

Multiworld

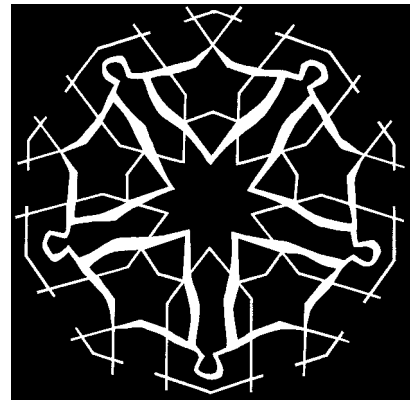
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2004 Vol.I No.3

The Multiworld Network's Newsletter

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The bomb is a product of schooled minds

Let me share some things with you that never came out from schools.

In our communities we have thousands of examples of personalities and as well as of communities which never ever entered in the school, but they know history, geography, literature, astronomy and many other natural and social sciences much better than many schooled and 'educated' people.

Within our communities we still look for underground water with the help of those who can easily find out the exact site by using their local wisdom. Many people can easily tell about the changes in the weather and season by looking at the movement of stars. Many people know much more about agriculture than agricultural graduates.

Great Sufi poets like Rehman Baba, Bhuley Shah, Sachil Sarmast, Shah Latif Bhataee never went to any formal school but any one will find great reflections, beauty of language and eye opening thoughts in their poetry.

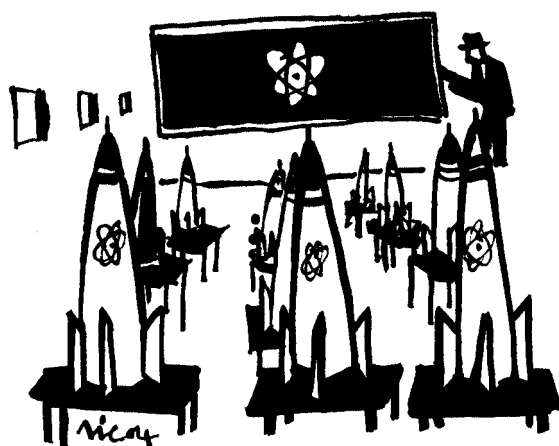
Similarly, Khushal Khan Khattak and many more never went to school but their thoughts are still guidelines for humankind.

On the other hand, we can certainly assert that the nuclear bomb (WMD) is a product of schooled minds.

Corruption, nation states, the arms race etc., are products of schooled minds.

Do you think that the sense of competition, fear of grading, burden of homework, tension of exams, keeping children in fear of punishment and greed of rewards that take place in schools can ever produce great thinkers, practitioners and challenging personalities within our societies?

CLASSY



Can you please imagine for few moments what is happening in the world? Who are involved in social injustices? Who created the World Bank and the IMF to suck the blood of poor throughout the world? Who are behind the huge MNCs and what is their role? Who invented and are still producing nuclear and hydrogen bombs? You know what happened to the common people of Afghanistan and who did it? You don't think behind all these situations are the 'educated' people who have studied in the best schools of the world?

You should go to communities and listen and experience reality with them. Once you consider that their knowledge, experience, and learning are worthwhile, then you would learn their life. In interaction with communities we first must dismantle our mental blocks concerning 'high education' and 'professionalism'. Only then would we be able to learn history, geography, art, travel, science and literature from them with a very different way. Openness and eagerness to learn is the first stage to learn from communities.

I have been schooled for 16-17 years, but when I reflect on the effects of schooling on my life I fail to find any distinction due to schooling except literacy. I was position holder during my school tenure but I never found any relevance of the realities taught to me in school to my social realities.

I am familiar with the history of Columbus (that was distorted history consisting of lies) because of school but I don't know my local history: is this the right thing?

If I know about the sonnets and plays of Shakespeare and cannot understand the treasures of the Great Ghalib, Khushal Khan Khattak and Shah Latif Bhataee, do you think it would be worth for me?

School told me about the role of Vasco da Gama as a traveller, but never told me about the atrocities for which he opened the door. School told me about the adventures of Columbus but never told me about the exploitation, loot, greed for gold, genocide of native Indians and atrocities that were led by Columbus.

Then how can we say that schools are the only and inevitable source of learning and that if we talk about de-schooling it would be great loss? Whose loss? I think it would be the loss of those who are dependent for their survival on schools.

Arif Tabassum

Multiworld Network websites

www.multiworld.org

Multiworld.org is the main Multiworld website.

A related website maintained by Citizen's International can be accessed at the following url:

www.citizensint.org

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 also hosts the Multiversity site, the Taleemnet site, the organic agriculture site (Natural Farming Institute) and the discussion dealing with the teaching and implications of (colonial) international law.

We are also providing linkages to several other sites which are working in similar directions.

We are 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 regularly. 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.

taleem@multiworld.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 network dedicated exclusively to de-schooling or unschooling experiments in Asia, Africa and South America. It is determined to reverse the processes of colonial education which still persist in our countries despite political independence.

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. All the prominent thinkers on education from the Global South are also featured, together with their writings.

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 personality development of children and youth.

organic@multiworld.org

This site deals exclusively with the field of organic agricultural science and the workings of the Natural Farming Institute.

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

In several countries, farmers in fact have completely lost indigenous knowledge of farming and are now finding it difficult to survive with an alien system of growing crops that is not only unprofitable but actually devastates the environment.

The site will report 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 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.

One special focus is the children of organic farmers who once they go to school, find themselves alienated from the land and from agriculture. The Natural Farming Institute is keen on formulating a syllabus for home schooling of children of such farmers, so that they can be well versed with both, the demands of living in the modern world and the knowledge and expertise of their parents relating to agriculture.

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.3 of this issue for more details)

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Yes, count me in on this enterprise. I want to deliver a mortal blow to globalisation's designs on the minds, spirits and lives of children and young people everywhere.

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WEBSITES

<http://www.multiworld.org>
<http://www.multiversitylibrary.com>

Multiversity

Decolonising Language

Ngugi wa Thiong'o writes about how schooling, through the medium of a foreign language, induced the most profound alienation among the children of Africa.

I started writing in Gikuyu language in 1977 after seventeen years of involvement in Afro-European literature, in my case, Afro-English literature. It was then that I collaborated with Ngugi wa Mirii in the drafting of the playscript, *Ngaahika Ndeenda* (the English translation was *I Will Marry When I Want*). I have since published a novel in Gikuyu *Caitani Mutharabaini* (English translation: *Devil on the Cross*) and completed a musical drama, *Maitu Njugira*, (English translation: *Mother Sing for Me*); three books for children, *Njamba Nene na Mbaathi i Mathagu*, *Bathitoora ya Njamba Nene*, *Njamba Nene na Cibu K-zng'ang'i*, as well as another novel manuscript: *Matigari Ma Njiruungi*.

Wherever I have gone, particularly in Europe, I have been confronted with the question: 'Why are you now writing in Gikuyu? Why do you now write in an African language?' In some academic quarters I have been confronted with the rebuke, 'Why have you abandoned us?' It was almost as if, in choosing to write in Gikuyu, I was doing something abnormal. But Gikuyu is my mother tongue!

The very fact that what common sense dictates in the literary practice of other cultures is being questioned in an African writer is a measure of how far imperialism has distorted the view of African realities. It has turned reality upside down: the abnormal is viewed as normal and the normal is viewed as abnormal.

Africa actually enriches Europe: but Africa is made to believe that it needs Europe to rescue it from poverty. Africa's natural and human resources continue to develop Europe and America: but Africa is made to feel grateful for aid from the same quarters that still sit on the back of the continent: Africa even produces intellectuals who now rationalise this upside-down way of looking at Africa.

