Religion, Education and Peace*

RADHIKA HERZERGER**

Abstract

Religion today has become an easy outlet through which people vent their hatred and thus become a source of violence ironically against its very essence of universal love and peace. Since hatred and violence are rooted in greed, turn up in the most insidious forms within the individual self, education has an important role in inculcating the values of peace among the students while unlearning greed and aggression. The presentation espouses the educational philosophy of Jiddu Krishnamurti's and the Rishi Valley School, a project guided by his philosophy to promote the culture of peace. In the wake of the growing problems brought with the assertion of renewed identities founded on religion and also the various problems resulting from human negligence, for example, the degrading eco-system, etc. Krishnamurti's vision could be translated into reality of today.

The world's religions unanimously talk about peace, but when religion becomes a source of violence the people must take stock of the situation and seize the responsibility for re-examining its ideals of peace, especially in a country such as India, the majority of whose population is religious. Equally important is the obligation to examine these ideals conjointly with the actual, on the ground violence. Of greatest importance is the need to embed the continually renewed ideal of peace into different aspects of education, into both the implicit and explicit curriculum of study. It is an educator's primary responsibility to reconstitute schools in such a way that peace becomes an overriding presence within its premises. Indeed if peace is to accompany schooling there has to be interdependence between the ideals of peace and the reality of violence, the gaps that divide them cancelled out. At this difficult moment in human history, the burden of carrying out this programme falls on the state, which designs educational policy; on administrators, who wield direct authority on the ground;

---

* This is a written text of a lecture delivered by Ms Radhika Herzberger on First Zakir Husain Lecture at RIE Mysore on 19 January 2007. It has been published by the NCERT in the form of a booklet.

** *Director*, Rishi Valley Education Centre, Madanapalle, Chittoor District, Andhra Pradesh.

on teachers, who exercise authority and on students, who stand at the bottom of this heavy superstructure.

The need for continually re-examining the notion of peace is particularly crucial to the enterprise of education today because the survival of civilisation depends on good education. Current scientific research predicts cataclysmic events following global warming – rising sea levels will gradually inundate coastal cities, wipe out island states, displace millions of people. Social scientists tell us that violent conflicts are inevitable in such a scenario. Which country will provide refuge to the Maldives population if their island home drowns?

The full impact of failing natural ecosystems will be felt by the generations that we educate today; it is therefore only right that we take measures to avert this grim future with intelligence. Human beings are products of culture as well as nature. To avert tragedy and to live in peace with each other and with nature, humanity will have to discover a new balance within itself. The present generation of educators needs to cultivate a long vision, and to create a culture that supports nature instead of further ravaging it.

Other questions relevant to this line of thinking about peace help enlarge the framework for examining the concept. Are war and peace opposites, and is peace merely the absence of conflict? Since violence, with roots in greed, turns up in the most insidious forms, globally, locally, systemically, and within the individual self, where does one begin to address the issue of peace? These are questions I have inherited from the founder of Rishi Valley School where I have worked for almost twenty-five years. In the course of this presentation I will focus on the issues of war and peace in the context of education. The aim of education at this point in human history, as I see it, is to establish a culture of peace in schools. For me peace means more than the absence of overt violence; I look upon it as a living presence that demands change and renewal of the human spirit.

The view that the education of the young is filtered through culture dominates current thinking in education. Robin Alexander puts it this way –

… drawing on the insights initiated by Vygotsky and Bruner and consolidated by later cognitive and cultural psychologists, we have replaced the view of the developing child as a 'lone scientist', who learns by interacting with materials … by one of learning as necessarily as a social process, In this, significant others – parents, teachers, peers provide the mediation or intervention which scaffolds and takes forward the child's understanding' (Alexander 2006 p.15).

Jerome Bruner further maintains that educators emphasise the central role for 'narrative', by which he means stories, songs, drama, fiction that give cohesion to a culture, and which help individual students 'find an identity within that culture'. 'Knowledge,' he says, 'is not simply thinking and the result of intellectual activity and experience, it is the 'internalising of tools that are used within the child's culture (Bruner, 1996).

'How one conceives of education, we have finally come to recognise, is a function of how one conceives of the

culture and its aims, professed and otherwise' (Bruner 1996: ix-x).

Bruner's separating out of what a culture professes and what it allows in practice creates spaces for questions, analysis as well as the liberty to shape culture. Given the environmental crisis, education will have to create structures that undo present attitudes to nature and create a culture that recognises and honours human dependence on sound ecological systems. The future of humanity depends on teaching coming generations to listen and learn from nature, on models of growth that are ecologically sound, on repairing the damage done by their forefathers to natural systems. In short, educators need to acknowledge that a radical change is necessary and that attitudes will have to change, cultures liberated from the violence they implicitly contain. It is certain that with the onset of modernity, particular sub-cultures have to accommodate tenets and norms beyond those that are an organic part of their own history. Universal principles, such as, respect for nature, equal rights for men and women are examples of these principles that culture groups are obliged to uphold. The pertinent questions in this context remain: whose stories, whose songs and theatre shall we, in a complex culture like India's, teach? And what are the cultural practices and values that need to be unlearned? And how is this unlearning to be effected? Given the vast religious, class and caste divides in this country, how we in India understand the word 'culture' is neither easily described and nor universally acknowledged.

India, with its myriad groups competing to assert their separate identities, defies an educator's intellectual compass; and so the present top down formalistic approach that offers abstractions in the form of national heroes and modern development successes in competitive contexts that reward aggression. The official line that India stands for 'unity in diversity' may be a truth waiting to be born, if we educate our children to stand together in solidarity for purposes that serve universal interests while preserving differences.

Human societies can come together to solve global problems of species depletion, soil erosion, air and water pollution, and rebuild their relationship to nature, if knowledge is united with values aimed at restoring ecosystems back to health and the task of education then is not only to design curricula that are Earth centred but also to teach students how to unlearn habits and worldviews born of greed and aggression.

