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Sahitya Akademi

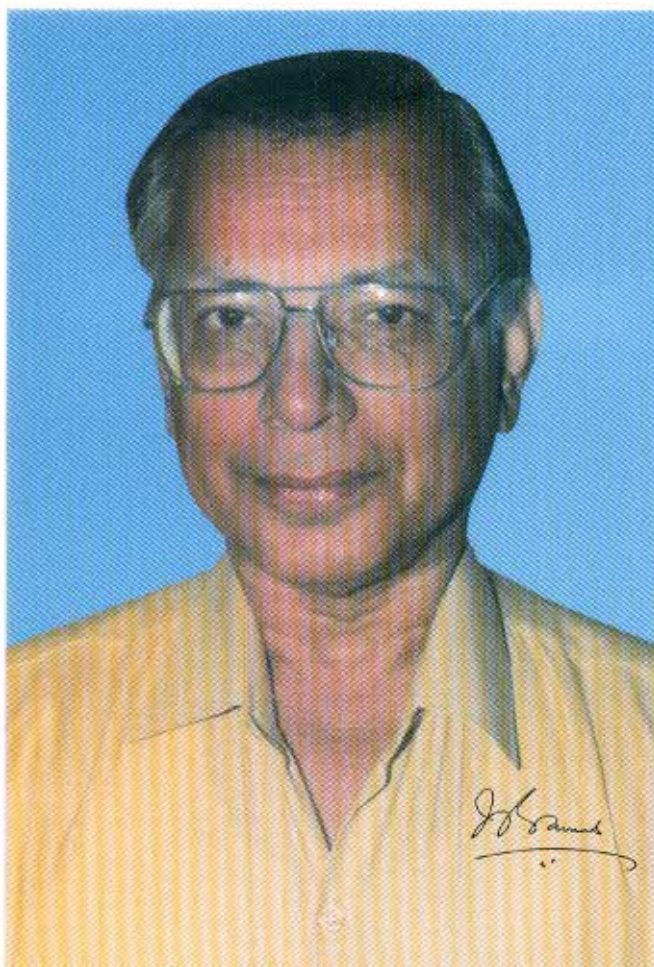


Konkani Bhasha Mandal
Mumbai

invite you to

meet the author

J B Moraes





“Simplicity, clarity and sincerity are the hallmark of Moraes’ poetry. He is not a poet who wields the pen to impress his readers or one who takes selfish delight in juggling with words. Moraes wants to say something and says it directly. His poetry lends itself to translation with apparent ease, for his language is astonishingly transparent just as his thought. After all, it is not the function of language to make clear what is not. Was it not Goethe who said that the best poem was the one that could be translated with ease into another language? Moraes’ poetry at its best is intensely human, unassumingly simple, never too loud, too gaudy, but soft and intimate like the murmur of a fountain”, says Dr. Manohar Rai SarDessai, the doyen of Konkani poets in Indian Literature, the bimonthly English journal.

“Moraes shows a great mastery of Konkani in his use of the simple language with the modern type of verse. His sense of rhythm of the spoken language does not forsake him. The metrical regularity found in some of the older poems has not been lost even in his later free verse. The difference is that he has found new types of rhythm to sing his

thoughtful songs. Thus his poetry is essentially lyrical. The influence of English romantic style can be gauged from the simplicity of language and the polished and tranquil expression of recollected emotion. This is what makes his poems highly readable” Mathew Almeida S.J. in the *Encyclopaedia of Indian Literature*.

John Baptist Moraes was born in 1933 in village Kallamundkur (Also known as Niddodi) near Mangalore. The newly opened high school seven kilometres from his home, was a boon which enabled him to complete his matriculation in 1951. He had to trek the distance to school on foot. Immediately after matriculation, he migrated to Mumbai seeking a job. He was fortunate to get a junior clerk’s post in Parke Davis, a multinational pharmaceutical company on a salary of Rs.120. With diligence, grit and hard work, he climbed up the hierarchical ladder in the company and retired on superannuation as Regional Manager in 1993. Notwithstanding the stress of holding a responsible post, the bulk of his writings belong to a period of 42 years of service in the company. He never allowed his literary activities to interfere with his fulltime job and *vice versa*. It was his discipline in appropriating diligently the spare time available that he could accomplish so much.

