Women who lead: Goa's trailblazers in empowerment and change

These remarkable women stand as pillars of strength, advocacy, and progress, proving that Goa's women are not just breaking barriers but also leading movements that transform society

Team Herald

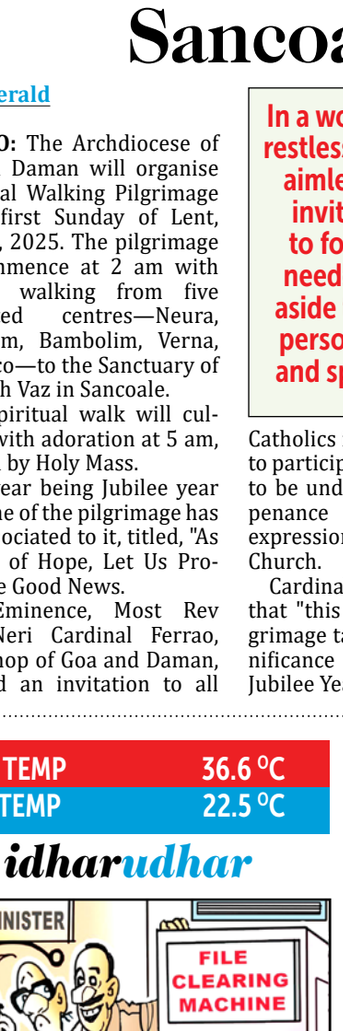
PANJIM: While gender discrimination, unequal pay, and workplace harassment remain persistent challenges, many women in Goa have risen above these barriers, making massive contributions to society, and life a little fairer for all women. On International Women's Day, O Heraldo spoke to some of these inspiring women, whose relentless efforts have shaped policies, uplifted communities, and paved the way for greater gender equality in the State.

PRATIMA DHOND: BANKING ON WOMEN'S ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT

Pratima Dhond, the Chairperson of Women's Co-operative Bank Limited, has played a key role in financial literacy and independence for Goan women. Starting in 1991 as a board director, she and her team conducted awareness drives in villages, encouraging women to become financially independent.

"We showed them that even a small income of their own brings happiness and confidence. Today, I see vast improvement in women's financial independence in Goa," Dhond noted.

Her efforts in economic empowerment expanded further when she joined the women's wing of the Goa Chamber of Commerce and Industry (GCCI) in the early 2000s, helping organise camps and training programmes to support less privileged women. Today, she serves as the Vice President of GCCI, further influencing industrial development and women's participation in business.



DR SABINA MARTINS: CHAMPIONING WOMEN'S RIGHTS THROUGH BAILANCHO SAAD

A founding member of Bailancho Saad, a voluntary organisation advocating women's rights since 1986, Dr Sabina Martins has been at the forefront of several policy changes in Goa. Under her leadership, Bailancho Saad successfully fought for:

The extension of the Dowry Prohibition Act to Goa in 1986

The Goa Children's Act, 2005 and the Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act

The establishment of the first all-women's police station after a decade-long struggle

"We fought and set many policy decisions right," Martins said, recalling how the group pressured the government into forming a screening committee to prevent the portrayal of women as sex objects during Carnival floats. Their protests also led to action against derogatory advertisements and the discouragement of Goa being promoted as a "land of vices."

CECILLE RODRIGUES: EMPOWERING WOMEN AND CHILDREN THROUGH DANCE

A renowned dancer and activist, Cecille Rodrigues made waves as the first runner-up in Dance India Dance (2013). Her Encore Academy of Performing Arts, founded four years ago, has expanded to Margao and Mapusa, teaching dance to students and professionals.

She also integrates performing arts into 30 schools across Goa, promoting both Indian classical and international dance styles. "I feel women should be given encouragement and a platform to build their career. Women should get more exposure and have access to skill-based learning, so they can be independent and stand on their own feet," she emphasised.

AUDA VIEGAS: FIGHTING FOR JUSTICE AND PROTECTION

From teacher to social worker, Auda Viegas has dedicated over three decades to advocating for the safety of women and children in Goa, particularly in criminal cases. As the founder of Bailancho Ekvott, she played a crucial role as the whistleblower in the infamous Mahanand Naik serial killing case.

Until November 2024, she was the Administrator of the Sakhi One Stop Centre (South Goa) before it was taken over by the government. Recognised for her work, Viegas was recently honoured with the Samvidhan Samman Puraskar award.

ASHA ARONDEKAR: ENTREPRENEUR AND MENTOR FOR WOMEN

A successful entrepreneur, Asha Arondekar founded Global to Local, a social entrepreneurship venture, and Satva, a chain of salons and spas. As the chairperson of GCCI's women's wing, she has been instrumental in encouraging women entrepreneurs in Goa.

Starting at the age of 19, she ventured into pharmaceuticals, later expanding into exports, research, and wellness industries. "It gives me happiness to work with and support women in various capacities," she said.

