

Last School

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- A CROSS DISCIPLINARY INVITATION
- COLLECTIVE WORK
- AND THE HIMALAYAS



A NEW TYPE OF SCHOOL FOR THE CONTEMPORARY WORLD

DEEPTI TEWARI

The contemporary world is becoming far too complex and chaotic to be easily understood by man from the level of his present mental status. When those who are students today reach their full professional capacity, their over-specialized knowledge and their manner of conceiving the world may well be already obsolete.

The world is an intricate totality evolving at a rapid pace while the mind remains trained to long, exhaustive and limited analysis of details quite separate from the whole.





An answer to a need

There is the need to develop newer capacities in our educational systems: a global thinking, a synthesis of knowledge and cultures, a rapidity of intuitive insight and discrimination as well as the rich potential for adaptation.

The harmony to which we aspire for humanity will only become practicable if the power to realize is actually possessed not only in knowledge but also in action.

Therefore the need of the present is to develop the ability of combining everything into a complex synthesis both in knowledge as well as in action.

*AUROVILLE IS A PLACE
DEDICATED TO THE
REALISATION OF "AN
ACTUAL HUMAN UNITY".*

It has then the mission to discover, experiment with and implement what seem as yet only potentialities, not just to dream of them. This could be its most decisive contribution.

WE ARE HERE
TO LAY THE
FOUNDATIONS
OF A NEW
WORLD.



EXPLORING THE UNTEACHABLE

IN CONVERSATION WITH
JEAN-YVES LUNG

Obviously, since consciousness and matter are at the heart of our work, one could say Mother and Sri Aurobindo should also be at the heart of our teaching. Yet, they are precisely what cannot be taught.

Discovering the path

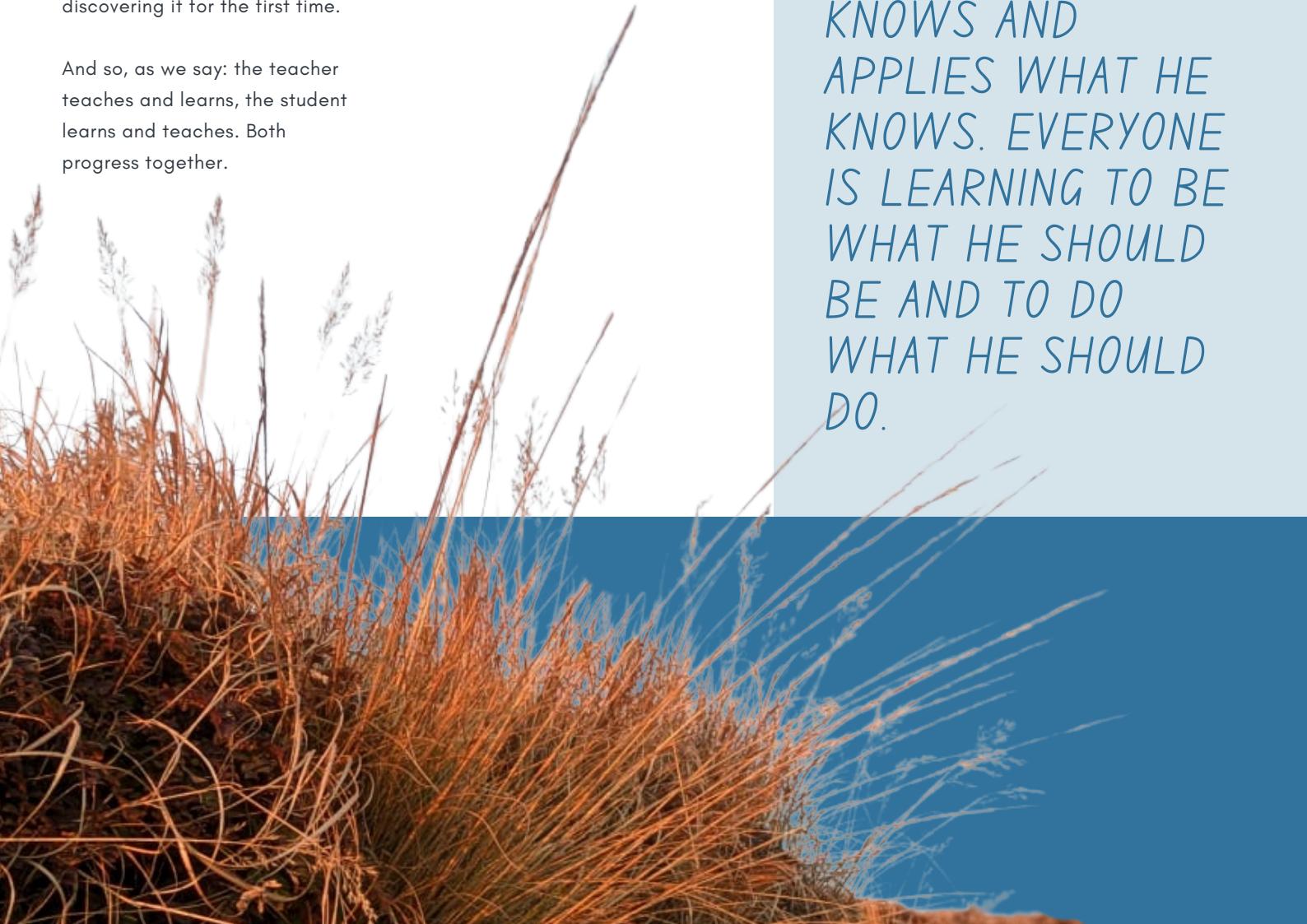
So, how do we approach something that cannot be taught?

