

## OTHER CONTRIBUTIONS

### **Responding to Contemporary World Crises: The Educational Work of J Krishnamurti**

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**Abstract** *In this essay, I briefly describe my personal encounter and journey with the writings and teachings of J. Krishnamurti. I describe his approach to education, explain why it is radically different from the traditional one, and comment on its relevance to the modern human condition, which we may describe as characterised by very high levels of technological progress, coexisting with equally high levels of fragmentation and discord and unsettledness in human society, along with high levels of violence in our relationship with the natural environment. I also describe some work being done in this regard in the Krishnamurti schools.*

**Keywords** philosophy, education, Krishnamurti, teaching, learning, crisis

#### **Introduction**

In this article, I describe how I first came across the philosophy of J. Krishnamurti, and what aspects of his approach struck me and impacted me

the most. I explain why I consider his approach to education to be radically different from the conventional one, in the sense of the very intention being different and not merely the methodology, and why I feel this approach to be of vital importance and relevance for current times. Following this, I write about the primary crises that modern society faces, and how these crises derive from our relationship with the world. Lastly, I describe my own experiences in the school where I teach, based on Krishnamurti's approach, and share the responses from some of my students. It is my hope and belief that readers will gain an understanding of what is being attempted and followed in a Krishnamurti school.

For me, discovering Krishnamurti was a chance occurrence; it happened in a bookshop. Or perhaps it was not mere chance! I distinctly recall asking my parents at the time, what is the point of it all? After a good college education, does one simply go on to get a good job, get married, and then "settle down"? Is that all there is to

life? Many of my college mates had already gone on to get high-paying jobs in private companies, but it all seemed rather pointless to me. I imagine that this must have alarmed my parents a great deal! But they never let on, and instead gave me space for asking these annoying questions. I also recall reading texts from ancient Hindu philosophy, such as the Bhagwat Gita and the works of Swami Vivekananda. But it was an encounter with *The Penguin Krishnamurti Reader* that hit home forcibly. It was the transparent simplicity of Krishnamurti's writings that attracted me at the time, the way he laid bare the problem being discussed, totally free of jargon, free of quotations from experts. I looked for more of his writings, and came across *Commentaries on Living, Third Series*. I was profoundly moved by this book. In part, it was his extraordinarily fine depictions of nature. This held an intense appeal for me, perhaps because of my own fascination and love for nature and animals. It was at that point that I bonded with him, even though I knew nothing about him—even whether he was still living or whether he belonged to some distant past era!

Before continuing, I mention here, briefly, for the benefit of readers who have not read Krishnamurti, the kind of topics one finds in the three volumes of *Commentaries on Living*. The names of some chapters from just the First Series should give an indication: Identification; Gossip and Worry; Thought and Love; Aloneness and Isolation; Pupil and Master; The

Rich and the Poor; Ceremonies and Conversion; Politics; Knowledge; Respectability; Experiencing; Virtue; Simplicity of the Heart... As can be seen, the range is vast. The common factor across all the chapters is the subtlety and penetrating clarity with which Krishnamurti delves into the complexities of the human mind, offering a mirror as it were to the person talking with him.

The following year, I decided to pursue my studies in mathematics, and accepted an invitation to join the PhD program in the University of Texas at Dallas (USA). I have always been deeply interested in mathematics (I still am; mathematics continues to be a mainstream activity of mine), so the decision was not difficult to make. But my actual intention was not this! It was to secure time for myself, time in which I could think out things for myself and study Krishnamurti's writings more deeply. I was able to do this, and I feel immensely grateful for the space that this move gave me. While in the USA, I came to know about Ojai and the newly established Oak Grove School, and I heard Krishnamurti in person for the first time (in April-May 1978; the talks were held in a school auditorium that year and not in the Oak Grove). I recall meeting David Bohm, and I was struck by how unassuming and approachable he was. A few years later, I moved to Canada and taught mathematics and statistics for a couple of years to undergraduate students at the University of New Brunswick,

Fredericton; this is on the Atlantic seaboard. Through the study of Krishnamurti's books, I had come to know of the Rishi Valley School in India, and after some hard work, I figured out how to get in touch with the Head of the school. (Those were the pre-Internet days! Finding out even the address of the school was no easy matter.) Soon after, I returned to India and joined Rishi Valley as a teacher of mathematics; this was in mid-1983. Over the years, I experienced life in a large number of different roles: as a subject teacher (physics; mathematics; geography); as a house parent for boys in the age range 14-17 years; as a class teacher; accompanying children on excursions in different parts of the country; accompanying children on treks in the Himalayas; and as Principal of the school, from 1992 till 2004. It has been an extraordinary journey for me, a time for learning and equally a time for unlearning. It would be difficult—indeed impossible—for me to summarise this learning, and the many, many insights I have glimpsed while grappling with the vastness of Krishnamurti's teachings.

