



DANCE PRINCE DANCE GROUP

Rhythm of Life

TEXT: J.K. MOHAPATRA



Daily wagers beat the odds and form an award-winning dance group

Six years ago, a 23-year-old daily wage labourer working in Mumbai's construction industry saw a dream of building a dance troupe in his native village of Ambapua of Orissa's Ganjam district. T. Krishna Mohan Reddy was not content with a life of lifting bricks and mixing cement. His passion was dance. He left Mumbai and organised a small group of like-minded friends in the town of Berhampur and called it the Prince Dance Group. After work, the group would start practising on the premises of a dilapidated Kali temple. His partners were twenty five

other boys, most of them school dropouts and daily labourers, two of them were even afflicted by polio. Though none of them had any formal dance training, they were all keen to make a mark in local dance shows.

Things changed in 2006 when the Prince Dance Group became runners-up in a TV reality dance show, *Boogie Woogie* on Sony. Mixing contemporary dance with mythology the group put up a stellar performance though they missed the crown by a whisker.

Life took on a more dramatic turn in 2009 when the group auditioned for the first edition of *India's Got Talent*, a reality show on Colors channel. Their dance, *Saare jahan se achha* choreographed by Reddy had everyone in tears "Everyone, starting from the cameraperson to judge Shekhar Kapoor was crying. It

was the happiest day of my life," recounts Reddy.

As scores of labourers and the general public in Orissa, as well as in his village in Ambapua and neighbouring Berhampur town, watched the finals on huge television screens, the group trumped their rivals by putting up a scintillating act called *Das Avatar*, the ten incarnations of Lord Vishnu. The ₹ 5 million prize money was divided equally among all the members while ₹ 50,000 was earmarked for the construction of a new Kali temple, the premises on which they started their practice.

The group members are now full-time performers, travelling from festival to festival. They are starting a dance school on a one-acre plot donated by the Orissa government near the Gopalpur-on-Sea beach. From labourers to celebrities it's been such a rewarding journey. ■

More on PDG at www.princdancegroup.org

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