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mycitylinks



A MATTER OF FAITH **RATH YATRA**

THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC HAS CAST A SHADOW ON THIS YEAR'S
EVENT BUT TRADITIONS, MEMORIES, AND HISTORY ENDURE



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Despite Covid-19 For The Second Year In A Row, The Rath Yatra Remains As Engaging & Immersive As Ever

THE Lord Jagannath Rath Yatra is an event of faith for millions across the world. The ongoing pandemic has entailed strict health Covid-19 protocols for a second year running. But this has done little to dampen the enthusiasm of the devout. In our Cover Story, we look at why the Rath Yatra remains as engaging and as immersive as at any other time in the annual event's history. This has as much to do with history, traditions and memories as with the religious significance of an event that is bound to be bigger than anything else around due to its intrinsic nature.

From a prominent 'tiger state' in the 70s, when Khairi was a well-known name in wildlife and conservation circles, Odisha has seen a gradual fall in interest when it comes to talking about tigers. In a special feature, this edition looks at three tigers that have their own significance in contemporary Odisha.

A solemn occasion for devout Muslims across the world, Eid-ul-Zuha is a time to recall the importance of sacrifice. With the Covid-19 pandemic casting a shadow over the religious event for the second year in a row, we take a close look at what different aspects associated with this

special occasion mean.

This is one 17-year-old who is striking all the right notes at a very young age. Meet Shreya Lenka, the Odia girl who is the only finalist from India in the audition for a place in Blackswan, the globally-acclaimed K-pop girl group from South Korea.

Another youngster making a mark, albeit in a completely different field, is Sujit Meher. An Odia designer based in Bengaluru, he is making Odia handloom global by promoting it in international markets.

It is well over a century but an iconic short story by Fakir Mohan Senapati on women's rights and empowerment continues to be relevant in this day and age. Written in 1898, the ideas discussed in 'Rebati' continue to resonate. Read more about it in a special feature.

In ScreenShots, we remember Tapu Mishra who passed away last month due to post-Covid complications. The Ollywood fraternity joins us in paying tribute to the popular singer after her untimely demise and talks about her work and her life. Elsewhere in this edition, we speak to a health expert to understand the psychological impact of the disease and how to deal with it. ■

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MOKSH TAUNK

PHOTO OF THE MONTH



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RATH YATRA

CHARM OF THE CHARIOTS

It's déjà vu for devotees of Lord Jagannath in Puri. Like last year, Rath Yatra will be held without devotees and visitors this time too in line with COVID 19 protocols. Only the Jagannath temple sevayats will be allowed to pull the three grand chariots this year. For dejected devotees, they can catch the live streaming of the event on TV and other media platforms. But yes, the usual fanfare and gaiety will be missing. To cheer you up dear reader, My City Links brings you snippets of lore, legend, beliefs and devotees associated with the Jagannath culture. Read on to know what we have spread out for you



BY MCL BUREAU

RATH Yatra —the biggest and most awaited annual event on the Odia calendar — is just days away. But the usual gaiety is missing this time. No wonder, devotees are barred from participating due to COVID 19 restrictions. In 2020, Rath Yatra took place only after the Supreme Court gave the go ahead at the last minute and that too without devotees. To see the chariot festival without devotees was something out of the blue for Odias across the world.

After the dampener in 2020, everyone hoped that there will be grand celebrations in 2021. However, as the pandemic continues to ravage our society, the festival will be a subdued affair this year as well. The Odisha government has made an elaborate plan for the conduct of Rath Yatra by adhering to COVID 19 protocols. All the sevayats involved will undergo mandatory COVID 19 tests during the multi-day festival.

In another break from the tradition this year, King of Puri Gajapati Dibyasingha Deb abstained from performing the Chera Pahanra ritual during the Snana Purnima festival owing to the prevailing COVID situation in Odisha.

TRADITIONS & MEMORIES OF ODIA HOUSEHOLDS

Rath Yatra is something that binds Odias together in their love for the Lord of the Universe. While thousands attend the chariot festival in Puri every year, millions watch it on TV, which has emerged as an unspoken tradition in Odia households. Trupti Mishra, an IT professional, recalls fond memories of watching Rath Yatra on TV along with her sibling when they were kids. “While my mom and grandmother would prepare a pure vegetarian and delicious lunch, we would follow the festivities on TV throughout the day with excitement. My favourite moments were when the king arrived in his palanquin and when the chariots started moving. To watch those massive chariots move surrounded by thousands of people was always an overwhelming experience,” she said with a tinge of nostalgia.

Subhra Mohanty, an architect

and ardent Jagannath devotee, shared the traditions in her house on the special day. “My mom makes muruja decorations in the shape of the chariots and food is prepared without onion and garlic. This year, I and my siblings have created a mini temple out of scrap wood and crafted idols of the three deities out of kadhuas. “One of the things that we always look up to every year is ratha bhoga or the special chuda ghasa that is offered to the gods on the chariots. My maternal uncle gets it for us from Puri every year without fail. Although chuda ghasa is made during different pujas and festivi-

ties across the year, the one made in Puri during Rath Yatra is unique. It tastes and smells heavenly,” she shared.

THE STORY OF SIX CHARIOTS

Talking of delicacies, it is a well-known tradition that during Bahuda Yatra (the return journey of the Lords from Gundicha temple), the sibling deities stop at the Mausima temple (considered the abode of their maternal aunt) to savour the delicious Poda Pitha. However, the origin of Mausima temple is not so well known. It dates back to the times when the norm was to build six chariots instead of the three as

chariots used to be constructed in ancient times. The gods would arrive on the banks of the river by three chariots, cross it by boats and then would travel to Sundaranchala or Gundicha Temple on three other chariots.”

“While this is a historical fact, the origin of the Mausima temple is part of folktale. According to legend, one day somebody saw a woman walking into Musa River and he asked her to not go in as there was a ganda. When the woman walked into the river, the water disappeared and the river dried up eventually. Later, locals filled the place with sand to connect both sides of the



As an artist you crave for such experiences as they are a visual treat for the heart, mind and soul. The milieu of Rath Yatra in Puri is pulsating and throbbing with eclectic sights and sounds. I was there for a shoot in 2018 and I will never forget the experience

ASHESH SAHOO
AERIAL CINEMATOGRAPHER

we know them today.

But why six chariots? Dr Srinibas Ghatuary, a scholar of Jagannath culture, explained, “There is a spot on Badadanda known as Balagandi Chhaka. The name is a corrupted version of the words bada meaning big and ganda which roughly translates to a deeper part of a river or any water body. According to history, there used to be a river that

ran right through the middle of Badadanda which was called Musa Nai. Because there was a river, six

dried river. A temple was built at the place and it came to be known as Mausima Mandira or Ardashosini Mandira. This is because here in Odisha, we address an elderly woman as ‘mausi’ (maternal aunt). The man who had called out to the woman walking into the river addressed her as mausi. It is believed that the woman walking into the river was the aunt of the sibling deities,” Ghatuary said.

The Mausima idol in the temple is unique. It’s the only idol of any deity in the world that is made out of two different materials. The idol is made in stone up to the neck and the head is made up of wood, which is a replica of the face of Devi Subhadra.



STORY OF SIX CHARIOTS

ACCORDING TO HISTORY, THE RIVER MUSA NAI RAN THROUGH THE MIDDLE OF BADADANDA. BECAUSE THERE WAS A RIVER, SIX CHARIOTS USED TO BE CONSTRUCTED IN ANCIENT TIMES. THE GODS WOULD ARRIVE ON THE BANKS OF THE RIVER BY THREE CHARIOTS, CROSS IT BY BOATS AND THEN WOULD TRAVEL TO SUNDARANCHALA ON THREE OTHER CHARIOTS - DR SRINIBAS GHATUARY



AN ARTIST'S PERSPECTIVE

Attending the spectacle of Rath Yatra in Puri is an ecstatic experience not just for the devotees, but for all kinds of artists as well. Ashesh, an aerial photographer and cinematographer, is one such person who attended the festival in 2018, "As an artist you crave for such experiences as they are a visual treat for the heart, mind and soul. The milieu of Rath Yatra in Puri is pulsating and throbbing with eclectic sights and sounds. I was there for a shoot and I will never forget the experience," he shared.

Ashesh had a vantage sight of the ceremonies by shooting right next to the chariots. "When the gods come out of the temple, the atmosphere becomes absolutely electrifying. Listening to the sound of the ghantas and mrudangas along with the constant buzz of the crowd is a visual storyteller's delight. The sweltering heat and humidity adds to the maddening atmosphere and you just lose yourself in it. Everyone should experience it at least once," he added.

SALABEGA: THE POWER OF LOVE

The Jagannath culture is steeped in many folklores, myths, legends and traditions that have intrigued people from various backgrounds from around the country and world too. As such, devotees of Lord Jagannath come from different religions and ethnicities. One such person was Salabega, the son of a Muslim subedar and an Odia woman. He is considered as the greatest devotee of the Lord. In his youth, Salabega was trained to become a soldier and later fought many battles alongside his father, Lalbeg. During one such expedition, his father was killed and Salabega was mortally wounded. His mother fervently prayed to Lord Jagannath and her son recovered miraculously.

This was a turning point with Salabega becoming a Jagannath devotee. Being a Muslim, however, he was not allowed to enter the temple to have darshan of the god whose blessings had cured him. But Salabega did not give up. He stayed near the temple and waited for Rath Yatra. Every year, he would get to see his Lord during the chariot festival. It so happened that he was away from Puri for one year. He was desperate to reach Puri before Rath Yatra, but fell sick and



This year, my siblings and I have created a mini temple out of scrap wood and crafted idols of the three deities out of kadhuas. One of the things that we always look up to every year is ratha bhoga or the special chuda ghasa that is offered to the gods on the chariots

SUBHRA MOHANTY
ARCHITECT

the Universe, the chariots started moving again.

Salabega was also a great poet. Also referred to as 'Bhakta Kabi Salabega' (Devotional Poet Salabega), his songs dedicated to Lord Jagannath are sung to this day during morning prayers in the temple. One of his songs 'Ahe Nila Saila' is considered to be one of the most famous and his songs are accepted as the best descriptions of Bedha Parikrama.

Salabega's mazaar is located on Badadanda where he rests eternally right next to the Lord whom he loved so dearly. Even today during Rath Yatra, the char-

OF DEVOTION & DIVINE INTERVENTION

The legend of Salabega exemplifies the belief that the love for Lord Jagannath goes beyond religion. And this has modern echoes too. Meet Aftab Hossen, who was born into a Muslim family at Itamati village in Nayagarh district. His religion is no bar to his devotion. Currently pursuing a Bachelor's degree in Economics, this final year student has installed the idols of the three sibling deities in his home and worships them daily. From 2012 till 2019, Aftab used to conduct Rath Yatra in his village. But he stopped doing so last year in accordance



was delayed. He prayed to Lord Jagannath to wait for him.

On the day of Rath Yatra, the chariots began to roll but stopped just in front of Salabega's house on Badadanda. No matter how much everyone tried, the chariots wouldn't budge.