My plan is to investigate these connected issues in two parts – I will first describe an educational project in the interior of south India, guided by the philosophy of Jiddu Krishnamurti. The attempt here will be to illustrate the manner in which one school has promoted a culture of peace by applying the philosophy of its founder to address the complex issues of poverty and ecological degradation that face the local population. The second section will contain an exposition of Krishnamurti's educational philosophy. I will present him as a deep ecologist who explored the nature of intelligence and human interactions based on this intelligence.

The unusual procedure of placing practice before theory flows from features in Krishnamurti's discourse that escape systematic analysis. Krishnamurti did not present his point of view in a clear expository manner. He had doubts about philosophy's speculative programmes. He was an iconoclastic thinker who fashioned a discourse of his own, the chief purpose of which was to challenge both the intellectual and emotional presuppositions of his audiences. In Kafka's moving words, his books and talks served as 'an ice-axe to break the seas frozen inside our soul.' For him, theory and practice were interdependent, meant to support each other: peace was a living spiritual presence, which had its own action. One might, following Abhinavagupta's commentary on the *Dhvanyaloka*, describe Krishnamurti's understanding peace as an aesthetic flavour (*santarasa*) that hangs over places where all life is welcomed, and whose inhabitants abjure violence, and seek to live a life of dedicated to doing the right thing.

The role of culture in building identity took several of our modern religious thinkers into the past. Unlike Swami Vivekananda and Sri Aurobindo, who attempted to create an Indian renaissance through spiritual revival of Hinduism, Krishnamurti distanced himself entirely from the nationalistic spirit they had espoused and from the traditional vocabulary they used. Instead, in an entirely new departure for a religious thinker, he embraced modernity — its sceptical spirit, its emphasis on everyday life, and its focus on the individual as opposed to the group. Holding on the one hand that the process of modernisation was inevitable, he denied on the other that permissiveness, nihilism and extreme forms of relativism were certain to follow in its wake. Krishnamurti sought to embed his vision of a 'good human being' in the practice of education.

Rishi Valley School was established by a philosopher of Indian origin who was educated with some pomp and ceremony by Annie Besant and her international group of Theosophists in Europe. Intended for the great universities of Europe, Oxford, Cambridge, or Sorbonne, Krishnamurti's academic record was dotted with failures. By the time he left Europe for America in 1922 he had forgotten his native Telugu. In 1922, having abandoned his scholastic career, he crossed the Atlantic and arrived at the Western coast of the American subcontinent, in Berkeley. He was dazzled by the place, by its sheer beauty as well as the sense of equality he perceived in the academic community. It seemed to him that the New World had created a people who transcended all 'odious distinctions' of class, race, and gender, so endemic in the Old World. The young man's thoughts travelling to India, he wrote, 'Oh! For such a University of California to be transplanted to India'. If his native country had something to give to such a place of learning, it lay in the gift of being able to 'create the proper religio-scholastic atmosphere.'

Not long afterwards this visit to California, the search for a place to locate his educational institution led Krishnamurti to south India, to the little town of Madanapalle where he was born. Twenty-five kilometres from there, in a small valley carved out from the

scattered hills, on the edge of the Mysore Plateau, he located the landscape where he hoped to lay the foundations of the 'religio-scholastic atmosphere' he had not found in California. The place was dry scrubland prone to drought, even famine, inhabited by stonecutters, shepherds and cattle farmers.

Sacred shrines built by these ancient people stood scattered all over the valley. Under the shade of neem trees, four thin slabs of stone not more than a foot high are arranged to form a rectangular space that encloses mother goddess stones; the goddess is propitiated with blood sacrifice of cocks and, during prolonged droughts, with goats.

The goddess Gangamma has a larger whitewashed temple. The majestic neem tree under which it stood was destroyed by a storm a few years ago and replaced by a Durga seated on a lion. Her step-well, so beautifully lined with dressed stones, remains dry throughout the year.

A classical temple to Krishna situated in the only traditional village Thettu gives the valley a hint of classical antiquity. It was not the temple, however, that drew Krishnamurti to Thettu Valley, but a three-hundred-year-old Banyan tree, which dominated the stark scene and the wooded hills that stood like sentinels at the western end of the valley. The disjunction between the primeval Thettu landscape from the urban vitality of a great university in the New World could not have been more complete.

In the 70 years, since the land was acquired for the school, the landscape has changed. The track that encircles the valley, where shepherds drove their flock of sheep and goat to distant forests, is now broader. It is still used by herdsmen, descendants of the same people, but also by rattling lorries and buses. A part of this road is paved. There is a small row of peepal trees on either side of the road, but the virgin forests on the hills are slowly disappearing; during the summer months goatherds trim these trees for their flock; local women have to walk long distances for fuel. There are many bore wells belonging to the school and the more prosperous landowners. The school and its urban population now dominate the valley. The Valley telescopes time, modernity mingles with many layers of tradition. As we shall see it represents in miniature the layering of cultures, which is a hallmark of social development in the past.

D. D. Kosambi, that doyen of Indian historians, more than fifty years ago observed that the telescoping of time, in other words, the contemporaneous existence of many stages of human development from the past is a general but unique feature of India's history. According to Kosambi, India is a country of "long survivals": 'People of the atomic age rub elbows with those of the chalcolithic,' he observed as he travelled on the Deccan Queen in the early fifties from his home in Pune to the Tata Institute of Fundamental Research in Bombay, (now Mumbai) and went on to prove that the ancient Buddhist caves along the Western Ghats followed the migratory patterns set out by older generations of Neolithic tribesmen.

