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A JOURNEY INTO THE HEART OF GOA

In our continuous efforts to put people at the center of our journalism, we bring to you a weekly collection of stories, specially curated from our ground-level reportage which celebrates the joys, and shares the sorrows of people in their grassroots. These are, at heart, very simple stories, simply told. Interesting initiatives, out-of-the-box thinking, dogged persistence on any issue, and the struggles of people over the years as they try and put their disrupted lives back together are not just news stories.

Each is a document from the wards and vaddos of Goa, a postcard, a letter, a share. This collection is brought to you from O Heraldo's team of reporters who have been given one simple mandate - go out, travel, and speak to people about their lives.

From Wards and Vaddos is as much your project as O Heraldo's and we welcome all of you on this journey into the heart of Goa. Pls email editor@herald-go.com or reach us on Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram.

Bridging Goa and Maharashtra: Amar Bagkar's bullock cart is Tiracol's forgotten lifeline

Young Amar grew up watching his father 'pilot' people across villages, offering an essential service that earned them respect and admiration. While adults viewed the cart as a necessity, for children, it was a joyride and a cherished part of their childhood

ERWIN FONSECA

TIRACOL: As Goa marks the 58th anniversary of its Opinion Poll – a significant milestone that reinforced its identity by rejecting a merger with Maharashtra – one region seems untouched by the transformative progress such events heralded. In Tiracol ward of Kerim Panchayat in Pernem, life remains as it has for decades, with the community still relying on neighbouring Maharashtra for its daily needs.

“The oxen we have today were born during my father's time. These bulls have been with us for decades. They plough the fields and pull the cart, to transport my harvest to my house, and occasionally, to the market. They are an integral part of our livelihood and our family

-Amar Bagkar

Here, a fascinating story of persistence unfolds through Amar Bagkar, a resident of the nearby village of Reddi in Maharashtra. In an era dominated by motor vehicles and rapid transportation, Amar remains dedicated to the legacy of his fami-

ly's bullock cart, a fading symbol of rural life and a lifeline for this remote region.

Reddi lies across the Terekhol River, just metres from Tiracol. While the village boasts historical landmarks like the Reddi Fort, it remains a backward settlement, with cow-dung-plastered houses and an economy heavily dependent on agriculture and mining. On the Goa side, Tiracol is home to about 50 Catholic families. Many of Tiracol's residents are involved in cashew farming. This border community also houses the Tiracol Fort and a martyrs' memorial honouring Sheshnath Wadekar, Alfred Afonso, and Hirve Guruji, who played significant roles in Goa's freedom struggle.

Despite its historical importance, Tiracol is physically isolated, with little direct connectivity. Residents here have always depended on Reddi for essentials, and the services of people like Amar have remained crucial in bridging the gap.

For 40-year-old Amar Bagkar, the bullock cart is not just a vehicle; it represents a way of life passed down through generations. He has been using the cart for the past 25 years, primarily for personal agricultural needs, but its history ties deeply with the community. "My father began operating a bullock cart soon after the liberation of Goa," Amar recalls. "He helped residents of Tiracol,

who had no transport facilities, by carrying both people and goods to nearby markets in Shiroda."

Amar remembers how his father's cart was indispensable for Tiracol's farmers, most of whom were cashew cultivators. "During those days, many farmers would ferment and process

A TRADITION UNDER THREAT

Amar fears the tradition of bullock carts may die with his generation. "Today, few people want to raise cows or oxen. If anything happens to the animals, many just leave them to fend for themselves. That's a very bad attitude," he remarks. He insists that proper grazing lands and caretakers are necessary to preserve the practice and ensure livestock is well-maintained.

cashew to prepare alcohol. The bullock cart was the only mode of public transport available, and it was affordable even for the poorest."

Young Amar grew up watching his father 'pilot' people across villages, offering an essential service that earned them respect and admiration. "The oxen we use today were born during my father's time. These bulls have been with us for decades," he says proudly. While adults viewed the cart as a necessity, for children,

it was a joyride and a cherished part of their childhood.

The advent of modern transportation has made the bullock cart obsolete. Even in Tiracol, most families

now own private vehicles, and small hotels have popped up, making the community less reliant on Reddi's services. Yet, Amar has refused to abandon the practice. "I know people in Goa and even in Maharashtra have moved away from bullock carts, but for me, it is a family tradition. My father used it to serve the community, and I cannot discard it so easily," he says.

