Welcome to the February issue! This issue is focused on our annual play. We did a shakespearean play called ‘A Midsummer Night’s Dream’...
Many of us also wrote about a Nostalgic Memory
We also have a transcription from our monthly podcast
And an article on Human Diversity
We talk about the experience, practicing and performing with much more!

- Sincerely, The Editors; Turiya Aadi, Nayomi & Kishore
Introduction to Lea!

Hello, my name is Lea and I’m 13. I stayed in Auroville for around 1 year. I was going to TLC but I moved to Deepanam a few months ago. I think my personality is quite good? I might be shy when you first meet me but when I get comfortable with you I could be really talkative and maybe even mean. My hobbies are watching movies and listening to music and I love playing around.
This is not exactly a particular memory but when I thought of nostalgia this is the first thing that came into my mind. At one point of time, I used to live very close to the beach and we used to go there every day. Most of the time I would just go to the water and sing to the ocean. Now that I think about it, it feels weird but at that time I was four or five, so I guess it’s fine. I used to also go and play with random kids who were in the beach. I wish that I could be like that again and not be so shy when it comes to talking with people I don’t know, but I think I am getting better at talking to new people these days. I don’t remember a lot of things about that time, but I do remember that I had a lot of fun singing and playing in the water.

- Isha

When we were in Slovakia we had a crazy idea. It was a chilly European summer night, and eating dinner inside just wasn’t possible. At first, we just wanted to eat outside, but then my dad had a better idea. We brought the table to the bottom of the empty swimming pool near the house. Once, I read that at the bottom of a well, you can see the stars even in daylight. The pool wasn’t exactly as deep as a well but the effect was still very interesting. We all liked it and I think I will remember this dinner for my whole life.

- Egor
One of my old good memories is when I was 7 years old in first grade. After school while me and my friends waited for our parents we were playing in the playground, we would play hide and seek or just running around. We were laughing and having so much fun whatever we did. The playground was so big for me back then and the happiness that the classes are over and freedom to be able to play as much as I want. I think I went to school everyday just for that after school time. And when I finally got home from school I would tell my parents what happened at school. After having delicious snack at home, I would play again with my brother in and out of the house. Playing with my brother was much wilder than my school friends and I tried to follow him around even if sometimes I would almost lose him while chasing him. On the weekends, I would invite my friends over and we would draw pictures or play with dolls.

- Lea

The first thing that comes to mind is - it’s not one thing but - all my memories of my old school. While some of them are a bit unpleasant (like when I got slapped for not doing my homework), most were amazing. Hanging out with my old friends, playing catch, and going to the beach at the end of the school year. It was all fun stuff. And does anyone remember the guys that sell ice cream or cotton candy with a cycle attached to a cart? Childhood me would hear the bell (that’s usually attached to the cart) and would run outside the house to see if it was one of those guys. If it is, I would beg my parents to buy me an ice cream like a maniac. Sometimes it’s a success, but sometimes not.

I also miss hearing stories from my mom. To this day, I remember every single story my mom told me when I was a small child. I remember her telling me on some mornings that I slept off halfway through the story, and I would laugh my head off. I found the idea of sleeping while someone talking to me hilarious. Also, if I can’t sleep well nowadays, I ask my mom to tell me a bedtime story as a joke, but she would actually tell me one. It brings all my childhood memories back, and I sleep like a koala.

- Kishore
Every year Faith and Hope’s group performs a full-length play based on a children’s novel. It is amazing to see our favorite stories and characters come alive. There is a lot of thought behind this process. Apart from the performance, our group had a few more tasks like painting the scenic backdrops and making the props and costumes. In August 2022, we started preparing for their play. Bhakti and Mahavir mainly decided on the play they would perform and divided the roles among the group members.

Some people in the group wanted to perform a romantic play like Romeo and Juliet, but Bhakti thought it wasn’t fair as there was only one pair of lovers. So, we looked for other romantic plays and decided to perform A Midsummer Night’s Dream, which had five pairs of lovers instead of one!

After deciding on the play, we chose the backdrops. We used money donated by parents to buy the paint and fabric and got it sewn by a tailor in Kuilapalayam. Then we drew on the humongous canvas and began painting. We painted during term breaks and even used English and painting classes to help us. Our art teachers, Tatiana and Evgenia, also provided us with a lot of support.

