



Suchana

The Uttor Chandipur Community Society

Newsletter

Who are we?

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 across the Education Resource Centre (ERC), in 5 other village centres, and in 25 library 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. Other centres are open 3-5 times a week. Currently, about 350 children participate in intensive learning activities. Our Mobile Library works in 26 villages taking library books and basic health and hygiene care to a further 1000 children.

If you would like more information, please contact us: suchana.india@gmail.com

Suchana's website is back!

You may (or may not) have noticed that www.suchana-community.org was down for a few months while we rearranged its location. But it is now back up and beautiful! Many thanks to Christian Wach and Akash Milward-Bose for their efforts.

Suchana now has some other types of web presence, in particular through its work with Storyweaver, the amazing digital platform which allows quick and easy translation of children's stories into multiple languages. There are now over 100 stories available in Santali and Kora (using Bengali script) – all translated by Suchana's Adivasi Support team.

A new initiative is in producing bilingual stories in Santali/Bengali and Kora/Bengali. Because we use Bengali script to write both Kora and Santali, these books can potentially be used by Bengali school teachers teaching Santali/Kora children, without a full grasp of the children's language. (See back page for lots of links).



APPEAL – Why we still need to run the ITE Learning Centres?

After five years of solid support, the Tata Trusts is closing its Integrated Technology in Education project all over India, from April 2019. In some states, such as Assam, the project has been taken up by state governments and will continue to run in schools. West Bengal is unfortunately not one of these, as the government has taken a different direction by introducing ICT in schools in an approach which is concerned only with content delivery. This means that children in West Bengal will continue to miss out on the core pedagogy of the ITE approach – which puts technology in the hands of students so they can make their own learning artefacts, based on the school curriculum.

We at Suchana therefore believe that where possible, we should continue to offer students this opportunity to experience this way of learning – to as many adivasi children as we can. We can do this through our 5 learning centres which offer supplementary classes to students in Classes 5 to 10, to support them to complete their school education.



Our appeal this year is therefore for help to support our Learning Centres to deliver the ITE and 'active learning' approach. Please help if you can!

- £4 funds classes in one subject of one week in a centre
- £20 funds a whole centre for a week including transport to take computers to students.
- £100 funds 5 groups to make full 'community projects' during holidays – authentic learning processes making digital projects, using first languages and on subjects of interest to their villages, using technology.

You can donate using these links, via the [Suchana Donation Page](#) or via [JustGiving](#)

STRENGTHENING FIRST LANGUAGE LITERACY AMONG SANTAL AND KORA CHILDREN

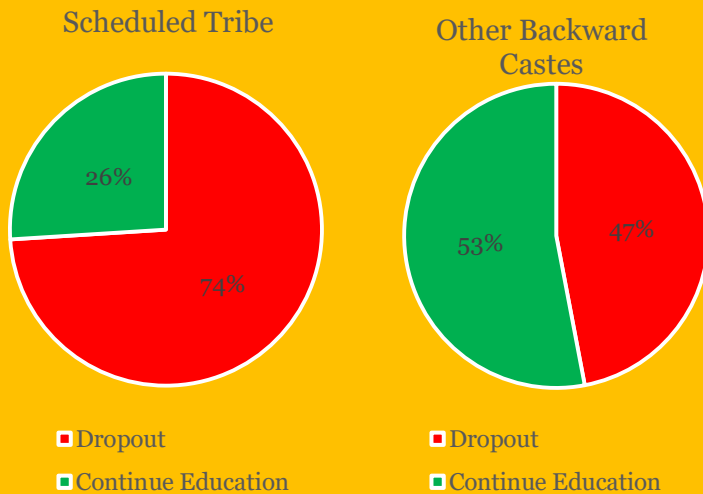
A project funded by The Paul Hamlyn Foundation

Suchana is delighted to have begun work in November 2018 on this exciting new project. Through it, we aim to work in partnership with schools, pre-schools and other NGOs to disseminate methods, materials and motivation to teach disadvantaged children in their own languages in early years education. The project pulls into focus many branches of work Suchana has been developing over the last decade.

Project Background

Learning in schools for Santali and Kora children is often challenging. Classes are conducted in a language that many do not speak or understand at the beginning. This can lead to slower acquisition of literacy and poor understanding of lessons. As a result, Adivasi children tend to have weak learning outcomes, and many drop out of school before class 10. This contributes strongly to a cycle of poor employment prospects, early marriage, early childbirth and therefore inter-generational poverty.

