

# Herald Cafe



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## Strength beyond stigma: Breaking stereotypes one at a time

Muscles are not just for men, and strength is not just physical. Meet the women who are not only lifting weights but also pushing out outdated mindsets

**Elsa Angel Rose**

"Muscles don't look good on you," "You look masculine," "Your body is not attractive." These are the regular taunts women fight every day to build their bodies. What they pursue for the longevity of their health, what burns as a blazing passion within them, is unfortunately often surrounded by years-old stigma and judgment. Unless you win titles or start something of your own, people rarely accept or respect you for who you are. Until then, it remains a solitary journey, a path paved with thorns, not petals. Today, women bodybuilders aspire and inspire younger generations of girls to take up this male-dominated sport.

**OLIVIA COUTINHO, GOA'S FIRST WOMAN PHYSIQUE CHAMPION**

"For me, women have been very supportive, and I have received negativity and jeers only from men. Women know how difficult it is for them to create a space in the male-dominated sport." Goa's first woman physique champion, with 6 gold medals to herself, Olivia had to go through several struggles during her initial phases of training. "You have muscles, you look masculine, you don't look attractive" were all taunts thrown at her.

Olivia, however, noted, "It's not all men as always, I have all male coaches, and they are my backbone." In 2023, Goa organised a competition that gave space for females to participate in bodybuilding. It was then she realised how much of a stigma there is surrounding female bodybuilding in Goa. She said, "In the nationals, I was the only female bodybuilder representing Goa, but states

like Kerala had 5, 6 girls representing them on the national stage." This instance made her realise how much Goa, as a state, had to unlearn to grow.

Olivia said, "People usually have this perception that only men need to be strong, and men alone need muscles. I wanted the concept of feminine and masculine not to be defined in just one way." Olivia holds numerous titles, including Ms Goa 2024, Ms Velim 2024, Ms Bicholim 2024, Ms Madgaon 2025, and more. She has been relentlessly working out for the past 12 years.



**HELNA APTE, BODYBUILDER, TRAINER, AND NUTRITIONIST**

A certified personal trainer, physique transformation coach, and nutritionist, Helna Apte has it all in her. Driven by her passion for fitness and her experience as an obese teenager, Helna began lifting weights at just 16 years old. She said, "Back then, I was the only woman in the weightlifting section; it was all men at that time." Now at 42, Helna is a successful trainer with a good number of clients and expertise.

The trainer said, "Many people say that bodybuilding is not for women. Someone even told her that building so much testosterone in her body, she won't be able to conceive." For Helna, most of these insults sadly came from women. According to her, the fact that she can deadlift 90 kg, 100 kg, and can leg press almost 400 kg gives her a high. It is not about her appearance, but about how much strength she has developed.

Helna said, "I enjoy the process, and the muscles are the byproduct of it. It feels empowering and liberating as a woman. I took all the negative comments I received for the way I look as an indirect compliment." According to her, things have changed a lot now. Initially, people, especially men, were hesitant to ask a female trainer for any training and nutrition advice. But now, thankfully, things are progressing in a good way. Helna noted, "I do not do it for anyone's gaze, I do it for myself. This is my passion. And people have started seeing it the right way." Helna is looking forward to taking part in competitions in the future with thorough preparations. She gladly said, "It is never too late, I might compete in my forties or fifties."



**KARISHMA PARKER, A BODYBUILDER**

Karishma started bodybuilding immediately after her divorce in 2016. Her initial goal with getting into it was to be fit; it was her interaction with a few passionate bodybuilders whom she met on the go that inspired her to get into bodybuilding. When asked about her encounters with the stigma and negative perceptions surrounding female bodybuilders, she said, "People haven't directly said anything to me so far, but I am sure they might be speaking behind my back. Of course, a few people have encouraged me to take up the sport, and some people thought this was absurd, as I was doing this post my divorce."

Karishma stated a few reasons as to why female participation is less in the

Goan bodybuilding realm and why it is still not encouraged enough. She said, "The public generally tends to have the view that muscular women are not attractive. The thought process is still primitive. Bodybuilding as a sport also requires a lot of money, so women have to be financially independent to get into this. The way things work has to change." Karishma is one of the torchbearers of this change.

According to her, the public tends to say that a woman just wants to show off her body, and they tend to overlook the fact that this is about passion and interest, not a mere showoff. She said, "For the first time, I had found my purpose, and I was reinventing my identity. Slowly, when I started winning, attitudes started changing." Karishma proudly holds NPC national gold 2024, NPC national silver 2023, Boss classic gold 2019, and more recognitions.

These women redefine strength, proving muscles are not masculine, but powerful. By challenging stereotypes, they uplift a new generation to embrace fitness unapologetically.

### SWIPE RIGHT

**Anupam Kher walks along with Robert De Niro in New York**

Veteran actor Anupam Kher

who was in New York for the premiere of his upcoming directorial 'Tanvi: The Great' took to Instagram, where he shared a picture of actor Robert De Niro and him walking in the city. He wrote as the caption: "Never in my wildest dreams had I ever thought that one day I will be walking on the streets of New York with the great actor in the world. The iconic #RobertDeNiro! God is kind and so is Mr De Niro!! Jai Mata Di!! #Actors." Anupam and De Niro are longtime friends and worked together in the 2012 romantic comedy drama titled 'Silver Linings Playbook' directed by David O Russell. The film is based on Matthew Quirk's 2008 novel 'The Silver Linings Playbook'.



