

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

Indian and Canadian Teachers' Panels **Session Five¹**

Shailesh Shirali, Anantha Jyothi, Vaishnavi Narayanan, Michael Cosgrove,
Kristen Amiro, and Carolyn Prest

Indian Teachers' Panel

Role of a Teacher in School: J Krishnamurti on Education **Shailesh Shirali**

I got to know about Krishnamurti through his writings, which I found transparently simple, free of jargon and quotations and containing deeply sensitive depictions of natural landscapes. I was drawn to study the teachings and joined Rishi Valley School as a teacher soon after, and I have been with the Krishnamurti Foundation of India schools ever since.

Looking around, we see the world in a mess: political systems in disarray; people lost in the advancement of careers and the pursuit of ambitions; lost in entertainment and sport; lost in ideologies. We see great loneliness and deep unhappiness. We see the ecosystem ravaged, close to breakdown, with the threat of catastrophe looming large. Where do these problems originate? The ultimate origin, surely, is our pursuit of false values, which comes from our upbringing. If one is concerned about the state of the world, then our attention is naturally drawn to school education. The question therefore arises, what is the role of a teacher in school?

Education all over the world has focused on the acquisition of knowledge about the world and the development of skills and techniques. All these add to the students' employability. More than that, they reinforce the notion that education is primarily about one's individual career and personal achievement. Krishnamurti introduced a different paradigm: he pointed out that unless education helps us to understand ourselves (which means understanding our urge for power and domination, our demand for security, our

¹ 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

aggressiveness, our possessiveness, our desperate desire for success; understanding that the disorder we see everywhere stems from within us), it will succeed only in making us ruthless and cynical. What follows from this paradigm? What does it mean to understand oneself? In what way do we alter our approach to education? In this talk, I explore some aspects of this question.

Exploring Krishnamurti With 12-Year-Olds: Reflections Through Poetry

D. Anantha Jyothi

Krishnamurti was once asked “Who are you?”. He reverted the question back to the audience urging them to seek the answer inwardly. He persistently asks [paraphrased], “Who are you?” and says, “You are the story of mankind. If you see that, it gives you tremendous vitality, beauty and love ... You are part of this whole humanity”. In the current world torn by political tribalism and identity politics, this seems a refreshing insight to explore with 12-year-old students. Their world too is strife driven in the classroom and playing-field, wherein they are constantly trying to validate their “self.” This presentation explores this dynamic with the self through a range of poems. The poems are seemingly light-hearted but ask probing questions. One is Dickinson’s poem *I’m Nobody, Who are You?* which echoes Krishnamurti’s exact words. Carl Sandburg’s provocative poem titled *Who Do You Think You Are?* completely dissembles man from toenails to the hair in his head into elements of earth and air. A third poem is of one caught between a child and an adult. Czech poet Miroslav Holub’s poem peeks into *A Boy’s Head* to see what is in there. There is an endearing poem by him on friendship where a boy beseeches to God for a new friend—“someone with a basketball”. Finally, there is angst of a middle schooler with whom everyone wants to be a friend but only after he has shot seven goals. Students are gently nudged to turn inward and question their relationship with their own self, peers, people different from themselves. Snippets from the work of students highlight some of these reflections: “I found that meaning of life was not to be found only by looking outwards, but more by looking inwards”; “... being nobody gives you the freedom to be anybody, and that sounds like fun.”

Learning: A Continuum

Vaishnavi Narayanan

My tryst with Krishnamurti and his teachings was incidental. When I started my work as a teacher at The School in Chennai (Krishnamurti Foundation of India), I would often wonder, ‘Why did Krishnamurti start a school? It is at that time that I read his book *Education and the Significance of Life*. It brought to fore the deep conditioning of the human mind. The more I read, the more my questions grew. I realized that I had been going about most of my life as a creature of habit, of tradition that defined me, that I was someone doing the things that were expected of me.

To begin where one is, to embrace all of myself—with the ugliness and beauty, fear and joy—that is the invitation, to just be. It requires affection at the most fundamental level for oneself, and life, so that something as beautiful as goodness can flower. Even as trees change

colour, leaves fall, flowers bloom and seasons change, there is something that I learn by just watching these seemingly simple acts of nature.

