

EKTAAN COOPERATION CIRCLE

Location: Burdwan, West Bengal,
India

Faiths/Traditions

Hindu, Christian, Muslim, Buddhist,
Sikh, and Tribal Peoples

Action Areas

Educations
Music
Environmental Protection.
Women Empowerment.
Inter-religious Co-Operation.





COOPERATION CIRCLE PROFILE

Summary

Ektaan CC is located in West Bengal, India and was formed to promote peace through music. Since 1991, musicians from different faith traditions have congregated to foster healing through music, art and culture. Ektaan CC has created a communal platform of cross-cultural dialogues and develops understanding among traditions through share learning experiences for a peaceful and blissful community. Ektaan CC is committed to uplifting traditional values by cultural exchange. It conducts programs with children, art and cultural training programs such as the Journey of Peace, aimed at nurturing and preserving traditional festivals of rural communities in India.

REFLECTION & LEARNING

- ***What is the current religious/cultural/social context in the area where your CC is working?***

Historically, India has been a place of paradoxes. While India is a country where tolerance and peaceful co-existence of many cultures and traditions have found a place, there are many cultural traditions that continue to promote cultural and gender inequality. Most recently, the influx of Western values are adversely influencing and eroding the traditional positive qualities. In addition, there is much communal unrest that is pervading the culture even in very traditional rural areas, resulting in very serious problems. Even in modern India, Indian culture and traditional ways dictate separate views and opportunities for the girl child and male child.

- ***Why is interfaith/intercultural bridge building needed in the area where your CC works?***

There is a need to preserve local traditional practices to keep the cultural identity as we observe that many ancient practices are eroding. Many traditional practices are not clear to the younger generations due to the generation gap; as a result many foreign modern practices are infiltrating the life of young people and thus creating family tensions. For example, youth in the family are losing their balance, between modern lifestyles that are very attractive to them versus old fashion family values. Many times, this tension eventually increases the drug problem among the younger generations. The one thread that connects our culture and transcends religions and cultural divisions is music; however, this live valuable art, and music are, many times swallowed by the modern media. There is an urgency to stop the adverse effects of invasion of foreign cultures which many times fuel misunderstanding and can lead to conflicts.

- ***Please briefly describe the main activities or programs your CC is carrying out this year?***

The most important work by us is the Journey of Peace, through which a group of interfaith and inter caste musicians travel to various communities in a caravan to host local cultural programs that engage communities for the purpose of preserving the local cultures, promoting the indigenous and ancient



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cultural practices in the community, as well as promoting interdependence within the various faith communities.

The Journey of Peace is not a show; it is a process of promoting family values that engages children, mothers and the entire community. In rural India, men are on the move, and women stay at home, so for a child, a natural bonding and manifestation of love is easily shown with their mothers; the first institute of love for the children is their mother.



Our programs in the community focus on the bond between a mother and child. This leads to the benefit of preserving our rural and ancient Indian communal harmony, and helps to cope with the challenges of the modern society. One challenge for us is the youth are going away from the family to pursue the Western values. Our overarching goal is to create a local network of communal harmony nurtured with spontaneous daily engagement with much inspiration from within our cultures.

- ***Between which specific religions or cultures are bridges being built?***

We have Hindu, Christians, Muslim, Buddhists, Sikh, and sometimes the Tribal community also gets involved. A major part we have noticed is that Hindu and Muslim interfaith cooperation through our music is at highest level.

- ***Please explain the method or strategy that your CC uses to bring together people of different cultures and faiths that would otherwise not interact or cooperate with each other?***

Music is the highest appealing approach to all communities. We host musical talent shows for a day where community members can participate. Our efforts bring the following individuals and groups below:

Musicians from the local communities

Children and women of the community

Local schools and community centers

And Cultural Organizations to help to connect to the wider network

We leverage URI resources by obtaining additional support from the various communities. Through our programs people relate to each other, and we are able to create a common space for discussions and for addressing issues to bring and work on together through shared responsibilities.

- ***Given the current context you described, what does your CC hope to achieve (goals)***

We want to bring global attention to engage the larger community. We want to also run local libraries and study forums where the scope for intercultural exchange will be provided. Education is the main key



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of growth, where children can learn about various faith traditions through direct engagement and social activities.

- ***How do you see your CC's work improving cooperation among people of different traditions?***

Beginning with few members early in 1993, we never realized the strong potential we have to expand and promote cultures of peace. After affiliating with URI we now have more than 5000 musicians in the country that come to our network who are from various faith traditions. We received recognitions and are now registered with the government. We have published interfaith music supported by URI that encouraged membership from different religious backgrounds. In many events members share food with each other and play music together. We are able to minimize the caste discrimination among each other, which is proof of the cooperation among different faiths.



- ***How is the work of your CC helping to prevent religiously inspired violence or transforming conflict? (NOTE: This question is relevant only in areas with violence/open conflict.)?***

In the year 2000, we hosted a seven day musical program at first with musicians from an inter-caste community. The village had never allowed lower caste musicians to participate in higher caste rituals; even in small social festivals they had separate events for separate castes. Although there were no tensions among those various caste people, we realized that separate programs are good but also a possible threat for upcoming conflicts among various castes, in case of a misunderstanding. We therefore designed specific programs to engage all groups together in a social celebration through music. In one year, the same festivals were celebrated by people from various castes. We are helping communities adopt practices that promote communal harmony and transform conflicts.

- ***What are some observations or signs you see that relations are improving between people of different faiths/cultures in the area where your CC works?***

We see people celebrating festivals together and hosting social programs, we can see a Muslim person taking responsibility to manage a Hindu event or vice versa. It is strongly visible that people like to share responsibility and love to maintain interfaith relationships for their personal and communal peace.

- ***Please share a specific short story about your CC's work that might teach a lesson about interfaith or inspire other CCs?***

Our musical events have inspired others; we now receive invitations from various government and non-government organizations to host events. We have also been able to connect with renowned activists and musicians around the country, through our Journey of Peace.

- ***How is your CC's work helping to achieve the mission of URI?***



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We engage people at the grassroots levels in social actions, to promote cultures of peace. We respect the sacredness of each tradition and spiritual expressions. We are promoting the PPPs of URI at various levels. We use the name of URI in a respectful manner and support CCs to achieve the mission.

- ***Within your CC, you have members from several different faiths and cultural traditions. How would you describe cooperation among your CC's members? What are the challenges?***



Our CC itself showcases the interfaith cooperation. We have musicians from various faith traditions. We are deeply connected to our own roots and indeed perform the best music collaboratively which draws larger attention to our causes. We have a very deep bonding to each other, thus we are able to make such profound music. We have high hopes for a bright future for our CC; we believe it is becoming a movement.

- ***How is being part of URI helping your CC to achieve its goals?***

URI is an international organization that provides us a good platform to expand and get connected with a larger global network; our CC members now have friends from other parts of the world just because of URI. We are very thankful to URI for providing such a good network. We are now considering making a global music album on global interfaith cooperation.

- ***Aside from funding, what are some specific ways URI can better support your CC in reaching its goals?***

We need leadership training, so we can better form an organization to cope with modern challenges. We also would like more global exposure.