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HIGHLIGHTS

News Pick: Saptana Pollution in Falakata
Entrepreneur: Himangshu Patel of Gujarat
Special Feature: Chinsurah's Unknown Heritage
Theme Stories: Saradiya Stories

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North Bengal's First Online News Magazine

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Creating 'Devi Durga' is losing its Land Gradually

Partha Chatterjee



Clay artist Bhanu Pal from Raiganj Kumartuli is worried for the last few years. For the last 40 years, he has developed his world of creative clay idol making especially for religious and other decorative purposes. However, he fears that this will end with him. The younger generation is not at all attracted to these traditional masterpiece creations. Bhanu babu has developed his art by watching his ancestors give life to the lifeless clay pulp to turn those into Devi Maa. He has started his work from the age of 15. From that day 40 long years have passed and he has not noticed at all. He was lost in creating his new world of creativity. His creativity had earned accolades for him. Not only was his creation known within Uttar Dinajpur, his idols reached beyond the district and even the outside the state. Well, of course, things have changed drastically. The raw materials cost is rising like a rocket. The parallel cost of the idols has not

risen. The life of the clay artists is gradually deteriorating especially who have not switched profession. The newer generations are feeling the heat and so are not attracted towards this profession. In fact, they have started choosing a different profession. Similar views were shared by Dhruva Pal, son of Bhanu Pal. According to him Bhanu babu i.e. his father has toiled hard and has earned this position. Now this profession has only the love of creativity and nothing else. One cannot make a life by earning from this profession. If at all the social or professional organizations or even the Government don't take some necessary steps to save this profession, there will be no creativity left with a human touch for the next generation.

Saptana Pollution in Falakata: An Alarm Bell Ringing

Arunangshu Maitra



Due to the non presence of the dumping ground in Falakata, the pollution related to garbage is increasing every day. Along with this, illegal rearing of pigs in the town alongside the river Mujhnai, river Saptana and River Jampui has also led to river pollution. Not only this due to the continuous dumping of waste materials in those rivers, the river base is also raising creating blockage in the river flow. The most dangerous output is that the rivers are getting dried up due to the pollution creating vacant land. These lands are then illegally sold by the land mafias. Last

but not the least is that the Falakatiens are now seeing big houses built on river beds. Though there might not be any type of organized protest however, the dwellers of the town feel that the administration has not taken lesson from the Karala fiasco of Jalpaiguri. They fear Falakata may face the same situation when in one fine morning people may see dead fishes floating on the Mujhnai, Saptana rivers. According to Dr. Prabir Roy Choudhury, an environmental activist of Falakata, there are no proper sanitation and drainage systems to wean away the daily garbage of the town. Moreover, the most affected is the Saptana River, which is facing its bank theft. Now concrete houses are built adjacent to the river blocking its natural flow. The non systematic dumping policy is giving rise to the various viral fevers in the town. The same viewpoint has been expressed by another social activist of Falakata i.e. Mr. Sabyasachi Ghosh. According to him the town is growing but is lacking of any systematic pattern. Once the fishermen used to earn their living from fishing in Saptana River but now it's unthinkable. Instead of water, the waste water is flowing in the river.

Kolkata Kumartuli: The Shine and Darkness Story Every Year

Swarnali Goswami



Kolkata's Kumartuli (Potter's Place), can be described as the Durga capital of the World. The place Kumartuli originated by the British, for the then Kolkata potters with the name 'Komortolla' (Potter's Quarters). It has over the years have survived and transformed into the present Kumartuli. Though Kolkata's Kumartuli is being replicated in various other places in Bengal like Siliguri, Malda, Coochbehar etc. However, the legacy and quality of Kolkata's Kumartuli remain unquestionable. This year too, the artisans are coming up with something unique in their creations. The sad part, however, remains the fact that the economic condition of many of these artisans is unfortunate. The role of the Government in trying to eradicate though cannot be denied but still, some prudent steps in that regard are still not there. Though the work

