

swapathgami



making
our own paths of
learning and living
july 2005



filmmaking workshop

"An artist is not a special kind of person. Rather, every person is a special kind of artist."

- Ananda Coomaraswamy

We take Coomaraswamy's words to heart as we prepare for our next Swapathgami Filmmaking Workshop, to be held from August 25 to September 2, 2005, in Udaipur, Rajasthan. Like last year, we will learn how to take shots with the digital camera, create storyboards for our films, and get the basics of editing software. We will explore our stories and the burning questions in our lives as the fodder for our films. We will also have lively learning exchanges among us, enjoy the *Rakshabandhan* festival, and view a wide variety of films. This year, we will also launch the Walkouts Film Festival at the end of the workshop for the wider Udaipur community. Contact Manish Jain <manish@swaraj.org> if you are interested in participating.



bartering and cycling journey

If you enjoy learning by traveling, if you like connecting with nature, if you want to understand more about rural life, living traditions and culture, and if you are game to experiment with a life without money, then join us for a cycling adventure!

We will be traveling through the Aravalli hills and jungles, the villages near Udaipur, Rajasthan, from September 30 to October 7, 2005 (dates subject to change). By bartering our various skills and talents (each of us will have to consider what we have to share), we hope to receive in return the food, supplies and accommodations we need. We will try and not to use any money over the course of the entire journey, and instead work to establish meaningful learning exchanges with villagers along the way. We will draw our inspiration from

the Bauls of West Bengal. They travel from house to house, sharing devotional songs, in exchange for whatever people chose to offer them.

We will start with a one week journey and can then think together about how to grow this kind of event further. Contact Shammi Nanda <shammi_nanda@yahoo.com> if you want to join in this exciting adventure.

Calling all
swapathgamis who up-
 cycle trash (waste)
 into treasures!
 Let's meet and share.

- Ranjan De and
 Vishal Dhaybhai, India
 <bridginggaps03@yahoo.com>

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 makes it difficult to walk out?



A lot of what I grapple with stems from a deep-rooted insecurity within myself that I am not good enough, that I am unsuccessful. Years of schooling, colleging, parenting, media have made me under confident and doubtful of my abilities.
- Pooja Hiranani, Bangalore, India
<verislava_53@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...

our diverse views

Somewhere I still seem to feel that I need the damn degree...well I don't see it just as a degree but as a learning process that is taking place in a formal setting like a university to equip me. Nothing wrong with that one might argue...but then, on the other hand, I believe very strongly in alternate forms, modes and settings of learning. Quite a conundrum there, huh? Besides I am still choosing privileged settings like Ivy League universities...so that's the fix I seem to be in.
- Gauri Kirtane-Vanikar, Pennsylvania, USA
<gmkirtane@hotmail.com>

I think the biggest constraint and pressure has been living in a society where walking out is almost equal to madness. In reality, we must live with others, fathers, mothers, wives, sons, daughters, sisters, brothers and friends. Sometimes you feel you have to compromise on some of the demands that society has you, I mean, they are people you love and they are people who love you and this sometimes makes you just fall a step short of doing what it is you want to do.
- Charles Otieno, Kisumu, Kenya
<otienohongo@yahoo.com>

walkout challenge: no more mobile phone

I want to stop using my mobile, because it's polluting my sense of commitment to other people's time. I recently arranged to meet someone by email and was blown away by how much integrity was demanded of me in the process and also by how un-neurotic it felt to wait for someone having only specified a time and a place, with no possibility of last minute changes or confirmations. I want to discard my mobile because without it, I live a life where I have to think carefully before what I say, because I have to keep my word when it comes to meeting people and doing things. And, contrary to what many mobile phone service providers claim, sometimes it sucks to be able to tell anyone anything at any time.

I was planning to go out with some friends, somewhere public, and stage a mock dramatic incident which would culminate in my throwing my mobile against a big wall or underneath a train or somewhere grand. I thought such a spectacle would tickle a good amount of people, myself most of all.

So I called my mother to let her know what I was planning and she said that she didn't approve because recent family health emergencies had taken their toll on her nerves and that she wanted to have 24 hour access to all members of the family. I had first made the elaborate argument but she wasn't convinced one bit. I then said that I couldn't afford the bills. She asked that I stop wasting her time.

I think I can stop using my phone without inconveniencing my mother. I am trying to never call anyone except from a land line. And to not give people my mobile number but my email address instead. And to honour my appointments and plans and to demand of people that they do the same, not automatically accepting last minute excuses or apologies. It is slowly happening...

- Motaz Atalla, Cairo, Egypt
<motaz49@yahoo.com>



why did you walk out of ... ?

the high tech industry

In April of 2001, I left my career as an executive in the high tech industry. There was something wrong, I thought — something perhaps inherently wrong — with the choices we were making. We thought growth was our purpose. We believed efficiency was essential for healthy relationships. And our view of responsibility to our community and the environment was to comply with accounting standards.

At the time I left, I believed that the central flaw in this model was the market's short-term orientation. In this system, you win when each successive three-month period beats out the ones before. It seems so simple. Most organizations play the game — as if winning is a question of adding up the good numbers, subtracting the bad and getting rid of any people, products and processes that get in the way.

Even in the high tech world, where innovation is honored and people's creativity can come forward, the work culture we had created was designed to maximize control and predictability. We streamlined our thinking into repeatable processes and reusable components. We created long-term plans and measured the gap with our performance — as if our purpose was to forecast the future and eliminate deviation.

So I began to read a little about systems theory, about chaos and about our desire to master complexity. I began to learn about alternative forms of leadership that have thrived on this planet since humans first began to live in communities. I was invited to notice how living systems grow and thrive and then die off to be replaced by the new.

By October of 2002, I knew I had walked out. I would never go back into the business system I had been being navigating for nearly 10 years. I believe it is a system in decline. It is a powerful system, and it will resist its demise for many decades to come — I certainly won't be around to see it disappear. But I've become far more interested in what comes next. What will the new system look like, the one that will replace the dominance of a market that holds growth and efficiency as its Golden Rule?

Today, I am walking on to help this new system emerge by identifying and connecting pioneering leaders. A year ago, I helped create the Berkana Exchange <www.berkana.org>, to bring together people who act locally, connect regionally and learn globally to create change in and beyond their communities.

