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HELPING HAND IN A PANDEMIC

EXTRAORDINARY SITUATIONS
INSPIRE EXTRAORDINARY EFFORTS
- THE PASSION SHOWN BY
INDIVIDUALS AND GROUPS DEALING
WITH COVID-19 IS PROOF ENOUGH



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Covid Superheroes: Over A Year Of Caring, Giving And Making A Difference To The Lives Of People

THE past year or so has thrown up some very unlikely superheroes. These are individuals, groups of persons, or organizations that have played a critical role in tackling multiple dimensions of the impact that the Covid-19 pandemic has had on people and life in general. Covid Warriors, as they have come to be known, have made a difference in some way or the other. In our Cover Story, we bring you some moving stories of determination, commitment, and caring.

From India Cares, an organisation formed to help people across the country, to voluntary organizations active in specific cities of Odisha, we take a look at the kind of work that is being done on the ground. We also introduce you to Global Odia Volunteers (GOV), a group which has brought together Odias in different parts of the world to pool in with help. With the pandemic continuing to take a toll, organizations have also come forward to provide a helping hand when it comes to health issues. Some groups are active in the field of mental health and awareness as well. This edition's Cover Story features their efforts too.

The City Lights section catches up with the creative minds behind 'The Mountain Hockey',

the first Odia documentary to be streamed by an OTT platform. Filmmakers Avinash Pradhan and Debashish Mohapatra tell us about the effort that went into the project and their dream of bringing about a revolution in the Odia entertainment industry.

Our CityZen for the edition is Debasis Panigrahi, an Indian Police Service (IPS) officer who has made a name for himself as a writer, poet and lyricist. He opens up about his passion as he talks about his literary journey and the choice of subjects.

In ScreenShots, we pay tribute to renowned Odia music director Amaranendra Mohanty who passed away recently. The special feature recalls the high points of an illustrious career spanning nearly 30 years. The section also has an interview with actress Anu Choudhary where she discusses her upcoming film even as she relishes the success of her last two outings.

To understand how passion can help one chart a clear course to success, one only needs to look at the career graph of young music composer Abhijit Tripathy. The 25-year-old opens up in a Question-Answer session as he talks about Odia music, his work so far and plans for the future. ■

SONAL SAI

PHOTO OF THE MONTH



In Bloom

To share your photography with the world send in your best photos with a caption to get featured in our 'Photo Of The Month' section. Mail to: analytics.mycitylinks@gmail.com

COVID HEROES: HELPLINE TO HUMANITY

The time is dark and hope seems far away. The COVID-19 pandemic has resulted in unprecedented deaths and has left millions helpless and in despair. Besides, it has pushed the healthcare infrastructure to its limits. And yet amidst this distress, constant anxiety and fear of the coronavirus, there are some who are inspiring us to strive ahead and restore our faith in humanity. These are the heroes who are battling adverse situations to help their fellow beings without expecting anything in return.

They have risen to the occasion to lend a helping hand to those who can't fend for themselves. Many individuals, groups and

organisations have come forward to help the needy. They are providing meals, oxygen cylinders, medical/ clinical consultations, counselling, emergency information and more and that too for free. While many people are sharing vital information on social media and creating and updating resource libraries, there are others who are getting out of the comfort and safety of their homes to provide essential items and necessities.

My City Links takes a look at some of these heroes without capes, but with masks and sanitizers who are risking their own lives to save many.



Oxygen concentrators, N-95 masks, pulse oximeters, and thermal scanners delivered to Shillong, Meghalaya

INDIA CARES: VOLUNTEERS WHO KEEP SERVING

“Arun Bothra came up with the idea of India Cares and he asked me to create a Telegram group. He explained me the idea and we started with a Telegram channel. We invited volunteers from across the country to join us via a Google Form. That is how we started

NAIMISHA
VOLUNTEER

BY DEBI PRASAD SAHU

A desperate mother's plea for help on Twitter to arrange camel milk for her autistic child led to the birth of India Cares on April 16, 2020. The tweet resulted in the arrival of 40 kgs of camel milk and powder in Mumbai from Rajasthan. Some SOS calls, a special train, an unscheduled stop and Mumbai Police came together to



India Cares is a volunteer collective on social media that aims to support fellow Indians in whatever way possible during this unprecedented crisis. Comprising doctors, pharmacists, administrative officials, police and army officers, students, entrepreneurs, consultants and many more, the volunteers have continued to arrange medical facilities, food, water and transport to the less fortunate by linking up with local administrations and NGOs across the country

the rescue of the child when the country was under strict lockdown during the summer of 2020. The credit goes to Arun Bothra, an IPS officer, CMD of OSRTC and MD of CRUT, who coordinated this extraordinary initiative from the forefront. Soon, Bothra started receiving hundreds of messages asking for help during the initial days of the pandemic. Many people also called him to volunteer to help those in distress. It was then Bothra realised that in-

dividually he can only help a limited number of people, but with a group he could do more. And this gave birth to India Cares, a volunteer collective on Twitter. The aim was to support fellow Indians in whatever way possible. What began with around 50 members has now swelled to more than 3,900 volunteers from across the country. The group includes doctors, pharmacists, administrative officials, police and army officers, students, entrepreneurs, consultants and many more. During the lockdown last year and even after, the India Cares volunteers continued to provide food, water and transport by linking up with local administrations and NGOs across the country. REACHING OUT Things seemed to be getting back to normal, when the second wave of the pandemic struck hard this March. The cases soared to stratospheric levels and suddenly there



Blue Dart joined India Cares to deliver emergency medicines



A box of emergency ration ready to be delivered

was a shortage of oxygen cylinders, ventilators, oxygen concentrators, Remdesivir injections and even hospital beds. Hell broke loose across the country and India Cares was again flooded with SOS messages. Over the past few months, India Cares has been expanding its network far and wide across the country so as to address every single call for help. It has provided a platform for people who wanted to help but were not sure how to. Whether it's consulting doctors, availing critical medication, arranging oxygen or hospital beds, they have been able to help the needy at any time of the day or night. Whether it was providing a critical patient with the rare 'Bombay blood group', tracing and uniting a child with his parents (daily wage labourers) who were in a different part of the country, cycling 24 km to provide ration to a family in distress; the volunteers of India Cares have been helping thousands since the pandemic began. Naimisha, a volunteer with India Cares and a Delhi-based policy analyst, shared her experience. "Last year, I was pursuing my graduation in Delhi University. I had come to Odisha for my summer vacation. I did not know anything about the lockdown and suddenly I was



DURING THE LOCKDOWN LAST YEAR AND EVEN AFTER, INDIA CARES VOLUNTEERS CONTINUED TO PROVIDE FOOD, TRANSPORTATION AND OTHER HELP BY LINKING UP WITH LOCAL ADMINISTRATIONS AND NGOS

stuck at home. Arun Bothra came up with the idea of India Cares and he asked me to create a Telegram group. I was wondering what it was all about. Later, he explained the idea and we started with a Telegram channel. We invited volunteers from across the country to join us via a Google Form. That is how we started," she said. Naimisha mostly deals with hospitalisation cases, providing oxygen cylinders and ration deliveries. But since the pandemic keeps evolving, the volunteers too try to keep pace with the changing needs and nature of help. For instance, Naimisha was very active last year with hospitalisation and ration delivery, but this year she is dealing with arranging and delivering oxygen cylinders and concentrators. TWEETS & PHONE CALLS During the pandemic, many people opened Twitter accounts to post SOS messages. Social media played a huge role in making the urgent needs of people visible to society at large. "That is how we pick up most of our cases. These cases are actively passed on to sub-coordinated groups. We have around 6-7 of them which deal with specific kinds of needs. If something comes up in the hospitalisation group, I try to take it up," informed Naimisha.



NAIMISHA WAS VERY ACTIVE LAST YEAR WITH HOSPITALISATION AND RATION DELIVERY, BUT THIS YEAR SHE IS DEALING WITH ARRANGING AND DELIVERING OXYGEN CYLINDERS AND CONCENTRATORS

"Many times people are not aware of the helpline numbers that they should call in case of an emergency and sometimes they are not in a state to make a call. So I dial up the helpline number and coordinate. In cases where there is a lack of hospital beds and/ or shortage of infrastructural resources we try to contact the local administration, the local MP or MLA. In many cases we try connecting with the sub-collector or the assistant collector and we put up the grievance across to the right authority who can address it. That's how we get things done faster," she shared

So why should the administration give you a priority when you ask for help while so many others are also trying? Naimisha replied, "The administration is not a bad system out there. I am saying this



from my experience because I have seen things happen. To assert her point, she gave the instance of a patient from Puri who had to be admitted in a COVID hospital in Bhubaneswar. "When a person arrives from another district they need a reference either from the Collector or the Chief Medical Officer or somebody. This patient was unaware of it and his condition was very critical. It was around 10 pm when I made a call to the Puri Collector, Samarth Verma. He went out of his way to help us out," she said.

"This is just one example. There

have been times when I called up the BMC Zonal Deputy Commissioner, Anshuman Rath, or the Deputy Commissioner, Suvendu Sahoo, at 3 am asking them for help and they have responded very cordially. There are so many people in the administration like that who are always ready to help," she added. "The thing is that the administration is not bad, they really want to help people. What they need is the support of the people and someone to connect them with the people who need help because there are so many cases and they are not aware of every detail of ev-



ery single case and that gap has to be filled," she explained.

MOTIVATION & INSPIRATION

How do the volunteers find motivation to carry on even though there is so much distress all around? "We are led by people like Arun Bothra and Amitabh Thakur who are always available for help 24x7. We are constantly inspired by people all around us, not just people in positions of power," Naimisha replied. "Last year, there was a migrant Shramik Express with pregnant women and old people on board. It was passing through UP and the passengers did not have any food. So we sleeplessly coordinated throughout the night with the administration until the train reached its destination. We were present there with food for everyone. It was an exhilarating feeling and this is what keeps us going," she added.

This time around the challenge is different. The demand for hospitalisation, oxygen and other medical resources has far exceeded the limited facilities. "The biggest challenge for us is prioritising people. This is a heart-breaking thing. This is something that one would not like to do. There have been times when hospitals have asked us if we really want to give a person with very low chances of survival a bed. There was a woman in her 70s and her oxygen level was at 27. There was absolutely no time for us and her son was pleading with us to save his mother. I called up Arun Bothra and asked if we should take the chance and he replied that even if there is only one per cent hope, don't leave it. The woman survived

and it was the happiest thing for me and Shreela, who also worked on this case with me. These experiences have changed me as a human being," said Naimisha about how volunteering with India Cares has impacted her.

OFFICIAL DUTY & VOLUNTEERING

Amitabh Thakur, IG of Operations, Odisha Police, shared his experience from last year when he was on official COVID duty to this year as a volunteer. "Last year, the Odisha government had appointed me as the nodal officer to address issues related to migrant labourers. That is when I came to know about India Cares and the work they were doing. I had taken their help to deliver medicines and food to people stuck at remote locations.

"This year during the second COVID wave, I joined the team of India Cares as a volunteer. We provided people with hospital beds, ambulance services and medicines. Apart from this, India Cares is helping people beyond COVID like arranging books for students, helping people to avail ration cards and old age pension cards."

Thakur further said it is a wonderful experience to work and coordinate with young volunteers of India Cares. "It is inspiring to work with such youngsters who are passionate and persistent in helping each and every one who needs help. Once I received a distress message in the middle of the night. So I called up our volunteer Sabita Chand at 2.30 am and told her that an ambulance was needed and within 15 minutes, she arranged it. I am proud of all these young people who are helping people and spending sleepless nights attending calls and arranging for help."

Talking about working with his peer, Arun Bothra, as part of a volunteer collective, Thakur said, "I will narrate an incident to tell you what it is like working with him. India Cares received a message that there is a COVID positive family and they needed food because they were in isolation. I got to know about it and I was told that Bothra was also informed about it. So I called him to find out if he knew anything about the matter. He said he couldn't remember, but if a family gets delivered 8 meals instead of 4 it won't hurt anyone. So please go ahead and do it."



STUDENTS IN FOREFRONT

Apart from working professionals and administrative officials, many students have also joined India Cares to lend a helping hand. One such person is Pallavi, a student of literature, who found out about it on Twitter when India was under lockdown in 2020. A few days earlier, Pallavi had decided to help people by arranging and delivering medicines that were not available locally. She came up with the idea because she lives near AIIMS Delhi where there are many medicine

DURING THE PANDEMIC, MANY PEOPLE OPENED TWITTER ACCOUNTS TO POST SOS MESSAGES. SOCIAL MEDIA PLAYED A HUGE ROLE IN MAKING THE URGENT NEEDS OF PEOPLE VISIBLE TO SOCIETY AT LARGE

shops.

