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TIATR: Expression of the Live, Popular Culture

Pramod Kale*

The historical experience of Goa—four-and-a-half centuries of political, social and cultural domination by a European nation—has given the Goan population an identity distinct from the rest of India. The British presence in India was of a shorter duration and much more diffuse. There were many territories such as the princely states where the British influence, administrative and cultural, was remote. In Goa, the Portuguese influence was direct and radical, affecting the population as a whole, at all levels. This is especially true of the three districts of Velhas Conquistas (Old Conquests)—Ilhas (Tiswadi), Bardez and Salcete. Most contemporary generalisations and stereotypical images of Goa and Goan society are based on the culture of these districts. The Novas Conquistas (New Conquests), although larger in terms of area, have a somewhat different cultural aspect.

The history of the interaction between the indigenous culture (mostly Hindu) and European culture (mostly Roman Catholic Christianity of the Iberian variety) has not always been a happy one. In its earliest phases, the interaction consisted of a violent confrontation with the local cultural traditions to transform them into the European mode. The roots of indigenous cultural traditions proved,

**The writer, a US-based social scientist who pays extended visits to Goa regularly, has been studying various aspects of the local culture for almost a decade. This authoritative research paper was published in Economic and Political Weekly (Nov. 22, 1986) under the title: 'Essentialist and Epochalist Elements in Goan Popular Culture'.*

however, to be too strong to be uprooted completely and many aspects of culture survived, even in a changed context, with the process of adaptation and assimilation. When, during the 18th and 19th centuries, a more liberal attitude began to prevail with the Church and the government, cultural performances in particular began to flourish amongst both Christian and Hindu populations of Goa.

The pre-colonial cultural traditions in Goa were centred around three institutions: the temple, the *gaonkari* (village organisation) and the *mand* (an informal voluntary organisation which dealt with local traditions and performances). The traditional cultural performances which still exist today have their base in one of these three institutions. During the colonial period, the place of the temple was taken by the village church, the *gaonkari* was transformed into *comunidades* and the *mand* adapted itself to celebration of feasts and performances honouring the new patron saints of the village.

During the early years of their colonial rule in Goa, the Portuguese launched a massive campaign to re-shape the cultural life of the newly converted Christian population. While complete assimilation and Europeanisation was attempted by a few very well-placed and well-connected native Christian families (whose members were professionals such as lawyers, doctors and educators) and while administrators began to share the power and the prestige of the colonial elite, the majority of the Christian population retained elements of their pre-Christian indigenous traditions in some form or other as part of their newly evolving culture.

Amongst the numerous cultural performances of Goa partaking of both indigenous and European transplanted traditions the most popular and vibrantly alive is the Konkani language *Tiatr*.¹ It is a form which is rooted in the working class and lower middle class Goan Catholic population living in Goa or outside, expressing their trials and tribulations, hopes and aspirations.

Tiatr is a unique performing arts genre. It has elements of drama, music, comedy and improvisation. In a typical *Tiatr* performance, there is a loose story line which runs through the show. It is punctuated by 'sideshows'—irrelevant and improvisational material consisting of songs (solos, duets and choruses called *cantar*), dances, comic skits and monologues—all to the accompaniment of a very loud Goan steel band which sits between the audience and the performers.

The plots of these dramas are contemporary. For the most part, the situations are set within the framework of family and domestic life. Their structure is episodic, each individual scene being a more

or less independent unit within an on-going, generalised framework. They play upon the empathic responses of the audience—especially of the women. The plays work within a strictly Goan Christian moral context and reflect a complex set of attitudes which include, amongst others, an intense regional/national pride for Goa and things Goan, a strong belief in the sanctity of family life and an abiding faith in God and his Church.

The language of the *Tiatr* is Konkani as it is spoken in the Bardez district. But the relationship between *Tiatr* and Konkani is much deeper. *Tiatr* can be said to be a celebration of Konkani. For *Tiatr* audiences Konkani is not merely a language, a medium of communication, but a cause, a Totemic symbol, a flag to rally around in fighting battles with the establishment and authority. At (current) *Tiatr* performances, the most enthusiastic and rousing response is reserved for the *cantartist* (singer) who stands up and calls the Konkani speakers to rouse themselves to fight battles for Mother Konkani so that she gets her rightful place as an official language in the eighth schedule of the Indian Constitution.

In spite of the immense popularity of *Tiatr*, not enough attention has been paid to it by critics, scholars or researchers. The few articles in the English and Konkani popular press are somewhat cursory and superficial, given to quick overviews and incantation of well known names of writers and performers. This neglect is partly due to the scorn with which an influential section of the Goan population regards this popular entertainment: as being a vulgar expression of low taste.

The very fact that *Tiatr* is the most vibrantly alive and commercially successful theatrical entertainment of the Goans demands serious attention and inquiry into what makes it so. Popularity of this form suggests the existence of a shared, common code of values, attitudes, perceptions of Self and World between the encoders (the performers) and the decoders (the audience). These signs and symbols, forming the common code, are a part of the context (the historical background, the social and cultural institutions) and the text (*Tiatr* performances themselves). The context and the text are not treated here as two separate areas of inquiry but as totality and the search is holistic rather than atomistic.

This study looks upon theatre primarily as a social institution and upon communication in theatre as a social act. Although theatrical performance has many elements in common with other public performances such as the circus, magic, ritual, acrobatic and martial art displays, in *Tiatr* the enactment (mimetic presentation) of a story

through action, words and music appears to be the most important constituent of theatrical performance.

James R Brandon² and A S Gunawardana³ have proposed separately two related sets of historical classification of theatre forms. Brandon identifies four main traditions of Asian theatre based on social environment: Folk theatre traditions; Court theatre traditions; Popular theatre traditions; and Modern theatre traditions. Gunawardana similarly postulates three types of Asian theatre: Traditional theatres which flourished under feudal circumstances but are fast disappearing because of their failure to accommodate large-scale social changes; Intermediate theatres, which still retain their 'epic' structure of story telling, but have moved from the sacral to secular and which are popular and even thriving; and Modern theatres which are the direct offsprings of western theatre and have spawned the present-day commercial and professional theatres of big cities and towns.

These systems of classification provide flexible frameworks to identify a place for *Tiatr*. It must be pointed out that the classificatory systems are used in a general way and many of its assumptions regarding 'modernity' and 'tradition' have had to be questioned in this study itself. Tradition and modernity as terms of reference to explain the process of social and cultural change are, in recent years, shown to be somewhat inadequate. The linear process of change that they seem to chart is often not borne by the reality of specific situations. Tradition and modernity are not fixed points of compass. The process of cultural-social change is more complex and flexible than a tradition-modernity model would suggest.

A more satisfying conceptual framework to explain the dynamics of change in societies and social institutions is to be found in Geertz's formulation of two distinct impulses, essentialism and epochalism, being at the root of the historical process of change. "Nationalist ideologies built out of symbolic forms drawn from local traditions which are essentialist tend, like vernaculars, to be psychologically immediate but socially isolating; built out of forms implicated in the general movement of contemporary history—that is, epochalist—they tend, like lingua francas, to be socially deprovincialising but psychologically forced. However, rarely is such an ideology anywhere purely essentialist or purely epochalist. All are mixed and one can speak at best only of a bias in one direction or another, and often not even of that...The interplay of essentialism and epochalism is not, therefore, a kind of cultural dialectic, a logistic of abstract ideas, but a historical process as concrete as industrialisation and as tangible as war."⁴

Goan Catholic cultural ethos, as it has evolved historically, is looked upon in this study as illustrative of the interaction between indigenous, nativist (essentialist) impulses and eclectic adaptation of norms, practices and forms of European culture (epochalism). This interaction is to be found in Goan social institutions as well as in cultural expressions such as *Tiatr*.

