

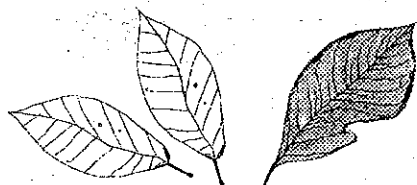
CFL Newsletter

Issue 8

Winter '01 - '02

Around July every year, a strong wind blows across Bangalore. It comes rushing across the hills and tears through our campus at top speed - there isn't anything to block its journey along the way. It slams doors shut - Bang! It swings windows to and fro - Crash!! It blows in one ear and out of the other - it turns umbrellas inside out - scatters papers all around the classroom - whips up the dust and sends what you've just swept out right back inside.

Suddenly one day, almost without warning, it ceases; the fallen leaves from summer stop blowing around, the trees quit swishing madly about. And we are left to welcome the monsoon rains.

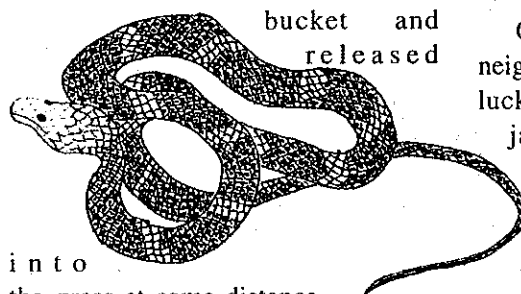


All creatures

It is a particular privilege for us to be able to share this campus with a variety of wildlife, and we don't mean just the juniors.

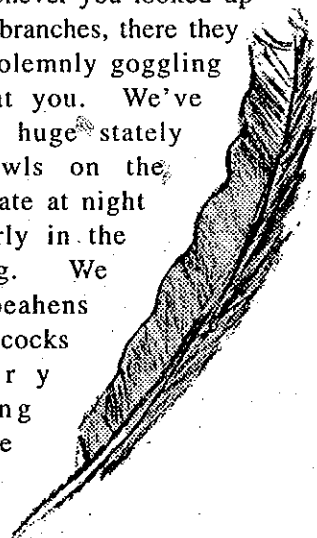
Perhaps the most exciting encounters have been with snakes - rat snakes, wolf snakes, boas, cobras, kraits, vipers and keel backs. We have cleared space around the buildings to discourage snakes from venturing too close to habitation. This has left large tracts of wild grassy areas for snakes and other creatures to live undisturbed. Even so, once in a while, a snake will stray into an unexpected place. News of these sightings travels like

bushfire through the school ("...this long, and this fat..."), and soon an admiring audience has gathered. The snake is coaxed into a bucket and released



into the grass at some distance - much to its own relief, one imagines! Once we watched a banded krait eat a whole frog - for an hour and a half. Even the timid and squeamish among us cannot resist the glossy beauty of these creatures.

Birds frequent this place in reassuring numbers. Green Bee-eaters delight us with their showy swoops, huge dragonflies in their small beaks. Drongos aggressively defend their airspace. Parakeets screech to and fro. A couple of wise owlets nested in a campus tree, and whenever you looked up into its branches, there they were, solemnly goggling down at you. We've spotted huge stately barn owls on the roofs, late at night and early in the morning. We hear peahens and peacocks every morning from the fields and

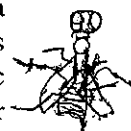
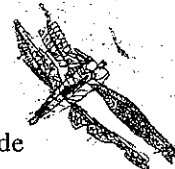


forests across our fence. Kites, spotted munias, robins, sunbirds...the list runs to well over a hundred bird species.

On long walks into the neighbouring forests and hills, a few lucky students have spotted bears, jackals, mongooses, a porcupine and even a panther (at close quarters - that was a story by itself!). The less lucky among us have at least seen fresh dung from all these animals. There are also wild boars in these parts, but the only signs of their presence are the newly dug pits they leave in the dry soil.

Smaller, but far more numerous, are the insects, worms and spiders we live with here. Dark winter nights are made magical by the fireflies, as sunsets are made unbearable by the mosquitoes. After a heavy shower, armies of ants criss-cross the land. Crickets and cicadas fill the silence so completely that they startle you when they stop.

