Santiago Miranda's 40-year-bond with Goan pao

St Thomas Bakery offers a variety of breads, including pao, katreachem pav, kakna, revddem, and the ever-popular kunneachi poli. The latter remains in high demand, especially among people with diabetes and other health issues

A JOURNEY INTO THE HEART OF GOA

In our continuous efforts to put people at the centre 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 Heraldo'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 Heraldo's and we welcome all of you on this journey into the heart of Goa. Pls email editor@ herald-goa.com or reach us on Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram.

JENIFER FERNANDES
joseph@herald-goa.com

ALDONA: Santiago Miranda of of Khoirut in Aldona, rises each day with a singular purpose — to bake bread the way it was meant to be. As the proprietor of St Thomas Bakery, Santiago has been kneading dough, shaping loaves, and keeping tradition alive for over four decades. "I've been in the bakery profession for more than 40 years now," says the soft-spoken Santiago. "But before that, I spent over 15 years learning the trade from others."

His journey began in Chodna, where he worked in a bakery alongside several other Goans. Those years, spent observing and absorbing knowledge from skilled bakers, laid the foundation for his future. "Back then, the goal was simple — to bake good bread and serve the community," he says.

There was a time when Goans eagerly awaited the arrival of the poder, the traditional bread-seller, especially in the early hours of the morning. Santiago remembers those days fondly but notes that the times have changed.

"Many Goans have gone abroad, and very few remain in traditional occupations," he says. "These days, migrants have taken over many trades, including baking. But they don't always follow the right methods — some start working in bakeries with hardly any training. The quality is lost when you skip the process."

Santiago is concerned about the slow decline of the traditional Goan bakery. He believes that as locals distance themselves from these trades, the soul of Goan baking — its techniques, patience, and care — is being eroded. Deter-

> *Bread has been part of Goan life since Portuguese times. We need to support and preserve it. Bakery work is not easy. People eat bread every day but don't realise the effort that goes into it. If you're unemployed and looking for work, come learn the trade. There's honour in this job*
> — Santiago Miranda

mined not to let that happen, he started his own bakery after leaving his job, supported by his family and fortified by years of training. "Learning from professionals is not the same as just doing a bakery course," he says. "Experience makes all the difference."

He recalls the early years when he would receive five massive sacks of wheat — each weighing more than 90 kilos — to make bread. "We used to start work at 5 p.m. and continue till 9 a.m. the next day. It was hard, but I never complained. I've always believed that if you

work hard, God will bless you." Despite studying only till the seventh standard and never taking a formal course, Santiago has become an expert in his field through sheer experience. His bakery now employs several workers, many of whom have been with him for over 15 years. He trains them personally to uphold his standards.

"There was a time we would bake 4,000 to 5,000 pieces of bread a day," he says. "After Covid-19, things slowed down. Many migrants started bakeries, and some Goans even rented theirs out. That's when the quality dropped."

He remembers selling bread for just one rupee, earning a profit of barely 5 or 10 paisa per piece. "But even with that, I was content. I used to save about Rs 10,000 a year. It was enough. These days, bakery workers make Rs 20,000 to Rs 30,000 a month, but prices have gone up too."

Santiago also has vivid memories of life in the early 70s. "In 1972, my mother gave me 20 paise to buy groceries. Ration rice was 1.50 paise a kilo. Life was simpler, and people seemed happier."

He never feared starting his own business. "It was a risk, yes, but I was confident in my training. The business grew slowly. I taught my workers everything — from mixing flour and yeast to letting the dough rest for two to three hours."

He adds, "Bakery work is not easy. People eat bread every day but don't realise the effort that goes into it. Once the dough is ready, baking starts around 11 pm and goes on till morning." He shares a story of a friend who once asked for

100 loaves within an hour. "I told him, 'This isn't like frying batata vadas. Good bread takes five to six hours to make.'" Today, St Thomas Bakery supplies between 2,000 to 2,500 loaves daily across various areas. While Santiago continues to work tirelessly, he admits that his children aren't very interested in taking over the trade. "They've studied well and prefer jobs that match their qualifications," he says. "One of my sons has done a bakery course and now works abroad. He's doing well and enjoys it — I'm happy for him."

