

Last School

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FREE PROGRESS AND OFFERING IN INTEGRAL EDUCATION

JEAN-YVES LUNG

A school that aspires to be a place of *free progress* must give the students freedom to grow along their own lines of development, which they have to discover. But what keeps this freedom progress-oriented?

One could argue that it is mainly the presence of a flame of aspiration and progress being a living reality in the teacher team and, therefore, in the very atmosphere of the school. This would mean that we cannot consider the school a place where teachers find a job in exchange for remuneration, the job consisting of training faculties in the students that will enable them to find a job in the labour market later on. This is totally insufficient.



Willing servitors?

The school has to be a place of growth for the teacher as well as for the student; it has to be a place of self-becoming. This is possible only if we introduce the dimension of *yajna*, offering, into our activities.

What is exactly meant by a sincere aspiration?

“AN ASPIRATION WHICH IS NOT MIXED WITH ANY INTERESTED AND EGOISTIC CALCULATION.”

In Auroville, each of us is meant to be a “willing servitor of the Divine Consciousness” and it is the main reason for our being here, doing what we are doing.

It is also important that the dimension of mutual giving, *dànam*, is alive, for it creates the fabric of the collective reality.

These are intangible elements that would be difficult to measure and assess although they are the most essential dimensions of the service.

IN THIS PLACE, TITLES AND POSITIONS WOULD BE REPLACED BY OPPORTUNITIES TO SERVE AND ORGANISE; THE BODILY NEEDS OF EACH ONE WOULD BE EQUALLY PROVIDED FOR, AND INTELLECTUAL, MORAL AND SPIRITUAL SUPERIORITY WOULD BE EXPRESSED IN THE GENERAL ORGANISATION NOT BY AN INCREASE IN THE PLEASURES AND POWERS OF LIFE BUT BY INCREASED DUTIES AND RESPONSIBILITIES.



An aspiring collective

Being a school becomes then just a pretext to have a field of aspiration and progress at our disposal, it becomes a place where our activities are offered to a higher consciousness so that it can become subtly and almost surreptitiously part of our reality, and it is in this kind of atmosphere that freedom can find its place and right orientation.

Ideally and ultimately, it is consciousness that must govern. Living Presence must replace mechanical rules. That is what would make the difference. And be effectively creative of a new reality.

EVERY WORKPLACE
IN AUROVILLE SHOULD
FIRST BE A PLACE OF OFFERING
TO A HIGHER PRINCIPLE AND
OF MUTUAL GIVING.

THEN THE REALITY
OF A NEW ECONOMY
WOULD EMERGE.

The New Reality of Education

And in schools, it would enable a new education. If this more qualitative and subjective dimension isn't there, we fall back into ordinary patterns, our life doesn't carry anything new and has to be propped up with administrative means to keep standing.

THE REAL OUTCOME OF OUR WORK COMES FROM WHAT IS MOST INTANGIBLE AND INFORMAL, THE FLAME OF ASPIRATION THAT SPRINGS FROM THE SOUL, IT CANNOT BE MANUFACTURED THROUGH ADMINISTRATIVE TOOLS.



THIS CREATES A DIFFERENT REALITY.

OF COURSE, IT MIGHT SEEM INCONSEQUENTIAL, IN A STRUCTURE THAT APPEARS ENTIRELY ORDINARY.