The school established in 1931, consisted of English-speaking, fee-paying students from India's successful middle classes. Gordon Pierce, the principal of Rishi Valley and founder of the Public School Movement in India,

enlisted Rishi Valley into the elitist body in the Fifties. Yet, from the very beginning the Rishi Valley landscape lacked some fundamental qualifications of Indian residential public schools. It is not located in the temperate zone, in hill stations made fashionable during the colonial period. Though standing at an altitude of 2500 feet, it was an area in Rayalseema, where drought turned the surroundings brown, the bald granite rocks radiated the sun's heat, and villagers walked with their cows through the school campus. India's colonial past was nowhere present in the landscape Krishnamurti chose. And yet the students who attended his school were products of several generations that had benefited from the colonial presence.

The consequences of educating students in an ivory tower oblivious to the world's suffering remained with Krishnamurti as the school's population in due course increased to roughly five hundred inhabitants, students born and bred in the urban centres of India and well-educated teachers from some of the best institutions in the country. Krishnamurti's talks to students were filled with sharp portraits of village life meant to challenge students. 'Have you ever', he asked them, 'observed the poor people, the peasants, the villagers, and done something kind—done it spontaneously, naturally, out of your own heart, without waiting to be told what to do?' (LA, p. 29).

If we were to educate students without regard to the poverty in the Valley we were in danger of falling under the category of omnivores, as defined by the ecological historians Madhav Gadgil and Ramachandra Guha (Gadgil and Guha, 1995). The classification of India's population into omnivores, ecological systems people and ecological refugees is based on the comparative consumption patterns and access to resources of the urban and rural elite and the urban and rural poor. Nearly four fifths of the population of India are poor, either ecological people, dependent on nature's dwindling resources or ecological refugees forced out of their own locality by the encroaching industrial civilisation. The majority of our fee-paying students and some of our teachers and administrators belonged to Gadgil and Guha's first category of omnivores.

The results of the urban-rural divide are best described in a recently published work by Guha —

India is in many ways an economic disaster zone; marked by high rate of deforestation, species loss, land degradation, and air and water pollution. The consequences of this abuse have been chiefly borne by the poor in the countryside – peasants, tribals, fisherfolk, and pastoralists who have seen their resources snatched away or depleted by powerful economic interests (Guha, 2006, p. 232).

Narpat Jodha's research in several dryland districts of the country adds another frame of reference to our view of surrounding village life. On the basis of comparative study of villages with vital common property holdings, he concludes that these shared resources support between 15-25 per cent of income of the poorer farmers and shepherds in dry region. He makes out a strong case for governments to replenish Common Property Resources in the countryside, as they provide both food security and

additional employment. In a joint paper with Anupam Bhatia, the authors mourn the systematic depletion of the commons 'closely associated with the depletion of social capital, i.e. the community spirit and actions reflecting reciprocity, trust, shared values, net working and group action' (Jodha and Bhatia, 1998).

The above writers place our location a certain perspective that we had to address if education is to stand for the values of peace with justice. Krishnamurti, who did not by principle create a blueprint for any of his schools, leaving the implementation of his visions to the school's location and to the talents of the people running it, concentrated his thought on the moral dimensions related to schooling. In typically metaphorical fashion he warned those in charge of the school against the tendency of an isolated educational institution becoming self-enclosed. 'Don't be a community,' he admonished, 'There is something aggressive and self-centred about them. Instead keep your doors open.' A community has to define itself; self-definitions set up boundaries excluding those who fall outside the defined essence. Krishnamurti wanted his school to keep its `doors open'. Closed doors and impenetrable walls are made up of exclusive ideals, class and caste prejudice. Its structures are held together by comparison, and the desire to dominate others; greed, envy and a lust to dominate support group consciousness. He made the question, 'how should we live?' central to his educational enterprise. How should we as individuals live and what should be the school's relations with its neighbours? – these questions moulded the school for the past several decades.

The realisation that the direction Krishnamurti was setting for his school went against the spirit of the present age, against parents' urge to get the best for their children, against India's aspirations to become a global player was all pervasive. The following quotation from a very recent articulation of this trend, by a blue ribbon education commission set up to re-think American education reflects the educational policies in several countries, including our own. 'There is this growing mismatch,' the report says 'between the demands of the economy and what our schools are supplying.'

If we continue on our current course, the number of nations outpacing us in the education race continues to grow at its and current rate, the American standard of living will steadily fall relative to those nations, rich and poor, that are doing a better job (The New York Times, December 15, 2006).

The pervasive anxiety driving reform was described earlier this year by the columnist Thomas Friedman:

Computers, fibber-optic cable and the Internet have levelled the economic playing field, creating a global platform that more workers anywhere can now plug into and play on. Capital will now flow faster than ever to tap the most productive talent wherever it is located, so every country is scrambling to upgrade its human talent base (New York Times, March 24, 2006).

In such a climate of international competition, governments see investment in education largely as a way of enhancing the country's GDP and by individuals as commanding the best international jobs. Earlier ideals of liberty, equality and fraternity take a back seat in the nation's priorities. The

aims of education are dictated by the idea of a 'knowledge society' that caters to the knowledge-based economy towards which nations are racing. This is a business model of education where knowledge as a commodity is to be traded.

The late Management Guru Peter Drucker predicted more than a decade ago that in a future world order knowledge and information would be paramount. Both the conception of what constitutes knowledge and the yardsticks by which knowledge and values are to be measured, will be placed at the disposal of business.

The acquisition and distribution of formal knowledge will come to occupy the place in the politics of the knowledge society which acquisition and distribution of property and income have occupied in the two or three centuries which we have come to call the Age of Capitalism (Drucker, 1994).

Peter Drucker readily acknowledged the dangers inherent in a future where business interests forge the yardsticks of knowledge and its value. How difficult, he admits, it will be for 'the knowledge society to give decent incomes and with them dignity and status to non-knowledge people... After all,' he acknowledges, 'knowledge workers will amount to no more than a large minority of the workforce.' (Ibid)

We, in India, need to pay particular attention to Peter Drucker's dismissive remarks about 'non-knowledge people,' given that India's impoverished villages have a tradition steeped in culture, in stories, songs, drama, fiction that, in Jerome Bruner's words, give cohesion to a culture, and that help individual students 'find an identity within that culture.'