Even if there's a staff shortage, Santiago doesn't shy away from getting his hands dirty. Sometimes, his children pitch in too. He takes pride in the fact that through this bakery, he was able to provide for his family and give his children a good education.

"Having your own business means freedom. I don't need to look for work or report to anyone. Every job has challenges — whether it's an office or a bakery — but this has given me everything I needed." Still, Santiago worries about the future. "Traditional Goan businesses are slowly slipping away," he says. "People are handing them over to migrants who care more about profit than quality. The heart of Goan bread is being lost."

Even today, he personally checks every batch of bread that comes out of his ovens. "Migrants may bake faster, but we Goans bake with care. That's the difference."

He believes it's not too late. "Bread has been part of Goan life since Portuguese times. We need to support and preserve it. If you're unemployed and looking for work, come learn the trade. There's honour in this job."

In the evenings, Santiago's wife still enjoys the freshly baked polis from St Thomas Bakery — a small, simple pleasure made possible by a lifetime of hard work and pride.

How constable Harish Sawant created a farming collective to green fallow land in Assagao

ERWIN FONSECA

ASSAGAO: It was in June 2014 that a small attempt was made in Assagao when four farmers came together for the first time to start farming under the community farming umbrella. In those days, even getting such a small number of farmers to work collectively was a big effort, as it involved continuous brainstorming sessions and awareness meets. However, no one took this move seriously, as for many it meant that just four farmers coming together was no big deal. But this was a stepping stone for a much greater project that would be coming up about ten years down the line, and a launchpad for the youth to get attracted to farming.

Agriculture is often seen as a non-lucrative job, particularly due to the high cost of labour and low returns, but if labour costs are reduced and returns increased, then agriculture can surely be profitable. It was with this thought in mind and also with an aim to create awareness in this area that Harish Sawant, a young police constable from Assagao, embarked on a mission — and it was truly a challenge.

"I basically come from a farmer family in Assagao, though now I am in the police service and my wife runs a business. But we still make time for field work. Even my parents were into farming. As I grew up, I noticed a downward trend in agriculture in Assagao and surrounding villages,

and this pained me a lot. So, I decided that I should do something, and after a lot of thought and discussions with close friends, we conceptualised a plan of community farming which would involve rigorous paperwork. But we thought we will accept the challenge and go ahead," he said.

It was two years ago that Harish actually began work to contact his neighbouring farmers and dig out all papers and pin down all survey numbers and their owners. Collecting all documents, he finally ended up with 32 farmers who had different areas of fields surrounding his field, and then started the work of holding meetings with them, convincing them and bringing them on board.

"It was a challenge to get on board 32 farmers, to convince them, have meetings with them, apprise them of the benefits and make them look at the positive aspects of it. Many had to be repeatedly met, as no success was achieved in just one meeting. No sooner did they agree, it felt like a big victory for me, and I embarked on my project."

Harish spent his own money for everything from the start, and this ran into lakhs. He applied for fencing of 1.5 lakh sq metres of land, and the officials from the agriculture department arrived and approved the project. And thus came to be born the Redisal Community Farming Group at Assagao, involving 32 farmers who would be cultivating in an area of 1.5 lakh sq metres of their land.

"The first crop we took up after fencing our fields was the kharif crop of paddy last year, and all farmers put together produced tons of paddy from this big area. While we retained

It is not an easy affair to build a team and imbibe a team spirit for a common cause which can benefit society, especially if the team building involves people of different ages, having a different mindset and different school of thought. But Harish Sawant of Assagao, a police constable, has succeeded in building a team which has now become a benchmark — probably for the whole of Goa — in the field of agriculture, which is often seen as neglected and not profit-driven

some paddy for ourselves, the other amount we sold, and all farmers were quite ecstatic with the produce — and it was all worth my efforts, I felt."

