

*Tiatr*

## Its Development and Scope for Study

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**W**HEN WE LOOK AT the development of theatre in Goa, we find that there were native traditions of music and dramatic performances even before the arrival of the Portuguese. Religious celebrations usually incorporated associated festivities. In fact, every temple had a courtyard or space with a stage for performances. Every feast would be celebrated with the *zagronn* or *zagor*, a night-long vigil with performances forming part of the celebrations. Even in a new or reconstructed temple, there is always provision for a staging area. Hindustani and Karnatic music was prevalent in Goa. Indigenous musical instruments such as *ghumott*, *maddlem* and *tas* (cymbals) were used. There were dances such as *fugddi* and *dekhnni* among a list of at least fourteen.

One of the earliest and significant references to indigenous music is from 1513, just three years after the conquest of Goa by Afonso de Albuquerque. The Portuguese governor, presumably Francisco De Almeida, was accustomed to dining while being entertained in the courtyard of his palace by the sound of trumpets and kettledrums. In the same courtyard, professional women dancers played instruments and sang and danced through the festivities.<sup>1</sup> As time passed, there was a ban on some of the native instruments being used in the church, but these survived elsewhere.

Native music suffered a setback particularly when converts were discouraged from developing their talents in indigenous music (purportedly to protect them from the inherited cultural influences). The Third Provincial Council of Goa, held in 1585, decreed that women were not to learn to dance, play or sing the *deqhanins* or other festive dances and courtly songs of native origin. The prohibition was intended to prevent them from going back to their cultural roots and then getting

enmeshed in the native traditions. Also, by a decree on 14 April 1736, the *ghumott* was banned in churches, and other local instruments such as the flute were prohibited at weddings. With the understanding that 'if you took away something, if the spirits were driven out from the house, there had to be some replacement', the alternative was to provide Western music. Western music brought in notation and new musical instruments. There were music schools run by the Church.

Among the first to learn Western music were those enrolled in educational institutions such as the Seminário de Santa Fé, later renamed the Colégio de S. Paulo in 1541. Besides the regular curriculum, the students were also taught singing, instrumental music and dance. The person credited with transplanting Latin musical culture in Goa was a Dutch Jesuit, Gaspar Barzeu (1515–53) who started music schools in 1545. He is credited with setting up the *escola de musica* in churches and also instituted the post of the *mestre capela* (choir master). He introduced processions such as the Flagellants,<sup>2</sup> the *Devotas*<sup>3</sup> and the Festival of Flowers.<sup>4</sup> Barzeu encouraged the sung mass and chants accompanied by the organ. Drama and music were combined in the enactments of the *Santos Passos* (Sacred Passion) of Christ. Some of these enactments continue to date. The novelties of Western music fascinated the learners and gave them an impetus to excel. They now encountered new musical instruments, new musical texture, new forms of vocal music and new musical genres.<sup>5</sup> The contribution of the *mestres* cannot be underestimated. They played an extremely important role in all the churches. The musicians they trained emigrated to different parts of India as well as to the Gulf region and East Africa. Goan musicians were prominent in Bombay, and were on hand to play below the screen to drown out the raucous sounds of the projector during the silent cinematic performances when the Lumiere Cinematographe arrived in Bombay in July 1896. Chic Chocolate, Frank Fernand, Anthony Gonsalves, Micael Martins, Mauro Afonso, Micky Correia, Peter Monserrate and sons, Braz Gonsalves and Chris Perry were among the prominent musicians in Bombay in the twentieth century. Many would recall Anthony Gonsalves from the Bollywood production of *Amar Akbar Anthony*. The musician passed away in January 2012 and there is increasing interest in his life and achievements, so much so that the Goa University has instituted a chair in his honour: the Anthony Gonsalves Visiting Research Professorship in Western Music.

There were traditional performances such as Zagors and Khells as well as Sangodds. The issue that needs to be discussed and clarified is:

how and when did the Khells (also seen as Experimental Theatre) become performances by roving or travelling troupes as in European forms of Commedia dell'arte, Morality or Passion plays or Miracle plays as they were performed by guilds in Europe and in England by roving troupes? Were the Khells influenced by these roving troupes or *troubadores* or, on the other hand, wasn't there a tradition of native travelling troupes or performers as are found in many cultures? Even in Nigeria, over a period of time, after troupes were formed to appease gods they then found the need to have groups to provide secular music and entertainment, so the religious and the secular separated.

