

Education for 21st Century: Reflections from an Ashram School

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ABSTRACT

The article takes a close look at the Eastern and Western foundations for an ideal education in contemporary world. It makes a comparative account of prevailing system of education with that of earlier system of education and tries to communicate to the reader that the aim of true education is to create harmonized and happy human beings. *Gurukul* system of education precisely meets this aim where, by sacrifice and dedication, education is imparted under monitored conditions close to the environment by a mentor. To drive home the point Swamy Mick (Guruji) uses his own personal experiences of running the Gurukul School, located at Dhajia, near Darjeeling, and looks at the theoretical foundations of a similar venture undertaken by Meenakshi at Puvudham near Dharmapuri, in Tamilnadu, South India.

Keywords: *Gurukul*, Mentor, Environment, Rousseau, Psychology

Dear Meenakshi,¹

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Namaste, and thank you for sending a copy of your thesis on Educational Psychology. More than the quotations from western authorities on education, your own observations and understandings of children are worthy of appreciation.

You have asked for comments and now after reading carefully your 1st version and 2nd version of *Creating a Society that Cares* there are a couple of points which seem worth mentioning although it is not certain how both of these may be received by you. We will learn how serious our relationship is when we increasingly reveal and express our thoughts to each other, on important matters.

First of all: You do have a personal prejudice as the result of your own painful childhood experiences. You stress at length the unhappiness and frustration which you experienced in school in Bombay. You seem to have been exposed to particularly insensitive pedants just at the time you were already suffering the shock of shifting from a village to the big city. This has led you to a general condemnation of "schooling" which may not be universally valid even when teachers are not well versed in the principles which you espouse; many of which agree with what Nataraja Guru teaches.

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The closer we are to Nature the nearer we are to Truth therefore schools away from city-centres, where teachers are stimulators who draw out awareness (not pedants who drive in information only in order to prepare for success in competitive examinations) generally create better character and more balanced individuals, although perhaps not the greatest achievers in the modern “rat-race”.

You have quoted all the popular authorities on education theory: Rousseau, Pestalozzi, Froebel, Montessori, John Dewey. Each of these prominent philosophers based his/her theories on the experience he/she had gathered while working with and observing children. They have all contributed some very valuable insights from which any serious educator can benefit but for our own work, we long ago concluded that we will seek guidance from one alone among them; namely Jean Jacques Rousseau.

Rousseau is the one philosopher among western thinkers who had the same attitudes which Eastern Gurus adopted. He was an idealist who saw man as a creature of Nature, born perfect; corrupted by human society. This agrees with the Upanishadic teachings and is why all the Gurukuls of ancient India were established and remained hidden away in the forest. The precursors of the Upanishads were the Aranyakas (forest treatises). These were the recorded insights of people who had stayed away from the corruption of human society and had delved deeply into their own consciousness.

Today we are obsessed with the outside world of objectivity. Is it any wonder that people do not know anything about themselves? (Christ: “What is the use of gaining the world if you lose your Soul?”) Rousseau divided Education into 4 stages: Negative, Naturalistic, Pragmatic and Idealistic. You have some intuitions about Negative Education but the intuitions cannot be followed through because your reference point is still society.

We will repeat ad nauseam what Nataraja Guru said: “Society is hopeless, no one can correct it. Do not waste your time trying. If you think you have a better idea, *try to do it!*” Thus Guru spent a lifetime trying to make Gurukuls in which people who agreed with him could live away from and outside of established society, all of their lives. Guru often said:

“I made *Gurukul* because I thought there might be a few people like me.” From this we understand that Guru did not expect his conception of Gurukul to ever become palatable to the masses who are always looking for some new fad.

Gurukul was intended for people who are searching for an alternative to prevalent society and are willing to pay a high price for that. The price is to be paid by sacrifice and dedication, not with ill-earned or cheaply valued rupees or dollars.

By contrast with your experience in Bombay where you felt frustrated because you preferred to climb trees and repair bicycles, learning from Nature and by “doing” rather

than sitting in a classroom, memorizing information, it must be said that circumstances conspired to provide a relatively better childhood school experience to Guruji and the main reason for that is: There were a lot of elements of Negative Education in that upbringing and in the environment of a rural township which did not even have a market and had very few human beings spread over a very vast area of land which was still used mostly for agricultural and dairy farming purposes, the influence of Nature and things natural was very strong.

