

# The Golden Chain

Alumni Journal of Sri Aurobindo International Centre of Education



## Responding to the Tsunami



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)

# CONTENTS

VOL 5 NUM 2

FEB 2005

## 1 THE EDITORS' PAGE

## 2 POST BOX

## 3 MEMORIES: My Teachers

Lopamudra '94 remembers.

### Batti-da and the Long "Short Circuit"

Pavitra Roy '79 recounts.

## 6 Monique

Sunayana '79, Renu '79, Prithwindra '56 & Richard '55 on the ballet teacher.

## 11 Celebrating Dortoir's 60th Anniversary

Prabha '80 reports.

## 12 POETS' PAGE

Nabanita '85, Suruchi '03 and Sutapa '84 share their poems.

## 14 COVER STORY: Responding to the Tsunami

Sunayana '79 reports on the relief efforts of The Golden Chain Fraternity.

## 24 CULTURE CORNER: "Saviour Grace"

We go behind the scenes of the 1<sup>st</sup> Dec programme with Parashmani '04.

## 26 ASHRAM HISTORY: Meditation in the Early Years

Raman Reddy '75.



On the Cover:

Effect of the Tsunami: the sea recedes and returns.

On the Back Cover:

Another photograph of the sea's retreat.

## The Golden Chain

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## THE EDITORS' PAGE

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by Sunayana '79

Before 26th December 2004 no one here had even heard the word 'tsunami', but today it is on everyone's lips. We had read about giant tidal waves and knew that they could swallow up towns in a matter of minutes but somehow it seemed that they existed only in story-books. Somehow it seemed to us that it could not actually happen in the real world. That Sunday morning what we had only imagined suddenly became real.

In the middle of all that horrible reality there was something that still had a touch of the mythic and the miraculous. The Beach Road is probably one of the most beautiful places in Pondicherry. Also along this road are situated some of the most important buildings of the town. How did this road remain completely untouched? On one end there is the French Consulate and the Chief Secretariat. On the other side there is Park Guest House and the Ashram Nursing Home. In between are the Court, the Town Hall (Mairie), the office of the Senior Superintendent of Police and the Tourism Office. There is also the Society Beach Office, the Ashram Press, and dear old Knowledge. All these buildings stand barely ten metres away from where the waves break. Absolutely nothing has happened to them. Even Mahatma Gandhi is still standing, his pedestal practically built on the sea sand. If this is not a miracle then what is? When you know that the entire coastline from Chennai to Nagapattinam has been badly hit and at places so badly that there is nothing left standing, then you know that you have to give thanks to the hand that has protected us.

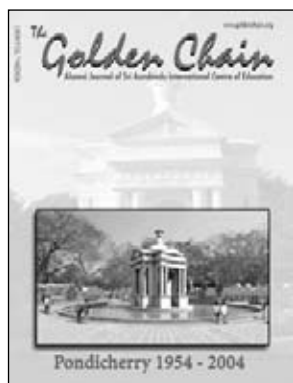
The Golden Chain Fraternity sent out an appeal once the sense of shock had passed, and we were very touched by the spontaneous and immediate response of so many well-wishers who came forward to help us so that we could help others. What amazed everyone across the world is the way people showed their sympathy and gave generously, both money and material. Just when it looked as if the world was rolling back to barbaric times, when war and religious fanaticism

were overtaking everything else, we were shown that men and women are still capable of feeling compassion and stretching out their hands to help people they don't know.

One morning towards the end of January as we were sitting in our office, receiving the donations which were coming in, an American lady walked in with several bags in her hands. She gave us whatever she had brought — money, homoeopathic medicines, and some old clothes. When she was about to leave, she said something that made us think for a long time afterwards: "It is true that there has been so much damage, but this has also brought us all much closer together. The whole world has acted as one large family. But what a pity that so many lives had to be sacrificed so that we could wake up and do things which we had never thought of doing. Let us say a silent prayer in our hearts and thank those souls who had to leave their bodies so suddenly in order that we could take a step forward in human unity."

How true. All the plans which The Golden Chain Fraternity has drawn up to carry out rehabilitation work, setting up facilities which will bring long-term benefits to villages, would never have crossed our minds had the tsunami not struck.

When our Fraternity had organised a trip to Auroville during our 2003 get-together, we were taken to their new Town Hall and shown an audio-visual presentation on Auroville. One of the sentences quoted from the Mother in that presentation was about how the fighting instincts of man should be used to fight against all that causes suffering to human beings rather than for fighting with each other. The reason for which we are always touched by Mother's words is that they have less to do with high philosophy and more to do with common sense. Ignorance, illness and the loss of dear ones are only some of the things which cause suffering to human beings. The tsunami has not only shown us how vulnerable the human race still is but also how much better we can fight against all that causes suffering if we fight against it together. ❧



## SPLENDID ISSUE

What a splendid issue that was! Thought-provoking, heart-warming and soul-stirring! Could a child of the Mother and Sri Aurobindo ask for more?

Your November 2004 issue marvelously mirrored all that Pondicherry stands for: the spiritual dimension which we open into thanks to the Presence of the Master and the Mother, true internationalism that Their education inculcates in us not as a concept but as a living fuel of our lives, the inmost value of the development of the mind when it takes you up to the threshold of intuition and humility, the mingling of Light and Delight when the Mind surrenders at the Feet of the Divine, the successful blending of beauty and business, the vision of a town as a vehicle of knowledge and truly understanding the significance and symbolism of “small is beautiful”, sweet moving snippets of

our ex-students’ experience of the magic that the Mother has wrought into the very fabric and quality of our lives... all in all a very deeply fulfilling feast for both mind and soul.

Allow me to express my joy and gratitude at discovering so much hidden beauty and love in the Mother’s very own children, Devendra and Dilip Kapur. May these bonds of the ‘golden chain’ grow forever stronger and deeper in this deepest of kinship: the Mother’s Love and love for the Mother. Thank you once again, dear editors!

**Maurice Shukla '75**  
**Pondicherry**

## JOYFUL MEMORIES

It gave me the greatest pleasure to see the 1982 photo of my dear friends from green and red group in *The Golden Chain* [Feb 2004 issue]. Dear friends, the time spent with you at the School was very rich and joyful. I will always be extremely grateful to you and to the Divine Mother for the privilege of sharing those wonderful moments with you. Love and best wishes to you all, wherever you may be.

**Mandakini**  
**Paris**

## ADULT EDUCATION

I cannot find enough words to thank you for this focus on Dikshit-bhai [May 2004 issue]. Like Rani Maitra, like Dr Satyendra,

like Sudhir Sarkar, he was an embodiment of the Mother’s sweetness permeating the Ashram atmosphere. The more we speak of them, the better we co-operate with the Divine’s will.

I was glad to read about the Adult Education classes. May I remind you that our zealous French teacher Benjamin Tirou was the pioneer in giving French lessons to adults, probably in the years 1948-49. And, for your information, with the Mother’s full approval, in 1956-57, I started a Bengali class for adults. Among the assiduous ‘students’, I was fortunate to have Girijadi, Taralakshmi-ben, Budhial-bhai, Chaitanya Garu, Har Kishen-ji and a few more, including Michèle Lupsa (who already had some grounding). Probably, after my departure, some of my old ‘students’ continued with Kanupriyo-da.

**Prithwindra Mukherjee '56**  
**Paris**

## WE WELCOME YOUR FEEDBACK.

Please send your correspondence to: The Golden Chain, Sri Aurobindo Ashram P.O., Pondicherry 605002 or email it to us at: [goldenchain@vsnl.net](mailto:goldenchain@vsnl.net)  
Published letters may be edited for reasons of space, clarity and civility.

# MY TEACHERS

*Lopamudra '94*

It is ten years since I finished Knowledge. The monsoons were drenching my heart that October. To say goodbye sounded like the last sad tinkling of the temple bells after a ceremony. Now when I wonder whence comes that fragrance, I am attracted to those flowers pressed in the book of my school days. And I realize how the Mother and Sri Aurobindo working through all our teachers have planted tree after tree in each of our gardens. I want to thank all my teachers, although there are no words to describe gratitude. Pardon me for mentioning only a few of them while there are so many I will never forget.

When I was in my early teens the day began with *Sudinam Arya* in the Corner House. In the second period we met with the same Arya who taught us mathematics. In the afternoon in the old Hall of Harmony with the cotton tree as a backdrop, we chanted the *Bhagavad Geeta* — again same teacher. In Group he taught us long jump and ran with us in our 100 metre sprint, screaming with the wind, “flex your knees”. At night back in Corner House we analyzed our basketball game and decided anger should be conquered. All this came from one teacher, Bharat-arya, during our crucial growing years. We were learning a new paradigm in mathematics and only such a skillful teacher could make it an adventure. Sanskrit I have never known better than when I was his student. He reminded us again and again to “internalize” these teachings and be “conscious”. Later when I had graduated from the Bharat-arya age, I applied his teaching to improve

my swimming style, to do long jump and in so many ways he was still my mentor. Those were the fastest years of progress, when teacher and friend and guide and sometimes even playful antagonist, Bharat-arya, kept us jogging at his speed. Without knowing it, we imbibed the enthusiasm to learn and excel. Is this what the ancients called a Gurukul?

