

Tiatr: A New Form of Entrepreneurship in Goa – Problems and Prospects

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Abstract: Tiatr, which has a history of more than 100 years, is a type of musical theatre popular in the state of Goa on the West coast of India as well as in Mumbai and with expatriate communities in the Middle East, London and other cities where Konkani speakers have a considerable presence. The dramas are performed mainly in the Roman Konkani dialects and include music, dancing and singing. Tiatr today revolves around social, religious and political themes. It is considered to be a mirror of Goan culture. The first original tiatr script was written and directed by João Agostinho Fernandes, entitled “Belle de Cavel” or “Sundori Cavelchi” in 1895 in Bombay and for all his consistent devotion and encouragement over fifty years, he was conferred the title “Pai Tiatrist” (Father Tiatrist). Tiatr as a form of entrepreneurship has created direct as well as indirect employment for many artists as well as back stage support staff. Some families are fully dependent on this form of entrepreneurship for their livelihood. The economy of the state to a large extent is supported by this form of entertainment. Realizing its importance in the Goan economy, the government of Goa has devised various schemes financial as well as non-financial for the development of tiatr. However, it still needs the attention of policy makers as it has bright prospects, Goa being a tourist destination. The article tried to find out over a period of time how this form of entertainment evolved based on secondary data and through personal interaction with the producers of Tiatr.

Keywords: Tiatr, Tiatrist, culture, entertainment, problem, prospect

INTRODUCTION

GOA, India, once a Portuguese colony for 450 years, is a small region on India's West coast sandwiched between the Western Ghats and the Arabian Sea with rich cultural traditions. Maritime trade contacts and Portuguese colonial rule helped fuse and blend cosmopolitan cultural elements in Goan society giving rise to unique ethnographic and musical traditions creating an unusual amalgam of East and West, a simple folk and modern Indian cultural ethos. The economic, social and cultural life of the Goan people is greatly influenced by the Portuguese rule in Goa [1]. The rich cultural heritage of Goa is a stark contrast to the rest of India. This is one quality that makes the culture of Goa truly unique. Goa is a place where you find people accepting the presence of all major religions without any prejudice. This is the place where people follow traditions as well as remain ahead with times and trends. The people of Goa have the essence of music in their culture. In fact music is quite dominant among people living in Goa. Not just Indian, but they take pleasure in western music and listen to the likes of trance, western classical music, techno, jazz, blues, etc. They have varied tastes and choices when it comes to Western music.

The main objective of the paper is to highlight how “Tiatr” as a form of entertainment evolved as a form of entrepreneurship providing jobs – directly as well as indirectly to the masses. Though it is more than 100 years old form of entertainment not much has been researched and published academically. Information on the subject is collected from whatever little that was written and published in various forms and through personal interaction with the producers of the Tiatr.

Tiatr^a is a type of musical theatre popular in the state of Goa on the west coast of India as well as in Mumbai and with expatriate communities in the Middle East, London and other parts of the world where Konkani speakers have a considerable presence. The dramas are performed mainly in the Roman Konkani dialects and include music, dancing and singing. Tiatr performers are called Tiatrist. Tiatr today revolves around social, religious and political themes. It is considered to be a mirror of Goan culture.

The drama consists of 6 or 7 acts called *pordhe*^b; the acts are interspersed by songs which need not be directly linked to the content or the issues of the main drama. There are 2 or 3 songs between each of the acts [2]. These usually relate/narrate a real life incident (social/political) and end with a moral or message.

Tiatrists have always demonstrated a very high degree of social awareness. Most of the themes of tiatr are concerned with social problems confronting the people. The Tiatr is an instance where mass support plays a crucial role. It is one of those arts which despite centuries of Portuguese suppression and post-liberation neglect from the state governments, has not just survived but also thrived and reinvented itself in many ways [7].

Prior to the emergence of tiatr, entertainment in Konkani was mainly through Zagors^c and Khells^d. Both of them had their distinct style. While the 'Zagor' was more lyrical, the 'Khell' had dialogues and while the former was more popular in Bardez in North Goa the latter was firmly entrenched in Salcete the South Goa [9].

Tiatr, Portuguese for theatre, is a type of musical performed in Konkani and includes live music, dancing and singing. Tiatr songs and performances are commonly recorded and sold as audio CD's and DVD's in Konkani speaking markets [6]. The primary aim of tiatr is to entertain and therefore besides the plot; comedy and music are very important. But it is equally true that Tiatrist have always upheld social values and kept up with the changing times to provide audiences with appreciable entertainment.

