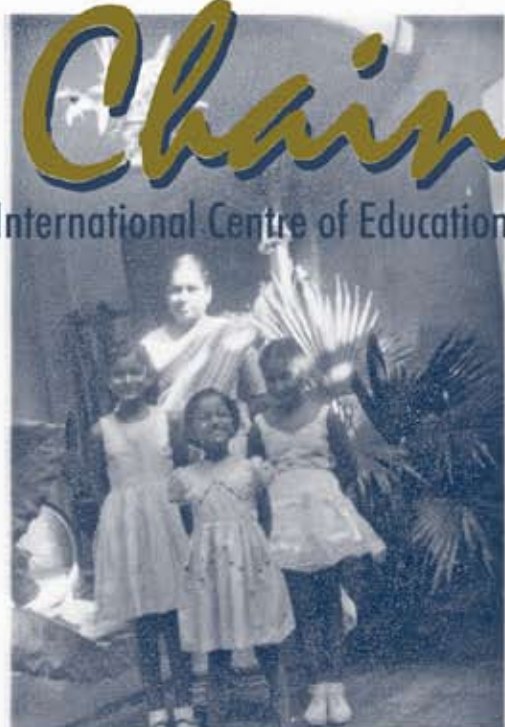


The Golden Chain

Alumni Journal of Sri Aurobindo International Centre of Education



Growing up
in "New Home"



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:
Images of New Home (Minku Boarding) and its boarders
over the years.

THE EDITORS' PAGE

by Sunayana Panda '79

My generation belongs to that period of the Ashram's development when the Mother was still in her physical body, but was not coming out of her room. It was a time when the very air was filled with an intensity that seems unreal now. "Bliss was it" to be a child in that world, but the music of that magical childhood is often lost in the noise and din of our adult lives.

Our day started at six in the morning. A few of us would walk all the way from Home of Progress, near Gandhi Street, so that we could be at the Ashram by six thirty. Already the children of Society Boarding and some others who lived at home would be there. Our little group would wait by the drinking water place. A little after that Pranab-da would come down from the Mother's room, holding several vases full of roses. "No-moshkar Dada!" we would say in chorus with our eyes on the roses. Then Pranab-da would hold the vases out and we would take a rose each and run off.

Our next stop would be Pujalal-ji's room. We would put our school things on one side and sit down on the floor. Every morning we learnt one shloka from Pujalal-ji and repeated all the others that we had learnt already. He would ask us to hurry up and rush to the Dining Room as soon as we had finished. In front of Pujalal-ji's room was the long line of people waiting to take their incense and flowers. Beyond that we could catch a glimpse of Bishwabani-di who was distributing the flowers. She had a smile that defied all description. It was not a smile — it was pure love. And it was there for each one.

As we came out of that room and put on our sandals we would often catch sight of Nolini-da coming out of the bathroom with his just-washed dhoti in hand. Yes, he washed his own clothes. And there at the other end of the courtyard we could see Amrita-da going from one room to the

other. As we walked around, rose in hand, people smiled at us. We might even have stepped over the feet of the people who were doing pranam at the Samadhi but nobody ever frowned or minded. Why? Because we were the children of the Ashram, we were the children of the Mother, we were everybody's children.

As we ran out of the Ashram we knew that somewhere above the branches of the Service tree, behind those green windows, there was Someone. She was the mother of the whole world and because She was there all was safe. From the corner of our eyes we could see that everybody was busy doing something and everything was being done for the Mother.

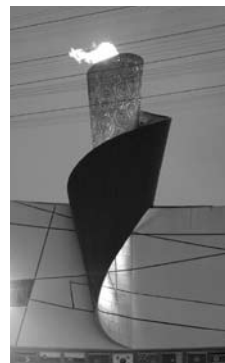
Then we ran to the Dining Room where Jogudi would call us as soon as we reached the door and serve us a hot bowl of milk. Actually she was not serving a bowl of milk at all. She was serving her heart's affection in that large bowl. After a breakfast in the company of friendly faces we would reach the School. And that rose from the Mother's room would finally be handed over to whoever was our teacher in the first period. What a hectic schedule we had had even before the first class of the day had started!

As we walked from the School to the Playground, from the Playground to the boarding we knew that we were always surrounded by affectionate beings. We knew that we were all really children, even the old and the bent, and that we were all growing up together. The most unique part of that childhood was that we were never asked "What will you be when you grow up?" Everyone knew that we would never finish growing up. Everyone knew that it would take us several lives to be what we really wanted to be.

Even today when we strain our ears a little and listen to that inner music, the memory of that unusual childhood comes up and becomes a source of strength and inspiration. ❧

FROM THE SPORTSGROUND TO THE OLYMPICS

Mangal Kothari '80



Every sports-lover's dream is to see the Olympics, live. Five of us such sports lovers somehow managed to make this dream come true this summer: Akshay, Ajay, Kamal, Lalit and Mangal.

As a first step, Akshay had booked service apartments in Beijing for all of us way back in February. At that time our dream was still out of focus. We had no tickets in hand as all were sold

out very fast on the Internet. Many discouraged us from going, as travelling all the way to China without any tickets in hand was meaningless. We started to wrap ourselves in clouds of doubt. I told Akshay that the only way now to come out of this situation was to take the Mother's name and flip a coin and then strictly abide by the outcome. Akshay readily agreed even though he had paid a full non-refundable advance for the service apartments. The moment we flipped the coin we got our answer and all our doubts suddenly vanished: the 'Adesh' was clear — all go to Beijing, tickets or no tickets.

So the next day, after going for the 15th August Darshan, all five of us left for Beijing, probably each one representing an Olympic ring!

When we landed at the Beijing airport, we met a few Indian Olympic Association officials. Lalit requested them for tickets. They themselves had a shortage of tickets for their batch and could not bail us out. The clouds of doubt again gathered around us and we could not decide whether to go to the stadium and try for tickets or to go to our service apartments and rest and try our luck the next day with fresh energy.



▲ Kamal, Mangal, Akshay, Lalit and Ajay

▼ A race in progress in the main Bird's Nest stadium



Akshay then rang up Jhumur-di; she told him to go the stadium and that we would get the tickets. This gave us confidence and we went straight from the airport to the main Olympic Stadium: The Bird's Nest.

Our English-speaking guide took us to the road that led to the main stadium. On that road Lalit met a gentleman who had an additional ticket which he wanted to sell. Immediately, Akshay, our chief negotiator, fixed a rate and we bought our first ticket. What a relief it was – at least one of us could see the Olympics! As we kept walking we found that lots of local Chinese were selling tickets at a premium of 20% to 40%. Soon we had four more tickets in hand and that meant all of us could go and see the Olympics. Every one of us was as full of joy as if we had won an Olympic Gold Medal!

When you enter the Stadium Complex, you have to undergo a security check. First, a computer scans the ticket: a green light on the scanner means it is genuine and a red light means it is fake. Four of our tickets were genuine, but for one ticket there was a red light which meant that one of our tickets was fake. Several thoughts raced through our minds — would one of us have to sit behind bars for this, or get sent back to India? Lalit was the happiest of the lot as he would not have fitted in any

► Lalit with Usain Bolt's mother.

▼ ► Usain Bolt, the fastest man in the world.

▼ A presentation ceremony



▲ The Beijing National Stadium or the Bird's Nest, the main venue of the Beijing Olympics

of the jails there, the average Chinese being quite short and very slim and trim.

The moment we entered the stadium we realised that it was a totally different world. The whole atmosphere was full of enthusiasm; everyone was cheering everyone. There were no country barriers and everyone was just celebrating each other's performance. Imagine a crowd of 80 to 90 thousand people cheering the athletes! The energy we absorbed from that atmosphere was very high as our entire long journey's tiredness disappeared — we were all feeling fit and fine, almost ready to participate in the 10000 M race

that was going on! That day, we got to see the 100 M women's final — in which Jamaicans won all the three medals: Gold, Silver and Bronze. This in itself was a record as no country had ever had a sweep of all the 3 medals in athletics.

From the stadium we went to our service apartment. There at midnight we did our cooking. We followed the instructions written by



SOME THOUGHTS ON THE OLYMPICS TRIP

Akshay Mehta '74H

- As I grew up in this school, sports has always been an integral part of me. That is where my interest to see the Olympics came from.
- We started our trip with no tickets but full of hopes. Keeping in mind Mangal's encouraging and soothing advice to 'Think positive' and Lalit's phrase 'The Power of Now', all five of us started our journey to Beijing just the day after Darshan.
- For me the Bird's Nest stadium was our Sports Ground but on a very massive scale.
- Every event I saw took me back to my childhood days, trying to figure out in my mind the Ashram record and my own timings. During pole vault I remembered Laxman-da, during the 100 m sprint I remembered Prakash-bhai, and during shot put I remembered Arvind Babu .
- Every event we saw revealed that man can surpass his own achievements and increase his level of endurance and get one step closer to perfection, if he works at it with full dedication and in the right spirit.
- One thing I would like to share with you all: The Mother has given us nearly all the Olympic events which we practise all 365 days (even the Olympians won't be doing that). Let us make the maximum, most sincere and honest use of the facilities and always be thankful and grateful to the Divine Mother.



▲ The view from inside

our wives on the food packets and we ate rice, daal and vegetables. The first day the rice was like 'khichadi' but by Day 3 we got it right; just as we have at the dining room or at home. Then we washed our dishes, and wiped them clean for the next day (Corner House Style).

The next day we needed to start early. The most difficult task on our trip was waking Lalit up early in the morning. The degree of difficulty of this task was more than that of winning an Olympic medal.

In the mornings Ajay and I had our Pranayama sessions and Akshay read passages from Savitri to

all of us before we left for the day.

On the second day, our guide took us for a sight seeing trip to the Temple Of Heaven. Just as we reached there Akshay got a call from his friend in Mumbai that an Indian had reached the next round in a boxing match and we must see that. Everyone became excited and told the guide to take us to the boxing stadium. I was not in favour of this, so I commented "What is this? We are at the Gate of Heaven and now all you guys want to go to Hell and see people hitting each other." Luckily good sense prevailed and we entered the Temple



▲ Kamal, Lalit (centre) with one of his fans, Mangal

of Heaven — it is nice to enter Heaven when we are all alive, as later there is no guarantee!

In the second half of the day we began our routine of hunting for tickets. Here I must say, Lalit can attract quite a crowd! Many Chinese used to come and hug him, take photographs with him and would have kissed him too but unfortunately for Lalit he was practically double their height.

