

O HERALDO

The Voice of Goa - since 1900

Claiming Heroes We Didn't Raise

In India, we've got a habit that's as endearing as it is absurd: we love to adopt 'sons' and 'daughters' who've made it big abroad, draping them in tricolour pride like they've just stepped out of a Bollywood blockbuster. The latest star in our sky is astronaut Sunita Williams, who recently splashed down after a record-breaking jaunt in space. Butch Wilmore spent the same amount of time up there but Indians couldn't care less.

Right from the Prime Minister and President to anybody with an X or Y account greeted and tweeted about it and her ancestral village in Gujarat lit up with poojas like it was hosting a cosmic homecoming. "Our girl!" they proclaimed, as if they had personally strapped her into the rocket.

Let's hit pause and zoom out. Sunita's a marvel—nine months orbiting Earth, nine spacewalks, and a career that screams brilliance. But she was born in Ohio, raised in the US, and launched skyward by NASA. India's contribution? A proud ancestral link and maybe a few fervent prayers. Some of the more vocal admirers are acting like the uncle who boasts about his niece's straight A's despite not helping with a single homework assignment. She's American-grown, folks—her grit's forged in the Stars and Stripes, not the saffron fields.

This isn't a solo act, either. When Rishi Sunak snagged the keys to 10 Downing Street in 2022, India erupted in a patriotic frenzy. "Our boy's ruling Britain!" they crowed, as if he'd been groomed in a Delhi drawing room. Never mind that Rishi's Southampton-born, Oxford-polished, and probably says "cheers" more than "namaste." His brown skin and Punjabi heritage were enough for people to claim him as a desi triumph, even as he wrestled with inflation and not, say, the price of paneer. Ironically, it was Sunak himself who tightened immigration laws, making it harder for Indians to secure work and residency in the UK.

The list goes on. Sundar Pichai became Google's big boss, and we hollered, "IIT ka ladka!"—forgetting that Silicon Valley, not Kharagpur, turned him into a tech titan. Kamala Harris stepped up as US Vice President, and people lost no time in unearthing her Tamil roots faster than you could say *thayir sadam*. She's Oakland-raised, not Chennai-bred, but that didn't stop us from beaming like proud grandparents. When Indra Nooyi took the reins at PepsiCo, India puffed its chest, conveniently ignoring that her leadership skills were honed in Connecticut boardrooms rather than under a neem tree in Chennai.

And let's not forget the sporting world. When tennis star Emma Raducanu clinched a US Open title, they scrambled to highlight her Indian connection, tenuous at best. Similarly, golfer Akshay Bhatia, making waves in the PGA Tour, is suddenly 'one of us', though his entire sporting journey has played out on American greens. Cricketer Shivnarine Chanderpaul, a West Indies veteran, may have an ancestor somewhere in India, but his batting prowess was honed on Caribbean pitches, not in Mumbai's maidans. And remember Harmeet Dhillon? The California-based lawyer made headlines in US politics, and we gleefully added her to the list of global *desi* achievers, even if her worldview is shaped more by the US Constitution than the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita.

It's a laughable tic, this urge to plant our flag on heroes thriving in fancy zip codes. As soon as *desi* name is spotted in the headlines and suddenly it's a national victory lap. Why the obsession? Maybe it's a post-colonial itch, a need to see 'our own' outshine the old masters. Or perhaps it's just human nature—who doesn't love a success story with a hint of familiarity? No harm in drawing inspiration from Sunita's courage or Rishi's rise, but claiming credit is like taking a bow for someone else's performance.

Meanwhile, we've got heroes aplenty right here—no visas required. Think Abdul Kalam, the Missile Man who rose from Rameswaram's shores to the Rashtrapati Bhavan, building rockets that didn't need a foreign launchpad. Or take Mary Kom, punching her way to Olympic glory from Manipur's dusty rings. These are legends India nurtured, not borrowed. Add to that the likes of P V Sindhu, who smashes global badminton giants, or Neeraj Chopra, whose javelin soars higher than our collective foreign aspirations.

Next time a *desi* dazzles abroad, let's cheer—heck, light a diya if you must—but save the ownership papers. This country has enough self-made icons to fill a hall of fame. Sunita and Rishi are fabulous, but they're not our homework to brag about. Let's raise a toast to our homegrown heroes instead—they're the ones who truly carry our flag, no adoption fee required.

Let us not abandon our future for our past

Peace times encourage growth and prosperity. Wars, riots, law and order problems, create instability and retard economic growth and foreign investment. Genocides and murders have never benefited humankind. What is deplorable is that such events are justified because of what happened three hundred or five hundred years back and passions are rekindled.

We are a democracy, but does everything in life depend only on winning elections? After the Lok Sabha elections in 2024, slogans like "Aurangzeb ki Aulad", (progeny of Aurangzeb) may have had its impact in 2025 in the Assembly elections. The Maharashtra local body elections are not far away and the sloganeering has restarted. In Goa, 2027 is just 19 months away.

