

The Golden Chain

Alumni Journal of Sri Aurobindo International Centre of Education

"The Mother's Work in Orissa"



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

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

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

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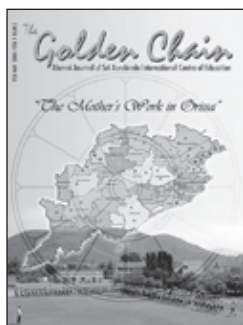
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THE EDITORS' PAGE

by Gopal Naik '90

Some years ago, not very long after I became an Ashramite, I happened to visit an Ashram farm with a friend of mine. We were shown around by my friend's friend who worked there. He had just come from Orissa to join the Ashram and had been allotted work on the farm.

As we walked around the vegetable patches and the Mango trees, the evening light began to fade and mosquitoes started buzzing around expectantly. We decided then to go to our young host's room. It was a very basic makeshift kind of place. One bare bulb hanging from the sloping ceiling cast a wan yellow light. There was very little furniture — a small table, a metal folding chair, a cot... that was about it. There was almost nothing else.

As I sat there on a mat listening to the new aspirant's animated Oriya-Hindi, I wondered whether I would be able to endure this kind of hard, solitary and spartan existence.... He interrupted my reverie with a point he was trying to make regarding life in the Ashram. He pulled open his table's drawer and brought out the Oriya translation of *The Synthesis of Yoga*.... I was touched. It was maybe one of the few things that actually belonged to him....

That evening changed some of the stereotypes I held regarding people coming to the Ashram from Orissa. I realised that if there is some truth in the impression that some people have come without much of an understanding of the yoga simply to escape their economic difficulties, it is just as true that there are others who have come after years of selfless service at the many centres there, moving to the "head-office" in Pondy as a culmination of their *sadhana*.

My understanding of aspirants from Orissa grew some years later when I happened to make a trip to that state and visited some of the Sri Aurobindo centres and Integral Schools there. I saw both: the modest economic means of a large part of the population as well as the profound impact Mother's message has had on the life of thousands in Orissa. I realised that one could not come to simplistic conclusions either regarding the

aspirants or the larger movement that has been going on there to awaken people to Their vision.

Whatever its pros and cons though, it's certain that the movement has changed the profile of the Ashram community itself. Take a look at groups E and F — the young women and men of the Ashram — Oriyas have a clear majority. When and how did this change take place?

Trying to trace the demographic and cultural changes in the Ashram over the years can be interesting. We know that in the early years there were many Bengalis and Gujaratis in the Ashram. Then from the late 50s through the 60s and even the 70s a large number of former students stayed back to be part of the community. The student-staying-back-stream probably began to slow in the 80s. Since 1990 typically there are just one or two outgoing students who stay back. The decline has coincided with the inflow of aspirants from Orissa.

We are clearly then at a period of transition, when the senior former students, those who grew up in the Mother's presence, are beginning to age. As time passes the proportion of former students in the Ashram will keep shrinking and in 10 or 15 years it is very likely that aspirants from Orissa will be the overwhelming majority.

What will these demographic shifts mean for the future of the Ashram community? Naturally, that is difficult to say. Maybe the changes will not be fundamental. Ultimately *sadhana* has very little to do with background, education, language... it has to do with the inner call, with openness to the Mother, with steadfast sincerity — all very individual traits which are the monopoly of no particular group of people. The challenge for the community has been and will always be to admit only those who come or stay for the right reasons — irrespective of their backgrounds.

I saw my friend from the farm again recently. He seemed well-settled now.... He had become an Ashramite, he rode a moped, he had found various interests to pursue.... Does he still read *The Synthesis of Yoga* as regularly?... I hope so....☞

BE THE MOMENT!

PARTICIPATING IN NAT GEO'S "MISSION NAVY"

***Chaitanya Datla '02** participated in the National Geographic Channel's docu-reality show "Mission Navy". The television programme was telecast every week and we saw her take on a number of challenges with grit and aplomb. In this article Chaitanya shares the once-in-a-lifetime experiences she had on the show including the realisation of a childhood dream of flying a fighter aircraft.*

The sea of life has always inspired me to explore and experience the possibilities of the limitless horizons that lie ahead of us. The journey is indeed adventurous, because it is often not the same route that we chart for ourselves. With rigour and excitement we decide to take off at a given moment, only to learn that it will be a long wait and will require a great effort, before it is the hour to experience the "flight". This, however, is no reason to pause my quest to be all that I aspire to



The top three. Chaitanya is on the right.



be. As I track my way on the unknown path, new dimensions open up for me to explore...and there comes my moment to "BE".... A Saturday night TV ad. Nat Geo Mission Navy, 50,000 applicants from all over India, five to be chosen... and one of them will get to live the dream of millions! Here's my little adventure at sea. Sit back and enjoy the sail as I steer you through this journey on the high seas and share my experience with the Indian Navy.

National Geographic Channel in collaboration with the Indian Navy came up with a unique docu-reality show — MISSION NAVY — to take its viewers on a never-before-seen journey inside the Indian Navy, through the live experience of five chosen civilians. The aim of Mission Navy was to profile the Indian Navy, the silent arm of the armed forces and give an insight into the lives of the brave

men and women who patrol and protect our country. After a nationwide talent hunt, through rigorous physical and mental tests, five civilians were chosen. I was one among them.

Our one-month stint with the Indian Navy kick-started with an unforgettable welcome to the academy life in the “Navy way”... at *INS Mandovi* — the Indian Navy’s training establishment. The initial days were extremely tough and testing but thrilling no doubt! We lived the life of a naval cadet, were put through rigorous drills and tasks to test our endurance levels and perseverance and were pushed to the edge of our limits — which now seem to be limitless! The intensive military-like training comprised tough physical preparation, small arms firing, endurance runs with weights, navigation classes and camps, rowing and sailing. We were trained and imbued with the courage, grit and determination that is synonymous with the Indian Navy.

Those who could endure this training were finally allowed to set sail on a voyage on the high seas, complete with battle stations and live weaponry. We sailed on mighty warships — *INS Mysore* and then on *INS Jalashwa*. During the sail, we donned the life of a sailor or a naval officer, were introduced to the world of navigation at sea



and took part in various adventurous activities, from maneuvering a Destroyer, firing, jumping into the middle of the ocean from the foxel of the Destroyer and from a Chopper, to performing the difficult Jack-stay task which demands the soldiers to traverse from one cruising destroyer to another on a ropeway.

All those who completed the tasks on board graduated to *INS Sathawana* — the Submarine Training School, at Vizag. Here we learnt various mechanisms of how to escape from a submarine, through challenging underwater tasks. One such gruelling task was escaping from a 10meter long Torpedo Tube (with 80cm diameter) flooded with water.

Then we were taken to the Naval Diving School, Kochi and were trained in “Compressed Air Diving” and “Buddy Diving” and furthermore, tough underwater exercises and strenuous circuit runs.

From the Diving school only two contestants were successfully marked out for the next mission, and the Gods were kind to me... I was one of them. We landed at the Naval Air arm *INS Hansa*, Goa, to train in survival at sea; a vital part of any naval pilot’s training.



Posing with the Sagar Pawan, the trainee jet fighter aircraft of the Indian Navy’s aerobatic formation team.



Another snap with the Sagar Pawan.

This included visual signalling by flares and use of Radio Transmission Communication sets. And then the most awaited part of the mission: Flying a fighter plane!... a life-long dream of mine!

10, 9, 8, 7, 6, 5, 4, 3, 2, 1, take off... zoom... off I went, flying the *Sagar Pawan* for the first time in my life! It is a trainee jet fighter aircraft of the Indian navy aerobatic formation team. As I sat in the twin-seater, next to the pilot, I felt the adrenaline rush, the speed was phenomenal, the tight turns and loops were breath-taking... and there... I soon experienced a 5.6G! Time froze... as I blissfully watched the sun set from the cockpit and cruised over the sea... it was no longer a mere dream.... Yes, the sky was mine and as it is said the wind too stopped to take a look at us flying! I devoured every second of my flight, trying to imbibe every millisecond of the

experience so that I could relive it every time I would think of it until... the next time! I knew in that instant that you are never given a dream without also being given the power to make it come true... however, you have to earn it! And I know that my wings will continue growing stronger with Her Grace blowing beneath them and that the sky is not the limit! This is only a beginning....

The climax of the Mission was yet to come. Those words are still ringing in my ears. 12th Dec 2008, Delhi, the Chief of Naval Staff, Admiral Sureesh Mehta... "Chaitanya, congratulations! You are the winner of Mission Navy!" It



In the cockpit.

took a moment for the compliments and appreciation to seep in. It was the greatest honour that I could ever hope to achieve as a civilian in the Indian Navy... an opportunity of a lifetime to be

a part of the uncharted world of the Indian Navy, replete with warships, submarines and missiles for over a month. I was humbled by the whole experience and silently saluted Her, “Je vous salue, Douce Mère. Merci!”

The journey through this mission taught me a great deal... to be conscious, focused and literally “BE the moment”. It reassured me, more than ever, that when you have a dream or a strong belief, hold on to it and work sincerely towards it with the right spirit, and sooner or later, what you want will come true. Maybe not exactly the way you imagine but for all you know in a better way — the way you are meant to experience it! ❧



Receiving the prize from the Chief of Naval Staff, Admiral Sureesh Mehta.

A DIARY NOTING

Devendra Sureka '80 ponders an oft-raised question

An issue discussed in every gathering of parents of the students of SAICE is: **“Why can’t the children go out to eat, not even with their parents?”**

I will try to put some light on this issue from my viewpoint....

I hope we all agree that this institution, SAICE, is different from other schools or other educational institutions. Here with an all-round education, including serious physical education, we are being prepared for a life Divine or spiritual. In other words it’s a research institute to prepare you for the Integral Yoga.

As students we can think otherwise, because we have not come here of our own free will. But as parents of students we should know better and help the children in their education and their spiritual upbringing.

When the Mother was physically present she stopped the students from going out to see

movies and even to the market. When asked why, I think She said that the consciousness is so different outside that one loses a lot of what has been achieved in the progress of one’s consciousness. So I guess, today, this is very certainly applicable to going out to restaurants to eat.

I believe that all this should be well explained to the parents of the students when they are taken into the family of SAICE — preferably individually to every family — and they should be made to decide in the beginning itself. This absence of a proper preliminary discussion is certainly one of the reasons for the

lack of understanding by the parents. This should be taken up more seriously along with the setting of the rule.

As parents I guess we should give much more respect to the system and have much more confidence in it, especially because we are putting our children in the Divine Mother’s lap. ❧



RUNNING THE AUROVILLE (HALF) MARATHON

Arpit Kothari '06

The banner along the route of the Auroville half marathon said I had seven more kilometres to go to the finish line. The body cried “stop”, the mind said “go” and I was proverbially caught between a rock and a hard place and felt what a rope probably feels during a tug-of-war. What confused me even more was the identity-crisis. Who was the real ‘me’, the body or the mind? I was tempted to think it was the body.

As I learned at the end, the real “me” turned out to be... but wait, we’ll get to the end when we get there. Let’s start at the very beginning; it’s a very good place to start.

This 21.1 kms half-marathon on Sunday, was the longest distance I have run at a stretch and with only two weeks of training behind me, I was apprehensive about my chances at succeeding.

The previous night I went over to Mark’s (a lawyer-friend’s) place and the conversation veered to the Auroville marathon.

“Those who run the marathon are stupid,” he said.

“Well, I’m only doing the half marathon,” I said defensively, hoping for a few words of encouragement.

“Well, that only makes you half as stupid, but you’re stupid nonetheless,” he stated matter-of-factly. The gavel had fallen, the verdict passed. He sipped his herbal tea, blissfully unaware of the wreck he had left in his wake.

Giving up with seven kilometres to go would have only reinforced Mark’s point and I was determined to go back, meet him, and flash my

certificate of successful participation in his face. I passed by the banner and never looked back... The red-clay route stretched ahead. Unending.

The Auroville marathon was started last year to celebrate the 40th anniversary of Auroville’s founding. This was only the second edition of the race but it had grown immensely in popularity mainly because the route winds through the pristine, untouched jungles of Auroville’s green belt — making this race a runner’s paradise.

As Chandresh Patel, race director, puts it, “One of the things we have decided is to keep it in accordance with the principles of Auroville and

not commercialise the event or market it. It’s about this beautiful place we have, and bringing that to you through running. Simple and sweet. We had 150 participants last year, but this year we have close to 485.”

By 5:30 a.m. we were assembled at the starting line. There was an unusual nip in the air. A mist hung

low, a silky veil hiding Nature’s pretty face under its monochrome greyness. In the next half hour, while the runners were busy warming up, an unseen hand gently — almost imperceptibly — lifted back this veil and little by little the colours came back to life...

There was a palpable excitement in the atmosphere as the 200 half-marathoners, in their fancy sneakers, dri-fit clothing, trendy butt-packs loaded with energy drinks and flashy ipods, jogged up and down, warming themselves up. Some others chattered excitedly as they met old friends, made new ones and discussed their targets and strategies.



At the starting line.

THE AUROVILLE MARATHON — AN INTRODUCTION

Ishita Deshmukh '04

It was 5:30 am, Sunday, the 15th of February 2009. Runners from all over India and abroad, were gathered in Certitude playground for the second Auroville Marathon.... In all about 485 runners would take part. There were some who were running the full distance of 42.195 km, which would take about 4 hours or more to complete. Many opted for the half Marathon (21.1 km) and some others decided to run a quarter of the distance (approx. 10 km). Among the runners were a number of Ashramites and former students of SAICE.

Chandresh Patel '79, an alumnus of SAICE, a keen runner, and the organizer of the race, had been disappointed by the lack of financial participation from Auroville in last year's event, and had then funded it on his own. "I'd never organised a run before, I was a trainer," he said. "So given last year's experience we decided to introduce an entrance fee and register all the runners. There was also a lot of support from volunteers in Auroville. There were also three doctors and an ambulance on standby, as well as four taxis. The dangers of dehydration are real. But there was a lot of goodwill and interest generated in this run. Though we still fell short of the budget, I'm confident next year's event will be even more of a success."