Stand still long enough and you may find a hopeful wasp hovering around you. They are building homes everywhere possible - in keyholes, electrical outlets, abandoned shoes, shelves. One weekend a large swarm of bees arrived with a terrific hum, and set up their hive on a rock behind a hostel. We don't know why, but

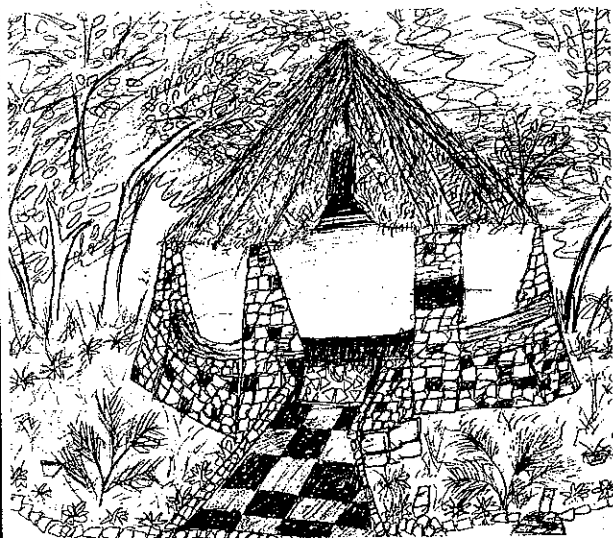


they left the very next morning.

And who can forget the frogs! Each monsoon rain is followed immediately by frog duets, quartets, quintets and full-scale symphonies.

Yet one of these same noisy frogs can sit so still and quiet in your shoe, that you don't suspect its presence till your toes encounter it!

Two thatches



The construction of our Assembly Hall was completed this summer. We celebrated this one morning in late July, joined by parents and friends of the school. Mr. Berjis Desai inaugurated the hall, and Sri D. Balakrishna treated us all to an enjoyable performance of Carnatic music on the *veena*. The assembly hall has been in regular use since. It is truly a space for many things - silence, quiet introspection, dialogue, singing together, dance, and of course assemblies. If you have not already seen it, when next you visit, be sure to spend some time there. The very structure of the hall invites participation from everyone - for some mysterious reason it is impossible to find a corner to hide away in!

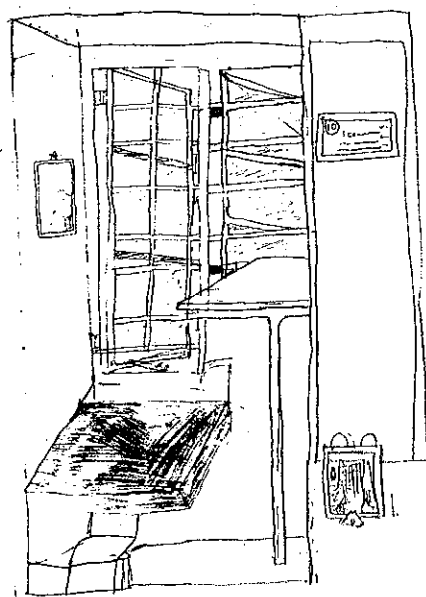
Another structure completed this year was the pottery thatch. One morning, it was 'almost ready to

move into'; the very next morning, or so it seemed, it was already full of children and clay. Pottery as an activity has always been extremely popular among CFL children, teachers and even parents. The clay is dug out from nearby lakebeds, and to find the right kind of clay - elastic, weathered and relatively free of impurities - takes some searching. Once every few months, all the clay work done by loving hands is deposited in the kiln, its fate committed to the firing gods. Here too, a lot of experimentation has to be done to determine the conditions that will yield the best results. Our first firing in this kiln, in fact, was the occasion of several loud and dismaying explosions...but the next firing was greatly successful, having benefited from the mistakes of the

