

Last School

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THE SPIRIT OF OUR WORKS

JEAN-YVES LUNG

Last School, being part of the Auroville experiment, is necessarily permeated by its ideals. Most of us who work here have come out of a need to serve, which changes what we call “work” into something different, a field of progress and growth through our offering, where the flame is allowed to become a more living reality in our life and work. One cannot but feel privileged to be given such conditions.

This brings about a subtle change, where work becomes something of a different nature, where one has the sense of being carried towards unknown yet promising destinations. Everything looks the same as anywhere else—the type of work, the activities—yet everything seems different, as if another script were being written upon the ordinary, moved by another law, like the breath of the open sea amid the banalities of the day, as if a new air were trying to find its place in our life and work, without displacing anything.



THE SUMMER ISSUE

LAST SCHOOL WORKS & STORIES

The question often arises, what goes on at school of Auroville during the summer months.

This particular issue of the Newsletter explores the summer works, preparation of the space the continued learning and other works of teachers.

We have used the occasion too to introduce a little of Last School and Auroville history & through the voices of three teachers and two students.

“THE FIRST NECESSITY
IS THE INNER
DISCOVERY

IN ORDER TO KNOW WHAT ONE TRULY IS
BEHIND SOCIAL, MORAL, CULTURAL, RACIAL AND
HEREDITARY APPEARANCES.

AT THE CENTRE THERE IS A BEING FREE, VAST
AND KNOWING, WHO AWAITS OUR DISCOVERY
AND WHO OUGHT TO BECOME THE ACTIVE
CENTRE OF OUR BEING AND OUR LIFE IN
AUROVILLE.”



Last School

ANCHORING BEAUTY

PREPARATION OF THE SPACE

SMITI TEWARI ARPI

The school holidays are a time of renewal: of cleaning, of clearing and sorting, of preparation and changing the old to bring in some new.

A time of renewal

In Last School the attempt is — as much as possible — for all the work to be done by the team themselves.

Why is doing the work ourselves (especially manual work) important?

It gives value and importance to the work and space, a respect for the environment around us and the material used, an equality between all members of the team and working staff as well. As teachers, it is an example for the students: to bring awareness, consciousness and beauty to matter in our day to day.

There is also a different kind of bonding that happens working together as a team at a practical hands-on level, outside of teaching individual classes.

WORK, EVEN
MANUAL
WORK, IS
SOMETHING
INDISPENSAB
LE FOR THE
INNER
DISCOVERY.

IF ONE DOES NOT WORK, IF
ONE DOES NOT PUT HIS
CONSCIOUSNESS INTO
MATTER, THE LATTER WILL
NEVER DEVELOP.

TO LET THE CONSCIOUSNESS
ORGANISE A BIT OF MATTER
BY MEANS OF ONE'S BODY IS
VERY GOOD.



Intensity and dedication

The work includes building maintenance, sorting classrooms, pruning and weeding and grass cutting and pond cleaning in the gardens, cleaning roofs, putting up exhibitions, flowers arrangements and finding of the little something extra that brings life to the art installations; so that the space itself can hold an atmosphere when the term re-starts.

Each team member contributes to their capacity in whichever way they can (regardless of age or inherent capabilities).

The Last School workshops and this collective work both bring the school (teachers and students) together in different ways.

Both require an intensity of dedicated time and effort and willingness to do things which may not be "your job".

Student participation

The older students usually ask to join in the preparation work and participate in creating the space for the whole school — they become the bridge and examples for the younger students who are new to the school and its culture.

There are also always individuals from the wider Auroville community who offer their help in some form, be it by helping with the physical work, through their expertise in something specific or their paintings/books/artefacts linked to a theme the workshop and exhibition might focus on.

WE ARE VERY GRATEFUL FOR THIS.

For work that gets put in, for the new ideas, for the generosity of spirit people bring, and for the quiet moments in those holidays when all is still and calm and the school feels like home.



“TO ESTABLISH
ORDER AROUND
ONESELF HELPS
TO BRING ORDER
WITHIN
ONESELF.”

