

Malcolm Harper reports

Greetings from India, from Orissa (now called Odisha) and from the staff of the PUSS school and the SOCH railway rescue operation, and mainly, of course, from all the children whom you so generously support.

I am actually on my way home, after a brief but I hope useful visit. My main objective was to help both **PUSS** and **SOCH** to reduce their dependence on our support. India is still home to about half a billion of the world's poorest people, and the children whom you help are from the bottom of that vast pile. Odisha is India's poorest state, but even Odisha is getting richer. It's Government, it's businesses, which include the

operations of many Indian global companies, and it's growing middle class, are beginning to take responsibility for the millions who have until now been left out, and we are doing our best to support Kuku's and Manoj's efforts to tap into these new sources of assistance.

It is a slow process; most local businesses have only recently become involved in what is called 'corporate social responsibility', and they tend to defer to their head offices in Delhi and Mumbai; Government is always slow; the new regime in Delhi is to an extent succeeding in it's efforts to clamp down on corruption, but one perverse result of this is that some officials prefer to make no decisions rather than to do things for which they might be accused of having been bribed.

We did achieve some results, however, and we are confident that both **PUSS** and **SOCH** will in due course be able to support their work from local sources.



Supper in the playground

In the meantime, however, they will continue to rely on your generosity; one way you can help, and can enjoy an evening of good music is to join us for our annual recital in Filgrave—see box at bottom of right-hand column.

It was as ever a joy to be at the **PUSS** school, and to join the children at supper; the Government is gradually reducing the subsidies on rice and other basic commodities but Kuku and her colleagues still manage to provide the children with plentiful good food including heaps of rice and dal which they consume in no time; any leftovers are kept for local cattle or other forms of recycling, but the children seem to clean every fragment from their shiny steel trays; the cows have to search elsewhere.



We had a community meeting in a nearby slum from where some of the **PUSS** 'day boarders' come every day, to meet some of their families and to meet potential new girls. Their housing conditions are indescribable, but the children are doing well at school, and there do not seem to be any problems in integrating them with the existing pupils. The Parisar Asha teacher training team were there at the same time on their monthly visit to **PUSS**, and they danced with the whole community to give them a taste of schooling which is good fun as well as good education; it was probably the first time that any adults had ever acted that way in such a place, and a good time was had by all.



Entertaining the slum children

I spent some time at Puri railway station where **SOCH** have recently stationed a new children's rescue team. They have rescued over sixty children so far. I watched them as they engaged four young teenagers who appeared to be on their own; apparently they were on their way to Calcutta to work as day labourers; they were almost certainly under age but they appeared to know where they were off to and the **SOCH** team decided to leave them to it.



SOCH rescue team at work at Puri railway station

I noticed another sad-looking little boy alone in a corner sitting with a dog; I asked the **SOCH** team whether they knew him, and they do, very well. Apparently his mother is a prostitute who works on the station and he lives there with her. The **SOCH** team have tried to help him but he wants to stay with his mother and she does not want him to leave her; every contact the team makes involves difficult decisions.

Laryssa Elyse Jones from Massachusetts will be making her fourth visit to Odisha later this month, and Mary Harper will be going back for her third time in a few weeks time. Philippa Baylis will also be there in the summer, further to maintain the Scottish link; **PUSS** welcomes volunteers, not only Scottish ones, so please let us know if you or anyone known to you is interested in spending time with the children. In the meantime, please keep up your support, and we look forward to seeing some of you in Filgrave on 30th June.

Malcolm Harper, Chairman, Friends of the Children of Orissa, Filgrave, March 2017.



Annual Recital at Filgrave Friday 30 June 2017



Please support our work by joining us for our annual recital at The Old Farm House in Filgrave.

This year, the highly acclaimed Antara flute and harp duo have agreed to play for us. Every penny of this will go to help the children in Odisha. (See www.antaraduo.co.uk for more information.)

Time: 7 pm for 7.30 pm, cost £65.00 per person including pre-music drinks on the lawn (weather permitting) and dinner with wine after the recital. **Please let us know as soon as possible if you will be with us.**

**FRIENDS OF THE
CHILDREN
OF ORISSA**

Registered Charity No. 1074935

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