India may have the world's largest illiterate population but the poor in India do not lack culture – poets like Kabir, Tukaram, Jayadeva and the great epics are not the exclusive preserve of the well educated; they are sung by poor weavers and itinerant bards; and the shadow puppeteers of Andhra Pradesh reflect the classical mural paintings at the Lepakshi temple.Jodha additionally argues in favour of a critical role of traditional knowledge systems in the management of forest resources, and the harm produced by 'marginalisation of traditional knowledge, and imposition of generalised solutions from above' (Jodha, 1998).

Unfortunately, the pressures of modernisation with its global vision and its lumbering bureaucracies, its drive for universal standards in elementary schools set to the drum beat of nationalist ideologies stamp out local, more ancient cultures and, in the process, alienate students from their ecologically sound wisdom, the complex patterns of protecting, sharing and conserving natural resources developed over several hundred generations.

Jodha's point that peasant and shepherd communities are not rootless people, but could have a vital role in the unfolding scenario adds yet another dimension to our thinking about our rural world, and helped structure the direction of our work.

Prime Minister Manmohan Singh is well-aware of problems in the countryside, the fact that income ratio within the urban and rural India has risen from 1:2 at the time of

independence to 1:4 today. (Reported in the financial pages of Asian Age, 18 November, 2006). In his address to Cambridge University worked through the consequence of a policy that has the potential to ignore the basic interest of the majority of India's population, he stated:

"The gap between the rich and the poor is widening. This, coupled with the inability of the public sector to provide adequate and quality services in health and education, and cater to the needs of the poor, is causing resentment and alienation. This is nurturing divisive forces and putting pressure on the practice of democracy. These are real and palpable concerns and they cannot be ignored. Ladies and gentlemen, I suggest to you that we address these vital concerns by making globalisation an inclusive process. We need to work for inclusive globalisation. This calls for a new global vision".

The juxtaposition, which finds graduates from the best educational institutions in the country living side by side with ancient but impoverished village settlements, provides a unique opportunity to work through a new global vision based on J. Krishnamurti's thought. For a start, our location in a degraded landscape brings to the people at Rishi Valley, students and teachers belonging to India's urban middle classes, the reality of India and presents a challenge of a long-range agenda for regeneration through education. That agenda has served to guide our efforts by teaching us to care for the earth, to share our educational resources with our neighbours, to conserve local species of plants, and to help them rebuild green spaces in their villages.

'Rishi Valley is more than a school', the founder once declared long ago. In this extended context of Rishi Valley's relationship with its neighbours the Founder's philosophy and the needs of a drought area with marginal farmers and shepherds have converged to create a promising model of integrated development through resource sharing. In this conception, the school is a resource centre for the neighbourhood.

In what follows I shall try to outline a case study of an educational project that through its 75-year-old existence worked towards a 'global vision' of an entirely different order.

We have articulated the following aims for educating teachers and students in our school. These goals derived from Krishnamurti's philosophy, are consonant with the times we live in.

- To awaken a sense of responsibility for the environment in teachers and students, by making them aware of the fragility of their environment.
- To create in students and teachers a sense of responsibility for other human beings.
- To urge students to employ the expertise they might acquire in science to 'repair' the damage done to the environment.
- To create a global outlook – the environment does not respect borders.
- To cultivate a sane attitude to India's past.
- To orient students in cooperative learning, rather than in competition.
- To create a sensibility that prizes harmony and quietude.

- To convince students that going against the tide of history is not impossible.

Following through with these aims and advancing Krishnamurti's long-term perspective into the classroom required us to create our own study materials. We needed to create textbooks and worksheets that opened student's senses to nature, to the inter-connectedness between plant and animal life and between nature and human livelihoods. It also meant seeking a fuller understanding of Indian culture in the larger context of human concerns. By extension, it meant creating a right relationship with India's own pluralistic heritage, and cultivating an informed detachment from the past. In pursuit of some of these goals, Rishi Valley is continuing to develop its own educational materials in the areas of social science, ancient history, mathematics, environmental studies and rural education.

The first major publication in this new series, *Birds of Rishi Valley and Renewal of their Habitats*, highlighted many facets of our new directions in education. The book describes local and migrant birds in relation to the several different habitats now found on campus. It explains the ecology of habitat formation and renewal and it seeks to show how small scale conservation efforts can make a difference, in the landscape and in the quality of our lives. A new study on insects is now planned.

The social studies texts have overlapping aims: to show that human beings in travelling from the Stone Age into modern times, have passed through stages of technological development that still characterise surviving cultures in different parts of India. Thus, even to relate meaningfully to the immediate environs of Rishi Valley, students have to learn about an arid region inhabited by shepherds and subsistence farmers, living in patterns that have existed since Neolithic times. The universals in human nature are not neglected. Here, Charles Darwin's theory of human origins is brought in to destroy old prejudices about race and caste, by teaching that human beings have a common descent. The lesson from Darwin is explicitly brought out in the topics about prejudice.

History is becoming a contested field in many nations of the world. The education scenario in India today reflects this frantic search for roots. Our approach seeks instead to impress on students the fundamental principles of the historian's methodology, that our knowledge of the past is never absolute, that new evidence can overturn the best hypotheses.

Above all we eschew the chauvinism in favour of the virtues of detachment. In the context of history, this faculty, which Krishnamurti's thought shares with ancient ideals of life, can play a truly restorative role in situating students and teachers firmly in the present. To orient students in a broader historical context informed by present realities, to free them from false views of the past, is not to strip them of their culture but to enable them to understand their present situation with greater clarity.

