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Sahitya Akademi
&
Konkani Bhasha Mandal

invite you to

meet the author

ManoharRai SarDessai





Manohar Rai SarDessai is — like all true Goan artists — an inheritor of the essence of the Goan *la joie de vivre* joy of life, a person gifted with curiosity like the seashores which make you dream of faraway islands, with a warm temperament like Goan climate.

In fact, Goa lives in every line that Manohar Rai writes. His poetry is a vibrant reflection of the cultural and political events that shaped this land right from Parashuram, the Portuguese tyranny, the freedom struggle launched by Dr. Ram Manohar Lohia, the liberation of Goa, the historic opinion poll, the visits of Dr. Lohia and Jawaharlal Nehru, the recognition to Konkani by Sahitya Akademi etc. Manohar Rai rightly says: 'Wherever I go, I carry with me this bloodstained earth, the silent sob of smoke-clad hills, the tearful waves of river Zuvari'.

Manohar Rai is the son of the eminent short-story writer Lakshman-Rao SarDessai. Being surrounded by books right from his childhood it is not wonder that he started wielding the pen at an early age. Dr. Lohia says, 'It is rare to see father and son excelling in the same occupation but, when such a thing happens, it calls to a celebration. Lakshman-Rao SarDessai is undoubtedly one of the best short story writers we have and his son Manohar is gifted with

the lyrical quality of which good poetry is made'.

Armando Menezes observes: 'There was never any pure Goan poetry before Manohar SarDessai and there could not be before the reintegration of Goa in India. There has been Indo-Portuguese poetry before him; and there has been Indo-Anglian poetry written by Goans, but it was not Goan poetry; and it was, therefore, not 'true' poetry. This is not a paradox. One sure mark of true poetry is that it finds an echo in the hearts of the people of whom and for whom it sings. Manohar Rai SarDessai could recite or sing, to a Goan audience and make it cry or laugh or applaud him in silence. The poetry of Manohar Rai SarDessai goes straight to the heart of the people; what is more, it goes straight to the heart of any Goan, however sophisticated and denationalised, who has just enough Konkani to follow its meaning.

Manohar Rai had his schooling in Marathi and Portuguese. Konkani was considered to be only a dialect. Portuguese was the official language of Goa (Portuguese India) and Marathi was taught privately. French was the second language. After matriculation, Manohar Rai came to Bombay and joined Wilson College to study literature. He had to work hard to make living for himself and his family at Goa, as his father was imprisoned fighting for Goan liberation. Manohar Rai topped the merit list at B.A. and M.A. examinations of Bombay University. While in Bombay, he contributed poems, short stories and articles to Marathi periodicals like 'Manohar', 'Kirloskar', 'Satyakatha', 'Abhiruchi', 'Huns', 'Navyug', 'Loksatta' etc.

In 1952, he was offered a scholarship by the France Government

to write a doctoral thesis on 'The Image of India in France'. His six years stay in France brought him in close contact with the rich French literature and culture as well as European literature. Poets like Paul Eluard, Jacques Prevert, Pablo Neruda, Garcia de Lorca fascinated him. Strangely enough he came in closer contact with India itself through the eyes of Voltaire, Diderot, Leconate de Lisle, Victor Hugo, Romain Rolland, Lanza Del Vasto, Albert Schweitzer. He also came in close contact with eminent Indian painters: Lakshman Pai, Raza, Krishna Reddy, Paritosh Sen, Shakti Burman as also with Portuguese and Goan patriots opposed to Salazar's dictatorship. He also interacted with French intellectuals opposed to any sort of colonialism be it English, French or Portuguese. The socialistic strain in Manohar Rai's poetry can partly be explained by his interaction with the political opinion in France.

In France, Manohar Rai was overwhelmed with nostalgia for his homeland still under foreign rule. Poem after poem in Konkani cascaded from his pen pulsating with rhythm of its own and sparkling with colourful imagery. The poems were later collected and published in 1961. After Goa's liberation on 19th December 1961, the book found entry on Goan



Receiving the title Chevalier De L'ordre Des Palmes Academiques — 1988

soil. It became instantly popular with both Catholics and Hindus. A child of Goa, Manohar Rai is in love with its evergreen luscious nature. In this collection *Goya Tujea Mogakhatir* (For Thy Sake O Goa) Goa lives vibrantly with its tall swaying coconut trees, its green paddy fields, its golden beaches, its milk-white cataracts and its wide-eyed children roaming about under the mango trees. You also see here the picture of Goa crushed under the heel of the foreigners: 'Land of cattle and of paddy fields, thirsty is my Goa for a drop of milk. My Goa sweats blood on the cross of the Portuguese'.

With the liberation of Goa a new era dawned. But the poet's cherished dreams were shattered. This finds reflection in his collection of poems *Zayat Zage* (Arise / Awake - 1964).

Here the poet attacks the economic inequality, ignorance

Being Honoured by Lions Club International — 1993



and corruption still prevailing in society.

