

Walk into a new world called
Loka



Annual Magazine 2023
A Small School with Big Dreams in India

Content

About Loka.....	4
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Winter - Spring (January-March)

Hand knitted with Love.....	6
Beauty of Being at Loka.....	7
Labour of Love.....	8
Holi at Loka.....	9
Work in Progress.....	10
Loka's Farm.....	11
Community Art (1).....	12
Community Art (2).....	13
Birds of Loka.....	14
International Connections, Cultural Differences.....	15
Village Maps.....	16
The Seeds of Vandana Shiva.....	17
Wildflowers of Bihar.....	18

Summer (April-June)

New Academic Session.....	20
Wheat Harvest.....	21
Sandeep's Art Classes.....	22
Buddha Purnima.....	23
Going to School.....	24
Remembering Pradeep Sachdeva.....	25
One-eared Chrystal.....	26
Art from the Heart.....	27
A Flower called Imagination.....	28
The Little Fir Tree.....	29
Conscious Construction.....	30
Summer Celebrations.....	31
Time to Pause.....	32

Monsoon (July-September)

The Season of Joy.....	34
Learning at Loka.....	35
Football Coaching.....	36
Frank the Farmer.....	37
Internship at Upasana.....	38
Cynotype Workshop.....	39
Art with Tia.....	40
Independence Day.....	41
Loka on a Sunday Afternoon.....	42
Art Presentation.....	43
Handloom Carpets.....	44
Bollywood Dance.....	45

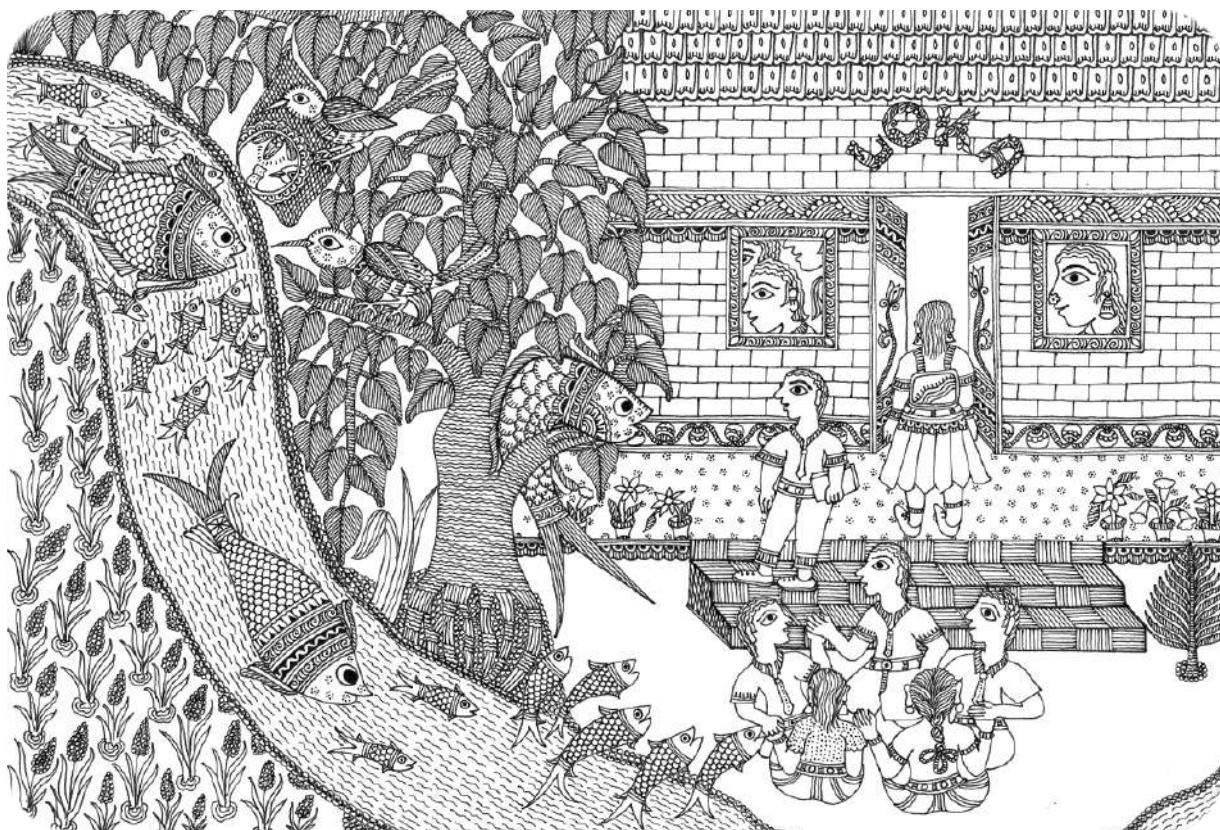
Flowers in the Monsoon.....	46
After Rain... comes Sunshine.....	47

Autumn-Winter (October-December)

A Winter Village Walk.....	49
Stars on Earth.....	50
Natural Connections.....	51
Learning for a Better World.....	52
Handmade Paper.....	53
Playing Kabaddi.....	54
Shiva Shakti Sessions.....	55
Financial Literacy.....	56
Van Kesteren Foundation.....	57
Paddy Harvest.....	58
Yoga Session.....	59
Colourful Learning.....	60
A Beautiful Day.....	61
Merry Mother Christmas.....	62
Self-Sufficiency.....	63
Hopes and Dreams.....	64

Information & Inspiration

Looking Ahead.....	66
In Residence at Loka.....	67
Friends of Loka.....	68
Thank you.....	69



About Loka

What? Loka is a small school with big dreams. **Where?** Along the Punpun river in Bihar, North-India. **Why?** Loka explores (new) ways of learning for a Beautiful, Just and Sustainable World. **Who?** Loka's 100 students aged 4-15, from nursery to grade 10, receive a complete education of Head, Heart & Hand. **How?** At Loka students are equipped to create their livelihoods, empowered to uplift their surroundings and enriched with a sense of purpose.

Loka according to its students

Sanatan - We are being educated for more than just passing exams and finding a job. We are here to find our purpose. Once we have found it, we are educated.

Shankar - We are doing experiments and from that we learn a lot of things.

Dinesh - Loka is different from other schools. The thoughts of students are being valued. We are having conversations, understanding more. Our surroundings are connected to the learning. Loka prepares us not just to think about our own futures, but also about the future of our community and the world.

Shilpi - Loka is not just for intelligent and rich children. Loka is for everyone.

Sandeep - What we see and hear is not just Loka. What we create is Loka. It depends on us, the students, what we make of our time here. Our learning is connected to our village and the world. To exist our village requires a healthy world and we can make this world more healthy by caring for our village.

Madhu - My mind is like a half moon. By being at Loka, it becomes a full moon.

Loka School

Loka serves the young population of Manikpur -a village where the school is located. The school is affordable to all and most children of Manikpur (80%) study at Loka. Their families generally earn their livelihoods as farmers, day-labourers and small scale entrepreneurs.

Total amount of students: 100

Teaching staff: 6 full time/2 part time

Non-teaching staff (cleaning/cooking/guard/handyman/gardener/farmer): 6

Grades: (Pre) Primary and Secondary Education until grade 8

Projects and entrepreneurship course: grades 8-12 and graduated students

Loka's community: Village with a population of about 750 people

International Boards

Loka has boards in India (Sarvodaya Society) and the Netherlands (Stichting Loka). The Indian entity is responsible for Loka's vision, mission, ground work and initiates conversations on education. The Dutch foundation supports the school in India and is building a Loka community through Vrienden van Loka.

