

A Texas Size Meet: the Largest and Best Gathering of Odias Outside India (42nd Annual Convention of the Orissa Society of the Americas)

Any Texan can tell you that the biggest and best of anything and everything is in Texas, and if it is not, it should be. The 42nd Annual Convention of the Orissa Society of the Americas (www.OSA11.org) concluded in Plano, a northern suburb of Dallas, Texas on July 4, 2011. And, true to the culture of Texas, it was the largest (900 + attendees) and the best of all OSA conventions so far, with a very successful and widely praised business symposium; back to back high quality cultural presentations on stage with artistes from Odisha, and home grown artistes from America; complete with academic seminars ranging from Higher Education to Women's Issues. The pride in Odisha and her culture was palpable in the ambience.



(Inaugural Stage)



(Wasitrac co-chair Mr Debadutt Dash, Hon'ble congressman Mr. Jim McDermott, co-convenor Mr Debasis Nanda)

This OSA2011 is remarkable in that a ranking member of the House, Honorable Congressman Jim McDermott, as the Chief Keynote speaker of the convention, not only knows Odisha and of Odisha, visited Odisha, talked about the up and coming Odisha of the future, and invited the next OSA2012 to his home state of Washington. Mr. McDermott, Congressman from the Seventh Congressional District of Washington State, is a member of the powerful House Ways and Means Committee, and Ranking Member of the Subcommittee on Trade, and founder and Co-Chair of the Congressional India and Indian-American Caucus. He is indeed a friend of Odisha at high places. Mr. McDermott has been to India 22 times. He spoke fondly of Odisha, and of his discussions with CM Sri Naveen Patnaik and other government and business leaders. He said he intends to visit Odisha many more times. But he also directed Odias in the US to do more in getting Odisha known in the US. He said 'You cannot expect people to invest in a place they never heard of'. In response to Congressman McDermott's invitation, OSA2012 will be in Seattle, Washington.

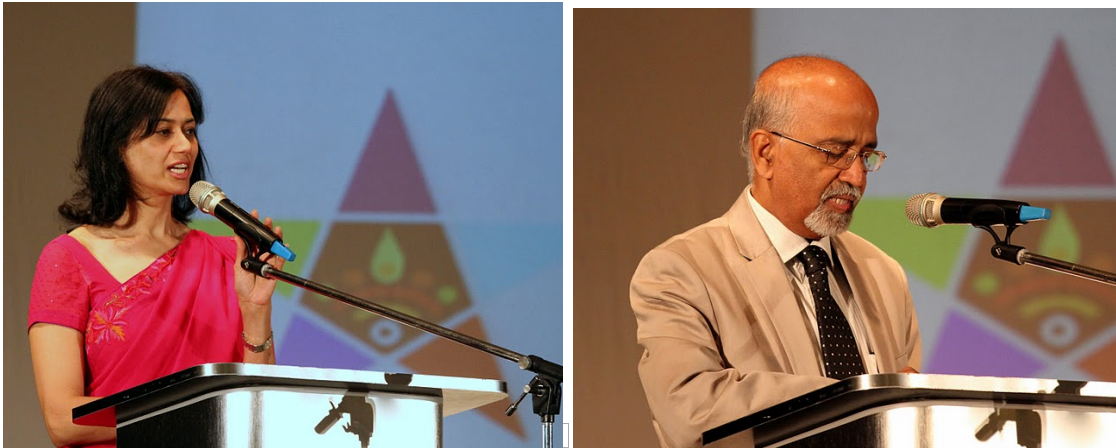


(Guruji Shri CB Satapathy inaugurating 42nd OSA Convention, accompanied by Convenor Tapan Padhi, co- convenor Debasis Nanda)



(President Dr. Bigyani Das) (Chief Speaker Mr Satyanand Misra, Chief Guest Mr. Shantanu Mohapatra, Chief keynote speaker Ms. Jagi Mangat Panda)

The convention was inaugurated by lighting the lamp and offering prayer to Lord Jagannath by Guruji Shri CB Satapathy who talked about cultural heritage and bright future of the OSA. Legendary Music director Mr. Shantanu Mohapatra was the chief guest. Ms. Jagi Mangat Panda, CEO, Ortel and OdishaTV was the Chief keynote speaker - youth and Mr. Satyananda Mishra, Chief Information Commissioner of India attended the convention as the chief speaker. Lifetime achievement award was conferred on Shri Shantanu Mohapatra and famous legendary odia singer icon Shri Chitaranjan Jena. President award winner and producer - director of Odia film "Kanaka Lata", Mr. Ghanashyam Mohapatra was awarded and recognized on stage for his contribution to Odia cinema by OSA past president Mr. Sitakantha Dash.



