Odisha has a rich history, heritage and culture. There is so much about Odisha that the world yearns to know.

**How do we know something?**

We can learn about something and earn knowledge by reading, experiencing or being taught or informed.

In the words of journalist and environmentalist, Nyadikira Amooti: “Only when people are informed, will they be aware. Only when they are aware, will they take action, and only when they take action will species and the environment be saved.”

Amooti was referring to the environment, but his words are true for any and every subject or issue. Right information is needed for the correct awareness and effective action.

What if someone (either out of ulterior motive or due to ignorance) misinforms us regarding something? What if that person is an influential personality or a scholar? Then, their words and beliefs (though wrong) are considered to be the gospel truth. People, who question such misleading information, are questioned and then suppressed or silenced. Later, other people do not even make an effort to investigate or learn the reality as they simply accept what is popularly believed to be the ‘truth’. Over the years, the wrong information becomes prevalent and is considered true.

**The ‘Rasagola’ Case**

Rasgulla or Rasagola, a syrupy dessert prepared using chhena (cottage-cheese), has been in the news for long, especially from the year 2015. Odisha has enough historical records and evidence that clearly prove that this sweet has originated in the land of Jagannath. But, many are yet to learn/know/accept/believe that Rasagola has been associated with the Shree Jagannath Temple culture and Ratha Jatra (the world famous Rath Yatra/ Car Festival) of Puri, Odisha for centuries.

**Rasagola Brand Recall**

Many books like *The Penguin Food Guide To India* among others state that Odia cooks introduced the Rasagola in West Bengal.

Quiz-books had this information. Still, people were/are either unaware or unwilling to accept this. Rasagola has been and still is being credited to Kolkata and West Bengal.
Rasagola is a precious brand. Over the years, Bengal has smartly branded and marketed this sweet as their sweet creation! Bengali journalists, writers and historians have written many articles and books supporting the view of this so-called “Bengali invention”. Just because a thousand people say/write something, it does not make a wrong right.

A law of propaganda is- “Repeat a lie often enough and it becomes the truth”.

But, “The truth is still the truth even if no one believes it. A lie is still a lie, even if everyone believes it.”

**Rasagola Brand Perception**

‘Seeing is believing’. If X has invented Z, and Y promotes, sells and markets Z, the public associates Y with Z. But, does the reality that X has invented Z change? That explains why Bengal is associated with Rasagola though Rasagola’s place of invention is Odisha. People generally tend to believe what’s served in front them.

In Hindi, it is said- ‘Jo dikhta hai, wo bikta hai.’ What can be seen, sells. Who is selling it and how it is being sold also counts.

If one is silent, pays no attention, and takes no care or action, others will seize the opportunity and capitalize and claim ownership.

As per a Sanskrit Shloka- ‘Na hi suptasya sinhasya pravishanti mukhe mrugaha’. Deer do not enter into the mouth of a sleeping lion. There is a popular Odia saying- ‘Soila pua ra bhaga nahin’. The sleeping son has no share.

**Rasagola Brand Awareness**

I was in school when I got to learn from my mother that Odisha is the birthplace of the Rasagola. My mother told me about Rasagola’s connection with Niladri Bije, the last day of the Ratha Jatra. My grandmother too shared many stories about Lord Jagannath and Odisha’s culture. They are no more in this world, but their
words are with me. Many such ‘witnesses’, ‘advocates’ and ‘judges’ are no more, having died. Imagine how strong Odisha’s case would have been had her writers and researchers undertaken serious documentation about Rasagola before. The printed words are trusted. But, simply having evidence is not enough. The world needs to be made aware and informed. What will the present day parents, who are not aware of our traditions and rich cultural heritage, share with their kids? On Niladri Bije, we still offer Rasagolas to the deities as per our custom. But, how many people know about this?

The questions that have been troubling me ever since I became aware about Rasagola’s cultural link with Odisha are:

- Why is Odisha not given credit for the invention of Rasagola?
- Why did not anyone object when they wrote ‘Inventor of Rasagola’ on their shop in Kolkata?
- How can we prove to the world that Odisha is the birthplace of the Rasagola?
- When will Odisha earn her rightful credit for the Rasagola?
- Why is Rasagola still shrouded with ‘controversy’?

50-100 years ago, had Odisha been proactive and taken cognizance and action regarding the above, there would have been no ‘controversy’ and the subsequent misinformation would have been nipped in the bud.

#RasagolaDibasa

On March 18, 2015, we proposed the celebration of #RasagolaDibasa.

