

By KAUSTUBH NAIK



A response to 'Archbishoppancha Sermao'

The Catholic communities in Goa have been at the receiving end of a vicious hate campaign spearheaded by the Bhartiya Bhasha Suraksha Manch (BBSM). BBSM's vocal activist Naguash Karmali recently made a statement saying that the 'Church is worse than the Portuguese', while Uday Bhembre urged the '75% majority population of Goa to rise up against the domination of 25% minority'. Reflecting on this hate campaign against the Catholic communities, Archbishop of Goa, at the annual Christmas civic reception held at his palace, remarked that newer forms of intolerance can be seen in the state today which are polarizing the majority against the minorities. In response to this speech by the Archbishop, the resident editor of Marathi Daily Lokmat, Raju Nayak, wrote a special editorial titled '*Archbishoppancha Sermao*' (Archbishop's Sermon dt. 30th Dec. 2015) which claimed to analyze the Archbishop's speech as well as the Church's role in the crafting of Goa's secular fabric.

Nayak's first complaint was over the Archbishop choosing to address the gathering in English. Nayak writes that there was no need for the Archbishop to speak in English as, except for the Governor Mridula Sinha, the rest of the guests at the reception were Goans. Thus, Nayak feels that the Archbishop could have spoken in an Indian language or Konkani [sic] as it would validate the 'Indian'ness of the Church in Goa. Nayak is implying that English isn't Indian, a position that largely stems from the Hindu majoritarian discourse that accepts only upper-caste Hindu cultural forms as Indian, and regards the rest as foreign. Such parochialism slyly suggests that the Church (and hence Goan Catholics) are lesser Indians for not abiding by the expectations set by the Hindu majoritarian discourse.

Nayak claims that the Goan Catholics have been abandoning Konkani from their households. He alleges that the Archdiocese and the Diocesan Society were never in favor of imparting education in Konkani. They were instead compelled to convert their schools to Konkani medium as a result of the uncompromising position taken by the then Education minister Shashikala Kakodkar on giving grants only to primary schools with vernacular languages as the Medium of Instruction; and adds that schools run by Diocesan society and Archdiocese have killed Konkani education [sic]. But Nayak must remember that the Goan Catholic communities were in the forefront of the people's struggle during the official language



movement. That were it not for the support of the Catholic clergy, right from the 1960s, the very idea of Konkani education would have been a dream. Despite all of this, the demand of the Catholics for granting of official status to Romi Konkani has not yet been realised. If the Hindu Brahminical leadership within the Konkani camp hasn't been receptive to this demand of Goan Catholics, why should the Catholics now feel any commitment towards shouldering the burden of 'safeguarding' an Antruzi and Nagari-scripted Konkani that is in fact foreign to them? Rather, the existent pro-Nagri Konkani groups should be left on their own to safeguard the language which they concocted up for their own benefit.

Nayak further exposes his communal biases by arguing that the queues to avail Portuguese citizenship would compel anyone to conclude that English education is not only inadequate to create ideal citizens, but is also responsible for the *sin* [sic] of creating a generation of selfish and narrow minded individuals who have no sense of belonging towards the [Indian] nation. By Nayak's logic, all English-learning Indian citizens will be regarded as anti-nationals. Why single out the Goan Catholics? Nayak further adds that the Goan Catholics are 'disrespecting the core values that define Goa and are turning their back on the Indian nation'. According to a recent report published in Indiatimes.com (dt 28th Dec 2015), 65% of individuals who availed Portuguese citizenship were Catholics while 25% were Muslims and 10% were Hindus. These statistics show that though the majority of those opting for Portuguese citizenship are Goan Catholics, a significant number of Muslims and Hindus too are availing the Portuguese citizenship. Moreover, the queues to obtain Portuguese citizenship are not Church-sponsored initiatives as Nayak seems to suggest, but are surely a product of the dominant Hindu nationalist discourse. If members of a particular community are surrendering their Indian citizenship at an average rate of 6 persons per day, accusing the entire community of turning their back towards the nation is not going to resolve the situation. Instead, one must also assess the implications of Hindu nationalism which treats non-Hindus as misfits within the Indian nation.

