

Last School

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- **HISTORY: OR THE HUMAN ADVENTURE**
- **AWAKENING WONDER**
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TOWARDS FREE PROGRESS

DEEPTI TEWARI

Last School's courses are not bound to a single approach or a predetermined syllabus. It is accepted that the best condition for learning is a free and conscious choice which emerges from an awakened aspiration to know and to be more truly what one is in the luminous depths of the being.

The very multiplicity in ways of teaching and learning seeks to create a rich environment that will unveil innate faculties and stimulate the growth of consciousness.



The programme at Last School includes literature, visual art in all its forms, photography, social sciences, Indian culture, natural sciences, philosophy, mathematics, physics & chemistry, languages. Physical education is very much insisted upon as are extra-curricular activities such as dance, music, theater, so that all the parts of the being may be awokened and developed.

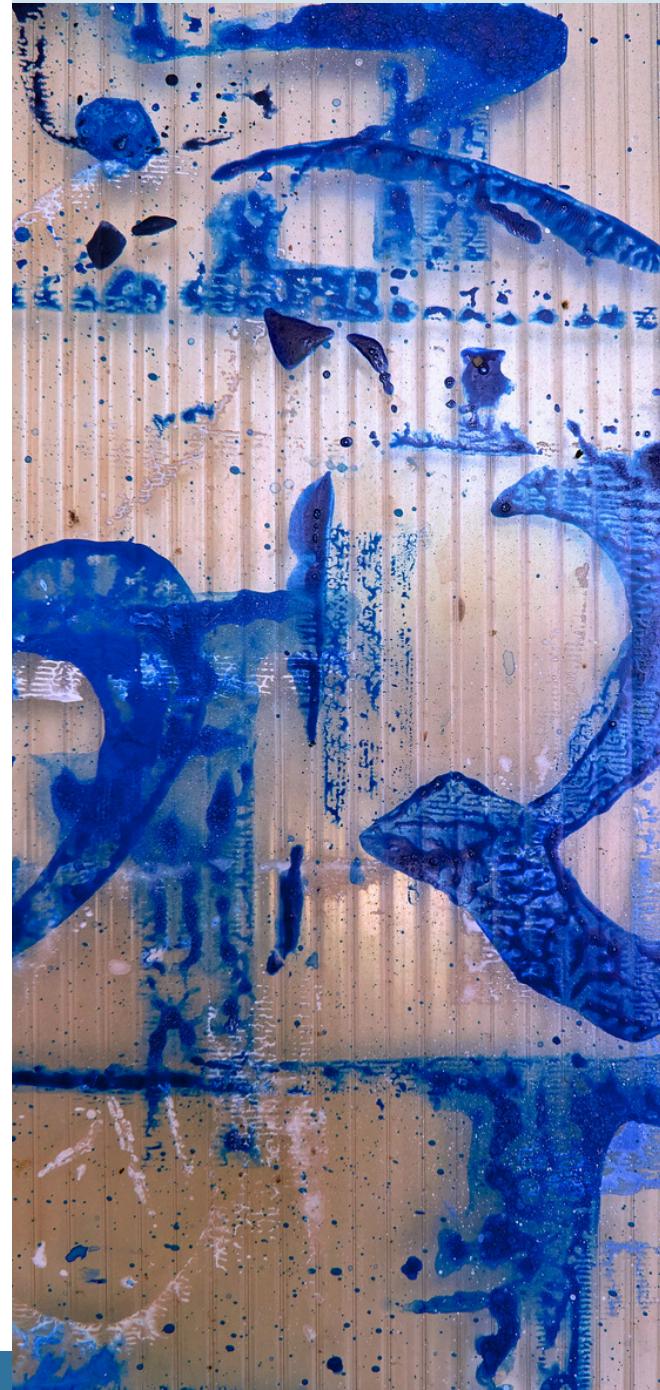
Evolving curriculae

Teachers start with a broad sense of the field to be covered with a particular group/person, in a particular discipline or subject.