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

paid employment

Many years ago, I started to doubt that that which was moneyed had any intrinsic value. I saw people working to earn money to buy something (like a watch) that they thought would somehow bring them closer to what they really valued (like self-dignity). They did not directly go after what really mattered, which made no sense to me.



I also witnessed how money was destroying friends. They would take on a position or job, based on how lucrative it was. They would acquire many material things, but their lives would be crumbling on other fronts: socially, spiritually, etc.

Because I did not have a mainstream upbringing, I was not bound by conventional relationships and images of home, career, etc. My parents were really open to my questions, and I was able to explore a lot. My father encouraged me at age 18 to get a boyfriend and travel around. For 'security', he suggested that I could always come back and work on the four acres of land we owned. This in a Tamil family! Our home was always open to the whole world. In our small sitting room, we hosted everyone from slum-dwellers to Tibetan refugees.

In my own life, I have tried to continue that home in a wider sense. I have gotten out of a sense of 'mine' and 'yours'. Resources are not 'mine'. They are not meant to be hoarded, but rather are to be shared liberally with everyone.

Here at the Gurukula Botanical Sanctuary, we have been able to live with this spirit as a close group of friends. From day one, we have been total agreement about resources. One doesn't need for oneself; everything that comes our way has been put into the place, into the plants and the people. Because of this, I have been able to resist paid employment for 12 years. I don't work for money; in spite of this (or maybe because of this), I am surviving quite well.

At the Sanctuary, there is a clear sort of life, a momentum, a commitment to looking after the plants and the people. We listen to the process of life and orient ourselves in ways that are life-nurturing, rather than life-destroying. Ultimately, there is total trust in being looked after by forces greater than yourself.

- Suprabha Seshan, Wayanad, India
<gbsanctuary@vsnl.net>

questioning development

It was summer 1999, and I remember waking up at 6 am in my little house in rural Costa Rica, getting ready to do my one hour hike to meet some of the micro-entrepreneurs that I worked with to assist them...well, to slaughter chickens to take to the market that day. I remember enjoying these walks alone on the indigenous reservation; I felt so fortunate to be doing this type of work in partnership with a Canadian NGO. However, this particular morning something overwhelming happened. As I walked through the beautiful landscape, I began asking myself questions that I had avoided for years: What was my real contribution to this community and others like it where I had worked over the past few years – I mean *real, lasting, sustainable contribution*? Weren't the people within this community completely capable to do the exact work I was doing, and for any skills they lacked, weren't there people locally that could provide appropriate training? I thought the work I was doing was good, and yet, I was quite convinced that a local person could do it better. And who was I, a foreigner, to be helping others when we had not figured out so many of our own issues yet in Canada?

My development experience was the most rewarding, confusing and – ultimately – life-changing time in my life. I embarked on each of these missions with good intentions and, yet, the more I learned, the more I came to understand that sustainability comes from a deeply vested interest in where you call home. No matter what I did, I would never be an indigenous Costa Rican and therefore all of the work I was doing would be better served if I initiated, developed and delivered these types of programs within my own culture – as real development needs exist in Canada too. I also learned not to run away from my country, my culture and myself. I was so overwhelmed by the complexity and inter-connected relationships of all the big problems in the world. This might sound harsh, and it was completely unconscious at the time, yet I think my motivator to work overseas was that I had absolutely no clue what to do to make the world a better place. I wanted to somehow contribute to "doing good", and it appeared less detrimental if I messed things up abroad. My accountability to these communities was much less than to where I would more likely build my life.

Since leaving, I have been asked by many young people if working in international development work is as rewarding as it appears. I explain that learning about other cultures and forming friendships is wonderful, yet Development has become an industry unto itself, considered to be "exotic", "cool" and "kind". I say it is absolutely the opposite, and development work, without

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. Unlearning is vital for uplearning.

unlearning

long-term commitment, is often more detrimental than positive. My personal experience led me to want to learn about my own country, my own people, our problems and our values.

I had to assess where I stood on my own values: What was the type of organization I wanted to work for? How can my professional goals be in line with my personal values? How can I make a reasonable, not greedy, income doing what I love and believe in? How can I look forward, every day of my life, to the people I meet, the conversations and experiences I have? As I started to answer those questions, Waterlution <www.waterlution.org> began to form.

The more I learned about our natural world, about manufacturing operations, about industry and social issues, this link kept creeping in – subtle at first and then stronger: EVERYTHING around us involves water. And maybe by using this universal element, one that I also felt deeply connected to, we could develop a style of dialogue for people to discuss complex issues. And we could solve a lot of water problems in the process.

Waterlution's role is to engage companies, municipalities, NGOs and school groups on how to deepen their knowledge of and relationship with water for the overall health of the community. This work matters since these sectors are quite disconnected. Each tries to advance their agenda while often dismissing the importance of others. Our processes work with one fundamental objective: respect for others. This respect is deeper than diverse views on how our water should be managed; it is about respecting everyone as a valuable human being first. Only after that can we move towards unraveling complex water problems.

I have never felt more inspired, more connected, more alive and purposeful since starting Waterlution. I realized that I had been scared of failure before. Yet as soon as I committed to my community, and I worked from my heart, that fear quickly disappeared and I have never looked back.

- Karen Kun, Toronto, Canada
<karen@waterlution.org>



giving birth at home

Chandresh

Our first son Qudrat (now age 5) was delivered at a hospital. We saw that, instead of us, the doctor, nurses and other staff of the hospital were tense. Though it was a normal delivery, the doctor gave him a BCG vaccination. When we asked the doctor why, she said, "It is for the safety of your child. You must give him all the vaccinations on time."

But our faith in our natural immune system had already been nurtured by one of our friends, who is a classical homeopath. She would say, "Nature has given every human being, right from birth, a resisting system to face all kind of challenges. Vaccination just suppresses this natural resisting power. I never gave any vaccination to my children and they are perfectly fit."

Sumi

We asked the doctor not to give him any other vaccinations, and we also asked her how we can remove this BCG vaccination from Qudrat's body. She was terrified with the thought and became really angry with us. She said, "I am a doctor and I know more than you." We said good bye to the hospital within two days, and she took Rs. 4000/-

Chandresh

So, when we thought of conceiving a second child, we asked ourselves if we could deliver at home? To have a child without the help of doctor was a challenge — not just to resist contemporary gynecological practices, but to respect and have deeper faith in nature. We asked many old people how they delivered a child when there were no doctors and hospitals. And they simply said that *Daaima* (midwife) always was there with us. We started visiting different villages around Ahmedabad to find a *Daaima*. I was delivered at home, so I had a lot of faith in this practice.

