

# “We will not step back”: Mirabag protestor Sanket Bhandari on the Bandhara

The proposed bandhara at Mirabag has triggered a growing protest movement in South Goa. What began as a small, local concern has now escalated into a wider agitation, even reaching the floor of the Goa Assembly.

In this conversation, Editor Suraj Nandrekar talks to **Sanket Bhandari** about the origins of the movement, the controversial Assembly protest, and why locals say they are fighting for their very survival



**Q: The Mirabag issue has suddenly come into focus. What exactly happened in the Assembly?**

**Sanket Bhandari:**

What happened in the Assembly was not sudden. This issue has been ongoing for nearly two years. But yes, recently it gained visibility when four of us went inside the Assembly premises with placards and raised slogans. That was a deliberate step.

We wanted to make our voices heard. For days, we had been protesting peacefully, but there was no response. The Assembly protest forced attention. Even the Speaker took note, and the Chief Minister had to comment.

**Q: Critics say raising slogans inside the Assembly is inappropriate. How do you respond?**  
**Sanket Bhandari:**

We understand that the Assembly is a formal space. But tell me, where does a common man go when he is not heard anywhere else? We did not damage anything. We did not act violently. We simply stood there and raised slogans. This was our way of telling the government: listen to us. If elected representatives do not carry our voice, then we have to find ways to express it ourselves.

**Q: When did this protest actually begin?**

**Sanket Bhandari:**

The issue started about two years ago when the proposal for the bandhara came up. Initially, only a few people knew about it. It was reported in newspapers, but it did not gain much traction. Over time, people began to understand the impact. In the last few weeks, the protests intensified. We have now been protesting

continuously for nearly a month.

**Q: What are your main demands?**

**Sanket Bhandari:** Our demand is very clear: we do not want the bandhara at this location. We are not

against development. We are not against water projects. But this particular project, at this particular site, will destroy our villages. We are asking the government to scrap this plan and  
**CONTD TO PAGE 04..**

# Springs Dotted Brahma Karmali

By **Satyavatinandan Satrekar**

Brahma Karmali, a village known for housing the only Brahmadev temple in Goa and the Konkan region, has long been sustained by numerous perennial springs. Among these, four major springs play a particularly crucial role in the ecological and cultural life of the village. Centuries ago, Brahmin communities from the Konkan region chose to settle here, drawn by the presence of perennial springs and favourable climatic conditions. The unique sculpture associated with the Brahmadev temple, reflecting the heritage of the Goa-Kadamba period, is believed to have been brought from Carambolim. The area, once known as Chandiwade due to the abundance of Macaranga peltata trees, gradually came to be known as Brahma Karmali. Among the four prominent springs, the Bibtyan spring is



particularly significant. This perennial spring has, for generations, quenched the thirst of villagers and irrigated horticultural fields across Brahma Karmali, Nagargao, Satode, and Hedode. The presence of the rare vegetation Semecarpus kathlekanensis has brought this spring recognition in India's botanical heritage. Sumitra Nadkarni, a resident of Brahma Karmali, says, "The water from this spring has quenched our thirst

## Main Points:

- ▶ Brahma Karmali is known for the only Brahmadev temple in Goa and the Konkan region
- ▶ The village has multiple perennial springs, with four playing a crucial role
- ▶ Bibtyan spring supports drinking water and irrigation across nearby village
- ▶ Ajobachi Tali sustains biodiversity within