But the details of the lessons as also their structure and progression develop in the course of the living interaction and exchange that takes place through the year between students and the teachers.

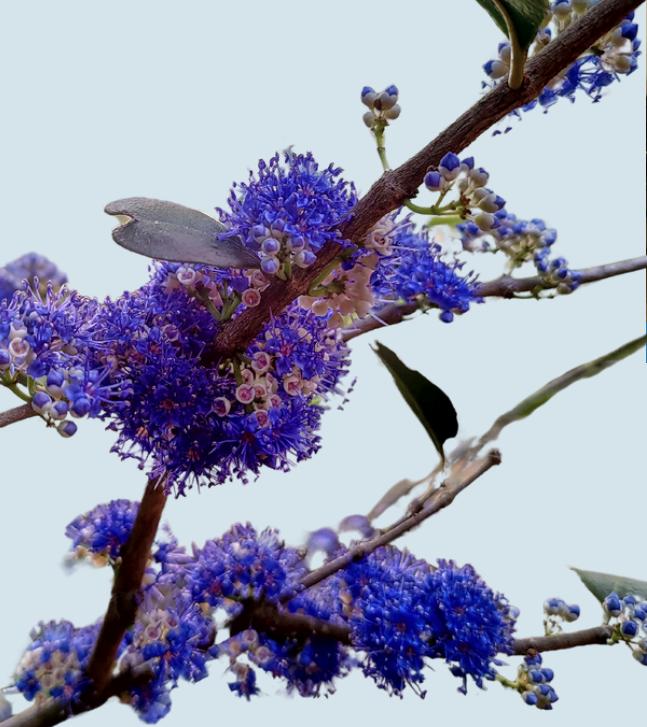
Last School has developed what can be called 'Post-syllabi': i.e., Course Descriptions compiled at year-end, which tabulate and illustrate details of the journey of learning and discovery as teachers look back and observe highlights and landmarks while mapping out the path traversed.

I WANT TO INSIST ON THE FACT THAT IT WILL BE AN EXPERIMENT, IT IS FOR MAKING EXPERIMENTS, RESEARCH, STUDY



When receiving new students

The attempt is that of receiving new students into a supportive and structured collective, and encourage them towards a deepening individual quest.



AN UNENDING EDUCATION, CONSTANT PROGRESS AND A YOUTH THAT NEVER AGES



Beginning with "Last School" and ending with "No School", this programme links with the second point of the Auroville Charter, which sees Auroville as a place of "unending education, constant progress and a youth that never ages".

The method to be followed is based upon what Mother called 'Free Progress'.

Mother's sutra

The first School in Mother's list is called "Last School"—clearly this suggests that it is the last school.

But as it begins the list, it must correspond to the point where schooling actually commences which is necessarily post-Kindergarten.

Thus the first years, when the child is learning, is being trained to read and write languages and make calculations, are the years of last school.

The teacher is there to train, to develop further and to awaken innate faculties so that as quickly as possible the child may learn how to learn independently.

This beginner's stage can also correspond to any first introduction or encounter with a new field of learning.

FOR, IF THE AIM OF EDUCATION IS GROWTH OF CONSCIOUSNESS, THERE IS NO LIMIT TO WHAT ONE MAY SEEK TO KNOW AS ONE LIVES IN A JOY OF DISCOVERING THE NEW AND THE BEAUTIFUL.

*Last School
After School 2:1
Super School
no School*

Subsequently, we enter into the years of After School, which has three phases according to Mother's list.

These can be understood literally to refer initially to the period when the youth consolidates and develops the knowledge and skills gained in the Last School phase.

It is when this has been achieved that he automatically tries to experiment and apply the knowledge learned, through a process of repeated experimentation and demonstration.

Finally, ready to move further, the youth enters a period of further exploration in which he widens his horizons and discovers newer vistas and worlds to learn and know about.

In these three phases, which can be defined broadly as stages of: Development; Demonstration; Exploration, the teacher's role, informed by keen observation and deep understanding, is more and more that of friend, guide and helper.

