

The

Golden Chain

Alumni Journal of Sri Aurobindo International Centre of Education



Taking Integral Education to the USA

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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A student from the Integral Elementary School in the USA holds a globe. At its centre is the logo of her school.

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Students engaged in various activities at the Integral Elementary School.

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THE EDITORS' PAGE

by Sunayana Panda '79

If I was told that I could see only one photograph of the Mother for the next one year I know which one I would choose. It is a picture taken in the 1950s when the Mother came out to the Playground and participated in all the activities of the Ashram. We see her standing in the Guest House courtyard, in her *salwar kameez* and kittycap. She is holding a book in her hand and she is giving a dictation. There is a group of children sitting on the ground. They are bent over their notebooks which are also on the ground, and they are writing the dictation.

The frozen moment that we see in this picture holds a clear message. When you want to build up an educational institution, the most important things you need are the will to do it, the dream and the vision. In that photo there are no chairs or tables, no rooms, no piles of books, no equipment and no boards. You cannot see the rules and regulations, nor can you see the idea of feasibility. But you can so clearly see the love that wants to create something new and the little minds so eager to learn.

Before us is the founder of the school, giving a dictation to the children who are in a courtyard adjacent to the playground where they had been playing only a short while ago. In fact, the children are still in the clothes in which they were playing. It is night time and they are sitting under an open sky. The picture speaks volumes. Any time and any place is fine when you have a dream to fulfil.

And that dream was fulfilled. She did create a centre of education unlike any other. The truth is that the Mother did not wake up one morning and say, "I am going to establish a school that will be like no other". The responsibility of the school was more or less thrust on her. Children started coming to the Ashram to be safe from the dangers of the war. She took up the challenge, seeing in it an opportunity to enlarge her field of work.

Half a century has passed since the Mother put in place the final structures and the codes of practice of a school which did away with all the stress that goes with primary and secondary education. Only in the last one year has the Indian government woken up to the possibility of making radical changes in the national education system. Even the world of cinema and entertainment has not remained unmoved by the crying need for change. In August 2009 the Indian Parliament passed an act to guarantee the right of children to free and compulsory education. Already there has been talk of how children can be freed from the pressure under which they work in secondary schools. It remains to be seen whether all this can be implemented.

It was not the building or the books that made the school in the Ashram so unique. It was the philosophy behind the system, the dedicated people working in it and the intention of wanting to be true to one's purpose. The system of Integral Education is linked by an umbilical cord to the philosophy of the Integral Yoga. One has to believe that the human being is made up of four parts — the physical, the vital, the mental and the psychic — in order to then go ahead and educate these different parts. One has to believe that the purpose of life on earth is to grow and evolve into a higher state of consciousness in order to believe in this system of education.

One of the great questions that has hung over the minds of the devotees who have followed the spiritual path shown by Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, and who are not living in the Ashram, is, "Can the experiment of Integral Education at the Ashram be replicated elsewhere?" We have already read about the various attempts carried out in India. In this issue of *The Golden Chain* we get an answer from Prapanna Smith who is very courageously trying to transplant the ideas of this new form of education onto American soil. ❧

STAY HUNGRY, STAY FOOLISH

Tejas Mehta '99, Senior Special Correspondent, NDTV, tells us about life as a TV journalist

I still recall that bloody morning in Ahmedabad, a night after it fell victim to a series of blasts in July 2008.

I was at the municipal hospital where Indian Mujahideen terrorists had, for the first time in India's recent history, planted a bomb at a hospital, targeting the injured that were being rushed for medical attention from other locations where explosions had shaken Gujarat's capital.



Discussing the suspects of the 26/11 terrorist attack on the show "The Buck Stops Here" with Barkha Dutt

It was a car-bomb. The most powerful I have seen. It had ripped apart the hospital wall, charred the surrounding trees. All that remained of vehicles parked in the compound was mangled metal. The air was thick with the smell of burnt flesh, blood and petrol. A dead pigeon lay just across a bunch of flowers. Every step I took was carefully measured as chunks of human remains were still strewn all over; so were nuts and ball bearings, a grim reminder of what was used as shrapnel.