To a large extent Negative Education means “teaching nothing”. Rousseau advises mothers to put a fence around their children and protect them from the influences of society. For Rousseau, society is poison. The pomp and personality cult of all “refined” societies is highly detrimental to the formation of balanced, contemplative character. As you have noted, the child is learning at an amazing rate, long before she/he ever sees a school. The child can learn only what is present in its immediate environment therefore the need by a conscientious mother to protect the child from wrong influences and fill the child’s “world” with proper stimuli.

Without knowing what they were doing, by virtue of being citizens of a rural community which was still participating in the activity for which New Jersey was named “the Garden State”, many people in the environment in which Guruji grew up were contributing elements of Negative Education and Naturalistic Education. Growing up far away from the crass consumerism which fills the consciousness of city children at a very tender age, protected from many of the vices of “refined” society, contact with the rough but natural people of an undeveloped “country” area gave the opportunity for certain inner value appreciations to form which took deep root and have never been displaced by the superficial values which misguide individuals to view their lives as a show for other people. The attitudes of doing things with full attention, of doing things which one enjoys and thus doing them well, simply because one enjoys doing that; the satisfaction of having planned, even a very small work and of then having executed it, oneself were all early lessons for a boy who grew up with very little disturbance from competition with others and entirely without attention destroying electronic gadgets. Surrounded by innumerable animals, both wild and domestic who were both friends and teachers of responsibility; enjoying, free of cost, the exaltations of swimming in forest streams and lakes, camping in thick forests without any worry of contact with dangerous human beings; delighting in the lessons taught by the rabbits, deer, pheasants, and foxes which still abundantly populated those regions at that time, much of life was like an extended summer camp, every day. With so many plant and animal friends with whom to be occupied, that there were only few human beings in that growing life and almost no one for whom to make a show, attitudes of self-contentment developed which have served well in the pursuit of happiness for the whole of life. Today, at age 66, we think that we have experienced some of the benefits of being protected from much contact with human society at a young age. Thus we are learning that our own life is a proof of the theories which Rousseau promulgated. Nataraja Guru fully agreed with

this aspect of education and incorporated it fully in the education of anyone who took up residence in Gurukul. To more fully clarify the attitude we are trying to practice, let us take one short quotation from Rousseau:

Would you like, therefore, to initiate and nourish in the heart of a young man the first movements of a nascent sensibility and turn his character towards a beneficial life and to bounty? Then do not allow to germinate in him pride, vanity, envy by the misleading picture of the happiness of men; do not expose at first sight before his eyes the pomp of courts and the feasts of palaces, the attraction of spectacles; do not make him promenade in social circles and in brilliant assemblies; do not show him the exterior of high life in society before he is in a state capable of appreciating it in itself. To show him the world before he understands humans, that would be not forming him, it would be to corrupt him, that would not be to instruct him, but to misguide him.²

Guru adds:

“It is not hard to notice how close a family resemblance this passage bears to what the ancient Indian educator conceived as the life of the Brahmachari (the initiate in the way of Brahman or the Absolute) in a Gurukula, a forest school where teacher and pupils lived together.”³

Given abundant opportunity to play in tree tops (and even construct tree houses with our own hands so that we could sleep in the trees at night), full days spent fishing and swimming in summer; in winter, skating, sometimes from early morning until night balanced the school experience because the youthful mind was enjoying the learning experience in both realms, the theoretical and the practical. Because we were given such rich amounts of time in Nature’s classroom, the time spent in school with a human teacher not only was not frustrating but was even interesting as a *means to understand things which had already been observed*. The circumstances of attending a small agrarian community school with not more than 25 or 30 students in a class, wherein every teacher from Kindergarten to Class 6 was a woman, most of whom were middle aged mothers who had learned much by raising up their own children and who rarely encouraged any kind of competition definitely helped to establish a solid foundation conducive to selfconfidence. These kindly caring women who all had raised up 2 or 3 children of their own had more knowledge of Child Psychology, gained by experience than our modern theoretically trained arrogant graduates of the state approved B.Ed. course.

The circumstances which followed have only confirmed the conviction that this early education created a foundation which was something solid and dependable.

