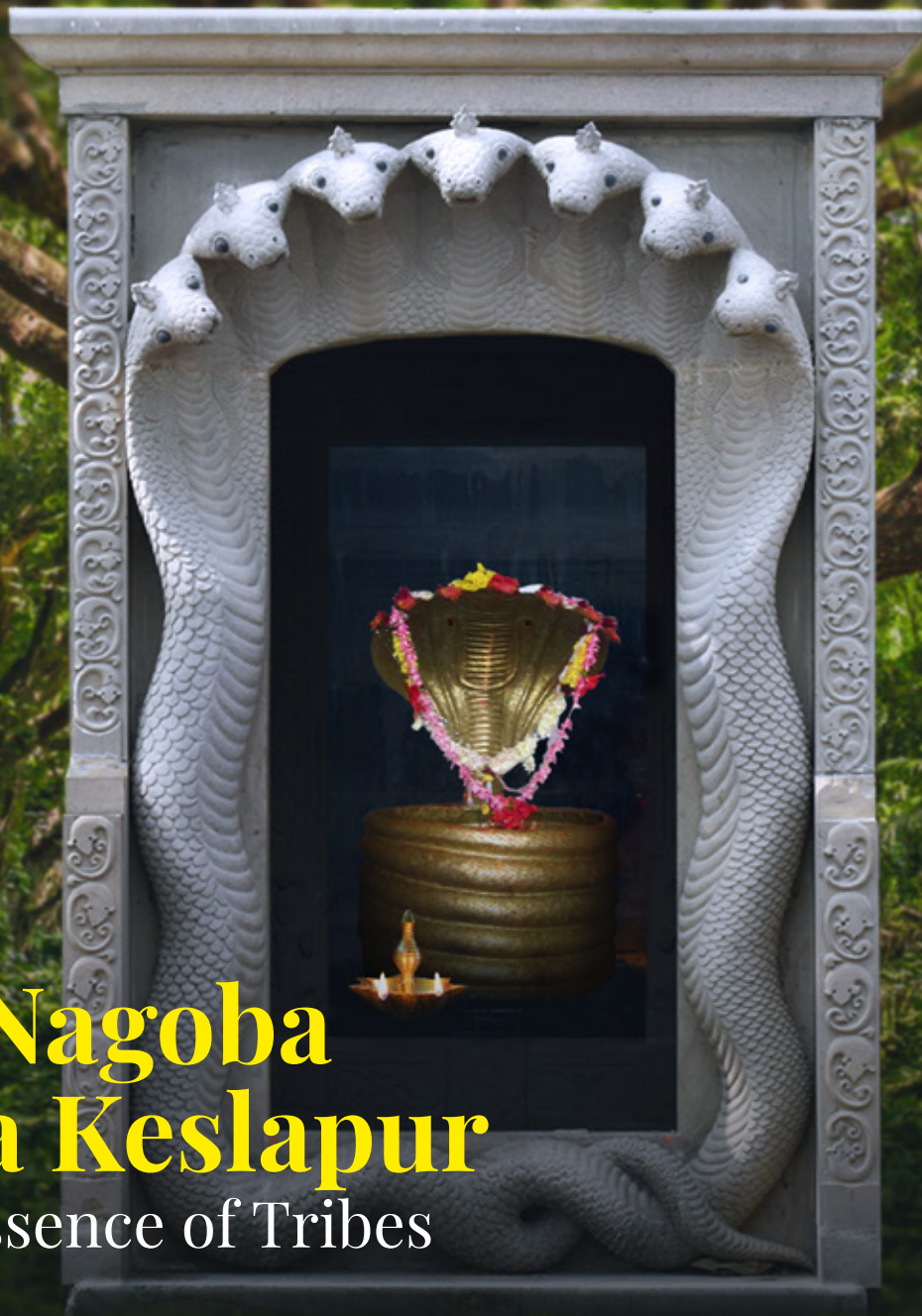


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# Indian Temples

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Discover. Temples of India.



**Shri Nagoba  
Jatara Keslapur**  
Divine Essence of Tribes

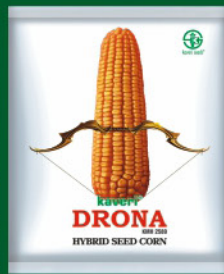
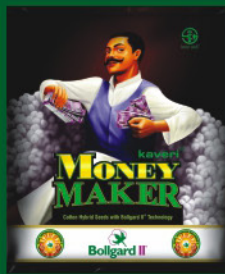
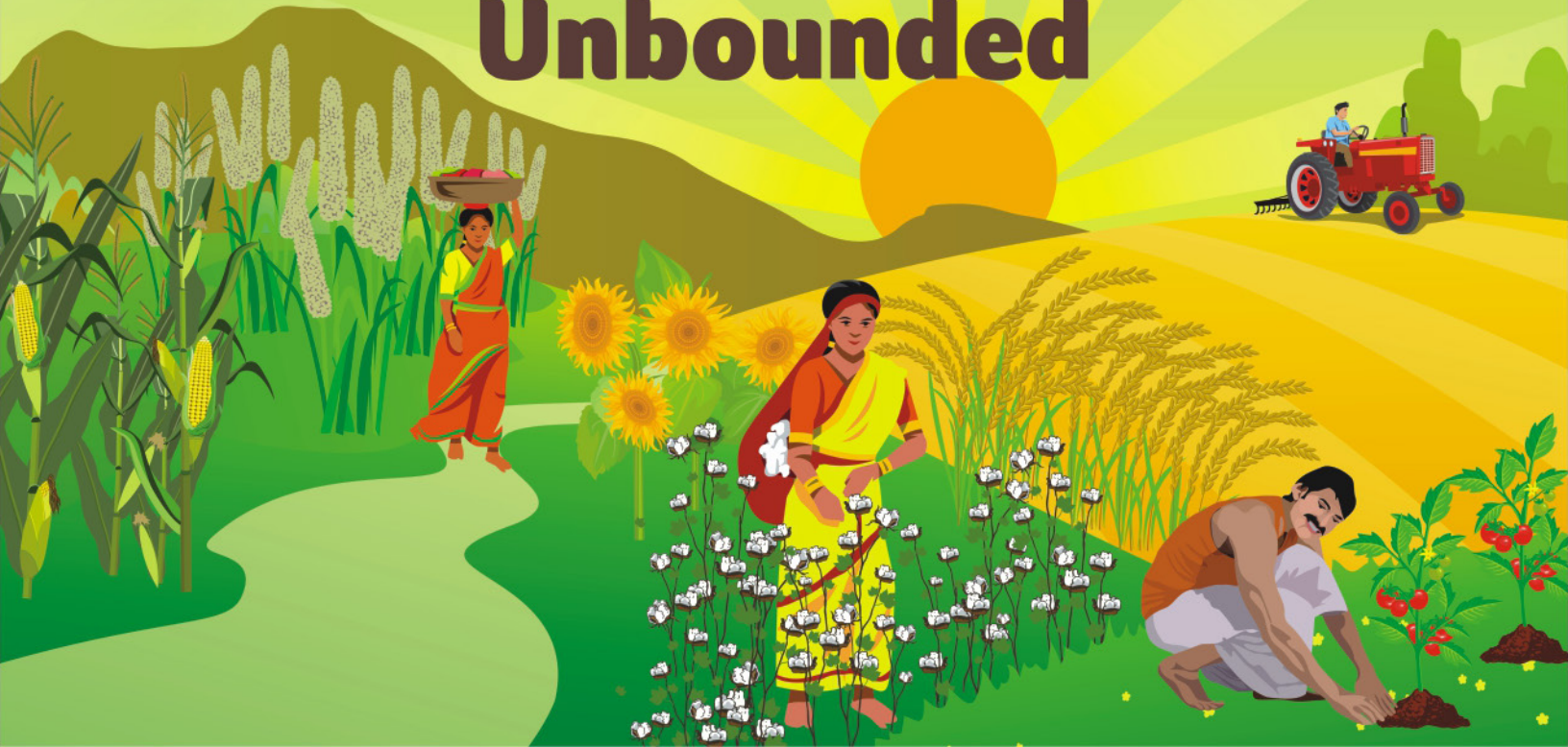
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# CONTENTS

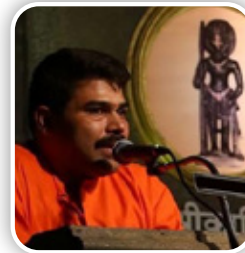
- |           |  |           |  |
|-----------|--|-----------|--|
| <b>6</b>  | <b>Bhagavadgeetha</b><br>Vidwan Krishnaraj Acharya<br>Bengaluru    | <b>6</b>  | <b>Indian Festival</b><br>Shri SK Rangarajan<br>Chennai  |
| <b>7</b>  | <b>Spiritual Tour</b><br>Smt. Trishal Sunman<br>New Delhi          | <b>10</b> | <b>Indian Rituals</b><br>Ms. Padmini Rangarajan<br>Hyderabad                                     |
| <b>12</b> | <b>Indian Saint</b><br>Shri Soyam Bheem Rao<br>Keslaguda, Adilabad | <b>14</b> | <b>Indian Kisan</b><br>Shri V. Shashi Kumar<br>Hyderabad   |
| <b>23</b> | <b>Cover Story</b><br>Ms. Padmini Rangarajan<br>Hyderabad          | <b>28</b> | <b>Tribal Leaders</b><br>Ms. Priyanka Tushar Khanaj<br>Pune                                      |
| <b>30</b> | <b>Tribal Leaders</b><br>Ms. Sonal Nayak<br>Mumbai                 | <b>32</b> | <b>Indian Tradition</b><br>Shri HK Puneesh, Muthnoor,<br>Shri Mesram Manoj, Girigam,<br>Adilabad |
| <b>34</b> | <b>Indian Dance</b><br>Shri Kodam Pavan Kumar<br>Hyderabad         | <b>35</b> | <b>Yoga</b><br>Dr. Rajendra Kumar<br>New Delhi   |
| <b>36</b> | <b>Indian Music</b><br>Shri Arka Manik Rao<br>Gunjala, Adilabad    | <b>38</b> | <b>Woman on Mission</b><br>Ms. Padmini Rangarajan<br>Hyderabad                                   |
| <b>41</b> | <b>Indian Philosophy</b><br>Smt Mona Gupta<br>Chandigarh           | <b>42</b> | <b>Health &amp; Wellness</b><br>Dr. K.Ramessh<br>Coimbatore                                      |

# My Journey with Tribes

India is a highly spiritual land, which houses several rishis, sadhus, saints, sages, santas tribes and mendicants. The Puranas and Itihasas give references about rishis and yogis hermitages and ashrams in deep forests, hilly regions, in the Himalayas, hidden caves for meditation. These rishis and sages chose to move away from the exasperating mass to the faraway places in order to achieve peace, Mukti or Moksha or the ultimate liberation. The hermitage is set so deep in the forest that it is almost another world, enveloped in a translucent green of sun and trees. One such community that resides in the peaceful environment around the world are known as 'indigenous peoples', 'aboriginals', 'ethnic groups', 'vanavasi', 'adivasi', or 'janajati'. The tribal communities are the ethnic groups that remain in isolation and self-containment. These aborigines have their own ritualistic practices; belief systems and life skills that revolve around nature. The hunt introduces us to the forest dwellers. They live in accordance with the nature. The tribes have abundant knowledge not only about the forest, but also nature in general. They do respect nature and safeguard the same. They have learnt to live in most hostile environmental condition in this universe. The most interesting feature associated with these indigenous and ethnic has been found that, they live in localities which are immensely rich in biodiversity. India is a country with large ethnic societies and has immense wealth due to which it is rich in biodiversity. The forest was never far away from habitation. The stories from the Puranas and Itihasas have many interesting stories revolving around forest, hills, penance, gurukulas and nature. Puranas and Itihasas quote Rishis ashram situated in the midst of holy trees. For doing meditation, sages preferred forests to do penance for the welfare of the entire universe. To quote from Ramayana, Lord Rama along with his consort Sita and brother Lakshmana on 14 years exile was first welcomed by the Guhan known as Kevat in north India. Guhan appears at a pivotal moment in Rama's exile when they reached the banks of the Ganga and had to cross the waters to go across in the dense forest. It is at this point that Guhan, who was the chieftain of the forest tribe, appears and offers to take Rama and his coterie across. Though his role is

quite small, the timely help of Guhan to Rama enabled him to cross the Ganga but for which, the purpose of his avatar would have remained unfulfilled. Here, the avatara Purusha Sri Rama in human form did accept the help of a native human and depended on his guidance about the forest and resources as he had to travel for the next 14 years in the forest and hilly zones. Likewise, the Puranas are full of stories about nature and people and their interdependence and interrelationship. In Mahabharata, 13 years of exile of Pancha Pandavas was spent in the forest regions. The whole epic revolves around forest, nature, rishis, sages, hermitage and surroundings. They quote wonderful stories that show examples of places, significance of arts, wealth and the culture. The author of both the Itihasas and Mahakavya sages Shri Valmiki and Sri Veda Vyasa in detail gives the description about the region, flora and fauna, rivers, richness of wealth, culture, language, habits and the significance of the region. India is a hub of such ethnic tribes from the hilly regions of western India through the Gond districts of central India. Maharashtra, Telangana, Orissa to Jharkhand and Bengal, where the Mundas, Oraons, and Santals predominate are also pockets of tribal communities. In the south the Chenchus, Todas, and Kurumbas. Very small endangered communities in the Andamans, like Jarawas, Onge, and Sentinelese. Northeast India has another major portion of the tribal population, including the different Naga sub tribes, Khasis, Garos, Mizos, Kukis, Bodos, and others. During a recent visit to Telangana state Adilabad region gave an opportunity to know about RajGonds tribes. Gonds or RajGonds have attained greater prominence of being one of the largest groups of tribes in India who are found in more than seven states. Gonds, once a ruling race with majestic power and resources in the region of Gondawana to contemporary Hindu rulers. Utnoor in Adilabad is part of the erstwhile Chandrapur kingdom. Utnoor, Mahur, Manikghar are some of the important forts in this kingdom. This is also a heroic land of great fighters who fought for the tribes, to safeguard tribal culture from external exploitation. It is the land from where Rani Durgavthi fought the Moghuls from Ghar mandla. Ramji Gond fought with

the British from Nirmal, Komaram Bheem fought with the Nizam from Babejhari and Jodeghat. This is a land of great culture, resources, traditions, rituals and belief systems. The Gonds have their own language and they call themselves Koitur, a word common to most Gond dialects. The Gonds classified as per gotras or Sagas as they call - identifying with a number of deities worshipped, have also been in the forefront of safeguarding nature, as human existence directly depends on the ecological balance. According to Gonds there are around 750 gotras or clans of Gonds spread across Gondwana region. Each saga or clan's identity is associated with a tree, an animal or a bird which they worship in the form of totems or so. Thus, it is the vested responsibility of each gotra to safeguard the associated deities. Thus, closely 2250 indigenous species in the form of trees, animals and birds are safeguarded by Gonds. This practice of protecting and safeguarding is the ultimate form of worshipping nature. The Mesram clans of Gonds believe in Snake Gods Persa Pen or Badadeo and thus safeguard the same. Thus, it is Nagoba - the Persa Pen. Closely linked with each individual Gond clan is a lineage of Pardhans, bards and chroniclers, who play a vital role in the worship of the clan deity and many other ritual activities. The Pardhans are the guardians of Gond tradition and religious lore. The present edition of the Indian Temples magazines covers in detail about the three important Jatara-fairs, RajGonds Dance, Music, Indigenous medicines and belief systems.



Mattu Harish Madhyastha

# Karma & Kshathriya Dharma

Sri Bhagavad Geetha the song of the spirit of Lord. With 700 slokas called verses divided into 18 chapters is a comprehensive work as a gift to mankind. It covers all aspects of human life and has answers for all the ambiguous questions that rise in one's mind. Here, it is the dialogue between Paramatma - Lord Krishna and Jeevatma - Arjuna amidst the battlefield of Kurukshetra. The beauty of Sri Bhagavad Geetha is that Lord Krishna preaches peace in the battlefield. Here, Sri Krishna enhances the philosophy of life. Our body is a Chariot and the panchendriya - the senses are the horses. One's ego, pride, greed, lust, jealousy, likes, dislikes are one's own enemy. It is a war within oneself between virtue and vice. It is the scripture with universal acceptance. Sri Bhagavad Geetha teaches that one should gather courage and rise to face the problem. As a manager Lord Krishna personified that one should have clear cut goals in the organization and that one should never allow their senses to

be uncontrolled. Krishna through his power of speech and oratory skills motivated Pandavas several times. He motivated them to serve good and only good, concurrently working towards attainment of justice.

Here, Lord Krishna further preaches that 'the choice that one has in life is never between right or wrong, but between doing right and doing easy'. Doing the right thing need not necessarily be easy and pleasant according to Lord Krishna. Lord Krishna says, 'Hey! Partha! Fighting with your own family members on the other side, is not unrighteousness, it is your Karma and Kshatriya dharma. You need to fight for justice and restoration of peace. As a kshatriya you need to fight for truth and justice - be it anyone in front of you'. Here, Lord Krishna advocates on 'Nishkama Karma'. Be a Karma Yogi without expecting the result or outcome of the battle. Thus, everyday being a battle day for an individual. One has to perform his righteous duty without expecting the results.



As modern youth are more focused on results than responsibilities, they give up on things as they don't see immediate results. This eventually leads to unproductive work and yielding no or zero results. Despite being a king and a supreme, Krishna lived his life in simplicity and he was a man of people. A leader should be humble, noble and down to earth. This will ensure his growth and progress. Krishna is an embodiment of all divine potentials. He through his life demonstrated how to live a life in entirety and stated to continue doing right, without having attachment towards the outcome of those actions and most importantly, never hurt anyone.

**Vidwan Krishnaraj Acharya**

Bengaluru

# Maha Shivarathri

Festival of Mahashivaratri has remarkable significance in Hinduism. Worship of Lord Shiva on Shivaratri day that falls on the 13th day of the dark fortnight in the month of Phalgun or Phalgun. Phalgun month pleases Lord Shiva the most and falls between the last week of February and the 1st week of March every year. As per one of the legends, Shiva got married to Parvati on this auspicious day. Lord Shiva appeared in the form of a linga or ling in front of Brahma and Vishnu on this day. It is said that whoever prays to the Shivalinga on this day attains salvation. Again, it is also said as per Puranas, Parvati performed tapas or penance, prayed and meditated on this day to ward off any evil that might befall her husband on the moonless night. Since then, Maha shivaratri is believed to be an auspicious occasion for women to pray for the well-being of their husbands and sons.