The answer is that it can be explored; it is something that can be offered for exploration. Because, in truth, even as teachers, we are just as much explorers as the student who is discovering it for the first time.

And so, as we say: the teacher teaches and learns, the student learns and teaches. Both progress together.



EVERYONE,
WITHOUT
EXCEPTION,
WITHOUT
EXCEPTION,
SHOULD KNOW
THAT HE IS NOT
SOMEONE WHO
KNOWS AND
APPLIES WHAT HE
KNOWS. EVERYONE
IS LEARNING TO BE
WHAT HE SHOULD
BE AND TO DO
WHAT HE SHOULD
DO.



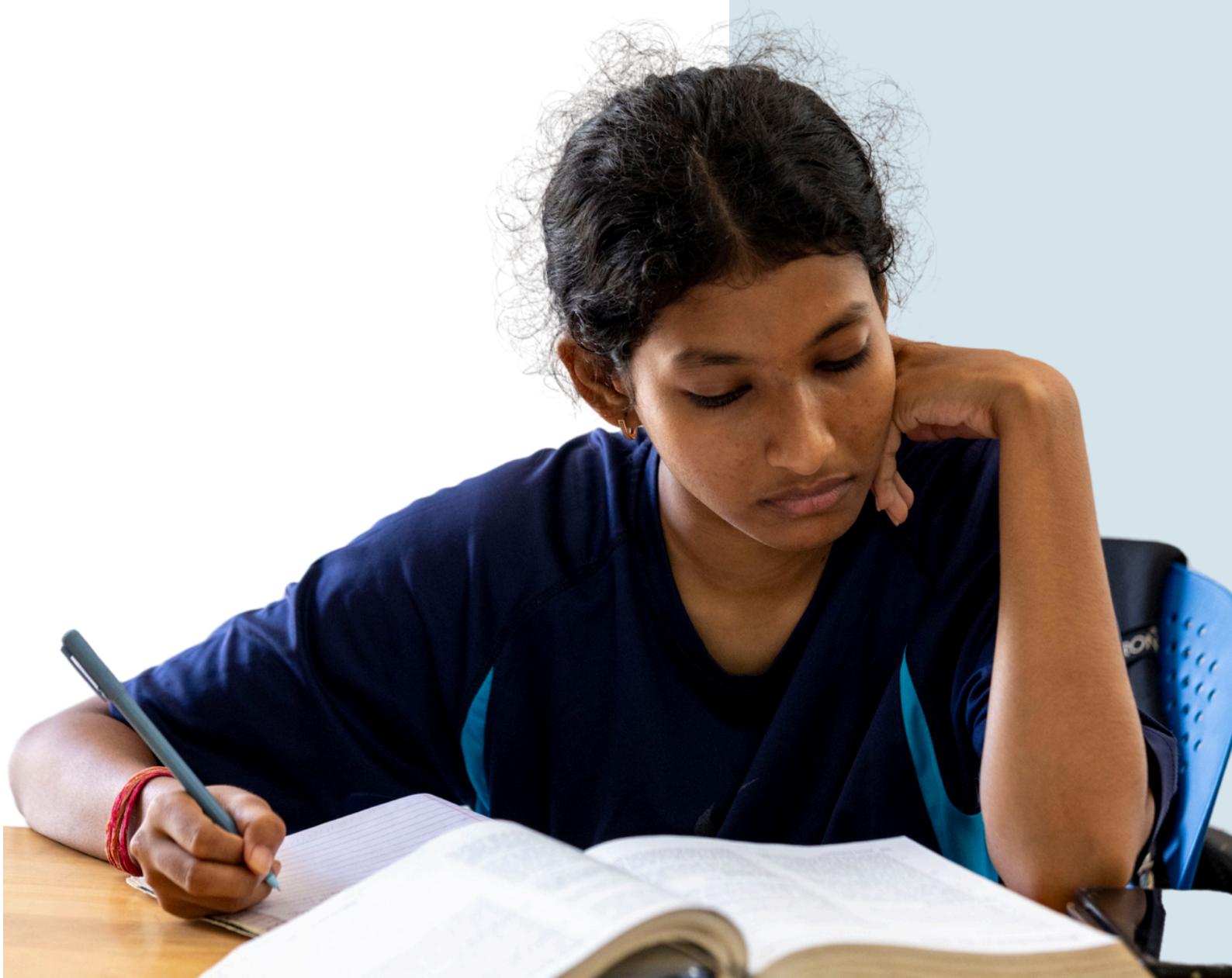
The limitations of formulation

Naturally, we have the tendency to limit the Unknowable to what we can understand —very easily, in fact, and yes, sometimes we fall into it— but the knowledge of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother goes beyond what they themselves expressed, doesn't it?

