



# the newsletter

The School, KFI Chennai

Issue #1

November, 2013

## In this Issue

As I write this I am aware that there is much happening in school. Class 1 is visiting an aquarium to see life under water. Class 9 is making a study of a selected area in Besant Nagar of a radius of two kms to create a neighbourhood atlas for the Symposium which will bring together 14 schools of the city. Class 8 is working with their teachers and a parent to produce the newspaper they have reported for and edited. The students of Class 12 are cooking a special lunch for the school with the help of the staff of the kitchen. And, of course, the rest of the students are working and playing. Creating a newsletter for the school, then, is a daunting task!

There are the preparations and the planning for classes and meetings and field trips, conversations among students and among teachers and students, discussions among teachers that are germane to the movements and decisions of the school, there is the working through of a difficult situation, the sharing together of an unexpected or amusing or joyous occurrence. Then there is the spotting of a garden lizard laying eggs, the watching of a green wine snake swallowing a lizard, finding a shikra sitting long in the centre of the lawn, noticing the cork trees that have begun to bloom, coming across little collections of red roaches under the wild badam tree.

We owe this revival of the newsletter to the interest and work of Kripa R who taught briefly at school and who has kept in touch with enthusiasm and joy.

Jayashree Nambiar

## From the Editor

Welcome to the first issue of **the newsletter**, from The School, KFI, Chennai. It was incongruous to try to christen a newsletter from a school that calls itself simply The School. So here it is, **the newsletter** from The School! At the outset, this newsletter might seem as a reporting of various events at the school. It indeed is. However, if one looks closer, one will see a common thread that runs throughout the events. *Learning. Learning from oneself about oneself.* For that is the true purpose of each of these events; be it the theatre festival where the children explore real issues surrounding them through a creative medium, be it sports where the true individual finds expression in the passionate, competitive milieu, or be it project time when the children learn through exploration

and questioning. Adding flavor to the learning are the tit bits of love, care, giving, camaraderie that were a part of every event and 'non-eventful' days at school in the first term. Be it the story of a cat adopting the school or of the nostalgic journey of one of the oldest members of the school-family or of a student concerned about a friend's accident in a competitive sport; all of these demonstrate a careful listening to the world around and within.

So it is only appropriate that we begin with a passage from a book on Krishnamurti's talk to children about what indeed is education. In the pages that follow this excerpt are the events of learning and education that The School strives to achieve.

## Seeing Anew

Find out. Listen to everything, to the birds, to the cow calling. Learn about everything in yourself, because if you learn from yourself about yourself, then you will not be a second-hand human being. So you should, from now on, find out how to live entirely differently and that is going to be difficult, for I am afraid most of us like to find the easy way of living. We like to repeat and follow what other people say, what other people do, because it is the easiest way to live – to conform to the old pattern or to a new pattern. We have to find out what it means never to conform and what it means to live without fear. This is your life, and nobody is going to teach you, no book, no guru. You have to learn from yourself, not from books. There is a great deal to learn about yourself from yourself, out of that learning wisdom comes. Then you can live a most extraordinary, happy, beautiful life.

Excerpt from the book Krishnamurti On Education, by KFI

*The (home) School, KFI*



*Star Visitor*

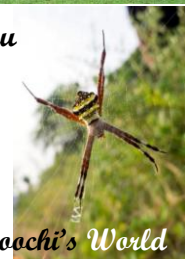


*Tapestry of simple living - Aurouille*

*Khelon Ka Mausam*



*Therukoathu*



*It's a Paachi's World*

## Orientation Meetings

The first event in the school's academic year is the series of orientation meetings. These meetings are for parents of children in transition classes – I, II, V, VIII, IX and XI. Students in these classes experience a change in one or more of these - physical location, school hours, meal hours, evaluation and academic structure and demand. These meetings seek to address questions, concerns and anxiety of parents in each of these classes as well as the seemingly small but very impactful changes in the child's life.

For children moving into middle school from class IV it is a move into a new world – changes in school hours, teachers, classmates, meal timings. Their curriculum too changes from being group work oriented to more of self study. The greatest change of them all however is that from being the oldest in the junior school they become the youngest in the middle school! Therefore to know that there will always be a healthy snack available in the kitchen for these children and even others whenever they are hungry is indeed a big comfort. And so is the fact that they, especially in the first term, come back to attend assemblies with the junior school. The orientation meeting not just provides this comfort but also emphasizes the importance and impact of the changes in the child's life and the need for care, attention and understanding to help them transition.

Class VIII faces time-bound exams for the first time as well as grading. Class IX is the first step to class X board exams and hence the significance of developing the skills required to study, take notes and be independent learners. Parent support and understanding is very crucial during these transitions. Usually, these are also the years when parental anxiety about academics start to increase. Class XI introduces children to entirely new academic programmes – subjects oriented towards their higher studies, and groups and electives of the students' choice. Not to forget that XI is the year of no holiday with trips during vacations. Parents no doubt, in turn are preoccupied with the anxiety and concerns about the board exams in Class XII.

