

10<sup>TH</sup>  
ANNIVERSARY  
ISSUE

# Suchana

*Uttor Chandipur Community Society*

Supporting a rural community:  
creative solutions to education and health



Suchana is a community organisation working since 2004 in rural West Bengal, focusing on education and health for adivasi and other marginalised children. Suchana runs 8 programmes at the Education Resource Centre (ERC) and across 16 villages:

• **The Pre-School** • **The Early Learning Group** • **The Tuitions Programme** • **Computer Courses** • **The Library and Mobile Library** • **The Health Project** • **Activity Groups** • **Supporting Adivasi Identity**

The ERC is open 7 days a week, and aims to support literacy and make learning relevant, enjoyable and accessible. Currently, about 340 children participate, facilitated by paid and volunteer teachers from within the community. Our Mobile Library works in 10 villages taking library books and basic health and hygiene care to a further 400 children.

If you would like more information, please contact us.  
[suchana.india@gmail.com](mailto:suchana.india@gmail.com)

*Newsletter Issue 19, October 2014*

## EVENTS UPDATE

It has been a jam-packed year, with all the old favourite events and programmes, plus some major new developments.

The absolutely bottom line good news is that we are starting to see gains to Suchana children that really count out there in the big bad world. 10 years on, Suchana's oldest batch of children – 2 boys and 2 girls – sat their **Higher Secondary Exams** this year. All four passed! And all four are going on to college or vocational training.

Our third batch of 7 students also sat **Madhyamik Exams** (5 boys, 2 girls) and all of them passed! One of the boys stood first among the boys in his Government school.

That's a 100% pass rate for Board exams this year.

As always, many events took place during the winter: **The Children's Mela** in November 2013 saw about 100 ELG and Tuitions children designing, planning and running a variety of stalls for the enjoyment of about 500 visitors from the local area. **A Half-day Educational Tour** for classes 3-6 took about 70 children to Nandan Mela, the annual art display held at the art school. January saw our annual **Sports Day**, a big event orchestrated by Suchana's sports teachers. February brought the flagship event **The Suchana Annual Show** with all the much loved old activities plus - new for this year – a 3-Minute Circus and Comedy Sketches. And two **Art Workshops** were held introducing Alpana designs, and inviting Patua artists to share their craft.

And of course there have been all the regular programme activities: The library and mobile library, health work, the pre-school, Early Learning Group and tuitions classes, computer courses and Activity Groups.

Learning and growing is as important for teachers as it is for students – it's part of keeping inspiration alive. And there have been several opportunities this year for teachers to develop their skills:

In January, 3 teachers attended a 4 day **"Using Stories"** training hosted by Sikshasandhan / Kathalaya in Bhubaneswar, Odisha

2 teachers attended a workshop in Jharkhand on the use of two **Santali genesis stories** published recently as children's storybooks in English.

Ruchi Tandon of the BBC World Service gave an excellent one week training on **audio editing and making photo stories**.

Students worked alongside teachers in a 5 session **film making training** brought to Suchana by French News TV journalist Joy Banerjee.

In August, Steve Capell held a workshop for teachers on using Ubuntu, Linux and other open source resources.

Suchana has also had many visitors, who are always welcome and always bring interesting perspectives and skills with them. Among others:

- Ben Cameron from Cambridge offered his circus skills at Suchana as a volunteer for 2 months.
- Dom Feroze from London School of Economics came as an intern for a week in August to conduct research on the ITE project for the SDT Trust.
- In April, 15 teachers from Sikkhasadan, Odisha, made a 3 day 'exposure visit' and to exchange experiences.

## Please Support the Friends of Suchana

**CHRISTMAS FAIR**  
**AT SHELDWICH VILLAGE HALL**  
**Saturday 29th November 10.30–3.00**  
**Enjoy coffee/ home-made soup and**  
**do your Christmas shopping.**  
**Offers of help, please, to**  
**Angela 01795 890210**

To celebrate our 10 years, this is a double length newsletter. It brings you in-depth information about special themes with two 'spotlights' – Science in Suchana and the Integrated Technology in Education Project.  
Please let us know if you like it like this !

