



Shishur Sebay
To Not Feel Alone in the Universe

LIFE AT SHISHUR SEVAY

Quarterly Activity Report January – March 2022

The Pilgrimage, the Seabeach, and Inclusion

For years we talked about taking a train trip to a distant place. We knew that accessibility and disability would pose challenges. But this year, with lockdowns behind us, and a generous donor who made it possible we decided to go to Puri, an ancient historic city situated along the seabeach, a nine hour train ride from Kolkata. It was vacation and pilgrimage, the latter being of most interest to the girls.

After a lot of discussion we realized we couldn't take everyone. Our "little ones" (a euphemism we use for our girls with disabilities) were no longer little and often required two people to lift them. The four girls we left behind (with their massis and one of their teachers) were profoundly disabled, unable to feed or toilet themselves, walk, or sit, and were not fully aware of their surroundings.

But we did take Ganga and Bono, each physically impaired, but cognitively intact, able to express themselves both by eye and hand signals as well as the Tobii eye tracker. We found a 2-Star hotel with a lift, on the beach, not fancy by any means but the food was really good.

We promised ourselves to document the difficulties, because these are what need to change, and I told the girls, "These are your challenges for the future."



At Shalimar Station, where we had to carry the wheelchairs as the station is not accessible. The subway has flight of stairs and no ramps.

- Dr Michelle Harrison

Day 1 - Kolkata to Puri

Dr Harrison is our official worrier and insisted we get yellow caps (for visibility from afar) and Shishur Sevay hanging tags for all our baggage. Twenty of us headed for Shalimar station and encountered our first of many quandaries. Our train was on a platform for which we either had to take the bridge over the tracks or the subway under it, requiring more than 30 steps each way. Five of us lifted the wheelchairs one at a time and we crossed over to the platform.

Once on the train, we folded the strollers and put Ganga and Bornali in their seats. We secured them at the waist, using dupattas, so they wouldn't slide down. We had to fall back on the Indian system of jugaad or making do with what we have. It did get us thinking about how we could make it easier for them on future trips.

(Later, back home Ganga and Bono said the train ride was one of their favourite parts of the trip.)

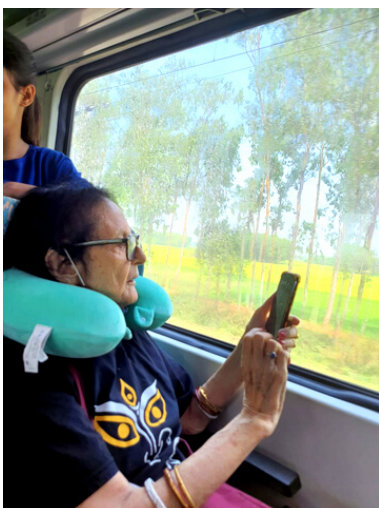
We made it to the hotel around 7:30 in the evening, freshened up, had dinner, made plans for the next day and called it a day.



Dupattas to the rescue



At Puri station



Scenes during the train journey

Day 2 - Jagannath Temple, and Beach

- Jagannath Temple in Puri, built in the 12th century CE, is very sacred to devotees of Jagannath, an avatar of Krishna. It is said that you are not a true Bengali if you haven't visited Puri and Darjeeling (5 of our girls have visited Darjeeling as part of their Karate camp). Jagannath Temple holds a special place in Hinduism. Lord Jagannath represents equality of mankind.

There were some restrictions on entry into the temple. Outside wheelchairs are not allowed and the temple inside is not accessible because of big steps, and also because of the jostling with the huge crowd. We thought of carrying them but that would be for over an hour. We decided that Ganga and Bono would stay in the hotel. Dr. Harrison as a foreigner and so couldn't go into the temple would stay back along with one of the teachers, and one of the older girls.

Later this girl wrote in her journal ***"My family went to Jagannath temple, but I did not go because I had promised my sisters that if they could not enter the temple then I will also not enter the temple."*** Some decisions and experiences were difficult but they were important for the girls as they work their way through the society and think about disability accessibility.

The girls and staff left at 4:30 in the morning for the temple to be there first thing when it opened. The girls were excited to see the gods they had read and heard so much about. They came back really satisfied and feeling blessed.



Jagannath Temple at 4:30 am

- LATER THAT MORNING we crossed the road onto the beach. We lifted and carried the wheelchairs, over the sand, close to the edge of the water. Puri is known for its strong currents and we went no further than knee deep without the life guards who were there for hires. We played with the sand, floating on an inflated tire tube for rent along with two life guards, throwing back coins as though it were a wishing sea. that the waves brought us, collecting shells that came with the waves and in the end going back to the hotel with some cotton candy.



Carrying the wheelchair across the sand on the beach



Fun at the beach



At the beach market

As it was not possible to move the wheelchairs on the sand so, Ganga and Bono, along with two teachers, stayed at the square overlooking the market and the sea. While the rest of us made our way to the sandy market.