More information/Contact

E info@loka.in W www.loka.in (school site) W vriendenvanloka.nl (Dutch site)

Winter-Spring at Loka (January-March)

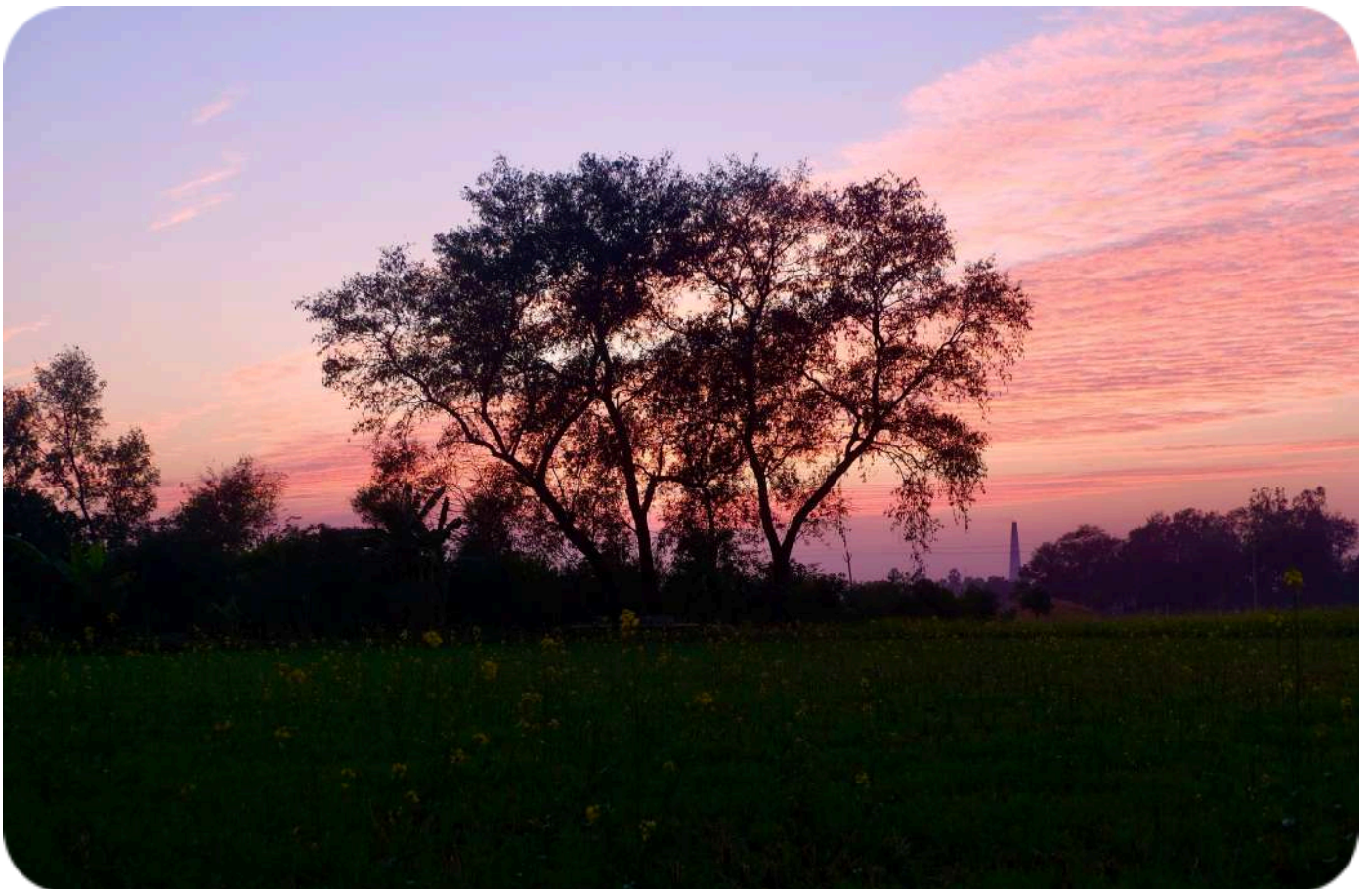


Hand knitted with Love

Beautiful hats and mufflers hand-knitted for Loka's children with love by Sandra Bullock and Janet Wootten's Friendship Group for the Elderly in the UK. The women were knitting throughout 2022 and created 110 sets! After experiencing years of lockdown and isolation this heartfelt project was a beautiful way for the ladies to get back together again! Loka's children are delighted. During the cold months of January and February they are kept cosy and warm thanks to their new winter woollens. What a beautiful gift!



Beauty of Being at Loka...



Labour of Love

Prasidh Mahato has been employed at Loka for quite a few years and is one of the school's oldest staff members. He originally worked on the farm and was engaged in construction work side by side with Loka's legendary 'Babaji' -a man who preferred plants to human beings and recently retired. Nowadays Prasidh takes care of Loka's cows. Prasidh comes from the pre-money era in this remote part of the world. At Loka, he earns a modest income which he directly sends to his family in a village elsewhere in the region, as his children depend on money and he has no use for it himself. "You will give him 100 rupees and it will last him 3 months" another Loka member once said.

If Prasidh does not care to earn, then why does he work at Loka? In his own words: "It is my duty and I love to serve cows. I rise early morning, clean up the stable and the cows, feed them and then I feed the dogs (one dog is standing in front of him as he speaks, which he lovingly pets). It is only after all animals are fed I take my own breakfast. I am with the cows almost all day and even sleep besides them. Our bond is close. When leaving Loka for a few days to visit my family I cannot help but thinking how the cows are; are they happy and healthy and being properly taken care of in my absence?" Then Prasidh walks off and continues his duty - work he does free from ambition and for the love of it. Work that makes him rise early and delay eating until certain tasks are completed. Work that makes him live separate from his family. Work that gives him a sense of dignity and purpose.

It is rare and humbling, in this world of power and money, to come across a person like Prasidh. May his story inspire many and leave us with a sense of wonder.



Holi at Loka

There is not just one colour, there are many. There are no inferior and superior colours -no 1st and 3rd rate colours- there are just colours and many shades in between. Each colour has its own importance and without one of them, something would be missing.

May the many colours of all life on earth join in mutual respect, combine their unique qualities and evolve together towards higher Truths and a more Fair, Joyful & Beautiful World.

One World. Many Colours. Happy Holi!



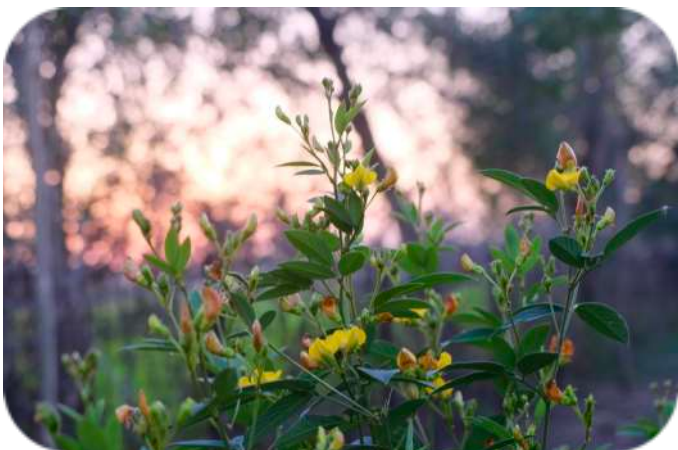
Work in Progress

Skilled labourers and craftspeople have created Loka's beautiful campus using not just their hands but their whole bodies -sometimes in acrobatic ways. Painters have been brushing, carpenters polishing, and the blacksmith welding to shape new learning spaces in which Loka's next phase will be realised: 'From Education to Entrepreneurship'.



Loka's Farm

So much to see; every day something new
mustard///pomegranate///wheat///mango///linseed///
chickoo///potatoes///papaya///lentils///chickpeas



Community Art (1)

Artist/educator Ashis Palei started guiding Loka's Mother Teachers and Student Interns to teach Art as a subject as part of a three year training Loka's partner **Art1st** is offering The programme is designed in a way that is sensitive to the philosophy and working method of Loka's school, as well as its local rural surroundings in a remote Bihar' village.



Shankar: "How we express ourselves alone is limited. When we express ourselves together something 'more' happens than that I, as an individual, could ever have imagined. That, and much more, I learned."



Sandeep: "I created a world in which people grow together and protect our natural world. Look, people here are standing around a tree and protecting it. Our village is rich. It is rich with fresh air, the Punpun river, trees and human connections. Who told us we are poor and why?"

Community Art (2)

Students and teachers went into the village and created a mural on a mud house.

Shilpi: "I was wondering what people in the village would think of this activity. The response was positive. This could be a starting point for creating a beautiful village through our school. What we learn in our school can be applied; it can be made real. Most schools do not connect to their communities, to do so is not considered education. Education is to create more big buildings, more of everything. Are the wars in the world connected to the greed we learn in school? All big things start small. Why do we not learn in schools to be happy with what we have? My dream is that we overcome our differences. All things take time. One day my school and village will be one family and everyone will learn and grow together. Today's activity has made me see this."



