

Wilfy Rebimbus – A Lyric Poet

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ABSTRACT

This paper explores the literary contributions of Wilfy Rebimbus, highlighting his role as a lyric poet in Konkani Literature. It examines his multifaceted career as a lyricist, playwright, short story writer, and cultural icon, emphasizing his influence on the growth of Konkani language through Kannada script. The study distinguishes between song and poetry, to establish Wilfy's position as a lyric poet, whose works combine poetic sensibility with musical rhythm. Through thematic and stylistic analysis, the paper demonstrates how his writings reflect diverse literary influences, while addressing social, cultural, and moral concerns, thereby affirming his enduring significance in regional literary tradition.

Keywords: Wilfy Rebimbus, Lyric poetry, Konkani literature, Musicality, Regional literature, Cultural identity.

Konkani language, which is widely spoken over the west coast of India, from Kutch to the end of the western coast of Kerala, is the language of the people belonging to different castes and religions. This language is strengthened by rich and varied folklore and literature produced in different dialects of Konkani. Mangalore Konkani is the Konkani spoken by the people residing in the erstwhile Dakshina Kannada district which also comprises the present district of Udupi in Karnataka. This dialect is spoken by most people from various Konkani linguistic groups such as Saraswats, Catholic Christians, GSBs, to name a few. Whatever literature that has been produced in this Konkani is written in Kannada script. This is basically because Mangalore Konkani speakers use Kannada script for writing Konkani.

A major portion of Konkani literature has been produced in Kannada script. There are a number of Konkani poets, novelists, short story writers, playwrights, columnists who write in Konkani using Kannada script. Apart from this, there have been several lyricists who have contributed to the growth of Konkani language and literature by composing melodious lyrics and songs that have become highly popular. Most popular among them is Wilfy Rebimbus, popularly known as “Konkan Kogul” (Konkani Cuckoo).

It would be a fallacy to limit Wilfy Rebimbus as just a lyricist. His contribution to different genres of Konkani literature such as plays and short stories is well recognised. Moreover, as a noted journalist and a publisher, his contribution to Konkani literature etches his name in the first place among the notable Konkani litterateurs of the last century.

Born on April 2, 1942 to a poor couple, Mr Landlyn Rebimbus and Mrs Magdeline Mendonca, at a place called Jeppu in Mangalore, Karnataka, Wilfy Rebimbus was the last among six siblings. He had his primary schooling at St. Joseph’s Boys School in Jeppu, Mangalore. He continued his Higher primary education in St. Aloysius School, Mangalore and later joined Milagres High School, Mangalore for his High School studies. After High School studies he completed his ITI course at Karnataka

Polytechnic Institution, Mangalore and started working as an apprentice at St. Joseph's Asylum Workshop at Jeppu, Mangalore.

But the boy had deep rooted passion for music. He derived this liking for music from his father. Wilfy, as a small boy, grew up listening to the religious hymns sung at home almost every day in the evenings. His elder brother Gratian introduced him to music through harmonium. His first professional entry into scripting lyrics was at the age of 14 when he scripted lyrics in Konkani to the tune of a popular Hindi song named "Bhikari" (Beggar). When this song became a hit, many producers approached Wilfy for similar compositions. Since by this time he had training in Classical as well as Carnatic music, he could deftly blend the popular with the classical and his lyrics were soon appreciated by the audience. This gave a new lease of life to Konkani dramatics. If at earlier stage people used to watch the plays for the action and the exhibitionism, after Wilfy's entry into stage performance as librettist, people started thronging just to listen to his melodious compositions.

When people lost their interest in Konkani plays, Wilfy Rebimbus started entertaining people with self-composed songs in his own musical concerts called 'Wilfy Nite.' His first musical concert 'Wilfy Nite' was held on 21st September, 1971 at Town Hall, Mangalore. In his second 'Wilfy Nite' which was held on the 29th day of the same month, he was conferred the title 'Konkan Kogul' (Konkani Bulbul) for his mellifluous singing. What followed after is history.

