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The

Golden Chain

Alumni Journal of Sri Aurobindo International Centre of Education



Sri Aurobindo at Cambridge

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:
View of King's College and its Chapel seen from the back.

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THE EDITORS' PAGE

by Sunayana Panda '79

On 15th August 2007 we will be celebrating the 60th anniversary of the Independence of India. True, we have much to be proud of as a country, but there still remains so much to be done. As we weigh the achievements and the drawbacks, perhaps we should focus our attention on those high souls who sacrificed their own happiness and sometimes their young lives so that we could live in freedom. Does anyone now remember the idealism that drove our countrymen? This is indeed the right moment to know more about those heroes and to be inspired.

It is easy to forget that Sri Aurobindo did not grow up in India, that he actually started learning Bengali while he was in Cambridge from an Englishman! When he came back to India it was as if he was coming to a new country. How far away psychologically was the quiet library of King's College from the dusty and crowded lanes of Baroda of 1893! How extraordinary that a man sitting by the banks of the river Cam was dreaming of the Ganges. How superhumanly bold of one whose weapon was the pen and a perfect command over the English language, to take up the work of waking up from its inertia a mass of people to whom English was a foreign language.

This is what Jawaharlal Nehru wrote in the foreword to Dr. Karan Singh's book on Sri Aurobindo, *Prophet of Indian Nationalism*:

"It is extraordinary that a person who spent fourteen of the most formative years of his life, from the age of 7 to 21, cut off from India and steeped in the European classics and the England of his day, should have become, in later years, the brilliant champion of Indian nationalism based on the philosophic and spiritual background of Indian thought. His whole career in active politics was a very brief one, from 1905 to 1910 [...] During these five years, he shone like a brilliant meteor and created a powerful impression on the youth of India. The great anti-partition movement in

Bengal gained much of its philosophy from him and, undoubtedly, prepared the day for the great movement led by Mahatma Gandhi."

It is not only sixty years since Independence but also a whole century since the famous Surat Congress where the Nationalists parted ways with the Moderates. The stance that was taken by Sri Aurobindo, of demanding *purna swaraj*, absolute independence, undreamt of in those days, brought in a new energy into the movement towards freedom.

There is no better time than the present, when our material situation has changed so much, to remember that we won this freedom with difficulty and that we came out of that trial as a nation, united and proud. We must remind ourselves that we can't fall back into our inertia, that we still have a long way to go before we can make our country "the guru of the nations".

What is it that stops us from bringing about a higher quality of life to the country as a whole? It is the usual story of looking at personal gains rather than the gain of the collective. We are still thinking of the short term benefits when we should be looking at the larger picture. What Sri Aurobindo wrote a hundred years ago about our attitude towards our motherland is still true — "...we would give one *anna* to the service of the Mother and keep fifteen for ourselves, our wives, our children, our property, our fame and reputation, our safety, our ease..." [*Bande Mataram*]

The real freedom movement is not over, it continues, because we are not free from greed and selfishness, nor are we free from prejudice and ignorance. And Sri Aurobindo is still leading us.

"The first thing that a nation must do is to realise the true freedom that lies within and it is only when you understand that free within is free without, you will really be free." [*Bande Mataram*]

It is so relevant to our lives that it seems as if it was written only yesterday. One can almost smell the ink on it. ❧

“THE MOTHER IS ALWAYS A PART OF ME”

An interview with Lakshman Sehgal '63

FATHER AND FAMILY

Tell us something about your father and how all of you came to the Ashram.

My father came from a privileged background; he was a jagirdar's son. After studying agriculture at the University of Dublin from 1931 to 1936 he came back to Hyderabad. In the late 30s he used to visit Raman Maharshi's Ashram with Dr Bhimeshwar Bhatt and Raja Shyamraj. During one of his visits, Raman Maharshi told them, “You are coming to me but there is a Giant of a Man in Pondicherry. You need to go there.” And when he came and saw Sri Aurobindo, he recognised that he had seen this same face in a vision when he was in Ireland. He knew then that this is the place for him.



Lakshman's parents (centre and right) with Dr. Venkataswamy (left) who was a close friend

Raman Maharshi actually told him to go to Sri Aurobindo?

Yes. And so my father began to visit Pondy for Darshan days. Then, once he finished sorting out his family responsibilities as the eldest son, against all family opposition, he moved to the Ashram with us (my mother, by brother Ramraj and I). I

was three years old when we came in 1945 and my brother Ramraj was six. We were among the early students in the Ashram School, which used to be in what is the Playground today.

Did your father have any personal contact with Sri Aurobindo?

The number of Ashramites was small at that time so Sri Aurobindo knew everyone.

Once shortly after we arrived, I was making a lot of noise, crying on the street below Sri Aurobindo's room. My parents were going into the Ashram and they wanted to leave me outside with the maid-servant. Sri Aurobindo heard me and asked Champaklal, “Who is this child crying?” When He was told that it was me, wanting to come into the Ashram, He said, “Let him come in.” I was told that I was one of the youngest children to be allowed inside the Ashram.

Our contact was more intimately with the Mother. At times She communicated our questions to Sri Aurobindo and we would get His reply.

There was a period in the late 40s when my father used to make ice-cream for the Mother and Sri Aurobindo at home. He was very fond of making ice-cream using fresh fruits. I'd come back from School and he would have it ready and my brother or I would run it upstairs to Mother's room. Mother used to take good care of what food She gave Sri Aurobindo. She would serve Him the ice-cream and we would get feedback on whether He liked it or not. This went on for several years.

It seems your father offered specially made gold rings to the Mother and Sri Aurobindo?

Yes, he made one for the Mother and one for

Sri Aurobindo. They were fairly good sized and had a lid and Their photo and symbol. Sri Aurobindo wore this ring and the Mother left it on His finger when His body was laid to rest.

My father's relationship with the Mother was a rather interesting one. You know my father was intellectual and his upbringing had been with Ram as his God. His values and standards had been moral and ethical. Here he was exposed to new standards that had nothing to do with mental norms, but in spite of that he surrendered completely to Her. My mother was just as committed and supportive and just as happy being here. So that made it easier for Ramraj and I to enjoy the full fruits of the Ashram environment. It always became a habit to first go to the Mother to ask for permission. Whenever we asked our father or mother something, they would always say, "Ask the Mother."

Once when my relatives in Hyderabad wanted me to go there for a Mundan ceremony, my father asked the Mother. She said, "Not necessary. I will do it." So She cut my hair.

So you went to Mother and She actually took a pair of scissors....

Yes, She cut my hair. You know, She was then reluctant to allow people to leave the Ashram environment. And for my father it was just enough that the Mother wanted something — he would unquestioningly do it. I remember another incident — this was much later, for the first commemoration of the Golden Day. The Mother wanted to distribute symbols in the Playground, so She referred the matter to my father as he had found a local jeweller who had learned how to make the symbols right. It so happened that a month or less before this, my father had gotten Rs. 50,000 from Hyderabad from one of the property settlements. And before he could decide what he'd do with the money this request from the Mother came and it turned out that the cost of the number of symbols She wanted added up exactly to Rs. 50,000!

Also if there was something She did not want, he followed that as well. Many times my father asked the Mother whether he should build a house here and She said, "No, I'll provide you." At

one point when he asked about the Atelier house upstairs which was basically two rooms, Mother said, "It's too small for you." My father said, "No, it will still work." So She came there with Khirodda of the Building Department, walked through the place and talked to Khirod-da, asked him if the terrace was strong enough to add a bathroom, and after She had reviewed all of it in detail She was eventually satisfied.



As a child

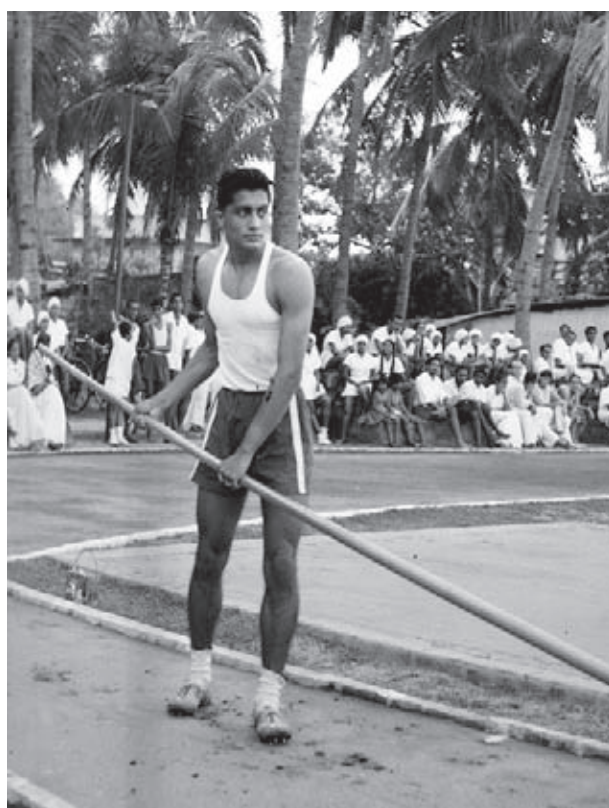
When Monsieur André visited the Ashram for the first time in 1948, the Mother had arranged for him to have lunch at our house, as She did with a few other homes, so he would get a taste of the variety of Indian cuisine.

STUDENT AND SPORTSMAN

Any memories of your life as a student, especially those with the Mother?

My classmates were Norman, Usha (captain), Arvinbabu, Namita, Asha and others. I think the lasting memory of anything we did was the

fact that Mother was very close and was a part of everything we did. In those days She used to watch all the sports competitions and my interaction with Her has been very strongly through physical education. Once in the hop-step and jump I didn't make the record as I had jumped from about half a metre behind the take-off mark. She had Arun Kumar measure it from there because She wanted to know if I had done the full length. So it was quite amazing how "into it" She would be. You know, you could see Her cringe if you were doing high-jump and hit the bar; or if you went over the



As a young man — about to do the pole-vault

bar, you would see the glee, the joy on Her face. It really motivated you to do your very best. That was the attitude with which we participated and She couldn't act more like a proud mother. I remember how a number of times She gave me an extra toffee in the Playground during distribution, or an extra bag of peanuts, because I had come first in some event in athletics or gymnastics. So we

were very focused in one direction: towards Her. That is the memory I have... She sitting there and watching everything.

I remember one time I had bruised my knee and had a bandage. In the Playground, that evening, She asked with concern about it. I replied "J'ai knocké mon genou," turning an English word into French. I have never seen Her laugh so heartily!

I also remember a quite different incident that had to do with a debate in School, athletics vs gymnastics, where I made some points supporting athletics over gymnastics. What I said was related back to Her. That very afternoon I was waiting for Her at the Tennis Ground. I used to be Her ball-boy when She played tennis. I used to wait at the referee's chair; normally She used to walk by and give a smile. But that day She pulled me to the side and gave me a verbal thrashing I had never had before. It was regarding what I had said in that debate — basically telling me that I was wrong and didn't know what I was talking about. I became very upset. In my mind I totally disagreed with everything She said.