The traditional Sangodd is seen as the marine version of Khell or Zagor. The Sangodd performance is not limited to a single location. Performers travel along the riverfront or, if it is a lake area, they go to various points on the shore and perform. One of the earliest records on the performance of the Khell is found in the mention of the inauguration of the Bom Jesus Basilica sacristy in 1659. Khell troupes were brought from South Goa to perform on this occasion. Khells continued being performed through the centuries especially during the Carnival days. They were greatly transformed through the innovations of Antonio Moraes from Benaulim. He introduced costumes to suit the characters and increased the number of musical instruments in the band. He further raised them from being ground-based performances to stage/ platform enactments replete with curtains. Rosario Rodrigues further changed the format from two short plays to a single non-stop drama for the entire session.

The record of Konkani dramas from the sixteenth to the nineteenth centuries is largely missing. This point needs to be emphasized because there is a tendency to look at modern Konkani theatre from 1892 onwards. This is a myopic view of the region's cultural history. It is like celebrating sixty years of Indian independence rather than looking at a civilization that is thousands of years old. There is much scope for research in Konkani theatre including the discovery of earliest Konkani *tiatr* much prior to 1892.

Among the Portuguese and other European dramas that were performed in Goa, Camoes' *Auto de Filodemo* was staged in 1555; religious plays in vernacular languages were staged on festive occasions such as Christmas, Easter and Corpus Christi; and Passion plays were performed during the season of Lent. The Stations of the Cross are still being enacted, at least in Panjim where the practice is continued annually. They used to be enacted on a grand scale in Old Goa, but that has since stopped. A significant mention is found of a play during the

Feast of the Conversion of St. Paul on 25 January 1586. It is noteworthy because of its connection with the medieval spectacle and pageant plays of Europe.

Under secular drama, we find references to Fr Francisco do Rego (1635–86). Besides his famous *Tratado Apologetico contra varias calunias contra a sua Nação Bracmane*, he also left *Comedias Varias*, which too remained unpublished. Mateus Lacerda, in late seventeenth or early eighteenth century, wrote poetry in Konkani, Portuguese and Castilian, and also 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 celebration in connection with the coronation of Dom Jose I as the King of Portugal. There are also references to Spanish plays being performed in Goa. In one of the earliest issues of the Portuguese weekly *O Ultramar* in the possession of the Central Library, Panjim, we find a notice for *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'.<sup>6</sup>

By 1866, Clube Harmonia/Teatro Harmonia was set up in Margão and the hall made available for performances. 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. He was followed by Luis Napoleão de Atayde, 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 *Nobresa da 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). There are two points of interest concerning Atayde. The normal spelling of the surname would have been 'Ataide'. It is significant to see that he spelled his name 'Atayde'. The title page does not give his full name but uses only his initials L.N. d'A. But autographs in *A Mulher do Artista* and *Nobresa da Alma* indicate his surname as 'Atayde' (Plate 29.1). Further, stage directions for *O filho do Mestre Jorge* contain the word 'theatro' rather than the Portuguese '*teatro*'. These are indicators that show the influence of English as by the 1880s education in English had already started in Goa. Later on, tiatrists who came to Bombay had already had the advantage of having studied English and they always played around with the etymology of *tiatr*.