² <http://isites.harvard.edu/fs/docs/icb.topic1105550.files/emileselections.pdf>

³ Nataraja Guru, *World Education Manifesto*, Varkala, East-West University of Brahmavidya, 1975.

Having reached Class 8 in the environment and conditions described above, there occurred a phenomenon which was common all over central and southern New Jersey in those years. Housing developers discovered this region and the desire by millions of Americans to get out of the cities stimulated the construction of tens of thousands of middle cost housing development homes which brought rapid increase in population to what had been sparsely inhabited agricultural communities. And what it brought were all city dwellers who had never touched the soil or an animal. Averse to all the traditional values of a farming community the children of these families of office and factory workers had nothing with which to manifest their personalities except fancy clothes, fashionable hairstyles and filthy language. From a rural village of 5,000 inhabitants this place grew to 5 times that number in the four years which corresponded to our High School years. Contact with these "city slickers" who knew and had all the "cool" things which were advertised on television made a farm boy feel ashamed of what had been the sources of his happiness until then and there followed several years of rather confusing experiences. After High School the next step was the State University where friendships were made with some very wealthy heirs to big money and it was noticed very soon that almost every one of such individuals was psychologically disturbed, addicted to some intoxicant or other form of escape from reality. The only ones who seemed safe from these vices were the ones who had decided that they had only one aim in life: "To be rich". It did not matter for these individuals what they studied or did, the only consideration was that the result should be exceeding material success.

Stuck in a city environment, surrounded by a shocking amount of drinking, drugs and sex (the ultimate University experience), trying out all of these things in order to know by personal experience, they were all found to be very shallow and void of lasting content. Fortunately at this time Henry David Thoreau came into the reading of this confused man's life and helped to bring about realization that the cause of all the pain and confusion was the conflict which was going on inside between the natural and non-competitive values of childhood years and this totally artificial, extroverted, extremely competitive way of life which is practiced by those who are or wish to be successful in the established system. Some solace was sought in working with slum-dwellers searching for some compensation in philanthropy. But the result of this was only to aggravate the pain when the abject misery and hopelessness of poor black people of the richest nation on Earth was intimately experienced. The alternatives of becoming a violent revolutionary dedicated to overthrowing such a degenerate system or leaving it entirely in order to search for the person or place that had a better system filled the mind for many months. These were the early days of cheap Indian spirituality and Mahesh Yogi had gathered many followers on college campuses. Thirty dollars bought one a "mantra" and with this one was supposed to be saved if he/she practiced "transcendental meditation". So this became one more man-made deceit to mislead those who were forever chasing "moksha" through every means except the right one: the path of rejecting the web of falsehood created by human society.

Trying to find the way back to Nature, a look at the kibbutz of Israel was attempted and more than one year was spent in communities where personal ownership was forbidden, material wealth of the commune was shared and all facilities were available to all members equally. Agricultural departments and animal husbandry departments were all experienced and found rewarding but ultimately, the principle of a state dedicated to a particular group of people, to the exclusion of other groups was unacceptable and the search for universal brotherhood and open-mindedness was continued. Overland journey from Turkey to India was undertaken after hearing about Nataraja Guru in Istanbul and the months of travelling through vast rural areas, villages, towns and cities, invited into the homes of rich and poor Christians, Muslims and Hindus along the way provided sufficient proof of the oneness of humanity so that upon reaching Kerala and meeting Nataraja Guru, it was like a grand home-coming rather than the reaching of a far off foreign destination. Guru had a universal vision on all topics and was dedicated to living outside of established society, permanently. There was no idea of reforming society. The intention of Gurukul life was to reform oneself. Gandhi also said: "You must be the change which you wish to see in the world." The intention of all of Guru's work was to found small communities where idealistic people could make a life away from and outside of the corruption, extroversion and hurtful competition of materialistic civilization.

The prime elements of Gurukul were: first, that study should be an essential part of life, every day; Second, that material wealth should be limited to *necessity* and if more than that is generated, it can be devoted to helping others attain to that same minimum/maximum ; Third, that it is natural and healthy for young people to be in contact with Nature and all things natural; that gardening and dairy farming are both healthful activities and pillars upon which to establish a self-sufficient community which is as independent from the bazaar as possible; and fourth, that disciples who are devoted to the same Guru will be necessarily bound to support and help each other because the bond between them is not personal, familial nor sectarian but purely on the basis of shared value and appreciation for each other's devotion to the same high cause and renunciation of personal benefit.

