

The many colours of Youth Festival (2018)



Yuva Mahotsav (Youth Festival) a three day festival to celebrate the successful completion of School for Social Change training was organized on **26th 27th and 28th May** at **Sane Guruji National Smarakin** Pen tehsil in Raigad district of Maharashtra. Yuva Mahotsav as the name suggests was meant to create a space to celebrate the vibrant colours of youth, diversity of cultures and build a collective strength and intervention through cultural expression.

The Festival was a culmination of a yearlong (School For Social Change) training process conducted in 6 centres : North Central India, Odisha, Maharashtra, Barwani, Dungarpur and Tamil Nadu, making it a truly diverse and energetic collision. The festival was dedicated to felicitating the 250 participants who had completed the training for the year 2017-2018 from the 6 centres and was envisioned to be a showcase of the transformative process.

The festival also brought together SRUTI fellows from across the country, SRUTI Delhi team, youth volunteers-interns from various colleges and universities from Delhi-Mumbai and eminent resource persons like Subhash Ware, cultural activist Sambhaji Bhagat, esteemed film maker Jayprad Desai and Dhamma and Pravin from Yelgaar Theatre Group.

LET THE GAMES BEGIN..!



A Few glimpses of the opening ceremony



Trainees from Dungarpur SSC rally towards the Pandal with their banners raising slogans



The opening ceremony was symbolically envisioned as a coming together of all the participants from the 6 schools, representing their sangathans with their respective banners; rallying from six different locations to reach the pandal. As the rallies came closer, the air was filled with the fervor of many languages and voices merging to become one emotion. Slogans like “Takht badal do! Taj badal do! Baimano ka raj badaldo!” and “Hum sab? Ek hai!!” kept resounding in the air as the raised fists and thumping beat of footsteps rose up like a tide and swept over every one, folding them into a collective rhythm. It was truly one of the most exhilarating moments of the event.

Channeling the energy further, all the groups were given a few clay pots to be inscribed as a token of the values we want to preserve in the society and the evils we want to uproot. They were then asked to come forward and call out the social evils they wanted to uproot as the pots were smashed; the values that we wanted to preserve were simultaneously showcased building into a sculpture. This process further instilled the idea that despite of belonging to different regions and cultures, we are all one in our humanity and conception of a humane society.



What do we want to preserve and what do we want to uproot from the society?

The next session was opened for participants to form groups and through group activities and appreciative inquiry get to know each other and share the struggles on respective fields. Participants were also encouraged to drop in suggestions of topics for group discussion to be carried out in the evening.

School for Social Change training envisions the pedagogy to equip young activists with perspective and questions that must be addressed in the struggle to bring in ‘social change’. Through the course of 4 to 5 shivirs the training covers detailed understanding of origin of earth, evolution of human species, transition from nomadic to settled agriculture, rise of early kingdoms and city centres, rise of organized religion, money and banking, industrial

society, capitalism and consumer culture etc. The process not only facilitates a deeper understanding of the issues that the activist is struggling with, but also sheds light on how the issues are interlinked.

The topic shortlisted for group discussions in the evening were: a) Gender discrimination b) Displacement and hinduisation of Tribals c) Unemployment and education d) Youth and the dream of a future society.



Group 3 discussing Unemployment and issues in education

It was heartening to observe that the participants who had low self confidence earlier had also through the course of the training transformed into self assured public speakers. The evening was then slowly stirred into a cultural extravaganza, with regional groups performing their cultural songs and dances.

On the second day we were joined by Mr. Subhash Ware for the morning session on the constitution. The purpose of the session was to burst myths regarding the constitution as well as build an understanding of the rights enshrined, giving a larger perspective of how the attacks on the constitution strike at the very heart of the democratic structure in India.

After the heavy discussion, it was important that the festivities return and indeed they did. The main agenda of the event was laid out as we welcomed Sambhaji Bhagat, Mr. Jayprad Desai and the Yelgaar theatre group for conducting song composition, film making and theatre workshop with the participants.



Sambhaji encouraging the participants to suggest a self composed rhythm

A pertinent question for the culmination of the School for Social Change training is that how will the informed trainees strengthen the ongoing processes of their sangathans or engage in a dialogue in their respective communities, to materialize their intervention, post the training?

