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HARVESTING HAPPINESS

Mother said many times: "Whoever gets my touch, whoever has a second of true aspiration, true love for me, he is finished for life, for all lives — he is bound to me. I have put a golden chain round his neck, his heart is bound eternally to me."

It is a thing nobody can see, you yourselves don't see; but it is a fact, it is there. The golden chain is there within your heart. Wherever you go, you drag that chain, it is a lengthening chain. However far you may go, it is an elastic chain, it goes on lengthening, but never snaps. In hours of difficulty, in hours of doubt and confusion in your life, you have that within you to support you. If you are conscious of it, so much the better; if you are not conscious, believe that it is there. The Mother's love, Her Presence is there always.

Sri Nolini Kanta Gupta (to the final-year students of the Higher Course on October 26, 1976)

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On the Cover:

Students harvesting groundnuts at the Lake Estate.

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THE EDITORS' PAGE

by Alo '92

...*Par exemple si je vous dis racine carré de 25, vous dites 5! – Cinq... OK... et alors? Ça t'a déjà sorti d'une galère ce truc?*

— Gad Elmaleh (French standup comedian)

Kindergarten it was I think. We walked three by three to the Dining Room and were made to sit on the stairs leading up to the verandah. The courtyard before us was filled with familiar faces of older students and Ashramites. There were gasps and tumult even as a gigantic crane appeared with a huge Neem tree. It was being transplanted, we were told. The tree did not survive but what mattered was the effort to transplant it, the decision not to chop it down. Years later, riding on the highways in Gujarat I witnessed the effort the state government was making to transplant roadside trees while they widened the highway. It hit a cord. A part of my heart touched by that visual in kindergarten finally resonated in joy.

Second year Flower Room perhaps. The entire School was being sent to the Lake in batches to see a century palm in bloom. I remember clearly the longish walk to the palm and the sense of “once in a lifetime” slowly getting ingrained in my head. In 2007 the joy and excitement of seeing a century palm bloom off the Valudavur Road near Mettupalayam was immense. Every time we went past it I showed it to my three-year-old son — Look! Look! That’s a century palm! It blooms this way and then it dies, look at it, and remember it well.

It wasn’t about nature always; there was something about the “hors du sujet” that fascinated us! Whenever my sister and I come across a form of extreme fastidious behaviour we say in unison “he’s doing a Fischer”. This comes from the column by Art Buchwald that Siddhartha-da had read us out in a “hors du sujet” session. An incredibly funny take on the Boris Spassky-Bobby Fischer chess clash. The most hilarious take on the cold war I’ve read! This particular class also got me to read the column regularly. It was

syndicated in *The Hindu* in those days.

The most unlikely surprise came from my Bengali teacher Kanupriyo-da. A cricket-crazy fan hidden behind his *bhadrolok* white *dhuti* and *panjabi* appearance, one afternoon he asked us to put down the poem we were studying to tell us that we were now going to do a quiz! Out came a diary with a zillion hand-written questions! Those were the days I knew the birthdates of every single cricketer on the team as well as their batting averages and even their middle names! I knew a lot of relevant information too I assure you! And man, didn’t I just nail the answers well! The Quizzes remain my favorite Bengali class memory. For years I’d follow the quiz section in the Purodha Magazine that Kanupriyo-da compiled issue after issue, and recently I had such a good laugh reading “Sourav Chandidas Ganguly” somewhere!

Two weeks ago my sister called me in the School during the first period from Gloria. “I need to deliver mangoes to the Dining Room on 2nd June, could it be possible for Rajesh and his kids to help with the harvest?” — Last Sunday, 63 of us, many age groups combined (Delafon children, School children, Knowledge children, ex-students, teachers and captains), plucked close to a ton of mangoes in an hour and a half’s work. As I collected the mangoes from the ground and served refreshments to the children and saw them at work I knew exactly what this morning’s work would mean to them. I spent several conscious moments looking at them individually hoping — and knowing really — that something precious was being embedded in their spirits that morning. And every Sunday morning this enthusiastic batch engages in such activity in spontaneity and collaboration.

In March this year, a group of EAVP 6 students organized a groundnut harvest at Lake. In this issue read, witness and relive for yourselves the joy of that activity. Hope the coverage brings back memories in your minds just as it has for me in writing this editorial. ❧

THREE RIVERS OF TEARS

A novel written by Lopamudra '94 has recently been published. Three Rivers of Tears is a historical fiction set in the Indian subcontinent primarily addressing the notions of national culture and unity. Lopa shares the experience of writing the novel.

How did you get the idea to write this book?

This story was sitting inside me for a long time, for many years actually. As a student, history was one of my favourite subjects, and the Freedom Struggle most of all. It evoked a lot of sentiments within me — pride in the heroism of the common man, in his acts of selfless sacrifice, sympathy for the oppressed, anger towards the rulers, outrage of the out-caste, and above all, love for my motherland. That this Renaissance should end in blood and tears made me very sad. Added to this was Sri Aurobindo's speech aired on All India Radio on Independence Day in 1947. He spoke of five dreams he had — for India, Asia, the world, humanity — of which the first was freedom for India. And yet when India arrived at that goal, he made it clear that India was free but unity had not been achieved. This disunion would leave the nation in a precarious condition. But his message put forth a ray of hope. He said the division must and will go, not in a form we



may imagine pragmatically, but in a fundamental way. Until that happened India's contribution to the future of humanity would remain unfulfilled. So using his words as my mantra I started on my journey to write this book.

How much research did you have to do to get all the facts?

For a year I read nothing but material related to this work. A lot of my research revolved around Partition — the circumstances, the actors, the forces — not just the one in 1947 but the second partition in 1971 too, when Bangladesh splintered out of Pakistan. I researched the world events that affected India, such as the Cold War and the hippie movement. I studied the different cultural groups that inhabit the subcon-

continent, their origins and trajectories — for example, the Zoroastrians, Sindhis, Christians, Bauls, Sufis. Also I learnt a lot about certain aspects of Indian heritage like *kalari payattu* and *kama shastra*.

Is there an author who you feel is your inspiration?

I like a lot of authors, especially those who write historical fiction, and playwrights whose dramas and screenplays are aimed at social awakening.

How long did it take you to write this book?

The skeleton of the story was written in nine months, fleshing it out took another six. For the rest of the two-and-half years it took to get it printed I made several minor changes, polished the language, waited for the typesetters and worked several passes on the proofs. The cover design took about three months and many trials to get finalized.

What was the most difficult part of writing this book?

There were two hard tasks. One was crafting the opening of the story. Perhaps a sculptor feels like I did — the sculpture is complete but the face needs to be perfected. One has to get the exact shape of the nose, the correct smile, the right expression in the eyes — since people will look first into the face and many will form an instant impression. Of course I was luckier than a sculptor. I fussed over umpteen versions.

The other hard task was to silence my personal preferences and hear what the many voices of history said. There were personalities I adored whom I had to downplay, and others who seemed larger than life, but I had to respect their value. The same is true of events. I had to lay them out on a canvas that stretched several centuries and so could neither privilege some nor shove others down. It was a tricky task to extricate history from politics, that is, balance out opinions of opposing parties and derive an unbiased perspective. Where neutrality was hard, I presented the divergent viewpoints and did not venture reconciliation.

You have very cleverly interwoven into this story your favourite Hindi film songs. Why did you think of including them in this work?

In an academic textbook it is okay to use dates

to mark historical events, but in a people's history one has to use intuitive markers. People remember events through associations, such as in village lore we hear "Ramu was born in the year of the failure of the monsoons". A song is a very effective marker because it is easy to catch on to a tune and hum it — in other words, internalize it. One does not have to look very far to find a song, even the poor can get it for free – while passing by shops, in fairgrounds, in wedding pandals. All the songs I have used have catchy tunes and were popular for a long time in their day. These also include non-filmy songs such as Anup Jalota's bhajan "Main Nahi" and Ali Haidar's "Purani Jeans".

Did you have to approach many publishers before your manuscript was accepted?

I sent my manuscript to a few publishers, big and small, all of them in India. I wanted the book to be available in the Indian subcontinent at a price that most people could afford. Moreover such an Indian story ought to be first discovered in the region of its setting. When the first publisher responded I went along with them and discontinued with the others.

What has been the reaction so far from your readers?

Readers are impressed by the interweaving of history with fiction. They say the style makes the story come alive before their eyes since most of the events are conveyed through conversations. Many hope the book will inspire people in our fragmented region to come together, as Sri Aurobindo had envisioned. An elderly lady was very happy to see her youthful days recreated so faithfully in the story, especially since she thinks the new generation should learn about the dangers her generation lived through and the sufferings they bore.

Do you plan to write another book?

I have a few collections of short stories and have some ideas for novels. I would like to work with activists and the subalterns to tell the story of their quest. A work of fiction is a powerful

tool to disseminate knowledge. People latch on to tangible events more easily than abstract thoughts. They identify with certain characters in the novel and follow their passions as their own. Readers then become part of the story and espouse the cause. Vishnu Sharma of yore used this trick to teach the dry subject of statecraft to three dull-witted students. Thus were born the Panchatantra tales.

Is there anything else you would like to add?

Literature for me is not just a pleasurable pastime. A book should linger with the reader; it should prompt him to think, to question, to act. When many minds dwell upon an idea they create a ripple in the collective consciousness field. Then wonders can happen. People will lend their voices, their sentiments, their goodwill. The writer has a big responsibility and also an exciting challenge.

AN INNER HISTORY OF THE SUBCONTINENT

Subhadra '93 introduces Lopa's book, Three Rivers of Tears

This is a modern *Mahabharata* — abounding in characters and stories, it takes us through an enlightening journey of our history and leaves us at a climax of the unity of the three nations — Pakistan, Bangladesh and India. Written with a master story-teller's confidence and steeped in classical Indian thought, it touches upon every subject of interest from nuclear science to the baul and fakir mela.

The heroine of the novel is Panchali (or Draupadi, as she is more commonly known in the *Mahabharata*). Draupadi had an extraordinary and fiery life, being one of the drivers of the events in the *Mahabharata*. Panchali is an extraordinary character too, who grows up in the India of the 1970-90s, whose experiences prepare her to deal with the crises in her life and society and who is able to make some sense of all the turbulence in the subcontinent and come up with a peaceful way to unite it. With Panchali's life are woven the stories of many other lives. There is the story of her parents' generation and the generation before them, and the story of Panchali's varied friends — Muslims, Sikhs, Sindhis, Parsis, Hindus and Tantriks.