Birds of Loka



Green Bee-eater



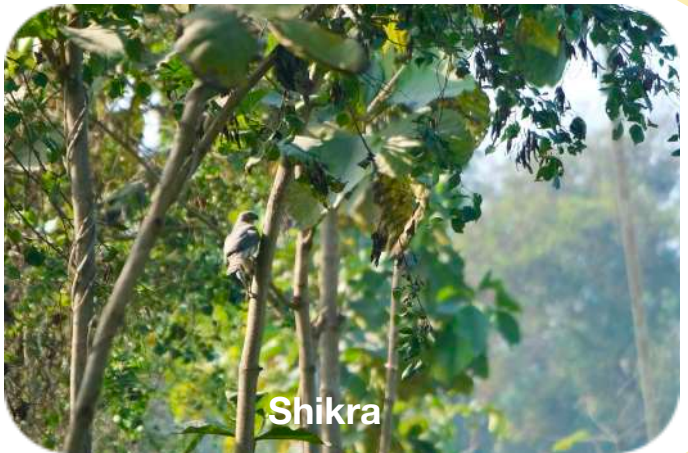
Pond Heron



Black drongo



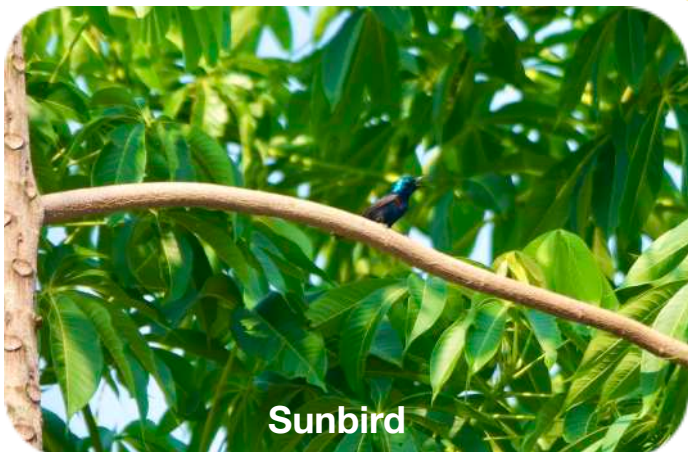
Bulbul



Shikra



rose ringed parakeets



Sunbird



Jungle Babbler

International Connections, Cultural Differences

Loka students were invited by Japanese student Hajime Kaneto to attend an online forum of his research connected to a Stanford e-Japan course on International relations. For the online event Hajime connected high school students from Japan, the US and Loka School in India who were asked to reflect on the rapid deforestation of the tropical rainforests due to expansion of agricultural and grazing lands. Students from Japan and the US came with some inspiring and innovative measures, mostly rooted in science and new technology.

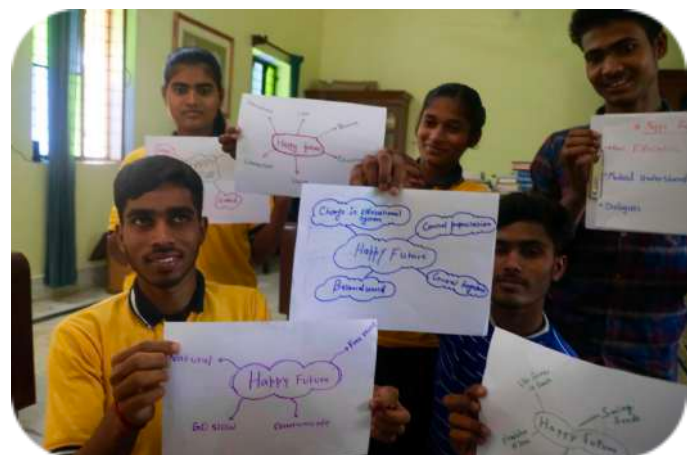
Loka students added to this conversation with their thoughts:

Dinesh - Limitless human greed, an increasing global population and limited natural resources have brought us in a situation of environmental destruction that affects us all.

Sanatan - We need to start a dialogue between all parties and countries involved and be able to see the situation from different perspectives while focussing on our deeper connections.

Sandeep - How can we expect humanity to care for our natural world as long as we are educated in an exam driven way that encourages us to compete and focus on personal achievements? Why instead of competing in exams do we not spend our student time observing nature and building communities? If all children in the world have access to REAL education, these problems need not arise in the first place.

Loka's Lions reflected on the conversation and realised that science and new technology can only bring true progress if they are used consciously and that creating this awareness needs to come at the core of the way children are being educated. To get new ideas for the future, we may need to look back at the past and not forget that for millions of years humankind lived in harmony with the natural world. If we can progress into the future while embracing this ancient wisdom, many of the global issues we face today can be resolved naturally.



Village Maps

A highlight of participating in the online education programme **Out of Eden Learn** (Project Zero/Harvard) at Loka is students creating maps of their village. Every child has an authentic way of doing so. This time the Peacocks (grade 5) worked in small groups and were inspired by Mithila folk art from Bihar.



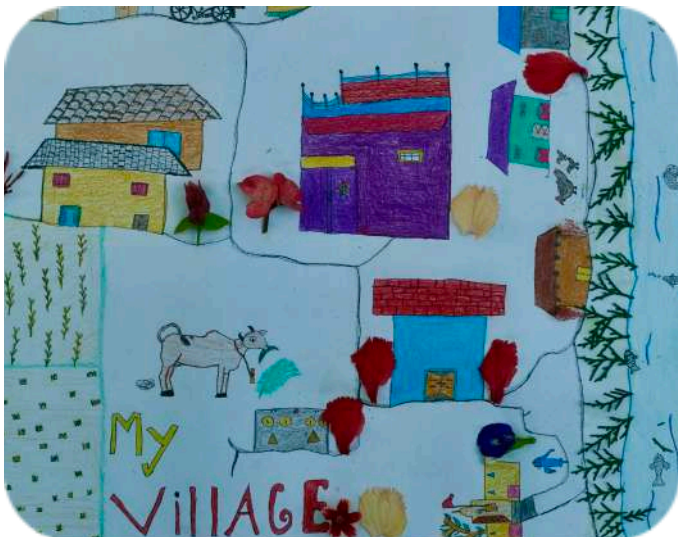
My village is small and has two temples and one river. River is very beautiful. More fish in the river. Many houses in my village and farmers are doing work. Many trees and plants . There are a few rabbits, many paddy and cows in my village.

My village has one school. School name is Loka.

My village is very beautiful and there are so many animals. Most people are connected to farming and one school in my village school name Loka. My village is small and there is one Punpun river. In my village mostly all houses are pucca (brick) house and very few houses made of mud. Two temples in my village. I made this map with my two friends.



In my village there are three temples and many houses one school and in the school is a garden. Garden is beautiful and many trees, plants, flowers. In my village one river and so many trees and cows and bicycles. Hens are in my village and there are many goats and many paddy. On the map paddy cutting is almost finished. I made this map with my friend.



The Seeds of Vandana Shiva

Loka's senior students watched the documentary-film 'The Seeds of Vandana Shiva' and reflected on the environmental activist's words: "The Small Scale Farmer is the last free person on this planet." Living in a village in rural Bihar, students were speaking from experience when they held a dialogue on the topic:

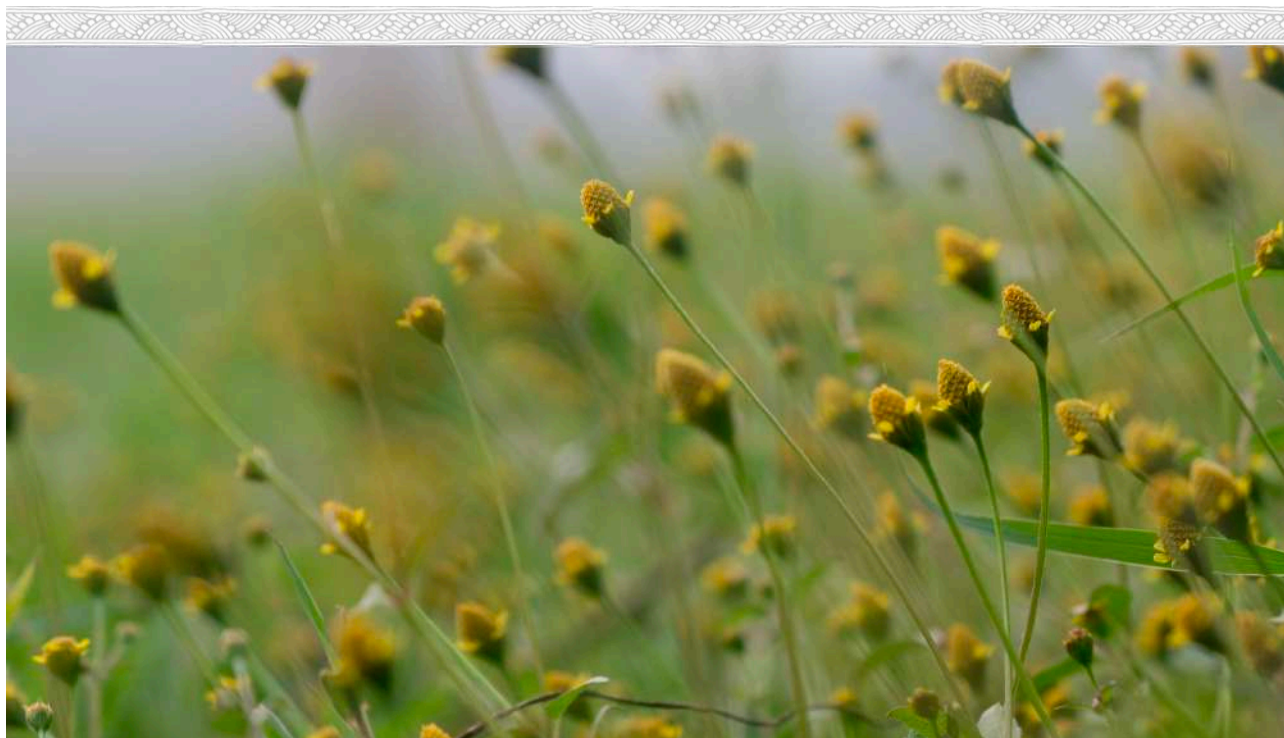
Shilpi - Most people in this world take - they take from other people and take from nature to earn money. The small scale farmer gives. The small scale farmer gives life to plants and feeds the world. His necessity to give is bigger than to take. In this giving lies his freedom.

Sanatan - The small scale farmer grows a variety of crops and keeps the eco-system of this planet balanced. He has not lost touch with the basic principle: if we care for the planet, the planet cares for us. The small scale farmer cares and is cared for. In that caring lies his freedom.

Shankar - Small scale farmers are the backbone of our society. All people depend on farmers - farmers depend on themselves. They do their work free from ambition and with a smile. They know not of the big things of this world, they live in faraway places and are focussed on their work. They find joy in the small things and in that joy lies their freedom.



Wildflowers of Bihar



Summer at Loka (April-June)



New Academic Session

Beginning April the new academic session started at Loka. An auspicious moment in time. During the morning gathering we prayed together and recited Sanskrit mantras. Then Loka's co-founder Sanatji gave a speech in which he talked about creating the right circumstances for the child's natural growth. He used metaphors connected to nature and farming: "To enable the seed to grow into a tree it needs to be nurtured. But we cannot change the seed of a peepal tree into that of a banyan tree. As a school our main task is to create the right circumstances for the seed to grow - not to change its inherent nature. Like a farmer the teacher's task is to create the right environment for growth. We live in a village, farmers are very close to us. We can learn a lot from them."

Students also shared their thoughts at the beginning of this session:

Sanatan: "Challenges are a sign of life. To be alive means to learn."

Shankar: "Loka is more than just a school. It is a space that allows us to discover the right path in life."

Shilpi: "Whatever small or big action we undertake, let us do so fully - with an alert and awake heart and mind. Our lives will become interesting and beautiful."



Wheat Harvest

Golden fields of wheat at Loka are cut with a sickle. The harvest provides 8 months of flour (atta) to Loka and the small scale farmer couple who helped.

We are often told that money makes a person rich. However, we can't eat, drink or breathe our money. Maybe breathing fresh air, having access to clean drinking water, living a self-sufficient life and creating something beautiful and useful in this world is the new 'rich'. It can be done without harming nature and other human beings and can give birth to a more fair world - not a first and third world but

One World



Sandeep's Art Classes

Loka student Sandeep has a clear aim: 'My goal is to enhance my village with art and education - and no fear.'

Sandeep started taking some practical small steps to realise his big dream by continuously practicing his own art work and giving daily art classes to junior Loka students. It is always heart touching to see Sandeep's students presenting their art during morning circles at Loka - and really showing ownership and a beautiful sense of pride in their drawings. This is all thanks to Sandeep - who is immensely enriching their education through his classes. Though himself a student, Sandeep is turning out to be a great educator too. His daily art classes are holistic and always evolving. Children are made aware to take care of materials, to be authentic and observe the world around them closely. Most importantly: he values students just the way they are. There is a wonderful atmosphere in his 'Loka art group' as children shine and the great outdoors is their classroom.



Buddha Purnima

On 5 May Loka's School in the land of Magadh celebrated the birthday of the Buddha - a Teacher whose timeless words still guide us on the path of wisdom today.

Buddha Purnima -the festival of (inner) peace- started with silence and meditation in Loka's beautiful flower garden with the sound of Buddhist prayers in the background. After a small puja we recited the Prayer of Lovingkindness and remembered the Buddha's words on temporary suffering and eternal bliss. Fruit prasadam (blessed food) was distributed after which we continued our daily routines -with fresh minds, open hearts and peaceful smiles on our faces.

Prayer of Lovingkindness

May all beings be peaceful
May all beings be happy
May all beings be safe
May all beings awaken
to the light of their true nature
May all beings be free.



Going to School

During their Environmental Studies (EVS) classes, Loka's grade 3 students learned about various topics such as travelling to school, forests and trees in their village. They made a beautiful presentation on these different topics and how they interconnect. Their EVS book tells a story of children in mountain areas having problems travelling to school because of a bamboo bridge and mud paths that slow them down and make the journey challenging. The construction of a concrete pathway and bridge are suggested as a celebrated solution. Loka's teacher Sapunam related this topic to her own experience of living in the mountains and having difficulties reaching school. But she also shared about the beautiful things children experienced together during their long daily walks through the forest. We reflected on different aspects of 'development'. Fast and easy transport comes with a price - beyond money. There may be a concrete bridge and road making things smooth, but gone are the songs children sang together while walking to school as they are now transported by a school bus or car. And so much for getting the necessary exercise and let's wonder about the trees that had to make way for construction. Every gain has a loss and every loss a gain. When we ask questions and dive deeper than the obvious and the superficial presented to us, maybe we can find ways to bring about a more conscious progress for humanity and nature. A kind of progress that is good for everyone and everything.



Remembering Pradeep Sachdeva

Loka's school building was designed by architect -and cultural icon of India- Pradeep Sachdeva. In his designs Pradeepji combined the practical with the beautiful - detailed intricacy with pure simplicity. He was inspired by Laurie Baker's 'uncluttered yet striking aesthetic sensibility' and detested facades and anything 'fake'. Pradeep loved the natural world and co-authored books about flowers, trees and shrubs of India. Books we cherish at Loka and often use for reference and inspiration. In below photos the buildings designed by Pradeepji are seen through the trees, plants and flowers that surround it. The storey on Loka's school was one of Pradeep's last designs made in February 2020. In May of that same year he passed on and the world lost a shining star - a wonderful personality and a great architect. Loka lost a dear friend and Trustee. Pradeepji continues to live on through the many buildings and gardens he designed and through his thoughts and the memories he left behind with those who were truly close to him. In a 'marketed' world of talks and podcasts, Pradeepji's legacy remains a fresh breeze - a guiding light for those interested in shaping the world in meaningful, useful and beautiful ways:

"You do the work you believe in, and it's there for everyone to see and learn from. What better way to teach?" ~Pradeep Sachdeva (1958-2020)



One-eared Chrystal

One morning we found Loka's sweet white dog Chrystal in a terrible state after she had been attacked by wild dogs. The fur of her head and ear were ripped off, she had an open stomach and severe wounds on her legs. Trails of blood were scattered throughout the school campus. We thought (and briefly even hoped) she would not make it. No dog vets are available near Loka's school - a remote part of the world. So we had to deal with her situation ourselves. Sanatji (Loka's co-founder) gave injections twice a day. Additionally a man from the village came daily to clean her up and apply ayurvedic medicine in her open stomach, which replaced surgery. We gave as much care and love as possible and realised that even during the most horrific circumstances we can add a touch of beauty to life. Who would have thought that mostly natural remedies, love and a will to live could cure our dog in just a short period of time. It was not the first time something like this happened but Chrystal was the first Loka dog to survive such an attack. Her wounds healed wonderfully. A year earlier Chrystal's heart was broken when the love of her life 'Snoopy' was brutally taken in front of her eyes. Since then her eyes had a sad look and she seemed lost. After Chrystal suffered the attack on her body she emerged stronger and more beautiful than ever with an incredible will to live. The shine in her eyes returned. What an inspiration!



