



AI photo editing

COVER STORY

P
3,4

Promise & peril

MY SUNDAY

Raja Dash, aka Raja D, is a celebrated director whose creativity, passion, and unflinching authenticity have redefined Odia cinema. Born in Cuttack, he began his career as an assistant director in 2009 and made his directorial debut in 2016 with the music video ‘Dilbara’. His first film ‘Durgatinashini’ marked the beginning of a successful journey, followed by a string of crowd-pleasers- ‘Tu Mora Sathire’ (Parts 1 & 2), ‘Dasama’, ‘Ghamaghot’, and ‘Ashiq Surrender Hela’- each fusing pulsating soundtracks with emotionally charged storytelling. Today, his genre-blending vision continues to inspire a new generation of filmmakers and moviegoers alike

With *Ghamaghot* team

Me-time

If I have no pending work, I enjoy spending my Sundays cooking, watching movies from different genres, and relaxing, appreciating some quality time with myself.

Strengthening family bonds

My ideal Sunday is all about enjoying quality time with my family, creating memories, relaxing together, and strengthening our bond through shared moments.

Homework for profession

In my leisure time, I like to hone my skills by reading books and articles by filmmakers, staying updated with new trends, techniques, and the latest technology in the industry.

Long drives on holidays

I learned driving in recent years, and now I enjoy going on long drives to explore new places, restaurants, and eatery joints around the city, discovering hidden gems along the way.

ANISHA KHATUN.OP

During shoot

Little scope to rest, relax

My Sundays are no different from other days, filled with shootings and various work commitments, leaving little time for rest or relaxation.

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

I stayed up all night wondering where the Sun went, and then it dawned on me.

What do you call a bear with no teeth? A gummy bear.

Did you hear about the guy whose whole left side got amputated? He's all right now.

I put my grandma on speed dial the other day. I call it insta-gram.

A true fighter

Sir, This refers to an article on Family Man actress Samantha Ruth Prabhu in Tinseltown section of last week's **Sunday POST**. Indeed, she is the living definition of “fight like a girl.” When myositis—an autoimmune muscle-waster—struck at the height of her career, she refused to retreat; instead she turned hospital corridors into rehearsal rooms and IV drips into dialogue cues, shooting Citadel: Honey Bunny between steroid cycles. A public divorce hurled slurs like “second-hand” at her; she answered by producing her own films and posting a viral clip of a little girl flooring a bully with the caption “Fight Like a Girl” the very day her ex remarried. She bankrolled other women’s scripts, launched a wellness podcast, and shared unfiltered photos of rashes and wheelchairs, transforming shame into sisterhood. Today, every step she takes on a red carpet is a quiet upper-cut to illness, patriarchy and perfection—proof that true stardom is forged not in spotlights, but in the shadows you refuse to surrender to.

Samarpita Sahoo, BERHAMPUR

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

Features.orissapost@gmail.com
B-15, Industrial Estate, Rasulgarh, Bhubaneswar - 751010, Orissa.
Phone (0674) 2549982, 2549948

AI photo editing

PROMISE & PERIL

ANISHA KHATUN, OP

For many, sharing photos online used to be a daunting task. The fear of being judged, criticised, or having images misused kept users from fully expressing themselves. A casual selfie could feel like an invitation to scrutiny rather than a moment of self-confidence. Today, that mindset is shifting dramatically. Thanks to powerful AI-driven editing tools, sharing images has become a form of creative expression and self-discovery.

It all began with OpenAI's Ghibli, where users could effortlessly turn their photos into beautiful illustrations inspired by the magical world of Studio Ghibli. Now, the excitement has reached new heights with Gemini 2.5 Flash Image (Nano Banana), which is captivating users across the internet with its realistic enhancements and artistic transformations.

Yet, this growing trend comes with underlying risks. The ability to alter images so realistically raises concerns about misinformation, identity manipulation, and unrealistic beauty standards. Edited photos can blur the line between reality and fiction, influencing self-image and mental well-being. Moreover, privacy issues arise when personal images are processed through AI systems, increasing the chances of data misuse or unauthorised sharing.

As the craze continues to take over the internet, **Sunday POST** spoke to some users and experts to get their perspectives.

