



Uttor Chandipur Community Society

Supporting a rural community:
creative solutions to education and health

Newsletter Issue 20, October 2015



Suchana is a community organisation working since 2004 in rural West Bengal, focusing on education and health for adivasi and other marginalised children. Suchana runs 8 programmes at the Education Resource Centre (ERC) and across 29 villages:

• **The Pre-School** • **The Early Learning Group** • **The Tuitions Programme** • **Computer Courses** • **The Library and Mobile Library** • **The Health Project** • **'Activity Groups'** • **Supporting Adivasi Identity**

The ERC is open 7 days a week, and aims to support literacy and make learning relevant, enjoyable and accessible. Currently, about 350 children participate, facilitated by paid and volunteer teachers from within the community. Our Mobile Library works in 24 villages taking library books and basic health and hygiene care to a further 1100 children.

If you would like more information, please contact us.
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EVENTS UPDATE

Suchana's regular programmes and events have kept everyone busy and engaged, as ever, this year. The winter months first saw the Children's Mela (Fair) in which children make games and events for parents and friends to play. Next were a student excursion to the University Art Fair, Sports Day, the Multi-Lingual Annual Show showcasing dance, drama, songs, circus skills and gymnastics, and the Annual Picnic.

The summer months once again saw a 100% pass rate for the Class 10 and Class 12 Board exams this year. These results are of course very encouraging to everyone involved in the programme.

During August, Suchana held its 3rd Science Mela (Fair) – an extravaganza of hands-on science involving 150 student participants, and several hundred student and parent visitors. This year's fair saw even higher levels of interaction and engagement with science demonstrations and games, and was given very welcome extra help this year with funds and science toys from <http://www.physicsfactory.org> and <http://www.sciencetoymaker.org>. As in previous years, this gave Suchana the opportunity to work with 4 local secondary schools.

Science Mela videos on youtube:

These simple videos give a flavour of the Science Mela and some of the hands-on learning that it promotes.

Energy transfer - two balls <https://youtu.be/kFsDVkM2k6A>
Exploring a water prism <https://youtu.be/aNPmX4YIPYE>
Finger movement mechanism <https://youtu.be/Hk2i7teSYRs>
How a Kaleidoscope Works
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qw3zDJHRXYI>
Taste areas of the tongue
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4airNnUTrDc>
Surface tension - water on a coin
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-2KDIAIpTaI>
Surface tension broken with soap
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DA4s6DUXzxo>
Speed light travels - disappearing tubes
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UBetRXf73RM>
Using magnifying glasses
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mtk-sjDoUG0>

SPECIAL EVENTS

In a really exciting development, Suchana now has a new plot of land, just next to the old one! This major acquisition will be used as a much-needed playing field for sports throughout the year. In the long term it also provides **room for expansion and development** of Suchana's activities.



Suchana's new playing field, next to the 'old' Suchana

Health Work has also progressed well this year, with an **Eye Camp** organised in coordination with Arogya Sandhan Santoshpur and Toronto-Calcutta Foundation, supported by Kathy O'Connell in memory of the late Joseph O'Connell – this gave eye checks to 203 adults and children, distributed 68 free pairs of glasses, and 140 children were given new clothes.

Paediatric checks and follow up care were also provided by Dr Sumita Basu for Suchana children, and a series of **mental health** clinics were held by Dr Chandra Banerjee, a UK based psychiatrist. In an event new for this year, for the first time Suchana brought students together from the 3 centres implementing the Tata Trust's Integrated Technology in Education (ITE) project in an **ITE Exchange Day**

**Please come to the Friends of Suchana
CHRISTMAS FAIR
AT SHELDWICH VILLAGE HALL
Saturday 28th November 10.00–3.00
Enjoy coffee or home-made soup and
do your Christmas shopping.
Helpers welcome too!
Contact Angela 01795 890210**

Spotlight on: Multi-Lingual Education

Over 80% of Suchana's children go to schools where no teachers can speak their language and where all teaching takes place in their second language: this situation would be a challenge for children from advantaged families giving a lot of support from home. How much more of a challenge, then, for children from very poor backgrounds whose parents never – or barely – went to school themselves.

From the outset, Suchana has made efforts to enable children to learn in their first languages. We use four languages in Suchana – Bengali, which is the state language and the language used in schools; Santali and Kora, which are 'tribal' or indigenous languages, and are first languages for over 80% of Suchana's students; and English is taught as an additional language. Suchana makes these efforts

- because cognitive development is known to be better when early years learning takes place in first languages
- because writing languages down helps preserve them
- because Suchana believes every child should have the opportunity to read and write in their own language, even if this is not possible all the time.