She joined India Cares and helped in delivering medicines and ration. She then also focused on migrants and their transportation back home. Soon, her number started circulating among the migrants who were desperate to go home. During the second wave, Pallavi focused on facilitating teleconsultation with doctors. Her team had 6-7 volunteers and they started with the help of around 15 doctors. It soon increased to 60 doctors who rendered their services pan-India. "The idea behind this was early intervention so that cases don't become serious. Many people had very common symptoms of COVID which needed to be identified early and treated accordingly. We managed to take care of many people and helped them from becoming critically ill," she shared.

According to Pallavi, the learning experience and most enjoyable part of volunteering with India

Cares is that the work is completely based on trust. "If somebody said that they will do something or will be able to arrange something, we all trusted them and they did it. This is a big deal, especially during a crisis when many people are using the circumstances to cheat people or profit from others' misery. With a lot of hard work and dedication, everyone at India Cares has made sure that nobody is left out," she added.

SERVING SOCIETY

Then there are many others who felt an urge to do something for the society. They found India Cares as a platform through which they could utilise their experience and resources for the benefit of others. Shreela Roy, a PR professional from Mumbai, became active on Twitter during the lockdown and came across many people who were facilitating the passage of migrant workers to their hometowns and villages. She wondered how she could be of help to someone. Through her network of people, she started doing her bit for people in need. That is when she came across Sabita Chand, who was working with many organisations including India Cares, and helping people in all kinds of need.

In March 2021, Shreela's father succumbed to COVID 19. This



Emergency help reaches people in far flung villages

THIS TIME AROUND THE CHALLENGE IS DIFFERENT. THE DEMAND FOR HOSPITALISATION, OXYGEN AND OTHER MEDICAL RESOURCES HAS FAR EXCEEDED THE LIMITED FACILITIES AVAILABLE, ACCORDING TO NAIMISHA

made her realise the devastation of losing a family member. “I know what losing your loved one feels like. So if I can help someone to not face that devastation, then I will do anything to help,” she shared. That is when Sabita got Shreela to join India Cares. Shreela initially started taking cases related to blood and plasma transfusion and soon moved on to helping people who were in desperate need of oxygen concentrators and cylinders.

“I worked with many volunteers of India Cares like Naimisha. Sometimes we would get cases late in the night where the patient’s oxygen level had reached below 40 and there was almost no hope, Arun Bothra would say if we can help then we will. That is motivating and you feel like you have the privilege of being able to do something for someone while many are



not able to do anything,” she added. Now Shreela lends her experience in public relations to help with correspondence related to donations or corporate collaborations. “The experience of working with India Cares has given me a lot of strength. I found my purpose of helping people and fulfilling it has made me stronger. Today people are fighting for one of the most fundamental things for survival like oxygen. It is high time that everyone who can do something to come forward to help

people in whatever capacity they can,” she averred, emphasising on the need to work together in this common fight against COVID 19.

HELP IN TIME

Shashank Kandoi, a GST consultant from Kolkata, had been following Arun Bothra on Twitter for a long time. Kandoi joined India Cares as it was announced. He felt like the pandemic was an unprecedented situation and he must do something about it. Shashank has been looking into the logistics of India Cares across the country. “We tied up with Blue Dart which has helped us to send medicines and other emergency deliveries across India. Last year things were a bit easier, but this year it was all chaos and I got so many SOS messages for medicines. There was an acute shortage of the tablet called Fabi-flu. We were able to arrange the tablets from Kolkata to send them across India,” he shared.

Talking about the ups and downs of volunteering during a public health crisis, Shashank said, “There was a case where I got an SOS message saying that they needed an oxygen cylinder for a pregnant woman. In less than two



hours, we managed to arrange a 60-litre cylinder for her. The woman was almost 9 months into her pregnancy and everyone in the team felt good because we were able to save not one but two lives. It was an experience that I will never forget. There are so many such cases and the team has been able to successfully provide help in time. That’s what makes this worth giving your time and energy. It cannot be described in words. But sometimes we lose people while help is on the way. Those times are heart-breaking.”

While the volunteers of India Cares have been doing a commendable job as a collective, one can do their bit even without a platform. “For people who want to contribute towards society, you don’t necessarily need a platform. Even though I am associated with India Cares, I feel if somebody wants to help they just need to go ahead and do it. You just need to know the right path and the right way to do it. You don’t have to do big deeds. You can start with the people around you such as your house help, driver, the local shopkeeper or vegetable vendor or anyone else in need. After all, charity begins at home,” signed off Shashank. ■

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UNLOCKING SMILES AMIDST LOCKDOWN

From busting the myths associated with menstruation to adopting a school under the State Government's 'Mo School Abhiyan', 23-year-old Hrudananda of Jajpur district is involved in numerous initiatives to bring about a positive change in the society



BY AFREEN FIRDAUS

THE youth of today stands out in not only voicing their opinions but also making a difference in the community by helping the people in need. One such youth is 23-year-old Hrudananda Prusty who is on a mission to ease the suffering of the poor and downtrodden affected by COVID 19.

From busting the myths associated with menstruation to adopting a school under the State Government's 'Mo School Abhiyan', Hrudananda of Jajpur district is involved in numerous initiatives to bring about a positive change in the society. Now during the pandemic, he is providing essentials and medical assistance to affected people through his organisation 'Unlock Smiles' free of cost.

Speaking to My City Links, Hrudananda expressed his joy at being able to help people during the pandemic. Through his organisation, he has been providing blood plasma, medicines, food and groceries besides online medical consultation for affected persons and arranging safe return of migrant workers stranded across India. A team of 20 members are attending to the distress calls of people in rotational shifts.

"We launched a helpline number recently and the response has been overwhelming. People are calling for essential commodities, consultation with doctors, hospital beds and oxygen. We are happy to be of some help to them. We receive around 30 calls

“We launched a helpline number recently and the response has been overwhelming. People are calling for essential commodities, consultation with doctors, hospital beds and oxygen. We are happy to be of some help to them

HRUDANANDA PRUSTY
SOCIAL ACTIVIST



People expressing their gratitude

daily, most of which are regarding the need of oxygen cylinders and blood," he informed.

Their team has tied up with doctors from all major departments to assist people during the lockdown. Since people are confined to their homes, the helpline number assists them to consult doctors online. Dr Sanjeev Kumar of Jajpur, who is volunteering for Unlock Smiles, said, "People are left in lurch due to the lockdown. Recently, I got a call from a youth who was feeling uneasy. He was in panic as he apprehended that he was infected by COVID 19. After tests,

it was revealed that he had a minor cold. This is the state of mind of people now. Teleconsultation is the need of the hour to ease the mental stress of people."

A part of Hrudananda's

venture is 'Hand of Hope' which helps migrant workers of Odisha to return home safely. Through this initiative, he and his team have managed to reach out to many migrants through social media campaigns. Recently, two workers stranded in Madhya Pradesh sought the team's help after coming across their post on social media. Hrudananda made all possible arrangements for their safe return. "The workers were stuck because of the lockdown without any money and basic amenities. It took us about a week to fulfill all the formalities of Madhya Pradesh's government and the local block development officer," he said.

Deepak Kumar Nayak of Sukinda, a migrant worker who was stranded in Madhya Pradesh, said, "In absence of livelihood options, I had lost all hope of returning home. Then I came across the poster of 'Unlock Smiles' on social media and contacted them for help. Within an hour, I received calls and was provided with food and shelter. I was asked to wait and in a week's time, I returned home. Now, I am in quarantine. I cannot thank this organisation enough for rescuing me," Deepak said.

Hrudananda gives credit to his team for carrying out this noble work. Spending from his own pocket and some donations from people, he has been able to serve the needy during these tough times. "When I started social work, I did not think about money. We don't have many donors but we still manage to help people. I believe God is with us. Our only aim is to unlock the smiles on faces of people amid the COVID 19 despair," he added. ■



QUEENS OF HOPE AMID COVID GLOOM

Members of the Rotary Club of Rourkela Queens are providing free nutritious meals to the staff and COVID-19 patients admitted to Vesaj Patel Hospital in the Steel City in a bid to support people struggling to cope with the adverse circumstances



Everyone in the team chips in with an aim to bring a smile on the faces of patients

“Many people were giving food to COVID-19 patients at their doorsteps. We also did it for a month but later thought since others are already handling this, there is a need to help those in hospitals. There are some private hospitals which don't have a canteen facility

AMISHAJAISWAL
CLUB MEMBER

BY PRACHURYA NANDA

AS the second wave of COVID 19 sweeps across Odisha, several social organizations have come forward to ease the pain and suffering of those caught in the vicious grip of the pandemic. The Rotary Club of Rourkela Queens is one such group. Members of the club are providing free nutritious meals to the staff and COVID 19 patients admitted to Vesaj Patel Hospital, Rourkela in a bid to support people struggling to cope with the adverse circumstances.

While a lot of hospitals have their own canteens, there are many which lack such facilities. Therefore patients in such hospitals depend on the food being sent by their families. Amid the COVID 19 restrictions in Odis-

ha which is under lockdown, sending food to patients has become an uphill task. Member of the club, Amisha Jaiswal said the initiative was the brainchild of club president Kan-



charter president and advisor Harpal Roopra.

"Many people were giving food to COVID 19 patients at their doorsteps. We also did it for a month but later thought since others are already handling this, there is a need to help those in hospitals. There are some private hospitals which are not providing food as they don't have a canteen facility. Currently, we are working for Vesaj Patel Hospital, but if any other health facility needs us, then we'll be happy to help," said Jaiswal who along with another member Kiran Arora is managing the entire affair.

Amisha informed that everyone including the club president, advisor, managers, treasurer Anita Lath, their children and the entire team of Rourkela Queens are involved. "Everyone in our team chips in with an aim to bring a smile to the faces of patients. We also asked the kids of Rourkela Queens to make handmade cards with positive quotes every day so that we can attach them with the food packets. Reading such positive quotes not only raises the spirits of patients but also aids in their quick recovery. After all, good food and a positive mind is what a patient needs for recovery," she said.

The Rourkela Queens have tied up with a restaurant named 'Jo'z Kitchen' which is helping them prepare as well as deliver food to patients. "Rachna is the head of Jo'z kitchen and she delivers the food herself. The

security guard collects the food and the nurses distribute it among the patients according to their bed numbers. We also mention the bed number on packets so that it gets easier while distributing since some patients have specifications in their food," Amisha informed.

The meals consist of rice, two rotis, fried veggies and a curry, dal, pickle and sometimes a sweet. The food is served in a plastic thali having small compartments. "We also keep five extra packets for patients who get admitted to the hospital on urgent basis so that they can have food if needed. So far, we have distributed more than 700 food packets in a week and the numbers are increasing," she added. ■



In view of the prevailing situation, we are providing medical aid like pulse oximeters and masks to patients under home isolation. Our members are available 24x7 to cater to the needs of patients. On an average, we get around 400-500 calls daily

SATBIR SINGH
SIKHAID TRUSTEE

THE SUPER SIKHS OF TWIN CITIES

From oxygen cylinders to 'langar at doorsteps', the good Samaritans of SikhAid Charitable Trust, a non-profit organization, are lending a helping hand to people caught in the devastating second wave of COVID-19



BY AFREEN FIRDAUS

NOT all heroes wear capes, some don turbans too. Meet members of SikhAid who are working round the clock to provide medical assistance, food and groceries to covid patients in the twin cities free of cost.

From oxygen cylinders to 'langar at doorsteps', the good samaritans are lending a helping hand to people caught in the devastating second wave of COVID 19. For the Sikh community, 'seva' is an integral part of their daily worship. Businessman and trustee of SikhAid Satbir Singh said after the resurgence of COVID 19, India is now facing an acute shortage of oxygen and medical supplies. "In view of the prevailing situation, we are providing medical aid like pulse oximeters and masks to patients under home isolation. Our members are available 24x7 to cater to the needs of patients. On an average, we get around 400-500 calls daily, most of which are critical cases and require oxygen immediately," he said.

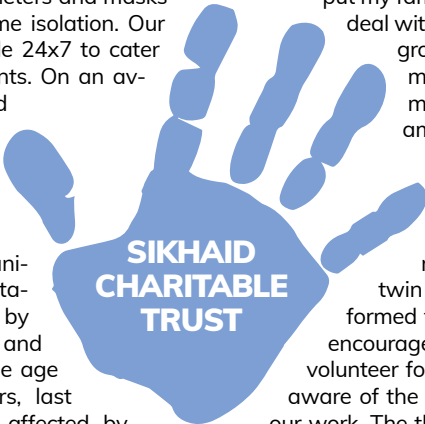
A non-profit organisation, SikhAid Charitable Trust was formed by a group of students and businessmen, all in the age group of 25-35 years, last year to help people affected by

the pandemic. Currently, SikhAid has a dedicated team of 70 volunteers across the country including around 15 in Bhubaneswar and Cuttack who are relentlessly working for those in quarantine driven by their 'seva-bhav' or the spirit of service.

