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The Golden Chain

Alumni Journal of Sri Aurobindo International Centre of Education



OUR
SWIMMING POOL
1957 - 2007

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

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

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

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On the Cover:

The Mother watching a demonstration at the Swimming Pool.

The Golden Chain

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THE EDITORS' PAGE

Once, not long after the swimming pool was constructed, the bore well which was used to fill it began throwing up murky water. Batti-da reported the matter to the Mother. She asked him to collect water from the bore well three times every day and bring it all to her. Accordingly, Batti-da used to take bottles of that water to the Mother who would look at it for a while. This went on for 5 or 6 days, after which, obediently, the well began yielding clear water and continued doing so as long as it remained functional.

We heard this interesting story when we were researching the history of our swimming pool. Any study of the development of the School and the Ashram reveals innumerable such anecdotes of difficulties surmounted, of lessons learnt, of the Mother's guidance and of Her intervention.

As students we did not really bother ourselves with how our pool, or anything else for that matter, developed. We took it all largely for granted. We might have loved swimming or hated it, but for us the swimming pool was just there. Little did we then know how much trouble was being taken to provide us with that facility. We did not know of the experiment with the settling tank for the bore well water, the various chemicals in their various proportions that were tried out as additives, the maintenance of the sand and gravity filters, the nocturnal visits to the below-deck room to check on the pumps which were working through the night, the laborious cleaning of the tanks and the pool itself. The use of the swimming pool was, in a sense, our birthright and so was the use of everything else that was laid out for us.

Yes, we had often been told by our teachers and captains that we should be grateful for the magnificent set-up that the Mother has provided us, for the bountiful grace and consciousness that She is pouring down on us. We were encouraged to always be conscious, keep our ideal before us, and benefit from it all to make integral progress. We knew they were right, but it was difficult to make their words a living reality.

One sometimes feels that living the ideal must have been easier when the Mother was physically present and intensely involved in every activity. She used to be there in the 50s at the Sports Ground watching the competitions, holding the tape at the finishing line, checking the measurements for long jump... suffusing everything with Her smiling Presence. In an interview that is to appear in our forthcoming issue, Lakshman Sehgal mentions the attitude that one automatically had during the competitions when one knew the Mother was there watching and reacting almost like a child's proud mother would. Everything you did was directed towards Her. There was the enthusiasm to show Her one's best, no thoughts or fears of accident or injury... only the eagerness to see Her happy smile.

That then may be the key. If we at all really want to move forward on the Path, maybe all we have to do is invoke the picture of the Mother in front of us. If we could just see and feel Her Presence, as vividly and constantly as possible, watching us, watching over us, would we not inevitably seek to be the best we can be, to live by the highest light we have?

Reliving the spirit She created by Her Presence must be easier for those living in the Ashram and more so for those who have lived in the 50s. But even so it is surely possible for anyone, anywhere, who intensely wills it, to recreate Her Presence. For as She has told us repeatedly, She is always there with us.

In his article on the celebrations for the swimming pool's golden jubilee, Batti-da recounts how in 1958, on Her first "absence" from the field, he asked the Mother what should be kept on Her chair in the Sports Ground (Her photo, flowers, etc.?) She replied, "Just leave my chair empty for me." ❧

Always behave as if the Mother was looking at you; because she is, indeed, always present.

Sri Aurobindo

IN THE LORD'S PRESENCE

Sri Aurobindo lived in Baroda from 1893 to 1906. He had just returned from England and was in the service of the Maharaja. Initially he was employed in the land revenue section of the administration. Very soon, however, he was asked to teach French in the Baroda College. After a while he was appointed professor of English when a post fell vacant. This move, from the administrative department to education, brought him to his rightful place, considering that he had studied literature at Cambridge, had been a brilliant scholar and also had an inclination towards poetry. At various times he was also called upon by the Maharaja to do his personal



Sri Aurobindo Nivas, Baroda, where Sri Aurobindo lived from 1901 to 1906, is now preserved as a National Memorial to Sri Aurobindo.

secretarial work such as drafting of important letters, documents and speeches. On one occasion he accompanied the Maharaja on a trip to Kashmir as his Personal Secretary. When Sri Aurobindo finally left Baroda in 1906 he was working as the acting Principal of the Baroda College.

When Sri Aurobindo went to live in Baroda he was only twenty-one years old and when he left he was thirty-five. This was a very large and important part of his youth. It was while he was in Baroda that he started his revolutionary activities as well as his yogic sadhana. He sought out those who

had had any yogic realisations and began practising pranayama. The ground work for his political activities was done with the help of Barindra, his brother. As he was in the service of the Maharaja, Sri Aurobindo could not do anything officially but he built up his contacts with his political associates and even prepared his base in Bengal while he was still in Baroda. In fact, the two activities, yogic sadhana and revolution, were connected. This is what Sri Aurobindo said during conversations with his disciples many years later in Pondicherry and which has been recorded by A.B. Purani in Evening Talks:

“Deshpande (a friend) at that time was doing Hatha Yoga, Asanas and other such Kriyas and as he had a great proselytising tendency he wanted to convert me to his view. But I thought that a Yoga which required me to give up the world was not for me. I had to liberate my country. I took to it seriously when I learnt that the same Tapasya which one does to get away from the world can be turned to action. I learnt that Yoga gives power, and I thought, ‘why the devil should I not get the power and use it to liberate my country?’”

The meeting with Vishnu Bhaskar Lele during which he guided Sri Aurobindo to achieve mental silence took place in the first or second week of the year 1908. By this time Sri Aurobindo had actually left Baroda and settled down in Calcutta. He had come to Gujarat for the famous Surat Congress which took place in December 1907. A meeting was arranged in Baroda and Lele was specially called from Gwalior where he was at that time.

The other important aspect of the Baroda period is that during these years Sri Aurobindo wrote a lot of poetry. His first book of poems, Songs to Myrtilla, was published here. His narrative poem, Love and Death, was also written and published in Baroda. This was an activity close to his heart because Sri Aurobindo said later that he considered himself first a poet.

Living in Gujarat, it was normal for Sri Aurobindo to learn Gujarati, but he also picked up some Marathi, which was the State language, and Hindi. He invited Dinendra Kumar Roy to come and live with him so that the latter could accustom

was a plan to build a temple to Mother India and have sannaysi-revolutionaries live in its precincts who would renounce everything in order to work for the freedom of the country.

Although he was earning a living in Baroda as a professor of English, he travelled frequently to Kolkata. In 1901, during one of his visits, he married Mrinalini Devi. From what we know, she did not spend much time with him in Baroda. Although he was married, he continued to practically live alone and his correspondence with Mrinalini Devi shows us what was going on in his heart at that time, how he was entirely engaged in his effort to liberate his motherland.

In 1901, after his marriage to Mrinalini Devi, Sri Aurobindo was invited by Shri Khasirao Jadhav to come and stay in a large bungalow he owned. Sri Aurobindo accepted this offer and occupied the upper storey of the building. He stayed here till June 1906 when he left for Calcutta for good. That build-

ing is preserved today as the Sri Aurobindo Nivas, a houses a mini museum and the Baroda Centre. **Akshay Mehta '75H** visited the house a few months ago along with some ex-student friends. In the following article he relives the visit — a visit that moved him greatly.

him to conversation in Bengali and help him perfect his knowledge of the language. He also began to master Sanskrit. It was a time when he was trying to enter into the Indian way of life.

In Baroda the idea of Bhawani Mandir, which his brother Barin espoused, was also on his mind. It

We (Smita, Kamal, Shobha bhabhi, Anirban and I) visited Sri Aurobindo Nivas in Baroda. It's a 100 years ago that the Lord stayed there for 6 years. The Lord's presence was so strong and vibrant that there are no words for me to describe it except that it was like visiting Sri Aurobindo's room in Pondy.

Sri Aurobindo Nivas looks as it always has — an old colonial bungalow with a garden and huge open lawns on all four sides. Today they have big tall trees on two sides. The ground floor was closed because it was Sunday. But the first floor has a Meditation Hall and it remains open all day.

As I climbed up the wooden stairs with their

strong wooden railings which I held, I thought how fortunate I was that I was touching something which the Lord must have touched millions of times during his 6 years' stay there. The presence was very strong and real as if the Lord was still living there. I climbed up and straightaway saw the first large hall with



Sri Aurobindo Nivas is a beautiful, capacious building built with red bricks and mortar. It has 23 rooms and is set in an open area of about 55,000 sq.ft. This photo is taken from the rear.



Wooden staircase and railing which the Lord must have used innumerable times.



The first room on the right of the staircase with two large gold-framed paintings by S. M. Waghela where I simply felt like sitting at the Mother's and Sri Aurobindo's feet.

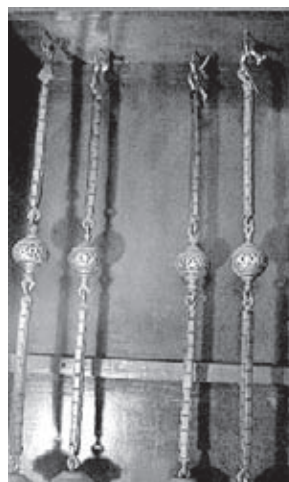
two big (very big) paintings of the Mother and Sri Aurobindo in pure gold frames. The floor was wooden and a big pinkish-cream plain carpet was spread on it. I had no other thought than just to sit at the feet of the Mother and Sri Aurobindo as if

They were going to tell me some nice stories. My eyes closed and my mind became blank and quiet. The room was somewhat dark because it did not have direct windows.

I heard my friend Anirban's (Budo's) voice, "Don't sit and meditate, first see all the other rooms." Directly behind the first big room there was a small room again with Mother's and Sri Aurobindo's portraits one third the size of those in the previous hall. The opposite side of the hall had a wooden frame with a lighted photograph of Matrimandir and the Amphitheatre — below was kept a 'hundi-box' on which was written "Money



The painting of the Lord sitting in an aristocratic posture. The bed-like platform below is the swing he sat on when he first realised the silence of the mind with Lele.