The following day we had a football match with some outside team, and I was on the team. The custom was that before She left for the Tennis Ground, before She got into the car, the team would assemble in front of the Ashram garage and She would wish us well. So I was there and I was one of the shorter people at that time. But I had no intention of seeing Her and I didn't want my eyes to connect with Her because I was still angry. So I was standing way in the back trying to hide. But it didn't work, because She found me through the crowd and the moment our eyes connected, my head went blank and all those emotions instantly disappeared. It was totally amazing that in a flash She had removed all of those feelings. And that was the end of it (*laughs*). That was the only time I remember having that kind of interaction with Her. Otherwise it was always one of encouragement, always.

When we were hurt we didn't even think about our parents, we only thought of Her first. I remember as a little boy waking up one morning with a swollen lip. Some insect bite must have done it at

night. I ran up to Her room. She saw my lip and opened Her chest of drawers. She took some ointment and applied it to my lip, and that was the end of that. Our parents never looked to give us advice — they always wanted us to go to Her. We just informed them that this is what we told the Mother and this is what She told us, you know. So I think it was a relationship that was very strong at a physical level too, a strong physical attachment. Anyway I think my parents couldn't have done us any better service than bringing us here.

TEACHING AT SAICE

When you completed Higher Course in 1962, you taught in the School for two years?

Yes. I taught maths. I remember a lovely experience of those years. It began when I was informed by Kirit Joshi that one of the other teachers was having a hard time controlling Kabul and Shantikar and that they were distracting the other students, so the Mother had asked for them to be transferred to my class. The very first day they came, Kabul was up to destructive mischief so I warned him, and as that didn't have any impact, I threw him out. My class then used to be held in Joshi-bhai's Laboratory, on the ground floor. Kabul immediately went out to the sandpit in the Guest House which was just outside my classroom window. Predictably, he began some mischief outside and the whole class was looking there. So I lost out in trying to impose my threats.

The following day what I did was I said that I may sometimes be late coming to class, and needed to appoint a class monitor whom I'd change every month or so. And I appointed Kabul as monitor. Once I gave him the responsibility, he became my closest ally in the class, to the extent that, the day before I went to Madras with my dad for the day, I would tell Kabul, "Can you stop by my house and we'll have the maths problems written out. Then would you please put them on the board, collect all the answers from the students and bring them to my house when I get back?" And it worked fine. Nobody knew the difference when I was not in the classroom — no noise, no disturbance — because of Kabul taking the responsibility. Since then, and even today, Kabul and I share a strong



Soaring over the bar:
Lakshman held the Ashram pole-vault record for a number of years

bond. I think that was my first lesson from Mother — learning to be creative rather than imposing and letting your ego take charge.

EARLY YEARS IN AMERICA

How did you take the decision to go out? Did the Mother say anything about it?

After I'd worked for some time in our School and with Joshi-bhai in the Laboratory I felt that I ought to go for further studies and get a Ph.D. I wrote to the Mother explaining my desire to study further and She wrote, "My blessings". She would generally either say, "No," or "My blessings". So She had approved it. At that time the School certificate was not recognised by any of the universities in India, so I applied to universities in England and the United States. I got admission in the London University, and a couple of universities in the States. Then I went to the Mother and asked Her where I should go. Her suggestion was that I go to America. So I made my preparations. Then before I left for the States I went to see Her and She had a kind of interesting response. She had a smile on Her face as She

said, "So you are leaving me." I replied, "Mother, you have to bring me back." Then She smiled and it was a very warm smile — no disapproval in it.

The first year or two at the Illinois Institute of Technology in Chicago were quite dramatic — there was a culture shock going from the Ashram

opportunity to be creative and productive.

In 1966, Hansa joined me. She had gone to the Mother to say that she wanted to join me and we wanted to get married. Mother approved, and before Hansa left She gave her a ring for me and a ring for herself. That's our wedding ring — Her blessing was our wedding ceremony....

And, you know, I corresponded with Her over the years. And when I came on a visit to Pondy I was happy to bring Her whatever I could from there: French perfumes, chocolates, anything interesting I thought She would like.

Which year?

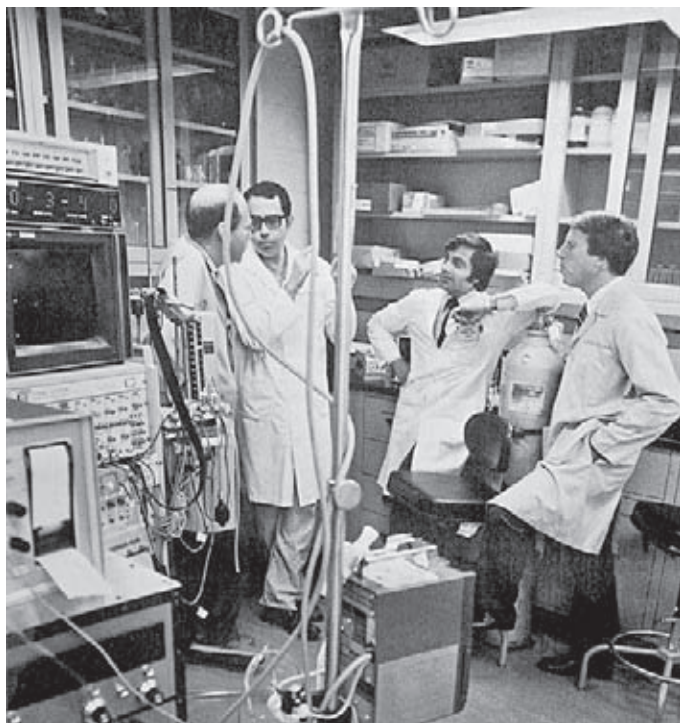
The first time I came back was in '70, right after I'd got my Ph.D. Then we came in '72 with our first child Niraj (name given by the Mother) — he was 6-8 months old. We'd come for August Darshan and we took him upstairs to Mother and he had the privilege of sucking on Her thumb.

And then in 1973, I remember I'd just started a new job, I heard that Mother had left Her body. I found out in the morning and took the flight the same evening. I couldn't even inform my boss that I was leaving. When I went back the surgeon I worked for, instead of being upset that I had left without informing him, was impressed that I had such high regard for somebody....

SCIENTIFIC RESEARCH

Tell us something about your research work as a biochemist.

Hansa (who also got her degree in medical technology in Chicago) and I worked for the chairman of surgery at Michael Reese Hospital for over 18 years. We got involved with trying to develop an artificial blood, a blood substitute. You see, blood can normally be stored for about 4 to 6 weeks and then it has to be discarded. We developed a blood substitute by basically recycling outdated blood, and converting it to a solution which has the same capacity of carrying oxygen as fresh blood has, and doesn't have any risk associated with it in terms of disease transmission, you



As a scientist in the US (second from right)

to the States. The climate and the educational environment were also very different. But I used to write to Her and most of the time things either resolved themselves or the answers became obvious right after I wrote to Her. I very rarely got, or needed, a written response. There was one time that I was sort of at a crossroad. I was at the chemistry dept. and there was nothing more I could do there; and people were telling me to move to the biology dept. I wasn't sure what to do and whether I should move to another university altogether, out of Chicago. So I wrote to Her specifically asking for a written response. She wrote back, "Whatever you do, always know that I am behind you." So, after that things sort of resolved themselves. I ended up in the biology dept. I got my Ph.D there and went into medical research where I had the

know, AIDS, hepatitis etc. It also does not require any typing and matching, like type A, or B. You can give it to anybody.

Really? Have they started using that?

It has completed all the clinical testing required and is now awaiting review by the US Food and Drug Administration.

Among the other projects that I'm currently working on is the use of gene-therapy in open heart surgery. This is a project that I'm doing in collaboration with the Cardiovascular Institute of the University of Groningen in the Netherlands.

I am also trying to initiate a project at the University of Copenhagen. It has to do with an idea I have of extending the shelf-life of platelets from 5 days to 2-3 weeks. Platelets are cell-fragments that are critical in forming a blood clot when an injury has occurred. That would greatly enhance their availability — preliminary data is very encouraging. There are a couple of other ideas in the back of my mind awaiting the right opportunity. They will take shape if that is what She wants me to be doing.

You have some patents in your name?

I currently have 11 patents. Hansa is a co-author on several of them.

Definitely there's a great job-satisfaction, isn't there?

Yes, it's Mother's blessings that the job environment from day one has been unbelievably satisfying. Also from the beginning there was great flexibility with work timings, so Hansa and I could share in looking after both our sons, Niraj and Uday (who was born in 1978 and named by Champaklalji).

Also for a decade starting in the mid 1990s, we committed much of our time to non-profit organisations. She was president of an NGO that provided help to battered women from south Asia and I served as president for an agency that served the larger pan-Asian immigrant community, providing a variety of social and educational services.

In 2005, after 40 years in Chicago, we moved

by the ocean in southern California. Both our children are also in California. Niraj is a physician and Uday works as a financial analyst. Hansa and I also serve on the Board of the Integral Education School in San Diego that Prapanna Smith has started.



A recent family photograph (L to R): Niraj, Hansa, Lakshman, and Uday

How much of your achievements would you attribute to your education in our School?

I think the Ashram upbringing and the Mother's support gave me the self-confidence, you know. That is far more important than technical book-knowledge. Creativity or the ideas don't come from book-knowledge. There's a lot that one absorbs from the Ashram "ambience" that goes beyond just the outer education. It's more the spirit than the actual schooling. Specially it has given me an addiction to staying fit. I try to exercise seven days a week. As long as my body will permit I want to remain as the Mother had last seen me.

Coming to America has made me realise what a pioneer the Mother was in every field, whether it is the emphasis on physical education, giving girls equal opportunities for sports etc. It's things

that Mother had established in the Ashram 50 years ago that you see expressing themselves in America. There is a recognition in the West now of the value of exercise, of Asanas, of meditation. There is a broader base of awareness in people. And along with people's thinking, science is also changing. Our understanding of matter, of genetic or molecular biology has changed quite phenomenally. Science is understanding the intricacies of creation and prolonging life but is unable to create Life! Also there are greater discussions on spirituality and consciousness, and, I believe, a movement away from organized religion.

You have any regrets of going away from here?

No. Not really. I think when I was in the

Ashram my attachment and association with the Mother was so much at the physical level that only by leaving this place could I build a longer-lasting relationship and develop a better awareness of Her total being and Her work in the world rather than just Her physical self, you know. That was my experience.

And I can live outside and still keep the Ashram within me. The Mother is always a part of me. Today whenever I have concerns or confusion, if I pray to Her before going to bed and expressly ask Her to come in my dream, She does. She gives me the assurance that She's with me. And the anxiety instantly lifts. It's a relationship that probably all of us have from past lives and it will go on in future lives. ❧

NEUROSURGEON WITH A DIFFERENCE

*In our May 2006 issue we had published an article by Ajay Mehta '79 in which he had written about how he was diagnosed at the nick of time by his friend **Dr. Ashish Mehta** who discovered that he was suffering from a serious illness. He was operated on by the same doctor and recovered completely. Our readers were amazed at the way the doctor had a suspicion about what Ajay was suffering from by simply shaking his hands and wanted to know more about him.*

At the request of Ajay's friends we decided to find out what makes Dr. Mehta, who is a young neurosurgeon in Mumbai, stand out from the rest. He answered our questionnaire and shared with us his thoughts and opinions.