Art from the Heart

From the very beginning, Loka's friend Reingard Braun has supported our school in many ways. She herself used to work with children and received an award from the then German Prime Minister for developing and designing equipment for physical activities that created lots of joy and helped children learn better. Not surprising that one of Reingard's first gifts to Loka consisted of simple sports and activity equipment such as cloth frisbees and colourful skipping ropes. She travelled all the way to Bihar to personally hand them over and be part of Loka's first ever 'sports day' -years before the school officially opened its doors. In more recent years Reingard started supporting the purchase of art materials as, in her words, "the emphasis on art is one of the aspects through which Loka distinguishes itself as a school". In 2023 Reingard celebrated her 80th birthday in a very special way. Instead of personal gifts she shared the story of Loka with her friends and requested they contribute towards art materials for the school. On below pictures you can see what all was purchased with Reingard's 80th birthday gift: varying from paint, palettes, chart paper and colouring pencils to books on Tribal Art and South Indian Sculptures.

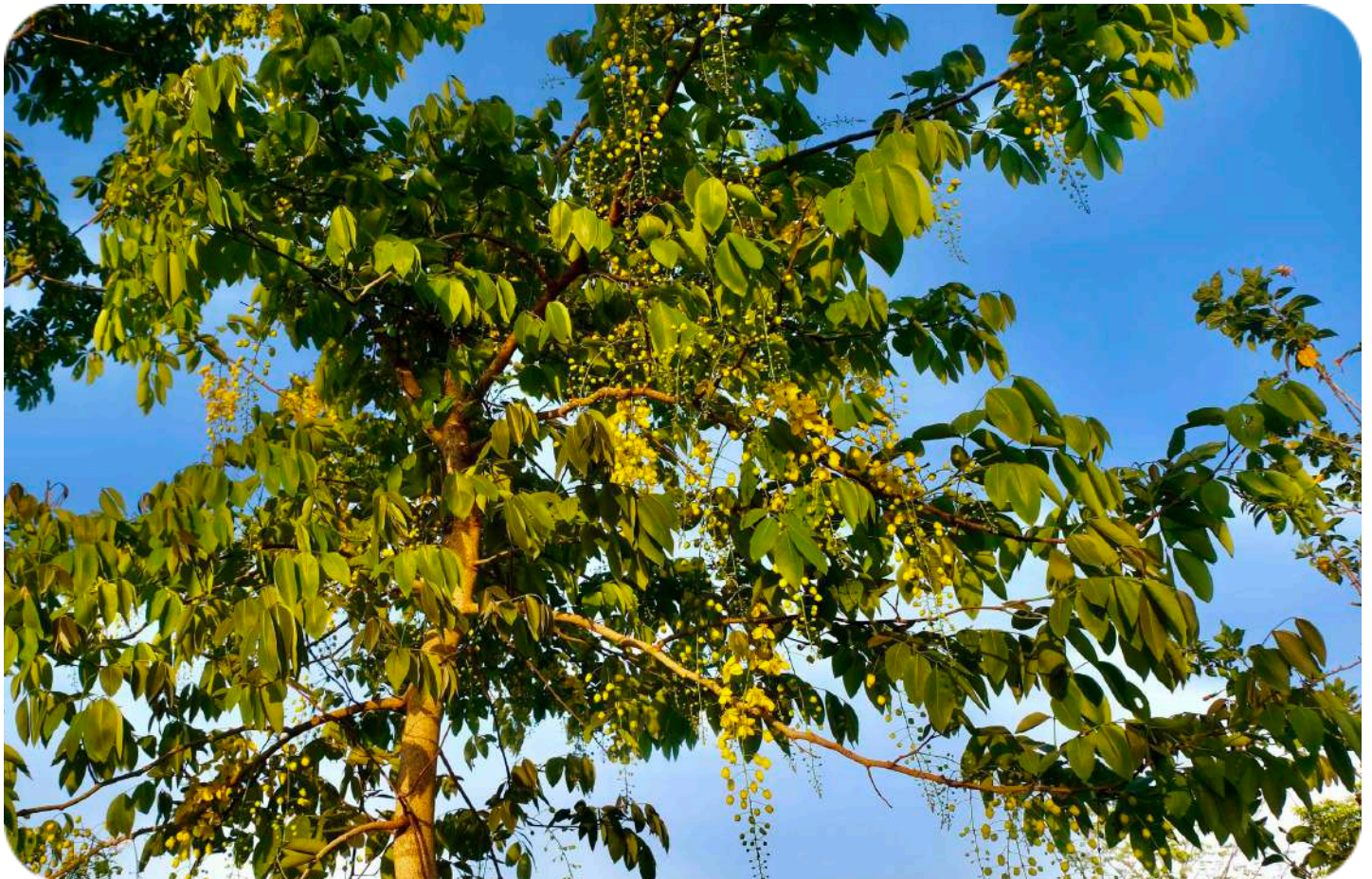
Thank you Reingard for your long standing friendship and support: from when Loka was only a dream, until today.



A Flower called Imagination

The golden shower tree (*Cassia fistula*) brightens up Loka's school campus with its profuse first blossoming. In Ayurvedic medicine, the golden shower tree is known as aragvadha, meaning 'disease killer'.

According to Mirra Alfassa/The Mother, founder of Auroville, the flowers' spiritual meaning is: IMAGINATION



The Little Fir Tree

One Saturday morning at Loka started with a beautiful short drama titled: 'The Little Fir Tree'. It was wonderfully performed in simple and creative Loka style by grade 4 students and guided by their amazing teacher Suprima.

The story was about a tree that was different from other trees. So this tree made a wish: to have the same leaves as other trees. After goats ate its leaves the tree wished for leaves made of gold. After its golden leaves were stolen by greedy men the tree wanted leaves of glass. After a storm blew the glass leaves to bits the tree realised its own leaves were not so bad after all... The moral of the story?



Conscious Construction

A structure to house supporting staff, cows and a Loka Cafe was created mostly by re-using existing materials such as bricks, windows and doors from the former cow stable and guard room.



Summer Celebrations

The start of Loka's summer break was celebrated with wonderful performances by teachers and students. We reflected on the last couple of months and had interesting conversations on how being at Loka inspires us and what we learn.

English Teacher Suprima: At Loka we naturally observe the world around us and identify what we see. Loka taught me the importance of learning slowly. I changed a lot in the last 6 months and used to think after getting my B.Ed degree: now I know everything. But, no, Loka taught me that learning never stops; that throughout life we continue to learn everywhere and from everyone.

Science Teacher Sapunam: I learn every day from my students. They share everything with each other. For example, when a student forgets his or her pen, another student will give theirs, even if it means they cannot write themselves. When I ask why, they reply that if they do not give the pen, their class mate will not be able to write and that concerns them more than completing the task themselves. This sense of community - instead of 'me' thinking for 'we' - is what I learn from my students.

Social Studies Teacher Vivek: I was educated to work and think for the individual - to focus on my own ambitions. At Loka I am learning to work in a team and am inspired by my colleagues who encourage this sense of unity.



Time to Pause

During the hot season -which is at its peak in May and June- Loka's farm has a rest. During this pause, the earth dries up, becomes rock hard and cracks open. Signs of life are scarce on the steamy hot surface. Nothing much seems to be happening. Or..? When looking closely one might discover something delicate, like these tiny little flowers amid a desert-like landscape.

Just like the earth, humans also become less productive during the scorching heat. This pause, however, may give rise to something unexpected and new. A less visible subtle beauty, carrying a value of its own.



Monsoon at Loka (July-September)



The Season of Joy

A view of Loka's campus during the monsoon through the eyes of student Shankar Kumar. Inside and outside, New learning spaces and old. It's the season of joy, learning, and lush green abundance!



