

**Formation of 'Self' and its Performance:  
Exploring the Metaphor of 'Inner' and 'Outer' Worlds at  
Rishi Valley School**

**GAURVI SALUJA  
2025**

WORKING PAPER SERIES 2025/5

This paper is an outcome of the Shiv Lal Scholarship which is awarded every year to M.A.(P)  
Sociology students of Delhi School of Economics, Delhi University.

## **Formation of ‘Self’ and its Performance:**

### **Exploring the Metaphor of ‘Inner’ and ‘Outer’ Worlds at Rishi Valley School**

GAURVI SALUJA

#### **Introduction**

Nestled amidst the forested countryside of Andhra Pradesh, Rishi Valley brings together a host of students, educators and nearby villagers who attempt to bring J. Krishnamurti’s vision of life and education into practice. J. Krishnamurti's vision of education rests on the “the harmonious development of the inner [self] and the outer [society] worlds” i.e. a development and knowledge of oneself and eventual transformation of society by individuals who have a strong sense of individual responsibility. (Thapan, 2022 ) For him, responsibility is not confined to one's family, school or country; rather, it is ‘responsibility for the whole.’ ( Krishnamurti, 1981, p.20) Thus, across his lectures and speeches, he calls for a creation of ‘different human being’ (Krishnamurti, 1975, p. 7) , one who observes, has an inquisitive nature and is sensitive to the needs of those around them.

“ When we talk about a total human being, we mean not only a human being with inward understanding, with a capacity to explore, to examine his inward being, his inward state and the capacity of going beyond it, but also someone who is good in what he does outwardly. The two must go together. That is the real issue in education - to see that when the child leaves the school, he is well established in goodness, both outwardly and inwardly.” (Krishnamurti, 1975, p. 66 )

Children educated in this way might be better positioned to bring about “a society that is essentially good [...] without violence, without the contradictions of various beliefs, dogmas, rituals, gods, without national economic divisions.” (Krishnamurti, 1979 as cited in Thapan, 2001, p. 2) In this context, he envisioned the role of the school “ 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.

In practice, one's understanding of 'self' occurs at the dialectic of ethos of Rishi Valley and the external demands of an increasingly competitive and digitised world. Thus, the paper attempts to look at how the school and societal realities impinge on each other to shape one's sense of identity in everyday realities. For the same, we look at how the school helps in cultivation of an 'inner' self through its everyday rituals and practices and its manifestation to the 'outer' world. Here, the term 'inner' refers to values, beliefs, and a sense of self that a student develops during their time at school and carries it forward after school. The term 'outer' refers to people, things and ideas beyond the individual.

### **Charting the Terrain: In Conversation with Existing Scholarship**

Education and schooling system, as an institutionalised form of socialization trains individuals and imbibes a certain set of physical and mental states of the social group they are part of. (Durkheim, 1956) In a residential school where a child spends majority of their time within the school, it acts as the primary source of socialisation. John Dewey (1966 as cited in Pathak, 2021, p24) also mentions how coming together of diverse sets of people in a school creates and accustomises them to a common, new and broader environment. This 'common subject matter' (Dewey, 1966 as cited in Pathak, 2021, p24) provides them with a "unity of outlook upon a broader horizon that is not visible to the members of any group while it is isolated." The paper looks at the ways through which this "unity of outlook" as a result of a common environment helps shape one's sense of 'self'.

In *Mind, Self and Society* GH Mead argues that the 'mind' and the 'self' are the result of a social process. "The mind is socially constituted and through which the self that is conscious of itself as an object appears." (Mead, 1972 , p. xv) The individual act occurs in a social context, and requires a minimal society constituting 'biologic individuals' participating in a social act, based on a consensus on gestures. In a school, the 'common subject matter' provides this framework of common gestures.

In *Living in the Bubble: Rishi Valley School and the Sense of Community*, Bhavya Dore (2014) argues how being an alternate educational institution, Rishi Valley has created a distinctive student

culture through distinctive rituals, language and shared histories. Thus, we infer, through the years, a distinctive ‘minimal society’ to use Mead’s phrase has emerged that makes possible a consensus on gestures. In *School and Shaping Students’ Identities: A Report on the Studies into Youth in the Silesian Voivodeship*, Alina Szczurek- Boruta (2021) also argues how school system and the formation of student identity are inseparable and dynamic systems and must be understood through a holistic lens encompassing individual (micro), school (meso), and societal (macro) perspectives. Thus, drawing from Mead and Szcurek - Boruta, one can infer how schools help a heterogeneous cohort of students gain a similar ‘value of identity capital’.

The present study, thus, aims to delve into how a school helps in constituting the idea of a distinctive ‘self’ among students, as envisioned by the goals of its founder. Moreover, the paper recognises that education does not take place in isolation, it takes place in the social, cultural and geographical contexts (Sadler 1979 as cited in Szczurek- Boruta, 2021 ). Every school develops varying practices and rituals based on its different realities of existence. Krishnamurti's vision of education too is pluralistic in nature (Herzeberger, 2018 ) and each school run by Krishnamurti Foundation India, while founded on Krishnamurti's ideas, have interpreted his teachings based on their local contexts. Thus, while Dore (2014 ), emphasises the ‘sealed-offness’ of the school captured in the phrase ‘ bubble effect’; this paper attempts to look at school’s interaction with its surroundings and how the two act on each other.

We also draw from Jackson and Barnett (2019) that the act of learning is an ecological phenomenon that brings forth new meanings and understandings of the world and of one’s own being and identity in and with the world. The very act transforms us and the world around us. (p. 1) Moreover, interactions in the school, shape one’s identity and at the same time prepare one for life in society. (Szczurek- Boruta, 2021 ) Krishnamurti, wanted individuals to bring change through self enquiry, and in this regard, he emphasises the transformative potential of education. (Thapan, 2022, p. 2 ) Thus, we further look at the development and interaction of this ‘self’ with society.

### **Mapping the Paper**

The first section locates the school in the spatial and social context, looks at the actors who constitute the school and delineates their everyday activities that constantly formulate and reproduce the school's social structure (Thapan, 2006, p. 5 ).

The second section lays down the ways and means by which, the school helps in development of an individual's 'inner' self, that is "awake to the processes of his own thinking, feeling and action" (Krishnamurti, 1969 ) and thereby, further social change. (Thapan, 2006, p. 12 ) For the purpose of delineation, I understand this process of 'development of self' occurring through two means- institutional means and through ways of living and being at the school. The institutional means include the formalised measures that the school undertakes to create a certain sensibility in individuals through their curriculum, discussions, pedagogic processes or specific village centered programmes and excursions. Through the 'ways of living and being', I refer to the nature of everyday interactions between the actors at the school that bestow a distinct quality to the institution. The section, thus tries to understand the role of the school in fostering a certain sensibility in the students that Krishnamurti envisioned. Moreover, while the section discusses the development of an 'inner' self; the author recognises and acknowledges that this is a continuous process, with no culmination at "perfect state of being" (Thapan, 2006, p. 11 ).

Thus, the third section takes note of the tensions between the institution and the individuals who constitute it. It looks at the negotiations that take place in the praxis of Krishnamurti's ideas which occur at the dialectic of the new and old generations, and their interpretations of what the founder meant.

Krishnamurti, in his speeches postulated that, 'to live is to be related' (Krishnamurti, 1975, p.53) and called for a right relationship with the surrounding elements. The fourth section, thus, looks at the formation of 'inner' being in relation with people, nature, things and ideas. Here, we'll also delve into the idea of the manifestations of one's learnings at the school in one's action and behaviour and ways in which the school and its external environment/ social political context impinge upon each other.

## **Methodology**

The study adopts an ethnographic method to minimise the influence of our preconceived constructions as it helped me pay specific attention to participant's understandings and the contexts of various practices, customs and conventions. The ethnographic study was undertaken at Rishi Valley School in Andhra Pradesh between June 15 to July 15, 2025. The period overlaps with the beginning of the new academic session of the school after summer vacations.

