

IBBY-Yamada Fund

Project reports 2025

IBBY India

Nurturing Critical Literacy through Literature in Indigenous Children



Every child has the right to become a reader



Final Narrative Report

Project Title: Nurturing Critical Literacy through Literature in Indigenous Children

Implementing Organisation: Muskaan, Bhopal, India

Supported by: IBBY–Yamada Fund (with support from Yamada Bee Farm)

Reporting Period: January 2025 – December 2025 (Final Report)

Project Locations: Bhopal, Madhya Pradesh- India (Dhekpur, Muskaan – Mitti Ka Ghar, Gandhi Nagar)

Target Communities: Kanjar, Pardhi, Gond

Project Coordinated and Facilitated by- Parag-IBBY India



Project Overview

The project “*Nurturing Critical Literacy through Literature in Indigenous Children*” was implemented by Muskaan, Bhopal with the support of the IBBY–Yamada Fund. The purpose of the project was to foster critical thinking and reflective engagement among children from marginalized and indigenous (adivasi and other deprived caste) communities through meaningful engagement with literature.



The project aimed to move beyond basic reading skills and instead used carefully selected children’s literature as a tool to question stereotypes, examine social hierarchies, and encourage independent thought. Through structured reading sessions, dialogic discussions, creative writing, and reflective activities, children were supported in developing the ability to analyze issues related to gender, caste, tribal identity, war, food diversity, constitutional values, and communal harmony.

The primary target group included children and adolescents (approximately 10–16 years) from Muskaan’s community libraries located in urban and rural areas and adivasi basties of Bhopal, including Gandhi Nagar (Pardhi Community) and Dhekpur(Kanjar Community) and Neelbad (Pardhi, Kanjar, And Gond). Many of these children come from historically marginalized backgrounds with limited access to diverse and high-quality literature. The project also worked closely with librarians and facilitators, strengthening their capacity to conduct critical literacy sessions and document children’s responses.

The broader context of the project is shaped by persistent social inequalities, gender biases, caste discrimination, cultural marginalization of indigenous communities, and shrinking spaces for democratic dialogue. In such a context, children often internalize dominant narratives without opportunities to question them. This project sought to create safe and reflective learning spaces within



community libraries where children could critically examine social realities, articulate their perspectives, and build a stronger sense of identity, dignity, and constitutional citizenship.



Over the course of implementation, the project evolved into a sustained journey of transformation —beginning with exploring gender beliefs, expanding into discussions on war and peace, caste and tribal identity, and culminating in strengthened constitutional understanding, creative expression, and community-level engagement through events such as writing workshops and a story fair.

Objectives and Results

Core Objective	To nurture critical literacy among Indigenous children through literature-based discussions on different social and political issues
Geographical Area	Community libraries (Pardhi, Kanjar and Gond communities) in Bhopal India
Total Children engaged	125
Total Structured Sessions	165
Total Structured Session type	read-alouds, facilitated discussions, creative responses, documentation by librarians, and reflective assessments to measure change
Total Librarian and Facilitator engaged	22
Total Youth volunteers engaged	50

The journey of the project from January 2025 to December 2025, with the children has been deeply enriching and meaningful. In every session, it was a truly gratifying and inspiring experience to witness the children move to higher levels of thinking and reflection.

While the children developed new perspectives and critical understanding, I too, as a facilitator, received valuable opportunities to learn and deepen my own insights. This initiative, along with the support received, has truly been a remarkable and impactful effort. Mursalin, a library facilitator.

Objective 1: To nurture critical literacy skills among indigenous and marginalized children through engagement with diverse and thought-provoking children’s literature.

Over the project period, children demonstrated a visible shift from surface-level reading to analytical and reflective engagement with texts. Initially, many children reproduced socially dominant beliefs (e.g., rigid gender roles, unquestioned nationalism, stereotypical views of caste and food practices). Through sustained dialogic reading sessions and guided discussions, children began to:

- Question stereotypes related to gender, caste, and tribal identity



- Distinguish between personal opinion and constitutional values
- Identify power structures embedded within stories
- Express disagreement respectfully and support arguments with reasons



Baseline and endline reflections showed a clear improvement in children’s ability to articulate independent viewpoints. By the final quarter, children were not only responding to texts but also connecting them to lived experiences in their communities.

