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FROM WARDS & VADDOS

Ground Reports Telling Stories That Matter



O HERALDO

Borim artisan Purso Rama Gaude weaves coconut leaves into unique artwork



With every intricate piece, Gaude's hands tell a story of tradition, perseverance, and love for Goa's artistic heritage—one coconut leaf at a time

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PANJIM: Borim-based artisan Purso Rama Gaude, 49, has been crafting intricate artwork from coconut leaves for the past five years. His passion for traditional Goan craftsmanship has not only earned him recognition but also helped revive an art form that is slowly fading in the face of modern decor trends.

Gaude was among the artisans featured in the Tribal Village section of the Lokotsav event organised by the Department of Art and Culture, where he showcased his handcrafted pieces made entirely from coconut leaves. "Many people associate coconut leaves with simple uses like weaving mats or providing shade, but I have shown that they can be transformed into unique and artistic decor," he says.

Gaude's journey into this craft began at a young age, watching his mother skillfully weave coconut leaves into various items. Inspired by her work, he started helping during his free time, gradually mastering the art himself.

His work has been widely appreciated, particularly for eco-friendly stage backdrops used at festivals and other events.

Despite his success, Gaude acknowledges the challenges of keeping this tradition alive. "The younger generation is drawn to bright, modern decorations, often overlooking traditional crafts like this," he says. While coconut leaf decorations may not last as long as synthetic materials, they are deeply rooted in Goan heritage and are admired by locals and tourists alike.

Tourists visiting Goa often stop by to witness his craftsmanship, many ex-

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-Purso Rama Gaude

pressing fascination with how a simple coconut leaf can be turned into such intricate designs. Some even take an interest in learning the art, further spreading awareness of this dying craft.

For Gaude, this work is more than just a livelihood—it is a mission to preserve Goan culture. "Many people today seek instant profits, but for me, this is about passion and heritage. The uses of coconut leaves are endless, and this craft deserves recognition," he says.

Over the years, he has developed nearly 20 different designs, each requiring patience and dedication. Though time-consuming, he finds immense satisfaction in knowing that his work contributes to

the preservation of Goan traditions. Recognising the need to pass on this knowledge, Gaude conducts workshops in schools, encouraging students to take an interest in traditional crafts. "These skills can keep children engaged in something meaningful, rather than being glued to screens and gadgets," he says.

While plastic decorations dominate the market, he believes that there is still hope for eco-friendly alternatives. "Goa is a land of rich traditions, and it's up to us to ensure that these art forms don't disappear," he adds.

Gaude's dedication has been recognised by the Department of Art and Culture, which recently honoured him with the Kala Gaurav Puraskar and Kala Vriddhi Awards for 2024–25.

As modern trends continue to dominate, artisans like Gaude are working tirelessly to keep Goa's cultural heritage alive. Through his artwork and workshops, he hopes to inspire more people to appreciate and support eco-friendly, traditional craftsmanship. "This may not be the most profitable work, but it brings joy, pride, and a sense of purpose," he says.

OVER THE YEARS, HE HAS CREATED A RANGE OF ECO-FRIENDLY DECOR, INCLUDING:

- Lord Ganesha faces
- Akash Kandils (traditional lanterns)
- Hats and jhoomars (hanging ornaments)
- Stage backdrops/ partitions



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 Herald's team of report-

ers 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 Herald'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.

THE HOMEOPATH WITH A WILD SIDE: Prithviraj Amonkar's love for trekking helps conserve wildlife



ERWIN FONSECA

MAPUSA: It is not always common to see a practitioner of medicine venture into wildlife conservation and develop a deep connection with nature. However, Dr Prithviraj Amonkar, a well-established homeopath, has seamlessly balanced both his medical profession and his passion for wildlife.

Having completed a graduation and post-graduation in Homeopathy, Medicine, and Surgery (BHMS), Dr Amonkar, hailing from a reputed Mapusa family (originally from Amona), started his general practice in 1997 by opening a small clinic in Mapusa. As a young doctor on the threshold of a bright future, he quickly established a solid reputation as he was immersed in consultations from dawn to dusk.

In 1998–99, an NGO called Green Cross approached him. Since it was a charitable group working for nature, Dr Amonkar recalls that he would donate free medicines to support their cause. "They were into animal welfare and were doing commendable work. They would rescue animals and release them into dense forests once a week," he shares.