While I was trying to fathom the devastating intensity of the blast, members of a family, wailing uncontrollably, showed me with trembling hands, the grotesque photograph that had appeared on the front page of a local vernacular paper — I wonder why the newspaper printed it

— that explained their deep agony.

"Two little legs and her frock. That is all that we found," I heard a man cry out painfully.

No matter how many years of journalism one may have completed, even for the most stoic, incidents like these leave a deep impression. It provokes one to ask the most fundamental questions that affect human existence. Shaken, I pondered over the futility of...

"Audio check, Tejas. Please count and give me a thumbs-up if you can hear me," the familiar voice of a female colleague in our Delhi office crackled in my earpiece, bringing me hurtling back to my on-camera reality.

I raised my thumb and quickly counted 1 to 10. "Audio is fine."

"Yes, audio is good," I was assured.

"Hey, the last time we went live there was a lot of feedback. I could hear my voice echo. Can you please fix that?" I pleaded.

"Sure. OK. Stand by. Nidhi is the anchor," the voice crackled again.

"10 seconds."



In Gadchiroli, Maharashtra, covering elections held in spite of a Naxal boycott

Welcome to my life of dualities! Off camera I may have to deal with numbing realities like a

bomb blast or an earthquake. But in a matter of minutes, I will have to go live, on-camera, and try my best not to betray the fear or the pain I may have experienced. I will have to gather my emotions, keep them aside, calm down and focus on doing my job: informing and giving a perspective to the viewer, without panicking or getting excited.



At Sanand, where Cyclone Phet hit Gujarat before veering off towards Oman

This is, thankfully, a rare and extreme situation, but one that I do encounter as a broadcast journalist working with New Delhi Television — NDTV, where I have been for the past five years.

It's the heady world of fast-paced — sometimes too fast even for us to play catch-up — adrenaline-rushing, right-now broadcast journalism, which has now been for a few years, breathlessly on the roll 24 hours, 365 days a year. I suppose the name of my channel — NDTV 24X7 says it all!

I have always enjoyed writing and so I began my career as a print journalist with the Indian Express newspaper, but moved on to TV news primarily for two reasons: the power of impact the audio-visual medium carries and the exposure to national and international news developments. Of course, needless to say, since NDTV was an established brand, it wasn't that hard to choose.

And sure enough, the past 5 years have been rewarding, both at the personal and professional level. Though my specialisation — or beat as it is known in journalistic parlance — is covering legal matters, the nature of TV news exposes a reporter to almost everything: terrorism, bomb blasts, city crime, politics, elections, education, aviation, railways, environment, natural and

manmade disasters, investigations, art and culture and of course, sports.

Moreover, I've also been lucky to travel across our beautiful country: from the non-descript but beautiful Dholavira village in Kutch, just a few kilometres from the Pakistani border, to the verdant landscapes of Goa and Mangalore on the Western belt of the peninsula, to the barren lands of Vidarbha in Madhya Maharashtra.

Sure enough, the job is exciting and demanding, and keeps you on your toes by making you think on your feet! But behind the so-called glamour of being on national television, is an extremely uncertain, hard and exhausting lifestyle.

Much like policing and practising medicine, journalism too is not a typical '9 to 5' occupation. Though that's exactly what I love about it — the unpredictability of news can keep you chasing a story for long hours, where one has to literally toil, waiting, sometimes standing for hours in the sun or the rain, without food or water. The average working time can be anywhere between 10 to 14 hours. You could be relaxing at home on your day off and all of a sudden, you could be called in, asked to take the first flight and rush somewhere.

And unlike in a newspaper, where your write-up will only appear the next day, thus giving the journalist sufficient time and space, the 'right



Dr Pranjoy Roy, the president of NDTV, asks Tejas a question during a show highlighting how badly India's beaches have been hit by man-made disasters

now' factor of broadcast news puts immense pressure on the field journalist to ensure that work is delivered in as short a deadline as possible.

