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# FROM WARDS & VADDOS

Ground Reports Telling Stories That Matter



O HERALDO

## At 68, Moira's Gurudas Thakur is still tailoring with precision & pride



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**NACHINOLA:** Gurudas Thakur is a traditional tailor from Moira who has spent over four decades perfecting his craft - his tailoring journey began when he was just eight years old. Driven by poverty and the need to support his family, Thakur enrolled at the Saligao Training Centre and learned the trade over several years.

"I studied only up to the 8th standard," he recalls. "We didn't have enough to survive, so I decided to learn tailoring. It offered a way to earn a living, and there was good demand for tailors at the time."

After gaining five to six years of experience, he struck out on his own and established a tailoring business. Over the years, he has stitched pants, shirts, suits, school uniforms, and more—always with a focus on precision and fit. "With years of experience, I can often estimate measurements just by looking at someone," he says. "I take

shoulder measurements first, and from there, I can determine the rest accurately."

Tailoring wasn't a family trade. "There was no tradition of tailoring in my family," Thakur says. "I took it up so we could survive. I remember walking into the training centre, expressing my desire to learn. Back then, there was no stipend. We stayed with our trainers, who would provide us food."

Thakur began working for just Rs. 60 a month. His earnings gradually rose to Rs. 150. With time and skill, he applied for a government subsidy, which allowed him to acquire three sewing machines and start his own workshop. He even employed a few tailors under him, but the rise of readymade garments drastically reduced demand. As the cost of labour increased and work dwindled, his assistants moved on, leaving him to manage alone.

"Tailoring, once a respectable and in-demand profession, started declining," he says. "People prefer ready-to-wear clothes—there's no waiting, and they're easily available. Traditional tailors like me were pushed behind."

Even today, he keeps his stitching charges low, though the cost of everything—from fabric to electricity—has in-

**“Tailoring used to be a way to earn a decent living. Today, it barely helps us survive. To me, tailoring is a skill, an art, and a legacy. I just hope the government and our society recognise this before it's too late —Gurudas Thakur**

creased. "Earlier, a shirt cost Rs. 100 to stitch and pants Rs. 140. Today, prices have gone up, but I don't charge too much. Still, it's not enough to sustain tailoring."

He notes that some renowned tailors charge high rates because of their reputation, but believes the quality of their stitching is no better. "The name matters more than the work now," he remarks.

Thakur still sources good cloth and offers fully customised garments to his clients. "Readymade garments often don't fit properly—especially around the waist or shoulders. But when someone brings cloth to me, they know it'll be stitched to their size, with care."

Despite the satisfaction that comes from his work, the

physical strain has taken a toll. "Tailoring requires long hours of sitting, and now my back hurts," he says. "I've slowed down with age, but as long as my health permits, I'll continue stitching. I make it a point to do basic exercises to stay fit."

Thakur opens his small shop in Nachinola at 8:30 am and works until around 8 pm, depending on the workload. His process is simple but methodical: inspect the cloth, take measurements, cut the fabric, and stitch. Customers are given a date for collection. The job is solitary, physically taxing, and demands long hours. "Tailors don't have fixed working hours or holidays. Sometimes we work more than 10 hours a day. Our income depends entirely on customer flow," he explains.

He feels traditional tailors like himself have been neglected. "I've worked hard and served the community through my craft, but our contributions have gone unrecognised. The government has never really supported people like us."

While tailoring helped him raise a family, he now finds it hard to make ends meet. "A daily wage labourer earns around Rs. 800 per day—more than a tailor can hope for," he says.

Thakur believes that unless the government steps in to actively promote the trade—through training centres, financial support, and awareness—young people will continue to turn away from it.

### 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 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.

### CORRIGENDUM

The article 'Mapusa's oldest miller holds on to faith, family and legacy' published on May 5 included details about 'Bicholkar Masala & Flour Mill' without the consent or knowledge of its owner, Bicholkar. Mapusa currently has just one flour and masala mill, managed and run by 75-year-old Ramesh Mandrekar, a part of Bicholkar's extended family, and the fifth-generation of their family business. The current location is about 35 years old, but the business itself has been around for five generations. The sixth generation is Chinmay Bicholkar, son of late Vasudev Bicholkar.

## Wild berry seller Ujwala Sharma: A life intertwined with forests

Forests, often described as nature's treasure houses, have long played a central role in the life of Ujwala Sharma, a hardy woman from Assagao who has spent the last four decades drawing sustenance—both physical and emotional—from the wild

ERWIN FONSECA

**ASSAGAO:** Now in her sixties, Ujwala is a familiar figure at the Sonarkhet Temple, where she sits every Thursday selling flowers and garlands. A widow with one daughter, she has never allowed adversity to slow her down. Despite facing health issues, Ujwala continues to work with quiet determination. "A sense of commitment to work keeps ailments away," she says. Her income from flower sales, though modest, is sufficient to meet her daily needs, thanks to a frugal lifestyle.

Born into a farming family, Ujwala moved to Assagao after marriage. It was alongside her late husband that she first began venturing into the forests surrounding the village. Over time, the practice of foraging became an essential part of her seasonal routine—especially in the months between March and May, when forests offer up an abundance of edible produce. While she once travelled as far as Calangute to sell her forest finds—using a direct bus that connected Siolim to the beach belt—rising transport costs eventually made those trips unsustainable. "Even when each packet fetched just two rupees, we worked hard to pluck and sell," she recalls. "But when bus fares began to eat into our earnings, we stopped going."

