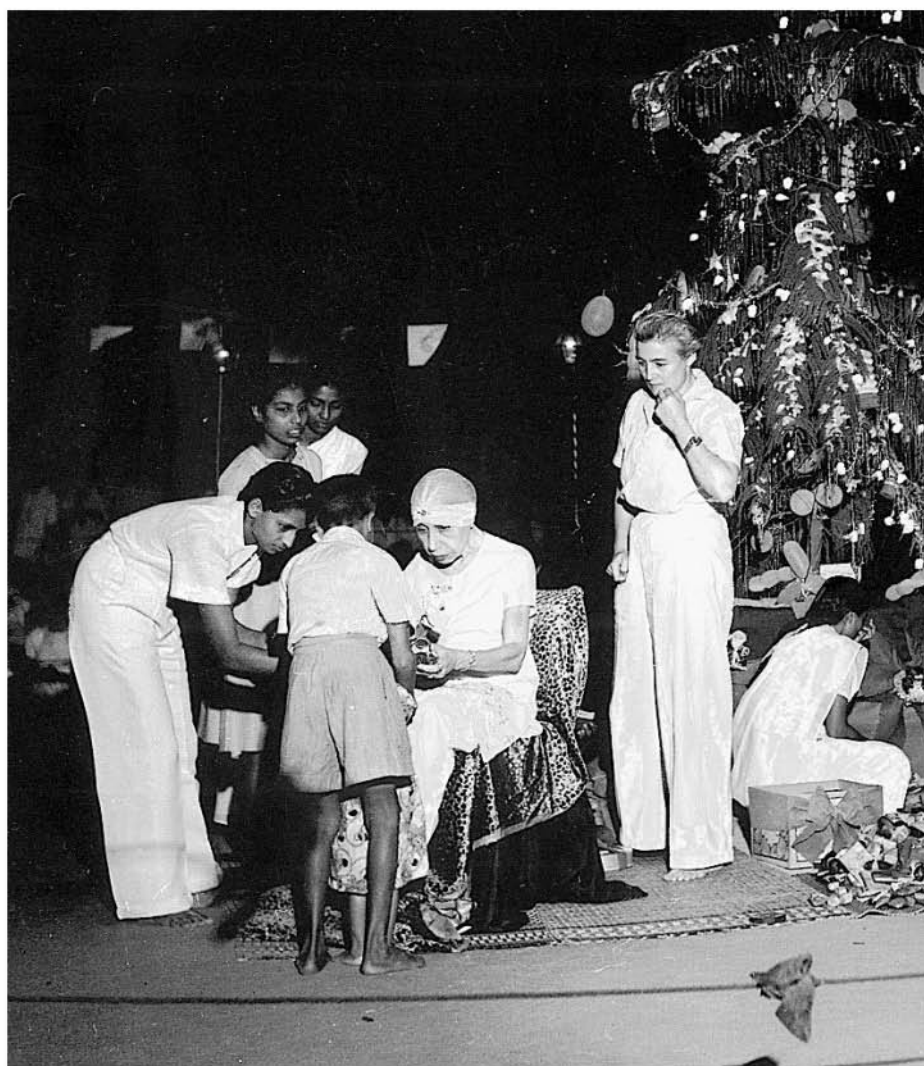


The Golden Chain

Alumni Journal of Sri Aurobindo International Centre of Education



Christmas in the Ashram

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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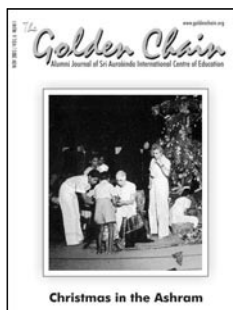
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Christmas 1952: Mother distributing gifts in the Playground. Mona Pinto is standing behind her.

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Class of 2005

The Golden Chain

Alumni Journal of S.A.I.C.E.

Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Pondicherry, INDIA.



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THE EDITORS' PAGE

by Sunayana Panda '79

When we wrote about the tsunami about ten months back it seemed as if we were writing about the calamity of the decade. The alarming truth is that since then almost every month some disaster or the other has been happening in one part of the world or the other. What is uncanny is the regularity with which one is followed by the other.

The world entered 2005 only four days after the tsunami had killed thousands in places as far apart as Thailand, Sri Lanka, India and even the eastern coast of Africa. Since then there have been floods, torrential rains, hurricanes and now a killer earthquake. As if this wasn't enough, these natural calamities have been interspersed with bomb blasts which have killed innocent people in places as far flung as London, Ayodhya, Bali, Iraq, Kashmir and Delhi. And now we read about the fury of the Paris riots. Suddenly no corner of the world seems to be safe from danger of one kind or the other. Hardly has the world recovered from the shock of the Kashmir earthquake that the news of an imminent pandemic of bird flu is beginning to appear in the media.

One feels like looking up at the sky and asking "What's going on?" Why is Nature suddenly acting in such a violent manner? Has she decided to punish us? Is she left with no other choice? Is she trying to tell us something? We are so lost in the maze of concrete and steel that we have forgotten that she is still all around us and she still nourishes us. If global warming is upon us today it is due to our own greed and our own refusal to see the consequences of our actions. The process of cause and effect is there but spread out over so long a span of time that we cannot see it.

If you open the pages of Mother's *Prayers and Meditations* you can see what a close contact she had with the forces of Nature. Her occult sight could see what is beyond the ordinary vision. Has she not revealed to us the secret codes of the plant

world? She could read the message of the flowers the way we read a book. She could teach us how to communicate with the sun. She could see the mischievous beings who were behind a storm and she could hear what the spirit of the trees were saying to her.

Perhaps we too should try and see this other, more subtle, reality. How ironic it is that the early man, all over the world, worshipped nature. He knew with his instinct that she was to be revered. With all our mental development we seem to have become more ignorant than the man who lived centuries ago and who remembered to thank the sun for the light and the rivers for their life-giving waters. The early man wanted to please the forces of nature out of fear; our respect should be born out of our understanding of them.

Indeed, behind most of the natural calamities as well as all the bomb blasts there seems to be one real cause: human ignorance. When one sees the statues of Shiva in his form of Nataraja, just under his foot is that rotund figure which he is trampling with his mighty foot. That's the very personification of Ignorance. No, ignorance is not the lack of something; it would seem that it is in itself an entity. And what a havoc he is creating!

In this issue we have gathered some facts about how Christmas came to be celebrated in the Ashram. For the Mother it was the ancient ritual of celebrating the return of the Light after the winter solstice. As the year draws to a close, let us disconnect ourselves for a while from our television sets and newspapers and re-connect with those invisible forces. Maybe if we listened to Nature with our hearts she would not need to communicate her message in such a furious way. Remember those lines from *Prayers and Meditations*? On 7th April 1917 Mother ends her page with these words:

"Then the cherry-tree whispered in my ear:

'It is in the cherry-blossom that lies the remedy for the disorders of the spring.'" ❧



ASHRAM HINDI

The August '05 issue of GC arrived just before Durga Puja. As always it brought a whiff of fresh air to our otherwise worry-strewn lifestyle! I was delighted, to say the least, and laughed as I ran through the "Ashram Hindi" article and read aloud certain portion to my daughters. It certainly brought back wonderful memories that are now almost forgotten.... I still remember how Bhabudi (our beloved Bhabatarinidi) was once so exasperated with us because we used to shorten all names (i.e. Punjabi — *Punju*, Gujarati — *Guju*, Marwari — *Méro* etc) that she said she would call us *Bangu*! We laughed but somehow that name did not stick then; but now people often call a Bengali film a *Bong* film or a Bengali singer/Bengali actress is a *Bong* singer/*Bong* Actress...

I guess Ashram Hindi was born out of necessity rather than design. I could speak Hindi

rather well (we lived in Kanpur for more than eight years) and when I reached Pondy I found to my utter amazement that even the Hindi-speaking friends were talking in a funny way. For instance there was no use of the verb *Hai*! Everyone was using Ashram Hindi! My good Hindi suffered but I happily embraced this wonderfully free language.

I feel envious of those who had such a great time at Tapovan. (But please, please *kindly* mention their names under the photos. Excepting a few it's so difficult to recognise them!) I wish we had such reunions here in Kolkata. There are many ex-students living here and I'm sure everyone reads GC regularly. So we can easily organise something like the Tapovan reunion. Guys! What do you say? Anyone interested?

Finally, I liked Raman's *Sawal* and Sunayana's *Jawab*. We, ex and present students, are *badnaam* that we are Snobs. Why? Search me!

But you are really doing a fantastic job. Keep it up!

Indrani '77
Kolkata

CONTACT ME

The news of Chhote not being anymore is on my mind. He was junior to me, his brother Bade Kake being my classmate. But we were together in many scrapes, quite often at loggerheads. I also came to know of

the passing of Nirmal Jhunjhunwala, a close classmate.

Since some time in my last visits I find somebody or the other from among my teachers and friends have passed on and it is like a nail in my own coffin being readied. It is not a pleasant thought but I suppose the inevitable passing on is nearing me too.

This is also the reason that I am trying to re-establish contacts with my old pals, and new ones are always welcome. The Ashram family is the only reality for me. Yet I find that most people in the Ashram are so well adjusted and self-contained that they really don't need anybody. This shows — sometimes one senses that people don't want to be disturbed.

Well, I love being disturbed. Perhaps all those friends of mine who may not need me may please take note that I need them and they can communicate with me at my address: s164gk1@yahoo.com

Pradeep Mahesh (Maheshwari)
New Delhi

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
Published letters may be edited for reasons of space, clarity and civility.

WORK ON THE LAKE LAND

On Sunday, the 14th of August 2005, a short visit was organized to our land near the Lake Estate in order to plant some saplings and get some basic development work started. This was also an occasion to get an idea of the topography and the surroundings so that a long term development programme can be worked out in a systematic manner.

A volunteer group was formed which suggested some points for the first phase of the work which include: making a broad plan for the landscaping of the entire area, making arrangements for getting water & electricity, constructing a basic residence and shelter for a watchman and workers. If any of our members have ideas or proposals for the development of the land, we will be very happy to have them for consideration.



VCD ON SAICE AND REUNION AVAILABLE

The Video CD made by Shivashankar '98 during the 2003 reunion is now available. The CD has two short films on it. The first is titled, "A Walk Through Sri Aurobindo International Centre of Education", and the second "The Golden Chain Fraternity Reunion 2003" [see interview with Shivashankar on page 12 for more details].

The VCD is available from the P.E.D. Office or from The Golden Chain Fraternity on a donation of Rs 150/- that will go to the Films Division of the Ashram under the P.E.D. Those who would like to have it mailed to them can write to us (The Golden Chain Fraternity, Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Pondicherry - 605002) or email us (goldenchain@vsnl.net). Having the VCD mailed will cost:

In India: Rs. 200 (Rs. 150 for the VCD + Rs. 50 for packing and postage)

Abroad: Rs. 225 (Rs. 150 for the VCD + Rs. 75 for packing and postage)

The cheque (payable at par)/DD/MO can be sent in favour of "The Golden Chain Fraternity".

WELCOMING THE CLASS OF 2005

In what is now becoming an annual tradition, The Golden Chain Fraternity met the outgoing students (class of 2005) and welcomed them into the Fraternity's fold. They were told about the activities of the Fraternity and the spirit in which it functions and were encouraged to participate. The meeting, held on the 1st of November 2005, ended with the distribution of a small memento.



WHO WAS HE?

In our previous issue, one of the boys in the photograph with Michael Zelnick on page 5 had remained unidentified. We can now tell you that the person (fourth from left in the front row) is Pramod.

TEHMI-BEN

Tehmi-ben passed away on 1st December 2004 and we would like to bring out a collection of articles in her memory. Please send us your write-ups by the end of January.

AN EMERGENCY IN L.A.

Dilip Patel '76H

The phone rang early one June morning in Boston, USA and my niece Pinky answered it. I heard alarmed sounds and came to the stairway to investigate; I saw Pinky slumped on the steps and she kept saying “oh no, oh no” into the receiver.

