

# Herald Cafe

## The 'POTEKARS' OF DIVAR

Divarkars have a unique tradition of celebrating Carnival for three days with 'Potekars' from March 2 to 4. While it's all about fun and frolic, the villagers now fear that the true charm of the festival is getting lost

Alexinho Monserrate

The word 'Potekar' comes from the 'Potem' meaning someone carrying a sack. In the olden days, three days prior to Lent, the elders of the village of Divar would move around the village wearing rags, covered their face with a mask so as to conceal their identity as they became 'Potekars' for fun during the Carnival celebrations. They would carry their 'Potem', a jute bag on their shoulders and roam in disguise. Not forgetting the string of brass bells tied around their waist usually meant for cattle. The very sound of the bells would keep the children on their

toes. The parents then would take the advantage of the 'Potekars' to instil fear in the minds of their children who played mischief, made fuss to eat their food, etc. that the 'Potekar' would come and put them in his sack and carry them away. Hearing this, the children would behave themselves out of fear. Some others would climb up the loft of the house and stay put until sunset.



CHOWGULE COLLEGE'S ENGLISH TYGERS ATTEND KALA GHODA ARTS FESTIVAL

### SWIPE RIGHT Oscar winner Gene Hackman and wife found dead



Legendary Hollywood star Gene Hackman and his wife Betsy Arakawa have been found dead in their Santa Fe home. The couple, who had been married since 1991, were found alongside their dog. No foul play is suspected. Santa Fe County Sheriff Adan Mendoza did not provide a cause of death, nor did he say when the couple might have died. Two-time Oscar winner Hackman had just turned 95 in late January. He was known for being a reclusive person, having not starred in a movie since 2004, when he played Monroe 'Eagle' Cole in the political satire, 'Welcome to Mooseport'.

### Michelle Trachtenberg had a liver transplant before death



Michelle Trachtenberg underwent a liver transplant shortly before her death at age 39. Sources said her body may have rejected the liver transplant, which she received within the last year. Although the 'Gossip Girl' alum's cause of death has not officially been released, insiders said she died of natural causes. They also claimed her passing is not being investigated as suspicious. The 'Ice Princess' star's mom, Lana Trachtenberg, found Michelle in her New York City apartment. She was "unconscious and unresponsive" at the time. Last year, the 'Buffy the Vampire Slayer' alum sparked health concerns with an Instagram selfie — and clapped back at haters in the comments section.



Over the years, the Potekar festival is changing. It is meant to be enjoyed within the village of Divar.

We had a bitter incident of molestation nearly 45 years ago and the case went on for 18 years. Now, through social media, the festival is getting highlighted and people from outside the island are dressing up and coming here. This festival is only for Divarkars to dress up as Potekars and have fun and frolic during Carnival. Those who want to enjoy the revelry, can come to the village but without wearing a mask to hide their identity.

Prasad Harmalkar, Santar Bhat, Divar



### PREPARATION TO DRESS AS A 'POTEKAR'

Preparation to dress as a 'Potekar' would begin at least a month in advance. The teenagers would influence the local Church sacristan to part with the wooden heads of the statue of Christ/Saints/Angels that were used to enact scenes of passion of Christ on Sundays during the Lenten season in absence of present day masks. Masks were then cast using pages of discarded old exercise books with boiled rice or wheat flour paste which would serve as glue. The masks were then dried in the sun and later painted using

water colours from the drawing kit used in school as per each one's imagination. Needless to mention that there is no link with the Church and the 'Potekars' it being a Pagan feast.

The 'Potekars' would only enter the houses of their friends and acquaintances for taking a break where they would be treated with sweet potatoes, home-made sweets, fruits, etc. and continue their onward journey and return home before sunset. Those who could afford would spend the afternoon at a local chai shop for a bhaji-pao and cold drinks in the absence of alternate eating outlets then.