Painting the backdrops for our play was quite a journey. The first backdrop was the enchanted forest one, which was relatively easy to paint, except for the blending parts. I think we could have done better, but it turned out alright.

The real challenge came with the second backdrop, which had the Parthenon as its centerpiece. We wanted it to be symmetrical and perfect, so we spent a lot of time drawing it on paper first, which took us a whole month and a half!
Once we had the drawing, we traced it onto the blank backdrop. But, it was mission impossible because we hadn't drawn dark enough to see through the cloth. So, we had to trace it over with a marker. Finally, after all that, the backdrop was ready to be painted. By then, a few of us were already coming in on Saturdays to work on it. We ended up finishing it during the Pongal Holidays. It was a lot of work, but I'm proud of what we accomplished.

Simultaneously we had started with props making. At first, only the Faith group and Veronique were working on the props in our craft class. But as we got further behind schedule, some of us from the Hope group started pitching in too.

We had to work fast to get everything done on time. We had a very busy schedule. We had to paint and make props for the play, practice every morning during school time, and study for our regular subjects like math, science, and geology.

Since the play had a dance number and song the Younger grades were learning the choreography in their dance class with Deepa. When they joined us later during rehearsals we were a bit jealous and thought they would steal all the glory.

One of the major challenges was to make costumes on a low budget. The material was also not available in Pondy. We got it from Bhakti's hometown, Narmada and Bhakti were stitching costumes, and once in a while whoever knew stitching in our group and whoever was free after school went and helped them. With a snap, six months had passed by and we were done with most of the work by then the actors had to focus on acting but Bhakti and the other teachers were still working.

The play also required makeup and face painting. For that we sought help from Noor an ex-student of Deepanam and her mother Mira.

The days leading up to the performance were intense. We spent so many Saturdays and even had evening rehearsals. It felt like we had no weekends at all! Despite all the hard work, we still felt nervous and unprepared on the day of the performance. But, when we finally took to the stage and heard the audience clapping and laughing, it was all worth it. And of course, we were all pretty excited about the pizza we got to eat afterwards!
Bhakti and Mahavir decided that we were going to do one of Shakespeare’s plays and I realized that even the name Shakespeare was unfamiliar to me. I have never really enjoyed doing things in front of 100 or more people, so I asked Bhakti for the briefest of the role and fewest lines for myself. But instead, I was given the role of Theseus, the Duke of Athens. And I realized it is one of the main characters. Bhakti gave me 26 lines and 15-25 minutes of stage time, and my scene was the first and the last. Further, Mahavir said they had to be perfect scenes.

This kind of led me to put a sort of pressure on myself, plus I didn't know anyone in my class. For the first two weeks, I was more nervous than I was on our final performance day because I barely talked to anyone except Sara. After a few days, I was okay with my class people, and after that, I got a bit of confidence. I was super happy and started enjoying the practices. As we practiced, I felt like a king during rehearsals and found my voice. I felt like the play unlocked a new side of myself. And being responsible for the younger kids backstage was fun.

- Nayomi

Theater has been my passion. I also like to play small roles whenever we start the production with the class. I got the chance of playing a minor role of 'Egeus', Hermia’s father in the play.

Egeus represents the traditional patriarchal society of Athens, where fathers have absolute control over their daughters' lives, including their choice of marriage partner. Egeus demands that Hermia marries Demetrius, a man of his choosing, instead of Lysander, whom Hermia loves. Egeus refuses to listen to Hermia's pleas.

Egeus is not flexible and unwilling to see Hermia as anything more than his possession. In the end, Egeus is reconciled with Hermia after she and Lysander marry.

I found it challenging to work with Shakespearean language, and I struggled with remembering my lines. Although, I was continuously reminding my class to do so. The difficulty began with pronouncing the word "hast," which proved very difficult for me. My students frequently pointed out my errors, and I tried to correct them, but I was only partly successful.