And he/she uses the triple method of suggestion; influence and example—never of imposition—to work with the developing personality of the youth. (It must also be understood that each of these stages exist simultaneously, based as they are on the varying level of advancement that a youth may have in any given domain. And one can conceive of a person being at the Last School stage (that is, the level of Basic training) in one subject, area of self-development or skills training and in another, After School 3 (the stage of further Exploration).

It is only that each stage emphasises one approach over and above the others.

FREE PROGRESS NECESSARILY IMPLIES A GREAT PLASTICITY.

All methods are valid—one has to find the right method for a given person or situation, which may be valid only for that particular person/situation).

We then come, in Mother's list, to the term Super School.

This name seems to suggest a certain amount of intensive, i.e., super schooling again. But, as the youth has learned to progress on his own by this time, it must imply a wholly other sort of schooling. Thus it must be schooling at a higher level or dimension.

This can be conceived of as the stage when the youth comes into contact with great movements of world thought and action; where he can summarise in his awakened thought all the vast ideas as also the fields of human endeavour.

Yet the orientation of his/her being must remain turned towards the future. A teacher or a guide becomes essential at this stage to help accelerate the process of learning.

The aim is integral personality development, and someone is needed who can help to indicate the essence of each domain. Schooling is intensive but of another order. This is also the phase of apprenticeships and the acquisitions of skills and/or professional training.



It is Super School that prepares the being to enter into the stage of No School which can be conceived of as the moment when the awakened consciousness needs no other guide than the one within.

Mother saw Auroville as a learning society and each unit necessarily should be a learning environment. In the future we can envision that possibilities for apprenticeships and professional/skills training will be available in all units.

Everyone will be then a teacher and learner simultaneously and Auroville will indeed be the place of an unending education, constant progress and a youth that never ages.

But till then the 'schools' and the society have a work to do in growing into the dimensions indicated in Mother's Sutra for Auroville education. Such are the ideas arrived at as of now but obviously more will be discovered and developed as the underlying truth of Auroville grows and manifests.

Much of what has developed so far can be viewed through the perspective created by Mother's list of names.

A certain conscious analysis and rationalisation still needs to be undertaken, but already each of these stages exists in practice.



LAST SCHOOL WORKSHOPS



A PLACE OF BEAUTY

BHAVYO TRIVEDI

Creating beauty in our surroundings is as essential as cultivating inner order. Inspire observation, wonder, and harmony.

Why art?

When art was first proposed in Last School in the early 90's, it was with the intention not to teach kids art, but to use it as a tool to bring much needed discipline to the rather wild Auroville teenagers of the day, as well as to rein in the energies of life through the aesthetic sense of harmony and beauty.

Thus, art came into Last School as a tool to channel rebellion and reign in the vital being. We continue to use it as a medium to look inwards and to work on the self.

Organizing matter helps to bring order to that which is immaterial.

Just as one cleans one's home to restructure one's thoughts, so is it with the school's physical environment.

Our insistence on beauty in all corners of the school has created a base we consistently come back to, as the habit of caring for a physical space and materials we use quickly slips from our minds as we busy ourselves with routine.

We seek to enhance the space, rather than decorate it, and through the attention brought, encourage the sense of observation and wonder. Beauty has truly become a key in our approach to education.

NATURE
MAKES AN
OFFERING OF
HER BEAUTY



ART AS A TOOL

Each new term begins with a school-wide workshop week, where students and teachers come together, face shared challenges, and work in silence on concentration, patience, and perseverance.

The workshops have become a crucial tool in our functioning. They are a way for the school to reconnect and interact; they set the themes which will be developed in different classes throughout the term, as well as setting the tone for the attitude we wish to have as a collective.

The reversal

Unlike conventional schooling, where tests conclude a term, and students must provide answers; Last School begins each term with a collective quest.

The workshop week becomes an entry into the term's theme.

These workshops act as a sort of psychological test, an occasion which demands that the students and teachers develop qualities of goodwill, concentration, perseverance, a sense of responsibility and wonder.