Dr. Anita Sabat @anitaexplorer - 18 Mar 2015

Replying to @BBSRBuzz

@BBSRBuzz I feel we should have #RasagolaDibasa too. Let everyone know that Odisha deserves credit. dswet @nishit_budha @sud @coding_ansa

We felt that #RasagolaDibasa initiative on social media will spread awareness that the Rasagola originated in Odisha and celebrating it on Niladri Bije will inform everyone about this centuries-old ritual of Lord Jagannath. We were united for the Rasagola Dibasa campaign as we saw this as an opportunity to settle the Rasagola origin debate once and for all.

The Maiden #RasagolaDibasa Celebration

We decided July 30 2015, the Niladri Bije of the Nabakalebara Ratha Jatra, for the celebration of the maiden #RasagolaDibasa on social media. Through a series of tweets and blog posts, public support was garnered. Many others on social media shared our views and supported this movement. Rasagola Dibasa was totally an initiative of our enthusiastic Odia group on Twitter.
Through public participation, we shared information about Rasagola online. #RasagolaDibasa hashtag trended on Twitter on July 30, 2015. Odia newspaper, Sambad, and FM Radio Choklate, and confectioners of Pahala, celebrated a Rasagola exhibition-cum-awareness event in Bhubaneswar and in Pahala. Eminent sand artist, Sudarsan Pattnaik, heeded to our request to make a sand sculpture on Puri Beach depicting Niladri Bije.

The maiden Rasagola Dibasa celebration, true to its intention, sparked nationwide debate and participation. Starting 2015, #RasagolaDibasa is being celebrated every year on the Tithi of Niladri Bije in the lunar calendar. The date varies every year as per the lunar calendar. The second Rasagola Dibasa was celebrated on 17th of July 2016, the third was celebrated on July 6th 2017, and the fourth Rasagola Dibasa celebration was on July 25th 2018. Rasagola Dibasa is on July 15 this year (2019).

Many articles were written and published in newspapers, magazines and online portals, videos were shared, and TV debates were conducted about Rasagola. Many unknown facts came to light. In September 2015, the Odisha Govt. decided to set up expert committees to research and collect evidence. On July 2016, Dr. Asit Mohanty submitted a report over hundred pages with supporting documents that Rasagola originated in Odisha.

Research shows that Rasagolas have existed in Odisha from centuries- even before the
birth of Calcutta city. Else, the word Rasagola would not have been present in 15th Century Odia text when it is claimed to be “invented in Calcutta, Bengal in 1868”.

**Dandi Ramayana – Late 15th Century**

The late 15th Century *Odia Ramayana* written by Balaram Das mentions Rasagola. Balaram Das’s Ramayana is known as *Dandi Ramayana*. It is also known as *Jagamohana Ramayana* as Balaram Das composed and sang it at the Jagamohana of the Puri Jagannath Temple. Its ‘Ayodhya Kanda’ has a list of many Odia food preparations- chhena and chhena-based products including the Rasagola.

As per the description, after Rama left for the forest, Bharata and Shatrughana went to bring him back. On their way, they accepted the hospitality of sage Bharadwaj, who served them many dishes including dudhachhena (cottage-cheese prepared from milk) and chhena items like chhenapuri, chhenaladu, Rasagola, and rasabali among others.

**Utkala Deepika - 1892**

Shri Fakir Mohan Senapati, father of modern Odia Literature, published a book titled *Utkala Bhramanam* (Utkala Travelogue- Utkala refers to Odisha and Bhramana means tour) in 1892. The book-review was published in ‘Utkala Deepika’ dated August 27, 1892.

Referring to *Utkala Bhramana* as an “excellent Odia book”, Fakir Mohan has written that it has “chuda (flattened rice) & Rasagola” too.

**Bali Jatra - 1893**

A poem *Bali Jatra* was published in the weekly *Indradhanu* in 1893. In his description of Cuttack’s famous fair, the writer of the poem, Damodar Pattanayak has described Rasagola along with other attractions found in the fair. In the mentioned Gudia shop of the 1893 Bali Jatra,
confectionery like ladu, Rasagola, barafi, jalapi, tejapatra podapistaka, kanchagola, sarapuli, malapua, mohanabhoga, lalmohana etc. were available.

It is evident that Rasagola was available and popular in 1893 in Bali Jatra, the famous fair of Odisha. Bali Jatra is being celebrated annually from many centuries in Cuttack, Odisha, and even today there are stalls selling Rasagolas there.

