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## Tiatr

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### INTRODUCTION

**T**iatr is the most popular form of modern Konkani theatre. It is unique, as its structure contains songs, known as *kantaram*, between the scenes or *porde* (literally meaning curtains). Songs that are integral to the play are called *kant*. Comic interludes are also an essential feature of tiatr.

Easter Sunday, 17 April 1892, is generally regarded as the date on which the first documented performance of a modern tiatr was staged at the New Alfred Theatre in Bombay. This play was composed by Lucasinho Ribeiro who had landed in Bombay from Goa, in search of employment. He was a good composer and singer, could play the violin, and was proficient in English. Hence, he could understand and appreciate operas being performed by an Italian opera company whose tour coincided with his arrival in Bombay. Impressed by the presentation, he attempted to obtain a job as a stagehand with the troupe and succeeded through the recommendation of a prominent Goan. He travelled with this Italian opera company to Poona, Madras, Simla, and Calcutta. When the troupe proceeded to Burma, Ribeiro parted company and returned to Bombay, keeping in mind one of their operettas. While leaving the job he purchased the velvet costumes of the opera company with the hope of utilising them in his own venture. He composed *Italian Bhurgo* on the basis of the Italian operetta and staged it as a *teatro* with the assistance of João Agostinho Fernandes, Caitaninho Fernandes, Agostinho Mascarenhas, and one more (unidentified) person. However, this performance was not the fruition of just a random creative impulse of Lucasinho's. He had an abiding interest in drama from his childhood.

### EUROPEAN INFLUENCE ON GOAN THEATRE

Goa has had traditions—imported and native—of festivities associated with religious celebrations. Such festivities included the staging of plays of a spiritual, moral or secular nature. Just as Mystery and Miracle plays or Morality plays, Passion plays and Biblical or Lenten enactments were performed in Europe, they were performed in Goa too. Just as emigrants or missionaries generally carry some facets of their culture with them, the Portuguese colonists and religious emissaries also brought along their cultural, spiritual and catechetical practices. The earliest documented evidence of a performance comes

from the early sixteenth century (Martins 176). References are found to the staging of many tragedies, comedies and tragi-comedies on religious themes by the church in Goa. There were performances of Passion plays and dialogues on religious themes. The correspondence of the Jesuits in Goa with their superiors in Rome and Lisbon contains brief accounts of such performances. The language used in the performances was Latin. The purpose of the staging was to demonstrate the achievement of the native seminarians to the civil and ecclesiastical authorities, to propagate faith and to provide wholesome diversion. It may be mentioned here that following the installation of Asia's first printing press in Goa in September 1556, *Conclusiones Philosophicas* was the first book published in October 1556. This was a compilation of the dissertations by seminarians. The previous year, 1555, a significant event had taken place in the form of the staging of a play, *Auto de Filodemo*, authored by Luís de Camões. Luís (Vaz) de Camões or Camoëns, (1524?–80), is one of the greatest Portuguese poets, whose principal work, *The Lusíads* (1572; trans. 1655), is considered Portugal's national epic. Camões' life was one of high adventure. Camões often presented his compositions to his friends and benefactors. Luís de Camões left Portugal for India in 1553. Besides being renowned for *The Lusíads*, Camões's fame also rests on his substantial number of posthumously published shorter poems: odes and sonnets, elegies, and *canzoni*. In addition, he also wrote three plays, *Auto de Enfatriões*, *Auto de El-Rei Seleuco* and *Auto de Filodemo*. Two of these plays *Auto de Enfatriões* and *Auto de Filodemo* were published for the first time in a book titled *Auto de Filodemo* (Cidade 1956, 76).

An insertion in the manuscript of Luís Franco, a contemporary of Camões, states 'Comédia feita por L. de Camões – representada na Índia a fr.º de barreto'. (Comedy written by L. de Camões... presented in India to Fr[ancisc]o de Barreto.). Francisco Barreto was invested as the Governor of Goa in 1555. So it is presumed that this was the date of the first presentation of *Auto de Filodemo*.

It is a novelistic play – has the sentimental romance background, which is no novelty since it was a practice in the Iberian Peninsula to turn eclogues into theatrical episodes (*Encina*). Gil Vicente had transformed the *Romance of Amadis De Gaula* and *Dom Duardos* (Portuguese high chivalry romances) into well-balanced theatrical episodes without removing their hallmark of chivalric romances.

At such a time, theatrical representation was a sufficiently elastic literary scene to enable everything and anything to be inserted in it. Whatever the faults of technicalities or shortcomings, the audience's imagination would fill in the gaps, since there was no possibility of time gaps for the changes required in the alteration of space of action (Cidade 1956, 101). Such audience involvement can also be perceived in the traditional roving Konkani *khells*.

## Religious Drama

Besides dramas in Latin and Portuguese, religious plays in vernacular languages were staged on festive occasions such as Christmas, Easter and Corpus Christi. Passion plays were enacted during Lent. A play, in the vernacular, performed in 1586 on the feast of St. Paul's conversion (January 25) at the College of St Paul in the city of Goa, seems particularly noteworthy because of its connection with the form of the medieval spectacle and pageant plays of Europe. The play described as a 'short and gay dialogue on conversion to Christianity' (Martins 1975, 188–189) was performed to celebrate the baptism of native neophytes. The plot was very simple. It opens with the appearance of the city of Goa, accompanied by the neighbouring islands of Chorao, Divar, Salsette and Bardez. Goa complains of the scanty zeal shown in matters of conversion. To this the devout Lady Conversion, who enters next, responds by reassuring Goa that new conversions would take place. She then disputes various pagans and the devil himself,

refuting their arguments. As a result of this the pagans discard their turbans, cut off their top knots and partake of the food of the Christians amidst general rejoicing.

The season of Lent is particularly noted for religious plays. The 'Stations of the Cross' continue to be enacted even now, just as they were enacted centuries ago. The performances involved live actors and dialogue. However, when the government passed on the burden of the church expenses to the local communities, beginning the seventeenth century, the staging of such performances seems to have suffered a decline.

Curiously enough, one finds a reference to a miracle play performed by live actors in the same tradition but not in Goa. Portuguese monks staged this at an old Portuguese mission established at Aurangabad during the post-Bahamani period. Meadows Taylor writes of how he was moved by the performance that he saw in 1825 at Aurangabad. 'A miracle play of the life of our Lord was performed there by them, beginning with the scene of Birth, and ending with the Crucifixion. Although, no doubt it could not bear comparison with Ammergau [Oberammergau, Germany] yet it was curious and strange. Portuguese monks chanted the story in their own tongue, interspersed with bad Hindostanee, but the effect was very impressive; and the last scene, a real man hanging to the cross, was the signal for wailing and groaning from the spectators, who looked on with awe and wonder' (1882, 28–29).