This work has developed a lot in recent years and now takes several forms:

First language teaching and learning:

For core lessons in the Early Learning Group, children are divided into language groups and taught by teachers who know those languages, using resources they have developed themselves in Suchana.

Multi-lingual also means Multi-cultural: The Annual Show sharing all our cultures:

Every year, all students learn songs in all four languages for our show. This means that students whose first language is the school language, Bengali, also get to know a bit about the other languages. But it does not stop at language – students also learn each others' dance, music and dramas in the show process.

Community Projects: Students bring first languages and technology together in their villages

This year students were given an opportunity to take their newly learned technology skills into their villages to make a project of use or interest to their wider communities. Supported by teacher facilitators, students collected data and interviews and made presentations and movies about their own communities, and using their first languages. Topics chosen ranged from the use of herbal medicines; the changing course of the river in a Kora village; comparison of pond usage in different villages; and perspectives on the changes that development has brought in recent years. These projects are now on Youtube and are likely to be the first artefacts of self-representation by young people in Santali and Kora on the web.

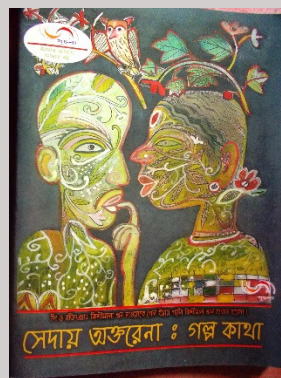


Student using a laptop to record an interview of an elderly villager for a Community Project comparing life 25 years ago with the present.

Developing resources to support multi-lingual education

Teaching in first languages is a challenge when there are no teaching materials anywhere in that language. Even more so when the language – like Kora – has never been written at all.

Suchana began trying to fill this gap several years ago, and has till now produced 14 different books and other resources in Santali and 10 in Kora. **Two of these were new for this year:** "Stories from the past" in Santali – a collection of Santali folk tales originally written down in roman script in the 1900s; and "10 Contemporary Stories" in Kora. These stories were written by Suchana teachers and senior students in a series of creative writing workshops over the past year.



Teaching older students: Most older students have never been invited to try to write in their own languages. Making these materials has also given opportunity for older students to learn to use the Bengali script for writing in their own languages.

Links to student's Community Projects

Rindanga Threatened by the River (Kora) <http://youtu.be/tMbrvuYxleY>
Our Village: Uttor Chandipur (Santali): <http://youtu.be/-SbdXZiS63Y>
Use of Herbal Medicine (Santali) <http://youtu.be/WNliYPAHXkg>
Rindanga Past and Present (Kora) <http://youtu.be/ILWUICAGu2c>
Bandlodanga Village (Santali) <http://youtu.be/5VxYliil-Es>
Ponds in Kamalakanta Pur (Bangla) <http://youtu.be/87qZrrm7PJE>
Khanjanpur Past and Present (Bangla) https://youtu.be/gT_0lwr9b3U
Important Places of SrichandraPur (Bangla) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WLuC7VKW4ig>
The Handeyagidi ritual (Kora) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Q7bN5eRvIjs>

Spotlight on: Suchana's Mobile Libraries

For most local children, the only books they ever read or even see are school text books. This is not surprising – they are the first generation of literate children in their communities. As Suchana's baseline shows, 75% of adivasi mothers and nearly 50% of adivasi fathers never went to school even for a day. So why would there be books in the house?

Going to school and learning to read through school text books is already a big step for this generation of children. But the information available in school text books is limited, and they rarely offer a 'reading for pleasure' experience, which is virtually unknown. Yet it is reading for pleasure which takes literacy from functional to advanced, and which opens doors to a myriad of experiences and perspectives in the wide wide world.

Suchana first started an in-house library in 2006, used by children coming to the Early Learning Group. In 2011, the first mobile library began: a van rickshaw taking about 1000 books in coloured trunks to 300 child members in 11 nearby villages.

Then, after a number of fundraising efforts especially for this purpose, and after reviewing and fine-tuning the library systems, in March 2015 the 'New Mobile Library' was started. This works in 13 more remote adivasi villages, using a Maruti Van driven by the teacher-librarians. The target was to reach about 400-500 new members with this library – but we are delighted to see that the new library already has over 800 active members. Across all the 3 libraries, nearly 3000 books are being issued every month, or about 100 a day.