- Mahavir
It was a miracle. I didn’t like the play (I don’t think anyone did) just the day before the play. But something, something just snapped into everyone. I think it was the crowd, not sure. But everyone did fantastic on the day of the play! It was mind-boggling. Why the play was bad before it actually happened? I don’t know. But we’re here to talk about my experience as Lysander.

It surprises me now to think Bhakti offered the role of Puck to me. I was happy back then because I did not want to be one of the couples because... well, who would want to? But now I have multiple reasons why I’m happy I wasn’t Puck. Number 1 is) The sheer amount of makeup my friend had to put on his face. He had fake eyelashes!!! And it got stuck in his eye around one hour before the play. Thank god it wasn’t me. But I felt pretty bad for that poor guy. 2) Turiya, (the guy who actually played Puck) had to practice his lines with the fairies (the younger kids) while everybody else from our class had something to do. And he was just alone at the amphitheatre, sitting, with no one to accompany him, watching the younger kids do their scenes again and again and again. And 3) He was on stage basically the whole time. And didn’t get much rest between scenes. He definitely deserved it though. And well, then Turiya fought for Puck’s role and Bhakti said yes. So then I got Lysander’s role.

Memorizing the lines was no big deal. Took me less than a week. But trying to act romantic was the worst part. Every time I did, Hermia (Aneeka), who was supposed to be my lover in the play, would laugh, causing me to laugh. But that’s fine because, in the end, nobody laughed on stage. Oh, we also got Pizza and cake at the end of the play!

"Where is my Oscar?!" -Turiya

“Pressure is really helpful”. That is what I had in mind after the play we worked so hard on was finished at last. I had thought that the play was doomed for failure and that everyone watching the play would be disappointed. Even the rehearsal we had the day before was a drag, it felt like no one took the play seriously and just wanted to get it over with. But on the day of the play something changed. Everyone’s acting was completely different from all the rehearsals. I always thought that pressure was a bad thing, and that all the mistakes we made in the practices were gonna be worse on stage. But I was completely wrong.

Somehow everyone managed to let the pressure become a tool to get rid of obstacles, instead of it being the obstacles. And it really helped me to see other people acting well on stage, because if other people were bothering to put an effort to make the play understandable while still being fun, then so should I. Overall I think we all did fantastically. We had a few unexpected audiences and a power cut, which complicated things, but I think we still performed well and it couldn’t have been any better.

- Turiya
Well we were going to perform a play by Shakespeare and I was going to play the part of Hermia, who is one of the main characters and also one of the couples, which is just... great. I have never been a main character because I don't like going on stage, and this time wasn’t different. We practiced for more than 4 months and I was so bad in all the rehearsals, especially one scene where I had to have a nightmare, I mean... acting it out was a nightmare. Also... how do people in movies act like they are in love?? HOW?

It’s so awkward and each time Lysander, who was supposed to be my boyfriend, acted romantic I started laughing cause it was so weird.

Before the final performance all of us were doing so bad, but on the day of the play, something happened and everybody was awesome and the play actually turned out really really good and everybody loved it.

- Aneeka

In the past I have always been in the choir or dance team but this time I don’t have a choice so I said yes to theatre. In the last few times I have done theatre I have always been a boy so I requested bhakti that, please make me a girl not a boy or man or object. I ended up becoming Oberon (who is a man).

I was very sure of quitting the play but when I came to school the next day everyone was very happy with their roles, so I decided to deal with it and do the play and don’t regret that decision at all. Especially when it was the performance day and time to put makeup I was the most grateful for being Oberon. It was a very fun and educational experience and I am looking forward to doing more theatre performances.

- Sara
Uncovering the Hidden canyons on a Forest Walk

When we first went there I thought that it would be very boring and just walking around the forest but when we started going it became a bit more interesting than we expected. We did not walk that much but I was a bit tired after coming back home. It was also very interesting to learn about the different animals that are in the forests of Auroville. I have seen most of them in Auroville but I was quite surprised by some of them because I was not expecting a place like Auroville where there are a lot of people and less space.

After we saw all the animals that live in Auroville we walked some more and kept on walking and walked even more. It felt like the walking would never end but it obviously did. Next week our class went to Raveena forest near Evergreen. We all met at Certitude gate at 8:30am and cycled together to the forest. When we arrived, it was quite cold inside, and I could smell the freshness of the forest. Regina showed us around and it was a huge forest.

