

OTHER CONTRIBUTIONS: Conference Proceedings **J. Krishnamurti and the Contemporary World Crises**

Alumni Panel and Closing Remarks **(Session Six)¹**

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Tara Brahme, Antony Card, Derek Fisher

Krishnamurti Alumni Panel

What I Learnt as a ‘K’ Kid Without Even Realizing It **Aashrita Kamath**

Having spent 13 years of my life as a student of two Krishnamurti Schools, my talk is a reflection on the impact that it has had on shaping me and my approach to life. In today’s tumultuous world, I dwell on the importance of that education, and I now recognize it to be a strong grounding force.

Having many family members and my husband (whom I actually met at Rishi Valley School) all alumni of Rishi Valley and The School, it is hard for me to pinpoint what I learnt from my “education” in the traditional sense and what I imbibed from the environment that was created for me at home. I have come to realise that the beauty in this, is that one could not have happened if it were not for the other.

Thinking back, the focus through junior and middle school was on developing and nurturing awareness in us. With the pressures of routine exams and tests deferred until high school and the lack of a competitive environment, we were free to explore aspects of life that were essential to developing sensitivity. Being surrounded by nature was a fundamental part of developing this awareness in us. We were also taught to not only be passively aware of our natural environment, but to engage with it and feel a sense of responsibility towards it. The notion of awareness stretched beyond ourselves, and we learnt how to feel compassion. We

¹ 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

were always encouraged to be inquisitive and curious, to question the world around us, to speak respectfully, but freely. Each school day also included a creative session of some kind.

I was not as aware of what I was learning then, as I am now, but there are many elements of my education that still guide me; I like to think that I have been instilled with a strong moral compass that guides me to a compassionate, sensitive life.

I recently had a powerful experience with nature at Torres Del Paine national park in Chilean Patagonia that left me transfixed and overwhelmed. It was then I realized what Krishnamurti means when he talks of a “one-ness with nature.” I also realized that, in my determination to succeed at what I do, I had lost track of that aspect of my education that I needed the most: the connection between the self and nature. In this past year, I have gone back to that moment countless times. It grounds me, reminding me who I am, and what I need to do to cope with the world around me.

Acknowledgements: I would like to sincerely thank Bonnie Petersen for creating this well-written abstract from a summary of my talk at the Krishnamurti conference.

Competition vs. Excellence

Chinmay Tumble

In this presentation, I outline how my experience at Rishi Valley School from 1993 to 2000 shaped my ideas on competition; its relative absence in school, its seeming abundance outside, and how I have dealt with this dichotomy.

The greatest thing about the Krishnamurti experience for me, is that I still don’t know much about Krishnamurti himself. The Rishi Valley School was about the ideas of Krishnamurti, not the person. There were, famously, no exams, and it was located on a spectacular campus. Although I didn’t necessarily recognise it at the time, there was a focus on valuing the environment, a focus on creativity and aesthetics, and a focus on excellence rather than competition. In my experience there was no sense of hierarchy between the students, the teachers, and the principal; we considered the teachers to be great friends of ours.

This lack of hierarchy was further supported through the lack of competition within the school. One illustration of this was Sports Day. Of course we were rooting for people to come first, but there were no prizes or certificates. It was not about who came first, but who was doing their best. It did not really matter how you placed, but whether you were pushing yourself. This was also true throughout the school. At Rishi Valley, you were not designated a failure if you didn’t do well in some things, you were encouraged to succeed in others.

This is even more apparent to me now as I work as faculty in one of the most competitive places to study in India—a Business and Management school. It is very competitive to get a place in the school, and there is fierce competition within the school as well. In my position as faculty in this highly competitive environment, I am trying to introduce less competitive methods within my teaching. I am exploring whether there are alternative ways to measure learning rather than the typical exam model. I also start classes outside the classroom sometimes, trying to introduce appreciation for the environment.

I have come to recognise that the emphasis on excellence rather than competition that I experienced at Rishi Valley has made my life much more meaningful. In introducing these ideas into this highly competitive context, I am trying to share this understanding with my students.

Acknowledgements: I wish to express my sincere thanks to Bonnie Petersen for developing this excellent abstract from my talk at the Krishnamurti conference.

Reflections on “Responsible Citizenship” Jyotsna Sara George

I will share my reflections on what it means to be a “responsible citizen” in this world—a theme that I have found myself coming back to more frequently in the last few years. I will reflect on the idea of “responsibility” as it relates to my personal activism and explore how my education at Rishi Valley School shaped my understanding of “responsibility.” I will also share reflections on how this idea of “responsibility” intersects with the urgency of cultivating empathy, tolerance, and acceptance.