Vijayendra-bhai was fun and witty. His physics explanations were sprinkled with punch lines which made it impossible for students to sleep. He had a Captain Haddock style of interjecting, with expressions like “Espèce de Paoli!” He re-named us, the new name often resembling our original name. I was Lopeze, rhyming with “trapeze” — I suppose it is spelt this way for it is the first time I am writing the name. It was fun

to have another name, as if you were acting in a drama. In Group he ran with us with his hockey stick and arched his back to get the softball. But always the joyous spirit shone forth. Apart from classes and coaching, he took a personal interest in his students. He gave us tips on health and asked about our achievements in the competitions. Once he offered to mediate between me and my best friend, but we preferred to fight it out.

Richard was another loving teacher. After drawing spiders in Nanteuil, we went to Cazanove and ate Chinese lemons. Then we cycled to the pier and studied barnacles under the rotting jetty. He placed his finger on my frowning forehead while I wrote the biology test. Sometimes now I catch myself frowning and think of the wise and gentle Richard.





Manoj-da (Das Gupta) was my mathematics and physics teacher in Knowledge and in his brilliant manner planted the fundamental concepts deeply in our minds. In those days I thought if I could imbibe the truths of physical reality the way he imparted them to us, very soon I would see Unity. On the last day of my schooling in the Ashram, he read out a story, for the sake of “*madhurena samapayet*”. It was a story written by Rabindranath Tagore about a child, who dreams of becoming a pilot, but his practical-minded father intervenes. There was a line that caught my throat — the boy wanted to fly in the sky where float millions of unfulfilled wishes. It made me cry, as I too had dreams and ideals painted in the sky, and on that day I was being launched from the aircraft of the Ashram School, and did I know if I had a parachute or a load on my back?

My English teachers were gems — Priti-di, Jhumur-di, Veena-di, David — all of them. Babu-da was the most dramatic and poured his versatile knowledge on us. He spoke in idioms and quoted from poetry. He shared a treasure of information on varied subjects that I wrote down in a special “Babu-da notebook”. Even now the rich assortment never stops to fascinate people, and they ask me where I collected such interesting facts from. All from the same source, friends. His most important teaching was asking us to write every scrap of English as if it were literature. I used to think literature was an exclusive club of Shelley’s and Oscar Wilde’s. My heart was so puffed, that whatever I wrote did sound like literature. And Babu-da read out those of our essays that were good before the whole class, cried “hats off”, applauded, stuck feathers in our cap, and did everything to make us strive and strive till we almost dreamed poems like Coleridge and spoke verses like Alexander Pope. Later, in Knowledge, Manoj-da (Das) opened a new facet of literature. He unearthed so many meanings even in apparently simple writings, that I caught myself pondering “what more would Manoj-da glean from this...” It is said about humans, that we are made up of layers like an onion — Manoj-da peeled off these layers from a piece of writing and revealed them to us one by one, more alluring than a magician,

subtly creating a world that we had missed.

When in EAVP, Swadesh-da was always teaching Science to the class next door and making the ‘Arts’ students love Science, while I sat impatient to do Science and was not allowed to be his audience. Finally in Knowledge I captured him. What a magnificent journey it was in the new world of electronics. He added other interesting corollaries to his teaching, with the cycling picnic and a birthday family party. It was a charm to go to his house and meet my past and present teachers together around the same table, and all of them memorable. The best junior Bengali dramas I did were directed by Manjushree-di; in Delafon I had learned French from Anjushree-di; in Knowledge I studied *The Foundations of Indian Culture* with Debranjana-da, and Swadhin-da filmed a documentary where I was a narrator.

We hardly heard Ajanta-di enter the classroom as we were upside down busy in the wall-peacock competition. She never scolded us, rather encouraged us to make mistakes, for mistakes teach, and more mistakes teach more! Kanupriyo-da was so intense while reading Rabindranath Tagore’s sad poems, lifting his voice to a crescendo and dropping to a whisper in the next line. Barendra-da introduced the heroic tales of Bankim Chandra and entreated us to bear with the unfamiliar language. Despite the stuffy afternoons and the rainy moods, the patience of the Bengali teachers taught me at last to respect the language and see the beauty that has captured so many hearts. Finally I was reading Sharat Chandra rather than Jane Austin.

I have had the best geography and history teachers, whose influence I feel most strongly. The passion I have for seeing a united world stem from the days of Subhash-da’s class in Progrès. His class lasted barely a period in the whole week but I wished it could be the whole week. There was a glossy book full of pictures, the Grand Canyon and the Amazon Basin, the tribes of Chile and the rituals of Tibet, piranhas and avocados, and all those fascinating far reaches of the earth. Then Lipi-di added ecology and Prakash-bhai, political geography. Beni-da and Kittu-da complemented Nature’s stories with the human story and the

whole grew into a rich fabric of the multicoloured flag of the world. Suddenly the name of my School seems so apt, Sri Aurobindo *International* Centre of Education. My school is *International* because it urges me to cast off divisions of nation, caste, religion and race and all the other sentiments that

cut the globe into clods of earth.

Today while I am taught by life and her less lenient teachers, I think of the Students' Prayer and realize what an onerous task Mother has placed upon us. I pray that I can remain Her hero warrior and always be prepared to welcome the future. ❧

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## BATTI-DA AND THE LONG “SHORT CIRCUIT”

*Pavitra Roy '79*

**B**atti-da, known to our generations as a sadhak with exemplary dedication and leadership skills, in his own quiet way often exhibits a razor-sharp mind. While in D Group many have experienced first-hand his phenomenal mental skills — skills required to keep a bunch of teenage boys focused and disciplined. Some such experiences have become part of popular Ashram folklore. I am reminded of one such anecdote.

1978, yet another athletics day (Wednesday I think) and yet another “Short Circuit” to run from the Sports Ground through Rainbow Nagar, past Nandanam and back to Sports Ground via the Lawspet Clock Tower. No big deal, right? Try telling that to a bunch of boys intent on giving “*faanki*”! Ask us to run after a ball — or other such interesting activities — and we would love to do so even at 2.30 in the afternoon on a hot basketball court. (Let's not lose track of the story by discussing the “other such interesting activities”!) But really why would any “sane” person want to run the Short Circuit if he could manage getting around Batti-da?

Rainbow Nagar those days used to be largely paddy fields. I do not remember whose idea it was, but Debashish [Samantaray], Devendra, Rajesh, Mangal and yours truly decided to cut through the paddy fields from the Rainbow Nagar side & come out on the other side in Lawspet well after Nandanam, in the process eliminating over 80% of the distance. Of course we were smart enough

— or that's what we thought then — to sprinkle water on ourselves from a street side tap in an attempt to give the impression of having completed a hard-run race before entering the Sports Ground.

Batti-da of course knew what we had done, god knows how! During the *rassemblement* he asked the five of us to step in front of the line and spelled out the “deal” — which was most ingenious:

The slowest runner amongst us would start the run first, accompanied by Swadesh-da on his cycle! Two minutes later the second slowest would leave, followed again two minutes later by the third... and so on till the last runner — the fastest amongst the five — would begin. Finally two minutes after the last runner, the evergreen Chinu-da would start the Short Circuit. The “deal” was that any one of us who got overtaken during the run would have to run the circuit again!

Boy did we run that day! We ran fast, looking frequently over the shoulder for fear of being overtaken by the man behind, while the runner in front kept pleading for a slower pace. But then none could slow down for fear of the last man being overtaken by Chinu-da.

Till today we marvel at the agility of the mind that formulated this simple yet water-tight plan and wonder as to whether Chinu-da did actually run that day... or was that the masterstroke? That's our Batti-da! ❧

# MONIQUE

## *A Biographical Note*

Monique's spiritual seeking started when she was about 16 years old. The Second World War had already broken out when suddenly one day her father announced that he wanted to divorce her mother. It was a traumatic experience for a young girl to be in a situation of total insecurity. She saw her country, France, in a helpless situation, occupied by the Germans and at home her mother abandoned and struggling to bring her up. This made her think about life and led her to seek that which gives an inner sense of security. This is how she came into contact with the Theosophical Society. Those who corresponded with her asked her to get in touch with Monsieur Richardé and Monsieur Honoré Vieil. She was asked to take these two men as her guardians. Indeed, both of them were old enough to be her father, having families of their own. Her contact with them gave her the emotional security she needed, and the companionship of those who were inwardly seeking a spiritual life.