Each chapter begins with the name of a character, which is a very interesting way of introducing people and recounting their stories. Lopa also recounts the history connected to them, which adds a layer of beauty to the stories. One may

not realise what turbulence our subcontinent has lived through in the recent past, but when the author recounts all the political upheavals that have shaken us during this time, we get a context for Panchali's actions. Panchali grows up in Bombay of mixed Marathi and Bengali parentage. They have a wonderful middle class life with visits all over India to see family and on vacation. Panchali's friends are from all over the three nations and of various religions. When she grows up, Panchali takes to street theatre where she brings up important issues such as population control and religious tolerance, much reminiscent of the Indian People's Theatre Association (IPTA) at the time of Independence. The objective of the IPTA was to enact the crisis of the time through theatre to help people understand their rights and duties. Her life journeys like a river to places where her courageous thought can make a difference — like helping prostitutes and widows. Just as Draupadi had to deal with an indecent proposal from Duryodhan, so does Panchali have to deal with one from the sponsor of her garden for women, Tapasya. But her friend Rahim/Partha saves her from her bondage. The simile of Panchali's life with the *Mahabharata* is very cleverly maintained, which I will leave for the reader to discover.

Panchali's brother, Prahlad, dies after the Kargil war. It is after this that the concrete idea of unification first presents itself to Panchali in a play. She realizes that that is the only way to

stop the subcontinent from self-destruction. The idea gains substance during Panchali's march up to Vaishno Devi where she meets a Tantrik, who lets her into the secret that she can get what she wants if she is willing to sacrifice herself for what she wants. The Tantrik tells her that she has to be instrumental in creating love in the hearts of all people of the continent. Panchali comes up with the idea of a Dosti march — a month-long march on the old Grant Trunk road built by Sher Shah Suri, from Chittagong in Bangladesh and Peshawar in Pakistan, culminating in Agra. There is a "Unity show" on TV every day where anybody with an idea of unification can participate. The shows prove to be a grand success and illustrate that there is no enmity among citizens and a strong desire to forget the bloody past and move on as friends. Finally the march happens and ends in Agra and the three nations are united.

The subject that Lopa is dealing with is the mistake of Partition and how that can be undone based on the fact that the people of the subcontinent are one, whether they are Hindu or Muslim.

This is a very emotionally charged subject for the subcontinent and Lopa explains and analyses it from various angles — history, politics, ethnic relations and the real characters of the story. The style of narration is a happy mix of journalism when recounting current affairs or history and of fiction while following the story-line and the characters.

All religions in India are examined in their historical context — Parsis, Muslims, Hindus, Christians.... All the important social movements of our time have been touched upon to give context: from the unequal treatment of women, the hippie movement to the Naxal movement. Many mythological stories are recounted to give context of a different kind such as the story of Ajatashatru

and Amrapali, where Ajatashatru tricks Amrapali to win her kingdom, and wounded and betrayed Amrapali runs away and finds peace with the Buddha; Ajatashatru too gives up his kingdom and follows his beloved on the path of Ahimsa. The novel chronicles our times to perfection; nothing is missed, from Rakesh Sharma in space, to *Mahabharat* on TV to Tehelka.

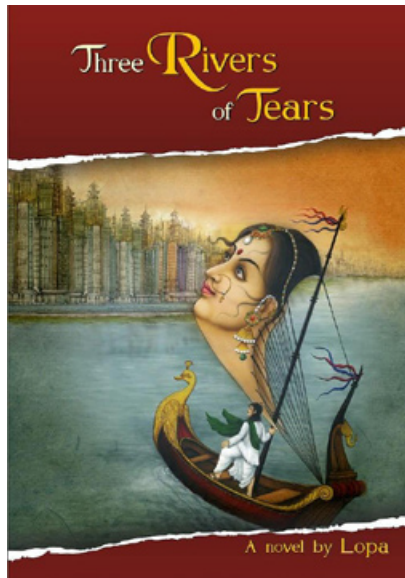
Just as a negotiator for unification would have to undertake a broad and vast research before presenting her case for unification, so has Lopa done. However, the master stroke is that she has brought

in real characters through her stories, which has enlivened all the facts of history and made the need for unification very tangible. Time and again Hindu and Muslim neighbours and friends save each other, time and again those living in a different country wish they could go back to their old motherland. In this way, through a cathartic process, Lopa leads her readers to understand the folly of partition and the dire need for unification.

This is a character based novel. The plot evolves through the introduction of characters

— their names, their backgrounds are a starting point of stories/events that the author wants to narrate. The characters are then all gathered at the end like tributaries meeting at an estuary and together flow into a sea of unity. Lopa writes easily, with a cinematographic style, full of dialogue. The characters are built with confidence and a few powerful strokes. Stories are woven in through informal discussions, just as happens in life.

The story of the novel moves chronologically, with Panchali leading the India story, Rahim the Bangladesh story and Tariq the Pakistan story — the novel recounts their life chronologically from childhood through school and to adulthood, but the narration of historical events is scattered in the novel as and when those histories are required



to be narrated to explain the characters. This makes the readers' interest in the historical events very personal.

This is also a coming of age novel, with all its excitements and mistakes and drama and humour, which keeps in balance the graveness of the historical facts. The story incorporates all the little details of our growing up days such as hindi songs on demand on the radio, Russian books and music and Aamir Khan. The plot is very well handled, with tension and drama that will captivate the reader's interest. Subtleties of language and the humour that they can generate is another distinct feature of the style. There is also beautiful poetry to delight the reader and a very interesting poetic conversation in baul style.

In trying to make this book accessible to the general reader, Lopa has had to explain a lot of things, as some readers may not be aware of Indian customs or clothing and some others may not know the stories from the *Mahabharata* or our history. The explanations may seem superfluous to many readers and come as an unwanted interruption to the pace of the story. The only other criticism I can think of is the sheer excess of facts Lopa has packed her narration with. She has tried to include every little detail we grew up with. On one hand this delights us with recognition and

memories; on the other hand it makes the narration very tightly packed.

This book is hard to compare with any other as it is a combination of fiction and non-fiction, history and novel. It attempts to stitch together a lot of subjects under one roof just as life is a whole made of very disparate parts.

It is very daring in the power of its positive imagination, full of stories of wisdom, simple truths and curious facts that we are not aware of such as the meaning of jihad or that the Avesta was translated into Sanskrit. Lopa's natural style in dealing with complex issues delights us and the sensitivity of the story she recounts touches our heart.

In the aftermath of the social revolutions in Tunisia and Egypt spreading to many parts of the world, many in the subcontinent have wished for such a revolution as well to rid ourselves of needless politics and corruption and violence. Lopa has shown a brilliant way forward. And the discerning reader will see the influence of Sri Aurobindo's *Savitri* as an inspiration on the turn of events.

In the age of fundamentalism, when knowingly or unknowingly most people fan radicalism, this voice of reason is a very important one. The question is — will we choose to survive? ❧

India today is free but she has not achieved unity. At one moment it almost seemed as if in the very act of liberation she would fall back into the chaos of separate States which preceded the British conquest. But fortunately it now seems probable that this danger will be averted and a large and powerful, though not yet a complete union will be established. Also, the wisely drastic policy of the Constituent Assembly has made it probable that the problem of the depressed classes will be solved without schism or fissure. But the old communal division into Hindus and Muslims seems now to have hardened into a permanent political division of the country. It is to be hoped that this settled fact will not be accepted as settled for ever or as anything more than a temporary expedient. For if it lasts, India may be seriously weakened, even crippled: civil strife may remain always possible, possible even a new invasion and foreign conquest. India's internal development and prosperity may be impeded, her position among the nations weakened, her destiny impaired or even frustrated. This must not be; the partition must go. Let us hope that that may come about naturally, by an increasing recognition of the necessity not only of peace and concord but of common action, by the practice of common action and the creation of means for that purpose. In this way unity may finally come about under whatever form — the exact form may have a pragmatic but not a fundamental importance. But by whatever means, in whatever way, the division must go; unity must and will be achieved, for it is necessary for the greatness of India's future.

Sri Aurobindo (Part of the message of 15th August 1947, SABCL, 26:404,405)

PLAYING OUMA

Sunayana '79 tells us about the film on the life of Alexandra David-Néel and her experience of being a part of it.

The screening of the film “Alexandra David-Néel: J’irai aux pays des neiges” was held on 8th April in the School Courtyard. It seemed almost like a dream. Perhaps this was the first time that a feature film was being shown in the School Courtyard. It was a film in which several of our former students had participated in one department or another. But most of all, it was a film based on a true story and about a person who had known the Mother and had seen Sri Aurobindo too.

In a previous issue of *The Golden Chain* we had published an interview with the actress who has played the role of Alexandra David-Néel and it was accompanied by the Mother’s stories about her as well as Alexandra’s impressions on the Mother. But it took almost a year for the film to be shown to the people of the Ashram. This is why many people could not make the connection about why we were taking so much interest in it.

As I have myself acted in the film, this subject was close to my heart. Also, I had always wanted to show a copy which would have English subtitles so that everyone in the Ashram would be able to understand the dialogue. And I was very moved that so many people turned up at the screening, even people who don’t generally go to any programmes in the evening.

When the screening ended I remembered how I used to play in this courtyard as a child and

there I was, in that very same courtyard, showing everybody a film in which I had acted. I would never have imagined it then.

Many people have asked me how I was chosen for the role I played in this film. The truth is this role was written for me. In fact, in the bound script with which the French team came to Pondicherry, the character I play was called “Suni”. As I didn’t want to be called by my own name, I had to persuade the director to change it and I myself chose the name “Ouma”

because it would be easy for the main actress, Dominique Blanc, to pronounce.

How it came to be that a role was written for me is another story. I had already worked with Joel Farges, the director, in 1986 and the film in which I had acted had done well. Although it was made as a TV film, in 1988 it had a theatrical release in cinemas as a feature film. I went to Paris and saw this film with the general public. It was something really extraordinary. I had never thought I would actually see myself on a screen in a cinema hall and that too in Paris!

