



In this column I would like to discuss one of Alfred Rose's most popular songs, *Anv Konknni Zannam* (I Know Konkani), which he sang along with his wife, Rita Rose. Given that the issue of language - particularly 'mother tongue' - is being hotly debated in Goa presently, this particular song provides an opportunity to reflect on a serious issue about the Konkani language that is rarely spoken about.

The song is a duet featuring one singer as a crooner who desires to get a break into the Konkani tiatr industry and the second singer, Alfred Rose, essays the role of an interviewer, scrutinizing the singing skills of the crooner in question. However, there is one problem: the crooner cannot speak Konkani 'properly'. Her Konkani is highly anglicized, which provides much fodder in the song for ridicule. For example, when this highly anglicized Konkani is being scoffed at, the crooner protests saying "Mhaka eok chance diun, why don't you try". To which the 'interviewer' retorts: "Try try try kitem kor mhunntai try,/...Osli Konknni bhas Goenkar uloit zalear,/ Konknnichi, zali chili fry".

Further in the song, the aspiring crooner actually tries to demonstrate her Konkani skills - albeit in her anglicized Konkani - by singing some popular mandde (or Indo-Portuguese folk songs in Konkani). When she is abruptly stopped by the 'interviewer', the aspiring crooner sings, "Why are you angry, I'm very sorry,/...I've asked my daddy, I've asked my mummy,/To teach me to speak real Konkani". What needs to be noted is the emphasis placed on "real Konkani". At this point, the song takes a preachy turn, wherein Alfred Rose sermonizes about the necessity to speak Konkani. I would argue that this song also reproduces some of the oppressive strands of Konkani language politics. But more on this later.

Alfred Rose as the 'interviewer' superciliously reasons with the crooner saying that in Africa she would speak Swahili, in Germany she would speak German, and Arabic in Arabia, so how did she forget Konkani, which undoubtedly is her 'mother tongue' owing to the fact that her parents are Goans? It is at this juncture that the crooner reveals that in reality she did not forget the Konkani language; rather she was feeling "shy" to speak Konkani. Further, she had learnt Konkani from the cooks (kuzner). Hence, Alfred Rose sings that when the parents

speaking Konkani, why should the children be brought up in English? Rather than treating Konkani as a second-class language, we should all be proud of it, he adds.



The Shame of Speaking Konkani

Although 'shyness' is given as the cause of the crooner not speaking in 'proper' Konkani, in reality it is the shame and humiliation associated with speaking Konkani publicly that generally prevents people from robustly using the language. This feeling of shame and humiliation is not a rarity, but in fact is deeply symptomatic of the public experience of Konkani. This means that one would not experience this shame or humiliation whilst speaking to or conversing among friends and family, but would certainly do so in a Konkani language classroom or while interviewing for a job, both situations that require fluency in the Antruzi dialect and the nagri script in the Goa of today. These feelings are strongly tied to the caste system, and dialects are markers of caste, religion, and region that are used to discriminate people who associate with such dialects.

Within the current Konkani language establishment, Romi Konkani and the various types of accents and dialects other than Antruzi-nagri Konkani are not given public legitimacy. Hence, many bahujan Catholics and tribal peoples across Goa feel shamed and humiliated to speak their Konkani outside the comfort zone of friends and family. In fact, on the public level, speaking and standing up for these non-Antruzi-nagri forms of Konkani would certainly be nothing short of an ordeal by fire! Being humiliated for speaking other forms of Konkani is a very serious problem.

It is this problem of a large number of Goans, of feeling shy, ashamed, and humiliated, that is not taken into consideration by either Alfred Rose in his song or even by Romi Konkani activists. Instead, what is generally done is to blame the mass of Goans (for instance, the Catholics) for failing to serve the Konkani language - and thus their Goan identity - by refusing to speak or support it publicly.

Further, by emphasizing on a 'real' and 'proper' Konkani, this song also privileges a singular form of Konkani as acceptable. Making fun of anglicized accents can also mean that the 'foreign' influences on Konkani need to be shunned. This particular song (along with others) of Alfred Rose reproduces a vision of language politics in Goa that values only the Konkani

language. If such prejudices were handed down by the dominant or Nagri Konkani establishment, it can be observed that the Romi Konkani activists have not done much to rectify the problem.

The Shame of Speaking Konkani

So in conclusion one can say that Alfred Rose was both right and wrong simultaneously. He could see the problem but not in its entirety and seriousness. This has been the failure of Konkani activism till now. Perhaps, this is also one of the reasons why the mass of Goans demand English for the primary schooling of their children. In this grim scenario, English seems the only way out of being shamed and humiliated on a daily basis. Before we can read, write, speak, and preserve Konkani forever (*vach, boroi, uloi sodamkal*), this chronic shaming and humiliation needs to end.

(First published in *O Heraldo*, dt: 2 September, 2015)



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