



ANNUAL ACTIVITY REPORT 2022-2023

DARICHA FOUNDATION

The background image shows two large, colorful puppets standing in a field. The puppets have red heads with large eyes and long, decorated necks. The necks are covered in a pattern of yellow, blue, and red fabric, with a green band near the bottom. The puppets are wearing long, flowing red skirts. In the background, there are trees and a person in a green shirt and white head covering.

Contents

- ❖ About Daricha Foundation, Page 3
- ❖ Year in Review : 2022-2023
 - Highlights & Achievements, Page 4
- ❖ Financial Sustainability, Page 21
- ❖ Looking Ahead, Page 21

ABOUT DARICHA FOUNDATION

Daricha Foundation is a small Kolkata based NGO that has been working in the field of folk and tribal arts of West Bengal for the past ten years. It was established at a time when there was practically no online presence for structured, in-depth information on India's folk and tribal culture.

Founded by Ratnaboli Bose, the society's Secretary, the members of Daricha Foundation's governing body are Goutam Ghose (renowned, award winning Kolkata based film maker) - President; Jaideep Ganguli (management consultant) - Treasurer; Subir Das (chartered accountant & Clean Energy activist); Prattyush Banerjee (Indian classical musician) - Assistant Secretary; Subir Datta (retired professor); Prosenjit Dasgupta (author & folk researcher) and Anandi Ghose (film maker).

Daricha's primary goal was the launch of a website that would deliver authentic and in-depth knowledge on West Bengal, to begin with, and help stem the paucity of knowledge and awareness on both the arts and its practitioners. It would act as a window (which is what "Daricha" means in Urdu) through which such knowledge would instantly flow to the public.

The website, www.daricha.org is a content rich knowledge domain, with a special focus on genres that are vanishing or have received less exposure. Through its continued focus on research, documentation, dissemination and promotion of public consciousness of West Bengal's intangible cultural heritage, the website features over fifty-five folk traditions currently, including many aspects of Santal culture.

In addition to its knowledge portal, Daricha Foundation has also been active in helping create sustainable and dignified means of livelihood for artists through activities that help revive and promote their arts. This includes workshops, training programmes and collaborations with festival organizers. Several workshops have also been conducted within the Santal community in their villages over the past few years, in an attempt to preserve traditional knowledge. In a small way, marketing of some of the products made by Santal women and other folk artists has also been undertaken, primarily through Daricha's Instagram page and a few retail stores.

Taking stock of our achievements since we started out in 2013, we would like to believe that we have made an impact, however small, in the promotion and preservation of tradition rural arts. But we have miles to go and promises to keep.

YEAR IN REVIEW

Key Highlights & Achievements

Post the Covid pandemic, our struggle to keep Daricha afloat continued at first, but over the course of the year, things improved. We kept ourselves busy by focusing on marketing folkcrafts, primarily through Instagram. (Facebook has never resulted in a sale for us.)

Collaborations:

In April, we accepted an invitation from A Hundred Hands (AHH), a Bangalore based non-profit trust to become a member. This would allow us to send three of our artists to the melas they organize, primarily in South India. Artists would need to bear their own travel and accommodation costs, but would not have to pay stall rent, which we would cover at a subsidized rate.



Our artists participated in three AHH melas in 2022. The first mela, their Summer Collective, took place in May. We sent Seramuddin Chitrakar (patachitra), Gourav Malakar (shola flowers) and Shriram Tudu (bamboo artisan). The bazaar was a five-day affair in Woodlands

Hotel, Bangalore and was a rip-roaring success, despite heavy downpours and the hotel lobby getting flooded. The artists were delighted with their sales.



Seramuddin Chitrakar's patachitras at the AHH bazaar.