Satbir informed that since the commencement of their 'seva' in March last year, his phone has not stopped ringing. The frantic calls of COVID 19 patients and their relatives in the twin city have kept them on their toes. Initially, SikhAid launched its services by providing food to patients in home isolation. However, after witnessing acute scarcity of oxygen for patients, they decided to kick off the oxygen drive as well.

Though a doting father to a three-year-old son, Satbir has had no physical interaction with his kid since the last two months. "Our job comes with a price. I cannot afford to come home and put my family at risk as we deal with patients at the ground level. For me, the safety of my family is paramount," he said.

With the Covid situation showing no signs of relenting in the twin cities, Satbir informed that they do not encourage more people to volunteer for them. "We are aware of the risks involved in our work. The threat is real and



The Enigmatic team of the Super Sikhs

we do not want to jeopardise anyone's safety just because we need manpower. Less in number but more effective work, this is what we are focusing on now. We want quality over quantity," he added.

Given the nature of their work, many volunteers of SikhAid had to face some resistance from family members during initial days. Paramjeet Singh's father was concerned over his son's safety as he had to deal with COVID 19 patients. "I sincerely did not approve of Param going out when the entire State was under lockdown. I tried to stop him but he managed to have his way. But now seeing the great work he and his friends are doing, I feel proud. It feels satisfying to see my son helping out people in distress. Now, it is their (the volunteers) duty to take care of themselves because people depend on them. Rab rakha!" said Paramjeet's father Surendra Singh.

Sharing his concern over the alarming rise in infections, Paramjeet said, "The resurgence of the deadly virus has created havoc among the masses. People are frantically calling for aid. We cannot rest until each and every person is reached out to with help. This pandemic is personal for all of us. It needs to be fought collectively on a united front. Our focus is to try to do our bit and use our resources as much as we can."

Despite the severity of the situation, some people still choose to be self centered in their needs without thinking of others. Members of SikhAid informed that people are hoarding oxygen cylinders at home, apprehending scarcity in the days to come. People taking oxygen cylinder from SikhAid pass it on to their other family members, or reserve it for future use instead of returning it after use.

"This creates scarcity and it becomes a challenge for us to provide oxygen cylinders to people who really need it on an emergency basis. I would request all to think about others as well. By hoarding oxygen cylinders at homes, you are depriving a needy patient who probably needs it more. In such difficult times, we need to be empathetic towards others," Satbir said and urged people not to stock up oxygen cylinders or covid supplies.

SikhAid follows a protocol before providing an oxygen cylinder to prevent its misuse. "Whenever we



Distributing essentials to the needy

get a request for an oxygen cylinder, we enquire about the patient's oxygen saturation level or whether they have consulted with any doctor through video call. We verify the information with the doctor concerned and then we deliver the cylinder personally. We educate patients about the oxygen level that they need to maintain and the immediate steps to be taken if it drops further," informed Satbir.

Free service does not mean that the organisation is working with zero costs of their own. To keep up with the relentless requests and needs, members of SikhAid spend from their own savings to procure oxygen cylinders, medicines, groceries and food. They also get financial support from some members of their community residing in the twin cities.

So far, SikhAid has helped over 400 patients with oxygen cylinders



apart from providing essentials. Last year, the team had provided oxygen cylinders to around 100 patients apart from food and other essential commodities. They also distributed masks and sanitisers among the frontline covid warriors, homeless people and senior citizens living alone in the twin cities. The organisation carried out a sanitation drive at public places in the twin cities.

SikhAid also has a team in Pune which is offering meals to the daily wage workers. Head Sewadar of SikhAid, Pune Rajveer Singh said they are involved in providing ration, medical aid, education and other facilities to the underprivileged people. "Our mission is to assist the migrant workers who have been left to fend for themselves in the pandemic. Plans are afoot to start an oxygen drive since there are many areas where people have no access to oxygen cylinders," he informed.

Many people, who have received help from SikhAid, are all praise for the organisation and its efforts to alleviate the suffering of patients and their family members. Nikita Khuntia, daughter of a critical COVID 19 patient, expressed her gratitude to SikhAid for its timely



Doorstep service of oxygen cylinders

help. "My family and I were frantically looking for oxygen cylinders but in vain. Then two of my friends forwarded the phone number of SikhAid. As soon as I called the volunteers, they got to know of my situation and were not only prompt but also empathetic. Their energy and zeal was commendable. They turned saviours for me and my family. It must take a lot of effort to help so many people. I will always be their greatest fan. They are the real heroes," informed Nikita, who works as an HR manager at Aegis Global.

Recently, the SikhAid team has decided to take care of the education of children whose parent(s) have passed away due to COVID19. "Education is the stepping stone for any individual. It has come to our notice that many sole bread-earners of families have lost their battle to COVID 19 forcing children to drop out or change schools. We have started the process to identify kids who are in such situations. Since educational institutions are closed now, we will do some more research before starting the initiative," said Bibek Talwar, an active member of the SikhAid team.

On making donations, Satbir informed that SikhAid tries to directly connect with the donor to avoid any discrepancies and maintain transparency. In case of a direct donation to the organisation, a bank transfer can be made. The members of SikhAid can be contacted on 8018008021 (Bhubaneswar) and 9040475426 (Cuttack). ■



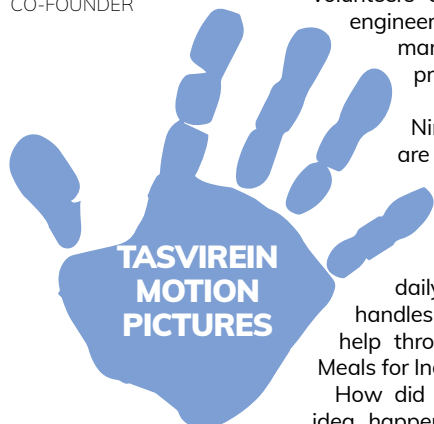
Instilling hope during the second wave of the pandemic

BY PRACHURYA NANDA



There are a lot of COVID-19 patients who are unable to cook food as they live alone and their children are away. There are some youngsters too who don't know how to prepare food. It is important for patients to get food on time so that they can have their medicines

NIRAJA ROUT KHER
STUDIO
CO-FOUNDER



HOPE AMID CRISIS: TASVIREIN'S FREE MEALS FOR COVID-19 PATIENTS

Award-Winning wedding photography studio 'Tasvirein Motion Pictures' is providing free food to COVID-19 patients under home isolation in Bhubaneswar. The studio has launched 'Tasvirein's Free Meals Seva' in which volunteers are delivering home-cooked food at the doorsteps of infected people



who belong to affluent families but don't know how to cook, contribute to 'Tasvirein Free Meals Seva' happily for the food.

When asked amid the surge in COVID 19 cases, do the volunteers feel scared to step out of the house to help patients in need of food, Niraja said they strictly adhere to all the safety protocols while delivering the food. "We don't touch anyone and leave the food packets at the gate or outside the doors. By God's grace, none of our group members have been infected so far," she informed.

Though there is risk involved, Niraja's family members have no issues with her work. "I live with my husband while my in-laws stay in Jammu. The cooking and packing of meals takes place at my house and we follow all the protocols. Since my parents also stay in the house, we ensure that all the safety measures are in place to keep everyone safe," she said.

Initially, Niraja and her team had to face a lot of challenges. "Getting passes during the lockdown and delivering food during adverse weather conditions were the major challenges. One of my brothers, who works with an NGO, helped us in getting the passes. Earlier, we used to deliver the food through Swiggy but now we are doing it ourselves. This is the main struggle. No matter how many volunteers we have, it is a difficult task to deliver food to people residing in various parts of the city," she said.

Niraja credits her team members for the free food service. "I am lucky to have a group full of people who are selfless and compassionate towards people. Our volunteers toil throughout the day without any complaints and deliver food from Patia to Old Town on their own vehicles," she added. ■

a large number of people including family members of COVID 19 patients were left to fend for themselves after the resurgence of the virus. "Everyone we knew was affected by the pandemic. As the situation worsened, we decided to help the needy people. This was how the idea of providing free food service came into being," she said.

Niraja along with her team of volunteers prepare the food together. For lunch, they serve meals consisting of rice/roti with dal and sabji along with some fruits. For dinner, it is roti and sabji. "There are a lot of COVID 19 patients who are unable to cook food as they live alone and their children are away. There are some youngsters too who don't know how to prepare food. It is important for patients to get food on time so that they can have their medicines. So, we ensure that our volunteers deliver the meals timely at homes," Niraja informed.

When the free food service was launched, there were only a handful of people to deliver the meals. Gradually, the number of volunteers increased and donations also started to pour in. Niraja said many infected youths,

TELECONSULTATION COMES FREE FOR COVID PATIENTS, COURTESY ILPF

Given the grave COVID crisis in Odisha, members of Indian Liver Patient Foundation (ILPF) are assisting and guiding patients with mild and asymptomatic symptoms in home isolation

BY AFREEN FIRDAUS



The scenario in Odisha is comparatively much better than other states who have a dearth of hospital beds and oxygen. But due to the lockdown and shutdown imposed to contain the virus, it is difficult to get general medical aid, which takes a toll on them mentally

ASHOK CHOUDHURY
DOCTOR

THE second wave of COVID 19 pandemic has hit India hard and none had expected the impact of it. However, the medical fraternity has been on their toes since March last year trying to help people navigate through this crisis. Given the situation, many doctors and healthcare professionals across the world have come together to provide tele-consultation services to patients in home isolation.

Odisha, which is also reeling under the unprecedented pandemic, has also witnessed such initiatives, one of it being taken up by Indian Liver Patient Foundation (ILPF) and Centre For Research And Professional Training And Services (CRAPTS) to assist and guide patients with mild and asymptomatic COVID 19 cases in home isolation. Odia Doctor, Ashok Choudhury has been instrumental in conceptualizing and coordinating the team of about 80 doctors, many of whom are from across the state as well as from abroad. They are catering to patients from across India in all fields of medicine- allopathy, naturopath, homeopathy, ayurveda, yoga, psychology, physiotherapy and mindfulness.

Dr. Ashok Choudhury shared, "This pandemic has taken an ugly turn since recent evidence proves that this virus is also transmitted via air. So most of the children and youth and people in the rural areas have been badly hit by it this time. The scenario in Odisha is comparatively much better than other states who have a dearth of hospital beds and oxygen. But due to the



lockdown and shutdown imposed to contain the virus, it is difficult to get general medical aid, which takes a toll on them mentally. Through tele-consultation, we are trying to bridge the gap and connect people with the doctors through an easy platform."

Dedicated phone numbers (9348864327, 8018240966, 9777707668 and 7873207695) are assigned respectively from morning 6 am to evening 10PM. The numbers connect you to doctors and healthcare professionals for free tele-consultation to mild or asymptomatic cases, post covid recovery and also for tips for self-care during isolation.

Experts in association with this initiative have so far come forward to provide voluntary services to people with COVID 19 symptoms through telemedicine helpline numbers.

One of the doctors associated with the initiative, Dr. Manoranjan Behera, Associate Professor of Medicine from Srirama Chandra Bhanja (SCB) Medical College and Hospital, Cuttack said, "It's been more than ten days since this mission commenced and we are getting overwhelming response already. So we are a team of about 80 doctors connected through a WhatsApp group. We have volunteers to take appointments from callers and pass it on to this group. The doctor available at that instant, takes up the call. Our aim is to prevent people from losing their calm and help them recover through physical and mental rehabilitation."

Anyone who is suffering from COVID 19 symptoms like cough, fever, tiredness and respiratory problems can dial the telemedicine helpline to

seek medical advice from the qualified doctors, who have registered themselves to provide medical assistance to COVID 19 cases. It is a completely free service.

This team of doctors offers tele-consultation regarding COVID 19 symptoms, guidance in diet and nutrition, yoga, prenatal and post-covid care and counselling and mindfulness practices. Another aspect this initiative is addressing is the health issue as well as expert advice for diseases other than COVID 19 because of closure of hospitals, lockdown and unavailability of doctors, who are now often busy with COVID 19 care services.

The activities will continue during the whole pandemic period. Umakant Pani and Sangram Dash from ILPF constantly coordinate the event passionately and can be reached on 9078700111/ 9937396796/ 7042155540 at any time for any queries and support.

Umakant Pani, Trustee of ILPF told MCL, "The response of people is overwhelming. More than 50 callers dial in to know more about the novel virus and the home remedies associated with it. Some even call up to cross check the medicines they have already been prescribed by other doctors. We also have trained doctors who counsel families to cope up and fight against the pandemic rather than being defeated by it. This is such a grave time and unfortunately people stress about the pandemic so much that they hamper their health, in the process."

The mission aims to be helpful for the masses and meet the expectation of thousands of people in distress during this pandemic.

Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik had earlier appealed to doctors in Odisha and across the country to register themselves on the portal of Project StepOne to provide their services voluntarily in the fight against the pandemic. He also asserted that the doctors are the frontline forces fighting against the virus.

It goes without saying that the coming times are very crucial for India and maintaining social distancing and double-masking are effective ways to control the spread of COVID 19. This can significantly reduce the number of people coming in contact with potential carriers of the virus.

My City Links urges all to stand strong with each other in fighting this novel coronavirus. With help pouring in from all sides, let us look at the brighter scenario and defeat the pandemic together. ■

MIND MATTERS: MANAM FOUNDATION HELPS PEOPLE DEAL WITH MENTAL STRESS

The foundation has started free counseling service 'Mann Ki Shanti' to address the mental issues faced by those affected by COVID-19 as well as the general public in collaboration with the women's wing of Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FICCI- FLO)

include inspire impact
Mann Ki Shanti
Always remember you are BRAVER than you believe STRONGER than you seem SMARTER than you think & twice as BEAUTIFUL as you'd ever IMAGINED
FREE MENTAL HEALTH COVID SERVICE
Are you feeling Fear, Panic, Confusion, Suicidal, Loneliness, Sadness, Restlessness, Anger, Irritation & Frustration...?
Please Call 986 1023 010 / 891 7364 558 753 9014 224 / 909 0092 911 828 0195 554 (10 am - 9 pm)

The changes that the pandemic has brought with itself have created confusion in people's minds. We call it 'Covid Anxiety Disorder'. It is of two types - covid apprehension which is the fear of the virus and post-Covid anxiety disorder
SOMYA SUCHARITA MOHAPATRA PSYCHOLOGICAL COUNSELLOR

Industry (FICCI- FLO). Director of Manam Foundation, Anuradha Mahapatra said the initiative was the need of the hour. "Most of the people reaching out to us complained of anxiety, fear, feeling low and panic attacks. There is death and suffering everywhere and it triggers people to such an extent that they need immediate counseling. The smallest of bad news lets loose a whirlpool of emotions which becomes difficult for people to deal with. Hence it was important to help people take care of their mental health and wellness," she opined. The Foundation has a team of 12 therapists who are on the job from 10 am to 9 pm every day. Multiple helpline numbers have been circulated to help people reach out to the organisation. Besides, there are certified counselors to provide advice to people in need. Each therapist gets around 6-7 calls per day. The service was initially launched for people of Odisha but after FICCI FLO tied up with Manam Foundation, it is now available across India. Chief psychological counselor of the Foundation Somya Sucharita Mohapatra said, "People have been affected both mentally and emotionally to a great extent in the pandemic. The reasons vary from person to person. Family members often miss out on the signs of mental health issues and do not give much importance to them. When we talk to these people, they feel heard. We just listen to them without being judgmental and advise them accordingly. The fact that there is someone who listens to their problems, gives them a feeling that they are not alone." After an Odia news channel ran posters of the free mental health consultation of the Foundation, calls started pouring in from rural areas and districts like Athagarh, Nayagarh and Mayurbhanj. But this did not sustain for long as when the posters stopped running, the calls stopped.

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The COVID 19 specific drive began in April 2021 due to the worsening mental health of people. Somya informed, "The changes that the pandemic has brought with itself have created confusion in people's minds. We call it 'Covid Anxiety Disorder'. It is of two types - covid apprehension which is the fear of the virus and post-covid anxiety disorder. An 80-year-old patient, who recovered from COVID 19, reached out to us and complained of having panic attacks. Any covid related news triggered him and filled him with anxiety. Similarly, the mother of a 10-year-old boy reached out to us and informed us that her son had a similar meltdown. The boy locked himself up and urged his parents not to leave the house. He feared that the virus was lurking around him to devour him. The pandemic has taken a toll on everyone." The modus operandi of the Foundation is quite professional but there is also a personal touch in the operations so that any individual who connects feels heard and secure. The calls are immediately answered and if any of the therapists is occupied, he/she makes sure that the call is passed on to the other. So no call goes unattended. "Patient confidentiality is maintained throughout. Counseling does not end with just one session. It needs follow-ups. After attending to one person, it becomes the duty and

MANN KI VYATHA
FREE MENTAL HEALTH COVID SERVICE
Are you feeling Fear, Panic, Confusion, Suicidal, Loneliness, Sadness, Restlessness, Anger, Irritation, Frustration
Please Call MANAM FOUNDATION (10AM-9PM)
986-1023-010 | 891-7364-558 | 753-9014-224

MENTAL HEALTH
Talking about mental health is NOT attention seeking. People die in silence every day due to this judgement and then people finally say, 'I wish they spoke up.'
-BRENDON BURCHARD

responsibility of the respective therapist to check regularly if he/she does not revert back for the next session. Each individual needs at least 3 sessions. So the person is taken care of till the therapist feels assured that the matter is resolved. Mostly, people don't revert back for the recurring sessions but we maintain a directory and check on them. Following the sessions, we teach them certain techniques to pacify themselves like mindfulness, breathing techniques and meditation," Somya added. In May 2018, Manam Foundation was set up with a group of women who were journeying through their own struggle with mental health. They joined together and decided to bring a qualitative mental health facility in Odisha. Despite having able mental health professionals, the services and facilities were not structured effectively. So they took it upon themselves to structure the whole system and provide a platform for mental health through counseling and incorporating therapy and related activities. So far, the team has been successful in easing the suffering of people during the pandemic by giving them respite from their mental ailments. ■



ANGELS IN DISGUISE FOR COVID-19 PATIENTS IN HOME ISOLATION

During these trying times, a shining beacon of hope is the Marwari Mahila Manch, Rourkela. Members of the outfit are providing free meals at the doorsteps of COVID-19 patients in home isolation in a bid to ease their suffering

Many people around us were affected by the virus, and we saw them struggling to cook food for themselves. While some were too weak to cook, others had no one in the family to take care of them. In these circumstances, having food on schedule is extremely important
VANDANA JAIN MEMBER OF MARWARI MAHILAMANCH

BY PRACHURYA NANDA

As the second wave of the deadly COVID 19 wreaks havoc across the State, many good samaritans have come forward to help people in distress during these trying times. One shining beacon of hope amid the gloom of the pandemic is Marwari Mahila Manch, Rourkela. Members of the outfit are providing free meals at the doorsteps of COVID 19 patients in home isolation in a bid to ease their suffering. Member of the Manch Vandana Jain said, "Many people around us

were affected by the deadly virus, and we saw them struggling to cook food for themselves. While some were too weak to cook, others had no one in the family to take care of them. In these circumstances, having food on schedule is extremely important. So we decided to provide meals at the doorsteps of people affected with COVID 19." For the initiative, all members contribute to ensure that the affected people get their meals on time. The Mahila Manch hired a cook and an auto-rickshaw for preparing and delivering the food. The cook prepares the food at her home and packs it in plastic thalis having compartments provided by the Manch. "We are only covering Basanti Colony since there are other organisations which are doing the same thing. So we have divided the areas among ourselves," Vandana informed. The meals consist of rice, roti, dal, fried veggies, curry, salad and a sweet. "So far, we have delivered around 3,800 food packets at the doorsteps of Covid patients. We distribute around 125 meals in a day," she added. THE LIONS PROVIDE BREATH AID AT DOORSTEPS Amid the raging pandemic, medical oxygen has become a vital requirement for people infected with COVID 19 who experience breathing distress. With emergencies surfacing at homes, the Lions Club of Rourkela Panposh has come forward to provide free oxygen cylinders at the doorsteps of self-isolating patients. One of the club members Bharat



Every effort counts

Lakhani said, "We have been supplying oxygen cylinders since September 2020. It all started when we saw one of our neighbors struggling due to lack of oxygen. Initially, we launched the initiative with only 4 cylinders but now we have 12. Besides, we have an associate club that has 50 cylinders. Before providing cylinders, we ask people for their Covid positive report and a short video of their SpO2 level. Those whose oxygen saturation is below 90 are given cylinders."

The club has hired an auto-rickshaw to deliver the cylinders at the doorsteps of patients. "The auto-rickshaw driver delivers the cylinders by following all the covid guidelines. We order empty oxygen cylinders and then fill them ourselves. There is an oxygen plant called 'Asiatic Gases' where one of our members works. He fills the cylinders. We have also taught the driver about the fittings of the cylinders. But usually, we ask patients to consult a doctor about their oxygen needs and the required flow from cylinders," Bharat informed.

Helping COVID 19 patients in such difficult times takes a lot of courage and determination. "One of our members Manoj Kejriwal

manages the counseling department. He not only encourages the people in need of oxygen cylinders but also our entire team. Our work involves proper sanitization, loading the cylinders in the auto-rickshaw and keeping a track of the delivery process and ensuring that the help reaches patients on time," he said.

Bharat further informed that they have procured the cylinders from donors. "We have not

tied-up with any industry. We only use the cylinders provided by donors. We refill the empty cylinders before supplying those to patients," he said.

The club members are providing 4-5 oxygen cylinders per day. "There are times when people get panicked and ask us for cylinders anticipating any emergency in future. But since our main priority is to provide oxygen support to those who are actually in need of it, we calmly explain to them that there's no need to panic as the cylinders will arrive at their doorsteps whenever there is an emergency," Bharat added. ■

MARWARI
MAHILA
MANCH

GLOBAL ODIA VOLUNTEERS: LENDING A HELPING HAND FROM ABROAD

Sanjay Dalai, an IT professional working with IBM in Irving, Texas, started this initiative with a few of his friends in April, 2021. GOV has Odia volunteers from almost 20 countries including the US, Canada, UK, Ireland, Australia, New Zealand, Japan, and Nigeria

“

Me and four of my friends in the US and Canada decided to create a resource centre that can be used by people affected by COVID-19 in Odisha and India. In order not to let people feel helpless, we were prepared to do everything in our capacity to save each and every life

SANJAY DALAI
US-BASED IT
PROFESSIONAL

BY DEBI PRASAD SAHU

THE pandemic may have physically separated people but surprisingly, it has in a way brought communities together in showing love, care, concern and compassion for those caught in the spiral of COVID 19. Global Odia Volunteers (GOV) is one such community that has brought Odias from all over the world together to lend a helping hand to people reeling under the crisis not only in Odisha but across India.

Sanjay Dalai, an IT professional working with IBM in Irving, Texas, started this initiative with a few of his friends in April, 2021. One of Sanjay's friends requested him to use his contacts to help get his father admitted to a hospital in Bhubaneswar during the peak of the second COVID 19 wave. After several phone calls, he managed to get his friend's father admitted to a health facility. Things were

getting better when all of a sudden the vitals crashed and the patient passed away. This incident was the trigger for creating a resource pool to help people in urgent need of medical care.

"Me and four of my friends in the US and Canada decided to create a resource centre that can be used by people affected by COVID 19 in Odisha and India. In order not to let people panic or feel helpless, we were prepared to do everything in our capacity to save each and every life. Be it food and medicine delivery to people in home isolation or arranging ICU beds, ventilators or oxygen, we are ready to extend every help possible. Besides, COVID 19, there is a new scare of Mucormycosis or black fungus. We are trying to arrange medicines for this new infection as well," Sanjay informed.

The GOV now has around 140 members from different parts of the globe. Initially, the organisation started its services in Bhubaneswar, Cuttack and Balasore. As more and more people got to know about their work, they started getting calls from other parts of the State. Soon people from places like Faridabad, Mangalore and Puducherry started approaching them for help. Most of the people were looking for hospital beds, oxygen cylinders, Remdesivir injections and other kinds of help.

Impressed by GOV's work, eminent personalities such as IPS officer Basant Rath, dancer Saswat Joshi, anchor Sulagna Routroy, Padma Shri Sudarshan Patnaik, actors Sritam Das and Sukantha Rath and many others joined the organisation to do their bit for the needy.

As the number of people seeking help increased, GOV started to look for more volunteers to work at the ground zero. Soon, NGOs started approaching them with their services. Today, the organisation boasts of a vast network of resources and volunteers ready to help people in distress round the clock.

Talking about the organisation's modus operandi, Sanjay said, "Our strength is collating, archiving, updating and sharing data. We have been able to collect first-hand information from government sources

GLOBAL ODIA
VOLUNTEERS
(GOV)

which are being constantly updated. Data is available in plenty but the challenge is streamlining it and making it accessible to the public. This is the need of the hour and can help save thousands of lives by saving time. Many organisations are focusing on providing different things, but people need to know about them, their point of contacts and other details. Thankfully, we have been able to

help people and save some lives during the second wave of the pandemic with our dedicated team."

GOV has Odia volunteers from almost 20 countries including the UK, Ireland, Australia, New Zealand, Japan, and Nigeria. Most of the people willing to join the organisation are young. Sanjay said, "One of our volunteers, Maheswari, a +3 student from Puri district, approached us to contribute to our efforts. She wanted to be of some help to anyone who needed it. Initially, she compiled a data sheet with details of resources and emergency numbers of all the 30 districts of Odisha and shared it with

us. This was impressive. Today, she is an integral part of our team. Young people like her keep us motivated at a time when it is easy to lose focus."