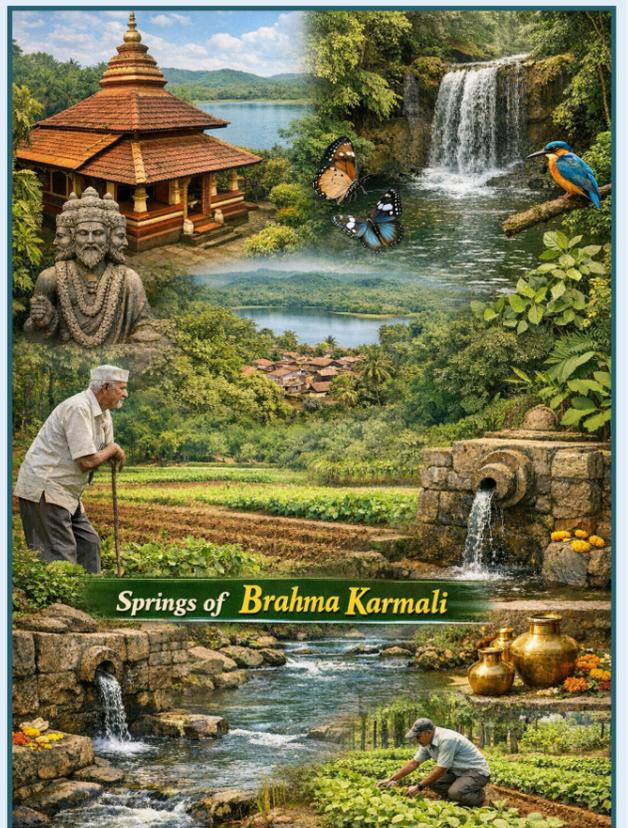
for decades. We consider ourselves fortunate to have access to such pure and tasty water, which we believe also has medicinal properties." Another important spring, Ajobachi Tali, has continuously supported the rich floral and faunal diversity within the forest patches of the Mhadei Wildlife Sanctuary for generations. Historically, its water is believed to have been used by prehistoric communities inhabiting the Dudin Sada region.

the Mhadei Wildlife Sanctuary

- ▶ Bagatali Zor, once a drinking source, is now mainly used for horticulture
- ▶ Brahmadevachi Zor holds deep religious importance for temple rituals
- ▶ Conservation of such springs is vital, especially on World Water Day

The swamp created by this spring attracts a wide range of butterflies, reptiles, birds, and other wildlife. Seventy-two-year-old Vishnu Harvalkar recalls, "In the past, large stretches of autumn agricultural fields were irrigated by water from this spring." Bagatali Zor, once a primary source of drinking water for many families in Brahma Karmali, has gradually faded from everyday use with the introduction of tap

**CONTD TO PAGE 04..**



Springs of **Brahma Karmali**

Sunday Thought

# When Development Drowns Tradition

Suraj Nandrekar

In the heart of South Goa, a quiet but profound conflict is unfolding. It is not just about land or infrastructure. It is about memory, identity, and a way of life that has endured for generations. At Sangameshwar Temple, the traditional Gondal ritual continues to bind the local community in faith and continuity. For decades, perhaps centuries, this ritual has not merely been performed. It has been lived. It represents a cultural rhythm that connects people to their past, their land, and their shared identity. Today, that continuity stands at risk. The proposed bandhara at Mirabag has triggered growing concern among locals, who fear that the temple and its surroundings could remain submerged for most of the year. If that happens, the Gondal ritual, inseparable from its physical and spiritual setting, may not survive. This is where the debate moves beyond development versus resistance. It becomes a question of what development means, and more importantly, what it costs. Infrastructure projects are often justified in the name of progress. Water management, irrigation, and resource planning are essential, especially in regions that depend heavily on seasonal patterns. But progress cannot be measured only in concrete and capacity. It must also account for what is lost along the way. When a project threatens to erase a living tradition, the cost is not just cultural. It is civilisational. Rituals like Gondal are not isolated practices that can be relocated or replicated elsewhere. They are deeply rooted in geography. The temple, the surrounding landscape, the seasonal cycle, and the community's collective memory all come together to give the ritual its meaning. Remove one element, and the entire structure weakens. What is at stake in Sanguem is not just a temple structure, but an ecosystem of belief. The voices from the ground reflect this anxiety. When villagers say,