The choice of the site as Rishi Valley School is based on the assumption that a residential school where students spend the majority of their time within the institution, allows for greater structuring of oneself and internalisation of school's norms as compared to a day boarding school.

The ethnographic study spread over a month adopts a combination of methods including participant observation; informal interactions with students, teachers and non teaching staff constituting majorly of people from nearby villages; formal interviews with teachers, principal, alumni, office staff and group discussions with students of grade 12. The informal interaction with the students across age groups took place at multiple sites around the school, while walking to the dining area, in school corridors, or at the sports field. To understand everyday practices at school, I attended junior school and senior school assemblies, teacher's discussion groups, culture and activity classes for different grades, Weekly Sunday Dialogues, monthly Krishnamurti Talk, nature walks, freshers hike, science and geography classes of the junior school. Moreover, spaces such as library, dining hall, corridors and sports ground also became a site for observation as they act as liminal zones where there is lax in oversight and rules are not that stringent.

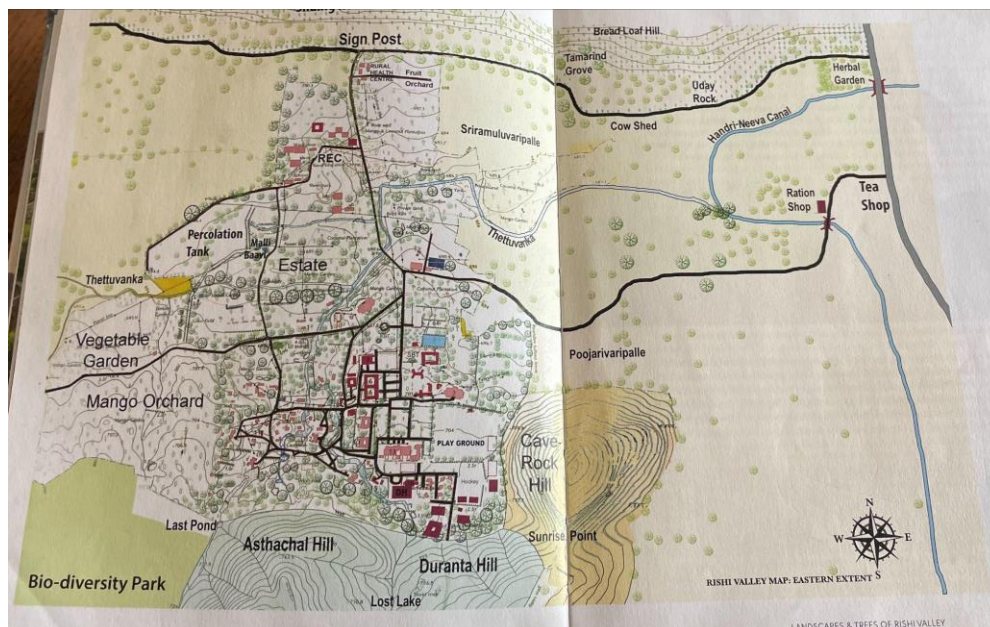
Further, to gauge an understanding of the school's village outreach programmes, I also conducted visits to the Rural Health Center; Valmiki Vanam, a satellite school in the village Eguvaboyapalle and Rural Educational Center (REC). I also joined weekly visits to REC along with students of grade 9, and an introductory session with students of grade 11 as part of the REC Programme and General Studies Programme respectively. Further, I conducted interviews with teachers at REC, satellite school and a doctor at Rural Health Center. I also got to attend a parent teacher meeting, followed by a plantation drive at REC.

Moreover, as someone who had studied in a conventional educational system, and went with a clear idea of school as an alternate educational system, it made the differences in the educational patterns shine brighter. Further, it was only through my training throughout the years in various English medium institutions, that allowed me access to the field. Additionally, sharing my own experiences as a college student, in group discussions with 12th grade students who were eager and looking forward to joining college in the coming year, helped me build rapport and gain their trust.

## 1.0 The School

### 1.1 Locating the School in Spatial Contexts

A twenty minutes drive from Madanapalle, the nearest town took me to Rishi Valley School, located in the interiors of Andhra Pradesh. It rests on the foot of Cave Rock Hill, which stands tall seen from the school's playground and is surrounded by Horsley range, Sliding-Rock Hill, and Bread-Loaf Hill to the north; Rishikonda, Bodikonda and middle peak to the west. ( Thomas, 2023 ) Enroute Rishi Valley School, on the Thettu village road, one passes by the Rural Health Center ( RHC ) on the left and a few meters away, on the right is the Rural Educational Center ( REC ).



**Img. 1: A Map of the Rishi Valley**

**Source: Landscapes and Trees of Rishi Valley by Sunil Thomas, 2023**

On entering the valley, I was instantly greeted by a host of blue butterflies. After interaction with a few students, I got to know they were commonly called ‘blue tigers’ and were a seasonal species only seen around summers. The campus broadly comprises reception, senior school, junior school, playground, dining hall (also called as DH) , approximately twenty houses where students reside, two guest houses for alumni and other visitors, a small dairy, residential spaces for faculty members and a post office. The infrastructure of the school is loosely spaced and rises only up to one storey.

The campus has three exit and entry points, two of which are guarded by a stationed guard while the other remains unguarded. In the very initial days of my stay, one of the teachers mentioned how this place is unusually safe and also cited instances of how villagers working in and around campus act as a safety net for the school. The school’s handbook mentions how for many years it had no marked boundaries and was called ‘a school without walls’. However, according to the Council norms, the school has had to put up fencing around the campus. Students’ movements have therefore become partially restricted. The school also has estate areas adjoining the main campus, where fruits and vegetables are farmed in house by nearby villagers using organic means to meet the requirements of the school.

## **1.2 Everyday Life at the School**

Rishi Valley School is a residential school, founded to put J. Krishnamurti’s ideas on education and world view into practice in 1931. The school begins from grade four until twelfth grade. The 10th grade follows ICSE Board, while the 12th grade follows ISC Board. The school year is divided into two four-month terms: June 15 to October 15 and December 1 to March 31.

The school also has a prep section for children of teachers working at the school. There are approximately 350 students in total. The junior school comprises grade four to eight, and the senior school from grade nine to twelve. Senior school and junior school have separate assembly halls. However, on Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday the whole school gathers together for a music assembly in the senior school assembly hall. The music assembly has been a long tradition at Rishi valley and students who have been a part of the institution for long, have memorised the songs by heart. Thus, at 8:30 in the morning, the whole school at the sounds of harmonium sings

in unison various couplets as the music teacher directs them. The couplets range from various vernacular languages like *awadhi*, hindi, etc. written in devnagri script and are compiled in a book. For the other days, assemblies take place separately for junior and senior school and are conducted by teachers and students. Students can propose to speak or present whatever issue they wish to in front of the assembly committee. During my stay, students spoke on the Gujarat Development Model, the Pride and Prejudice, played tabla, sang songs, etc. The assemblies at Rishi Valley, unlike a conventional school, did not include national songs and anthems. As for Krishnamurti, subscribing to a particular group identity and the everyday acts of nationalism confines oneself to a particular group. He rather calls to be ‘united in our humanity’ i.e individuals are part of the web of humanity and must be responsible to life in all its forms of interconnectedness. (Thapan, 2022, p. 35) The assembly ends with five minutes of silence.

Silence times are a regular feature of the school. Krishnamurti mentions how a silence imparts a sense of sacredness to a place. Silent mind, which comes into being when the mind empties itself of its content, of the known, and which is not in a state of mindlessness but of intense and clear awareness of “what is” (Holroyd, 1980, p.53 as cited in Thapan, 2006, p. 13). In the dining hall, at a large sound of thud, instantly everyone used to stop where they were, and resumed at yet another sound. Gordon Pearce, one of the former principals in the early years of the school also introduced the practice of *Asthachal*, wherein the children sit in silence at an elevated space to watch the sunset, the changing light, and commune with nature and the environment. (School’s Handbook) However, given the rainy season and mosquitoes, the practice was discontinued at the time of my visit.

