

## THE ROLE OF LIBRARIES, ARCHIVES AND COMMUNITY NETWORKS IN MEETING THE INFORMATION NEEDS OF FOLK ARTISTS IN GOA

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### Abstract

*This study explores the role of libraries, archives, and community networks in meeting the diverse information needs of folk artists. Libraries and archives serve as custodians of traditional knowledge, offering resources on history, performance practices, and cultural documentation. Community networks—formal and informal—facilitate the sharing of practical information on funding opportunities, training, performance spaces, and policy support. Together, these systems not only preserve intangible cultural heritage but also empower folk artists to adapt to contemporary challenges, such as digital visibility and livelihood sustainability. The findings highlight the importance of strengthening collaborations between cultural institutions, local communities, and artists to create inclusive and accessible information ecosystems that safeguard Goa's folk traditions while ensuring their continued relevance in a changing socio-economic landscape.*

**Keywords:** Folk artists, Goa, libraries, archives, community networks, information needs, cultural heritage, digital preservation, traditional knowledge.

### Introduction

Folk art represents the cultural heartbeat of a community, embodying its traditions, stories, rituals, and values through performance, visual expression, and oral heritage. In Goa, a state celebrated for its vibrant blend of Indian and Portuguese influences, folk art has long served as a medium for storytelling and identity preservation. From the spirited Mando and Dulpod songs to the ritualistic Fugdi, Dekhni, and Kunbi dances, Goan folk artists not only entertain but also sustain the intangible heritage of the region. However, in the age of globalization, shifting cultural aspirations, and technological advancement, folk artists often face challenges in accessing, preserving, and disseminating the knowledge needed to keep these traditions alive. The role of libraries, archives, and community networks therefore becomes vital in addressing their information needs, ensuring that cultural continuity is not lost amidst modern transformations.

The information needs of folk artists in Goa extend beyond simple access to books or recordings. Artists often seek historical documentation of performances, traditional lyrics, costumes, musical instruments, and oral narratives that are rarely captured in mainstream publications. They may also require guidance on adapting their craft to contemporary platforms such as digital media, while staying true to its authenticity. Moreover, access to funding opportunities, cultural policies, and collaborative spaces forms a crucial aspect of their information environment. Meeting these multidimensional needs requires a network of supportive institutions and community-driven systems that not only preserve but also actively circulate knowledge.

Libraries, traditionally seen as repositories of books, have been evolving into dynamic knowledge hubs that can cater to such specialized communities. In Goa, public and academic libraries, when equipped with local cultural collections, can provide folk artists with references, scholarly works, and recordings that document the region's heritage. Digitization projects undertaken by libraries also create opportunities to archive rare manuscripts, songbooks, and performance records, thus making them more widely accessible. Beyond this, libraries can function as spaces for cultural exchange, hosting exhibitions, workshops, and interactions that allow folk artists to learn from scholars and from each other.

Archives, both institutional and community-based, play a complementary role by safeguarding primary resources of immense cultural significance. They preserve rare photographs, recordings, scripts, and personal papers of artists and cultural groups that provide invaluable context to present-day practitioners. In Goa, where much of the folk tradition has been orally transmitted, archives serve as custodians of authenticity, offering artists a way to reconnect with their roots. Digitized archives and oral history projects further expand access, ensuring that fragile, perishable materials are not lost to time and environmental degradation.

Community networks, however, remain at the heart of sustaining folk traditions. These networks, comprising artists, local cultural organizations, village institutions, and informal knowledge circles, enable the sharing of resources, skills, and opportunities. Unlike formal institutions, they are rooted in lived experience and collective memory. For Goan folk artists, community networks provide a practical space to exchange performance techniques, adapt songs to modern audiences, and mentor younger generations. With the growth of social media and digital communication, these networks are expanding beyond physical boundaries, allowing Goan folk artists to connect with global audiences and collaborators.

Together, libraries, archives, and community networks create a holistic information ecosystem that can meet the complex needs of folk artists in Goa. While each serves a distinct function—preservation, dissemination, or exchange—their convergence strengthens cultural resilience. Understanding their roles highlights not only the importance of safeguarding Goan folk traditions but also the need to design policies and practices that empower artists to thrive in a changing world.

