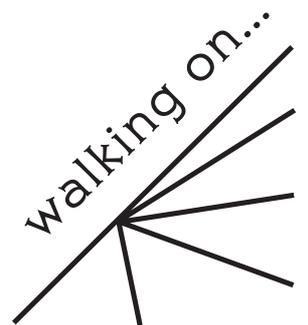


swapathgami



making
our own paths of
learning and living
april 2005



walkout challenge day

Walking out from an institution, dehumanizing societal norm or dysfunctional mindset usually isn't easy. Sometimes we find the courage to walk-out because the dysfunction is so great, or because we're passionate about being the change we want to see in the world. This strength isn't always there, however; sometimes the desire to walk out exists, but not the confidence and courage to make it happen. A little help is needed, a little encouragement for those of us generating new ways of living.

Walkout Challenge Day is when walkouts help each other overcome the fear and/or inertia that's limited their walk-out/walk-on journey. On April 6, 75 years to the day since M. K. Gandhi defied the British by making his own salt, walkouts in several sites throughout the world will host a walkout celebration. At each celebration, a handful of people who have declared in advance will embrace a new path and officially "walk-out" from something they've thus far not had the courage or confidence to reject. Gandhi marched 24 days so he could walk-out from British salt laws, a simple act of nonconformity that changed his own life and the world. Walkout Challenge Day continues the tradition. (Note: The Salt March is being re-created again this year. <www.saltmarch.org.in>)



We envision these celebrations as walkout parties, perhaps a potluck lunch, perhaps public commitments/speeches by those who are walking-out/walking-on, perhaps presentations from those in the community who help and strongly support walkouts, perhaps a buddy system to encourage walkouts after the event, perhaps all or none of the above. To learn more about Walkout Challenge Day, or to host a celebration in your neck of the woods, contact Peter Kowalke <shikshantar@kowalke.info>



families learning together

Where has your family embraced the self-created instead of the readymade? What learning resources inspire your family? How can you share your skills and ideas with other families? First organized at the World Social Forum (Mumbai, 2004), Families Learning Together is a network of families who believe that learning is a family activity and who want to co-create new ways of organic living. The Network will hold its first gathering from May 26-29, 2005, in Panchgani, Maharashtra. A special emphasis will be placed on families who have chosen not to send their children to school. Interested families should contact Vidhi Jain <vidhi@swaraj.org> for more details.

the swapathgami network

Swapathgami refers to those individuals who self-identify as *walkouts-walkons*. In contrast to the labels of 'dropout' or 'failure', the Network sees the decision to rise out of institutionalized structures, as a positive choice to reclaim control over one's own learning and life. Walking out and walking on is a chance to 'be the change we want to see in the world' by realizing each individual's power to co-create the world. As people who make our own paths, we engage with society from our own perspectives and, in the process, re-configure the relationships we have with the mainstream. The Network has four main kinds of activities:

Learning Journeys – to connect and learn with innovative thinker-doers in different places.

Celebrations/Gatherings/Public Dialogues – to intensely explore challenges/opportunities among walkouts, build strong relationships for future collaboration, and enhance the public discourse.

Communications – to share our stories and experiences, in print and on the web..

Walkouts Sub-Groups – to make new experiments and possibilities (film, art, music, organic farming).

Check out our website <www.swaraj.org/shikshantar/walkoutsnetwork.htm> for details of our experiences. We invite you in co-creating what comes next...

what is something you want to walk out of and you haven't been able to ... yet?

"The urge to buy instead of make or experiment. The convenience of buying a gift, a bag, a dish of pasta, a dress. I convince myself that I don't have the time or the talent to make any of these things."
- Pooja Hiranandani, Bangalore, India
<verislava_53@yahoo.com>

"An intellect-dominated life. I see that ways of thinking are not just what you think but also thinking itself. I've given big decisions over to intuition, but on a daily basis I want to engage with the world in a non-mental way. I'm not against the intellect, but I see its limitations."
- Suprabha Seshan, Wayanad, India
<gbsanctuary@vsnl.net>

Some eight months before I graduated, I landed a plum job in a company that promised a lot of learning opportunities and of course, big money. Though I was quite happy about it then, my view of the world totally flipped in the one year I had on my hands, before I actually joined them. The last thing I wanted to be doing with my life was to be working on the shop floor or the assembly line, making trucks and buses.

With a rough idea of what to expect and a heavy heart, I decided to accept the job as the money was good and the financial situation at home didn't really give me much of a choice on that one. Its been four months now since I joined, and things here turned out to be worse than expected. The company's value-system is totally antithetical to that of mine. Profitability is their prime motive and everything comes after that. Their functioning is based on exploitation both of workers and natural resources. As somebody who believes in treating his fellow beings with love, respect and dignity it's hard to digest a lot of stuff there. The rigid hierarchies, pyramidal power structures and all the red tape don't help either.

The one good thing about being in a place like that is one gets to see firsthand what industrial capitalism is all about. It's not like this place is full of monsters waiting to exploit everything that comes their way for profit; there are in fact many genuinely nice people who feel

they are hopelessly stuck within the larger quagmire called 'modern society'. It's been very illuminating interacting with them, and it only reinforces my determination to get out of there soon.

Some of the experiences on the shopfloor and the assembly line have been particularly disturbing. I once met a gentleman who has been doing the same operation day in and day out for the last 20 years, on a dangerously malfunctioning machine that was more than 30 years old. Another time I came across somebody just as old as I am, who was working for 17 hours a day on the shopfloor for a paltry Rs.3000 a month. While I just sit inside air-conditioned rooms for five or six hours a day and sometimes get paid eight times as much – all because I have a lousy piece of paper that says I am qualified and he doesn't. It hurts to be a parasite.

Every day has become a struggle between what I do and what I believe in. As the main breadwinner of a family, whose financial situation isn't very encouraging, I can't just afford to just blindly chuck the job. Neither do I want to do something that would be very irresponsible of a son and a brother. But, nor do I want to be doing things that are irresponsible of a fellow being. I am stuck and am actively looking for ways to get out of it. I hope I succeed.

- Naveen Kumar, Chennai, India
<nainathechamp@yahoo.com>

What is walking out and walking on? How do we make our own paths in a world where so much is readymade? How can we unlearn the many lies we have been taught in schools, colleges, jobs, mass media? How can we explore our deepest potentials and fullest selves? There is no single answer, no silver-bullet solution. Here is a platform for people around the world who are interested in these questions and more...

why did you walk out of ... ?

the world bank

Almost two years ago, I left the World Bank – an international financial institution advancing market capitalism through policies and projects. I joined the Bank as a skeptic with clear ideological differences from its growth-oriented paradigm, but with a generous dose of optimism about the ability of people to change. I believed that if people became aware of the direct or indirect consequences of their actions, they would take steps to change their institutions. I wanted to expose the inherent contradictions of the dominant System and its basic underlying assumptions, such as: an unwavering belief in economic growth and more personal consumption as the ultimate aspiration of all people; the role of the Market, reinforced by Western science and technology, as the engine of economic growth; and the reduction of nature, knowledge, well-being, relationships, traditions, etc. to 'capital' or 'assets' for this growth equation.



