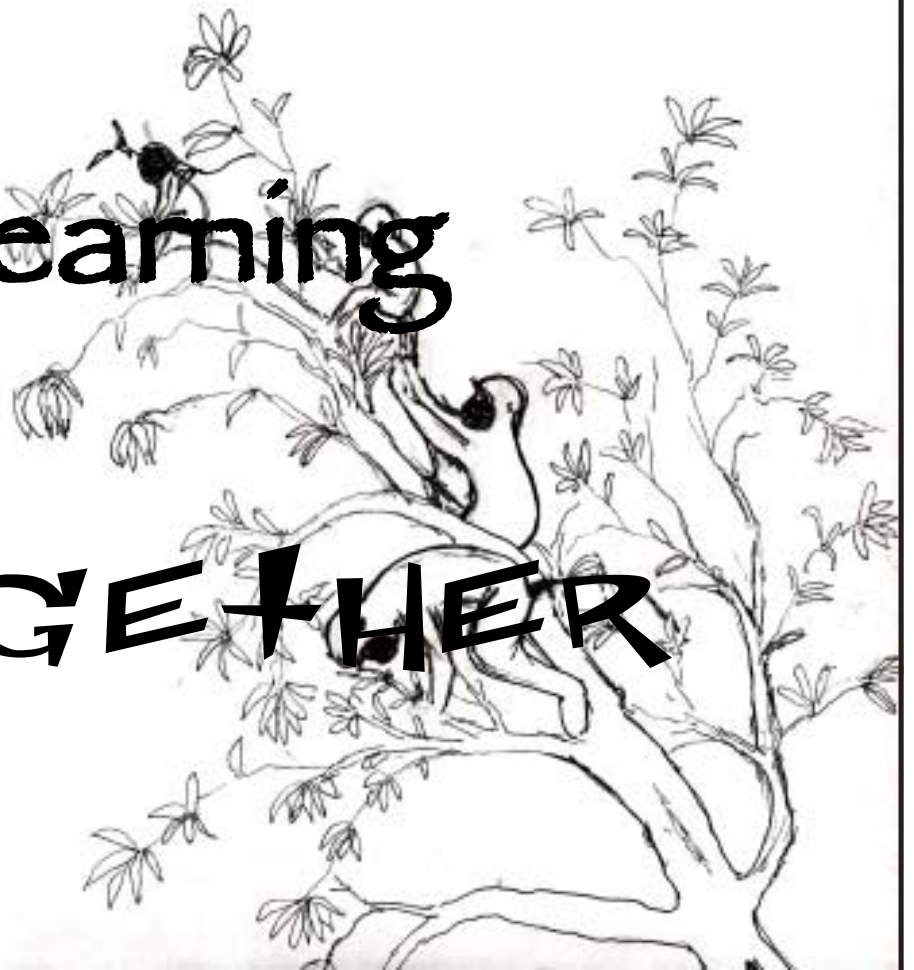




families

learning

TOGETHER



second issue december 2007

तब से अब तक

पिछले तीन-चार सालों से मैं इस खोज में लगी हुई हूँ कि ऐसे परिवार कहाँ-कहाँ हैं, जो सीखने और प्राकृतिक जीवन जीने के नए-नए प्रयोग कर रहे हैं? मेरे लिए यह खोज बहुत ही अहम् है, क्योंकि हमारे परिवार में हमने मिलजुलकर यह निर्णय लिया है कि हम अपने आपको स्कूली मानसिकता व व्यवस्था से दूर रखेंगे। इसमें केवल हमारी बेटी को स्कूल न भेजना ही नहीं, बल्कि बहुत सारे अलग-अलग महत्वपूर्ण कदम जुड़े हुए हैं। इसमें खान-पान, स्वास्थ्य, मनोरंजन जैसे मुद्दे भी उतनी ही अहमियत रखते हैं। इसी खोज में हम बहुत सारी नई-नई जगहों पर जाकर अलग-अलग परिवारों के साथ समय बिताते हैं। जैसे अमरावती में प्राकृतिक खेती से जुड़े फुटाणे परिवार के साथ हम सप्ताहभर रहे।

जबसे हम इस फेमिलीज लर्निंग टूगेदर नेटवर्क के उत्सव आयोजित कर रहे हैं, तबसे कई नई चीजें एवं प्रश्न हमारे जीवन में पैदा हुए हैं। जैसे शहर में रहते हुए हम प्राकृतिक जीवन से जुड़ने के क्या-क्या प्रयोग कर सकते हैं? इन उत्सवों से ऐसे कई मौके भी बने, जिनमें बच्चों ने दूसरे शहरों में अपने दोस्तों के अभिभावकों के साथ रहकर नए-नए प्रयोग किए। जब मेरी बेटी कंकु चार साल की थी, तो वह बेझिझक हमारे दोस्तों के साथ अहमदाबाद में तीन-चार दिन बिताकर आई और वापस आने में आनाकानी ही करती रही।

दूसरी चीज यह कि ऐसे उत्सवों में हमने कभी भी कोई ज्यादा पूर्व-प्लानिंग नहीं की। क्योंकि उसकी कभी आवश्यकता ही महसूस नहीं हुई। हर उम्र के लोग स्वयं दूसरे उम्र के लोगों के साथ अपने शौक व ताकतें बाँटते हैं। मेरे खुद के पिताजी जब गोआ के उत्सव में थे, तब मैंने कई बार उन्हें ऐसी चीजें करते देखा, जो उन्होंने कभी नहीं की थी, जैसे – सब्जी काटना, कंकु व बहुत सारे बच्चों के साथ घण्टों तक मिट्टी के खिलौने बनाना। ऐसे उत्सवों में भाग लेने के बाद मुझे महसूस होने लगा कि मेरे माता-पिता ने भी हमारे जीवनशैली में ज्यादा रुचि लेना व अपनी भूमिका निभाना शुरू किया है। उनकी स्वयं की भी छुपी सृजनात्मकता उभर रही है। जैसे मेरी माँ ने हैण्डमेड कागज व फूल-पत्तियों आदि से बहुत सारी नई चीजें बनाना शुरू किया है और मेरे पिताजी ने अपने बरसों पुराने कारपेंटरी के शौक को पुनः अपनाते हुए बांस व लकड़ी के फर्नीचर बनाना।

इन उत्सवों के परिणाम-स्वरूप मैंने और मेरे कई दोस्तों ने स्वास्थ्य को लेकर काफी बातचीत शुरू की है। पिछले कई महिनों से मैंने अपने ही परिवार की बुजुर्ग महिलाओं से भी काफी सीखना शुरू किया है। मुझे यह जानकर बहुत खुशी और

Invitation to FLT Network

- *Where has your family embraced the homemade over the readymade?*
- *What learning resources have inspired your family?*
- *How can we evolve new de-institutionalized joint families and healthy learning communities?*

Do these questions intrigue you? We're a group of families, first organized at the World Social Forum in January 2004, who believe that learning is a family activity, that sharing our own questions, experiences and skills with each other is a good way to learn, and that co-creating new ways of organic living is vitally important to humanity and the planet.

Currently, we have an online discussion group (learningfamilies@yahoogroups.com) and we host gatherings of families from around India. If you're interested in Families Learning Together Network, please email Vidhi Jain at vidhi@swaraj.org or write us at the address below. We look forward to hearing from you!

