

Swaraj University



Dear friends and family,

Warm greetings from Swaraj University!! This year, in July, with the onset of new khoji cohort, Swaraj University began its 7th year in action and also crossed mark of 100 khojis who have joined this 2-year program. 7th khoji cohort brought in 22 new khojis from around the country. The year also started with a note of celebration as we saw the 5th cohort getting initiated and embark on a new journey at the Naya Aagaaz (New Beginning) ceremony. Heartily congratulations and wishes to all of them on this journey.

PROGRAM - EXPERIEMENTS AND EXPERIENCES IN YEAR 1

Since there was no major shift in the facilitating team of year 1 of the program this year, there were various experiments the team could do with 7th cohort also keeping in mind the sheer number of khojis in this cohort, i.e., 22. Our objectives were, this time, to create more flexibility for khojis (in terms of their pace, learning style, needs), reduce dependency of khojis on facilitators, keep time and space for emerging needs of khojis and turn it into a more peer-led program where they are taking initiatives. Surprisingly, in the first meet itself, a lot of khojis did take charge of the sessions and hosting. A group of khojis designed and hosted a sharing session of City Eklavya time (a 2-day challenge to meet artisans, go beyond comfort zone, take risks, make relationships, to break the patterns of learning just from so-called experts) Another set of khojis designed and hosted 'Documentation and portfolio' session. A group also experimented with re-thinking morning meetings. It was also an intention to create a 'doing and possibilities' energy during the meet where they take up small projects on and around campus to do something with hands and we called it *Hunar Hours* (time to learn/practice a skill) In it, one of the groups was working on creating a hangout space within the campus, one wanted to set up a herbal product store, another wanted to try out making and selling tea, and another wanted to write and perform a play. Though, after reviewing, we felt, some more time and a good closure would have made it much more valuable for khojis.

Other objectives were also to create a space for real projects for people who want to try it. 6-7 people from the cohort, in their Eklavya time, collaborated, with a friend Rohit Jain, who runs an organic store Banyan Roots as well as is a part of organic farming movement, on visiting organic farmers, documenting their journeys and turning that into a presentable format (Movie & PPT presentation) to be shown at gatherings of Organic Farmers Association of India. Also some other khojis volunteered in organizing an Unconference in Udaipur. This helped people get the right exposure to interact with the world and also realize the gifts they are carrying within. Having a large group had its strengths and challenges both. Khojis coming from diverse background, different age groups and work experiences was a gift as they could now find support, guidance and motivation within the group. They could also find partners with similar interests with whom they could team up and co-work. This reduced their dependence on facilitators and helped khojis who would otherwise feel lonely and in-apt for taking up a task alone. Presence of *Mitras* (friends – Pradnya, Sameer and Shivendra) during the meet helped khojis have more support and guidance. Though, as a team, we feel, for such a big group with diverse needs, having more mitras, elders or facilitators on the campus would help, who could take different roles like interacting, listening, guiding, connecting khojis to possibilities and resources, and sometimes doing some tasks together with khojis, which all otherwise lands on the few available facilitators now on the campus.

PROGRAM – EXPERIEMENTS AND EXPERIENCES IN YEAR 2



Khojis learning to market by selling a broom

Focus of our second year program is to help khojis dive deeper and go to the core of the subject in field they are passionate about. This happens based in real world context where the khojis take up projects and dabble in various dimensions like – experimenting with new ideas, communicating their idea to the world, trying to make it sustainable, seeing how it impacts the society and the larger world, engaging in deep reflection, etc. Khojis are invited to participate in several exercises which help to hone their skills to start enterprises or sustainable projects. The year started with khojis sharing dreams that they want to bring to life – some projects are in the field

of cooking, facilitation, alternative education, farming and design and art. As a first step to take their dreams to the next level khojis visited 6 local enterprises (some with social cause) and did a thorough interview of the founders to understand various business dimensions. Later part of the meet khojis experimented taking up a challenge to sell any idea/ concept/ product close to their heart and in 24 hours trying to double the money they have put in the business. Through fun, team work, prototyping – all the teams had a great learning experience through this challenge.



Deepankar sharing his story and story of his initiative Anubhavshaala

We began year 2 this year with going on a learning journey to Chhattisgarh (which is currently a hotspot for Naxal issues). This journey was an eye opener and helped khoji establish a connection of their city based lifestyle to the atrocities faced by the Adivasi folks in the interior jungles. In our experience such journeys do leave a deep impact on khojis and influence the kind of work that khojis want to engage in.

WHAT'S NEW ON THE CAMPUS

On the campus, we have a new mud plastered & circular structured hall named *Ojas*, that was build earlier but due to low capacity of roof to hold the weight, it was reworked and along with some khoji involvement, the roof was built again and is now ready to use. A previously built room was extended with cob-wall construction (involving khojis who wanted to learn eco-architecture) having a kitchen and storage space within making it ready for the use as a facilitator quarters. Also there have been some experiments on organic farming on the campus using *Natueco model of organic farming*, as a part of which, many beds of soil and compost were prepared for *Amrit Mitti*, a nurturing output to improve the soil quality of rocky lands and to enhance crops and fruit output.