As I was leaving Paris, Joel told me that he was planning to make a film on Alexandra David-Néel and he had written a small role for me in that script. He gave me a bound script to take back to India. Actually, that script was completely different from the script of the film from which the 2012 film was made. In that script I had a very small role and there were two



In costume for the first scene.

small scenes which were to be shot in Varanasi, in a boat on the Ganges. The actress who was supposed to play the role of Alexandra David-Néel was Glenda Jackson! You can imagine how thrilled I was.

A year later I was told that the project had been dropped because the people who were supposed to finance it had pulled out. Then, more than twenty years passed and I lost touch with the director. In early 2010 I met him again and he told me that he had once again started working on the project of the film on the life of Alexandra David-Néel. This time he was preparing a new script which he was co-writing with another screen-writer. Most importantly, it was the well-known TV channel ARTE which had approached him to direct this film so the project would have sound financial backing.

Joel had been told that I had moved to London and thought I would not be available for this film. He had almost thought of taking another actress. But when he finally met me in Pondicherry and was sure that I would be doing the role of the Indian woman, he rewrote it and made it longer. Working on this film I realised how much a film can change from the script stage to the final edited version. The script was revised several times and kept changing even when they were editing it.

Many scenes which were shot were finally not included in the film and many scenes were changed completely. For example the scene where Ouma is telling Alexandra about her sad love story, was quite different when it was shot. My dialogue was very long and very dramatic and Dominique Blanc had nothing to say, except one line at the end. But when they started editing they realized that Ouma's story was distracting the viewer's attention, and taking away from the main focus of the film. So, in the edited version you don't hear my story at all, and there are lines

recorded in Dominique's voice which were superimposed on my voice and one hears my story in the background.

The director told me that I would not be given more than 3 takes for every shot as we had a very limited number of days for shooting, and we had to stick to our time-schedule very strictly. The main thing was to know my lines so well that I would not make mistakes during the shooting. For one entire month I repeated my lines once in the morning, once in the afternoon, and once at night. The end result was that I rarely fumbled on the sets.



L to R: Sunayana, Datta Mukherjee, Dominique Blanc.

Film acting is different from stage acting in many ways. I am more at ease on the stage. While I was learning my lines by heart for the film I had no idea what the set would look like, whether I would be sitting or standing or where my co-actor would be positioned. In theatre you start by fixing your place on the stage and you rehearse knowing exactly where the actors are. In fact, you remember the lines by going through the movements every day. In cinema the text and the movement come together only at the time of shooting. So you have to struggle with giving the right intonation to your lines and the right

expressions, without forgetting your lines. At the same time you have to make sure that you do the movements you have been asked to do, without going out of the area which is in the frame. If you are not fully focused you can easily go wrong.

Before the shooting started I was told that I would be given the opportunity to spend some time with Dominique Blanc so that we could know each other and bond well. If we were total strangers it would show in our eyes in the scenes in which we were going to be together. But unfortunately we had only one meeting over lunch as things were not so organized before shooting started and we went through our lines together only once. Finally we chatted on the sets and came to know each other better. After my scenes were over I interviewed her for *The Golden Chain* and I was very happy that she agreed to be interviewed without any hesitation.

My role was based on two real people who knew Alexandra. It seems there was a woman journalist in Calcutta who was a friend of hers. And she also knew a Tamil woman in Adyar at the Theosophical Society who had befriended her. But much of this role was imagined. For example, we know that she stayed in someone's house in Calcutta for a month but we don't know whose house it was. The character I play is the only other woman in the story and her presence allows the audience to know Alexandra's views on subjects such as marriage and a woman's desire for freedom.

All those who watched the film found it hard to understand why I ask her to leave my house. Let me take this opportunity to make that clear. Alexandra, being a Buddhist, thought little of the Hindu sadhus who lived in their own world and did nothing to alleviate the suffering of the poor who were all around them. This angers Ouma

at first. When they have an argument Alexandra makes a remark that Indians in general are not compassionate towards the less fortunate. At this Ouma says that Alexandra herself is not very compassionate. And their argument continues and Alexandra also makes a personal remark. Ouma is furious and asks her to leave.

Many people have wanted to know where the shooting took place. Apart from the scenes which were shot in Sikkim and Ladakh, all the others were shot in Pondicherry. We had a set for the station scenes and the scenes shot inside the trains. It was wonderful to see how the art director managed to create such fantastic and convincing sets out of nothing or in existing locations which were quite ordinary before the team started working. One becomes even more acutely aware of how much hard work is put in by people who will never be seen or heard.

For me personally it was a fantastic occasion to see how an actress of Dominique's stature works. I noticed how she remained concentrated between shots and how she prepared herself in advance. She too had learnt her dialogue by heart well before she came to India for the shoot. I was very touched when on the last day she embraced me and told me, "It was a pleasure working with you."

Already this film has been sold to many TV channels across the world, particularly in the Buddhist countries. I hope that all those who watch this film will then read the books written by Alexandra David-Néel. I hope too that people are inspired by her determination and her quest for knowledge. Cinema is such a powerful medium that it can influence large numbers of people very deeply. It would be wonderful if more filmmakers took up such fascinating and true stories as their subjects in future. ❧

If the growth of consciousness were considered as the principal goal of life, many difficulties would find their solution.

The best way of not becoming old is to make progress the goal of life.

The Mother
(MCW, 12: 123)

I SAW MORE, I HEARD MORE, I FELT MORE...

Bina Dharod '86 communes with Nature.

My life is a vast shopping trip. I go on buying, consuming, buying, consuming and I have filled my house and cupboards with lots of things and still I am not satisfied. But when I go to a garden, I feel happy and peaceful.

One day, I came early in the morning to the School garden and saw its beauty with leisure. The lush green lawn, plants with beautiful flowers, a grand big tree, a pond, a path... here Nature was transmitting joyous energy in the air. The more time I spent in the garden, the happier I felt and I also became rich with deep experiences. I started to think less and feel more. If I got lost in my thoughts then I couldn't see the real beauty of the garden but when I shifted my focus from thought to feelings then thoughts no more disturbed me and I could see the flowers smiling. I could hear the songs of the birds and I could feel the cool breeze. This shift from thought to feeling gave me tremendous joy and I continued to see more, hear more and feel more. A garden can transform my suffering into joy and darkness into light. I sat down on the lawn and continued to see its marvel.

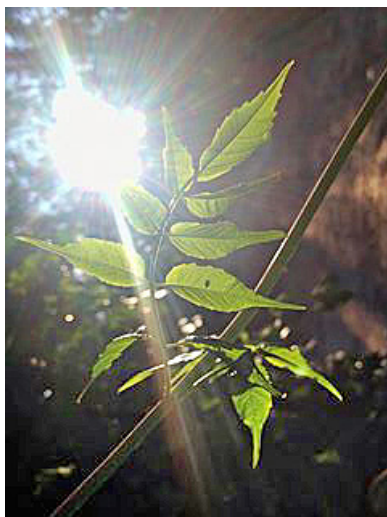
A leaf fell on my lap. I picked it up and marvelled at its beauty — with what perfection it was made! It is impossible for any scientist to replicate it. It is the Divine force that has effortlessly made countless varieties of leaves and this same force has also made the cells of my body and regulates

my metabolism. It is this same force which is taking care of everything. My force is nowhere close to that force. I can't even stop my hair from growing; I am just a tiny portion of its creation. I rely on it completely because it is managing the universe perfectly and silently. The sun rises and sets silently, the flowers bloom silently, the organs in my body perform their task silently, everything that the Divine has made does its work silently.

I closed my eyes and meditated, keeping the garden in my mind. I could feel its peace and joy. With my heart full of joy, I praised the garden: "O garden, there is no worldly contamination here, no greed, ego, prejudices, selfishness. The universal wisdom shines here. The objects in the garden are free of disease; they don't have fever, high blood pressure, ulcers... they all look so fresh, quiet and happy."

The silence of the garden was broken and I heard a voice telling me: "My child, one of the reasons why humans get diseases is because they are always in a hurry, doing more and more in less and less time, obsessed with saving every second. Only when your mind slows down does greater awareness become possible. You will also start to think before you act and you will be able to take decisions consciously. I replied to the garden: "I feel the pressure of slowness in the garden. The flowers bloom slowly, the plants grow slowly and it takes many years for a tree to grow big."

The garden continued to talk to me: "Be fast



when it makes sense to be fast and be slow when slowness is required. Live at the right speed, in the “tempo giusto”, as a musician would say. A few moments of slowness in your daily routine will help you to connect with the inner peace. You can add some slowness to your daily routine by giving some time for meditation, listening to music or reading a book. You can also cook slowly and eat slowly.”

I opened my eyes to see the garden because it made me aware that the truth is hidden in Nature, and I can discover it by identifying myself with the objects in the garden.

I saw the pond and it reminded me of a mirror which reflects silently the objects around and above it, but never becomes those objects. Whether a mirror is placed in a palace or in a hut, it reflects the images as they are. It doesn't change the image by making it more beautiful when it is kept in a palace and less beautiful when kept in a hut. It is like a fair witness. The pond taught me to become undisturbed which will help me become a fair judge.

Then I saw ants quietly doing their work. They are never seen alone, they are always many in number doing one work. They have such a great sense of teamwork and a great sense of unity! One ant looked at me and said: “It is not possible to build a house alone, or do any work alone. Be it in the office or at home you need to do it together. That is why it is very important to understand each other and to understand the meaning of communication which will help to create togetherness. Everyone can flourish only in an environment of unity. This will happen only when the selfish ego goes and the spirit takes charge.”

I thanked the ant for having shared with me her wisdom.

Then I saw and caressed the leaves of a plant. I felt that they are so open to sunlight and the sunlight is absorbed by the leaves which gives the plant the energy it requires to survive. The plant spoke to me: “Be open to the light that shines in your heart, and let it pervade the whole body. It will give you strength, peace and joy.”

I thanked the plant for having shared his

wisdom.

Then I paid attention to the voice of a bird and I felt that it was an expression of her aspiration, her prayer, thanking the Divine for all that He is doing for her. The bird sat on my shoulder and whispered in my ear: “Aspiration is the beginning of your journey to become a better person. It is an inner cry which will liberate you from ignorance.”

I thanked the bird for having shared with me her wisdom.

