

# The Krishnamurti Foundation India - Holistic Education and Social Transformation

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The Krishnamurti Foundation India (K.F.I.) is a charitable organization concerned with spiritual development, education and social reform. It is a registered society under Act XXI of 1860. The organization is run by a group of people who are devoted to the teachings of Shri J. Krishnamurti.

The Rural Centre of the Krishnamurti Foundation India, Rajghat, Varanasi is spread over an area of about 250 acres of land. It was founded by late Shri Achyut Patwardhan in 1953 in collaboration with Shri J. Krishnamurti. It is engaged in the upliftment of rural masses and provides educational and health services to nearly 10 villages situated in the proximity of our Rural Centre in Varanasi.

The villagers around our Rural Centre are predominantly fishermen, weavers and harijans who are very poor, backward and illiterate and most of them exist at the bare edge of survival. There are about ten villages to which the Rural Centre has been extending its educational and health facilities since its inception in the year 1953.

Our educational programme was started in 1953 with a primary school which was later upgraded to a middle school. In the Rural Centre, until recently, we had only this school which was overcrowded and where boys and girls studied together upto class VIIIth.

The education that we provided to the poor village children did help eradicate illiteracy, but it could not bring about appreciable changes in their behaviour and outlook on life. Therefore, in addition to running a village primary and a middle school we also started, on an experimental basis, a small girls' school in 1998 in the memory of Late Shri Achyut Patwardhan. The school has been named "Achyut Patwardhan Balika Vidyalaya." At present it caters to about 213 poor rural girls studying in classes I to VIIIth.

The reason for starting a separate girls school is that the education of girls is very badly neglected in our villages. Moreover, it is a well known fact that if we educate a boy we educate only one individual but if we educate a girl we educate a whole family.

Furthermore, convinced that the society can only change deeply and fundamentally if man's psyche changes, we decided to impart holistic education to the girl students first and then gradually extend it to the Boys' School as well so that the children may "flower in goodness." This kind of education is only possible if a dedicated teacher is given not more than 25-30 students in a class to educate keeping in mind the following objectives :

1. creation of learning promotive environment for underprivileged and under nourished children, especially girls.
2. imparting holistic education which "concerns itself with the whole process of living".
3. promotion of social-cohesion, harmony, peace and individual human dignity, and

4. freedom for and promotion of creativity and development of an enquiring mind leading to self-knowledge.

As our educational programme is in its nascent stage it would be too early to evaluate its success or failure. However, since right education seems to be the only way out of the present-day chaos, it calls for perseverance and patience. We would, therefore, rather share the difficulties we have encountered in implementing the rural educational programme and the way we propose to overcome them.

Holistic education with its objectives, as stated above, demands dedicated teachers who are willing to live and work in a rural environment. This necessitates foregoing the comfort of a city life. It is difficult to find such dedicated teachers.

We receive no grant from the government to run our schools. Besides, considering the affordability of the parents we charge only nominal tuition fees from the students. Not only this, adherence to an ideal teacher - student ratio also places an additional financial burden. All these factors make our task of finding good teachers all the more frustrating as we can scarcely afford to pay them a reasonably good salary.

To overcome this problem we propose to create an endowment fund of Rs. 20 lakh or \$4500 with the help of donations and invest this money so that we may enhance the salaries of the teachers from the interest on this fund and also be able to improve the teacher/student ratio which is 1:40 at present.

The other major problem that we are confronted with is the gender bias which is prevalent in our villages. The parents in our villages not only deliberately neglect the education of their daughters and make them work at home to earn something but they also do not get sufficient food to eat as the lion's share is invariably reserved for the male child. As such, the girls in the villages remain uneducated and under nourished. We tried to tackle this problem by arranging mid-day meals for the girls with the funds provided by ASHA- St. Louis, USA. Our mid-day meals project became very popular and proved to be quite an incentive for the parents to send their children to our school regularly. This served the dual purpose of providing the girls quality education as well as a wholesome meal which improved their general health considerably and was much appreciated by the parents.

The socio-economic background from which our rural children come, the uncongenial and often quarrelsome environment that prevails at their home and the fact that the parents being mostly illiterate cannot help their children with their studies and home-work make the task of a teacher really very challenging. Against all these odds the intelligence, sensitivity and creativity of these disadvantaged children is to be awakened. This calls for dedication and devotion of a very high order on the part of teacher to the cause of imparting holistic education with a sense of commitment and responsibility. But it is more easily said than done because the teachers themselves are not free from their own conditioning. They are as much in need to learn as the taughts are. Therefore, there is a definite need to create a learning promotive environment which will help us all grow in body, mind and spirit. To create such an environment all the teachers and other staff of the Rural Centre meet regularly for an hour or so on every Saturday. In these meetings J. Krishnamurti's teachings are gone into and discussed in the form of dialogues. Reading out a passage from Krishnaji's "Letters to the schools" or from "Education and The Significance of Life" and deliberating over it has been found to be very educative and illuminative.

Realizing that parents too have a very important role to play in the education and shaping up of their children we organize "parents day" once a month. In such meetings parents are made aware of their

responsibilities towards proper education and well-being of their children. We also exhort them for the sake of their children to give up drinking, smoking, drugs etc and to see to it that both they and their children grow as good human beings. They are made to understand that they can contribute a lot if they create a congenial atmosphere at home for the proper growth of their children. They are also encouraged to attend our evening adult education classes that we run for the villagers.

In the end, it may not be out of place to quote Shri J. Krishnamurti from "Education and the Significance of Life" to bring home the point that holistic education, which concerns the whole process of living and which must lead to self-knowledge, is the only means of radical transformation of society.

"To transform the world, there must be regeneration within ourselves. Nothing can be achieved by violence, by the easy liquidation of one another. We may find a temporary release by joining groups, by studying methods of social and economic reform, by enacting legislation, or by praying; but do what we will, without self-knowledge and the love that is inherent in it, our problems will ever expand and multiply. Whereas, if we apply our minds and hearts to the task of knowing ourselves, we shall undoubtedly solve our many conflicts and sorrows."

"The responsibility for building a peaceful and enlightened society rests chiefly with the educator, and it is obvious, without becoming emotionally stirred up about it, that he has a very great opportunity to help in achieving that social transformation. The right kind of education does not depend on the regulations of any government or the methods of any particular system; it lies in our own hands, in the hands of the parents and the teachers."

"If teaching is one's vocation, and if one perceives the grave importance of the right kind of education, one cannot help but be the right kind of educator. There is no need to follow any method. The very fact of understanding that the right kind of education is indispensable if we are to achieve the freedom and integration of the individual, brings about a fundamental change in oneself. If one becomes aware that there can be peace and happiness for man only through right education, then one will naturally give one's whole life and interest to it."

We have made a beginning and those who share our vision of bringing about the much needed social transformation through holistic education are most welcome to join us.