




The presence of Marathi in Goa is looked upon with suspicion by some for its links with the demand for Goa's merger with Maharashtra from the period between 1961 until the Opinion Poll of 1967. In writing off Marathi as a Maharashtrian import, people often ignore the centuries-long historical presence of Marathi in Goa, as well as its current usage in the public sphere. Gauging by this usage, one can safely say that Marathi is as much a carrier of the Goan ethos as Konkani (both Romi and Nagari) and Portuguese.

The demand for Marathi as official language was largely made by the Hindu Bahujan Samaj of Goa initially, many of whom also identify with a Maratha identity. The Bahujan Samaj is a conglomeration of lower caste groups in Goa that was comprised of Kshatriya Maratha Samaj (Fisher communities), Gomantak Maratha Samaj (temple servants), Naik Bhandaris or Kshatriya Naik Marathas (toddy tappers), Kshatriya Komarpant Maratha (service caste) and Gaud Maratha (tribals). Following the rise of Maratha power in 17th century and Maratha invasions in Goa, Maratha identity had become a cultural resource through which lower castes imagined a modern identity, as Parag Parobo articulates in his book *India's First Democratic Revolution* (2015). This reorganization of Hindu bahujan samaj in Goa around Maratha identity was aimed to contest brahminical hierarchy and social dominance.

The potency of the Maratha symbol for the bahujan samaj was further deepened in the course of the merger-language debates that dominated public discourse from the 1960s until their culmination in 1987. Recognizing that the pro-Konkani forces were in fact directed by Saraswat interests, the bahujan Hindus realized that the imposition of Nagari Konkani was a tool towards instituting Brahmin hegemony in Goa. It was for this reason that they chose to side with Marathi as their preferred language of expression. The political establishment in Goa was well aware of the emotional currency that Marathi carried for Hindu masses in Goa. Hence, there was a provision made to grant 'equal status' to Marathi in the Official Language Act of 1987 (OLA) and subsequently it was notified that Marathi would also be used in official purposes of the state government.

The suspicion of Marathi, especially among the Catholic communities in Goa, isn't surprising.

The merger with Indian union in 1961 implied the arrival of Indian nationalist discourse in Goan public sphere which meant a preferential bias towards Hindus while Catholics would be rendered as second class citizens. The animosity of Catholic communities towards Marathi is precisely because of this reason and the Marathi camp in Goa did not make any attempts to address this problem. Instead the Marathi supporters further validated the apprehension that Goan Catholics harbored towards them by fashioning their demands of merger with Maharashtra and official recognition for Marathi with Hindutva symbolism.

But much has changed since the passing of Official Language Act, 1987. The Official Language Act did not give any recognition to Romi Konkani despite the fact that the mass support in favour of Konkani emerged from those who desired the recognition of Romi Konkani. If the demand for Marathi was seen as suspect as a bow towards a Hindu majoritarianism in Goa, instituting Nagari Konkani as the sole official language proved that suspicion right. One of the recurring argument made by the Nagari leaders against Romi Konkani was that the Roman script is 'western' and not 'Indian', and hence unfit for any official recognition. Secondly, they argued that the adoption of Nagari Konkani will help bring the Goan Catholics into Indian mainstream. What these two arguments not so subtly implied is that the Catholics in Goa would have to adopt the modes of life set by upper caste Hindus while rejecting the peculiar history that the Goan Catholics were part of. It is about time that Goan masses realize the brahminical agenda operating in the name of Nagari Konkani. The recent debate over the Medium of Instruction (Mol) issue is a direct result of this agenda and the failure of subsequent governments to amend the Official Language Act in order to make it more inclusive by giving equal status to Romi Konkani and Marathi.

The current Marathi leadership, however, is not positioned against countering the brahminical agenda operating via the Nagari Konkani camp nor do they seem to be interested in addressing the issues of caste tied with the assertion of Marathi in Goa. To make matters worse, the leadership within the Marathi camp is assumed by upper caste individuals who have suspicious links with right wing groups such as the RSS and VHP. What they will end up doing is to push down a brahminical Hindutva agenda on Hindu Bahujans. Also, the current Marathi movement, especially the one led by Marathi Rajyabhasha Prasthapan Samiti, is geared to oppose the alleged onslaught of English in Goa. Such a stance will curtail the possibilities of upward mobility to Hindu bahujans in a world that is dominated by English. An ideal assertion for Marathi in Goa would be one that recognizes the bahun position of Marathi in Goa as well as that which employs Marathi as a gateway to learn English and helps

the Goan bahujans access a world view beyond regional parochialism of Goa or India.



Marathi and the Hindu Bahujans

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