Then I got up and started to walk on the path, and it reminded me of the path of life on which I want to walk consciously and continuously. I shouldn't fall, stop, deviate or go back. I am here on earth not to suffer but to learn, to progress, to grow wise and to become godlike. I heard the path telling me: “Man is not the summit of evolution. He is a transitional being, and he is on the way to another stage of evolution. At the end of the evolution, he will become a supramental being.”

I thanked the path for having shared with me his wisdom.

At the end of the garden I saw a big garbage bin which was full of rubbish and rotten things. I took it and emptied it outside. With a big sigh of relief the bin spoke to me: “Everywhere in the world we see corruption, injustice, violence and to end this there must be a revolution. Not a physical revolution of throwing bombs, shedding blood or even a revolt, but an inward revolution by changing oneself.”

I thanked the bin for having shared with me his wisdom.

Then I walked a few steps and stubbed my toe against a rock. It hurt and tears fell from my eyes, but nothing happened to the rock. It remained there at the same spot, undisturbed. “I am sorry if I hurt you,” said the rock to me. “In your life whenever you face difficulties, become like me, undisturbed from within. Make your mind, heart and body quiet, absent of any thought or action. Then you will see that the correct solution, the correct answer will come to you from within which will guide you out of the difficult situation.”

I thanked the rock for having shared with me his wisdom.

I continued my walk in the garden and saw small flowers on a plant. I identified with them and I felt their simplicity and this helped me to become simple... simpler... simplest and my desire life became short, shorter and shortest, and I got peace of mind. Some of the flowers of the plant were fallen on the ground; they too looked fresh and happy. Humans on their deathbed look miserable because they hang on to life-saving machines and refuse to die. But these flowers on the ground had a complete sense of surrender, and this helped me to give up my inner battles, my sufferings, all my problems of life.

By doing this I felt a shift, a change in me and all my problems got resolved by themselves. Help came to me when I did what I thought was unthinkable — to give up. I surrendered to the circumstances of life because I had faith in the Divine. The flowers saw my eagerness to become a better person, so they told me, “You are at the threshold of a new age; a new type of society will be born. Humans have tried different systems and none of them have seemed to work. Communism has failed and capitalism is on its last legs with financial structures breaking down. None of them seem to have worked because none of them have roots in the spirit. Lastingness belongs to the spirit and so you shall now have spiritual socialism. A spiritual society will consist of people who will be guided by the spirit, not by the mind or the ego. No longer will men be guided by their ego. It has built a civilisation of wars, of hatred and strife and suffering. Men will have to let go their selfishness and let themselves be guided by their spirit. Whenever they speak, the spirit will speak through them; whatever they need to do, the spirit will do through them.”

I thanked the flowers for having shared with me their wisdom.

I continued to walk in the garden and then I sat down close to the pond and stretched my hand and caressed a lily and told her: “You look so beautiful, quiet and happy; you are not struggling to become better.”

The lily answered me: “You are not your life

story, your mind, your body, your feelings, your experiences of pain or pleasure, struggle, success or failure. The life you have led and are leading is uniquely and exactly appropriate for your awakening. You can start over again and again because your life’s mistakes are initial drafts and not the final version.”

The leaf beside the lily wanted to say something: “You don’t need to wait for transformation by trying to achieve an egoless state or by trying to achieve a still mind, because you have a portion of the divine in you — you are the Divine.”

I thanked the lily and the leaf for having shared with me their wisdom.

I got up from near the pond and went onto the stage and saw the Patience tree with awe and I said: “O Patience tree, you look so grand and undisturbed! You are standing here and accepting the sunlight and water for growth, you are accepting the harsh cold wind in winter. You never fight; you accept the birds who sit on you, and you accept the children who hit your trunk, pull your branches and pluck your leaves. You are always unaffected by circumstances; you are in a continuous state of joy.”

The tree answered me: “I am standing here for many years and from my topmost branches I have witnessed some of the greatest moments in the history of time. I remember in 1922, Sri Aurobindo came to live in the Library House of the Ashram building. I saw him guiding the sadhaks very patiently with his advice and answering all their questions. I saw the evening talks where the disciples discussed various topics with him. On 24th Nov. 1926, Sri Aurobindo attained Siddhi. That day at six in the evening, 24 disciples gathered around Him and the Mother and meditated for 45 minutes. The months that followed were a golden period in the Ashram. I saw on the 8th of February 1927, Sri Aurobindo and the Mother shift from the Library House to the Meditation House. I saw the soup ceremony when Mother would meditate, then stretch her hands over the soup vessel pouring something of her subtle physical into the soup and then distribute it. Sri Aurobindo never went out of this new residence for almost 24 years; he concentrated on his Sadhana, not for himself

but for the earth consciousness. I saw piles and piles of notebooks of the sadhaks' queries. Sri Aurobindo would reply to them patiently, spending many hours at night and some in the day. He also wrote so much — both poetry and prose. The Mother was a power at work, working day and night to develop the Ashram and guide the sadhaks. On 5th December 1950, Sri Aurobindo left his physical frame. The Mother continued to run the Ashram and continued her Sadhana. She was the explorer of the new race. The physical substance of the human body is capable of a progressive development, until finally it can get freedom from the old habits of disease and death and no more remain a physiological prisoner. Mother did this Yoga in the body because she loved Sri Aurobindo and this was his mission on earth. On 17th November 1973, the Mother left her physical frame. She has gone, but she has not gone far; she is there, I feel her, she smiles at me, she holds me, she is there."

I thanked the tree for having told me the story of the Ashram in a few sentences.

I continued to walk in the garden and see its beauty and remember all the wisdom that it had given me. My heart was filled with gratitude and I said, "O garden, I want to be like you, so beautiful and calm."

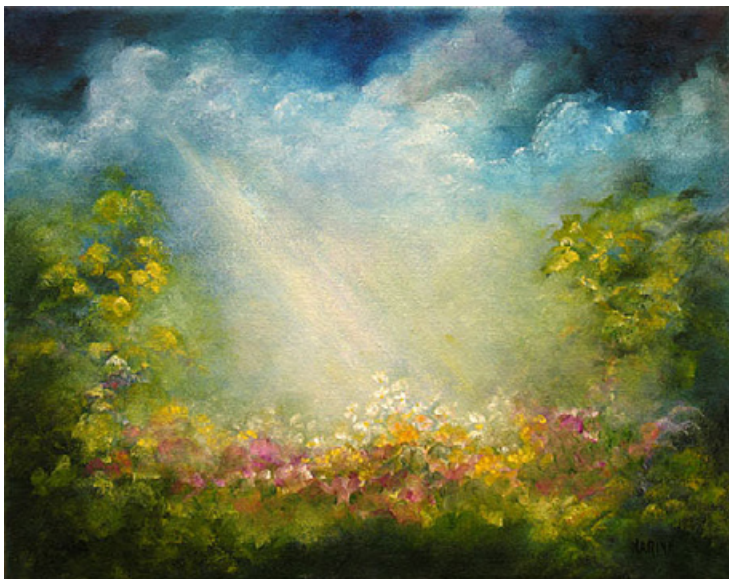
The garden said to me: "Dear child, there is a garden which is more beautiful than me; it is in your heart. You just have to close your eyes and

go deep within and you will be able to see it. It is so beautiful that no words can describe it, no poetry reaches its level, no music can ever touch its feet. Put your mind and your ego aside and the moment you do that, a great light will explode in you. You will be enlightened by your own being and the path will be shown to you. Walk on that path and you will reach your garden."

I tried but I saw only darkness within me. I

became like a blind man and could see nothing. I told the garden that it was impossible and I just could not do it. Again the voice of the garden told me: "Do it by filling yourself with love; then meditate and pray to the Mother. She will take you to your inner garden."

I did exactly as the garden told me to do and in just a few seconds everything in me lit up and I saw the Mother. She caressed me, held my hand and took me to my inner garden. What a shame! I saw that my inner garden was covered with weeds and dust. It was not taken care of, it was forgotten for ages. The flowers under the weeds were crying and wanted me to uproot the weeds because they were suffocating. With the help of the Mother I uprooted all the weeds and wiped the dust from the inner garden, and then saw its glory! It looked so beautiful that I just can't describe it. It vibrated pure happiness and I felt that I had got an inner bath and had become a new person. Then Mother and I held hands and danced in my inner garden. ❧



HARVESTING HAPPINESS

Karthik, Mukunda, Narottam, Pranav, Shubhankar, Shashwat, Suman (all from EAVP 6) tell us about the students' groundnut harvesting trip they organised at the Lake Estate.

Life is all about experiences. Our school offers us the means to explore diverse avenues. Education is not just confined to academics but can also be obtained through unconventional activities. Practical work teaches a lot and thus amongst the various events, an annual harvest is organised by the students.

One might ask, like many of our teachers do, why should such a harvest be organised at all? You can know the answer only by participating. When one toils for two tedious hours in mud and dirt, with the sun beating down mercilessly,

one is apprised of the monumental effort that goes behind getting a single grain from the field



to our plate. One appreciates better the role of the humble farmer and thinks twice before wasting food.

Going for harvesting is about working in Nature with friends and teachers. It's about the atmosphere, it's about the fatigue and the fun, and of course... it's about missing classes! Besides, with our outsized work force, we are always a great help to the people of Lake... so we hope!

Pradeep-bhai, the manager of the Lake



STUDENTS' IMPRESSION...

When I hear the words “groundnut harvesting”, I feel elated because it is not every day that one experiences working in unity and in Nature. It’s a two in one bonus! It’s not very often that I dig into the soil to pull out a groundnut plant, or any plant for that matter! It gives me the chance to experience something I’m not used to. I also enjoy the lemonade, fruits, bread with chutney and jam. It’s extremely rare to find the urban population going out, being in Nature, working with it, and most importantly, enjoying it. To me it is a day mixed with work, play, laughter, accomplishment, tiredness, heat and fun and even learning. It is also great because you learn how to work in teams. In the process some even make great friends.

The work I did was nothing compared to the work the farmers do and still I was drained out, so it also made me realize and appreciate the amount of work they do.

Now for those who love maths, here’s an equation: Groundnut harvesting = awesome and unique experience. To sum it up I would like to say that I enjoyed it to the fullest!



Aditi (E3)

Such events help students get multi-faceted, to know what lies beyond their desks, and perhaps most importantly, to value the people who toil.

