

GOA, MONDAY, JUNE 16, 2025

## 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](mailto:editor@herald-go.com) or reach us on Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram.

## PRESERVING VODACHI PUNAV:

## Taramati Ghadi weaves banyan leaf plates for Goa's sacred ritual

ERWIN FONSECA

MAPUSA: Goan lifestyle is rich with customs and traditions passed down through generations—threads of identity that continue to shape the state's cultural fabric. These age-old practices mark the rhythm of life and define the calendar year. One such tradition is Vodachi Punav, also known as Sutachi Punav among Goa's Hindu communities—a sacred ritual that, while still observed, is slowly witnessing a decline in local participation.

Goa celebrates many festivals throughout the year, each with its own unique significance. Among them, Vodachi Punav holds a special place for married Hindu women, who tie sacred threads around a banyan tree while praying for the well-being of their husbands. This ritual, usually observed in late May or early June, is symbolic of devotion, endurance, and the bond of marriage. From early morning, women along the Konkani coast gather at sacred sites to perform the ritual, creating a solemn yet vibrant scene.

Though this tradition remains spiritually meaningful, it faces mounting challenges. Fewer people participate each year, and the rituals are often met with dwindling interest or logistical hurdles. Yet there are those who work quietly and consistently to uphold the custom—like Taramati Ghadi from Dodamarg, a skilled artisan devoted to making traditional vadache patr (banyan leaf plates) that are an essential part of the ritual.

For years, Taramati has been travelling to the Mapusa market to sell these woven leaf plates. Once she would arrive by local bus, but now she and around 15 other women from her village pool resources to hire a vehicle and arrive the day before the ritual.

"The banyan tree is worshipped by married women, and its leaves have special significance," she says. "No other leaf should be used. In my village, we're all rural people. We grew up with this art, and that's why we weave even the banyan leaves and sell them."

Her preparations begin well in advance—collecting banyan leaves in large quantities and weaving the plates to a specific size. "There are five items, including fruits, that are placed on these plates. Women offer them to their husbands and elderly men after the ritual. The plate must be big

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to hold everything," she explains. "In our village, both the peepal and vad (banyan) trees are considered sacred. These trees are deeply important in our religious traditions."

But the weaving tradition, like the ritual itself, is under threat. "Not many Goan women want to sit with these leaves and weave anymore. It's not very profitable—it lasts just a day or two. So, most of us who do this now are from Maharashtra," she says. "Also, there are fewer banyan trees left in Goa. With all the over-development, Goans have lost the essence of preserving these trees. People are selling land with old trees, cutting them down, moving to Maharashtra or going abroad. When that happens, customs and traditions can't be sustained."

Dodamarg, she notes, is still densely forested, and trees like the banyan are abundant there. But she worries about the future. "Come monsoon, we rediscover the importance of nature. These trees are always tied to some ritual. If we don't protect them now, what will the next generation of Goan women do?"

For Taramati, the ritual is not about profit—it's about cultural preservation. "We want people to realise the importance of trees and their role in our rituals. Our survival depends on nature. We come from hilly areas. Trees give us life, livelihood, and identity. We only come to Mapusa occasionally, and people are eager to buy because these items are now so rare in Goa."

Having spent her life weaving leaf plates, Taramati feels it is time locals take greater interest in safeguarding these customs. "There's harmony in nature, and our traditions were built with that harmony in mind. If we lose our connection to the land, we lose ourselves."

## Retired armyman turns scrap into soulful art in Corjuem

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ALDONA: In the quiet village of Corjuem, lives Yeshwant N. Sanjgiri, a 61-year-old retired defence officer whose humility and simplicity stand in sharp contrast to the rich legacy of talent and tradition he carries. Though far removed from the regimented life of the military, Sanjgiri's days remain marked by precision, discipline, and purpose—this time, through the world of traditional craftsmanship.

