

JUNE 8-14, 2025

SUNDAY POST

HERE . NOW

World Ocean Day - June 8

Voices for the blue

COVER STORY

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Creating memories

If nothing else is happening, you'll probably find me out on trips, creating unforgettable memories and living my best life with my closest friends by my side.

A day for passion

My ideal Sunday is all about blending work with passion. I enjoy engaging in creative pursuits, and most of my Sundays are dedicated to doing what truly inspires me.

Relaxing Sundays

On lazy Sundays, I love unwinding by binge-watching something interesting or spending quality time hosting cozy dinners for my family and close friends at home.

Having joie de vivre

In my free time, I enjoy riding, driving, watching sunsets, and exploring music across genres. As an artist, anything related to art and creativity truly captures my heart.

Lipsa Panda is a celebrated anchor and media personality, known for hosting over 2000 live and television shows across India. The only Odia anchor to share the stage with stars like Sonu Sood, Parineeti Chopra, and Sushmita Sen, she is also the proud founder of Desi Muffins Productions. A former RJ at 93.5 Red FM, she's a Rajiv Gandhi Pratiba Puraskar awardee and two-time CM Gold Medalist in NCC. Recently awarded Best Host of the Year by Fardeen Khan, Lipsa is now pursuing a PhD in English, resuming her academic journey after pausing it due to a personal loss

Mix of activities

As an entrepreneur and anchor, my Sundays are usually packed—either spent fulfilling work commitments or cherishing quality time with my family.



With family



With Sonu Sood

WhatsApp

This Week

Only on SUNDAY POST!

Send in your most interesting WhatsApp messages and memes at: features.orissapost@gmail.com

And we will publish the best ones

THE BEST MEMES OF THIS ISSUE

Which day do chickens hate the most? Friday.

Laughing stock: cattle with a sense of humor.

Whoever said nothing is impossible is a liar. I've been doing nothing for years.

By the time a man realises that his father was right, he has a son who thinks he's wrong.

Unique talents

Sir, I found last week's cover story 'Difference, not a deficit' quite informative. I was unaware about the fact that famous people like Sir Issac Newton, Albert Einstein, Anthony Hopkins also suffered from autism before turning icons. As attributed by Greta Thunerg – Being different is a superpower, autistic children often possess unique capabilities that set them apart. They tend to have an exceptional ability to focus deeply on tasks they are interested in. This intense concentration can lead to remarkable achievements in areas such as art, music, or technology. Their attention to detail is unparalleled, allowing them to notice patterns and inconsistencies that others might miss. Autistic children also have a strong sense of logic and a unique way of thinking, which can lead to innovative solutions to problems. While they may face challenges in social interactions, their strengths in other areas should be recognized and nurtured. With the right support, these children can thrive and contribute their unique talents to the world.

SOMESH SAHOO, KENDRAPARA

LETTERS

A word for readers

Sunday post is serving a platter of delectable fare every week, or so we hope. We want readers to interact with us. Feel free to send in your opinions, queries, comments and contributions to

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World Ocean Day - June 8

Voices for the blue

Our oceans, which have bestowed upon us beauty, bounty, and balance, now urgently require our intervention. While human actions, neglect, and inaction are imperiling the very essence of the planet, it remains true that even the smallest efforts can spark significant change

ANISHA KHATUN, OP

The oceans—vast, deep, and full of wonder—are the heartbeat of our planet. They cradle life, whisper stories through the waves, and gift us the air we breathe. But today, they are crying out for help. Choked by plastic, poisoned by chemicals, scarred by oil spills, and silenced by overfishing, our once-thriving seas are turning into graveyards. Gentle creatures like turtles and dolphins die with plastic in their stomachs. Coral reefs, once bursting with color, lie pale and lifeless. The very lifeline of millions of coastal families is fading fast.