When the War was over she went to live in Monte Carlo where she joined the Monte Carlo Ballet. Even though she was a professional dancer, deep in her heart she nurtured the dream of having her own little dance group. This was so strong an aspiration, that even while she was herself a student, she began to teach younger girls in the presence of her own teacher so that the latter could guide her to become a teacher herself. She knew that being a good dancer was not enough, one had to know how to teach.

She was always a hard worker. While she was learning to dance she also decided to learn to sing. This interest in singing came from her contact with Honoré who was himself a singer and who later became her husband.

In the mid-50s Monique, Honoré, and Monsieur Richardé decided to come to Madras to visit the Theosophical Society. At the end of their visit,

someone suggested to them to go to Pondicherry. This is how she found out about the Ashram and met the Mother. During this first visit, Monique performed a series of dances at the Playground in front of the Mother. Before going back to France, she expressed a wish to return and settle down in Pondicherry when her husband

retired. Mother assured her that she could join the Ashram.

In 1962 she moved to Pondicherry, and within a couple of years started teaching classical ballet. Her dream of having a little group of her own was realised. For twenty years she taught dance and put up a programme once a year, handling every aspect of the production herself.

In 1984 she fell from the terrace of her house and was paralysed waist downwards. She remained confined to a wheel-chair for another twenty years. When she had recovered from the other injuries she tried to revive the ballet classes but there were so many difficulties that she had to give them up. On 10<sup>th</sup> April 2004 she passed away in the Nursing Home. By a strange coincidence the old colonial house where her last ballet studio used to be was pulled down the very same week.



Monique and Ajit Sarkar



# BALLET CLASSES

*Sunayana Panda '79*

I came to know Monique after I started going to her classes. But my story begins a little before that. In 1968 there was a ballet performance at the Theatre, the very first one that I had seen. I was sitting in the front row of the wooden benches of the gallery. As soon as the programme started, I just couldn't believe my eyes when I saw that the dancers were actually standing on the tip of their toes, sometimes on one leg only. How could that be possible? I thought that

weeks before I turned nine, I took a piece of paper and in my best handwriting wrote a letter to the Mother. It was brief (only two sentences) and to the point.

A couple of days later I was informed, to my great joy, that Mother had allowed me to learn ballet. Later that evening someone in the boarding came up to me and told me that in my letter instead of writing 'ballet' I had mis-spelt it and written 'balai' (a broom!). My friend Jinu (Jayas-

urya '80) found it so funny that he laughed for an entire year. He never lost an opportunity to tease me saying that I had written a letter to the Mother asking her permission to learn to use a broom! The letter never came back to me. In my heart I was convinced that this joke had been cooked up by Matri or someone else so that everyone could laugh at me, until... until that letter was found. Mollie-di saw it among Monique's papers after she had passed away. And there, clearly, in blue ink on a mauve paper, I saw my spelling

mistake, as well as the other grammar mistakes, after nearly 36 years. It was true after all. The first sentence of my letter was, "Douce Mère, je voudrais apprendre la balai avec Monique." At the bottom of the letter in Amrita-da's neat handwriting were the words "La Douce Mère t'accorde la permission" (Sweet Mother grants you the permission.)

After having forgiven Jinu in my heart (after all, he was right), I thought of how, surely, Mother and Amrita-da must have had a jolly good laugh. Mother, in her all-knowing heart, must have seen how much I wanted to learn this dance though I could not even spell its name. Until I finished Knowledge, twice a week, rain, sunshine or thun-



From left to right: Amra, Leslie, Kanta, Aradhita, Savitri, Sunayana, Renu, Dipali. Picture shot in August '77.

probably there were holes in the stage into which the dancers just put the tip of their toes. So I got up and walked up to the far end of the Theatre where it is so high that you can clearly see the floor of the stage. But there were no holes! I had to get to the bottom of this mystery. By the time the programme was over I had made up my mind to join ballet classes, not only because I wanted to know how the dancers could stand on their toes without falling down but also because I was totally under the spell of the grace and lightness of this dance. Pratigna-di, who was in charge of our boarding, told me that I would first have to get the Mother's permission as was the usual practice in those days. So in November 1968 a couple of

## BELOVED MONIQUE

*Renu R. Mehta '79*

It was with deep sorrow and regret that I learnt about Monique's passing away.

Today, the word Ballet rings in memories of lilting music from Tchaikovsky, Chopin, Strauss with the colorful twirling of skirts and well-tied glossy pink shoes. The awesome pirouettes, pas de deux, and arabesques whisk you into the world of "petit rats de l'opera!" Yes, friends, this miniature opera was created in Pondicherry at SAICE by our very own and beloved Monique!

I was one of those lucky ones to have worked with her from a very young age, the reason why she affectionately always called me her "poupée" (doll). Regularity, punctuality, dedication in her teaching helped blossom my inherent dancing talents.

"Avec la patience on arrive à tout". Yes, this was the essence of Monique! She was not only the choreographer, costume designer, make-up artist, hairdresser, stage decorator and supervisor of lights and music, but also a very loving teacher. She wanted perfection in every task she undertook — whether it was teaching of steps, pas de deux or cutting, stitching, decorating costumes and maintaining them in the best conditions.

With all this she always had a beaming smile, her eyes moist with love! Today I have no words to express my heartfelt gratitude to her who has chiseled out the hidden "ballerina" in me and given it exposure. Memories of a "bygone era" will always stay fresh in my heart, as will Monique's love. And sincerity, motivation and dedication will never be erased from SAICE!

derstorm (so to speak) I was there in the studio at every single class, except when I was really unwell. And finally I found out the secret of how the dancers actually stand on the tip of their toes. They go through several years of sheer hard work.

When I joined the class our studio was a room on the first floor in Delafon. The name that Mother had given to the ballet group was "Courage". Indeed my first lesson was in courage. Every time, a few minutes after our classes started, we would see Padma's dog "Chocolat" come running into the room wagging his tail, his pink tongue hanging out. In those days my friends and I were only slightly taller than the dog. He would run into the room and start licking our feet. If we so much as flinched, Monique would be furious. "Poor little dog!" she would say

"Don't make him feel unwelcome by looking so frightened."

Later our studio moved to Vysial Street, again on the first floor. And finally we shifted to the

"Tout-ce-qu'il-faut" house, where we had a spacious hall full of fresh air and sunshine. Our classes continued all through the year but we learnt the most when we were preparing for a programme. The rehearsals would often go on till midnight but we never felt tired or sleepy.



From left to right: Gauri, Kanta, Mina, Parul, Lotus, Chhanda and Vimala

It was such a joy to hear the music on the speakers of the Theatre which we could only hear on her old tape-recorder in the studio. And the even greater joy was to be able to finally see the older students dance. After all, in the studio during our classes we could only see each other struggle with the complicated steps.

## MEMORIES OF MONIQUE

Prithwindra Mukherjee '56

Learning that you are going to remember Monique, I take the liberty of sharing with you a few flashes she brings back to my mind. Early in the 50s, she and Honoré came to the Ashram: I do not quite recall whether their little Maurice (Arjuna) was already with them or joined them later on. For the 1<sup>st</sup> December function, Honoré, the thundering tenor, sang the *Récit du Graal*, an extract from Richard Wagner's opera *Lohengrin*. It was quite an experience in sudden and unaccustomed decibels. Monique was to dance one scene from a ballet by Tchaikovsky. Inadvertently, the person in charge of the drop-scene had failed to wait till she made her last bow. Screaming like an adolescent, she rushed in the direction of the Mother. Surrounded by distinguished guests, the Mother tried her best to console her.



The way, however, Monique kindled and entertained the flame for her art among the students is well known today.

The couple and I had a friend in common: the solicitor Bachubhai Munim, an earnest devotee. Whenever the latter came from Mumbai, alone or with his family (including his brother and sister-in-law, Madhubhai and Asha-ben), he treated us all to a big lunch at Ganpatramji's terrace. Both Monique and Honoré had a sense of humour which seemed to please Bachubhai considerably.

I am ignorant about the depth of her knowledge of French literature but, proud of my own love for it, once in a while Monique used to invite me to share with her and Honoré some typically French specialities she cooked. When I was going to France, she told me that she was not the least surprised to hear about it, since she had known for certain that I would do it sooner or later.

Dance was only one of the things which Monique taught us. Discipline was certainly the main lesson in her class, but a joyous discipline. She taught us by her own example that one should never be afraid of hard work. Whenever she put up a programme it was one big learning experience. We observed how hard she worked and she included us at every step. From choosing the music to the choreography, from teaching the steps to teaching us how to do our own hairstyle and make-up, from making the costumes to planning the lighting, she did absolutely everything. And sometimes she herself danced in the programme also.