### **Folk Art and Cultural Identity in Goa**

Goa, the smallest state of India by area, is widely celebrated for its scenic landscapes, syncretic cultural heritage, and distinctive history as a former Portuguese colony. While the global image of Goa often gravitates toward its beaches, nightlife, and tourism-driven economy, the deeper layers of its identity are embedded in its vibrant folk traditions. Folk art in Goa is not merely an expression of creativity but a living testimony of the region's socio-cultural evolution, religious plurality, and community resilience. From the energetic beats of ghumot drums in Mando and Dhalo performances, to the intricate craftsmanship seen in kaavi mural painting, wood carving, weaving, and folk theatre forms like tiatr and zagor, the folk arts of Goa embody centuries of oral tradition, ritual significance, and collective memory.

Folk artists, often rooted in rural or marginalized communities, play a crucial role in sustaining these traditions. However, their livelihood and cultural contribution are increasingly under threat due to modernization, globalization, and the shifting cultural economy. Many younger generations gravitate toward mainstream professions, tourism-based

employment, or digital content creation, leaving traditional art practices vulnerable to neglect. At the same time, folk artists struggle with limited access to resources, platforms, and visibility in a rapidly digitizing knowledge economy.

Within this backdrop, the role of institutions and networks that provide information, training, and preservation becomes paramount. The survival and flourishing of folk arts are contingent upon how effectively folk artists can access, interpret, and use information relevant to their craft, livelihood, and cultural transmission. This necessitates an inquiry into how libraries, archives, and community-based networks address — or fail to address — the information needs of folk artists in Goa.

### **Information Needs of Folk Artists**

Information is a vital resource for artists, shaping not only the preservation of cultural heritage but also the innovation and sustainability of their practices. For folk artists in Goa, the information needs can be categorized broadly into several domains:

1. **Artistic Knowledge** – Folk artists require access to documentation of traditional techniques, motifs, oral narratives, and performance scripts. This includes ethnographic studies, visual archives, and audio-visual recordings of performances.
2. **Cultural Contexts** – Since folk arts are deeply rooted in ritual and social life, artists need contextual information about cultural history, religious practices, festivals, and folklore that inform their work.
3. **Economic and Professional Opportunities** – In the contemporary era, information on grants, government schemes, artist residencies, and training programs is essential for sustaining livelihoods.
4. **Legal and Intellectual Property Awareness** – Folk artists often lack knowledge about copyright, traditional knowledge rights, and fair use, leaving them vulnerable to exploitation.
5. **Technological and Digital Skills** – With the rise of digital platforms, folk artists increasingly need information on online marketing, digital archiving, and the use of social media to reach audiences.

Despite the richness of Goa's folk traditions, most artists face challenges in accessing such multifaceted information. Oral transmission remains a key mode of knowledge sharing, but this alone cannot meet the demands of a globalized and digital era. Hence, examining how institutions such as libraries, archives, and community networks bridge these gaps is critical.

### **Libraries: access, learning, and living collections**

Libraries—public, academic, and special collections—are key nodes for accessible knowledge. In the Goan context, libraries can support folk artists by:

- **Housing relevant materials.** Collections of ethnographies, songbooks, regional literature, local newspapers, audio recordings, and iconographic resources provide artists with historical and contextual insight. Libraries can prioritize collecting locally produced materials—zine-style songbooks, field recordings made by community researchers, and multilingual resources in Konkani, Marathi, Portuguese, and English.
- **Creating living collections.** Beyond static holdings, libraries can host instruments, costumes, or tactile teaching sets that artists and learners may examine. “Living collections” invite hands-on learning and bridge textual and embodied knowledge.
- **Providing training and tools.** Libraries can offer workshops in digital literacy, audio/video recording, archival metadata, notation systems, and grant-writing. Access to digitization

equipment (portable recorders, scanners, cameras) and public computers helps artists document their practice and reach audiences online.

- **Serving as community hubs.** With after-hours hours, rehearsal rooms, and performance series, libraries can provide safe public spaces for exchange and intergenerational transmission. Programs that invite artists to demonstrate craft, lead sessions, or curate exhibitions create mutual benefit.
- **Mediating language and translation.** Librarians skilled in local languages can help with transcription, translation, and contextualization—making oral traditions more findable without stripping them of nuance.