We found an 80 years old *Daaima*. We explained to her that we don't want to give any kind of injections or vaccinations to our child or to me. We asked her if we could have a normal delivery without these? She said, "I have delivered hundreds of children. My own 11 children were delivered at home normally. You can see that I am a healthy person. Don't worry. I will be there with you anytime you need me."



Home-born Ajanmya smiles behind his father's shoulder.

Sumi

During the whole year, when the baby was in my womb, we had to face many negative situations from our surroundings and family. We lost some of our projects, through which we were sustaining ourselves. My in-laws were in an economic crisis too, and we had to support them. Many things were going on, but I had great faith and I was not tense at all.

Though the situations were difficult, I relaxed by listening to the *Garbopanishad*. This *upanishad* is fully based on how to give birth to your child. I would play with Qudrat and we used to talk to the baby. Qudrat helped me a lot. I used to eat simple homemade food; I would work at home doing cleaning and cooking too. I would go for walks and listen to music. Sometimes I would read books with inspirational thoughts. I took no medicines, vitamins or iron. Instead, I would make different vegetable soups and eat all kinds of vegetables, fruits, etc. So my mind was occupied with positive thoughts.

On November 5, 2003, I was doing my regular work. My pain started a bit after 6:00 pm.

Chandresh

Daaima asked me to go out when *Sumi's* contractions started. I told her, "I need to be in this process and I will help you." She was a bit shocked at first but she agreed. *Daaima* was very sweet to *Sumi*; she was continuously saying, "Just relax and keep smiling and don't fall asleep." Without a single stitch and any injections, *Ajanmya* came out.

Sumi

Even after this healthy birth, most people still reacted with, "Oh, you were just lucky!" We think it's mostly because of how much fear the medical establishment continues to pump into people. Sonographies, vitamins, injections, constant check-ups — they all make people afraid. On top of it, gynecologists say, "There can be complications at any time! Don't take any risks!" This is how they can be sure to make money.

To me, giving birth is not a pain; it is a process. I feel every woman should enjoy this process. It is almost more like meditation.

I believe a child and his/her mother can only be healthy, if they can together go through this process.

- Sumi and Chandresh,
Ahmedabad, India
<sumichandresh@rediffmail.com>

petrol? no thanks!

Up until a year ago, in Nasik, India, near Abhivyakti's office where I work, there was no petrol pump. When the first pump opened, we were all happy. We wouldn't have to go very far to fill our tanks. Then, in the year that followed, two more petrol pumps opened. You may not believe it, but all of them were busy all the time.

Whenever I would pass that way, I would feel like all the pumps were calling to me, "Come! Take as much petrol as you want! We are here to help you. Take more petrol, and use your vehicles more."

I kept thinking, "I need to resist these in some way." I became very inspired by my friend, Tushar. In order to respect his own internal rhythm and to challenge the readymade world outside, Tushar rides his bicycle everywhere. I decided that I would stop driving my scooter and instead use my bicycle too.

From childhood onwards, I have enjoyed living in a quiet place, being with nature. There is a peace, a kind of calm, a rhythm in nature; everything has its own order. It is beautiful in itself. Why do we become blind to this rhythm? This question would always come to my mind. Worse, why do we expect all people to move to the same rhythm and the same speed?

To see three petrol pumps open up in a small neighborhood within the span of a year — that made me sick. Now that I ride my bicycle, each part of my body takes on a natural rhythm and speed. Even my mind slows down. I feel healthier and more at ease. I never felt this way while driving my scooter.

I talked with some of my friends about this issue, that the more petrol pumps open, the more vehicle crowding and traffic will increase. Nasik's roads are getting wider, but not for pedestrians. To get more people to buy petrol and then become dependent on it — so that they forget how to walk, how to bicycle — this is the purpose of these petroleum companies and the exploitative market they are operating in. Why don't we resist this system? How can we make a more healthy, peaceful, beautiful environment in Nasik? To continue this dialogue with local people, my colleagues and I are thinking about hosting a Petrol-Free Week.

I am also getting a lot of energy from this possibility, and my faith in a Petrol-Free Life is growing. Now, on my way to Abhivyakti, I happily respond to the petrol pumps' exhortations with "No, Thanks!"

- Sujata Babar, Nasik, India
< Sujata@abhivyakti.org.in >

*"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.

oh! i want to leave it all behind

the need for fame
the need for money
the need for luxury
the need to be qualified
the need to be eligible
the need to be liked

oh! i want to leave it all behind

the need to own
the need to be secure at all times
the need to entertain
the need to perform

*why do i need to profess
why do i need to justify
why do i need to sanction
why do i need to do for i must*

oh damn! i want to walk away from it all

i search for freedom
i search for a simple life
i search for this and that...

***i need to walk away from...
the desire to be free
from the desire to walk away itself...***

oh! how i just want to be.

- Bhakti Mehta, Delhi, India
< bhakti20m@hotmail.com >

planting new seeds

She had fake blue eyes and a real toothy smile. A red kurta and a bowl of *laadoos* and *koftas*. She asked me, "So what have you learned?"

I left home in the October after my highschool graduation for nine months of travel. To learn about permaculture (see box) and explore communities and lend a hand and figure out what next. I knew there was more to the future than dormitories and distribution requirements and mandatory memorization but I needed to see it and sift it like soil through fingers. My mother recommended that working on farms and volunteering at different projects would give me a good picture of some of that something more. I agreed.

So you would think that after six months of explaining myself, someone would have asked me what I've learned. But they didn't so she was the first and I stuttered. Talked about self-reliance, mostly. A few days later we have had the conversation 100 more times in my head. Today it goes like this:

Girl with fake blue eyes and real smile: "So, what have you learned?"

Girl with real blue eyes and nervous smile (me): "Well I learned about planting seeds. That when you stick a little bean in the ground it understands that it is time to sprout and it has all the things it needs to grow and photosynthesize and become a plant."

I think I stuck me in the ground. Flowers and pods and tendrils and seeds erupting from small places and I'm erupting too.

And in December I was in Hawaii watching lava gasping towards the sea, making new land inch by inch. And I watched Hawaiians standing up for the rights to their old land, grasping towards freedom and sovereignty inch by inch. And I learned strength and persistence from them both.