In such a community, all the a-social conditionings of youth found their proper expression. The early conditioning to be content with few human contacts, contentment to be occupied in the responsible activities which enable one to live free from obligations to the society outside of this idealistic community and the cultivation of a disciplined life with a strict schedule of necessary work, common study and individual contemplation all agreed with the experience that life should not be a show for others but rather a continuous development and unfolding of one's individual potential in such a way that it contributes to the *General Good* of the people, animals and environment in which one lives.

After years of Gurukul life, and much consideration of problems of the contemporary world it is our conclusion that we are not in need of very complicated theories of education, we do not need very expensive infrastructure in order to educate children well. We must keep them away from society as much as possible and help Nature express the unlimited diversity of talents which it deposits in human beings. We know that at some point in their lives our children will go to bigger schools/colleges. They will have to face competition and all the vices which human beings carry around *but* it is also thought that the value of enjoyable and enriching experiences in Nature, the years growing up in a noncompetitive community where co-operation and sharing are practiced as a way of life and the guidance of a Guru who has only their welfare in mind will leave impressions on their minds/Souls which may cause them to see through the Soul-killing superficiality of “refined” society and which may guide them back to genuine values after having some direct experience of the opposite.

You should give credit to Kahlil Gibran for his thoughts on children. You can give them your love but not your thoughts, for they have their own thoughts. You may house their bodies but not their Souls, For their Souls dwell in the house of tomorrow, which you cannot visit, not even in your dreams.⁴

We do not know what will come out of any child, we may be fortunate to be given an opportunity to participate in the opening of a unique flower and experience the Joy of watching it develop. Nothing should be expected and we may watch in wonder at what develops when the growing life is allowed to develop into what it is meant to be.

The second point is that you may not have recognized that there is a theoretical basis for the attitudes of the teaching method at Gurukul. That basis is stated clearly in one *principle*:

“Generally, normal children do enjoy, in fact thrive on learning.”

Unless terribly disturbed by murderously wrong teachers, most children enjoy being in school, together with other children and easily accept whatever a kind, gentle, enthusiastic teacher presents to them. There is so much “theory” and we do not wish to add more to an already unreadable mass. Also, we do not wish to talk about how to deal with “special children” (formerly called disabled, mentally retarded or sometimes uneducable). Rousseau said that he will give us the theory of how to create the perfect, balanced, sensitive human being. He admitted that no one can practice everything which he has suggested but he promised that the teacher who succeeded best would be rewarded with the best educated pupil. We accept that as true. We start with an ideal and then we work with it to the best of our ability and resources, circumstances and conditions. Normal children do tend to develop into what they were born to be when not disturbed by sick, emotional, prejudiced adults who fill them with their own

⁴ Kahlil Gibran, *The Prophet*, Ashwin J Shah (ed.), Bombay, Jaico Publishing, 1998.

conditionings before they have any chance to express the natural, healthy, unique contribution to God's Plenitude which each individual is intended to be.

You have quoted Piaget who wrote of "optimal time", something we would very much endorse. When we find a young person of 12-14 years old deciding by herself/himself to wake at 4:30 a.m. before other children because s/he has become enthusiastic to study/practice music, football or mathematics we know we have seen this "phenomenon".

When a child of U.K.G. comes and explains that she understood by herself that the multiplication table of 3 means that we add 3 to 3 and then again add 3 to 6 and keep on so, then we think it means that this child can learn this lesson. On the other hand, when the child is confronted with subtraction and is told that 3 taken away from 6 equals 3 and she replies: "Where did the 3 go, you say take away but tell me, where did 3 go?", we accept that maybe this child should not be forced to learn this lesson until some development has taken place. In the context of the vegetable garden there are infinite opportunities for teaching counting. 10 tomatoes, 6 cucumbers or 8 cabbages . . . there is no problem at all to teach the child to count when the object counted are things which are of interest. If the vegetables fail, counting sweets surely will not! We have made cards with multiplication sums on one side with the solution on the reverse. For our hostel children even kids of Nursery already play with these "games" and learn the multiplication tables as play even before they know what they are doing. By the time they come to that lesson in school, they will have already learned it as a game. You are an artist and you are especially interested in architecture so drawing and figures are a part of your teaching equipment. Guruji plays a little guitar and sings a little better than a frog so has used singing as an instrument for teaching even very small children to "speak" English. It works, sometimes with amazing results. The point being: "*Don't Make Fixed Rules.*" Each teacher must be who s/he is and use his/her own capacities to make the lessons for the children interesting and enjoyable.. Children love to learn with a teacher who knows how to make school a fun experience.