'Coolest things to happen of late'

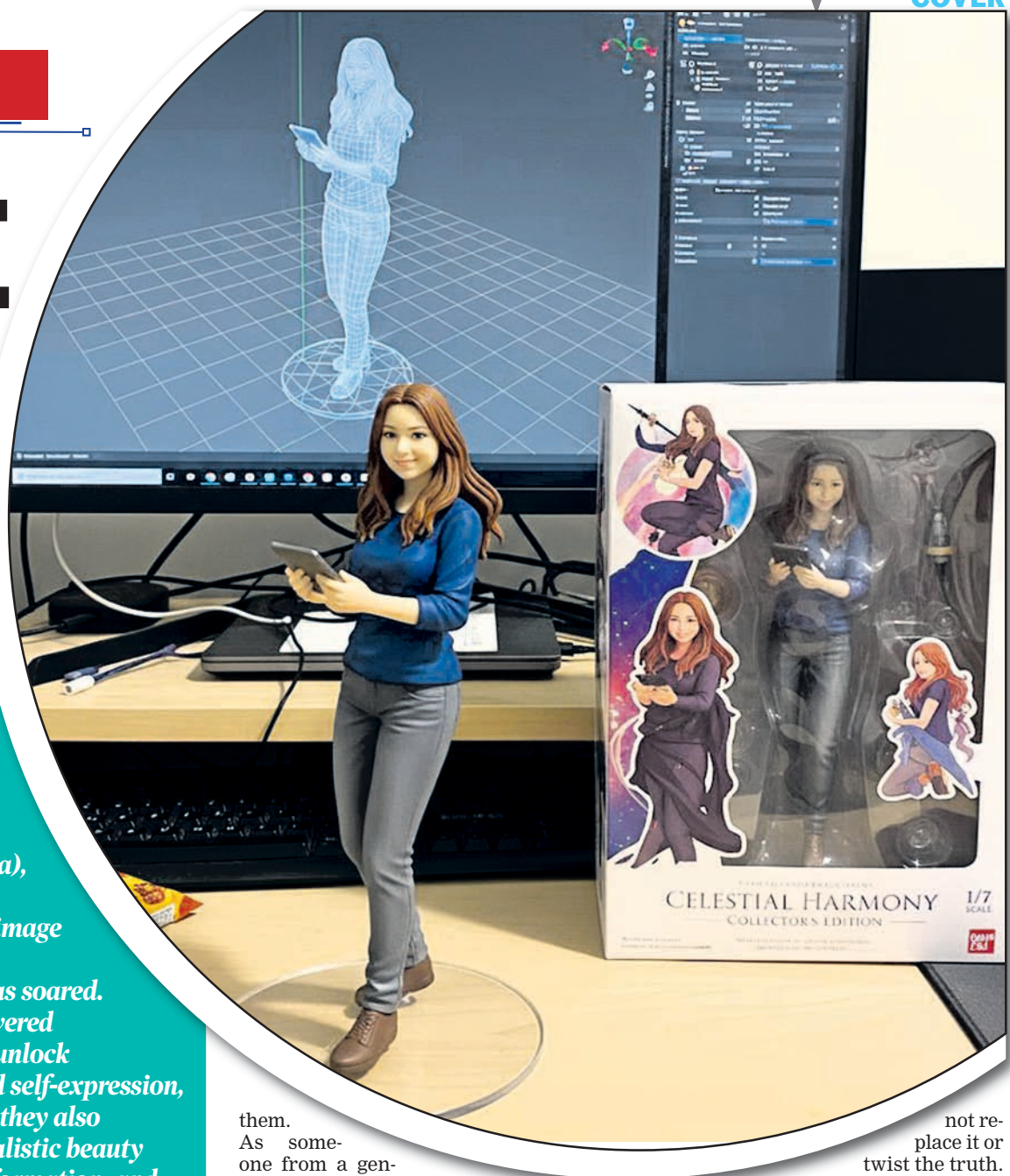
Rahul Jena, 16, +2 first year student from Sarala Residential College, Kakatpur, Puri, says "Honestly, I think this whole AI photo editing trend is one of the coolest things to happen in recent times. I remember how, back in school, editing photos was something you either had to spend hours on or leave to professionals. But now, with these apps anyone can transform their pictures in just a few taps. It's not about making everything look perfect or flawless—it's about expressing yourself, experimenting with styles, and having fun with the way you present yourself to the world. For me, it's empowering. I can try out different looks,



With the launch of Gemini 2.5 Flash Image (Nano Banana), Google's cutting-edge image model, user excitement has soared. While AI-powered editing tools unlock creativity and self-expression, experts warn they also amplify unrealistic beauty ideals, misinformation, and privacy threats—eroding authenticity and mental well-being in an increasingly altered digital world

play with lighting, or give my photos an artistic touch without worrying about technical skills or expensive software. It helps boost confidence, especially for those who are shy or self-conscious. Social media used to feel intimidating because of the pressure to look a certain way, but now it's more about creativity and sharing moments in a way that feels authentic to who we are."

Jena further shares, "I also believe this trend is encouraging people to be more open-minded and experimental. Everyone's expression of beauty is unique, and AI tools allow us to celebrate that diversity. Of course, we should be mindful and responsible while using these tools—but fear shouldn't stop us from exploring



them. As someone from a generation that's growing up with technology at its fingertips, I feel this trend is helping break barriers. It is bringing art, technology, and personal expression together in a way that's accessible to all. I'm excited to see where this goes next and how it'll continue to shape the way we communicate, create, and connect online."