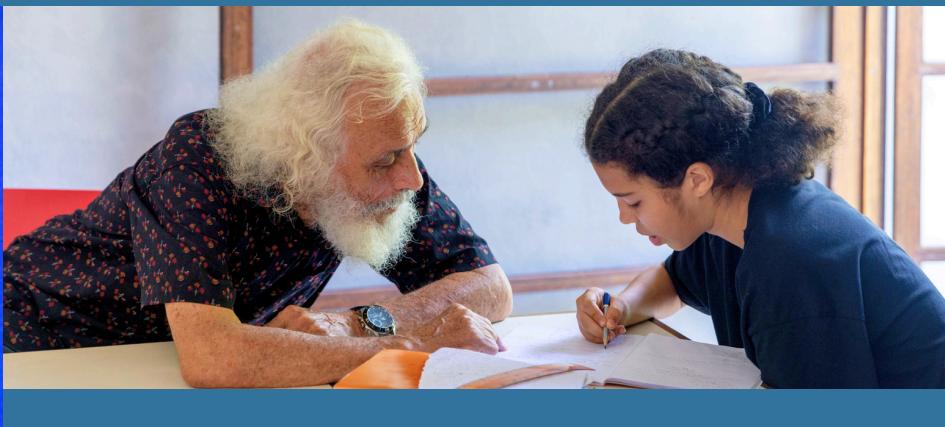
That's why we must also avoid being confined by any formulation, which, after all, evolves over time.

WHATEVER IS EXPRESSED IS CONSCIOUSNESS ITSELF SEEKING TO WORK ITSELF OUT INTO FORMS.

IT IS NOT BY BOOKS THAT SRI AUROBINDO OUGHT TO BE STUDIED BUT BY SUBJECTS— WHAT HE HAS SAID ON THE DIVINE, ON UNITY, ON RELIGION, ON EVOLUTION, ON EDUCATION, ON SELF PERFECTION, ON SUPERMIND, ETC.,



LAST SCHOOL WORKSHOPS



PULL A THREAD! MULTIDISCIPLINARILY

FANNY AVIER

The students were encouraged to decide what they wanted to focus on for their projects, whether it was a historical, scientific, or artistic theme.

Independent learning

Usually, the workshops that happen at the beginning of each term are very guided and collective. We love them because they are a great challenge that we all face (teachers included) three times a year.

This time, we thought of doing something slightly different, where the students would have more freedom and responsibility than usual. They could choose their own theme and the way they wanted to approach it. They were given three days to work on it, after which they would present what they had discovered to the rest of the school.

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.

WE PROPOSED A LIST OF IDEAS FOR THEMES TO INSPIRE THEM:

- Arborescence
- Aspiration
- Clarity
- Dance
- Diversity in Unity
- Energy
- Equality
- Generosity
- Goodness
- Gratitude
- Humility
- Perseverance
- Progress
- Receptivity
- Sense of Wonder
- Sincerity
- Sound & Movement
- The Bird
- The Path
- Transformation
- Wilderness



Then, they were asked to find three ways to approach their topic.

For example: Art, History, and Literature, or Biology, Math, and Photography. Teachers were available to answer their questions or ask them thought-provoking questions to help them progress in their path of discovery.

At this age, students usually like to be independent and do things on their own instead of being told what to do—especially when something is difficult.

Here, nobody was telling them what to do, yet it was still challenging because they faced issues on their own, such as:

MANAGING THEIR TIME, NOT KNOWING WHICH DIRECTION TO TAKE, PUSHING THEMSELVES FURTHER THAN THEY WERE COMFORTABLE, DIVING DEEPER INTO THE TOPIC, DOUBTING THE RELEVANCE OF THEIR FINDINGS, AND STRESSING ABOUT THE PRESENTATION AS THE DEADLINE APPROACHED.

However, it was heartening to see them trying, working hard, and putting all their energy and effort into the research.

They questioned things—teachers, themselves, or what they thought they already knew.

The quality of their concentration and their enthusiasm for discovering new things was truly beautiful to witness.

LET ALL CIRCUMSTANCES,
ALL HAPPENINGS IN LIFE BE
OCCASIONS, CONSTANTLY
RENEWED, FOR LEARNING
MORE AND EVER MORE.”



I CHOSE THE THEME PROGRESS

because I felt that I wasn't making progress, both internally and externally.

For the speech, I simply tried my best to present to the audience without fear. I believe I can do it, as nothing is too hard or easy for me.

The working atmosphere was good for me. I worked independently, without anyone's help. Over these three days, I stayed focused on my work and avoided talking to anyone.

IT WAS A VERY CHALLENGING WORKSHOP. ALTHOUGH I RECEIVED HELP FROM ADULTS, THE STRUCTURE AND THE WORDS WERE MINE. IN THE END I HAD ALL THE CONTROL. I NEEDED TO MAKE DECISIONS, THINK FOR MYSELF AND FOLLOW MY INSTINCT.