◀ The four chains of the swing which had the privilege of having the Lord take support and hold it. How lucky they were.

▼ The legs of the swing look like the paws of a tiger.



for Auroville Land." I went through the left-side door and found myself in a medium-sized room. It had a very big portrait of Sri Aurobindo painted by the same artist, S.M. Waghela, on the wall. The Lord is sitting in an aristocratic posture on the green sofa with a very serene and peaceful look as if He is thinking about how His motherland will progress and show the world the spiritual path. Just below this photo, is the swing on which the Lord meditated for three days at Majumdar's house in Baroda, under the guidance of Mahashree Vishnu Bhaskar Lele and there the Lord realised the silence of the mind.

The swing was really big in length and in breadth; I would say 65% of



▲ The almirah is filled with things used by the Mother and the Lord.

◀ The dhoti that was worn by the Lord when He was photographed by Henri Cartier-Bresson in April 1950.





The cigar box

the bed in Sri Aurobindo's room. It was covered with a bed-sheet made of embroidered silk m a r o o n and cream thread. It

had four legs which looked like large paws of a tiger on four corners. Four strong, long chains which held the swing were kept in a wooden glass cupboard in the corner of the hall. The 7-8 feet long chains looked like they were made of silver. They reminded me of swords and weapons kept in the museums of the maharajas. They were anyway very strong because they carried the Lord on them and the Lord's realisation of the silence of the mind was realised on the swing. The whole room was charged with very strong vibrations and the presence of the Lord himself.

There was a small locked glass almirah and inside it was the most wonderful treasure that I have ever seen: It was Sri Aurobindo's dhoti and *upavastra* which the Lord wore when His photos were taken by the French photographer Henri Cartier-Bresson in April 1950. They are since not even washed (that's what Champaklalji

specifically mentions). Can you understand what it means... it's the Lord's physical presence that I sensed before me. It's not all, the case also has two empty cigar boxes which the Lord had used, before He gave up smoking after coming to Pondicherry, perhaps because the Mother did not approve of it.

There's also a small blue light-bulb which was used as a night lamp in the Lord's room. It must have been present during all His experiences and must have also taken part in the Lord's day to day life. It's a material object but I felt it had life and because it was a faithful servitor of the Divine and it is still serving Him and is present in the Lord's room with other material objects like the swing, the chains of the swing, the cigar cases, the dhoti and the *upavastra*.

The material objects are much more fortunate than I that they at least have the privilege to remain in the room *forever* with the *Lord's vibrations* constantly with them. How fortunate and lucky they are.... ❧



The bulb and other articles which had the honour of serving the Lord.

THE ROAD NOT TAKEN

By *Purushottam Kothari '83*

There is often a little story behind the big story. I was asked to share this incident linked to Akshay's experience but it is as ridiculous as writing a sequel for "Gone with the Wind" and naming it "Back with the Breeze".

On 30th December 2006, a group from the Ashram — Devendra-da, Parshuram, and myself — left for Alang (Gujarat) to get some equipment for the Ashram. It was a 2,000 km drive, which we

covered in two days! We spent another two hectic days to procure, arrange, transport and load the truck, working practically through the night. We had time for only one meal on the first day, and none on the second. A banana each was all we could manage. Aside from one *dhaba* which is only open for lunch, there was no other food in Alang, let alone a toilet — if you don't have food to eat, why do you need a toilet?

We started our return journey on 4th January

at 3:30am, just after we had finished loading the truck. Our original plan was to stop briefly in Baroda to visit the Sri Aurobindo Nivas. But

my rib cage. My eldest brother, Kamal, called and said, "If the others are not stopping to see the Nivas, then why don't you just proceed to Pondy with them?" I told him that my work at the shipyard was over and I just had to see the Sri Aurobindo Nivas.

We were dropped off at the by-pass road to Baroda at 9:00 am and we took an auto rickshaw to the Nivas, a nice, quiet place in an old, colonial structure. We made a quick tour of the house in which Sri Aurobindo spent some of his prime years — the Lord playing secretary to the Maharaja of Baroda.

During dinner that night, I got calls from my brothers Mangal and Kamal, asking me to take some pictures of the

Bhavan before I came back. They explained that Akshay had written an article for *The Golden*



A hall in the Nivas

Devendra-da had to report back to the Ashram in time for his workers' payment-day on Saturday, 6th January; so he decided to proceed directly to Pondicherry halting only at traffic lights! Two other NGO-associated friends of mine, Mark Jacobs and Yoo-Mi Lee, had met our team in Bhavnagar to see the operations at Alang and joined us on the return trip. I was debating whether I should continue on with Devendra-da or get off at Baroda and have the three of us visit the Nivas. Things would be quite difficult for me if I got off, as I would have a hard time getting back to Pondy on my own. The road we were driving on was the national highway and I was tempted to continue when I recalled a line by Robert Frost from my school days: "Two roads diverged in a wood, and I — I took the one less traveled by, and that has made all the difference." The desire to see the Nivas was pounding through



The relics' shrine

Chain magazine describing his astonishing firsthand, first-heart experience at the Nivas, and it would be nice if I could get pictures for the article. I agreed willingly as Mark and Yoo-Mi were there to help and had a digital camera with them. Just

that night, Jhumur-di had called Akshay to suggest that he include some photographs along with his article and that he should do it quickly to meet the printing deadlines.

We decided that we would take a few shots of the Bhavan in the morning, and proceed to Surat to deliver the pictures to Akshay. That morning, Akshay called on the speaker phone and read out his entire experience. We all heard it, in the words you have just read. I could tell that he was emotional, so I told him not to say another word — we knew what we had to do. Mark told me: “Puru, this is a huge responsibility. It is not just clicking the camera. The lighting conditions are quite difficult in the dark house, but I’ll do my best. I understand how much this means to him.”

We got permission to photograph and the devotees working there went out of their way to help us in our effort. As there was reflection off the glass in the cabinets that held the chains of the swing and the other artifacts, the staff opened the cabinets and laid out the artifacts for us to shoot. We took more than 350 photographs, and missed two trains to Surat in the process. By now, we had gotten used to missing lunch, so we skipped another meal and, crawling toward the station in perhaps the world’s slowest auto-rick-

shaw (“Bhaiya, my auto is CNG — cannot go.”), barely caught the 1:30 pm Nagercoil Express to Surat. Mark reviewed and cleaned up the photographs on his laptop computer during the two hour journey.

We reached Surat at 4:30 pm (the train was late), had a late “lunch” and had just enough time to make a presentation to Akshay and the ever-hospitable Smita before catching our train to Bangalore at 7:00 pm. Akshay and Smita were thrilled, and excitedly pointed out the relevance of many of the pictures to their experience. Akshay told me that, despite Mark’s protests, he was the best person for the job because he did it from his heart.

At first I didn’t understand why I had such a strong compulsion to get off in Baroda when all the practical indicators were in favour of continuing the journey by the national highway. Sometimes you have to follow your instincts, and the reasons may reveal themselves later on.

A hundred years ago from these very precincts the Lord was guiding and helping the Maharaja for Rs. 150 per month. Today he continues to guide his subjects without charge but charges within. As Sri Aurobindo says in *Ilion*, “Often we think that we drive — but are driven.” ❧

HER GLOBAL GRACE

Yogamaya '95

We have read so many anecdotes about Mother’s Grace, and always thought “what a beautiful abstract feeling it must be”. I say “abstract” because I hadn’t felt it as concretely as described by a few. My parents always told me that Her Grace is showered on all Her children all the time and She is always there with us. We have to just consciously and sincerely try and feel Her close to us.

Another beautiful reflection that I came across was that whenever you think of Douce Mère, it

means that SHE is also thinking of you. Well in our school days, we used to remember Douce Mère while the morning music played and we heard Her voice, and that too was difficult as we had to collect our wandering thoughts and concentrate. In group, when we were called for the “rassemblement” we concentrated for a minute and then again at the end of our physical activities, we shut our eyes and pondered. I don’t know how many times I really concentrated and thanked Her.

Years have rolled by since those immature days,

and time has taken me to another continent and new people and family. I used to wonder if my physical distance from Douce Mère would dilute Her Grace upon me, and if I would feel less protected and despair. On the contrary, everything turned out to be good in Nairobi where I presently live with my family. On my trips to Pondy, I used to brag about my comfortable life to my parents and friends, and always at the end of our conversation, my father used to calmly tell me, “Mayu, it is Mother’s Grace that does everything...”. I marveled at the unshakable Faith my dear Papa had in Mother’s Grace, and somewhere envied him too, wondering why I did not feel this strong sentiment.

Well one day, I was blessed to concretely feel this strong sensation. I was playing in the garden with my one and half year old son, Krish.

He is a hyper child, and is always running around faster than his legs can cope with, and stumbles and falls, and bruises his knees and elbows. My pleas fall on deaf ears, and he is entirely absorbed in his activities of chasing the pet dogs, running behind butterflies, circling the parked cars, playing hide and seek and singing to himself — sometimes loud enough to perturb the neighborhood and chase away the dogs.

Unable to cope with his activities, I sat down while he was exploring the insects around him and calling out to me, “Mamma... ant, dudu

(insect in Swahili).” I gave him a half nod, while I was lost in my thoughts and trying to catch my breath. All of a sudden, he saw the dogs jump down a flight of steep steps leading to another level in the garden. They were chasing a monkey which was hiding in the mango tree. With big questioning eyes and a curious look on his face, Krish ran full throttle towards the stairway, with the intention of flying down the steps to the pet dogs and the place of excitement. I was stunned



Yogamaya (Mayu) and her son Krish

with this sudden change of activity and I heard myself cry out, “Maa...” To my amazement, Krish stopped a few inches before the steep steps. I ran and picked him up, while he was looking at me, bewildered as to what had happened. Tears streaming down my cheeks I realized that it was Mother’s Grace that had saved Krish from tumbling down

the near vertical steps. What other force could disrupt his speed and bring him to a stand still! Unconsciously it was Her that I called to save my son, and HER GRACE was showered instantly.