This isn't just about nature—it's about us. Our choices, our negligence, and our silence are costing us the soul of our blue planet. The oceans have given us everything: beauty, bounty, balance. Now, they need us. We cannot turn away any longer. Each action, no matter how small, is a wave of change—carrying hope for the waters that sustain us.

We are the last generation that can still make a difference. It's not too late, but soon it might be. Let us

rise—not just to protect the ocean—but to honour it, heal it, and fight for its future. The ocean needs our love, not our waste. The time to act is now.

On World Oceans Day, Sunday POST reached out to a diverse group of individuals—scientists, activists, and the ocean lovers alike—to hear their voices and gather their insights.

'People staying far from seas contribute to ocean pollution'

Soumya Ranjan Biswal, Managing Trustee of the Odisha Paryavaran Sanrakshan Abhiyan Trust, offers a compelling insight into the widespread and collective responsibility behind marine pollution.



He says, it is a misconception to blame only coastal communities or tourists for the deteriorating condition of oceans.

"It is not that those who live in coastal areas only pollute seas or tourists only pollute seas—even people staying in urban areas far from seas contribute to ocean pollution. They discard their waste in drains, which connects with rivers, and those rivers eventually flow into the seas, explains Biswal.

In Odisha, while commercial fishing isn't dominant, ocean pollution is aggravated by oil spills from ships, unregulated fishing practices that violate environmental protocols, and unchecked plastic, sound, and light pollution. Besides, People who reside in the peripheral area of Chilika think that the lake is their dustbin.

People living by the

river think the river is their dumping yard, laments the activist.

Although waste management systems are in place, Biswal insists they are inadequate and urgently need expansion and modernisation.

The impact of this pollution on marine biodiversity is both severe and heartbreaking, he says.

The toxins and debris also degrade coral reefs and destroy breeding habitats essential for the survival of various species. Plastic and other residues act as traps, entangling marine animals and hindering reproduction. As pollutants accumulate, they silently wreak havoc beneath the surface, posing a long-term threat to the entire aquatic ecosystem, observes Biswal. He further reveals how pollution is not just an eyesore or inconvenience, but a direct, often fatal threat to marine life.

To address this growing crisis, Biswal calls for a united and grassroots-driven response. "We need to build communities to protect our oceans. Mass change is necessary," he says, stressing that, policy reforms and public awareness must go hand in hand.

"The mere banning of plastic use will not suffice unless production is also curtailed. If we want to ban plastic, then the production of plastic needs to be banned. Equally important is the creation of better waste disposal infrastructure, especially in underdeveloped regions, and the provision of affordable, sustainable alternatives. People need to be made aware and they should be given sustainable options. If plastic needs to be banned, then people should have a cheap alternative," he asserts.

Biswal's vision is clear: lasting

change will only come through informed communities, robust systems, and a collective sense of accountability.

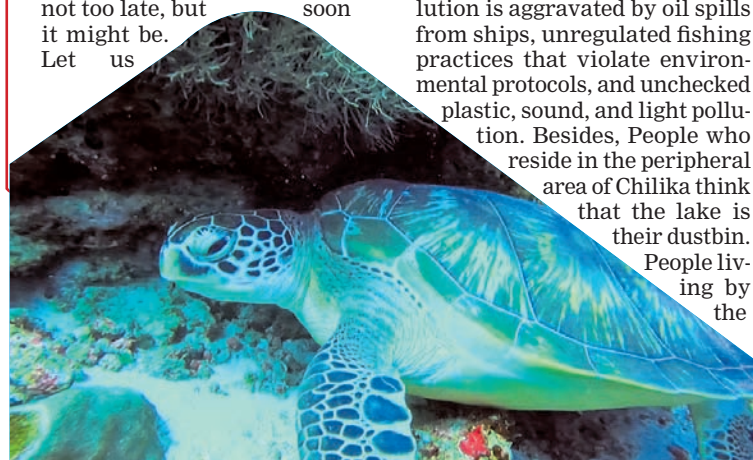
'Ocean health and human well-being are interlinked'

Ranjan Panda, Convenor of Water Initiatives and Mahanadi River Waterkeeper, raises an urgent alarm about the deteriorating state of our oceans and its far-reaching consequences on climate, biodiversity, and human life—especially for coastal communities.