Later, in New Zealand, I found out that planting beans puts nitrogen in the soil, which helps other plants grow. And that marigolds keep pests away from vegetables and that chickens do both of those things and that everything has more than one use. Like when I helped make a garden after the tsunami in Thailand, they got food and future and I got skills and friends and strong.

People I meet keep talking about karma. The lady at the tennis courts in Hawaii said you love the world, the world loves you back.

Which is different than what I learned at school and on TV in the US. Where the heroes compete with the world and use the world. Beat and win the world. They make money but can't plant it. And they try to watch it grow. They spend it on cars and watches and microwaves and cameraphones. And tickets to Hawaii and Thailand. Vacationland. Because that's why we go to other countries: to relax. Not learn or work and definitely not to erupt.

It's not all one sided: I learned the alternatives. If I want to make change I have to go to college. Do Peace Corps. Be a social worker or a teacher or a yoga instructor. Winters in Costa Rica. Ecotourism.

So when I was IN Hawaii and Thailand and Costa Rica I looked for life there. Weeding through the foreign transplants and Western culture, I wondered where indigenous people find the strength to fight assimilation and exploitation. How this momentum can be spread and inspired in people everywhere, especially those who benefit from the system. Why do people accept the status quo of competition, materialism, homogenization? Why are we so isolated from the environment, our food sources, and each other? What would the world that I want to live in look like? And what can I do to reject the way things are and build that world? I walked out on the norm and its packaged alternatives because I'd rather not follow a path I didn't forge. And because there are a lot of things to do and people to meet and questions to answer.

So, blue eyes, I learned how to meet people. How to shit without toilet paper. How to share kitchen duties. How to not complain. When to cut down banana trees and how to share what I know.

A Little On Permaculture

A term coined in the 70s by Australian Bill Mollison that refers to a design system combining traditional farming, natural systems and common sense. Permaculture uses sustainable, organic practices like composting, companion and lunar planting, passive solar heating, grey/blackwater harvesting, and unconventional garden layout. It proposes to build a permanent agriculture, and thereby permanent culture, that participates and nourishes the environment rather than exploiting and annihilating. The main principles of design are to fit the local environment/culture, to use waste as a resource, to promote biodiversity, and to use every element in the cycle for multiple purposes. Check out www.permaearth.org, www.permaculture.co.uk, and www.attra.org/attra-pub/perma.html.

My experiences in the last six months only set new ideas in motion. Only built up the tools and knowledge and practice I have to work from. From permaculture farming to dialogues about sexual assault to deschooling, I take my experiences with me to the next ones. And the next. Creating spaces like the ones I have encountered on this expedition. Open spaces for experimenting and getting my hands dirty.

- Amina Baird, DC, USA
<aminaalthea@yahoo.com>

an epic journey

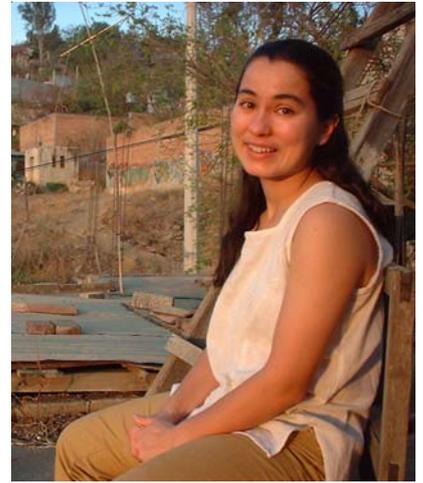
A year and a half ago, my partner and I set out from our home on Vashon Island, Washington, on a journey that would take us almost 3000 kilometers by bicycle and foot along the coast and mountains of our home region. Like many journeys, this one began as an act of faith. We had been working on our friend's organic farm for several years since finishing university, gaining many of the skills that make up our real, non-schooled learning – how to grow our food, how to build our own home from local materials, how to make our own clothes and other useful items with our hands. We had tasted what it was like to live our dreams and to believe in other possibilities beyond the institutions and the conventional paths laid out for us. We knew that making our dreams real nourished our spirits and opened up all sorts of unforeseen possibilities. So, despite much skepticism from acquaintances and family members, we committed ourselves to this journey.

We made many of the things we would use on our journey. At the end of the previous year's fall harvest, we dried and prepared much of our food. During the dark, rainy winter months, we sewed our own backpacks, clothes, sleeping bags and tent. We were pleased to see how much we could learn by seeking the advice of friends, neighbors and the resources of our local library. There is a beautiful sense of satisfaction in making something for oneself. Not only could we appreciate the care that went into each item, we enjoyed knowing that we didn't need to buy the expensive, "high tech" goods that "outdoor supply" stores claim are necessary. How refreshing to break one of the biggest myths of a society based on consumption – that ordinary people are incapable of providing anything for themselves without the intervention of the industries, institutions and specialized experts.

When summer came, we set off on our bicycles. Near the border of California, we took apart our bikes and mailed them home before setting off northwards on foot. We were to walk 1600 kilometers to Canada.

The thing that's hard to explain is that even as we were traveling these long distances, we never really thought about it in those terms. Each day followed the rhythm of our footsteps (or pedal strokes) from dawn until dusk. Each night we made our meal and shelter in whatever suitable spot we could find to pitch our tent. These were the daily rituals that made up our life, it was impossible to think of "going to Canada" or walking "1600 kilometers" (at least not without laughing at the absurdity of it.) We never knew if we would get there and really, it didn't matter. The things that marked the passage of time and distance for us were these: how the songs of the birds changed as we headed south to north or from coast to mountains; how the temperature of the air shifts throughout the

day or from ridgeline to valley; how it feels to go to sleep tired and wake up joyful at the thought of another day of walking; how our senses heighten to the scent of pines, the feel of rain on skin, the taste of food in one's mouth.



Without motorized vehicles, and then without bicycles and only our feet to carry us, we found that the vividness and pleasure of our experiences grew. In southern Oregon, we walked several days up the dry, pumice-covered flanks of Mount Mazama with only the company of the twisted, sparse pine trees and ant mounds. When we reached the summit ridgeline, we found ourselves gazing down into the crater-like expanse where an enormous lake lay, it seemed impossibly blue and dazzling, so much water in a dry land. We could do no more than stand in stunned silence. Not too long after, however, we were joined by many people who had driven up to this point along a paved road. We were surprised at how discontented some of them seemed, some looked bored and others were intent on arguing irritably about the details of their vacation plans. How different our experience of this lake was from these people! We weren't thinking about the road sign 10 kilometers back or the last parking lot rest stop or the song that had been playing on the radio minutes before. Without the distraction of speed, there was nothing to carry our senses away from the real place where we stood with our feet touching the soil.