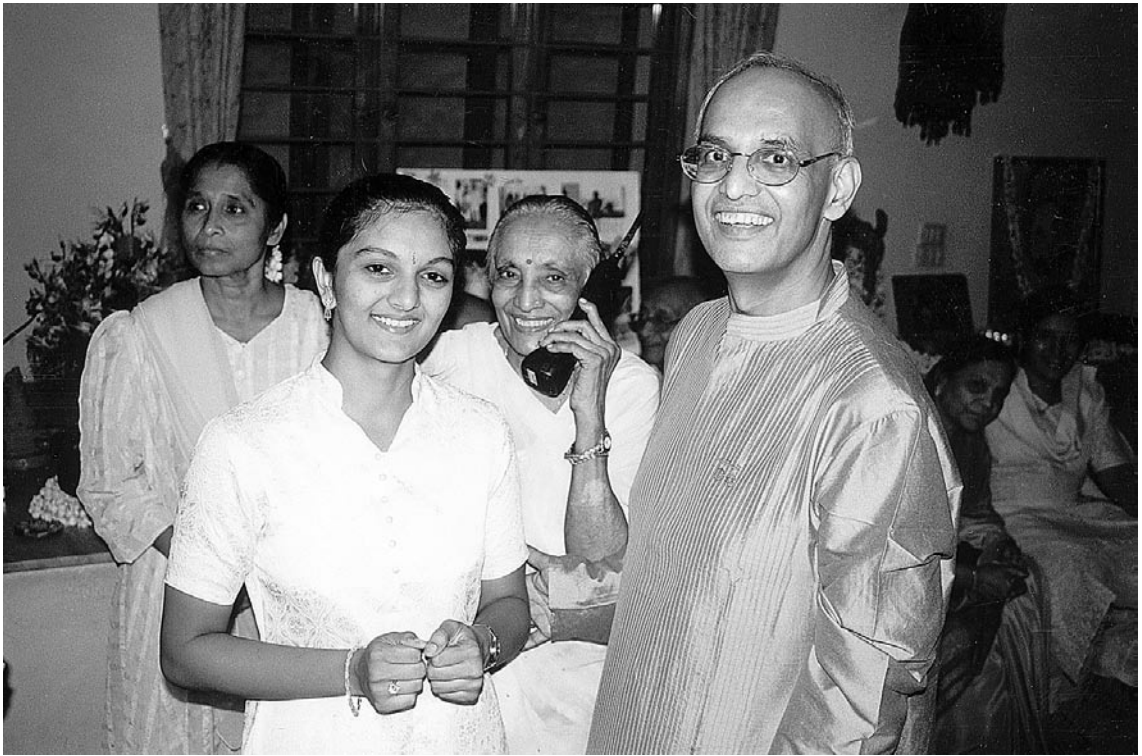
I had come to Boston to organise an exhibition of my paintings at a gallery there and was staying with the in-laws of my elder brother Kirit '74H. Kirit's wife, Manjubhabhi was visiting her sister in Florida and Kirit was on a business trip in California. Nothing, however, had prepared us for what followed in the next few days.

Bhabhi was on the line to Pinky and asked for me. She explained in a calm voice that Kirit had had a massive heart attack in Los Angeles and that I should rush there with Pinky and her brother Ashish by the next available flight. Anyone who has travelled in the States will know that distances are vast there and even if we left Boston right away we would reach only after a whole day's flying! We did manage to get an early flight but it meant a stop in Las Vegas and so we did not get to the hospital in LA till late the following day.

We found Kirit in a terrible state. His body had borne the cardiac arrest but it was devastated. It was as if Kirit had lost twenty kilos overnight. The attack had come early in the morning at 2 am, and Kirit had had the presence of mind to call for an ambulance rather than a doctor. Ambulances in America are fitted to deal with heart attacks and other emergencies and this decision was probably a factor in saving Kirit's life. After the emergency procedures were undertaken in the ambulance, Kirit had been taken to Huntingdon Memorial Hospital in Pasadena where the doctors had performed an angioplasty and inserted medicated stents that opened and enlarged his stricken arteries.

As we stood by Kirit's bed, we saw that he was monitored, and a nurse was present around the clock. Kirit had resigned calmly to his fate and requested me not to pester the nurse with too many questions as the worst was already over and that we should maintain peace in a spirit of gratitude for the Mother's constant help. The nurse took us outside the room and gave us the details. We were eager to know how many arteries were affected and how the whole operation was performed etc. She was a middle aged American lady, had seen pretty gruesome sights and was probably hardened, had dealt with heart patients on a routine basis and knew the pattern of events well. However what she related to us in Kirit's case came as a complete surprise, and that too from an American (Westerners are not given to emotional outpourings in public) and her words immediately made us feel deeply a sense of gratitude for the Mother's Grace in times of stress.

The nurse said that she had been in the business some forty years and never had she prayed to God to save the life of any of her hundreds of patients. Something in the way Kirit calmly subjected himself to the often traumatic medical procedures had opened her to God and virtually for the first time (the last time she had prayed was in Kindergarten!) she prayed for Kirit's life on the way to work in the car. As Kirit was a model patient (we saw how violently the other patients could react in the wards) she kept asking us about where he had acquired his composure and the quiet confidence with which he faced events. She was genuinely interested to know where Kirit had got these qualities. We explained that it was a place deep in the south of India called Pondicherry where, at the Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Kirit had spent his formative years, and we filled in details about the Ashram.



Kirit at his 50th birthday party after having recovered from a massive heart attack.

In the days that followed we were witness to many minor miracles, too numerous to mention here, but one event needs special mention as it is so close to Kirit's (now healing) heart! It was soon after we had left Kirit alone in his room after one of our visits that whilst still awake, he felt Ganesha, the elephant-headed God he had loved since childhood, come to his bedside. This endearing God, big ears flapping and of grey skin, seeing that one of his devotees needed him in a time of crisis had come to bless him! Kirit was of course elated as a result and we were all happy for him. So it is not just the Mother but *ishta devatas* too who show that they are close!

There was a deluge of flowers and fruit from people all over the world, none of which Kirit was allowed to keep in the room. However the therapy dogs were most welcome! It seems patients respond positively to these furry friends. I have nothing but gratitude for the way Americans run their hospitals, though of course it comes at a price, and Kirit recovered well under all this expensive care and was soon allowed home.

After a few weeks of recuperation in the US and the UK, Kirit returned to his home base Pondicherry for his 50th birthday, which we all celebrated in style, especially as it marked a new life for him. ☸

Remember that the Mother is always with you.

Address Her as follows and She will pull you out of all difficulties:

"O Mother, Thou art the light of my intelligence, the purity of my soul, the quiet strength of my vital, the endurance of my body. I rely on Thee alone and want to be entirely Thine. Make me surmount all obstacles on the way."

The Mother (Vol 15, page 230)

HARD RAIN

This year saw a number of natural calamities. One of them was the flooding of Mumbai. In a span of 24 hours Mumbai received 944 mm (37.2 inches) of rainfall — one of the highest ever recorded. Rohaen '01, who works for a software firm in the city, recounts his experience of that day.

Mumbai is a city that never sleeps, a city so densely populated that people are ready to travel for more than 3 hours from their homes to work and then back. That Tuesday, the 26th of July, the city didn't sleep, nor did people stop travelling. There was only a little twist in the tale....

It started to drizzle in the morning when I left for office at around 10 am. I cursed the sky because it wasn't raining hard, "Damn you rain, pour down hard on us or else don't rain at all, but just don't drizzle down like this." Well I don't know how many that morning uttered similar words, but I am sure the echoes were loud enough for the gods in the sky to hear them.

I carried on with my daily schedule until at around 11 am I noticed a completely drenched girl walk into the office. That's when I pulled up the shutters to notice the rain pouring down hard onto the road. I smiled to myself, "Ah... that's what I call rain." There was a lot of work pending and a [software] code drop to be made to a client, so without any further ado I went back to my desk and continued with my work as usual.

Soon it was 2 pm. Boy! I was hungry. I went up to our canteen to have my lunch and it was still pouring down diligently, heavily. Someone then came into the dining room and remarked, "Infosys (Pune) is closed today due to the torrential rains; their entire ground floor was flooded". Instinctively I wished the same for us.

At around 3:30 pm the main lights in the office were switched off and some of us were asked to switch off our PCs. I had a final delivery to be made and so I continued with my work.

By 4 everyone had stopped working, they were talking about the rains and how the ground floors of many buildings in Mumbai were flooded. Most of them were ready to leave for their homes. This was unusual — generally people leave late, at around 9 pm. The rains got harder by the minute and by 5 pm the office was pretty much empty.

Fortunately for me I had completed my work



by 5:30, and soon after, the lights in my office and in Mumbai went out. My friend remarked, "Come *yaar*... let's go to my place. Later on you can leave for your home." So we packed up, went up to the canteen to have our snacks before leaving for my friend's house. During the snacks we heard people saying that the rains had flooded many roads and that everyone had to walk to reach home. My

home being 15 minutes walking distance from office, there was really nothing to worry about. My friend and I left the office at 6:15 for his house which was also 10 minutes from the office, though in the opposite direction to my home.

On the road it was raining cats and dogs. There were shops flooded by water: some shop-owners were closing down, others were pouring buckets full of water out from their shops. There were people all around in the streets walking to reach their homes. There were rickshaws, autos, cars, and buses stranded on the road. Everywhere people were telling each other, "Don't go from this road, it is flooded chest-high." We reached my friend's house at around 6:30 to find that his entire ground floor was submerged in knee-deep water. We went up the stairs to his room. We chatted till around 7 pm and then at 7:15 I left for my home. By now the knee-deep water at the foot of

the stairs had risen to my thighs. There was ankle-deep water on the roads and I said to myself, "This is fun." It reminded me of the time when as a kid I used to jump in the puddles and ride my bicycle right through the potholes in the rain. I merrily walked along towards my house. The water was slowly creeping up to my knees as I approached my house. It was around 7 minutes away to my house when suddenly I froze at the sight in front of me.

There were ropes tied all along the road and across. For some reason the current was stronger in that area and people were holding the ropes and wading through the waist-deep water to cross. A bolt of lightning woke me up from my shocked and frozen state. Now I was scared and it was already dark (remember no electricity!). But I could still make out people moving around me and walking to the ropes to go past the running water.

There was a second flash of lightning and my mind started to work. I couldn't decide whether to go back to my friend's apartment or to wade through this water and reach home, because my house was very near.

A third flash and I moved ahead to grab the dangling rope to my home and safety. Mid-way through the current I smiled, though I didn't laugh this time. This was getting fun. I actually thought that I was in a movie. The rain was pouring down hard on us, the current was strong below my legs, we had to hold on tightly to the rope to move forward and there were people all around shouting and telling you to move forward and step at the right places. It felt like I was Indiana Jones, or Samuel L. Jackson in *Hard Rain*. The final turning which was about 100 meters away from my home had come and to my utter astonishment there was no rope leading my way, and so I stopped. Someone from the side shouted "*Kahaan jaana hai?*" I pointed in the direction of the road which had no ropes attached, and he replied "*Yahaan se aa jao, koi problem nahi hai.*" Thanks to the smile, I had come back to my senses, and I knew what re-

mained to be done to reach home. I left the safety of the rope and moved to one side of the street, along the walls of the buildings. The current was not as strong there, though making progress was not easy. Constantly checking my footing, I slowly and steadily worked my way forward towards my home. Some others realizing that I was able to



move forward even though there were no ropes, followed me. I waited for them, advised them to stick close so that we could help each other if the need arose, and continued on my way forward. It wasn't long before I reached the gate to the colony where I stayed.

I was out of the water, panting and tired, but smiling. And yes, I did laugh and say, "Not bad, I made it, I made it home." There were quite a few people standing near the gate or gazing from their windows waiting for their sons, daughters, husbands, wives, and parents to return home safely. A few were frantically dialing their mobiles to reach their loved ones, but were unable to get through as almost all the networks were down. It made me feel sad. I wanted to help them but couldn't, and didn't know how to.