With a strong database and contacts across Odisha and major cities of India, the GOV community has been able to help more than 170 families so far. Sharing an instance when the GOV team was able to arrange PPE kits for people in Sundargarh, Sanjay informed, "In Mahulpada village, there was an acute shortage of PPE kits. The villagers had been asking the BDO and the Tehsildar for PPE kits and oximeters for some time. Almost 91 people had tested positive for COVID 19 in 10 panchayats and ASHA workers were reluctant to venture into the villages due to lack of protective gear. Since there was no response from the local administration, they approached us. We reached out to the District Magistrate and the local MLA and within one and a half hours, all the necessary items reached the people."

Similarly, the team was able to arrange an ICU bed for a critical patient in Bhubaneswar. "The family of the patient was not able to get him admitted to a private hospital which charged 1.75 lakhs rupees as upfront payment. Since the family didn't have the entire amount, the members requested the authorities to get the patient admitted while they arranged the money. But the hospital refused. On being contacted, GOV had a word with the hospital management but the latter did not oblige. "We then called MP Aparajita Sarangi and sought her intervention. She responded within 15 minutes and we were able to save the patient's life," Sanjay said.

Currently, the GOV team is getting at least 15-20 SOS calls every day. "One of the biggest problems in rural India is the lack of mobile network and internet connectivity while most of our work is done over the internet. It is difficult for people from rural areas to reach us and we don't want to miss out on any chance of saving more lives. That is why we are planning to introduce a hotline soon so that people can reach us anytime and from anywhere," he informed.

With their selfless service, the volunteers of GOV are playing an important role in healing the scars of COVID 19 by reaching out to people in these distressing times. ■

FOOD FOR THOUGHT: SELFLESS SERVICE TO SOCIETY

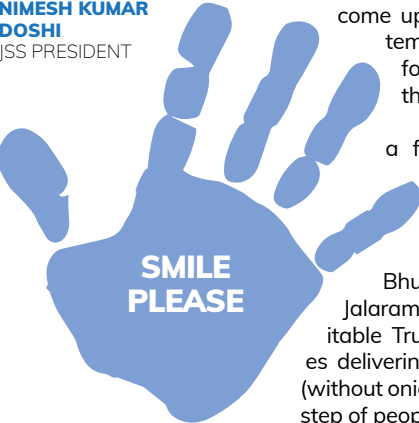
A free service delivering pure-veg meals to the homes of COVID-19 patients in Bhubaneswar reaffirms faith in humanity during these harsh times



“
BY AFREEN FIRDAUS

The motto of Shree Jalaram is 'bhajan' (devotion to God) and 'bhojan' (food for the hungry). Both go hand-in-hand. When we came to know about this initiative, our entire team was eager to collaborate to carry out the noble deed

NIMESH KUMAR DOSHI
JSS PRESIDENT



JSS in association with Smile Please and Smile Project Team has been running the food delivery service since May 17. The team has tied up with two city restaurants, Vineeth's and Gupta's, who prepare packaged hygienic meals. These are then collected by volunteers for distribution. They also have two helpline numbers (8895573721, 9438361575) for people to reach out and order food.

People are advised to place an order for lunch before 9 am and dinner before 4 pm to ease the process of coordinating with the restaurants to prepare and package the meals accordingly. They also distribute bread packets to slum dwellers on alternate days. With a small team of around 15 volunteers, they are able to provide about 100-120 meals daily across the Odisha capital.

When the members of JSS Charitable Trust came up with this initiative, they approached Sabyasachi and Pravin Agarwal for support in this noble cause. The two, who were already involved in helping people stuck in different parts of the country to return back home, gladly agreed.

Speaking to My City Links, the President of JSS, Nimesh Kumar Doshi, said, "The motto of Shree Jalaram is 'bhajan' (devotion to God) and 'bhojan' (food for the hungry). Both go hand-in-hand. When we came to know about this initiative, our entire team was eager to collaborate to carry out the noble deed. This pandemic is such that it is difficult even for relatives and neighbours to come out and help each other. Each one is fighting their own battle in this pandemic. We make sure that the food reaches the person on time and with utmost hygiene. This is our small bit to fulfil our duty towards society."

Jai Doshi, a member of the initiative, informed, "We commenced this initiative when we noticed people being in a fix with their basic need of food in the harsh times of the pandemic. Being a pure vegetarian myself, I know how difficult it is to find proper home-cooked meals during such times, when cooking becomes a chore. My



friends and I teamed up and so far we are happy with the response.

"We give priority to older people and children since they are the most vulnerable. It is a ten-day package, wherein we provide both lunch and dinner to COVID 19 positive patients. It continues for more days if the need arises. Some people are good enough to inform us that they no longer need our services after they are up and doing. This reduces the hassle of providing to someone who is no longer in need. This pandemic has been hard on everyone and we hope people are considerate of each other as well," he added.

Indeed, during such harsh times of the pandemic, it is refreshing to see people come up with such selfless social service, alleviating the needs and necessities of their fellow beings. A big salute! ■

THIS YOUNG MAN HELPS MAINTAIN UNINTERRUPTED BLOOD SUPPLY DURING PANDEMIC

A professional blood donor since 2009, Dharendra Thakur has been relentlessly donating and arranging blood for patients braving all odds. He has been instrumental in opening a blood donation unit 'Lifeline Charitable Trust' by bringing together a group of voluntary donors



Dhirendra encouraging blood donation

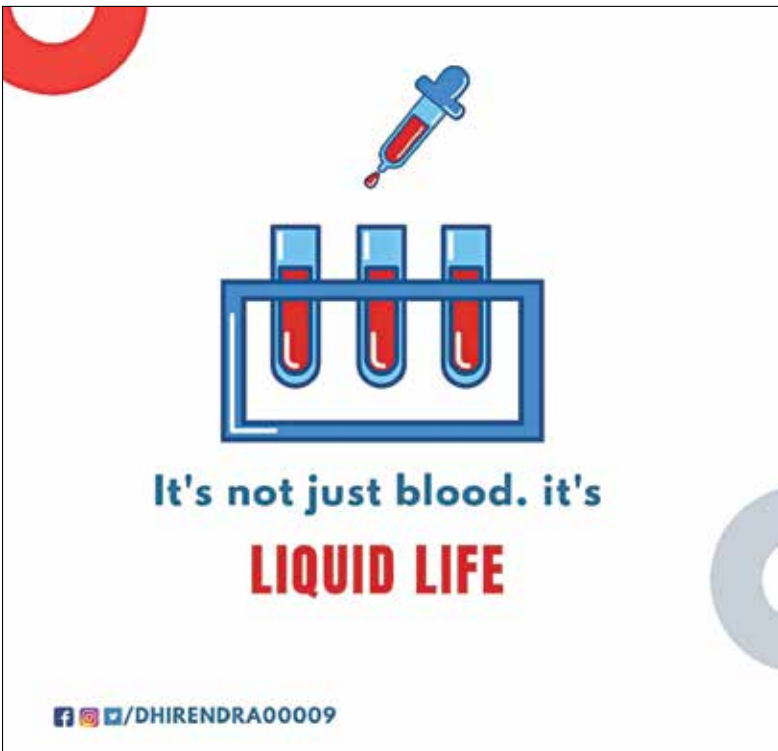
BY AFREEN FIRDAUS

“
The pandemic has instilled a fear of hospitals in people because of which volunteers and other potential donors prefer not to go through the blood donation process in fear of contracting the coronavirus. This has led to a scarcity situation

DHIRENDRA THAKUR
PROFESSIONAL BLOOD DONOR

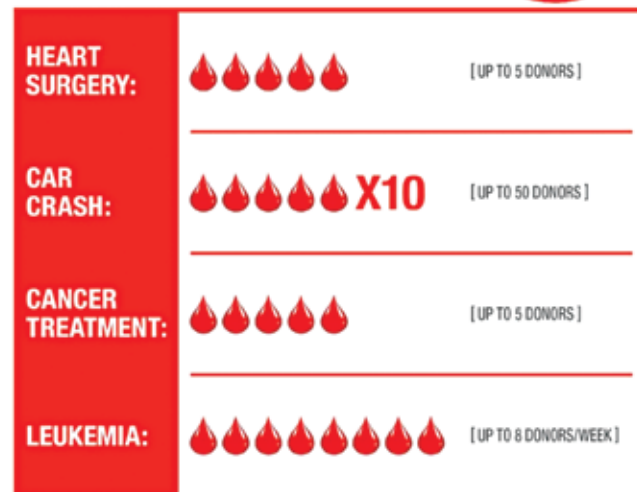
THE pandemic has overwhelmed the country's healthcare system with the surging infections pushing it to the very brink. Among the many services which have been impacted by COVID 19 is blood transfusion. Blood banks are running dry as collection and donation activities have almost come to a standstill. Amid this crisis, there are some people who are like a ray of hope and have come forward to ease the suffering of people reeling under blood scarcity. Dharendra Thakur is one among them.

A professional blood donor since 2009, Dharendra has been relentlessly donating and arranging blood for patients braving all odds. He has been instrumental



in opening a blood donation unit 'Lifeline Charitable Trust' by bringing together a group of voluntary donors to tide over the situation. The unit consists of 20 members who are active round-the-clock, amplifying requests for blood through social media

as well as word of mouth. Blood transfusion services (BTS) are a critical component of any hospital as it is required in all elective and urgent surgical interventions including treatment of trauma, obstetric cases, and several serious medical conditions like thalassemia and cancer. Therefore, maintaining uninterrupted blood supplies is an important public health concern during the pandemic. "The pandemic has instilled a fear of hospitals in people because of which volunteers and other potential donors prefer not to go through the



[f](#) [i](#) [t](#) /DHIRENDRA00009

As the second covid wave

22 MY CITY LINKS | June 2021



Felicitated several times for his work, Dhirendra has earned a familiar name in different health institutions across the State. His

The Lifeline Charitable Trust can be reached on +91 9692300009 for any blood requirement. ■

The advertisement features a dark green background. At the top, the 'Terra Rosso' logo is displayed in a red, arched frame with a brick-like pattern. Below the logo, a yellow banner reads 'PIZZERIA AND SALAD BAR'. The word 'NEW' is written in large, bold, white capital letters. Below it, 'NEAPOLITAN STYLE' is written in yellow capital letters. A central image shows a round brick oven pizza with toppings like pepperoni, mushrooms, and onions, being cut by a black-handled pizza cutter. To the left of the pizza, the words 'BRICK OVEN' are in white and 'PIZZA' is in large yellow letters. At the bottom, the word 'NOW' is in large white letters, followed by 'Serving' in a yellow script font. Below this, '@ Master Canteen' is written in white. The bottom left corner contains social media icons for Facebook, WhatsApp, and Instagram, followed by the text 'TerraRossoBBSR', the phone number '7873183333', the Instagram handle 'terrarossobbsr', and the address '108/B, Master Canteen, Bhubaneswar - 751001'. The bottom right corner features the text 'Brought to you by' above the 'Bocca Cafe' logo, which is a circular emblem with the name 'Bocca Cafe' inside.

ANATOMY OF BLACK FUNGUS

Even before the second wave of COVID-19 could be tamed, rising cases of mucormycosis (black fungus) have posed a new challenge to healthcare professionals. Initially, a few States reported such cases, but black fungus soon became an issue of concern across the country including Odisha. My City Links got in touch with Dr Manoj Kumar Lath, Consultant ENT Surgeon at Care Hospitals, to know more about this health threat

BY AFREEN FIRDAUS

ACCORDING to the US Center for Disease Control and Prevention, mucormycosis is a serious but rare fungal infection caused by a group of moulds called micro-mycetes. The symptoms of black fungus infection include abnormal blackish discharge or bleeding from the nose, nasal blockage and excessive dryness of the nose. These are accompanied by headaches, swelling and redness of the eyes, double vision or loss of sight as well as difficulty in closing and opening the eyes. Patients also complain of facial numbness as well as difficulty in opening the mouth and chewing.

"The fungus has always been freely present around us, but re-



A patient being treated for mucormycosis

mained mostly dormant. It needs a very specific kind of environment in a host to cause an infection. COVID 19 has given it that environment

because the patient's immunity is weakened," ENT surgeon Dr Manoj Kumar Lath explained, adding that a main cause behind its aggrava-

tion is the misuse of steroids.

"It is most commonly found in the nose, sinuses, and eyes. It can also spread to the lungs. But once it spreads to the brain, it can be very difficult to treat," Dr Lath said and advised that people should follow protocols of infection control at hospitals.