(Ms Jagi Mangat Panda and Mr. Satyanand Misra speaking during OSA inauguration)



(42nd OSA Convention Audience)



(OSA Vice-President Mr Pradeep Mohapatra)

The Odisha Delegation to OSA2011 in Dallas was led by Shri Surya Narayan Patro, Minister of Revenue and Disaster Management. Other delegates were Shri T. Ramachandru, Industries Secretary; Shri C. J. Venugopal, MD, IPICOL and Dr. Dhanada Mishra, Co-Chairman, Invest Bhubaneswar along with many young Odia entrepreneurs from Orissa. The organizing team of business symposium led by Ashok Khuntia, Deepak Mohapatra, Gopal Mohapatra, Satyakam Nanda and Sribachha Panda did a wonderful job.

Noteworthy is the presence of the Odia entrepreneurs in the business symposium with multinational companies, with presence in Odisha, US, Canada and the Middle-east. Just a few years ago Odisha came as a supplicant, to invite foreign investment to exploit her resources. This time there has been a subtle shift, in that there is a two way movement of investment. In fact many of the main sponsors of the OSA2011 are from outside US: grand sponsor Mr. Akshay Kumar Parija, of Blue Line Shipping, is from the Middle-East; diamond sponsor Mr. Subhas Bhura, of Utkal Builders is from Bhubaneswar; gold sponsor Mr. Nihar Samantara, of IGNIS technology is from Bangalore; Mr. Sradhananda Mishra, of CSDC Systems, started in Canada, but now has offices in US and India; Mr. Dharendra Kar, of BI Professionals, is in US and Odisha. Individuals and companies are to be commended for the support of community events and the support of arts and culture of Odisha.



(OSA 11 inaugural cultural program - "our heritage our pride")

The inauguration program on Saturday morning "Mahanadi Bahe Dhire" was spellbinding, composed by legendary music director Shantanu Mohapatra and choreographed by local artists under the able supervision of cultural committee chair Tapas Sahoo and advisor Swati Tripathy, depicted the rich heritage of the places where the river Mahanadi has flown in. More than seventy participants played a role in the presentation of Orissa's rich heritage. The theme "Akshaya Amara Aama Gouraba" - "our heritage our pride" was very nicely

portrayed with a strong historical content presentation and displayed during inauguration. The custom stage was thoroughly occupied all the days having one performance to other. Everyone enjoyed the kaleidoscope of performing arts from traditional and contemporary artists. As per Dr. Chitta Baral, "The haunting theme line was "Mahanadi bahe dheere". It was played more than 15 times and the music and its articulation in the stage still haunts me. The opening cultural program was one of the best opening cultural programs I have seen in OSA and by far the most educative one narrating the history and geography of all parts of Odisha. My hats off to all involved in various aspects of that program."

Youth participants took the center stage in the inaugural and closing ceremonies. Youth teams led by Reena Patro, Tapannita Padhi, Ravi Epili, Mikash Das, Raj Patro conducted a semi-parallel convention for the youth attendees designed and executed by the youth group which included youth seminars, soccer game, odia jeopardy, BBQ dinner etc.

On Saturday evening at OSA2011 there were gasps of amazement and tears in the eyes of many, to see an artiste dance and prance his way into the hearts of the audience. He is Guru Nityananda Das, perhaps the only professional Odissi dancer in the world, with only one leg. He was a brilliant young dancer, with a promising future, developing a career in film, television and stage, winning awards in 1997 and 1998. Then his world collapsed, when he lost his right leg in a hit and run, at the age of 25. After the accident, he was like a broken doll. He has overcome his disability, and with a dancer's agility, on the stage in Dallas along with Guru Shri Bijaya Dash and Guru Shri Amulya Balabantaray, re-enacted the story of his life. In rehab, he stumbles and falls repeatedly. In utter hopelessness, in despair, on the brink of suicide, he received divine inspiration, and persevered. What we see is the fluidity of Odissi dance, executed with one leg. That Nityananda could achieve this with the handicap is a tribute to human spirit. The audience gave him a standing ovation, many shedding tears of admiration. Organizers thanked past president Pratap Das for his active support and guidance in organizing such a program.

