

By DALE LUIS MENEZES



Reading Reginald: Between “Venice” and “Russia”

During a recent visit to the Central Library in Panjim, I stumbled upon an entry in the database titled “Theatr Nekettr Fuddarachem” authored by “Reginaldo Fernandes”. Knowing that generally Reginald Fernandes used an anglicized version of his name in most of his *romanses*, I decided to make sure if it was the same Reginald that I was interested in. The book procured for me was a small, pocket-sized one with no more than 70 pages which had badly yellowed and had become brittle as well. This book was published from Bombay in 1936.

1936? There hung a question in my mind: was the author the same Reginald Fernandes who wrote *romanses* from the 1950s onwards? To be moderately sure about this, his date of birth needed to be ascertained. Help came in from the editor of *Gulab* and *The Goan Review* Fausto V. da Costa who informed me that Reginald was born on June 14, 1914. This meant that when Reginald had authored and published this *tiatr* he was only around 22 years old. This means that if Reginald’s literary history is to be charted we have to go back to as early as 1936.



Reading this text no doubt raises more issues and questions about this genre of Konkani literature. This is because, first and foremost, when views are being expressed that *tiatrists* do not publish and document their scripts, here was someone quite young and already printing his works. Was he an exception? Indeed, Reginald seems to be the exception as even

today a lot needs to be done as far as documenting the scripts of *tiatr*. Secondly, why was a young writer publishing his script? What were the conditions and factors that allowed such a person like Reginald to publish his work? Is it the only *tiatr* that he wrote and/or published? And if so why did he shift to writing *romances* later in his life? Suffice it to say that these are questions for the future, for our purpose in Reading Reginald is quite different: to see what unfolds in his *tiatr*.

The story revolves around two young lovers Bobby and Flora. In keeping with many of his writings in later times, Reginald portrays these two lovers as not equal to each other. In the very first scene or the opening act set in a garden, Bobby tells Flora that she is from "Venice" and he is from "Russia". The reference is at once enigmatic as it is revealing. What it immediately reveals is that because they are not same socially or economically, the young lovers will face opposition, and indeed later in the *tiatr* this is exactly what happens. The reason why this reference is enigmatic is because it is not clear from where Reginald is taking his inspiration from. Immediately, what comes to one's mind, considering the fact that many Romi writers would adapt from English and other literatures, is some Shakespearian influence. But as one reads further, this reference never gains any clarity as far as its provenance is concerned.

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Considering the fact that towards the climax of the *tiatr*, the characters engage in sword fights, the hero of the *tiatr* being thrown in jail and his lover entering the prison dressed like a man to free the hero, it would not be surprising that detailed study would reveal a mixture or medley of influences that is not just confined to Shakespearian drama. Thus, the act of Reading Reginald involves not just locating the provenance of the influences on the writer, but also acknowledging the influences of European literatures as legitimate in the development and progress of Konkani literature.

The story is simple: two young lovers, with the girl hailing from an economically well-off family. There is a third person, Alvaro, who is jealous of the love of Bobby and Flora and tries

every scheme in the book to separate them, and thereby inherit the wealth through marriage to Flora. If we would like to know more about the influences and thought process of Reginald, and try to link them to his later writings, then I think this *tiatr* that he wrote can be used as a starting point considering the fact that he was just 22 years old when he wrote it.

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Another reason why *Neketr Fuddarachem* is a fascinating text is because not only does it include the *cantaram* (songs) that accompanied the *tiatr* but also the musical notations. So Reginald is not just an able writer, a composer, but also a musician and all these facets of his personality come together in this text. Most of the dialogues rhyme, perhaps to provide the necessary dramatic or theatric effects. Such texts wherein prose, dialogues, *cantaram*, and music come together can also point to us alternate ways in which to conceptualize the nature and function of Konkani writings in the Roman script. More so because if one compares how scenes or *podd'ddes* change in a *tiatr*, similarly in Reginald's *romanses* he deliberately makes the reader know that the focus of the story is being shifted to some other aspect and/or location of the story. So, a Reginald *romans*, in a sense, also works like a *tiatr*.

I admit that I have not been able to give a definite answer to the meaning of the reference to "Venice" and "Russia". However, by reflecting on such references in Romi writings one can come up with new ways to engage with Konkani and Goan culture.

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