"This is our heritage, our belief, our way of life," they are not making an emotional appeal. They are stating a fact. Cultural heritage is not an abstract concept. It is lived daily, often quietly, and often without recognition, until it is threatened. The challenge for policymakers is to recognise this before it is too late. Too often, development decisions are made through technical assessments that overlook intangible heritage. Environmental impact studies may measure water flow, land use, and displacement. But they rarely capture the value of cultural practices that have no easy metric. This gap is where conflicts begin. The question, then, is not whether development should happen. It is whether it can happen responsibly. Can alternative sites be explored? Can design modifications prevent submergence? Can local communities be genuinely consulted rather than merely informed? These are not unreasonable demands. They are essential steps in ensuring that development does not become displacement in another form. There is also a larger lesson here. Across the country, similar tensions are emerging between infrastructure expansion and cultural preservation. Each case may seem local, but together they point to a national pattern where heritage is often treated as expendable. That approach is short-sighted. Once a tradition disappears, it cannot be rebuilt through policy or funding. It is lost in ways that are irreversible. The erosion of cultural practices weakens not just communities, but the broader social fabric that holds them together. In Sanguem, the choice is still open. The project has not yet erased what it threatens. There is still time to rethink, to reassess, and to engage with those who stand to lose the most. Development should not come at the cost of identity. It should strengthen communities, not displace their history. Because when water rises over land, it does not just submerge soil. It buries stories.

# Masterstroke

## 7 Years of Dr Pramod P Sawant Ji's Double Engine Sarkar

Irfan Iqbal Gheta

On a fateful day, March 17, 2019 — exactly a year before the COVID-19 pandemic would go on to ravage the world — Goa woke up to devastating news. Manohar Parrikar, the then Chief Minister of Goa, was no more. After a prolonged battle with a life-threatening illness, Goa's beloved Bhai passed away at the relatively young age of 63, plunging the state into deep mourning, shock, and disbelief. The sense of uncertainty was immediate and widespread. Parrikar was not just a political leader; he was widely regarded as the chief architect of modern Goa. With his passing, a pressing question echoed across political circles and among ordinary Goans alike: who would lead Goa forward from here? Could his successor rise to the occasion? Could anyone match his administrative acumen and connect with the people? As these questions lingered, the state watched closely. Then, quietly but decisively, Parrikar's young protégé stepped forward. Pramod Sawant, an MLA from Sankhali, took oath as Goa's next Chief Minister on March 19, 2019. He was just 46 at the time. His elevation came as a surprise to many. Yet, it was a calculated decision by the party leadership, which entrusted him with a clear and demanding mandate — to consolidate power, outmanoeuvre political opponents, and deliver governance that was stable, development-oriented, and free from controversy. Seven years later, Sawant has largely lived up to those expectations. He has steadily built his image, positioning himself as a proponent of digital governance while steering Goa towards becoming a more tech-savvy state. On March 19, 2026, he completed seven years in office — a significant milestone that coincided with Gudi Padwa, marking the beginning of a new year in the Hindu calendar. In Goa's often volatile political environment, such continuity is no small achievement. His tenure has not been without internal challenges. His cabinet has included senior leaders, including former chief ministers, along with several aspirants eyeing the top post. Managing



these competing ambitions while maintaining stability has required careful political balancing. His early years in office were marked by an unprecedented crisis. During the COVID-19 outbreak, Sawant faced his first major test as Chief Minister. At a time when fear and uncertainty gripped the state, his now-iconic phrase — "Bhivpachi Garaz Naa" — struck a chord with people, offering reassurance in the face of anxiety. The pandemic period became a defining phase of his leadership. In 2022, Sawant led his party into the Goa Assembly elections and secured a decisive victory. The mandate was widely seen as an endorsement of development-focused governance and a relatively clean administrative record. Voters appeared to place their trust in the idea of the "Double Engine Sarkar" and its promise of faster, coordinated development. There was also visible support for Sawant's vision of "Swayampurna Goem," centred on self-reliance and sustainable growth. Next month, Sawant turns 53. Unlike his mentor Parrikar, whose political journey was cut short, Sawant has time on his side to further shape his legacy. However, time alone does not guarantee political success. This is a crucial period for Goa's politics. The spotlight is firmly on what the Chief Minister does next. With the Goa Assembly elections scheduled for 2027, the challenge ahead is clear. Can Sawant effectively counter anti-incumbency and convert it into electoral advantage? Can he lead his party to an ambitious target of 30 seats? Before that, an important political signal will emerge from the upcoming Ponda by-election on April 9, 2026. The outcome of this by-election is likely to offer an early indication of the public mood and the direction in which political currents are moving in the state. For a leader like Sawant, it also presents an opportunity to assess the ground reality and recalibrate strategy if needed. In many ways, it will serve as a testing ground ahead of the high-stakes 2027 Assembly elections. The months ahead will be crucial in shaping that trajectory. For now, the message remains unchanged — Bhivpachi Garaz Naa.