The teachers seemed to have a minimal presence as one wouldn’t see them instructing students on what was to be done. After the assembly, everyone dispersed to their classes. As an external observer, at first, it was unusual for me to see how students did not move in lines but were rather free to move around campus. Krishnamurti mentions that to ensure an actively learning mind, there must be freedom to look and observe, and not be restricted in either time or space. (Krishnamurti, 1972, p.15)

### 1.3 Constituting Actors at the School

People from different walks of life come together to constitute the institution. The school brings together students, teachers and support staff.

Admission and recruitment processes become institutionalised mechanisms to ensure ‘who gets to be the part of the institution.’ The primary motive of the admission process, as the principal of the school stated, was to gauge “whether the parents understood the school” and if their interests for their child align with the school. The admission process for the students is a long drawn, multifaceted process including preliminary admission form, an english and maths test, group discussion and a final interview with a group of faculty members. The regular entry points are standards 4,6,7 and 11 only and admissions to classes 5, 8 and 9 are against vacancies created by withdrawals. The admission form attempts to gather information regarding a child’s language proficiency, previous associations of parents or relatives with the institution, a description of child’s temperament and personality, aptitudes and interests and academic profile, followed by a test and a group discussion. However, their performance is only one factor amongst a host of things that the school looks at. Diversity in the cohort of students is yet another aspect that the school tries to maintain. For the same, the school has created a scholarship fund out of which 50-60 students each year are subsidized to varying extents. Over the years, children whose parents work in non-governmental organisations have benefited from this subsidy as they have enriched the educational experience of their peers. The application form also has a separate section requiring passport and visa permit of the students, indicating that intake of non resident Indians is not an exception, rather a routine feature. The school tries to ensure to take the ‘right parent’ or ‘right child’ lest it be stuck in a never ending battle. Here, the idea of ‘right’ parent or student is understood as someone who aligns with a way of life that the school envisions and upholds, which broadly focuses more on a holistic development of students rather than a career oriented education system. Thus, the school looks for certain predispositions in a student.

Majority of the students come from various metropolitan cities or those whose parents have been living abroad. Asked about why the students chose Rishi valley to other schools, most of them responded by saying how their parents were influenced by Krishnamurti’s way of thinking, or some got to know about the school from their friends or relatives. One of the teachers whose family is from the neighbouring town of Madanapalli and is also an alumni of the school, mentioned how

her mother too was a student at the school. She recalled how when she was a student, she never felt away from family as most of her cousins were studying in the same school.

Meenakshi Thapan (2006 ) mentioned how most of the students come from middle and upper class backgrounds. The same, holds true even today. Their economic and cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1986 ) is visible in the way they speak, dress and the interests they share. This is evidenced in their fluency and command over English. However, given everyone is fluent in the language, it ceases to be an active factor of exclusion within the institution. While students know their vernaculars as well, usage of English as a shared language reduces some of the regional or class differences, while giving way for others. For instance, a student recalled having been made fun of for her accent when she initially made the shift from a school in London to Rishi Valley. An interaction with one of the teachers who had earlier taught at Rajghat School mentioned how there is lesser focus on vernaculars in Rishi Valley as compared to Rajghat. Cynthia Groff, (2017 ) in ‘Language and language-in-education planning in multilingual India: a minoritized language perspective’ through an ethnographic study in Uttarakhand mentions how national approaches often emphasize unity over diversity, privileging dominant languages and perspectives, which raises issues of power and inequality in education and representation. She talks of this trade off between favouring a dominant language to promote unity, leading to compromise of vernacular languages at the level of national planning. This trade off is evidenced in the school too where English takes primacy for communication at all times.

Further, the support staff becomes the mainstay of the school, which ensures an efficient working of the school. Sulekha\* ji, a jolly lady in her fifties who does the cleaning work at the guest house, told how many people from nearby villages come to work at the school in varying capacities as drivers, caretakers or at the kitchen etc. She herself has been working in the school for twenty years and has picked up basic Hindi and English over the years. Workers from the nearby areas are strewn all around the campus.

All the teachers and students reside on the campus. The students reside in hostels which are here called houses. There are around twenty houses each of which accommodates twelve to twenty

students of varying age groups. A teacher lives along with the students in each house, and are called as houseparent.

In one of the assemblies, the school's former principal spoke about all the development and renovations that took place in the campus during the summer break, he explicated the entire process from how labour was procured, the processes used, why certain decisions were made, the challenges encountered and how they were resolved. He also laid down the future plans of the school in the coming year as it is completing a centenary in 2026. The entire telling of the process, engendered a feeling of 'oneness' and being part of the greater family. Further, this also indicates that the school aims to make students aware of practical challenges that one encounters and aims at a holistic development of students, preparing them to meet everyday realities.

## **2.0 Development of 'inner' Self**

“Human functioning is immersed in the context of time (past, present and future create a horizontal dimension of development) and in the socio-cultural context (networks of relationships, multiple roles, vertical dimension of current functioning).” (Szcurek - Boruta, 2021) Alina Szcurek - Boruta (2021) in her study of Youth in the Silesian Voivodeship, located in Southern Poland, argues how the school in the formative years of a child, provides students with 'knowledge, experience and identification models'. School allows students to experiment with different social roles and foster a commitment to values or ideals.

Rishi Valley School, founded on the ideals of J. Krishnamurti attempts to foster a certain sensibility in individuals in line with the founder's vision. For Krishnamurti, schools were to be building blocks to change how one thinks.

Educate in the real sense of that word; not to transmit from the teachers to the students some information about mathematics or history or geography, but in the very instruction of these subjects to bring about a change in your mind. (Krishnamurti, 1975)

The school, along with attention to pedagogic processes and activities, must also engage with emotions, behaviour, attitudes, and perceptions of students as well as teachers. (Thapan, 2022, p.

19) Thus, the school aims to develop a certain kind of mental and emotional capacity in the students to awaken a sense of humanity. He emphasises the importance to observe and learn about oneself lest one becomes a second hand individual, dependent on others' views of the world. For this, he suggests,

Find out. Listen to everything, to the birds, to that cow calling. Learn about everything in yourself, because if you learn from yourself about yourself, then you will not be a secondhand human being. (Krishnamurti, 1975, p. 10 )

This would result in an inward revolution, an exploration of one's own beliefs and ideas, which would allow students to formulate their own opinion on issues on 'here and now', and not be carried by the past. Krishnamurti fears that without an inner change the individual will only perpetuate the disorder in society. (Herzberger, 2018 ) Thus, while the school as an academic institution fulfills its educational goals, it also attempts to develop individuals to 'inner' self that is able to think independently, has a sensitivity towards their surroundings and beings. We observe this occurring through two means - through institutionalised means including curriculum, discussions, pedagogic processes or specific village centered programmes and excursions; and through ways of how people live in the space, i.e to their everyday interactions, routine activities or the principles they abide by.

## **2.1 The Institutionalised Means**

While there have been changes in institutional schema of schools based on the administrative body at a particular point of time, their efforts have constantly been directed towards the implementation of their interpretation of Krishnamurti's lectures. (Herzeberger, 2018)

The school partitions the day into numerous activities, many of the students also said how one gets little room to get bored or miss home during the day as they are constantly occupied in one thing or another. For Durkheim (1961, p.43), it is by discipline that the institution is able to "teach the child to rein in his desires, to set limits to its appetites of all kinds, to limit and through limitation, to define the goals of his activity." The regimented structures and partitioning of a day into fixed schedules, leads to what Foucault called as 'docile bodies.' (Foucault, 1982) However, as any

institution cannot work without a given structure, thus, the school aims to negotiate between having a structure, while allowing students the freedom to create an order.

