



Where Sun Meets Sea: Poetic Representations of Goa Across Languages

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Abstract

Literature forms an integral medium by which both, continuity and change over time in societies are reported. More so in societies which feed on cultures ingrained in visual and musical arts, poetry takes on a precedential role as a narrator of the times. This is incredibly true of regions like Goa, which are multifaceted on numerous accounts - right from being colonized by the Portuguese, to its plurilingual population, from the tribes that inhabit the hilly belts to the affluent tourists who crowd the sun-soaked beaches come summertime, Goa is a live representation of diversity unparalleled. The literature and poetry emerging from and about Goa also happen to be extremely voluminous and varied in style -- ranging from *mandos* and *dulpodds* in Konkani to crisp ballads in English. The manner in which the region and its socio-cultural terrain is represented in the existing corpus of poetic discourse, therefore, is subject to intense variation and perspectives. This paper seeks to draw out a variety of representations and images of Goa through poetry, incorporating linguistic diversity as an important parameter, with the three poems under analysis being written in three different languages.

Keywords: Ecocriticism, Goan Literature, Representation, Imagery, Hybridity, Linguistic Diversity

Introduction

Goa has long been fabled as the land of sun and sand, which lures tourists from all corners of the country and of the globe. Many speak of the tiny state on the western coast of India as the proverbial melting pot marked by an intermingling of cultures, as a land where the East collides with the West. The identity of Goa, locally termed as *Goemkarponn*, sets itself apart from the mainstream Indian tradition, in large part due to a starkly

different colonial past that precedes its present. In sharp contrast to the conventional Indian outlook, the Portuguese influence continues to linger in a Goa that appears to be forging its way towards a blossoming future, particularly in the surviving architecture, esplanades, cuisine and naming traditions, whose vestiges hold strong as reminders of its enduring colonial legacy. Apart from its tangible culture which also doubles as an economic lifeline for the state, Goa finds itself steeped in a wealth of languages and literatures. These vessels of intangible culture, which shape the passage of history and tradition, unfortunately, tend to be lost in the razzmatazz that has engulfed the region as a by-product of the tourism and leisure industry.

As languages abound in a land, so do their literatures. Goa paints this claim in iridescent light; the cross-cutting literature transcends landscapes and languages, serving to channel the very ethos of the state, its identity and its people over regions and generations. Festino and Garmes aver, “In Goa, there have traditionally been literary narratives in four languages: Portuguese, Konkani, English and Marathi” (91). One must note that in recent years, the advent of writing in traditional Indian and regional languages has taken root and compensated for the gradual disappearance of authentic literature in French and Portuguese from the literary picture in Goa. The corpus of writings from and about Goa may be analyzed from a host of standpoints that shape it. Given that Goa is subject to an influx of visitors and simultaneously the out-migration of its own, the accounts of travellers and the diaspora form an integral component of this corpus. Some of the other factors that combine to lend the body of Goan literature an innate richness are the linguistic, cultural and intellectual ties with Portugal, the ripple effect of a burgeoning local music and drama scene viz. *mandos* and *tiairos* on literary culture, socially relevant issues of caste, patriarchy and proselytization and the outcry against them through literature, and the exposure of indigenous literatures to an international audience through translation work, among others.

Poetry is among the foremost literary genres through which Goan writers have promulgated not only the beauty of the beaches and the grandeur of the groves of the land, but also messages which paint an image of the socio-cultural ethos of Goa in the eyes of a reader enraptured. The medium of poetry, the language notwithstanding, is particularly enchanting for Goans themselves, as it lends itself to being set to music and performed. It must be noted that the plurilingualism prevalent in Goa and India in general, translates into a body of poetry that is spread across languages -- a body visualized through the eyes and words of different poets, and so, different perspectives. This paper aims to highlight the similarities and variations in the representation of Goa in poetry across three languages viz. English, Konkani and Marathi, through a detailed comparative analysis of three acclaimed poems -- "*Majhya Govyachya Bhumit*" by Bakibab Borkar, "*Sobit Amchem Goem*" by Manohar Rai Sardessai, and "*Idyll*" by Eunice de Souza.

Sobit Amchem Goem

Words of many languages flowed from the pen of Manohar Rai Sardessai, but it was the recurring theme of love for the land that populated not only the literary oeuvres of the great 'Kaviraj' (the prince of poetry) but equally transcended his life's work. According to Melo Furtado, "He has been mostly acclaimed as a lyrical poet, but he was also a people's poet or 'Lok Kavi'; one who was deeply involved, mentally and emotionally, in the fortunes of his land. There was a deeper purpose to his poetry."

