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For veteran drummer Cosme 'Cozy' Fernandes, passion plays louder than money

For Cosme, teaching is a way to keep the rhythm of life going—and to pass on the fire that once made a little boy fall in love with the beat of a drum

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ALDONA: Cosme Fernandes, fondly known as Cozy, lives in the village of Moira in Goa. Born in Mumbai in 1959, he was brought to Goa in 1962 at the age of three by his father, Joaquim Fernandes—affectionately known as "Joklu." Joaquim was a gifted trumpet player who performed with renowned musicians like Chris Perry and Emiliano da Cruz, and played in several bands in Mumbai.

Cozy's relationship with music, particularly drums, spans more than five decades. Now 66, he says, "Music still lives in me." His fascination with drums began when he was just four. At a neighbour's wedding where his father had arranged for a band, Cozy saw a live drummer perform with his father's group for the first time. That experience left a deep impression. "I was mesmerised," he recalls. "That moment planted the dream of becoming a drummer in my heart."

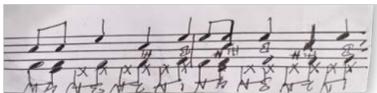
His father initially tried to guide him toward the trumpet. "Around the age of 5 or 6, my father began teaching me the trumpet. But while he was an excellent trumpeter, and widely respected, I never felt a connection with the instrument." Cozy's heart, he insists, belonged to the drums. Since his father was reluctant to buy him a drum set, the young Cozy improvised—using tree branches and homemade pads to mimic a drum kit. Eventually, at



the age of eight, he persuaded his father to let him give up the trumpet and focus solely on drums.

At 11, he played drums for the first time at another neighbour's wedding. Around that time, he also started writing songs and acting in village dramas. Hungry to learn more, he convinced his father to send him to St. Anthony's Music School in Duler, where he stayed for two years. Even there, he didn't have a drum kit, but his passion kept him going. At 13, he left school and returned to Mumbai.

There, he stumbled upon an unusual opportunity. A German circus was looking for a drummer. Cozy took the job, earning Rs 500 a month and playing three shows a day. "It wasn't glamorous," he admits, "but it gave me a lot of practical experience." He even slept at the club where he performed. After a year, he returned to Goa and joined a band called "The Daybreakers", where he learned to read music. He began giving drum lessons and continued performing with various



bands, gradually earning a reputation in the local music scene.

During band breaks at weddings, Cozy would play solo, keeping the audience entertained. He credits his father for teaching him most of the drumming techniques he uses to this day. "Back then, we had no FM or internet," he explains. "I used to go to my neighbour's house at 2:15 pm just to listen to Konkani songs on the radio, memorise the beats, and prac-

tice them at home." Still without a drum kit, he created a makeshift practice pad using a chapati-making board.

Eventually, his father recognised his determination and gifted him a drum set worth Rs 800. "That was a turning point," he says. He practiced intensively for three months before returning to Mumbai, where his musical career began to flourish. A neighbour introduced him to rock music, and the first cassette that captivated him was by Santana.

Cozy's first earning came from playing at a neighbour's wedding—just Rs 2, gifted by his father, who played for free. He also played the snare drum at funerals, earning Rs 2 or Rs 3 per service. For Goan weddings, he would get Rs 60; for Parsi weddings, Rs 45—

"even though we had to carry the drum set in a taxi and pay for transport ourselves."

In 1981, Cozy returned to Goa and joined a band that paid

him Rs 1,000 per month. He recalls many nights when he would crash in a friend's laundry room after a performance, only to head home the next morning. He vividly remembers one particular day when he was on his way to Dona Paula for a show. Just after crossing the Mandovi bridge, news came in that it had collapsed. "I had narrowly escaped a tragedy," he says.

Over time, Cozy began creating his own beats rather than copying from tapes. He found drum notation to be relatively simple and approached learning creatively. "We didn't have music books, so we used drawing books to draw lines and write music notes," he says. As his reputation grew, he became a familiar face in Mapusa market—people would even stop to take photos or ask for autographs. "I had long hair and felt proud to be known for my music."

