




The indefinite hunger strike of Savio Lopes and members of Forum for Rights of Children to Education (FORCE) for government grants to English as Medium of Instruction (Mol) have exposed the shallow and undemocratic language politics - under the guise of 'mother tongue', 'Goan identity', 'Konkani', 'Marathi', etc - in Goa. While arguing for a robust multi-lingual outlook as well, we would like to open up the conversation to a host of other languages that Goans can profitably engage with.

Arguably, when one talks about expanding the access to languages other than Konkani, Marathi, and English, the obvious choice that immediately comes to mind is Portuguese. The importance of the Portuguese language for Goa cannot be understated. Briefly, since a lot of legal and historical/archival material is available in Portuguese, a good grasp on this language would help thousands of Goans to access their own history. Further, as matters relating to land and properties are recorded in Portuguese being conversant with the language will help many to access this information, thus preventing frauds through fudging. Though, familiarity with the Portuguese language may not instantly result in overcoming the balance of power between the have and have-nots, learning it has a potential of creating a more level playing field. This is because in Goa, Portuguese as a language - then and now - was the preserve of a few elites, which allowed them to hold onto power and privilege.

The condition of the access to the Portuguese language, historically, is not so different from that of the English language today. The large non-elite population of Goa (across religious lines) demands English as Mol as it seems to be the preserve of the few; the rich can afford the exorbitant fees of private institutions. Therefore ending this monopolistic and hegemonic hold that a few people have over languages can lead to the emancipation of the have-nots by giving them access to power, privilege, and least of all, respectable employment.

To further open up the conversation about languages that can help us understand Goan history, we would like to suggest that Persian or Farsi is also very important. The territories that came to be known as Goa from the fifteenth-century onwards were part of the Deccan Sultanate and can be said to live in its cultural, and political, shadow. In fact, before



Portuguese intervention, Persian (as well as Arabic) terminology was much in use for legal, administrative, and taxation matters in the territory which became Goa and it continued to do so even during the subsequent Portuguese period. Moreover, Goa was in a constant interaction with the cultural and political hubs of the Deccan, such as Bijapur and Golconda.

Along with Persian, a case can also be made for acquiring skills in Arabic. Given the decades old migration of Goans in the Arab world, teaching Arabic in schools may also be useful. Further learning to read and write the Perso-Arabic script may also help many to access Konkani written in that script in pockets across the Konkan and Canara coasts!

Sign language, although not a spoken language might also be useful as it might help us interact with people with hearing handicap. This suggestion might seem out of context but it does help us to extend the idea that many people who understand sign languages consider those who don't as handicapped, and why not. Of course there are cognitive benefits of learning a sign language for all children, but the larger concern is that the learning for, and communicating with, people with disabilities, is completely ignored in Goa.

The article thus far has made reference to a number of ways in which Goans can engage with multiple languages. To take this point forward, we would like to suggest that contrary to the rhetoric of groups like the Bharati Bhasha Suraksha Manch, identity is not tied to a singular language or 'mother tongue'. To demonstrate this, we would like to make reference to the literary career of the Goan writer Laxmanrao Sardesai (1904-1986).

As Paul Melo e Castro writes in his essay 'Of Prison Walls and Barroom Brawls...' (2012), for most of his literary career Sardesai wrote in Marathi, with most of his stories being "anti-colonial, a bold stance when Salazarist propaganda depicted Goa as part and parcel of Portugal" (p. 128). Having started his literary career by the 1930s, despite being considered an eminent Marathi writer, Sardesai shifted to writing in Portuguese and Konkani from the 1960s. As Castro explains, Sardesai wanted to craft a different identity for Goa to oppose the merger with Maharashtra. As such "Sardesai's turn to writing in Portuguese (and Konkani) after a lifetime of renown as a Marathi writer" (p. 130) was a demonstration of the unique singularity of Goan identity within the Indian nation.



Today none would dare to suggest that there were any contradictions in Sardesai's choices; neither would anybody argue that he was 'denationalized'. What is important to note is that Sardesai could choose from a pool of languages, which he learned due to his privileged background. It is this privilege of choice that needs to be opened up to the Goan masses as well.

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