

Model Farm
The Green
Upper Poppleton
York
YO26 6DP
www.projectmala.org
01904 341004



Mala News

Patrons
Felicity Kendal CBE
Maharaja of Benares
Sir Mark Tully OBE
Lady Young
Madeline Weinrib
Obeetee Pvt Ltd
Surya Inc
Totzke Ltd

Anne Gilmour, Education Trustee, describes her initiatives to encourage children to enjoy reading stories

One of the things that has always frustrated me when I have been working with the staff and pupils at the Project Mala schools is the extent to which reading for pleasure is just not part of their lives. The pupils, of course, come from barely literate families and books have no place in their homes, but in fact pretty much no-one in India, apart from upper middle-class city folk, reads for enjoyment. The verb, 'to read' is translated as 'to study' and that is what books are for: reading for information that later will be regurgitated onto an exam paper.



We have tried many initiatives to encourage children to enjoy reading stories and to exercise their imagination by writing some as well, but progress is slow. We are well supplied with folk tales, and stories from the Hindu religious texts, and as these are the tales that have been told to children by their grandparents for generations, all our pupils are very familiar with the stories of gods and heroes, and the animal fables from the Panchatantra (which are similar to Aesop's fables). However, I am always searching for 'real life' adventure stories, and books set in the 21st century, and what I find difficult to source are story books written in Hindi that reflect the experiences of children like our pupils, from a poor rural background. The story books I do find are more often than not about well-off children in cities, who go to private schools, have cars, and holidays and servants. They are as far removed from life in a village in Uttar Pradesh as an Agatha Christie is. I would love to have as wide a range of interesting and exciting fiction in our school libraries as possible, to tempt our children to develop the habit of reading.

It was with this in mind that I came up with the idea of writing something myself for our youngest primary school children based on their village, families and school, in the hope that, recognising themselves in a story, they might be inspired to try one or two others and realise that a book could be read for fun.



'Sushil Sings' is the result. I chose an illustrator whose bold and colourful pictures I hope will make the book leap off the shelf and she based the illustrations on photos that I sent her of our children, families, homes and schools. The story is not true, exactly, but Sushil could be any one of the boys I have taught over the years and the inspiration for Asha is someone very real, who greets me with a beautiful smile every morning when I am in the schools.

I have published 'Sushil Sings' in an English and a bi-lingual English/Hindi version (translated by our Education Director, Mukesh) and the copies arrived just in time for me to take some of the bi-lingual books here to the schools, where they are now available in the school libraries. The profits from any of the books I sell in the UK will go to Project Mala and I hope that they will gradually make their way out into the world. Buy them for your children and grandchildren. Buy them for your friends. Buy the bi-lingual version for Hindi speaking parents who would like their children to have some books in their mother tongue. Buy one for yourself!

The books are available [here](#), on our website, and the profits will help us stock our school libraries with books for all our pupils to enjoy.

[Click here to buy the book \(https://projectmala.org.uk/donate-list-book.php\)](https://projectmala.org.uk/donate-list-book.php)



If you know anyone who you think might be interested in this newsletter, please forward it on.

Regards
Project Mala
01904 341004
mail@projectmala.org
www.projectmala.org