

## J. Krishnamurti's Right Education

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**Paper No:** 83 **Received:** 22 July, 2013 **Accepted:** 29 December, 2013

### Abstract

Krishnamurti was not an educator in the narrow or formal sense of the term, his concern for what he considered 'right education' was clearly not an attempt to provide temporary solutions to society's problems or seek to correct them through merely educating people to read or write. Krishnamurti has been described as a 'revolutionary teacher who worked tirelessly to awaken people—to awaken their intelligence, to awaken their sense of responsibility, to awaken a flame of discontent', and this commitment to awakening the consciousness of people was undoubtedly based on a 'strong moral passion'.

Krishnamurti's quest for self-knowledge or self-discovery does not take one very far from oneself. It is in this sense that, as Krishnamurti often said, 'the teachings are yourself'. There is also no culmination of this process of self-discovery: 'there is only the journey. There is no total knowing of oneself but rather an unending process of knowing oneself'. Education forms a central core of Krishnamurti's world view. Education is therefore the foundation on which the good society will build itself. Krishnamurti always asserted the individual's responsibility to the social order: 'You are the world'.

For Krishnamurti, therefore, the right kind of education does not simply produce engineers, doctors or scientists, but a 'human being who is alive, fresh and eager. An 'educated mind' is one that 'thinks, that is active, alive; it is a mind that looks, watches, listens and feels'. Krishnamurti's perspective on education seeks to bring about a more just and humane society in a world that is rapidly degenerating. Krishnamurti saw the possibilities for radical change through human transformation.

**Keywords:** Right Education, Revolutionary Teacher, Self-knowledge, Educated Mind, Human Transformation

Krishnamurti was not an educator in the narrow or formal sense of the term, as he had no formal qualifications to either propagate or promote educational goals or establish educational institutions. His concern for what he considered 'right education' was clearly not an attempt to provide temporary solutions to society's problems or seek to correct them through merely educating people to read or write.

The right kind of education, while encouraging the learning of a technique, should accomplish something which is of far greater importance: it should help man to experience the integrated process of life. It is this experiencing that will put capacity and technique in their right place. If one really has something to say, the very saying of it creates its own style; but learning a style without inward experiencing can only lead to superficiality. Throughout the world, engineers are frantically designing machines which do not need men to operate them. In a life run almost entirely by machines, what

is to become of human beings? We shall have more and more leisure without knowing wisely how to employ it, and we shall seek escape through knowledge, through enfeebling amusements, or through ideals. Krishnamurti has been described as a 'revolutionary teacher who worked tirelessly to awaken people—to awaken their intelligence, to awaken their sense of responsibility, to awaken a flame of discontent', and this commitment to awakening the consciousness of people was undoubtedly based on a 'strong moral passion'. Krishnamurti encourages 'critical looking' or 'choiceless awareness', rather than the more commonly known process of 'critical thinking', as a mode of self-discovery.

The right kind of education is not concerned with any ideology, however much it may promise a future Utopia: it is not based on any system, however carefully thought out; nor is it a means of conditioning the individual in some special manner. Education in

the true sense is helping the individual to be mature and free, to flower greatly in love and goodness. That is what we should be interested in, and not in shaping the child according to some idealistic pattern.

Any method which classifies children according to temperament and aptitude merely emphasizes their differences; it breeds antagonism, encourages divisions in society and does not help to develop integrated human beings. It is obvious that no method or system can provide the right kind of education, and strict adherence to a particular method indicates sluggishness on the part of the educator. As long as education is based on cut-and-dried principles, it can turn out men and women who are efficient, but it cannot produce creative human beings. Krishnamurti's break with tradition and all forms of authority, however, characterizes his strength as a philosopher, for he was like a breath of fresh air to those who had been trying to fathom the depths of both consciousness and existence following traditional paths of understanding.