Sardessai, born in 1925 to the noted Goan writer Laxmanrao Sardessai, was a linguist all his life. Although academically trained in French literature at the Sorbonne University, Sardessai worked not only to promote French in Goa, but also his native tongue of Konkani, having compiled *A History of Konkani Literature* and edited the first Konkani Encyclopaedia at Goa University. True to the spirit of Konkani which pervaded his being and writings, his collection of Konkani poetry is soul-stirring, right from the children's

collection of *Bebeachem Kazaar* (The Frogs' Wedding) to the reminiscences of the gallant struggle for liberation in *Otthra Jun* (The Eighteenth of June).

Coming from a lineage of litterateurs, the writings of Sardessai bring forth an inimitable perspective in Goan literature on two counts. In the first place, he was an academic in the truest sense, having earned his doctorate from one of the most prestigious universities in the world, and singlehandedly established a university department. Added to this was his command over Indic languages viz. Konkani, Marathi and Sanskrit, as well as a supreme proficiency in foreign languages of French and Portuguese. Despite this background, a surprising simplicity defines his writing, challenging the norms of contemporary academia, and endearing him all the more to the local populace. The second factor which separates Sardessai from the rest is the hybridity he assumes as local writing away from home. On leaving the state, and later the country, in search of higher echelons in education, Sardessai's self-imposed exile from the soil he called home rings out unequivocally through themes of belongingness, longing for home and reverence of the motherland, which underline his body of work. Accordingly, his poetry sings of a love for a state that he can no longer see with his eyes, but whose memories linger strongly in his mind. "Manohar Rai Sardessai gave fresh content and new direction to Konkani poetry. While describing Goa in colourful and emotionally charged words, he emphasized its slavery with great poignancy (George 214).

We proceed to analyze one of Sardessai's simplest yet most popular poems, "*Sobit amchem Goem*", which was originally composed in Konkani:

*Sobit amchem Goem,
Sundor amchem Goem!
Rosall follachem, Pikall mollachem,
Lalit kalanchem, Goem!
Madd-maddianchem, Nohiam-dorianchem,*

Dudam-zorianchem, Goem!
Fulam –fantiechem, Tambdde matiechem
Loknna chhatiechem, Goem!
Porne kirtiechem, Torne xoktiechem,
Omor sfurtiechem, - Goem!
Meklleponnachim, Munisponnachim,
Sopnn bhangarechem, Goem!

(Sardessai 12)

[Our Goa is beautiful, Our Goa is lovely, Of juicy fruits and fertile fields. Goa, of timeless arts. Of coconut palms and areca trees, and blue rivers and seas, Goa, of milky springs. Of flowers and branches, and earth of red, Goa, set in iron. Of ancient traditions, and youthful vigour. Goa, of immortal inspiration. Of liberty and humanity, Goa, with golden dreams.]

Sardessai commences this musical poem with a refrain harking to Goa as a ‘beautiful land’. The word *amchem* in Konkani translates to ‘our’, indicative of feelings of association and oneness that the poet longs to share with the brothers and sisters of his motherland, Goa, even if his absence from the land is conspicuous. Rao (2014) explains: “He started writing while he was in Paris, and perhaps, his idea of Goa, to begin with, was framed by the idea of so-called ‘exile’.” The depth of descriptive parameters which Sardessai employs as a means of drawing the reader’s attention to the natural wealth of Goa makes one conscient that he certainly did not let the flame of love for his state dwindle from his core, in spite of being exiled from the home he loved so. The yearning for a return to his roots is evident through the repeated invocation of the name ‘Goem’ and the poet wishes to make himself a part of the ‘*bhangarechem sopnn*’ or the golden dreams which he envisions for the future of Goa.

The light in which Goa has been presented through the vivid imagery is radiantly symbolic of its multifaceted beauty. There is a predominant focus on the natural world, to begin

with, as the poet invokes ripe fruits, towering coconut palms and free-flowing rivers. Sardessai also makes a special reference to a 'milky spring' -- probably the magnificent waterfalls at Dudhsagar -- and the *tambddi mati* or the 'red earth', representative of water and soil -- both of which are intrinsic to human life in general, and in particular to a coastal agrarian economy, as Goa's is. The land is personified, in that all of the attributes right from the rivers to the flowers 'belong' to its bounty. One ought to bear in mind that this poem was written in the age before wholesale developments in agriculture, mining, industry and the like in Goa. Thus, it is also reflective of a time in the past when Goa was a paradise ensconced by the lap of nature -- quite contrary to the present circumstance. The second speciality of Goa, according to this poetic representation, lies in its people. In his words, the reputed legacy and glory of the past infused with the vivacity of youth combines to bring about an inspiration for generations to follow, which will never die. Sardessai additionally mentions the key value principles underlying the Goan ethos -- liberty and humanity, the abundance of which promises to hold them in good stead along their voyage towards a golden future. Much of the poem is rendered as a tribute to Goa and therein explains the innate desire of the son-in-exile to renew a lost bond with the land.