In order to understand *Tiatr* as an expression of popular culture, it is necessary to relate it to the historical processes which have shaped Goan Catholic society and Goan cultural ethos. Specifically for understanding a popular phenomenon such as *Tiatr*, it is necessary to understand predominantly mobile, lower middle class ethos which has contributed so much to and, in fact, shaped *Tiatr*.

The inquiry focuses on the Goan society, its hierarchical structure, the lower middle class migration from Goa, the spatial and temporal factors contributing to the formation of Goan ethos and the Konkani movement, and other cultural performances (both indigenous and foreign) which preceded and affected the development of *Tiatr*. These provide the context within which *Tiatr* operates. This is followed by a 'textual' analysis of *Tiatr*—the performers, the audience and the message, the structure and organisation, plots and themes.

Goan Society and Stratification

What strikes one most about the contemporary Goan society is its highly complex and subtle divisions. The Portuguese seem to have very successfully implemented the policy of 'divide and rule'. One even suspects that the Portuguese were able to provide what may be called a prototype model for Apartheid.

The Portuguese rulers, in the first hundred years of their rule, tried out a policy of forced assimilation and integration of the local population. They used mass conversions and inter-racial alliances. They instituted harsh punitive measures such as deprivation of property and other rights exclusion and ultimate expulsion from the territory against the recalcitrant Hindu population. This policy, however, proved to be counter-productive. Later on, in the 17th and 18th centuries, they adopted a softer approach—a more flexible and less coercive model of separate and unequal existence, a prototype Apartheid model, as it were, for the various groups within the population.⁵

From the beginning of their rule in Goa in 1510, the divisions and groupings both amongst the conquerors and the conquered were many. They were based on colour, race, religion, caste, creed, birth, rank and occupation, amongst other things. The topmost layer consisted of the governing class—the high ranking Portuguese officers

and military commanders sent to Goa to conquer, to administer and to rule. They shared their power, *albeit* sometimes uneasily, with the bishops and archbishops, the prelates sent by both Rome and Lisbon. These were the *Fidalgos* (the nobly born). The very Portuguese concept of 'purity of blood' decided their social status. Those born in Portugal of the 'purest blood' and who came to India for a short period were the *Reinoes*. Those who spent almost all their lives here were *Indiaticos*. Those who were born in Asia to Portuguese parents were known as *Casticos*. The progeny of inter-racial marriages were *Mesticos* (Portuguese-Indian parentage) and *Mulattos* (Portuguese-African parentage).

Marital status and occupation also played their part in deciding status groups. Thus mere sojourners, unmarried Portuguese soldiers, *soldados*, were at the bottom of Portuguese colonial society in Goa while the married settlers belonged to a higher status group known as the *Casados*. As can be expected, the ranking based on blood often overlapped with the ranking based on marital status and occupation.⁶

The Portuguese conquerors looked down with great disdain and scorn upon the subjugated population because of its colour. The early Portuguese documents refer to the Indian population as a whole as *Preto*s (niggers).⁷ The many methods of persuasion, some gentle and some not so gentle, practised by the European Catholic missionaries, especially the Jesuits, brought into existence a new division in the population of local converts (called the *Canarins* by the Portuguese). Because of mass conversions of whole villages which consisted of several communities and castes and because of the Portuguese rulers' own predilection for active support of hierarchical and occupational divisions, the 'New Christians' retained their caste affiliations and status grouping even under their new faith. In other matters of overt behaviour such as food, drink and dress, they were forced to adopt 'Christian practice' of eating beef and pork, drinking wine and using clothes tailored in the European fashion.

The two higher status caste groups amongst the Goan Catholics were the *Bamon* and the *Chardo*, corresponding to the Brahmin (Gaud Saraswats) and Kshatriya castes of the Hindus. (The *Chardo* probably included converts from other high status groups such as the Vani, Chati and even some non-Gaud Saraswat Brahmins).⁸ Converts from other 'lower' Hindu castes were grouped together as *Sudir* corresponding to the Sudra cluster—a blanket term used to describe a number of occupational castes⁹ with varying degrees of social status. Converts from the *Kunbi* and *Gauda* communities, the actual cultivators, formed a separate group.

The Hindu population which resisted conversion was subjected to numerous humiliations, to deprivation of their rights and even expulsion during the first two centuries of Portuguese colonial rule. The Saraswat Brahmins were the dominating Hindu caste and, although some of them were accepted as collaborators and partners, as traders, agents of tax collection and interpreters, a large number had to leave their ancestral homes and settle in coastal areas of Karwar and Mangalore over the course of centuries. With the decline of the Portuguese ruling population and the rise of Hindu (Maratha) power in adjacent areas, the Saraswats were later able to regain and consolidate their position. The reinstatement of the Saraswat Brahmins and other Hindus was a gradual and slow process opposed by the Church and its clergy who watched over the special interests and privileges of the native Catholics through the office of *Pae Dos Cristaos* (The Father of Christians).

In the course of the 17th and 18th centuries the *Bamon* and the *Chardo* groups amongst the native Catholics had become increasingly caste-like endogamous groups with their membership determined on the basis of birth, and with very few new entrants into their ranks. The competition and rivalry between the *Bamon* and *Chardo* also continued to grow, till by the 19th century in Margao and the surrounding Salcete areas, these two elite Catholic communities of clergymen, landowners and administrators, were practically at war with each other.¹⁰

While the *Bamon* and *Chardo* groups ossified, the *Sudir*—a looser, more fluid group—grew because of continued conversion from amongst the lower castes of the Hindu population. Members of the *Sudir* group worked as tenant-farmers (*mundkar*) for the landed gentry on their fields and plantations. They also worked as menials and servants in their houses and places of business and as small independent tradesmen: carpenters, tailors, barbers, cobblers. Toddy tappers (*render*) and fishermen (*kharvi*) considered themselves to be separate groups. Bakers who had to be licensed by the Portuguese government came from the *Chardo* community. They received their rudimentary education in the three R's and music (to be able to sing and play at Church services) at the Parochial schools run by the clergy in the villages.

The clergy and through them the teachings of the Church were of much more importance to this lower caste section of Catholic population. The upper caste Catholic had either assimilated and lusitanised¹¹ or identified themselves with a larger European culture of liberal republicanism.¹² Among the former, the clergy and the Church were given token respect while among the latter, there was

tendency towards anti-clericalism. The *Sudir*, very few of whom owned property or resources, had to depend on the Church and the clergy for active intervention on their behalf by the office of the Father of Christians. In spite of this, even by the beginning of the 19th century, their overall economic position seems hardly to have improved.

As a matter of fact, it seems to have worsened, partly because of the reinstatement of the Hindu elites and partly because of the incorporation of the New Conquest districts with their large Hindu population. Beginning in the late 18th century, the *comunidades* (village councils) were heavily taxed by the government and by the Church. In the 16th and the 17th centuries the government had supported financially the various activities of the Church. It provided building sites for Churches and convents, defrayed the costs of construction and maintenance. It paid for the cost of the food and clothing of the priests. It also contributed towards the celebration of numerous feasts, many of which were on a lavish scale. In the year 1574, for instance, out of a total revenue of 8.8 million Reis from the three old conquest districts, the government spent 1.55 million or nearly 17.7 per cent on the Church.

With the decline of its maritime trade and commerce in the East, the colonial government found it difficult to bear the burden of these expenses. It gradually began to pass the burden of these expenses over to the *comunidades* through various devices such as *Jonos dos Santos* (Share of the Saints). By the end of the 18th century the *comunidades* (which raised their funds through voluntary contributions from the members of the village community) were subjected to an indirect taxation by having to pay for the masses, for the feasts and the processions of the Church, as well as for the repair and maintenance of the churches.¹³ The village-based *Sudir* who were bound to the Church both morally and financially, had to make heavy financial contributions for the privilege of having the Church watch closely over their spiritual well-being.