The immense contribution of Wilfy Rebimbus to Konkani literature and music is as follows:

- In his fifty years of active involvement in music and literature, he has scripted more than 3000 lyrics.
- He has put up 248 musical Nites under the banner 'Wilfy Nite'.
- He has composed music to more than 500 plays.
- He has published 10 books of Konkani songs.

- He has brought out 50 CDs of Konkani popular songs, 7 CDs of devotional hymns and 2 CDs of Tulu Songs. (Tulu is a local language spoken in Udupi and Dakshina Kannada districts of Karnataka).

Wilfy Rebimbus hasn't restricted himself to lyric poetry or music alone. Being a multifaceted person, he has contributed to Konkani Literature as a playwright, short story writer, journalist, publisher, and a director of Konkani Movies.

The plays written by Wilfy are:

- *Pyshancho Saunsar* (1959) (Materialistic World)
- *Doth Makha Naka* (1960) (I Don't Want Dowry)
- *Mai Maka Adaynaka* (1961) (Don't Stop Me Mother)
- *Modern Novro* (1962) (Modern Husband)
- *Bebdyachi Duv* (1963) (Daughter of a Drunkard)
- *Tisri Cheet* (1964) (Third Letter)
- *Bhesto Dubav* (1966) (Unnecessary Doubt)
- *K. D. Bona, B.A* (1975)

Apart from these plays, he has written musical plays such as:

- *Hajar Umalyanche Kazar* (Marriage of Thousand Emotions)
- *Vechik Puth* (Prodigal Son)
- *Vompiyachi Vopar* (Beatitude of the Sower)
- *Mother Teresa*

As a writer of short stories, he has shown his literary creativity and deft craftsmanship. Jo. C. Siddakatte writes; “Lyricist Wilfy didn’t limit himself to music alone. His creative talent is seen in the stories he has written. Though he has written only 5 stories, every story is different and are worthy to be studied as fine pieces of literature. These stories uphold human relationship and values and thereby, help to lead an ethical life” (*Suryacha Kimani* 1) (Translation mine).

The stories he has written are:

- “Pintram” (Eye Goop)
- “Nithal Khotam” (Clean Stains)
- “Fatimachem Kazar” (Marriage of Fathima)
- “Muguti” (Nose Stud)
- “Needh” (Sleep)

Apart from this, Wilfy Rebimbus also involved himself in the silver screen as a producer, script writer, music composer and music director. The five films he was involved in are;

- *Tisri Cheet* – As a script writer
- *Mog ani Moypas* – As script writer, lyricist and music director (1977)
- *Kazara Upraanth* – Lyrics and Music (1988)
- *Bhogsane* – Lyrics and Music (1996)
- *Padri* – Lyrics and Music (2005)

The above information, no doubt, introduces a great literary talent in a regional language to English readers and thereby tries to show how regional languages are enriched by people like Wilfy. In the context of the onslaught of a global monoculture, it is the need of the hour to work on the regional

languages and more importantly, to appreciate the creative genius of people like Wilfy Rebimbus who make a conscientious decision to work on regional culture.

Wilfy Rebimbus is a household name among the Canara Konkani speaking community. Through his rich lyrics he has not only widened the reach of Konkani language but also has taken Konkani literature to a greater height. He has written over 3000 lyrics which have been recorded as songs. To brand Wilfy Rebimbus as merely a lyricist would be undervaluing the great works done by a great litterateur. Needless to say, it is a massive loss to Konkani literary criticism as well. His lyrics are not only poetic in emotional appeal, but also prophetic in discussion of human predicament. In simple terms he can be conveniently called a 'lyric poet'. Yet, his lyric poetry is very rich in content. We can come across a wide array of influences and elements such as classicism, romanticism, mysticism, puritanism, metaphysics, realism and the like in his poetry. The themes of his poetry would swing from Nature to God, moral uprightness, rich and the poor, family values, natural calamities, oppression of the less privileged, addictions, superstitious beliefs, self-respect etc.

