

Imagine a University with No Classrooms, No Teachers, No Degrees, Curriculum or Exams Founded on Principles of Self-Designed and Self-Determined Learning

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What if you walk into a university to find out that there are no classrooms, no teachers, degrees, curriculum, and exams? Above all, you see people learning joyfully

in their own ways, involving their head, heart and hands, doing what interests them and making a difference to what they most care about in their lives. This is the vision and practical educational goal for Swaraj University.

A university (Latin: *universitas*, "a whole") has come to mean an institution of higher education and research which awards academic degrees in various academic disciplines. But the word "university" is derived from the Latin *universitas magistrorum et scholarium*, which roughly means "community of teachers and scholars."³

Our concept of university is a place where learners and teachers come together to learn, research and experiment. We use the word 'University' to challenge the notion of what a university has come to mean. Swaraj University does not offer any

Imagine if the youth of today...

- Were equipped with the skills to deal creatively with complexity, uncertainty, collapse and change in the world?
- Had a personal vision of and commitment to building healthy and resilient communities and lifestyles?
- Were able to put their ideas and dreams for social change into real action?

Swaraj University was founded in 2010 as a two year learning programme for youth. The focus of the programme is on self-designed learning; deepening understanding and practice of perspectives like ecological sustainability, social justice, healthy living; and finding / designing and starting 'right livelihood' + leadership (livelihood which integrates my dreams / heart's calling, gifts, beliefs & values in a way that is in sync with Nature, communities

This self-directed learning process invites learners to identify their hearts' visions and engages them in developing the skills, relationships and practices they need to manifest those visions.

The programme is as much about developing the capacities and confidence we need to create and pursue our unique learning paths as it is about strengthening the leadership capacity and right livelihood opportunities in communities.²

degrees, diploma or certificate, nor does it have or require accreditation from anyone. Rather than certificates Swaraj helps learners (learners at Swaraj are known as khojis i.e. seekers) build their learning portfolios, which comprise their experiences and achievements, actual work models and recommendation letters from mentors, peers, and feedback council



Swaraj University is located at Tapovan Ashram 15kms from Udaipur city in the Rajasthan province of NW India. The University was founded in 2010 when it launched a 2-year programme that is partially structured and partially co-created with khojis to enable them to become self-designed learners and whole, happy and healthy beings.

The concept of swaraj, or self-rule, was developed during the Indian freedom struggle. ... As Gandhi states, "It is swaraj when we learn to rule ourselves." The real goal of the freedom struggle was not only to secure political azadi (independence) from Britain, but rather to gain true swaraj (self-rule where 'self' implies an interconnection of many selves, local governance and localized and self-reliant model of living). Swaraj University uses this concept as a foundation principle for educational and pedagogical

cultures and practices to support and enable self-directed and self-managed learning.⁵

Educational mission

Since its inception in 2010 Swaraj University has provided a platform for young people to identify their hearts' vision and engage them in developing the skills and practices they need to turn their vision into reality. In this way Swaraj University nurtures the creativity of its learners and empowers them to bring their ideas into existence so they can make a positive contribution to the world.

Our khojis come from all over the country. They are also from varied socio-economic backgrounds and hail from metropolitan cities, semi-urban as well as rural areas. The first cohort of khojis joined Swaraj in 2010 and in the last 7 years, over 120 khojis, more than 250 mentors, and countless other supporters from all over the world have been part of the programme while the idea has reached many more in some way or the other.

The question might arise as to why we need a programme for self-designed learners. All of us have experienced self-designed learning and we might be ready to walk our own unique paths, but several factors stop us: fear and doubt, lack of mentorship or guidance, finding supportive co-travelers, socio-economic responsibilities or simply not knowing how to start.



At Swaraj University, we support and enable khojis to start, create and reclaim self-designed learning processes and projects and provide a safe space for learners to walk their own path with other co-travelers. We engage them with many unlearning challenges to help them out of their comfort zones and build deeper perspectives for regenerating self, soil and society.