ADVOCATE NORMA ALVARES: A MESSAGE OF STRENGTH, LOVE AND COURAGE

Senior Advocate Norma Alvares took the opportunity to extend her wishes to women and men alike on International Women's Day, emphasising the importance of women's roles in society.

"I hope women have the courage to take the necessary steps to contribute meaningfully to society. Our young, educated women must realise that with determination and wisdom, they can achieve any goal they set for themselves," she said.

STREET VOICES — WHERE GOANS ARE HEARD

ARE WOMEN REALLY LIBERATED IN POLITICS OR ARE MEN RULING FROM BEHIND THE SCENES?

March 8 is celebrated as International Women's Day, from the late 1970's. But are women really liberated today? Have they been able to break the glass ceiling? Herald Media asked men, "Are women really liberated in politics or are men ruling from behind the scenes?"

"Now, this cannot be a general scenario. There are ladies, especially at the Assembly and Parliament levels, who are quite independent. They may pretend to act as if they are controlled by their husbands, but I believe that they have a mind of their own, where they can tell their husbands that things are a certain way, and they would not just bend to anything. The maximum I think, if money is to be collected, they would leave it to the men, but the decision would be theirs - this is what I know. Because if anyone says that women will agree to a situation where they will allow a deal to take place, yes. If you look at the history of Goa's Assembly, I'm very convinced that women are just as, if not more, corrupt when in positions of power

– Trajano D'Mello, *Political Commentator*

"Politically, the Women's Reservation Bill has been passed, allocating 33% of reservations to women. However, this raises questions - is this a case of hypocrisy or manipulation? In Goa, for instance, women legislators lack full authority. There have been instances where a chief minister has asked a minister to silence herself, even attributing her perspective to a "Portuguese mentality." This suggests that women politicians lack independence. To achieve better governance and a more robust political system, we need to foster strong women leadership and encourage their participation in politics

– Olencio Simoes, *Social Activist*

"Women, from the panchayat level upwards, are controlled by men. Take Sancoale, for instance, where a woman sarpanch holds office. However, she is merely a puppet, controlled remotely by the men around her - either the deputy sarpanch or the panchas who wield political power. At the Zilla level in Sancoale, the MLA Anton Vas's wife is a Zilla Member, but her presence in political circles is barely felt. In reality, Anton Vas himself calls the shots. Similarly, at the Assembly level, in constituencies where husband and wife are both MLAs, decision-making power rests firmly with the husbands. Men exert complete control, while women lack autonomy and remain politically unliberated.

– Anthony D'Silva, *Social Activist*

YouTube

Watch Street Voices on Herald Media on YouTube by scanning the QR code

Goa's Lenten Walking Pilgrimage to Sancoale marks jubilee year

Team Herald

MARGAO: The Archdiocese of Goa and Daman will organise its annual Walking Pilgrimage on the first Sunday of Lent, March 9, 2025. The pilgrimage will commence at 2 am with pilgrims walking from five designated centres—Neura, Cansaulim, Bambolim, Verna, and Vasco—to the Sanctuary of St. Joseph Vaz in Sancoale.

The spiritual walk will culminate with adoration at 5 am, followed by Holy Mass.

This year being Jubilee year the theme of the pilgrimage has been associated to it, titled, "As Pilgrims of Hope, Let Us Proclaim the Good News.

His Eminence, Most Rev Filipe Neri Cardinal Ferrao, Archbishop of Goa and Daman, extended an invitation to all Catholics from the Archdiocese to participate in the pilgrimage, to be undertaken in a spirit of penance and as a powerful expression of our unity as the Church.

In a world that is often restless, distracted and aimless, the Church invites the faithful to focus on what is needed most: to set aside time for prayer, personal conversion and spiritual renewal

Cardinal Ferrao highlighted that "this year, our call to pilgrimage takes on a greater significance as we celebrate the Jubilee Year 2025, when Catholics worldwide are called to be "Pilgrims of Hope." In a world that is often restless, distracted and aimless, we are invited to focus on what is needed most: to set aside time for prayer, personal conversion and spiritual renewal.

He exhorted the faithful to "let this pilgrimage be a moment of grace, when we deepen our faith through prayer and reflection, renew our hope in God's mercy and strengthen our love by growing in compassion and service to others. 'For they'll know we are Christians by our Love.'

The Church further pointed out the Old Church of Sancoale is one of the Pious places in Goa where one can gain indulgence during this Jubilee year. More details of indulgence and the prerequisites are being explained on a video uploaded in the Goa Diocesan YouTube Channel.

The Church added that since this year's walking pilgrimage has double significance the Archdiocese of Goa and Daman invites all Catholics to participate in the Walking Pilgrimage.