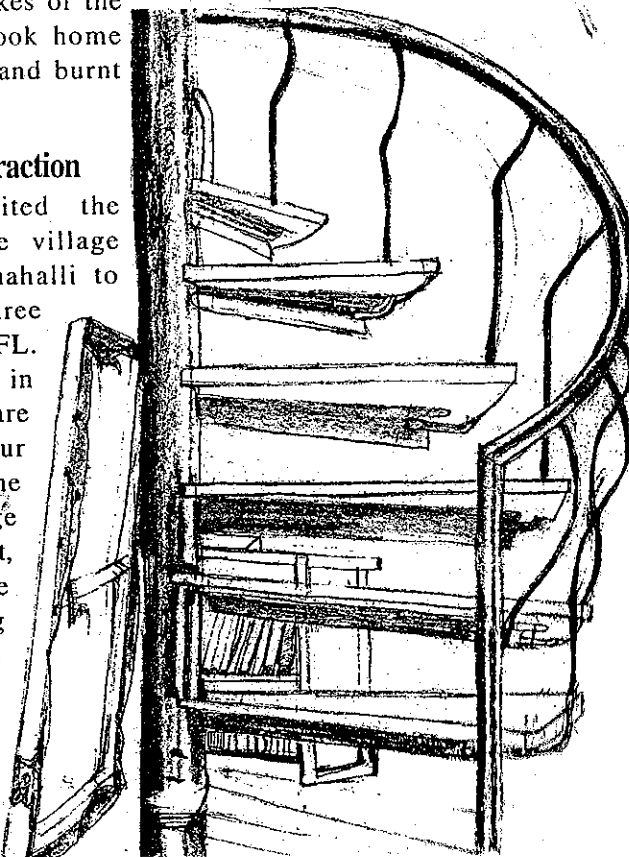
first. Everyone took home beautifully baked and burnt masterpieces.

Varadenahalli Interaction

We have invited the children from the village school in Varadenahalli to spend an hour three days a week at CFL. This is just a start in the attempt to share some of our resources and time with the village children. At present, the time they are here is spent doing jigsaws, learning to handle a ball, playing group games, drawing and so on. A few interested children



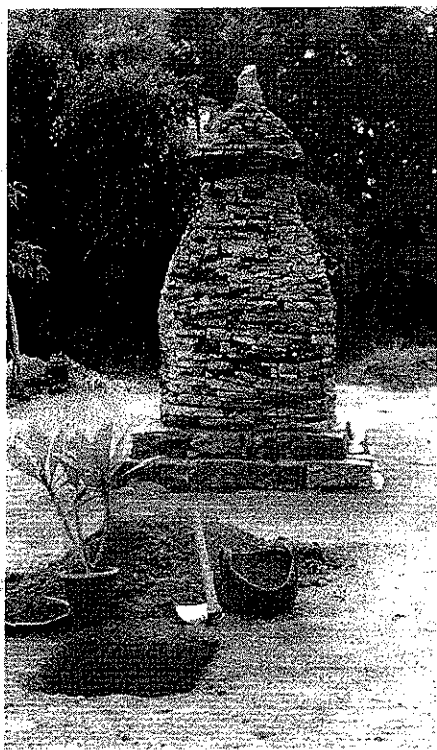
are receiving help in learning English. We have a book returning and borrowing session each week, for which children come from villages beyond Varadenahalli as well. If we are able, we would like to move from this informal interaction to a more rigorous and sustained one of teaching specific skills, as well as introduce them to computers.



Warp and Weft

Several friends from all over the world were in and out of CFL this year too. Nandini, a former student of the school, spent a term here teaching weaving. In addition to individual pieces, the whole school worked on a large woven wall hanging. The frame hung for two months in a central place, with a huge pile of discarded strips of colourful cloth beside it. Anyone who wanted could go and add a new line to the pattern, which in the end turned out spectacular looking.

Merran Poplar visited from Holland, and introduced many of us to the Alexander Technique, in which she has received extensive training. We're all a little more conscious of our necks and spines since she came. Lorenzo, long-time friend, helped organize and lead a trip to the Pindari Glacier with our 14 and 15 year olds. Sandy, a former student, designed and built a stone edifice in front of the assembly hall in time for its inauguration in July. The 'stupa', as we all call it, took him about 60 hours to build, and was completed in a week!

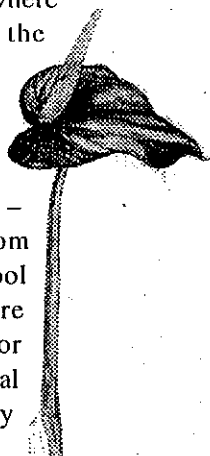


Gerard Bayle from Brockwood Park, UK, spent two weeks here helping direct the Mahabharata episodes. It was, as always, exciting for students and teachers to work with such a consummate professional. Chantal Fortune, a former student of Brockwood Park School, is here for a couple of terms and is enjoying her stay. And on a day-to-day basis, we are grateful for this year's volunteer cooks in our kitchen – Sara, Nalini,



Bharathi, Anju, Manjunath, Krishnamurthy - thank you.