## Secular Drama

While the religious enactments may have been generally staged during the major liturgical seasons, performances of a secular nature were held during the rest of the year. It is evident that there existed in Goa a history of theatrical performances in European languages, mainly Portuguese, but also French and Spanish, from the seventeenth to the nineteenth century. Most of these performances would have been generally restricted, being written, staged and acted by the elite. The earliest reference one can find in this period is to Fr. Francisco do Rego (1635–1686). Besides his famous *Tratado Apologetico contra varias calunias contra a sua Nação Bracmane* he also left *Comedias Varias*, which too remained unpublished, according to Barbosa Machado (*Biblioteca Lusitana*, Vol 4, 1741–59). He was followed by Mateus Lacerda (late seventeenth century or early eighteenth century) who wrote poetry in the mother tongue (Konkani), Portuguese and Castillian, and also penned several comedies. The manuscripts were lost and it is not known if the plays were staged.

In 1751 a French play, *La Tragedie de Porus* by Corneille and a Portuguese play *Adolonymo em Sydonia* were performed during the week-long celebration ordered by the Viceroy in connection with the coronation of Dom Jose I as the king of Portugal.

In one of the earliest available issues of the Portuguese weekly *O Ultramar* (18 July 1861) we find a notice for a teatro being performed by a 'band of curious young men ... at the house of Padre Mestre Pacheco in the hall where at one time classes of Latin were held ....'

An example of the early teatro in Portuguese, written by a Goan and performed in Goa, is the play *Os Dois Irmaos Doidos as Duas Meninas Vizinhas* ('The Two Mad Brothers and the Two Neighbouring Girls') by Inacio Custodio Coelho in 1866, staged at the Teatro Harmonia, by that time set up in Margao. He was followed by Luis Napaleão de Ataide (1909), author of *A Mulher do Artista* (The Wife of the Artist), *O Filho do Mestre Jorge* (The Son of Master George), *A Viuva do Comandants* (*The Widow of the Commander*) and *Nobreza de Alma* (Nobility of the Soul), all published in 1901, and by Antonio Jose dos Martires Sousa, author of *Viva O Tio Regedor* (Long live Uncle Mayor). Other examples of teatro in Portuguese, written by a Goan and performed in Goa, can be found in the work of Joaquim Filipe

Neri Soares Rebelo (1873–1922) whose *Obras Completas* in three volumes were published by his son in Mozambique in 1973. Volume 1 contains *O Rei- Milhao*, a comedy drama in two acts (performed at Margao 1900), *O Peixote*, comic monologue (performed at Verna in 1895, and Margao in 1904), *Efeitos da Pinga*, comedy in one act (performed at Nova Goa in 1906), *O Senhor Serapião*, comic sketch (performed at Margao in 1908), *Tempestade em Copo de Agua*, comedy in one act (performed at Margao in 1908), *Os Dois Namorados*, comedy in one act (performed at Margao in 1909), *Mogarem*, a historical drama in four acts (performed at Margao in 1910 and at Coimbra in 1912). The performances of teatros in Portuguese appear to be more urban based and bourgeois centred. Incidentally, the early performances of Konkani tiatr were styled as teatro, and the first troupe which performed *Italian Bhurgo* in Bombay in 1892 called itself the Goa Portuguese Dramatic Company.

## INDIGENOUS TRADITIONS

There were other indigenous traditions that must be taken into account. Among these indigenous performances were *zagor*; and *khell* or *phell* or *fell* (the *ll* is pronounced as a retroflex). There were also several folk dances such as *Dhalo*, *Dashavtari*, *Ghodemodni*, *Romtamel*, and others as mentioned in the following text.

### Folk Performances in Goa

*Zagor* comes from *jagar*, a Hindu performance genre in Goa. The word *jagar* is derived from Sanskrit and refers to a vigil or wakefulness or nightlong performance. *Jagran* and *zagronn* are the Konkani words for a vigil. The name highlights the purpose of the participants to stay awake for a full night in order to honour and worship a particular local pantheon of ancestors, gods, saints and spirits. The *zagor* combines religious ritual with the performance of dance, song and theatre.

Amongst the Hindus there are two distinct kinds of *jagar* performances: *Perni jagar* is a ritual performance of the *Perni* community in temples, and the *Gavda jagar* is performed by members of the aboriginal *Gavda* tribe for the entertainment of the village.

*Zagors* were performed at the time of certain village feasts and church festivals, sponsored by the village community as a whole. The expenses for these performances came from the common village funds. The audience and the performers of *zagor* were co-celebrants and not patrons and beneficiaries. The people would gather at an open place. A fire was made at the centre of the area. The audience would sit around, keeping free the space required for acting. Though *zagors* were also performed in *Salçete*, they were more popular in the Christian villages of *Siolim*, *Calangute* and *Candolim* in the *Bardez* district. They were very similar to the *Gavda jagar* of the Hindus and consisted of a series of appearances of caricatured stereotyped characters from village life as well as characters from the world of fantasy. There is no theme or story, but each character represents its essence through song and dance, with rudimentary and ribald exchange between two characters at times. Acting in *zagors* was mostly extempore. The actors had liberty in their actions and speech including open criticism of others. The criticised person could also, through his performance, give a befitting reply to the critic. Vulgarity used to play an important role in the *zagors*. Even references to extra-marital affairs or village gossip could figure in the *zagor*. Sometimes the dialogues would comprise a slinging match. There were no rehearsals, no script, no direction but *zagor* did entertain the people at that time. The musical accompaniment

consisted of the indigenous *ghumot*, a quasi-semicircular earthen vessel, the front covered with monitor lizard skin, the bottom an open tube, and *madlem*, a cylindrical earthenware vessel. Christians perform zagors less frequently now. However, one remnant is the zagor at Siolim performed on the first Monday after Christmas. (While zagor is a land-based performance, the *sangodd* can be regarded as its aquatic counterpart). *Zagor* has been recognised as the earliest form of Konkani drama in Goa, staged by the indigenous Gavda community. Some of the other folk performances or dances in Goa are *chapai*, *dhalo*, *dashavtari*, *divli nach*, *fugdio*, *gavankani*, *goff*, *ghodemodni*, *banvad*, *lagan geet*, *lavni*, *kalshi fugddi*, *romtamel*, *tonyamel*, *veerabhadra* and *gudulyan geet*. In fact a perspective view shows common features of the zagors and the folk performances of Goa, with many other such cultural practices including *gondhallis* and *moche madkars* in Maharashtra and even *jatra* in Bengal.

Zagors continue to be performed in Goa, more by the Hindus than by the Christians. As mentioned earlier, the most prominent Christian zagor is the one organised at Siolim. The other place which keeps up the tradition is Calangute, where the zagor is held during Easter. The celebration of Easter provides the impetus for the resumption of the theatrical season after the abstinence practised during the preceding Lenten season. Zagors undoubtedly prevailed on the Konkani entertainment scenario in Bombay and were quite definitely replaced by tiatr. But one must not forget the role of the other indigenous form of theatrical entertainment – the *khell* or *phell/fell*, *mell* and the adapted version of *Contra Danca*.