While his medical practice continued to grow and the number of patients increased, Dr Amonkar felt a calling toward wildlife conservation. By the late 1990's, around mid-1999, he organised treks every Sunday. "With Green Cross, I reached unimaginable places. As I joined them, I felt so drawn to wildlife that I knew I had to start something on my own on a larger scale. That's when we formed Wild Trek Adventures in 1999 and

'IN 20 YEARS, GOA MAY NOT HAVE ANY FORESTS LEFT'

Dr Amonkar expresses disappointment with the general attitude toward nature in Goa. "Today, trekking is flourishing, but mostly because of Neo-Goans who want to learn. Very few native Goans are serious about understanding our biodiversity. Most Goans prefer to laze around on a Sunday, visit a casino, or attend a party. We have closed our minds to further learning. We must also become more cleanliness-conscious. People visit forests, and litter the place with garbage—this must stop. We must learn to keep the animals' world clean, and we should not disturb or pollute their surroundings," he emphasises.

He believes that trekking in Goa has no future in the next 20 years. "We are now traveling mostly to the border areas outside Goa because there is much more to learn there. Goa's forests are being destroyed bit by bit. I seriously believe that in 20 years, there will be no forests left in Goa, and consequently, no wildlife either. Even forest officials are indifferent and lack basic knowledge of forestry. They are only concerned about collecting entry fees. Many times, they harass trekkers as if to send a message that we are not welcome," he laments.

began taking wildlife enthusiasts on treks every Sunday without fail. Whether in the sun, or rain, we are forest lovers and have never skipped a Sunday trek," he says.

According to Dr Amonkar, during those days, only a few trekking groups existed in Goa. Additionally, the State was primarily promoted for its beaches and the Dudhsagar waterfall. "These small trekking and hiking groups would take people only to fixed locations. However, through my research and inquiries, we explored the interiors of Goa and undertook many challenging treks. I have a great interest in traveling and learning, so we travelled extensively on Sundays, discovering about 50 different waterfalls in Goa, each of varying magnitudes," he says.

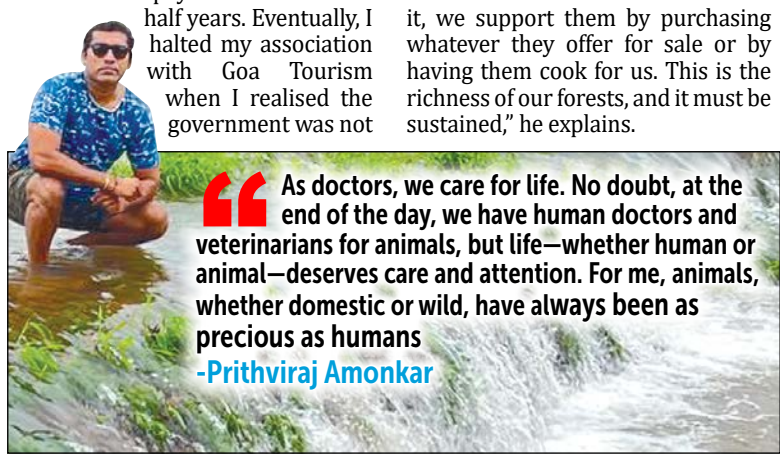
Dr Amonkar expresses disappointment with the authorities. "The State government has never promoted quality tourism; it's all about pocketing funds. The Goa Tourism Department contacted me, assuring me that they would compile all these 50 waterfalls into a book to help promote them. However, to this day, the book has not seen the light of day. The same department took me on board to organise treks for them but did not pay me for two-and-a-half years. Eventually, I halted my association with Goa Tourism when I realised the government was not

serious about promoting tourism—it was all about siphoning funds," he claims.

Dr Amonkar runs his clinic throughout the week and ventures into the wild on Sundays. His dedication to his patients remains unwavering, as he is available for consultations even after his Sunday treks.

Over the last 25 years, Wild Trek Adventures has conducted extensive treks within Goa, across India, and even abroad. Dr Amonkar and his team toured Bhutan for eight consecutive years with wildlife enthusiasts. "We have had mountain trips, outstation trips, overnight trips, and weekend trips," he says.