THE LAST SCHOOL STREET

SATYAVAN BHATT

The period between May and June is used to prepare the space, especially the corridor, which the architects of the school called *The Street*, and the art center for the new academic year starting in July.

Gardening, roof cleaning, repair work are among the other things to be done.

The spirit is simple, be ready to do whatever is required to have the school ready for July.



This year Luisa and Jean-Jacques helped the art center team decorate the corridor and the art center.

THEIR GOODWILL, SKILL AND ENTHUSIASM WAS VITAL AND WAS ALSO A BEAUTIFUL EXAMPLE OF THE SPACE THAT IS LAST SCHOOL WHICH ENCOURAGES COLLABORATION AND CREATIVITY.

ONE SHOULD ORGANISE ONE'S LIFE NOT
ACCORDING TO OUTER AND ARTIFICIAL
RULES,

BUT ACCORDING TO AN ORGANISED
INNER CONSCIOUSNESS, FOR IF ONE
LETS LIFE GO ON WITHOUT SUBJECTING
IT TO THE CONTROL OF THE HIGHER
CONSCIOUSNESS,

IT BECOMES FICKLE AND INEXPRESSIVE.



SILENT HEAT AND DETERMINATION

FANNY AVIER

The holidays are always full of silent heat and determined hands. There is always a time when only our lovely dog walks around the empty corridor, while the brave Ammas still come regularly despite their quiet wish to stay home and rest.

We also use the holidays for big work: painting the walls, tending the garden, varnishing wooden furniture or door frames. Sometimes we get outside help, but most often we try to do it ourselves.

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Jean-Yves is the one who never breaks his routine; he comes to school with his laptop, finishing a report or answering mails. Sometimes visitors also pass by, and some of us come to show them the school.

It is also a time when some of us go out to visit family or friends outside of Auroville, or perhaps go on a trek or even a solo trip somewhere. It is definitely a moment to recharge our batteries, so that we return full of energy and ready to give it all.

IT IS TO WASTE ONE'S
TIME IN THE SENSE THAT
MATTER REMAINS
WITHOUT ANY CONSCIOUS
UTILISATION.



UNENDING EDUCATION AND CONSTANT PROGRESS



THE EARLY SHAPING OF LAST SCHOOL

DEEPTI TEWARI

Last School was reactivated at the beginning of 1985 on a demand from teenaged Auroville youth. In those days, people did things almost by chance, often in response to some collective need – there was always so much that needed doing.

Organised teamwork in Auroville's context

A team came together and slowly and quite organically the shape and purpose of the learning/teaching process developed.

*NO ONE TOLD US WHAT TO
DO OR HOW TO DO IT.*

Layers of responsibility were added simply because no one else was doing things that seemed necessary for the overall needs of a school.

At first the structure was very free. But as we introduced more subjects of study at the school and more teachers came forward, the need arose for organised class timetables. We had relatively large groups divided mostly by age or language group – English, French, Tamil. I started to organise subject and age-group specific timetables for the more than 60–70 students.

It is important to note here that Last School was the first organised large-scale Secondary School for Auroville Youth.

This was an enormously significant circumstance because the collectivity had no previous experience about the needs of this particular age group. The students who signed up had been previously habituated to a great deal of freedom.

For the first time, in Auroville's amorphous collective atmosphere, a secondary school level teaching was being organised.

Bringing in a culture of punctuality and regularity took some prolonged work. And it came about because the youth seemed glad to come to school – they wanted to learn.

LORD, GIVE ME
PERFECT SINCERITY,
THAT SINCERITY
WHICH WILL LEAD
ME STRAIGHT TO
THEE.

IN THIS PLACE, CHILDREN WOULD BE ABLE TO GROW AND DEVELOP INTEGRALLY WITHOUT LOSING CONTACT WITH THEIR SOULS; EDUCATION WOULD BE GIVEN NOT FOR PASSING EXAMINATIONS OR OBTAINING CERTIFICATES AND POSTS BUT TO ENRICH EXISTING FACULTIES AND BRING FORTH NEW ONES.”

