

Challenges of an Urban Day School

The City of Madras in which The School was born 25 years ago, was a very different place from what it is today. The last quarter of the 20th Century has inexorably carried forward the economy of scale doctrine across the world. Many small hamlets have become little towns, small towns became cities and cities have transformed in complexity and size to mega proportions. Madras today, with its population of 5 million citizens is a Metropolis into which not only flights from Eastern nations land but also now from the West. The port is vying with Colombo as a major transshipment point for containers on ocean going vessels. Being called the Detroit of the East with Ford and Hyundai setting up manufacturing base nearby, the city has moved ahead. In its journey of growing bigger, with bigger shops, taller buildings and faster traffic, its inhabitants have encountered the questions of every big city. Like all big cities Madras is confronted with waste, pollution, plastic, crime, drugs and terrorism along with water shortage, power cuts, increasing costs and overcrowding. No one can fail to be surprised at the rapidity with which these problems have got established in our midst. In the middle of such a metropolis The school is immensely fortunate to be situated on the beautiful and open grounds belonging to the Theosophical Society.

Cities do not represent a sane way of human living. A Krishnamurti School in this context, poses a challenge to the students, teachers and parents. What directions can we point to the new generations?

It is obvious that we have to address questions connected with the young growing up as viable human beings in the society of tomorrow. It is commonly felt that students need to be geared up to be competitive and equipped with skills of one-upmanship. there is fierce competition in the market place. By not encouraging competition are we preparing children adequately? By educating children in an atmosphere where adults do not control them through fear, rewards and punishment, will they not become misfits in society ? Goodness alone is not enough to earn a livelihood does one not need the killer instinct ?

It is necessary to answer these questions unambiguously. It is not enough if the answers are to be found in Krishnamurti's writings or talks. The answers need to be held among the staff and shared by parents and senior students with a sense of clarity. It is this that can be called the endeavour at The School. An attempt to create an atmosphere where Teacher and Parent can experience the invitation to enquire into life's questions, where students encounter the possibility of questioning the norms of society and understanding their own conditioning. One can then venture to ask other questions:

- Religions, nations, groups are expressions of division between human beings. Is there a way of living without such a division in the consciousness?
- Money power, status act as motivations for human beings exerting themselves. Is there a source of action beyond self interest as the motivation?
- We see around us people, trees, skies and living things. We get used to everything and become creatures of habit. Getting habituated we become mechanical in our outer and inward responses. Is there a way of living which is not mechanical ?
- We see that the creation of an image is very useful for making houses bridges, aeroplanes, toys etc. We also see that images come in the way of relationship. Is there an intelligent way of living where we do not make images where unnecessary?

- Human beings feel hurt when insulted and when thought ill of by another. Is there a way of living where one does not feel hurt?

The school has come upon the understanding that there is lot for all of us to learn about conversation. This learning and the conscious creation of opportunities is a special feature of the school. Conversations in different formats are considered very important by the teaching staff of the School. For example we have meetings, discussions conversations among:

- a class of 25 students,
- a group of 100 students of middle and senior school,
- a group of 25 parents and about 10 teachers with or without students present,
- the full group of teachers meeting fort nightly,
- outgoing class 12 and the full staff body

Sitting down together in small groups and large, there is an immense challenge in creating and fostering an atmosphere where people can genuinely speak about their actual experience. Fear of retributions or rebuke will not permit this. Also fear of one's peers and their views will block true expressions. Thus one is constantly knocking on the doors of our conditioning about authority and the need to belong to a group.

Such conversations can begin from a situation or a problem. There must be inherent in the conversation, a searching movement of observation, a movement away from the visible. There are enough opportunities in daily life to be able choose one or two for examination. With Matters like jealousy, bullying, insecurity, belonging to a group, entertainment, interest in boys / girls, fear etc are never far from the daily experience of students.

It is also possible to acontextually invite an exploration of fear, prejudice, insecurity, pride, comfort, success etc. It is often felt that we must talk about things which are relevant as and when they come up. There is no use inviting students to a 'philosophical' enquiry. There is a strong case however for speaking about fear when one is not in the grips of fear, knowing that it is there beneath the surface. And there is little point in speaking about it when one is actually afraid. These are the explorations into human life and living that pose the biggest challenge to the adult because he has not ended the problem within himself. It is here that the greatest courage, determination and honesty are called for and a willingness to sensitively explore the human condition in a language, in a manner that the young can relate. Krishnamurti has said, 'As you speak you learn.' To hold the invitation to explore, speak and to go beyond words is the ever present challenge.

One could say that this is a school which has become aware of the extraordinarily strong bonds of conditioning and is constantly looking for ways in which the challenge of education can be addressed without becoming diminished by the experiences of human society. Society in its structure has never been what it is today. And human beings have never been very different from what they are today. Thus the challenge of education is to address that which is not rooted in time through structures and ways that are of the time, the present time. A school in the present needs to learn to respond to changes. It also needs to learn to respond to the context as a whole and not in a fragmented piecemeal way. We have attempted to find ways of addressing the 'patterns of the city' through academic and experiential inputs. It is so easy to get trapped in the world of man made things and lose appreciation for things of nature and things not made of thought. There have been significant steps that the school has been able to initiate. We have introduced Environmental Studies as an

optional subject in classes 11 and 12. A special programme has been created which takes class 11 students through camping for a week, travel and visits to projects like the Narmada Valley and a 3 week stay on the School Farm in a village about 70 km from Madras. A self study package is also being tailored for this age group. Our search for interaction between students on non competitive platforms has been very rewarding - the drama festival, symposium and the mixed basketball league have been contexts which have brought hundreds of students from other schools to participate in these events at our school. We are in the process of reorganizing the Junior school in such a way that students of different ages learn and play together. This endeavour has got off to a very fulfilling start with great enthusiasm on the part of the teachers and the parents.

In the Silver Jubilee year The School appears poised with determination to continue exploring the challenge of K education. There is at this juncture an awareness that the form, structure and methodologies could transform into completely new shapes and contours.. For the information of people interested in educating children in The School, application for scholarships are entertained on the basis of family income and other circumstances.

- G. Gautama