The stagnant economy of late 18th and early 19th century Goa closed all doors of opportunity for this service community in their native land. The British occupation of Goa during the Napoleonic war made this group aware of possibilities of and opportunities for jobs and advancement which the British offered elsewhere, in India and abroad. These were the conditions which led to the first wave of emigration of Goans of lower middle class origin which has continued for the last one-hundred-and-fifty years.¹⁴

Along with the *Sudir*, some declassed and impecunious *Bamon* and *Chardo* (especially those who were bakers and confectioners) also

migrated. There was also a growing number of upper caste migrants who were accompanied by their families while the migrants of lower order were single males who 'clubbed' together in *kuds* (rooms) in Bombay.¹⁵ Most of the early migrants were from the Tiswadi and Bardez areas and many of them had working knowledge of English as the British influence in the late 18th century was greater here. It was not till the opening of the railroad line later in the 19th century that large-scale migrations from the Salcete area to the north and south began.

Sirvis (service) was the main occupation of these emigrants. Most early Goan emigrants to Bombay worked as cooks, butlers and domestic servants. Some ventured into trades such as tailoring and baking. A large number worked as shiphands, and as cooks and waiters on foreign-going passenger and cargo ships.¹⁶ These shippies or *tarwatis* as they were called earned good wages, could save substantial funds which they transferred to their families in Goa, where they were invested in buying small plots of land and building houses. A sizeable part of these funds was also spent in ostentatious living. This was probably promoted by a desire to compete with the life style of the affluent Goan aristocracy of landed gentry and professionals of the *Bamon* and *Chardo* communities.

Goan Catholic Ethos

In spite of all these stratifications and class and caste barriers amongst various groups of the Roman Catholic population in Goa, one can perceive elements of what may be termed as Goan Catholic ethos which binds these groups together. The Goan Catholic ethos, or more particularly the ethos within which *Tiatr* as an institution operates, is the outcome of three main historical factors. The first one is the traditional Hindu social order with its belief in a strict hierarchy for the family and the society based on prescriptive rather than ascriptive norms. The second one is the Roman Catholic belief in the Church and its officials, in the sanctity of suffering and martyrdom, or humility and poverty, a belief in the ultimate triumph of good over evil and a belief in divine intervention and miracles realised through prayers, rituals and penance. (The Catholic framework in Goa is still more reflective of the Council of Trent than Vatican II.) The third factor is submission to and acceptance of colonial rule as a beneficial one because of the material benefits and rewards associated with it.

The complex love-hate relationship which the Goans seem to have with the outsider—whether he is a tourist, sojourner or a legal resident—seems to stem from this colonial factor. The outsider is

needed for the material benefits he brings, but resented for invading the space—the domain of the natives. The feeling of superiority which the lower middle class Catholic Goans used to have toward the Hindu Goans and toward the Indians in general was the direct result of this colonial mentality, where sharing of the religion and manners (if not the morals) of the rulers conferred a special status on the subject populations.

The City of Goa (*Cidade de Goa, Goa Xahar*) was the supreme spatial symbol of the Goan cultural synthesis. It was Golden Goa (*Goa Dourada*), the Rome of the East and a cosmopolitan urban centre—the seat of a seaborne empire. Both the power and the spirit of Portuguese colonialism were concentrated within its space. If the three districts of *Velhas Conquistas* represent the core of colonial Goa, the City of Goa represented the vital centre of this core. It stood for Christianity, for urbanity, for *civitas* and for power. The Goan countryside, on the other hand, represented a primordial Garden of Eden, an earthly paradise to which migrant Goans looked back with longing. Like the Biblical Eden, the Goan paradise was pre-Christian. People lived here in a state of natural grace. The City of Goa and the picturesque Goan countryside are two distinct, yet complementary spatial elements of the Goan self image and world view. In the case of the *Sudir*, mostly village-based, it was natural that the paradisaical image of Goa was the dominant one.

Konkani, Language of the Common Folk

The language of Goa, the speech of the common folk, Konkani (or *Concanim*, if one would spell it in the Portuguese manner) is a crucial (and increasingly important in political terms) element of the Goan ethos. Like the Goan landscape it is 'natural' and pre-Christian. It represents the strong bonds and common heritage the Goan Catholics have with the non-Christian Goans. Historically, the Goan elites—both Hindu and Catholic—did not have much use for it. Portuguese was the official language and the language of public discourse. The Catholic elites used it at home as well. For the Hindu elites Marathi was the cultural language, the language closely associated with their traditional institutions such as religion. But for the elites as well as for the large number of non-elites from both the religions, Konkani was always the first language (mother tongue) they acquired naturally as children. (This was the situation in the *Old Conquest* territories. In the *New Conquest* territories a large number of people speak a dialect form of Marathi as their first language—not unlike the Marathi dialect spoken in Sawantwadi and Kudal areas of Sindhudurg district of Maharashtra).

Although the official language of colonial Goa was always Portuguese, the Catholic missionaries who were entrusted with the responsibility of spreading the word and converting the heathens to Christianity, learned and used the local languages, Marathi as well as Konkani for this purpose. They used Roman characters to transcribe the sounds, the orthography being the one used for Portuguese in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. The Jesuits who were in charge of the spiritual welfare and moral education of the Catholics in Salcete district and the Franciscans who held similar responsibility for Bardez district, produced a number of books and tracts on religious subjects. These were the first printed books in any Indian language.

While Marathi, especially literary Marathi, had by the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries made long strides toward developing a received standard form, the speech of the native population of Goa (*Lingua Canarim*, as the Portuguese called it) remained a conglomeration of dialects marked by regional and caste variations. The speech of the Hindu population differed from that of the Catholic population. Even amongst the latter, the Salcete Catholics spoke differently from their brothers in Bardez. Adoption of the Roman script and Portuguese orthography led to a further separation between the Hindu and Christian speech habits. Amongst the Hindus too, the speech of the Goa and Saraswat Brahmins differed from the speech of the other castes. The divisions and subdivisions among the population were expressed and preserved through this dialect variations, but there still was a core structure which made them mutually comprehensible.

Given time and propitious circumstances these dialects might soon have evolved into received standard form. However, in 1684 a decree was promulgated by the Conde de Alvor, the viceroy, suppressing the use of all local and indigenous languages and requiring the entire Catholic population to learn and switch over to Portuguese within a period of three years. A political exigency of a very serious kind threatened the existence of Goa as a colony and, on the face of it, caused the viceroy to promulgate this decree—the incursion of the Marathas into Goan territories. Since the native speech of Goans—both Hindu and Christian—had obvious links with the language of the invaders, the viceroy thought he would forestall any attempts at sympathetic revolts, sedition or collaboration with the enemy by breaking the linguistic bonds and turning the Goan population into staunch Portuguese speaking loyalists. But clerical rivalries between the Jesuits and the Franciscans, between the local and foreign clergy, provided the real reasons for this decree.¹⁷ Once the early enthusiasm

for proselytising the natives in their own language had subsided, the missionaries, especially the Franciscans in charge of Bardez, had found it cumbersome and wasteful of time and energy to learn the local language. Besides, the requirement that a priest should know the local language put the foreign priests at a disadvantage. The Franciscans who had long been feuding with the Jesuits and campaigning against these handicaps, found in the atmosphere of fear and paranoia a proper occasion to persuade the viceroy to act and promulgate the decree for suppression of native languages.

The decree brought about further polarisation creating divisions and cleavages amongst the Catholic Goans. The elite Catholics in cities and towns as well as the landed gentry in the countryside could make the switch easily and some even welcomed it as an essential element of Europeanisation. The lower class, lower caste *Sudir* Catholics, however, found themselves in a quandary. They lacked the education, the social background and the status to become members of a Portuguese-speaking milieu. Since in the villages they moved and worked with non-Catholics who continued to speak their own language, it was impossible for them to adopt a foreign language as their own. However the decree, over time, did affect the speech of lower class Catholics making it distinct from that of non-Catholics. With an infusion of Portuguese loan words, and a tendency toward the use of syntax reflecting the Portuguese, the Konkani spoken by the non-elites showed signs of creolisation.

