



the newsletter

The School KFI, Chennai

Issue #3

July, 2014

From the Editor

Welcome to the third and last issue of The Newsletter from The School KFI, Chennai for the academic year 2013-14. This issue again is a result of the time, contribution and support of the teachers.

One of the salient contexts in this newsletter is of the field trips. Every year the class 12 students, in their farewell addresses unfailingly mention the deep influences of these trips through their school years. As a precursor to the trip reports in this issue, here are the voices of the students on some of these trips against the backdrop of J Krishnamurti's thoughts on education.

"Education has no meaning unless it helps you to understand the vast expanse of life with all its subtleties, with its extraordinary beauty, its sorrows and joys."

- J Krishnamurti, 'This matter of Culture', Chapter 1

"...a sense of relationship in which there is not only a verbal statement of affection and concern but also this sense of communion which is not verbal. It is a sense that we are all together, that we are all human beings and we are all living on this extraordinary, beautiful earth."

- 'The Whole Movement of Life is Learning', J Krishnamurti's letters to his schools

"...you learn a great deal by watching, watching the things about you, watching the birds, the tree, watching the heavens, the stars, the constellation of Orion, the Dipper, the Evening star. You learn just by watching not only the things around you but also by watching people, how they walk, their gestures, the words they use, how they are dressed."

- J. Krishnamurti, Letters to the Schools Volume 2, 15th November 1983

"I was struck by the self-sufficient farm. I never thought it was possible"
 "How trusting the villagers were to let their small child walk alone with us through the entire market excursion!"

"We took access to water for granted till the trip where our baths were rationed to one a day!"

- Nilakkottai trip, Class 9

"Is real integration happening?" - On seeing visitors clapping for a person with hearing and speech challenges

- Maharashtra trip, class 11

"I enjoyed listening to the sound of bamboo. I learnt how to stay alone. I learnt how to focus"

"I learnt how to live together. I learnt how to live alone"

"We had fun and we learnt about ourselves and about one another"

"I think the trip was about helping each other, working in a group and understanding each other. I learnt new things about myself and my classmates. I think everything we did taught me that"

"I learnt to speak to everyone in my class. I learnt to take care of my own problems. I could go and do things by myself"

- Mamandur Trip, Middle School MAG

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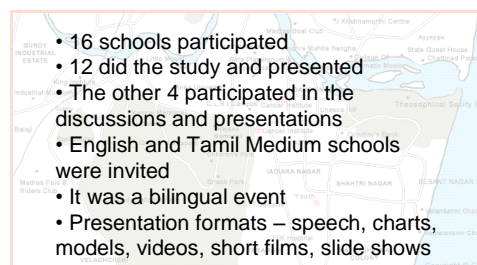
- * An Evening of Folk * Class 12 trip
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Symposium

Started 15 years back, the Symposium is a platform for young people (class 9) from different schools to come together and look at issues and concerns related to the city in which they live in a meaningful and non-competitive way.

This year's topic: Our Neighborhood Atlas

The objective of the symposium is to enable direct learning through observations, conversations and interviews. Through a study of the status of their neighbourhood, the students realize their responsibility towards it and understand their roles as members of a civic society.



Format

- Study
- Presentation of findings
- Discussion on the topic
- Presentations by guest speakers and resource persons



Learnings

The children were surprised to learn about the many facilities and amenities the government provides for us and were exposed for the first time to their role as citizens (users of these facilities) and what they could do.

Keepers of the Green Estate - Interview

They are a duo with striking contrasts. One very silent, the other talkative. One trained by years of working in a "structured" garden, the other by years of search for the 'right' kind of work. One knows the trees, plants and shrubs by their names and the other by their nature. However what they both share is their love for flora and fauna, a parenthood for the greens of the school campus and a loyalty and attachment to the school. **Kathirvel Anna (K)** and **Samikannu Anna (S)** have had very differing lives but their paths crossed briefly at the Theosophical Society gardens before they became partners at managing the gardens and the wilds of the school campus.