### MODERN 'POTEKARS'

The modern day 'Potekars' are a different lot. The younger generation does not know the significance of 'Potekars' and their consequences. Yet, they try to promote 'Potekars' by inviting their friends and make them take part in the festivities. In recent years, the festival has taken a new trend. The 'Potekars' assembled at the main square of the island which only resulted in just a show thereby, losing the very essence of 'Potekars'. People from outside the island also participated dressed as 'Potekars'.

In the bargain, the merriment of the 'Potekars' of the yesteryears with the participation of the locals is losing ground. The locals should discourage outsiders taking part. It is high time the youngsters realize where they are heading for. Outsiders behind the mask can invite trouble and could be disastrous in future. If corrective measures are not taken in right earnest, the 'Potekars' of Divar will be forced to go into oblivion.



Supermodels Heidi Klum and Adriana Lima pose for a photo during the filming of 'Germany's Next Top Model' in Los Angeles.

# RUNNING CLUBS ARE NOW LEADING THE WAY



The exercise of running is increasingly getting more popular in Goa, and this trend is evident with the number of running clubs mushrooming around the State, attracting enthusiasts of all ages and fitness levels

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As the message of the importance of physical fitness spreads in Goa, more runners are taking up the most basic of activities known to man, running. It is not uncommon to see runners in the morning determined to complete the distance set for the day.

Dinesh Heda is a chartered accountant by profession but a runner by passion. He is part of the Club Susegaad Runners, which had centres in Panjim, Vasco, Mapusa, etc and has approximately 70-100 runners per club. He said, "The interest in running is increasing with more events taking place. When the first River Marathon took place in Goa in 2009, we used to have a handful of marathoners but now we have around 100-150 full marathoners in the state. I am 55 now and I can say that the numbers will continue to increase in the years to come." The running groups meet every day though the runners have their own schedule and run three to four times a week.

### THE INITIAL PUSH

Madhav Tak who is 70 years old started running 15 years ago. He was a pool swimmer but a speech by Dr P S Ramani pushed Madhav. He said, "The doctor runs a hospital, runs himself and manages a marathon in Ponda. He advised Goans to be fit and to run. That motivated me to run. I am based in Margao and part of the Ballistic Runners group, which is the only registered group in Goa."

### RUNNING CLUBS IN GOA

- SUSEGAD RUNNERS (centres all over the state) - 600 runners
- FIT SWAGGERS RUNNERS - 100 runners
- ANTRUZ RUNNERS - 80 runners
- GOA ROAD RUNNERS - 70 members
- BALLISTIC RUNNERS - 50-60 runners
- FITNESS FREAKS - 50 plus runners
- RUN FOR LIFE - 40 members



### REASONS FOR RUNNING

54-year-old Guirish Sawant of Susegaad Runners took up running around 15 years ago when he made friends with people who were interested in running and from various demographics. It helped him develop discipline and it positively helped improve his physique. It was not unusual to come across an engineer, a doctor or a runner in government service in the group. He said, "Running brings us together and I intend to run as long as possible and that is the ambition of every runner. I intend to remain fit as long as possible."

For avid runner Althea Fernandes, it all started in 2012. She said, "I started off in a running group but now I am in a triathlon group. The club Susegaad Runners was started by the Vasco Sports Club. It was started by a bunch of runners but now it has grown. In Panjim, there are around 400-500 runners. In Vasco, there are the Antruzz Runners, in Margao there are the Ballistic runners, who run long distances with around 30 runners."

### NUMBERS OF LONG DISTANCE RACES ON THE INCREASE

The number of runners in Goa are on the increase. Every alternate Sunday, there is a long distance race. There were 30 marathons every year in Goa during the year. These races were essentially 5 kilometres, 10 kilometres, 21 kilometres races which were contested by people in the area. In addition, there were also registered marathons like the River Marathon, the Goa Marathon, the I Run Marathon which attracted runners from the rest of the country and even the odd international runner.

Another doctor, Mukul Pai Raiturkar, used to go for a run, then to the gym and then for the class. He said, "All you need is shoes and proper technique. This sport does not require anything else. That possibly explains why it is growing in popularity." Perhaps the simplicity of the activity and the fact that it is not expensive has attracted the masses to running. And that will mean better health for society which is something everybody aims for.