The clergy—the Jesuits of Salcete especially—continued to use the local Konkani for hymns and oratorios. The landed gentry and the elites used Konkani to express their feelings and emotions through the songs and poetry of *Mando* and *Deknni*. By the early 19th century, the image of Salcete Konkani as a vehicle for poetry was established and became an ongoing tradition.¹⁸ Bardez Konkani, on the other hand, the language of the Goan emigrants, established itself as a vehicle for prose. This was the language from which emanated, by the end of the 19th century, a great deal of popular literature—newspapers and magazines, simple tales and novels. The base for this was laid significantly enough, not in Goa but in the British Indian territories in places like Pune and Bombay.¹⁹

The movement toward a received standard Konkani as a language of discourse and public communication, based on the Bardez dialect, was helped by the efforts of the 19th century cleric scholar, lexiconist and academican, a respected figure in Goa where he was born and in Portugal where he taught, Monsignor S R Dalgado.²⁰ Dalgado put standard Konkani firmly within the group of middle Indo-Aryan languages deriving from Sanskrit. He reversed—or at

least discouraged—the process of creolisation of Konkani. He restored many Sanskritic and other indigenous language words to Konkani and even expanded its scope by proposing alternatives based on local linguistic traditions. Dalgado's position in the Church and Academia and his posthumous fame brought to it the acceptance of a received standard Konkani, based on Indian linguistic tradition as a fit vehicle for communication in the Church for the sermons and homilies which priests at various levels delivered to their congregations. The high flown declamatory *sermao* Konkani or *Padri Bhas* was a result of this acceptance.

In the 1880s attempts were made to lay the foundations of secular literature, especially fiction, by writers such as Eduardo who produced romantic novels (modelled after Alexander Dumas' romances in French) and by F Y Fernandes Liberal.²¹ Perhaps because of a lack of readership for these quality novels, the form soon deteriorated to the melodramatic and didactic as in the prolific production of Antonio Vincente da Cruz. Cheaply produced and printed and avidly read by the 'shippies' and other emigrant workers of the lower middle class, the 'romances' as they were called, provided the popular fictional genre. These 'romances' which continue to be popular are escapist tales of love and adventure with a heavy coating of morality. Bonaventure de Pietro, Jesse Fernandes, A Gomes, Reginald Fernandes are some of the fecund authors of these romances. In a way, these romances can be considered to be the counterpart in popular literature of what *Tiatr* is in terms of popular theatrical performance.

Tiatr and Konkani

Joao Agostinho's *Tiatr* was a reformist movement of the last decade of the 19th century. Agostinho himself was *Chardo* and an educated man. It was his disgust with the vulgarity of the *zagor* performed in Bombay by the Goan clubs for more than three quarters of a century before him, that led him to experiment with and launch a new form of theatrical presentation. Although the texts of his plays are not extant, from the praise they received from being high-minded and moral (as against later *Tiatr* which is condemned, like the earlier *zagor* which it was supposed to replace, as being vulgar and cheap, pandering to low taste).

One can assume that the language used for dialogue was a refined version of the Bardez dialect. The language of *Tiatr* even today is Bardezi no doubt, but it is not the Bardezi of the actual colloquial speech. It is a stage Bardezi (written and spoken mostly by Salcete

writers and actors) delivered in intonation patterns and cadences which have more to do with the conventions and artifice of the stage than the actual speech of the people. It is in the sideshows that the comedians use and play with the colloquial and natural elements of the language. It must be mentioned that the increasingly popular *Khel Tiatr* of the present day show a tendency toward naturalism in dialogue.

The Hindu Konkani, the so-called Antruzi dialect espoused by V R Varde Valaulicar (Shenoy Goembab) as literary vehicle, has had very little to do with the Konkani used in the past and present in the performance of *Tiatr*. Occasionally, these Hindu characters are major protagonists (as in *Ekuch Rosto* and *Konkno*) in plays advocating Hindu-Catholic marital alliances who speak refined Goan Saraswat Konkani, but more often the *Konkno* (Hindu) with his *dhoti*, cap and peculiar speech is an object of parody and ridicule in the sideshows. Although most enlightened Catholics look upon this as a vestige of a dead past, its presence is acknowledged and condemned by a reformer and *Tiatrist* in his contribution to a recent issue of a popular Konkani magazine.²²

Konkani used in *Tiatr* is thus a stage language based partly on the actual speech of the Bardez Catholics and partly on the high sounding, declamatory, formal Konkani adopted for public discourse especially from the pulpit. This artificiality does not seem to affect adversely the popularity of *Tiatr*. The new Konkani drama (*natok*), on the other hand, consciously using the rhythms of natural colloquial Konkani, seems to have very little popular appeal as performance, though respected as literature.

Historical Antecedents of Tiatr

Although Konkani *Tiatr* itself began in Bombay as late as in 1892 with the staging of *Italian Bhurgo*, in Goa there existed a history of theatrical performances in European languages—mainly Portuguese, but also in Spanish and French—from the 17th to 19th century. These performances were not popular by any stretch of imagination, being written, staged and acted by the elite. The earliest reference one can find is to Fr Francisco do Rego (1635-1686), who, besides his famous *Tratado Apologetico contra varias calunias contra a sua Nacao Bramane*, also left *Comedias Varias*, which also remained unpublished according to Barbosa Machado (*Biblioteca Lusitana*, Vol 4, 1741-59). He was followed by Mateus Lacerda (late 17th century or early 18th century) who wrote poetry in the mother tongue (Konkani), Portuguese and Castillian, and also several comedies.²³

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 D Jose I as King of Portugal. The celebration, incidentally, coincided with the fall of Bassein and the loss of the 'Northern Province'.²⁴

In one of the earliest available issues of the Portuguese weekly, *O Ultramar* 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..."²⁵

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 Inancio Custodio Coelho in 1866 and staged at the *Teatro Harmonia*, by that time set up in Margao. He was followed by Luis Napaleao 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 Viúva 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 Patel).²⁶

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*²⁷ in three volumes were published by his son in Mozambique in 1973. Volume I contains *O Rei-Milhao*, comedy drama in two acts (performed at Margao 1900), *O Pexote*, comic monologue (performed at Verna 1895, Margao 1904), *Efeitos da Pinga*, comedy in one act (performed at Nova Goa, 1906), *O Senhor Serapiao*, 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*, historical drama in four acts (performed at Margao 1910 and at Coimbra 1912).

The other tradition of elite performances which began in the 19th century was that of the *Mando* and *Deknni* dances. *Mando* and *Deknni* were the entertainment of the rural elite and the landed gentry in their stately homes and drawing halls; the performances of Portuguese language *Teatro* appear to be more urban-based and bourgeois-centred.

Mando (with Dulpod) and *Deknni* developed in the 19th century

as two major cultural expressions of the upper crust of Goan society. The songs of *Mando* are plaintive, nostalgic love lyrics, gently evocative of the life in Goan villages as seen through the eyes of the elite Europeanised gentry. The dance is performed by a group of couples. The men are dressed in black coattails. The women's costume bears a close resemblance to that of women in Portuguese Macau and in South East Asian countries such as Indonesia, Malaysia and the Philippines. The movements are slow and stately in the beginning but become spirited as the tempo gathers. *Mando* was performed in the great halls of the Goan aristocracy to celebrate various social occasions, especially weddings. *Mando* thus is a synthesis of Lusitanian culture and the cultures of Lusitanian Asia, the former Estado da India.