Samikannu Anna, who hails from Vizhippuram, served briefly as a watchman at the school, left and rejoined in 1992 as a gardener. He also remembers that Kathirvel Anna joined the school a few years after he did. Kathirvel Anna whose hometown is Vedanthangal knows that it is definitely more than 15 years since he joined the school and that he retired five years back. However when it comes to the trees they are both very accurate. They know who got them each of the saplings and when each of them was planted. Sitting in the visitors' room near the office both of them took me on a virtual tour of the campus marking the coordinates of each of the large trees.

Q: How did you happen to take up gardening?

A: K: It found me. I joined the Theosophical Society (TS) 20 years before joining the school and learnt everything about gardening and trees in the two decades there. I have worked only at these two places and always in the gardens. I handed the banyan and peepul tree saplings to a former prime minister when she visited the TS for planting. I was also a part of the team that revived the fallen Banyan Tree at the TS

S: I started herding and grazing cattle at the age of 8, tried my hand at farming at the age of 12 on leased land. I did many odd jobs, small businesses for many years during which I also learnt to dig and construct wells, tend to coconut fields and banana plantations

Q: How did the campus come to house the trees it does?

A: K&S: The trees were brought in by the Akkas, Annas, children, parents and the two of us over the years. Some have also been gifted to the campus by friends of the school. Of course many have germinated on their own.

Q: What is special about the trees on the campus?

A: K&S: Most of the trees we have are medicinal. We have over the years tried to get different kinds of trees. So today we have coconut palms, banana, lime, cotton, wood apple, neem, frangipani . . . a very unique mix of trees which could be the reason we have just diversity in the birds on campus!

Q: What is the most challenging part of your work?

A: K&S: To care for the saplings like caring for newborns till they become independent. We have seen many live grand lives and die, many that do not make it at all, and most still stand tall and pretty on the campus. Even when they do not flower or go bare with no leaves, they are all our trees, our children.

Q: Could you think of some interesting moments at school?

A: K&S: The most enjoyable moments are when we help the children with their gardening composting activities. And children who just want to know more about the trees and plants. We are always amazed at the many questions the children pose. Their excitement and impatience when they take our help to plant something and see it grow is very endearing.

Q: What has the school given you?

A: K: An opportunity to work with children and teach them gardening
S: The school taught me to save money, and gave me a sense of stability and security

Today Kathirvel Anna tends to the gardens and trees full time while Samikannu Anna teams up with him for part of the day and works in the maintenance department for the other part of the day. Both of them are equally proud of the bicycle that the school has gifted them.

Q: What does the school mean to you?

A: K: The Akkas, Annas and the children. Their love and respect for me.
S: I have never been in a place for very long till I came here. Now I know that I would like to be here for the rest of my life

"Do you know that even when you look at a tree and say, 'That is an oak tree', or 'that is a banyan tree', the naming of the tree, which is botanical knowledge, has so conditioned your mind that the word comes between you and actually seeing the tree? To come in contact with the tree you have to put your hand on it and the word will not help you to touch it. "

– J Krishnamurti, *Freedom from the Known*, 25

Wednesday Assembly

Daily morning assemblies are a time for coming together to sing, listen and share ideas. However Wednesdays are about not just that! Every Wednesday the students of the Middle and Senior School participate in discussions and present before an audience plays, project presentations, reports on field trips, quizzes and other creative activities in what they call the **'Wednesday Assembly'**. Artists and guests involved in various fields of work are also invited for lecture demonstrations. Here is a snapshot of some of the assembly topics and activities for the academic year 2013-2014.

