

#JKK

Lokrang: Myriad Hues of Folk Culture

The 25th edition of Jawahar Kala Kendra's popular annual folk cultural festival 'Lokrang' is witnessing the performance of a whopping 3000 artistes from as many as 22 states of the country across 11 days. Around 170 artisans are also showcasing their handicrafts in the National Handicraft Fair in the Shilpgram area.



Chari dance.



Tusharika Singh
Freelancer
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dressed to the audience related to the folk art and culture of the states during the performances. The audience members who answer correctly are also being given prizes.

National Handicraft Fair at Shilpgram

The handicraft fair at Shilpgram has on display various products intricately hand-crafted by artisans. Many of these artisans are also national and state award winners. Since Diwali is just around the corner, visitors can be seen buying various home decor products like wall hangings and traditional textiles such as applique, batik, zari, bandhej etc. There are many takers of jewellery and accessories too. Furniture, blue pottery, wooden toys, paper mache products etc. are also generating interest among visitors.

Kolkata's Kakoli Banerjee is showcasing her organic jewellery at the fair. From earrings to necklaces, everything is made out of seeds of fruits and dried fruits. "These seeds have been processed for over two years and this jewellery can easily live up to over 5 years," shares the artisan, while talking about her jewellery which is available in the range of INR 30 to INR 500.



A full house at the cultural performances of Lokrang.

crafts in the Shilpgram area. Here are some interesting glimpses of the festival:

A Glimpse into the Culture of Various States

In the evenings from 6.30 pm onwards, the amphitheatre of the Kendra, Madhyavarti comes alive with the music and dance performances of folk performances of various states. In all, artistes of as many as 22 states such as Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Andhra Pradesh, Himachal Pradesh, Haryana, Manipur, Gujarat etc. are participating. Many diverse dance forms like Ghoomar, Bhangra, Chari, Jhoomar, Dandiya Raas, Gangaur, Lavani, among others, are being presented at the festival. During the afternoons, the Shilpgram area of the Kendra is filled with the melodious tunes of Shehnai-nagada, Teen Dhol, Kathputli, Algoza, Behrupiya, Kalbelia, etc. This year as a fun element, various questions are also ad-



Bamboo products from Assam.

#STORY



N.N. Sachitanand
Senior journalist

"A mma, I'm hungry!" The tearful refrain from five-year-old Sujata broke Janaki's gloomy reverie. She gazed sadly at her daughter. Woe-begone eyes, dark with entreaty, implored from a hunger-pinched, grimy face. A tattered skirt, long past the garbage dump stage, barely covered the child's undernourished pumpkin belly.

Janaki smoothed the tousled, dust-encrusted curls on the girl's head and soothed, "Wait for some more time, Appa will be coming soon. He will be bringing something nice for you."

But, in her heart - of - hearts, she knew it was a hollow reassurance. It was a week since Kittu, her husband, had lost his job as a cookie in a contractor's firm. Shortage of cement and steel had forced the contractor to stop work and discharge his casual workers.

A week of unemployment! Seven long, interminable days, when the small store of ragi petered out to nothing, despite careful preparation of only thin, watery gruel. Seven exhausting days, in which she had dragged her children from pavement to pavement under the blistering sun, whining for money from cold, contemptuous and even hostile passers-by. Seven back-breaking days of frustrating search in the dust bins and waste pits of the city's restaurants and marriage halls, hunting desperately for scraps of food amidst snarling dogs and swarms of starving beggars.

"Times have changed," one of the beggars had told her. "People have no money to give us and no food to throw out."

And every evening, back in their cave-like hut of scrap iron and wooden boards, where the roof was a sieve when it rained, she would perk up at the familiar shuffle of feet heralding her returning husband, only to slump again in despair as he answered a dejected, "No luck," to her unspoken question.