Objective 2: To promote values of equality, dignity, constitutional awareness, and peaceful coexistence among children.

Thematic engagements around war and peace, caste discrimination, food diversity, tribal identity, and the Indian Constitution led to measurable attitudinal shifts.

- Children showed increased understanding of equality and constitutional rights.
- Discussions on caste and food practices reduced visible hesitation in speaking about discrimination.
- Children began recognizing discriminatory language and practices in everyday life.
- Conversations around war shifted from glorified nationalism to more nuanced reflections on human cost and peace.



By the end of the project, several children were able to articulate why dignity, diversity, and peaceful coexistence are essential for a democratic society.

Objective 3: To strengthen children’s creative expression and confidence through writing, storytelling, and participatory activities

The introduction of structured writing workshops and reflective activities significantly enhanced children’s expressive abilities. Children produced original stories, poems, and reflective pieces engaging with themes of identity, fairness, and imagination. Participation in the Story Fair (with 156 children across communities) demonstrated increased confidence, collaboration, and public sharing of ideas.

Children who were initially hesitant began volunteering to read aloud and lead discussions, indicating growth in self-confidence and ownership.

Objective 4: To build the capacity of librarians and facilitators to conduct critical literacy sessions effectively.

- The project significantly strengthened the pedagogical confidence of librarians.
- Facilitators shifted from transactional reading sessions to dialogic and inquiry-based approaches.
- Documentation quality improved, capturing children’s reflections more analytically.
- Librarians demonstrated greater comfort in facilitating discussions on sensitive topics such as caste and identity.



By the final quarter, facilitators were independently designing reflective prompts and adapting sessions based on children’s responses, indicating institutional capacity strengthening.

Overall Change Observed

Across the project duration, the most significant transformation was in children’s ability to move from passive acceptance of dominant narratives to active questioning and reflective engagement. The libraries evolved into safe spaces for dialogue, critical thinking, and democratic learning.

The project not only improved reading engagement but also nurtured identity affirmation, constitutional awareness, and social sensitivity among indigenous and marginalized children.





For instance- Vandana, a student, remarked with sharp insight,

“In riots and religious rallies, it’s always the poor youth from our communities who participate. The children of the rich or the politicians never get involved – they go to good universities, while we are made to fight.”

Children recognized how religious hatred is sown early, and how it breaks down the fabric of communal harmony and unity. These discussions reveal the emergence of a critical political consciousness among children – they were not only interpreting the stories, but questioning the systems of power and inequality that fuel such violence.

Activities and Approach

1. Selection of Books and Themes

The project began with careful selection of diverse and thought-provoking children’s literature. Books were chosen around themes such as gender, war and peace, caste, tribal identity, food diversity, constitutional values, and equality. Lesson plans were developed around each book to guide reflective discussions rather than conventional comprehension-based reading (see annexure- 1)



Approach

- Dialogic reading approach
- Developed lesson plan with Open-ended questioning (see annexure- 2)
- Small-group and whole-group discussions
- Reflective writing exercises

This approach directly supported the objective of nurturing critical literacy by encouraging children to question, analyze, and connect texts to lived realities.

2. Structured Reading and Critical Dialogue Sessions in Libraries

Regular library sessions were conducted across Muskaan’s community libraries in Gandhi Nagar (Gond community), Dhekpur (Kanjar community), and Neelbad mix group of Pardhi Kanjar and Gonds.

Books focussed on themes of gender beliefs, war and nationalism, caste discrimination, food practices and diversity, tribal identity and cultural dignity, and constitutional values were introduced progressively.



Approach

- Baseline and endline reflection tools: We developed a survey using a Likert scale, posing questions linked with gender and war. Based on the response children were scored (see annexure 3)
- The data shows a gradual shift in the children's perception (see annexure 4)
- Facilitated dialogue circles
- Use of visual prompts and story-mapping
- Group reflection charts



Children were encouraged to disagree, reason, and respectfully debate, creating safe democratic spaces within libraries.