Following Krishnamurti's insight that observation of nature has a fundamental role in educational

practice, the school set up an Institute of Bird Studies and Natural History. The Institute has a two-fold agenda: to cultivate a close study of nature in the students of Rishi Valley and to heighten awareness of our natural heritage on the national scene. Nature Studies have become an important activity for students. They keep track of migrant populations of birds, watch out for newcomers and have documented the breeding biology, for instance, of the Great Horned Owl and Brown Fish Owl. Research conducted by students and teachers has revealed the following data: there are 200 species of birds in the valley, 50 species of butterflies, some rare like the Blue Mormon; and a variety of reptiles, including the near extinct bridal snake.

To promote a caring attitude towards nature and birds among students and residents Rishi Valley was declared a Bird Preserve in July 1991 and since then bird studies have gained prominence. The oath we took on that occasion reads in part underlines our resolve of 'preserving, protecting and enriching the avifaunal wealth, habitat diversity and flora of the Valley as a whole.

A love of nature, freedom from the past, and a long vision, the basic virtues embedded in Krishnamurti's educational philosophy, are necessary if our future citizens are to fulfil the constitutional obligations embodied in Article 51A (g) —

'It shall be the duty of every citizen to protect and improve the natural environment including forests, lakes, rivers and wildlife and to have compassion for wild creatures'.

It is a Directive Principle in the Indian Constitution but for the inhabitants of the Valley it should become a central tenet.

Rural Education

A new design for village education is being developed at Rishi Valley for the past twenty years. The programme is based on the premise that human welfare demands a regenerated landscape, especially in a country where the majority population lives at subsistence level, and where the produce of the earth directly enhances human well-being (Jodha, 2001).

The 'Satellite Schools' RVIEC created in the centre of hamlets around the Valley represent degraded landscapes turned into green public spaces. A typical Satellite School can host, beside an elementary school, a *balwadi*, adult education programmes, puppet shows and theatre. The schools are linked with each other and with government schools through *metric melas*, where children from neighbouring schools buy and sell food, weigh themselves and their parents, compute averages and, in the process, learn to play around with numbers. Doctors from Rishi Valley take responsibility for student health in these schools.

It is hoped that the grounds of the school, which are terraced to conserve water and planted with shrubs and trees, will partially meet part of the food and fodder needs of the village, and provide spaces for conservation of bio-diversity. One day perhaps the grain for mid-day meals could be grown on the school premises. Our eventual hope is that these schools will serve as the

nucleus for a recovery of the traditional commons, and the return of 'social capital': a wise use of natural resources that is being lost to a competitive market economy.

The Rishi Valley Institute for Educational Research, located on the Rishi Valley Campus, has created study materials suited to the educational needs of the village. A typical village school in India provides one teacher to cater to students belonging to mixed ages and ability groups. The method of teaching is textbook-centred, with the teacher dominating the classroom. Failures haunt these schools; most elementary schools count the largest numbers in their first grade.

These educational materials break down the learning process into a sequence of concrete and manageable steps. This collection of cards in elementary mathematics, environmental science and language are graded in ways that students can easily identify and work through by themselves or with minimum help from the teacher; students are self-learners; teachers merely facilitators. Respect and tolerance for other cultures and concern for the natural environment are values woven into the material.

A graphic chart described as the Ladder of Learning in at the centre of the multi-grade programme. The Ladder, in conjunction with the cards, charts the progress of a student through stages of the learning process. It registers this progression in a simple visual display that gives the child a concrete sense of progress. It is a visual metaphor that has proven to be a very effective motivating factor, as each student clearly sees herself moving onward (and upwards!) through the subject.

The Ladder guides the organisation of classrooms. It enables teachers to divide the class, not according to ability groups but to different organisational principles: fully-teacher Supported, Partly teacher-supported and peer-supported groups are clubbed separately irrespective of their ability. In an arrangement where older students and younger students are part of the same group, a great principle adopted by RIVER from J. Krishnamurti — 'You are both the teacher and the taught,' is translated into the classroom, but in different ways.

It is sometimes thought that the Ladder of Learning is a straightjacket into which all content is inflexibly strapped. It has occasionally been described as a system of 'programmed learning'. The confusion that can be cleared away by reflecting on the relationship between grammatical structures and the use of language; the rules of language do not impede an individual from speaking creatively. The Ladder's constraints are no more limiting than those imposed by grammatical rules on speech – both poets and ordinary human beings are able to speak in sentences they have not learnt before.

Forty per cent of the spaces mapped on the Ladder are left free, for teachers to fill in with the help of local content: songs, riddles, local myths and mother's tales. Puppetry and surveys of local flora and fauna are part of the enrichment routine followed by each school. Local culture, in this way, finds its way into the classroom. The school doors remain open, and local potters donate their clay elephants and horses to beautify school

grounds. A Mother's Committee takes charge of mid-day meals, hosts *metric melas* and overseas the teacher's work.

A Rural Health Centre has been providing quality primary health care to the villages in the area. The success in the immediate vicinity has drawn people from as far as one hundred fifty kilo meters away. A unique feature of the centre is nurses trained in each village to monitor that patients continue treatment. A volunteer from each of these villages receives training from the Health Centre on AIDS awareness.

These multi-grade, multi-level teaching and learning methodology has become a model for thousands of formal and non-formal schools in several parts of the country. Among the more prominent adaptations of the methodology are the famous Nali Kali experiment in the formal schools of HD Kote block of Mysore Districts and the Corporation Schools in Chennai. We have just signed an agreement with a UNICEF and *Sarva Siksha Abhayan* (SSA) supported programme for defining, designing and developing 'a holistic quality package of essential interventions for primary schools,' in several states, including Gujarat, Andaman and Nicobar Islands. Orissa, Bihar and Jharkhand.

Conservation Work

The educational work of Rishi Valley is nested in actual practice — water conservation, soil and moisture conservation, reforestation, preserving local species of domesticated cattle, use of alternative energy are all part of our work that benefits the inhabitants of the valley and introduces students to an alternative lifestyle.