WORDS FROM STUDENTS

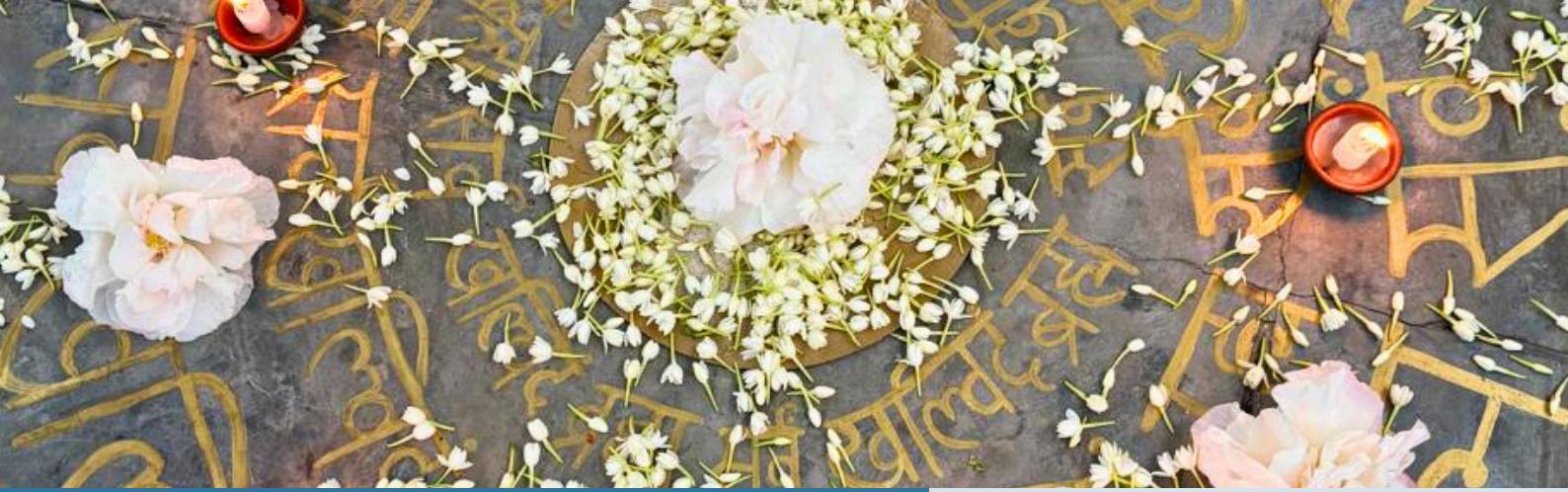
I chose the topic *Innocence*. And explored it from *psychological, artistic and scientific angles*.

I'M SURPRISINGLY HAPPY WITH HOW I ORGANISED MY TIME, AND I THINK I DID THE BEST I COULD HAVE.

I think this workshop was my favorite, as it let me explore in depth a topic I was actually interested in, and to do so as I wished. As I sometimes dislike being told what to do, and how to do it, which is the recurring thing about the workshops I dislike, however this time it didn't really happen, which I loved.

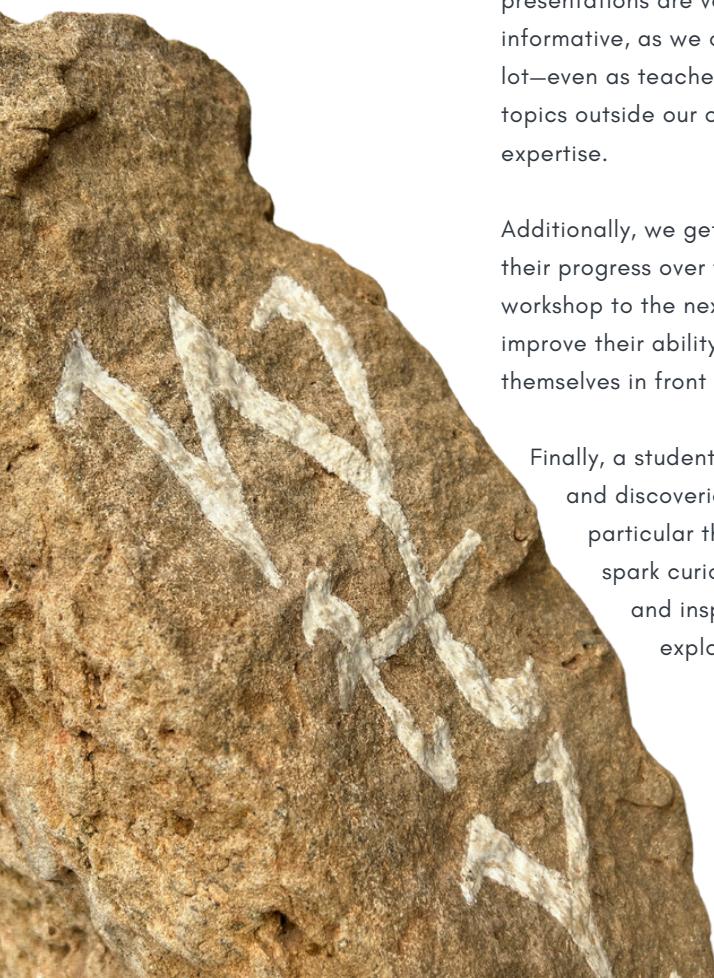
I LEARNED TO KEEP AN OPEN MIND, WHICH MEANS MORE QUESTIONS WILL ARISE, AND ALL I HAVE TO DO IS KEEP ASKING QUESTIONS AND NOT BE SO ATTACHED TO CERTAINTY.





WHAT'S NEXT?

For future workshops, I think we could adopt the "freedom within structure" approach. This would allow participants to decide the direction they want to take and how to get there, while we, as mentors and a team, provide support and challenges to help them grow.



The presentations are a great opportunity for students to prepare something to share with an audience, face their fear of public speaking, and organize their thoughts. It encourages them to decide what is interesting and important to convey. For the rest of the school, these presentations are very informative, as we often learn a lot—even as teachers—about topics outside our own fields of expertise.

Additionally, we get to observe their progress over time, from one workshop to the next, as they improve their ability to express themselves in front of others.

Finally, a student's enthusiasm and discoveries about a particular theme can spark curiosity in others and inspire them to explore new ideas.

AS I KNEW MY EXPLORATION WOULDN'T END WITH THE WORKSHOP, I WAS MORE INTERESTED IN THE JOURNEY, RATHER THAN THE END RESULT.



I STARTED OVER-CONFIDENT AND ENDED UP CURIOUS.