Rasagola Tradition

Rasagola has been traditionally offered as Bhoga to Goddess Lakshmi (Sridevi) at Shree Jagannath Temple of Puri on Niladri Bijë, the last day of the Ratha Jatra. Goddess Lakshmi gets upset because Her husband, Shree Jagannath goes on Ratha Jatra, a nine-day long sojourn to His aunt’s place at Gundicha Temple with His siblings and without taking Her along. After the Ratha Jatra, when it is time for the deities to re-enter the Temple on Niladri Bijë, She allows Lord Balabhadra and Devi Subhadra to enter. However, She locks Jay Vijay Dwar, one of the temple gates, and prevents Lord Jagannath and His convoy from re-entering the sanctum sanctorum of the Temple.

There is a ritualistic conversation known as ‘Bachanika’ between the divine couple. Then, Lord Jagannath offers Rasagola. This is called ‘Manabhanjana’ (the
appeasement of Goddess Lakshmi by the offering of Rasagola). Each year, this forms part of the Niladri Bije. Niladri Bije marks the return of the deities to the temple after the Ratha Jatra festival. Niladri refers to Shree Jagannath Temple and Niladri Bije means ‘arrival of the God’. Niladri Bije is the only day of the year when devotees offer Rasagolas as Bhoga to Lord Jagannath. This is a continuing tradition from several centuries. This observance marks the end of the Ratha Jatra festival.

Rasagola is also clearly mentioned in the list of bhogas of Shree Jagannath Temple, Puri. ‘Bhitarachha Seba’ is mentioned in Serial No.4 of the list of ‘Sebaks, Pujaris and other persons employed for or connected with Seba-Puja’ of the Shree Jagannath Temple. As per the rituals of Niladri Bije, the Rasagola Bhoga is traditionally offered to Goddess Lakshmi on behalf of Shree Jagannath. As per Record of Rights, this is the duty of Bhitarachha Sebaka. It is mentioned in the Page-15 of the Bhitarachha Sebara Niyama.

The English translation of the selected text is as follows:

“As Jagannath proceeds to His Singhasana from the Ratha, he (Bhitarachha) unties the marriage-knot of Rukmini and Jagannath. He offers Dahipati (curd & khoa), Ghasa (scented-water), Bidiya paan, Manohi (food-offering) and Bhoga.”

Traditionally and, as per Record of Rights, Tadhau Karan Sebaka is the record-keeper of
Shree Jagannath Temple, Tadhau Karan Sebaka has furnished an ancient record related to palm-leaf manuscript, the text of which is copied to ancient diary.

The text of Page- 104 of Tadhau Karan Sebaka’s diary clearly states that “Rasagola is the Bhoga of Niladri Bije.”

“Hereafter Prasad is offered and ‘bandapana’ (lamp-offering) is performed, and Rasagola Bhoga is offered.”

Rasagola Special-Cover

A palanquin-carried special-cover for Rasagola - ‘Rasagola in SriJagannathji’s Cuisine’, sharing info about Niladri Bije, was released by the Department of Posts on Dola Purnima in March 2018.

Many “Rasa” and “Chhena” Sweets of Odisha

The Odia word ‘rasa’ means ‘juice’, ‘relish’, ‘flavour’ or ‘savour’. ‘Rasa’ refers to the ‘taste of something’. In Odisha, ‘rasa’ is intrinsically linked and present in so many spheres—food, literature, geographical places, conversations...

Apart from the Rasagola, Odisha has many sweets starting with the word ‘rasa’ like Rasabara, Rasakora, Rasakhai, Rasabali, Purnachandra Odia Bhasakosha, Volume VI, Gopal Chandra Prahrabaraj, Page-7013

Rasagola, Rasakora and Rasakhai, Purnachandra Odia Bhasakosha, Volume VI, Gopal Chandra Prahrabaraj, Page-7013
Rasaphena, Rasakadamba, Rasaladu etc. Pages 7007-7020 of the Volume VI of *Purnachandra Odia Bhasakosha* (Purnachandra Odia Dictionary) list words starting with ‘rasa’. This dictionary, with 1,85,000 words and their meanings in four languages, is the result of three decades of dedicated work by Gopal Chandra Praharaj (1874-1945).

Many Odia sweets like Chhenaladu, Chhenamanda, Chhenabada/Chhenabara etc. have been traditionally prepared from chhena and other ingredients from centuries.

The **Chhappan Bhoga** of Shree Jagannath in Puri Temple in Odisha is not just limited to a fixed quantity of ‘fifty-six i.e. 56’ types of Bhoga daily; the number varies as per festive occasions. Mahaprasad constitutes of more than a hundred dishes including many Chhena dishes like Rasagola and Dahi-Rasagola. The general public is not aware about the Bhoga and the elaborate rituals. 115 varieties of Bhoga of Shree Jagannath Temple were on display in an exhibition held on 24th December 2017 at Bhubaneswar.