An unmarried woman prays for a husband like Shiva, who is considered to be the ideal husband. Another legend of the day is that Shiva and Shakti married each other. There is one more myth associated with Samudra Manthan, a process in which the asuras or rakshasa gana and the gods joined hands to churn out amrut (nectar) from the depths of the ocean, using a mountain 'Mandrachal Parvat' and a snake named 'Vasuki' as a rope. Among many things that came out like Irvath elephant, Kamadhenu, Kalpavrush, Ujjaishrava horse and others, a pot of poison came out of the ocean and on the request of gods, Lord Shiva drank the poison. Parvathi arrested the poison at the throat itself by placing her hand and stopped it entering Shiva's body. The poison was so potent that it changed the color of His neck to blue. For this reason, Lord Shiva is also called Neelkanth. This also happened on the 14th day of

dark fortnight in the month of Phalgun. Another legend also states that the whole world was facing destruction and Goddess Parvati worshipped her husband Shiva to save it. She prayed for the jivas (living souls) remaining in sea during the long period of pralaya (deluge) night, that they should, upon becoming active again, have His blessings, but only if they worshipped Him just as she did. After getting the blessings from the Lord, Parvati named the night for the worship of Ishwar by mortals Maha-Sivaratri, or the great night of Shiva. On this day to please Lord Parameshwar, people observe fast the whole day and jagaran (night out) and perform Shiva Puja. Few exceptions are that the one who is unable to fast can eat fruits, or light snacks. Old, pregnant women, children are exempted from observing fast. On Shivaratri, Rudra Abhishek and Rudra Homa are performed throughout day and night. Lord Shiva is one of the major gods of Hindus, whom Hindus accept and worship with great faith and devotion.

"OM NAMA SHIVAYA"

**Shri SK Rangarajan**

Chennai



## Shri Jangu Bai Pilgrimage

January month is the month of celebrations for Gonds and Kolams. Gond adivasis worship a month long traditional celebration of Goddess Jangu Bai. Raj Gonds, Kolams and their sub-tribes known as the aboriginal tribal communities worship the shrine of Jangu Bai which, according to Adivasis, is believed to have been formed naturally 25,000 years ago. Jangubai, or Raitaar Jango, is the Sadar Pen or the chief goddess of eight Gond sagas or clans and therefore the most revered of all the mythological personalities in Adivasi ethos. The Jangu Bai deity, a wish-granting Goddess, pilgrimage occurs in the auspicious Poos month as per Gondi calendar and Pushyam month as per Telugu calendar. The Gonds have strong belief that the Goddess fulfills their wishes when worshipped with dedication and devotion. For the Gond Adivasis in the country, the Jangubai pilgrimage is a major event associated not only with their religion but their socio-cultural identity. The Pen da Dasra or Dev ka Dasara or the Dasara of the Gods celebrated by Raj Gonds at the remote Jangubai cave temple. The main beauty of this pilgrimage tribe is worshipping nature as Goddess Shakthi as shakthi Peetam. Gonds perhaps, have unearthed the truth of 'nirakar rupa' worshipping which is considered as aiming the highest level of union with the universal energy. Jangubai, or Raitaar Jango, is the chief goddess known as Sadar Pen of eight Gond clans. It is a must for the priests of eight gotras to perform various rituals at the temple. Goddess Jangu Bai has bestowed in the midst of the forest and caves for the upliftment of Tribes. The Jangu Bai deity located in the Telangana-Maharashtra boundary. The Telangana State and Maharashtra borders forestry hillock range are home of natural caves. Goddess Jangu Bai deity is believed to be manifested in the set of four caves on a cliff of the

Sahyadri hills in the forests of Maharajuguda thanda in Kota Parandoli village panchayat, of Kerameri mandal which is 25 km away from Kerameri of Asifabad district, Telangana State. A stream flows adjacent to the hillock. There is only an oil lamp which is lit for the period and represents the deity in her Mahal. The spot can be accessed from Lokari in Narnoor mandal and Kerameri mandal headquarters in Adilabad district besides from Rajura Tahsil in Maharashtra. It is said that the rituals associated with the worshipping the goddess are very tough. Nevertheless, the Gond tribes follow a systematic ritual of visiting the Goddess. They take a holy dip in the stream water locally known as Toplakasa before entering the abode. The stream is considered very sacred and bestowed with medicinal properties. A dip would cure all the ailments are the belief of the tribes. Most of the tribes trek all the way wearing no footwear to the cave from their village. Women devotees cover white shawl clothing around them while trekking to Jangu Bai Pilgrimage. They perform pooja with kumkum(vermillion) and haldi turmeric), offer coconut fruit. 'Nobody has explored inside the cave, though it looks quite small. Inside it is pretty dark. The Gond members Shri. Sidam Jangu, Shri Athram Laxman, Shri Arka Manik Rao, Shri Mesram Manohar, Shri. Soyam Bheem Rao, Shri. Mesram Nangu Rao, Shri HK Puneesh, Shri Kodapa Gajanand and many others have opined that the essential arrangements towards the smooth functioning of the pilgrimage. The priests of eight clans from various tribes perform the customary ritual of depotsavam to mark the beginning of the festivities. Devotees arrive at the temple by carrying a bamboo basket on their heads, beating drums and playing traditional instruments such as Sannayi, Kaliko and Tudum. The basket contains ingredients

required for performing the prayers. The ingredients include rice milled through traditional methods, wheat, jaggery and oil extracted from either sesame or castor. The material needed for cooking is carried on bullock carts till the shrine. Women prepare special offerings called Garkang similar to the vadas and Podiyang Krenjang known as Burelu in Telugu by grinding the pulses and in traditional pestle and mortar that they carry along with them. After observing strict disciplines they grind the soaked black gram dal and chillies and deep fry hot and spicy Garkang and Podiyang Krenjang which are slightly sweet in taste. Similarly, they cook rice balls. The offering 'nivodh' is made of local variety of sesame, red rice or vanjin, green gram and black gram. They cook items like the 'garkang' with green gram in the sesame oil that they themselves produce. This they offer to the Goddess and present it to her by performing depotsavam. Later, in the evening they do engage in sacrificing hens and sheep to Goddesses Maisamma, Pochamma and Ravudk –well known as gram devatas. The mass dining is arranged for all the devotees. They celebrate the festivities and dance to drum beats and sounds of musical instruments and as per the custom, meet priests after the rituals. Thus, Sri Jangu Bai Dheeksha as it is known –a vow that is followed with devotion among Gonds is symbolic with reverence to the salutation to Mother Nature. Soyam Bheem Rao concludes by saying that, 'we Gonds worship Goddess Jangubai deity. This is a sacred cave temple dedicated to the deity in the forest land. An interesting thing is that no torch or electrical light source can give light in the cave, only a fire light works. Other sources get extinguished on their own'. Today one can see many adoring a yellow colour dress code and undertaking Jangubai deeksha also known as 'Jai Jangu Jai Lingu Dheeksha' is taken at Jangaon (Ramjiguda) temple on Jan 14th on new moon day. This was initiated by a saint named Sri Hanumantha Rao Maharaja. This is followed by the Gonds even today. During the pilgrimage they wear the sacred dress code, attend camps, do fasting or take one meal, and visit the Jangu Bai caves. For the Gond Adivasis the Jangubai pilgrimage is a major event associated not only with their religion but their socio-cultural progression.

**Smt. Trishal Sunman**

New Delhi



# Dakke Bali

## - Shri Khadgeshwari Brahmasthanana

*Bharath Darshan is more sacred  
than Prapancha Darshan*



Dakkebali is a form of the snake worship also known as Nagaradhane. Dakkebali ritual is practiced in the town of Padubidri in the Udupi district, Karnataka, India. Padubidre Brahmasthana as it is known is a place of Shakti worship in Parashurama Kshetra is located in the west coast of Southern India in Tulunadu of Karnataka State. The festival is held once two year. This pooja is performed for Naga, Bramha, Raktheshwari, Nandikonna, Haygulli, Kshetrapala, Bagilu Bobbarya, Motukalu Bobbarya, and Yakshi. The festival starts from the Makara maasa (normally 14th January) and continues till the end of Meena maasa i.e., 2nd week of March. It is a rare place of Shakti worship, which has retained the age-old custom and practices, which trace their origin back to the Vedic Ages. The belief system has manifested right from Vedic Age. However, there has been transformation in belief system that has gradually grown towards

nature worship, naga worship, evolving customs, practices, ritualistic observations that has become part of the human life. Human beings besides creating progeny started worshipping nature borne things like water, fire, trees, stones, animals and naga, in safeguarding the progeny and human race. It is said that instruments like bells, Vaadya, Nagari, Didumbu, Dakke etc were made for these worships. Dakke bali is the amalgamation of man, history and nature taking place from times immemorial in this land. Nagabanas can be seen abundantly in this region. Nagaaradhana, Brahmaradhana are conducted with a lot of devotion and dedication.

### Khadgeshwari Brahmasthanana

It is a place of worship where these chaitanyaas Shaktis are said to be presided over by the deity Sri Khadgeshwari- Brahma, Naga, Raktewari, Nandigona, Kshetrapala

known as Panchadaivikas. The place, where the deity known as 'Khadgeshwari' or 'Vanadurga' or 'Nagavesthithi' presides over in the midst of the dense forest, is called the udbhava sthala where the deity appears swayambhu as Aadi Shakti with all pervasive powers. The place has lot of sanctity. Dakke, a small instrument, made of bronze and leather, is first placed in the holy place and then played by the possessed pathri moving spherically. Devotees carry their offerings, called 'Hore Kanike' in Kannada and 'Pude' in Tulu language, from the famous Padubidri Mahalingeshwara, Maha Ganapathi temple to the Brahmasthanana, in a long procession passing through Padubidri town, which is more than a Kilometre. The offerings mainly consist of fruits, flowers, tender coconuts etc and hingara or pingara the arecanut flower is a must. Before the procession, 'Anna Santarpane' is held in which thousands of people are offered free meals near the Brahmasthanana premises. The beating of Dakke is harmonized with the Tala play, giving a special musical blend that electrifies the atmosphere. Dakkebali is performed in other places also but the one Brahmasthanana, Padubidri is exceptional and unique in that it involves Devi as well as Naga worship. While Nagamandala performed widely in south Karnataka to please Naga Deva only and this held throughout the year. During Dakkebali both the Naga Pathiris and Dakke Pathiris are involved. It is the customary practiced at Padubidre that one person from each family does volunteer service during the Dakke Bali period either in flower decoration or in other service. Entire Brahmasthanana is converted into a floral palace by the time the sacred function starts. Plantain stem sheathing cuts and designed green leaves are used





to frame the "Devi Gudi" while all stone pillars are wrapped with Pingara flowers, fruits, tender coconuts bunch, plantain bunches, and flowers of various colours that transform the place into a royal place. The pathris who by custom belong to the Shivalli Brahmins of the place which is called Bengre in Padubidri. These pathris are not selected by the people nor compelled to play that role. They are in a way accepted as pathris by the presiding deity of the place Khadgeshwari. When the Shivalli Brahmins of the place feel that they must have a pathri according to the custom, they assemble together in the local Mahalingeswara and Maha Ganapathi Temple, pray and proceed to Khadgeshwari Brahmasthana in a Bhajana gosthi-singing devotional songs procession and arrive at the Brahmasthana. They continue to chant the sacred name of the lord Govinda!, Govinda! Till they reach Brahmastahan until they get a person of their community possessed by the holy Chaitanya. There is a customary procedure in accepting the pathri of the place. The Shivalli Brahmins of the place who have assembled there will have to extend their formal opinion before accepting a new pathri by the deity of the place. This opinion is called upon by a verdict given through existing pathri. When the Shivalli Brahmins of the place extend their consent, the family of the pathri is summoned to the holy place and is called upon to give their whole hearted consent. Thereupon, the pathri who is also called as koradu is accepted by the deity of the place blessed with 'abhaya'-assurance of protection of the deity. The pathris of the place cannot perform except at Brahmasthana. There used to be nine pathris once upon a time but now, only three. The 'viniyogas'- work connected with worship of this place are supervised



Indian Rituals

by three persons of different family called Gurikaras who represent the Shivalli Brahmin community of Padubidri from each of the three families viz., Kornaya, Balappa and Murudi. For performing the pujas the priests belonging to Rajapurohit class is chosen. The administrative work relating to the worship of this place is carried out by a trust called 'Sri Vanadurga Trust' which has a centralized administrative system covering all seva activities. The Shivalli Brahmins of this place elect the members of 'Vanadurga Trust' once in three years.

### Brahma Mandala

This mandala – a special kind of rangoli called mandala depicts the divine union of male and female snakes and is drawn by the Panara community in the shape of a rectangle using five different colours. The area is also sanctified and decorated with various Vanahan symbols that symbolically signifies the presence of ashtdikpalakass, vasus, subramanyana, MahaVishnu, Brahma and others.

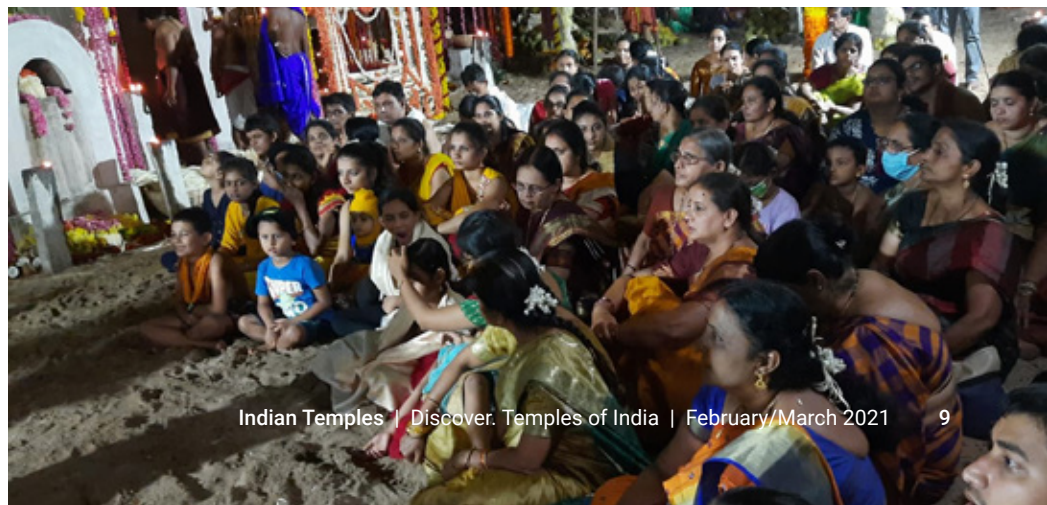
A family by name Vaidya, of Udupi District are mainly involved in the performance of Dakke Bali. Dakke instrument, which is played by vaidyaas as a hereditary art. They reside in Nalkoor of Udupi District. Men dress up in a manner to symbolize as Naaga Kannike. The role of naaga kannike is usually played by senior vaidyaas. Dakke is played

by the Vaidyaas in their hands, to invoke the spirits. They initially place the dakke at the holy place, pray and then play upon until the pathris of the place get possessed. With this possession they move around spherically during the worship. This is known as Dakke Bali. This movement has a significance of male and female snakes meeting and number spirical rounds have a count which twists called ass mudi meaning knots. As initially, by signing songs and depicting in nartana style they evoke the pathris who are said to be the male snakes, which follow the nagakannike. Initially it is clockwise mudi till they unite. Then it is anticlockwise mudi that is to depict the separation.

Here, again, only oil lamps are used and no electric power lights can be lit. Further all have to be seated on sand irrespective of caste and creed and the sacred sand is taken as Prasad by all. Here, this being the nagaloka or kshetra the deity who is seated as sarpavestithe wants nagas to be pleased. Again, the union of nagas symbolises the union of atma or Jivastam with Paramathma –the union with universal energy. All the devotees who hail from different places in India visit the sacred place with devotion.

### Ms. Padmini Rangarajan

Hyderabad





## A Divine Soul Gond Sant Shri Suroji Maharaj

Every society undergoes a social change and reforms periodically. These social changes do not come only from the new generation. So is with tribal societies that have undergone changes in customs, rituals, practices, food intake and so on. One such influencer is education or Renaissance movements. One such noticeable social change in Gond tribal society is a Bhakthi movement by Shri Suroji Maharaj.

Adilabad is a land of various Adivasi communities and of rich natural resources. In the mid-1950s-1960s, a number of reforms and Renaissance movements moved through the villages of the then unified Adilabad District; Mahagaon Village is the centre seat to bring in noticeable change and reforms. Mahagaon is a Village in Sirpur (u) Mandal present Kumram Bheem Asifabad District of Telangana State. The chief reform amongst the Gonds lifestyle progress was of the Shri Guru Dev Seva Mandal. This started in the village of Mahagaon on the central plateau under the leadership of a Gond called Shri Kotnaka who was a Devari from Kinwat region of Maharashtra. Shri Kotnaka Surya Ban attained sainthood and became an ascetic hermit who disseminated a mixture of tantric, yogic, and ascetic practices. He preached to the villagers in Gondi language about life-salvation and surrenderness philosophy. It was the teachings of Shri Kotnaka Surya Ban, who was revered as Maharaj - a Maharashtra guru by his followers. He was fondly called as Suru Maharaj.

Shri Suroji Maharaj's preceptor or Guru was Shri Geram Jyoti Ram; a Gond of Brahmaguda who was the disciple of a Guru named Shri Narsimlu a non Gond tribe. The Nizam rulers allotted land in Uttoor then a taluk to Gonds. Kotnaka Suru along with other settlers from Kinwat was granted patta on a vacant land in Mahagaon. He formed a hamlet along with other settlers away from the old village Mahagaon surrounded by hillocks and slopes. With support of then good governance, Kotnaka Suru obtained some funds for the construction of houses with tiled roofs and solid mud walls to the village settlers.

Here, he built a temple installing a shrine of Lord Shiva on top of the hill close to the village and a platform for Satsang and Bhajans. Here, Shivaratri Jatra is held and the Jatara is attended by Gonds from Adilabad, Kinwat, Yeotmal and other regions. In 1979, a Gond from the vicinity attended the jatra and was moved by the good works and gestures of Suroji Maharaj. He is none other than Shri Raja Bhagwant Rao from Kanchanapalli, who became an adherent devotee and follower of Suroji Maharaj. As Gonds are accustomed to alcohol drinks, Suroji Maharaj's intervention to stop consuming alcoholic drinks amongst some percentage of Gonds tribe is even visible today. 'Without work you will go to waste. You will get into the habit of drinking. Even if you kill me, I shall go on asking you people not to drink' - these were the words of Suroji Maharaj recalls one of his followers



of today Shri Arka Manik Rao. 'There was a devotee named Mesram Jaithu. He was doing all service and seva to Suroji Maharaj. In his earlier days, Suroji Maharaj would do long meditations for a number of days. The whole area was a dense forest with wild animals like tigers, wolves and poisonous snakes moving around. But they did no harm. Mesram Jaithu has witnessed snakes, drinking milk from Maharaj's milk cup'-recalls Shri Arka Manika Rao.