In 2012, I moved to Sahyadri School KFL, as its Director, and I continue to be in this school, in that role. Sahyadri is a comparatively young Krishnamurti school, established in 1995, the year of Krishnamurti's centenary. At the time of my joining, it had students only up to grade 10 (which is the stage at which children appear for their first public examination). One of my tasks

was to help prepare the school for grades 11 & 12 (what is generally referred to in India as the +2 program). We got this done soon after I joined, and the school now has an active program at that level.

### **Krishnamurti as Important**

When we look around the world today, we see problems proliferating everywhere, overwhelming us. We see the worsening environmental crisis, threatening doom for us. We see super hurricanes, torrential rains, devastating fires, unbearable heat, unbearable cold, and crippling water shortages. We see a pandemic which has laid entire economies to waste. And we also see our utter inability to cooperate and work together even in the face of such an extraordinary threat. It is a crisis of extraordinary, terrifying proportions. The thought of what shape the world will probably take a few decades from now is itself a source of terror.

But that is not all. We see authoritarianism on the rise in so many countries across the world, and alongside, the phenomena of fundamentalism and nationalism, the aggressive assertion of identity, the deepening divisions between groups of human beings, and the ever-widening gap between the rich and powerful on the one hand, and the poor and the dispossessed on the other. We see consumerism and the desire for entertainment on the rise, everywhere. We see technologies being created that enable us to lose ourselves in non-existent worlds, also those that enable

us to create and propagate fake news with the greatest of ease.

Alongside, we see the miracles of modern science and technology: mind-boggling discoveries and inventions of extraordinary subtlety and power. We see the beauty of entire worlds that we have created in our minds.

Looking at all this, we naturally want to ask, how has such a situation come to pass? What has brought about these problems? Why do they persist? Why is there a worsening environmental crisis? Why is there an ever-widening gap between the rich and the poor? Why is it that all across the world, we are so inclined towards authoritarianism? Why do we elect authoritarian leaders to power? Why are we becoming fundamentalist in our outlook? Why is there such an aggressive assertion of one's identity? Why is there so much anger among us today? And, lastly, how can such sophistication and subtlety of intellect coexist with so primitive a mindset? That is itself an extraordinary phenomenon. Looking carefully at the problem, it should be obvious that the only way that we can address it is through education, by bringing up young people rightly. But it requires questioning the purpose and scope of education.

Traditionally, we enter schools in order to master skills and techniques and learn enough about the world to prepare us for professional life. Perhaps it is just such a mindset that has brought about the present

situation? Consider this striking remark from Martin Luther King (1948)

The function of education, therefore, is to teach one to think intensively and to think critically. But education which stops with efficiency may prove the greatest menace to society. The most dangerous criminal may be the man gifted with reason, but with no morals. (King, M. L., 1948)

“Education which stops with efficiency...” That is what our schools are largely about. The world over, we see that education is largely focused on the acquisition of knowledge and the mastery of skills and techniques. Traditional education thus conditions us to live very narrow lives. We are eternally trying to solve our problems with patchwork reform, asking superficial questions. We examine the symptoms and make small modifications to society. This means that we treat only the symptoms and never the problem. We are strongly conditioned to operate within the domain of social engineering, with great emphasis and dependence on laws, incentives, and inducements; in short, everything that lies within the domain of reward and punishment. Such approaches are all from the outside; they never touch the core. At bottom, we have adopted the “business as usual” principle: never tamper with the basic structures of society; the game must go on! We seem to have

given up altogether asking whether another approach is possible. Consider for example the following quote of David Bohm:

We are faced with a breakdown of general social order and human values that threatens stability throughout the world. Existing knowledge cannot meet this challenge. Something much deeper is needed, a completely new approach. I am suggesting that the very means by which we try to solve our problems is the problem. The source of our problems is within the structure of thought itself. (Bohm, 1994, np)