From the age of 10, Sanjgiri nurtured a passion for art and craft, lovingly passed down by his parents and grandparents. "Even after retirement, I chose not to sit idle," he says. "Instead, I embraced what I love most—working with my hands." Today, he is known as a skilled carpenter, potter, and net-maker, specialising in crab nets that serve as vital tools for local fishermen.

But his craftsmanship goes far beyond function. Sanjgiri sells a variety of handmade items at markets in Bicholim and Sanquelim, where he has built a loyal clientele over the years. With help from two

## FROM DEFENCE TO DESIGN:

For Yeshwant, art is more than aesthetics—it is a philosophy, a way of life, and a quiet rebellion against wastefulness and monotony. His journey proves that with vision, even discarded items can tell stories—and that true artistry lies in finding beauty in the overlooked

agents who manage orders and expand his outreach, his humble talent now touches more lives than ever.



"I find immense pride and peace in my work," he reflects. "Each piece I create carries the essence of heritage, experience, and dedication. Crafting is not just a livelihood—it's my life."

His knowledge is deeply rooted in family tradition. From his grandfather, he inherited the intricate art

of net-making—a skill demanding patience, steady hands, and a sharp eye. "You must sit for hours, knotting each thread carefully to ensure strength. It's not a job for the restless," he laughs.

His creative journey began early. At just 12, Sanjgiri crafted a Lord Ganesha idol entirely out of paper—a creation so meaningful that his grandfather placed it on the family mandap and performed a traditional immersion ceremony. "That was one of the proudest moments of my life," he recalls.

He also learned patchwork from his grandmother, sitting beside her for hours and absorbing her quiet dedication. "She didn't speak much, but her hands taught me everything I needed to know."

Sanjgiri's ingenuity lies not only in traditional technique but in his ability to see value in waste. Old newspapers are transformed into clay and molded into ceramic-like items. Used tissue paper is soaked and pulped into decorative fruits. Even soft drink bottles, often discarded, are turned into flower pots and dolls. "It's all about perspec-



tiive," he says. "Where others see trash, an artist sees potential."

Nature is another major source of inspiration. "A coconut tree, from root to leaf, has nothing that goes to waste. Similarly, the sea throws up driftwood and shells—raw materials that, with some imagination, can become art."

His experiments range from boats made out of M-Seal to decorative pieces crafted from scrap. "You don't need a hotel job or an office desk to earn a living. If you're creative, craftsmanship can offer you a dignified and fulfilling life."

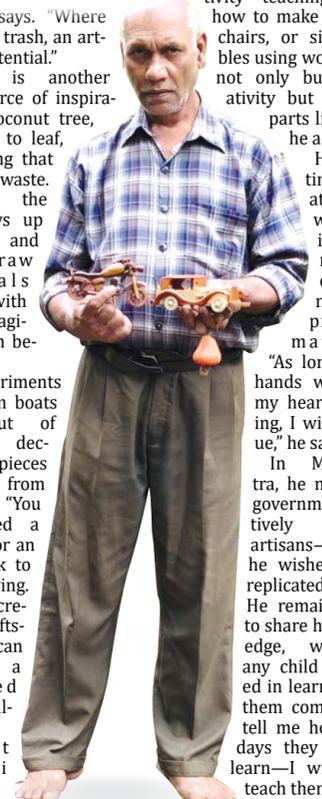
But Sanjgiri is deep-

ly concerned about today's generation. "Many children dream of getting rich quickly, forgetting that real success comes from patience and hard work," he warns. "Parents must take the lead in teaching them the value of our traditional arts."

He believes schools and homes should actively encourage hands-on creativity—teaching kids how to make toy cars, chairs, or simple tables using wood. "This not only builds creativity but also imparts life skills," he adds.

His routine begins at 6 a.m., working until noon, crafting nets or preparing materials. "As long as my hands work and my heart is willing, I will continue," he says.

In Maharashtra, he notes, the government actively supports artisans—a model he wishes to see replicated in Goa. He remains eager to share his knowledge, welcoming any child interested in learning. "Let them come to me, tell me how many days they wish to learn—I will gladly teach them."