Munna (Gauri Shankar '80) and a few other former students had helped manning the various posts at both the events. "This year," he said,



"the organisation was excellent and much bigger in scale, a fantastic improvement from last year. We were about 12-15 volunteers from GCF. A little before the race, we were told where to go and what to do. Some of us were at different posts, while others were at the finishing line, timing the runners." He observed that in spite of the runners being strangers to each other and to the helpers (which is not the case in our Ashram Men's Road Race), there was a lot of camaraderie amongst all. Often runners who were doctors or professionals would stop on the way and aid others who were suffering from cramps and injuries, without worrying about their personal timing.

"It was an incredible feeling of human unity," continues Munna. "Many

were regular Marathoners. When they came by our posts, they would cheer for us, saying, 'You are doing a great job! Keep it up!' I found that very heartening." He remembers one particular American runner who was 69 years old and perhaps had come to India simply to participate in the Marathon. He had already run 611 of them, averaging about one every 6 weeks.

The one thing that most of the runners felt and expressed was the beauty of the trail. They loved the meandering unpaved lanes through the "not-so dense" forests of Auroville and of course the cool freshness of the hour. Above all, it was everyone's passion for running which made the second Auroville Marathon a great success.

"Why do you run?" a runner asked another.

"Well, I do it to shake the jelly off my belly."

Another quipped, "I run because I've run out of ideas to look cool. Thought I'll end up at the finish line!"

There were people of many nationalities: Germans, French, Americans, Italians and many

more. Indians too had assembled from all over. There were Pondicherrians, Bangaloreans, Delhiites, Chennaiites and Hyderabadis. The result: a wonderful potpourri of cultures both Indian and Western in the melting pot that is Auroville.

The race started at 6:10 a.m. and the herd of runners surged ahead in a stampede like the

wildebeest in the African savannahs. Some spectators hooted, some whistled joyfully and somebody shouted out loud, "Enjoy Auroville!" My



Brajkishore-da takes part..

target was to complete the race in 1 hour 45 minutes — it was a tough task given my inadequate training, and meant that I would have to run 1 kilometre in 5 minutes, maintaining it over 21 kilometres.

The woods were lovely, dark and deep, and I loved

the rush of the cold, crisp air on my skin and through my ruffled hair. The better part of the race was on red-earth tracks, often under thick avenues with the overnight dew dripping from the leaves above. Drop after drop, cold and fresh.

I could hear yon distant cry of a green barbet as it called out — hypnotising, regular, staccato. The cicadas, the crickets and the sparrows all sang a complex contre-chant... Chirrrrp... chirrrp... chirrrp. The wind swished and whistled — swishtled — through the treetops of the casuarinas and the eucalyptus.

I ran through Nature's symphony.

I wondered whether the invisible hand that conducted the orchestra was the one that had earlier lifted the misty veil.

This is what sets apart the Auroville marathon. No city marathon can provide such an atmosphere. Venkat, a software engineer from the Silicon Valley who was on his first trip to Auroville, said, "I have run several marathons and half-marathons but nothing quite matches this experience."

"In cities, you run on concrete roads. Here, running on the dirt tracks is awesome. It is immensely beneficial too as it puts much less strain on the joints. I swear, every serious runner should come and run here at least once. I know I'm coming back."

At the six kilometre mark, Svaram, a group of

SATISFACTION COMPLETE

Kanav '00, one of the few ex-students to participate in the full marathon, spoke to Alo '92.

We gathered before the break of dawn in the sylvan surroundings of Auroville and ran as the first rays of the sun turned night into day. As we ran, much to our delight, a few horses galloped by — graceful, handsome steeds. In the distance we heard some drumming. It grew in intensity and that added to our rhythm as we approached it and then faded slowly away as we went along...

The organisation was commendable, the spirit enjoyable and infectious, the participation enthusiastic, the atmosphere festive and joyous, the muscles a little tired, the satisfaction complete....

professional percussionists from Auroville had set up their African drums by the side of the road and were beating up such a powerful, peppy rhythm that your feet couldn't but move to their cadence. They shouted and cheered us on. Some runners even stopped by their side and performed a small jig before laughing and running off.

We were more than thirty minutes into the race now as we ran into the sunrise. The light gradually became brighter and the sunlight sliced through the thick foliage and danced on the red earth below as the wind blew into the sun-kissed, sun-burnished treetops. The light strained down through a leafy sieve.

There were water-posts at every four kilometres along the way and they provided all the refreshments that runners required. Bits of lemon or oranges to suck on, bananas for instant energy, lemonade, water or dry-fruit cookies — it was all there. I typically drank one glass of water and Splash! Another glass of water on the face and the head to refresh myself.



So does Simmy-ben..



Chandresh '79, the organiser, completes the marathon.

The running and the breathing were getting tougher as every kilometre ticked along. By the twelfth, a righteous, burning pain seared through my calves and my hamstring. Every strand of leg-muscle was a mutineer against the mind, the de-facto captain of the ship that stumbled and ploughed its way across the pebbly gravel. I was close to hitting the wall — a phenomenon in long distance running where sudden fatigue sets in as a result of the depleting glycogen reserves in the liver and the muscles.

Under these circumstances, the grand edifice of Newton's third law of classical mechanics which states that every action has an equal and opposite reaction, crumbled. I pushed the ground hard but the ground didn't propel me forward with an equal and opposite force. Newton had definitely not run a half marathon, I thought. And to think that his third law was the rotten foundation on which a lot of our modern theories rested!

I thought of walking for a while but theoretical physics had also taught me that the coefficient of static friction was much greater than the coefficient of kinetic friction. In other words, it requires a greater force to move an object from rest than it does to keep a moving object on the roll. I ran on. The reasoning was subconscious. Or perhaps what drove me on was the horror of seeing Mark's face with a smirky, I-told-you-so expression.

I trundled along, in a zombie-like trance. Scrunch... scrunch... scrunch.... Phew... phew... phew.... The feet fell on the gravel, the lungs screamed for air. The mind and the body fought on. I was on autopilot.

Three kilometres to the finish the banner by

the roadside announced. I don't know where the energy came from but I felt like a gazelle enjoying its freedom in the limitless grasslands of Africa. The feet hardly seemed to be touching the ground as I crested a knoll which seemed like the top of the world!

I had hit the "runner's high" — a phenomenon that runners often experience, characterised by a feeling of invincibility, superior performance and euphoria. Thing is, I don't drink and I don't smoke and I can never quite understand people when they say that they do this because they love to be "on a high". Perhaps now I can. And I'll make it a point to tell them that there are ways of getting high that are actually beneficial to their health. Just run.

I crossed the finish line with a timing of 1 hour 49 minutes, ranked 20 out of some 200 runners. That was 4 minutes off target but that was all right. The joy of completing hard and strong compensated for that.

The Auroville marathon on its jungle trails is a runner's holy grail. Running past the Matri-mandir as it balloons up in all its golden splendour, like a giant golf ball ready to be teed off into uncharted eternity by those same invisible hands, is as much a spiritual experience as it is physical and mental.



Relaxing after the run.

But coming back to the question, who was the real "me"? Was it the mind or was it the body?

Hmmmm.... I think it was my runner's soul.

The next Auroville marathon will be held on February 14, 2010. See you at the starting line! ☼

IN THE ADVERTISING WORLD, AND AFTER...

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

LIFE OUTSIDE

Could you tell us a little about your work in different companies?

Each company, at that time, unlike now, had its own very strong culture. For example, S. H. Benson was an English company. So they were more protocol and hierarchy conscious. J. Walter Thompson was American. The people there were very friendly, not pompous or arrogant. So that was the cultural difference.

Contract was actually an American company called Grant Kenyon & Ekchart which went broke. So Thompson bought it. That was the first agency transaction in India, one company buying another company. All this is happening more now.

I was negotiating to buy it, without realizing that they're going to send me out there. We bought Contract very cheap, Rs. 60,000, because they had made losses of Rupees 50 lakhs, *in those days*. So anyway, the Chairman of Asia-Pacific, Don Thompson, on his way to Hong Kong, stopped at the Bombay airport, and asked me to come. "Ram, now we are going to ask you to turn a real estate agency into an advertising agency." They had leveled it down to sq. ft. and I had to turn it back into an advertising agency.

It was a nightmare. Everything was wrong. They had over two hundred people, no business, huge losses, nobody worked because there was no work to be done! It was a blood bath. They never told me the truth. I would have never taken the job if they had. They didn't show me the balance sheet. They didn't tell me anything. They'd left it to me, saying, this guy is smart, he'll find it out himself. Either he'll stay or he'll quit.

This is where my turning point in life happened. Because J. Walter Thompson was very huge, stable, no big issues. It was a very easy life. Everything was organised. The systems were there.

But here everything had collapsed. The company was completely wiped out.

I walked into this trap. After visiting the different offices, I came back and decided to send off all the extra staff, people who were not performing. I made a list of 100 people and I asked them to write letters of resignation. I think at first nobody took me seriously because they had a union.

The union came to see me and I said, "Well, the choice is yours. We can decide in the next 5 minutes. Shall we shut down the company, kill the company? Then I can declare bankruptcy and we can go. If you want this company to continue and at least some people to keep their jobs, then we have to do as I say. It's your call, I'll wait for 5 minutes, you tell me. If you want to go out, you can..." They said, "No, no. Don't close the company. We'll ask them to leave."

Then I got key people from different agencies to help me rebuild it. At first they were skeptical. So I said, "Listen. Either we succeed or we fail. Everyone expects us to fail, so there's nothing to lose. We are very good at work, we'll get jobs. But if we succeed we'll become heroes..." They fell for it... they joined.

The rest was spectacular! The effort of my people, the team spirit, the passion... we did an admirable job. In eighteen months we bid for 89 new businesses, got 70, and became a top ten agency. We entered the top five in 3 years. Four out of five times, we were the creative agency of the year. That was the year that they gave me this A&M Magazine award and later the Hall of Fame.

Later when Rediffusion became a part of WPP, I moved to that group. Another well-known Indian agency, Everest, was sick. It was bought over by Rediffusion. I had to solve that. *Same* problem, *same* thing I lived through. I did that within

one year. It was not very difficult, because I had already had practice of doing this stuff.

Then I was asked to take over as President of Rediffusion and I stayed for five years.

Finally in 2005, I said, "I cannot continue... I need to get back to my roots." At 67 years, I was already 7 years past my retirement age.

In your entire career, which person(s) would you say most inspired you?

I think, the Thompson Chairman... Subhas Ghosal. He was really a legend. He died of cancer three years ago. I had the privilege of working with him for twenty years in Thompson, then



Ram Sehgal (centre) with Team Contract, after winning the Agency of the Year award.

later on in Contract. Everything I know, I learnt from him. He was a perfectionist, ruthlessly honest, extremely knowledgeable and very humble. He wrote extremely well, a craftsman of words. He spoke extremely well, could keep an audience completely rapt for over an hour, with his choice of words, his sense of humour, his delivery. Outstanding man!

You have said that in the years you were outside, you used to read from Sri Aurobindo and the Mother daily. Can you tell us how it helped you?

That's an interesting question. I used to be under tremendous pressure. Nolini-da or Amrita-da, I don't exactly remember who, asked me to

read the Mother's and Sri Aurobindo's books.

I used to carry them in my briefcase... I'll tell you why. If I brought the tension home, I'd stay with it. I had to fight the tension in the office itself. So whenever there was a problem, and I wanted to be on my own, I used to take fifteen-twenty minutes, half an hour off, not take calls, and I used to read randomly from *Entretiens* or *Letters on Yoga*.

At first, when I read, nothing would go into my head because I was still worrying about the problem. Then I would put in some effort. I had to keep at it. It took me a few weeks or maybe some months, but finally reading the books used to detach me from the problem. Some-

how, almost magically! And then, two things happened. I didn't get tensed and I got a better solution.

This helped me to realise that, if I've any problem, I should think about it and park it. And then read their books. The books relax the mind and take away the tension. Then they draw you in. Then, you benefit from it, and a solution comes out.

What are the qualities one needs to succeed in this field?

Very hard work. And you have to be physically and mentally fit to do those long hours, day in and day out. Everyday you'll be hit by problems, sometimes you'll be hit by problems every fifteen minutes. Therefore you have to be up to it. There are lots of people in the industry today who are collapsing because they are not able to take the pressures. Unless one is passionate about creativity, I would not recommend anyone to get in. Money alone cannot take people through life, there has to be a passion. It's rewarding at the end of the day, both creatively and financially, but it's a blood bath.

And it requires a kind of a mind which can adapt very quickly to changing environments and circumstances, because the problems are different. Every time you have to readjust your mind. If Citibank has a problem, it is totally different from



Receiving the A&M Advertising Person of the year award.

what Colgate has. You cannot use the same approach for both. It won't benefit them.

And the other thing, which **most** people are bad at, is going into details. They just don't have the patience to go into the details of every single thing. And that is a disaster in advertising. Because if you've released a full page print ad, and spent 2.5 crores on it, and the background colour was wrong, the client *won't* pay. Your company is down the tube by 2.5 crores! God lives in details — if any industry can say that, it must be advertising.

What is the negative side of the advertising industry?

You know, there is a great deal of insecurity and unpredictability in the profession. I worked with the largest group. Fifty percent of our business is multinational, and if someone blows the lid in New York, we get sacked around the world. We've nothing to do with it. So there's a great amount of insecurity.

I got over the sense of insecurity with a very deep and intense faith in the Mother. That was my protection. If I had a problem, I prayed to Her to solve the problem. At the same time I prayed that if you don't think it should be done the way I want it, give me the strength to bear it. And it

worked like wonders.

All of us want things to happen our way, because that's how we think we'll solve the problem. And if it doesn't happen, we can get very depressed. And we say, "Ma toh korlen na kichhu!" One thing that I hated all my life is depression. I am always very positive. That's why, built into my prayer was a safety-net for my own depressions.

