



Children tell their story of *azaadi* on the final day of the workshop through the play they staged at Apeejay School, Salt Lake

# Stories of freedom

Underprivileged and differently-abled children came together to tell their stories of *azaadi* through a play, which they wrote and enacted on the final day of a 10-day workshop conducted by Apeejay schools



Children pose with certificates along with their mentor, Rijita Chatterjee, after staging the play

**I** had no idea what a workshop was. But the platform I received through this event has taught me how to express my feelings," said Rahul Bali — who is blind and partially deaf — after attending a workshop conducted by Apeejay schools.

"I believe my physical disability will not act as an obstacle for me. I want to become a singer and I will do everything possible to turn my dreams into reality. After all, even I want to become successful in life," said Rahul.

He was among the 15-odd children who came together to tell their stories of *azaadi* on the final day of the 10-day workshop. While the workshop took place at Apeejay School, Park Street, the final event was hosted by the Salt Lake centre.

The children included underprivileged kids who are a part of Apeejay Anand Children's Library, and specially-abled kids from Kolkata Society for the Empowerment of Differently Abled.

The play, including acting and songs, was staged to show what the kids had learnt at the workshop. Children interpreted "freedom" in various ways. Some said they wanted to party but the fact that they would not be allowed to wear



Kids in the audience watch the play with interest

clothes of their choice to party late at night scared them.

One of the stories said how they wanted to be free so that they could eat *phuchika* and *ghugni* with their friends — things other kids take for granted. Their stories of *azaadi* had a touch of survival intertwined in them in such a simple manner that it touched everyone's heart. From the idea of lending a helping hand to whoever is in need to giving a message of "safe drive, save life" — everything was well projected.

A programme that started with children asking, "*Kaun dega azaadi?* (Who will give freedom?)" followed by singing Falz Ahmed Faiz's *Hum dekhenge* to ending the show on the Bollywood number from *3 Idiots*, *Give me some sunshine*, made us realise how everyone has a different story of survival and idea of freedom.

"I want my son to get more such opportunities. The fact that he is happy after attending this workshop gives me immense pleasure," said Rahul's mother, Alo Bai.



A scene in the play shows we should help everyone in need

Art is the beginning of all education. It is all about expression. We decided to give the kids of Apeejay Anand Children's Library a platform to express themselves and were amazed to find out how much potential these kids have.

— Rita Chatterjee, principal



I feel these kids are not less than anyone. If they get opportunities they will shine like stars. I teach them at the library, so I know they aren't any different from privileged kids. It is we who will have to be more inclusive in our approach.

— Mithu Ghosh, teacher, Apeejay Anand Children's Library



Differently-abled kids can grasp everything so well; they give their best at everything they do and that is what makes them different. Society needs to be more holistic and for that to happen people need to be literate. I believe art is the only medium which can bring everyone together.

— Rijita Chatterjee, Theatre artist



The experience of being a part of this theatre was very good. I did not know much about theatre. I am glad that I got this opportunity to learn about this medium through which we can express our thoughts. I would love to be a part of this workshop again.

— Vansh Lama, Class II, Apeejay Anand Children's Library



I want to be a part of this venture more often. I loved the fact that I could project the kind of freedom that I want. The workshop was full of fun.

— Shalini Khatoon, Class VII, Apeejay Anand Children's Library



I made so many friends at the workshop! The experience was very good, and I enjoyed myself a lot. Among others, one thing I learnt is team work. If we work in a team, anything can be achieved.

— Nirjala Das, Class V, Apeejay Anand Children's Library



I am very happy that I could participate in this workshop. Freedom for me would be able to play freely. I had never done something of this sort before and I am glad that everybody appreciated our performance.

There are very few people who think that we can do something and appreciate what we do.

— Saiba Khatoon, Class IV, Apeejay Anand Children's Library



I have participated in a play before and I am glad that I got the opportunity to perform in one this time, too. I am very happy that we got to be a part of this venture. I want to get more such opportunities.

— Avirup Raha, Class IV, Kolkata Society for the Empowerment of Differently Abled (Avirup cannot see beyond a couple of feet)