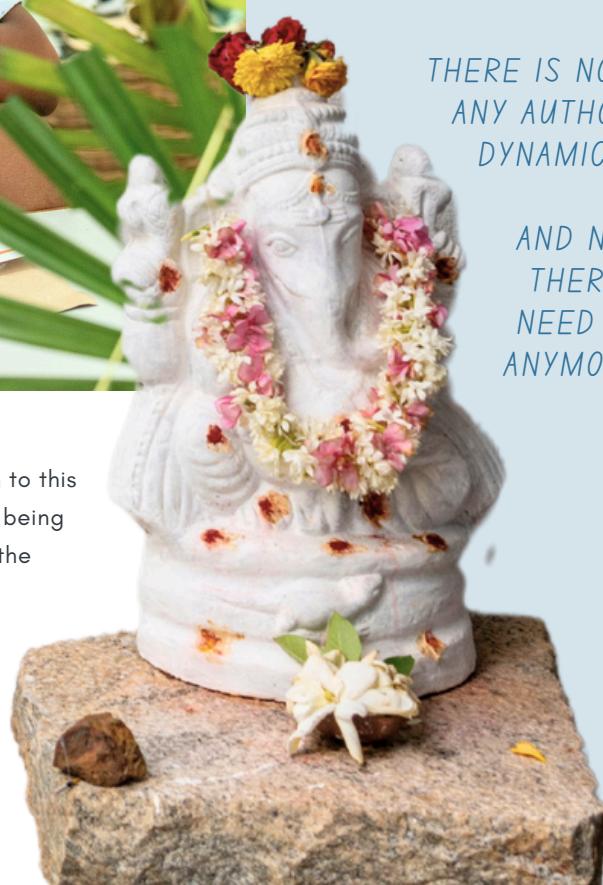
BUT WHAT HAPPENS WITHIN THIS STRUCTURE IS VERY DIFFERENT.

THERE IS NO LONGER ANY AUTHORITY DYNAMIC AT PLAY.

AND NATURALLY, THERE'S NO NEED FOR ONE ANYMORE.

Thus, consciousness and matter are to be proposed and explored, certainly not imposed. Attention must be given to this aspect, meaning we must avoid giving the impression of being dogmatic, of presenting something as if to say, "Here is the answer." Great care must be taken not to use this to position oneself above or to reason on behalf of someone else. That's simply not possible.

WE CANNOT APPROPRIATE SOMETHING THAT IS PERPETUALLY A SUBJECT OF EXPLORATION.



LAST SCHOOL WORKSHOPS



WHAT IS TRANSFORMATION?

IN CONVERSATION WITH LOLA AND BHAVYO

The January 2024 edition of the Last School Workshop focused on the theme of transformation, the underlying promise of evolution, and the possibility of our conscious attempt to participate in it.

Why Last School Workshops

These tri-yearly workshops, are week-long silent adventures during which both students and teachers come together in a collective exploration, or concentration, and goodwill, often exploring a theme through the medium of art.

As the new year began, an exhibition of images of contemporary glass works lined the corridor walls. Blue, gold and white paper butterflies fluttered by the hundreds in the school. And haiku punctuated this explosion of life.

This we hoped would nourish them and inspire in them a sense of wonder for this theme of transformation and change of matter.

Students were asked:

WHAT DO GLASS AND BUTTERFLIES HAVE IN COMMON?





The theme of transformation in matter was explored through morning talks, speaking of evolution, the *raison d'être* of Auroville, of aspiration and dedication to an incredible dream.

In art, it was looked at through the story of glass the beauty of shape and colour in contemporary works as well as through the work the students undertook.

For science, we had Jana who came to make a fantastic, enthusiastic, powerful introduction about the imaginal cells. And all the capacity, the possibility alive in these cells. They are incredible. It shifted something. It brought in a sense of delight.

And then we explored and practiced writing Haiku: the telling of what is, the concise here and now. Which speaks always of the unsaid.



LESS IS MORE

We tried to give them a contact with another quality of work, culture, different culture, different approach to the space.

We did this through the Japanese approach to zen and beauty, because they have this unique sense of space and that "less is more."

And we wanted the students to be able to see that. To experiment that in their works, in their attitudes.

Then again, it was research before going to a final work, to make it with a kind of research of perfection in the technique and to be as simple as possible. It's always very difficult.

We took time with it, we extended the workshop and added in an aspect of installation.

We asked the students to create their own stamps, and like a signature, find its purpose and placement in their work; completing it with intention and precision of each element.



AGILITY & GRACE

EXCERPT FROM A TALK GIVEN BY JANA EARLEY DURING THE WORKSHOP

And I want you to answer me out loud: what do we love about butterflies? I mean, butterflies are one of those creatures that nobody says, "Hey, squash that butterfly." Nobody stops and says, "Oh God, get that butterfly action," because something inside of us responds to a butterfly. So what is it that we respond to with the butterfly?