2013-2014						
WEDNESDAY	WEDNESDAY	WEDNESDAY	WEDNESDAY	WEDNESDAY	WEDNESDAY	WEDNESDAY
			0 New student introductions	0 'Drama Fest Curtain Raiser' – a short preview of the school's play	0 'Maths in Kolam' – by a Professor from the University of New York	0 'What's the good word?' game with students and teachers in unique team combinations
0 Story telling - by Prakriti Foundation	0 Clean Sabarmati Project- by an ex-student who is now a part of the project	0 Independence Day guest address – "India's relations with its neighbors and what does the future hold for us?" – by a representative from The Hindu	0 Open House with the students and teachers where they may raise any question or concern relating to their school and their lives at school for the group to reflect upon	0 A scavenging drive of the campus and display by the middle school - looking for paper, sharp objects, plastic and bottles –and understanding the school's impact on its immediate environment	0 'Math in life – how to connect math to life' - by a Guest Speaker	0 'Trains and Locomotives – the experience of traveling and different types of trains' – by a friend of the school
0 Presentation on their Wardha trip – by Class 11	0 Small group discussions on newspaper articles – what do they say, why do they find a place in the newspaper? etc	0 Language Assembly – presentations in Tamil, Hindi and Sanskrit (songs, poems, drama etc) – by the Middle School	0 Western classical music performance by 14 students and teachers	0 Shadow play – by class 9	0 'The Telengana Issue' – presentation by a teacher of the school	0 Indian classical dances Bharatanatyam and Kathak performance by students
0 'The Dabbawalas of Mumba'i – presentation by a teacher of the school	0 'History of wind energy and how it came about' – presentation by a teacher of the school	0 Making a calendar for the new year with materials found in the campus – barks, twigs, leaves, fruits etc – by each student	0 Western Music performance – by students	0 Indian Classical Music performance – by students and teachers	0 Art Assembly – making of 100 scrolls by the students for the Art Display	0 Presentation on Nilakottai trip – by class 9

Class IX trip to Nilakottai

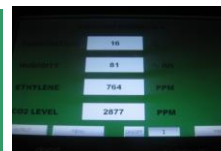
Trip objective: To study how the geography of a place is related to the flora, fauna, people, occupation, agricultural practices, commerce and economy.



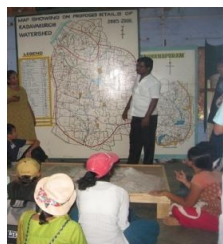
Organic farming as a solution to an arid climate. Chemical farming is water intensive! - study of and interactions and conversations at a model farm



Renewable sources of energy – a biogas plant at an energy sufficient farm



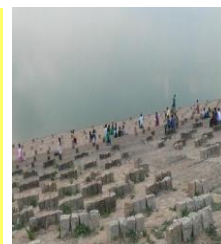
Visit to four local industries to understand the economic drivers



Watershed management by CIRHEP (the host for the students) – different techniques of watershed management and conservation structures, integrating and involving the community - earthen dams, village management committees, ownership of forests and water



Drawing contour lines for contour bunds. Learning how to read maps



Contrast study – arid Nilakottai vs. the water fed Vaigai basin – dry vs. wet cropping, primary and secondary occupations, difference in the economy of the two regions.



Flower trade is the mainstay of the town's commerce – visit to the largest flower market in India! It also defines occupations and lifestyles – interaction with families involved in the trade



Living the local life – picking flowers



Trek to an elevation of 800 m using compass and maps

News from the Campus

The Animal Shelter

Early this academic year the Junior School teachers noticed some activity between the banyan tree and the quadrangle. Every time there would be a play break or free time a group of heads and hands would get to work in the sand. It turned out that this group, deeply concerned about animal life and eager to make a difference with their hands were building small trenches, digging small pits to make what they called their hospital for insects, adhoc birdbaths and even erected boards saying 'silent zone!' When the teachers encouraged them to put their minds and hands to work on paper instead, the group came up with a blue print for an animal hospital!

What the Junior School teachers and the principal saw in the blue print was not just the children's enthusiasm and passion for the smaller creatures around them but also the scope for a new learning methodology. They saw that the age group exhibited a keenness to work with their hands, that it calmed their minds, made them work cohesively in groups and face challenges and find solutions through the tasks.

Thus originated the idea of the animal shelter, a building project of the Junior School. The children of class 2 to 4 who volunteered for the project were given a few days to think over their decision and even experiment to understand the tediousness of the job. They had to weigh their interest in the project against the loss of free time or play time because this project was to be completed during school hours without impinging on class time.

The animal shelter stands strong and proud, near the dining hall, the result of a week of grit, hard work and enthusiasm of a group of junior school children. This shelter houses any abandoned, stray or injured bird or animal till it finds the proper medical care or safe home.

The idea of building the bird baths as a part of the ES curriculum also found its origin in this story.



There is something 'happy-sad' about farewells. They are symbols of an end and a beginning. This year as every year, the school said goodbye to yet another batch of students and parents.

The farewell event was for two days – day 1 hosted by class 11 and overflowing with gifts from the middle and senior school students and day 2 hosted by the school for the parents and students.