No matter how far we children of Mother are, Her Grace and Love is always with us. And not only us, but with our children and families also. My doubts about Mother’s Grace reaching us so far away vanished since that eventful day and amazing occurrence. I realized how fortunate we are and what a protected world She has created for us. ❧

A sadhak should always remember that everything depends upon the inner attitude; if he has a perfect faith in the Divine Grace, he will find that the Divine Grace will make him do the right thing at every step. He will be made to go out of the house, for example, if it is dangerous to remain in the house; and he will stay in the house if there is danger for him outside. The Grace will prompt him to do just the thing that makes him escape the danger. But for things to happen like that, you must have a deeply-rooted faith pervading your whole being, contradicted by no other movement in you. And this is naturally difficult.

Sri Aurobindo (SABCL, 24: 1696-1697)

TO PHASE-OUT OR GET PHASED OUT

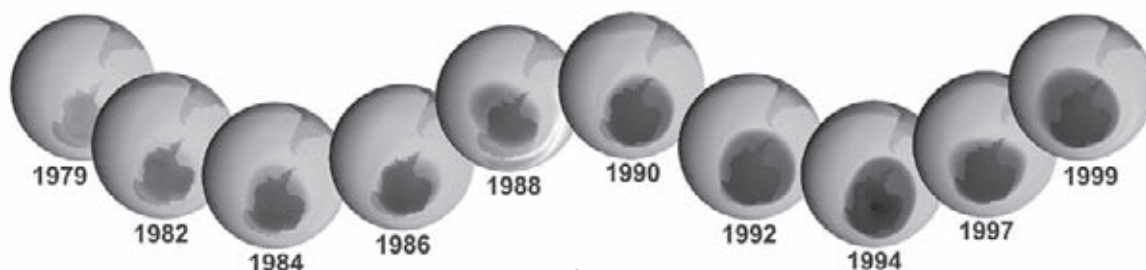
THE OZONE LAYER AND OUR EARTH

*Recently global warming and the possibility of impending climate change have been in the news. Another similar global environmental challenge is that of the “hole” in the protective ozone layer above the earth. **Sudhanshu ’79** and **Kshem ’79** are part of a team which is working to phase out certain Ozone Depleting Substances which are used in various industries. They tell us about the problem and the work they are doing in the field.*

All cricket aficionados will recollect the first time they saw cricketers on the field with sunscreen cream applied on their faces. I believe the Aussies were the first to sport the new look. However applying cream has nothing to do with looks; rather it is used to protect the skin from harmful ultraviolet rays (UV-B in particular) of the sun that can even cause skin cancer. Till three decades ago, only very little of this harmful radiation reached the surface of the earth due to the protective ozone layer that acts as a filter.

The ozone layer, consisting of tri-atomic molecules of oxygen (O_3), is located in the stratosphere, which stretches from 15 kms to 60 kms from the earth's surface. This may sound like a lot of ozone but its peak density is no more than 10 ppm (parts per million) or 10 molecules of ozone per 10 lakh molecules of air. If all of the ozone in the stratosphere were to be gathered around the earth at sea level at standard temperature and pressure (STP) it would barely have a thickness of 3 mm.

In May 1985, The British Antarctic Survey Team first reported the ‘ozone hole’ spreading out from the South Pole. The term ‘ozone hole’ refers to a large and rapid decrease in the concentration of ozone molecules and not to their complete absence and has been occurring since the late 1970s. A recent study tells us that the ozone hole is spread over an area of 28 million square kilometers, an area corresponding to more than 8 times the size of India or the entire African continent. These facts point to a global problem of serious magnitude that concerns the entire earth. Interestingly, the ozone hole appears only during late-September-early-October corresponding to the spring season of the southern hemisphere. This is because during the dark and cold winter over the Antarctic, where the temperatures fall as low as -80°C , the molecules of ozone depleting substances (ODS) are trapped in tiny ice particles. With the coming of the first rays of the sun all these molecules are liberated in a short period and dissociated by the UV rays. This results in an army of chlorine atoms that begin their destruction of the ozone



Images from the Total

Ozone Mapping Spectrometer of NASA's Earth Probe Satellite shows the gradual but definite increase in the Ozone hole over Antarctica in the last twenty years.

layer causing the ozone “hole” which corresponds to a reduction of more than 50% in the ozone concentration. Gradually the depleted ozone spreads out over the entire earth and the “Hole” disappears. The cycle begins again the next season.

As a consequence of the thinning of the ozone layer, the UV-B rays now reach the earth’s surface causing damage to human, animal and plant life. The UV radiation increases the incidence of skin cancer. In Australia for instance, studies indicate that a decrease of 1 % in the ozone layer seems to cause a 2% increase in cases of skin cancer. UV rays are also known to damage the cornea and lens of the eye leading to cataract. UV radiation causes suppression of the human immune system thus making the body vulnerable to a number of infectious diseases. It has a harmful effect on fish and other marine life; it adversely influences the productivity of aquatic systems leading to decreased reproductive capacity and impaired development. It hinders the growth, photosynthesis and flowering of major agricultural crops like rice, wheat, corn and soya bean. A 1 % increase in UV-B radiation at ground level can cause as much as 10% decrease in food production. Hence the depletion can cause havoc on global agriculture, health and nutrition sectors.

Studies have identified chlorine atoms (Cl) as the scavenger of ozone molecules. The main sources which release Cl are CFCs (chlorofluorocarbons), CTC (carbon tetrachloride), methyl chloroforms, HCFC (hydrochlorofluorocarbons) and bromochloroethane. Apart from these, other ozone depleting substances (ODS) are bromine containing halons i.e. methyl bromide and HBFC (hydrobromofluorocarbons).

The most popular among the ODSs are CFCs commonly known as “freons”. Their major applications are as coolant gas in refrigerators and other cooling appliances and as solvents in cleaning of electronic circuitry. CTC, another ODS, is used as a cleaning solvent in various applications in the textile, metal and other industries.

In a typical reaction, one chlorine atom from an ODS molecule can destroy over its lifetime (typically between 50 to 100 years), thousands of



The Offset printing industry uses CTC as a cleaning agent

ozone molecules. For instance, one molecule of the refrigerant CFC-II causes, during its lifetime in the stratosphere, a destruction of 100,000 molecules of ozone. This ozone depleting potential is referred to as ODP.

In order to save the planet of this growing danger, on 16 September 1987 an international agreement known as the ‘Montreal Protocol’ was signed by developing and developed countries binding them to take action to preserve the ozone layer. The Montreal Protocol is an example of a remarkable and successful international commitment, agreed upon by more than 185 countries which are committed to ensuring and accelerating the phase-out of all ozone depleting substances. For developed countries the phase-out dates are past (in 1996) and the targets already achieved. For India, which like many other developing countries, benefits from a grace period, and is a signatory to this agreement since 17 September 1992, the phase-out date for CFCs and CTC is set to 1st January 2010.

For the phase-out of CTC in India, the Ozone Cell of the Ministry of Environment and Forests, Government of India, is the central coordinating agency. The cell has established the regulatory framework and national phase-out plan. It ensures that domestic CTC production and import progressively decrease in compliance with national targets.

The German Technical Cooperation or Deutsche Gesellschaft für Technische Zusammenarbeit (GTZ) is a German development assistance organisation mandated by the German

Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) to assist the Government of India to phase out the ODSs within the time frame set by the Montreal Protocol. In regard to the phase-out of CTC, GTZ's mandate consists of assisting small-scale industries (with an annual consumption of less than 10 Metric tons) in finding alternatives to CTC.

The phase-out effort of the GTZ team is focused on the facilitation of a sustainable solution. The approach to this facilitation consists of a multi-pronged strategy that identifies viable alternatives for known CTC uses in close interaction with industries and that translates in the following activities:

- Information dissemination to increase awareness through articles, brochures, seminars, workshops and a dedicated website (www.ctc-phaseout.org).
- Identification of industry applications dependent on CTC as well as potential alternatives (already used in the industry) through surveys.
- Assessment of the viability in terms of safety and efficacy of the alternatives under industrial environment.
- Development and implementation of components required for capacity building in the industry for successful deployment of the alternatives.

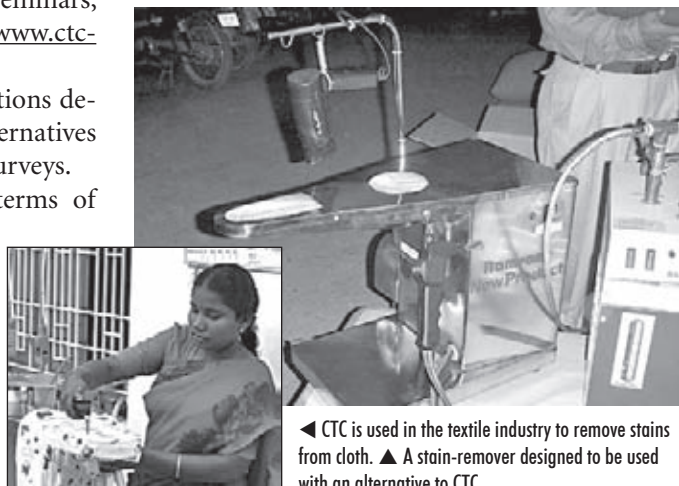
One may wonder why it is so difficult to find alternatives. Why reinvent the wheel? Why not simply substitute CTC by alternatives used by the developed countries that have already phased out CTC?

The answer is that the feasibility of any new solution is highly dependent on the local environment, economy, technology used and the industrial process itself. Therefore it is important to understand the local industry and work according to its specific requirements. For this reason we look for alternatives already in use in the industry. For instance one offset printing unit owner advised us to find the alternatives used by the Malaysian offset industry, as Malaysia has dusty roads like ours (in the offset printing industry CTC is used mainly to clean dust, cello tape gum etc).

Our responsibilities however do not end there.