Water is the Valley's greatest problem. Monsoons are erratic and the few natural streams flow only during the monsoon season and swiftly grow dry. For most of the year underground water drawn from wells is the only source of water. The ground water stood at one hundred-thirty meters below ground level, as a result of too many new wells being dug by the school's need to bathe and feed five-hundred inhabitants, maintain its dairy and by farmers who now grow paddy instead of the rain-fed millet and peanuts.

Serious water harvesting began in the seventies with the Centre donating its own land for the construction of two percolation tanks, and supervising projects financed by the Andhra Pradesh government. The two tanks, the first called 'Lost Lake,' situated midway up the hills to the south of the campus helped regenerate one hundred-fifty acres of a once-barren hillside. The other, situated in the valley, services wells three miles downstream and has resulted in a much more prosperous farming community. Five more tanks were built more recently in the Valley.

Beginning in 1988, under a grant from the Wasteland Development Board, the Centre built small check dams and bunds along the contours of an 800-hectares hillside. This meant persuading villagers to donate labour and allow construction of bunds across their small holdings. Custard Apples, which goats avoid, were planted along the bunds to hold in soil. Large nurseries of *jamun*, tamarind, *peepal*, red sander and *neem* saplings were established. Several of these were given away to farmers from

distant parts, and many others planted on hundred fifty acres of the bald hillside where Lost Lake is located. Over a period of twenty years this barren hillside is now part scrubland and part dense forest. For the local village community the hundred fifty acres hillside means fodder for its animal population and fuel wood; the space is a kind of insurance against long periods of drought. The campus that once consisted of dry lands and scrublands, now boasts of woodlands and several wetlands.

A survey of the flora on campus revealed many hundred species of plants, several of which have medicinal properties. Following the survey a flourishing Herbal Garden has been established on six acres of land. Under the care of an Ayurvedic specialist, it now has two hundred species of local bushes and trees that provide medicinal benefits to the local population. There is a concerted effort to spread the plants and restore the fast-vanishing knowledge and faith in their healing properties to nearby villages, especially among the women.

The Rishi Valley Dairy is engaging in the task of breeding Ongole cattle, a domesticated breed famous for the load carrying capacity of the male. In the current economic climate where breeding is almost entirely aimed at increasing milk yields, the species is near extinction in Andhra Pradesh. We are concerned about the long-term implications of this practice for marginal agriculture whose mainstay is the bull-driven plough.

Mindful of the limited energy resources in the country and taking advantage of various subsidies from the Government of India, Rishi Valley Education Centre has built a large *gobar* gas plant in its dairy which serves around 25 per cent of the school's cooking needs. Solar heaters for hot water serve several dormitories.

Krishnamurti, the Deep Ecologist

Arne Naess the Norwegian philosopher who coined the term 'Deep Ecology', distinguishes three types of 'Deep Ecologist' in the following —

... within deep ecology you have those who specialise on a spiritual level, saying you have to change the way you are mentally, and others say no, all the problems in deep ecology are political more or less, you have to go into politics and the third one just utters "ah, wonderful nature, wonderful nature, wonderful nature." For Naess himself, '. . . ecological science concerned with facts and logic alone, cannot answer ethical questions about how we should live. For this we need ecological wisdom. Deep ecology seeks to develop this by focussing on deep experience, deep questioning and deep commitment' (Naess, 1997).

Krishnamurti properly fits Naess' first category of spiritual thinkers. The main thrust of his thought was to awaken human beings from the 'obstinacy', a description used by the well-known biologist Edward O. Wilson, in which they are sunk. 'Human beings are adapted by Darwinian natural selection,' Wilson explains, 'to short-term decisions and focus on local concerns.' Krishnamurti's analysis of the human condition took in this destructive side of human nature, its incapacity to take a long view, and consider the wider implications of its own actions. But Krishnamurti tempered this

recognition with a radiant sense of human possibilities.

According to Wilson, if human consumption patterns continue at present levels we will by 2100 need four more planet Earths to 'sustain life as we know it'. And it is fairly well-established that resource scarcity results in violence. Krishnamurti addresses these issues in his philosophy of education.

The aim of education, according to Krishnamurti, is to create good human beings with an awakened sense of responsibility. The aim is not primarily to mould them into slots created by society: professional success, a comfortable homes and a respectable family life. These he dismissed as being narrow, bourgeois and second-hand; as locked into the short-term vision and incapable of resolving the problems that we as a species face. Instead he thought education should be dedicated to creating 'good human beings' with a long view.

The three main components of Krishnamurti's concept of goodness are freedom, intelligence and responsibility. And all three are the outcome of the right kind of learning. Learning, for Krishnamurti, is both a positive faculty and a negating capability. Learning is positive because it teaches you about yourself and the world. It is a negating capability because it allows the darker impulses that guide human nature, greed and violence, to dissolve.

Krishnamurti's response to a student who asks him, 'How can we know ourselves?' helps highlights both aspects of this faculty. The first step in the process, as he explains very simply, is to observe as one might in a mirror 'the way you talk, the way you behave, whether you are hard, cruel, rough, patient' (Krishnamurti, 1974, p. 76). The mirror reveals what one is, but problems take hold when one begins to disapprove of what the mirror shows. 'The mirror says, this is the fact; but you do not like the fact. So, you want to alter it. You start distorting it.' (Krishnamurti, 1974, p. 76). Attention is silently watching what the mirror reveals, without the desire to change it. When this silent observation comes into being there is freedom from anger, envy and the pettiness that clouds the mirror. 'Look', he says, 'not with your mind but with your eyes' (Krishnamurti, 1974, p. 23).