We all believe, as do Ajay and his family, that the Divine Mother saved him but we also believe that you were a special instrument through which her force could work. Do you also feel that a higher power was working through you, or do you feel that when people say that the Divine Mother saved him, we are denying you the credit, which should go to you for your hard work?

The Universe runs by absolute principles set by the "divine". We are but mere actors on a stage, performing the act assigned to us incessantly. The fallacy blossoms with the actor's feeling that he controls the entire act, whilst the director smiles quietly behind the screen. I am not yet a 'realised' soul to be able to opine about the 'doer'. I don't feel that I am a "karta" (doer) for anything. I am

just a "nimitta" (an instrument). As long as the issue of credit goes, nature is impartial, it imparts one the fruits of one's efforts, never does it remain indebted to anyone for

anything. I prefer to remain a mute spectator for the great act — "sakshibhava". There are no special feelings. I live only peace during the entire process.

How does it feel to be able to pull a human being from the brink of death? How does it feel to



be fighting against death on a daily basis?

Death is nothing but a punctuation mark in an unending essay. I don't fear death, nor do I get overwhelmed by the thoughts of death. Witnessing death is just the realisation of the efficiency of the divine to recycle failing machinery, of how opportunities abound to realise the divine. I am neither afflicted by death, nor the disease, nor the pleasures of the cured.

As asserted above, we are just actors in the divine drama. I don't think I have any abilities to appease sickness or allay death. I perform my duties, the result... "Karmanye Vadhikaraste, Maa Phaleshu Kadachana...."

I don't fight anything or anybody. I feel honoured to play my role as a healer. I feel concerned about the patients whom I take care of, as I go on to take them in as my family.

What made you choose the medical line? Did you always have an attraction for healing?

I honestly don't know. I had an attraction towards Neurosurgery right from my school days. I did decide to be a neurosurgeon then. I was provided with the means to achieve my goal. The nervous system being the most accomplished of the creations as well as the most complex to handle, probably I was attracted by the "challenge".

I love to bring peace to the environs. Healing is just one instrument.

You detected Ajay's illness simply by shaking his hand. How much of it was intuition and how much was it the result of your experience in the medical field?

"A trained mind and a sharp eye" working in tandem, do bring about these seeming 'miracles' to a bystander.

How much do doctors rely on intuition?

I can't comment about other doctors. But whenever I see a patient, even before talking to him or touching him, there are subtle vibrations that make me feel good or bad about the well-being of the person in question. Usually these perceptions turn out to be true.

The management decisions do not alter, but the prognostication does. These perceptions verbalise eventually without any specific mention about intuitive feelings.

Do you think that there is a greater chance of curing a patient if the person has a faith that he will be healed?

A positive thinker, a positive emoter and a person who has faith in the all-pervasive divinity, always fares better on the healing front.

Have you had any other cases where a person was saved in the nick of time?

Plenty of these incidences happen almost regularly. I have had new born babies at one end and people in the eighth or ninth decade of their lives coming in the most dilapidated condition and leaving hale and hearty, much beyond human expectations.

What could our country do to minimise illnesses? Instead of building more hospitals and opening more specialised medical colleges would it not be more logical to educate the people of our country so that they can look after themselves and prevent illnesses in the first place?

Preventive knowledge and wisdom annotated in 'Ayurveda' is the key to a man's health — Spiritual, Mental, Verbal and Physical. We need to radically transform our lifestyles. Prevention is the key to success in any field. The economic burden borne by society for building hospitals, if diverted to prevention, could provide, not only for good health but a much higher productivity for the community.

The prescribed education as it prevails in the so-called modern world has done more harm than good to almost every aspect of our lives. Unless our ancestral wisdom and knowledge percolates down to the grass root levels in a logical manner which a common man can understand, the diseases and the hospitals will flourish under the 'umbrella of modernisation'.

I would love to be a part of a radical revolution in the field of Health and Education. Redesigning our lives would lead to much greater prosperity and Peace. Not many would like to listen to this.

Can you tell us something about yourself as a person?

I love... Spirituality... Peace... Principles... Meticulousness. I would love to redistribute what I have received in the field of education and "health" — in its broadest perspective. ☸

SRI AUROBINDO AT CAMBRIDGE

By Sunayana Panda '79

Here are Sri Aurobindo's own famous words which reveal something about himself and more particularly about how he was conscious of his purpose in life right from his early youth.

"I know I have the strength to deliver this fallen race. It is not physical strength, — I am not going to fight with sword or gun, — but the strength of knowledge. The power of the Kshatriya is not the only one; there is also the strength of the Brahmin, the power that is founded on knowledge. This feeling is not new to me, it is not of today. I was born with it, it is in my very marrow. God sent me to earth to accomplish this great mission. The seed began to sprout when I was fourteen; by the time I was eighteen the roots of the resolution had grown firm and unshakable." *[From a letter to Mrinalini Devi]*

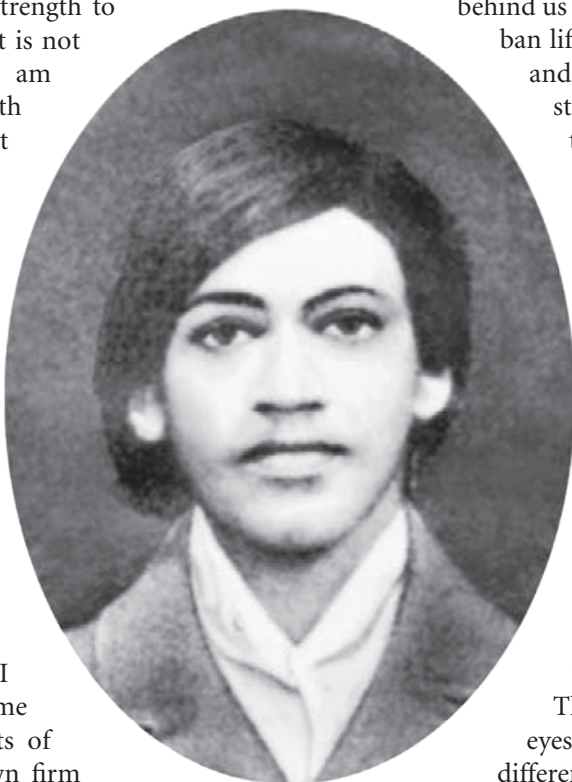
So, the question that arises in our minds is "Where was Sri Aurobindo when he was eighteen?" He was at Cambridge, actually. This clue is enough to make us want to go there and see for ourselves this very special place, only a short train ride to the north of London. It was in the summer of 2004 but it is still so clear in my memory.

We got to King's Cross station by ten so as to avoid the rush that starts quite early and caught one of the many morning trains to the university town. Within fifteen minutes we are already beyond the outskirts of London, leaving behind us the huge structures of urban life, the tall office buildings and the shiny new football stadium. I am happy that the next forty-five minutes of the journey are going to be "far from the madding crowd".

Looking out of the window I can see the lovely English countryside. The gently swelling hills, the soft sunlight on the streams and the ripening wheat fields, the little clusters of houses in the villages which we pass, all remind me how different this country is from India. The images pass before my eyes as in a film — a hundred different shades of green, a dash of white here, a sprig of mauve there and all this wrapped up in a restful silence.

I wonder who would not become a poet if he lived surrounded by such beauty.

Halfway through the journey as the train leaves one of the smaller stations and gathers speed, I am not sure whether it is taking me forward in space or backward in time. A sense of anticipation grows in my heart and I feel as though on getting off at



the station and on walking into the grounds of King's College, I will actually see young Aurobindo in trousers and coat walking towards the library.

It has been more than a century since Sri Aurobindo, then known simply as A. A. Ghose, studied at Cambridge and I know that nothing would be the same except the physical structures, the buildings and the roads. We know that the Twentieth Century has changed the world more radically than the five centuries which preceded it and yet this place holds such a fascination that I can barely wait to see it.

The University of Cambridge was founded in 1209, and along with Oxford, is the oldest in the world. Almost 800 years old today, its very name is synonymous with excellence and over the centuries people across the globe have pronounced it with awe and admiration. The University includes 31 colleges which are more or less independent financially and administratively. An indication of how high its standards are can be judged from the fact that 81 people who have been awarded the Nobel Prize since it was started in 1901 had studied at Cambridge. Of these almost all have been given for achievements in various scientific fields; only a couple were for literature. These eminent minds have contributed much to the progress of the world as a whole, going beyond the confines of Britain, the "sceptred isle".

Newton, Darwin and William Harvey studied here, but also Wordsworth, Byron and Milton.

We get off the train and catch one of the many

buses which take the tourists to the centre of the town. As in many other countries in Europe, the historic town centre has been made into a pedestrian zone. Only bicycles and the buses run by the town administration are allowed on the old cobbled roads. Entering into the outer part we see how new buildings have come up to cater to the tourists — cafés, restaurants and souvenir-shops are all around us. Fortunately, as we approach the centre, we observe that the old part of the town is well-preserved and the old houses are still standing. As we walk through the narrow streets in the sunshine of a June day, admiring the decorated doorways of the old colleges, we remember that actually the University is closed for the summer holidays and that the streets are full of tourists who have come to visit this famous place. There are crowds everywhere, in their brightly-coloured



◀ Facing page: Sri Aurobindo during his Cambridge years.

▲ Gibbs Building, the main building of King's College, Cambridge. Photo by Kate O'Connell.

shorts and T-shirts. Visually, this is far from what Sri Aurobindo would have seen here, during the last years of the Victorian era.

All of a sudden we find ourselves in an open market-place. There are stalls selling fruits, vegetables, clothes, old books and knick-knacks. On the other side of this market we catch sight of the King's College Chapel and a bit further away, to

the famous chapel whose entire length we can see now. Beyond all this is the river Cam which gives its name to the town.

We amble slowly towards the river. Being the holiday period there is no one. A quiet and rest-

ful air is about us. Surely it must have been even more so during those two years, 1890 to 1892, which Sri Aurobindo spent here. In those days it was still only a university town. The population of this town was made up almost entirely of those who had come to study and all those who were a part of the colleges in one way or another. The traders and merchants who lived there were only



King's College Chapel seen from the road in front of the College

the left, the ornate gatehouse of the college. It's difficult to take one's eyes off the beauty of the chapel, after walking along the narrow lanes and being in the prosaic atmosphere of the cafés and the railway-station. This chapel is famous in the world not only because it is the finest example of Gothic architecture and probably the last of such structures to be built, but also because its choir is considered one of the best in the world. Every year at Christmas when the choir sings in this chapel, people all over the world watch the live broadcast on television or listen to it on radio.

We enter the college campus through the elaborately decorated gateway. Before us is a large square lawn, to our left is a massive two-storied building which we later learn is the Dining Hall. Across the lawn is another similar building and is the area of the lecture halls and to our right is

there to serve this university population. There were so many colleges, almost one on every street, that this population attached to the colleges could have sustained the entire town. An interesting point is that the University was only for men and it wasn't until 1866 that the first women were allowed to attend lectures. It was only in 1947 that women were actually given degrees.