Jiddu Krishnamurti's interest in education was long standing and always passionate. In what is perhaps his first book, "Education As Service" (1912), we see his concern for education and the introduction of a few themes that remain in his work. We hear the voice of the seventeen year old Krishnamurti writing from his heartfelt experiences when he says in the foreword,

*Many of the suggestions made in this little book come from my own memories of early school life;... I have myself experienced both the right way of teaching and the wrong way, and therefore I want to help others towards the right way. (Krishnamurti 1912)*

And for the rest of his life he did try to help others towards a better form of education. Krishnamurti's perspective on education, was seen as towards the fullest development of the full human being. From the full body of his work, we can conclude that, for Krishnamurti, education is 1.) educating the whole person (all parts of the person), 2.) educating the person as a whole (not as an assemblage of parts), and 3.) educating the person within a whole (as part of society, humanity, nature, etc.) from which it is not meaningful to extract that person.

### **About Krishnamurti**

J. Krishnamurti was born on 11 May 1895 in Madanapalle in the state of Andhra Pradesh, southern India, close to the Rishi Valley Education Centre, an institution he established in 1928. His father was an official in the Revenue Department of the colonial administration and Krishnamurti was one of five children. After his retirement from public service, Krishnamurti's father offered his services to the Theosophical Society in Chennai in exchange for accommodation for his sons and himself. They eventually moved to Adyar, Chennai, in 1909. In the early years of his youth, Krishnamurti and his brother, Nityananda, were adopted by Dr. Annie Besant, the President of the Theosophical Society, who saw

certain spiritual qualities in him that set him apart from others. This further resulted in Mrs. Besant and other theosophists proclaiming Krishnamurti as the vehicle for the World Teacher who was coming, in their words, to bring salvation to mankind. To prepare the world for the coming of this World Teacher, an organization called the Order of the Star in the East was formed in 1911 with Krishnamurti at its head. The role of World Teacher and spiritual leader was thrust upon Krishnamurti at a relatively young age and this daunting task must have undoubtedly influenced his own psychological development.

This process did not, however, create the World Messiah and nor did it lead Krishnamurti to announce or proclaim his superiority over others. In fact, it had the contrary effect. Although Krishnamurti underwent all the training and education befitting a budding World Teacher, he developed an independent perspective both about the nature of inquiry and about his own role in the pursuit of the good society. On 3 August 1929, in a historic and powerful speech, Krishnamurti dissolved the Order of the Star :

*I maintain that Truth is a pathless land, and you cannot approach it by any path whatsoever, by any religion, by any sect [...] Truth being limitless, unconditioned, unapproachable by any path whatsoever, cannot be organized; nor should any organization be formed to lead or coerce people along any particular path [...] My only concern is to set man absolutely, unconditionally free (Krishnamurti, 1929).*

By breaking away from the Theosophical Society and its organizational trappings Krishnamurti asserted his independence, and his 'teachings', so to speak, unfolded over the remaining years of his life. Krishnamurti did not assert himself as a Teacher of Truth whose teachings had to be followed to attain Nirvana or self-understanding. He questioned whether such authority could actually initiate individual perception and change. The 'journey of understanding', therefore, has to be made by oneself, which means that one has to discard every kind of authority: 'to be a light to ourselves we must be free of all tradition, all authority, including that of the speaker, so that our own minds can look and observe and learn' (Krishnamurti, 1972, p. 52).

Krishnamurti rejected the view that the 'teaching' is something that has to be first studied and then translated into action. On being asked what his teaching was, he said that it was a matter of partaking or sharing together rather than the giving or receiving of something.

There is also an emphasis on the instantaneous nature of the transformation: it is 'not something that is accomplished gradually through striving, seeking and bringing one's life, one's conduct and thought by degrees more in conformity with some ideal'. The state of 'becoming' or 'being' does not exist for Krishnamurti: it is more a state of timelessness, as it were.

