

OTHER CONTRIBUTIONS

A Living and Learning Space: Approaches to Education in a Krishnamurti School

Vaishnavi Narayanan

Principal, The School, Krishnamurti Foundation of India

Abstract *Teaching is intrinsic to my identity. I came upon Krishnamurti when I joined The School (Krishnamurti Foundation of India), which is hidden away in the deep recesses of shade and beauty amidst dark woods, an oasis in a concrete jungle. My journey with Krishnamurti is what I hope to capture in this essay. The experience of being touched by Krishnamurti is not an ordinary experience; it is deep and moving. It shook up the very ground of my beliefs and nudged me, gently but firmly, out of my comfort zone. It challenged me to examine myself, ask questions, and reflect on my life and how I live it.*

Keywords Krishnamurti, teachings, teacher, pedagogy, inquiry, learning, conversation

Introduction

I have been a teacher for the past eighteen years, fifteen of which have been at a Krishnamurti School in Chennai, Tamil Nadu, India at The School (Krishnamurti Foundation of India). When I chose to become a teacher, it was driven neither by an

ambition to teach nor by the yearning to “make a difference” in the lives of young people. One can say that it was perchance a mere happening that somehow became intrinsic to who I am today, as a person. My tryst with Krishnamurti also was as a matter of chance and not borne out of a conscious seeking around what he had to say about life at large. In fact, I came upon his teachings when I joined The School (Krishnamurti Foundation of India), a school hidden away in the deep recesses of shade and beauty amidst dark woods, an oasis in a concrete jungle, a happening that changed my life. In the verdant ambiance of the school and the bedrock of Krishnamurti’s teachings that form the core of the school’s approach to education, I have learnt much, and I have grown tremendously as an educator as well as a person. The experience of being touched by Krishnamurti is no ordinary experience; it is deep and moving. It shook up the very ground of my beliefs and nudged me, gently but firmly, out of my comfort zone, out of my ready acceptance of answers, and

challenged me to examine myself, ask questions, reflect on my life and how I live it. This journey of self-exploration continues, and the intent of my paper is to give an understanding—a glimpse—of how the philosophy of a Krishnamurti school finds its expression in the structures that have been evolved for the learning of the adult and the child in this place called The School.

Nature: An Extension of Our Existence

What is a teacher? It is the greatest profession in the world, though the least respected, for if he [she] is deeply and seriously concerned, the teacher is bringing about the unconditioning of the human brain; not only his own brain but the brains of the students.

In the quiet of the mornings, in the crunch of the fallen leaves below my feet, in the colors of the sunset and the song of the birds, I have found solace in my moments amidst nature. To be aware of the smells of the earth, the feel of the cool morning breeze, or to watch as the beautiful kingfisher gets ready to take flight, is to be alive. Krishnamurti has often spoken about the importance of nature and our relationship with life around us, in all its forms.

As a teacher, I have found immense value in coming in early every day of the working week onto the school campus. It is a time, to just be by myself and enjoy the solitude of the place. It is that time before the

rush of the day begins, before the students come in and the chaos of the day takes over, before the routines and schedules demand my attention; before all that. It is a time to connect with myself and listen to my thoughts as each vies for my attention. It is in that flurry of thoughts that I allow myself to settle down, to quieten and just be. In that moment, I turn outwards, to nature, to all the beauty that is around me, beauty that reaches out to me and makes me come alive with a sense of wonder. I have realized over the years how much I value this time, as it is more important than any of the work I do in school; these precious minutes enable me to connect with myself.

I also take my students frequently on nature walks around the campus whenever we feel the need to disconnect from everything and connect with ourselves. The subject, nor the time of the day, do not matter. What matters is the need to be quiet and observe, around us, but of ourselves too. We usually go and find a space to be alone, to sit under a tree or an open space, looking around, trying to listen, not necessarily to identify everything that we hear and see but to allow for that space to be attentive. I remember how once, one of my colleagues, in his earnestness to show a certain bird on the tree raised his voice to get everyone's attention, and a child said, "Anna (that is how male teachers are addressed in school) if you shout, the bird will fly away." It is in the recognition of the quiet that

attention takes birth. We observe all that we see and hear, appreciate, and then try and understand it, together.