We also connect khojis to a wide network of individuals and organizations that provide internships, mentoring and work opportunities, support them to discover and translate dreams and passions into real and sustainable livelihood possibilities. The programme also involves building skills like critical questioning, self-awareness, effective communication, goal setting, project planning, self-

evaluation, managing multiple perspectives and more.

Origins

Swaraj University was founded by four visionaries - Reva Dandage, Manish Jain, Nitin Paranjape and Deborah Frieze - who imagined a democratic open learning space for youth to engage in. The seeds for this venture were sown years before. One of the co-founders, Reva Dandage, in spite of being an above-average student in school failed in all subjects of class 12th exam. During the same time, two of her friends committed suicide due to failure in exams. This made her question the parameters of grading and measurement and pushed her to find the dreadful impacts it was causing to a learner. She felt these parameters were not leaving learners with satisfaction and happiness; rather they created new social hierarchies like rank, grades, pass or fail. Then on, she has been passionately involved with democratic education. Her interest in understanding the pedagogy of self-directed learning made her leave a well-established design business and took her to several alternative and free schools around the world.



Manish Jain, on the other hand worked with UNSECO, where he realized that there were existing traditional learning systems in African and Asian nations to which the mainstream education not just neglected, but destroyed. He saw a big picture of how the whole education system is destroying local cultures, traditions, occupations and is creating more insecurity and fear, and is getting people ready only for corporate slavery. This made him quit his job and he came back to India, and along with his wife and sister, initiated a learning movement called Shikshantar in Udaipur. For last 20 years, Shikshantar has worked tirelessly creating alternatives and challenging mainstream education system. It has also worked for creating Udaipur as learning city. Over the years, several hundred people have visited Shikshantar and have gotten inspired and taken home a seed for change in their lives. Manish along with his wife have unschooled their daughter Kanku and has motivated many families to do the same.



Nitin has been actively involved in activism through Abhivyakti Media for Development, an organization he and his wife started 25 year back in Nasik and has actively worked with land rights movement including Narmada Bachao Andolan. Nitin, in his life, has experimented a lot on learning and unlearning. He also supported her daughter to unschool. He opens up space for talking which a youth does not find anywhere in society. Nitin and Manish ran a fellowship program called Berkana fellows for self-driven adults striving for a different lifestyle and occupation just before the launch of Swaraj.

Deborah, another co-founder, lives in USA and was long associated with Berkana institute. This US-based nonprofit promotes “leadership development” projects based on community conversations on issues of interest. She has also co-authored a book with Meg Wheatley called Walk Out Walk On: A Learning Journey into Communities Daring to Live the Future Now. She also runs an urban learning center where neighbors gather to rediscover how to create healthy communities.



Concept of fee at Swaraj University

What are the expected expenses for a learner at Swaraj University?

Today we see commodification of everything around us, including education. This is wiping out ideas and practices of deep learning, self-organizing learning communities and vibrant learning ecosystems. Hence, at Swaraj University we believe that learning should be free. This will not only help revive other practices of learning but will also give us the opportunity to re-examine our relationship with money. Through this we can explore money in a newer and holistic manner and experiment with the spirit of gifting, sharing, trust and abundance.

However, to run this program we will incur expenses for lodging, boarding and travelling for each learner. For those whom it is possible we ask a contribution against the above mentioned expenses. And if you can, your additional contributions will help to support other peoples' participation. This year for the batch starting in 2017, the expected contribution to meet the cost is Rs. 1,30,000/ year/ person (equivalent to £1534).