*Khell* is a Sanskrit word which means game, sport or play. In other areas of coastal Konkani, *khell* and *khelle* are names used for ritual dances performed by various village communities at the time of Hindu festivals such as Holi. Amongst the Goan villagers, the Catholics perform various kinds of *khells* mostly at the time of the pre-Lenten Carnival. There are some that are performed at Easter and during the Christmas season. One of these is the *mussallam phell* or *mussallam khell* (pestle dance) performed by male dancers in the villages of Cotta Chandor and Cavorim in Salçete district on the second and third days of the Carnival.

Just as the *mussallam khell* is localised, the *mell* too is unique in being limited to the Assolna and Velim area in Salçete. After invocatory prayers at the common Holy Cross structure, the participants dance to the accompaniment of a drum. This cultural practice actually serves to arrange a ‘meeting’ of the villagers (*mell* as a verb means to meet). Their relationships are maintained through their coming together from several villages.

## The Carnival Plays

There were, however, other kinds of *khells* performed during the Carnival, again in the villages of Salçete area. Till thirty years ago, these *khells* were performed commonly in villages such as Colva, Benaolim, Chinchinim, Varca, Nesai (Sao Jose de Areal) and Raia. The performers were amateurs and their fare consisted of satirical and humorous skits and sketches on village life as well as dramatisation of folktales and traditional mythological stories. The musical accompaniment consisted of two drums, one of which was bass, and a trumpet or a clarinet. Female impersonators acted out women characters. There was a great deal of obscenity and vulgarity in the social sketches. Since there were a number of married women in these villages, separated from their husbands who worked on ships or in British India and Africa, cuckolding, extra-marital affairs and other local gossip figured largely in these sketches. Prominent villagers invited the performers to perform at their houses for a payment, ranging from fifteen to fifty rupees. The *khell* lasted from one to two hours and was divided into four *partes* (parts, episodes). The social sketches were *bhatkar parte* (showing the tussle between the landlord and the tenant); *tarvotti*

*parte* (showing the fortunes and misfortunes of sailors); and *konkaniyacho parte* (which poked fun at the ways of the Hindu *Goans-Konkanos*; *devcharacho parte* and *raksasa parte* based on traditional myths and folk tales, showed the exploits of demons and giants of yore. (One of the celebrated khell performers was *hada* (bearded) Miguel of Varca, who re-enacted the fighting of the Second World War, with a troupe of thirty people).

Khells were generally performed by roving troupes. They can be regarded as experimental theatre. A lot of improvisation went into the presentation of the khell. Material props for the play were those that could be easily carried by the performers. Items of furniture would be borrowed from the patrons or sponsors where the performance was being held. In an open air staging the director would loudly announce the scene location and blow a whistle to indicate scene changes. Over the decades khells have undergone much transformation. Whereas earlier they used to be performed in the courtyard of a landlord or a wealthy sponsor, the troupes were subsequently invited to perform elsewhere. During Portuguese rule, when censorship was in effect, the first show had to be performed at the residence or compound of the 'Rejidor' (equivalent to a *patil* or mayor) for approval. Thematically the khells have shifted from social sketches to concern with present day problems such as environmental degradation, corruption in society and the loss of values.

*Contra Dança* was similar to khell, where the improvised material satirised the pomposity and cupidity of the landlords. It eschewed the vulgarity and ribaldry of the khells. The *contra dança* performers were accompanied by one or two violinists. There were no accompanying percussion or wind instruments. The big landlords invited them to perform in their mansions and the prelude to the performance consisted of their ceremonial procession permitted only through the great halls. The landlords laughed at their own foibles but certain decorum was always maintained by the performers, thus lacking the more boisterous public performance of the khells.

The zagors, and Carnival khells (with the notable exception of the *mussallam phell* and *mell* which are community performances), and *Contra Dança* performances can be looked upon as precursors of modern Konkani theatre.

## Zagors in Bombay

When the first Goan migrants settled in Bombay in the early nineteenth century, they also performed zagors as a part of their cultural life. The Goan emigrant population in Bombay provided the participants as well as the audience for the cultural activities. Those who were not provided with living quarters at the workplace usually resided in the *room* or village club (*coodd* or *coor*). Separate clubs were set up for ladies. In some clubs there was even a provision for a family room, which could be booked for about a week at a time. Seamen and those going abroad for employment found this arrangement very convenient as they did not have to be separated from female members of their family who came to see them off or receive them on their return. . There were about 500 such Goan clubs. Many of the Goan clubs were situated in the Marine Lines – Dhobitalao area. There were also some in the Mazagaon area. The club was like 'a home away from the village'. It provided a convenient social support system for the migrant workers and also helped to keep up ties with fellow villagers. Life in the club also kept alive the local Goan traditions such as evening prayers (the Angelus, the Rosary and the Litany), Goan cuisine and celebrations of feasts followed up by entertainment in the form of dances or theatrical performances. The club fulfilled the responsibility of functioning like the *mand* in Goa.

Mand is the name for an open place in the village, which through traditional usage has become sanctified. It is the area used for the inaugural worship which precedes ritual performances such as zagor and mussallam phell amongst the Christians, and shigmo and dhalo (variation of *dhavalgit*) amongst the Hindus.

Although in Goa the Gavda community staged zagors primarily for its own members, in Bombay zagors were not enacted by Gavdas, but initially by persons who worked as domestic servants, cooks and butlers. Zagors were usually staged at Alfred Theatre, Bombay Skating Rink, Gaiety Theatre (the present Capitol Cinema), Novelty Theatre, Opera House and Victoria Theatre. The entire Goan expatriate community did not favour zagors. In fact because of the destructive criticism and vulgarities, decent people refrained from attending them. There has been a general impression that zagors were an unrefined form of entertainment. But all zagors were not crude. While some were in bad taste, others were very good and entertaining. Even Dadabhai Naoroji, the then Member of Parliament attended a zagor show in December 1893 at the Victoria Theatre, Bombay. This theatre was electrified for the first time and specially illuminated for the occasion (Claro 1994, 85). The hall was packed to capacity for this performance.

## Theatres in Bombay

The infrastructure that was set up by the Bombay mercantile class also facilitated the entertainment scenario for Goans. The halls, Gaiety and Novelty, attracted English and European performers on their global tours. The two halls were used for early cinematic exhibitions as well. Louis and August Lumiere sent one of their emissaries, Maurice Sestier, to screen the Cinématographe in Bombay in 1896. The first movies were shown on July 7, 1896 at 7 p.m. at Watson's Hotel (now known as Army and Navy building, opposite Prince of Wales Museum). After the initial shows at Watson's Hotel the Lumière Brothers Cinématographe was moved to the Novelty in the same year.

Audiences were exuberant and fulsome in their praise or blame of theatrical performances. A favourable reception was demonstrated by loud applause, shouting, and demands that a song or dance be repeated 'once more'. Multiple curtain calls and showering of artists with cash gifts or *inam* were also common. Hurling of slippers, rotten fruit, empty liquor bottles and shouts of 'shame, shame', indicated disfavour. Some of these features were also reflected in Konkani tiatr.