I walked out of the World Bank because the space for open dialogue on the above assumptions and on alternative models was highly constrained. Whereas I was able to open up some space for reflection in my work and with the people close to me, I was less able to confront the mainstream development paradigm in which staff members operated. For example, my former colleagues were unwilling to question the singular focus on growth as the panacea for poverty.

Moreover, the structural limitations of World Bank operations affected me. Its policies and project loans are mediated through borrowing country governments only. I did not have the chance to help redefine and support creative approaches to development in collaboration with local communities.

Walking out meant coming to terms with the marginal progress I made in truly reshaping the institution from within. It also meant facing social expectations and pressures. I received several raised eyebrows on the decision to leave a tenured position at the World Bank for a small non-profit organization called Bank Information Center <www.bicusa.org>. BIC partners with groups in developing countries to challenge the World Bank, regional development banks, and the IMF to promote social and economic justice and ecological sustainability. Working at BIC requires considerably more entrepreneurship, creativity, and independence, which has made my decision to leave the Bank even more meaningful and gratifying.

- Manish Bapna, DC, USA <mbapna@care2.com>

a newspaper

I viewed journalism as a profession of integrity, which had an obligation to society at large. But while working at the Times, I often felt that I was becoming a part of the system that we were trying to break. All the discussions in college about media monopoly and its negative consequences were now very real and staring me in the face. Their priority was profit and I felt that the media couldn't be run solely on this objective. But at The Times of India, where ads made up more than 50% of the paper, news is given a backseat.

For instance, a friend and I were writing an article about the tourism police in Mumbai who were rather ineffectual at that time. Sponsoring and setting up tourist information kiosks and training the tourism police was the responsibility of a well-known travel agency. When they got wind that The Times was doing a piece on the tourism police, they realized that they would be portrayed in a bad light. As powerful advertisers at the newspaper, they struck a bargain with the editors. The paper had to assure them that there would be no mention of the travel agency in the article. In return they would continue advertising!

When our immediate superior told us of this, we were disgusted. The arm-twisting tactics of the advertisers and the subservient behaviour of The Times to money power had once again prevented news that is important to the people from being published. Our story was not major or groundbreaking, yet the flutter it created was substantial.

The Times also had a disgusting habit of having a sexy woman on their masthead every day. This supposedly hooked readers! Was it such a bad paper that it needed Barbie dolls to sell it? I did not want to be a part of an organization where the 'target' is the elite, whose boat is never to be rocked so that they can continue with their cozy consumerist lifestyle.

When I told my friends and family that I wanted to leave, everyone thought that I was being impulsive and irrational. Were I to work with The Times for longer, my resume would look impressive. I must admit that I had initial reservations too; working at an NGO would never pay like a corporate.

But today I have no regrets. After leaving, I joined Centre for Education and Documentation (Mumbai) <www.doccentre.org>, which houses information on contemporary social issues like human rights, civil society, gender, environment, development and various other issues. I am presently working on a project on alternatives in education and am able to explore a great deal.

- Tanvi Patel, Mumbai, India <tanvi@doccentre.org>

love is limitless

Western society has taught me many lies, but none is more pernicious than the lie that there's a finite amount of love in the world; we only have so much love to share with other people, so therefore love is a scarce resource to hoard, covet, and deny others. I was lucky enough to escape this lie at a relatively young age, but I still deal with its consequences every day during my interactions with others. Let me share how I unearthed this lie.

When I was three years old, my mother inadvertently gave me a koan — one of those riddles that reveals truth if properly understood. My mother was in a grouchy mood and, she had yelled at me for no good reason. I felt bad, of course, and she quickly felt bad, too. So, my mother sat me down and said in no uncertain terms that she might do stupid things like yell at me, but she always loved me and always would love me. This was said with such force, far stronger than any anger I ever had felt from her. I couldn't help but believe my mom and internalize her statement.

Her statement was a koan, though, because how could she always love me if I kept changing as a person, if I kept living a life she may or may not agree with? I puzzled over this motherly love for several years until I realized my mom must love me for my essence, for the changeless me beyond my thoughts, knowledge, body or actions. Unconditional love. I loved my mom in the same way, so this was knowledge about self, about loving.

The koan had deeper levels of understanding, which I became aware of when I got a little older and began liking girls. I was a precocious, chubby 10-year-old head over heels in love with a girl. The koan said love was unconditional, and I distinctly felt love for this playmate. Did I love the girl unconditionally? My answer was no, so I pondered the koan some more.

Were there different kinds of love? This is where I began to vary from society. Western society said Yes, there was mom love, friend love, random stranger love and, of course, spousal love. This introduced limits, as only moms could get the mom love, only spouses could get spousal love, etc. Love became a scarce resource, too, tied to social relationships; I only had time for so many friends, and I only could have one wife and one mother, so the type of love reserved for these people suddenly became limited (and quite competitive if you wanted to be my wife or "best friend").

Everywhere I looked, my Western world propagated the idea that love is limited. Movies and television were obsessed with relationships, but they were always about finding the right person or choosing between two or more lovers. Sports stars had their childhood friends, their spouse, and a lot of "fans" who they kept at a distance. Politics revolved around which people were friends, which people were enemies — and a career would be ruined if a politician had both a wife and another lover. Friends could be close, but didn't dare say "I love you." Strangers were people you didn't approach. Mothers were irreplaceable, unique among relationships. Mother-in-laws were hated, a burden.

I didn't buy into this system. It seemed very artificial. It didn't speak to what my heart was feeling. If there was only one love, how did I choose who I loved? This was the next question that sprang, by implication, from my mother's koan. I couldn't help but feel it was random, dictated by those who showed their humanity when I was most receptive. Once I saw a person's humanity, I identified with the person a bit and began down that path of love until I reached total identification/love. As an experiment, one day I decided that I love everybody; if I didn't consciously love a person, I just hadn't yet found his or her humanity.

In this section, *swapathgamis* share a lie that they have been taught by school, through the mass media, from the market economy, from the government, by religious institutions, etc., and that they, through various life processes, have been unlearning.

More than a decade of ongoing experimentation has proved the theory true, at least to my satisfaction.

I've conducted many other experiments as I ceaselessly unravel deeper understandings of what my mother said all those years ago. Eight years ago I learned how to love people who don't love or even like me. Five years ago the koan showed me how to deal with death. Currently, my wife and I are moving beyond jealousy and possessiveness in our marriage (almost there, but not quite). All come from little experiments, and all have shown me that love is not a limited quantity. In fact, the more I love, the more my capacity for love deepens. I just keep pushing love further. Not once have I found a limit to love.

In the process, I've needed to unlearn quite a bit. I've needed to unlearn what faithfulness means, to realize that you can faithfully love someone and still love other people, too. I've had to unlearn the mainstream notion of "us vs. them," of factional groups and identity politics, because love requires total identification with another. I had to unlearn the defense mechanism of keeping strangers at an emotional distance, as I needed to approach each person with love, even in a first meeting. The list goes on.

Society must be wrong when it tells me there is a finite amount of love in the world. That's okay; I experiment more, I walk out more, I love more. Society is wrong, but I love it all the same.

- Peter Kowalke, Ohio, USA
<peter@kowalke.info>

no more drugs! reclaiming the power of self-healing

It has been four years now since I left allopathic medicine. I have never felt healthier in my life.

