

GOA, MONDAY, MARCH 24, 2025

Heritage buff Kevin Rebello restores derelict homes to their former glory

For Kevin, renovating crumbling old homes isn't just about aesthetics—it's a mission to preserve Goa's architectural elegance and cultural identity for future generations, safeguarding it from the drab monotony of modern minimalism

FRAZER ANDRADE
frazerandrade@herald-goa.com

CUNCOLIM: Kevin Rebello from Cuncolim is a dedicated advocate for preserving Goan heritage, devoting his life to restoring traditional Goan houses. With a deep connection to his roots, he works tirelessly to revitalize architectural gems that embody the region's rich history and culture. For Kevin, each house tells a unique story of Goa's past, and his restoration efforts are a labour of love—ensuring these cultural treasures endure for future generations. Through meticulous craftsmanship, he preserves the charm of Goan homes, allowing their beauty and historical significance to shine in the modern world.

Kevin's passion for safeguarding Goan heritage homes stems from a profound respect for their cultural history, architectural elegance, and the identity they represent. These homes stand as living reflections of Goa's diverse influences, blending Portuguese, Indian, and local traditions. "By preserving these structures, we ensure that future generations can engage with their history, appreciate the artistry involved, and uphold the cultural legacy that defines Goa," he says.

Goan heritage homes are re-



BEFORE AFTER



nowned for their unique Indo-Portuguese architectural style—featuring colorful facades, spacious verandas, intricate wooden carvings, tiled roofs, and decorative arches. Many also boast expansive courtyards, high ceilings, and vibrant azulejos (Portuguese tiles), blending European and Indian design elements seamlessly.

However, Kevin acknowledges that preserving these homes comes with significant challenges. "A lack of financial support, limited awareness of their cultural importance, pressures from modern development, and the scarcity of skilled artisans make restoration difficult," he explains. Bureaucratic hurdles and inadequate legal protections further complicate conservation efforts.

As an active member of various heritage organizations, Kevin plays a crucial role in raising

awareness about the cultural and historical significance of Goan homes. He leverages social media and organizes heritage evening events to bring together enthusiasts and like-minded individuals. By sharing his own journey of restoring his 200-year-old ancestral home, he provides a tangible example of the importance of preserving cultural heritage.

One of the biggest threats to Goa's traditional architecture, he notes, is modern development. "Commercial projects and large-scale constructions often take precedence over conservation efforts, leading to the demolition or drastic alteration of historic homes," he laments.

Reflecting on his experience with restoration projects, Kevin highlights some of the common challenges. "One of the first hurdles is finding skilled labour. Restoration requires artisans

who understand intricate details, and variations in craftsmanship can be a challenge. Ensuring they follow proper techniques while staying on schedule is a balancing act," he says. He also points to family disputes as a frequent obstacle.

"When a home is a

family heirloom, different members often have conflicting opinions on restoration. Some want to maintain a specific style, others are concerned about budget or modernization. These disputes must be handled diplomatically to keep the project moving forward smoothly," he explains.

Despite these challenges, Kevin finds immense fulfillment in his work. "There's nothing more rewarding than transforming a rundown building into a beautiful, livable space once again. The process of preserving original character while incorporating modern comforts keeps me inspired. Each project is a new journey, full of unique challenges and learning experiences," he shares.

Balancing heritage preservation with modern living requires

careful planning. "The key is integrating contemporary elements subtly—using sustainable materials, installing modern systems discreetly, and preserving the home's original structure while enhancing comfort and functionality," Kevin says.

Unfortunately, he notes, many

“There's nothing more rewarding than transforming a rundown building into a beautiful, livable space once again. The process of preserving original character while incorporating modern comforts keeps me inspired. Each project is a new journey, full of unique challenges and learning experiences

—Kevin Rebello

people see heritage homes merely as tourist attractions, overlooking their true value as culturally significant living spaces. "These homes are more than just historical landmarks; they are a part of our identity. Preserving them isn't just about aesthetics—it's about keeping our history alive," he emphasizes.

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 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 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.

