which the

Gaunkaris were being managed. To prevent the legal, economic, and political challenges that could arise from this widespread illiteracy, the government was urged to establish Marathi schools.

Following the annexation of the various territories and their constitution into the New Conquests, the Portuguese administration operated in both languages, Portuguese and Marathi. They established Marathi schools in the New Conquests. In a preamble to a circular dated August 8, 1843, the Portuguese government explained its rationale for setting up Marathi schools: there was a large amount of practical documentation in Marathi, which was essential for judicial, financial, and administrative decisions. The government needed clerks and translators who could read these documents and translate them into Portuguese. This demonstrates that in the New Conquests, Marathi was the local and official language, leading to the establishment of Marathi schools.


GRAMMATICA
DA LINGUA MARATHA
POR UM METHODO NOVO
AOS ESTUDIOSOS DE GOA
Suriagy Ananda Rau,
NOVA GOA:



GOVERNO GERAL.

N.º 216 — O governador geral do estado da India determina o seguinte:

Tendo-me sido presente a grammatica portugueza e maratha, composta pelo Lingua do Estado Suriagy Ananda Rau, e attendendo aos pareceres que sobre a dita grammatica deram o conselho do lyceu nacional desta capital, e a commissão especial, a cujo exame a mandei submetter: hei por conveniente auctorisar o uso da mesma grammatica nas escolas deste estado.

As authoridades a quem competir assim o tenham entendido e executem. Palacio do governo geral em Nova-Goa 19 de dezembro de 1861. — O governador geral, *Conde de Torres-Novas*.

Surely you have erred, Mr. Mauzo!

The first Marathi teacher and translator appointed to the Portuguese court was Sakharam Narayan Wagh, followed by Suryaji Anand Rau Deshpande. During his tenure as Lingoa do Estado, Suryaji wrote a grammar of the Marathi language in Portuguese and compiled a Portuguese-Marathi dictionary based on Molesworth's dictionary. In the Marathi preface of the dictionary's first volume, he makes insightful remarks about Marathi's place in Goa. He writes:

> *After the inclusion of the 'New Conquests,' the status of Hindus has risen. The government had promised to protect their religious practices and other rights. The regions were brought under government control between 1763 and 1788. From then on, the government's benevolent gaze fell upon the Hindus, and they started making arrangements for their education and welfare. Although these arrangements were not entirely sufficient initially, they improved over time as people received the status of Portuguese citizens. Consequently, in 1843, the government established Marathi schools in the city, a number which is now increasing. We hope that these measures will be expanded in the future to benefit the Hindu community.*

Following the inclusion of the New Conquests in the Estado, the Marathi language paved the way for government jobs for the Hindu community—especially the upper caste—due to their

proficiency in Marathi. They seized this opportunity and tightened their caste dominance through collaboration with the Portuguese. Thus, it is clear that the Saraswats in Goa had no aversion to Marathi and instead chose to benefit from it.

The assertion that the language of the Saraswats was Konkani and not Marathi is a notion that emerged in colonial Bombay. By the late 19th century, writings to this effect, claiming that the Saraswat community's original identity was linked to the Konkani language, had begun to appear in the local print. Vaman Varde Valavalikar, the patriarch of the Konkani movement, realised Konkani's distinctiveness during his time in Bombay. (Incidentally, even Ravindra Kelekar and Damodar Mauzo have later written about experiencing Konkani's distinctiveness after moving to Bombay and Pune. Both of them went on to win the Jnanpith Award for Konkani. Thus, there's ample scope to establish that those who experience Konkani's distinctiveness in Maharashtra are likely to win the Jnanpith Award in the future. Those Konkani writers clamoring for the next Jnanpith should take note.)

However, the feeling of Konkani's distinctiveness from Marathi needs to be critically examined. It was not just the Saraswats, several other caste groups from Goa also resided in Bombay. Why didn't they perceive Konkani as unique? Various Goan caste associations, including those of the Bhandari and Maratha Gayak Samaj (the former Devdasi castes) communities etc., in fact, had declared their identity as Maratha. Professor Parag Parobo's book – *India's First Democratic Revolution* (2018) – provides detailed research on this matter (which diligent readers should definitely read—it is now available in Marathi as well as English). So why did the Goan Saraswats in colonial Bombay feel that Konkani was their language (and that Marathi was so foreign to them that it warranted disdain)? The reason lay in the internal caste conflict among Brahmins in Mumbai.

Dr. Urmila Patil's Ph.D. dissertation submitted at the University of Texas, Austin and Dr. Jason Keith Fernandes' biographical essay on Valavalikar provide insight into why the Saraswat community in Mumbai turned to Konkani. The Shenvi Saraswats in Mumbai were not considered Brahmins by the local Chitpavan Brahmin community. This strife was best exemplified when the Malvankar-Wagle dispute in 1869 brought the issue of Saraswat Brahmin status to the British court. While the verdict was in Wagle's favor, this dispute exposed the caste conflict between Chitpavan Brahmins and Saraswats. In a later instance, noted orientalist R. G. Bhandarkar was denied participation in a Shastrarth Sabha (religious debate) because he was deemed not to be a Brahmin. Thus, it was imperative for the Shenvis to establish their Brahmin status in the face of this challenge from the Chitpavans. To do so, the Shenvi Saraswats had to assert that their Brahmin identity was distinct and that their language was Konkani rather than Marathi, which was dominated by the Chitpavans. This argument is evident in the research conducted by Fernandes and Patil.

