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FROM WARDS & VADDOS

Ground Reports Telling Stories That Matter



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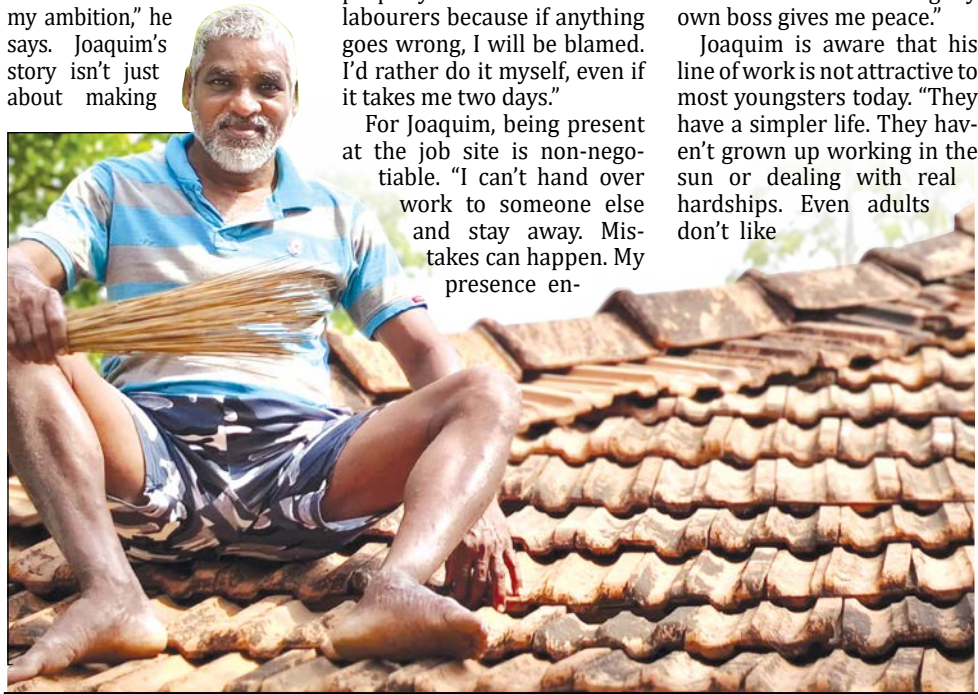
Handyman Joaquim Fernandes is the all-rounder of Udoi Vaddo

For 42 years now, Joaquim has been an indispensable member of his village—the person everyone turns to when they need a job done, and done well

JENIFER FERNANDES
joseph@herald-goa.com

ALDONA: “I may not have been good at studies, but I always believed that hard work would lead to success and happiness. I believe I have a God-given talent to serve people.” That’s how Joaquim Fernandes of Udoi Vaddo, Aldona, sums up his life philosophy. Now 68, Joaquim has been working since the age of 15—fishing, farming, building houses, cleaning wells, fixing roofs, cutting trees, and more. He has never been tied to a single employer or vocation and carries with him a rare sense of joy and pride in doing honest work.

“I didn’t answer my Std VI final exam—I quit school. But even then, I had a clear goal: to work hard and fulfil my ambition,” he says. Joaquim’s story isn’t just about making



“Even if I’m offered more money to join a conventional workplace today, I will refuse – I won’t give up my independence. I like having the freedom to take breaks and choose how and when I work. Being my own boss gives me peace —Joaquim Fernandes

ends meet. It’s about perseverance, versatility, and a genuine desire to help others. “Every job I’ve done—from mending homes to working in the fields—I’ve done with a smile. I believe a smile begets another smile, and that’s the real reward,” he quips.

Over the past 42 years, Joaquim has worked solo on most projects. He only occasionally takes the help of his son or a trusted friend. “People rely on me. So, I make sure their work is done neatly and properly. I don’t hire random labourers because if anything goes wrong, I will be blamed. I’d rather do it myself, even if it takes me two days.”

For Joaquim, being present at the job site is non-negotiable. “I can’t hand over work to someone else and stay away. Mistakes can happen. My presence en-

sures things go right.”

He believes every kind of work deserves dedication. “Just because something is difficult doesn’t mean it’s impossible. If someone asks you to lift a heavy brick, don’t say ‘I can’t.’ Say, ‘I’ll try.’ If you fail the first time, try again.”

He began working for a daily wage of Rs 6, which eventually increased to Rs 12. “Even if I’m offered more money today, I won’t give up my independence. I like having the freedom to take breaks and choose how I work. Being my own boss gives me peace.”

Joaquim is aware that his line of work is not attractive to most youngsters today. “They have a simpler life. They haven’t grown up working in the sun or dealing with real hardships. Even adults don’t like

working in the sun now.”

Still, he holds no regrets. “Maybe I would’ve had a better life if I worked in an office, but I’m satisfied. I’m happy even if the wages are low. There’s dignity in what I do.”