Since word has spread about the impending ban on CTC, manufacturers out of fear of being discovered have quickly disguised CTC under a variety of new brand names. In fact we found this interesting label — “50% CTC Free” — on a solvent for removing stains from fabric in the textile industry. Also there is a need not only to ensure that the alternatives are completely ODS free but that they are free from health and safety risks as well. In our efforts to protect the ozone layer we cannot ignore the risks to human life itself. After all, substituting an ODS substance by another fraught with health risks is like jumping from the frying pan into the fire.

Once appropriate alternatives for a particular industry sector have been identified and assessed,



◀ CTC is used in the textile industry to remove stains from cloth. ▲ A stain-remover designed to be used with an alternative to CTC.

we help the industry in adapting new methods or technologies that may be required with the use of those alternatives. For example for the textile industry where CTC is used mainly to remove stains from cloth and garments, we have developed a training package to train the industry not only in the efficient use of alternatives but also in following clean housekeeping practices which will prevent stain occurrence in the first place. We have also taken the initiative to redesign the stain removing equipment to better suit the alternatives and reduce its cost to suit smaller pockets.

Though our activities have begun to bear fruit, the journey ahead is still long and arduous while the phase-out date is fast closing in on us. ☞

GOLDEN JUBILEE OF OUR SWIMMING POOL

21.02.1957 — 21.02.2007

A report by R. Prabhakar '58 (Batti) on the demonstration of 20th February 2007

INTRODUCTORY WORDS

(Opening note read by Manoj Das Gupta after a concentration with Mother's music).

"Welcome everybody,

On 21st February, 1957 at 4 pm, exactly 50 years ago, a long-awaited dream became a reality when the Mother inaugurated our Swimming Pool with a short programme which we will replicate to a certain extent today.

At first, the Mother dropped a key into these waters and Jean (Medhananda's son), jumped in and retrieved it.

village pond for 30 long, long years! The water was green, translucent. The walls and floor were covered with a thick layer of slimy moss and algae. We had to empty the Pool every 1 ½ months or 2 months and scrub it clean, wearing down a dozen brushes to the bare handles! One is reminded of Hercules cleaning the Aegean stables. Yet, undaunted we swam without coming to any harm!

This water you see today is about 3 years old. We have moved from innocence to ignorance to some knowledge."

THE PROGRAMME

1) KEY RETRIEVING — Aruna (A5 Captain) was chosen to drop the brass key made for the occasion (it was about 20 cm long and weighed a good 800 grams).

Aruna (Anna) is the oldest serving captain — she is evergreen — no change in commitment, attitude and voice (volume) in the last 4-5 decades. Her thirty children are six-year-olds needing care and careful handling.

"Who will retrieve the key?" was for a while

a question incubating in my mind. Then it struck me — why not "all", represented by three persons from the length of the last half a century? Three names emerged from three generations of



Concentration before the start of the demonstration

The Pool has come a long way since that day of its birth to this day. We may claim it has come of age. Those who had seen it then and see it now must wonder at the great changes. It was like a

CALL TO ARMS

R. Prabhakar '58 (Batti)

It all started with a casual remark or observation of mine made amongst my friends that the pool is completing 50 years (so too my “professional” life — so called). Not much thought was given to that remark for a few days. Then it was Sumit, I think, who nagged me saying, “Battida, at least put up a few old photographs.” When I didn’t respond he persisted, “I will search for them etc.” Maybe that gave the first nudge. Then more voices joined in (Swadesh, Sumitra) and finally these pushed me towards the brink. Before taking the plunge, I asked Pranab-da and sought his consent. He pushed me further — so, over I went, had to take the plunge head-first.

I thought of just a relay or two and half a

dozen dives, and of announcing the programme quietly to the groups for an altogether informal gathering. But that was not to be. I was wonderstruck at the enthusiastic response from the captains and the group members. The captains then took over — I had much of the time to sit back to await the Day.

The idea was born very late, so the practice was very short and insufficient for a show. Nevertheless, the “mood” was on — it touched everybody. That chance remark, snow-balled into the “Show” that so many saw and enjoyed.

The group members too pitched in with more than usual hard work, concentration and goodwill and willingness. The time slots and swimming space were to be shared and the normal group routine too continued. Yet “that mood” made up for all the constraints.

captains: Vishweshwar of the ancients, Abhijit from the middle ages and Arun of this era.

The key was thrown into the water when they were facing away from the pool. They turned round and dived in to look for it. Arun it was who rose up with it and placed it at the feet of the Mother.

2) THE FOUR STROKES — These are: Crawl, Breast stroke, Back Crawl and Dolphin/Butterfly. Six youngsters were chosen for each stroke. The stress was on style — speed was of no consequence.

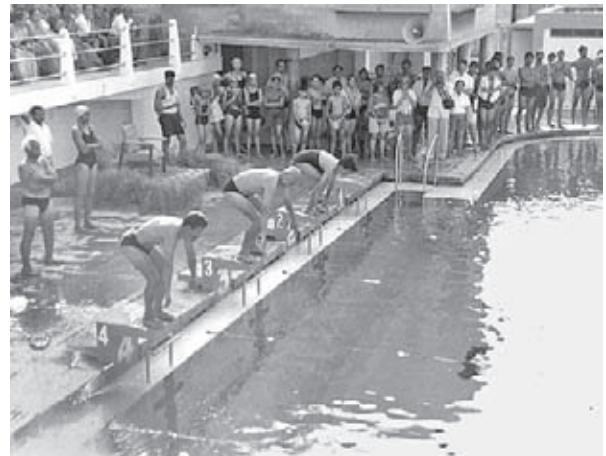
Four Red Group children (Group B) swam underwater. Nothing much could be seen. Those on the balconies and galleries could have seen the swimmers. One of them covered a lap and some more.

3) RELAYS — Normally relays engender a great deal of excitement (in the racers and the audience) and competitive spirit. These were no exceptions. The best 24 taken from all groups took part in the 4 x 33m Crawl Relay. The 4 x 33m Medley Relay teams were made from the remaining mixed lot.

The Relay that brought everyone to their feet was the three-team one comprising of veterans (Captains). The children shouted themselves

hoarse rooting for their respective captains.

This was a last minute idea from Arpit and Swadesh. A couple of Captains pulled out of years



Veteran captains' relay

of retirement even took special time out to re-condition their muscles. The minds were young and motivated enough for the demands of the occasion.

4) NOVELTY RELAYS — These were Relays done by A2 children. They enlivened the programme quite a bit. They used car tubes to row

themselves across; then they had to use only the leg strokes of crawl and breast stroke holding planks or balls; both these were a novel and useful training. The last race was also a work, enjoyed by the participants and the watchers. The lane ropes had to be taken out for the events to follow. So seven children held the seven rope ends. Two of



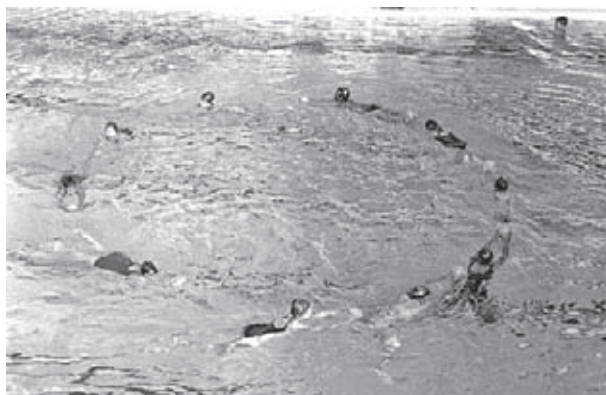
Demonstration of life saving techniques

their team mates (for each rope) pulled as fast as they could from the deck at the other end. The wave in front of each child was akin to that at the bow of a fast-moving boat.

5) LIFE SAVING — Some of the B groupers demonstrated the different holds and resuscitation methods of life saving. A commentary explained the whole enactment.

6) FORMATION SWIMMING — The A1 children with swimming floats (planks) and balls swam in changing formations to a soft music in the background.

7) SYNCHRONIZED SWIMMING — The senior girls gave a good performance of some simple movements synchronized to music. They formed the number 50 to mark the occasion. Considering the short time at their disposal to practice for the event, it was a



Formation swimming by A1 children

commendable performance.

8) DIVING — Boys and girls were picked out from different groups, including some ancients. Diving is a hard item. It is said, “a diver is a very lonely man” — so true, as many can vouch for. The results were better than expected and the spectators were very appreciative.

The last two dives were from the 5 metre board, by the two oldest veterans, Vishweshwar and Prabhakar (Batti).



Senior girls form the number 50 as part of their synchronised swimming display

Vishwa showed fine form and a smooth entry in his “swallow” dive. i.e. Forward dive — straight.

Claps and shouts of appreciation and surprise went up all round.

Batti's was a "log" or "statue" dive performed in an old style — stand at "attention" and lean



Visweshwar '58 performs a swallow dive

over, let gravity do the rest; no other movement but to hold a tight form. The head meets the water for the entry. This dive fairly brought down the house. (A young lady had a witty remark: "Surrender in Action").

Thus ended the Golden Jubilee Celebrations and a happy day.

It took us one hour from the first whistle to the last dive. That one hour was a nostalgic compression of the last 50 years, especially for those who were present half a century ago. But even on those of later or recent years, a gentle euphoria settled. Their minds too could feel and live in good measure a Past they had not witnessed.

Often in some idle moments, I used to dreamily picture our Sports Ground as a Crown and our Swimming Pool as the Jewel in the Crown — a Crown on whom but on our Mother, the Creator. The picture now seems to be more and more not a dream.

On looking back at the programme to commemorate the Pool's golden jubilee and the 50 years that preceded it, thoughts, memories and events "swim" past my mind and I put them down

on these pages for the mere pleasure of it.

To begin with, the day was a great success from almost all points and from everyone's point of view. The programme was tasteful, varied and even just the right length for the audience to feel like wanting a little more when it did end. It seems a goodly feeling of "togetherness" and a simple happiness filled the participants and the audience. In many — as they told me — a deep sense of gratitude for the Mother welled up. Her chair was not "empty." That is why I leave it empty when I place it — not as a whim, fancy or lack of ideas — but as per Her specific instructions, better a "Sweet Injunction..."

