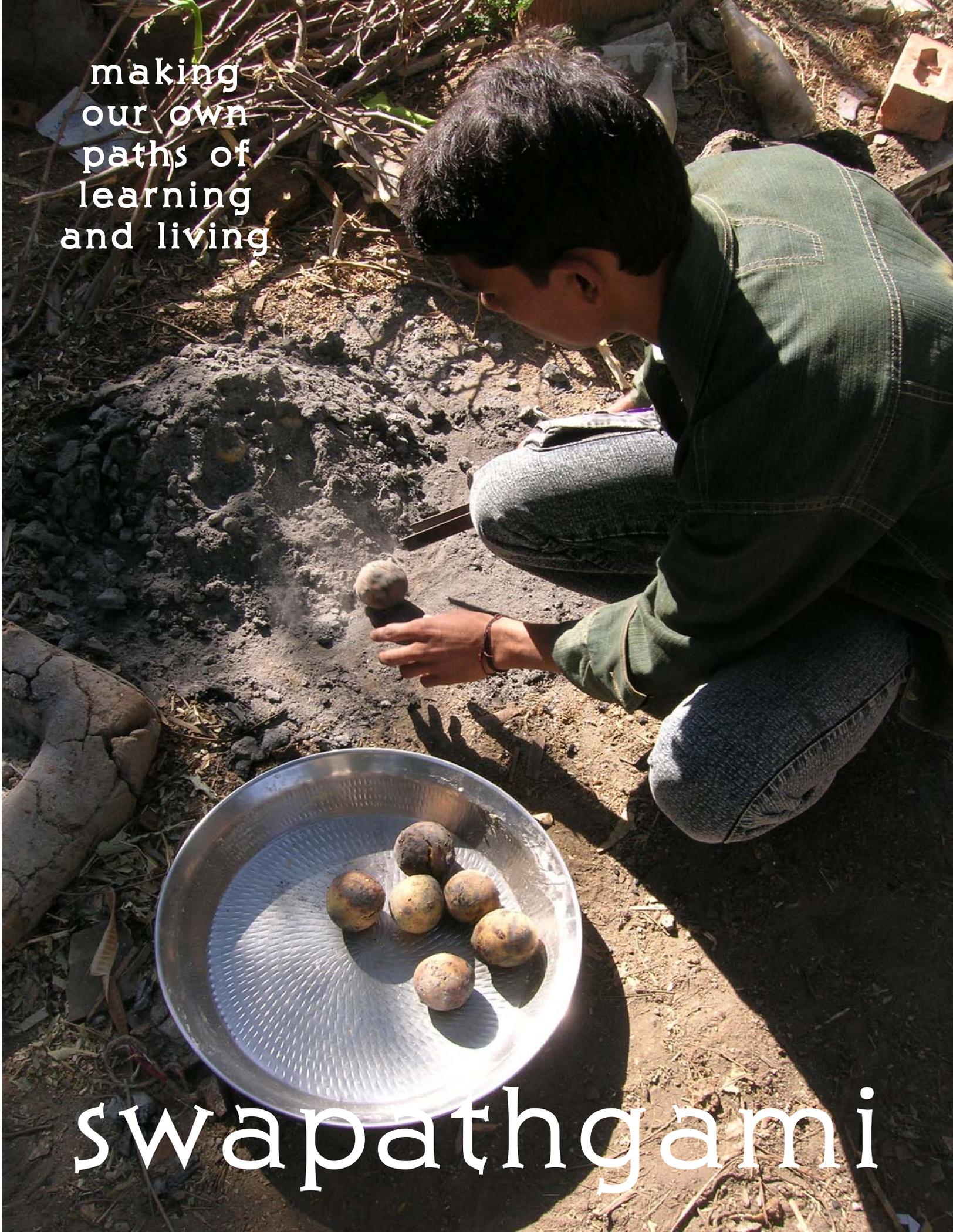


making
our own
paths of
learning
and living

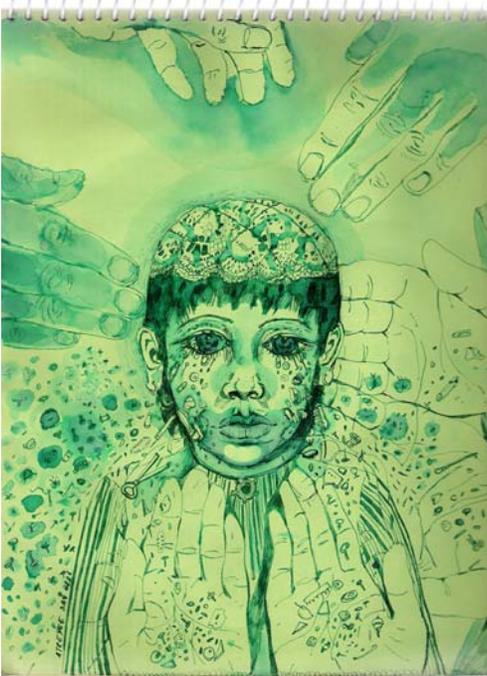


swapathgami

The third annual money-free, mobile-free, medicine-free **Swapathgami Cycle Yatra** will be held from **November 1-6, 2007**. We will travel by cycle, flow with cosmic rhythms, engage in physical work and appreciate the amazing beauty of nature and people. If you're interested in an unforgettable adventure, to reaffirm your faith in the human spirit and hope for the future, join us!
 Contact: Shammi Nanda
 <shammi_nanda@yahoo.com>

The times we live in call us all to step up and contribute whatever we can to stop the destruction and plant new seeds of possibilities. Figuring out what our resources are (money, time, contacts, networks, skills) and how we can put them to the best use, while getting through those fears and obstacles which block us, takes careful thought

Where do you get your courage/ inspiration/ energy from, in order to resist, walk out and create new possibilities in your life?



Share your stories with Shilpa
 <shilpa@swaraj.org>
 for the next issue of Swapathgami.

and a community of friends. Join us in Himachal Pradesh for a first-ever gathering dedicated to such work: **Sharing Our Gifts and Resources for Social Change - November 17-22, 2007**. For more information, contact Shilpa Jain <shilpa@swaraj.org>.

In two years, Gandhiji's pivotal work, *Hind Swaraj*, will be celebrating its 100th anniversary.



In preparation, a number of *swapathgamis* are coming together to explore how they understand and are trying to live *Swaraj* (self-rule and radiance of the self) today, in their own lives and communities. The hope is that such a gathering will spark a number of 'Regenerating Swaraj' efforts throughout the country in the coming years. We anticipate holding three '**Swaraj100**' meetings in 2008-09. Contact Naveen Kumar <naveenv@gmail.com> to learn more.

the walkouts-walkons network

The Network is a collection of people engaged in exploring individual pathways outside of institutionalized structures. As *swapathgamis*, we trust our own creative intelligence over the prescribed lives of the Ready-Made world. By 'walking-out' from unhealthy and isolating lifestyles, we are 'walking-on' into endless possibilities. Anyone can be a *Swapathgami*, and all are invited to join us for:

- Learning Journeys** – to connect individuals and groups engaged in exciting thinking and doing.
- Celebrations/Gatherings/Public Dialogues** – space to explore crucial issues and to build strong relationships between people with common concerns. Possibilities for future collaborations evolve during these events.
- Communications** – print, film and web resources to share experiences of walking-out and walking-on.
- Communities of Practice** – collaborative explorations and sharing of skills. Past groups have focused on a diversity of interests including (but not limited to) film-making, music, eco-livelihoods and *kabaad se jugaad*.