His fondness for reading, which manifested even in his childhood, earned him the quote “He converses only with his books” from the village folk. While in service, he was instrumental in starting a library



With family members

of English, Hindi and Marathi books for the employees. He chose the books himself, going to various book exhibitions and bookshops. This widened his knowledge of literature and literary figures in these languages. Like any other book-lover, he has a habit of collecting second hand books from the roadside. About 50 years ago, books of real literary value could be purchased from the roadside for a pittance. For instance, 'The Home Library Club' formed jointly by *The Times of India*, *The Statesman* and the Associated Newspapers of Ceylon Ltd. brought out some great anthologies like *The World's Greatest Short Stories*, *The World's Greatest Speeches* etc. These books contained over 600 pages on an average and were hardbound. The biggest thing was, they were available for as little as rupees five!

"Despite a fulltime job, domestic responsibilities, the tensions and stress of a busy city life, if one is determined to write, it is not impossible" - so wrote the "Evening News of India" in 1986 quoting Moraes in an article titled 'An Encounter with an Outstanding Author'.

As an author, Moraes is at home in several genres of Konkani literature, such as poetry, fiction, biography, essay, full-length plays, verse plays, research articles, book reviews, translations, adaptations etc. Moraes has published 15 books including three collections of poetry, one collection of short stories, one collection of translated poems, a full-length play, a political biography, a monograph on a Konkani poet and the translation of a literary history. The last two are published by the Sahitya Akademi. He plans to bring out in book form his serialised epic poetry *Divyamrut* based on the *Bible*.

Though the beauty and mystery of nature moulded his poetry to some extent, his early writings were mainly influenced by the abject poverty, illiteracy and ignorance around him in his native village and a sense of dedication to his mother tongue Konkani which was struggling to gain recognition as an independent and literary language 60 years ago. His short stories bear a strong flavour of the soil and delightfully illustrate the

village life around him.

His most acclaimed book is the biography of George Fernandes, *Ek Sahasi Jinn* published in 1999, perhaps the only biography of the national leader in any language. The struggle and tribulations and the fight against adversities are brought out effectively in the book which earned him the Best Book Award from the Dr. T.M.A. Pai Foundation, Manipal.

Moraes received the Sahitya Akademi Award for his collection of poems *Bhitorlem Tufan* in 1985. He was the first Konkani writer from Karnataka to receive this Award. Eight writers who received the Award before him were all from Goa. He received Maharashtra Gaurav Puraskar in 1990 and Sandesha Prathistan Literary Award in the year 2000. He has written a monograph of the great Konkani poet C.F. DeCosta for the Sahitya Akademi under the series 'Makers of Indian Literature'. He has also translated *History of Kannada Literature* for Sahitya Akademi.

As a journalist, Moraes has a long experience of over 45 years in working with the various Konkani periodicals. He was one of the three founder editors of *Konkan Daiz* a monthly on the lines of *Reader's Digest* started in 1958. He was on the editorial board of *Poinnari* weekly for 12 years (1964/76) and in 1965, wrote a series of well-researched articles in the weekly on eminent Mangaloreans. He was also the founder-editor of *Divo* weekly (1995-1998). Now, Moraes is editing the Konkani Bhasha Mandal's quarterly news-

magazine *Konknni Saad* since 2000. He has read research papers in various seminars and symposia on issues concerning Konkani language and literature. His paper on "Problems of Konkani Journalism" read in the First World Konkani Convention held in Mangalore in 1995 was well-received.

Moraes was elected President of the 19th Session of the All India Konkani Parishad held in Madgaon in January 1993 when Mumbai was reeling under the impact of communal riots. People were not venturing out of their homes. With great determination and effort, he along with his wife, were able to reach the Santacruz airport on the way to Goa. He admits it was a scary moment.

