

## Multiworld

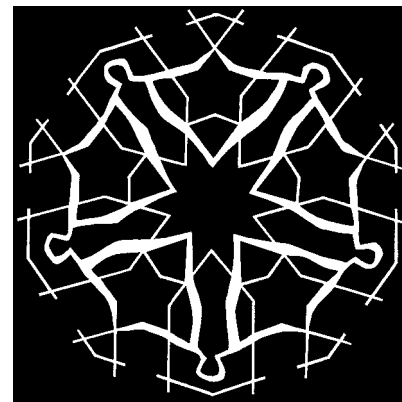
*The End of Education*  
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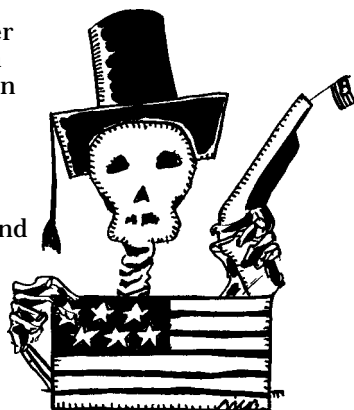
# War on Iraq: The End of Education?

In the intervening period between the publication of the first and second issues of *Kamiriithu*, the world of human beings has been transformed in a most profound and tumultuous manner.

The illegal invasion and occupation of Iraq by a country reported to be celebrating for some time now "the end of history" has frontally assaulted our most cherished human ideals. We have to seriously consider now whether the "end of history" in the United States of America has come to mean the "end of education" there as well.

What kind of "education" would allow the brutalisation of the innocent people of Iraq, and earlier, of Afghanistan? Which system of learning would justify the open theft of resources from a nation kept forcibly impoverished for a dozen years? Can one ever applaud a high-tech war against a nation of undernourished people, many children?

The rulers of these highly "educated" and so-called advanced societies of the United States of America, the United Kingdom and their crony allies violated every conceivable law known to civilised society. They resorted to unacceptable levels of violence against innocent civilians. They lied and fabricated documents to show that the Iraqis had weapons of mass destruction. By their unilateral use of brute force, the invaders created overnight a country bereft of civic life and education (and a planet emptied of international law as well).



For decades, the United States has been a magnet for people seeking "quality education" from around the world. The "brain drain" of several years has ensured that "the best and the brightest" of young people from all across the planet end up in American universities. How did this allegedly brilliantly endowed country descend almost overnight into this abysmal sewer of human depravities?

Education ought to have prevented the need of war and all else associated with this terrible human disease. We associate education with the hopeful long term curing of the human pathologies associated with all war, just or unjust. These ideals failed in the United States where even school children take up guns and spray their teachers and colleagues with lead in senseless bouts of violence. So what can be expected of their political leaders?

In fact, the violent American conquest of Iraq symbolises not just the *failure* of education in the United States, but its *rejection* as well.

With what face shall we teach American students about the beginnings of human civilisation knowing we collaborated in the destruction of museums that housed the

priceless heirlooms of the ancient civilisations of Mesopotamia, Sumeria, Babylon? How do we teach the next generations that the destruction of history and scholarship was required in order to safeguard fuel supplies for American cars, stubbornly pursuing not just the end of history, but the end of the planet as well?

Can any decent, civilised citizen from any part of the remaining profoundly human societies of Asia, Africa or South America ever again pretend that flying to the US will any longer get him or her an "education"? What education? Education to become a plague, a pathogen, a disease?

Post-Iraq, many will say that the direction in which we are headed is largely towards making the planet a more miserable place for all the people fated to live in these times. Others, however, have a better view. Munir Fasheh wrote me recently, for instance:

"What is ugly is not new, it has been there all the time, especially since the invasion of the Americas. What is new, and to me marks a new phase in human history, is the new spirit, as manifested for the first time in human history, in millions of people from all walks of life and backgrounds and regions going out on the same day in more than 600 cities around the world and saying no to the dominant inhuman logic. They did not go out for support of a charismatic leader or ideology (as what happened in the sixties) but for feeling that the dominant logic will soon reach and wipe out everyone. This spirit, these manifestations reflect the main human treasure which consists of what people and cultures have. The danger of wiping out life from this earth is there, of course; these maniacs have the tools to do it. But, I feel things are and will be swinging the other direction in the coming future."

The publication of *Kamiriithu* and its message is therefore timely. Multiworld's associates have no desire to conduct themselves as pall-bearers of the glorious ideals associated with "education". But the Multiworld community is convinced that offering more and more children to the altar of "American-inspired" educational institutions and their life-less curricula can only make the globe a more terrible and galling place to live in. As Arif Tabassum wrote recently, we can never forget that "the nuclear bomb is a product of schooled minds."

We may not be able to stop the American war machine in its tracks as yet because there is today simply no institution large enough to hold the clinically insane, thoroughly schooled individuals who control and direct it.

But we can begin right now by taking greater care about how we undertake the education of our children: that we never surrender these most precious gifts from God to be trained for service in a system that can only benefit and strengthen this manic cabal of anti-civilisation, anti-culture terrorists and thieves that claims it has reached the end of history – and of education as well.

*Claude Alvares*

2003 Vol.I No.2

The Multiworld Network's Newsletter

# Kamiriithu

UN MUNDO EN QUE PAPAN MUCHOS MUNDOS

# Multiworld Network websites

## multiworld.org

Multiworld.org is the main Multiworld website.

We are encouraging educational activists in every country within the South to have their own Multiworld chapter and site, operated by their own core group. Naturally, several of these will be in their own national, regional or local languages, with crosslinks to the main Multiworld page.

The main website will eventually host discussions in the principal languages of the South: Hindi, Chinese, Swahili, Spanish, Arabic, Farsi etc.

Multiworld.org, for the moment, also hosts the Multiversity site. It also hosts the discussion dealing with the teaching and implications of (colonial) international law.

There are crosslinks that will take you to other multiworld sites, including those dealing with schooling (taleemnet) and organic agriculture (indiaorganic). We are also providing linkages to several other sites which are working in similar directions.

We are also envisioning separate Multiworld sites on specific issues like the WTO, debt, international law, etc. Any person volunteering to set up and run such sites for us is welcome to do so. Please keep us informed so that work is not unnecessarily duplicated. If you come across interesting sites that should be linked with the Multiworld page, please inform us.

The multiworld.org site is being updated every week commencing June, 2003. We welcome comments and contributions to the multiworld webpage from sympathetic colleagues and friends in Asia, Africa and South America. This Network is not designed to be run from above, but through its numerous constituents.

## taleemnet.org

This site is exclusively for reporting on discussions and experiments dealing with learning experiences outside school walls or outside the framework of 'factory schooling'.

Taleemnet is actually the first major site dedicated exclusively to de-schooling or unschooling experiments in Asia, Africa and South America.

The site aims to create an international community of parents and students who take a decision to "walk-out" of school and resume learning using their own resources.

Educators, parents and students are encouraged to visit the site to learn about the mental and spiritual damage that is done to children and learners when they submit themselves to the coercive processes of schooling.

After reading the critique, parents may be interested in knowing what other parents are doing in different parts of the country and abroad.

The site features stories of children who have done better out of school than if they had continued with it.

Taleemnet hosts stories making fun of the school and cartoons critical of the school.

The site also provides a detailed overview of educational systems outside the purview of Western educational institutions.

Links are provided to significant home-schooling movements within the industrialised countries where there is an even greater mental anguish about the negative impact of schooling on the personality development of children and youth.

## indiaorganic.org

This site deals exclusively with the field of organic agricultural science.

Traditional agriculture in almost all countries has been replaced by imported agribusiness science based on use of copious synthetic chemicals and pesticides pushed by huge corporations.

In several countries, in fact, farmers have been cut off from inherited knowledge of farming and are now finding it difficult to survive with an alien system of growing crops that is not only increasingly unprofitable but that actually devastates the environment as well.

For the moment, the information available relates largely to the organic farming movement in India and Malaysia.

The site provides linkages to several organic farming sites within the country and abroad.

It reports on intellectual work carried out by farmers and innovations in the area of restoring soil fertility, improving the micro-community of soil species and organisms, homemade inputs, etc.

The main activities of organic farming teaching are carried out under the rubric of Vazhviyal Multiversity which is located in Tamilnadu and was inaugurated on September 11, 2002.

The first major activity of Vazhviyal has been the conducting of training camps for farmers eager to turn away from chemical farming.

In April 2003, several farmers from Tamilnadu visited Malaysia to exchange notes with farmers there on natural farming techniques.

## multiversity msn page

Yusef Progler from the UAE runs an independent Multiversity website which also features exciting new discussion material, rare articles and reports on Multiversity themes.

You can access the site at: <http://groups.msn.com/multiversity>

Join the discussions there. The site is frequently updated and the discussions way out. Everything relating to the regime of Western academic studies is being challenged with determination, verve and imagination.

Progler is also editing a series of short booklets containing essays by important scholars who have attempted to challenge in a fundamental way Western academic culture and its various associated components. Called the "Radical Essentials Pamphlet Series", the essays appear in the format of colourful booklets (*see p.5 of this issue for more details*). Indian editions of these books will be out shortly.

These booklets have been designed for seminars and workshops on themes relating to decolonisation of knowledge.