For more information, explore our website:
 <www.swaraj.org/shikshantar/walkoutsnetwork.htm>
You are invited to share your experiences as a Swapathgami co-creator!

natural connections

My relationship with nature was forged at a very young age. I spent summers with my friends and family exploring Northern Ontario by canoe, bicycle and foot, navigating lakes and landscapes, coming face to face with wild animals, getting pelted by freak hail storms and captivated by glorious sunsets. Here I had my first learning experiences (and struggles) with sustainable living by fire and no trace camping. I have vivid memories of singing at the top of my lungs with my best friends floating in the middle of an endless lake, sitting on the bow of sailboat with my mother on a perfect day in Georgian Bay, or trekking through unmarked forest with a canoe on my shoulders. Sitting around a fire with friends under the stars and free-styling a tune was a perfect feeling. I have been floored by the smell of a tree in bloom, the taste of a fresh spice or the sound of a symphony of crickets. These experiences left an indelible mark on my character. Nature was the stage. And taking a moment to stand in awe of my environment encourages reflection as to where I fit in with this system.

At the Kabaad se Jugaad Meet (Chandigarh, February 20-25, 2007), washing our plates with leaves and ash, singing and dancing under the stars, and sharing stories with the group reinvigorated my own dialogue around people in their environments, grounding me again in the reality that we are a part of nature, rather than masters of it. Workshops at the gathering turned plastic bags to twine, newspapers to baskets and bags, cardboard to furniture, and coconut shells and bottle caps to jewelry. Being a part of this process (as something completely new to me) I began seriously asking questions about how I can lead a more sustainable life, why we consume with reckless abandon, and how my thoughts, expressions and actions have the ability to strengthen the bond between my environment and myself. Most importantly, how do we unlearn the deeply ingrained practices that we engage in without thinking twice?

What is the consequence surrounding the fact that 8 billion plastic water bottles were consumed in the USA in 2006 alone, for example?

Now as I find myself back in the concrete jungle of Toronto, I begin to see ideas from the Zero Waste Meet illuminated in every corner of my community. My experience with other swapathgamis encouraged me



to identify opportunities within a different context, to embrace creative and practical ideas around what many would consider to be basic life choices: Refuse plastic altogether. Use paper, reuse it, recycle it, make more paper. Ride your bicycle. Compost your food scraps. Develop a relationship with your garden. Many urbanites might scoff, but all this is essential to achieve any degree of sustainable livelihood.

I personally struggle to be faithful to the above suggestions and lifestyle choices. When I make suggestions, I am often smiled at or told to go hug a tree. Maybe

I am hanging out with the wrong people, but this seems to be the way the majority of people think! Everything is packaged with layers of Styrofoam, plastic, paper... "Oh, I don't need a bag" is hardly a step towards actively challenging the standard of accepting a bed of lettuce in a tray of styrofoam. How to find viable options that make sense to both consumers and vendors? If it doesn't make financial sense, the environmentally-friendly solutions get put on the back burner. Who is to blame?

I see how humans struggle to live in harmony with nature. How mainstream marketing encourages sloth-like consumption. How we have been taught not to live with nature, to value our 'convenience' above all else. This points directly to the disconnect between what people do in their lives and what they believe to be sustainable and positive choices for the future. There is a systematic problem that has blinded people to the impact of their footprint while perpetuating the complex of the increasingly self-absorbed and isolated individual. Maybe when we start burying our deceased relatives in garbage we might get the message.

Before that somewhat horrifying step though, the more we are able to engage in Zero Waste and like meets, the more we will catalyse a drastic change. We need to find alternatives to these misguided behaviors and ultimately strive to unlearn them altogether.

- Julian Caspari, Canada
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living without cable TV

Two years back, we decided as a family to switch off our satellite cable connection. The major rationale was to experience and live in ways which are more natural and less mechanical. We live in Karachi, the hub of Pakistan. Each new development in any field is adopted very fast here, especially regarding media and technology. The government's media policy has encouraged the launch of many private channels. Cable operators have started their businesses in apartments on a monthly rental basis. Today, it is difficult to find a family who is not exposed to these channels. The satellite channels are also aired in local hotels and restaurants.

My family belongs to a faith-based religious community, one of the Shiite Islamic sects. We go to Jamat Khana where congregations take place every day in the evening. I live in a joint family system with my parents, wife and two kids. My wife and I grew up at a time when there was only one TV channel in Pakistan. The VCR came when I was ten, and computers four years later. Cable TV was introduced in our home in 1998. The popular Indian soap operas were watched every evening, and if an episode was missed, my mother and wife would watch it in the afternoon. We also used to watch Indian movies, songs (especially the old ones), folk songs, English movies on HBO, news and sports, like cricket. Though, my father (who is retired) is uninterested in TV and loves to spend time chatting with his friends instead.

Since we live in a joint family, everyone had to make a choice of which program to watch. The rationale was that we do not have any other form of entertainment available; therefore, TV was the only way to relax, be entertained and better informed. Although there are some forms of entertainment available like beaches, family discussions, parks, funhouses, neighbors and relatives, food streets, but the security situation prevents us from utilizing these options on a frequent basis. Social isolation and dis-integration also have contributed to this.

I now firmly believe that mainstream media is a means for controlling attitudes and beliefs. So, I started reflecting on my own TV viewing habits and decided to reduce them. I also tried to observe TV programming (most of which I felt is against our humanness) and tried to involve my family in discussing this. Whenever I came home from work, I saw my family watching soap operas. Everyone would be stuck to the screen; sometimes they wouldn't even notice my coming home.

I also observed the changing nature of advertisements and realized that they were becoming more focused on children, their future consumers. Whenever I came home,

I tried to take my daughter to other room to play or go outside for a walk. I noticed she was getting engrossed in a world which is not appropriate for her personality and language development. But soon my daughter started resisting and insisted that she was more interested in TV. We were blessed with a second child during this period. I tried my best that TV should not become a babysitter, or a motivating/rewarding factor for children. In our neighborhoods, there are families, whose children eat only when TV is turned on for them.

I decided that I must do something to get rid of cable TV. Initially I took this decision as a dictator and informed my family that I have told the cable operator to unsubscribe us for six months. I made my routine such that after coming from work, I spend at least two to three hours with my daughter for playing together. Storytelling became the core activity. Sometimes we dance together, make different poems and do some writing activities. We play piano on the computer at home. On Sundays, I usually take my kids out for walks in the nearby park. Visiting book fairs and selecting and buying books also became important, and a small home library was set up gradually. Interestingly, we did not create a schedule for every day activities. I found my daughter automatically engages herself in drawing, takes out a book and reads, engages her younger brother as well. They create games on their own, play, fight, negotiate, share things together.

Almost two years have passed now and I am glad that my wife and mother acknowledged that the decision to take out cable TV was the right one. The family bonds and relationships have strengthened. Now, we eat together and love to share our experiences and daily activities as much as possible. Family outings became another key activity for enhancing this bond.