This year we also welcomed four new staff members. Suseela Kumaravel coordinates the Sarala group (6 and 7 year olds), and has had several years of experience in Steiner preschool education in New Zealand. Rajini Kaul, who coordinates the Bilvas (8 and 9 year olds), came to us from Sahyadri School where she taught in the middle school. Meena Pandey has been working in the middle school and teaching Hindi – she came here from the FabIndia School in Rajasthan where she had worked for several years. Gopal Krishnamurthy arrived (or should



we say returned!) halfway through the term – and was instantly neck deep in a dozen activities, from singing to trekking. He took on the organization and direction of the *Mahabharata Mela* with help from other teachers.

In April, we said goodbye to Clive Elwell and his family, who returned to New Zealand to continue with their farming and home-schooling programme.

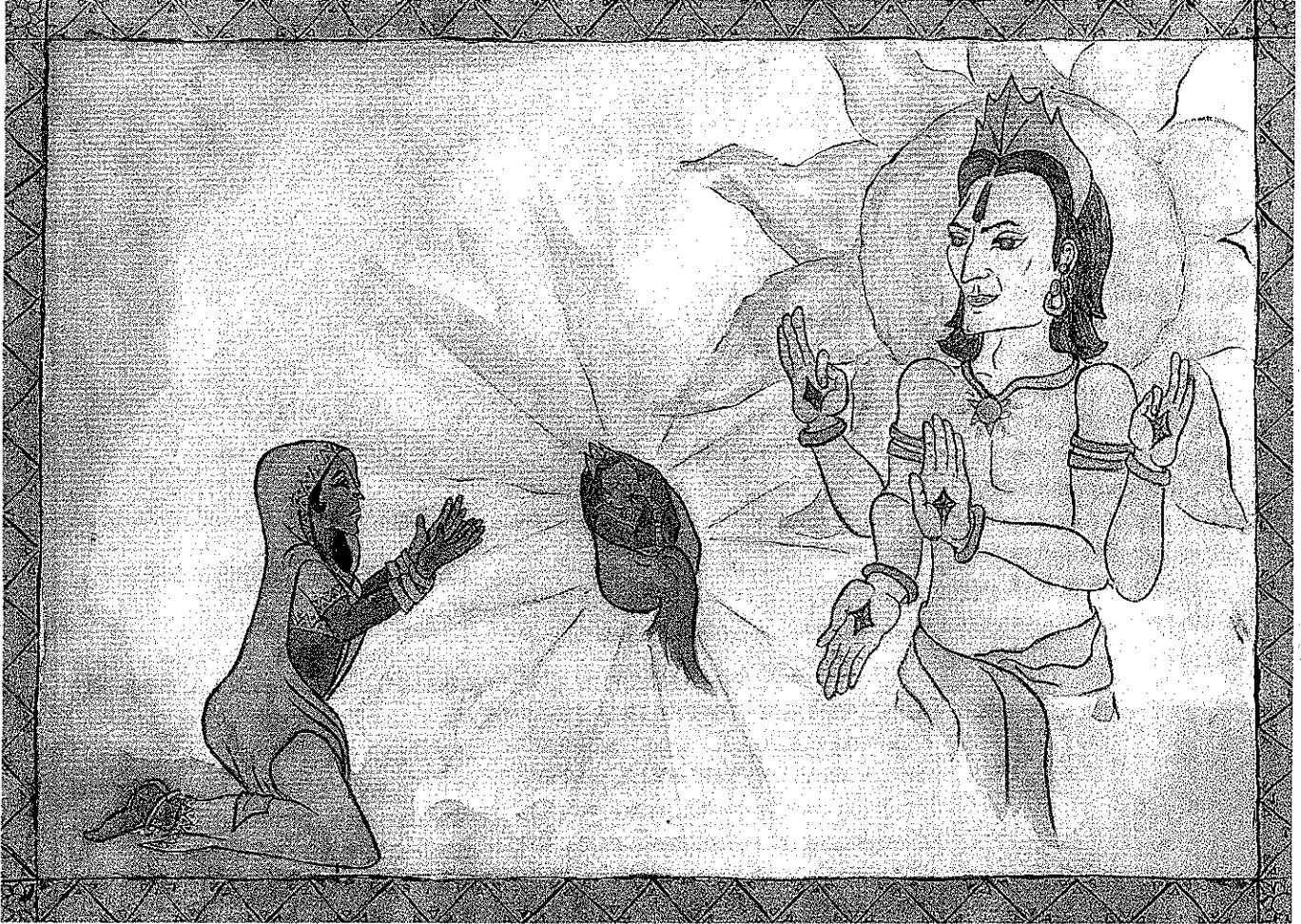
This is the way we sow the seeds...

