

OTHER CONTRIBUTIONS: Conference Proceedings

J. Krishnamurti and the Contemporary World Crises

Introduction to the Conference Proceedings

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Land Acknowledgement

We would like to acknowledge that this conference was hosted in Halifax, Nova Scotia which is the unceded, ancestral territory of the Mi'kmaq people, and traditionally known as Mi'kma'ki. Over our decade long stay here, we have come to learn so many things about Mi'kmaw culture from our students and community members, and we have noted many remarkable connections between the philosophical and spiritual traditions from India and Mi'kmaw culture. Many of our Indigenous students have often shared that they find Krishnamurti's ideas to be closely connected to the Indigenous worldviews. Some common shared themes between Indigenous worldviews and the work of Krishnamurti include the importance of relationships, relationships between human beings and nature, the value of listening and dialogue, the significance of spirituality, and the value of holistic education. Each of these themes have been discussed, from a variety of perspectives, in this conference.

Introduction

We, Ashwani Kumar and Nayha Acharya, are excited and honoured to share the conference proceedings of the *J. Krishnamurti and the Contemporary World Crises International Online Conference*. The conference took place at the end of February 2021. It was free for anyone to attend. In our introduction we share how the conference was conceptualized, why J. Krishnamurti is a relevant focus in today's world, how the conference unfolded, and how attendees responded to this conference.

I, Ashwani Kumar, have spent much of my academic journey studying, applying, teaching, and engaging in dialogues about J. Krishnamurti's insights into human consciousness and education. Early 2020 brought with it a tremendous shaking up of human consciousness with the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic and the emergence of the Black Lives Matter movement that seemed to have ignited the entire world. These occurrences shone

a spotlight on so many of our individual and collective issues including our fears, anxieties, mental illnesses, racial violence and prejudice, vaccine nationalism, and even our over-commitment to productivity resulting in personal, societal, and environmental detriment. Noticing all this, I was struck by the value that J. Krishnamurti's ideas can have in the contemporary world. I envisioned an intercultural and inter-disciplinary dialogue that would enable an exchange of ideas on the relevance of J. Krishnamurti's insights from various angles and perspectives. I discussed this idea with Nayha Acharya, who had recently begun incorporating J. Krishnamurti's themes of human consciousness and conflict in her law school teaching and her research on conflict resolution. She was excited at the idea of being involved in such a rich gathering, so a collaboration between the two of us began.

We were awarded the Shastri Indo-Canadian Institute's Program Development Grant to organize an online conference exploring the work of J. Krishnamurti and its relevance for contemporary world crises. The Shastri Indo-Canadian Institute's vision is to strengthen ties between India and Canada and to facilitate ongoing connections between scholars, students, and other interested parties in the two countries. This grant provided us with the exciting opportunity to bring together Indian and Canadian scholars, practitioners, teachers, and students with a common interest in J. Krishnamurti's work to learn from one another, build lasting connections, and explore our collective problems and possible responses. In this endeavour, we had the excellent assistance of two PhD students, Bonnie Petersen and James Caron, from Mount Saint Vincent University, and one Law student, Michal Jeszka, from Dalhousie University. The event could not have come together without their hard work, dedication, and commitment.

The goals and purpose of the conference are discussed in more detail below, but in summary, the conference featured twenty-two speakers from a range of disciplines including psychology, law, religious studies, philosophy, and education. The speakers engaged in panel discussions and question/answer sessions with attendees in six two-hour sessions throughout the two weekends of the conference. There were over 370 registrants. Every daily session resulted in rich expressions of the panellists' personal, scholarly, and professional journeys with the work of J. Krishnamurti, and engaging dialogues with attendees. It brought together a vast number of like-minded individuals, resulting in a cross-cultural and inter-disciplinary community of people concerned with societal and individual betterment, and who have seen how the wisdom of J. Krishnamurti may further those goals in their own unique contexts.

Who was J. Krishnamurti?

