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Onam - the festival of harvest and rejoicing is here

Onam is a festival of extraordinary importance among individuals of Kerala. People show their appreciation and gratitude to the land for providing a good harvest by celebrating this festival. For the sake of their loved ones' health and longevity, people pray to Lord Vamana and their adored King Mahabali. In Goa, Malayalis talk about their plans for the day and its importance to them

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Onam, the Kerala festival of harvest is here. It is a festival which has nothing to do with religion or caste. It is celebrated by everyone. There is a saying in Kerala which goes that if you are poor, you have nothing but then whatever little you have, you should sell and celebrate Onam. Goa is home to a large number of Malayalis who are celebrating the festival with great aplomb. Bhavani Venuogopal, the secretary of the Kerala Cultural Association, Vasco says that Onam is a ten-day festival in Kerala, celebrating the harvest season and the return of King Mahabali. It starts on the Atham day of the 'Chingam' month of the Kerala Calendar and culminates on Thiruvonam day, when the main Onam is celebrated with Onam-Sadya spread on banana leaves with many vegetable dishes, pickles, papads and 'payasams' - the sweet dish.

Onam is viewed as a time for feasting and cultural bonding. Though basically a Hindu festival, it later rose to the status of a state festival in Kerala when people of all faiths join hands and celebrate this festival in a grand scale. It is like a carnival season in Kerala when the entire state is decked with lights and

Pookalams. Big processions are held in cities and villages in Kerala. A ten day festivity with Pookalams made of fresh flowers, traditional dances of Kerala like Kaikottikali, Kummattikali, Thumbithullal, Atha chamayam and Pulikkali.

Pulikkali is a unique form of dance where men adorn their bodies with the colours depicting Tigers/Leopards and dance to the tune of drum beats. The famous Nehru Trophy boat race called 'Vallom Kali' is conducted at this time. Swings decorated with flowers are hung on tree branches and the entire family has fun swinging and singing Onam songs. There are variations in the way the festival is celebrated in various parts of the state. Onam is a great time for families to get-together, and visit the elders and other extended family members and friends after 'Thiruvonam' Day. It is an association to remind one of certain values, the importance of sharing, protecting nature, humility and self-sacrifice.

In Goa, Onam is celebrated in the traditional way by various cultural associations spread across the state of Goa. Dressed in typical Kerala attire, events like making Pookalam,



Kaikottikali, Onappattu, (Onam Songs), and dance dramas depicting the essence of Onam with the appearance 'Mahabali' dressed in dhoti, wearing crown and holding the Olakkuda (umbrella made with palm leaves in the traditional way). Mahabali greets and wishes everyone happiness and prosperity.

This year because of the Wayanad tragedy and to show solidarity with the suffering people of Kerala, The Kerala Cultural Association, Vasco-da-Gama Goa, is celebrating Onam on September 22, in a subdued way at the Ayyappa Temple, Vasco premises with just a small Pookalam and Kerala style Onam Sadya and felicitation of the meritorious students who have passed out from Class 10 and 12 twelfth Board exams, which is done every year during Onam celebrations.

According to Hindu mythology, Onam is observed in Kerala in honour of the wise leadership displayed by the mythical demon King - King Mahabali.

Mahabali, a devotee of Lord Vishnu was the son of Virochan and grandson of Prahalad, a righteous charitable king who treated all his subjects equally. There was no poverty, crime or cruelty during his rule. Mahabali's fame grew



by each passing day which enraged the Devas. Afraid of losing their power, they begged Lord Vishnu to aid them in stopping Mahabali.

As a result, Lord Vishnu in his Vamana Avatar (as a Brahmin Boy) appeared in front of Mahabali who was doing yagna for Lord Vishnu and asked for a piece of land which could be covered in three steps. Mahabali readily agreed. Vamana began to grow in size and covered the entire universe in 2 steps. Mahabali then realised that this was no ordinary boy before him, but Lord Vishnu himself.

The King then bowed before the boy and offered his head for the next step. Satisfied by his devotion Lord Vishnu blessed Mahabali and sent him to Pathala or the netherworld, with permission to visit his subjects once every year on Thiruvonam day. The place where the incident is believed to have taken place was given the name 'Thrikalkkara' (place of holy feet) which was later changed to Thrikkakara.

The incident is said to have occurred on the star sign of Thiruvonam in the Malayalam month of Chingam. Every year, during the 10 days of Onam the people of Kerala eagerly wait for their beloved King.

For Gifty Abraham, an artist, it is a great occasion but this year, she says she would be not celebrating because her husband and daughter are out of the state. "As a resident of Goa for 16 years, I am a pure Malayali who has not forgotten my roots and as a member of the business group BNI, I decorated the place with flowers and had ordered payasam and appam. I do my best to represent Kerala.

Another Malayali, Beena Phillips, a resident of Bambolim has been resident in Goa for 30 years. She says, "I am not in Goa this year but it is a very important festival. It is a festival which is celebrated

by everyone and they all come together. The main thing is the vegetarian meals on the banana leaf. There are quite a few Malayalis living in Goa."

Another Malayali, who is looking forward to the festival is Nebu Xavier, also called Tiger, a sales director in a local company. A resident of Goa for 10 years, he is married to a Goan girl. He says, "If I was in Kerala there would be a lot to do during this time but in Goa I am looking forward to the great lunch I will have with my wife and a colleague who is also a Malayali." He says, "In Goa there are Onam places which serve 28 dishes and it can go up to 55 dishes on the plantain leaf. In Kerala, it can go up to 100 dishes. It is a time for dancing and having great fun."