The school trips that we go on with students always have an element of spending time outdoors, of being with nature and with oneself. There are night-walks that students go on, in complete silence, for one to recognize and be aware of what one feels. The stars above, the shadows of the trees, the hooting of the night owl, all of it becomes part of that experience, something that is part of our being and not outside it. The fear that one has of the dark is unraveled and understood. As one middle school child once said, "I realize that the dark is nature's way of turning out the lights!" Simple words that make me ask myself about my role as the adult in the lives of students. Krishnamurti says,

Nature is part of our life. We grew out of the seed, the earth, and we are part of all that, but we are rapidly losing the sense that we are animals like the others. Can you have a feeling for a tree, look at it, see the beauty of it, listen to the sound it makes? Can you be sensitive to the little plant, a little weed, to that creeper growing up the wall, to the light on the leaves and the many shadows? One must be aware of all this and have that sense of communion with nature around you (Krishnamurti, 2006, ch. 54, np).

Over the years, I have discovered that my role as the adult in the child's life is to carefully nurture the space for a student to grow and be their own person. That, by itself, begins the process of self-discovery. To help articulate and express what one feels in the midst of nature, students are often encouraged to write in their journals when they return from their walk. They also choose to illustrate what they have experienced. The writing and the illustration could be factual in terms of what they saw and identified, or simply be an expression of their self-reflection. The intent is to help them watch their thinking, to question and understand oneself in this pause. Students are encouraged to read these pieces of writing and share with the entire group so that everyone gets a glimpse of this thought process. These are spaces of introspection that allow for immense learning for both the teacher and the student.

How often have we made an effort to sit with our backs against the trunk of a tree? To just lean back and look at the sky, to be quiet, watch, and take in what nature offers to us, unconditionally. To be able to appreciate these nuances with a gentleness and sensitivity, makes us alive to other relationships that we experience in our lives. If we cannot relate to nature, we cannot relate to each other.

To respect nature, to have a sense of wonder for it, is to respect the whole of life. In school, students enjoy the activity of doing gardening

together, of watching a plant take life from seed. The idea of taking care of something and nurturing it, nurtures the quality of attention in them as they carefully observe the changes they see in the plant, the colors of the flowers, the texture of the bark or the smell of the leaves. All this is energizing in its own quiet way. When there is conflict inside or outside of them, students seek quiet. It helps to take that pause when they are distracted or when they feel the need to be by themselves.

The act of saving an ant from drowning or putting a caterpillar back on a leaf nurtures a sense of care and affection for all living beings. When we learn to appreciate that which is around us, we learn to value others and ourselves too. It is this relationship we have with nature that leads to growth as sensitive and caring individuals.

Conversation: An Opportunity to Listen

As a teacher, I have found that the most meaningful conversations happen when there is no context, or any agenda to them. Talking to students at different times of the day, through the different activities that happen, creates the space for conversing and examining ideas and questions on one's mind. It is not always necessary that the adult initiates these conversations. It is sometimes the students who themselves take the initiative to begin a conversation. Conversations bring to our attention the importance of

listening, of being open to examining something together. Conversations also do not have to be complete or resolve a question but can leave one with further questions that can be pursued as one deems fit.

In school, there are structures that enable a directed conversation with students in the space of circle time conversations or culture classes, where a topic is taken up and discussed by raising questions for the group. The group decides together to come up with and engage in a topic. Examining fear, anger or envy are relevant for any individual, adult, or child. These spaces create the groundwork for listening and understanding together, for each one to bring in their perspective to the discussion. In the listening, there is an unravelling and an attempt to go deeper into the questions that are raised.

In a circle time around the question of fear, one student asked me, "Akka [name given to female staff with Anna for male], what are you afraid of?" At that moment, when this question was asked, I realized that I had been caught unawares. I could not say that I had no fears, for that would have been an untruth. I also recognized that while I did not have many of the physical fears that these young people had, it did not imply that I did not have other fears. Fear of others, one's own thoughts, or living up to expectations, are some that came to my mind. It is something that is ingrained in us, possibly because of

our experiences in life. The important thing, I realized, was to acknowledge that I had fears, that at a certain level, I was the same as these twelve-year old students who were trying to understand the idea of “fear.” I was not free of it too and therefore it left me free to examine it along with them. That is the power of conversation and talking together.

