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?

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, Chineese, Swahili, Spanish, Arabic, Farsi etc. Multiworld.org also hosts the Multiworld University website, the Taleemnet site, the organic agriculture (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 designed to be run from above, but through its numerous constituents.

www.taleemmultiworld.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 hence learning using their own resources.

www.organicmultiworld.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.

www.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/multi-university
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.

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WEBSITES
http://www.multiworld.org
http://www.multiversitylibrary.com
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 Whichever Man I Want) I have since published a novel in Gikuyu Caitaani Muthabaini (English translation: Peace in Harmony) and completed a musical drama, Maitu Njugia, (English translation: Mother Sing for Me); three books for children, Njamba Nene na Mbaathi i Mathagu, (English translation: Mother Nene and the Children’s Road) and two novels, Matigari Na Mjirumi. 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 distanced 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 form the European and American economies 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 for the people and culture and the values of the language of our daily humiliation and punishment. I do not want to see any of that 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 peoples’ 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. Control of his mother tongue where he was living 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 relation to others.

For colonialism this involved two aspects of the same process: the destruction or the deliberate undermining of the child’s upbringing in the school (even his spoken language is the colony’s script) 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 school 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 an alienation of the child from his natural and social environment, what may well 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 Thiongo
Multiversity Initiates Working Group on Social Science Curricula

One of the main objectives for which Multiversity was set up was to bring together creative intellectuals and scholars within Asia, Africa and South America to work for a common effort to contribute to the development 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 courses that are 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 pages that may be different here and there, but by and large the principal body of thought has been imported literally hand car, from Western universities. For example, in the field of sociology, though some concessions may be made to local data, the discussion of the principal concepts, thinkers, histories has remained unaltered, and a sort of takeover 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 construction has been narrowly taken from the societies of the West, ignoring most others.

Similar arguments could be made against disciplines including political science, psychology, anthropology, economics, history, etc. In psychology, for example, almost all scientific concepts taught within 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 indigenous knowledge 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 psychotherapies though these are available in plenty, have been validated by experience and still direct the allegiance of nations across the world. In political science, no effort is made to utilise effective indigenous political science documents. This situation is one of the principal colonial mentality which uncritically assumes that since the social sciences were allegedly born in Europe, we have no option but to imbibe the Western intellectual tradition when we teach sociology or other social sciences in our universities. However, this situation is changing slowly within the social sciences and it is possible to locate 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 set up a Working Group on Social Sciences. The primary focus of this group is to reframe the scope, content and even methodology of social sciences and to sever—wherever possible—inherited vestiges and unnecessary links with the social science traditions that have emerged within the Western world and Western universities. The group will also consider how to inject indigenous intellectual input into the body of our social science teaching.

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 is commencing working group 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 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 university lecturers and related groups on the changes required to be made in the curriculum of educational institutions. Individuals who are willing to take up this work may write to Multiversity. They should please send 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.

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 their 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 facilities of multiversitylibrary.com and multworld.org to circulate the best of their writing within the international community.
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 inhuman or inhumane and real learning. In comparison with the thousands who try gamely to be successes within the present day 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.

Abhiyakti, a radical media collective based in Nasik, Maharashtra, 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 outsourcing. At the end of day, each of the walk-outs, it appeared, was struggling to remain the master of his 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 Corbin for the interviews.)

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**FREEING CHILDREN FROM THE TYRANNY OF SCHOOLS**

*Drop-outs or Walk-outs?*

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**RANBIR RANA**

*Bhethilkhi, Himachal Pradesh, Age: 25 Years*

Ranbir Rana, a sprite young youth of 25 years, bright eyed, bursting with energy, ready to take on life at a moment’s notice, hails from Bhethilkhi, 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 ethnocentric 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 rearer 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 in a village in Lahaul and Spiti 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.

He got back to his home town, Bhethilkhi, and started his own business of making incense sticks for the export market. Ranbir has now helped his father and a couple of his friends to learn 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 business.

**Multinational Network’s Newsletter**

A summary of the event is given by Norma Alvares and Nyla Corbin:

**The walk-outs speak for themselves.**
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 employement system works on the master-servant basis. You may be the supervisor but you have to do what the superiors tell you. 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 were turbins, 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.

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 instilled 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 wanted 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 they are not 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 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.
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 Garhwal hills of Uttarakhand. 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. Sus- tenance was a problem for the mother who, one fine day, de- cided 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 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 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. He 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 old jobs, computer related job, works of scanning, CD writing, etc. Theatre is his passion when he spent 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 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.

