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FROM WARDS & VADDOS

Ground Reports Telling Stories That Matter



O HERALDO

Raghoba Sataderkar: The cobbler who stitched together a life of strength & simplicity

JENIFER FERNANDES
joseph@herald-goa.com

ALDONA: In the quiet village of Santarxette in Aldona, a man sits at his humble shop, working silently with his hands—hands that have shaped leather, stitched soles, and mended lives for over seven decades. His name is Raghoba Sataderkar, 84 years old, and still going strong as a cobbler.

"I never went to school beyond Class I," says Raghoba with no trace of regret. "I lost my mother when I was just 9, and my father couldn't feed us. So I was put to work—not by choice, but because I had to earn for the family." But what began as a necessity turned into a passion. At just 13, he started learning the cobbler's craft—not from formal teachers or books, but by watching others who were often unwilling to share their knowledge. "They wouldn't teach me directly, but I observed everything they did. My interest helped me learn," he recalls.

From making small shoes for children to mastering men's formal footwear, Raghoba's journey took him through Tivim, Margao, and even Kolhapur, where he picked up different techniques. "I learned to make sandals in Margao, and men's shoes in Kolhapur. Then I returned to Goa and began my own small venture."

That venture

What makes Raghoba truly inspirational isn't just his skill—it's his dedication, dignity, and determination. At 84, while many have long retired, he still opens his shop at 8.30 am, takes a break in the afternoon to buy fish and vegetables, returns at 3.30 pm, and wraps up by 6.30 pm. "Earlier I would work till 11.30 at night, making and supplying shoes to wholesalers. But with readymade shoes flooding the market, our business has faded."

would eventually become his life's foundation. He opened a shop in Aldona, got married, built his home with his own earnings, and raised a family. "I educated all my children. Today they are well settled. I may not have gone to school, but I made sure they did."

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Despite that, he continues. Not because he must, but because he loves his work. "My family tells me to stop now. But this is what I've done all my life. How can I stop?" he says, smiling.

His work remains purely traditional—no machines, no shortcuts. "Everything I do is by hand. That's how I learned, and that's how I continue." He understands different kinds of leather, recalls the days of using real animal hide (now banned), and explains how modern shoes are often made from resin and synthetic materials.

"People think this work is easy," he says. "But you need to sit for long hours. It takes patience, strength, and love for the craft. My back hurts, but I'm used to it now."

Raghoba is one of the last of his kind. Once, there were

eight cobblers in Aldona. Today, he's the only one left. "Even my children won't take it up. They've seen the struggle. In the future, people may have to throw shoes away because no

one will be left to repair them."



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But he doesn't complain. He reflects. "I took care of cows once for just Rs 5 a month. I've stitched shoes, sandals, bags, chains—and even worked in the fields, from ploughing to harvesting. I never dreamed of a white-collar job. I was taught that if you learn a skill, you'll never go hungry. That was enough."

And it was. Through his craft, Raghoba built a home, raised a family, and lived with contentment. He credits his long life and fitness to the natural foods of his childhood—tizaan (ragi porridge), pezz (rice gruel or kanji), ghodshey and vonn (puddings made of lentils, coconut milk, palm jaggery)—and a life free of excess.

As the sun sets on the old cobbler's day, he closes his shop, freshens up, watches a bit of TV, and rests. But his thoughts still linger on the future of his trade. "Goans don't want to do this work anymore. Migrants will take over these traditional jobs. That's the truth."

And yet, with quiet pride and undying spirit, Raghoba declares, "As long as I am alive, I will do this work. If someone works hard and doesn't feel ashamed, they can earn enough. You don't have to go abroad or sit in an office to live a good life. I'm proof of that."

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-goa.com or reach us on Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram.

How trucker John Fernandes reaped success with a return to the soil

When the mines shut down, John dug deeper — converting an idle orchard into productive farmland, now growing over two tonnes of nutritious ladyfingers each season

GAURESH SATTARKAR

CURCHOREM: At a time when many are turning away from agriculture in favour of urban employment, John Fernandes from Karemoddi, Curchorem, is proving that farming still holds promise — not only as a livelihood but as a path to self-reliance and pride. Over the past seven years, John has transformed a patch of neglected land into a thriving farm, becoming an inspiration for his community and a symbol of resilience.