Deknni, on the other hand, looks towards Hindu India for its inspiration, its lyrical themes and its costumes (the women dancers wear the traditional nine yard saris of the Hindus of Goa and the neighbouring Deccan (Maratha country). The music is Western, but the dance movements belong to the local traditions. *Deknni* is a romantic recreation of a past which, for members of the Goan aristocracy, was an ethnic memory more than anything else. Romantic nostalgia is the dominant modality (*Bhava*) of both *Mando* and *Deknni*. In the 19th century and 20th century when the Goan elites emigrated with their families to East Africa, Europe, the United States and Canada, they took with them the *Mando*. It reinforced their longing for their motherland through its lyrical fusion of the Goan landscape and what were perceived as "Goan" feelings.²⁸

Considering the hierarchical nature and compartmentalisation of colonial Goan Catholic society, it is doubtful whether these elite performances had any direct influence on the humbler and more popular cultural expression such as the Konkani *Tiatr*. It must, however, be admitted that the early performances of Konkani *Tiatr* were styled as *Teatro* and the first troupe which performed *Italian Bhurgo* in Bombay in 1892 styled itself as Goa Portuguese Dramatic Company.

Non-Elite, Village-Based Performances

The non-elite, especially the *Sudir* based in villages, had their own performances. These were *khel* (*phell*), *zagor* and the *contra danca*. *Khel* is a Sanskrit word which means game, sport or play. In other areas of coastal Konkan, *khel* and *khele* are names used for ritual dances performed by various village communities at the time of the Hindu festivals such as *Holi*. Amongst the Goan villagers, vari-

ous kinds of *khels* are performed by the Catholic villagers, mostly at the time of the pre-Lenten carnival, traditionally known as Carnival. There are some which are performed at Easter and during the Christmas season. The most elaborate of these is the *mussallam phell* (pestle dance)²⁹ performed by the *Chardo* families of the villages of Cotta Chandor and Cavorim in Salcete district on the second and third days of the Carnival. This is a group dance performed by male dancers each one of whom represents a *Gaonkar* (bona fide residents of the village) family. The costumes are those of pre-Portuguese Hindu inhabitants. The dancers carry stout jangling sticks (*mussal*) with which they pound in unison. Starting at main village church the dancers go from house to house accompanied by a man dressed as a bear which is "caught" ritually the day before the dance, and four torch-bearers. They dance in front of the houses of the *Gaonkars* only, consecrating the house and the family. Many of these houses have been closed and some have decayed as their owners live abroad, but the dancers perform there all the same. At the end of the dance, a woman dressed as a *Mahar* sweeps the spot and sprinkles water over it. The villages where this dance is performed stand on the site of an ancient (probably Mauryan) capital of Goa known as Chandrapur and the tradition which this dance represents is certainly of considerable antiquity.

There were, however, other kinds of *khel* performed during the Carnival, again in the villages of Salcete area. Till thirty years ago, these *khels* were performed commonly in villages such as Colva, Benaulim, Chinchinim, Varca, Nessai (St Jose de Areal). The performers were amateurs and their fare consisted of satirical and humorous skits and sketches on village life as well as dramatisation of folk tales and traditional mythological stories. The performers were mostly from the *Sudir* community. The material was largely improvised. The musical accompaniment consisted of two drums, one of which was bass, and a trumpet or a clarinet. The drummer usually belonged to the (Catholic) *Mahar* community. Women characters were acted out by impersonators.

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 of a few rupees, ranging from fifteen to fifty. The performance lasted from one to two hours and was divided into four *pat* (parts; episodes). The social sketches were *Bhatkar Pat* (showing the tussle between the

landlord and the tenant), *Tarvati Pat* showing the fortunes and misfortunes of the sailors), and *Konknnnyacho Pat* (which ridiculed the ways of the Hindu Goans—*Konknnnos*). *Devcharacho Pat* or *Raksasa Pat*, based on traditional myths and folk tales showed the exploits of demons and giants of the yore [one of the celebrated *khel* performers was *Hada* (bearded) Miguel of Varca, who reenacted the fighting of the Second World War with a troupe of thirty people].

Contra danca was similar to *khel*, in which the improvised material satirised the pomposity and cupidity of the landlords, but it eschewed the vulgarity and ribaldry of the *khel*. The *contra danca* performers were accompanied by one or two violinists. There were no percussion or wind instruments in consort. The big landlords invited them to perform in their mansions and the prelude to the performance consisted of their ceremonial procession and only through the great hills. The landlords laughed at their own foibles but a certain decorum was always maintained by the performers which was lacking in the more boisterous public performance of the *khel*.³⁰

The *khel* (with the notable exception of the *mussallam phell*, which is a community performance) and *contra danca* performances can be looked upon as ritualistic precursors of modern theatre in which the relationship between the performers and the audience is that of the seller and the buyer—a commercial transaction. In *khel* and *contra danca*, the individual householders and the landed gentry act as patrons and the performers as beneficiaries in a semi-feudal framework of social relationship. The community as a whole does not play any role in these performances.

Zagors (the word is borrowed from *Jagar*, a Hindu performance genre in Goa) 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 *zagar* were co-celebrants and not buyers and sellers or patrons and beneficiaries. (Amongst the Hindus, there two distinct kinds of *Jagar* performances: *Perni Jagar* is a ritual performance of the *Perni* community in temples and *Gavda Jagar* which is performed by members of the aboriginal *Gavda* tribe for the entertainment of the village. The word *Jagar* is itself revived from Sanskrit and refers to a night-long performance, a vigil)

Zagar performances were popular in the Catholic villages of the Bardez district. They are very similar to the *Gavda Zagar* of the Hindus and consist 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; sometimes there is rudimentary and

ribald exchange between two characters. The musical accompaniment consists of the indigenous *ghumot* (a semi-hemispherical earthen vessel, the front covered with lizard skin, the bottom an open, short tube) and *madlen*, a cylindrical earthenware vessel. Many of the religious feasts at which these *zagors* were performed have disappeared. One remnant is the *zagor* at Siolim performed on the first Monday after Christmas.

When the first wave of the lower middle class Goan migrants from the Bardez district settled themselves in Bombay and organised their lives around the village clubs, they also seem to have taken *zagor* with them as a part of their cultural life. *Zagors* were performed by Bombay Goans as early as 1820.³¹

In Goan villages, the organisation and expenses for ritual performances such as *zagor* were the responsibility of a unique Goan village institution called the *Mand*. *Mand* is the name for an open space in the village which, through traditional usage, has become sanctified. It is the place used for the inaugural worship which precedes ritual performances such as *zagor* and *mussallem phell* amongst the Christians, and *Shigmo* and *Dhalo* amongst the Hindus. An informal voluntary organisation, the *Mand* supported through voluntary contributions the ritual performance of religions at the popular level, both Hindu and Christian. Whereas the village *comunidades* supported the feasts and festivals of the established religion, the *Mand* watched over and regulated the humbler forms of worship and celebration.³²

In Bombay, the function and responsibility of the village *Mands* was transferred to the village clubs. The clubs provided a powerful social system for the migrant Goan population and provided strong linkages with local Goan traditions. Very few of these clubs were from villages where the *Bamon* predominated (such as Saligao, Moira, Loutolim). Most clubs were *Chardo* and *Sudir* village clubs. They provided the audience as well as the performers for the new entertainment format introduced by Agostinho and Ribeiro.

Role of the Church

The service rendered by the Church in popularising western music through the centuries cannot be underestimated. Every parish church took upon itself to acquaint its humblest parishioners with the rudiments of Western music, especially the violin, opening up some additional avenues of making money, especially in the 19th century British India. But one cannot say that the Church, in its long history, has contributed much to the development of theatre in Goa.

The role that the Church played in medieval Europe and some colonies through mystery and miracle plays, through passion plays and Lenten performances seems to be, at best, minimal in Goa.

In the early 16th century, references are found to the staging of many tragedies, comedies and tragi-comedies on religious themes by the Church in Goa. There were also performances of passion plays and dialogues on religious subjects. The correspondence of local Jesuits with their superiors in Rome and Lisbon contain brief accounts of such performances. The language of these performances was Latin and 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.³³

Besides these neo-classical performances in Latin, religious plays in vernacular languages were staged on festive occasions such as Christmas, Easter and Corpus Christi as well as passion plays during Lent. A play in the vernacular performed on the occasion of the day of the conversion of St Paul (January 25) in 1586 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"³⁴ 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 Chora, Divar, Salcete 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 there would take place new conversions. She then disputes with various pagans and the devil himself, refuting their arguments. As a result of this, the pagans discard their turbans, cut off their topknots and partake of the food of the Catholic to general rejoicing.