How did you feel receiving the "A&M Advertising Man of the Year" in 1994, and being elected as a part of the Hall of Fame by the Advertising Club of Kolkata in 2001?

In total honesty, I felt very humbled. Especially the first one came very early. Frankly there were many people who were more deserving than me then. I was very surprised that they chose me.

I shared the table on the podium with Dr. Kurien who created Amul. That was the most humbling experience I had, sitting next to this man, this legend, and being congratulated by him.

You have been a part of the panel of judges for international ad competitions. How was the experience and what are the current trends in advertising?

The interesting thing is that each ad that I have seen is valid and relevant in the context in which it is created, but difficult to understand outside



Citation at being inducted into the Hall of Fame.

it. So if you see an ad from Brazil, then you won't understand much of it, because it is to do with Brazilian culture... Similarly for Indian commercials; with the result that Indian commercials never got awarded because others could not understand them. Take the Fevicol ad... In the US for example a product like Fevicol is not an advertised product. It's just a commodity. Whereas here the whole campaign is about sticking, bonding, so it just went over their head, till I explained it to them, and then I think they reluctantly gave it a bronze.

But I think now what has happened, both abroad and in India, is that because globalisation has come in a very big way, campaigns have to travel across countries and cultures. So we are tending to get more universal ideas. And one element that does it very well is humour, if you handle it right; which is why you see a lot of humour coming into advertising.

I think we have come a long way. In 2008 India proved that we've got over that hump... because we won a hell of a lot of awards at Cannes... 20 or 25.

RETURN TO PONDY

You have chosen to return to settle in Pondicherry. What has brought you back? How easy or difficult has it been so far to re-adjust to a simpler life-style?

On 29th October 1964, the day after Manju (Ira's sister) and I got married, when we were leaving Pondicherry, we went to see the Mother. All She said was, "Come back, it's your home." That was it. That's what She told both of us. "Come back, it's your home." So we're back.

Regarding adjusting to a simpler Pondy life-style, I think She played a tremendous role there. I'd written an article which was published in *Mother India / The Golden Chain*, "Homecoming". It was written in 2000, because I was already 62, and I had asked for retirement, but I was held back by my colleagues.

Thinking back now, probably, in 2000 I was not mentally ready to come back. I had not prepared myself as to what I would be doing here. But I had recognised very early that the biggest



With wife Manju in Hong Kong.

obstacle I was going to face was the ego. Because I may have been this or that... but nothing matters here. So in 2003 I started detaching myself completely. I was working mechanically, without the obsession or the inner passion. I had delegated quite a lot, preparing somebody else to take over from me. I stopped attending public functions and parties. I think what the Mother did was prepare me for the move.

We had three nice apartments in Bombay, but to avoid being tempted to visit and end up remaining dangling, we sold all three. After I left, I never went back to any of my offices. I never look back. That chapter is over. I'm now completely at home here.

Can you tell us something about your family ?

Within 11 days of my marriage to Manju, I was posted in Hong Kong. I had to fly 4 days a week to Tokyo. This was Manju's first trip abroad. She had just completed Higher Course the previous year. Now she had to live alone most of the time in a strange city. But she was courageous. And that courage of hers was of immense value

to me throughout my life.

Manju passed her B.Ed (teacher's degree) from Bombay University and taught in a school. She gave it up. She brought up our two daughters all by herself while I was busy building my career. Today, the elder daughter is managing director of a large French bank in Singapore and the younger is vice-president of India's largest advertising agency.

It was only when she settled our daughters that Manju was able to travel with me. We truly became world-travellers. My work took me to over 220 cities in India, within Asia, parts of Africa and Latin America, most of US and Europe. We continue to travel even now!

You have written two books: "Mixed Feelings — My Advertising Years" and "9 Secrets of Advertising". What motivated you to write?

The reason I wrote *Mixed Feelings* is that I found young people, attracted by the money etc., were getting into advertising without realising what it entails. So I wanted to share my life and experiences and draw lessons from my mistakes. They should know what they are getting into, how tough it is, what to be careful about, what kind of people they're likely to meet and how to deal with those situations. They have to be prepared. That was the purpose.

9 Secrets of Advertising is really a practical guide for young people. There are no Indian books like that for those entering the advertising field.

But the book that I am writing now is not about my knowledge of advertising but of my varied experiences during my extensive travels. It's tentatively titled, "Around the World in Forty Years". I'm half way through. Harper Collins has taken it up.

It's not trying to tell you what places to see, but actually portraying human character across cultures. The first chapter is on taxi drivers. I'll just recount an incident from it and you'll get an idea.

We arrived in Prague by train, and when we came out of the station the pre-paid taxi driver we got seemed pretty rough and unresponsive. But as soon as I handed over the address, he became very happy. He picked up our bags, put them in the car, drove us round and in broken English explained to us all the landmarks, "This



Indulging the passion for travel — at Brussels.

you must see, this you must see..." till we came to the hotel. We stayed in Prague for four nights and on the fifth morning we were checking out and we asked the hotel guy, "Can you get us a taxi? We're going to the railway station." He said, "The railway station is opposite the hotel." We had paid twenty-five dollars to go round the city!

On the other hand I also mention in the same chapter my experience in Tokyo. The taxi driver there, when he got confused about the address I had given him and took twice as long to get to the office where I had a meeting, refused to take any money... he just apologised, bowed and drove off!

The moment you arrive in a country, your experience with the taxi driver tells you something of the character of the nation. That's the approach of the book. I still have to travel to some countries and there is still a lot to write. I put my heart into it because I found it very amusing...

You had been keeping notes?

Yes.... Extensively. Because Mother had given me this habit. She had said whatever experiences you have in the day, write at night and keep it. I had cratefuls of diaries. And I have got about 5-6 thousand photographs taken during my travels. I was doing it out of sheer interest... I never thought that I will publish any of these as books...

You have started an institution in Pondicherry which offers a course in advertising. Can you tell us about it?

Again, this was a way to share my experience, and secondly I thought that I could help some of the Ashram boys who might be looking for a career, but didn't have any real exposure. The only thing I knew was advertising. So I thought maybe I should start a course and see whether they can be helped.

The course is a bridge between what really happens and what you should know. The reason is that generally in this field there is no bridge between the academician and the practitioner. I feel that they should understand each other's issues and draw from them. Therefore I send my students for one month exposure to different agencies, which does them a lot of good. I also present several case studies on advertising and marketing which help them understand how to deal with real life situations.

I also teach at Bharatidasan College here in Pondy. I also conduct workshops and am asked to speak at seminars — there are regular such assignments in Sri Lanka, Bangladesh and Singapore for the International Advertising Association.

Looking back — your life has come full circle in a sense. How different is Ashram life for you

now from what it was 50 years ago?

Personally, as I mentioned, the biggest worldly baggage I think I have to give up is the ego and its feeling of importance. It is very dangerous if you don't know how to handle it. For example, I know two other people belonging to the same group. We joined the company the same year. Six months after retirement, one went for an open heart surgery and the other suffers from Alzheimers. They couldn't handle the shock. They couldn't handle themselves at that time. And this is a very serious thing. People don't realise that, but it's very serious.

Coming back to the Ashram, if you ask my honest opinion, nothing has changed here. It's not that things are different now, or worse. She



At home in Pondicherry.

faced the same things when She was physically there. Because this is a laboratory, an ongoing experiment. The big problems of the world are here in small ways. If a problem gets resolved here, it will get resolved elsewhere. And She is helping us. She has created this with a lot of pain, a lot of trouble, a lot of hardship. This institution is in the name of Sri Aurobindo! You think She'll leave it alone? Why would She leave it alone? She is here with us. ❧

COVER STORY

Compiled by Gopal '90 and Anurupa '86

“THE MOTHER’S WORK IN ORISSA”

We try to understand the spread of the message of the Mother and Sri Aurobindo in Orissa

Our white Maruti van shudders and bounces as it navigates the small village road.... We are 35 kms from Cuttack. The landscape is quite picturesque; there is greenery all around and a pretty hillock on the east.... Before long we reach our destination. As we enter the sprawling 250 acre campus we are greeted by inmates in khaki shorts and white shirts. We walk first through well maintained gardens to the shrine that houses Sri Aurobindo’s Relics. The hall is peaceful, the flowers fresh, carefully arranged. We kneel at the lotus-like “Samadhi”.... We are at home....

Later we walk around the campus talking to the sadhaks who are engaged in some activity or other at the centre. We admire their cactus collection, we walk around the farmlands, we see some of the cottage industry products they make, peep into the cottages they live in, visit the school and health

centre they run before we finally have a satisfying meal (with freshly cut mangoes) at the common dining room. Throughout we are struck by how similar this place is, in its approach and organisation, to our Ashram in Pondicherry. The natural setting and the horticultural activities can’t fail to remind one also of Auroville.

What is this place? Who are these people doing their sadhana in such difficult conditions, in a remote area, with few external contacts?

This is the Sri Aurobindo Srikshestra at Dalijoda in Orissa. This is a Sadhana Kendra, a centre for those who have dedicated themselves to the practice of Integral Yoga.

Anybody who has visited Orissa will not be surprised to find such a centre in the middle of nowhere, to find sadhaks with the dedication needed to pursue sadhana in these conditions. More than in any other Indian state, the message of the Mother and Sri Aurobindo’s yoga has spread across the state of Orissa. On first visiting this region, not only is one astonished at the number of centres, ‘Integral’ Schools, Relics centres, Study

Circles that have come up all over, but one is struck by the deep devotion of the people and the commitment of those who have made it their life’s mission to spread the message and sustain the movement.

How did the Mother’s message spread so widely in this state? When did it start and how did it grow? And

how is the organisation managed today? An exhibition held last year to commemorate the 50th anniversary of the Navajyoti Karyalaya and the 100th anniversary of Babaji Maharaj, the catalyst of the Orissa movement, gave answers to some of the questions. We will attempt a brief overview.

THE ORIGINS

The first two Study Circles in Orissa were established as far back as 1949 and 1950 with



Babaji Maharaj speaking at a Study Circle in Orissa.

Sri Aurobindo and Mother's sanction. (A Study Circle is a gathering of devotees who meet at a specified time and place to read and discuss the Masters' works, and to pray and meditate together.) The first one was established at the residence of Umapada Sen of Rairangpur in Mayurbhanj district and the second in Cuttack, at the residence of Lalit Mohan Ghose, one of the great educationists of Orissa.

The seed was thus planted, but to grow and blossom it had to await the arrival of two quite different but complementary figures: Ramakrishna Das, better known as Babaji Maharaj and Prof. Kangali Charan Pati or Prapatti ("the Surrendered One"), as the Mother fondly called him.

BABAJI MAHARAJ AND PRAPATTI

Babaji Maharaj was born on 14th August, 1908 and grew up in Rairpur village in the Jagatsinghpur subdivision of the Cuttack district of Orissa. He had no formal schooling, but studied till the 6th grade in the village school. At the age of 20, he left for Ayodhya to become a sannyasi. While in Ayodhya he came across the Hindi translation of Sri Aurobindo's *Bases of Yoga*, *Lights on Yoga* and The Mother's *Words of the Mother*. He was so inspired by these books that he made up his mind to travel to far-off Pondicherry to join the Ashram. He also received a blessings packet of the Mother while in Ayodhya and the moment he touched it, his entire being was flooded with peace and joy. He thought to himself: if the rose petals received from the Mother could have such power, how would Her Presence be! On 2nd February 1945, at the age of 37, he arrived in Pondicherry. He had the Darshan of The Mother and Sri Aurobindo and joined the Ashram.

Mother initially gave him work in the Dining Hall. His work was to wash the used utensils. Imagine a sannyasi who did not even touch anybody's "jhootha" (left-over food) having to wash dishes used by others. It was Mother's way of breaking the old mould, the barriers of tradition. Babaji Maharaj used to go and have a bath once he had washed the dishes after every meal — sometimes ending up bathing 6 times a day!

When asked later, he said that initially after



An early Study Circle in Cuttack receives Mother's blessings.

he saw Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, he felt nothing. He started working in the Dining Hall and still felt nothing. Some days later, sitting in the Dining Hall, he wondered what was happening: he had been so moved by Sri Aurobindo's books and now he was feeling nothing. To add to it, he had to wash used dishes! As these doubts preyed on his mind, Babaji Maharaj suddenly had the vision of a resplendent Mother blessing him. For the next two hours, feelings rose up in him as he revelled in that vision. Then as he washed dishes, he saw Mother's face in the dish. The more he wiped, the more Mother's face became clear.

Since Babaji Maharaj had come from Ayodhya, initially people in the Ashram didn't know that he was Oriya. One day someone from Orissa sent an Oriya translation of Charu Chandra Dutt's *Bhagavata Jiban* to Nolini-da for verification. When Nolini-da came to know that Babaji Maharaj was Oriya, he handed it over to him.

Similarly, when a student of philosophy at the Benaras Hindu University hailing from Orissa, Prof. Kangali Charan Pati (Prapatti), wrote to the Ashram with some questions regarding Sri Aurobindo's Integral Yoga, Madhav Pandit gave the letter to Babaji Maharaj. Though Prapatti's letter was in English, Babaji Maharaj answered in Oriya. This was the beginning of a close and enduring friendship that would last over four decades. The correspondence continued for some time till Prapatti decided to visit the Ashram. He came first as a visitor in December 1949, at the age of 25, then settled for good on 28th September 1954.

BABAJI MAHARAJ

An extract from a Birth Centenary Tribute to Ramakrishna Das by Manoj Das

...He was extraordinary in several ways.... Inwardly he remained engrossed in the spiritual lore right from the time he had been able to read. One day he bade goodbye to his milieu and, in search of a guide for his Sadhana, reached the holy city of Ayodhya and was accepted as a disciple by a renowned Guru....