I joined the profession as I discovered it was a perfect mix of what I enjoyed doing most: understanding life and the world around me,

writing or talking about it and travelling. I also realised that the unabated exposure to the myriad facets of life, more often than not, ensures it takes far less time to comprehend the realities of the world around, compared to what somebody else would experience in the same duration in another profession.

That's a situation that could foster in some maturity but is also capable of promoting the cynic. The more one is faced with discomfiting truths of life, the more one wonders: Will politicians *ever* have the best interests of the people in mind? Will we *ever* have proper roads, quality infrastructure and clean, hygienic living conditions? Will anything *ever* be possible without corruption? Will the Kashmir issue *ever* be resolved? Will terrorism *ever* end? Will poverty *ever* be reduced?

These are issues one reflects upon often and it can be rather debilitating if one spends too much time mulling over questions that have no immediate answers.

This is especially true when one is faced with disturbing occurrences like the Ahmedabad blasts. Death, I personally believe, is the hardest to

cover. A son killed in a terrorist attack, a daughter burnt alive by her in-laws, in a fit of rage a baby smashed against the edge of a wall, a grandfather crushed by a massive boulder.... A million ways to die, but the grief is just the same.

While the profession can be extremely rewarding, sadly, there are media companies that don't follow the best of ethics. Public interest has given way to entertainment for the masses. TRPs (television rate points) and advertising revenues — though most controversially counted — matter more than real issues. Yellow journalism, which was once restricted to tabloids, has unfortunately now gone mainstream. The meaning of news itself seems to have changed.

The silver lining? The broadcast industry is still taking baby steps, growing up, rather immature as most analysts proclaim. Our American counterparts had also suffered the same crisis, which we are currently facing. But as their industry matured, so did the quality of news.

Till that hopefully happens, my mantra: stay hungry, stay foolish. Hungry to learn more. Foolish enough to keep me grounded. ☼

AT THE FIFA WORLD CUP

Mohini Ranjan Mishra '87 (Tulu) is currently the Chief of Sports Bureau with the Press Trust of India (PTI), the country's premier news agency. In a career spanning over two decades, he has covered major international and national sporting events, including various Olympic, Asian and Commonwealth Games and Cricket World Cups. He remembers his latest assignment covering the FIFA football World Cup that was held in South Africa.

As I stepped out of the swanky O R Tambo International airport in Johannesburg, I just could not escape it... the football World Cup fever. Like any other sports journalist, I had always nurtured this hope of covering the FIFA World Cup some day and when it came my way, it took some time to sink in.

Having been in this profession for so long, I knew it was a challenging assignment for more than one reason, as for the first time, a sizable Indian media contingent was there to cover it. So you can imagine the rat race for exclusives and scoops....



My sole objective was to cover the events from an Indian perspective, trying to reach out to the

Indian audience who have largely been brought up on an overdose of cricket. Football is gradually gaining popularity in India but it cannot in any way match cricket which is a religion. So it was certainly not an easy task to find Indian angles



"If you can't beat 'em, join 'em." Tulu blows on the vuvuzela.

and flavours for your stories, especially when India is nowhere in the World Cup scene.

Apart from the soccer action on the field, what struck me most about this World Cup was the splendid organisation and how every little detail was taken care of. The South Africans proved to the world that they could do it. Everything moved with clockwork precision.

The mood was fantastic at the magnificent Soccer City stadium in Johannesburg. The Calabash, as the stadium is called, shaped as it is like an African beer pot, was like a cauldron on match days. The constant din of the vuvuzelas reached a crescendo whenever the teams took to the field.

Many of my colleagues asked me whether I had to use ear plugs to shut out the din of the vuvuzelas, but honestly it did not seem too bad inside the stadium. You got so absorbed by the whole atmosphere that the sound was not much of a problem.