Class II is the first year of the child in a mixed age group (MAG) and in the same class as older students. The parents are introduced to MAG – its vision, purpose and process. Class I is 'aculturation' time since children from different structures and formats of playschools and kindergartens start their primary schooling together. Also the entry point to the School for most, it orientates the parents to The School, KFI.

Each of these meetings this year was also a time for parents and teachers to introspect about their role in the child's education and learning, decisions that they make for their children, contexts that they create for them and the conversations that they have with them. As always the parents were reminded that 'Boredom is good!', 'Simplicity makes children more resourceful' and 'It is important to sometimes leave the child alone!'

## Khelon Ka Mausam (The Season of Games)

30<sup>th</sup> August 2013

It was about sportsmanship and not competing or winning on the **Junior School's Sports Day**.



A drill of colorful swirling ribbons that twirled, danced and pranced to western music gave a sprightly start to the day.



The sports day song followed. Inspired by the children of the junior school (through a conversation with their teachers on what the Sports Day meant to them) and composed by the teachers of the school. The song is a simple and sincere **multilingual** oath.

Balloon Rail – Class 4



Sprints – all classes in same age group



Globe Stand – cooperative game



Pick Me Up - cooperative game

There were 14 events – skill-based games in same age group and cooperative games in mixed age group



Ulta Pulta – cooperative game



Nandu Nadai – Class 1

### Magical Moments

During the sprints, one set of children willingly repeated their run just because two of their friends did not have a right start. A child completed an entire leg of relay despite losing one shoe right at the start. He remembered that he had a team that he could not let down.

In the obstacle event for Class 1, despite the entire class completing ahead, a child did not give up but persisted to complete the race. The classmates of the child waited patiently too; a show of determination and camaraderie!

In the cooperative games, there was no yelling or irritability. Children in a team seemed keener on achieving the goal together and easily let go of their team mates' errors and inefficiencies. They helped and guided one another to do better and no team seemed concerned about the progress that the other teams were making.

### Lighter Moments

A clap was given for a relay race to begin; but no one ran. It took a moment for it to sink in that none of the runners had batons in their hands!

Runners in the sprint were poised for a launch. The commentators were getting the audience all charged up about the impending race, the audience cheering in gusto for the runners. And then . . . silence! No clap had sounded to kick the race off. The clapper had forgotten!

A toddler was so captivated by the events that she ran to the field to join her sibling making her mother sprint half way round the field to catch up with her!

A child was so busy warming up for the sprints (mind you, every child did some serious warming up!) that he missed the call for the race.



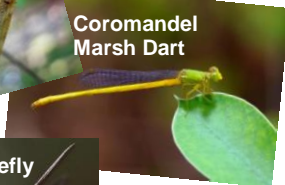
## It's a Poochi's World

26<sup>th</sup> July 2013

Ever wondered what inspires the extraordinary creatures in science fiction movies? One needs to just listen to Poochi Venkat, an old friend of the school and more a friend to the insects on campus, to believe that insects are the main and sole inspiration of not just science fiction movie makers but even motorbike designers!



Preying mantis



Coromandel Marsh Dart



Housefly

Take a look at some of the macro shots by Venkat given here. These are extreme close-up shots of insects found in Chennai. It just

takes a very keen human eye, an open mind and a warm heart to spot and admire them. Mr S.Venkataraman a.k.a. Poochi Venkat that day, armed with these three simple tools - his breathtaking close up photographs (called

macro photographs) of a variety of insects of Chennai, a contagious passion for the creepy crawlies and a humble wit, he had a very diverse audience of students (including some from the junior school), teachers and parents exclaiming, laughing and even loving the pesky pests!

Each of us took with us very interesting news about the beautiful insect world. That the pesky housefly is indeed very colorful and beautiful up close, that the preying mantis does look like a 'praying' mantis and infact is alternately called that, that a robber fly can be an effective solution for reducing mosquitoes, that cockroaches are the real maintenance crew for the world's drainage system, that dangerous looking insects are seldom dangerous- their menacing looks are just shields for a timid soul . . .

The speaker who is currently a consultant to many organizations, scientists and researchers wears many hats - that of a naturalist, an astronomer, an art historian, a macrophotographer, a designer . . . That day Venkataraman donned his poochi macrophotographer hat with elan and the result was an hour and half of complete joy and fascination for the world that exists but yet does not just before our eyes but a little beyond our awareness. If you thought that Poochi Venkat was the school's nickname for the speaker (as I did!), find him on the web or in print by the same name!!

## The Joys of Simple Living

Class 10's trip to Auroville , Sept 2013

Class ten students have been visiting and staying at Auroville near Pondicherry for many years now. This year was special in that each of the three groups of students got to not just work with three different communities at Auroville but also share their living quarters and lifestyle for three days of simple yet joyous living. Coincidentally all the three hosting communities viz. **Botanical Gardens, Sadhana Forest and Picchandi Kulam** were working on afforestation.



## Interview – Of Lime Juice and Love

A mother's cooking is the tastiest meal and warmest memory for everyone. Srimathy Akka has been serving mother's love to two generations of KFI students and teachers. She shares with us her 40 year journey with the school.