Language studies: ideas, culture, consciousness

Initially, my classes were focused upon the English language in all its externalities. They were very structured and organized, covering language, structure, syntax, spelling, vocabulary, grammar.

Soon enough storytelling came naturally into the teaching/learning process. If you take up vocabulary, soon enough there can be a branching off into word-stories: language roots; origins and evolution of words; their etymology and evolving connotations. If you explore figurative language, there is a particularity in each language, to how its idioms and other literary devices come about and how that creates the multitudinous nuances of communication. We began to have fun discovering all this.

The subtle measure by which the class sessions were evaluated was they should always bring to the students a sense of enthusiasm and a sense of wonder at the marvels of human ingenuity and the complex magic of life and living.

I received no guidance, no direction on how to teach or what should be the class content and methodology. I evolved processes in the doing – testing in real time what worked and what did not.

As the classwork grew in complexity and as the students responded to organisation and structure, my sessions expanded deeper into an exploration of literature and poetry as seen through the masters of language.

And, beyond that, the sessions flowed into the realms of ideas as well as the cultural roots contained therein.

HUMAN LANGUAGES ARE A REFLECTING MIRROR OF IDEA-FORCES, OF AIMS OF LIFE, OF STATES OF CONSCIOUSNESS. THIS BECAME THE NEXT PHASE OF THE EXPLORATION.

In our early English language classes, it became clear that one could not make sense of language if one did not look at the history of peoples and the way differing world views have created countless effects in the human story.

There was thus a natural turning towards the psychology of social evolution: the variety of cultures and histories; the movements of inner and outer growth; how trade and travel from earliest times created a cross fertilization of ideas.

History had not yet begun to be taught in Last School because of the strong sense of keeping Auroville free from narrow and partisan nationalist perspectives.

The question arose of how one could approach human development given that available schoolbooks tended towards limited worldviews.

A NEW WAY TO EXPLORE THIS VAST DOMAIN HAD TO BE FOUND.



Studies of society and culture

Even the best educational processes tend to be organized on nationalistic principles. Clearly this was not desirable in the multicultural context of Auroville, a society aspiring towards universality.

Thus was born the collective 'History and Culture project' with its ambitious idea of creating a summary exploration of the world through its luminous psychological, cultural, social periods, wherever and whenever they appeared.

These historical events were periods that seemed to represent an accelerated evolution for humanity.



For this programme, teachers had to become the first students, and naturally the guiding force in this journey was Sri Aurobindo's world view.

A collective learning and teaching environment came into being. Historical periods were distributed amongst the teachers team. History, Culture, Comparative Religions were visited in this wide-ranging exploration. Sri Aurobindo's social and political thought had found its rightful place in the individual learnings of the teachers team.

There was also a need for all Auroville youth to experience a living exploration of the spirit of India of why she was the only place on earth that could host a spiritual experiment such as Auroville.

It was for the teachers team a period of a rich, shared investigation into this question.

A special moment was organised: what came to be called the "India Week" when for a full week all classes were focused on India.

The spirit, culture, festivals, dresses, foods, of the subcontinent were explored; field trips were organized to cultural and heritage sites. We even came dressed in Indian clothes.

There was so much collective enthusiasm to do this. Interestingly, I was keen to undertake a similar exploration of other cultures, but none of non-Indian teachers felt enthused about focusing upon what they had left behind.

EXTRACTED FROM 'THE LAST SCHOOL STORY 1985-2023'

"IN THIS PLACE, TITLES AND POSITIONS WOULD BE REPLACED BY OPPORTUNITIES TO SERVE AND ORGANISE"



GROWING IN AUROVILLE

EXCERPT FROM A CONVERSATION WITH ASHWIN EZHUMALAI

This is going to be my twelfth year in Last School — eleven years went by quite quickly. There have been a lot of discoveries and learnings along the journey, which I'm really grateful for.

Born and brought up

I started in Auroville's pre-crèche, where the base camp used to be. Then Centre Kindergarten — I still remember the keet roof on the main building. After that I joined Transition from first to eighth grade.