At another time, a senior school student, who had just started reading Krishnamurti, asked me my thoughts on “unity” and the quality of not being “divisive.” Words that have often been explained and understood from a certain location in society. I had to consciously put aside my understanding of it and look at it afresh. This meant asking questions of myself, holding my convictions tentatively, and engaging actively with the idea. Asking each other, clarifying, and disagreeing – each of these are integral to a conversation. This is an important aspect of talking together, as it helps move one’s location in the understanding of an idea and explore it as fresh, unknown territory. This also demands a serious engagement by us and brings in much needed width and depth into one’s exploration and inquiry. As Krishnamurti points out,

And to listen is only possible when you put aside your particular opinion, your particular knowledge or problem, your conclusions; when you’re free to listen, not

interpreting, not judging, not evaluating, but actually the art of listening. To listen with great care, attention, with affection. And if we have such an art, if we have learnt such... rather, if you are capable of such listening, then communication becomes very, very simple. There’ll be no misunderstanding
(Krishnamurti, 1977, np).

To ask a question and to listen to each other is a quality that is encouraged in school, even in informal spaces such as the dining hall where we all sit together as teachers and students during breakfast and lunch. Questions around food, choice, leisure, and work surface in the context of eating together. It is much like the discussion one might have at home with one’s family. Affection and respect guide these interactions and one learns to agree and disagree in the relationship that one shares with the other.

A dialogue is very important. It is a form of communication in which question and answer continue until a question is left without an answer. Thus the question is suspended between the two persons involved in this answer and question (Sahyadri Education Centre, 2014).

It is a journey that one undertakes on common ground, knowing that each individual is essentially the same. To

traverse this familiar ground and ask questions of each other, to pursue with the serious intent to inquire and not just examine opinions and ideas, is the demand of good dialogue.

Each of the Krishnamurti schools has a Study Centre that attempts to create the space for a serious dialogue amongst the adult community of the school. The Study Centre meetings that happen once a month are a way of coming together to delve into Krishnamurti's teachings. These meetings create a rich ground for serious dialogue between parents and teachers. It gives the much-needed impetus to questions that are not directly connected to the travails that one deals with in life, but to examine these in the context of a Krishnamurti text. Questions on fear, comparison, relationship, and many other themes are taken up in these meetings. The goal is to examine the conflicts we face in our lives, and it is an invitation to come together in conversation. It is also to work with the tentative holding of an idea, of an understanding, of seeing the scope for further and deeper examination of one's deep conditioning with no ideal objective to be reached. The pertinent questioning of one's ideas is a reflection of the work of the school, that it is not just a space of learning for children but also for adults, parents, and teachers alike.

The strength of the school's work lies in this invitation it holds for all—students, teachers, and parents—to come together in conversation. This creates the climate for inquiry and

helps foster an environment where one can examine the dogmas of beliefs and ideas, handed down through generations, and do so with conviction and without the fear of judgement.

Reflection: The Much Needed Pause

Krishnamurti says “We have so committed ourselves in different ways that we hardly have any time for self-reflection, to observe, to study” (Krishnamurti, 2019, np). A day takes us through myriad experiences, and each of these bring to fore some aspect of our personalities. I use the word “personality” because we play out that certain personhood in the context of each specific experience. A moment of appreciation, disappointment, anger, or sadness; each of these make us into a certain kind of person at that moment. Does this mean that I am a “certain” kind of person? Or that I must stay the same through all of my experiences? What does it mean to respond and not react to situations and experiences? Questions like these and more come to us after the moment has passed.

Reflection is that much needed pause that helps us to look at something from outside of us, in a detached sense, from the periphery. When I suggest the word, “look,” it is with the intent to observe oneself closely and objectively in relationship to others and everything. For that to happen, I must be quiet in my mind. A mind that is pre-occupied or caught up

A Living and Learning Space

with other thoughts will neither have the inclination nor see the importance of this pause.

Self-reflection is the gateway to freedom. It also brings greater appreciation and enjoyment. We begin to enjoy spending time with our own mind, and we enjoy reflecting on our experience of the teachings. Like the sun emerging from behind the clouds, the teachings of the dharma become clear (Kongtrul, 2006, p. 14).