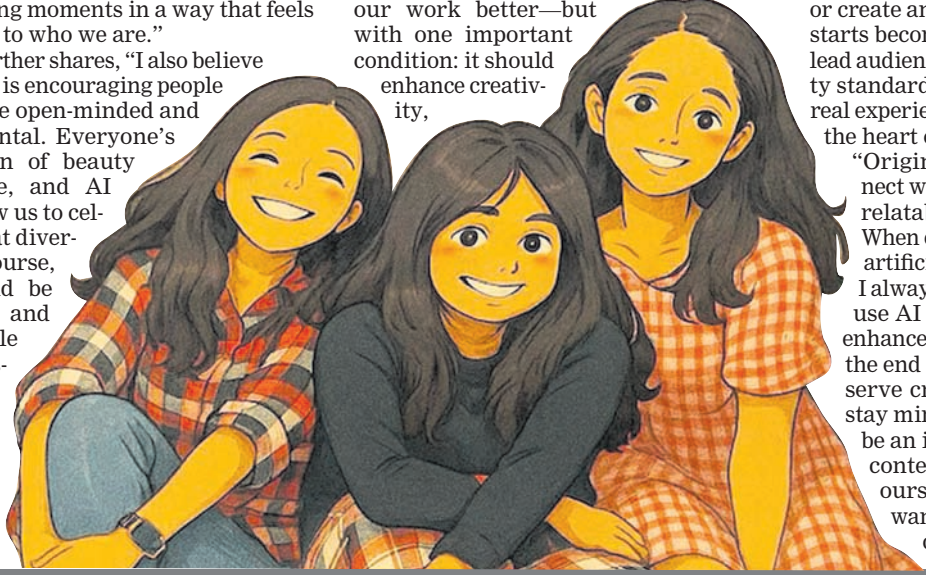
'Technology should serve creativity, not define it'

Priyanka Sahoo, a 24-year-old YouTuber from Rourkela, says, "As a content creator, I'm all for using technology to make our work better—but with one important condition: it should enhance creativity,



not replace it or twist the truth. AI tools are fascinating. They offer new ways to play with visuals, add effects, or fix technical flaws without needing a huge budget or team. For creators like me, that's a huge advantage. It allows us to experiment, tell stories in new ways, and deliver polished content that grabs attention. I believe we need to draw a clear line between using AI for enhancement and using it to distort reality. When we edit a video or image, it's okay to improve lighting, remove background noise, or add a filter that matches the mood—but when AI is used to completely change a person's face or create an illusion that doesn't exist, it starts becoming problematic. It can mislead audiences, promote unrealistic beauty standards, and shift focus away from real experiences and emotions, which are the heart of storytelling.

"Originality matters. Viewers connect with content that feels genuine, relatable, and crafted with effort. When everything looks too perfect or artificial, it can lose that connection. I always encourage fellow creators to use AI as a tool, not as a crutch—to enhance their vision, not replace it. At the end of the day, technology should serve creativity, not define it. If we stay mindful of how we use AI, it can be an incredible asset in elevating content while staying true to ourselves and the stories we want to share," Sahoo concludes.



Gemini

The last 27,000

From half a million to a few thousands in just a century, rhino populations are in free-fall. Relentless poaching—driven by the black market demand for horn—claims one life every 16 hours, pushing Earth’s ancient giants ever closer to a silent extinction

World Rhino Day – September 22



PHOTO BY OLIVIER BACQUET

World Rhino Day, marked every September 22, was dreamt up in a Zimbabwean farmhouse inbox in 2011 when Lisa Jane Campbell emailed American activist Rhishja Cota-Larson a simple plea: “Can we make this bigger?”

Within months their online brainstorm became a planetary shout: “Keep the Five Alive”—white, black, greater one-horned, Javan, Sumatran.

The 2025 tally is sobering: roughly 27,000 wild rhinos remain, down from half-a-million a century ago. Yet hidden inside that bleak headline are fragile green shoots. India’s greater one-horned population has climbed from 600 to more than 3,700 in four decades. South Africa’s Kruger National Park recorded its lowest poaching figure since 2012. And in Sumatra, a female named Pahu—rescued from a mining concession—carried a foetus when veterinary scans were done last month, kindling hope for a species down to fewer than 80 animals.

The billion-keratin question

Rhino horn is keratin—compressed hair, identical to your fingernails—yet on the black market it fetches up to US \$60,000 a kilo, more than gold or uncut cocaine. The myth that it cures cancer, hangovers or turbo-charges male libido survives in Hanoi backrooms and Guangzhou clinics where chips are dissolved in red wine.