DREAMS, AMBITION AND HARD WORK:

How Ibrampur's Amita Naik went from milkmaid to dairy queen

ERWIN FONSECA

PERNEM: Women's empowerment is often spoken about, but real change is seen in those who break barriers and carve a niche for themselves despite challenges. Amita Naik from Ibrampur, Pernem, is one such woman who, through sheer determination and hard work, has created her own success story in the dairy industry.

A homemaker by background, Amita's journey into entrepreneurship wasn't planned. Today, she is known for producing high-quality dairy products from her home, including lassi, ghee, paneer, curd, and even reviving the childhood favourite 'Pepsi' (ice candy).

Just a few years ago, Amita and her husband had no concrete plans to venture into dairy farming. Coming from a farming background, they initially focused on cultivating gerbera flowers in a polyhouse with support from their relatives. However, despite their efforts, something always felt missing.

In 2017, the couple decided to buy cows. Since they already had good farmland, growing fodder for the animals wasn't difficult. They started selling milk—some to local buyers and the rest to Goa Dairy. It's worth noting that several farmers in Pernem, particularly in villages like Ibrampur, Chandel, Hasapur, Nagzar, and Casarvannem, are engaged in dairy farming and supply large quantities of milk to Goa Dairy. The Naiks joined this network, but they soon realised they weren't fully satisfied with the returns.

"Selling milk at just Rs 30 per litre didn't justify the effort and investment we put in," Amita recalls. They continued in this manner for two years, but the thought of improving their income and future kept lingering.

Then came the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, which unexpectedly became a blessing in disguise for them. With restrictions in place, demand for milk increased temporarily. However, the couple wondered what would happen once things returned to normal. It was during this time of reflection that they decided to enter value-added

Apart from running her business, Amita is also committed to sharing her knowledge with others. She is often invited as a guest lecturer at schools, educating students about dairy farming and entrepreneurship. Many schools even organise study tours to her farm, where children get hands-on exposure to dairy production

dairy production.

"Goa has a huge gap when it comes to locally produced dairy products. Instead of just selling raw milk, we realised we could process it into curd, paneer, and lassi, which would fetch much better returns," Amita says.

Determined to succeed, Amita underwent training through Lupin Foundation, which helped her understand the technical aspects of dairy production. She also explored various government schemes and subsidies available through the Rural Development Agency (RDA) and Lupin Foundation. These initiatives allowed them to acquire necessary equipment, including a lassi stirrer, testing kits, a paneer-making machine, and sealing machines.

"From 2020 to 2022, we spent time learning the market, understanding our machinery, and sourcing raw materials like packaging materials. It was not an overnight process," she explains. Amita also connected with suppliers who could provide quality materials for packaging, as dairy production required a reliable supply chain.

After two years of research and preparation, the Naiks finally obtained the necessary approvals from various authorities, including

the panchayat and the Food and Drugs Administration (FDA). With all the groundwork complete, they officially launched their business in the summer of 2023.

What started with just 10 cows has now expanded to a full-fledged dairy business with 25 cows producing 150 litres of milk per day. The Naiks still supply some milk to Goa Dairy, but their primary focus is now on manufacturing and selling their own dairy products.

Under their brand Adishri, they have introduced fresh lassi and curd, which have gained popularity, especially in Bardez. They sell around 1,000 litres of these products regularly, and the demand continues to grow.

However, dairy sales are seasonal. From September to May, demand is high, but during the monsoon months, there is a slowdown in milk product consumption. To make the most of their resources, Amita also started producing vermicompost from cow dung, generating an additional Rs 15,000 per month—a sustainable income source requiring minimal investment.

The decision to shift from raw milk to processed dairy products has paid off. While selling plain milk would fetch only Rs 30 per litre, the same milk processed into curd, paneer, or lassi now brings in nearly Rs 70 per litre, doubling their revenue.

"Looking back, I realise how important it was to take this step. Hard work and perseverance have truly paid off," says Amita.

Despite her success, Amita acknowledges that local businesses face an ongoing challenge—Goans often prefer well-established brands, many of which come from outside the state.

