

O HERALDO

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Why risk safety of children at unrecognised schools?

With pre-primary schools sprouting up across the state, the education department has finally announced that it will take strict action against pre-primaries that are found to be functioning without permissions and recognition from the state government. The director of education, Shailesh Zingade, said an initial fine of Rs 50,000 would be slapped on such schools initially, after which they would have to cough up Rs 10,000 per day if they found to continue operations without the requisite permissions. In light of this, the education department will soon begin surveys at the taluka level to identify such schools and to pull them up.

While calling upon the government to do its job, the onus also lies with the parents of toddlers to ensure that their little ones attend pre-primary schools which are recognized by the education department. Randomly admitting such small children - some of whom are just about two years old - into schools that are not regulated by any authority smacks of negligence on the part of parents and makes the little, unsuspecting children vulnerable to safety risks. Zingade told mediapersons recently that there have been reports of some pre-primary schools being operated from a single room in a residential home, and in some cases, even out of a garage.

He also said that in some instances, parents find out much later that their little ones have been attending an unrecognised school. To remedy this, awareness is being created by the authorities concerned, he said. However, one does not need awareness to understand that allowing one's child, that too a toddler who is just learning to communicate, to study out of a single room or a garage is not only ample evidence that the pre-primary 'school' is not recognized by the government but also poses a huge risk to the wellbeing of such small children. In the event of any misfortune befalling their children either due to an accident on the premises or intentional harm, which authority will the parents turn to get justice if the school is unregistered and unrecognised?

The safety of all school children, be they toddlers or teens, is paramount. This is all the more reason why the education department should be conducting regular surveys in each taluka during every academic year to check if any new pre-primary schools have been set up. In the absence of such a survey and with the department only relying on a complaint or a tragedy to swing into action not only gives such 'illegal' schools a free hand to do what they please and to operate from wherever they see fit, but also exposes young children to unforeseen dangers, which neither the managements nor the parents should entertain.

Zingade further said that school found to be operating from unfavourable premises will be given time to set up the requisite facilities, such as a playground and toilets for boys and girls separately, following which the education department will take a call on whether such pre-primaries should be recognition or not. It would, however, be in the government's best interest to first impose a punishment on such schools and then direct them to get their act together. Giving them ample leeway without pulling them up is likely to only embolden the managements concerned to continue functioning with impunity.

The National Education Policy has a slew of lofty ideals and a vision to revamp the country's education system entirely. If this is to happen, the cooperation of the government, school managements and parents is extremely important. Absence of cooperation from even one of these three will not only go against the letter and spirit of the National Education Policy but will also put young children in dire straits not only safety-wise but also where the basic foundation of their education is concerned. It is hoped that better sense prevails and the government, schools and parents are on the same page in this sensitive matter.

In Goa, Qoreshma is practiced by even the non-Christians as a period that enhances the detoxification of the body, mind and soul and inculcates self discipline to abstain from alcohol, sweets or meats



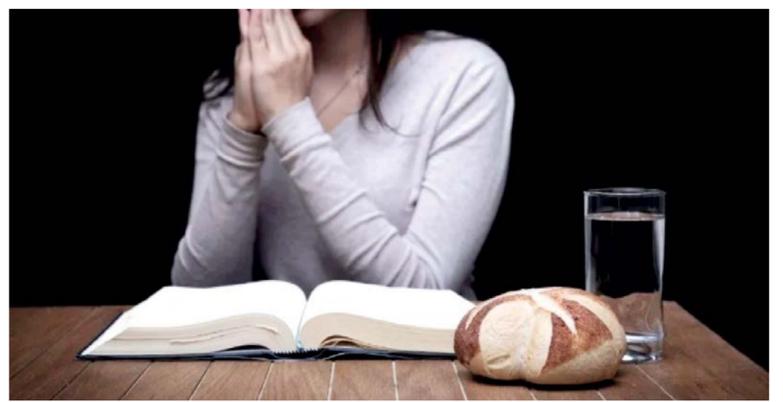
BY INVITATION
Sushila Sawant Mendes

This is the month of fasting, especially for the Christians and Muslims all over the world. Fasting has existed in history and has been practiced by people from most religions. All religions understand the importance of prayer, fasting, abstinence and alms giving both in the life of an individual as well the community and society at large. These are proscribed in the tenets of all religions as a means of peace and well-being of the body mind and soul.