School was something I always enjoyed because our teachers were not just teachers — they also had a personal connection with us. Growing up in Auroville, we don't just see them in school; we see them around — in the community, on the road, at events — so it was easy to approach them.

I was a very shy person, so I didn't really talk much or ask many questions, but I was always interested in the classes. I wasn't very good at talking to people, I did what was needed to get through.

What I really liked was that after school we had sports. That was great — as kids, running around, getting that energy out, and learning something in the process. It wasn't just wild running — there was quite some structure.

In Future School, the structure helped me too. We had proper schedules and clear organization. There were extracurriculars like robotics, which I really enjoyed. We had to design robots that followed obstacle courses, or even "bot wrestling," where two robots tried to push each other out of the ring. That was fun, but also about problem-solving and creative thinking.

I didn't fully understand the idea of "education" back then — it was just discovery.

Stepping out

After school, I went to university — Vellore Institute of Technology — and that was a huge contrast to Auroville. At that time, the IGCSE certificate wasn't widely recognized, so it took some effort to get in.



Once there, it was a good eye-opener. Everything was structured like a strict school — rules, permissions, time limits.

IN FACT, AUROVILLE, HAD ALWAYS FELT MORE LIKE A UNIVERSITY — IF YOU NEEDED SOMETHING, YOU ASKED AROUND, EXPLORED, FIGURED IT OUT YOURSELF.

For the first two years, I worked really hard, trying to do everything right. But after a point, something dawned on me: it didn't make sense. The whole rat race of assignments, exams, and placements — yes, it trained you, but for what? The university was among the top ten in the country, known mainly for its placement record. Its focus was on producing employable graduates, not necessarily educated individuals. You were trained, not taught. That realization hit me deeply.

In university, everything had been measured by marks. There was no real value given to the person — no space to appreciate other forms of intelligence or creativity. But in Auroville, it was different. I started taking long rides on my cycle — two hours, four hours, forty, even eighty kilometres. It became my way to breathe, to think.

That sense of space helped me see that real education wasn't about what you got in marks, but what you discovered about yourself.



The way home

While I was studying, I'd also come back during weekends to help with stage lights — working with Jean, setting up for performances and plays. I loved climbing and rigging lights, spending hours in the auditorium after classes or late in the evenings. It was hard work but deeply fulfilling — not just physical, but meaningful.

By the fourth year, of University, I still had a few subjects left to clear. It was the summer of 2014, Last School was shifting from the old campus to the new one. Friends asked if I could help with the shifting. I said yes, of course — community work always felt natural.

Then I was asked to take up Science. I said I wasn't a science teacher, but I remembered what I'd learnt in high school and could give it a try. Deepti told me, "You just have to be a little ahead of the students." So I started teaching Science — chemistry specifically — and math.

That's how my journey with Last School really began. It gave me a sense of purpose that was missing in the academic system.

That's when I began to truly understand what Sri Aurobindo and the Mother meant by education — an inner journey.

And that the exploration of many areas — nature, science, creativity, and physical work — are all parts of the same learning.



The Himalayas

In 2012, I went on my first trek with the Auroville trekking group. It was a difficult one — physically I was fit, but mentally it was tough. That experience changed me. For me, the mountains gave me something very deep. Up there, even when you are with a group, it's actually just you — in the vastness. It opens up something in you. For me, that was humility. I think humility was always within me, but up there, it became much more present. Because you realise how small you are in front of the mountain, how little you actually control. You can't take anything for granted there. You are just there — present — and you appreciate the moment.

Joining the ambulance

For me growing up in Auroville, it was always about getting involved in different things — to be able to be there, offer, and not expect anything. Every time I was giving, being present, and doing whatever was needed, I received a lot in return. That was already quite a rewarding experience. So there was never a question of why — only of how to help. Whatever work was asked — setting up something, helping with the farm, or in this case, with the ambulance — there was a need, and I would just step forward. And not just me; many would do the same.

I think that is what Auroville has given me — the ability to act, to offer, without measuring, without waiting for recognition. To be there when needed. That's what education here has meant for me — not something you learn in a classroom, but something that gets built into your way of being.