A former government employee, John had resigned from his job to start a truck transport business. But his plans were upended when the mining ban in Goa brought his business to a standstill. Left with no income and uncertain about his future, John was forced to rethink everything. It was during a visit to Pune that he stumbled upon an unexpected turning point. Observing successful farmers growing watermelons and ladyfingers in similar climatic conditions sparked something in him. He returned to Goa with a renewed sense of purpose and the determination to rebuild his life from the ground up — quite literally.

John began by converting his ageing cashew orchard, which had stopped yielding profits, into usable farmland. He invested Rs 4 lakh of his own money into clearing the land, preparing the soil, and setting up the infrastructure needed for cultivation. The effort paid off.

Today, he grows ladyfingers (bhende) during the monsoon and watermelons during the summer, making full use of the seasonal cycle to keep his farm productive throughout the year.

He cultivates ladyfingers across 5,000 square metres of land, producing over two tonnes each

season. With help from just two labourers — and plenty of hands-on work from John himself — he manages the entire process, from planting to harvesting to selling. Every morning during the harvest period, he sets up a roadside stall in the Curchorem market. The produce is sold directly to local customers, many of whom are regulars. Demand is so high that John doesn't supply to the horticulture department, as everything is sold before he can consider bulk orders.

John credits the Quepem Agriculture Department for playing a vital role in his success. The department provides regular technical support, crop inspections, and annual subsidies that help him sustain and expand his operations. Importantly, John has stayed away from chemical fertilisers, using cow dung and organic methods to maintain soil health and ensure clean, nutritious produce. "The officers visit my farm regularly and help me improve. The subsidies help me manage costs. Since

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I also work alongside my labourers, I'm able to save on wages," he says.

His efforts haven't gone unnoticed. Local schools often organise visits to John's farm, where students get to see practical farming techniques and understand the possibilities of agriculture as a career. "Watching young people take interest in farming gives me hope," says John. "Agriculture gave me a new life when everything else failed. I want to show people — especially the younger generation — that there is dignity and value in farming. If you have land and no job, turn to the soil. It's hard work, but it's honest work."

John's journey from setback to success is a shining example of what can be achieved with vision, persistence, and a willingness to learn. In an age of growing disconnection from the land, he reminds us that farming is not just a way to survive — it can also be a way to thrive.

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—John Fernandes



The rise of Vidhyesh Kavlekar — the skinny Goan teen who became Asia's bodybuilding pride



MANJALI NAIK

PONDA: As a puny kid, he never dreamed of being a bodybuilder. He didn't grow up chasing trophies or idolising fitness icons. In fact, when he first walked into a gym, all he wanted was to stop looking like the "skinny guy" people joked about. Weighing barely 40 kilograms, Vidhyesh Kavlekar was tired of being overlooked and used as a comparison for thinness. He just wanted to gain a few kilos — to look healthy and to feel better.

But sometimes, the first step you take for yourself becomes the turning point of your entire life. That small decision to join the gym turned into a life-changing journey — one that took him from a skinny teenager to becoming one of Goa's most recognised names in bodybuilding and fitness.

His foray into bodybuilding began when a gym trainer recognised his potential and suggested he consider competing. That suggestion planted the first seed. In 2011, Vidhyesh stepped into the world of competitive bodybuilding. The road ahead

Today, Vidhyesh is a seven-time Mr Goa, winner of the Sheru Classic 2019, and recently secured fifth place in the Men's Classic Physique category at the 2025 Asian Bodybuilding Championship in Ajman, UAE — a major international achievement

wasn't easy. He trained rigorously, competed locally, learned continuously, and never looked back.

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But it didn't happen overnight. It took years of dedication, constant learning, and pushing his limits. His close friend Sahil Naik encouraged him to take the leap and aim for the international stage. Before representing India at the Asian Championship, Vidhyesh took part in Amateur Olympia. He trained hard for over seven to eight months and made it to the top six finalists.