Another special feature this year will be depictions of the passion of Christ at the venue by youth of different Parishes. Since the walking pilgrimage gives an impetus to Lenten reflection and penance, these depictions would be an added spiritual benefit for the faithful. The Convenor for the walking pilgrimage, Fr. George Ratos has urged the faithful to make the best use of this opportunity to grow spiritually and receive God's Blessings.

Auxiliary Bishop Simiao Fernandes on maiden visit to Daman

Team Herald

MARGAO: His Lordship Bishop Simiao Purificacao Fernandes paid his maiden visit as the Auxiliary Bishop of the Archdiocese of Goa and Daman to the Mission of Daman recently, from February 22 to February 27, 2025. He was accompanied by Fr Mario Souza and Fr Leo Fernandes.

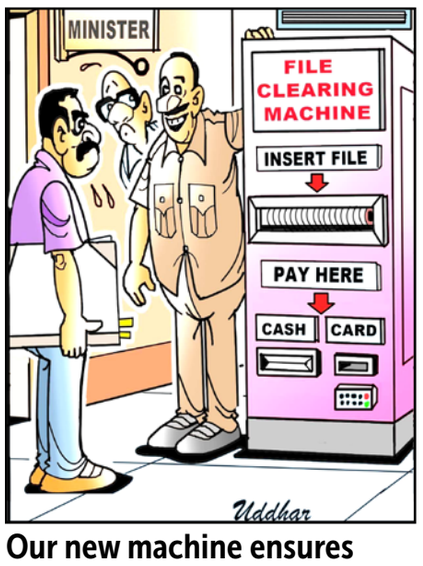
During his visit, Bishop Fernandes administered the Sacrament of Confirmation to candidates in the parishes of Nani Daman, Silvassa, Shelti, Masat, Sindoni, and Dapadda. He was welcomed with traditional dance and song at all locations. He also visited the parishes of Chisda and Vellugam, bringing joy to the local communities.

On the penultimate day, after administering the Sacrament of Confirmation in the parish of Dapadda, he addressed all priests and religious members working in the Mission of Daman at the Pastoral Centre. He expressed gratitude for the warm welcome and appreciated the enthusiasm of the missionaries.

Bishop Fernandes also briefed those present on the Archdiocese's plans for the Jubilee Year and noted that several proposals were already being implemented in the parishes of the Mission of Daman.

MAX. TEMP 36.6 °C
MIN. TEMP 22.5 °C

idharudhar



Our new machine ensures seamless processing!

Folk tradition finds new life through TAG's 'Zomnivele Khell'

Team Herald

MOHIT KHARANGATE

MARGAO: In a landmark moment for the Tiatr Academy of Goa (TAG), Goans across the state were introduced to the traditional Zomnivele Khell on an unprecedented scale. This initiative, spearheaded by TAG, was met with widespread appreciation from not only khell enthusiasts but also from writers and directors dedicated to preserving and promoting this unique folk art.

TAG's initiative enabled around 30 Zomnivele Khell directors to stage performances across various constituencies in Goa. Even in North Goa—where Zomnivele Khell has not traditionally been as popular—these performances drew large crowds, with local MLAs also showing their support by attending the shows.

Speaking to the media, Arnaldo Costa, President of Non-Stop Tiatrist and Tiatristanchi Sonstha, praised TAG and its President, Anthony Barbosa, for facilitating an opportunity for people to experience the rich cultural heritage of Zomnivele Khell during the Carnival festival.

"Such an initiative deserves appreciation, as it provided a platform for many directors to showcase their talents. They are deeply grateful not just to TAG but also to the government for backing this project, which plays a crucial role in safeguarding Goa's artistic traditions," Costa said.

Historic revival: Khell will now reach newer and wider audiences; tiatr directors laud government support, seek more funding

During a press conference held in Margao on Friday, nearly 30 directors of Zomnivele Khell expressed their heartfelt gratitude to TAG, Chief Minister Pramod Sawant, and Art and Culture Minister Govind Gaude for their unwavering support, including the provision of necessary funding to make this initiative a success.

The directors also extended their thanks to Sagun Velip, Director of Art & Culture; TAG President Anthony Barbosa; Vice President Marcos Gonsalves; and other members of the TAG General Council for their collective efforts in championing this traditional art form and ensuring its continuity for future generations.

Renowned khell director Xavier Mascarenhas, popularly known as Xavier de Maina, echoed similar sentiments. While thanking TAG, he urged the government to allocate increased funding to the academy to support future initiatives.

"Additional financial support will ensure the continuity of such projects, particularly those aimed at preserving and promoting tiatr and related folk arts for future generations," he stated.

Other directors, including Melisa Gomes, also expressed their appreciation, acknowledging the instrumental role played by TAG and the government in enabling the Zomnivele Khell performances across Goa.

It is worth noting that while TAG had previously organized a Zomnivele Khell competition, limited participation meant that many directors could not showcase their art. However, this latest initiative has provided a more inclusive and expansive platform, allowing a greater number of directors to contribute to the preservation and revival of this important Goan tradition.