War on Iraq: The End of Education?

In the intervening period between the publication of the first and second issues of Kamirithu, 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 “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 justly open 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 undermined children, 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 find their way to 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 these manifestations reflect the main human pathologies associated with all else associated with this terrible human disease. We associate war, just or unjust. These ideals failed in the United States where even school children take up guns and spray their teachers 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 generation that the destruction of his parents and colleagues with lead in senseless bouts of violence 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).

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 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 in the other direction in the coming future.”

The publication of Kamirithu 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 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 Alvarez
Multiverse Network Websites

**multiverse.org**
Multiverse.org is the main Multiverse website. We are encouraging educational activists in every country within the South to set up their own Multiverse chapter and site, operated by their own core group of people. Some of these will be in their own national, regional or local languages, and others will be in the main Multiverse page.

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

Multiverse.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 multiverse sites on related subjects, including those dealing with schooling (taleemnet) and organic agriculture (indiaorganic). Taleemnet and organic agriculture are also providing links to several other sites which are working in similar directions.

We are also envisioning separate Multiverse sites on specific issues like WTO, debt, international law, etc. Any person volunteering to set up and run such sites 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 Multiverse page, please inform us.

The multiverse.org site is being updated every week commencing June, 2003. We welcome comments and contributions to the multiverse 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 “formal 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.

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 carbon 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 agricultural science-based on use of poisonous 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 links 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, home-made inputs, etc.

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

The first major activity of Vazvihy 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 site 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 demarcation, 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 also be available.

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

Hilferto, 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 yield influence in the knowledge system being disseminated - is notorious for its lack of openness expressed by intellectuals from the South. So one of the Multiversities first tasks has been the publishing of books by intellectuals from the South, 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 access to 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, Destine and Rule Europes Myths of Orient
3. Edward Said, Orientalism
4. J.P.S Loberi, Science and Culture
7. Ivan Illich, Deschooling Society
8. Ivan Illich, Tools for Conviviality
9. Ivan Illich, Energy and Equity
10. Sunil Sahasrabuddhi, Gandhi’s Challenge to Modern Science
11. Masanobu Kikuno, The One Straw Revolution
12. Ashis Nandy, The Intimate Enemy
13. Claude Alvares, Decolonising History
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 Dominions
19. Walter Rodney, How Europe Underdeveloped Africa
20. Mohammed Kattami, Islam, Liberty and Modernity
22. Dharampal, Collected Writings (5 vols)
27. I ust World Trust, Dominance of the West Versus the Rest
28. I ust World Trust, Human Wrongs: Reflections on Western Global Dominance and Its Impact on Human Rights
29. Orlando Fals Borda, Knowledge and Peoples Power
30. Chinnia Advilings Things Fall Apart
31. Orlando Alibn, Sociology and the Third World Perspective
32. Renato Enzo, 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, Inhuman Rights
37. Ziauddin Sardar, How we know: lm and the revival of knowledge

Eventually, the entire 500 titles will be written on 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 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 multiversal.org to circulate the best of what is happening in 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 ideas current in the 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 dimensions of the Hindu spirit, and the alleged dichotomy between Oriental and Occidental philosophies.

Sarkar was very explicit about his case for a new ideology that would function to demolish the idols of Orientalism as they are found in sociology. In an essay entitled “Sociology and the Orient” he argued that the social science disciplines had been invented by the West, to which the postulate of the Orient and 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 dimensions of the Hindu spirit, and the alleged dichotomy between Oriental and Occidental philosophies.

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 discourse 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 societies and journals, conferences and other academic forums) with the participants being established scholars who have attempted to deal with the issue of teaching sociological theory by way of a more universalist approach to the study of sociological theory. This includes raising the question of whether sociological theorising has been done within 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, Og Sori (1866-1922), who called for the emergence of an independent East Asian sociology based on 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.

Because of the relative autonomy that university professors have, 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 of the 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. 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 and its history, 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 the Muslim world, 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, political and rational sciences that developed among the Arabs and Persians, the contact with the Greek heritage, and the impact that Islam had on medi- eval Western thought 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 Islamic movements in Europe and the Islamic response to it. This section also provides an overview of the political and social sciences and setting the stage for discussions on a number of contemporary 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) inter-civilizational encounters; b) Multicultural origins and diversity and c) The variety of points of view. (Full text of this paper at multiworld.org)
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 they have no teachers or curricula and don’t provide a diploma. They loved the idea that they would be in full control of their learning. They would learn from the people they met around what we read. 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. What they 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 diplomas, they get those skills by producing and denied to them by the educational system. Instead of enduring 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 their request, a reading circle full of strange sentences. At their request, a reading circle starts, where several ‘students’ study together the Agrarian Law.

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.

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 community both the kind of knowledge or skills not available in them and the kind of learning that is relevant 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.), for example, they are granted a conventional 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 Unitiera.

Why Unitiera?

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Entitled thinkers and the revolutionary society
By Ali Shariati (Rs. 30, US$3)
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. Jhohn Mohawk is a native Ameri- can 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 elo- quent writer who forecasts the end of Western liberalism and its manifestation as an empire. The War on Iraq is a revealing exposure of Israel direction of the criminal US led war on Iraq.