I freshened up with a good bath, and made my bed. I walked up to my window and gazed out — there were no cars, no buses, only people treading their way back home on the Western Express Highway. Tonight too this city, Mumbai, would not sleep, but there was a difference this time. I looked up at the sky and thanked God I was safe and prayed that He stop this torrential downpour. I am certain that this time He heard me and all the others LOUD and CLEAR. ❧

LODI ASHRAM

Lopamudra '94 tells us of the Sri Aurobindo Sadhana Peetham in California

If you drive inland from the San Francisco bay, away from that blue and windy expanse of the Pacific Ocean, you will observe the land flattening out after 50 miles. Vast cultivated fields will replace hills and soon you will see rows of lush green vineyards and white and pink cherry blossoms. Get into one of the inlets through the fields, go up a hundred metres and round the corner you will see the welcome sign of "Sri Aurobindo Sadhana Peetham". It is a plot of about three acres, full of plants and ancient trees, hanging oranges and peaches looking like ornaments, lotus ponds, and a vegetable garden. A white owl may circle over you and return to its grandfather walnut tree. You might see a tea-coloured cat meditating on the lawn. Pass by the swimming pool and enter the leafy garden

gate. Such a pretty sight will meet you! It's a garden in the shape of Sri Aurobindo's symbol; each section marked by flowers of different colours, and in the centre is a lotus pond. All around are roses splashed from God's favourite palette, as big and pretty as cherub faces. But what are you still doing here? Can't you hear them calling? Sprint past the volleyball court, the tree house and reach their playground. Three muzzles are barking at you across the fence and are wondering at your delay. They are Madhu, Lila and Umati, three friendly dogs. Lila will jump in joy, all four legs in the air. Madhu will sidle close by, keeping her nose on the ground, not to miss that scurrying rat. Umati will try to place her paws on your shoulder, but duck, because she is a foot taller than you and

possibly heavier too. Her paws are as big as your hands. The trio will entreat you not to leave, but surely you want to visit the ashram. Go up the few wooden steps and come face to face with the delight of your being. You have returned home.

The altar has full-sized photos of the Mother and Sri Aurobindo, and at Their feet are vases of garden flowers and burning candles. The wall on the southern side is of glass, and you can see the spread of vines and then the highway beyond it. Light floods in illuminating the orchids dangling on their pots, and lays its fingers on the books across the room. All around are other emblems of purity: an idol of Ganesha, a painting of Sri Krishna, Babaji's photo, the Auroville calendar. When you come here disturbed, you get peace; when you are sad you feel happy. You can sense

all the love that has been collecting from so many people for so many years. You are in touch with the beautiful, the good, the sacred.

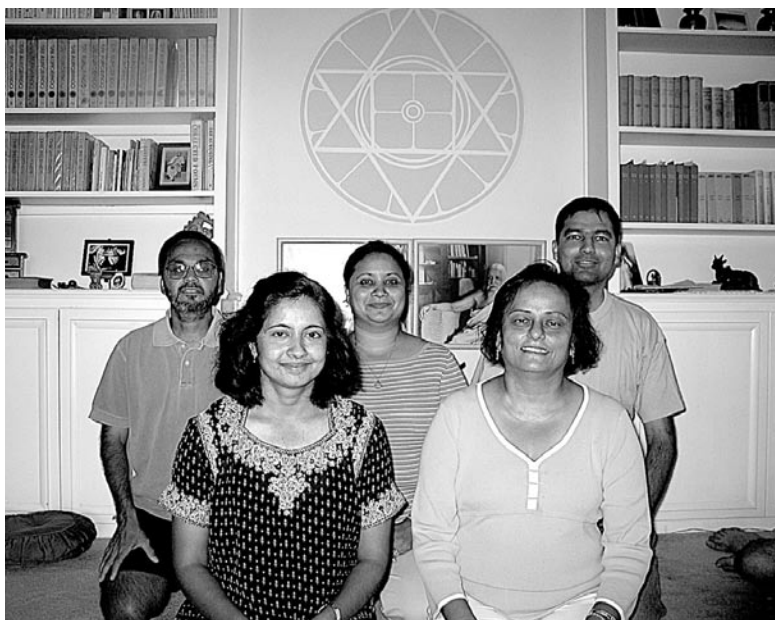
Ten years back Dakshina and Vishnu-Bhai, the founders of the Lodi Ashram moved from near Los Angeles to Lodi, from southern to central California. Over the years many others have become ashramites for a while and have lived and worked and prayed together. The ashram building was a farmhouse until it was bought by "Sri Aurobindo Sadhana Peetham" and transformed. For the first many months, indignant nails scratched at the ceiling and drummed in the basement. In the house every nook is tastefully decorated — the meditation hall, the dining space with the oak wood furniture, the guest rooms upstairs,



the gym in the basement, the library, the kitchen. Everywhere you see paintings, photos, messages and feel Their presence. The ashram has a store, called Auromère, which sells books of Mother, Sri Aurobindo and devotees, ayurvedic products, incense and other such articles. Much of the work of the ashramites is to maintain the Auromère store — collecting shipment from seaports, unpacking, posting orders, inventory and book keeping. Other works include looking after the garden, caring for the dogs and the cat, maintaining the house and office. There are weekly study circles, and monthly gatherings. Some time back the Auroville International USA office moved here.

When the ashram shifted to Lodi, the devotees living around central coastal California came up to see the place and fell in love with it. So they decided to return every month for a day of collective dedication. I look forward to these days when I can be close to my inner being in that wonderfully uplifting ambience, and meet so many others on the same path of aspiration. A theme is chosen for the retreat as well as facilitators for it, months in advance. We have study sessions, discussions, meditations, chanting, karma yoga projects, potluck meals and volleyball. For karma yoga we go to the warehouse often to open shipments, or arrange books and incense in their right place, inflate shampoo bottles, or there is gardening, fence building and painting, cooking. Some past retreat themes were on the psychic being, Mother's Agenda, *Savitri*, Birth of Light, Bhakti, flowers and their significance. Once we had an inspiring poetry retreat where many of us blossomed into poets. In a karma yoga retreat we emptied the pond of its muck, planted sunflowers, brought down an old shed. There was a physical yoga retreat where we learnt ballet, asanas and a

drill which we performed on Darshan Day. There are Aurofamily reunions once a quarter where the Ashram meets Auroville. We listen to stories of planting trees, birth of the solar kitchen, concretizing of the Matrimandir. There are some ex-students in the group, and sometimes we break into SAICE dialect — “as good as Dining Room dal”, “don't give phanki”, “she is dood-bhaat”. Sometimes we stay overnight a day before Darshan. In



At the Lodi Ashram. Back Row: Chandresh '79, Mahashweta '91, Sadamahan '97H.
Front Row: Lopamudra '94, Kalpana '84.

summer it is thrilling to sleep in a tent outdoors and hear the coyotes howl and the owl screech. Meditation in the Symbol Garden on Darshan mornings with Sunil-da's music is a poignant experience.

Moving to California was for me an opening up of the skies. I did not know where Mother was bringing me until I was there on the court playing basketball with my former coach, Prabuddha. Then Lodi ashram was shown to me and there I met so many kindred spirits, come to Her by different roads. I cannot express my gratitude, but only marvel at Her works. We don't need to plan our life or fret about our choices; our sweet and mighty Mother has gathered to Her bosom Her children's lives. ❧

DORTOIR WORKING GROUP

As told by Parul-di ('61) to Sujata Jauhar '84

Everyone in the Ashram knows the Dortoir. It is an institution almost as old as our School. It is our first boarding, started by the Mother on 15th January 1945. It has seen innumerable children come and go, and by God's grace may it go on forever. For

it has always been a very precious part of the children's lives. It has effectively moulded their characters, teaching them lasting values and inspiring in them a strong sense of unity and belonging.

To commemorate its golden jubilee in 1995, inmates

past and present gathered here from across the world, to put up a cultural programme as an offering to the Mother and Sri Aurobindo. Not only was the cultural programme a huge success, but

the feeling of unity among the boarders, the concrete sense of the Mother's presence, the joy of reunion, were all such enriching experiences that everyone wanted to maintain some kind of contact. But instead of organising meetings and 'get-together parties', someone hit upon a unique idea:

that of offering their collective, physical work to the Mother. "The joy of service and the joy of inner growth through works is the sufficient recom-

pense of the selfless worker." It was an idea that was readily accepted by all members, young and old.

The 29th of March, an important day in our Ashram calendar, is remembered as the day when the Mother first met Sri Aurobindo. The Guest House, where Sri Aurobindo lived from 1913 to 1922, is the location of their meeting. The room where he lived is now maintained as

a meditation hall. Every year it is opened to devotees for Darshan on this particular day. On the 26th of March 1995, a Sunday before the Darshan of the 29th, the members of Dortoir met for their very first assignment: to clean up the meditation hall in preparation for the Darshan.

That was ten years ago. From then to this day, the 'Dortoir Working Group', as the team has been christened, has held on to its ideal and most of its members. In fact its ranks have swollen over the years, to include members who were not boarders but who enjoy work. One Sunday of every month

is dedicated to cleaning, in any department that needs a hand. Thus they have been to Udavi, Senteurs, the School, Batik, the Paper-Factory, Lake





and the Weaving department, to name only a few. Through the years, they have passed through many Ashram departments, like a magic wand working a transformation.

All set to sweep into the next decade, the group is focussed on one aim: to serve the Mother. 'Work is the body's prayer' is an ideal that this body of workers understands and practices.

We asked the members to express in a few words their experience with the Dortoir Working Group. This is what some of them had to say:

Lata Jauhar: Irrespective of age, we do every kind of work happily.

Raja: It is a great pleasure to work together.

Uma S.: I like collective work and eagerly wait for the day to come.

Anuben: This work started with the idea of bringing cleanliness and order, but it has outgrown that now. The group has become a family and there is comradeship.

Ila Patel: I love collective work and look forward to it.

Surabhi: I look forward to collective, organised work by the Dortoir group. I have always

THE DORTOIR GROUP

The Dortoir (cleaning) group, a wonderful creation Six years ago, invented, to improve human relation.

Not, as you may think, just by their meeting,
Having nice talks, and disperse after eating —
No! they have a higher, greater aim

Which is indeed not just an empty claim:
Ashram departments are their meeting places
Where you see them all working with smiling faces!
Moving in corridors, at stairs, in rooms
They sweep away all dust with coco-brooms.
By cleaning, what since decades could not be done,
Their action makes cockroaches and spiders run!
Creepers, bushes, and plants in the small yard
Are cut and trimmed by working hard.

"Worry not," the expert does console me,
"Soon fresh leaves are growing, you will see!"
The Mango tree is cleared of wild and useless wood,
And loads of dry leaves removed — it looks so good!
After busy hours of work and its delight,
It's the lunch at noon that does unite
The Dortoir group, enjoying the togetherness.
After all we know, that "Cleanliness is godliness"!

Mrs. Sharma (Hablik)

enjoyed variety in work, since childhood, and I love to be a part of this enthusiastic group of selfless workers.

Parul: This collective group-work has taught me to put into practice perfection, regularity, and right attitude in doing no

matter what kind of work we are given. An offering to the Mother of our inner and outer capacities, so that we could follow the true path with dedication, sincerity, and constant remembrance. ❧



THE PARTICIPANTS

Chitra J., Promesse J., Lata J., Anuben, Kusumben (Senteurs), Tulsa U., Sudha U., Lilaben, Urmila Raghavan, Arvindbabu, Raja, Sudhir, Ramrao, Asit, Harakchand, Brajendra, Rukmini, Parul Ch., Suniti Deshpande, Uma Sud, Ila, Namita.

Others (who also come): Sumedha, Anjana Sarkar, Kokila P., Debjani (Care), Barbie, Surabhi, Sujata J. (Mita)

CAPTURING THE S.A.I.C.E. EXPERIENCE

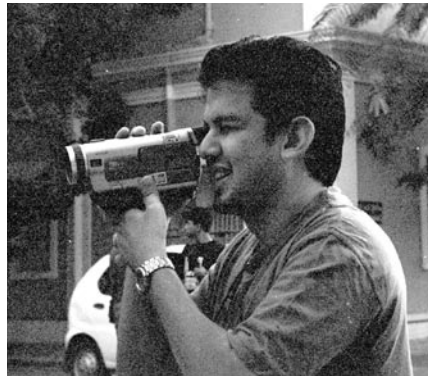
Shivashankar '98, who has studied Mass Communication and worked in the advertising industry, has now settled in Pondicherry. He took up the project of making short video films on S.A.I.C.E. and The Golden Chain Fraternity Reunion of 2003 on the occasion of the 60th anniversary of the School. The video on S.A.I.C.E. intersperses glimpses of the different sections of the School (Kindergarten, l'Avenir, En Avant vers la Perfection, Knowledge) with comments from students and teachers and quotes from the Mother regarding education. The video on the 2003 Reunion covers the various programmes that were held on the occasion (students' programme, ex-students' programme, visit to Matrimandir, getting together on the GC's Lake Land, visit to Sri Aurobindo's room etc.) It also has ex-students sharing their thoughts on coming together. The two films are now available on a VCD [see page 3 for ordering information].