Another point is that no two children in a class are exactly the same but in a large school individual attention cannot/will not be given. If you ask: "Then what is the answer for large schools?", the reply is: "There is no answer. Factories are factories. Factories are good for making machines, robots, but not good for making sensitive, intelligent human beings. No one can work with thousands of children and even attempt any of these idealistic methods and if such is claimed in a Montessori School, it is mostly just a commercial advertisement.

Small is Beautiful is true in so many ways and in education it is especially a valid principle. If children live in a protected environment, away from the commercialism and constant exposure to excitement created by advertisement, if they are kept occupied with natural activities and are guided by a mentor who enjoys spending time with them, ways and means of teaching all the primary subjects will be discovered without

much difficulty.

There are children who are not ready to learn even the alphabet at the age of 5 years. We live in a village, people are not yet so aggressive and competitive as city-dwellers. We have left one boy in Nursery Class for 3 years, waiting for him to be ready to study. He did not wish to write anything and even was not speaking properly. He had not yet touched his own "optimal time". We asked his parents to be patient. Fortunately they trusted us and agreed to leave him to decide for himself. Ultimately he began to read and write, overcame his hesitation to speak and left Gurukul as a normal student. He has now completed High School, speaks and writes English with a good standard and in fact is here right now helping us with the children as a teacher and a friend of the children who comes at 7:00 every morning and plays with the children after school, staying also to help them with their homework until 7:00 p.m.. He has a very big body but is very gentle even with little children. *What do we think we have to make out of such People?* Is every doctor and every advocate a good person? Human beings interfere too much in the working out of "svadharma" which is the only path to lasting happiness and peace.

Nataraja Guru got a doctorate for his thesis *The Personal Factor in the Educative Process* in which Guru described the importance of the personal relationship between Guru and Sishya and stressed that it is so at every stage of the educative process. Although Nataraja Guru studied the writings and quoted extensively from the same authorities as you have done (Froebel, Pestalozzi, Montessori, John Dewey) it was Jean Jacques Rousseau who Guru found as the philosopher closest to his own appreciations. The main reason for this is one single factor. All the others are still thinking in terms of "saving the world". Rousseau alone condemns society as the greatest enemy of wisdom and all of his educational principles revolve around protecting the "growing plant" from wrong influences of society.

Nataraja Guru struggled all of his life to establish Gurukuls because Guru had concluded that "society is hopeless!" Guru said repeatedly: "Society is hopeless! No one can change it. Do not waste your time trying. If you think you have a better idea, try to do it!"

We have found this attitude to be very helpful for children as well. The children who are given to us to live in the hostel of Nataraj Gurukul are almost all disturbed by their own parents or by the loss of one/both of their parents (after which they did not receive proper care and love from anyone). Kept in Gurukul, maintaining minimum contact with any of the factors which caused their disturbance they become calm and surrounded by fellow students who study in a regular and relaxed manner, they soon adopt the same habit and begin to study without serious problem. The prime factor for this is simply: Guruji sits with them every day, morning and evening, doing lessons with them, reading story books and lessons together with them, playing educational

games with them, singing songs with them As often as possible when necessary works arise through which they can “experience” the lessons which they are learning in class, they are taken to the garden, the dairy or to the workshop to witness, touch and experience lessons which they are reading in their books. It also helps that they see an adult who is enjoying study himself and is enjoying studying with them. When a father sits watching a cricket or a football match on television while he shouts at his son to do his homework; when a mother sits watching soap operas on the television while shouting at her daughter to do her homework, we have the makings of tragedy filled with frustration and anger. At Gurukul there is no such problem for one simple reason: The Guru is the example of what he is encouraging the children to do. When we study we study together. When we watch a movie, we watch a movie together and when we work , we work together. Whether in the classroom, in the garden, in the workshop or simply doing the ordinary, everyday chores of a home, “doing together” rather than ordering others is a “magic formula” that works.