The joy we felt for walking and for our journey seemed contagious. Strangers that we met along the way would ask a question and sometimes we'd end up talking with them for a while. Occasionally, a light would come into their eyes and we'd leave wondering whether some of their dreams now seemed possible after seeing us living ours. We hope so.

Our journey planted a joyful kind of hope within us. We're nurturing dreams everyday in our lives because we know that things are possible. These days, we don't think as much about the long distance to cover as we do about the sensation of footsteps. We can feel how even a short walk in our neighborhood carries the memories of an entire journey. The rhythm of footsteps can become the rhythm of a day, a month, and a life renewed to wholeness and vibrancy.

- Emily Keiko Pruiksmā, Washington, USA
<emily_pruiksmā@yahoo.com>

businesses we believe in meeting

From March 31 to April 3, 2005, an intergenerational exchange on "Businesses We Believe In" took place outside of Ahmedabad, Gujarat, India. It brought together swapathgamis who were interested in exploring their selves, their life's work, and the possibilities of creating an organic business or eco-livelihood in today's world.

Several questions emerged over the course of the meeting, such as:

- What distinguishes an organic business from mainstream businesses?
- How can we identify and live by our real needs (instead of being caught up in manufactured wants)?
- How can our business nurture the local economy and culture?
- How do we make sure the entire process, from procuring raw materials to marketing a final product, reflects the values we believe in?

Those gathered shared a commitment to both challenge the dominant model of business (its violence, exploitation and injustice) and to regenerate a healthier, more balanced and honest sense of business.

A photo essay can be found at <www.swaraj.org/shikshantar/walkouts_business1.htm>. A short film also emerged from the wisdom and potential shared in the meeting. Contact Shilpa Jain <shilpa@swaraj.org> for a copy. Below, some of the participants share their ideas and inspirations.



I would like to start a new kind of bookstore, a community space that brings together youth and their families to learn together and become more self-reliant.
- Shreya Janssens-Sannon, New York

My father has made and sold sherbet for years. He has used artificial colors to make it more tasty and look better. Now I am going to experiment with how to make this sherbet without using any chemicals.
- Nirmal Prajapat, Udaipur

The first thing about business we believe in is how much do we believe in ourselves. Almost every single one of our present systems – education, economics, methods of working – start with a kind of fear, a kind of insecurity: "There's not enough to go around." "What will happen to me?" And what happens when you start with fear? The next step is, "Let me grab whatever I can for myself." There is this whole vicious cycle of fear and grabbing and insecurity, and still trying to grab more. What if instead, you start with the assumption that there is enough for everyone's needs, for your real needs? Then you're starting with courage, with faith in yourself, faith in the opposite person, in whatever you're doing. And the outcome will inevitably be different.

— Aspi Shroff, Mumbai

Whatever businesses we start, we are trying to make sure they are grounded in the local, so we can support the balance of our local economy and benefit nature and our local ecology. We are thinking of businesses like making brooms and hand-spun (khadi) cloth.
- Yuvraj, Indore

I am collecting local seeds and trying to grow medicinal plants. Because I do not want my family to be dependent on chemical grains and western medicines.
- Nooratmal Jat, Ajmer

I liked the idea of Van Vadi and land-based communities (shared by Bharat Mansata), several families pooling money together to buy some land for organic farming and natural living. I want to do something like that, and I see no reason to delay.
- Ravi Gulati, Delhi

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!

guni ashram - rajasthan

About 10 months ago, I was dependent on hospitals and doctors for my health. Especially for my stomach pain, I was addicted to allopathic medicines and would visit the hospital once a week.

I took my health into my own hands when I realized that all the things I needed to keep myself healthy were available in my local environment. For example, I started with aloe vera. Using it continuously and discovering all its benefits – this was enough for me to decide to never go to the hospital again.

As I get more and more into self-healing, I am always searching for different people and places where I can learn more about natural healing. I heard about Guni Ashram, a community of people who are working on



traditional methods of healing. Their research and experiments are all based on their personal experiences. I had the opportunity to spend some days at this ashram. These *gunis* (traditional healers) don't have any degrees, nor have they done any formal course of study.

Living with them I tried to learn more about the healing powers of the plants in our local environments. Jagran Jan Vikas Samiti, an organization in Udaipur, helped to regenerate these *gunis'* knowledge and practices and establish the ashram as a place for them to learn and work. Here, they share their local knowledge with one another and also prepare medicinal plants for others to use. They occasionally have gatherings, in which they visit jungles to recognize healing plants; they share what they know about the multiple uses of a single plant; they prepare different medicines and tonics from plants together.

Since I visited the ashram, I have started a small medicinal plant nursery, and have also been making my own herbal medicines and massage oils. Learning with *gunis* has been different from the textual ways that I was trained in. Now it is about trying out real experiments, seeing what works and what doesn't, and then engaging again with their wisdom.

Most of the *gunis* are *swapathgamis*, and the Guni Ashram is a place open to *swapathgamis*. Any one can visit there for a few days or participate in any of their training programs. Contact Smt. Bhanwar Dhabhai, Jagran Jan Vikas Samiti, Sapetia Road, Bedla, Udaipur, Rajasthan, India (phone:+91-294-244-1322) to learn more.

- Ramawtar Singh, Ajmer, India
<ramawtarsingh@yahoo.co.in>

hospitality club

Hospitality Club <www.hospitalityclub.org> is supported by volunteers who believe in one idea: by bringing travelers in touch with people in the place they visit, and by giving "locals" a chance to meet people from other cultures, we can increase intercultural understanding and peace on our planet. Thousands of Hospitality Club members around the world help each other when they are traveling, be it with a roof for the night or a guided tour through town.

Everyone is welcome to join. Members can look at each other's profiles, send messages and post comments about their experience on the website. There are no obligations (you do not have to host anyone at your home!), and membership is free!

I've been a member of the Hospitality Club for about two years now. I joined up when I traveled around the world last year for a film project. We never needed to use it overseas but at the same time, an Austrian couple stayed at my house while I was away. Now that I am back, we have regular visitors from the club staying at our community building and getting involved in our community events. We have around one visitor per week at the moment, sometimes more.