In five minutes we are near the river. To Indians this would be a stream, because the bridge which goes over it can be crossed in twenty steps. Standing on this stone bridge one has a beautiful view of King's College — the grounds, the chapel and the young people enjoying boat rides on the river. The river itself, bordered by the tall willows whose leaves touch the water, is a picture that one can go on admiring.

As I stand on the bridge, looking at the boats,

I think there is no student of Oxford or Cambridge who does not look back in after days on the few years of his undergraduate life as, of all the scenes he has moved in, that which calls up the happiest memories, and it is not surprising that this should be so, when we remember what that life must have meant to him. He goes up from the restricted life of his home and school and finds himself in surroundings which with astonishing rapidity expand his intellect, strengthen his character, develop his social faculties, force out all his abilities and turn him in three years from a boy into a man. His mind ripens in the contact with minds which meet from all parts of the country and have been brought up in many various kinds of trainings, his unwholesome eccentricities wear away and the unsocial, egoistic elements of character are to a large extent discouraged. He moves among ancient and venerable buildings, the mere age and

beauty of which are in themselves an education. He has the Union which has trained so many great orators and debators, has been the first trial ground of so many renowned intellects. He has, too, the athletics clubs organised with a perfection unparalleled elsewhere, in which, if he has the physique and the desire for them he may find pursuits which are also in themselves an education. The result is that he who entered the university a raw student, comes out of it a man and a gentleman, accustomed to think of great affairs and fit to move in cultivated society, and he remembers his College and University with affection, and in after days if he meets with those who have studied with him he feels attracted towards them as to men with whom he has a natural brotherhood.

Sri Aurobindo

From "Lecture in Baroda College",
SABCL, 3:130,131.

I wonder if Sri Aurobindo went boating on the river. Who knows? But surely he must have spent some time on her banks to reflect on her beauty. Even today when the river is full of boats packed with tourists, there is still an atmosphere of serenity. One can hear the sounds of nature and feel the freshness of the open air. All that this river has seen! She has been there, quietly flowing past this temple of knowledge, for several centuries now. How many great minds from King's College must have sat on her banks and meditated or sat in boats and glided down her dark waters.

There are so many colleges in this town and each one has a history. Although the University of Cambridge dates back to 1209, King's College itself was founded in 1441 by King Henry VI of the Tudor dynasty and that is how it gets

its name. The construction of the chapel continued intermittently for a hundred years and was completed under the famous King Henry VIII. At first the college was meant only for boys from Eton but in 1865 it was opened to others as well.



River Cam seen from the Clare College bridge

There is a photograph in A.B.Purani's biography of Sri Aurobindo which shows a narrow road, King's Lane, where Sri Aurobindo had lived in Cambridge and there is even a picture of his room. But today this house doesn't exist anymore. In those days the young men who came to study at King's found accommodation outside, in the



Far end of King's Lane. The side gate of the College, which is near the library.

town. The ones who had scholarships were given accommodation in a house which was separated from the college campus by a narrow lane. In order to get this scholarship one had to pass an examination and Sri Aurobindo passed this examination with the highest marks. This scholarship entitled him to £80 a year, which, considering his financial difficulties, was at least a sum of money he could count on. As this property where the scholars lived was so near to the college there was a kind of passage under the lane so that they could go to their rooms directly, without having to go out into the road. This passage was popularly known as "the drain". This term had nothing to do with the rooms themselves. However, it is also true that the rooms were not in a good condition.

We come to know this from a letter written by Sri Aurobindo to his father. He writes how Oscar

Browning, a historian who taught at King's and who was socially very highly regarded, was so impressed by his entrance examination papers, that he told him, "I have examined papers at thirteen examinations and I have never during that time (seen) such excellent papers as yours (meaning my Classical papers at the scholarship examinations)." At the end of that same letter Sri Aurobindo writes, "The great O.B. afterwards asked me where my rooms were and when I had answered he said 'that wretched hole! ...How rude we are to our scholars! We get great minds to come down here and then shut them up in that box! I suppose it is to keep their pride down.'" [Quoted by A. B. Purani in his *Life of Sri Aurobindo*]

Today King's Lane itself doesn't seem to have changed much since the 19th Century, but the old house has been demolished and a new modern structure now stands in its place. There is now an extension from the new building which, like a covered bridge, connects with the college building on the other side of the lane.

One of the most important features of King's College is the library.

Apparently it has been there, and in constant use, since the founding of the College in 1441. The entrance, which is close to the river, is through a small inner courtyard with a magnolia tree at the centre. The old stone staircase is straight out of some Gothic tale — cold and dim. As we climb up this short flight of steps we cannot help imagining how Sri Aurobindo himself must have climbed up and down these steps so many times.

Inside the library there is a soft silence and the gentle light coming through the tall windows creates an atmosphere of meditation. Of course, as the summer holidays are on, there is no one. The librarian, to whom I have explained the purpose of my visit, calls his assistant and asks her to show us around. There are tall wooden shelves, full of books, reaching up to the ceiling. Not only are they arranged all along the length of the library but at various places they form the partitions of

the different sections of their collection. The assistant leads me to the English section and shows me where they have kept the entire set of the centenary volumes of the Master's works. I just stand there looking at those familiar volumes on that high shelf. The assistant can see that this is a very moving moment for me and leaves me to enjoy it.

When she comes back she shows me the different sections of their collection. "What exactly did Sri Aurobindo study at King's? What were the subjects of the Tripos?" I enquire. "The only subjects were Greek and Latin," the assistant tells me to my surprise, "and the main work was to translate from Greek and Latin into English and vice versa." Then she patiently explains to me that even Greek philosophy wasn't a part of the Tripos. If texts were chosen from the Greek philosophers it was more for the style than for the content. Even Greek and Roman history were sometimes alluded to but only to better understand the literature of the period rather than for teaching history.

I have a good look at the Greek and Latin section after which the assistant takes me to the section where they preserve the question-papers of over a hundred years. There I see the examination paper that Sri Aurobindo had to answer in 1892. There are passages from Greek poetry and prose to be translated into English and again short passages in Latin prose and poetry to be translated into English. Then there is the exercise in reverse, that is, translations from English passages into Greek and Latin. The last exercise is an essay to be composed in English, imagining a typical day in the life of a character in Latin literature, a normal day in ancient Rome.

Then we walk around, admiring this fabulous collection of books. I know that there used to be a photograph of Sri Aurobindo in this library, but I can't see it anywhere. Upon enquiring I am told that it has been put away in the office of the librarian. He brings it out and we exchange a few observations. He looks visibly impressed when we inform him that the picture is taken by Cartier-Bresson. After that we thank him and leave.

As we walk out of the library, into the little courtyard, we sit for a while and reflect on this experience. What was the significance of those years

that Sri Aurobindo spent at Cambridge? What effect did it have on the rest of his life?

I see before my mind's eye the court-room during the trial of the Alipore Bomb Case. On one side is the judge, Charles Porten Beachcroft, on the other side is the chief accused Aurobindo Ghose, unmoved although surrounded by the other young men who have all been implicated in this case and who are still full of energy. The judge, in his ceremonial robes, looks at the chief accused. Their eyes meet for a brief moment. What must have passed in that look? The electrifying drama of that moment lay in the fact that less than twenty years earlier both these men were at Cambridge as fellow students.

While Beachcroft was at Clare College, Sri Aurobindo went to King's. The two colleges are just next to each other; the walls of Clare College are right next to the walls of the King's College Chapel. What must have gone through the heart of Beachcroft, the man? What must it have been for an English judge to sit in the heat of a Calcutta court-room and determine the fate of a man who had won the first prize for the Greek Iambics and the Latin Hexametre at King's College in Cambridge? They had lived in the same town, in the same year, and were studying in two different colleges of the same University. And then they find themselves in a court-room, as judge and accused. Very often reality is stranger and more difficult to believe than fiction.

And this is the crux of the whole story. Sri Aurobindo was not a passionate youth from a small town in Bengal who was trying to overthrow the British Empire. He had been a scholar at Cambridge, one of the highest seats of learning then in Britain, if not the world, and had competed with the Englishmen and passed the examination of the Classical Tripos in the first class. His articles in *Bande Mataram* were shaking up the nation, written in "the most excellent English", as Ramsay MacDonald would say in the House of Commons. As he has himself said, he was fighting with "the strength of knowledge".

These two years at Cambridge were linked to all the three aspects of Sri Aurobindo's personality: the poet, the patriot and the philosopher. His first

collection of poems was published from Baroda but actually these poems had been written in Cambridge. His first contact with the Freedom Movement came when he joined the Indian Majlis and became its secretary. His writings in



The decorative Gatehouse, main entrance of the College.

Pondicherry on philosophical subjects have the stamp and the style of a scholar. Perhaps it is his high style that has kept the common man from understanding him. But, on the other hand, can we expect less from someone who was a first class scholar from Cambridge?

As we were thanking the librarian for having allowed us to see the many valuable documents, he remarked that there aren't very many young people who take up the Classical Tripos these days, even though the course has been slightly modified to adapt to the needs of our modern times. It is important to note that at the end of the 19th century studying the classics was a normal thing for people of the upper class to do. It wasn't until relatively recently that people started to choose a line of study according to what they were planning to take up as a profession in life. In those days higher studies were meant more for training the mind to think rather than to acquire a job skill.

This study of Greek literature has contributed much to Sri Aurobindo's poetry and one doesn't have to search very hard to find direct and indirect references to it. Having been involved in the stage production of "Perseus the Deliverer" as well as of "Illion", I am familiar with Sri Aurobindo's thorough knowledge of ancient Greece. The story of the Trojan War forms the backdrop of "Illion". The lines are written in Quantitative Hexametre and although the language is English, the thoughts and feelings come out of the complex tales of Greek mythology and legends. And even though "Illion" is incomplete, it still remains an epic poem. It is not only in "Perseus" and "Illion" that we see the Greek influence but in "Love and Death" too. The story very closely resembles the tale of Orpheus and Eurydice. Sri Aurobindo has himself, when in Baroda, written in a letter to his brother Manmohan, how his mind was still tuned to Greek mythology, even though he had been living in

India for 6 years. His Yama in "Love and Death" bears a greater resemblance to Pluto than to the Death of Indian mythology and even the portrait of Madana is more like Eros or Cupid.

There is another interesting story of the Quantitative Hexametre. It was while Sri Aurobindo was at Cambridge that a fellow student called Norman Ferrar gave him the clue to the rhythm of this unusual metre in poetry. Not only "Illion" but also "Ahana" is written in this metre. Years later when Ferrer was travelling to Singapore he stopped at Calcutta only to discover from the papers that his friend was the chief accused in the Alipore Bomb Case. He tried very hard to help Sri Aurobindo but obviously couldn't do anything much.