What I feel is that multinational corporations, media companies and government authorities have joined hands and are putting their best efforts in maximizing their profits, propagating an image of a developing and liberal nation by using all electronic and print media. Living in an urban society, I have realized that the challenge is huge and that it's really difficult for a person to not get contaminated with these diseases which promote individualism, greediness, selfishness, consumerism, and monoculture. However, at the same time, I also feel that the struggle must continue at personal, family and community levels, to be the persons we are, protecting our identities, individualities and value systems.

- Nooruddin Merchant, Karachi, Pakistan
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CHECK OUT TV TURNOFF WEEK!
<www.tvturnoff.org>

*Another airplane, another sunny place,
I'm lucky I know, but I want to go home
Let me go hooooome,
I'm just too far from where you are,
I wanna come home**

She was not sure where home was anywhere...
split up in too many places in her heart.
They say home is where the heart is,
but even there, there is not peace
No refuge, no more excuses
She is rocking like a boat on rough waters
Connected to everything, not anchored in anything

And scared to death that she will not find a resting place
A place to escape from her head
A place to escape from all that is dead
inside her, in the world
She is a spider, caught in her own web

Her prayer is for a resting place
Refuge from Spiritual homelessness
Everywhere and no where at the same time
That ladder everyone wishes to climb
She can do without it just fine

Assumptions, stereotypes, lies: how do we let go of the things do not serve us? What experiences enable us to question that which we have been taught by schools, the mass media, government propaganda, consumerist conditioning? Where do our unlearning journeys lead?

God moving so fast through her
She cannot keep pace with her desires
Internal evolution...internal revolution
Where will she land?
Wondering if she can

So many choices made out of distress
As she comes home to what is true
Means leaving everything she knew
Not sure if she can
Will she perpetually begin again?

*I feel I am living an imposter's life,
everything cold outside
I know why you could not come along with me
but you always believe in me*

So this time around, she will be there for herself
Courageous in her own definition
Tired of reacting, instead of choosing
Searching for palpable acceptance
of an invisible stranger...fear of them judging
She will dance the dance
denied herself for so long...
Apply healing balm, glue of her truth to her heart...

*And I'm surrounded by a million people
and I still feel alone
Let me go home...
Baby I'm done
Let me go home....
It will all be alright...Let me go home*

- Kisha Montgomery, Oakland, USA
<healingword@gmail.com>

Kisha is a walkout from the international development industry. Currently, she is aspiring to share her poetry, songs and stories on intergenerational healing, spiritual grounding and self-care.

* From the song "Home" by Michael Buble



towards wholeness

Mine raye mintawe Danwe hinganye ke. Baxoje tunap'l kiraje wokigo ida hahu ke. I grew up in a small Midwestern city a few hundred miles away from the land where my family lived and farmed for the six generations before me. That land, the Iowa reservation, sits along the Missouri river on the border of Kansas and Nebraska, just across the river from Missouri and Iowa. I didn't grow up there learning the stories and skills of my elders. Instead, like most of our young people living in cities, my primary form of 'learning' took place in the public school system.

Just as I see with the youth today, school did little to reinforce my interests, if anything it presented the world in a way that made it difficult to see where I could possibly 'plug in'. The way curriculums are presented in nicely packaged subjects- math, science, history, etc... never seemed right to me. And while I didn't have any evidence or well articulated opposition to this way of doing things, I knew there had to be another way to learn, and in turn another way to live...

The summer after I graduated high school I moved to Lawrence, Kansas to attend Haskell Indian Nations University- a former BIA assimilation boarding school. Ironically enough it was there that I began to reconnect with my culture and people. It is even more ironic since I have relatives who went there when it was still one of the primary tools of colonization used by the federal government, and is subsequently at least partly responsible for me not knowing how to speak our language. The more time I spent around other native people the more I realized how much my worldview was shaped by other Baxoje that came before me, even though I had never met them. Learning that there are others who don't see the world as a compartmentalized set of professions and research tracts helped reaffirm my way of seeing and doing things. It made me question why we continue to look to modern educational institutions to be our primary source of validation as a people. If our primary forms of learning separate the world into little pieces, how can we expect to be whole ourselves?

A few years ago I went with a contingent of youth and elders to the Navajo Nation in the four corners region of the southwestern 'US'. As part of our trip, we went to speak with representatives from the US Forest Service about a proposed ski area expansion on the San Francisco Peaks just north of Flagstaff, Arizona. (Being

that it no longer snows enough to warrant a ski resort, the proposal would have allowed for reclaimed wastewater to be pumped 8 miles from the city of Flagstaff up the mountain where it would then be turned into 'snow' for recreation.) We refused to meet in their office chambers, or to limit ourselves to an allotted three-minute comment. Instead, we met outside in the forest and ensured that all of us, particularly the elders that had come from all corners of Turtle Island would be heard out for as long as deemed necessary. We were there to let them know that the repercussions of continuing to disrupt sacred sites reverberate throughout the world, and do not merely effect the twelve tribes listed on their Environmental Impact Statement.

As we spoke, we sat in a forest that has been decimated by a pine bark beetle infestation due to ongoing drought. In the distance we could see smoke billowing up into the sky from one of the largest forest fires in recent memory. And yet, we were still having a conversation with local leaders of the Forest Service as to why we can no longer continue to treat our mother in this way... What has enabled people to be so far removed from the land that they are truly unable to see that their actions have greater, long-lasting repercussions than are acknowledged?

As the compartmentalized worldview of modern educational systems has taken hold of our people, we have lost an entire generation (sometimes more) of knowledge because of its refusal to be translated into, and its incompatibility with academic disciplines. We move away from our elders and our homelands so that we can sit in classrooms and read about how our cultures are being lost to assimilation into a wage economy. Then we go to the next classroom to learn of environmental degradation, then the next to learn entrepreneurial skills. Never is the connection made between the 'different' disciplines, much less that not only are these things 'related', but they are one and the same. Our ancestors knew the world to be this way, and now we want that back.

I recognize that the future of the little ones depends on our ability to transform how we view 'education'. It depends on remembering our connection to the earth and each other and valuing, above all else, the form of knowledge those connections bring. It depends on recognizing the strength and knowledge that come with being indigenous to a place. And it depends on our ability to support each other as we further decolonize our hearts and our minds and prepare ourselves for the transformation that is coming...

- Brett Ramey, Flagstaff, USA
<eatweeds@gmail.com>



my life minus money

Right now in my life, my greatest challenge is having no income. While I do embrace 'my greatest learning is where my greatest challenge is' thinking, yet this is still a difficult experiment for me. I took it on as a natural extension of nothing-ness experience in which I try to be consciously. If I decide that this is a period of 'being' in a certain life situation, being with people, being as it is, I try to respect that. So it isn't only about income and money, but also about approaching 'doing' with awareness. In my whole life I have never done any work only for material wealth. Now, I am taking it one step further and not doing any work which doesn't serve life and community.



It isn't as scary as I thought it would be. Certainly, I feel limited at times but there is no life-threatening situation. I have to be aware of my self-image and self-perception and how ego translates this situation into self-degradation. I experienced some self-resentment about "not doing, not being productive, not trying desperately to make money" when I had no income at all. I would be working in the garden with friends, writing an article, or drawing, and my mind would still be shouting, "C'mon, what are you doing? You should be doing something real and making money!" Yet, growing food, expressing myself through drawing and writing, studying with a young person, building relationships in the community... what's more real than that? But my mind was not happy. I am observing my own conditioning about what productive means, and in relation to that, what successful means. To let go of the conventional success of the modern world, or to unlearn the mindset that allows the dominant system to dictate one's self-worth, has taken some nerve. I feel my true freedom depends on freeing my mind from these very subtle and deep conditionings...