Dr. Naomi Ojuok, a Kenyan wildlife pathologist, keeps a confiscated horn on her desk like a macabre paperweight. “Same stuff you clipped off your fingers this morning,” she laughs, then turns serious. “But when demand is cultural, facts alone don’t save lives. You must replace the myth with something stronger—status, storytelling, shame.”

Crypto-cracking the cartels

At a lab in Pretoria, geneticist Dr. Cindy Harper shows a handheld device the size of a supermarket scanner. Insert a horn shaving and, within minutes, it spits out a DNA barcode. “RhODIS” (Rhino DNA Index System) now holds 200,000 genetic fingerprints, evidence that has convicted

190 poachers and traders.

The newest twist: crypto-ransom. Syndicates hack into game-reserve servers, download rhino location data, then demand bitcoin in exchange for not pulling the trigger. Conservationists have responded with military-grade encryption, decoy collars and, in one private reserve, a policy of de-horning every animal before hackers can auction the coordinates.

A village that guards a horned treasure

In northern KwaZulu-Natal (South Africa), the 8,000-strong Mbokodweni community owns 22,000 hectares of thornveld that 150 white rhinos call home. Instead of

fences, there are benefits: 10 per cent of every tourist dollar goes to clinics, school buses and a bakery that perfumes the dawn with baking bread.

Headman Bheki Zulu, whose grandfather once hunted rhino for meat, now blesses each new calf in Zulu tradition. “We don’t protect animals because whites tell us to,” he says. “We protect them because our children’s future walks on four stumpy legs.” Since the programme began, not one rhino has been lost to poaching—an anomaly in a province that averages three a week.

A date in the mud: When Tam died

Conservationists still speak of 27 May 2019 in the hushed tone others reserve for 9/11. That morning Tam, the last male Sumatran rhino in Malaysia, died in Borneo of old age and organ failure. His caretaker, veterinarian Zainal Zahari, hand-fed Tam bananas laced with painkillers as tears dripped off his surgical mask.

Tam’s passing reduced the global Sumatran population to fewer than 80, scattered in shrinking pockets of Indonesian rainforest. “When a species slips to double digits, every birth is a cathedral bell, every death a cathedral fire,” Zahari says. He is raising funds for an “assisted reproductive technology” centre—essentially rhino IVF—hoping to merge eggs from Pahu with frozen semen collected from Tam before he died. If successful, the calf will be the first Sumatran rhino born outside the wild in a generation.

What you can do

You will probably never guard a rhino at 3 a.m. or extract ovum from a 900-kilo-gam patient. But you can:

Stop buying rhino horn products: The illegal trade in rhino horn is the largest

Why is conservation necessary

Ecosystem Engineers: As mega-herbivores, rhinos graze large areas of grasslands and wetlands, preventing dense brush from overtaking the landscape and creating clearings for other plant and animal species to thrive.

Keystone & umbrella species: Rhinos are keystone species, meaning their presence is crucial for the health of their habitats. They are also considered umbrella species because conserving their large territories protects numerous other species, like elephants, tigers, and birds, that share their habitats.

Habitat Health: Their activities, such as grazing and using water bodies, help with the natural rejuvenation and maintenance of their aquatic and grassland environments.

threat to rhinos, so avoid purchasing any products made from it.

Educate others: Raise awareness about the poaching crisis and the medicinal beliefs surrounding rhino horn to reduce demand.

Donate to conservation organizations: Organizations such as WWF and Save the Rhino work to combat poaching, protect habitats, and support local communities.

Use sustainable products: Choose certified sustainable wood, paper, and palm oil products to help protect rhino habitats from illegal logging and forest conversion.



Keep the Five Alive is a slogan and initiative by the International Rhino Foundation to raise awareness and protect the world’s five living rhino species: the Black Rhino, White Rhino, Greater One-Horned Rhino, Javan Rhino, and Sumatran Rhino. The campaign highlights the critical threats of poaching and habitat loss facing these endangered animals and encourages global efforts to conserve them and their habitats.

Divya slams botox craze

Mumbai or Dubai, simply by the uniformity of results.

Divya explained why she never felt compelled to follow the cosmetic trend. "I never felt the need to succumb to beauty stereotypes. Nothing beats natural beauty and how you've been brought up. I don't believe in fillers or Botox," she said, adding that her mother never even allowed her to use bleach growing up.

Citing Kylie Jenner as an example, she argued that natural aging often looks better than artificial enhancements. Divya also rejected the use of AI to retouch her photos, saying, "Thoda imperfection toh hona chahiye. Fake images don't look like me at all."

Despite criticism of her "round face," Divya remains unfazed, emphasizing that real beauty lies in confidence and inner strength, not cosmetic perfection.