I believe that my writing in Gikuyu language, a Kenyan language, an African language, is part and parcel of the anti-imperialist struggles of Kenyan and African peoples. In schools and universities our Kenyan languages – that is the languages of the many nationalities which make up Kenya – were associated with negative qualities – of backwardness, underdevelopment, humiliation

and punishment. We who went through that school system were meant to graduate with a hatred of the people and the culture and the values of the language of our daily humiliation and punishment. I do not want to see Kenyan children growing up in that imperialist-imposed tradition of contempt for the tools of communication developed by their communities and their history. I want them to transcend colonial alienation.

So what was the colonialist imposition of a foreign language doing to us children?

The real aim of colonialism was to control the people's wealth: what they produced, how they produced it, and how it was distributed; to control, in other words, the entire realm of the language of real life. Colonialism imposed its control of the social production of wealth through military conquest and subsequent political dictatorship. But its most important area of domination was the mental universe of the colonised, the control, through culture, of how people perceived themselves and their relationship to the world. Economic and political control can never be complete or effective without mental control. To control a people's culture is to control their tools of self-definition in relationship to others.

For colonialism this involved two aspects of the same process: the destruction or the deliberate undervaluing of a people's culture, their art, dances, religions, history, geography, education, orature and literature, and the conscious elevation of the language of the coloniser. The domination of a people's language by the languages of the colonising nations was crucial to the domination of the mental universe of the colonised.

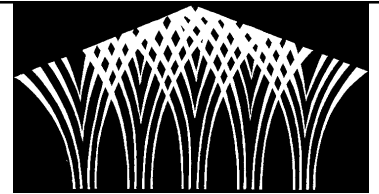
Take language as communication. Imposing a foreign language, and suppressing the native languages as spoken and written, were already breaking the harmony previously existing between the African child and the three aspects of language. Since the new language as a means of communication was a product of and was reflecting the 'real language of life' elsewhere, it could never as spoken or written properly reflect or imitate the real life of that community. This may in part explain why technology always appears to us as slightly external, their product and not ours. The word 'missile' used to hold an alien, far-away sound until I recently learnt its equivalent in Gikuyu, *ngurukuhi*, and it made me apprehend it dif-

ferently. Learning, for a colonial child, became a cerebral activity and not an emotional felt experience.

But since the new, imposed languages could never completely break the native languages as spoken, their most effective area of domination was the third aspect of language as communication, the written. The language of an African child's formal education was foreign. The language of the books he read was foreign. The language of his conceptualisation was foreign. Thought, in him, took the visible form of a foreign language.

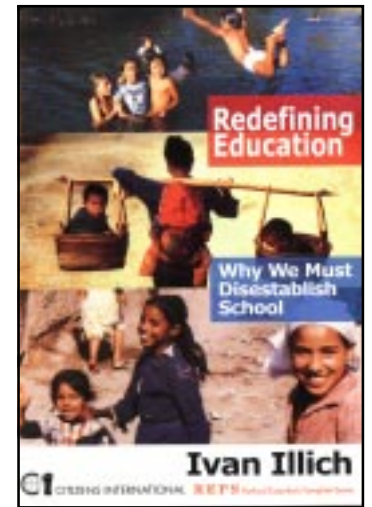
So the written language of a child's upbringing in the school (even his spoken language within the school compound) became divorced from his spoken language at home. There was often not the slightest relationship between the child's written world, which was also the language of his schooling, and the world of his immediate environment in the family and the community. For a colonial child, the harmony existing between the three aspects of language as communication was irrevocably broken. This resulted in the disassociation of the sensibility of that child from his natural and social environment, what we might call colonial alienation. The alienation became reinforced in the teaching of history, geography, music, where bourgeois Europe was always the centre of the universe.

Ngugi wa Thiong'o



Multiversity Tracts

- **Iraq the Torments of Empire**
By Frederic F. Clairmont (Rs. 30, US\$3)



- **Redefining Education**
By Ivan Illich (Rs. 30, US\$3)

Both the above titles are just out. One deals with the US war on Iraq. The second is a brilliant piece on de-schooling by the late Ivan Illich.

Earlier titles:

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

Citizens International, Malaysia, has brought out these eight booklets which look at the world and its major problems through non-Western eyes and brains.

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.

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.

Those who wish to be kept posted of new titles should consult multiworld.org for more details.

In India, the booklets are available from Other India Bookstore, Above Mapusa Clinic, Mapusa 403 507 Goa.

Multiversity Initiates Working Group on Social Science Curricula

One of the main objectives for which Multiversity was set up was to bring together creative intellectual talent from universities within Asia, Africa and South America to work for a common effort to transform the content of social science education in higher educational institutions. It is a well accepted fact that almost all universities within the global south rely upon curricula and even sometimes syllabi that—at some stage or other—have been copied from Western universities ('white studies', if we are to use the phrase coined by Ward Churchill). There are a few details of academic courses or even a few papers that may be different here and there, but by and large the principal body of thought has been imported, like a second hand car, from Western universities.

For example, in the field of sociology, though some concessions may be made to local realities or data, discussion of the principal concepts, thinkers, histories has remained largely within the catchment of the Western intellectual tradition. Thus sociology all over the world is more or less the same in its fundamentals because the experience utilised for the its construction has been narrowly taken from the societies of the West, ignoring most others.

Similar arguments could be made about other disciplines including political science, psychology, anthropology, economics, history, etc.

In psychology, for example, almost all scientific concepts taught in our universities originate from within the Western psychological tradition despite the fact that in

countries like India, Tibet or China, for example, there is a vast corpus of extremely valid and useful psychological information available for study and use. Almost nothing of the latter is to be found in any of the psychology textbooks. There are no details about indigenous psycho-therapies though these are available in plenty, have been validated by experience and still direct the allegiance of millions across the world. In political science, no effort is made to deal with effective indigenous political science doctrines or histories or concepts.

Partly this situation is a result of a continuing colonial mentality which uncritically assumes that since the social sciences were allegedly born in Europe, we have no option but to imbibe the Western sociological tradition when we teach sociology or other social sciences in our universities.

However, this situation is changing and many professors and lecturers are questioning the need to continue to do this and are firmly convinced that it is possible to create social science traditions for teaching at universities which are based on indigenous sciences and which may not even have a reference to the Western sociological tradition (or other Western academic traditions) except perhaps as footnotes.

To further this perception, Multiversity has now set up a Working Group on Social Sciences. The primary focus of this group is to re-define the scope, content and even methodology of social sciences and to sever—wherever possible—inherited vestiges and unnecessary links with the social science tradi-

tions that have emerged within the Western world and Western universities. The group will also consider how to inject indigenous theoretical inputs into the body of our social science teaching.

The group has first decided to carry out a comparative study of curricula of social science teaching and specific syllabi from various universities in India, Malaysia, Africa, the U.S. Coordinating this project at the moment is Vishram Gupte who is in the process of collecting curriculum details, syllabuses etc and analysing them in detail. His insights will then be placed before the Working Group for a discussion.

Thereafter the Working Group is expected to put together a detailed critique of these various curricula and to come up with suggestions for alternative curricula which will reflect indigenous thinking, indigenous thinkers and writers and also assemble the necessary literature for constructing the syllabi that will eventually match the curricula.

The project of the Working Group is expected to take at least one year before it produces extremely concrete and practical results. It is expected that the papers resulting from the discussions will emerge in the form of booklets for widespread distribution and debate.

To locate these discussions within a specific frame of action, Multiversity organised two meetings in India. The first meeting was held in Trichy in October this year with interested persons from the autonomous colleges of Trichy and a few from outside the area as well. Another meeting was held

Working Group on Social Science Curricula

1. Alito Siqueira, Goa University
2. Peter Ronald de Souza, C.S.D.S., Delhi
3. Vishram Gupte, Multiversity, Goa
4. Syed Farid Alatas, Singapore University
5. Claude Alvares, Multiversity, Goa
6. Ashis Nandy, formerly C.S.D.S.
7. Vinay Lal, University of California
8. Vivek Bhandari, New Hampshire College

the same month with interested persons from the University of Kerala. This was done with the support of the Vice Chancellor, Dr. B. Iqbal and his associates.

