



THE PORTUGUESE INFLUENCE ON KONKANI

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THE PORTUGUESE INFLUENCE ON KONKANI

It will be interesting as well as rewarding to inquire into the character and extent of the influence of Portuguese on the Konkani language. The impact of Portuguese on Konkani is much more considerable than that of English on Marathi or other Indian languages. This is not only because the Portuguese remained in India for a longer period than did the British but also due to the fact that Portuguese made its influence felt in almost all spheres of life, with the State and the Church actively aiding in its dissemination. The Portuguese were also more interested in cultural assimilation of the people conquered than merely in political domination or economic exploitation.

A brief survey of the colonisation of Goa will help explain the phenomenon of Portuguese influence on Konkani through its various stages. Goa was conquered by the Portuguese on 25th November 1510. It was in the first half of the sixteenth century that the Portuguese conquered the coastal talukas (*concelhos*). These talukas were called Old Conquests (*Velhos Conquistas*). The New Conquests (*Novas Conquistas*) were acquired in the second half of the eighteenth century. The Old Conquests, though smaller in area than the New Conquests, contain about half the total population of Goa. They are more urbanized and predominantly Christian. During the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries large numbers of Goans, both Hindus and Christians, left Goa for South Kanara and spoke Cochin. In South Kanara and Bombay, Konkani speakers are both Christians and Hindus, while in North Kanara, Savantwadi and Cochin they are mainly Hindus. This religion-wise classification is of significance because the Portuguese impact on the Konkani dialect of the Christians of the Old Conquests is much more considerable than on the dialects of the Christians who migrated to South Kanara in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

Konkani is an Indo-Aryan language and its main stock of vocabulary comes from Sanskrit; Portuguese is an Indo-European language, its main stock of words coming from Latin. Taking into account the close kinship between Sanskrit and Latin, Portuguese and Konkani have certain vocabularies in common, e.g., cardinal and ordinal numbers--Konkani: *ek, don, tin, chear, panch, so, sat, atth, nnu, dha*; Portuguese: *um, dois, tres, quatro, cinco, seis, sete, oito, nove, dez*.

There are, however, marked differences between the two languages: lexical, phonological as well as syntactic. The first Europeans who made an attempt to understand and learn the local language were fully aware of these differences which were for them obstacles in the way of acquisition of the new tongue. Padre Francisco de Souza, author of *Oriente Conquistado a Jesus Christq* states, "The main difficulty of the language lies in its pronunciation, for its alphabet consists of more letters than ours. The second difficulty lies on the part of our ears, for the Canarins talk with great speed. Being so careful in pronouncing double letters, and in aspirating the h's, that if this were not done, the words would entirely change their meaning: Kellem with double 'll' means 'banana'; kelem with one 'l' means 'did'; khelem with aspiration, 'ate'."

Being fully conversant with the peculiarities of the Konkani phonetic system, Father Thomas Stephens (1649-1619) tried to express Konkani sounds in Portuguese orthography, warning: "To pronounce the words it is not enough to know orthography alone, it is necessary to hear sounds which are uttered and to utter them

as they are uttered by those who know how to speak." In spite of these attempts, corruption in pronunciation set in, Portuguese orthography slowly eliminating or deforming original Konkani sounds. The setting up of the printing press in Goa (1556) and the adoption of roman script for Konkani had far-reaching consequences. The use of roman script eventually rendered devanagari script unfamiliar, thus putting other Indian languages out of bounds and making Konkani more and more dependent on Portuguese for its vocabulary. This also indirectly led to the division of Konkani into Hindu and Christian dialects, a division which persists to this day.

In the initial stages when the missionaries produced religious literature, Portuguese words were sparingly used, and just those absolutely necessary to express Catholic religious concepts and ceremonies for which there were no Konkani forms readily available.