Shreyas (E4)

We were students of different classes working together, our chit-chat helped us come to know each other. Instead of teachers, older students were appointed as captains which helped them learn how to manage teams. Our captain spoke to all of us and made us laugh and we did not realise how time flew.... We also tasted freshly harvested groundnuts.

Shakti (E4)

...The worst part was that I had never spoken to the members of my team, but as the harvest proceeded I got very familiar with them, I even became friendly with members of the adjacent team.... This kind of work is important as we get an idea of how much labour goes into the making of the oil we consume.

Tanushree (E4)

Estate, was exceedingly encouraging, helpful and supportive. He saw to it that we were comfortable and enjoyed the work. He also shared with us a few interesting facts about the groundnut harvest:

To meet the Dining Room’s annual requirement of seven tons of groundnut oil, 26 acres of land in the Lake have been allotted to ground-

nuts. Every day, twenty labourers work for eight long hours and harvest one acre, whereas, the 180 of us were given the task of harvesting the same expanse in less than two hours!

The major aspects of the organising included informing Manoj-da, the respective teachers and other officials, making batches, arranging for transport and preparing a hearty breakfast. We

STUDENTS' IMPRESSION...

...It might not seem like it, but the feeling of doing the work was great. Our feet were caked with mud, backs bent, pulling out the slightly damp plants and throwing them in a pike behind. Even as the sun rose behind us we kept advancing.... It was the first time I actually saw my entire class together ! Even though it was just during the ride that we sat together and although we were chatting in our little groups, it actually felt like the students of the fixed batch were also my classmates.

Nihaalini (E5)

Once we reached in our various modes of transport our already growing excitement was given an enormous boost when Vikas-da turned on his mike and began singing a hilarious song which managed to lift the spirits of even the sleepest ones.... The teamwork out in the fields was something I don't think I will be able to forget for a long time. The harvest created a connection not only with nature but also with the joy of manual labour.

Meera (E5)



The annual groundnut harvest done by students is more than just a day off from school. Despite the hot weather, the back-breaking work, the muddy fields, children from EAVP 1 right up to Knowledge 3rd year gladly come together to work hand in hand and help the

Ashram in whatever little way they can. Not only does it create a feeling of solidarity and gratitude but also gives a chance for EAVP 6 students to experience what goes on behind the scenes as usually they organise the entire event independently, with little help from their teachers. We are indeed extremely fortunate to learn and experience more than what is merely taught in textbooks.

Brihas (K1)

have always taken food for granted and have conveniently considered it to manifest "naturally". But surprisingly, for us, the most challenging task was organising breakfast for everyone. From getting loaves from the Bakery and slicing them, to preparing invigorating lemonade and the scrumptious garlic chutney concocted by Abhi-ben, we had to accomplish innumerable such chores. Nobody actually bothers about the source of their food, but after having painstakingly thought out a healthy breakfast for 180 people, we will now be

grateful towards all those who work daily to give us a proper meal!

Regarding the batches, the initial reaction of the students was that of discontent and annoyance, for we saw to it that no two friends were in the same batch. Some were even outright angry with us. We explained that batches were made thus, so that the focus stayed on the work, and not on chatting. It also gave the students a chance to interact with various age groups. And we noticed that, at the end of the day, they all enjoyed



each other's company.

Arranging for transport demanded little effort, but a lot of responsibility. We had to constantly coordinate with the members of Atelier and the drivers to ensure that the entire re-

location of the students was carried out smoothly and securely. Thus at 5:00 a.m., all the vehicles were present in front of the School and soon our battalion of 180 people was transported to the fields in a convoy of buses, cars and bikes.

We reached Forest Land in pitch darkness. To get us out of our slumbering selves, Vikas-da entertained us with his amusing song "Allons-y, allons-y dans les prés ramasser des *Mallatés!*" and conducted a cheerful rhythmic warm-up. With high spirits, we directed the batches to their respective locations in the plots and plunged into the work. The students worked so enthusiastically that they harvested the entire acre in a mere hour.

This was the first time we organised an event on such a grand scale. In the previous years, we had merrily gone and enjoyed ourselves during the harvest and had never imagined the effort and work that went behind organising it. We had a big responsibility on our shoulders and there was little

room for error. We had to anticipate the problems and possible scenarios and take heed of them. We felt relieved and proud when everything went smoothly and everyone worked wholeheartedly and had a great time. We hope more of such wonderful activities are organised for us students.

Often in life, we tend to shirk responsibility, but in the end we feel a sense of achievement and realize the importance of our role in the grand scheme of things. ☼



I HAVE NEVER LEFT

The transcript of a talk given by Basabjit Deshmukh '72 in the Hall of Harmony some time ago.

Bonjour friends! I was asked to speak on “What do you take from here?” I am sorry, I may not be the right person to speak on this topic, since I have never left. For me, it’s a different perspective. This talk is going to be some sort of a walk down the years... reminiscences... a personal tribute of some sort to my teachers, leaving the captains out at the moment (just too many you know).

I came here in 1965. My sisters had got admission here. I didn’t come for the Ashram. I came to leave them here. I was in Calcutta. I was in a Christian Protestant Methodist School; that’s a formula, that’s a rigorous institution. It’s a very different type of school, very strict. It was always the rule of fear. You had to perform or else you were punished. When I came here, I was about eleven. I didn’t have the privilege like many of you, studying here from Kindergarten. I saw the playgrounds! We too had a playground in the Calcutta school with six to seven cricket ‘pitches’. You needed to know and mark your ball; you needed to know your teammates and then you could play. As a kid, I was really attracted to the sports grounds in the Ashram.

I still remember... We were staying down the road from the Ashram, the house opposite the Auroshika building, and “Bhaiji” that is Navajata-ji, Vijay-bhai’s father, was our guardian. My sisters were already in the Society boarding. One afternoon — it must have been the 27th of December, because I joined on the 28th (I was the last student in 1965 to get admission) — I heard this knock on the window in the afternoon and Bhaiji calling out to my father, “Deshmukh! Deshmukh!” and then “Bijoy!” My father opened the window and Bhaiji told him, “Mother has accepted your son.”

That’s way back in time. I still remember those words... still can hear them.

School for me started the very next day, the 28th. The first day I went to Sishir-da, I was late. I was pretty nervous. Someone took me to Lata-di’s class. I don’t know if any of you actually know Lata-di, like we knew Lata-di then. It was scary. Fourteen periods of French a week! The first day I went in, there was a ‘dictée’ and I was made to sit last, because

I was actually last. I got one out of thirty: ‘La Table’; table and ‘table’ is the same in French and in English. It was baptism by fire. It was tough. We had to come to the class in time, before her. I was in the Society boarding and she lived in the Playground, upstairs in the Guest House. I used to see her coming out

from the building, walking towards the school. And we used to race into the class to enter before her! Still had to remember by heart the French poem and recite it in front of all the others. And she spoke only in French! We were all grown up: eleven, twelve etc... She promised us that we would bless her one day. It was tough during that



year. None of us believed that we would be blessing her anytime soon... But after that year, I don't think any of us had to really study French that hard again ... we almost knew it backwards!

I too joined the Society boarding — crazy rules, some very tough discipline, some crazy type of affection, great food, really great food. We had to do many peculiar things. We had to get up at five in the morning everyday! We had to study every morning, afternoon and night! Thank God somebody forced it into us. We learned obviously, discipline, regularity; like Ram-da said, "It gets into you." Things like "nettoyage", I don't know if you people have ever heard of nettoyage. We used to come to school early in the morning and clean up, arrange the chairs and tables, wipe them free of dust. When you do that, you hear the school waking up, it's different. Today you come in, mostly it's all ready.

They used to take us to the Matrimandir on Saturday nights. That was a great time for us, we were going out! This boarding was strict; we couldn't go out anywhere — to school and back, to group and back. I happened to have friends like Pota and Lalbabu and some others who were literally vagabonds, and their lifestyle, stories of their escapades, gave me a complex, a great complex. So Saturday night Matrimandir was great! We were the batch which started digging Matrimandir. We didn't know what we were doing. We were just digging a pit. We used to work all through the night and come back Sunday morning, quite exhausted, and then actually study. But this pressure, it was formative. Later on, this Cours Accéléré made you jump; we jumped into quite senior classes. I remember going to class seven. There were numbered classes at that time, not levels like now. Now you also have a lot of free periods. I hear my daughters telling me twenty-eight periods in Higher Course, it's too much, or thirty is too much. I am sorry, we had all periods fixed! The concept of free periods did not exist then. We had free periods only in the Higher Course. Oh, I remember class nine, or was it ten? I think Ramu will also remember. We finished off



Hiralalji's geography course in eight months. We had then two months of two free periods a week. We finished biology in six months. We had four months of two free periods. That was very precious!

I happened to get Nirod-da in class eight, in English and also in Bengali. I went first to the English class. It was downstairs in room no. 7, and we didn't know what hit us. I came out dazed. I had a coin in my pocket. I took out this coin and asked Nirod-da "one minute" and tossed the coin in front of him and held it. He asked me, "What are you doing?" I told him, "Well, I am choosing between English and Bengali with you and this is English." I dropped my Bengali then. It was a mistake but at that time I saw no way out. I don't know, he found this probably strange because after that he sort of "adopted" me; he always called me "boy". I am sure he knew my name, but he always called me "boy". I did my Higher Course with him. English, yes, we were supposed to do literature. We learned to think precisely. He was a stickler for precision, and we learned to communicate clearly.

I think it was during my Higher Course itself that we both decided, Nirod-da and I, that we would do some poetry with Amal Kiran. So we used to cycle across from here. Amal lived somewhere in the French town, across the park. We cycled across, both of us, to go to Amal to study poetry, the theory of poetry etc...I found it a little strange, my teacher and myself both



Nirod-da

going together. Believe me, he asked really simple questions, which were very difficult for me to understand why, because he was my teacher, and I thought he should know the answers. It was a very strange experience, I saw him sort of begin to learn again. One day, I suddenly realised that at that time, he was writing the book *Twelve Years with Sri Aurobindo*, and the years had fallen away from him, literally. It was a very precious time, to see someone being reborn in front of you. It takes some doing!