The prime concern with black fungus is the high mortality rate, the doctor warned. "The cases of mucormycosis are rampant in hospitals on a daily basis now. It has become a major concern after COVID 19 as its mortality rate is high. It has been observed that secondary infections, fungal & bacterial, are causing more mortality," he informed.

NOTIFIABLE DISEASE

Due to its alarming growth rate, the Central government has urged States to declare black fungus as an epidemic by making it a 'notifi-

IT IS MOST COMMONLY FOUND IN THE NOSE, SINUSES, AND EYES. IT CAN ALSO SPREAD TO THE LUNGS. BUT ONCE IT SPREADS TO THE BRAIN, IT CAN BE VERY DIFFICULT TO TREAT

able disease' under the Epidemic Diseases Act.

A 'notifiable disease' is one that is required by law to be reported to government authorities. The information allows the authorities to monitor the disease and provide early warning of a possible outbreak.

The States and Union Territories (UTs) are also required to make it mandatory for government and private hospitals to report all suspected and confirmed cases of such a disease. Promptly responding to the Centre, Odisha, Tamil Nadu, Gujarat and Chandigarh declared black fungus as a notifiable disease that day itself.

WHO IS AT HIGHER RISK?

This infection is being detected mostly among recovering or recovered COVID 19 patients who were administered steroids to treat symptoms, and also among those suffering from diabetes and cancer. "Immunocompromised patients (people whose immunity is not good enough) are at higher risk of the infection," Dr Lath explained.

"Patients undergoing oxygen therapy in intensive care units (ICU), where a humidifier is used, are quite prone to fungal infections because of constant exposure to moisture. Conditions such as unchecked diabetes, debilitation of the immune system due to the use of steroids, prolonged ICU or hospi-

tal stay, voriconazole therapy (used to treat serious fungal infections) in COVID 19 patients increase the risk of contracting mucormycosis," he said.

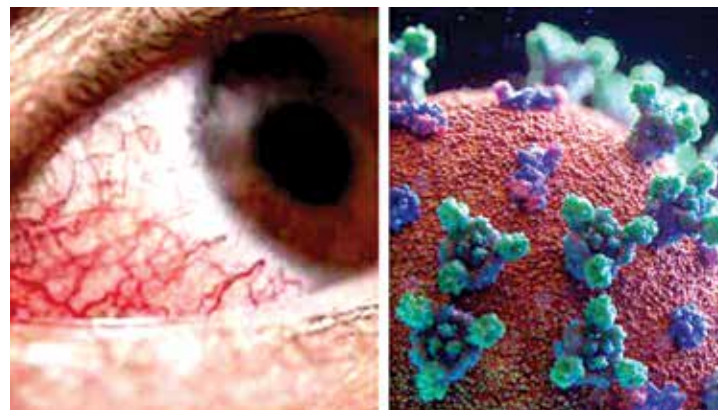
"Although contracting black fungus is not an issue of concern for healthy people, those with high blood sugar should be alert as they are at a greater risk of being infected, even if they do not have COVID 19," the doctor advised.

HOW DOES BLACK FUNGUS AFFECT THE PATIENT?

"Black fungus is present in our body as a commensal in its dormant stage. This means that it is present in our body, but does not cause any problems. However, this fungus gets activated in COVID 19 patients due to their compromised immunity," Dr Lath explained.

"This fungus derives its nutrition from ferritin in blood. In case of a diabetic patient, the ferritin level is very high in blood. So it serves as an easy passage for the fungus to enter into such a person's blood vessels and block circulation in body parts, making those areas black and swollen," he added.

The disease is caused by a set of micro-organisms known as mucormycetes, which are present naturally in the environment and seen mostly in soil and in decaying organic matter like leaves and compost. Its manifestation begins as a skin infection in the air pockets located behind the forehead, nose, and cheekbones and also in between the eyes and teeth. In the process, the eyes, lungs and even the brain gets infected with its rampant growth. This leads to severe complicated symptoms like the blackening or discoloration over the nose, blurred or double vision, chest pain, breathing difficulties



BLACK FUNGUS

ALL YOU NEED TO KNOW

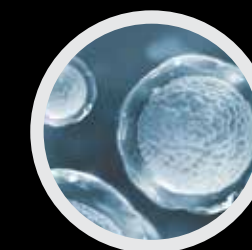
WHO ARE AT RISK?



**SEVERE
COVID-19 CASES**



**HIGHLY
DIABETIC**



**PATIENTS ON
ANTICANCER
TREATMENT**



**HIGH
DOSE OF
STERIODS**

HOW TO DETECT?

- ABNORMAL DISCHARGE FROM NOSE
- EYE PAIN BLURRED VISION
- FACIAL NUMBNESS
- CHEWING PROBLEM

WHAT TO DO?

- CONSULT A SPECIALIST
- FOCUS ON CONTROLLING SUGAR LEVEL
- NO SELF-MEDICATION
- REGULAR CHECK-UP

NEW VARIANT: WHITE FUNGUS

Infection due to white fungus is found to be deadlier than that of black fungus due to its acute effects on the lungs and other vital body parts, including the brain, digestive tract, kidneys and even private parts. Another reason for the white variant being more lethal is that it spreads quickly and causes greater damage to vital organs. It can be caused if people come in contact with water or an unsanitary environment containing the infectious moulds. People with low immunity are more likely to be at risk. Although it is not contagious, a person is said to be vulnerable to the infection since these moulds can be easily inhaled by a patient, triggering major health complications. Its symptoms are quite similar to black fungus. Since the white fungus affects lungs and chest, it may lead to coughing, chest pain and breathlessness. Inflammatory symptoms of facial features and swelling, infections, persistent



An affected patient in pain

and coughing of blood.

SHOULD COVID 19 PATIENTS DO SELF-EXAMINATION?

According to medical professionals, regular self-examination, including facial examination in daylight for swelling — especially of the nose, cheeks and eyes — or black discoloration, hardening, and pain on touch is advisable. “They should also look for signs of black areas and swelling inside the mouth, palate, teeth, or nose. Oral and nasal examinations using torchlight are also advisable. If

anything appears abnormal, they should start repeatedly cleaning the nose with saline water and take prescribed medications. If the vision or pain deteriorates, consult a doctor immediately,” Dr Lath recommended.

Medical professionals, especially ophthalmologists, advise recovered COVID 19 patients with high risk to do regular check-ups with doctors even after discharge.

HOW TO TREAT BLACK FUNGUS?

The treatment of this infection

headaches and pains are some of the other major symptoms. Nevertheless, the infection can be detected through X-rays and CT scans and the patients are given anti-fungal medication.

THE TREATMENT REQUIRES A MULTI-DISCIPLINARY APPROACH CONSISTING OF EYE SURGEONS, ENT SPECIALISTS, GENERAL SURGEONS, NEUROSURGEONS AND DENTAL MAXILLOFACIAL SURGEONS

country. “The most effective treatment is surgical debridement with the injection of antifungal medicine. The contamination of the fungus can be diagnosed through nasal endoscopy -contrast enhanced MRI, frozen section and KOH mount,” Dr Lath informed.

WHAT IS THE SCENARIO IN ODISHA?

On May 10, the Odisha government announced that the first case of black fungus was detected in the State. Since then, the disease has been observed to be increasing among COVID 19 patients who were under corticosteroids and other immunosuppressive drugs as well as among those in the post-corona period.

A State-level task force committee was promptly constituted for early detection and management of such cases. The committee has suggested a protocol for identification, treatment and follow up action. The authorities concerned are also directed to generate awareness on the fungal disease. ■



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BY MCL BUREAU

Sum Covid Hospital And Sum Ultimate Medicare – A Lifeline For Families

THE COVID 19 pandemic has been a testing time for everyone who has been infected by the virus and for those who are treating the patients. One of the biggest problems getting admitted to a COVID hospital has been that the family members of the patient have not been able to keep track of their loved ones. However some hospitals like SUM Covid Hospital and SUM Ultimate Medicare have gone out of their way to make it easier for both the patient and their relatives.

In the prevailing uncertain times, a family goes into a tizzy if a member becomes COVID-19 positive. The situation gets difficult after a person is admitted into a COVID-19 hospital as no family member has access to the patient because of the highly contagious nature of the disease. In such a scenario, the treating teams at SUM Covid Hospital and SUM Ultimate Medicare have been extending yeoman service to the family members of patients



them on a regular basis. The case of Pradip Kumar Madhup, a senior officer with RITES working at Jharsuguda, is an example. After being infected by COVID 19, Madhup was initially admitted in the MCL Hospital at Jharsuguda and then rushed to the SUM Covid Hospital here for treatment. When he was wheeled into the ICU, none of his family members were with him. In fact, his family members, stationed at Patna, were also infected by the disease and were

under treatment there. One of his relatives living in Singapore was in constant touch with the hospital help desk and was provided all information about the patient. After 12 days, he was shifted to the SUM Ultimate Medicare where he was treated under the care of the Senior Consultant in Pulmonary Medicine and critical care unit team. He was discharged from the hospital on June 7. "When I was brought to SUM Covid Hospital, there were no family members with me. They were far away from me. But the care and treatment I received from the doctors, nurses and paramedics of both the hospitals, SUM Covid and SUM Ultimate Medicare has given me a new lease of life," Madhup said as he was leaving the hospital. His relative based in Singapore, Kumar Anand also thanked both the hospitals making a special mention about the cooperation he received from the help desk. Priyambada Das, a 59-year-old lady, also had a similar experience. She was also brought to SUM Covid Hospital after being infected and was subsequently treated at the SUM Ultimate Medicare. Her son Sambhab Das, who lives in Mel-



bourne, was worried about her condition. The help desk in both hospitals provided him all information till she was discharged from the hospital a month ago. Das expressed his appreciation and gratefulness to the teams who treated his mother. ■

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HI, I am 5649. This code which holds information about me is very important to me. I need it for any kind of job, from buying things to selling them. This code contains my birthplace. I am from the Segrant Galaxy, Sandar System, Planet Jatrice, Continent Seleria, Country Alura, Costenda State's Capital City Alebra. The number 5649 is given to me as my identity. This code is given to every creature of the Universe, by the Universal Naming Organization. But people generally call each other by a name decided by the creature. I have chosen my name as Frag. This code is immortal, as every creature in this universe is. I am 325 years old. My Birthday is on 46th Ruqesa, the second month.

This all happened after the Universalization. Which started in the year -300 and ended with the beginning of year 1. This was because every different civilization had a different set of rules for time. The values were different. So, it was decided by the Universal Time Organization (UTF) that just as the universalization will end, the time will start from Year 1. Each Year has 300 days. Each day has 30 Hours, each hour is of 30 minutes and each minute has 30 seconds. These years are divided into 3 months, each of 100 days. The names of these months are Aspol, Ruqesa and Habania. According to the decided time every planet regulated their time, distance from their star, temperature of their stars, etc.

All these different organizations which created rules had members of every different civilization. The total number of members of these organization keeps on increasing, due to hybridization of species. The organizations were created during the period of Universalization. Universalization started with the exploration of the great universe and it was of a complete 301 years. There were a lot of wars during this period, but at last we were successful in maintaining peace and harmony. As the medical facilities of most of the civilizations was as smart as ours, we were and we are immortal, we would also stay

The World Of My Dreams



YASH AGRAWAL
CLASS 10
MOTHER'S PUBLIC SCHOOL

young forever. After universalization we shared our technologies with each other. Now we have organizations for everything.

Like tomorrow is the Universal Happy New Year 9688. We will be completing a total of 9688 years of togetherness and peace. Everyone is excited as there are 10 hours more to go.

Like every year each Star System creates some planets in the shape of occasion, so this time it would be in the form of "UHNYY", full of booms and crackers, and the atmosphere of these planets contains only oxygen. This time too we did it, with a count of 5...4...3...2...1 and boom, it was completely wonderful. The planets that are created for these purposes are named as per the year of occasion.

All the occasions are handled

by the Universal Occasion Managers (UOMs). There are no possible crimes here like smuggling, terrorism, rape, acid attack, heists, discrimination and everyone lives together in peace and harmony. Creatures can only eat veg food, which are created in food labs, by the scientists appointed by Universal Food Managers (UFMs). We can also get customized taste of food. The food is completely safe, healthy, nutritious and tasty. All these food items are universally available.

We have infinite amount of space so that we can create anything. We can create infinite number of gaming planets where we can get real life experience of wars and adventure without causing harm to any living being. The best thing about this universe is that no one can own a land, even if a planet has been created by you. The land will belong to nature, and everybody has equal right on it.

Here the people get education from the basics, and then the level is increased slowly. Everybody is made self-sufficient for every situation. The education system is very smart and productive.

Here everyone gives importance to nature as in each planet the surface is covered with at least 45% forests which are undestroyable. We can plant more trees but we can't destroy one, because they are also living organisms, and destroying a living creature has been made impossible here.