This was, perhaps, the period of Bhakthi movement amongst Gonds tribes too. Mesram Jevant Rao like Suroji Maharaj was a disciple of Sri Jyoti Ram of Bhamamguda in Kinwat. He was surrounded by a circle of followers around him. They are found in Chudur Burnur, V Chudur Koinur, Dubbaguda



and so on. Shri Todasam Maruthi of Jatarla in Boath also a disciple of Shri Jyoti ram has a similar group of devotees following his teachings.

Gonds are also called Koya or Koitur. The earlier practices here were that for any festivity or celebrations sacrificing animals were quite common. After coming in association with Sant Maharaj Suroji, who preached about 'ahimsa paramo dharm', and slaughtering of animals as a sinful act, the Mahagaon villagers and others slowly gave up animal sacrifice and turned to consuming vegetarian food.

**Social Reformers:**

He is regarded as a great learned and Savior amongst Gonds. His teachings were well received and accepted. His earlier disciples were Smt Jangu Bai from Dhanora village, Sidam Maru Master from Gineedari, Athram Bhagvantha Rao from Kanchanapalli, Kumra Ukand Rao from Mahgaon, Kanaka Dharm Rao Guruji from Sakada Village, Athram Bheema Rao from Gaddeguda, Madavi Gangu Patel from Kairdhatwa, Sidam Pakru (Zilla Medi), Gangaram Guruji from Urmi. These main disciples formed a working committee under the guidance of the Suroji Maharaj to take up village service activities for the benefit of Gond tribes' development. Smt Jangu Bai was nominated as President and the rest others nominated for responsible positions of the working committee. Suroji Maharaj propagated that only education as a seed can germinate confidence amongst Gond tribes. Under his guidance ship, the working committee started a Telugu medium

school at the Mahagaon village by employing teachers. After initial hardship, the school gained momentum. These aborigine Gonds and sub tribes like Naikpods, Kolams, Pardhans, thotis possess almost identical social structure and traditions. It is said that the traditional village council and inter village councils were strengthened by Suroji Maharaj. These councils are strong centers of mechanisms of social controls. At village level Gram sabhas are established. At Mandals or Taluq levels Rai Centres were established. For every 15-20 villages one Rai centre was established. The functioning of these Rai centers again was systematic in nature. The members of the office bearers were nominated by the Rai-Patels and Sarpartels of the individual Gram Sabha for a minimum period of 2 years. These centers take the responsibilities of representing the local problems of tribes, and act as liaison work for the implementation of development schemes. Smt. Jangu Bai, and other committee members dedicated their valuable time in the service of the tribal community and representing the Rai Centers. This age old traditional system of independent organization encouraged equal participation and representation of men and women folk. These initiatives of strengthening Rai centres and School for tribal got the attention of the Late Shri Madavi Tukaram IAS, Project Officer of Integrated Tribal Development Agency-ITDA Utnoor and he was quite impressed with the service of Suroji Maharaj and enrolled the school under ITDA Ashram Schools. Slowly this school is upgraded till class 10th.

Again under the guidance of Suroji Maharaj, a devoted devotee, Shri Athram Bhimrao a prominent Gond leader as Rai Sabha Zilla Medial in 1986 formed a 'Grain Bank' for every Rai Center as a gesture of community participation. It was a collection of 60 kg grains or an equivalent amount from each tribal family towards the requirement of conducting mass religious and marriage ceremonies. This was done with the interest to safeguard tribal from exploitation from the non tribes and money lenders. Along with a collection of food grains, an underground food grain storage known as 'Peamk' was incorporated. This being a unique system with a scientific base of digging underground 15-20 feet depth and a width of 10-12 feet , after covering the unearthed walls with neem and other insect protective leaves and roots grains were stored. The grains kept would be fresh and uninfected for more than three years. Peamk was found in surrounding villages of Mahagaon. Suroji Maharaj also started 'Medem Marming' known as mass



wedding and mass feasting. This activity is still followed by the present members of the Sansthan. Later after his death Shri Sedam Faku another staunch follower and Gond leader took the charge as District Medial of Rai Center and did commendable service. Indeed, most tribal schoolmasters in Asifabad Taluk are followers of the sect's founder and leader, Kotnaka Suru Maharaj.

He founded a society called the Shri GuruDev Seva Mandal of Mahagaon, which now manages considerable sums of money and runs a jeep, the only tribal-owned jeep in the entire eastern area. His teachings involved ideas of Moksa –the ultimate salvation. He did put on a ban on spilling blood, smoking, and drinking, and promoted worship of the tulsii plant. Followers of this sect attempt not to drink, smoke, or eat meat. Adherents are found outside Gond society among the Kolams, Wojaris, Pardhans, Totis, and Vishwabrahmas, but generally the majorities are Gonds. The interesting feature of this movement is that it has attracted members from the progressive element of Gond society. The leaders of the movement are all tribal schoolmasters and progressive village headmen.

Suroji Maharaj took Samadhi on 18th January 1985. The temple and ashram activities were looked after by mother Sadhavi Jangu Bai. She took Samadhi on July 13, 2018. Now the Mahagaon Village Patel Shri Mesram Tanu Patel takes care of the temple Sansthan ashram activities. He is assisted by Shri Mesram Kailash.

**Shri Soyam Bheem Rao**

Keslaguda, Adilabad





## A True Kisan **Shri G.V. Bhaskar Rao**

**“We believe that innovation and strategic investment represents the cornerstone for sustainable development. To meet the growing demand our research concentrates on genetics, technology and sophisticated strategies to design and develop hybrids for multiple regions.”**

A rural background, soil, peasants, water gave rise to ample scope of learning both material world and the spiritual world. Sri G.V. Bhaskar Rao - Chairman and Managing Director of Kaveri Seed Company Limited hail from a big family in a village named Gatla Narsingapur in Karimnagar district, Telangana. His father Shri Srinivasa Rao being the headman of the village always had concern of the villagers more than his own family. He always used to say, “It is our responsibility as a village head and also as a farmer to guide and stand by our fellow farmers all the time. Education is an essential tool to upgrade skills that help in service not in personal growth. Personal growth follows automatically”. Right to education was the notion of his father; hence he did not compromise on anything to fulfill the same. Shri Bhaskar Rao’s two elder brothers are engineers, one brother is a medical practitioner and his three sisters are also medical practitioners. The passion for agriculture and the aroma of the soil, drew Shri Bhaskar Rao close to his fields’ right from childhood. He engaged himself with his brother and other family members in the field to learn more about agricultural practices and science behind it. This passion pushed Shri Bhaskar Rao to pursue Graduation in Agriculture. This made his parents too proud and his mother Smt. Satyavathi would also say the golden words, ‘all the things in the

world like wealth, name, lands, power may get destroyed or lost not the education as it is earned by an individual’s effort’. Even though he comes from a landlord family, his father had to sell the agricultural land to fulfill his dream of providing good education for all his children and also to the fellow children of the village. This golden word ring even today in my ears –says Shri Bhaskar Rao garu.

As a young and passionate agriculture graduate, with an agricultural family background had a dream to help farmers to improve agriculture yields foregoing the best white collar job opportunities in bank and as a field officer. He had a firm conviction that the future of agriculture is destined in the seed. His father used to grow corn and would harvest 5-6 quintals. The less harvest of a crop and struggle of a farmer pushed Shri Bhaskar Rao to take up a research experiment in his own agricultural field laboratory. To fulfill his passion he built on his family farm in the village of Gatla Narsingapur, Telangana, a small seed production unit for public bred varieties of rice and corn. He spent quantity and quality time in understanding the crop pattern, the practices involved and the basic struggle of farmers under the hot sun. The seeds of growth were sown and the journey had begun to build one of the India’s premier agricultural Company specializing in Hybrid

seed, which would help farmers and also help in contributing sustainable alternatives to India’s growing demand for food and nutrition. Thus, his research outcome revealed the major input of ‘SEED’ that could bring a drastic change. Lack of quality seeds in the market to the farmers being one of the reasons, pushed him further to work on the supply of quality seeds. Hybrid variety was new and acceptance by the farmers took time. That was the testing period.

Nevertheless, in 1976, in 3 acres of land he began with quality seed production on an experimental basis. After tasting the success, he slowly increased the seed production in large acres of land. In 1980, he ventured out into the marketing of seeds; he surveyed and explored Karnataka state in Gokak and surrounding villages of Belgaum District. Belgaum District is the largest producer of Maize crop, he ventured with his new seed variety. Thus, he began with a small company named G.V.B. Rao and Company. Knowing the suffering of the farmers, he was determined in maintaining the quality of seed production. Six years later, started his new company naming it as ‘Kaveri Seeds Private Limited’ as a tribute to the jeevanadhi ‘Kaveri’ of Karnataka and also for his progress in the seed production. From thereon, there was no going back, as Kaveri Seeds is a well known name in Karnataka. In 2007, he made



it a Public limited company. Started with 3 acres of land, now the company is producing different kinds of quality seeds in 1 lakh acres and supplying for Pan India. Now, this company has more than fifteen thousand distributors' and more than one lakh seed production farmers in India. For more than three decades the company has been continuously investing in strengthening our Research & Development with an objective to produce the right seeds to improve farm yields. Our state-of-the-art laboratories for Biotechnology and Seed Technology, are today unmatched in the industry in terms of Infrastructure, Intellectual Capital and Machinery. The company has further increased the manpower in scientific research across our multi-crop portfolio. A clear road map for R&D has been drawn to produce the innovative seeds with futuristic needs that are suitable under various agro-climatic conditions so as to sustain high yields and improve farmer's income.

Improved seed quality will play a key role in food security in order to sustain agricultural productivity. The rising global population has cascading effects, not only for increased food requirement, but also on the availability of land and water to ensure sustainable agriculture produce. Also, understanding the customer need is critical to food security today. Kaveri Seeds Company is one of the largest seed companies in India, which has around fifteen hundred direct workforce employees and more than three thousand other auxiliary workforces.

Shri Bhaskar Rao opines that today, one of the biggest challenges of the 21st century is to provide food for the fast growing world population, sustainable. As part of our business philosophy, he innovates constantly to help farmers achieve higher yields and mitigate the challenges. The agriculture sector continues to be the most important sector in India. Efforts and funds continue to be invested to make the sector sustainable, aligning to the national interests of farmers' prosperity and food security. Given the challenges that exist, Kaveri Seeds are determined to bring innovative solutions

that would help seeds perform better and thereby bring value to the farmers. Started with one Maize seed and now are multi seed products like cotton, jowar, bajara, sunflower, vegetables and multigrain seed. Along with quality seed produce Shri Bhaskar Rao has empowered farmers towards strategies on non dependence on climatic conditions, disease tolerance, improving farming methods, empowering better livelihood, and yielding happiness. Now the seeds are exported to Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Pakistan and other countries. As society has given this wonderful opportunity one has to give back to society also. 'I am happy if my fellow members are happy too'-exclaims Bhaskar Rao. He has achieved the highest milestones in his dream career as an agriculturist. He was awarded the Best CEO award by India Today in 2010. Kaveri Seeds have been listed in 'Forbes Asia's Best Under a Billion list' in 2010, 2011, 2012, 2013, and 2015. Shri Bhaskar Rao also featured on top 100 CEO lists by Business Today PWC survey in 2014, 'Bio-Excellence Award' by Department of Information Technology, Biotechnology and Science and Technology, Karnataka Government in 2015. Sri Bhaskar Rao has been nominated as the board member at the prestigious Prof Jayashankar Telangana State Agricultural University-PJTSAU in 2017 and Governing Council member of National Seed Association India and many others. Kaveri seed Company's QC Lab received National Accreditation Board of for Testing and Calibration Laboratories (NABL) Certificate of Accreditation for the year 2020-2022. Kaveri Seed Company Ltd., has been figured on the "Forbes 'Asia's 200 Best Under a Billion List" 6th time during the year 2020. Kaveri Seed Company's R&D has been recognized by the Department of Scientific Industrial Research (DSIR), GoI, from March 2001 to March 2023. Initial days struggle, hard work and determination has fetched fruit of success to Bhaskar Rao.

Coming to his spiritual journey, he belongs to Sri Vaishnava philosophy followers, Bhaskar Rao believes in serving mother earth as a service to the Almighty. Nevertheless, he has

built two temples of Sri Hanuman and Sri Kodanda Rama in his native place. He has also constructed a free marriage hall for villagers with ample of amenities. He personally supervises the temple administration and also does regular annadanam services at his temples and other temples. Sri. Bhaskar Rao, nominated as Board Member of Tirumala Tirupathi Devasthanam (TTD) Tirupathi by the Govt. of Andhra Pradesh.

Under CSR activity from 2005, he has adopted and re-constructed government schools, silting work or the tanks, road constructions, installation of mineral water plant as a part of drinking water supply and many more such activities not only in his native village but at taluk level. This and many other socio-educational activities are looked after by his wife Smt. Vanaja Bhaskar Rao. Now, the present generation is more conscious about health and food. People's food habits have changed from rice, wheat or so to millets and fruits. Again in the villages, farmers want to grow organic crops with no pesticides and fertilizers. Present generation people are now ready to shell out money to buy organic food products. Thus, Kaveri seeds now produce indigenous seeds and organic seeds of vegetables and encourage organic farming. Educated youth is moving back, especially to urban outlets as a passion to grow more of terrace gardening, vegetables with less soil and water.

In order to protect indigenous seeds, Kaveri Seeds have come up with a 'Gene bank' in which they are protecting thousands of varieties of seeds for the future.

Agriculture sector can't be ignored as a sector of our country, as more than 65 percent of the population depends directly on this sector. Even today, according to Bhaskar Rao, India can supply food to the whole world as the resources here are still untapped. Again, today, agriculture has taken the back seat-as youth aspire for white collar jobs and are not ready for putting in hard work. 'A farmer who works hard under the sun is the healthiest person in our country, but his efforts are not recognized and encouraged'-says Bhaskar Rao. It is still a lucrative field for growth and development. Today, the country is blessed with advanced technologies in the agricultural field. Determination, hard work and patience would yield long run happiness-concludes Bhaskar Rao.

Anna Datta Sukhi Bava!

**Shri V. Shashi Kumar**

Hyderabad



## Shri Nagoba Jatara Keslapur

Jatara or Jaatara or Fair has been the connection of human culture since good old times. There are numerous fairs or festivals held in India by the names of God or Goddess or even saint and saint babas. Each society's beliefs, customs, rituals are preserved, protected and propagated through the exhibition of ritualistic practices, narratives, music and dance to the members of the society in a common show ground called the Jatara or fair. These Jataras are held annually or periodically or seasonally that suits the convenience of the congregation of the members of the society. One such fair is Nagoba Jatara of Keslapur. Keslapur village comes under Indervelli Mandal of Adilabad district in Telangana State. From Hyderabad it is at a distance of

320 km and from Adilabad it is 32km. It is located at a distance of 20 km from the ITDA headquarters Utnoor and from Gudihathnoor on the National Highway No. 44. The Jatara is held on Pushya Amavasya (new moon day in February). The aboriginal Gond tribes popularly known as Raj Gonds are living in the unified Adilabad district of Telangana State. They call themselves in the Gond language as Koya or Koitur (man of hills or mountains). In India Gonds are divided into four tribes: Raj Gonds, Madia (Maria) Gonds, Dharve Gonds and Khatulwar (Khutwad) Gonds. The Gond society is divided into four groups (Saga), these are Nalwen Saga (Four divine brother group), Seewen Saga (Five divine brother group), Sarwen Saga (Six divine brother group) and Edwen or Yerwen

Saga (Seven brother divine group). Among these four groups, Yerwen Saga has seven clans; Madavi, Purka, Korveta Marskola, Pandram, Vedma, Mesram, and Tadam. Of these seven clans, only Mesram clan Gonds Perform the Nagoba Jatara in Keslapur village of Indervelli mandal, Adilabad district of Telangana State. Nagoba Jatara is an annual festival and Twenty two Mesram clan families of Gonds play the main role, they are Patel (Patlal), Katoda, Gaykir, Zadyalir, Nayakwadi, Wadir, Zopalir, Ramkhamb, Aarke, Bande, Yewati, Empililir, Sapalir, Bejelkar, Garudi, Daf, Hawaldar, Sankpayala, Udrapurya, Kotwal, Boddiguda and Dahaklir. Nagoba Jatara begins in the month of Pushya Maasa (January-February); officially it is performed for five days. However, the event goes on the whole month. The chief deity of the Jatara – Nagoba is the Adi Sessa or Sri Shek -the Cobra. It is the supreme deity Persa Pen of the Gonds and Pardhans belonging to the phratry of seven-divine ancestry.

The Mesram clan follow many cultural practices from the beginning of Nagoba Jatara, they study the moment of moon, order the new pots from Sirikonda village, going to holy water, puja at Hastinamadugu in village of Kalamadugu, Pooja of Indradevi, under Banyan trees, bringing the new pots, Thum preparation of castor for God, entry in Goshala, Bheating Koriyad, Satik Puja, Persa Pen Puja, Maha Puja of Nagoba, Masai God, the Darbar, Shampur Bodum Pen Jatara, the God house, and the End of the Nagoba Jatara. Among all above mentioned practices, Bheati Koriyad (Introducing bride) is very important aspect to the Gonds Mesram clan community.

Gonds are in a majority of the tribal population in India. They have many Gods related to Nature. Akipen -village deity, Nat Aawal -village mother deity, Siva or Dasuri Aawal-mother goddess, Polam Rajul-deity of hills and forests, Gouri Pen goddess of tiger, Dodi Marke-mother of cow-shed and Persa Pen, Satik etc. are some of the important deities. Mahadev is prominent and common God to Gonds. Raj Gonds worship Persa Pen is also known as a Bada dev or Barodeo. The Barodeo is considered as a high ranked God who supervises the activities of Gods lesser in rank and protects its clan. Persapen is worshiped twice a year in the month April or May. The worship of Persa Pen is done in different forms. All the people take part in this festival. The proceedings take place outside the village and reach the place where Persa Pen is situated. Persa Pen is central in the traditional worshipping system of Gonds.