"Our oceans are at serious threat at the moment for various reasons," he states. Climate change is warming ocean waters, intensifying disasters such as cyclones and storm surges. "Both frequency and intensity of such rapid onset of disasters are not only causing economic losses but also a lot of non-economic losses and damages for the coastal communities," he adds.

Wildlife habitats are being destroyed, and the very survival of many species is under threat. Panda draws special attention to sea-level rise, which he calls a "slow-onset disaster" impacting millions of people across the globe. He notes, "Such impacts are not recorded properly by current data generation systems. Hence, they don't find much place in policy formulations, resulting in a lack of plans to handle the impacts." Coastal communities, including many in Odisha, are being forced to migrate, losing access to traditional resources, socio-cultural identities, and their homes to an ever-invasive sea.





Beyond climate, pollution is also choking the oceans. According to Panda, “Both chemical and plastic pollution are also choking the oceans and marine species in ways that are seemingly looking irreversible now. Oceans are losing their capacity to absorb carbon emissions for this, and that brings more extreme events than we expected.”

He warns that overfishing—particularly deep-sea fishing—and deep-sea mining are pushing marine ecosystems to the brink. “I would like to put this alarm bell that our oceans are seriously ill at the moment and with them, the dependent coastal communities and ecosystems are also facing health, economic and socio-cultural crises.”

On the policy front, Panda acknowledges the efforts of global frameworks like the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), which has raised awareness and identified ecologically significant marine areas. However, he cautions, “It has been struggling in the wake of growing commercialization of marine resources with an aim of optimizing production of both food and non-food items.” While India has policies to protect marine biodiversity, he believes true conservation is not possible without inclusive, multi-stakeholder approaches. “We are yet to be able to promote truly multi-stakeholder initiatives where the coastal communities – including the indigenous communities – are given their due rights and where their roles are respected in the forefront.”

Emphasising the link between ocean health and human well-being, he says, “Unhealthy oceans can reduce food intakes, expose people to contaminated resources, and even affect oxygen supply. Their pollution also hampers mental health beyond comprehension.”

Panda underscores the oceans’ pivotal role in regulating climate and producing oxygen. “Different studies have shown that oceans produce somewhere between 50 to 70 percent of Earth’s oxygen.” He calls for science-based action rooted in traditional wisdom. “It’s very important to understand the oceans and their related ecosystems with scientific rigour and complete community participation.” Through campaigns like Youth4Water In-

dia, he is pushing for meaningful conservation that goes beyond symbolic cleanups.

‘Ocean mining must be guided by sustainable practices’

Kirti Ranjan Mallick, Assistant Professor in the Department of Geology at Utkal University, provides a comprehensive understanding of the oceans’ indispensable role in climate regulation and biodiversity, while drawing attention to the serious threats they currently face.

“Oceans absorb, store, and transport solar energy very effectively,” says Mallick. “They distribute heat around the globe through various western and eastern boundary currents which carry heat from equatorial regions and release it at the poles, and vice versa. This process helps in maintaining moderate temperatures, influencing the world’s climatic pattern.” In addition to regulating temperature, oceans act as significant carbon sinks, absorbing vast amounts of carbon dioxide from the atmosphere, thereby mitigating the greenhouse effect.

He adds that the ocean is a reservoir of immense biodiversity, offering varied habitats such as coral reefs, mangroves, and deep-sea trenches. “Phytoplankton forms the foundation of the marine food web and are crucial for supporting marine life,” Mallick notes. From microscopic organisms to majestic creatures like blue whales, marine ecosystems are complex and delicately balanced.

However, he warns of the rising threats. “Chemical runoff from industries contaminates the marine environment. Over one-quarter of all marine life relies on coral reefs, which are now severely threatened by ocean acidification due to climate change. This leads to coral bleaching, habitat destruction, and a sharp decline in marine populations. Overfishing further disrupts native marine ecosystems,” according to him.