The Kerala University, in fact, has already sent to Multiversity records of discussions carried out by the Kerala teachers, university lecturers and related groups on the changes required to be made in the curricula of educational institutions.

Individuals who are willing to take up this work may write to Multiversity. They should provide some idea of their area of interest. They may also give us an idea of any concrete manner in which they can contribute to this effort to rid universities of Eurocentric biases.

The intellectual work that we in Asia, Africa and South America have created—or which we still create everyday—has been suppressed or been simply ignored because it does 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 this vast corpus 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 for their purposes of research and teaching.

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:

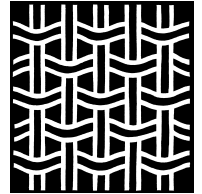
1. Ngugi wa Thiong'o, *Decolonising the Mind*
2. Rana Kabbani, *Devise and Rule: Europe's Myths of Orient*

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 Alborno, *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*.

Some of these books (marked with an asterisk) are in fact already available on a single CD. Those who want copies may email admin@multiworld.org for copies. Those who send in such requests will have to pay for the cost of the CD and for postal charges.

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 are 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.



Drop-outs or Walk-outs?

The official educational system has endless reams of paper printed on 'drop-outs'. Invariably, in their perception, the 'drop-out' is a misfit, an incompetent, an inferior person mentally and otherwise ill-endowed to appreciate the wonders of modern day education and to stick on determinedly to drink at its breast. 'Drop-outs' are considered failures.

Some 'drop-outs' may even internalise such perceptions and accept themselves as deficient in some profound way and retreat from life altogether.

But many 'drop-outs' are in reality 'walk-outs'. They have decided to use their intelligence and their God-given power of dissent to literally walk out of a system that is largely an insult to human creativity, intelligence and real learning. In comparison with the thousands who try gamely to be successes within the modern world's education system by becoming BAs and MAs or Ph.Ds, millions refuse to join

the race to mediocrity and homogeneity with honour. Walking out of school is a political act. These individuals are walking out of an opportunity to join the global economic system as its life-long serfs.

Abhivyakti, a radical media collective based in Nasik, Shikshantar of Udaipur and Multiversity, Goa organized a five-day celebration of 'walk-outs' from September 17 to 21, 2003 at Bhandardara, near Nasik in India.

The venue of the meeting reverberated with the bold testimonies of these 'walk-outs', each one trying to drive home the message that schools, with their oppressive methods, kill rather than nurture young people's aspirations.

None of these walk-outs showed any regret for ditching their schools. These courageous voices are like a guiding light for students who feel browbeaten by the existing schools, their curriculum and teaching methods.

The testimonies are full of vigour, innovativeness, courage and the instinct of survival. Unfortunately, all the walk-outs who spoke in the meeting acquired these qualities outside the four walls of schools!

What began as an exercise in self clarification at Nasik, turned into a profound critique of the existing system of education. It is difficult not to be moved by such outpourings. At the end of day, each of the walk-outs, it appeared, was struggling to remain the master of his or her own destiny because each one had learnt the art of heeding the voice coming from within, rather than just following the system's demands blindly. In the pages that follow, the 'walk-outs' speak for themselves. (Thanks to Norma Alvares and Nyla Coelho for the interviews.)

RANBIR RANA

Bhethjhikli,
Himachal Pradesh,
Age: 25 Years

Ranbir Rana, a spry young youth of 25 years, bright eyed, bursting with energy, ready to take on life at a moment's notice, hails from Bhethjhikli, a remote village in Himachal Pradesh. So comfortable is he in his remote homeland, that he has insisted on bringing opportunity to his doorstep rather than go fortune seeking in Indian cities ending up finally as a face in the crowd. In Ranbir Rana we see a blend of the ethnic and contemporary. A typical example of a confident walkout who has not for a single moment looked back or regretted walking out of college mid-way through his 2nd yr of Bachelor of Arts (BA).

Ranbir hails from a farming and sheep rearing background, typical of Himachal Pradesh on the Indo-Tibetan border. What comes across is his clear focus on wanting to combine his interest in making a career in computers combined with a comfortable life style and wanting to stay attached to his roots. Ranbir did his schooling and college at Vajjanath in 1997 and opted for a Degree in Arts with English, Hindi, Political Science and Economics. Soon he realized the futility of having to go through the drudgery of formal education and its non-utilitarian value in his daily life. Being a boy of the times, he chose to train in computers at a private institution.

Complains Ranbir: "My Computer tutor kept drawing pictures of the computer and its peripherals on the blackboard, pointing to *Del* and *Esc* keys, while I was itching to see these on the key board and see for myself how they operate, rather than learning the theory. Out of



Ranbir Rana realized the futility of having to go through the drudgery of formal education and its non-utilitarian value in his daily life. He took to computers and learnt skills under a friend.

disgust I quit, for computers to me meant learning by doing and not some remote theoretical exercise."

He took this learning process in his own hands and started hounding the nearby Buddhist Monastery that attracted foreign devotees. He was lucky to meet Mr. Gary of England who spends 6 months in a year from October to April at the Monastery. Who with a heart could refuse to teach young Ranbir? Everyday of 6 months Gary became Ranbir's tutor, teaching him the intricacies of computer programming and operation. Armed with self-confidence and his new training,

Ranbir moved to Jammu for a year to work as a data entry operator with CEAT tyres.

His roots however kept beckoning. He got back to his home town, started his own.

It did not stop there. He happened to meet Mr. Milan of Uruguay at the monastery, and learnt about antiques, old books and pharmacy.

The Tibetans in his village are expert incense makers, who make incense sticks for the export market. Ranbir has now helped his friends to learn screen printing so the entire process of making and packaging happens indigenously.

His friends have trained in plumbing, and one owns a shop.

This group of self made youth are very protective of their roots, and environs. There was a proposal to connect his settlement by bus, which Ranbir and his friends thought was unnecessary as the people could easily walk a kilometer to the nearest bus station. Ranbir is a bundle of confidence, fun, responsibility and brotherhood. His surely is set to go great places.

Interviews with “walk-outs”

RAMAWATAR

Village Nalu, District Ajmer,
Rajasthan
Age: 26 years

I have a post graduate degree in Hindi but I consider myself a walkout since mentally I walked out of the educational system at Class VIII. At that time itself I felt that the educational system had nothing to offer and I began to go steadily downhill after that, class by class. I finished my schooling and went on to do my college because of pressure from my family.

My father is a farmer and we have a farm in Mewar. My father believes that for farming and for education you need the same skills i.e an intelligent mind, since both involve complicated tasks. So when I told him I was not interested in education he put me to the test in farming and I could neither match his skill nor his physical fitness. I felt defeated and the family put pressure on me to at least keep up the family honour by continuing with my education where at least I showed I was competent.

During my college years I also took up contract work in the Govt. Public Works Dept. There I learnt that the whole employment system works on the master-servant basis. You may be the supervisor but you have to obey the dictates of your superiors. There is no scope for independence here. I didn't like that too.

Then I came to learn of the existence of the Social Work and Research Centre better known as Barefoot College and I joined the NGO, first as a night school teacher and later as a full time worker where I was put in charge of the night school learning programme. In the Barefoot College firstly those who come to learn, do so at their pace, secondly the skilled people of the village are the resource persons of the project. They wore turbans, they talked in Marwari, some of them signed with thumb impressions. They were not like academicians at all. Yet they discussed education and learning. There were several sections training the learners in varied aspects of day to day living e.g. solar energy, mechanical repairs, handicrafts, recycling, toys and so on but there are no degrees awarded for the skill acquired. This I felt was a good system. I worked there for four and half years.



