



The Uttor Chandipur Community Society

Supporting a rural community: creative solutions to education and health



Suchana is a community group working in rural West Bengal, focusing on education and health. The Education Resource Centre grew out of the Early Learning Group which started in 2004. The resource centre is open 7 days a week, and aims to support literacy and make learning relevant, enjoyable and accessible to very marginalised children. Currently, about 215 children participate, facilitated by paid and volunteer teachers from within the community.

Our health project in six villages explores primary health in participatory ways and links villagers in with local health services.

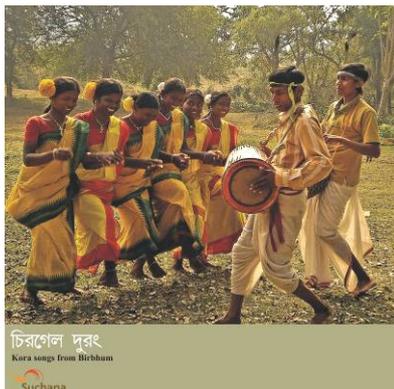
If you would like more information, please contact us at suchana.india@gmail.com

Newsletter Issue 13, May 2011

GOOD NEWS!

'Chirgel Durong' – Kora songs from Birbhum

This month we are hugely happy to present our CD of Kora songs! This is a collection of 14 traditional and new songs in the Kora language, mostly composed locally and some by Suchana members. A group of young Kora women from Suchana's tuitions group, accompanied by musicians, practiced for several months and finally spent a long day in a recording studio in February. The CD is an output of our programme 'Supporting Adivasi Identity'. We hope to make the CD available locally to Kora communities, and to schools attended by Kora children. There are very few recordings of songs in this language, so we hope it will make a real contribution to sustaining the language and celebrating the musical tradition.



'Chirgel Durong' Kora songs from Birbhum

The CD is available @ 100 Rs.
Email us at:
suchana.india@gmail.com

Toilets and washing facilities

Our fine new toilets are nearly finished, and we are very much looking forward to using them! Especially so, because our single temporary toilet had to be deconstructed (!) in order to make space for the new building. The building consists of 3 latrines, a boys' urinal, a small shower room and two sets of hand-washing sinks. We are really delighted with this progress – not just because it makes the environment much cleaner, but also because it enables Suchana to 'practice what we teach' in hygiene and sanitation. This was challenging when we had inadequate facilities, so up until now we have not emphasised latrine use too much! Sincere thanks to ITI Sydney in Australia for supporting this important step.



EVENTS UPDATE:

Winter and spring – when it's sunny and cool – is the time when nearly everything happens at Suchana! ☺

We began the events season with the second run of our **Children's Mela (fair)** in November – extremely well attended and enjoyed. This is fast becoming an entirely child-managed event. The benefit of a year's experience was there for all to see – some children had been planning their games and activities for months.

This was closely followed by **Sports Day** in December, which pitched events across a range of skills so that – true to Suchana's emerging tradition – 76 of about 110 children won at least one prize.

From early January, we rehearsed for our **Annual Show**, held on 20th February and featuring songs, dance and drama in all our four languages – Santali, Kora, Bengali and English – with magic and gymnastics adding to the melting pot.

And our reward for all the hard work? – The annual **Picnic and Trip**. This year we took 170 children to Kala Bhavan, the art school at Vishwabharati University in Santiniketan. This gave them opportunity to assess and absorb the significant art heritage nurtured locally, to see print and sculpture studios in action, and perhaps to relate these to their flourishing art work in Suchana.

In March we took the unusual opportunity to visit the **Science Express** with Suchana's secondary school students. This is a mobile science exhibition mounted in a train, now on its 4th tour of India. A session in the excellent hands-on lab demonstrating basic science principles, and a spontaneous visit to the big Damodar Dam made the trip especially rewarding.

Raja Rammohun Roy Library Foundation

This month, Suchana received a small grant from the Raja Rammohun Roy Library Foundation, a Government of India trust. The money is for books, boxes, bags and a van rickshaw to morph part of our existing and very successful library into a **children's mobile library** in the surrounding villages. This is very exciting! We plan to start twice weekly trips in September, initially taking in 4 villages for 'story time', book borrowing, and – we hope – facilitating literacy a little further afield.

Programme news

Suchana's **Education Resource Centre** is thriving: children drop by to play, read books, do art work, and to take part in one of the **8 programmes** it runs. Sometimes we think we should change its name to Children's Community Centre: it is always buzzing with activity and children involved in something!

The **Pre-School** has 22 children, mostly Santals, and is run by two Santal teachers. The **Early Learning Group** has 140 children, mostly Santals and Koras, and still runs on 2 days a week with extra Sports on Fridays. The **Tuitions Classes** get bigger each year as more children enter secondary school: currently there are 67 children and 5 teachers. The **Computer Courses** remain popular: the current batch doing the children's course are age 11-12; the adult course has a long waiting list having gained a reputation for being a good-quality hands-on course.