The latest statistics on dropout rates after class 9 amongst tribal children highlight the severity of the problem:



Suchana's Experience

Suchana has been developing methodologies for first language teaching and learning using Santali and Kora over the last decade. We have made alphabet charts, flashcards, text books and story books in both languages. We also use digital books that are easy to translate online. Our Early Learning Group has pioneered first language literacy and multilingual learning with children in classes 1 to 4. Results of tests conducted in Bengali show how these approaches have supported wider learning.

International research demonstrates the positive outcomes of supporting first language teaching and learning at a primary level, with case studies such as Indonesia, Ethiopia and Mexico providing evidence for this. The research shows that children learning in their first language is advantageous in 3 key ways:

- Better performance in second language academic work.
- Parents can take a more active role in their child's education
- Improves the learning of a second language

Based on the success we have experienced in this area, we plan to extend and improve these programmes. The 'Strengthening First Language Literacy' project, will make these methods available to primary and pre-primary educators in West Bengal, enabling more Adivasi children to learn in their own languages.

Our Key Project Aims:

- Facilitate Anganwadi teachers working in Adivasi villages to use first language approaches.
- Support primary school teachers in Santal and Kora schools to use first language and bi-lingual materials.
- Inspire and facilitate increased production and distribution of first language books, e-books and TLM in Kora and Santali.
- Generate further evidence to highlight the advantages of first language learning.

SPOTLIGHT ON: SUCHANA ALUMNI

Suchana is just now reaching the stage where its first students are now making their way out there in the real world, beyond Suchana's support. It is always difficult in education processes for providers to track the outcomes or impacts of their efforts in the long term, or to provide strong evidence of the link between those efforts and the results in students' lives. Like most education organisations, Suchana does not explicitly track what happens to its ex-students, but assumes that some of Suchana's explicit values of equality, including gender equality, cultural respect and celebration, and implicit values of resourcefulness, creativity and self-belief, are being carried into their own adult relationships, their communication with their own children, and into their approach to making livelihoods – as, for many of us, our own education has influenced our own lives.

Over the last year we have made efforts to reach out to local alumni in practical ways through some specific activities:

- **Three workshops for ITE project alumni covering practical life skills: online form filling; IRCTC train ticket booking; bank form filling; creating budgets, with the example of a family budget.**
- **A CV development workshop, and, to encourage more story availability for Suchana's younger students, a Storyweaver translation workshop.**

This year, Malini Basu – who herself grew up alongside Suchana - took the opportunity of applying for funding from her college for an enterprise development project at Suchana. She donated 3 sewing machines and fabric, and ran a 3-day workshop teaching a group of alumni to use them, making clothes and other products using both new and old 'scrap' fabrics. In the group was an alumni 'leader', Gita Mahato, who has taken the flag from Malini and will continue to teach new alumni groups basic machine skills as part of Suchana's 'activity groups' programme.

Alumni Success

Suchana is a closely community-based organisation, so we do have access to a variety of 'anecdotal' evidence about students living close to our main and original centre. At least 10 Suchana alumni have been involved as staff in Suchana in some capacity, sometimes initially as volunteers, including as: mobile librarians; English teachers in the ELG; art teachers; 'activity group' leaders sharing art/craft/performance skills.

- We were delighted to learn that Rajesh Kora, one of Suchana's very first students, after admirable perseverance, won a place at Viswabharati University's much respected Kala Bhavan (Art School) and is now in his first year of a Fine Arts degree.
- Debkanta Khan is now in his second year of a degree in Japanese at Viswabharati University's Japanese department.
- Nobin Kora completed a vocational Fitter course at the competitive Industrial Training Institute in Suri.
- Mahadeb Ghosh is now in his 3rd year of a Chemistry honours degree.
- Ajay Mahato has started his own cyber café business, also supplying computer peripherals



EVENTS UPDATE

The 2019 Stakeholder's Meeting:

On the 19th of January, a meeting was held hosting close to 100 stakeholders as part of our 'Strengthening first language literacy amongst Kora and Santal children' project. The meeting's attendees consisted mainly of local primary school and Anganwadi teachers, and other NGOs focused on first language issues. They listened to numerous talks from experts from different educational backgrounds, who focused on the ease and necessity of implementing first language teaching methods in a traditional classroom environment. The second half of the day then saw cross-party discussions between Anganwadi and primary school teachers on possible teaching methods and materials that could be used to improve the learning experience for Kora and Santal children.



October 2018 Children's Mela:

The 2018 Mela saw hundreds gather for a day of fun games and food organized and executed by the students of Suchana. There were 22 stalls overall featuring popular games such as the lottery, football through the hoop and potato throwing. The children were highly successful, selling close to 9,000 rupees worth of tickets.

