



The ban on entry of Pramod Muthalik's Sri Ram Sene into Goa has now been extended till January 2016 by the Goa Government. Drawing attention to another sinister group engaged in cultural policing, last week, BJP MLA Vishnu Wagh urged the chief minister to impose a ban on Sanatan Sanstha for its alleged links with the murder of Govind Pansare in Kolhapur. While Sanatan Sanstha was alleged to have been involved in the Margao blast case few years ago, Muthalik, who achieved national attention after his associates ransacked a pub in Mangalore in 2009, wanted to set up a Ram Sene branch in Goa.

Goa has been a target of these groups for the supposed 'western' outlook and character. Outfits like Ram Sene have stated their intentions to cleanse Goans of western influences. Such cultural imposition of right wing Hindu outfits must be resisted, though whether to ban them or not is a topic for another article. However, while it is important to be vigilant of these external forces altering plurality of Goan society, one must be aware of such culture police locally present within Goa. This local culture police might not be as formally organised as Ram Sene, but their larger project has similarities, i.e. to impose a singular identity by carefully erasing all cultural differences to ensure the hegemony of a dominant social group. It is also interesting to note that some of these individuals indulging in cultural policing are also active members of a Facebook group called "*We Don't Need Ram Sene in Goa*".

I am referring to the lobby that propagates Konkani as the authentic embodiment of Goan identity. The Official Language Act of 1987 instituted 'Konkani written in Devnagari script' as the sole official language of Goa. This Konkani, however, was not the extant and popular *Concani*. Rather, it was the dialect spoken largely by the Hindu Saraswats of Goa. By officially recognizing this Konkani as the only official language of Goa, the state excluded two major Goan communities i.e. the Catholic and Hindu Bahujan groups. The Catholics in Goa largely use the Roman script to write *Concani*. By specifically mentioning 'Konkani written in Devnagari script', the official language act slyly suggested that Devnagari script is the marker of 'Indianness' in Goa.

(2015), the upsurge of Maratha power in 17th century had turned Maratha identity as a symbol of cultural resource. The lower caste Hindus in Portuguese Goa articulated a modern identity through the Maratha symbol to escape caste oppression. The potency of this symbol was further deepened in the course of the merger-language debates that dominated public discourse from the 1960s until their culmination in 1987. Recognising that the pro-Konkani forces were in fact directed by Saraswat interests, the bahujan realised that the imposition of Nagri Konkani was a tool towards instituting brahminical hegemony in Goa. It was for this reason that they chose to side with Marathi as their preferred language of expression.

The symbolic power attached to Nagri Konkani by its institutionalisation through the state apparatus has rendered Goan Catholics and Hindu Bahujans as 'lesser' Indians and Goans respectively. Instead, it frames the Nagri Konkani supporting Hindu as the 'ideal' representative of Goan identity. Such idealisation is in the interest of sustaining the caste hegemony of Saraswats in Goa. In the popular press or social media platforms, any demand for official status for Romi Konkani is vehemently opposed citing it as a representative of the colonial hangover of Goan Catholics. Similarly, even though the pursuit of merger is no longer feasible, the demand for official status for Marathi in Goa is held under suspicion as a step towards Goa's merger with Maharashtra. Both these demands emerge out of a resistance to upper caste hegemony and are a call for accommodating the plurality of vernacular cultures in Goa. However, the '*Nagri Konkani sena*' has time and again opposed such assertions by labeling them as a threat to "Goan identity"; implying that such identity should be expressed only through Nagri Konkani. Those demanding official status for Romi Konkani are asked to leave for Portugal. Similarly, those asserting a Marathi identity to resist Nagri Konkani hegemony are asked to settle in Maharashtra.

Muthalik and the Nagri Konkani lobby may have different organizational structures and modus operandi but they strive towards similar agenda. In the case of Muthalik, it is the militant imposition of Hinduism as the authentic Indian culture, by attacking cultures that challenge the idea of 'Hindu rashtra'. In the case of the Nagri Konkani-wallahs, it is professing of Nagri Konkani as the sole vehicle of Goan identity. Any opposition to this is accused of being a 'traitor' to Goan and Indian society. Muthalik has often resorted to violent ways of propagating his claim while the Nagri lobby systematically executes its agenda through an equally violent, albeit insidious, state apparatus. Both consider themselves to be the guardians of monolithic identity formulations that are validated only by excluding the subaltern communities of the land. While there is no doubt that Goans need to be vigilant

against the Ram Sene, there is clearly a need to challenge such locally present cultural
policing as well.

Of Muthalik and Nagri Konkani



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