Yesterday, her baby had fallen ill, with a rapidly rising fever and uncontrollable shivering. The doctor at the government clinic had prescribed some medicine. How was she to get it without money? Long ago, the last article worth pawning had been sold. The mon-

Suddenly, a woman's shrill laughter pierced the confines of the hut. And Janaki remembered! Yes, there was one avenue of income she had left unexplored. The idea had fleetingly crossed her mind in the last two days, whenever she passed by the house of the prostitute, Rangamani. But, instinctively, she had shied away from the thought. Oh no! Not Rangamani's way!

A Small News Item

eylender had since then stopped giving their credit.

Janaki had not cried since her marriage. She realized the futility of tears in a hand-to-mouth existence. But, this morning, there was a tearful appeal in her eyes as she saw her husband off. Nothing was said, but Kittu had understood the message: "You must get some money, somehow, today."

The Wait

The evening shadows added their touch of murkiness to the tawdry landscape of the slum. Familiar sounds of dusk penetrated to where Janaki sat: the snarl and whine of dogs, the raucous wail of children, the shrill curses of quarrelling women, coarse oaths from the arrack shop, the screeching blare from a transistor radio. But, the sound she wanted to hear, the shuffling footsteps of Kittu, did not reach her.

Dusk turned into night and she still awaited her husband's return. Sujata had cried herself to sleep - a sleep of hunger and exhaustion. In the last two days, the poor child had got nothing to eat except a rotten, over-ripe banana which Janaki had begged from a fruit vendor. Glancing at the child's piteous form Janaki felt a wave of helpless frustration engulf her. What could she do? Where could she go foraging for food? She had exhausted all avenues.

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Just then the baby woke up and gave a fretful cry. Janaki went anxiously towards the makeshift hammock fashioned out of an old saree. The skin of the baby was hot to the touch. It was breathing with difficulty. It urgently needed medication. What should she do? Where was Kittu?

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smuggler, came bursting into the hut crying, "Janaki! Janaki! They have got your husband. The police! Just ten minutes ago. My Kannan told me. Kittu was caught trying to pick a man's pocket in the street."

"Oh God!" she breathed. "No, not this! What shall I do now? I must go to the police station and see him. Parvathi, can you please look after Sujatha and the baby till I come back?"

"Go by all means, Janaki," assured Parvathi pityingly, "although I don't think it will be of any help to you or Kittu. Men are such fools. Don't worry about your children. I will take care of them till you return. Kittu has been taken to the thana just next to this hell-hole of ours."

At the police station, a disconsolate and badly bruised Kittu narrated a sad story. "I couldn't help it, Janaki. The whole day I went around from mill to mill, contractor to contractor, but nobody had a job for me. And then, I met these two fellows at the tea stall where I had gone to ask the proprietor for some work. As I was turning away after being refused by the proprietor, these two men came up to me and said they had a scheme by which I could make some money but it was a bit illegal. But they assured me that there was no danger of getting caught. I wanted to

refuse. But then, I remembered the plea in your eyes this morning and the sick baby and I accepted. The plan was that I should stagger against the indignant victim and during the altercation and disturbance these two would nick his pocket and that of any passers-by whose attention wandered to the fight. Unfortunately, while the two fellows vanished with the victim's purse, before I could make good my escape the victim detected his loss and collared me. And then the public thrashed me before the police came."

"What will I do, Kittu, what will I do alone now?" quavered Janaki. "I don't know," there seems to be no place in this world for the likes of us," Kittu moaned, shaking his head dejectedly.

Confronted with a pleading Janaki, the Station House Officer scolded, "Don't be foolish, woman. Your husband has been caught red-handed. Moreover, he has confessed to being part of a gang. We cannot release him now until we have nabbed the other fellows. His case will go to court in a month or so. Most probably he will get jailed for a few months."

The Hunger

The city had donned its nightly blanket of smog as Janaki wearily plodded home. The slum had gone to sleep. Only the arrack shop still excreted and swallowed up its habitual patrons. Janaki's mind was numb with despair as she automatically threaded her way through garbage heaps, stagnant pools, piles of human excreta and deep pits that littered the travesty of a lane leading to her hut.