# Health Officials of Goa Health Ministers of Goa

## BLOOD TRANSFUSION SERVICES AT GOA MEDICAL COLLEGE



**By Dr Roque Wiseman Pinto**

Professor of Pathology  
Former Head of Department (2003–2024)  
Former Dean, Goa University (2018–2021)  
President, South Asian Academy of Cytopathology and Histopathology  
Chairman, International Affairs Committee (IAC)  
India's Representative at the International Academy of Cytology, European Federation of Cytology Societies, and Asian Federation of Cytology Societies  
Chairman, International Conferences and CMEs in Goa

From 19 December

1961 to 29 May 1987, Goa, Daman and Diu functioned as a Union Territory of India. Goa attained statehood on 30 May 1987. I recall reading this historic news in a national newspaper while travelling by train from Delhi to Bombay. I had been to PGIMER, Chandigarh, to attend a CME in Hematology. Those were times before social media and the internet, when news travelled differently and often carried a sense of quiet significance. This article attempts to document the health officials and health ministers who served Goa during the Union

Territory period and after statehood.

Among those who held key positions were Alban Couto, IAC Development Commissioner; Dayanand Bandodkar; V.S. Karmali; Shashikala Kakodkar; Shaikh Hassan Haroon; Dr Kashinath Jhalmi, an alumnus of Goa Medical College and a general practitioner from Marcel; Pandurang Raut; Dr Wilfred De Sousa, MS, FRCS (Edinburgh), a leading consultant surgeon in GMC, Health Services, and private practice, widely regarded as one of Goa's finest surgeons of his time; Francisco Sardinha; Dayanand Narvekar;

Alban Couto, IAS Advisor to the Governor of Goa; Pratapsing R. Rane; Laxmikant Parsekar; Francis D'Souza; and Vishwajit Rane. As part of my research into the history of medicine in Goa, I studied the biosketches of Dayanand Bandodkar and V.S. Karmali. With most of the others, I had the privilege of direct interaction during my tenure at Goa Medical College.

Many of them also consulted me as patients for biopsies, diagnostic investigations, and expert opinions. Over the years, I met them at the Old Secretariat in Adil Shah's Palace,

the New Secretariat at Porvorim, and at various official and social venues where meetings were held. Many of these distinguished individuals are no longer with us. A defining moment in my career came in 1987, when I was appointed Head of the Blood Bank at Goa Medical College. For the first time, a Lecturer in Pathology was made the independent Head of the Blood Bank, reporting directly to the Dean. I assumed this responsibility at the age

of 28. This role gave me early administrative and organisational experience in a public-facing institution that was frequently in the news and constantly engaged with the community. During my tenure, I received invaluable guidance from Dr G.J.S. Abraham, the Dean, and from my respected teacher in Pharmacology. I also remain grateful to the then Health Secretary, Ms Neeru Nanda, IAS, for her support and encouragement.

# Colonial Influences Shape Goa's Furniture Traditions, Says Designer Nityan Unnikrishnan

## The Palakkad Chair designer reflects on craft traditions, design practice and artisan livelihoods during MOG Sunday session.

**Panaji, March 2026:** Goa's furniture still carries visible traces of its colonial past and its heavy wooden pieces, carved cupboards and cane-backed chairs found in many older homes reflect centuries of Portuguese influence on local craft traditions, according to artist and designer Nityan Unnikrishnan, who used this context to reflect on how furniture-making traditions in Goa and Kerala evolved along different paths. Speaking at a MOG Sunday session at the Museum of Goa, Unnikrishnan said that while both regions share humid coastal climates and access to similar woods, their craft traditions developed differently. Goa's furniture retains clear colonial

influences in its forms and materials, while Kerala's traditions emerged through different craft practices and techniques. "Craft traditions usually develop out of the materials, the climate and the people who work with them," Unnikrishnan said. "Goa's furniture has very clear colonial influences," he said, adding that Kerala's traditions evolved through different craft practices.