The lyrical tempo which accentuates the poem is such that it has been set to music on numerous occasions, and has once even officially been produced by the Department of Art and Culture, Government of Goa as a 'theme song'. This, in effect, could suggest that the poem has taken on anthemic proportions with respect to representing the homeland and that which it stands for. In this context, one must be conscient of the perils of losing the depth of the verse, when poetry is set to music, as is often the case with anthemic poetry. On the other hand, the simplicity with which it underscores appreciation for the Goan ethos has contributed to the poem being prescribed as part of the syllabus in Konkani for Class six under the Goa Board of Secondary and Higher Secondary Education. It is intended that

inclusion of the rich narratives emerging from writers native to the land in the school curriculum foster an appreciation for local literature, heritage and socio-cultural ethos.

“*Majhya Govyachya Bhumit*”

Balakrishna Bhagwant Borkar, commonly known as Bakibab Borkar, primarily wrote in Marathi, even though his mother tongue was Konkani and his education was conducted in Portuguese. Borkar was renowned as a poet, teacher and editor in Goa and Bombay, but also involved himself actively in Goa’s freedom struggle against the Portuguese. The arrival of Dr. Ram Manohar Lohia in Margao in 1946 particularly infused in him the desire to contribute to the liberation movement. To the dismay of many, the corpus of Borkar’s writing is relatively unknown beyond the frontiers of Goa and Mumbai, where he spent long years at work.

Although both Sardessai and Borkar emerge from similar time frames, and consequently, social contexts,, the oeuvres of Borkar are distinguishable from those of Sardessai on multiple accounts in terms of context and approach. Borkar’s approach emerges not strictly from an academic focal point, but more from the sheer presence, contributing to reverence and regard for the land and its people - the joys and sorrows, the vicissitudes of combat resulting in an authentic perspective of regaining something as precious as land lost in the hands of an alien power for decades on end. The aspect of emotion-charged yearning for the homeland which is evident in Sardessai’s poetry is conspicuously absent from the volume of work attributed to Borkar for the simple reason that Borkar lived much of his life, geographically, closer to the homeland than Sardessai did.

We now deconstruct the features that encapsulate Borkar’s ‘insider’ description of the motherland, and distinguish these from the poetic style of Sardessai, through the poem *Majhya Govyachya bhumit*. It must be noted that the following analysis

covers only the first five stanzas as a sample of the poem which originally runs into several more.

*Majhya govyachya bhumit
Gadyaa naral madhache
Kadya-kapari madhuni
Ghat futati dudhache*

*Majhya govyachya bhumit
Ambya-fanasanchi ras
Phulin phalanche pazar
Fali fulanche suvas*

*Majhya govyachya bhumit
Vanashrinchi karagiri
Pana-fulanchi kusar
Pashu-pakshanchya kinari*

*Majhya govyachya bhumit
Unhalyat khara vara
Pavsant darapudhe
Sonya chandichya re dhara*

*Majhya govyachya bhumit
Yete chandane mahera
Olavalya lochanani*

Bhete akash sagara. (Borkar)

[In my land of Goa, of coconut and honey, through the rings, flows the milk, In my land of Goa, a pile of mangoes and jackfruit, the fragrant spray of fruits and flowers, In my land of Goa, the craftsmanship of the forest, by the leaves, the trees and the wild, In my land of Goa, gusty summer winds, streams of gold and silver in the face of the monsoon. In my land of Goa, moonlight comes home, with teary eyes, where sky meets sea.]

Borkar's opening refrain of '*majhya govyachya bhumit*' which translates to 'in the land of my Goa' is significant when one considers the dichotomy of insider-outsider writing. Whereas Sardesai invokes the collective '*amchem*' or 'our' to solidify the bonds of fraternity that bind him to Goa from a faraway land, Borkar is content to brand the land his very own. Secondly, he repeatedly draws attention to the soil, the defining characteristic of the land -- a feature of his writing which touches upon the deep personal relationship that envelops one and the soil upon which they build their lives.