Sri Aurobindo has said that he considered himself first a poet. This aspect of his personality is somehow eclipsed by the more prominent ones. If you turn the pages of *The Collected Poems* you will notice that the earliest poems are dated 1890-92. This period corresponds to his Cambridge days.

These poems are a clear indication of what was passing through his mind. There are poems written during that period which are full of allusions to Greek and Roman myth, the language is flowery and decorative, intertwined with emotions. But if you continue to look more closely you will come across two poems which have nothing to do with roses and sunlight or spring and stars. These poems are written on Charles Stuart Parnell, the Irish nationalist leader.

The revolt of Ireland brings to Sri Aurobindo's mind the images of his own motherland, India, which is still in bondage. His sympathy for the Irish patriots and the outbursts of praise for them show the first signs of what will grow and one day become the fiery articles in the Indian papers. The lines of the two poems on Parnell are so full of emotions that one would imagine Sri Aurobindo was talking about himself. Here are the opening lines of the poem "Hic Jacet" which in Latin means "Here lies":

"Patriots, behold your guerdon.
This man found

Erin, his mother, bleeding, chastised, bound,

Naked to imputation, poor, denied,

While alien masters held her house of pride."

"Erin" is another name for Ireland but the lines would still make sense if it was replaced with "India". Under the title of the poem are printed the words "Glasnevin Cemetery". This is the name of the cemetery where Charles Stuart Parnell is buried. Did Sri Aurobindo write this poem after he had visited the cemetery? Did he then travel to the west coast of Ireland? It would not be impossible. After all, it was quite the done thing to travel during the summer holidays when the colleges were closed. Although there are no references in any published sources to such a journey, it is quite possible that Sri Aurobindo would have wanted to travel to visit the grave of the famous patriot.

The entrance to the King's College Library is very close to the river. We strolled down the bridge and crossed the Cam. From this bank we had a view of the college which was quite breathtaking. Suddenly we saw it from a distance and so much was included in this picture. We could just sit under a tree and look at it as if it was a giant painting.

College days hold a special place in everyone's life. But for Sri Aurobindo the time he spent at King's College was also a time when he was under great pressure. He was simultaneously preparing for the Classical Tripos as well as the ICS examination. A. B. Purani tells us in his biography of



Exterior of the College showing a statue of the famous King Henry VIII.

Sri Aurobindo that he passed the first part of the Tripos in the second year of study. Why did he not sit for the second part then? Why did he plan to stay only for two years at Cambridge? Other sources suggest that he probably thought that in the third year, by 1893, he would have entered the probationary course of the ICS. The results of the written ICS exams, in which he had passed, came out in August and Sri Aurobindo left Cambridge in October. It wasn't until November that

Sri Aurobindo was officially disqualified from the ICS. Having left King's College he probably could not go back when he knew that he was out of the ICS. It would seem that he never intended to stay in England and that once the ICS examinations were done with, he saw no point in staying on, not even to finish the Tripos. In *On Himself*, we can find a paragraph where he says that he "voluntarily chose to forego his third year at Cambridge."

A. B. Purani came to England in the mid-50s to gather information on the life of Sri Aurobindo. This is what he has to say, "Aurobindo passed the First Part of the Classical Tripos examination in the first class at the end of his second year at Cambridge. It is on passing this First Part that the degree of B.A. is usually conferred. But the degree is only given if the examination is taken in the third year. Sri Aurobindo had only two years at his disposal.... Nevertheless, he might have got the degree if he had applied for it, but he did not care to do so." This means, in fact, that Sri Aurobindo came back from England with neither the official B.A. degree from Cambridge nor the ICS.

He left Cambridge in October 1892 and spent the remaining time in London before taking the ship back to India in January 1893. "It is strange how things arrange themselves at times," Sri Aurobindo says in the *Evening Talks* as recorded by A. B. Purani, "for example I failed in the ICS and was looking for a job exactly when the Gawkhar happened to be in London."

We cannot end the story of Cambridge without mentioning the other discovery we have made. In the year 2001, while we were working on the dramatisation of "The Phantom Hour", we had been struck by the similarity in the theme of this story with the stories of M. R. James who was also a part of King's College, Cambridge. He is the best-known raconteur in England of stories which have a supernatural twist to them. It is well-known that he used to read out his own stories at Christmas time to a gathering of friends at Cambridge. The point to note is that M. R. James not only studied at King's but became a Fellow, Dean, then a Tutor and finally Provost from 1905 to 1918. He was Dean at King's when Sri

Aurobindo joined the college. Although his first stories were published in book form in 1904, the first time that a magazine carried these stories was in 1895, only three years after Sri Aurobindo had left the university town. However, it is an accepted fact that M. R. James wrote or recounted these ghost stories much before they came out in print. One can easily surmise that Sri Aurobindo would at least have known of his stories if he hadn't actually met him. The only short stories that we have from Sri Aurobindo's pen are stories of the supernatural set in England, and in my opinion, far more dramatic than M. R. James'.

The afternoon is still sunny as we catch the train back to London. It has been a day full of emotions and information and there is so much to take back in the heart as well as in the mind. It's nearly four o'clock and we re-enter the hustle and bustle of city life. Back at King's Cross station we make our way through the crowds to get to the exit. I can't help wondering how many among these men and women, walking so purposefully towards the various platforms, have even heard of Sri Aurobindo. How many know of his writings? How much time do we have to wait until the world at large recognises him?

"I know I have the strength to deliver this fall-en race..." Sri Aurobindo was always a liberator, a deliverer. At first it was political freedom of the Indian subcontinent, but eventually he showed us the way out of the greater bondage that is our own ignorance, and even beyond — out of the human state into a divine state of being.

It is not a coincidence that both the Mother and Sri Aurobindo spent their formative years in the West but carried out their work, of manifesting the higher truth, in India. It was all a part of the global vision of things that they have given us. Cambridge has played an important role in Sri Aurobindo's life, in the preparation of "the strength of knowledge". And even though more than a century has passed since he was there, when you stand in the grounds of King's College you know that you are in a very special place on this earth. Even Time seems to be holding its breath in awe. ❧

TIGER'S STORY

Dilip Patel '76H and Gopal '90 retrace the story of S. D. Thyagarajan, Ashram's World War II hero

I affirm again to you most strongly that this [World War II] is the Mother's war. You should not think of it as a fight for certain nations against others [...]; it is a struggle for an ideal that has to establish itself on earth in the life of humanity, for a Truth that has yet to realise itself fully and against a darkness and falsehood that are trying to overwhelm the earth and mankind in the immediate future.

Sri Aurobindo

In a letter to a disciple dated 29-7-1942

World War II saw the involvement of the Mother and Sri Aurobindo in many ways and on many levels, as it

was a major battle with the adverse forces that were attempting to lay claim to the whole of civilization. Amongst the many tales of bravery emerging from those turbulent times is one which involved the sacrifice of a young life from the Ashram, S. D. Thyagarajan.

CHILDHOOD

Sayanapuram Duraiswamy Thyagarajan was born in 1918 into an eminent Tamil Brahmin family. His father, Duraiswamy Aiyer, was a leading lawyer practising in Madras and an ardent devotee of Sri Aurobindo. Thyagarajan's early days began in "Palm Grove", a palatial bungalow in Madras, with his elder sister Kaushiki, his elder brother Mithran and his younger sister Ansuya.

From the 20s Duraiswamy began making regular week-end trips to Pondicherry. He had a permanent room in the Ashram Main Building. By the time he settled down here in 1938, the family had become very much part of the small well-knit community of the Ashram and very close to the Mother and Sri Aurobindo. (It was to Duraiswamy that Sri Aurobindo entrusted the important task of going to Delhi to ask the Indian leaders to accept Sir Stafford Cripps' proposal of a dominion status for India.) Thyag, as he was known to the family, along with his brother and sisters, continued to visit Pondicherry regularly.

On the completion of his studies Thyag left



Thyagarajan (right) in the Ashram with his brother Mithran (left) and Purani (centre).

for France. He lived there for a while with Andréda's family and then went to England to study Engineering. Very soon war broke out and Thyag chose to join Britain's Royal Air Force.

WORLD WAR II

Thyagarajan joined the RAF as a Sergeant with Squadron no 263. Between October 1942 and May 1943 he flew Westland Whirlwinds. To his British fellow officers at 263 Squadron, Thyagarajan was known as Tiger Rajan or simply “Tiger” — a logical nickname and much easier for them to pronounce!

From January 1944 Tiger began to fly the single-seater fighter aircraft, the Hawker Typhoon. Typhoons played a crucial role between May and August 1944 during the preparations for D-day and the subsequent invasion of Europe by the

of the heavily fortified coastal radars in north-west France with the result that during the invasion no German fighters interfered with Allied airborne operations, and the coastal batteries were impotent. This saved thousands of Allied lives.

From June 6th when the Allies landed on the beaches of Normandy to the end of August when France was free, the Typhoons gave close support to the Allied troops. Squadron after squadron took to the air and rained down rockets on enemy armour, tank and troop concentrations, their HQs, airfields, road and rail systems, thus enabling Allied beachheads to expand and con-

solidate. German reinforcements were critically delayed by these constant air attacks, and their morale suffered. The Typhoons too were vulnerable — as they flew low, they took a number of losses from ground fire. In spite of this they continued attacking, returned to refuel and rearm, and attacked again.

Tiger must have been in constant action during this period. Then towards the end of August on one such mission to attack an armoured column, Tiger’s fighter aircraft was hit badly by enemy fire. The damage would prove to be fatal. From a letter written by Mithran, Tiger’s brother, to a local newspaper in Normandy, we can gather what exactly happened in the last moments of Tiger’s life:

“On August 25th, Thyagarajan flew for his last mission. He was followed by another fighter aircraft manned by his no 2. They were attacked by anti-aircraft fire. As a result, my brother was hit. His no 2 told him over the radio that thick smoke was coming out of his engine. My brother

replied that he knew his engine was failing but he was wanting to land only after they had reached Allied lines. On the way back, while flying over La Lande my brother radioed his companion telling him that his plane was not going to make it and he had to land. Either his controls were dead or



Tiger, still a Sergeant, with a Hawker Typhoon of 263 Squadron of the Royal Air Force.

Photo: Chris Thomas via www.bharat-rakshak.com

Allies which led to the liberation of Europe. These aircraft which flew low and carried both rockets and canons were ideally suited to ground attack roles. For more than a month before D-day they attacked enemy transport, railways, shipping and airports. They also successfully neutralised most



Two months before his fatal sortie. Members of 263 Squadron pose for a 'Sqn Portrait' in June 1944, with Tiger taking the position on the Typhoon's engine cowl. Photo: Chris Thomas via www.bharat-rakshak.com

he misjudged the distance, the fact remains that his aircraft missed the ground and went crashing against trees, along the edge of the field. There was an explosion. The aircraft blew up in flames. You know what happened afterwards. After his death, we were informed that Tiger had participated with great success in some thirty operations against the enemy's merchant navy."

