



Enabling the youth for employment and Equality

Jobs bring security and stability in life, but securing one is no small feat, especially for the youths coming from disadvantaged social classes and rural areas. For the last 16 years, Gujarat-based Samata Education Trust has been enabling the youths to secure jobs by providing affordable coaching, and also inculcating values like equality and fraternity among youths belonging to diverse cross sections of society. Now the organization plans to spread its wings over Uttar Pradesh and Punjab too. Founder of the trust, Mr. Punamchand Narsingh Bhai Patel, explains his model of ushering in equality and fraternity through education in this interview. Read on.



UV: - Please tell us how the seed of this concept was sown in your mind, and why?

Mr. Patel: - My family had some land and we had a dispute with another party. Question used to come to my mind is why people do not support each other during the time of crisis. We founded Samata Nirman Seva Trust in 2007 to address it. It is an inter-caste federation to help people belonging to SC/ST category. Subsequently, we started coaching classes and set up a library too. We also undertook other initiatives like tree plantation drives and providing financial help to needy persons. In 2013, we brought 70 students from the villages close to the Pakistan border aspiring to get jobs as police constables to provide them coaching for the examination. We provided accommodation to them in the building of my house, where we run a library today. Later on, we acquired a private property for coaching. We provided them with not only coaching but also food and accommodation, all free of cost, for three and a half months. Of these 70 students, 15 cleared the examination successfully and got government jobs.

Later in 2015, we purchased this land and founded

Samata Education Trust. We chalked out plans to work across Gujarat and inaugurated it in 2017. We have built a hostel building consisting of 125 rooms in 2020. Today, students from every district of Gujarat come here. We also provided coaching to 21 girls who came in from various districts. That was when we acquired more six acres of land to construct buildings for the girl's school and hostel. We also undertook tree plantation drives and created a Smritivan in memory of all national heroes such as Babasaheb Ambedkar, Phule, Chatrapati Shahu Maharaj, Maharaja Sayajirao Gaikwad. Now we are working on a Rs 20 crore project to build a community hall and a hospital. Today, we have 300 students.

UV: - What was the thought behind your decision to founding the trust?

Mr. Patel: - When Babasaheb Ambedkar's sacrifice was for the welfare of people from all cross sections of society. He did not restrict himself to his caste. He believed in equality and fraternity. We are working to uphold the same values. We think help must be provided to needy persons, notwithstanding their castes.



UV: - Does Samata Education Trust give admission to youths belonging to upper castes?

Mr. Patel: - Yes, we believe in equality. But our first priority of admission is SC/ST students. However we welcome students of EBC. In past, we gave admission to such students and provided them with coaching and training. Around 200-300 students use our library in Ahmedabad. We also conduct coaching classes. Approximately 25 students from surrounding villages attend it. A total of 125 students have been provided accommodation in the hostel. Around five per cent of our students belong to the Other Backward Classes and upper castes.

UV: - What activities do you undertake to inculcate the value of equality?

Mr. Patel: - Firstly, we do not ask for the caste of students. We only ask for their names, educational background and requirements. We also organize programs to motivate them. IAS, IPS officers come here and motivate them and imbibe in them the importance of equality, fraternity and other values emphasized in the Constitution of India. They explain to the students that the 'Sabka Saath Sabka Vikas' model is the only way to achieve progress for all.

UV: - Do you find any difference in their social approach between ex-students of your hostel who have become officers and other officers? What is the perception of your students about the value of equality?

Mr. Patel: - National heroes like Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj, Chhatrapati Shahu Maharaj, Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel and Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar overcame the caste barricades and worked for the welfare of people belonging to all cross sections of society and women. Our students are aware of it. They feel they should treat everyone equally and work for all instead of focusing only on their community.

UV: - What facilities are provided to students here?

Mr. Patel: - Students are provided accommodation, tea and snacks in the morning, lunch, tea again at 4 pm, evening meal, library etc. We also invite professionals as visiting faculty. We admit students of Arts, Science, Commerce, Engineering and all other streams. We design coaching courses for them after considering which competitive examination they want to appear for.

UV: -What is the approach of your past students who have now settled down in life towards the institute?

Mr. Patel: - Around 2,000 of our past students have secured government jobs. Most of the students who secure jobs, donate their first salary to the institute. They remain associated with the organization and come here as visiting faculty too. They feel gratitude. That increases our support base.

UV: - What modern technology is available here and how do the students of backward classes adapt to it?

Mr. Patel: - Organizations working on enabling

disadvantaged students to use modern technology refer some students to us. These organizations pay their fees too. However, most of the students coming here do not understand even the basics of Mathematics. We start coaching them from the basic level. The family members of most of the students here are illiterate. Some students have quit private jobs with a salary of 8,000 to 10,000 because they aspire to secure better jobs after getting coaching here.

UV: - What is the ratio of rural students in your institute?

Mr. Patel: - About 15 to 20 percent of students come from urban areas and the rest are from rural backgrounds.

UV: - What are your future plans?

Mr. Patel: - We are working on providing free-of-cost education to all communities of the SC/ ST category. We have been to Punjab and people from there have been asking us to set up an institute there too. Presently we are talking to people in UP too. Some people in Punjab say they can help us. If kind-hearted persons provide us with land, we would set up an institute with the participation of members of local communities and work on providing both education and healthcare facilities. Our model is applicable across India.



UV: - What is the peculiarity of your model?

Mr. Patel: - Many government schools in Gujarat are closing down. Since real estate prices are soaring, institutes are being closed down and their properties are being sold. Besides, though Gujarat has many private universities, there is not a single institute for SC/ ST communities. We believe that privatization will increase in the time to come. We must prepare ourselves for that. Considering the increasing cost of education, only the rich will have access to education in future and the poor will be left out. We are trying to address that too.

UV: - Do you see the need to change the curriculum? Do you feel social values are given adequate importance in the present curriculum?

Mr. Patel: -The new education policy provides for more thrust on social values, technical education, and employment-oriented training. That is a good policy.

*As told to Vijendra.
uv@unheardvoices.co.in*