Our ticket strategy was clear: Akshay would spot the potential ticket seller and pass him on to Lalit who would then negotiate and then again Akshay would step in and give the final offer and strike a deal. Then Kamal and Ajay would take over and hand over the cash and get the tickets. My job was to look around and warn all if any security person around was eyeing us suspiciously. Later we came to know that security persons were not after those who wanted to buy tickets but after those who were selling them; it was because of them that the genuine buyers could not buy tickets from official counters.

On that day we got tickets for Artistic Gymnastics and we got to see Uneven Bars, Trampoline and Vaulting (Box). The mastery the gymnasts have over their body is remarkable.

The next day we drove past the famous Tiananmen Square and the

Forbidden City (now no more forbidden) where at one time the Chinese royalty and top officials used to stay.

That day we got only four tickets for synchronized swimming. So Lalit suggested that we four go ahead and that he would manage the 5th ticket and join us shortly. Somehow he could not get a ticket for swimming but he got one for Hockey. Since he wanted to join us, he somehow convinced the volunteers there that he had to be with



▲ Artistic Gymnastics



▲ The Water Cube, the venue for swimming and diving

us — so he walked into the swimming stadium with a ticket for Hockey! His gift for convincing anyone is remarkable. In fact, because of him we got to sit in the best of seats. He had observed that the most important seats at any given time would be empty (either people would go to the washrooms, or to eat). He would walk in confidently as if he were a top authorised official and the volunteers awed by his personality would not stop him; the rest of us would follow as no one could spot us behind his large frame. By the time the volunteer realised that four more had crossed it was too late as he/she had to check others.

The next day we were not as lucky with tickets so we went to an interesting antique street, filled with antiques and then at night saw a Chinese Opera.

On our fourth day in Beijing, Akshay's son Arnav and his wife Namita joined us. That day Akshay, Ajay, Lalit, Arnav and Namita saw the men's football finals between Argentina and Nigeria. Kamal and I went to see the women's handball final between Norway and Russia. During the match we noticed that the Russian Coach was shouting at all the players for their mistakes and the Norwegian coach was encouraging his team to play well. Finally the Norwegians won. We learnt how the attitude of a coach can make a difference; encouragement lifts the performance levels as the underdogs beat the former champions — the Russians.

After this handball match, three of us were sitting on the pavement having some snacks. We did not have any tickets for the evening events. Then



▲ At the foot of the Great Wall of China.

out of the blue one volunteer came towards us and asked us if we were interested in three tickets for the evening as some people had not turned up. He gave us the tickets at very low prices. The three tickets were for VIP seats and amongst thousands of ticket seekers they landed in our hands, something beyond our imagination. This was another instance which strengthened our belief that when we are sincere in our efforts and have a positive attitude, Grace pours down at every step.

Our next day began with a visit to the Great Wall of China which is around 70 Kilometers from Beijing. Lalit did not climb up to the wall



- ▼ The boxing match featuring the Indian in the semi-final.
- ◀ We are in the audience crying out "Vande Mataram".
- ▶ Watching the closing ceremony on the 6 storey screen.



▲ Women's handball final between Russia and Norway

as he was tired and Akshay because he had had a minor heart surgery some years back. There in the wall I noticed a loose brick and slipped in a Blessing packet under it. I don't know why but I did it; sometimes it is better not to know 'WHY'.

The next day we went to see a boxing match as an Indian was there in the semi-final. He finally won a bronze medal. Here Akshay shouted "Vande Mataram" and "Victoire à La Douce Mère" and all of us did so in chorus.

On the last day we could not get tickets for the closing ceremony as they were too costly. We enjoyed it from outside where it was being telecast on a six-storey-high TV screen (double the height of the Secretariat on Pondy Beach Road). Seeing it on such a big screen is also an experience.

At the end of our trip all of us were convinced that a positive approach and attitude with full faith in the Grace can lead to miraculous results. ✂



DEVELOPING FOR THE iPhone

***Shashwat Parhi '93**, who started the School's Computer Lab and still looks after it, is to a large extent, a self-taught computer programmer. He is known among his friends for his keen design sense and his fondness for Apple computers which he also introduced in the Lab. We find out about his recent success in developing an application for the iPhone.*

Can you be called a “self-taught programmer”?

It's true I have never attended any course or classes in computer science other than what I took from the Computer Centre in Knowledge. Honestly though, I owe a lot to Kamal-bhai. Almost every trick in the book I know today, I learnt in EAVP 5. There has been very little in terms of algorithms and data structures that I picked up on my own, later. Right from the beginning, Kamal-bhai always insisted that I should learn to think in algorithms. Learning a programming language becomes trivial after that.

You have been passionate about Apple's products and design philosophy. Why?

I am not alone in thinking that Apple is probably one among only a handful of companies today, whose primary motive to excel goes beyond the simple requirement of satisfying its shareholders. Engineers at Apple really care about what they do, and it shows. The Mac isn't great because of a bulleted list of points that impresses financial analysts, but because the people who worked to build it simply wanted the best machine they could build for themselves. The same is true for the iPod and the iPhone. Beauty isn't simply skin-deep, or in this case simply wrapped up in shiny steel and glass. From the way components are laid out on a board, the way the shells snap in without any screws, the way hinges operate, everything screams “genius”. It's not important that it can't also toast your bread.

The ideal system isn't one that does everything under the sun, but the one that makes the best compromises in choosing what to leave out. To quote Antoine de Saint Exupéry, the aviation engineer who also wrote “Le Petit Prince”:

“Il semble que la perfection soit atteinte non quand il n'y a plus rien à ajouter, mais quand il n'y a plus rien à retrancher.”

For many, Apple embodies this minimalist point of view. Steve Jobs has been quoted to have said, “We are as proud of the things we don't do, as we are of the things we do”.



Shashwat at Apple's World Wide Developer Conference. At 4pm on the last day. The crowd had already started thinning out. Still cold for a Pondyite.

On a recent trip to the US you attended an Apple Conference. Can you tell us what the experience was like? What did it tell you about your own ability to absorb information?

Attending the World Wide Developer Conference or WWDC was probably the craziest thing I have done lately. Crazy, because it was in such stark contrast to my otherwise boring and uneventful life. I was in two minds before signing up for the conference, as the costs were significant and the benefits questionable. After all, a lot of information is freely available on the internet. But was I glad, I did attend. I came completely new and ignorant to the development side of



Lounging area just outside the conference halls. Relax, chat, catch up on mail, coffee break, snooze. I guess I wasn't the only one feeling the overdose.

Macs and the iPhone is really just a Mac inside.

The 5 day event is gruelling. You wake up at 4. Get ready. Too early to eat breakfast, so pack something you can munch on, on the 1½ hour train ride from San Jose to San Francisco. If you miss the 7 o'clock train, the next train gets you in too late for the first session that starts at 9 am. Then run/walk to Moscone West, a good mile and half from the train station, to be somewhere at the beginning of the line that has already started forming. The whole day is packed with sessions back to back, with just enough time for rushing out to the lobby and picking up a coffee or going to the loo. Lunch is served at noon at level 1 (ground floor) so you barely have time to go down, grab your lunch pack and come back up to level 3 where there are lunch time speakers. It is perfectly ok to eat during that session and they get some of the most brilliant people to talk during the lunch breaks. You really don't want to miss out on those. The day finishes at 6pm and you have to get on the 6.30 train back to San Jose. Otherwise there is no hope of getting back home before 10pm. Quick shower, some dinner and then plonk into bed. No time to even mull over the information overload your poor brain has been subjected to during the entire day.

Same story next day. After the second day you really start asking yourself if it is even worth doing all of this. San Francisco is cold. Any time of the year. All the more you can't let go of your blanket, simply at the thought of having to endure one

more day of this. But I was happy I pushed myself to go through with it. At first, you are totally lost. NOTHING is entering your head, but gradually things start to fall in place, you find yourself courageous enough to walk up to a mike after a session and actually be able to formulate a sensible question. In front of 1000 really smart people. You feel confident enough to cut across the crowd and go get yourself a seat in the front row. You go over to the speakers after a talk and clarify doubts that you may have had. I am not usually like that at all.

The one amazing thing at the Conference was that they had these Labs. There were about 1000 Apple engineers on site and you could just take your code over to them and ask them to have a look at what you were doing and why things were not working. Unfortunately, I did not have much to show at that point in time but I did manage to get 3 engineers at once looking over my code and trying to figure out why things weren't working the way I intended. Finally one guy figured it out. I had with me the person who did the entire documentation, and in some way I had managed to find a mistake in the way he had worded one of the functions. I got to talk to the person who actually built one of the key development tools called Interface Builder, because no one, not even other Apple engineers knew off-hand how to do something in IB. It felt great. At one point, one of the engineers who I got quite friendly with, asked how long I had been coding in Objective C. I told him just one week prior to the Conference....

The information overload is real. You feel like crying at certain points of time. You are totally lost, running from room to room, clueless. Your brain starts putting the various pieces in place only weeks after the event. I ended up having a renewed belief in the fixed system of education. Maybe not the way it is in most schools, but the ideal of this system is by no means a not-so-desirable method of training. Everyone has experienced the kind of mental inertia that basically makes it impossible for us to absorb the first 15 minutes of any period, because we are too preoccupied with

assimilating what went on in the previous period. The same happens in the next. Many believe that not having to divide the day into fixed periods might be more fruitful. But I experienced firsthand what it is to be forced to switch contexts and move on with the flow, how you train your mind to adapt and how you develop faculties that you didn't know you had, or in my case thought I had lost in the 15 years since I finished Knowledge.

After the conference you started work on creating an application (app) for the iPhone, Apple's hugely successful mobile phone. Why was it the right time to take up such a project?

The iPhone is a new platform. While Apple did not invent the concept of the "internet in your pocket", they certainly have been able to make something that actually makes that a reality. This year's WWDC also saw the launch of the official iPhone SDK. What that means is that anyone interested can now actually build an application for the iPhone. But because it is so new, it means that even the best software companies have the same disadvantages as a single programmer sitting in Pondy. It kind of evens out the playing field a little.

From a business perspective, getting your app out as soon as the App Store launched, a month after the conference, meant that you had a month to polish whatever you were working on, and a much greater chance of being noticed than when there were tens of thousands of applications out there. Also, much as I had anticipated, most of the initial apps were crummy so even one that was not half bad had a fair enough chance to succeed. Over time of course, there would be a lot of people building really clever things and the initial advantages would get diluted. In a way, I was lucky to catch the wave at the right point.