As in the vein of Sardesai, Borkar too takes pride in glorifying the land through a lucid description of the natural world. One must take note that nature was among the few pleasures that life offered free of cost during the period of Goa's struggle for freedom, with uncertainty, bloodshed and questionable politics looming over as dark clouds. Thus, there is an overt attempt on the part of the poet to sketch a pen portrait of a green Goa, while simultaneously appealing to the senses. Borkar brings out the tender fragrance of coconut and honey, the sweet juice of mangoes and pineapples, the gushing of the milky cascades. He even attributes the prosperity of Goa to '*vanashrinchi karagiri*' or the 'craftsmanship of the forest'. He contrasts the two principal seasons of Goa, with the summer winds knocking on monsoon's door, engulfing it in regal shades of golden and silver.

Besides environmentally-channelled emotions, another common thread that runs through the work of both Borkar and Sardesai is the uncomplicatedness and economy of words with which they successfully transmit an ocean of emotions. Especially poignant is the last stanza of the section selected for analysis. Here, the poet magnifies the untouched, unfettered beauty of the land, which makes for a simply symphonic reunion of the moonlight, the sky, the rain and the ocean -- all elements of nature which co-exist as things of beauty. Although this masterful poem of Borkar has not been accorded the acclaim it richly merits, it serves to highlight numerous

characteristics representative of the imagery of Goa in Marathi poetry.

“Idyll”

Within the portals of Indian poetry in English, Eunice de Souza’s name commands an aura of enigma and respect. Being a professor of English Literature at the prestigious St. Xavier’s College in Mumbai, de Souza came from a more-than-adequate academic grounding. However, in contrast to the works of Sardesai discussed earlier, de Souza’s academic connection does not make itself overtly palpable in her volumes of poetry. The economical language which is a hallmark of her work is simplicity personified, yet one that cuts deeply into the consciousness of an awakened reader. A large volume of her poetry centres around the ideals of feminism and the exploration of identities of girlhood and womanhood within the claustrophobic familial and parochial space. “She uses irony as a defence not only against the onslaughts of racism and sexism, but as a means of foregrounding the displacement she experiences within her own country. Her satirical approach to catholic values, sexual prudery, hypocrisy and prejudices is quite notable” (Gupta and Sharma 96). However, her prowess in poetic echelons cannot be confined strictly to feminist writing, for she has carved niches for herself, equally, as an exponent of writings on culture and religion, environment and human foibles. One feels that these angles of de Souza’s writing have not been delved into sufficiently by contemporary critics, as many incorrectly regard her writing strictly from the feminist perspective.

de Souza was born into a Goan Catholic family in Poona and her use of language and style of writing is flavoured with her strong cultural background. Through a heady concoction of symbolism, pernicious wit, satire and the effervescent allegory, de Souza awakens the dormant spirit to grim realities of the present - many of which are directly linked to the actual state of affairs in Goa. Her writing is vividly descriptive, just as that of Sardesai and Borkar, giving credence to the affinity of poets

for painting Goa through pictures. Although de Souza was Goan by birth and heritage, she spent very little of her life on Goan soil, which explains her detachment from the actual land. As a global citizen, she appears to have no physical or emotional connection with the land like Borkar, but more than makes up for this apathy with an overwhelming concern for the people and the vicissitudes of a transforming society. The fact that her writing is in the English language as well as that she commanded a reputation for herself from the metropolis of Mumbai, makes her body of work accessible to a wider readership, therefore earning her more recognition than her previously-discussed contemporaries.

When Goa was Goa
my grandfather says
the bandits came
over the mountain
to our village
only to splash
in cool springs
and visit Our Lady's Chapel.
Old ladies were safe
among their bags
of rice and chillies,
unperturbed
when souls restless in purgatory
stoned roofs
to ask for prayers.
Even the snakes bit
only to break the monotony.
(de Souza 15)

Idyll presents an ideal example of writing about the homeland from a hybrid perspective, as de Souza recounts tales narrated to her by her grandfather, which forms the basis of her

mental image of Goa. Oral history is thus propagated from one generation to the next, be it through word of mouth, storytelling or the written word. The passage of time does not deter offspring from developing an understanding of their roots, with the transmission of history through such a wide variety of media. We notice that more emphasis is laid upon society and personal tendencies, which the poet neatly accentuates with references to the surrounding natural environment. This is a major point of contrast between de Souza as a poet writing from the proverbial 'outside', both spatially and linguistically, Borkar writing from the 'inside' and Sardesai juxtaposing perspectives of both insider and outsider.

de Souza subtly makes known the difference she observes between man and nature through a treasure trove of imagery. She begins and concludes with symbols that are traditionally espoused as negative - those of bandits and snakes. The antithetical nature of her lyricism rings true with evocations of bandits peacefully splashing in springs and old ladies unperturbed in the wake of storms from purgatory. The thunderous opening salvo of 'When Goa was Goa' implies that Goa has lost not just its name, but itself, in the quest of cultural appropriation and rebranding itself to pander to the needs of the other, instead of its own. Ironic as it is true, she confesses on behalf of a generation that refuses to admit to its follies, by conjuring the image of the snake in a devastatingly cutting fashion, to suggest that the snake population is no longer limited to slithering on its belly, but some snakes walk on two legs among humankind as well. Through the representations, therefore, de Souza illustrates Goa as being in a state of flux - physically, environmentally, socially and morally.

