



# Bidya Charcha Kendra

Local Initiatives for Education – The Alternative

**Bidya Charcha Kendra** – the village centres for basic education of children – is a concept and a mission, not any organisation or institution. The mission is to regenerate the local initiatives for evolving an alternative system for educating their children. Its first unit started in Phuldanga village, Birbhum, on 14 April 2014 and now through individual efforts, 24 Bidya Charcha units have been initiated till September 2018, in several villages of Birbhum, Jalpaiguri, West Midnapore, Bankura, and Nadia districts, with 24 local educators catering to the educational needs of about 450 children.



## Why alternative local initiatives are needed?

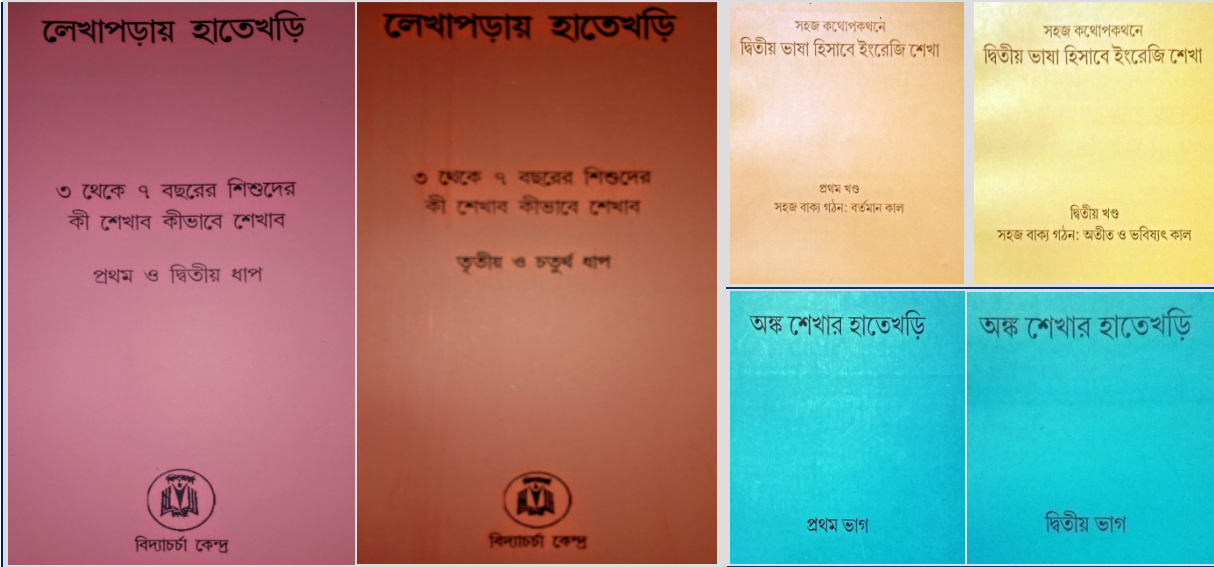
The formal education system — whether run as public or private schools by outsiders, its school buildings, the hourly bells and attendance registers, the so-called trained teachers coming from outside and speaking a different language or dialect, the teacher-student divide, the ceremonious mid-day meal, the voluminous and high-priced text books loaded with colourful pictures and written in modern urban perspectives — is, in fact, intimidating the local habitation and its children. What is being taught and how is being taught in these formal schools do not attract children to learning. It rather repels them, and that is the main reason for their drop-outs, which is particularly pronounced in the tribal areas.

Now-a-days children can pursue school education up to some level, only if their parents are able to engage private tutors for them, paying Rs.150–200 per month per subject. An alternative is therefore badly needed, particularly in remote villages. What could be this alternative? It can neither be in the model of formal schools nor be a private coaching centre —

- The classroom instruction model of formal education with its teacher-student divide and the so-called trained teachers coming from outside the village and speaking a different language or a different dialect cannot really help the children at the foundation of learning. The foundation of learning for the children has to be laid by their mother or aunt-like persons from the same village with some education. So, **local educators** should essentially be from among homemakers or young girls of the village. They should not act as teacher-instructors but would rather sit with the children and explain things in local vernacular with motherly care, and help them learn and practise the lessons.