Hitherto, the knowledge we in Asia, Africa and South America created or which we still create everyday, was suppressed or was simply ignored because it did not fit within the dominant paradigms that rule the academic world. The present day output of books – that wield influence in the knowledge system being disseminated – is notorious for its lack of any works generated by intellectuals from the South. So one of the Multiversity's first tasks has been the rescue, airing and sharing of suppressed knowledge.

To achieve this, the Multiversity has set up an internet library called Multiversitylibrary.com. The site will offer scholars from Asia, Africa and South America free loads of major titles written by scholars from these continents.

Eventually the Internet Multiversity library will comprise over 500 of the best titles from Asia, Africa and South America. The list of titles already scanned includes the following:

1. Ngugi wa Thiong'o, *Decolonising the Mind*
2. Rana Kabbani, *Devise and Rule: Europe's Myths of Orient*

## multiversitylibrary.com

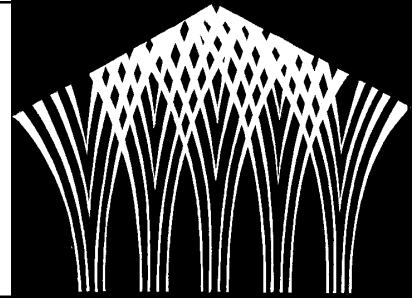
3. Edward Said, *Orientalism*
4. J.P.S Uberoi, *Science and Culture*
5. Nsekuye Bizimana, *White Paradise, Hell for Africa?*
6. M.K. Gandhi, *Hind Swaraj*
7. Ivan Illich, *Deschooling Society*
8. Ivan Illich, *Tools for Conviviality*
9. Ivan Illich, *Energy and Equity*
10. Sunil Sahasrabudhey, *Gandhi's Challenge to Modern Science*
11. Masanobu Fukuoka, *The One Straw Revolution*
12. Ashis Nandy, *The Intimate Enemy*
13. Claude Alvares, *Decolonising History*
14. Claude Alvares, *Science, Development and Violence*
15. Ziauddin Sardar, editor, *The Touch of Midas*
16. Winin Pereira, *Inhuman Rights*
17. Winin Pereira, *Global Parasites*
18. K.M. Panikkar, *Asia and Western Dominance*
19. Walter Rodney, *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa*
20. Mohammad Kattami, *Islam, Liberty and Development*
21. D.L.O. Mendis, Eppawala: *Destruction of Cultural Heritage in the Race of Development*
22. Dharampal, *Collected Writings (5 vols)*
27. Just World Trust, *Dominance of the West Versus the Rest*
28. Just World Trust, *Human Wrongs: Reflections on Western Global Dominance and its Impact on Human Rights*
29. Orlando Fals Borda, *Knowledge and People's Power*
30. Chinua Achebe, *Things Fall Apart*
31. Orlando Albornoz, *Sociology and the Third World Perspective*
32. Renato Constantino, *Synthetic Culture and Development*
33. Claude Ake, *Democracy and Development in Africa*
34. Roberto Galeano, *Open Veins of Latin America*
35. Ngugi wa Thiong'o, *Moving the Center*
36. Ali Shariati, *The Sociology of Islam*
37. Ziauddin Sardar, *How we know: Ilm and the revival of knowledge.*

Eventually, the entire 500 titles will be written onto a single CD which will not be available for sale commercially. However, scholars and teachers from Asia, Africa and South America will be able to ask for copies for use in classrooms and for purposes of their own research.

Where permissions from authors or publishers is available, we shall also post the entire text of these books on the Net.

Multiversity is also commencing preparation of an annotated bibliography of up to 10,000 articles written by intellectuals from the South and organised under various disciplines and which demonstrate creative work, new ideas, methodologies equal to or superior to what we have learned from the academic institutions of the West. Many of these articles are already posted on the Net.

We request intellectuals, writers, academics from Asia, Africa and South America to use the webpages of multiversitylibrary.com and multiworld.org to circulate the best of their writing within the international community.



## Why Teach European Social Science to Asians?

**Syed Farid Alatas of the Department of Sociology, National University of Singapore tells us of the new courses he and his colleagues are designing in order to marginalise the dominance and tyranny of Western social scientists and their work in his sphere of influence.**

Writing in the early part of the last century, Benoy Kumar Sarkar (1887-1949) was well ahead of his time when he censured Asian thinkers for having fallen "victim to the fallacious sociological methods and messages of the modern West, to which the postulate of an alleged distinction between the Orient and the Occident is the first principle of science."

He attacked such Eurocentric notions as the inferiority of Hindus in matters of science and technology, the one-sided emphasis on the other-worldly and speculative dimension of the Hindu spirit, and the alleged dichotomy between Orient and Occident. He was also critical of the methodology of the prevailing Indology of his times on three grounds: (i) it overlooked the positive, materialistic and secular theories and institutions of the Hindus, (ii) it compared the ancient and medieval conditions of India with modern and contemporary European and American societies, and (iii) it ignored the distinction between existing institutions on the one hand and ideals on the other.

Sarkar was very explicit about his call for a new Indology that would function to demolish the idols of Orientalism as they are found in sociology.

In 1968, the well-known Indian periodical, *Seminar*, devoted an issue to the topic of academic colonialism, which was understood in terms of two aspects. One referred to the use of academically generated information by overt and covert North American agencies to facilitate political domination of Afro-Asian countries. The other referred to the economic, political and intellectual dominance that North American academics themselves exercise over academics elsewhere.

Why read or teach the works of Marx, Weber and Durkheim or other European authors long since departed to a class of Singaporean or Southeast Asian students? What have the ideas of three European theorists born in the last century in a different cultural milieu to do with the non-European regions of the world today?

While the various calls for alternative discourses have in

theory questioned the existing paradigms in the social sciences, they have so far been unable to displace the fundamental assumptions of specific disciplines in practice. The pragmatic need to reproduce disciplines such as sociology and anthropology demands that certain continuities with the past be maintained. Hence, it is not insignificant that the critique of the human sciences is confined to the professional arena (that is, scientific journals, conferences and other academic forums) with the participants being established schol-

ars and not students. The critique of the social sciences that emanated from academic institutions in Asia, Africa and Latin America tended to remain at an abstract and reflexive level. There had been several thoughtful pieces on the state of the various disciplines, raising the issue of the lack of connectedness between social science and the societies in which it was taught. But the calls to decolonize the social sciences were generally not followed by successful attempts to build 'indigenous' theories and autonomous social science traditions, delinked from the academic core of Western Europe and North America. Neither have these calls manifested themselves at the level of teaching in the social sciences. As far as sociological theory is concerned course on this throughout the world tend to restrict themselves to discussion and exposition of the works of Marx, Weber and Durkheim in addition to those of other nineteenth century Western scholars.



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Given this scenario, my colleague, Vineeta Sinha, and I

have attempted to deal with the issue of teaching sociological theory by way of a more universalistic approach to the study of sociological theory. This includes raising the question of whether sociological theorising had been done outside of the bounds of European modernity. This would imply changes in sociology theory curricula. We have been experimenting with various approaches entailing changes in the way sociological theory is taught. Some interesting results came out of such changes which we had reported

in the journal, *Teaching Sociology*. These changes involved, among other things, introducing Asian thinkers who were grappling with similar problems of social change and emerging modernity as nineteenth century European scholars were. For example, the works of Ibn Khaldun, Rammohun Roy, Jose Rizal and Benoy Kumar Sarkar were taught in addition to those of Marx, Weber and Durkheim. We are also planning to introduce the ideas of East Asian thinkers such as the Japanese, Ogy Sorai (1666-1728).

Because of the relative autonomy that university professors enjoy, we are in a position to make such changes in the courses that we teach, even if entire curricula cannot be revamped along these lines. In addition to the two courses mentioned above, I have attempted to put into practice some themes that I believe should inform the dialogue among civilization in a course entitled "Islam and Contemporary Muslim Civilizations".

This is an introductory course to Muslim civilization. Emphasis is on the historical, cultural and social context of the emergence and development of Islam, and the great diversity that exists in the Muslim world, from Morocco in the west to Indonesia in the east.

The course is divided into five sections. The first, consisting of two lectures, provides an introduction to the study of civilizations in general, defines Islam as belief and practice, creed and civilization, and briefly discusses the origins of Islam.

The next set of lectures discusses the spread of Islam and the encounter between Islam and the West in the past. This part of the course introduces the major cultural areas within Muslim civilization, that is, the Arab, Persian, Ottoman, Moghul, and Malay, and covers topics such as the Muslim conquest of Spain and Sicily, the Crusades, and the Islamization of Southeast Asia.

The third part of the course examines the cultural dimension of Muslim civilization, with particular emphasis placed on the religious and rational sciences that developed among the Arabs and Persians, their contact with the Greek heritage, and the impact that Islam had on medieval European philosophy and science. Also discussed in this part of the course are the literary and artistic dimensions of Muslim civilization.

The fourth part of the course focuses on current issues in the contemporary period (post-World War II). Particular emphasis is given to the emergence of Orientalism in Europe and the Islamic response to it. This section also provides an overview of the political economy of the Muslim world, setting the stage for discussions on a number of contemporary problems and issues such as gender, underdevelopment, Islamic revivalism, and imperialism.