It should not be forgotten that Manohar Rai belongs to a generation of young men and women who fought for the liberation of Goa and for the development of Konkani language and literature, with the sword and with the pen. And the pen was not less mighty than the sword. Manohar Rai as a poet has played a significant role getting for Konkani its rightful place in the mosaic of Indian languages.

Many of Manohar Rai's poems have a social content and are expressions of his love for his people and his concern for their moral and physical well being. His poems like *Goenchea Mhojea Goenkaramno* (O my Fellow-Goans), *Hundranchi Sobha* (Rats' conference), a realistic and satirical sketch of Goa's first Legislative Assembly, *Hi Lokshai* (This Democracy) have become immensely popular with the masses.

Dr. Jose Pereira describes him 'as the poet of Konkanism, unrivalled in wealth of imagery, profundity of thought and vividness of expression, with whose crowning as the "prince of Konkani poets" (Kaviraj) on 2 January 1966 the new Konkani writing was regally vindicated. Konkani's long smouldering fire had now sprung into flame.'

Of course not all of Manohar Rai's poetry is in defence of Konkani. His *Zaio-Zuio* is a collection of short poems with a philosophic content. Armando Menezes says: '*Zaio-Zuio* is precious little volume which is reminiscent, in its discontinuity and epigrammatic character, of Tagore's *Stray Birds* but is otherwise entirely original — I almost said entirely Konkani. One cannot imagine it in any other language. The title itself



On his 60th birthday with Uday Bhembe, Ravindra Kelekar and Mrs. SarDessai

is redolent of Goa, and like a true poet's titles, it is symbolic.'

Simplicity of expression and a rich poetic content made *Zaio-Zuio* popular among the readers and fellow poets. A poet like B.B. Borkar acknowledges the influence of these poems on him as they inspired him to write poetry of the same kind.

Manohar Rai's *Pisollim* (Butterflies) follows the same pattern, or almost. They are 'intimately personal utterances. They are lyrics in their distilled essence, each of them opening up for a sensitive reader, a whole world of poetic potentialities' (M.V. Rajadhyaksha).

Manohar Rai's impact on Konkani poetry was phenomenal. Readers smelt the fragrance of the Goan soil in his verse which revealed consummate mastery over word and craft. It was he who revolutionised Konkani poetry in theme, tone and technique. Manohar Rai has also written some of the finest poems for children in Konkani. His long poem *Bebearchem Kazar* is popular with children because of its catchy rhyme and rhythm.

A poet of the people, he is equally the poet of poetry... and poetry is for him a search: 'On this sandy desert of paper, I take along with me my camels the words, in search of an oasis'.

A Select Bibliography

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1968 16p. 18.5 cm.
- HONORE DE BALZAC Goa:
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JMT AMCHEM OSHEM, 1970

A CHRONOLOGY

- | | | | |
|---------|---|---------|--|
| 1925 | Born, Panaji, Goa | 1966 | Founded University Teachers Association, Goa |
| 1942 | Matriculation. Participated in Quit India Movement | | Electd Prince of Konkani Poets (Kaviraj) |
| 1949 | Master of Arts (French, Marathi), First class First in University of Bombay | | First Prize AIR Patriotic Songs Competition (Konkani) |
| 1949-52 | Lecturer in French, Wilson College, Bombay | 1970 | Founded Association France — Goa |
| 1952 | Proceeds to Paris on French Government scholarship | 1972 | Goa Kala Academy Award for the best script and direction — One act plays competition |
| 1956 | Travels all over Europe | 1973 | Goa Kala Academy Award for <i>Zaio-Zuio</i> (Poetry) |
| | Participates in the Conference of World Association for Refugee Problems at Helsinki | 1977 | Visits U.S.S.R. on scholarship |
| | Participates in the Conference of World Association for Peace and Freedom at Hamburg | 1979-85 | Reader in French, University of Bombay |
| 1958 | Doctorate in French Literature on <i>Image of India in France</i> , University of Paris, Sorbonne | 1980 | Sahitya Akademi Award and Goa Kala Academy Award for <i>Pisollim</i> (Poetry) |
| 1960 | Joins AIR (External Services) Delhi | 1985-90 | Co-ordinator, Department of French and Portuguese, Goa University |
| 1960-61 | Lecturer in French, Somaiya College, Bombay | 1985-92 | Vice-President, Goa Konkani Akademi |
| | Publishes and stages dance-drama <i>Aiz Re Dholar Poddli Boddli</i> in Bombay (First publication) | 1991 | Chief Editor, <i>Konkani Encyclopaedia</i> . |
| 1962 | Presides over the Eighth Konkani Parishad, Margao, Goa | 1991-92 | Goa State Cultural Award |
| 1964-70 | President, Konkani Bhasha Mandal, Goa | 1992-93 | Lions Club International Award |
| | | 1993 | Satvahan Award by Rashtriya Hindi Academy |

In front of Cathedral of Notre Dame De Paris — 1985