- **Alternative textbooks** are needed as the school textbooks available in the market are not usable for this purpose.
  - The textbooks must be very simple and specific in their approach, without any excesses of elaborations and colourful pictures, which are confusing. The textbooks in the market, in order to enhance their market price, blow-up the contents with colourful pictures, unnecessary large font size and repetitions of contents and discussions.
  - The textbooks must be in small booklet form, which can be handled by children with their little hands. The production costs must be affordable, say within Rs.20 to 30 per book.
  - Besides the lessons for children's practice, the textbooks should contain detailed instructions with explanations for the local educators, indicating what is to be taught and how in stages.



- The work must begin at the **foundation stage**, that is, with the children in the age group 3+ to 7+. Later on, after 2–3 years, the children with proper foundation may be brought to the **next level** (8+ to 11+ age group, or class III to VI) by opening another unit of Bidya Charcha Kendra in the same village.





- For carrying out this local educational activity, the so-called education infrastructure like schools buildings, etc. is really not needed. In fact, it would rather shift the focus of the initiative to creation of something else — an institution or organisation and its everyday administrative activity. The alternative is— the local educator may carry out the teaching activity with 15–20 children every afternoon (six-days a week) **at a place in her own premises.**



- A Bidya Charcha unit can be initiated in a village with a bare minimum financial support — a provision of about Rs.3500/- as one-time expense for blackboards, seating mats, chalks, dusters, slate-pencils, books, etc., and a monthly amount of Rs.1500/- as support to the Local Educator. The parents would be requested to donate Rs.20/- to Rs.25/- per children, that may be used by the Local Educator for providing some snacks to the children once or twice in a week, and/or locally purchase consumable items like exercise books, pencils, erasers, etc as required.

### How to Go About It – the Road Map

With these realisations, the followings have been evolved in the course of this journey—

1. Model Plan — how to begin this alternative system of local initiatives in villages for education of their children — what are its dos and don'ts.
2. Study Material in lesson form — these are small booklets on Bengali, English, and Mathematics meant for children, starting with the 3+ age group. (These are copyrighted and permission may be granted for using them for similar activities.)
3. Instructions to the Local Educators — some detailed instructions and explanations about the activities to be performed and subject-wise syllabi to be followed for various age groups.
4. List of Items for setting up and consumables required (with approximate costs).

### Initiators – Spreading the Movement

Anyone intending to initiate such educational activity in villages, as his/her own independent activity, may contact any of the present Initiators to get the above four items. These being available, the only requirement for him/her would be to have some local contact with villages to identify the local educators to be assigned with the work, and arrange the financial support for the activity.

The donors may be requested to make direct bank transfers to local educators' bank accounts for sending the one time setting up cost of about Rs.3500/ and Rs. 1500/ to the local educators every month,. However, if required, the initiator may create a small independent Trust, which will

have its own bank account for arranging and making such transfers on behalf of the donor. A prototype of a Trust Deed is also prepared.

#### Present Initiators as on March 2018

Initiator	District	Initiator	District
Sutanu Bhattacharya	Birbhum	Debotra Dey	Bankura, Medinipur(W)
Dhiman Das	Jalpaiguri	Senjuti Gupta	Birbhum
Arun Kumar Agarwal	Nadia	Sunil Soren	Medinipur(W)
Karimul Hak	Jalpaiguri	Monidipa Kisku	Bankura
Benjamin Murmu	Medinipur(W)		

