



Nitish Rele and his wife, Shephali, put together an issue of Khaas Baat newspaper from their home. The publication is distributed at places of worship and businesses throughout Florida.

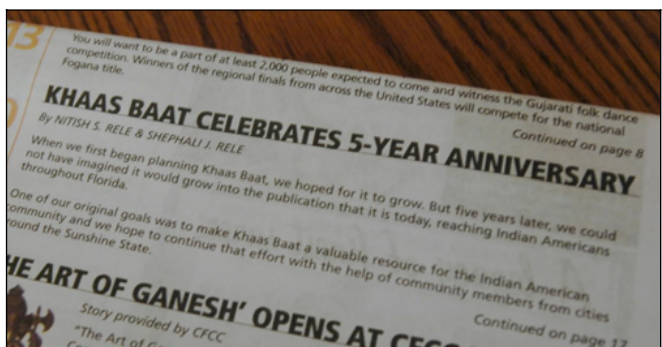
Tribune photos by JAY CONNER

Editors' big news

Khaas Baat, a locally produced newspaper serving Indian-Americans, marks 5 years in print. **STORY, PAGE 8**

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This month's issue marks the fifth anniversary for a publication created as a resource for Indian-Americans.

COVER STORY



Nitish Rele and his wife, Shephali, review an issue of their newspaper, Khaas Baat, at their New Tampa home recently. The publication connects Indian-Americans throughout Florida with event listings and community profiles. The first edition was printed in August 2004.

Tribune photos by JAY CONNER

Newspaper's 5-year feat

A local couple have helped Indian culture thrive in the state via Khaas Baat.



In five years, the statewide circulation of Khaas Baat, which translates to "special news," has grown to 10,000.

By **KENNETH KNIGHT**
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PEBBLE CREEK » The road to success has been bumpy for the co-owners of Khaas Baat, a New Tampa-based newspaper catering to the state's growing Indian-American population.

When Nitish Rele and his wife, Shephali, launched the media enterprise five years ago, they had full-time jobs and were raising two young sons.

With a \$3,000 investment and a 2-year-old home computer, the Reles premiered an eight-page inaugural edition in August 2004.

They couldn't afford to pay writers, so the Reles began to report and write

articles. With no money for a sales and circulation team, they published the newspaper and completed the legwork to get it delivered to homes, store restaurants, community centers and places of worship.

That is why this month's edition of Khaas Baat, two Hindi words that roughly translate to "special news" in English holds special meaning for the Reles. The 24-page issue marks the fifth anniversary for a publication created on a bare bones budget to serve as a resource for Indian-Americans through reports on culture, health, fashion, immigration and entertainment.

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KHAAS BAAT

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Today, with a statewide circulation of 10,000, Khaas Baat has grown to become a leading source of news and information for Indian-Americans in Florida. The monthly publication reaches 25,000 readers from Miami to Tallahassee whose median household income is more than \$75,000.

"I think that's why we have been successful," said Shephali Rele, co-owner and associate editor of Khaas Baat. "We stick with the community and Florida."

"People want to know what's going on with youth accomplishments and community events."

According to statistics from the 2000 U.S. census, more than 10,000 Indian-Americans live in the Tampa Bay area. Florida ranks sixth among the most populous states for people of Indian-American descent, totaling 96,000 residents.

The Reles expanded the newspaper's circulation to Orlando within six months of publishing the first edition.

Shephali Rele recalled the first year of operation as an exciting time.

"We were all over West Central Florida, Ocala, Gainesville, the greater Orlando area, Bradenton and Sarasota, all within the first six months," she said. "By our first year anniversary, we were all over Florida."

The Reles, two professionally trained journalists with master's degrees, said the calendar listing, which spans four pages in the August edition, always draws intense interest from readers because the community through heritage and culture.

"That's where we have kind of captured our niche," said Nitish Rele, co-owner, publisher and editor of the newspaper. "We get people to e-mail us stuff."

Creating an environment that allows readers and editors at Khaas Baat to interact has been beneficial to the newspaper. A sense of community pride has trickled down to the writers and columnists whose work regularly appears in Khaas Baat.



The first issue of Khaas Baat, at left, is paired with the most recent issue of the Indian-American newspaper. The Reles have established a solid advertising base to keep the publication going.

Tribune photos by JAY CONNER

The newspaper still operates on the kindness of supporters. None of the writers are paid; the Reles' only paid employee is a page designer.

Why do the writers work for free?

"They want to give something back," Nitish Rele said, describing the writers and columnists as generous professionals who are experts in their fields of study.

Nitish Rele followed a similar path to become publisher of Khaas Baat.

An auto beat writer and former Tampa Tribune copy editor, Nitish Rele said he saw a need for relevant news and information tied to the Indian-American culture and heritage, an element sorely missed in mainstream media.

"I knew I wanted to do something — a publication for our community," he said.

Nitish Rele has worked as a freelance writer for national Indian-American publications, including India Abroad and India Today.

The Reles have garnered respect in local Indian-American circles and established a solid advertising base to keep the business operating.

They don't relish the idea of watching newspapers fold and others slash staff and shave work



Lifted by the website, Nitish Rele plans a print edition of his Web site, www.motoringtampabay.com.

hours to reduce costs. They both have been affected by layoffs.

Their new workload offers more the opportunity to spend more time with sons Amar, 13 and a freshman at Wharton, 13 and Ishan, 7, a second-grader at Turner Elementary.

Nitish Rele also has started publishing profiles featuring well-known individuals and their accomplishments.

"I have more time to meet and interview prominent Indian-Americans," Nitish Rele said. "I hope to make it a monthly fea-

ture."

Nitish Rele has no plans to rest on his laurels. He launched www.motoringtampabay.com in May 2008, a Web site that aims to whet the appetite of muscle car lovers.

He plans to add a print edition in September to offer car lovers updates about new models, car clubs, car shows, cruise-ins and swaps.

"If you find a niche, you go and do it," Nitish Rele said.

Reporter **Kenneth Knight** can be reached at (813) 259-7413.

SENIOR MENU

Hillsborough County Aging Services serves daily midday meals to senior participants throughout the county. Participants may attend an agency dining center or receive home delivery when eligible. For information, call (813) 272-5250. Here is the menu for Aug. 17-21.

Monday: Breaded fish fillet, potatoes Florentine with cheese, stewed tomatoes, whole-wheat bread, apple-pear

Tuesday: Southwest chicken with black beans and rice, green beans, carrot cuts, wheat bread, fresh fruit in season

Wednesday: Salisbury steak with gravy, whipped potatoes, California vegetable blend, whole-wheat bread, sugar cookie

Thursday: Sliced turkey ham with fruit sauce, mashed sweet potatoes, green peas, whole-wheat bread, peach cup

Friday: Chicken breast patty with Spanish rice, yellow rice with tomatoes and peppers, mixed vegetables, whole-wheat bread, mixed fruit cup

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