## Theatre by Educated Goans in Bombay

Educated Goans had been staging English and Portuguese plays in Bombay. Members of the Instituto Luso-Indiano generally performed these once or twice a year at Gaiety Theatre, Bori Bunder or Cawasji Hall, Dhobitalao. S. G. De Souza Karachiwalla and John Lazarus were among the prominent producers of drama in English or plays translated into Konkani. Around the same time when *Italian Bhurgo* was performed, a Portuguese comedy in three acts titled *Doutor a Forca do Pau* was staged in Bombay. It was a translation, by a Goan, J. S. Diogenese Noronha, of Moliere's '*Le Médecin malgré lui*'. Lucasinho studied the situation and took the middle path. His attempts brought back respectability to Konkani entertainment in Bombay. In fact, handbills for João Agostinho Fernandes' later dramas credited both of them with bringing about the end of zagors in Bombay. Within the context of Goan theatre, it is important to understand the role of music, and therefore trace its development within Goa and export through the diaspora.

## SALIENT ASPECTS OF TIATR

### From *Teatro* and *Theatro* to Tiatr

*Teatro*, both in Portuguese and Italian means theatre and can also be used for drama. The term *teatro* has been in use in Goa ever since dramatic performances were held here with the advent of the Portuguese. While the initial religious plays including Passion plays in the early sixteenth century were in Latin as well as in vernacular languages (Martins 1975, 176), there were also *theatrical* performances in other European languages such as Portuguese, Spanish and French, from the seventeenth to the nineteenth century. Two of the stalwarts who pioneered modern drama in the native Konkani language were born in the third quarter of the nineteenth century. Constancio Lucasinho Caridade Ribeiro was born on January 18, 1863 at Sokol Vaddo, Assagao (near Mapusa in North Goa). João Agostinho Fernandes was born on December 14, 1871 at Borda, Margão (South Goa). Both Lucasinho Ribeiro and João Agostinho Fernandes would have been familiar with the zagors and khells in Goa as well as the songs vocalised on various occasions. They were also aware of the Goans' attitude towards the zagors being performed in Bombay, and the need for alternative forms of entertainment for the expatriate community. It is reported that khells were also being performed in Bombay up to the late nineteenth century. The troupes would go from one Goan club to another on foot, accompanied by a drummer and a trumpeter. But such itinerant rounds were seen as rather amusing by onlookers and locals who did not know the background of this cultural activity, and therefore khells declined in popularity and the performances suffered.

In Bombay, Bori Bunder, Grant Road, Dadar and Mahim were some of the localities where zagors were being performed. As in Goa, the zagors in Bombay too had become occasions for gossiping. If any girl or woman in the locality was having an affair, it would be highlighted at the zagor. Sailors' wives were often the subject matter of such gossip. Neighbourhood quarrels would find re-enactment on the zagor stage. Many of the dialogues would contain sexual innuendos. Most educated persons were disgusted with the vulgarity in the zagors. The zagors continued to be performed till the *teatros* appeared on stage in Konkani and gained popular support. It is no wonder that Ribeiro and Fernandes were eulogised for being the pioneers of the Konkani tiatr that led to the decline and elimination of zagors in Bombay.

Given Lucasinho's background of having worked for the Italian opera company, it is not surprising to find that the first tiatr, which he decided to stage, had elements borrowed from the Italian operatic form, and he even titled the drama *Italian Bhurgo*. Since it was at his initiative that the path-breaking drama in Konkani was being staged, his companions accepted his leadership and the fact that he was the most experienced among them in matters concerning stagecraft. When attempts were made to pinpoint the pioneers in Konkani theatre, some writers credited João Agostinho Fernandes as the founder of modern Konkani drama. João Agostinho has been rightly regarded as '*Pai tiatrist*' (the father of Konkani tiatr). However, João Agostinho himself set the record straight with reference to the pioneer, by writing in the *Ave Maria* newspaper on November 25, 1943, in connection with the golden jubilee celebrations of Konkani Theatre. The article is highly significant in tracing the history and development of tiatr.

The foundation was strengthened and later Mr. Ribeiro presented *Alladin*, *Ali Baba* and *Carlos Magno*, all performed under the banner of the Goa Portuguese Dramatic Company. Mr. Ribeiro left and formed another company called Ribeiro and D'Cruz Opera Co. Several (dramatic) clubs were founded which survived for a few years and then became defunct. Among these were: Lusitan, Dona Amelia, Dom Carlos, Douglas Comic Opera, Karachiwalla's Delectable Company, Goan Union, Lazarus Comic Opera, and Goa Nacional and Union Jack. Some of the others were Goan Amateurs Dramatic Club, Jolly Boys Amateurs Co., Star

Affonseca Dramatic Company, The Mazagon Opera Co., Goan United Dramatic Association, Dom Manuel Braganza Dramatic Co, The Leading Amateurs Dramatic Club of Margao, Bombay Portuguese Association, Grand Original Artistes, Goan Capital Theatrical Co., The Portuguese Heroes Co., and The Stars of Bombay. All these groups or clubs came up like mushrooms and vanished.

Though Lucasinho may not have received much of a salary by working for the Italian opera troupe, the experience paid him rich dividends in securing him the position of a pioneer in the history of modern Konkani drama. Even after a centenary of performances, the general structure of today's tiatrs still retains some of the elements of opera with which Lucasinho initiated the process.

## Etymology of Tiatr

The Goan dramatists who began writing plays in Bombay initially called them operas. As seen earlier, many of the dramatic troupes were named as opera companies or opera troupes. And indeed they were, because they generally produced musical plays. The trend that the founders had started, of having plays with integrated songs, continues even today. When humour played a major role in the composition, the plays were called musical comedies. In fact João Agostinho extensively used the word *comed* along with 'drama'. His very first original creation, *The Belle of Cavel* was a musical comedy. The publicity for these early plays was done in English. When *Batcara [Part I]* was premiered on November 22, 1904, the original handbill for its publicity was printed entirely in English. Hence the word *theatro* came into use based on the English word 'theatre'. The final 'o' would keep the word closer to the Portuguese word *teatro*, which many of the Goans were already familiar with. Consequently, when João Agostinho printed *Batcara Part I* in 1909 he referred to the play as a *theatro*. For the staging of *Batcara Part II* in 1911, the play was advertised in English as a musical comedy. Subsequently the word *theatro* became a regular feature. The first major change towards Konkani phonetics by dropping the final 'o', occurred in March 1932 when *Bebdo* was publicised as a *theatr* to be performed in Vasco da Gama, Goa. The same handbill also contains the word 'theatre' in English. *The Belle of Cavel* too was advertised as a *theatr* in May 1932 at Margao. The change seems to have been short-lived, as about two years later *theatro* was back in vogue for *Vauraddi* in Margao. The next exceptional modification appeared in the *Goa Mail* newspaper (in June 1937) when a review of João Agostinho's *Drama, Comed ani Farsam, Volume I*, referred to his *teatr*. The next deviation from *Theatr* was *Thiatr* in a handbill for *Kunbi Jakki* on November 21, 1941. From then on the option of choosing any of these terms, namely *theatr*, *theatro*, *teatr*, *teatro*, *thiatr* or *tiatr* seems to have been open to the Konkani playwrights and critics. *Tiatr* is more in keeping with Konkani phonetics ('i' as /i:/). In contemporary usage, *tiatro* and *tiatr* are increasingly preferred.