HONOURING A FALLEN AIRMAN

Tiger's Typhoon fighter crashed near the little village of La Lande St Léger in Normandy, France. The Indian pilot's last moments were witnessed by a 13 year old boy, Claude Roussel who saw the ill-fated Typhoon crash to the ground after hitting a row of poplar trees, turn upside down and blow up in an orchard. Claude (now mayor of the village) said that the pilot had tried to force-land the fighter plane. Some British soldiers had retrieved the pilot's charred body and were burying him on the crash site when the village priest, assuming he was a British Christian airman, stopped them and had Tiger properly honoured by burying him in the churchyard.

Tiger lost his life on 25th August, 1944. Ironically and poignantly it was the very day that Paris was liberated by the Allied forces, the day General Charles de Gaulle led the victory parade down the Champs Elysées!

is honoured here, Pilot Officer Sayanapuram Duraiswamy Thyagarajan, Pilot R.A.F., 25th August 1944, Age 26."

- In French: "Né le 10 août 1918, mort sur le champ d'honneur, en défendant la liberté du monde".

POSTSCRIPT

Sixty-three years after he was buried in the small village churchyard, Tiger's story again came to light with an email from the "Association pour le Souvenir des Ailes de la Victoire en Normandie" to Jagan Pillarisetti, the webmaster of www.bharat-rakshak.com/IAF. The association was looking out for relatives of Tiger's who could be present for the unveiling of a plaque in his honour.

When by sheer chance Wing Commander (IAF, Retd.) D. P. Soni got to know of this, he immediately responded, "I have been known to the

The villagers of La Lande have tended his grave since that day. It is an unusual grave. Firstly because it is the grave of a Hindu airman (generally Hindus killed in action were cremated and their names commemorated on a memorial). And secondly because it has a head stone (set up more recently) with inscriptions in three languages:

- In Sanskrit: "Om Bhagavate Namah"
- In English: "This Hindu airman



Headstone on Tiger's grave with inscriptions in Sanskrit, English and French. Photo: ASAVN

Duraiswamy family since 1960,” he wrote in an email. “I used to hear about Tiger from his parents during my visits to Sri Aurobindo Ashram in Pondicherry (1958 -1964) while I was with 4 Squadron, flying Toofanis. How often I was treated to breakfast or lunch and enjoyed their kind hospitality. I knew I was being seen in the shadow of Tiger whom I had never met or seen. He only lived in my imagination.” We can only picture the mixture of pride and pain that memories of Thyag must have brought to his parents. We know that Thyag’s mother, Amma as she was known in the Ashram, rode out all the trauma with an unwavering will — “the flame that withstood the storm” — in the spirit of a true child of the Mother’s.

Wing Commander D. P. Soni then immediately tracked down Tiger’s surviving sister Kaushikamma, who is now in her nineties. It was decided that, though she will not be able to attend the commemorative ceremony for Tiger, some of her descendants will.



The unveiling of the plaque in honour of Tiger.

So earlier this year, on June 2nd 2007, more than six decades after his fatal crash, Tiger was honoured with a special plaque which was unveiled near his resting place. The village of La Lande with its 220 inhabitants, came alive for the



The family of Tiger Rajan at the ceremony.

occasion. The newly appointed French Defence Minister, the Indian Ambassador to France, Tiger’s family and surviving members of RAF Squadron 263 were all there. Radhika, Tiger’s grand-niece, who was present at the commemoration ceremony, sent a letter recounting the events. Here is an abridged version of that letter:

“The Mayor of La Lande commenced with a speech in French in which he said he was only a little boy at the time of the crash to which he was a witness. The Indian Ambassador then spoke, followed by the charming French Minister. Strangely just as his speech was ending a lone plane flew through the skies and he pointed it out saying that it must be a sign from Thyagesh. Every one of them bestowed much praise on Uncle for his bravery and his martyrdom. Finally George the oldest war veteran who had travelled from England to attend the ceremony and had also been in the same squadron as Thyagesh Uncle, unveiled the black plaque nailed on the wall of the church which had Uncle’s name inscribed on it. The three national anthems, i.e. the Indian, British and French, were played by a live band in great solemnity and it was very moving. The Indian flag that served as the veil was presented to my father.

The farmer who owns the field in which Tiger’s plane had crashed told us that just two years ago his field was being ploughed and they had unearthed small parts of the plane, a piece of which was presented to my father. The rest were displayed on a table for all to see. My mother was offered

SIMPLE BUT MOVING CEREMONIES

Part of an account by E. R. Badrinath, who was present at the function held for Tiger recently.

On the morning of 2nd June, a name plaque ceremony for Tiger had been organised jointly by the “Association pour le Souvenir des Ailes de la Victoire en Normandie” (which has been conducting extensive research in locating crashed Typhoons, their history, the debris and the pilots, with great dedication) and by the Municipality of La Lande-Saint-Léger, a very small village in lovely “Bocage” country in Normandy.

Tiger’s family had come from Delhi and London. The Indian Ambassador and the Air Attaché, attended the ceremony. The recently-appointed French Minister of Defence had motored down from Paris. The local authorities, the Préfet, the Senator of the region, the Commander of the close-by Air Force Base and several others attended to pay homage.

In the various speeches made, after the plaque was unveiled, India, France and Britain each claimed Tiger as theirs! Wreaths were placed by India and France, with the flag bearers doing the honours all through the ceremony with a (Retd.) Sergeant Major bellowing in true style. The “Vin d’Honneur” in front of the local Town Hall and the lunch that followed at the Auberge du Président in Corneilles was well attended.

The next day, on Sunday, the 3rd June, we gathered for Mass at Noyers Bocage Church and to meditate at the Typhoon Great Roll of



The Indian Ambassador reading a speech and the author (E.R. Badrinath) translating his speech into French.

Honour Plaque at a pretty Memorial built with the names of all the Typhoon pilots inscribed, with a flame lit from what looked suspiciously like a tea pot or a kettle (British touch?)! Here too, the local authorities, the lady Mayor, the Préfet, and others gathered together for the National Anthem of India, Australia, Malaysia, Britain, France, Canada and the United States.

Overall, we were very glad to have been there the two days to attend simple but very moving ceremonies staged with great dignity and honour for a fellow Indian whose destiny brought him to Britain only to die in France!

Events such as these should make Indians and Europeans better aware of India’s military involvement in the two World Wars. Such places so close to Paris are surely worth a visit to underline our commitment to the valiant — “devoir de mémoire”, as the French would say!

the piece of glass of the front of the plane by one of the boys who had found it and while handing it over said, ‘Take it; these were the last eyes that saw him.’ My mother told us that as he was saying this he had tears running down his face.”

It is heartening to know that the West still remembers with pride those who sacrificed their lives to bring peace to their land. In fact as E.R. Badrinath who was present at the function writes, “In the various speeches made, after the plaque was unveiled, India, France and Britain

each claimed Tiger as theirs!”

Let us remember with pride this valiant child of the Mother who made the ultimate sacrifice, for the freedom of the world, in an unknown field in distant Normandy. ❧

Acknowledgements

www.bharat-rakshak.com/IAF/History/1940s/Thyagarajan
www.asavn.net
<http://david-mcmahon.blogspot.com>

THE ASCENT TO TRUTH

Participants remember the play that the Mother wrote and directed 50 years ago.

In the very early years the Annual Programmes of the School on the 1st and 2nd of December were held in the Playground. There was a temporary stage put up at the far end of the ground, towards the Guest House, which had a keel roof and the spectators sat in the open air. At first the cultural programme was only a variety programme and the participants were the students of the School. Often a play was performed along with the other items. Gradually, the programmes became more elaborate and the preparation was started well in advance. Some citizens

of Pondicherry, especially from the French administration, were invited by the Mother to watch the show.

In 1956 the place where the Theatre was going to be built was acquired. There used to be a series of warehouses there, just like the ones which are still there across the street. In those times the place was considered very far away as most people walked or rode on bicycles to go from one place to the other. The main reason for buying that property was that even though the space was very large, the price being



Group photo of the participants 50 years after the play was staged. Those who were absent were inserted using Photoshop.

GIST OF THE PLAY

“L’Ascension vers la Vérité” or “The Ascent to Truth” is a drama of life with a prologue, seven stages and an epilogue. There are 12 persons — a philanthropist, a pessimist, a scientist, an artist, three students, two lovers, an ascetic and two aspirants — who come together with a common goal: the discovery of the ultimate Truth of life. In a combined effort they begin the ascent of a sacred mountain whose summit leads to the Truth. But at various stages of the ascent and for various reasons, all give up the climb except the two aspirants. Resisting valiantly all the trials, they lift themselves up by a supreme effort to the summit in full light.

They are surrounded by the sparkling, dazzling Truth. Nothing else exists except the small bit of rock which is hardly wide enough for the four feet to stand upon. Then they discover on the other side of the bottomless abyss, the new World. In Mother’s words, “ce sommet

resplendissant de lumière éclatante, ces formes parfaites, cette harmonie merveilleuse, la Terre promise, la Terre nouvelle!”

But how does one get there? With an absolute and complete surrender to the Divine Will and full faith in the Divine Grace, they jump fearlessly and borne upon invisible wings, by a miraculous power, they arrive in the new World, ready to learn to live the New Life.

THE CAST :

The philanthropist	- Ramraj Sehgal
The pessimist	- Braj Kishore
The scientist	- Richard P
The artist	- Manoj D.G.
Three students	- Prabir Nahar, Jo, Madhusudan Patel
Two lovers	- Parul Chakraborty, Badol Chakraborty
The ascetic	- Ranajit Sarkar
Two aspirants	- Ajit Sarkar, Tara Jauhar



Prologue — the group in the Artist’s studio before the journey

asked was relatively low because it was situated on the outskirts of the town. Udar-da, who handled the purchase of the plot, was in charge of the construction too. The basic structure has remained practically unchanged since then even though some major renovations of the stage and the technicians’ room at the back were done in 1972, for Sri Aurobindo’s

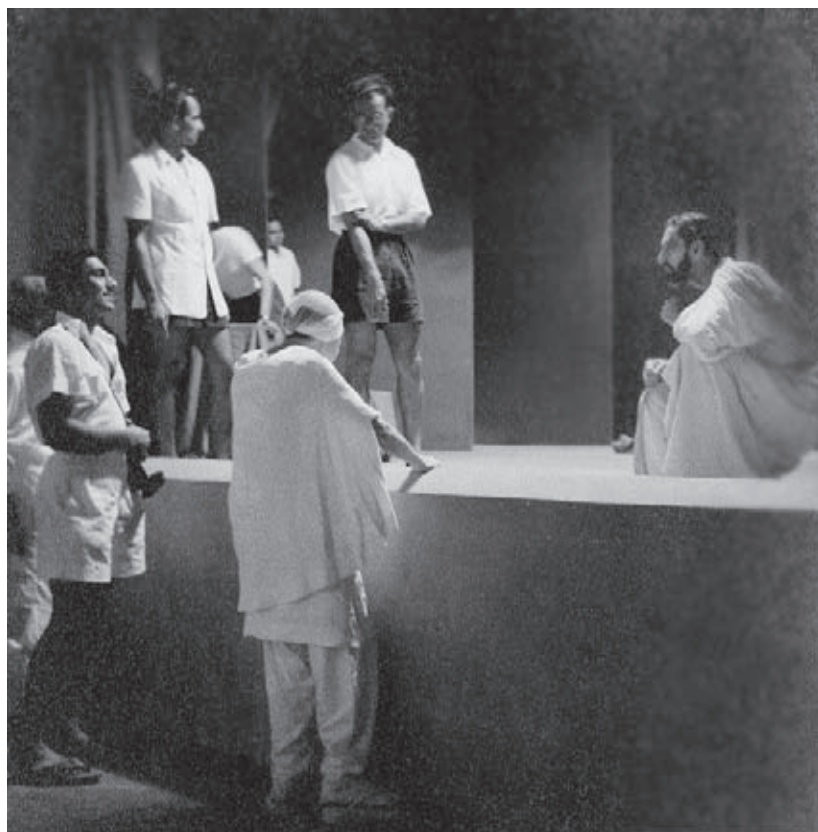
centenary. At that time an orchestra pit had been made in front of the stage, but as there was never a live orchestra which played in that pit the only purpose it served was to hide the prompter — the person who helps actors when they forget their lines. Some years later it was filled in and this created the extension of the stage in front.