This may sound strange – “What? How could you be healthier without medicine?” But it is very simple. I feel healthier because I have stopped looking externally for others to heal me, and have instead taken the power to heal myself in my own hands.

I took this decision for several reasons. First, I realized that when I would get sick, I would never deal with the root cause of the sickness. The reasons I would fall ill were all in my hands – not sleeping enough, not eating properly, not drinking enough water, or having intense mental pressures and/or emotional stresses. Yet, instead of making adjustments in my lifestyle, I would simply take a pill, in order to have a quick fix to my health problem.

This is exactly what Gandhiji warned about in *Hind Swaraj* (1909), when he critiques doctors and the medical establishment. He saw that medicine is a dangerous trap, because it allows people to pursue lifestyles which are inherently unhealthy. Doctors make money when we/people come to them for pills and remedies. If we instead looked to ourselves and changed our own habits and ways of living, then how would the allopathic medical industry survive?

In fact, how would this model of Development and Progress continue, if we believed in self-healing? Because today, we don't bother to clean the water or the air; we take medicine. We don't do physical work or play regularly; we take medicine. We don't fight against the chemicals in our food and clothing; we take medicine. We don't heal all the violence and frustration in our communities; we take medicine.

Doctors have almost unhinged us... I have indulged in vice, I contract a disease, a doctor cures me, the odds are I shall repeat the vice. Had the doctor not intervened, nature would have done its work, and I would have acquired mastery over myself, would have been freed from vice and would have become happy.

- Mahatma Gandhi

When I took the decision to stop taking allopathic medicine, and instead take responsibility for my own health, I began to examine more closely all the ways I can change my lifestyle to be more balanced and beautiful. Making more time for play, dancing, yoga and physical work; eating more wholesome, nutritious and organic foods and drinks; listening to my body and its strengths and limits; learning about natural herbs and plants from my grandmother; building positive relationships with friends, strangers, and acquaintances...

I have even been able to gain the support of my mother — herself a medical doctor. Initially, she told me I was crazy to take such a decision. But over the years, as I share with her about the benefits I have felt, she sees that there is a value to recovering one's health through practice, rather than through pills.

I should be clear. I am not replacing allopathic medicine, with another medical system — be it homeopathy, ayurveda, rekhi, herbal therapies, etc — although many consider these more beneficial than chemical-based medicine. While I am not opposed to such alternatives, I do not want to fall from one readymade trap into another, where once again, I rely on outside experts to 'fix' me. Rather, I want to remain alive to my body and mind, to the actual sources of illness as they appear, and to the many natural and simple ways

I can heal myself. Let me give an example.

In August, I caught the cough-cold viral that was going around Udaipur. It happened during *Rakshabandhan* celebrations and a filmmaking workshop. I had a lot of work to do, and it would have been easier to pop a few pills to get better quickly. Yet, I resisted the temptation, and experimented with a combination of things: sleeping extra hours at night and without the fan, drinking warm water throughout the day, chewing on *tulsi* leaves, avoiding cold or spicy foods, having black pepper tea in the mornings and lemongrass tea in the evenings, laughing and enjoying the company of many new and old friends... It took a week, but I did get better. I realized the importance of being able to tolerate short-term discomfort/pain, so my body could work for my long-term benefit.

This isn't always possible though, and I had a humbling experience a few weeks later. I got caught in the rain after a strenuous day of farming and playing. For the next two days, I was in bed with a fever and flu. Try as I did, none of my old remedies worked! What's more, I was pressured by time because I was leaving for seven weeks of travel abroad. So after over four years of no medicine entering my body, I broke down and took some fever-reliever and mild antibiotics for three days. Although I did 'get better', I felt terrible for breaking my vow to myself.

I realize now I need to be a little more patient. It isn't easy to break free of one part of the readymade world, when much of the rest of my life is still impacted by it. The best I can do is to try and be honest with myself in the process. My struggle continues...

- Shilpa Jain, Udaipur, India
<shilpa@swaraj.org>

custom-made greetings

I have always disliked commercial greetings cards. They cost too much for what they are, never say exactly what you want, and seem so impersonal. Yet, in the past, I sometimes bought such cards out of a need to "impress" certain people. No longer. Now I make my own greeting cards using digital photos.

My photo cards are a culmination of years of playing around with various materials, driven by a desire to create cool-looking home-made cards. As a kid, I mostly worked with scissors, paper, and glue. But, the resulting cards never quite met the expectations I had for them.

Then, about a year ago, it occurred to me that digital photos might make great cards. I started playing around with my photos, altering them in various ways using Photoshop. I started off by simply applying different filters to photos I thought would make nice cards. Now get a lot more elaborate — adjusting the lighting, color balance, and other settings as well. I've learned a lot about how to use Photoshop's tools effectively.

Some of my favorite cards are the ones I've created using photos from my semi-retired father. He has sent me some absolutely stunning images of flowers, snow, and autumn landscapes. I look forward to every new installment of photos he sends, and usually when I get a disc from him I spend all day playing with the photos, designing new cards. This is a new way for me to stay connected with my dad.

I have learned a lot about composing photos by looking at the pictures my dad sends me. Part of what makes his photos so stunning is that he really takes the time to think about what he wants in the picture frame. He's reminded me that if I want to take effective pictures, I have to do more than point and shoot — I really need to slow down, to ponder, to feel out the scene and what about it I want to capture.

Often, when I want to create a card, I just look through photos I've taken. Other times, I take a picture for a specific card. For example, for my in-law's wedding anniversary card, I took a picture of a salt and pepper shaker set. My father-in-law is Scott, and my mother-in-law is Paula. So I wrote inside the card, "You two go together like salt and pepper."



one of mae's special custommade greeting cards

*"If it [the law, the government, the system] is of such a nature that it requires you to be an agent of injustice to another, then I say, **break the law**. Let your life be a counter-friction to stop the machine. What I have to do is to see, at any rate, that I do not lend myself to the wrong which I condemn."*

- Henry David Thoreau

In this section, different people highlight the ways they are challenging the Readymade World (the mechanical and institutional order that claims 'more consumption' is the answer to each of life's questions). The contributors share how the small steps they are taking in their own lives can serve as a 'counter-friction' to the dominant machine, and how they are co-creating ways to more balanced and meaningful living.

I mostly use my cards to send birthday and anniversary greetings. I'm an amateur poet, and usually don't have trouble coming up with my own creative wording that expresses a message that is personalized from me to a specific person. For example, my dad is a boat-builder and avid sailor so for his birthday last year I sent him this message:

May all the winter days this year
be ice-sailing days/
May all the summer days this year
be water-sailing days/
And may the wind be always at your back!

The really cool thing about making my own greeting cards is that each customized with a particular person and occasion in mind. In so many ways, the Western culture propagates the cookie-cutter mentality. This point was brought home to me a few summers ago when I worked at a mall branch of a large portrait studio chain. During training, I was told that a person could walk into any branch of the company, anywhere in the U.S., and get the same type of picture taken — like McDonald's food. To me, this seemed ridiculous. If I am getting my picture taken, I don't want just any picture; I want a picture that says something about me, a unique person unlike any other.

I feel the same way about greeting cards, and that's why I've chosen to walk away from readymade. Instead of relying on a cookie-cutter message that someone else created, I choose to say what is meaningful to the person receiving the card. Each card, like each person, is unique.