In the years since I attended Rishi Valley School, I have come to realise that there were seeds planted at the school that we were not necessarily aware of at the time. Two that I have come to recognise are the gifts of introspection and critical thinking.

As a student at RVS, *astachal* was a very special time for me. This took place in the evening when the whole school came together to watch the sunset and reflect. These are very sensorial and experiential memories. There was an initial restlessness, but then each person would find their own kind of stillness that was so profound. At first, I resented this, but gradually, as I got older, I found a kind of refuge in it and came to crave it. Even now I find a kind of excitement with the sunset; I am connecting to a part of myself that I first became aware of as a part of *astachal*. The sense of connection was on many levels—from the very practical to the very profound.

We all find ourselves in a polarised world. People are so quick to judge, and we don’t know what’s real and fake, what do we rely on for information, and community? In my role as an activist in the years since RVS, I sometimes wonder if I have become that which I have been trying to fight and become part of the pull toward polarisation. I search for that ability to connect with another person, regardless of who they are and what their value system is—how do I come back to a place of tolerance and empathy?

When I think back to our school-days, I see that we grew up with people with a wide diversity of experience and culture. We learned to accept people very different than we were as we witnessed their struggles. All of the tensions that exist now, also existed then in some form. We were all trying to make sense of the world around us at school, negotiating relationships with various people and scenarios, and learning to speak our minds as we learned that we have minds and perspectives. We are all now, as adults, still going through these things and can learn from these previous experiences.

Critical thinking and introspection, things we all share as humans, are great gifts that we can use to help us negotiate responsibility in the modern world.

Acknowledgements: I want to sincerely thank Bonnie Petersen for creating this wonderful abstract from my talk at the Krishnamurti conference.

How Krishnamurti's Philosophy Helped Me Choose to Live a Sustainable Life
Kartik Srinivasan

The talk focuses on how the most valuable thing about a Krishnamurti education for me was being made aware of conditioning and being allowed to think, question and choose for ourselves. It is tremendously empowering to not have to break out of an oppressive system. We were always encouraged to pave our own paths of our choosing. This framework of allowance and tolerance enabled me to truly chart my own course, unshackled by the fetters of obligatory roles or following only certain predetermined socially approved roads. Krishnamurti said that truth is a pathless land; I interpreted this to mean that truth is both multifaceted and individually different, which encouraged me to follow a path of living sustainably off-grid. Knowing that there were unlimited choices that existed during the formative years of my schooling, made a world of a difference. As a child, being offered that choice, patience and allowance helped shape me into who I am today.

Reflections on freedom as the *real* goal of education
Tara Brahme

As young people inheriting a world that esteems and admires individualism over a sense of community, one of the things many of us have to deal with is a feeling of isolation. Simultaneously, we are also part of a generation, which is so connected that we're forced to consume information at break-neck speed. This hardly leaves us any time to think and reflect on today's circumstances before we have to confront the future. My talk was a reflection of how a KFI school education has helped me deal with the conditions of such a world and drew from conversations in the [Krishnamurti] book *Think on These Things*.

It is in these circumstances that thinking about The School allows me to recognize how it has equipped me to deal with such issues. It particularly brings up Krishnamurti's writings on "fear" as a central theme, as something that helped me to find a way out. Through a kind of education that gave us the freedom to question, we (the students) were encouraged, as he says, to be in a state of "constant revolt" against conformity, against tradition, against dogmatism, so that we could discover what was true and, in that process, learn to understand that fear that taints human existence and interaction.

Krishnamurti says that the only way we may move towards an awareness of this fear then is when our education prioritizes freedom. When learning becomes about "understanding what you are from moment to moment," when we are "in revolt against the whole tradition of trying to become something." And as I understand it, this doesn't mean completely rejecting material reality and not giving in to ambition and fear but recognising it for what it is and constantly

reflecting on where your desire to do or not do something is coming from and being critically aware of the position that you occupy in the “system.”

Closing Remarks

Antony Card

Thank you for this opportunity to provide some closing comments, and words of congratulations and thanks. I thought I would just share my own journey with Krishnamurti, and some of the teachings and learnings I have discovered. Those learnings started on February the 19th, 2021 at 11 a.m., with the start of this conference. This has been new to me. But let me share some of the things that I am taking away from this conference. I think what I have learned is that we are not dealing with a single crisis but a multiplicity of contemporary crises, and the way modern society is dealing with the problem, is the problem itself. The crisis is not political, or economic, or religious, but a crisis in consciousness; solutions exist within our hearts and our minds. I have also learned that Krishnamurti’s ideas transcend boundaries, are timeless, and are perhaps more relevant now than they have ever been. What we are looking at is a different type of knowledge, one that gets away from the “me, me, me.” We must evoke and discover unity through that. This is about the pure role of education in understanding the self. I think the other thing that I have discovered is that it takes half a lifetime to fully understand and appreciate Krishnamurti. Now that I am in my fifties, I think I really need to get started. It has been really most enjoyable experience listening to the speakers at this conference.

