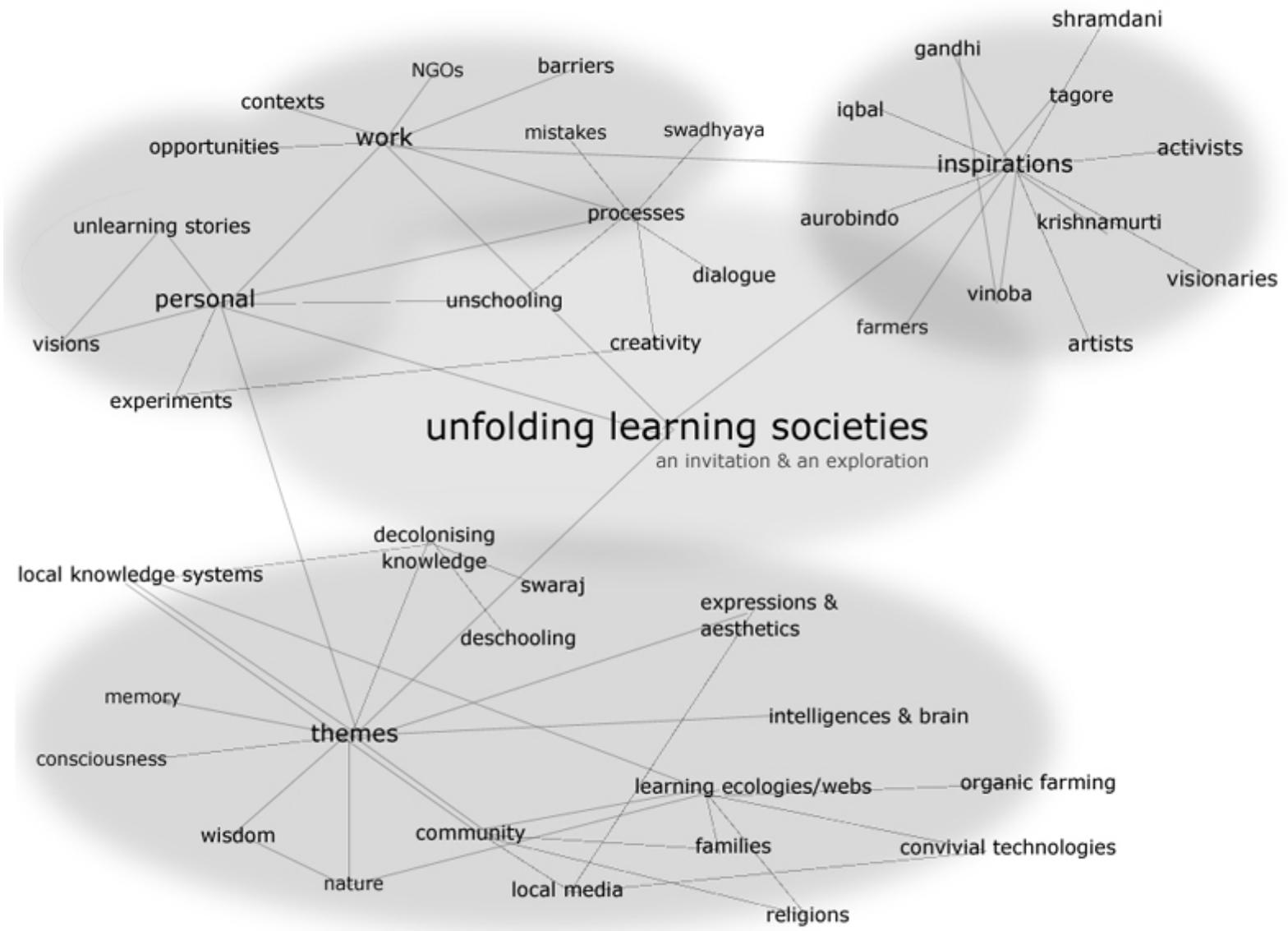


*Where roads are made  
I lose my way.  
In the wide water, in the blue sky,  
there is no line of a track.  
The pathway is hidden by the birds' wings,  
by the star-fires,  
by the flowers of the wayfaring seasons.  
And I ask my heart if its blood carries  
the wisdom of the unseen way.*