- Mae Kowalke, Ohio, USA
<mae@kowalke.info>

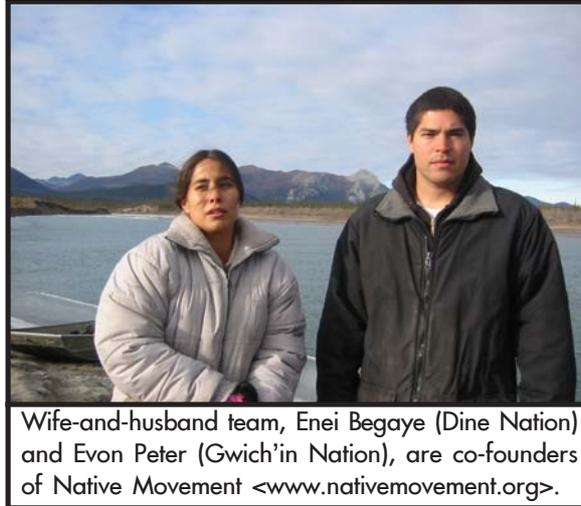
indigenous learning and struggles to survive

As a young boy I grew up with my uncle and grandfather in a single room cabin in the mountains of northern Alaska. There were several other families that lived with us totaling nearly a hundred people among our tribe. We resided in a place called Vashraii K'oo (creek with a steep bank), where our people traditionally fished. Our homes were settled into a large valley of lakes and creeks surrounded by hills and mountainous peaks that greet the horizon in the distance. Vashraii K'oo was hundreds of miles from the nearest road, store, running water faucet, or home that possessed electricity.

Our understanding of our existence as human beings, as Gwich'in people, came from the relations with each other, the land, and the animals. The animals and plants provided us with our food and our warmth. In particular, the Porcupine Caribou herd which numbers around 130,000, provided us with our primary source of food and traditional clothing. The herd traveled over a 1,000 miles on its natural migratory route unobstructed by fences and industry, similar to the once bountiful buffalo of the Great Plains. The rivers and lakes provided us with clean water. We lived a life rich with culture. We understood that big changes were occurring in the world outside our community. It was thought that no matter how crazy things became out there, we would have the land, the water, the Caribou, and our way of life to sustain us through the hard times.

Between 1970-1988 we came to realize that our remoteness would no longer protect us from facing the negative consequences of decisions that we were not part of making. By this time, the United States had claimed ownership to most of our traditional lands and resources and the right to govern our peoples, without ever sitting across the table from our leaders. The turning point was when the oil industry and the State of Alaska began to aggressively pursue oil exploration and development in the calving grounds of the Porcupine Caribou herd. The Gwich'in, like the caribou, the ducks, the mosquitoes and the land, all have roles in continuing the cycle that is life. For us, a threat to any other aspect of this cycle of life is a threat to our own people, simply because we are an inextricable part of it.

I remember when thirteen tribes of the Gwich'in Nation gathered at Vashraii K'oo in 1988 to take guidance from our elders. The younger generation had prepared a written agenda for the meeting. The elders chose to rip up



the written agenda and made this statement as to how the meeting would be held, "when you speak you speak from your heart, only the person holding the staff speaks, when you speak you speak in our language, and everyone will be heard." At that meeting our Nation unanimously decided to oppose oil exploration and drilling in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge. This was the beginning of our engagement at the national and international levels to educate others of the human rights struggle

of our people and to share with the world our understandings about the responsibility we all carry to maintain balance with all our relations.

I grew up in this struggle and today the only thing that has changed with Vashraii K'oo is that we now have electricity in our homes. We still haul the water in buckets, heat our cabins with wood, and hunt for our food from the land. The nearest road is still hundreds of miles away and we live in relation with the caribou herd as we always have. Our struggle to protect our way of life has placed us near the center of tremendous political and corporate controversy. Our struggle has become a symbol against colonialism, corporate globalization, and environmental devastation.

As I traveled North America and the world, I came to understand that the Gwich'in struggle is similar to the struggles other communities face around the world who are fighting for their own self-determination, land, and the right to practice a sustainable way of life. It became clear that our local struggles are not independent of one another, but that collectively they make up a resistance to a global neo-colonization taking place.

I believe the path begins within each of us. Engaging in a process of healing entails confronting the pains that we carry from our individual experiences and those of our ancestors and peoples. Often many tears are shed, and through this process, we naturally uncover the true histories of our peoples and come to realizations about our current circumstances. It is the first step because we must come from a place of balance and love to be effective in our work; otherwise we are susceptible to perpetuating the cycles of mental, physical, and spiritual violence that permeate humanity in these times. Spirituality and love naturally become our greatest weapons in the struggle for peace, justice, and balance.

- Evon Peter, Alaska <evonpeter@mac.com>

in search of good food...

My mother reminded me of the first meal I ever cooked for her, my father and my younger sister. I showed a propensity for flair in the culinary arts even at that age. It was my father's birthday, so I decided that my present would be a three-course dinner. I started with a salad of iceberg lettuce, cucumbers and tomatoes plucked from our garden. Tossing the salad with bottled Italian dressing, I cracked fresh pepper on each person's serving as if I were a waiter at a high-end restaurant.

Next, I proudly unveiled the second course: chicken, potatoes and fresh corn-on-the-cob. Even though the chicken was spottily burnt on the outside, they politely nibbled at the edible parts. Dessert was four individual containers of chocolate pudding poured into a large bowl and served as if made from scratch. After that dinner, I was always experimenting – my meals becoming, thankfully, a little more advanced.

But as a young Black boy in Memphis, Tennessee wasn't I supposed to be out of the kitchen and in the streets with the rest of the boys – climbing trees, playing "IT" or looking at my older cousin's Playboy magazines? I did all that too; but I didn't see cooking as a pursuit "just for girls." In retrospect, I'm sure my interest in cooking was sparked by the passion for cooking held by men on my father's side of the family – they were always in the kitchen cooking with a smile. Without doing it on purpose, the men in my family were challenging gender roles, especially in the American South. They made it ok for me to do "woman's work" and connect with food in ways that many young men don't.

Both of my grandfathers grew up in rural Mississippi, and they lived and worked on land owned by their families. Like the majority of Southern African Americans of their generation who moved to urban centers like Memphis, they bought memories of country living and survival skills to boot. Both sets of my grandparents had backyard gardens, and they grew most of their food – vegetables, fruits and legumes (with the help of all their grandkids, of course). The only food that they bought at the grocery store was meats, dry spices, fats for cooking and flours for baking.



Paw Paw, my paternal grandfather, converted his whole half-acre backyard into a garden with little pathways leading to each

tidy section. If you didn't work in Paw Paw's garden, you didn't eat. We would help plant, tend, harvest, shell, shuck, snap and eat everything from Acorn Squash to zucchini. And because he had a lot of surplus, Paw Paw would give away several pounds of food to neighbors and church members. I like to think that we had our own community supported agriculture (CSA) back then.

Ma'Dear, my maternal grandmother, worked in her backyard garden with pure passion. It wasn't very large but it produced enough food for her to feed herself, Granddaddy and her four grandchildren. Ma'Dear made sure that she had enough food from April to November and plenty to preserve for the winter.