I did my poetry with Tehmi-ben. I am mentioning teachers you have probably not met. Everyone sitting on the left here has been my teacher, on the right some of them too have been my teachers. I am just trying to pay tribute to people whom you will probably not have as a teacher. Tehmi-ben was incredible — the essence of poetry. She taught me all things poetic. She was a dreamer also, and she taught us to dream too. I remember once I was standing with her at the Bulletin room. I had finished Higher Course but was lucky to be associated with one or two later batches, and one of my friends came up to her. He was all fresh into the Higher Course, a very close friend of mine, and he said to her, “Tehmi-ben, I am doing Indian philosophy with Arindam-da.”

And she asked, “I see... what are you

reading?”

He answered, “We are starting off with Buddhism and we are going to read this, and this...”

She looked at him and suddenly she said, “But why don’t you become a Buddhist for a week?”

It stunned me; it opened up things in me at that time. If someone can do that to you, you have got to hold on to that person.

There were others too, like Champaklalji. He was not a teacher; but we shared the same birth date and that was special. Everybody else got some regular birthday cards, but those on his birth date got special cards because he had just made those cards for the Mother. And we used to get them!

Another thing I remember was the 1968 Christmas day, when my parents were here. We had just come back from Christmas at the theatre, all jazzed up, absolutely, you know how Christmas is. It was even then a fashion show! We had just returned to the boarding and there was my father, waiting for me, in the evening. He just said, “Come on, let’s go.”

I asked him, “Where?”

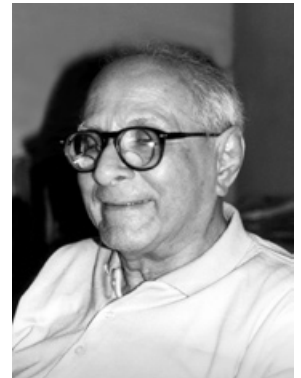
He said, “We are going to the Mother tomorrow.”

I said, “Ok, that’s special.”

He said, “You are going to get ‘Poita’, sacred thread.”

I really didn’t realise what was happening. We were out at night, it must have been 8 o’clock, and he took me to the nearest barber. ‘Plonk’, and the hair went off, totally! I came out in the December air and it hit me cold. What hit me more was: “tomorrow you are going to be bald. There are girls around, the image problem, and all sorts of things rushed through my mind...”

The next day, I had to wear ochre robes, a bit like a ‘Sadhu’, and I felt much like a ‘Bhondo’. Then you know, I had to go to Mother, and I was sure She could totally see through me. I went with a lot of trepidation, some fear — no not fear, but a bit of nervousness about things.



Amal Kiran



Tehmi-ben

I don't remember my father being with me, I remember Champaklalji being there. It was a very private meeting. Mother put this sacred thread, and then she put a ring on my finger. When this ring was being put on — I still have the ring — Champaklalji shouted into my ear:

“Now Mother is your Guru.”

I can still hear those words; he could instill things in you. He became a very dear friend. I had this privilege; I could go to him sometimes in the evening.

He was so much like a child. I remember, he had taken this ‘Maun Vrata’. One day I asked him, when I went to see him, “Champaklalji, are you free?”

He took a slate and wrote, “Always busy, always free.” That then is a different dimension.

Then there was Sunil-da. I was never his student, I have really missed this. People like Kake, Binu-da, they swear there has never been a better teacher in the whole world, absolutely. I really didn't know him well. We used to nod to each other whenever crossing on the street, he would just smile. I hardly ever spoke to him. After finishing Higher Course, I felt quite confused, as perhaps many of us are... I don't remember exactly why, but I was confused, perhaps too many choices! I went to see him and asked him about the Ashram, its functioning, and continuing to live here.

He told me, “You know this Ashram is not these buildings, not the people, it's just between you and the Mother, you and the Samadhi, wherever you are.”

Very helpful words at that time! And then of course you know, he gave us his music. For all of

us, a gift absolutely sublime! Sometimes you hear his music... it touches you, it lifts you, and it takes you away. Here, in the Ashram, things happen like a miracle, a gesture here, a touch there....

Once, I remember I was in the Meditation Hall, doing pranam, standing in front of the Mother's photograph. As I looked up, I saw one of my captains, coming down the staircase. He stopped on the stairs, and there is this message, and he did his pranam, in front of this message, and came down. I used to glance at this message ‘Cling to Truth’ quite often, but had never paid particular attention. He brought it alive for me. There are very few messages as short as that, ‘Cling to Truth’. It's not even a message. It's a command, an “adesh”. If you look at those wordings, it's the word ‘Cling’— it is that which shakes you up afterwards.

For you friends in Higher Course today, you are the world you grow into... a very exciting world. Ram-da knows this very well, he is part of things which are being made, being discovered. It's exciting. India shining, technology, the internet, information at our fingertips... The real thing is: what do we make of that? How do we fashion things from that? It's all there for us today, we just have to click, and it comes on...

Once, I met a young boy who was just finishing Higher Course and was very interested in photography. Somehow, he wanted to continue in that line. I was hoping he would have the courage to continue. I called up a distant relation of ours, of Pallavi's actually... I had met him just once. I didn't know him very well, had only talked to him sometimes. He was a photographer. He lived his life through photography.

I rang him up in Mumbai and asked him, “Is there any institute that one can go to, to study photography? I'm just asking....”

He replied, “Basu, technology is there today. Anyone can take a picture, a good picture. Ask this boy, to learn to see. He has to learn to see. He has to have his personal vision.”

Who was this person? Out of the blue, a stroke of wisdom... just like that!

It is this which will probably define us. Like the others earlier pointed out, the crux of our

education is that learning never stops. Not so much the curiosity to know, but rather the passion to learn, to become something, to discover. What stays with us, is what we have discovered by ourselves, not probably what our teachers taught us, but probably what we discovered ourselves. For me personally speaking, excellence is a given. I expect all of us to excel. I will not accept anything less than that. Excellence for me, is to exceed, is to exceed in capacity. It's to push the limits. It's hard work; but it's great fun, because you discover, because you learn, because you surprise yourself.

Sometime back I was in a small discussion group with a friend of ours from Mumbai. He happens to belong to a family of lawyers. He is a lawyer himself. There was this question about the Ashram, and we were discussing that among Ashram inmates, perhaps there are categories, there are Yogis, there are Sadhaks, and then there are workers. So, this fellow suddenly turns around and asks me, "Hey, Basu what are you?"

And I just replied, without thinking, "But I am a child of the Mother!"

And I suddenly realised that for those of us who have been students, we have a category to ourselves. It's a privilege, yes, without doubt. Many tell us that 'You are special!' I think we have to grow into becoming special.

On another occasion, I was on a flight from Mumbai to Hyderabad. The flight was packed. The person sitting next to me was a little elderly, but smart and elegant. We got chatting and then we exchanged cards. He turned out to be the global head of a very large investment bank.

He saw my card and just asked, "Pondicherry?" I said, "Yes."

He said, "Is this somewhere here, nearby?"

I said, "No it's down South, beyond Madras."

"There is an Ashram there; my wife and I want to go to that Ashram."

I said, "Actually, I am from the Ashram, from my childhood I have been there."

He turned and looked straight at me, with different eyes. At such times, you feel a glow about you. It's a responsibility. You see, people will look

at you differently. The yardstick will be different. You come from a different place. It's a big responsibility. Wherever you go, you will probably be the spark. This entire blue planet is She.

The Ashram today, like somebody said, is, "Not the walls, not this town, now it extends all over."

Long back, I remember, Nolini-da gave a talk in the playground. It was called "The Golden Rule". There are so many rules, there are so many things to follow: you need to be good, you need to be noble, you need to be upright, you need to be honest, straightforward, fine... But he brought it down to this one simple 'golden rule': "Always behave as if the Mother is looking at you, because She is indeed always present."

This rule that he talked to us about brought simplicity into my life. It reduced everything down to one basic command. Perhaps it's a difficult task, but it's doable. It is doable.

Not long ago, I was working on a compilation. I was looking at all the old rules in the Ashram and I was surprised. In the 1920s, the Ashram was very small. It was a place of 'kathor' Yoga. There were no children at that time. It was almost a monastery. Sri Aurobindo formed certain rules and the first rule was this, the very first rule of the Ashram: "Always behave as if the Mother is looking at you, because She is indeed always present."

For this rule, there are no boundaries. It doesn't talk of a time or place. It talks of Her being with you and you being with Her. Nolini-da in that talk goes on to say, and I quote, "A child asked the Mother in his simplicity, 'How do you know Mother what we do or what we think, what we feel? How do you know it?'"

"The Mother smiled and answered 'My child because you are within me, within my embrace always. Therefore I know, isn't it? I know what is happening within me, that is why I see what is happening within you. You are not outside me. You are part of myself. I am you.'"

I think the moot point is not what we take from here, but more pertinently, what do we have to offer? I wonder, once you become Her child, do any of us really leave the Ashram? ❧

GROWING UP IN THE ASHRAM

Nandita Chatterjee '61 speaks to Sunayana about her early years in the Ashram and her experience as a teacher

Sunayana: Can you tell us something about how you came to the Ashram and your growing up years here? What was it like as a student?

Nandita: You see, I used to come here with my parents, since 1948. I was ten in 1948 and it used to attract me immensely, intensely, the whole place. I wouldn't say that Mother attracted me, that wouldn't be quite true. But the whole thing attracted me. Everything in the Ashram attracted me — of course, including the Mother and Sri Aurobindo. I wanted to stay back, but being the only child it was difficult. Nobody would pay attention to me. I used to cry going back. I still remember there used to be a train that took us to Egmore from Pondicherry Station and the first half hour I used to be in tears and Baba used to ask me, "Why are you crying? What has happened?" and I couldn't tell what I was going through. This went on till 1949, and in 1950 I was here when Sri Aurobindo left his body. We used to come in November. I had already had three *darshans* including this one. The whole thing was a huge turmoil. We went back.

Then in 1951 we could not come. Father was not well. We came in 1952 and then my father jokingly told me, "What happened? Aren't you going to sing that old song of yours?" The song being, "Why don't you leave me here? I want to stay here." So I told him, "What is the point? You are not going to listen to me."

Then he said something which he perhaps regretted later [*laughter*]. "The Ashram is not mine. It is the Mother's Ashram. So ask the Mother. If she says yes, then you can stay here." So I said, "How do you do that?" That problem was solved

by Nolini-da. The Mother used to come down on Tuesdays, Fridays and Saturdays to give blessings. I went to Nolini-da and Baba was also there. Nolini-da was saying, "Do you want to stay here?" I was a thin little thing.