Most come from Germany and Canada but we're beginning to get more from other parts of the world. It's great to have them around... fresh energy, new ideas and stories of their adventures and impressions of the world as they travel.

I believe that the idea of owning property is theft and that homes should be for those that need them. Opening my home to travelers has been really rewarding, and I hope to continue this with a view for a world without borders and costs, where everyone is free.

- Emily Bailey, Wellington, Aotearoa
<wrag_@hotmail.com>

Shikshantar was founded in 1998 in Udaipur, Rajasthan, India, and links itself to struggles throughout time to live with justice, balance, dignity and beauty. It works to challenge the culture of schooling, the readymade world, and institutions of thought-control. It has many faces: a local learning community, an applied research institute, a filmmaking and publishing house, a network of people from all around India and the world... Above all, Shikshantar see itself as a 'jeevan andolan' (an agitation/movement of one's own life). To learn more about its internship program, visit www.swaraj.org/



I don't think I have learned more in one month, or had the opportunity to do as many different things as I did in the rest of my 22 years. I was exposed to the current water crisis around the

world; I installed rainwater pipes on roofs; I learned how to organically farm; I shot and edited short films. I co-learned with little children in workshops in the neighborhood, and went to local schools to talk to young girls about water usage. I even got a chance to run my own workshop about how to make a portfolio. I wrote articles, participated in satirical "plays", put on lemongrass tea stands. I was introduced to ideas, thoughts, perspectives, communities, people, traditions, technologies, games, challenges, art, entire other ways of life.

It may seem extreme to say that, but growing up the way that I did, there is not room for people to think about living in different ways. There is a path that one follows, and I had not strayed far from it because I did not realize that straying was ok, and that making another path was not scary, but uplifting. I realized how many people were leading different lifestyles. It's not just a handful of people here and there, there are millions of people living with a conscious effort to make the most of their time and do something they believe in. I have still have many unanswered questions, but now there is a possibility of answering them.

- Sweta Daga, DC, USA <swetki01@aol.com>

shikshantar - india

Though Shikshantar addresses the impact of factory schooling and globalization, provides creative opportunities, regenerates the local language and culture, it still brings about a different kind/level of realization in every individual, to re-evaluate who they were, what they are and what they intend to be. The same thing happened to me.

I walked in and read on the wall, "I hear, I forget. I see, I remember. I do, I understand." At that time, I didn't agree to it completely; now I have to.. One week at Shikshantar, one heaven (hell) of an

experience. Now I know it's impossible to translate all the cramming into concrete work, that topping my class in reality means nothing. I think I always knew that, but here I feel it.

- Ankana Daga, New Delhi, India

In the course of four months, there have been so many things I've gotten involved with – some I'd never done before, but many were things I had done before, but never really pursued because I "didn't know what I was doing." Because I wasn't an expert, I didn't think I was qualified or capable to follow so many of my interests; and so I let them go. Here, I rediscovered so many paths I had closed off for myself – from cooking, to painting, to video-making, to storytelling, to medicinal plants, to vermicomposting. I'm learning to place less emphasis on expertise, and more of an emphasis on experimentation. For years, I think I stifled the urge to experiment, because I was captive to the fear of results. But I am also learning the value of making mistakes. I can't theorize a solution, I



have to get my hands into it and keep working until it feels right. That means making mistakes – the more uninhibited I feel, the more I can learn and create.

Simultaneously, I am also unlearning the notion that the most valuable work or experiences are mental ones. In the past, my work and my life has been much more focused on ideas, discussions, thoughts. Here, my life seems much more tangible, much more physical, my hands are literally in my work. I've mixed gober, I've dug ditches, I've planted seeds, I've rolled rotis, I've run and played with children, I've danced in the rain, I bicycle to work, I wash my clothes. The more I use my body, the more I experience its potential, the more I feel like all ancient and powerful energies within me are unlocked. I operate on a more physical level, and it also helps me operate on a more instinctual and creative level.

- Shreya Janssens-Sannon, New York, USA

<sjs77@lycos.com>

book review: outwardly simple, inwardly rich

Within its first few pages, *Voluntary Simplicity* seemed to have put into words the way I had chosen to live my life.

Written by Duane Elgin in 1993, this book articulates a philosophy and practice of living. "To live voluntarily is to live more deliberately, intentionally, and purposefully... to be aware of ourselves as we move through life." To live more simply is "to establish a more decent, unpretentious, and unencumbered relationship with all aspects of our lives: the things we consume, the work we do, our relationships with others, and our connections with nature and the cosmos." Taken together, voluntary simplicity means being authentic — who we are at the deepest level of our selves — in our thoughts, words and actions.

The beginning of the book beautifully shares how a choice for voluntary simplicity impacts all aspects of our lives. For example, those choosing a simpler life:

- Tend to feel an intimate connection with the earth and a reverential concern for nature.
- Tend to have concern for social justice and for balance and equity in the use of the world's resources.
- Tend to lower their overall level of personal consumption, by buying less clothing, jewelry, cosmetic products, and observe holidays in a less commercialized manner.
- Tend to shift their diet away from highly processed foods, meat and sugar towards foods that are more natural, healthy, simple and appropriate for sustaining the inhabitants of a small planet.
- Tend to develop personal skills that contribute to greater self-reliance and reduce dependence on experts to handle life's ordinary demands (basic carpentry, plumbing, gardening, crafts, etc.)
- Tend to appreciate the simplicity of non-verbal forms of communication: silence, the language of the eyes, hugging, touching.
- Tend to participate in holistic health-care practices that emphasize preventive medicine and the healing powers of the body and mind.
- Tend to change transportation modes in favor of public transit, car pooling, biking, walking and living closer to work.
- Tend to work on developing the full spectrum of their potentials: physical (running, biking, hiking, etc.), emotional (learning the skills of intimacy and sharing feelings in important relationships), mental (engaging in lifelong learning) and spiritual (learning to move through life with a quiet mind and compassionate heart).