Just as she came level with Rangamani's hut, the door opened and a man staggered out, followed by the giggle of the prostitute. Rangamani came to the doorway,



World Menopause Day

Menopause has been part of the lives of women since time began. Or at least since women lived long enough to age into it! Over time and depending on the culture, a great deal of mystery, confusion and misunderstanding has encircled this season of a woman's life. As women's health changes so significantly in midlife, World Menopause Day seeks to inform and educate about menopause, raising awareness about women should expect and encouraging them to get the help they need from health care providers and other support workers.



buttoning her blouse over her voluminous breasts.

Janaki gazed at her, at first absent-mindedly, then with the force of desperate realization. Why not? What had she to lose anyhow? What was chastity when the belly was knotted with hunger? And would chastity save her baby who was dying with fever, or feed Sujata who lay curled up and moaning with hunger? But how did one go about it? How could she sell her body? How did one approach men for the purpose? She would ask Rangamani. That's it. The prostitute, who was reputed to make a good income, would be able to advise her.

Inside Rangamani's hut, the walls were cluttered with garish calendar prints of bosomy women in various stages of undress. A half-empty bottle of booze lay on a low stool near the rumpiled bed. The bedsheets were dirty and must have last seen a washerman weeks ago.

Rangamani listened, first with curiosity, then with a contemptuous smile and finally with outright amusement at Janaki's request. With a jeering laugh, she dragged Janaki in front of the cracked and chipped dressing mirror and said, "So, you think you want a dig at my profession do you, my lady? Here have a look at yourself and then look at me and tell me - which man will pay you for the pleasure of having you, even if he is dead drunk?"

A long glance at the tall-tale mirror and Janaki was defeated. Staring back at her was a sunken -



Janaki sat staring into space - seeing nothing, feeling nothing. Only her thoughts churned in turmoil without arriving at any solution to her predicament.

eyed, prematurely wrinkled, privation ridden face, a body that was all angles and bones and breasts that were flattened out with malnutrition. Her hair was like a mass of tentacles and already streaked with the grey of worry.

The Witching Hour

Rangamani, on the other hand, was plump, heavy of breast and had a face which, if not attractive, was at least coarsely interesting. Her reflection in the mirror sneered back at Janaki. Without uttering another word Janaki shuffled out of Rangamani's hut, followed by the jeering laughter of the harlot.

Back in her own place Janaki was accosted by an anxious, impatient Parvathi: "What took you so long? My husband has already called for me twice. What happened at the police station? When will they release Kittu? Your child is very sick. You must get some medicine for it immediately."

Bleakly, Janaki gazed at her and then, listlessly recounted what she had learned at the police station. Parvathi clucked sympathetically and said, "Oh dear! How difficult it is for you! What will you do now?" She was interrupted by her husband's shout, "Paro! Paro! Hasn't Jaanaki returned yet? How long will you stay there nursing her brats?"

"I must go now," whispered Parvathi urgently, "otherwise he will get very angry and beat me. I will talk to you in the morning."

She pressed Janaki's shoulder

comfortingly and hurried away.

For a long while, after Parvathi's departure, Janaki sat staring into space - seeing nothing, feeling nothing. Only her thoughts churned in turmoil without arriving at any solution to her predicament. Her reverie was disturbed by the child, which started to cry. She started, got up and went to the hammock. She stroked the child's fevered brow. As she felt the child's face tightened into a grim resolve. Her glance went to Sujatha, curled up on the floor and stirring in hunger-ridden, troubled sleep.

Janaki then knew what she must do, had to do. She gathered up her baby in her left arm, tucked Sujatha on her right hip and slowly but unhesitant walked out of her hut.

It was, as the poet called it, the "witching hour". The arrack shop's proprietor was closing the door as the last of his customers reeled out. Ranagamani blew out her lamp and crawled into bed - alone and finished for the night.