Krishnamurti's quest for self-knowledge or self-discovery does not take one very far from oneself. It is in this sense that, as Krishnamurti often said, 'the teachings are yourself'. There is also no culmination of this process of self-discovery: 'there is only the journey. There is no total knowing of oneself but rather an unending process of knowing oneself'

### Right Education

Education forms a central core of Krishnamurti's world view. In fact, Krishnamurti spent his entire life talking about education as being the agent not only of inner renewal but also of social change. Education is therefore the foundation on which the good society will build itself. Krishnamurti always asserted the individual's responsibility to the social order: 'You are the world'. One individual's action therefore affects another, since 'to be is to be related' and in this sense there is no individual consciousness but only a collective human consciousness, which implies that the world is not separate from the individual. Krishnamurti points to the harmonious development of the inner and outer worlds of an individual: 'what one is inwardly will eventually bring about a good society or the gradual deterioration of human relationship'. This harmony, however, 'cannot possibly come about if our eyes are fixed only on the outer'. The inner world is the 'source and continuation of the disorder', and for Krishnamurti education should be concerned with changing the source which is the individual, since it is 'human beings who create society, not some gods in heaven'.

I will try to support the main theme of this paper by presenting what Krishnamurti said about 1.) the intentions of education, 2.) the physical nature of the places in which education occurs, and 3.) the participants in education – the students and staff. I believe these three elements are the focus of much, if not most, of Krishnamurti's work on education.

### The Intentions of Education

Krishnamurti repeatedly stated the intentions of the education centres he founded in very unequivocal terms, and in very religious ones.

*... children... must be educated rightly... educated so that they become religious human beings. (Krishnamurti 1979)*

*Surely they must be centres of learning a way of life which is not based on pleasure, on self-centered activities, but on the understanding of correct action, the depth and beauty of relationship, and the sacredness of a religious life. (Krishnamurti 1981b) (Letter dated 15th October 1980)*

*These places exist for the enlightenment of man (Krishnamurti 1981b) (letter of 15th October 1979)*

Krishnamurti often stated that the purpose of education is to bring about freedom, love, "the flowering of goodness" and the complete transformation of society. For Jiddu Krishnamurti, the intentions of education must be the inner transformation and liberation of the human being and, from that, society would be transformed. Education is intended to assist people to become truly religious. These intentions must not be just pleasant sounding ideals to which one pays lip service, and they are not to be arrived at by their opposites. And the religious intentions are not for some eventual goal, but for life in educational centres from moment to moment.

### The Physical Nature of the Places of Education

Krishnamurti felt that the physical nature of educational centres was very important. He maintained that we are affected or informed by and therefore educated by far more than we suspect, and this is especially true of young impressionable minds. I will focus on what I believe to be the three elements that Krishnamurti spoke of most concerning the physicality of educational centres – 1.) the aesthetics, which includes order, 2.) special areas that Jiddu Krishnamurti felt should exist in the centres he founded, and by extension we can assume he would feel should exist in all schools, and 3.) the atmosphere he felt should prevail and which he usually spoke of as part of the physical nature of the centres, though one can argue that they are material only in a very special sense.

There was a very memorable discussion with Jiddu Krishnamurti at the end of his life when several representatives of different schools he founded in India, America, and England went for a walk with him. He asked us all what would be left in his schools to indicate that they were Krishnamurti schools if the name Krishnamurti was removed and if all his books, audio tapes and video tapes were gone; and if something was still there, what would sustain it. It was a question about the all important ineffable qualities, the atmospheres of the educational centres, and it was a question about what we were generating; and it was a question answered by a very uncomfortable and telling silence.

### The Participants in Education

There are, generally speaking, two kinds of participants in educational centres: staff and students. Jiddu Krishnamurti felt that any adult that was regularly in one of the centres was a staff member (regardless of function) and because of their regular contact with at least the educational environment if not the students, then they were in the position of educators. When discussing the selection process for students and staff at his English educational centre, Krishnamurti always stressed the importance of the candidate's 'being' – their deepest sensitivities, their goodness and intelligence (in his definitions of those words which had nothing to do with conventional morality or IQ), the depth of their questions about themselves and the world.