Spaces in school, such as the staff meetings, have an element of self-reflection in the way questions are taken up and discussed. The reflective exercise of writing down one's questions in thinking or understanding an idea gives direction and clarity to how one would like to take it forward for themselves. The journal writing as an exercise is a good way to articulate this for oneself. I have often recorded my questions and observations in the journal about a class that might have not gone well that week, or my reaction to a colleague's statement, or just to look at my work as a teacher—of what I bring to this space each day. As a group of adults working with young people, it is important that we reflect often, that we go back to structures, practices, methodologies, and pedagogy to see their relevance in our work. It is to push ourselves to ask questions, questions that can also

sometimes be difficult, and are a way to discover ourselves. This process of reflection is significant in its purpose for the individual and is essential to my work as a teacher. It is to reiterate that we have to look inward to grow in the space that is outward, to find the joy and immerse ourselves in the act of teaching instead of just going about our work in a functional manner.

Periodic assemblies in school with students over a Krishnamurti text or any other writing create the space for this reflection. Studying something together and connecting it to observations of oneself gives direction to this reflective exercise. In one such assembly when we looked at "comparison," there were different responses to one's understanding of the idea of "comparison." We sat quietly and noted down our thoughts and when we shared these with each other, we realized that the fear of judgement and expectations one has of oneself pushes one to compare. The act of just sitting quietly and gathering one's thoughts around it helped us to come upon this understanding and to ask further questions for ourselves. The process of reflection is a follow-up to discussion and conversation followed by further inquiry and exploration. New possibilities and thinking emerge as a consequence of this process of reflection. It is this pause, this quiet, that gives the much-needed impetus to move forward.

Only when the mind is tranquil—through self-knowledge and not through imposed self-discipline—only then, in that tranquility, in that silence, can reality come into being. It is only then that there can be bliss, that there can be creative action. (Krishnamurti, 1949, np)

Relationship: Looking Inward

When we look at the word “relationship,” we immediately think of someone or something outside of us. Krishnamurti said:

Life is relationship, living is relationship. We cannot live if you and I have built a wall around ourselves and just peep over that wall occasionally. Unconsciously, deeply, under the wall, we are related. (Krishnamurti, 1972, np)

It seems as though we can only have a relationship with that which is outside of us. In school, one is urged to look inward, and that means to look within, to uncover and understand the truth of our existence in relationship to all of life.

The school is a place of relationship with nature, with the adults and students around me and most importantly with myself. If I do not recognize the importance of engaging with myself, then I can—at best—be someone who carries out

tasks in a functional manner without ever truly understanding the meaning of why I do what I do. To be related, for me, is to be sensitive, aware, and attentive.

My mind captures images of everything and stores them as memories, adding to my knowledge. These often come in the way of my relationship with others as the mind tends to operate from these images. Thought gives its own description to what I observe, and I need to be aware of that, of that movement in my mind. A colleague once asked me as we were talking over a Krishnamurti text, “How can one stop thoughts from coming? It is impossible, isn’t it?”

At another time, during a retreat, when I asked the same question of another participant, the answer I got made me pause for a while and see if there was something that one could do. “Watch your thoughts and as they come, watch them pass you as you would watch the waters of a river flow. When it is passed, you know it is not there anymore.” These words have stayed with me, and though I have not been able to do it as often as I would like to, I have tried to watch my own thoughts and it has been a revealing experience. I see how caught up I am in defining my identity and holding on to it, for fear that without that identity, I will be nothing. I can only say that in my tryst with the Krishnamurti school and way of education, I have always been able to begin from where I am at that point

of time. This is an opportunity to look inward and see how I relate to myself.

Krishnamurti has often spoken about co-operation and what it means to “come together” as teachers in the work they do in the space of the school. This is not easy, as each individual is a different person, but if one were to look at the school and its work, then these individual identities somewhere melt into the background, leaving behind the purpose and intent of the school. Staff meetings are spaces that create the impetus to exchange ideas and discuss with an open mind about possibilities in school. Events that happen in school are usually organized without a “duty list” that outlines specific tasks for each one to do. At such times, everyone takes charge of different areas of work and brings in their strengths to make things “happen” the way they should.

Another example would be when the school relocated to its current campus a couple of years ago. All staff and students moved with the school to the new location, unmindful of the fact that the new campus is at quite a distance from the city. New schedules and structures had to be created, keeping in mind the variables that had changed. This might seem an irrelevant detail for it is quite obvious that any institution for that matter has to work with change, and there is sometimes no choice in the evolution of these structures. To me, the move to the new campus is a reflection of the relationship each one has with the

school, its spirit and what it has brought to individual lives in inexplicable ways. A mammoth task such as relocating a “living and working” school is not possible without the fine thread of relationship that binds each one to that space.