Ramawatar (left): I have not just walked out of the educational system but from the whole of the modern system as well. We don't need this system. We can very well survive without it.

I left when I found that the group decided to draw up a curriculum and prepare guide books and so on for the teachers. I felt this was not right and we were falling back into the old system. If the teachers have guide books they are bound to forget to ask the students what it is they want to learn.

My priority now is how to become self reliant with my own resources and not on the basis of my educational qualifications. I think to go back to farming. There I can be independent as well as self reliant. I have not just walked out of the educational system but from the whole of the modern system as well. We don't need this system. We can very well survive without it.

Kishen (right): I rediscovered first my many talents—I knew I enjoyed writing. I took part in theatre, street plays and tried painting. I learnt Tai-chi. There are many options before me in which I can satisfy my yearning to lead.

KISHEN PRAJAPAT

Kumhar Vara, Bhuvana, Tehsil
Girwah, Dt. Udaipur
Age: 18 years

I was a very good student. Without studying much I could manage to do quite well in school. I was good in literature. My ambition, however, was to be a soldier. In the TV serial “Fauzi” I was very impressed with Shah Rukh Khan's role of an army commander and I decided that I wanted to be in the military and perform sacrifices for my country. My parents had inculcated in me this concept of seva for the nation. I believed that being a soldier was the best way to serve the people and my country. In school therefore I joined NCC, Scouts etc. But I also wanted to get a good education which for me meant getting at least an M.A. degree.

After I finished my 12th, I enrolled in an Arts college. At that time entirely by chance I came in contact with Ajay Bhat of Shikshantar. I used to write poems which I sent to magazines here and there and they never got published. Ajay told me about Yuva Halchal, a magazine published by SS and I got immediately interested. In the next few days I went to meet him again at SS and was immediately struck

by the possibilities that lay ahead. Ajay talked of youth power—there is fire in youth but it has to find expression—this is how he put it.

But I wasn't sure about what to do about my college education. However during one of the vacation periods I went to SS regularly for 2 months and then decided that this is what I want to do. I decided to give up formal education and I quit the college. I also found that my ambition of becoming a soldier had died as my ideas of what a soldier could do were not correct at all. I had wanted to be a soldier so I could lead the country to victory etc. But in reality I realized that soldiers are followers. They do what they are told to do. There is no heroics in this job. There is no real commanding role. Instead I felt that I could lead people in other ways. And through SS I began to explore these ways.

I rediscovered first my many talents—I knew I enjoyed writing. I took part in theatre, street plays and tried painting. I learnt Tai-chi. There are many options before me in which I can satisfy my yearning to lead.

My parents were absolutely opposed to my quitting college, particularly as I was a good and promising student. They were also afraid that I might get my younger brother to also quit school. But I persuaded them to give me just two years to convince them that what I have done is the right thing. I told them that if at the end of this period they are not convinced I would do what they want. I was so confident they would see I had done the right thing. It is now just one and half years and they are already happy with what I am doing. As for my younger brother I have no wish to convince him or any one else to imitate me. I believe that the choice must be made by each one. However, through my articles in the magazine I am making an effort to communicate my thoughts to other youth like me.

I work regularly at SS but am not a formal employee of the organisation. However I am paid what is necessary to meet my expenses and right now this arrangement is o.k. with me. I am not worried about a job right now. I am confident that when the time comes I will manage to create a job or find something which is suitable for me.



JYOTHI RAI
D2-129 Kakarnagar
New Delhi

Jyothi Rai is a young and pretty girl from Delhi whose life's dream is to be an artist. This 18-year old lives with her parents and three sisters. She has never been very keen on academics, and naturally did not clear Class II in school. What is interesting is that she put her foot down and made a very clear choice to quit further formal education, because her heart and mind was in art and poetry. This gumption comes across very strongly in her conversations.

She now trains at Manzil to be an artist and at the same time takes drawing classes for juniors who come to learn drawing.

Her poetry reveals a fear in the recesses of her subconscious, which once in a while reminds her, that this is not how the majority does things.

Will she conquer her fears and stifle the demon? This is an important question in Jyoti's personal fight.

With Prof. Anil Gupta of IIM, Ahmedabad and Ravi Gulati as her guiding light, this young lady of the light will light up the art world in the years to come.

Runnbhoomi (a poem)

*Jeevan hai ek runnbhoomi
Jise maine hamesha par kiya.
Kabhi is runnbhoomi se mujhe
khushi
hath sami to kabhi nirasha.
Ek azad panchhi hoon mai
Jise har kisi ne kaid karna
chaha. Par kar na saka.
Har kisi ne koshish ki
Mujhe bachane ki is
runnbhoomi se.
Par koi bacha na saka.
Ma-baba ke pyar ne,
Ravi bhayya ke vishvas be,
mujhme navchetna ka nirmaan
kiya.
Abhi bhi lad rahi hoon mai
apni
Ladaii, apne atma-samman ko
Bachane ke liye, kuchh kar
dikhane ke liye.
Par ab na jane kyon aisa laga?
Mujhme aur ladne ka sahas na
raha.*

Composed on 15/9/2003
Bhandardara, Nashik.

ANISH SINGH

K-8, 3rd floor
Sujansingh Park
New Delhi 110 003.
Age: 18 years

Anish Singh, the small made, fair boy with a thin but stocky bone structure, hails from the Gharwal hills of Uttaranchal. His family has been forced into displacement from their home and farmland. The father, a taxi driver in Delhi, took to alcohol due to conditions he had no control over. This speaks volumes for the people of the northern hills of India who have had to leave their home, farmland, way of life, to come and seek employment in the plains and the metropolises of India.

Anish grew up with his mother and 2 brothers—Rohit 14 and Mohit 12 in the hills at his maternal grandparents' home. Sustenance was a problem for the mother who, one fine day, decided she would move her family to Delhi to be with her husband. Back home, Anish used to walk to school 8 kms away from home and got used to missing school because 8 kms was a long walk for a young boy. He would rather sit out to be going to school, midway, decide to play with friends and later return home in the evening in time to show that he had spent the day in school.

His mother's going to Delhi was



Anish has found his life's interest in theatre and music. After doing odd jobs in the morning to earn his keep, he works with a theatre group in the evening.

the turning point in their life. She took up work as a housemaid. The father was driving a taxi, but hardly contributing to the family income, because of his addiction to alcohol. Anish found the move a good change for the first six months. He now thinks the youth in his neighbourhood are directionless.

Anish has found his life's interest in theatre and music. Has passed 12th, is doing a course in travel and tourism, an IGNOU Bachelor of Tourism Studies Certificate. He does a round of paper delivery in

the morning fetching him Rs.500/month, works for Rajiv Gulati for Rs.1500 working on odd jobs, computer related job works of scanning, CD writing, etc. Theatre is his passion when he spends the rest of his day after 2 p.m. training with Walter Peter who runs a theatre group in Delhi.

For an 18-year old, supporting his family, doing distance learning and pursuing his passion of theatre, he is doing great and going places.

GOPAL LAL SHARMA

21, Fatehpur, Udaipur.
Age: 20 years

I presently live in Udaipur and work at Shikshantar but my home is in Kumbalgarh and it is there that my family i.e my parents and family live. I studied in a regular school. I was not very good in studies. I was good in Hindi literature but the other subjects I didn't like very much and was not good in them. When I was in school I always felt that something must be wrong with me and that is why I am not able to be good in school. I never thought that something could be wrong with the schooling system.

Anyhow I managed to go through school. I failed in 10th but passed at the second try and went on to do 11th and then 12th. I persisted with my studies as it seemed the best thing to do and got admission in an Arts college. I took Political Science as I was interested in social issues.

