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cal outfit. For instance, in 1972, Christian-dominated Benaulim was won by Vasudev Sarmalkar on the UGP ticket; he defeated former MLA Elu Miranda. But after two years, a Christian was chosen in the bye-election, this time on the MGP ticket. Since MGP was perceived as a nativist party of the Hindus, its acceptance in Benaulim was surprising.”

Two more examples in the book are inspiring. Hindu-dominated Mormugao elected (five times) a man of letters and former judge, Muslim by religion, Shaikh Hassan Haroon. When Haroon first stood for election on a Congress ticket in 1977, Mormugao's Muslim population was barely nine per cent. Today, it has grown to 16 per cent of the total 21,000 electors; their voting is not governed by religious considerations. In Curchorem, again a Hindu-dominated constituency, Muslim legislator Abdul Razak and Christian candidate Domnic Fernandes, both Congressmen, have had fruitful stints.

The first volume of Prabhudesai's book races against a deadline—the upcoming announcement of the February 2022 Assembly elections. But, the ensuing volumes will dive deeper in larger cultural themes

as well as the local politics surrounding land ownership. It will go into the historical reasons for the current behaviour of Goan voters and their elected representatives. Why are Goa's CMs toppled by intriguing defectors? How do defectors face their voters in a one-on-one setting, especially since Goa's 40 assembly segments hold 18,000 to 25,000 (intimately known to the candidate) people? Is the texture of electioneering at the municipal level messier? It is also a matter of academic study that while a major national party, Congress, has lost its clout in Goa's politics, its replacement, the BJP, presents a worse shade.

Readers are interested in these aspects of a crucial small-sized, but strategically-positioned coastline state. Goa has an impressive literacy rate, it has a great tradition in public service journalism, it shines as a tourist heaven, it excels in the performing and visual arts, its green countryside holds bio-diverse riches. And yet, it is remembered on primetime television for a fractious bickering political leadership. Goa's migrant resident, with no historic connect, is rumoured to be bought at a rate of ₹4,000 per vote. Defections of Goa's legislators forever provide fodder for the WhatsApp joke club. This book tells Goans to do away with these gajab factors.



Late Goa CM Manohar Parrikar, who praised Narendra Modi's magnetic pull, had initially avoided inviting the leader to the state. Parrikar wasn't sure if Modi rhetoric was suitable for Goa's "thinking voter," says Prabhudesai. PIC/AFP

Former CMs of Goa

| Election | Chief Minister | Community | % |
|----------|---------------------|----------------------|-----|
| 1963 | Dayanand Bandodkar | Gomantak Maratha | 2 |
| 1967 | Dayanand Bandodkar | Gomantak Maratha | 2 |
| 1972 | Shashikala Kakodkar | Gomantak Maratha | 2 |
| 1977 | Shashikala Kakodkar | Gomantak Maratha | 2 |
| 1980 | Pratapsing Rane | Kshatriya Maratha | 5 |
| 1984 | Pratapsing Rane | Kshatriya Maratha | 5 |
| 1989 | Pratapsing Rane | Kshatriya Maratha | 5 |
| 1994 | Pratapsing Rane | Kshatriya Maratha | 5 |
| 1999 | Luizinho Faleiro | Christian (religion) | 30 |
| 2002 | Manohar Parrikar | Brahmin | 2.5 |
| 2007 | Digambar Kamat | Brahmin | 2.5 |
| 2012 | Manohar Parrikar | Brahmin | 2.5 |
| 2017 | Manohar Parrikar | Brahmin | 2.5 |

While Goa has a large Christian population, Luizinho Faleiro is the only CM to have been elected (by popular vote) from the community

Suburban service chalu aahe

A newspaper started 30 years ago and dedicated to the socio-cultural issues of Vile Parle has continued to enhance the quality of life of its residents through its hyper-local approach

SUCHETA CHAKRABORTY

IN 1991, Dnyanesh Chandekar, a metallurgist born and brought up in Vile Parle and employed at a steel company at the time, started Aamhi Parlekar, the first ever suburban newspaper to bring local news and offer a platform for visibility for the socio-cultural activities taking place in Vile Parle. This was also the time of economic liberalisation in India when the role of foreign investment expanded. "So, while people were talking about globalisation, we were focusing on localisation," says Chandekar whose publication turned 30 this year. "At the time, I thought that the world is coming closer and while we are more aware of what is happening in faraway countries, it is important to know what is happening in our own area."

