

# BRIDGING CONTINENTS: HOW EUROPEAN DRAMA SHAPED THE SOUL OF GOAN (INDIAN) TIATR

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## Abstract

Drama has always been a significant medium of entertainment, blending imagination and reality with creative expression. It serves as a reflection of different eras; offering valuable insights into cultural beliefs, traditions, emotions, social structures, and political issues. As drama evolves, it influences various cultures, shaping local theatrical forms. One such notable influence can be seen in Goan Tiatr, a unique and vibrant theatrical tradition. The Portuguese who ruled the state for more than 450 years left behind an indelible mark on Goan tiatr particularly its dramatic technique, music and storytelling. Today Goan tiatrs are not only popular in Goa but also other parts of the state as well as European countries. From the commercial point of view, tiatrs not only sustained financially but also provided entrepreneurial opportunities to many thus providing direct as well indirect jobs.

This paper explores the impact of European drama on Goan Tiatr, tracing its origins and development. It examines how elements of European theatre, including structure, themes, and performance techniques, have influenced Tiatr while allowing it to retain its distinct cultural identity. Furthermore, the paper analyzes how Tiatr has been embraced by Goan audiences, leading to its widespread popularity and recognition within Goan society and diaspora abroad. By understanding this artistic exchange, we can appreciate the dynamic evolution of Tiatr and its significant role in preserving and enriching Goan cultural heritage.

**Key words:** Tiatr, Drama, cultural influence, dramatic structure, stage craft.

## Saranx

Nattok (*drama*) hem sodanch mon'rizvonchem ani kolponaxokt madheom. Nattok ek vastov ani srojon'xil obhivoktichem surmell sadovpachem ek mhotvachem madheom' zaun asa. Tem vegvegllea yuganchem podbimb mhonnun kam' korta. Tantuntlean sonskrutichi xrod'dha (*beliefs*), porompora, bhavna, somajik rochna ani rajki vixoyancher moladik nirixonn divop zata. Nattkachi (*drama*) udorgot zait veta toxi tacho probhav vegvegllea sonskrutayancher zata ani thollavea nattyoprokarank tem akar dita.

Osoch ek khaxelo prokar Gõycho Tiatr, ek ekmev (*unique*) prokar zaun asa ani tantunt rosroxit nattyo porompora pollounk mellta. 450 vorsam poros odik kall Gõy rajyacher sot'ta cholovpi Purtugezamni Gõychea tiatracher, vixex korun tachem nattya tontr, songit ani kothanokacher pusun kaddunk zainam toslo chhap soddla. Aiz Gõycho tiatr fokt Gõyantuch nhoi bogor desachea her vattharamni toxench Europi desamni-i lokpriya zal'lo asa. Vevharik dixtin pollelear tiatr nhoich fokt orthik nodren tigon urlo, bogor zaitea zonnank udiogi sondi mell'llio ani oxie toren protyokx toxench oprotyokx nokrio gavlio.

Hea sôdant Europi-i nattkacho (drama-cho) Gõychea tiatracher zal'lo porinnam' sodun kaddla; tacho oromb ani tachi udorgot sodun kaddlia. Rochnnuk, vixoi, sadorikoronn tontr hea sarkea Europi-i rongmachiechea ghotokancho tiatracher koso probhav poddla ani tech borabor taka apli agli-veglli sonskrutik osmitai tigoun dovorpak mell'llia hachi topasni kelia. Te bhair Gõychea prexokamni tiatrak koso apnaila, taka lagun Gõykar somazam modim ani pordesantlea pordexvayam (*diaspora*) modim taka xekaxek lokpriyota ani man'yotai mell'llia hachem vixlexonn hea sôdant kelam.

Ho kolatmok adan-podan somzon gheun tiatrachi sudduddit vadd ani Gõychea sonskrutik daizachi rakhonn ani ti girest korpant tachie mhotvachie bhumikechi amchean tokhnnai korumieta.