**“If everyone starts doing the same thing, we lose what makes us unique. Originality is what gives value to your work. That's what I strive to teach and live by —Yeshwant N. Sanjgiri**

## Silvia Fernandes turned a childhood dream into a thriving chonak farm

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MARGAO: Four years ago, Silvia Fernandes, a mother-of-two from Curtorim, stumbled upon a newspaper article about aquaculture—fish farming—that would go on to change the course of her life. While her husband, Clement, had spent decades fishing for chonak and mud crabs in village ponds, Silvia, a city-bred woman from Mumbai, had always been in family life—raising her children and managing the household.

"Sure, I wanted to be an entrepreneur. It was my childhood dream to have my own business and not depend on the men of the family," she says. "I started reading everything I could find about farming fish and learnt that the Fisheries Department was offering subsidies for aquaculture."

With her children now in their teens and a year of research under her belt, Silvia decided to take the plunge. She applied for river cages under the Pradhan Mantri Matsya Sampada Yojana—a central government scheme promoting sustainable fisheries.

Today, Silvia farms chonak (Asian seabass) in 4x5 metre floating cages anchored in the brackish waters of the Zuari river, right beside her home. She began with three cages—simple square frames made of GI tubes and netting. "The Fisheries Directorate gave me 200 fish seedlings, around 3.5 to 4 inches in size, on a trial basis and placed them in the cages," she recalls.

For seven months, Sil-



via nurtured the fish with meticulous care. Initially feeding them commercial pellets, she later switched to feeding them wild bait fish bought in bulk.



"Yes, it's more expensive than pellets," she admits with a laugh, "but I wanted them to eat clean, natural food like they would in the wild. I read that processed feed affects the taste."

At first, she and her husband managed the entire operation themselves. "Now that the business is doing well, I've hired two labourers to help," she says. After seven months, the fish grew to a marketable size—between 1 to 1.2 kilograms—and Silvia began harvesting. "I started advertising on social media apps like WhatsApp and Facebook. People coming home to buy the fish. I even started selling in the wholesale market. The response was amazing."

Encouraged by the success, Silvia expanded operations. She now manages 12 cages and has registered her venture on the National Fisheries Digital Platform. Timing her farming cycles carefully, Silvia is able to harvest consistently. Per cycle, she brings in a remarkable 45 tonnes of chonak and pearl spot—45,000 kilograms of fish.

Her day begins at 2:30 a.m., when she and her husband begin harvesting roughly 100 kilos of live fish. By 3:30 a.m., the fish are packed in tubs and loaded

for sale at the SGPDA wholesale market. "I only sell them live. They stay fresh for a few hours in tubs and fetch a better price," she says.

Despite the physically demanding routine, Silvia finds it all worthwhile. "It's hard work, but the feeling of achievement and independence makes it worth it," she smiles. She admits that sleep is a luxury. After the morning harvest, she's back to her

role as a mother—dropping and picking up her children from school, college, and tuition classes. Born and raised in Mumbai, Silvia admits it was a big adjustment when she married and moved to Curtorim in her twenties. "I didn't even know how to speak Konkani, though I was fluent in Marathi, Hindi, and Gujarati," she recalls. "It was a huge shift, but I soon fell in love with the peaceful riverside life. Yes, I put my dream on hold because family came first, but I'm glad I could realise it now—with the support of my husband and help from the Directorate of Fisheries, ICAR, KVK, and the Government of Goa."

Her efforts haven't gone unnoticed. Silvia has received awards from Goa Chief Minister Pramod Sawant and the state's Vice-President, and was even invited to take part in the Republic Day parade in New Delhi. Her message to other women is clear and heartfelt: "You can—and should—strive to be entrepreneurs, to have your own disposable income. There are so many schemes and subsidies for women farmers. Make use of them. It builds confidence and sets a great example for your children."

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