To be alive to all this and to oneself is about paying attention to the physical senses. Krishnamurti says "Start with the outer, look at nature." Walking the untrodden paths in the mountains, during treks and hikes that we go on—there are moments of quiet, where nothing is heard but the sound of one's breathing in sync with the rustling of leaves on the trees or the soft crunch of dried leaves under one's feet. I have found this quiet to be deeply energizing, both in the physical and psychological realm.

In my work, there is the space to experience moments of chaos and clarity, to hear the noise within and to also come into touch with a certain quiet. I see the immense possibility of a nuanced approach to living life, of being able to observe, reflect, learn and grow.

Canadian Teachers' Panel

Teaching Krishnamurti in a Canadian Public High School

Michael Cosgrove

This presentation was part of a Canadian Teachers' Panel that explored the significance and impact of Krishnamurti's teachings and philosophy in Canadian classrooms. Specifically, it explored student responses to Krishnamurti's books *Freedom From the Known* and *Education and the Significance of Life*, in a Philosophy 12 classroom, by presenting student reflections on different excerpts from the texts. There were common themes to the students' responses when they reflected.

In general, students were engaged with the concepts that Krishnamurti talks about, such as: conditioning, competition, and comparison. It allowed them to inquire about their own conditioning, their views of success, and their relationship with the others, and created an important space for growth in the classroom. This type of inquiry gave students an opportunity to explore some foundations of their beliefs, and also allowed them to challenge certain long held beliefs and ways of thinking. As one student responded, "We are afraid of being wrong, so we agree with what we think is right, even if not necessarily true."

The discussions in the Philosophy classroom that centered Krishnamurti's texts were meaningful and thoughtful. The students enjoyed the challenging work, even though at times it made them feel uncomfortable. Krishnamurti's ideas have an intensity, and in order to approach them with students, a teacher has to acknowledge that. Nonetheless, sometimes even the things that we fear are worth asking deeper questions about. As one student put it, "We are so scared to be ourselves because we are so worried about judgment that we will try and be someone else."

John Steinbeck, Jiddu Krishnamurti, and Holistic Education

Kristen Amiro

This talk was about holistic education as informed by the writing and talks of Jiddu Krishnamurti, the literature of American writer John Steinbeck, and the multidisciplinary work of Ed Ricketts, an early marine ecologist. These contemporaries may have met in California

between the 1920s and 1940s, or perhaps not, but their complementary worldviews offer insights to the meaning of education, and its potential to reduce conflict in the self and the world. Steinbeck and Krishnamurti's core beliefs about the importance of relationships and the development of the self are central themes of holistic education. Holistic education is informed by ecological thinking, and Ed Ricketts was a pioneer of ecological thinking.

As an example of holistic education, I analyze a pedagogical relationship in John Steinbeck's novel *Sweet Thursday*, specifically between two characters named Fauna and Suzy. I argue that through this relationship in particular, Steinbeck's holistic worldview is illuminated, a worldview consistent with the ideas of Jiddu Krishnamurti, who was a Steinbeck contemporary. The relationship in the novel is not literally a teacher-student relationship, rather, Fauna is the madam of a brothel and Suzy is a worker there. Putting humanity before capitalism, Fauna helps Suzy self-actualize and become a self-actualized person. As she evolves, Suzy personifies Krishnamurti's ideal of developing awareness in relation to the environment.

Holistic education is informed by ecological thinking, and it takes into account the student as a whole person, in relation to others. I examine Steinbeck's writing about and with Ed Ricketts, marine ecologist. Ricketts-inspired characters in Steinbeck's fiction personified the wisdom and warmth of a compassionate and connected way of being in the world.

Crisis, Identity and Krishnamurti in Rural Populations **Carolyn Prest**

As society adapts with modernity, rural life becomes less common and populations in once-thriving communities dwindle. Subsequently, rural individuals and families find it increasingly difficult to reconcile their identities and way of life with mainstream expectations. In light of the rural-urban shift, centralization of services, and modern perceptions, individuals with deep rooted connections to their physical environments (often the woods and water) struggle to maintain this connection in a way that supports themselves and their families.

Throughout his work, Krishnamurti expresses the need for self-understanding in the individual, and expresses the importance of giving value to the natural world and our environment. Without self-understanding, we are incapable of interacting with the external world in an authentic manner that is productive and healing. Krishnamurti teaches that without a strong connection to ourselves, we cannot educate or support others in a holistic way.