The gracefulness. Absolutely. And in fact, I'll bring this up because, and I want you while I'm talking about butterflies, to go ahead and make analogies.

An analogy is where you go, "Oh yeah, that's how I have to be," or, "That brings up how humans need to evolve," or things like this. Go ahead and think away while I'm talking.

So how many of you have seen these huge butterflies with the blue and the black wing? I think we all see this one. It's the blue Mormon.

This butterfly is a deep forest butterfly. It navigates its way through really thick, dense forest through *mulu*.

This butterfly, with these huge wings, enters the deepest part of the forest and navigates its way very gracefully through the forest without getting caught on anything. Talk about agility.

And when I say agility, I want you to go ahead and create an analogy to the brain, because right now in neuroscience, they're studying through insects the agility of the human brain, how our brains can actually change.



You hear people say, "Oh, people can't change."

Science, through the study of insects, is changing their ideas.

They're actually coming to—

WAIT A MINUTE, THE BRAIN CAN BE CHANGED. IT CAN BE OVERRIDDEN. THINGS IN YOUR BRAIN CAN BE RE—NOT READ—CAN BE OVERRIDDEN, YOUR PATTERNS.

And they're studying this through insect neuroscience.

Now I don't want to get too deep into this because I can go on and on for a couple of hours, and we don't want that.

So today what I'm going to go ahead and dive into is the transformation itself, because the transformation is what brings us into the philosophy, the spiritual, the artistic. And for scientists, it really does this also, because for ages, scientists had no—scientists had no idea what was happening inside that cocoon. It turns into a soup, literally. When you cut a cocoon open, it's a liquid.

So what is happening inside that cocoon, and what has happened inside that cocoon?



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INTEGRATING KNOWLEDGE ACROSS DISCIPLINES

ORGANISING THE SCHEDULE

FANNY AVIER

Last School is a special school when it comes to schedules: we want everyone to have a unique schedule suited to their needs for progress. Scheduling is challenging in general, but the fact that it's highly individualized here makes it even more complex.

Getting started

We usually start by setting up the group classes (we typically have between 3 and 4 groups), such as History, Math, Science, and Literature.

Then come the second languages, which happen based on the students' interests (Hindi, Tamil, French, Sanskrit, Spanish, Italian, Russian, etc.), as well as the art activities (Craft, Painting, Drawing).

Having an "integral schedule" is essential, where students can work with their mind, hands, and heart.

They also need to have some physical activity (usually outside of school, though gym class is now an option during school hours).

Their schedule is designed so they touch upon a variety of activities and gain diverse perspectives (depending on the teacher).



AS STUDENTS GROW AND MATURE, WHEN WE FEEL THEY ARE READY, THEY CAN CHOOSE TO FOCUS MORE ON SPECIFIC SUBJECTS, AND THE SCHEDULE IS ADAPTED ACCORDINGLY.



If the class a certain student wishes to attend happens outside the school but during school hours, we can be flexible as long as it contributes to their progress.

They are given freedom, trust, and support, as well as encouragement and a gentle push from the teachers. However, as a team, we do not seek results and strive to remain detached, without expectations.

It is sometimes challenging to identify what they truly need to progress. Like most teenagers, they occasionally test limits or avoid certain difficulties. However, as we get to know them and build relationships, it becomes easier to communicate and guide them through challenges and life situations.

FREE PROGRESS NECESSARILY IMPLIES A GREAT PLASTICITY.

On the teachers' side, we try to make their schedules as convenient as possible, enabling them to support students in the best possible conditions. Teachers also learn from one another by being in each other's classes or participating in exploration classes, where Mother's and Sri Aurobindo's work are often read and discussed.

Once in a while, schedules are set aside, and we all go on a walk around Auroville or to the nearby hill, from 5 a.m. to 9 a.m. Sometimes, we clean the school or do gardening together, students and teachers alike. These activities help develop essential skills, such as being in nature, building endurance, and handling daily life tasks with joy!