In my view, one of the things that happens in schools is that learning is considered ephemeral. Students learn a date, a figure, a number, a fact for the purpose of some contrived test to meet the needs of a neoliberal, technocratic government curriculum, and of course, that learning is forgotten as quickly as it is learned. However, I think that the learning that we are talking about in this conference has been about the results of a transformation of the student. Perhaps they have “lightbulb moments,” the “aha” moments, the epiphanies that are emancipatory, and have the power to transform the individual in society. So I thought I would share the epiphanies that I have had through this conference, and how they relate to my own background.

My scholarly background is in physical education and health education, and through that I have been able to engage with the subject of this conference. One thing that has stood out to me is how, in outdoor education literature, we often talk about nature deficit disorder. That is a term that has been coined. It really struck me that many of the presentations through this conference have reflected on the way Krishnamurti similarly talks about the beauty and importance of nature.

Another thing for me is that people often think of physical education as learning sports—the rules, techniques, and skills and so on in a game like cricket or basketball—or they think it is about fitness. For me, those things are outcomes for sure, but that is not really the crux of it. Physical education is really about conflict resolution. So, when you throw a ball in and you

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have a game, within a couple of minutes, students have to deal with conflict resolution. And I like a game where students can be doing the refereeing, and unpairing themselves, maybe developing their own rules. Or we have a collaborative game where we see how many times we can keep the volleyball in the air between two people, or keep a rally going in tennis. And I think it is that sharing and learning together that has helped me connect to Krishnamurti's work. It has left me thinking that I need to take this further. I think what we do in physical education needs to include self-inquiry, nurture compassion, and perhaps get to some of the existential questions. I am really looking forward to engaging in this work, and hopefully, one day visiting a Krishnamurti school. I really appreciated the presentation today from Chinmay on school sports; when he spoke about that, it certainly resonated with me.

So, to close, this is about saying a very big thank you to you, Ashwani. Mount Saint Vincent University is very proud of you and this conference, and I think it has been a great opening with the Shastri Indo-Canadian Institute. I hope that we are able to do more. And for Nayha, I would also say that Dalhousie University is equally as proud of you, and what you have been able to achieve through this. I did really appreciate the fact that the resources and materials have been so accessible. This has been a free event. I have been able to watch the YouTube videos that have helped when I have not been able to attend a session. I thoroughly enjoyed that, and the resources and materials have been absolutely first class. Thank you so much. I deeply appreciate this. I am going to leave you with one request: Can we please do this again sometime? It has been wonderful, thank you.

Derek Fisher

Thank you for inviting me to offer some closing remarks and for your attendance at this wonderful conference. I am reminded by the words of Jiddu Krishnamurti himself that "Through a narrow window we can see only part of the sky, and not the whole vastness, the magnificence of it."

When considering these words at an immediate level, I think of this conference where people with different expertise and perspectives come together to discuss global crises; to not simply offer our own viewpoints but to bring all of our windows together in order to broaden our perspective and, even if we cannot see the whole vastness of the problems and their solutions, our own narrow windows get a little bit wider. More broadly, I think this speaks to the value of organizations like the Shastri Indo-Canadian Institute (SICI). In Canada, and I think one could argue North America more broadly, our perspective tends to hyper-focus on North American and European texts and systems to guide our thinking and knowing; so it is that when we look for how to improve education or consider global crises we tend to look through narrow windows built by our colonial history and, whether we realize it or not, are shielded from the vastness and magnificence of knowledge available to us. Through partnerships, such as those fostered by SICI, we can consider these issues through a different lens, to consider ideas beyond what we have learned in our narrow education and experience. If our goal is truth and solving problems in an ethical manner, whether they be local or global, this broadened perspective is not only important, but essential.

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education focused on health and physical education and health promoting schools. His research projects have focused on children and youth in Newfoundland and Labrador and engaging policy makers, practitioners and researchers in jointly setting priorities for youth health in schools across Canada, such as with the development of Core Indicators and Measures of Physical Activity. Email address: Antony.Card@msvu.ca

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