

The Challenge of School Education
Rishi Valley School and its Work

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26 October 2010, IIT-Delhi



A view of Rishi Valley, from a nearby hill

Part I

Background

“The purpose, aim and drive of these schools is to equip the child . . . [to] function with clarity and efficiency in the modern world, and far more important, to create the right climate so that the child may develop fully as a human being. This means giving him the opportunity to flower in goodness so that he is rightly related to people, things and ideas, to the whole of life.”

“A mind that is not concerned with itself, that is free of ambition, not caught up in its own desires or driven by its own pursuit of success — such a mind flowers in goodness.”

— J Krishnamurti, 1895–1986

Rishi Valley is located in the rocky, boulder strewn district of Chittoor, in the south western corner of Andhra Pradesh.

All around there are ancient, eroded hillsides with exposed granite.

Drawn by its quality of silence and by the presence of a large banyan tree, the renowned teacher Shri Jiddu Krishnamurti chose Rishi Valley to start an educational institution in 1931.



Rishi Valley banyan tree, estimated to be about four centuries old



Ancient eroded hillsides

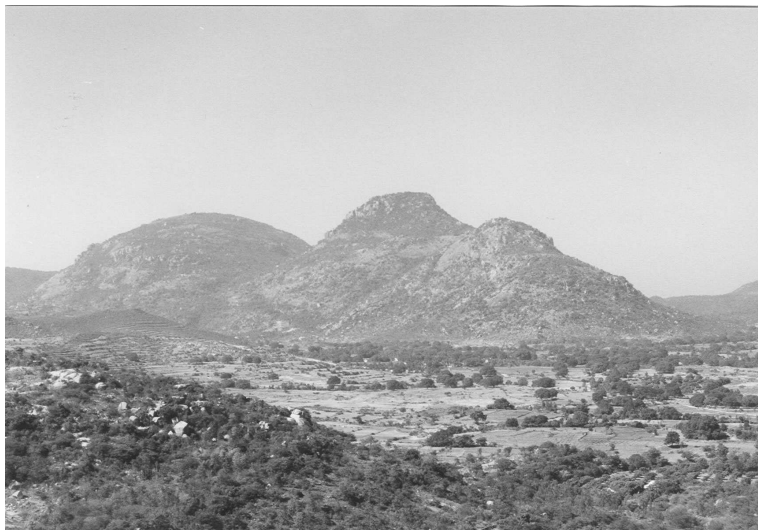


The road to Rishi Valley

Dominating Rishi Valley is the **Rishi Konda**, or Hill of the Rishis. Legend has it that rishis had lived up its slopes in grand isolation.

In 1910 the Rayalaseema region was rich in water and forests, with large animals inhabiting them — leopards, cheetahs, elephants, bears. But by 1930, the valley was barren and dry, thanks to the pressures of railway building, population growth and the timber industry.

From 1926 till 1986, Krishnamurti visited Rishi Valley nearly every winter. His inquiry into the human condition and insights in education were shared with students, teachers and those involved with the care of the land.



Rishi Konda and its companions, dominating the view to the West

Krishnamurti created no blue-print for what a school should be.

However, the passionate concerns he articulated remain the basis of the school and all its endeavors.

Rishi Valley's ongoing experiment in education, founded on Krishnamurti's insights, is dedicated to exploring — in a rural context — Krishnamurti's vision for humanity and the Earth.



View of Rishi Valley percolation tank, which has contributed much to the greening of the valley

Part II

Principles That Underpin Rishi Valley

General principles of school leadership

Acting from a perspective that can see the local as well as the global

- Nurturing a long vision: not simply responding to the immediate; not simply responding to a market need
- Nurturing a relationship with the environment and neighbours: being a “school without walls”
- Nurturing an ethic of simple living and social responsibility
- Nurturing creativity along with intellectual rigor

Styles of functioning

What values can we nurture through our very style of functioning?

- Nurturing freedom of speech and transparency of decision making (responding to problems of high handedness, authoritarianism, and lack of transparency in Indian organizations)
- Nurturing a true sense of democracy (moving away from the notion of a Principal centered school)
- Engaging teachers in creative dialogue
- Nurturing a constructivist paradigm, for teachers and students

Teacher growth – I

Growing in our understanding of a subject, and in our skills

- Keeping in touch with one's subject, with its culture
- Cultivating reading habits — books, journals, websites
- Engaging in writing, making presentations
- Taking assemblies: presenting a carefully researched account of some topic of importance to the school or staff body
- Engaging in professional dialogue

Teacher growth – II

Growing in one's ability to confront difficult issues

- Plagiarism
- Why do we take ourselves so seriously? — the place of humour
- Taking responsibility for one's views and actions
- Nurturing leadership skills
- Dangers of micro-management
- Power relationship between teacher and student

Teacher growth – III

Learning the art of listening, the art of questioning

- Onus on teachers to not “teach to the test”
- Dialogue and inquiry as the way forward
- Dialogue, not formal stylized debate (which is a mere skill)
- Learning the ability to ask questions (of oneself, not of others)
- Nurturing the long vision

Challenges of our times – I

Challenges that span the world, unmindful of national boundaries

- Widespread breakdown of environment
- Fundamentalism, regionalism, nationalism — the atomization of human society

We need to learn the art of treading lightly upon the Earth, of living in the manner of guests

Challenges of our times – II

Challenges specific to our country

- Authoritarian style of functioning
- Worship of success and condemnation of failure (I wonder why we cannot have a “kinder, more humane philosophy of success” . . .)
- Our excessive touchiness and quickness to take insult — is it a lack of sense of humour?
- Lack of culture of cooperation

Challenges of our times – III

Challenges specific to our country

- Lack of sense of history
- Poor skills in documentation
- Plagiarism, lack of originality
- Bullying; why have we allowed it to become so big a problem?

Let us remember that **school is a microcosm of life**. It holds up a mirror to society, and reflects truly and tellingly most of its values.

To confront such challenges requires ruthless honesty on our part

Key elements of Krishnamurti's philosophy – I

- **You are the world** — every individual is inextricably linked to the whole of humankind and to all life
- Human beings grow up conditioned by specific biological, cultural and social factors
- These factors encourage separative tendencies, leading to division, strife and violence in society
- Escalating degradation of nature is an outcome of this separative and acquisitive conditioning

Key elements of Krishnamurti's philosophy – II

- A mind that observes and questions can begin to know itself and thus break down this conditioning
- Attention to the “outer” as well as the “inner” are essential to freeing oneself from this conditioning

Key elements of Krishnamurti's philosophy – III

- Intelligence based on clear perception and insight into the nature of things may be awakened in each individual
- Education is the process of awakening this intelligence
- A truly educated human being feels responsible for the world and acts from this sensibility

Some practices that derive from K's philosophy

- Atmosphere of affection, order and freedom, without fear or license
- Close teacher-student relationship — compact classes and hostels
- Stress on cooperation rather than competition
- No exams till upper primary level; non-comparative evaluation
- Opportunities for students to engage with a wide range of issues; to be in contact with natural and social environment; to explore interests and talents as well as inner nature

Specific aims of Rishi Valley School – I

- To awaken a sense of responsibility amongst students for the human and natural environment — by making them aware of the fragility of their immediate environment and the deprivation of their neighbours.
- To create a global outlook
- To cultivate a sane attitude to India's past

Specific aims of Rishi Valley School – II

- To inspire students to employ knowledge and expertise they might acquire to repair the damage done to the environment by humans
- To create a sensibility that values beauty, harmony and quietude
- To convince students that going against the tide of history is not impossible.



Let Rishi Konda, with the glory of the setting sun behind it, have the last word . . .