- Rabindranth Tagore

what possibilities exist for us to create  
our own paths?



flow

Paris, 17 December 2002

Dear friends and co-creators of learning societies,

Life is full of surprises: some are wonderful and some are difficult to accept. It is wonderful that all of you have been able to make it to Udaipur to exchange about your experiences in unfolding learning societies, reflect on key issues and propose activities for the future. The focus this time is on South Asia, but there will be the wonderful opportunity to also share ideas with co-creators from Africa, the Arab region, Australia and North America.

On the other hand, we have to deal with the disillusioning news. Our friends from Pakistan did not receive their visa. This is hard to accept. We are trying to move towards learning without frontiers while our world is still full of barriers preventing the free movement and interaction between people and countries. It is only somewhat consoling that at least we have been able to engage in a rich exchange via e-mail over the past few weeks, where we stepped across borders - not only in the geographic sense of the word - and started to become a learning community. We lived the beauty of learning together and I am sure, this process will continue in the future.

As I said in an earlier e-mail UNESCO was founded to promote peace in the minds of men through the exchange and construction of knowledge and experiences in the fields of education, science, culture and communication. Our collaboration with Shikshantar and all of you involved in the adventure of unfolding learning societies, shows our commitment to accompany the knowledge exchange and creation in this new area.

We see this initiative as part of the multiple efforts around the world of humanizing the current globalisation process. UNESCO and some



Image by Shilpa Jain

of its civil society partners will participate in the next World Social Forum in Porto Alegre, a self-organising event, where thousands of activists and learners from around the world come together, because they believe that the creation of a different -- a better -- world is possible.

The invitation letter mentioned the Collective Consultation of NGOs on Education for All, a group of about 500 civil society organisations involved in education around the world. The Collective Consultation includes a diversity of civil society organisations ranging from advocacy NGOs and coalitions to popular education networks, from action-research organisations to implementers of non-formal education programmes, from training institutions to associations involved in facilitating participatory processes at local levels. There is a great commitment to the Dakar Framework for Action on Education for All, but also a deep concern about how to give more meaning to education and learning. We are hoping that the outcomes of the Conference can inspire and be shared with the network.

I trust that the Conference will become a symbolic moment in our search for ways and means to promote learning societies. Hopefully everyone will be involved, those who made it to Udaipur and those who did not.

I will be with you in spirit and look forward to listening to the story of "Once upon a time in Udaipur ..."

