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Bangalore: Under the clear night sky, a group of young astro enthusiasts are living it up, all night. They call themselves the Sheratan Astronomy Club, and their most recent night out was to ring in the Venus transit at Nikaya Observatory.

"At this grand star party, we got to observe the night sky prior to the transit. We usually have parties when there are clear night skies, to learn about the twinkle of the stars and the life of planets," says Akash Dalmia, who has been fascinated by the night sky since class 7.



Akash is among the increasing tribe of astro enthusiasts who are part of Sheratan, started by a fellow student and enthusiast Akshay Kumar, at Jain College on July 6, 2010. Akshay started the club under the aegis of their chairman Chenraj Jain when he was in I PU. But the star bug had bitten him much earlier, for through his growing up years, he had visited the planetarium on Sundays

STAR PARTIES UNDER THE SKY

along with his father who was a member of the Association of Bangalore Amateur Astronomers.

"I grew curious about astronomy over time and my father who is a 'do it yourself' enthusiast built a four-inch refractor telescope through which I saw the Moon's surface, its craters and mountains. While in class 9, I took this telescope to my terrace and watched the sky all night. Thereafter, I became an active member of the Association of Bangalore Amateur Astronomers and Bangalore Astronomical Society and started interacting with professional astronomers who guided me. I completed class 10 as an 'astroboy' and walked into Jain College, with the Sheratan dream. Lo and behold, Chenraj Sir gave me funds to procure a telescope for the college and the astro club was born," recounts Akshay.

Today, Sheratan has 700 student members from various Jain institutions and other education-



Young Enthusiasts Get Together, Delve Into Astro Wonders



DIFFERENT HORIZON: (Left) Astro enthusiasts who are part of Sheratan Astronomy Club, have a date with the celestial bodies. (Above) Akash Kumar, the founder of the group

al institutions as well. "We involve the public through activities at malls and star parties," explains Akshay.

"Reputed astro scientists like Sriraghavan, president, Education and Collaboration, come to lecture us. Some of them also come to our star parties to point

out the wonders of the night sky," says Vibha Mohan, another core member of Sheratan.

"These sessions help bridge the gap between the scientific world and the lay person. "In India, although a lot of people are interested in astronomy, they don't go to planetariums. Our star parties, contests and lecture sessions have brought several enthusiasts closer to the sky," says Aniruddha V.

"I want to make astronomy accessible to everyone, especially those who are not formally attached to educational institutions. We've been able to reach out to many such people," says Sheratan member Arun Bharadwaj.

Sheratan is bursting with enthusiasts and the numbers are growing. "We hope to have a self-funding system with an annual membership fee of Rs 120 to support our activities. Our club will soon become a public entity and a not-for-profit initiative," says Akshay.

All this is for the love astronomy, as Aishwarya Girish says: "Astronomy is a mystery, the more you learn about it the deeper the mystery gets. These past two years, we have had many star parties and the experiences have been amazing. I used to like astronomy earlier, now I love it!"

QUOTE UNQUOTE

Whenever Sheratan students come to me for guidance, I help them. Their star parties are doing well. I was around for the inauguration of Sheratan Astronomy Club and went with them for a star party at their global campus. These students are very enthusiastic and I hope their tribe increases.

— **GSD Babu** | DIRECTOR, MP BIRLA INSTITUTE OF FUNDAMENTAL RESEARCH

I've been mentoring these youngsters at Sheratan. As a science promoter who has been part of their activities, I feel they've taken off really well.

— **Naveen Nanjundappa** | VICE-PRESIDENT, BANGALORE ASTRONOMICAL SOCIETY

It's very important how one conveys the glory of the night sky to children and the common man. They planned their Venus transit activity three months prior to the event, for observing the night sky comes with a lot of preparation.

— **Shylaja BS** | DIRECTOR, JAWAHARLAL NEHRU PLANETARIUM