One must be cognizant of the fact that this poem was written in the 1970s, and accordingly value the prescience harboured within it. de Souza brings to the fore customs and traditions like the purchase of rice and chillies by old ladies at the *tinto* or the local marketplace, which doubled as the hub of village gossip and entertainment as well. She talks about Our

Lady, in whose reverence a plethora of feasts, festivals and community traditions are commemorated. The cool springs were, once upon a time, a meeting point for the youth; the icy water a reservoir of instant refreshment during parched summers. The *tinto*, Our Lady and the springs are three vehicles, so to speak, which were torchbearers of the community spirit in the Goan society during the time. Looking back, these stand as representatives of a wealth of traditions and aspects endemic to a quintessentially Goan life that are swerving along the path of extinction as a cocktail of migration, modernity and metropolitanism spreads its tentacles. We also see the religious aspect being alluded to - religion and faith, then, playing fundamental roles in the lived realities of Goans.

Conclusion

Before comparing the poetry of Manohar Rai Sardessai, Bakibab Borkar and Eunice de Souza, it bears acknowledging that the three are gifted poets in their own right, whose contribution to Indian writing in their respective languages is unparalleled. Yet, closer inspection reveals certain commonalities between the representation of Goa and the subjects of descriptiveness, the fact that the three wrote predominantly in three different languages - two regional and one international - notwithstanding. This adds weight to the argument that the universal truth that poetry cannot be bounded by language or region, but the corpus of the poetry of each language only serves to give voice to the thoughts of the people and the culture intrinsic to it, thereby enriching the world of literature, and the world at large.

We surmise that the three poems all emerge from the poets having different relationships with the subject of their writing -- Goa. While de Souza locates her ties to Goa from the standpoint of family and ancestral heritage, Sardessai and Borkar were born in Goa and hence may be referred to as 'sons of the soil'. However, the fact that Borkar spent much of his life in the state, while Sardessai did not, having travelled across the globe, traversing a journey of academic excellence, makes for an

interesting dichotomy between the ways they present themselves in relation to the land and its people. Borkar, in *Majhya Govyachya bhumit*, appears to hold fast to the physical soil in which he has bloomed, while Sardessai, as in *Sobit amchem Goem*, concerns himself with the characteristic features of the land. de Souza, on the other hand, dissociates herself from the land in its entirety and targets her writings more towards social life and people. We must take into account the variation in the time-period during which the three poems were written as the nineteenth century was an era of metamorphosis, particularly in the subcontinent. Nevertheless, all three poets bring out a different mode of hybridity in their poetry, in terms of how they visualize and represent the state, its environs and its people.

An overarching theme that finds mention in all three poems under scrutiny is the wonderful world of nature at play. The land and its riches are given precedence in the writings of Borkar and Sardessai, with an observed fondness for fruits, trees, rivers and the earth - the simple gifts of the natural environment. There exists a socio-cultural undertone to Borkar's and Sardessai's, evidenced by passing references to local arts and value formation among the people. Their references drowned in overtones of nature, however, are income parable to de Souza's loud overtone of religious indicators coupled with moral and social feelings, which shadow her succinct allusions to nature. Whereas de Souza overtly addresses her heritage by interweaving it within her verse, the same cannot be said for Borkar and Sardessai, who, in the context of the poems under discussion, appear to gloss over lost history. With consideration upon the style of writing, the poets writing in the vernacular appear to concoct depths of feeling from exceedingly simple language, which sees them fit in as melodious songs, and endearing them to a local populace that thrives on music. All three poems are equally rich in character, marked by minimal usage of superfluous words and maximum strain of raw emotion extracted out of the lines.

Poetry, as it has always been, stands tall as a beacon of posterity and continuity in the midst of changing seasons, changing environments, changing attitudes and a changing world. In summary, it can be said that though there are, but naturally, variations in how each of the three poets represent Goa through their choice of language, and choice of words therein, each strives to highlight the unique threads that are woven together, strand by strand, to produce the magnificent fabric of Goa.

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