There are some very positive sides to living with almost no money. It has certainly simplified my life. My consumption has gone nearly flat. Before I purchase anything, there is a whole conscious thought process now: Do I really need it? Do I already have something that can fulfill the same need? Can I borrow it from someone? Can I exchange it with something else? And I don't go through this process with resentment; instead, I appreciate this opportunity for awareness practice. I am discovering other ways of fulfilling needs rather than buying something. For example, how I decide what I give people as gifts. One of my best friends recently got married, so instead of a golden coin (which is what is traditionally given to wedding couples in Turkey), I made her a beautiful mandala with

watercolors, something she can put on her wall and enjoy. And guess what? By not buying a golden coin, I don't contribute to the gold industry which uses poisonous cyanide to process gold.

My decision also encourages me to get in relationship with people in a different way. When we take out money, the easy and superficial way of exchange, a more complicated yet a more

'relationship-based' exchange takes place. I remember Shammi's wonderful way of relating to people in Greece by offering them his handmade earrings or paper baskets and the smile in people's faces worth much more than money can buy. The small gestures of kindness surpasses the power of money in authentic human relationships. Money makes us so lazy; it removes the space where people can interact for their livelihood. With no money in hand, I am making an effort to relate to people, to be with them in their living situation rather than choosing my own comfort, to offer what I can to those who have hosted me at times.

Another interesting experience was initiating community conversations. I was staying at my friend's eco-farm-camp, and I had a burning question about economy. I was thinking (am still thinking), how can we create a local, closed, sustainable economy in the area, and how can we support each other to achieve that? I then had this urge to share this question with people, so I extended an invitation to the community, villagers, farmers, newcomers (like me). Why not a potluck? I thought, and asked people to bring food, so we can eat together before the conversation. So, weekly potluck gatherings started. I facilitated the first two meetings, and it was very exciting!

Out of the local economy conversation came the idea of setting up a local network of exchange, gift and *imece* (which roughly means 'solidarity'; the community helping out a community member with harvest or with building a house, etc.). I would like to develop this local network further and offer to administer it initially. I am also thinking other interactive ways of engaging in the community, bringing up vital issues for the local realities, like organic farming, water, sustainable energy, etc. I am planning to move there in a few months, so I will keep you updated.

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Approach love and cooking with reckless abundance

the power of our generation

Three years ago, I was asked to participate in a book project entitled "Imagining Ourselves: What defines your Generation?", a compilation of women from all over the world, edited in collaboration with the International Women's Museum in San Francisco, USA. When I received a copy of the book in the mail, I was shocked. I found myself placed among women leaders of charity projects, powerful North American NGOs, famous singers, a golf player, sex symbols, the Princess of Jordan, and the niece of President Bush who talks about her missionary work with the World Food Program (which causes more damage than help to local traditional agriculture).

The women in this book, the editor says, were selected no so much for their geographical origins but for their "diversity of ideas and aesthetic quality." They chose entries which were allegedly inspiring, controversial and provocative histories, but nothing was published of the responses that I so carefully prepared within the limited time they gave me. Only my photo appears with a small phrase that sounded 'poetic', that they extracted from my responses, along with only one image of my paintings that is presented as an exotic object. I feel that I have been used and had my mouth covered.

Is the arrogance of the dominant culture and its imposition on others that which defines our generation? This is the first question that they should have asked us. They should have made it clear that they were inviting us to celebrate the increasing integration of women of our generation — from all corners of the world — into the lifestyle of the western middle and upper class. Like many so-called 'women's empowerment' books, it makes it appear that the only way to realize human dignity is by being competitive and individualistic — the model of modern, industrial life. We refuse to see it, but the road to peace has been and is still being landmined by our own generation. Below I share part of the answer to the question of the book which I wrote years ago and was never published.

WHAT DEFINES MY GENERATION

I belong to the generation of 'neo-colonialism'. We have seen economic power invade all human values. We have grown up beneath dictators-neoliberals, of an unsustainable system; destroyers of traditions, languages, cultural heritage, community-based organizations, and our environment.

In our generation, the trends towards monoculture and consumerism have created enormous insecurity in women and have

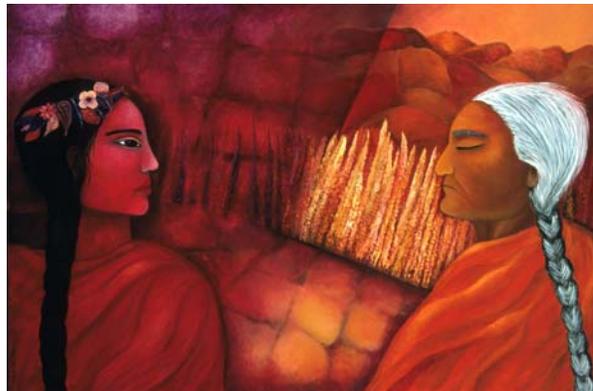
pushed us towards the need to fight for the right to be our true selves, to be who we are. We continue being oppressed under the same model that pressures us to abandon our identity, in order to be homogenized by the arrogant patriarchal structure that promises to liberate us... Although we seemingly find ourselves more equal with men than in past generations, in general we are farther away from living our instinctual and intuitive feminine archetypes (that synchronize with nature). I feel that the gap that normally existed between grandmothers and granddaughters has widened in our generation. The language of values, like the sense of responsibility and family-community connection that offered security and self-esteem, is a language more foreign to us...

I have realized that in our generation, 'returning' is our way to transgress progress. Especially as women, our sights are not limited to looking ahead, where there appears more chaos, denigration, misery, and anguish over an uncertain future for our children. The returning is towards the ancestral sense of interrelation and interdependence... We have arrived at the opportunity to reclaim our dignity, our abundant creativity, our ability to bring to light innovative alternatives, and therefore our capacity to celebrate every aspect of life.

I think that in place of talking about the 'power' of one generation, we should reflect about what we have learned from our past generations and where we now focus our struggles. I find it important to address this from my parents' generation (and even my grandfather's) — the fact that their struggles, formed by Marxist views, were around social-revolutionary change, to liberate the poor and the oppressed, and were based in the belief that working class people and *campesinos* would never be able to find their knowledge-strategies and paths to liberate themselves. I now realise that this idea of liberation has pushed us towards a disconnection from ways of living and relating to life.

My parents are artists and they were, during the 1970s, revolutionaries, communists along the lines of Che Guevara's ELN army in Bolivia. My grandfather is an

anarchist from Andalusia, Spain, a writer who has very radical principles that he expresses in his poetry; writings as tools leading towards *la revolucion libertaria*, while also celebrating his failures inside the



capitalist system, rebelling against the state. He also was a natural actor and trickster, who was able to save my uncle and aunt's lives, when they 'disappeared' and were tortured by the military during the times of dictatorships. Dressed up as a rich businessman, with his little savings he bought high quality bottles of alcohol and cigars, and went to visit different military commanders who were involved. He became 'friends' with them, pretending he was a right-wing fascist and racist caricature, burning inside with anger and despair, but showing the opposite to them; until finally, after a month, my aunt and uncle re-appeared, evading more torture and death. I learned from him when to take risks, how to creatively survive, how to avoid selling one's integrity to the dominant system.