She said there were porcupines, wild cats, mongooses, wild boars, civets, etc. Today we were going to see the canyon. I have never seen a canyon in real life, only in pictures, so I was really excited. We had to walk for more than an hour to reach the canyons, but Regina taught us a lot about the tree types and animals in the forest so it wasn't boring. And one tree that she showed us was so old, like more than a thousand years!!! When we finally arrived at the canyon I was so happy because I could finally rest and the color of the canyon was really pretty.

It was a shade of dark red. After Regina showed us the canyons we could finally go back to school. When we were walking back to where we parked our cycle, the sun rose and because of the sunlight the forest looked so much prettier than before and I saw lots of beautiful flowers too. Afterwards we cycled back to school. When I reached school I was so tired and at the same time I was very grateful for going into the forest and seeing the canyons. It was a precious moment!

- Lea and Isha
1. How do you deal with failure/pressure?

The first question is, whether the person is willing to come for counselling. I would look at what that person is experiencing at that moment and what they are feeling right now. Then I would ask why they have come to me and what are they looking for. If there are unrealistic expectations of people for e.g. Let’s say a child says he/she is unwell.

Unwell can mean many different things like physically, mentally, etc. I would want to see if the child is dealing with anxiety, depression, or something else. I would like to understand what’s happening, and what’s causing it. You work with the root of the problem, why something is happening. Sometimes there are problems within the family. Sometimes, parents are having fights or there is disharmony in the family. Then I would like to invite the parents and see how we can work on that because that is impacting the child.

It is very complex but at the same time, we want to make it as simple as possible. Usually, you have to see everything in the child’s life. It’s no point in focusing on the child’s life and saying “ok you failed, now let’s see how we are going to pass”. No, that’s not counselling. We work in the here and now but we also see what is happening in the child’s life.

2. What do you think people should know more about mental health?

The foremost thing is that Mental Health is a big taboo. Although, in the last few years I have seen that there is a lot of awareness like mental health campaigns and social media, and even big celebrities talking about it. While all that is fantastic, there is a massive taboo not only in India but also in the West. The minute we know that somebody feels vulnerable and they share about their mental health, they are immediately boxed and labelled as “this or that”.

Firstly, labels are very dangerous. It can be very hurtful for individual lives and is not great for mental health. I wish that this is something that should not be there. You asked what I think would help. I wish the taboo part of it was lesser and the fact that people think “only if I am in depression or my anxiety is so bad that I need a counsellor or a psychologist then I need to see one”.

But the truth is that all of us need to speak about transitions, and challenges. Sometimes if it is difficult, just speak about it in a healthy way, where you feel safe. That is why, in Maatram, we believe it is a community psychology that we practice and it is open to everyone.

For e.g. if someone feels “I am having exam pressure and I am really nervous about tomorrow’s exam and I want to talk about it” Or “I am having this problem with my girlfriend and she doesn’t... blah, blah blah”. “So I am nervous she is going to break up with me”. These are not massive mental health issues. These are regular issues anybody can face at any point in time. I wish that this would be there, that there should be more awareness about taking care of our mental health just like we take care of our bodies.
3. Do you have any tips for everyone to take care of their mental health?

Deep Breathing 100%; also, check in with your emotions like what you are feeling right now. Most of the time we cannot name the emotion that we are experiencing. We find it hard to talk about them for e.g. “am I really frustrated, sad, or what am I feeling?”. Also, observe some very rigid thoughts like “I can’t do this; they don’t like me, etc.” There are some conclusive thoughts that we have. To have the ability to challenge them and to see whether it is a belief system, to check whether it is true.

And as shared before ANTS (Automatic Negative Thoughts) – is very very important. How do we talk to ourselves? Are we nice to ourselves? (Aneeka: depends on the mood) Have we observed ourselves? We are not very nice to ourselves. I always ask the person how would you speak to your friend about it. Would you say the same mean things like “I am so dumb, I am so stupid, what an idiot, why did I do this?” But you will not say that to your friend. If they made a mistake, you would say to them “Hey it’s ok!” right? Our Internal Dialogue, how we speak to ourselves is important. These are some tips I definitely would mention.