He recalls the olden days fondly. “Earlier, we used clay roof tiles that kept homes cool. Today, everyone wants ACs. It’s not wrong—but where’s the fresh air now?” With six children to raise, Joaquim has lived through many struggles. “It takes blood and sweat to bring up a family. I may not have given them everything, but I gave them what as much as I could. I raised them with

“You have to give your all. Don’t think about failure before you even begin. Take the first step. If you’re scared to climb the stairs, you’ll never reach the top —Joaquim Fernandes

values and gratitude.”

His faith in God is unshakable. “Everything I’ve received is from Him. My customers have been kind. I’ve fulfilled every job I took up with responsibility. If I take up a task, I finish it—no matter how tough.”

Joaquim also makes it a point to guide his clients about how to maintain their homes and wells. “I earned enough to live. I may not have saved for the future, but I ed-



ucated my children and gave them a better life.”

He acknowledges the uncertainty that lies ahead but remains content. “I’m still working. I don’t know what the future holds, but I’ve lived a happy life.”

To those complaining about unemployment, Joaquim has a message: “You have to give your all. Don’t think about failure before you even begin. Take the first step. If you’re scared to climb the stairs, you’ll never reach the top.”

His caution about hiring outsiders is rooted in today’s realities. “There are so many robbery cases now. I can’t risk someone else’s household for the sake of running mine. I’d rather do the job myself, no matter how long it takes.”

With quiet dignity and relentless passion, Joaquim Fernandes has built a life that many might overlook—but one that deserves admiration. “I thank all those who trusted me with their homes. I believe in hard work, sincerity, and the will to serve.”

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 sto-

ries. 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. Please email editor@herald-go.com or reach us on Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram.

Venissa Conceicao champions fading Goan sweet treats



JENIFER FERNANDES
joseph@herald-go.com

ALDONA: Venissa Conceicao, a resident of Carona, has been at the helm of her family-run bakery business in Ucasaim for over two decades. She also operates a popular stall at the Mapusa market under the name St. Peter’s Bakery, where she specialises in crafting authentic Goan sweets. Her mission is simple yet profound: to spread the fragrance and flavour of traditional Goan sweets, made from the humblest of ingredients yet transformed into something extraordinary.

Over the years, Venissa has built a loyal customer base, but she remains concerned about the fading knowledge and recognition of many traditional sweets. “There are sweets like serival and letri which are rarely made these days. Some names are forgotten, and some of the authenticity is lost. There are several reasons for this — some sweets are tedious to prepare, while others require expensive ingredients. The sweets I mentioned are the ones the market currently demands,” she explains.

Married into a family that has been running this bakery business for over 25 years, Venissa joined the trade soon after her wedding. “From the beginning, we used to make bread like all the other bakers. My stall is still in the bread market. But there were already too many people selling bread, and we noticed there was a demand for sweets. So we introduced them one at a time, and as the business grew, so did our range.”

Though the business remains deeply rooted in tradition, it is also very much a family affair. “We have three workers. These days, there are no local Goan workers, so we have to hire people from outside and train them. It’s not easy teaching them. In our family, we know how to make the sweets, so we don’t rely entirely on outsiders. That’s very important in this line — you need to know the craft yourself.”

Venissa is a mother of five. While none of her children are fully immersed in the business, a couple show occasional interest. “This generation is unpredictable. Some kids want ‘white-collar’ jobs and see this as ‘blue-collar’ work. But in business, every challenge is an opportunity — success depends on how creatively you handle it.”

During Christmas, when demand spikes, her children help with tasks like packing. While the response from customers remains strong, health concerns and inflation have begun to impact sales. “Many people have diabetes and are cutting down on sweets. We try using natural sugars like palm jaggery, but not everything can be made that way — the cost goes up, and we have to raise prices too. Local people can’t always afford it.”

The price of ingredients has skyrocketed over the years. “Even just a few years ago, sweets were priced around Rs 100 to Rs 250 per kg. Now, I’ve set the price at Rs 560 per kg — a big jump. Coconut, the cornerstone of Goan sweets, costs Rs 50 a piece. If we buy at that rate, how can we sell cheaper?”

“We prepare a variety of sweets — bolinhas, doce, kokad, pinagr, bebinca, perad, dodol, baath cake — and not to miss out the traditional Goan wedding bol,” says Venissa. “It creates a symphony of taste in every bite. We also take snack orders for weddings and bake carrot cake, chocolate cake, date and walnut, ribbon cake, fruit cake and many more.”

Many of the sweets require extensive preparation and early hours. “Some sweets like bolinhas need to be made the day before because they require fermentation. Bol also requires toddy for fermentation. We start as early as 3am to ensure fresh sweets as well as breakfast snacks are ready by 7am,” she says.



For Venissa, tradition must begin at home. “We’re at fault too — we don’t introduce our youngsters to traditional tastes. When we teach them from childhood about what goes into our food and what it produces, they’ll value it more. When I got married, my husband was abroad and I had a job too. But our parents were ageing and handed over the business to us. Initially, we hesitated — we had jobs, and staying in Goa to do a traditional business felt uncertain. But in the end, it kept our family together. My husband came back, and we’ve been living together ever since.”