**Biz utram:** Tiatr, nattok, sonskrutik probhav, nattya rochnnuk, rongmachi kuxolltai (*stage craft*).

## सारांश

नाटक हें मनरिजवणेचें एक म्हत्वाचें माध्यम. जातूंत कल्पनाशक्त आनी वास्तव हांच्या सृजनशील अभिव्यक्तीचें मिश्रण जाता. हातूंतल्यान वेगवेगळ्या युगांचें प्रतिबिंब; संस्कृतीक समजुती, परंपरा, भावना, समाजीक रचणूक आनी राजकी प्रस्न हांचे विशीं मोलादीक म्हायती दिवप जाता. नाटकाची जशी जशी उदरगत जावपाक लागली तसो ताचो प्रभाव वेगवेगळ्या संस्कृतायांचेर जाताना, थळाव्या नाट्यरुपांक आकार दिताना दिसपाक लागलो. अशेच तरेन उल्लेखनीय प्रभावांतल्यान गोंयांत तियात्र हो एक आगळोच आनी जिवंत नाट्य परंपरेंत दिसून येता. 450 वर्सां परस चड काळ गोंयांचेर राज्य करपी पुर्तुगेजांनी गोंयांत तियात्राचेर खास करून ताचें नाटकीय तंत्र, संगीत आनी कथा सांगपाचेर एक वेगळीच छाप सोडली. आयज गोंयच्या तियात्रांक गोंयांतच न्हय तर राज्याच्या हेर वाठारांनी तशेंच युरोपीय देशांनीय लोकप्रिय आसा. वेपारी नदरेन पळयल्यार तियात्र फकत अर्थीक नदरेन तिगून उरलोच पूण जायत्या जाणांक उद्देगीक संदीय मेळ्ळ्यो आनी अशे तरेन प्रत्यक्ष तशेंच अप्रत्यक्ष नोकऱ्यो मेळ्ळ्यो.

ह्या प्रपत्राच्या आदारान युरोपीय नाटकाचो गोंयच्या तियात्राचेर जाल्लो परिणाम, ताची उत्पत्ती आनी उदरगत सोदून काडपाचो यत्न केला. रचणूक, विशय, सादरीकरण तंत्र ह्या सारक्या युरोपीय रंगमाचयेच्या घटकांचो तियात्राचेर कसो प्रभाव पडला आनी तेच बरोबर ताका आपली वेगळी संस्कृतीक अस्मिताय तिगोवन दवरपाक मेळ्ळा हाची तपासणी केल्या. ते भायर गोंयच्या प्रेक्षकांनी तियात्राक कसो उखलून धरला, ताका लागून गोंयकार समाजा भितर आनी परदेशांत पसरल्ल्या समाजा भितर ताची व्यापक

लोकप्रियता आनी मान्यताय मेळ्ळा हाचें विश्लेशण ह्या प्रपत्रांत केलां. हो कलात्मक आदान-प्रदान समजून घेवन तियात्राची गतीशील उत्क्रांती आनी गोंयच्या संस्कृतीक दायजाची राखण आनी समृध्द करपाक ताची म्हत्वाची भुमिका हांगां दिसून येता.

**मुखेल उतरां:** तियात्र, नाटक/ नाट्य, संस्कृतीक प्रभाव, नाट्य रचणूक, माची कौशल्य.

## Introduction

The term drama originates from the Greek word "*draō*", meaning "to act" or "to do." The roots of drama can be traced back to ancient Greece, where theatrical performances were a significant cultural and religious practice. Over centuries, this dramatic tradition evolved into various forms and genres, each influenced by the cultural, religious, and social contexts of the time. As these theatrical forms spread across Europe and beyond, they ultimately reached the shores of Goa, where they helped shape one of the region's most beloved theatrical forms—Tiatr. This rich legacy of European drama has left a profound influence on the Goan Tiatr, one of Goa's most important and enduring theatrical traditions.

## European Drama: Origin and Its Development

European drama spans over 2,500 years, beginning in 5<sup>th</sup> century BCE Greece, where it emerged as part of religious festivals dedicated to the God Dionysus. Both drama and theatre derive from Greek origins, reflecting their deep-seated significance in Greek society. The early Greek dramatists, such as Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides, laid the foundation of Western theatre with their tragedies and comedies.

As the Roman Empire expanded in the 3<sup>rd</sup> century BCE, it absorbed and adapted many aspects of Greek drama. Theatre became a key element of Roman entertainment and culture, often staged in grand amphitheatres. Roman drama placed more emphasis on spectacle, using elaborate scenery, costumes, and special effects to engage audiences. This period marked the spread of drama across Europe, eventually influencing regions like England.