The ballet classes were the centre of her life, she had no other activity. We were not preparing to be great ballerinas; we were never going to make a career out of what she was teaching us. And yet she pushed us to give our very best, so that dance would always be a part of us, so that we would never make an ungraceful movement in life. All

the world's a stage, after all. Even though we were far from the perfection she wanted us to reach, at least we had all got from her the passion for dance. What a lonely struggle it must have been for her to all alone create a group and inspire it to follow classical ballet which in the 1960s and 70s was considered shocking and not quite acceptable even by some people in the Ashram.

She knew that one can only teach through example, so she always herself showed us any step she wanted us to do. But probably she never knew how much we learnt, not only about dance but about patience and kindness, good taste and politeness, perseverance and self-control, only by observing her. With her passing away it seems as if a whole chapter in the history of the School has come to an end. Or rather as if the curtain has come down on a performance. Monique must be in some heavenly green-room now changing her costume and getting ready for the next performance. ❧

# MON CONTACT AVEC MONIQUE: DANSEUSE ET AMIE DE LA VIE

*Richard Pearson '55*

Parmi les Européens qui s'établissent à l'Ashram j'ai observé trois genres de sadhaks : il y en a qui retiennent toujours leur identité culturelle : goûts, façon de vivre, langage ; d'autres sont seulement nés à l'étranger : on dirait qu'ils veulent devenir aussi "indiens" que les Indiens dans le sens où ils acceptent les mœurs, la langue, les coutumes du pays. Enfin il y a de ces rares exceptions qui, par une évolution progressive, peuvent garder en équilibre le génie de leur pays maternel autant que celui de l'Inde.

Monique faisait partie du premier genre : elle vivait tellement sa culture — la façon française de vivre et son ballet. Quoique sensible encore à l'essentiel de l'Ashram, elle n'y participait pas d'une manière visible. Depuis le moment de son arrivée et pendant longtemps, elle n'avait pas de contacts sociaux — en dehors naturellement de son lien profond avec Douce Mère — qu'avec une amie sur laquelle elle pouvait compter. C'était la sœur Thérèse de Cluny (à l'Orphelinat).

La danse l'occupait complètement et elle enseignait à un petit groupe de jeunes filles et à de rares garçons.

Fidèle à la tradition dans laquelle elle avait été formée, elle faisait tout par elle-même : les leçons, les costumes (préparés, il est vrai, par les filles de l'Orphelinat de sœur Thérèse), et le décor. Elle ne se détournait d'aucun travail ou responsabilité, et elle avait l'habitude de ne rien demander à ses élèves, à moins que ce ne fût essentiel à la prépa-

ration d'un spectacle.

J'ai mieux appris à la connaître à partir du moment où elle m'a demandé, à plusieurs reprises, d'arranger au Laboratoire des séances de projection où elle montrait à ses élèves de nombreuses diapositives prises lors de ses spectacles de danse.

Ce qui m'a toujours frappé c'était sa politesse extrême, sa franchise qui lui permettait d'avouer

spontanément ses propres erreurs. Elle avait une simplicité candide qui était loin d'être simpliste, car elle était, en dehors de sa dévotion absolue à Douce Mère, une femme du monde. Elle savait aussi critiquer sans aucune mauvaise intention; mais avant tout, elle pouvait faire rire.

Monique avait une

forte personnalité et comme elle s'exprimait avec vigueur et franchise, il y a certaines expressions qui m'ont frappé et pour terminer, je voudrais en citer quelques-unes car elles m'ont servi de marchepied sur le chemin du progrès.

En voici quelques exemples :

1) "Mettez-vous en premier !" (la première position de ballet), c'est-à-dire, "Préparez-vous à la leçon."

2) "Il faut savoir sourire !" même quand on souffre et qu'on ne peut plus supporter cette angoisse, car les orteils portent tout le poids du corps quand on danse sur les pointes.

3) "Je me promène avec mes baluchons !" car elle avait l'habitude de mettre dans plusieurs sacs, qu'elle prenait sur son vélo, ses bandes sonores pour la leçon, son juste-au-corps et des chaussons pour le ballet. ❧



Cette photo était prise après le spectacle de danse "La petite sirène" donné au théâtre de l'Ashram. De gauche à droite: Monique, Vimala, Chandrika.

# CELEBRATING DORTOIR'S 60TH ANNIVERSARY

*Prabha '80*

All those of us who had lived in 'Dortoir' in the past, as well as those who are living there at present, celebrated the 60<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the boarding on 15<sup>th</sup> January 2005 (1945-2005).

Every year, right since the beginning, the children of 'Dortoir' have been unfailingly putting up a private show on the 15<sup>th</sup> of January, keeping



it an informal affair. This time it was done on a grander scale and all those who had lived in 'Dortoir' and who were present in Pondicherry were invited to participate and take part in the fun.

In the morning of the 15<sup>th</sup> at 9.30 a.m., we gathered at the Ashram premises for a visit to Sri Aurobindo's room.

Later in the day at 2.30 p.m., we put up a variety programme in the School courtyard, as an offering at the Feet of the Divine Mother. As it was a Saturday we presented it as a Saturday programme. The show started with a collective prayer which Mother had given to the children of 'Dortoir', followed by songs, bhajans, recitations, dance movements and two short plays. A sign of how much time had passed, and that the boarding was sixty years old, was evident when Madhulita '80 sang and her daughter Unmukta (who is still a student) danced. Both had been in the boarding. The young and the old, all joined in the last chorus, a very powerful and moving Bengali song on "Our Mother India" written by Dwijen-

dra Lal Roy, Dilip Kumar Roy's father. This song had been translated by Sri Aurobindo into English and it was read out before we sang the song. The show ended for the Anniversary day with another prayer which we traditionally recite on the 15<sup>th</sup> of January. Then there was a distribution of sweets. But unlike all good things that have to come to an end, our celebrations were not concluded, but extended over to the next day.

To make the event more memorable and making good use of the following Sunday, a trip to Lake Estate was organized. We started at 8.30 a.m. in a bus and sang our way to the Lake. There we split into groups and in turns, we did boating, canoeing, took a round of the Lake Estate in an open lorry (a rare treat), lazed about in the clean, fresh air and drank in the beauty of the wide range of flora.

Around 12.30 p.m., we assembled at Chitra-di's Farm (Faith Farm) for lunch. After having a sumptuous meal, we gathered under the cool shade of trees and reminisced together of those golden olden days. Everybody shared their experiences. The old timers revealed some of their innocent past mischief, and partly relived their childhood. The youngsters too were emboldened to confide some of their secrets. Then finally there was a joke session which made everybody burst into uncontrollable laughter, bonding the young and the old closer together. The past intermingled with the present and looked beyond, towards a glorious future.

Before we parted, the next rendezvous was fixed for 15.1.2020, the 75<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of 'Dortoir'. ❧







# WHY?

Why does she walk ahead  
                    when nothing can be seen?  
When the path she moves along is unclear,  
When she knows not her aim  
                    and the journey's unknown,  
When only darkness is around  
                    and no light is near?

Something stirred among  
                    the inner shadows  
In the moonless welkin a star was born;  
It lingered but a moment  
                    then soon it was lost  
The heart was left barren and forlorn.

Somewhere inside the being a lamp was lit,  
Somewhere some hope had shone;  
But now nothing remains besides suffering,  
Midst her pain she stands all alone.

Where is the Hand that carved out Nature?  
Where is the Touch that allayed all strife?  
Where is the Whisper  
                    that called from the depth,  
The murmur of the Soul  
                    that supported life?

**Suruchi Verma '03**

# AUREATE WORLD

What is it that beckons beyond this haze,  
When it is neither night nor morn,  
What compels me to rush outside  
Wrenching wide my drowsy lids?  
Like a spirit set free  
                    from its shackles of flesh  
I shoot forward from the torpor of sleep  
And leave my chamber of birth and death  
Not knowing whither I have leapt.

Wide, wide I raise my gaze  
And stay transfixed by what lies beyond—  
There is no sky nor any heaven above;  
No sun, no moon, no stars.  
The universe is a disk of light,  
An aureate disk of light.  
Round and round it spins,  
Covering all the worlds,  
Whence comes a downpour  
                    of golden Light  
And all is but Light and Gold.

I was invited to visit the Chidambaram temple to see the reclining Vishnu with Pratigna-di and her class. On the eve of the outing I was still undecided and I went to bed in two minds, for I prefer smaller batches of people for such occasions. Then I had this "dream". When I woke up my room was suffused with a soft orange light, and I was, so to speak, at least a foot above the ground. This continued for some time, till it gradually....

*The Grace is always there.*

**Sutapa Mohapatra '84**

# RESPONDING TO THE TSUNAMI

*Sunayana '79 reports on the Relief Operations conducted by The Golden Chain Fraternity for the victims of the Tsunami*

The usual peace and relaxed feelings of a Sunday morning were shattered when the first news of the tsunami waves were announced on television on 26<sup>th</sup> December 2004. There was confusion and disbelief as one by one the various coastal villages of Tamil Nadu and Pondicherry were named where the giant waves had taken away the lives of men, women and children. Here in Pondicherry, the town itself was saved but the neighbouring villages were af-

fectured. Many fishermen lost their homes and their boats. At many places the sea waves carried away the things which were in the houses and people were left with the empty shells of what had been their homes.

