



SNEHA School Fact Sheet

SNEHA SCHOOL, Diyun, Changlang, Arunachal Pradesh, India



Chakma children in Arunachal Pradesh, India have very limited access to state-provided education. State-provided teacher ratios are as low as 1:300. There is little cultural appreciation of the value of literacy in this predominately farming people, who rely mainly on paddy and a few cash crops for a subsistence living. The school dropout rate is as high as 95%. Many Chakmas grow up expecting to be harassed, assaulted and despised. They have been routinely prevented from participating in literary activities, games and sports.

A few educated and dedicated Chakmas want to change this position. A grant from the National Foundation of India allowed SNEHA to start a Chakma primary school in 2003. The school hopes to upgrade every year to achieve the Secondary Senior level. Recently, 148 children attended. Students are taught in three languages: their mother tongue, Hindi and English. But from Grade III onwards, they are taught only in Hindi and English. The attendance rate in the area served by this school is now 98%.

SNEHA aims to provide value-based education based on five core universal values: truthfulness, righteous conduct, peace, love and non-violence. The school stresses the following areas:

- * Promoting reading habits in children and their parents
- * They want their children to be good human beings first. 'Smart' can come later.
- * Creating environmental awareness by planting trees, gardening, discouraging the use of plastic, and explaining the consequences of deforestation, which is widespread in AP.



All photos taken at Diyun, courtesy SNEHA, unless otherwise noted



Driver, Suresh Bauddha and Susanta Chakma, Mainpuri, India, August, 2009

- * Instilling awareness of the importance of hygiene, cleanliness and social service and responsibility through cleaning their own campus and the premises of the local Buddhist temple.
- * Providing students with games and sports.
- * Trying to find funds for cultural activities, such as purchase of musical instruments; teaching children to sing patriotic songs.

What BODHI's doing

BODHI provided an initial grant in 2005 to enable a pay increase for the dedicated Chakma teachers of IRs/- 300 per month. Since then, our support has included teachers' salaries and starting a library.

We have expanded our support in 2009 to include a health education and deworming component (see below), at the cost of INR 60,000 per year.

As SNEHA grows, the central administrative heart also needs help. Mr Susanta Chakma, founder and director of SNEHA, has requested two years' administrative support from BODHI. We have agreed to fund INR 61,000 per year.

What you can do

- 1 teacher's salary for 1 yr IRs/- 36,000
- Teachings aid & equipment 20,000
- Games and sports 10,000
- Cultural activities 10,000
- Books and stationery 750 ea x 240 students 180,000
- Library books 100,000
- Teachers' training 50,000
- Medicines, water, electricity 22,000

Health What BODHI is doing

Health will improve not only by reduced poverty but also by the greater knowledge and behavioural changes that education (especially literacy) allows. Health facilities to the Chakmas are very limited but may follow if funds allow. Dysentery, diarrhoea, elephantiasis and typhoid are common. 'The nutritional status of the



Susanta Chakma translating for Colin Butler, Youth Buddhist Society, Mainpuri, India August, 2009



Chakma children is very pitiable. Pregnant and lactating mother do not get sufficient nutrition. All live in an environment characterised by malnutrition, undernourishment, poor shelter, dearth of safe drinking water and sanitation,' Susanta says.

BODHI and SNEHA have been talking for years about adding health education and sanitation to the curriculum. We have now done so, and added deworming the schoolchildren.

Please see 'Health education in rural areas in Arunachal Pradesh, India' (see end of Fact Sheet) for details.

Health: What you can do

BODHI has committed to supporting health education and deworming in Arunachal Pradesh, Northeast India. We need your help for:

- 2,000 INR Medical kits for Nurse
- 10,000 INR Deworming Medication for 420 students of SNEHA school
- 23,000 INR Training Materials and audio-visual aids
- 5000 INR Medical care and emergency
- 15,000 INR Training Expenses
- 2000 INR Auditing
- 3000 INR Contingency



Background, BODHI Times No. 28, June 2005

Thoughts of the Partition of India in 1947 usually bring to mind the Hindu/Muslim and India/Pakistan rifts, but spare a thought for those who became refugees in their own land. The Chakmas are classified as a tribal people. They regard themselves as Buddhist, and for this reason face discrimination in both predominantly Muslim Bangladesh and mainly Hindu India. On April 2, 2005 in Delhi, Colin met with Mr. Susanta Chakma, the first Chakma from the North East Indian state of Arunachal Pradesh (AP) to graduate in law. Susanta founded SNEHA, a word that, like 'BODHI' can be translated as 'compassion.' We hope SNEHA will be the local partner for a new BODHI project in NE India.

In the 1960s, Chakmas now in AP lived in a river valley in the Chittagong Hill Tracts of East Pakistan (now Bangladesh). They'd been there for millennia, though some Chakmas believe they once lived around Lumbini, where the Buddha was born more than 2500 years ago. At Partition some campaigned, unsuccessfully, to join India.



Nehru's generosity

In 1964, 30,000 Chakmas were resettled in AP, a still remote and sparsely settled state close to a sensitive border with Chinese-occupied Tibet. The Chakmas had been displaced by the Kaptai Hydro-Electric Project, which submerged their arable land. President Nehru offered them resettlement, as he also did around the same time to Tibetans fleeing Chinese persecution. Chakmas were offered about 5 forested acres per person, close to one of the many strongly flowing rivers of this region. Since 1964 the Chakma population in AP has doubled, the forests have been cleared and their land remains fixed in size. Flooding is an increasing problem. Birth rates are high and poverty is increasing. Health care, roads, schools and other infrastructure are rare.

Kaptai Dam

At first, life in India was more promising. But since the 1980s, Chakmas in AP have faced increasing resentment and discrimination from the predominantly Hindu population. This spilled over from increased tension in neighbouring Assam, in part triggered by the migration of other Bangladeshis. Tensions climaxed in a 'Quit AP' movement in the early 1990s, marked by violence, intimidation and house burnings, directed not only at the Chakmas but also at Tibetans and Hajongs, a Hindu minority group.

One discrimination practised by AP state government officials was the consistent failure to forward Chakmas' legitimate applications for Indian citizenship. In 1996 the Indian Supreme Court ruled that this practice was illegal, affirming the right of Chakmas to be full Indian citizens. However, on the ground little has changed, except that overt violence has diminished. Clearly the Chakmas cannot rely on the Indian authorities to escape their poverty; they must improve their own human resources. Education is vital for this.

Reports and photographs

For reports and photographs from SNEHA and the National Foundation of India, 2005-2009, please either visit our website (www.bodhi.net.au) or contact us @bodhi@bodhi.net.au.

Sneha schoolchildren
on a picnic, August 2009