Communication is not only the exchange of words, however articulate and clear those words may be; it is much deeper than that. Communication is learning from each other, understanding each other; and this comes to an end when you have taken a definite stand about some trivial or not fully thought out act. (Krishnamurti, 2006, ch.37, np)

It is important to understand communication when one speaks of relationship. All relationship takes its birth in the bedrock of affection and respect. In school, we are in a relationship of learning with the student, with each other and the school itself.

There can be no relationship if there is assertiveness, authority, and mere acceptance of that. Krishnamurti has often said that relationship is the mirror in which we discover ourselves. He even says that without relationship one cannot exist. What does he mean when he says this? Perhaps it is to delve within and find out for ourselves, to be self-aware, to understand my pretenses, fears, and motives. It is to uncover the ugliness

that I do not wish to engage with. The true acceptance of oneself is the first step towards embracing another. When the ego dies, the self disappears and the “other” becomes visible.

Life cannot be without relationship. If we can deeply understand the problem of relationship between oneself and another, then perhaps we shall understand and solve the problems of society, for society is but the extension of ourselves. The environment which we call society is created by past generations; we accept it, as it helps us to maintain our greed, possessiveness, illusion. In this illusion there cannot be unity or peace. As long as we do not understand individual relationship, we cannot have a peaceful society. (Krishnamurti, 2006, ch.67, np)

Learning: A Continuum

I write this paper at a time when the world is going through a crisis, the crisis of the pandemic. Never before have we been challenged like we are now. We need evolution. Krishnamurti said:

Learning is one thing and acquiring knowledge is another. Learning is a continuous process, not a process of addition, not a process which you gather and then from there act. Most of us

gather knowledge as memory, as idea, store it up as experience, and from there act. That is, we act from knowledge, technological knowledge, knowledge as experience, knowledge as tradition, knowledge that one has derived through one’s particular idiosyncratic tendencies; with that background, with that accumulation as knowledge, as experience, as tradition, we act. In that process there is no learning. Learning is never accumulative; it is a constant movement. (Krishnamurti, 1964, np)

The absence of human contact, the fear and anxiety of getting affected by the virus and the reality of immeasurable loss, have had their impact on the physical and emotional well-being of all individuals. The school is like an oasis at this time, a place that has helped many of us just visit it to feel alive again.

The school, a place I have walked into every day, taking in the sights of children walking down the path as they get off the bus, laughing and talking as they make their way to their classes. I have often wondered what it is that they talk about and engage with in such delight. Sometimes I have asked them too. The responses have sometimes led to questions around entertainment, pleasure, and how we understand them.

A Living and Learning Space

In the assembly hall as we sit down to sing together, songs of different languages, regions, written by poets over time—there is an energy that is felt, as it reverberates through the physical space into our very being. We all sit together, unmindful of who is next to us, singing softly or sometimes listening to others sing, but engaged in this act of coming together. Questions that are raised at this time are an attempt to bring to one's attention, one's responsibility to the school space. Discussions happen in this space, allowing for any question or idea that one may wish to examine. I remember in one assembly presentation a senior school student spoke about honesty and truth. At the end of that presentation, a ten-year old middle schooler raised his hand and asked, "Are you always able to speak the truth? I want to know because I feel that truth hurts and it is not easy to speak it." The question was asked in all its seriousness and with the intent to understand the other person's stance on it. The senior school student responded saying that it was not easy and maybe that is why it was important to speak the truth. Conversations are never conclusive and in the living quality of a moment when a question is asked, it always leaves behind it the trail of further questioning.

Truth is living, it is not static, and the mind that would discover truth must also be living, not burdened with

knowledge or experience. Then only is there that state in which truth can come into being.
(Krishnamurti, 2006, ch.26, np)

Sitting together and having breakfast and lunch makes the simple act of eating so much more meaningful. Again, the table has students and teachers in a mix from across the school. To appreciate the effort of those who make the food for you is seen in the gentle reminders that students give each other if they see anyone wasting food. Likes and dislikes take a backseat and the food is eaten because someone made it for you. Even food is used as an analogy to sometimes understand life. I remember this instance when a student pointed out that the beetroot always bled into the rest of the dishes on his plate making them all pink. To which a senior school student replied, "Don't you think that's something like life? No experience is independent in itself. It always has its shade from another and leads to another." I still think of this student who passed out of school a long time ago, and this nugget of wisdom that he shared that day over lunch is something that has stayed with me.