On the 28<sup>th</sup>, when a group of former students had gathered informally, a decision was taken to do something to show that we care about those who had lost their homes in this devastation. There are now a lot of ex-students who live in



26th December 2004. The effect of the Tsunami seen along Pondy's beach road: the sea first recedes leaving a huge stretch of exposed beach

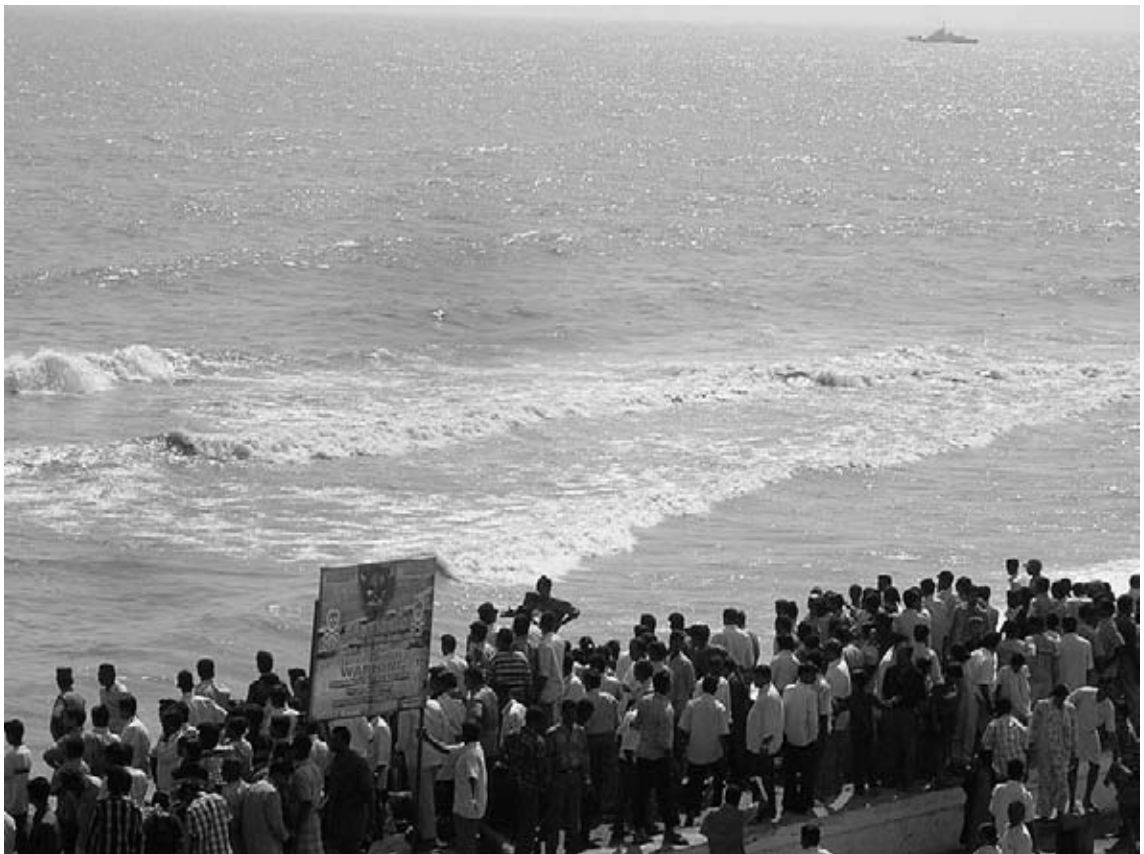


Photos showing the sea having receded along the Pondicherry coastline and then coming back to crash on the rocks and splash onto the road

Pondicherry and earn a living here and it is only natural that we participate in the life of the town. It wasn't enough to feel concerned, we knew that it had to be translated into some concrete action.

The Golden Chain team talked things over with the Shuddham group which has been working for a while now in the field of garbage disposal

and sanitation and has built up a contact with the local people as well as the municipality. By 29<sup>th</sup> a notice was put up on the Ashram notice board, appealing to those who wanted to help, to donate money to our relief fund. At this stage the idea was to collect whatever we could and donate it to the Chief Minister Relief Fund.



Minutes later: the sea returns

## THE DAY THE TSUNAMI HIT

*Devendra Kumar Sureka '80*

It was 26<sup>th</sup> December 2004, a regular Sunday after a nice Christmas evening at the Ashram Theatre where the children, just back from the annual holidays, had been in their colourful best.

As it was an alternate Sunday, many of us ex-students had gathered at 6:15 AM to go to work in Matrimandir. We had informed a lot of our visiting friends in the Theatre about the trip, and happily, quite a few of them had turned up. So gaiety prevailed, with the ex-students meeting up with each other.

After a safe ride down East Coast Road in our private cars, we went to the inner chamber of Matrimandir and meditated for half an hour. Then we got to work, cleaning and painting scaffolding pipes. Shortly after 9 am as we had stopped to eat breakfast, Mr. Selvam, one of the Aurovilians who brings us tea and biscuits from the kitchen, got a call saying that his house near the ECR road was flooded. We joked about it since just a couple of hours before we had travelled down that road. Then, as I live closest to the sea, someone suggested that I call home. Still in a very light mood, I called my wife Sujata and asked her jokingly whether she was under water or still on dry land. We exchanged more

pleasantries, as she seemed totally unaware of any crisis. Then in ten minutes she called back in a panic-stricken voice and told me about the pandemonium which had broken out in Kuru-chikuppam, the area I live in.

We stopped working, packed up as quickly as possible and took to the road, taking the Chennai highway via JIPMER hospital. Only when we reached Pondy did we realize the full seriousness of the situation. The beach road was full of people who had come out to see the tsunami effect: the sea receding to reveal a huge clear beach and then coming back to dash against the rocks and the wall along the beach. The joking was over. The devastating scene was now in front of us.

Later, listening to the news, I realized how lucky we were to be in Pondicherry, fully in the hands of the Divine Grace. On the one side Chennai beach had suffered many casualties and on the other side, Cuddalore. We, in the middle, had felt nothing at all, except perhaps some moments of fear.

It reminds me of what the Mother once said: "People are not aware of the workings of grace except when there has been some danger, that is, when there has been the beginning of an accident or the accident has taken place and they have escaped it. Then they become aware."



Damage in the fishing villages on the outskirts of Pondicherry



A number of boats were destroyed

There was an enthusiastic response from everyone around us as soon as word went round that we wanted to do something to help those affected by this natural calamity. But there were two questions that everyone was asking us. The

first thing that people wanted to know was, of course, what we were going to do with the money. The general request was that we should ourselves do something instead of handing over the money to some other agency. The second question that was being asked was if we would accept things in kind.

Since we ourselves had no experience in this field we turned to those NGOs which had already done such work before and who could advise us.



The team from The Golden Chain Fraternity surveying the affected villages

We were told that if we accepted donations in kind in small quantities it would be very difficult to sort through these things and to distribute the relief materials in a systematic way. So we insisted that we could only accept money and not old,



Handing over a cheque for the Chief Minister's Relief Fund to the Chief Minister



Meeting representatives of other NGOs who worked with us

used things. Also by then we took the decision to do the relief work ourselves with the help of the local village panchayats who could help us locate those who had been affected.

While we were thinking of how to go about

this whole operation some well-wishers from Gujarat and Mumbai began to contact some of our ex-students. In many cases they were friends and family members asking about the well-being of their loved ones but they also wanted to know



Relief material arriving from Mumbai and Gujarat by lorry



Preparing the kits: mats being rolled



Volunteers packing the kits for distribution: children's stationery being packed





Volunteers packing household utensils and other articles

how they could help. In their turn they contacted NGOs based in their area who wanted to extend their help. After all they had seen the terrible earthquake of 2001 and they knew how relief work was done.

The Golden Chain team, meanwhile, surveyed

the coastal fishing villages to ascertain how much damage there had been. After this it was decided to make kits which we could distribute to each affected household. Each kit would include those items which would really be of use to those people who had to pick up the threads of their life. Each



Manoj-da pays a visit



Kits ready for distribution

*The Golden Chain Fraternity*

Tributed Relief Distribution Token no: 05

Name of the affected person (Family): Chandrasekhar

Village: North Solanagar

Date of Receipt: 01/2005

12, Subramaniam Street, 1st Floor, 1st Floor, 1st Floor

things were given to us, we still had a substantial amount of cash with us, we donated a sum of one lakh rupees to the Chief Minister's relief fund. We also went and met the collector of Cuddalore.

were companies wanting to donate medicines, we consulted doctors who had already some experience of working with the tsunami victims in Cuddalore and Nagapattinam regarding what to get. When the medicines arrived they were given to the group of doctors from the Pondicherry Institute of Medical Sciences who were working in the villages.

