

# Libraries and Tiatr: Preserving Goan Culture Through Literature and Performance

**Shamin Pereira**

## Abstract

The state of Goa is known for its rich cultural heritage, blending Indian and Portuguese influences. Two significant cultural pillars in Goa are its libraries and Tiatr, a popular form of Konkani theatre. This article explores the interconnected roles of libraries and Tiatr in preserving and promoting Goan identity, language, and heritage. It analyzes how libraries serve as custodians of literary and historical records related to Tiatr, while Tiatr as a dynamic art form invigorates the language and provides social commentary. The article further discusses challenges faced by both institutions and suggests strategies for their mutual reinforcement in cultural preservation.

**Keywords:** Libraries, Cultural heritage, Cultural preservation, Konkani theatre.

## Saranx

Gõy raj, tachea girest sonskrutik daizakhatir prosid'dh asa, zhoim Bharoti ani Purtugez probhavachem sundor mixronn dison yeta. Göyantlean don mhotvache sonskrutik adharstombh mhollear vachnaloi ani tiatr, zo Konknni rongmachiecho ek lokpriya prokar. Göychi osmitai, bhas, samballpak ani vaddovpak vachnaloi ani tiatr hanchi porospor sombondim bhumikecho sôd lavun hea lekhant mhaiti dilia. Gronthaloï tiatra sombondint sahityik ani itihāsik nondnnieche rakhonddar koxim kam' kortat, zalear tiatr ho ek gotixil (*dynamic*) kola prokar bhaxek urba dita ani somajik tipanni dita hachem khaxeleponn tantunt kelam. Lekhant fuddem donui sonsthank mellpia avhanam vixinchi cheorchea kelia ani sonskrutik choddovnni divpa khatir yukti suchoiliat.

**Biz Utram:** Vachnaloi, Sonskrutik porompora, Sonskrutayechi rakhonn, Konknni tiatr.

## सारांश

गिरेस्त संस्कृतीक दायजा खातीर गोंय राज्य प्रसिद्ध आसा. जातूंत भारतीय आनी पुर्तुगेज प्रभावांचें सुंदर मिश्रण दिसून येता. गोंयांतल्यान दोन महत्वाचे संस्कृतीक आधारस्तंभ म्हणल्यार वाचनालय आनी तियात्र -- कोंकणी रंगमाचयेचो एक लोकप्रिय प्रकार. गोंयची अस्मिताय, भास, दायज सांबाळपाक आनी वाडोवपाक वाचनालय आनी तियात्र हांची परस्पर संबंदीत भुमिका ह्या

लेखांत सोदून काडल्या. ग्रंथालयां तियात्राक संबंदीत साहित्यीक आनी इतिहासीक नोंदींचो राखणदार म्हूण कशीं काम करतात, जाल्यार तियात्र हो एक गतीशील कलाप्रकार भाशेक उर्बा दिता आनी समाजीक टिप्पणी दिता हाचें विश्लेशण तातूंत केलां. लेखांत फुडें दोनूय संस्थांक मेळपी आव्हानां विशीं चर्चा केल्या आनी संस्कृतीक संरक्षण दिवपा खातीर रणनिती सुचयल्या.

## Introduction

The State of Goa is well-known for its vibrant culture, historical sites, and its natural beauty. Konkani is considered as the identity mark of Goans. One notable art form is tiatr, a unique type of Konkani theatre that has thrived in Roman-script Konkani for over 130 years. Tiatr is based on satire, music, and dance. It has generated public discussions around caste, religion, identity, politics and other social matters since it began. Similar to how tiatr preserves and promotes Goan identity, language, and heritage, libraries also act as guardians of literary and historical documents related to tiatr. Libraries preserve and share knowledge, while tiatr serves as a popular medium for cultural expression and social critique. This study presents tiatr as a collection of texts and media that require archiving besides being a live performance tradition. It draws attention to the evolving functions of libraries and demonstrates how these two organizations help to preserve and advance Konkani theatrical and literary traditions. This paper examines the close relationship between libraries and tiatr in protecting Goan cultural heritage.