These sustained engagements resulted in visible shifts in children's attitudes and reasoning capacities, directly advancing objectives related to equality, constitutional awareness, and identity affirmation.

3. Writing Workshops and Creative Expression

In the later phase of the project, writing workshops were introduced to deepen children's expressive capacities.

Approach

- Guided prompts linked to themes discussed.
- Peer-sharing sessions.
- Individual storytelling exercises

Children produced original stories and poems and reflective pieces, demonstrating internalization of critical themes (see annexure 5).

This strengthened confidence, articulation skills, and ownership over ideas, fulfilling the objective of creative expression and voice-building. Annexure



4. Story Fair (Community Engagement Activity)

A Story Fair was organized involving 156 children from multiple communities. The event included:



- Story-writing corners.
- “Kabad se Jugad” creative corner (waste to wonder)
- Storytelling and reading spaces

Approach

Activity-based participatory stations encouraged collaboration and imagination.

The fair expanded the impact beyond individual reflection to collective learning, confidence-building, and community-level celebration of children’s voices.

5. Capacity Building of Librarians

Continuous mentoring and reflection sessions were conducted with librarians.



Approach

- Team training sessions (see annexure 6)
- Feedback meetings.
- Strengthening documentation practices.
- Co-designing lesson plans

Facilitators gradually shifted toward inquiry-based pedagogy and demonstrated increased comfort in handling sensitive discussions.

Urmila, a library educator, shared,

“I had never seen war from this perspective — how so many innocent people, children, and animals die in something they have nothing to do with.”

This ensures sustainability and institutional strengthening of critical literacy practices.

Main Challenges and Adjustments

1. Initial Resistance to Sensitive Themes- Discussions on caste, tribal identity, and food practices initially led to hesitation and discomfort among children.

Action Taken

Facilitators slowed the pace, used storytelling as an indirect entry point, and built trust before deep discussions. Gradual scaffolding allowed children to open up more confidently.

2. Deeply Internalized Gender and Nationalistic Narratives- Baseline responses showed rigid gender beliefs and uncritical glorification of war.





Action Taken

Instead of confrontation, facilitators used comparative stories, reflective questioning, and peer dialogue to encourage gradual rethinking.

3. Librarian Confidence in Handling Complex Themes- Some facilitators initially felt underprepared to guide conversations on caste and constitutional values.

Action Taken

Additional mentoring sessions were conducted. Reflection meetings strengthened conceptual clarity and facilitation confidence.

4. Adjustments from Original Plan

- Writing workshops were expanded in the final phase after observing children's increased readiness for deeper expression.
- The Story Fair was strengthened as a culminating community-sharing event to consolidate learning.
- Additional time was allocated to discussions on constitutional values based on children's interest and engagement levels.



These adjustments enhanced the overall impact and responsiveness of the project.

Target Groups and Reach

1. Direct Beneficiaries (Children)- The project directly engaged **125 children and adolescents** (aged approximately 10–16 years) through sustained critical literacy engagement in Muskaan's community libraries.

These children primarily belong to marginalized and indigenous communities, including Pardhi community in Gandhi Nagar, Kanjar community in Dhekpur, and the mixed group of Pardhi gond Kanjar at Neelbad. Many participants come from historically marginalized backgrounds with limited access to diverse literature and structured spaces for dialogue and reflection.

Over the course of the project:

- **165 structured sessions** were conducted across libraries.
- **157 children participated in the Story Fair**, expanding outreach beyond the core group.





The project therefore ensured both sustained engagement (depth) and wider community outreach (breadth).

2. Secondary Groups Involved: Librarians / Facilitators

A total of **22 librarians and facilitators** were trained and actively involved in the project.

Their role included:

- Conducting 165 structured sessions.
- Facilitating critical dialogue on themes such as gender, caste, tribal identity, war, food diversity, and constitutional values
- Maintaining qualitative documentation
- Supporting writing workshops and Story Fair activities

The project significantly strengthened their confidence in handling sensitive themes and adopting dialogic teaching methods.

