

Free from School

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Rahul Alvares 22nd August 2003

It's not every day that a 16 year old writes a book. In fact, girls and boys of that age are supposed to spend their time studying what other people write. It is presumed that at that age they do not themselves have anything significant or interesting to say. And the education system guarantees just that. The best rewards go to those who can parrot set answers to set questions in examination halls. Those who try to use their imagination or reply differently are often punished with low grades.

Rahul Alvares did not set out to write a book. Under the encouragement of his parents, he consciously set out to try his hand at learning things outside the school framework and you might say as a result, Free From School actually came looking for him! After his SSC, unlike his other classmates, he opted out of schooling to follow his instincts: fond of reptiles, he chased them up at the Pune Snake Park and at the Crocodile Bank at Mamallapuram. In the process, he also picked up trails of spiders, earthworms and turtles. He caught snakes in the company of Irula tribals. He got bitten by hot-tempered reptiles. He came out of it all grinning and wiser. 'Free From School' is his story of a year out of school, when the learning graph of his young life went up leaps and bounds. He wrote it to encourage other boys and girls his age to move out of the sterile school and college environment offered by India's antiquarian educational system, if they wish to experience another side to life and learning. He lost nothing but gained a lot. So did his parents. When you read his story, so will you.

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