The project was executed under the aegis of The Golden Chain Fraternity and the Fraternity is very grateful to Manoj-da (Das Gupta) and Pranab-da for having granted the permission to shoot S.A.I.C.E. and P.E.D. activities. Shivashankar answers our questions regarding the project.

How did you get involved with the production of this video CD? What inspired you to take it up?

In 2003, when I was informed that in two weeks there is going to be a celebration and a get-together on the occasion of the 60th Anniversary of our School, I just thought how nice it would be if I could record this event by making a video on it. I approached Kiran Kakad with my idea and conveyed to him how I would like to go about doing it. The first thing Kiran said after hearing me was: "You know Shankar, I too was thinking how nice it would be if we could get this done, but I didn't know whom to approach or who would be willing to take it up... and here you are." I was thrilled — thrilled because it gave me an indication that I was going to be involved with something special. What was so special? I'll come to that.

Once Kiran approved of my idea, I began doing the paper work on the different approaches to filming the event. Initially I only had the idea of covering the Golden Chain Reunion and its various programs. But suddenly at one point I began viewing the whole video in my mind from a totally different perspective. This happened one evening while I was sitting on the Sports Ground



gallery (my real source of creativity!) observing the various activities that were taking place, and all of a sudden, idea after idea on the 'would-be video' began pouring into my mind! I then got a feeling that this video would be complete only

if something of our School is captured. The real soul of my video, the great cast would have to be S.A.I.C.E. itself! But would this be possible? I again approached Kiran and explained to him my new concept for the video. He took up the matter with Manoj-da and within a few days I got a green signal! I was to film a video on our Centre of Education! It was something which I would have never dreamed of.

So finally two titles were produced: one, on our Centre of Education and the second on the 2003 Reunion. Can you tell us a little more about the concept of each of them? What were you trying to convey through each?

Let me tell you that making a video on our Centre of Education is not an easy task. One really needs a lot of time to understand, ponder, analyze and give it a right direction. The time I had in my hands was only a month and a half. So to really get into details was out of question. But in any

case what I had in mind was that when all of us sit together to watch this video, each one should naturally be led to re-live, to remember, to recollect all the wonderful things that this place had offered to them and to spontaneously feel grateful to Her for having chosen us to be students at this great seat of learning.

The video on the Golden Chain Reunion was fairly easy. It was basically to capture the mood of the moments of celebration. But I wished that I could have handled this a little better. I wanted people to share some special moments of their S.A.I.C.E. years, some interesting incidents and thoughts on their teachers and captains, etc. But unfortunately that didn't happen.

In both the presentations you have beautifully captured the spirit of S.A.I.C.E. and the occasion. How did you go about achieving this?

In the S.A.I.C.E. video, I knew what I needed to shoot. I knew the content well but it needed a lot of time and patience. For, while filming the School, I had to always keep in mind the fact that I am supposed to re-kindle the memories of the former students... make them walk down their memory lanes. I hope I have achieved that to a certain extent.

The most difficult part of the video was when I was filming the children. I had to re-shoot, again and again, to get really interesting visuals... to catch them on camera when they were not aware or when they were most natural. But I was so lucky to get some really beautiful moments on camera.

The GC video didn't need too much of a creative element except for its last five minutes, where I chose shots from various programs during the celebration and put them together with a nice vocal music piece in the background. I was quite satisfied with the way it turned out as many remarked that they felt a sense of bond and unity while watching it.

What kind of work did it involve? We know that the storyboard, the scripting and the shooting were done by you, but did you also do the full video and audio editing and mixing part as well? Where was this facility available? What

were the technical challenges involved? Did you get help from other members of The Golden Chain Fraternity as well?

Editing was the most challenging part of the project but at the same time, creatively very rewarding for me. It was this stage of production which really tested my ability to create visuals in a way that would touch some emotional chords in the audience. One needs a lot of time, patience and perseverance to achieve this. To give you an idea of the time consumption for editing — it takes around anything between 15 to 20 hours to edit a 60-second television advertisement with



two to three hours of video footage. I had with me video footage running to ten hours which had to be condensed to an hour and a half.

Not only was this project creatively challenging, it was physically demanding as well. I began feeling the heavy load especially during the filming of the GC Reunion video where, after shooting an event, I had to rush immediately back to the studio to dump all the footage on to the computer and arrange the files accordingly. Before this could be complete, the next program of the day would have begun. The celebration began on the 25th of December and ended on the 31st. My presentation was scheduled for the evening of the 31st. So it was literally a race against time!

Regarding the work on the audio track... yes a lot of time was spent on editing it as well. Music pieces had to begin and end at the appropriate visual junctions. Sometimes within the music piece I wanted certain portions to be repeated for

specific shots, and for that the audio file had to be trimmed, cut and pasted accordingly. For both, audio and video editing I used a software programme called I-Movie (which is Mac-based).

With Manoj-da's support and permission, we were able to achieve this on one of the latest Mac machines at the Ashram Archives. Shashwat, Chaitanya and Kapil made all the necessary arrange-



ments for setting up the logistics. Without their timely help it would have been very difficult to set the project in process. Then I had the guidance of Basabjit (Video Department, P.E.D) when it came to resolving problems related to audio. Bhaskar, then still a student in Knowledge, was instrumental in making the master VCDs and DVDs of the video. And of course I have to mention the people at the Archives who were so cooperative and understanding when it came to my late night work in their department. Last but not the least I must thank Kiran, who was always there to extend all help and support on every front to make this video possible. Special thanks also to Punit who arranged a projector for us when we urgently needed it for an occasion.

It is not often that permission is readily given for taking video of the S.A.I.C.E. and its premises. What do you think made the authorities accede to your request? Was the final version screened to them for their approval?

Personally, I really don't know how to express my gratitude and joy to Pranab-da and Manoj-da. As you have rightly said, it is not often that per-

mission is given for shooting in the S.A.I.C.E. and P.E.D. premises. I really don't know or can't say what made them agree. Maybe The Golden Chain Fraternity evokes a certain trust and goodwill.

In the S.A.I.C.E. video itself, initially I went about only shooting and editing the School. When I had come to the stage of creating visuals related to our Physical Education, I had no option other than placing some photographs of sports activities. For I thought it wouldn't be possible to get permission for filming in the various grounds. But personally I thought it was really unfortunate not to have moving visuals of our sports activities. They had been so much and so important a part of our life for almost 18 years and not having them captured in the video disturbed me very much. I again approached Kiran and requested him if I could avail the permission to film in the P.E.D premises. After much discussion, we both thought it would be a great idea if we could project the video made so far to Pranab-da and see what he thinks of the idea. Dada agreed to have a look at the presentation. So one evening, we screened the video to him — and at the end of it we conveyed to him our thoughts on the missing elements of the video. To our great surprise he readily gave his consent for filming in the various P.E.D premises and remarked "This is a very good beginning." I was thrilled again and couldn't sleep much after that. Visuals after visuals came rushing to my mind on how best I could present the video — now with the 'would-be' most exciting visuals of the project.

Personally, as an ex-student, how did it feel to go back and try to capture the spirit of our School? How rewarding was the experience? What has it given to you?

I would like to keep the answer to this, to myself. It's something beyond words, something I am unable to explain. But I can say this much that I truly consider the opportunity given to me, as something very special that has happened in my life. As I mentioned earlier, it was something which I never dreamed would happen to me. Anyone and everyone wouldn't get a chance like this. It was a special gift... a gift from Her. ❧

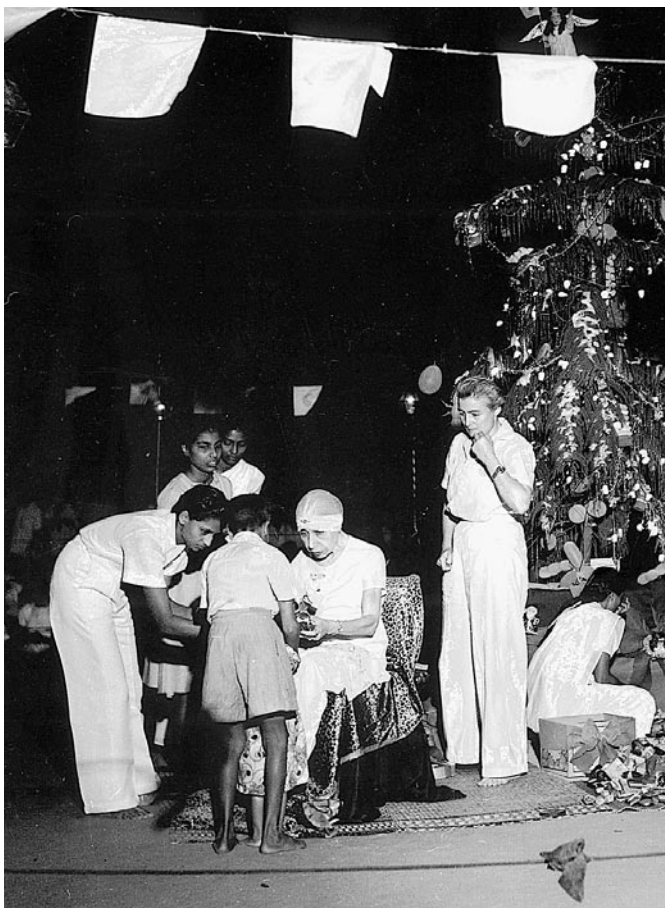
CHRISTMAS IN THE ASHRAM

Sunayana Panda '79

Many people often wonder about the origins of the Christmas celebrations in the Ashram. Of course, to those of us who grew up here it seems so normal that we have probably never given any thought about how it all started. All we remember is how happy we were to find a present on top of our mosquito-nets on the morning of 25th December and how Udar-da would come in his red Father Christmas costume and a big white beard, ringing a bell. There would be a nip in the air as we would come to School and spend the whole morning listening to stories or visiting the various boardings to see their decorations. We could hardly wait for it to be evening so that we could go to the Theatre where we had a lot of fun. There were presents, games and music and instead of being in our group shorts, for once we were all in fancy clothes.

The earliest reference that we find of Christmas in the Ashram is in the reminiscences of Mrityunjoy-da, but it is connected to another event in the Ashram. It was in 1929, on Christmas day, that Barindra Kumar, Sri Aurobindo's brother left the Ashram. Mother had organized a distribution of little bunches of the leaves she has called New Birth to mark that Christmas day. During the distribution Nolini-da noticed that Barindra Kumar was not present. He then asked Mrityunjoy-da to go and see what had happened. When he went to the house where Barindra lived he did not see him anywhere. The next day Nolini-da and Amrita-da went to Barindra's room and found a letter on the table. The

letter stated that he was leaving the Ashram. That Barindra had left on a Christmas day was highly significant. One of the main reasons for his leaving was his difficulty in accepting the Mother. He



Christmas in the Playground (1952)

had been one of those who had been deeply involved in the freedom movement and had even been imprisoned in the Andaman Islands as one of the main accused in the Alipore Bomb Case. In his eyes the Mother was a European lady and

celebrating Christmas may have been to him like glorifying the main festival of the British who were then our enemies.

What he probably did not know was that the Mother was familiar with the ancient traditions of the West and was well-acquainted with the occult realities of the world. Long before it was celebrated as the day of the birth of Christ it was actually celebrated as the festival of the return of Light to the Earth. And it was in this spirit of remembering the new birth of Light that the Mother celebrated this day.