"Son get up it's too late, come on get up." I woke up from that good dream, and returned to Earth. I hope that one day we would also have that same type of life or at least I can know something more about that universe which would help me to make my earth stronger and more beautiful. If we humans will stand united, respect and take good care of nature, we can make the Earth a better place to live. ■



CREATIVE
CORNER FOR CHILDREN

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. So get into the magic of weaving stories as CityYarn gets ready to welcome you.

BY JYOTI PRAKASH SAHOO

IT is often said that if you are passionate enough, nothing can stop you from following your dreams. This adage has been proved right by Director of Odisha Vigilance, Dr Debasis Panigrahi. Though an IPS officer by profession, he has managed to establish himself as an eminent writer, poet and a lyricist too.

Panigrahi is a bilingual writer whose works have been published both in Odia and English. Writing for nearly three decades, he is the recipient of Odisha Sahitya Akademi Award for short stories. So far, he has published 11 collections of stories, 3 novellas, a novel and one work of non-fiction besides writing lyrics of Odia songs. His English translation of short stories 'Things Left Unsaid' has been exhibited at Beijing and London Book Fairs and he has received rave reviews for it.

On the occasion of World Poetry Day on March 21, Panigrahi launched his new poetry collection 'Mellowed with Years' at the Oxford Book Store in Bhubaneswar. A few of the poems are based on 'COVID 19', the deadly pandemic. One of the recurrent themes in his works is the deceptiveness of memory, remembrance and recollections as the line of distinction between fact and fiction gets blurred.

In an exclusive interview with My City Links, Panigrahi shares his journey as a writer. Here are the **EXCERPTS**.

TELL US ABOUT YOUR RECENTLY LAUNCHED BOOK 'MELLOWED WITH YEARS'.

'Mellowed with years' is a collection of poems that are musings on our lives and times. It is also a part-memoir of life in the time of coronavirus. The poems portray emotions, events, relationships, people and places in a deeply intense and personal mode.

TELL US ABOUT YOUR JOURNEY IN POETRY?

I am more into writing prose than poetry. But I write poems and lyrics in Odia as well. I took to writing poems in English in 2017 when I visited Ladakh, the fascinating region of mountain passes. The beauty and mystery of the place captured my poetic imagination. After 'Ladakh', I

For This IPS Officer, Writing Is A Labour Of Love

Director of Odisha Vigilance, Dr Debasis Panigrahi has managed to establish himself as an eminent writer, poet and a lyricist too whose works have been published both in Odia and English



kept writing poems in English but at a slow pace. It was during the lockdown last year when I started to write poems more prolifically. Poetry in English came late in my life and I am enjoying my journey in it. But there is still a long way to go.

YOU WRITE BOTH IN ODISIA AND ENGLISH. WHAT ARE THE DIFFERENCES IN TERMS OF EXPRESSING THOUGHTS?

In Odia, we are more liberal with use of words, adjectives, and ornamentation of the language. English is a language of economy of words. Brevity of expression is more rigorous in English. You have to understand the texture and nuances of both Odia and English languages very well in order to write bilingually.

SOME OF THE POEMS ARE ABOUT COVID 19. HOW DID THIS HAPPEN AND HOW HAS THE PANDEMIC AFFECTED YOU AS SOMEONE WHO HOLDS A PUBLIC OFFICE?

Coronavirus is the kind of pandemic that comes once in a hundred years. The last pandemic of this scale and intensity was the Spanish Flu of 1918-20. COVID 19 has



Dr Debasis Panigrahi

disrupted every aspect of our lives. It is most certainly the worst nightmare of our times. As someone holding a public office, I am aware of the massive proportions of the challenges that the deadly virus poses to our State and country, especially to the frontline workers, policy makers and implementing agencies. I wrote poems on COVID 19 to express the deep anguish and helplessness of the people living in these desperate and distressing times. Writing poetry was also my way of coming to terms with the pandemic and making some sense of it. It was cathartic and provided me emotional support.

WHAT DO YOU MEAN BY THE 'DECEPTIVENESS OF MEMORY'?

Memory is deceptive in the sense that it is shaped by perceptions and may not always reflect the truth, the way a thing had actually

happened. Memory therefore may not be a trusted guide to retrieve information and distinguish facts from fiction. The 'deceptiveness of memory' is on account of multiple filters of perception, values, beliefs, time, space and characters that our remembrance and recollections have to go through invariably.

HAS YOUR WORK AS AN IPS OFFICER HAD ANY INFLUENCE ON YOUR WRITING?

As an IPS officer, I have a vast reservoir of human experiences to draw upon. It also helps me to get a ringside view of things on certain occasions. The job also has made me more observant and perceptive. All these have influenced me as a writer.

AMONG ALL YOUR WORKS, NAME ONE WHICH IS VERY CLOSE TO YOUR HEART AND WHY?

It is a difficult question to answer. There are many works which are written in various contexts and at different points of life. They are all close to my heart. I look upon writing as a labour of love. I write only when I am sure that I am ready for it.

HOW DO YOU MANAGE YOUR PROFESSION AND PASSION TOGETHER?

It is like a tightrope walking to find a balance between the two. Both are important to me and crucial to my persona. In my profession, it is hard to get personal time and the right frame of mind to write. But I have to somehow find it to satiate my urge to write. Writing helps in unburdening myself and coming to terms with the harsh realities of life. It also helps me fight loneliness and turn experiences of pain and suffering into works of art.

We had spoken to Dr Debasis Panigrahi just before he was down with covid. Currently, he has been airlifted to Kolkata. We, at My City Links, wish him speedy recovery. ■

Gen Z Rebels To Religion

In these times of information overload, Generation Z sees the world with a different perspective. They are undoubtedly breaking away from age-old stereotypes, stigma and sexist customs, particularly those pertaining to religion. No wonder they are called the 'rebel generation' for all the right reasons. An MCL report

BY AFREEN FIRDAUS

MOST teens and young adults these days are trying to sync in with their spiritual side rather than being a herd follower to an organised religion. For them, "taste testing" religion and self-introspection are the means to chart out their path towards spirituality. "For me, religion is an inherent trait that you follow just because your family is doing the same. It is more of worshipping without understanding the impact. On the other hand, spirituality is about understanding your actions and their consequences," averred Rimil Murmu, a young banker.

"Spirituality is like feeding your



Today's youth feels when the voice inside you is clear then you are on the right path and you don't need to follow others

soul. Hence, if your soul is content, so will your world be," she added.

Religion and spirituality, according to Rimil, are two diverse ideas.

"Religion divides people by creating a barrier whereas spirituality connects souls," she said. The only commonality between the



I think the most successful thing that one can get into in today's age is to become a Baba. A god man just needs to win the trust of the people and then his business is set

ADITYA PANI
SCHOOL STUDENT

two is faith. "I believe in the voice of my conscience and introspect myself through meditation. When you know the voice inside you is clear, you're on the right track," she quipped.

Yashika Gupta, a Class 12 student of Lawrence School, Kolkata,

echoed this seeming difference between religion and spirituality. "Religion is an intrinsic promoter of faith and belongingness. It is more about devotion to a supreme being. But then it's made a compulsion, whereas spirituality is a personal quest to understand our own identity," she opined. This 16-year-old girl believes that change in the mindset of people and balancing factors in life is more important. "Spirituality promotes positivity and peace," she added.

'RESTRICTIVE RELIGION'

For Sandeep Sahoo, an IT professional, religion is an aggregate of beliefs. "We relate to religion as an individual, whereas spirituality is something to which our soul relates to. It comes to the rescue of our inner self when everything appears to be futile," he said. As for



For the youth today religion is freedom of being able to be whatever they want to be

investment banker, Fanindra Pradhan, religion comes with too many restrictions and too many illogical customs. "Can't one just live and respect all lives other than themselves without any preconceived



The path to being happy is beyond all vices



Believing in a higher entity is appreciated, but not when it gets in the way of one's lifestyle. Religion should be individualistic

FANINDRA PRADHAN
INVESTMENT BANKER

opinions?"

For Gen Z, religion has always been on the back burner. They were introduced to it in their childhood, but learnt to question restrictive traditions and religious practices as they grew up.

"In India, there are lots of restrictions regarding religion, from what one should eat to what one should wear. And this has been the custom for so many years. But religious in-

gion should be individualistic, but it has and will be a collective activity. People just try to influence others to practice a religion so that they get more people to follow the same common interest," he added.

BABA BUSINESS

The trend of emerging god men and their dubious business tactics has further fractured the millennials' belief in religion. These impersonators can be identified by their signature look consisting of flamboyant jewellery, extravagant lifestyle, saffron uniforms with a godly tilak on the forehead, and "Baba" attached as a prefix to their names.

Such frauds are so sly in their techniques that they go on to the extent of claiming that they are not god men (or women) but rather God themselves. Many of them have been charged with high-end crimes such as rape, murder, assault, financial frauds and even paedophilia. And yet they court a growing number of "blind followers" seduced with their fake promises.

But not so for the secular-minded millennials, who are challenging the irrational ideologies of god men and boycotting them publicly.

Aditya Pani, a student of Class 8, said, "I think the most successful thing that one can get into in today's age is to become a Baba. A godman just needs to win the trust of people and then his business is set," he chuckled. Hence, for millennials religion is there, but most choose to ignore it. After the tech boom in the 90s, people have been less superstitious and that has resulted in most of them being realistic towards life rather than being blind followers of religion. And millennials are a product of this generation. ■



‘THE MOUNTAIN HOCKEY’ The First-Ever Odia Documentary on Disney+ Hotstar

BY JYOTI PRAKASH SAHOO

Directed by Avinash Pradhan & Debasish Mohapatra, it is the first ever Odia documentary to be streamed on an OTT platform, and that too on Disney+ Hotstar, one of the most popular OTT platforms. The film was released on June 4



YOUNG and talented Odia filmmakers are carving a niche for themselves across OTT platforms these days. Moving away from the beaten track, they are creating exceptional content which is being recognised both nationally and internationally. Odia documentary ‘The Mountain Hockey’, directed by Avinash Pradhan and Debasish Mohapatra is a case in point. Not only it is the first ever Odia documentary to be streamed on OTT platform, it’s the first Odia content

to be streamed on Disney+ Hotstar, one of the most popular OTT platforms. The film was released on June 4.

The film narrates the story of a selfless teacher, hockey coach and sports activist Rajendra Kumar Kujur as he goes through a lot of hardship to teach hockey to tribal girls in a remote area of Odisha. While the story is by Avinash, cinematography has been done by Brajaraz Behera. The classy posters of the film have been made by Uday Bhadraraj.

“The Mountain Hockey is our third documentary. I and Avinash have done two other documentaries titled Sambalpuri Weavers and One Screen Cinema before,” informed Debasish who is a diehard fan of Shatrughn Khan. Both Debasish and Avinash have a mass communication degree and during their college days, had a keen interest in filmmaking.



It took us 20 days to complete the shoot. But we faced several hurdles as we are independent and new to this field. It took us almost 3 years to prepare the film. We approached several regional and national OTT platforms and we wanted to stream it in Odisha

DEBASISH MOHAPATRA
DIRECTOR

The film’s story was conceptualised during the hugely successful 2018 FIH Men’s Hockey World Cup in Bhubaneswar. During the hockey world cup, the duo planned to make a documentary to promote women players of the State. They came across Rajendra who was training 400 girls in hockey in a tribal village near Sambalpur-Sundargarh border. Apart from being the headmaster of the local Government girls’ high school, Rajendra was also a father at Amlikhaman Church.

“That’s how the film’s idea took birth and we reached the remote village. It took us almost one month to research the film’s settings and then we approached father Rajendra for the film. Being a kind-hearted person, he agreed to do it. Since there are no hotels or restaurants, we lived with father Rajendra’s



During Practice Kujur with his students



Avinash with some villagers and Hockey Coach Dominic



Team Mountain Hockey Naval Tata Hockey Academy students

family and shared food with them,” Debasish said.

The toughest part was to make the tribal girls face the camera as they didn’t know much about TV. But all of them are fantastic hockey players. Though more girls were needed for the movie, the filmmakers got permission to use only 30-40 players for the shoot. Rajendra also made it clear that the girls’ studies should not be hampered. So the shoot used to start from early morning and continued till 9 am only.

Debasish said, “It took us 20 days to complete the shoot. But we faced several hurdles as we are independent and new to this field. It took us almost 3 years to prepare

the film. We approached several regional and national OTT platforms and we wanted to stream it in Odisha. But the offers were not that encouraging which was quite depressing. After putting in a lot of effort, we got the opportunity to release it on Disney+ Hotstar with the help of Raj Kishor Hota, Manish Bhushan Mishra and our PR man-

ager Avinash Jaiswal.”

The filmmaker duo wishes to bring a revolution in the Odia entertainment industry. “We have two other documentary films in the pipeline and our aim is to make better feature films in the future,” he added.