## ***Spotlight on: Suchana's Integrated Technology in Education (ITE) Project***

The ITE project is now just a year old at Suchana – and it has brought lots of new developments over that year. Put simply, the project introduces technology – computers and sometimes cameras – into the classroom as tools for students to make their own projects based on the curriculum. ITE does aim to make computers and computer skills available to children who have no possibility of access elsewhere, but it also aims to do more than this. It aims to transform how learning happens. Taking the emphasis right away from memorizing information in text books, the focus here is on creating. Students create their own learning artefacts, and by doing this they process, apply and retain information.

### **Mobile Tutorials at 2 New Centres**

Suchana is now reaching 100 more children by taking our ITE tuition classes to their villages. After training for this kind of teaching, and starting in Suchana's 'old' tuition classes in January, classes started in Mohishdal, a Santal village, in April and Noadangal, a Kora village, in May. The 'going mobile package' includes an 8-seater van, 15 laptops, whiteboards, mats and lanterns because neither location has an electricity connection. The teachers are careful to keep the laptops charging overnight!



### **Teacher Drivers**

Rather than employ a separate driver for the ITE van, Suchana decided to train teachers to drive. So the first batch of 5 teachers took driving lessons before the mobile centres opened: 3 young men and 2 young women. Churki Hansda, probably the first Santal woman driver in the district, said when Suchana asked if she wanted to learn driving 'I've never even been in a car, how will I know if I can drive one?'

Women drivers of any description continue to be very rare in the area, so this was quite a radical step.



*ITE open 'classrooms' with the van in the background*

### **What students and teachers say...**

Suchana carried out a short review when the project completed one year, asking teachers and participating students what they thought of the project.

*"I have seen the world through ITE. We can see all the things in the world on the computer."* Shyamoli Kora, class 7

*"ITE makes learning fun. The things which I cannot learn by reading text book, I can learn it quite easily through ITE."* Amrita Konra, Class 9

*"Students are learning a lot more from ITE; and it's not just students, I am also learning a lot more alongside students... Students are getting new ideas from ITE."*

Churki Hansda, teacher.

*"Students are not limited to their books; they can unfold unknown things themselves, with their creations."* Mongol Das, teacher.



*Making projects in an ITE class*

See some of the students' ITE projects on the ITE Blog:

### **ITE Training and Exchanges**

The project is funded by the Sir Dorabjee Tata Trust, and involves 8 more partner organisations. Exchange between these organisations is encouraged by the Trust, and Suchana's growing expertise with the project has already been called on to help other organisations. In June, two teachers travelled to Koraput District, Odisha, where Ashakiran is now starting ITE. In August, 15 teachers from Gram Vikas Manch (GVM) in Assam visited Suchana for an exposure visit.

Teachers have also travelled for training; to Kolkata in September 2013 and to Lucknow in September 2014. These new responsibilities have been greeted with enthusiasm – and opportunities for travel and exchange are great for the teachers' development.

# Spotlight on: Science at Suchana

**Q: Why is it hard to find Doctors who want to stay in rural areas?**

**A: Because few Doctors come from rural areas.**

**Q: Why?**

**A: Because rural children have little opportunity to study science.**

## The problem:

In classes 5-10, science makes up part of the curriculum but there are no labs for building practical understanding. Standard teaching methods also make little or no space for the many ways of demonstrating and experiencing scientific principles using everyday materials. For most children, science exists only in textbooks.

The village secondary schools do not offer science at all at classes 11-12 (6<sup>th</sup> form). If a child from Suchana's villages wants to study science at this level, s/he will have to cycle 8 kms each way to the nearest school offering science at Class 11. That's no joke in heavy rain or heavy heat. And it is virtually impossible for girls, who are not usually allowed to cycle alone after dark – that's 5pm in winter, and about the time school finishes. S/he will have to own a cycle too.

In addition, science can only be taken by students with the best grades. So poor quality teaching and learning is another blocking factor. These are some of the challenges for rural children interested in science. They surely contribute to the problem of resourcing rural health facilities.

## Suchana's Work

Suchana aims to make science more accessible to rural children.

- Several hands-on-science activities take place in regular classes;
- a 10 week 'science games' course is one option often available for children to choose as an Activity Group.

Suchana also has good support from scientist friends visiting with knowledge and inspiration. Last winter Professor Soumya Chakravarty gave an amazingly accessible yet in-depth talk, in the run up to comet ISON's close encounter with our Sun, on where it came from and how close it was.