A place that always sees action and vigor is the games field. This is the place where comparison and competition rear their heads often. Tears from a lost game often find their space in the classroom after games is over. A conversation to reflect upon questions of aggression, fair play and

inclusion helps to understand oneself. To play well and play hard without feeling the pressure to meet others' expectations and to give one's best to a game is a learning that finds its expression in cooperative games. One such instance of a cooperative game that comes to my mind is of carrying a small cup filled with water by a group of students balancing the cup in the middle on a flat base to which varying lengths of threads had been attached with each end held by a student of the group. It took patience and slowing down for the group to figure out how to do this together. As one student remarked later, "It was just a matter of understanding each other's strengths, Akka. Once we knew that, we knew how to go about the activity with ease." Discovering for oneself and helping others see it too, there is immense learning there.

One is always comparing oneself with another, comparing one painting with another. There is comparison between the greater power and the lesser, between the timid and the aggressive. This constant measurement of power, position, wealth begins almost at birth and continues throughout life. This comparison is one of the many aspects of violence. The word more is always comparative, as is the word better. The question is: can the educator put aside all comparison, all

measurement, in his teaching?
(Krishnamurti, 2006, ch.26, np)

Working together in the kitchen, making dishes or doing dishes, all of it brings to the fore the quality of "livingness" to a classroom. One has to engage with the discomfort of doing things that one may not be used to doing. Breaking free of habit and paying attention to what needs to be done is a vibrant experience in itself. Cleaning the classroom, putting away things in their rightful places and doing something for the common spaces is a step away from the "self." Doing something for others, be it laying the table for lunch or putting away the "chowkies" (traditional Indian chairs) in class; all these create the climate for learning from doing seemingly insignificant acts.

Order can be brought about by watchfulness throughout the day, and then, before sleeping, by putting everything that has been done during the day in order. In that way the brain does not go to sleep in disorder.
(Krishnamurti, 2006, ch.72, np)

A middle school student once asked while doing the dishes, "Why do we have to clean everyone's plates? Why don't we just get a dishwasher, Akka?" I did not respond and waited to see if someone would pick the thread of conversation. Sure enough, there was a response, "A dishwasher uses too much water, do you think we

should waste water?" I still waited and another voice piped up," I think that everything we do in school is done together and this is one more such thing. I like it." I had not intervened in this conversation yet and listened to see if more voices will express their understanding. A student who usually never talks surprisingly spoke and said, "If we don't do it, the Akkas and Annas in the kitchen will have to do this job too. Don't you think we all are responsible for the school?"

The washing continued after this with nothing more added. I smiled for I had not said a word and the students had themselves figured out the importance of doing something for another, of putting aside one's discomfort and doing a task because it needs to be attended to and done. These are the moments when one sees how a Krishnamurti school is different in its approach to learning for it about all of life, with all its beauty, challenge, and conflict. There is no running away from it all and the mere acceptance of something paves the way forward to engage and learn from whatever comes our way. It is not experience that is important but what it leaves behind in the mind of the learner something more than the mere accumulation of knowledge, which can be limiting.

The school trips are a way of further seeing the world in all its colors. These experiences are not to tell the students that there exists a world "outside" of school but to

actually and closely examine the fact that the school is located very much in that world. These experiences are also not to create an idyllic setting or to define "ideas" and "ideals" that can be problematic in themselves. The intention is to appreciate life, to see the beauty in the ugliness, to be sensitive and sensible, to be accepting and non-judgmental and to see the immense possibilities that life holds for an individual.

I remember one of the school trips to Kotagiri, a small town in the hills of Ooty, where we had gone to study the Toda tribe and learn about their lives. As we went into the Shola forest, there was a quiet and a silence that was almost physically palpable. When we neared the sacred space of the Todas, the person who was guiding us told us how the spirit of the forest took care of their needs and that this space was a celebration of the spirit. They had rituals and celebrations once a year to worship the forest spirit and only the men folk participated in these rituals. We were quiet as we listened to him. Upon our return the students had many questions. "Why do people believe in a spirit? Isn't that also a kind of religion?" "How did the idea of god and worship reach a tribe that lives deep in the forest?" "Looks like we are all quite the same, whether we live in the city or far away from it. There is gender bias in a tribe too!" The discussion continued and there were further comments that appreciated the tribe, about how respectful these

people were of their environment and how simple their lifestyle was. Observations and questions kept the group thinking and discussing their understanding of this hill tribe that was part of the larger world too. It was enriching to just listen and observe the earnestness of a group of young adults trying to make sense of the world, to see the nuances and identify how at a certain level all humans were essentially the same.