The Palakkad Chair itself began as a personal project for him in 2013, when Unnikrishnan designed a wooden chair as a birthday gift for a friend. The design later evolved through several iterations and collaborations, eventually becoming the iconic Palakkad Chair now produced with the furniture



design studio Phantom Hands.

Inspired by the work of American woodworker and architect George Nakashima, the wood-and-cane chair gradually evolved through several iterations before taking its present form in collaboration with Phantom Hands.

Unnikrishnan's practice spans painting, design and collaborations with traditional artisans across India. Trained in industrial design, he has also worked as a ceramic designer and explored furniture-making. His work has been featured in several solo and group exhibitions over the past

decade and is currently on view at the 6th Kochi Muziris Biennale in Kerala. Speaking about the influences behind the design, Unnikrishnan referred to the work of Japanese-American woodworker George Nakashima and his approach to combining craftsmanship with design. "Designing and making for me... it's not two separate things, it's just one and the same," he said.

Reflecting on his practice across painting, ceramics and furniture, Unnikrishnan noted that designing objects intended for wider production requires a different approach from creating artworks. "I was clear that I was not doing it for myself," he said. "It has to be easy to be made... it can't cost beyond a point."

Returning to the subject of traditional craftsmanship, Unnikrishnan said designers often misunderstand the needs of artisans. "What they need help with is to find better ways to make a living," he said. "They don't need help to design."

He added that despite the growing popularity of handmade products in global markets, the economic benefits rarely reach artisans themselves. "Nothing really benefits the artisans," he said, noting that while handmade design is widely consumed, the work often remains concentrated in small pockets and does not translate into sustainable livelihoods for craftspeople across the sector.

# GREENING GOA, ONE KOKEDAMA AT A TIME

By Kajal

In the quiet village of Sasoli in Bicholim, a simple yet powerful green idea is taking root. Lekhni Naik is introducing Goans to the Japanese art of kokedama, blending global technique with local wisdom and materials.

Kokedama, a traditional Japanese gardening method, literally translates to "moss ball". It involves shaping soil into a ball, embedding a plant within it, and wrapping it with moss or fibre instead of placing it in a plastic pot. The result is both aesthetic and sustainable.

"For many people, this is a completely new concept," Lekhni says. "But when I explain it, they realise it's very simple and can be done at home with what we already have."

Her approach is rooted in accessibility. Instead of relying on imported moss, she uses coconut fibre, a material widely available in Goa. "We don't always get sphagnum moss here," she explains. "So I use coconut husk fibre. It works beautifully and is completely local."

The process, she says, is as important as the result. Soil is mixed with coco peat and shaped



into a firm ball, with just enough moisture to hold it together. The plant roots are carefully cleaned and placed inside, ensuring they are not damaged. The ball is then wrapped and tied, often with simple thread.

"You have to feel the soil," Lekhni says. "If it's too wet, it won't hold shape. If it's too dry, it will crumble. There's a balance, and once you understand it, the process becomes very intuitive."

Her workshops, both online and offline, have drawn participants from across Goa, including students, homemakers, and gardening enthusiasts. Many come in with curiosity and leave with a deeper appreciation for sustainable practices.

"People often ask

me what kind of soil to use," she says. "I tell them, don't overthink it. Use what you have, but prepare it well. Mix soil with coco peat, let it settle overnight, and then work with it."

Beyond technique, Lekhni's work carries a strong environmental message. She is particularly vocal about reducing plastic use in gardening. "Plastic planters are everywhere," she says. "We don't realise that over time, they break down and release microplastics into the soil. That affects soil fertility and the health of our plants." Kokedama, she explains, offers a simple alternative. By eliminating plastic pots, even for small plants, gardeners can make a meaningful

difference. "It may look like a small step," she says, "but if many people start doing it, the impact is huge." Her own garden stands as proof. What began as a modest kitchen garden has grown into a lush collection of indoor plants, each carefully nurtured using kokedama techniques. Hanging plants, tabletop arrangements, and even experimental designs fill her space, creating what she describes as "a living, breathing ecosystem".