Many of us feel entangled in the dominant economic-political-social-institutional system and are seeking to find ways out. Where are our growing edges? How can we support one another in the face of serious challenges? Where do we draw our strength from?

on our edge

During my parents exile, we lived with different communities and, years later, working to rescue lost art forms to re-teach to young people in different communities of the Bolivian Amazon. I came to an understanding that our work — and the role most people and institutions play — was arrogant, defining after a short time of living with them, what their needs are. My parents thought that we needed to be 'liberated' from the conditions of our lives and certain traditions that they perceived as submissive to the system, and to have access to education so that the people in power would not abuse us and push us down. I could see that their struggles were about class and power as opposed to the people's struggles in the most rooted communities that was simply about survival as *crianza* (nurturance). Our values were placed in only one fragment of our beings — our minds.

But though I have much to unlearn, I also have much to thank to my parents for transmitting to me their commitments with one's principles and knowing when to rebel; in my case, to resist academies and other educational institutions. I learned my art directly from them and from my grandmother, and especially from women and men that showed me real beauty and profundity in their daily simple doings and lived experiences. When I was a girl, my grandmother with other *compañeros*, occupied a house in a town, for an art center and for the communist party's meetings. She was a puppet maker, a weaver, a painter, and a farmer. My mother taught ceramics and painting and my father taught theatre. The center had to run clandestinely, for free expression was prohibited under *la dictadura*. I can see now how much this situation enriched our creativity.

We had to create 'silently' but we expressed *all* that we so much needed in those circumstances of anguish, violence, sadness and despair, but also times of much hope and joy, of being together, sharing in solidarity. I see how this situation corresponds with the communities that we used to go to visit and try to 'change'. If somebody would have come to try to 'liberate' us from doing our art, in the name of liberation, we would have reacted angrily and resisted them no matter what. And so the people in communities resisted and are still resisting, practising their own diverse ways of liberation.

Today, the regeneration of *Ayni**, occupies the centre of my life, of my family and *compañeros*. To liberate ourselves from the notions of progress and development is the most important challenge of all in my generation. We live in a very threatened rural community, Totorkawa, outside of the city of Cochabamba, with a fragile tapestry of relationships, and blurred but alive vernacular values. With our collective of diverse people, from here and from the city, we re-opened *La Casa de la Crianza*, an old *chicheria*. Many people today are irreverently drinking a denigrated form of our traditional drink, *chicha* (a fermented corn brew), in order to evade their current problems. But this leads to more disconnection and violence. I wanted to help create a *chicheria* space for diverse cultural affirmation and mutual learning activities instead. We are all re-learning this, including the people who have been here forever, and have been forced to lose the *Aynoqas***, now becoming ever-more individualistic. We are re-learning to weave with others, textiles and relationships, in the *chacras* (fields). We are re-learning to sow and to offer to *Pachamama* (mother earth) reciprocity, re-learning to make the ancient *chicha* we ritually drink to remember, instead of to forget. We are re-learning the *Allin Kausay* (sweet life) that comes from creative subsistence. I hope that someday we will be able to tell a different story about our generation.

- Valentina Campos, Bolivia
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* *Ayni* is the integral form of conviviality and organicity of Andean communities.

** *Aynoqa* is communal agricultural and ritual land.



my no-school thing

"The first principle of teaching is 'Nothing Can Be Taught'."
– Rabindranath Tagore

When people ask me about my no-school thing, my answer was simple. "Where there are restrictions, there is no growth."

My father worked as an activist in the JP movement (Jayprakash Narayan) in the 1970s. He was lecturer in Maharaja Sayajirao University. My mother was Bank of India employee. They left their jobs in 1983 and started working as full-time social workers. They worked in a small village in north Gujarat's Sabarkantha District and in many movements like Banas Bachao Andolan and Narmada Bachao Andolan, etc. Right now, they are working in Gandhinagar district in the field of Water and Sanitation. They decided that; "If Ruchir goes to school, we won't stop him. If he doesn't, we won't force him." I did not go to school. I liked painting, music, travelling, meeting people, going to all the villages around with them and many other activities.

One day, when I was 10 or 11, I thought, "All my friends are going to school, why can't I go to school?" I talked to them, and they said, "Okay. If you want to go, try for the day." I went to the school the next day with my friends. When the teacher came, all the students stood up and said in unison, "Good Morning, Teacher!" I was confused and shocked about this programmed behavior of the class.

School is all about this programming.

I came home in the afternoon break and did not go back, ever.

I started searching about pros and cons of schooling and of course, about non-schooling. I believe that learning is like eating. If I am in the school, other people decide WHAT to eat, WHEN to eat, WHY to eat, WHERE to eat, HOW and HOW MUCH to eat and WHO will feed. The 'What' is all about your taste. I like potatoes and I don't like carrots. Similarly, I like science and I don't like math. 'When' is about mood and time. 'Why' is the "for Real Learning or for a Degree?" thing again. 'Where' is about place or situation. When I am in the jungle, on the roof, on the tree, near the river or in the toilet, I have provision or time to think, evaluate or

learn. The classroom situation is different. 'How' is about method or style of teaching and learning. The classroom is like a city bus. Everyone is facing the same side. One person drives, and everyone has to go to the same direction he takes you. 'How much' is about quantity. Many times, my friends were so tense and depressed about their homework. They would say, "Why the hell does she give me this much homework? She knows I am not able to do all this!" I should only eat as much as I can digest. If I will overeat, I will not be able to digest and I will vomit. 'Who' is the person who teaches. As per my idea, this is very important thing. In many schools I have seen, the teachers are not interested in teaching at all.

Learning is a Basic Instinct!

I used to publish a 16-page magazine, every month for five years, a total of 60 issues. I would send it to my 100+ friends. I also translated five small books from Hindi to Gujarati. I am always interested in music. I can play some instruments like tabla, harmonium (piano), mouth organ, flute, guitar, violin and sitar, and am trying my hand at more. I do web designing, animation, 3D graphics, photography. The Internet has always been generous to me for learning. After the Swapathgami filmmaking workshop in Udaipur, I wanted to learn more, so I went to Gurjarvani Studio in Ahmedabad. I made 5-10 small documentary films after that.

My father is Mechanical Engineer. My mother is BA, LLB. My two *chachas* (uncles) are Ph.Ds. *Dadaji* (paternal grandfather) is a retired IAS officer. *Dadi* (paternal grandmother) is also double graduate. Both *mamajis* (maternal uncles) are engineers and working in big companies. *Nani* (maternal grandmother) is a retired teacher. *Nana* (maternal grandfather) is retired from Agro Industries. In a family of well-learned people, the idea of non-schooling was not accepted at first. Many questions were raised, but after seeing my growth and development, everyone started respecting the idea.

Nowadays, there are many people like me in Gujarat who are not going to school. To name few: Vishven (21) and Bhargav (17) are brothers from village Sakawa, Narmada district, and are doing organic farming. Kujan (21) and Kshiti (18), are sisters from village Dhedhuki in Rajkot district. Dhaivat and Jajvalya, sons of well-known Gujarati poet Rajendra Shukla, have never gone to school. Chandresh-Sumitra's sons Qudrat and Ajanmya are also not going to school. I am happy to have friends who are challenging the industrial commercialization of the school system.