The main objective is to bring students to an understanding of what I understand as the three central themes of the study of civilizations: a) Intercivilizational encounters; b) Multicultural origins of modernity and c) The variety of points of view. (Full text of this paper at [multiworld.org](http://multiworld.org))

Universidad de la Tierra:

## Reclaiming Our Freedom to Learn

*Gustavo Esteva (who wrote this piece for Multiversity) is a grassroots activist and deprofessionalized intellectual. Author of 27 books and many essays, he lives in a small indigenous village in Oaxaca, in southern Mexico. Universidad de la Tierra en Oaxaca was created by a coalition of grassroots organisations. The University is a unique institution created for the uneducated and unschooled of South America. We welcome many more such universities all across the planet. Those wanting to set one up can contact Gustavo Esteva at: [gustavoesteva@terra.com.mx](mailto:gustavoesteva@terra.com.mx)*

They came from villages and *barrios*, mostly Indigenous. They were naive *refuseniks*, fed up with the classroom. They came with curiosity, rather than conviction. They heard about Universidad de la Tierra from friends or acquaintances and decided to give it a try.

They knew that we have no teachers or curricula and don't provide educational services. They loved the idea that they would be in full control of their own learning – the content, the rhythm, the conditions. But it was not easy for them to take such control into their hands. (Even those that suffered school for only a few years were already conditioned to think of themselves as passive receptacles for receiving instructions).

As soon as they arrive, they start to work with a tutor, a person doing what they want to learn, who is willing to accept them as apprentices.

In doing their work, in observing their tutors, the 'students' usually discover that some books may have good use. As apprentices with an agrarian lawyer, for example, they observe how he alludes during his work to some articles of the Agrarian Law and smell with curiosity that little book full of strange sentences. At their request, a reading circle starts, where several 'students' study together the Agrarian Law.

They also discover that they need specific skills to do what they want to do. Most of the time, they get those skills by practice. At their request, they may attend specific workshops, to shorten the time needed to get those skills.

We have regular seminars, to freely discuss what we want to discuss. We usually start with a definition of a common interest. Someone suggests a specific text, pertinent to the theme. In the next session we organise our conversation around what we read. The number of participants in every session varies from six to 25.

We also organise special seminars, when one of us or an interesting visitor has something to share. The speaker speaks for 30 or 40 minutes and all the participants discuss with him or her for one or two hours more.

A regular seminar is focused on the ideas of Iván Illich. We are exploring how he articulated our experience at the grassroots and how appropriately he achieved this. We use a selection of his texts as a reference or a framework to examine our own experience.

The seminar has been very fruitful. Most of the participants are now conscious *refuseniks*.

Our 'students' have been learning faster than we expected. After a few months they start to be called by their communities to do there what they have learned. Some of them are combining different lines of learning in a creative way. One of them, for example, combined organic agriculture and soil regeneration (his original interest), with vernacular architecture. He is thus enriching, though a variety of experiences and tutors, what a good peasant usually does. Instead of seeking to get dignity and income by producing and

denied to them by the educational system. Instead of certifying a number of ass-hours, as conventional diplomas, we certify a specific competence that is immediately appreciated by the communities.

We are also extending similar diplomas to wise people, who may never have been in a school or our university. Their competence is certified by their peers and the community. The idea, again, is to use in our own way – laughingly – the symbols of the dominant system.

The cost of the whole adventure is ridiculously low, almost irrelevant. Most of the 'students', however, do require support for

school with those out of the school. The latter knew more about everything, except the national anthem... And those going to school were looking down at their communities and cultures, and subordinating their minds and hearts to the authority of the teacher. Maldonado's report is titled, "How the school produces ignorance".

The people in the villages know very well that the school prevents their children from learning what is needed for survival in the community. And that it does not offer to them appropriate preparation for life or work out of the community. They no longer delegate their children's learning to the school, but most of them don't dare take the children out of the school either. They don't want to deprive them of the school diploma, a required passport in modern society, whose lack is a continual source of discrimination and humiliation.

They know by experience what happens with those abandoning their communities to get "higher education". They will not come back to the community and are usually lost in the cities, in degraded jobs. A recent official study found that only 8% of all graduates of Mexican universities will be able to work in whatever they graduated. Certified lawyers or engineers are driving a taxi or tending a stall. In spite of such awareness, people still hold the illusion that higher education may offer something to their children. They don't feel comfortable in depriving their children of such "opportunity".

And so we created our university. Young men or women without any diploma, and better if they never attended the school, can come with us. They will be able to learn whatever they want to learn – practical trades, like topography or law, or fields of study, like philosophy, astronomy, whatever. They will learn the skills of the trade or field of study as apprentices of someone doing those activities. They will also learn, in doing it, how to learn with modern tools and practices, not available in their communities.

We called it 'university' to laugh at the official system and to be able to provide university diplomas, protecting our 'graduates' from discrimination. But we also reclaimed for our organisation an old tradition of the medieval university: the opportunity for a group of friends to learn and study together, around a table

(continued next page)



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selling professional services, he learns how to share what he is learning with others. Like the peasants.

What we are mostly doing is to reclaim practices of apprenticeship as old as the hills, and complement them with some contemporary practices for shared learning and study.

To define areas of apprenticeship, we explore with the communities both the kind of knowledge or skills not available in them and the kind of learning they want for their young people.

Of course we also play with the symbols of the oppressive educational system. After one or two years of learning, once the 'students' are successfully able to perform the activities they want to learn (as Agrarian Lawyers or Alternative Medical Practitioners, in Popular Communication, Vernacular Architecture, Forestry, Social Research, etc.), we give them a magnificent university diploma. We are thus offering them a 'social recognition'

food and lodging, since they are out of their communities during their learning process. This has been a limiting factor, preventing us from accepting all the 'students' that apply to learn at Unitierra.

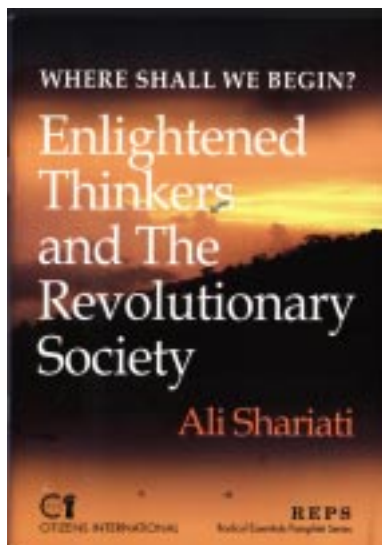
### Why Unitierra?

Years ago, we started to observe in villages and *barrios*, particularly among Indigenous peoples, a radical reaction against education and schools. A few of them closed their schools and expelled their teachers. Most of them avoided the political conflict involved in such move and opted for by-passing the school, while reclaiming and regenerating the conditions in which people traditionally learned their own ways.

They came to this point after a long experience. For many years they resisted the school. And then, like the Zapatistas, they said ¡Basta!, Enough! They knew very well what was happening. Benjamín Maldonado, a young anthropologist, certified it. Using a collection of tests, he compared children going to the

### Enlightened thinkers and the revolutionary Society

By Ali Shariati (Rs. 30, US\$3)



**War on Iraq: Conceived in Israel.** By Stephen Sniegowski (Rs. 30, US\$3)

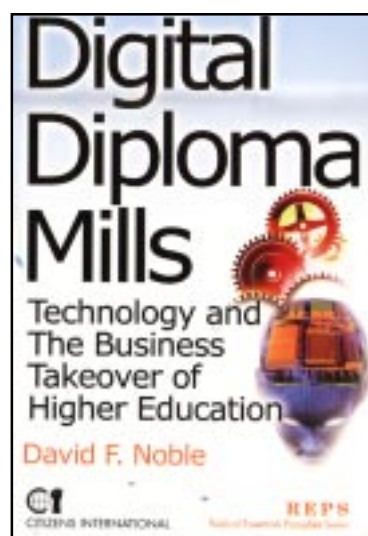
## Multiversity Tracts

Citizens International, Malaysia, has brought out these six booklets which look at the world and its major problems through non-Western eyes and brains. *Kamiriithu* has already featured "White Studies" in its first issue.

John Mohawk is a native American who has challenged the hegemony of Western thinking. So has Ali Shariati, who also wrote critically of Western academic sciences and sought to replace them with Islamic models.

'Digital Diploma Mills' is a sharp critique of the Western education system with its new emphasis on distance learning. Frederic Clairmont is an eloquent writer who forecasts the end of Western liberalism and its manifestation as an empire.

The *War on Iraq* is a revealing exposure of Israeli direction of the criminal US led war on Iraq.

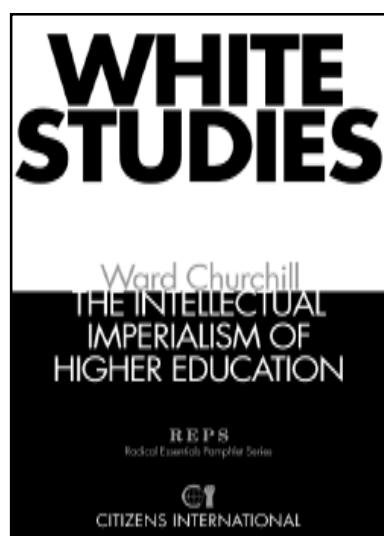


**Digital Diploma Mills**  
By David Noble (Rs. 30, US\$3)

These booklets are part of the "Radical Essentials Pamphlet Series". The series is intended to bring readers a collection of essays necessary for envisioning life beyond the hegemonic grip of Western modernity, its knowledge traditions and its socio-economic systems. Pamphlets feature works by Third World thinkers developing their own intellectual traditions and works by maverick thinkers operating within the Western intellectual tradition.