In March, Dr Birendra Nath Das and Professor Gautam Basu gave crucial technical and practical help to teachers preparing for the 2014 Suchana Science Mela – our second, and now even bigger, science event.



*Demonstrating optical illusions at the Science Mela*

## Science Mela 2014

The Science Mela was a two day event this year: a day for learning and a day for sharing. It was run by Suchana in collaboration with 3 nearby secondary schools. Nearly 100 students – 40 from these secondary schools – worked in groups with teachers to understand and prepare a demonstration or activity which they then shared with visitors to the Mela. This year, activities were arranged thematically in different spaces – we had 'Maths Games' 'Electricity' 'Chemistry' 'Biology' 'Sound' 'Forces' 'Magnets' 'Light' and 'Optics'.



*Older students demonstrate how to isolate DNA from a tomato to younger children.*

The 'sharing day' had 2 sessions – one for schools visitors, attended by groups from 5 different schools, and one for the general public, which was attended by siblings, parents, local people and guests from Santiniketan and further afield.

*The Science Mela was funded by Friends of Suchana*

## Ten Years Ago ...

Suchana started in January 2004, with a dozen children who came on Sunday mornings to the Milward-Bose house in Khanjanpur village to 'learn through play'. Fairly quickly, it was clear that there were big learning gaps among these mostly (loosely) in-school Santal children. So the Milward-Boses recruited a Santali teacher, and so it all began.



*The full team in 2004*



*Two years later - 2006*

By 2009, Suchana had moved into its own building and took the big step of going full time as an open-house Education Resource Centre. The computer course was started with 6 donated second hand laptops. Activity groups began bringing crafts into the learning centre. And teachers started making resources in Santali and Kora languages for publication and distribution. In 2011 the mobile library made its first village visit.

All of these milestones owe a great deal to you who have supported us in so many ways on this journey. Thank you! And we look forward to seeing the next 10 years of developments at Suchana.

### Mobile Library Expansion

The mobile library is about to get bigger - with a motorised van which means we can travel to about 12 more villages. By June 2015 we hope to be bringing books to another 400 children.

**Watch this space!**

### COMING SOON

### Suchana Children's Mela

**Sunday 26<sup>th</sup> October, 3 to 7 pm**

With games, food, prizes, art and activities - all run by the children.

**Please join us if you can!**

### THANKS TO ALL THOSE WHO HAVE HELPED US

Friends of Suchana extend a warm welcome to new Trustees Christine Ford and Jonathan Elliott who bring with them their valuable and different relevant experience. Thank to you all regular donors and helpers who are the backbone of the funds we send to Suchana and to the Mere supporters who have been very successful and active in recent fund raising: special thanks to Judith Thompson who asked for donations instead of gifts for her 70<sup>th</sup>. Birthday if people wished, at her party for which she cooked for 80 people and over £700 was donated (without the Gift Aid still to be claimed on much of that amount). Thank you very much to the kind anonymous donor of £1000 and to the donor who paid our subscription to Just Giving. We are full of hope that some readers will be inspired to undertake a sponsored personal challenge of their choosing, using Just Giving to publicise their challenge and claim Gift Aid (see [www.justgiving.com](http://www.justgiving.com)) (contact Angela Stoddart, [angela@claresforstal.plus.com](mailto:angela@claresforstal.plus.com)). Thanks also to Akash Milward-Bose, who has greatly improved Suchana's website, including the Friends of Suchana page, so that our potential donors can find out about Suchana. [www.suchana-community.org](http://www.suchana-community.org) - see our Facebook pages too - at 'Friends Of Suchana' and 'Suchana Community'.

Suchana is also very grateful to Mustard Seeds, Calcutta International School and Ranjini Lahiri for the Puja-season clothing drive; and to Jhilum Saha, Srabani Ghosh Raghavendra Chattopadhyay, Gautam Basu, Debasish Gangopadhyay for their handsome donations and Manjusree Basu for the sewing machine. A special thanks Ruchi Tandon who for a week in January did a very interactive workshop in Suchana, on Audio editing and tricks/rules for Audio interviews and Joy Banerjee for the film making training.

### Suchana: The Uttar Chandipur Community Society

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