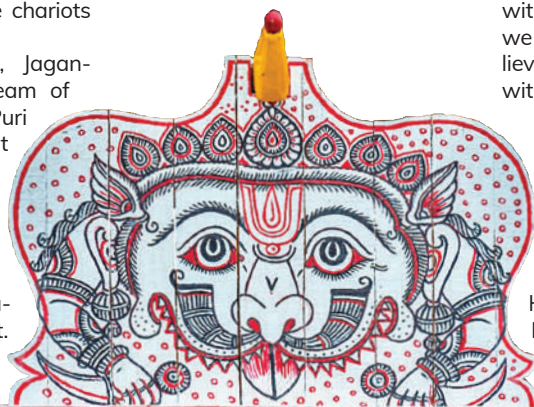
According to folklore, Jagannath appeared in a dream of the head priest of the Puri temple and told him that he was waiting to see his favourite devotee, Salabega. When Salabega finally managed to reach Puri after seven days, he rushed straight to see Jagannath atop his chariot. Once he met the Lord of

chariots stop in front of the mazaar so that the Lord can meet his favourite devotee. It's true that love may make the world go round, but it also makes the Lord of the Universe stop in his tracks.

with the pandemic guidelines.

When asked how a Muslim boy became a devotee of a Hindu god, Aftab replied, "Lord Jagannath is like air; we can't bind him. With complete devotion, we can feel him within us. I feel that is the only way we can make him stay with us. I believe nothing happens in this world without the Lord's order."

He also attributes his devotion to his family. "My maternal grandfather, Mutalab Khan, was a devout person. He had knowledge about several Hindu scriptures. He had built a small temple of Lord Trinath in the village. Hindus still go there to worship. My mother also followed in my grandfather's footsteps. So it is





POWER OF LOVE

DEVOTEES OF LORD JAGANNATH COME FROM DIFFERENT RELIGIONS AND ETHNICITIES. ONE SUCH PERSON WAS SALABEGA, THE SON OF A MUSLIM SUBEDAR AND AN ODIA WOMAN. ONE OF HIS SONGS 'AHE NILA SAILA' IS CONSIDERED TO BE ONE OF THE MOST FAMOUS AND HIS SONGS ARE ACCEPTED AS THE BEST DESCRIPTIONS OF BEDHA PARIKRAMA



in my genes," he said.

Happy to catch a glimpse of the Lord during Rath Yatra, he said, "Jagannath comes out of the temple for devotees like me. Whenever I get the opportunity to look into my Lord's eyes, I just drown into them and tears roll down my face."

Aftab is a strong believer in divine miracles. "I have always felt my Lord's miracles. There are many such incidents. I remember while I was visiting Puri once, I was very hungry and wanted to have some Mahaprasad. But I was unable to get it. Suddenly a sevayat came to me and asked me to go with him and have some Mahaprasad. I wondered how he got to know what I was searching for."

Last year, Aftab was the first person to write a petition against stopping Rath Yatra. The petition was rejected, leaving him heartbroken. He went to sleep without eating anything. And then a miracle happened. "While I was sleeping, I felt like someone came to me and said that everything will be fine. And fortunately our next petition got approved and Rath Yatra was held successfully," he shared

FINDING JAGANNATH IN BIG APPLE

Not only religion, love for the Lord of the Universe goes beyond geographical boundaries. So is the case with Eric Santagada of New Paltz, New York State in the US. Born and brought up in a Christian household, Santagada developed a keen interest in spirituality in a quest for the divine. However, he could not find the answers in organised religion. This led him to study yoga, meditation and other world religions. It was during this quest that Santagada was introduced to the Jagannath culture.

Rechristened to Ekacakrā-prāṇa Dāsa, he narrated how he discovered Jagannath and faith in the Big Apple. "I learnt how god, the one supreme lord, has many names and shows up in my traditions. I was a musician and yoga teacher when I moved to Nashville, Tennessee and that led me to start going to kirtan performances with people chanting Hare Krsna and Jai Jagannath and other names of the supreme lord. There I was introduced to Bhagavad Gita, kirtan, to honour prasadam and to ISKCON. I started traveling all over the world as a musician playing in kirtans.

Once I attended Rath Yatra in New York City, which has been conducting the festival for the past 46 years. It was an incredible full circle. I came back to my home State after traveling the world and here I found Jagannath right next door to me. I have been playing bass on the stage for Lord Jagannath and I have been helping devotees during Rath Yatra celebrations ever since.

"I grew up in New York and never knew anything about Lord Jagannath and then I travelled all over the world looking for him and when I returned home I met him on the streets of New York City," he quipped. It's true that god works in mysterious

ways. We go around in search of the divine only to realise that it was already there right within us.

HOPE TO SEE PURI RATH YATRA

Unlike Santagada who discovered Jagannath quite late, Larry Pugliese aka Laksmi Nrsimha Das of New Jersey has been a devotee of the Lord since his teenage days. He has been attending Rath Yatra celebrations in New York City since 1976. "For me, Rath Yatra is a very auspicious and exciting time. Devotees travel from across the globe to attend it here in NYC. It takes place on 5th Avenue, the

a marvellous event and devotees were ecstatic to be a part of it after missing it out last year," he shared.

But one wish remains unfulfilled. "I have visited the Puri Jagannath temple, but have never been able to attend the Rath Yatra celebrations there. I wish to be a part of it at least once," said the retired English teacher from New Jersey.

PROPOSING IN FRONT OF LORD

Everybody dreams to make their proposal as romantic as possible. For Ekanatha Gaura Das, a Jagannath devotee from Buenos Aires, the moment had to be both



Lord Jagannath is like air; we can't bind him. With complete devotion, we can feel him within us. I believe nothing happens in this world without the Lord's order

AFTAB HOSSEN
JAGANNATH
DEVOTEE



most influential street of New York and ends at Washington Square Park with dance performances and kirtan on the stage. It is a sight to behold," said Larry.

The pandemic had put a stop on all festivities across the globe, but it did not dampen the high spirits of the devotees in New York. "Last year Rath Yatra was celebrated through a huge online event. People from all the continents participated in it and it was a huge success. In the United States, the permit for the Rath Yatra parade is given for the second Saturday in June. This year we have already celebrated Rath Yatra on June 12. It was

breath-taking and auspicious. So on a visit to Rath Yatra in Puri, he pulled out a ring from his pocket and proposed to his beloved right in front of Lord Jagannath.

"I have the advantage of looking like an Indian and when I dress up in dhoti, I look like one of the priests. This makes it easier for me to go close to the chariots. Grabbing the opportunity, I crossed the rope that prevented me from going nearer to the Lord and went inside and got the ring blessed. Jagannath is Dinabandhu, he is our best friend. So for me it was very auspicious," he quipped.

Ekanatha has witnessed hundreds of Rath Yatra across the world. When asked about his favourite, he replied that it was a



Photo By Avinash Patnaik

HOPE TO SEE THE LORD

FOR ME, RATH YATRA IS A VERY AUSPICIOUS AND EXCITING TIME. I HAVE VISITED THE PURI JAGANNATH TEMPLE, BUT HAVE NEVER BEEN ABLE TO ATTEND THE RATH YATRA CELEBRATIONS THERE. I WISH TO BE A PART OF IT AT LEAST ONCE.
- LARRY PUGLIESE AKA LAKSMI NRSIMHA DAS





LESSER KNOWN FACTS ABOUT RATH YATRA AND THE JAGANNATH TEMPLE

Many people say that during Rath Yatra Lord Jagannath and his siblings travel to their aunt's place whereas they visit their mother's place or their place of birth.



There is a misconception that Poda Pitha is offered to the gods during Rath Yatra but they have it on the return journey during Bahuda Yatra at their aunt's place.

Out of all the 32 beshas of Jagannath 31 are associated with different devo-



I grew up in New York and never knew anything about Lord Jagannath and then I travelled all over the world looking for him and when I returned home I met him on the streets of New York City

ERIC SANTAGADA
MUSICIAN

wanted to meet Jagannath and she got the chance in 2013. "I always had the urge to be a part of Rath Yatra in Puri. There are so many people like foreigners and people of other communities who are not allowed to enter the temple but Jagannath is so merciful that he comes out to give darshan to his devotees during Rath Yatra. He proves that all are equal in his eyes. In 2013, I attended Rath Yatra for the first time. We saw thousands of servitors and devotees get ready and clean the Gundicha Temple. It was an astounding spectacle in itself. I was fortunate enough to witness and also be a part of it," Indira recalled.

to have darshan on the chariot and finally got permission. When we came down the Rath it started pouring, we could literally feel the blessings of the Lord. Then we took shelter in Subhadra Maiyya's rath; it was as if we were in her arms. She took care of us. We were crying in joy," she said, wiping away a tear.

SPREADING LOVE IN MOSCOW
Natalia Milanova, who is known by her spiritual name Narayani Radhe, is an ardent Jagannath devotee who hails from Moscow. She said the Jagannath culture has reached several places in Russia and gained popularity. "We have Jagannath,



tough question. "Each Rath Yatra has its own flavour. I started out when I was young so it was very adventurous for me. Travelling, sitting on the rath with Jagannath, doing puja, watching the parade, pulling the rath, chanting, I was pretty much engaged with each of the activities," he reminisced.

MEETING JAGANNATH ON HIS RATH

Lord Jagannath is said to be the most merciful. There is no barrier in worshipping him. Indira Shivram has always

"I got a coupon and sat in the gallery overlooking Badadanda and watched the spectacle. First Valabha Dev came out, then Subhadra Maiyya came out and finally my Lord Jagannath came out of the temple. He was dancing and showing himself to all. We pleaded with the cops

Baladev and Subhadra deities in many cities of our country and Rath Yatra is celebrated elaborately here. They are not as big as in Puri, but as big as allowed by the police and the government. Despite the cold and chilly weather in Moscow with temperature about -20°C, devotees swarm the chariots during Rath Yatra. Devotees also make and then gift warm winter clothes for Jagannath and his siblings," she said.

She has the idols of Jagannath, Balabhadra and Subhadra at her home and her entire family worships them. "I worship a small wooden idol of Patita Pavan Jagannath. Our entire family offers everything we cook to the Lord. Whenever we have guests we of-



Photo By Subhra Mohanty



FINDING JAGANNATH WITHIN

IT IS A TRAGIC PERIOD THAT WE ARE GOING THROUGH RIGHT NOW. JAGANNATH COMES OUT OF THE TEMPLE DURING THE RATH YATRA AND YET THE DEVOTEES CANNOT GO TO HIM. THIS IS A PAINFUL MOMENT LIKE SO MANY SINCE LAST YEAR WHEN WE WERE NOT ABLE TO REACH OUR LOVED ONES IN TIMES OF NEED. WE MUST THINK ABOUT AND FIND JAGANNATH IN OUR HEARTS



tees except for the Suna Basha during the Rath Yatra. The gold used in the decoration is that which is won in wars and is surrendered to Jagannath because he is considered the King of Odisha.

According to the "Records of Rights", the treasury of the Puri temple has 150 gold articles consisting of three necklaces of 120 tolas each or 1.4 kg each and limbs of Jagannath and Balabhadra made of gold weighing 818 tolas or 9.54 kg and 710 tolas or 8.28 kg of weight.