In her presentation, Carolyn Prest shares her identity and its connection to her family history and the physical environment that she has grown in. She discusses the material loss that rural citizens have faced over generations and the effects that this loss has had on citizen's ability to understand themselves and connect with their identities. When rural citizens experience global crises such as the Corona virus, the gaps between what they have and what they've lost widens to catastrophic proportions. With a focus on Krishnamurti's teachings, Carolyn considers the impact of the loss of rural identity on that population and considers a path forward in the face of modern crises across the globe.

Authors' Details (in order of appearance):

Shailesh Shirali studied at Delhi University (1974) and the Indian Institute of Management Ahmedabad (1976). Following this, he did a PhD (1980) in mathematics at the University of Texas. He taught at the University of New Brunswick (Canada) and joined Rishi Valley in 1983; he has been with the Krishnamurti Foundation of India schools since then. He is a trustee of the KFI. He served as Principal of Rishi Valley School (1992-2004) and is now Director of Sahyadri School. He has been for long in the field of maths education and has written many maths books. He serves as Chief Editor of *At Right Angles*. He has a particular interest in ancient Indian mathematics and in facilitating enquiry into issues of life and society among teachers and high school students. Email address: shailesh@sahyadrischool.org

Anantha Jyothi joined Rishi Valley School as a teacher after completing her PhD in English. Though she was familiar with Krishnamurti's philosophy, she was not prepared for what unfolded in the next phase of her life. Anantha wonders when the line between the professional and the personal in her blurred and blended teaching in Rishi Valley is not just a livelihood but a way of life. She took a short break from Rishi Valley. In this interim period, she did her teacher training in the UK and taught there briefly. Eventually, like a homing bird she returned to Rishi Valley School. Email address: jyothi@rishivalley.org

Vaishnavi Narayanan is a teacher, and Vice-Principal at The School (KFI) and has taught different subjects—English, Economics, History, Geography, Math and Hindi across different sections of the school for the past 15 years. Before coming into The School, she also taught briefly for a period of three years in another school in Chennai. She is a post-graduate in Economics from the University of Delhi along with a degree in education. Her interests span reading, writing, painting, singing and theatre to name a few. She has written articles for a few journals on the topic of education and learning. She is an avid trekker and her love for the mountains is reflected in the treks she goes on every year in the Himalayas. She enjoys working with young people and her own tryst with education has found her delving deeper into questions around it. Email address: vaishnavimani@gmail.com

Michael Cosgrove teaches English and Philosophy in high school, where he continues to find ways to incorporate the educational philosophy of Krishnamurti. He received a Bachelor of Arts and Bachelor of Education from the University of British Columbia, and a Masters in education in both Educational Foundations and Curriculum Studies from Mount Saint Vincent University. He has written a book titled *Salt of the Turf* (2017) and is a regular contributor to *Halifax Magazine*. Michael resides in Dartmouth, NS, with his wife and two daughters. Email address: MCosgrove@hrce.ca

Kristen Amiro grew up in Pubnico, Nova Scotia, Canada, and lives with her husband and two daughters in Dartmouth. She teaches English and Social Studies at the secondary level. Her non-fiction writing has been published in *The Steinbeck Review* and *Aviso*, and her poetry has been published in literary journals. Kristen has a poetry collection called *The World and I*

*Shailesh Shirali, Anantha Jyothi, Vaishnavi Narayanan,
Michael Cosgrove, Kristen Amiro, and Carolyn Prest*

Both, available online as an e-publication. She holds Masters degrees from Mount Saint Vincent University in Arts and in Education. Email address: KAmiro@hrce.ca

Carolyn Prest was born in Mooseland, Nova Scotia—a very small rural community on the Eastern Shore. Following her education, she has chosen to settle and raise her family on the Eastern Shore, in Pleasant Harbour. Currently teaching Junior High Mathematics at the local P-12 school, she is passionate about rural education and the nuances of teaching in small communities with rich histories. She enjoys the natural beauty of the area, and spends most of her leisure time experiencing nature alongside her husband and two children. Email address: CPrest@hrce.ca



This work by Shailesh Shirali et al is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 Unported](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/)