## Literature Review

Tiatr is a form of Konkani musical theatre that emerged in the late 19th century and since then has become vital means of expression for the Goans. The Portuguese influence in Goa has affected the Goan cultural society. The interaction of the indigeonous Goan culture and the European with its associated attempts to substitue local Goan customs, has meant that the Goan culture has been, in some sense, rather unique. The 19th century witnessed a more liberal approach from the church which permitted the keeping of more open attitudes of culture performances to flourish among the Goan Christians and Hindus. Out of these, tiatr has become the most popular (Kale. 1986).

The history of tiatr can be traced back to 1892 where the first play “*Italian Bhurgo*” was staged by Lucazinho Ribeiro in Bombay. Shortly after, Joao Agostinho Fernandes took the genre to another level by composing the first Konkani script and using it for a major genre of Goan literature and theatre. Under his influence, Goan literature and theatre bloomed. Come the late 1950s, Goan theatre was reaching its most glorious peaks, driven by the profound works of extraordinary scriptwriters who continuously elevated and preserved the essence of tiatr (Cardozo).

Tiatr developed in the working-class Goan Catholic communion community. In Goa, during the old days, villages would perform a tiatr which was composed by local artists primarily from the same village during the local parish feasts. This enabled the local young artists to collaborate. It

was also an opportunity for younger budding artists to meet either semi-pro or professional artists. In turn, the younger ones would receive many encouraging tips. However, in the present days, such activities have decreased primarily owing to the attention span of the audience. It is a fact that the current generation viewing theatre is gravitated towards watching professional sponsored tiatrs, and is even more drawn towards watching them in the now available air-conditioned auditoriums. (Fernandes, 267)

Kala Academy has played a major role in the improvement of tiatr by organizing tiatr festivals and competitions. Similarly, the Tiatr Academy of Goa (TAG) was set up by the Goa Government in 2009 to streamline the efforts of archiving and providing access to tiatr scripts, 'kantaram' (lyrics), recordings, and other associated research. To further the cause of the tiatr, TAG has formulated several schemes (Tiatr Academy of Goa). These institutions, together with the Goa State Central Library, will align with the purpose of these institutions

A vital and vibrant theater tradition, tiatr is regarded as an important component of its cultural legacy. The Goan government has advocated for the recognition of Tiatr as a national cultural heritage and has suggested that it be added to UNESCO's Representative list of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity because of its democratic and community-focused nature. (Task force)

People grow and develop under the influence of culture, and libraries play a vital role in supporting cultural practices that promote sustainable growth. A cultural heritage is the parts of our past which we value and which we choose to preserve and pass on to the future generations and the outside world (Ekwelem et. al.).

The International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA) emphasizes that libraries must help protect cultural heritage so it can inspire future generations. (Preserving cultural heritage).

Different types of communication, both tangible and intangible, are placed within libraries. Libraries play a critical role in the preservation of cultural heritage by protecting objects, oral tradition, and writing. To keep these knowledge systems accessible for future generations, libraries must document and digitize them. Through enhanced technologies, libraries can utilize digitization and archiving approaches to preserve indigenous knowledge in online archives. (Mahadeva 54)

Despite their importance, libraries face challenges in preserving knowledge. These include limited funding, ethical issues related to ownership and access, and technical difficulties. However, there is little research on how libraries specifically interact with tiatr, even though it is central to Goan cultural expression. This lack of study highlights the need to explore library efforts in protecting and promoting tiatr heritage.

## Objectives

- To investigate the role of libraries in the collection, archiving, and promotion of literature and scripts related to Tiatr.
- To evaluate the contribution of Tiatr as a performing art to the preservation and transmission of Goan culture, language, and social events.
- To examine the collaboration between libraries and Tiatr in the curation and promotion of cultural heritage.
- To explore the challenges faced by libraries and tiatr in preserving Goan cultural identity.

## Research Methodology

The research employs a qualitative approach combining:

- **Document analysis:** Review of Tiatr scripts, playbills, and archival collections in selected Goan libraries.
- **Interviews:** Conversations with librarians and cultural activists.
- **Observation:** Study of library-hosted workshops, and cultural events.
- **Document analysis** of TAG's official documents (constitution, scheme descriptions, publications list)
- **Published tiatr volumes** such as the 125th Anniversary commemorative book and recent script collections released by TAG.
- **Media reporting and commentary** regarding tiatr themes, institutional infrastructure
- **Online websites** that depict the voices of tiatr community.