The focus of the series is on action-oriented critical analysis about a variety of contemporary topics, including the environment, consumerism, technology, health and education.

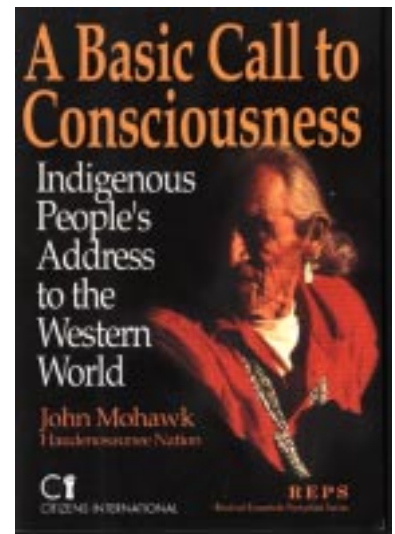
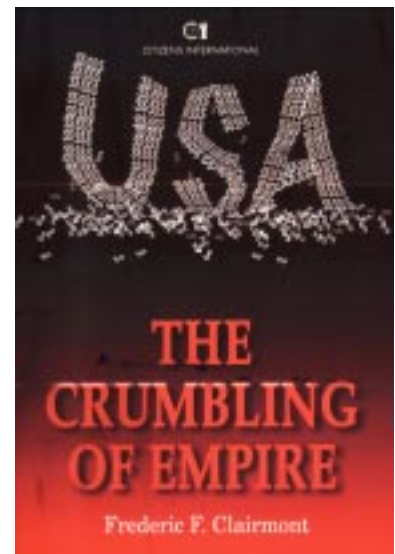
You can order all the titles from Other India Bookstore, Above Mapusa Clinic, Mapusa 403 507 Goa, India. Rs.30 each.



**White Studies**  
By Ward Churchill (Rs. 30, US\$3)

### USA: The Crumbling of Empire

By Frederic F Clairmont  
(Rs. 30, US\$3)



**A Basic Call to Consciousness**  
By John Mohawk (Rs. 30, US\$3)

(continued from previous page)

## Esteva: Reclaiming Our Freedom to Learn

– not to get any diploma or advance up the education ladder, but for the joy of it.

We started recently another adventure. People of 300 communities from three provinces are participating with us in an exercise in cultural regeneration. We have two or three day workshops, in groups of 20 to 40, every six months, in some towns near the communities. Every month we have one or two day workshops, in groups of 3 to 8, in the communities. We share with all the participants some texts, audiocassettes and videocassettes, for them to share the experience in their communities. For a few months we will share reflections on our cultures and how they have been affected and damaged. The participants will then conceive of initiatives to strengthen their own cultures. During the following years we will accompany them in the implementation of their initiatives. Those so willing may continue their learning process in the university.

In this adventure we are using the analogy of a tree. In

recent years, indigenous peoples have been repeating an old saying: "They wrenched off our fruits... They ripped off our branches... They burned our trunk... But they could not kill our roots." The foliage represents the visible aspect of a culture, its morphology. The trunk, part visible and part invisible, represents the structural aspect. And the roots represent their myths, their view of the world, their notion of the self, space, time, spirituality.

A culture may have, as a tree, some grafts – something brought by another culture that became fully incorporated. The Spaniards, for example, brought the plough, which is now an intimate part of our peasant cultures. But to prosper, a graft should be of the same species, and it should be grafted in the appropriate way. In the communities there are also many alien elements, that cannot be grafted in their cultures. They may decide to keep them and use them in their own way, with a critical distance, or they may decide to reject them, as something damaging or dissolving their own culture. The school is often the

first example mentioned by the participants when we discuss such alien elements. They remember that three years ago, in a public forum of the indigenous peoples of Oaxaca, after months of reflection and discussion, they declared: "The school has been the main tool of the State to destroy the Indigenous cultures".

We are learning together, with these young or old people designated in communities' assemblies of ten indigenous peoples to participate in this adventure of 'reflection in action'. We are learning how to regenerate our own cultures. We are hospitably opening our arms and hearts to others, but fully aware that we need to protect our own cultural trees from inhospitable people, tools and practices that corrupt or kill them. We are thus healing ourselves from the damages done to us by colonisation and development. And we are joyfully walking again our own path, trusting again our own noses, dreaming again our own dreams...

## An Apology

Despite the best of our efforts, we were unable to bring out *Kamiriithu* earlier.

But in the near future as well, the publication of *Kamiriithu* will not be on a regular basis. This is largely because we are operating on a shoe-string basis, with completely inadequate staff.

We have therefore taken a unilateral decision that subscriptions sent for the newsletter will not be valid for a bi-monthly published over six months of the year. Instead, all subscriptions will be for a set of six issues as and when these are published.

The reason for this change?

We have decided to ensure that half of the newsletter will feature actual stories of people already working to meet multiversity objectives. Meeting such people and writing up their stories takes considerable time. But, you will agree, such stories will ensure that *Kamiriithu* is not just a talk shop, but a real life workshop as well.

We are keen to ensure that subscribers preserve every issue of *Kamiriithu* as if it were gold. Or better.

*Teaching Across Borders*

# Multiversity introduces natural farming to Malaysia

Through the assistance of the Third World Network, organic farmers from Vazhviyal Multiversity arrived in Malaysia for a three week teaching tour targetted at getting Malaysian farmers to switch to natural farming and decrease their dependence on destructive Western agricultural science. Malaysia's farmers appear to have completely forgotten about composting, earthworms and mulching. The rotten economics of modern agriculture based on expensive fertilisers and toxic pesticides is inducing them to learn their subject all over again.

Over the years, almost all of Malaysia's agriculture has converted to intensive farming based on expensive synthetic chemicals and toxic pesticides. However, as with farmers' experiences elsewhere, the use of these chemicals is producing diminishing results. Farmers find they are making greater cash payments to companies for costly inputs, while their output is stagnant or declining.

Worse, synthetic chemicals damage the soil, driving out the micro and macro fauna including earthworms. Toxic pesticides affect not only the health of those farmers that use them, but also end up in the food crops bought by innocent people in the open market. They also destroy important elements of the ecosystem including honey-bees and fish in the streams and ponds into which the toxic pesticides end up.

All these impacts of modern "green revolution" agriculture are well known, but those who continue to propagate the package of practices associated with it have no options left.

Within this context, Indian organic farmers appeared to be natural candidates for initiating Malaysian farmers into the intricacies of natural farming: a way of growing crops that relies wholly on recycled natural materials and eschews completely any dependence on inputs, especially synthetic chemicals, from outside the farm.

The organic farming movement has taken great strides within India in the past decade. The Third World Network played a key role in the movement by assisting in the publication of *The Organic Farming Source Book*, an encyclopaedic document that created enormous excitement and energy among those looking for alternatives to modern agriculture and induced a runaway trend among farmers converting to natural farming. In many areas, the *Sourcebook* functioned as a sort of clearing-house for new ideas relating to organic agriculture. Today farmers in India are glad to be rid of the dependence on costly synthetic chemicals, toxic pesticides, bank credit, crop insurance and a host of other dependence created by the so-called Green Revolution of the mid-sixties.

Since a number of farmers in Malaysia originally migrated from Tamilnadu in India (associated with earlier indentured labourers), it was decided to bring in farmer teachers from Tamilnadu, so that the prob-

lem of communication would not constitute an obstacle.

Accordingly, three key organic farmers associated with Vazhviyal Multiversity were first selected to visit Malaysia and train their Malaysian counterparts. The three farmers included G Nammalwar, one of the principal leaders of the organic farming movement in Tamilnadu. (Nammalwar is a former trained agricultural scientist who today disavows whatever he learnt at agricultural university.)

65 year old Nammalwar surprised ordinary Malaysians by his vast knowledge of plants found during his visit. While walking around either in the urban environment or in the fields of the Malays, he picked up various grasses, weeds, ferns and other plants and explained



*Organic farmers from Vazhviyal Multiversity (Tamilnadu) explain to Malaysian farmers the basic skills of composting agricultural wastes*

their medicinal properties. He even picked up several plants growing by the roadside in Penang town and explained how they could be used for dealing with specific pests in agriculture.

The other farmers included K. Mohanasundaram, Tamilnadu's best known organic turmeric grower and M Venkatachalam, a barefoot untrained entomologist who learnt the entire art of biological pest control on his own without going to university and set up a successful village level unit for raising natural predators that farmers could use in their fields against pests.

The three farmers spent practically the entire month of April (2003) visiting farmers in various parts of Malaysia: Cameroon High Lands, Ipoh, Kedah, Penang and KL. They came equipped with slide presentations on various techniques and procedures that were essential to natural farming.

They began their first course in Cameroon Highlands with a mere ten farmers in attendance. As news of their techniques

spread and the media got involved, more and more enquiries poured into the offices of the Consumers Association of Penang that was organizing the tour. By the end of their stay, the organic farming promotion tour was covered by *The Star*, the *New Strait Times*, *Utusan Konsumer* and a host of Tamil newspapers including *Tamil Nation*, *Malaysia Namban*, *Makkal Osai* and *Kumudam*.