Moraes was instrumental in reviving the oldest representative body of Konkani 'Konkani Bhasha Mandal, Mumbai', in 1992 which was stagnating for several years. After revival, the Bhasha Mandal was able to celebrate its Golden Jubilee (1993) and Diamond Jubilee (2002) mainly due to his efforts. He has been its General Secretary since 1992.

Currently, he is a member of the General Council and Konkani Advisory Board of the Sahitya Akademi. He is also Convener of the Konkani Advisory Committee of the Bharatiya Jnanpith.



With George Fernandes



Receiving TMA Pai Foundation Award - 2001

A SELECT BIBLIOGRAPHY

Poetry

NOVI VHOKAL, 1977
BHITORLEM TUFAN, 1984
EK DHENT, EK PAAN, 2002

Short Stories

KOSHEDDAN KELLI
KHUN, 1980

Biography

GEORGE FERNANDES, 1999

Plays

SOPANN-PARKI ZUZE, 2002

Verse Plays

PUTIPHARACHI BAIL, 1990

Life Sketches

MONGLLURCHIM UJWAL
RATNA, 1983

Monograph

CHA FRA DeCOSTA, 2001

Translations into Konkani

ROMEO-JULIET, 1954 (Play)
ONTYA NASHILLEM SOPANN,
1975 (Novel)

NOVEM POINN, 2001 (Poetry)
KANNADA SAHITYACHO
ITIHAS, 1989 (Literary History)

Adaptations

NISRALLEAK LOTUN GHALO,
1976 (Novel)
BOLPYAM MODHLI SHELLI,
1977 (Novel)
ZORLO GOMES, 1987
(Sherlock Holmes Stories)

Serialized Epic Poem

DIVYAMRUT, 1989

In English

Collaboration

HISTORY OF KONKANI
LITERATURE, 2000

Contribution of Articles

MASTERPIECES OF INDIAN
LITERATURE, 1997



With Gulzar, releasing book - 2001

A CHRONOLOGY

- 1933 Born in village Kallamundkur (Niddodi) Near Mangalore, Karnataka
- 1948 Wrote first poem
- 1948 Co-founder of Konkani Prachar Mandali while in High School
- 1951 Migrated to Mumbai; joined Parke Davis multinational pharma company
- 1954 First book, 'Romeo-Juliet' (translation) published
- 1957 Married to Matilda
- 1958 Founder/Co-Editor: 'Konkan Daiz' monthly
- 1961 Started broadcasting poetry, stories, talks on All India Radio
- 1964/76 On the Editorial Board of 'Poinnari' weekly
- 1967 First play 'Hi Vatt Yemkondachi' staged
- 1969 Participated in AIR's Kavi Sammelan on Gandhi.
- 1980 Konkani Bhasha Mandali Goa prize for 'Kosheddhan Kelli Khun' (Stories)
- 1985 Sahitya Akademi Award for 'Bhitorlem Tufan' (Poetry)
- 1986 Second play 'Vidhicho Khel' staged
- 1989 Participated in AIR's Kavi Sammelan on Nehru
- 1989/94 On the Editorial Board of 'Raknno' weekly
- 1990 Maharashtra Gaurav Puraskar
- 1992 Appointed Gen. Secretary, Konkani Bhasha Mandali Mumbai
- 1993 Elected President of 19th All India Konkani Parishad, Madgaon
- 1993 Retired on superannuation from Parke Davis
- 1995 Founder Editor: 'Divo' weekly
- 1995 Elected Regional Secretary, 1st World Konkani Convention
- 1997 Member, Konkani Advisory Board, Sahitya Akademi
- 2000 Editor, 'Konknni Saad' quarterly
- 2001 'Best Book Award' by Dr. T.M.A. Pai Foundation, Manipal for biography of George Fernandes
- 2001 'Sandesha Pratishtan Karnataka', Literary Award
- 2001 'J.B. Moraes Special Issue' brought out by 'Poinnari' weekly
- 2002 Convener, Konkani Advisory Committee, Bharatiya Jnanpith
- 2002 Participated in National Symposium of Poets held in Jaipur
- 2002 Member, General Council, Sahitya Akademi



Receiving Maharashtra Gaurav Puraskar -1990



Receiving 'Sandesha' Award - 2001