Before settling in Goa, Venissa worked as a pastry chef abroad. When their son was born, they returned home and took over the family bakery. Interestingly, she never trained in baking. “I had done a hotel management course, but not in food production. I learned everything after marriage.”

Cleanliness is a top priority in her kitchen. “We have one worker just for cleaning. Twice a week, we do deep cleaning with a pressure wash — it’s very important in the food industry.”

Venissa has no regrets about her career path. “I would choose this over a government job any day. Today, all the youth want to go to London — it’s the Portuguese passport trend. Migrants are coming to Goa, buying property. Why can’t our kids do that here? If they look at this positively, they’ll realise that a traditional business will never die out.”



Veteran traders Graciana and Leopoldina’s lifelong bond with Siolim’s weekly bazaar

ERWIN FONSECA

SIOLIM: In the early days, when tarred roads were non-existent and transport was minimal—limited to a lone ‘Camiao’ truck that made a few daily trips—traveling to Mapusa market was a distant dream for most. Bullock carts were the main means of transport, and even bicycles were rarely seen. During the Portuguese era, a single Camiao operated a few times a day to support the working class. After the Portuguese left and until the launch of the Kadamba Transport Corporation (KTC) service by Chief Minister Pratapsingh Rane in 1980, Goans had little access to public transport. In this context, weekly village markets emerged as vital commercial hubs. Villages across Bardez—including

PILLARS OF THE MARKET

Goa’s traditional weekly markets have long been the economic and cultural backbone of its villages, offering local communities a platform to sell produce and handmade goods. Among these, the Siolim market, held every Wednesday on the Siolim church grounds, has stood the test of time, growing in popularity and significance over nearly seven decades. Two women—Graciana D’Souza and Leopoldina Gonsalves—have become synonymous with this market, each having done business here for over 40 years

Calangute, Assonora, and Siolim—established their own weekly bazaars, allowing local vendors to sell their wares without needing to travel far.

The Siolim market quickly became one of the most popular and enduring of these, often likened to a miniature version of the bustling Mapusa market. Women would walk long distances—often carrying heavy loads on their heads—to reserve a spot in the market square.

After a day’s work under the hot sun, they would make the same journey home, undeterred by hills or muddy paths. These markets not only helped people survive economically but also fostered a sense of community, especially among women who travelled in groups, united by shared struggles and hard work.

Today, 80-year-old Graciana D’Souza, fondly called Gracy, remains a fixture of the Siolim market. A pillar of strength and an embodiment of perseverance, Gracy has continued her work despite enduring personal tragedies, including the loss of her husband and only

“I’ve built my family because of this market. Whatever success my children have achieved is because of the people of Siolim and the surrounding areas who have supported me all these years. Their patronage gave me the strength to carry on —Leopoldina Gonsalves



daughter. “I come from a very hardworking family. We are deeply rooted in our culture and traditions and have come up through difficult means,” she says.

Initially, Gracy sold local produce in Mapusa, but due to the logistical challenges, she began focusing on her village market instead, setting up her stall every Wednesday and eventually even on Sundays. She now sells a variety of traditional Goan items, including sweets, vinegar, pickles, and agricultural produce—either prepared by herself, her equally industrious sister, or sourced from well-wishers.

Despite her age, Gracy remains active and engaged. She recently participated in the Siolim Coconut Festival, setting up a stall with an array of coconut-based sweets that won much praise from visitors.

Another stalwart of the market is Leopoldina Gonsalves, who travels all the way from Nerul—crossing seven villages—to set up her stall in Siolim every Wednesday. Now in her 60s, Leopoldina began her market journey at age 17, shortly after marrying into a farming family. “In those days, girls married young. My mother-in-law would bring our local produce to Siolim on a bullock cart. After a couple of years, I took over, and I’ve been coming here ever since,” she says.

In her 42 years at the Siolim market, Leopoldina has witnessed immense transformation—not only in Siolim but also in the villages she passes through. “A lot of Goan fields have disappeared. Labour costs have skyrocketed. The same produce I now sell for hundreds of rupees used to be sold for a few paisa,” she observes. Yet, her pride



“Be it rain or sun, I’m always present at the market. I’ve been here for nearly 50 years, and in that time, I’ve earned a lot of goodwill. People know I sell traditional, local items, and they would flock to this market because it was like a mini Mapusa market. I’m grateful to everyone who has supported me over the years —Graciana D’Souza

in her farming roots remains strong. “We have large fields in Nerul, and we continue to grow seasonal produce and strictly Goan food items all year round.”

The Siolim market, much like its vendors, has adapted and evolved, but it continues to serve as a beacon of Goan resilience, tradition, and self-reliance. And thanks to veterans like Gracy and Leopoldina, it still retains the warmth and familiarity of a bygone era.