# Legend Tribal tale

narration by Mesram Clan to  
Ms. Padmini Rangarajan

The very basis of Gonds social order rests on an elaborate mythology which explains the manner in which the different section of Gond society functions and interacts. The legendary stories revolve around a holy place named Bowurmachuva- the present Keslapur. This is a pilgrimage centre for Mesram clan. Bowurmachuva was known for its spectacular beauty and abundance of wealth. There lived a divine woman named Jaaradevi who was a great devotee of Sri Shambhu Madeva. In order to seek a right companionship, she did a great penance at mount Kailasha. Pleased with her devoted penance, 'Mahadev directed her to visit a holy place close to the dense forest zone near the seashore. He further directed to locate a 'Beruli Marra' also known as 'holy Vata Vrikshm'- an eternal tree under which there is an anthill. After performing sacred puja rituals and penance for twelve years she would meet her life partner'. Following Adi dev instruction, Jaaradevi reached the Bowurmachuva place. She did the sacred



puja rituals to the eternal tree by offering holy sea water filled in her 'Khalash'. Under the anthill was a pious man doing penance. On completion of twelve years, one day, he received the enlighten message and saw Jaaradevi. He is known as Sessa Narayan. Both could feel the sense of companionship as directed by the Lord Mahadev. There companionship gave birth to a male child named BharDev. As he grew, Sessa Narayana and Jaardevi performed BharDev's marriage with Nagamoti. The couple was blessed with a son named Jajkal Dev. He was married to Sondevi Bapi. Every generation before departing narrated the family history and handed over the sacred Khalash to the next generation. After listening to family history, Jejkal Dev left to the Bowurmachuva-the present Keslapur. By then the holy place had turned into a barren land. With his efforts, he started cultivation, water supply, building tanks and gardening. He brought in the lost glory of Bowurmachuva. He was blessed with a male child named Vedchal Dev. He was married to Rupdevi. The couple was blessed with seven male children. They were Balesuryal, BaleAikiyal, BaleJaital, Baleshekal, Anmolal, Dhanmolal, and Sonmolal. The glory of Bowurmachuva reached the other eternal world. Once, four



energies from other world set on a mission to visit the entire fourteen worlds. They reached Bowurmachuva. As soon as the four energies entered in, Bowurmachuva started losing its glory. The whole place was totally hit by famine, drought, sickness, deaths of cattle and humans. Recognizing this being the worst period, Vedchal and Rupdevi handed over the holy Khalash to the eldest son and ordered him to move to a place called Sondarthi for survival along with his six brothers. On his journey he reached places where there lived seven yadava brothers with a good number of cattle. Every day, a tiger attacked the cattle. This caused lots of grief. As that night too, a tiger came to attack cattle, saw Balesurya. A divine spark from his eyes drove the tiger un-attacking. The yadava brothers saw Balesurya and his brothers and their happiness grew as the cattle were safe too. Then, the Yadava brothers adopted all the brothers as their own. As time passed by, the brothers grew up, the Yadava brothers after twelve years decided to get all the seven brothers married within their community. This was refused by the brothers as they thought this new relationship would bring in disgrace to their family, ancestors and clan. After bidding adieu to the Yadava guardians they left to their native. Yadava brothers gave twelve thousand cattle breed, wealth and abundance grains for them. On the way, they reached a place called Bodumgutta during dusk. Here, the cow delivered a male calf and it was believed to be the 'Nandi' of Mahadev and they left it behind. This is present at Vankamaddigram. As they continued the journey, they reached Mukti village. The

Chahakati rulers were on hunting sports. They noticed the seven brothers and the huge cattle breed approaching the village as attackers. They left to Indervelli to Rupal Jaru's place. The Seven brothers reached a place called Gowrapur near Keslapur. Here, they made Gowrapur as cattle town and their living too. Rupal Jaru who was spellbound at the looks of seven brothers who again happened to be her cousins thought of a plan. Rupal Jaru also was good at using magic spell and changing forms. Every night, Rupal Jaru in disguise would clean up the house and cook food for all the brothers. In order to find the person in disguise, all the brothers made their best efforts but failed. At last the younger brother Mesram Padiyor wounded his little finger and dusted chili powder and was awaken the whole night. As Rupal Jaru entered in, Mesram Padiyor held her hand. Due to this act, his brothers decided to get Mesram Padiyor married with Rupal Jaru. She also gave her consent, but asked Padiyor to visit her parents at Indervelli. So they left to Indervelli. On the way at Harkapur, Rupa Jaru made the Mesram Padiyor to wait for her and she changed herself as tigress and came to attack Mesram Padiyor. In order to save himself, he prayed to God Persa Pen, Shambhu Mahadev and all his ancestors and he was changed into a mango fruit that grew on a mango tree in the waiting place. The tigress kept waiting for the fruit to fall. By then a parrot, plucked the mango and flew. Tigress chased the parrot's shadow. The fruit fell from parrot's beak at Sirikonda Lake. The fruit was swallowed by a fish. Disappointed tigress left the place. Rupal Jaru, then

changed her form into a beautiful lass and rested under a tree. She would be in human form during day time and become tigress in the evenings. Then Sirikonda was ruled by the king Pirthumpatti Vth saga rulers of the Chikarm-gattu. Some youth in hunting sport, notice the beautiful lass and by force presented her to the ruler. The ruler Pirthumpatti Vth intended to marry her. Rupal Jaru agreed on the conditions that for the next twelve years she should not be smeared with turmeric on her body and that the marriage to be performed to the finger ring as a symbolic representation. After someday, a group of fishermen went fishing at Sirikonda Lake. An old woman named Mokemathari in Gondi (in Telugu as Pedarasi Peddama) also went along. A big fat fish known as 'Korrameenu' in Telugu and 'Bodimeenu' in Gondi was caught in her fishing net. She was very happy and was cleaning the fish. While doing so, she heard a voice asking her to be careful while cutting and chopping. She found a healthy male child inside the fish. Fearing the situation and answerable to the King and others, she bought a special kind of a huge clay pot from the potter of SiriKonda and hid the child in it during daytime. Thus, could be the traditional practice even today, followed by the Mesram clan of getting a special clay pot from the potters of the SiriKonda for Nagoba Jatara. In the form of a tigress, Rupal Jaru roamed around the village and neighbourhood during nights. One day, the young boy stood holding a sharp knife hid behind the doors. As the tigress came near, he attacked the tigress with his knife and cut its nose. Wounded Rupal Jaru fled, and covered her head with a blanket and said she was suffering from a severe eye infection to the king. She also asked the King to get a rare flower named







'Mahamangdur' as a medicinal remedy. The King Pirthumpatti made an announcement to his country that 'whoever would get the rare flower would be rewarded with half of his kingdom'. The younger youth, then sent Mokemathari to inform the King that she would get the flower for him. He then set on his mission to procure the same. On his journey he was welcomed by his maternal uncles of 4th (Saga), 5th (Saga) and 6th (Saga). They gave good hospitality and arranged for lavish dinner. To everybody's surprise, all the chieftains of the three sagas had one daughter and they gave their daughters in marriage to the Mesram Padiyor. The Mesram Padiyor before setting out on his mission handed over to all the three brides his finger rings and in exchange took wedding cards. He also told them that if the finger ring would lose its shine and break that would be the sign of his death. All the three Saga chieftains were highly knowledgeable. One knew to join bones, one to rejoin muscles and the other to pour life in a dead body. As the Mesram Padiyor reached the island located midst of the sea, there was an eternal tall tree and he climbed up the tree on which the rare Mahamangdur flower was blooming. As he plucked and was about to climb down, he had a terrible fall and he breathed his last. Along with flower, the entire wedding card fell on the ground. These cards were picked by Garuda bird (pakshi) in its beak. It dropped the cards at the three (saga) chieftains capitals. The newly wedded brides accompanying their fathers went to the seashore and with their knowledge brought back the Padiyor life back. Then the Padiyor left with flower to Sirikonda. Hearing the news of the arrival of rare flower Rupal Jaru fled to Indervelli. King as per his words gifted half of his kingdom to MokeMathari. Today, she is worshipped as 'Sirikonda

Mahalakshmi'. One day, the chief Yadava guardian in order to enquire the wellness of all the seven brothers came to Bowurmachuva. On his way, Rupal Jaru attacked him by changing her form as a tigress. The head Yadava chieftain pronounced a magic spell on a black thread made out of the cattle's tail and controlled her spells. He further assured her that in future there would be festival celebrations at Bowurmachuva; the chief worshipping clans would make first a ritualistic offering to her and then proceed with the festival celebrations. Then, Mesram Padiyor left to the cattle town Gowrapur. Gowrapur is at a distance of 4Km from present Keslapur. However, he was disappointed as his brothers were not around. He then established his rule and continued with his kingship. He worked hard and reestablished the lost glory of Bowurmachuva. As the time passed by, his youngest queen complained

of no festivity or celebrations at Gowrapur. This alarmed Mesram Padiyor who with the aid his brother-in-law performed a ritualistic sacrifice, named 'Chudar Gangamani Huda' and 'Persa Gangamani Huda' with a specific objective to trace his brothers. The ritual shook the eternal world with a loud sound. The six brothers, in-laws, maternal and paternal relatives heard the loud sound and all the six brothers, maternal and paternal family members, in-laws came to Bowurmachuva in search of young Mesram Padiyor. The older ones retold about family history and asked to seek blessings of the family deity- Raithad Adi Sessa Nagdev. All six brothers refused to travel to Nagaloka, however Mesram Padiyor for the sake of the family welfare decides to travel to Nagaloka. Then Mesram Padiyor travelled to underworld of Pathaloka and reached Nagaloka the kingdom of Raithod Adi Sessa Nagdev. The Mesram Padiyor went to sanctum Sanctorum for worshipping the Nag 'devata' but he was not allowed to enter by the dwarapalaka-the guards. But the Mesram Padiyor did not listen to them and entered inside and worshipped the throne visualizing it as Nagdev. He then, in order to show his visit with evidence ate a beetle leaf and carried seven of them along with him. When Nagdev entered the Nagaloka he smelt something different. He sensed that somebody had entered the Nagaloka. Then the dwarpalaka-the in charge guard told him the Mesram Padiyor visited the Nagaloka. The Nagdev through his vision could know the purpose of his devotee Mesram Padiyor visit to Naklok. Nagdev decided to visit Bowurmachuva. Nagdev pretended to be angry in order to test his Mesram Padiyor's devotion towards him. Thus, he pronounced to punish the Padiyor's



clan. Hearing this, Mesram Padiyor went to receive Nagdev and requested him to punish him instead his entire clan. He also requested him to wait over there till he returns with nivodh materials for worship. Pleased with his devotion, Nagdev agreed to stay over there. The Padiyor proceeded to worship Nagdev with seven big bowls of milk, curd, ghee, jaggery, cereals/ lentils, honey, cashewnuts, almonds and cardamom as nivodh- (naivedhyam or Prasad). He poured the same into the wide opened mouth

priest and 'Naikwad' who cooks 'nivodh' or naivedhyam for the rituals, 'Jopal' welcomes all the worshippers. So also, 'Bodigudiyal', 'Sankepaiyal', 'Udir Puriyal, and 'Yeuthy' the one who perform pooja rituals near the anthill. He further stated that every year in the month of Pushyami New Moon Day at night, he would visit the place and bless them all and disappeared at the present spot of the temple of Nagoba. Thus, the twenty-two Meshram families enjoy the right to perform worshipping Nagoba pooja. They



of Nagdev. Pleased with his devotion and Prasad, Nagdev blessed the Mesram Padiyor and also conferred his stay at Keslapur which would be a holy pilgrim centre of worship. He granted the boon of residing at the present place and every year there would be grand fair, fun and frolic celebrations. Nagadev, then pronounced Penbhupiyal (Katoda), Gaykir, Zadyalir, Nayakwadi, Wadir, Zopalir and Patadi (Pardhan) to fetch holy water from the Godavari River and worship him devotedly. He ordered the Mesram Padiyor to give seven danas (service charges) to Pardhans. They are Deva dana, Pal dana, Merming dana, Tangeduldana, Mauyardana, and sade dana. He also said that Padiyor Mesram clan will enjoy the celebrations of the festival with kith and kin, however, it would be the 'Deva Katoda' the main priest, Gaikijokyal' who assist the main

are called as 'Meshroor' Temples which is open to all after the Mesram clans complete their pooja worshipping.

### Ritualistic Practices:

Nature worshipping is the ultimate worshipping the almighty for the Gonds. Gonds believe that Persa Pen lives in trees, water and in nature forms. There are several rituals in the worshipping that the Mesram and other Gond tribes observe and follow. Fifteen days in advance of the commencement of the Nagoba Jatara, Mesram clan and other Gond tribes start off on their journey on bullock carts which are parked under the holy Banyan tree at Keslapur. There is a 'koneru' or 'kund' under the tree. The water of this 'kund' is called as 'seegna yer' meaning holy water. This water has special pooja significance.



### Holy water of river Godavari: Ganga Jal

Water is called 'yer' in Gondi language. Members of Mesram clan set out to fetch the sacred Ganga jal from Godavari River at a spot called Hasthinamadugu on the outskirts of Kalamadugu village in Jannaram mandal of Mancherial district, from Keslapur village in Indervelli mandal. All the Mesram Clan elders meet one month before, after a new moon day at Keslapur preceded by Katoda and Patadi (Pardhan). They hold a rathyatra for four days about Nagoba Jatara. Again they meet at Keslapur after rathyatra and decide a day and time to procure holy water from the Godavari River. Around 200 members join along the main members to get holy water from the Godavari River on barefoot from Keslapur. They walk in a single file through the country side. They maintaining discipline, distance, follow strict rules wearing white dress code, maintaining order and commands. Further they stay on the same side of a bullock cart track, whether right or left, over the course of their journey. If they begin the journey on the right side, they strictly maintain the same till they complete the journey. The fetching scared Godavari water is an indispensable part which Mesram clan regards as highly sanctimonious. Thus, they see that not even a dog or cat intervene their way. The distance is around 150 km to and fro from Keslapur and takes around twelve days to complete the journey. The troupe halts in a village at sunset. The Mesram clans make the necessary arrangements of boarding and lodging. They would cover 150-160 tribal villages during the course of the journey over

150 kilometers to and fro by travelling for a fortnight. Others also accompany them to get the feel of the celebrations. People go on bare foot to bring the water in the pot Khalash called 'Jhari' which is made of five metals. It is believed to be 1,500 year old. On the way back they go to Katoda's- the main priest house. From there accompanied by musicians go to Indervelli and perform Indradevi's pooja and return to Keslapur and Jhari kept secure tied on the edge of bamboo and kept on the Banyan tree for four days. Jhari is never put on the ground. Women are not allowed to touch the Jhari even their shadow is forbidden. The water is used for bathing the God and then Jhari is placed in the temple. After five days, in the end the Jhari is demounted from the tree and it is then given to katoda and Zadiyar to safeguard for the next year Nagoba Jatara.

### Bowla Watval: (Making of Mud House):

As a ritual they involve in collective participation of all. On the fourth day in the morning, sister-in-laws fetch water from Khund near Nagoba temple make mud balls. After the cleaning of Gowad all the women except recently married ones bring the water in a traditional way, and proceed to the temple. All the pot of water and plates full of cow dung is placed in a row and all the devotees take their seats in a row. Then 'Pardhans' start blowing trumpets 'Ligo or Lingad Rahud' is believed to have created sixteen Dhemsa and eighteen vajanga for Gonds recreation. All the drums are played in the rhythm. Pardhan play the 'Kikri' which is known as Heeriyal sukka Kikari or Hirabai Kikari in Gondi language. Hirasukka



mud house. Bhawala is considered tomb of Nagdevta. Towards the end, sons-in-law then asked to culminate the mud balls into one to signify that all are one and unity.



### Entry towards Gowad:

On the day of pooja, all the devotees with priest march towards Gowad. There they light three lamps using and castor oil. The castor oil is procured from Mesram families. This is used as the mashal (light batten). Several musical instruments are used like drum, Shehnai, trumpet, Kikkri etc. Women folk collect water from tank 'Kund' and cow dung in their hands and follow the persons who walk with those mashals. All the Women wear new saris and have white coloured dupptta over the saris. All come to Gowad where Gowad is ritually worshipped. The entry in Gowad is as per the ritual. All those privileged women from Meshram families live at Gowad which is secured

### Thum Rituals

Mesram Clans come from all parts and camp under banyan tree. On the three Thum rituals-is offering to the ancestors. So they first worship the ancestors first known as 'Pinda Pradanam or Pinda Arpannam' in Telugu and seek their blessings to continue with the Nagoba Jatara. For three nights Pardhans tell stories in the form of songs of family history glories, Nagoba songs and entertain all.

was a pardhan who stood as a guardian in upbringing the Gonds clans. This Kikri is used only in the pooja. Later, sons in law of Meshram come with sharp sticks and dig in the ground. Then these holes are filled with cow dung and water by women. The mud prepared is used for making an idol of Goddesses Satik. Priests help in placing those idols to the women. Here, pardhan and Gond have their separate waruls (Mud House). Nagdev is supposed to stay in that



from all the sides. The first, worshiping right is given to Katoda –the main priest. Worshiping articles include coconut, water, incense sticks, mungdal, jaggery etc. In order to safeguard women inside Gowad from wild animals, it is now well built with compound wall. There is 'Nivodh' offering as naivedyam for god is prepared at Gowad. The nivodh is prepared outside is not allowed for the offering. Women folk of the Buigota Khandan of Mesram Clan prepares an ant hill like earthen Lingam and make balls out of it and arrange them in seven concentric circles one above the other. The mud balls are used to plaster the floor of Sati shrine located in the premises of the Nagoba Temple. The clan priest and village headman prepare seven lumps of mud and decorate

who carries the brass plate with articles and things, enters the room and keep the things to the left side of the platform near the seven Goddesses (Satic) were installed. Incense sticks in a holder and clay bowl are kept at the base of the plat form to its right. To the left of the platform two (consists of seven nodes) bamboo sticks are kept.