Shrinath Tudu (bamboo), Suman Jana (mats), and Chhobi Besra (natural fibre ornaments) at AHH's Monsoon Collective

The next event, “The Handmade Collective-Monsoon Edition” took place in August. The artists we sent this time were Chhabi Besra, (natural fibre ornaments), Suman Jana (Medinipur mats) and again, bamboo craftsman, Shrinath Tudu. The bazaar was held between August 24th and 28th at National Institute of Fashion Technology (NIFT), Bangalore. The leaf ornaments, a novelty for Bangaloreans, flew off the shelves and the artist was overjoyed with her sales. The others fared very well too, the incessant rains notwithstanding.

The final AHH event for the year took place in November. The November show is their flagship event. Seramuddin and Gourav participated yet again. Since the artisans we work with are not the well-established ones usually, very few of them are willing to invest in the cost of travel, stay and transporting goods, especially if they work with wood and terracotta. The bazaars of A Hundred Hands do extremely well, but they are also a mix of contemporary and traditional, with a larger accent on the former. Variety is the mantra and the artisans who manage this usually fare better.

Crafts Support





In June, we received an exciting and unusual request from a Daricha supporter, Mrs Jaya Chakrabarti. She wished to order folk crafts to use for her son's wedding. We got Jharna Chitrakar to make a gorgeous painted winnowing fan to be used as a "*baron dala*" – a tray holding auspicious items to bless and greet the bride and groom, Shrinath Tudu to craft dramatic bamboo trays for the wedding gifts - "*tattwo*", Bholanath Karmakar to craft an exquisite "*sindoor*" container and other auspicious items in the sherpai tradition, a delightful set of bride and groom puppets crafted by master puppeteer Amarendra Naskar and beautiful coasters painted in the alpona and patachitra tradition by Rabi Biswas and Amena Chitrakar respectively.



Meanwhile, sales of crafts and paintings continued. We were particularly delighted to find buyers for two patachitra masterpieces. The first, painted by Seramuddin Chitrakar of Naya village, West Medinipur, was a 15 feet scroll of fourteen panels, illustrating the traditional tale of the robber, Manohar Phansure and inspired by a 19th century scroll at the Gurusaday museum. A few panels of this scroll are shown above. The second was a magnificent six by four feet depiction of Saraswati by Shahajan Chitrakar.

Saving the Sherpai



The Agaati Foundation, New York, headed by Saloni Sreshtha is committed to celebrate and conserve handmade creativity, elevate visibility and the value of artisan made, leading to the socio-economic development of global artisan communities. The Agaati Foundation Awards announced for 2022 included a category for endangered craft. We applied in July on behalf of Bholanath Karmakar, the last practicing sherpai artisan.

The Sherpai is an ornate traditional grain measuring bowl made of wood and bound and ornamented with brass. Sadly, it is an

endangered craft, with just the one artist, national award winner, Bholanath Karmakar, who actively practices the craft. He is helped by his wife and daughters. This labour-intensive craft requiring meticulous work ensures that Bholanath can just about cope with whatever orders he gets and he gets by. But he cannot afford assistants and he does not receive the economic sustenance commensurate with his exceptional skills.

We were informed in August that he had been selected as a semi-finalist from hundreds of entries across the world and early in September, we were given the wonderful news that Bholanath had been chosen as a finalist! We sent a sherpai bowl to New York and waited on tenterhooks on behalf of Bholanath. The Global Eco Artisan Award for Revival and Conservation of Endangered Crafts went to a deserving woolen rug weaving community from India, but we were thrilled that Bholanath had received international attention.

Anxious about the future of this craft, we put out feelers among our well-wishers and a generous supporter, Mr Debal Dutta made a donation that would take care of 3 months of wages for two apprentices for the Sherpai maker!! We are extremely grateful to him!

At around the same time, we also applied for the Hyundai Art for Hope 2023 grant to help build Bholanath's capacity. Our proposal was entitled Saving the Sherpai and we were fortunate to be one of 35 applicants to receive a grant of Rs 2 lakhs each in December.