Families Learning Together Network

83 Adinath Nagar • Udaipur, 313004 • Rajasthan, India

Tel: (91) 294 245-1303

www.swaraj.org/shikshantar/familieslearning.htm

अचम्भा होता है कि मेरे ससुराल में मेरी पीढ़ी के करीब आधे से ज्यादा बच्चे घर पर ही पैदा हुए हैं। हमारी सब चाचियाँ जो किसी न किसी गाँव में ही बड़ी हुई; घर पर ही बिना कोई डॉक्टर की मदद के प्रसव कराने में ही विश्वास करती हैं। यह मेरे लिए बहुत रुचि की बात है, क्योंकि आमतौर पर शहरों में यह अब नामुमकिन माना जा रहा है। मेरे परिवार में भी यह खोज आपसी रिश्तों को मजबूत बना रही है। मुझे अपने परिवार की ताकतों को पहचानने हुए बहुत सन्तुष्टि का अहसास होता है।

इस नेटवर्क में मैंने महसूस किया है कि जो भी हम नये प्रयोग करने की कोशिश कर रहे हैं उनमें केवल बच्चों को ही बदलने व कुछ नया सिखाने की कोशिश नहीं कर रहे बल्कि बड़े भी अपने स्वयं की खोज को बढ़ाने के प्रयास कर रहे हैं। मेरे लिये यह बहुत महत्वपूर्ण रहा है क्योंकि इससे मेरे खुद की कमजोरियों व विरोधाभास को भी पहचान पाई हूँ— जैसे खान पान को लेकर मेरी कुछ कमजोरियाँ-चाय जैसी निर्भरताओं को पहचानना व उसके समय समय पर विकल्प खोजना।

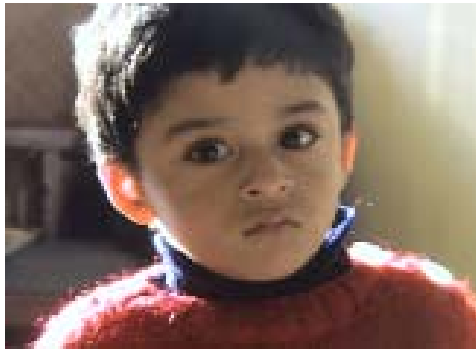
हमारे एक साथी की इस बात से मैं बहुत प्रभावित हुई कि जब हम अपने बच्चों को ज्यादा प्राकृतिक तरह से बढ़ने का मौका देते हैं, तो इसका यह मतलब नहीं है कि हम उन्हें लापरवाही से खुला छोड़ रहे हैं; बल्कि इसमें हम उनकी गतिविधि में बाधा डाले बिना उनके और स्वयं के बारे में निरन्तर सतर्क रहते हैं।

विधि जैन, उदयपुर

<vidhi@swaraj.org>

BEFORE GOING TO SCHOOL...

I want to put it down here for the records all the things that my three-year-old son Aadi already knows, before he goes to school. He will start going to school from tomorrow and I don't want the teacher (or anyone else) to tell me, "See how much he has learnt in school." I totally believe that whatever one learns (and by that I mean 'to learn about the process of life and living'), one does so outside school, not inside it.



1. Aadi knows basic colours, their names in English and some in Hindi. He knows the difference between blue and purple.

2. He knows the names of most of the vegetables, like *bhindi*, *baigan*, *mirchi*, *shimla mirch*, carrot, *gobbi*, *kaula*, *lauki*, beans...

3. He knows two poems in Tamil, namely *Mambaram Mambaram* (a poem about mangoes) and one more, which even I don't know! Anuradha says that his vocabulary in Tamil is rich, divergent and at times, nuanced. She herself had such a vocab only when she was much older.

4. He knows two poems in Marathi, namely *Ek Hota Dongar* (a poem about mountains and forests), and *Sasa Sasa Disto Kasa* (about a rabbit).

5. He knows several Hindi songs; the current favourites are *Dhoom Machaale* and *Dam Tara*.

6. He knows a few poems in English too, like *Humpty Dumpty* and *Twinkle Twinkle*. A friend told me that children in Kenya and Tanzania also recite these poems. That sent jitters down my spine.

7. He dances vigorously to rhythmic music with at least three innovative steps that I have not seen anyone else do. He is not a performer; he dances for himself and only when he feels like it. He can dance alone in a room where no one is present. He can dance along with a group. Lately, I noticed that he prefers the latter. He can, at times, make a group dance along with him, though that is rare.

8. He speaks three languages in which Hindi and Tamil is fluent. His English is very limited... but at his age he manages. And how! He once said a whole sentence in what sounded like English but was actually gibberish!

9. He can identify a *bhindi* plant, a bitter gourd plant, the leaves of *palak*, *methi* and *sarson* (that's all we have on the terrace so far). Lately we have added aloe, melon, chillies, garlic and *ajwain*, so he knows them as well.

10. The two trees he knows are *Palaash* and *Gulmohar* and he likes saying these words. He can identify these trees by their flowers. He especially likes to say *Palaash*.

11. His eyes shine bright and his thigh and calf muscles are well-formed

(touch wood). I realised today that these things don't happen by sitting endlessly in a classroom.

12. I once read him a story in which there was this little girl who cried all the time, and her parents could not figure out why she was crying. Later, it is revealed in the story that the girl was asked to eat porridge *again*. So the story was that this girl must have had porridge for many breakfasts and now didn't want any more. Slowly Aadi got the hang of the story and said, "But I like porridge." I said yes you do. "But she doesn't like it." I said no she doesn't. "So that's ok," he said. I said yes it is ok. I know people my age, or people older than me, who are not able to resolve a conflict with such ease and simplicity. You may not like something that I like, and it is ok and we can still be friends! I silently said to myself, "You're doing great Aaditya. What am I going to teach you?"

13. He is never tired. At times, he wants to sit and play or see a book with pictures or wants a story to be read to him, but more often he wants to run, kick, hit with a bat, play ball, do wrestling in bed – in short, vigorous physical activities. Sometimes he stares in space. My friend Sonati describes this act of children very beautifully. She says at such times, they are being one with the universe. He, however, never sits down and say "I am bored." Not yet!

14. He talks to everybody he meets whether we know them or not. He can strike up a conversation with anyone he pleases. His friendships happen within minutes and without any inhibitions. His conversations can last several minutes and at times, we notice that he has his audience in splits before they know what's hit them.

I hope people don't mind my writing all these points. I am not trying to dote on Aadi or say that he is special in anyway. And yet he is special, like all children, each one of them is special... like we all are special. But that speciality has to be noticed and nurtured. I seriously believe that schools are singularly incapable of doing this (they are not even interested). But parents and only parents can. We can.

- Sanjay Maharishi, New Delhi
<sanjay.maharishi@gmail.com>

Two Years of Freedom

Me and Rajeev got married in 1997, and the function was held inside the boys hostel of Film Training Institute of India, Pune. Before we even started planning our life together, we had our first daughter, Abhirami, amidst us. And after a year and half, Anantara joined us too.

We were shifting places, criss-crossing the whole country, in search of work and peace, and Abhirami was witnessing all the things that we grownups encountered. It was only because of our intention to put the children in a school that believed in freedom, that we settled in Chennai, to end up with a Krishnamurti school. But the years they went through the school made us notice a few things, like Abhirami who drew human faces in a vibrant way, started to draw apples like the rest. That, along with many other reasons, prompted us to take them out of school.

It has been two years now that my daughters, Abhirami (age nine) and Anantara (age eight), are not going to school. We decided to take them out of the school, as we felt that they can learn more from life rather than from the books and curriculum. And believe me, these two years have



been very interesting, both for us and them. Abhirami by nature is a shy child. She used to hardly speak with others when she was going to school. She used to stay aloof from other children. I even

Nostalgia

Roses are red
Sleeping on the bed.
Happy, sad moments
Shuffle on my head.

My new friends,
My old friends,
At school days,
We learn to lend.

At school we feel to
snore,
Just one pending chore,
The next day for me,
It becomes a bore.

After years I will see you,
Trying to recognize the face-can't remember you,
My sir, big and strong, with a stick,
I hope that the slaps would be few.

Pushing, laughing, shouting was the only fun,
Necessary to giggle while I chewed the bun,
One day when I will leave you,
This friendship would be blank and moments none!

- Astha Wadhvani, age 12, Delhi
<nehawadhvani@yahoo.co.in>



got the same remark from her teachers in school.

Post-school, she has opened up more, and now she feels free when she meets others, whether from her own age group or an adult. Anantara also treats any adult as an individual and not as a person who is older than her. During these two years they have spent most of their time playing games, contributing to household activities, making things of their own choice, watching films and visiting different local places. Now they are more aware of their surroundings.