Through this week we will find the *questions* which we will explore during the term.



Silence

We seek to create an environment in which the mind is distracted as little as possible. Each participant has the responsibility to be silent and allow the others to concentrate on the work.

Even if reactions arise and there are emotions at play, the individual takes into account the collective and tries to offer the best of themselves.



HARMONY IN NATURE

BHAVYO TRIVEDI

A collaboration with Jinyeo & Shradhanjali

**LIFE MUST
BLOSSOM LIKE A
FLOWER
OFFERING ITSELF
TO THE DIVINE.**

One-week intensive workshop created in collaboration with Shradhanjali and one of their artists and designers in particular, Jinyeo Kim.

The focus of this week was to work with nature and learn from its forms.

Detailed works with pressed leaves explored composition in the micro and macro. The skills developed were put to test in a collective puzzle to challenge the students and teachers.

The school also visited Shradhanjali to learn from its craft and its history as one of the first units of Auroville.

A walk through the Revelation Forest and a presentation on its diverse approach to reforestation was part of the workshop week as well.

This workshop focused on nature and its beauty, harmony as a basis for the artworks created both in the individual and the collective.



AUROVILLE OFFERS COUNTLESS POSSIBILITIES WHERE LEARNING EXTENDS BEYOND THE WALLS OF A SCHOOL. HOW FAR DO OUR EDUCATIONAL STRUCTURES MAKE USE OF THESE POSSIBILITIES?

Shradhanjali welcomed us with warmth and great generosity.



SHRADHANJALI

Shradhanjali ('offering of faith') is a handicraft unit of Auroville.

It was started in a corner of Aspiration community in 1980 by two young Indian women who dreamed of creating beautiful products to generate some much needed income for Auroville.

It has been a profoundly enriching voyage to reach where we are today as it is a special privilege and responsibility to be an Auroville unit.

WHO IS JIN ?

I am Jin - Jinyeo Kim.

I was an automobile engineer in Korea, and now I have been working as a designer for five years in Shradhanjali.

My work has the perspective of an engineer. I imagine the sweat drops of the workers and the gestures of the leaves in the process of completing the work.

I keep, always, in mind that the work is not only mine.

When I'm making a work, I don't think my hand is mine. My hand is just a communicator, it captures the gestures of nature on a canvas.

NATURE IS ALREADY BEAUTIFUL.



INTEGRATING KNOWLEDGE ACROSS DISCIPLINES

HISTORY: OR THE HUMAN ADVENTURE

JEAN-YVES LUNG

When we talk of a curriculum or a programme, we often speak of what must be covered, what skills must be developed. The students must have done this, seen that, covered that.

If we take history for example, it's very vast of course, the history of humanity as a whole.

The history of India, the history of ancient Greece, ancient Egypt, the middle ages, the Islamic world, what China is and represents, what Russia is and represents... all of that and much more, has to be explored to some extent.

We need an internal understanding of what each civilization represents, that the others are not, what is special and specific – the irreducible specificity of each culture.

The question arises:

WHAT IS THIS HUMAN ADVENTURE?

What is this incessant race between the forces of progress, the forces of destruction, of inertia, this never ending construction site.



HISTORY IS APPROACHED BASED ON SRI AUROBINDO'S PERSPECTIVE, TO AWAKEN IN THE STUDENTS A SENSE OF HUMAN ADVENTURE, TO SHED LIGHT UPON ITS MAIN ISSUES, AND IDENTIFY ITS CYCLES.



The start of this year saw a particular interest expressed by the students to explore Sri Aurobindo's works.

Through various classes, passages from The Foundations of Indian Culture, Secret of the Vedas, The Bourgeois and the Samurai and a few chapters from the Human Cycle were studied.

Discussions arising from these readings were often linked to current events, the perspective of which became more comprehensive through Sri Aurobindo's approach of the development and evolution of human beings and human society.