The Indian farmers were surprised to discover that their Malaysian counterparts had completely forgotten how to prepare simple compost and were routinely getting rid of the large quantities of organic waste generated on their farms by disposing them of as unwanted and troublesome garbage. The first step was therefore teaching the assembled farmers how to pro-

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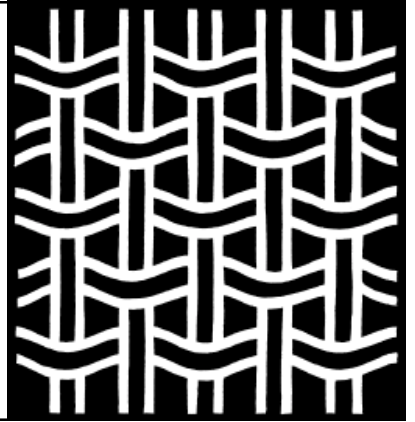
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*Claude Alvares*

# Taleemnet

FREING CHILDREN FROM THE TYRANNY OF SCHOOLS



## To school or not to school

Schools are both a manifestation and a tool of the dominant logic.

One basic ingredient in any logic is the assumptions/premises/ governing values (or whatever word one uses in this regard). A basic value within the dominant logic is the belief in universal thinking, i.e. believing in a single, undifferentiated path for progress. Other values that accompany this value of universalism are control and winning. Measurement becomes a corollary, absolutely necessary for the spread of control and universal thinking. In order for these values to be served best, the mind had to be elevated to a supreme ruler and wisdom had to be imprisoned. This logic along with its values have been a major factor in destroying diversity, distorting pluralism, forcing learning to move along narrow paths, equating understanding to acquiring information and technical skills and knowledge, and pushing wisdom aside.

The logic embedded in universal thinking naturally leads to the belief that one person/people/ nation/ country/ religion/ culture can be absolutely better than another (according to some supposedly universal measure!) and, thus, can impose their ideas and ways on the world at large.

The belief that one's ideas and ways are universal or the best is not new. What is new (and exclusively characteristic of western civilization) is the successful diffusion/ dissemination, through "universal" tools (softly or coercively), certain beliefs and practices as universal. The most effective tool has been education as it has been conceived and practiced at least during the past 300 years through a curriculum taught to all students, and through standards, measures, concepts and meanings that are assumed to be universal. Mathematics and the sciences with their claims to universal truths, and technology with its magical impact on people, have been part of this triumphant march of universal thinking and the belief in a linear path for progress. Ignoring wisdom and pushing it outside people's consciousness seemed necessary for science and tech-



nology to develop at an amazing rate. However, they have been, at the same time, a main cause for the catastrophic situation and trends, which we witness today around us. Life cannot hold together for too long without wisdom.

For me, two basic values we seem to share (not so much explicitly) are harmony and health (of the human body, of communities, and of nature). Pluralism and wisdom are crucial in this quest. That's why I think that trying to prove that schools are good or bad, in some universal sense, is falling into the grip of the dominant logic. My feeling,

Those who like schools and want to go to schools should have the freedom to go to schools. If some have sweet memories of their school days, let them enjoy those memories. I don't think we can tell anyone that they should not send their children to school. But this freedom has to be also enjoyed by those who do not want to go to school, and who want to follow other paths for learning.

in this regard, is, if some are happy with schools, let them have them. The problem is not having schools as much as in not allowing (or legitimizing) other ways of learning to flourish (or even to exist).

Those who like schools and want (or their parents want them) to go to schools should have the freedom and ability to go to schools. If some have sweet memories of their school days, let them enjoy those memories. I don't think we can tell anyone that they should not send their children to school. But this freedom has to be also enjoyed by those who do not want to go to school, and who want to follow other paths for living and learning. This is what I think we should pursue and put a lot of effort towards realizing. It is the diversity of ways of learning that I think we are struggling for; for such ways to gain legitimacy, recognition, resources (including a proportionate part of the budget geared for education); i.e., to provide various forms for children to choose from. My concern concerning schools is with the students (and they form the majority) who leave schools after 12 years (or less), basically as useless people, with hardly any skills other than passing or failing in meaningless tests, and are blamed for it. I think what we are talking about is regaining diversity in learning/ living, pluralism in our attitudes, and wisdom in our approaches.

Of course we have a big challenge in front of us. Schools have been ingrained in our minds and our psyche for so long and so deep that our imaginations can't even think of alternatives. But those of us, who believe that the universal path is disastrous to human beings and to human communities and to nature, have no choice but to go on doing what our inner convictions tell us, regardless of what others think and regardless of the price we may have to pay for swimming against the current (i.e., in believing and living in accordance with a pluralistic and wise attitudes and ways). The mind, the sciences, etc should be looked at as part of the tools we can use, not as masters.

Munir Fasheh

## On guard

by Satinath Sarangi (Sathyu)

Children listen with a lot of attention

Children see with a lot of attention

They have just come into this world

And they have so many questions to ask

Like

Why should guavas be always drawn round in pictures?

Like

Why isn't the death of a goat an accident?

Why are there firings across borders?

Why are there firings?

Why are there borders?

They are ignorant

They do not know that it is more important to brush your teeth in the morning than to give clothes to someone who doesn't have them.

The system is threatened if too many questions are asked.

If the answers are not approved.

So deploy a parent behind every child.

And for further caution,

Open schools.



Interviews with "walk-outs"

## Out of school, at last!

**A middle-class family in India decides to walk out of school and begins living and learning all over again. Their story.**

For years, Janani Narayanan, a school teacher, smarted under the restrictive and deadening environment of her school. Both she and her husband, a retired Navy officer, watched helplessly as the school their two sons attended prevented them from learning anything outside the school syllabus. According to the school teachers, any activity other than text-book mugging was illegitimate and "diversionary".

In 1999, just when their eldest son, Srinivas, was being promoted to the last year of his school, the family finally revolted. Both Srinivas and his younger brother, Shivram, were yanked out of formal school and given their freedom.

Now *that* in India needs a lot of courage. Children in their final year of school drive parents up the wall, upset family routines, get the entire family high-strung and nervous till the results are out. Some who fail or even don't get the marks they want, commit suicide. But here was this family taking their children out of school just as their eldest was going to wrap it all up!

At the time of walking their children out of school, Srinivas was 14 yrs old, in class 9. Shiv was 11. Janani says that a lot of people thought that they had taken a very bold and courageous step, but she never did feel that way at any point of time. When probed a bit more, both parents insisted they had nothing against schooling but did not subscribe to the prevalent education system and its detrimental effects it was having on society. They feel (even three years after they got the children out) that they have made the right decision.

Both parents found that the present schooling system encouraged students to be mindless morons doing everything at the biddings of the higher authorities i.e. (teachers, in this case). They said that the students do not even know nor understand what they were learning. All that schools and teachers are interested in are marks, marks and more marks, and ranks in the Board exams so that they have more and more students. Schools are big money. Teachers do not like students asking questions and tend to ignore them when asked. This reminded Janani of a line from 'The Charge of the Light Brigade' - Ours not to question why, ours but to do and die. The text book is the gospel truth which cannot be questioned. It has to be drilled into the student's head.

When students learn by rote without understanding, where is all this going to lead them to? demanded Commander Narayanan.

The Narayanan household is located in an ordinary middle class neighbourhood in Vasco-da-Gama, one of Goa's five cities. Commander Narayan

took voluntary retirement from the Indian Navy before he decided to settle down with his family in the city. In 1999, he started a fortnightly 'Vasco Watch' (VW) primarily for the residents of Vasco. He was ably assisted in this new profession by Janani.

It was while they were setting up VW, that both parents came to the conclusion that they should take their children out of school. Accordingly, Janani quit her job as a school teacher and decided, apart from helping with VW, to be a full-time teacher of her boys. Along with commander Narayan, she could educate and initiate them into a broad based value system based on their own practical experience and knowledge. They

did not agree with this thrust as they felt they wanted to 'educate our children and give them a sound platform to build their lives on and also to make them understand the dignity of labour. As any other parent, we too wish to give the very best to our children. We feel we are the best persons to teach and guide them.'

Thus they exercised their choice as parents to free their children from the oppressive shackles of present day school routines.

They were rather fortunate that their respective families respected their decision and did not seek to undermine it.

And how did Srinivas and Shiv feel on leaving school? Both of them have a smile and a twinkle in



Srinivas, Ananthanarayan, Janani and Shivram: escape from school

would have, in addition, ample time and opportunity to pursue their specific interests.

Both parents told me of their conviction that 'a teacher is often a role model and a positive influence in the life of a student. Sadly, these features are lacking in most teachers of today. So we decided we could play the role of a teacher instead and have a positive impact on children in their formative and crucial years. Since both of us were now at home, this was possible as well. We felt we knew our children better than any body else, hence our decision.'

Janani added that there was another vital element missing from school curriculum: life skills - a major dimension to being a conscientious citizen and to making a meaningful contribution to the community. By life skills the Narayanans mean - communication, curiosity, openness, developing self confidence, and inherent basic human values.

Commander Narayan and Janani both emphasised the difference between academics and education. Academics was just a curriculum devised to put students through some sort of system to get a job, and all that it stressed on was marks. They

their eyes when asked this question. Without hesitation, Srinivas said: 'We feel free to pursue our hobbies and interests, and this becomes a part of our educational process. Our parents are always there to guide us and discuss our problems.'