Can you give us some details about "Units", the app you developed? What does it do? Why did

you choose to make a unit converter and design it the way you did? Did you know if anybody else was creating a similar product? Was it difficult to get Apple to put it up on their AppStore?

Units was an idea I had for a while now. It was something simple enough that I could start working on before/during/after the conference. I knew I wanted to have something to work on;

otherwise the conference is just so much information without any real application. So when I started thinking about what I could wet my hands with, it was quite a natural choice to make a unit converter. It is one of those things that you learn to do first in any course on programming. Convert Celsius to Fahrenheit, or Miles to Kilometres. Yet, I hadn't seen ONE that I would have been proud to build. I wanted mine to look more like a calculator rather than something that looked like an online form with text fields. I knew sooner or later, a lot of people would write

unit converters for the iPhone. I mean, you don't need to be a rocket scientist to create one. Yet, Units does some really clever programming things behind the scenes and I am happy on how I managed to implement them.

Putting it up for sale on the App Store was a completely different ball game. Apple has made it so hard to jump through all the hoops to get your application ready for sale that I was again confronted with the disheartening feeling of, "What is the point of this?" But I did manage to overcome all the hurdles and finally did manage to get my application in. On my birthday. Made me very happy.

"Units", became a chart-topper, at one point the 4th most downloaded paid application, with thousands of downloads from all over the world. What kind of satisfaction did that give you? What kind of feedback did you get from people around the world? And what are your plans now for "Units"? Will you need to keep



Front screen of Units with the 3 programmable shortcut buttons.

upgrading it? Any other apps on the way?

Units is considered by many users as the best unit converter, for any platform, not just for the iPhone. The number of people who took the trouble to write to me and give me feedback and ideas for improvements has been overwhelming. Doctors, pilots, masons, physicists, biologists, students, tourists.... It has been a real learning experience for me. And I find that far more rewarding than the fact that my little app managed to reach the spot that it did. Of course, it doesn't hurt that I managed to recover the cost of the WWDC and my entire US trip, many times over.

I am still working on improving Units as it is still not there in terms of my dream application. But I will get there soon. Yes, I do have a couple of other applications that I am working on. One is called Signal, a sinewave generator that I have always wanted to build. Setting up all

that equipment before every school program is a real drag. Having one of these devices makes all the difference in trouble shooting signal paths. But having your mobile phone also do so many other things, that really gives to the word "convergence" a completely new meaning.

How do you look back at the whole experience now? What do you think it has taught you?

I think the entire experience was well worth the effort. Having spent all your life here in the Ashram and Pondicherry, you do not get that many occasions to test the limits of your abilities. I think writing good software is an art, no less than a great painting, and what we have imbibed here in terms of taste, aesthetics, ideology, goes a long way in making us who we are. Seeing the world appreciate some of that only strengthens my belief in this system rather than specifically my abilities as a programmer. ❧

WHAT'S THE BUZZ?

Soma Kundu '94

"Totora ekta museum khuleche Ootyte, dekhecho?" Sumitra-di, Toto's mother, enquired with her sweet smile. I made some embarrassed polite noises that I had been "very busy" but that I would do so soon. Immediately after returning to Coonoor I took a day off from College and headed for the Bee Museum.

The experience was more than informative. In my routine life impersonating a diligent lecturer, I keep going round and round, thinking I am going ahead, doing some good. A peep into Toto's world shows me the shortcomings in mine, inspires me and also makes me respond to the call of the wilderness within me. He is one of the few people pursuing indefatigably and successfully a dream of bringing about a difference in the ecology of the Nilgiris. He and his team are keenly involved in projects under their NGO, Keystone Foundation, based in Kotagiri. Recently they were awarded the prestigious Darwin Fellowship for their project on honeybees and bee-keeping.

The museum is part of this project.

The Honey and Bee Museum, "Shola Ridge", in Ooty, is one of the few of its kind in the world. It has everything that you ever wanted to know about bees. Information gathered from 12 years of research and fieldwork is organized in concise sections with attractive displays that take us on a fascinating journey into the secret world of the bees. We travel through the biological characteristics of bees, the traditional tribal methods of honey-hunting, the contemporary techniques of bee-keeping and finally arrive at the magical symbiosis between bees and the biosphere.

Purnima, one of the caretakers of the museum, cheerfully showed me around.



- Honey mixed with ginger improves digestion and cures gastric problems.
- Honey mixed with pepper cures severe cough and cold.
- Honey mixed with saffron builds immunity.
- To Reduce Obesity: stir 2 teaspoons of honey and 1 teaspoon of cinnamon powder in a glass of warm water. Drink it on an empty stomach in the morning.



▲ Modern bee-keeping equipment.

BEE BIOLOGY

Did you know that the bee dies after it stings? That the worker bees rear 2 or 3 female bees to be the queen, but they finally choose the most developed one for the royal post and kill the others?



▲ Pratim Roy '85 (Toto) showing visitors around the bee museum.
► Exhibits displaying tribal honey-hunting equipment.

I did not. I learnt that a beehive comprises of one queen bee (fully developed female) and 100s of drones (male bees) that live in the lower part of the comb. The top floor of the hive is reserved for the 1000s of worker bees (underdeveloped females) that store the honey there. The bees' wax is a secretion from the lower abdomen of young worker bees with which they build the hexagonal cells to form the comb. I sincerely tried to understand the "waggle" dance of the bees, which communicates the distance and direction of the nectar, but there I was stumped!

HONEY-HUNTING

The indigenous bees of the Nilgiris play an important role in local livelihood. Hunting honey from the wild colonies of the ferocious Rock Bees (*Apis Dorsata*) is part of the tribal culture. Since traditional honey hunting involves life threatening efforts and ingenious skills, a number of customs, traditions and folklore have been associated with it.

Each tribe has developed its own method and tools to gather honey. This section in the museum displays several traditional tools used for honey gathering, i.e. the basket with a handle to collect the honey comb, the bamboo peg to climb trees, the "satuka", as the Kurumba tribals call it, which

is used to slice out the honey comb, the rope ladder made of vines of the "Bis-kotti kodi" (*Derris Spp.*) to climb high cliffs, and the smoker made of dried and green leaves to smoke out the bees from the hives. All the tools are made of wood since traditionally nothing metallic was allowed to come in contact with the honey.

There are songs sung in the various stages of honey-hunting, i.e. from the moment the honey-hunters leave the village, till before the harvest, to calm the bees! A Kurumba song repeated till the honey hunters leave the village is translated thus:

"Like every year, my dear woman
Today I will go to gather honey
I am going with my brother-in-law
Who will keep my life safe and secure
Or the village will see a widow."

As honey-hunting using traditional methods is a terribly risky affair, the main honey-hunter can depend only on his brother-in-law to hold



KEYSTONE FOUNDATION IN WORLD CHALLENGE 2008 FINAL

It is wonderful to know that Keystone Foundation has been short-listed as one of the top 12 finalists in the “World Challenge 2008” which is a global competition presented by BBC World News and Newsweek, in association with Shell, aimed at finding and championing projects or small businesses from around the world that have shown enterprise and innovation at a grass roots level.

In its profile of Keystone, the World Challenge website states:

“For generations the Adivasi people of Southern India have specialised in collecting honey from wild bee colonies on cliffs. The hunters are lowered by ropes towards the colonies, where they waft smoke to calm the bees before breaking off a chunk of comb. Even in times of hunger, the hunters are always careful to leave enough of the nest for the bee colonies to recover [....]

“With commercial plantations exploiting Adivasi communities and taking over their lands, their ancient way of life was under threat. But now the Keystone Foundation is securing a future for the honey hunters by turning their wild honey into a source of income.

“The Foundation helps with processing and packaging, adding value to the honey. It has also taught the hunters how to make valuable products such as candles and balms from the beeswax — previously the wax was thrown away. Other goods have been added to the Keystone range, including gooseberry candy, pickles, jams, silk cotton mattresses and pillows. All the products are sold in Keystone’s shops, with profits helping around 50 Adivasi villages.”

We asked Pratim Roy ’85 (Toto) about what it felt like to be a finalist on World Challenge. He replied, “I think we all feel quite cool actually, most of our friends and well wishers are more excited than us. Let’s see what happens. The project which wins the maximum number of votes will be the winner. We thought the movie made on Keystone’s work was good. In 8 minutes it captured quite a lot of the action and story of our work.

“So many things happen here at Keystone that there is never a dull moment and good news like this occupies limited space and time and gives way quickly to more new initiatives and discoveries. There is so much to do in the region, in the country and in the world on ecology, development, culture — combining conservation, enterprise and livelihoods in a manner that is imaginative, relevant and forward looking.”

The work goes on!

▼ The Keystone Foundation team. Toto is seated 6th from left.



the rope that lowers him to harvest the wild nestings on the side of a high cliff. It is done with belief that the brother-in-law would not want his sister widowed and therefore would be extra cautious.

SOME MORE FACTS

Several records suggest that human beings valued honey since the prehistoric times. It has medicinal values including reduction in diabetes, obesity and even cancer. Purnima shared a few medicinal tips using honey. Today honey and bees wax are extensively used in various products.

Bee-keeping has always been a specialized occupation of certain communities or families. However, modern apiculture is based on a scientific knowledge of the structure, life history, habits and habitats of the different honeybees. There are some hives displayed in the museum, i.e. the Log Hive, which is primitive, the Pot Hive, used in the rural areas like Wyanad and Nilambur, the Tree Cavity Hive, used by tribals like the Todas, the Bamboo and the Wooden Hives, which are usually used everywhere today.

Purnima explained that bee-keeping not only generates a good income, it is further an activity that promotes environmental well-being. On the commercial side it requires no land investment. Only a low initial capital investment for hives and basic equipment is sufficient. On the ecological

side it increases plant diversity and crop production through pollination. This helps to protect the ecological balance.

Tribals have always grown food and allied crops where the availability of nectar and pollen was guaranteed.

But today there are major changes in the bee habitat due to the ecological changes caused by large-scale deforestation and intensive monocultivation. Many agriculturists promote the use of



Tribal honey-hunting: hanging from a rope on a cliffside, smoking out aggressive wild bees to collect their honey. Very risky affair.



fertilizers and pesticides that kill the bees. The Nilgiris biosphere is one example where the ecological change has negatively affected the bees and apiculture. This section in the museum ended with the note: "Conserve Bee, Conserve Nature".