The treasury also has decorative crowns of Jagannatha, Balabhadra and Subhadra weighing 610 tolas or 7.12 kg, 434 tolas or 5 kg and 274 tolas or 3.2 kg of weight respectively. According to the temple sources, in the past, the total weight of the gold ornaments used to adorn the deities weighed more than 208 kg initially made in 138 designs.

The Jagannath temple complex consists of one main temple surrounded by 30 other temples of various sizes.

The Nila Chakra atop the temple weighs a ton and is 20 feet in height. Its positioning is such that no matter where you are in Puri, you will find the Chakra facing towards you.

fer the same food to them and they love it," she shared.

And soon word spread around of the amazing cooking at the Natalia household. "People started asking us to cook for different public institutions, military units and various kinds of city events. Now we cook for hundreds of people. Most of them do not know about Jagannath but they love the food. They enjoy the prasadam very much. This year we have already distributed tens of thousands of portions of the Jagannath Prasadam. It seems like Lord Jagannath wants to have more through the food we cook," she



Sharing about what makes Jagannath special, she said, "He is never far away from us. He takes the shape of whatever we want to imagine him as. He is very friendly and affectionate and he binds the universe together. People from all over the world want to see the Lord of the Universe but since non-Hindus are not allowed inside the temple Jagannath comes out of his abode to meet his devotees which is a very unique tradition. This shows the all compassionate and all-encompassing nature of the god. What can be a grander occasion to meet your loved one than the Rath Yatra?"



We pleaded with the cops to have darshan on the chariot and finally got permission. When we came down the Rath it started pouring, we could literally feel the blessings of the Lord

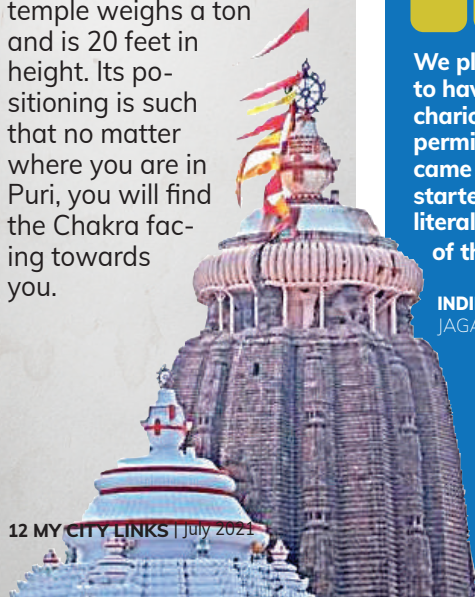
INDIRA SHIVRAM
JAGANNATH DEVOTEE

shared with a smile.

FINDING JAGANNATH IN OUR HEARTS

Coming back to Odisha, Eminent dancer Ileana Citaristi has dedicated her life to Odissi. She was inspired by the devotion for Jagannath after attending the Rath Yatra for the first time during the late 80s. "I can distinctly remember that I was on a terrace near the temple along the Badadanda and I was excited to see the three chariots and all the people around them. The excitement in the crowd, the chanting, the music and dance was a wonderful experience. I had a great view of Badadanda and I can never forget it," she recalled.

Citaristi feels that at a time like we are in we must find Jagannath in our hearts where he resides in all his glory. "It is a tragic period that we are going through right now. Jagannath comes out of the temple during the Rath Yatra and yet the devotees cannot go to him in these trying times of the pandemic. This is a painful moment but at the same time people must think about so many painful moments since last year when we were not able to reach our loved ones and relatives in times of need. We must think about and find Jagannath in our heart. It is only through our responsible behaviour, kindness, love and empathy that we can find Jagannath around us and within us." ■





JAGANNATH IN MOSCOW

I WORSHIP A SMALL WOODEN IDOL OF PATITA PAVAN JAGANNATH. OUR ENTIRE FAMILY OFFERS EVERYTHING WE COOK TO THE LORD. WHENEVER WE HAVE GUESTS WE OFFER THE SAME FOOD TO THEM AND THEY LOVE IT.
- NATALIA MILANOVA,
JGANNATH DEVOTEE



TIGERS IN CONTEMPORARY ODISHA

Famous tigers have played an undeniable role in connecting India's citizens directly with our wildlife and wildlife habitats. In some cases, like in the case of a conflict tiger in Maharashtra who received tremendous attention, the media and concerned citizens gave her a name, 'Avni', to draw attention and public empathy to her plight

BY ADITYA C. PANDA

We often hear of popular tigers from across India. They have names, personalities and are usually extensively filmed or photographed individual animals. There are superstars of national parks such as Ranthambhore's 'Machali', Pench's 'Collarwali', Kanha's 'Munna', Bandhavgarh's 'B2' and his father 'Charger', etc. This trend has caught on even in the South Indian national parks with the increasing visibility of tigers and leopards there. There is a trend of naming regularly seen tigers in areas that receive a chunk of India's wildlife tourism. Their lives are documented by tourists, researchers, park managers, etc., over the years. These chronicles in still and video images have taught us a lot about the lives of these elusive animals.

Whether tigers or any wild animal should be named or not, is an open debate. There are many downsides to anthropomorphising animals, as ascribing human-like personalities misinforms more than it informs. They certainly do not feel about us the same way we do about them and they couldn't care less about the names we give them. This is the natural course of life in the wild.

However in some cases, like in the case of a conflict tiger in Maharashtra who received tremendous attention, the media and concerned citizens gave her a name, 'Avni', to



draw attention and public empathy to her plight. A movie was recently made, loosely based on her story, called 'Sherni'. Yet, these famous tigers have played an undeniable role in connecting India's citizens directly with our wildlife and wildlife habitats. Thanks to these animals, citizens living far from India's remote forests care and speak up for animals that they might have 'met' and 'known' as individuals—be it on social media, through documentary films or in the flesh while on safari holidays in these regions which are flagships of India's wild-

life conservation.

WHY DON'T WE SEE SUCH A TREND IN ODISHA?

The state has lost its prominence of the 1970s and '80s as one of the top tiger states of India. In those decades, Odisha used to have well over three hundred tigers, but in the past decade, the state has consistently reported under 30 tigers. Odisha's forests then were rich in wildlife and had very few human habitations inside them in comparison to present day. Large scale mining, industry and infrastructure

projects had not yet intruded into the tiger landscapes at the scale at which they do today. To sustain big cats, the forests of the State had abundant prey like deer and wild pigs, which were not yet poached at the scale they were in the 1990s and 2000s. Through the nineties, there were also large-scale commercial poaching of tigers and leopards in the State. Currently the State does not have a single viable breeding population of tigers. As a result, besides 'Khairi' and 'Kanan'—both wild caught captive tigers—the individual lives of prac-

ROAR FOR SURVIVAL

ODISHA HAS LOST ITS PROMINENCE OF THE 1970S AND '80S AS ONE OF THE TOP TIGER STATES OF INDIA. ODISHA USED TO HAVE OVER THREE HUNDRED TIGERS

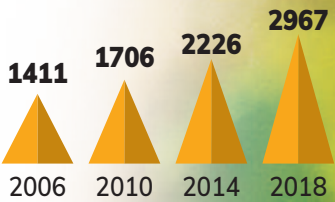


TIGER CENSUS 2018

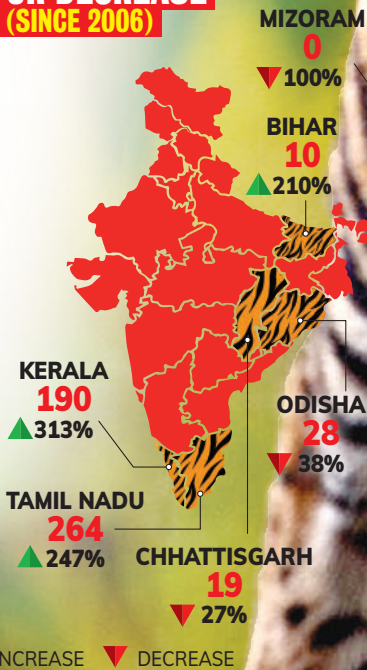
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IS THE TIGER
POPULATION IN INDIA

TIGERS IN INDIA 2006-2018



STATES TIGER POPULATION INCREASE OR DECREASE (SINCE 2006)



04 STATES WITH MORE
THAN 300 TIGERS

08 STATES WITH MORE
THAN 150 TIGERS
(INCLUDING ABOVE 4)

08 STATES WITH
MORE THAN 100%
TIGER POPULATION GROWTH
COMPARED TO 2006 CENSUS

313% INCREASE
IN TIGER
POPULATION IN KERALA SINCE
2006 CENSUS

0 NO TIGER WERE SPOTTED IN
MIZORAM STATE

0 BUXA, BAMPA & PALAMAU TR
HAS NO TIGER LEFT

33% INCREASE IN TOTAL
TIGER POPULATION
SINCE 2014 SINCE 2014 CENSUS

526 IS THE TOTAL
POPULATION OF TIGER IN
MP (MAXIMUM IN A STATE)

KEY FACTS

COMMON NAME:

BENGAL TIGER

SCIENTIFIC NAME:

PANTHERA TIGRIS

LENGH:

275-290CM (M),

260CM (F)

WEIGHT: **35-230 KG**



tically no other tiger is known of in the State.

In this piece here, we explore the lives of three tigers - significant in their own ways - in contemporary Odisha as they navigate their tryst with destiny in the State's tiger landscapes.

SUNDARI

'Sundari' was a tigress in Bandhavgarh Tiger Reserve in Madhya Pradesh. Born in 2015 to a famous tigress called 'Spotty'—a safari star in the Tala Range of the reserve—Sundari was one of three cubs, all female. Her sisters, 'Kajri' and 'Bhitri' continue to occupy parts of their mother's territory in the prey rich Tala area and are established, adult breeding tigresses now.

For Sundari, life had other plans. She was always the most adventurous of the three cubs. She started roaming away from her mother and sisters soon after turning a year old. Cubs usually stay with their mothers till about two years of age. But Sundari liked her space. She would wander by herself and get into frequent fights with her sisters. She routinely went into human habitation outside Tala and boldly killed cattle in daylight. She began maturing into a fine young tigress with tremendous promise for the future of Bandhavgarh.

About 700kms to the east of Bandhavgarh, another story was unfolding in the Satkosia Tiger Reserve, Odisha. Satkosia was notified as a tiger reserve only in 2007. By then, much of its tiger population had been exterminated. Comprising the Satkosia Gorge Wildlife Sanctuary and Baisipalli Wildlife Sanctuary that clothe both banks of River Mahanadi along the Satkosia Gorge, Satkosia Tiger Reserve is a very high quality tiger habitat. Unfortunately, most of the valleys in the reserve had been taken over by villages and agriculture through the 1980s and 90s. This had led to loss of natural grasslands and blanks that used to support large populations of chital or spotted deer. Besides the loss of habitat, illicit timber felling, large scale poaching of deer and wild pigs for bushmeat consumption were serious problems well into the early 2000s. All of this had meant that natural prey for tigers, leopards and wild dogs was in serious decline. With a poor prey base, tiger numbers began to rapidly



fall. The tigers that remained were forced to take to cattle killing, which had increased simultaneously with the human population, taking over natural habitat meant for wildlife. When tigers kill livestock, they are frequently poisoned by local people in retaliation. A lot of Satkosia's last few tigers are believed to have been lost this way.