When the government passed on the burden of Church expenses to the local communities, beginning the seventeenth century, the staging of such performances seems to have suffered and may account for the loss in Goa of a continued tradition of performances involving live actors and dialogue. The Inquisition might also have contributed to this loss.

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 which he saw in 1825 at Aurangabad. "A miracle play on the life of our *Lord* was performed there by them, beginning with the scene of Birth, and end-

ing with the Crucifixion. Although, no doubt, it could not bear comparison with Ammergau (sic), 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."³⁵

As far as the Konkani *Tiatr* is concerned, one must mention that the negative attitude of the Church toward this popular entertainment form underwent a complete change in the 1960s when Goa was liberated and the winds of a new ecumenical and tolerant spirit began to blow in the Catholic world in the wake of Vatican II.

As a popular form of entertainment, the *Tiatr* often tended to be irrelevant if not downright profane. Although existing strictly within the Roman Catholic code of morality, the *Tiatr* often made fun of the sanctimonious and the hypocritical. The Church establishment always looked upon the *Tiatr* and the *Tiatrist* with suspicion. In pre-Liberation Goa there were strict rules as to what could or could not be shown in *Tiatr* performances. Amongst other things *Tiatr* performance could not depict a priest as a character, nor could the priest's habit be used as a disguise for any character, confession and confessional sanctity could not be ridiculed. Priests, secular or religious, could not associate with or attend *Tiatr* performances.

All this has radically changed since 1961. Not only are priests depicted as characters in *Tiatr*, but real life priests actively participate in the production, organisation and performance of *Tiatr* hoping to use it as an instrument of Christian enlightenment; and confessional sanctity as well as the priestly habit seem to have lost their privileged positions.

An important question to be investigated is how far *Tiatr* is influenced by the older traditional Hindu performances in Goa. It has been pointed out earlier that, during the first three centuries of colonial rule, both the Portuguese administrators (through enactment of a series of draconian measures and promulgation of *forals*) and the Catholic Church (through the Holy Office i.e. the Inquisition) tried first to drive out all Hindus from the three districts of *Velhas Conquistas* (Old Conquests). When this was found to be impracticable, they embarked upon a policy of setting up two completely segregated societies in Goa. How far they succeeded in doing this is a matter of debate. The composition of Christian *Purana* on the lines of Hindu *Purana*, the existence of Christian ritual performances such as the *mussallem phell* of Chandor and the *zagor* of Siolim are considered to be examples of persistent and continuing Hindu influence

on the cultural expressions of Goan Catholics. It would, however, be injudicious to conclude on the basis of this that *Tiatr*, a modern, semi-urban, non-ritualistic performance was influenced by the existence of a variety of other popular Hindu performances in Goa such as *Kala* or *Dasavatara*.

Performance, Performers and Audience

Tiatr and *Khel Tiatr* performers can be roughly divided into two main categories: the commercial and the amateurs. The commercial *Tiatrist* look upon *Tiatr* primarily as a money-making activity. It would be wrong to use the word professionals to describe them as they lack most of the pre-requisites of professionalism. Most of them have full-time jobs in other fields and use their acting and singing ability to generate some quick additional income for themselves and their families. It is only when they achieve the status of 'stars' that they devote themselves full-time to *Tiatr*. Such cases are very rare.

The *Tiatr* troupes are organised on an *ad hoc* basis. There are no permanent companies or repertoires. The town of Margao in Salcete taluka is the organisational centre for *Tiatr* and related activity. There are three or four well frequented eating and drinking establishments at which these activities are conducted. They are in the centre of the town near the Margao municipality, the municipal gardens and the municipal market. Since the 19th century, Margao has been proud of its honorific title, *Athens of Goa*. There might be some significance in the flowering of Konkani *Tiatr* in close proximity of its civic facilities.

The *Tiatrist* themselves live in the various small village communities near Margao such as Loutolim, Benaulim, Colva, Curtorim, Assolna, Raia, Fatorda, etc. There are various networks formed on the basis of a common or shared village background, schooling or kinship. For example, currently there are many popular *Khel Tiatr*, which have originated from the village of Benaulim. There appear to be at least five successful *Khel Tiatrist* writing in and working from Benaulim. It should be noted that the 'commercial' *Tiatrist* often denigrate these successful money-making *Khel Tiatrist* as opportunistic amateurs who pack the troupes with their family members.

At the other end of the spectrum, there are serious dedicated amateurs who shun money-making practices, look upon *Tiatr* as an instrument of non-formal education and social change. These are 'serious reformers' who deplore the slipshod methods, lack of education and social purpose of the commercial *Tiatrist*. Where the commercial

Tiatrist have merely a couple of rehearsals before they open a show, the 'serious reformers' have three weeks or more of rehearsals. Whereas the commercial *Tiatrist* do not bother themselves with the publication of their scripts once the run is over at least one 'serious reformer' has taken the trouble to publish his scripts.³⁶

Besides the 'serious reformers' we have another group of amateurs who are generally the younger and more enthusiastic members of the village communities or town wards, whose interest seem to be divided between football (soccer) and *Tiatr*. Banding together under such names as Jolly Boys Club of St. Agostinho, Santa Cruz or Jolly Boys Club of Borda, Margao, they enter the annual competition of amateur *Tiatr* organised by the Kala Academy in Panjim and perform heroically if not skilfully to an audience which has come—if at all it has to jeer rather than cheer. For the most part, these are teenage and young adult *Tiatr* fans who dream of making a breakthrough into the commercial world of *Tiatr*. They also perform at their village feasts.

The rewards in commercial *Tiatr* are high for those who make it. The highest payment per performance for the top *Tiatrist* is Rs.300. At present there are only three or four *Tiatrist* who command such fees. It should be remembered that a successful performance might be staged at five different places in Goa from 10 am to 12.30 am during a single day. A star *Tiatrist* with stamina stands to make as much as Rs.1500 during the day. The average pay per performance is Rs.100. The individual members of the band which is recruited locally are paid much lower.

Although *Tiatr* are performed throughout the year, the summer holiday season (April to June) and the Diwali-Christmas-Carnival season (October to February) are the two main seasons. These are the seasons when expatriate Goans return to Goa, many as patrons but sometimes also as performers. During this season, the *Tiatr* which originate in Bombay tour the home counties, combining business with pleasure. Like the municipal square in Margao, the Dhobi Talao area in Bombay is the centre of Goan cultural life and during the rainy season there is more *Tiatr* activity in Bombay than in Goa.

A *Tiatr* performance is, generally, a combination of several inputs. This individual either writes or gets hold of a script and contacts persons from his network for their participation. Since these performers are participating in a number of *Tiatr* at the same time, besides having full-time jobs, the juggling of their schedules and dates for performance become the primary responsibility of the initiator/producer. Creative abilities and artistic aspirations have con-

stantly to be subsumed to managerial skills. It is no wonder that often the whole cast meets for the first time at the first performance.

The contractor is the most important person in the business of *Tiatr*. Contractors come from all walks of life. There are contractors who are shopkeepers and there are contractors who are officers in the Goa police force. Barring one star *Tiatrist* who is a good businessman as well, all other *Tiatrist* have to depend on the contractor for an assured income.