Six and seven year olds make wonderful gardeners. Armed with shovels, rakes, spades, good soil and saplings, they have managed this year to grow strawberries, sunflowers, pumpkins, lettuce, marigolds, basil and oregano. All in small quantities of course, as it was a very small patch. Older students have also done gardening and landscaping around campus. But the specialty of our junior gardeners is that they, unlike most others, are cheerful weeders!

A large group of students took up landscaping during the monsoon months this year. It seemed as if every time they planted new saplings, an immediate rain shower blessed their efforts. Thanks to them, we have some pretty exotic plants around campus – and flowers from asters to zinnias.

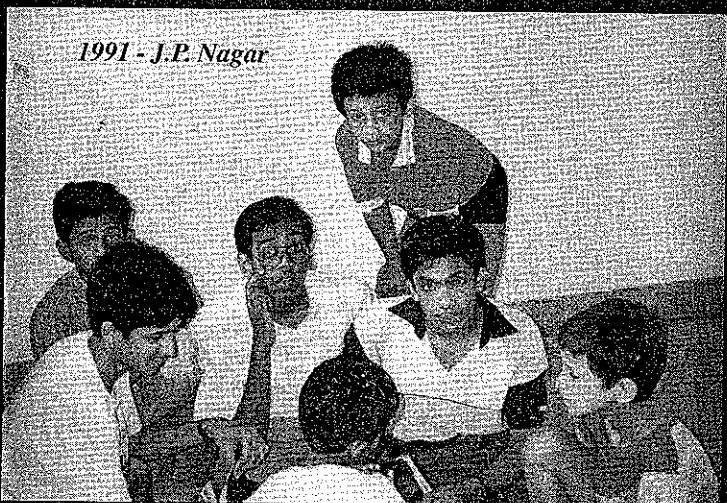
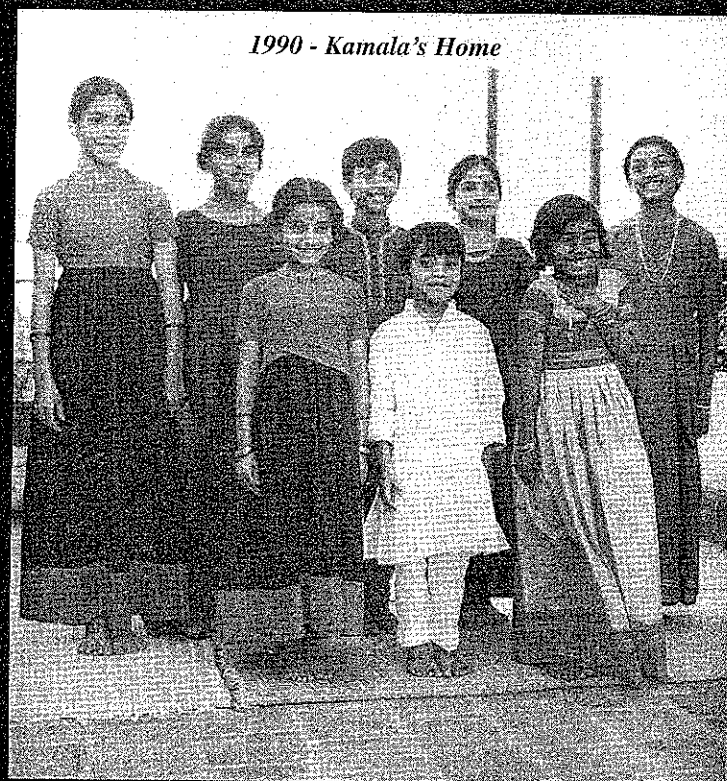
Mahabharata Mela

"...Bharata is a mine of gems like the deep Ocean. Whoever hears it, and understands even a small bit of it, escapes the chains he has forged by deeds of good or evil...the one who tells it to the one who asked to hear gives him as a gift the whole Earth with her belt of seas."



