

# Manthan

By students of I am a Teacher

Issue 1, September 2015

There is no end to education. It is not that you read a book, pass an examination, and finish with education. The whole of life, from the moment you are born to the moment you die, is a process of learning.



- J. Krishnamurti



'I am a Teacher' (IAAT) is a not-for-profit organization, with the objective to set up an alternative working model for teacher preparation. The first batch of its Post Graduate Diploma in Learning and Teaching (PGDLT) joined in June 2015. This is a practice based, one year full time program, where students (called Residents) spend a whole year in actual school classrooms, as an apprentice alongside mentor-teachers. Besides, they also have course work through the year that helps them integrate theory and practice. The host school is the Heritage School, Gurgaon, where mentor teachers have been selected through a process of peer nomination, where their peers judged them to be highly competent teachers.

She had a dream, a beautiful vision, to reform the teacher education system of the country, and this dream transformed into “I AM A TEACHER”, a not-for-profit organisation that has started a one-of-a-kind Teacher’s Education Programme. In my tête-à-tête with Smriti Jain, the co-founder, I realised that dreams do come true, you just have to have that conviction and faith in yourself.

– Interview by Megha Jobanputra



**Me:** How did the concept of IAAT come about?

**Smriti:** During my stint with Mirambika and The Heritage School, I saw that these schools were doing a lot for teacher development. I realised that it is all about knowing yourself, what you want to do with your life and what you can take to the classroom. I learnt that helping teachers find their voice can ultimately transform our classrooms. Only empowered teachers can empower our children. I guess that’s where the idea must have set in; the vision to contribute in remodelling the teacher education system of our country. I was aware there were very few good teacher education programmes in the country.

**Me:** Can you elaborate on your experiences at Harvard where you did Masters in Instructional Leadership?

**Smriti:** During my course, I took an independent study on different teacher education programmes in the US like Harvard, Boston Teacher Residency (BTR), High Tech High, Shady Hill, etc. I interned with BTR and was really impressed with what they were doing. I learned a lot from these models and integrated some of these insights in the IAAT programme. I believe it is important to bring theory and practice together to prepare effective teachers for our country.

**Me:** How did this name come about?

**Smriti:** Usually, when people ask about your profession and you say, ‘I am a teacher’, they look at you as if it’s nothing big. They may sound like, ‘Oh! You are **just** a teacher.’ It’s actually happened to me as well. So when the name came to me, it meant something significant. I wanted that pride to come across when you say “I Am a Teacher!”

**Me:** Now that your dream has turned to reality, what are your thoughts, feelings & apprehensions, if any?

**Smriti:** The first few days were just unreal and only now, it has sunk in (laughs)!! I am glad about it because I am genuinely hopeful that students are going to benefit from this, in some way or the other. There are still many challenges though. I really have to do a lot more to make the programme self-sustainable.

**Me:** What next?

**Smriti:** The programme has to become truly effective. The next step is to do a great job with our current students, so that they are ready for the classroom when they leave and become the kind of teachers we want them to be. We would definitely like to have a few more host schools in future and make this initiative contribute towards rethinking teacher education in our country. We also aspire that school transformation and teacher education should work together as an integrated whole. Taking small steps, one at a time, but yes, moving ahead!

**Me:** A message you’d like to send across.

**Smriti:** Dream, dream and dream, because dreams have a lot of power and once you take the first step, the rest falls in place, so follow what your heart says!!

**“Only as high as I reach can I grow,  
only as far as I seek can I go,  
only as deep as I look can I see,  
only as much as I dream can I be.”**

**-Karen Ravn**

The journey began with our quests inscribed on snowy stones and blessings from valued well-wishers of the education field, in a divine arena, inscribing a magical effect on each of us.

The two day Orientation program was an amazing ice-breaking session, as we all welcomed each other introducing ourselves with warm hugs, laying the foundation for our solid relationship for the course.

Each one of us brought in our unique strengths to the gathering through the “Diyas” we lighted and shared the energy through the light . We were all encouraged to write our burning questions in our life on a pure white stone and there began my habit of reflecting, which has become a substantial aspect for my inner transformation thereafter.