Digital Diploma Mills
By David Noble (Rs. 30, US$3)
White Studies
By Ward Churchill (Rs. 30, US$3)

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 communi- ties. Every month we have one or two day workshops, in groups of 3 to 6, in the communities. We share with all the participants some texts, audioscasses and video-cassette, for them to share the experience in their communi- ties. For a few months we will share reflections on our cul- tures 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 accom- pany them in the implementa- tion of their initiatives. Those who wish may continue their learning process in the univer- sity. In this adventure we are us- ing the analogy of a tree. In recent years, indigenous peoples have been repeating an old say- ing: “They wrenched off our fruits... They ripped off our branches... They burned our trunk... But they could not kill our roots.” The foliage repre- sents the visible aspect of a cul- ture, 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 Basic Call to Consciousness
By John Mohawk (Rs. 30, US$3)

An Apology
Despite the best of our ef- forts, 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 shoestring basis, with com- pletely inadequate staff. We have therefore taken a unilateral decision that sub- scriptions sent for the news- letter 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.
Multivitry 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 targeted 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 toxic pesticides that affect not only the health of those farmers that use them, but also all the people that eat the food crops bought by innocent people in the open market. They also irrevocably damaged important parts 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 originated in India, where it has taken root in various parts of the world, including Malaysia, where it has been growing for the past two decades. The Three World Network, through the assistance of the Third World Network, has taught the art of making Panchagavya: cow: milk, curd, ghee, dung and urine. Panchagavya enables farmers using synthetic chemicals to make the switch to non-chemical based agriculture within the space of a year.

The five elements required for Panchagavya are: earthworms, honey-bees, earthworms and herbal pesticides. Nammalwar, the Indian teacher who taught the Malaysians the art of natural farming, also taught the Malaysians how to make Panchagavya.

Accordingly, three key organic farmers associated with Vazhviyal Multiversity were first selected to visit Malaysia and train the Malaysian counterparts. The three farmers included G Nammalwar, one of the principal leaders of the organic farming movement in Tamilnadu. (Nammalwar is a farmer trained agricultural scientist who today disavows what 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 their medicinal properties. He even picked 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 Venkat Ramu, 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: Cameron 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 Cameron Highlands with more than 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 Straits Times, Utusan Konsmer and a host of Tamil newspapers including Tamil Na- tion, Malaysia Namban, Makkal Osai and Kumudam.

The Indian farmers were surprised to discover that their Malaysian counterparts had completely forgotten how to prepare compost and were reluctantly getting rid of the large quantities of organic waste generated on their farms by dispersing them as unwanted and troublesome garbage. The first step was therefore teaching the assembled farmers how to produce costly chemical fertilizers.

Another major component of the teaching was vermicomposting: the use of select species of earthworms for preparing compost from agricultural wastes.

Earthworm farming is a major industry in India with several entrepreneurs setting up huge sheds for raising these useful creatures. The earthworms are raised for sale and also for producing A grade compost which farmers use in place of synthetic chemicals.

Malaysian farmers had several misconceptions – mostly hostile – about earthworms. Some believed that earthworms, if not eliminated, would destroy vegetables by boring holes through such produce. It took some time for the Indian farmers to dispel these prejudices and to convince them that earthworms were useful and very effective tool for sustainable agriculture.

From day one, the Tamilians also taught the Malaysians how to manufacture their own, environmentally benign, herbal pesticides. Nammalwar and his team were able to identify several plants they found growing in the Malaysian countryside – and which are normally treated as “weeds” – that could be used for purposes of controlling pests. The farmers were taught how to mash these leaves, then boil them and finally use the concoctions in the form of effective sprays to control pests.

The Indian farmers also visited homes and taught the Malaysians how to composting agricultural wastes.
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 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 used, not as masters.

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 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 humankind 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 (Satihy)

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 each 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.

When students learn by rote and die. The textbook is the intellectual 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 about the biddings of the higher authorities (i.e., teachers, in their school). They thought that the students do not even know nor understand why 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-making businesses asking questions and tend to ignore them when asked. This resulted in a blow to their confidence 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. But the Narayanans mean - a major 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 then any body else, hence our decision.

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, the younger, has been making signs (around forty) in origami - paper folding without cutting or sticking of any manner the decision was. They say they want to continue 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 be a conscientious citizen and understanding the dignity of labour. Their parents say: 'We have no plans for our hobbies and interests, and this becomes a part of our educative process. Our parents are always there to guide us and discuss our problems.' Their 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 socialising with friends. They travel extensively too. While Sriniv, the older, is a wildlife photographer, he takes it one day at a time. He will be appearing for his 10th standard next year. When asked if they regret in any manner the decision taken three years ago to walk out of school, they pose a counter question: 'Would we have been able to do all this, if we were still in school?'

Shiv the younger has been learning origami and paper airplanes since the age of five. Origami is an ancient Japanese art of paper folding without cutting or sticking of any manner the decision was. They say they want to continue 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.