## SCRIPTS

João Agostinho, the 'father of Konkani tiatr', led by his example of preserving manuscripts and publishing his plays and associated musical notations. Additionally, in 1908, he published an album of songs along with the music. Sebastiao Gabriel D'Souza published his dramas *Kustoba*, *Faust 1*, and *Faust 2*. He also printed *Comik Cantaranche Album* and *Cantarache Chear Album*. Not too many have followed in their footsteps. Only in the last quarter of the twentieth century, Tomazinho Cardozo, Planton Faria, Freddy J. Da Costa and Cezar D'Mello have published most of their tiatrs. In fact, one

of the greatest challenges a researcher or student of tiatr faces, is the lack of proper documentation. Senior citizens report that some of the tiatrs were narrated by the composer/director to the actors, and they would fill in additional parts of the dialogues as they rehearsed. The freedom of innovation and adjustments permitted the more creative actors to make positive contributions towards the dramas. But if the text was not transcribed, the expertise was lost. In many cases, the loss of precious manuscripts occurred through lack of proper storage or destruction by termites or silver fish.

During the Portuguese era in Goa, and the British regulations in Bombay, the script had to be submitted to the Censor for approval. Even the performances in both locations were monitored by representatives of the Censor. In Goa, handbills were required to carry a translation in Portuguese of whatever was being stated in the text, and a remark 'Visada pela Censura' (seen by the Censor) was printed on the leaflet.

With the support provided by the Tiatr Academy of Goa and Dalgado Konkani Akademi, more tiatrists are now encouraged to publish their scripts.

## CLASSIFICATION

Various criteria can be used to classify tiatrs. The major criteria are themes, genres and the types or media of presentation. Tiatrs can be broadly classified into three categories according to their themes: social, religious and political.

Most of the tiatrs (over ninety per cent in the last one hundred years) are social dramas dealing with family and society. The themes explore relationships and problems within the family or families. Conflicts and situations that affect the community as a whole take precedence in this category, since tiatrs have been used as a very effective means of social reform. Some of the issues explored here are dowry, caste and class discrimination, dignity of labour, harmful addictions, anti-social behaviour, and superstitions, among others. *Divorce* by Aristides Dias was the first tiatr that completed 100 performances on October 5, 1980.

Religious plays were staged mainly in the Lenten season when other kinds of enjoyable dramas could not be staged. Most of these are written by the clergy and based on the life of Jesus, on the lives of saints, biblical stories or those on Christian/human values. Writers included in this category are Fr. Dominic Alvares s.f.x. (Society of Francis Xavier, Pilar, Goa), Fr. Freddy J Da Costa, Fr. Ivo Conceicao De Souza, Fr. Jose Antonio Da Costa, Fr. Lucas Rodrigues s.f.x., Fr. Matthew Fernandes s.f.x., Fr. Nevell Gracias, Fr. Planton Faria, Fr. Peter Cardozo s.f.x., Fr. Ubaldo Fernandes s.f.x.

Among lay persons J. P. Souzalin (Jose Pascoal Fernandes, 1903–1970) has been highly acclaimed as the writer and director of religious plays. Some of his plays were: *Sat Dukhi*, *Sad Aimorecho*, *Nimanneo Chear Vostu*, *Patkanchem Dar*, *Dev Bapachi Dhuv*, *Essua ani Jacob*, *Jesus ani Judas*, *Padre Agnel*, *Panch Mister Horkache*, *Bhagivont Josechi Khorvont*, and *Sam Anton*. In what seemed to be a world record at that time, his *Sam Francis Xavier* was staged at the Princess Theatre, Bhangwadi for three shows on the same day, November 25, 1969, and all three shows played to a full house.

The earliest attempt at writing a political tiatr based on Goan history, was made by João Agostinho Fernandes when he composed *Revolt De Sattari* (or *Ranneanchem Traisaum*) in April 1897 and staged it in Bombay. Political dramas could not be staged in Goa during the Portuguese rule and any undesirable reference to the colonisers resulted in harassment of the artiste. Robin Vaz reportedly suffered at the hands of Agente Monteiro, a Portuguese police officer, for remarks having political overtones. Hence,

political plays are a recent phenomena, seen only after Goa's liberation in 1961. Nelson Afonso's *Nationalist* was the first of the post-liberation political dramas. In recent times Tomazinho Cardozo and Mike Mehta have been active in writing political tiatrs.

On a very broad scale, tiatrs can again be classified under the genres of comedy, tragedy, and tragi-comedy. As a matter of fact most tiatrs are either comedies or tragi-comedies. Even in comedies, some element of melodrama is likely to exist. Since the tiatrs are the most popular form of theatrical entertainment in Konkani, the comic element is essential for any commercial success.

## Media of Presentation

No doubt most dramas would be regarded as tiatrs if they were performed on the stage. But there is a need to recognise that there are also performances of tiatrs off the stage. Traditional khells or khell-tiatrs continue to be performed on the ground in many villages in south Goa during the Carnival. Another popular medium is the radio, and some tiatrs have been broadcast as tele-plays. In comparison to the local TV, radio has been promoting tiatrs by broadcasting them on AIR for the past several decades. Before economic development was widespread, people looked forward to listening to the plays being broadcast on the radio.

## Language

Though Konkani is the language for the tiatrs, there can be variations according to the choice of the Bardez (North Goa) or Salçete (South Goa) dialect. Generally, the Bardez variety was preferred. But in recent times South Goa has had much more theatrical activity and the language preference is undergoing changes. Other languages such as Portuguese, French, Hindi, Marathi and English have also been integrated into the scripts. Formal language is used for most of the dramas, but a colloquial variant is employed for comic effect. When Salçete Konkani was used in tiatrs in North Goa, it induced laughter because of the quaintness of the phonetic expression.

## PHASES OF TIATR AND SOME PROMINENT TIATRISTS

The Konkani tiatr fraternity has a very large membership. Hundreds of persons have been involved in the tiatrs in different capacities—as writers, directors, singers, comedians, musicians, prompters, stage managers, contractors and in several allied jobs. The inter-dependence is undeniable, but there is no doubt that of all the personnel, the composer is of primary importance. A good script is the essential ingredient for a successful drama. As seen earlier, not all dramas were written down fully. As rehearsals and performances progressed, adjustments and changes were made in the script. The comedians would add their impromptu bits on the stage. But every little correction or interpolation would not necessarily be jotted down. The drama was normally staged for one season or two, after Easter and after the monsoons. In many cases the scripts were then forgotten. Very few tiatrists found it necessary to publish their plays. Perhaps rightly so, because the Konkani readership of yester years was fed more on romances (novels) and newspapers for reading, while tiatrs were for audio-visual enjoyment. With the proliferation of the entertainment available through the electronic media, the reading habit has further deteriorated now. Consequently, even though thousands of tiatrs have been produced over the last century, only a few are available in print.