The events in Wayanad have certainly cast a shadow over the festival. Shanoj Thuprath, president of the Kalpaka Cultural Association, Bicholim, has cancelled celebrations. He says it is a national festival which appeals to all classes of people. A resident of Goa for 30 years, he says his kids were born in Goa but they had also participated in celebrations in the past.

Prem says, "Celebrations start 10 days in advance. There is a star called hasta. On hasta, we start the pukalam flower arrangement at the entrance to the house. The 10-day-long harvest celebration starts with Atham and concludes with Chithira, with Chodi, Vishakam, Anizham, Thriketa, Moolam, Pooradam and Ultradam being the other eight days of celebration. The last day of the celebration, Thiruvonam, holds extraordinary significance with families planning and participating in Onasadya, the amazing Onam feast. Malayalis are present all over Goa in places like Vasco, Bicholim, Panjim and Mapusa."

It is a festival which is celebrated with great joy and it brings the community together.

Celebrating Vocation Sunday: Responding to the Call of Faith

On September 15, the Archdiocese of Goa and Daman celebrates Vocation Sunday. It's a day to celebrate the diverse and inspiring journeys of those who have responded to God's call to priesthood and religious life. These vocation stories highlight the transformative power of divine guidance, prayer and personal conviction. It also reflects our rich spiritual heritage and honour those who have devoted their lives to serving others in Christ's name

Br Makvino Alfonso

Divine Guidance moved me to say 'Yes'

I am the second child in my family, with my parents and one brother. As a child, I was deeply inspired by the Missionaries of Charity who served the poor in Uguem in Sanguem; their love and dedication sparked a strong desire in me to follow their path. Although I kept my wish to become a nun private, I was moved when the Pilar Sisters began their local work. Their simplicity and love deeply resonated with me. Eventually, I shared my vocation with my hesitant mother. A divine message during prayer gave me courage, and with a nun's support, my mother consented. Today, I am fulfilled as a missionary in the Missionary Society of Our Lady of Pilar.

- Sr Dalhilda Carvalho, MSP, Uguem-Sanguem



Daily Eucharistic Celebrations strengthened my vocation

When I was young, my parents worked on a cashew plantation. They prioritised our spiritual upbringing by ensuring my brother and I attended the Holy Eucharist each morning. Our home was a sanctuary of faith where we prayed the Rosary daily. My family's prayerful atmosphere was crucial in shaping my spiritual journey and deepening my sense of God's calling. Their unwavering support and dedication were instrumental in nurturing this vocation. In 2009, at the age of 13, I took a significant step in answering this call by joining the Seminary of Saligão-Pilerne. Today, I am a Diocesan priest serving as an assistant to the parish priest, of Nuxem.

- Fr Venancio Fernandes, Arambol



Prayerful life of sisters inspired me

In life's challenges, God's call is the reason to say 'Yes.' As the eldest child in my family, cherished by my parents and both younger sisters, the seeds of my vocation were planted early. My family taught me to pray, and St Joseph Vas High School, Saneocole, nurtured this call. The prayerful life of the sisters and their work attracted me to follow Jesus through my simple life. Despite conflicting plans, convincing my parents was challenging. I prayed and surrendered everything into the Lord's hands. I joined the Sisters of the Holy Family of Nazareth and now experience God's love in my life.

- Sr Jovita De Souza, SFN, Quelossim



Mother Mary's love led me to priesthood

My vocation began with my miraculous birth. Despite a bleak chance of survival, my parents' faith and fervent prayers, through the intercession of Venerable Fr Agnel, saved my life. His holy life, combined with my parents' love and guidance, inspired my love for Jesus from childhood. As a teenager, I admired the Blessed Virgin Mary and felt a strong calling to the priesthood, though the path was unclear. During my final high school year, Carmelite friars handed out questionnaires. The questions 'Do you want to become a priest?' and 'Are you ready to sacrifice?' led me to discern God's answer and embrace the Carmelite vocation. Today, I am serving in Canada as a Carmelite priest.

- Fr Victor Fernandes, OCD, Raia



Family environment guided my call

I am blessed to have grown up in a devoted and disciplined family that prioritises Mass and catechism. I have seven sisters and a brother. My mother is a homemaker, and my father is a government employee. Deepening my faith, I felt a strong call to serve like Jesus and Mary. After discussing this with my mother and my sister, who then spoke to the Parish Priest, I was introduced to the Helpers of Mary convent in Rivona, where I was inspired by the sisters' loving and dedicated work. Today, I am a grateful member of the Society of Helpers of Mary, serving in mission outside Goa.

- Sr Janet Araujo, SHM, Mercos



Vocation talk prompted my 'Yes'

I'm one of four siblings. As an altar server, I felt called to the priesthood. In Class 6d, I needed surgery due to a serious illness. A third doctor's intervention, supported by my mother's prayers to St Francis Xavier, saved my life. Inspired by a vocation talk from the Pilar Fathers, I attended their camp and joined the seminary in Class 9. Despite initial academic struggles, my prayers helped me improve. After Class 12, my mother's support—"You went of your own free will"—encouraged me to decide for myself. Today, as a priest of the Society of Pilar, I serve as assistant to the parish priest of Agonda.

- Fr Baltazar Fernandes, SFX, Colva