The intent is to develop in students the capacity, not only a keen sense of the past, human aspirations and tendencies but to explore the world at large in its diversity as well as its underlying oneness. To develop through this study, a depth and wideness of understanding, a capacity for self-reflection.

SATYAVAN BHATT

[STUDENTS] ARE TAUGHT HISTORY OR SPIRITUAL THINGS, THEY ARE TAUGHT SCIENCE OR SPIRITUAL THINGS. THAT IS THE STUPIDITY.

IN HISTORY THE SPIRIT IS THERE; IN SCIENCE THE SPIRIT IS THERE;

THE TRUTH IS EVERYWHERE.

THE QUEST OF ANCIENT INDIA

DEEPTI TEWARI

Last School insists on a deep dive into India, exploring its culture and its main ideals, as well as the role it should play in the world.

India's offering to the world

Many of India's great idea-forces are highlighted, especially the Upanishadic quest: *Kasmin Vijnate Sarvam Idam Vijnātam: What is that, knowing which, everything can be known?*

This is the great fundamental question that separates a knowing and learning which is all about the outer world of 'becoming' from an inmost knowing - a knowledge of 'Being' - that which is the source of manifestation.

Last School attempts to create an awakened awareness of these different types of knowledge in the hope that students growing up in Auroville will be able to differentiate and pursue the two paths, inward and outward, simultaneously.

**कस्मि न्विज्ञाते
सर्वमिदं विज्ञातम्**



POETRY AND THE LIFE FORCE

DEEPTI TEWARI

A great importance is given to poetry which can have such a deep effect upon the emotional, imaginative and visionary side of the student's developing personality.

Dramatic poetry

With the older group three great plays were studied through a deep dive and critical analysis: Sri Aurobindo's very special play: Perseus the Deliverer.

This received an enthusiastic response from the students. It was decided to study Shakespeare's history plays in relation to the Roman Empire. Julius Caesar first to be followed by Antony and Cleopatra.

When studying dramatic poetry as embodied by the above, the students are also given an introduction to the history of the time.

Thus, there was a glance at Hellenic Greece and its surroundings as well as a dwelling upon the transitional moment of what had become an effete Republican Rome to the Imperial Rome of the Caesars.

The class looked at the life of Socrates first when tied to Hellenic Greece through the great play of Sophocles which constitutes his trio of Theban plays: Antigone.

This was a moment to discuss the deep question of individual vs collective responsibility.



RISE FROM THE
STRENGTHENING SOIL
TO THE GREAT
ADVENTURE

Literature selections are always illustrative of some key moment, historical or psychological in the development of human consciousness.

Thus, there is an accent on great historical events such as the World Wars through stories such as that of Anne Frank. Or the transcending of insuperable difficulties such as is illustrated by the story of Helen Keller and her teacher Anne Sullivan. The manner in which the Europeans settled the Americas is also illustrative of some of the issues that arise in the present-day world and this too is looked at through selections in literature and poetry, short stories and plays.

The attempt is to create a set of young persons who are culturally literate and at home in various world views and contexts.



SINCE LITTLE BY LITTLE EARTH MUST OPEN TO HEAVEN
TILL HER DIM SOUL AWAKENS INTO THE LIGHT



LANGUAGES

Language forms the way we see the world. This year 8 languages are available at the school and students are encouraged to gather at least three under their belts.

Language classes are taken in small groups, according to both interest and familiarity with the tongue.

As students choose their languages, they must clarify what about the language interests them, how deep they are ready to go.

Is it the spoken part of a new language that is to be acquired, or the script and grammar to be able to tackle texts in their original tongue, or is it the chance of discovering the world and culture that language opens up which fascinates them.



THE WORLD IS A SPIRITUAL PARADOX
INVENTED BY A NEED IN THE UNSEEN.
A POOR TRANSLATION TO THE CREATURES SENSE
OF THAT WHICH FOR EVER EXCEEDS IDEA AND SPEECH,
A SYMBOL OF WHAT CAN NEVER BE SYMBOLISED,
A LANGUAGE MISPRONOUNCED, MISSPELT, YET TRUE.