To protect the oceans, Mallick believes

individuals must play a proactive role. “Use reusable bags and bottles, reduce energy consumption, and raise awareness about marine conservation. School and college students can act as volunteers, form eco-clubs, perform street plays, and educate the public. Awareness is the first step toward action.”

On the issue of plastic pollution and oil spills, Mallick paints a grim picture. “Marine animals mistake plastic for food, leading to their internal injuries, starvation, and death. Entanglement of endangered species like olive ridley sea turtles, seals, and sharks can restrict movement or cause fatal injuries. Oil spills, on the other hand, cause respiratory and reproductive harm in marine organisms. Toxic substances accumulate in smaller creatures and move up the food web, affecting biodiversity at multiple levels.”

Touching upon deep-sea mining, Mallick explains, “As demand for minerals increases and land-based



resources dwindling, deep-sea mining has gained interest. But it disturbs seafloor habitats and releases harmful substances that degrade marine ecosystems. Since current technologies are still evolving, their environmental impacts warrant careful consideration. Ocean mining must be governed by strict regulations and guided by sustainable practices.”

‘Marine national parks offer hope for future’

Priyadarshree Panigrahi, a Dubai-based noted Odia scuba diver and Head of MENA operations for an Indian multinational corporation, shares a deeply personal and insightful



account of the changes he has observed in marine ecosystems due to human activity. With years of diving experience across diverse marine habitats, he has witnessed firsthand the impacts of climate change, pollution, and irresponsible human behavior on ocean life.

“Over the years, some changes that I have noticed in marine ecosystems are degradation of coral reefs, reduction in fish population due to overfishing, and poor visibility in some dive sites,” says Panigrahi.

He explains that coral bleaching—a condition caused by rising water temperatures—turns vibrant, colorful corals into ghostly white skeletons. “Visually, diving in an area with bleached coral is like watching a black and white TV. The colours are gone, and you just get a two-colour picture in front of you. It is a very distressing sight.”

Coral reefs, often referred to as the rainforests of the sea, are also damaged by destructive fishing methods such as dynamite fishing and by callous diving practices. “Overfishing is making many fish species endangered. Too much construction near beaches impacts underwater visibility,” he adds. However, Panigrahi notes that marine national parks and protected areas offer hope, where coral reefs and fish continue to thrive under the vigilant protection of government agencies.

A committed advocate of eco-conscious diving, Panigrahi emphasises the importance of mindful diving practices. “As divers, we must practice eco-conscious diving which includes maintaining adequate buoyancy to avoid touching or kicking reefs, using reef-safe sunscreen products, and supporting dive centers that follow sustainable practices. Beyond that, we can use our voices and platforms to raise awareness about the fragility of coral reefs and the urgent need to protect them.”

Pollution is another persistent problem he regularly encounters. “Yes, we do encounter some plastic objects during our dives. Whenever we see plastic or other debris, we try to collect them and bring them up with us to dispose of them responsibly.” He and his elder daughter Tisya, one of India’s youngest advanced open water scuba divers, are active members of the Emirates Diving Association. Together, they frequently participate in underwater cleanups like the ‘Clean Up Arabia’ dives organised in high-traffic marine zones such as jetties and harbors. “We pick up a huge amount of plastics and debris and this gives us a lot of satisfaction,” he shares.

“Scuba divers are the eyes of the ocean and storytellers of the sea,” says Panigrahi, adding, “We see firsthand what most people never do—both the beauty and the damage.” Through underwater photography, advocacy, and education, he and Tisya strive to inspire others to act responsibly and protect marine life. “We try to bring out the beauty of the underwater world with our pictures and videos with the hope that people’s exposure to such beauty will compel them to think about oceans and pollution and change their behaviour.”