Bholanath Karmakar examines the bowls that the new interns, Nadiya and Suraj, have helped craft.

The project began in December 2022 and continued for 60 days. Bholanath, with two interns of his choosing, set about crafting a set of 9 ornate bowls topped by a lid. With a photographer in tow, we made repeated visits to Lokepur, Bholanath's village in Birbhum during this period, documenting the process.



The 10-piece set of Sherpai bowls is ready – after 60 days of hard labour



A proud Bholanath poses next to his splendid creation.

The interns were taught the basics of how to cut out bowls from logs of wood and how to craft brass decorations. Bholanath's wife, Ruma, a national awardee herself and their daughter Priya assisted with the brass work. The workshop was a period of two months only and the interns would need at least ten months of training before they can imbibe necessary skills. But at least a beginning was made and since we would be able to fund their training a few more months beyond the workshop, thanks to the donation received, some progress would be made.

The final exhibition of the work of all 35 awardees took place at Bikaner House, Delhi, between 27th February and March 5, which the artist and the secretary were invited to attend. This was followed by another exhibition at Chennai, which we did not attend.



Receiving our plaque and certificate from the representatives of Hyundai Motor India Foundation

Samvaad 2022

In November, Tata Steel Foundation invited us to participate in their annual Samvaad, a grand one-of-its kind pan-India tribal conclave, that they organize each year. It is always a five-day affair which begins on the November 15th, the birth anniversary of tribal activist, Bir Birs Munda. The 9th edition reconvened after the pandemic years. Every year, Samvaad is bound together by one specific theme- a theme that is borne out of numerous discussions surrounding tribal identity. The theme for 2022 was “Reimagine”- aimed towards fostering conversations around the role of tribal people in enabling social change in this dynamic society and listening to voices from the communities themselves as to what this “reimagination” entails for them.

The discourse, one of the biggest platforms on tribalism in India, saw a cohort of tribal artists, weavers and artisans, musicians, healers, home chefs, scholars, film-makers, and performers coming together on one platform to celebrate tribal culture while also contributing to the overall discourse in Samvaad. Over 2000 people representing about 200 tribes, including 27 Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups (PVTGs) from 23 states and 4 Union Territories were present.

We sent artists from the Santal and Mahali tribes – Shrinath Tudu, bamboo craftsman,



Chhobi Besra, leaf ornament maker and Sahadev Kisku and his group of Santal puppeteers and musicians. Along with Chhobi, we also sent Kunami Mandi and Sonamoni Besra whom we had trained in 2018 in Purulia, to gain some experience and exposure, selling to a large market. Extremely nervous at first, the two girls were all smiles by the end of the event.

All the artisans participated in workshops during the day, where representatives from National Institute of Fashion Technology and National School of Design interacted with them. Tribal artists who have made a name for themselves, like Jangarh Singh Shyam's daughter, Japani, also addressed their fellow artists.



Large crowds thronged the stalls



The santal puppeteers went around the grounds, entertaining the people

In the evenings, a grand mela took place at the beautifully decorated Gopal Maidan – where large crowds thronged the stalls showcasing tribal crafts and tribal medicines from across the country. Adding to the gaiety and excitement, tribal dancers and singers performed on a massive stage in the centre of the maidan.



Our team of artisans and puppeteers

Visit to Vidyasagar University



Professor Frank Korom

In January, the secretary made a short visit to Vidyasagar University, Medinipur at the invitation of Dr Sumahan Bandyopadhyay of the Centre for Adivasi Studies and Museum there. The purpose was to attend a series of special lectures being delivered by the renowned Frank J. Korom, Professor of Religion and Anthro-

pology at Boston University. Professor Korom, an ethnographer, has done extensive research on the patuas of Medinipur and is the author of the seminal "Village of Painters: Narrative Scrolls from West Bengal". It was indeed a great honour to be able to listen to Prof. Korom speak about his thoughts and experiences and we are indeed grateful to Dr Bandyopadhyay for enabling this.