Their parents however say: 'We don't push them in any one direction: we encourage them to think for themselves and utilize their time in the manner in which they want to.'

Commander Narayan is of the considered opinion that to learn a vocation one has to undergo apprenticeship for a number of years if one has to get a hands-on feel of the subject. Srinivas wants to be a wild life photographer and is ready to undergo an apprenticeship with a professional in the field. His interests are diverse: he has completed a correspondence course in ornithology through the Rishi Valley Foundation, Chittur, and one on entomology through the Bombay Natural History Society. An amateur electronic buff with special interest in robotics, sailing and trekking, Srinivas has designed a land yacht from cycle parts and old wind surfing material. He trekked through uncharted terrain with eleven colleagues from Valpoi to Gawali in

Karnataka - the source of river Madei - documenting the rich bio-diversity of the region and seeking to create an awareness against the dam project proposed on the river.

At present, Srinivas is appearing for his 12<sup>th</sup> standard examination through the National Institute of Open Schooling. The subjects he has chosen for his board exams include geography, history, english, hindi and economics.

Shiv the younger has been very passionate about origami since the age of five. Origami is an ancient Japanese art of paper folding without cutting and sticking or pasting, surviving from around 1000 AD. (*Ori* - to fold and *kami* - paper = origami).

Despite his young age, Shiv has already held eight exhibitions across the country plus numerous workshops with schools, senior citizens' groups, mentally challenged persons etc. He finds interacting with people from all walks of life very stimulating as there is fruitful exchange of knowledge and skills. Shiv has also created his own designs (around forty) in origami and spends time working and improving upon them.

In February 2003, Shiv was invited by the Goa Science Centre for a two day workshop. The first day's demonstration was on 'Aerodynamics through paper airplanes'. The second day was devoted to explaining mathematics and science through origami.

Srinivas and Shiv are both *shishyas* (pupils) of the great Ghatam music maestro, Shri Vikku Vinayak Ram. Srinivas is learning the *mridangam* and Shiv the *ghatam* and flute from Shri Ramanathan.

The brothers are voracious readers (like their parents). Apart from their study material, they read novels and subscribe to magazines like 'National Geographic' and 'Popular Science', to name just a few. Incidentally, the Narayanans have never kept a television set till date. The parents say they spend quality time as a family instead of watching inane serials.

The boys' daily routine is waking up early in the morning, reading the subjects they have chosen, surfing the Net and pursuing their various hobbies, interacting with parents and playing and socialising with friends. They travel extensively too.

While Srinivas wants to be a wild life photographer, Shiv takes it one day at a time. He will be appearing for his 10<sup>th</sup> standard next year.

When asked if they regret in any manner the decision taken three years ago to walkout from formal day school, they pose a counter question: 'Would we have been able to do all this, if we went to regular school?'

P D Mukherjee



An interesting light is cast on the Indian attitude to education by the fact that in all fourteen languages of India there is no root word corresponding to English "teach." We can learn, we can help others to learn, but we cannot "teach." The use of two distinct words, "teach" and "learn," suggests that these two processes may be thought of as independent of one another. But that is merely the professional vanity of the "teacher," and we shall not understand the nature of education unless we rid ourselves of that vanity.

Our first task is to realize that an "uneducated" human being is nowhere to be found. But today, all too often, an ordinary schoolboy treats a first-class carpenter as if he were an ignorant boor. The carpenter may be a man of maturity and experience, a wise and skilled workman, who is of real service to his community. But simply because he cannot read or write, the "educated" boy treats him as an inferior.

Wherever two people live together in this kind of comradeship, giving and receiving mutual help, there real education is in progress. The place of books is, therefore, secondary. This idea troubles many people, who think that if the place assigned to books is reduced the students will be de-

## Vinoba Bhave: "Only Teaching"

**Bhave was a close disciple of Mahatma Gandhi. He followed Gandhi in challenging conventional ideas about education, learning and schools. Here he talks of those who can "only teach".**

prived of the most valuable tools of knowledge. Books do have a place as tools of knowledge, but it is a very minor place. The major need is for teacher and student to become work-partners, and this can happen only when the distinction between the teacher "teaching" and the student "learning" can be overcome.

In matters of knowledge, no orders can be given. Education does not "discipline" students, it gives them complete freedom. Whether or not society free from governments is ever built in the larger world, such a society must be found in the world of students. If there is one thing of supreme importance for students it is this freedom.

A young man said that he wished to do some good work for society.

"Tell me," I said, "what kind of work do you feel you could do well?"

"Only teaching, I think," replied the young man. "I can't do anything else, I can only teach, but I am interested in it and I feel sure that I shall be able to do it well."

"Yes, yes, I do not doubt that, but what are you going to teach? Spinning? Carding? Weaving? Could you teach any of these?"

"No, I can't teach those."

"Then tailoring, or dyeing, or carpentry?"

"No, I know nothing about them."

"Perhaps you could teach cooking, grinding, and other household skills?"

"No, I have never done any work like that. I can only teach..."

"My dear friend, you answer 'No' to every question, and yet you keep saying you can only teach. What do you mean? Can you teach gardening?"

The would-be teacher said, rather angrily, "Why do you ask all this? I told you at the beginning, I can do nothing else. I can teach literature."

"Good! Good! I am beginning to understand now. You mean you can teach people to write books like Tagore and Shakespeare?"

This made the young man so angry that he began to splutter.

"Take it easy," I laughed. "Can you teach patience?"

That was too much.

"I know what you mean," I said. "You can teach reading, writing, history, and geography. Well, they are not entirely useless, there are times in life when they are needed. But they are not basic to life. Would you be willing to learn weaving?"

"I don't want to learn anything new now. Besides I couldn't learn to weave, I have never before done any kind of hand-work."

"In that case it might, of course, take you longer to learn, but why should you be unable to learn it?"

"I don't think I could ever learn it. But even supposing I could, it would mean a lot of hard work and a great deal of trouble. So please understand that I could not undertake it."

This conversation is quite enough to enable us to understand the psychology and characteristics of far too many of our "teachers." To be "only a teacher" means to be: completely ignorant of any kind of practical skill which might be useful in real life; incapable of learning anything new and indifferent towards any kind of craftsmanship; conceited; and buried in books.

"Only teaching" means being a corpse cut off from life.

## Textbooks as Missiles

The educational system in Israel has also become a form of war

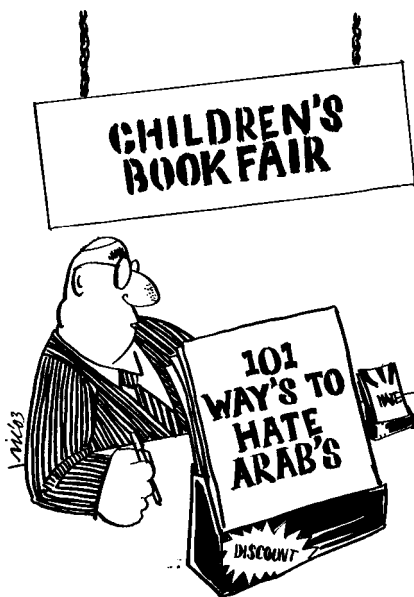
Israeli school textbooks as well as children's story books, according to recent academic studies and surveys, portray Palestinians and Arabs as "murderers", "rioters", "suspicious," and generally backward and unproductive.

Direct delegitimation and negative stereotyping of Palestinians and Arabs are the rule rather than the exception in such educational material.

Professor Daniel Bar-Tal of Tel Aviv University studied 124 elementary, middle- and high school textbooks on grammar and Hebrew literature, history, geography and citizenship. Bar-Tal concluded that Israeli textbooks present the view that Jews are involved in a justified, even humanitarian, war against an Arab enemy that refuses to accept and acknowledge the existence and rights of Jews in Israel.

Israeli writer/researcher Adir Cohen's book *An Ugly Face in the Mirror* is a study of the nature of children's upbringing in Israel, concentrating on how the historical establishment sees and portrays Arab Palestinians as well as how Jewish Israeli children perceive Palestinians.

One section of the book was based on the results of a survey taken of a group of 4<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> grade Jewish students at a



school in Haifa. The pupils were asked five questions about their attitude towards Arabs, how they recognize them and how they relate to them. The results were as shocking as they were disturbing:

Seventy five percent of the children described the "Arab" as a murderer, one who kidnaps children, a criminal and a terrorist. Eighty percent said they saw the Arab as someone dirty with a terrifying face. Ninety percent of the students stated they believe that Palestinians have no rights whatsoever to the land in Israel or Palestine.

Cohen also researched 1,700 Israeli children's books published after 1967. He found that 520 of the books contained humiliating, negative descriptions of Palestinians. He also took pains to break down the descriptions:

Sixty six percent of the 520 books refer to Arabs as violent; 52 percent as evil; 37 percent as liars; 31 percent as greedy; 28 percent as two-faced; 27 percent as traitors, etc.

Cohen points out that the authors of these children's books effectively instill hatred toward Arabs by means of stripping them of their human nature and classifying them in another category.