20 *The Golden Chain*

gar and North Solai Nagar. After that we went to the villages South of Pondicherry, towards the new lighthouse, to Dubrayapet, Vebmakirapalayam and right up to Pudukuppam which is only 12 km from Cuddalore. By the end of the week we had reached Karaikal. Before every distribution there was a concentration and we prayed to the Divine to grant peace to those who had lost their lives and to thank Him for having protected the others. The volunteers who came to pack the kits worked all through the 13<sup>th</sup>, 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> January. Many Ashramites and other devotees and well-wishers joined us in this work.

The Golden Chain team kept in touch with the Auroville group which had got into action right from the day this tragedy occurred. We benefited greatly by interacting with other NGOs and medical teams who had a far better knowledge of the population for whom we were working.

As donations continued to pour in even after the relief work was over we began to think in terms of doing rehabilitation work also. We have already held several meetings and we will be discussing things thoroughly before charting out a plan for long term action which will bring an improvement in the lives of the villagers. We will actively involve ourselves in this for a whole year and follow the guideline which the Mother had given in the mid-fifties regarding the kind of work that could be done in the villages around us.



Distribution of kits to villagers living to the south of Pondicherry

There are many stories which our team brought back from the villages which they visited. Here is one of them. An old man came up to those who were distributing the relief materials and told them "This is the place where Agastya Muni had lived." He reminded them that the Muni had once swallowed up the ocean and that is why they had to be careful because the ocean now wants to swallow them up.

This churning of the ocean has brought out many things. It has also brought out our latent capacities to organize and bring about an improvement in the world which surrounds us. It has also shown us the length and the strength of the Golden Chain. ❧



The last distribution at a village near Mahabalipuram. Volunteers with children of the village. Also seen in the picture are members of other NGOs.



Our team talking to others, including actor Vivek Oberoi, involved in relief work near Cuddalore.



Safeguarding the future

## THE POWER OF KALI

Behind all destructions, whether the immense destructions of Nature, earthquakes, volcanic eruptions, cyclones, floods, etc., or the violent human destructions, wars, revolutions, revolts, I find the power of Kali, who is working in the earth-atmosphere to hasten the progress of transformation.

All that is not only divine in essence but also divine in realisation is by its very nature above these destructions and cannot be touched by them. Thus the extent of the disaster gives the measure of the imperfection.

The true way of preventing the repetition of these destructions is to learn their lesson and make the necessary progress.

**The Mother** (CWM: Vol. 15, p. 19)



The tricolour flies high in the hands of a Tsunami-affected child



The way ahead is uncertain but help is at hand

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Date: February 2005

(Sd.) Jhumur Bhattacharya

*Signature of Publisher*

## “SAVIOUR GRACE”

### BEHIND THE SCENES OF THE 1<sup>ST</sup> DECEMBER PROGRAMME

The programme of 1<sup>st</sup> December 2004 was unusual in that it was entirely a students' (primarily outgoing students') production. **Sunayana '79** spoke to **Parashmani '04**, one of the organisers, about his experience of putting up the 1<sup>st</sup> December 2004 programme. The remarkable achievement was that he was also a panel member of the Knowledge programme. It had indeed been very difficult for him to juggle the year-end speech, the Knowledge programme and the preparation of the annual programme for the Theatre.

The idea of taking up the 1st Dec programme had been suggested to the students by Priti-di after they had done a programme in February. It was Shraddha, one of the final year students, who had taken the initiative to talk to her classmates and to convince them that they could do it. She had then formed a core group and they had

Shraddha, and had worked very hard at making the programme a success. Creating the script was the first big work. At first they had themselves written a series of dialogues where people from various walks of life talk about their dissatisfaction about the state of the world. They then begin to look for something else and find a solution in the synthesis of their various philosophies. But the team soon discarded this idea as they thought that it did not have enough scope for everyone's participation. After this they thought of taking up *Durga Stotra* and even that had to be given up. The next idea was to dramatise *Bhavani Bharati*, but this proved to be very difficult too. In order to make the script more effective they added some passages from *Savitri* but when they saw that *Savitri* was adding a completely new dimension to it they decided to give up *Bhavani Bharati* and make an entirely new script with only lines from *Savitri*.

The dances were choreographed by Suranjika and Aurobrata who were also part of the cast. The music was taken in parts from Sunil-da and some pieces were taken from Nadaka of Auroville. Some other pieces were taken from various other sources. At first the idea was to have Pavak compose music for the entire programme, but composing one piece, which was to accompany the dance of the Titan, took so long that the team decided to take music from other sources.

The real rehearsal could only start from 1<sup>st</sup> November, after the School had closed and all their regular activities had stopped. All along the preparatory stage Parashmani had to plan his day in such a way that not a minute



worked together to organize and execute all the various aspects of the show.

This is how Parashmani had become one of the main organizers, along with Suranjika and



was lost. It was not the planning alone but also the team spirit that made their work such an important learning experience.

Here are some excerpts from the interview:

***One of the major aspects of the production were the lights and sound. Would you like to say anything about that?***

Well the first thing is that Mahi-bhai and Bokul-da are in charge of these things. And I'm sure that they have always worked with senior directors before this. And this time they had to work with us students. So it must have been a totally different experience for them. And as for me, I didn't know



anything about lights and sound in the Theatre. I had done dramas and even directed small plays in the Knowledge programme, but doing something in the Theatre is a different affair. And so the first time I met Mahi-bhai I told him, "Mahi-bhai we are novices. Please help us and guide us till the end." And he really took us with him right from the beginning till the end. He was always patient and encouraging. For the collar mikes he really worked hard, so that they worked well. We had three trials, and each time the mikes were not working well. There were cracking noises, like Diwali crackers. He worked late nights to sort this out. On the 1<sup>st</sup> of December it was perfect, near perfect. And this is something I know about. But I'm sure apart from this he has done so many other things which I don't know about so that this programme works out. The lights and sound people gave their best as much as we did to make

this programme work.

Bokul-da is in charge of the lighting. So after every light-fixing day we would sit together and go through the whole thing and I would tell him that this is not working or that is not working. And gradually he got into the drama and became a part of it and it was a pleasure working with him. Because at first the technicians don't know anything about the drama and slowly they see and begin to have an idea of it.

***In the end they know it as well as you do.***

Yes, and they can give ideas and that's what is more interesting. We worked together to build up the drama.

***Sometimes the actors don't know the sequence but Bokul-da knows it.***

Yes, and the whole thing is very clear in his mind. He gives the order to the lights people like "Now you switch on the green and now you switch on the red." We actually used a lot of light effects for our drama. We had a very fast battle scene with lighting effects but it was not working out. And one day, just after the programme, Bokul-da asked everybody to wait and even the light people had to wait and he went through the sequence five or six times, so that it became clear to the lighting people what we were trying to do. So these people also worked tirelessly to make this programme happen. And they have always done



it and they will always do it in future. But it's not something that is seen by the audience who come on that day.

## THE 1<sup>ST</sup> DECEMBER PROGRAMME (2004) — A REVIEW

*Sunayana '79*

The programme at the Theatre on the 1<sup>st</sup> of December is always eagerly awaited from the month of October. The 2004 programme, called “Saviour Grace”, was not a play. It was a performance which included dance, recitation and music, depicting the story of the forces of Good against the powers of Evil. The text, or the script of the performance, was taken from *Savitri*.

Such a theme is simple enough as an idea but quite difficult to express when it has to be presented on stage. It takes on a daunting aspect when you know that you have to make a whole programme out of it, which should last at least an hour.

In a series of scenes held together by recitations, live and recorded, we saw the story unfold itself. At first, the forces of evil, headed by the Titan, establish themselves on the earth. After that a group of people, more evolved than the others, invoke the Mother of Might, asking Her to help them. In answer She sends forth three of Her emanations. Finally, there is a fight between one of these emanations, Mahakali and the Titan, very reminiscent of the fight between Durga and Mahishasura. Eventually the forces of Good establish themselves upon the Earth. The play ended with a passage from *Savitri*, read out by the Mother, accompanied by a projection of Her photo on the backdrop.

What was unusual about the 2004 1<sup>st</sup> De-

cember programme was that it was entirely a students’ production. The Third Year Knowledge students took it up on their own initiative and worked very hard to come up with this very convincing performance. As the work started, they included some older students from the School in their cast. They themselves directed and choreographed the recitations and dances. Of course, they turned to some of their teachers

for advice and guidance. Considering that they did not have any experience in doing this kind of work, their efforts and the result were truly commendable.

Not only were the individual performances finely executed, but the various elements of the group work were harmoniously co-ordinated. It is one thing to be a good dancer, but quite another to choreograph and co-ordinate the work of a

group of dancers. Similarly it is one thing to be able to recite poetry well, but quite another to be able to make a group recite correctly and together. The performance glided effortlessly from live recitations to dances and on to movements done to the accompaniment of recorded recitations.