Day 1 – Gifts Galore!

Day 2 is a more formal occasion. Attended by the parents and students of class 12 and the teachers, every student of class 12 speaks for 3 minutes about:

- How do they see themselves in five years?
- What learning will they carry with them in life?

Two teachers speak on behalf of the teachers. Every student was presented the book "Think on these things" by J Krishnamurti. The day concluded on a 'high tea' note.

<p>A video of various happenings in school with pictures of class 12</p>	<p>Goodbye songs in Tamil, Hindi, Korean and English</p>
<p>A game with the class 12 Songs for the class 12</p>	<p>A unique Square Dance where class 12 was invited to join Handmade cards for each class 12 student using materials from the campus</p>

A bird in the bath is worth many a brick!



The bricks of the pedestal of the three new bird baths on campus have a story to tell. Of little hands from the Junior School that enthusiastically laid and cemented the bricks of the pedestal to anchor the bird bath that would be theirs to look after. Each MAG class of junior school built one bird bath.

An extension of their third term ES (Environment Study) topic on birds, the bird baths found company in a bird feeding tray as well.

The Fruits of Science

In the last term, the fruit break of the Middle and Senior School transformed into a science lab some for a few weeks as class five presented their individual projects titled 'science in action' through toys and models that they had made.

What did they learn?

- That science works!
- How inventions happen
- What it takes to make discoveries
- How research hypotheses are conceived and validated

Some of the toys presented:

- Electric Lift
- Steam boat
- Solar fan
- Wooden moving toys
- Types of pulleys
- Climbing rabbit
- Newton's colour disc
- Model airplane
- Toys with optical illusions
- Working motors
- Kaleidoscope
- Hovercraft with a balloon
- Car with a balloon
- Paper clapper
- Sewing machine
- Biogas plant

Preparation:

- Choice of a concept
- Ideation to come up with a toy or model based on the concept
- Preparation of a blue print before execution (by some students)
- Working with all teachers including the senior school teachers

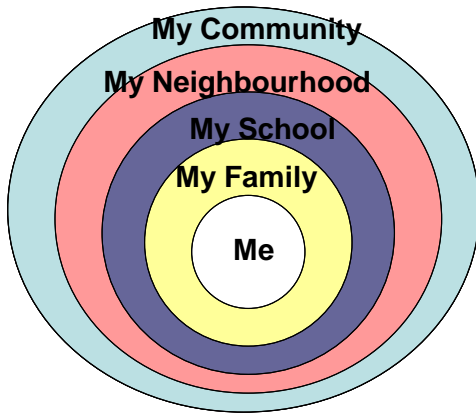
Presentation:

- Toy's name
- Materials used
- How did they do it?
- How did they work on it?



Class 1 Field Trips

Class 1 trips are a part of their ES curriculum structured thus:



My Family	Trip to Dakshin Chitra
My School	Campus Walk
My Neighbourhood	A slow bus ride of the school neighborhood
My Community	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A longer bus ride to look at community helpers • Visit to the school office • Trip to the fire station at Teynampet • Visit to the Adyar Post Office

Simultaneously the flora and fauna also are introduced as a part of the student's immediate world:

Santhome Aquarium	:	Fishes
Guindy Snake Park	:	Snakes
Guindy Zoo	:	Animals

The ES curriculum culminated in a community helpers' parade during a morning assembly where every child of Class 1 came dressed as a community helper of their choice and presented the helper's role.

Water – Mango, Class I



- Water stories from home
- Water cycle through a story and a model by the entire class
- Water sports – conversation
- Water habitat – trip to aquarium
- Saving water, water pollution – conversations



- Experiments**
- Osmosis – flower colored by colored water
 - Sprouting seeds
 - How a water filter works
 - Egg floating on salt

Junior School Project

The core of learning in primary school is DISCOVERY. This year's project themes for classes I to IV was on every day materials. In the two weeks running up to the presentation day, the children worked with their hands to discover, understand and create from the materials – **water, clay, cloth and wood**. Presentation day is but a culmination. The actual event is during the two weeks when the children unravel the topics and dig as deep as they can to find answers and ask more questions. This is a snapshot of their two weeks' exploration.

