

# OPINION

## Mapusa library opens a new chapter

*The new library promises to be more than a quiet reading room; it envisions expanded spaces for children and young adults, research corners, and a digitally connected environ*



**Nandkumar M Kamat**

I was impressed by the quality of original Indo-Portuguese construction of the inner walls of the old Mapusa Municipal building, which housed the Athaide Library since 1883, during my study visit in August 2023 as the Chairman of the Goa State Library Policy Committee, accompanied by our member secretary, the former curator of the Central Library, Sushant Tandel. I met workers from Agra, Uttar Pradesh, who were carefully removing the cracked lime plaster. Observing me test and photograph the laterite bricks and RCC-like hard mortar bonding the structure, one of them remarked, "Sir, the walls of this building are like a fort, stronger than our Taj Mahal." The tour revealed the immense potential of the majestic old building, especially after its sensitive and dignified renovation. Full credit goes to the Minister for Urban Development Vishwajit Rane for generously supporting the restoration project, which he is set to inaugurate on April 23, World Book and Copyright Day. A highly respected local businessman and leader of the trading community, Rajiv Neugi, shared with me the contributions made by his relative, Vaman Anant Shet Khalap, in the first half of the last century, who donated books and supported the library's management. Architect Sandip Falari, thrice elected Chairperson of the Mapusa Municipal Council (MMC), nostalgically recalled his school and college days spent in the library's quiet and scholarly ambience.

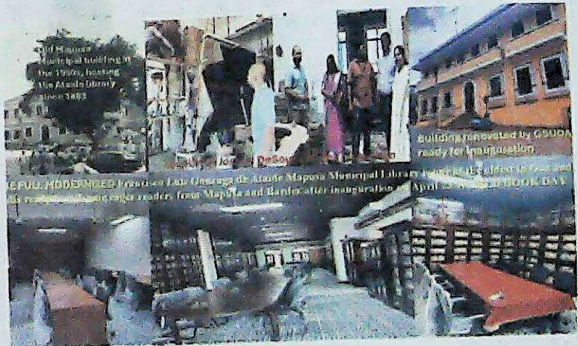
The Athaide Municipal Library—

long known as the Mapusa Municipal Library—stands proudly as one of Goa's oldest and most historically significant public institutions. Established on November 12, 1883, during the Portuguese regime by Dr Joaquim B Azavedo and like-minded citizens with a vision for educational upliftment, the library was later named 'Athaide Bibliotheca' in memory of Fr Francisco Luis Gonzaga de Ataíde, a remarkable priest and educationist. Though Ataíde passed away in 1881, his legacy of fostering knowledge lived on. Just two years after his death, the library was named in his honour, and to this day, his portrait remains in the library hall, watching over an institution that continues to embody his values. Over the

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decades, the library steadily evolved into a crucial centre of learning, public engagement, and archival preservation in Bardez. Its holdings grew into a rare and valuable collection of 25,000 books, including more than 5,000 Portuguese titles, making it one of Goa's unique literary repositories. The library holds an uninterrupted collection of official gazettes dating back to 1857 and has digitised many rare documents, newspapers, and publications of cultural importance.

It once served over 6,500 members, a number expected to rise again with the announcement by current MMC Chairperson Priya Mishal to reactivate memberships upon reopening. In February 2016, the library achieved a major milestone when it was granted e-library status by the National Informatics Centre (NIC), marking its digital transfor-



mation with the implementation of NIC's e-Granthalaya software and the Web OPAC interface. Throughout this transition and even during years of closure, one individual remained steadfast in his commitment—the librarian, Dnyaneshwar Parsekar. His hands-on dedication, quiet diligence, and professionalism kept the spirit of the Athaide Library alive. From overseeing the careful cataloguing of rare books to facilitating digital services and guiding renovation needs, Parsekar has truly been the library's living guardian, deeply respected by readers and officials alike.

By 2019, the deteriorating condition of the structure led to its closure, but in 2022, the Goa State Urban Development Agency (GSUDA) sanctioned a Rs 3.8 crore restoration plan. A pivotal force in driving the renovation forward was the local MLA and Deputy Speaker of the Goa Legislative Assembly, Joshua D'Souza. Representing the Mapusa constituency, he undertook regular inspection visits, coordinated with various government departments and municipal chairpersons, councillors, and officials, and ensured that the project stayed focused on both heritage preservation and future-readiness. Thanks to his proactive leadership, the beautifully restored library is all set to reopen on April 23, 2025, World

Book Day. This is not just the reopening of a structure—it marks the reactivation of a vital knowledge hub.

The new library promises to be more than a quiet reading room; it envisions expanded spaces for children and young adults, research corners, and a digitally connected environment to meet the aspirations of more than ten thousand students from Mapusa and surrounding areas. The MMC is now pursuing the creation of a fully functional digital library, further underscoring its commitment to contemporary learning. As the Athaide Municipal Library enters this long-awaited chapter, it represents not merely a renovated edifice but the revival of a community's intellectual soul. This is a space where books meet people, history meets technology, and ideas are free to grow. It reminds us that libraries are not merely about bricks and books but about people, purpose, and possibilities. For Mapusa and the wider region of Bardez, the reopening of this library is a cause for celebration, a homecoming of knowledge. In the enduring legacy of Fr Francisco Luis Gonzaga de Ataíde, new generations will find inspiration to read, question, imagine, and evolve.

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