Drama reflects the realistic view of Society. It is the most rigorous form of literary art expounded in the form of performing art. Drama is art as well as craft and in reality is life and breath of it. Tiatr, the popular Konkani art form also falls under the category of drama. In fact, the main basis of tiatr is drama [10]. Tiatr also has all the elements of entertainment such as a play, music, song and dance which are so necessary for dramatic expression. Tiatr has become the mirror of society. Besides providing entertainment, it educates, sensitizes and enlightens the people on various problems faced by society. The innumerable performances of tiatr reflect the great mass appeal that it holds. Today tiatr is the only commercial stage of Goa [7].

The following major changes in the Konkani tiatr Vis a Vis Konkani tiatr of the earlier days over the last three decades [11].

1. A well written script became the basis of a Konkani tiatr as against a haphazard one in the past or as was on some occasions, "no written script at all"
2. Script writers started writing their own original script as against adapting established scripts of English playwrights.
3. Extensive, well organised rehearsals became a regular feature for Konkani tiatr.
4. "Settings" relevant to the play were introduced
5. Use of light effects, back-ground sound effects, trick-scenes etc. was introduced.

6. The script writer automatically became the director and direction was given due importance.

7. Encouragement to Singers (old and new) to compose new songs on newer subjects was given.

8. A separate rehearsal for songs and "Cantos^e" became necessary and compulsory.

9. A full 5 instrumental brass-band became an integral part of the Konkani tiatr.

10. Konkani tiatrs were regularly performed round the year in established auditoriums in Mumbai, Goa and other parts of the world where Goans and Konkani speaking people lived.

11. Konkani tiatr became a must as a part of the celebrations for Hindu and Catholic festivals in every village of Goa.

12. Advertising for Konkani tiatrs became more organised i.e. an advertisement or two in a local newspaper with a special page carrying all tiatr performances, distribution of handbills near churches, football games and other places where people gathered and publicity by car with a microphone and loudspeakers moving through the villages of Goa. So also a poster of the tiatr was put up at the venue of the show.

13. Permanent tiatr contractors came up in every village and halls who organized the entire show in their area of operation.

14. Allied business like poster painting, handbill and tickets printing, block making, car publicity, sound equipment hire, light effects, hire and settings, stage hiring, hiring of the entire enclosure with chairs for seating arrangements, generator hirers etc. were established.

Origin and History

April, 17, 1892 is regarded as an important date in the history of Goa on which date the first Tiatro titled "Italian Bhurgo" (Italian Boy) based on Italian operetta was staged in then Bombay (British) at the new Alfredo theatre [4]. It was staged by a Goan working in Bombay who was well versed with music, proficient in English, a good writer, composer and worked for an Italian operetta company and toured several parts of the country.

Second in line in the development of Konkani Tiatr in the olden times was Joao Agostinho Fernandes [2]. He was a great thinker and creative writer, who tirelessly worked to re-establish tiatr. He ranks second in the hierarchy of Goan tiatr. It is he who infused realism into Konkani drama. He studied the works of Moliere, Congraver, Hartley, Dickens, Cervantes, and Dekocks Schiller and many other dramatists and novelists and found that the writings of these great men reflected the life and culture of their respective people. He then realized that what his contemporary writers were doing was incorrect and set out to reflect Goan life in his plays. It is he who pioneered original scripts in Konkani, until then tiatr – plays were translations from other languages [4]. His

first drama “Cavelchi Sundori” (Belle de Cavel) was written and staged in 1895. The whole play depicted Goan life. Therefore, Joao Augustinho Fernandes was called as “Father of Tiatr”.

Since then a lot of development has taken place in the field of tiatr in terms of writing an original script which initially was based on translations of popular dramas, costumes, and light effects acting, stage setting, introduction of female artist and so on.

Prior, to Tiatr, ‘Zagors’ and ‘Khell’, were the two important forms of entertainment in Goa and in Bombay too among Goans[6]. However, as time passed the standard of Zagor as well as Khell deteriorated in quality with the introduction of elements of vulgarity. Educated people stopped patronizing the Zagor as well as the Khell. While tiatr was making its presence felt, its original form – the zagors and the khells - were dying a slow death and the zagor finally stopped being performed while the khells continued in the revised form called Non Stop drama for some time before it was totally taken over by the “Tiatr”

Tiatr as a form of entrepreneurship

Tiatr today is a well-accepted form of entertainment among the Konkani speaking people spread across the globe especially Middle East, London, Canada, Manglore, Mumbai, Nagpur, Pune, etc. besides Goa. It is an industry of its own without any recognition from the government pumping incrores of rupees into the Goan economy.