**Chhena**, the main ingredient used for preparation of Rasagola and other dishes, is not of ‘foreign origin’. Contrary to the belief that Portuguese have taught the art of Chhena preparation, cottage-cheese dishes have been prevalent in the Puri Temple much before the Portuguese visited India. Though some argue that it is “sacrilege to offer curdled milk to Gods”, Chhena dishes have been a part of Mahaprasad for long.

The dishes that are being offered to Lord Jagannath have had centuries-old historical and cultural association. All food-items are prepared with great care by following ancient customs. As per Puri Temple’s strict rituals and
customs, only the dishes prepared using indigenous vegetables, fruits and grocery are allowed. That explains why foreign items, not native to our land, viz. chilly, potato, tomato etc., are still not being used to prepare Mahaprasad. Had chhena been of foreign origin and not been indigenous, Rasagola would never have been offered as Bhoga.

‘Khiramohana’, ‘Khira Mohana’, or ‘kheer mohan’ has created much confusion. Whenever Odias try to share the reality about Rasagola, Bengalis and those who believe in their story, argue that ‘white’ Rasgulla belongs to Bengal, while the ‘brown’ Khiramohana is of Odisha. The Wikipedia page about Khiramohana, has the link of a report published in the Times of India on July 6, 2015 that states- “the precursor to the rasgulla was probably the kheer mohan, which was invented in Odisha and was offered to the deities at the Jagannath Temple in Puri.” Other news-reports share that it was “known as Khira mohan due to its almost white appearance back in the 11th century” and that this Chhena sweet dish “was offered” earlier. However, consultation with Jagannath Temple servitors and Jagannath culture experts reveals that there is no mention of ‘kheer mohan’ in ‘religious texts and temple records’, rather ‘Rasagola’ Bhoga is mentioned that is still being offered on Niladri Bije every year as per the continuing tradition.

‘Khir Mohan’ is sold in Odisha – it is the brand name of the popular brown variant of Rasagola sold by Bikalananda Kar’s sweets, a famous confectionery seller. Perhaps, this may have caused the association of Khiramohana with Odisha. In the birthplace of Rasagolas, varieties of Rasagolas are found- white & light brown/ saffron too.

**Rasagola Brand Spelling And Pronunciation**

Presently multiple spellings are used for Rasagola viz.- Rosogolla, Rasogolla, Rasagulla, Rassogolla, Rasogulla, Rasgolla, Rashogolla, Rosgulla, Rasgoola, Roshogulla, Rossogolla, Roshgola etc. Confused about how many ‘S’ or ‘L’ to use in the spelling ? Why pronounce Rasagola in any other way ? Why allow multiple spellings of Rasagola ? For brand communication, Rasagola must be spelled the same all across our state. All must use the same English spelling of Rasagola online & offline. First step for branding and marketing is to- **Use a uniform spelling of RASAGOLA. #RasagolaDibasa** has been an attempt to stress on the Odia spellings of ‘Rasagola’ and ‘Dibasa’ and to mark the Niladri
Bije celebration. Spelling the brand in our own way as R-A-S-A-G-O-L-A will be the first step to stake ownership of our centuries-old dessert linked to our Odisha’s culture. This is everyone’s responsibility- public, sweet-shops, hotel associations, media-channels, newspapers etc. Please change the incorrect spellings and update ‘RASAGOLA’ spelling in banners, hoardings, reports and communication everywhere. High time we start using this spelling consistently- R-A-S-A-G-O-L-A. Everyone must also have the same beliefs and stories. Time to ask yourself that which version of the story do you have- the real or the fake ? Innovation, collaboration and promotion is needed. **We need an aware and responsible public and media.**

**Conclusion**

Rasagola has immense potential and power. Each year, on Niladri Bije, it comes to the rescue of Lord Jagannath, the Lord of the Universe. Rasagola’s reach must be widened so that the world can taste this dish. This ‘King of Sweets’ can easily win the world’s fancy and ‘most favourite dessert’ title.

Till the public perception tilts to Odisha’s favour, enjoy and make others enjoy the Odisha Rasagola’s legendary taste, texture and flavour! Don’t forget to spell RASAGOLA right. If you spot anyone misspelling Rasagola, set it right by not taking it light! There is no doubt that with Odisha Rasagola has a rich connection. High time the world acknowledges and accepts Rasagola’s cultural link with Puri Jagannath Temple and Odisha’s history and continuing tradition.

*Every year, Rasagola Dibasa is celebrated on Niladri Bije, the last day of the Ratha Jatra. Join us in the fifth celebration on social media using hashtag #RasagolaDibasa on July 15 this year (2019).*

Dr. Anita Sabat, Bhubaneswar.