The progressive ideas of the people of Maharashtra have been known since the days of Chhatrapati Shivaji and Shahu Maharaj, Mahatma Phule and Babasaheb Ambedkar among others.

We in Goa have looked up to their progressive ideas, as all these great minds never practised narrow sectarian politics. The instructions given by Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj to his soldiers not to trample the field of the ryots endeared him to the peasantry.

It is this farming section that generated loyal soldiers to his army. There were no farmer's protests or farmer suicides then. Malhar Chitnis states that "Chhatrapati Shahu Maharaj was a father and protector of the young and the old, to men and women, to nobles and servants, great and small". He made happy, not only his subjects but even aliens in race, religion and rule.

Mahatma Phule was a nineteenth century anti-caste social reformer and started the Satyashodhak Samaj, which drew inspiration from Chhatrapati Shivaji's principles of fighting oppression and promoting social justice. Shiv Jayanti was started by him in 1870. He wrote the history of Chhatrapati Shivaji in the form of a powada, portraying him as the leader of the peasants. Babasaheb Ambedkar's role as Chairman of the Drafting Committee of the Indian Constitution and his advocacy to promote political rights and social freedom for all is legendary.

Maharashtra politics seems to depend on figures from history right from the days of Balasaheb Thakeray to the present CM of Maharashtra Devendra Fadnavis. Aurangzeb has been portrayed as a destroyer of temples and a Muslim monarch who imposed jizya on the non-Muslims. Emperor Aurangzeb also issued firmans to donate land and money for the construction of about hundred temples, some of which were in Gauhati, Ujjain and Vrindavan to mention a few. As an emperor, who ruled for almost fifty years, he knew that the stability of his government depended on the cooperation rendered to him by the Hindu majority.



The progressive ideas of the people of Maharashtra have been known since the days of Chhatrapati Shivaji and Shahu Maharaj, Mahatma Phule and Babasaheb Ambedkar among others. We in Goa have looked up to their progressive ideas, as all of these great minds never practised narrow sectarian politics

The destruction of any place of worship can never be condoned but many a times, they were destroyed as they were also places of wealth. Mohammed of Ghazni attacked the Somanath temple for the same reason. These holy places were sometimes used as spaces of refuge against an oncoming invader. So it was not always due to religious animosity that temples were destroyed. Temples, masjids or churches built hundreds of years back, need to be restored as repositories of India's heritage, history and culture—not only temples, as is being done in Goa at the tax payers cost. India's culture and political concept is based on pluralism and diversity, since times immemorial. Hindus and Muslims have fought shoulder to shoulder against the British colonialists and also to defend our nation as soldiers in the Indian army.

Wars were fought in the past and are still being fought today. In every war, an enemy is an enemy, whether man, woman or child. This week Israeli bombardment killed more than 400 Palestinians and a few days later another 85 were killed by Israeli airstrike, more than half of those killed were women and children. In the sixteenth and seventeenth century, whether the Marathas or the Mughals, it was common for the victorious king to take the losing population as prisoners of war, to be used as slaves and therefore these events cannot be viewed from the lens of 2025. It was more of a trade war. Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj passed away in 1680 and Emperor Aurangzeb in 1707.

In the 1789 revolution in France, the clergy was considered even more exploitative than Bourbon monarchs. Protestants

in England and Wales were executed if anyone was judged guilty of heresy against Catholicism. Catholics were persecuted in Scotland two centuries later. Violence and extremism are never justifiable, regardless of perceived injustices.

Today's politics and communal historiography joins religion to the religion of the king. Aurangzeb should not be exhumed from his tomb to ignite passions. Aurangabad has already been renamed as Sambhajinagar. In these emotionally charged times, Abu Azmi, the Samajwadi Party leader contributed his share of hate speech by eulogizing Aurangzeb as the builder of Hindu temples.

The India Hate Lab Report highlights people in power to be behind the spread of communal hate. One such leader is T Raja Singh, BJP MLA from Telangana, who self-declared his 83 criminal cases, many of which are related to communal violence. Nitesh Rane, the Maharashtra Minister has incited that the kar sevaks should do their jobs like they did at the Babri Masjid. People are so radicalised that gram panchayats in Maharashtra and Goa are passing resolutions that Muslims will not be permitted to sell their wares in a temple fairs. This is a very dangerous trend and does not auger well for a democracy. When stand up comedians crack jokes, or when the young tweet on the social media it is never tolerated, complaints are filed, FIRs registered and cases are filed but the high and the mighty go free. Why is it that only free thinking individuals are harassed and contrarian views unacceptable?

When economy is not doing good, when the whole world is

appreciating Sunita William and Butch Wilmore, we are envisioning to dig graves and dig into history to create issues of convenience. The new Maharashtra government had made electoral promises. The Ladki Bahin Scheme, where two months advance of Rs 15,000 per month was given before elections and an larger amount of Rs 21,000 was promised thereafter. Loan waiver was also promised to farmers. Once the fiscal assessment was done and budget allocations made, it was explained that these promises could not be kept and both the schemes were stalled. Mahayukti Alliance government, went back on its poll promises. It is issues such as these that are deflected by the hate speeches. Digging economic causes is more important than digging graves.