Learning at Loka

Dinesh - Every week we receive special guidance. We study throughout the week and know that every Wednesday we get together and reflect more deeply on topics that concern us all. We also get access to interesting books from the library which help us broaden our minds, shape our own thoughts.

Sanatan - Loka provides a platform for learning and it is a space where we can freely express ourselves in a way that matches us. Loka teaches us a balanced life. We learn to see things from different perspectives and make more conscious choices related to our personal growth and that of our community.

Shilpi - Loka is a space where I share precious moments with friends of all ages and participate in all kinds of activities. I appreciate the opportunities we get at Loka.

Shankar - The basic guidelines of Loka inspire me. We can make mistakes here without getting punished. We are invited to 'find out by ourselves' and learn, and that is a learning related to real life.

Sandeep - Being a student myself, Loka also provides me an opportunity to teach. My art students inspire me. Whenever I feel negative energy, I put it into something constructive, into my art classes. Besides enriching others, it also enhances my own art practice.

Madhu - Loka is nature to me. We learn from and are surrounded by nature. We learn together, in a group, and develop learning minds.

Dinesh - Madhu is right. Loka spreads positivity among students and makes us feel that, together, we can overcome anything.



Football Coaching

A professional trainer of Shreeja India in Kolkata visited Loka in the monsoon to teach students football and during his absence they would continue practicing. It was a great experience: Loka's girls and boys built stronger bodies, good health, confidence, discipline, a team spirit, a deeper love for their school and much more than that!



Frank the Farmer

Three Loka students worked during the monsoon season as interns in Auroville, an International township in South India. Sanatan and Shankar had their internship at organic farms.

“I am Shankar Kumar from Loka School (Bihar) and I would like to share my internship experience with Frank Sir at Integral Harmony Farm in Auroville. Sanatan and I got an opportunity from Loka to come to Auroville. Here we get a chance to explore and learn something different which everybody does not understand the importance of. Sanatan and I decided to change our village through organic farming. Here in Auroville we get a chance to learn methods of organic farming which we can also apply to our village. At Integral Harmony Farm we gained deep knowledge about Organic Farming with Frank. We are so glad that to have a teacher like Frank. He is a person that does the work with patience and mindfulness. During the learning time on the farm we ask so many questions which we don't know and he answered in a deep way. By the way, Frank is also a scientist. He says that for starting farms we need to understand the interconnection of plants, flowers and all organisms.

I always like to learn new things and new types of technology to do something different and after going to Integral Harmony Farm my experience increased because everyday I learned new things about plants and how we can maintain our farmland, the uses of different tools in the proper way that makes sure they do not get damaged. Beside this I also learned care of plant if it is getting dry then what method we can apply. We also learned to identify plants. And I think identification is important in farming. The experience which I got in Auroville will help to change my small village (Manikpur) organically.”



Internship at Upasana



“At Upasana I learned to create something with my hands. Everything we can learn by doing something with our hands. There is no wrong, no right - just learning.”

Hi! Vanakkam (greetings) to everyone. This is Dinesh, doing a one-month internship at Upasana: a conscious clothing circle in Auroville founded by Uma Didi in 1997. Upasana is all about fair trade for everyone: farmers, spinners, weavers, printers and tailors. Its mission is to create conscious, sustainable fashion that takes care of the environment. Upasana looks at social issues as a space to exercise change. I want to create change in my village in Bihar while being conscious of nature and empowering people, especially women. That is why I chose to have my internship at Upasana.

My first two days started with an introductory class with the Upasana family. In these two days, we introduced ourselves to each other. Everyone comes in the morning and worships the statues of gods and goddesses. Then the day starts with a 15-minute meditation in front of The Mother (founder of Auroville). These are things we cannot find in any other textile industry. The day starts with full consciousness and good energy.

Every woman who is at Upasana is connected to me. They care for me like their own child and brother. I went into each room carefully and observed things very deeply. I considered the quality of clothing to be more important than the quantity. I saw the fine embroidery done by Kalyani and Ilavarasih. Kalyani was doing embroidery as beautifully as she adorned her hair with jasmine flowers. I was inspired by her, so I sat in front of her and started doing embroidery myself.

Uma Didi is the conscious and brave leader of Upasana. She welcomed me into her office and asked me to explain my purpose and what I want to learn. I want to learn how a social enterprise can run in a financially sound way. She told me to make a pattern of the bag that I had made at school. I did a sketch in my diary and showed it to her. She told me to make it more fine, so I made one nice bag myself. Then she told me to work with the pattern on a one-metre piece of fabric and see how many bags I could create, what the costs are, how much the women creating the bag should be paid, etc. After doing a lot of hard work, I finally completed it and learned about conscious design and finance and much more such as making a pattern, measurement, cutting, sewing, calculation, how to be creative, how to utilise waste, handling the advanced sewing machine and making perfect bags. These are some of the things I have discovered under the guidance of Uma Didi.

Cynotype Workshop

*Cyanotype workshop by photographer Sasi Somu at Centre d'art, Auroville.
Dinesh (17): "When we are more conscious, we can create more beauty."*

Dinesh: Cynotype is a photographic printing process, which produces prints that are blue. This type of photography is very simple and the result is unique. First we coloured a sheet of thick paper with a solution of two chemicals. Then we placed parts of a papaya plant in a decorative way and spread some turmeric powder, salt and vinegar to create special effects. We covered it with a glass slab and kept it for 10 minutes in the sunlight. We all were amazed by the results!



Art with Tia

Layers of Creative Nourishment



Independence Day



The 15th of August is India's Independence Day and the birth anniversary of Sri Aurobindo. On this day we celebrate complete independence: both external and internal Freedom from domination. From India's sacred soil great souls have arisen such as Sri Aurobindo- a philosopher, yogi and poet who gifted the world a universal and timeless wisdom that is to be lived in this world.

On this auspicious day Loka's school in Bihar strengthened its board with Uma Haimavati Prajapati. Uma originates from Bihar and lives in Auroville as a conscious entrepreneur, fashion designer, founder of Upasana, heads social projects, guides young entrepreneurs, teaches conscious fashion nationally and internationally and is initiator of the Shakti Center for South India.

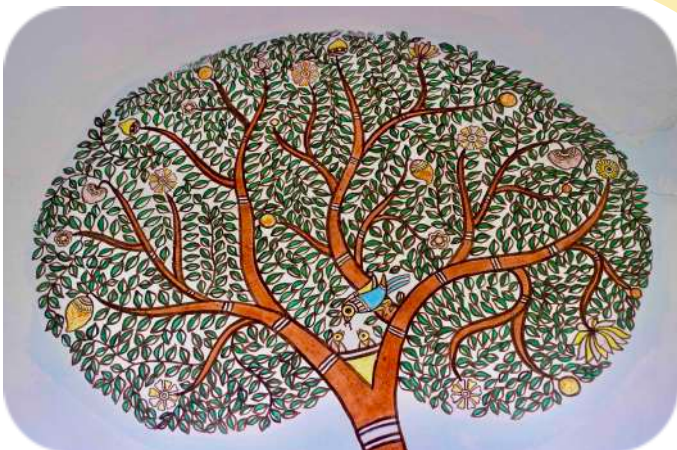
Uma: thank you for strengthening Loka and being part of an emerging new world!



Signing documents to include Uma in Loka's Indian board with co-founder Charlotte and student Dinesh who was following an internship in Auroville.

Loka on a Sunday Afternoon

One School can Change the World



Art Presentation

During a presentation of Sandeep's art students, they creatively depicted their connection with nature and their village - in unique and colourful ways. Sandeep (16) himself studies in grade 10 and daily guides 20+ students in art classes.

"The works my students presented today took a week to create. My main concern is that students are free from fear. Some children are afraid to draw, they want it to be perfect. Or they are afraid to present their work. To create art and express ourselves we need to feel free. Free from fear. That is what my classes are all about. I connect to each and every child as a friend and have conversations and give suggestions when students are stuck and ask questions: Have you thought of this or that? In my class, we move slow."



Handloom Carpets

"In the handmade is a soul. I want to keep that soul alive." ~Sanatan (17)

Loka's Lions (grades 10-12) visited a local carpet handloom unit. The manager kindly showed them around and answered their many questions.

Obra, a small town just a few kilometres from Loka's school, used to be known for its handloom carpet industry. Beginning this century the factories were closed as sales were in decline. Only recently a unit opened with government support to revive this local craft and skilled artisans from the same families have been employed. Some of them were working in other states and could move back to their homes. The factory is contributing to the local economy and something beautiful and durable is created: carpets of such quality they can be passed on for generations.

