BEFORE A SEED

Recently I had gone on a trip with students to Azhagar Koyil. At one spot, seeds that had fallen from the trees lay scattered along the path. Each one had a distinctive structure that nature had given it for traveling on the wind. But the students didn't notice them at all. Only after I picked up a few seeds and showed them did they take notice. Some, saying "I've never seen this before," began asking one question after another — how far these seeds fly, which tree's seeds these are, why so many seeds form. It showed how quickly children's interest comes alive once given a small invitation to pay attention.

But the question that stayed with me was different. Why weren't the students' minds moved to notice such things on their own, to pause for a moment, look closely, and sense their strangeness?

Every day we encounter countless people, objects, and sights. But how many of them stir our attention and wonder?

We usually connect wonder with an aesthetic or artistic sense. But it is tied to knowledge too. It was only when the students picked up those seeds and examined them that questions were born, and answers were sought. Wonder and attention pull each other along like this. Human knowledge grows only through this ongoing chain.

Things worthy of wonder have always surrounded us. Today's problem is that children are living in an environment where the habit of pausing to marvel, even for a moment, is slowly fading.

The New Human Environment and Commodified Wonder

It's true that never before in human history has there been as much knowledge and opportunity as today. But never before has human attention and thought faced this many challenges either.

Information overload, digital screens, artificial intelligence, social media, algorithms competing for our attention, endless entertainment — all of these together have created a new kind of human environment. This reshapes not only our attention, thinking, and daily life, but also human relationships and values.

In this environment, before we can take in one sight, the next one has already arrived. Before we can dwell with a question, the answer has already appeared. Speed has increased, but calm, unhurried observation is declining.

Today children experience images and information about the world more than they experience the world directly. Thanks to technology, a child can, from within their own room, learn about everything from outer space to the depths of the ocean, to the lives of various people in distant countries. But what matters is why, how, and how much we use that technology.

Nature has now become something we go searching for only during holidays — a kind of "tourism." In an environment cut off from direct contact with nature, artificial sounds, colors, and screens can never replace the natural stimulus for observation.

What amazes us is mostly content deliberately designed to capture our attention. Nature, everyday life, and human relationships have lost that place. Consumer culture and the attention economy use humans' capacity for wonder as their raw capital.

The wonder of consumption gives only a moment's thrill; the very next moment sends us searching for another thrill. The wonder of knowledge is different in nature — it builds a mental image, raises a question, stirs a thought, and invites us toward understanding.

How Do We Reclaim Wonder and Attention?

To keep wonder alive, we need to create opportunities for children to observe the world closely and converse with it. Wonder doesn't show up equally in everyone. But it can be nurtured — it cannot be forced.

Becoming a poet is suited only to some; but language ability is essential for everyone. In the same way, the habit of observing with wonder is necessary for everyone too.

Adults can be models of wonder through their words and actions. We can invite children to observe the world minutely through their senses, and to discover the novelty hidden within familiar things.

It's only when we go beyond the mere utility of objects and begin seeking out the stories, people, and relationships behind them that their vastness becomes clear.

We can take children outside and, without teaching them anything directly, simply ask them to observe their surroundings. Instead of supplying every answer immediately, we can let them sit with their questions for a while. We can stir wonder through imaginative questions and scientific facts.

Instead of asking "What did you learn?", we should give importance to open-ended questions like "What did you notice?", "What question came to your mind?", "How would this look from someone else's point of view?" Such questions mostly don't have just one correct answer, nor a wrong one. But they invite children to observe, to seek connections, and to think from others' perspectives.

These are just some possible starting points. What matters is to keep searching and keep trying.

A Skill for the Future

It's true that the world has shrunk into a village through communication technology. But the task of education is to help us feel, once again, the vastness and depth of the world.

Artificial intelligence may get better day by day at remembering information and using tools. There is training available for mathematics, language, and physical skill. But what matters is how much we nurture habits unique to humans — wonder, attention,

mental imagery, forming questions, exploring connections, and shaping ideas with the help of our own experience or imagination. This is what raises children from being mere consumers of the new human environment to becoming thinking participants in it.

Even if we walk past those seeds lying on the Azhagar Koyil path without noticing them, they lose nothing — they remain ready to travel on the wind and sprout. The loss is ours alone.

It is our responsibility to build in children a mind that can see the great tree sleeping within a single seed. As long as a student does not lose their sense of wonder about the world, their learning never ends.

— Author: C. Arunkumar, Child Development Worker, Madurai Seed Education Centres, maduraiseed1999@gmail.com, 99528 85135

(This is an AI generated English translation of the Tamil article)