"Goans still hesitate to support homegrown businesses, but I am optimistic. One day, they will recognise the quality and importance of promoting local entrepreneurs," she says.

For Amita, this is just the beginning. She and her husband have ambitious plans to expand Adishri, focusing on becoming a major player in Goa's dairy industry. While they are currently concentrating on paneer, curd, lassi, ghee, and ice candy, they hope to introduce more dairy-based products in the future. After overcoming numerous challenges over the past three years, Amita now stands as a shining example of determination and resilience.

"We have built this market from scratch, and we are determined to take it to new heights. There's no looking back now," she concludes with confidence.



Working class hero: Rickshaw driver Vasudev Vishnu Naik's life of struggle and perseverance

JENIFER FERNADES
joseph@herald-go.com

ALDONA: Vasudev Vishnu Naik, now 70, has spent a lifetime navigating hardships, determined to provide for his family through sheer perseverance. From working as a motorcycle taxi pilot to becoming an auto-rickshaw driver, his journey reflects the struggles of the working class, the changing times, and the diminishing viability of traditional occupations.

Looking back on his life, Naik recalls growing up in Aldona, where he spent his childhood and school years. He studied up to the 10th standard, which, at the time, was considered a good qualification for employment. "In those days, even with a 10th standard education, government clerks and officers would come offering jobs," he said. "Now, even well-qualified youth struggle to find work without influence or pressure."

Naik's working life began as a motorcycle taxi driver at the Aldona bus stand. Over time, he took up different roles—first as a bus conductor and later as a ticket master

on private buses operating between Aldona and Mapusa. He even worked on long-distance routes between Goa and Bombay. However, despite years of effort, he found himself questioning his future. "I kept asking myself—where is this all going? What am I truly achieving?" he said.

Realising the need for stability, Naik decided to take control of his earnings and started driving an auto-rickshaw. For over 30 years, he has been a familiar presence at the Aldona stand. But the job, once a reliable means of livelihood, has become increasingly challenging due to rising costs and changing transport trends. "I remember when petrol cost just Rs 5. Then it rose to Rs 10, then Rs 15, and now it's Rs 97. Survival gets harder with each passing year,"

he remarked.

Despite financial hardships, Naik prioritised his family's well-being. He worked tirelessly, through heat and rain, to ensure his children received an education. "With pride—and tears in my eyes—I can say that through this job, I managed to educate both my children," he said. However, even with degrees in hand, they struggled to find the jobs they aspired to. "It pains me, but I never stopped trying, even seeking other jobs just for their sake."

Naik believes that auto-rickshaw driving has lost its relevance in today's world, with most people owning their own bikes and cars. "This job is no longer fashionable, but I carry on for as long as I can, because that's what I know," he stated.

However, life today is drastically different from what it used to be. The cost of living has skyrocketed, making it difficult for people like Naik to survive. "In the past, even 2 paise felt like wealth—we could buy all the basic needs with it. Today, even Rs 500 won't get you half of what's required," he lamented. "Rs 100 and Rs

“I do not understand the government's approach to employment and livelihoods. They (politicians) say they can't bring in private jobs, yet their own children live comfortably abroad in skilled positions. They tell us to send our children to work in the fields, but I ask—have they ever shown their children what a field looks like? As the saying goes, practice before you preach

—Vasudev Naik

200 notes have lost their value; one needs at least Rs 1000 just to live decently."

Maintenance costs for vehicles have also increased. "Back then, earning Rs 50 meant spending Rs 20 on maintenance, but now, keeping a bike running is exhausting," he said. He believes that people like him have little control over these changes. "We cannot change God's plan—what He wills, shall be."

"I have lived a hard life, full of struggle, but I have overcome every obstacle, and I am still here today, standing strong," he said. His only wish is for the younger generation to have a better future, though he fears that their struggles may be even greater. "These young children will face tougher times, especially those from below middle-class families."

Despite the difficulties, Naik continues to work with dignity, finding small moments of joy in his daily routine. "What little happiness we find is when we drop a customer safely home and earn our fare," he said. Until his body allows, he is determined to keep going, with faith in God's blessings and the satisfaction of having done his best for his family.