***What are you doing to live more voluntarily or more simply?
How has this helped you in pursuing the learning you are interested?
Share your ideas and experiences with us for the next issue of Swapathgami.***

In doing many of these things, one is implicitly (and explicitly) challenging the dominant notion of 'progress' and 'success' — which means going against the grain of media advertising, industrialization, mass consumption, the promise of schooling, the power of the nation-state. Moreover, these are all voluntary acts! Doing something out of choice, out of a feeling of beauty and desire to live by my own values, and not out of resignation or force, is very powerful. Elgin cites this voluntarism as the key difference between 'poverty' and 'simplicity'.

One limitation of the book, however, is that it is written primarily for an urban or Western audience. I think this is why it doesn't go far enough in raising questions about many of the dominant institutions in our world, especially technology, science and education. Perhaps it is because those in Europe or North America cannot imagine a life without these institutions. But in India, or other parts of the world, we have traditions of simplicity and ways of balanced and healthy living that existed far before such institutions ever entered. So we need to

re-contextualize "voluntary simplicity" and decide what it means in each of our diverse realities. For example, in the Jain tradition, we have *aparigraha*, translated as "non-accumulation," or (more positively) as "existing with a sense of enough."

Living this way has helped me to reaffirm many of the practices of my family and neighbors. Like eating simple food, or sleeping on the ground, or owning only a few clothes, or speaking with humility, or getting one's hands dirty... I see these actions as powerful — instead of as poverty, as I was taught.

I also have realized that voluntary simplicity requires a special attitude. While making changes in my own life, I have to be careful not to judge others or become self-righteous (or conversely, be put down or feel guilty or depressed). People have also reacted to me defensively, trying to justify what they are doing. I feel it is important not to get into debates or try to convince others. Rather, I try to engage in a dialogue, so both of us can deepen our inquiry into our values and see what it takes to live in alignment with them.

Elgin is careful not to call this phenomenon a 'movement', because that takes time to emerge. But I do believe that many of us are being called to confront the crises before us, both on personal and societal levels, with compassion, consciousness, and ingenuity. Isn't that what voluntary simplicity and being a *swapathgami* is about?

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

gurukula botanical sanctuary - wayanad, india

The Gurukula Botanical Sanctuary is a forest garden in the Western Ghat mountains of Kerala, India. It is home to over 2000 wild plant species, nearly one half of the region's flora. All have been rescued from degraded and destroyed environments. The Sanctuary works to 'garden back the biosphere' through conservation, forest restoration, biodiversity and nature learning. Contact <gbsanctuary@vsnl.net> to learn more.

opportunities

I first came to the Sanctuary at the end of March in 2004. My wife, Jen and I, had been traveling around visiting various schools and farms in southern India. As educators in the U.S., our work with children focuses on the connection between the individual and the environment, often using the idea of food as a starting point for exploration. We were interested in finding schools or communities where similar explorations were taking place. Thus we found ourselves climbing those rather substantial steps up to the Sanctuary one by one...



What struck me upon arriving at the Sanctuary was, of course, the land it self. It is so carefully cared for and lovingly cultivated. I immediately felt the intention behind the work. The more I explored the more I could see this intention, feel it all around me. Every plant is carefully

collected or propagated from tiny, delicate seed, every, leaf is collected, composted and re-applied, and every stone is selected, carried, shaped and placed in the wall or steps. A sense of the deliberate, exacting choice permeates every inch of space. This is a personal connection, an intimate co-mingling of the path and force of Nature herself with that of the desires, knowledge and personalities of those seven people who comprise the Sanctuary family. This is the work of the Sanctuary.

'Collaboration' is the lesson learned at the Sanctuary. Collaboration between individuals is what makes the beauty and vitality of the Sanctuary possible and continue to grow (quite literally). It is the more essential collaboration between Nature and humans that is the most powerful lesson. The Sanctuary is a model of possibilities, of potential, of the beauty and richness that is available to those who choose to enter into this collaboration. And this is the most precious gift the Sanctuary gives, the opportunity to participate in this relationship.

While living at the Sanctuary, I felt more integrated into my environment than I ever have before. I could see where the water I drank came from, the very spot upon the Earth from whence it bubbled forth. I harvested food that I had nurtured and helped to grow and others that grew in the wild. Jen and I built our own dwelling from bamboo and lemongrass (and a few other items) that we collected from the land around us. To be so completely tied and entwined to the living world around you is an experience that, in my modern up-bringing, I had only glimpsed but a few times. I am certainly changed. I have been shown the sense of fulfillment that can be had when one enters into a direct partnership with the natural world.

- John Grainger <doodoolove@hotmail.com>

I spent a month working here as part of the Post School programme of the KFI at The Valley School. It wasn't long before I felt a part of this place. I didn't feel, at any point, like I was working for an institution, and neither did the place ever treat us like guests. This made things very easy and our stay participatory and a lot of fun. I engaged in a lot of physical work during this month, which was something I had been keen on doing, and enjoyed every minute of. The hours of sawing logs, picking coffee and pepper brought me certain quietness and lightness, which I think I have retained in some way. I had been in a kind of taut and heavy state of mind before we came to the Sanctuary, but something about the environs, the people, the work and the general routine relaxed everything.

- Aditya Pandya, Ahmedabad, India
<aditya_pandya@hotmail.com>

A feeling of completeness penetrated a lot at the Sanctuary for me. No work, whether of my particular interest or not, ever felt forced. It was spontaneously fuelled from both inside and the outside. The physical activities evoked mental engagement and attention. At the same time, there was so much opportunity to spend time alone and in quiet - out in Manicheri picking coffee or pepper, up the water tower, down at the river, on the forest walks. I found the entire time very *rounded*: with all the senses, the mind and the body, in its entirety, engaged in a challenging and nurturing way. There was a poignant lack of struggle for dominance amongst all the life: the place, the people, the dogs, the fish, the birds, everything.

- Chaiti Seth, Bangalore, India
<chaiti_seth@hotmail.com>

sweetness of contact: an interview with Wolfgang Theuerkauf

What made you leave Germany (your birthplace)?

I grew up in the post-war years, when everyone was enthusiastic about putting things together. I was in *kolleg* then – a kind of special high school where I would get a certificate to join university. I thought I would study something like botany or environment, having already walked out of an apprenticeship in electronics and an engineering program. (Even though I learned a lot, I found myself getting depressed by doing such mechanical work. I didn't want to have a mind-killing job.)