However, if you cannot afford this for any reason, then please let us know and we will arrange for a scholarship for you <http://www.swarajuniversity.org/concept-of-fee.html>

A unique ‘institution’

One frequent compliment we have received from khojis is that this place offers them acceptance that they struggle to get elsewhere, and that is one of the biggest reason young people are attracted to Swaraj. Unfortunately, due to pressures of society, family, media, and education system, youth today are devoid of acceptance at every level. In the tender age of 15-27, a lot changes in the life of a youth which they need to cater to - there are struggles with parents on career & livelihood; that is when they begin tryst with relationships and love; there are a lot of bodily changes, one also begins to question their role in the society, or find purpose of life, or try to understand one’s own sexuality. Unfortunately, our education system and none of the universities focus on all these aspects of life. The only focus is on career and livelihood while a lot of youth today struggle with low self-esteem, and if unnoticed and uncared for, they carry the unnecessary emotional baggage with them.

Making music from waste



Community



At Swaraj, apart from understanding one's interests and developing and practicing life skills, a lot of the focus is on holistic learning; which means it is inclusive of understanding self, working with others including the local community, harmonizing relationships at home and society, and understanding body and emotions, and much more. Workshops on Non-Violent Communication (NVC), Understanding, Gender and Sexuality, Dance Movement Therapy, Jeevan Vidya, and living together in a community at Swaraj have helped khojis find balance in their lives. To cite an example, two of our khojis at separate points in time had to leave the programme to spend time with their ailing fathers. Any other place of study or work would have not counted or valued this experience, but here, as a community, we did it and rather encouraged them to hold that period of time as a learning time. One of them even used NVC to bridge many gaps to heal his strained relationship with his father.

Life at Swaraj University teaches young people to be an active citizen in a democratic community. Right from deciding a day's schedule to deciding what kind of food experiments the community want to try, from resolving a conflict to sometimes sitting 8 hours at stretch in a community meeting struggling to come to a decision - all of it has help khojis build muscle to live in any kind of group - be it in a family or workspace. Democratic education has helped khojis be more tolerant, patient and learn to look at other's point of view- which is very essential in today's living.

The best part for khojis as well as the facilitation team has been the continuous evolution of the programme. It has never been the same for any khoji cohort, and nor it has been for the facilitating team. Every khoji cohort bring their own flavors, ideas and needs, thus helping the program to not be stagnant but evolve keeping everyone on toes, ready to learn new things, challenging & pushing everyone out of their comfort zones.

Table 1 Important differences between Swaraj University and a traditional university⁵

<i>Swaraj University</i>	<i>Formal university</i>
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Self-directed learning where individual interests and styles are the foundation of the programme 2. Learner decides the amount of time he/she requires to go into the depth of the subject 3. Learners carry out self and peer evaluation as well as develop their own learning portfolios 4. Grooming of learners so that they question the current state of society and develop the commitment and practice of sustainable action 5. All the learning opportunities are real and are based on understanding of local issues and their global context 6. Geared towards starting one's own enterprise 7. Co-learners coming from a wide variety of backgrounds and ages that can help in bringing different flavours and learning resources to the process 8. A sense of community and democratic co-learning environment 9. Each learner will have a mentor in their area of interest and a mitra to provide guidance in the learning process 10. Hindi and local languages are used in the learning process to bring out feelings and nuances, and to keep ourselves in contact with our cultures 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Compulsory learning- individual interests and learning styles are not taken into account 2. Limited time and opportunity to understand the subject in-depth 3. Evaluation based on testing which creates fears, inferiority complexes and a sense of competition with others 4. Grooming of learners so that they become spectators, producers and consumers for the state and corporations 5. Teaching matter and the process is disconnected from their immediate world 6. Geared towards finding a job in the government or a corporation 7. Students separated by age groups. Students from similar age group are put together in the classrooms. 8. Hierarchical and authoritarian learning environment 9. Larger class size, so lack of individual attention 10. Teaching done majorly in English, which disconnects the student from local culture

Pedagogical principles & practices

An educational concept of 'swaraj' (learners as self-determined, self-directed, self-managed and self-regulating) underpins the pedagogical practices that are used to develop learners so that they can become proactive beings. There are also strong elements of ecological thinking embedded in the relationships that are cultivated between the learners and their mentors and facilitators and the natural and social environment in which they are learning. For example, Khojis are also empowered to build their own support structure involving parents, peers, friends, mentors, and other people who can motivate, inspire, instigate, critique and help them through their journey.