Sports News

Girls' (and Boys') football

Boys' football has long been a popular village sport – it requires virtually no equipment and can be played in many kinds of open spaces. But girls' football has really taken off in pockets of West Bengal over the last four or five years.

Aside from giving girls' opportunity to excel in physical activity and to learn team coordination and cooperation, like for boys – girls' football is important because it gives adolescent girls an opportunity and legitimacy to leave the domestic spaces they are more confined to once they cross puberty, and participate in wider public life. It expands their geographies as they travel for matches, and it broadens their social networks as they interact with girls from other teams. In addition, when a team does well, it gives them real respect and status in their local communities. And even when they don't do so well, everyone loves a football match and respects the players' efforts.

Since Suchana had been making efforts to include girls in our Friday sports sessions over the last 15 years, it was a natural progression that a Suchana girls' football team would emerge when these opportunities arose – and they have been doing very well! Highlights of the Suchana girls' team efforts include:

- Winning the RSV tournament of 4 teams in April 2018
- Reaching the semi-finals of a tournament of 16 teams,
- Runners up in a tournament of 8 teams at Mohisdal, October 2018

Now both the boys' team and the girls' team are benefitting from a high quality twice-weekly football training initiative arranged by neighbouring organisation RSV. So, who knows where they will go next – watch this space!

THANKS TO ALL THOSE WHO HAVE HELPED

A huge thank you to La Martiniere school in Kolkata for help from different sources: to Martinian '78, an alumni group, for funding the external centres of our flagship Early Learning Group and its multilingual programme during 2018-19; and to the current boys' school for donating over 100 blankets to help with the winter months. Thanks also to Calcutta International School in collaboration with Maura Hurley for their large clothes donation.

Many thanks also for donations from the following: Helen Reid, Ben Wright, Mary Grey and Jo Lees, The Community of the Presentation Trust, Sheldwich Coffee Morning, Jeanne Hutchinson, Ritwick, K.S. Radakrishnan, Madhava Prasad, Amrit Bose, Indra Kumar Ghosh, Reena Dasgupta, Arunavo Sengupta, Ratna Mazumdar, Ranja Gurha, Panchali Rakshit, Kustav Chatterjw, Sudeshna Dasgupta, Ruby Mitra, Soumendra Mohan Basu, Darshan Mekani, Kirat Randhawa, John Shanahan, Anna Binnie-Dawson, Tracy Johnson, Jenn Humns, David Earley, Rachel Duncombe-Anderson, Angela Stoddart, Judy Seymour-Ure, Megan Reynolds, Paresh Birla, Margaret Scutt, Rosemary Ades, Robert Ivry, Margaret Allen, Annie Gogarty, Rontu and Cherrie Ghosh, Bunt and Susal Ghosh, Nirmal Ghosh, Sheldwich Primary School and to the Mere group for their consistent and generous support. Thanks also to the friends of Sujit and Sudhakaina Ghosh who made donations to Suchana as requested wedding gifts, and to Verna Blewett for the wonderful projector.

Thanks to those who have allowed us take collections and hold stalls: Macknade Fine Foods in Faversham, the Methodist Church in Canterbury, Morrisons in Faversham, Friends of the Earth in Faversham; Throwley Village Fete Committee.

Thanks to those who have helped at stalls and collections including Jinee Patel, Frank Stoddart and Christine Ford and Acacia Stoddart; who as part of her National Citizenship Award held a stall at Betteshanger. Thanks also to Alison Saracena for her contribution to rescuing our website, Slater Harrison at the Physics Factory; Heather Chappell; Julia Naman, Madeline Bronstein, Benedict Croft, Alice Marriott and Charlotte Thomas for volunteering at Suchana. And thanks, as always, to our institutional donors Tata Trusts, Paul Hamlyn Foundation, AidIndia, Paresh Birla of the India Council Philadelphia, and Friends of Suchana.

Important links

Suchana's work with Storyweaver is highlighted in this short video: [Suchana's work with Storyweaver](#)

And here are some of the stories Suchana's Adivasi Support team have translated: [Santali-Bengali bilingual stories](#), [Santali and Kora stories](#).

Not to be forgotten, here are a few of the wonderful 'community projects' made by Suchana students in their first languages (Santali, Kora or Bangla): [A new road in Mohisdal](#), [Rindanga threatened by the river](#), [Gender equality in Uttor Chandipur](#).

Last winter, a team from Google.org featured Suchana in a short film about the Storyweaver project (the platform was built by Google). We used parts of their very nice footage to make a video for the new First Language Literacy project (see above).

[Strengthening First Language Literacy among Santal and Kora children](#) – credit to Lonely Leap for the footage and Benedict Croft at Suchana for the editing.

Suchana: The Uttor Chandipur Community Society

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