Realising this awkward situation, attempts were made to have some representative plays printed. As a result of these efforts, the Goa Konkani Akademi published ten tiatrs in two volumes till date. The first volume covered the works of later tiatrists, as their scripts were more accessible and the writers were still alive when the collection was being compiled. The authors had a say in determining which of their plays could be published in this collection. The second volume contained plays of the first generation of tiatrists. Here the factors that came into consideration were the reputation of the plays chosen by the editor and the availability of the scripts. A third volume was also planned, to project the skills of the non-stop tiatrists, but this compilation has not yet seen the light of day.

Any attempt to classify the eras of the tiatr development must take into consideration several criteria. In the case of the Konkani tiatr this job is made a little difficult because there have not been many attempts to categorise these phases. However, there does exist some consensus among the tiatr exponents that the best era of Konkani drama was during the active lifetime of the great playwrights and comedians. This period could be located roughly from the mid-thirties to the mid-seventies. Within this period too, there was one great historical event, the Liberation of Goa from Portuguese rule in December 1961 that marked a turning point for many aspects of Goan history and culture. The Liberation meant freedom from the shackles of the censorship that was in force during the Portuguese regime. It was not altogether lifted, as many of the Portuguese laws still continued in Goa. But there was a feeling of freedom that gave wings to artistic creativity. One of the indicators of this freedom was the possibility of staging political tiatrs, a category that was unthinkable during the colonial occupation. But to be fair to the media of the pre-Liberation era, it must be pointed out that newspapers in Portuguese and Konkani did carry reviews and articles concerning tiatrs. Pedro Correia Afonso, Nagesh Karmali and Sanches De Sousa were among the writers and critics who contributed to *A Vida* and *Vauraddeancho Ixtt. Emissora de Goa* broadcast, an unprecedented special programme lasting almost two hours, as a tribute to Minguel Rod when he passed away on October 4, 1955.

In the last part of this phase came the Middle Eastern oil boom. With the meteoric rise of the economy in the Gulf region, Goans found a new source of employment— one that would also have its impact in terms of socio-cultural changes in Goa. The emigrations to Bombay, the rest of British India, and the colonies in Africa had provided employment in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Now the boom in the Gulf job opportunities, particularly for unskilled labour, provided a channel of income whose end-effect in Goa would do much to obliterate the class distinctions that existed for several centuries. Many who had been poor, now had the financial power to purchase properties, own television sets (a status symbol at that time) and telephones, wear branded products, etc. Meanwhile, the situation in Bombay too had changed for Goans.

Goans no longer looked forward to Bombay as the land of opportunity. Housing had become difficult. Many of the traditional clubs had closed down due to degraded buildings or because the construction industry had bought them off. The music (in films) industry, which had been a stronghold of Goans, had fallen into crisis. Goans had started relocating to Goa or moving to the suburbs of Bombay, or emigrating abroad to the United States, Canada and Britain.

The changes in Bombay and Goa resulted in the gradual decrease in the number of tiatrists available in Bombay and a rise in their activities in Goa. And with the entry of the Middle East factor, there was now a prospect and a demand for entertaining Goans in the Gulf region. The tiatr fraternity did not miss this opportunity. Many of the tiatrists started touring the Gulf States of Kuwait, Bahrain, Dubai, and the other regions of the United Arab Emirates, and performing musical shows and tiatrs.

Having considered all these factors, we can attempt to attach broad labels to the phases. Some of the artistes who have worked for more than fifty years may have their work spread over two or more phases. The phases would be:

1. The Early Phase from 1892 to the 1930s,
2. The Golden Phase:
  - a. The first part from the 1930s to 1961 (Liberation of Goa).
  - b. The second part from 1961 to the seventies,
3. The Non-Stop tiatr and the Contemporary Phase.

### **The Early Phase from 1892 to the 1930s**

The dramatists of this phase are the pioneers and the immediate beneficiaries. These names have been listed here as most of them have not been included in other sources. Some of these names have been sourced from the original handbill (1904) and printed copies (1909, 1937) of *Batcara Part I*, and from *Dotichem Kestaum* (staged in 1908 and printed in 1937). Among these artistes were Lucasinho Ribeiro, João Agostinho Fernandes, Caitaninho Fernandes, and Agostinho Mascarenhas as the pioneers. Some of the early ladies on stage were Regina Fernandes, Carmelina Fernandes, N. Gomes, Luiza Maria Fernandes, Sophia Fernandes and Anne Fernandes. Among the gentlemen we find Policarpo Mendonça, N. M. Fernandes, A. J. F. Dias, Ann de Souza, Minguel D'Souza, D. Fernandes, E. B. Vaz, S. X. Vaz, F. X. Pereira, S. Fernandes, J. M. Nunes Pinto, A. Diniz, Roque Rodrigues, F. D'Souza, Joaquim Pereira, J. L. Rodrigues, Pascoal Fernandes, Venancio Fernandes, J. A. Baptista, Rosario Pereira, L. C. Afonso, Sebastiao Gabriel de Souza (Karachiwalla), Anthony Toloo, John Lazaro D'Souza, Joao Luis Carvalho, Affonceka (Assiss João Avelino Afonso), Dennis Simoes, J. Aquila, A. J. Rocha (Saib Rocha) and many more.

From among these artistes, we have seen the importance of Lucasinho Ribeiro and João Agostinho Fernandes as the founders of the Konkani stage. Karachiwalla translated Shakespeare's *Merchant of Venice*, *As You Like It*, *Winter's Tale* and *Hamlet* into Konkani and presented them in Bombay. He also composed *Carlos Magno ani Bara Par Fransache*, *Kusttoba*, *Roldao Xinvachea Pottant*. He published three plays and two collections of songs. John Lazaro produced *Romeo and Juliet*. His *Godd Vikh* had thirty parts and the entire play had to be performed over a stretch of three days. Saib Rocha wrote more than sixty plays. Some of his reputed plays were *Romeo and Juliet*, *Dubavi Ghorcarn*, *Noketr Italia Xarachem*, *Gupit Cazar*, *Mog ani Krim*, *Calsad Nouro*, *Ghor Zanvoim*, *Son of Jerusalem*, and *Ankvarancho Sounsar*.

### **Tiatrists from the Golden Phase (from the 1930s to the 1970s)**

Some of the tiatrists who rose to fame during this era were Rogaciano D'Souza, Jack Aquila, Ernesto Rebelo, Saib Rocha, John Battlu, J. P. Souzalin, J. R. Fernandes (Fithna), Dioguinho D'Melo, Luis Borges, A. R. Souza Ferrao, Aleixinho de Candolim, John F. Costa Bir, Champion Alvares, Kid Boxer, Young Menezes, Minguel Rod, S. T. Miranda, A. M. B. Rose, Master Vaz, Freddy Barboza, Anthony Mendes and Vincent de Saligao. By the fifties there came on stage another generation of tiatrists such as C. Alvares, Rennie Colaco, Prem Kumar, M. Boyer, John Claro Fernandes, Jacinto Vaz, Alfred Rose, Rico Rod and Titta Pretto. These tiatrists were instrumental in maintaining the high standards that the founders expected of them. Among the ladies, Carlota D'Souza and Ermelinda Rocha were

later joined by Mohana, Shalini, Filomena Braz, Carmen Rose, Cecilia Machado, Antoneta Mendes, Ophelia Cabral, Rita Rose, Clara, Platilda, Sabina, Jessie Dias, Betty Naz and Betty Fernandes. With the exception of the father-figure *Pai* tiatrist João Agostinho, most of the other prominent artistes began their work during the Golden phase.