With warm regards,

**Susanne Schnuttgen**

*Program Specialist*

*Focal Point, Collective Consultation of NGOs on EFA*

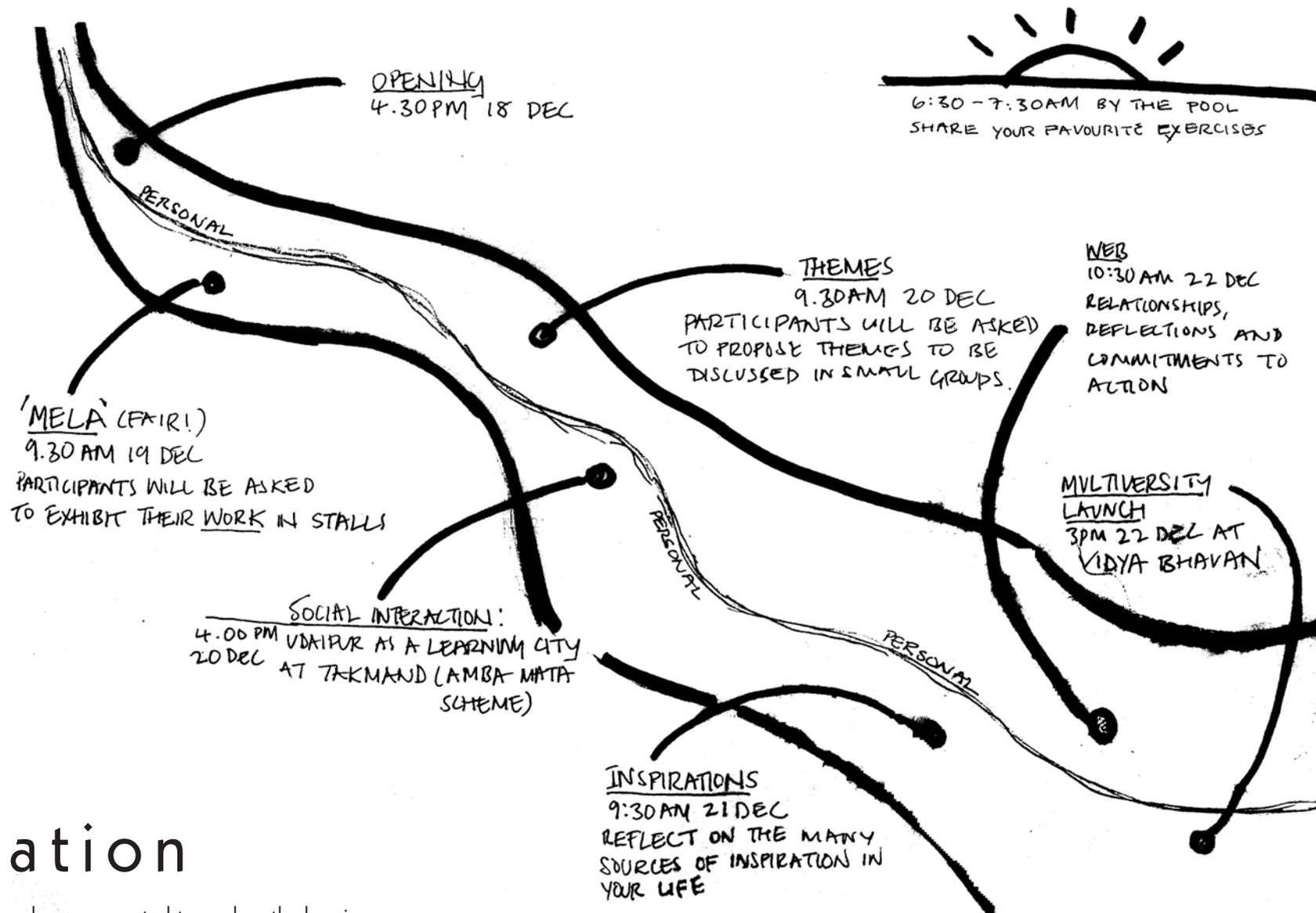
*Basic Education Division, Literacy and Nonformal Education Section*

*UNESCO, Paris, France*

Path is made by walking on it  
and goals are reached by treading on new paths  
but we discover ourselves  
by just staying where we are  
for a minute  
still, reflective, pensive and patient  
lest the moment of intimacy with ourselves passes  
and we become just a tourist in this world  
instead, a traveler  
who came, conquered him/herself and  
left a little more silence  
a bit more subtlety  
and quite a lot of space  
for others to discover their paths.

- Anil Gupta





# navigation

Over the course of four days, we wanted to explore the learning that takes place in our personal lives and in our work, and which connects to certain themes and inspirations. We envisioned this as a natural and dynamic journey, rather than as a linear and forced agenda.