This external, outward imposition of discipline makes the mind stupid, it makes you conform, it makes you imitate. But if you discipline yourself by watching, listening, being considerate, being very thoughtful - out of that watchfulness, that listening, that consideration for others, comes order. (Krishnamurti, 1975, p.20 )

The school aims for a multidimensional development of the student, and the day is scheduled to include a variety of activities befitting from physical training in the morning, followed by assembly, classes, sports, classical dance, music etc. On weekends, folk dances and movie screenings are also arranged. The school also has activity classes for woodcraft, needlecraft, pottery, batik painting and drawing from grade four up to grade twelve. The intent of the classes is to make students observe, explore and think.

“ Inquiring mind untethered from fixed beliefs paves the way to truth about the self.” (Herzberger, 2018, p. 70 )

The freedom to wander, observe and think become key tenets to create an individual who can think independently. This occurs at multiple levels inside and outside the classroom. For instance, this can be seen if one looks at the rules and regulations at the school. Interactions with the students revealed how the school has a minimal predefined set of rules, rather they are formed progressively based on particular cases as they come up. For instance, while the school does not prescribe any particular uniform, a dress code has developed over the years. In yet another instance, while students were allowed to go on hikes independently, given some instances, now they are not allowed to go without supervision. Moreover, while there might not be institutionalised rules for everything, unsaid norms of the place based on conventional practice and of those around oneself, guides actions.

Moreover, rather than giving exact instructions to perform a certain task, they are given basic structure and made aware of the potential possibilities and limitations. For instance, in the pottery

class among the fifth grade students, the instructor asked them what they observed when they saw a leaf. He asked them to observe its quality. He explained how the intent was not to make them artistic but to make them observe and increase their focus.

The school does not subscribe to any particular textbook or conduct any exam till grade 8, the students are rather encouraged to experience things and learn from their surroundings. One of the teachers mentioned when, “ from the first standard onwards, you start conducting tests and you start giving numbers to children, you start judging children based on these numbers and you are conditioning them. And children who keep getting lower scores, you don't like those children in your classes. The teachers would prefer the other children, they would keep them as the class monitors, good children and all of that. ” Thus, when you aren't given any particular marks, one doesn't see each other through the marks they scored in a given test. One's notion of self is not formed around it. An alumni of the school commented how, while in all other institutions he has been to for higher education, he was recognised for his excellent academic performance, however, at school, “we saw everyone as the same, we never looked at each other through marks.” This alters the very notion of labelling students as ‘good’ or ‘bad’ students by teachers as ‘moral entrepreneurs’ (Becker, 1963 ), stripping it off the social expectations to perform well or ‘better than the other.’ Thus, marks cease to be a factor to distinguish oneself from the other. The schooling at Rishi Valley, thus, stands in contrast to Illich's conceptualization of school as “a world where everything can be measured including their imaginations, and, indeed, man himself.....what cannot be measured becomes secondary, threatening.” (Illich, 1984 as cited in Pathak, 2021)

Further, the school doesn't subscribe to a fixed set of textbooks or a generalised syllabus for the junior school and the teaching process is tailored to ensure that a child garners a certain set of skills at a particular age. The teachers have developed a lot of resources over the years. The faculty has various subject groups which meet regularly to discuss the resources and latest developments. The groups meet once a week to discuss details of their work, and also to raise general awareness. The lectures are further made activity based and hands-on. The idea of the classroom too has been reimagined beyond the four walls. For instance, to teach various types of soils, the students were asked to collect samples of various soils on campus. In yet another instance, in grade 8, a teacher

asked students to chew bread pieces, to teach formation of saliva. For a class on transportation, students were asked to record the time they reached a certain place by foot and then by bicycle. Further, the learning and lessons are related to one's immediate surroundings. For instance, grade 5 students went on a nature walk in the campus to learn about the flora fauna around them, during the walk the teacher pointed at various plants and insects and discussed their advantages and disadvantages. Similarly, while teaching about the solar system, a teacher asked students to map out their location beginning from the school to the galaxy. Grade 7 also has a chapter on Rishi Valley and their Surroundings in their Geography textbooks. Classroom interactions too are open, students ask questions, and draw their learning from different classes. For instance, in gardening class, while students are engaged in laying beds, watering plants, the teacher would tell them about different agricultural cycles, importance of compost etc., the students also bring in concepts they learnt in EVS or geography class there.

Western Folk Dance is a long standing tradition of the school which was brought in by early international visitors to the school and has since then, been a linking thread connecting Rishi Valley alumni across various batches. Students from grade eight are taught dances from a number of countries over the summers. By the time students reach grade 11 and 12, they become quite adept in the art form and every weekend get together at the assembly hall before dinner to dance to the tunes of *hoshua*, and other European dances. Mr Mahesh Pandey, an alumnus of the school who has been coming to the school every year for a month to teach various folk dances mentioned how he uses art as a form of education and makes students question. For instance, why are there mirrors on dance costumes or why people wear more of white clothes in Kerala. Further, he mentioned how dancing helps channelise energies among teenagers, improves mental health and boosts one's confidence as one has to come forward in such activities.

Thus, attempts are made to make the learning processes engaging and locate them in their everyday immediate surroundings. So, the learning process doesn't seem to be compartmentalized to fixed school hours but rather becomes a way of life. Efforts are made to maintain this balance in senior school as well, through various research projects. However, given the students have to appear for board examinations, class tests have become a regular feature in senior classes. For 11th and 12th grade, the school offers varied subject combinations. A student is allowed to choose based on their

interests, and availability of the teacher and not stick to the division of humanities, sciences and commerce. Some of the common combinations in the school are- PAL - Physics, Accounts, Literature; BEC- Biology, Economics, Commerce; MSE- Maths, Sociology, Environmental Sciences and CCHG- Chemistry, Commerce, History, Geography.

The school also has an REC programme wherein ninth grade students from Rishi Valley visit the Rural Education Center every Wednesday. They are paired up with a seventh grade student of the rural educational center. In the first week, they are asked to get acquainted and learn about each other, in the second visit Rishi Valley students were making them read story books. Thereafter, they started playing with them. The aim of the programme is to make students empathetic and acquaint them with their immediate realities of the village through children.

The school also organizes excursions for students. Excursions are usually planned to some social organization in the area, and students are urged to acquaint themselves with the culture and lives of the people there. For instance, a student mentioned how they made biscuits with the women in Pondicherry, which were later deposited in the tuck shop and made available for anyone in the school. In yet another interaction, a student mentioned how they went to a tribal school in Odisha and had made a good bond with the kids there. She mentioned how, because of their regular interaction with students of REC, they don't consider such activities as work but rather relish them. This was also visible in visits by ninth standard students to REC, while the students seemed a little out of place with regard to what to talk about to their REC counterparts on their first visit, they seemed much more friendly and at ease in subsequent visits.

In one of the assemblies in the early days of my visit, the principal attempted to sensitize the students on how they must be with each other and how their behaviour affects everyone around them. She highlighted how even the unhappiness of any one student, is a reflection on everyone. She urged students, "know your norms, all norms serve a purpose of us being a community together." She asked everyone to be on time, and how if we get late, it hampers the schedule of dishwashers too. She tried to make students aware of how their actions reflect on others around them, making a point that, "we care for each other." Further, she brought into light how in the

recent past, the school had observed certain cases of exclusion happening in subtle ways among the students and asked them to reflect on their behaviour.

“ If we’re doing it, why are we doing it? ”

“Why are we not standing up to people?”

“Why are we following herd mentality?”

“What else can we do?”