With the tiger population of Satkosia Tiger Reserve down to a single, old tigress, alarm bells had begun to ring about the future of the big cat in the reserve around 2013. Gradually, efforts were made to improve management practices in the reserve. Protection was strengthened and staff shortages filled up. A village called Raigoda, in the core area of the reserve, opted for voluntary relocation. The relocation not only brought them closer to mainstream society and its economic and social benefits, it also freed up a large tract of habitat to return to wildlife. A grassland now occupies the paddy fields of Raigoda and large herds of chital deer graze there.

Once things began looking up at

Satkosia, the Government of Odisha along with the Government of Madhya Pradesh and under the guidance of the National Tiger Conservation Authority decided to take the bold step of reintroducing tigers in Satkosia. This would be India's first interstate tiger translocation programme. Under the programme, six tigers—three males and three females would be brought to Satkosia in a phased manner from tiger reserves of Madhya Pradesh and reintroduced to seed a new foundation population. Madhya Pradesh was chosen not just because it has enough tigers to spare, but also because Odisha's tiger landscapes being an extension of the Central India Tiger Landscape, it was best to get animals that were genetically closest to Odisha's original tigers.

In 2018, just before the monsoons would break, a young male tiger, about three years old, was translocated from Kanha Tiger Reserve to Satkosia. Known there as MB2 (Cub number 2 of the Mahabir Tigress), he was first kept in a 'soft release' enclosure at Satkosia to help him acclimate to the new habitat before complete release into the wild. He had a GPS collar fitted to help track his post release movements. He appeared to have settled in well and was even seen in the company of the Old Tigress of Satkosia, affectionately called Asha. He was hunting successfully and avoiding human occupied parts of the reserve. The park management, buoyed by this success, decided to expedite getting a second tiger. This time it was a young tigress. Bandhavgarh's Sundari was chosen to be Satkosia's tigress. At two and a half years old, she was at the right age for reintroduction. That is the age at which a young tigress sets out to establish her territory.

As with Mahabir, things initially seemed fine with Sundari. But something was off. She began frequenting the buffer area of the reserve and other parts where human occupation was high. Perhaps no one had given a thought to the fact that with Old Tigress holding fort over Satkosia's only undisturbed, prey-rich parts, Sundari would be chased out into the fringes. The male was easily accepted as a potential mate, but Sundari was competition to Old Tigress. Also, perhaps Sundari was the wrong choice of tiger for Satkosia. She was used



to roaming in human habitation in Bandhavgarh and killing livestock. That sort of behaviour would certainly not be easily accepted by the communities living in Satkosia who, for at least a couple of generations,

have forgotten what it was like to live with tigers. In Bandhavgarh, with its high tiger density and quick conflict redressal mechanisms, communities were a lot more tolerant of tigers amidst them.

In any case, Sundari was in trouble. With frequent interactions with humans, it wasn't long before she killed a human. Her first victim was accidental. A woman was crouched while washing in a jungle stream and was attacked by Sundari. Humans are not part of the natural diet of tigers. Tigers usually go out of their way to avoid humans and carry a deep fear of our species. But, as it happens in some cases, a human in a crouching or squatting position is sometimes mistaken for four legged prey by a stalking tiger. In such cases, as soon as the tiger realises that it has killed the hated biped form, it leaves the carcass. That is exactly what Sundari did. But her fate was sealed. Local people were furious. They attacked forest department staff and property and held a dharna on the national

highway connecting Cuttack and Sambalpur.

It wasn't long before Sundari killed her second human victim. This time, it was clear that she needed to be captured and put back in the enclosure. She spent over 30 months in it. After great deliberation, it was decided that the best course of action for her would be to send her back to Madhya Pradesh where she is now kept in the tiger rewilding enclosure at Ghorela, Kanha Tiger Reserve. Mahabir, the male, was killed in an unfortunate way when he was caught in an illegal snare trap set by a poacher.

Satkosia is now back to square one with just one remaining tiger. But, this time, the park management and the State Wildlife Wing have some crucial, though very expensive lessons that the experiment with Sundari and Mahabir taught. There is no question that tigers must and will be re-established at Satkosia. Now, it is important that due attention be given while at it to protection, creation of safe and human-habitation free habitats and also to invest in tiger tracking and monitoring capacities of the reserve's frontline staff.

ASHA/ BUDHI BAGHUNI (OLD TIGRESS)

For the first time she was camera trapped in 2011. That was the first ever camera-trapping exercise in the then recently declared Satkosia Tiger Reserve (2007). Till date, she remains the only tiger camera-trapped in Satkosia. That is the tragedy of her life. By the time Satkosia was declared a tiger reserve, its tiger population had gone down drastically—beyond the point of no return. By the time the first camera traps were set out, she was perhaps the only remaining tiger in these forests of the Mahanadi.

For a short period in 2018-19, two other tigers, translocated from Madhya Pradesh's Kanha and Bandhavgarh tiger reserves, were sharing her landscape. But, due to unfortunate reasons the male from Kanha was killed in a wire snare set up by a poacher. The female, Sundari, who submitted to Asha's dominance over the undisturbed, prey rich parts of the reserve, was forced to roam in the human dominated areas and needed to be captured after she killed two people. Sundari was returned to Madhya Pradesh last year and Asha,



or Budhi Baghuni, the Old Tigress, remains the only tiger left in Satkosia. She could be called, what in conservation terms is known as an 'endling'. The last surviving individual of a species. As far as Satkosia

is concerned, she is certainly an endling.

But, it's not for nothing that she is sometimes called 'Asha', or hope. With management practices at Satkosia Tiger Reserve under con-

stant improvement, voluntary village relocation making more prime habitat available for wildlife and improvement in protection, great efforts are being put into setting the stage for the return of a breeding tiger population. If the tiger reintroduction exercise can be resumed soon enough, there is a slim chance that Asha might find a mate again and, perhaps a slimmer chance that she might bless Satkosia with her cubs. If that happens, not only will her species get a new lease of life in Satkosia, the bloodline of Satkosia's original tigers will be saved forever.

NANDAN

In October 2012, a tiger sighting was reported near Khuntuni, close to the Cuttack - Sambalpur highway. Initially, it was dismissed as a

rumour. Soon, however, undeniable evidence emerged in the shape of pugmarks in the area. Over the course of the following months, the tiger appeared and disappeared. Evidence would appear, sometimes days, sometimes weeks apart, and then the tiger would seem to vanish. This started happening across Dhenkanal and Cuttack districts. Elephant trackers of the Athagarh Forest Division saw the tiger crossing a narrow road near Mundali and heading towards River Mahanadi. If the tiger would cross the river, Chandaka - Dampara Wildlife Sanctuary was just beyond the opposite bank. Sure enough, some days later firewood collectors from the villages inside Chandaka reported seeing a tiger! It even killed a cow inside the sanctuary. This was the first recorded tiger in Chandaka since the 1960s!

Clearly, this was a dispersing male tiger, young and in his prime, looking to establish his territory in a forest rich in prey and tigresses. Would he find such a forest? It was totally unlikely. Chandaka did not have any tigresses, nor did Kapilash Wildlife Sanctuary nearby. The tiger wouldn't go to Satkosia—100kms as the crow flies—as he most likely originated from there and must have had his reasons for leaving. Satkosia was bereft of any breeding population of tigers. By now this tiger's progress across the human dominated landscape between Satkosia and Bhubaneswar, had become apparent: the tiger would most likely land up at Nandankanan Zoo, sensing the presence of its population of captive tigresses. Nandankanan, after all, shared a boundary with Chandaka.

Sure enough, on the evening of Makar Sankranti (January), 2013, the tiger visited a private farm house near Nandankanan. For three months after that first detection within Bhubaneswar city, the tiger remained in the vicinity of the zoo. He was constantly exploring the area, even crossing the busy NH-5 near Janla before returning back to Nandankanan Wildlife Sanctuary. Once in a while he would be seen by truck drivers along the Barang-Chandaka route. But most of the time he managed to remain undetected. He was likely feeding off the spotted deer and wild pigs that inhabit the area. There wasn't a single reported case of attacks on humans or livestock.



The tiger was doing what tigers do best in human dominated landscapes—remaining low profile, avoiding conflict, surviving. He was set on avoiding humans and finding habitat with tigresses.

One of the zoo tigresses perhaps came into oestrus around that time. The tiger began hanging around her enclosure. By then he had been captured on camera traps set by the zoo authorities and was regularly caught on CCTV security cameras as well. That's when the zoo authorities decided to bait him and trap him. He was lured into

one of the enclosures. The gates were shut. But he was a wild tiger. He wouldn't take well to captivity. In no time the tiger had scaled the 14ft fence of the enclosure and was out again! Sadly for him, the lure of tigresses was too hard to resist and he continued to occupy the area. He was captured again, this time he was kept in an enclosure that was better secured.

This sort of capture was totally against every law and policy of wildlife conservation. A healthy, wild tiger that was not engaged in any conflict with humans cannot

be captured in India and certainly not for the purpose of being kept in a zoo. Such animals are of priceless conservation value and every effort must be made to keep them in the wild, in natural habitat so that they can continue to serve their ecological function. Wildlife conservationists were outraged at this and demanded that he be released. The National Tiger Conservation Authority advised the State government to have the tiger fitted with a GPS tracking collar and released in Satkosia or Similipal tiger reserves. Satkosia was on the verge of local tiger extinction. Similipal has now been recommended for artificial tiger supplementation because of the paucity of breeding male tigers in its population. Some adamant, influential officers from the zoo administration, however, refused to part with an animal that they believed was of more use for zoo breeding!

Thus, a fine wild tiger, unimaginatively named 'Nandan' was touted as "voluntarily" joining the zoo. A similar line had been touted in the 1960s when Chandaka's last wild tigress (called 'Kanan') had jumped into a moated enclosure to join a male tiger for mating when she didn't find one in the wild—unwittingly trapping herself for life.

Nandan now languishes in the zoo. His spirit nearly broken as noisy tourists stare and scream at him. He has fathered cubs, though. Cubs who will continue to languish in zoos. Nandan would have been far more useful to the purpose of tiger conservation had he fathered cubs in Satkosia or Similipal. This, especially so when Odisha now has barely only a single viable tiger population left: Similipal. Even that population might not survive long without artificial supplementation of tigers from Central India, as has been recommended by the report of the All India Tiger Estimation Exercise, 2018. ■

The author is a well-known wildlife conservationist and naturalist. He currently serves as Honorary Wildlife Warden, Angul District. Professionally he operates and leads wildlife photography and safari operations across India. To know more about him, visit www.adityapanda.in

(Photos By - Andy Parkinson, National Geographic Photographer)

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DELIVERY AGENTS: UNSUNG HEROES OF THE PANDEMIC

They create a sense of normalcy during the lockdown when all activities come to a grinding halt. In these difficult times when the general public is being forced to live indoors, these unsung heroes are braving the Sun and rain besides COVID 19 to make sure that people get all their wants and needs

BY AFREEN FIRDAUS

AS COVID 19 sweeps through the State, the delivery agents have proved to be a lifeline for people stuck inside their homes due to restrictions on outdoor activities. Pushed to the frontlines of the pandemic, the agents have become a kind of first responders, playing a vital role in ensuring that food and other essentials like groceries and medicines are delivered at people's doorsteps.