BUZZ WORLD

The museum has plans to conduct workshops relating to Bees' wax processing, candle making, Toda embroidery, Kurumba painting, Bamboo craft and organic farming. It has already held a few programmes in candle making for children from local schools. There is also a fully equipped room where people can view educational films on environmental issues. In fact a couple of foreigners were engrossed in a film on Kurumba honey-hunting while I was there. "Shola Ridge" has a Green Shop on the ground floor that sells products of Keystone and other NGOs.

The Honey and Bee museum is not just an educational treat of information and activity. It aims to create awareness and sensitize people about the ecology of the Nilgiris. It is a perfect destination for ecotourists and nature lovers. For me it was truly an enriching and re-energizing experience.

So now you know what the buzz is! ☘



Green Shop selling Keystone products

THE JOURNEY BEGINS

Part I of an interview with Ramraj Sehgal '61. Interview given to Ishita Deshmukh '04.

EARLY LIFE IN THE ASHRAM

You came to the Ashram in 1944 at the age of 6 and were here till the age of 25. What are your memories of your student life at SAICE? Any experiences or individuals (teachers / captains) who made a lasting impression?

My very first teacher was Pavita, an English lady who was here for many years. She used to teach us all the subjects — mathematics, geography, history — because there weren't many students or many teachers. Our class used to be where the Gymnasium now is.

Then Manubhai (Albert-da's brother) came. He took over mathematics and science. Then, when we went to a higher class, we had Nolini(Sen)-da, Chitra-di's father, as our teacher. Ranju-da was our English teacher as well as Ravindra Khanna. M. Rasendran and Nirod-da were our French teachers. Manoj was our Mathematics teacher. Physics and Biology were taught by Jugal-da and Joshi-bhai. And Joshi-bhai also used to double up for the lab experiments.

Yes, there was also Sunil-da, our Science teacher. He had this thing, that after certain sections, he would ask you a question. If you didn't answer, then you kept going back and... you finally found yourself on the last bench. So he had a different way of motivating us to learn our lessons.

I don't know how it is now, but at that time the teachers had a great ability of being fairly emotionally detached from us during the daytime, so that we treated them as teachers and didn't take any liberties. For example, Abhaysingh-da, our mathematics teacher! He was very tough and you couldn't fool around with him in his class, but in the evening, we used to quarrel on the tennis court when one of us missed the ball — we were doubles partners for many years. It was a fantastic experience to see two sides of the same person. Of

course, I can never ever forget Dada (Pranabda). He had created a sense of discipline in us which gave me a flying start to my working life.

What was it like to have the Mother physically present and attending/participating in many of the activities? Any anecdotes of contact with the Mother that you would like to share?

It was the golden era! Take birthdays, we could see the Mother four times on birthdays. Morning, afternoon, evening, night... So it was unforgettable. Of course, at that time, you did not think of it



Mother leaving Tennis Ground. The young boy behind Her is Ramraj Sehgal.

as extraordinary. Only now when those memories are triggered and someone says, "You know what you guys went through!," then you really realise the value. She was so much a part of our lives!

She was so approachable. For example, when the Mother used to play tennis, I was the ball-boy — I used to go every evening to pick up the balls.

So if I had any problem, I could tell Her there. And on my birthdays She used to play tennis with me. That was only once a year, since I was in 2nd group and normally She played only with the 1st group.

Once when I was studying for the baccalaureat exam I lost sleep. For a week, I couldn't sleep at all. So finally I went and told Mother that this is what has happened. I also told Her that the doctor had given me sleeping tablets, but they had no effect. That was enough for Mother to get fired up. She said, "You know, you people don't understand that the body has its own ability to cure itself of small ailments etc. By giving it medication, you are making the body lose self-confidence. So stop taking anything." That night I went to sleep like a shot. I just put my head on my pillow and I was gone, as if someone had put chloroform. So next evening, when I went to collect balls, Mother asked, "So did you sleep?" I said, "I slept very well." "Of course you slept," she said, "I was sitting by the bedside."

She was actually in our bloodstream. We didn't have to pray to Her. We saw Her every moment. There was absolutely no fear, no inhibition. We could tell Her anything we wanted. That's the Mother.

In 1963 you chose to go out. What did the Mother say?

Yes. I always desired to travel. I wanted to see the world. It had always been my desire since childhood. So when I saw an ad from Air India in the newspaper, I applied. After about 6 weeks, I got a letter asking me to come for a written test in Chennai. So I went for it.

There were 550 boys and four seats for the slot. So it was kind of a huge lottery. Anyway I sat through the exam, I.Q test etc. I was short-listed and finally chosen.

So then I wrote to Mother, explaining about this job. She wrote back to me:

"C'est très bien. Une excellente occasion pour voir du pays et élargir ta conscience. Accepte donc — avec mes bénédictions."

I left soon after.

C'est très bien - Une excellente occasion pour voir du pays et élargir ta conscience - Accepte donc — avec mes bénédictions

LIFE OUTSIDE

What was the transition to the outside life like?

Did the Ashram education stand you in good stead outside?

In a strange way, the Ashram education and training prepare you to live with ups and downs. The other thing is that whatever I learnt here, hard work, honesty, a non-political view, I stuck to it. Unknowingly and out of ignorance, I might have made a mistake, but if I thought something was wrong, I've not done it, even when I was in training. For example, people used to be surprised that if my bosses pulled me up, I used to say, yes, I made a mistake and admit it, rather than pass it on to somebody else. I knew that if I stick to what I am, at least I'll be able to live with myself.

And I think, strangely enough, I began to be treated a little differently than people of my level. People noticed me because I would tell the truth. People respect somebody who can stand for something. If you don't stand for anything, nobody respects you. Most people in advertising are very suave, and cook-up stories. It was complete dishonesty. Why? One day they'll be found out, and will be humbled, will be abused and how will they defend themselves? So I think it was fear of losing face, fear of not being able to defend something wrong etc., which also could have been my motivation for not doing anything knowingly wrong. But you need tremendous will-power, courage and faith to stick to that. It is Mother's Grace that I hung on to that. And I think that made a difference to my life and to what I did.

Also, I was a very disciplined person. I hated people coming late. I think it is lack of respect for either side not to be on time. I became obsessed with that. And I think everyone who knows me,

who has worked with me, will say, "This man is a maniac for time."

I also chose not to drink or smoke. I remember, much later, Martin Sorrell, our Chairman, saying, "Ram is an extraordinary person. Because at a cocktail, everyone gets drunk and he can behave as if he is drunk!"

We begin to value the holistic education that we have here only when we are out of it. One of the other things that helped me was exercise. I never failed to do it. Even after coming back here, I exercise seven days a week. It didn't matter if I came home at nine o'clock at night... First thing I would do is get on the jogging machine. Then have a bath and then dinner. Because I think a healthy body leads to a healthy mind. Physical fitness makes your body able to take the hardship. I had put a gym in our office basement, but the only one going there was me! So, one of the things which stood me in good stead was physical fitness. I am not bragging, but nobody could cope with my long hours of work.

Also I think the Mother had told me in some context that when you stop learning, you die. So we have to have the ability to learn all the time, not for passing some exam, but simply as part of one's culture. One of the things we don't realise is that as students, because we're not going to appear for examinations, one very big tension that most people have at that age is gone. So imagine how much you are liberated in your mind... it's priceless... we don't realise that... it's priceless, because there is no fear, no tension of failing. There is the freedom to learn constantly.

Another thing I learnt in childhood, in the Ashram, is that you can make friends very easily. I learnt that you should not keep looking at yourself but at the other guy, at his issues. With the result that, throughout my life, I was recognised as a professional man manager. And this came from my Ashram background. For who can be a finer example of caring for people than the Mother? She knew each one by personal name. She knew each one's birthday. Each one was treated as if he was the most precious person to Her. So I think

that all this grounding helped me tremendously. It has stayed with me for life.

Can you tell us something of your initial years as an airline purser?

I always had a passion for travelling. So I was willing to take any hardship. And those five years were very hard. Time-zone flying! We used to get picked up from home and travel through the night. Then you arrive at the destination and you sleep most of the day. You're completely exhausted, although you might have flown only 5-6 hours. Due to lack of sufficient oxygen, you get dehydrated, so you're dead when you get off the plane. For instance on the London-New York route, it was night flying both sides. Similarly Hong Kong-Tokyo.

But it gave me great fulfillment to see the world, to meet different people. On the flight, you have a captive audience, from various countries. So you get to talk to them, learn from them about different cultures etc. It was very amusing, very interesting, very insightful, and completely worth the price.



As a purser in Air India

Then how did you shift to advertising or why?

Actually my first love was journalism, so while I was posted in London and working for Air India, I took a diploma in journalism from the Regent Institute. A teacher there told me to join advertising, because journalism will never allow me to be creative, whereas the way I wrote or expressed myself was creative writing. So he asked me to join the Institute of Practitioners in Advertising. It's a diploma course, 2 years, in London. And that is how I moved to advertising.

What were the initial years in advertising like?

Very tough... Extremely tough... Because everyone treats you, a management trainee, as an extra hand to run. For instance I used to be sent for proof-reading annual balance sheets in a printing press. Hundred pages, all figures, columns, one mistake, and you are dead on the spot. Only *chhokras* like us were sent to do the dirty work. Nobody cared for you. So it was very tough.

However, again the Ashram background helped me to learn in adversity as well. When I went to the printing press, instead of doing only that, I would go around and see what they were doing, printing, colour processing etc. So, in the meetings when they were talking about all this, I could tell them things they didn't know. Also I worked very hard. I would never give an excuse for not doing the work. I would do whatever it took. I used to also go to the library of the office and do extra reading etc. But yes, it was tough.

Were you in regular contact with the Mother then?

Yes! First of all when I was with Air India, I used to write Her a postcard from every city I landed. Pavitra-da used to read it out to Her. Then, when we used to come here, She used to see us. I used to bring photographs of the cities that I had seen. Three places that really interested Her were Paris, of course, Tokyo, and Egypt. She would take a long time to see those photographs, and She used to make some comments... this has changed, that has changed etc.