In essence, Nayak's article suggests that to fashion oneself as Indian, one must abide by the diktats set by the Hindu majoritarian discourse. Such positions are not very different from the hardline Hindutva professed by far right groups such as RSS and VHP. Such a stance not only subjects the minorities under constant validation against the majoritarian standards, it also denies the minorities the agency to make their own life choices. Nayak also expresses his concern over religious organisations posing a threat to Goa's plural character. But by espousing the lines of soft Hindutva, Nayak seems to contradict with his concerns for

plurality. Instead of berating Goan Catholics as unpatriotic, perhaps we need to broaden the definition of 'Indian'ness to encompass cultures that are not necessarily Hindu.



A response to 'Archbishoppancha Sermao'

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Selected Passages from "Archbishoppancha Sermao" by Raju Nayak (Translation by Kaustubh Naik)

Why did archbishop speak in English? Except the Governor Mridula Sinha, rest of the attendees at the gathering were Goans. Had the Archbishop addressed the gathering in an Indian language or in Konkani, it would've suited the occasion. Also, it would have validated the 'Indian'ness of the Church. The reason why BBSM members are dissatisfied with the Church is due to the attitude of distancing itself away from Indianness exhibited by the Church. Church's support to English medium schools as well as disregard towards local languages and cultures are results of such attitude. If the Catholic community had taught their kids in English medium schools and taught them Konkani or Indian languages at home, it would've been fine but the Catholics have been systematically erasing Konkani from their households.

Goan Church organizations say that this [support to English medium] is not related to the Higher orders of Church but we are merely under the pressure of Catholics as well Hindu majority for the same. But there is no iota of truth in such position taken by the Church. The truth is that the Diocesan and Archdiocese were demanding for English education since beginning. The decision to give grants to regional languages was taken under Shashikala government but these two organisations created many hurdles for the said policy. Finally, when they could not do anything to influence this grant policy, they obliged to run their schools in Konkani medium. However, they never implemented the Konkani medium and these institutions literally killed Konkani education. This wasn't only a disrespect towards Konkani but contempt of the Indian constitution and a government decision. That parents want English education for their wards is a myth and it is only the senior priests and leaders within the Church who chiefly arguing for English education. As a result of this, we know what kind of citizens the church has



created. If one sees the queues to avail Portuguese passport and citizenship, one can conclude that the English education is not only inadequate to create ideal citizens and skilled service class, but also responsible for the sin creating a generation of selfish, narrow minded individuals who have no sense of belonging towards the nation. Cunha referred to this attitude as 'denationalisation' because the Church strengthened the colonial power in Goa and continued a colonial legacy after that. Portuguese and other such religious groups not only robbed Goans of their ways of being but uprooted them completely. After Goa's liberation, several cultural revivalist movements were taking shape that helped blooming of Goan identity but sadly, that too has been stifled and religious groups have been active in spewing venom. This is alarming and especially, church's involvement in education is unpardonable. It has never so happened that the Archbishop has pulled the ears of his children who are planning to leave the country.

We have always respected the 'Goemkar' feeling that the Catholics have nurtured all these years. We have undoubtedly asserted that the Catholics are on forefront to safeguard Goa. When the Gram Sabhas have called out for 'Saving Goa', we have always championed their cause. But on the other hand, when the Catholic community is disrespecting the core values of Goa and turns its back towards the nation, we are deeply saddened and our heart mourns. This saddening should've been reflected in Archbishop's address who took the BBSM head on. Nagesh Karmali often become over-extremist. His nationalism is so narrow that it seems vicious and a hurdle to our plurality. But forces that hamper Goa's vivid and plural character must be condemned. We can't have second thoughts about it and Lokmat too has respected this need to condemn. BBSM's agenda is political. Some interpret their 'Bhartiya' as only limited to Hindus but no one should doubt their commitment to safeguard Indian languages. In the wake of the sad state of political parties, minority appeasement and the overall depressive state of the society, must we sit quiet and witness Indian languages being sacrificed? Actually, even the Church should participate in this movement of shaping human beings. The Church is supporting the English medium schools whose agenda is to burry regional languages, especially Konkani, and this is known to everyone. Church shouldn't forget this.

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