While music didn't bring him

great financial wealth, Cozy says it has enriched his life in other ways. "Music has given me a lot—not in money, but in fame, love, and passion." He notes how the times have changed. "Today, transporting equipment alone can cost me Rs 2000. Back then, after four shows in one night, I'd earn Rs 350-370, which was a decent sum. But it wasn't about the money—it was passion that kept us going."

Cozy strongly believes that a drummer plays a crucial role in any live performance. "A good drummer can lift the entire band, while a bad one can ruin the experience." He observes that while musicians today may earn over Rs 10,000 per show, in his time they "performed with Rs 100 in our pockets and gave it our all—no sequencing, just pure live music."

As a teacher, Cozy has seen many students arrive without practising, expecting quick results. "There's no shortcut to success," he warns. "Now with YouTube, anyone can learn, but dedication is still key. I remember when learning a Santana track took a whole week, rewinding cassettes again and again. Today, you can learn a song in an hour

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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 grass-roots.

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

Sweating it out for salt: Praveen Bagli is one of Pernem's last salt farmers

ERWIN FONSECA

PERNEM: Goa is filled with traditional occupations such as fishing, pottery, toddy tapping, and farming. Among these lies a very important yet declining trade—salt farming. Once a common sight, salt pans are now disappearing across the State. Few from the younger generation are willing to take up this backbreaking work, but Praveen Bagli from Agarwaddo, Chopdem, is a third-generation salt farmer keeping the flag flying high for this noble profession.

Local salt collected through salt farming has always been in demand. Today, only a few salt pans remain. Salt pans that once existed at Agarwaddo, Calangute, and near the Anjuna-Arpora boundary have all vanished. The only operational salt pans today are at Ribandar-Merces and Agarwaddo-Chopdem. Even in Agarwaddo, the number of salt pans has reduced from eight to five.

It is no easy task to raise and maintain these pans and collect salt. According to Praveen Bagli, a veteran in the field, the process begins in November after the monsoons have fully withdrawn, and salt is collected from January onwards. "It's a tedious job to erect these salt pans after the monsoons. We begin our work in November and collect salt from January till May. The salt collected in April and May is actually the true salt—because the hotter the sun, the more salt we collect. On cloudy days, we get less salt, and if it rains during these months, we get black salt, which is used only for plants," he explains.

Despite the availability of refined salt and modern pesticides, local salt remains in demand both for human consumption and as a natural solution to destroy



“We collect salt in the evenings and keep it on the banks. The next morning, we pack it and take it for selling. In spite of all this hard work, we salt farmers are completely at the mercy of the weather. As much as this profession can be lucrative, it can also be loss-making if the weather plays truant—and that's exactly what has been happening over the last 15 years. The weather has become completely unpredictable, and this is not good news for salt farming

—Praveen Bagli

white ants and improve soil fertility. "Especially between March and May, there is a huge rush to buy salt as people still follow the practice of stocking it for the monsoons, and use it on plants with the first showers of rain," Bagli says.

Around 15 families in the entire Agarwaddo area are engaged in salt farming. Bagli owns about 50 salt pans, amounting to roughly 2.5 acres. "This land is not my own

but taken on lease from a landlord. The unique feature of Agarwaddo is that you will find only locals involved in salt farming—no outside labour is used, and that's why our salt stands out in the market," he says.

Once the salt collection begins, the farmer must regularly attend to the salt pans. Bagli admits to working six hours daily in the pans, from 2 pm to 8 pm. The process requires care and patience—any misstep can result in mud contaminating the salt. "We collect salt in the evenings and keep it on the banks. The next morning, we pack it and take it for selling. In spite of all this hard work, we salt farmers are completely at the mercy of the weather. As much as this profession can be lucrative, it can also be loss-making if the weather plays truant—and that's exactly what has been happening over the last 15 years. The weather has become completely unpredictable, and this is not good news for salt farming," Bagli says.

Predicting a slow death for this traditional occupation, Bagli believes that without government support and with erratic weather conditions, no youth is willing to enter the profession. "At least if one works for a company, a salary is assured. But what if the weather plays spoilsport and untimely rains destroy your salt pans? There's no government compensation available—so why will the youth want to join this profession?" he questions. He believes the government must introduce backup measures to support salt farmers in times of loss if the profession is to have any future.