Bohm adds: “This may seem strange because our culture prides itself on thought being its highest achievement.” It may be pertinent to add a few lines here about David Bohm (1917-1992), as he collaborated with Krishnamurti so extensively, and they together produced an enormous body of work. In the scientific world, Bohm is known as a front-rank theoretical physicist who contributed hugely to quantum theory. However, his work has been considered highly unorthodox and has thus remained on the fringes of science. In the late 1950s, his work in quantum mechanics and his interest in the question of the observer and the observed led him to study Krishnamurti’s work. In following two decades, Bohm and Krishnamurti had a large number of dialogues in which

they explored the nature of thought, consciousness and insight (see, Bohm, 1982).

Our schooling systems have adopted, at bottom, the same approach, and this means that learning is essentially based on reward and punishment. Perhaps it would be surprising if this were not the case, given how deeply the modern industrial system of production is based on the same model. Consider for example the words which we associate with reward: award, bonus, accolade, profit, honour, incentive, perquisite, rise in salary, title.... And consider the words we associate with punishment: discipline, penalty, sanction, forfeiture, physical abuse, loss of reputation.... The belief that the behavioural model is the way to proceed lies very deep in our thinking. Unfortunately, we don’t look into the consequences deeply enough. As Krishnamurti writes,

Reward or punishment for any action merely strengthens self-centredness. Action for the sake of another...leads to fear, and fear cannot be the basis for right action. If we would help a child to be considerate of others, we should not use love as a bribe, but take the time and have the patience to explain the ways of consideration....There is no respect for another when there is a reward for it, for the bribe or the punishment becomes far more significant than the feeling of respect. If we have no respect

for the child but merely offer him a reward or threaten him with punishment, we are encouraging acquisitiveness and fear. Because we ourselves have been brought up to act for the sake of a result, we do not see that there can be action free of the desire to gain. (Krishnamurti, 1981, p. 31)

It is in looking at the underlying problems of life that Krishnamurti's approach is radically different from traditional approaches. He lays bare the entire network, the mechanism which is the cause of all these problems. It is this aspect that left the deepest impact on me.

Krishnamurti points out, in essence, that our problems result from our own actions, our mindset, our inclinations, and from our relationship with the world. It is not easy to grasp the truth of this statement, because of its great depth. It has to do with our very success as a species: the ability we developed in some distant past age to conceptualise, to create abstractions, to calculate forwards and backwards in time; the ability which has allowed us to spread to every remote corner of our planet, and the ability which has brought about the miracles of present-day science and technology. It is an ability of such power and of so extraordinary a nature that we have fallen in love with it, and we are unable to see its limitations; we are unable to see that for all its extraordinary reach in the physical world, for all its

incredible success story, in the world of the psyche, it is unable to do anything that endures, anything that has a living, self-sustaining quality, anything that is of real significance. Therefore, it is inevitable that our societies, which are modelled on our understanding and mastery of the physical world, hold within them the seeds of their own destruction. (This may be what Bohm meant when he said (see above), "...the very means by which we try to solve our problems is the problem. The source of our problems is within the structure of thought itself.")

Unless we comprehend this fact in the depth of our being, we will not change inwardly, we will persist with making superficial adjustments, as we have been doing for many centuries now, and our problems will recur indefinitely. But what does it mean to "understand" this fact? Does it not mean becoming aware of our belief structures and ideologies, and becoming aware of the way we become prisoners of our drives and ambitions? Looking at the chaos we have created in the natural world and in our own lives, the question of self-knowledge naturally comes up, and we begin to see that it is essential to understand ourselves. And this brings us to the question of education.

Krishnamurti starts by pointing out that while the accumulation of knowledge and gathering of skills are essential to education, they must not constitute its central component:

The ignorant man is not the unlearned, but he who does not know himself, and the learned man is stupid when he relies on books... to give him understanding. Understanding comes only through self-knowledge.... Thus education, in the true sense, is the understanding of oneself.... Conflict and confusion result from wrong relationship with people, things and ideas, and until we understand that relationship and alter it, mere learning can only lead us to engulfing chaos and destruction.

While it is obviously necessary to know how to read and write, will technique give us the capacity to understand life? Surely, technique is secondary; and if technique is the only thing we are striving for, we are denying the greater part of life. Life is pain, joy, beauty, ugliness, love, and when we understand it as a whole, that understanding creates its own technique. But...technique can never bring about creative understanding.