Across the city, on the rooftop restaurant of the luxury hotel, the waiters were clearing the tables as the diners made ready to leave. In the air-conditioned study room of his big bungalow, the minister was making the final corrections in the draft of the speech he was to deliver the next day. In the secret vault of his new, glass and concrete house, the food grains dealer was locking up the substantial black-market cash of the day in a speciality concealed vault.

In the still and silent slum, an emaciated woman, with a child tucked on each hip, staggered grimly and silently towards a certain clearing.

The day after next, the local paper carried a two column spread of the minister's speech on the front page. It extolled the "Garibi Hatao" (Remove Poverty) slogan of the Prime Minister. On an inside page at the bottom, there was a small, four-line news item, stating that a slum dweller named Janaki had killed herself and her two children by jumping into the public well located in the slum.

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#ATHLETICS

These Sports Are Better For Young Athletes

Anyone who oversees a junior athlete or team-parents, coaches or trainers-should think twice about pushing them to specialize in one area too early. To allow for proper growth and development to occur, he recommends young athletes not specialize until at least their freshman year of high school.



Young athletes who participate in multidirectional sports, instead of specializing in a unidirectional sport like running, can build stronger bones that may be at less risk for bone injuries as adults, according to a new study.

The researchers examined Division I and II female cross-country runners, who often experience bone stress injuries like stress fractures.

The researchers found that athletes who ran and participated in sports that require movement in many directions-such as basketball or soccer-when younger had better bone structure and strength than those who solely ran, swam, or cycled.

The findings, published in the journal Medicine and Science in Sports and Exercise, support recommendations that athletes delay specialization in running and play multidirectional sports when younger to build a more robust skeleton, and potentially prevent bone stress injuries.

"Our data shows that playing multidirectional sports when younger versus specializing in one sport, such as running, decreased a person's bone injury risk by developing a bigger, stronger skeleton," says Stuart Warden, associate dean for research and professor in the Indiana University School of Health and Human Sciences.

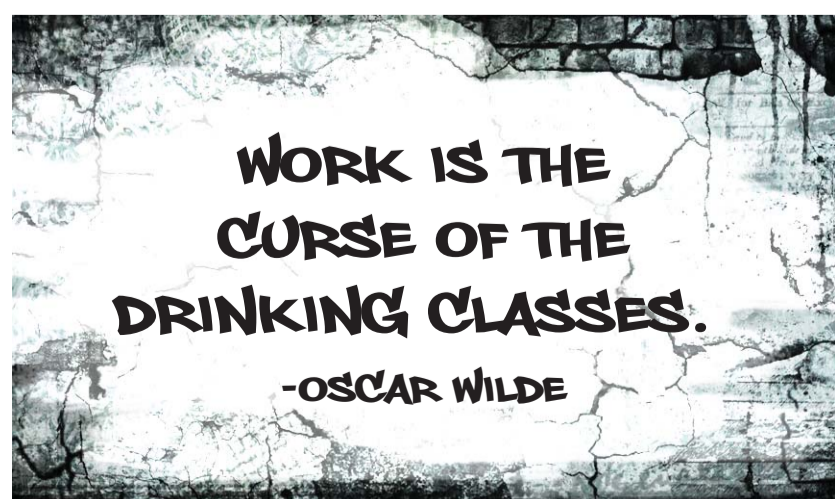
"There is a common misperception that kids need to specialize in a single sport to succeed at higher levels. However, recent data indicate that athletes who specialize at a young age are at a greater risk of an overuse injury and are less likely to progress to higher levels of competition."

Historically, Warden says, "Anyone who oversees a junior athlete or team-parents, coaches or trainers-should think twice about pushing them to specialize in one area too early. To allow for proper growth and development to occur, he recommends young athletes not specialize until at least their freshman year of high school. For athletes who already play multidirectional sports, he says it is important that they take time off for rest and recovery during the year, which can improve both bone strength and performance."



By Jerry Scott & Jim Borgman

THE WALL



BABY BLUES



ZITS



By Rick Kirkman & Jerry Scott