In a sampling of 86 books, Cohen counted the following descriptions used to dehumanize Arabs: Murderer was used 21 times; snake, six times; dirty, 9 times; vicious animal, 17 times; bloodthirsty, 21 times; warmonger, 17 times; killer, 13 times; believer in myths, 9 times; and a camel's hump, 2 times.

*(Readers will notice that the research reported in the above news item was carried out by Israeli citizens and scholars committed to a Mid-East without violence. There is still hope for our times.)*

## Supporting Multiworld

Good ideas need the support of good money from good people.

Can you help? Here's how.

Unlike other projects which begin with large grants and huge offices, the Multiworld Project on dismantling colonial and corporate-led education has begun small. But even small initiatives require small amounts of resources, support and money.

For those with little or no access to money, we welcome the idea of contributions in the form of voluntary labour. How can you best do this?

Be the eyes and ears of Multiworld in your area. If you are aware of exciting work outside the framework of factory schooling, document it and keep us in touch with it. If you find articles, books, media reports, films, CDs on any multiversity themes, mail these to our office.

You can also support our work by sending us a regular amount, however small, every year, automatically from your bank account and be happy you are helping support one of the most critically important projects launched this century.

Another useful way you can support our work is to buy and gift subscriptions to *Kamiriithu* to people in your working circle and within your community. *(The subscription form is on p.11)*

# Unlearning in Pakistan

Arif Tabassum tells of his wasted schooling days and how he had to unlearn the manufactured facts fed to him for over a decade. Now as a member of the Faculty of the Institute for Development Studies and Practices (IDSP), he and his colleagues spend their time on their own homegrown cultures which they have found are a rich resource for collective learning.

Arif Tabassum's email is ariftabassum@yahoo.com

I belong to a family that was totally dependent on agriculture for all its needs. But I never went near my agriculture farms because I was supposed to be schooled for a 'bright future'. I still remember the days of my life when I was unconsciously forced to spend all my fruitful time in attending classes that were full of facts, of which I never found any relevance to my social surroundings and ground realities.

I was kept engaged in memorizing the lessons taught to me for my learning and reinforcement of those lessons by tutors. Because of these engagements (morning to night) how could I spare time for my agriculture, culture and social interaction that were basic and real sources of learning? I



was unable to find some time even for sports, because I was told that school was my first priority, compulsory and inevitable for my learning.

So I remember the day when I went with all my schoolmates to our farm and we planted the seeds of tomatoes through *ashar*. That was a very rich opportunity of learning 'how to plant tomatoes with a collective effort'. While on the one hand this activity provided us with an opportunity to learn the skill of sowing tomatoes, on the other, it enabled us to learn the 'value of collectivism'. At that time this realization was blurred. After that lesson I was never again to experience such learning activities throughout my formal schooling process.

When I was in tenth class, I got bored with my studies and became active in a progressive political movement. I started reading, writing literature (poetry, fiction, articles). This activism nurtured my capacities of being a conscious citizen and I was introduced to a lot of learning that was live and experiential. I became involved in social activities with some of my colleagues and we

formed an organization for addressing social issues facing our town. Through this process and interaction with communities I felt more confident and realistic than I ever felt, even for a moment, in my formal education process. I continued my formal studies but not with the inten-

Because of these engagements (morning to night) how could I spare time for my agriculture, culture and social interaction that were basic and real sources of learning? I was unable to find some time even for sports, because I was told that school was my first priority, compulsory and inevitable for my learning.

tion of learning, but for a formal degree in order to avoid the social pressure associated with my 'bright future'.

My association with IDSP-Pakistan, first as a learner of a pilot course (1998) and then as a faculty member (1999 till date), shed light on all my foggy thoughts about learning, education, development and progress. Through discussions, dialogues, debates within the IDSP team, interactions with learners and continuous reflections over learning processes and the development paradigm, I came to clearly understand the theoretical logic of this paradigm and the causes of my frustrations and blurred thinking during my formal studies whose roots I had never been able to uncover.

So I started the process of unlearning manufactured facts and irrelevant so-called realities on memorizing which I had spent a good period of my life in school. This unlearning process was strengthened when I involved myself with learners during their participatory action researches in different communities of the country on indigenous cultures, local literature, education, poverty, agriculture and many more.

During these researches I found indigenous cultures a rich resource of learning. An example of my relearning is research on 'indigenous learning systems' in a rural community of Loralai, conventionally termed an 'undeveloped' district of Pakistan that was carried out by a group of learners from our community-based course (2001). I was involved then as research supervisor throughout the course.

During this research I have become aware of the collective learning processes of indigenous

cultures that are now obsolescing due to the overwhelming spread of formal schooling in far-flung communities. I belong to the same race but was never allowed to reflect on my indigenous culture during my formal studies nor was it ever included in our core curriculum. The findings of the said research were an eye opener. A brief account of the findings is given as under:

- The collective work of cultivating and harvesting of crops, construction etc. which was the principal 'indigenous participatory learning approach', was



called *ashar*. This approach, in which the whole communities collectively work for a member's need without any remuneration, was valued strongly.

- Another participatory and collective learning approach, woman-led was termed *krastah*. After a family had extracted the wool from the sheep, all the women of the community were

All these indigenous collective learning opportunities and spaces have been overwhelmed first by the colonial schooling system with its past mission of 'civilizing the sub-humans of the world' and with the present agenda of EFA. They are also crushed by 'development workers' and 'change agents'.

invited to its home where they collectively started the process of making a carpet from the wool. During this process, life, social matters, and the problems and hurdles of routine work were shared by the women. The situation created the learning opportunities from each other's experience and, on other hand, kept the women well informed about social events. Carpet mak-

ing skills were also acquired. The gathering also provided creation/recreation opportunities through folk songs, thus contributing to keep the local folk literature alive.

- Through the practice of *charah*, the whole community is involved in the construction and cleaning of conduits or water canals (*karez*), so that no water is wasted. Every family sends some members to participate in this common action voluntarily. The activity generated feelings of ownership of the work. But it also enabled the interaction between community members to be smooth and frequent and helped the settling down of the water distribution mechanism. Communities acquired important knowledge of water sources, their distribution and proper usage and about knowledge transfers to the next generation.

- Communities get together in social events, events of joy and sorrow. In every marriage the whole community shares their commodities (i.e. pots, beds & tents etc.) and helps to accommodate the guests. Likewise when a death has occurred, the community felt the responsibility to share and provide the breakfasts, lunches and dinners to the affected family. This process is a collective learning activity that led communities towards voluntarism, being accountable to themselves to help others and share their sorrows and joys.

The *bijjar*, *jirga*, *nanawati*, *gudar*, *baitak*, etc. are other similar customs that provide major sources of learning and help keep the people interdependent and in touch with each other.

All these indigenous collective learning opportunities/spaces have been overwhelmed first by the colonial schooling system with its past mission of 'civilizing the sub-humans of the world' and with the present agenda of EFA. They are also crushed by 'development workers' and 'change agents' who are promoting agendas of consumerism in far-flung rural communities from corporations in the shape of the neo-liberal, market economy.

At our institute we are engaged in re-creation and revival of these learning systems through reflective dialogues and interactions with motivated youth and other sections in different communities. Let's hope we succeed.



## Love Letters to *Kamiriithu*

Today your new magazine came in the mail. Very excited to know that your torch is now focussed onto education. Since my husband and I are educational consultants we have a lot of our own 'stories'.

Just yesterday Dinesh was teaching our eight year old daughter. We were looking at the drawing Tara had done of the life cycle of the mustard seed. I had pulled up various stages of mustard growing in the garden. Then Suman (the lady who manages our house) and Tara and myself spent about 15 minutes examining these mustard plants. I then drew up a series of cartoon-like squares and asked Tara to draw the stages.

Later we picked up the drawing to talk about it. Tara told her Papa what was happening in each square. Papa was impressed and wanted to know who taught her. 'Suman' was the very quick reply. 'She knows everything. She manages the kitchen, she manages upstairs [the four roomed guest house], she manages the garden... and you and mummy only know how to read.'

So Tara had 'evaluated' her parents and Suman was happy to know that she is on the top of Tara's list.

Tara is home-schooled. If Dinesh and I were settled in one place she would most probably be going to school. But our job as consultants in 'active-education' requires us to travel, so she goes along with us.

Two hours a day is more than enough for the formal part of learning. The wasted hours in school are quite scandalous. The assembly takes half an hour ... what was said, what was understood, no one knows. The news of the day, the thought of the day, the pledge, the songs - have they made us patriotic? Moral? Thoughtful? During school hours children sit and wait ... for the English teacher to show up ... while their teacher practices a speech with two children ... while their teacher chats in the hall with her neighbour ... while the



vice-principal discusses sports-day ... or annual day ... or the report card ... or the art competition.

And if a teacher does teach it is usually one-way traffic.

Teachers themselves are very much victims of the system. Too many students, too much marking to do makes them weary and dull. The object is not to learn, but to rank and grade kids as if they are labeling spice jars.

There are alternatives for parents. You could send your four and five year old to a small neighbourhood school and leave her there for only 2 or 3 hours. She will have time to socialize, the small student-teacher ratio means she may get more attention, and you could also volunteer for a few hours. You will save a lot of money and you can spend more for a nice library, art supplies, good music and sports equipment. (When you volunteer, you can read stories to the kids, sing songs along with the cassettes, play games that you learned in childhood, and chat with the kids about themselves).