### **The Non-Stop Tiatr and the Contemporary Tiatr Phase**

The tiatr activity that picked up after the liberation of Goa gathered momentum and became widespread, giving opportunity to many young enthusiasts. Depending on their age, some tiatrists began their work soon after Goa's liberation. So it should not be misconstrued that they are to be classified only in this phase. As almost all of them are still alive and very active they have been included in the contemporary period. Among these are Tomazinho Cardozo, Irene Cardozo, Wilson Mazarello, Sharon Mazarello, Premanand Sangodkar, Brazinho Soares, Cezar De Mello, Caitan Pereira, Alvito Araujo, Alfred Fernandes, Michael Gracias, Albert Cabral, Rosy Alvares, William de Curtorim, and Sylvester Vaz, who have made a mark in this period.

The post-Liberation period also saw the spurt in khell-tiatrs which later became non-stop tiatrs. Some of the tiatrists who are more prominent in this variety are Antonio Moraes, Patrick Dourado, Socorro Fernandes, C. De Silva, Premanand Lotlikar, Ligorio Fernandes, Pascoal Rodrigues, Christopher Leitao, Jose Rod, Jack Ferry, John De Silva, Menino de Bandar, Roseferns, Prince Jacob, Humberto Fernandes, Felipe Almeida, Lawry and Jenny, Vitorin Pereira, Mario Menezes, Ben Evangelisto, comedian Dominic, and comedian Agostinho.

### **Competition from other Forms of Entertainment**

The latter half of the twentieth century has seen the tiatr achieve success in terms of popularity through all-round development, but questions have also been raised about its standard and tenacity to survive. According to John Russell Brown (1997), 'theatre has strong and well-financed rivals in television, film, popular music, and spectator sports, which provide more easily exploitable forms of entertainment' (1). While this statement is true in a general sense, some of the Konkani tiatrists have outsmarted the rival forms of amusement and used them for their own popularity and benefit. Several tiatrs have been video-filmed and are being shown through the cable television networks, particularly in South Goa. Such a medium keeps the fans in touch with their favourite tiatrists and encourages them to see the live shows. Films without tiatrists fared badly compared to those with a major cast of dramatists. Tiatrs in Bombay had such a high standard that the famous film producer of yesteryears, V. Shantaram, in 1948, thought of filming some shots of Konkani tiatr using film cameras. The music scenario has been the exclusive domain of tiatrists. In all tiatrs, songs have been an essential element. At times the singers have been the major attractions at dramas. The very sight of Minguel Rod sitting in the ticket booth at a drama in Santa-Cruz set off frenzy among the buyers, and tickets were sold out within a few minutes. In fact some of the singers such as M. Boyer and Alfred Rose have been such crowd-pullers that they have had to sing at two or more dramas within a few hours. Such a singer would sing two or three songs in the initial period at the first venue and then travel to the next immediately by car or motorcycle. They also commanded high fees for their performances. The combination of Lorna Cordeiro's voice with Chris Perry's music has resulted in Konkani songs that are considered to be classics, to be appreciated for many generations to come. According to the era and the medium available, all major tiatrists have

recorded songs on vinyl discs of His Master's Voice, Columbia and Polydor; produced audio cassettes, and with the availability of digital recording, have been cutting compact discs. Video recordings of songs are telecast. Many of the older recordings are now being transformed into the compact disc format, or remixed and re-recorded.

All these arguments may seem to give a rosy picture of Konkani tiatrists, but it is not the complete story. There is no doubt that tiatrists enjoy a reputation among Konkani speakers in Goa, Bombay and elsewhere. However, it must be remembered that besides these, the various other forms of entertainment such as cable television, internet, music etc., are all competing for a market share in the recreation sector. And given the simple economic situation of limited means having to choose from unlimited forms of entertainment, the tiatrs are facing challenges in retaining audiences.

## Crisis in Tiatrs

There seems to be an impression now that the tiatr which boasted of completing a century just over a decade back, is now on the decline. The reasons are many and varied. Some of these have been mentioned elsewhere, such as the demographic changes that affected Goans in Bombay and the rise of theatrical activity in Goa after Liberation. Tiatrists themselves have also been analysing the lacunae and challenges. The developments in television technology have affected many aspects of life and culture, so their effects cannot be limited to tiatrs. In spite of the entry of educated writers there has not been a visible rise in the quality of tiatr scripts encompassing both the plot and the *kants/cantos* (songs which are integral to the play). It has often been difficult to get reputed artistes together to prepare the drama for staging. Other reasons that have contributed to the crisis include lack of novelty, attraction towards the English language and neglect of Konkani, high cost of production, availability of recorded songs and lack of unity among tiatrists. And combined with all such factors is the fact that the Non-Stop variant of drama has overcome the drawbacks of tiatrs and made rapid progress in satisfying audiences.

## Rise of Non-Stop Dramas

The traditional *khells* had been transformed into *khell-tiatrs* by Antonio Moraes, by raising them from the ground to the stage (replete with curtains) in March 1956. Whereas earlier, the same costumes (consisting of top hat, sleeping suit and zinc swords swinging at the waist) were worn for the entire play, Moraes insisted on changes in costumes to suit the roles or the characters. He split the performance into *porde* or scenes. Being a musician, he introduced a proper drum set and a musical interlude between scenes. By skillfully eliminating the time-gaps between changes of scenes, he brought in the term 'Non-Stop' *khell-tiatr* in December 1962, when his troupe toured Bombay. However, these used to be two plays being staged, one each before and after the recess. In 1976, Rosario Rodrigues staged a single full length three-hour play and christened it 'Non-Stop Drama'.

The eighties and after, have seen a spurt in the number of Non-Stop dramas being staged in and outside Goa. The tiatr had evolved to the state where the writer's responsibility was only for the script and the *cantos*. The sideshows, songs and other interludes could be composed by the performing artistes who were not necessarily members of the cast for that play. Non-Stop tiatrs are generally performed by troupes, and this facilitates co-ordination and rehearsals. Thus they got rid of prompting. In the Non-Stop tiatr, the writer is responsible for the entire script including the songs and comic interludes or side shows performed by the troupe members who are an integral part of the cast for the play. The Non-Stop

tiatrs also eliminated songs that were not related to the play. However, because of the importance of these songs, and in order to encourage fresh talent as well as to cater to the demands of the audience, they have begun to incorporate such *kantaram* (songs). The Non-Stop tiatrs were severely criticised and blamed for lowering the standards of Konkani theatre. Their dialogues were allegedly raucous, delivered in an unnatural, singsong style. They were accused of giving no moral to the audience and that left the spectators with little to reflect on except the jokes and antics of the comedian. A major differentiating factor was the cost of production. Non-Stop dramas could be produced at a quarter of the cost of a tiatr. The refinements brought in by the artistes have vastly improved the Non-Stop tiatrs or dramas. For most members of the public, there is little to distinguish between the tiatr and the Non-Stop tiatr. All the essential elements of drama such as a good plot, emotive acting, great language, songs, music, etc. are found in both. In fact many advertisements have stopped using the label Non-Stop. Now all such Konkani dramas are labelled as tiatrs.