Talking to students, Krishnamurti reiterated that what education normally does is prepare students to fit into a 'particular frame or pattern, that is, the movement in a predetermined groove' and this is what society calls 'entering life'. With such an education, the student meets life, which is 'like a little river meeting the vast sea'. However, such an education does not necessarily prepare the student to meet the psychological challenges and physical vicissitudes of life. It is important that education should in fact 'awaken intelligence' and not simply reproduce a programmed machine or trained monkey, as Krishnamurti put it. Education therefore cannot be only about reading and learning from books but about the whole of life, and should prepare students to meet the challenges of living in a complex social world.

For Krishnamurti, therefore, the right kind of education does not simply produce engineers, doctors or scientists, but a 'human being who is alive, fresh and eager. An 'educated mind' is one that 'thinks, that is active, alive; it is a mind that looks, watches, listens and feels'.

### **Krishnamurti's Legacy to Education in Contemporary India**

From 1929, when Krishnamurti declared that his only concern was to set man totally free, 'freedom' as a state of being was central to his view of life. Evidently, he developed his 'celebrated doctrine of freedom against the background of an abiding love of nature and a firm commitment to individual responsibility in working towards a better society and protecting our natural heritage'. This is reflected in the strong commitment to the habitat and the environment within the KFI schools' curricular frameworks. It has been suggested that this commitment points to 'new policy goals for education in India—goals that give priority to the Indian *earth* rather than to the Indian *nation*'. This in turn would lead to a new curriculum in Indian schools focusing on 'sustaining the earth'. To this end, the schools recently organized a workshop on biodiversity and conservation issues with the goal of exploring 'the possibility of modifying the existing school curriculum to reflect the concerns of an Earth-centred outlook'. The workshop identified certain key principles for developing an earth-centred curriculum in secondary schools and an attempt was made to actually redefine the current curriculum without compromising the conceptual frameworks of disciplines such as biology, chemistry and physics. By enhancing children's understanding of the earth's vulnerability and its relationship to different subject disciplines in very concrete terms and in students' engagement with teachers in, for example, reforestation projects, the KFI schools pose a challenge to conventional pedagogy in schools across India.

Learning, therefore, in the KFI schools is not just about ideas or facts in books, but is also about feeling the earth, watching the sunset, listening to the birds, seeing the colours of the leaves change in the different seasons and observing nature in its many colours,

forms and shapes, not as a romantic naturalist but in harmony with what is being observed. From this harmony, a sense of responsibility towards the earth and a commitment towards life on earth will evolve. The KFI school in Chennai has in fact developed a formal curriculum for Environmental Studies as an optional subject at the senior secondary school level, which has been accepted and granted recognition by the Indian Council for Secondary Education (ICSE)

for use in all schools affiliated with the ICSE. This has undoubtedly been a major contribution by the KFI schools to the senior secondary school curriculum in India and has wider ramifications in terms of developing the potential for developing a perspective and lifestyle that support ecological balance and emphasize the sustenance of the biosphere. It is true that very few schools in India have included environmental and social concerns directly in the curriculum. There is a component of 'Socially Useful Productive Work' in secondary schools that enables students to engage in a variety of activities, from gardening to community service, on a fixed and somewhat formal basis. It is here that KFI schools have made another contribution to educational processes in terms of the school's relationship with the community. Taking the cue from Krishnamurti's emphasis on an individual's relatedness to society, the KFI schools undertake projects with the local community and try to establish a wider network of relating to the community that goes beyond mere 'community service' as an aspect of the formal curriculum.

The Rural Education Centre (REC) at the Rishi Valley Education Centre in Andhra Pradesh has grown and expanded from providing quality elementary education to the children of workers and of neighbouring villages to being part of a larger network of schools spread over the surrounding villages. The REC infrastructure now includes two demonstration multigrade schools, sixteen multi-grade satellite schools within a radius of fifteen kilometres, a teacher training centre, a curriculum development cell and a vocational training centre. In response to the dismal learning conditions in rural classrooms, where there is high absenteeism, low motivation levels, high drop-out rates, bored and demotivated teachers and an acute shortage of funds, an alternative approach to elementary education has been planned. This approach focuses on the preparation of high-quality, individualized self-learning materials, community involvement and teacher development (Rishi Valley Education Centre, 1999). Rather than relying on formal textbooks that are often unrelated to children's lives, the focus has been on designing material and methodology that are most useful, meaningful and successful as a pedagogical tool. This has resulted in the now well-known 'School-in-a-Box' material, which is being used in elementary schools all over Andhra Pradesh. This REC project has now greatly expanded, and the REC also provides its expertise in rural elementary education to other agencies—State-funded, non-formal or international—engaged in similar work in other states in India.