At the *kolleg*, I joined SDS, the extreme leftist socialist student group of Germany. This was not because I liked Marx, but because I liked the meetings and demonstrations. But after a short time, I noticed that for many people, it was just theory. People would manipulate each other, on the sly or by brute force, and do the very things they claimed to be opposed to. They would try to control each other by measuring their acts of extremism, by labeling someone as 'part of the establishment' if he did not agree to do as told.

My society had become disgusting to me. I couldn't find a slot to fit in, and I didn't want to stay. Being well-adjusted to a sick society is not a sign of health.

So how did you end up in India?

This was not a conscious decision, but more of an impulsive one. Some friends were driving to India and Nepal to start up an antique trading business. They wanted people to come along, to chip in on gas costs. So I went. I was 18 and ended up doing various things. I sold a Mercedes, part by part, in Kabul, Afghanistan, to get some money. I worked with some friends on a handicraft business.

Compared to all that I was learning while traveling, the world back home in Germany seemed so small. If I went back, I'd have to spend two years in *kolleg* to get my certificate, five years to get my Ph.D., another five years doing menial jobs for megalomaniacs I would be nearly 40 before I did anything interesting. I thought I'd skip it!

At 21, I sold everything I had (including my luggage) and started traveling around India. I ended up going to an ashram in Ooty, Kerala, to rest and recover. Later, the ashram head, Nataraj Guru, wanted a volunteer to start a forest retreat on the land we had been gifted through Kerala's Land Reform Act. So in 1971, at age 23, I came to Wayanad, where I have been ever since.

When I came, it was all forest. But then other settlers arrived, and the first thing they did was to burn the forest to get charcoal. They then planted tapioca and lemongrass to earn a living. I survived by greatly reducing my needs. I begged for food and lived in extreme simplicity.

Why didn't you walk out of this difficult situation?

When you start living basic, then your thinking also becomes very basic. I became very introspective for some time. I could not agree with what mainstream society was doing, but I could not agree with the available 'alternatives' either. Being dissatisfied with society also meant being dissatisfied with myself. And I had studied *advaita Vedanta*, which suggested that nothing was real anyway. So what to do? Here was as good a place as any other. For about six years, I did nothing but simply live alone on the land as I was.

How did Gurukula Botanical Sanctuary emerge?

One year, a group of local kids turned up. They kept coming back, and so their parents agreed to let them move in with me to have an ashram-type education. That went sour for various reasons, but I had tasted the sweetness of human contact, and I didn't want to be alone anymore. Through them I learned Malayalam and was able to interact more with my neighbors.

During those years, I was relating to the living beings of the forest – birds, insects, butterflies, plants were everywhere. I didn't have scientific or local names for them so I named them in my own language. At the same time, I saw the tremendous environmental depletion happening around me and saw that these beings were retreating. So I started taking the plants off the firewood and re-locating them elsewhere. Once the interest was there, of course, I started looking and seeing more.

Though a whole worldwide movement on environmental issues was happening, I was cut off from it until much later. I was collecting plants not for the goal of conservation, but simply out of my own interest. But through word-of-mouth, people started coming as visitors and staying on to work with me.

The Sanctuary has over the years just organically grown into the form it is today, shaped by the people and the land itself. There has always been a sense of direction, but not a plan. Our challenge has been to remain in true to our interests. We cannot forget what we are doing, or we lose contact with our selves.

What can walkouts learn from nature?

Nature is never doing anything unnecessary. Not one bit of energy is wasted in a rainforest; everything is used. And there is always plenty. Being with nature you learn that there is always enough.

Wolfgang Theuerkauf <gbsanctuary@vsnl.net> is the founder of Gurukula Botanical Sanctuary. His dream of restoring the forest and plant life of the Western Ghats is slowly becoming a reality, as Sanctuary plants are finding their way back into the wild. Wolfgang has not visited Germany in over 35 years, though you can sometimes catch him humming the tunes of German nursery rhymes..

"We are the walking dead. For the walking dead to wake, what do those whose spirits still desire life have to do?"

Refuse to live on a diet of great lies and minor lies as food, refuse to take seemingly inconsequential lies as our drink. And face the tyrant coming dressed in prophetic robes, screaming the defense of cruel gods, accusing us of blasphemy, and saying we will die if we dare speak the truth we know.

Because we have been trained to run from death before actually looking into its white face, we run from truth and put our faith in established lies, preached day and night, century after shouting century, as if it were eternal truth. It is far from the truth. I, Djely Hor, trained in the traditions of the black people, say this: It is a monstrous, monumental lie. When we are ready to face assassins threatening to kill us for saying so, we will begin awakening from the dead... there comes a time when the whispered truth must follow the loudness of established lies.

There is no secret about the paths along which our people have moved over the millennia. Hear the words of the ancient tradition. Broken by fraud and violence, it will become whole if we inform it with our energy, working in love to make it live. It says: Go toward the rising sun until you come to the great water. All along the way you will see our faces, hear our music, wonder at the same dances being danced by the same people across so much land. Ask yourself: What is happening? Reality will answer you. It will tell you, gently but persistently, where we came from.."

- Aji Kwei Armah, *Popenguine, Senegal*
excerpted from "KMT: in the house of life" (2002)

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:

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Growing Our Own Learning Webs

swapathgami businesses
we believe in

Spirit in Business

www.spiritinbusiness.org

Visionaries, leaders and entrepreneurs from all around the world gather in the Spirit in Business community. They aim to bring creativity, innovation, and caring to build an economy that works for everyone. Spirit in Business serves as a support community to those beginning eco- and spirit-based businesses. Find articles, contacts, and new ideas on this site.

Local Exchange Trading Systems

www.gmlets.u-net.com

LETS is a system of local barter and currency which strengthens small communities. LETS has been launched in a number of places, with great success. You'll find details on the design and development of LETS, ideas about local currency, the software and tools for starting LETS in your community, and links to other LETS practitioners. Start building your community's own LETS today!

Entrepreneurial Business Networks

<http://sohodojo.com/index.html>

Sohodojo is an independent, non-profit applied research and development laboratory, working to support solo and family-based small business entrepreneurs in rural and distressed urban communities. They see the community networks they are building as part of the "Small Is Good" World, where person-to-person relationships are the key. On their site, you'll find their research and methods for reviving creative communities.

Ecoventures International

www.eco-ventures.org

Their vision is for a world of sustainable communities and sustainable livelihoods. On the Ecoventures' website, you can read about their mentoring programs and their youth projects, which focus on balancing natural environments and building local economies. Get ideas for what might be possible in your community.