AGENCIES

Divya Khosla has never been one to hold back her opinions, and this time she's raising her voice against Bollywood's growing obsession with cosmetic procedures. In a recent interview, the *Ek Chatur Naar* actress criticised the widespread use of Botox, fillers, and prosthetics, saying these trends have made many faces "look pretty much the same." She observed that it's often possible to identify which doctor or clinic someone has visited, whether in



Malaika's fitness mantra

Actress Malaika Arora is known to lead an extremely healthy life by mostly eating clean and exercising regularly.

Giving us a glimpse into her fitness regime, Malaika dropped a string of stories on her Instagram handle Thursday. The primary post showed her performing yoga by the lakeside.

"Early to bed, early to rise. My happy place," the text on the pic read.

This was followed by a pic of her "perfect breakfast," which included an omelet, accompanied by some other healthy options.

Malaika further revealed that she uses oxygen therapy to maintain that optimal health.

Along with all this, Malaika further ensures to complete her daily step target. Her checklist further includes sun, water, sunscreen, and fresh air.

Malaika keeps on sharing fitness goals through her social media posts from time to time.

Previously, Malaika claimed that women can be desirable and powerful at every stage of life. During an exclusive interaction with this news agency, she talked about breaking stereotypes around age and glamour in the entertainment industry.

She told, "I think it's high time we let go of outdated notions that beauty belongs only to a certain age. Women can be glamorous, desirable, and powerful at every stage of life."

Malaika hopes to inspire women to embrace their authentic selves and break age-related stereotypes.



Ameesha on lost love

Ameesha Patel has opened up about a deeply personal chapter of her life, revealing that she once chose her career over love. In a conversation with Ranveer Allahbadia on *The Ranveer Show*, the *Kaho Naa... Pyaar Hai* star reflected on her first serious relationship and the difficult choice she faced at the start of her acting journey.

"I had a serious relationship in my life before I decided to join films. It was my first and only actual relationship," Ameesha shared. However, when she decided to step into cinema, her partner was unwilling to accept a life in the public eye. "That's why I chose career over love. And that was the only time," she revealed.

The actor admitted the decision left her heartbroken at 21, an age when marriage would have been considered appropriate by societal standards. But she felt it wasn't the right time.

"First, I had to find myself. Who is Ameesha? Am I just a daughter, a wife, someone to take care of the house and kitchen? I didn't want that cycle," she explained.

Her reflections highlight her pursuit of independence and self-discovery, choices that ultimately paved the way for her successful debut in 2000.

AGENCIES



Harshvardhan joins nepotism debate

Actor Harshvardhan Rane decided to share his two cents on the ongoing nepotism vs outsiders' debate.

Recently, a YouTuber shared a clip explaining how nepo babies are taking over Bollywood, citing examples of Ananya Panday, Ahaan Panday, and Janhvi Kapoor.

Giving his own spin to the clip, Harshvardhan pointed out that 7 out of 10 top stars in Bollywood at the moment happen to be outsiders.

The *Sanam Teri Kasam* actor penned on his official Instagram handle, "there is another way to look at this... what i tell myself 3 times in a day is that 7 out of top 10 stars are outsiders!!! Big fan of your objective take on the industry @jammypants4."

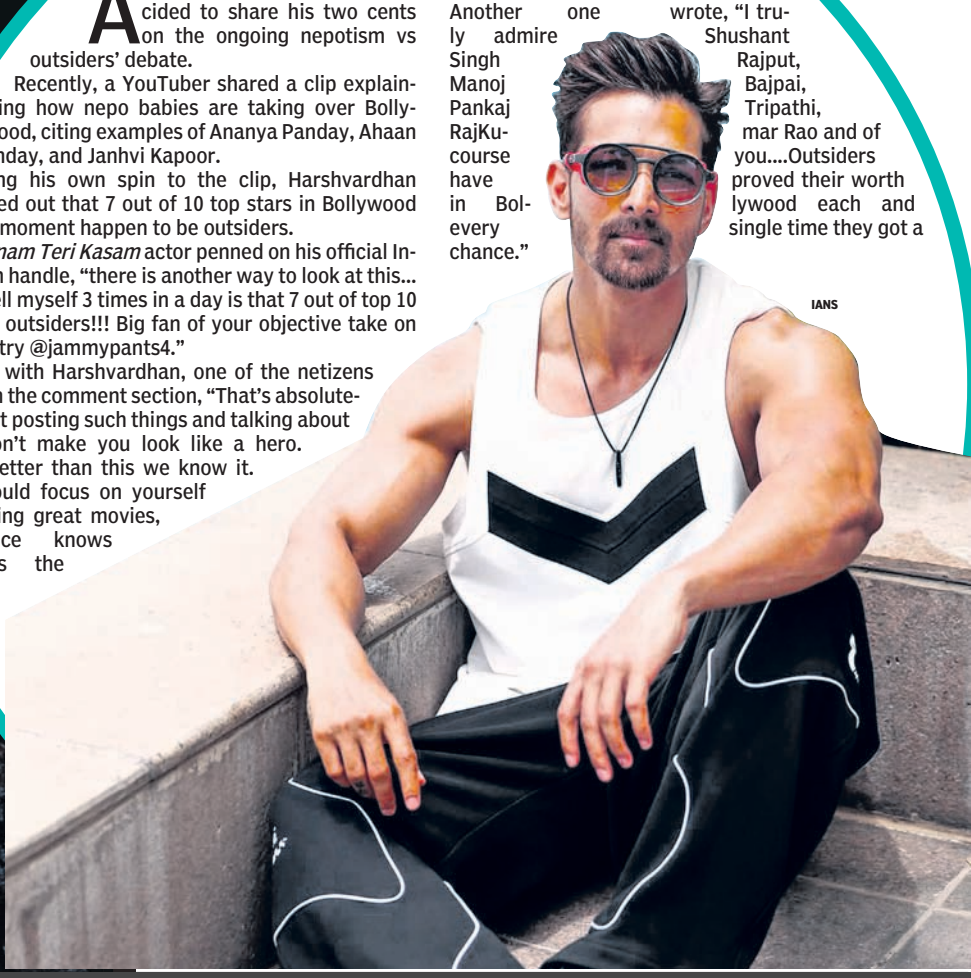
Agreeing with Harshvardhan, one of the netizens penned in the comment section, "That's absolutely true but posting such things and talking about them won't make you look like a hero. You're better than this we know it. You should focus on yourself and doing great movies, audience knows what's the best so