Then I met Manish at Shikshantar. Someone told me about this organisation and that they publish writings in the Mewar language so I went across to meet them. Talking to Manish and the others at SS I came to realize that nothing was wrong with me. There is a fault in the system. The system crushes you. I decided to quit this education system which I did not fit into and which I also realized had nothing real to offer. I looked at the syllabus for Pol. Science and found it could teach me nothing about society.



Nothing was wrong with me. The system crushes you. I decided to quit this education system which I did not fit into and which I also realized had nothing real to offer.

Instead I began a new education at SS of learning things for myself and by myself. I liked writing and began to contribute articles for the local magazine. I found that I had an interest in art and music. I also enjoy theatre, street theatre. I began to do all these things and instead of feeling inadequate as I felt earlier I now feel that there is nothing that I can't do if I decide I want to do it.

I am employed now in SS for the past 2 years. I have no wish for getting a degree in order to get myself a job. I am actually not dependent on society for a job as my family has land and that makes me independent. I would like to go back to my village to do farming.

I have kept in touch with the land, not regular, but I know I like farming. I am concerned that people in the city have no contact with the land. I have been thinking about how to create innovative city kitchen gardens for them. Those who do not have terraces for their houses can hang pots of plants on the nearby trees. These are just ideas of course.

For city based jobs I will have to be dependent on others. But for farming I can be totally independent.

HEMANT KANOJIA

K-10, 3rd Floor, Sujan Singh Park, New Delhi
Age: 19

I was an easy going student, I never paid much attention to studies but I got by from class to class without trouble. Then suddenly in the XI standard I failed the class and I thought how is it possible that even this simple system I couldn't pass? I have to be able to beat the system. So I worked hard at it and will you believe it I stood first in the next try. It confirmed in my mind that you can easily deal with this system if you want to. However I never questioned the system, I just got along with it.

Of course there were subjects that I just didn't like. Maths was one of them. When I was in the 9th I came in touch with Ravi Gulati (of Manzil) and I was shocked to learn from him that my problem with Maths was that I didn't even know the basics. Ravi coached me from scratch and not only did I learn the subject but I started coaching the other younger kids who came for coaching for Maths to Manzil. Today, believe it or not, but I give paid tuitions in Maths. I don't hate the system. I am indifferent to it. It is there—let it be. Since it doesn't interfere with me I don't want to waste my time even criticizing it. As you can see I even use the system to earn money tutor-

ing these rich kids who are weak in Maths.

My aim was to be an Air Force pilot. I decided to go to college for a degree in order to take the Combined Defense Services exam. I couldn't get Physics which I wanted but took chemistry even though I knew I didn't like it even in school. I found people who gave me free tuition in Chemistry—I even traveled all the way to Ghaziabad everyday as my tutor lived there.

But one of my childhood passions was music. I just love music and can play music anywhere. I can play harmonium, dholak, drums. I am basically a percussionist. As a child I would practice rhythm on the sides of the wooden bed, plates, water pots, steel cupboard and produced soft sounds even on polyethylene bags. Give me any surface and I will produce a variety of rhythmic sounds from it. But till recently I never thought I could make music my profession. My family always discouraged me in the sense that, like all elders, they said that music is for pastime only.

Now I want to hopefully do something seriously with music. I don't know exactly how to go about it, but I am willing to give anything a try. I have no formal learning in music; neither do I have the means to afford music lessons. Do you know I have never even owned any musical instrument in all my life? That's why I used to like school because there were



I am still pursuing a college degree but not through regular college anymore. Too much of time gets wasted there. I have changed to correspondence course instead.

many instruments available there and I could play to my heart's content.

One day I thought that even the great musicians must have at some point experimented on their own. So I have started composing ragas depending on my moods and the environment. My friends tell me that they are good. I am also trying to find places in Delhi where I can listen to good music, watch theatre and so on.

I am still pursuing a college degree but not through regular col-

lege anymore. Too much of time gets wasted there. I have changed to correspondence course instead. The only reason I have kept my links with formal education is because of my one time ambition to be a pilot. But even that ambition has died down somewhat. I am only keeping it as a kind of back-up profession in case the music angle still doesn't work out. Right now I am not confident enough to give up that option altogether.

PANKAJ SULODIA

J-1/3, 2nd Floor, SS Park, Near Khan Market, New Delhi
Age: 22 years

I am a recent walk out. Only this year I have decided not to complete my Bachelor in Computer Application where I had reached the 3rd year. My reasons? They are linked with my past. I never liked studies and I was not good at studies. But I was considered to be a good student because in all other respects I was okay. I got along well with others; I was enthusiastic, cooperative and was generally called by the teachers to assist with all school programmes etc. So I guess they passed me from year to year and that's how I finished my XII standard.

Thereafter I decided to go in for computer studies. Actually I didn't know anything about the course but quite accidentally I had developed an interest and skill in computers. This happened when I was at my uncle's place. In his office there were two small computers with a few programmes. I was fascinated with the technology and stealthily crept into the office after all had left and started fiddling around. My uncle saw I was interested and showed me a few things and thereafter I was on my own. I spent up to 12 hours, sometimes even without food, happy on the computers. I called it my first love. I learnt windows, coral draw, photoshop, all by myself. I went



Pankaj: the books we study in school tell us something totally different from the actual reality. There are no trees and yet the books speak of forests. Even our teachers do not know that they are not teaching us the truth.

on internet and discovered web designing. So I thought this is my aptitude and I will take computer studies for higher education.

But I was advised not to go for full time college but to take the correspondence course which, I too thought, was a good thing since otherwise full day gets wasted just hanging around the college. Around this time I met Ravi Gulati of Manzil Learning Centre and became interested in the kind of work he was doing, helping young people to cope with their studies and so on. Through

Ravi bhai I got some computer tuitions which also earned me some money. I did well for myself and through such contacts I found myself one day appearing for an interview for a job. The company was Essel Towers, a newly opened real-estate firm which wanted a hands-on computer man to handle software, hardware etc. I was just a XII standard pass guy. I wondered how they would give me the job. However, the man in charge said "show us what you can do and in 3 days we'll decide if we want you".

I got the job with a starting salary of Rs. 4000. I couldn't believe it. So I worked at Essel in the day and helped at Manzil in the evenings and also managed to finish two years of the degree course. But there just wasn't enough time to do everything. I had to make some choices. And the first thing I chucked out was the degree course. By now I had found the course entirely useless, outdated and backward. Moreover I had absolutely no need for it. My salary had gone up to Rs 8000 by then. So I just decided to discontinue the correspondence course, I was doing. It was the easiest decision to take.

I found, however, that I want to do things for others rather than merely earning a good living for myself. I have been selected for a 6 months World Youth Exchange programme which would take me to UK for 3 months. I have, therefore, left my job. In any case I was looking for an excuse to leave as I was unhappy with this kind of job. In the real estate business

you have to tell a lot of falsehoods in order to keep customer happy and for the business to survive. I have done it but just doesn't feel good about it. In any case my passion for computers is long since over and has been superceded by my wanting to do something for others.

On one of the Manzil programmes I toured with others the Narmada dam area and saw the consequences of displacement on the people living there. I felt that the books we study in school tell us something totally different from the actual reality. There are no trees and yet the books speak of forests. Even our teachers do not know that they are not teaching us the truth. So I want to start a programme called Traveling Learners where people can learn from those who know the truth themselves and not from the intermediaries who are no wiser than the learner. Learning how to do from those who do (farmers, potters, etc.) and learning about a place from those who live there seems to me a better way of getting a real education. That's as far as I have got right now. It's just an idea at present.

MANAV CHANDRESH VYAS

Ahmedabad.

Manav—meaning man—is a person with 19 names, who earned one more at the Walk-outs Celebration in Bhandardara, Nashik.

He mentally walked out of school during his 4th standard at the age of 9, while his teacher was doing a lesson on living and non-living things and was at a loss to give the nine-year old a convincing answer as to why “we” are living.