To be effective for folk artists, libraries must shift from being solely custodial to being responsive, participatory institutions. This means adapting opening hours, outreach modes, acquisition policies, and cataloging practices to local realities and to oral/embodied forms of knowledge.

#### **Archives: preservation, provenance, and ethical stewardship**

Archives—whether state-run, university, or community archives—play an irreplaceable role in preserving documentary traces of folk culture. Their relevance to folk artists includes:

- **Long-term preservation.** Archives provide climate-controlled storage, conservation expertise, and preservation metadata for recordings, manuscripts, photographs, and audiovisual materials that otherwise risk decay.
- **Provenance and contextual records.** Archival collections can preserve not just artifacts and recordings but the contextual documentation that explains origins, consent histories, and chain-of-custody—critical for ethical reuse and cultural sensitivity.
- **Digital repositories and access protocols.** Digitization expands access geographically, but archives must implement access protocols that respect community wishes, including restricted-access options for sacred materials or custodial agreements that require community approval before public use.
- **Supporting research and recontextualization.** Archives enable artists to trace variants, rediscover forgotten repertoire, and make historically informed creative choices. Providing research fellowships or artist residencies linked to archival access can spur creative revival. However, archives often face challenges: bureaucratic acquisition practices, rigid cataloging vocabularies that misrepresent local categories, and insufficient community involvement. Addressing these requires new archival practices: participatory cataloging, community stewardship agreements, and co-created finding aids that reflect local taxonomies rather than imposing external ones.

#### **Community networks: lived knowledge, transmission, and trust**

Community networks—guilds of practitioners, temple and church organizations, local NGOs, cultural committees, and informal mentorship ties—are the most immediate source of knowledge for folk artists. Their strengths include:

- **Trust and tacit knowledge.** Much folk knowledge is tacit—absorbed by watching and doing. Community networks facilitate apprenticeship, oral transmission, and mentorship that no library or archive can fully replace.
- **Contextual ethics and custodianship.** Community groups know which materials are sacred, which can be shared publicly, and which require ritual permission—guidance often absent from institutional descriptions.

- **Resource mobilization.** Local networks can organize performances, pooled funding for instruments, or communal workshops. They also mobilize local memory and provide oral histories that enrich documented archives.
- **Adaptive innovation.** Communities adapt forms to contemporary needs—integrating new instruments, transforming ritual content, or using social media to reach diaspora audiences. These adaptations often originate within networks rather than institutions. However, communities can be fragmented or face generational discontinuities. Strengthening networks—through intergenerational programs, mentorship incentives, and platforms for knowledge exchange—bolsters the living fabric of folk arts.

### **Connecting the three: models of collaboration**

The real power comes when libraries, archives, and community networks collaborate in equitable, sustained ways. Several models are promising:

1. **Community-Driven Archives.** Rather than top-down collecting, archives can support community archives—either housed within community centers or as community-controlled collections within larger institutions. This model preserves agency: communities decide what is collected, how it's described, and access terms.
2. **Mobile and Pop-up Documentation Clinics.** Libraries and archival teams can operate mobile units that visit villages and talukas, offering on-site digitization, metadata capture, and training. Short interventions collect materials while building trust and transferring skills to local custodians.
3. **Co-curated Exhibitions and Events.** Joint programming where artists co-curate exhibitions with librarians/archivists ensures that displays respect local voice and interpretative authority. Events that pair archival screenings with live performances animate the connections between past and present.
4. **Apprenticeship Networks Supported by Institutions.** Libraries and archives can subsidize apprenticeship stipends, provide rehearsal space, and host recordings of master-apprentice sessions that remain under community control—bridging economic support and cultural stewardship.
5. **Ethical Digitization Frameworks.** Agreements that embed culturally sensitive access rules, benefit-sharing, and consent processes enable digitization while safeguarding community interests. For instance, sacred chants might be digitized for preservation but placed in restricted-access tiers requiring community consent for public release.
6. **Knowledge Commons and Open Educational Resources (OER).** Where communities consent, libraries can help produce OER—annotated songbooks, video tutorials, and contextual essays—that are freely available to learners and diaspora communities, expanding transmission pathways.