Present-day education is a complete failure because it has overemphasized technique. In overemphasizing technique we destroy man...

As society is now organized, we send our children to school to learn some technique by which they can... earn a

livelihood. We want to make the child a specialist, hoping thus to give him a secure economic position. But does the cultivation of a technique enable us to understand ourselves? (Krishnamurti, 1981, pp. 13-14)

Traditionally, education focuses on acquiring knowledge and the many skills that we need if we are to function effectively in society: reading, writing, reasoning, calculating, public speaking. By themselves, skills and knowledge are neutral attributes; they do neither harm nor good. But human beings are, unfortunately, not so simply constituted. We fall in love with our skills, with our talents, with our mastery of knowledge, and with our abilities. We fall in love with them because we are taught that they will give us financial capacity, stability, prestige, power. Along with skills, then, comes the desire for security; the urge to power, to possess, to dominate, to conquer, to exploit. This combination makes for a deadly mix; it brings about terrible cruelty to man and nature.

### **The Purpose of Education**

If the cultivation of technique and the acquisition of knowledge must not form the core of education, then what must? Krishnamurti addresses this:

It is becoming more and more important in a world that is destructive...that there should be a place, an oasis, where one

can learn a way of living that is whole, sane, and intelligent.... Surely a school is a place where one learns about the...the wholeness of life. Academic excellence is absolutely necessary, but a school includes much more than that. It is a place where...the teacher and the taught explore not only...the world of knowledge, but also...their own behaviour.... Freedom from conditioning...begins with this awareness. It is only in such freedom that true learning can take place.... A school is a place where one learns the importance of knowledge and its limitations.... In school one learns the importance of relationship which is not based on attachment and possession.... From the ancient of times, man has sought something beyond the materialistic world.... It is the intent of this school to inquire into this possibility. (Krishnamurti, 1975, p. 1)

Several phrases and sentences stand out in this piece. It should be obvious that these present a radically different vision of education. We deduce that for Krishnamurti, a school is a place where both the student and the teacher learn about their conditioning, their prejudices, and their many attitudes, where one learns the true place of knowledge, where one learns about

relationships that are free and generous, calm and gracious by not being based on personal needs sought to be satisfied by another. A school is also where one becomes aware of the existence of forms of spirituality. It should be clear that this vision goes fundamentally against the grain of our prevailing culture. It places a tremendous responsibility on the teacher, far greater than traditional schooling does.

### **Three Great Arts**

If one is to know oneself, and such knowing can happen only in relationship, then education must concern itself profoundly with the nurture of three basic arts: the art of seeing, the art of listening, and the art of learning. To Krishnamurti, these arts acting in harmony make up the art of living.

Krishnamurti (1967) regarded listening as one of the greatest arts and a doorway to a miracle:

Listening is an art not easily come by, but in it there is beauty and great understanding. We listen with the various depths of our being, but our listening is always from a particular point of view. We do not listen simply; there is always the intervening screen of our own thoughts, conclusions, and prejudices. To listen there must be an inward quietness, a relaxed attention. This alert yet passive state is able to hear what

is beyond the verbal conclusion. Words are only the outward means of communication; but to commune beyond the noise of words, there must be in listening an alert passivity.... It is only in listening that one hears the song of the words... (Krishnamurti, 1967, p. 175)

This has particular significance in today's conflict-ridden echo chamber world. Krishnamurti is asking us whether we can nurture a quality of quietness in which one can be directly in touch with another. We have perhaps not appreciated the power of such listening.

Then there is the art of seeing:

And there is an art of seeing—seeing things as they are. When you look at a tree, do you translate it immediately into words and say, “Tree”? Or do you look at it, perceive it, see the shape of it, see the beauty of the light on a leaf, see the quality of that tree? It is not man-made fortunately; it is there. So do we see ourselves as we are, without condemnation, without judgement, evaluation and so on, just see what we are, our reactions and responses, our prejudices, opinions—just see them, not to do anything about it but just observe them. Can we do that? So there is an art of seeing things as they are,

without naming, without being caught in the network of words, without the whole operation of thinking interfering with perception. That is a great art. (Krishnamurti, 1985)