She urged students for self examinations and asked them to carry it forward in their further discussions. Discussions between students and teachers form an important part of everyday life at school. While some discussions like those during Class teacher (CLT) periods in the beginning of day, or with the houseparents are more unregulated and spontaneous in nature. Every Sunday, at six in the evening, students and teachers meet at the study center to discuss a variety of issues. The structure or topic of discussion is not regimented or pre-defined and is rather, an open space of discussion wherein people can bring in their everyday dilemmas. During my stay, the discussion revolved around, how does one reconcile between scientific rational thought as well as religion and, whether it was a contradiction to believe in religion, while learning sciences. In yet another discussion a student came up with the question of how one could be empathetic with their fellows who do not share similar interests as them.

Yet another way through which students are sensitised are culture classes. They are a formalised part of a student’s schedule and take place once a week. Various issues are discussed in these classes, either through a lecture, followed by a discussion or a movie which follows a discussion around it. In one of the classes, among grade eleven students, the discussion revolved around, ‘what is the purpose of human life and the changes in society over time?’ The class began with a discussion on various Indian philosophies on the meaning of life. It then treaded towards contemporary questions of what drives violence and hate, how minds are now preoccupied with the pursuit of wealth. The teacher asked students what they wished to do after schooling. And thereby, mentioned how one sees more students joining finance club these days, than philosophy club. In yet another class with the twelfth standard, the teacher raised dilemmas, and made them

self examine their own choices on questions of truthfulness, standing for what is right and if, being rude to others could be justified on a bad day.

Thus, there isn't a hierarchy in learning, the school focuses on learning in totality, and an overall development of students without assigning differential value to various learning processes. Different forms of activities find a place in the schedules of the students and are directed towards making them observe, question and think for themselves.

## **2.2 Ways of Living and Being**

As I walk from the guest house which became my abode for a month to the dining hall, I would smile and greet anyone who passes through, whether it is one of the members of the school's administration, a student whom I interacted with or one of the members from the support staff. Such an experience wasn't unique to me, but something shared by most people who have been living there. The place has a general sense of 'we' feeling, a small group of people who have been living together in a shared space and look out for each other. One finds students talking and laughing with teachers, carrying water cans to their houses, senior students carrying bags of their younger counterparts on a hike, etc. Moreover, there's a general slowness and calmness to life, where one learns to not be afraid, rather live in harmony with nature, as snakes and scorpions become regular acquaintances of people; where mails and letters are encouraged to phone calls and where vegetables and fruits are grown in house. A physical education teacher and an alumni of the school remarked, "...why this [way of life] has sustained for so long is because there have been so many people who have been here for around 40-50 years. And you can see that they were committed towards just the philosophy of the place, rather than their professional or financial growth."

While institutional measures become a tool for its formal implementation, people over the years have internalised these values which reflect in their general behavior towards each other i.e. the ways in which people maintain relations with each other inside the classroom and in everyday interactions.

### *2.2.1. Open Interaction Between Students and Teachers*

One of the marked differences between any conventional school and Rishi Valley, is the nature of relation between students and teachers. Teachers share an open and informal relationship with students. Students are not fearful of the teachers but see them as ‘compatriots of the school’, because of living and being together at the same place for a continued period of time. Students refer to female teachers as *akka*, which means sister in Telugu; and the male teachers are referred to by sir. Moreover, the teachers are quite accessible to the students, students could be found approaching them in corridors, during tea break or during meal times.

While sharing one of the experiences, a teacher mentioned how once when a student came up to him to sing in an event, he discouraged him a little thinking he wasn’t ready yet. The child later asked him why he wasn’t given a chance, this made the teacher reflect on himself. In the next event, he ensured that the student was given the opportunity to sing. This wouldn’t have been possible had the student had no space to communicate. In yet another instance, a junior school teacher reflected how a newly admitted student was afraid of meal times. When she talked to her about her lifestyle at home and why she was afraid, she was able to adjust well.

Thus, when students are able to express their concerns to teachers, it helps teachers realise how students come with their own baggage and the idea of ‘good student’ evades once they get to know a child.

Further, an alumni of one of the initial batches of the school, Dr Kartik, ISC 1978, who is also a doctor at Rural Health Center and was a houseparent for over fifteen years, mentioned how school is a much more friendly place now, as it is much easier to talk to teachers. He further added that there's no crossing of respect in these interactions. This, thus, creates an environment and gives students the space to understand how they can be friendly and open but at the same time learn boundaries of what’s acceptable and what’s not. This balance between friendliness and respect teaches students the boundaries of social interaction.

In an interaction with one of the newly joined teachers, she mentioned how as compared to other schools where children are practically different when adults are around and when they are by themselves, here, there's a general atmosphere of certain kindness. In my observation, while there were instances wherein, students might try to create space free of teachers' supervision, but there isn't a stark dichotomy in their behaviour. For instance, after every exam, some of the students of grade eleven used to gather in the library stacks to discuss the questions. The stacks became the space wherein students created a new spatial possibility by strategically using the furniture to reduce visibility (Reh, Rabenstein & Fritzsche, 2011). Thus, creating a 'space within a space' to override oversight. The librarian, being aware of the fact, always asked them to take up the seats directly visible to her.

Thus, the informality and accessibility of teachers allow students to see themselves not merely as subjects of authority but as active participants in a shared community of learning. When the students are able to communicate freely- whether to question, express fear, or seek understanding enables them to recognize their individuality within a collective framework.

### *2.2.2 No Competition*

One of the key tenets of the school that almost all the teachers evoked was not comparing students with each other, and respecting that everyone follows their own pace. A computer teacher mentioned, "comparison is one dimensional, but cooperation is multi-dimensional. And cooperation cannot be need-based. Even though we can say that this is a good comparison, for the child's mind, it is a comparison. A child doesn't have that kind of sharpened faculty to figure out which is objective, one becomes more sort of egoistic. I know more, that's why my value is more. And for others, they become closed, because they are not very accessible to other adults and teachers."

Further, when students are not constantly pushed towards scoring better marks than their peers, and when equal value is attached to all activities, dance, music, sports and academics, students are not limited just to academics and scoring well, but get an opportunity to find what they are

interested in. A teacher remarked, when students are not under constant fear, it enables them to think beyond saving themselves.

“Here, students' minds are not constantly preoccupied in saving its skin, while it may happen, but maybe in one odd pocket, for one odd subject, in one odd year. It is not their regular experience. Because of that, there is a freedom to be. There is a mind space. And because of that mind space, these other things that ought to matter, start mattering to them.”  
( Interaction with a senior school teacher)

“The highest function of the teacher is to bring about the ‘psychological freedom’ in the pupil and in himself.” ( Thapan, 2006, p. 20)

Freedom to think without the fear of being judged or compared by societal expectations are reflected in the aspirations of students after schooling. In an interaction with an alumnus of the school mentioned how, “ In rishi valley, grades weren’t given any importance. So you saw everyone as the same, no compartmentalisation in terms of grades, we didn’t look at each other through marks. A friend used to like music and is now a full time musician.” In a small informal survey conducted by him, he revealed that from his batch of more than fifty plus students, less than ten pursued engineering or medical; and others went ahead for PhD, sculpture, pure sciences or humanities. Thus, when students are allowed to evolve without the pressures of competition or judgment. They get the space to find and value their own pace, interests, and capacities. This nurtures intrinsic motivation rather than performance driven by fear or validation. The atmosphere of psychological safety and “mind space” cultivates curiosity, reflection, and authenticity. Over time, this freedom to explore without comparison enables students to build a sense of self rooted in confidence, self-awareness, and purpose.

Thus, the school subscribes to a particular lifestyle, while some are materialized as part of institutional approaches, others take form in everyday interactions. An alumnus of the school, who is now a teacher at Rishi Valley remarked, “ the school doesn't teach a lot of things. It's just part of the way we live life here.”