If ever a story deserved rereading and retelling, over and over, it is the great Indian epic, the Mahabharata. At school, we celebrated a Mahabharata Mela in November and December, culminating in an exhibition of art and craftwork and a play in two languages. Though many of us thought ourselves familiar with the story, we discovered new twists and interpretations, new parallels with the state of the world today, and new connections with our own lives. The entire school (all students and staff) either acted (the size of the cast was a whopping 71!), or sang, or provided offstage support. The performance consisted of four episodes, in Kannada and English, and ended with Lord Krishna's efforts towards peace before the Kurukshetra battle became an inevitable reality. Given the heightened atmosphere of war and violence in the world these days, this episode was particularly moving and timely.

A trip down memory lane: CFL since 1990!





Dialogues

By the time our students are eighteen years old, they have had many discussions with the teachers on all sorts of issues. Some, though not all of these take place in culture classes - a time in the week set aside for a group of students and teachers to go into questions about life and living. Even if it isn't always easy for a young person to articulate what he or she feels about such questions, their own lively participation can add tremendously to the meaningfulness of such a discussion. A senior student shares the perceptions of her classmates -

"Culture class comes across as a time allotted to observe ourselves. What we are, compared to what we should be, though this comes across subtly. Certain questions are raised: how do we relate, do we actually watch ourselves, what does it mean to let go of the 'self'...differing

views are obtained. Occasionally, discussions on right action come up.

"At least from the time I have been in the A-level programme, this class has consisted of many active debates. Where different views are presented, allowing us a chance to step out of the situation and watch from a distance. The teachers here are open to questioning of any kind from us; ranging from their beliefs to their personal lives."

Bits and Pieces

The CFL library has just gone completely electronic. Now anyone borrowing, returning or searching for a book can do so with a few clicks of a mouse, thanks to a lot of programming work put in by two students.

The school excursions in October went off very well, with three groups tackling the Himalayas and the rest exploring areas down South. Once again, the children and adults

found themselves pushed to their physical limits and enjoyed every moment of it. We'd like to thank these people for their help and hospitality to CFL on the trips: Sebastine, Nalina, Jean, Ranjan, Sanjala, Mrs. Wazir, Vishnukant, Nachiket School, George Fernandes, N. C. Gangadhar and family, Narendra and Santosh.





Our eleventh birthday was buckets of fun. Soaked by a light persistent drizzle, we went ahead and enjoyed a long treasure hunt, a lunch cooked by 80 people, farewell ceremonies to the graduating students, and a damp bonfire to round off the day.

Twice a month, a group of students and staff have been camping out in the Savandurga forest nearby. Their experience has been very positive, and we would like to extend this to