Loka's lions will be reflecting and writing essays on this visit and more in general: how they can uplift their own livelihoods in a way that also supports the local community and inspires the world by giving new forms to ancient wisdom.



Bollywood Dance

'Dola re Dola' - 90's Bollywood song wonderfully danced to by Loka's charming students



Flowers in the Monsoon



After rain... comes sunshine!

Loka students shining like suns. Serious seniors, playful pre-primary students. Loka has it all!

Aspiring towards an education that ignites a spark in our hearts and minds.



Autumn-Winter at Loka (October-December)



A winter village walk

An evening winter walk through the village with students and teachers. Paddy being harvested, animals having food, people working or talking and children playing while the Punpun River keeps on flowing.



Stars on Earth

Loka's Lions (students aged 17-18) engage in dialogue, reflection and conscious action as part of their learning journey. Aligned with the past, present and future, their humble minds and vast capabilities allow them to shine like stars on earth.

Dinesh - Competition is at the root cause of much destruction in this world - I thought deeply about it. When we stop competing we start discovering how unique we all are. Just look at our fingerprints - they are all different.

Sandeep - There is such focus on achievement but what about our people? There are farmers providing food for the world yet struggling in their own survival. Have we thought of them? Can we shift our aim from 'achievement' to creating a more balanced world?

Sanatan - When children harm insects or animals and are not made aware, as they grow up it may one day lead to creating greater harm. Having this kind of awareness for our actions and their effects is crucial.

Shilpi - Our parents and teachers always ask about our future. We need to remind ourselves that when we make our present good, our future will be good. If we don't think about the future, we will have a good future.



Natural Connections

Loka's grade 1 students wandering through Loka's lush green campus and collecting leaves and flowers that have fallen on the ground. The harvested materials are used to paint and stamp on paper - creating colourful compositions.

At Loka we value being creative, using simple resources at our disposal, engaging with nature and connecting with each other and our surroundings.

A Bright & Beautiful world starts with the right education



Learning for a better world

During an English class at Loka, grade 4 students were having a conversation with their teacher about their relationship with animals in the village. Some of the questions students talked about and reflected on were:

What kind of animals do you have in the village?

Do you also take care of animals?

How do you treat your animals?

When asking students what they learned, they answered:

I learned to make sentences.

I learned new English words.

I learned to speak in English.

Then Navneet said:

I learned not to harm animals.

What use is it to learn English if we go into the world and use it just for our own benefit - and not to create a better world?



Handmade Paper

What is straw used for in our village in Bihar? Students replied:

- We use straw as cow food
- When we burn it the smoke repels mosquitoes
- We use straw to start a fire for cooking food
- Straw can also be used to cover seeds to help them grow.

During an Artreach India Masterclass, Loka students learned another purpose of straw: we can use it to make paper!



Playing Kabaddi

Girl students playing kabaddi - a contact team sport that originates from ancient India. The core idea of the game is for a "raider" to run into the opposing team's half of a court, tag out as many of their defenders as possible, and return to their own half of the court without being tackled by the defenders. Whilst doing so, the raider must loudly chant the word "kabaddi" on a single breath.



Shiva Shakti Sessions

Shiva stands for consciousness and through Shiva sessions at Loka awareness is created about certain topics which are important for boys. Boys indicated they are interested in behavioural changes such as stopping to lie, steal and engage in physical fights. Many mentioned they struggle with relationships, such as with their parents, siblings, teachers and girls. How to deal with aggression was another important issue, which especially emerges while engaging in team sports such as cricket and football. Co-facilitator Dinesh: "These gatherings have the potential to slowly change the lives of these boys and the village for the better."



Shakti sessions at Loka create a safe space for girls to freely share their stories. Conversations revolve around about periods, changing bodies, families, friendships, teasing, dealing with abuse, girl-boy relationships and much more. In the traditional surroundings where Loka's girls live they generally are treated well but also face many struggles. What is more beautiful and nourishing for girls and women, who endure a lot, to discover their strength in togetherness and start honouring their bodies and souls as beautiful vehicles and bright sparks that can live a life of purpose.

Financial Literacy

Have you ever been to a gathering on Finance where there are more women than men and instead of black suits, colourful sarees dominate? It is possible at Loka. It is possible in a village in Bihar. Representatives of ICICI bank Foundation Patna gave a session on financial literacy during which village people and Loka students were made aware how to use a bank card, learned ways to borrow money without falling into a debt trap and received tips about dealing with fraud. Participants of the session engaged with the representatives of ICICI foundation, questions were asked and doubts cleared. It is tragic that due to increasing fraud cases farmers lose their hard earned money to criminal practices and the session's aim was to contribute in preventing this.



Van Kesteren Foundation

In November '23 a delegation of the Van Kesteren Foundation (Switzerland) visited Loka's school. The Van Kesteren Foundation has been supporting Loka since 2018. Teresa van Kesteren wrote a beautiful report of their visit, here an excerpt:

"The school has a very holistic ethos and rather than focusing on measuring abilities by grading or tests, all students' abilities are highly praised and recognised. The number of students in each class is very small and, consequently, the teacher/student ratio is very high, allowing the teachers to work closely with the students. All of the students we met were very bright, confident, and intelligent. Even the youngest children were very confident and had worked hard on a school concert and play to welcome us. Many of the children spoke good English and were literate in both English and their local language. For many of them, they are the first literate people in their family. The older students took us on a tour of the school classrooms and land and then into the village where they live. They were very proud to show us their homes and village and even some artwork that one of them did on a building. Later on, we had a Q&A session with 8 of the older students. We discussed what they liked and didn't like about Loka (there were no negatives) and their plans for the future and some of the careers they want to pursue include: Teacher, Designer, Musician, farming techniques, Catering and Tailoring.

Loka truly is a beautiful school in a beautiful environment -the children are excelling in their studies and should be able to improve their future options in life as a result."



Paddy Harvest

Paddy harvest 2023 on Loka's farm was made possible thanks to a wonderful team from Gaya. Kausalya and her family worked like whirlwinds - leaving behind a growing trail of cut paddy.



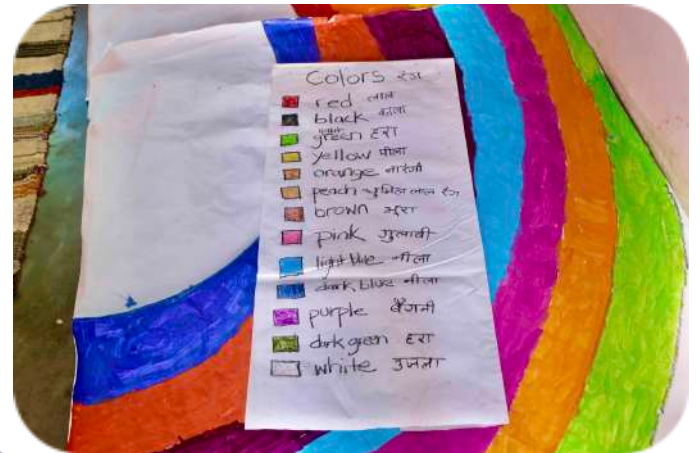
Yoga Session

Awanish ji studied Yoga at Dev Sanskriti Vishwavidyalaya in Shantikunj (Haridwar) and lives nearby Loka's school. He taught Loka students the practice of yoga asanas illustrated with stories of Swami Vivekananda and explained how yoga allows people to shine in their true potential, increases longevity and enhances the quality of life. The session enriched students with meaningful knowledge on the art of living.