Before long, even though he never wished to be a Guru, seekers, attracted by his most amiable personality and transparent faith, were drawn to him. Among them were princes, judges and educationists of eminence. While he became a great support in their search for light, his own quest never stopped even with what we believe to be realisations of lofty planes of mystic reality. It is this blessed and rare quality of Ramakrushna Das — who could have easily presided over an ever-growing circle of disciples — that introduced him to the world of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, either through some of their works or through some authentic articles on them. It did not take his mature psyche long to recognise in them the ultimate he sought. Without the slightest hesitation he broke away from his hermitage and came over to Pondicherry and joined the Ashram on the 2nd of February 1945.

We can imagine the difficulty for one steeped in the traditional ideas of asceticism-oriented spirituality and occupying a position of mentor for numerous others, to join as one among so many sadhaks of Sri Aurobindo Ashram conforming to a radically different life-style, accepting the Mother as the supreme Guide and offering one's services in any field chosen by Her. For the greater part of his life in the Ashram, Babaji or Babaji Maharaj as he came to be

lovingly called, worked in the Ashram Dining establishment, washing dishes. He rarely absented himself from the regular programme of physical education as a member of his group. But, with a keen sense of discipline and an exemplary hold over time, he devoted himself to study, writing, answering questions from visitors whose number kept growing, and replying to a bulging volume of letters....

A smooth transition from the old to the new order of Yoga and from the undeclared position of a Guru to the position of a child of the Mother were no doubt remarkable achievements of this progressive sage, but no less remarkable were his humility, his austere way of living devoid of the slightest concern for personal comfort, his unfailing patience in satisfying the queries of visitors as well as his untiring guidance to hundreds of Study Circles formed in Orissa, inspired by him and executed by his worthy lieutenant, Prapatti.

I joined the Ashram early in 1963 and had the privilege of enjoying his never-failing company for long stretches of time.... The education he imparted to me, never through preaching but through his conduct or only when I sought his advice on any issue, is among the most valuable I had ever received. If I were asked about the most memorable quality of this sage, I should say that he had the innate capacity to be spontaneously happy at someone else's happiness. Indeed, it speaks of one's nobility or humanity when one suffers at someone's suffering, but to be able to be quietly happy when someone else was happy, of course for a worthy reason, appeared to me a divine quality in this remarkable Yogi.

Courtesy Mother India (24th April 2009)

THE AWARENESS SPREADS...

Babaji Maharaj had aspired for the people of Orissa to open to the Mother and Sri Aurobindo. With Mother's approval and Prapatti as an able instrument, he took up the work of organising Sri Aurobindo Study Circles in various parts of the

State. He visited Orissa in 1959 while on his way to Ayodhya and met with the organisers of the movement, giving them both guidance and encouragement.

The number of Study Circles kept growing. In 1961 the first Sri Aurobindo students'

NAVAYYOTI KARYALAYA — THE LINK BETWEEN ORISSA AND THE ASHRAM

Based on an article in Navajyoti magazine

The Navajyoti Karyalaya and magazine were both established in 1958, although the translation of the Mother's and Sri Aurobindo's works and their printing had started earlier.

The building housing the Navajyoti Karyalaya had been taken on rent until 1966. Prapatti-ji was staying there and the main Navajyoti office was also located there. By then many devotees had started coming to Pondicherry from Orissa and as soon as they reached, they went to Navajyoti to freshen up and keep their belongings. So, when the owner wanted to sell the house, with the Mother's permission and blessings, it was bought in the name of the Ashram Trust. Utsavananda Samantaray of Cuttack came forward, obtaining the property. After the building was bought, when some people from Orissa joined the Ashram, they were given work there by the Mother.

During that time, a few other buildings like the Navajyoti Press, Oriya Nilayam and Orissa House were also bought. All these buildings were bought in the name of the Ashram and nothing belonged to Navajyoti Karyalaya (which is a department of the Ashram).

Prapatti-ji was the main link between Navajyoti Karyalaya and Orissa, though his

main work in the Ashram at that time was teaching in the School. But as the work-load grew, he eventually had to give up teaching, and with the Mother's permission, took up the organisation work in Orissa on a full-time basis under the guidance of Babaji Maharaj.

Sri Aurobindo Study Circles, Integral Schools and other centres in Orissa receive inspiration and support from Navajyoti Karyalaya but are independent units. Apart from printing Mother's and Sri Aurobindo's works and magazines in Oriya, Navajyoti Karyalaya receives offerings from devotees and sends them replies with the Mother's blessings packets. Navajyoti also provides guest house facilities at a very nominal rate to devotees from Orissa (and other states) when they visit the Ashram. All this has been achieved step by step with the Mother's permission and blessings.

At present Navajyoti Publication publishes two magazines: *Navajyoti* and *Navaprakash*, which are published quarterly, and monthly respectively. It also continues to translate the Mother's and Sri Aurobindo's works. Thanks to Navajyoti Karyalaya, a strong and enduring link has been established between the devotees in Orissa and the Ashram.

organisation was also established in Cuttack under the name Sri Aurobindo Adhyatmika Samiti (the name later changed to New Light Society). The Mother used to select the subject of the annual seminar of the society for many years and used to be regularly informed of its activities. The first Sri Aurobindo Mahila Pathachakra (women's organisation) was opened in 1962, again in Cuttack, by Khetramani Mohanty. Zonal and state level Study Circle meets began to be organised.

The spread of the Study Circles in Orissa also coincided with the setting up of the Navajyoti Karyalaya in Pondicherry and the publication of its magazines.

The movement would later gain an additional impetus in the early seventies, with the arrival of

Sri Aurobindo's centenary and the accompanying effort to spread His message.

PUBLICATIONS AND NAVAYYOTI

The publication of *Navajyoti*, a quarterly Oriya magazine, started in 1958. The Navajyoti Karyalaya was also set up in the same year. Since the Ashram Press did not have Oriya types at that time, the first two issues were printed in Jeypore, Orissa. Later that year, Oriya types were sent to the Ashram Press and with the Mother's approval, an Oriya composing section was started. Thus the third issue (15th August, 1958) of the *Navajyoti* magazine could be printed in Pondicherry.

In 1962, Babaji was informed that people were finding it difficult to follow the Masters' original

writings. In response, he wrote a letter that was by turn read and discussed in many Study Circles. But as the number of circles was steadily increasing, it became impossible to circulate the letter in every centre. So all Babaji Maharaj's letters written to Sri Aurobindo Study Circles were published in book form. This is how the first book in the Sri Aurobindo Loka Sahitya Series (popular literature series) appeared. It was titled *Pratyeka Manusyara Kartyabya* (the duty of every human being). Written mostly by Babaji in simple Oriya, the Loka Sahitya series sought to bring about a mass awakening in Orissa. The idea was to make the Mother and Sri Aurobindo's philosophy understandable to people at large. Some of the books were also written by Prapatti and some were translations of the writings of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother. Today, in every Sri Aurobindo Study Circle one finds books from this series.

As more and more Sri Aurobindo Study Circles and Associations came up in Orissa, the *Navajyoti* magazine could not publish all the news regarding their activities. So, in 1963 a newsletter, *Pathachakra Patra*, was published (the name was later changed to *Sri Aurobindo Karmadhara*). As more and more students showed interest, the necessity of a magazine catering to their need was felt. So with Mother's blessings, the first issue of *Navaprakash* came out in October 1970. Prapatti was the editor of both *Navajyoti* and *Navaprakash*, assisted by Sripati Das and Niranjan Naik. Along with the study circles, the publication of the magazines also became an important vehicle for spreading the Masters' thought in Orissa.

As the number of Oriya books for printing increased, the Ashram Press was unable to provide sufficient space for a larger composing section.

So in 1970, a new composing section was started at the Navajyoti Karyalaya. However, the task of printing three magazines and a number of books every month again became a load on the Ashram Press. So in April 1971, a new printing machine was bought at Navajyoti, and gradually a complete press, the Navajyoti Press, came into existence. It was to run for about 30 years before it was finally closed.

INTEGRAL EDUCATION CENTRES

In December 1958, Harekrushna Mahatab, the then Chief Minister of Orissa, requested the Mother to admit Kabul (Prabal Mitra) in the Ashram School. Little Kabul came to Pondicherry accompanied by his father, Jagannath Babu. The Mother accepted him (he was in fact the 1st student from Orissa in the Ashram School), but Kabul started crying because he wanted his brother and sister to come too. The Mother gave Her consent. Other children from Orissa came in the years that followed and in 1966, the Home of Progress boarding was started for Oriya students.

Towards the end of the 60s there was an increasing feeling among many devotees in Orissa, especially those who had had the Mother's Darshan, that they should not let their children miss the priceless opportunity of being near Her Divine Presence. In 1971 with the permission of Babaji, thirty students from Orissa came during the April Darshan. Though it was difficult to accommodate so many and in the middle of the session, Mother consented to take them. For physical education, they were accommodated in the separate non-group that was already in existence.

Meanwhile realising that the number of students the Ashram could absorb was limited,



Babaji Maharaj and Prapatti.

Babaji had asked Prapatti to go to Orissa and start a School there. Chief Minister Nandini Satpathy gave place for the School in the old Assembly building called Patel Hall, at Bhubaneswar. The School was started on 15th July 1970. It was the first Integral school in Orissa.

The focus on education as a central point of the movement corresponded also to a vision that Prapatti had. In it he saw 4 doors: those of Education, Politics, Commerce and Agriculture. He had the clear indication that if one went through the door of Education, all other doors would open.

So the next phase of the movement, after the setting up of the Study Circles and publications, was the creation of Integral Education Centres (see pages 27 to 35 for details) and Relics Centres with experiments in collective living, initiated by Prapatti, under the direct guidance of Babaji.

THE RELICS CENTRES

Sri Aurobindo's Relics came to Orissa for the first time on 9th December, 1970. They were installed simultaneously at two places — Jagatsinghpur (Cuttack district) and Jeypore (Koraput district). They were brought several more times thereafter. Totally the Relics have come to Orissa fifteen times to sixty-five places. And each time they have been received by the Government of Orissa with state honours.

In Orissa all the Relics Centres are independent bodies, mostly trusts. They are the inspiration for Sri Aurobindo Study Circle activities. Each of the centres also has a Sri Aurobindo Integral School attached to it (see pages 24 to 26 for details).

DALIJODA: THE SADHANA KENDRA

If the Integral schools were set up to try and follow the model of the Ashram school, with emphasis on all-round development, the setting up of the Sadhana Kendras tried to replicate the organisation of the Ashram. There are totally 3 Sadhana Kendras in Orissa, but the most important one is the Sri Aurobindo Srikshetra, Dalijoda. It is the only centre in Orissa, that was directly handled and organised down to the details, by Babaji and Prapatti.



Path leading up to the Relics Shrine in Dalijoda.

The initial proposal for the Sadhana Kendra at Dalijoda came to Babaji Maharaj and Prapatti from Dr. Jyotsna Devi. The idea was to have a centre in Orissa, like the Ashram, where sadhaks could come together for the purpose of sadhana alone. So in 1974, a group of young spiritual aspirants gathered at Dalijoda to practise intensive Yogic discipline under Babaji Maharaj and Prapatti's guidance.

As mentioned, Sri Aurobindo Srikshetra is set in a sprawling plot of 250 acres about 35 kms north of Cuttack. It has a Relics centre, various departments, a community kitchen and dining hall. Since it is located in the midst of nature, it also undertakes many horticultural activities. It has a beautiful nursery with a small but rich cactus collection and a well-organised dairy. The entire area is utilised for agriculture, horticulture and the conservation of agro-biodiversity and its commercial exploitation. The Kendra prepares incense sticks, sweets and collects honey from nearby forests as cottage industry products. It also produces paddy, pulses and vegetables using organic farming techniques. Recently a section for weaving and making coir products has been set up. It also has a school up to standard X for the children of nearby villages. The Sri Aurobindo University was inaugurated here on 4th April, 2006. Babaji Maharaj and Prapatti had wanted Dalijoda to ultimately be the centre of all the organisational and educational activities of Orissa.

At present there are 19 sadhaks at Dalijoda. Some aspirants have joined the Ashram in Pondicherry after spending some years there.

AFTER PRAPATTI AND BABAJI

Prapatti passed away on 28th June 1989 at the age of 65. Babaji Maharaj then wanted all organisational work of Orissa to be carried out centrally from Matrubhaban, Cuttack. Though Prapatti's active participation was missed, Babaji Maharaj's presence was there for advice and guidance. But a different situation arose after Babaji Maharaj passed away on 8th November, 1998. Nearly 500 active workers from all parts of Orissa came together on 20th December, 1998 and resolved to continue the work in Orissa. The following was decided:

1. To form a committee named All Orissa Sri Aurobindo Study Circle Committee, having its office at Matrubhaban, Cuttack.
2. To divide Orissa into seven zones (later nine zones) to facilitate the organisation.
3. The organisers of each zone would arrange meetings, seminars and conferences in their respective zones and would look after the Integral Schools and Relics Centres there.
4. Each zone, Study Circle, Integral School, Relics centre would work as an independent body. The responsibilities of the central committee would only be to see that the ideal is upheld and to provide encouragement and support.
5. All the organisers of different zones and districts would meet every April in Matrubhaban. The newsletter published from Matrubhaban, the *Matrubhaban Patra*, would co-ordinate the activities of all the zones.
6. Every worker would independently carry out his own sadhana in his own way.

CURRENT SITUATION

The number of the Sri Aurobindo Study Circles currently stands at 10676. Some of them are registered societies, some are registered trusts whereas most are unregistered but "serious" centres. Some registered centres possess land ranging from a few decimals to several hundred acres. Around 65 such centres have Sri Aurobindo's Relics. Many Study Circles are located in remote parts of the state in people's homes. As far as Sri Aurobindo Integral Education Centres are concerned, there are about 66,000 students and 5000 teachers in around 482 schools.

Throughout the year almost every day, seminars and meetings are conducted in Orissa, the most important being the annual April Conference at Matrubhaban (4th to 7th April) where organisers and representatives from every district come together and decide the programme for the next year.