It was the time when the Mother stopped coming out (physically) to oversee and bless the various sports activities and competitions. This was in 1958. The particular occasion was the opening day of the Athletics Competitions or perhaps the 2nd of December. In any case, it was her first "absence" from the field. The question arose: "What to do for the March Past?" A few suggestions came in (to me) — to keep a photo of the Mother on the chair — to keep some flowers etc. I heard it all quietly. When I went up to Her (physically), I passed the problem and the suggestions to Her for a solution. She replied in no uncertain terms, "Just leave my chair empty for me." She added, "At one function my sandals were on my chair, so when I went there, there was no place for me!" ❧



The Mother's chair

OUR SWIMMING POOL

Ambika Sarkar '03

The Mother has provided Her children with every facility to nurture the body's education. On the material plane, She has taken meticulous care to bestow on us everything that will contribute in shaping the physical consciousness. The swimming pool is one such instrument that She has provided us with.



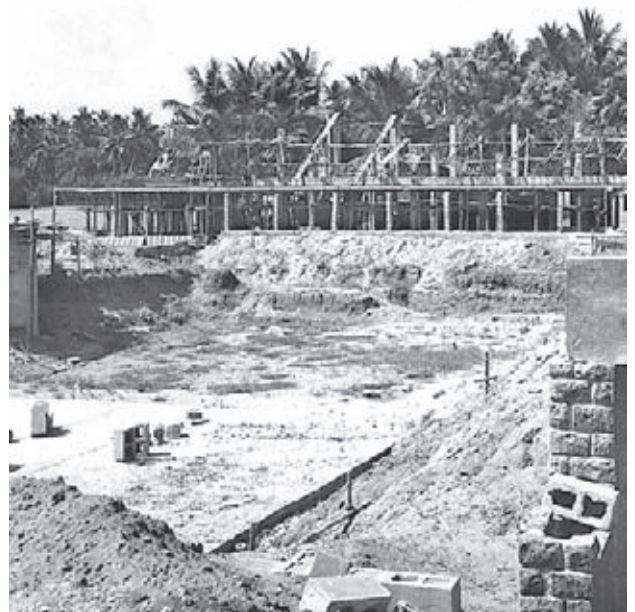
The Swimming Pool being constructed ▲►

Who doesn't have pleasant memories of our swimming pool? We sure are proud of it. The routine practice during group, the competitions, novelty events and individual accomplishments and anecdotes around it, have stamped our life in SAICE. On its 50th anniversary, 21st February 2007, we can look back at its evolution and feel grateful for what it has offered us.

Before 1957, children in the Ashram longed to be able to swim. In those days, before Tennis Ground was leased out to the Ashram, swimming in the sea was strictly forbidden. A few young ones had to make do with simply wetting their legs under supervision. But gradually, ideas about a place to swim began to emerge; some speculated that an area in Parc à Charbon (present Park Guest House) would be the site for this creation. But, it

never really materialised. Some of the boys used to swim in the Lake. The Mother had observed that children were eager to swim, "How I wish to give a swimming pool to my children," She had said. "They are swimming where buffaloes are washed."

In 1950 or so, Ashram acquired a big piece of land on the far end of the Mahatma Gandhi Rd, then called 'Ancienne Route de Madras'. At this point, it became possible to think concretely of a swimming pool of one's own. The spot selected for the pool was an elevated area where grew a few sweet-potato plants. Udar-da is said to have taken the initiative and to have come up with some preliminary designs with the help of some French magazines. Louis Allen, Olga's husband, was to lead the construction work and Udar-da and Vishwanath-da were responsible for the inner



workings, laying of pipes, pumps and filters etc. For some time, the actual construction work was delayed due to financial constraints, but a devotee

stepped forward and offered a large sum and the work could be resumed.

Digging began with forty labourers and some of our boys and girls. Gradually, the children saw their promised pool take shape. It went from a hole to a rectangular pit and then one day white concrete walls were laid around it. As an afterthought, part of the south west wall was broken to make room for a diving area; those responsible fortunately realized that it would be dangerous to have a common swimming and diving area. The main pool was $33\frac{1}{3}$ metres in length and 15 metres in width. Its floor sloped down, the shallow side being 1.20m deep and the deep end 4m. The diving bay was 14m long and 6m wide. The Mother chose a spot for a water source, a bore well which was located below the "Club room", on

one's way from the bathrooms to the deck. A 5Hp pump was installed that hauled water and passed it to two gravity sand filters situated at a height. The filtered water flowed into the pool from the top of the slope by gravity. Three diving boards were erected, more or less in the place where they are today except for the 1 metre board. The 1 metre board then stood perpendicularly close to the 3 metre board, a dangerous thing as the entry point in the water, for divers from both boards, was the same. It took a while before this was rectified. The galleries and the two rows of bathrooms and toilets were completed at the same time. This much was ready by 21st February 1957, which was chosen as the inauguration day.

Some of the boys and inmates of the Ashram wanted to mark the occasion with a swimming



The Mother watching a swimming demonstration

SOURCE OF WATER

Udar-da

When we were building the swimming pool at the Sportsground I wanted to have our own independent supply of water from a tube well so as not to depend on the town supply. Now I know that sinking a tube well is a risk. There are narrow underground streams and if the well hits one of these then it will give a regular and constant supply of water. But if one misses

it by even a few feet then the water supply is intermittent and can fail in summer. So we had to hit the right spot and for this I remembered what Sri Aurobindo had said and I asked the Mother to come and choose the spot for us. So Mother came to the place, meditated a while and then put Her foot on a spot, which we marked at once. We went ahead and had the bore well at the exact spot and now we get ample water all the time.

and diving performance. But where would they practice when there wasn't any place to swim? They were eager to do something for the occasion and they found the means to make it happen. Luckily the lake was full at that time of the year; so Batti-da and some others began to practice swimming there. Louis Allen even devised a way to practice diving! A plank was fixed on posts close to the lake shore and it would serve as a diving platform.

The grand day finally arrived. The Mother, who turned 79 on that day, came to inaugurate it. To mark the opening of the pool, She threw a key into it and Jean, Medhananda's son, dived in, retrieved it and offered it to Her. With this

symbolic action, the pool was inaugurated. Then followed the swimming and diving programme. The swimmers, decked with flower garlands on their heads, Polynesian-style, filed in in two lines and entered the pool from the southwest and northeast end. They swam in many formations

with gentle strokes and then proceeded to a diving display. One of the highlights was Puraniji's padmasan dive from the 3 metre board. (It was this opening ceremony that participants from all the groups reenacted on 20th February 2007.)

From that day till today, the pool has undergone several changes; we can take a look at some of the interesting ones. Not everybody knows that in the diving bay, on the northern side, there used

to be a small underwater room with glass panes. It was meant for underwater photography. The room was filled and closed after a while as the glass could not withstand the water pressure. Some important features of the pool are the systems



The Swimming Pool today

used for filtering, filling, drawing and recycling or reusing the water. This process or parts of it have undergone several stages of evolution. For example, we have already seen that a pump was ready to fill the swimming pool with water before the inauguration. But how was the pool to

HOW BATTI-DA BECAME MANAGER OF THE SWIMMING POOL

One day, like everybody else, Batti-da was waiting for the Mother to come out of Her room in the Playground (near the map) and begin the ground-nut distribution, when Narendra Jauhar, who was looking out for a suitable candidate to oversee the pool, saw him and stopped. As Batti-da recounts:

“Narendra just strolled by and all on an impulse... he stopped near me. He casually caught my hand and said as casually, “Why don’t you look after the swimming pool.” It was hardly a question. I had no time to say, “How? Why me?” when he stepped into the Mother’s room. She looked up and smiled — so I too stepped in —

what else to do?... Narendra told Her, “Mother, he (pointing at me) can look after the pool.” She, not to be outdone, said, “Oh! You can look after the pool?” It was only half a question. Maybe I too got into the same mood and said. “I can try, Mother.” And the deal was made. She was the snare and bait, the cause and the end! My professional career started.”

*

Apart from Batti-da, over the years, right from its inception till today, a number of people have been involved with our swimming pool’s working. Among them are: Udar-da, Allen, Vishawanth-da, Kamal Banerjee, Yogananda, Gerard, Madhusudhan-da, Jogeshwar-da, Lakshmidhar, Chinu, Borun, Poorna, Maya, Puru.

be emptied? One must remember that the tiled, clean pool with luscious blue water that one enjoys today is only a recent phenomenon (since 1991). Earlier the water was invariably moss-ridden and picturesquely ‘green as a village pond’; it had to be cleaned every two months. Well, an old fire engine was used to pump all the water out of the pool. Later on, a powerful 12Hp pump was installed in the ‘pump room’ below the Mother’s symbol which served multiple functions. It drew water from the pool or from the tank used to store excess water, it watered the lawns and plants of Sports Ground and it performed another remarkable job of pumping the water to the nearby gardens right upto Ambabhikshu’s. The cleaning

of the pool was a veritable task. Eight coolies had to be lowered inside with the help of several car inner tubes and they scrubbed the walls till the brushes were reduced to only stubs.

The anecdotes are endless and interesting as in the case of everything that has seen time go by and especially so in the Ashram where each thing was designed with a purpose and served the Divine’s workings in some way. As for me, like all my SAICE fraternity, I have enjoyed my frolic, my first courageous jump from the 5 metre board in A3, all the improvement that I have made and didn’t make through the years in the field of swimming and diving, and even some very memorable personal experiences. ❧

Behind the appearances that the physical eyes can see, there is a reality much more concrete and lasting. It is in this reality that I am with you today and will be during all the athletic season. The force, the power, the light and the consciousness will be in your midst constantly to give to each one, according to his receptivity, the success in his endeavour and the progress which is the crowning result of all sincere effort.

19 July 1959

The Mother (CWM, 12: 275)

RENOVATING BHARATI PARK

The area where the Bharati Park stands today was the heart of colonial Pondicherry. The *Compagnie des Indes* was established here in 1673 for textile trade. The French, led by François Martin, built two forts here: the first, Fort Barlong in 1689 and the second, the much grander Fort Louis in 1706. The earliest streets of the town, to the south (Dumas, Suffren) and to the north (Saint Louis, François Martin) emanated from this centre.