Over the past year, while working on my first book — *Grub: Ideas for an Urban, Organic Kitchen* (Tarcher/Penguin 2006) — I have thought a lot about my personal experiences with food because *Grub*¹ is essentially the story of my life. In it, I explore many of the questions that I've been asking myself for the past six years: Why are American families not producing our own food as we have in the past? Why do we eat so much packaged, processed and pesticide-ridden food? How can we resist the corporate takeover of our food systems, on both a personal level as well as through more organized structures and movements? How can health conscious people erase artificial food boundaries that restrict what they eat and listen to the needs of their body? Why are so many of us not cooking anymore? And when we do, what are we thinking about? Are we singing, and if so, to whom? What kind of energy do we bring when we cut tomatoes, grill corn or roll out dough?



The United States government and giant food corporations have made it difficult for many Americans to eat grub. But things are changing, and I'm hopeful. With my organization, B-HEALTHY <www.b-healthy.org> and with a growing movement on eating grub <www.eatgrub.org>, I am clear that the revolution has to start not only in the fields but also in the kitchen (and certainly not the soup line).

- Bryant Terry, New York, USA
<bryant@b-healthy.org>

¹ definition of grub \grub\ n.

1 healthy, local, sustainable food

2 food that supports community, justice, sustainability

3 grub should be available to all

up-cycling to reinvent my life

I think it started when I was around four or five years old. The youngest of three siblings, my parents would state that they were too broke to afford the expensive books and toys that my older siblings had (primarily because I destroyed or lost everything anyway, including my older siblings' toys!). So, not to be outdone, I used to make my own toys from available junk, mainly with the paper I found in dustbins and bits of cellotape.

I guess that's where my relationship with dustbins and junkyards initially started - places that were and still are treasure troves for my imagination. Both my brother and sister were always in boarding school, and so they'd be my playmates only during the holidays when they returned home. The rest of the year, I had to pass time mostly living in imaginary worlds of my own making... and not a boring moment passed. There was always so much to do, whether it was making toy cars, planes, ships and trains or imaginary environments like tropical isles and jungles — all with the lovely paper junk that I found.

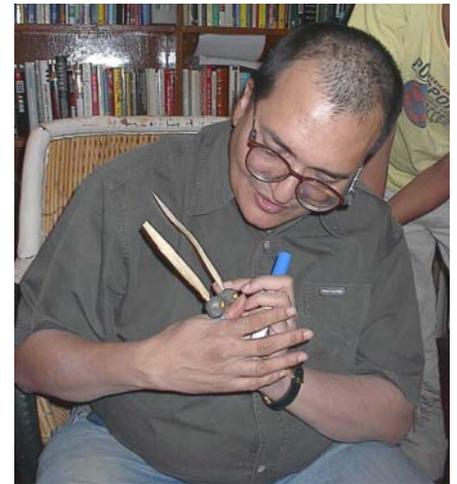
In between schools (I went to nine different ones and got chucked out of some as they couldn't handle me), my days were passed making entire cities with everything in them: harbors, railway stockyards, with wagons and trains, a metro that travelled over and underground, bridges, skyscrapers, streets, shops, factories, airports, everything! My imaginary city as I thought it should be, all out of my brother's box of magazine subscription cards.

I still haven't figured out where those skill sets came from, but I could have been inspired by the fact that my brother made an entire fleet of the world's most well known warships with the tiniest bits of cardboard and paper pins. He also made the most amazing board games that we all played; they were far better than most games that we could buy then in the toy-shops (in the early 1970s). I figured, if he could do it, so could I!

I finished with school and kept making bigger and even more detailed kinetic models of transportation vehicles. By then, I started to explore other materials that worked well with cardboard and paper — like plastics, rubber and cloth. During the last few years of school, I had started thinking that I wanted to be a passionate, mad artist. On a challenge made by my friends, I sat for the entrance test for National Institute of Design (NID), Ahmedabad. They claimed that the bright young talent went to NID, but it was the last choice on my list!

NID's faculty thought I would be good at Industrial Design, due to all my years of model making. I had other plans. I had come there to learn Graphic Design, though I learned to work with a host of materials (like textiles, metals, plastics and wood), which were way beyond the boundaries of my formal course contents. Yet, after five years of design training, I walked out without my diploma certificate.

Not having the degree didn't really matter, as I soon found out. Most of my employers to be were interested in what I could do for them, not my qualifications. Based on my portfolio of NID projects, and with my skill in working with diverse materials, I continued to explore the many things I could do with available junk. Only now my childhood repertoire had increased.



I applied this new found knowledge to toy-making, theatre properties, theatre sets, nomadic furniture, pneumatic furniture and architecture and making low-cost educational aids and puppets. This was in my spare time, an addition to the graphic design projects that I was handling on a day to day basis. During weekends, I'd host workshops for kids.

After 16 years of working in the rat race, two years ago I decided to re-invent myself and get into a line of work that incorporated all my skills. Now I rove around the metros and corners of India as a Innovative Workshop Instigator/Sharer/Facilitator. Call me what you will, as I hate being cubbyholed and labeled.

But truly, I've never enjoyed myself so much as I make and do all the things I am passionate about. I work primarily with available junk whenever possible, propogate locational learning¹, innovate in mainstream vocational and educational courses, and primarily continue to work with my hands and discover new materials and methods. Life is great, with loads of fun, meeting new people, exchanging ideas and with lots of travelling. Most of all, I get the chance to work with loads of young minds who love junk as much as me, so I'm in great company in exploring the tactile world of making things with your hands. I am longing for the day I build my own house of recycled environment-friendly materials, that blend into the natural environment, epitomising the character I am.

- Ranjan De, Chennai, India
<bridginggaps03@yahoo.com>

Ranjan De is a member of the Multiworld Underground.

¹ By locational learning, I mean learning intimately all the parameters of one's own immediate environment: the materials, methods, even tools, emerging from the specific locality.

welcome home to rainbow club

My first experience at a Rainbow gathering was in Montana in the northwest of the USA. I had met a young wanderer while driving, who can be called a hippie. He invited me to this gathering, and when I showed up this is what I learned.

Rainbow is a tradition that carries the message, "We need to heal the earth." Its roots are from Native American stories of the Rainbow Warriors who have come to restore the planet.

The Rainbow Family, as the collective is called, is a spiritually-based community. The gatherings are spiritual events. A retreat for healing, partying, and praying. For connecting and meeting old and new friends. For all people, from all places. The idea is plurality. All are invited. Every gathering is unique, but the annuals have a regular program or Rap to follow. The gatherings are out in nature, in the woods, and the programs help people to know what is best for their unique environment. There are no official leaders, authority, nor a hierarchy. People work as cooperative volunteers, and live by principles, rather than by rules, and everyone takes responsibility for everyone else.

Being in nature is intended to heal us. People use their time to celebrate and do all the things we can't do or have trouble finding the time for within modern society. For example, I learned about building camps, mud ovens, and temporary kitchens using materials from the forests. I drummed and danced around fires all night. I learned survival and nutritional ideas like what was edible in the forests and about healing herbs. There were acoustical jams, artist camps, yogi camps, tipi villages, massage training, trading circles (no money transactions or business is allowed on U.S. forest lands).