Putting their safety at risk, agents of app-based food delivery services like Swiggy and Zomato drive around the cities to fill a void in our lives left by the deadly coronavirus.

They create a sense of normalcy during the lockdown when all activities come to a grinding halt. In these difficult times when the general public is being forced to live indoors, these unsung heroes are braving the Sun and rain besides COVID 19 to make sure that people get all their wants and needs.

But this is a dangerous undertaking. As part of their job, these guys interact with numerous people, from customers, security guards to restaurant staff. They face almost the same risk of exposure to the infection like healthcare workers. My City Links caught up with a few delivery agents to know about the nature of their work besides fears and hopes during the pandemic.

IMPACT OF THE LOCKDOWN

The COVID 19 lockdown has lim-

ited the movement of people outside the safety of their homes. People increasingly strive to maintain control on hygiene by limiting the things that come inside their homes. Hence, the pandemic and lockdown has had a negative impact on the online food delivery business. There was a fall in the number of orders when total lockdown came into effect. The highly infectious nature of the virus made people wary of ordering food from outside and sticking to home-cooked meals.

Sunil Hota, a food delivery personnel of Zomato, said he has been working for nearly 15 hours a day since March, 2020. "There has only been a marginal decline in the number of orders due to the pandemic. The change is not that drastic. Earlier, I was delivering

about 25 orders to customers on a daily basis. Now, it is 21 orders a day. So the gap isn't much. I am content with my work and pay," he informed. A graduate, Sunil used to work in a garage before deciding to switch to this job as it promised him a salary of Rs.15,000.

RISKS INVOLVED

Both Zomato and Swiggy expanded their operations by including delivery of groceries and vegetables during the lockdown. Some customers were wise enough to opt for contactless delivery and asked the agents to deliver the food at their doorstep. But many customers are not aware of the contactless delivery option available on the app and hence, the agents have to hand their orders to them in person. Besides, the delivery personnel

come in contact with several people at the restaurants. While some restaurants have sanitisers for delivery agents, many don't provide such luxury.

On the other hand, the workload of agents has increased with the addition of groceries to the delivery list. In the process, they often encounter challenges like unpleasant attitudes of customers and harassment by police personnel.

"Initially, it was a tough task to explain the nature of our job to police personnel. We were stopped at frequent intervals and for a longer period as the policemen checked our identity cards and asked us many questions. This delayed our delivery. But now, that has changed. People recognise and respect us for being outside during the surge in infections to fulfill the needs of people," said Ashok Mohanty, a delivery valet with Swiggy who was the owner of a roadside stall before the lockdown.

CUSTOMER ATTITUDE

"Many customers are not mindful of the pandemic and their demands are rather careless. Recently, I went to deliver a food packet to a customer who insisted that I go to his flat's entrance rather than taking it from the apartment gate. I requested him to pick up the order from the security guard at the main entrance as he was under home quarantine but he became rude and forced me to come in contact. Such behaviour increases the chances of transmission of the virus," said Vijay Kumar, a diamond valet of Zomato.

What irks many delivery personnel is people continuing to buy non-essential items in the middle of the pandemic. "It is our job and we are happy to help people in times of a crisis like this. But we get orders for one juice or a dessert. We hope that people stick to the most essentials at least during this time. Though we are equally paid for such orders, it is just not right to be delivering these luxurious commodities when someone somewhere might be in need of basic household items," said Soheli Khan, a delivery agent working with Swiggy.

He, however, admits that customers have been quite generous while tipping. "Several customers offer us drinks, give us masks,



a snack or essential items for our households. It goes a long way in making us feel nice," Soheli said.

PRECAUTIONS

The restaurants screen the body temperature of all team members and riders on a daily basis. The delivery agents are instructed to wear masks at all times and sanitise their hands regularly. Mandatory hand washing and sanitisation process is practised to contain the virus. Stringent hygiene of the valets as well as the delivery bags is ensured. The same is reflected on the app to guarantee the customers. The valets opt for a contactless delivery of orders, either at the doorstep or

with the security guard of the colony. Online payment gateways instead of cash on delivery option are preferred to ensure social distancing and contactless delivery.

PERKS

Swiggy has provided insurance for workers in case they test positive for COVID 19. However, this insurance coverage is of little help to workers given their past experience in trying to use accidental insurance.

The insurance claim is a rather complicated and unsuccessful process which has led to workers resorting to pooling in money to help cover coworkers' medical expenses in case of accidents at work.

Companies have provided masks and sanitisers and even celebrated delivery 'partners' as heroes. The government has recognised their work and even arranged for an exclusive vaccination drive for all the delivery valets. "This was

a great step by the government. It helped us get the vaccine easily without any hassle over available slots and waiting in long queues. It is in fact encouraging for all of us on being recognised for our job, which was earlier considered menial," said Ashok.

CHALLENGES

When working from home and practicing social distancing have become the order of the day to protect oneself and others from COVID 19, delivery agents are moving around the city to cater to the needs of people. "It is frightening to go out during such times. My wife and mother are very anxious about my job. But one has to fill the stomach as well. It is terrifying to put our family at risk due to the nature of our job," said a valet.

The delivery agent further informed that his landlord warned him to throw him out of the house if he stepped out to work. So he had to send his family to his village and rent a separate room for himself. In this time of crisis, the delivery workers are helping people to keep going by ensuring supply of essentials during the lockdown. Their service indeed makes them unsung heroes of the pandemic. ■





Unlike Eid-ul-Fitr, Eid-ul-Zuha is a solemn occasion when all Muslims are reminded of the importance of 'qurbani'. The willingness of Prophet Ibrahim to sacrifice the thing most dear to him, his first-born son Ismail, to a command of Allah, is a day of remembrance for all Muslims

LET'S RELIVE
Eid-ul-Zuha
WITH VIGNETTES
FROM THE PAST



BY AFREEN FIRDAUS



FOR Muslims across the globe, Eid is a time of happiness and merriment. The very idea of 'going home', which is synonymous to native place or village, during the festival is evocative and triggers many emotions in people living in cities for most part of the year. It brings along a myriad of memories associated with the time spent with loved ones and the gastronomical delights that come with the festivities. But with the pandemic playing a spoilsport to all our plans, many of us are already feeling nostalgic for life before the COVID 19 era.



VIGNETTES FROM THE PAST

Unlike Eid-ul-Fitr, Eid-ul-Zuha is a solemn occasion when all Muslims are reminded of the importance of 'qurbani'. The willingness of Prophet Ibrahim to sacrifice the thing most dear to him, his first-born son Ismail, to a command of Allah, is a day of remembrance for all Muslims. This day also marks the culmination of the annual Hajj pilgrimage, which is one of the five pillars of Islam. On this day, people hear of relatives and friends who are on their Hajj. Unfortunately Hajj has been suspended for everyone except the citizens of Saudi Arabia because of the pandemic.

While Eid-ul Fitr celebrates the occasion to partake of the bounty that Allah granted after a month of abstinence and introspection, Eid-ul-Zuha reminds Muslims of the importance of qurbani as well as patience and constancy, the hallmarks of a true believer. On this day, Prophet Ibrahim's obedience and willingness is commemorated by an act of sacrificing an animal such as a goat or sheep or camel and then distributing the meat among the poor, family and friends.

EIDGAH

The day begins with the men going to congregational prayers in an Eidgah, while the women pray at homes. The Eid namaz is followed by a special khutbah (sermon) by the maulvi. This is followed by customary Eid greetings and embracing three times. Then the men usually go to graveyards to offer prayers to the dead and departed ancestors.

THE SACRIFICE

Usually purchased a month or two before Eid, the animal to be sacrificed is fed well and taken good care of. On the D-day, the sacrifice is performed as early as possible. Its meat is divided into three equal parts:

one for the poor and needy, one for friends and neighbours and a third for one's own self. While the men and boys laze around, drink tea and go visiting soon after the qurbani, the women's work begins.

Keeping a watchful eye on the proceedings, ensuring that the butcher has cut the meat as needed, dividing the meat with mathematical precision, wrapping the apportioned pieces in packets for distri-

and then taking up the humongous task of cooking the many delicacies that are Eid favourites, it is a long day for women.



DELICACIES

The first of the many Eid dishes to tickle one's palate is always the roasted kaleji, the goat's liver cooked in a pungent sauce and redolent with robust flavors. What follows is a day of relentless binge eating. Having had one's fill of whatever has been cooked in one's immediate family, one embarks on a gastronomic journey to the entire neighborhood that has many known and unknown delights. The biryani, kebabs, paya, akhra and sewaiyan are some of the delicacies one gets to gorge on during the house-hopping adventure.



In view of the deadly second COVID 19 wave, Eid-ul-Zuha, which is expected to fall on July 20, will remain a low-key affair this year as well. There will be no mass prayers and sacrifice of animals will be strictly regulated. ■



Soumya, who initially worked as a manager for Sustainability and Environment at Unilever, realised that the planet, which is currently witnessing rampant pollution, needed attention. She came up with the idea of eliminating plastic and other harmful materials from daily usage and replacing it with more biodegradable and eco-friendly options. This resulted in All That Grass



BY AFREEN FIRDAUS

HAND crafted and sustainable products made of natural fibres are a celebrated and sought-after commodity not only in India but across the globe. The iridescent textiles and meaningful motifs woven by rural artisans of India tickle the fancy of many aesthetes. Owing to the demand and love for the products, 'All That Grass', an online arts and crafts store, has come up in Bhubaneswar. This sustainable and eco-friendly start-up has also been recognised by the Government of Odisha. The sale of merchandise commenced in 2019 with an aim to bridge the gap between manufacturers and consumers, thereby reducing the exorbitant prices because of the middlemen involved.

Founders of the start-up Soumya Pati, Bhabatosh Pati and Bishnu Charan work with a motto of 3Ps

ALL THAT Grass IS ALL THAT'S SUSTAINABLE



- People, Planet and Profit to cater to the needs of people without hampering the planet and at the same time earning enough to keep the venture going. Serving clients across the globe, this trio of young professionals and academicians has reshaped online business with an environment friendly approach.

Soumya, who initially worked as a manager for Sustainability and Environment at Unilever, realised that the planet, which is currently witnessing rampant pollution, needed attention. She came up with the idea of eliminating plastic and other harmful materials from daily usage and replacing

it with more biodegradable and eco-friendly options. "The name All That Grass adheres to the variety of grasses (fibres) used in the manufacturing of our products. It served the purpose without causing any ill effects to the environment," she said.

Co-founder Bhabatosh believes



that doing business responsibly and successfully are two sides of the same coin. "We believe that doing good for the environment and people around you is the way forward for any business these days. We integrate the artistic skills of artisans with our modern designing and marketing skills, thereby making these art forms suitable to the taste of the present day consumers. Sustainability is central to our business strategy and all our products are made of natural fibres," he informed.

Working on more than 15 varieties of fibres in different clusters across India, All That Grass has become a hit among many government organisations along with retail clientele like Reserve Bank of India (RBI), United Commercial Bank (UCO bank), State Level Bankers' Committee (SLBC), TATA Power, Wadhvani Group, Nirmalya Labs Private Limited and many more.