Visiting different units of Auroville or attending art exhibitions is also something we tend to do regularly.



Student to teacher to organiser

I first discovered India when I was 16 years old, on a trip with my class from France, and as I left, I knew I wanted to come back soon. Six months later, I was landing in Auroville, living in Kailash, and studying at Last School. I finally had the freedom to work on my interests as well as my weaknesses with the trust and push of my teachers.

I enjoyed the Art classes with Lola (and still do) in our bright and spacious art center. I also fully immersed myself in learning languages such as Russian, Italian, Hindi, and later Spanish. I was encouraged and happy to do a lot of sports before and after school, and I had the opportunity to spend time at Shradhanjali to observe how a creative unit of Auroville works.



MOST IMPORTANTLY, I GOT TO KNOW MYSELF BETTER, UNDERSTAND THE WORLD AROUND ME A BIT MORE, AND REALIZE THAT THERE IS SOMETHING DEEPER TO DISCOVER IN EVERYTHING AND EVERYONE.

After two years in Last School, I decided to volunteer at Deepanam, where I helped in Craft classes and French. Soon, I returned to Last School and joined the teachers' team.

I helped a French teacher, and started English one-on-one with students who needed time and attention. Then started with craft work such as crochet and knitting. Today, I work in all of these, sometimes simultaneously.



Increasing responsibilities

A year ago, I was given the opportunity to take on the responsibility of creating schedules for everyone. I've always liked planning, arranging, and making things fit and suit everybody. So far been quite natural and pretty enjoyable. However, it comes with its set of challenges and difficulties: trying to accommodate the needs of everyone, spending time understanding those needs, finding solutions when needs don't match or can be contradictory, and, of course, aspiring to organize classes not just in a logical way but in a magical way – for each class to feel as if it were meant to be.

I'm 24 years old now and this responsibility brings me a lot of joy and is definitely helping me progress in my problem-solving, communication, and observation skills. It is also teaching me to set boundaries when things are unmanageable and to accept that I cannot satisfy everybody.

I will keep doing my best, as I am receiving so much from the school as a whole: in terms of classes that I still take, such as Art, Languages, reading Mother's and Sri Aurobindo's works, the support from the teachers as my mentors or trainers, and just dealing with teenagers, all in the beautiful space that is Last School.



IMPROVISATION

MICHAEL SOKOLIN

In these classes we work on helping the students develop a capacity for dynamic self-expression through movement, voice, scene-work. Finding the 'natural rhythm' is what we focus on in these classes.

Yes, and...

The exercises demand spontaneity, naturalness in expression which helps the students discover their own sense of confidence that is natural and authentic to their expression.

This additionally helps the students build their interpersonal skills becoming more comfortable with embracing their vulnerability and being seen.

Improvisation inculcates qualities of courage, swiftness in decision-making, flexibility and adaptability in responding to the demands of the present moment, which demands concentration, silence and a refinement for learning how to listen better and better.

Alongside developing a sense for timing, rhythm and learning to discern organic impulses from fear/anxiety based suggestions.



INDIFFERENCE DEEPEN INTO INFINITY'S CALM
AND JOY LAUGH NUDE ON THE PEAKS OF THE ABSOLUTE.




JOYOUS
ENTHUSIASM:
THE BEST WAY OF
FACING LIFE.

TRUE ENTHUSIASM
IS FULL OF A
PEACEFUL
ENDURANCE.

OUR COURAGE AND
ENDURANCE MUST
BE AS GREAT AS
OUR HOPE AND
OUR HOPE HAS
NO LIMITS.



IMAGINAL CELLS

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 8

EXCERPT FROM A TALK GIVEN BY JANA EARLEY

The caterpillar is not like us. It doesn't have a—it has—it doesn't have an endoskeleton that grows with it. So it has to—it has an exoskeleton, which means its body outside has to change its size as it grows.