Wood – Jamun, MAG



- Ancient tree song sung before chopping trees
- Wood in daily life – specimens from home
- Videos on products from wood – paper, pencils etc
- Learning to make Paper Mache
- Working with wood – cutting, sawing, sawdust,
- Experiments with water
- Wood craft – by each child



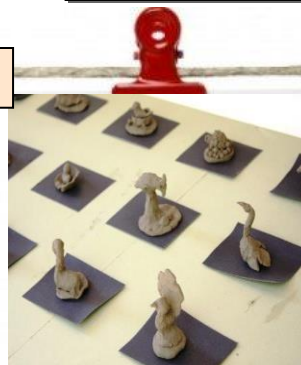
Fibre/Cloth – Peepul, MAG



- Origin of cloth – conversations, books
- Hands on activities – spinning, weaving, stitching, knitting, tie and dye, block printing
- Non violent silk – videos and conversations
- Machination and its economic and societal impact – conversations
- Cloth and fibre in daily life – samples from home



Clay – Banyan, MAG



- Modeling with clay
- Visit to Kalakshetra to see kiln and baking
- Working with clay – clay paintings, clay masks, models of old jars and pots
- Grain of clay through a microscope
- Everyday clay at home
- properties, states, formation, history of clay - books and conversations

An Evening of FOLK - Songs, Tales, Dances

As the school day nears its close, I hear singing from class 1 and I hear a Tamil song that we sang as part of our **Junior School Parent's Day** program. The familiar sound of singing brought a smile to my face, as I remembered the evening not so long ago when the children staged a wonderful performance, and all the practice and work that went into making the evening such a wonderful one.

The children had been practicing for a few days and the school had transformed into a hive of super energetic individuals. Where the teachers used to walk fast, they seemed to have sprouted wings and seemed to be all over the place – singing, dancing with the children, discussing costumes, props etc. We heard talk about **Villu Pattu, fisherman songs, Nautanki style, Scottish dance and Turkish songs**, and many more. The theme was to be Folk – stories, singing and dancing from all over the world. Akkas and Annas, not only from the Junior School but from Middle School and Senior School as well were frequently spotted with the children, joining at work and play. And then there was the parents' group that came in to work on the props; mango trees, boats, donkeys, pots - nothing was impossible for them.

All the children were part of one group or the other and soon we saw that the Tamil playgroup was reciting the Nautanki play lines and vice versa. The plays were then improvised along with the children, they heard the stories first and then they had a go at picking characters and making up dialogues for themselves as per the story. Slowly as the script with dialogues evolved the children were given their roles and rehearsals began. The Akkas went to meetings and came back with newer inputs that were incorporated. The school was filled with music and laughter, dancing and some hissing and muttering too as cues were delivered for forgotten lines.

The stage was being decorated simultaneously and the children from class 8 were painting red, black, white and several colors, while all the groups also got a few class 8 volunteers to deal with the stage management. The art department was busy with the stage decorations, directing and working with the children. It was dress rehearsal day and out came the children in all their fabulous costumes and tried out the sequences on stage. We had a few parents, Akkas and Annas sitting around with feedback sheets and carefully making note of changes required, even as they were beaming at the little performers. The feedback was incorporated and the final changes made. Invitations were being folded and being sent to the parents, announcements and reminders were given at the morning assemblies for Middle and Senior School to make sure that the parents got the invites and would be welcome to join in the celebrations. Classes 11 and 12 were all excited about coming dressed in sarees and traditional attire/suits for the evening.

Over these few days, the children and teachers spent a lot of time together in practice sessions and in the informal environment that ensued there was more opportunity and time for talking tall stories, braiding hair, dancing and singing, acting silly and laughing with and at each other! The spirit continued well into the evening of the performance when moustaches were drawn and turbans and sarees were draped. While some of the little men wanted moustaches there were few others who were shy to sport one. Class 8 swung into action reliving with great delight how they had felt in their time when they had to sport moles and moustaches and soon the shy ones did not seem to mind it any more.

Finally it was time for the show. I have been watching the parents' day show for three years now as a parent, always wondering how the magic came alive. This time around I was all set knowing what to expect, all the workings of how we got here and how much the whole school and parents had worked together so intently and harmoniously to stage this show. And then the show began. As I watched, it felt as if everything was anew, the show was simply not a sum total of all that I had seen over the last few days but much more, there was a palpable difference and what can I say but that the magic came alive yet again!!