When we shifted to Delhi, one of our neighbors asked me about their

education. As I mentioned that they were not going to school, she had a confused look on her face. She was interested to know what they do the whole day since they are not going to school. I told her about their activities, and she showed interest to come over to our place and to see what Abhirami and Anantara were doing. She was amazed to see that their studies were not limited to textbooks. Instead, they are exposed to lots of art, cinema, music, literature. I personally feel that they have grown beautifully these two years, and the decision we all took has been a good one.

- Indrani Dey, Delhi
<endrani@yahoo.co.uk>

GROWING WITH NATURE

Hello, my name is Yorit and I live in Sadhana Forest with my husband Aviram and seven-year-old daughter, Osher Shanti. Sadhana Forest is part of Auroville, an international community created by The Mother and based on the teachings of Sri Aurobindo. Our main project is the reforestation of 70 acres of severely eroded land. This is done along with living a sustainable life, which includes very simple way of living. Our houses are built from natural materials, we compost and recycle whatever is possible, and use solar energy. We are also vegan *and* we don't send our daughter to school. The work in the farm is done with volunteers from all over the world. They come to live with us for varying amounts of time, from two weeks to months and years. This leads us to live our lives in an ever-changing community.

For many years we were looking for our life 'recipe'. One of the most important topics we considered was in what kind of environment we wanted to raise our daughter. **Our thoughts led us to understanding that we wanted to: (a) be close to nature, (b) live as sustainably as possible, and (c) practice spirituality in our everyday lives.**

Our journey toward living naturally and unschooling was inspired first by ideas in *The Continuum Concept: In Search of Lost Happiness* by Jean Liedloff. They led us to understand that we should find and follow our instincts, by being close to nature and watching nature. For raising a child, this means fulfilling her evolutionary expectations of parental contact, trust, and freedom. This is what led us to understand that a child should grow following her own being, developing the natural tools that she needs to survive in her environment. For example, a child growing up in a jungle will learn to recognize the tracks of wild animals. Likewise, the moment that the environment includes the need to communicate through reading/writing, the child will develop these skills.

During my pregnancy we were exposed to how other families unschooled their children, as well as to various books (such as those of John Holt) about child development. From these we formed our philosophy about raising our daughter. The Mother's and Sri Aurobindo's teachings of Free Progress Education further reassured us.



When Osher was four years old, she asked us "How come I cannot carry you, but in the water I can carry you?" Recently I asked her if she remembered this, and she did. "The water carries you,"

she said. By observing nature, she is able to learn firsthand many things about life.

The community environment she lives in has led her to develop communication and interpersonal skills. People in the community are always coming and going, because of which Osher has learned to value the moment, and to form deep relationships in short periods of time.

We have a daily structured routine in our life in Sadhana Forest, but we do not have the pressure or demands that are usually part of a school system. Osher's life is centered, and she understands the purpose of our projects. She takes part in them and chooses to take responsibility in many aspects of community life. The way her life is structured has given her the freedom to develop into a confident and independent child. She can recognize outside manipulation and refuse it.

Osher knows her own needs and can explain them. If she is upset, she will state it, "I am upset, I am hungry and need to eat something." When we have tension within the community that causes her to become restless, she says, "I am taking all your tension inside me."

Living this life in Sadhana Forest, I find that Osher is very much connected to her inner soul. We experience this through things she does and says on a daily basis. Once I asked her where her new bag was. As an answer, she pointed to herself, and said that her body is her bag, carrying Osher.

The main challenges we face are communicating ourselves to the outside world and facing the different criticisms and reactions to the way we choose to live. To see Osher growing reassures us about our way. Finding confidence in ourselves leads us to feel content and happy.

- Yorit, Auroville <aviram@auroville.org.in>
tel: 0413-2677682, 2902566

Welcome to the Parrot Collection

Our six-year-old daughter's jewelry business started one day with a trip to the bird shop. At least, that is the moment that Tara fell in love with the vivid green parrot with his handsome black collar and his sidelong glances, and started dreaming of him sitting on her shoulder and chattering in her ear, just as we had been reading about the various exotic pets in the journal of a shipwrecked family, the Swiss Family Robinson. Tara's tender young heart was firmly set on bringing that parrot home, despite my protesting about his rather unbecoming pricetag. My refusal seemed only to fuel her determination, until we started brainstorming how the money would come to buy Mitu (he already had been named) if it were not to come from MY pocket.

That's when Tara hit upon the idea of making jewelry--which she would sell to all my friends--to buy her bird. Great idea, I said! So industriously she started searching through all her little boxes of stored treasures for all those beads and pearls and buttons and shells and corals and wooden pieces that she had been collecting; then came out scissors and various old belts and purses with sequins and plastic beads; then her jewelry box with all its strings of fake pearls and glass beaded necklaces. We experimented with the strings and hit upon fishing line as the most secure, and settled upon twisting clasps for the finishing fix.

After the first few haphazard designs (which were purchased with goodwill by the first customers!), some patterning started to emerge, as well as a rapidly developing discernment for higher quality beads. We started combing the beaches for interesting shaped shells and driftwoods for the nature lover look, and tripping to the bead shops and searching for just the right center pieces for the glitter gals, although many times we still resorted to cutting up flashy hair tie bands with diamond shaped plastic gems, which were perfect as pendants!

Beading became her obsession. At the breakfast table and through the day and even during our bedtime story (and even, a few times, AFTER the light had been turned out!), Tara beaded. She muttered and hummed, twiddled and chortled, simmered and sang. She told stories about her patterns, imagined foraging the world's gem mines, gave spontaneous dissertations about the merits of the correct sitting posture for design inspiration, but above

all, she spoke of her beloved talking parrot, Mitu and all the adventures they would have on the high seas. We made little price tags for each of the necklaces, bracelets and anklets that came, sometimes in sets, and they all were titled "Welcome to the Parrot Collection". Navina's brother had premature twins during this time, and Tara and her friends (especially her friends Sneeden and Stephanie, whose original ideas gave quite a flair to the collection) started making an entire collection of premature baby bracelets, which were the most adorable of all!

Finally, the day arrived, after many jewelry displaying tea parties and visits to all our friends with the display board in tow, with an experiential course in what all those numbers on the notes and the change they require means, the money was collected for bringing Mitu home and Tara could hardly wait another minute. She finally had her very own talking parrot! Well, the idea was that he needed training to actually become a talking parrot but funnily enough, even once he was brought home, she didn't stop

beading. Now she had a momentum going, and people kept bringing her all kinds of interesting beads, crystals, pearls, etc. I even allowed her to cut up my ruby and emerald chains and was impressed by the lovely combined chokas that resulted. She talked and talked to her parrot as she beaded, sitting by his cage, his beady eyes watching every movement.

And then one day a friend told us her dog had just had ten pure-bred labrador

pups...another incredible something that Tara had ALWAYS wanted....and after just one visit, she wrapped her arms around the little golden runt of the litter and said, "but Mummy, he loves me and I love him and I simply must bring him home. I will pay for him myself!" What can a natural learning mother-cum-facilitator of her child's own self-directed interests say in such a situation?

So now, I live in a house, with a parrot, a labrador, a tank full of fish, a crazy kitten and a very disdainful mother cat watching the steadily increasing zoo.... Tara's hands are rather full now to be beading all day, but we are all very curious what the next venture will be!

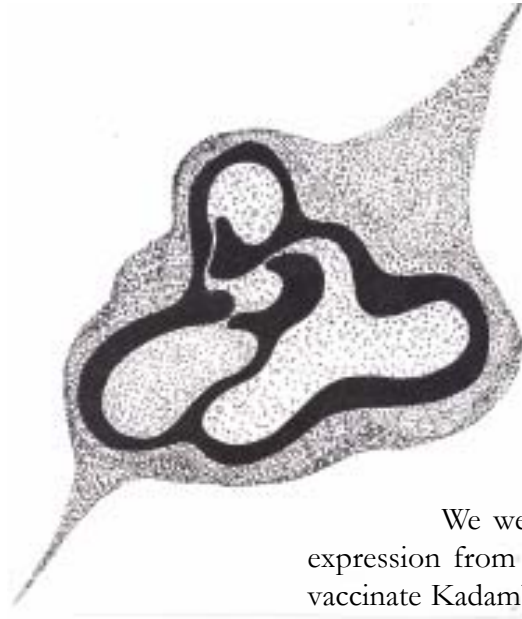
- Anna Jahns, Goa <sajahns@gmx.net>



So we decided . . .