The Two Mobile Libraries.

Suchana's first mobile library uses a van rickshaw to visit nearby villages. Two teachers accompany the rickshaw, and the rickshaw driver also works as a librarian, issuing books and reading aloud to the children.



The new mobile library, which began operating this year, uses a Maruti Van – bought second hand after special fundraising by Friends of Suchana – to go further field. Teachers have taken driving lessons so they are all able to get the books to the children.



First Language Books

Most books distributed by the mobile libraries are in Bengali, the language of schools. But the first languages almost all of library users are Santali and Kora – so Suchana uses this opportunity to take the experience of reading in their first languages to all of the libraries' 1100 members.

This way, Suchana's own Santali and Kora publications have been widely read locally!



Using Activities and Technology at the Libraries

Suchana uses puppet stories, reading aloud, art and basic literacy activities to engage children in learning at the library sessions.

We also have a growing interest in how technology can be used to support learning in very marginalised settings. Very simple mobile phones have been used in the villages for a few years; recently a few people also have low-end smart phones. So this year, Suchana has been working on digitalising and animating our Santali publications so these can be distributed on phone chips as a literacy resource. We have also been working with www.bookbox.com to convert the Santali anibooks they have made to Bengali script, so they are tailored for Suchana children.

Emerging good practice: Exchange-based sharing and learning

Suchana is increasingly being identified as a model for education innovation. This year it has had several opportunities to evolve methods for training and learning that use direct observation, hands on opportunities, and an exchange-based approach. A series of 'exposure visits' from Tata Trusts partners and other organisations, have aimed to share best practice in Suchana's priority areas, and to support organisations to evolve their work and experiment with new approaches.

Through these, work has begun to develop skill and theme based learning 'components' which visiting organisations can select from to build a tailored learning package. The exchange approach is based on the philosophy that each organisation has special skills and experiences to share, and that learning is enhanced when it builds on these skills and experience.



A visiting organisation talking to students in a 'mobile' centre about what they like about the ITE approach, and about using education materials and resources in their first languages.

COMING SOON – put the dates in your diaries and join us if you can!

Suchana Children's Mela

Sunday 8th November
2015

3 to 7 pm

With games, food,
prizes, art and activities
- all run by the children.

Annual Sports Day

Thursday 31st
December

2015

12 noon - 6pm
Join in a race
with us.

For the first time... Suchana's ITE Mela

Friday 29th January
2016

Introducing the
Integrated Technology in
Education Approach to
parents, schools and
other visitors

The Multi- Lingual, Multi- Cultural Annual Show

Sunday 14th
February 2016

Come and see many
performances!

THANKS TO ALL THOSE WHO HAVE HELPED US

Congratulations to Anna Binnie-Dawson who ran the Bath Half Marathon and raised over £1000! The group at Mere, Wiltshire, have raised over £11,000 since they started a few years ago, and recently held a very successful Pancake Party and Quiz. Thanks to: Jo Lees, Michael and Petrina Slaytor, Heather Chappell, Daphne Winter, Monica Russell, Christine Ford and Mary Grey; Sophie Milward who sold goods in Malvern, and many others for their continuing support; everyone who has made donations - new and old friends; everyone who attended, helped or took a stall at the Suchana Christmas Fair in Sheldwich Village Hall, Kent, raising over £500; Mary Anthony who cooked delicious food for a lunch for over 60 people raising £500 in April in Kent; the children of Sheldwich School, Kent, who fundraised for Suchana; all those kind people who make regular standing orders, many with UK Gift Aid adding 25% to their donations, amounting altogether to around £3,400 a year.

In India – many thanks to Mary Hurley, Jhilum Saha, Angele Vermette, Jill Hemmings, Parosh Society for the underprivileged, Krishna Roy, Indra Kumar Ghosh, Manjusri and Soumen Basu for generous donations – and of course for your visits too! Thanks to Maura Hurley and helpers for organising the clothing drive; Gautam Basu, Birendranath, and Soumya Chakravarti for guidance and encouragement for the Science Mela, Slater Harrison for a Science Mela grant; to Kathy O'Connell, Arogya Sandhan Santoshpur and Toronto-Calcutta Foundation for the eye camp and clothing gifts. And thanks, as ever, to our institutional donors, Tata Trusts and AID INDIA (Cincinnati Chapter).

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