J. Krishnamurti (1895-1986) was a world-renowned educator, philosopher, and institution builder from India who contributed profoundly to the fields of philosophy, education, religious studies, consciousness studies, and psychology (Blau, 1995). His greatest contributions lie in his deep insights into the conflict-ridden nature of human consciousness due to fears and

insecurities, his incisive understanding that such an internal state of conflict is the root of our destructive external conflicts, and his assertion that understanding the art of awareness can transform human consciousness (Kumar, 2013). A meditative inquiry into consciousness forms the foundation of Krishnamurti's views on education and life, both of which, he suggests should be oriented towards transforming human consciousness and freeing the individual through self-knowledge (Krishnamurti, 1953, 1954).

Krishnamurti was one of the few philosophers and spiritual teachers who considered the entire world as one unit rather than something fragmented and divided. The central focus of his philosophy is to discover the unity of life within oneself and with the world through an inward meditative exploration that may shed light on our conflicted consciousness. The COVID-19 pandemic has shown us our fragilities and vulnerabilities, our connection to one another, and the significance of existing together peacefully and harmoniously. In our contemporary world, which is simultaneously globalized and divisive, the ideas of a holistic thinker have tremendous value.

Goals of the Conference

The goals of the J Krishnamurti and Contemporary World Crises Conference were four-fold:

First, we wanted to introduce a wider audience to the work of J. Krishnamurti who may not have been familiar with his works especially youth and community members from all walks of life.

Second, we wanted to highlight the relevance of J. Krishnamurti's work to present world crises, including the COVID-19 pandemic and the pre-existing problems of humanity that it has highlighted, including environmental issues, tensions and conflicts among individuals and nations, mental health and other psychological issues, and social inequity and injustice.

Third, we hoped to initiate an interdisciplinary, intercultural, interuniversity, and international dialogue on Krishnamurti's work and its potential to lead Canadian and Indian academics and policymakers towards novel responses to both domestic and global issues.

Finally, we intended to begin a dialogue and commence an enduring community of collaboration between Indian and Canadian scholars, students, and youth.

In furtherance of these goals, Canadian and Indian scholars, educators, and alumni of Krishnamurti schools were invited to this conference to engage in a cross-cultural and multi-disciplinary dialogue aimed at understanding contemporary world crises (including the COVID-19 pandemic) through the lens of Krishnamurti's philosophical and educational ideas. The diverse and multi-national community of thinkers gathered for this conference represented disciplines ranging from law to physics to education. They drew on their own insight and personal experiences to deepen our understanding of J. Krishnamurti's ideas in modern contexts.

At the Conference

The conference opened on February 19, 2021. On that day, Dr. Julie McMullin, Vice President Academic and Provost at Mount Saint Vincent University, and Dr. Prachi Kaul, Director of the Shastri Indo-Canadian Institute, offered opening remarks. The conference then kicked off with keynote addresses delivered by Dr. Meenakshi Thapan, Dr. Ravi Ravindra, and Dr. Hillary Rodrigues. Each of the keynote panellists has decades of experience engaging with Krishnamurti's insights into human consciousness, conflict, dialogue, and the art of awareness.

Over the next five days of the conference, panellists and attendees explored such questions as:

- What are the primary crises that face modern society?
- How have these been highlighted or exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic?
- How might the ideas of J. Krishnamurti help us identify the root of our crises and conflicts and to identify possible responses?
- Considering the crises that face humanity, what should the education of children and youth entail?
- How have students educated in Krishnamurti schools been prepared for life—its conflicts, struggles, and demands?

A panel of two practitioners, Dr. Ashutosh Kalsi and Mukesh Gupta, presented on the second day of the conference, February 20, 2021. On February 21, 2021, we heard from a group of scholars: Morgan Selvanathan, Kathryn Jefferies, John (Jack) Miller. The second weekend of the conference began on February 26, 2021 with a second panel of scholars: Ashwani Kumar, Nayha Acharya, and Vikas Baniwal. On February 27, a group of teachers (Anantha Jyothi, Vaishnavi Narayanan, and Shailesh Shirali) who teach in Krishnamurti schools in India shared their reflections on their pedagogy and the educational experience within the Krishnamurti schools. This was followed by a group of Canadian teachers (Kristen Amiro, Michael Cosgrove, and Carolyn Prest) who use the insights of J. Krishnamurti in their classrooms in Canada. The final panel was a group of alumni of Krishnamurti schools—Aashrita Kamath, Tara Brahme, Jyotsna Sara George, Kartik Srinivasan, and Chinmay Tumbe—who shared their learning and lived experiences at Krishnamurti schools in India.