**The Poes Garden Years:** "I joined the school as cook in 1973, at the age of 15, at its Poes Garden campus. There were all of five children, an ayah and a watchman then on campus. There were many three-year old children as we also had kindergarten in those years. I used to mash their food, seat them on my lap and feed them while telling them stories. Today, I meet some of them as parents of our school!"

**Damodar Gardens Days:** "In 1980 I moved with the school to its current campus at Damodar Gardens. Despite a much larger campus with many more people, the love and warmth remained unchanged. We, the kitchen staff, sometimes do have our share of disagreements and concerns but resolve it. My most treasured learning at our school has been that conversations and communication can solve any problem."

**Her secret recipe:** "I tell every new colleague who joins the kitchen that "Paasathai setthu samaikkanam" (that they should add love as an ingredient). I love children and have always seen every child in this school as my own. When cooking for children attention to details is very important. For e.g the curd used for curd rice should be very fresh with not even a hint of sourness in it. So we make curd every night, put it in the refrigerator and take it out just before making the curd rice the next morning. Water is chilled in the freezer before making the juices. It is indeed gratifying when old students of the school taste the lime juice today and tell me 'Akka, the lime juice tastes exactly as it did when we were in school!'"

**Her motivation:** "The school is like a family. If for one day I do not see a teacher at school, I worry. I notice it when a child does not eat well. Just as each family member contributes differently and differing, so do we all in the school. And though my job is in the kitchen I have always been ready to help in any task related to the school. The school too has treated me as its own. As a single mother they made me feel confident about raising three children by myself, helped me build a house and provide good education for my children. I cannot imagine leaving the school. I am grateful to the school.

Just as we finished talking, an akka walked into the kitchen looking unwell. Before I realized it, Srimathy Akka sprung to action to look for something to eat and drink for the akka. In that moment, I saw her forty years in the school

This year's 'living with the communities' introduced the students to the art of simple living – to evenings of no electricity, to days without running water, to uniquely simple yet creative amenities. One group even turned vegan for the three days as their hosting community was. Here are some pictures that the students brought back with them along with the knowledge that it is possible to give up lucrative careers and luxurious lifestyles to live a meaningful life in balance with nature.



## News from the Campus

### A Star Visitor



A month back, the school's football field had a star visitor!

The Herbivorous **Indian Star Tortoise** found in dry areas and scrub forests



### The (home) School, KFI

There is a special education underway these days at The School - Home Schooling!



This cat adopted the school a year back and now so has its two and half month old kitten. The kitten schools with its mom at home which we call The School.



And at meal time the mother tastes the food laid out before its kitten does but never begins its meal without its offspring. We welcome the new parent and student to our school!

### Rain, Rain, come again!



Terrestrial flatworm called Bipalium, also known as the hammerhead slug. This worm visits the school campus unfailingly during the rainy months every year.

## Therukoothu (Street Theatre)

July 4 - 7, 2013

The Annual Festival of Drama and Dialogue was conceived of by the students of class XI and XII nineteen years ago as a context for creative and meaningful interaction between schools. It creates opportunities for different groups of students to work together on issues that concern them. The plays staged during this festival use contemporary and relevant themes that stem from the students and their interests.

This year, the participating schools were invited to introspect, represent, construct and present their themes within the format of **street theatre**. Street theatre is one of the oldest forms of theatre in existence. It is a highly physical theatre usually having dance, mime and slapstick, with simple costumes and props. The festival this year spanned four days and was preceded by a day of two workshop sessions – one for the teachers and one for the students to orient the participants to the possibilities of the street theatre format. The workshops were anchored by, Pralayan, one of the founders of the Chennai Kalai Kuzhu and a veteran of the street theatre movement in Tamil Nadu and Elango Kumaravel, an actor and script writer and co-founder of Chennai-based theatre group Magic Lantern.

Each school chose from the 4 venues located all over the campus – The jungle gym, open circle, magizham poo tree, and the junior school play area. 14 schools participated and explored socio-political themes as is common in street theatre. The schools staged their plays on the 4th and 5th of July. Each day, following the presentations there was a panel discussion with the students and teachers of the participating schools and the hosting school. This discussion was an honest critique of the plays of the day by the panel followed by a panel and audience Q&A with the cast of the plays. On the 6th of July, Varun Aiyer, an ex-teacher of the school and a theatre artiste anchored a dialogue with all the participating schools on the issues raised in each of the plays. As is tradition, the KFI students staged their play for parents and friends of the school on the 7th of July bringing the festival to a grand finish.



**This year's festival was special.** Not just in that it opened to the dance of the butterflies after the first seasonal showers nor that it brought the entire campus alive with voices, music and dance. It was special because it brought about fascinating camaraderie between the schools during and after the plays, in each school trying to learn the small tricks and techniques that the other used to get the crowd's attention. It also showcased the same children taking differing stands on the interpretation of the socio-political issues and the styles of their theatre presentations. Here is a generation that can relate and argue and learn from one another without personalising issues or interactions yet being deeply involved with them.