The answer was aptly put into words by Mr. Sambhaji, who said that “Human species are by evolutionary right, creative in nature! This is what sets us apart from other creatures and creations of this planet.” He went on to add that humans are social animals who inhabit in a sense of culture. Cultural activism therefore is a powerful tool to reflect the society to itself and thus guide it or remind it of a more humane world.



Jayprad Desai talking about films as not only a means of entertainment but also important medium of spreading awareness

The participants chose between song composition, theatre and film making, whichever best interested them as a medium of expression. Workshops then began simultaneously in the Pandal, Yuva Bhavan and Audio Visual room, respectively. The orientation focused on equipping participants with elementary techniques of concept development and discipline for creating content specific to social issues.

One of the advantageous outcomes of these creative processes was that for expression language was no longer a barrier. Participants from different regions were working together as a team and through the process friendships could be seen building. There was something for everyone to learn and share, no matter the age, or language or qualifications of the person.



Dhamma (left corner in blue) facilitating an ice breaking session with the theatre group

The third day of the festival began with a vivacious ardour as participants set out to work on their own content could be seen working in groups all over the campus. It was wonderful to see how the participants had adopted the various nooks and corners and structures of the Sane Guruji Smarak to fit into their requirements of space and frames.

The brain storming and chatter that made up the process sounded almost like the buzzing of inspired bees building beehives. The songs, drama, short films and ads created through the day were to be presented in the closing ceremony of the festival, beginning early evening that day.

Finally around 5 in the evening, all the groups gathered in the amphitheatre wearing their Centre wise SSC t-shirts, for the presentation and felicitation ceremony. If it was not apparent earlier, the colour coordinated t-shirts, made everyone seem even more like teams now. The teaming was also an outcome of coordination of participants in organising



the whole Yuva Mahotsav. From coordinating kitchen work to logistics to sloganeering, the three-day Mahotsav also witnessed the wonderful chemistry and very energetic bonding between the participants. The rhythm of such spontaneity and synergies was seen at the felicitation ceremony with cheering each other and sloganeering together extending mutual expressions of solidarity without even knowing each other's languages.

The video can be accessed here →

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NO4VQEIIIYo&feature=share>

The felicitation ceremony was preceded by a series of delightful song and drama performances. The three days workshop gave room for many original creations which were received with much enthusiasm by the participants. Participants were felicitated with certificates and the youth festival bag, to carry as tokens of this journey.

"Jinhe koi fikar nahi" a song celebrating the spirit of bold and fiery women, composed by the hindi group and can be watched here →

<https://youtu.be/RW5K9ox25rY>

A Short comic satirical twist on the digital india was prepared by the tamil group which can be seen here →

<https://youtu.be/HawFyF1tIUQ>

A short film on who holds power in the society was also prepared by a group of participants, titled "Kiski Chlti hi?" it can be seen here →

https://m.youtube.com/watch?feature=share&v=6JEqW_Xyt00

The Mahotsav also proved to be an exposure and learning event for interns from the colleges of Delhi and Mumbai. Some of the excerpts of their experience sharing are as followed;

*Having looked at the specifics, my most cherished memory stands to be mentioned. What I am taking back from the Youth Festival flows from my interactions with the festival's various stakeholders – it rests in “Hum Sab Ek Hain”. My most cherished memory from the festival rests in the collective sense of being one – one people with varied cultures, languages and ways of being. Every attendee of the festival could be himself/herself at the festival without having to be conscious of their identity. Infact, their identities were celebrated at the festival. The festival celebrated the collective sense of being one. - **Akshay Kharbanda, Intern, SRUTI and Student St. Xavier's College, Mumbai***

*How ironic it is that we sympathize with tribals and at the same time are reluctant to getting involved with them. I wasn't aware of these people's problems before going Mangaon. I talked with these people and got to know that fighting for their rights is not the only thing they do. They stick together, help each other, work together and will do it forever until they get what they want. I have realized that their journey is not all about their fight but about their strength to fight. They do everything to keep themselves motivated.- **Mahima, Intern, SRUTI and Student, Symbiosis Law School, Noida***

*It is said that experience is the best teacher and for a person who has lived a comfortable life in a home which is not about to be wrongfully snatched away, and is trying to understand the issues faced by the tribals and the rural poor, experience is the only adequate teacher. The youth festival was one such opportunity to experience the lives and culture of people by living among them and working with them.- **Bhavya, Intern, SRUTI and Student, Symbiosis Law School Noida***