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}

Karnataka - the source of river Yadava - documenting the history of bi-dominant region and seeking to create an awareness against the dam project proposed on the river.

At present, Sriniv is appearing for his 12th standard examination as a student of the Rishi Valley Institute of Open Schooling. The subjects he has chosen for his board exams include geography, history, English, Hindi, and Economics. Shiv has chosen to be a wild life photographer and has already held eight exhibitions of his work. He trekked through unchartered walks of life very stimulating for him is fruitful exchange of knowledge and skills. Shiv has also created his own website. Both Sriniv and Janani are spending time working and improving upon them.

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 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. In addition, they are members of 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 socialising with friends. They travel extensively too. While Sriniv wants to be a wild life photographer, he takes it one day at a time. He will be appearing for his 10th standard next year. When asked if they regret in any manner the decision taken three years ago to walk out of school, they pose a counter question: 'Would we have been able to do all this, if we were still in school?'

Shiv is learning the mridangam and Shiv the ghatam and flute from Shri Vikku Vinayak Ram. Sriniv is learning the mridangam and Shiv the ghatam and flute from Shri Vikku Vinayak Ram. Sriniv is learning the mridangam and Shiv the ghatam and flute from Shri Vikku Vinayak Ram. Sriniv is learning the mridangam and Shiv the ghatam and flute from Shri Vikku Vinayak Ram. Sriniv is learning the mridangam and Shiv the ghatam and flute from Shri Vikku Vinayak Ram.
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”.

“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 classes in life when they are needed. But they are not basic to life. Why should you be willing to learn weaving?”

“I don’t want to learn anything new now. Besides I couldn’t learn weaving. 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,” the author suggests that these two processes may be thought of as equivalent to English “teach.”

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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.

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 agricultural farms because I was supposed to be schooled for a 'bright future'. I still remember the days of my life when I was unconsistantly 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 the knowledge, in every sense. Because of these engagements 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 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 activity 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. I ever felt, even for an assignment, in my formal education process. I continued my formal studies but not with the intention of learning 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 reservoir of learning. An example of my unlearning is research on 'indigenous learning systems' in a rural minority 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 motivated youth and other agents who are promoting agendas of consumerism in far-flung rural communities for incorporation of new agents and help keep the people interdependent and in touch with each other.

- All these indigenous collective learning opportunities and spaces have been overwhelmed first by the rural 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 for incorporation of new agents and help keep the people interdependent and in touch with each other.

- Communities get together in social events, events of joy and sorrow. In every marine the whole community shares its 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 breakasts, 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.

- We can find through the practice of charah, the whole community felt the responsibility to share and provide the breakasts, 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.

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Love Letters to Kamiriithu

Today your new magazine came in the mail. Very excited to know that your torch is now focussed on educational issues and I am educational consultants so 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 had the very quick reply. She knows everything. She manages the kitchen, she manages upstairs (the four roomed guest house), she manages the gardener, the security guard 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 learning... no matter how good the teacher... with the kids about themselves.

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. You 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 humiliating 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 022-25565940

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.

J oghesh

jogeshmotwani@hathway.com

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Appeal for Stories

If you have come across a family like the Narayans or the Rastogis, please write to us, adding 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 details of 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 articles, 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:

Multiworld G-8 St. Britto's Apartments Feira Alta, Mapusa 403 507 Goa, India.

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SUBSCRIPTION FORM
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.

Ploughing a field Indian style is not as simple as it looks. The heroes of the ploughing exercise are of course the bulls. So, let me tell you about Guru's bulls. Both of them are 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 the cows were so impatient. Then in order to waste more time, the younger bull would walk slower than the older bull. Sometimes I would get a little bit frustrated. I would say, 'Now you have 20-30 rounds to go I will get a little impatient.'

Next year I'm sure to be back, though I am not suggesting you plough fields in your spare time. I think that I have just been too fortunate. In the rainy season, while all the students were back in college, I was still here in the fields. The cool rain was soothing. I could hear the sound of the raindrops. There was something wrong with me. I was in a field ploughing. They all 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 see me out in the field at 6 a.m. hard at work in their fields. I think they were the only ploughman who had a college education and also sported a pony tail and wore glasses to work. Sometimes the men would compliment me and say I was doing a fine job.

But the women who came to talk with me, without knowing me, thought I was something wrong with me. They couldn't understand why the son of a so called bhakkar (landlord) was out ploughing a field instead of going to college. In fact, they thought they would say to me to be, '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. She said, 'I don't think you are bluffing. When I told her that I was definitely going to college but there was still a week left her to begin, she relaxed a bit. Another lady whose field I had ploughed met my mother at the local market. She said, 'My mum rather hesitantly, 'Your son did a good job ploughing my field - the furrows were absolutely straight.' Then realising that her compliment perhaps unintentionally implied that I was from the peasant class, she quickly retracted what she had said and added, 'He is not meant to be ploughing at all.'

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. I found it odd, but 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 Snakes (pp.110/US$6), has been recently released. Both titles can be ordered from Multiworld Network, G-8 St Britto’s Apartments, Feira Alta, Mapusa 403 507 Goa, India. email: mvrsity@sancharnet.in