INTEGRATING KNOWLEDGE ACROSS DISCIPLINES



TRAINING THE EYE AND HAND

Working with hands, brings students out of their heads, develops focus, patience, increasing their capacity for concentration, and if beauty is brought in, refines and uplifts the vital. Activities at the Last School Art Centre, working in composition and still life, through various medium, or exploring mandala, clay and would work, crafts with paper, cardboard, glass or wires, are an important part of the Last School curriculum. Not to form artists, but call forth psychological qualities in the developing beings.

Mandala

Mandala is a Sanskrit word that means 'disc' or 'circle.' The circle is a two-dimensional shape representing a sphere, fullness, or oneness, such as that of our planet or even the universe.

For this reason, much scientific research has been conducted regarding the archetypes of shapes across geography, cultures, and periods of humanity.

Carl Gustav Jung, a Swiss psychiatrist of the past century, refined a method and approach to self-knowledge through these mandalas.

Today, the coloring and drawing of mandalas are used worldwide in many contexts—whether to simply calm the mind or to create something that embellishes an environment.

I chose to offer this practice to help students improve their fine motor skills and aesthetic development,

AND TO PROVIDE THEM WITH A TOOL TO DISCOVER OR BUILD INNER HARMONY AND A SENSE OF BEAUTY.

The consistent practice of drawing mandalas improves concentration and focus, develops precision, clean lines, harmony in the distribution of elements in space, a basic understanding of geometry, and the use of specific tools such as the compass, scale, protractor, and cutter. Students transition from basic and simple shapes to more complex and detailed patterns, using of a variety of materials such as graphite, ink, brushes, watercolour, pastels, colour pencils, etc.

ROSALBA CICERELLI



TO THINK THAT GOD LIVES HIDDEN IN THE CLAY
AND THAT ETERNAL TRUTH CAN DWELL IN TIME,
AND CALL TO HER TO SAVE OUR SELF AND WORLD.

Botanical paintings

Deep and detailed observation is what we focus on—hyperrealism, emphasizing details and realistic colors. We explore various watercolor techniques, using different brushes on various qualities of paper. Copying from live references and photos, students deepen their concentration, determination, patience, sense of acceptance, and organization (both mental and physical) with a table full of materials.

Each student works at their own rhythm, seeking and accepting limitations, while integrating or discovering new information. Whichever path the student chooses, we gently nudge them toward self-observation and inner discovery as they work.

**ROSALBA
CICERELLI**



Clay modelling

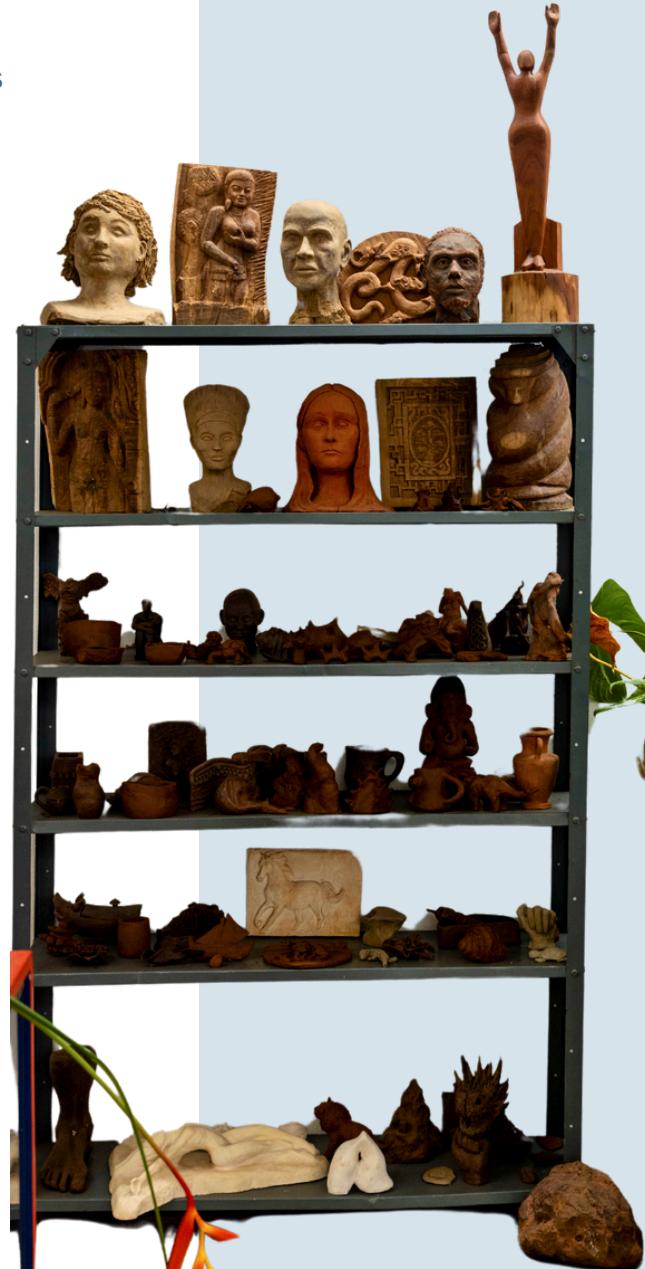
Modelling with clay (or other soft material) is the first and natural step towards sculpture. Clay particularly has a pleasant and soothing touch that makes it, among other things, an instrument suitable for calming agitation and other energies popping up in the vital part of the being, leading the student to a natural state of concentration.

I've been using the work with clay mainly in the sense to give the student the opportunity to explore their creative potential, which leads naturally to the field of sculpture as a three-dimensional art. As a starting point, many possibilities are offered to the student: they can start with a free exploration of form that may come on the way of manipulation of the clay.