The caterpillar has to go into a stasis state, meaning it sits very still, then sheds its outer skin like a snake and comes out bigger. It does this five times. Each time it does, the other cells are busy trying to push the undifferentiated cells out, but these cells aren't going anywhere. They just float out of the way.

These strange cells are given a name by scientists: imaginal cells. How's that for a name? It says everything.

These cells carry the imagination, the imaginal aspect, of the butterfly already, but the cells themselves don't even know it yet. What happens is that the caterpillar's hormones start to wake these cells up.

Skipping ahead to the fifth instar, the imaginal cells begin to send out a high frequency—a different frequency to the other cells in the body. This frequency causes these cells to finally start coming together. As the cells start clustering, the hormones in the caterpillar signal that it's time to create a chrysalis. The word chrysalis is quite interesting because it comes from both Greek and Latin, meaning gold.

We are lucky because we actually have a caterpillar that creates a gold cone. Have you seen this? First, it creates a silver cone, then as it matures, it becomes gold.



This caterpillar is where the name chrysalis originated. The caterpillar finally goes into a stasis state and creates the chrysalis.

Inside the chrysalis, something remarkable happens. The caterpillar's cells—not the imaginal cells—begin to eat and digest each other. The caterpillar literally eats itself.

Meanwhile, because of the different frequency, the imaginal cells cluster together. You end up with a little pocket where the waste from the caterpillar eating itself is collected.

IN OUR BODY'S CELLS THERE
SITS A HIDDEN POWER
THAT SEES THE UNSEEN AND
PLANS ETERNITY,
OUR SMALLEST PARTS HAVE
ROOM FOR DEEPEST NEEDS;
THERE TOO THE GOLDEN
MESSENGERS CAN COME:

In another area, the imaginal cells come together to form what is called the imago. The imago is the final product, the mature adult.

Scientists have discovered that these undifferentiated cells can become anything according to their frequency. They conduct experiments, implanting imaginal cells into different pupal states to see what will grow. Since these cells are undifferentiated at the beginning, scientists are curious about when they start differentiating.

Finally, we have the imago. The imago is the final, mature adult. The word *imago* brings about all kinds of ideas. The ancient Greeks used it, and if anyone here has studied Plato, you'll know about the shiny image—the imago. *Imago Dei* is the image of God. Imago also brings forth the idea of a perfect image. Plato, through Socrates, described this concept, and Plato wrote it out.

There's a shining image up there, and of course, they call it God. There's a shining God up there, and we're all trying to be like that God. This was their idea. So, the word *Imago* has all kinds of connotations to it. The fact that we call the butterfly the *Imago* carries great significance, really, because the cells have imagined, the cells have remembered, and the cells have come up with this beautiful creature that now breaks out of its chrysalis and flies away.

So, *Imago Dei* means "in the image of God." *Imago* brings about your imagination. They've done all these studies on how cells come together to bring this beautiful butterfly into existence.

Now, I want you to think as an artist. *Imago Dei*—you're going to be God. In your artwork, you are God.

This is what the Greeks believed.

That's why art and beauty were so revered in ancient Greece. They believed they had to create this shining image, creating replicas of it.



OUR MIND AND LIFE AND SENSE AND LAUGH IN A LIGHT
OTHER THAN THIS HARD LIMITED HUMAN DAY,
THE BODY'S TISSUES THRILL APOTHEOSISED,
ITS CELLS SUSTAIN BRIGHT METAMORPHOSIS.

ON COURAGE



HAVE THE COURAGE
TO BE COMPLETELY
FRANK WITH THE
DIVINE.

WHAT SORT OF COURAGE DO I HAVE?

The dynamic of the student group this year at Last School is brave. They push themselves and each other, question and challenge the team. Can we give more, be more, risk more, offer more. The following are excerpts from writing assignment exploring the theme of Courage.

Break a pattern

Last Wednesday, a friend sang a song for our class. I got goosebumps. I thought about why that happened. When I sat down to write this piece, I realized I admired the quality in her to step out of her comfort zone. It's one thing to push yourself and another to push yourself knowing that people in the same room are better than you.