Keeping the tempo on, all the farmers decided to cultivate osanne (cowpea — a dry pulse crop grown in Goa as a rabi crop), and it was yet another achievement for them and yet another cause for jubilation. "Though many even undertook planting of chillies and other winter vegetables, the main crop we took up was osanne, as we felt that such a big area should not be kept vacant while we wait for the next monsoons for paddy. Though we never grew osanne on this place in a big way, we decided let's give it a try, because in any case it requires no labour and no irrigation. And I must say that on average, each farmer has harvested about 200 kg of osanne — for some, it could be even more — and after selling, as this crop has no labour involved, each farmer's net income from selling only osanne could be anywhere around a lakh. So this gives me a sense of satisfaction that I played a vital role in helping our farmers not only bring their land under cultivation but even earn a decent income," says Harish.

He feels that more than paddy, it was this cowpea crop that was more profitable to the farmers, but nonetheless it has been a project for others to learn from and follow. "No doubt compared to other states, our land holdings in Goa for each farmer are quite small, but I am sure if farmers come together and start such community farming, we can generate Goan produce in a big way and be sustainable in farming. Instead of discarding agriculture or selling our fields, it's better we come together as a team and work — and the results could be just fabulous," he concludes.

How Professor Madhusudhan Joshi powers his home with solar energy, and gets paid for the surplus

A resident of Merces in Goa, Madhusudhan Joshi doesn't pay a single rupee for his electricity bills, thanks to a sustainable home that's powered by solar energy

ROSHINI MUTHUKUMAR

In 2021, when cyclone Tauktae hit the West coast, many homes in Madhusudhan Joshi's locality in Goa faced a power outage for three days. However, his home had enough electricity to power essential appliances as well as charge the mobile phones of a few neighbours.

This was only possible thanks to the hybrid solar energy system he uses to power his home.

In 2018, when the 58-year-old was constructing his home, he decided to make it an eco-friendly one. To do so, the Goa resident visited several home exhibitions.

"Being a professor at the Goa College of Pharmacy, for the last 25 years, I have been teaching a subject on renewable energy. However, I had not put any of the practices I taught to use before. But when I was constructing my home, I decided to power it with solar energy," says Madhusudan in an interview with The Better India.

Today, his home in Merces, Panaji, and all the appliances within it are fully powered by solar energy. Since the energy system is a hybrid model, he not only saves money on electricity bills but also gives back energy to the government and earns Rs 350 annually.

Zero bills and earnings from surplus
When Madhusudhan decided to construct an eco-friendly building, he began visiting home exhibitions conducted around the city. At one of those, he came across a company named Solar360 located in Vasco, Goa.

"While most solar providers offer on-grid and off-grid systems, this company was installing hybrid systems. This means, the solar energy is stored in a battery as well as connected to the grid and gives back energy to the local electricity provider," says Madhusudhan.

To explain in simple terms, when using a hybrid system, the energy generated from the sun is stored in a battery first. If there is surplus energy, it is exported to the grid and the

government will offer compensation based on the number of units generated. This system costs Rs 5,80,000, which is more than the conventional solar panel installation.

In January 2019, Madhusudhan and his wife moved into their newly constructed home. The house had solar panels that could generate 11 kW of power, installed on their roof. The energy generated was connected to four 15-Volt batteries, which further supplied energy to their home through an inverter.

"We use solar energy to power all kitchen appliances, including the refrigerator. Other heavy appliances like washing machines and television are also powered by solar energy," says Madhusudhan. However, during monsoons, Goa experiences heavy rainfall and there is inadequate sunlight for several days. At that time, the power

supply system automatically switches to the grid, where electricity is supplied by the government.

"Two weeks ago, there was heavy rainfall, and my solar unit generated only 1 kW of energy for an entire week. But all my appliances were still working because the system automatically draws power from the grid when the battery is empty," says Madhusudhan.

To check the power supply and usage, he has a Battery Management System installed on his mobile phone.

Throughout 2019, Madhusudhan powered his entire home using solar power and did not generate any electricity bills.

"I paid zero rupees for my electricity. However, at the end of the year, since I had supplied surplus energy to the grid, the government compensated me with Rs 350. This amount is calculated based on the cost of electricity per unit along with surplus units," says Madhusudhan, adding that he paid up to Rs 800 per month for electricity in his old house.

Madhusudan says that he has no complaints about using the solar energy system. Speaking of how others can learn from his example, he says, "It has made my life hassle-free and I do not have to worry about power cuts, which could affect my daily routines."

Edited by Yoshita Rao