### **3.0 Institution and Identity:**

#### **Negotiating Institutional Ideas in Everyday Contexts**

The above section delineates how the school provides the space and institutional mechanism for the development of one's self that is 'rightly related' to others. However, the everyday practice is a result of negotiation between the guiding principles which form the structure and the individuals coming with varying lifestyles, ideas and beliefs. Moreover, in a space where academic competence reduces to be a dominant and active differentiating factor, other factors gain predominance. For instance, students remarked how there's a hierarchy within the sport one plays, with those playing football being valued more than basketball, cricket or badminton respectively. Juniors look up to their seniors who are good at sports.

Teachers also mention how differences come up within students based on varying lifestyles back home, or different temperaments. In an interaction with one of the students, she mentioned how her parents are self made and considers herself different from her peers at the school who initially found her 'loud mouthed'. However, with time, she learnt the 'ways of the place' and got adjusted. In yet another instance, a student who had earlier studied in London, joined the school in online mode during lockdown was teased for reading in a certain way. A newly joined student of grade six, further mentioned how, "it could get lonely, if you don't have friends." This emphasises the importance of finding one's own family away from family. Amisha\*, a new student who joined in grade eleven, had come a week ago and seemed well adjusted to the place. She mentioned how she found the school and the people very accepting and was quite happy to be here. Thus, the ideas and way of life that the school upholds can be seen as a Durkheim's 'social fact', an external reality, that exists outside the individual and exerts a force, realised only when one doesn't fit into the normative standard. (Durkheim, 1982)

Further, usage of the internet for applying to colleges abroad is yet another bone of contention amongst those who wish to pursue higher education outside the country. They feel that the school discourages them from applying in international universities for undergraduate degrees and using the internet for looking out for higher education prospects becomes a hassle given the bureaucratic nature of permissions required for using the internet. Similarly, a few students expressed how they

would want to have a counselor that could guide them. The school feels that having a dedicated councillor would put an added pressure on the students and teachers could help them with the same. In yet another context, a teacher mentioned how parent's expectations from the child have increased over the years, thus, the school now focuses more on academics for grade nine to twelve. Thus, one sees pockets of discontentment arising out of the demands of the society and the principles of school.

Moreover, the idea of 'fitting in' at the school is not exclusive to students, but also for the teachers who come in from varied experiences and different motivations. Thus, it is also imperative to look into how newly joined teachers navigate through the place. Do they accept the established ideas or actively try to challenge or negotiate them?

A teacher mentioned how when young teachers come in who have been taught in a very structured environment, they bring in a different kind of experience or a culture to the school. If a person has come with a lot of structure in his life, they find themselves out of place and frustrated. Moreover, while the majority of teaching staff has been working in the school for over two to three decades, the school has seen the coming in of younger teachers in the past four to five years. Teachers who are motivated by Krishnamurti's way of life or in general prefer a simple way of life are able to transition easily, as compared to those who are used to the fast paced city life. Further, given it is a residential school, the line between working hours and personal hours are blurred and being a houseparent entails a number of tasks beyond teaching. Thus, when one has to spend most of their time in a given institution with a small number of individuals, it becomes necessary to have some sense of motivation and commitment either to Krishnamurti in particular or the way of lifestyle in general. This is incongruence with Thapan's (2006) analysis of teachers as ideologues and pedagogues and their convergence. (Thapan, 2006, p.xiii- xiv) While one need not be ideologically inspired by Krishnamurti, one has to conform to a certain do's and don'ts being at the school. A common thread of responses among a few teachers was how over the years, they also got the opportunity to learn about themselves. An English teacher mentioned how it gets a little off balancing in the beginning, however, the learning process is never ending. One learns to live here, it's a movement as one learns to transition from being too sensitive about one's own grief, sorrow, pain, feelings, to being emotionally intelligent. She mentioned how she associates

herself with teaching - learning, rather than just teaching. Another teacher mentioned how for the first two years, she was getting to know the place and the children and what works well. With time, she realised how there wasn't as much pressure on her as she got to know the children better, their preferences, challenges and what would intimidate her as well.

There is no rule book as such, one learns their responsibilities, work with every situation they face. For one year a senior teacher mentors the new teachers. Teachers discussion groups also meet during juice breaks to discuss Krishnamurti and how his ideas can be put into praxis in everyday routines.

Thus, while every hour is scheduled for a particular activity, the way of living at school is in contrast to the 'runaway world' (Giddens, 2000 ) that is marked by distanciation, uncertainty, risk and disembedding of social relations from local contexts. Efforts are made to embed actions in immediate contexts, through school's curriculum and everyday practices. The Principal added how every change needs to be thought over as it might have ramifying effects.

“I think there is one tension which is always there in the school. In some ways we want to hold on to what has always been there. And it is not very well defined. But intuitively when you are there you know that these are things that are non-negotiable. And I think the second thing is that we cannot become stagnant here. But any change that happens can have a long term effect. Sometimes it could also be a short term effect. But change when it happens one has to think it through and not be very impulsive. It can be a very simple thing or it can be very important or a very complicated decision.”

#### **4.0 Performance of Self: Interaction with the 'other'**

‘It is no use sitting in a corner meditating about myself’

(Krishnamurti, 1972, p. 22 as cited in Herzberger, 2018, p. 73)

Society in its entirety is our making, and not created by 'some gods in heaven.' (Krishnamurti, 1981 as cited in Thapan, 2006, p. 18 ) Krishnamurti's world view was not static in nature, but a result of individual action and agency. And, the role of education wasn't limited to transmission

of knowledge, rather as enabling individuals with agency to bring in social change. Drawing from Levison and Holland, in *Educators for Peace*, Meenakshi Thapan (2022) argues how an educated person is both a product of specific cultural contexts and a producer of new cultural meanings and practices. This dual process entails extension of learning and identity formation beyond formal schooling and ‘transforming aspirations, household relations, local knowledges, and structures of power’. (Thapan, 2022, p15) Alina Szczurek Boruta (2021) also argues how interactions within the school also shapes an individual for preparation for life in society.

Thus, this section will explore how the principles on which the ‘inner self’ is grounded directs action. This will be seen through the school's interaction with the surroundings, its efforts in nature conservation and village outreach programmes- Rural Education Center and Rural Health Center become central. Further, we’ll also see how social contexts of the school’s location in turn affect its functioning.

#### **4.1 Nature**

‘In these schools of ours’, he maintained, ‘responsibility to the earth, to nature and to each other is part of our education’ (Krishnamurti, 198, p 20).

An English teacher while talking about her relationship with the surroundings quoted Lord Byron’s words, “I love not man the less but nature the more.” The location of the school in proximity to nature amidst the calm and serene valley, away from the fast paced city life has a calming effect. Krishnamurti, in his work, *On Education*, mentions how the location of the school allows one to be able “to listen to the birds, to see the sky, to see the extraordinary beauty of a tree, and the shape of the hills, and to feel with them, to be really, directly in touch with them.”

John Dewey, also mentions aesthetic of everyday experience as the genesis of creativity, and conceived of a continuously unfolding experiential interaction between the individual and their environment (Dewey, 2005, p. 87 as cited in Germein & McGavock, 2024 ). An alumni of Rishi Valley who joined Rishi Valley in grade 11th in 1999, remarked how his time at Rishi Valley was the “the best time of his life” and how daily access to nature encourages self reflection. Having been the dean and professor of law and politics at Shiv Nadar University, he mentioned how during

student interviews for admission into university, Rishi valley students can be distinguished from others as they have comparatively greater attention span.

“When you talk to RV kids, they think for thirty seconds before answering. This shows that they are listening to you carefully. The way you interact with someone, they show certain genuineness and thoughtfulness.” (An alumni and currently dean at Shiv Nadar University)

However, the school and the surrounding area has long been a chronic drought area, and was sparsely cultivated and was plagued by failed monsoons, poverty, famines, and epidemics before the establishment of school. (Dalal. n.d) The school has over the years made continuous efforts to regenerate the valley through tree plantation projects. Mahesh Pandey, the alumnus of the school mentioned how during his time, students used to go uphill carrying bags of seeds and sticks and form a human chain and sow seeds. Seen from top of the cave rock hill, the dense green cover marks the difference between the school enclaves and the village land.