S: How old were you?

N: I was 14, just going on 15. I was tall, but inside I was a little thing. I used to be afraid of everybody. Nolini-da with his huge moustache said, "So, do you want to stay here?" Then he asked, "How will you stay here without informing the Mother?" I summoned up some courage and I told him, "You tell her." So he said, "Come tomorrow."



There used to be a long queue for blessings. Nolini-da came out of his room and saw us. I was in the queue — Nolini-da, Nandita, Baba and Ma, all in a row. Nolini-da said, "Mother, Nandita wants to stay." I remember it so clearly, so clearly. Nolini-da said, "Nandita wants to stay here." And Mother said, "Who?" because Mother couldn't see me. I was standing behind him. So he said, "Come in front, how will she see you?"

So she said, "You want to stay here?" There was one fortunate part. I had studied in a convent school from a very young age, so I was conversant in English. So I said, "Yes, Mother". She looked at me and said, "But why?" [*laughter*] and to that question I had no answer. I never had an answer, very frankly speaking [*laughter*]. And so I made it clear to her, "I don't know, I don't know." Mother said, "You don't know?" I said "No." Then Baba came forward. Mother looked at him. He didn't object, if he had to object, he could have objected then.

In those days there weren't any boardings. The only boarding was Dortoir and that was chock-a-block full. So she said, "With whom... yes, but with whom?" My mother had a friend... Mri-tyunjoy-da's sister Bimala. She knew my mother even before my mother was married. It was a long friendship they had. She used to sit there... A whole lot of people used to sit there, just to look at the Mother. Somehow, I don't know what happened, I suppose it had to happen. She got up and said, "Nolini-da, if Mother permits, I can look after Nandita." And that's how it all started and I stayed back and I had a great, great hope that she would send me to one of the departments. No studies.

S: Oh!

N: The first thing she said was, "I will talk to Sisir. She will go and join the School." Out went my hope [laughter]. That's how I stayed back. I was alone for about 4 to 5 years. My parents came and joined me later. It was an experience, you know. As I look back I feel the atmosphere of the Ashram of that time. I was not prepared for that. I was not ready for it. When you come from outside it takes some time to get used to this life. I adjusted all right. I adjusted to School, I couldn't adjust to the Playground. That emphasis on sports, I couldn't take it.

I was not interested in physical education and that became a problem. I used to not go to group. I used to not go anywhere. I used to just sit at Dyuman-bhai's door by the Samadhi. And the Ashram was as it has always been. Letters were fired at my father that I was not going to the Playground, the most essential thing of Ashram life. My, my, my! Father wrote back, "What are you doing? You have yourself chosen that life." He was clear. "You have stayed there by your own choice and you are going to live that life. That's because you have chosen, I haven't asked you to stay." He used to write to me in English, "What are you do-

ing, why are there these complaints?" Imagine! Why were all these people sending out letters to him?

S: People who were really not connected to you?

N: No, not necessarily. 'Oh, my God!' They knew Baba, he was a very interesting personality, you understand what I mean. My father was angry, and my mother was such a loving person I can't tell you... I am very lucky in my parents,

more so in my mother. So she told me, "What are you doing? You have seen things yourself. If you are not happy, let me know." And Mashi (Bimala-di) came to know. She knew I was not going to group but she never forced me to do anything. She said, "Why don't you write a letter to the Mother? Don't go to anybody else. Just write a letter directly to the Mother." I thought that was easy. So I wrote a letter to her. I said, "Mother, I don't go to group, because I am not interested and people are complaining." And the sentence that was used by the others was, "She is not leading an Ashram life."

S: That's because you were not going to the Playground?

N: And what Ashram life is a 14-year-old supposed to lead? Today I turn around and ask. So I put it this way: "...that I am not leading an Ashram life and I am blamed. People are complaining and I don't know what to do."

I still remember Mother used to take a class for younger children in Dortoir and gymnastic marching used to go on in the Playground. We were supposed to study, which I never did. And Nolini-da used to take a stroll. And so somebody came and called me and said, "Nolini-da wants to see you."

So I went and saw him. "It seems you have written a letter to the Mother." And I said, "Yes, I have." "The Mother wants to see you. Come tomorrow morning." So I took some flowers and waited by the staircase. It used to be called "stair-



case darshan". I went up and she said, "What is it? You don't go to the group?"

"No, Mother".

"Why?"

I told her that I was not interested, that I didn't like sports.

She said, "You don't like sports, you don't go to group. What do you do?"

I said, "I sit here."

"Sit where?"

I said, "Right here by the Samadhi."

"And then?"

"And then when your time comes and you come out and start distribution of groundnuts, I go to the Playground. Then I sit and see you. Before that I am sitting by the Samadhi."

"All evening you sit there all alone?"

So I said, "Yes, all alone."

S: *Perhaps somebody must have said, "she is going off with somebody..."*

N: I don't know. A 14-15 year-old girl, what is she after all? Then she started saying, "No my child, you have to do something, some little exercise, something you are interested in. You don't like this? You don't like that?"

So I said, "No, I don't know."

Then she said, "No, you must go and see. May be you will find this interesting, or that interesting."

And she really coaxed me. And at that I said, "Everybody is advising me. Mother, I don't know who to listen to."

And you know what she said? "Don't listen to anybody, only listen to me."

I still remember that. I can't tell you, it was such a relief. It was such a relief, "Don't listen to anybody. But listen to me. I am asking you to go to group."

After that I went to group — "dilettante attendance", very dilettante.... That was my first six months or one year perhaps. But school was wonderful. I went through, somehow, even though I was not a very good student. Not among the brighter ones.

S: *Did you become a teacher immediately after you finished your studies?*

N: In fact how I became a teacher, that's another

story. I had a huge difficulty with Mathematics and Science. It just wouldn't enter my head. Every year-end I would go back to the Mother and then I started speaking in French.... She insisted that I should speak in French. "Cette fois-ci, Mère, je ne veux pas faire les sciences et les mathématiques." (This time, Mother, I don't want to do Science and Maths.) And she would reply, "Eh! Tu dois les faire, absolument, jusqu'aux cours supérieurs." (Eh! you have to absolutely do them until the Higher Course.) That was her stock answer and I drugged on and on and somehow teachers were also happy to get rid of me. So when I reached the first year of Higher Course I went to the Mother and said, "Cette fois-ci je peux quitter?" (This time I can leave?)

She replied, "Ah! Tu veux te débarrasser de tout cela." (Ah! So you want get rid of all this.)

So, I said, "Yes,

Mother, please let me go." She

said, "Si tu le crois." (If you think it right.)

She was not very happy but

she allowed me to go. In those

days everything was done with

Mother's permission. Every

little thing was done with

Mother's permission. So

I was happy. Good riddance! She had given me

flowers. And as I was coming away, she turned

and caught me by the hand. What a grip!

S: *Yes, I have heard the Mother had a tremendous grip.*

N: What a grip! She said, "Où vas-tu?" (Where are you going?) I didn't know what to answer. She

said, "Qu'est-ce que tu vas faire avec tes périodes libres?" (What are you going to do with your free periods?)

"Je ne sais pas." (I don't know.)



“Tu vas travailler dans la salle des professeurs.”
(You will work in the Teachers’ Room.)

That was when I was 17 or 18. I was put in the Teachers’ Room and within a very short time Mother gave me some classes. I was a student and also a teacher. I did both.

S: *At what age did you start teaching Bengali?*

N: Bengali? There was a gap. So Sisir-da said, “Will you take some classes?”

“I have never taught anything. What will I teach?”

“I will inform the Mother. If she says yes, you can teach.” He said, “If the Mother approves.”

S: *Then after that you took on English.*

N: It was after this that the Higher Course was formed. The Higher Course that you know today, we were the very first batch in the Higher Course. It was a huge batch. 1959, 1960, 1961. In 1961, I came out of the Higher Course. I was teaching, I was working, I was studying, I was doing everything and I loved it.

S: *At that time a lot of people were in the School and worked for various departments also. Is this true?*

N: Yes, but not many really. School was a full time affair. So that’s it, I am still going on. And to think that I wanted to run away from education! It is ironical, because I am still at it [laughter]. She must have seen it, you know, then.

S: *How do you feel about the change that has taken place over the years? The kind of students there were before and the kind of students that are there now. How have you had to adapt yourself? What do you feel about that? Surely, you must have an opinion since you have worked for so many years.*

N: Very many years.

S: *Such a great change has taken place.*

N: I love change, if you ask me. I love change. Logically speaking you cannot avoid it. Not all changes, Mother says somewhere, bring progress. But it is better than being static. At least there is a movement. I have been teaching for many years and my one observation is that children today are far more intelligent than what they were then. Far more intelligent, far more mature and those that are hard working are very good. I get the best

students. That’s another complaint against me as I teach in the Free Progress section and they choose me. I always collect a lot of complaints. My *jhola* is quite full of it. They choose me and



those who come to me do so because they want to learn, because they want to work hard and I have always had very fine students.

As far as their sincerity or hard work or even intelligence is concerned, I have absolutely no complaints. They are freer today, very free. They voice their opinions more freely. Sometimes it is not very pleasant, sometimes it is pretty jarring but somehow they have got that courage to speak out, to say what they want to say, I think, in their own way. I take children who are 14, 15, 16, 17 years old — both in English and Bengali. They have a formed personality.

That’s one part. The other part is — which is again my personal opinion — that as far as the uniqueness of the institution is concerned, the backbone is what Sri Aurobindo and Mother want us to be, what actually life should mean.

What should life be for a child who leaves from here with all these value systems? How to put it in a nutshell? You sometimes do not get enough response from the child. When you start talking about some basic value systems which are crumbling in the outside world today, it’s because you want to make them aware of it. We as teachers are supposed to do it and I also do it. Sometimes you see a very fine response, sometimes you don’t. This is to say that even though it appears

that all the children who are growing up here are not imbibing the spirit of this place, in fact it is there in the atmosphere and unconsciously they are absorbing it. In our generation and yours it happened more directly. (Our generation definitely, even with your generation, people who were not necessarily going to stay back here or lead this life.) Yet it was there. I think the reason for that was that your parents were very great devotees.

