



Saina, the Chess Master

Dr. Lenin Mohanty

“ Winners don’t do different things, they do things differently.”

Odisha’s Chess prodigy Woman Fide Master Saina Salonika is an exception. She not only does things differently, she also does different things exceedingly well making her stand out from others in her age group.

Born in 2003, Saina at the tender age of six anchored a kids show in the MBC TV channel. She also modelled for popular nutrition product which was telecast in different channels. At the age of 5/6 years she had earned a name for her in the field of modern dance, fashion show, anchoring and modelling by bagging a lot of prizes in different competitions.

But fate had something in store for Saina. On persuasion from Soubhagya Ranjan Acharya, the bosom friend of her father Ganeswar Jena, she went to SR Chess Centre with her elder sister Simona Sanjeebita. It was SR Patnaik, her coach in the formative years who discovered the inner talent and insisted her to participate in the National Championship in 2008, only after one month of her initiation to chess. Her winning of four games out of eleven in that tournament paved her way for further coaching.

Her mother Babita Jena saw a great future in her and took extra care of her coaching as a result of which Saina became the National Champion in U-7 Girl category in the year 2010 at Jamshedpur.



Saina receiving the National Child Award for Exceptional Achievements- from H.E. the President of India S.J. Pranab Mukharjee in the 'DURBAR' Hall of Rastrapati Bhavan, New Delhi On- 14.11.2014

There is one unique feature of her achievements. She won State Championship, in Bhubaneswar, National Championship at Jamshedpur and Asian School Chess Championship at Colombo, Srilanka in 2010 without losing a game in any of the three tournaments.

She repeated the feat in the year 2012 when she once again became the State Champion, National School Chess Champion, Asian School Chess Champion in her age group in 2012 without losing a game in any of the said three tournaments.

To cap it all she became the World Champion in her age group i.e. U-10 Girl category in the World Youth Chess Championship at Al Ain, UAE in the year 2013 without losing a game. She also bagged two Bronze Medals in the World



Youth Chess Championship in Caldas Novas, Brazil in 2011 and Halkidiki, Greece in 2015.

Saina is a winner all the way. She got two Gold medals in Commonwealth Chess Championship in her age group in the year 2012 at Chennai and in 2017 at New Delhi. She also got three Gold Medals in ASEAN Chess Championship at Singapore in 2017 and three Gold Medals in the Asian Youth Chess Championship in Chiang Mai, Thailand in the year 2018.

Year 2019 is also a fruitful year for her as she won Gold medal in the Western Asian Youth Chess Championship in Blitz category and Silver medal in Standard chess category. She also bagged silver medal in the National U-17 Girls Chess Championship at Kochi, Kerala. Recently she also bagged two WIM norms one at Goa and the other at Paracin, Serbia. Till now Saina has bagged 17 international medals. Though Saina is now working with Russian coach Grand Master Farrukh Amonatov and Odisha Grand Master Swayams Mishra, she was coached by Satya Ranjan Patnaik, Padma Lochan Ray and Manoj Panigrahi in her formative years.

The winning formula of Saina also extends beyond the 64 squares. The class XI student of KIIT International School performed brilliantly in the CBSE Class X Exam this year by scoring 97.4 percent. She even scored 100 marks in the Social Science paper.

Saina also participated in the Little Miss India pageant in the year 2014. She sailed through the initial tough 18 rounds comprising Classical dance, Modern dance, Cat walk, Quiz, Personal Interview, Group Discussion, Situation assessment, Sports, Antakshari, etc. and eventually bagged the Runners up trophy.

For her multifarious talents she was awarded with the National Child Award for Exceptional Achievements in 2014 and she was extremely elated when she received the award

from the Hon'ble President of India Sri Pranab Mukherjee in the Darbar hall of Rastrapati Bhavan on 14th Nov 2014.

A mini celebrity in Bhubaneswar, murals of Saina were painted on the walls of Bhubaneswar during Men's Hockey World Cup 2018. Shri Naveen Patnaik Hon'ble Chief Minister of Odisha also felicitated Saina in his office chamber for becoming the youngest ever Odia to get International title of Woman Chess Master in 2012.

On being asked what is the best advice she got, Saina quipped, my mother told "Think big, have a dream, and chase your dream. If you think you can, then certainly you can."

On how she balances her study with chess she replied, "Once a journalist asked Madam Curie what is the secret of your success ?

Madam Curie's reply was a bit philosophical. She said "when I comb my hair, I only think about my hair"

"I also apply the same principle in my life. I keep Chess and Study in two different Platforms. When I do chess I think only about it and when I study I think only about study."

On being asked how he feels about the success of his daughter, father of Saina, Dr. Ganeswar Jena, a senior Odisha Administrative Service Officer told :

"Once I had said to Saina when she was seven years old that I would be happy if I am identified as your father rather than being you identified as my daughter."

She had proved her mettle and I am extremely happy that people identify me as her father I get phone calls, people asking "Am I talking to father of Saina Salonika ? There is nothing more pleasure than this.

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