Each person's learning programme is individualized according to his/her specific interests, talents, questions and dreams. There is ample scope for learners to develop a multidisciplinary curriculum. There is a strong focus on apprenticeship learning, leadership development and community living. In the area of community living, learners explore healthy and sustainable personal lifestyle choices, gift culture, co-creation and democratic decision-making. Decisions regarding day-to-day functioning is done through the form of consensus,

with a space for each person in the Swaraj community, be that learner or facilitator, to express his/her voice.

The world is our classroom! Swaraj University challenges and helps learners to 'self-design' their learning processes. Rather than being dependant on external sources and frameworks for one's education, we believe in enabling the learners to take responsibility for their own education and hence design their own learning path. A learner at Swaraj is hence called '*khoji*' or 'one who seeks'.

In a self-design learning approach, each khoji is encouraged to...

- Explore their learning styles, questions and passions without the institutional constraints that smother interest and joy, and breed mediocrity
- Engage consciously with unlearning, *jugaad* (playful improvisation), deep dialogue and gift culture
- Design individualised learning webs that are based on authentic real world trans-disciplinary projects and inter-generational relationships
- Build feedback frameworks and mechanisms to reflect on their learning
- Use the close, supportive learner community as a base from which to engage with local, regional and global communities

With this as a basis, the *khojis* design their own learning plan. Their learning plans revolve around one core feature of this program - intimate mentorships. Swaraj U aims to revive the traditional approach to education in India, through a *guru-shishya parampara*. That is, learners being placed one-on-one with mentors (also called *ustads*) who share both a range of practical skills as well as personal philosophies/wisdom. These mentors have been carefully selected to ensure that, in addition to being cutting edge leaders in their respective fields, they are able to engage with youth in a true spirit of co-learning and friendship.

This is complemented by...

- **Khoji meets:** The *khojis* converge every few months to cross-fertilise their learning and build perspectives on the core principles of Swaraj at our campus 30 kilometres away from Udaipur city. (To know more see Campus)
- **Individualised self-study program:** After getting initial exposure to several practice areas, *khojis* chart and pursue their own path of study based on their interests. They are guided in developing their self-study program using various books, websites, films, etc. Significant attention is given to processes of self-awareness, self-understanding, and examining their life choices.
- **Skill workshops:** *Khojis* have the choice to participate in workshops featuring basic entrepreneurial skills as well as other skills such as: communication, facilitation and group dialogue, computers, financing, marketing, cooking, sewing, farming, yoga, film-making, web design and blogging, desktop publishing, writing of proposals and business plans, documentation, working English, etc.

- **Service projects:** *Khojis* design individual and group projects in collaboration with local communities and social movements.
- **Organisational internships:** *Khojis* can do internships with leading social organisations and social movements spread all over India. This experience gives them the opportunity to know the expectations of the real work-world.
- **International dialogues:** They interact with and spend time with visiting students from other countries. In addition, they are able to engage in virtual interactions with partner programs from around the world.
- **Learning journeys:** *Khoji* cohorts travel together to engage with the cultural diversity of India and visit inspiring people and places such as Auroville, Ladakh, and POSCO *andolan*.

Each *khoji* builds their own portfolio over the course of 2 years, comprised of recommendations, self-reflections, published work, photographs, etc.

Programme structure

The structure of the programme (see below) reveals that there is an emphasis on learning, developing and applying knowledge and skills in the real world in a range of contexts linked to the idea of learning journeys in which social learning is important. There is plenty of opportunity for project-based learning, and self-directed learning is underpinned by mentors who encourage reflection on learning experiences and the results of actions. A summary of differences between a traditional university and Swaraj University is shown in Table 1.