Each day the speakers in the various panels shared their own story of how they came to be introduced to Krishnamurti's work, and offered remarks addressing some, or all, of these questions. Although the theme for the talks was shared, and the speakers each day were grouped, each speaker offered an entirely unique perspective of how Krishnamurti's work touched their lives, and how they see it contributing to the world today and in the future. The

Introduction to the Conference Proceedings

great differences between the life stories and range of disciplines of the speakers was a fascinating reflection of the broad impact Krishnamurti's writings have had, while the personal and professional stories they told helped to bring a shared understanding of how Krishnamurti's words can help each person on their own path of self-discovery and social transformation. The alumni panel was unique in that they were not consciously familiar with Krishnamurti's ideas, books or life history, yet had been impacted deeply by it through their educational experiences in Krishnamurti schools. This conference provided them with the opportunity to read and reflect on Krishnamurti's work consciously in their adult lives.

After the speakers concluded their remarks each day, the floor was open to the conference registrants to ask their own questions to the speakers. The speakers then took turns to address questions that had been asked, adding another element to the dialogue taking place. As conference chairs, we moderated the discussions, summarized key points for the benefit of the audience, and offered brief reflections at the end of each day—all of these efforts were greatly appreciated by attendees especially those who were new to Krishnamurti's ideas.

Over 370 people from around the world attended the conference. Videos of each of the six conference sessions have also been posted to YouTube which allow everyone to access the conference easily and free of cost. They can be located by searching "J. Krishnamurti and the Contemporary World Crises" on YouTube. The links are also embedded at the end of this document.

The huge success of this conference was possible due to contributions from many individuals. We would like to thank everyone who made this conference possible.

First, we extend our sincere thanks to the Shastri Indo-Canadian institute for financially supporting this endeavour. We would especially like to thank Dr. Prachi Kaul, Reshma Rana, and Pikee Sharma at the Shastri institute for their support.

We sincerely thank our wonderful presenters who brought such a rich and multi-faceted look at Krishnamurti's work and its relevance today. We know how busy they all were, and we appreciate their willingness to share their insights. We would like to give special thanks to Professor Meenakshi Thapan for helping us secure teachers and alumni of the Krishnamurti school to speak at this conference.

We would also like to thank Vice-President Academic and provost, Dr. Julie McMullin, Dean of Education, Dr. Antony Card, and Acting Vice-President Research, Dr. Derek Fischer at Mount Saint Vincent University and Acting Dean, Richard Devlin and Associate Dean Research, Sara Seck at Schulich School of Law, Dalhousie University, for supporting this event. This event has led to an important collaborative relationship between Mount Saint Vincent University and Dalhousie University, and we hope to maintain this collaboration in future.

We are grateful and thankful to all our attendees who enthusiastically participated in all the sessions. As noted, more than 370 people registered for the conference as a whole, and each of the sessions were very well attended.

We extend our heartfelt thanks and appreciation to the research office, financial services, and communications at Mount Saint Vincent University for all of their administrative support. In particular, we would like to thank Veronica Bacher, Jessica Long, Cathleen Madgette, Valerie Brace, Lora Arenburg. We would also like to thank the communications team at the Schulich School of Law, Dalhousie University.

We would like to again recognise the work of the students who were on the conference organizing committee—Bonnie Petersen and Jamie Caron, doctoral students at Mount Saint Vincent and Michal Jeszka, student at the Schulich School of Law. We simply could not have asked for a better team. Without them, the conference could not have run so smoothly, particularly given its technological format and international scope.