Historians today admit that the Christians superimposed their own festival on a day which was already a special day for the pagans. Astronomers now say that Christ was prob-

A SADHIKA REMEMBERS

We were sitting around Mother's chair as She took our Wednesday evening class towards the end of the year 1950. Since it was Christmas time Mother was telling us about the origin of this Festival of Light and why we celebrate it here, in the Ashram.

Long, long ago, She said, some wise men noticed that the days were getting shorter and the nights longer at that time of the year. They felt that the increasing darkness might soon engulf the world and life would suffer. So they sat together in meditation, aspiring for the Return of the Light. They meditated and prayed, prayed and meditated. They then noticed that the days were slowly becoming longer and the dark nights shorter. Since then the Return of Light was celebrated in Ancient Egypt.

"That is why the 25th of December was a festival of Light long before Jesus Christ. This festival was in vogue long before Christianity and originated in Egypt and probably the birthday of Christ was fixed on the same day as that of the Return of the Light." (CWM, Vol. 4, p.6)

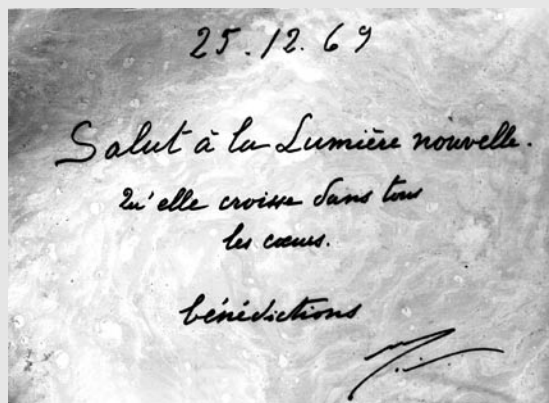


Christmas 1945. Standing at the back (l to r): Norman-da, John (Mona's brother), Manu-bhai, Kumud, Lilou, Amita, Tanima, Pushpa, (?), Dhanvanti, Urmila, Lata, Paru, Anu, Kusum(Senteurs), Pran-bhai, Pearson, Chellamma. Standing in front (l to r): Pavita, Arvind Prasad, Prabhucharan, Chum, Kalu, Parul, Jhumur, Nirata, Usha, Prabha, Tara, Prabir, Narendra, Arun Kumar. Sitting (l to r): (?), Nirankar, (?), Jyotindra J, Bhai, Chitra, Purnima, Ranganath, Chinu, Krishna Kumar, Namita, Aruna, Bubu, Gauri, Sudha, Kuku, Lucy, Birju and 2 French girls.

CHRISTMAS MESSAGES

- | | | | |
|------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1959 | NOËL
bénédiction | | |
| 1960 | BON NOËL
bénédiction | | |
| 1961 | BON NOËL
à tous avec les bénédiction de la Grâce
pour tous. | | |
| 1962 | Que la Lumière nouvelle illumine vos
pensées et vos vies, gouverne vos cœurs
et guide votre action.
bénédiction | | |
| 1963 | Joyeux Noël
Fêtons la Lumière Nouvelle en laissant
entrer en nous.
bénédiction | 1968 | Let the Light dawn in your
consciousness.
blessings to all |
| 1964 | If you want peace upon earth,
first establish peace in your heart.
If you want union in the world,
first unify the different parts of your
own being.
Noël 1964 blessings | 1969 | Salut à la Lumière nouvelle.
Qu'elle croisse dans tous les cœurs.
bénédiction |
| 1965 | BON NOËL
à tous. | 1970 | BON NOËL
1971 Bonne Année
bénédiction |
| 1966 | BON NOËL
à tous dans la Paix et la joie. | 1971 | Il est temps que le règne du mensonge
prenne fin.
Dans la vérité seule est le salut.

The time has come for the rule of
falsehood to end.
In the Truth alone is salvation. |
| 1967 | NOËL
Derrière la rigidité des célébrations
extérieures, il y a un symbole vivant;
c'est de cela qu'il faut se souvenir.
Paix et bonne volonté pour tous. | 1972 | Nous voulons montrer au monde que
l'homme peut être un vrai serviteur du
Divin.
Qui veut collaborer <u>en toute sincérité</u> ? |



ably born in spring rather than in the middle of winter and that he was probably born three or four years before what is commonly accepted as the year of his birth. The scientists base their assumptions on the appearance of certain astronomical phenomena which happened around that period and in this way they have calculated a more realistic date of the birth of Christ.

Since here in Pondicherry we live so close to the equator we are used to seeing the sun rise and

set almost at the same time every day. We notice hardly a difference of half an hour between the time at which night falls in summer and the time when it gets dark in winter. But to those who live closer to the Poles, for example in Europe, the lengthening and shortening of days is a part of life. It is something that never fails to strike those who visit Europe for the first time to see how daylight lingers in the sky till ten o'clock at night in summer and how in winter it is night by four o'clock.

On 21st December people observe the longest night of the year just as they celebrate the longest day of the year on 21st June.

Early man, all over the world, worshipped Nature. Those early people who lived in Europe must have observed how gradually the days got longer after the winter solstice. To them it must have been reason enough to rejoice, having lived through long, cold and grey days, to know that the sunlight was now going to return. A feeling of gratitude must have filled their hearts for that light which brought life, heat, flowers and fruits, and which made the Earth alive once again. The very words “summer” and “sunshine” are almost synonymous with an inner warmth and cheerfulness in the English language. Even today in some Scandinavian countries people celebrate the festival of light with candles and special dinners.

We don't have much information on how Christmas was celebrated in the thirties in the Ashram. Maybe it wasn't celebrated at all. However, when the children came, things took a different shape. Mona Pinto, being English, used to send presents to the Mother on 25th December after she joined the Ashram, since in her country it was a day of festivities and gathering of friends and families and also of exchanging of gifts as a symbol of love and affection. In 1944, during the war years, when all of a sudden there was a large influx of children, Mother asked Mona to organize a little celebration for them. The ladies who were working with Mona at Golconde made fancy hats and little presents. Games were organized and these presents were distrib-



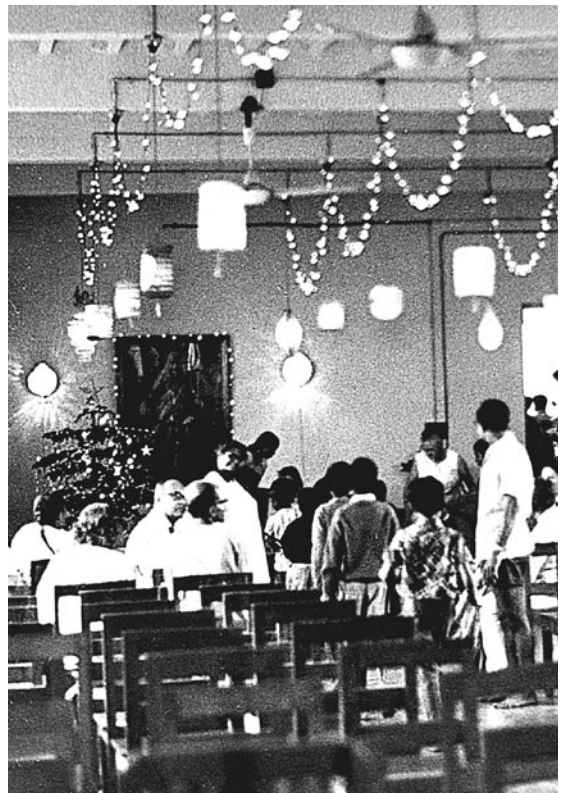
Mother sitting in front of the Christmas tree, Mona kneeling beside her (1960)

uted. All this was done in the house where Mona used to live then with her husband Udar and her daughter Gauri, in the red house facing the Ashram Library.

The children enjoyed the celebration so much that it was decided to hold it the next year too. A couple of years later the Pintos shifted to their house on Rue St. Gilles. The first year after they shifted, the Christmas celebration was held there, but it was decided there itself that from then on the distribution of presents would be for everyone in the Ashram and that it would be more convenient if it were held at the Playground. For the next ten

years or so the Christmas tree was decorated and lit up at the Playground. It was a simple affair, and the young and the old participated in the cheerful mood of the celebration. Mother herself sat near the tree and distributed the presents.

In those days the Ashram's finances were very limited, so the presents which were given to the children were not new toys which were bought. What the children got in their little packets from Mother was re-cycled material. The tennis balls with which Mother played were afterwards passed on to the other players. When these balls were completely worn out they were dyed in bright colours and distributed to children at Christmas. For many years the only things the children got were these brightly-coloured old balls and a top made at Harpagon (probably from leftover bits of wood), and a few walnuts. The special presents were the objects people made themselves and offered to Mother on their birthdays. These beautiful things were sent to Mona to keep in her store and brought out at Christmas and given as presents. Many years later Manoranjan-da would go to Madras and buy little plastic toys. Even though everyone enjoyed this little celebration, the Playground, as it turned out, was not the ideal place. Sometimes it rained and everything had to be



Christmas in the Hall of Harmony (1971)

hurriedly taken into one of the rooms and at other

times there was a strong wind and the decorations on the tree would get blown away.

In 1956 the Theatre Hall was constructed and it was at that time the biggest covered space of the Ashram (and perhaps it still is). From 1958 the Christmas tree was decorated at the Theatre and Mother distributed the gifts there. Mona



The courtyard of the Theatre Hall on Christmas day (1967)

sat next to her and, one by one, handed her the packets to be given. Since then the celebrations have been held there, except for a couple of years in the seventies when the tree was brought to the School. This was because during the Indo-Pak war the Ashram wanted to show its solidarity with the country and decided to keep things to an austere minimum. It was also because of the financial constraints of the Ashram at that time.

Probably the last time that Mother came to the Theatre for Christmas was in 1961. That year she did not sit and distribute the presents but only came and saw the decorations. It seems that that year she only distributed the packets to a few people and left. When Mother stopped coming to the Theatre the distribution was done by Mona. Mona said on many occasions that had the Mother herself not insisted on this celebration she would not have done any of this planning and packing and counting and sorting, as it meant a lot of work for her and her team all through the year. But she did it with all her enthusiasm and all her cheerfulness because it was for the Mother.

At the beginning Mona would collect little things, as and when she received them, which she thought could be given as presents, and keep them separately in a cupboard. Over the years the preparation for the Christmas distribution got more and more organized. Since Mona was in charge of this distribution, all the preparation and storing of presents was done in the basement of Golconde and is still being done there. Several people work all through the year to collect and sort things which eventually go into the packets which are distributed. Some things are made and some come as donations in kind. Little objects are divided into different lots,

All those who would like to contribute in cash or kind to the Christmas fund or would like to help in purchasing, sorting and packing during the year (even if you are in Pondicherry for a short stay) please contact the Golden Chain office.

depending on which age-groups they might be suitable for. Some presents are bought with the money that is donated by well-wishers to the Christmas fund.

From 1959 until 1972 Mother gave messages for Christmas which were put up on the Ashram notice-board along with a collection of beautiful cards. Those messages are a real indicator of the spirit in which this celebration was done. In all the messages Mother refers to the day as "Noël" and speaks of the Light, of renewal and peace. Even though all over the world Christmas has become one big shopping season, we here have had



Christmas at the Theatre. Kindergarten children being taken by Kala-ben to get their presents (1968?)

the privilege of knowing its ancient and occult significance. And it was with this idea of invoking the Light that the Mother had started this tradition in the Ashram. ❧

REMEMBERING MONA PINTO

Sunayana Panda '79

There is only one word to describe Mona Pinto: extraordinary. She was unlike anyone else. She was born on 11th November 1911. That in itself is something striking. Look at it this way: she was born on 11.11.11. And you can see at once that she was destined to be unusual. What an eventful life she lived! She had broken conventions and done what others would not have had the courage to do. But her heroism also lay in her tenacity, in carrying out her duty in the face of difficulties. Speaking of the unusual date of Mona's birth, Mother had said that the number eleven signified progress. If we read between the lines of this uncommon tale, then it becomes clear that indeed Mona's life was a life of continuous progress.