goes here throughout the year but it's the Durga Puja time when the dimension becomes skyrocketing. Despite the overseas booking is taking shape gradually but the domestic market occupies the volume. TNI talked to one of the artisans of Kumartuli, Mr. Swapan Paul, whose main earning comes during this time. He said "Our way of making the Durga Idols is based on early booking. The booking comes from Clubs, Puja Committees, Housing societies etc. We try to make idols according to their specifications. Till now we could supply satisfactory outputs, which lead them to come to us every year". Mr. Paul is the third generation, working in this domain since his childhood. This year he has got 25 idol bookings for which the work is going on. Such is not the circumstance for everyone. 60-year-old artisan Sona Paul is disappointed about his business. He basically creates readymade idols for sale. Price is decided by bargaining based on the pre-made idols. Mr. Paul laments "Market is shrinking for us every day. The younger lot of my family is not interested in this arena and is trying their luck elsewhere. Nowadays the younger people, who come in this field is for money and not for passion. They are either untrained or are inexperienced, creating a bad name for our community here". He added further that idol making is gradually becoming hard for the artisans because the costs of raw materials are increasing but the selling price is not rising.

Himangshu Patel: The Panchayeti Entrepreneur

Analjyoti Basu



16th November 2011 was a landmark for North Gujarat’s Talod Taluka’s Punsari village and its Sarpanch Himanshu Patel when then Chief Minister of Gujarat and present Prime Minister Shri Naredra Modi gave away the prize for state’s best performing Panchayat at Mahatma Mandir in Gandhinagar. The award announced on 4th November fetched Punsari an award of ₹ 25 Lakh and another award for its young sarpanch, Himanshu Patel, who was feted as the best Sarpanch at district level. What was the prize and what are the achievements achieved by this village under Himanshu? To get the answer let’s know what was not there in this village when Himanshu Patel, 31-year-old graduate from North Gujarat University, won the panchayat polls in 2006, at the age of 23 and took charge of the village. In words of Himanshu “When I was elected sarpanch of the village in 2006 there was no sewerage connection, no street lights, no cemented roads and, of course, no source of income for the gram panchayat except the grants and funding

from various state and Union government schemes. In consultation with the talati (the gram panchayat secretary) we decided to create a corpus for the village panchayat,” but in these 6 years from 2006 to 2011 what changes are made that helped this village to get the awards. Let’s get the glimpse of it. Population around 6000 (2011) and 1500 houses the village is having Wi-Fi and optical broadband network, Punsri has four primary schools and CCTV cameras are there in the classrooms. Work is going on to make all classes air conditioned. Also there are 25 CCTVs located on important junctions of the village. Moreover the village is having its own mini-bus transport system to ferry on clean RCC roads. Villagers can buy ticket of Re 1 to use the mini bus service. Special arrangements in these buses are made for the female students. For them bus service is completely free. Women come to deposit milk to milk bank couple of times during a day through this bus. A 35-seater bus was bought through 100% funding of the District Rural Development Agency (DRDA). RO water treatment is installed which supplies 20-litre cans to houses for a token cost of ₹.4. By investing ₹ 30 lakh reverse osmosis (RO) plant project a 20 liter jar of clean water for ₹. 6.00 is supplied to every doorstep of the village. At the same time it’s employing two youths of the village. This is not-for-profit project, but in social functions the charge is ₹ 20 per jar, which is the market rate. Set up by Panchayat the plant is run by village youths. What else, yes -gutter project, clean primary health care center, 8 kinder garden schools, banking facility, toll free complain receiving phone service, biometric machines among others. Those who pay tax (90% tax collection achieved) get gifts from the Panchayat in terms of plastic dustbins. Tractor visits each home to collect waste. Village panchayat has built a well-maintained and clean shopping center too in Punsri. What about direct Panchayat to public communication. For that Punsri has 120 loud-speakers, spending 4 lakhs and covering each corner of the village. Villagers listen to prabhatiya in the morning and bhajan and bhakti songs in the evening. Also important announcements like telephone bill, power bill, results of 10th and 12th are made through these speakers. Unique feature is that the village sarpanch can pass on any announcement from his mobile phone. Yes also totally modern concept introduced by Punsri is ‘asthi bank’. Pots containing ashes of all those cremated are taken to Haridwar once in a year to release in river Ganga. Next question will arise where the fund is coming from. Giving details, the talati of the village, Nanjibhai Parmar said, “We prepared a proposal to sell plots of village panchayat land to the villagers. We lobbied to get the proceeds of the sales from the state government and created a corpus of around ₹ 30 lakh. With this, we undertook developmental