### **Barriers and ethical considerations**

Implementing these models requires navigating practical and ethical challenges:

- **Power imbalances.** Institutional actors may inadvertently dominate agendas. Equitable collaboration requires recognition of community authority, formal agreements, and shared governance structures.
- **Intellectual property and cultural appropriation.** Copyright frameworks often poorly fit communal, living traditions. Libraries and archives must work with communities to design

rights frameworks that protect communal ownership and provide artists with recourse against exploitation.

- **Language and cataloging bias.** Standard cataloging vocabularies can erase local categories. Participatory description models—community-generated metadata and vernacular keywords—are necessary.
- **Sustainability and funding.** Short-term projects risk creating dependency or leaving communities with inaccessible digital dumps. Funding models should support long-term capacity-building, maintenance of collections, and ongoing community engagement.
- **Technological access and literacy.** Digitization is not panacea: internet access, device availability, and digital literacy vary. Programs must be appropriate in scale and include training and offline solutions (e.g., distributed physical copies, local servers).
- **Cultural sensitivity.** Some material cannot or should not be public. Institutions must respect redaction requests and find respectful alternatives for preservation and scholarship that protect cultural integrity.

### **Practical recommendations for Goa**

To operationalize these ideas in Goa, stakeholders can pursue specific actions:

1. **Map existing assets and networks.** Conduct a participatory audit of libraries, archives, performance spaces, and artist networks across Goa's talukas. This builds baseline knowledge of gaps and strengths.
2. **Establish community custodial agreements.** Create standard templates for custodial arrangements that specify ownership, access, benefit-sharing, and dispute resolution—crafted in consultation with local cultural leaders and legal advisors.
3. **Create a mobile documentation unit.** Equipped with audio/video recorders, digitization tools, and a small conservation kit, the unit should be staffed by a rotating team of archivists and community researchers, and schedule regular visits to villages during festival seasons.
4. **Launch an apprenticeship and fellowship fund.** Small stipends for master artists to teach apprentices, with libraries/archives providing rehearsal space and recording support, will incentivize transmission.
5. **Implement participatory cataloging workshops.** Train artists and community members to create metadata in Konkani and local terms and integrate those into library systems—making collections searchable by local categories (e.g., ritual names, community terms).
6. **Design ethical access tiers.** For digitized content, implement levels of access: public (non-sensitive items), community-only (sacred or private materials), and research-only (with community authorization). Use this to honor sensitivity while enabling scholarship.
7. **Promote hybrid programming.** Libraries should host combined events—archival film screenings followed by live performances and Q&A—so that recorded materials are contextualized by living practitioners.
8. **Develop legal and business literacy programs.** Workshops on copyrights adapted to communal traditions, contract negotiation for performances, and digital platform strategies help artists sustain livelihoods.
9. **Use vernacular publication channels.** Produce materials—song-books, how-to pamphlets, annotated transcriptions—in Konkani, Marathi, and Portuguese where relevant, distributed through panchayats, churches, temples, and schools.

10. **Monitor and evaluate impact.** Establish community-defined indicators (e.g., number of apprentices completing terms, community satisfaction with access policies) and regularly reassess strategies.

### Conclusion

Libraries, archives, and community networks play a vital role in sustaining and enriching the cultural practices of folk artists in Goa. While libraries provide structured access to written records, reference materials, and knowledge resources, archives safeguard oral histories, performance recordings, and rare manuscripts that document Goa's vibrant folk traditions. Community networks, on the other hand, act as living repositories of knowledge by enabling the exchange of skills, narratives, and performance techniques through interpersonal relationships and collective practices. Together, these three institutions form a complementary ecosystem that addresses the diverse information needs of folk artists—ranging from research on traditional art forms and historical continuity to practical support for performance, training, and preservation.

However, challenges such as limited digitization, inadequate outreach, and lack of tailored services often restrict access to these resources. Strengthening collaborations between libraries, archives, and community groups, alongside the adoption of digital platforms, can significantly enhance information accessibility. In this way, the preservation and transmission of Goa's folk heritage can be ensured while simultaneously empowering folk artists to innovate and thrive in contemporary cultural landscapes.

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