I attended consensus circles (as to where next years gathering would be held). We cooked community meals and all food is vegetarian and vegan, except one place where meat and alcohol is allowed. I helped dig latrines, carry water and supplies along the trails. Cleaning up and restoring also take a long time after the gathering finishes. There were also many religious groups there, including Hari Krishnas, Christian

missionaries, African tribal priests and Jewish Rabbis. I met amazingly fresh and kind people from many parts of North America and from all over the world.

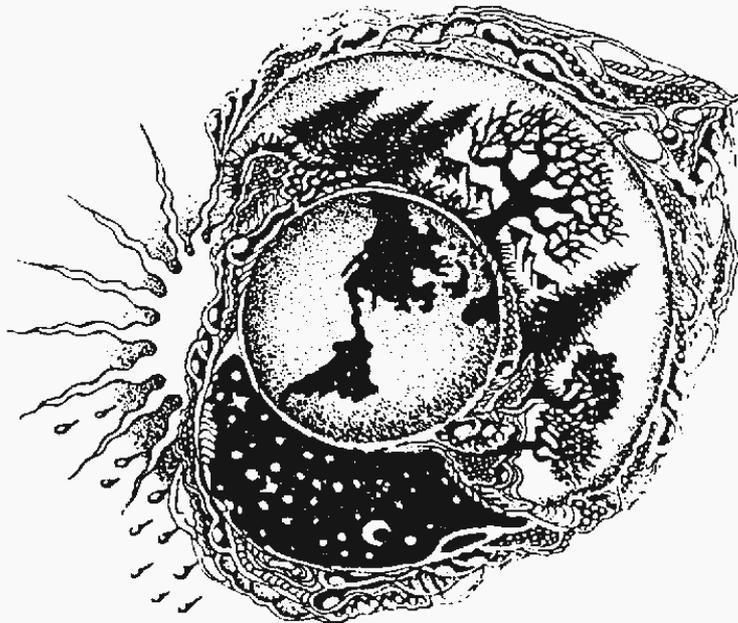
Discovering the land and the local communities where the gatherings are hosted is also really exciting. Seeing how the atmosphere is in the local townships, before and after, is amazing. Peoples' attitudes are transformed. Most of the locals are really happy to have hosted a gathering, even though they may have been tentative before hand.

Many attendees are nomadic and move around regularly. This has helped encouraged me in living this way, and not to feel isolated in my journeys. Rainbow gatherings are a place where I don't feel odd or different, as I sometimes can in the normal world. People there are tolerant and high-minded. The Rainbow Family feels like home to me. It comes as no surprise that the most heard greeting shared upon arrival is "Welcome Home". Belonging to this global community brings me great joy and much needed support to my life.

Most travelers can get the chance to go to a gathering, as they happen all over the world. The four that I know most about are the Canadian annual, the European annual, the U.S. national annual, and the world gathering. Local gatherings are most often word of mouth and can be small in size. The Central American gathering of the Rainbow family will be held in Nicaragua, from November 1 to December 1, 2005 <mx.groups.yahoo.com/group/nicaravana>. Or check out the main server at <www.welcomehome.org>

- Taamer Fasheh, Boston, USA
<taamer@hotmail.com>

This section of Swapathgami offers a number of potential resources and opportunities to support you in unfolding your own path of learning. Some of these exist in several countries; others are tied to a particular place. Some ask you to raise your own funds to access them; others provide funds for you. But all of them are open to walkouts-walkons as sources of friendship, understanding, insight and fun. If you decide to use any of these opportunities, do share your experiences with the rest of us!



kufunda learning village - zimbabwe



"We are learning to work together again, and play, and learn, and simply be. To join in community again. Such power is available as we learn this, and move into it. As we support each other, we grow stronger as a group, and as individuals. As we recognize that we each have something of value to offer the community, our sense of self-worth grows and our process of unfolding is just like a flower."

- Marianne Knuth, founder, Kufunda Village
<marianne@kufunda.org>

"At Kufunda I learned to use hands as hands, in stone sculpting, permaculture, batik and sandal making. It made me realise that our hands are useful in creating our own employment. I had the opportunity to learn the wisdom of our African treasures, and truly Kufunda was an eye opener to me in terms of seeing life with a new vision. The idea that we never came here to learn a pre-stated set of Kufunda textbooks made me understand that we have to explore ourselves deeply in trying to search for the useful resources, talents and skills we possess. I had the opportunity of exploring my inner talents and I discovered that I had plenty to offer to the world."

- Munyaradzi Toto, Rusape, Zimbabwe

"I used to think that I don't have anything to give. At Kufunda, I have realized that giving is always done in many ways. In the form of money, sharing ideas, natural resources. In fact we used to think that natural resources were not good enough to share. If I gave *mangai* (a traditional food) that would not be good enough. I did not know that *mangai* is actually better than the white

bread and jam we choose to serve visitors instead. We did not know that our traditional foods have all the nutrients. We're forgetting our own foods. Now we're realizing that we should go back to our roots. Not just with food.

I used to think that money was the only thing that could solve things. Now I am doing things without money. Organic gardening, sewing. I didn't have the idea that I can have a garden and get some money from it to start my own projects. Now the garden is beginning to do well. I sell my produce at the local market. In our culture there is an assumption that if you are not married you cannot earn a living. But I am learning that I can do things on my own."

- Dumisani Chinyuku, Mubaira, Zimbabwe

"When we were doing the course, there was time to have fun. Different exercises, sharing stories with other people - that all made me realize that money was not all that important. **I was happy.** You can be happy even if you don't have a cent in your pocket. Before Kufunda, I used to worry about when I was going to have a job, when I could afford to buy new shoes, a gift for my mother. I don't worry so much about these things any more."

- Sikhethiwe Mlotsha, Kufunda Village, Zimbabwe

"Belonging is elusive in the West. We are not well rooted in our communities. We are slow to open our hearts to strangers. On my first visit to Kufunda in November 2003, I was overwhelmed by the spirit of welcome and warmth. I am often comfortable connecting with new people and environments. And yet, I had never before experienced such a complete sense of belonging as I did in this community of Shona people whose language and customs were entirely unfamiliar.

Where did this feeling come from? It is woven into the rhythms of Kufunda — in the morning check-in, when we gather in circle saying

Mangwanani, I slept well if you slept well. In community meals, when we cook and eat together under the kitchen's thatched roof. In the teams working together in the garden or building compost toilets or tending beehives. Perhaps most of all, in the community's constant eruptions into song and dance. What I learned at Kufunda is what it feels like to be part of a community that celebrates life."

- Debbie Freize, Boston, USA <debbie@berkana.org>

resources / opportunities

On a farm outside Harare, Zimbabwe, exists a small group of people who have created a learning village aimed at the creation of locally rooted solutions to community self-reliance challenges. Kufunda seeks to bring together individuals from different rural and high-density communities in Zimbabwe to explore the possibilities of individual and community self-sufficiency. They believe that there is tremendous untapped potential in the energy, wisdom and knowledge of African peoples, and they are challenging stereotypes of Africa as a 'dark continent'. Kufunda programs are designed to nurture that potential so that innovative solutions can emerge. Visit <www.kufunda.org>.

work with OFAI

The Organic Farming Association of India has decided to set up its Central Secretariat in Goa. OFAI is looking for young people who have an interest in farming and/or working on organic farms. First preference will be given to children of organic farmers. We welcome those who never went to school and are self-directed learners. Persons who join the Association can be based in their own states or can also work from the office in Goa.