projects in the village.” Son and Grandson of sarpanchs of the same village, Himangshu Patel after taking power for next eight years, together with the district administration, accumulated funds from various heads – the District Planning Commission, Backward Regional Grant Fund, 12th Finance Commission, and those under Self Help Group Yojana began the development of the village. The results are in front of everybody. Recently, a team from the Central ministries of rural and urban development had come to study the “Punsari model”. But the young sarpanch is already onto his next projects – a unit producing electricity out of plastic waste and e-rickshaws for garbage collection. “The state government has already sanctioned ₹. 52 lakh,” he said. Here one thing is worth mentioning that, Mr. Patel has not asked for a penny from the MLA fund, and over the last eight years, the village has just got ₹. 1 lakh from the MP fund. “We didn’t feel the need, since there is enough from various budgetary grants of the state and Centre. If you utilize it properly, you can work wonders,” said Mr. Patel.”The village has demonstrated how understanding various schemes available and leveraging them properly can bring about a qualitative change,” said Himmatnagar collector Banchha Nidhi Pani.

Unknown Heritage of Chinsurah - Vande Matram Bhawan

Kaushik Ghosh



No Indian would be found who wouldn't get goose pimples as a response after listening Indian national song 'Vande Mataram'. Rabindra Nath Tagore sung this song for the first time in a political context in 1896 in the Calcutta session of 'Indian National Congress'. Thousands of freedom fighters sacrificed their lives by chanting this song. Later this song was translated into English by Shri Aurobindo. It is a hymn to the Mother Land. It played a vital role in the Indian independence movement. Bankim Chandra is widely regarded as a key figure in literary renaissance of Bengal as well as India. He was the composer of India's national song Vande Mataram, originally a Bengali and Sanskrit stotra personifying India as a mother goddess and inspiring the activists during the Indian Independence Movement. This song was first published

in the novel ‘Anandmath’ by Bankimchandra. However, very few people know the exact location, from where Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay wrote this song. In early 1877 he was appointed by the British Government at Hooghly as a Deputy Magistrate. There he stayed with his family in a rented a house near Joraghat, Hooghly-Chinsurah. It is believed that he spent 5 years in this house. Some of the important literary works that were completed by him during his stay at Hoogly – Chinsurah were ‘Rajani’ (1877), ‘Rajsingha’ (1881), and ‘Krishnakanter Will’ (1878). His famous novel ‘Anandamath’ (1882) was also published during this time. So, this is that very building which is the witness of the creation of ‘Vande Mataram’ as a patriotic song. The ‘Vande Mataram Bhawan’ (the name given to this building later) noticed the meetings of Bankim Chandra with other 19th century Bengal legends like, Bhudev Mukhopadhyay, Akshay Chandra Sarkar, Haraprasad Shastri and Dinanath Dhar. The importance of ‘Vande Mataram’ has made out in 1905 when Sister Nibedita prepared a national flag for India comprising the words ‘Vande Mataram’. Later, the design of the national flag changed in the year 1906 and 1907 (by Madam Kama) but the words ‘Vande Mataram’ were present in intact form within the flag.



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