Many studies have proved that fasting brings about many health benefits. In Goa, Qoreshma is practiced by even the non-Christians as a period that enhances detoxification and inculcates self-discipline to abstain from alcohol, sweets or meats. Qoreshma is derived from the Latin word Quadragesima, which means Fortieth. It echoes the 40 days Jesus spent fasting in the desert and enduring temptation by Satan, according to the Gospels of Matthew, Mark and Luke, before beginning his public ministry.

Lent is the solemn Christian religious observance in the liturgical year, an almost 40-day period of prayer, fasting, and alms giving, that prepares Christians for Easter. Ash Wednesday, Good Friday, and all Fridays during Lent are obligatory days of fasting and abstinence. This year it is from Ash Wednesday, March 5 to Maundy Thursday, April 17, some also fast on holy Saturday before Easter Sunday. Those that are excused are outside the age limits (18 and 59 years) and include the physically or mentally ill including individuals suffering from chronic illnesses. Also excluded are pregnant or nursing women. In all cases, common sense need decide if fasting cannot be medically permitted.

Ramadan is the most sacred month in the Islamic calendar / Hijri Calendar. The length of the month varies between 29 and 30 days depending on the sighting of the moon which leads to the much awaited Islamic festival of Eid ul Fitr. Ramadan is one of the Five Pillars of Islam and during this holy month, Al-Quran, the holy book was first revealed to Prophet Mohammed. The word 'Ramadan' comes from the Arabic word 'Ramad / Ramida' which means scorching heat or drought. The month of Ramadan means abstinence from eating and/or drinking anything from dawn till dusk. Even though fasting in Ramadan is obligatory upon every able Muslim, some are pardoned like in Christianity, if they are unable to fast due to certain legitimate reasons. Sick people and travellers are exempted from fasting during Ramadan. According to many scholars, like Christianity some people are also exempt from fasting like, the physically or mentally ill peo-



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ple, women who are pregnant or breast feeding, elderly people (if fasting will cause their health to deteriorate further) and children.

Zakat is another pillar of Islam, and giving charity becomes even more important during Ramadan. Similar rules are also practiced by the other religions. Christianity also recommends the tithing or the donating to charity of one tenth of one's income. The three pillars of Lent are also prayer, fasting and alms giving. Fasts generally start at sunrise and end at sunset for all religions. Fasting is said to redirect the heart away from worldly activities, and to cleanse the soul by freeing it from harmful impurities. Muslims believe that Ramadan teaches them to practice self-control, sacrifice, and empathy for those who are less fortunate, thus encouraging actions of generosity and compulsory charity. It is the month of worship, self-discipline and contemplation.

In India's national civil calendar, Śrāvaṇa is the fifth month of the year, typically beginning in mid to late July and ending in late August. Fasting is a common practice during the holy month of Shravan, also known as Sawan, in Hinduism. Devotees observe fasts especially the Sawan Somvar Vrat: observed on every Monday of Shravan, to seek blessings and spiritual growth from Lord Shiva. This period is during the monsoon months in India which symbolizes renewal and growth in nature. At this time of the year, vegetables grow in plenty, especially the wild edible produce of the forest. This is also the breeding season for fish and the period

when there is a ban on fishing especially in Goa.

The exact dates of Shravan mass differs from region to region within India as it depends on whether the solar or lunar calendar is followed in that region. Different types of fasts are practiced. Some people fast the entire day. Some people follow a strict vegetarian diet and avoid onions, garlic, grains and pulses. Other practices during Shravan entail visits to Shiva temples, the performance of special prayers and rituals, making offerings to Lord Shiva, and participating in pilgrimages. The Solah Somvar Vrat of fasting on 16 consecutive Mondays to pray for a good life partner is observed by young boys and girls who believe in its efficacy.