Chandresh endured this meaningless education that gave him no answers to life's real questions. Hence leaving school and home at the age of 16, he started exploring himself.

Starting out as a coolie at the Railway Station for a wage of two meals with the coolie group on Ahmedabad Station, Manav moved from estate broker to telephone operator, library assistant, marketing of consumer products like books at 10% commission. Manav's marketing expertise and experience found him his niche—people. Door to door salesmanship meant seeing around 200 people every day, every new person meant a new experience.

The sales job taught him to dramatize for sales promotion, at the same time fetching Rs.200-300 / day. According to Manav, Sales jobs come with their own package of conflicts: product promotion involves creating a need that is largely artificial—evasion of truth and telling lies. Through all this drifting, Manav sometime in 1996, met his anchor and strength in Sumitra (Sumi), a senior accountant in a private firm. An M.Com, LLB by education, hailing from



When I think about it I feel that the school system helps those who are good in it and neglects those who are not so good. Those students who had facilities would get greater attention whereas guys like me would get shunted away so we found it even more difficult to cope.

Kerala and settled in Ahmedabad.

With Sumitra by his side, Manav grew from strength to strength and became more confident of himself.

It was by invitation and common consent that Manav and Sumi started living together, challenging the conventional bonds of matrimony. Along the way setting up a new school (Experimental School) for Classes I-IV, putting together a library for children in

a week's time. There is also a platform for students to opt for learning through the National Open School system—“Munch”.

Manav, the man with 20 names, has expertise and skills in as many areas from playing various musical instruments, to writing music, lyrics, apart from also being computer savvy.

With Sumi in his life, there is now Kudrath, a happy 4-year old and a little one on the way. Manav

also calls himself Sumichandresh, a tribute to woman's ability to procreate and give strength. When asked why, he says Indian mythology has Radhakrishna, Laxminarayan, Sitaram and others.

VIKRAM RAJPUT
Flat No.2, Red Cross
Kakarnagar
New Delhi 110 003

Vikram, of the devil-may-care attitude, told me right away that he could spare only 10 minutes from the non-stop fun that he was having at the celebrations. That he later spent an hour and a half talking to me about himself is another story. This youngster's potential comes across immediately. On asking how old he was, “I was born in 1984, so you figure it out yourself!” pat came the reply.

This sprightly 19-year old is well built and hails from Orissa. The family consists of his father who is a taxi driver, mother working for the Red Cross, and a young 9-year old brother Vishal, affectionately called ‘Jill’, whom he loves to challenge in a playful, boxing/wrestling match.

In Vikram one sees a personality that swings from extreme confidence to sheer blind alleys. A born go-getter, Vikram is in the habit of traveling by himself on short trips of 2-3 days since the age of 12.

Ravi Gulati of Manzil, New Delhi, an MBA from IIM, Ahmedabad is a guiding light in the life of Vikram. Vikram has imbibed strong qualities like responsibility, keeping time and commitments.

While in class nine at the age of 14, Vikram once wanted to play basket-ball. An impossible dream for a student of Municipal School living in economically restricted area in Delhi. Vikram however, made up his mind, approached the coach at National Stadium, trained himself night and day and represented the State that year.

Here is an individual who is daring and determined. All that is needed is a little conducive platform. He would like to be trained as a pilot, but worries if it is possible without the formal, conventional educational background. Can India offer a system where this is possible? This is a challenge for all of us to look at.

Will Vikram be able to take off beyond the skies or will it be a life of compromise is something that only time will tell?

PARAG PEDEKAR
Vanarvadi, Dindori, Nasik,
Age:20 Years

I was not so good in studies but I managed to pass each year. Being just average my father asked me after I finished 10th standard whether I wanted to continue studies or start working. My father is a farmer and we own land, a part of which is for grapes and the other part for vegetables. I decided to go for kheti instead of college education. So I am a farmer. My father has left a lot of responsibilities to me and has taken a back seat and I am running the farm. I give some of the jobs on contract, the rest I do myself. Of course my father guides me whenever necessary as I cannot afford to make mistakes.

I have recently registered at the Yashwant Rao Chavan College which offers practical courses on different aspects of farming. Each course requires an year. If you do all three years you can get a B.Sc. degree in Agriculture from the college. The courses are all related to work, the teaching is practical and not mere theoretical knowledge. Right now I am doing one course. I may think of doing the

others later, I don't know. The classes are only on Saturdays and Sundays from 10 am to 4 pm. so you can see that this is meant for working people farmers like me. We ask a lot of questions since we face difficulties on the field and we need assistance. My father knows a lot but technology has advanced and he too feels he is not up to date with the latest knowledge.

I no longer have any connections with the world of school or my school friends. When I think about it I feel that the school system helps those who are good in it and neglects those who are not so good. Those students who had facilities would get greater attention whereas guys like me would get shunted away so we found it even more difficult to cope.

I am very happy to be a farmer. (To a question as to whether he was doing organic farming he replied “No I don't do organic farming. I have no ideas on that as yet. The college also doesn't teach us about it).

SHIJU JOY

15, Geet Govind Society,
Thaltej, Ahmedabad
Age: 25 years

I finally quit school in the 12th standard but I think, I was not fit for school right from the start. I failed in most subjects and would get just a pass in English. I didn't like school and attended it because I was forced to. The main thing is that I never felt wanted in school. In school the teachers ask you questions and if you can't answer them, as they expect you to, you receive humiliating punishments like 'stand on the bench', 'kneel down', 'go out of the class' and so on, which have no relation to making you learn anything. Worse still, you are insulted – you are called worthless, 'bekar'. I must also admit that I easily fell into bad company and was more out of the school, bunking classes.

I am surprised how I got through class by class. Mostly it was because I pleaded to be promoted, promising the principal that I would try to improve next year, a promise I knew I would never keep. In this manner finally I reached 8th standard at which point, when I failed once again, the principal said he didn't want me in the school anymore and as incentive for me to leave the school, agreed to promote me to the next class if I would just get lost. So I got admission elsewhere where the same story repeated itself for the next two years.

I was however fond of sports and was also good at football, basketball etc. In the school I was made an offer to train for



The main thing is that I never felt wanted in school. In school the teachers ask you questions and if you can't answer them, as they expect you to, you receive humiliating punishments like 'stand on the bench', 'kneel down', 'go out of the class' and so on, which have no relation to making you learn anything. Worse still, you are insulted – you are called worthless, 'bekar'.

the Junior Under 15 in football and the whole of my 9th standard I worked mostly at football. Maybe because of the sports somehow I cleared 9th and then I had to answer board exams where I knew nothing. However, my parents put pressure on me to do at least 10th standard so I had to appear. The paper in English subject I answered by copying. For the Hindi paper I knew really nothing so I just copied the whole question paper 4 or 5 times as neatly as I could. I was certain I would fail the exams but was shocked to find I had passed in all subjects! In Hindi I had scored some 45 marks or so. I wondered what is the fate of sincere students who study. If someone like me who had not studied anything could also pass then what is the

meaning of this education? Now, I should have given up studies but I was told that if I clear the 12th standard then I can get admission into college for free on 'sports quota'. Also I could later get a bank job if I have a graduate degree again on 'sports quota'. I knew, I didn't have to study for the exams since all along I had got by somehow or the other without studying. Anyway, in the 11th standard I got a slip disc problem and that was the end of my sports career. I also fell into rather bad company and became part of some local gangs who would beat up and threaten people for money or on contract. Money was thus easy to get in this business. But one day I saw my cousin severely beaten and it struck me rather hard, as I realized that the people

I helped to beat up also had families who cared for them. So I decided to quit but quitting wasn't as easy as gangs don't let go of you. So I became withdrawn and stayed at home. I was only afraid of being recognized by the gang which would force me back into what I had escaped from. Although in one sense I did nothing at home for nearly three years, I also started learning music. I learnt to play guitar, drums from friends or from tapes and passed my time that way. I wouldn't go to work at all. Then through some friends I came to know Chandresh and a friend suggested that I go and help as a volunteer at a summer camp they were conducting. They were looking for a person to help with the kids. I liked the idea and gave it a try. I found it amazing how the kids were enjoying at this camp and I began to discover my own talents in painting and papier-mâché and so on. Soon I was also teaching the kids. I felt energized again and then decided to start some job. My father gave me some money and I have started to run a canteen in the office compound of Food Corporation of India. It is not a great job but its okay. My cousin has a Masters in computer Application and he is still looking for a suitable job. I don't think education would have given me anything better. But what I would like to do is to go into farming. Organic farming. 2 bighas of land is enough. I am saving for it. In my own land I will be carefree. I think that farming will give me the peace which has eluded me all these years.