They can start by trying to reproduce as accurately as possible a chosen model, like shells, interesting seeds, etc.; they may choose to model their own hand or foot or the face of a colleague nearby, in short, the possibilities are many.

In my work during many years using clay I'm always rewarded by the amount of excellent work, done by many students, but most of all by the atmosphere of calm and concentration that the work with clay entails.

**JIVATMAN
PRISCO
TEIXEIRA**



Persistent Craft

First, I check what this particular student's motivation is for the class. And then I start with beginner's work: introduce the components we will need for the work. We start like this: what is a pencil? How is it used? And the compass? And ruler? And how we use them with most precision.

HOW FOCUSED CAN THE STUDENT BE? HOW LONG CAN THEY KEEP THEIR CONCENTRATION?

And if things don't work out and they're not right, or something breaks, they must start again.

HOW DO THEY DEAL WITH THAT?

That is what I look for, that's what I check for.

Afterwards, we start to look at what kind of lines they enjoy working with. And lines are not only two-dimensional lines on paper. Is the student looking for a fixed external structure which they can follow and replicate into 3D models?

Or are they able to dream up their own lines, understand how things come together, how they can work together, and create their own forms, their own projects, and make them work. Do they need to follow a structure, or do they create it?

The question is, how is it possible to give the space for this new generation to find ideas, to look at objects and create objects, other forms, to step out of the box.

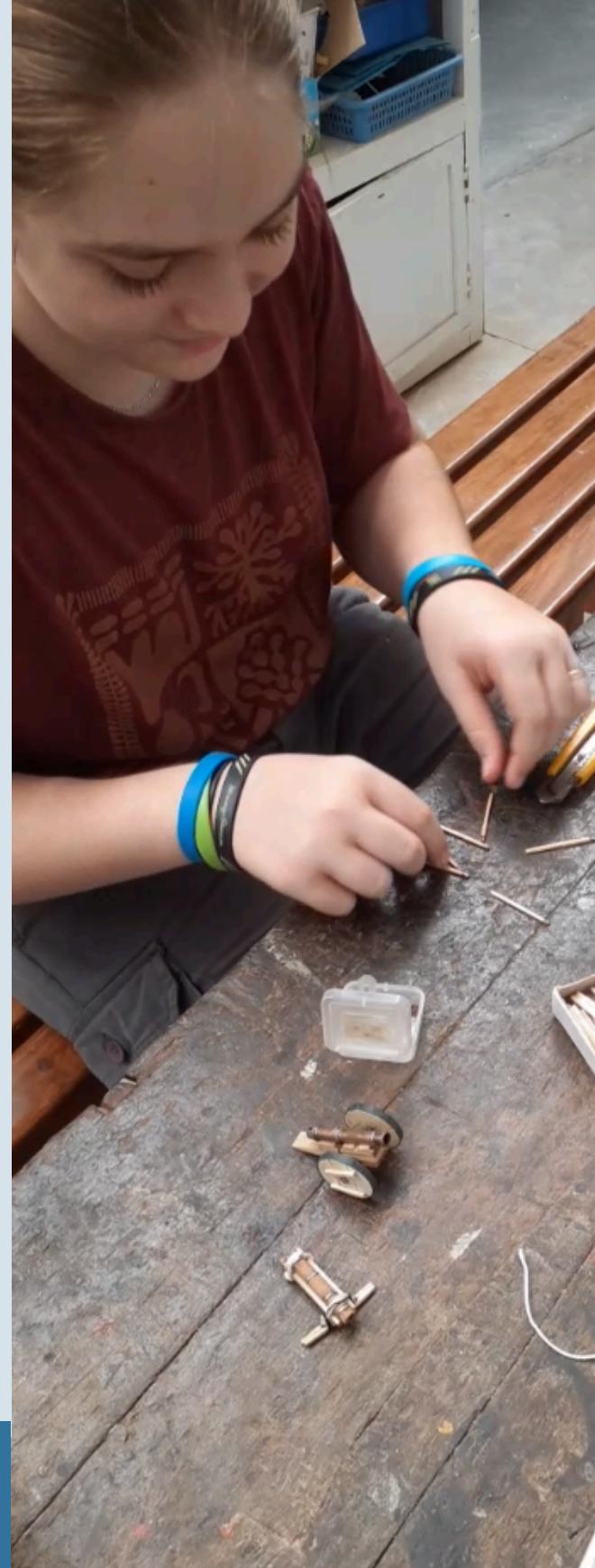
Creation, just to create, no, it's not that, that's not interesting.

WHAT IS GOING ON INSIDE THEM, WITH THEIR EMOTIONS WHEN THEY CREATE, WHEN THEY TRY, WHEN THEY FAIL, WHEN THEY LOOK FOR A SOLUTION, —THAT IS INTERESTING.

It's like a small engineering practice, only this.

**VICTOR
BAKHTIAROV**

ITS SKILL ENDORSING MATTER'S RIGHT TO THINK
CUT SENTIENT PASSAGES FOR THE MIND OF FLESH
AND FOUND A MEANS FOR NESCIENCE TO KNOW.



ONE AND HARMONIOUS BY THE MAKER'S SKILL,
THE HUMAN IN HIM PACED WITH THE DIVINE;
HIS ACTS BETRAYED NOT THE INTERIOR FLAME.
ORIGINAL AND SUPERNAL IMMANENCE
OF WHICH ALL NATURE'S PROCESS IS THE ART,
THE COSMIC WORKER SET HIS SECRET HAND
TO TURN THIS FRAIL MUD ENGINE TO HEAVEN USE.