With the fall of the Western Roman Empire and the rise of the Byzantine Empire, theatre faced a decline as the Church viewed performers with suspicion. Drama was mainly sustained by traveling troupes of entertainers—jesters, acrobats, minstrels, and storytellers—who performed at fairs and in public spaces. However, these were largely informal, and staged productions became rare.

By the early Middle Ages, the Church reclaimed drama as a tool for religious instruction. Liturgical plays became part of church services, enacting biblical stories to educate the largely illiterate population. This marked a shift from secular to religiously motivated performances.

- Churches popularized drama by staging biblical events inside church buildings or on their grounds.
- Performances were conducted in Latin, often with two singing groups (choir or monks) creating a call-and-response effect.
- By the 11th century, this form of drama spread across Europe and Russia.
- These plays, though religious, were also a means to educate and reinforce moral values.

During the medieval period, drama developed into several key forms. Miracle plays focused on the lives and miracles of saints, portraying divine intervention in the lives of mortals. Mystery plays enacted biblical narratives, covering events from Creation to the Last Judgment. These plays were organized into cycles and were often staged during major festivals like Corpus Christi. Morality plays featured allegorical characters such as Everyman, Good Deeds, and Death. They centered on the struggle between good and evil, emphasizing Christian morality. Interludes were short, often comic performances staged between acts of serious plays or during social gatherings. They served as comic relief and sometimes conveyed satirical messages.

Mystery plays were commonly performed as part of cycles known as Corpus Christi cycles, especially in cities like York and Wakefield. The cycle of drama refers to a series of interconnected plays that collectively tell the story of Christian salvation history, from Creation to the Resurrection.

Medieval drama was performed in various locations, including churchyards, marketplaces, and public squares. The stage design often included temporary stages or pageant wagons, which were movable platforms. Actors were typically amateurs from local guilds, although sometimes members of the clergy also participated. The costumes were richly symbolic and elaborate, helping to distinguish different characters, such as angels and devils. The audience included people from all social classes, making medieval drama both educational and entertaining.

The 16th and 17th centuries marked the Golden Age of English drama. Playwrights like William Shakespeare, Christopher Marlowe, Ben Jonson, and Thomas Middleton produced works that remain influential to this day.

- Most plays were written in iambic pentameter, a rhythmic structure that added a poetic quality to dialogue.
- Themes were often drawn from Greek and Roman mythology, history, and human nature.

- The Elizabethan stage emphasized complex characters, universal themes (e.g., ambition, fate, love), and innovative stagecraft.

In the 18th century, European drama saw the rise of Sentimental Comedy and Domestic Tragedy, which focused on middle-class values and moral lessons. Playwrights like Richard Steele and George Lillo portrayed characters who embodied virtue and emotional sensitivity. The earlier Restoration Comedy with its crude humor declined, making way for more serious and sentimental themes. Theatres became more professional, with dedicated acting companies and permanent venues. Audiences favored plays that promoted morality, emotion, and respectability.

The early 19th century was dominated by Romanticism, which emphasized individual emotion, imagination, and freedom. As the century progressed, Melodrama became popular, with exaggerated characters and sensational plots highlighting the battle between good and evil. Later, Realism and Naturalism emerged, led by playwrights like Henrik Ibsen and Anton Chekhov, who focused on ordinary life and social critique. Themes began addressing real societal problems and psychological conflicts. This period laid the foundation for the modernist theatre movements that followed.

#### The Role of Portuguese Colonialism and Influence of European Drama in Shaping Goan Tiatr

Goa's colonial history under Portuguese rule played a significant role in shaping its cultural and artistic landscape. The Portuguese introduced European theatrical traditions through operatic performances, religious plays, and secular drama. While Goa had indigenous folk theatre forms like Zagor and Khell, the exposure to European stagecraft led to the development of a more structured form of drama.

The migration of Goans to Bombay for employment further facilitated this cultural exchange. English and Portuguese drama performances in Bombay influenced Goan artists, leading to the adaptation of these elements into Konkani theatre. The cross-pollination between European trends such as Romanticism, melodrama, and operetta with Goan folk traditions created a unique cultural synthesis. Tiatr became a medium through which Goan social issues were dramatized using European theatrical techniques, making it both a local and global artistic form.