you don't worry about that."

Another one wrote, "I truly admire Shushant Singh Rajput, Manoj Bajpai, Pankaj Tripathi, RajKumar Rao and of you....Outsiders proved their worth in Bollywood each and every single time they got a chance."

IAN S

IAN S



An attempt to revive portraiture



PRATEEK PATTANAİK

Since the twentieth century and the spread of mass-produced prints, popular portraiture in India has adopted Western realism. In ancient Indian art and traditional art styles, portraiture has always been on the rare side, though not entirely absent; the same is the case with Odisha. And so it is quite simple to see why most historical figures in our state are depicted in modern styles, usually oil paintings; from the 15th-century poet Sarala Dasa to the 2nd-century BCE Kharavela, popular imagination latches onto the 'photographic' style of art, diametrically opposite to the Indian schools of art which tend to capture realism in their own subtle way. However, this was not always the case. Gajapati Langula Narasingha Deba is depicted elegantly in the sculptures of Konarka; we have Pattachitra paintings as old as 1550, with portraits of kings and saints. In post-independence India, would it not be fair to revive portraiture in these indigenous artistic schools, not just among artistic circles, but also as popular depictions? That is exactly what artist Bibhu Patnaik strives to do in several of his works: reimagining historical greats of Odia culture through the native lens of Pattachitra. It would be an understatement to say that his works have been well received; they have been celebrated by both laypersons and artists.

In two recent works, Patnaik sets out to visualise the Panchasakha, five seers from the 16th-century who pioneered Odia philosophy and thought. The corpus of Panchasakha literature is as formidable in volume as it is in content. The first work depicts Balarama Dasa, the eldest of the Panchasakha, popularly known by the honorific Krupasiddha and as the author of the *Jagamohana (Dandi) Ramayana*, the first version of the *Ramayana* in Odia. Being a master of both Sanskrit and Odia, his works exhibit both pan-Indian as well as indigenous Odishan elements, and he employs both with great effect, bestowing special affection on the latter. A fearless critic of discriminatory social structures, his *Lakshmi Purana* needs no introduction. In the hinterlands, legends recount his free-spirited, character; how he would

speak with Jagannatha, challenge him point-blank; here scolding him ruthlessly, there making fun of him and then again coaxing him with the utmost affection.

How does one go about depicting such a mystical saint, notwithstanding the general lacunae of physical descriptions in erstwhile texts? Patnaik addresses this gap by consciously choosing another traditional method; in his own words, "capturing the sukma-sarira, the subtle body, in other words, the personality of the individual gleaned through diverse sources alongside the sthulasarira, the physical body."

And so Patnaik's Balarama Dasa derives from an 18th-century Pattachitra of the great deity Balabhadra as four-armed Sankarsana, from Ganjam; drawing upon the belief that Balarama was born by the grace of Shiva, traditionally considered indifferent with Balabhadra. Hence Balarama Dasa is depicted with the colour sankha, traditionally used for Shiva. Some

and armlets stand as a contrast, reminding one of his previous royal background, the life of luxury that he leaves to pursue greater good. The background is bereft of filigree, draws attention to the intricate

pasapali floor, derived from another Bhagabata Pattachitra of the Puri school. The top corners gleam through with the motifs of Chandra (the feminine element) and Surjya (the masculine element), subtly communicating that the great saint has achieved equilibrium, balancing these two forces permeating every jiva through the ida and pingala, together forming the intricate balancing act of life.