### From Raj Sethia

Once upon a time when the lakes were filled with sparkling blue water and birds chirped to usher in a cheerful morning, and when little children had no fear and knew the art of smiling a lively group of young and young-at-heart people decided to meet in the beautiful city of Udaipur. They traveled from far and near, from different countries and cultures. They spoke different languages, wore different clothes, followed different professions and believed in different religions. Yet they were all SAME SAME and not DIFFERENT DIFFERENT.

It was a warm and sunny winter in the year 2002. And for almost a week people learnt from one other, they shared their experiences and raised new questions; they explored a new vision for the world that they deserved to live in. They dialogued and debated, played and read, sculpted, painted, sang and danced, they snored and beat drums... and even chased away a handful of tourists in the dark of the night, who preferred peace to the pace ...they laughed out aloud and even wept together. They explored their creative instincts in several ways - be it clay or even shoes - their urge to create and nurture learning always prevailed.

People learnt about peace and pottery, friendship and freedom, life and learning, theater and parenting, water conservation and traditional folk instruments. It was a "Meena Bazaar" (a traditional market set up usually for women of royal households in their palaces where merchants/peddlers would bring curios from around the globe) of learning - and some determined souls created their own space for dialogue and doggedly didn't allow the 'open space' to confine them.

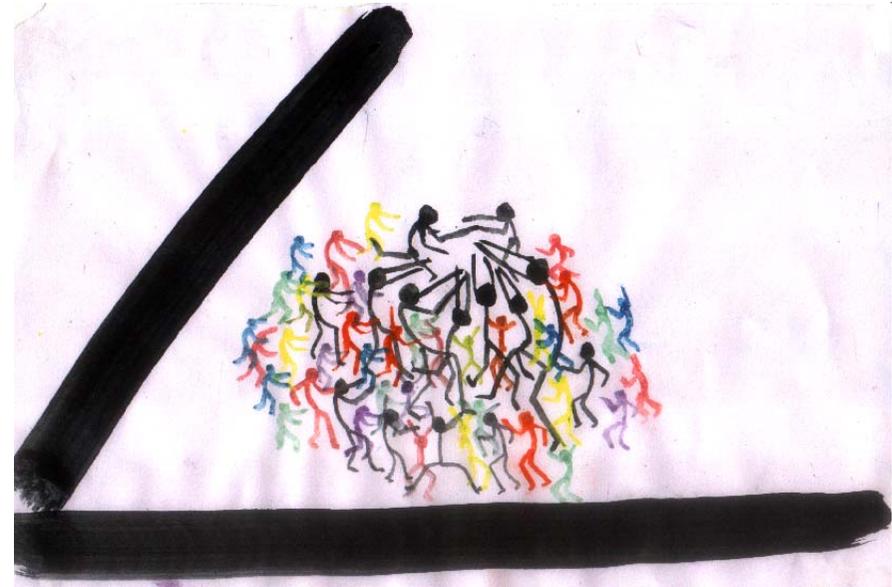


Image by Ganesh Mandekar

### From Satish Inamder

A gathering of people from various backgrounds school teachers, social workers, theatre artists, musicians, activists working to preserve tradition, herbs, Meera's bhajans, writers, environmentalists, travelers. Working with educational institutions in U.S.A., Europe, Africa, India, Australia.

A gathering of people concerned with the affairs around, concerned with the chaos, concerned with goodness and innocence. A gathering intending to make a change in human life, in spite of odds and cynicism.

What flows are natural dialogues amongst friends. Dialogues without assertions without dogmas and without defenses. Dialogues that are not authoritative sermons. A feeling of not knowing adequately. A feeling to share in whispers. Understanding the limitations of oneself and every pattern of thought and organisation. Willing to accept insecurity to breakdown the fat forts of evil doing. Breaking the walls to create windows for the moonlight to enter.

# one-to-one opening introductions

- Share the story of your journey to the conference.
- What was a meaningful learning experience in your life?  
What were the conditions? Who was involved?
- What is most exciting for you personally about learning societies?
- What urgent or burning questions are you bringing to the conference?
- How are you feeling?