It started as a "one-man army," he recalls, going beyond publishing news to initiate cultural activities like Sangeet Rajani for promoting local talent and the first ever cricket training centre in Vile Parle. "Till that time, the only seasoned pitches were at Dadar. All the Bombay students used to go to Shivaji Park to train to become the next Gavaskars and Vengsarkars," he says. They offered the suburban crowd another option, one which is still run by the Parle Tilak Vidyalyaya Association.

They were also instrumental in starting agitations against unauthorised hawkers, initiating cleanliness drives, and bringing attention to traffic congestion in Vile Parle's streets, he says, which may not have found space in a national publication. There was also the matter of local businesses. "Why should they advertise in state or national-level newspapers?" he asks, insisting on their need for a local platform, both because it was cost-effective for these businesses and also because their businesses were retail, like those of jewellers, or banks whose branches required their account holders to be locals.

The publication has managed to remain non-political, says Chandekar, its primary support stemming from the common man of the suburb. While they did organise coordination meetings between representatives and local bodies and residents, "the political parties re-

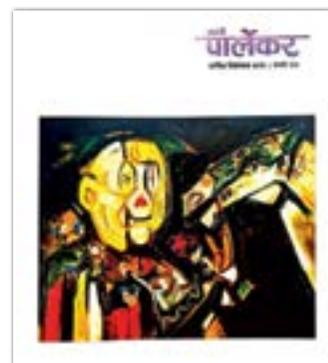
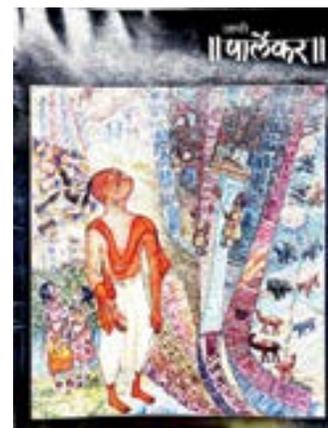
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Aamhi Parlekar started as a "one-man army," its founder-editor Dnyanesh Chandekar emphasising the importance of local news as well as offering a platform for suburban businesses to thrive. PIC/SAMEER MARKANDE

mained friendly, but at a distance". This was also in part, Chandekar explains, due to the fact that he was never financially dependent on Parlekar. This gave him the liberty to conduct activities without getting influenced politically. Around the time he started Aamhi Parlekar, he founded two other international business publications—SteelWorld on the iron and steel industry, and MetalWorld on the foundry sector and non-ferrous metals industry. He had the media infrastructure in place, he says, running conferences and exhibitions related to both in and outside India. "So, though Parlekar was not a big profit-making venture, my other ventures supported its activities."

They also compiled a people's



Aamhi Parlekar has developed a tradition of displaying the work of prominent painters from Vile Parle on the front cover of its annual special issue. In 2015, it was Sukhsheel Chavan, and his painting Kingmaker, and in 2019, Joker by DG Kulkarni

manifesto for Vile Parle, created after conducting a survey in the suburb about its social issues, something which its editor says they may do for the upcoming BMC elections as well. Recent activities have also included a suburban redevelopment conference organised annually bringing experts from the BMC, the architectural and civil engineering sectors to discuss issues and information about laws and regulations related to redevelopment in the area, which due to its proximity to the airport is in the funnel zone. The adoption of a municipal school in Vile Parle East, the conception and formation of public opinion around the need for a ground for specially-abled children, and the launch of the website parlebazaar.com, with e-newspaper townparle.in, which carries listings of all commercial enterprises of Vile Parle, are some of its other initiatives.

During the pandemic, Parlekar published a pandemic bulletin, Chandekar says, which released information on cases in the suburb along with safety measures and new norms. "We asked the police, BMC officials and doctors to use our platforms to address people. We also conducted Facebook live sessions on safety." Like with most publications, COVID-19 pushed Parlekar to change its approach to survive. They stopped their print edition to go digital. "I think people were also waiting for this. There is an irreversible change that has happened to all of us in the pandemic," says Chandekar, pointing out how all their exhibitions and conferences are now virtual. "It's a step ahead, and I don't think we should go back to print." Ad revenue was of course affected, leading them to conceive a more cost-effective package. But at the same time, their printing costs, due to the switch to digital, came down, while their circulation effectively increased. While switching back to print may not be economical, editorially his objective remains the same—"to do socially, culturally relevant work for the suburb, which will add value to the lives of its people".

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