Another activity that was started in 1984 and is still being continued today is the July tour. In 1984 Madhusudan Mishra and Bhajakrushna Sahu took up the work of touring 13 districts of Orissa in 30 days to interact with the organisers of the Sri Aurobindo Study Circles, to keep track of their activities and also to inspire and get inspired. The report of the visit was presented to Babaji Maharaj in a notebook on 14th August, his birthday. This annual tour went on till Babaji Maharaj's passing away in 1998. Then the responsibility devolved on the "All Orissa Sri Aurobindo Study Circle Committee". In 2001, the Committee decided to visit all the 30 districts of Orissa in 30 days in a group, in the month of July, the dates of the visit being fixed in advance for each district. So the July tour continues today, encouraging the networking and coordination of the various centres.

On the Pondicherry front, the Navajyoti Karyalaya coordinates the needs of devotees and visitors from Orissa. It has 3 missions: 1) publications, 2) correspondence (coordinating offerings etc), 3) management of the guest houses (see details on page 19).

Another recent development has been the creation of a website (www.motherorissa.com) that provides information on the centres of Orissa.

OTHER ACTIVITIES

As the Mother and Sri Aurobindo's message has spread to all corners of Orissa and as people from all walks of life have come in touch with Their all-embracing vision, other fields of activity have come under the umbrella of the movement. Along with the general Study Circles, women's Study Circles and organisations for the youth, people from the fields of medicine, commerce, engineering, law, art, literature, agriculture and educational research have each come together

and formed organisations to pursue their activities in the light of the Mother and Sri Aurobindo. They also provide their services to Orissa's centres and Integral Schools. Their work has been categorised as Dasa Karmadhara or "Ten Streams of Action".

CONCLUSION

The journey of the "Mother's work" in Orissa has been an exceptional and unique journey. It would probably require a whole book to chart its history and to recount the many individual stories and personal experiences of those involved



Surendranath Jauhar speaking at the April Conference. Also seen are Prapatti and Chhotu Narayan Sharma among others.

in it. Our attempt has been only to give an idea about how it started and grew and how it is organised today.

The "organisational target" of the movement is described as, "to carry the Mother and Sri Aurobindo's message to every corner of Orissa". It has probably been the biggest organised, systematic movement to spread awareness about the Masters in any one region. It has also been a grass-roots movement, since Study Circles and Integral Schools have reached the remotest areas of the state and the most underprivileged populations.

The result has been an enormous upsurge in the number of devotees of the Mother and Sri Aurobindo in Orissa, attested by thousands of Study Circles and tens of thousands of students in the Integral Schools. The impact has also been

felt in Pondicherry. There has been a large influx of devotees from Orissa here, particularly in the last two decades, many of whom have joined the Ashram and made Pondicherry their home.

Views have varied though, as to the methods to be followed in spreading awareness about the Mother and Sri Aurobindo in the "outside world", on whether one must prepare oneself inwardly first, before trying to take the message to others, on whether a mass awakening is possible or desirable, since it would lead to dilution and to an indiscriminate mixture of all kinds of elements. In 1934 Sri Aurobindo wrote (*On Himself*, pp. 375–376) about the risks of turning His work into a large-scale movement:

"A movement in the case of a work like mine means the founding of a school or a sect or some other damned nonsense. It means that hundreds or thousands of useless people join in and corrupt the work or reduce it to a pompous farce from which the Truth that was coming down recedes into secrecy and silence. It is what has happened to the "religions" and is the reason of their failure."

It is interesting that certain doubts came up even in the early years. The influx of visitors from Orissa had started during the Mother's time itself. When many people started coming, Prapatti started wondering whether all of them were genuine devotees. Babaji on his part felt that since they were economically not so well off and were still spending significant amounts to come to Pondicherry, they must be genuine. Prapatti wrote to the Mother about this. Mother replied that "the subliminal part of Orissa is open towards the Light". After getting this reply, Prapatti had the confidence to push the effort with renewed vigour.

The Mother's positive view regarding the people of Orissa was reiterated in a conversation (on June 3rd, 1968):

"The people from Orissa, they are nice people; of all provinces, they are the ones who seem the most eager to forge ahead, to change something."

When we try to understand the work that has been done in Orissa we have to also keep in

mind that the bedrock of its growth is the Study Circle — so the basis is the study and practice of Their Yoga. Also, it seems to have developed like a grassroots movement, not based on cheap publicity or miracle-mongering. And, among those who have come into the fold, there appears to be a spontaneous and deep love for Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, an easy and natural faith in Their vision. One is reminded of the Mother's words (CWM, 13: 251):

"From the spiritual point of view, India is the foremost country in the world. Her mission is to set the example of spirituality. Sri Aurobindo came on earth to teach this to the world.

This fact is so obvious that a simple and ignorant peasant here is, in his heart, closer to the Divine than the intellectuals of Europe...."

Those working with faith and commitment in the field are in no doubt. As Hrishikesh '80, who has helped set up an Integral School (see pages

28 to 35), remarks, "None other than the Mother herself does Mother's work in Orissa."

Whatever the pros and cons, it is undeniable that the movement in Orissa has been nurtured by many dedicated individuals and that it has made a profound and lasting impact not only on the state itself, but also on the Ashram. Unprecedented in scale, it would be hard to replicate anywhere else. But like for any work done for the Mother and Sri Aurobindo and in Their name, constant care and utmost sincerity will be required to ensure that the effort lives up to Their sublime vision.

...Our visit to the Dalijoda centre has been an eye-opener. As we head back to Cuttack, the blistering heat of a May afternoon gives way to the more benevolent rays of a late evening sun. We are quiet, reflecting on the day's trip.... We feel a sense of renewed dedication, a sense of calm inspiration.... ❀

RELICS IN ORISSA

Sri Aurobindo's Relics have been sent to a large number of locations in Orissa. There are sometimes questions raised regarding their safety and care. Through Debashish Samantray '82, we find out from Gadadhar Mishra about the measures taken.

How many Relics centres are there in Orissa?

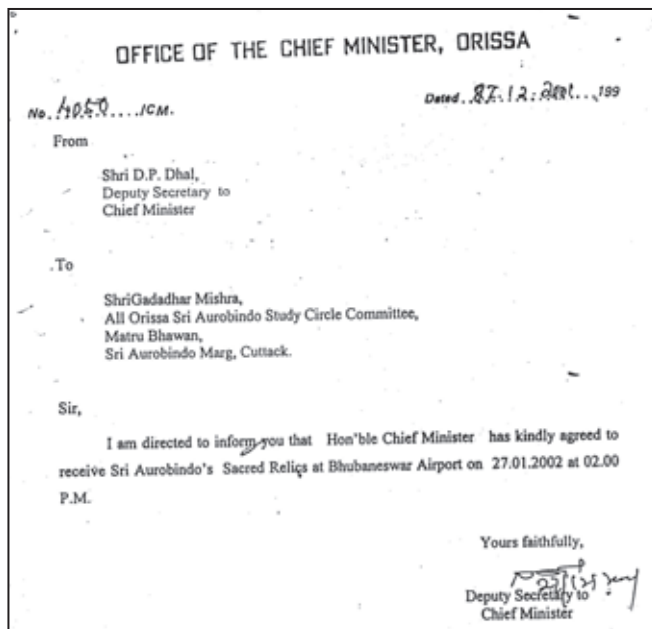
How is it that there are so many?

There are 65 Relics centres in Orissa. The first two were established on 9th December, 1970—one at Jagatsinghpur and the other at Jeypore of Koraput district. The next three sets of Relics were given by the Mother to Matrubhaban, Cuttack, Sri Aurobindo Bhaban, Bhubaneswar and Sri Aurobindo Mandir, Gopinathpur near Cuttack in December 1972. After the Mother left Her body and with the increase in Sri Aurobindo Study Circles, there was a yearning in upcoming centres

to have the "Physical" Presence of Sri Aurobindo in the form of the "Sacred Relics"; therefore more and more such requests for Relics were made. Previously all our requests for Relics were monitored by Babaji Maharaj and Prapatti and placed before Sri Champaklalji who was in contact with the work of Orissa from the time of the Mother and who had also visited Orissa six times. He would decide the centres to which Relics could be sanctioned. He had himself installed Relics at 16 centres in Orissa and had laid the foundation stone of several centres.



The Relics shrine at Gopinathpur, near Cuttack.



A letter from the Office of the Chief Minister agreeing to receive the Relics when they arrive. They are accorded state honours wherever they go.

Could you please explain how the Relics Centres are organised? Is there any central board which monitors the Relics? At one time there were complaints that not all the Relics in Orissa are properly looked after. How have things changed? How does the central board ensure that the Relics are properly maintained?

Each Relics centre is organised around a Sri Aurobindo Study Circle. Before asking for Relics, the centre must have its own group conducting studies on Sri Aurobindo and the Mother's writings. It must be a registered trust having land of its own, running an integral school and having a sales centre for basic self-sufficiency. These activities must be carried out steadily for many years. Currently there is a central organisation, the All Orissa Sri Aurobindo Study Circle Committee that mediates between Sri Aurobindo Study Circles aspiring for Relics and the Sri Aurobindo Ashram Trust. We have an annual conference of all the Study Circles from 4th to 7th April at Matrubhaban, Cuttack. There are now 30 districts in Orissa which are divided into 9 zones. Every zone has a convenor to look after its organisational work. Similarly every district has a district convenor to monitor the proper functioning of the Sri Aurobindo Study Circles, Relics centres and Sri Aurobindo Integral Education centres in that

district. Every block has a Block Convenor. There is always a discussion on all organisational matters in the annual meet and an effort is made to help the centres to come out of their difficulties mostly by friendly counsel and dialogue. But legally every centre is independent.

The Relics centres are visited regularly by all the concerned convenors, so the chance of them not being properly looked after does not arise. Also every year different groups from Orissa visit the Relics centres; any problem perceived is reported immediately. In addition to this, every year from 1st to 30th July, a group visits all the thirty districts of Orissa and holds organisational meetings at every district headquarter. In these meetings, convenors present their report of Sri Aurobindo Study Circles and their activities, Relics Centres, Integral schools during the past year and plan out the programme for the next year. The report is given to Dada (Pranab Kumar Bhattacharya) on 14th August and a copy is handed over to all the Trustees of the Ashram. The Central Committee always keeps track of the activities of the Relics centres and supports them in every possible way in order to solve their problems.

What are the criteria to be followed by a centre in Orissa to be considered for receiving the Relics? Among all the centres wanting to have the Relics, how do you choose where the Relics should go? It is sometimes said that centres compete for the Relics because it is seen as a status symbol. What do you have to say regarding this?

The procedure for Relics installation goes like this: Generally we advise the centres aspiring for Relics to write to the Sri Aurobindo Ashram Trust with a copy to the Convenor, All Orissa Sri Aurobindo Study Circle Committee.

When required, a team from the All Orissa Committee visits the centres and verifies the following pre-requisites: (a) The Sri Aurobindo Study Circle aspiring for Relics must have the record of the land on which the Relics will be installed, in the name of the centre. (b) The centre must be registered as a trust, not a society, because members of a society are liable to

11.50 P.M. The Relics will be taken to the Shrine by the devotees by handing over from one to another.
 12.12 P.M. Installation of Sacred Relics at Kumbhermandhakots
 12.20 P.M. Meditation around the Shrine
 12.30 P.M. Offering of flowers
 2.00 P.M. Return of the Relics party to Cuttack and halt.
 7.50 A.M. Meditation near the Relics
 8.00 A.M. Dep. of Relics (9) for other nine centres from Matrubheben, Cuttack, DERA, CEMENT NAGAR, SOHELA, KHARIAR, JUNAGAD, B. MALIGUDA, KOTPAD, RAYAGADA and PAIKAKUSADIHA. The Hon'ble Minister Prof. Kalandi Behera will receive the Relics from Smt. Sashiprabha Samantrey and proceed to Dera. Procession with one Pilot Jeep, one Jeep with Bande Mataram recitation, open Jeep with Relics, Escort Jeep and other VIP cars will proceed. Reception at special places erected for the purpose.
 9.15 A.M. Arrival at Sri Aurobindo Purna Yoga Kendra, Sri Aurobindo Nagar, Mahishapat, Ihenkanal. Sri Nityananda Sahoo will receive the Relics (9) from the Hon'ble Minister Sri Behera and place on special dias for public Darshan. Leave Ihenkanal after Darshan.

Part of the detailed plan to receive and enshrine the Relics. All those involved, including the Ashram authorities are kept informed.

change regularly, and the new members may not have the same spirit and intention as those who had initiated the Relics centre. Also chances are that persons with different motives might be attracted to the office and spoil the very purpose of the centre. (c) An Integral school preferably with hostel facilities must be attached to the centre. This is to ensure daily service to the Relics centre. The teachers and students look after it and carry out all the activities. (d) The construction must be complete. (e) The structure where the Relics will be installed must have two chambers — the Relics will be placed in the lower chamber and the upper chamber must be sealed strongly. (f) The road facility to the centre must be ensured. (g) The members of the Sri Aurobindo Study Circle must sign a declaration form stating that they will act harmoniously and take utmost care of the Relics.

After scrutinising the above criteria, we recommend to the Ashram Trust to sanction Relics to that particular centre. In the Trust meeting we place all these points and request their approval.

What happens from the time the Relics are sanctioned, to when they leave the Ashram, to when the Relics are received? What are the instructions given by the Mother regarding this?

After we receive the sanction letter of the Ashram Trust, we meet the Chief Minister for permission to hold a state reception for the Relics at the time of their arrival. Then we contact the ministers or legislators of the respective areas who will carry the Relics in procession to different places.

We seek the assistance of the Home Department to give a guard of honour at all places where the Relics will be either installed or be kept before installation. The collector of every district is invited to be in the Relics procession. All the police stations are informed. Sri Aurobindo Study Circles of the particular area, through which the procession will pass, are informed to participate in the reception. Then we make a final visit to the centre where the Relics will be installed to check that all the arrangements have been made.