Kewda's lineage stretches far into India's ritual and literary past. In Vedic texts, it is associated with purification and spiritual awakening. In Mughal era recipes and Unani medicine, kewda made frequent appearances as a cooling agent, a nerve relaxant, an aphrodisiac

AMBIKA PRASAD KANUNGO

On the sun-bleached coastlines of Odisha's Ganjam district, where the rivers Rushikulya and Bahuada wind through a landscape rich with myth and history, something delicate and deeply evocative blooms. It is not a rare orchid or an exotic spice, but a spiny, sword-leaved plant that thrives in the saline soils of this triangular delta. The kewda flower *Pandanus fascicularis* or *kia* in local parlance is one of India's most aromatic botanical marvels, and perhaps its most underappreciated.

With its intoxicating scent and centuries-old cultural lineage, the kewda is more than a flower it's a symbol, an industry, and a fading promise. In its soft cream-colored bracts lies a tale of sensory opulence, rural resilience, and a quiet cry for recognition.

A coastal treasure

Tucked away in the southeast of Odisha, Ganjam is the epicenter of India's kewda production. This unassuming region, often overshadowed by more prominent perfume capitals, accounts for more than 90% of the nation's kewda essence. The figures are staggering: across roughly 5,000 hectares, hundreds of thousands of kewda plants bloom seasonally, their flowers harvested with care and distilled into an aromatic oil revered around the world.

The crown jewel of this floral economy is Rooh Kewda, an essential oil so potent and rare that one kilogram can command prices upwards of Rs 17-18 lakh. The process is painstaking over 1,000 male flowers are required to yield just one ounce of this oil. No synthetic perfume comes close to matching its depth and complexity.

And yet, the value of this industry is not just in perfume bottles or international export figures. It lies in the human chain, farmers, flower gatherers, distillers, traders that upholds it. According to V.V. Rama Rao, a senior scientist at the Fragrance and Flavour Development Centre (FFDC) in Berhampur, over 280 small-scale distilleries operate in Ganjam, processing nearly 4,000-5,000 tonnes of flowers annually. Together, they generate an economic turnover of Rs 80-90 crore, a sizable contribution for a rural economy.

The sweet smell of struggle

But behind this fragrant economy lies

Scent of a culture

a paradox. The scent that perfumes biryanis, temples, and attars does little to sweeten the lives of those who grow it.

Padma Charan Sahu, a kewda farmer from Badaput village, puts it bluntly: "We sell each flower for Rs 30-35. It barely covers the cost of labor." With no government-run distillation units, farmers are at the mercy of private buyers, often middlemen who control pricing. The result: while the end products command high market value, the base-level cultivators remain trapped in low-margin transactions.

The plant itself offers certain agricultural advantages it requires minimal irrigation, thrives in saline coastal soils, and is resilient to climate stress. "In many parts of Ganjam, farmers are switching from paddy to kewda," says Ashok Choudhury, a former legislator and longtime kewda cultivator. "Paddy has become unsustainable. Kewda needs little input once it's established." Still, without institutional support, the shift feels more like resignation than reinvention. "We need a state-supported processing facility," urges Krushnachandra Nayak, the sitting MLA from Chhatrapur and also a grower. "If the government invests in infrastructure, farmers can earn five times more by selling processed products instead of raw flowers."

A botanical wonder

The kewda plant is as intriguing botanically as it is economically. It is dioecious, meaning male and female flowers grow on separate plants. Only the male flowers *Ketaki Viphal* in Sanskrit are fragrant and harvested for commercial use. The female plants, *Swarna Ketaki*, bear fruit but no scent, and are usually ignored by the perfume industry.

Each mature plant yields 30-40 male flowers annually, harvested during three distinct flowering seasons. The monsoon bloom from July to September is the most prized, producing over 70% of the yearly yield due to higher fragrance concentration. Harvesting is no gentle act. The flowers grow up to 20 inches long, enclosed in tough bracts and protected by sharp leaves. It requires experienced hands, often women

and teenage boys, to pluck them without injury. These blooms, once gathered, begin a swift journey from thickets to distilleries, where they are transformed into three primary products:

Rooh Kewda (Essential Oil): The purest and most valuable form, used in Ayurveda and high-end perfumery. A powerful stimulant, it is traditionally employed in treating respiratory ailments, joint pain, and even anxiety.