The contractor is responsible for the rental of the theatre, the audio system and publicity. He pays a lump sum to the initiator-leader which for *Tiatr* averages Rs.6,000 per performance and for *Khel Tiatr* Rs.4000 per performance. His income for a capacity house of 2,000 in a temporary shed is estimated to be Rs.17,000 and for a full house of 1,000 seats in a permanent theatre to be Rs.10,000. Expenses which the initiator/producer/author/director has to meet from the lump sum payment are: payments for artists (per person)—Rs 100-150 average (Rs.300 top); band (total—Rs.450-500); make-up—Rs.75; prompter—Rs.75; settings and props—Rs.300 to 400; and light effects—Rs.100 to 200. Besides this, a troupe from Bombay has to bear the expenses for travel to and from Bombay, boarding and lodging as well as travel in Goa. It also pays the cost of letter press blocks for publicity material such as handbills.³⁷

On an average, a run of fifty performances is considered to be a fair one. The runaway hit of the current season, a domestic melodrama, based on a real life event has already passed the 150 mark and returned from a tour of the Gulf countries. Although the amateur *Tiatr* competitions held annually by the Kala Academy in its outdoor auditorium are very poorly attended (in spite of the very low admission fee charged), the commercial *Tiatr* and *Khel Tiatr* troupes, which include at least one or two well known performers (generally either *cantartist* or comedians) play to capacity houses in towns and village communities during the season.

The Performances

Tiatr and *Khel Tiatr* performances are staged at the permanent theatres available in Margao, Panjim and Mapusa, the main towns of the Velhas Conquistas. They are also staged at the numerous feasts and festivals held in honour of the patron saints of various village communities. On such occasions, a temporary stage and an enclosure for the audience are erected. There is a marked difference between the spirit and composition of the audiences in towns and villages.

Tiatr performances in towns or villages are known for their tardiness. It is considered normal for a performance to start 30 to 45 minutes late. In the villages, a performance scheduled for 10.30 pm might well start at 12.30 am and the audience would hardly know the difference as their festive spirit is being nourished through other means. This festive audience is also more enthusiastic, demanding and outspoken in their responses. The *cantaram* (songs) which they like are given encores so many times that they have a tendency to become real show stoppers. The performances at town theatres have constraints of time and place and as such are comparatively more tame and less free flowing.

Cantaram are the most essential elements of the performance of *Tiatr*. These *cantaram* are composed and set to music by the *cantartist* themselves. Often, these songs are written and improvised for the particular occasion. A short briefing to the musicians in the band before the performance is all that the cantartist needs. The thrust of the *cantar* is social and political criticism. The main targets are politicians in power and their corrupt practices. The tone is satirical, but quite often it is virulent, harsh and strident, bordering on personal attack. As they express the anger and frustration of the powerless (Catholic) common man of Goa, they elicit an overwhelming response from the audience. *Cantaram* also criticise Goans for failing to be good Goans and good Catholics. The *cantaram* which open *Tiatr* performances currently are largely devoted to extolling the virtues of the Konkani language, reprimanding and scolding the Goans for neglecting their mother tongue, and making a fervent plea for recognition of Konkani as an official language by Parliament in New Delhi. Some *cantaram* are entirely humorous forming a part of the skits and comic routines which are also important elements of *Tiatr* performances.

The plays, generally speaking, are domestic melodramas (with a great deal of simulated physical violence a la Hindi film added) or soap operas (with a great deal of tear jerking material and sob stuff). There are two or three subplots in the manner of Victorian novels which may or may not converge in the end.

In the choice of themes and plots, as well as in treatment, presentation and acting, the main influence on *Tiatr* is that of the popular Hindi cinema. The 'serious reformers' referred to earlier, deplore this influence and would like *Tiatr* to be more naturalistic and 'socially relevant', like Marathi drama.

Theatrical devices such as costumes, sets and make-up are generally given short shift by *Tiatr* producers. *Khel Tiatr*ist, however, pay more attention to these devices and especially to light and

sound effects. Competing with them, the *Tiatrist* are beginning to pay more attention to these devices. The efforts of *Tiatrist* and *Khel Tiatrist* in the area of theatrical devices are marked by a naivete and crudeness which have their own appeal.

The plots of *Tiatr* plays have generally championed the cause of the poor and the downtrodden, of the powerless against the powerful, of the *mundkar* (tenant) against the *bhatkar* (landlord). This might be considered a natural extension of the Christian ideal of compassion. In political terms, however, this is never extended to the conflict between the rulers and the ruled. Before 1961, *Tiatr* was never a theatre of political protest. *Tiatr* and *Tiatrist*, during the colonial rule, accepted the Portuguese rulers and the special benefits accruing from being citizens of Portuguese Goa. The period between the first and second world war was a period of growing fascism and isolationism for Portugal and its colonies. The Colonial Act passed by Salazar's government in 1930 was a regressive measure which made Goans second class citizens. It brought about a wave of protest and nationalism amongst the Goan intellectuals of Bombay. One does not, however, find any reflection of this in the world of *Tiatr*. For the majority of Goans in Goa and other places, a sense of peace and serenity prevailed; the key factors contributing to it were said to be "Fatima, *Fado* and Football".

The stance of *Tiatrist* was so pro-establishment in political terms, that during the period of escalating tensions between the Indian and Portuguese government in the 1950s, some prominent *Tiatrist* carried on anti-Indian propaganda in Bombay and there were instances of the Indian government having to expel some of them to Goa. Propagandists of Goa Radio under the Portuguese took full advantage of the talent of these and other popular artistes to broadcast skits and songs attacking the designs of the Government of India against 'Catholic Goa'.³⁸ Since the Liberation in 1961 things have changed in this respect. *Tiatr* now has a growing element of political protest as well as social protest. The cantarist who receive most applause are those who lampoon politics and politicians.

Where does *Tiatr* stand in the light of the two contrasting ideologies of essentialism and epochalism? If we look at its history, *Tiatr* began as an epochalist response to the traditional ritualistic performances such as *khel* and *zagor*. It was influenced by the cosmopolitan theatre world of the city of Bombay in the 1890s. It reflected the sensibility of the mobile personality of the Goan migrant. However, essentialism asserted itself through the distinct world view and self-image of the Goan Catholic. The appeal of *Tiatr* was essentialist and directed to the lower middle class-caste *Sudir* Goan Catholic. It did

not appeal either to elite Catholics or to the Goan Hindus. Currently this essentialism is expressed in the militant championing of the cause of Konkani. *Tiatr* is also popular, commercial theatre. In order to be successful commercially, it has to go along with the needs of the present hour. Innovative techniques and gimmicks are in a way epochalist strategies for survival. The popularity of *Khel Tiatr* (non-stop, which follows the sensational action-packed formula of Hindi films) is also an epochalist manifestation.

Structurally, the essentialist elements seem to be more strongly rooted. For instance, characters in *Tiatr* appear as types rather than as persons. Little attempt is made to deal with the psychological make-up of an individual. The father, the mother, the brothers, the wife, the children, the daughter-in-law, the son-in-law, the brother-in-law and other members of what appears to be an extended family (not unlike the Hindu joint family where each kin relationship entails certain formal responses and patterns of behaviour) are all types—they conform to an inherited traditional code of conduct and morality. Departure from this constitutes the dramatic element in the domestic melodramas. The same is true of characters in the larger social setting such as the landlord, the tenant, the priest, the doctor, the lawyer, the police officer, the policeman, the politician, the social worker, the new rich from the Gulf or from Africa, the shippies.

Both in the family dramas and the social dramas the conflict is between the powerful and the powerless and the sympathy is always for the latter. Depending on the playwright, the powerless, protagonist may win over the powerful, through long suffering, through intervention of fate or sometimes through fighting or he might suffer like Job and end up as a martyr for the sake of somebody else. In the basic conflict between Good and Evil which practically all *Tiatr* plays are concerned with, Evil is powerful and Good is powerless and weak. The ultimate moral victory of the Good over the Evil quite often appears to be arbitrary and serendipitous. Except for a short period when Souzalins' *Tiatr* based on biblical and religious themes was very popular with the Goan audiences (*Sat Dukhi*, a *Tiatr* depicting the seven shafts of pain and sorrow in The Virgin's life was played to capacity crowds in football stadia and village playgrounds all over the Old Conquest territories during the 1950s), we find the basic theme between Good and Evil, the Powerless and Powerful expressed in contemporary terms rather than in mythological terms.