- Ruchir Raju Deepti, Gujarat, India
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the compact community

In the living room, the group gathers to share inspirational stories about the joy of finding just the right previously-owned shower curtain. To the uninitiated, these people appear almost normal, at least in a San Francisco kind of way. But upon closer inspection, you see it: Nothing in this house, nothing on their bodies, none of their products — nothing is new. Everything is used.

For these people, recycling wasn't enough. Composting wasn't a challenge anymore. No, they wanted much more of much less. These people haven't bought anything new in 352 days — and counting. These 10 friends vowed last year not to purchase a single new thing in 2006 — except food, the bare necessities for health and safety (toilet paper, brake fluid) and, thankfully, underwear, and maybe socks (they're still debating whether new socks are okay).

Everything else they bought secondhand. They bartered or borrowed. Recycled. Re-gifted. Reused. Where? Thrift stores and swap meets, friends and Dumpsters, and the Internet, from Craigslist to the Freecycle Network, which includes 3,843 communities and 2.8 million members giving away stuff to one another.

They call their little initiative "the Compact," which they say has something to do with the Mayflower and the Pilgrim pledge to live for the greater good, renew their souls, etc. Although these modern "Compactors" say they never intended to spark a mini-movement, that is exactly what has happened. Their user group on Yahoo has grown to 1,800 registered members, representing SubCompact cells operating across the US and around the planet. The online Compact community (<http://groups.yahoo.com/group/thecompact>) spends enormous amounts of typing-time discussing things most Americans probably do not. Such as how to make soap. Or whether a mousetrap counts as a safety necessity. Or how to explain to your children that Santa Claus traffics in used toys.

Some have called the Compactors un-American, anti-capitalist, eco-freak poseurs whose defiant act of not-consuming, if it caught on, would destroy the economy and our way of life. But as one says, "We didn't do this to save the world. We did this to improve the quality of our own lives. And what we learned is that we all have a lot of more stuff than you think, and that you can get along on a lot less stuff than you can imagine."

Excerpted from "Nothing New Here - And That's the Point" by William Booth, originally published in the Washington Post, December 18, 2006.

Do you know of any good learning resources or opportunities that you would like to share with other swapathgamis? Write to us with your non-institutionalized and welcoming spaces of co-learning, unlearning, and uplearning!

co-learning

couchsurfing.com

Ever travelled through a new city and wondered how the people there in that part of the world live? Maybe even wondered how to meet such people, learn something about their lives and maybe share some part of your own? What about living with them for a day or two or longer? We live on a big planet that now, for many more of us, is suddenly made a whole lot smaller and accessible because of such social networking platforms as couchsurfing.com.

Couchsurfing.com gives anyone, with an ability to log onto a computer, access to thousands of people all around the world waiting to meet and host them at their home for a night or two or longer. Just set up a profile and step into a world waiting to welcome you home wherever you are travelling.

I've been using this site for a couple of years now and have only had great experiences meeting people that I'd probably not otherwise bump into. You will see some of the people I've met and made friends with on my profile here: www.couchsurfing.com/profile.html?id=GMQXP You'll see references of people that I've stayed with on my most recent trip, people from Madrid to Amsterdam to Berlin, Warsaw, Istanbul to New Delhi....

For example, I stayed with Faizal, a video animation teacher in New Delhi, after being recommended by Harmeet, another guy that I had initially contacted through the CS website when searching for people to meet and stay with in Delhi. None of us had ever met before. All we had going were the personal website profiles (photos and various descriptions of ourselves) that we had each set up when we joined the site. These provide some few ideas about who we are and then the rest is all completely a matter of trust. That's pretty much how the whole thing works, through human curiosity and trust.

If you have any questions, I am happy to help out. But why not just register yourself on the website and join in this rapidly-growing international group of folks. Come visit and couch surf in Seattle!

- Michael Dobbie, Seattle, USA
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rethinking sustainability

Recently, I spent two months in India: one month in Udaipur at Shikshantar, three weeks in Auroville at Sadhana Forest, and one week in Kerala, part of which was spent in Thrissur with COSTFORD. My time in each place really challenged me as a person, and also forced me to rethink what is meant when people talk about 'sustainability' (myself included) and the types of relationships people have with sustainable spaces and practices.

In the United States, the word 'sustainable' is used to demarcate practices, lifestyles, physical materials (objects, buildings, food), and ideologies that work with the environment from those that are harmful to nature. In terms of construction, sustainability refers to the types of materials used, the methodology, various principles such as light and thermal dynamics, as well as the structure itself (how it blends with and compliments its environment).

In India, this separation between what is 'sustainable' and what isn't is much less profound. Generally, I have found through my travels that what is considered 'sustainable' in the States is very much a part of everyday living in India, minus the catchy title. Millions of people build with mud, practice human composting, live in a way that produces little waste, and most importantly, they react to nature rather than try to change it. But for these people, this is not a trend, nor some response to increasing environmental degradation. Rather, it is a way of living that has been practiced for thousands of years that recognizes the value and omnipotence of nature and peoples relationship to it.

At Shikshantar, I was able to really question my understanding of sustainability and learn from those around me how to live in a less destructive manner. More than any other place, my time spent in Udaipur provided me with the space I needed to deconstruct what I thought about sustainable living and construction.

My visits to Sadhana Forest and COSTFORD provided me with the opportunity to learn about sustainability directly and in a personal way. In Auroville, I learned about human composting through the use of human compost toilets, organic farming, natural construction, and natural medicine by simply being a member of the Sadhana Forest community. So long as people take initiative and are interested

in learning, they have many opportunities available to them both in Sadhana Forest, and in Auroville in general.

I originally made the trip to Tamil Nadu to learn about compressed earth blocks with the Earth Institute in Auroville, but was unable to spend more than a few hours with them due to their hectic schedule. Fortunately, I was able to make the mud bricks with my peers from Shikshantar on a farm in Udaipur. This was a valuable learning experience, particularly because the machine is manufactured in India and not widely used in the States.

COSTFORD <http://in.geocities.com/c_ncr/> is also an interesting place to visit for someone exploring sustainable construction because of its affiliation with Laurie Baker (1917-2007) and their dedication to his style of architecture. Most importantly, they build structures according to his philosophy, which stresses using locally available materials that are low energy, use them efficiently using local labor, and only include materials and structural components that are necessary. Further, Laurie Baker (and thus COSTFORD) emphasized building spaces that used nature to its advantage, such as using *jalis* (screens) as a method of naturally lighting a home or making rooms a certain height to maximize airflow. During my stay, I was given books written by Laurie Baker, and was taken to both completed and current work sites to see how buildings are constructed. The engineers that accompanied me answered any questions I had regarding structural components and why certain materials were used.

All in all, my time spent at all three places helped me to question how sustainability is framed in the United States by providing me with the opportunity to observe and learn how people live their everyday lives in India. One of the most important things I learned from my interactions is how resourceful people in India are. They see opportunity in waste and bounty in nature. Although India is currently experiencing a push away from this type of living towards more 'modern' lifestyle (in concrete houses, with wasteful plumbing, in less interactive communities), a majority of Indians continue to benefit

from a direct relationship with nature that is founded on respect, rather than greed. If anyone else wishes to really learn about sustainability, they need only to visit any local community in India and observe how people are living day-to-day.