Films like "Chhava", show audiences crying and shouting slogans against Aurangzeb as it has enacted the scene of Chhatrapati Sambhaji Maharaj being tortured and killed in the Mughal Court. Maharashtra is turning into a Hindutva tinderbox. Fortunately yesterday Fadnavis visited Nagpur, met the police chiefs and declared that all those who indulged in violence would not be spared.

For us in Goa, 2027 is not far away. The current controversy around the Maratha's relations with the Portuguese and its indirect connect of the Portuguese to religious conversions and Catholics is only meant to fuel the present day electoral politics. The leadership of the freedom struggle of Goa has also been both from the Catholic and Hindu communities. Goa has made the country proud by a large number of Catholic youth in the armed forces. Let us not abandon our future for the sake of the past. It would be great if both sides showed restraint in both demonising or glorifying Aurangzeb in such polarising times. Historical monuments cannot be destroyed and history cannot be effaced by sheer vandalism. Elections won and governments formed on the corpse of free speech and on a hate campaign is pure fascism.

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

When economy is not doing good, when the whole world is appreciating Sunita Williams and Butch Wilmore, we are envisioning to dig graves and dig into history to create issues of convenience



BY INVITATION
Sushila Sawant Mendes

Alcoholism, the deadly disease

Alcoholism is a medical condition characterised by a long-term, compulsive pattern of excessive alcohol consumption. So, when a BJP MLA Premanand Shet had pitched for a ban on alcohol consumption in Goa in the State Assembly some time back, one expected the other legislators to ponder over it and have a serious discussion.

However, there were no takers to what seemed like a legitimate demand with the way things are going in the state but what's worse is that it sparked off flippancy with many ridiculing the demand.

It is high time we realise that alcoholism is slowly turning out to be one of the deadliest diseases that's plaguing Goa. There is no denying the fact that our State is undergoing a major shift in its drinking habits, with tourists and locals consuming dangerous amounts due to its easy availability coupled with cheap pricing.

Today, almost every day, the so-

VIVIAN MAVERICK MARTINS

cial media is abuzz with tourist-local clashes, murders, accidents and many more crimes that are directly or indirectly related to alcohol.

Statistics suggest that every year, the state sees a little over 300 deaths due to liver cirrhosis. However, alcohol experts claim the real death toll could be much higher, once deaths from diseases closely associated with drinking, including heart disease and many cancers, are included.

Then there are innocent people who lose their lives due to rash and negligible driving by those under the influence of alcohol, so the deaths caused due to alcohol disguise the grim truth.

If truth be told, there has definitely been an increase in alcohol consumption and crimes associated with it, due to the utter failure of the government to firstly recognise it as a problem and then find necessary long-term solutions to deal with it.

On the contrary, the government

UPFRONT

It is high time we realise that alcoholism is slowly turning out to be one of the deadliest diseases that's plaguing Goa. There is no denying the fact that our State is undergoing a major shift in its drinking habits, with tourists and locals consuming dangerous amounts due to its easy availability coupled with cheap pricing

is busy dishing out licenses to wine shops and bars citing revenue to the state exchequer.

It is baffling that the government lets go of multi crore scams like mining, land grab among many others which if investigated and loot recovered can fill the government coffers.

What's even wickeder, is that the government seems to be more interested in blood money that comes in the form of revenue from the alcohol and casino lobbies.

Alcohol has become much more affordable in real terms in recent years due to successful lobbying by alcohol

bodies for tax breaks resulting in higher number of crimes and deaths.

While the government appeases the alcohol lobby for gains best known to its ministers, it fails miserably when it comes to keeping checks and balances on the licenses issued which is why one can see bars and liquor shops close to schools and colleges. There is no Think 18, 21, 25 policy, bar and wines shop owners don't think at all while making their sales. Minors below 18 can easily purchase alcohol from wine shops and served drinks even at high end restaurants, pubs, discos etc.

Youngsters are lured into drinking by these people so that their business flourishes and they call them Happy Hours, only if alcohol made one happy so many people wouldn't be drowning in their sorrows.

A major political effort is needed to tackle alcohol harm in recent years and Goa government should ramp up facilities for alcohol treatment to ensure more people receive better

quality support. The taxation on alcohol should be re-looked as part of measures to reduce drinking-related harm. Few people will oppose, but the government should introspect for the larger common good as it will reduce alcohol-related crimes and improve public health.

People take to alcohol mainly due to personal problems or to destress themselves. Many people feel that it's the easiest way out to fight adverse situations but by personal experience I can say it's not true as there are better ways to deal with it. One needs self-motivation to give up alcohol and to live a healthy life ahead. They also need moral support from their family members and the people in general. People have to be a little more supportive to alcoholics rather than ostracising, vilifying and neglecting them.

Alcoholism if not eradicated or controlled will prove to be incurable in near future. Stay away from alcohol because, life is a high.