When we decided to have Kadambari (both of us wanted a girl, so the name was decided many years back), we were not sure where, how and who would do the childbirth. We had shifted to Ayurveda and natural healing practices long before (for the last eight years we have not touched any other medicine). So when we decided to have our child with Dr. Girija, who is a Vedu and had never done childbirth before, there was lot of apprehension from both our families and friends. Since we were in Pune and the doctor in Chennai, it was all the more difficult. In the seven months that I was in Pune, I changed some four doctors, because whenever I used to say that I won't take any iron, calcium or vitamin tablets, the doctors refused to check me. I was on strict Ayurvedic diet (mostly milk) and various legumes and *kashyams* (varies from month to month) and applied *picchu* (oil tampons). All this helped me to have good and sufficient breast milk.

I shifted to Chennai in my eighth month for childbirth. Dr. Girija had arranged two *dais* (*marandvachi* in Tamil) for me. They checked me and measured the womb with hands, did some calculations and, to all of our surprise, announced that baby is going to be born in a particular week, which was much before the due date. And yes, their calculation was right. The labor was 18 hours long, but I was regularly administered with oil both on my whole body as well as on my vulva. I had been given nice hot bath, which was very soothing and constant refreshment of sweet *kanji* (powdered boiled rice). I was walking all the time and when it was difficult to walk, I decided to sit on the floor. With a lot of encouragement from many women, my amma-in-law and my husband Arvindan, our little bundle came out. It was an inexpressible joy to see her. Arvindan and I both cried with joy.



The cord was not cut immediately. Rather, we waited for the placenta to come out, and then *dais* cleaned the baby with *ghee* and *atta*. The childbirth was free of episiotomy too, which is a routine thing in hospital. I was given a decoction full of warm *ghee*, and Kadambari was put close to me. I was back to my normal activities in two days, but followed the *pattya* for 60 days.

We were quite prepared to handle a similar expression from our families when we decided not to vaccinate Kadambari. Though my side of the family still continues to remind me about it, Arvindan's family has given up. We usually don't tell people as we find it very tiring to explain it and listen to all their discouraging stories. We have full faith in ourselves and got lot of encouragement from our doctor. Some of my friends still suggest that we can take inactive vaccination instead of live, as it is very common in Western countries, but then the whole point was not to introduce her to any active or inactive viruses.

We also decided that Kadambari will be exclusively on breast milk till one year of age. Today, she is eight months old and still not been introduced to any supplementary food. Many relatives and friends also question this and say a lot about proteins and vitamin deficiency. But we have read many books and talked to any people (mostly Ayurvedic and Sidda people) and realized that even if don't introduce her to any food for one year, it will not do any harm to her. Rather, if sufficient breast milk is there, it is much better.

Our childbirth experience was documented by a Jawarhalal Nehru University professor to teach as part of Social Anthropology lesson. We now share our experiences with many new mothers, who would not like to have childbirth in a hospital.

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Say No to Vaccines Websites

There is an international debate raging about vaccination. Here are some of the websites with more info:

www.mothing.com
www.vaccinetruth.org
www.vaclib.org
www.byronchild.com
www.naturalparenting.com

Share your experiences with/without vaccines with us...

Living with Germs

Tanay, our nine-year-old son, has never been pricked, injected, drugged or dosed. No oral vaccines, no externally injected immunities either.

Why?

Because when we chose to homebirth him, we had in a way already chosen a lifestyle! Its basic tenet was (and continues to be): to respect the organic unity of life. This means the basic relationship between ourselves and our biological environment. Its like a sheath around us/within us that's alive, dynamic, always responding –but invisible.. this is our protective armour with which we are all born with.



Whats that got to do with germs?

Organic unity implies that all forms of life are in one way or the another, dependent on each other. This includes bacteria, viruses, fungi, protozoa and other micro-organisms. Not only externally but also within our body. Interestingly as the pharmaceutical industry continues its determined (and highly funded) search to beat the germs and combat each disease causing microbe.. the 'strains' of bacteria and viruses keep changing. They become drug resistant. They persist stubbornly despite all the sterilization, pasteurization, vaccination or immunization.

So are you not scared of 'catching germs'?

There is no catching to do. There are a over a hundred viruses present at this very moment in our mouths, eyes, stomachs.. all over, most can be found living in perfectly healthy people-incapable of causing any disease.

You mean Germs, against which we must protect ourselves, are not the enemy?

The father of the Germ theory was a chemist (not a biologist!) from France, called Louis Pasteur. In 1864, he merely demonstrated the existence of various microorganisms. A little known fact then. (By 1870, the microscope made it possible to view them).

The basis of orthodox medicine is that the so-called Germ theory. It states that 'infectious' diseases are solely due to the invasion/attack of specific (terrorist like) micro-

organisms. Each specific micro-organism is responsible for each disease. They are like aggressors. This view has been unquestionably held-that germs are the only primary cause of a disease. Like 'outside agents' they are invisible invaders. (Please note: Till today conventional medicine practise sees little co-relation between our individual lifestyles and causes of dis-ease)

We still need to stay Germ-Free, don't we?

Louis Pasteur just before dying is quoted to have said "...the germ is nothing, the soil is everything." Rats, flies and mad dogs only live in garbage areas, where there is rotting food for them to grow. They don't usually attack the living rooms! The same thing with germs. It's the biological environment within our body our internal soil, that determines whether micro-organisms/germs can grow. Throw seeds on concrete they will not sprout. Seeds like germs need the right grounds to grow and proliferate. An acidic environment within the body, aids germ growth. Keep the internal environment - our biological body right, and the balance within the organic unity is maintained.

So what do vaccinations/immunizations do?

They covert the general immunity with which we are all born with(and its intangibly present at 100%) into specific immunities-into specific virus attacks- like polio, meningitis, whooping cough-mmp's and DTP's..) Gradually as we inoculate, inject, vaccinate and dose our kids. More and more regularly at every doctor's appointment - we are only lowering their general immunity.

Does Tanay ever catch disease?

Colds, fever, runny nose and the odd runny stomach. Disease and illness are the way the body initiates a clean-out. Illness is the *jhadu-pocha* (sweep and swipe) of the system - a toxic build-up inside requires channels to eliminate. Illness gets critical only when we disturb the organic unity.

If we believe we are fighting a monster, a terrorist attack called Dis-eases caused by germs, then we need to leave the germs to the body to handle. Suppress the germs with poison and they will only grow more.

Ask any organic farmer, he'll be able to tell, and anyway kids don't like being pricked.

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एक बंगला बनाया न्यारा

“हाँ, फिर क्या हुई कल बातें? कुछ तय हुआ क्या?”

“कुछ नहीं विशेष।” उसने कहा, कुछ समय चाहिये। घर वालों से बात करनी होगी। अगले दिन मैं वसन्त से मिलने गई थी उस बारे में भाभी से गुस्सा हो रही थी।

भाभी ने हँस के कहा, “बस, इतना ही! और कुछ बातें नहीं की तुम लोगों ने?”

“वैसा नहीं, वो कह रहा था कि तुम्हारा आश्रम नदी किनारे है। गाँव में तुम्हारा मन नहीं लगेगा। लेकिन अपना एक खेत नदी किनारे है, वहीं घर बनाएँगे हम।” भाभी जोर से हँसी और बोली, “शादी करने का तो तय नहीं हुआ और बातें की घर बाँधने की!”