RAVI MAHOR

L/399, JJ Colony, Wazirpur
Delhi
Age: 31 years

I failed in the 9th standard thrice and I thought this is enough, so I quit school. I had to do something to earn some money so I took Rs. 1000 from my father and started a small stall on a charpoy selling sweets, biscuits etc. It ran quite well. Then I took a loan of Rs.10,000 from my father and opened a small general store selling all kinds of groceries. I took goods on credit from the bigger shops nearby and paid them back from the sales. The business ran quite well but keeping track of those who owed me money and reclaiming cash from friends who used friendship to make purchases proved quite difficult. So after some time I closed this business down.

Wandering around one day, I saw some group performing a street play on HIV / AIDS. They had quite a crowd collected around them. I thought this I can do too so I wrote a play, got some neighborhood kids to act and we performed a street play. A professor happened to see it, he told me it was good and suggested that if I did this on regular basis I

could get Rs. 500 per show from those NGOs who are concerned with this programme of HIV awareness. I was game for it.

Then someone suggested I go to an NGO looking for trainees in reproductive health issues. I told them I had just passed 9th standard only. They asked me to fill a form which was a tick mark affair and which I did right. I was hired at a salary of Rs.1850 per month. It worked for sometime but then I got tired of the job.

I saw someone do a puppet show and decided to try my hand at puppetry where I was also successful. Similarly with papier-mâché items and so on. In this way I worked off and on with many NGOs. I told each of them truthfully that I have not passed 9th standard but it didn't matter to any of them. They found me suitable and gave me a job. After several years I got a job with Katha with a starting salary Rs. 5000 and within 3 years it went to Rs. 10,000.

Eventually I began to think, why not start my own NGO and be a Director instead of an employee. I already knew the basics for forming an NGO and it was not difficult. To prepare the Memorandum of Association I looked at MOAs of many different NGOs, copied out and modified objectives here and there, then got together some people to join me. Some of



As you can see, even a 9th standard fail can become the Director of an NGO, which is a very respectable job in our society.

them are professors and other well established people. They have sympathy for me and want to do something. In any case, they don't have anything to lose.

My NGO is called NECTAR. I am the Education Director and I am in charge of the programmes. We have 3 programmes all in Delhi. One, a non formal / self education programme for slum kids, two, an HIV/AIDS counseling programme for truck drivers. For this programme I get a grant from the

Delhi State Aids Control Society and three, a self employment cum rehabilitation programme for criminals who have returned to ordinary life.

I am very happy doing what I do, I may want to do something else in the future but as you can see, even a 9th standard fail can become the Director of an NGO, which is a very respectable job in our society.

SHIVRAM NARAYANAN

Vasco da Gama, Goa

Age: 15 years

I have studied in school till 7th standard. My father was in the navy and I joined school in Mumbai then continued in Chennai, later went to school in Goa where my family settled down when my father quit the navy job. I was an average student, didn't like school very much, and didn't hate it either. I left formal schooling because of my love for Origami. I began doing origami at the age of around 5 or so. My parents bought a book on origami and I took an interest. My mother realized I had an aptitude and encouraged me. Soon it became more than a hobby and I was devouring books on how to do origami as fast as my parents could get them. I don't know how to explain my fascination with origami but I just enjoy making these objects from paper. We were in Madras at the time and my parents had contacts here and there and soon I was doing demos at schools and holding small exhibitions also at institutes. Origami became more important for me than school and I happily worked hard at it, enjoying myself all the time. When I joined school in Goa the management wanted me to take my studies more seriously. I was to have an origami exhibition and the

school wouldn't give me leave for it. I had just won the National Child Award from the Human Resources Development. Ministry for the year 2000 and was eager to do the exhibition. So the school opposition was a disappointment. So my parents discussed it at home with me and my brother also present and they put the choice before me: if you want to go to school okay if you want to quit school that's also okay. I thought fine, I'll quit and left just like that. My brother who was in the 9th class also quit the school. So first I devoted myself to origami whole time then I also began to study music. I learnt the flute. I went to Chennai and took lessons in Ghatam, (an earthen pot on which rhythm is produced) came back and practiced my lessons. To one of the music concerts we went to, I was advised to learn melody instruments also. I had learnt piano when I was young and learnt harmonium subsequently. But the best I have enjoyed is origami. The Origami Association of USA holds an annual competition where candidates from all over the world send in their compositions. I have won it four times continuously. I was also nominated for the Origami Teacher Award. About school studies, I haven't done any of them since I left the school. But I read a lot, whatever I want. I intend taking the Open School exam next year in September. I have applied for



Shiv quit school at 14 because the teacher thought origami was a waste of time. Shiv is now one of the country's best origamists. What's more, he has time for music as well.

the exam and I will start preparing for it. I am confident I will clear it. I am not aiming at anything high at all. The good thing about Open School is that it offers you a wide variety of subjects which is easy to study. You don't have to take the hard ones they force you to do in schools. I have taken English, social studies, Indian culture, Word processing, Home Science. All these don't require tuitions or cramming. Even the SSC is not really required.

The Madras University offers anyone who is 18 years old, a chance to get a Bachelor's degree in the subject he wants as long as he can clear the exam. No other prerequisite. You just have to be 18 to apply for the degree course by correspondence. I want to study Indian music more thoroughly, I want to learn veena and guitar too. I may decide to get a Bachelor of Music degree someday.

ROHIT SOOD

Kalimpong, Darjeeling

Age: 24 years

I have not had much of family life or parental guidance due to certain personal circumstances and most of my childhood was spent in a missionary boarding school in Kalimpong. It was a very strict school but that could not stop boys from being boys. Harmless pranks and ordinary mischief like sneaking out to eat in order to escape the confines of the boarding were greatly frowned upon by those in charge. The strict discipline of the school structure is what remains uppermost in my mind as regards my school years.

I was an average student, not very bright, I should say but I got by. I loved the outdoors, hiking, swimming, trekking but these never formed part of the school exam system. I loved to read, play music (guitar), and especially hear tales of far distant lands. I think my answers to the exam questions must have reflected some of these longings because I recall that very often the teachers used to say we don't understand what you have written and what sense there is in it. But they never made any effort to understand what was going on in my mind. They didn't fail me either because that would perhaps cast a responsibility on them. Instead, they just gave me average pass marks, which was neither here nor there.



Rohit Sood (sun-glasses) and Shiv on a boat during the walkouts conference. 'We don't need structures. We don't need more doctors and engineers. We need to allow the child's imagination a space to expand, to create, to be more compassionate and thus make for a caring society.'

I finished school and enrolled for an Arts degree because I didn't know what else to do. I was emotionally disturbed at that time as a teenage relationship had gone wrong. I was lonely and had nowhere to take my troubles to. I went to Delhi on a month's vacation and in order to escape returning to a place where I had emotional conflicts, I made a decision not to return to Darjeeling and dropped out of college.