When he speaks about nature, we come across Wordsworth in him. His poetry on God reminds us of Robert Frost and William Blake. When it comes to the treatment of the rich and the poor in his poetry, we find the touch of Robert Herrick in his lines. He treats the themes of family values as Langston Hughes does. His lyric poetry on natural calamities reminds us of the American poet Micheal R. Burch. When he deals with the subject matter of superstitions, we get the smell of Shakespeare in his lines. On the whole, when we read the lyric poetry of Wilfy Rebimbus, we are reminded of Shakespeare, John Milton, William Wordsworth, William Blake, John Donne, Robert Frost and many more. Never before has a lyric poet like Wilfy Rebimbus appeared in the Konkani literary scene.

If the Konkani speaking community wants to term Wilfy as a lyricist and singer, musician, I would like to call him a lyric poet for several reasons. At this juncture it will be very appropriate to speak about the difference between songs and poetry in order to strengthen the claim of Wilfy as a lyric poet.

For many, 'song' and 'poetry' appear the same. But they are two different genres. Many songs which have been composed cannot be termed poems at all. In Europe, song-writers or the writers of the 'librettos' of the great operas are not classed among poets. In Asia, the the classification of songs and poems is hazy as it has been commonly accepted to combine song-quality with poetic value. It is said that in ancient Greece too, lyric poetry was often composed with a view to being set to music. But still poetry and songs, though they can be combined, are two different arts, because the aim and the principle of their composition is not the same.

People are of the opinion that poetry has to be understood and music or singing has to be felt (*anubhūti*); that one has to reach the soul through the precise written sense and the other through the suggestion of sound and its appeal to some inner chord within us. A true poem contains something more other than its intellectual value, which has to be felt just as one feels music, and that is its most important and essential part. Poetry has a rhythm, just as music has, and it is the rhythm that helps this something else to come out through the medium of the words. The words by themselves do not carry it or cannot bring it out altogether, and this is shown by the fact that the same words written in a different order and without rhythm, would not at all move or impress in the same way.

The real difference between a poem and a song is that a song is written with a view to be set to musical rhythm and a poem is written with the ear listening for the needed poetic rhythm or word-music. These two rhythms are quite different. That is why a poem cannot be set to music unless it has either been written with an eye to both kinds of rhythm or else happens to have a movement which makes it easy or at least possible to set it to music. This happens often with lyrical poetry.

The above explanation is fair enough to call Wilfy Rebimbus a lyric poet. All the lyrics he has written have been tuned into melodious songs because his lyrics have both poetic quality and the musical rhythm in them.

Here is a lyric written by Wilfy Rebimbus which is rich in poetic content with beautiful rhythmic sense.

My language is Konkani

My breath is Konkani

My Caste is Konkani

My culture is Konkani

My way of life is entirely Konkani (*Kogul Gayta* 88)

The above lyric, tuned to a beautiful song with a metre 1, 2, 3, 4 pattern, is poetically rich. This lyric poem speaks about the love for the Konkani language. The poet says that Konkani is not only his language but his entirety. The words touch the listeners' heart through the poetic sense in words and the musical sense in rhythm. Thus, Wilfy Rebimbus can be aptly called a lyric poet.

In conclusion, Wilfy Rebimbus emerges not merely as a lyricist but as a significant literary figure whose contributions transcend the boundaries of music and enter the realm of serious poetic discourse. His works reflect a harmonious blend of poetic depth and musical rhythm, making them both aesthetically appealing and intellectually engaging. Through his lyrics, plays, and stories, he has enriched Konkani literature and strengthened its cultural identity. In an age of cultural homogenisation, his dedication to regional language and expression stands as a powerful reminder of the importance of preserving linguistic heritage. Wilfy Rebimbus, therefore, deserves recognition as a true lyric poet whose creative legacy continues to inspire generations.

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