घर बाँधना वसन्त का अत्यन्त प्रिय विषय है। जगह-जगह घर बाँधने के प्रयोग उसने किए हैं। हम 20 साल रहे, वो पुराना घर भी ऐसे ही प्रयोग से निकला है। अब हम जिस घर में रहते हैं, वो भी तो एक प्रयोग ही है। पुराना घर भी मिट्टी का और यह भी मिट्टी का है। लेकिन दोनों को बाँधने के तरीके अलग हैं। मिट्टी के घर हमें बहुत प्रिय हैं। क्योंकि वे गर्मी में ठण्डे और सर्दी में गरम रहते हैं। वे स्थानीय संसाधनों की मदद से ही बांधे



जा सकते हैं और वे पर्यावरण मित्र भी हैं। मिट्टी के घर में रेडियो एक्टिविटी के परिणाम कम होते हैं, ये शोध से सिद्ध हुआ है।

ये घर सीमेन्ट के घर की तरह मजबूत नहीं होता है, क्योंकि छोटे-छोटे

आघातों से वह टूट सकता है और उसे हर साल लीप-पोतकर ठीक किया जा सकता है। शायद यही कारण है कि हमें दो सौ-तीन सौ साल पुराने घर भी सुस्थिति में दीखते हैं। मिट्टी के घर बांधते समय लकड़ी की जरूरत होती है, लेकिन वो लकड़ी सागवान की ही हो, यह जरूरी नहीं है। खेत के किनारे उगने वाले नीम, शिरिष आदि भी मिट्टी के घर बांधने में काम आते हैं। केवल उसके बारे में जानकार बढई की जरूरत होती है।

हमने जब नया मिट्टी का बाँधा, तो भीत बनाने वाले ढाडू भाऊ और लकड़ी का काम करने वाले रामदास

भाऊ दोनों ही अपने काम में माहिर थे। ढाडू भाऊ ने बिना किसी रस्सी की मदद के सुन्दर व सीधी भीतें बाँधी और रामदास भाऊ ने हर किसी प्रकार की लकड़ी का इस्तेमाल करके घर को एक रूप दिया। रामदास भाऊ रोज सवेरे खेत में घूमने जाते, इधर-उधर की लकड़ी के टुकड़े, खराब पड़ी बैलगाड़ी आदि जो भी दिखता, सब एक जगह इकट्ठा कर लेते। और सवेर उसके सामने ध्यान लगाकर बैठते। कौनसी लकड़ी किस काम में इस्तेमाल होगी, यह तय कर काम में लग जाते। मैं देखती थी कि कई टेढ़ी-मेढ़ी लकड़ियों को वे छत का आधार बनाने के लिए इस्तेमाल करते, तो कभी छेद पड़ी पट्टियों से खिड़कियाँ सजाते। मैं थोड़ा नाराज होकर कहती – “ऐसी लकड़ी क्यों इस्तेमाल करते हो?” तो वे हँसकर कहते – “खिड़की बन्द होती है ना, इसमें हवा तो नहीं आती। तो बस!”

धीरे-धीरे उनके काम की ओर देखते हुए मेरे मन में विचार आया कि यही है भारतीय संस्कृति। जो कुछ हमारे पास उपलब्ध है, उसी से सौन्दर्य और सुविधाएँ खड़ी करना। वह हमें सिखाती है कि जो लोग हमारे पास आते हैं, उनके बारे में भी हम यही सोच रखें। ये दोष, ये गुण ना सोचते हुए हर आदमी की क्या क्षमताएँ और विशेषताएँ हैं, यह समझ लें और वे अपना लें।

ऐसा है हमारा मिट्टी का घर, जिसने हमें खूब सिखाया और आनन्द दिया। जिसे देखकर मैं गुनगुनाती हूँ – “एक बंगला बनाया न्यारा, मिट्टी और पेड़ों से घिरा प्यारा।”

वसन्त का मिट्टी पर बहुत ही स्नेह है, जो हमारे मजाक का विषय है। कोई भी घर बांध रहा हो, तो वसन्त उसे पकड़कर सुनाने लगता है – “घर तो मिट्टी का ही अच्छा! गर्मी में ठण्डा और सर्दी में गरम! और मिट्टी को फिर-फिर से इस्तेमाल कर

सकते हैं। मिट्टी के घर दो सौ – तीन सौ साल तक टिकते हैं और सीमेन्ट के घर 50 साल में ही गिराने पड़ते हैं। और उसका भंगार भी किसी काम में नहीं लिया जा सकता है। सीमेन्ट-गिट्टी के लिए हम कितनी ही टेकरियाँ खत्म कर दे रहे हैं।” बेचारा सामने वाला चुपचाप ये बातें सुन लेता है और हम मुस्कराने लगते हैं।

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मेरा मस्त परिवार

मैं अपने दो बच्चों और पति के साथ अपने मम्मी-पापा के घर में रहती हूँ। मेरे पति मार्बल का काम करते हैं। हमारे घर में हम कुल 12 लोग शामिल रहते हैं। साथ ही खाना बनाते हैं, साथ ही खाते हैं। इतने लोग इकट्ठा होने के कारण हमारे घर में नित-नई चीजें बनती रहती हैं, खासकर खाने में। मेरे पापा को खाना बनाने का बहुत शौक है। वे खाने में कई प्रकार की चीजें बनाते हैं। उनसे मुझे काफी उर्जा मिलती है।

मैंने अपने घर में जब पहली बार बिना तेल का खाना बनाया, तो मेरा पूरा परिवार बहुत खुश हुआ। मैंने अपने घर में एक जीमण भी रखा। उसमें मेरे परिवार के सब लोग तो थे ही, साथ ही मेरे पड़ौसी और मेरी सहेलियाँ भी थीं। इस जीमण का असर यह हुआ कि मेरे एक पड़ौसी, जिनको डायबिटीज की बीमारी थी, वे खाने में खूब सलाद एवं अंकुरित अन्न खाने लगे, तो उनको इस बीमारी में काफी राहत मिली। मेरा बेटा भी अंकुरित मूग का सलाद खाना खूब पसन्द करता है।

मैं अपने घर और मोहल्ले में कार्यशालाएँ भी करती हूँ। इन कार्यशालाओं में बच्चों से लेकर बुजुर्गों तक सभी उम्र के लोग आते हैं। हम कबाड़ की चीजों से अलग-अलग नई चीजें बनाते



हैं, जैसे – नारियल के खोल से गहने, मसालादानी, पेपरमेशे की टोकरी-बाल्टी आदि। पेपरमेशे की कार्यशाला में मेरे मोहल्ले की 75 साल की एक बुजुर्ग महिला ने अपने टूटे हुए बॉस की टोकरी को तार से बाँधकर उसको फिर से पेपरमेशे से लीप लिया। मैं इतनी खुश हुई कि उसने इस उम्र में भी इतना जल्दी किसी पुरानी चीज को एक नया रूप दे दिया। फिर मैंने उनसे बात की तो उन्होंने मुझे बताया कि बचपन में वो बहुत सी चीजें बनाती थीं, जैसे – धान की कोठियाँ। वो देर रात तक जागकर भी ऐसे काम करती थीं। पर अब वो उम्र की वजह से और परिवार का सहयोग नहीं मिलने के कारण यह काम नहीं करते हैं।

मेरे बेटे मयूर को संगीत का बहुत शौक है। वो घर के बर्तनों – बाल्टी, चम्मच, प्लेट आदि को बजाता रहता है। साथ में उसके मामा भी शुरू हो जाते हैं। फिर यह थोड़ी देर चलता रहता है, तो मेरे घर का माहौल एकदम बदल जाता है। चलता टीवी बन्द हो जाता है और घर के सभी लोग मस्ती करना शुरू कर देते हैं। इस चक्कर में मयूर बर्तन भी फोड़ देता है। मैंने उसको बजाने के लिए एक ढोलक लाकर दी है, लेकिन वो उसको नहीं बजाता है! उसे तो वो ही बर्तनों का संगीत अच्छा लगता है।

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शादी हो तो ऐसी?