### Holy Bath to the Nagoba Diety.

Second day evening all gather for Mahapuja along with holy water in Jhari. With the holy water Nagadevata is given a holy bath, thus commence the Mahapuja. Then, this Jhari is then place on the tree, behind the temple tied with white cloth. Then Jhari is also worshipped with thanks ass it the main



### Midnight Mahapuja on New Moon Day

Katoda , Patel (Patlal) and other assistances in total seven gather near the sacred anthill. They worship the anthill. They also cover the anthill with a new white cloth and wait patiently for the blessings of Nagdev. Pardhans play musical instruments. The moment the white cloth raises up katoda offers Maha aarthi which signifies the arrival of the Nagadev and they welcome him devotedly. This confirms the jatara can proceed with fun and frolic. Then nivodh-naivedhyam is offered by the Katoda. This could take 3-4 hours. Newly wedded brides are not permit to attend Mahapuja. They are sent to Gowad. After Maha Puja, newly wedded brides come to the temple. Then the Bheatikoryad (bhetsuna) introduction of newly wedded bride to the Nagoba Nagdevta and to the Mesram family elders takes place.

them with vermilion paste to make the Sati. Later, the place is cleaned and also given the layer of cow dung. The women worshiped the symbolic stone deities and pray. The women prepared 'nivodh' on the hearth (soddel) where men are not allowed to enter. Those 'pardhans' are also given a specific place to stay; Gowad is surrounded by all the men. Women of Madavi are given privilege in the fair as the daughters of Meshram are daughters in law in Madavi families. The three persons inside the room arranged all the seven bases believed to be Mesram. Deities (they are made out of clay in the form of balls and kept in seven lamp bases) on the clay frame. Then decorate using Marigold flowers and leaves, seven coconuts are kept in front of this frame. Patel's (Patlal) wife,

Khalash that has been passed on to the Mesram clan form ancestors as it would be used only the followed by Mahapuja. In this ritual all the devotees are asked to stay way. Only seven Meshrams are permitted to enter the temple. Women are prohibited. Holiness and purity are given the top priority among Gonds. These seven Meshrams observe fast on the particular day and remain away from other. Then the Katoda – clan priest performs the ritualistic bathing to the deity Nagoba with the holy waters of Godavari and worship with seven coconuts and other offerings. After five days, in the end the Jhari is demounted from the tree and it is then given to katoda and Zadiyar to safeguard for the next year Nagoba Jatara.

### Bheatikoryad –Introduction of newly wedded brides

The newly wedded brides are introduced to the God -Nagoba serpent and to the entire Mesram Kitta and this is called Bheati Koriyal. There is an exception to this procedure;



whenever a death takes place in the family of the newly married or the married women, the women from these families were allowed to enter the temple and do puja only after 'Thum (a kind of ritual)'. If any more deaths occurred in the same family after Thum, then those family women are ineligible to attend Bheati Koriyal. New brides of the clan dress in white saris come in procession and enter into the Sati shrine and worship the seven miniature stones representing their seven divine ancestors. Then the new brides will be led by older women to worship the Nagoba amidst beating of drums and blowing of pepre by Pardhans. Together they all are being called as "sisters of Mesram". This is held at early hours. From then onwards the new brides are recognized as the full-pledged members of the clan and are entitled to participate in all the socio-religious rituals and rites. From then onwards the new brides are recognized as the full-pledged members of the clan and are entitled to participate in all the socio-religious rituals and rites. Thereafter, all the tribes and non-tribes are allowed to have darshan of the deity. Pardhans sing the song 'Dere Hari Dena Dena' on the Kikkiri this is called 'Nagobal Bhids' in the language of Gond this is song of Nagoba. Every newlywed bride is accompanied by some elderly women from their family, Of the many women present, wife of the Katoda comes with a plate full of things a small brass bowl with lentils, coconut, small clay pot with water and lamp, and the remaining ladies too carry things like coconuts and rice puffs that are to be offered in the Nagoba temple.



### Satik Pooja:

The goddess 'Satik' is said to be 'Sati' is a Hindu goddesses. It is believed that the seven women ancestors died as Satik. Hence, in the memory of those seven women dance is performed and this dance is known as 'Neki'. In this dance, 'Kotwal' directs all the performers. Here, the dance performed

in a traditional way. Every woman takes the blessings of satik, after the dance. Women offer money to pardhans. The money is thrown on the piece of cloth placed there. All the devotees offer money, coconut and other articles.



### Pooja of Persapan (worship of Persapan)

This is done similar to Mahapooja by offering seven coconuts, green grams, lentils, nine grains known as navadhanyalu, jaggery, milk and curd to the Persa Pen. It is the Katoda and his seven assistances do this pooja. Every family has to make the offerings. Women are not allowed here. This is done on the following day in the night near the big trees.



### Masai (mahsoba):

After Persa Pen Pooja, Masai pooja is done. There is a deity at the entrance of Nagoba temple. This deity is in saffron in colour. Some people call it Masai or Mahsoba. This deity is said to be guarding deity of the temple. So everybody takes the blessings of Mahsoba when he/she takes blessing of Nagoba, people offer money or food to Mahsoba.



### Mandagajling : Offering to Bank diety.

On the fifth day, in order to thank the Persa Pen, Nagdevta, Mahsoba and other deities this ritual is held in the evening behind the temple in a place where this ritual is held. This deity is supervises the smooth function of five day Nagoba Jatara. Thus he is finally thanked and offering is made. It is kind of farewell ceremony. In the evening, all the articles collected in the temple of Satik are collected and distributed equally among the people. This process is known as Mandagajling. After the Mandagajling people start moving to shyampur as Indrani attained salvation by Nagoba. People celebrate the joy Indrani's salvation.



### Bethal Puja

On the Mandagajling day, Here, Patel (Patlal), Pardhan and others jump high with sticks to symbolize the presence of other energies around. Other energies and spirits also come to Keslapur to witness Nagoba Jatara. They exhibit their fighting prowess by rotating large sticks that represent the god.

**Jonnagato and Sherani Prasad (food made of Jaggery):**

All the devotees meet each other and prepare a Prasad of Jonnagato –raw flour of Jawar. They make balls and distributes in all family members now only such a nivodh is given to a devotees instead of meals. This is the food or food item given to devotees by the people who vow to the God.



**Community Panchyat (assembly):**

All get assembled early in the morning under the guidance of Patel (Patlal) and Pardhan to exchange greetings and express grievances. It is to know the welfare and well being of Mesram clan. The Nagoba Jatara is also the period when eligible bride and bridegrooms marriages are fixed. It is perhaps the traditional way of matrimonial system that prevailed among the Gonds for long. This is the period when the families exchange greetings, wellness and also get into a new relationship ties.

**Durbar:**

Sometimes ago the Gond king used to organize his assembly here for all the public purposes like giving, justice, etc. then, the government started providing all the decisions from here. This Durbar was re initiated by Prof Christoph Haimendorf as Advisor to the erstwhile Government of H.E.H. The Nizam's Dominions, introduced in the 1940s a tradition of Durbar in the afternoon after the darshan of the deity. The local tribal leaders by sitting on one side will put the local problems before the Hon'ble Ministers, MLAs, Other Public Representatives, District Collector, Project Officer, ITDA Utnoor and other officials sitting on the other side to address them then and there itself. This practice is followed even today. They make the welfare schemes available and also list the grievances to be addressed.



**22 privileged Meshrams (Kitta) of worshipping of Nagoba:**

There are 22 Meshrams who have the right to perform pooja of Nagoba. This right comes from family tradition. Everybody of them get opportunity of performing pooja they are as follows.

**Patel-Patlal:** He is the chief of worshipping (pooja). He supervises entire ceremony. Everybody follows his instructions orders strictly.

**Katoda (priest):** Katoda is main Priest who performs worshipping. He follows all the rules & lows strictly.

**Gaykir:** They are the ones who keep the cows and bulls (bhodum) of the God. He is

also known as cow herd. He keeps watch on cows

**Zadyalir:** they are said to look after all the process of Jhari

**Nayakwadi:** He makes nivodh naivedhyam.

**Wadir:** Wadir perform the jobs which are done by carpenter. He makes idol of God from the wood. He also provides a large wooden spoon for cooking. This big spoon is known as Sukudu.

**Zopalir:** They move all the cows of the God in the Gowad and keeps patrolling.

**Kotwal (Pardhan),** teaches all the religious and traditional songs narrations to the people in the form of songs and play musical instruments like Pepre and Kikri and others.

Ramkhamb, Aarke, Bande, Yewati, Empililir, Sapalir, Bejelkar, Garudi,Daf, Hawaldar,

Sankpayala, Udrapurya, Boddiguda, and Dahaklir all assist and aid to the above seven during Nagoba Jatara.

**Notes:**

1. Thum (Pinda arpaan) is a ritual followed by Gond's for their dead members.
2. Goshala is a place for cows, it is Gond's holy place.
3. Mashals are traditional lamps of God Nagoba.
4. Kalikom is a musical Instrument.
5. Masai God is a watch man of Nagoba temple, and this is the belief of Gond's.

6. Nivodh is the Naivedya of food item or fruits offered to the God.
7. Mud Platform is a part of Nagoba temple, where Serpent god holes looking like ant hills are made.
8. Kikkiri is traditional musical Instrument, it will play when telling story of Nagoba.
9. Pippiri is musical Instrument; it will play with other musical Instruments before starting Nagoba story
10. Mothuku leaves are weaved like plates for keeping Nivodh.

### Government Supports:

Earlier there was a thatched hut as a shelter to the deity. Half a century ago a brick-cement temple was built in place of initial one. Now the temple is being enlarged in a grand manner in stone media making the look as it was constructed some thousand years ago. Now, a big temple Gopuram is under construction with the support and contributions exclusively by the Raj Gonds Mesram clan. The Government is also supporting with

exterior works and in arranging public utilities for the devotees. The Tribal Welfare Department, Government of Telangana has been supporting the Nagoba Jatara and releases annual budget towards it.

The following details about Nagoba Jatara - Tribal tale and other rituals shared by Mesram Clan Committee Members and Nagoba Temple Committee Members, Keslapur, Indervelli mandal, Adilabad to the Indian Temple Magazine Team.

# Sthala Vruksha

A Sthala Vruksha or Sthala Vruksham is a significant tree that is indigenous to every historical to most of the Hindu temples. This forms a prominent feature of Hindu temples, especially of the Dravidian style. 'Sthala' means Place and 'Vruksha' means tree. From ancient periods, trees were considered as sacred and worshipped in Indians from time immemorial. It is the natural tree found on a temple site before construction of the temple. These trees have religious and medicinal importance. The worshipper who comes to the temple attains a healthy spiritual well being. Tribes perhaps know this secret of being one with the nature, dwell in the forest and protect the tree. As, each clan of Gonds is symbolically associated with an identity associated with an animal, bird and plant or a tree. This ensures them to protect these indigenous species for the next generation. For instance, the Mesram clan of Gonds identifies with Snake as their animal deity and thus never attempt to harm or kill. Similarly, is with tree. The tradition here exhibits the symbiotic relation between human and nature. SthalaVruksha is a single plant mostly in the form of a tree or in some



places occurring as an herb, shrub, grass or climber. These sacred trees are valued for their botanical, medicinal, environmental, religious and mythical importance. Sacred trees have been chosen on the basis of certain ecological, economical and mythological considerations. It is again a practice of tying bangles, cradles, paper slips containing demand and mantras and even clothes on these sacred trees for good health, to possess child, for getting married and to achieve desired boon. In some temple the holy tree/s is/are worshipped as the main deity by devotees by offering flowers, lighting of camphors and place turmeric and kumkum over the trunk. So to say, people also

often collect the withered plant materials of the trees based on local beliefs to tie the plant parts at the doorsteps to ward off evil spirits. For time immemorial, our ancestors circumambulate around the peepal tree as part of morning Prayer. Scientific researchers have revealed that peepal is the only tree that produces oxygen in abundant quantity day and night. During the early hours in the morning the flow of oxygen is in abundance. Thus, peepal trees were planted along with neem tree on the either side of the pathways to ensure good and fresh air. There is a unique practice among the RajGonds who worship the Persa Pen –Badadeo or Bada Dev in various forms of nature. Each gotra or saga or to say clan is bestowed to safeguard a tree, an animal and a bird as they call them as Totems. This practice is to maintain the ecological balance in the nature and human existence depends directly upon them. The seven clans of RajGonds out of which 4th to 7th clans reside in Adilabad region, the tree totems identified are: for 7th gotra(saga) clan of Mesram clan it is 'Bilva Vruksha' or 'Beal tree', known as 'Maredu chettu' in Telugu, 6th gotra it is 'Mouha tree', 5th gothram it is 'Sal tree', 4 gotra it is 'Teak tree'. To conclude, the representation of a totems, animals, trees and so on and worshipping them is perhaps to inculcate the practice of protecting the nature and more so as the initial steps that leads to the ultimate realization of being one with the nature.



# Unsung Heroes

## Christoph von Furer-Haimendorf

Christoph von Furer-Haimendorf was born in an Austrian aristocratic family. He was Professor of Asian Anthropology at the School of Oriental and African Studies, where he built up the largest department of anthropology in the country by the time of his retirement in 1976. Being primarily interested in India, he decided to forgo the opportunity of studying in America in favour of the London School of Economics. Very early he developed an interest in Indian culture.

He studied anthropology and archaeology in Vienna and there he was most influenced by Robert von Heine-Geldern. He wrote his thesis on the tribal social organization of the peoples of Assam and NW Burma. By 1936 he traveled to India, where he worked among the Naga people and established good friendships among the local administrators of the British Raj. After five months and great effort, he succeeded in learning the local language and was able to do without an interpreter. In 1938, von Furer-Haimendorf married Betty Barnardo, a colleague. At the time he only made a brief visit to Europe and returned to India, so that at the outbreak of World War II he found himself in British territory holding. Being in possession of a German passport, he was arrested by the authorities under the jurisdiction of the Nizam, but was able to undertake some of his best field-work among such groups as the Chenchus, Reddis and Raj Gonds. Thus he was confined to Hyderabad State in South India. As time went by von Furer-Haimendorf earned the trust of the local authorities, who could see that he had no Nazi sympathies. He was then able to do some of his best fieldwork

ever while living among the Chenchu, Bhil, Reddi and the Raj Gond Adivasi of present-day interior Telangana. At the end of the war, Haimendorf was appointed to the position of Advisor for Tribes and Backward Classes to the Nizam's Government of Hyderabad to deal with the complicated issue of land reform. In the course of his work, he set up various educational and other schemes for tribal peoples, all with the aim of preserving and safeguarding indigenous cultures and languages. He also accepted a teaching appointment at Osmania University which he later relinquished, after ten years in India. He published ten ethnographic monographs based on his field-work, including *The Chenchus* (1943), *The Reddis of the Bison Hills* (1945), *The Raj Gonds of Adilabad* (1948), *The Sherpas of Nepal* (1964) and *The Konyak Nagas* (1969). He also published several other volumes of essays and theoretical works, including *Morals and merit* (1967) and *The tribes of India: struggle for survival* (1982), which drew heavily on his fieldwork. He received numerous academic honours as well as the Sykes and Roy Medals, he was awarded the RAI Rivers Memorial Medal in 1949, and was President of the Royal Anthropological Institute itself from 1975 to 1977. In all this he drew inspiration from his wife Betty Barnardo, whom he married in 1938 - a co-worker, organizer of his expeditions, and herself a notable ethnographer. As a person, Christoph von Furer-Haimendorf was courteous, genial, charming and extremely personable, with a wide circle of friends. After anthropology, his second love was the classical music of his native Austria, which helped to give him solace in old age though he was never reconciled to modern styles of

opera production. Haimendorf, did settle at Marlawai village, Jainoor Mandal, Adilabad District. Even today, his house and his essential things are preserved as a gesture of goodwill by the villagers who pay their high regards to his invaluable service.

## Dr. Michael Yorke

Dr. Michael Yorke is an anthropologist, photographer and documentary filmmaker. Dr. Michel Yorke, Senior Tutor in Filmmaking at University College London Yorke inherited the study on Raj Gonds from his professor Christoph von Furer-Haimendorf, an Austrian anthropologist who developed deep ties with the tribes of Adilabad during the World War II and who became a tribal by choice. Yorke, later, continued his professor's study on the Gond tribe and won many awards for his movie on the Gonds he made for the BBC. "I like to work in teams and developed an interest in filmmaking and photography. And I suggested to BBC to make a film on the Raj Gonds," said Yorke who was also a member of the BBC ethnographic film unit. The ever enthusiastic anthropologist observed that Raj Gonds have a rich cultural heritage, oral tradition which is lost due to modernization and they also suffered from economic and social deprivation. After hitchhiking in India in 1962 he decided to become an anthropologist, specializing in South Asia. He has always wanted to engage people in the understanding of the 'other' which is evident in his work and ethnographic pieces on tribal culture. His films and visual anthropology have explored subjects such as Hijras, The Raj Gonds and Sadhu Holy men, among many others. After many broadcasts with the BBC Anthropology Unit and Channel 4, he later taught digital filmmaking at UCL and is now retired. Michael is an active member of the Royal Anthropological Institute Film Committee and has been on the jury for many film festivals such as the London International Documentary Film Festival.



Well there were two major fieldworks by Yorke. One amongst the Ho tribe, a Mundari speaking tribe in India and the other his postdoctoral research, amongst the Raj Gond tribe in India.



### Madavi Tukaram IAS

Many great Gond freedom fighters like Kumram Bheem, Ramji Gond were born in Adilabad. There was a great personality named Madavi Tukaram, who also belonged to this land. Tukaram was from one of the vulnerable Gond tribal groups, who succeeded in becoming the first Gond IAS officer.

Madavi Tukaram was born on 14 May 1951 in Luxettipet village, Utnoor mandal of Adilabad district. His father's name was Madavi Bapurao Maharaj and his mother's name was Manku Bai. He was the youngest son of his family and had two sisters. Tukaram's parents were daily wage labourers. He completed his primary school education in his own village. Afterwards, from class 6th to 10th and then high school education, he pursued it in tribal welfare school in Adilabad town. Later after many hardships, he went on to pursue his MA in Osmania University. For his financial sustenance, he worked as a daily wage employee in the forest department, Kagaznagar town. Apart from speaking his own mother tongue Gondi/Koya, Madavi Tukaram also mastered many languages like English, Hindi, Telugu, Marathi, and Sanskrit.

During Austrian anthropologist Prof. Christoph von Fürer-Haimendorf's stay in Adilabad during the Nizam period, he took help from Tukaram for his translation works from Gondi to English. Later Tukaram himself translated many writings of Haimendorf in Telugu. After encouragement from his parents as well as Haimendorf, Tukaram

passed the Group 1 exam and landed in an officer's job (as Revenue Divisional Officer). Thereafter he worked in many government positions and with his sincerity and hard work, he was finally selected in IAS and worked as collector in Nizamabad, Karimnagar, Mahbubnagar, Kakinada. He also worked as commissioner in various departments and served as Secretary in the Ministry of Tribal Affairs and Ministry of Home Affairs. He was also a former Project Officer of Utnoor Integrated Tribal Development Agency. Tukaram is also remembered for his contribution in establishing "Rai Centre" – a traditional Gonds' judicial court. In Gondi, Rai means legal decision or justice. Rai Centre was established for protection of Adivasi culture, history and their rights. In Rai Centre, civil conflicts were solved under its jurisdiction. Madavi Tukaram is remembered as a hero. He died on 29 November 1997 after suffering from Cancer. In his remembrance, last year in 2017, Adivasis in Adilabad demanded "inclusion of a chapter on late Madavi Tukaram in history books in the State besides establishing a trust in his name. While Adivasis remain one of the most marginalized groups in Telangana, with only a few civil servants of IAS ranks, Madavi Tukaram will always remain as an inspiration for all young Adivasi students and youths for achieving their goals surpassing all the hardships in their life.