Krishnamurti's perspective on education seeks to bring about a more just and humane society in a world that is rapidly degenerating. Krishnamurti saw the possibilities for radical change through human transformation. He had a holistic approach that did not seek to fragment human existence into the 'personal' and the 'public', but pointed to the relationship between the personal and the public, the individual and society. In this sense, his vision encompasses both our little individual spaces and the wide world of our relatedness to the community, the natural environment and human society. In postcolonial India, there has been a major emphasis by the State on evolving an approach to education for the economic growth and social development of society; and in this process, the intrinsic worth of education—in terms of its greater transformational potential—for individuals who are privileged to have access to it has been lost. The emphasis on the socio-economic development of society has so far included the rhetoric of a holistic approach to education, taking into consideration all sectors, public and private, primary, secondary and tertiary, and encompassing teachers as well as students, the girl child and the ubiquitous backward castes. In practice, however, the scenario for elementary and secondary education in India is rather bleak. This is borne out not only by the numerous policy documents and reports available from time to time but also by field studies undertaken by non government organizations and individuals.

The only area where the State concedes space for individual growth and development is in the inculcation of 'values' through some kind of moral education. These values are defined in terms of certain prevailing social problems and do not seek to address fundamental issues that inhere in all social relationships. For example, a current discussion document, released by the National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT) in New Delhi for evolving a National Curriculum Framework for School Education, notes 'the erosion of essential values and an increasing cynicism in society' and advocates value education that will 'help eliminate obscurantism, religious fanaticism, violence, superstition and fatalism'. 'Values' such as 'regularity and punctuality, cleanliness, industriousness/diligence, sense of duty and service, equality, cooperation, sense of responsibility, truthfulness and national identity' are recommended. Quite apart from its being patronizing and prescriptive, this focus will clearly not effect a major change in individual consciousness unless there is clarity about the nature of inner renewal which we seek through education.

It is in this context that Krishnamurti's engagement with education is of paramount significance, namely his emphasis on the relationship between education and society in terms of the transformational potential of education. This aspect of Krishnamurti's teachings is the cornerstone of his educational thought and can make a significant contribution to evolving a sensible policy that concerns itself with change through 'right' education. In 1929 he stated what he felt was the central intention in his life,

*I want to do a certain thing in the world and I am going to do it with unwavering concentration. I am concerning myself with only one essential thing; to set man free. (Krishnamurti 1929)*

For this Krishnamurti started schools, and for this reason only. We read the words of the young seventeen year old Krishnamurti who wrote,

*If the unity of life and the oneness of its purpose could be clearly taught to the young in schools, how much brighter would be our hopes for the future! (Krishnamurti 1912) (Foreword)*

Forty one years later he wrote,

*If one becomes aware that there can be peace and harmony for man only through right education, then one will naturally give one's whole life and interest to it. (Krishnamurti 1953c) (Chapter 6)*

And that is exactly what he did.

## Conclusion

Krishnamurti's perspective on education seeks to bring about a more just and humane society in a world that is rapidly degenerating. Krishnamurti saw the possibilities for radical change through human transformation. He had a holistic approach that did not seek to fragment human existence into the 'personal' and the 'public', but pointed to the relationship between the personal and the public, the individual and society. In this sense, his vision encompasses both our little individual spaces and the wide world of our relatedness to the community, the natural environment and human society. It is in this context that Krishnamurti's engagement with education is of paramount significance, namely his emphasis on the relationship between education and society in terms of the transformational potential of education. This aspect of Krishnamurti's teachings is the cornerstone of his educational thought and can make a significant contribution to evolving a sensible policy that concerns itself with change through 'right' education.

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