In order to understand how heroic she was, we have to see her life in its right perspective. Let us rewind our story to London of the 1930s. She was then a strikingly beautiful young woman, known to everyone as Ethel Lovegrove, the eldest in a family of six children. She was already working as a secretary when she met Udar, then known as Laurence, while doing some fund-raising work for a charity. However handsome, charming and intelligent he may have been, Udar was, after all, an Indian. Falling in love with him and deciding to get married to him was in itself a very bold step.

Only a year before she passed away, she spoke about that time of her life when she had just met her future husband. Her eyes lit up with a delightful smile as she spoke of how she had only talked to him on the phone and how when she saw him she found him as handsome as a movie star. She

was old and wrinkled when she was recounting this, but you would have imagined that the person sitting in front of you was a young girl. Oh that magic moment, to see a woman whose body was ninety years old but whose heart was still twenty-three!

When she announced her decision to get married to Udar her father made it clear that he was against it. What made things worse was that his family didn't accept the idea of having her as a daughter-in-law either. The only way out was to

live independently, on their own, cutting themselves off from the rest of the family. So Udar had to come back to India and find a way of earning enough money to be able to bring her to India and to support her. This is how he landed in Pondicherry. [See *GC August 2003*]

In the meantime Mona waited, an embodiment of faithfulness and hope. When she told her story more than sixty years later, she made it a point to underline that she waited three years, three months and three days before starting out to join Udar. By

now her father had passed away and this made it easier for her to leave. She who had never travelled alone, was now setting out on a journey to the other end of the world, far from her own people, not knowing if she would ever see her affectionate and close-knit family again, to start her life in a country about which she knew practically nothing.

How much courage was there in the heart of that young woman who was crossing the ocean, knowing she was not only unwelcome in her new family, but being British unwelcome in her new



Mona at the age of 21



Mona with her daughter Gauri (1939)

country too! Even in the ship in which she travelled she found no friends because the English passengers didn't want to have anything to do with a woman who was going to marry an Indian while the Indians were wary of all English people anyway.

She and Udar (actually, Ethel and Laurence) were married in the church Notre Dame des Anges which is on Dumas Street (in Pondicherry), but to their regret there were no family members present. They were happy however that at last they were together and starting their own life. Soon Mona got down to setting up her home and all seemed to go well. Within a few months there were curtains at the windows and creepers over the gate, and in her heart she had the joy of knowing that before the year was over there would be a child in her arms too. 1937 was a very special year for her. It was, in her life, the year of transformations. She came to India as the beautiful beloved, then became the loving wife and after that she became the caring and affectionate mother,

all in one short year. But this was not all. It was also in August of this eventful year that she saw the Mother and Sri Aurobindo and made her first contact with the Ashram.

And that is where the second turning point came in her life. Although Udar had been living in Pondicherry for three years, he had no interest in the Ashram. However through his friendship with Amal Kiran he came to know about the Mother and Sri Aurobindo and the activities of the Ashram. After his marriage he came into contact with some more people from the Ashram since the home of a newly-married couple attracts more people than the house of a carefree bachelor. It was at the suggestion of these friends that the Pintos finally decided to have the *darshan* of the Mother and Sri Aurobindo. In those days the devotees used to go in a line to the Darshan room which is one of the small rooms on the eastern side, next to Sri Aurobindo's room. Mona and Udar too joined the line and went upstairs. That first vision of the Master and the Mother sealed their destinies.

Their contact with the Ashram grew stronger and stronger until Udar finally decided to join the Ashram. We have to really put ourselves in Mona's shoes to understand what must have gone on in



Mona doing Shot Put during the competitions

her heart. First she waited for three years in England, without seeing the face or hearing the voice of the man she loved, then she travelled half-way

round the world to marry him, and after that, within three years he asks her to enter an Ashram! The Ashram of the forties was quite different from the Ashram of today. Life was austere and without any distractions. But she accepted this new turn because she had chosen to share his life



Mother being shown the decorations on Christmas day at the Theatre.
Seen at the back: Udar, Nolini-da and Pavitra-da (1960)

and this was all part of it. This does not mean that she lived as his shadow. She was someone in her own right, and someone quite irreplaceable too, within the Ashram.

When the Pintos joined the Ashram, Golconde was not yet completed, but Mother asked Mona to start preparing the bed linen that would be needed when the dormitory began to be occupied. She had a small group of young women who worked with her and who stitched and embroidered the bed-covers by hand. Once the dormitory was opened, Mona was given the charge of looking after its running and she did this work with all her time, energy and care for the next sixty years of her life, even when she had turned ninety and could not walk without support. If you happened to be there when she was around, you could hear her giving instructions to the cleaning women in her high-pitched, but sweet, voice — and you could not have missed her Tamil spoken with an English accent.

In the Ashram of the forties when some sad-

haks were pondering over the mysteries of the cosmic consciousness, Mona's mind was deeply concentrated on how to remove the last particle of dust from the furniture, or to save them from getting scratched. And thank God for that! Or rather, shall we say, she had the appreciation and the praise of both Mother and Sri Aurobindo for that. On the birthday card which Mother sent her she wrote:

Bonne Fete! To Mona

Here is one more occasion to tell you physically what I tell you so often when we meet in the night. How much I appreciate the quality of your work and how much I rely on your faithful steadiness. We are very close inside although we meet rarely outside, but my love and blessings are always with you.

Mother has written here something that we tend to forget, but which was a way of life in those days:

the fact that she met many people at night on a subtle plane, in her subtle body.

Sri Aurobindo wrote about Mona's work in a reply to a letter. But first a few words about how this came to be written at all. Although Golconde was constructed to house sadhaks, it eventually became a guest-house too. In 1945 a doctor, who had probably come for the Darshan, had occupied one of the rooms and had damaged the surface of a table for which Mona must have expressed her displeasure. His friend, a sadhak, wrote to Sri Aurobindo complaining about Mona. Here is only a little extract of Sri Aurobindo's answer to that letter:

Mona has taken the responsibility of the house and of keeping things right as much as possible. That was why she interfered in the hand-bag affair — it was as much a tragedy for the table as for the doctor, for it got scratched and spoiled by the hand-bag — and tried to keep both the bag and

the shaving utensils in the places that had been assigned for them. If I had been in the doctor's place, I would have been grateful to her for her care and solicitude instead of being upset by what ought to have been for him trifles, although, because of her responsibility, they had for her their importance.

When one sees her photograph, taken in her twenties, and sees her as a ravishing beauty, one can understand that she was the heroine of an unusual love story. But one doesn't realize that she was also, as the story continues, one of the devoted sadhikas of the Ashram. She was that piece of the puzzle without which the picture of the Ashram of the early years would be incomplete, because she was one of those who were the instruments of the Mother in her effort to bring beauty and harmony in the material aspect of the Ashram.

It was part of her nature and upbringing to pay great attention to material things, and this would be her contribution to the life of the Ashram. While the East had spent centuries in developing its spiritual wealth, the West had lost no time in making the physical world more perfect and orderly. Here at last was an opportunity for mankind to work out a synthesis of the best of both the worlds, and to complete each other. This spiritual community was also going to be a materially beautiful community. When one enters Golconde, one feels a sense of peace immediately. There is cleanliness and order, but there is also that very Japanese principle of beauty in simplicity. And it is this harmony on the physical plane which creates an atmosphere of tranquility and adds another dimension to that silence in which one can hear the whisper of the leaves and the bird's calls.

It was not only her tidiness and her strict rules, but also her graciousness in dealing with people which made her the right person in the right place. Because no one can outdo the English in their politeness. With the guests who came from outside she was full of concern, and did whatever



Photo taken in the mid-40s with the first batch of Golconde workers. Sitting in front and standing at the back are the gardeners and the maid-servants. Middle row (l to r): Sivalingam, Mona, Kusum-ben (Press), Kumud-ben, Maniben, Gauri, Lilou, Pushpa-ben, Mridula-di, and Udar.

she could to make them feel that they were being looked after. It was not only the cleaning and washing at Golconde that took her time and attention. When she got back home in the evening, she spent a lot of time writing letters and sending cards to all those whom she knew or who wrote to her. Most of the people she wrote to had, at some time or the other, stayed at Golconde.

The sadhaks of the Ashram knew her as the person in charge of Golconde, but we, the children of the School, knew her only as the smiling lady who appeared before us once a year, in front of the glittering Christmas tree, and wished us a "Merry Christmas" as she handed us a packet with our presents. All over the world children have a Father Christmas. We actually had a Mother Christmas! This work of organising the Christmas celebrations was also given to Mona by the Mother. It started in a very small way, in her house, around the time when the School was started. Since then it has grown, as the Ashram grew, and today there are so many people who participate in this gathering, that there is no place to stand at the Theatre Hall.

Year after year Mona worked tirelessly to see that things went off smoothly on Christmas day. For us the decorated tree just materialized out of thin air on the 25th of December, right in the middle of the Theatre Hall, as if by magic. But actually, this magic was the result of a year-long preparation and planning. Our Mother Christmas worked quietly in the basement of Golconde where there is a Christmas room and where all



Photo taken on 11.11.99. Back row (l to r): Reena, Linda, Meera, Mona, Sumangauri, Patty, Damayanti, Suman, Bhavani. Front row (l to r): Amra, Dominique, Bina.

the nice presents are neatly stored. And that is also where all the decorations of the Christmas tree are packed away in large boxes after all the distributions and all the fun and games are over.

To the generations which have grown up after the Mother and Sri Aurobindo were no more with us in their physical bodies, one of the ways in which we can understand them is through the lives of those people who lived and worked in an attitude of complete consecration to them. Not only the lives of those who were prominently in everyone's sight but also, and specially, the lives of those who lived discreetly, away from the gaze of the world.

When Udar received his new Sanskrit name from Sri Aurobindo he wanted the Master to also give a new name to Mona, but Sri Aurobindo replied that she could continue to be called "Mona" as that reminded him of "Mona Lisa". There was indeed something mystifying about our Mona, just as the smile of her famous namesake. One cannot help wondering how she managed to embody completely opposite qualities. For example, in spite of having lived for more than sixty years in India, she remained completely English. And yet she was totally devoted to Mother India too. While she lived, probably the only other woman more English than her was the Queen of England herself. And yet Mona was totally Indian in the way she lived her *karmayoga* and the devotion she bore for her Gurus. On the one hand she had the charm of the old traditional world, on the other

hand she was very much in the thick of the action of the modern world. After all, she was born at the beginning of the twentieth century and two World Wars had been fought during her lifetime. She was a lady, always surrounded by beauty and refinement, and yet she could put herself in the place of the poorest maidservant and understand her suffering. Indeed she was deeply concerned about the well-being of all her workers and was continuously helping them out of their financial difficulties. How did she manage to be two opposite things at the same time? She was surely the incarnation of the Goddess of Practical Sense, or if such a goddess doesn't exist, then surely she was the incarnation of the Goddess of Good House-keeping. She was so matter-of-fact that she could not call a spade anything but a spade. But if you spoke to her in her freer moments, you could see that in her heart she was the eternal romantic, the



Mona giving Nirod-da his present on Christmas day 2002, the last time she went to the Theatre.

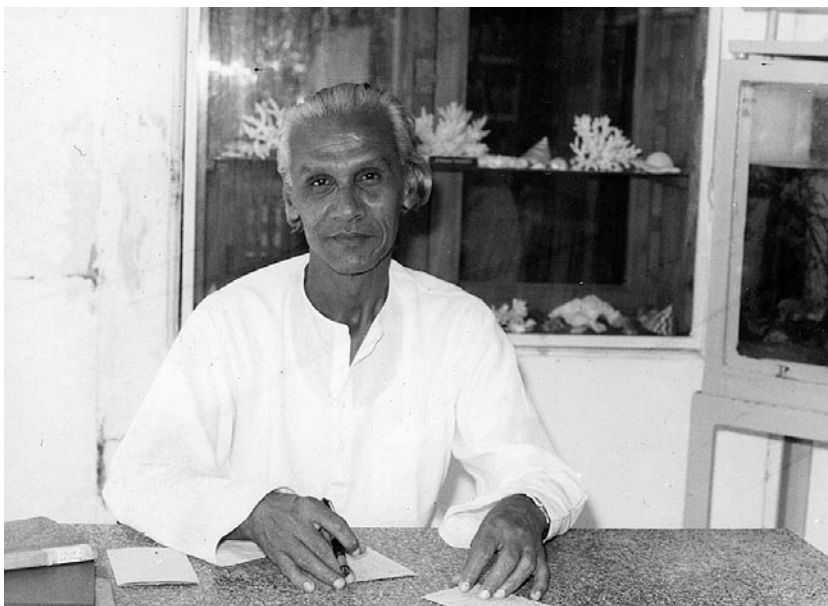
dreamer who believed in impossible things. She was a princess whose carriage was waiting outside to carry her away to the ends of the world. Mona, there will never be anyone quite like you. ❧

To get a longer version of Sri Aurobindo's letter quoted in this article, please see Mother India, July 2004. The letter appears in an article written by Babu-da (Aniruddha Sircar) on Mona.