Kewda Attar (Perfume): A marriage of kewda essence and sandalwood oil, this attar is a staple in Indian personal grooming, often dabbed on wrists or behind the ears. It takes up to 15,000 flowers to produce just a pound.

Kewda Jal (Floral Water): A gentler by-product, widely used in Indian kitchens to flavour festive sweets like gulab jamun, rasmalai, and rich rice dishes like biryani. About 24 flowers are needed to yield a pound of kewda water.

A fragrant geography

The region's sandy, mineral-rich terrain is not incidental to its floral success. The kewda thrives in saline, porous soils, found in abundance along the coasts of Chhatrapur, Brahmapur, Gopalpur, and Jagannathpur. This precise ecology has been recognised formally through Geographical Indication (GI) status an official tag that ties the kewda to its unique origin, much like Champagne to its namesake region in France.

Still, GI protection is not a cure-all. Without wider promotion, investment, and market linkage, the GI tag remains a paper shield. Local entrepreneurs and policymakers argue that Odisha must position kewda not just as an aromatic but as a heritage product, on par with Darjeel-

ing tea or Mysore sandalwood.

A scented history

The kewda's lineage stretches far into India's ritual and literary past. In Vedic texts, it is associated with purification and spiritual awakening. Temples across eastern India still use kewda water to sanctify idols. In Mughal era recipes and Unani medicine, kewda made frequent appearances as a cooling agent, a nerve relaxant, an aphrodisiac. Even today, its influence lingers. A whiff of kewda jal in a dessert or a few drops of attar on a wedding guest's wrist speaks of a culture where fragrance is not just a sensory pleasure but a spiritual register.

Holding on to the fragrance

As climate change alters the landscape and industrial agriculture tightens its grip, Odisha's kewda farmers stand at a crossroads. The global perfume industry increasingly seeks "natural" and "authentic" ingredients, and kewda fits the bill. But without a policy push incentives, research, branding the flower risks becoming another beautiful relic of India's neglected agro-heritage. "Kewda is not just a flower, it's a way of life here," says Dr. Rama Rao. "If we treat it as a commodity alone, we lose the story behind it. But if we invest in its potential through tourism, value-addition, and education it can bloom again, stronger than ever." Odisha's kewda is a scent that connects generations, temples, kitchens, and trade routes. It wafts through the air carrying a message: that even the most ephemeral things a smell, a memory, a tradition can root a community, fuel an economy, and endure across time.



Payal on her battle with depression

last two years.

Sharing her journey of coming out of this toughest phase of life, Payal said, "Neither did I get any support from the industry, be it the ones I knew or the ones with whom I worked earlier nor from my loved ones. It was all about me being entirely alone and all by myself. Every actor goes through a phase when no matter what you try, everything is working against you and nothing is working in your favour. The last two years were like that for me.

There have been countless times when I have literally

Actress Payal Ghosh opened up about her battle with clinical depression and anxiety after staying out of work for the

cried my heart out alone all by myself and spent days locking myself in my house out of anxiety, stress, and trauma. Be it my family or the industry, I didn't get any support from anyone and was all by myself at home."

Payal revealed that she had to take the help of the professionals for her growing troubles, "I had to resort to professional help and medicine for those entire 2 years and each and every day passed like a nightmare. Having no work for a period of 2 long years is a long time."

IAN S



Sara channels her inner poet

Bollywood actress Sara Ali Khan, who is gearing up for the release of her film, *Metro...In Dino*, took to social media to share her poetic side. Taking to Instagram, the At-rangi Re actress revealed a more artistic and expressive side of herself. She wrote, "Har umar ka ishq hai in Dino Mohabbat ka har mausam hai Metro in Dino... Kabhi fairytale feels kabhi Saras silly reels ka mann hai in Dino Trending at #1 ka fun hai Metro in Dino."