The pedagogies and the structures in a Krishnamurti school are created with the intent of recognizing the limitation of knowledge and engaging with each moment as it unfolds itself before us. I have said this earlier in my writing and I repeat: the school is a place of learning for both the student and the adult, for unless we examine ourselves in the light of all the knowledge we have accumulated, we will not engage authentically with the dynamic quality of learning.

As an educator, I have to engage with my fears, questions, and uncertainties even as I engage with those of the students. It is not that the former has to be resolved and then the latter can be attended to. It happens moment to moment, in our lives—of both the adult and the student. When Krishnamurti talks about learning, he talks about life. It is in the living of life that one learns. It is in the teaching of a subject that I engage with fear, anger, disappointment, and elation. If I do not engage with these questions, as and when they emerge,

then my work as a teacher holds no meaning.

In Closing

All the instances and experiences that I have shared in this paper are a reflection of my journey as a teacher and of my growth as a person. Every interaction and conversation that I have had in the space of the school has always left me with further questions and the urge to inquire. I have had the time to examine these questions around education and engage in dialogue with colleagues and others who are interested in this journey of “being” and not reaching somewhere. There are those meaningful pauses that allow for reflection and each pause gives expression to a new question.

I have often heard from teachers who work in other schools that this approach to learning and to understanding life is only possible in a Krishnamurti school, that this space, this leisure, is not present in “non-Krishnamurti” schools for adults to come together and examine with serious intent and reflect upon the essence of one’s living and being. That is my attempt in writing this paper, for educators everywhere, that as long as one is serious about one’s question, the path for its exploration emerges in that sincere attempt to inquire, and that many of these practices I have mentioned in my paper, can be followed and structures created for education to enable, as Krishnamurti says, the “flowering of

goodness.” It is also interesting that all these questions take their birth in a place like The School, abuzz with much activity and the daily humdrum of being with children! *This* is my trust with Krishnamurti’s teachings.

There is no end to education. It is not that you read a book, pass an examination, and finish with education. The whole of life, from the moment you are born to the moment you die, is a process of learning (Krishnamurti, 2018, para.152).

References

Kongtrul, D. (2006). *It’s up to you: The practice of self-reflection on the Buddhist path*. Shambhala Publications.

Krishnamurti, J. (1949). *Does self-knowledge come through searching? First public talk, Ojai, California, USA*. July 16, 1949. <https://jkrishnamurti.org/content/does-self-knowledge-come-through-searching-0>

Krishnamurti, J. (1964). *Third public talk, New Delhi*. October 28, 1964. https://hcloud.softether.net/kcollection/the_collected_works_of_j.krishnamurti_vol_14/1964-10-28_new_delhi_3rd_public_talk_28th_october_1964.html

Krishnamurti, J. (1972). *Freedom, order, love and death: Public talk 3 Madras (Chennai), India*. December 16, 1972.

<https://jkrishnamurti.org/content/freedom-order-love-and-death>

Krishnamurti, J. (1977). *The art of listening, seeing, learning and living: Fourth public talk, Ojai, California, USA*. April 10, 1977. <https://jkrishnamurti.org/content/art-listening-seeing-learning-and-living>

Krishnamurti, J. (2006). *The whole movement of life is learning* (R. McCoy, Ed.). <https://jkrishnamurti.org/content/whole-movement-life-learning>

Krishnamurti, J. (2019). *Choiceless awareness*. Krishnamurti Foundation America.

Sahyadri Education Centre. (2014). *The study centre*. Krishnamurti Study Centre Sahyadri. <http://kscskfi.com/studycentre.php>

The Krishnamurti Foundations (2018). *Krishnamurti on education*. <http://legacy.jkrishnamurti.org/krishnamurti-teachings/view-context.php?tid=43&chid=297&w=education&s=Context>

Author Details

Vaishnavi Narayanan is a teacher, and Principal at The School (KFI) teaching various subjects for the past 16 years. Email address: vaishnavimani@gmail.com



This work by Vaishnavi Narayanan is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 Unported](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/)