We returned to find Ganga was angry that she could not go to the beach market. Purba Rudra (Academic Director) carried her down to the edge of the market, but once there she kept looking out to the sea where she wanted to be. We walked close to the waves and stood there for a while and promised her that we would be back at the beach again.



Bono feeling the water at her feet

- IN THE EVENING we went to the market on the beach. The girls had a good time, snacked on corn, and falooda and bought trinkets.

The market is on the sand where it was not possible to use the wheelchairs. Even we were having trouble to walking on the loose sand.



We followed her eyes and they took us to the sea

Day 3 - Raghurajpur Heritage Crafts Village and Konark Sun Temple

Raghurajpur is a village of Pattachitra artists, not far from Puri. Each of the houses in the village is painted with bright colours. The artists here paint pattachitra and at the same time carve wooden idols of Jagannath, Balaram and Subhadra.

The girls are familiar with Pattachitra since three years ago we had an artist from the Pattachitra village, Pingla, West Bengal, spend a week teaching girls how to prepare the paints and cloth as well as draw in the Pattachitra style at Shishur Sevay.



Wooden idols



Pattachitra painting



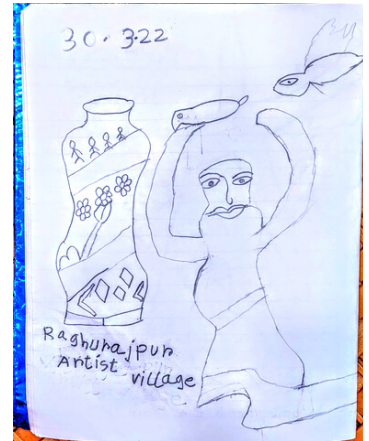
Purba noting down the details



A lady selling the handmade products



An artist shows his work while one of the girls, who has trouble with letters and writing, but loves drawing, takes her version of travel notes, in images



Dr Harrison having fun with the child



Ganga and Prapti being playful with the puppy



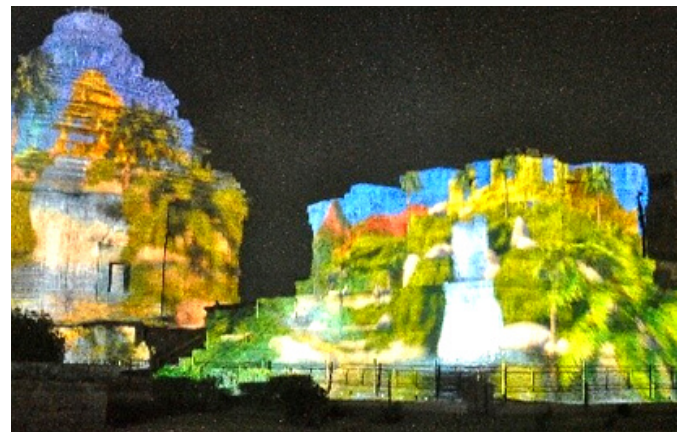
- The second half of the day was spent at the Sun Temple at Konark. First we went to the Interpretation Centre (museum) that prepares you for the visit to the 13th Century Sun Temple. The temple was fashioned as a chariot being pulled by seven horses, each depicting a day of a week. Much of the original structure has broken but much of it is undergoing restoration directed by the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI). The girls had researched the history of the temple and experienced the excitement of witnessing and feeling the actual sculptures.



Group picture in front of The Konark Temple



The girls explored the monument and took the customary picture in front of the wheels.



Light and sound show at The Konark Temple

Day 4 - Resting, Flag Changing at Jagannath Temple, Shopping and an Evening at the Beach

As per our initial itinerary this day was meant for traveling to see the temples and caves of Bhubaneswar. Almost everyone was exhausted and/or sick so we switched plans with the next day and mostly rested.

In the evening some of us went to the Jagannath Temple to see the flag changing ceremony that takes place every evening. The flag bearers free climb (no ropes) the 200 plus feet sheer tower above the sanctum sanctorum of the temple, right up to the Neel Chakra at the top. They carry the flags offered by the devotees each day and tie them to the Neel Chakra.

On this day the flags included our Bijoy's offering to the Lord. We got some prasad to bring back to those who had not gone to the temple.



Picture taken outside the temple premises

As promised, we took Ganga and Bono to the beach in the evening and most of us just sat there watching the waves break on the shore, while snacking on jhal muri, corn along with tender coconut water and tea.

Day 5 - Dhauli Shanti Stupa, Udayagiri & Khandagiri Caves, Temples in Bhubaneswar

- On this day one group travelled two hours to Bhubaneswar to visit the temples and caves.

We went to Dhauli Shanti Stupa (Peace Pagoda) which marks the place where emperor Ashoka gave up arms after realizing the horrors of war. The stupa stands as a reminder of the futility and the cost of war and the need for peace.