If it be said (as is often said): “But Gurukul is small. What is your answer for the larger society?” we have arrived back where we began: Society is hopeless. No one can change it. We will not waste our time trying. We are surrounded by Government schools in which teachers earn ten to twenty times the salary which we are able to pay our teachers but most of them are not in their classrooms 2 or 3 times a week. Many of them are doing a business on the side while collecting their Gov’t teacher’s salary (which by the way is forbidden by law). There is no one to stop this because those who might complain are relatives of the clever teachers who do this and they do not wish to spoil their “comfortable situation”. We had earlier tried to do something but found no support and in fact were threatened with dire consequences if we did not cease endangering their “comfortable situation”. We realized that what Guru had said was perfectly true and decided to keep away from all of this and simply do our own work as well as possible. Children of those same wretched teachers come to study in Gurukul (no one of them would ever keep their child/children in the Gov’t school where they teach and from which they derive their livelihood) and praise Guruji for his good and devoted labour! This is why Nataraja Guru said: “It is hopeless!”

When more people decide for themselves that they wish to do something which contributes to *General Welfare* rather than spend an entire lifetime seeking only personal benefit, the problem will solve itself. Until then, those who truly understand must continue silently to perform their own labour of love and be happy that they are making some contribution to making the world a better place. If efforts to force what one thinks is right result in violence or even death, what is the use? . As modern education is all “personality cult” and directed toward personal material benefit at the cost of all human values we are not interested in having anything to do with it. Gurukul is small, *Small is Beautiful*. Gurukul will remain small because few people are willing to be “left out” of the mad rush toward the “good life” as advertised/ promoted by western value orientated commercialization of every aspect of modern life.

No one can change this because the masses of humans have no higher value appreciations. Even highly accomplished academicians are often surprisingly attracted to very gross forms of self-indulgence. Masters of arts and geniuses in every field of science are remarkably abject and ignoble in their personal lives. Because of television, newspapers and Internet we are all learning about the very ungentlemanly often very base mentality and behavior of very important people of the world. *This is society*. The aristocrats of Europe were cruel but at least they had some culture. The Brahmins of India too could be very cruel but at least they made some effort to promote a life style intended to raise human beings above the passions of a brute. Today the world is ruled by the bourgeoisie. The only quality that one needs to belong to this class is that one has a lot of money. How one got his/her wealth there is no one to ask. The world has rarely or perhaps never seen such crudeness as the behavior of these morally uncultured people who parade themselves at the theatres and opera houses, appearance at which is supposed to convince everyone that they are "refined" and superior. In most cases it could not be farther from the truth. We are all living in a time when we can watch, every day, uneducated movie stars rise to high political positions on the basis of cheap popularity and then use their wealth to capture the government machinery, commit every conceivable crime and get away with it by virtue of their ill-gotten money power. Political murders have become everyday happenings and the excesses of police makes one wonder who are the bigger criminals, the goondas or the law enforcement officers.

The point: Where in all of this is the chance to turn an innocent young person towards a beneficial life which contributes to *general welfare*? Who in such an environment could be expected to decide to dedicate life for the *general welfare* of a country or the world? We have created an international system that almost guarantees the germination of and robust development of one-pointed selfishness. This is the great achievement of advanced materialistic society.

Surrounded by advertisements on television, on roadside hoardings and on the Internet with enticements to indulge in the worst forms of sensual pleasure; encouraged to eschew all forms of restraint and personal discipline, incited to exercise the worst forms of cleverness in order to advance oneself materially and directly or indirectly taught to worship those who have succeeded in the "get rich" game; what is the chance for a young person to form an upright and sincere character? How can people any longer dare to deny the obvious: *that we have created a monster which we are no longer in control of and this monster is eating our children, right under our noses*.