In his second work, Bibhu depicts Atibadi Jagannatha Dasa, the famed author of the *Odia Bhagabata*. The popularity of this work can be understood from an 1800s quote by Bhudev Mukherjee, inspector of schools, Orissa - "There is not a single Hindu village in Orissa where at least a portion of Jagannatha Das' *Bhagabat* is

center on a high pedestal; symbolic of the Muktimandapa where he held a position of great regard. The young ascetic wears only the kaupina, his golden body marked with urdhwapundra signs. The golden hue indicates that he is born from the smile of Radha, she who is brilliant as molten gold. At his feet, women bow down and sing songs with the karatala. It is interesting to note here that of the sixteen chief disciples of Atibadi, Gaura Mahadei, the wife of Prataparudra Gajapati is prominent. Women were barred from receiving initiation from saints in the culture of those days, yet Atibadi gave initiation to the queen; popular legend recounts his response to this as "I am a woman myself, Jagannatha's woman; what is the harm if I give initiation to another like me?" Indeed, looking at the Tantric heritage of Odisha, it is hardly unjustified to offer an equal position, or even prominence to women. Several medieval texts record the story of Atibadi's imprisonment on another occasion, and his physical body having morphed into that of a lady's, sheerly by the sadhana of his nari-bhava devotion. It is yet another instance of the Panchasakha's great contribution to

The diptych stands as exceptional for its layered depiction of not only the individuals, but their mutual relation. Balarama Dasa was Atibadi's Guru; in Bibhu's vision, they embody the twin elements of Shiva and Shakti. The balance of male and female elements is a hallmark of the Panchasakha school of philosophy, harkening back to the Tantric roots of Utkaliya Vaishnavism. Balarama's bhakti comes with his offering of all he has to the deity; from his temper tantrums to his overbearing love, all is offered to the deity. In this sense his bhakti is quite masculine, like Shiva; easy to annoy, easily pleased, yet firm in his meditation. Atibadi's model of bhakti, on the contrary, was very unlike Balarama's; he sought to take care of Jagannatha like a wife would look after her husband. The off-white Nepali paper shows through in Balarama's portrait, enveloping the image in a brilliance that seems to emanate from the figure. In Atibadi's case, the feminine bhakti of the saint is reflected by the bright red surrounding him. The brilliance of the artist shines through in this careful choice of colors, manifesting a subtle theological detail with clues from tradition; for white stands for Shiva and red for Shakti in Odishan tradition.

In the process of concentrating a host of symbolic elements, the artist captures the essential character of the two saints to a degree that can seldom be captured by other approaches. This is the true spirit of Odishan classical painting and the Pattachitra tradition.

The reviewer is Odissi musician and researcher

**Eminent artist
Bibhu Patnaik's recent
works on two saints - -
Balarama Dasa and Atibadi
Jagannatha Dasa - celebrate
the true spirit of Odishan
classical painting and the
Pattachitra tradition**



Saint-Poet Balarama Dasa, Gouache
on Nepali paper, 42 x 29.5 cm, 2025



Poet Atibadi Jagannatha Dasa, Gouache
on Nepali paper, 42 x 29.5 cm, 2025

works mention Balarama was an incarnation of Narada; Patnaik incorporates a near-extinct three-leaved Jata that is used exclusively for Narada in ancient murals. It is said that as a kid, Balarama would play with snakes fearlessly; Patnaik incorporates the nagabandha border and positions the jata like the hood of a cobra, reinforcing the serpentine association. The saint sits calmly at the center with a pothi held between his palms in an entrancing mudra. With its muted palette, the painting radiates calm and peace, a mystic silence enveloping the canvas. The reclusive character of the saint shines through in his simple attire, wearing the cotton Boirani Luga; the golden earrings

not kept and daily recited." A great expert in Odissi music, Atibadi's charming diction, penchant for simplicity and inherent musicality has made his life's work the lifeline of the Odia people. And so for Atibadi's depiction, Patnaik delves into portraits of the saint preserved in his institutions, notably the Bada Odia Matha of Puri. Across stone, wood and Pattachitra, his depictions show great conformance in terms of iconography. With a firm base in these Puri sources, Bibhu reimagines Atibadi with subconscious inspiration from the Ganjam school of Pattachitra, harmoniously integrating these two characters for an even richer idiom. Framed by an elegant pidha shrine, Atibadi sits at the

Mansa Musa: The wealthiest man ever lived

Modern tycoons can buy super-yachts, islands or social networks but none can buy 30% of the planet's commodity supply for a century. When adjusted for inflation and relative share of global GDP, African emperor Musa, who turned Mali into an economic super-power and became the benchmark for impossible wealth, eclipses Rockefeller, Augustus Caesar and today's tech oligarchs

Larry Ellison sits on top with \$393 billion, thanks to Oracle's AI-fuelled cloud boom—enough to elbow past Elon Musk, Mark Zuckerberg and Jeff Bezos for now. Yet fold history into the ledger and the quartet's combined fortune shrinks to pocket change. Sunday POST time-travels to the 14th-century Mali Empire to size up Mansa Musa I, the emperor whose inflation-adjusted gold pile still makes today's mega-rich look like mere millionaires.