Dhaulti Shanti Stupa in the background, under going reconstruction

Following that we went to the rock cut caves of Udayagiri and Khandagiri, built in the 1st century BCE as living quarters for Jain monks, by King Kharavela. The relief work in some of the caves was still intact, despite the years showing living quarters, bedrooms, kitchens, drainage system that were cut from the rocks.



This represented huge rock(s) sculpted into living quarters

It being Utkal Divas (Odisha Day) the museums that we had planned to visit were closed. We went to a number of temples some as old as from the 7th century CE, many being maintained by the Archeological Survey of India (ASI). Before the trip we had discussed Kalinga temple architecture style and the various parts of the structures. They got to witness them for real.



Peeking inside Parsurameswara temple, built in the 7th century CE



We also talked about the role of Archeological Survey of India (ASI), and the work of restoration and maintenance of old monuments.

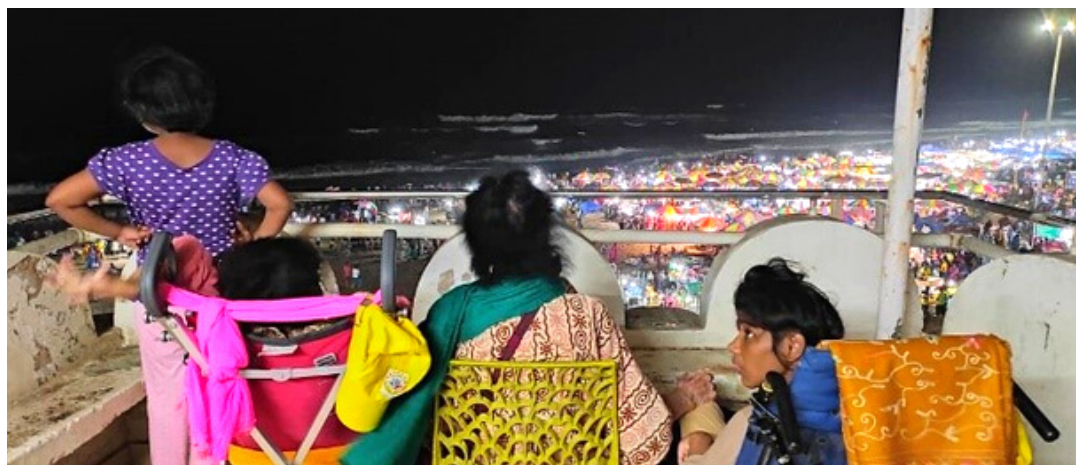


Meanwhile back in Puri we went to the beach. We hired life guards and hotel staff to carry Ganga and Bono in the wheelchairs down to the beach and four life guards to remain with us as a safety measures against the strong under toe.

As earlier we also rented chairs and an umbrella and set about having a good time. The life guards took us in the inflated tire tubes further out in the waves, and Ganga and Bono each had specially good times riding the waves.



On our last night in Puri we spent some time on the terrace of the hotel, overlooking the beach market and the Bay of Bengal beyond.



Day 6 - Puri to Kolkata

Everybody was ready to head back home. On the way we enjoyed the picturesque view of rural India.

We worried about accessibility at the Shalimar Station because of the stairs but were able to rent a trolley that could take us and our baggage to an accessible crossing usually closed to the public.

Once out of the station we packed ourselves into the waiting bus and headed back to Shishur Sevay. Everyone was happy to be home at Shishur Sevay and especially to hug the girls who had stayed behind.

THE IMPACT

- We had planned a wonderful trip where the girls could enjoy the beach, worship one of the four *Dhams* according to Hinduism, and witness historic places of Indian culture and heritage.
- Strengthening of the Indian identity - As abandoned children they may not be able to name their past two generations but in visiting these historic sites they see first hand what their ancestors created and built. They understand that these are their ancestors and they are their descendants.
- For the most part we managed the challenges of disability with a lot of teamwork and flexibility so that we could meet the very needs of each girl.
- We arrived home on Saturday evening, rested on Sunday, and Monday began the intense preparation of opening our new school, Children's Smart Centre, a free inclusive playschool for the community.

Foreign Contribution

Account Name: Childlife Preserve Shishur Sevay
SBI New Delhi Main Branch, 11 Parliament
Street, New Delhi - 110001
FCRA Current Account No: 40108969339
IFSC Code: SBIN0000691
SWIFT Code: SBININBB104

Domestic Contribution

Account Name: Childlife Preserve Shishur Sevay
RBL Bank Limited, New Alipore Branch
Account No: 309013832148
IFSC Code: RATN0000280

ONLINE DONATION

[U.S. Donation : friendsofshishursevay.org](http://friendsofshishursevay.org)

Friends of Shishur Sevay is a 501(c)(3) not-for-profit organization

[Indian Donation : shishursevay.org](http://shishursevay.org)

All Donations toward Childlife Preserve Shishur Sevay are tax deductible under 80G