#### Presence of Bidyacharcha Units

As on September 2018

##### Birbhum

*Phuldanga, Mahisdal, Paruldanga, Tamsuldanga, Dhaltikuri*

##### Jalpaiguri

*Dhalabari, Lalbari, Dakshin Majhgram, Uttar Majhgram*

##### West Medinipur (Jangol Mahol)

*Chirugora (E), Chirugora, Birmadal, Dealrapara, Dhangikusum*

##### Bankura (Jangol Mahol)

*Gorabari, Khuridungri, Mahulboni*

##### Nadia

*Maajherchar*



BCK Centre	Started	No. of Children	BCK Centre	Started	No. of Children
Phuldanga I	14-04-14	22	Dhalabari	01-01-18	17
Phuldanga II	01-07-15	15	Lalbari	01-01-18	21
Mahisdal I	01-11-17	22	Dakshin Majhgram	01-01-18	23
Mahisdal II	01-11-17	14	Uttar Majhgram	01-01-18	18
Paruldanga	01-11-17	18	Chirugora (E)	15-04-18	19
Tamsuldanga	15-12-17	22	Chirugora	15-04-18	18
Dhaltikuri	01-09-18	17	Dealrapara	15-04-18	20
Majherchar	21-03-18	22	Birmadal	10-06-18	20
Dhangikusum I	22-06-18	19	Dhangikusum II	22-06-18	20
Dhangikusum III	22-06-18	19	Gorabari Barda I	15-03-18	16
Gorabari Barda II	15-03-18	17	Mahulboni I	22-04-18	16
Mahulboni II	22-04-18	17	Khuridungri	22-04-18	20

#### Donors/Sponsors– Providing Financial Support

The Donors/Sponsors as the benefactors have an important role in this education movement. They are the external financial support system and thus an integral part of the movement. The Initiator of the unit would keep the donors abreast of the developments of their sponsored unit(s). The donors are also expected to be in regular contact with the Local Educators and Initiators of the unit(s) supported by them.

The donors are requested to pay the financial support of one time Rs.3500/ and monthly Rs. 1500/ for the unit, by bank transfers directly to the Local Educator.

However, if a donor finds it inconvenient to regularly make this monthly payment to the Local Educator, he/she may send it to the Initiator of the unit in lump-sum— the One-time Setting-up Expenses and the Annual Value of the Monthly Support. The Initiator of the unit in turn will make, on behalf of the donor, the transfers to the Local Educator's bank account.

Besides the unit-specific donors, there may be some general donors who may wish to contribute more than or less than the exact amount of financial support required to run a particular unit for a period. As these contributions may not be linked with one particular unit, these may be handed over to any of the initiators of the existing units. If the Initiator does not have a separate bank account for the purpose, such donations may be given in cash only to the Initiator.

#### Donors as on September 2018

Unit Specific Donor	BCK Unit	Donor	BCK Unit
Dr. Santanu Dasgupta	Chirugora–I, Chirugora–II, Dealerpara (Medinipur-W)	Arun Kanti Saha	Dangikusum–II, Dhangikusum–III, (Medinipur-W)
Dr. Shubhashis Mukherjee	Dhalabari (Japiguri)	Dr. Sourav Das	Mohulbona–I (Bankura)
Dr. Basujit Gangopadhyay	Uttar Majhgram (Japiguri)	Gita Dey	Khuriduhgri (Bankura)
Dr. Manas Kundu	Lalbari (Japiguri)	D. K. Dey	Barda –I, Barda–II (Bankura)
Dr. Ratnabali Banerjee	Mahisdal, Tamsuldanga, Dhaltikuri (Birbhum)	Arun Kumar Agarwal	Maajherchar (Nadia), Birmadal, Dhangikusum–I (Medinipur-W)
Ms. Stokes	Mohulbona–II (Bankura)	Dr. Senjuti Gupta	Paruldanga (Birbhum)
Dhiman Das	Dakshin Majhgram (Japiguri)	Sutanu Bhattacharya	Phuldanga (Birbhum)

#### General Donor

Dr. Raghendra Chattopadhyay	Amrita Chowdhury Ghosh	Pratap Paul
Yashajit Saha	Dipanwita Nath	Anamika Chakraborty
Kalpana Mukherjee	Rupa Das Banerjee	Bimalananda Nath

#### Support and Assistance

Anirban Mukherjee	Ashoke Kundu	Maya Dehri (Birbhum)	Kolkata Kairali Samajam
Dibyendu Bhattacharya	Raju Hak (Jalpiguri)	Rinku Sekh (Jalpiguri)	Barnana Prakashani
Aparna Mazumder			



## Academic and Social Interactions – A Collage

### Hool Dibos (Jangol Mahol units in Medinipur-W and Bankura)





**Donating for Kerala Flood Relief 2018 (Jangol Mahol units in Medinipur-W and Bankura)**



**Annual Picnic (Birbhum units)**







Academic Interactions (Jalpaiguri)



Academic Interactions (Jangol Mahol units in Medinipur-W and Bankura)





**Academic Interactions (Birbhum)**



Bidyacharcha Kendra, September 2018. © Sutanu Bhattacharya

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