The lectures were delivered over 3 days, between January 9th and 11th. Prof. Korom spoke on the Birth of the Museum and the Origins of Anthropology, The Salvage Paradigm: Rationalizing and Displaying Colonialism and Decolonizing Museums: Indigenous Collaborations.

Dr Bandyopadhyay also gave us a tour of the Adivasi Museum, which



Dr Sumahan Bandyopadhyay at the McCutcheon Gallery at VSU

houses among other artefacts, Adivasi musical instruments. The highlight of the tour was the very special patachitra gallery dedicated to the rich collection of the late British scholar Indologist who taught at Jadavpur University, David McCutcheon.

Painters of Birbhum



Jamir Chitrakar displays a Jom Pata, always featured in Birbhum patachitras.

Even though the patachitra of Medinipur is renowned throughout the world, the district of Birbhum has its fair share of patuas – unfortunately, mostly unsung. Unlike their more popular and actively promoted brethren, the patuas (scroll painters) of Birbhum continue to be itinerant performers, singing and displaying their art. It is only very recently that one is seeing a few Birbhum patuas in Kolkata. There are several hubs of scroll painters in Birbhum.

In January, we visited Itagoria village, home to a group of patuas, who claim to belong to the Bedia tribe. Their style is quite different from the Medinipur tradition and the artists we met at Jamir Chitrakar's home were all eager to receive the same attention as the Medinipur painters.

The scrolls of the Jadopatias are quite distinctive from those of the “Bangla” style. The Jadopatias are traditionally painters who live in the vicinity of Santal villages and whose primary audience has always been the Santals, followed by Bengali communities close by. In West Bengal, Jadopatias are mainly to be found in Purulia, Bankura and Medinipur. The scrolls (jadopatas) painted for the Santals are on specific topics like their birth cycle and the famous Chokkhudaan pata - a type of mortuary painting. We discovered that a well-known jadopatia, Babudhan Chitrakar lived quite close to our hotel in Siuri and promptly set out for his village. We had a most interesting visit.



Jadopatia Babudhan Chitrakar displays a Chokkhudaan pata painted by an ancestor.

Collaborations with Tata Steel Foundation



A beautiful weave by Shrinath's wife

At the request of Tata Steel Foundation, we sent bamboo artists Shrinath Tudu and his family for a craft residency on bamboo which took place between February 22nd and March 2nd. Tribal bamboo artisans from the eastern states of India primarily got together to combine their regional traditions to create something new.



Shrinath Tudu receiving his certificate of participation

Thanks to our association with TSF, our tribal artists get invited to participate in several of their programmes. They have also been invited to take part in their Johar Haats – where they are able to set up shop and sell their wares for a week. Our natural fibre ornament makers have also attended a Johaar Haat.

Sohrai Likhan Workshop

Towards the end of March we visited Purulia yet again – this time to conduct a workshop on Sohrai wall art. Subsequent to our documentation of Santal Sohrai Wall Art in Purulia in collaboration with the Anthropological Survey of India a few years ago, we have been observing that traditional motifs are giving way to modern forms and increasingly, clay is being replaced by bricks and mortar, thanks to urbanization.



The first day – moistening the walls with diluted *poli mati*



Wall painted in the now popular Hatimara style

More recently, we discovered to our dismay, that the wall paintings were fast disappearing. Geometric patterns in vivid colours which originated in Hatimara in Hura block about a decade ago, seem to have swept across the region like wildfire, consuming with it practically all traces of traditional motifs. The young women we spoke to recently in the field area, actually admitted to being

embarrassed by the old-fashioned motifs of their mothers. It was evident to us that this form of wall paintings was nearing extinction. Moreover, with increased focus on education, many young girls, busy with their study schedules do not have the time for these traditional activities. And then again, if there is a poor harvest, walls often do not get painted.



