



*Swatantra Talim :*  
*a newsletter by*  
*Swatantra Talim*



### Editors Note:

Swa-Kranti is starting of a revolution in education and learning. It provides a space for Questioning and exploring the world. So let's all learn, unlearn and relearn in this journey.

### Looking Inside:

- **First Steps:** Our Journey
- **Milestones:** Updates for the field
- **Insights:** Democratic Education, perspective
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- **Join Us:** Be a part of this movement

## First Step

March 2013 a visit to Sumavanam School near Madanapalli was a spark which gave birth to Swatantra Talim. Meeting Usha Akka and Narsimhan sir shook something within us and this is when we started conceptualising the idea of setting up a learning community where-in each individual explores learning democratically. We gave our thoughts some shape and shared them with one of our mentors Ravi Gulati, Incorporating his valuable feedback we embarked on our journey. Thus Swatantra Talim was set up on 1<sup>st</sup> July as an initiative where children and youth are given space (both physical and mental) where they can truly practice, rather than just read about the principles of free speech, free association, and the freedom to choose their own learning paths.

In the initial phase enormous time was spent in meeting people and organisations who have devoted their energies and intellectual strengths towards teaching-learning initiatives and on ground educational experiences. One of them being Arvind Gupta who gave us a motto: share knowledge freely with everyone, his Kabad se Jugad experiments are being extensively used by us in our work. We learnt from each one of these experiences and they have played a major role in shaping our thoughts, programs and approaches.

We at Swatantra Talim believe that Children are born curious and we should try to enhance this potential rather than binding them in structures made by us. Let them hit and try and develop their own structures. Because what we learn through our own experiences we remember throughout out life. And in our society where the discourse on education mostly revolves around employability and competitiveness we at Swatantra Talim intended to extend the discourse to nurturing the child's innate ability to learn by co-creating spaces where children can explore, engage and empower themselves.

In our endeavour to co-create learning spaces we started our first democratic learning centre by the name Swa-Angan at Ramduari Village, Mahmoodabad, around 90 kms from Lucknow, where children explore their potential. Our learning community currently have 50 girls in the age group of 5 years to 14 years along with 5 adults in the age group of 30 to 50 years.

At our learning centre we have a community where learning is fun, where rules are made democratically with compassion and learning happens in a free environment with responsibility. Questioning is encouraged and actions are valued, initiatives and independent thinking are inculcated.

With Our learning centre being the core of our ecosystem providing a physical space for exploration, our work is also directed towards building mental exploration spaces by strengthening communities, spreading the work through workshops and creating opportunities wherein people can learn and share their learning with freedom.

## Milestone

- Conducted sessions to build on the capacity of an adult member from the community to serve as a “mentor” for the children and grooming the senior children to be the “co-mentors” for the junior children
- Some of the children had never gone out of their village, therefore organized excursion to “Mahmoodabad Fort” which is 10 kms from their village so that the children build their own perspective about the town, road, transport etc as well as assist them in learning about the history of their town
- Community involvement and participation initiated through managing committee meetings which led to the construction of enclosed learning space by the children, guardian and villagers out of their own means
- Conducted workshops in private city schools, government schools and twinkle learning centre through story pedagogy, kabbad se juggad experiments and co-operatives games
- Collaboration with organizations like Yeh Ek Soch Foundation, Lucknow working in the field of education and gender sensitivity
- Introduced the concept of “Bal Sangh” in which different fields like stories, co-operative games, kabaad se jugaad experiments, art and craft are selected by children on their own. On the similar lines, all the children participated and performed in the Republic Day celebrations

## Insight

As we had set the vision of our democratic centre: 1) a choice of areas of learning: the students choose what and how they want to learn 2) democratic self management 3) evaluation focusing on the individual—without comparison with others and without tests and grades 4) a place where children grow from age four till adulthood