## CONCLUSION

When João Agostinho encouraged the dejected Lucasinho Ribeiro to proceed with plans for staging the first Konkani opera (*Italian Bhurgo*), he was conscious of the objective they had to achieve; the best way to do away with the undesirable zagors was to provide a decent alternative form of entertainment for the Konkani speaking community in Bombay. They faced many hurdles initially, finding it difficult to get the required number of actors, but their persistence created a revolution that changed the entertainment scenario for Goans in Bombay. The success of the pioneering venture boosted their confidence and they proceeded to perform several other operettas and adaptations of plays.

The existence of the infrastructure in Bombay aided their efforts. Spacious, comfortable theatres and opera halls were available. The Goan emigrants in the music industry in Bombay assured provision of musicians. And of course, in keeping with their nature of relishing entertainment, Goans responded enthusiastically to patronise the fledgling Konkani theatre in Bombay.

Lucasinho did not hesitate to bring the novelty of the theatrical experience to Goa. And so the first teatro was staged by him in his native village Assagao on New Year's Day, 1894. Thereafter he continued performing in Bombay and staged more teatros in Assagao on his subsequent visits to Goa.

While some of the playwrights continued adapting western plays, João Agostinho realised that the best contribution he could make was in dealing with issues that affected the lives of Goans in Bombay and Goa. Thus, very early in his career he set out to feature themes linked to Goans (and by extension, to society in general): the value and impact of education particularly on girls, the freedom to choose one's life partner as opposed to arranged marriages, drunkenness and its consequent effects on the individual and the family, the evils of the caste and class systems and their ramifications, the evil of dowry and the dignity of manual labour. In his plays, he also dealt with socialis themes. In brief, the tiatrs were all about human values and their importance in society.

While the moral emphasis formed the core of the tiatrs, the presentation was made attractive and entertaining through humour and songs. No doubt the greatest attractions in many tiatrs have been the comedians. But beyond their antics, the tiatrs were sustained by good scripts, skilful use of language and developments in technical aspects.

Whereas a conscious effort was made to obliterate the zagors in Bombay (the khells having been phased out through lack of patronage), in Goa both these folk forms continued their run. The indigenous

theatrical forms were closely linked with the life of the people and their cultural festivities. Though the zagors had been vulgarised, the khells retained the moral codes which they had absorbed through the Morality Plays and Portuguese *Actos* enacted in Goa. There was, of course, the established theatre in Portuguese, but it remained the exclusive privilege of the educated elite. Folk songs too had been appropriated by the upper class and transformed into song and dance for the aristocrats. But the zagors, khells and other folk performances continued their existence with the support and participation of the people until these forms were also affected by changes in society.

The Liberation of Goa from Portuguese rule in 1961, the decline of tiatrs in Bombay, the employment opportunities in the Middle East, the change in emigration patterns of Goans have all affected Konkani drama. The present day Mumbai has to depend on troupes from Goa for performances of tiatrs. Besides visiting Mumbai, the troupes are also in demand to perform at other Indian cities having Konkani speakers. Hence the troupes have been performing in Mangalore, Bangalore, Poona, Ahmedabad, Nagpur, and Delhi as well. There is also an increasing demand for tiatrs in the Middle East. In fact, Konkani speakers in places such as Kuwait and Dubai have started organising their own tiatrs and one-act plays in Konkani. Still further away, London is fast becoming another centre for Konkani tiatrs and performances have been held in the USA and Canada. Internet news magazines report the enthusiasm generated at such cultural activities which help them to retain the link with the mother tongue and the ancestral homeland. Feasts, corresponding to the village church feasts in Goa, are being celebrated there too.

We also have to reckon with the role of the Church and its attitudes towards tiatrs. Whereas religious plays have been performed through the centuries as aids to catechesis or the spiritual edification of the faithful, the Church had largely shirked away from involvement in secular theatre. However, with the winds of change and the new spirit that blew through the Catholic Church as a result of the Second Vatican Council in the sixties, there has been a significant change in the Church's stance. An increasing number of priests are involving themselves in music and Konkani theatre.

In the present day academic atmosphere of debates on colonisation, and extensive post-colonial discourses, it is relevant to discuss briefly the attitudes of tiatrists towards the Portuguese colonisers. Criticism of the Portuguese has been largely absent in tiatrs. One of the reasons was the functioning of the censorship in Goa as well as in Bombay. But this was not the major reason. The other reason was that under the Portuguese rule, life was fairly comfortable. Basic necessities were assured, law and order, sanitation were strictly enforced, and minimum educational opportunities were available. However, there was no political freedom, and there were many issues of social injustice. But these defects were inherited from the local culture rather than imposed by the colonisers. Of course one cannot ignore the fact that at certain times in history there was social turmoil because of religious zeal or intolerance. However, taking a very comprehensive view, the Goans were *susegad* (relaxed). In fact some social evils such as the hindrances to remarriage of widows were frowned upon by the Portuguese. Rather than straining themselves to fight for political rights, the tiatrists realised that social reforms were more urgent. Hence they highlighted the crucial themes concerning attitudes and relationships between different sections of society.

The fervour of seeking liberation from the colonisers gathered momentum only after India obtained independence. There had been a few rebellions and uprisings in Goa, but only a small number of these were for gaining political independence of the territory. With the demand for liberation growing in the late forties, the Portuguese here realised that it was only a matter of time before they would have to quit

(though the Salazar regime in Portugal thought differently). With Liberation came other changes whose effects are now discussed in contemporary *tiatrs*.

Contemporary *tiatrs* are loaded with themes relating to politics, corruption, environmental degradation. *Tiatrs* must be admired for keeping up with social changes and foregrounding the pitfalls even before the problems rise to alarming levels. Abuse of drugs, divorce, AIDS and its consequences have been dealt with at their very initial stages. While evils are castigated, the good is upheld.

Networking through various media is raising awareness levels among Konkani speakers to a new high. The Press and the Internet are being widely used for this purpose. A few years back there was very little information on the Internet about *tiatrs*. Now several news items, reviews, photographs and videos are being posted. Konkani music too is available on the Internet. The idea of a global community of specific interests is truly being fulfilled, and *tiatrs* are gaining from the use of this technology.

Questions will be raised time and again about the standards and the future of *tiatr*. The dramatic form may take a few knocks, adjust and adapt to changes and innovations, but at heart it will remain a *tiatr*. Audiences, particularly from the rural areas, have remained faithful to the Konkani theatre as it fulfills the twin objectives of entertainment and moral edification. The dramatic form is appreciated as an integral element of Konkani culture. *Tiatr* has an assured future because it is essentially in Konkani, a language dear to the hearts of its speakers.

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