In Goa, Tiatrs are performed at two levels- professional and non-professional. At the moment to produce one professional Tiatr as venture involves huge investments consisting of Fixed and Recurring capital. The Fixed capital consists of investment in the vehicles (optional), stage setting and props, costumes, furniture, special lights whereas the recurring expenses consist of payments made to artist, hall owner, musicians, helpers, electrician, sound technicians and other back stage workers.

Though statistics are not available, through the interaction with producers who are also directors revealed that a good play requires on an average a fixed capital of Rs 1,50,000 to 2,00,000/. There exists competition in this field and who delivers the best in terms of story, setting and acting will survive.

The recurring expenses per show are anywhere between Rs 50,000/ to Rs 60,000/ considering the best set up and good actors. The shows in Goa are performed in the Government run Ravindra Bhavans with around 1200 seating capacity. Assuming that a show is performed with 100% full capacity, the producer will earn anything between Rs 60,000/ to 70000/. This applies to the performances in the cities only. When they perform in the villages, their

profitability decreases considering the fees charged to the contractors.

Many organized producers have left their well-paid jobs and are fully involved into this profession as their full time venture to the extent that they have their own production houses. However, there are few producers for whom this is a part time hobby and are still doing well. Yet some well-known directors are working in the Middle East who have kept this tradition alive in those countries among the Konkani speaking people and also occasionally perform in Goa when they come down for holidays. Tiatrs are also performed in the Middle East and other parts of the world through their contacts, called as “Contractors” and thus adds to their existing income and profits besides a free tour to the foreign countries.

This form of entertainment generates direct as well as indirect employment to the people throughout the year. Many people have taken up tiatrs as their full time job, thus earning their livelihood. The people are employed as actors, singers, musicians, stage setters, sound and light providers; make up men, prompters, stage manager directly involved in the production of Tiatrs. Indirect jobs such as transporters, catering, costume providers, carpenters, painters; designers, crafts man etc are also generated by this unique form of entertainment.

A well written and performed show some times performs three shows in a day and all the stake holders are paid per show. A good actor charges on an average Rs 2500/ to Rs 3500/per show where as a singer charges between Rs 800/to Rs 1500/ or even more for two to three songs the minimum being Rs 500/ paid to the back stage assistants.

Shows are also performed outside the state and country too and thus provide a unique opportunity to the artist and others to tour abroad and get international exposure. For some it is a dream come true through these types of tours.

The producer also produces the DVD’s and ACD’s of their productions and songs which adds to their income and also provides business to various service providers. These DVD’s and ACD’s are in great demand outside the state besides Goa. Thus, it can be said that this unique form of entertainment has provided a descent livelihood to many in Goa and thus a boost to the economy in an unorganized manner.

The Role of Government

Better late than never, Government of Goa at last has taken some initiatives to save the oldest treasure of Goan culture through its various programmes. Tiatr Academy of Goa which is a statutory body set up by the Government of Goa provides various financial as well as non-financial assistance to promote and preserve

tiatr, its songs and music in in Goa. It has designed several schemes such as [12]:

1. Oral Documentation of History of Tiatr
2. Documentation of Tiatr through Research Work
3. Promotion of Tiatr through Academic activities
4. Preservation of Tiatr Literature
5. Promotion of Tiatr Music
6. Financial Assistance to dramatic troupes participating in Kala Academy's Yearly Tiatr festival
7. Remembering tiatr artistes of yester years – Commemoration of Jubilees/Birth Anniversaries
8. Remembering tiatr artistes of yester years – Organisation of special dedicated programmes
9. SompleleaTiatristanchoUgddas – Monthly Programme
10. Financial assistance to troupes going to Mumbai/Poona and other parts of the country & vice versa
11. Production of tiatr in villages/urban areas
12. Popular Tiatr Festival/Competition
13. Konkani Song & Music Awards
14. Promoting tiatr related activities
15. Production of Model Tiatrs
16. Promotion of Acting
17. Promotion of Patriotism/National Integration/Communal Harmony – Organisation of competition on choreographic dancing on Konkani songs on Patriotism/National Integration/Communal Harmony
18. Promotion of Patriotism/National Integration/Communal Harmony -Production of Musical Programme or Tiatr on Patriotism/National Integration/ Communal Harmony
19. Orientation courses in dramatics
20. Children's Tiatrs
21. Promotion of duets/duos/trios/quartets
22. Promotion of Konkani songs with choreography
23. Celebration of Tiatr Day
24. Meet the Tiatr Artiste
25. Festival of 'Khells'
26. Financial assistance to dramatic troupes participating in Kala Academy's yearly Khell-Tiatr Festival
27. Lifetime Contribution Awards - Tiatr
28. Lifetime Contribution Awards – KhellKhellTiatr
29. Lifetime Contribution Awards – Tiatr (Non-Commercial)
30. Library of TAG
31. Identity Cards
32. Publication of Directory of Tiatr Artistes
33. Visit to Old and Sick Artistes