Then from Paris, we would bring her French

perfume. One was called "Je Reviens", another "Prophécie". She would immediately open the bottle, spray and smell. That was the first time I realised that She knew how to smell the perfume, as an expert. And She said, "Ah c'est très bien!" Then, when we came back from Tokyo, we brought Her a bed sheet with a Japanese painting.

There was a moment when you wrote to Her from Calcutta when you were posted there during the Naxal movement. Can you tell us about that?

Oh my god!!! It scared the hell out of us. We were staying in Maniktala. Behind our building, the young kids were being shot by the police and the blood was all over the wall. Those guys were throwing bombs, police opened fire... one 17-year-old kid shot in the back, shot in the head. Six bodies at one time! The police brought a van and took them away. It was horrible.

It was a pain to get out of the house or go to the office. There was no way out. I was a management trainee, a junior guy, and hired for Calcutta. I had just been posted there. There was no question of going anywhere.

So I wrote to the Mother, describing the horror and asking for Her blessings. Two weeks later, the Calcutta Manager called me and said that he was transferring me to Bombay. Out of the blue! I was speechless. The next week we arrived in Bombay. Then I wrote to Mother.

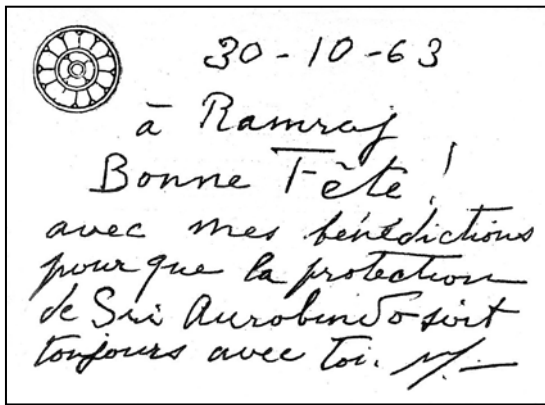
"Thank you for your blessings. I am now in Bombay."

Any other occasion where you have felt Her help?

I have always felt Their help and protection. You see, on my 1st birthday away, She sent me a card. She said:

"À Ramraj, Bonne Fête! avec mes bénédictions pour que la protection de Sri Aurobindo soit toujours avec toi."

And from the word go, these two things that She wrote to me, at that time, have been with me all along. For instance you have no idea how many times I've survived air crashes and bombings.



One of the early experiences was when I was flying from Bombay to New York via London. At around 6.30 pm, we were over London and the pilot announced that we're landing. The seat belt sign came on, and we were approaching the Heathrow airport runway, when a PanAm flight which was flying past told our pilot that our aircraft's undercarriage (the wheels) hadn't come down, though this was not showing on his panel. Our pilot informed the terminal building and he was asked to circle around till the special runway was made ready for an emergency belly landing. The plane started circling. We were two 1st class passengers, myself and a lady. And the nervous lady started weeping. I went, sat next to her and started talking, when I saw Mother's ring on her finger. She was returning from a visit to the Ashram. So in that weeping, she said, "Oh! You are also wearing one?"

I said, "That's why we are sitting together. Don't worry. Pray, you'll be ok. But if you panic, then Mother's Grace won't work. Let's both pray."

We circled for 45 minutes before we finally landed. They had made arrangements so that as the plane touches down, there are chains that pull the plane and hold it back. It should not move, because if it does it will catch fire, because of the friction. That runway was also filled with fire-proof foam, so that we don't catch fire. The plane stopped dead, on the spot. It took them an hour to clear all that, to come with the staircase for us to go....

Another incident, which was very dramatic, because it was touch and go, was when I was

flying from Bombay to Bangalore for a meeting. My flight was at twelve. I left home at 10:30 am, and on the way I had to pass by my office. I saw my secretary standing on the road, because she had learnt that I had already left home. There was no mobile phone in those days. So she stopped me on the road saying that the meeting was postponed to the next day, "Do you want to go today or shall I shift it to tomorrow?" she asked. I said, "Why should I waste one day there?" So I went back to the office.

Two hours later, the flight crashed — it was the Indian Airlines flight to Bangalore. Birla's son died on it. My Bangalore manager didn't get the message that I wasn't coming. He was waiting at the airport when the flight crashed. He was crying. He didn't even call. He was so sure it was over. And it's amazing because normally I would not have postponed. I would have chosen to spend time at the Bangalore office.

Another incident... In the 1992 Bombay blasts, one bomb burst right opposite my office. The face of the office had glass, every single piece was broken. The air-conditioner came out of the window and broke my bag. I'll never forget the sight I saw from my office balcony. People... head is one side... body is elsewhere. Nobody could do anything. So that was a miracle, because 20 minutes before, I had travelled on that road. If the blast had occurred a little earlier, I could have been blown off.

Similar thing in Sri Lanka. An hour after we check out from our hotel, the Galadhari, we are at the airport and see on TV that a huge bomb has just exploded at the hotel blowing up the reception.

You just get stunned when something like that happens. Your mind doesn't work, it just goes off. And then of course, immediately you realise that Mother has protected you. And then you become a little more peaceful.

So you know, what Mother writes is of great value. She doesn't write for nothing. None of us take that seriously. The fact that She had this in writing, She stood by it. So I think the protection that Mother promised has stayed for life. ❧

To be continued in the next issue...

We continue our Boarding story. Minku Boarding which was started in the '50s continues to exist even today. Not only that, but it was also run by the same person — Minku-di — for all these fifty years and has been in that same place for over forty years. Minku-di, never seen anywhere else, never part of any other activity, did the work given to her by the Mother to the best of her abilities, until the last day of her life. And even though she is no more, she continues to be an example of sincerity.

As all boardings of that time, it was a home for children of all age-groups until it changed into a boarding for very young boys.

'NEW HOME' OR 'MINKU BOARDING'

Mita (Sujata '84)

1st December 1956. Minku-di was in Golconde when Madhav Pandit hurried to inform her that Mother wanted to see her urgently. She immediately left her room and went with him to meet Mother. She



Minku-di with Niles (Lalji's nephew), Gita, Jyoti, Minu and Dipika.

was waiting for her at the garage, and on seeing Minku-di, told her that she was to take charge of a boarding. Minku-di's first reaction was one of consternation. Take care of a boarding? What was she expected to do? How does one look after a

boarding? As these and many other questions rioted through her mind, she was aware that it was Mother who was asking this of her. There was no question of dithering — if Mother required this of her, she would do it!

After Mother left, Minku-di hurried to meet Nolini-da and confessed to him her predicament. Much as she respected Nolini-da, he was not of much help in this situation. So Minku-di went to meet Gauri-di (Sunil-da's wife), a family friend. Gauri-di fixed, for the next day or the day after, a meeting with Mother, and at the meeting, acted as a translator. Minku-di conveyed to the Mother that she had no idea how a boarding was to be



The entrance to the building which has housed New Home since 1960



Minku-di with Gita and Binapani (Krishna)

Minku-di set off on the path Mother had chosen for her.

Later that day, Rajkumari-di, Krishnakumari-di's sister, showed her the house that Mother had selected for the boarding. It still stands there, opposite to where the Pondicherry Museum used to be. That very night Minku-di shifted to the new house.

She had the charge of seven children, her first boarders: Dipika, Jyoti, Gita, Krishna, Reena and Ratna. The boarding was named "New Home". For the next four years this was to be Minku-di's home. Then on 8th December 1960 the boarding shifted to its present location.

When I asked Minku-di how the boarding got its name, she smiled, reminiscing. When the cooking vessels meant for the boarding arrived, they were marked "M.B." Mystified, Minku-di asked Amrita-da what "M.B." meant. In his characteristic humorous vein he answered: "Maybe 'Mother's Boarding'. Or it may be 'Minku Boarding'."

I know that all of us here, when we look back, realise what a privileged childhood we have had. We grew up in a unique environment. Our boardings, with their respective guardians, have been a part of this wonderful experience. What I notice now is how each boarding had its distinct characteristic. I remember the boarders of Minku-di's

boarding in their spotless white pyjamas and kurtas, always neat and clean. They were a 'rough and tumble', happy lot, very boyish and fiercely independent. With this in mind, I asked Minku-di how she disciplined her children. She said she had never forced anything on them. She had always seen to it that they grew up in an environment of love, appreciation and trust. She never interfered with their freedom. Gently but firmly she insisted on some basic rules. She never punished the children. Instead she was very mindful to be appreciative whenever the children were cooperative. She said, sooner or later the children themselves would come to realize the importance of the rules and willingly follow along. She also said that she had always tried to build an individual rapport with each child, tried to understand his individual need.

When I asked her about anecdotes, she told me about a boy who had been sent to her. His previous guardian had, from sheer exasperation, given up trying to discipline him. He was very naughty, unruly, and completely disobedient. In his new boarding, he was much the same, initially. But he soon began to change, and within a few months, was a different person. Today, he is a well-adjusted, well-behaved, intelligent youngster. Minku-di was quick to add that the credit for all this was not hers, but it was due to Mother's constant supervision, encouragement and concern. All she had learnt was taught to her by the Mother. She had had a daily contact with Her. Of her own, she had made the constant effort to be always available to the children. This is why she had refused work in any other department.

Minku-di passed away in November 2007. The boarding is now looked after by Chhanda '77 and her husband. The boarding has also re-acquired its old name — 'New Home'. ❧



OUR “DIDI”

Manobendra Tagore '85 remembers Minku-di, his grandmother.

I was often asked why I called my grandmother “Didi”... In fact even I wonder why I did so. Perhaps because I stayed at her boarding from the time I came to the Ashram and everyone around me called her so.



Born in a very avant garde family of Calcutta, her forefather helped found the Bethune School, the first girls' school in India, by donating a huge piece of land in the heart of Calcutta to Rev. Bethune. Didi did her schooling in the same school. Her father was the grandson of poet Rabindranath Tagore

and she was herself the granddaughter of famous painter Abanindranath Tagore. She used to be a regular member of the legendary Tagore household of the Bengal Renaissance. She first visited the Ashram during the August Darshan in the year 1949 with my grandfather and came for good in 1956.

Within a few weeks of her coming, Mother asked her to look after some children who were away from their parents (because the Dortoir was full). I recall Didi telling me that she informed Mother of her inexperience in looking after children and how Mother assured her that She would always be with her and that she should not worry. It is interesting to note that what everybody called “Minku Boarding” was actually named “New Home” by Mother.

Except for a few weeks in 1975, when she went to Calcutta to look after my ailing grandfather, till her last day, she tried her best to make a home

away from home for all those who came to her.