And there is the art of learning. The significance that Krishnamurti gives to listening and seeing leads to the possibility of non-accumulative learning. Consider these extracts from his talks and writings:

To inquire and learn is the function of the mind. By learning I do not mean the mere cultivation of memory or the accumulation of knowledge, but the capacity to think clearly and sanely...to start from facts and not from beliefs and ideals....Merely to acquire knowledge is not to learn.... Learning implies the love of understanding and the love of doing a thing for itself. (Krishnamurti, n.d., p. 2)

The essence of learning is constant movement without a fixed point. If its point becomes your prejudice, your opinions and conclusions, and you start from this handicap, then you cease to learn....Learning is not born out of curiosity. You may be curious about sex. That curiosity is based on pleasure, on some kind of excitement, on

the attitudes of others....Learning is far deeper and more extensive. You learn about the universe not out of pleasure or curiosity, but out of your relationship to the world....We are not talking of learning about something, but the quality of the mind that is willing to learn. You can learn how to become a good carpenter or a gardener or an engineer. When you have acquired skill in these, you have narrowed down your mind into a tool that can function...skillfully in a certain pattern....This gives a certain security financially...so we create a society which provides what we have asked of it. But when there is this extra quality of learning that is not about something, then you have a mind and, of course a heart, that are timelessly alive. (Krishnamurti, 2006, p. 135)

These are challenging notions. As Krishnamurti has said on different occasions, listening in the true sense of the word is one of the most difficult things to do, and this is what we would have found for ourselves, for listening through a screen of prior conclusions or prejudices, or listening purely to preserve superficial social relationships, is a common experience for all of us.

It is interesting and curious to read the sentence, “learning is not born out of curiosity”. This goes completely

contrary to our accepted notions! The vital insight comes two sentences later: “Learning is far deeper and more extensive. You learn about the universe not out of pleasure or curiosity, but out of your relationship to the world...” If learning can have relationship as a basis, and not mere curiosity, what a transformation it would bring about in the way we regard and treat nature.

### **Krishnamurti’s Teachings in the Classroom**

An important discovery one makes after joining a Krishnamurti school is that Krishnamurti did not leave any blueprint for his schools. They were not all supposed to be organised according to some grand plan. This is in keeping with his repeated insistence that answers to questions must emerge from our own careful exploration of the questions and not be guided either by ideological tenets or by personal preferences. It is not at all surprising, therefore, that the different Krishnamurti schools across the world have developed differently, each in its own way. Of course, there are broad similarities between them: they are all set in very beautiful natural settings, and they all give a great deal of importance to aesthetics, so they all have strong art and craft departments.

I have used Krishnamurti’s teachings in the classroom in my own way. In all the Krishnamurti schools, we have “Culture Classes” which are offered at all levels, from the junior-most class to the senior-most; here, the word “culture” does not refer to the

culture of any particular society or country, but to human culture in general: the traditions that have shaped our relationships and along with it the natural world. In Class 11, we also have a “General Studies” course. Both these are offered internally; the content is not set by any outside agency. An immediate implication of this is that different schools handle these courses quite differently, and there may also be major differences between how different teachers approach the courses within the same school. I have been handling these two courses for several years now. I will share some of my experiences here with a view to elucidating purpose in education.

In both courses, the intent is to look at the world and ourselves—that is, the inner and the outer—and understand that the way we have shaped the world stems directly from what lies within us. In the General Studies (“GS”) course, the focus is on understanding the major problems that the world is facing. I will say more about this below.

#### *Culture classes*

We may think of what happens in a culture class as an exercise in self-awareness. In the formal school curriculum, we learn about the universe, about the Earth, and about civilisations. Alongside, we learn many skills: how to read, how to write, how to calculate, how to paint, and how to program a computer. Growing up in the midst of family and friends, we pick up social skills and attitudes and

know-how about human beings. The one item missing from this lengthy list is ourselves: we learn almost nothing about our inner nature, about what happens within us. We may describe ourselves as belonging to a particular nation or religion, as having particular political views, as having attachments to particular objects, as finding particular things appealing or annoying; and so on. But we have almost no understanding of why we do any of these things. The absence of self-awareness means that we are driven by forces whose origins lie within us, but about which we have no understanding: why we want to experience more and more; why we crave for excitement; why we want to belong to some group; why we want to possess the latest model of some gadget; why we fall prey to advertising so easily; why nationalistic agendas take hold of us so easily; why we are eternally insecure; and so on. Our mindsets are such that all these things seem quite natural; we never question why we have them. Therefore, we do not realise the role that we individually play in the making of all the crises we see around us.