Kala Academy (KA) is another premier institution in Goa supported by the government of Goa to promote art and culture. It conducts various competitions such as Tiatr Competition for seniors as well children, Cantaram^f competition for seniors as well as juniors. It also has a Faculty of Theatre Art which was established in 1987 to promote and advance the cause of theatre art in Goa [8].

Directorate of Art and Culture (DA&C), Government of Goa also conducts activities in general to promote art and culture in Goa. It facilitates various budding and senior artists with state awards and provides various financial incentives. The central government too now considers tiatrist⁶ for various central awards such as Padm Vibushan, the first Tiatrist to have earned this distinction was Mr M. Boyer [5].

Tiatr as a form of entertainment is more than a century old which has gained the governments attention recently. It has absorbed various shocks and thus survived for longer periods of time without any government support. Today Tiatrs are performed at two levels- commercial and non-commercials and both have its own unique place. The involvement of government in the production of tiatrs helped to develop and preserve this unique form of entertainment.

Over a period of time there has been a lot of development in the production of a tiatr. Earlier they used petrol lamps to light their stage and now use the latest form of lighting available in the market. They introduce latest forms of technology to make tiatrs more attractive and competitive. Previously the ladies roles were performed by the men themselves but now it is represented equally. In the past tiatrs were performed in a temporary erected shade and are now performed in the AC Auditoriums. In the 1970's the rate of a ticket was something around Rs 7/ to Rs 10/ which is now charged at Rs 100/ per show per head. The town criers, brochures and press advertisements were used to give publicity which is replaced by the latest methods available in the field of advertising [7]. Looking at the progress made over a period of time, it goes beyond doubt that tiatr will enjoy sound prospects in the future. If managed scientifically, it can turn into an industry in par with the Bollywood industry of India.

Problems

Like any other industry, tiatrs too suffer from serious and severe problems and criticisms. Some of them are highlighted below:

1. No industry status from the government and thus barred from the privileges available to other forms of industries.
2. No proper accounting
3. There is no formal school or academy to train the prospective and budding actors
4. Lack of financial support

5. Not an attractive form of employment to many unemployed youth.
6. Internal conflicts and misunderstanding among the Tiatrists
7. Non availability of the standard halls
8. One actor in many other tiatrs simultaneously
9. Avoid surrogate or personalized attack on the people and thus prevent another form of Zagor
10. No proper scripting
11. More shows in the cities and not in the villages

CONCLUSION

Against all odds, tiatr in Goa is here to stay. Taken off from scratch today it has reached to a massive form in terms of its overall standard. As a form of entrepreneurship, it has provided jobs- directly as well as indirectly to many. Many producers and actors are full timers and dependent on it for their lively hood. For the Goan economy it is a blessing in disguise which is pumping crores of rupees in the economy besides providing employment.

Tiatrs have helped to preserve the state language which otherwise is dying its own death besides generating a sound public opinion on various social and political issues. Tiatr needs a professional approach to take it further to its glory in par with other forms of business. A careful planning before it is launched will help to cut down on its cost and thus will help to improve its overall standard.

Theatre is a driving force of cultural tourism in many economies globally such as Britain, France, Australia, Italy, Libia etc. People visit these countries especially to witness the cultural events and thereby promote tourism in their countries. Goa being a prominent tourist destination of the country, tiatr can be developed in lines with cultural tourism endorsed in these countries to attract more numbers of tourists in the state. And hence the Government needs to support it on a full scale if it needs to preserve and promote this age old tradition of the state.

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Notes:

^aMeans theatre in Portuguese/ Italian language, a form of drama originated in Bombay(British) by Goans and later entered to Goa(Portugues)

^b Scenes of Drama

^cA form a unorganized form of entertainment mostly performed preferably by Hindus in North Goa throughout the night

^dA form of entertainment performed mostly in south Goa during pre-Lenten season by catholics

^eA song emotional or depicting the story of the tiatr sung by the artist.

^fCantaram-Konkani songs sung in the tiatr

^gTiatrtrist- one who acts in tiatr