Centuries of Portuguese rule laid the groundwork for this artistic fusion. Exposure to European liturgical dramas, sacred music, secular operas, and theatrical conventions enriched Goan artistic expression. Western classical music, elaborate stagecraft, and narrative techniques were seamlessly integrated into Tiatr, creating a hybrid form of theatre that continues to thrive.

## Cultural Folk Traditions in Goa Before Tiatr

Before the emergence of Tiatr, Goa already had vibrant folk theatre traditions. The primary forms of Goan theatre included *Zagor* in North Goa and *Khell* (also known as *Fell*) in South Goa. These folk performances were deeply rooted in the Goan cultural fabric and were staged in public spaces, often as part of major festivals like Carnival and Easter feasts.

*Khell*, a traditional play passed down orally across generations, retained rustic and folk elements such as improvised dialogue, local themes, and simple stage designs. Over time, it evolved into *Khell-Tiatr*, maintaining its connection to traditional Goan culture while incorporating structured narratives. Unlike *Tiatr*, *Khell* continued to use folk instruments and followed a more spontaneous performance style.

While *Zagor* gained popularity in Bombay, it was often perceived as crude. Affluent Goans living in Bombay distanced themselves from it due to ridicule from non-Goans, leading them to turn their interests towards English and Portuguese drama instead. This transition paved the way for a more structured and sophisticated theatre form—*Tiatr*.

### Lucasinho Ribeiro: The Pioneer of *Tiatr* and His European Inspirations

While the development of drama was taking place in Europe, a Goan boy named Lucasinho Ribeiro (also known as Rebeilo) became associated with an Italian operetta company. During his time with the troupe, Ribeiro gained hands-on experience and valuable knowledge in various aspects of operatic and theatrical performance, including stagecraft, acting, music, and song composition—essential elements in European drama.

After acquiring this knowledge, Ribeiro returned to Goa and staged a play titled *Italian Burgo*, heavily inspired by European theatrical traditions. This production incorporated multiple scenes, live music, and songs to enhance the dramatic narrative, marking a shift from traditional folk performances. Ribeiro's exposure to European theatre helped lay the foundation for a hybrid form of drama that blended Western artistic elements with Goan storytelling.

Goa's long-standing status as a Portuguese colony had already laid the foundation for cultural cross-pollination. Centuries of Portuguese rule exposed Goans to European artistic forms, including Catholic liturgical dramas, sacred music, secular European operas, and theatrical conventions. The integration of Western classical music, elaborate stagecraft, and narrative techniques with local traditions created fertile ground for a hybrid form of theatre. Ribeiro's efforts led to the emergence of Tiatr, a theatrical form that combined European dramatic structures and musical sensibilities with Goan language, themes, and social realities.

The first Tiatr performance was staged on Easter Sunday, 17th April 1892, at the New Alfred

Theatre in Bombay. Bombay, at the time, was a cultural melting pot, exposing Goan performers to both Western stagecraft and indigenous performance traditions. Ribeiro's first Tiatr was an adaptation of an English opera called *Italian Boy*. While rehearsing, he faced challenges in arranging set changes between scenes, as delays could bore the audience. To overcome this, Ribeiro introduced songs performed in front of the curtain while stagehands prepared the next scene. This strategy was well received, keeping the audience entertained throughout and soon becoming a defining hallmark of the Tiatr structure.

Unlike *Khell-Tiatr*, which continued to use folk instruments and traditional tunes, Ribeiro's Tiatr incorporated Western musical instruments such as the violin, banjo, trumpet, saxophone, and drum. Additionally, he collaborated with trained musicians who could read and write musical scores, distinguishing Tiatr from purely oral folk traditions. Ribeiro's success with *Italian Burgo* led him, along with fellow Goans such as Sebastiao Gabriel D'Souza (popularly known as Karachiwala) and Joao Lazarus D'Souza, to adapt and stage other Western theatrical works. However, Ribeiro ensured that his productions remained connected to Goan culture, integrating local social narratives into the scripts rather than focusing entirely on European storylines.