OFAI is busy with documentation of organic farms, vermiculture stations, organic and biodiversity experts (We don't mean Ph.D.s, but farmers and peasants who know their subject matter better than university professors). A lot of writing is involved, using computers, emailing, taking pictures, etc. We need persons who can assist State Level Steering Committees to do their work more efficiently and to help streamline communications between such Committees and the Central Secretariat. This is a great opportunity for people who want to travel the length and breadth of India, propagate organic farming, help set up organic farming learning centers and farmer tours, and put organic farming in India on a firm footing.

If you are interested, contact: Reshma Salgaoncar, OFAI, G-8 St. Britto's Apartments, Feira Alta, Mapusa, Goa 403507 INDIA, phone +91-832-2255913 <admin@ofai.org>

making your own portfolio

How can you display your skills, talents, competencies and experiences? How can you show your strengths and capacities to potential collaborators, partners or employers? A useful tool for walkouts-walkons is the portfolio. Unlike degrees, certificates, grades and ranks, a portfolio shares different and real aspects of ourselves. We create it to show others what our values are, what we appreciate in ourselves, what we know and what we are able to do. Often, a portfolio helps in gaining future work opportunities.

A portfolio usually takes the form of a handmade book, though people also make portfolios using digital media, like power point presentations, websites and video. Our portfolio shows our strongest experiences and best work – what we feel most confident about discussing further. In our portfolio, we can include our creations: cartoons, drawings, poems, photographs, short stories, book or film reviews. It is also important to add recommendations from a past partner, employer, a teacher or friend – people who can vouch for your work, character and capacities.

- For example, in my portfolio, I include:
- photographs of my team work in Udaipur as a Learning City (co-learning in community media workshops, organic farming, local festivals).
 - web links to the Swaraj Foundation and Shikshantar websites, which I update regularly.
 - copies of my writing, with the publication in which it has appeared.
 - video cassettes of my dancing (my Bharatanatyam Arangetram and dandia raas folk dancing).
 - a recommendation from Bliss Browne, director of Imagine Chicago, who I spent three months working with on a publication and conference.

- You might consider the following questions to get started on your portfolio –
- What are some important experiences you have had in your life so far?
 - What are your special interests and talents?
 - Who have you worked well with, who you can approach for a recommendation?
- Shilpa Jain, Udaipur, India <shilpa@swaraj.org>

To learn more on portfolio-making, check out:
<http://www.gomilpitas.com/olderkids/Portfolios.htm>
http://oror.essortment.com/creatingjobspo_rxxa.htm
<http://www.eduscapes.com/tap/topic82.htm>

Join the Swapathgami Network in asking employers to 'Say No to Certificates and Degrees' and accept alternate forms of assessment like portfolios and interviews. Contact Manish Jain <shikshantar@yahoo.com> to learn more!



Get ready for TV-Turnoff Week — April 25-May 1, 2005!

Learn more at <www.tvturnoff.org> and organize a TV Turnoff Celebrations in your place!



joyful living at kanavu - kerala

Lightning bugs lit up the dark night, along with millions of stars that filled the clear sky. Crickets and frogs by the thousands rang loudly from seemingly everywhere. The paddy fields stood still, barely visible, growing silently in the dark. Yet, it was the sound of children and youth singing joyfully that filled the air and overwhelmed all else. It was my last night at Kanavu, and after a full day my favorite time had arrived. That day, after waking up at six and doing Kalari, Kerala's traditional martial art, we then went to the nearby forest to collect plants to put in our newly dug up beds. The knowledge of which plants have which benefits was astounding. The forest was green as always, the main river supplemented by several small streams with pure water. Leeches here and there kept us watchful, scorpions and snakes kept at bay. After lunch, I joined the team building a bamboo hut close by for one of our friends. We gathered everything we needed locally - bamboo from the forest and thatch from coconut leaves. I learned a lot watching the group skillfully cut, scrape, and weave bamboo with grace. We worked until dusk, bathed, and feeling refreshed after a good day's work, we sat down on the verandah and sang with happiness.

After leaving my corporate job in America and returning to my family's homeland of Kerala, I was led to Kanavu by a question that has pursued me for some time now: what is the good life? Is it possible to live a life based on values of sharing, love, peace, justice and harmony with nature, rather than the competition, alienation, exploitation and violence so much a part of capitalist culture?

While not perfect, in many ways Kanavu actually exceeded my dreams of the good life - simple in material possessions but so rich in spirit. Here everyone participates in work, which hardly seems like work at all, since we do varied tasks with people we cherish, rather than doing monotonous labor only for money. And here the lines between work, play, and education are not so clearly separated. At the rice harvest in particular, I was amazed how quickly my friends would break into song and dance!

My experiences at Kanavu raised many questions. What has my own schooling lacked? What are my true needs? What have I been neglecting? How do I change myself?

After working in the paddy and ginger fields, I felt surprisingly great. I discovered that we as humans were meant to do physical activity - something I wasn't getting much of in my years of schooling and office work. Despite all the propaganda to the contrary, working with our hands in the fields is not beneath our dignity.

At Kanavu I learned that so many of what I used to consider 'needs' were really artificially created, whereas many of our true needs I was neglecting. After experiencing the daily singing and dancing that



so enriches Kanavu life, I have little doubt that there is something in the human spirit that needs this. And the songs here are not formulaic film songs that are played off a CD, but mostly folk songs that touch our spirit - the energy is amazing. Community also is a true human need - we need other people near us that we know and love.

Finally, I have a need for nature - both being connected to the forest, animals, and rivers, but also being connected to the processes of nature - birth and death, young and old, day and night. At Kanavu, we live in harmony and connection to nature, growing much of our own food without chemicals, building with local materials, treating animals like family. In my artificial urban upbringing, food was something that seemed to grow at the supermarket, people lived in fear of old age and death, and even night was turned into day by bright lights and the TV. By meeting more of our true needs, I experienced a joy at Kanavu far deeper than the temporary pleasures of the consumerist lifestyle.

On the other hand, living without electricity or running water, sleeping on the cold floor, leeches, etc. - those are all things one can get used to rather easily. I learned that the human body has a remarkable ability to adapt to new environments if one is willing.

I was challenged personally at Kanavu in many ways. I realized I had a strong sense of 'mine' - my space, my belongings, doing what I feel like doing, etc. It was a challenge to learn to share freely - something that seems quite natural to everyone here. My very consciousness needs to change - from seeing myself in separation from others to sensing the interconnectedness of us all. I may know this in my head but it needs to go deeper than that. Being in an environment like Kanavu certainly helps in nurturing such a deep change.

- Roy Jacob, Kerala, India
<studentoflife@fastmail.fm>

opportunities

Kanavu is a learning community of over 40 children and youth of the Naika and Pania tribes of Wayanad, northern Kerala. Founded by KJ Baby and Shirley in 1991, Kanavu, which means 'place of our dreams', is home to many walkouts of all ages. Contact them at <nannaru@rediffmail.com>

the call of the drums – an interview with KJ Baby

How did you get involved with indigenous peoples?