## Findings and Recommendations

*Role of Libraries in Promoting Tiatr:* Goan libraries like Goa State Central Library, Kala Academy Library and Tiatr Academy of Goa Library are working towards preserving tiatr documents including tiatr scripts, memoirs, folklore, critical analyses, tiatr CDs, playbills, and newspaper clippings. In light of the extensive body of literature produced in the last hundred years,

the Goa State Central Library has curated a distinctive anthology of tiatr reports, comprising 250 newspaper articles sourced from publications based in Bombay. The State Central Library is currently engaged in the process of digitizing newspaper articles pertaining to tiatr and incorporating them into its archival collection. The Kala Academy Library has an impressive collection of over 500 tiatr scripts housed within its script bank.

In order to raise awareness, the Tiatr Academy of Goa frequently hosts a variety of events on the anniversaries of notable tiatrists who are recorded and preserved by its library, which features archival material. Tiatr scripts are preserved in the institute library for future generations. Kala Academy hosts tiatr competitions annually to promote tiatr and along with the oral history of tiatr, the Tiatr Academy of Goa Library also has CDs of the different tiatr competitions organized by Kala Academy.

The Goa State Central Library is the only library that exhibits digital archival efforts of the Tiatr ephemera. Researchers are pursuing literature in this field because of the significant increase in tiatr research over the past few years. However, a lack of funds, technical resources, and qualified staff makes it difficult for libraries to systematically catalog and digitize older text. The thoughts and experiences of seasoned tiatr writers and directors who have aided in the development of tiatr in recent years must be captured and documented. In addition to competition tiatr, the commercial tiatr that are held must also be recorded and documented at the aforementioned institutions for the benefit of future generations.

***Contribution of tiatr to Goan culture:*** Tiatr continues to be an essential medium for dramatizing historical events, social events, and other local concerns. Goan identity, migration, Catholic traditions, political satire, and moral values are all revealed in the scripts. Numerous well-known tiatrists have reflected and critiqued modern life on stage, using it as a "mirror of Goan culture." Notable tiatr examples include:

*Bhattkara* – written by João Agostinho Fernandes in 1904 which depicts the cruel caste systems and addresses injustices in Goan society.

*Ghor Dukhi Ganv Sukhi* – written by M. Boyer explores family problems and values.

*Revolta de Satari* – written by João Agostinho Fernandes depicts the Rane Revolt in Sattari, a rebellion against the Portuguese rule.

*Portuguese Kolvont* – written by John Claro depicts the lives of artists during the Portuguese era in Goa.

*Rog* – written by Shamin Pereira, which was presented at the Kala Academy B-group tiatr competition in 2024, focuses on the drawbacks of Goans moving to the UK, especially when they

leave their aging parents behind.

In addition to providing entertainment, the pastoral themes of the Lenten tiatr organized by the late Fr. Nevel Gracias encouraged the Catholic community to consider religion and Christ's teachings.

Additionally, Tiatr is a stronghold for the Konkani language, particularly in Roman script, which supports intergenerational transmission and linguistic preservation. Tiatr also acts as a mirror of Goan society, reflecting the socio-political dynamics over the decades, diaspora experiences, and social norms of the time.

***Collaboration between libraries and tiatr in promoting cultural heritage:*** Only the Goa State Central Library has partnered with the Tiatr Academy of Goa to preserve and promote Tiatr. This collaboration is demonstrated by the publication of the research publication "Tiatr Machi," which gathers research articles on the history of Tiatr. The local history collection at the Goa State Central Library is a vital resource for students pursuing higher education as well as for researchers seeking to comprehend the historical background of Tiatr. But the majority of these partnerships are unofficial and motivated by personal initiative. In order to promote tiatr, it is imperative that institutions such as Kala Academy and Tiatr Academy of Goa establish a structural institutional policy that includes other libraries.

Libraries and educational institutions can work together to digitize and archive materials. In order to ensure preservation and distribution, libraries can digitize screenplays, music recordings, and videos and build a digital repository that is readily available to the general public and scholars.

To encourage research on tiatr, the Tiatr Academy of Goa offers research schemes. Faculty and researchers will be able to study different facets of this field through collaborations with other higher education institutions, which will enhance the body of knowledge on tiatr.

Workshops, seminars, and exhibitions on Tiatr history can be arranged by libraries. Partnerships with educational institutions will support the inclusion of Tiatr literature in the curriculum, which will advance cultural literacy.