Right from inception some 42 years ago, the OSA has supported the classical performing arts of Odisha, providing a US and Canadian performance experience to many singers and dancers. The appearance on the OSA Convention stage is usually a kickoff to a US and Canada tour, with performances at major centers. Singers Shri Chitta Jena, Shri Prasanta Mudaly, Smt Sangeeta Gosain, Smt Anindita Das, composer and music director Shri Santanu Mohapatra, devotional dancers Purnashree Rout and Lucky Mohanty, Shipra Mehrortra, Aparupa presented a veritable feast for our eyes and ears. Home-grown (i.e. from North America) talent in singing, music and dance were exceptionally impressive which included songs by young singer Pratik Dash. There was a singing competition for the youth in singing *chhanda* and *champu*, two art forms rarely heard in Odisha these days. Yet there they were on stage, Odia youth growing up in US, with sweet rendering of the roots of centuries old Odia traditional songs. It was a lovely feast for the ears. Odissi icon Smt. Minati Mishra at her age presenting an Abhinaya was superb even without any proper costume.



(Odia children singing Champu, Chhanda, Odissi songs)



Dr. Minati Misra doing Abhinaya)



(Gifted Odissi dancer Shri Nityananda Das)

From the very old Odisha to the very modern India - Shri Satyananda Mishra, Chief Information Commissioner of India, spoke on the revolutions towards good governance brought about by the Right To Information (RTI) Act. This powerful law is bringing about fundamental changes in the way India is governed.

Well organized seminars led by Smarak Bhuyan, Sukanta Mohapatra, Sandip Dasverma, included seminars on Odia Literature, on Higher Education, on Role of NGOs, health seminars etc. The Women's Forum was crowded, with standing room only. A Mexican videographer, Yunuen Perez Vertti and her husband Aswinee Rath, launched *Aparajita*, a video highlighting lives and times three inspiring women, newspaper editor Manorama Mohapatra, freedom fighter and social worker Annapurna Moharana and tribal leader Tulsi Munda. It is a view of the leaders in our midst with new eyes. The three could be your grandmother or mine, but their gentle demeanour hides a lifelong hard push for social reforms. Many young women, and men, grown up in the luxury, were moved by the message of the three remarkable women. Sri Gopal Mohanty spoke on the rural revolution being brought forth by the Mahila Shanti Sena, supported in part by the Gandhi Peace Institute of McMaster University, Hamilton, Canada.

New executive of OSA took office at Dallas for next two years. The baton was passed by outgoing OSA President Dr. Bigyani Das, vice-president Mr. Pradeep Mohaptara, Treasurer Mr. Akhileswar Patel, Secretary Mr. Pitambar Sarangi to the new President Dr. Annapurna Pandey and her team: Ms. Kuku Das, Vice President; Ms. Leena Mishra, Secretary and Mr. Susant Satpathy as Treasurer.

The mood was always festive with warm ambience. Sumptuous food was abundant and was served until midnight and the whole delivery was well designed and coordinated by Pankaj Patra, Subrat Acharya, Sukant Mohapatra, Jagannath Rath and Hari Patro. The registration and finance team led by Loknath Patro and SriPrakash Das conducted the smooth process for all three days. Excellent journal and directory were edited and published in time by chief editor Sikhanda Satapathy and Editors Prachee Behera, Ashapurna Mishra. This Convention had the most appealing website designed by Santanu Das. It was heartening to see so many tireless volunteers putting countless hours to look after every minute detail in organizing a grand scale convention.

As a feather in the cap, this convention had the largest number of legendary guest artists from Orissa than any previous Conventions. As commented by OSA NYNJ chapter President Lalatendu Mohanty, "The legendary performers from Orissa were very energetic and

entertained the attendees until the wee hours that forced the Convener to be too apologetic to end the night due to hotel restrictions. Other artists showcased the rich heritage and the attendees enjoyed the kaleidoscope of performing arts from traditional and contemporary artists. The voices of Chitta Jena, Shantanu Mohapatra, Prashant Muduli, Anindita Das, Sangita Gosain et al revitalized the odia cultural affection within the attendees.”



(Drama by Dallas group- L to R Kailash, Sukant(director), Debajyoti, Kanhu, Debashis, Mousumee, Chitra, Jagannath and kids)



(Convener Mr. Tapan Padhi)



(OSA Southwest President Dr. Gopal Mohapatra, Co-convener Mr Debasis Nanda)

As per past convener Dr. Lalu Manasinha, “The success of OSA2011 is surely due to the graft of the Texas pride on the Odia culture in this new breed of Texan Odias, or Odia Texans. Convener Tapan Padhi with his team members, Co-convener Debasis Nanda, OSA Southwest President Gopal Mohapatra and Odia Texans Jagannath Rath, Hari Arjun Patro, Niranjana Tripathy repeatedly stated that their goal has been to organise the biggest and the best OSA Convention ever. They did it.”