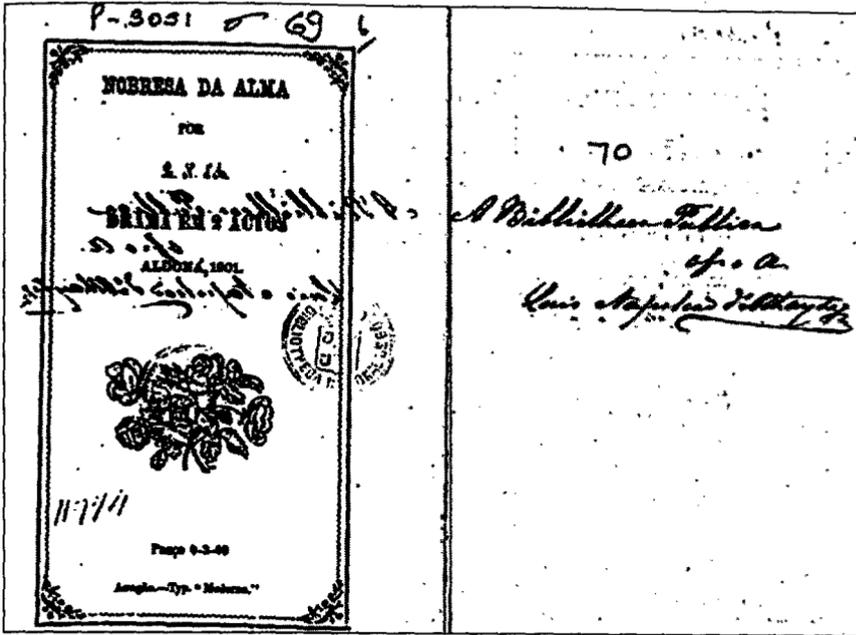


PLATE 29.1: Title Page of Luis Napoleão de Atayde's *Nobresa da Alma*

Source: Central Library, Panjim, Goa

Other examples of Portuguese language *teatro*, 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.<sup>7</sup> The plays and performances were: *O Rei-Milhao*, comedy drama in two acts (Margao, 1900); *O Peixote*, comic monologue (Verna, 1895; Margao, 1904); *Efeitos da Pinga*, comedy in one act (Nova Goa, 1906); *O Senhor Serapião*, comic sketch (Margao, 1908); *Tempestade em Copo de Agua*, comedy in one act (Margao, 1908); *Os Dois Namorados*, comedy in one act (Margao, 1909); and *Mogarem*, a historical drama in four acts (Margao, 1910; Coimbra, 1912). The performances of Portuguese language *teatro* were 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.

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/adaptation of Moliere's '*Medicin Malgre Lui*' by J.S. Diogenese Noronha. This also brought in the practice of using multiple languages in *tiatrs*. I was told that the opening song in Bombay would always be in English first and then in Konkani. As mentioned earlier, the availability of Goan musicians in Bombay facilitated the performance of drama by Goans in Bombay. By 1776, theatres had been built in Bombay by the British and also by the Shetia or Bania business class, so the infrastructure was readily available in Bombay. However, in Goa, most towns had only open air theatres until the 1960s. Now, most of the major towns have well-furnished halls.

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 were monitored in both locations 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*' was printed on the leaflet. There is a need to locate where the censored scripts could be stored as no plays could be performed without being passed by the Censor. A study into the role of the Instituto Luso-Indiano found that there was largely an absence of political drama and no reference or criticism of the Portuguese presence in Goa. Obviously one has to search for the reasons. It is understandable that while political plays could not be staged in Goa, they could be staged in Bombay. The Portuguese had good relations with the English in Bombay. The Instituto Luso-Indiano annually received a substantial amount as subsidy for its activities—Rs.75,000 since 1929<sup>8</sup>—and, therefore, all performances that were under them or supported by them were absolutely non-critical of Portuguese presence.

When troupes started coming to Goa, if they had to bypass the censors, they would hold performances after dinner time. The drama would start after eleven or midnight and go on until two or three o'clock. Such a custom gave rise to the late night shows during village feasts where the audience would go to the *tiatrs* only after dinner. *Italian Bhurgo* by Lucasinho Ribeiro is credited as the first modern Konkani *tiatr*. Ribeiro, who was from Goa, had landed in Bombay in search of employment. He was proficient in English, knew music and could play the violin. He was a good composer and singer. 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 gain employment as a stagehand with the troupe. His desire was fulfilled through the recommendation of a prominent Goan. He travelled with this Italian opera company to Poona, Simla, Madras 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 that he might be able to utilize them in his own venture. He composed *Italian Bhurgo* on the basis of the Italian operetta and after much struggle staged it as a *teatro* with the assistance of João Agostinho Fernandes, Caitaninho Fernandes, Agostinho Mascarenhas and another (unidentified) person. Five persons enacted nine characters because it was difficult for them to get actors for this *tiatr*. They had difficulty in producing the drama because at this time there were also *zagors* and *khells* in Bombay and these did not have a good reputation. Although in Goa the Gavda community staged *zagors* primarily for its own members, in Bombay, *zagors* were enacted by persons who worked as domestic servants, cooks and butlers. *Zagors* were usually staged at the Alfred Theatre, Bombay Skating Ring, Gaiety Theatre (the present Capitol Cinema), Novelty Theatre, Opera House and the Victoria Theatre. The entire Goan expatriate community did not favour *zagor*. In fact, because of the destructive criticism and vulgarities, decent people refrained from attending *zagors*. Gossip, illicit affairs of neighbours, rumours and washing dirty linen in public formed the content of some *zagors*. Thus, 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 Noorojee, the then Member of Parliament attended a *zagor* show in December 1893 at Victoria Theatre, Bombay. This theatre was electrified for the first time and specially illuminated for the occasion.<sup>9</sup> The hall was packed to capacity for this performance. But the general impression was that the *zagors* were not very desirable.