**Img. 2: View from Cave Rock Hill- School Enclaves (Right) and Village Land (Left)**

In 1991 Rishi Valley was also designated as a Bird Preserve. The school also has collaborations with institutes like Indian Institute of Science which conducts research on the fauna in the campus. Further, the students who have been living in the valley for long are well acquainted with the flora and fauna species found in the campus. Hiking, trekking, and camping, has been an integral part

of Rishi Valley. Teachers very often organize hikes for a particular house or class. The school also adopts environmentally friendly practices, for instance, the majority of the lights and electric devices found on the campus are solar powered. Further, the school cultivates fruits and vegetables on its estate land by purely organic means. Moreover, given the sensitive nature of the land and its drought prone nature, the school is presently working on building a water conservation plant.

Thus, the surrounding nature forms an integral aspect of life at the school for all actors. Over the years, the school has made continuous efforts to regenerate and preserve the valley. An alumni also jokingly mentioned how, many of his peers who did not read Krishnamurti's texts often assume nature conservation as his central teaching.

#### **4.2 Village**

In his address at Rishi Valley School in the year 1984, Krishnamurti explored the metaphor.

“What it might mean to keep the Schools’ doors open to the surrounding world of nature, and to the poverty of the surrounding countryside. First of all, I would get all the villagers together, and explain to them we’re going to have schools for their children. We’ll see that we get enough money; we’ll work for it. We’ll say: “We’ll build; you help us to build”. That’s one thing I would do: schools for them” (Krishnamurti Foundation India, 2011, p. 1).

In the very early years of Rishi Valley, sixteen Rural schools, called as satellite schools, were set up in the neighbouring villages under the Rural Education Programme. The land for the school was provided by the village itself, this was done to ensure that the villagers have a connection to the school. However, between 1989 and 2000, to counter shortages in funds and teachers, Rama and Y.A. Padmanabha Rao conceptualised a new methodology of Multi Grade Multi level learning. Satellite schools became a pioneer of such a methodology which has now been implemented in other states and countries. Researchers from Germany have been visiting the schools every year to further their understanding about the same. In the early days, most of the buildings were constructed by the villagers; and are now maintained through donations by alumni of the Rishi Valley School.

The satellite school admits students from nursery to grade five, therein, they are transferred to Rural Education Center, located on the Thettu Village Road. The REC extends up to grade 8th and also has facilities for hostels. The education in all satellite schools and REC is free for the students. After 8th grade, many of the students join either government schools or any private school in the nearest town of Madanapalli. The Rishi Valley School also provides scholarships to four to five students for further education based on funds available. Priority is given to orphans or girl children. Rama Rao, the director of the Rural Education center, mentioned how a large number of students passed out from rural schools have went on to pursue higher education degrees in Btech, MBA etc. and some have even been able to go abroad. REC also attempts to involve parents of students in the educational processes of their children and at the same time make them aware of the latest developments.

Further, a large number of people from the neighbouring villages have been employed at the Rishi Valley School and the Rural Outreach Programmes school in varying capacities. Over the years, a relationship between the villagers and the school has evolved wherein each looks after the other. While the school provides them with secure employment, health benefits through the Rural Health center and education of their children through Rural Educational Center; the workers enable the efficient functioning of the school. Many get food from the dining hall, which they carry home. So, they don't have to cook back home. Thus, employment of women in the school allows them the opportunity to protect themselves and their families. Moreover, the villagers are scattered all across the campus, acting as a safety net for the school. This is also manifested in everyday acts of how *akkas*, serving in the dining hall, often remember the preferences of some students and serve them more than the stipulated quantities or how they help students when they are ill. Last year, the student body comprising students of twelfth grade also volunteered to wash dishes after breakfast so that those who have been working in the dining hall could attend the assembly. However, this could not sustain for long.

Further, the evolution of the students's relationship with the surrounding villages can be seen through the responses of alumni spread over various batches. Dr. Kartik, ISC batch 1978 mentioned how they had almost no contact with the village when he was a student. While they

used to go on hikes through the villages, nobody spoke about the villages, about life outside the school. He mentioned how initially the school was “looked at as ‘another’, as a big person here, now we are like a family to all of them.” Further, Chinmay Tumbe, ISC batch 2002 while talking of his relation with the school said how the only contact between students from Rural Schools and Rishi Valley students was through sports days or how students were sent to rural schools for quarantine if they got chickenpox. However, lately, the contact between the village and the students’s of Rishi Valley school has been institutionalised through REC programmes wherein students of grade 9 regularly visit the REC throughout the year and through General Studies programme for grade 11 wherein students undertake group projects on themes of livelihood, farming, health, environment and village. While interactions between the students are limited because of language barriers, one would find grade 11 students talking to their buddies they met during the REC Programme.

With the coming of Rishi Valley School in a drought prone low population area, we see a change in the realities of the valley over the years. Interactions with alumni of the school reveal how there has been change in village demography and their everyday realities.

“ Earlier there were much less villagers working in the school, and the villages were much less crowded. Now, it's more crowded.” (Dr Kartik, ISC 1978 and Doctor at RHC)

“ While earlier, people lived in thatched huts, now you wouldn’t come across anyone living in them.” (A teacher at the school)

Thus, while some have directly benefited through employment opportunities created by the school, and given them financial stability which they lacked in farming; a large majority of such beneficiaries are women. For instance, Sulekha\*, who has been working in the school for over twenty years mentioned how his husband is an alcoholic and her earnings help her run the family. Others have indirectly benefited from the co-existence through the school's rural initiatives like health center, educational centers and dairy, which had to close down due to water scarcity. Dr Kartik mentioned how while earlier, everyone used to wear simple clothing, eat the same food and live at the same place, the difference between the way of living of villagers and students and

teachers wasn't stark. However, over the years, with increased access to global brands the gap in the lifestyle has increased between the villagers and the students and between how students live at Rishi Valley and at their homes.

### **4.3 Living the 'Two Lives': A Continuous Negotiation**

Further adding on to the dichotomy, a teacher remarked how with increased use of media devices at home and rise of platform economy that caters to immediate demands, students now live 'two lives'. "They live one kind of a life here for eight months in two terms at the school and when they go back home, it's totally different for them. They are hooked on their gadgets. They are hooked on their social media. So, now it has to be seen how they are, once they pass out of the school, how they really value what they had here in school and try to apply that in their world outside and maintain that kind of balance or just go all out with the outside world."

This makes us question whether this leads to a double consciousness amongst the students- the idea of 'self' they gained by being at the school, in contrast to the competitive and fast paced nature of city life. However, one does not realise the importance of learning when they are in the school and even feel that they are singled out for "every little thing", as a student expressed her dismay with the school. In conversations with alumni of the school, one of the alumni commented that "fish doesn't notice the water", "we were not indoctrinated with the ideology as such, but living it." One doesn't find Krishnamurti's presence in school through direct references or teaching of his ideas, except the monthly Krishnamurti Talk, but rather, one lives by them and in the process negotiates and internalises them through their everyday practices and conduct. Thus, the ideas of life and the oneself that a student gains by being, living at the place and engaging in daily activities.

Moreover, the school has been successful in sustaining its initiatives mainly by the contributions of the alumni, many of which continue to be associated with the school and contribute either through donations for scholarship funds, maintenance of infrastructure, etc or through their services as many either return back to teach, or help in archival or other kinds of research. This reciprocal relationship reinforces a sense of belonging and shared identity with the school. Chinmay Tumble, an alumni, mentioned how he dedicated his first book to one of the teachers at Rishi Valley and always mentions the school in his introductions.