The **Library** now has nearly 2500 books, about 220 members and is preparing to go mobile. The **Activity Groups** have continued to bring new people into Suchana as craft specialists: the current groups include hand-fan making; making baskets from straw and biscuit packets; and pottery wheel work.

The **Supporting Adivasi Identity** programme is working on a lot of material just now: watch this space for a Santali children's songs CD; a book of children's writing in Santali and another in Kora; a Kora word book (mini-dictionary) and Santali children's story books.

The **Health Project** hosted an eye and dental camp, expertly organised by **The Peace Clinic** – so many thanks to them. Nearly all Suchana children and a number of local adults were checked and followed up ... quite a few fillings!

Suchana is fundamentally a community organisation, evolved by community members. This approach has recently been given full support by a one-year programme grant from the **Sir Dorabji Tata Trust**. The grant includes some paid time for teachers to take full responsibility for the teaching programmes and invest in developing methods, schedules and activities. Six teachers have taken on the **management and development** of the programmes with calm competence and commitment.

Friends of Suchana News

Friends of Suchana, a UK Trust, was accepted for Charity Commission registration in November 2010. Their registration no. is 1138960; details can be seen here:

www.charitycommission.gov.uk/showcharity/registerofcharities/registerhomepage.aspx?&=&

They also welcomed two **new trustees**, **Mary Byrne**, who worked as a volunteer at Suchana in March-May 2010, and **Nikhil Roy**, who has long experience in human rights organisations.

Friends of Suchana is now also on JustGiving for online donations: www.justgiving.com/suchana

Two trustees have taken on brave sponsored events in aid of Suchana: in April, **Angela Stoddart** embarked on a 'bus-pass cathedral adventure' for 10 days. See www.justgiving.com/Angela-Stoddart and www.thisiskent.co.uk/where/medway/Charity-bus-pass-expedition/article-3414900-detail/article.html to find out more. In July, **Rob Anderson** takes on the 3-peaks challenge – that's climbing Ben Nevis, Scafell Pike & Snowdon and getting from one to the next as fast as he can: see www.justgiving.com/PenTAG-3peaks.

Thanks to all sponsors of these inspiring initiatives!

Suchana's strengths: Flexibility is one key

What are the features that make Suchana work? Projects working in education with adivasis often have difficulties finding local adivasi teachers. We realised recently that an important part of how Suchana works has been calibrating people's schedules and skills in session-based arrangements. This has meant that nearly all the teachers have been able to pursue their own education alongside working in Suchana, taking on more time and responsibilities as they were able and ready. As a result, six years on, Suchana now employs 3 adivasi graduates, a scheduled caste MA and an adivasi BA student. Four teachers have taken their school leaving exams while working in Suchana. Others have gained teaching and other experience working in second jobs while at Suchana. This has been a strategy with great results!

Thanks to everyone who has helped us

ITI Sydney for supporting our toilet building; Sir Dorabji Tata Trust for a programme grant; Richard Kuper as Executor and the late Irene Bruegel for the generous legacy to Friends of Suchana.

To all who **bought and sold Christmas cards** and 'Joyful Play' greetings cards. For **donations of money and useful equipment**: Abeer Chakravorty, Isabel Milward, Lisa Knight; Somen and Manjushri Basu; Judith and Ross Thompson; Nilanjan Banerjee for blankets in winter; Petrina Slaytor; Daphne Vivian-Neal; Avril Waters (and for help with stock taking); T. Anderson; Mary Grey; Maureen Bailey; B and A Wright; Mr and Mrs Chappell; Pam Ratcliffe; Susan Ghosh for a year's subscription to Just Giving; and all regular donors.

For sharing skills and time: The Peace Clinic, Goalpara for the health camp; Pankaj Seal for help with the Kora song recording; Soumya Chakravarty for recording experience; Shikshamitra for an inspiring visit; Marie Ghyselincx for photos of the Annual show and for putting them on her blog <http://santitown.wordpress.com/2011/02/25/139/>

To all involved in fundraisers, including: Mere coffee mornings, Mere Ceilidh, Mere Grove Building, Mere World Fair; Kirsty Reid for a sale at Highstead School; The Munday family for a book sale at Sheldwich School; Sheldwich Village Hall coffee mornings; Green Fair, Faversham; Whole World Fair, Canterbury; Wildlife Fair, Canterbury; Craft Fairs, Faversham and Mayor Anita Walker; Faversham Fair Trade; Lent Lunch, Throwley; and Queen Elizabeth School, Faversham for Tuck Shop proceeds.

Suchana: The Uttor Chandipur Community Society

Regd. Office: P.O. and Village Khanjanpur, Via Sriniketan, Birbhum, West Bengal 731 236, India

Tel: +91 (0) 3463 329278; Email: suchana.india@gmail.com

www.suchana-community.org