Growing through Education

When I was asked to teach at Last School, it felt natural. There was already that connection from before — when I was in Future School, sports was something I always looked forward to. It pushed me to discover and redefine my limits. It built confidence and resilience. Eventually, I was given the opportunity to assist with teaching there — and it resonated deeply.

I loved being with the younger kids. When they look up to you, you feel responsible — not just for teaching, but for embodying what you want them to see. You have to hold yourself with integrity, because they reflect it right back. If you slack, they mirror it.

That taught me a lot — that children learn most through example. It was an exchange: I shared skills, and they reminded me how to be a better person.

It's a learning process — and for me, it's easier to work with them than with adults. With the students, there's openness. The shell isn't fully formed. You can have honest exchanges, admit when you don't know something, and they appreciate that.

They see that you don't have to know everything — that learning is a shared journey. With adults, change can be harder, but with children, there's a freshness.

Growing up in Auroville, I've always heard that inner voice — *stay open, let things unfold*. And the more I discover about myself, the more interesting it becomes.

So yes, that's my journey — at least whatever I can remember for now.

And photography...

And photography? It started with the fascination of how light could translate into stories — how it could tell something. In the mountains, I came across landscapes that are so vast and alive — I wanted to learn how to make that story take shape through the light itself.



EN CHEMIN

JEAN LEGRAND

Since the experience is about living the wonder in every moment, how can we define an education in constant flux?



Step by step

Whatever the activity, chosen or not, being awake to the wonder of each moment is one of the keys to self-discovery and to being able to find a truer approach to education.

ONE THING THAT CONFIRMS WE ARE ON THE RIGHT PATH IS THE QUALITY OF THE SPARK THAT ILLUMINATES THE STUDENT'S EYES.

What is important is this experience of wonder which surrounds us. The work is to make this experience as permanent as possible and to proceed step by step on the adventure.

*AND FOR EACH ONE,
THE PATH IS DIFFERENT,
WITH ONE COMMON THREAD:*

AN ASPIRATION THAT, IN THE FACE OF EVERY CHALLENGE, MUST BE ACCOMPANIED, BY THE MOST SINCERE SURRENDER POSSIBLE.

I am on my way; that's all I want and can say for now.



*REINFORCE THE
QUESTION MARK,*

*WITHOUT FALLING INTO
THE TRAP OF THE
EXCLAMATION MARK!*



ON THE PATH

THE PROCESS OF EDUCATION

AHANA LEA MARIA

In the beginning when the process of education started for me, school was not even a thought – of course if someone told us to think of the concept or the word school it would have been, and to be honest people did do that a lot – but yet it was always clear my learning would be different.

First guides

My parents were my teachers at first. My mother taught me the English alphabet. My father taught me the Sanskrit alphabet, and was a constant guide in anything I wanted to learn.

I remember drawing straight lines on a paper that was already covered in led because I had been drawing for half an hour already, line after line...

Until my father eventually came and told me that I can start drawing diagonal lines now.



Practicing, diving into one subject was what I did, it was the way I learnt, and it has stuck with me even coming to Last School.

It went like this:

INSPIRATION. CURIOSITY.ACTION.

And then, suddenly I would not study for days, lying in bed, sleeping in, going for an occasional walk, but the second I found the next Inspiration, I was gone again plundering libraries, finding anything and everything I can get my hands on about this new thing that was just so fascinating.

The constant

And while these fascinations came and went, art stuck with me.
Always.

And art was what brought me to Last School, and when I got adopted by Last School, art was the one who signed the adoption papers, (*metaphorically speaking*).

AND THEN I WAS A LAST SCHOOLER.

WITH THE EVER PRESENT GUIDANCE OF MOTHER AND SRI AUROBINDO.



SILENT HEAT AND DETERMINATION CONTINUED FROM PAGE 6

FANNY AVIER

And then comes the time to prepare the school for the new start: everything has to be cleaner than usual, flowers have to be arranged to bring the beauty of nature inside.

Breath of inspiration

The theme of the term is chosen weeks or months in advance, and decorations are prepared so the whole school can offer a beautiful atmosphere for the students to learn in.