I don't have the courage to do that. I tend to only do things I'm good at. If I'm not good at something, I often don't even attempt to do it. She inspired me to try frisbee this weekend. I've been putting it off for two years, solely out of fear of not being the best or relatively good at it. But, I've decided to give it a shot, knowing people there are obviously better than me. It's important for me to break out of this pattern of only doing things I'm good at.

SIMRAN SHAH

Forge a character

Traveling alone for the first time to another country or receiving one of, if not, the most horrible news of my life has been one of the situations that have forged my current character.

Facing family problems without going crazy has been a survival challenge. A letting go of regret, fear, or shame.

*LET LIFE COME WITH
WHATEVER I AM GOING
TO BE PREPARED.*

As a human, I don't have courage in many other aspects of my life, like having the courage to believe in myself or having the courage to stay in the present without thinking so much about the future.

**GAIA POSADA
DEL TORO**

THE PROCESS OF REFLECTING AND WRITING THIS PIECE BROUGHT ME CLARITY ABOUT MYSELF I DIDN'T KNOW I NEEDED! THERE WERE POINTS I HAD NEVER THOUGHT OF, QUESTIONS I HADN'T ASKED MYSELF AND THROUGH THIS JOURNEY, I WAS ABLE TO DISCOVER MYSELF A LITTLE MORE.

SIMRAN SHAH



Courage to be

I have the courage to break my ego. As soon as I realise that I have been indulging in too much ego I try my best to shatter it to pieces. I might get cut by the shards but don't need to carry the weight any longer. The breaking of ego is inevitable. It will either break in its own unexpected ways or you can choose how it is broken.

I have the courage to be vulnerable, to behave in ways that are not seen to be socially acceptable. I will tell you exactly how I feel, even if I am feeling greed, guilt, or jealousy. I can make myself look smaller than you, be hurt by it, and know I did the right thing.

I have the courage to be comfortable with discomfort. Making sense of why I do what I do is necessary. When you intentionally put yourself in uncomfortable situations without the intent of growth, it is a form of self-harm.

I have the courage to be, to fall on your lap when I don't have the strength to hold myself. I might even ask you to help me up.

I will remove myself from your lap, see no pain.

I HAVE THE COURAGE THAT ALLOWS ME TO BE, TO LAUGH, TO LIVE, TO LOVE, TO FALL, TO CRY, AND TO HEAL.

ISHA MEENAKSHI



And if courage were me

I'm not the most courageous person. There are people far braver than I am, and some who simply aren't — but I try. And trying, I believe, is the first important step toward courage. Even the smallest attempts matter, success or not, as it shows the desire to move past fear.

Courage is an interesting thing, isn't it?

For me, courage isn't always about grand, showy gestures of what may, or may not, be bravery. It can be as quiet as smiling through a bad day or choosing kindness when anger is overwhelming. It's the everyday choices, others often don't even notice, smiling rather than crying, laughing rather than holding on to anger and helping out despite running on empty.