### Komaram Bheem 'Jal Jangal Jameen'

Komaram Bheem-The Gond Adivasi Leader Komaram Bheem is the great Gond adivasi tribe leader of Adilabad region. Though, he has been no less of a martyr in adivasi struggle for autonomy, his recognition has been mostly limited within the boundaries of Telangana/Andhra Pradesh. He advocated 'Jal Jangal Jameen' the popular slogan

of adivasi movements, in his movement against Nizams, he argued that complete rights on all the resources of forest should be given to Adivasis. Komaram Bheem is known as the brave warrior of Telangana. He is from Jodeghat of Asifabad in Adilabad District of Telangana. The Gonds took a small part of the population as the area which was ruled by Chanda (Chandrapur) and Ballapur. These tribes used to have little interaction with the exterior world. Komaram Bheem also had no exposure to the exterior world and was an uneducated man. It was ruled by Asifjahi dynasty During Nizam's time unbearable taxes were imposed and exploitation and atrocities of local zamindars were rampant on adivasi masses. In the background of ongoing atrocities, Bheem launched massive agitations against Nizam government, and started guerrilla warfare against their army. Making Jode Ghat the centre of his activities, Bheem continued his guerrilla war from 1928 to 1940. He drew inspiration from the freedom fighters like Shahid Bhagat Singh; he gave the slogan "Jal, Jungle Jameen" which means the people living in the forests should have the full fledged rights on all the forest resources. Bheem's movement against Nizam was solely born out of 'denial of basic Adivasi rights over land, recourses and demand for autonomy'. In his people's imagination, he was only seeking to liberate his people from dikus (outsiders) and was fighting for justice and self-rule. In the light of decades long Adivasi struggle for patta rights, Komaram Bheem's contributions remains significant – He exemplifies a revolutionary icon for all Adivasi movements and also reminds us of the forgotten promises of nation and state towards the Adivasis. Komaram Bheem holds utmost respectful position among Gond Adivasi community and is considered as a deity (Pen). At the historic Jodeghat village in Kerameri mandal of Komuram Bheem Asifabad district, the Tribal Welfare Department, Government of Telangana has come up with a museum named as the 'Kumram Bheem Memorial Tribal Museum.' Gonds observe Bheem's death anniversary every year on 'Aswayuja Pournami' and on this day, an event is organized at Jodeghat to commemorate his life and struggle.

### Ms. Padmini Rangarajan

Hyderabad



## Shri Soyam Bapu Rao 'Duvval - Tiger' of Tribes

Shri Soyam Bapu Rao popularly known as Sahayam bapu Rao, born on 28 April 1969, 52 years young, is from the poor Gond tribe community at Vijjur Naguguda, Boath mandal. Presently he is residing with his family at Naguguda-Ghanpur village, Boath mandal of Adilabad district. His father is Shri Soyam Nagu and mother smt Soyam Lakshmi. He is the sixth born of seven brothers and a sister. He attended government primary school at Pardi (B)

Boath mandal. He attended secondary school at Zilla Parishad High School at Boath mandal. He further underwent Intermediate course at Andhra Pradesh Residential Junior College APRJC, LalTekdi, Utnoor, Adilabad. He was appointed as a government teacher in 1987 by ITDA, Utnoor at Vajjar Mahadguda in Boath mandal. In 1990-1992, he underwent Teacher's Training course from Teacher's Training Centre, Bhukhapatnam, Anantapur, Andhra Pradesh. He then

continued with his teaching profession. In 1994 he married Chandra Bhaga also known as Bharati Bai from Ichooda mandal. During his teaching career he travelled to tribal areas like Sampathnaik Tanda, Movarat Asifabad, Sonepalli (Bajahathanoor) and finally before resigning his teaching career in 2004, he served at Komaram Bheem Sports School, KB Campus, Utnoor. As a teacher he was quite sensitive towards the problems and welfare schemes for tribal development. Thudumdebba (Adivasi Kakkula Porata Samithi -AHPS). Soyam Bapu Rao is also the state president of the 'Thudumdebba' (Adivasi Hakkula Porata Samiti). Thudumdebba is fighting for the Constitutional rights of the Adivasis for Jal, Jangal and Jameen and empowerment of the Adivasis in various fields and striving hard in preserving their unique culture and traditions. During his teaching career he was an active member of the organization, RIA center activities, and tribal development activities and so on. His constant interaction with the native tribes gave a scope of understanding their basic culture, value system and the exploitation of forest reserves and tribes. He quit and entered politics to serve the tribe people. Thus, paradigm shifts from teaching profession to politics. He first contested and got elected from Boath constituency as Member of Legislature Assembly-MLA in 2004 as a Telangana Rashtra Samithi candidate. From then he is serving the tribal community selflessly. The Adivasis of Telangana and Andhra Pradesh call Soyam Bapu Rao their Duvval (Duvval means Tiger in Gondi) with love and affection. Adivasis worship the Duvval since they consider it as their 'Pen' means God. Shri Soyam Bapu Rao (Sahayam Bapu Rao) is an elected Member of Parliament from Adilabad, Telangana in the 2019 general election as a member of the Bharatiya Janata Party. He has chosen politics to serve the tribes and not for his personal growth. He is a mass leader. He has been extending financial help to the poor students who get seats in prestigious educational institutions to continue their higher studies and also marriages of the poor. He is also helping the poor Adivasis in meeting their medical expenses in emergencies besides providing free treatment for many. During his visit to the constituency, he makes it a point to visit health centres. His concern is to provide nutritious food to pregnant women and children. As a people's servant, he has taken the initiative of approaching the Health and Medical Department to sanction ultrasound machines to primary health centres of Boath and three other government-run hospitals of the district at the earliest. People irrespective



of their caste and creed say that Soyam Babu Rao is good at heart and his politics are considered as politics with humane approach. His house and office are open round the clock for all and the signboard that hangs in front of his office reads that 'people need not pay money to anybody here to get their problems resolved'. People with problems and works who come from any place to meet Soyam Babu Rao will get free accommodation and meals during their stay. Whoever visit's Soyam Babu Rao, he would first ask, "Did you have breakfast or lunch?" and then he would offer them a seat and water followed by tea and snacks. Then he would spend time with the visitors and give a patient hearing to their problems. This is his style of functioning which makes the tribes and non-tribes to be his followers, fans, and supporters. Perhaps, it would be a surprise to the readers to know that people of the interior villages wait for his arrival to give him a rousing welcome even at midnight. He extensively travels and visits even interior areas that are Maoists affected to get first-hand information about the problems faced



by the local people. Shri Soyam Bapurao joined the Telangana Rashtra Samithi (TRS) and contested with the party ticket in 2004 election from Boath Assembly Constituency that was reserved for Scheduled Tribes (ST) and was elected as MLA. Soyam Bapurao joined the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and on being denied the party ticket to contest for Parliamentary elections by the Congress, contested with the BJP ticket in 2019 elections and got elected with a thumping majority. He is the lone Adivasi MP of BJP elected from South India and BJP won the first MP seat from the erstwhile Adilabad district. It is surprising to know that even today, Soyam Babu Rao is living in a rented house in Adilabad even after serving as MLA and MP positions and having a long political career. Shri Soyam Babu Rao's family comprising wife Smt. Bharati Bai, Sons Venkatesh, Mahesh, and daughter Krishnaveni stay in their native village Naguguda-Ghanpur village in Boath mandal of Adilabad district. His children are pursuing higher education. His wife and children do support his good gesture of serving people and also join him in forefronts.

**Ms. Priyanka Tushar Khanaj**

Pune



## Shri Athram Sakku A Leader with Vision

A rise of sun from Lakshimpur village has spread its rays across Gond tribes. Sri Athram Sakku a government teacher entered the arena of politics to serve RajGond tribes of Adilabad region. Born in Lakshmpur village of Piryani Mandal, present Kumaram Bheem Asifabad District in 1973 to Shri Athram Raju and Smt. Athram Manku Bai. His parents engaged in farming activities.

He was also exposed to farming and other tribal agricultural practices along with his elder sister Badru Bai. He had his schooling till class 10th at Tiryani Mandal Government Schools. He then further went to Lakshtipet town to pursue Intermediate course (12th class or Junior college) at Mancherial district. Then after completion of Intermediate course, he served at District RAI centre,



Adilabad as General Secretary. He then underwent he underwent Teacher's Training course and in 1993, he was appointed as Government teacher post and served at Government school at Gopera(Mangi) Village, Asifabad region for seven years. This was the prime time of his life to know the tribal community, cultural practices and belief system by moving closing with them. A born leader, Athram Sakku always raised his voice towards injustice towards tribes and extended helping hands for the needy. This inborn leadership qualities compelled him to take active participation in Thudumdebba (Adivasi Hakkula Porata Samithi -AHPS). He served as General Secretary of Tudumbebba. ). Thudumdebba is fighting for the Constitutional rights of the Adivasis for Jal, Jangal and Jameen and empowerment of the Adivasis in various fields and striving hard in preserving their unique culture and traditions.

2001-2003 he was posted at Chintaguda village of (Narnoor Mandal), present Gadiguda Mandal. This is a Kolam village of Kolam tribes. Here, he had an opportunity to know more about Kolam tribes, rituals, languages. 2003-2006, he was posted to Lakshmpur village Government school. During his teaching profession, he was elected ass State Councillor for Andhra Pradesh Tribal Welfare Teachers' Union-APTWTU. Here, he represented the tribal teachers teaching, facilities, service, and other related issues to the government.

Along with his teaching profession, he also started to study about Indian Politics. His selfless service as a teacher, motivational speaker, and a true leader made Athram Sakku to work with tribal Youth closely. In 2006, he motivated the right candidates from RajGonds to contest for Zilla Parishad Territorial Constituency-ZPTC and Mandal Parishad Territorial Constituency-MPTC



elections. In 2007, he on deputation got an opportunity to serve as Personnel Assistant to Shri Kokkerala Prem Sagar Rao-MLC from Mancherial district. This opportunity gave Athram Sakku to know in and out detailing of Politics. This he made use to know the welfare schemes available for tribal development and other issues. It was in 2008, as he was impressed with the then Congress government under the leadership of Shri Yeduguri Sandinti Rajasekhara Reddy-popularly known as YSR, former Chief Minister of Andhra Pradesh. He resigned from his teaching profession and joined Indian Congress political party to serve Tribal people of Asifabad region. He also contested for the first time for Member of Legislative Assembly-MLA from Asifabad

Constituency and won the election. He then, primarily focussed on 'Health, Education and Culture' of Gonds. However, in 2014, again he contested but lost. Not losing much hopes, in 2019, he contested again and got elected as Member of Legislative Assembly-MLA from Asifabad Constituency. During his political career, he was impressed with the Eklavya Foundation, Hyderabad's Kumaram Bheem Study Circle-KBSC at chikkadpally for the Tribes from Adilabad region. Eklavya Foundation-an NGO working under the Chairmanship of Shri Venugopal Reddy is working for RajGond, Kolam, Koya tribes of Adilabad. The KBSC hostel is a self management hostel. The management is also done by the tribes. In order to start similar centres for educated tribe youth



which could provide ample facilities for preparing for competitive examinations, Athram Sakku has started one Kumaram Bheem Study Circle at Asifabad. This centre provides free coaching along with free boarding and lodging. Similarly, at Adikmet, Hyderabad, a tribal hostel for girls named as Haimendorf Girls Management Hostel was catering to few tribal girls. This hostel also lacked some of the basic facilities too. Due to which the enrolment to this hostel was less. Athram Sakku with the support of then Congress Central minister Shri Jayaram Ramesh, got the hostel building renovated with all the facilities. Now the enrolment of tribal girls has increased tremendously. He has started similar study circles for boys and girls at Kagajnagar, Jainoor Mandal and other places too. He moves a step ahead to extend financial help to the needy tribes. As a Member of Legislative Assembly-MLA, he focuses on village development, tribal welfare schemes, health camps, youth developments-sports, and education. He is married to Smt. Tulasi Bai who is a teacher. He has six children who are pursuing higher educations. His family supports him wholeheartedly. Athram Sakku is better known among tribes as 'Person whose doors can be knocked even at midnight'.

### Ms. Sonal Nayak

Mumbai





# Gonds Paintings And Ojha Dokra Metal Crafts

The Gonds paint is also known as Digna, a traditional geometric pattern drawing commonly found on the walls and floors of the houses of Gond tribes of Gondwana region. Bhattichitra is painted on the walls of houses, and these paintings include images of animals, plants, and trees. RajGonds of Adilabad too have similar artistic paintings using geometrical figures and motifs. For the paintings they use bright colours and intricate lines across the paintings are the unique features of the Gond Paintings of Telangana. The lines are adopted from the traditional Ojha / Dokra metal crafts made by Ojha. The most predominant element in the Gond paintings is a tree emerging out of birds (cocks and peacocks) and animals (ox, horse, deer, antelope, elephant and tiger). The themes and motifs of Gond painting are drawn from local flora and fauna, deities and urban culture. Gond paintings mainly, depict the following subjects: pictures of peacocks, birds, tigers, deer, snakes, wild boars, cows, monkeys, elephants, horses, fish, Mahua tree, Mahua flowers, fruits, seeds, and leaves, myths, legends, and aspects of the daily life of Gond people and so on. The upcoming artists do use Gond painting techniques to depict social awareness related to tribes' problems and grievance, culture and lifestyle,

food and clothing and so on. Modern design such as airplanes, bicycles, cars, technology, is also drawn to depict changes in the lifestyle of tribes. The patterns adopted in Gond paintings are dots, fine lines, curved lines and dashes, fish scales, water and water drops, all combined in a geometrical shape. The Tribal Welfare Department of Telangana has recognized the potential of traditional painting practices of the tribal communities of Gonds, Koyas and Naikpods. The Department has conducted workshops for the tribal youths under the guidance of well known artists, subject experts and community elders of the respective tribes. The tribal youths retrieved their traditional art forms and are painting them on the canvas boards.

### Dokra –Ojha Metal Crafts:

Dokra metal handicrafts are made by tribals well known in Central Indian states of Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgar, Odisha and Telangana. In Telangana the metal crafts are prepared by Ojha Gonds for Rajgonds meeting their needs of deities, agriculture and household utilities. The around 100 Ojha families, a sub tribe of the Raj Gond Adivasis found in Keslaguda, Ushegaon and Jamgaon



and Ramjiguda of Kumram Bheem Asifabad district and Tamsi mandal of Adilabad district, manufacture brass metal items using the lost wax technique for centuries. The artisans traditionally manufacture only items like lamps and bells of different sizes used by the Raj Gonds and Kolam tribe in agriculture and religious activity. "During Dandari season, Polala Amavasya, during marriage season and Nagoba Jatara, we sell big ankle bells or 'ghungroo' used by the Dandari and Gussadi dancers. The heavy demand for ghungroo bells is an indicator that traditional products' - exclaims Uyka Indrajeet Ojha artist from Belsari Rampur village of Bheemapur Mandal of Adilabad District. The Ojhas also sell 'Tichpalli Ghumela', the percussion musical instrument played during the Dandari dance.



The technique of lost wax casting has been practiced in India for more than 4000 years and even to this day, it is in use by these craftsmen. Dokra is a labor-intensive work, because even a simple piece requires 4-5 days while complicated designs may require 2-3 weeks. The Dokra artifacts, mainly made in brass are highly unique wherein the pieces do not have any form of joints. The entire object is fully handcrafted with traditional designs being considered highly aesthetic in nature and a collector's delight. The lost wax technique is distinct from where the mould is used only once and broken, which makes the figure unique in the handicraft market. There are two processes in lost wax casting. The first one is Solid casting which is the method followed in the South and hollow casting, practiced in other states. The hollow casting method makes use of the clay core method, treated as the traditional method. The workmanship is practiced by the Ohja community, who create the idols and figures. In this process, initially the hollow casting is used for making a clay core that would define the way the object is created. The core



is further filled with bee's wax and resin etc. This wax is further shaped while finer details are made with proper embellishments. This task is mainly dependent on the carver's skill, which is then covered with clay and there are drains made in the mould to see that the wax is drained after the mould is heated. The wax is replaced next by molten brass, gold, bronze or silver which is left for hardening inside the mould. The mould is subsequently chipped away for retrieving the object inside. Finally, it is polished and the finished product is put on display.

Dhokra represents the exquisite variety and glory of Telangana's handicrafts. The work is popular across the domestic and

international markets due to the aesthetic and primitive simplicity. The designs made are metal figurines, elephants, folk motifs, peacocks, horses and also household articles such as measuring bowls. Pen holders, oil lamps, Pandhan, wall hanging, hanging bells, paper weights, card holder and many such appealing products are created using Dokra.

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## Dandari-Gussadi Gonds dance with Nature

Every Gond and Kolam adivasi village gears up ten days ahead of Deepawali for Dandari-Gussadi dance festival. The four northernmost districts Adilabad, Kumram Bheem Asifabad, Mancherial and Nirmal of Telangana state get transformed into a celebratory amphitheater where the Raj Gond and Kolams aboriginal tribes celebrate the energetic Dandari-Gussadi dance festival. The Gond tribal communities of Telangana have full-bodied and captivating folk dances. These dances are the most essential segment of their cultural heritage. The Raj Gonds and Kolams have been steadfastly protecting and performing their ethnic dances in spite of drastic influence of cinema music and dance. The ethnic dance is an enlivening visual display of tribal culture through which these ethnic tribes also look to foster marital alliances.