Praveen, who says he is 52 years old, has been working in the salt pans since the age of 10—initially with his father, then with his late brother. Today, some well-wishers and friends work alongside him to keep the legacy alive.

Goa's 'Saladbaba' turned his adoptive parents' organic farm into a thriving empire

Ambrosia Organic Farm in Goa started out as a tiny venture. Today it spans 135 acres and has an annual turnover running into crores, all thanks to the efforts of Janardan Khorate, who was given charge of the farm by his adoptive parents from London

KRYSTELLE DSOUZA

Ask anyone in Goa about 'Saladbaba' and they will direct you to 36-year-old Janardan Khorate, manager of Ambrosia Organic Farm. The farm prides itself not just on being one of India's first organic companies, but also on being the go-to provider for numerous restaurants and cafes across Goa. For Janardan, who now goes by the name John, 2003 was the year his life changed forever. In a conversation with The Better India, he recounts how it all took shape.

FROM A LOCAL VENTURE TO NATIONAL PRIDE



"There weren't many organic farms or ventures in India at around that time. Ambrosia was a start in this direction,"

the way we wanted to expand the concept of organic farming."

However, it was only when

online sales came into the picture in 2016 that the business picked up speed.

"Until then we were doing well among our local customers. But soon we had people from other States visit our farm. Some people who visited from Delhi loved our products so much that they asked us why we didn't consider selling to Delhi. That was when we decided to get on Amazon to reach a wider base," he recounts.

AMBROSIA'S AMAZING JOURNEY

"Today we have farmland that spans 135 acres, 4,000 registered farmers working with us, and 59 different products," says a proud Janardan.

Among their much-loved products are blueberry-flavoured peanut butter and rice cakes, which are apparently a hit among Russians, Italians and Germans. These are ready-to-eat ladoos made from brown, red and black rice. The rice is puffed and the cake has a shelf life of nine months. "People carry it with them after their stopover in Goa," he notes.

"Apple cider vinegar is one of our products which we source from Himachal. We provide seeds and compost to the farmers who grow the crops there," Janardan adds. Ambrosia ships its products all over India, and

began exporting to Japan and Taiwan in 2020. They are also planning to export to the Middle East this year.

The brand has witnessed a turnover of Rs 22 crore in the



last financial year and the numbers are only set to increase. With the funds they raise, they provide children in schools across Goa and the Maharashtra border with books, notes and uniforms. "Some of these schools are for orphans while others are managed by the Government for children of farmers," Janardan notes.

Ambrosia is scaling heights, but for Janardan, it all still feels like a dream. "None of this was planned. I never imagined my life would turn out like this. The moment I said yes to David and 'mummy', my life changed."

Edited by Asha Prakash

HOW IT ALL STARTED

"David Grower and his wife Michaela Kelemen, his adoptive parents, would often visit Goa whenever they came to India from London, from 1978 onwards. They became so fascinated by Goa that they wanted to start an organic farm there," recalls Janardan.

In 1993, they set up their own 5-acre farm in Siolim, an area of Goa that they would frequently visit where they began growing tomato, capsicum and other exotic vegetables and fruits.

"They would supply the vegetables and fruits to nearby restaurants for salads and that's how the name 'Saladbaba' came to be," Janardan adds. By 1999, Ambrosia had started diversifying to producing peanut butter, rice and grains such as chia. At the time, Janardan wasn't involved in the venture, but as fate would have it, he soon would.

He recounts, "Whenever David and mummy (as he fondly calls Michaela) visited the farm in the course of the next few years, I would accompany them and we would roam around the farm together," he notes.

By the year 2003, the couple had taken such a liking towards young Janardan that they proposed he come with them to London.

"I instantly agreed. They spoke to my parents who gave their consent since the couple promised to provide me with a college education, a home and everything one could possibly ask for," he says. In 2008, they handed over Ambrosia to him to manage, officially. Today, the family spends a few months of the year in London and the rest in Goa, while Janardan is closely involved in all the activities of the venture.

Edited by Asha Prakash