But at the end of the seventeenth century the zeal of the missionaries to learn the local language and to write in it seems to have died out. Word-for-word translations from Portuguese are resorted to, Portuguese terms freely and indiscriminately used. This gave rise to a singularly hybrid language. Konkani fell on evil days following Viceroy Francisco de Tavora's order that "The natives of the country should abandon the use of their language and speak only Portuguese within three years" (1684). In 1745, Archbishop Lourenço de Santa Maria made it obligatory for all Christians to speak Portuguese. When the Marquis of Pombal assumed power, he commanded that all the priests should learn the language of the people. However, after his fall in 1777, Archbishop Assunção de Brito ordered that religious instruction be imparted in Portuguese alone. In 1831, when the first Government schools were started, Konkani was not included in the curriculum. Portuguese was now the only medium of instruction, becoming the sole official language, the language of the press, the language favoured by the Church and the elite of the territory. Many Christian families began to speak Portuguese at home and proclaimed it as their mother tongue. This predominance of Portuguese for centuries together could not but leave important traces on the language. Konkani is a remarkably flexible language. It has freely borrowed words from other languages but has in this process transformed them according to the laws of its own genius.

Evangelisation went hand in hand with lusitanisation and the converts were given Portuguese names. Konkani, however, readily konkaniised them: Conceição (Koninsanv); Francisco (Foransik).

The Portuguese also lusitanised Konkani place names and personal names: Kutt' thalli (Cortalim), Moddganv (Margao). Portuguese nouns have only two genders while Konkani has three: Portuguese masculine nouns remain masculine or turn into feminine or neuter in Konkani. Portuguese feminine nouns remain feminine or turn into masculine or neuter.

In general, Indo-Aryan languages do not readily borrow verbs from other languages and inflect them. Instead they add native verbs meaning 'make' or 'become' to a borrowed verb, and construct a phrased verb stem. Konkani does likewise with Portuguese verbs: *picar* (to prick) : *picar zavop*, *picar korop*.

Portuguese influence is not limited to lexicon alone. Certain phonological syntactic differences have arisen between Hindu and Christian dialects, 'a' and 'ã' have merged with 'o' and 'õ' respectively: *chadd* (much) is pronounced like *chodd* and *chadd* (climb) as *chodd*. Aspirates (non-existent in Portuguese) are eliminated: kh, gh, th, tth, ddh, bh, h give place to: k, g, t, tt, b, a respectively; e.g., *dondo* for *dhondo* (profession); *biran* for *bhirant* (fear), *add* for *hadd* (bring).

Christian literary Konkani shows marked signs of Portuguese syntactic influence. Konkani, like other modern Indian languages, follows the subject

object, predicate word order. But largely as a result of verbatim translation of Portuguese religious literature the subject, predicate, object word order is adopted. Thus instead of *An'ton' boro bhurgo asa* (Anthony good boy is) we have, *An'ton' asa boro bhurgo* (Anthony is good boy). The relative clause construction common in Portuguese and Latin is also imitated: *Am'chea bapai so sogar asa* (Our father who in Heaven art). This tendency, is, however, fast disappearing and we have now such constructions *Am'chea sogar aril'lea bapai* (Our in heaven residing father) where the relative clause is placed before the head noun.

Countless Portuguese words have become part of the common man's speech:

- (1) First, the words that represent objects that the Portuguese brought with them to this part of the world: *caju* (cashew), *popai* (papaya), *tomat* (tomato).
- (2) Catholic religious terms: *mis* (Mass), *sakramen* (sacrament), *natlam* (Christmas), *besaum* (blessing) *igroz* (church), etc.
- (3) Words denoting family relationship; professional, educational and architectural terms; miscellaneous words.

Portuguese influence on Konkani can best be felt in *mando*, a dance song which is the product of the aristocratic class of the second half of the nineteenth century and which is a happy blend of Portuguese and Konkani words. Here is just one example. Note the Portuguese derived words therein:

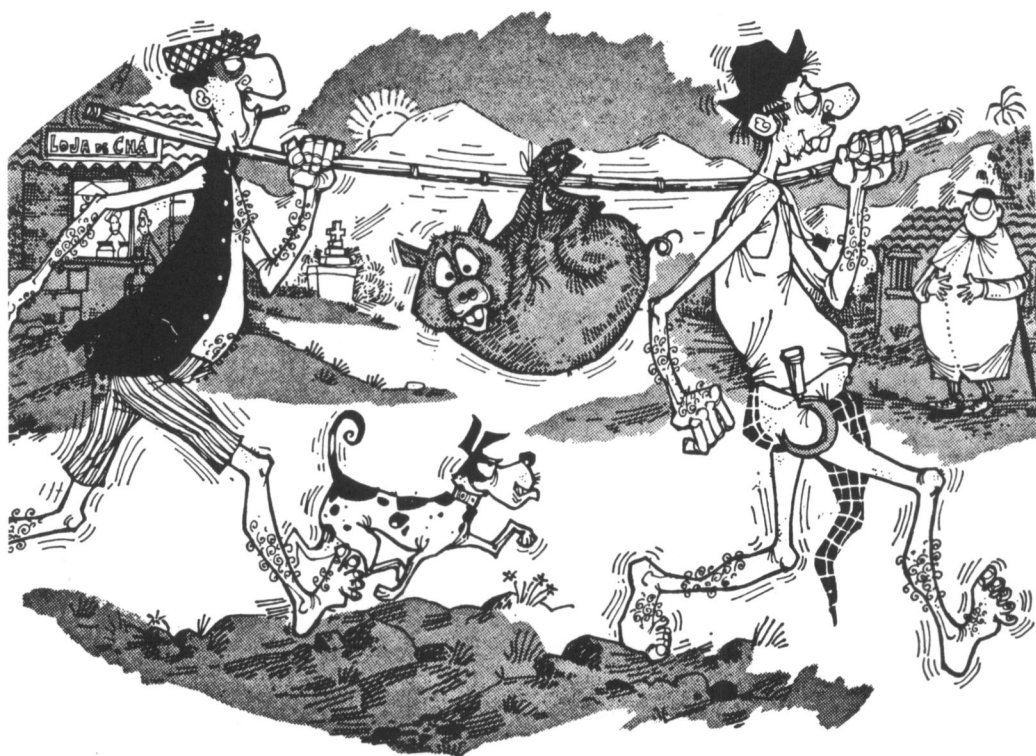
*Inocenti vidu mujem
Sacrificar tuka kelem;
Mujem kallizu ugodd'am
Poilem entrad tuca dilem.
Papan maman' vinchilolo,
To Devanu nirmilolo;
Aiz sakramentu zoddilo,
Devan sagrar amcho kelo
Aiz dis muzo sontossacho.
Mollbar uzvadd neketrancho;
beiju ditam aum mogacho
Ulas ghenu re sukhacho.*

The all-pervasive dominance of Portuguese, however, was seriously countered by three factors: the increasing emigration of Goans to Bombay, the growing spread of English education in Goa and the renaissance of Konkani at the outset of the present century. Now, more in contact with English than Portuguese, Goan emigrants in Bombay, be they Hindus or Christian, brought back with them English terms, and English education slowly drove out Portuguese words from the speech of the educated classes in Goa. After the liberation of Goa in 1961 this tendency is on the increase. Even Portuguese words that had entered the speech are being replaced by their English equivalents.

A third factor as important as the first two is the deliberate attempt to purge Konkani of Portuguese vocables and the phenomenal rise of Konkani literature in Devanagari script. Following the clarion call of Cunha Rivara to raise the languishing Konkani language to a position of prestige, scholars like Msgr. Sebastiao Dalgado were all set to demonstrate the close relationship of Konkani with Sanskrit. Though Msgr. Dalgado admits that almost a tenth of the words of the spoken language are taken from Portuguese, he exhorts Konkani writers to go to the Sanskrit source rather than borrow indiscriminately from Portuguese. He himself has taken care to include in

his *Konkani-Portuguese Dictionary* (1893) as few Portuguese words as possible, stating in no unclear terms that alternative Konkani terms could be used with profit, e.g., *Kulcheta-colchete* (*Po-de-se dizer amkado, amkadi, phaso*). Even the Catholic Church today seems to carry on Dalgado's mission of sanskritization of Konkani. The present-day liturgical movement is decidedly in favour of adopting Indian terminology.

The modern Konkani literary movement spearheaded by Shenvoi Goenbab, which has recently produced significant literature, has also tried not to use unnecessary Portuguese words. This trend appears to have gained ground mainly with Christian writers who are going to the other extreme now and eliminate altogether from their writing Portuguese words, even those used commonly by the people.



The joyful peals of the village church bells, announcing the eve of the feast of the patron saint, unfortunately, sounds the death knell for the fattened pig fraternity. Pigs on poles on their way to market mean only one thing . . . delicious "sarpatel" for a sumptuous family meal the next day.

--Mario