"We work with artisans and self-help groups (SHGs) directly, skipping the middlemen. This not only

helps in making the products affordable but also ensures their quality. In each of these clusters, our point of contact (POC) ensures availability of raw materials to our artisans, majority of whom are women. This ensures that artisans do not run around for raw materials but focus on their core job. The ar-

isans work from their homes and our POC collects the finished goods and sends these to our warehouse for quality check and further processing. We believe in deep rooted relationships with our artisans which in turn results in strong personal loyalties," said Soumya.

The COVID 19 pandemic has adversely affected almost all business ventures and the vocation of artisans is no exception. Because of slump in demand as well as scarce availability of raw materials, the textile industry has been badly hit. This has led to serious sustenance problems for artisans. To overcome the crisis, the All That Grass team is or-

ganising a fundraiser in collaboration with Fab India and few other brands to help the artisans get back on their feet.

Sharing his experience of working with All That Grass, Biswajit Dutta, an artisan from Medinipur, West Bengal said, "I have been working with the team for the last two years and it has been really worthwhile. They have helped me and my fellow artisans and weavers to come out of the financial and economic crisis during the pandemic. It is a great innovative platform which cuts unnecessary costs that come with various layers between us and the consumers."

What sets All That Grass apart from the competitors is its modus operandi which encourages dealing in 100 percent natural (including azo-free colours), bio-degradable and unique products. Natural fibres from across the globe are used in lifestyle products to suit the taste of modern-day consumers. "They are suited for the conscious consumers who wish to eliminate plastic and other hazardous materials from their lifestyle. Some of our unique products are table runners made from banana fibres, yoga mats made from darbha grass and many more. Through our intervention, we have ensured products with high quality and modern design. This has resulted in higher selling value of these traditional products which are also the highest rated on the platforms we do our trading on," Soumya added.

The most-loved products of All That Grass are laptop bags made out of banana fibres, kauna cane handle organiser, sabai wall baskets, sabai laundry bags and cane mirrors to name a few. One can buy their products through their Instagram handle, website or on online shopping platforms like Amazon, LBB and Loopify. Though the venture is based in Bhubaneswar, it also operates in West Bengal, Manipur, Jammu and Kashmir, Tamil Nadu and Haryana.

From connecting artisans across the country with different parts of the globe to resolving financial woes of weavers, the trio of All That Grass has come a long way in helping the environment by encouraging sustainable and eco-friendly alternatives. As patrons of art, they have managed to strike a delicate balance between tradition and modern art. ■

BY AFREEN FIRDAUS

Rebati: A Literary Legacy For Women's Rights

FAKIR Mohan Senapati — the father of modern Odia literature — worked with a reformist zeal to pen Rebati, representing women's fate and society's ambivalent attitude towards them.

Published in 1898, Rebati is considered as the first short story in Odia language. It's truly iconic as the subject of women's right to education and its sensitive treatment laid the literary foundation for a crop of women writers in Odia such as Sarala Devi, Kuntala Kumari Sabat and Kokila Devi among others.

EMPOWERING TALE

The story revolves around a 10-year-old girl named Rebati living at Patapur village in Cuttack district. The girl harbours the "forbidden desire" to study in a conservative rural setting, which is also hit by a deadly epidemic of cholera. A tale of empowerment and progressiveness, Rebati's desire for education is born out of two patriarchal figures in her life — her father, Shyambandhu Mohanty and potential

Fakir Mohan Senapati's iconic short story questioned the social prejudice against women's education of his time. Though almost written 125 years ago, the story continues to echo a sensitive issue in modern times: Have women in rural India overcome the constraints faced by Rebati or are they still fighting for their rights?

husband Basudev.

Rebati's parents, especially her father, were visionary enough to favour her education. On the other hand, the girl's grandmother was



sceptical and totally against the idea. Besides talking about women education in a conservative society, the story opens another dimension when it talks about the bond between Rebati and a school teacher.

The story leads on to the death of Rebati's father, depriving the household, and eventually to the girl's demise. For the conservative and superstitious grandmother, this seems like "divine wrath" invit-



ed by the singular act of educating a girl. She rants: “Rebati! Reba! You are fire that turns all to ashes.”

This is the ironic highlight of the story. It reads like a cautionary tale against allowing the female agency to be educated, lest it should spell doom and disaster. On another level, it’s a progressive story that exposes social stereotypes against women. In this, Rebati stands as an iconic feminist figure and a symbol for female emancipation.

ACROSS THE WORLD

Fakir Mohan was indeed ahead of



his time. The social issues he wrote about were controversial and yet ignited the readers' thoughts against social injustices. On the

THE SOCIAL ISSUES FAKIR MOHAN WROTE ABOUT WERE CONTROVERSIAL AND YET IGNITED THE READERS' THOUGHTS AGAINST SOCIAL INJUSTICES IN HIS TIME

102nd death anniversary of the literary giant on June 14, 2021, Dhauli Books published a book titled 'Rebati: Speaking in Tongues', which features translations of the story by acclaimed authors in 36

languages.

This covers 23 scheduled languages and two non-scheduled languages of India and 12 foreign languages such as German, Japanese, Russian, French, Spanish, Polish, Hebrew, Turkish, Sinhalese, Balochi, Uzbek and Pujabi-Shahamukhi besides Nepali. According to the anthology’s editor, Manu Dash, this is the first such attempt in publishing history. It was compiled to target readers and students of comparative world literature.

“This anthology is indeed a veritable collectors’ item. It is an attempt to express my fervent desire to showcase the rich legacy of Odia literature in the national and international arenas. Odia literature needs to be popularised,” Dash said. “Fakir Mohan wrote on women’s issues much before Munshi Premchand came into the picture, but he did not get the recognition he deserved. And also Rebati is the first short story that revolved around an epidemic as well.

“For a writer and his works to be known and enjoyed globally, translations remove the limitations of language and connects people,” he added. The renowned short story was also adapted as a 12-episode serial by Tarang TV in 2017. ■



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ODISHA'S SLEEPWEAR FASHION GETS A MAKEOVER BY

Taking advantage of the State's transforming fashionscape, Diksha Bhanja and her friend Rajan Surana have come up with 'Label DIRA', a start-up dealing with designer sleepwear

DIRA

BY PRACHURYA NANDA

FASHION in Odisha has undergone a sea change in the last several decades. Earlier, the fashion trends were limited to traditional wear like Sarees, Dhoti, Kurta and Gamucha during festivities and celebrations. But over the years, western clothing has found acceptance among people, especially in towns and cities. From Salwar Kameez to denims to high street fashion, people of Odisha have adopted the evolving trends. Taking advantage of the State's transforming fashionscape, Diksha Bhanja and her friend Rajan Surana have come up with 'Label DIRA', a start-up dealing with designer sleepwear.

Fashion designer turned entrepreneur Diksha said, "Both of us love shopping for sleepwear and we realised that our market was missing quality sleepwear that was youthful, chic and affordable. There were either the dreaded nighties or revealing lingerie. This was when we decided to launch DIRA. With our start-up, we hope to fill this gap in the market. Our label has something for everyone in any age group, starting from handmade cotton pajamas, to ones made

from imported poplin, lounging shorts, or beautifully tailored PJ sets."

Unlike other States which are familiar with the concept of night suits, people of Odisha have still not accepted it. A lot of people still prefer T-shirts and pants over PJs. "We knew that not many brands were providing premium nightwear at such a reasonable price. DIRA has been able to increase its presence on social media and celebrities like Sulagna Panigrahi and Sidharth Batra have promoted the brand on their Instagram handles. We've received an overwhelming response from across the country since the launch of our brand. Besides, the local response has been positive too," she informed.

Many night suit brands are available online. What makes DIRA different from those available online?

"Our fabrics are thoroughly scrutinised to provide sleep ritual which has no signs of discomfort along with

gender neutral pieces and unique prints. The clothes are locally made





in smaller batches, which leads to better quality products. The packaging boxes are made of 100% recycled paper that also tends to be ethical and sustainable. Our homegrown label uses local talent and the products are handmade and hence, have better finish and artistry," Diksha said.

Both Diksha and Rajan are planning to grow their business by adding different kinds of apparels and not just restricting themselves to nightwear. "We will be launching A-line of unisex shirts soon. In fact,



People of Odisha have put their faith in Dira but we want more people to accept the brand. It's always great to try something that has been locally made.

DIKSHA BHANJA
APPAREL DESIGNER

our upcoming collection will see kimonos, palazzos and shirt dresses as well. Though our label will always have nightwear, we also intend to make robes, camisoles, and a wide range of loungewear that can be worn outside the confines of your home," she said.

Supporting a local business can help discover some great products and services while building a strong and successful community around the brand. "People of Odisha have put their faith in Dira but we want more people to accept the brand. It's always great to try something that has been locally made and since we are a homegrown brand, it gives us a sense of pride when we see our people supporting us as a local brand," Diksha added. ■

AVOID NEGATIVE NEWS TO KEEP PANDEMIC STRESS AT BAY

BY SHEELA PATTANAYAK

My City Links caught up with renowned doctor Suvendu Narayan Mishra to know more about the psychological impact of COVID 19 and the ways to deal with it

CCOVID 19 has upended all aspects of our lives in unprecedented ways. The pandemic has not only taken a toll on the physical health of people but also impacted their mental well-being. Trapped within the confines of their homes due to restrictions on outdoor activities, many people are suffering from anxiety, fear, panic and desperation. These symptoms are prevalent in all age groups, be it children, adults or elderly persons; the situation is only getting worse as the cases surge. So in these difficult times, it is important to take care of our mental health and adopt healthy ways to cope with the pandemic stress.

My City Links caught up with renowned doctor Suvendu Narayan Mishra to know more about the psychological impact of COVID 19 and the ways to deal with it.

EXCERPTS FROM THE INTERVIEW:

WHICH IS THE CRUCIAL STAGE IN DEPRESSION?

Initial days are the most crucial period, both for the patient and the doctor. During this period, a patient acts normal excluding some minor changes in the behaviour. So it is important to detect the signs of depression early and treat the patients accordingly. It is the responsibility of family members to spot the symptoms of depression in a patient and talk to a doctor at the earliest. Early diagnosis and treatment can save a patient.

WHAT WOULD BE YOUR SUGGESTIONS TO AVOID DEPRESSION DURING THE PANDEMIC?

The main reason behind stress is the fear of being affected by COVID 19 or losing someone in the family or friends to the virus. The fear and anxiety increases every time one hears the news of some acquaint-

tance dying from COVID 19. This leads to depression, the symptoms of which are breathlessness, dry throat, cardiac issues and suffocation. Those who have lost their near and dear ones are likely to suffer from depression. But the constant news of patients succumbing to the virus leads to anxiety and phobia in many people.

The first thing people should do is to avoid any covid related news or that which has negative impact on the mind. It is important to do physical exercise or take a morning walk as it is beneficial. People should avoid taking a nap in the afternoon and stop consuming substances during depression and anxiety. In the evening, people should watch comedy shows to keep the negativity at bay. These habits help in bringing a positive change both in the mind and body.

It is being said that kids are more vulnerable to the third covid wave. Besides, children are also suffering from anxiety due to prolonged confinement in homes.