S: *They surrendered us to the Mother.*

N: Yes, you people were given to her and she would take care of you. Whatever she wanted to do with you, she would do. The parents themselves thought that their life was taken up by her. I remember when I was in the Higher Course, there was this report card which had to be signed, every trimester. The first time it came up, I went to get it and Kireet-bhai was there. He said, "Nandita, go and get it signed." But I was a colleague. In a manner I was Kireet-bhai's colleague and on another side I was a student also. What a jumble!

So I took it to my father and said, "Can you please sign here? Look at my report card and then sign."

He said, "I will not sign."

So I said, "If you don't sign it then who will sign it?"

"The Mother will sign. I have offered you to the Mother. I have no rights over you any more. Mother will do whatever she wants to do." I went back and told Kireet, that my father refuses to sign.

He said, "Well it is true, it is true." He laughed and said, "You put your own signature, be responsible for yourself." So after that I started signing my own report card [*laughter*]. So that was that.

S: *But I understand your father's logic.*

N: He didn't sign. He said, "I offered you to the Mother when you were fourteen years old. So why should I sign your report card now? I will not do it." I was offered to the Mother. That's what my mother was told by Nirod-da. I remember she was heart-broken. Heart-broken, absolutely. Nirod-da and Baba were pretty good friends. My father said, "She is crying a lot." So Nirod-da told my mother, amongst other things, "One offers

to the Mother the most beautiful flower of one's garden. And this is the most beautiful flower of your garden. So you have offered her and left her with the Mother."

The whole attitude was different and in your case to a great extent it was the same. But now that has undergone a lot of change. The backgrounds are different.

S: *Don't you miss that?*

N: It is not a question of missing. You know, there are two or three passages of *Savitri* that I read with my E.A.V.P. 5 class. It's my course. I have made it a point to introduce *Savitri*. It's a beautiful passage, where *Savitri* says, "I heard the call..." That extract, you see. And I go further, depending on the reaction. Then I go back to where the Lord of Death says, "Reveal yourself, so that I can also worship you."

Sometimes you see brightness in their faces and they say, "Nandita-di, *Savitri* is supposed to be difficult but it is not so, we can understand." And with some, you know you are hitting a granite wall and then it hurts. You have five students in a class, three are responding, two aren't. But you drudge through, you don't stop even though it is disappointing. I do it because they have to take something from here. It is only then that society outside may change. With their influence something may happen. And that is the only justification I find when the children go out.

S: *You know, Nandita-di, people outside, even though they don't know the Mother and Sri Aurobindo, are searching, asking questions and there are many things which are opening up. Life is forcing them to open up in such a way that they are talking our language. They don't say, "Mother", they don't say, "Sri Aurobindo", but they are talking of change.*

N: I am aware of it. That bit of change they understand, that little change which you are talking about is necessary, but what I am referring to is a direct acceptance. That is what I sometimes find missing. It is definitely not general. As you say there is a change taking place outside. There is no doubt about it. It is because of that, that these children can make a difference out there, if they take something from here. ❧

REMEMBERING VED-JI

Shyama '85

The desire of the earth for the infinite — a mountain. Where does one begin to measure it when one is not a scientist, a geographer or a topographer, or if one doesn't even possess a "desirometer" to measure the earth's desire? The difficulty looms larger when it represents the spirit of an aspirant of the infinite — Ved-ji. Therefore I refrain from this activity and instead choose to share with you all, the beauty of the mountain as part of a landscape — I beg your pardon — the "Dining-Room"scape.

Vedprakash-ji was in charge of the Dining Room and also a Trustee from 1996 to 2006. Every day many of us went for our work to the Dining Room. Did he come to our notice? Oh! No....

In fact, I worked at the counter for the first two years totally oblivious of his presence. Strange, isn't it? How was it possible? He had a capacity to pair up a given work with the right worker to execute it. This acumen was only one out of many which made him a master organizer. Not only did he



In front of the Ashram Dining Room.

assign the work but he was ready with the system into which the work could be fitted; keeping always the learner in himself alert to modify, improve the system and the work. Starting from the number of people who have dined, all the raw material that has come from our farms or the market, to all that is served on the counter — how much to be cooked, what measure to be served per head, what was in excess or fell short — a detailed chart is maintained. Maintaining such statistics is like the lubricant of an engine and allows a unit that works 365 days of the year, to run with an ease

that is unimaginable. Working with him one realized how important it is to develop a system for a given requirement.

In fact, the word 'system' leads my line of



Working in the Dining Room (above and below).

thought backwards to the interval of time between 1974 and 1980 when I attended his talks as a student in the Hall of Harmony. I remember them being interspersed by peals of laughter all through. Economics was the subject matter of his oration since he was a professor of that subject in Knowledge.

This leads my thoughts further back in time. Born in Malakand (at present in Pakistan) on 23rd of January, 1928, to Dr. Banarasi Das (an Army Doctor) and Savitri Devi, he had his early education in Arya School, Ludhiana, where his father had moved. He finished his M.Com there. Just before he entered University, Partition broke out. He was put in jail for 9 months as a leading activist of the R.S.S.. When

he came out of jail, he was offered an Honorary Degree for the subject of his choice, but he refused it and entered Ludhiana University and finished his education, specialising in Economics. His first post as a Professor was in Ferozpur College, followed by Calcutta, then Dhaka for six months. Eventually he returned to Ludhiana College in 1952 and finally taught at Dev Samaj College for Girls as the first male professor.

Meanwhile after his return to Ludhiana he got introduced to the Sri Aurobindo study circle of Ludhiana, led by Professor Singla of Government College, Ludhiana. That was his introduction to the Mother and the Lord. He visited Pondicherry for the first time in 1953 and thereafter came every summer and offered his services to the Mother. In 1963 during his stay in Pondicherry he asked the Mother whether in the coming years he could join the Ashram. The Mother wrote back, "Join Dining Room from tomorrow."

That command was obeyed. Not even his love for his parents, his academic aspirations as



a much-loved and very popular professor or the much-needed belongings he had left behind were



With his nephew, Lalit '86.

capable of deterring him from that command. From the next morning till his demise on 4th September 2011 he served Her night and day. Come rain, come

storm, come any-

thing, he was there; other than some weeks when he left for his treatment — having succumbed to Parkinson's disease — he was always present.

All we see today in the present Dining Room with the modern equipment, the boiler, the cookers, the trolleys, the washing machine, cream machine, the vegetable cutting machine and so many other things... it was his vision of what the Ashram Dining Room should be. That reminds me that in one of our conversations I had asked him, "What makes you dream?" "It is Dyuman-bhai who taught me how to dream," was his answer. Well, it goes without saying that Dyuman-bhai was trained by the Mother Herself.



Whether crossing him on the way up the stairs in the Dining Room or working shoulder to shoulder making mango juice or storming into his office with complaints, one always met with that beautiful smile, and the vibration of love and gentleness that wrapped one in a soft tender blanket allowing one to quieten down. His smile transmitted a calm strength to go on serving Her. Every contact with him was answered with a lot of gentleness and quiet strength.



As a trustee, receiving dignitaries: M.S. Gill (above) and Atal Bihari Vajpayee (below).

"Un point remarquable" in him was his handling of human nature and bringing out the best in someone; a really good example is Jacques Delage from the Canadian Centre of Montreal who served him through his illness. Has any one of us tried nursing someone from morning 5 a.m. to evening 9 p.m., hours rolling into days and months? Only a love which has a divine element in it can elicit such service. Yes! His love comprised of human understanding, respect, patience, and above all, (I think I can never get tired of repeating it), gentleness, gentleness, and more gentleness. This allowed a person to be very open to change, since change in human nature is the whole



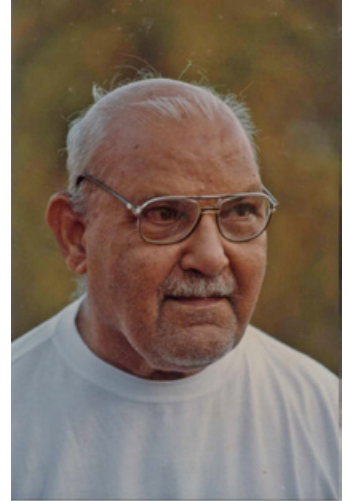
Working at the Matrimandir.

purpose of the Lord and the Mother's huge experiment in the Ashram. Of course, as far as help during his illness goes, I must mention Lalit and Shernaz for the immense help rendered to him and Roopa-di who need not be mentioned at all as her contribution cannot be compared to anyone else's; and, of course, Jolly and Kalyani who work at the Ashram Dining Room.

Parkinson's disease paralyzed him — his attitude in facing it is what paralyzed us. When asked

once, "Why did the Mother not prevent this disease from taking a hold on you?" he replied, "This is Her best gift for my *sadhana*." His ailment was an excuse for life to show us the courage that dwelt in his heart. Even when he had taken to a wheel-chair he was there at 5 a.m. in the office, when work begins. Till the end he served, even if he could con-

tribute only by wiping a few dishes instead of planning for boilers or what our farms could cultivate. Service was where his life began in the Ashram and in service his life ended here in the Ashram at Her Feet. ❧



GOD IS MANAGING

You must put aside what you want and wish to know what God wants; distrust what your heart, your passions or your habitual opinions prefer to hold as right and necessary, and passing beyond them, like Arjuna in the Gita, seek only to know what God has set down as right and necessary. Be strong in the faith that whatever is right and necessary will inevitably happen as the result of your due fulfillment of the kartavyam karma, even if it is not the result that you preferred or expected. The power that governs the world is at least as wise as you and it is not absolutely necessary that you should be consulted or indulged in its management; God is seeing to it.

Sri Aurobindo
(SABCL, 16:418)

*Be simple,
Be happy,
Remain quiet,
Do your work as well as you can,
Keep yourself always open towards me —
This is all that is asked of you.*

The Mother

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Devotion is not utterly fulfilled till it becomes action and knowledge.

Sri Aurobindo



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Only those years that are passed uselessly make you grow old.

A year spent uselessly is a year during which no progress has been accomplished, no growth in consciousness has been achieved, no further step has been taken towards perfection.

Consecrate your life to the realisation of something higher and broader than yourself and you will never feel the weight of the passing years.

The Mother (MCW, 12:122)