To work towards our vision we started by doing lots of activities like kabaad se jugaad, origami, painting, story-reading, puppetry, co-operative games etc and finally at the end of two months of exhausting labour, we thought we had done it and can now introduce self directed learning concepts, for which we had set up an innovation lab where we took a lot of material with us and asked the children to make whatever they want to and learn by themselves. But actually, we were only at the beginning of a long, hard, and wondrous journey. As children could not figure out what to do and wanted instructions which turned into a chaos which in the beginning appeared as if we had a long way to go but this is when we started analysing how to work on it and we devised a curriculum that was divided into two; half a day of compulsory studies and half a day of electives. While the children chose which elective they want, it was difficult in the beginning, but as they picked it up they wanted only electives throughout the day. Children started taking initiatives as four of our senior children (age-wise) started sharing knowledge by taking classes for the juniors. Taking things further children themselves planned an event on Republic Day. It was a first exploration where children did everything from organising, participating and managing resources in a democratic manner. In January we reached a milestone where we established the concept of Bal-Sangh where children choose to do what they want to do and learn through self-directed learning. Now once a week they decide what will happen - it could be games, dance, stories, science experiment or math problems, but the key is that they individually decide what they want to learn. They have a slogan: Coercion does not encourage creativity while free-will enhances learning.

# Pictureka



# Voices

"Rahul and I had made the Arvind Gupta DC motor for today's class. They were thinking of doing a few sessions on energy with the older children, just exposing them to new ideas, try to draw out questions from them etc. . I thought he made a good science teacher, getting the children to look at different aspects of the motor, and asking questions that made them think."

: Kishore (friend)

"मेरे सर जी और मैडम जी हम सबको अपनी इच्छा अनुसार जो हमको पसंद है वह करने के लिए प्रोत्साहित करते हैं. मुझे रोज सेंटर जाने से कुछ न कुछ सीखने को मिलता है और मैं वहाँ पर जो मुझे आता है वोह मैं भी सिखाती हूँ"

: आशिमा बानो (learner)

इस केंद्र के माध्यम से, सामाजिक, मानसिक, आत्मनिर्देश का विकास बड़ी आसानी से होता है। जो व्यक्तियों के दैनिक जीवन में अहम भूमिका निभाती हैं। मुझे इस कार्यक्रम में काफी गौरव प्राप्त होता है। तथा एक सच्योनिष्ठ से कार्य करना चाहता हूँ। इसी प्रकार यदि यह केंद्र कार्य करता रहे तो व्यक्तियों और मेरा आत्म गौरव बढ़ेगा केंद्र पर पढ़ाना मुझे उत्पादक अर्थदाता है। क्योंकि इस खुली तालीम (SWA) आने वाली पीढ़ी का भी विकास भागी भी सुपधी बनेगा।

विनोद कुमार  
अनुदेशक - स्वतंत्र तालीम

# Join Us

## *Be a Pen-Pal*

Lots of things are happening around us every day but few reach to the other person. It is an endeavour to bring these stories or experiences out, whether being experienced by an adult or child, so that our children in villages build their own perspective about your surroundings. Similarly, the children from the villages would love to respond to your stories or experiences so that the children on the other side build a perspective which is of their own and is unbiased with an adult's perception. It is by being each other "pen-pals" that one could have meaningful insights about each other's surroundings. You could write to us to share your story or experiences.

## *Be a change-agent*

Join the revolution by being a part of our team, one who has the trust in the vision and has the enthusiasm to steer the way. If you believe you could spend some time during the day or week (onsite or offsite) and contribute towards this journey, do write to us at or give us a call.

## *Plan a visit*

You can visit our rural learning centre which is approximately 90 kms from Lucknow. The children would love to interact, play and co-learn with you. So when are you coming tell us the dates?

## *Send a gift*

We promote gift culture and you can be a part of it, bring a smile on the children's faces by sending a gift in the form of story books, stationary items, hand-made items, greeting cards, board-games etc. You can send the gifts at Swatantra Talim Foundation, 1355, Sector K-1, Aashiana, Lucknow – 226012

## *Endorse Financially*

You can make a difference in their life by supporting the project in financial terms. You can directly send the money in bank account the details of which are as follows.

Swatantra Talim Foundation,  
HDFC Bank, Aashiana Branch, Lucknow  
A/c number – 50100033963170  
IFSC Code – HDFC0001943

## *Contact Us:*

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