

The Wandering Minstrels of Orissa– Singing to Save Sea Turtles

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Operation Kachhapa engaged two *minstrels* to sing turtle songs in the coastal fishing villages of Orissa. The song was composed by Trilochan Dwivedi, Natya Taranga in the local language, *Oriya*. It was set to music by. Aditya Mohapatra, Bhubaneshwar, who is a wildlife lover and a flute player.

This team also used hand painted scrolls of:

- turtles in nesting beach
- dead turtles lying in the beach with a fishing trawler in the background
- image of Lord Vishnu in his incarnation as a turtle
- country boat and trawler showing the prohibited fishing zone of 10 kms from the coast for trawlers



A brief survey was made of the number of coastal villages and the routes to approach them. Many fishing villages could only be approached by water. The group's performances were in the villages of Ganjam, Puri and Jagatsinghpur districts in 110 fishing villages. The group went to each of these coastal fishing villages and performed the song along with the posters. The singers often stayed overnight in these fishing villages and also put up posters and stickers to spread the message of turtle conservation in the fishing villages. The posters carried conservation messages in Oriya regarding the role of the turtle in marine ecosystems and urged people to protect it. The painted scrolls were a huge attraction and many fishermen and their families showed great interest in them.



There was much interaction with the villagers in the evenings and many questions about turtles and Government. rules were put to the group. These questions were patiently answered and the group explained the rules to them. There was a problem with language at some fishing villages such as Nolia in the south where Telugu was spoken. However, the issues were conveyed by the use of the posters.

It came to light that traditional fishermen in this region were completely ignorant of the fishing regulations of the state government. They also vociferously complained about the way trawlers are affecting their livelihoods by destroying their nets. They also said that they were threatened by the trawler crew many times. At the instance of Operation Kachhapa, petitions were received from villagers of Agasti - Nuagaon addressed to the Director of Fisheries complaining of the lack of implementation of the fishing laws by the Department. Operation Kachhapa forwarded these petitions to the concerned Director. However, it is regretted that no steps have been taken towards enforcement by the Fisheries Department.

The song being sung by the minstrels was very catchy. Following the success of the song with the fishing community, it has been proposed that cassettes of this song would be made and distributed amongst these communities so that they remember the message. It may also be pointed out that this effort was the first such endeavour in the state involving the spread of a wildlife conservation message through songs and painted scrolls.

TURTLE SONG PERFORMED BY THE WANDERING MINSTRELS OF OPERATION KACHHAPA IN THE FISHING VILLAGES OF ORISSA COAST

*The Lord of the Universe, Lord Jagannath had
taken the form of turtle in the 10 avatars to
save the world*

*Catching Mandaragiri mountain he churned the
oceans and took the form of the turtle to
rescue the gods and goddesses;*

*Nowadays, cruel man is destroying the natural
world*

Without considering the pros/cons, they eat
turtle meat ;

Man never thinks that with every passing day
their numbers are decreasing

Please think once o brothers how to save our
environment ;

The turtle is a useful animal and we should not
harm it knowingly

The jellyfish which eats shrimp juveniles cause
much harm to the fishermen community ;

For the benefit of the fishermen community,
the turtle chases and gobbles up the jellyfish

If shrimps live, then fishermen survive and
shall improve their economic position;

Fishing is the profession of the fishermen and
without fish there is no life or existence of
the fishermen

By selling the fish, he obtains money and
without fish he is helpless;

The turtle is our only support and it eats
plenty of jellyfish ;

Increases shrimp juveniles which enables the
fishermen to sustain himself;

The entire world is aware of Orissa 's pride....
the turtles

Turtles are found from Rushikulya mouth to
Balasore ;

Masses of turtles come rushing to Gahirmatha
to stay and nest

Without destroying turtle eggs let us increase
their numbers ;

We should save Orissa's turtle and not
destroy their population

Since this is our race's pride , let us not
forget this fact ;

Remember remember o fishermen brothers
that government rules are not false

Motorized trawlers are supposed to fish
after a distance of 10 kms from the Shore;

They are prohibited from fishing within 10
kms of the coast

We wish to remind you of this rule which is
for big motorized boats ;

Those who do not obey this law will be surely
be punished

Caught in the nets, the turtles o brothers
sacrifice their lives day by day ;

The law provides that upto 10 kms from the
coast, country boats can fish,

Do not forget this o brothers ;

Whenever you see turtles release them o
brothers since they are our beneficial Friends;

Let us take an oath ; let us take an oath

Let us join together and take an oath ;

United we should join our hands ;

And save the turtle race together

If turtles survive we survive;

Let us be prepared for our own selves;

Chorus : If turtles survive we survive