Over and over again, distinguishing what is artificial or socially constructed from what is natural, Krishnamurti directed students to nature and to the senses. The senses are tools for cleansing the mind: 'Just look at the stars, the clear sky, the birds, the shape of the leaves. Watch the shadow. Watch the bird across the sky. By being with yourself, sitting quietly under a tree, you begin to understand the workings of your own mind and that is as important as going to class' (Krishnamurti, 1974, p. 47).

Unlearning the emotions of envy, greed, anger and ambition is the key that opens the mind to a wider and deeper reality, away from its narrow, self-centred vision. Unlearning frees the mind from its divisive actions, its tendency to look at others in stereotypical images: 'You are not a Russian or an American, you are not Hindu or a Muslim. You are apart from these labels. You are the rest of mankind' (Krishnamurti, 1987,72-73).

Krishnamurti's educational philosophy sought to uncover the

individual's relationship with society and through that with nature. He held that human beings, despite being modern, are not really individuals in the truest sense of that word; they are still driven by social forces, by the worldview derived from their elders, peers, society at large and the times in which they live. These social forces are motivated by fear, ambition, and greed. Learning about the influences that direct one's life and shedding the emotions of fear, greed, envy and anger through learning about them clears the way for compassion.

So the moral truths that Krishnamurti sought came neither packaged as true belief, nor as knowledge and theories, but were intrinsic to a spontaneously-born sensitivity to life: 'Fear shuts out the understanding of life with all its extraordinary complications, with its struggles, its sorrows, its poverty, its riches and beauty—the beauty of the birds, and of the sunset on the water. When you are frightened, you are insensitive to all this' (Krishnamurti, 1963). Krishnamurti was convinced that our shortsighted instincts can be overcome and the right kind of education can show us the way to reclaiming the Earth for future generations.

Edward Wilson recognises that our species' destructive instincts are unique; they are not shared by other species with whom we live on Earth. With Krishnamurti, Wilson also recognises that science alone cannot solve the problem human beings have created. But whereas Wilson invokes the lost instinct we share with the whole of life as the path to salvation — 'Every species, right down to nematode worms, has pretty elaborate behaviour that leads them to the right habitat at the right time. Shouldn't we find some residue of that instinct in human beings? … On some level, it is wired into us to be around nature. We should not let that instinct disappear'. Krishnamurti puts his faith in the human ability to free the mind from the negative emotions of greed and violence, as a way of unlocking the shackles that bind individuals to self-interest.

Krishnamurti's vision for humanity resonates with thinkers both from India's ancient and more recent past.

His almost nihilistic radicalism is captured by the Buddhist Nagarjuna's tribute to the Buddha in the last stanza of the *Mulamadhyamakarika.*

I prostrate before the Gautama, who, grounded in compassion, taught the true dharma in order to destroy all opinions (or all points of view).

His great passion for nature with Tagore's idea of India's civilisational values.

Contemporary Western civilisation is built of brick and wood. It is rooted in the city. But Indian civilisation has been distinctive in locating its sources of regeneration, material an intellectual, in the forest, not the city, India's best ideas have come where man was in communion with trees and rivers and lakes, away from the crowds. The peace of the forest has helped the intellectual evolution of man. The culture of the forest has fuelled the culture of Indian society. The culture that has arisen from the forest has been influenced by the diverse processes of renewal of life that are always at play in the forest, varying from species to species, from season to season, in sight and sound and smell. The unifying principle of life in

diversity, of democratic pluralism, thus became the principle of Indian civilisation.

Not being caged in brick, wood and iron, Indian thinkers were surrounded by and linked to the life of the forest. The living forest was for them their shelter, their source of food. The intimate relationship between human life and living nature became the source of knowledge. Nature was not dead and inert in this knowledge system. The experience of life in the forest made it adequately clear that living nature was the source of light and air, of food and water (Quoted by Vandana Shiva, 1988, p. 55).

Krishnamurti's idea of a school with Open Doors recall Gandhi's idea of Trusteeship, some of the basic principles of which were codified under the Mahatma's direction:

Trusteeship provides a means of transforming the present capitalist order of society into an egalitarian one. It gives no quarter to capitalism, but gives the present owning class a chance of reforming itself. It is based on the faith that human nature is never beyond redemption (Dantwala, 1986, p. 40).

Conclusion

The urgent need of the hour is vividly described by Mark Edwards, who has been following environmental issues for close to forty years.

Humanity will have to put aside the deep divisions it has maintained for thousands and thousands of years and take practical steps to solve this problem. The prize will be to deflect military spending, currently one trillion dollars of global taxpayer's money a year, to pay to reinvent the modern world so that it is compatible with nature. This would require a coalition of those in the peace movement, environmentalists, those who support the campaign against poverty – and the silent majority. They have to find their voice. Unless they do, a hard rain's a-gonna fall (Edwards, 2006, p. 8).

If what Peter Drucker predicts is true and the world is moving towards a knowledge society then knowledge will have to be harnessed to nurturing the Earth, not savaging it. Krishnamurti suggested this transformation would require that human beings unlearn the habits of thought bred by greed and aggression.

"Indian society seemed to develop more by successive religious transformation than by violence", Kosambi remarks, adding that society "failed to develop further for much the same reason" (Kosambi 1956). India might have emerged as a more homogeneous society in the twentieth century, if its mode of development in the ancient world had been more like that of European cultures — if overt violence had been an instrument of subduing the cultures of technologically less advanced people.

There was rarely the bitter, violent conflict between the most primitive and the most developed elements of society in India that one finds in the devastating interaction in the devastating interaction of Spanish conquistadors . . . with tribal cultures in South America (Kosambi, 1956, p. 8).

Kosambi's attribution of a positive role to religion in India is intriguing, coming as it does from a historian with a Marxist view of history. But then Kosambi was an historian for whom the relationship between theory and

empirical data was one of interdependence; ideology did not take precedence over evidence; history he said 'is there for those who have the eyes to see it.'