How are the Relics protected from special calamities like floods and cyclones?

Relics boxes are always kept in the lower chamber of the shrine and properly sealed with concrete. In the flood affected areas, the shrine is constructed at a much greater height than the usual flood level.

How does the arrival of Relics in an area change things? Do the activities of the centre increase? Do people at the centre feel that the Samadhi changes the atmosphere at the centre?

All regard Sri Aurobindo's Relics as His material Presence. A sense of responsibility grows and they start to make the Shrine the centre of all their activities. Daily meditations are held at specific timings as well as on Darshan days and other special days including New Year's Day. In all centres some individuals come forward to reside in the premises and offer their lives in service to the Masters. It is apparent that Their Force acts unceasingly and gradually moulds the minds and lives of the persons in and around the Shrine which is regarded truly as a sacred "Pithasthan" by those in the locality. Many of them come very regularly to offer their Pranams. Occasionally enthusiasts in groups go from Shrine to Shrine to draw inspiration for their work and enjoy the unique atmosphere specific to each place. It is a common experience that people receive direct help and support for all their activities from the Presence embodied in the Sacred Relics. Circumstances change for the better, situations become different; a loving, illuminating and soothing guidance is felt by those who turn towards Them with faith and aspiration to change for a better life. ❧

INTEGRAL SCHOOLS OF ORISSA

One of the results of the growth of the Mother's work in Orissa has been the mushrooming of Integral Schools all over the state. The movement began, as mentioned in our previous article, when Babaji Maharaj (Ramakrishna Das) realised that the Ashram School would find it difficult to absorb the large number of children from Orissa aspiring to study there. So the need was felt to open schools in Orissa having a similar atmosphere and inspiration. This would also allow a large number of local aspirants to work in Her service. With the inspiration of Babaji and Prapatti (Kangali Charan Pati) and the help of the Orissa Government, the first Integral school of Orissa was inaugurated at Bhubaneswar by Udar-da on 15th July, 1970.

The opening of an Integral School in an area becomes possible only when there is a pool of committed persons in tune with the ideal. That is why the growth of a Sri Aurobindo Study Circle precedes and becomes the base of the educational activities. The teachers are individuals having an aspiration for a higher life who are already familiar with Sri Aurobindo's and the Mother's literature. That such a preparation is essential cannot be denied. For instance when the Mother's permission and blessings were requested to open the second Integral School at Rourkela on 21st February, 1973, She asked, "Is there anybody at Rourkela who has studied Sri Aurobindo thoroughly?" She finally gave Her permission and blessings and named the school "Sri Aurobindo's Rourkela School".

The expansion of the educational movement has continued steadily over the years and the number of Integral schools today is staggering. Currently there are about 482 Sri Aurobindo Integral Education centres in Orissa. Of them 79 have gone up to high school level and four of them have +2 wings. Most of these secondary

schools are in rural areas set up with local initiative. There are about 5000 aspirants who have taken up the work of imparting integral education to almost 66,000 students in the State.

For every school, the Sri Aurobindo Study Circle is the parent body. The managing committee, formed by only the members of the Study Circle, runs the school.

To liaise between the government and these schools an institution was formed in 1977 with the name "New Life Education Trust" (NLET). This trust, located at Matrubhaban, Sri Aurobindo Marg, Cuttack, has become the central coordinating body for the Sri Aurobindo Integral Education Centres in Orissa. Though not mandatory, almost all the Integral Schools are affiliated to this trust, which looks after their welfare and plays a guiding role. Schools have to fulfill certain criteria to be recognised by the Trust as an Integral School. The trust organises teacher training camps and workshops, seminars and conferences, develops teaching material and text books, in its attempt to put into practice Their vision of education. Though the conditions in which they operate are very different from those of the Ashram, by providing basic physical education and other activities, the Schools try to make the education as Integral as possible.

Benefiting from the widespread recognition of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother in Oriya society, the Integral Schools of Orissa have the permission, from the Government of Orissa, to frame their own syllabus up to Class VII. The Trust has prepared its own text books from Class I to Class VII. The students of Sri Aurobindo Integral Education Centres (only those schools recognised by the NLET as Integral Schools) have also been exempted from appearing for the common Class VII examination conducted by the Board of Secondary Education, Orissa.

In an attempt to understand and profile the

Integral School in Orissa we take up one particular school, the Sri Aurobindo Purnanga Shikshya Kendra which functions under the aegis of Sri Aurobindo Central Study Circle, Damanjodi, in the Koraput district of Orissa. The school is a typical example in many ways but has one important difference. It was begun and is run by alumni of SAICE. Hrishikesh Rath (Rishi) '80, who is

part of the team, tells us about this school. We also briefly cover the two largest Integral Schools / centres in Orissa — the Khandagiri school in Bhubaneswar (the first Integral School in Orissa) and the centre at Matrubhaban in Cuttack, the headquarters of the New Life Education Trust. We also touch on the Sri Aurobindo University, a recently initiated venture.

SRI AUROBINDO PURNANGA SHIKSHYA KENDRA

Hrishikesh Rath (Rishi) '80, who is part of the Sri Aurobindo Central Study Circle, Damanjodi, Koraput, Orissa, tells us about the Integral School they started and developed.

The bus came to a screeching halt as I woke up with a jolt. It had been a fifteen hour long and tedious journey from Bhubaneswar. The conductor shouted, "We've reached Damanjodi. So, everybody get down." The watch read 7:15 in the morning. I stepped out as did all the other passengers. I looked around. It was a bright February morning in the year 1987. The bus had stopped

I inhaled the salubrious mountain air and felt invigorated. I was lost in the enchanting beauty of nature for a while and soon enough found myself back in the "vale profound overflowing with the sound" of a lone cuckoo unseen in the sylvan growth. This was my first experience of Damanjodi, a paradise for nature lovers, an abode of peace and tranquillity. Little did I know then that I would stay here for decades on end.

But for the National Aluminium Company Limited (NALCO), a public sector undertaking which had a huge alumina refinery plant and an open cast mine to extract bauxite established here, the life of the tribal people in this remote location in the Koraput district of Orissa would have perhaps remained unaltered and undeveloped for all time to come.

Damanjodi seemed literally cut off from the rest of the world those days, as there was hardly any communication. Life moved at a slothful pace as though time had come to a stand still.

Three years prior to my coming to Damanjodi two former students of SAICE, Nirmal Das Adhikari and Deepak Panda had already come here. Just three or four months later Manasranjan Mishra, Lopamudra Mahapatra and Mohiniranjana Mishra (also former SAICE students) arrived. At one time we were six in all working together in



Mass Drill in the school ground. Also seen is the Study Circle Hall (one storeyed building) and the school buildings.

just at the foot of a hill. To my left lay other hills and beyond them, more to the right, there were a range of mountains in the horizon and amongst them stood out the highest peak of Orissa, Deomali (as I came to know later), basking majestically in the sun.

It was the beginning of spring as was evident from the twittering of the birds and the gurgling springs nearby. Surrounded by mountains and forests punctuated with man-made tenements down the slope of a hill, I realised I was in a valley.

NALCO as French interpreters. Sujata Dash, who had also studied in SAICE for a few years and her husband, a staunch Sri Aurobindonian, joined us only in 1995. We tried, listlessly though, off and on for some time to get a common place to start a Study Circle (SC) but were not successful. Finally it was decided that as long as we did not get a common place we would hold the general SC at our quarters i.e. in the joint accommodation Manas and I had. So by Mother's grace we inaugurated the general SC at our quarters on 24th November, 1987.

As time wore on and gradually the devotees increased, accommodating so many people in our quarters became a problem. Also many hesitated to attend the SC in private quarters as I had a family by then. So again we set out in right earnest in search of a common place. At long last, in answer to our prayer, the NALCO authorities handed over a room to us, though unofficially. This was where, in 1992, we started the central SC in a common place on 20th November, the Mahasamadhi Day of the Mother. As part of a prayer to Her we then wrote: "We pray to Thee, Sweet Mother, to be constantly with us, in our thoughts, in our words and in our acts enabling us to realise our wish.... We know that Thou art there helping and guiding and piloting us...."

Meanwhile the district Sri Aurobindo Study Circle coordinator would visit us off and on and would urge us to start an integral school. We would laugh at his proposal and tell him not to be in such a hurry and to let us go ahead step by step. The first solid step in this line for the integral yoga aspirants here would be to unite and activate the general SC as well as all other private SCs in and around the township.

We are of the opinion and strongly feel that in the sequence of events that follow the prime prerequisite before starting a school anywhere is that, number one, the people should be made aware of Mother and Sri Aurobindo, their life, work, philosophy and yoga. Spreading the great teaching of the Masters amongst the local populace is indispensable for building a strong foundation. And this can be done through SCs.

What is a Study Circle? Briefly speaking,

keeping in view that Sri Aurobindo's yoga is a collective yoga, a Study Circle is nothing but two or more persons meeting regularly at a particular time at a specified place, invoking collectively the Mother's Presence and involving themselves in prayer and meditation, reading and discussing the Mother and Sri Aurobindo's works for an hour or more. It may be an intellectual quest in the beginning but is invariably translated into practice most naturally in the course of time if one truly loves the Mother.

Whatever little we have learnt from our own practical experience is this. We feel the more the opening of the sadhak towards the Mother, the less the problems and disharmony between fel-



The Nursery kids engrossed...

low sadhaks, the greater the joy of serving Her in any way whatsoever. By virtue of this we did try to cohere in a closely-knit community and strengthened and activated the private and general SCs. We had this simple faith that no problem, however big, would remain unsolved once presented or offered to the Mother. Individual and collective sadhana of aspiration, rejection and surrender in whatever small degree was surely being done. This enthused us to collect funds from personal and other sources and enabled us to purchase almost three acres of land and get the registration done in the name of Sri Aurobindo Central Study Circle, Damanjodi. Subsequently, as necessity arose, a registered association with its by-laws under the "Registration of Societies Act" was formed with a president, a secretary, a treasurer etc., and executive and general bodies.

No sooner was the land purchased than the construction of a school building and a Study

SRI AUROBINDO INSTITUTE OF INTEGRAL EDUCATION

Ajit Panda '76 writes on the school in Khandagiri, Bhubaneswar, the first Integral School in Orissa.

It was with the enveloping inspiration of Sri Ramkrishna Das and the selfless efforts of Prof. Prapatti along with a group of devotees in Bhubaneswar that a Study Circle with the



name **Sri Aurobindo Sanskruti Sansad** was constituted. The Sansad established the Institute of Integral Education at the Sardar Patel Hall (Old Assembly Campus) in Bhubaneswar on the 15th of July, 1970 with only two

standards of classes to start with: Nursery and K.G. This venue was offered by the then Chief Minister, Smt. Nandini Satpathy. On the occasion of the inauguration of the Institute, the Divine Mother gave the following message: **"Make Matter ready to manifest the Spirit"**. A land of 3 acres situated at Khandagiri was also offered by the Chief Minister. Later on seven more acres were allotted



by the Government of Orissa in two stages. The Institute functioned at the Sardar Patel Hall till 1992-93 after which

it was shifted to the land at Khandagiri constituting of its present area of 10 acres.

The Campus of the Institute is enviable for its rare and unique location among the historic caves of Khandagiri and Udayagiri. It resembles

the Ashram of a Rishi surrounded by green grandeur. The sacred Relics of Sri Aurobindo were installed in the premises of the Institute on the 14th of February, 1999 after which the 'Sri Aurobindo Sanskruti Sansad' was converted to a Trust with an Advisory Body.

The Trust has opened a +2 Science College since 2004-05 and thus the Institute provides teaching from Nursery to +2 Science. The Government has recognised the +2 Science College with 128 seats and six subjects: Physics, Chemistry, Mathematics, Biology, Information Technology and Electronics. There is separate hostel accommodation for boys and girls along with a Laboratory, Conference Hall for Seminars, Teachers' Meet, Guardians' Meet etc. The Trust has also been organising annual conferences on Integral Yoga and Integral Education from 9th



to 11th December attended by dignitaries from the Sri Aurobindo Ashram and more than a thousand devotees, including teachers.

The State Government has given a distinctive status to the Institute:

I) The Institute has been declared as an Experimental School.

II) It has been given full autonomy to prescribe its own curriculum and follow its own system of education from Nursery to Class VII.

III) Its students have been exempted from appearing for the Common Upper Primary Examination (an examination fixed by the State

Circle hall were simultaneously underway. Both were completed in less than a year. This event of all of us coming together and taking up the entire earthwork or digging for the foundation of our Study Circle-hall as an offering to the Mother

was an exhilarating experience and reminded me of a similar experience of excavation work at Matrimandir in Auroville decades ago. Both have stayed etched in my memory as though it all happened only yesterday. As a spontaneous outflow a

Government after Class V) and the Middle Education Examination (examination after Class VII) conducted by the Board of Secondary Education, Orissa. But the students appear for the Board Examination after Class X. The stu-



dents in +2 Science appear for the Examination conducted by the Council of Higher Secondary Education, Orissa.

IV) The New Life Education Trust, a co-ordinating body, prescribes the curriculum, prints and provides text books up to Class VII.

V) The Government provides partial grants in the form of Special Financial Assistance to run the Institute.

Now let us see what the students do at Khandagiri. There are now 900 students in the Institute with 80 teachers (both in school and college). This is around the same number of students that we find in a classroom in SAICE, Pondicherry. From what I have come to know from my own experience in SAICE, this small number of students is maintained because it is only then that the teacher can give all the attention required for the integral development of each child. The Institute at Khandagiri and its management are always conscious of the all-round requirements of the students, both day scholars and boarders. Regular Study Circle classes, spiritual discourses, sports and gymnastics are provided besides computer training. They are given regular facility of study tours and visit the Sri Aurobindo Ashram in groups. Facilities are also there to learn dancing, painting, music and other artistic and extra-curricular activities. At the time of admission the

children of devotees are given due preference. At the same time the teachers are given Refresher Courses conducted by 'The New Life Education Trust' twice in a year besides the Zonal Teachers' Meet and study tours to Pondicherry. The teachers take up regular meetings with the guardians and also visit the residences of the students for interaction with them and their parents. All these endeavours provide for an integral development of both the teachers and students. At the same time they are adequately exposed to the teachings of the Mother and Sri Aurobindo and come into direct contact with the life and surroundings of the Sri Aurobindo Ashram at Pondicherry.