João Agostinho, the 'Father of Konkani Tiatr' made conscious efforts to obliterate *zagors* from Bombay. Handbills testify to his success in achieving such an objective. In a career spanning over five decades, Agostinho scripted a total of thirty plays. Twenty-six of these were his original creations and only four were translated or adapted from Shakespeare, Moliere and Dumas. What is amazing is his quest for social transformation through drama. Personally, he was very exemplary, absolutely honest and generous. He was also a perfectionist

and made sure rehearsals were held seriously. Sadly, such zeal was lost over a period of time and prompters began to become indispensable. However, present-day directors are now trying to ensure that adequate rehearsals are held before staging a drama.

João Agostinho also revised and published his plays and made available sheet music. This is significant because later on, other tiatrists did not bother or worry about publishing their works. As a consequence, out of thousands of *tiatrs* only a few have been published. One of the

# BATCARA.

( Theatrachi Poili Part. )



Buroinar :

**JOÃO AGOSTINHO FERNANDES.**

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Mol 6 annem.

**1909**

PLATE 29.2: Title page of *Batcara* by João Agostinho Fernandes

**CHORUS.**

Kunbi Sudir Bramon Chardi, vortonta rochna Devachi  
 Amcam goroz tumcam sangehi zati mun sogleoch fotti  
 Zanar zalear munis tami, ek borem con chintati  
 Cosli olsig vortouna zait hi amoho ekvot nasleari.

**Song 3 AFRICAN Dance.****I**

Kilimajaro—Matomba—Gaza zengo—Matomba  
 Palapayo—Batonga—Buluwayo—Bengala  
 Bominigani—Matonga—Pachuna Mari—Matomba  
 Longendoti—Matomba—Musambiki—Ta ra ra ra  
 Ta—ra—ra—ra Ta—ra—ra—ra. (repeat)

**CHORUS.****II**

Mahagi kana—Matomba—Mandarra zalla—Matomba  
 Sahakamella—Bangala—Koba kutema—Matomba  
 Musumbi zongo—Matomba—Kanua mahogi—Bengala  
 Shide bulola—Matomba—Mugongara—  
 Ta—ra—ra—ra Ta—ra—ra—ra Ta—ra—ra—ra

**CHORUS.**

Kuronga barengo zambuya baugala  
 Adama zambuya Bengala  
 Buscumbi zengo Angola.

PLATE 29.3: African Dance Song from *Batcara II*

Source: Collected works of João Agostinho Fernandes

earliest publications was *Batcara*, printed in 1909 (Plate 29.2). The play was staged from 1904 onwards. The first women on the Konkani stage acted in *Batcara* on 22 November 1904. Agostinho's wife Regina Fernandes was prominent among them. He later published *Batcara Part II*, which included an African dance. The song contains African words, testimony to his collaboration with Goans who had emigrated to Africa for employment (Plate 29.3).

In the early stages, troupes came from Bombay to Goa and performed plays. Such a trend continued up to the 1970s. In the post-liberation period, there was a fillip to theatrical activity in Goa. The

exodus of Konkani speakers from Bombay to the suburbs, the Middle East and their return to Goa resulted in a significant decline in the Konkani speaking population in Bombay leading to a gradual decrease in local theatrical activity. At present, there is a reverse movement of troupes going out from Goa to Bombay, the Gulf region and even to London. The Goan diaspora members try to stage shows wherever they are based, particularly during occasions of important feasts.