When the British took Pondicherry in 1761, they systematically destroyed Fort Louis. The ruins of the fort remained long after the French returned and were like a deep physical and psychological scar on Pondicherry's urban landscape. For many decades the area remained bare and largely unused except as a ground for military training and for celebrating the French national festival. Then in 1854, partly to heal the wounds of history, a central monument named Aayi Mandapam was built. It was dedicated to a legendary courtesan of the early 16th century who had established the source of water five kilometers west of the town at Mutrapalayam. After initial failures, engineers succeeded in piping water from Mutrapalayam to a fountain in the monument.

Then, almost a hundred years later, after the Second World War, in 1946, the first trees were planted and the area was rechristened "place Charles De Gaulle". Pavitra-da, we are told, was the one who then designed the Park with its four-petal scheme and its "Service" trees.

Recently, this park, a witness to the turbulent changes in Pondy's history, again saw change. The Pondicherry Government with the help of INTACH redesigned the Bharati Park (renamed after Subramaniam Bharati) and it was inaugurated on 26.1.2007. **Ashok Panda '77** of INTACH answers our questions regarding the latest renovation.



Old photo of the ground which is now the Bharati Park. At the centre is the Aayi Mandapam.

Why was the need felt to renovate the existing park? Was there a change in the larger concept of how the Park should be used?

With the increase in population and vehicular movement — INTACH, along with colleagues at the Asia

Urbs Programme [see GC Nov 2004] felt that an exclusive pedestrian area had to be created in the French quarters. The first design and walk-through video was done with funding from the Asia Urbs project. As the idea grew, the Govt. of Pondicherry, under a centrally sponsored scheme from the Ministry of Tourism, Govt. of India, named "Product / Infrastructure and Destination Development", planned the Revitalisation of the Bharathi Park project. It was one of the projects approved by the Govt. of India amongst some others like the development of the Shore Temple in Mahabalipuram in Tamil Nadu at the end of the year 2004.

The Park is meant to be a place where people can sit under the shade of trees and enjoy the quietude. It is the first pedestrian area in town

where people can stroll unhindered by the flow of traffic.

Can you describe the details of what has changed and what is the intention behind the changes?

We have tried to design it like a park in France with fencing all around, four gates of entry and pedestrian granite pathways replacing the old tar roads. The new elements are a music kiosk, two



One of the new entrance gates to the Park. Note the fencing all around.

play areas for children, two fountains (flow form fountain and musical fountain), wind chimes on the trees, and new grass planted all around for people to sit and relax. Many more benches have been provided for people to sit and many bins fixed so that the Park can be kept clean. The small red hill has been improved to make it more children-friendly.

Good lighting is an important element and we have worked very hard to implement it. Unlike the earlier lights which were more like search lights focused on the Aayi Mandapam, we have introduced LED and modern lighting techniques — using less electricity than before. All the statues have also been lighted. All the lamp posts have been manufactured in the old traditional style to bring in a surreal ambience in the Park.

You may have also seen that instead of the conventional watering of trees and lawns we have installed a modern pop-up sprinkler system which uses less water and is more efficient.

We have tried to make small interventions and

not drastic changes. Initially we had the idea of a water body around the Aayi Mandapam, but it was shelved as we were unsure of the capability of the Municipality to maintain it clean.

The Park is closed at night to prevent unwanted elements from sleeping there.

Have any new trees/plants been planted? Anything special to look out for? Why have the existing Service trees been heavily pruned?

No new trees have been planted. All the trees were pruned by specialists from Auroville (tree doctors) as they had not been pruned since ages. Unhealthy or dead branches were removed to allow more light — which in turn would allow a healthier growth of the trees. The grass was re-laid all over the Park. Flowering plants were planted all around the Aayi Mandapam and also all along the fence inside the park. You will see them flowering in a couple of months.

Look out for the wind chimes on the trees, the 0 km milestone and the Fort Louis plaque.



Granite pedestrian pathways have replaced the tar roads. Note the benches and the traditional decorative lamp posts.

The Park is beautiful today — but how is the Government planning to maintain what has been achieved at great expense? Paid entry for instance?

As the Park belongs to the Municipality it is being maintained by them, but we have proposed that it should be given to a private agency or NGO which is paid for the upkeep of the Park.

The Park, after the renovation, is generally pretty crowded. There is no place to sit quietly.

Any ideas to create alternative recreational and relaxation spaces elsewhere in town to reduce crowding?

We had proposed the improvement of the Beach near the New Light House and even a design was finalised and funds allocated by the Tourism Department. But unfortunately somebody in the Govt. came up with the bright idea of a deep water port and the project was shifted for the improvement of the Karaikal beach!

Now the work on the triangles around the Park has begun, where more and more benches will be provided. We have also proposed that the Gandhi Thidal (area around the Nehru Statue) could be made into a plaza (see facing page) with a lot of open space. On the steps under the shade of the trees young people could hang around and relax.

The north-south lane behind Hotel Promenade could be made into a kind of “Delhi Haat” where exhibitions and handicrafts’ sale can take place, thus freeing up the Gandhi Thidal area for more public space. The existing nursery to the south-west could be opened to the public with the Band Stand restored (historically there was a band stand in the same place on a podium). And finally the Health Mission situated to the north-west could be relocated and the place converted



The Service trees have been pruned and fresh grass has been laid. Notice the wind-chime hanging from the tree.

into food courts and more public space.

Big dreams one could say! But the same was said to us by skeptics when we presented the first 3D simulation of the Bharathi Park.

Pedestrianisation of the roads inside the Park has contributed to the bottlenecking of traffic around it (especially the road between Gandhi Thidal and the Park in the evenings). Any plans to reorganize traffic?

Again let’s learn the best practices from the West and not the worst. We have proposed that this road can easily be designated as a zebra cross-



The children’s play area

ing where pedestrians have priority for crossing the road. A one-way flow of traffic can also be planned all around the Park for smooth flow of vehicles. It has been proved all over the world that you can never satiate the demand for parking of vehicles, especially cars. The more you provide, demand will always outgrow supply.

Paris and London are good examples where city authorities have made life extremely difficult for private vehicles coming into town — with a lot of green spaces for parks and exclusive pedestrian zones around shopping areas. Parking rates are very expensive and there are very few parking spaces compared to the number of cars on the road.

Paris also has exclusive paths for bicycles! And London has a congestion tax for private vehicles coming into the central business district. But to be able to do that, we first need to have an efficient public transport system in place — like the metro in Paris. Once people realise the hazards and difficulties of driving into town and the time it takes to reach your destination due to traffic jams, they think it wiser to take the public transport or just walk around.



The Beach Road as it is today



The Beach Road as it could become.

Unfortunately in India our priorities are lop-sided — bigger vehicles have priority and right of way. Pedestrians have no place to walk. All footpaths are encroached upon either by shops as in Nehru Street or by house owners to prevent beggars or hooligans from creating a nuisance in front of their houses.

In fact Pondicherry was designed for cyclists and pedestrians. The grid-iron pattern of streets, and crossings almost every 100 metres clearly suggest this. In fact my colleague Ajit Koujalgi always mentions that in the early seventies when he first came here, he saw in Pondy all the characteristics of a beautiful heritage town like many other towns in Europe — with its distinctive French and Tamil quarters. But with unplanned growth and urbanisation the town has lost much of its charm.

How soon will INTACH's plans for the beautification of the Beach Promenade and the Gandhi Thidal be taken up for implementation?

We have received work orders for both but I am certain that there will be many obstacles on the way before we realise it on the ground (as per the plans and images). Maybe in two years time I would be recounting the story of how we managed to do even that.

But hold your breath — we have also made a presentation for making the Nehru Street pedestrian from Gingee Salai to Mission Street! What that would mean is that the footpath and the road would be aligned at the same level and only pedestrians would be allowed on that stretch of road. Vehicles would not be allowed to enter or even park on that stretch.

But first we are getting proper parking organised on the covered portion of the canal. As a pilot project, the covered canal in front of Hot Breads (from Rangapillai Street to Nehru Street) would first be made ready. Only then will we talk of creating a pedestrian zone on Nehru Street! ❧



Gandhi Thidal as it is today



Gandhi Thidal as it could become.

CHANDRA

Jhumur Bhattacharya '61 writes about Chandra '58H who passed away on 3rd February 2007

With her dark flashing eyes, her gorgeous smile and incredibly long and lustrous hair, it was not surprising that Chandra was the cynosure of all eyes. She was not just beautiful, but there was a magnetism about her. Added to that was her talent in almost every field of expression, be it painting or singing or dance. Her imagination and creativity in the field of dance, for instance, was such that she composed and performed ever so gracefully and with a total lack of nervousness, a form of dance that was neither classical Indian nor Western Ballet, but an innovative, though always aesthetic, fluidity of movements which



Chandra, sitting on the right with her sisters Ravibala (centre), Madhumalati (left) and little brother Bababhui. It must have been Ravibala's birthday, since she is holding the birthday bouquet.

Mother always appreciated. Because that is what She always wanted — not a return to the past, She said, but that we should evolve a new form of dance that should express the spirit of what we are trying to say. She taught all of us our movements and for every First December Programme



Chandra, soaring high.

— which usually had a dance drama as one of its main items, Chandra and Usha usually played the central roles while we were all part of the rest of the cast. Anuben, the teacher, shared a big portion of her responsibility with Chandra.

The self-control, grace and mastery of movements that she showed while dancing were evident also in gymnastics. Her body, supple and strong, helped her perform the figures in the floor exercises, on the



With her baby son

trampoline and in the drills, which again she helped to compose. She shone at whatever she did, and so, Dada selected her to be our B Group Captain. Obviously he too had recognised her leadership qualities.

In her studies too she was brilliant — particularly in Maths and Science. But most of all, I remember her for her joie de vivre and her sparkling personality. It radiated from her, except when she had her terrible headaches when one needed to approach her very cautiously.