In today's society, the obsession with getting good marks and the stress of examinations have been taking a serious toll on children's health and well-being. This has led all concerned to seriously consider a drastic change in the present system of education. But unfortunately the system at present has taken such a deep root in the life of the society that it becomes difficult for the authorities to take immediately any drastic step. What they want to do has to be realised but it will take its own time. It is in this context that the efforts of Integral Schools like the one in Bhubaneswar should be seen.

With the Grace of the Mother and dedicated efforts of the Managing Trust and the teachers, this 1st Integral Education Centre of Orissa has not only completed 38 years but has set a bright example in shaping the lives of thousands of students and is a unique landmark in the history of Integral Education in Orissa to be emulated by others. ❧



spiritual centre emerged. Sadhaks and sadhikas as if from nowhere flocked to stay in the centre even before the completion of its initial phase.

Pending the completion of the school building the demand for an Integral school was so great

that we had to start the school with the Mother's blessings in a rented room with two teachers and five to six students admitted in kindergarten on 22nd July 1993. This was our second step.

By the Mother's grace and in answer to our

aspiration we got the right sort of people at the right time to carry out the various tasks including construction and imparting integral education. When the Divine had willed even rocks had floated on water, so today as Douce Mère willed, money flowed, the right human instruments arrived and lo and behold, one after another buildings stood up, the two storeyed school buildings and a hostel, a conference hall, a science lab, a computer lab and a library. Coordinating with NALCO authorities, six classrooms were constructed and bulldozers were made to ply and by cutting part of the nearby hill a playground was made by levelling the ground. We went from strength to strength and there was no looking back after that.

The school which had a humble beginning way back in 1993 with two teachers and six students in class nursery in a rented dingy room boasts today of about 400 students and around 30 teachers till tenth standard. It was probably at this stage that one could aspire for the advent of the sacred Relics of the Master to this centre of the Mother. A shrine in the form of a Japanese pagoda was constructed and the floor was made of white marble from Rajasthan. How nine to ten lacs of rupees could be collected and spent within such a short time is in itself a miracle. However we still await the advent of the sacred Relics. It has been our experience that Mother willing, money and human resource have never been constraints.

At present, as in the Ashram so here we have about seventeen sadhaks and sadhikas in the centre, the inmates who have resolved to lead a life totally dedicated to the Divine by doing whatever work is allotted to them as the Mother's work, serving Her alone. The 'Association' looks after the material welfare of the inmates by providing them with food, clothing and shelter like the 'prosperity system' back at the Ashram. We know Mother always wanted the children to stay protected from the harmful influence of the outside world, so hostel facility is provided to them. Our hostel consists of about fifty students ranging from the age group of 7/8 years to 15/16 years. We have noticed over a period of time that a few children opt to stay back instead of going home during

vacations. This augurs well as they stay protected from external influences to a great extent which is conducive to our system of education.

We have always preferred devotee teachers who are willing to stay inside the campus and teach, but when such teachers are not available we have been compelled to select non-devotee teachers through a written test followed by an interview. We have a few of these teachers who stay outside the campus with their families. They come, take part in the curricular and extra-curricular activities of the school as assigned to them and go back once the school is closed. Almost all of them in the long run have turned towards Mother and Sri Aurobindo.

Our school has a small hill in the west as a backdrop. To the east there is a fascinating view. In between the slopes of two mountains the third hill is set in such a way that it appears as the rising sun. With the azure sky above, greenery all around, far from the madding crowd... well, this seems to be the ideal place to impart integral education.

However the situation is quite the contrary. Implementation of integral education as



Babubhai, our Principal taking his class.

envisaged by the Mother in our school is extremely difficult under the present local social scenario. Our students come from varied backgrounds. While most are from lower middle-class and extremely poor families, others are from the illiterate and poor tribal population. Obviously most parents are non-devotees and they know nothing about the Mother and Sri Aurobindo. Integral education demands a unique teacher-parents-child relationship based on a psychic and spiritual foundation. Unless the three are open to

SRI AUROBINDO INSTITUTE OF HIGHER STUDIES AND RESEARCH

Members of the centre at Matrubhavan, Cuttack, tell us about the school they run.

The Matrubhavan School, also known as the “Sri Aurobindo Institute of Higher Studies and Research”, came into existence when Dr



Ashok Das approached Babaji Maharaj (Sri Ramakrishna Das) to open an Integral School in Cuttack. At that time Babaji

Maharaj along with Prapatti was on a visit to Orissa and was residing at Cuttack Rajabagicha, in the house of Sri U.N.Samantray. Babaji Maharaj immediately called Prapatti and asked him to make arrangements for the opening of the school. Prapatti agreed and gave it the name, “Sri Aurobindo Institute of Higher Studies and Research”.

The school was opened on 18th July 1975 with 31 students and 3 teachers. Initially all its activities were reported to Babaji Maharaj and Prapatti. One could say that the school was managed by both of them. A college section was started in 1988 with + 2 Arts. Before leaving his body, Babaji Maharaj advised the organisers of the school to open a + 2 Science section. Then

in 2007, a + 2 Commerce section was opened. At present, the total student strength of the institution stands at more than 1500.

The students here are not only students of an educational institution, but are taught to meet the challenges of the future. They are aware of the great message of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother. Consisting of classes from Nursery to +2 (Arts, Science & Commerce), under one roof, the institution is unique in the entire state. Even though integral education has not been achieved totally, we are trying to give importance to value-oriented programmes.

Physical Education has a prime importance in this institute.

The students learn different physical activities along with demonstration programmes which they display on 9th Dec.

Art, culture and other subjects also get equal weight, for the integral growth of the children.

The teaching staff consists basically of dedicated people, whose main motive is to serve the Mother.



and interested in this novel and unprecedented educational system nothing can be done. That out of the three the first two have to open themselves to the influence of the Mother and Sri Aurobindo is indispensable.

The teacher, of course, we all know, plays the major role. The child is with him almost the entire day. He can do justice to his work only if he sincerely practises the integral yoga. In other words he has to be a yogi, as the Mother has said, a living example for the child to follow. Apart from the teachers' SCs, their own sadhana, the teachers are sent to the summer integral education training camps held at Cuttack. The New Life Education Trust organises such periodic meetings, semi-

nars and educational workshops for the teachers at the state level. The teachers undoubtedly are immensely benefited by these activities. They go back greatly inspired and try out novel and innovative methods in teaching. Occasionally, experienced teachers and sadhaks from the Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Pondicherry, and those from the Delhi Branch come and interact, train and share their experiences with our teachers.

Then come the parents. Their role undoubtedly is also very important. They are the child's first guides. It is with them that the child spends the remaining time of the day before and after school hours. So, it is vital that the atmosphere at home is conducive to the child's development.

Efforts were made from our side to inculcate and present the Mother and Sri Aurobindo's philosophy in a simple manner through parent-teacher interactive sessions at the centre. At first a lot of people attended these sessions but gradually the number dwindled. So, when this didn't work out satisfactorily we went to the doorstep of the parents. We took the Mother and Sri Aurobindo to their houses by conducting SCs at their homes (of course with their consent) thereby bringing greater awareness among them. This has stood us in good stead so far, as there has yet not been a single case of reluctance. So, we hope to see better times ahead.

Last but not least comes the child. The child is like wet earth and can be moulded at will, a sapling which needs protection and nourishment to grow. Hence extreme care and dedication are required. Once the parents and the teachers are conscious and try to practise yoga, then the much required atmosphere is created at home and in school and we know for sure we are on the right path.

Apart from the normal curriculum of the school we have a few periods set aside exclusively for knowing more about the Mother and Sri Aurobindo in which children are introduced to the life, work and yoga of the Masters through stories and anecdotes, photos, books and com-



Computer Class in progress.

puter programmes. Films on the Ashram where Mother is seen distributing cards to the disciples in the Meditation Hall on Puja days or the Terrace Darshan, create a greater impact on the children, as they have not seen Her moving around in Her physical body during Her lifetime. A special Study

SRI AUROBINDO UNIVERSITY

The Sri Aurobindo University was inaugurated on 4th April 2006 at Sri Aurobindo Srikhetra, Dalijoda, Orissa, by the late Dr. M. V. Nadkar-ni. The University, which is something both Babaji and Prapatti aspired for, has been initiated with the conviction that the global solution to the problems that confront the world today are to be found in Sri Aurobindo's and the Mother's writings. The objective of the University is to encourage aspiring individuals to participate in the Masters' vision of the New World through the study of Their works. In an attempt to embrace the whole of human existence, and raise it to a higher level, the Sri Aurobindo University will spread its illuminating and enlightening activities to different disciplines of education and thereby embrace life in its entirety.

Circle for the children known as Sri Aurobindo Chhatra Samaj is conducted at the centre every Sunday for the entire student community of Damanjodi. Above all, almost every year a group of students escorted by their teachers visits the Ashram and gets an opportunity to witness and get involved in some of its multifarious activities. This works as a catalyst and brings them closer to our ideal, though they may be unaware of it.

We hold a three day long Sri Aurobindo Yuva Chhatra Shikshya Shibir, an annual educational camp for students in which students from other integral schools of the district and also from other nearby districts participate. We invite adept and experienced faculty (sadhaks) from within Orissa, at times even from Pondicherry, to attend the camp. All aspects of integral education i.e. physical, vital, mental, psychic, spiritual are read, explained and thoroughly discussed in the camp. Certain points are practically demonstrated for better clarity and understanding.

Shramdaan, in terms of "nettoyage" or cleaning the rooms and the periphery of the centre, gardening, taking out water from the well, vegetable-cutting and cooking, night duty (as we still do not have a boundary wall), even cleaning of lavatories,

is taken up by the campers with equal zest as an offering to the Mother. These camps help the kids to build and develop their personality, character and leadership qualities. They learn to be obedient and disciplined, help and love each other and to stay in harmony with fellow-students.

We have our own syllabus. From class nursery to class seven all the textbooks for all the subjects are published and supplied by the “New Life Education Trust” to all integral schools. Each of these textbooks has the Mother’s childhood photo in the beginning, with a quotation from Her. Some have Sri Aurobindo’s photo and another quotation at the end. A brief life-sketch of both is given in simple English, Oriya and other vernaculars with questions to be answered. We regret to say that so far we have not done away with the abominable exam system even until class seven, due to certain problems. We are on the job and hope to do so soon.

As a part of their academic activities our students also take part in science exhibitions, debates, quizzes, essay writing and other competitions conducted by outside agencies. These activities not only sharpen their acumen but also make them bold and outspoken and help their hidden talents and qualities to flower.

Drama, music, art and dance are taught as a part of vital education. The teacher at times takes his class out in the meadows or to the nursery where the kids are taught to appreciate beauty and love Mother Nature. The annual day of the school is celebrated with a March Past, followed by a physical demonstration at the playground and culminates with a cultural program of recitation of mantras, songs and dance and ends with a short drama based on higher ideals.

We all know the importance given by the Mother to physical education. We are able to provide only athletics, gymnastics to some extent and games, mainly minor games except football and cricket. Free hand exercises, mass-drills and other drills are taught during school hours. March Past practice with French orders as taught by the Mother is carried out regularly by the students, teachers and Study Circle members especially a few days before Darshan. On Darshan and other



Shh! Only prayer and meditation allowed here, at the would-be Relics Centre.

special days we have ‘rassemblement’ in the evening with full uniform and do March Past at the playground saluting the Mother in front of the spiritual map of India with a tête-gauche.

So far we, the members of this centre, have moved through thick and thin and worked harmoniously despite all odds as a team due to Mother’s grace. But lately cracks have developed, egos have surfaced and it appears as if the grace has receded. Probably this state is described by Sri Aurobindo in “The Hour of God” thus, “There are moments when the Spirit moves among men and the breath of the Lord is abroad upon the waters of our being; there are others when it retires and men are left to act in the strength or the weakness of their own egoism. The first are periods when even a little effort produces great results and changes destiny; the second are spaces of time when much labour goes to the making of a little result. It is true that the latter may prepare the former, may be the little smoke of sacrifice going up to heaven which calls down the rain of God’s bounty.”

Perhaps in this short passage lies the panacea to all our ills, the remedy to all our problems. The aspiration that is corroded and soiled or sullied over a span of time has to be cleaned into a sparkle so that it glitters and invites the breath of the Lord to our rescue. Only then will all opposition, obstacles and differences due to selfishness and egoism melt away and vanish, the dark and dismal clouds dissipate and give way to a new sunrise. Thus alone can we go on and shall go on and on and on....

Victoire à la Douce Mère! ❧

“THE WORLD-STAIR”

THE 1ST DECEMBER PROGRAMME 2008

INTRODUCTION

The 1st December programme of 2008 was based on *The Traveller of the Worlds: The World-Stair*, Book II Canto I of Sri Aurobindo's *Savitri*. In this canto Aswapati begins his journey into the unknown. We travel with him to the dawn of creation and witness the secret process that sparked the beginnings of life. An observer across time and space, Aswapati sees the universe unfold, out of its primal origin into the many-hued splen-

*All could be done no mortal will can dare.
A limitless movement filled a limitless peace.
In a profound existence beyond earth's
Parent or kin to our ideas and dreams
Where Space is a vast experiment of the soul,
In an immaterial substance linked to ours
In a deep oneness of all things that are,
The universe of the Unknown arose.*

Sri Aurobindo



dour of our existence and beyond.... The canto begins with the following lines:

*Alone he moved watched by the infinity
Around him and the Unknowable above.
All could be seen that shuns the mortal eye,
All could be known the mind has never grasped;*

plywood, whitewashed and covered to look like it were hanging),

- by projecting slowly moving space images (all linked together in Photoshop and Premier) giving a planetarium-like feel,
- by having lighted globes (made of bunches of LEDs) descending from above,

How does one stage such an abstract and wonder-inspiring subject? Is it at all possible? The organisers of the 2008 programme showed us just how it can be done. The idea was to create, using every possible prop and technique, a visual experience that would draw the viewer into a marvellous primal world and let loose his imagination. They did this in a number of ways:

AS THE YOUNG CLIMB "THE WORLD-STAIR"

Aster Patel '55

Not just in their "inner landscape", but also in the "outer"... making of their "Space... a vast experiment of the soul"....