## फिर से सीखा हमने सवाल करना

फिर से सीखा हमने सवाल करना,  
जीते थे कितने सवालों के साथ,  
समझते थे जवाब ज़हन में समाये हैं सारे ,  
जब हल्का सा पल्ला खींचा,  
ज़र्रा से बिखर गए ये जवाब ज़मीन पर सारे।

जवाब हम खुद ही हैं फिर भी खोज जारी है,  
नए सवालों और सवाल करने वालों की,  
ज़र्रा ज़र्रा हर एक को पुकारता है,  
कि जी लो अपना सवालों भरा बचपन,  
बड़े होने में अपनी उम्र क्यों गुजारता है।

बड़े होना है अपनी ही नज़र में,  
फिर भी न जाने क्यों,  
हर एक की नज़र निहारता है,  
हर एक से सवाल है,  
फिर भी पूछने से कतराता है।

मानसी

# Expedition to Damdama and Kadarpur villages near Gurgaon

- Manjula

The very mention of a village will transport one to a place where people are self-reliant and live simple lives. They work hard, facing challenges at ease, depend on agriculture for living. But Damdama depicted a very different picture. Farming is no longer the key source of living. The area is hilly and the existing wells have dried up. Lack of electricity is another major problem. I asked the youth of this village if they were interested in farming. Majority of them answered in the negative.

## Status of Women

We found that the elected panchayat women members existed only in paper. They have no say in the affairs of the village. They don't go for panchayat meetings, their respective husbands are participating in panchayat affairs and this is seen as perfectly natural! People are still driven by the notion that a girl's duty after marriage is to look after the chores of her new household. Hence, education for girls is neglected. Gladly, we came across a few households where emphasis is laid on educating the girl beyond school. But that was not the usual trend.



After three days of village expedition, we got clarity on many aspects of village life, but our minds got captured by many more fundamental questions...

What is the quality of Education in India after 68 years of independence?

What kind of democracy are we living in?

Will women ever be able to exercise their basic rights?

A mother of five children, had delivered all her children at home under the supervision of a local midwife. She has no regrets. The womenfolk, especially daughters-in-law of almost all households, follow a demanding work schedule, having little time for themselves. They live in purdah and speak in a low voice. Most of them expressed their desire of pursuing higher studies and living better lives.

## School education

In government schools, there was no school fees upto class 8; school books, bag, uniform and mid day meals were provided free of cost to students. However, some classes had benches but in others students sat on the floor; there were frequent power cuts and teachers often would beat students with a cane. In some cases students' hair were pulled as punishment. The quality of food was also not consistent. Those who could afford Rs.1000 – 1500 per month opted for private schools. Though in private schools as well, the teachers were under-qualified and girls from nearby villages were working as school teachers after getting senior secondary education. Most girls of Damdama have dropped out of school after eighth standard. Even though the village is very close to National capital, Damdama has no senior secondary government school and parents don't want to send girls to other schools outside village. As a result girls have to drop out of schooling.

## Governance

I used to think that government is not doing much for villages' development in India. I found out from villagers that each village panchayat gets one crore Rupees every five years for development. But many people in governance at the village or block level use it for personal gains and do almost nothing for their village and infrastructure development. They spend most part of this money in order to remain in power. Money from government reaches villages through various government schemes but does not trickle down to the last one in the line.



Every day of the retreat posed challenges bigger than the previous day. On day two, we needed to trek down a narrow and difficult path. On reaching the destination I realized I was to do something I never imagined I could do – Rappelling! I don't have a fear of heights but was so unsure of myself. I had a health condition which had made even walking difficult for so many years and now I had to do rappelling? But, I DID IT! It was a HUGE moment for me. I had a great sense of accomplishment. That was the first time self-belief was restored in me. On reflection, I realized what this activity taught me. I had to completely let go of my body weight and trust the instructor. ***I learnt it is very hard to let go but unless I do it I cannot take the next step.***

On deeper reflection I also realized that even though a lot of members did not believe they could complete the task, eventually they did because the instructor did not give up on them.

***I learnt that a teacher's belief in a student can lead that student to accomplish things that he/she might otherwise perceive as impossible.***

A bigger challenge awaited on day three. We were to do an uphill trek of 7.5 kms. Could I do it? I wasn't sure but thought how great it would feel if I did. Initially it seemed very challenging. But surprisingly the higher I went, the easier it seemed. The constant exchange of encouragement helped and at other difficult moments the group's silent support made the journey easier. ***I learnt that even though a new beginning seems extremely tough, if I continue to persevere I will reach my goal. And the more I persevere the easier it will get.*** Bonfire and cooking process seemed like a breeze. Each team member found a role and got started. ***I learnt that we can contribute and play our unique role in a team without being loud and overpowering.***

## Learning of Math-a glimpse from our class

Ushaji drew a girl on the board, her name is Himmat. She lives not very far from her naani's house, so went to visit her *naani* on her own. Her mom gave her *laddoos* for *naani*. She saw a lion with a big mouth open, yawning.

