

**Friends of Dhrubotara : Reg No : 1202364 Annual report 2024 – 25.**

**Friends of Dhrubotara (FoDh) was registered with the Charity Commission on 16<sup>th</sup> March 2023 as a Charitable Incorporated Organisation (CIO).**

The 4 trustees are Sharon Whitfield, Rachel Douglas, Samuel Ellis, Jonathan Ellis.

The object of FoDh is to provide supplementary education to underprivileged children in Hugli / Hooghly District of West Bengal, India. Before becoming registered as a CIO it was an informal group which supported a small, village education project known as Dhrubotara (Pole Star) in 2 villages of Hugli District for about 21 years. In order to transfer funds legally to this project FoDh has used the services of an Indian NGO local to the project called Athmik. Athmik are co-operative and take only a small fee to administer the project. It is possible that FoDh may support other education projects through different NGOs in future.

Dhrubotara consists of 2 small supplementary primary schools in the villages of Makhalpur and Joihoripur, with associated tuition classes for children who have moved on to attend the local government high schools. A majority of Dhrubotara's students belong to one of several 'tribal' communities in the area, and all are of poor families of the labouring class.

At Makhalpur in December 2024 24 children were enrolled in the primary section and 16 in tuition classes.

At Joihoripur in December 2024 40 children were enrolled in the primary section and 46 in tuition classes.

The primary section teachers at Makhalpur are Tapasi (Chompa) Dey and Sobhan (Sumon) Das. Tuition classes are taught by Paromita Das.

The primary section teachers at Joihoripur are Nando Maheli and Puja Bag. Tuition Classes are taught by Tumpa Mudi, Sikha Mudi and Nando Maheli.

Wages of the staff were increased by approximately 15% from January 2024 (after 2 years) to compensate for local price inflation running at 7 – 8% pa.

Their wages since Jan 2024 are :

Name of Teacher / Tutor	Amount monthly IRs.
Tapasi Dey	8,000
Nando Maheli	7,700
Sobhan Das	6,000
Puja Bag	6,000
Tumpa Mudi (Tutor)	4,300
Sikha Mudi (Tutor)	2,380
Paromita Das (Tutor)	3,120
Nando Maheli (Tutor)	3,220

Miscellaneous expenses (snack food for children, electricity, materials etc) cost about Rs.3,000 monthly. The exchange rate in March 2025 was £UK1 = IRs110 approx.

Dhrubotara costs IRs44,000 monthly for regular expenses. Additional items included Sports event (IRs.12,000 approx), Childrens' Show (IRs.12,000 approx) and fee for a local dance teacher to train children during the cool season.

Athmik is paid a fee of IRs.30,000 per year to give a financial service to Dhrubotara and make occasional visits.

Cultural and sports events were suspended due to Covid and have now restarted. A successful sports event took place at Joihoripur, involving Makhalpur also, on 23 January 2025. As well as 100m races, long jump and ball throwing, there was an inter villages football match between the Makhalpur and Joihoripur youth and young men. It was a hard fought and skilful match, and was won by Joihoripur.

The first Shishu Mela (Childrens' Show) since 2020 took place at Makhalpur on 2 March 2025. It was well supported by guardians and the community and consisted of dances (children trained by a local professional dance teacher), songs, recitations and a few comic acts. As usual there were speeches and presentations of bouquets.

There was one working laptop at Joihoripur, not in good repair, for several years. In February 2025 Makhalpur received a second hand laptop in good condition, bought for Rs.13,000 from a business known to JE in Kolkata. JE paid for this in cash and has taken £UK 100 towards the cost from the UK bank account in his name.

No significant progress was made toward registration of Dhrubotara as an NGO / charity in W. Bengal. JE suggests that this proposal be left in abeyance until/unless the teachers / community there decide to pursue it. Similarly the plan to buy a small plot of land for a new schoolroom at JHP has made no progress for various reasons. The current best option seems to be to continue with the existing room at JHP and to put an open sided roof on the flat roof of Nando's house, which is very close to the school, so that there is protection from sun and rain. No planning permission is needed for this to happen. Tuition classes already take place there, weather permitting, and on Nando's verandah. We should think of 'the school' as the activity which happens there, and not as a particular building. The activity is happening, in spite of the makeshift accommodation.