He has also conducted talks and treks for children, debunking many myths about wildlife. "The specialty of our treks is that they are truly challenging. We mean business—this is not just time-pass or entertainment. I conduct thorough research, explore the deepest parts of forests, and select routes so unique that even if a trekker wants to return on their own, they cannot easily find their way. This ensures that forests remain preserved, and cleanliness is maintained at all costs. Additionally, we respect the peace and privacy of those living in the dense forests. When we visit, we support them by purchasing whatever they offer for sale or by having them cook for us. This is the richness of our forests, and it must be sustained," he explains.



As doctors, we care for life. No doubt, at the end of the day, we have human doctors and veterinarians for animals, but life—whether human or animal—deserves care and attention. For me, animals, whether domestic or wild, have always been as precious as humans
-Prithviraj Amonkar

Threads of passion: Benaulim's ace embroiderer Sweeny Sequeira crafts handmade magic

From wedding décor to tiny, embroidered babywear, this Benaulim artisan is turning fabric into stunning mementos

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BENAILIM: Sweeny Sequeira, 37, from Pedda-Benaulim, has been stitching her way into people's lives—literally. Whether it's wedding accessories, custom embroidery (both hand and machine), or her best-sellers—embroidered baby clothing and towels—her knack for bringing people's ideas to life has

earned her a loyal customer base. And the best part? Every order comes with a dose of finesse and a happy client walking away grinning ear to ear.

Sweeny's Studio is hidden in a quiet corner behind a chapel in Mungol-Benaulim, and can be located thanks to the steady whirr of her sewing machine, which is almost meditative. Taking a rare break, she shares her journey and passion. "I start my day at 10 am, and my hands only stop when my stomach

reminds me I need fuel to go on. Sometimes, I get so immersed in a piece I'm working on, that I forget how many hours have passed," Sweeny shares with a laugh.

Born and raised in Fatorda, Sweeny grew up in a family of five siblings with a clear goal—to do something creative and eventually start her own business. And today, she's done just that. "My mother was extremely supportive of whatever I wanted to do. She introduced me to summer courses in stocking flower making, tailoring,

embroidery, and painting. Soon, all my siblings came to me whenever they had an art or craft project," she shares.

All those little courses sparked a deep interest in creating things by hand. She started buying books, practicing every day, and exploring new techniques. At just 13, she landed her first real order—a church communion project—which was all the confirmation she needed that this was her calling. "Creating functional art makes all my stress disappear. My parents were my biggest cheerleaders," she says.

After completing her studies in fashion design, Sweeny trained under a local tailor before getting a job as a teacher in the Labour and Employment Welfare Department, where, for 14 years, she taught cutting and design to women in the 18–40 age group.

Even after marriage, her passion never took a backseat. In fact, it flour-

Dreaming is free. Take one small step at a time—buy a book, practice art regularly, or start by making a little décor around the house. If you keep at it, things slowly start falling into place
-Sweeny Sequeira

ished. Sharing similar creative interests, her husband, Hansel, has been a major supporter of her craft. "During the Covid pandemic, I finally got the time to practice more and refine my work. Seeing me tirelessly embroidering by hand, my husband encouraged me to get a machine so we could work faster and more efficiently," she shares. But despite the machine's precision, many customers still request hand embroidery—

something she's always happy to do.

Looking back, her proudest moment was working on her younger brother's wedding, for which she crafted the bridal bouquets, family flowers, headgear and special pocket flowers for the bridal entourage. "That's when I truly felt my vision had become a reality. I couldn't have done it without the support of my husband and in-laws, who constantly push me forward in my endeavours," she shares.

For those dreaming of starting something of their own, Sweeny has simple but solid advice "Dreaming is free. Take one small step at a time—buy a book, practice art regularly, or start by making a little décor around the house. If you keep at it, things slowly start falling into place."



DIY WEDDING ACCESSORY FROM WASTE MATERIALS HANDMADE STOCKING FLOWER

MATERIALS: Old nylon stockings, floral wire, thread, fabric glue, beads/pearls, floral tape.

STEPS:

- Cut petal shapes from old stockings.
- Stretch over floral wire and secure with thread.

- Arrange petals into a flower shape, gluing them together.
- Wrap the stem with floral tape for a polished look.
- Add beads or pearls at the center for elegance.

USE FOR: Bouquets, hair accessories, or wedding décor. Eco-friendly & budget-friendly!