In resolving conflicts, playwrights often depend on faith or a *deus ex machina* expressing perhaps a deep Roman Catholic belief in the efficacy of divine intervention and miracles, a belief counter to the idea of individual choice and psychological motivation as key fac-

tors in the unfolding of human drama. *Tiatr*, though set against the background of contemporary Goan society, thus reveals a world view which is essentially pre-modern and is essentialist partaking of the elements of the medieval Christian miracle and morality plays. In spite of its commercial modernity, the *Tiatr* still harks back to the stereotype village character impersonation of *zagor*.

Tiatr as popular entertainment has not much in common with the Italian operetta or opera. It resembles popular performances such as the Music Hall entertainment of 19th century London, Vaudeville of France or the Variety in the United States of the same period. The main difference is the presence of a play with a beginning, middle and end, within the framework of Musical Variety Entertainment. In a way, as genre, *Tiatr* seems to come closest to Brecht's theory and practice of Epic Theatre.

It would be more profitable to compare the origins and development of the Konkani language *Tiatr* with the development of the *Zarzuela* as it took place in the Philippines in various Philippine languages dialects, following the colonial model of the Spanish *Zarzuela*. The socio-economic conditions which triggered its development, the choice of plots and themes as well as the styles of presentation reveal a remarkable degree of similarity³⁹ This is, of course, not to suggest that there is any kind of direct influence of the one on the other. It does point out that a similar historical colonial experience underlines a cultural ethos which seems to bring about a parallel development of popular cultural expressions.

Tiatr is a dynamic performance genre. Its form and content constantly change in response to changes in popular taste as measured in commercial success. The traditional *Tiatr* with its star performers, currently seems to have become a somewhat vehicle. *Khel Tiatr* (non-stop) also has produced a number of commercial flops which try to follow the successful formula of sensational action-suspense melodramas. Perhaps the trend is toward integration of the improvisational comic sideshow material from the traditional *Tiatr* into the plots and themes of *Khel Tiatr's* direct dramatic format. The recent success of Jacob D'Souza (Prince Jacob, as he styles himself) is illustrative of this change. His approach can be contrasted with that of a traditional master of comic sideshow such as Jacinto Vaz, who even when he plays a character remains outside as a great comic—an eternal figure like Chaplin.

During the last twenty-five years, Goan society has undergone radical changes. Vatican II has liberalised the outlook of the Catholic Church. Political integration into the Indian Union has ended the isolation and stagnation of a colonial dependency. It also has brought

about feelings of frustration, felt more keenly by the traditional elites and the new rich migrant workers in the Gulf countries who feel that their home space is being taken over by outsiders. There are also signs of changes in Goan Ethos. Portuguese is no more a language of public discourse. Goans are realising that the Catholic Church is not a mere Portuguese or European phenomenon but a global institution with a large number of Catholics living in conditions of privation and exploitation in Third World countries. Some Goans have taken the trouble to go to the records of parish churches to trace and adopt their ancestral Hindu family names. Many more are choosing Sanskritic names for their children. Intercaste and interfaith marriages, though not commonplace, are being accepted. There are more Goan pilgrims visiting our Lady of Vailankani in Tamil Nadu than our Lady of Fatima in Portugal. *Fado* and Portuguese music as well as Latino-African rhythms of the 40s and 50s are fast fading. The Catholic Goan youths speak and practise the universal language of pop and rock. Football is still the most popular sport in Goa's villages, but cricket is also making inroads.

There are these signs of epochalist attitude which are balanced by a search for Goan identity and essentialist quest. The Konkani language, of course, is a key factor in defining Goan identity. It would be wrong to dismiss *Tiatr* as the outcome of cheap commercialisation. *Tiatr* is a genuine expression of popular culture which juxtaposes and balances the epochalist and essentialist values of Goan society.

Notes and References

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3. A S Gunawardana, 'From Ritual to Rationality', *The Drama Review*, Vol XV, No.3, 1971, Spring, New York, pp.48-61.
4. Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures*, Basic Books, Inc, New York, 1973, pp.243-244.
5. "Jajamani model of race and ethnic relations" as characterized by Caroline Ifeca, 'The Images of Goa', "Indo-Portuguese History: Old Issues, New Questions", ed Teotonio R de Souza, Concept Publishing Co, New Delhi, 1985.
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7. Jean-Luc Camilleri, "*L'acculturation des Catholiques des Vieilles Conquetes de Goa*" (unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Aix en Provence, France, available in Central Library, Panjim), fn 28, Vol 1 p 96.
8. B D Satoskar, "*Gomantak: Prakriti and Sanskriti*" (in Marathi), Vol 1, Poona, 1980, pp.441-442.
9. There is a great deal of confusion as to which occupational castes are included amongst the *Sudir* cluster. A non-Bamon, non-*Chardo* person does not identify himself by his occupational caste, and not as a *Sudir*. A somewhat muddled listing of sub-castes identified as *Sudirs* can be found in A B de Braganca Pereira, *Etnograifa da India, Portuguesa, Bastora*, 1940, Vol 2, p 47.
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11. Goan professionals and bureaucrats, elected and nominated representatives of municipal and national assemblies in Goa and Portugal were representatives of this class.
12. F L Gomes and Miguel V de Abreu provide examples of this republican liberalism.
13. B S Shastri, "Sources of Income and Expenditure of the Churches in Goa (C L 1510-1800): A Note" (unpublished paper delivered at Seminar on Local History, Panjim, Goa, February 1986) pp.1-6.
14. C F Saldanha, "A Short History of Goa", Goa 1957.
15. For a Discussion of these clubs see B G D'Souza "Off-shoots of Goan Village Communities", 'Goan Society in Transition', Popular Prakashan, Bombay, 1975, pp.204-214. Also Baptista D E, "The 'Coor System'—A Study of Goan Club Life in Bombay" (unpublished dissertation—The University of Bombay), Bombay, 1958.
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17. J H da Cunha-Riviera, 'An Historical Essay on Konkani Language' (Translated from Portuguese by T Lobo) in A K Priolkar, "The Printing Press in India", Bombay, 1958.
18. Olivinho Gomes, "The Konkani Odyssey-IV", *Herald*, Panjim, May 16, 1985, p.2.
19. Ibid.
20. His work published posthumously includes "*Diccionario Portuguez-Konkani*", Bombaim, 1893. These have been reissued recently in a single volume edition.
21. Olivinho Gomes, "The Konkani Odyssey-VI", *Herald*, Panjim, May 16, 1985, p.2

22. Tomazinho Cardozo, 'Tiatrist Bhavamno', (in Konkani), *Gulab*, Vol II, No 10, October 1984, p.115.
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24. P S Pissurlencar, "Portuguese-Maratha Sambandh" (in Marathi), University of Poona, Poona 1967, p.324 (Citing Francisco Raymundo de Moraes Pereira, *Annal Indico Lusitano*, pp.38-61).
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28. Jose Pereira and Micael Martins, 'Goa and Its Music', *Boltim do Instituto Menezes Braganca*, Basbra, Goa, 1984, No 144, pp.75-90j; No 145 pp.19-112.
29. For a detailed description of the performance and a transcript of the song see Antonio da Cruz, "Goa—Men and Matters", Vasco da Gama, Goa 1974, pp 337-344.
30. Interview with Felicio Cardoso, Margao, February 1986.
31. Interview with Dr Manohar Rai Sardesia Panjim, July 1985.
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34. *Ibid*, pp.188-189.
35. Meadows Taylor, "The Story of My Life", London, 1882, pp 28-29.
36. Interview with Tomazinho Cardozo, Candolim, January 1985.
37. Interview with Wilson Mazarello, Margao, May 1985.
38. Interview with Mario Cabral e Sa, Panjim, February 1986.
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