In the photos, Sara is seen striking various graceful and stylish poses against a lush jungle backdrop. To note, this isn't the first time Sara has showcased her poetic side; She often shares her creativity and heartfelt verses with her fans. In an earlier post, the Simmba actress referred to herself as an "Anurag Basu heroine." Sara shared a video on Instagram from the trailer launch event of *Metro...In Dino*. The post also included sneak peeks from the trailer of the upcoming film, which is set to release on July 4.

"From watching and loving Metro to now featuring in it. Dreams really do come true. I've been an Anurag Basu fan- now I can say I'm an Anurag Basu heroine too," Sara Ali Khan wrote as the caption.

IAN S



I am Kalia: First look Unveiled



Bhubaneswar: The first look of the new Odia movie *I am Kalia*, produced under the banner of Lee Bliss Entertainment and starring and directed by Harihar Mohapatra, was recently released.

In today's world, many individuals are deeply devoted to Lord Jagannath, having entirely surrendered themselves to Him, even though they may not be visible in the public eye. *I am Kalia* is an Odia movie built around one such touching social story. For true devotees, God is always supreme.

Produced by Subash Sahu, the film features Harihar Mohapatra in the lead role, along with renowned Russian theater actress Ania, senior actor Kuna Tripathy, actress Pushpa Panda, Satwaki Mishra, and others.

The story is written by Monalisa Mohapatra, while the screenplay and direction are handled by Harihar Mohapatra. The music is scored by Baidhyanath Das.

Entirely shot in Puri, the film will be released across Odisha on the occasion of the Bahuda festival. PNN



Aksharaa raises alarm

Actress Aksharaa Haasan, the younger daughter of actor Kamal Haasan, has now alerted the public about a person who has been falsely using her name and her family name, claiming that they were involved in producing projects and that they were operating from an office in Ooty.

Taking to her Instagram page to put up an alert Thursday, the younger daughter of actress Kamal Haasan wrote, "To My Fellow Fraternity Members, Please be informed that a person named Ibrahim Akhtar is falsely using my name and my family's name, claiming we are involved in producing projects and operating from an office in Ooty."

Stating that these claims were entirely untrue, the actress underlined the fact that they had no association with him. "We are taking the necessary steps to address this matter. We are taking necessary legal steps to address this issue," she said and urged people to remain cautious. "...Do not engage with or encourage him in any way. Thank you for your attention and continued support," Aksharaa Haasan said. Aksharaa made her debut as an actress in director Balki's *Shamitabh*, featuring Amitabh Bachchan and Dhanush in the lead.

IAN S

Bring a Book, Take a Book – Read a Book

Street libraries serve as a window to the wider world, connecting children to local libraries, schools, sports or computer clubs, theatres—enabling them to participate in community activities and thrive within them

DASARATHI MISHRA

Street libraries are a beautiful home for books, planted in front yards and park areas that are easily accessible to the public. With their easy accessibility, they become an invitation to share the joys of reading with the neighborhood. Street libraries are a window into the mind of a community. Books come and go; no one needs to check them in or out. People can simply reach in and take what interests them. When they are done, they can return them to the street library network or pass them on to friends. If anyone has a book or two that they think others would enjoy, they can just drop it into a street library they happen to be walking past. The main motto is: BRING A BOOK, TAKE A BOOK – READ A BOOK. Street libraries are a unique experiment. India saw its first street library in Melavasal village in Mannergudi Taluk of Tamil Nadu in 1931. The mobile library was created and launched on a bullock cart on October 21, 1931, by Dr. S. R. Ranganathan. Subsequently, such libraries were launched in Kolkata, Kerala, Mysuru, Mumbai-Mulund, and Trichy. The boat library in the Hooghly River, launched by the West Bengal Transport Corporation, is also very attractive.