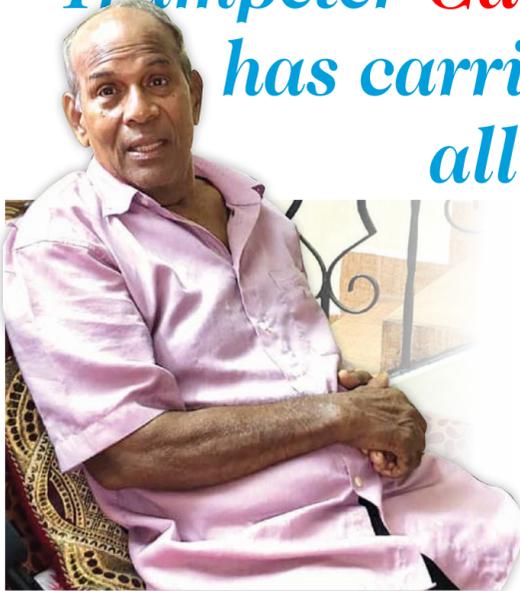
Amar's fields provide paddy, vegetables, groundnuts, and beans. He uses the cart to carry tools to the fields and transport his harvest home or to the markets when buyers don't come directly to purchase produce. "These bulls plough the fields and pull the cart. They

are an integral part of our livelihood," he explains. However, the challenges are many. This year's erratic rainfall, combined with leaks in the Tillari irrigation project, has disrupted his winter crop. "The heavy rains destroyed many fields, delaying our paddy harvest and planting of the winter crops. It has been tough," Amar shares.

In Tiracol, residents now move on scooters, cars, and buses, leaving little space for nostalgia. Yet Amar continues to uphold the bullock cart tradition, even as its practicality diminishes. "For me, this is more than transport; it's my father's legacy and a part of our cultural heritage. I hope it is remembered, even if no one continues it after me."



Trumpeter Carmo Fernandes has carried Goan music all over the world



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ALDONA: The trumpet melodies of Carmo Caridade Fernandes, a musician from Castellvaddo, Aldona, have travelled across the world. For 29 years, Carmo served as a trumpeter in the police band in Bahrain before retiring and returning to the land he always called home—Goa.

Carmo's love for music was deeply influenced by his father, a multi-talented musician who mastered several wind instruments. By the age of 12, young Carmo was drawn to the trumpet, an instrument that would define his life. Under the guidance of his father and with inspiration from musicians like Mr. Tavares of Corjuem, Carmo began his musical journey, performing at local events.

Though his formal education ended in Standard IV due to financial challenges, Carmo's early musical earnings—just Rs 13 per performance—were significant at the time and fueled his dedication to music.

Carmo's life took a pivotal turn in 1967 when his father took him to Bahrain and enrolled him in the police band. Over the next few decades, Carmo played for various international audiences, earning accolades and a stable livelihood. The Bahrain police band performed in places like Germany and London,

“As my health declines, I'm unsure if I will be able to play the trumpet much longer. However, I urge the younger generation to pick up wind instruments and carry forward our Goan musical traditions. There is immense scope in music; one just needs the vision to realise its potential. Music is not just about talent; it's a way of life that builds character and resilience. I encourage all young people to embrace music, practise diligently, and strive to shine in their own way

-Carmo Caridade Fernandes

often winning competitions and capturing the hearts of audiences.

In Bahrain, the band adopted traditional Arab attire for their performances, blending cultural identity with music. These years not only honed Carmo's skills but also brought him recognition beyond Goa's borders.

Among the many highlights of his career, Carmo fondly recalls meeting Chik-Chok, a world-renowned trumpeter who once attended one of Carmo's performances. Impressed by his talent, Chik-Chok ap-

THE CHANGING LANDSCAPE OF MUSIC

“In earlier times, there was not much value for music but there was great respect for musicians. In my prime, children in Aldona would line up to learn instruments. Today, that passion seems to have diminished. As kids, we managed to balance it very well, we even helped our parents in doing all work. Modern distractions like mobile phones and a focus on high-paying jobs have led the younger generation to distance themselves from traditional musical instruments. Anything in life you do – whether it is studies, sports, work or a skill, there is hard work involved. There is no short cut to success. We need to keep a goal and keep learning, keep practicing,” says Fernandes.

proached him and said, "One day you will become a great trumpeter. This instrument is meant for you. Keep playing."