जब किसी के विवाह का निमंत्रण आता है तो मेरे मानस पटल पर एक दृश्य उभर आता है वो ही बैण्ड बाजों पर फिल्मी गाने, पटाखों का शोर व साथ में दम घुटाता हुआ धुआँ, वो ही बफेट गिद्ध भोजन, वो ही थोथा दिखावा व चकाचौंध। मेरी शादी में ये सब तड़क भड़क नहीं था। सादगी के सात फेरे हुए बैठ के खाना खाया, विवाह के पारम्परिक गीत व पहेलियों का आदान प्रदान बस शादी हो गई। ऐसे विवाह आप सोच रहे होंगे के आज के आधुनिक दिखावे के युग में संभव नहीं है। लेकिन ऐसा हो रहा है लोग ऐसे सुनहरे मौके बना रहे हैं और अपने विवाह को भी यादगार बना रहे

हैं। हमारे मित्र मिथुन ने बहुत से विवाह बड़े शहरों जैसे मुम्बई व अहमदाबाद में कराये हैं जिनमें न कोई प्लास्टिक, न बिजली, न तड़क-भड़क होती है। खास बात के ये शादियाँ प्राकृतिक तरह से ही आयोजित की जाती हैं जिनमें बर्तन भी तांबे के होते हैं। रोशनी भी दियों की, दुल्हा-दुल्हन के कपड़े भी खादी के और सारी सजावट ताजे फुल पत्तियों की। शादी का सारा मनोरंजन व संगीत भी पारम्परिक होता है। मनोरंजन के लिये कठपूतली व जादूगर का खेल आदी। यानि कि विवाह भी जीरो वेस्ट के साथ। कोई कचरा नहीं। कोई प्रदूषण नहीं। आज के समय में निश्चय ही बड़ी बात है कि ग्लोबल वार्मिंग जैसी उभरती हुई समस्याओं में कैसे ये छोटे मौके प्रकृति के

हीत में हो सकते हैं। इस मशीन भावना वाले जमाने में अपने रिश्तों में प्रेम, प्रकृति व सादगी को महसूस करने के लिये ऐसे ही कुछ कदम उठाने ही पड़ेंगे।

मिथुन अहमदाबाद में जैविक खाद्यान की दुकान चलाता है जिसमें रासायन विहिन खाद्य सामग्री ही वो बेचता है। अगर आप भी अपने जीवन में ऐसे यादगार पल संजोना चाहते हैं तो ऐसे आयोजनों हेतु मिथुन से सम्पर्क कर सकते हैं:-

मिथुन शाह, 5 तेजपाल सोसायटी, पालड़ी, अहमदाबाद, गुजरात
फोन 079-26622022

पन्नालाल पटेल, उदयपुर
<shikshantar@yahoo.com>

बिन टी बी का सुकून

दो साल पहले हमारे परिवार ने तय किया कि अपने घर की टीवी के सेटलाइट केबल को हटा देंगे। क्योंकि हम सब मिलजुलकर ज्यादा प्राकृतिक एवं कम यान्त्रिक जीवन जीने का अनुभव करना चाहते थे। हम करॉची में रहते हैं, जो पाकिस्तान का एक बहुत बड़ा केन्द्र है, जहाँ हर तरह का विकास – खासकर के मीडिया एवं टेक्नोलॉजी का; तुरन्त अपना लिया जाता है। सरकार की मीडिया नीति ने भी निजी चैनलों को बहुत बढ़ावा दिया है। ऐसे समय में बहुत मुश्किल है ऐसा परिवार पाना, जो इन सब चीजों से बचा हुआ है।

हमारा परिवार इस्लाम के शिया सम्प्रदाय का हिस्सा है। हम हर शाम को जमातखाने में भाग लेते हैं। मैं एक संयुक्त परिवार में रहता हूँ, जिसमें मेरे माता-पिता, पत्नी व दो बच्चे साथ रहते हैं। मैं और मेरी पत्नी ऐसे समय में बड़े हुए, जब पाकिस्तान में केवल एक ही टीवी चैनल था। टीवी आने के बाद हम सब घर पर रोज शाम को हिन्दुस्तानी नाटक, फिल्में व गाने देखते थे। केबल टीवी तो हमारे घर में 1998 में आया। तब से हमने टीवी पर क्रिकेट जैसे खेल व अंग्रेजी की फिल्में देखना शुरू किया। चूँकि हम एक संयुक्त परिवार में रहते हैं, तो सबको तय करना पड़ता था कि कौनसा कार्यक्रम कौन कब देख सकता है। इसके पीछे यही सोच थी कि हमारे पास मनोरंजन का और कोई साधन नहीं था तथा सुकून पाने के लिए व जागरुक इंसान बनने के लिए टीवी देखना जरूरी है। वैसे तो हमारे आसपास बहुत समुद्री तट, पार्क, आस-पड़ौस व रिश्तेदार हैं, पर हम उन सबमें असुरक्षित महसूस करते हैं। शायद इसीलिए, क्योंकि टीवी ने हमें समाज से काट दिया है।

मैं मानता हूँ कि मुख्यधारा मीडिया ने हमारे व्यवहार व सोच को पूरी तरह नियन्त्रित कर लिया है। इसीलिए सबसे पहले मैंने अपने स्वयं के टीवी देखने की आदत पर चिन्तन किया और उसे कम करने की कोशिश की। मैंने टीवी के कार्यक्रमों को भी और गम्भीर रूप से ऑब्जर्व करना शुरू किया। तब से मुझे लगने लगा कि टीवी हमारी इंसानियत को खत्म कर रहा है। इसी मुद्दे को लेकर मैंने अपने परिवार में भी बातचीत शुरू की। मुझे यह देखकर बहुत दुःख होने लगा था कि जब भी मैं थक-हार कर ऑफिस से घर वापस आता था, तो सब टीवी के कार्यक्रमों में इतने मशगूल होते थे कि मुझ पर कोई ध्यान भी नहीं देते थे।

फिर मैंने टीवी पर आ रहे विज्ञापनों पर भी ध्यान देने लगा, तो पाया कि वो भी बच्चों को उपभोगी बनाने पर खास जोर दे रहे थे। घर आकर मैं जब अपनी बेटी को दूसरे कमरे में खेलने या

भ्रमण करने के लिए ले जाने की कोशिश करता, तो मुझे महसूस होता कि वो एक ऐसी दुनिया में घुसी जा रही थी, जो उसके व्यक्तित्व व विकास के बिल्कुल विपरीत था। वो बहुत देर तक जिद करती कि मुझे टीवी ही देखना है। जब मेरे घर में हमारे दूसरे बच्चे ने जन्म लिया, तब हमने यह तय किया कि हम टीवी को उसके लिए एक बेबी-सिटर या पुरस्कार की चीज नहीं बनाएँगे। हमारे पड़ौस में तो यह हाल है कि बच्चे खाना खाने के लिए तभी तैयार होते हैं, जब उनके लिए टीवी चलाया जाता है। इसलिए हमने तय किया कि हमें केबल टीवी को हटाना ही है।

पहले तो मैंने यह निर्णय एक तानाशाही के रूप में ही किया था तथा अपने परिवार को 6 महीने के लिए केबल टीवी को बन्द करने की सूचना दी। फिर मैंने अपनी दिनचर्या को बदला तथा रोज शाम को घर आकर दो-तीन घण्टे अपने बच्चों के साथ खेलना शुरू किया। कहानी कहना-सुनना भी एक महत्त्वपूर्ण गतिविधि बन गई। कभी हम नाचते, कविताएँ बनाते और कुछ लिखते। हमने पियानो और कम्प्यूटर से भी खेलना शुरू किया। रविवार को हमने किसी किताबघर या पार्क में भी जाना शुरू किया। इसके फलस्वरूप धीरे-धीरे हमारे घर में भी एक छोटा-सा पुस्तकालय खुल गया। सबसे ज्यादा खुशी की एवं रोचक बात तो यह है कि हमें किसी भी दिन कोई टाइम-टेबल बनाने की जरूरत नहीं पड़ी। जो चीज जब मन आता, साथ मिलकर करते; जिसमें लड़ना-झगड़ना, रोना-चिल्लाना व कभी-कभी बिल्कुल शान्त समय बिताना भी शामिल था।

दो साल बाद भी आज हम इस बात को याद करते हुए खुश होते हैं कि हमने बहुत अच्छा निर्णय लिया। इस दरमियान हमारे परिवार के रिश्ते बहुत मजबूत हुए हैं।

— नूरुद्दीन मर्चेट, करॉची, पाकिस्तान

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FLT Gathering at Tapovan Ashram, Udaipur
April 2007

Experiencing a farm

We all eat moong dal in our houses. But did you ever think where this moong comes from and how much hard work farmers have to do to grow it? I had never thought about it, but now I know how much hard work we need to do to grow a crop. I learnt a lot about crops from my three-day stay in a village called Ladegaon.