Year 1

The aim of the first year is to encourage *khojis* to unlearn their dependence on external sources of knowledge and to engage in co-creating their self-directed learning path. *Khojis* also learn basic *jugaad* (playful improvisation), planning, facilitation, media and communication skills, as well as identify a practice area to pursue in more depth. It is also the time to go deeper into their own stories, histories and understand one's own self - beliefs, values, patterns, fears and emotions, and not just one's own self, but also understanding these stories of the whole group that empowers them to support their peers much strongly. There are various explorations and experiments to understand the meaning of Swaraj, and the core principles related to it, which are sustainability, social justice and holistic living. *Khojis* are exposed to different kinds of community contexts - rural villages, social movements, entrepreneurs and non-profit organisations.

The first year is divided into *Khoji* meets and mentorship periods. The duration of the *Khoji* meets is around 5-8 weeks in the first year. Between the meets is the mentorship or 'guru' period of 1.5-3 months each. The *khojis* learn with their chosen *ustaads* (*mentors*) during the mentorship period and return to the campus for the *Khoji* meets, where they cross-fertilize their learning with other *khojis*. *Khoji* meets are also spaces for reflection, deepening our emotional understanding and healing ourselves from the hurt and stress caused by the System.

During the first year, khojis also go on Learning Journeys to various parts of India and get exposed to new livelihoods, initiatives and organizations which are engaged in new ways of learning and living. One Learning Journey is on cycles, without money, technology or first aid, with the aim of going to the heart of India - its villages - and learning from nature and those living in harmony with it.

Here is a typical time-table for the year 1 programme:

Khoji Meet 1: Exploration of self, our own stories, community building, etc. Includes the initiation ceremony of khojis who have completed 2 years' process (5-8 weeks)

Learning Journey 1: Whole group goes to one city or area to meet various inspiring activists, artists, social entrepreneurs, and change agents (2 weeks)

Self-Designed Learning Time 1: Individually or in pairs (1.5 - 3 months) Khojis design if they want to do mentorships, travel, go home or a combination

Khoji Meet 2: Re-thinking development, co-learning and community living with peers and through workshops @ Udaipur (8 weeks)

Learning Journey 2: Cycle Yatra to villages (10 days)

Self-Designed Learning Time 2: Individually or in pairs (1.5 - 3 months) Khojis design if they want to do mentorships, travel, go home or a combination

Khoji Meet 3: Co-learning and community living with peers and through workshops @ Udaipur (6 weeks)

Learning Journey 3: Whole group goes to join any live people's social movement of resistance and stay with the resilient communities.

Mentorship 3: Individually (2.5 months)

Year 2

The focus of the second year is on *Deep Diving*. The aim is to facilitate deeper learning around each khoji's emerging vision. It is in a way consolidation of first year's exploration into a live project they take up.

Central piece of year 2 - identifying one's heart's calling & following it.

This is done through Project Based Learning (PBL) which is a form of self designed learning (SDL).

Project is to give your heart's calling some concrete shape in the real world. It involves:

- Pedagogy of mistakes / failure: risk taking, learning by doing, celebrating mistakes as paths of learning.
- Feedback & iterations: unlearning the student teacher relationship of writing an exam and getting marks which declare whether you know something or not and that's the end of it. Here, learn to take, seek and value feedback, create dialogues to figure out what can be better / different in your own work instead of thinking I need to give the 'right' answer. Based on this iterate for constant improvisation. Khojis sometimes find it hard to take feedback / dialogue about their work / iterate as they are still stuck in the cycle of 'but I gave the right answer' / seeing facilitators as authority.
- Identifying and leveraging your learning style

- Self awareness
- Self evaluation

Khojis are encouraged to take risks, to try new things out and not to be afraid of making mistakes. These projects can be anything - right from their dream ideas to ideas they want to experiment with in their communities, from a foundation of an enterprise to ideas implementation in existing organizations. We call it Alivelhoods. Usually the focus of existing universities is just to have learners reach livelihoods. Our focus is to increase the spectrum and include questions, ideas and deeper calling from the world that makes the khojis alive or the communities they intend to work with, Alive. Khojis also begin to develop understanding and practice in leadership, management, resource mobilization, marketing and networking skills to engage others to support their vision. They also learn about the basics of social entrepreneurship, starting a green business or a social initiative, fund-raising, basic accounting and budgeting, creating business plans and project management.