Our family had a peculiar “tradition” of meeting around her every evening at 7 pm for a cup of tea, a time when most people in the Ashram would be preparing for dinner, while a few would have already finished theirs! The hurly burly of the day (mostly having to deal with maids!) behind her she would sit on her favourite chair facing the door. It was also the time when the children would tumble in noisily from Corner House and would try to beat each other to reach her first to describe in detail one by one what each of them had had for dinner. It mattered little that each of them enlisted the same items, give or take a slice of bread or a *puri* or the number of potato pieces in the *tarkari*. I would sit bemused as to how each of the children would try to reach her first and press close to her to breathlessly describe every



Manob cutting a cake at a birthday party organised for him by Minku-di.
Also in the photo are Sujit, Bhupi and Saumya.

detail of their meal as if it was the banquet for the queen's coronation while she patiently listened to each of them in order of appearance with an interest that would have put the best of auditors to shame! This simple everyday practice perhaps illustrates the indescribable bond of secret complicity she shared with each of her boarders.

Her day would start by waking the children and ensuring that they performed their morning ablutions properly and would end long after they had gone to bed. Her bed room could have best been described as an all purpose passage right next to the children's room and with a large study-cum-dining table to seat 10 people beside the bed. Perhaps the only time she had to herself was the two meal times and even during this, she would call the children to have a share of something special that she may have cooked that day. Whatever came her way, be it a box of sweets from Calcutta or chocolates from abroad or fresh mangoes, the children's share would always be discretely tucked away. It would be a standing joke for us who



On a picnic — Minku-di with Kumudben, Prakash M, Aniruddha-da, Smriti, Dr. Nripenda and others.

There was an unconditional and unrelentingly disarming quality in her that seemed to melt the most stubborn and unruly heart and it was only a matter of time before all our mournful apprehensions proved unfounded and the child would be seen to be harkening to her every call.



A birthday party. In the foreground: Mahesh, Ranojay (left) and Jay, Kalpesh and Ambika Prasad (right).

would sometimes be at the table, to tease her if the children had already had their share.

Often children would be sent to her when other boardings were not able to control them. She would always smile quietly while everybody around her would be groaning and protesting.

I recall a few occasions when people complained to her about how the Ashram was not giving them something or the other. She would quietly listen and never comment. Afterwards she would remark to me how strange it was that we expected things from the Ashram while we rarely thought of how much we could offer to the Ashram.

When I think of her, perhaps an offshoot of this thought endures the most in my mind: how she put the boarding before every-

thing else till the last day of her life and how she wished to offer ever more of all that she had, and was, to Mother. Perhaps that is what gave her the ability to face the vicissitudes of life, from the deepest tragedies to the simplest joys, with an ever-smiling equanimity. ❧

WHAT DO I REMEMBER DIDI FOR?

Ravindra Reddy '73

It is now nearly fifty years... a young lanky boy was shifted from Ganpatram Boarding to Minku Boarding. The first night itself intelligence reports reached Didi that I was skipping the night bath. All my excuses failed, even the promise of “*kalke theke korbo*”, and I had to take the bath. When Pranati asked me to write about my days in Minku Boarding it brought forth memories, none of which I had ever gone into my memory drive and replayed. Like the small insignificant incident above, it was not necessarily path-breaking but it did help in bringing to path a young boy.

The boarding building was in the French-Pondy architectural style, with big gates, windows and high ceilings, with tiled roofs for the verandahs in front and on the first floor as well as for the kitchen and bathrooms. There was a small garden in front and at the back. A photograph of the main gate of the boarding, 9, Rue Desbassyns de Richemont, was for many years displayed among the exhibits of Pondicherry Museums.

We were about a dozen children: Dipika, Jyoti, Mukund, Gita, Meenakshi, Anil, Jeetendra, Gurudas, Rekha, Binapani, and Nilesh who joined a few years later. (I may have missed out one or two who might have come for a short stay.) Arup-da, Didi's eldest son, used to stay on the first floor. With a dozen children there must have been some trying times for Didi. But what strikes me today, when I look back

after more than four decades, is how coolly and quietly she managed the boarding, never showing any exasperation or tiredness in her face. Even for some of our excesses, when she would admonish us, it used to be just one or two lines. For many of my clumsy mistakes, and the silly excuses I used to give to wriggle out of them (silly in hind sight), Didi would never scold me, rather ask me always in a low voice. I have a feeling that by the second line she used to hide and hold back a smile, and



Minku-di with boarders. Standing: Nirmal J, Anil, Mukund, Jyoti, Dipika, Indira (a friend).
Sitting: Haridas, Chandranath, Jeetendra, Rekha A.

this may be the reason why she could not proceed further.

If I had any hesitation to come before Didi after any such close encounters with her, fearing she would still be angry with me, my fears would be put to rest. There would be nothing in her face, voice or in today's term in her “body language”, to remind me that she was still cross with me or that



Something special for the children

I had done some wrong, and that would make me feel completely secure and relaxed. Even today when I think back on this quality of Didi, it does not fail to impress me.

Apart from us, Didi took under her care other inmates, who were less troublesome. First there was a cat, called Bachchu, a great favourite with Didi, Arup-da and some of the girls, but not me. Then came lovebirds (budgerigars). Debou-da (Dada's brother) used to rear these birds near the samadhi flower room. Later some parrots were added, and one of the parrots, for some reason called "Mynah", was there for more than a quarter of a century. The girls used to give some titbits to the parrot and keep on pleading, "Mynah, *kotha kao, kotha kao*", and the only *kotha kao* it ever did was to repeat the "Mynah, *kotha kao*". There used to be regular dog brawls on the street, and Mynah picking up these dog growls would sometimes say, "*mynah kotha kao*," in dog growl style. Many of you might know Arup-da as a singer but he was also very good at whistling. Mynah had picked up his whistling so well that I would not have been surprised if in a whistling contest Mynah had got the first prize and Arup-da came second. Credit, of course, goes to the teacher! Finally, Didi made a beautiful rock garden and brought in the least

troublesome inmates, the fishes.

Apart from her love for birds and plants, Minkudi's skill in cake baking was well known. During group picnics, ovens used to be collected from different houses, and along with the help of the group members, cakes used to be baked, iced or chocolate-coated and enjoyed in annual picnics. It used to be quite a sight, with Didi indulging herself in full enthusiasm along with the group members, joking and enjoying the whole work.

She was also a good storyteller, and she read and narrated to us the story of *Anandamath*. After lunch we used to sit daily round her bed and listen to the story. In fact, I was disappointed when the story ended and there was not more of it.



Ravindra R with "Mynah", the resident parrot.
Around him are Minu, Gita, Anil (partly visible), and Rekha A.

Arup-da had a very good collection of gramophone records, and we used to regularly go up and listen to songs on the gramophone player as well as on the radio. Arup-da also tried his hand at electrical guitar and piano accordion, but I don't remember hearing them much. Joy-da and Barun-da, the two younger children of Minku-di, were staying in a room on the first floor of the drawing office. Joy-da was of soft nature and Barun-da boisterous. They used to come everyday to have dinner with their mother. Very often they would sit with us and share interesting anecdotes and jokes. Finally a word on Arun-da, Didi's husband: he belonged to that group, which along with



Minku-di with some recent boarders (Jaydev, Auroanand, Utsav, Harinarayan).

many wonders of Nature is getting fast extinct — a group called “gentlemen”. He used to stay in Calcutta, and all of us children used to be quite excited about his occasional visits to the Ashram. Gentle, courteous and always appreciating us, he was very much liked by all the children.

What do I remember Didi for? Is it because she looked after us well, or is it for all the fun and games that we as children had there? For all this definitely, but I think for something more too. That is for her nature, non-imposing, never moralising and free from any social and religious conventions. The last is all the more commendable, considering that Minku-di was born in the year 1923, and by the time she joined the Ashram, her age was already thirty three. Yet she could shed the old social and religious conventions and mould herself to the freer life of the Ashram. This is not as simple as it looks, especially when I see some of us from the GC community, who

having been brought up right from childhood in the Ashram, are slowly snuggling into some smug traditional grooves. I also remember her for the fifty years and more that she looked after the boarding. From the time Mother entrusted her with the work, she never left the Ashram/boarding circuit, except only once when she left for Kolkata for a month or so, when Arun-da was not well. In all these years whenever I used to visit her, I never found her looking bored, tired or disgruntled. As Batti-da wrote in *Among the Not So Great*, “these people did not know what it is to get bored”. How could they when they were striving towards a goal, and not shifting the goal to suit their own complacent needs?

Minku-di left us on 21-11-07, leaving behind memories to cherish and to learn from. Her birthday was on 16th of December and that of the boarding on the 11th of the same month. So, on the 11th she used to take all of us for Mother’s Darshan. Once in the evening, during the after-dinner anecdote time, Joy-da had said that Didi always wanted to look after children, and when she came to the Ashram, Mother gave her this work. I don’t know if Didi got the sort of children she wanted, but the children definitely got the right Didi. Thank you, Didi. ❧



In a quiet moment in the boarding

REMEMBERING MILLIE-DI

Sunayana Panda '79

In the early years the Ashram was a community of sadhaks who observed a very strict discipline in everything they did. Even visiting a friend required permission from the Mother and every small incident had to be reported to Her. When a person joined the Ashram he knew that he had entered a world of seclusion and concentrated inner life. But all that changed when the Second World War broke out. All of a sudden there were families coming down, mainly from West Bengal, asking for the protection of the Mother. They were, of course, people who already had a contact with the Ashram and many had already visited before.

Pondicherry was an unlikely place to be bombed, a small town which was not part of British India and far from where the real battles were being fought. As one after the other the little groups arrived, a whole new chapter started in the history of the Ashram. One can imagine how the old sadhaks must have felt to suddenly see little girls with pigtails and fidgety little boys in their midst. From the silence of the monastic life, they had to now adjust themselves to the hustle and bustle of life in a very large family. Now added to the group of sadhikas were the young mothers who took up work in the various departments of the Ashram but also kept an eye on their children.