Such was the experience of this December 1, 2008. Only to be expected in this year of great changes.

The team, in the final year of studies at "Knowledge", made a singular choice of climbing the "World-Stair" from Book Two, Canto I, of *Savitri*. Very apt... as these beings move across a threshold... and into the mysteries of the world around! A world they are ready to explore on their onward journey.

This is the stage of their journey... and there is the "physical stage" on which these contemporary beings find expression. The inner seeking... and the outer form... made into one Whole of "an immaterial substance".

A seeking that expresses itself in a simplicity and transparency of form and space, a deep hidden symbolism of sound and movement, a presence of light that fills the air with subtle significances, a contemporary world of choreography in which space and time and form and substance, all bathed in the folds of Conscious Being, spring into life.

The *Savitri* of Sri Aurobindo moves into another time-zone. The young of the world step into an exploration of its mysterious stair-way. Their steps are assured... a sense of fullness of the inner seeking and the outer form marks their achievement in the creation of a space that is luminous.

As the team-leader says, "I read *Savitri* and go to sleep. Ideas come and I write them down."

The new creation is simple.



- by creating shadowy cloth figures (with old Prosperity dhotis) on stage....

There was no live recitation. The audio was entirely pre-recorded at the School's new studio and was one continuous track of 51 minutes with the lines (clear and evocatively read) woven in with the background score.

The presentation was cinematic in its visual scope and in the clarity and continuity of its sound, and yet had the realness brought in by the live presence of the actors and very quickly drew you into its surreal world.

Like in the recent past, the 1st Dec programme of 2008 was organised and executed primarily by the outgoing students of Knowledge along with some who have recently completed Higher Course. It required all their youth and energy, all

their innovation and familiarity with technology, to put up what was a unique audio-visual experience. Mita '86 spoke to some of them regarding the programme.

AURIJOY:

Initially I wanted to choose 'Descent Into The Night' for the drama's theme, but changed my mind after some consideration because I found it too heavy. I was more intensely drawn by 'The World-Stair' because it encapsulates the whole range of Ashwapati's (and Sri Aurobindo's) voyage through consciousness.

Subsequently, I approached Cristof with this subject matter. Although his first reaction was one of dismay (over the unwieldiness of the subject) he was careful not to dampen our enthusiasm and

creative urge. He encouraged us to think beyond set patterns.

Next I bounced my ideas off some of my friends to explore possibilities. I was always certain that, difficult though the subject was, it could be staged.

As the idea caught on, along with some of the others, I started by setting the canto into sections that could hold as scenes. Along the way, as we experimented with ideas, a picture began slowly to emerge in our minds. Rather than limiting the programme to a viewing experience only, we wanted to draw the audience into living the adventure through the visuals, sounds, emotions, imagination — all coming together to suggest the beauty of the passages. Rather than witnessing someone else's interpretation of Sri Aurobindo's words, which can be limiting, the audience was drawn in to experience all that imagination could suggest.

About the curved wall and the stairs, the initial idea was to construct something within the stage — a flight of steps rising from the fore-



preconceived notions of what could or could not be done. Thinking out-of-the-box, the final idea gradually took shape.

Praful and Rakesh were very helpful, and uncompromisingly exact about executing the ideas.

I think I was able to convey my ideas and conceptions with enough conviction and vividness to carry the other team-members' faith in the project. Differences of opinion notwithstanding, our team was united in its aim and approach: to lead the audience to experience rather than only view the presentation.

Bringing it together without the help of Namrata, Satyajit and Tanmay would have been impossible. Namrata's capacity of management and knowledge of using sound and video editing software were absolutely essential. Satyajit understood the show's concept and his capacity of expression using his body was just what I wanted. Tanmay's work under



ground and sweeping up in a large semi circle to the back wings. But Cristof's idea was to raise a stair that would span the entire width of the hall. Though not feasible, Cristof's idea broke all



the cloth was spectacular, and without his imagination the cloth routine would have ended up as a strange unsuccessful gimmick.

The point of the show, for me, was to create some sort of an experience. I never thought of it as theatre, I know nothing of theatre. In my mind I wanted to somehow merge audio and video to create an alternate reality, a single continuous piece without anything to remind you that 'it' is not real, much like a dream.

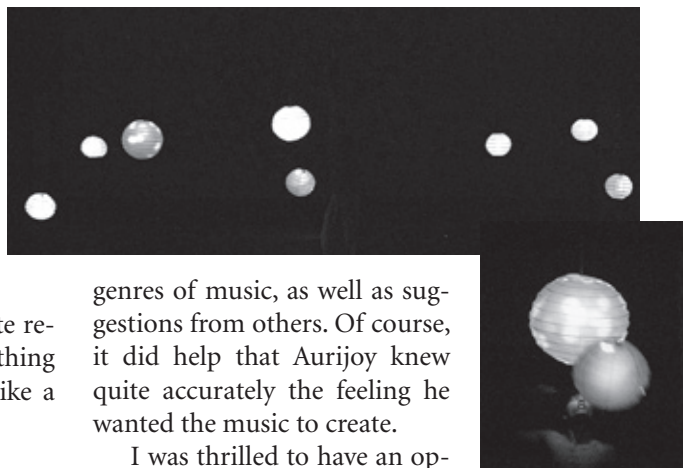
TANMAY:

I was responsible for the little globe lamps. Ambi helped us make them. They were a bunch of LEDs soldered together with a battery holder. Unfortunately they kept blowing and the toughest part were the repairs, a little bit of stress would get the soldering off, so almost every day, including the 1st of December, was spent doing lamp repairs, practically remaking each one every time. But on the final day they behaved themselves beautifully.



NAMRATA:

I was in charge of creating the sound track. I listened to many different kinds of music. I was always careful to keep my mind open to different



genres of music, as well as suggestions from others. Of course, it did help that Aurijoy knew quite accurately the feeling he wanted the music to create.

I was thrilled to have an opportunity to work in the new studio, and especially, to handle Sunil-da's equipment. I strived to achieve excellence for every track that we recorded, an urge reinforced by Shashwat. Owing to his expertise, he was of great assistance, not only for the recording but also in pointing out to us excellence in sound technology: what was acceptable and what was not in recording and sound tech.

The tracks eventually chosen were from different rock bands: Pink Floyd; Radiohead; Sigür Ros (I guess people are surprised to know that much of what they heard was "rock music"). There was also a choir (the "Lux Aeterna" by György Ligeti) and orchestral music (the "Gayane Ballet Suite" by Aram Khachaturian), both of which were tracks from the movie: *2001: A Space Odyssey*. There were also some experimental compositions by Michael Northam and a portion of Sunil-da's New Year music of '95.

An interesting feature of the soundtrack was that the music was arranged to cover blackouts as well as to establish continuity between scenes. The music, the stage setup and the lighting were so closely synchronised that the tiniest hitch somewhere could throw the entire production off sync; the smallest delay was potentially disastrous. And this did happen on dress-rehearsal day. Everything that could possibly go wrong, did go wrong. The cyclone had torn the cyclorama; the projector malfunctioned; the globe lamps broke (this was not unusual). Remarkably though, and by Mother's Grace, on the final day things worked out as smoothly as a well-oiled machine. ☘

DYNAMIC HOCKEY MASTER

*We present a collage of memories on our well-loved hockey coach, **Vedprakash Pabrai**, who passed away on 2nd May, 2008.*

HIS CHILDREN REMEMBER

Vedprakash's children, Bindu '78, Varun '82 and Vandana '83, go down memory lane:

There are hundreds of stories that our father used to tell us throughout his life. But the ones that were the most told and the most exciting were the ones about the game of hockey. Such was his passion and love for the game that he would keep at least one hockey stick in each bedroom. Whenever there was some "hulchul" in the neighbourhood, papa would simply grab one of the hockey sticks and rush to the scene. The hockey stick was like his security blanket!

Our father was born, on the 23rd of December 1923, in Mirpur, Kashmir. His family owned a huge farmhouse in Baramullah, where they spent six months of summer every year. The remaining six were spent in Lahore, Pakistan. All around this farmhouse there were acres of apple orchards. They were about a dozen brothers and nephews. All of them shared a great passion for the game of hockey. There was enough place in the farmhouse to enjoy the game thoroughly. Even when they had no ball to play with they would pluck raw apples and use them as hockey balls!

Later on, papa went to D A V college in Jalandhar which is famously known as the nursery of hockey.

After the partition of the country, the entire family moved to Cuttack, Orissa. Even there, he started playing hockey with local friends. While in Cuttack, he got married and started his own family. All three of us were born there. It is in Cuttack that he was fortunate enough to meet

Nari Babu, through whom we came in touch with the Mother. In 1964, we moved to Pondicherry and joined the Ashram. And so began the most amazingly beautiful life.... It was Paradise!

DADA'S COMMENTS:

Vedprakash came from Orissa and settled here. In my first acquaintance with him I liked him! And he liked me! We became very good friends.

He was a real man! With upright speech and headstrong constitution. He always stood for Truth. He was extremely kind-hearted and helpful. He was very friendly with me. I liked him very much. Mother also liked him a lot and helped him a lot. He was straightforward and even quite jolly. He was strong from childhood. When others ran one mile he would run five miles.

Vedprakash and I followed the same path. It is because of him that we could open our hockey section. I personally could not play hockey with him as I was with the Mother all the time. We were about the same age. He coached till the age



of 80. I too fell ill at about the same age.

Vedprakash has helped PED acquire some sports equipment through Nari Babu's family from Orissa, which also included full hockey gear...some sticks... balls... etc... to get the game started in the Ashram.

The first stick and ball were sent to the Mother for blessings. Mother took the stick in Her hand but held it on the reverse side. Dada showed Her how to hold the stick. Then She lightly pushed the ball. The family has preserved that ball till today.

One day when Vedprakash went to the Mother for Pranam, She asked him, "Are you teaching hockey?" Vedprakash answered, "Yes, Mother!" Then the Mother told him, "It is good! It is very, very good!"

A CAPTAIN RECALLS

Parul Chakraborty, captain of Group B2, recalls:

We all remember Vedprakash Pabrai as a Hockey Master, whatever may have been his other qualifications. Learning of the game of hockey starts in group B2. I started learning hockey with my group B2 in the year 1965-1966. Initially I found it to be a dangerous game for teenagers and felt that it was a game with a weapon in the hands. It was Vedprakashji who convinced me that once you learn the proper technique and follow the rules and regulations, it can be a very interesting game, just like any other game: football, basketball, volleyball etc...

Vedprakashji was an impressive and dynamic coach: stalwart, strong, tall, fair and handsome in his game moves. For his age he was very active and encouraging. He played with the boys and girls and taught them the basics of the game. If need be he used the blackboard to show the positions in the game. He was very enthusiastic and

would encourage the children by shouting "HIT LAGAO!" He had a resonant commanding voice which acted as a current in the veins.

Vedprakashji was regular in his duties till the end. He loved group B2. Towards the end his children, or even his grandchildren, Sutanu and Tanushree, would bring him to the Sportsground. On his birthday he distributed chocolates to the children of Group B2. He was a very loving, caring and encouraging coach. I can still remember his enthusiastic involvement. He kept up this interest for as long as his body and active mind could participate in his effort to come to the game spot.

We appreciate his sincere services to the Mother. Our thanks and prayers to Vedprakashji who has left us physically but his memories linger amongst us as a living example of dedication.

Vedprakash also had the privilege of becoming the President of the Pondicherry State Hockey Association as well as a member of the Executive



Committee of the Indian Hockey Federation.

Just a few years before he passed away he wrote a prayer to the Mother with tears in his eyes:

"Sweet Mother,

Pray, grant total Resurgence of Indian Hockey and to be at the summit of World Hockey, I place myself, thankfully and gratefully at Thy Lotus Feet for Thy Sweet Will, Thy Sweet Grace and Thy Sweet Blessings." ❀

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The site is divided into six sections:



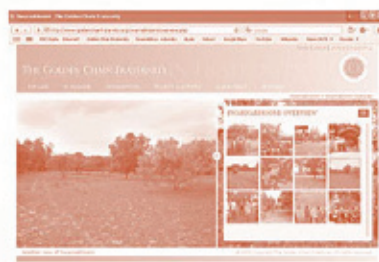
OUR SAICE

Images of SAICE and quotes on education to capture life in our School. Also video clippings of latest programmes and events.



GC MAGAZINE

Download back issues of The Golden Chain in PDF format. Search through our article database.



SWARNABHOOMI

Find out about our Lake land — including the multipurpose building that is coming up.



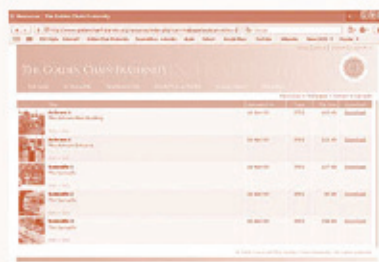
PROJECTS & ACTIVITIES

Information regarding projects and activities supported and facilitated by The Golden Chain Fraternity.



ALUMNI FAMILY

All available outgoing photos. Information on joining the SAICE Yahoo group. Images from Reunions.



RESOURCES

Ashram-related digital content (wallpapers, music, powerpoint presentations etc.) available for free download.

Rs. 18/-