Sometimes butterflies, sometimes trees, sometimes kimonos or insects—each term is different, so that every student, whatever their interest, will be touched by something and inspired to create.

The walls of the corridor are used like a museum; often it goes beyond the walls, spreading onto the floor, the ceiling, even the garden.

We get to see pictures, drawings, paintings of famous artists—or not so famous ones. We get a taste of what they dedicate their life to.



And the year begins

On the last day of the holiday, we are usually working until late—8pm, 9pm, sometimes midnight—to make sure everything looks perfect, and all the workshop material is ready to use the next day.

Then we come early to school to sweep, light candles, arrange fresh flowers, and place incense sticks. The Ammas may draw a kolam at the entrance, while the dog and the three cats are happier than ever.

Slowly the students begin to arrive—some earlier, helping us finish a few last things, others later, even on the first day of school. We all gather quietly in the art center, sitting in a circle as we do every morning, excited for the year to begin.

It is still hot, but the summer has passed; the light in our hearts is now the true heat we feel.





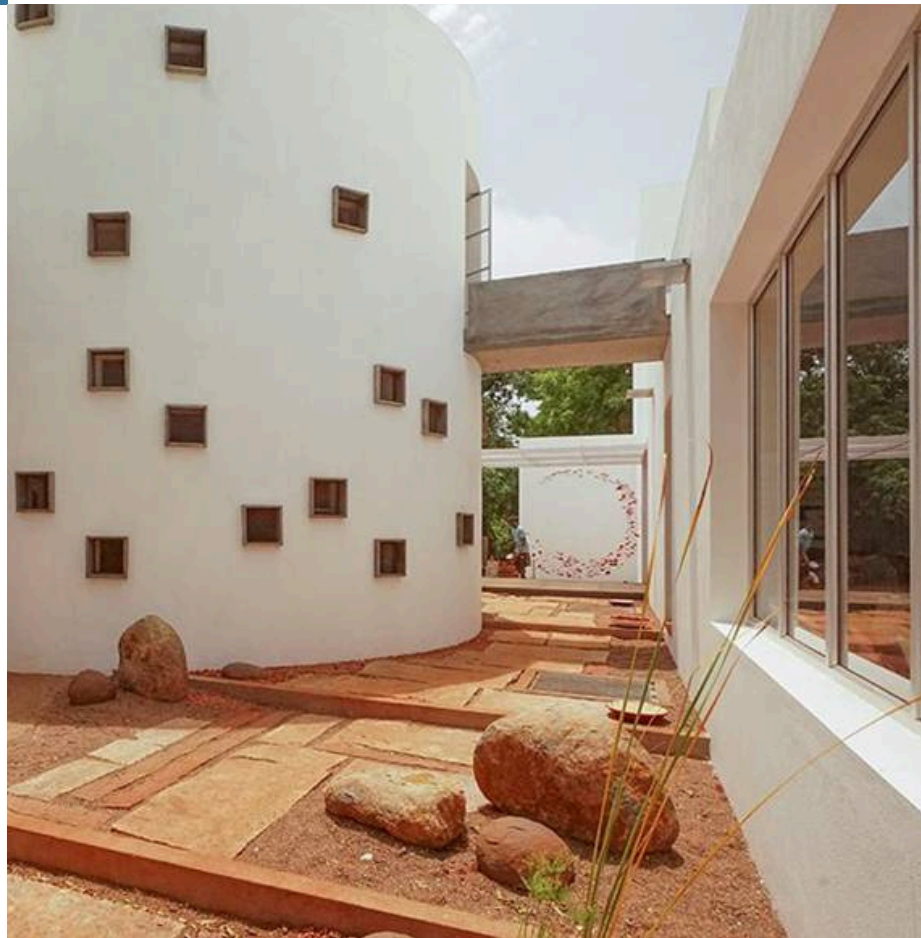
Last School

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.

Last School
 After School :-!
 Super School
 No School



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PHOTOGRAPHY: ASHWIN EZHUMALAI

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