My friend Renu comes from a family of farmers. When I and my mother went to visit them, they were busy with the moong harvest.

I helped Renu's family with the harvesting. The first day I was able to work for only one hour. The next day I worked for three hours. In all, I had plucked three kgs of moong beans. It was a very tiring job and my back was aching.

I learnt that a labourer earns just Rs 9 for plucking the same quantity of moong as I had plucked. In the city, children like me spend Rs 10 or 20 on junk food without a single thought. We are constantly pestering our parents



for money. But in the village I realized how tough it is to earn money.

I also learnt that farmers have to work very hard to grow the food that we eat, and sometimes waste.

The experience in the village has taught me a lot. I have decided to make some changes in my life.

I am going to be much more disciplined than I was, and will try to not waste food. I am also going to try to live a simpler life.

- Shuchita Prakriti, Nagpur
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Vijaya Nani's Tasty-Healthy Treats

Stuffed Pancakes

Ingredients:

1 Glass Raw Rice (unpolished)

½ Coconut

Soak for 3 hours, grind finely with coconut. Keep overnight (or a couple of hours). This batter should be slightly thinner than the usual dosa-mix.

To make the pancakes:

Heat Tava. Reduce flame. Smear tava with a cut onion a couple of times. Make thin pancakes.

Filling Ingredients:

6 Pineapple slices

1 Banana

¼ cup Jaggery

12-16 dates, Cinnamon powder, Nuts

To make the filling:

Steam pineapple and dates with jaggery. Cool and add mashed banana. Mix well. Garnish with nuts and cinnamon powder. The traditional *Modak* filling can also be used. Add filling to the cooled pancake and roll...

Peanut Sauce Salad

Ingredients:

Cabbage, Tomato, Potato, Cucumber, Carrot, French Beans and Capsicum - all chopped and cubed.

For the sauce:

Roasted Peanuts - 100 grams

Roasted chilli powder, jaggery, soaked tamarind, salt to taste

To make the salad:

Cube the vegetables. Steam potato and french beans. Mix all the ingredients for the sauce. Add a little water and blend into a paste. Mix the sauce well with all the veggies. Can also cut the veggies into sticks and serve with the sauce as a dip.

for more ideas, contact:
The Health Awareness Center, Mumbai
<thacindia@yahoo.com>

A Life of Non-Violence

For some time now, our family has been exploring an 'alternate' lifestyle. After having been in the corporate world for many years, we have concluded that there is more to life than this kind of 'good life'. As part of this exploration, we have been visiting people who are doing things differently, to understand *what* they are doing and *how* and *why*, to learn from their experiences and see how their journey has been and their own analysis of it thus far.

A few months back, **we went to Gujarat to meet Dhirendaji and Smitaji** <telephone # 02640-291-173>, something that we had been planning for quite some time. They earlier lived in Ahmedabad. Both were teaching in a college there. Dhirendraji was an engineer and Smitaji did her masters in Science. Both were troubled by the hustle-bustle, pollution, lack of organic food, meaningless-ness of city life and decided to buy a land in a village and live there and produce their own food and live with nature. They believed strongly in the ideals of non-violence and understood that the lives they were living earlier (as in the case with any modern urban life) directly or indirectly involved exploitation of other human beings and of nature in general. This troubled them a great deal.

They moved to Sakwa village about 20 yrs ago. Slowly, they learnt about farming. Dhirendraji had no prior knowledge on this whatsoever. I was surprised to learn this, given the fact that they are doing such a successful job growing completely organic food. People from far and near go to them to learn about farming. They grow all of their food except sugar-cane and salt.

They live on two acres of land out of which they cultivate about 1 acre; the other 1 acre has their house, shed, pond, well, and lots of fruit trees and medicinal trees/ plants. They eat good food (of course! it's all organic, from their land), very healthy. They lead healthy lives with ample physical exercise as they do farming by themselves. They eat four or five different kinds of grains and three or four varieties of lentils (daal) along with umpteen vegetables and fruits.

If they fall sick, they know how to treat themselves through home remedies and medicines they make at home, some of them from herbs that they grow. A common acquaintance told us how once when Smitaji's fingers got

crushed in a wheat grinding machine (*atta chakki*), they just took care of it at home instead of going to the doctor. Whew! Dhirendraji also told us that once while he was using the axe, it fell on his hand, affecting his nerves. He just took care of this at home. All this requires a deep conviction and faith in one's own treatment!

They have 2 kids: 20 yr old Vishven and 16 yr old Bhargav. Initially, they started going to the village school, but found it too boring. So, they were home-schooled. We could meet only Vishven as Bhargav was off to Vigyan Ashram time as a trainer. They have both done a course in Rural Development from there. Both the boys want to explore a bit more of the world and then decide what they want to do, although both of them like farming. Vishven is also working on becoming fluent in English so it doesn't become a handicap in his dealing with the 'modern' folks.

All of these people seemed versatile, they seemed to know how to do just about anything e.g. from mending the umbrella, to fixing their shoes, to making their own chappals (sandals), their own house, their own go-bar-gas plant, and using this for kitchen, to making soaps and sharbats, to doing any electrical work, mechanical work, working on the lathe, welding, making their own parabolic solar cooker, making their own tools and machines. It was amazing to see them.

Our son Maanas loved being there (he has gotten used to going to such places now). He loved their cow Ganga (and as he said when we returned "Mumma, I miss Ganga"). In the mornings, MJ and I would help the family in whatever was required in the fields. Maanas would sometimes join in with great enthusiasm, but soon the heat and the humidity would bring him indoors to the table fan. Dhirendraji gave him a small axe which he used with great gusto.

Dhirendraji is very creative. Although his own kids are grown-up now, he knew just how to entertain kids. He would come up with all sorts of creative games which he played with Maanas with great enthusiasm. He seemed to take great joy in it.

In such places, Maanas never needs his toys. There is so much to play in nature. One day, when it rained, Vishven, MJ and Maanas just stood in the rain and were in bliss.

- Rashmi Goyal, Bangalore
<rashmi.goyal@gmail.com>

Thai Noodles and Mud Bricks

We came back from Thailand from a Natural Building workshop in November last year. Dev, Tara and I really enjoyed the week we spent on a farm near Chiang Mai...we learnt various earthen building techniques, like adobe, cob, wattle and daub and earth bag. More than that, we just simply loved playing in the mud, enjoying the simple community life. I came across <www.kleiwerks.com> that led me/us to Thailand, in my search for completing the building of our house. (I had asked the 'ecological architect' to leave, as she was not really interested in the project; it was just another job that brought in money for her.) It was an easy decision to make as we are a 'homeschooling/unschooling family' so school holidays and vacations did not 'decide' for us when we could take off and do what we wanted.



I was amazed to find such an interest in natural building. And even though there are architects who are seemingly dedicated to building natural houses FOR people, the courses I saw offered on the website seemed more hands-on, more fun. They seemed to be having a lot of fun, and there was a lot less dependency on architects and the team of builders, who usually seem to just take over. At the bottom of a list of 10 reasons to attend a natural building workshop was, "If not anything else, just come and have fun and play in the mud!!"

I did not know quite what to expect when we arrived at Pun Pun organic farm, north of Chiang Mai. But we came away with a feeling of empowerment, that we could literally, with our own hands and feet, build small homes, that we lovingly can sculpt using common sense...

As Jon Jandai, one of the founding members of this farm and a leading earthen bulder in Thailand said, of the less privileged people in his country, *"It's the way to solve their problems now. They want to solve their problems, and they want to do it together. With adobe, if a lot of you build together, it's faster and more fun. It's the old tradition that we have almost lost now, because people have to work for money. When they work for money, they will not work together like that. But now we take back the old tradition to work together and help each other. If five people each want to build a house, they all build this house together and then move to another house, then another..."*

Now that was something that left an impression on me. Dev and Tara were the only children at the workshop.