Since then, Ujwala has remained rooted in Assagao, selling her wares locally. She has watched prices rise over the years—from Rs 2 to Rs 50 a leaf packet—but has also seen the forests undergo stark changes. "Earlier, they were cleaner, safer. Even a girl

### WHAT ARE KANTTAM?

Kanttams are wild edible berries found in Goa's forests during the dry season. They are known for their tangy flavour and versatility. Kanttam is best harvested from April to early June, just before the monsoons. They grow on thorny shrubs found in forested and hilly areas like Assagao.

**WHY IT MATTERS:** Foraging supports livelihoods, keeps local food traditions alive, and fosters a connection with nature that modern convenience has eroded.

### HOW IT'S EATEN

- Eaten fresh
- Made into water pickles or masala pickles
- Preserved for off-season use

**A DYING TRADITION:** Only a few older women like Ujwala still forage for kanttam. Forest degradation and land encroachments are threatening both the berries and the knowledge around their collection.

could go alone to pluck cashews or berries. Today, it's different," she says. Once-abundant wild spaces are shrinking under pressure from illegal encroachments, commercial activities, and neglect. "People suddenly fence off forest land with barbed wire, cutting off access. The forest is being grabbed piece by piece."

She points to the Assagao hill as a case in point. "Twenty years ago, there was talk of starting the Lingo night market there. Then a murder took place. Now the area is strewn with garbage, liquor

bottles, and broken glass," she says. "Young boys go there to drink. The place stinks. It's no longer the forest I once knew."

For Ujwala, the decline is not just environmental but deeply personal. Forests have been her workplace, her source of income, and her place of refuge. She worries about the future of wild species and local forest produce. "Earlier, you could see wild rabbits and foxes in these parts. Now there are none. Jambhul trees were once plentiful—we'd just pluck and eat. Today, they're so rare that the fruit is expensive in the market. The Forest Department is planting acacia, which kills off other trees. Why not plant native species?"

She speaks with clarity and without bitterness, only concern for what is being lost. "Forests have given us so much. But if we don't protect them now, soon they—and everything they offer—will vanish."

## Mom uses age-old practice of 'baby wearing' to start successful business

**Bayiravi Mani Mangaonkar** is a Goa-based entrepreneur who launched Kol Kol Baby Carrier to make ergonomic baby carriers that are suitable to Indian weather and comfortable to wear



VIDYA RAJA

**THEY SAY NECESSITY IS THE MOTHER OF ALL INVENTIONS.**

This holds true in the case of Goa-based 'accidental entrepreneur' Bayiravi Mani Mangaonkar, who went from being an event management professional to a home-baker, and then a successful entrepreneur with the launch of Kol Kol Baby Carrier in 2014, which has an annual turnover of over a crore.

"Being a home baker was the

closest I thought I would come to being my own boss. Little did I imagine that motherhood would change my life in such unexpected ways. In order to continue baking whilst looking after my 45 day old son, I stumbled upon baby wearing, and life was never the same thereafter," Bayiravi tells The Better India.

Baby wearing is the practice of carrying your baby in a sling or any other form of cloth fastened to your chest or back. While baking, Bayiravi would often have

to spend hours in the kitchen, and she found it challenging to work and care for her newborn son at the same time. As a solution, began using an old saree or dupatta to keep her son tied to her.

The idea was inspired by the age-old habits of women who would tie their children to themselves while working in fields or tea-estates.



were – a fabric that was breathable and comfortable for the baby in Indian conditions, a design that would not put any pressure on the carrier, yet strong enough to support the child, and leave enough room for free movement of the carrier. This was when she designed and created her own baby carrier.

"Given how much I could sense the benefits of baby wearing, I decided to try and make carriers for others as well," says Bayiravi.

She adds that she made almost 100

different prototypes of the first carrier and gave them to around 60 parents. Bayiravi fine tuned her product by spending hours listening to other baby carrier users.

What also worked for her products was her own experience of using them.

"That was the biggest advantage I came with. I knew exactly what the pain points in the carriers I used were and I worked to set them all right. I could test all the carriers I made with my own son, who by then was over one year old," she says.

"I receive a lot of feedback that only makes me work harder. This carrier helped parents calm their baby who was suffering from colic, and another family was able to freely enjoy a holiday," she adds.

Edited by Divya Sethu

### SHE QUICKLY FIGURED THAT THIS WAS A BUSINESS OPPORTUNITY.

However, being an entrepreneur was not always Bayiravi's plan. In fact, having seen her father and uncles run their own business, she says she was sure she did not want to be one. "I liked the idea of having a fixed and stable income every month. The unpredictability of being an entrepreneur did not hold any charm for me," she says.

The first time she had forayed into entrepreneurship was when she started baking. She says this was more to shirk off boredom, as she had no formal training or prior experience in the field.

"Baking was brand-new for me, and it was all going great with a steady stream of clients until I got pregnant and had my son, Advait, in 2013. He was all of 45 days old when I went

back to baking," she says. "I had to find a way to use my hands while being there for him – managing the business and keeping the baby calm and close. This is where baby wearing helped."

"I had two hand-me-down baby carriers of a European brand, but I found them to be uncomfortable to use," she says.

"The baby isn't meant to hang in the carrier. The person wearing the carrier should not feel any pain or pressure on the back. It should, in no way, lead to any discomfort," she says.

This led Bayiravi to do some reading up on ergonomic baby carriers, in which the baby fits snugly. She found a few international brands and experimented with their carriers. The first one she purchased was made out of canvas and cost almost Rs 15,000.



"Since the material was too thick for Indian weather conditions, I did not really enjoy it," she says.

So Bayiravi started experimenting with various fabrics to come up with something on her own. She un-

derstood that while there were products in the market, none of them could satisfy her. Some of the key factors for her

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