During the Chinese Vegetable Festival, the Chinese do not eat any type of meat. I recollect the Dalai Lama when he had come to Goa some years back and some of us had the privilege to share his table for lunch, he joked during mouthfuls, "We Buddhist monks eat only once a day, don't look at my plate", accompanied by a robust laughter. Asking forgiveness and worshipping with genuine dedication and hope of a reward in this world and the thereafter is the essence of fasting of Buddhism, Jainism and during Shravan, Lent and Ramadan.

Wild animals and humans share similar traits in their eating habits-however animals rarely overeat! It's only the domesticated animals who don't have to hunt for their food and are pampered by their masters that become obese. Both animals and humans loose their appetite when sick. It is the body's natural

rhythm that needs a break to aid the process of natural healing. Medical science has proved that fasting leads to the detoxification of the body as fasting mice live longer. Besides flushing out the toxins from the body, fasting also helps us to avoid eating unhealthy and fast foods and loose weight. It gives the digestive system a break. Medical guidance is however necessary before deciding to undertake a fast to decipher the body's physical readiness as it can also result in headaches, acidity and nausea.

During Shravan, Ramadan and Lent, devotees are asked to seek their Lord in prayer by reading the scriptures. The 40 days of Lent are also a good time to work on personal discipline in general. Instead of giving something up, it can be doing something positive.

"I'm going to exercise more, pray more and be nicer to my family, friends, and co-workers." Mahatma Gandhi used fasting as a weapon against the British colonial power. Early in life, I knew that he practiced maun vrata (to remain silent for the whole day) periodically to cleanse his mind with only positive thoughts. On this day, he would use the back of old cyclo-styled paper to write the very important messages. One of them was his congratulatory message to my parents when they went to his ashram in Sevagram to seek his blessings on the occasion of their marriage. His handwriting was a readable scribble but his signature was always neat and clear.

These are difficult times and we need to lay emphasis on what unites us, rather than what divides us and live in peaceful co-existence and respect for each other's beliefs and values, irrespective of our religious and political beliefs. Even in fasting there are streaks of unity in diversity-let us always strive to preserve this unity for our very own survival and that of posterity.

(The writer is a Professor in History, Author and an Independent Researcher)

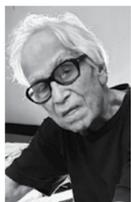
Architect Bruno Dias Souza: A Mentee's Memoir

My mentor, architect Bruno Dias Souza passed away on March 2, 2025. He was 99. Goa has lost one of the finest architects throughout its history. And India has lost one of the last architectural stalwarts from its first generation of Western-trained, post-independence cohort. It is truly the end of an era.

My association with this brilliant architect was both serendipitous and conscious. I was a second-year architecture student when I chanced to visit his house with a senior. I can still recall stepping into that voluminous living room for the first time. I had not seen anything like it. Every architectural move was simple yet masterful. I knew in that instance that I was in the presence of a great architect.

I cannot recall what compelled me to return to the house the following afternoon, but I do remember that it felt intimidating. What would my meeting with this master architect be like? Would he even talk to me without a prior appointment? I introduced myself with a nervous voice and told him that I wanted to work with him. "I do not have any work right now" he said. There was a long pause. But then, I think he sensed that it was not work I was looking for, because his next words were quite unexpected. "I cannot pay you, but if you

VINAYAK BHARNE



Architect Bruno Dias Souza

stick with me, you will learn a lot!" It was as simple as this. This is how it began.

And what a journey it was for both! Four years as a mentor and mentee. Four years in which we packed as many designs, discussions and conversations as we could have in forty! In the Altinho House and the Nizari Bhavan office of Bruno Dias Souza, I received a parallel education to the one in architecture school. I designed office buildings, houses, furniture, and even urban design schemes with him. None of them came to fruition, but in the process of sitting with him, watching him think, draw, redraw, rethink and redraw again, the art and science of architecture began to reveal itself to my naive mind.