Chandrabala Khodabhai Patel, for that was

her full name then, came here with her huge family — parents and ten other brothers and sisters, all of them very talented — way back in the early or mid forties, at a time when the Ashram and the School were small tight-knit communities. After leaving East Africa and Baroda, they had come to settle down here in Pondicherry, at the feet of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother. All her life, I have known her to be beautiful, cheerful and strong and it is with these qualities that she fought her final battle with cancer, till Mother saw it fit to gather her up in Her arms. ❧

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(Sd.) Jhumur Bhattacharya
Signature of Publisher

JAYANTIBHAI

In the following pages we feature articles on Jayantibhai, one of our longest standing teachers.

We start with a biographical note by Mita '84.

With Jayantibhai's passing on 23rd November 2005, we lost a remarkable teacher. His teaching career in our School spanned 59 years. Starting in 1945, when his family came to the Ashram, he had learned and taught French, just as Mother had first asked him to.

Jayantibhai was born in Uganda on 24th December, 1927. As Jayantibhai's friend, Ramakant-bhai, recounts, his father, Naranbhai C. Patel, had settled in Africa, and had helped many compatriots to also settle in the foreign land. On Naranbhai's sudden death in 1931 at the age of 33, Surajben, Jayantibhai's mother, came away to India. In 1945 the whole family, Surajben, Jayantibhai's elder brother Indubhai, sisters Maniben, Lilooben and Pushpaben, and Jayantibhai himself came to Pondicherry and with Mother's gracious permission, settled down in the Ashram for good.

Mother first asked Jayantibhai to start work in the Granary. She also arranged for him to learn French with Bharati-di and Yatanti-di; he also learned from Shantibhai. Then, within a month, Mother wanted him to teach French in the School. She encouraged him a great deal and also told him that he would progress much faster through teaching. His teaching career of 59 years is a testimony to

his commitment to learning as well as teaching!

Jayantibhai was a very meticulous teacher. Pushpaben remembers him preparing for class. He would thoroughly prepare every lesson for the next day's class; check and cross-check words in several dictionaries so that he could present the words with their various nuances. Texts were simplified to suit the understanding of the children. He was quick to grasp the fact that he was teach-

ing a foreign language to the children; the level in most of the textbooks was adapted to a native French-speaking population and not for foreigners. So he simplified tenses and the vocabulary to suit the environment. He also translated into French many stories from different languages. He had a thorough knowledge of our Bibliothèque Choisie, and made sure he was himself familiar with a book before he recommended it to one of his students.

Jharna-di remembers him as a very positive personality. Instead of focusing on mistakes

and drawbacks, he would very consciously encourage the children's qualities and strengths: what they could do or did well. He was most emphatic about the conjugation of verbs and about grammar, and he drilled them in, as I myself well remember. Thanks to this insistence, most of us can still hold a decent conversation in French,



though we may not have spoken the language in years.

Apart from simplified text, Jayantibhai also used pictures, especially for the littlest ones, to introduce ideas and words. These pictures were painstakingly drawn and painted by him. But the cornerstone of Jayantibhai's vast teaching repertoire was his own insatiable curiosity — he was on a lifelong quest to learn. He would even cultivate the friendship of French visitors so that he could practise his French and learn new things from them. Through these contacts, he acquired for our School books and tapes that have delighted many generations of our children.

In spite of decades in the line, Jayantibhai carried a zest for teaching that easily communicated to the children. I remember many lively hours in his classroom, repeating the lyrics and

conversations from “Collargol”:

C'est moi qui suit Collargol
L'ours qui chante en Fa en Sol
En Do diese, en Mi bemol
En gilet et en faux col.

Sadly, in the last years of his life, due to his deafness, he lost this rapport with the children and it perplexed him not a little. He still sought desperately to re-establish this contact but could not, and it saddened him greatly. Our children did not realize what an opportunity they were missing, and busy in their own young worlds, had no time for an elderly man trying to reach out to them.

Jayantibhai was bedridden only for a week before he passed away. But far from handing in his resignation, I am sure he has gone for a refresher course — to learn so as to be able to teach.... ❧

“GENTIL” BHAIR

Samata Bhatt '66

Yes, that is how we used to address him, especially when we wanted to wheedle something out of him, say, a story on an arithmetic class day! Not that it was too difficult to do so, because Jayantibhai was really “très gentil”.

Jayantibhai was one of our earliest teachers, the second year teacher in what would be the kindergarten section now. The first year teacher was Pran-bhai and then Jayantibhai. As far as my memory goes, in those days, one teacher taught all the subjects to the class allotted to him — French, Arithmetic, Science, Drawing. We did not have separate teachers for different subjects.

Always soft-spoken and smiling he was a favourite with the children. At least for me he was the best teacher. He never scolded terrifyingly, though he could be strict and stern when required. I cannot recollect now any particular event or incident which stands out vividly, but I know that it is his training which has given me the strong base in French grammar which later Suprabha-di and

Sumitra-di so much appreciated.

He was our teacher again in Class 2, when with Tanmaya-da (Monsieur Raymond as we called him then) and Krishnakumari-di, the “Experimental Classes” were first started. He made learning so interesting. We first started with the multiplication tables with him. Of course, we had to learn them by heart at home, but in the class instead of just reciting them in a sing-song rhythm, he would make five or six of us sit in a circle around him and shoot a question at each of us haphazardly — “Deux fois deux font...? Trois fois cinq font...?” and we had to reply on the spur of the moment or else we were out. It used to be fun and we learnt fast. I remember the historical “un fois un fait...?” shot at Sanjay, who in his hurry to give a fast reply to the easiest question ever asked to a student burst out with “Deux!” The whole lot of us roared with laughter and Sanjay promptly dissolved into “Unhh... Unhh...”

Jayantibhai, thank you very much for being our “Gentil”bhai. ❧

REMEMBERING JAYANTIBHAI

Sunayana '79

My memory of Jayantibhai goes back to 1968 when he was our French teacher. Our classroom was tucked away in a corner near the verandah which is near the lily pond. Of course, there was no lily pond then, neither was there the stage under the Patience tree. In fact, there was a little inner courtyard in front of our room as there was a wall between the rooms on our side and the teachers' room. Along this wall were two flights of stairs which went in opposite directions. One of them went towards the room next to the Art Room while another went up to a little terrace which overlooked the school courtyard.

We lived in a secluded little world. Every morning Jayantibhai would come, always in his white shorts and white shirt, an embodiment of

kindness and patience, and teach us the basics of French grammar. He always carried such an atmosphere of self-giving that we used to call him 'Gentil-bhai' instead of 'Jayantibhai'. We were a group of about twelve children not more than eight or nine years old. Even though we were so small we could still understand that our teacher was putting all his heart and all his sincerity into his work.

He had prepared, with the help of an artist friend, a series of large pictures. He would clip these large sheets on to a wooden stand which he kept on his table. He would then make us speak in French by asking us to describe these pictures. We learnt new words not by looking at printed words but at these drawings which made the whole process so much more direct. He also made sure that



Tanmaya-da, Krishnakumari-di and Jayantibhai

AN INCIDENT

Dharitri '79 (Lucy)

I have many sweet memories of Jayantibhai. In the class, he came across as strict. I got to see a very gentle side of him as well. I remember a time when I was 8 or 9 (very shy and with no confidence) and I was ill before a School programme. Jayantibhai came home to see how I

was doing and to help me prepare for the programme. I remember how gentle he was as he helped me rehearse while I was running a high temperature. His voice was soft, his hands were gentle, his smile always sweet. He came to tell me that he believed in me and that I could do anything I chose to.

Some things just stay with you forever. I have not forgotten his kindness.

he spoke very clearly so that we had no difficulty in associating the picture with the spoken word.

One day he came to the class and told us, "The Mother has told us that in the integral education we should educate all the senses. So far I have only helped you to develop your sight and hearing, so tomorrow we will do something different." The next day he came to the class with a bag which was full of flowers. He asked us all to sit around his table, which was easy since we were so few. Then he put the five or six different kinds of flowers, which he had brought, on the table. One by one we smelt them. They all had distinctly different smells. One of them had no smell and one of them had actually an unpleasant smell. After we had smelt them all and identified them by their spiritual names, he asked us to come to him one by one. We had to shut our eyes and by only smelling the flower which he held out we had to say which one it was. We really enjoyed ourselves that day. It was a wonderful game and there was suspense and drama as many of us couldn't tell which flower we were given. And all this was done in French so we were not even aware that we were actually learning to express ourselves in this new language.

Jayantibhai had also found out a wonderful way to encourage us to read. He had himself prepared a collection of story books. He had probably taken some of the story books which were in the French section of the children's library and had the texts typed out. Each book had about ten pages of these typed sheets which were then stitched between two sheets of brown paper. They were actually hand-made books! Obviously this

was Jayantibhai's way of getting round the difficulty of having to create a library of real books. Every week he would take some of these books and read out only the first two pages and then he would tell us that if we were curious to know what happened next we could borrow the books and read them at home. His trick worked very well because we took turns and read all of them. Today as I look back I see that he achieved so much with so little.

Of course, things were not always smooth and effortless. There were days when we tried his patience to the limit and there were days when he had to muster all his physical energy to keep order in the class-room, without being harsh to the twelve little children who were clamouring for his attention.

One day, as we were enjoying our soup, I asked him with the frankness which is so natural to children, "Jayantibhai, do you really enjoy being a teacher or are you doing this work because you have been asked to do it?"

"There is no doubt about it. Of course, I enjoy being a teacher. The Mother has said that a true teacher has to be a yogi. So, you see, it is a special work."

Many years later I learnt that when the Mother had asked him to teach French he had answered that he did not know enough French to teach. To this the Mother's reply was: "Learn 'Bonjour' and teach 'Bonjour'". He started out bravely from that point and went on to become one of the most unforgettable teachers of the school, having taught at various levels and to several generations. ❧

UN PORTRAIT

Écrit par *Ritu '81* quand elle était étudiante

Déjà cinq minutes de retard. En face d'une fenêtre, accoudé sur la table est assis mon professeur, le dos droit, un livre dans les mains. J'arrive, il lève doucement ses grands yeux affectueux qui s'emplissent aussitôt de bonté. Il sourit : « Bonjour, mademoiselle. » Il ne manque jamais de dire « bonjour » et non seulement de sa voix chaleureuse mais parfois aussi d'un mouvement de la tête ; en sorte que ce souhait prononcé lentement n'a rien de mécanique ni de conventionnel.