***Challenges faced by tiatr and libraries:*** Despite their cultural importance, both libraries and tiatr face significant challenges as under:

### ***Libraries***

The maintenance and modernization of libraries are impacted by the lack of funding for infrastructural facilities, which is a significant challenge for libraries.

The limited digitization of rare materials impedes their wider accessibility and preservation due to a lack of ICT-skilled personnel.

The inability of authorities to acknowledge the value of libraries makes it extremely difficult for librarians to plan activities and events that will attract patrons. The majority of libraries struggle to draw in young patrons and adjust to the shifting reading preferences of the younger generation.

**Tiatr:** The tiatr audience has been impacted by the growth of digital media and film. The younger generation tends to steer clear of tiatr because they are greatly influenced and drawn to the different OTT platforms that offer them entertainment.

Secondly, the expansion and caliber of tiatr are constrained by a lack of funding for productions. Tiatr directors must use the proceeds from ticket sales to reimburse the entire group. Therefore, the directors must bear the losses if the audience is smaller.

Most tiatr directors fail to submit their tiatr script to the libraries thereby making archiving difficult. Tiatr art form has been staged since more than 100 years. However, few scripts are found in the Goan libraries. There is a need to document the live performances and archive the literature for future generations.

## Conclusion

Tiatr and libraries work together to protect Goan cultural heritage. Libraries preserve the literary and historical significance of these artistic creations, while Tiatr revitalizes the Konkani language and social stories through performance. They work in concert to produce a framework that fosters continuity, education, and cultural pride. In an era of rapid technological development and globalization, it is more important than ever to preserve and promote indigenous literature and art forms. In addition to protecting Goan heritage, strengthening the relationship between libraries and tiatr will improve the cultural landscape for coming generations.

## References

1. Cardozo, Irene. "Goan tiatr: 125 years and counting". *The Times of India*, 20 Apr. 2017, [www.timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/goa/goan-tiatr-125-years-and-counting/articleshow/58270528.cms](http://www.timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/goa/goan-tiatr-125-years-and-counting/articleshow/58270528.cms)
2. Ekwelem, V. O et al. "Preservation of Cultural Heritage: The Strategic Role of the Library and Information Science Professionals in South East Nigeria." *Library Philosophy and Practice* (e-journal), 2011.
3. Fernandes, Andre Rafael. *Tiatro: A critical study*. 3<sup>rd</sup> May 2004. Goa University, Ph.D Thesis, [https://irgu.unigoa.ac.in/drs/bitstream/handle/unigoa/3676/fernandes\\_a\\_r\\_2004.pdf;jsessionid=DF4B04A56D9302A3C327E12C9B63CE77?sequence=1](https://irgu.unigoa.ac.in/drs/bitstream/handle/unigoa/3676/fernandes_a_r_2004.pdf;jsessionid=DF4B04A56D9302A3C327E12C9B63CE77?sequence=1)
4. Kale, Pramod. "Essentialist and Epochalist Elements in Goan Popular Culture: A Case

Study of 'Tiatr.'" *Economic and Political Weekly*, vol. 21, no. 47, 1986, pp. 2054–63. *JSTOR*, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4376359>. Accessed 14 Aug. 2025.

5. Mahadeva Prasad M S. “The role of libraries in preserving indigenous knowledge and cultural heritage.” *International Journal of Library and Information Science*, vol 10, no. 1, 2025, pp. 44-55, 10.34218/IJLIS\_10\_01\_006. Accessed on 29 Aug. 2025.
6. “Preserving cultural heritage for the future.” *International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions*, 2025, [www.ifla.org/preserving-cultural-heritage/](http://www.ifla.org/preserving-cultural-heritage/). Accessed on 27 Aug. 2025.
7. “Task force set up to seek UNESCO tag for tiatr”. *The Goan Everyday*, 19 Jun 2025. <https://www.thegoan.net/goa-news/%EF%BB%BFtask-force-set-up-to-seek-unesco-tag-for-tiatr/131990>. “Tiatr Academy of Goa”. Government of Goa, 2025, [www.goa.gov.in/department/tiattracademyofgoa/#:~:text=To%20collect%20funds%20by%20way](http://www.goa.gov.in/department/tiattracademyofgoa/#:~:text=To%20collect%20funds%20by%20way), <https://tiattracademyofgoa.com>. Accessed on 29 Aug. 2025.