This was their first building experience, a non-institutionalised lesson in engineering, design and architecture. We came back to Bangalore, and soon after, on my parents' farm, Tara and Dev gathered some of the children of farm hands and made about 50 adobe bricks. We played and splashed in the squishy mud, and sneaked a few bucketfuls of the feed for the cows. Mixed it all up!

We did not get further than that, as we did not manage to garner enough interest and people. But since then, having met folks from Shikshantar and others at Van Vadi, our interet has been revived, and we plan on building a small cob guest room and earthen oven...

Natural Building offers long-lasting solutions to many of today's ecological and social ills. Referring to a number of durable time-tested construction methods, Natural Building uses local clays, sand, straw, stone, bamboo and other abundant and recycled materials. Because Natural Building is easy to learn, it also empowers people to reclaim their dignity and basic human right to healthy, affordable, beautiful and ecologically-sound shelter. Coupled with permaculture, whole-systems design and renewable energy, Natural Building has the propensity to provide accessible long-term solutions that will last for generations.

Tara says, "It felt sad to leave Pun Pun, after a week filled with fun and meeting different people, but it felt good to know that I could build and sculpt a house with a group of people!" When we came back to Bangalore, and made 50 bricks with the help of local children, it was our first effort, the first step...

I hope to build a natural adobe and cob house in the future. Anyone interested? Please contact me at <tarasana94@yahoo.co.uk>. I would love to hear from folks of any age who are interested in natural building and community living. Here is a link I really like that will give you an idea of adobe and cob building <www.housealive.org>

- Tara, Dev and Amita Sharma, Bangalore
<theorganicdream@yahoo.com>

Please share your experiences of 'alternative vacations' with us!

Continuing the Co-Learning Conversation...

Vidhi Jain and her extended family published "Co-Learning with Kanku" in August 2007 (available in English and Hindi at www.swaraj.org/shikshantar/familieslearning.htm). The booklet shares some experiences with five-year-old Kanku, who is building her own learning web. The booklet generated lots of interesting conversations. We are pleased to share some of them with you:

I am very happy that someone has what it takes to negate all the myths and compulsions of conventional education. (wondering here what does it take? Not really courage, but perception, seeing things as they are). And it seems from what is described that Kanku is living proof of the rightness of your actions. She is growing up as a child NEEDS to grow up; in a non-institutionalized way, with the freedom to explore what interests her, the freedom to make real relationships. I love the part of her just wandering into houses!

And behind it all, one senses that one factor, without which all efforts to produce "a different sort of education" are bound to fail; that is, the factor of love. What a tragedy that overwhelmingly, children are brought up in a culture of separateness: my house, my family, my property, my ambitions, my achievements, my country, my beliefs and so on...

- Clive Elwell, Australia

In my daughters' 'holistic' school, we pay twice the fees other school charge because we only have half the number of children in every class - and we thought all of this would be worth it because with fewer children in the class, each child's potential and differing abilities would emerge and be encouraged to bloom. I can't believe how naive I was!!! The final goal of almost every educational institution in India is to produce children who are successful in the 'mainstream' (a word that everyone uses but nobody ever defines). What's worse is that 99% of parents want this more than anything. So the school pushes them along this path - sometimes with kindness, but most often with criticism and intolerance for anything that doesn't fit in. Sadly, a 'good' teacher is an exception, never the rule. The children slowly lose their natural abilities and the frustration of this breeds so much violence in them. We will end up with a generation of achievers who will perpetuate all the misery in the world because they were not taught better. Warm regards and

my great admiration for all those who didn't get sucked into the system. When the world becomes a better place, it will be because of people like you.

- Iona Sinha, India

Thank you for sharing Kanku's learning adventures. I wish I had my hands in mud, paint, thread and prose. I wish I could enter people's homes and not feel embarrassed to ask for *halwa* or *chhaach*, or inquire about *bakri ke bachhe*. I want to climb trees, steal mangoes, and not worry about anyone's wrath, or spill the flour and mess the soup and still know all will be well. You're inspiring me to think it's possible and probable, and I must be braver in this life. The consequences are all mine.

- Rahul Vaswani, Oman

It was absolutely delightful to read through co-learning with Kanku, and the idea of co-learning for elders is even more challenging.. It is the adults who are having to unlearn and relearn without being obtrusive and directing. It does not matter if we are adults with degrees, books, we can be liberated through our children and grandchildren, an opportunity to deconstruct our brains and reconstruct. Frankly, it does not matter where the learning takes place provided that it is

a priority, that it is conscious and primary to our growth at all times. Children grow furiously in terms of their brains/emotions at early years, and thus adults need to experience that with/alongside them when they are young without worrying about 'putting them right', etc. etc. The paradigm of education is so bogus as it currently stands that it needs a rethink totally.

- Baela Jamil, Lahore

For me, Co-learning with Kanku is a sincere effort of getting involved with our children in a way that flourishes our own humanity. The sharing of this experience was not intended to scale it up or project it as a model that has to be adopted by others, but it simply shows us different ways of asserting our freedom and living, interacting, growing and flourishing together.

I believe that all of us possess the same wealth of resources, wisdom and richness around us, but the dominant way of seeing/perceiving things has made these resources invisible for us. We are thus unable to feel them, engage with them and get our own sense of meaning from them...

- Raziq Fahim, Balochistan



INVITATIONS FOR EVOLVING LEARNING COMMUNITIES

CHILDREN HERE AND

NOW is an experimental natural learning center created in 2006 with the intention to look into and explore new ways of growing our children into a life in the 21st century! In laying the foundation for our children becoming self reliant, realizing their human potential and **TRUSTING** in what they perceive is right, there are several areas of focus in the program. There is the possibility of:

- growing and cultivating food and exploring intelligent and healthy lifestyle;
- practicing yoga and meditation;
- exploring sensory and motor competence;
- expression through arts and crafts, color and music;
- movement awareness;
- experimenting with visualization, self-healing, awareness of energetic fields and the abilities to read these energies and colors.

For our Facilitators and Volunteers, this does not require previous experience, but definitely the prerequisite is an interest to learn and explore alongside the children. We would like to invite children with their parents to explore and experience the possibilities. This meeting place, open on a daily base, intends to set a platform for children to take responsibility of their own learning process. Together we can explore questions, find answers and support each other to raise children without the factory-school.

- Dariya Avantario, Goa
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KUMBHAM ORGANIC FARM

What do we mean by 'alternative education'?

It has to be an alternative to the present structure of society and/or human mind. We have to think what the motive of modern education is. It is all based on material success: status, power, fame, money and success. So the question is not whether we can do it at home or in a school, where there is not

much pressure on a child. But can we help the child to question all this and go against the tide? Can there be an education where this thrust on individual attainment is not so central? The schools take away children from actual situations. The child is confined to a classroom to hear the descriptions of reality and form concepts. From concepts and methods we are conditioned to approach life. But when we observe a natural learning process like somebody learning cooking in a traditional house, or the children learning skills in craft community, it is not through instructions and theories they learn. There, learning and doing are a unitary process. Observation, listening and doing are important.

We have an organic farm and have provided a guest house for visitors. One room is generally occupied by volunteers from the west and the other by occasional visitors. We are inviting volunteers to establish a lasting relationship with peoples of different places. Also for the education of our child age eight who is not going to school. So we will be happy to accommodate other interested children also here <www.kumbham.in/organicfarming.html>

- Suman, Kerala <sradhaa@yahoo.co.in>

SUNO YAAR!!!

We need your contributions in the form of essays, artwork, critical feedback, interviews, poems, healthy recipes, healing tips, questions, book reviews, website reviews, film reviews, jokes, interesting people/places to visit, cartoons, love, etc.etc.etc.

Thanks! for your contributions to the art of this issue:
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Sameer Parvez (p.6), Chandresh (p.7), Minu Parvez (p.15)
Anjali, Mayur, Guddi Prajapat (p.16)

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