Our fondest time together was often the late evening hours, when Bruno would tell me about his United Nations missions in Africa and Europe, of his student experiences at Columbia and Harvard, and of the day he met Le Corbusier. We would analyse the work of Modern masters such as Oscar

UPFRONT

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Neimeyer, Walter Gropius and Joseph Luis Sert. We would discuss the work of his close friends Raj Rewal, Ranjit Sabikhi and Charles Correa. We would talk about the power the urban design, and the importance of heritage conservation. Through these conversations, I got to see sides of Bruno that very few knew about. I got to understand the visions and ideas that lay behind many of his large unrealized schemes and works - the national competition winning Goa High Court Complex, the Goa Assembly Complex, the Goa College of Architecture Campus, and the Bikaji Cama Complex in Delhi.

Every few days, I would draw immense pleasure in foraging through his office shelves and reading through numerous architecture documents and drawings that he had prepared during his UN days. Back then, everything for me centered around Bruno. I wanted to think like him, draw like him, be like him. He was the center of my world. The privilege of being in the presence of an

individual with his architectural caliber was second to none. The precision of his insights and teachings was second to none. To the world, Bruno Dias Souza was not an easy man to please, but for me, he was everything I could have asked for as a mentor and guide.

It was upon Bruno's encouragement that I left Goa for graduate studies to the United States. On each visit to Goa, there would be at least one "Edna & Bruno Day" with lunch and laughs. He was the guest of honour at my wedding reception at the Mandovi Riviera, and soon after, Edna and Bruno stayed with the young couple for a week in our small Santa Monica beach apartment.

Over the years, on many an occasion, Bruno would anxiously text me - "need to talk to you." In these calls, he would lament about Goa, about what it was becoming and what it could have been. In these calls, I sensed a tone of helplessness. In August 2017, when the Indian Institute of Architects invited me to speak on my work at Kala Academy,

I felt it would only be appropriate to do so under the shadow of my teacher. I requested them to change the event to "A Conversation between Mentor and Mentee." In the packed black box, Bruno presented his work beginning with the following words. "I want to first of all thank my friend, Bobby, because though I have been in Goa for so many years, this is the first time I have been invited to show my work."

Not many know that Bruno had refused an offer to become the Dean of a prestigious architecture school in Portugal and chosen instead to return and retire in his beloved Goa. He had arrived with dreams, ideas and ambitions. But none of them came to fruition. I wonder if Goa let him down. I wonder why Goa let him down. I wonder what Goa might have been had the buildings and visions of this master architect been realized.

I knew Bruno for over three decades - as a mentor, and over the years, as someone I would consider nothing less than family. Perhaps I should not hesitate to be as bold as to say that of all the students that came into his life, I might be the one that got to know him the most; that remained the closest to him. It is hard to explain this: Back then, I know I was seeking a mentor. But who knows? Maybe Bruno too was waiting for a mentee? How

else can I rationalize the depth of our thirty-four-year relationship?

I saw Bruno for the last time in December 2025. He was confined to his bedroom and was hard of hearing, but his mind was as sharp as always. We spoke about this and that, and by the time I returned to the bedroom after lunch, he was fast asleep. I took it all in for a quiet moment and touched Bruno's feet. This was my last physical gesture to him.

Why do we cross paths with certain individuals? What deeper meanings and purposes underlie such associations and relationships? Perhaps this what living the beautiful mystery of life is all about?

Till we meet again Bruno...my mentor, my teacher, my reference point. You have taught me about architecture, only as much as you have taught me about integrity. And I am a better man for it. It was a true honour. I will carry you in me no matter where I go. You are with me - always.

(Vinayak Bharne lives in Los Angeles, USA. He is the recipient of the John Chase Visionary Award from the American Planning Association for excellence in city design, and the Allied Professional Appreciation Award from the Indian Society of Landscape Architects for significant contributions to the profession of landscape architecture.)