Italian

In Italian, literature and philosophy classes were explored. Western thinkers like Immanuel Kant, Nietzsche, Goethe, Feuerbach, and Schopenhauer through Sri Aurobindo's perspective on consciousness and evolution.

This approach encourages students to connect Western philosophical questions—such as Kant's inquiries into judgment and metaphysics—with Sri Aurobindo's ideas on the unfolding of consciousness.

We studied the works of Tiziano Terzani and Gabriele D'Annunzio, and examined the "Divine Comedy," focusing on its structure, symbolism, and timeless characters.

ROSALBA CICERELLI



AWAKENING WONDER

ENTOMOLOGY

MANYA SEKAR

Entomology - the joy of a deep dive into hours to explore the fascinating world of insects. And much venturing outdoors.



Insect poetry

Cloudy mornings find the entomology class outside, often staring at a single rock for hours, enthralled by the wonders that emerge from beneath.

Like poetry, entomology has awakened in us the art of noticing. We have become so much more attuned to the minutiae, the small things so often taken for granted. We no longer look at insects with disgust or indifference, but awe and curiosity.



We've all become experts at identifying insects, no creature too small or unworthy for the time we spend hunched over it.

It's as if insects have increased in number since entomology was introduced to me.

Everything becomes apparent the more we look for it, just as everything takes on the meaning we give it.

A WORLD ONCE SO MINISCULE
WE GLANCED
RIGHT PAST IT

For Jana, entomology means so much because at every level of study, it shows us how interconnected everything is, and how no organism can survive without the others. At the base of the pyramid are the most microscopic members of our planet.

As Jana says, it's sad that entomology is not a widely taught subject.

As our class has learnt, inviting the science of insects into our minds and lives has drawn us within ourselves and opened us to a world once so minuscule we glanced right past it.



EVER SINCE CONSCIOUSNESS
WAS BORN ON EARTH,
LIFE IS THE SAME IN INSECT,
APE AND MAN,

ITS STUFF UNCHANGED, ITS
WAY THE COMMON ROUTE.



BUGS OH BUGS

GAYATRI SUZUKI

Comfort class

I was very fortunate to have been given the opportunity of joining entomology. It is a class that I believe isn't typically a "school classic" subject in any way, shape, or form, and yet one of the classes that stuck with me the most.

In the limited time I was present in this class, I began to touch upon the basics. The major categories of bugs, and how to tell them all apart, and basic bug anatomy.

From what I remember, we did go into specifics when it came to beetles and caterpillars. The main ingredients of this entomology class, however, were the documentaries of all sorts of topics.

How bugs see the world, bugs taking flight, bugs storing food and how they play a role in the ecosystem, and so on.

However, I think more than the bugs themselves, I enjoyed watching people come together to appreciate the critters that typically are subject to "kill them!" jokes.

I definitely noticed a shift of attitude, in the whole school, in fact. I saw genuine effort to suppress fear, from people who might have freaked out over bugs once. Newfound curiosity and appreciation for them in others. People would notice, and send photos of bugs in the group chat, and come together to try and identify a "mystery bug" every now and then.

I myself gained another layer of love for bugs, and had a space to go in depth on bugs I always wanted to, but never did at home. Of course, all while learning new things about bugs, that I'd never heard about, along the way.



IN SO MANY FORMS

DUNYA GRISHINA

Busted knees and efficiency

When I was just a small kid, running around with busted knees, along with a smile that had missing teeth, there was no better place for exploring and adventuring than our dacha.

A small community of wooden houses, one hour trip from Moscow, was surrounded by nature wherever you looked. My group of friends would run around the compound from noon till sundown, coming home only to eat the day's meal and sleep till tomorrow arrived.