A traditional Sohrai wall art composition

The Santals being a community whose youth struggle to balance tradition and modernity, we felt an urgent need to ensure that these traditional skills and the indigenous knowledge are preserved. Unable to attract funds for our initiative, but determined to help maintain a continuity of this unique visual art, for which Purulia seems to be the last bastion in the

state, we dipped into our own resources and conducted a five-day workshop. Three experts in traditional wall art, Sraboni Baskey, Bodoni Murmu and Rathi Hansda trained 18 younger women in the community, selected from five or six villages. The students were initially screened and only those who desired to learn traditional styles were taken.



The workshop was successfully conducted between March 24th and March 28th at Gobag village in Purulia with the help of our local resource, Bimal Baskey. Three groups of six Santal women were taught traditional designs by 3 experts from within the community. The women found the workshop inspiring and promised to paint traditional designs on their walls for the coming Sohrai festival in October this year.

At the end of the workshop, we experimented with converting wall art to paper art – something we have been wanting to do for a while, inspired by what had been achieved for other



Initial efforts on paper

forms of tribal wall art. This would, if marketed well, ensure a steady income for the artists, more than they can hope to earn now, working in the fields and looking after their homes. Our master trainers got to work, carefully pouring their creativity into small sheets of handmade paper and learning to work within a much smaller format than they were used to. The results were very encouraging and we will need to conduct a formal workshop soon.



Gurus and shishyas – a happy group at the end of the workshop

Field Work in Purulia

No trip to Purulia is complete without a visit to our friends in Bhurkundabari. This time, we documented a dance form – the Ghora Nach or in the Santali language, Sing Sadom. The Sing Sadom dance of the Santals is a colourful and vibrant performance that is gradually being revived by the Santals. It is performed only at Santal weddings by a group of men, to the accompaniment of pulsating tribal drums. Sing Sadom literally translates to the Day or Sun horse.



Making the bamboo framework for the horse



The completed horse or Sadom

The dance had been popular about forty or fifty years ago, but had gradually faded into oblivion. In those days, there would be Sing Sadom groups with about five to six members in almost every village. Each village would craft a large bamboo horse and a group of men would then dance around with it to the throbbing sound of santal drums. In a bid to revive a forgotten form, the villagers of Bhurkundabari, all members of Sagun Thili Gounta, their local club, got to work, digging up facts and consulting with elders who had seen it being performed in their youth. Shyamsundar Mandi and his team demonstrated the making of the horse and later, a team of 20 men performed the Sing Sadom dance.



The Sing Sadom performance in Bhurkundabari

FINANCIAL SUSTAINABILITY

Donations from members and well-wishers and small grants continue to be our chief source of sustenance. This past financial year, a grant from Hyundai Motor Foundation along with some generous donations and orders enabled us to support some artisans quite well.

We hope to be able to take attract more grants for the preservation of cultural traditions and continue our field documentation, though this is increasingly becoming a daunting task. However, we continue to reach out to both government and private agencies with a view to promote folk and tribal arts and provide improved market access for the artisans that we work with. With our Section 12AA Registration under the Income Tax Act, 1961 and approval to receive donations eligible for Section 80G deductions under the Income Tax Act, 1961, we also hope to receive enough donations to help us continue our work in the following year.

LOOKING AHEAD

What we would like to achieve over the coming years continues to be:

- Facilitate workshops by master artists/artisans at the grassroot level, within folk and tribal communities, to help preserve the legacy of traditional knowledge. In particular, we hope to be able to upscale the Sherpai craft.
- Workshop with Sohrai wall artists and facilitate painting on marketable mediums and smaller formats.
- Conduct field trips, particularly to villages of lesser known ethnic communities who are gradually losing their identity.
- Collaborate with organizers of fairs and festivals so that craftspeople/performing artists find newer opportunities
- Direct marketing of folk and tribal crafts either through our Instagram page, existing e-commerce platforms and domestic craft stores.