Here is a typical time-table for the year 2 programme (Hindi meanings- sangh = union or association, milan = *coming together* or unification and *aagaz* means *new beginning* and it is the initiation ceremony)

What	Details	Days
Meet 1	Common meet	7-10
	Livelihood module	4-5
	Learning Journey	10
	Milan	8-10
Meet 2	Common meet	7-10
	Livelihood module	4-5
Sangh meet up 1	Khoji organized	4-8
Meet 3	Common meet	7-10
	Livelihood module	4-5
	Learning Journey	10
Sangh meet up 2	Khoji organized	4-8
Meet 4	Common meet	7-10
	Livelihood module	4-5
Pre Milan prep		4-5
Milan and Aagaz		6-8

Encouraging & facilitating creativity

The whole pedagogical approach to encouraging khojis to determine and design their own learning pathways taps into the deep interests and intrinsic motivations in which creativity can thrive. Indeed one of the core purposes of the Swaraj approach is to develop people so that they are able to create their own learning projects and bring new enterprises into existence. Here are just two examples of strategies we employ to encourage khoji's to use their creativity.

One of the interesting experiments we do with the khojis in the first year of the programme is called Eklavya Ghumantu. Ghumantu means a nomad. And Eklavya is a mythological character who learnt archery by constructing a sculpture of his Guru as his teacher. He represents a

true self-designed learner. Eklavya Ghumantu is an exploration of finding learning opportunities on the run. In India, learners are made to believe that learning could only be possible if there's an expert to teach you. So, the whole power of learning is shifted to that expert. Eklavya Ghumantu is a process where khojis are encouraged to go on the streets to search for and find their own Gurus. There is treasure of learning everywhere and potential teachers are everywhere. Artisans, cobblers, barbers, mechanics, and repair artists - the streets are full of people whom we can learn from. The khojis have to find these teachers and learn from them. It challenges their notion of learning and whom to learn from, encourages them to use their creativity to find and engage their own teachers and introduces them to many everyday contexts in which people use their creativity.

Inspired by Red-clip challenge, in the second year of the programme we challenge They are given an object of some value and asked to exchange it as many times possible in lieu of new objects / resources of higher value. The learners then have to use their negotiating and resourcefulness skill to exchange.

A lot of processes at Swaraj University are indeed designed by khojis themselves. From the 1st meet of year 1, they get into designing the khoji meets and many aspects of the meet. Right from designing the conflict resolution mechanism to designing the way responsibilities will be help and executed, from designing and hosting events, to setting their own criteria for graduation, the khojis do it all and they are encouraged and forced to use their creativity.

Experiments like cycle yatra, Eklavya Ghumantu, where they are not allowed to carry money or food, push them to think more creatively, and they have to use their imaginations and be resourceful.

Many a time khojis struggle to take initiatives because they get into the head-space too often and think on it so much that action seems to be a faraway thought. We encourage them to act, to try things out to make quick prototypes to shift into action and experiment without thinking too much. If they are taking up a big project, we ask them to make a quick prototype that breaks their fear and gets them involved in action so that they can learn from doing something that contributes to what they want to achieve.

In the year 2 , they are also encouraged to undertake a research, collate all the necessary inputs and experiences and design a Course Hamara (*Hamara*, in Hindi means Ours). Taking their cue from the online learning platform like Coursera, Course Hamara encourages khojis to put together their learning into a form that can leverage the project they are already doing and we believe that one of the best ways to learn is also to share/teach it to others. A few examples of Course Hamara taken up by this year's khojis are - Human trafficking, Life in Ladakh, Pornography, Disappearance of Vultures, Menstruation. Researching, designing and presenting a course on a subject that interests them deeply is another important we encourage khoji's to use their creativity in the service of others.