But deep breathing is definitely helpful to take care of our anxiety. Anytime you face anxiety, there is a way to destress. One method is the 4 times inhale and breathe out longer say 5 counts. Or, there is the candle method, take a deep breath in and blow out the candle. (Aneeka: there is also the 4-7-8 method) Yes, absolutely. So, how do you practice it when something is bothering you? And then it calms you down. Then ask yourself and observe ANTS - whether you are being hard on yourself. What are your expectations? Are they real? Are they manageable? Those are some things I would say.

4. How do you deal with self-esteem? Some have more but that can lead to Ego or some might have low self-esteem which is also not good. So how do you moderate?

Such amazing questions!! Wow, I love it. Self-esteem can also show up as somebody trying to hide that they have low self-esteem. They can pretend that they can do everything well.

To kind of compensate for that feeling that I am not good enough. They may really try to work very hard and show that they are perfect or they do everything well and if you show them one tiny mistake in what they do they get very angry. They will deny it. That means they are actually suffering internally. It’s really hard. They feel they are working hard to ensure that they do not make any mistakes. Your question is basically, how does one work with self-esteem to draw a balance?

There is no one in this world that is going to have high self-esteem all their lives all the time. Sometimes or the other we do feel low about ourselves, right? Isn’t that human? That sometimes we are going to feel that we are not good enough. And that’s ok. But how do we embrace ourselves is the most important question. When you feel like a failure, for instance. But the truth is are you a failure every day, every moment of your life? That’s a question I would ask. Or you have this negative self-belief that I am a failure.
Those are negative thoughts and I would challenge them. Working on those is important because all of us are blessed with resources. We all have something within ourselves to fight, to do better, and to encourage ourselves. I would actually tap into ourselves to find those resources, what is there that can work for me positively? Self-esteem is something we constantly work on but it does not mean that because of one incident, we say I cannot do something. These resources come up slowly. Remind yourself of all those times that you were able to succeed.

(Isha – so what about those that have high self-esteem, does that mean they have a big ego ?) That means they will have some relationship issues maybe. How do you see that? (Isha – I experience it when I do something well and people compliment me and I feel a high ego) Is that wrong? You mean overconfidence? (Aneeka – and the next time you try to do it, you feel you will be good because of last time but next time if it goes really bad then your confidence just goes down and then you don’t want to try again). (Isha – maybe the pressure from the previous time that you were really good and the expectation is built to live up to it).

So that anxiety? I would ask you the question “can someone constantly perform ?” No. If you are relaxed, most likely you will perform beautifully. But if you are anxious about the performance, then it might just be a little shaky. Right? That’s the only thing. Other than that, we just have to learn to work with that.

"The Year Earth Changed" is a beautiful documentary that captures the unprecedented changes in the natural world during the COVID-19 pandemic. The documentary uses stunning visuals and narration by David Attenborough to tell the story of how the pandemic has affected the planet’s wildlife and their habitats.

The documentary is a powerful reminder of how interconnected all living beings are and how much we depend on the health of our planet. It wakes up a call to action for us to take urgent steps to protect our environment and reduce our impact on the natural world.

The film showcases a positive aspect of the pandemic, highlighting how the temporary pause in human activity allowed wildlife to thrive and habitats to regenerate. It shows how, by giving nature the time and space it needs, we can make a positive impact on the environment.

Overall, "The Year Earth Changed" is a must-watch for anyone who cares about the health of our planet and the wildlife that inhabits it. It is a reminder that we all have a responsibility to do our part in preserving the environment for future generations.

- Mahavir
The importance of diversity

There are countless reasons that make the world we live in a beautiful and fascinating place, and undoubtedly the diversity between one another makes it one step better. From the earth to the universe there is a diversity we can’t fathom. And diversity is important among us. Diversity can mean a multitude of things in the human sense, such as race diversity, cultural diversity, gender diversity etc. To give you some context, just imagine a world where everyone had the same beliefs, was the same shade, had the same personality, it would be a world of human robots, and well... boredom. Diversity does the exact opposite of boredom; it enhances creativity and innovation! To me I just find it amazing how there are 8 billion humans in this world and not one of them are the same. In modern society to even get a job offer you need to be quirky and unique.