Ribeiro was proficient in English, a good composer, singer, and violinist, making him well-suited for operatic theatre. Through the recommendation of a prominent Goan, he secured work as a stagehand with an opera troupe and traveled with them to Poona, Madras, Simla, and Calcutta. Eventually, when the troupe left for Burma, Ribeiro parted ways with them and returned to Bombay. Before leaving, he purchased velvet costumes from the opera company, intending to use them in his own theatrical venture. Drawing from his experiences, he composed and staged *Italian Bhurgo* with the help of fellow artists such as Joao Agostinho Fernandes, Caitaninho Fernandes, Agostinho Mascarenhas, and one other unidentified individual. Ribeiro's production was not simply a result of a sudden creative impulse but stemmed from his long-standing passion for drama, which he nurtured from his childhood.

Through this fusion of European theatrical techniques—ranging from operetta, Elizabethan structure, Renaissance comedy, Italian *Commedia dell'arte*, and melodrama—with Goan cultural traditions, Ribeiro laid the foundation for what would become the unique and enduring art form of Goan Tiatr.

## Structural and Thematic Parallels Between European Drama and Goan Tiatr

Tiatr exhibits several key similarities with European drama, particularly in terms of structure and themes:

The structure of Ribeiro's Tiatr, using 3 to 5 scenes, reflected the multi-scene format of Elizabethan drama, which was traditionally divided into five acts with multiple scenes, where

playwrights like Shakespeare divided their works into acts and scenes to build dramatic tension. Moreover, Ribeiro's plays leaned heavily on comic elements, drawing inspiration from Renaissance interludes and Shakespearean comedies, which often used humor, satire, and fool or jester characters for comic relief. Ribeiro intentionally prioritized comedy over tragedy, aligning his works more closely with the light, improvisational style of Italian *Commedia dell'arte*, which featured stock characters and humorous skits.

The use of musical interludes between scenes in Ribeiro's productions was similar to practices found in Italian operettas and medieval morality plays, where songs were used to entertain the audience and bridge dramatic moments. Ribeiro also borrowed elements from 19th-century European melodrama, which emphasized emotional intensity, moral clarity, and the ongoing battle between good and evil. However, rather than directly imitating European melodrama, Ribeiro reshaped these elements to reflect Goan social realities, bringing issues like injustice, family disputes, and everyday struggles onto the Tiatr stage.

It is important to note that Tiatr, unlike *Khell-Tiatr*, was structured with songs called *kantaram*, performed between the scenes or *porde* (meaning curtains). These songs were often unrelated to the play's main storyline but served as entertainment during scene changes. However, when songs were integral to the play's narrative, they were referred to as *kant*. Another essential feature of the Tiatr was the inclusion of comic interludes, which provided levity and helped balance the overall tone of the performance.

Through this fusion of European theatrical techniques—operetta, Elizabethan drama, Renaissance comedy, *Commedia dell'arte*, and melodrama—with Goan traditions, Ribeiro laid the foundation for Tiatr. This innovation marked a turning point in Konkani theatre, leading to a thriving performing arts culture. *Tiatr*, with its combination of songs, comedy, and socially relevant themes, remains one of the most popular forms of modern Konkani theatre, carrying forward the influence of European drama while staying deeply rooted in Goan identity.

Another important influence of European drama on Goan *Tiatr* can be seen in how it has become more professional and financially organized. Just like in European theatre, where artists are respected and paid for their talent, Tiatr in Goa also values the work of its performers and crew. Today, *Tiatr* actors usually earn between ₹1500 to ₹2000 per show. If the actor is well-known or experienced, they may receive up to ₹5000. The backstage crew, who manage lighting, sound, and stage setups, also earn between ₹1000 to ₹1500 for their contribution. Tickets for *Tiatr* shows are usually priced around ₹150 per person, making them affordable for the audience and helpful in supporting the team financially. This payment system shows that Tiatr has followed the European example of treating theatre as a serious and rewarding profession. It highlights how foreign influences have helped improve not only the artistic quality but also the earning potential of *Tiatr* in Goa.

## Conclusion

Tiatr became more than just a form of entertainment—it served as a cultural bridge for Goans under colonial rule, blending Western artistic styles with Goan identity. While rooted in Western stagecraft, *Tiatr's* focus on local themes made it accessible to Goan audiences of diverse backgrounds, thus uniting different social and cultural spheres.

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