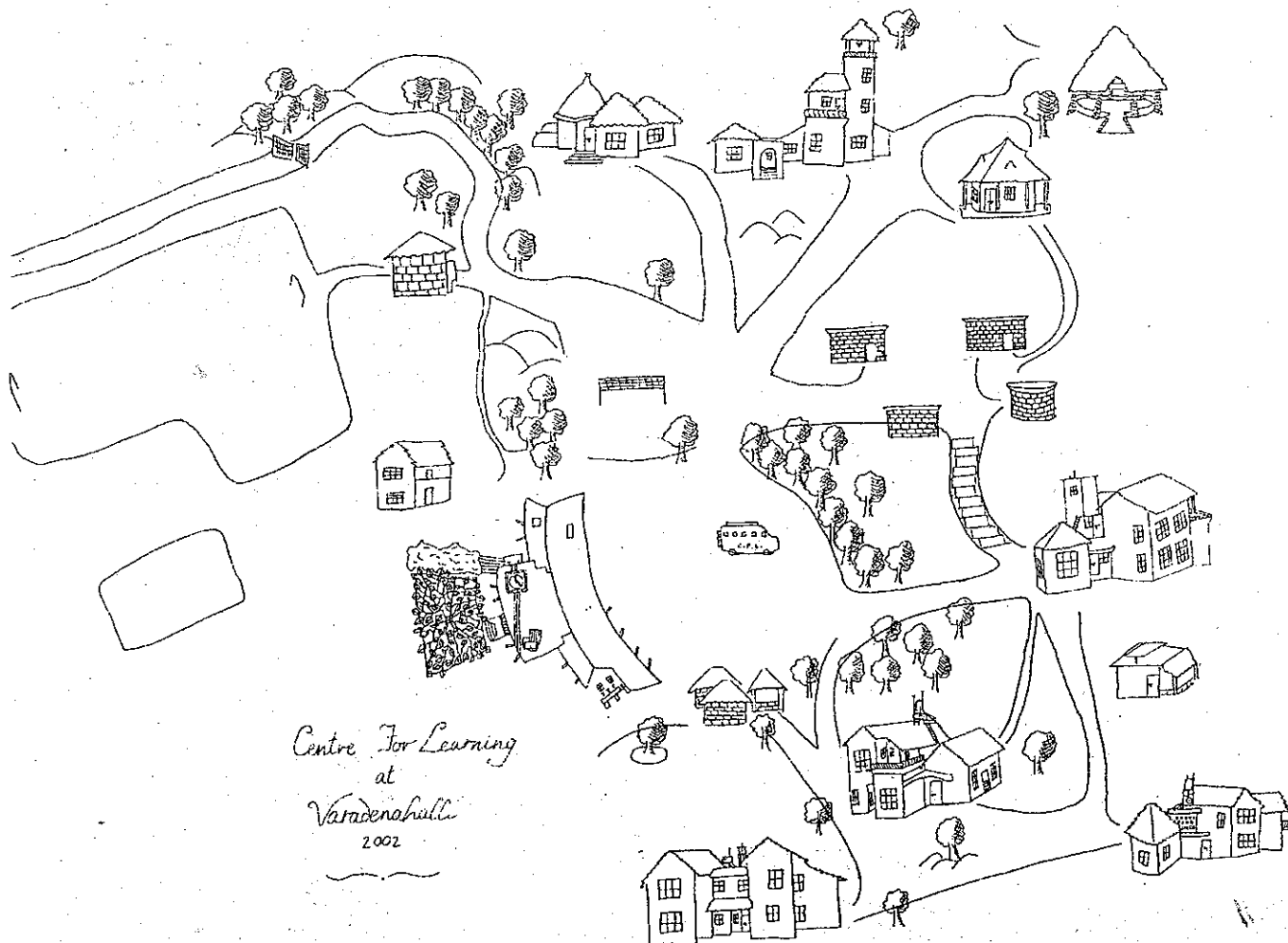
longer periods and include more students. In March, when Bangalore skies are their clearest, we climbed the Savandurga hill and spent the night on top under a large, bright moon. It was all we could do to keep from being blown off the edge of the hill, the breeze was so strong!

The pictures on this page were taken in the afternoons during 'activity time'. Following their

interests, the students have learned guitar, worked with clay, landscaped and planted. The carpenters sawed and nailed, the tailors worked the machine and embroidered, others sketched and painted, and everyone learned something new.

Sunsets at Varadenahalli are a lesson in life. Beauty comes at a price, they remind us. There is no free lunch, you know. Pain and pleasure always come together. For us, sunsets go with mosquitoes. So we sit there, stunned by the palette of colours in the sky, and simultaneously a high, irritating whine assails our ears. We're lost in admiration of the 3D clouds, their pink linings, and all the while we feel the pain of tiny multiple syringes drawing blood from face, neck, hands, feet... We watch the orange pancake sun slip down, down, till only a sliver is visible above the horizon - and we can only hear our bites screaming to be scratched. The glory of the sun setting behind two-and-a-half-billion-year-old rocks, and dinnertime for the mosquitoes, have become, for us, inseparable phenomena.





Centre For Learning
at
Varadenahalli
2002

Sketches by students and teachers.

Photographs courtesy students, teachers and friends.

Quote on page 4 from William Buck's 'Mahabharata'

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