The first Annual Programme of the 1st December to be held there was in 1956. By then a decade had passed since the first celebration of the 1st December and an entire organisation had been put in place. The teams which took charge of the costumes and backdrops had gained in experience. The Mother was very much involved in the planning and

excitement of watching a play in the new Theatre Hall. (Actually the space is not really a hall since one of the sides is left entirely open. This is very good for ventilation but very bad for acoustics, especially when one wants to do a play and the actors can't always be in front of a microphone. For 1956, however, it was an achievement of sorts for the Ashram to have its own permanent auditorium.)

How important this space was can be understood from the fact that in February 1958 the Mother's 80th birthday was celebrated here with a March Past in the courtyard and a performance on the stage after that. The Mother took the salute standing on the little cement dais which is at the centre of the courtyard and on which we all go and sit when we are bored or just want to take the air.

For this first representation at the Theatre the Mother wrote the play "L'Ascension Vers la Vérité" ("The Ascent to Truth") and She also directed it. This was a short play and there were two other items in the programme that evening — Sri Aurobindo's "Conversations of the



The Mother directing one of the plays for the 1st Dec. Programme, 1956

execution of the entire show. Not only did She take decisions about the cast and the costumes but she actually wrote the script of some of the programmes. This is how we have today in Her collected works the three plays: "Vers l'Avenir", "Le Grand Secret" and "L'Ascension vers la Vérité".

The opening of the Theatre was going to be an important event but the construction was not yet over and so the work had to continue through the night in order to finish it before D-day. As it is people have always waited eagerly for the performance of the 1st December but in 1956 there was the added

excitement of watching a play in the new Theatre Hall. (Actually the space is not really a hall since one of the sides is left entirely open. This is very good for ventilation but very bad for acoustics, especially when one wants to do a play and the actors can't always be in front of a microphone. For 1956, however, it was an achievement of sorts for the Ashram to have its own permanent auditorium.)

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“SHE WAS PUSHING US TO EXCEED OURSELVES”

Richard '56 looks back at the Mother's marvellous and mysterious ways of dealing with Her children.

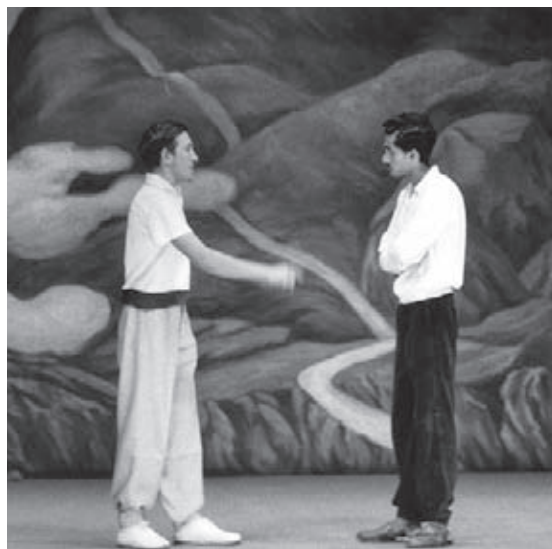
For this play, the Mother chose all the roles Herself and each of us participants got a cyclostyled copy of the text. We were all called to the long veranda in the Guest House. This was unusual as I do not remember Her using this veranda before or after. It is the one that leads to the room Sri Aurobindo lived in before moving to the Ashram Main building. She sat at the eastern end and we, as well as those who accompanied Her in the Playground, sat in front. I believe Diana too was there, since it was she who conducted the practice during the months that followed.

The Mother had the whole reading recorded by Vishwanath-da, so that we could listen to Her way of pronunciation. Perhaps that is why we sat upstairs away from the noise of the Guest House and the Playground. Diana would play the recording for us. As far as I can remember she did not give us instructions as we practiced. I believe we all sat and read our texts first and a little later we did our rehearsals on the stage. The only thing she reminded us was to know our lines by heart! She really gave us freedom to discover our own expression.

A few words about Diana will make it clear that Mother chose her to guide us for reasons quite beyond the ken of mortal mind.

She lived as a recluse in a small room that the Mother had selected for her. It was attached to a local temple which had a fairly large garden with coconut trees and a large temple tank full of large fish no one ever disturbed. Her head was shaven clean and she wore a white shirt and longer-than-usual white shorts. She would go out occasionally by car to visit certain temples. I learnt this from Jyotin-da who accompanied her on these excursions. During one of these he brought back a new colour of the Adoration flower from Tiruvannamalai and planted it in Pradyot-da's garden (Consul House). In fact the first Adoration tree we had in the Ashram grew in Diana's garden.

The Mother chose me to be the scientist in this play. In fact I feel She must have been able to work on a certain aspect or facet of our nature when She gave us a particular role to enact. She would usually give me the part of a villain or a devil, allowing me to express what was not at all part of my outward or surface personality! But in this case it was different. This was the work dearest to my heart at that time. I was actively involved in the science “Laboratoire”, in the small room for Natural History.



The Scientist and the Artist

When we look back at that time when the Mother was actively guiding all the movements of our life as well as the development of the Ashram, we realise that She was constantly moving forward and encouraging all to progress constantly. During all the various practices and plays and demonstrations we did in those days, we felt Her pushing us to exceed ourselves.

Two incidents stand out and are unforgettable. The first was after the dress rehearsal, which the Mother came to see in the Theatre (the old Rally Godown). The play had gone off well. So

pleased were we with ourselves that we thought we would not need to practice any more before the 1st December. Our hopes however were short-lived. The Mother told Diana that we should continue to practice normally till the day of the performance.

The second incident took place on 1st December. After the play, the Mother called us into the little room that had been arranged for Her. Since the Theatre had just been completed — no more temporary stages put up in the Playground — this room looked more like a store-room than a room fit for the Mother. I feel She could adapt

to all conditions and create Her own presence anywhere.

After congratulating us on the performance very warmly indeed and most affectionately, She looked around to give us something. Picking a very large sprig of “Harmony” She did something most unexpected. With great force She started tearing off smaller sprigs and giving each one of us a piece, with a broad smile and a word of praise. I could not believe my eyes. I would have imagined She would have cut them off daintily with a pair of scissors!

AIM FOR PERFECTION

Ramraj Sehgal '61

When you attempt to recall a big event that happened some 50 years ago, it is surprising how your memory comes to your help. Though I must admit that there are bound to be some losses or inaccuracies in the narration of the event, I do sympathize with my memory. It has done its best.



The defection of the Philanthropist

There are 12 characters in this play and Mother Herself chose the 12 boys and girls to play them. I remember who they were and what roles they had performed. I was a philanthropist and I was the first one to get off the stage! She had spoken to each one of us individually. I remember Her asking me in the Tennis Court, “Do you speak French?” I was shocked with the question considering that French was our medium of instruction. I murmured, “Yes, I do.” She smiled and walked away. The mystery of this question unfolded some three weeks later. We were asked to come to Her room in the Playground on 1st September. That day I was running a high temperature and my father informed the Mother that I was unwell. But I decided to go nevertheless. As I entered the room, She smiled at me and asked Gauri-di to provide me a cushion. She did not want me to sit on the floor.

She read the entire play at the end of which She announced each individual’s role. We were then given our respective parts to learn. Within a few days, individual rehearsals began in the Guest House. She corrected our deliveries. Once She was satisfied, the venue shifted to the Theatre. In the beginning, it was once a week and later it became more frequent. She would stand at the end of the Theatre and watch us. Then She would come on stage and point out our mistakes and we would do it again. This went on for a few weeks.

Then came the final rehearsal. She sat in Her

usual place and watched us with great attention. After the show, She came up to the stage and made Her comments. It was quite encouraging though She did point out certain flaws.

The final day had arrived. We assembled before the play and She came back-stage and gave us an encouraging smile. When the curtains came down,

we eagerly met Her in Her little room. She smiled at us and said, "You did well." She gave us some flowers. An eventful evening had come to an end.

Many years later, when I recall this unique experience, I realize that my greatest learning has been that whatever we do, we must aim for Perfection.

L'ASCENSION VERS LA VÉRITÉ

Brajshore '61

C'est avec surprise et joie que j'ai reçu la nouvelle que je participais dans une pièce que Mère venait d'écrire et que je devais jouer le rôle du Pessimiste.

Je crois au début quand la que Mère nous a réunis c'était sous la véranda de Sri Aurobindo, où Elle l'a vu pour la première fois.

Elle nous a fait lire le texte dans sa pièce au terrain de jeu où Elle avait commencé ses classes des *Prières et Méditations*. À cette époque Elle était toujours accompagnée d'une Française nommée Diana. Ce jour-là Mère semblait se concentrer sur la prononciation. Mais Elle a signalé qu'Elle avait, après tant d'années ici, perdu son acuité pour les sons français et s'en remettait à l'oreille de Diana. Elles ont échangé de petits commentaires après la lecture de chacun. Quand j'ai lu Mère a hoché la tête et a prononcé le nom de Bharati-di¹. Pour quelques personnes Elle a dit qu'il y avait l'influence de l'anglais dans leur accent.

Quand les répétitions ont commencé sur la scène, il fallait jouer aussi avec le corps. Chaque jour je me sentais de plus en plus misérable. Que faire de ce corps qui ne voulait pas s'exprimer? L'ego probablement opposait une résistance supplémentaire à s'identifier avec un rôle négatif.

Un jour Mère m'a dit : "Tu n'as pas envie de le faire?"

J'étais bien attaché à rester là et j'ai répondu : "Je veux bien!" Cela m'a secoué peut-être mais ce n'était qu'un départ.

Bientôt un jour Mère a démontré avec son

propre corps ce qu'il fallait faire. Elle a joué mon rôle, sur toute la longueur de la scène en diagonale. Elle l'a fait avec un tel abandon que cela m'a cassé complètement. Cela dépassait tout ce que j'aurais pu imaginer....



Le Pessimiste

Dès ce jour le corps a commencé à s'ouvrir. Je respirais enfin.

Se tenir sur cette scène fut une expérience, celle d'être devant une grandeur indéfinissable.