**'Flash' actor Ezra Miller is making Hollywood comeback?**

Actor Ezra Miller,

best known for projects such as 'Justice League', 'We Need to Talk About Kevin' and 'The Perks of Being a Wallflower', is planning to return to Hollywood after staying away from the limelight for years. He recently attended the Cannes Film Festival, to support his friend and collaborator Lynne Ramsay, whose film 'Die, My Love' was a part of the main competition. The actor was largely absent from the cinema after being involved in several controversies related to assault, burglary, and allegations of inappropriate behavior and has been arrested multiple times in 2022. The 32-year-old actor said he is considering returning to Hollywood on "the tentative grounds". He also shared about working with Ramsay on a project.



Anubhav Singh recently celebrated his birthday bringing in this talented gang of actors. The actors include Rajkummar Rao, Bhumi Pednekar, Ayushmann Khurrana, Vijay Varma and Tahira Kashyap who posed for a selfie together.

## Inter-religious unity among Goans

**Pio Esteves**

**Tiatr:** 'Devachem Nanv Jietam Hanv'  
**Cast:** Varsha Usgaonkar, Dhruv Sincro, Prince Jacob, Prajakta, Maggie, Conceicao, Avers Pereira, Meenakshi Chougule, Anil Pednekar, comedienne Platilda, Marcus Vaz, Remy  
**Director:** Mariano Fernandes  
**Band:** Joaquim D'Souza (soprano saxophone), Theo Alvares/Senon D'Souza (trumpet), Semy Braganza (trombone), Martin Fernandes (tenor sax), Neville (keyboard), Trian D'Costa (bass), Savio (drums)

The story revolves around Jacob (Prince Jacob), his spouse Varsha (Varsha Usgaonkar) and their two grown-up children Dhruv (Dhruv Sincro) and Maggie (Maggie). There's Jacob's spinster sister Platilda (comedienne Platilda), who drops in whenever time permits.

Maggie is still pursuing her studies, while Dhruv is an agricultural engineer by profession, with thoughts on organic farming. After enjoying six years of courtship, Dhruv now plans to settle in

marriage with Meenakshi (Prajakta).

Dhruv's mother has no objection to his marriage, but she insists upon pre-nuptial agreement. And there's a reason for such an insistence.

On the other hand, there's another family comprising of Concy (Conceicao), his son Avers (Avers Pereira) working abroad and daughter Megan (Meenakshi Chougule), who resides with her father.

After tying the knot with Jose (Anil Pednekar), within 10 days of marriage, Megan faces divorce and consequently she turns insane. Insanity leads to unmet tensions and Concy finds it difficult to handle it all single-handedly.

With Meenakshi's entry into the family, things are not the same as before for Dhruv. Earlier, there was unity, love and concern among all the members of the family. At the insistence of his spouse, Dhruv seeks his share of property with plans to sell off to the best bidder and with that amount to buy houses in UK and lease them on rent to the Goans.

But Dhruv's father is unwilling to accept his son's proposal and Varsha extends full support to her husband. On the other hand, Avers returns home for good and vows to treat his insane sister. Now, what transpires in these two



families is worth the watch during the second half of the drama.

Mariano Fernandes' monsoon tiatr 'Devachem Nanv Jietam Hanv' carries a gripping storyline with realities of Goans and themes of love, family, faith, betrayal and redemption. Various subjects are touched upon and messages delivered as the drama progresses on stage.

It portrays the unity between Goa's Christian and Hindu communities. Besides there's an appeal to build hospitals in every village before the vast church properties are grabbed by the government. Unity among neighbours on various festive occasions are also the

highlights of the drama.

Apart from entertainment through songs and comedy, you get to enjoy the presence of stars from Konkani, Marathi theatre and films and 'Lavni', a typical live dance performance by Varsha Usgaonkar and Prajakta, probably for the first time on the tiatr stage and the audience enjoy it.

Bollywood actor Varsha Usgaonkar stands out in her overall performance and she is ably supported by Prince Jacob in a serious role of a father. There's Maggie, Platilda and Bollywood actor Dhruv Sincro extending their hands to the main cast. Conceicao is equally good as an understanding father and Meenakshi

excels as his insane daughter. With first time entry in acting, Avers is good in his acts and dialogue delivery. Anil Pednekar plays double role with ease and Tony de Ribandar makes a cameo. Maggie wins the hearts of the audience with soulful singing of 'cantos', reminding the audience of Antonette of yesteryears.

In the comic acts, there's Platilda returning after long break with comedienne Brian, Marcus Vaz, Remy and Anil Pednekar. They entertain with a good dose of laughter pills.

In the section of songs, the opening is unique as all the artistes hop on stage, introducing themselves to the audience through song and dance. There are solos from Avers Pereira, Varsha Usgaonkar, Xavier Gomes, Maggie and Symphonia

### Tiattr Review

**'Devachem Nanv Jietam Hanv'**

D'Souza. Other songs include two trios from Edwin D'Costa, Jose Mascarenhas and Anthony de Nuvem. There's also a song by Meenakshi and Anil Pednekar and Marcus, Tony de Ribandar, Jose, Xavier,



Avers, Meenakshi and Prince Jacob.

There's an 8-piece band offstage comprising of Theo Alvares and Senon D'Souza (trumpets), Semy Braganza (trombone), Martin Fernandes (tenor sax), Joaquim D'Souza (soprano sax), Neville (keyboard), Trian D'Costa (bass) and Savio (drums). Under the leadership of Joaquim, you get to enjoy good live music.

Joesean Afonso has provided the background music. The stage sets have been designed by Kapil Chari and A P Rojols have handled the lights tactfully.

Each show has been ticketed at Rs 300 probably to bear the cost of the Bollywood actors roped in the tiatr. But was there the need to get them in the first place when we have good, talented artistes in the tiatr circle, be it in Mumbai and elsewhere?