One such mother was Bratati, known to the younger generations as Millie-di or simply as

“Jhumur-di’s mother”. Joining the Ashram meant adapting to a totally different way of life. When she came to the Ashram she offered all her gold ornaments and her beautiful Benaras silk saris to the Mother. This was the usual practice in those days. Even married women in those days gave all their gold to the Mother and went about their lives with neither bracelet nor necklace. In pre-independence India, when women were never seen without ornaments, when they were almost

considered naked if they did not wear jewellery, this was truly an act of self-giving and inner surrender. On Her side, the Mother sent Dyuman-bhai to personally oversee every detail of Millie-di’s living arrangements, from the moment she arrived with her sister-in-law and their two little daughters. As long as the war was on, her husband would be away, being an officer in the army.

Born on 1st June 1917 Millie-di grew up in the ambience of a Brahmin family in Calcutta. In an age when young women had no voice in choosing

their husbands she showed a remarkable will in deciding to marry Anil Bhattacharya who was her neighbour. He was also from a Brahmin family but from another sub-sect. No marriage had ever taken place between their two communities but both the teenagers were adamant and stuck to their choice. Eventually the elders relented and they were married.



An early photo in the Ashram

Some time earlier Anil-da had begun to involve himself with the revolutionary movement in Bengal for the liberation of the country and because the British were beginning to suspect him of being a revolutionary, a family friend (an Englishman) lured him into the Army. Being very young at the time, and tempted by the physical challenges, he accepted.

It was after her marriage that Millie-di's links with the Ashram and the Mother and Sri Aurobindo were established. There were quite a few families in Kolkata then which celebrated the Darshan days together. All family events were reported to the Mother and Sri Aurobindo, and Their blessings received for such occasions. Sunil-da, the musician, was the younger brother of Millie-di's husband and through his wife Gauri they were related to Manoranjan Ganguli. Eventually many members of this large and interconnected family settled down in the Ashram. The Bhattacharya household was for long a transit camp for people who were preparing to come to the Ashram.

Before coming to the Ashram Millie-di had lost a child who had been born with a congenital defect. This must have been hard for a young and sensitive woman like her. She had the emotional strength to go through such an ordeal as she prayed to the Mother to take the infant child away because she knew that such children can never live long nor can they ever lead a normal life. She had established an inner link with the Mother through this trial and indeed had felt that it was an act of grace when the child died in her arms while she was calling the Mother inwardly on a Darshan day. Not long thereafter the Second World War broke out. Soon after that her daughter, Jhumur, was born. There was collective suffering all around but also the rhythm of her own life was disrupted when, leaving her home and familiar surroundings, she came with her daughter and other members of her family to live in Pondicherry while her husband was away with the army.

The inner reliance and surrender were already there but when she came to the Ashram she readily surrendered her outward responsibilities to the Mother too. She admitted in a talk which she

gave that she was really free from the worry of having to care for her daughter because she knew that the Mother would look after her, even to the smallest details. She could give herself entirely to her outer and inner work in the Ashram, knowing that there was nothing else more important in her life than that, since her child was now the Mother's child.

After joining the Ashram, Millie-di was asked to work in the Mother's apartment. Her work consisted of cleaning and tidying, arranging the cupboards, washing up after the Mother had eaten, possibly washing and ironing Her clothes and helping the Mother to get ready for Her various engagements of the day.

In the year 2000, a year before she passed away, she was asked to give a talk about her life in the Ashram in the early years. The one sentence that she said several times was, "I was a daughter of the house." This just shows that the Ashram was a community which had grown in a spontaneous way and retained that quality of a large family in which everybody finds a place. Millie-di also reminded the listeners that she never questioned or analysed when she was given a work to do by the Mother. She just took it for granted that all the work that was being given to her was a part of her duty and her life. "My answer to everything the Mother asked me to do was, 'Yes, Mother.' I never thought whether I could do it or not, whether the work was easy or difficult," she said.

In the same talk Millie-di recounted how the ladies who were working in the Mother's apartment on the first floor were very keen to learn French. The Mother then decided to teach them French Herself. At first no one else knew about these classes as they were held in the Mother's own room and were meant only for a very small group of ladies. But with time others came to hear of it and wanted to join. Some of them were allowed to join and now the classes were held in the Darshan hall which is the room on the southern side of Sri Aurobindo's apartment.

This was an unusual class and truly special because the Mother taught French directly through the original French version of Her own book *Prayers and Meditations* (which in the origi-

nal French, with its poetic quality and purity of expression, would rank very high for its prose style) and they were all sitting in the room adjacent to Sri Aurobindo's room, fully aware that He was actually just there. It is from the reminiscences of those who were a part of that group, such as Millie-di and Priti-di (Das Gupta), that we come to know of this class and get a glimpse into this aspect of the Mother's life. It is quite a revelation to know that in spite of Her busy schedule and all Her responsibilities the Mother could find the time to teach the French language to a group of adults.

At some point, at the beginning of her Ashram life, Millie-di had mentioned to the Mother that she had learnt leather work before coming to Pondicherry. Just around that time the Ashram Press had brought out the Mother's *Prayers and Meditations* in French in a new edition. Millie-di took this opportunity to ask the Mother if some of these copies could be bound in leather. She then trained a group of people who bound a certain number of copies in leather which were then distributed to the disciples.

There are two events in Millie-di's life that stand out and show us how the Mother could count on her when She wanted to do something new. The memorable event of the Ashram life, for which she will always be remembered, happened in 1948 when the Mother decided that women would wear shorts and do sports. For a while the women had been doing sports in salwar-kameez and later in long trousers, but some women had injured themselves when they fell down. Although the Mother had taken the decision that She would ask the women to put on shorts for doing the physical activities, She did not say it to anyone.

Millie-di remembered how one day the Mother called her while she was working in her room and told her that She wanted her to do something a bit unusual that afternoon. "Could you put on a pair of shorts and come to the playground?" She had asked her. Millie-di did not even think twice that there was something out of the ordinary. As she had always done, unquestioningly she went home and borrowed a pair of shorts from a male

relative and pulled out a shirt from her husband's wardrobe. She realised that the shirt was far too big for her as her husband was a big man, so she stitched it by hand on both sides to make it narrower. When the Mother came to the Playground She asked that the gates be kept shut. (There is an internal gate which connects the Playground to the house where Millie-di and her family lived.)



Millie-di in shorts (centre) with the Mother

Wearing her borrowed shorts and shirt she came to the playground by that gate and stood in front of the Mother. A few other ladies who were usually around the Mother were also there. The Mother looked at her and was satisfied. After that the Mother announced that women would put on shorts and come for playground activities.

It is important to note that the gates were shut while the Mother saw how Millie-di looked in shorts. This was way back in the late 1940s and a grown up woman, in this case it was a wife and mother, seen in a pair of shorts, was something unheard of. India had just become independent and women were largely confined to their homes

and had no freedom in choosing the life they wanted to live. It was in such a time and context that the Mother thought of asking women to put on shorts to come to the playground. There was shock and disbelief among some elderly sadhaks and some heads of families wanted to leave the Ashram. Was the Mother going to turn everything upside down? As it is there were those who thought that the Mother was turning the Ashram into a gymnasium, but asking the daughters of respectable families to put on shorts was going beyond their comprehension. Keeping this in mind it is important to note Millie-di's unquestioning faith and how remarkable it was in that context.

The other event which brings Millie-di into sharp focus and literally on centre stage took place in 1949. The Mother was planning the annual programme of the School and had even written a play *Herself* for the occasion. The play was called "Vers L'Avenir" (Towards the Future) and was about a married couple who separate when they find out that their relationship has changed. The Mother chose Millie-di to play the very important role of the wife. It is interesting to note that the Mother had read out the entire script to Sri Aurobindo before She started the rehearsals. We come to know of it from Champaklal's diary notes.

The play was written and performed in French, so Millie-di was an unusual choice for the role she played. There are very few characters in the play — primarily the husband, the wife, the young woman who is a singer and a neighbour and for whom the husband feels a strong attraction, and a painter. Given the subject one would imagine that the play ends in melodrama but actually the last scene has a note of peace as the wife says that she wants to lead a life of spiritual seeking. She leaves the husband and the new woman

in his life, wishing them a happy life. The play was performed in 1949 and by the standards of that era it was much too ahead of its time. Even the French government officers who were invited to the show were so shocked that they did not come after the performance to thank the Mother for the invitation as they usually did.

What an experience it must have been to be chosen by the Mother to play a role She had created, an important role in Her own play which She not only wrote but also directed! In 1995 Millie-di spoke privately about that experience of being directed on stage by the Mother. Millie-di was transported to that age, as she spoke about the play, when she lived in such close proximity with the Mother. When the rehearsals started, Millie-di told the Mother that she did not know enough French to do a play. The Mother reassured her by



Millie-di in Mother's play "Vers L'Avenir"

saying that She would herself teach her the lines. "Mother made me go through my lines while I was doing her hair," she said. What a privilege! So, Millie-di had combed the Mother's hair!

The role is a difficult one — there is a lot the actress has to express beyond the words that she speaks. The play opens with the wife expressing

her disillusionment with marriage but not in the usual sense. She confides to a friend how the relationship between men and women does not usually go beyond a certain level. She had expected a companionship which would have led to a higher level of discoveries, but that never happened. The play closes with the wife saying that she will leave her home and lead a life of spiritual seeking because this is what she truly wants to do. But all this is done without any bitterness or anger. The wife genuinely believes that the husband has found his true soul-mate and that now she is free to devote herself to her inner life. The Mother explained to Millie-di that She wanted the role to be played by a married woman so that in the expression and in her performance there would be a certain maturity as well as that quality of someone who had set up a home, had lived within a social format and an established order.

There were quite a few married women in the Ashram at that time but probably none among them who could have acted on stage. The Mother knew that Millie-di came from a family where artistic creations were nothing new. Many cultured families in Kolkata often put up their own private cultural programmes where all the members participated in some way or the other. The stage was not an unknown area for her. Even so, how difficult it must have been to stand and perform before a large audience a role that would have put even a seasoned actress to test and that too in a language which she was not fluent in! Behind that performance was, on her part, her ever willingness to do whatever the Mother wanted her to do and the Mother's recognition of a special quality in her.

Millie-di's main occupation was her work in the Mother's apartments (which she continued even after the Mother left her body). When the Ashram School started in 1943, the stage performances didn't take long to begin. The costume and make up became Millie-di's responsibility. Most of the work was done by hand and with very little resources. There were some memorable costumes such as the one made with feathers, which was worn by the actor who did the role of Jatayu in the *Spiritual Destiny of India* or

the clothes of the *rishi patnis* made from pieces of cloth made to resemble the barks of trees. Often the costumes had to be redone after the dress rehearsal if the Mother wasn't satisfied with the result. Over the years Millie-di gathered around her a small group of helpers who stitched and cut and decorated these costumes. Even the fake jewellery and other accessories were made by hand by this group. Forty years after they were made they were still being used by actors and actresses, those brooches and belts made with shiny beads and gold threads and sequins. Although initially it was for the 1st December work that she started working on the costumes, in the end she became the head of the costume department for all the programmes.