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thawing out in ladakh

When I was very young, Doordarshan (the national television network) showed documentaries on nature and the different cultures of India. I used to stay awake till late in the night and watch without batting an eyelid. One such series was on Ladakh and the Buddhist culture in the higher Himalayas. The clear White Mountain streams, pebbled river beds, deserted landscapes, the stoic bald headed monks, the big booming drums in their ceremonies, tall distant snow-peaks, all fascinated me no end. I had fallen in love with the place. So when I was invited to go to a conference on "Beyond the Monoculture: Localization" hosted by ISEC in Ladakh, there was no way I was going to say no!

The journey to Leh from Delhi was the best and worst (!) bus ride I've ever taken in my life. It lasted more than three days. The cramped space, cold climate and high altitudes made it physically exhausting. It was also a scary ride, especially when the bus was on the edge of a steep fall hundreds of feet deep!

The conference helped open my eyes to the massive destruction of life, values and diversity that is happening today in the name of Globalization. It was easier for me to see its destructive effects in Ladakh, since the assault on its culture is more recent (compared to Tamil Nadu where I am from). This society still reflected some of its earth-people-life friendly values but was fast losing them, thanks to 'development'. The large influx of tourists, an education system geared towards undermining self-reliant cultures, the mass media and the presence of the Indian army in the region have all played decisive roles in this uprooting. Helena Norberg-Hodge, founder of ISEC, says that schooling and the mass media make it very enticing to embrace the 'religion of the machine'.

I feel we often look at change as something outside of us — 'problems' that lie with other peoples' lives, homes, and countries. Our own condition remains blind to us. Localization is a powerful, as it emphasizes on finding our center in our places and communities first, and being rooted from here instead of to things external to our immediate contexts.

While at ISEC, I volunteered in their efforts to promote local and organic food. In Ladakh, most of the food



is now imported either from Srinagar or Manali, both more than 500 kms away. Apart from environmental unsustainability, such long distance transporting also breaks up local rural economies and opens these populations up to the vagaries of Global market place. To challenge this, we asked local restaurants/hotels, *Where does your food come from? Why don't you buy local? What*

challenges do you face in buying local? etc. Following various dialogues, it was decided to open a shop in the Leh market to sell local food, making it easy to source different varieties of food like vegetables, grains, flour, dairy etc from one place. Through ISEC's efforts, by next summer the shop will be running, I hope.

The trip also provided me with a chance to make a lot of new friends from different parts of the world. It was exciting to live at Abagon House with ISEC Farm Project volunteers. This program supports urban people to live and work with rural Ladakhi families in order to get a first-hand perspective on localization. This community of vibrant young people were full of questions and active discussions. We all lent a hand with cooking at dinnertime, which was filled with fun and experimentation with new recipes. The interactions with Helena helped me understand globalization and localization a lot better. I am thankful especially for our morning walks together during when she patiently explained some of her views.

I was also touched by the warmth of the people there. The elderly ladies selling fruits and vegetables, waiters at the restaurants, children playing in the streets: they all seemed cheerful and greeted me with broad smiles. In fact, I've not been to any other place where people smiled so much! Being on the trip also helped me taste freedom again, all notions of which I seemed to have forgotten after entering the competitive environments of college and work. Life in the rat race had numbed me so much that I had even forgotten what it was to

intensely feel, and life was one long sleep walk. I will always remember Ladakh for this one reason above all else: the high-altitude that thawed something in me which had remained frozen for so long!

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The International Society for Ecology and Culture (ISEC) is concerned with the protection of biological and cultural diversity, and with promoting locally based alternatives to the global consumer culture. ISEC believes in resistance to the dominant economic system and renewal of our relationships to one another and to the Earth. <www.isec.org.uk> Contact: ISEC Ladakh, c/o Women's Alliance of Ladakh, Sankar Road, Chubi, Leh, Ladakh - 194101 (J&K) India; tel: +91-1982-50293

opportunities

seeker of self-healing

Some years ago, when I was living in Bombay I had developed asthma. I began meeting an *ayurveda* who told me to have foods according to my body constitution in terms of *vata*, *pitta* and *kaph*. Since then, I have thought a lot about the impact of food on our minds, bodies and spirit. I couldn't take the pollution of Bombay. The spirit of the city was also not in tune with my own self. So I decided to live in a place where I could breathe and moved to Udaipur. This almost cured my asthma, but it came back once or twice. Last time, I had to take an inhaler which made me feel terrible. I didn't like the after taste of chemicals and hated the fact that I was dependant on drug companies for my breath.

Meanwhile, I had already begun experimenting with zero-oil healthy food and was rethinking my way of looking at diseases. I had read about the ill-effects of milk and wheat. No other species drinks milk after weaning and that too of another species. So our body stops producing the enzymes required for the digestion of milk. In the case of wheat too, its protein gluten doesn't get digested easily. Milk and wheat both stay undigested in the stomach for a long time, putrefy and produce acid. This leads to a toxic overload. I now believe that our so-called diseases are just an attempt of the body to heal itself by getting rid of the toxins. Asthma is the body's attempt to get rid of toxins through the lungs; eczema does the same through the skin.

I decided one day that I will not take the poisons of the inhaler. The same day I totally left wheat and dairy products and made some other changes in my diet, like avoiding processed foods including sugar. The next day, my asthma left me.

I am right now making a film on a friend, Vinita Mansata from Calcutta, who practices self-healing and has not taken any medicine for the last twenty years. She gave birth to her daughter at home and didn't give any vaccines to her. She believes that vaccine itself is a toxin and is disrespectful to the body's self-healing power. She came out of malaria in five days with water fasting. When she got a brain hemorrhage and was in coma, she didn't take any medicine and let her body heal on its own. For Vinita, there is basically one disease in the world: Toxemia. When we abuse our body with stress, a

polluted environment or bad food, acids are produced. Because our body's basic nature is alkaline, acid is a toxin. What we call the symptoms of a disease (vomiting, diarrhea, fevers, colds, asthma, etc.) are basically the body's attempt to restore the balance. For example, pain is a sign for us to not move that part of the body, or a coma is the body's way of resting and fasting. If we suppress these with drugs or antibiotics, the result is chronic illnesses like diabetes, tuberculosis and cancer.

Unfortunately most medicine systems today tell us to cure the symptoms and thus disrupt the body's own self-healing mechanism. We have to listen to the body and go with it. Vinita has helped me see health and in a different perspective. When I had fever, joint pains and couldn't move, I took her advice, went on a water fast and healed myself. I understand now that the duration of fasting depends on the level of toxins in the body.

Today I try to look for the reasons behind any 'dis-ease' I get. If it's a headache, often I can connect to a lack of sleep, or if it's a diarrhea, it has its root in some unmindful eating. Gandhiji once said that doctors allow us to lead irresponsible lives by taking medicine (quick-fix solutions) rather than making changes in our lifestyle which might be the cause of the disease.

I now believe that our health is in totally our hands. We need fresh air, clean water, creative work and loving relationships. I try to have local, wholesome and seasonal foods. I cook food without using any oil, sugar, dairy and wheat. I also steam the veggies, as it helps retain the enzymes and nutrition. I try to have a large percentage of raw foods in my diet. All this also allows me to live lightly on the planet. I don't need to use any detergents for washing utensils, I save on fuel, my water consumption is low, I can have a plastic-free kitchen, and my compost pit is also happy.