One red paperclip is a website created by Canadian [blogger](#) Kyle MacDonald, who [bartered](#) his way from a single red paperclip to a house in a series of fourteen online trades over the course of a year https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/One_red_paperclip

What are our khojis up to?

Khojis have explored more than 75 different fields, such as sustainable living practices, eco-architecture, farming, theatre, design, healing (psychology, pranic healing, naturopathy, etc.) technology, facilitation/teaching, writing, film making, storytelling, alternative education, kabaad se jugaad, event-management, and much more. More than 60 khojis have now completed their two-year programme at Swaraj University.

Khoji Explorations in various fields!

Media

Community Radio
Journalism: alternative
magazines & publications
Poetry
Film: editing, direction
Translation & Transcription
Documentation: film, articles,
blogs, events, formal writing
Story writing
TV Programming : script,
coordination
Social media management

Entrepreneurship

Marketing & Production:
bags, jewelry, handloom
cloth & products

Social Justice

Gender & Sexuality
Anti-Corruption
RTI activism and training
Politics: campaign
management, grassroots
Localization :
strengthening communities
through cafes, city walks,
cycle tours
Working with under-
privileged communities :
Teen girls, Rag pickers

Science

Weather Science
Astronomy
Understanding
plants

Healing and Self care

Various healing techniques: Pranik,
Reiki, Past life regression
Ayurveda
Massage therapy
Non-Violent Communication
Dance therapy
Urine Therapy
Animal based therapy
Systemic constellation
Drum circles

Alternative education

Renewable energy

Solar energy: home and
commercial
Human powered water
pump



Here are a few examples of the ways our graduates are using their creativity and talents.

Ritesh is currently running a collaborative enterprise called Eco-Hut, which is a store in Udaipur that sells handmade herbal products, products out of waste, books, and hand-made jewelry. She makes jewelry out of seeds.

<https://www.facebook.com/ECO-HUT-451732841625718/>

Gyan is a documentary filmmaker. He has worked with Ekta Parishad, a pan-India organization working on land rights movement, covering 18000kms of Jan Samvaad Yatra. He has also worked with other activist organizations and has made more than 50 films.

Kamalbir has started her own enterprise 'Saadgi' where she with the help of women-folk of a village in Udaipur, makes utility bags out of fabric waste and then markets it at various handicrafts store and exhibitions. <https://www.facebook.com/saadgicreations/>

Arjun has been working extensively with SkillTrain in developing video content, marketing and the website administration part of it. SkillTrain is a technology-enabled blended vocational training company that offers online and mobile-based training programs to cater to prospective vocational skill learners anywhere in India, for free.

Karen left her job of 5 years in IT & Advertising sector and gave herself space to explore her association with theatre. She has begun directing theatre shows in Bangalore and has started her Theatre company.

Vikas is currently practicing Pranik healing on gift culture basis in Anand, Gujarat and carries out small experiments in farming with his wife. During the course of Swaraj process, Vikas worked at Vinobha ashram (Naturopathy centre) for 1 year and experimented that year living without money and later also practiced consultancy for 6 months at a friend's clinic in alternative therapy.

Rahul Karanpuriya initiated his traveling and learning process called 52 parindey, in the process of which, he travelled to 52 differently located people who have self-designed learners in their life and are experimenting with their life and lifestyles. The intention is to make short films and inspire others to take a leap and walk on their own path. Right now, he is visiting and documenting 12 weaver communities for next 12 months.

Neema worked as teacher with a Government school for 10 years and then joined Swaraj. Her pursuit has been to bring reform and liveliness to the educational system as a whole, specially in the State of Gujarat, where she belongs to. She is currently the principal and brought Theatre and democratic styles of learning into her school. She has also been part of the Frisbee team of her state.