It may seem like the world loves it, but unfortunately not everybody is pro diversity.. So many people all over the world are bullied or not accepted because of maybe their body, sexuality, or for not being a part of social norms. And it’s troubling because it’s usually the “oddballs” that make it far. With more diverse and different views on the planet, amazing things can happen. New possibilities, Ideas, and knowledge. Imagine if people didn’t dictate their lives only by one culture but explored different cultures, religions, and people, to see different perspectives. Because the more you learn and what this does is that it opens up our world to new possibilities, and we find out more about ourselves. This proves that living a certain way, or doing things in a traditional manner, isn’t all the best because confining yourself, blocks up what might work for you.

It’s not a myth that the world we live in holds billions of species, different shapes, sizes and different ways to adapt to their environment. One of the most beautiful things about earth is its biodiversity. From an ant to an elephant They started out in the same way. Not only is this diversity cool that there is so much variety to discover, but it’s also that it’s the difference between living things that keep balance to the fragile ecosystem. Just because an ant may be smaller, it doesn’t reduce its importance, and just because a silverback is massive does not make it superior. Speaking of importance, biodiversity is crucial to our survival.

For example, monkeys eat fruit and disperse seeds through their dung or by simply dropping it, then the seeds grow into trees helping, by reducing carbon dioxide. But if that species of monkey is threatened by extinction (this goes for many species) less trees are planted, and less carbon dioxide is absorbed. And especially with climate change peaking it’s more important than ever to restore, and save our natural wildlife “hotspots.” Some environments with more species can come with a few going extinct like the amazon, because there are so many species that do the same role, the effect would be less harsh, but something like the coral reef, it’s more sensitive to change.

I know this might not be a valid point but also the fact that so many iconic and inspirational animals are under threat. Imagine growing with tigers, pandas, rhinos, and lions. It hits me hard that the coming generation won’t be able to be with these animals, unless we act fast to secure the lives of the animals and the planet.
Back when we weren't stuck
With these little screens
And used to spend the buck
For tiny figurines
Or jump over fences to pluck
Some tangerines

Man, I miss those days
The good ol' days
When we lay on hays
And look at the cows graze
Or the sunny rays
in a daze

But looking at now
At all the change
I ask myself how
Things have ranged
What is this all 'about
The stuff so strange

Can we go back
When all was plain
And none would slack
But no need to explain
The fear of attack
For I'm no more in pain

- Kishore

A blue sun

My mind wanders off time to time
My eyes start to turn monotone
Sometimes I feel like life's the crime
Is this what happens when you fail alone
I feel like I'm in my own space
A place where your thoughts are ten fold
It feels like life was a race
And I could have been like polished gold
I wanted to move at my own pace
But now I've started to get old

if I had a chance to restart life I would
My frozen mind in the same state
The fragile footing a top I stood
if only I was aware at age eight
Aware of the place I'd end up standing
Aware of the regret I'd end up Brandishing/Clasping
Aware of the Confidence I'd end up handing
Aware of the blank time that keeps expanding
The affair/relationship with my past has started weakening
it gets further distant when I look back
I'm barely holding on by a weakened/breaking string
Before my skin starts to crack, will I see another dawn?
Am I too far gone, Am I really just an add on?

To me the sun looks blue
My life gets separated into two
Two sides that makes my life whole
I wish just one could do it alone
How I got here is a huge plot hole
This one side will forever be known
This one side is filled with love and with joy
I look back fondly, when I was just a boy
But it hurts to look back
I think to myself, I should have done that
Should have done this, But there I sat
I want to go back to that unaware bliss
And enjoy living before life's reality check kiss
it's unfair to compare heaven to an abyss
The other side is seven times worse than the worst crisis

To me the sun is blue
Everything the light touches becomes that hue
At this point I've just accepted it
Back then I really should've expected it
I shouldn't feel regret 'cause I slept on it
Life ran faster than me, should've kept with it
I shouldn't try to change something I can't
Because life is really just like a plant
Put all of the cons below
Take the pros with you and grow

- Ren