- Shammi Nanda, Udaipur/Jaipur, India
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To learn more about self-healing, contact Vinita Mansata at +91-3322296551 or <earthcarebooks@vsnl.com>



The Peas vs. Pills Workshop is about how to be healthy, or how to recover from chronic illnesses, without the use of medicine, but instead through lifestyle changes. The workshops are a whole day of audiovisual explanations and three meals: breakfast, lunch, and snacks made from simple but healthful recipes. Cooking demonstrations are included. Participants receive a 60-page recipe book and a CD as ways of sharing the information with their families. Contact Nandita Shah <shahnandi@gmail.com> for details on when the next workshop will be.

opportunities

food for thought: an interview with nandita shah

How did you get interested in the vegan diet?

My parents were always interested, so ever since I was young, I would start a meal with a salad. Though we were definitely lacto-ovo vegetarian, we never had a lot of sugar or soft drinks. When I was sick, I was treated with homeopathic medicine. I was quite young when I thought, why put chemicals into your body? So I studied homeopathy and had been practicing for many years. It was in this period when I became vegan.

What happened to make you change?

My father was involved with Beauty Without Cruelty, an organization who was campaigning to remove calf rennet (extracted from the inner lining of a calf's stomach) from the process of making cheese. At that time, I remember my father saying, "Let's get milk out of the house. There is too much *himsa* (violence) in it." That's when I understood what milk was all about. I got more into animal welfare, and I felt that, more than anything else, the best way to help animals is to not eat them or their products.

What happens to people who become vegan?

I had a patient who was 76 years old and had been diabetic for 30 years. I had been treating him for six years with homeopathy, and he was doing really well. I had initially advised him against dairy, but he said, "I already have stopped sugar and more. If I stop having dairy, what'll I eat?" After six years, his daughter, also a homeopath, came to me and said, "His blood sugar is rising again. What can I do?" So I said, "Why don't you stop the milk and milk products?" And within two weeks, his blood sugar came down from 222 to 88.

Also with people who have obesity. They say, "Please don't give me another diet." So I tell them, "I am not suggesting a diet, but instead, a lifestyle change. And it has to do with eating whole, but you can have as much as you want." And when they hear that, they are relieved because 'diet' means cutting calories for them. And I have had people come back and thank me, because they have done diets all their lives without losing weight, but this time, it worked. People realize that they need not deprive themselves and the food is still tasty.

What do you think people need to unlearn in order to explore this diet?

There are certain cultural myths, like "Milk is necessary," "We need meat or milk for protein" and "Without milk, where will we get calcium?" I respond to these myths with a few simple statements: All mammals produce milk only for their young, not for anyone else. And think about it: where do horses, elephants and cows get their protein and calcium? From the plants they eat!

What people really need is alternatives to milk. In my workshop, I teach them to make vegan cheese, what to use instead of milk, what to use instead of butter. And I feel like when I show practically what to do, this helps in unlearning these myths. I also try to do something dairy-free that tastes like what they are used to. I make a *raita*, a buttermilk, a *payasam*. The minute it tastes good, people are convinced.

Why do you think people continue to consume dairy and meat even with so much information on the health benefits of a vegan or raw diet?

I feel there are several reasons: people find change difficult; socially, it's not mainstream; people don't want to cook for themselves. Like cigarette smoking, protein and sugar are also addictive. Above all, I think people don't face the truth, because they do not want to think of themselves as 'not compassionate'. They avoid seeing photos or investigating what is really happening.

Why do you feel a vegan diet is important today? What inspires you to do this?

The 56 billion land animals and billions of aquatic lives killed each year to satisfy peoples' palates and yet which makes them ill in the process! I feel that so much grain is grown to feed animals, in order to feed us. The animal is like a middle man. And so much energy is lost in this process — not just the energy of food grains, but the energy of moving things, for which you need petroleum and also a lot of water. I feel there is no better way to help our planet than to change our diet.

What are your future plans?

I'm creating a place called SHARAN (Sanctuary for Health And Reconnection to Animals and Nature) <www.sharan-india.org>. It is not just a sanctuary for farm animals, because how many can I rescue, compared to the billions being slaughtered every day? But I thought this could help motivate people to not eat animals. Because if you become friends with animals, even if it is a chicken or a cow, it is harder to eat.



Nandita Shah <shahnandi@gmail.com> walked out of the rat race and a lucrative homeopathic practice in Mumbai to settle in the natural simplicity of Auroville. She practices homeopathy part-time, counsels on diet and works on animal welfare. She credits a lot to the animals who reside with her, who give from the heart and live in the moment — no hoarding for the future.

learning webs: vegan food

Not Milk

www.notmilk.com

This comprehensive website gives you A-Z what you need to know about milk, the dairy industry, and its impacts on our health and planet. It carries political stories and histories, analyses of milk advertisements, testimonials from numerous doctors, and information about milk's link to over 50 diseases. Enough to wow even the most die-hard dairy eater.

Go Veg!

www.goveg.com

Humorous and creative, this website brings celebrity flavor to the vegan/vegetarian conversation. It showcases the impacts of a vegan diet on health and environment. Its video series on "Meet Your Meat" introduces visitors to the chickens, pigs, fish, and cows, giving us insight into the cruelty they are experiencing at the hands of industry.

Raw Sistas

www.rawsistas.blogspot.com

Three friends together have started a blog to focus on their transitions from unhealthy, unconscious eating habits to more healthy eating choices and lifestyles. They welcome stories from others in regards to your health, your environment and your lifestyle. Their goal is to have the site be a resource for people of color who are often under-represented and overlooked in holistic health and eco-conscious discourses.

Sustainable Table

www.sustainabletable.org

This site invites us to take steps to shift to small-scale growing, seasonal eating and local shopping. It offers information on Additives, Antibiotics, Cloning, Food Irradiation, Hormones, Pesticides, Pollution...

The Meatrix

www.themeatrix.com

A flash animation series which takes the premise of the blockbuster, The Matrix, and uses a cast of characters (like Moopheus and Leo) to expose factory farming and the dairy industry. Clever, on-point, and subtitled in numerous languages!

**"We must not think ourselves victims
Disadvantaged, held back...**

**Our handicaps can be
the seeds of our glories.**

We shouldn't deny them.

**We should embrace them,
Embrace our marginalization,**

Our invisibility, our powerlessness.

Embrace our handicaps, and use them,

And go beyond them,

For they could well be the key

To some of the most beautiful energies

That we have been given.

**Accept no limitations to
our human potential.**

We have the power of solar systems

In our minds.

Our rage is powerful.

Our love is mighty.

Our desire to survive is awesome.

Our quest for freedom is noble, and great.

And just as astonishing is the knowledge

That we are, more or less,

The makers of the future.

We create what time will frame..."

- Ben Okri, *Mental Fight*, 1999

an invitation

The power within *Swapathgami* comes from our own practical experiences and relationships. We invite you to share your essays, poems, cartoons, photographs, stories, quotes, films, books, websites, etc. We print both English and Hindi editions. Contact:

Shilpa or Ramawtar

c/o Shikshantar

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thanks! thanks. thanks & thanks ^ thanks...

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