*Tiatr* has a very enthusiastic audience as some highlights indicate. J.P. Souzalin's *Sam Francis Xavier* was staged at Princess Theatre, Bombay, for three 'houseful shows' at 10 a.m., 3.30 p.m. and 9 p.m. on 25 November 1969. *Divors* by Aristides Dias completed 100 shows in a single season on 5 October 1980. *Soccorin* by Menino de Bandar had a run of over 200 shows and *Padri* by Prince Jacob went on for more than 300 shows and was even produced as a film.

*Tiatrs* generally comprise of six to seven *podde* or curtain changes. Comic interludes and songs intervene between the scenes. Songs are very important in *tiatr*—there are integral songs known as Cantos and, between the scenes, other songs known as *kantaram*, which can be on any topic. Songs range from solos to duets, trios, quartet or even a quintet. Tiatrists/singers have risen to fame through live performances as well as through films and music recorded on LPs, CDs, VCDs and DVDs. Comedy is absolutely important and *tiatr* has to provide entertainment along with education. There is very little of absurd theatre in Konkani; it is, in fact, almost non-existent.

An indication of the vibrancy in *tiatr* can also be gauged from its advertisements: *O Herald* on 13 January 2013 carried three full pages of advertisements (Plate 29.4). Two weeks later, on 27 January, another edition of the newspaper again had three pages of advertisements (Plate 29.5). Such quantity of advertising is rarely seen elsewhere.

There is a vitality in *tiatrs*. It is the most popular cultural performance among Konkani speakers. Strangely, though it has enjoyed popular support for more than a century, its need for systematic documentation offers wide scope to academics and researchers. Fortunately, with the formation of the Tiatr Academy of Goa, some efforts have begun in this direction. But much more needs to be done, especially with respect to the digitization of available records, before vital data gets lost. There are possible sources in Goa, Bombay as well as Portugal. The Torre de Tombe contains material that could throw more light on the missing history of theatre in Goa. For further reference, one may read *When the Curtains Rise*.<sup>10</sup>



PLATE 29.4: Three Pages of Tiatr Advertisements in *Herald* Newspaper in Preparation for Carnival, 13 January 2013

Source: *Herald*, Panjim, Goa



PLATE 29.5: More Advertisements of Tiatr in *Herald* Newspaper just before Carnival, 27 January 2013

Source: *Herald*, Panjim, Goa

## Notes

1. Jose Pereira and Micael Martins, *Song of Goa: Mandos of Yearning*, New Delhi: Aryan Books International, 2000, p. 20.
2. The Flagellants, religious fanatics of thirteenth-century Europe who proclaimed the imminence of the wrath of God against corruption and, as a religious rite, practised public, self-inflicted scourgings.
3. The *Devotas* were nocturnal chants, announced by marchers with wooden clappers, for the souls in Purgatory.
4. The *Festival of Flowers* commemorates the birth of The Virgin Mary, Mother of Jesus. It is celebrated on 8 September. During the nine-day period of preparation and on the feast day, children dressed as angels empty baskets of flowers at the feet of her statue. The practice continues to date in many churches.
5. Pereira and Martins, *Song of Goa*, p. 21.
6. *O Ultramar*, Anno 3, No 120, Quinta Feira, 18 July 1861.
7. Joaquim Filipe Neri Soares Rebelo, 'Obras completas', vols. I–III, Mozambique: Minerva Central, 1973.
8. Teotónio R. De Souza, 'The Colonial Past & Transition', see <http://religare.blogs.sapo.pt/71012.html>, accessed 26 January 2013.
9. John Claro, 'The Origin of Konkani Teatro', in *Tiatr ani Tiatrist*, ed. Fausto V. Da Costa, Bombay: Goan Review Publications, 1994, p. 85.
10. André Rafael Fernandes, *When the Curtains Rise... Understanding Goa's vibrant Konkani Theatre*, ed. Frederick Noronha, Goa: Tiatr Academy of Goa (TAG), 2010. This book is made available under Creative Commons for free download and is published under a Creative Commons licence.