Maintenance, she insists, is not complicated. "Indoor plants don't need daily watering," she says. "Once every two days is enough in most cases. You can either dip the kokedama ball in water or gently sprinkle it." Plant choice, however,

matters. "Money plants grow quickly and adapt well," she explains. "Snake plants and some succulents take more time. You have to understand each plant's nature." Her journey has also become a platform for empowerment, especially for women. Through her workshops, she encourages others to turn this skill into a source of income or personal expression.

"I tell women, this is something you can do from home," she says. "You don't need big investments. You just need interest and patience."

There is also a deeper cultural connection in her work. She draws parallels between traditional skills and modern sustainability.

"We already have skills like stitching, weaving, and working with natural materials," she says. "If we use those same skills creatively, we can protect nature as well."

For Lekhni, kokedama is not just an art form. It is a way of thinking, one that values simplicity, resourcefulness, and a closer relationship with nature.

"People think they need big spaces or expensive tools to start gardening," she says. "But it can begin with one plant, one small effort."

In Sasoli, that effort has already begun to ripple outward. Through her work, Lekhni Naik is not just growing plants. She is growing awareness, one kokedama at a time.

...CONTD FROM PAGE 01

## "We will not step back": Mirabag protestor Sanket Bhandari on the Bandhara agitation

explore alternative solutions like pumping systems or shifting the project to a safer location.

**Q: You mentioned villages being affected. Can you explain the impact?**

**Sanket Bhandari:** This is not just about land. It is about existence. If the bandhara comes up, large parts of the area will be submerged. Homes, temples, schools, and agricultural land will be affected. My own house is in the danger zone. There are temples, sacred sites, and riverbanks that people have been connected to for generations. These are not things you can relocate easily.

**Q: The government says the project is for**

**irrigation and public benefit.**

**Sanket Bhandari:** That is what they say. But we have serious doubts. We have studied the issue. The area currently has a natural balance between freshwater and saltwater. If a barrier is constructed, saltwater intrusion could increase, affecting crops and soil fertility. Farmers here depend on this ecosystem. If that balance is disturbed, agriculture will suffer.

**Q: Have you been consulted by the government?**

**Sanket Bhandari:** Not properly. There have been meetings, but they were not transparent. We were asked to attend presentations, but there

is no clarity on who supports the project and who opposes it. There is no proper record of public opinion. We feel decisions are being taken without genuinely considering the people who will be affected.

**Q: The movement seems to have political undertones. Are political parties involved?**

**Sanket Bhandari:** This is not a political movement. This is a people's movement. Yes, individuals from different political backgrounds may support us. But the protest is not led by any party. It is led by villagers. We have said from day one: this is about our rights, not politics.

**Q: There were**

**comparisons made with revolutionary actions in history. Do you see your protest in that light?**

**Sanket Bhandari:** People may draw comparisons, but our intention is simple. We are not promoting violence or extremism. We are exercising our democratic right to protest. If raising slogans peacefully is being labelled as something else, that is unfair.

**Q: How has the public response been so far?**

**Sanket Bhandari:** The response has been growing. Initially, only a few people were involved. Now, more villagers are joining. People are beginning to understand the seriousness of the issue.

## Springs Dotted Brahma Karmali

water. Despite this shift, it continues to support horticultural activities.

Horticulturist Milind Gadgil notes, "We have been using the water from this spring for our horticultural fields for many generations, ensuring its continued relevance."

Brahmadevachi Zor holds deep religious significance. The water from this sacred spring is used daily for rituals and ceremonies at the Brahmadev temple. According to local folklore, members of the Gawda tribal community who brought the Brahmadev idol from Carambolim were captivated by the beauty of the area. One among them is believed to have

dreamt of Brahmadev expressing a desire to reside there. This led to the establishment of the temple, and the spring came to be known as Brahmadevachi Zor. Every year, March 22 is observed as World Water Day. On this occasion, it is essential to reflect on and plan strategies for the protection and conservation of precious water resources such as springs, streams, tanks, and rivers. The springs of Brahma Karmali are not just sources of water, but living symbols of heritage, ecology, and community life. Preserving them is vital for sustaining both nature and tradition for generations to come.