Colourful Learning

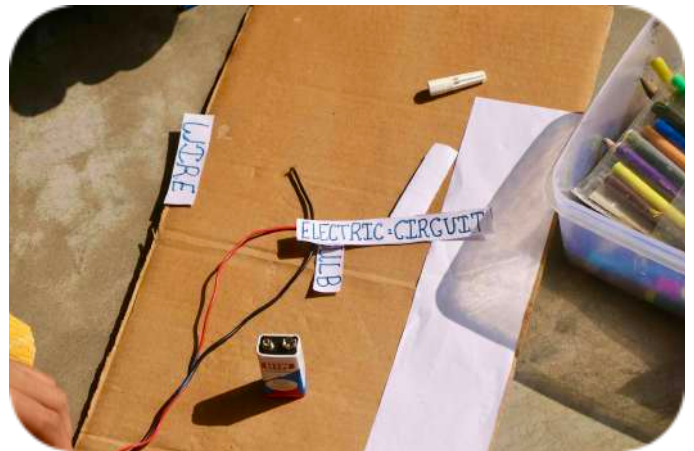
Educator/Art Therapist Tia Pleiman lives in Auroville and has been connected to Loka since its small school with big dreams in Bihar first opened in 2015. During her visit to Loka in December 2023, she spent time with the smallest students and creating a structure for them to learn with joy and creativity. She guided Loka's grade 2 students in a body awareness activity during which they learned the different body parts and to paint with bright colours and work in small teams. Students also learned to be patient while waiting for materials and for each other and the art of working slowly: to avoid doing things in a rush and becoming sloppy. Children were bubbling with enthusiasm and the classroom looked bright with many colours!



A Beautiful Day

The gentle winter sun invites Loka's students to abandon their cool class rooms and sit outside in its warm rays where they may be reciting Hindi poetry, creating electric circuits or learning English language. They sit on the floor and walk barefoot through the grass. Their footwear neatly arranged at the school's entrance.

It's a beautiful day.



Merry Mother Christmas



Shanti Claus presenting the programme



Loka's Christmas Garden created by students



Joyful Performances



Bharatanatyam Dance



'Loka Love'



Police maintaining order



Students sharing school work with the village



Celebrating Love, Joy and Victory

Self-sufficiency

Separating paddy from straw - the fast way. What used to be a procedure of several weeks of intense labour, now gets done in a matter of hours.

The harvest will supply Loka's community for the coming year with rice and the surplus will be sold on the local market.



Hopes and Dreams

Loka's senior students ended the year 2023 with a reflection during which it became clear that it is time for them to spread their wings and fly into their futures. As we were sitting on the well at Loka's farm, symbolically, a flock of white egrets kept flying above us- zigzagging from school to farm to village- high up in the sky with a view of the wider world.

As our students gazed into the new year, their hopes and expectations included: being conscious, healthy, openminded, joyful, courageous and to trust life.



Information & Inspiration



Looking Ahead

Loka aspires to move from teaching to learning; from covering to discovering; from divisions to interconnectedness.

A school that is unique (खास) and flowing like a river; embracing stories from ancient times, while remaining open for the new.

Charlotte Leech: "The main aim is to move from teaching to learning; from 'covering' to 'discovering' and to bridge divisions and embrace more interconnected ways of being. For the coming months this means we will focus on expanding the meaning of learning beyond the classroom and include farming, gardening and the local community. We will be dealing more consciously with our natural and material environments. We will reflect on the kind of materials we use to support our learning, how we use them and explore ways in using our resources to bring about more beauty and consciousness. Theme based class rooms will be created where instead of instructive teaching, children will be discovering in their own ways and paces about themselves, their surroundings, the wider world and beyond. Ways that make learning joyful, the child attentive and immersed and which leads to more curiosity, a deepened understanding and the ability to apply the learning throughout life."

Sanat Kumar: "Schools are generally like ponds where nothing much changes. Students visit schools to obtain their certificates based on fixed outcomes. Other than those who study there, these schools don't really attract visitors from elsewhere as they continue doing the same thing, in the same ways, everywhere. Just like that people generally don't travel far distances to visit ponds. A school can also be like a river; always flowing, taking with them stories of ancient times, while always remaining open for the new. People travel far distances to visit rivers -



Loka Founders Charlotte Leech & Sanat Kumar

for example to worship and take a bath in the Holy Ganges. Loka's school aspires to be like a river and embrace the flow of learning - the best of all times and places. A school that is unique (खास), with its own character, that attracts visitors from far and wide - who wish to learn and grow with us."

In Residence at Loka

From autumn until spring -September until March- Loka provides space for visitors interested in a life of learning, to engage in their own work and contributing with their stay towards a Small School with Big Dreams.

Be immersed in your work as a dancer, artist, writer, researcher or with online assignments while staying at a unique location in a village along the Punpun river in Bihar. Enjoy fresh air, a lush green space and beautiful flower gardens. Explore the farm or make a village walk with students. Eat fresh local vegetarian food from the Loka Cafe and much more.



Staying at Loka is possible for the short term and for longer stays up to a month. It can be to work quietly on a project, have a retreat or a peaceful place to rejuvenate while travelling through Bihar. The campus can accommodate small groups for retreat purpose. Rooms have attached bathrooms, wifi and views of lush green gardens and farming fields.

Loka's Centre is located in a remote village along the Punpun River in Bihar, North India, with a population of 750 people, mostly small-scale farmers. Airport Transport to/from Varanasi (225 km), (Bodh) Gaya (110 km) and Patna (130 km) is provided upon request. Day trips to these places can be included in the stay. More information: info@loka.in



We spent three pleasant and productive days at Loka, sharing ideas about education, conferencing about our own work, and doing classroom activities with the students that focused on creative thinking and 'slow looking.' ~Educators from the US

Friends of Loka

Loka is more than 'just a school' it is a new perspective on a world that challenges us. Increasing social inequalities, climate change and depleting resources demand from us that we revise old ways of thinking about growth and prosperity . ~Loka Chairman Sander Tideman

Loka's work relies on kind support from people and organisations as the school is situated in a village in a remote part of India and parents of students generally work as small scale farmers and day labourers and are unable to afford fees for quality education. Through Loka children living in a simple village along the Punpun river in Bihar have access to a unique school that educates students to shine in their full potential, uplift their surroundings and inspire the world.

What your contribution as a Friend of Loka means

INR USD/EUR

450	5 - daily sport classes for 1 child/month
900	10 - students plant 4 trees
2250	25 - school books and stationary for one student/year
4500	50 - school uniforms (3 sets) for 1 child
9,000	100 - daily fruit for 25 students/month
22,500	250 - half year education for one child
45,000	500 - week long art/science workshop
90,000	1.000 - summer internship senior student (design/organic farming/food processing) in Auroville
450,000	5.000 - education of 10 students (one class) per year

Support the realisation of a Maker Space for Loka's Community.
For more information, contact: info@loka.in

Vrienden van Loka

For Loka's Dutch circle of friends Stichting Loka in the Netherlands created an online platform.

The 'Vrienden van Loka' site is meant to create awareness about Loka's school, organise events and build a community of people interested in education and conscious progress.

[Vrienden van Loka Site](#)

[Annual Report 2023](#)

[Donations](#)

Donations

European (Dutch) Bank Account

IBAN NL04 TRIO 0254 4577 38
(Stichting Loka) BIC:TRIONL2U

Donations within India

Account nr. 28490100019100 Bank of Baroda in name of Sarvodaya Society
IFS: BARB0RAMNBS
MICR: 221012023

Vrienden van Loka

[Vrienden van Loka Site](#)

Paypal

lokafoundation@gmail.com

Thank You

For joining hands with Loka for a Bright & Beautiful World

Loka's Partners

Van Kesteren Foundation

Synechron

Triodos Foundation

Hofsteestichting

Stichting Triple Value Foundation

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Collaborations

Artreach India
Art1st
Shreeja India
Upasana
Out of Eden Learn

Advisors & Ambassadors

Shari Tishman
Ita Mehrotra
Wendy Nordemann
Sandeep Kumar
Gaurav Tiwari

International boards

Loka India (Sarvodaya)
Sanat Kumar
Charlotte Leech
Uma Prajapati

Stichting Loka (NL)

Sander Tideman
Anne Wibaut
Alain Hubers

Support

Trudy Kamsteeg

Guest Teachers

Ashis Palei
Gopa Roy
Tia Pleiman
Avinash Karn

Contact/Information

info@loka.in
www.loka.in
vriendenvanloka.nl

International Loka Events, Spring 2024

- | | |
|------------------|--|
| 18 April | Annual Vrienden van Loka Event, Retreat Centre Avani, Noord-Brabant, the Netherlands. More information/registration here |
| 19 April | Stories from India with Author Alexander Reeuwijk and Loka co- founder Charlotte Leech, Embassy of the Free Mind, Amsterdam, the Netherlands. More information/registration here |
| April/May | Presentations at Project Zero/Harvard University, USA |

लोकाः समस्ताः सुखिनो भवन्तु

Lokah Samastah Sukhino Bhavantu

May All Beings Everywhere be Happy and Free



www.loka.in