

It takes two to keep this dying tradition alive

Author - Karsten Miranda, Published on - 8.6.2016

Mandri is a traditional mat made from the 'Lavo' grass found across Goa. This mandri can be used as a sleeping mat or to sit on. It is more comfortable than a common plastic mat due to the fact that it is natural. The major issue is the production of the product. The fact that the art of weaving a mandri is dying means that it isn't available in the market as people opt for the plastic one now. Two women though are striving to keep this tradition alive despite the odds. KARSTEN MIRANDA weaves out their intriguing story.

[Twenty years ago, 'Mandri' a traditional mat from 'Lavo' grass was found across Goa, especially in remote areas where it was used as a sleeping mat. Lavo or Nouo as it is locally known is a grass grown in the marshy land of fields with which these traditional mats - Mandri came into existence.](#)

The mat would be used regularly and the tribal villagers recall how they would offer these mats to their guests to sleep on or sit; whenever they came to their village for a social function like a wedding.

[However, as has been the case with many of these traditional products, Mandri has lost its place in the market due to the lack of demand given that the market space is dominated by the plastic mats which are cheaper and produced in bulk at far greater speeds.](#)

Unfortunately, this sounded the death knell of an entire generation that was dependent on Mandri weaving for their livelihood and the product itself.

["With the plastic mat you tend to sweat and it sticks to your back. The Mandri is natural and used to be placed on a hard surface but was thick enough to serve as a light mattress and allow you to sleep with no issues such as scratches or bed bugs," quipped a local villager lamenting that people have disregarded its value.](#)

Currently two women, a 64 year old lady Santana Fernandes and her daughter in law, Minguelina Gomes are keeping this dying tradition alive.

Banglanatak dot com, a 16 year old social enterprise that has a partnership with UNESCO, World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) and also accredited with UN ECOSOC status and Advisory Status to ICH Committee in UNESCO Paris; heard their story and tracked them down in a remote village Chaifi in their home ward that is known as Lourebat.

The area in front of Santana's house is used to weave the Mandri while the Lavo is kept to dry and processed on the roof. With 42 years of experience in Mandri weaving, Santana is central to the attempt at reviving and preserving this art. Santana has undergone a heart surgery and has a pace maker but still takes an interest even though her health slows her down. It's her enthusiasm that has inspired other women from her ward that is now the only reason the Mandri culture still exists. **Santana will tell you how she learned this art of weaving Mandri from the ladies of other villages who were married in their village. Similarly, Minguelina Gomes who hails from Chinchinim is Santana's eldest daughter in law and was taught this trade and currently assists her mother in law along with Opozinha Lima.** "These ladies use to weave Mandri for their personal use in their free time after coming back from the fields. Many women were involved in Mandri making in the village but at present they don't find any scope for economic development in it. As a result, the elder people have involved them in the household work or in the agricultural fields. The young generations have also shifted to other suitable job options in the city areas or searching for the jobs after completing their studies. The elder people still have interest as it gives the option for earning by staying at home. The younger people are also interested in the traditional work if proper market demand is created with proper sustainable socio-economic growth in their lifestyle," said Amitava Bhattacharya, Founder Director of Banglanatak dot com. **The villagers concur and stress that their first concern is to ensure that they earn their bread and better. They point out that it takes at least 2 days and three to six women to help out and days spent on this means loss of income. "We had not received an order for this mat in about ten years. Recently we have started getting a few orders and the cost of each mat is Rs 1,500," said a villager. The idea here is that if they get enough orders per month, the profits they make will surpass their monthly wages at working in the fields but the villagers know that this will take a while and while they were reluctant at first they have now acknowledged that this is a viable alternate source of income. "Mandri is weaved with jute threads in a machine called Kamb which is made of wood with holes in it, used to fasten the jute threads tight and through which the lavo is passed in a criss-cross way," said Santana. The organisation that specializes in Culture and Development is working on ensuring that a steady number of orders come in to create market linkage and recognition for them and have already started the training programme for other villagers which culminates in June.**

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