(or make your own, since these are entry points, not a questionnaire)



*pictured (from left to right):*  
Deep in conversation -  
Smriti Sinha and Munir Fasheh  
Vineeta Sood and Claude Alvares  
Kameshwar Bahuguna and Dayal Chandra Soni

*“Why I came here?  
I am not satisfied with the prevailing conditions in the country  
so I am in search of something worth having.”*

– Kameshwar P Bahuguna

## HIGHLIGHTS FROM DAYALCHANDRA SONI'S WELCOME ADDRESS

### Society Should Itself Bear the Responsibility of Its Own Education

1. With my humble greetings, I would like to welcome all of you to Udaipur. As requested by friends at Shikshantar, I am sharing with you my views on the plight of Indian Education and beg your pardon for the mistakes I may commit in doing so. My view is that our society must itself bear the responsibility of its own education.

2. Today, India is suffering from the following wrong views of education:

- (a) The first wrong view is that human life, in itself, is educationally barren and that if there is any source of education, that source is the school-system alone.
- (b) Another wrong view is that the success of an educated person lies in his securing a service job and getting rid of personal occupation involving any physical labour.
- (c) Another wrong view is that abandoning the languages spoken by the common people and adopting foreign clothing, foreign etiquette and foreign languages prove that the person concerned is successfully educated.
- (d) The fourth wrong view is that getting a certificate of learning is the only, or the sole proof of one being an educated person. Whether a person is dishonest or honest, whether he is sincere in his assigned work or not, whether he is polluting the ecology or not, whether he respects his society's common man or not, are irrelevant questions for our educational system and the educated class of our society.

3. What I really wish to say and emphasize is that education does not only consist of one dimension of the knowledge or skill gained in a school, or a college or a university. Education is also deeply concerned with the moral and spiritual emancipation of a human being. In fact, in ancient India out-of-home education from a teacher was not needed to become qualified for a job. In ancient India, education from a teacher was considered necessary for the development of the moral and spiritual aspects of the human life. The job of the teacher (or the Guru) was to enable the student to recognize the dictation of his conscience and give him the capacity and the courage to abide by his conscience. The belief, in ancient India, was that if the people were taught to be governed by their own awakened conscience, the role of the king as a caretaker of the people's conduct would be minimized, and a state with a minimum government would be an ideal state. That was why, in ancient India, education of the people was not a state concern and people were autonomous about their education.

4. But, today, education is a state responsibility; it is a state concern. And today's state knows very well that if the people of the state are educated successfully to become morally and spiritually healthy, the health and responsibility of the state administration would be minimized, the bureaucracy of the state would become less relevant and such large paraphernalia of the state employees would become irrelevant and out-of-date. And that situation would be a calamity on the vested interests associated with the state machinery. That is the reason why the bureaucracy which is very powerful in the Indian government

will not allow a system of such education as would enhance the moral and spiritual dimensions of human behaviour.

Besides this, before 1947, India was being ruled by the British. These foreigners needed such Indians who could be manipulated to serve a foreign government for governing their own compatriots. For that purpose, they devised an educational system to be introduced and managed by their own government. The Britishers knew that education that would awaken and activate the conscience of the Indian people would not serve their purpose. So they used the state pattern of education for making the educated category of men indifferent towards the moral and spiritual aspects of behaviour. And they designed their educational pattern in such a way that it made people prefer government service over their traditional livelihoods. The British educationist Macaulay expunged manual work or productive body-labour from the curriculum. The objective behind this step was to make the student unfit for any other job but the job of becoming an obedient servant of the British Government. Secondly, English language and British attires were made the supreme symbols of being educated and getting a government job. Thus, an educated person felt he was superior as compared to the common people of India.

This British education should have been replaced by a new Indian pattern of education after the attainment of freedom in 1947. But a government is just a government. It is wrong to hope that such an educational system as is controlled by any government can be revolutionized in favour of the common man. The educated person in India identifies himself with the special elite class. And this elite class continues to keep the Indian education devoted and wedded to elitism.