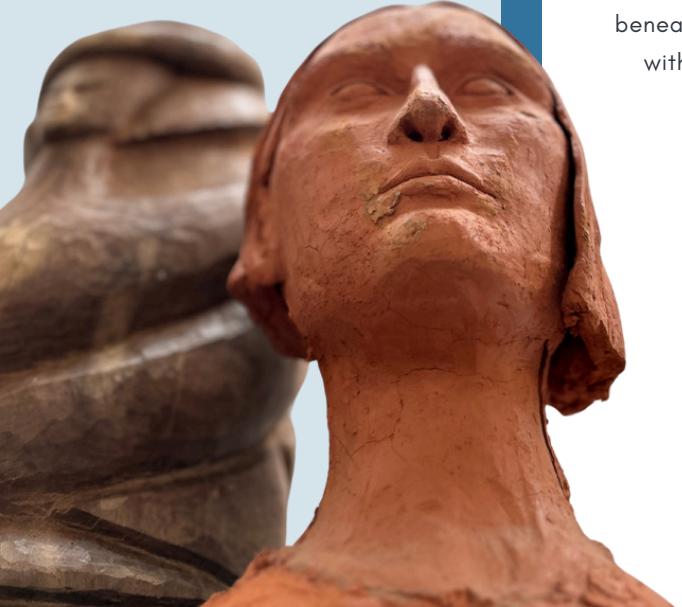


It's simple, really. Courage is intimidating, scary, and downright terrifying. It requires vulnerability, something most can't stand, for a reason or another. If it doesn't scare you, then maybe it's not courage you're feeling. It might be something adjacent, such as confidence, but not the real thing. Real courage is messy, it's the shaky hands, the racing heart, the uncertainty, but it's also that small stubborn voice saying 'do it anyway'.

Sometimes courage is about persistence, it's about going back up when life knocks you down. It's about believing in yourself in your darkest moments. And sometimes, it's just about accepting you're human, flawed, imperfect, and full of beautiful mistakes still to be done.

So no, I'm not the most courageous person, but I try, and maybe, just maybe, that's enough.

**NITIMEY CANDERLE
WEIHRAUCH**



On battling dragons

My best friend called me brave when I was lying on her bedroom floor, sunlight bleeding slow around me, a bronze halo. I laughed. I mean it, she said.

But I am not brave. I have battled no dragons and wielded no swords. I don't even wield words well sometimes; I knit them into armour that leaves my toes exposed. Courage is a cloud I cannot reach, a spell I cannot speak. I fall apart on bathroom floors and fall asleep near open doors I could so easily walk through.

I still hope there will be more doors. And that is how courage has crept up on me, soft tendrils wrapping around the windowsill till I could no longer close my eyes. I have learnt to find bravery in the ground beneath my feet, how it beats with the pulse of my blood.

I still see courage in the clouds, but now in how I have never stopped craning my neck for the silver. And hope comes in slivers but I open my hands and they're coated in glitter.

My courage lives in the tips of my fingers, in the words that clog my throat and bring tears to my eyes. My courage is that I try. I write. I place sentences like cookies on a platter. I hold out my heart and hope that it matters, again and again. I let people sink their teeth in.

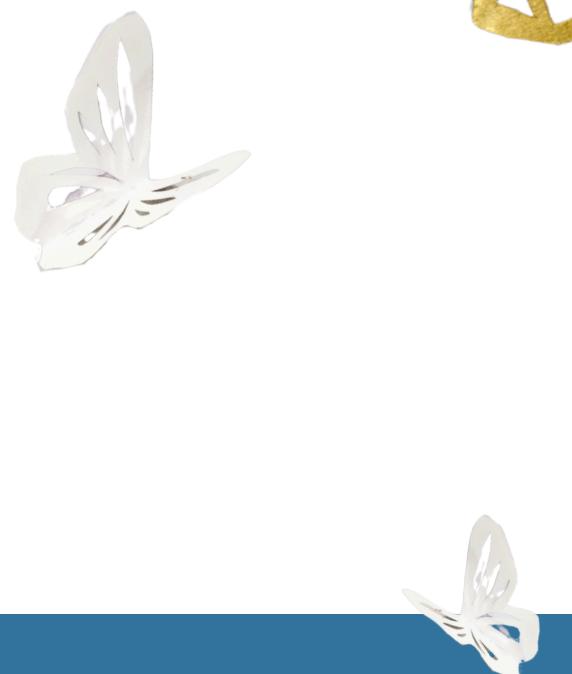
Courage is the guest that has never stopped knocking.

MANYA SEKAR



I HAVE THE COURAGE TO HELP YOU HOLD YOUR PAINT BRUSH WHEN IT SLIPS OUT OF YOUR HAND. LOOK AT YOU IN THE EYE, SMILE, AND STILL ADMIRE YOUR PAINTING AS YOUR OWN.

ISHA MEENAKSHI





Last School

A UNIT OF SAIIER, 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.



Last School
After School 2:1
Super School
no school

PHOTOGRAPHY: BHAVYO TRIVEDI

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