The wide and strong network of school alumni becomes a social resource for students to tap into and expand their networks. A teacher remarked how given the liberal options available in private universities like Krea, Ashoka and Azim Premji University a large number of students prefer them, and have even formed a ‘mini RV’ in Azim Premji University. Thus, the alumni act as a reservoir of social capital (Bourdieu, 1986 ) that students and the school can draw from. Further, the mention of a “mini RV” in Azim Premji University indicates how this identity persists beyond the physical space of the school. Moreover, this identity is formed not just against students of conventional schools, but also against members of other sister schools that are run by Krishnamurti Foundation.

### **Conclusion**

The present paper, thus, attempted to understand the manifestation of the metaphor of 'inner' and 'outer' world in the routine activities of Rishi Valley School. The subtle, yet pervasive presence of Krishnamurti's ideas form the background in which school creates a space for development of one's 'inner' self that is self aware and rooted in “reflexive moral consciousness”. (Thapan, 2006) However, one's understanding of 'self' occurs at the dialectic of 'two lives' - ethos of Rishi Valley and the external demands of an increasingly competitive and digitised world. Both the school and societal realities impinge on each other to shape one's sense of identity.

The way of life that the school upholds becomes a 'social fact', wherein the ideal Rishi Valley student becomes an english speaking, ethically grounded individual with a disposition to question, observe, and act with awareness. The students, thus, internalize not only the values of non-competitiveness and simplicity but also a symbolic distinction, a sense of being “different” or more reflective than others. Moreover, the 'self' is constantly negotiated as some factors of identification are downplayed to give way for other factors such as one's competence in a particular sport or how assimilated they are to an 'ideal' Rishi Valley student.

Further, the institutional and way of living at school, occurs in context of its immediate environment wherein one's identity forms in interconnection with its interaction with nature and surrounding villages. Drawing on Jackson and Barnett’s (2019) conception of 'learning as an

ecological phenomenon', the school emerges as a microcosm where the individual and society are co-constituted through everyday practices. The school extends its pedagogical philosophy into the social and material world through its outreach initiatives such as Rural Health Center, Water harvesting unit, Rural Educational Center and Environmental programmes. While the villagers strewn across the campus act as a 'safety net' and allow for the efficient functioning of the school, the school has acted as a springboard for changes around the valley. Thus, bridging the 'inner' and 'outer' worlds, as the founder envisioned wherein one's knowledge of self enables transformation of society. Further, while constraints of language and time became barriers for an in depth study of change in social realities of surrounding villages with the coming of an institution which would now, complete its centenary in the coming year; it remains a site for potential research with immense sociological value on social, ecological and economic transformative potentials of an education institution.

However, while Krishnamurti, refrained from the formation of any 'community', a network of teachers, students, and alumni has developed over years who share a common sense of belongingness to a way of life at the school. While it is not a 'closed' and 'exclusive' group, one's proficiency in English, and alignment with school's idea of 'simple' lifestyle apart from economic capital becomes central to one's inclusion.

\* Names used in the report are fictional in nature.

### **Acknowledgements**

While writer is a means, the writing of the report would not have been possible without the respondents who willingly came forth to share their experiences, and recount how and why they took the decisions that led them to their respective positions and roles. I am grateful to them for sincerely answering all my questions, and for sparing time for the interviews which often went for an hour or more.

I would like to extend special thanks to Professor Meenakshi Thapan, Director of the Rishi Valley Education Centre, for her valuable guidance and support. Further, my sincere thanks to Ms Jyoti Akka, the principal of the school, for accommodating me and for supporting my research throughout my time there. I want to express my deepest gratitude to Ms Valli Akka who helped me navigate the field, introduced me to the faculty members, helped facilitate interviews and was always there to answer my doubts. I would also like to thank Mr. Mahesh Pandey, an alumni of the school and a western folk dance teacher for lively discussions on a multitude of aspects. I'm also grateful to Dr Kartik, Dr Chinmay Tumbe and Professor Vinay Sitapati for sharing their experiences at the school with me.

I extend my heartfelt gratitude to the Department of Sociology, Delhi School of Economics for granting me this scholarship, with special thanks to Professor Anuja Agrawal, the Head of the Department, and Dr Charu Sawhney, for their continued guidance and engagement with this research from charting out the research question to finalisation of this report.

I am wholeheartedly grateful to all the teachers, students, alumni, interns, and the non teaching staff at the school for making me feel welcomed during my stay at a place thousands of kilometers away from what I call my home.

## References

Becker, H. S. (1963). *Outsiders: Studies in the sociology of deviance*. Free Press.

Bourdieu, P. (1986). The forms of capital. In J. G. Richardson (Ed.), *Handbook of theory and research for the sociology of education* (pp. 241–258). Greenwood Press.

Bourdieu, P. (1990). *The logic of practice*. Stanford University Press.

- Dalal, R. (n.d.). Rishi Valley School: The first forty years. In R. Herzberger & H. Herzberger (Eds.), *Rishi Valley Education Series* (Vol. 10).
- Dore, B. (2014). Living in the bubble: Rishi Valley School and the sense of community. In M. Thapan (Ed.), *Ethnographies of schooling in contemporary India* (pp. 272–274). SAGE Publications.
- Durkheim, E. (1956). *Education and sociology* (S. D. Fox, Trans. & Intro.). Free Press.
- Durkheim, É. (1961). *Moral Education: A Study in the Theory and Application of the Sociology of Education* (p. 43).
- Durkheim, E. (1982). *The rules of sociological method* (S. Lukes, Ed.; W. D. Halls, Trans.). Free Press. (Original work published 1895)
- Germein, S., & McGavock, T. (2024). Learning ecologies and agentic pedagogies: Children meeting the world. *The Journal of Environmental Education*, 55(1), 64–77. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00958964.2023.2259826>
- Giddens, A. (2000). *Runaway world: How globalization is reshaping our lives*. Routledge.
- Groff, C. (2017). Language and language-in-education planning in multilingual India: A minoritized language perspective. *Language Policy*, 16(2), 135–164. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10993-015-9397-4>
- Herzberger, R. (2018). Values and the culture of schools. In M. Thapan (Ed.), *J. Krishnamurti and educational practice: Social and moral vision for inclusive education* (Chap. 3). Oxford University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780199487806.003.0003>
- Jackson, A. C., & Barnett, C. (2019). Learning as an ecological phenomenon. *Educational Philosophy and Theory*, 51(11), 1092–1102. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00131857.2018.1563016>
- Krishnamurti, J. (1975). *On education*. Krishnamurti Foundation of America.

- Krishnamurti Foundation India. (2011). *Rishi Valley School: 80 years*. Krishnamurti Foundation India.
- Foucault, Michel. 1982. *Discipline and Punish; The Birth of the Prison*. Middlesex; Penguin Books.
- Mead, G. H. (1972). *Mind, self, and society from the standpoint of a social behaviorist* (C. W. Morris, Ed.). University of Chicago Press. (Original work published 1934)
- Pathak, A. (2021). *Ten lectures on education: Pedagogic and sociological sensibilities*. Routledge.
- Reh, S., Rabenstein, K., & Fritzsche, B. (2011). Learning spaces without boundaries? Territories, power and how schools regulate learning. *Social & Cultural Geography, 12*(1), 83–98. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14649365.2011.542482>
- Szczurek-Boruta, A. (2022). School and shaping students' identities: A report on the studies into youth in the Silesian Voivodeship. *European Review, 30*(3), 408–425. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1062798721000120>
- Thapan, M. (2001). J. Krishnamurti (1895–1986). *Prospects: The Quarterly Review of Comparative Education, 31*(2), 273–286
- Thapan, M. (2006). *Life at school: An ethnographic study*. Oxford University Press.
- Thapan, M. (2022). *J. Krishnamurti: Educator for peace*. Routledge.
- Thomas, S. (2023). *Landscapes & trees of Rishi Valley*. Rishi Valley Education Centre.