3. Youth Volunteers- **50 youth volunteers** were engaged in supporting the project.

They contributed to:

- Session coordination and logistics
- Community mobilization
- Facilitation support during the Story Fair
- Activity management at creative corners



Their involvement strengthened youth leadership and intergenerational engagement within the community.

4. Parents and Community Members

Parents and community members were indirectly involved through:

- Children's continued discussions at home
- Attendance and observation during the Story Fair
- Increased visibility of library-based activities

Several children reported sharing conversations about gender equality, caste discrimination, and constitutional rights within their families, indicating ripple effects beyond direct participants.

Qualitative Results and Indicators of Change

Over the course of the project, significant qualitative changes were observed in children’s thinking patterns, expression, confidence, and social attitudes. These changes were documented through baseline–endline reflection tools, session documentation by librarians, children’s written work, and observation of participation in discussions and public sharing spaces.



1. Change in Critical Thinking and Analytical Skills

Observed Change: Children moved from giving fixed, socially dominant responses to offering reasoned, multi-layered perspectives. They began questioning stereotypes rather than accepting them as “normal.”

Measurement Approach

- Comparison of baseline and endline responses.
- Quality of reasoning in group discussions.
- Written reflections and story.
- Documentation notes by facilitators.



For example, in early sessions on gender roles, many children expressed rigid beliefs such as specific tasks being “naturally” assigned to boys or girls. By the endline phase, several children articulated that such roles are socially constructed and unfair when imposed.

One child reflected during a later session,

“Pehle mujhe lagta tha ki kuch kaam ladkiyon ke hote hain aur kuch ladkon ke. Ab lagta hai ki kaam ka gender nahi hota, bas logon ne baant diya hai.”

This indicates a clear cognitive shift from acceptance of norms to critical questioning.

Observed Change: Children demonstrated greater understanding of equality, dignity, and constitutional rights. Discussions on caste, food practices, and tribal identity showed reduced hesitation and more reflective engagement.

Measurement Approach

- Responses during structured dialogue sessions.
- Ability to reference constitutional values in discussions.
- Participation in debates with respectful disagreement



Children who initially hesitated to speak about caste discrimination later openly discussed discriminatory practices in schools and communities, questioning their fairness.

“The police never treat our Pardhi people well. They come to our settlements and take people without a warrant, even though the Constitution says that no one should be treated unjustly. But our people never get justice. Even the judges look at us as if we are criminals. If a rich person commits a crime, the police talk to him respectfully and offer him a chair. But they treat us like animals. I don’t see any respect for human dignity anywhere.” (Dilbaaz, a child)

“You say that the government has no religion, but I saw our Prime Minister performing rituals at the Ram Temple. If the government is not supposed to promote any religion, then why is no action taken against that?” (Nakul, a child)

“If the government itself is not following what is written in the Constitution, then who can we complain to?” (Gulabi, a child)

In one discussion on food diversity and discrimination, a participant stated,

“Kisi ke khane ko galat bolna matlab uski pehchaan ko galat bolna hai. Agar sab barabar hain, to khana bhi barabar ka samman paana chahiye.”

Such reflections demonstrate growing empathy and the ability to link lived experiences with the principle of equality.

2. Strengthened Identity and Cultural Confidence

Adivasi and marginalized children showed increased confidence in speaking about their cultural practices without visible shame or defensiveness. Participation became more assertive, and children





began taking pride in sharing their traditions during discussions.

3. Growth in Creative Expression and Confidence

Children who were initially reluctant to speak or write began volunteering to read aloud, share original stories, and participate in public forums. The Story Fair, which included 156 children across communities, served as a visible indicator of collective confidence and creative ownership.

Overall Indicator of Change

By the final quarter, libraries had evolved into safe and dialogic spaces where children engaged critically, debated respectfully, and expressed independent viewpoints. The most significant qualitative outcome was the shift from passive acceptance of dominant narratives to thoughtful and reasoned engagement with social realities.