SIMPLICITY INCARNATE

Arup Mitra '72

All old generation Ashramites may not be geniuses of creativity or towering personalities, but their regularity gives them a touch of immortality. You grow so accustomed to their steady attendance at work or their regular passing by a road, that you take it for granted that they will continue to do that forever.



Such an eternal sadhak was Kanupriyo-da. You could set the watch by his appearance at six forty-five at the beach. Smiling and cheerful, he would greet everyone he saw on his way to the egg-room and then to the dining room. After breakfast, he would be in the library, feeding the fishes and issuing books.

Kanupriyo-da's greatest passion was teaching Bengali. He enjoyed most teaching the works of Tagore to school-children and adults, as well as to foreigners and research scholars. And to the sur-

prise of his students, his voice would tremble and even choke while reading out emotional passages from well-known authors. Sometimes he would even shed a tear. He was also fond of asking his students to render simple messages of the Mother into Bengali. But this elderly Bengali teacher's lack of skill in dealing with naughty children was an amusing shortcoming. Usually, these un-

manageable boys got the better of him. However regrettable that decision may appear today, I myself opted out of a third year of studying Tagore under him.

Kanupriyo-da's love of nature drew him to the Lake Estate or to Gloria Land where every weekend he would walk long distances. Though he was the regular companion of Nirod-da during his excursions, he would go out alone even if the latter could not go. He also took part regularly in the annual pic-

nicns organised by the P.E.D.

Films had a very special place in his heart. But his punctuality in going to bed would not allow him to see a film beyond the first reel as early morning was reserved for doing his creative writing.

Kanupriyo-da's love of cricket was legendary. Having played the game during his youth, his longing for it diminished after joining the Ashram. But the dormant passion needed only a little spark to revive during a yearly outing in the mid

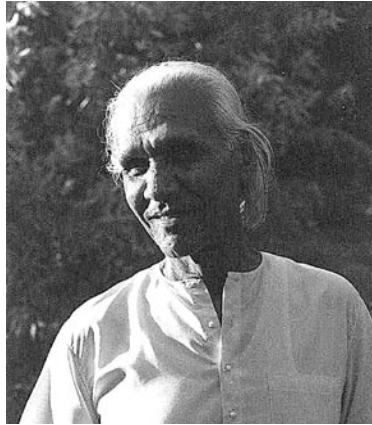
1980s. As he alighted from the bus in Gangaikondacholapuram, he stood mesmerised watching some youngsters play cricket with a tennis-ball. His desire to take part in the game was so strong that a friend had to request the boys to let him play. The young players were amused but complied gracefully by allowing the elderly man to bowl to their batsman. Then displaying his fine skill, Kanupriyo-da bowled just a ball that ripped through the batsman's wickets and magically rekindled a flame in Kanupriyo-da's youthful heart. Following this episode, his participation in tennis-ball cricket became a regular affair in the sprawling courtyard of the theatre hall.

Sometime in the early 1990s when India played Pakistan in Sharjah, Kanupriyo-da was counting the days and displaying the excitement of a child. But to his great dismay, the first match had to be postponed following the death of a nobleman of United Arab Emirates. "*Aar moraar jaiga pelo naa*," Kanupriyo-da complained hopelessly, "*or moraar daurkaar holo aaji!*" (He could not die anywhere else. He had to die just today!) At other times, when India lost a match, Kanupriyo-da would say mournfully: "*Aamraa herey gelaam*," (We have lost), revealing the full extent of his involvement with the Indian team.

As the younger brother of Nripendra Krishna Chattopadhyaya, the renowned writer and scenarist, Kanupriyo-da had a natural interest in literature and blossomed into a fine writer in his twenties. From the mid 1950s, his writings appeared in leading Bengali magazines connected with the Ashram. He also wrote many books based on the works of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother.

His mastery over Bengali was finally recognised by a group of devotees in Calcutta and he

was awarded the Sri Aurobindo Puroshkar a couple of years ago. Kanupriyo-da's brief speech on the occasion brought out the true sadhak in him. "The Mother had once said," he began shyly, "we should try to turn our consciousness more and more towards the Divine." Then blending wisdom with simplicity, he added: "And that is what I always strive to do."



His adherence to the spiritual path was irrevocable. His spiritual life began unexpectedly with his first visit to the Ashram in June 1956, and from then on he has stayed on here. His regular attendance at collective meditation was uninterrupted as there could not be any activity more important in the evenings.

Despite the ageless appearance of Kanupriyo-da, he would have celebrated his eightieth birthday on 24th November. The fellow-participants of his Asana class openly marvelled at his body's suppleness in spite of his advanced age. His unfaltering steps while climbing up unaided to the 3rd floor of Knowledge was a matter of pride to Kanupriyo-da himself.

Just as Tagore's works never failed to move the poet in Kanupriyo-da, his aesthetic nature swayed delightedly under the enchantment of *Rabindra Sangeet*. You could often catch a strain of that nostalgic recorded music emanating from his room while passing by in the evenings. And his collection of Tagore's songs kept swelling with the steady additions brought by his admirers.

After taking the above photo in 1999, I requested him to write a few words behind the print before signing it. "*Jiboner prothom aar aamaar shesh kauthaa — "bhalobaashaa"*," Kanupriyo-da wrote significantly. "*Taai rekhey gelaam*." (Life's first word and my last word is "love". That is what I am leaving behind.) ❧

To express Harmony, of all things Simplicity is the best.

The Mother (Vol 14, page 158)

PRADYOT-DA

By *Sujata Jauhar* '84.

Based on the exhibition put up by Amal Sircar on the occasion of Pradyot-da's centenary.

It was the 31st of August 1905, the auspicious day of Krishna Janmashtami. In the household of Shri Ramesh Chandra Bhattacharya, a well-respected pleader of the mofussil and later of Chittagong, there was added cause for celebration; it was the birth of their fourth child, Pradyot.

Pradyot-da was brought up in a simple and frugal household. His father was determined not to let the affluent status of the family soften the impressionable boy. In 1915, Pradyot-da was admitted into the Town Government School in Chittagong, where his two elder brothers were already studying. Also admitted into the same class in the same year, was an energetic and sporty youngster called Nirodbaran. The two struck up a friendship that would weather the vagaries of many eventful decades, till in 1984, 69 years later, it would finally sink to rest in the Sri Aurobindo Ashram.

The two friends could not have been more different in character. Pradyot-da was a town boy, polished, studious, and poised, with a calm, cheerful air about him; he was always simply dressed and hard working. Nirod-da was a village lad, with an abundant vital energy. Pradyot-da finally took the laurels in academics, and Nirod-da shone as the captain of the school sports team. Young Pradyot was very fond of going to the Kali temple atop the nearby hill. He enjoyed reading the *Ramakrishna Kathamrita*, and felt an intense joy in its words.

After completing matriculation and intermediate in the local school, Pradyot-da got himself admitted into St. Xavier's College in Calcutta. Around this time, he suddenly decided to go to England for further studies. His father would not hear of it, because he feared that his son would

come back with an English wife. Pradyot-da was put to a hard test; for the first time, he had to face his father to assert himself.

"Have you anything to say?" asked his father in a distant voice. "I won't marry," was the curt reply. After a pause, his father relented, "Very well, let it be so."

Pradyot-da sailed off for England. His close friend Nirod-da was already there. Both studied at Glasgow University; Pradyot-da studied electrical engineering and Nirod-da studied medicine. While they were in Edinburgh, Dilip Kumar Roy paid them a visit. It was from him the two friends heard about Sri Aurobindo and of his famous interview.

Pradyot-da, being studious and diligent, finished the four years' course in three. In 1928, he received his B.Sc. (Hons) in electrical engineering from Glasgow University. With that he returned home.

Back in India, with a B.Sc. degree from Glasgow University in his pocket, Pradyot-da still found it hard to come by a government job. He had been black listed in the police records as a *Swadeshi* sympathizer. Undeterred Pradyot-da joined Mahatma Gandhi's non-cooperation movement. The hard life and frequent fasting affected his health and resulted in severe gastritis. One night, in acute pain, he dreamt of being rocked like a little child in Mother Kali's lap.

Pradyot-da joined the Tata Iron & Steel Company in Jamshedpur, on a monthly salary of Rs. 200. Having lived frugally all his life, he cheerfully managed now with nothing more than a *khatia*, a few wooden packing cases serving as a table and some tin chairs. But it was not long before his diligence and earnestness carried him far; on the

strength of sheer merit he rose to the coveted post of superintendent of TISCO.

Meanwhile Nirod-da went to Burma to practice medicine. After three years there, he came to Pondicherry and made the Ashram his permanent home. He invited Pradyot-da to visit Pondicherry for a *Darshan* of Sri Aurobindo. Pradyot-da paid a short visit. He had his first Darshan of Sri Aurobindo in 1933. The sight of Sri Aurobindo so affected him that it seems he was transfixed to the spot; it was only when Sri Aurobindo made a gesture, that he could move. As he was leaving, Nirod-da requested Pradyot-da to make a token offering every month, believing this would do him good.

To be given the opportunity to help the Ashram in any little way is no small privilege. Pradyot-da readily complied. But in spite of regular correspondence with Nirod-da and the Master's

seemed to set some occult force into motion, because Pradyot-da showed a quickening of interest thereafter, even though he knew nothing of this exchange.

His growing interest in the Ashram took now a definite course. He formed a centre in Jamshedpur for all the local Bengalis. Owing to this initiative, Bengalis from all walks of life came into contact with the Mother and Sri Aurobindo.

Pradyot-da once accompanied his father to Varanasi. At the famous Vishwanath temple, while his family members went in, he sat outside reading a newspaper. A middle aged lady of fair complexion, dressed in a red border *garad* saree, with flowing wet hair and a *kamandalu* in the hand walked up and spoke in a commanding voice,

"My son, take me in!" Pradyot-da was taken aback.

"Are you asking me?"

"Yes, you." Came the imperious reply.

"But I am quite new here.... Could you not ask someone else?" Pradyot-da tried to excuse himself.

"No, it is you I want," was the adamant reply. Seeing there was no way out but to comply, Pradyot-da accompanied her in. But rising from the customary *pranam*, when he tried to find her, the woman had disappeared.

Pradyot-da explained later: "I realized later on that *Annapurna*, the mother goddess herself had appeared before me."

Many years later when he recounted this incident to the Mother, She simply smiled.

Pradyot-da's contact with the Mother grew. More and more he relied upon Her judgment in all matters. When he wanted to leave TISCO because the authorities repeatedly brushed aside his request for a promotion, Mother advised him to stay, have patience and buy time. After a



blessings, he evinced no further interest. Nirod-da wrote to Sri Aurobindo regarding this matter:

"Is there any use of communicating with him?"

"I don't know; some people say that everything one does in this world is of some use or other, known or unknown. Otherwise, it would not be done." Sri Aurobindo's cryptic answer

considerable period, when still nothing happened, Mother counselled him "Give them an ultimatum." When this too had no effect, Pradyot-da finally resigned. He joined the West Bengal Electricity Development Directorate in Calcutta as chief engineer, appointed by the then chief minister, Dr. B.C. Roy. Though his tenure was brief, the department benefited hugely from his drive and his organizational powers. From there he went to the

Damodar Valley Corporation to work on their new project, the Bokaro thermal plant, as chief engineer. It bears splendid testimony to Pradyot-da's constructive genius. Pandit Nehru, when he came to open the plant, expressed his extreme satisfaction with it and its clean environment.