8. Perhaps some people might feel that today's schools are good and beneficial for those individuals who are actually educated in them. But, to my mind, present schooling, which has been inherited by India from the British Government, is not only bad and unfortunate for the nation as a whole, but is also bad, harmful and unfortunate for those very people who attend them and are educated through such schooling.

If we carefully study the constitution, or the makeup of the human being, we shall discern that man is not made of the mind alone. Man is a joint creation of hands, heart and head. That is why any education which segregates a man's mind from his heart and hands and concentrates on his mind alone, cripples the man in the name of education. Right education is that education which preserves and deals with the whole man. Advocates for our present day scholarship try to plead that body-labour or craft work by hands is a hindrance for mental development and spiritual growth. But this pleading is wrong. The reality is that when a person abandons productive manual labour, he loses the courage of fighting for truth and preserving his integrity. He has to depend on paid service jobs only and carry out the orders and adjust with desires of his officer or his boss who happens to be his employer. Now if such a person is ordered to do something which his own conscience does not allow or approve what will such an educated or highly paid person do? He shall neither have the courage to protest, nor shall he have the courage of resigning and earning his livelihood by his own productive manual work.

Thus, the so-called educated person of today tends to suffer from moral impotence. Now, can we say or agree



Image by Panna Lal Patel

that the present schooling is good or beneficial even for the individual who has actually passed through such a schooling process? Outwardly, these white-collared government workers may appear to be well-placed and honorable. But they lack the inner tranquility, which a self-confident manual labourer enjoys even without any schooling. No worldly richness and no worldly pleasure is greater than inner tranquility and the inner peace of a human being. But those people who have accepted to become dependent on and obedient to others, can never enjoy that tranquility and inner peace of mind. There are many voluntary institutions in our society which try to help and secure the poor and uneducated people, but there is no voluntary institution having pity on these pitiable bureaucrats who are suffering from inner poverty and anxieties.

9. What I have said above may create a misunderstanding that I am against all paid service jobs. I am not. What I wish to say is that a man should preserve his capacity to

do physical labour or craft work, even if he earns his livelihood from a paid service job. So that if he faces a situation in which he is required by his employer to do something which his inner conscience does not approve, he may resign and quit that paid service job and have the capacity to earn his livelihood by adopting a non-salaried job of his own.

10. A misunderstanding which is prevalent in our society today is that reading or studying the books, performing various religious rites or pilgrimage, etc., are the main ways to preserve human dignity, human spirituality and human morality. But unless a man is capable of body labour to maintain his living, he cannot perform such formalities of religious or spiritual values. A flower may be fragrant and beautiful, but only when it is planted can it derive sustenance from the soil. In the same manner, bodily labour is helpful in the development of morality and spirituality of a human being. That is why no education should disregard productive manual labour.

11. Every educationist must know and remember that productive manual labour is the main educator of the human being. The schools and the teachers with their books are just helpers or assistants. Knowledge is sought and digested by a man only when he is facing some problems, when he has some questions and curiosity and when he can utilize the knowledge gained by him. This fertile situation can come up only when a student is engaged in productive manual work. Secondly, productive manual work connects the human individual with his natural and social environment. Thus, the knowledge he has gained through pursuing his manual work is such knowledge as would be immediately

relevant for him. All of us will agree that the knowledge gained in today's schools has no immediate utility or relevance for the students. It is the fear of the examination hall that compels the students to listen and to study, so that the knowledge could be helpful in the examination hall and provide the student a certificate, which may be his license for achieving a paid service job.

If we accept that work is the main educator of the human race, we shall agree that the school has no monopoly on education. Even those human beings who do not attend schools, that are engaged in productive manual work, are receiving solid and valid life-long continuing education.