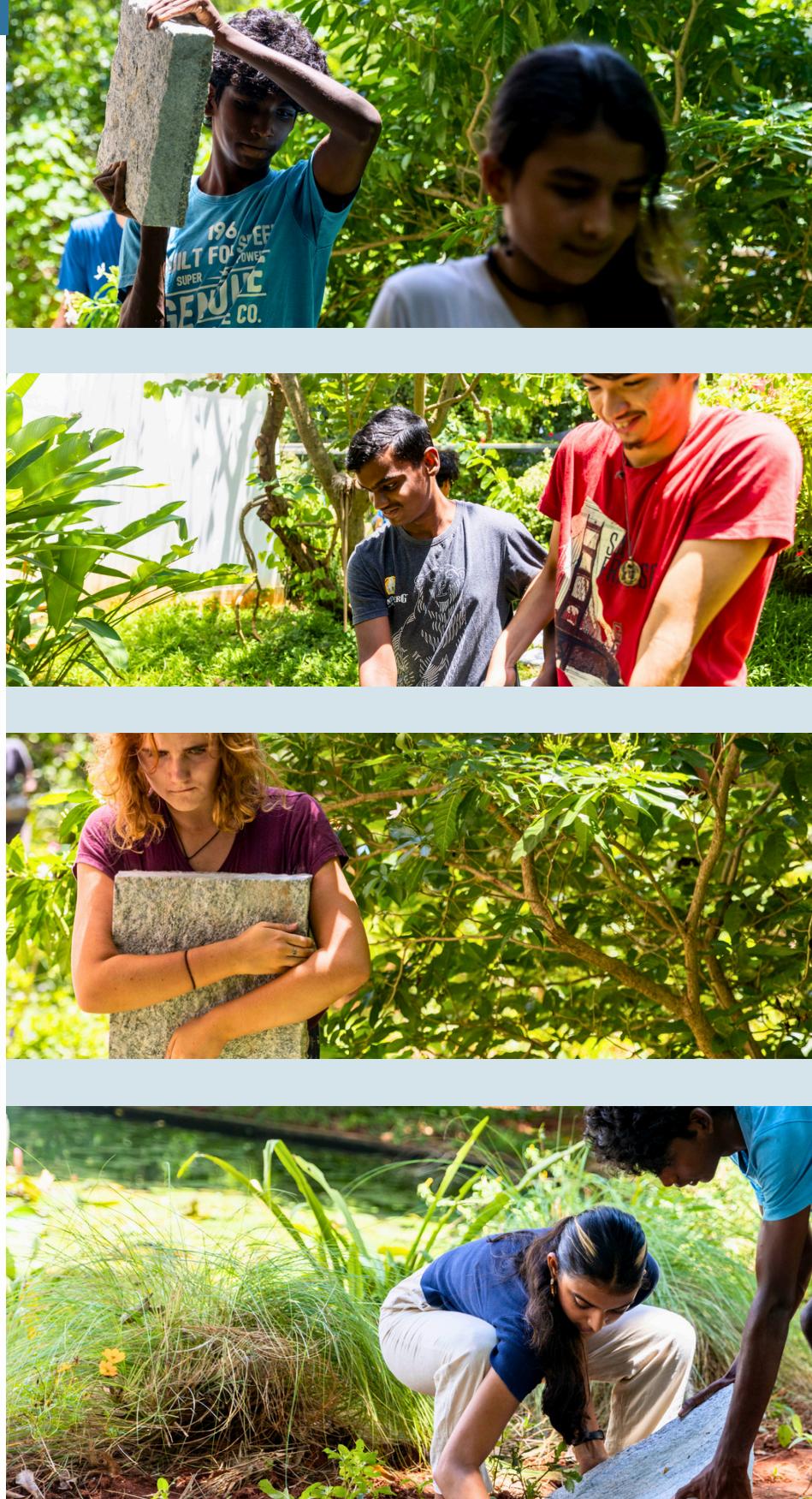
WE, LIKE THE TEMPLE, ARE IGNORANT OF THE GREAT CONSCIOUS POWER THAT HAS MADE US WHAT WE ARE, AND BECAUSE WE DO NOT PERCEIVE THE LABOUR OF THE SUBLIME WORKER, WE AScribe THE MERIT OF THE WORK TO OURSELVES.

Stones and collectivity

We've had several donations given to the school by people who are involved in the wider collectivity and who have been touched or inspired in some way by Last School.

Recently, an Aurovillian who has been consistently supporting the physical organisation of the school, offered to purchase and deliver stones slabs to the school, to make a pathway, where during the monsoon we slip and slide, as well as to create an outdoor platform for carpentry work. The day came and the students made an assembly line, laid the stepping stones, set, dug a bit around, cleared the garden.

These intense physical workdays at school are a regular element, whether waxing the floors, or cleaning the roofs, the collective effort not only makes us appreciate something as often unnoticed as stepping stones in the monsoon but also pours a collective effort and energy into the space of the school.



ARE INVITED TO AUROVILLE ALL THOSE WHO THIRST FOR PROGRESS AND ASPIRE TO A HIGHER AND TRUER LIFE

PHYSICAL DISCIPLINE: ON HIMALAYAN FOOTHILLS

THE CHALLENGE

It is 6am on a Saturday morning of July, 20 of us, teenagers and adults of Auroville, begin to train for the upcoming trek, in December we will see the Himalayas.