So, instead of being discouraged by the lack of interest in what we say and have done, we are determined to persevere and die trying to present an alternative. Rare individuals do decide to give up on this absolutely corrupt system and do decide to concentrate on changing (reforming) themselves. Yoga means balance and we have no goal for ourselves or for our children other than to practice moderation and balance in all aspects of life. A balanced routine of study/play/work continued with regularity

under the guidance of one who has no monetary interest but is genuinely concerned with the formation of decent human character, conducted in a secluded place rarely fails to painlessly produce decent students with good behavior but would young people who have been so educated wish to integrate themselves into the kind of corruption which prevails in every country of the world today?

So, we do not have the intention of being patriotic and do not think in terms of forming citizens to serve the nation. Our efforts are directed toward the formation of character which can dream of living a life which brings benefit to mankind in general, not to any individual or particular group. It will be the task and the mission of such an individual to discover how he/she will accomplish this.

As recommended by John Dewey who prescribed that schools of the future should have longer school days and shorter vacations from school we have practiced such thinking for twenty years. Our school is open to children who do not wish to live in our hostel and most of them do achieve a fairly good result in their academic work. But the real work of Guruji is with the children of million who live in the hostel with whom Guruji can spend 24 hours a day trying to influence their notions of good and bad and protecting them from the foul world of commercialized advertisement which treats them like mindless donkeys who have no other purpose than to consume all the totally unessential rubbish which is being manufactured in the world today. With all this unessential manufacturing we are not only destroying the environment of our one Mother Earth but we are also destroying the character millions of our children.

As we are always trying to do interesting things with the children, most of them are quite amenable to stay the whole year round and follow the routine of maintaining some study even on Saturdays, Sundays and holidays. It is mostly just a matter of a mentor who is willing and happy to spend so much time with the children. They cannot be expected to do something extraordinary unless they are given an example whom they can see is happy in doing that. We may convince young people to give up much pleasure and sacrifice much personal benefit *only* if we can convince them that the ultimate goal is greater happiness. The matching of name-form and the practice of describing in words correctly what one is thinking; the assimilation of concepts of time/space/causality as well as notions of absolute and relative are all learned best by doing all the normal plays and works which were part of every villagers practical life. Sedentary habits and the obsession with the Internet are the greatest impediments to the formation of simple common-sense. Common-sense, the sense of what is common, the appreciations and unprejudiced judgements which are normal for balanced human beings. There is nothing in society that conduces to the gaining of such balance and thus we agree with Nataraja Guru's statement: "Society is the worst enemy of a contemplative."

Modern people might have an aversion for quotations from ancient scriptures but with growing confirmation of the detrimental effects caused by wrong eating habits, lack

of regular natural physical exercise and the constant tension under which competitive contemporaries must live their lives we would like to close with a few verses from the Bhagavad Gita,⁵ that venerable canonical text which has so much valid wisdom to offer to anyone concerned with how to guide a child to become a happy human being.

“To one of proper food (habits) and recreation, who engages in activities in proper moderation, who wakes and sleeps in a well-regulated way, yoga takes its course painlessly.” Chap. VI verse 17

When the subdued relational mind stays in the Self itself, desireless of all desires, then (it) is said to be united. Whatever causes the changeful, unsteady mind to go out (again and again), from each such, restraining (it again and again) it should ever be led to the side of the Self. Such a yogi, verily of calmed mind, of pacified passion, who has become the Absolute, and free from all dross, comes to supreme happiness. Chapter VI verses, 17-18;26-27⁶

If the aim of true education is to create harmonized and happy human beings rather than millionaires or international celebrities who end their lives with suicide, perhaps we ought to give a moment's thought to these sage words. It may be said that these are practices for mature or even elderly people, not for children. To teach the virtue of self-sufficiency and inculcate the value of moderation are basic principles of a good education at whatever age. Rousseau said:

“Youth is the time for studying wisdom, old age is the time for practicing it. What is the use of learning to drive your chariot when you are at the end of the road.”

The caring and responsible mentor will have to adapt and adjust constantly to actual circumstances in the practice of these principles. Creating a Society that Cares is impossible within the system called Capitalism because the basic tenet is diametrically opposed to that end. We need a radical departure from the system that we have grown up in.

“We can't solve problems by using the same kind of thinking we used when we created them” (Albert Einstein).

⁵ Nataraja Guru (ed.), *The Bhagavad Gita, Sublime Hymn of Dialectics Composed by the Antique Bard Vyasa*, New Delhi, DK Printworld, 2011.

⁶ Ibid.