Nothing was wrong with me. The system crushes you. I decided to quit this education system which I realized had nothing real to offer.

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.

JYOTHI RAI
D-2-129 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 11 in school. Whether it is leaving school or even sitting for exams, is something she has never done very strongly in her conversations.

She now trains at Manzil to be an artist and at the same time, she trains at Shikshantar. Someone told me about Shikshantar. I looked at the syllabus for it and realized had nothing real to offer. I decided to quit this education system which I did not fit into and which I also felt earlier I now feel that there is nothing that I can't do if I decide I want to do it.

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New Delhi 110 003.
Age: 18 years

Anish Singh, the small made, fair boy with a thin but stocky bone structure, hails from the Garhwal hills of Uttarakhand. 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 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 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. He 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 old jobs, computer related job, works of scanning, CD writing, etc. Theatre is his passion when he spent 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.

JYOTHI RAI
D-2-129 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 11 in school. Whether it is leaving school or even sitting for exams, is something she has never done very strongly in her conversations.

She now trains at Manzil to be an artist and at the same time, she trains at Shikshantar. Someone told me about Shikshantar. I looked at the syllabus for it and realized had nothing real to offer. I decided to quit this education system which I did not fit into and which I also 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.

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For an 18-year old, supporting his family, doing distance learning and pursuing his passion of theatre, he is doing great and going places.
HEMANT KANOJIA
K-10, 3rd Floor, Sujan Singh Park, New Delhi
Age: 39

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 found I wasn't doing so well. And I thought, is it possible that even this simple system I couldn't pass? I had 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 amazed 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 to Manzil for Maths to Manzil. Today, believe it or not, but I gave 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 tutoring 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 to do. Chemistry even though I knew I didn't like it even in school. I found people who gave me free tuition in Chemistry—eventually travelled 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, dhola, 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 past time only.

Now I want to hopefully do something seriously with music. I don't know 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 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 rags depending on my course, I 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 college anymore. Too much of time gets wasted there. I have changed to correspondence course instead.

PANCAK SULODIA
J-3/1, 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 but for all the reasons? They are linked with my studies and so on. Through helping young people to cope with the kind of work he was doing, I found, however, that I want to do something 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 superseded 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 spend our time in studying make no sense 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 tie up that option altogether.

Pankaj: the books we study in school tells 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.

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on internet and discovered web designing. So I thought this is my wanted profession and took computer studies for higher education.

But I was advised not to go for full time college but to take the correspondence course which, I thought, was a good thing since otherwise full day gets over and I am 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. It 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 took out was the degree course. By now I had found that 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 false-hoods 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 superseded by my wanting to do something for others.
Vikram — meaning man — is a person with 19 names, who earned one more at the Walkouts 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 working for the Red Cross.

Starting out as a cook at the Railway Station for a wage of two meals with the cook 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, Ravi Gulati of Manzil, New Delhi 110 003.

Manav, the man with 20 names, has Radhakrishna, Laxminarayan, Sitaram and others.

The family consists of his father, 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 basketball. 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?

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 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.”)

VIKRAM RAJ PUT
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. And Manav, 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, boxwrestling 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.

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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 wanted to go to 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 was made to be promoted, promising the principal that I would try to improve next time but 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 however fond of sports for the next two years.

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'.

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 big 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 friends to avoid paying knew 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 of my own based on knowledgeable 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 and train for 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. I found an NGO and it was not difficult for me to find one. I was conducting programmes for criminals who were looking for a person to help them learn and so on. 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 started to run a canteen in the office compound of Food Corporation of India. It was 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 careful. I think that farming will give me the peace which has eluded me all these years.
SHIVRAM NARAYANAN
Vasco da Gama, Goa
Age: 15 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 imprinted 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.

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 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.

Some time later, 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.

SHIVQUIT 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 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 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 imprinted in my mind as regards my school years.

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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, a 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 early difficult school years in Japan, I still wonder how I made it. But 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 gave us the freedom to decide how best we 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 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 our 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 we took us out for walks in the mountain and showed us how rivers and lakes were formed, how patterns were 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 gave us 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 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 more over taught us how to play them on a re-corder. We would also play musical Bingo where prizes would be rubber 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 first way and 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 dialogue. 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, tape 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 my memory 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.

About Kamirithu

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