Going on to illustrate with multiple examples which need not concern us here, Kosambi ended the first chapter of his *An Introduction to the Study of Indian History* with a quotation from Marx wherein he congratulated the philosopher's foresight into the consequences of British colonial rule for the future of India. The colonial legacy 'of railways, and machine production, a new Indian bureaucracy, bourgeoisie, proletariat, and army', would certainly remake the subcontinent, but would not bring any change the material condition of the people.

India's cultural pluralism, which began in the ancient world, was achieved at the cost of hidden violence that positioned caste groups into hierarchies, assigning strictly defined ecological niches to each group. *Jati,* like species, in this pre-Darwinian enterprise, imitated nature. The post-industrial era in India's history has led the country into what Gadgil and Guha describe as 'a cauldron of conflicts'. Economic and educational policies of the state have neither levelled the field for all individual citizens nor provided opportunities for advancements to the poor. The cauldron of conflicts is the result of competition and conflict over limited resources. The Indian reality only reflects the larger picture in the world where nations compete over resources and spend their wealth of weapons of power rather than on servicing the Earth.

The statement is prescient despite the hopes of Indian statesmen who dreamed of erasing the hierarchical structures and hidden violence in India's ancient societal structure when the new constitution adopted after independence enshrined the concepts of liberty, equality and fraternity.

Education based on a spiritual non-divisive philosophy of J. Krishnamurti can play a positive role that D. D. Kosambi recorded in his historical reconstruction of India's past. J. Krishnamurti, as the following quotation illustrates, defined the problems of education in a holistic framework.

The world of nature and the world of man … are inter-related. Man cannot escape from that. When he destroys nature he is destroying himself. When he kills another he is killing himself. The enemy is not the other but you. To live in such harmony with nature, with the world, naturally brings about a different world. This is one of the responsibilities of the educator, not merely to teach mathematics or how to run a computer. Far more important is to have communion with the world. The world may be too large but the world is where he is; that is his world. And this brings about a natural consideration, affection for others, courtesy and behaviour that is not rough, cruel, vulgar.

The world of nature and the world of man are inter-related. Man cannot escape from that. When he destroys nature he is destroying himself. When he kills another he is killing himself. The enemy is not the other but you. To live in such harmony with nature, with the world, naturally brings about a different world (Krishnamurti, 1985).

The education project at Rishi Valley demonstrates that Krishnamurti was more than a visionary; that his educational vision can be translated into a reality that is both relevant to our times and to the future.

REFERENCES

ALEXANDER, ROBIN. 2006. *Education as Dialogue*. Hong Kong Institute of Education. Hong Kong.

BRUNO, JEROME. 1986. *Actual Worlds Possible Minds*. Harvard University Press. MA., Cambridge.

BRUNER, J. 1996. *The Culture of Education*. Harvard University Press, MA, Cambridge.

DANTWALA, M.L. 1986. 'The Moral Economy of Trusteeship' in *Trusteeship: The Gandhian Alternative*. Gandhi Peace Foundation. New Delhi.

DRUCKER, PETER F. 1994. 'Knowledge Work and Knowledge Society: The Social Transformations of this Century' (lecture given at Harvard University). http://www.ksg. harvard.edu/ifactory/ksgpress/www/ksg_news/transcripts/drucklec.htm.

EDWARDS, MARK. 2006. *Hard Rain: Our Headlong Collision with Nature*. Still Pictures and Moving Words, London.

GADGIL, MADHAV and RAMACHANDRA GUHA. 1995. *Ecology and Equity. The Use and Abuse of Nature in Contemporary India*. Penguin Books, New Delhi.

GUHA, RAMACHANDRA. 2006. *How Much should a Person Consume*? Permanent Black, Delhi.

INGALLS, DANIEL et al. 1990. *The Dhvanyaloka of Anandavardhana with the Locana of Abhinavagupta*. Harvard University Press. MA, Cambridge.

JODHA, NARPAT. 1998. 'Community Management of Commons: Re-empowerment Process and the Gaps' (lecture presented at "Crossing Boundaries", the seventh annual conference of the International Association for the Study of Common Property, Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada, 1998), http://http//www.arc.cs.odu.edu:8080/dp9/getrecord/oai_dc/dlc.dlib.indiana.eduoai:dlc.dlib. Indiana.edu.

_____. 2001. *Life on the Edge: Sustaining Agriculture and Community Resources in Fragile Environments*. Oxford, New Delhi.

KOSAMBI, D.D. 1956. *An Introduction to the Study of Indian History*. Popular Prakashan, Bombay.

KRISHNAMURTI, J. 1953. *Education and the Significance of Life*. Victor Golancz, London.

_____ 1963. *Life Ahead*. Victor Golancz, London.

_____ 1964. *This Matter of Culture*. Victor Golancz, London.

_____ 1974. *On Education*. Orient Longman, New Delhi.

_____ 1975. *Beginnings of Learning* Victor Golancz Ltd., London.

_____ 1985. *Letters to the Schools*, Vol. 2. Krishnamurti Foundation, India. Chennai.

_____ 1987. Krishnamurti *to Himself*. Victor Golancz, London.

_____ 1987. *The Collected Works of J. Krishnamurti*. Krishnamurti Publications of America.

NAESS, ARNE. 1997. Interview- Radio National, the Australian Broadcasting Corporation's national radio network of ideas. *www.abc.net.au/rn/talks/8.30/relrpt/trr9743.*

DE LA VALLE POUSSIN, LOUIS. 1931. *Mulamadhyamakarika de Nagarjuna avec Pasannapada commentaire de Candrakirti.* Bibliotheca Buddhica LV, St. Petersburg.

SHIVA, VANDANA.1988. *Staying Alive: Women, Ecology and Survival in India.* Kali for Women, New Delhi.

WILSON, EDWARD O. 'Only Humans Can Halt the Worst Wave of Extinction Since the Dinosaurs Died' *http://raysweb.net/specialplaces/pages/wilson.html*