Street libraries are very user-friendly. They cater to the needs of all age groups. They create a unique space for sharing knowledge that satisfies children's curiosity, rekindles their joy for learning, and inspires them to uncover and share their talents. They build trust between children, their families, and the facilitators, serving as an initial step towards broader social involvement. This space also nurtures other cultural activities, including reading workshops, literacy support, and creative projects such as books, murals, and performances.

Street libraries thus serve as a bridge to the wider world, connecting children to local libraries, schools, sports or computer clubs, theaters—enabling them to participate in community activities and thrive within them.

Patha Pranta Pathagar (The Street Library) – a unique experiment in spreading the reading habit among the general public against the onslaught of social media – was launched at KananVihar Phase, Bhubaneswar, and inaugurated on January 20, 2025, by Dr. Tarun Kanti Mishra, IAS (Retd.), a former Chief Secretary of Odisha and a prominent literary luminary and popular Odia short story writer. The innovative library is sponsored by the Abhyutthana Foundation Charitable Trust, at its office premises in



KananVihar, Bhubaneswar.

Such roadside libraries are a common feature in developed nations. Recently, Prime Minister Modi, during his popular program Mann Ki Baat, highlighted a successful initiative by a female student who established a micro library in Nagaland. Social media shows that, besides Nagaland, these libraries are also present in the states of Goa, Gujarat, Kerala, Tamil Nadu, and West Bengal. It is expected that people in general, and the younger generation in particular, living in the area will benefit from this unique experiment. The library is open 24/7; anyone can freely take a book and, if they like, share a book.

The world is facing a growing literacy crisis. As reported by the Little Free Library website, today in the United States,

more than 30 million adults cannot read or write above a third-grade level. Studies have repeatedly shown that books in the hands of children have a meaningful impact on improving literacy. The more books in or near the home, the more likely a child will learn and love to read.

Like the "Little Free Library" (present in 128 countries, 400 million books shared), "Patha Pranta Library" plays an essential role by providing 24/7/365 access to books and encouraging a love of reading. As the venture is essentially a non-profit one, "Patha Pranta Pathagar" will work in the state to fill book deserts and expand libraries to underserved communities. It will play a catalytic role in transforming the community and society. The government should come forward to

promote them. Registration and logistic support from the government will be crucial to taking the movement forward.

In the USA, "Little Free Library" book-sharing boxes play an essential role by providing 24/7 access to books and encouraging a love of reading in areas where books are scarce. The library works as a clearinghouse for book exchanges. Through the Little Free Library book exchanges, millions of books are exchanged each year, profoundly increasing access to books for readers of all ages and backgrounds.

In Odisha, even though the Odisha Public Library Act, 2001 was passed in 2002, not much progress has been made. The Odisha Public Library Initiative, 2024 (OPLI) has laid down broad guidelines for libraries in the state. It is an excellent document but needs proper leadership from the government. OPLI talks about early childhood libraries, literacy, digital libraries, e-libraries, and social inclusion. The library would provide opportunities to host programs on community service that engage the local public for the betterment of the society they live in, and discuss/brainstorm local social and economic challenges. However, the document has not mentioned the creation and expansion of street libraries. There should be a system to register street libraries. More registered street libraries make it easier to access books, foster universal access to books, and democratize reading. This means a lot for someone with limited mobility or capacity to visit a library, bookstore, or e-library.

Dr. S. R. Ranganathan, the doyen of the Library Movement in India, said, "The library is a growing organism." A study by Syed Haquikat Ahmad and Moutsi Paul suggests that in the long run, we need to establish a greater number of street libraries in order to communicate with people and provide information as per their requirements. It is also imperative to develop a website on street libraries so that people can learn about the locations of different street libraries operating in India. This will help many reap the benefits during their travel.

The writer is a former Chief General Manager of the Reserve Bank of India



PRAGATI

WANT TO BECOME A MODEL?
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