‘The Mountain Hockey’ can be streamed online for free. ■

BY JYOTI PRAKASH SAHOO

Odisha Music Falls Silent: Amarendra Mohanty No More

RENOWNED music director of the Odia film industry Amarendra Mohanty aka Bulu Bhai passed away due to COVID 19 on May 17, 2021. At the age of 63, Mohanty left the world while receiving treatment at a private hospital in Odisha after testing positive for COVID 19. The Odia film fraternity mourns as it has lost one of its stalwarts working for over thirty years.

“He tested positive for COVID 19 on April 24 and was admitted to the hospital on May 3. He was on ventilator support for the last four days. Doctors said he was responding well to the treatments. But unfortunately he left us,” informed Anwesha Mohanty, the music director's daughter.

Mohanty was trained as a classical musician from a young age. He started his career as a singer with All India Radio, Cuttack. In 1993, after being a successful singer in many Odia films, he ventured into the world of music direction with the film ‘Shradhanjali’. With the success of the film, he made a name for himself in the film fraternity not only as an ace singer but also as a brilliant music director.



Starting from iconic Odia singers Akshay Mohanty, Pranab Pattnaik, Chitta Jena to Bollywood singers like Sonu Nigam, Md Aziz, and others and today's new generation of singers, he has worked with multiple generations of talents

ABHIJIT MAJUMDAR
MUSIC DIRECTOR

After Shradhanjali he composed music for many films and gained accolades for his work which was appreciated by one and all. His credit list includes hit films like ‘Magunira Shagada’, ‘Suna Panjuri’, ‘Sara-pancha Babu’, ‘Bhai Hela Bhagari’, ‘Stree’, ‘Kandhei Akhire Luha’. And the last film that he was a part of was the 2012 film ‘He Sakha’.

Remembering the legend, popular Music director Abhijit Majumdar said, “Like his behavior, his

Renowned music director Amarendra Mohanty aka Bulu Bhai passed away due to COVID-19 on May 17. The Odia film fraternity mourns the loss of one of its stalwarts working for over thirty years



songs are very sweet too and it always has that Odia flavor in it. Starting from ‘Puchuki Gali’, ‘Soija Mama’ to ‘Jhumuka Thila Baju Nathila’, from Bhajan Samrat Bhikari Bal's ‘Mun Ta Bada Deulara Para Re’ to Sonu Nigam's ‘Chal Begi Begi Jiba Sangata’, he has always won hearts with his creation. With his music, he has also played a vital role in popularizing Odia Jatra industry.

“Starting from iconic Odia singers Akshay Mohanty, Pranab Pattnaik, Chitta Jena to Bollywood singers like Sonu Nigam, Md Aziz, and others and today's new generation of

singers, he has worked with multiple generations of talents. Whenever I go to Mumbai, Bollywood singers like Udit Narayan, Kumar Sanu, Suresh Wadekar and Md Aziz used to ask about him saying, “Bulu Bhaiya kaise Hain?” Recently he has invited me to sing at his new studio. We were hoping that he will be fine soon. But destiny had some other plans and he left us. Odia Entertainment Industry can never forget him.” he added.

Another famous music composer Prem Anand said, “Bulu Bhai's creations have made him immortal. He was a royal music director and his

personality was also like that. Last year he made a covid awareness song and this year we lost him due to the same disease. No one can take his place.”

Recollecting the memories with the legend, Actor Sritam Das said, “We have been working together for the last 25 years. So we do have a lot of memories together. Recently we met while attending a reality show. He shared some interesting memories of our old days. And we had a great discussion on his music and songs. He even offered me to sing a song in his composition. But unfortunately that will not happen anymore.” ■

BY PRACHURYA NANDA

OLLYWOOD diva Anu Choudhary seems to be on a roll! While both her recently released projects, ‘Nirvana 13’ which was released on MX player and Odia web series, ‘72 Hours – Life or Death’ that released on Tarang Plus received good reviews, she is all geared up now for her upcoming film, ‘Atithi –The Unwanted Guest’.

While the shoot is on hold for the time being due to the surge in Covid cases and the ongoing lockdown, the actress is hopeful of resuming shooting once things are under control and is all excited about the film. We caught up with Anu Choudhary to know more about the film!



EXCERPTS FROM AN INTERVIEW

WHAT IS THE THEME OF THE FILM AND TELL US ABOUT THE CHARACTER YOU ARE PORTRAYING?

The film comes with a tagline ‘Atithi – The Unwanted Guest’ and that is good enough for audiences to take a guess. I cannot reveal the storyline but we then I can say there is a suspense element to the film. Not all guests are welcome, sometimes, we can react differently to a guest. So just wait for the movie to release and check it out yourself!

As far as my character is concerned, it is that of a housewife cum mother and there is her sister-in-law. It's a typical modern family that one can relate with. And I have tried to give my best as far as my character is concerned. As an artist, every time I get an opportunity to play a character, I always try to understand the character properly and portray it in a different way so that even if I may have played similar roles, the character would appear different to my audience and fans. I always prepare for that.

WHAT MADE YOU CHOOSE THE FILM?

I liked the script when the narration



Anu Choudhary On ‘Atithi – The Unwanted Guest’

The Ollywood diva is on a roll! Both her recently released projects, ‘Nirvana 13’ and Odia web series 72 Hours – Life or Death’ have been receiving rave reviews



came to me! It was a story that had to be shot just within a house with no such fancy locations and the story revolved around the character and the guest and so it got me excited because it was interesting and different. So, I said a yes to the script. Besides, today people are looking for meaningful and subject-oriented cinema rather than the run-of-the-mill hero-heroine romance, action and song films! And that's another reason why I chose this script.

THE TITLE OF YOUR FILM - HOW SIGNIFICANT IT IS - SINCE WE GENERALLY ASSOCIATE ATITHI WITH DEVO BHAVA?

Like I said, the title depicts and justifies the story. You have to watch it to know more.

WHAT PREPARATIONS WENT INTO THE CHARACTER YOU ARE PORTRAYING IN THE FILM?

As I said, for every character, I do prepare and when I heard about



this role, I was very excited. For me, every character is special and as an artist, I want to play my character in such a way that even as the audience realises it is Anu Choudhary, they relate with the character instead. Like when they watch this film, they will connect with the character, ‘Meera’.

APART FROM YOURS, ANY OTHER CHARACTER THAT YOU FEEL WILL STAND OUT IN THIS FILM?

The story itself is the ultimate hero of the film! The story is everything, I can say. Apart from that, there's a little child who is playing my daughter and she's really good at such an age and has beautifully portrayed her character.

HOW WAS THE SHOOTING DIFFERENT DURING THESE TRYING TIMES?

We had to face a lot of difficulties because of the pandemic. In fact, almost during the entire 2020, shootings remained cancelled. No work was there, not for me alone, but the entire fraternity. Everyone suffered but then COVID was an unknown enemy when it hit us and none of us had any idea what to do. Things are still bad and we do not know when shooting can resume. But we can just hope that good times will be back again and the entire industry including me is looking forward to resume work when it is possible. ■

I Wish To Be A ‘Kalakar’ All My Life: Abhijit Tripathy

A young sensation, Tripathy has composed more than 170 songs in only two years of his career in the music industry. The 25-year-old music composer has dabbled in all genres of songs except devotional



BY JYOTI PRAKASH SAHOO

FOR many, music is like therapy and it can do miracles. Composer Abhijit Tripathy cannot agree more as he firmly believes music is the food for his soul. “Few years back music was nothing for me but now it’s like my heartbeat. Music has been used to cure people and even to welcome rain since ancient times. I wish the magic of music reaches more people and makes their lives colourful,” says Abhijit of ‘Sammohini’ fame.

For any Odia music lover, Abhijit Tripathy is not a new name. Hailing from a nondescript village of Godipada in Nayagarh district, he has composed more than 170 songs in only two years of his career in the music industry. The 25-year-old

music composer has dabbled in all genres of songs except devotional. His credit list includes more than 40 hit songs including Tu Mate Bhala Je Pau, Mate Prema Heijae Sete Thara, Sammohini, Apsari, Mo Prema Kahani Ra Nayika and Matha Re Dei Pata Odhani.

MCL caught up with Abhijit for an exclusive interview. Here are the **EXCERPTS**.

TELL US ABOUT THE MAKING OF YOUR RECENT TRENDING SONG ‘SAMMOHINI’.

I got a request to make a song for the YouTube channel ‘Odia Blues’. They wanted me to make an experimental song like my previous song ‘Apsari’. The name of the channel reminded me of the music genre ‘Blues’. Be it in Bollywood or Ollywood, composers have stopped making Blues since years. But that is a genre which has always been



loved. So I thought to give it a try.

YOU’RE PASSIONATE ABOUT ACTING AND DANCE. HOW DID MUSIC COMPOSITION HAPPEN TO YOU?

It’s true that I never learnt music. I started dancing and theatre acting in my village from a very early age. During my engineering days at Bhubaneswar, I was part of a dance group and we even reached a certain level attending different reality shows. One fine day, I wrote a song ‘Gun Guna Ke’ and one of my college juniors Sidharth Samal agreed to sing and produce it.

He also introduced me to Happy Chandan who directed and was also the DOP of the song. I played the lead character in the music video. I took the help of Asad Nizam sir and he did all the arrangements. And that’s how my journey as a composer started. In the early days, I used to both write and compose songs. Later I hired writers after making more than 60 songs.

WAS THERE A STRUGGLE PERIOD AND HOW DID YOU MANAGE IT?

I was in a decent job but I left it to pursue my passion and focused only on music. There was a time when I got no work at all. People didn’t believe that I could do this and that was a bad phase of my life. There was even a time when I had to live without food for days. But I feel the difficult phases made me what I am today.



Personally I love Odia language and feel we have much more beautiful words to explore. But at the same time I don’t mind people using words of other languages to make songs. At times, there is a demand of the producers to add such words

ABHIJIT TRIPATHY
COMPOSER

OF ALL YOUR CREATIONS, WHICH IS YOUR PERSONAL FAVORITE?

Although all of them are very close to my heart, the song Tu Mate Bhala Je Pau is my personal favourite.

WHAT’S YOUR TAKE ON PEOPLE COMPLAINING ABOUT COPY-PASTE SONGS?

I feel copy paste has been mostly done by a few popular composers who became lazy after the audience accepted them. But I can guarantee they can do far better things as they are experienced.

SOME PEOPLE SAY YOUR SONGS ARE SIMILAR TO SOUTH MUSIC. WHY?

I do take reference but I have never copied any song. I listen to Malayalam and Tamil songs a lot but not Telugu. I don’t even spare the songs from flop films. So I am well acquainted with their culture and sense of music. I feel that’s the reason why my songs sound like that.

WHO ARE YOUR FAVORITE SINGERS IN ODIA? TELL US ABOUT THE COMPOSERS WHO INFLUENCE YOU?

I like veteran Odia singers Sakti Mishra, Kumar Bapi, Tapu Mishra, Ira Mohanty and T Souri. In the present generation, I like Human Sagar, Kuldeep and Aseema. Technically I am influenced by A R Rahman sir. When I make melodies with some desi flavor, my inspiration is the Ajay-Atul duo.

WHAT’S YOUR OPINION ON USING OTHER LANGUAGE WORDS IN ODIA SONGS?

Personally I love Odia language and feel we have much more beautiful words to explore. But at the same time I don’t mind people using



Abhijit with ‘Sammohini’ fame singer Archana Padhi



Photo Caption here I don’t have saliva, which is why I have



During ‘Badnam Premika’ song dubbing session. From left, Smruti Ranjan Samal , Puspak Parida, Abhijit and Kuldeep Pattanaik



Abhijit with singer Ipsita Panda and Swayam Padhi during dubbing the song ‘Mo Prema Kahani Ra Tu Nayika’



Abhijit with the producer of the song ‘Mate Prema Heijae Sete Thara’, Milan Dash and singer Ananya Sritam Nanda

words of other languages to make songs. There are a few people who are writing such songs in the hope that the audience may like it more. At times, there is a demand of the producers to add such words.

DO YOU HAVE ANY MEMORABLE FAN INTERACTION?

After I made the song ‘Adha Kasa Anka’, a person called me up and appreciated my composition. He said that I have shown the ‘dark side’ in the song and he was right. I always say dark and sad sides are two different things. I am very happy that he found exactly what I wanted to portray with that song.

WHAT ARE YOUR FUTURE PLANS?

Since people are showering their praise and love on my compositions, I can never leave the song making avenue. I will definitely continue with it. But simultaneously, I will also pursue a career in acting. I also have plans for starting a business. Recently, I got a tattoo on my hand that is ‘Kalakar’ (Artist). So I have decided to dedicate my life to art. ■

Odishaaah!

Dhauli Shanti Stupa, Bhubaneswar

15 Buddhist sites. 6 Jain sites. 1000 temples. 15 museums...
there's a surprise at every corner.



ODISHA
INDIA'S BEST KEPT SECRET.