- *Perspective, by a teacher trainee*

A Walk with the Birds



The MAG classes of Junior School had birdwalks as a part of their Environmental Studies for the last term. We take you back to join the young birdwatchers on their discovery!

What to look for?

- Size
- Shape (beak, feet, tail, wings)
- Special marks or colours
- Behaviour
- Habitat
- Calls

What to take along?

- A small notepad
- A pencil
- A bird book
- Water bottle
- And of course a pair of binoculars!

How to watch birds?

- Make a sketch of the bird noting down as many features of the bird as possible.
- Check with the bird book later or consult an expert.

From the orientation workshop

Through the birdwatcher's eyes:

- Purple rumped sunbird
- Copper smith barbet
- Eurasian golden Oriole
- Asian Koel
- Crow
- Parakeet
- Babblers
- Mynah
- Kingfisher
- Pond heron



- Ash minivet
- Bulbul
- Spotted owl
- Brain fever bird
- Woodpecker
- Cattle egret
- Moor hen
- Magpie robin
- Black drongo
- Rufus tree pie

Bird Lessons

- Babblers and squirrels are natural partners
- Owlets are smaller owls, not young ones of owls
- Small birds nest close to the aggressive drongo that keeps large birds away
- The long tailed green parrots we see are actually paroquets

The bird walk started at 7 am with listening to bird calls under the peepul tree outside the dining hall. The trail wound its way through the wild badam to the pond and back to the dining hall by 8 am for a special breakfast with hot choco-malt drink! What the highlight was of the unusual early morning start at the school for the children is anybody's guess!

Muziris – History Beckons, Class VIII

History



Class 8 went on their history study trip to Ernakulam from the 22nd to 27th of February 2014. The focus of the trip was Muziris, an ancient sea port and an urban centre that has existed from around 2nd Century AD and is being excavated by the Kerala Council for Historical Research (KCHR) in the areas of Paravur, Chennamangalam, Kottapuram and Pattanam.

The aim was to explore the connection between trade, people and culture through the study of different excavation sites, places of worship, craft centres, architectural remains of forts and palaces and a spice market. The class saw the co-existence of many religions and communities all living in harmony, how important spices were to trade relations and archaeology at work.

Landscape



Commerce



Culture



Highlights of the Trip

Walking early morning through a busy market that probably existed in continuity from many centuries ago.

Walking through a spice market.

Visiting what is said to be the oldest mosque in India.

Visiting in one day: a synagogue, church, temple and seeing a mosque all within a radius of 1 km.

Speaking with Dr. Cherian who heads the KCHR archaeological study of Pattanam and its surroundings and seeing a dig in the progress.

Class XII trip to Rishi Valley School, Madanapalle

Every year, the students of Class 12 get to choose and plan a retreat trip at the end of their academic year. The intention of this trip is to give space for conversation and quiet reflection before the end of their journey in school. This year they chose to visit one of their sister schools, the Rishi Valley School at Madanapalle. Their first evening at the school, they watched a movie, Amandla, a story of how song and music played an important role in the movement against apartheid in South Africa. In the following days they went on '360 Degree' walk in the valley around the school, played some spirited games of basketball and football, in mixed teams and shook a leg at an evening of folk dance with the Rishi Valley students. They had conversations on Environmental Science and the role of the Rural Research Centre at Rishi Valley and also visited the centre. The class 12 students interacted with the children at the outreach school and taught them a few school songs. The students also spent time to understand the health problems of the rural people of Madanapalle from those involved with the Rural Research Centre.

There was ample time, space and scope for conversations with the students and teachers of Rishi Valley be it on examinations, learning, education or life. Ofcourse the trip would not have been complete without the quiet times and times alone that each student had – sitting by oneself under a tree, walking around the campus, reading or sketching. In the few days of the trip their minds were at work and yet their minds were at ease.

"Through inquiry, through search, through exploration, inevitably the mind becomes quiet, and then the problem gives its full significance; and it is only when the mind is quiet that there is understanding of the significance of the problem, . . ."

– Reflections on the Self, J Krishnamurti, Fourth Talk in Bombay, March 1950