The sincerity of their attitude and their attention to details shone through their performance and the audience was, right from the beginning, drawn into this atmosphere of concentrated invocation.



### *It is their sadhana.*

Yes. And there were others who worked a lot with them like Arun-bhai and Sukhi-bhai and others. The whole team.

### *What kind of help did you get from the Ashram*

### *departments?*

A lot of co-operation is required from the Ashram departments for the 1<sup>st</sup> of December programme. We may have good ideas, good dances and music, but without their co-operation it’s not possible to put up such a programme.

And anytime we needed help from any of the departments, we got a red carpet welcome — be it the Ashram Press, be it Praful-da's department, Srinivas-da's department, be it from Ashok-bhai (Acharya) or Chandrakant-bhai.

We worked a lot with Ashok-bhai. And he was always very patient with us. Pavak spent countless number of hours with him in the studio and he was always understanding towards us. He burnt countless numbers of CDs for us. Sometimes a 20 second piece needs four to five hours of work.



I mean that's the kind of work he put in for this program, that's the kind of help we received from people in the Ashram. Praful-bhai was very co-operative towards us. So was Srinivas-da. I also worked with Deepak-da of Srinivas-da's department. He was very prompt and cooperative. Chandrakant-bhai and Dinker-bhai were also very helpful. They helped us for the stage décor, to pin cloth and other things. I thank them all.

#### ***What kind of help did you get from the School?***

Well, firstly Manoj-da and Jhumur-di were extremely encouraging, extremely supportive and they trusted us. That's the most important thing, that they trusted students to take up a drama and they told us that this is a students' programme. Before starting work on the programme, we called Manoj-da and Jhumur-di to speak to us about how 1<sup>st</sup> December was in their time and what their experience was, so that they could guide us. So that started off very well.

#### ***Did you take any help for direction from anybody?***

Jhumur-di wanted our creativity to flourish so she gave us a lot of freedom. We started working on our own. By the end of October I realized that we needed help from a senior person who knows how to direct something from *Savitri*. We chose Cristof. Cristof never imposed anything on us. He helped us to bring out our ideas in a better way and he gave us confidence, so that we could do it on our own. He pushed us along and made us discover our own ideas in a better way. It was fun and educative working with him. He is so open to new ideas, new ways of looking at things. He makes a little change here and there and the whole thing looks completely new. And he also has a keen eye for perfection. He is always after perfection.

Shraddha practiced for the voice of the Mother of Might with Jhumur-di. She worked very hard with Jhumur-di. Manoj-da and Jhumur-di had told us to try to do new things and at the end we saw that it can work out and everything depends on the spirit with which you do it.



Shraddha too had always insisted on doing something totally new. She always said that we are going to break clichés. At that time some of us didn't understand what exactly she was trying to say, but after doing the whole drama what she had said made a lot of sense. Because that stayed in our minds. What she told us and what she insisted on throughout the script process, "Try to



do something new.” Just because somebody else had done *Savitri* in a certain way, it doesn’t mean that it has to be done again in that way.

***A lot of people at the end of the programme were saying that even though everybody didn’t register the details, there was a fine atmosphere. And building an atmosphere isn’t easy. Can you say something about that?***

One may not feel the atmosphere every day because it slowly builds as you work. On the 1<sup>st</sup> of December I felt that we were carried by the Mother. I mean it was concrete, there was no doubt about it. That day we weren’t our ordinary selves, we were something else, there was the concrete force and light surrounding us. That carried us through the programme.

On the 1<sup>st</sup> of December, Pavak was totally inspired, he was different from everybody else and that’s because he is so intense in whatever he does.

And quite a few people came over to the stage and asked “Where is Pavak?”

***Who were the others who helped you?***

One of them was Beena-ben.

***Beena Dharod?***

Yes, we discovered her in the month of November. We worked on the performance but the back stage work wasn’t ready and suddenly Beena-ben came and she added 200% to the whole thing. She worked tirelessly for the drama. Apart from her duty she helped us out in many ways. For example we had got a new idea and we wanted a net to be stitched around a big ring to try it out. She worked the whole day to build this thing and in the evening we came for practice and rejected the idea. Twelve hours of work were gone like that in a few seconds and she undid the whole thing. She had worked without lunch or a tea-break. She never cringed, and was always ready to help us.

There was also Neera-ben who did all our costumes. November is the month of Diwali and she has tons of work during Diwali, but she got our dresses ready on time. We are very grateful to her. Shilpa-di and Uttama-di also helped us a lot with dressing, make-up and many other things. I am sure there were many others who helped us and I’m not being able to take their names right now, but we are very grateful to all of them.

***Were there difficult times?***

Yes. I think on the 15th we had a run-through. We were not at all happy that day. A lot of things had turned out to be negative. Rajesh-bhai came to see the drama that day and he told us something that helped us a lot. He told us not to look at the negative side. He said that we were working very hard, in fact so hard, that we were only seeing the things that were not working out. That helped us a lot.

***On the personal level what was your experience? How did you overcome the challenges on the way?***

Well from the administrative and organiza-



tional point of view I think that a lot of planning is needed for this kind of thing. You know I was the panel-member for the Knowledge Programme. There everything is chalked out. It is a 5 weeks affair and thanks to Jugal-da everything is flawlessly organized. You can look through notes and get answers for any questions about dates etc. But for the 1<sup>st</sup> of December there are no guidelines to follow. You have to build from scratch if you have not done it before. You can always find out from people, but nobody has the full picture. You'll have to build that up with bits and pieces of information. Therefore a lot of planning is required. But your planning has to be flexible. With an open mind you need to track every day's progress and make fresh plans. A lot of people will have ideas. One has to accept what is good and reject the bad ones.

From the personal point of view, very concretely the 1<sup>st</sup> Dec is a sadhana, it is a sadhana. I grew so much through the whole process. Taking up the 1<sup>st</sup> December was a gift from the Mother. What I learnt from it is that work is sacred. That's something that I was trying to live throughout the whole process. And in the month of November I stopped everything else and focused only on

the 1<sup>st</sup> of December. Every day I would face new challenges. In the morning I would get up and ask myself "What's going to be today's difficulty?" Sometimes things were difficult but we were always helped by the Mother.

One thing that really helped was that I would get up every morning and tell myself: "I made mistakes in the past and I will make mistakes in the future but today I am going to give my best. Right from the morning till the evening whatever I do I am going to give my best." And I think that really helped me.

***What advice would you give to students who want to take up the 1<sup>st</sup> December?***

There is sometimes a tendency in students to choose people only from their classes. I would advice organizers to be open to students from all levels. But what is most important is to focus on their strengths. They should be very positive about each other. Recognising each other's talent will go a long way. A programme or for that any matter any work is achieved by everyone's contribution. Therefore everyone's contribution should be respected. One's mindset is so crucial. One should never close one's door to anyone. To say somebody is not capable of something is a serious mistake. Each one is capable of more than what the other person thinks. I would tell them to discover their limitless potential and possibilities. ❧



# MEDITATION IN THE EARLY YEARS

*Raman Reddy '75 presents texts with research notes tracing the history of collective meditation with Sri Aurobindo and the Mother.*

## MEDITATION WITH SRI AUROBINDO

In the year 1921 collective meditation was begun. At four in the evening the inmates of the house sat with Sri Aurobindo on the verandah of 41, Rue François Martin....

When Sri Aurobindo and the Mother moved to 9, Rue de la Marine in 1922 the same routine of informal evening sittings after meditation continued.

A.B. Purani

*Life of Sri Aurobindo*, (1978), pp. 178, 183

In those days [1921-24], we used to sit around the Master in chairs during the evening meditation time which lasted for about half an hour from 4.30 p.m. after initial talks on varied topics and things and events, from 4 p.m. to 4.30 p.m....

Sri Aurobindo was a magnetic dynamo radiating his light and force to the sadhakas that sat round him, if they were only calm and receptive. Every evening, as I sat before him, I felt the force and light coming from him with redoubled vigour and energy and it was always on the increase. I felt as if I was being rewound every evening at the meditation time, the given force to last till the next evening, to be reinforced again then with fresh force and light. The force was illimitable and I felt that the Master

was an inexhaustible storehouse of Divine Force and Light. The light that he gave us lightened up the corners of the whole being and began to show the dark spots and tendencies and defects to be worked upon by the Force for change. According to one's capacity, every one received the divine blessings from the Master. Others also used to have similar experiences....