WHAT ARE THE SAFETY MEASURES PARENTS CAN TAKE TO IMPROVE THE MENTAL HEALTH OF THEIR KIDS?

It is just an intuition that kids will be the worst affected in the third wave of the pandemic but not fully true. The logic behind this apprehension is that by the time the third wave comes, most of the adults would have been vaccinated and only the kids will be left.

It is true that many kids are struggling with mental health issues during the pandemic. The reason is



the restrictions on outdoor activities. Besides, as classroom studies have been suspended, children are attending online classes and in the process are spending more time in the digital world. This is not good for their mental health.

In the prevailing situation, parents should carefully observe the behaviour of their children and monitor their daily activities. If any symptoms like irritation, anger and laziness are detected in kids, parents should immediately consult with a doctor. Timely detection of the symptoms is important as it will enable doctors to start treatment early and cure a patient.

And treatment does not always mean taking medicines or visiting a doctor. We can also start treatment at our homes. In the case of children, we have to spend more time with them and involve them in tasks like painting, yoga, craft, etc. Parents should try to keep them away from smartphones and television. We should also follow proper food habits as this gives positive vibes and helps maintain a

good mental health. All these are part of home treatment. This is a very crucial time for kids and we have to be more careful while dealing with them.

ARE PEOPLE SUFFERING FROM DEPRESSION AT A HIGHER RISK OF CATCHING THE VIRUS?

Actually, mental health controls our immune system in some ways. If a person gets mentally depressed, his/ her daily routine like sleeping and eating habits will be affected. Therefore, their immunity will decrease and they may be easily infected by covid.

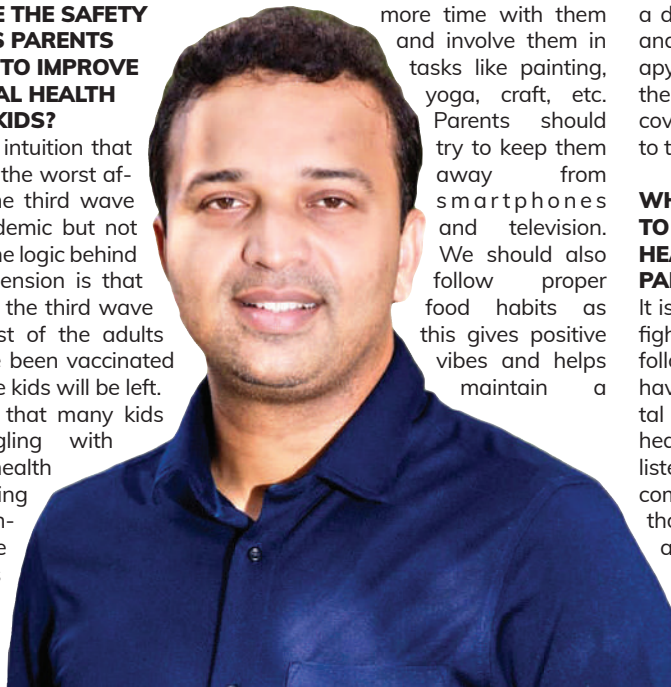
THESE DAYS, ANXIETY AND DEPRESSION ARE INCREASINGLY FOUND AMONG PATIENTS WHO HAVE RECOVERED FROM COVID 19. WHAT IS THE TREATMENT IN SUCH CASES?

Post covid depression cases have increased by 20-30 percent. Generally, covid recovered patients' lungs are compromised and they get tired easily. Hence, they suffer from anxiety frequently. Besides, after spending time in isolation during their treatment in hospitals, patients experience loneliness. This also affects their mental health.

Such cases need to be treated immediately. We should consult a doctor and counsel the patients and treat them with proper therapy. If required, we have to give them medicines because post-covid depression may cause harm to them.

WHAT WOULD YOU SUGGEST TO MAINTAIN GOOD MENTAL HEALTH DURING THE PANDEMIC?

It is a challenging time but we can fight and defeat the pandemic by following covid appropriate behaviour. To maintain good mental health, we have to stick to a healthy diet, do yoga regularly, and listen to soothing music or watch comedy shows to avoid negative thoughts. Besides, we should stay away from all the negative news and rumours. ■



After graduating from NIFT in 2013, Sujit took a keen interest in the work of the artisans and weavers of Odisha and wished to represent their work at an international level in a way that they could be benefitted

BY AFREEN FIRDAUS

THE handloom of Odisha is no alien to handloom lovers across the globe. Its fame has reached far and wide and has seen it flourish on a global stage. In yet another proud moment for Odisha, Sujit Meher, a Bengaluru based Odia designer has branded Odia handloom at the international level. For his promotion of the exquisite handlooms, he has been awarded with the 'Best Designer For Social Impact' award by Star India recently. My City Links got into a candid chat with the awardee.

"This award is given to people who are doing something worthwhile in any field of art, science, literature, medicine or social work which benefits the society in some way. Any work that impacts the society positively as a whole," informed Sujit. "I have been awarded for promoting the handloom, textile and designs of rural Odisha," he added.

After graduating from NIFT in 2013, Sujit took a keen interest in the work of the artisans and weavers of Odisha and wished to represent their work at an international level in a way that they could be benefitted. Belonging to the Meher community, who are basically the creators of handloom, he takes it upon himself to take the tradition of his forefathers ahead. "Meher's are confined mostly to western Odisha and being a son of this community, I aim to take handloom to a top notch level and create a new revolution in this sector."

The award ceremony was scheduled in April 2020, in Mumbai, but due to the new normal brought about by the pandemic, it was held virtually recently. His brand, Tilot-

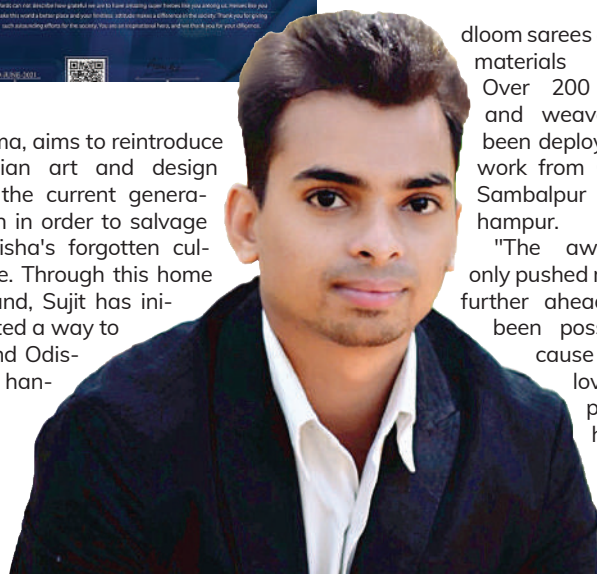
Odia Boy Takes Odisha Handloom To The World



I have already started experimenting on the designs in my mind and what I really want. I am already in talks with a couple of handloom designers across the State, from Berhampur, Gopalpur, Nuapatna and Sambalpur

SUJIT MEHER
APPAREL DESIGNER

tama, aims to reintroduce Indian art and design to the current generation in order to salvage Odisha's forgotten culture. Through this home brand, Sujit has initiated a way to send Odisha hand-



loom sarees and dress materials abroad. Over 200 artisans and weavers have been deployed in the work from Gopalpur, Sambalpur and Berhampur.

"The award has only pushed my dream further ahead. It has been possible because of the love that people have for Odisha

and its handloom. The artisans make the designs and send them to me in Bengaluru. My expert team then stitches the materials into clothes of different designs and makes them into sarees and dresses to send them abroad including the US, Dubai and some European countries. I have a vision to adopt the same fabric into modern trendy clothes and attract the younger generations mostly. Gen Z is very influential and that's my target audience," he informed.

On being asked about his future plans in Odisha, he revealed that he has been planning and working on designing wedding attires using the handlooms of Odisha. "I have already started experimenting on the designs in my mind and what I really want. I am already in talks with a couple of handloom designers across the State, from Berhampur, Gopalpur, Nuapatna and Sambalpur. I have also roped in a few artisans from Rajasthan to train around 15 women of the Kalahandi district in stone work," he further added.

Belonging to Kalahandi, Odisha, Sujit has taken upon himself to promote his handloom heritage globally. "I want to shift my work base to Odisha so that more Odias can be a part of my work. This way there will be proper marketing and outsourcing of their work. Odisha is losing its own identity. Its traditions, designs, art, heritage and crafts are vanishing day by day because of rapid industrialization. So as a designer, I have to emphasize on the craftsmanship of India and bring a new evolution in Indian designs," he signed off.

Besides being a visionary designer, Sujit is also a multi-talented person who is a good orator, motivational speaker, writer and a storyteller, who has penned a best-selling novel in 2015, titled 'Dreams Beyond Grades' that talks about his own journey from rags to riches. A role model for many, he considers himself to be a designer for a cause. ■

Odia Girl Only Finalist From India In Blackswan Audition

Meet Shreya Lenka, a 17-year-old lass, who is the only Indian to have been among the top 23 finalists selected by DR Music for the fifth member of the dance group Blackswan. My City Links got into a groove with this chirpy terpsichorean and vocalist to know all about her recent gig

BY AFREEN FIRDAUS

THE saying 'adversity makes one stronger' is true for 17-year-old Shreya Lenka of Jharsuguda. Using the lockdown period to pursue her passion of dancing and singing, the teenager from Odisha has made it into the top 23 finalists across the world to be part of Blackswan, a globally-acclaimed K-pop girl group of South Korea. She is the only Indian to be selected by Korean Music Label DR Music.

After one of its performers left the group, Blackswan's agency DR Music decided to hold a unique global audition in search of its fifth member. In view of the prevailing COVID 19 situation, the audition pro-

cess took place online. Shreya was among thousands of applicants from across the globe who participated in the audition.

Being a K-Pop fan, Shreya used to follow the group religiously when she came to know about the online audition during the lockdown this year and applied. On July 3, her name was announced live by the remaining members of Black-

swan on their YouTube channel making Shreya the only Indian girl among the finalists. Formerly known as Rania, Blackswan consists of four international artists. Apart from two Korean idols, the group comprises Fatou, a Senegalese vocalist/rapper and Leia, a Brazilian-Japanese singer.

Expressing happiness over her selection, Shreya said it was a pleasant surprise for her when she heard her name being announced by Blackswan members during a YouTube live chat session. "I have received an email from the agency DR Music confirming my selection. But as per

audition rules, I can't reveal much now," she said.

A part from Odissi classical and contemporary modern dances,

Shreya has a keen interest in yoga. She has also participated in various events and won several awards. Having completed her Class X from DAV School, Jharsuguda, the teenager wants to excel in academics too. Her daily routine consists of hours of studies apart from the rigorous dance and singing practice sessions.

With the final round of auditions ahead, she is leaving no stone unturned in preparing herself to become India's first K-Pop sensation. "I would request everyone to support me and help me achieve my dream," she added. ■





develops their curiosity, once the skill is developed, they do not feel shy to ask questions. The mind of a curious child always remains active as a result they take part in all activities. A neurological study has shown that curiosity makes our brains more receptive to learning. Without being curious neither Sir Issac Newton would have ever formulated the laws of physics nor Alexander Fleming would have discovered penicillin. As Albert Einstein said, "The important thing is to not to stop questioning, curiosity has its own reason for existing."