It is interesting to note in passing, the date of the opening: 21st February 1953, Mother's 76th birthday.

During his years in Calcutta, Pradyot-da, who was increasingly in contact with other disciples of Sri Aurobindo, came to be associated with the Pathmandir. Under his guidance, the once amorphous body became a well-knit organization. Similarly, Lakshmi's House, another property in Calcutta offered to the Mother, blossomed under his tireless assistance into a valuable cultural and educational centre. His unique role has been to make the Mother's presence manifest in these centres.

There was once some talk of Pradyot-da visiting France; when the matter was referred to the Mother, She asked: "Oh, he wants to go to France?" On his next visit to the Ashram, Pradyot-da went up to see the Mother and blurted out "Mother I am not going!" He had felt in her laconic question a vibration of Her disapproval. Mother then

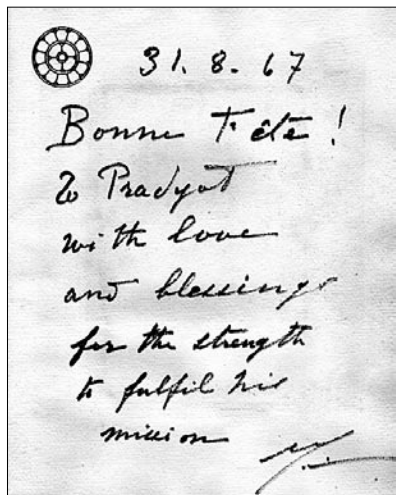
explained to him at length that going out would destroy much of the spiritual refinement he had received in the course of his association with the Ashram.

Pradyot-da returned to work but his heart was no more in it; he yearned to leave everything and dedicate himself to Mother's work. Mother, learning of his intention, confided in a few inmates, "What work befitting his position can I give him here?"

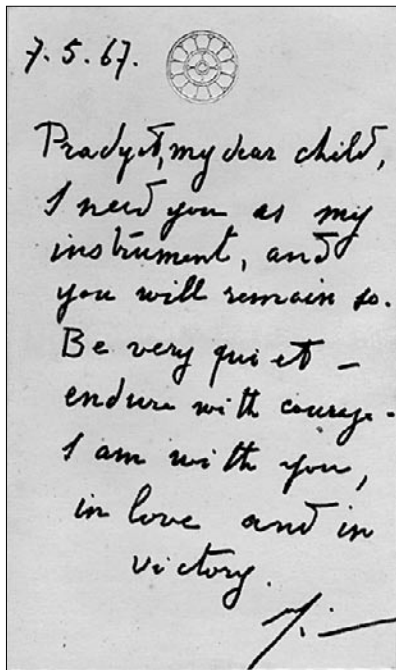
However, Mother Herself soon called both Dr. Sanyal and Pradyot-da to the Ashram. The two distinguished men, each an expert in his own field, dropped all their other commitments and readily responded to the call. Pradyot-da's resignation elicited a barrage of questions. Some went so far as to question Mother's wisdom in drawing away from the work of nation building, such a brilliant man!

On 2nd March 1955, Pradyot-da joined the Ashram. He was also made the Adviser of the Pondicherry Government Electrical Department. When the Mother formed two committees, called the ACC and the TCC — the agricultural and the technological committees, She named Pradyot-da the chairman of both. He was appointed the supervisor of the Ashram Electricity Department, and soon thereafter, the dean of the Electrical Section of the Centre of Education. In 1980, he was awarded a special certificate for completing 25 years in the service of the Government. As head of the Ashram's electricity department, he set up among other things, the boilers in the Dining Room.

In times of financial crisis in the Ashram,



Pradyot-da worked as a special instrument of the Mother to collect funds. There is the instance of



one such crisis when the Mother went to Sri Aurobindo for His advice; Sri Aurobindo said, "Ask Pradyot."

In 1958, in the midst of another such crisis, Mother called Pradyot-da and told him, "I have no money. I shall have to go to the Himalayas." Mother needed five lakhs urgently. Pradyot-da appealed to devotees and collected the

amount. When he went to the Mother with the money, She remarked, "I was thinking how you could go on with this bold venture. I looked into your past and I knew."

To tide over another crisis, Mother gave Pradyot-da Her saris and ornaments to be sold. He sold them in Calcutta to collect whatever amount he could. No doubt Pradyot-da acted under Mother's force and as Her instrument. She Herself told him, regarding a suitable instrument, "...you can't play the piano on a log of wood."

Not every one can be a 'piano'. In his book, *Mother's Instrument Pradyot*, Nirod-da quotes Sri Aurobindo, "When you ask for the Mother, you must feel that it is she who is demanding through you a very little of what belongs to her.... If you are free from the money-taint but without any ascetic withdrawal, you will have greater power to command the money for the divine work." Nirod-da adds, "I believe Pradyot fulfilled this condition admirably." Mother once gave Pradyot-da an old Tibetan coin from Her table and a talisman; both represented the powers of wealth. She told him,

"Keep them with you. This will bring all the money you need."

During the India-China war, Mother sent some ornaments to the Prime Minister as a token of Her help. Pradyot-da was Her envoy. Indira Gandhi, who along with Nehru received the token, immediately understood their significance. (Mother considered her an excellent instrument.) What no one understood, was why Mother had so specifically instructed Pradyot-da to deliver the box on the 1st of November. Mother Herself later clarified this little mystery when She explained that 1st November was the date the French colonies merged with India.

For Pradyot-da's 61st birthday, Mother got a special card made by Champaklalji. The right hand leaf of the card held a photo of the Mother; on the facing leaf was the picture of a lion's head, set in a way so as to be against Mother's heart. Pradyot-da always gratefully remembered that Mother kept him close to Her heart. In 1967 Mother sent Pradyot-da this message when She heard that he was not well:

"Pradyot, my dear child,

I need you as my instrument, and you will remain so.

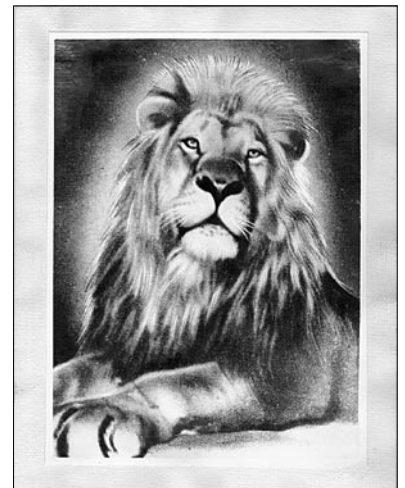
Be very quiet
— endure with
courage.

I am with you,

In love and in
victory."

On 6th February 1971, Mother appointed Pradyot-da a trustee of the Ashram. He rendered "invaluable service" in that capacity; and "at a time when the Ashram had

opened itself to a subtle attack from outside forces, his shrewdness and firmness stood in good stead and enabled it to tide over the difficulty," remembers Nirod-da. When Sri Aurobindo's birth centenary began in the same year, Mother appointed



him Chairman of Sri Aurobindo's Action. Acting under Mother's instruction, he spread Sri Aurobindo's message far and wide across India.

Over the next decade, Pradyot-da worked tirelessly to discharge his many duties. Though he looked frail, his shoulders bore a weight of responsibilities that would have knocked down a much younger man. Even deteriorating health could not stop him. A little before 17th November 1984, when he returned from one of his frequent trips to Calcutta, people close to him felt all was not well. He visited Mother's room on the 17th; on the 18th, he attended Nirod-da's birthday. On the 20th he was in the Ashram for the meditation. On the 22nd, Dilip-da noticed some irregularities in his blood pressure; he gave Pradyot-da an injection and a saline transfusion.

Nirod-da recalls this strange, symbolic dream he had on night of the 22nd. "In the first part of the night, that is around 11pm, while I was sleeping in Sri Aurobindo's Room, I had a dream. Through a window I saw in the eastern sky in the midst of

clouds a bright golden sun. I wondered what it meant. It happened to be the time Pradyot's soul left." As it happened, around 11.30 pm, on the 22nd of November, Pradyot-da left his body, with the Mother's name on his lips.



In tribute to his lifelong friend Nirod-da says: "His unwavering faith in the Mother's force was the keystone of his success.... The Mother has showered on him many compliments." One of them was "You don't suffer from amour-propre." ❧

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4. "Long after he is dead and gone, his words will be echoed and re-echoed, not only in India, but across distant seas and lands." Who said this about Sri Aurobindo?

Deshbandhu Chittaranjan Das said this in court during the Alipore Bomb Case trial. One often wonders how C. R. Das could have known this at that point of time.

5. How did Barindra Kumar Ghose, Sri Aurobindo's younger brother, call him?

Barindra simply called him "Sejda". In Bangla this means the third elder brother, the eldest being "Bod-da", the second being "Mejda". Sri Aurobindo used this name to end his letters to Barindra Kumar.

(Answers to questions 1 to 4 are from the biography of Sri Aurobindo by K.R. Srinivasa Iyengar.)

QUIZ TIME!

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

1. Which Indian city is Sri Aurobindo referring to in the following lines of the poem “Nirvana”?
“The city, a shadow picture without tone,
Floats, quivers unreal; forms without relief
Flow, a cinema’s vacant shapes; like a reef
Floundering in shoreless gulfs the world is done.”
2. *Arya*, the monthly journal started by Sri Aurobindo was printed at the Modern Press in Pondicherry and published from 7, Duplex Street, where the Mother was staying. If you walked into this house today what would you find there?
3. “For such a long time I thought I knew what love was, and now that I no longer see anything that cannot be called love, I also no longer see anything that may specially be called love. And how can I be that which I can no longer define, that which I can no longer distinguish?”
In which book would you find these lines written by the Mother?
Clue: This was written before 1920.
4. He joined the Ashram in 1929 when he was only nine years old. He was the first child, and for a long time the only one, in the Ashram. He was a poet and a musician. He played the sitar and performed on stage quite often. But to the students of the school he will be remembered as the librarian (of the little library which was in Room no. 7 of those days) who used to suggest to us what story-books to read. Who was he?
5. What is the spiritual significance of the flowers of the mango tree?

ANSWERS TO THE QUESTIONS OF THE PREVIOUS ISSUE’S :

1. “...the complete synthesis that has been realized to this day of the genius of Asia and the genius of Europe....” Who wrote this about Sri Aurobindo?

This quote is taken from the book *India on the March* written by Romain Rolland, the French writer and thinker. He continues “...the last of the great Rishis holds in his hand, in firm unrelaxed grip, the bow of creative energy.”

2. “...look and you will see that your thoughts come into you from outside. Before they enter fling them back.” Who said this to Sri Aurobindo?

This was what Vishnu Bhaskar Lele told Sri Aurobindo when he taught him how to achieve mental silence.

3. “In the interest of peace and good governance, it is absolutely necessary that this man should be removed from the political arena.” Who wrote this to the Home Secretary of the Government of India on 16th May 1908, referring to Sri Aurobindo?

E.A.Gait, the Chief Secretary of Bengal wrote this in his report. The same day the Lt. Governor of Bengal, Andrew Fraser, wrote to Lord Minto: “He is the ring leader. He is able, cunning, fanatical...But he has kept himself, like a careful and valued General, out of sight of ‘the enemy’”

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Class of 2005

Standing (l to r): Kashika Sharma, Tejas Poddar, Ritam Bhattacharya, Aurobrata Hui, Jaydev Sharma, Nishant Jhunjhunwala, Deepak, Dinesh Gupta, Gaurab Bose, Bhaskar Patil, Utpal Smart, Ravichandran
 Sitting (Second Row): Lakshmi Samantaray, Ahuti Arya, Dilip Mehtani, Jhumur Bhattacharya, Manoj Das Gupta, Swadesh Chatterji, Arati Das Gupta, S. Ramprakash, Sunanda Mitra
 Sitting (Front Row): H.S. Manasa, Kanupriya Puranik, Meera Sahoo, Shilpa Patel, S. Sowmyadevi, Ahana Sureka, Subha Jagannathan, Kanchan Chakravarthy, Smita Gupta