We need to address this massive lacuna. In Shirali (2017, pp. 6-8) I wrote:

This is what a culture class is all about. Here, “culture” refers to the shared culture of humankind. Such a class cannot have a curriculum or a textbook; or rather, the curriculum is life itself, and the book is ... one’s

relationships... It requires a teacher who is aware of the world without and the world within, ... [and the] need to talk about what is happening in that world. It does not require any "tech"; all it requires is that we give ourselves time to enquire, to talk with each other, to ask questions... It requires that we question each other in a free and affectionate way; not just question the other person ... but question myself: my demands, my assumptions, my attitude to power and authority and the role they play in my life. It requires honesty and courage, and a simple willingness to talk with others and enquire into life together. And once one begins to ask, why, there are so many questions to ask! (Shirali, 2017, pages 6-8)

I concluded by writing,

One wonders why we have not felt the need for such education. It ... hardly exists anywhere. Yet, the ... fact is that we are tearing the world apart ... And the cause for this disintegration lies in ... us. (Shirali, 2017, pages 6-8)

I should add that holding such a class is not easy; things do not always proceed in a harmonious way. Looking inwards in this manner can seem unnatural and unappealing to students, and unlike in an academic class, there is no progression, no accumulation, and no conclusion. One has to work hard to draw students into such a self-reflective exercise.

An enormous challenge that anyone who teaches a culture class faces is to speak in one's own voice, to speak

from one's own observation and experience, and to not merely repeat what Krishnamurti says; that would amount to a travesty. But as I noted elsewhere (Shirali, 1998),

Krishnamurti insisted that there be no interpreters of the teachings ... At the same time he asked us not to shy away from sharing our insights with others. He pointed out that when one sees a fact for oneself ... it is no longer a borrowed insight, nor is it second-hand knowledge. Then one can talk about it; and one will find one's own metaphor, one's own words. In this there is no interpretation, no falling back on authority. (Shirali, 1998)

There is clearly a very fine line to be traversed in this matter: to freely share one's insight and understanding with others in a spirit of humility and exploration, without the harsh elements of authority and definitive assertion, and with the door to questioning always kept open.

The explorations described above would seem to be largely of an inward nature. But this is not enough; we also need to understand for ourselves more clearly the ills of society. We need to understand how they have come about, our current understanding about them, and the manner in which people and organisations around the world have tried to solve them. Alongside, we need to see how vested interests operate even in dire situations, how cooperation is so challenging, and how little such efforts seem to accomplish; i.e., initiatives based on protests and

diplomacy. All this and more is attempted in the General Studies course which students do in Class 11. We say more about this below.

*The General Studies (GS) course*

Another name for this course might be Contemporary Studies. That kind of course is probably offered in many schools and colleges. However, the focus in the GS course is not just to talk about the crises we are facing in multiple directions (of which there are any number), but to see directly that these crises have emerged from within; to see directly that the outer is a reflection of the inner, and the inner is also a reflection of the outer. Each mirrors the other.

There are various pressing crises around us such as environmental degradation, authoritarian governance, authoritarian societies, consumer culture, fundamentalism, nationalism, globalization, exploitation of natural and human resources, our obsession with entertainments and sports. These feed into increased consumption and mindless preoccupation with matters that have very little significance. (It may not be immediately clear why obsession with entertainment is an issue. Please refer to Postman (1985) whose title itself is most revealing: *Amusing Ourselves to Death*.)

All these crises are reflections of what is happening within us, but we need to do some work to see this clearly. Are we aware of our authoritarian tendencies, our nationalistic tendencies, and our

fundamentalist tendencies? Do we know why we have such tendencies? Are we aware of our own intolerance? Are we aware of the reason behind our demand for entertainment, and the consequences of this demand? Are we aware why the demand for the new and fashionable is so strong in us? Are we able to see how this demand leads to increased consumption at the global level, and therefore to overexploitation of natural resources? In a course of this kind, we explicitly draw out these connections. In short, we look at the world and at ourselves very carefully and see directly that the outer and inner mirror each other.