...Je pose soigneusement mes livres sur la table, non pas seulement que mon tempérament m'y incline mais parce que la présence de mon professeur le commande. Mon professeur tire un dossier où se trouvent plusieurs exemplaires de textes dactylographiés dont certains sont pâles. Il m'en prête un, puis le reprend et m'en donne un autre : « Voici le meilleur exemplaire que j'aie. » Le sien n'est point aussi net.

« Prenez celui-ci. »

« Non, ça va. Je peux voir. »

...Lire les extraits de son choix, c'est se promener dans les vallées fleuries de la littérature. De temps à autre, son regard se fixe sur mon visage pour saisir cette expression enchantée qui s'y dessine quand les idées s'éclaircissent dans mon petit cerveau. Parfois il me regarde, espérant un sourire sur mes lèvres.

Lui, ne manque guère d'apprécier la beauté, que ce soit des fleurs, d'une peinture, ou d'un adjectif expressif. Il a de surcroît l'amour de l'ordre. Maintes fois je l'ai vu arranger les chaises et les pupitres laissés en désordre par les élèves et ramasser des papiers de bonbons pour les jeter dans la corbeille. Son respect profond pour les choses matérielles fait qu'il les traite en objets conscients.

...La leçon terminée, nous rangeons nos extraits. Il nous reste cinq minutes. Sa mine pensive annonce le début d'une discussion sérieuse. De nouveau sur le thème de la concentration, de la

volonté, ou de la flamme qui nous guide. Chaque fois au cours de nos entretiens, son ton devient grave, une profonde émotion se lit dans son regard. Le pouvoir de ses paroles est tel que je suis ses conseils.

...La cloche sonne.

« Veux-tu quelque chose pour lire à la maison ? Tu te souviens ? »

« Oui. Il faut en prendre soin comme de la



prunelle de mes yeux. »

« Exactement. »

Son visage s'épanouit. « Au revoir... bonne journée... »

Ce recueil qu'il m'a remis prouve le mal que

se donne, admirablement, un professeur pour ses élèves. Il lit, choisit des extraits qui les intéresseront, les tape lui-même, les assemble au moyen d'agrafes, y met de jolies couvertures où il écrit des titres de sa belle écriture calme. Il prépare aussi des exercices et des jeux. Quant à nous, nous nous donnons moins de mal pour faire nos devoirs. Il met du temps à corriger nos cahiers et le fait avec grand soin.

Selon certains étudiants il est indirect dans ses reproches ce qui les rend piquants, mais il aime ses élèves.

...Le jour de mon anniversaire quelqu'un m'apporta un papier marbré de mauve, artistiquement plié. Surprise, je l'ouvris. C'étaient des

vœux accompagnés de paroles de Douce Mère. Je reconnus l'écriture ; cela me toucha profondément. Il était malade mais n'avait point oublié...

J'ai été son élève pendant plusieurs années au bout desquelles je tenais dans mes mains, si je puis dire, un bouquet parfumé de ses qualités. La simplicité de son cœur et de sa vie, la détermination dans ses poursuites, la sincérité qu'il a envers ses élèves gagnent une admiration et un respect profonds.

Quand je quittai l'école, il me dit: « Ah, sur ces hauteurs de « Knowledge » on m'oubliera bientôt... » Mais un cœur pareil, plein de bonté, de tendresse, de gentillesse, ne s'estompe point dans les souvenirs. ❧

(end of special feature on Jayantibhai)

Mon Âme

Pourquoi m'arraches-tu la vie ?
Comme une herbe déracinée du sol,

Laisse-moi tranquille, je désire vivre la vie,
Bien qu'elle soit triste, je me réjouis,

Tout au fond de mon âme,
Résident la béatitude et la beauté infinies.

Mais alors mon Dieu, qu'est-ce qui me trouble ?

Rose Par terre

Se fane la rose toute délicate,
jetée par terre,
Souffrant d'une ardeur pénible,
la soif avide de vivre.
Se fane-t-elle comme la vie se détache,
de son cœur rose,
Doucement elle change de noire en ébène,
gardant sa beauté intérieure,
Qui lui donne son nom, la « Rose ».

Un Jour...

Est-ce qu'Il va venir ?
Pour nous aider ? Bien sûr.

Il nous regarde,
Des astres lointains, ou
Parmi nous, nous veille,
Comme une étoile au monde.

Il est la Mélodie, le Chanteur,
Le Créateur Puissant, Il est...
Le Tout, qu'on peut imaginer,
L'Incarnation d'Amour, Il est...

Il nous regarde, nous pèse,
Nous bénit, pour qu'un jour,
Le rideau se soulève,
Pour son retour dans ce monde.

Pour jouer la musique de l'esprit,
Pour souffler la vie au mort,
Rendre le monde comme il
Était, il reviendra un jour.... ❧

Shveta Dhingra '05H

ASHRAM TITBITS

BETWEEN THE TWINKLE AND CHUCKLE

It is said that while his horse walked, Napoleon slept on it, and while his body took rest, his mind was busy plotting out military strategies unique in the history of battles. We too had a multi-tasker, dear to everyone for a whole lot of reasons. He was our dear Nolini-da, a man way ahead of his time.

Well, there was a movie as usual on a Saturday night at 7.45pm but as it had poured heavily the screening was shifted to Sunday, same time same place at the cost of the regular Sunday meditation. Upset at such a blatantly sacrilegious alternative being offered at our family altar (Playground), a moralistic righteous gentleman went to Nolini-da and complained lamenting, "Look what is happening in the Ashram. A cheap thrill substituting a solemn meditation? *Chhi chhi chhi! Sharban-ash! Chan korar jonno ékhantai ganga o néi, shudu noonér jol.*" (Good heavens! There's not a drop of fresh water from the Ganges to cleanse oneself — nothing but sea-water.) Pat came Nolini-da's reply which began with a twinkle and ended with a chuckle.

"*Aré bhai, chok bujhlé dhyān ar khullé cinema. Tumi ja khushi korté paro.*" (Close your eyes and meditate or open them to enjoy the movie. The choice is yours.) ☸

You should be able to meditate even on the battlefield.

Sri Aurobindo

As part of the Emerveillement Project, one of our teachers collected anecdotes of our School's children. These stories show the world around us through the eyes of kids. It is a peep into their little world of wide-eyed wonder and colourful imagination! Here is one of the amusing anecdotes.

DOUCE MERE HAS GONE FOR TEA

The 11th of June is the birthday of the Corner House. It is a big occasion, especially for the children of Kindergarten.

On one such day one little boy was eating with his dish very much at the edge of the table. The

teacher sitting next to him pushed his dish back saying that it would fall down. The boy pulled it forward again. This went on a few times. Finally, the inevitable happened — his dish fell, but he managed to save it and exclaimed, "Ah! Sri Aurobindo *bachiyé diye chhen*" (Ah, Sri Aurobindo has saved it.)

The teacher, quite surprised, (because we all naturally call to the Mother for help) asked, "Why Sri Aurobindo, why not Mother?" And the smart answer, "*Maa je chaa khete giye chhen*" (Because Mother has gone for tea.) ☸

CARTOONS SEEN BY THE MOTHER

During the mid to late 60s Mina (Amal Kiran's sister-in-law) used to cut out a series of animal cartoons from a magazine and send them regularly to the Mother, sometimes with her own additional words or comment added. We will reproduce here some of the cartoons seen by the Mother.



QUIZ TIME!

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

1. What was the first play performed on the permanent stage in the School courtyard?
2. Who was Ramayya?
 - a. a student
 - b. a teacher
 - c. the man who made the glue in the school.
3. In which year was the Art Room built?
4. Where did the students park their bicycles in the seventies?
5. What is the name of the white flower which grows on the tall tree by the North gate of the School?

ANSWERS TO THE QUESTIONS OF THE LAST ISSUE :

1. *In which poem written by Sri Aurobindo would you find the following lines:*
“O Thou who climbedst to mind from the dull stone,
Turn to the mirrored summits yet unwon.”
These are the last two lines of the sonnet called “Evolution”.
2. *In which year did the Mother sing while playing the organ after the midnight meditation to celebrate the New Year?*
It was on the night of 31st December 1931, to herald in 1932, that the Mother played on the organ and sang. Here is how Sahana-di describes it in her reminiscence.
“...like a flash light tearing asunder the veil of darkness, pealed out a resonant chord from the organ and with it flooded out her voice in song. Her voice had a quality of magical power rising from the profundities as if endeavouring to awaken our consciousness to meet the light from above.”
3. *In which year did the Mother start giving Terrace Darshan (on the Rue François Martin side)?*
It was in 1963.
4. *When did the Mother play her last game of tennis?*
Her last game of tennis was on 7th December 1959.
5. *What is the spiritual significance of the light pink country rose? On Darshan days the Samadhi used to be entirely covered with the petals of this simple variety of rose.*
That variety is called “Surrender”. Its smell always brings back memories of Darshan days of the past.

Erratum: The computer section in the School was started in October 1970 and not in September 1970 as mentioned in the answers of our previous issue.



Reason is a very respectable person. Like all respectable people it has its limitations and prejudices, but that does not prevent it from being very useful. And it keeps *you* from making a fool of yourself. You would do many things if you did not have reason, things which would lead you straight to your ruin and could have extremely unfortunate consequences, for your best means of discernment until you have attained higher levels is reason. When one no longer listens to reason, one can be led into all sorts of absurdities. Naturally, it is neither the ideal nor the summit, it is only a kind of control and a guide for leading a good life, it keeps you from extravagances, excesses, inordinate passions and above all from those impulsive actions which may lead you to the abyss.

The Mother

CWM, 8: 373, 374