A trustee (JE) made 6 visits to Dhrubotara during Dec 2024 to February 2025 to see teaching, meet teachers and students and attend the sports event. He found all to be working well and with a good spirit. There remains a small concern about the low number of students enrolled at Makhalpur. This is in large part due to the small size of the 'tribal' community there and the fact that other children are unlikely to associate with them.

Child attendance data for 2024 has been received from Joihoripur, and from Makhalpur. The Excel sheets sent are circulated with this report. The summary is below :

Joihoripur :

Primary section	Children enrolled	Days of classes	Av attendance	%
	40	297	267	89.9
High Sch tuition				
	46	297	274	92.2

Makhalpur :

Primary section	Children enrolled	Days of classes	Av attendance	%
	24	295	250	84.7
High Sch tuition				
	16	295	267	90.5

Former students of Dhrubotara, most of whose parents were field labourers and illiterate, are moving into other kinds of work (mostly boys) such as factory work, building trades and gold jewellery making. The marriages of girls do not happen at such an early age as previously.

FoDh has Gift Aid status in the UK so as to maximise income from donations. There is regular income from several individuals in the UK and an annual donation from a small charity in Australia (Uthana Mission). A group of 5 representatives of Uthana visited Dhrubotara with JE in Feb 2025. Uthana has since made a donation of £795.96 to FoDh (after 5 April 2025, so not shown in this account for 2024-25).

A donation of about £1,000 pa has come for several years from the USA (Bill Cook Foundation). This was last received as a double payment 2 years ago. A request will be sent for another donation.

The website ' dhrubotaraschool.org ' is on line and needs updating for 2025. JE has paid the costs associated with the website, in India where these are much lower. It will be useful if our friends and associates can be encouraged to view it.

The trustees of Friends of Dhrubotara are satisfied that the funds raised are being used appropriately and to good effect by the NGO Athmik in India, and by the staff teaching at the village level. We thank them for their commitment and achievements.

This is the financial statement of Dhrubotara for 2024 -25 :

Year 06/04/24 – 05/04/25		Opening balance £
		6960.26
income (donations + HMRC) £	expenditure (grant) £	Closing balance £
3952.95	6,020	4893.21

Income during 2024-25 included £2244.79 received from HMRS due to tax deductible status on donations up to then.

The account of JE on behalf of Dhrubotara holds £962.68 which will be transferred into the Fr of Dhr account. JE took £100 from this account while in India to pay for a secondhand laptop for use at Makhalpur.

Death of friend of Dhrubotara : Robi Maheli, aged 42 years, of Joihoripur, died on 5 May 2025 of a stroke. He was a small scale farmer and labourer. His son Rudro is one of Dhrubotara's current best students. Rudro's mother remarried and lives elsewhere. Rudro is therefore alone in the family home, but is fed and supported by the community and school. He has just been admitted into Class 11 (higher secondary) at the well respected upper high school in nearby Dhaniakhali town. His admission costs and tuition will be paid by Dhrubotara.

FoDh held 2 online meetings during the year 2024 – 25. The AGM is a face to face meeting at 3.30pm on 10<sup>th</sup> May 2025.

END

This is the financial statement of Friends of Dhrubotara Reg Charity 1202364 for the tax year 2024-25 :

Year 06/04/24 – 05/04/25		Opening balance £
		6960.26
income (donations + HMRC) £	expenditure (grant) £	Closing balance £
3952.95	6,020	4893.21

Income during 2024-25 included £2244.79 received from HMRC due to tax deductible status on donations up to then.

Friends of Dhrubotara has no operating expenses and pays no remuneration or rent. Funds are used solely to support a small school for underprivileged children in India.

J. D. Ellis on behalf of trustees.