A caravan that shook Cairo
In 1324, a lone traveller could stand on the rooftops of Cairo and watch the price of gold collapse before his eyes. The cause was not a market crash or a war, but a pilgrimage. Riding at the head of 60,000 courtiers, slaves and camel-drivers came Mansa Musa I, emperor of Mali, flinging so many gold-dust gifts into the streets that the dinar lost 20 % of its value and took twelve years to recover. Medieval chroniclers thought they were hallucinating. Modern economists call it the only documented case of one man triggering regional inflation simply by existing.

The empire built on dust and salt
Born around 1280 into the Keita dynasty, Musa inherited a realm that already stretched from the Atlantic seaboard to the Sahara's edge. What made Mali unimaginably rich was geology: half of the Old World's gold

came from its riverbeds, while the northern mines at Taghaza produced slabs of salt literally worth their weight in gold. By taxing every ounce that crossed his borders—on caravans bound for Tunis, Tripoli or Alexandria—Musa turned dust into sovereign wealth centuries before the term was invented. Some historians estimate the empire supplied a third of global GDP at its peak.

A trillionaire who kept no spreadsheet
Assigning a modern net worth to Musa is folly: he owned land equal to Western Europe, commanded 100,000 soldiers, and personally approved every nugget that left his realm. Conservative guesses hover around US \$400 billion; viral lists throw out "\$400 trillion" because no spreadsheet can cage him. The truth is that Musa's fortune was denominated in sovereignty, not currency. When you can build a mosque in every town you sleep in, or commission Andalusian architects on a whim, money ceases to be numbers and becomes gravity.

Timbuktu: The first start-up hub
Flush with bullion, Musa invested in human capital. At home he imported Granada's finest architects to build



PIC : BBC

Djinguereber, the university-mosque whose libraries still stand. Foreign students received full scholarships—paid in gold—to study Qur'anic law, astronomy and mathematics. By 1330, Timbuktu housed more books per capita than any European city, and the Sankore madrasah graduated scholars who later taught in Fez, Cordoba and Cairo. Musa was branding centuries before nation-states: the desert city became shorthand for "impossible wealth," appearing on European maps years before most Europeans could pronounce "Mali."

The 4,000-mile commute that rewrote geography
The 1324 hajj was partly devotion, partly IPO road-show. Starting from Niani on the upper Niger, Musa's retinue crossed today's Mauritania, Algeria and Libya, feeding 12,000 servants fresh fish couriered from the Atlantic. In Cairo he loaned the sultan 50,000 dinars at zero interest—then tipped the royal staff the same amount again. By the time he reached Mecca, every spice merchant from Samarkand to Venice knew a new economic super-power had logged on. A Catalan atlas drawn just twelve

years later depicts Musa enthroned, orb in one hand, gold nugget in the other—the first time a sub-Saharan monarch became a global logo.

The philanthropy that cost a dynasty
Generosity on such a scale was soft power, but it was also leverage. To fund the caravan Musa borrowed against future tax receipts; when he returned he raised transit tolls, squeezing traders who had grown rich on his outbound giveaways. The same scholars he patronised began questioning whether a Muslim ruler should hoard bullion while subjects starved during Sahelian droughts. By the late 1330s, rebel cities in Gao and Takedda were testing imperial nerves, and after Musa's death in 1337 the empire slowly fragmented—proof that even trillionaires cannot repeal the business cycle.

Legacy: The yardstick no billionaire can reach
Modern tycoons can buy super-yachts, islands or social networks; none can buy 30 % of the planet's commodity supply for a century. When adjusted for inflation and relative share of global GDP, Musa eclipses Rockefeller, Augustus Caesar and today's tech oligarchs. More importantly, he re-defined wealth as cultural leverage: universities instead of vaults, trade routes instead of ticker symbols. Every time Forbes crowns a new richest person, Twitter memes resurrect the king who gave away so much gold he broke the economy—reminding us that the scoreboard Musa played on no longer exists.

Epilogue: The invisible fortune
Today, the Musa story still glitters because it is impossible to verify. No balance sheets, no tax returns—only accounts of travellers dazzled by a monarch who turned sand into scholarships and caravans into quantitative-easing. Perhaps that is the ultimate luxury: to be so wealthy that history remembers the spending, not the number.

OP DESK