To prepare for such a major platform, he trained under international coach Irshan Bijani from Canada, who guided him through professional techniques, diet corrections, and competition-level routines. Over the years, Vidhyesh has consistently upgraded his skills, completed fitness courses, and surrounded himself with people who helped him grow.

One of them is Sampad Nanda Swain from Delhi, who has always supported him with insights about competitions, even though he isn't his coach. His friend Amod Mardolkar played a vital role during his formative years. Vishwanath Dalvi, a Municipal Councillor from Ponda, stood by him during important competition phases.

But the biggest strength in

Vidhyesh's life has always been his family. His father Damodar Kavlekar, mother Suman Kavlekar, and his wife have always given him the freedom to chase his dreams without fear.

Today, Vidhyesh runs Godspeed Gym in Ponda — a space open not just to bodybuilders but to anyone who wants to feel healthier and stronger.

"Fitness is not about six-pack abs," he says. "It's about energy, mental clarity, discipline — it's a lifestyle."

He believes that everyone's body is different, so diet and exercise routines should be tailored to suit individual needs. For himself, he follows a strict diet only during competitions.

Otherwise, he sticks to a smart diet plan — seasonal food, high-protein meals, less sugar and junk, and plenty of water. He also enjoys cheat day meals. But throughout the year, the focus is always on eating clean and staying consistent.

Training hard is important, but he says mental focus is even more powerful. "When I commit to something," he says, "I give it my full attention."

He also makes it clear that while financial investment is a big part of professional bodybuilding — for good food, supplements, and expert guid-

ance — many athletes drop out because they can't afford the required nutrition or training support. This is why he believes there should be more awareness and backing in this field.

With over a decade of experience, Vidhyesh is now passionate about passing on what he's learnt to the younger generation.

"Don't compare your Day 1 with someone else's Year 10. Start small, be regular — consistency beats motivation. Eat smart, not extreme. You don't need fancy gear to begin. You just need the will to move."

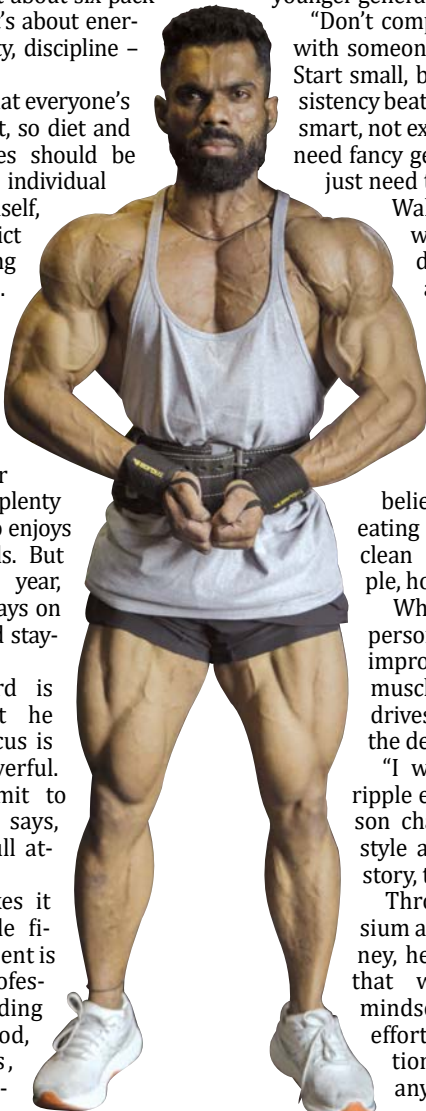
Walk, stretch, lift — whatever you can do, do it daily." He also adds, "If you want to build a great body, build a great routine first."

Even during competition prep, he believes in smart eating — grilled foods, clean carbs, and simple, homemade meals.

While he still has personal goals — like improving specific muscle groups — what drives him today is the desire to inspire.

"I want to create a ripple effect. If one person changes their lifestyle after hearing my story, that's a win."

Through his gymnasium and his own journey, he hopes to show that with the right mindset, support, and effort, transformation is possible for anyone.



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