हिम्मत रुकी और उसने पूछा – क्या आप मुझे खाओगे?  
शेर- मैं छोटे बच्चों को नहीं खाता हूँ, भूखा भी नहीं।  
हाथ में क्या है?

हिम्मत- लड्डू, गोल-पीला, मुलायम-मीठा!

शेर- पीला, गोल, मुलायम तो मालूम है, पर मीठा क्या होता है?

हिम्मत ने शेर के मुँह में दूर से एक लड्डू डाला।

शेर- यह तो बहुत अच्छा है - एक और दे दो!

हिम्मत- (एक और लड्डू देकर), 5 से ज्यादा नहीं दूंगी  
(बच्चों से पूछें)- 3 तो खा लिये, कितने और देने पड़ेगे?

हिम्मत ने 2 और लड्डू मुँह में फेंके, पर वो गिर गये -  
5 दिये पर मिले नहीं।

Teacher asks – और देने है?

First day tell the story. Next day, a carton with a big hole drawn as the lion's mouth. *Laddoos* are represented by plastic balls.

Teacher – कौन खिलायेगा लड्डू?

Children have to throw balls into the mouth from a distance, and the class counts.

Using numbers upto 5, many activities can be done.

(5 is an important landmark for children)

Come to Shaji's Math class to know, how to save a child from .....



68...69.. 70.. 71... 72.....

## Learning of Language- a glimpse from our class

-Radhika



The schema theory suggests that words get organized or stored in the brain like a thesaurus, not like a dictionary.

Sonika, our faculty, actually demonstrated this in the class. She asked us to list a few words starting with the beginning sound 'ch', and then asked us to list a few words that come to our mind about the word 'book'.

When the responses were shared, it was found that most people could list many words when 'book' was mentioned, and in a very limited time. Whereas, most found it difficult to think of words with the beginning sound 'ch', with many not able to list a single word.

Since a word (here, 'book') has a visual quality, the recall connected to it is much easier. Whereas, a beginning sound is an abstract concept, and the brain finds it difficult to base any recall on that.

This concept can have big implications on the way we introduce reading to young children. Currently, it is being introduced in the phonic way – where children learn to form and read words by blending letter sounds. Is this really the best way?

ऊआं, ऊआं ... दुःखभरी

दर्द भरी गिनती !!!

There was always this child in me who looked forward to birthdays and wishes from all the near and dear ones. It was my special day, everyone ought to make me feel special. I used to tread carefully making sure that every instant of that day was beautiful. But this year I felt that the child had grown. I did not have to search for moments, search for wishes, it was all right there. So much love, so much warmth and so many wishes.

We could not celebrate my birthday on the actual date but celebrated a day later. A lot of my friends commented that we should have celebrated it on that very day. But with the warmth and love received, I felt that the day should never end and the fact that it actually extended into another day was in itself a blessing. Everyday should be a birthday. Everyday should be a celebration. Everyday is a blessing.

Birthdays are a good time to make those resolutions for yourself. That's when I talk to myself the most. I realized that birthdays need not be the times a person feels bad for their age. Each day we grow older, should we dread each day? Instead by making it a time of reflection, a person can use their birthdays to reach goals and become a better person. This was a thought that was shared by Smriti that really appealed to me. Birthdays are special days when there is so much positive energy created around. Conserve this energy and reflect on such days, through your own reflections a new person takes birth again on this special day.