Children need the company of many other children of all ages and stages. Home-schooling has limitations if the child does not get to socialize. In the USA, many parents homeschool because of the violence in schools or for religious reasons. In India, the problem seems to be total irrelevance of the subjects, the dull teaching methods, the humili-

ation and ranking of children. All that destroys the joy of learning.

Maybe parents could consider getting into groups of 10 to 15 families. If they hire tutors for subjects that they do not feel comfortable with, it will still be much cheaper than the costs of going to school. Parents can share teaching, and almost every home has space for 15 to 20 children. It will also force one to be regular and consistent. (That is our biggest problem with Tara.)

Parents will soon notice that many subjects are completely irrelevant. What class 3 child enjoys learning about the food habits or industry in Orissa? And who cares what the highest desert of the world is? First of all there is so much to explore around one's own community.

In fact, schools themselves should know that they can decide on their own course of study - at least up to class 5. No one has told them to teach in a boring manner. They could easily shorten their school hours and encourage parents to provide extra stimulation. After all, the sheer numbers in school mitigate against personal attention and learning ... no matter how good the teacher is.

Hope you find this interesting. Look forward to your next newsletter.

Ruth Rastogi

WE TOTALLY BELIEVE AND AGREE WITH YOUR VIEWS. PLEASE KEEP US ON YOUR MAILING LIST.

SEEMA GUPTA  
MUMBAI 022-2-5565949

My wife Lakshmi and I are going to adopt a baby girl soon. We plan to 'educate' her at home (all the usual reasons).

Any help, guidance will be greatly appreciated.

Thanks,

Jogesh

[jogeshmotwani@hathway.com](mailto:jogeshmotwani@hathway.com)

## Appeal for Stories

If you have come across a family like the Narayans or the Rastogis, please write to us, giving us their address and contact information.

Taleemnet will send a person to do a detailed interview with these families, so that others can learn from their experiences as well. The detailed interviews will also find place on the Taleemnet webpage, enabling these stories to be made available to all learners worldwide.

Alternatively you can conduct the interview yourself and send this along to us for publication and for hosting on the Internet.

Every issue of Taleemnet will carry at least one major story with a family that walked out of school in disgust and has ventured to have its children learn about life on their own.

We especially welcome first person stories, written by either parents or by children out of school. They should never be more than 1200 words long. Pictures are welcome.

If you find an interesting article or booklet on Taleemnet themes, please send it along to us.

There are literally hundreds of stories of parents in Asia, Africa and South America that have taken their children out of school and set them free.

Eventually we hope that all these stories will be assembled in the pages of the *Alternative Education Sourcebook* which we plan to publish towards the end of 2003.

Please send your story to:

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Feira Alta, Mapusa 403 507  
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## WEBSITES

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# Ploughing a lonely furrow

**Rahul Alvares, a college boy from zoology class in India, learns to plough fields in his spare time – and enjoys himself in the bargain.**

When I first saw Guru (my immediate neighbour) ploughing his fields, I thought it to be the most simple thing in the world. All that it appeared necessary to do – as the bulls pulled the plough effortlessly up front – was hold the implement steady by its handle. When Guru reached the end of the field, the bulls would automatically turn around and he would plough in the opposite direction. It seemed like a fairly monotonous job to me. When I took a one year break from school, three years ago, ploughing was one of the skills I learnt during the rains.

As I first held the plough, however, I soon realised that this was going to require some skill. In fact, I eventually took longer to learn ploughing than to drive the family car. I also found the work quite enjoyable. Nothing about it was monotonous.

Since then Guru has called me to help in ploughing his fields for the past three consecutive years. Guru is part of a big joint family of about 25 members but yet he doesn't have a single member in the entire family who will help him in ploughing his fields. Every one wants to get nice 'desk' jobs.

Let me start by telling you how the plough works. A wooden piece about one and a half metres long and 10 cms thick is tied across the necks of the two bulls. Tied perpendicular to this is the plough which is about 3 metres long, with a handle and the sharp curved blade. The bulls move forward as you tap them with a stick. Normally you start ploughing from either the centre or the edge of the field and continue with concentric circles around them. Usually, Guru used to do the first round so that the bulls knew where to turn around and then he would hand me the plough. He would then leave me to plough the rest of the field.

As he left he would call out his famous parting words: 'Rahul, go straight, OK? Don't miss the line.' Then he would return after an hour when the work was almost done and seeing me fully drenched in sweat, he would say, 'Now you can leave this to me.'

Sometimes I would be ploughing in the rain, cold and wet, and Guru would return snug in his raincoat, 'Don't get wet or you'll catch a cold,' he'd say.

A lot of people are under the impression that when you plough you have to push the plough into the ground. Actually you have to guide the plough, a task that is really more difficult than handling the steering wheel of a car. The plough has a curved blade and a pointed end which goes into the soil. This is situated



*Ploughing a field Indian style is not as simple as it looks.*

exactly between the hind legs of the two bulls. The trick is to move parallel to the groove created in the previous round, and at the same time, avoid ploughing the bulls' hooves. If one of the bulls had to get the plough into his leg he would need at least one week's rest for the wound to heal and this would cost the owner severely. This is because bulls have only one use, which is to plough the field for one month of the year. Also, if a bull is injured, it is as bad as having both the bulls injured because a lone bull can't plough the field.

In theory, holding the plough seems to be quite easy but actually each field is different. In some fields, the soil is hard and the plough lifts out of the field on its own and has to be pushed back in. Some fields are full of grass which would get entangled and the plough would start slipping towards the bulls' hooves. At times, the field is so full of water, you can't even see what you are ploughing. At times the bulls would lash out with their tails, throwing mud straight into your eyes.

Another area of difficulty is the turn at the end of the field: the plough has to be gently turned and at the same time you have to concentrate on directing the bulls to turn around too. If you incline the plough too much, it will start skidding: then follows the comical jugglery of the farmer with the plough, trying to push it back in as it dangles dangerously behind the bulls' hooves.

Then you have to remember to lift the plough with one hand over the bund (raised mounds of mud that divide fields) and then push it back in again. The plough wasn't that heavy but when you lifted it about 40-50 times over each bund, you definitely felt its weight.

The heroes of the ploughing exercise are of course the bulls. So let me tell you about Guru's bulls.

Both of them are two different characters altogether. The older one is a 23-year-old and is reddish brown in colour. He has short and thick horns like two oversized bananas sticking out of his head! His back was arched but yet he never appeared tired when compared to his younger partner who is a 16-year-old. The younger bull looks stronger, his back is straight but yet he was the one who tired out more easily. After I finished one round around the field, sweet sixteen would immediately demand a rest. Normally I wouldn't disapprove of this but when I knew I had 20-30 rounds more to go I would get a little impatient.

Then in order to waste more time, the younger bull would throw down the *zu* (wooden piece across his neck). I had to lift it up and place it back again across his neck. This of course put me into a very vulnerable position because I was right between the heads of the two bulls and if any one of them had to lash out, I would be in deep trouble. Fortunately, they were both well behaved and I suffered no injuries.

Though both the bulls were silent and showed no expressions except the usual sad and mournful face, I was quite sure that there was some bull talk going on between them. For example, the older bull was a bully. If the younger bull didn't manage to throw down the *zu* at the end of the round, the older bull would lash out at him. Sometimes, the younger bull would walk slower than the older bull who would naturally get angry and swing his horns towards him, as if to say, 'Do you expect me to do all the work!' Sometimes I felt

sorry for him because he would receive punishment from me and from the older bull as well.

During my ploughing exercises I met a lot of farmers. Most of them seemed surprised that I was in a field ploughing. They all recognised me of course because I am from the same village. But they were always a little surprised to find me out in the field at 6 a.m. hard at work in their fields. I think I was the only ploughman who besides having a college education also sported a pony tail and wore glasses to work. Some of the men folk would compliment me and say I was doing a fine job.

But the women who came to the field thought that there was something wrong with me. They couldn't understand why the son of a so called bhatkar (landlord) was out ploughing a field instead of going to college. In fact, the first thing they would say to me would be to ask, 'Are you going to college or not.'

One rather strict lady even asked me which class I was in and what subjects I had taken just to make sure I wasn't bluffing. When I told her that I was definitely going to college but there was still a week for it to begin, she relaxed a bit.

Another lady whose field I had ploughed met my mother at Sunday mass. She told my mum rather hesitantly, 'Your son did a great job ploughing my field – the furrows were absolutely straight.' Then realising that her compliment perhaps unwittingly implied that I was from the peasant class, she quickly retracted saying, 'Of course, I know he is not meant to be ploughing at all.'

Now as I write this article during a free lecture in college, I think of the great time I had this year ploughing. It was a wonderful feeling being all alone with two bulls under your control, the cool rain beating against your back: you definitely felt tough.

Next year I'm sure to be back in the fields again, with the pungent smell of bulls, muck all over my body, the farmers all asking questions about my college as usual.

Guru, of course, still calls me on Sunday mornings when I don't have college. And I find I can never resist.

*About the author:* Rahul Alvares is an expert snake and reptile handler. His first book *Free from School* (pp.136 Rs.100/US\$5) was published when he was sixteen. His second book, *The Call of the Snake* (pp.150 Rs.110/US\$6), has been recently released. Both titles can be ordered from Other India Bookstore, Mapusa 403 507 Goa, India.