Quantitative outputs

Planned versus achieved outputs and criteria used to define success

S.No	Indicator	Planned	Achieved	Criteria for Success
1	Sustained engagement of Indigenous children	Year-long structured critical literacy engagement	125 children engaged consistently across the year	Year-long participation (not one-time attendance)
2	Community representation	Inclusion of diverse Indigenous communities	Participation from Pardhi (Gandhi Nagar), Kanjar (Dhekpur), and mixed Pardhi–Gond–Kanjar groups (Neelbad & other settlements)	Cross-community representation
3	Community-level outreach event	Culminating literary event	156 children participated in Story Fair	Participation beyond core group; public sharing
4	Capacity building	Train and involve facilitators	22 librarians/ facilitators trained and actively engaged	Active facilitation & documentation
5	Structured reading sessions	Regular dialogue-based sessions across libraries	165 structured critical literacy sessions conducted	Completion of planned session frequency
6	Thematic implementation	Thematic cycles aligned to critical literacy	Cycles completed on gender, war & peace, caste, tribal identity, constitutional values, and food diversity	Completion of thematic modules
7	Strengthening library collections	Procure diverse, theme-aligned literature	14 books purchased and integrated into community libraries	Books actively used in sessions



8	Reflective writing by children	Encourage thematic creative expression	250 original writing pieces collected (stories, reflections, responses)	Increase in voluntary participation
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Sustainability and Continuity

The project has laid a strong foundation for sustained critical literacy engagement within Muskaan’s community libraries. Sustainability has been built at three levels: institutional capacity, resource strengthening, and children’s ongoing engagement.

1. Institutional Capacity Strengthening

Through continuous mentoring and reflective practice, librarians have developed confidence and skills to independently conduct dialogic and inquiry-based sessions. The shift from transactional reading to critical engagement is now embedded in regular library functioning. Facilitators are capable of:

Designing reflective questions

- Handling sensitive themes such as caste and identity.
- Documenting qualitative observations systematically

This strengthened pedagogical capacity ensures that critical literacy practices will continue beyond the funded period.



2. Strengthened Library Resources

Strengthening library collections with diverse, high-quality literature aligned to project themes. The procurement of **314 diverse and high-quality books** has permanently enhanced the resource base of Muskaan’s community libraries. These books remain accessible to children and will continue to support thematic sessions in the coming years. Since the books are fully integrated into structured programming rather than kept as passive resources, their educational impact will extend well beyond the project timeline.

3. Sustained Engagement of Children

A core group of **125 children** has been consistently engaged over the years. These children now demonstrate increased confidence, reflective thinking, and creative expression. Many have taken ownership of library spaces and are emerging as peer influencers during discussions and public activities such as the Story Fair.

The continuation plan includes:

- Integrating critical literacy themes into regular weekly library sessions.



- Continuing writing workshops as a periodic activity.
- Organizing annual or bi-annual Story Fairs to sustain community-level engagement.
- Expanding thematic discussions to new groups of children

4. Building on Achievements

Muskaan plans to build on the project's achievements by:

- Developing a structured critical literacy module based on learnings from this project. The learning module can be online/offline to interested organizations and learning from the project supported by IBBY Yamada Fund can be shared widely.
- Strengthening documentation practices to track long-term attitudinal change.
- Exploring partnerships and funding opportunities to scale the model to additional communities

The project has shifted libraries from being reading spaces to becoming democratic dialogue spaces. This cultural shift within the institution represents the most sustainable outcome of the initiative.

Other suggested contents

Interviews with participants/beneficiaries of the projects (see annexure 7)

Financial Report

The detailed Financial Report, including the approved budget, actual expenditures per budget line, and explanations for variances, has been prepared in a separate document (see annexure 8)

Kindly refer to annexure 9 to access the complete financial statement.





Annexure Index:

Annexure 1: [List of Books Used](#)

Annexure 2: [Lesson Plans](#)

Annexure 3: [Base Line Assessment Tools](#)

Annexure 4 : [Changes in Perception](#)

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Annexure 8: [Approved Budget](#)

Annexure 9: [Financial Statement with Remarks](#)