## Self disciplined freedom

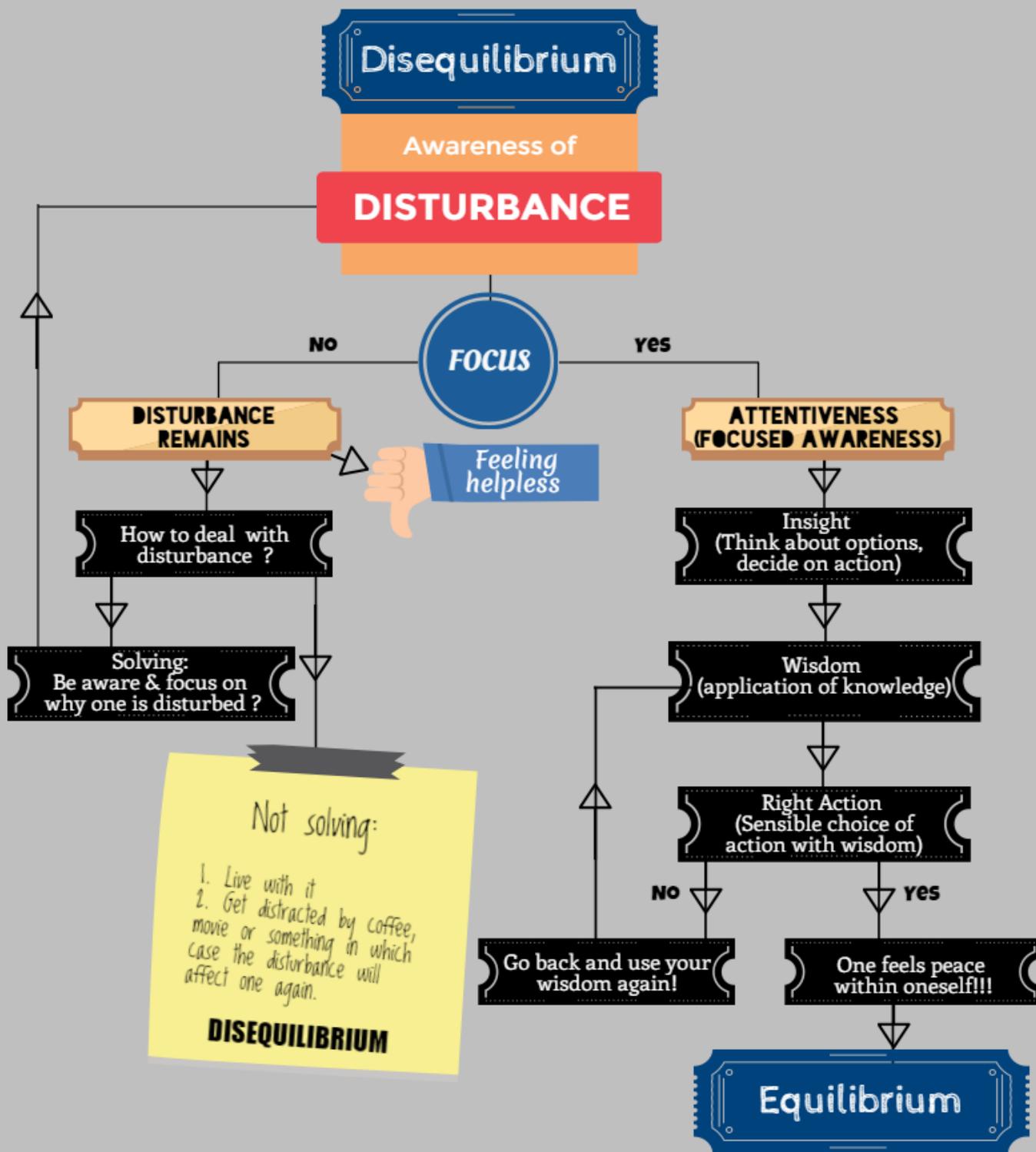
-Pallavi and Sivadevi

What is freedom? What is discipline? Are these mutually exclusive or inclusive? Such questions have been hovering above us, especially after our stint with philosophy of education. While engaging with the works of Aurobindo, J. Krishnamurthi and A. S. Neill, we realized these are no easy terms to fathom. Who would have thought that “freedom implies order, freedom does not mean allowing a child to do what he likes, to come to lunch and to class when he likes”. And that discipline does not exist outside of us which can be imposed, but comes from within. Thus began the quest. Sivadevi took her learning a step ahead and experimented with her practicing class- grade 6.

While given the opportunity to handle the class in the absence of her Mentor teacher, she entered the class without any agenda of her own. Children went berserk with the freedom bestowed on them. Each one wanted to be louder than the other. After two days of chaos, she asked the children to think about what went right and wrong during the free time they



had in her class. A morning circle on the same was also conducted where students admitted that there was apparent lack of unity and an absence of a leader. They realized that each one of them will need to be the torchbearer of discipline. What next? Just after the discussion, it was a sight to experience a game in progress where each child exercised self-discipline without any control required by the teacher. Attaining discipline is a long process but its results have ever lasting effects, claims Sivadevi. It was also possible for her since she implemented it in her personal life first. Try it out for yourself.



Have you ever experienced that pressure, anxiety, tension and the like create disequilibrium in one's state of being? Doesn't it end up in anger and resentment? Do you feel the need to be at peace? In order to be in harmony, returning to the equilibrium state is of utmost importance. Here is the flow from disequilibrium to equilibrium which I came across in Partho Bhaiya's session. It depicts the exact position where one has reached and the way further. It has worked for me and I wish the same for you.