OJAS – Mud and Bamboo circular hall



Cob-walled extension of a room

KHOJI INITIATIVES

Rahul Karanpuriya, a 3rd cohort khoji, inspired from the initiative '*52 Weeks, 52 Jobs*', Rahul began *52 parindey*, a project dedicated to identifying and documenting the lives of 52 innovators who are making a conscious living for themselves and their planet through alternate careers. On this course, he has already met and documented lives and works of 36 people that includes farmers, innovators, story-tellers, gardeners, etc.



A group of 5 khojis (**Jawahar, Samyuktha, Isha, Abhiram, Asawari**) from the 6th khoji cohort decided to do an experiment on simple living as that was a common vision for all of them. It started with a 15-day tent stay, living with minimum necessities and getting to know each other. Presently, they are on a similar 6-month experiment in Dharwad, Karnataka at Sumana Sangama Farm.

Aman and Hari, both 5th cohort khojis, trained as and Drum circle facilitator at Taal Inc., organization that conduct Drum Circles for a wide range of groups, teach West African Drumming, perform music and conduct various behavioural training programs and action – research into how arts and music affect Health and Well-Being.



Anuj, a 4th cohort khoji recently started, along with his father, an enterprise 'Takali' in Indore (M.P.) retailing hand-woven and natural dyed fabric and clothing. He held a 3-day exhibition in Indore and also participated at other handicraft exhibitions across the country. Recently, he opened up a retailing outlet in Indore.

Gaurav Gurjar, a 3rd cohort khoji is working with Swechha, a Delhi-based ecological organization, to design Delhi's first air-shed park in Vasant Kunj. This model community park is designed in a way to clear out polluted air and also have a mini forest, native Indian herb garden, butterfly garden, a moth pollinated moon garden, native grass patch and much more for all the species to co-exist.

Karen D'Mello, a 3rd cohort khoji co-founded 'KathaSiyah' a theatre company in Bangalore last year with the aim to produce and support work that draws on lived experiences portrayed from the perspective of women. Since its inception, KathaSiyah has produced the award winning play, 'Taramandal', written directed by Karen. Their next production 'GidaGiduga' is ready to premier at the Rangashankara, Bangalore.



REACHING OUT TO THE WORLD AND MEDIA



Reva at Olakh – feminist resource, training center in Vadodara, Gujarat

In last 6 months, some of the khojis' journey and initiatives got published in media. *Eartha*, *The Better India*, *Loksatta* and *Optimist Citizen* published about Rahul Karanpuriya's initiative '52 parindey', whereas *Yourstory.com* published on Kamalbir's enterprise of upcycled bags 'Saadgi'. Gaurav Gurjar, who now heads Green Creeps, an enterprise on urban farming, had his share of interviews on news channels, speaking against the use of banks of Yamuna River for a massive festival held by a prominent spiritual organization. *India Today* magazine published an article 'My freedom to unlearn' by Manish Jain featuring Swaraj University. Reva

Dandage hosted a dialogue session at Olakh – a feminist resource, training, and counselling center in Vadodara, Gujarat. She also gave a Ed-Talk held by MindMingle group, Delhi on "Death of a learner and Birth of a directionless society". Rahul Hasija wrote for online portal *Eco-folk* on 'Practices and experiments on ecological sustainability at Swaraj University'.



UPCOMING EVENTS

There are three big events lined up this winters that are co-hosted by Swaraj University and Shikshantar, starting with

- 1) **Art of Hosting:** an approach to leadership that scales up from the personal to the systemic using personal practice, dialogue, facilitation and the co-creation of innovation to address complex challenges. Facilitated by Toke from 2nd – 5th December 2016.
- 2) **Learning Societies Un-conference**– a confluence of 1000 + people from diverse backgrounds who are consciously trying to lead a different life and work. This event is happening after a gap of 3 years, starting 14th December to 19th December
- 3) **Water Innovation Lab:** in partnership with **Waterlution Canada**, it is a 12 day learning journey from Jan 18th – 29th 2017 that develops future water leaders to think holistically, design innovatively and communicate effectively across cultures.
- 4) **Eco-versities'** second gathering of '*Kindred Folk Re-imagining Education*' from 17th Feb to 23rd Feb 2017 in Costa Rica. Eco-versities is an emerging collective of individuals and communities from a variety of learning projects around the world.

In the recent past, we have had 'open for public' workshops & gatherings like Jeevan Vidya, Sociocracy, Udaipur City Unconference, Shamanism, Non-violent Communication, Re-thinking Development that became a medium to involve seekers from different walks of life, at different points in their journey, creating a space for inter-generational learning.

Looking forward to your presence,

Sonika Gupta- Rahul Hasija-Suyash Saboo - Pradnya Khadilkar
Sameer Dandage - Deepankar Raina- Shivendra Vaiyapuri
Aas Bai - Choti Bai - Ravi Gaekwad- Suresh Garg
Reva Dandage - Manish Jain - Nitin Paranjape

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