When I was 19, I was studying surface grinding at the Indian Technical Institute in Mumbai. I went home one vacation to visit my family in Kerala, who had recently moved to Wayanad, a neighboring district. My first night there, I heard the drums. I walked to the other side of the paddy field, feeling the small vibrations as I moved. I met the tribal chieftain; he started shivering, afraid of what I might do. But I was so moved by the drums that I asked him for more. For the next several days, whenever I got time, I went to see them and slowly built a relationship.

As a middle-class person, I was taught that tribal peoples were thieves, that they were bad and culture-less. I learned that these were lies when they began to share their stories with me. One story was about a festival, *onam*, which celebrates a king, Mahavira, who created a casteless, classless society. He was kicked out by Vishnu, who wanted to control people. In the tribal version, the people under Mahavira protested against these new lords. The rulers tried to win by using weapons, but it didn't work. So Vishnu sent a goddess, Mali, to make them obey. She infiltrated the people. With her bloody teeth and tongue, she frightened everyone and made them slaves.

When I heard this story, I realized that people were more controlled through culture, and not through weapons. So I thought, what kind of work can I do? Cultural work!

But you were a technical student! What happened?

I didn't want to go back to ITI. But my family and friends were putting pressure on me. I went back to see what it would be like. The principal tried to threaten me to stay, but I said, "No, I'm walking out," and I came back home.

I decided to follow the *onam* story and it led me to meeting other tribal chieftains. They shared other pieces of this story, while young children shared other stories. I started learning how to play the drum, do dances; I participated in rituals and slowly became part of the tribe.

How did you relate to this community?

At first I thought I wanted to teach them. I started with alphabets, showing them how I learned. They were interested for about a week, then they didn't want to do it any more. They laughed at me! I tried to convince them that this was important, saying, "You'll be cheated!" But they didn't care. So I thought, "Either you are wrong or I am." I tried to use a harmonium to teach them using music, but again after a week, it was the same story. I decided that this approach was not right.

How did your cultural and arts work grow?

Writing songs and composing came very naturally to me. In 1981, I wrote a drama, *Nadagidiya*, which traveled

everywhere and had 530 performances. The second part of this drama was banned by the Leftist Communist government, because it showed people organizing against the state. We were put in jail for three months. The government and many people called me an extremist, but I believed I am an artist, who is with the people, trying to tell their stories. Still, after this, our theater group collapsed.

I decided to try and understand what had happened to tribal peoples in Kerala by looking at history, British and State records. I got the idea to write a novel on the life of slave who had run away. After being rejected by many magazines, I published *Mavalimandram* on my own and sold it on the street. This generated interest in my drama again, so I organized a new team to perform it.

How did Kanavu emerge?

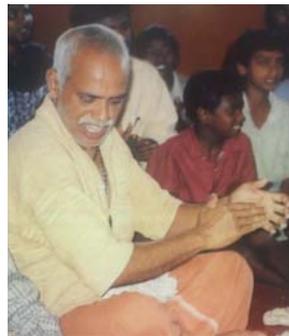
From 1991-93, we went to many places to perform the drama. Many children came along with the adult actors. Without any planning, we began doing things together: sharing stories, dancing... Our dream was to live together. Some friends donated money and we were able to buy our land. At the time, people laughed and called us 'University for the Hungry'. But we were very happy doing cultural work: yoga, meditation, *kalaripattiyu*, singing, dancing.

Where is Kanavu today?

We have transferred the land, accounting, etc., to the Kanavu Children's Trust. We see the grown-up children taking over this responsibility, sharing what they've learned from travels/work outside back here.

The State has asked us to 'spread' Kanavu, but we say, "No thank you." We know it is not easy to do such a thing; there is no base for it. We do not give certificates or promise any jobs, so many tribal leaders are suspicious of us. But we are clear that we are not doing this for other people, we are experimenting for ourselves.

So many *crores* of rupees have been given, and the tribal situation has gotten worse. When I first came to Wayanad, I heard the drums every night. Now there is only liquor, and the drums have been thrown out. That is why we do drumming and dancing every night – to keep our culture and our selves alive.



Known affectionately as Bay-Mama, KJ Baby is a well-known cultural activist in Kerala. He is soon to be working on his next novel. He can be reached at Kanavu, Village Cheengodu, PO Nadavayal, Wayanad, Kerala, phone +91-4936-211114.

walking on...

"We are united by dissatisfaction, rebellion, the desire to do something, by non-conformity. History written by Power taught us that we had lost, that cynicism and profit were virtues, that honesty and sacrifice were stupid, that individualism was the new god, that hope was devalued by money, without currency in the international markets, without buying power, without hope. We did not take in the lesson. We were bad pupils. We did not believe what Power taught us. We skipped class when they taught conformity and idiocy. We failed modernity. Classmates in rebellion, we discovered and found ourselves brothers and sisters.

We are united by the imagination, by creativity, by tomorrow. In the past, we not only met defeat but also found a desire for justice and the dream of being better. We left skepticism hanging from the hook of big capital and discovered that we could believe, that it was worth believing, that we should believe -- in ourselves. We learned that that many solitudes did not make one great solitude but a collective that found itself united beyond nationality, language, culture, race, and gender...

Be assured that we will support you to the end (which may not be in triumph) and will not abandon you. Don't be discouraged by difficulties; you should resist. You should press on and know that in the mountains of Southeast Mexico there is a collective heart that is with you and supports you. Don't feel alone or isolated. We will be watchful and will not forget you.

Vale. Health to you, and don't forget that flowers, like hope, are harvested."

- *Subcomandante Insurgente Marcos and the Zapatistas, a selection from Our Word Is Our Weapon (2001)*

an invitation

"We make the road by walking it."

- Antonio Machado

Swapathgami, available in both Hindi and English, is a bulletin to share ideas, experiences, (un)learnings, useful resources, future opportunities, inspirational mentors, for the vibrant Walkouts-Walkons Network emerging across India and around the world. We invite you to share your essays, poems, cartoons, photographs, stories, quotes, films, books, websites, etc. Contact us at:

Swapathgami

c/o Shikshantar

21 Fatehpura, Udaipur, Rajasthan 313004 India

Phone: +91-294-245-1303

Web: www.swaraj.org/shikshantar/walkoutsnetwork.htm

Email: shilpa@swaraj.org

growing our own learning webs

tools for engaging dialogue

Open Space Technology

www.openspaceworld.org

It's been called passion bounded by responsibility, the energy of a good coffee break, intentional self-organization, spirit at work, chaos and creativity, evolution in organization, and a simple, powerful way to get people and organizations moving — when and where it's needed most, especially during conferences and meetings. Check out Open Space Technology in nearly 20 different languages on this site.

Appreciative Inquiry (AI)

<http://appreciativeinquiry.cwru.edu>

Learn about the art and practice of asking questions that strengthen a system's capacity to apprehend, anticipate, and heighten positive potential. Find case studies, books and articles, community news and learning opportunities in AI on the site.

Circle

<http://www.peerspirit.com/htmlpages/circlebasics.html>

Get the principles, practices, and entire process of peer spirit circles. Start your own circle, and find out how to link up with other leadership and peer spirit circles around the planet.

World Cafe

www.theworldcafe.com

More than just espresso and capaccino, find out how to use the World Cafe to create hospitable space; encourage each person's contribution; listen for patterns, insights and deeper questions; and share collective discoveries. Check out the 'how-to' guide along with stories and related good links.