OUR TEACHER JANA HAD SUCH AN INFECTIOUS ATTITUDE THAT BY THE TIME CLASS WAS OVER I LEFT SMILING FROM ONE EAR TO ANOTHER

The fresh air endlessly buzzed with our excitement, curiosity as well as a couple of other things. Insects, they were a given thing in our lives at dacha. Whether it was mosquitoes hungry for our juvenile blood, ants trailing across the winding pathways, bees drifting from one clover flower to another, horseflies that would bite us when we swam in the river, they were such a constant in our lives we often overlooked them.

For years I considered bugs as mostly a nuisance or did not consider them at all. Then something in me shifted and I had the strongest urge to defend "villainized" animals. It did not take long for me to get immersed in the world of insects, I was fascinated by them to a degree that was uncomfortable to some adults in my life.

When it was announced that there was going to be an Entomology class in Last School I did not hesitate to write my name on the list of attendees. Our teacher Jana had such an infectious attitude that by the time class was over I left smiling from one ear to another. The class immediately solidified itself as one of my favorites, standing right next to the uncontested champion of more than 13 years— Math.

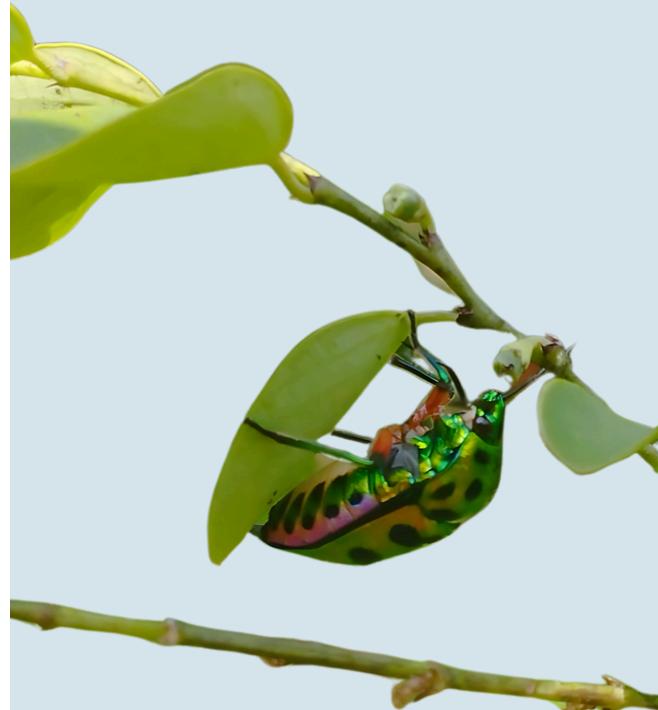
THE FRESH AIR ENDLESSLY BUZZED WITH OUR EXCITEMENT, CURIOSITY,

AS WELL AS A COUPLE OF OTHER THINGS.



The more we learned the more I saw insects all around myself, they were everywhere, they were breathtaking. Life prevails in so many forms, us and them, so unlike each other, yet I couldn't help but notice similarities in our behaviors, and social structures, in our struggles.

Now I dedicate my time painstakingly trying to capture their essence on paper. An insect's design is so very beautiful to my eyes. The efficiency in their design, that level of precision is something I wish to emulate in all art I create.



I COULDN'T HELP BUT NOTICE SIMILARITIES IN OUR BEHAVIORS, AND SOCIAL STRUCTURES, IN OUR STRUGGLES.

the first
necessity is
the inner
discovery

Last School
After School 2:!
Super School
No School

Last School

A UNIT OF SAIER, AUROVILLE

Last School in Auroville, India, works primarily with teenagers. Its educational approach, anchored in Sri Aurobindo, is centered on an integral development through the method of Free Progress.

The school offers an environment of beauty, where students asking their own questions, approach learning outside the constraints of traditional academic programs or external standards. Thus stepping firmly away from formal diplomas, Last School seeks to develop individuals who are better equipped to address tomorrow's complex challenges, invent new solutions, and contribute to an evolving society, rather than simply integrating into the existing one.



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PHOTOGRAPHY: ASHWIN EZHUMALAI

“IN THE PHYSICAL THE DIVINE MANIFESTS AS BEAUTY”
Mother's message to Last School in 1971