For many centuries, the Raj Gonds and Kolams have inhabited the tribal heartland of north Telangana. Predominantly an agrarian community, the religious festivals of these tribes revolve around the agricultural season and the Dandari-Gussadi is the most important post-harvest event. Prof. Michael Yorke, the former BBC journalist who made a documentary film called Raj Gonds – Reflections in a Peacock Crown in 1981-82, observes that the festival, in accordance with Raj Gond mythology, is an



annual celebration and re-enactment of the marriage procession of Yetma, the daughter of God of Creation with a Raj Gond suitor. When a Raj Gond falls in love and marries Yetma, a procession accompanies her to her marital home. Dandari, which means a 'collective', is of the same kind to a 'baraat' or marriage procession. The Dandari

dance troupe of men is called Diyor and the women's Dandari dance troupe called Deyang. The Dandari team arrives in the village between 7 and 8 pm. The women's Deyang troupe is invited by the respective host village after Deepawali, whereas, Diyor Dandari troupe is invited before Deepawali along with the Gussadi team. The Dandari





nriya group enters with Dappu Tudum Sannai Kalikom Mothas and the villagers also greet them with Dappu Tudum Sannai Kalikom Mothas. These Dandari groups bring the Dandari deities with them. A group of male dancers dance all night and the next day they entertain the guests. These deities are the Gods of the four Gothras or clans. These clans are divided as per the number of Gods and deities. In unified Adilabad, Gonds of 4 clans reside. They are the 4th clan of the Yetmasur Goddess (Gumela), 5th clan of the Yetmasur Devata (Parra), 6th clan of the Yetmasur Goddess (Kodal) and the 7th clan of the Yetmasur Goddess (Tupple).

The Gussadi-thado or Ghusarks, sporting huge hats made of hundreds of peacock feathers are the personification of the God of Creation. About 1000-1500 feathers are systematically placed into the headgear called Singeral Topi which is also called Maljaalina Boora - the peacock feathered cap. Kohks of the horns of wild goat/sheep embellish the headgear in the front portion. The headgear is further decorated with glittering circular mirror glass pieces. The headgear acts like a crown on the head of the Ghusarks. Veylo Kodal is a female mask made in wood. This mask is worn by a Porik during dance performance. Makkamalli Jori is the bag of the Gussadi man to carry his essential belongings. The Gussadis and Porik will carry several typical musical instruments viz., Gumela, Pharra, Dapdi, Dappu, Dol, Thudum, Vette, Pepre (Sannai), Kaalikom and Chachoy Kolas. Paasudi is a deer / goatskin - Ghusarks carry it under their left shoulder to use it as a mat to rest / sleep on during nights. Gangaram Sota or Rokal is a wooden roller as a sacred symbol of Trishul of Lord Shiva which is carried along. Neypalk haar is a garland made of wild nuts. Small Ghagra (jingling bells) are tied to the anklets. Garlands of the Ox-ghagra are tied around the neck and waist of the Gussadi men to generate rhythmic sounds while dancing.

called para-porik is believed to represent the Yetma. Every village inhabited by Raj Gonds or Kolams has a troupe called Dandari dance troupe which travels to other villages where they have given their sisters and daughters in marriage and vice versa. Each Dandari troupe consists of twenty - forty members. 'Gussadi' is part of Dandri troupe consisting of two - five members known as Gushaks. At the start of the festival, the Kolams began the festival by performing the Sakshe Akadi, Naushe Betak puja in the morning; the Raj Gond aboriginal people performed the Yetmasur puja in the night. It starts on the full moon day and goes on till the fourteenth day before the new moon day of Deepawali celebrations.

As a thanks giving expression to mother earth or nature, Gonds and Kolams start the Dandari at the beginning of the agricultural season when the seeds germinate. The Dandari dance, which stretches for 105 days until harvest time, incorporates songs which beseech the gods for the protection of the crops. The dance is performed every night in the tribal hamlets for an hour or two after the Gonds return from the fields. The first day

pooja rituals is called Bhogi puja, an offering of special prayers to the Dandari-pen (or the Dandari god) comprising the majestic peacock feather covered head gear, in the front a mirror is placed and on either side sheep horns are placed. Usually, this ritual is performed at the house of the Patel-village headman. All the villagers gather over there for the ritualistic celebration. The village folk especially, the male members offer prayers respectfully, and the ritual is completed by women seeking blessings from the Dandari pen.

Shri Athram Sakku, says with great pride, "It is our tradition to celebrate Dandari-Gussadi and we follow it every year without fail. Our Gussadi-thado -thado means 'old uncle' will put on their typical makeup, smear their bodies with holy ash and sport the peacock crowns. After performing the necessary rituals here, the troupe and some villagers will head to the next village". Persons choosing to be Ghusarks, smear their bodies with ash and designs are drawn. They wear false moustaches, beards, large strings of beads around their neck and bells around their waist as well as feet. In addition to peacock feathers, the extraordinary headgear also has a pair of ram horns, a mirror, and is decorated with colourful shiny flecks. HK Puneesh, Kodapa Gajanand, Soyam Mahender and many youth eagerly wait to be donned as a Ghusark and to get into the detailed costume. HK Puneesh explains, "This ritual is like a deeksha. We leave home today and return only after a minimum of five days. We travel to the designated villages and during this period one must sit or sleep only on the deer-skin and will not even take a bath." "The Ghusarks are an embodiment of Gond Gods and as the God is pure and omnipotent, what is the need for a bath?"- says Mesram Nagu



## Indian Dance



Rao. These Ghusarks are often seated in front of the Dandari-pen; all of them eat from the same plate. The Ghusarks here belong to the host village as well as the visiting troupe from nearby village located about five-eight km away.

The host village welcomes the Dandari-Gussadi troupe by washing their feet and extending hospitality of comfortable stay. The host has to feed the Ghusarks till they sign the signal of dashing the ground with the stick that they carry along. This is followed by a bugle made out of the horn of Indian bison is played, and all Ghusarks assemble in the dance arena. When the drum beats follow, the crowd takes cue and clears the ground, making way for the dancers. As the vigorous beats of traditional percussion instruments and tunes from pepe - a smaller shehnai like wind instrument puffs around the Ghusarks enter the arena in a line, taking simple steps. They gently follow it up with circular formation, leading to an 'S' shape formation and eventually come back to form the circle naturally. The accompanying live music has a fairly even tempo and the entire village and spectators get gripped with spellbound. The



dance moves of the Ghusarks are miming the movement of the wild animals and cattle, more specifically the deer, peacock, rabbit, cattle (neelgai and bison).

These tribes draw a lot of inspiration from nature not only for their day-to-day survival but even for their dance and entertainment. They never part away from nature. After the Ghusarks complete their first round of dance, the Dandarists stand in a large circle with sticks in their hand. The lilting music starts with the dancers now and then tapping each other's sticks. The Ghusarks make an inner circle while the Dandarists dance in the outer periphery. When a routine is soon to change, the leader hums "Cha-choi Cha-choi" and the rest of the dancers respond by humming "chah-ve", in reciprocation.

The Dandari dance provides the bachelors of the visiting troupe an opportunity to draw the attention of the parents of unmarried girls from the host village and impress them with their dancing skills. The girls watching the performance, which runs day and night can also choose a boy of their liking and convey their interest to their parents. After the conclusion of the festival, the families of

the eligible girls and boys follow up on the nuptials mutually.

To lighten the mood, as well as provide a breather for the dancers, a skit, a street play or funny act is staged as a comic interval. These skits are usually themed around serious contemporary issues that the Adivasis face, but are presented in a humorous satirical way. In one of the villages, through a hilarious skit-street play the performers tried to drive the attention of the audience regarding the correction of the land records and ownership of the Adivasis as the true owners of the lands.

During the entire course of the festival, for about ten days, the Dandari-Gussadi troupes

in every village make it a point to visit as well as host troupes from other villages. To end the Dandari gussadi festivity, a ceremony named Kolabodi Ceremony is performed. Devari - the traditional Priest or Aakad Rother performs a puja called Korkotutsaval to Aaki Pen or Avval Pen after the Ghusarks returned from the host village.

Gonds belonging to 4th, 5th, 6th and 7th sagas (phratries) are living in Telangana. Each member of the sagas pour a fist-ful of rice before the deity Avval Pen and offer a sacrifice of a cock to indicate the end of the festival of Dandari. Thereafter the Ghusarks and Porik will shed their festive wear and take baths (after 10 days) and return to their normal work life. The Dandari-Gussadi festival is a fine example of how these forest-dwellers evolved rituals to keep themselves interconnected and underscores the importance they attached to maintaining kinship.

**Shri Kodam Pavan Kumar**

Hyderabad

# True Inner Worship - Yoga Vasistha

*He dwells in the body but he is omnipresent.  
He is the reality in all the thirty- six elements.*

He transcends the internal states, he is the one that produces the internal sounds, and he brings into being the bird known as mind. He is the reality in what is described as imagination and non-imagination. He dwells in all beings as oil dwells in the seed. He dwells in the heart -lotus and again he dwells throughout the body. He shines as pure consciousness. He is immediately seen everywhere, for he is the pure experiencing in all experiences. One should contemplate that the Lord is the intelligence in the body. The various functions and faculties in the body serve that intelligence as consorts serve their lord. The mind is the messenger who brings and presents to the Lord the knowledge of the three worlds. The two fundamental energies, viz., the energy of wisdom (jnana\* sakti\*) and the energy of action (kriya\* sakti\*), are the consorts of the Lord. Diverse aspects of knowledge are his ornaments. The organs of action are the gates through which the Lord enters the outside world. 'I am that infinite self which is indivisible; I remain full and finite,' thus the intelligence dwells in the body. The Lord should be adored with the

noble qualities of a pious heart—friendship, compassion, joy and indifference. The Lord should be worshipped with all kinds of pleasures that are granted to one unsought, whether those pleasures are sanctioned by the scriptures, etc., or forbidden by them. The Lord should be worshipped with those which are regarded as desirable and others which are regarded as undesirable, with those that are considered appropriate and others that are considered inappropriate. For this worship, one should abandon what is lost and one should accept and receive what has been obtained without effort.

One should engage oneself in this worship at all times, established in supreme equanimity in regard to all the precepts whether they be pleasant or unpleasant. One should regard everything as good and auspicious (or one should regard everything as a mixture of good and evil). Realising that everything is the one self, one should worship the self in this spirit. One should look with equal vision upon that

which is pleasant and beautiful through and through and that which is unendurably unpleasant. Thus should one worship the self. One should abandon the divisive notions of 'This I am' and 'This I am not' and realise that 'All this is indeed Brahman', the one indivisible and infinite consciousness. In that spirit one should worship the self. That alone is regarded as worship which is performed when one is in a state of equanimity like that of space, when the mind has become utterly quiescent without the least movement of thought, when there is effortless absence of perversity. Established in this state of equanimity, the wise man should experience infinite expansion within himself while carrying out his natural actions externally without craving or rejection. Such is the nature of the worshipper of this intelligence. In his case, delusion, ignorance and ego sense do not arise even in dream. Remain in this state, O sage, experiencing everything as a child does. Worship the Lord of this body (the intelligence that pervades it) with all that is brought to you by time, circumstance and environment, and rest in supreme peace, devoid of desire.

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## Sailing high with Indigenous Music

Indian tribes are the epitome of tribal music and tribal dance. About 40% of India's population, including various ethnic groups lives in the Gondwana region, whereas 40% of the Gond tribes live in Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, Orissa, Maharashtra, Andhra Pradesh and Telangana. Interestingly, Gondi language belongs to the Dravidian family of languages and is related to Tamil and Kannada. Recent excavation of the Gondi lipi at Gunjal Village, Narnoor Mandal of Adilabad District states the gerontology of this language could be older than Dravidian languages like Tamil, Kannada or Telugu or perhaps the origin of these languages could be traced through Gondi language too.

Among Gond tribes, both males and females dance to the tune of the music played. 'No matter what festival we celebrate, we sing, play with joy and dance' says an old Gond tribe with a smile. Tribes are known for their own culture, beliefs, rituals, worships and tribal beat and unique tribal dance across the globe. This is true with Gonds also. However, the dances and beats differ and go according to the celebrations and festivity. Both males and females join together and dance during festivities, marriage or during tribal cultural meets.

As the legend goes, Gonds Dharmaguru Sri Pahandikupar Lingo created sixteen types of dances and eighteen instruments. This he gave to Gonds as a recreation

activity. In Gondi they call them 'Soda Demsankya Atharvajanga'. It is believed that Gondi Dharmaguru played all the eighteen instruments simultaneously. The music played by Gonds is called 'Varnavati Jodi kitor' in Gondi language. 'Demsankya' means dances and eighteen 'vajanga' means musical instruments. These eighteen instruments can be divided into 3 types. They are divided into three parts: 1 Susira, vocal instruments are of six types. Susira means instruments blown by wind, wind instruments. They are namely: 1 Pillanagrovi, 2 Sannayi, 3 Thotakommu, 4 Kommubura, 5 Eela, 6 Sarangi. String instruments of six.

They are namely: 1 Kikiri, 2 Karnat, Kinnera, 3 Jatur, 4 Tambura, 5 Chondaka, 6 Kingiri and Sound or Percussion Instruments are six. They are namely: 1 Dol 2 Tudum, 3 Dappu, 4 parr, vette, 5 dolki, 6 gummela.

With regard to Gonds tribal folk songs can be classified as 1. Rela Tracks songs, 2. Wedding songs, 3. Kolapatalu, 4. Chants, 5. Songs of the Gond Gods and deities 6. Songs on social awareness 7. Bavamaradala, songs 8. Cradles ceremony songs, 9. Dandari songs, 10. Gummela songs, 11. Children's Songs, 12. Demsa songs, 13. Purudu songs-special songs sung during rituals celebration during pregnancy, post delivery and at puberty,





and practices, herbs and healing practices. Along with this they are trained in sixteen forms of dance, playing eighteen musical instruments.

Gonds celebrate most festive occasions with song and dance. In some instances, such as with the Dandari dances, dancers retell events from Gond mythology. At other times, dances are performed simply for fun. Dhulia is a professional musician caste and Pardhans (bards) preserve legends, myths, and history, passing these traditions on from generation to generation. Gonds also enjoy assembling on full-moon nights to sing and dance. Cockfighting is a favorite pastime.

14. Genealogical-family history songs, 15. Heroic tale songs 16. Comic -satirical songs and 17. Bhovani Khapranruthyam

Gonds believe in the existence of 700 Ekmasuru Pen- 900 Betal pen. The highest deity of Gonds is Persa Pen. They also worship other dieties namely: Bhimal Pen, Avval Pen, Jango Pen and so on. The worship of these dieties is celebrated twice a year. They worship on January full moon day and on the full moon day in the May month known as Vaishakamasa purnima. After the ritualistic pooja, offerings are made to the dieties, followed by meals and the playing of the music followed by dances. Gonds dance collectively to the traditional and rhythmic music with their feet on the ground. The music is melodious and the audience is mesmerized by the dance. Importantly such performances are held in an open space at a distance wherein, the entire village can come and rejoice. It is called 'Karma Pata' and singing traditional Devotional songs are called 'shaila pata'. Here, they sing and

narrate the origin of Gond Gods and their importance. During performances, no electric lights are used. They gather around a big bonfire to sing and dance around it. Gonds believe that they don't have specific temple or dome-like structures for their dieties. All the dieties are part of nature and are far away from the village. They use negadu - castor oil lamps for lighting, The dance that encircles Negadu is called Karmanritya. The songs that are sung are called style songs. These songs are about the ancestral origins of the gods.

In Gond culture, every action is tied to a musical sound, which is the basis of our distinctive sound. 'GotulPito'- a Learning Centre or to say a Gurukul wherein young boys and girls are admitted from the age of 3 -18 years. Here the Community elders motherly and fatherly like takes care of the children. Here, all the children undergo schooling more like training about Gond origin, Clan classification, Gond culture, Myths, Beliefs, worships, marriage, customs



Thus, to conclude, rich Gondi culture, beliefs, practices, dance forms all are getting intermixed with non-tribal myths and rituals. Perhaps, with this intermixing the original Gondi rituals and ritualistic practices are further getting diluted, diminishing and disappearing too. At present due to the advent of English language and English medium of Education in schools and colleges, the Gondi speaking among Gonds also is coming down. Most of the Gonds now speak Telugu, Marathi, or Hindi instead of Gondi at home. So, the next generation wouldn't perhaps be in a position to speak the language. This would mark the beginning of the death of Gondi language. Secondly, Gonds are now fascinated towards the non-tribal ritual practices and are adopting them. Thus, these rich tribal practices shall get buried unheard and unnoticed.

**Shri Arka Manik Rao**

Gunjala, Adilabad





# Vanita Shiromani -Vanaja

mission to give good education to her kids and neighbourhood children. Irrespective of race, creed, and gender, education makes it possible for people to stand out as equal with all the other persons from different walks of life. Overall, education is the platform that makes it possible to defeat all barriers. After her marriage with Shri G.V. Bhaskar Rao in 1975, she came to know about their family association with Sri Sri Sri Pedda Jeeyar Swamiji and in 1980, she also got involved with the Jeeyar Educational Trust-JET as a sevathi. Her spiritual journey flourished under the guidance of H H Sri Sri Sri Chinna Jeeyar Swamiji. Right from then she has involved herself in service with devotion at JET and later JIVA. Under the guidance of revered swamiji she opened a branch of Vikas Tarangini in Secunderabad. To get engaged and work for noble causes, she was first initiated to locate the root cause by HH Sri Sri Sri Tridandi Chinna Jeeyar Swami of JET ashram Hyderabad. It was he who emphasized to know the root cause and work in accordance. This association with a spiritual organization led her to work with dedication as she had a 'Guru-the Acharya' force guiding her. This determination made her to collaborate with other organizations. The focus was on evening tuition class, yoga classes, summer class, and winter classes on about our culture, traditions, shloka recitation, music, dance and so on. The main objective was to focus on education along with open space for cultural learning. Here, she engaged children and women. In 2004, under Vikasa Tarangini, she was asked to do counselling service to the inmates of

"Education is the passport to the future, for tomorrow belongs to those who prepare for it today"

Grown in the midst of fields and meadows, cattle and carts had a fun filled life of childhood. While growing, school, teachers, Telugu lessons, songs, friends were full of amusement. 'I grew up looking at my father who was a Post Graduate in English and hence dreamt to study like him' says Smt Vanaja Bhaskar Rao. Smt. Vanaja Bhaskar Rao is from the Juppally village from Mahaboobnagar Telangana. Her father Shri - a scholar, agriculturist, an actor and also a philanthropist and mother Smt. Soundardevi was quite docile and caring. Coming from a service oriented family, she sought pleasure in helping and aiding the needy. 'I did my schooling and education in Devarakonda Taluk, Just after completion of my graduation, I got married in 1975. There is a hitch of not studying further' says Vanaja Bhaskar Rao. After marriage, she made it a