Quand Mère nous a vus après le spectacle Elle m'a dit : "On t'a bien applaudi !"

Les meilleurs artistes de l'Ashram avaient travaillé de longues heures pour terminer les toiles de fond.

Ce fut une saison de grande activité dans une atmosphère de collaboration.

1. Nom indien d'une Française (Suzanne Karpelès), professeur de français dans notre école entre '52 et '68. Elle jouissait d'une grande intimité avec la Mère.

LEARNING UNDER HER GUIDANCE

Badol Chakraborty '61H

I came to know that the Mother had chosen me and my sister to play the role of the Lovers. I accepted my role happily. It was the Mother who directed and guided us all throughout. Practices were often held on the first floor of the Guest House or Dortoir Annexe, as it was named later on. An iron railing was fixed on the staircase wall to enable the Mother to climb upstairs for the drama practice.

Regarding our French diction and pronunciation, the Mother appointed Diana to help us. I trained myself under her guidance and tried to do to the best of my abilities.

Much to my dismay, a few days before the final rehearsal my voice failed due to a severe cold. I went to the Mother and She saw my miserable condition. She immediately gave me a ginger lozenge which worked like a miracle! Lo! After taking the lozenge I was completely cured the next day.

The whole drama was enacted very well by all the actors. I felt I should have acted more freely as a lover. After the play, when we all went to see the Mother, She praised all of us. When She looked at me, I saw a sign of satisfaction. Yet in Her smile I could intuitively read an expression which said that more could have been achieved by improving my part as a lover. She perhaps wanted my acting to be more natural. Even without Her uttering any words I could feel, know and realise that with a conscious effort for perfection I could have done much better. After all it is the perfection in the performance of the actors that tangibly conveys

the theme to the audience.

We have to remember though, that while for the play the Mother wanted the act of the lover to be more natural, in reality She generally disregards human love, as we have to turn to the true love, the "Divine Love" which never betrays. In fact the world-evolution itself is a play conducted by the Supreme Shakti whose aim is to see humanity turn consciously towards the Truth. On their upward march human beings are faced by



The Lovers find their ideal abode

the power of Maya which pulls them downwards but the Divine Grace is always present to help those who sincerely yearn to overcome it.

CARRIED ON HER WINGS OF LOVE

Parul Chakraborty '61

In 1956 on the 1st of December, Mother's play, "L'Ascension vers la Vérité", was staged in our Theatre for the first time. Mother had selected the entire cast. My brother and I were chosen for the role of the 'Lovers'.

Being too shy and self-conscious on the stage, I felt I would not be able to do justice to this role. So after a great inner conflict I picked up courage to go and confess my difficulty to the Mother and request Her to select someone else.

Mother drew me to Herself, clasped me close and ever so lovingly explained to me that She had chosen me because I had a good French pronunciation. She also wished for a brother and sister duo for these roles as She wanted affinities between the two 'Lovers'. She thought my brother and I fulfilled Her requirements.

Mother then got up from the chair and announced that She would do my part with me. Drawing me very close to Her, She put Her left arm around my waist; I put my own around Hers. We were one in body, mind and heart, in our thoughts and emotions, One Soul. She poured Her love into me that will sustain me for lives to

come! She leaned towards me, Her head resting on mine. Slowly we walked clasping each other, I, completely enamoured and transported into another world! Then She spoke to me in such endearing, unforgettable words: "See how beautiful everything is! We are so happy together like this and we shall remain so together always strong in body, harmonious in our thoughts and happy in our union. Think only I exist for you and nothing can separate us. How beautiful! What a splendour! How marvellous!"

She loosened Her clasp and reluctantly I came back to my earthly self to realise how She had carried me 'There' on Her wings of Love.

A LESSON IN AESTHETICS

R. Prabhakar (Batti) '58

I was never one for "acting" (theatre) though on 4-5 occasions I had managed to get embroiled or enrolled. The closest I came to the stage was as a stage-hand. This was during the staging of the Mother's play — "L'Ascension Vers la Vérité". It was an extremely lucky stroke as it gave me an opportunity to watch Her sit and shout instructions from the auditorium, come up on stage to give closer attention and even a push.

I remember an incident during one of the rehearsals. This happened when I walked in to place a large sketch of Her painting depicting a steep cliff which the aspirants in the drama had resolved to ascend. The scene was the drawing room of the Artist where all aspirants were to meet to plan the ascent. I came and placed the sketch plonk in the centre. Immediately came Her voice from the auditorium: "Ah! monsieur, pas de symétrie" (Ah! Sir, no symmetry). I moved it a little off centre and that was appreciated by a "Ça va" (That's alright).

This episode irreversibly changed my fixed notion about the importance of symmetry in art. I

learned that such symmetry is more suited for geometry and not necessarily a "thing of beauty". ❧



The Aspirants at the Summit

A life consecrated to union with the Divine is the only life worth living.

The Mother (CWM, 15: 200)

ASHRAM TITBITS

NO LAUGHING MATTER

Purushottam Kothari '83

I think we all agree that laughter is the best medicine, but how many of us try to live up to our beliefs? Well, Laloo-bhai was one who never had to practise what he preached simply because he never ever preached. He only practised, and practised really hard whether it was mass exercises, acrobatics or even a laughing competition, at night or during the day.

Mass Exercises

A relentless practitioner of mass exercises, he would love what most of us find hard to swallow and unlike some others would not come up with an original composition.

Acrobatics

During groundnut distribution, while Mother took centre stage, Laloo-bhai would provide the perfect backdrop by going on walking up and down the length of the Playground. Not a great feat apparently? Only he did it on his hands! (peacock)

Laughter

Somebody told Mother about Ravindraji's roaring laughter or 'Attahaasa' which is said to have travelled from Ashram to Playground in the early days when 'Peaceful Pondicherry' was not just a tourism slogan. Mother seems to have replied that it came from some other plane. Laloo-bhai took the laughing matter rather seriously and started going to the beach regularly at 3 am in the morning to practise laughing aloud. Kake, Chhote, Bokul and Ashok would hide nearby to enjoy the roaring competition between Laloo-bhai and the waves. Today the beach has gone and Laloo-bhai is no more amongst us. He has probably teamed up with the waves and continues his practice

non-stop. Now Kake and Co. can visit the seashore anytime to hear him laughing away.

An anecdote of our School's children collected by one of our teachers.

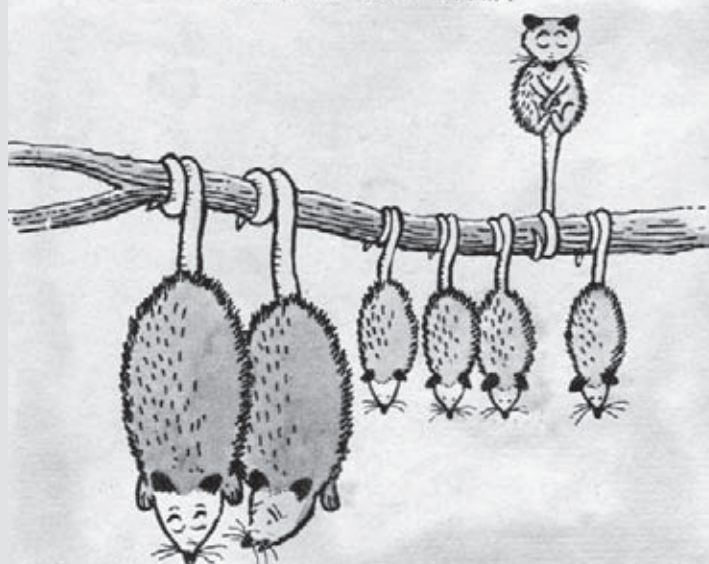
STEALING OR PRASAD

During competitions, especially for Athletics, there is a thermos of ice for any emergency. After everything is over the ice cubes are distributed to the group members and there's always a rush and a fight to get them. A few of the older boys got into the habit of taking ice cubes on the sly. As a result, when ice was really needed, there wasn't any. A captain, angry at their greedy behaviour, decided to place the thermos of ice in front of the Mother's photo, saying, "Now let's see if they can steal from in front of the Mother."

One naughty boy, on hearing this, came out with this gem of an answer: "But when we take something from in front of Mother's photo, we take it as PRASAD!" ❧

CARTOON SEEN BY THE MOTHER

MOMENTS WITH MAMA



"I think we've got a 'problem child' "



QUIZ TIME!



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



1. On 15th August 1947 what was Sri Aurobindo's age?
2. Where did Nolini-da first see and speak to Sri Aurobindo?
3. When Sri Aurobindo went to Surat to attend the annual session of the Indian National Congress in 1907 who went with him as an attendant and a bodyguard?
4. Whose words are these?
“...The illustrious example of Arabindo Ghose looms large before my vision. I feel that I am ready to make the sacrifice which that example demands of me.”
5. From which poem written by Sri Aurobindo are these lines taken?
“Me from her lotus heaven Saraswati
Has called to regions of eternal snow
And Ganges pacing to the southern seas”



ANSWERS TO THE QUESTIONS OF THE LAST ISSUE :

1. *What was the first play to be performed on the permanent stage in the School courtyard?*
At the beginning whenever there was a programme in the school courtyard a makeshift stage used to be put up under the tree. The stage which we see today was inaugurated in January 1980. The first play performed on it was Sophocles' "Antigone" in French. It was directed by Svetlana (and was probably the last play she fully directed) with a large cast made up of teachers, former students and a few students.
2. *Who was Ramayya?*
The man who made the glue in the school. It was this man's job every morning to make glue out of flour (the kind you see in the post office) and anybody who needed it had to go and get it from the room where he worked. The amazing thing about him was that he never smiled and had a permanent frown on his forehead.
3. *When was the Art Room built?*
The Art Room (in the School) was built in 1971.
4. *Where did the students park their cycles in the seventies?*
For many years the School courtyard had a cemented surface except for a small garden on the south-east corner. Students used to park their cycles inside the School, near the gate but also in the courtyard. To keep them out of the sun some students used to park their cycles in front of the windows of the room where Arati-di sits (next to the Teachers' Room).
5. *What is the name of the white flower which grows on the tall tree near the North gate of the School?*
That white flower with a long stem is called "Transformation".

One Single Advice

...I wish to see some of you becoming rich, rich not for yourselves but that you may enrich the Mother [India] with your riches. I wish to see some of you becoming great, great not for your own sakes, not that you may satisfy your own vanity, but great for her, to make India great, to enable her to stand up with head erect among the nations of the earth, as she did in days of yore when the world looked up to her for light.... There are times in a nation's history when Providence places before it one work, one aim, to which everything else, however high and noble in itself, has to be sacrificed. Such a time has now arrived for our Motherland when nothing is dearer than her service, when everything else is to be directed to that end. If you will study, study for her sake; train yourselves body and mind and soul for her service. You will earn your living that you may live for her sake. You will go abroad to foreign lands that you may bring back knowledge with which you may do service to her. Work that she may prosper. Suffer that she may rejoice. All is contained in that one single advice.

Sri Aurobindo
SABCL, 1: 516-517