It will not be out of place to state here a few more of my experiences I was having at the time. The Divine Shakti began to descend with greater force into the head centres and below and an arrangement of molecular structure began to take place in the brain and the navel region. A kind of electric drilling was taking place in the head and there was felt the breaking of cells and loosening of knots in the whole being. Channels for the flow

of Light and Force were being hewed out and what seemed to be metaphorical phrases when the Master wrote about the pouring of light and force, were becoming concrete experiences. As I sat before the Master for meditation, the whole being used to become numb as his Force began to work in me and fill my nerves with light

and force. I felt as if he was transmitting his divine force and light into me. In his presence, the Force was felt intensely and it began to work in the body day and night and was omnipresent. A supramen-



The verandah on the first floor of the Library House where Sri Aurobindo meditated with his disciples from 1922 to 1926



tal being is one in whose [company] “we feel ourselves in presence of a light of consciousness, a potency, a sea of energy, can distinguish and describe its free waves of action and quality, but not fix itself; and yet there is an impression of personality, the presence of a powerful being, a strong, high or beautiful recognisable Someone, a Person, not a limited creature of Nature but a Self or Soul, a Purusha,” as per the description of a Gnostic individual given by the Master in his magnum opus, *Life Divine*. The Master had become concretely that which he was describing above.

Kodanda Rama Rao

*At the Feet of the Master*, pp. 17, 25, 29-31

## THE NEWSPAPER MEDITATION

When I first came here in April 1921, Sri Aurobindo was living in the Guest House. When I came for good in June 1923, both Sri Aurobindo and the Mother were living in Library House. Sri Aurobindo used to see people in the morning in the verandah upstairs. At that time it was an open verandah, covered on three sides (east, west and south) with big curtains; the windows you now see on these sides were put in much later. The hall to its north, where Mother distributed Prosperity blessings, was then her Stores. The room to the north of this hall was Mother’s room (it was later to be my room). The corner room (to the east of the hall) was Sri Aurobindo’s. The room to the left, on the top of the staircase, was Datta’s (later Rajangam’s).

There were three doors (the upper halves had shutters) connecting the Stores and the verandah but only the middle one was used; the easternmost door was kept shut. Three chairs were placed along the eastern side of the verandah, leaving sufficient space between them. The centre one was for Sri Aurobindo, it had a small table in front. Along the southern side of the verandah, there was a row of chairs.

As I said, Sri Aurobindo used to meet visitors in the mornings. Amrita would come up with the newspaper and tell him who were due to meet him that day. Then Amrita would go down and announce the order in which people had to come up. After the interviews were over and while Sri

Aurobindo read the newspaper, those sadhaks who were permitted would sit there in meditation. Usually it was Tirupati, Rajangam, Kanai and myself. We used to sit on chairs. Now, who would not like to meditate in Sri Aurobindo’s presence?

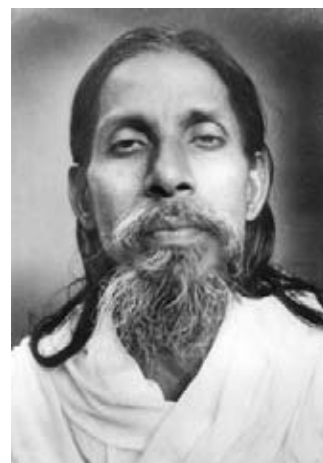
Champaklal

*Champaklal Speaks*, (2002), pp. 41-42

## Compiler’s Notes

*The “newspaper meditation” began at a period when Sri Aurobindo’s sadhana was so intense that he had stopped the collective meditation and evening talks in the Library House. A.B. Purani writes that the reason for discontinuing them was that it obliged Sri Aurobindo “to descend lower in the consciousness”. Therefore “it was considered better that Sri Aurobindo be allowed to complete the perfection of his physical consciousness; from this all the sadhaks would stand to gain.”*

*Many of the sadhaks were disturbed by the sudden loss of contact with their Master. Rajangam’s diary relates how Barin Ghose was sent by Sri Aurobindo to enquire as to who really missed the meditation with him. Rajangam replied that he definitely needed it and “felt perturbed” and that his “being simply ran after and sought for A.G.”. The next day (24.01.1924) he went and sat on the stairs leading to the first floor of the Library House where Sri Aurobindo lived. He waited from 8.30 to 10.30 in the morning and was very disappointed when he could not meet Sri Aurobindo because of some visitors who had come to see him. One of the visitors that day was Dilip Kumar Roy — his interview with Sri Aurobindo on this day lasted about 45 minutes and is published in his book, *Among the Great*. The following day (25.01.1924) Rajangam received Sri Aurobindo’s blessings after which he pleaded*



Rajangam

for “his constant touch and presence” due to which “many coarse things” in him had been “rendered fine”. That night he paced in his room and “felt the need of going to A.G. and being with him”. The gap was felt of “not having the opportunity to be with him in the afternoons. And everywhere in the atmosphere, all around him and within the being, [he] searched [for] him, ran after his presence and touch”. This he conveyed to A.G. on Saturday morning (26.01.1924) before requesting him again for meditation. Sri Aurobindo conceded and said he would make the necessary arrangements with Barin, who later announced Sri Aurobindo’s new schedule:

There will be morning meditation at the time of reading his papers. People can see him before that time. After some time he may come for a collective meditation in the evening twice a week and he was making an experiment at present. That he will come out at 6.15 p.m. however for talk to keep personal touch with others.

The “newspaper meditations” began on 27.01.1924 and the evening talks were resumed on 30.01.1924.

## MEDITATION WITH THE MOTHER

Three or four sadhikas (lady disciples) began to go to the Mother for meditation. After a few days sadhaks as well were allowed to go to her for meditation.

02.09.1926 A.B. Purani  
*Life of Sri Aurobindo* (1978), p. 209

In Library House, meditations were held in the verandah upstairs with people sitting around Sri Aurobindo.

After some time Mother started a group meditation in Sri Aurobindo’s room. She used to sit on Sri Aurobindo’s cot. This meditation was meant only for women but Mother herself asked me to join saying I could do my work afterwards. People used to joke that Champaklal is a woman. But I continued. And, you will be surprised to know, gradually, one by one, all asked for permission to

join, and meditations with Sri Aurobindo automatically stopped.

Champaklal  
*Champaklal Speaks*, (2202), pp. 73-74

**Sri Aurobindo:** Mother has told you about your taking part in their meditation?

**Pavitra:** I think I misunderstood. I thought she meant my meditation with the group here with you.

**Sri Aurobindo:** No. With them.

16.10.1926 Pavitra  
*Bulletin*, November 1971, p. 30

## Compiler’s Notes

A.B. Purani’s note of 2 September 1926 is the earliest reference to the Mother’s collective meditations. When the Mother started meditating with a few sadhikas in Sri Aurobindo’s room, the meditations with Sri Aurobindo had not yet stopped. Thus, for some time, both Sri Aurobindo and the Mother meditated with their respective groups of disciples. According to Haradhan Bakshi’s diary, Sri Aurobindo’s collective meditations continued right up to the Siddhi Day. The Mother then took charge of all the disciples and presided over the collective meditations.

Champaklal was the first sadhak to join the Mother’s group for collective meditation which, in the beginning, was meant only for ladies. Pavitra and Rajani Palit followed suit in the month of October and Haradhan Bakshi in November. Thus there was a growing recognition of the Mother as a spiritual guide among the disciples even before the Siddhi Day, so that it was not difficult for them to accept her as such after Sri Aurobindo retired. It should be noted that in the case of Pavitra and Haradhan Bakshi whose records are available to us, the Mother first meditated individually with them before permitting them to attend her collective meditations. They first took permission through Sri Aurobindo to meditate individually with her and found it so beneficial that they asked the Mother’s permission to attend her collective meditations. ❧

# QUIZ TIME!

*Here are the questions for this issue. Send us your answers by email...*

1. What was the Japanese name Mother gave to herself when she was living in Japan?
  2. What work was given to Tehmi-ben when she joined the Ashram?
  3. What important event took place in Sri Aurobindo's life in Kashmir?
  4. Finish the quote: "Une vie sans but..."
  5. Who was called "My little smile" by the Mother ?
- 

## ANSWERS TO THE PREVIOUS ISSUE'S QUESTIONS:

1. The name of Mother's own mother was Mathilde.
2. "Il ya une grande beauté dans la simplicité."
3. The spiritual significance of the flower of the tree behind the School stage is "Patience". Anybody who has ever directed a play knows the importance of this quality.
4. The painting on the Eastern wall of the Meditation Hall was done by Pramode Kumar.
5. The Mother's physical age when Auroville was inaugurated was 90. Has there ever been anyone in the world who has started a new project as enormous as a new township at the age of 90?

*Why should earthquakes occur by some wrong movement of man? When man was not there, did not earthquakes occur? If he were blotted out by poison gas or otherwise, would they cease? Earthquakes are a perturbation in Nature due to some pressure of forces; frequency of earthquakes may coincide with a violence of upheavals in human life but the upheavals of earth and human life are both results of a general clash or pressure of forces, one is not the cause of the other.*

Sri Aurobindo

(SABCL: Vol. 22, pp. 492-493)