12. We have dealt with the moral, spiritual and the knowledge gaining aspects of productive manual work. But, productive manual work has one more advantage in the education process. Today, our schools are providing education as a government charity, or it is being purchased by the money paid on school fees. But education which is either received as a charity, or purchased as a commodity, can never prove to be true education. An ingredient or

component of economic self-support is also a must for the functioning of the educational process. Without an ingredient of some economic self-support, education cannot have the courage or the capacity for maintaining its autonomy. Thus, productive manual work can help the educators of our nation to resist wrong interference from our political parties or our bureaucrats.

14. The present situation is worse than British rule. During the British rule, this anti-people and pro-elite education was restricted to a few people. But today, the same anti-people education is being universalized. The result is that there is a lot of unemployment and frustration. The moral character of the Indians is falling day by day and since there is no work ethics now, the country is facing a serious financial bankruptcy which is a risk to our independence.

15. So my appeal to all of us is that together with our interest in the new idea of "Unfolding Learning Societies," we should also awaken our societies about the need of bearing the responsibility of right education of the people of our nation. More than half a century has passed after

achieving political freedom, but educational freedom of the Indian people is nowhere to be seen. Real democracy is sustained by people's character, people's vigilance and people's power. Today's education is emaciating our people and our democracy is deteriorating in party politics and vote-manouvering. This situation is very unfortunate and the hope of redemption lies only in shifting of educational responsibility from the state to the people.

The basis of real democracy is not in people choosing their rulers. Real democracy is when people can choose their teachers.

*Shri Dayal Chandra Soni was born in 1919 in Salumbar, Mewar, Rajasthan. Having received intensive training in Nai Talim, he worked for several years as a teacher in Vidya Bhawan in Udaipur. Over the past 60 years, Dayal ji has authored more than 300 essays and 25 books on basic education; non-formal, adult, and women's education; and public administration. At present, he lives with his wife and runs a small flour grinding mill. He can be reached at 26 Vidya Marg, Devali, Udaipur, Rajasthan 313004.*

“Komal Kothari was sharing some of the 16,000 proverbs he has collected in Rajasthan. Hearing these proverbs I felt a great sense of loss. We don't use these anymore. Komal said pre-literate societies use them, but once they become literate, they stop.”

– Ravi Gulati

- How are we contributing to the emergence of learning societies through our work and communities?
- What are the issues, challenges, and opportunities before us?
- How has our work helped us to grow as full human beings?

# mela

## a festival of questions, experiments and passions

To link one's personal learning and questioning, with one's organizational work, participants created a *mela* (festival) on the second day of the conference. The idea was to share one's work in a multimedia, multi-layered, interactive and spontaneous format. Members of each of the organizations present worked together to prepare an exhibit or stall about their ideas, practices, resources, questions and challenges. To share themselves, they used everything from research publications and graphic images/posters, to computer presentations and creative activities (drama, mask-making, clay modeling, singing, painting, etc.). Half of the organizations hosted their stalls in the morning, while the other half visited and interacted with them. After lunch, the situation was reversed, with the second group hosting and the first visiting. In the warm sunshine of a Udaipur winter, a festival spirit emerged.



Anil shares the Honeybee Network with Anita.



Ganesh and Mandar exploring identity at Abhivyakti's stall.



Getting our hands dirty by shaping clay and conversations at Shikshantar's stall.

Unlike the typical conference schedule of dull papers and dry presentations — where only a few speak to the entire group, typically from a podium, and with only a few minutes for questions and answers — the *mela* gave everyone a chance to share what they were working on. Multiple conversations were occurring at the same time, and the creative arts energized the overall atmosphere. And since each session ran for over two hours, there was also plenty of time to go beyond introductions and probe more deeply into the challenges and questions of the work itself. Participants had an opportunity to see the growing edges of their and others' work, and also to plant the seeds for conversations that would continue over the course of the rest of the conference.



Reaching for the sky in Peter's Theater-In-Education stall.