Cheralpally Jail. It was then she moved with inmates closely and made them to come out of the shells. "Inmates were quite hesitant, but still I was determined not to give up the task'- says Vanaja Bhaskar Rao. Through regular visits, arranging cultural programmes and talks by motivational speakers, vocational trainers and so gave scope for the inmates to open up. Smt. Vanaja Bhaskar Rao also went a step head in enrolling the dropout children of the inmates back to school. Looking at her commitment and services, Jail Superintendent invited her to do similar programmes in other Jails like Karimnagar, Rajahmundry, Warangal, Vijayawada, Vizag and others of then Andhra Pradesh State. She is continuing visiting Jails and rendering service of counselling along with her team. 'In 2005, under the guidance of Sri Swamiji, we propagated a dheeksha named Sri Venkateshwara Saranagathii Dheeksha. This dheeksha programme is of 30 days of duration starting from Dec15 to Jan 15th every year. During this dheeksha period the inmates are given yellow dresses or plain white dresses signifying the dheeksha. They are also given a separate barracks to stay and satvik aahara- food is served. Good number of jail authorities from different parts of India had come to visit and to know about the dheeksha programme. From morning 4 am satsang, bhajan commences. Musical instruments also provided by her family. Then, motivational speakers from different fields are invited who address the inmates. Along with organizing cultural events regularly. 'This is a kind of corrective measures by which a chance is given to the inmates to realize the mistake or offence committed. Secondly, it is to bring a kind of discipline which would bring in a change of being more responsible person. Thirdly, it is also giving a chance to correct oneself which is seldom given in our society, as we are good in pointing out the wrong or mistake committed and never give a chance to overcome the same'-claims Vanaja Garu. She further reconfirms dheeksha kind of spiritual programmes do kindles and brings in the necessary changes. 'In 2006, it was a real surprise out 200 inmates 190 was released. This was also the year when on the conluding day of the dheeksha programme we received 2000 ladoos and copies of Sri Bhagavad Gita books from Titupati Titumala Devasthanam-TTD. This was a real blessing and sign of success'-says Vanaja Bhaskar Rao. The beauty of her committed service is even today the she is in touch with the released inmates. They are living a meaning life with family and earning too. For many she even arranged tailoring, embroidery classes and other vocational trainings

as per one's interests. She engaged the inmates in garment stitching, making of pooja materials, prasadam and so on. Under 'Kaveri Bhaskar Rao Charitable Foundation', a Trust, She and her family have also adopted three government schools in her native village Narsingapur in Karimanagar district. She has not only adopted but also has got the revamp done to the schools and provided with good school furniture and other infrastructures. Before adoption, the strength of these government schools was around 120-130 students. Today the strength is about 800 students who come from nearby ten villages. Further, in order to reach the school in time and due to non-availability of government buses, through the trust transport services is made available to these three government schools. As the time passed by, there was shortage of qualified teachers too. 'I took the initiative of

employing twenty qualified teachers in these schools without waiting for the government to appoint teachers, as it is a lengthy process and students will be at a loss. Thus, every month we spend around Rupees Six Lakh for the schools which I am quite happy, as I am enabling the underprivileged with a quality education within their village. This way, they will also be proud of their school and village'-recalls Smt Vanaja Bhaskar Rao. As a regular trust activity, every year after the reopening of schools, distribution of school books, writing materials, school bags and school dresses to all the government schools in the Bheemadevarpalle mandal is undertaken. Through trust, donation of good quality school furniture to nearing hundred government schools of the Karimnagar District is done. Apart from this, under the trust activity, drinking water tank slitting work has been taken up and mineral water plant installed to



## Woman on Mission



access safe drinking water supply to the ten villages of Bheemadevarpalle mandal. To the meritorious students, especially girl students' scholarship is given in order to continue higher education. 'In order to be par with private schools, in some of the government schools who approached us with an interest to start Computer lab and education we have denoted computer systems too'-recalls Smt Vanaja. 'We have also constructed a new government school in Siddipet and at Chintamadaka Village. Chintamadaka is the village of our beloved Chief Minister Shri Kalvakuntla Chandrashekar Rao garu'-with a smile says Smt Vanaja.

'I strongly feel spiritual and education go hand in hand'-claims Smt. Vanaja. Her association with JIVA ashram and Vikasa Tarigini activities has paved ways for her dedicated service to the fields of education and woman and child welfare. At Gatla Narasingapur village, along with her family support have built two temples, one dedicated to Sri Kodanda Rama and one to Sri Hanuman. Within the temple premises they have also constructed a marriage hall with all facilities is rented for free towards conducting marriages for the villagers. For



Smt Vanja Bhaskar Rao, Acharya's seva is the prime motto. 'It is the guidance of and blessings of the Acharya I am able to serve the society not otherwise. Be it Acharya Seva yathra at Bellary in 2010, Sri Rama Pudukh Pattabhishekam at our village in 2016. During the period of Prachara I covered around 300 villages and stayed there for four months. This was the first time Swamiji visit our native village and I wanted him to shower his blessings to all. So it was a huge gathering of more than 50,000 attendees. Arranged transports for pick and drop, food and loading. Every attendee has received a pair of Sri Rama Paduka in silver from the Swamiji as a blessing. All those who never lit lamps in their houses, learnt the significance of lighting lamps in the house which is our basic culture. This culture is fading away in the villages too. That is the change'-says Smt Vanaja. Along with education, she has also focused on health

sector too. Regular health check up camps organized in government schools in Ranga Reddy Districts. This is a regular activity incorporated through the Vikasa Tarangini supported by the trust. Presently, Vikasa Tarangini is focusing on Woman Healthcare and Cancer awareness programmes. For this she has adopted 21 villages of Husnabad Taluk of Bheemdevarapalli Mandal towards the Women Health programme awareness. The Asha workers, Aaganwadi teachers, and native tribes of the region are trained through the programme along with other volunteers. Untiring with the services she renders to the society, she also looks for learning aspects that makes her more dynamic. Smt. Vanaja Bhaskar Rao service is well recognized and she is also bestowed with various awards and rewards for her selfless service. To name some of them: Citizen Council of Andhra Pradesh bestowed with 'Mother Teresa Award' in 2011, Cultural Association of Osmania University, Hyderabad awarded 'Seva Award' in 2013. Colors Service Entertainment awarded 'Seva Award' in 2013, VELMA association awarded 'Women Empowerment Award' in 2015 and many more. Having traveled far and wide to various countries, Smt Vanaja Bhaskar Rao reveals that along with education and health, one need to safeguard one's culture, tradition and natural resources to the next generation. We are less sensitive when compared to other countrymen. That is the one which binds humans and also makes humane'-concludes Smt Vanaja Bhaskar Rao

**Ms. Padmini Rangarajan**

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# Learning Sanskrit expands and improves human brain..

Dr. James Hartzell studied Sanskrit and India studies at Harvard and Columbia University. He then went on to do cognitive neuroscience research at the University of Trento (Italy). His work shows that people who memorize long Sanskrit texts have brains that literally expand and become better with sharper memory and cognitive skills. His research paper shows results of tests done on a group of verbal memory specialists to determine whether intensive oral text memory is associated with structural features of hippocampal and lateral-temporal regions implicated in language processing. Professional Vedic Sanskrit pandits (priests) in India train from childhood for around 10 years in an ancient, formalized tradition of oral Sanskrit text memorization and recitation, mastering the exact pronunciation and invariant content of multiple 40,000–100,000 word oral texts.

Tests conducted structural analysis of gray matter density, cortical thickness, local gyrification, and white matter structure, relative to matched controls. The tests found massive gray matter density and cortical thickness increases in pandit brains in language, memory and visual systems, including i) bilateral lateral temporal cortices and ii) the anterior cingulate cortex and the hippocampus, regions associated with long and short-term memory. It must be noted that increased grey matter density is not the same thing as increased grey matter volume ("expansion") – in fact the researchers found a slight decrease in the volume of the right hippocampus in pandits when they did a volume-specific analysis. Differences in hippocampal morphometry matched those previously documented for expert spatial navigators and individuals with good verbal working memory. The findings provide unique insight into the brain organization implementing formalized oral knowledge systems. He told Grin why his research is a breakthrough. When I arrived at Harvard as a freshman I decided to take a comparative religions course. I was drawn most strongly to the eastern traditions – Hindu, Buddhist, and Taoist, and I decided initially to major in Comparative Religions. We were required to choose one scriptural language to study, and I chose Sanskrit since both the Hindu and the Buddhist traditions have strong Sanskrit roots, so I thought this language would give me the best access to both of these

very large traditions. I was also frustrated by the multiplicity of English translations for Sanskrit terminology that appeared in secondary sources, so I wanted to learn the language for myself and see what the original meanings were. Soon after starting my sophomore year I became frustrated with the approaches typical of comparative religion studies, and I decided to major in Sanskrit and Indian studies. This was over the objections of both my parents and the head of the Sanskrit department – I later learned that I was only the third person in the history of Harvard to major in Sanskrit as an undergraduate.

The effect of thinking in Sanskrit is really interesting – I find my mind somehow works more fluidly. One time, when I was working in South Africa on one of the committees of the Medical Research Council Board of Governors, a colleague (I believe he was a cardiologist) turned to me and kindly said that he had never met anyone who had such an ability for lateral thinking as I demonstrated regularly in those meetings. Other times ,when I was taking cognitive science courses in the masters program in Italy, my fellow students would corner me and ask – okay, how do you do that? You remember exactly the words the instructor has used, and you can ask them questions quoting them back to themselves? I wasn't able to answer my friends on this point.

The Sanskrit tradition is very deep and rich. I have been told that the volume of Sanskrit texts still just in manuscripts in institutional and private libraries all over India exceeds by many multiples the entire corpus of ancient Greek literature that played such an important role in the development of modern western civilization. There is extensive Sanskrit literature in yoga, mantra, philosophy, ritual, poetry, drama, music, history, myth, ancient astronomy and astrology, mathematics and many other disciplines such as traditional Ayurveda medicine. For some reason I've long been drawn to the tradition. After years of study and reading I think that probably the most engaging domains for me are those that relate to the person

Given my own experiences as a Sanskrit-to-English translator and long time student of the Sanskrit and Indic traditions, as I was trained as a cognitive neuroscientist

I wanted to try and begin to scientifically investigate what I've called the Sanskrit effect: why is it that when working in the language I experience such significant shifts in cognitive function? This is also a topic discussed in many ways in the Sanskrit tradition itself. So when I had the opportunity to begin scientific research on this topic I thought it appropriate to begin with the oldest part of the tradition – i.e. the tradition of Vedic memorization and recitation – out of respect for the Sanskrit tradition as a whole, and as a way of beginning to establish a scientific baseline for further studies.

It's difficult to say at this point what the results could mean for medical and educational science. Certainly the between-group differences we documented are dramatic and suggestive. One important point is that they demonstrate very clearly the remarkable structural plasticity potential of the brain – the mere fact of the extent of the group differences we documented indicates that the brain has a much larger and more complex structural plasticity potential than has been previously considered. I am not a specialist in verbal memory-related pathologies such as Alzheimer's, but from what I know it's pretty clear that Alzheimer's, Mild Cognitive Impairment, Semantic Dementia, and Aphasic anomia typically involve degeneration of the medial temporal lobes and related brain structures and circuitry. There is also evidence from other studies that certain types of cognitive training can increase grey matter density in these same regions. This suggests that some version of the type of mental and physical practice the pundits use (i.e. the memory dimension, the training dimension, and the recitation aspect) could potentially have a beneficial effect. This would need to be carefully researched and tested to find out – right now we have just a suggestion.

**Smt Mona Gupta**

Chandigarh

# Gond Tribes - Healthy Medicinal Practices

Indigenous medicines are connected to nature, environmental and cultural aspect of society. Each indigenous society has its own medicines and healing practices that is widely accepted by the members of the community. Primitive Gond and Kolam tribes of unified Adilabad districts are aware of indigenous medicines and treatment. In Kolami dialect a medicine practitioner is known as 'Vaidyalak'. These tribes have their own beliefs and practices regarding diseases and develop their own system of medicine in order to treat diseases in its own way. The herbal specialist man, usually the family members collect the medicinal plants like twines called 'kaurka, roots, barks, leaves, flowers and preserves them well. Some of these herbs are seasonal. The collection of medicinal plants is done usually after the rainy season. These traditional practitioners follow a systematic procedure before plucking the leaves or barks from a plant as they regard it very sacred. Vaidyalaks' performs puja kind ritual at the site of the plant by lighting incense sticks and then pluck the plant parts like leaves, bark, seeds, fruit, bud, branches, flowers, root during evening

hours especially before sunsets which is considered as an effective and curative time for collection of certain varieties of medicinal plants. Further, these practitioners reminds the villagers about their God and Goddess 'Jai Jango', 'Jai Lingo', 'Persa Pen', 'Bheem', 'Jangubai', 'Pochammathalli' right from medicinal preparations to administration of the same to the patients. Vaidyalak are known to treat ailments such as typhoid, infertility, stomach-ache, cough, cold, headache, jaundice, fits, broken bones, abortions, worm infestation and Gynecology and complicated labour problems. The local names of the common herbs are Gandighu and Relamaakh, Ippa maakh/ Ippa sara/ Ippa parka oil, Ippa chekkaBoothganza, Adavi vulligadda, Tuniki, Vepa, and so on used for medicinal preparations.

Late Madavi Gangaram Mamudipalli Village, Jainoor Mandal, Todasam Bandu Tummaguda, Indravelli mandal, Atram Bheemu from Sungapur village of Narnoor mandal, Sidam Maru and Sidam Somu, Madavi Bheemrao, Atram Bheemu from Gouri Village, Jainoor Mandal, Atram Barik Rao of

Jainoor mandal are few of the well known traditional Vaidyalaks who are experts not only in treating common ailments but also treat for scorpio and snake bite too. Some of the roots and leaves are also sold on weekly bazaar day at various mandals and villages. According to vaidyalak, in some plants all parts are used for medicine preparation and in some only some parts. These parts are plucked, cleaned, dried well, powdered and made into small balls like tablets by mixing it with other mixtures. These tablets are consumed by mixing in water. These tribes are well aware of forest and its rich resources. The knowledge system of medicinal practices is passed from older generation to the younger generation. The knowledge of the use of plants and herbs has transformed from one generation to another orally without documentation. Though it is still prevalent but in a bleak state. Younger generations of the vaidyalak families don't know they seldom show interests towards this traditional practices. These Vaidyalak use fresh water for medicinal preparations. The primitive generation vaidyalak used to spell charms while using the fresh water and administered it to patients which cured illness completely.

**Dr. K.Ramessh**  
Coimbatore



*Thanks  
giving*

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**Harish Madhyastha**  
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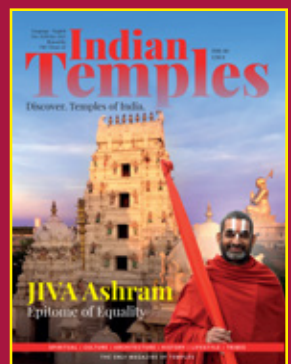
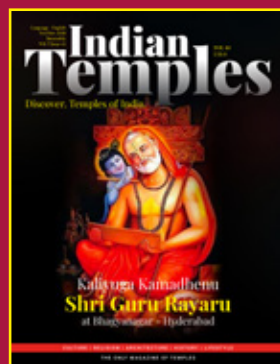
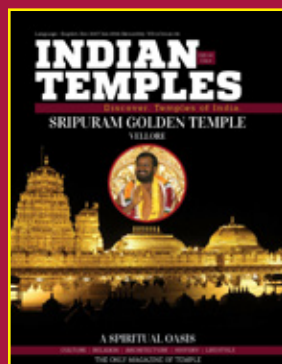
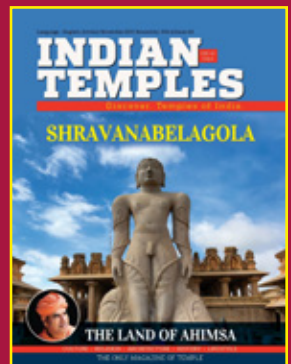
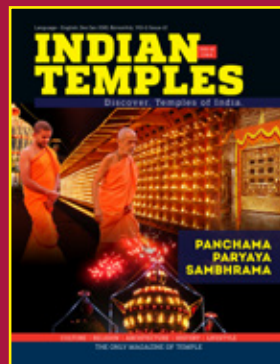
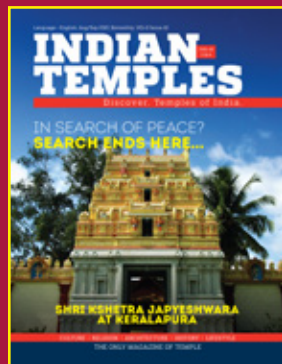
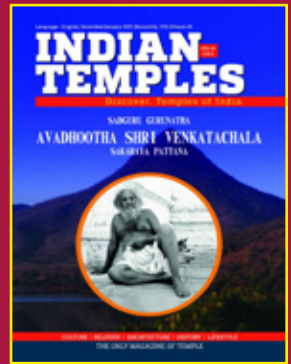
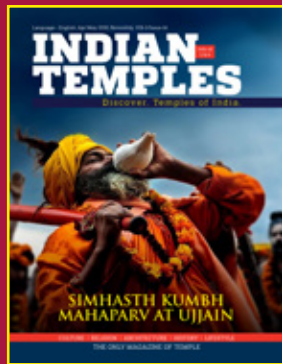
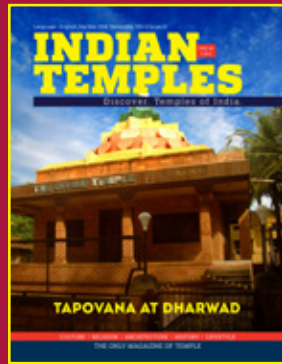
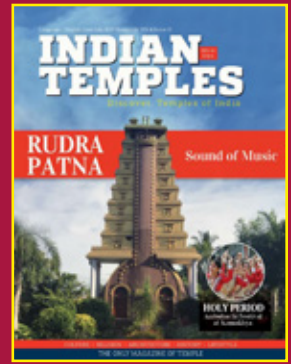
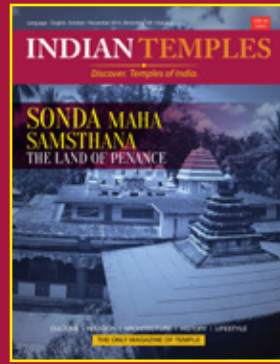
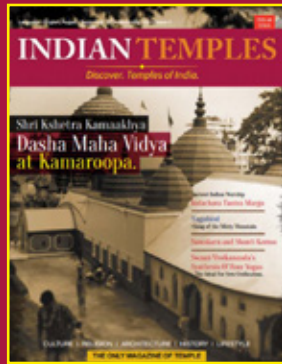
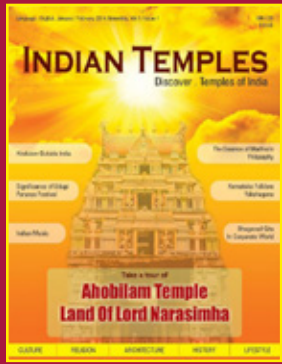
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