For more stories of what khojis are up to, check: <http://www.swarajuniversity.org/khoji-stories.html>

Many other khojis are trying out different things, experimenting different ways of lifestyle and livelihoods, some figuring out what kind of life they want to live, some confused, some trying to understand the impact they want to create in society, but all are connected to each other, sometimes working at individual levels, yet kind of supported by a community.

Ideas, experiments and way forward:

Many people, of all ages, show interest in being part of Swaraj University but due to family and financial responsibility and unavailability of time, they are not able to join. For people who cannot afford to give 2 years into it, we have short period workshops, which are open for khojis as well as outsiders, which also helps people interact with the khojis and get the feel of the programme and space.

At Swaraj we also are constantly striving (failing, falling, getting up, trying again) to imagine and create a space for being the gift - which means slowly cultivating inside us and around us a wholesome state of giving and receiving. As a part of this, we are experimenting with gift culture practices in our relationships with khojis, mentors, resource persons and team-members like moving from transaction to trust, contracting to connecting, scarcity to abundance, private ownership to commons, extracting from relationships to nourishing each other. These are big words and yet they hold meaning for us in small acts.



We believe spaces like Swaraj University can sprout up anywhere and everywhere. The idea for us is not to scale up and expand to various cities, but support individuals, groups and communities to begin one in their own locality, with their own philosophies, design and ideas. That is how learning can evolve and be diverse; otherwise, expansion with the same idea will homogenize the learning and will turn it destructive similar to mainstream education.

For the readers of Creative Academic who are open to new ways of thinking, have dreams of building healthy and resilient communities and who want to keep learning alive, we urge you to experiment. Begin with your own lives, start with your own learning spaces and contexts, challenge continuously what you have been taught all the while. Make your own learning live.

You are welcome to visit Swaraj University to experience the joy and aliveness of learning.

We welcome contributions of all kinds!

Swaraj University is a small but potentially powerful step in the direction of 'Swaraj' the way Gandhi imagined it. Our aim is to restore the responsibility of education to the learner and the community and revive local cultures, local economies and local ecologies.

We invite you to join us on our journey. Swaraj University is not accepting any grants from big donor agencies. We operate on the idea of Gift Culture, accepting gifts of various kinds from friends, supporters and well-wishers. You can also contribute in our journey by gifting books or films for the library, or old laptops for the media resource centre, games and sport activities for the khojis, or gift us your time and share your skills and/or wisdom. Financial contributions to support scholarships for khojis are also welcome.

Sources

1 A version of this article was originally published in “The Common Indian”

<http://thecommonindian.in/2015/11/learning-what-you-feel-like-to-learn-welcome-to-swaraj-university/>

2 Swaraj University <http://www.swarajuniversity.org/>

3 the meaning of university <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/University>

4 the meaning of swaraj www.swaraj.org/whatisswaraj.htm

5 <http://www.swarajuniversity.org/comparison.html>



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2gesJTwkga0&t=216s>

This TEDx talk by Reva Dandage, co-founder and director of Swaraj University, explains how she came to hold her beliefs that led her to establish an alternative university with a focus on self-design learning, including exploration of basic entrepreneurial skills within the context of environmental sustainability and social responsibility. It is India's first university dedicated to strengthening local economies, local cultures and the rich diversity of local traditions. Its two-year program is rooted in the age-old 'guru-shishya parampara' or learning through practical experience with mentors or gurus.

Reva's passion is to create and host alternative spaces for learning, and through Swaraj University, she facilitates young people in co-creating their learning programs towards their passions and dreams. She is also dedicated to living sustainably and engaging youth in dialogues to challenge their ideas of success and inspire a spirit of compassion and social responsibility in them.

Her talk is about the journey of her new initiative: Swaraj University. Faltu is a movie, which is a Hindi remake of the movie "Accepted". Swaraj is a kind of University where students make their own curriculum and decide their own path. This talk focuses on the problems with our education system.