Carmo remembers these words as a source of motivation that pushed him to refine his craft.

Carmo has witnessed the transformation of the music scene in Goa over the years. He reflects on a time when Aldona had many eager students learning instruments, inspired by the musical culture of the village. Today, he laments that children are more captivated by modern gadgets and less inclined to pursue the rigorous practice that music demands.

In earlier times, respect for musicians was immense, even though the financial rewards were modest. Practising music, particularly wind instruments like the trumpet, required hours of dedication and discipline. Despite these challenges, Carmo found fulfilment in his craft, making sacrifices to perfect his melodies.

"Learning to play an instrument doesn't just make you talented—it sharpens your mind and helps you stand out. While going abroad to perform might seem like the ultimate goal, I want to remind young people that success is achievable right here in Goa," says Carmo.



OF BREAD AND HERITAGE: Bartolomau Tavares is the last of Moira's traditional bakers

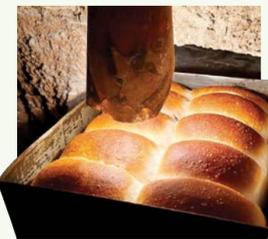
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MOIRA: Tavares Bakery in Moira, run by Bartolomau Tavares and his family, stands as one of the last few traditional bakeries in Goa still operated by Goans. For over four generations, this bakery has been a cornerstone of the community, providing freshly baked bread to surrounding villages, including Aldona, Nachinola, Mapusa, and nearby hotels.

Bartolomau Tavares and his brother oversee the daily operations, baking over 5,000 breads every day. The process begins with mixing the flour, a task that takes over an hour, followed by shaping dough into balls of different sizes for various types of bread. Each batch of around 200 breads takes approximately 15 minutes to bake. Their systematic approach ensures consistent quality, a hallmark of Tavares Bakery.

Baking is not just a business for the Tavares family; it's a legacy. Bartolomau fondly recalls that this trade has been passed down through generations and remains the family's sole source of livelihood. Despite the challenges, such as rising flour prices, the family is committed to preserving their traditional methods and high standards.

Unlike many Goan bakeries that have been leased to outsiders, often from regions like Karwar,



Tavares Bakery continues to be run by its original owners. Bartolomau notes that these newer operators often fail to meet the quality standards of traditional Goan bread.

The baking trade in Goa is under pressure due to the rising costs of ingredients, which have significantly increased over the years. While the prices of factory-made sliced bread have risen, traditional Goan bread prices have remained stagnant, forcing bakers to absorb financial losses.

"This is a tough profession that requires dedication," says Bartolomau. However, he laments that the younger generation does not show interest in continuing such family businesses. Many prefer office jobs, careers abroad, or professions offering instant recognition and luxurious lifestyles.

Bartolomau himself worked abroad in countries like Kuwait, Abu Dhabi, and London, but eventually returned to take over the bakery from his father. His children, however, have expressed little interest in following in his footsteps.

At Tavares Bakery, only natural ingredients—salt, water, sugar, and baking powder—are used, with no chemicals added. Bartolomau takes pride in the fact that their breads remain fresh for 3-4 days and are renowned for their flavour and quality. "We ensure every loaf is made with precision, keeping our customers happy," he shares.

He explains that maintaining this level of quality requires both hard work and a systematic approach, but these efforts are rewarded by the bakery's strong reputation in the community.

Bartolomau worries that traditional businesses like theirs are slowly disappearing as younger generations shy away from such labour-intensive trades. Many traditional Goan bakers have closed down or leased their businesses, leading to a loss of cultural heritage.

"Goans must step forward to save these traditions," he says, urging families to encourage their children to learn and continue these trades. He believes the decline of such professions is rooted not just in changing aspirations but also in societal attitudes, where such jobs are sometimes seen as lesser or unfashionable.

“This bakery is our identity. It represents the hard work of generations before us, and it deserves to be preserved. Goans must step forward to save these traditions

Bartolomau Tavares

Despite these challenges, Bartolomau remains committed to running Tavares Bakery as long as his health allows. "This bakery is our identity. It represents the hard work of generations before us, and it deserves to be preserved," he says.

Tavares Bakery continues to thrive as a symbol of resilience and tradition, even in the face of modern pressures.

For now, Bartolomau and his brother ensure that the people of Moira and its neighbouring areas have access to freshly baked bread, a small but significant link to Goa's rich heritage.