Here are some of the issues that we dwelt on in the GS course this year:

- We talked about authoritarianism, and how history is repeating itself in this matter in so many different countries across the world. We screened a TED talk to the students, Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya's "How to be fearless in the face of authoritarianism" (Tsikhanouskaya, 2020); many found it very moving to listen to her short talk.
- We talked about fundamentalism and its origins, about how no religion has escaped this trend, and about its terrible consequences on human societies.
- We talked about consumerism, and how it has

been shaped and driven by propaganda (e.g., the work of Edward Bernays) and business interests. We also talked about the connection between consumerism and our belief in infinite growth of world economies.

- We talked about how the big tech companies (specifically, Facebook) have gone about manipulating their consumers, and the use they have made of big data.
- We talked about climate change and COP26 (which happened to be in progress at the time, so we heard some of the talks), about the solutions being proposed, about the endless wrangling, and how commercial interests are operating even in such a dire situation.
- We talked about caste (an enormous problem in my country, India).
- At this moment, we are talking about gender issues, patriarchy and feminism (patriarchy is an issue of major concern in India). We screened a TED talk by the late Kamla Bhasin, an ardent and eloquent feminist (Bhasin, 2017); many of the students were visibly moved after hearing this remarkable and beautiful talk.
- We plan next to talk about LGBTQ and the numerous strands associated with that

term. Conversations about LGBTQ are relatively new in India, and we will have to see how it goes.

### **What Are Students' Responses to These Courses?**

Students' responses have been mixed. Some students are eager to take forward what they learn in a GS course or a culture class; they are quick to see the connections between the mess in the outside world and the conflicts within us, and they see the need for individuals to start taking responsibility for their lifestyles and the consequences of these lifestyles on the world (or, to use the term currently in use, our footprint). Some students "cheat" by saying what they think they are expected to say, what they think the teacher would like to hear. Others are bored. Some who are thoughtful and sensitive ask, plaintively, what can they do about the enormity of problems in the world? It is a mixed bag.

In general, students are intrigued by discussions on political events and contemporary issues such as consumerism and exploitation of the environment, but they find it challenging to take the inquiry inward. Some students would like to keep the discussions in the GS class separate from the discussions in the culture class ("In the GS class, we talk about the outside world; in the culture class, we talk about ourselves"); they seem to resist the notion that the outer chaos is a manifestation of what lies within us. It is a continuous challenge for me to

find ways of engaging them (and in the process, I have learnt a great deal). But as I said, there are always a few who are genuinely eager to learn about things.

The same diversity in profiles may be seen in alumni of these schools. A good many immerse themselves in environmental work, or in some line of work connected with the natural world; many take to writing and journalistic work, working in areas connected with the environment; and equally, many take to mainstream occupations, content to climb the corporate career ladder.

As I happen to be Director of the school, students sometimes look at me as an authority figure, which means that if there are strong clashes of views, I have to step in and play the role of the wise teacher. I would rather not take on this role, but at times I am obliged to do so.

I should add here that there is another important area of work I undertake as Director of the school: anchoring the Krishnamurti study groups for teachers. At the time of entry into the school, most teachers have little or no awareness of what Krishnamurti talked about, and therefore little or no awareness of the philosophical underpinnings of the school. We therefore hold regular sessions for the teachers (once a week for each teacher), in which we discuss passages from Krishnamurti, particularly those dealing with education. I regard this activity as an extremely important part of my work.

Serving as a coordinator for these meetings can be extremely challenging.

### **Concluding Remarks**

In this essay, I have attempted to share with the reader some central aspects of Krishnamurti's approach to education. I have pointed out how there are radical differences between his approach and what conventional education regards as central, chiefly in where we locate the following: the understanding of oneself; the exploration of one's conditioning; understanding the distinction between knowledge of the physical and natural world and psychological knowledge, and thereby understanding the limitations of knowledge itself; understanding the centrality of listening and first-hand seeing in learning; understanding the vital importance of becoming aware of one's relationship with things and ideas; understanding the place of technique, and the danger of preoccupation with talent; understanding the quality of learning that is born from relationship rather than curiosity

As one goes deeper into these areas, it becomes evident that the terrain is vast. Considerable work is needed on our part if we are to grapple intelligently with the task of understanding the subtleties and complexities of relationship, and if we are to tackle the diverse problems of living in the fragmented world that we have created.

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