With increasingly heavy packs, we will walk around Auroville, twice weekly for several hours, rediscovering its paths and beauty. By September, we will hike up to Perumukkal, Gingee's Devadanapettai, and Parvathamalai in Pollur District.

These treks are a crucial part of our Last School tests.

They are aimed at working with the participants both at a collective level and an individual level: developing strength and endurance in the physical, the capacity of pushing one's limits, putting the collective above one's own personal needs, developing leadership and discovering the joys and beauty and sheer grandeur of the mountains.

ASHWIN EZHUMALAI



A GOD CONCEALED IN MOUNTAIN MAJESTY, EMBODIED TO OUR CLOUDY PHYSICAL SIGHT IN DIZZY SUMMITS AND GREENGLORIED SLOPES, MEASURING THE EARTH IN AN ENORMOUS EASE,



MOUNTAINS AND TREES STOOD THERE LIKE THOUGHTS FROM GOD



STRANGERS TO FAMILY

I'VE ALWAYS BEEN A
BEACH PERSON.

My main reason to go on the trek was the group. Initially we were all strangers to each other. After a few months of training and living together for two weeks, we're family.

I used to make fun of Ashwin for saying
"GUYS, WE'RE ALL ONE BIG FAMILY, OKAY?"

Now, I hate to admit that it does feel like we're family. We've all learnt to understand each other's needs, likes, dislikes, and accept each other for who we are.

On the day that I was struggling, everyone was ready to help out. Distributing my weight, helping me take off and put on my bag, massaging my shoulders, offering nuts, chocolate, water, electrolytes, checking up on me, waiting with me when I took breaks, walking beside me and holding my hand.

I never felt like I had to deal with anything on my own, I was always held by the group and I'm eternally grateful to all of them for taking care of me when I needed it, even though they were facing their own challenges.

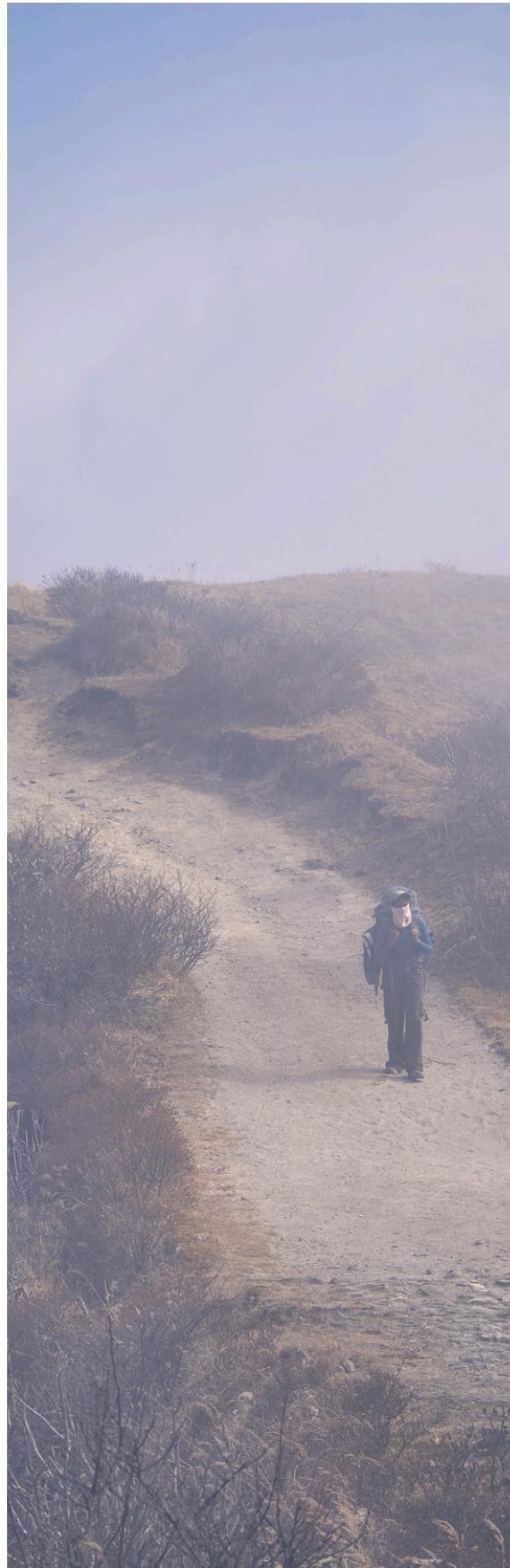




A few days later, I was able to pass on the care and help that I received the other day, to someone else in need of it.

The actual trekking part, was a bonus for me, but my real take away from this trip was the group energy that we shared, and those are the memories I'll forever cherish.

SIMRAN SHAH



Acclimatization

On the first day, someone said '*Guys, only have 9 more days to go.*'

I frowned not because we had so many days left but because we were counting days, and in no time it ticked, ticked to 'only 2 more days left'.

I thought I had only acclimatized to the cold... but,

THE SILENCE OF THE WALKS, THE WARMTH OF THE GROUP.

—regardless of how much we were freezing, made me realize I had acclimatized a bit too much. And, that coming back home would be harsh.

ANANTINI JOAN MOHANTY

I HAD NO SENSE OF TIME—I DIDN'T KNOW WHAT DAY IT WAS OR WHAT TIME IT WAS.

I felt free—to laugh, eat, smile, be quiet, observe, and walk at my own pace, fast or slow. Being far from home allowed me to act and feel differently.

FANNY AVIER



Last School
After School 2:1
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.



PHOTOS: A. SILVER & G. BARBACHANO, ASHWIN E. & SMITI

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