A very special thanks is due to Bonnie Petersen. She played a key role throughout the conference. Bonnie maintained communication with us as conference co-chairs on every matter related to conference and helped us in putting the poster and the program together. She communicated with the presenters and the financial services at Mount Saint Vincent University, helped us prepare the final report of the conference, and supported our work on preparing the conference proceedings including creating abstracts for a number of authors who could not do so on their own. It would have been impossible to organize this conference without Bonnie's help.

Finally, we extend our heartfelt thanks to Helen Lees, Editor-in-Chief of *Other Education: The Journal for Educational Alternatives*, for providing a forum for these conference proceedings.

It is our sincere hope that these conference proceedings—in the form of abstracts and video recordings of each of the conference sessions—will help us further our goal of introducing a wide audience to the educational and philosophical ideas of J. Krishnamurti and their relevance for today's world.

References

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Materials on Krishnamurti

Free Krishnamurti books:

<http://krishnamurti.abundanthope.org/krishnamurti.htm>

For beginners we recommend the following books by Krishnamurti: *Education and the Significance of Life*; *Freedom from the Known*; and *First and the Last Freedom*.

Krishnamurti and his ideas:

<https://jkrishnamurti.org/about-core-teachings>

Krishnamurti's schools:

<http://www.jkrishnamurti.org/worldwide-information/schools.php>

Association of Krishnamurti Studies:

<https://www.krishnamurtistudies.org/>

Documentaries on Krishnamurti's life and work:

Krishnamurti: The Challenge of Change

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IWVtovuTRE0>

Krishnamurti: With A Silent Mind

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TPAzpDI7VvM>

Journal of Krishnamurti Schools:

<http://www.journal.kfionline.org/>

Links to all the Sessions of the Conference

Session One - Welcome Remarks and Keynote Panel: Prachi Kaul, Julie McMullin, Meenakshi Thapan, Ravi Ranvindra, and Hillary Rodrigues

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1isPbB-IXwo&list=PLfVjDB_dQhEpYnHf6l8WMJ_XrT-Oln7CL&index=1&t=3559s

Session Two – Practitioners' Panel: Mukesh Gupta and Ashutosh Kalsi

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VffegmYOSLI&list=PLfVjDB_dQhEpYnHf6l8WMJ_XrT-Oln7CL&index=2&t=1390s

Session Three – Scholars' Panel: I Jack Miller, Kathryn Jefferies, and Morgan Selvanathan (Session Three)

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DsJZ8koe8ME&list=PLfVjDB_dQhEpYnHf6l8WMJ_XrT-Oln7CL&index=3&t=4s

Session Four – Scholars’ Panel II: Ashwani Kumar, Nayha Acharya, and Vikas Baniwal (Session Four)

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UNF6TaWFxbQ&list=PLfvjDB_dQhEpYnHf6l8WMJ_XrT-Oln7CL&index=4&t=8s

Session Five – Teachers’ Panel: Shailesh Shirali, Anantha Jyothi, Vaishnavi Narayanan, Michael Cosgrove, Kristen Amiro, and Carolyn Prest (Session Five)

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EWPGDhXmCZo&list=PLfvjDB_dQhEpYnHf6l8WMJ_XrT-Oln7CL&index=5&t=4s

Session Six - Alumni Panel: Aashrita Kamath, Chinmay Tumbe, Jyotsna Sara George, Kartik Srinivasan, and Tara Brahme (Session Six)

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Z6JFfMlcmUc&list=PLfvjDB_dQhEpYnHf6l8WMJ_XrT-Oln7CL&index=6&t=2384s

Author Details

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Nayha Acharya is an Assistant Professor of law at the Schulich School of Law, Dalhousie University. She teaches and writes in the areas of civil procedure, legal ethics, and alternative dispute resolution. Recently, Nayha has been finding ways to incorporate a pedagogical style rooted in J. Krishnamurti’s educational philosophy in her classrooms, and she has been working on developing a framework for conflict resolution also grounded in J. Krishnamurti’s philosophical ideas about conflict. Email address: nayha.acharya@dal.ca