In Delhi, I got a job in a freight-forwarding company through a family connection. It was just a job which paid me reasonably well. I did it for an year and a

half and quit when a lady in Aurobindo Ashram suggested that I join Mirambika's Research Centre for Integral Education and Human Values. This is a training programme where the trainee learns and teaches, interacting with young students of the Mirambika school.

I feel my education began here. For three years I explored my wants and needs and the things I desired to learn about. I enjoyed singing, acting, even went to science labs to do experiments that I never liked in school. Mirambika has guides and facilitators who assist you in finding the knowl-

edge that you are seeking. The choice of subject is yours alone. I remembered how, when I was in school, I was never good at the Nepalese language but then suddenly, in class 8 or 9, I felt a desire to know about Nepalese literature and its thinkers and how suddenly I found it within me, the desire to study the language and master it so well that my teachers too were shocked. At that time, of course, I didn't think much of it but Mirambika showed me that learning really happens when you want to learn. Freedom is the key to the learning process. We don't need structures. We don't need more doctors and engineers. We need to allow the child's imagination a space to expand, to create, to be more compassionate and thus make for a caring society.

Eventually I joined a team selected to start a school in Ranthambore, the Fateh Public School, whose uniqueness was its syllabus which was based on the environment. Studies started from the environment around. In Ranthambore it was the "Save the tiger" campaign. I held charge as headmaster for sometime. Unfortunately public pressure demanded that the school become more conformist in its approach and that being something alien to the principles for which the school was set up, the school had to be closed. I am presently exploring options.

Competing with ourselves

Radhika Aradye writes of some dream teachers she was fortunate to have in her school. Our wish in 2004 is that all children can have some similar dreams.

My school in Japan was a British School called St. Michael's International School. It was in Kobe. When I went to Japan I had passed Standard III from St. Anthony's High School in New Delhi, so I was admitted to Standard IV and was in that school for three years.

This year I finished my schooling and now I am in a college! When I look back at the eight different schools I attended, I realize that St. Michael's has made me what I am today. My teachers there taught me to enjoy studies, to do original thinking, to love myself and to love the world.

In Standard IV my teacher was Mr. Shand. He taught us everything except music, physical training, Japanese and a subject called 'reading skills'. There was no fixed curriculum or textbooks, which had to be covered. At least Mr. Shand seemed to have all the freedom to decide how best he would develop his students to pull them up to the level of mental growth expected of a particular age group.

In history we chose topics of our interest from the ones Mr. Shand gave. Mr. Shand told us to collect all the information on the topics of our choice by referring to the books in the library, which were selected after consultation with the librarian. We worked either individually or in twos. Geography was taught partly in the same way, and partly in outdoor lessons when he took us out for walks in the mountain and showed us how rivers and lakes were formed, how plantation was done to stop the erosion of soil and so on. In the same way, from the top of the mountain he explained to us why population is dense on the plains, and why industries grow around the port. We had no tests, no homework exercises, no examinations, and yet we thought we had learnt geography very well.

For English we not only read books recommended by the teacher but also the books we thought we should enjoy. In the class we wrote our own stories and poems. The teacher would sometimes give us a topic, sometimes he gave us a line or sometimes he showed us a picture on which to write the story. Mathematics constituted of sets of cards of different levels. We were required to work through them at our own speed and capacity. So at any given time in a class, there would be students doing Math of the level of a class below or two classes above.

Science consisted of studying slides ranging from cells to the moon. Everything we were taught was supported by practical examples. For example, in Standard V we were to study parts of the human body. We were given two plastic models – actually we were given parts – one male and one female. We had to identify each part, paint it and fit it in its place to construct the model. In science too, the emphasis was on understanding and not on reproducing. We did not have to write answers to questions. While studying blood cells, we were asked to prick our own fingers and make slides, which we observed. And all this we did in standard IV!

Music lessons were great fun! Our teachers taught us all kinds of songs and moreover taught us how to play them on a re-

order. We would also play musical Bingo where prizes would be rubbers and chocolates, the aim would be to teach us various kinds of musical instruments and musical notes. We had lessons in folk dancing, which we thoroughly enjoyed. But what we enjoyed most was the play-acting. Our teachers told us to select a story, write a short play on it, form groups, distribute the roles and enact it. Everyday our first period was used this way and we all thought it was the best possible start for the day at school.



In one term Mr. Shand hit upon a novel idea! He announced in the class that we were going to make a film during the term and the film included all our studies! So he suggested a few themes for the story. We selected 'The Time Machine'. We invented a suitable story making the time machine run into the remote past and also the remote future. We wrote the dialogues. We made costumes. We made the time machine. Mr. Shand taught us about the make-belief world of films and so we decorated our time machines with all sorts of things like springs, wheels, tapes and what not! We had outdoor shooting in a forest and we wore strange costumes as barbarians! It took us two and a half months to complete the film and we thought we had learnt a lot during those days, much more than what we would have learnt from textbooks. In Christmas parents were invited to see this 'great' film made by Standard IV pupils and the parents were so proud of their little ones who had turned into stars!

We had library period once a week. It was not just for returning and borrowing books, but we were also shown how the library works – how books are registered, how they are arranged on shelves and so on. Two students were actually made to sit next to the librarian and they stamped the books given out and put back the books returned.

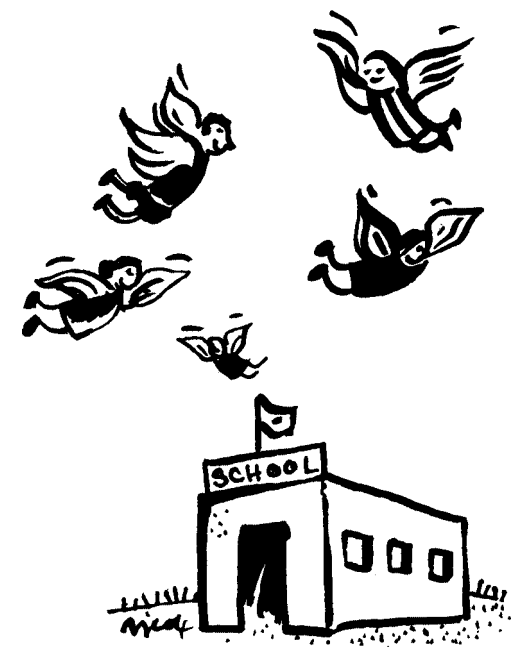
Once Mr. Shand asked us in the class what we wanted to do in life and I was the only one who said, 'I want to be a writer.' Mr. Shand liked that idea. He said, 'Why not start from today? Write a storybook for our K.G. classes. Draw some pictures. Make it a neat manuscript. And then I will ask the K.G. teacher to read it out to the students. We will go and see how they like it!' I was so thrilled! I remember at least five of my books were read this way, and the little children told me, 'Radhika! It's a beautiful story. I liked it!' But Mr. Shand did not stop there. He said to me, 'Radhika, when you will become a great writer, you will need to know typing. I am arranging typing

lessons for you everyday in the recess. Let's go to the office and fix it.' So for two years I learnt typing from the age of nine!

Mr. Jackson, who was my teacher in Standard V, has etched a permanent corner in my heart for himself. He was 40 years old and a confirmed bachelor. He hated competition and wanted each child to think highly of itself. In Standard V there was a girl who was still doing Standard IV Math, but when we did our respective sums correctly we all got 'excellent' in our notebooks.

Once he said to my mother, 'If at all you must compete, you must compete with your own self. Try to improve yourself day after day. That is the message of Hinduism, isn't it? In every life your soul becomes purer till it attains freedom. What a wonderful idea!'

I don't remember the exact wording of the motto of St. Michael's but its meaning was, 'A child should never feel that it is treated unfairly' and every teacher strove to line up to it. We were free to argue with our teachers. They always wanted to understand why we were doing a particular thing. Not one teacher was authoritative, nothing was forced on us.



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