I really admire the way the facilitator converses and resolves conflicts by connecting with students at their level and probing out the answer from them. Consistent exposure to the values and attitudes demonstrated by the facilitator makes learners absorb the same values and thus a student culture starts shaping up. It almost reflects in whatever they do, the way they think and the way they interact. In early years, students have uninterrupted free play wherein they are free to be and develop life skills like managing themselves in a group, resolving their conflicts, respecting each other as well as resources, giving wings to their imagination and thus connect well with each other. They learn to patiently wait for their turns and start caring for their friends.

E.g.: Kashish took Nabhia (a newcomer in the class) under her wing and made her comfortable on the first day itself by constantly being there for her and by taking care of her.

Rajat scribbled on the writing table. Aarav saw it and immediately cleaned it saying we should not spoil our things.

Learners patiently waited for their turns when they went to their “Gardening patch” which was quite admirable.

Everyone was sitting in a circle. Aarav started playing with toys. The Facilitator asked him to join the circle but he said no. She patiently explained it to him that this is no free play time so either he can join the circle or can go out with the other facilitator. He decided to go out. The Facilitator respected his decision. Again he came back within a minute and sat down with the class. During free play and group work I have noticed students giving choices to each other.

**“The mind is not a vessel to be filled, but a fire to be kindled”**  
- Plutarch



All those who have never written a book, ever wondered what a book is? Is it just about a story or is there more to it? We were all very eager to learn what a writing workshop had to offer since most of us had not had any experience with formal writing and that too writing for children. Beth Norford started out with reading “Where the Wild Things Are”.... a week later I remembered the story word to word as I have read it a million times already. But that was not the purpose of her workshop, there was much much more to it.

She asked us to just start off with picking a topic without any prompt whatsoever and start writing. No inspiration, no trigger, no direction, just write! Slowly the class started coming up with ideas, ideas that sparked more ideas and very soon we each had our own topic to work upon. A couple brave souls were invited to share their stories with the class and she used the group dynamics to discover more about our stories. I thought it was absolutely ingenious to have the students connect with others’ stories and open up their own chambers to create something simple and beautiful. As we progressed into Day 2, we delved

into yet another aspect of the book - the cover. There was a sudden explosion of ideas flowing around like different coloured lights, a new idea emerging at the cross section of the beams. There was team work and the now omnipresent creativity. For some of us who had never written before and still didn’t quite have the story, there was this sudden want to write into our very own books. The stories do not need to have morals explicitly called out, they can be for the simple joy of reading. The plots can vary from being simple to complex, the illustrations to be complete stories in themselves to stories that build that illustration. Day 3 culminated with the completion of the cover and story in it along with a Publishing Party. Class IV G was invited to our party and experience some of the latest creations. Her admiration for literature and her love for books has left us with not just a want but a need to build a culture of reading literature. We now have a whole new definition to a book - there is creativity, there is imagination, there is expression, there is author’s thoughts and the author’s style of presenting, there is illustration, there is art of creating illustration through words and then the much needed, the actual story.

He who learns but does not think, is lost! He who thinks but does not learn is in great danger.