BEYOND THE 4CS

Understanding leadership is an essential learning skill that every student must develop within. Natural leaders are always an asset in every classroom, from monitoring to collecting money for some given purpose, leadership matters. A student whose attitude moves from "I can do it" to "We can do it" makes the classroom better. It's the responsibility of the teacher and parents to allow such students to go-ahead in their chores to see more, do more and learn more.

In this present day scenario, "media literacy" is the most important thing to be learned by students. To attract the attention of viewers on social media, there are phony photos, celebrity gossip, easy wins etc. This type of information is known as "clickbait". Students must be very careful while watching and forwarding any information whose source is not known. Having the consequence in mind if students use social media, not only will they save their time but also they would stop gossip mongers who make unnecessary stuff go viral.

Today's students are part of a world that is intertwined and interconnected. With exposure to proper learning skills, their minds would be prepared to lead from the front in a newer world. ■

LEARNING is a lifelong approach and attitude, and it will serve you well if cultivated properly, which means opening to new experiences and ideas and allowing ourselves to grow from what we encounter in the world. Learning should not be mistaken as studying, because while studying learning happens in a confined way but real learning has no circumference. It can go beyond, it doesn't require a classroom. For example, you must have heard people saying "I have learned a lot from life", or "Dhoni learned from his friend how to hit the Thappad Shot."

In particular, the learning skills that are beneficial to students mainly comprise of 4C's, the pivotal pillars of learning. We will discuss them here.

CREATIVITY

Creativity is vital to success in school and it's a valuable learning pursuit. It grabs the attention of everyone, be it answering a literature question or solving a mathematical problem, the creativity of a child is conspicuous. Creating something from the unknown is always praiseworthy.

COMMUNICATION

Communication skills are an important aspect that a student must

Learning Skills For Students



There is no end to education. It is not that you read a book, pass an examination and finish with education. The whole of life from the moment you are born to the moment you die is a process of learning

J. KRISHNAMURTI

develop. It is the responsibility of the parents and teachers to develop this skill in a child. Some children have this quality innate in them while others can develop them easily. If we want to make a child a good communicator, first of all, he/she must learn the skills of listening, which means he/she must be a good listener which would imply his/her improvement in verbal and non-verbal communication skills. Brian Tracy said "Communication is a skill that you can learn like riding a bicycle or typing. If you are

willing to work at it, you can rapidly improve the quality at every point of your life.

COLLABORATION

When a teacher assigns a group project, collaborative learning happens. This is an approach that encourages students to create groups and work together. When such types of conditions are created, children develop social skills and they communicate well. They learn from their peers, as for any query that comes up, different students have different answers, as a result they learn from each other. Above all, they build trust and gain confidence. Collaborative skills have a secured place among the learning skills, which a student must develop.

CURIOSITY

Curiosity is the desire to learn, to understand new things and to know how they work. Curiosity is the urge to learn, it opens the mind to different levels. Creating a condition for children to ask questions

Anil Kumar Patnaik, an enthusiastic educator with a flair for writing on topics related to innovative and engaging educational methods, is known for his creative skills, story writing, his dramatic and mimicry abilities, disciplined life-style and contributions as a community worker. He can be reached at > anilpatnaik@gmail.com

OLLYWOOD REMEMBERS THE MELLIFLUOUS MEMORIES OF

TAPU

MISHRA
1985 - 2021

THE SINGING STAR PASSED AWAY ON JUNE 19 THIS YEAR WHILE UNDERGOING TREATMENT FOR POST-COVID COMPLICATIONS AT A PRIVATE HOSPITAL. SHE WAS ONLY 36

BY JYOTI PRAKASH SAHOO

THE Odia film fraternity is yet to come to terms with the untimely demise of popular Ollywood singer Tapu Mishra. One of the most versatile singers in the music industry, Tapu lent her mellifluous voice to numerous hit songs that are still adored by people today. Apart from being a talented artist, she was an affectionate human being with a beautiful heart.

Born in Sambalpur, Tapu began singing at a young age, taking lessons from Prabhudatta Pradhan and Gyan Ranjan Mohapatra. She received a degree in music from Sambalpur University and later studied at Gandharva Mahavidyalaya. Making her debut as a playback singer in the film Kula Nandan (1995) with the composition of Swarup Nayak, Tapu went on to sing over 500 songs. Besides Odia, she sang in Bengali, Hindi, and other regional languages. She was the recipient of four State Film Awards.

Tapu sang in over 150 films including Mate Ta Love Helare, Dream Girl, Love Dot Com, To Paen, Pagala Premi, Sasu Ghara Chalijibi, Subha Bibaha, Matru Shakti, Idiot, Samaya Hatare Dori, Chanda Na Tame Tara, Family No. 1, Bye Bye Dubai, Target, Mun Premi Mun Pagala, Tu Kahibu Na Mun, Luchakali, Chocolate, etc. Her hit songs include It's Only Pyar, Kichi Bata Chali Puni, Gol Janha Dekhi Dele Kainn, Sasu Ghara Chali Jibi, Dhire Dhire Chal Re Samaya, etc.

Tapu had married actor Deepak Pujahari in 2018. The singing star passed away on June 19 this year while undergoing treatment for post-covid complications at a private hospital. She was only 36.

HERE IS WHAT SOME OF THE SINGER'S COLLEAGUES SAID ON HER SUDDEN DEMISE:

Indian Idol fame and Ollywood singer Biswajit Mohapatra saw Tapu as his mentor. "The first time I met her was during an audition at my native Kalahandi. I got the opportunity to interact with her and came to know how sweet a person she was. Later, she became my mentor in another reality show where I trained under her guidance," Biswajit told My City Links



He further said, "Since she was from Sambalpur, we used to speak in Sambalpuri dialect. I remember jamming with her at her home with my guitar during my days at Utkal University. It was my dream to work with such an iconic singer like her. Finally, I got that opportunity and we sang the song 'Kouthu Asilu Janena' for the film 'Jaga Hatare Pagha'."

Veteran actor and Odisha Film Development Corporation chairman Kuna Tripathy said, "Tapu was a very loving person. She has left a big vacuum not only in the film industry but also in the lives of everyone who knew her. But she will always remain in the hearts of music lovers due to her songs."

Actor Poonam Mishra, who shared a beautiful bond with Tapu, said she first met the singer at the music launch of one of her movies. "From then on, we started to talk more often over the phone and gradually our bond became stronger. I can hardly remember not going to the theatre to watch films without her. We used to roam in the market together and even shop

together. We did everything that besties do. Sometimes we talked over the phone the whole night. She was no less than a family member. Losing her is like a nightmare for me," she said.

Poonam loves all the songs of Tapu. "My personal favourite is her 'Haire Hai Tora Chehera' with Bollywood singer Shaan from my film 'Love Master'," she added.

One of the most popular music directors of Ollywood, Abhijit Majumdar knew Tapu from when she was very young. "I used to sing with her elder sister and she called me Mamu. She has sung many songs composed by me. We have also travelled to places like Delhi, Gujarat and even the US together to perform at live shows. She was very melodious and believed in perfection. While dubbing, she used to listen to the lyrics again and again till the song came out perfectly," he informed.

Remembering Tapu's early days, composer Prem Anand said, "She used to come to Cuttack with her father to record songs. She has sung

more than 50 songs of my composition. We have also judged 3-4 reality shows together. We used to travel to different corners of Odisha in search of new talents. During this period, I got to know more about her as a human being. Being a versatile and very popular singer, Tapu had no tantrums at all. She was very caring and a jolly person who always laughed her heart out."

Tapu's father had succumbed to COVID 19 related complications on May 10. She had mild symptoms then and was in home isolation. On May 31, her oxygen saturation level dropped to 45 and she was admitted to a private hospital in Bhubaneswar. Later, she was shifted to another hospital when her condition did not improve. Though Tapu tested negative and was shifted to a regular ICU, her condition remained critical. The entire film industry and music lovers across the State had come together on social media to pray for her recovery. Her family had also started a fundraiser for her treatment. However, she succumbed on June 19. ■



FAMILY is the most precious gift given by God. The one blessed with a family is considered very fortunate. We should be happy that we have some people to utilise our time with, to play, to have fun and share the emotions together.

Many youngsters nowadays do not like spending time with their kin, but rather choose to spend their time with friends. Personally, I like to spend time with my family, especially with my dad and grandfather. This pandemic and the lockdown was a great time to spend time with family. My bond with my family became stronger in this lockdown. I recall, last year, in 2020, as the lockdown started we all were exhausted from being bound to our homes. But as time passed, I enjoyed a lot with my family. Every morning, it had become a routine with my dad to wake me up by sprinkling water onto my face and then we would go to the terrace to do yoga and some light exercise. Post that, he would make green tea for everybody and we would have a nice time sipping on it while watching the television. Then we would always fight over what to eat for breakfast and I love that cute fight. During this lockdown, I even gained a lot of knowledge about cooking from my mother. I assist her in her

The Gems Of My Life: My Family

cooking and we both enjoy experimenting on curated recipes. My dad looks very funny when he is in the kitchen, confused and flabbergasted. I enjoy seeing him in a dilemma, so much that I even made some cute videos of him. He did not even know the C of cooking and would just want to do everything very fast and come out of the kitchen as soon as possible. But thanks to the lockdown, he can at least make tea and maggi, and the credit goes to me.

Then every afternoon we would play ludo and dad would always set aside cash prizes of rupees five hundred or so. I have been successful in winning most of the games and my piggy bank proves it all. I also engaged my family in activities that they would never get involved in. I made parody videos with my



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family and posted them on YouTube and I became quite famous due to those videos and gained many likes and subscribers. I am an ardent lover of nature and always choose to help Mother Earth in whichever way possible. I along with my family went on a 'No Plastic' drive where we limited use of plastic products to the minimum. It was a satisfying experience and surprisingly, some of our neighbors joined in too. My brother is fond of reading and always keeps himself updated with the latest news and current affairs. He took it upon himself to enlighten me as well and started teaching me Mathematics and English. I had to give in as he was backed by my mother. Thanks to him, I did not lag behind in my studies.

The pandemic also saw a

unique change in our family. Since the maid was not coming, all the household work was mutually divided amongst ourselves. There were no qualms or tantrums from anyone. This indeed made my mother happy. Every night I would go to my grandpa and grandma, who lived in the flat above us and I always gave them a foot and head massage and shared my day's activities with them. It was a calming and relaxing bond that I still enjoy every night. I enjoy being a part of devotional gatherings, which they organize, every month.

I consider myself very lucky to be the only daughter in our family. I am treated with an overdose of love and affection and I enjoy everyone favouring me over my brother. I have always had a very strong connection with my family and the lockdown came in as a boon for me. My friends are important to me, too. But if I am ever given a chance to choose between my family and friends, it would surely be my family. They are my most precious possession and I will always value them for life. ■



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A new addition to our magazine. We believe this is the right time to tap into the creativity of children, who must be bored sitting at home during vacations and the nationwide lockdown and so we invite them to send in their short stories, poems and creative writings to us. The best ones would find a place in our magazine.

The word limit should be 600-700. Along with the story/poem, mail us your name, photograph, school name, class, location at info@mycitylinks.in.

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