But the Shenvis did not singularly rally behind Konkani and this adoption of Konkani identity did face some resistance among Saraswats. Some, like Raghunath Talwadkar, stood up for Marathi in opposition to Valavalikar. However, in the post-independence period, Valavalikar was declared the founding father of Konkani, which gave his view historical legitimacy. Due to the scorn from the Chitpavans, Valavalikar began to write that the Saraswats' origin was in the Konkan region and that their language was Konkani. (This process is quite extensive and complex. For brevity, it has been simplified here. Those interested should read Fernandes' essay on Valavalikar and Patil's doctoral dissertation. Research by Frank Conlon, Susan Bayly, and Polly O'Hanlon is also worth reading for a better understanding of caste dynamics in Maharashtra.)

The second question is – Why did the Goan Bahujan Community embrace Marathi? There is still much room for research on this topic, and for now, we can only propose a few preliminary hypotheses. As mentioned, Dr. Parag Parobo's book discusses the Marathaization of the Goan Bahujan community. Claiming a history of having served in the Maratha army under Shivaji, these bahujan groups began to identify themselves as Marathas. Alternatively, this affinity towards Marathi may also have been influenced by the percolation of the writings and activism of thinkers like Jyotirao Phule, Vitthal Ramji Shinde, and Tukaram (Tatya) Padval, who propagated Bahujan ideologies. The Goan Bahujan communities likely found Marathi more relatable because the ideological discourse addressing their caste oppression was being articulated in Marathi. Bombay was a major center for the Bahujan movement. Many Goan bahujan caste groups who had settled there provided financial and other support to the caste reform movement in Goa. There could be no disagreement that Marathi provided the Goan Bahujan community with a broader understanding of social equality and gave them a vocabulary to articulate their oppression.

Conversely, one must ask what ideological framework did the Konkani movement offer the Hindu Bahujan communities of Goa? At least in colonial-era discussions, the Konkani linguistic movement does not appear to have provided a solid ideology for the Hindu Bahujan community to overcome caste oppression. Valaulikar's idea of "educating the Gaudas to make them pundits" cannot be considered a radical ideology of caste emancipation.

This article has primarily focused on colonial-era language conflicts. The dynamics of language movements changed after Goa's integration in India which warrants a separate analysis – some of which has been elaborated in Dr Jason Keith Fernandes' book "Citizenship in a Caste Polity" (2020) and Narayan B. Desai's doctoral thesis submitted to the University of Goa. This article also does not address the conflict over script, where the users of Romi Concani have been subjected to nothing short of a backstabbing. However, that is not the goal of this article. An inquiry into the post-integration language politics would have to

examine whether the post-integration Devanagari Konkani movement has provided any ideological foundation for the Goan society. Even today, Konkani literature falls short of espousing progressive, modern values because its authors are anxiously occupied with affirming Konkani's regional indexing to Goa. As a result, they continue to churn out parochial fictions. Konkani literature rarely ventures beyond the glorification of idyllic village life, and it does so without any ounce of criticality. The village is an institution deeply entrenched in the caste system, and Dr. Ambedkar argued that society should move away from it. Has Dr. Ambedkar's writing been translated into Konkani? At the very least, they should have translated Rajaram Painginkar's autobiography *Mi Kon* (Who Am I?) into Konkani. That way, generations in Goa, who have distanced themselves from Marathi, could understand the historical nature of the caste system in Goa. Instead, the Konkani movement celebrates figures like Valavalikar who rather abhorrently supported the continuation of the Devadasi system. One is then compelled to think what modern thought has state-supported or Devanagari Konkani contributed to the eradication of caste? If it had done so, perhaps the so-called Nagri Konkani litterateurs would not have reacted to Vishnu Wagh's poetry collection *Sudirsukt* in ways that led to the cancellation of the literary honor awarded to the poet. A social audit of Konkani literature is necessary to understand its role in addressing social inequality. As a literary ecology, what possibilities has Konkani established for societal change within the Goan community?

Though this article was triggered by Mauzo's statement, that is not the core issue. Marathi and Konkani shouldered critical responsibilities in Goan society. It is high time to assess what has happened to those roles subsequent to awarading official language status to Nagri Konkani. Has any Konkani intellectual, solely nurtured by its ideological and intellectual heritage undertaken this task in the last three and a half decades? Perhaps it isn't as easy as trolling Marathiwadis in Goa as 'pro-Maharashtra'. There is ample historical evidence, as demonstrated in this article, to conclude that Marathi indeed thrived in Goa, even as its official language during the colonial period. If the custodians of the Nagri movement were to explore these questions, perhaps Konkani proponents would finally understand why, despite their numerous efforts, people in Goa still rally in support of Marathi.