Over the years Millie-di built up a collection of costumes and accessories. There were saris and dupattas given by ladies who did not feel the need to keep such fancy things in their wardrobes. Other pieces had been made for a specific play and had been put away to be re-used whenever that play was done again. There were crowns and swords of different styles and representing different epochs in history. Millie-di was the head of this department almost until she passed away. The participants of the programmes of so many decades will remember how on the dress rehearsal evening Millie-di would be there, her tall figure visible from anywhere, in her soft white sari, with a bunch of keys in her hands, opening the cupboards, giving instructions to her helpers, checking that everyone had what they needed. If you were doing an important role then she would finally open her special boxes and give you a glittering necklace or a shiny bracelet. But most of all it was on the night of the 1st December that she was really in her element because the celebration of the School's anniversary has always been something special. The atmosphere of collective concentration, the tension, the nervous silence of the green room, the hustle and bustle of people coming to take this or put that back, the smell of make-up and sweat, and in the middle of all that you would always find Millie-di, perfectly calm, with a smile on her lips and a word of encouragement to all.

How did that generation manage to do so much without ever complaining? The beautiful thing about Millie-di was that she did not draw a line to separate her home and her work, her personal time and the time given to the collective. Everything was rolled into one. She never stopped working in the Mother's room, but she was also the head of the Art House where batik work was done in a novel style with a totally original approach. The work involved not only the day to day running of a department but also arranging for the exhibitions which are held before the February and August Darshans. The department was within her house and the room where the painted articles are displayed was just adjacent to the room where she lived.

As if that wasn't enough, she also looked after the egg distribution. The egg-room is where the eggs, which are brought from the poultry, are put neatly into little bags or egg-boxes and people come at certain hours of the day to collect them. Once again, this egg-distribution room was just a few metres away from Millie-di's own kitchen. Funnily enough the room from where the eggs are distributed was once upon a time the green-room where the actors used to get ready when the performances were held in the playground. Old timers know that there was a link between the two and that link was Millie-di.

The actual work of making the costumes and sewing the decorations was also done in the Art House. This meant that when a director suddenly needed to see a particular costume or had to make certain changes, he or she would have to make a dash to Millie-di's house and consult her. Often it would be at an odd hour or in the middle of her working hours, but she would always be available and accessible because for decades there were no

telephones and there was no way to inform her that one wanted to see her. To Millie-di it was the Mother's work and so there was no question of time or place, it was at every moment and everywhere.



A smiling, affectionate presence

Millie-di embodied a whole era in the Ashram when the details of one's outer life were kept to the simplest minimum so that all one's energy could be offered in the quiet service of the Mother. The people who belonged to that period of the Ashram's life talked neither of their outer achievements nor of their inner work and progress. Their relationship with the Mother remained personal and silent. Although Millie-di worked in the Mother's room, lived in such close proximity with Her and within Her personal space, she was reluctant to say anything more than the bare

essential, keeping the details of her relationship with the Mother to herself. When asked about anything important and interesting the Mother had told her about Herself, all she conceded with a sweet smile was, "All that is private."

Her refinement and her affectionate nature still live in the memory of those who knew her but most of all she is remembered in the Ashram as someone who carried out the responsibilities given to her by the Mother as long as she lived. Even in what is usually considered ripe old age, she was engaged in various activities and it was a common sight to see her, her snow-white hair neatly parted at the centre and a gentle smile on her lips, during the Darshan exhibitions at the Art House showing people around. Her name will always come to mind when one thinks of those whose spiritual fulfilment was through their work, those who embodied the words, "work is the body's best prayer to the Divine". ❧

BUILDING OF SHELTER AT SWARNABHOOMI

Swarnabhoomi is The Golden Chain Fraternity (GCF)'s 10 acre plot in the Lake Estate area. Plans are being drawn to construct there a small, functional, beautiful and multipurpose structure which will include a room and kitchenette for the caretaker, a store room and pump room, and toilets. There will be a covered open area in front and attic-like resting space under the sloping roof.

This facility will make it possible for us to contribute to School's work in the area and to take up educational and research-oriented projects at Swarnabhoomi. It will also allow all Fraternity members to spend some quality time amidst natural surroundings.

Currently we are ready to start construction. To complete the building we require approximately **Rs.16 lakhs**. At present we have only **Rs.6 lakhs** and we need to raise another **Rs.10 lakhs** in a year's time. Already some have come forward and donated and the initial collection has begun. A team of 3 persons — **Gaurishankar** (Munna, Mob: 9443334054), **Lalit** (Mob: 9894222795) and **Man-gal** (Mob: 9345060912) — has been formed to raise funds. They can be contacted for all donation modalities and details.

Contributions can be of three kinds:

- In the form of **Funds**
- In **kind** (e.g. building materials)
- On the spot **supervision** of construction, its account keeping, coming for work on the last Sunday of every month.



BREAK-UP OF CONSTRUCTION COST:

	RATE	QUANTITY	AMOUNT
1. Pillar	4000-00	12	48000-00
2. Windows	3000-00	12	36000-00
3. Bricks	8-00	50000	400000-00
4. Doors	6000-00	12	72000-00
5. Tiles for Roofs	11-00	25000	275000-00
6. Flooring	50-00	800 Sq.ft.	40000-00
7. Door & Windows, Locks & Latches	---	Total	150000-00
8. Washrooms with construction	100000-00	3	300000-00
9. Electrical Fitting including Lighting	---	Total	130000-00
10. Labour	---	Total	150000-00

These are all approximate figures.

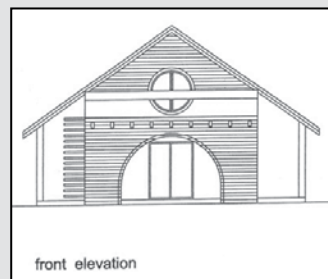
Grand Total **1600000-00**

WE CAN DONATE FOR

Some can donate for:

- The cost of flooring 10 sq.ft.: Rs.50 x 10 = Rs. 500/-.
- 100 tiles: Rs. 11 x 100 = Rs.1100/-.
- Each granite pillar: Rs. 4000/-.
- One entire washroom: Rs.100000/-.

Or have your own calculations and donate accordingly.



ASHRAM TITBITS

PLACE FOR WHOM?

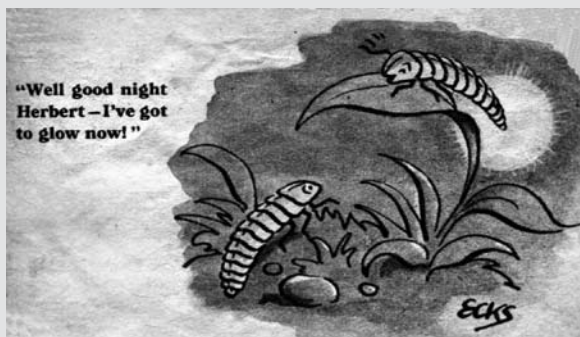
The children of Delafon were sitting in a circle in their class-room. Seeing a large gap between two children, the teacher asked them to close up but they paid no attention. The teacher again asked them to close up. The two children finally answered, "We have kept this place for Douce Mère!"

WHAT'S IN A NAME?

There was a little boy whose name was Abhay. He was very frightened of everything and his teachers would always tell him that he should not have fear as his name was Abhay — one who is fearless. One day, be-

ing told so often not to be afraid, he innocently asked a teacher, "Est-ce que je peux changer mon nom?" (Can I not change my name?) ❧

CARTOON SEEN BY THE MOTHER

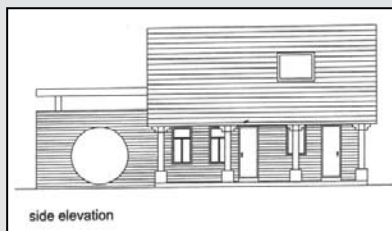


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DONATIONS IN INDIA

- 1) You can give a **cheque or cash at The Golden Chain Office** directly and obtain a tax exemption receipt under section 80G.
- 2) You can **deposit money anywhere in India:**
A/c Name: The Golden Chain Fraternity
Bank: ICICI
A/c No: 005601013404

Note: When you deposit any amount in the bank, send an e-mail or a letter to The Golden



Chain Fraternity with: a) Details of deposit, b) Your name and complete address.

- 3) You can **mail us a cheque / DD in favour of "The Golden Chain Fraternity".**

DONATIONS FROM OUTSIDE INDIA

- 1) You can use the **Electronic transfer system:**
 - a) A/c Name: **THE GOLDEN CHAIN FRATERNITY**
 - b) FCRA A/c No: 005601028159
 - c) Bank: ICICI
 - d) Branch: MISSION STREET, PUDUCHERRY, INDIA.
 - e) Swift Code: ICICNBB0056.

Note: When you deposit any amount in the bank, send an e-mail or a letter to The Golden Chain Fraternity with: a) Details of deposit, b) Your name and complete address.

- 2) You can mail us cheques or drafts in foreign currency favouring: **"The Golden Chain Fraternity - FCRA A/c No: 005601028159"**

CONTACT/MAILING INFORMATION

Phone no: **0413-2233683** (10 am to 12 noon).
Email id: **office@goldenchainfraternity.org**

Mailing Address: **The Golden Chain Fraternity, Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Pondicherry 605002.**

Class of 2008

Rs. 18/-



Standing (Top Row left to right): Ashlesh Chahal, Mangal Samantaray, Aurijoy Mitter, Tanmoy Banerjee, Satyajit Roy, Pradyumna Mahapatra, Debabrata Hui, Utsav Mandadi
 Standing (Third Row): Minalini Patnaik, Anshul Kumar Rai, Miraj Desai, Danish Anwar, Kushal Sengupta, Taarak Parasher, Satyam Putti, Rohan Sharma, Raoul Roy, Sneha Kapur
 Sitting (Second Row): Kirtu Reddy, Dilip Mehtani, Swadesh Chatterji, Manoj Das Gupta, Jhumur Bhattacharya, Arati Das Gupta
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