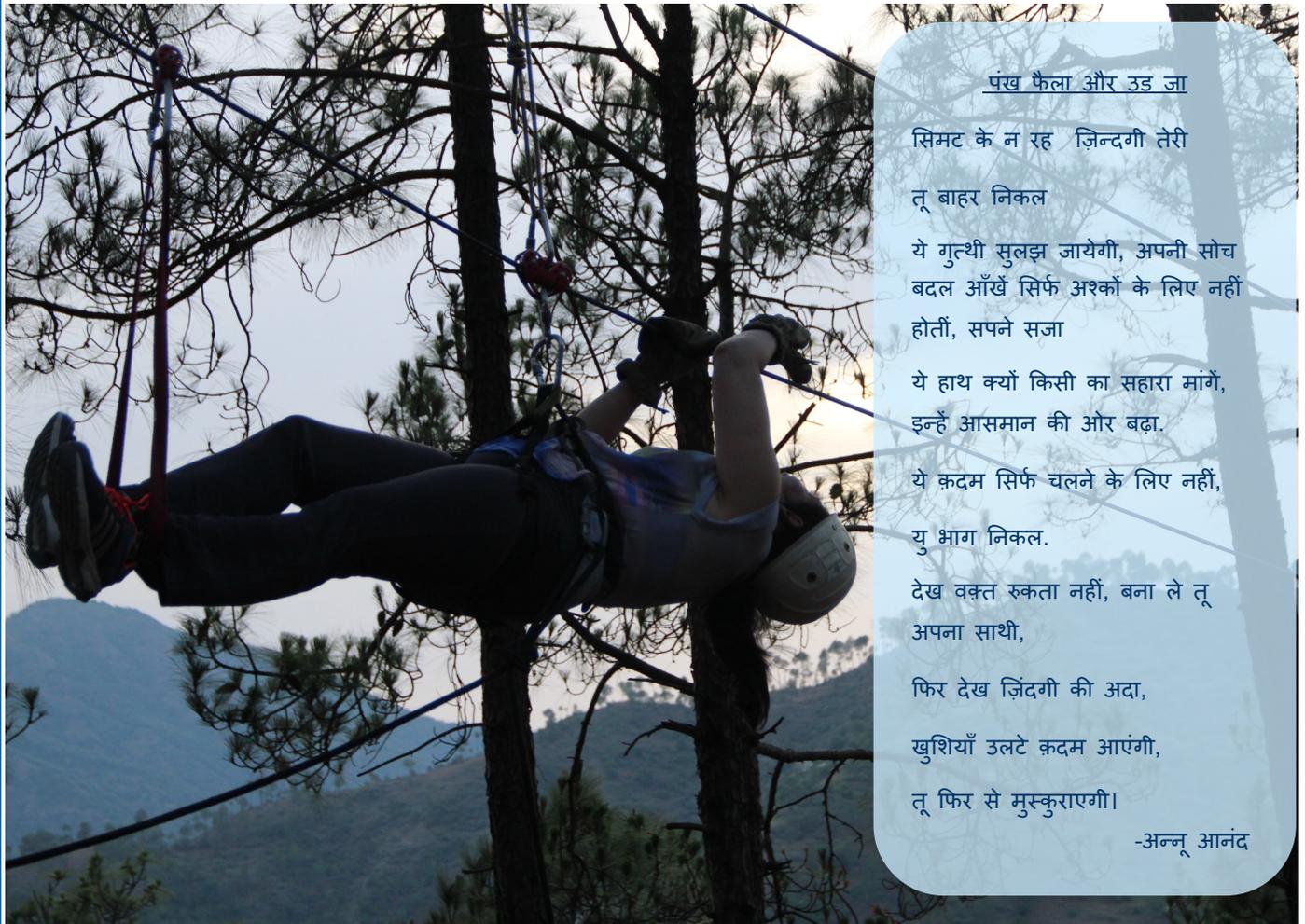
-Confucius

Story telling could be a powerful teaching tool, particularly with younger children who have a rich imagination. Stories may help children with listening skills, help them visualize things, setting and scenarios that may not be immediate for them. Stories are the best medium to transport listeners to other people's shoes or to worlds far away.

We had a story-session, where one of the stories was about an earthworm. As I started listening to the story, I was reminded of the rains and the numerous slimy earthworms that I used to come across on my walks back from the bus stop to my house. I used to and still find them creepy.



When the story began, I imagined a slimy brown earthworm. As the story progressed, I started developing a fondness for it. By the time the story ended, I thought that the earthworm was cute. I caught this thought as it entered my head and suddenly became aware of how powerful story-telling could be. It took a 5 minutes story to change my lifelong impression of an earthworm from yucky to cute.



### पंख फैला और उड़ जा

सिमट के न रह ज़िन्दगी तेरी

तू बाहर निकल

ये गुत्थी सुलझ जायेगी, अपनी सोच बदल आँखें सिर्फ अशकों के लिए नहीं होतीं, सपने सजा

ये हाथ क्यों किसी का सहारा मांगें, इन्हें आसमान की ओर बढ़ा.

ये कदम सिर्फ चलने के लिए नहीं, यु भाग निकल.

देख वक़्त रुकता नहीं, बना ले तू अपना साथी,

फिर देख ज़िन्दगी की अदा,

खुशियाँ उलटे कदम आएंगी,

तू फिर से मुस्कराएगी।

-अन्नू आनंद



## My Dream

-Harjeet

*I want to discover, I want to explore*

*I want to understand all the more*

*Why is it that I do not believe*

*In the wonder that is me*

*I want to be a traveler who always walks*

*I want to be a dancer who never stops*

*I want to spread love*

*And be a true friend*

*And grow more and more*

*Till the very end*

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