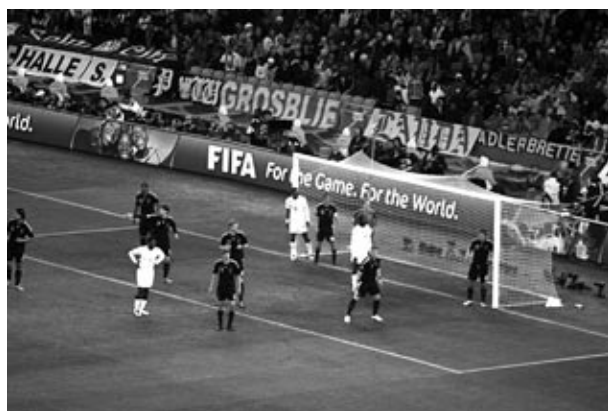
Although it was winter, around 5 °C at night, the atmosphere in the stadiums was electric. I have been to so many major events in my career, but somehow this excitement seemed so different. It was a new experience and every minute was worth it!

There were some apprehensions about security in South Africa which has a relatively high crime rate, but I must say that the thousands of football fans who flocked to the stadiums did not seem to worry about mugging at all. There were a few isolated cases here and there and a few journalists became victims, but on the whole the World Cup passed off smoothly.

Another aspect of the World Cup which amazed me is the crowd management. Thousands of fans, from across the world, streamed into the stadiums but everything was orderly; there was none of the chaos one sees at an Indian stadium handling this kind of a crowd. There were hundreds of police and security personnel around, but you didn't feel their presence much.

When you leave the stadium, you realise what a difference seeing a match live makes; the full view of the field, the players' positions, fans' reactions, the incessant buzz of the vuvuzelas, all add to the magical experience of seeing a World Cup match live.

In a few months' time, New Delhi will be staging the Commonwealth Games and the world's focus will be on India. As things stand today, everything seems to be in a chaos and I sometimes wonder whether all the infrastructure and other works will be completed on time. It will surely be done, but it will be a mad rush.



Like a true Indian wedding, everything will be ready at the last minute but are we really equipped to deliver a world class Games? Can we match the South Africans? We will know in October. ❧

THE SOUL-SCRATCHING YATRA

Devendra Sureka '80 travels and contemplates.

This is the 4th day on a hermit's trip — it's the 22nd of February 2010. Das and I have come out of Pondy on a trip to... God only knows where. But the beginning is the religious trip to Puri, where every year there's a film festival called BYOFF (Bring Your Own Film Festival). As the name says it all, amateurs and aspiring film makers can have a platform to showcase their work....

What makes this trip different is that we are trying to realise ourselves or whatever there is to realise.

The interesting thing is that we have carried very varied reading material to keep us company. And as I start to read from the first booklet, called *An Intelligent Man's Guide to the Hindu Religion*, well, the first guidance we receive is this: "...the instinctive quest for God comes to us first in the form of a general uneasiness. The mind becomes restless and loses its taste for many of the things to which it was formerly adhering. A vacuum or emptiness is felt in the core of our heart. To fill this vacuum we engage in various kinds of pursuits. When the source of joy is located outside our being we soon get tired of it and become disillusioned, begin to look for the Real elsewhere. The cinema, radio, TV, cocktails, cards and all such shortcut devices to happiness drop away from our interest, leaving behind only their boring shadows in our memory. We get the clues for a more lasting joy when we seek for it in our own being." It is quite shockingly striking that we get in words the guidance from the beginning of our trip.

The next suggestion comes from the same

book: "Ours is an age when people spend all their time and energy to accumulate material values in life. It is very rarely that we find somebody of real worth getting out of this maddening crowd of ignoble strife to spend his time and energy for the proper assessment of spiritual values. Such a revelation of religion, when expressed clearly to the masses, the spiritual attainment of one goes to the benefit of the multitude, and there is no other activity greater than this to a wise man."

Well at least it feels like our paths are being lit nice and bright so we don't get lost....

Talking about yesterday, it was 21st of February. Significantly it was My Mother's Birthday (the Mother's birthday). So we decided to go and have Jagannath Darshan. Being on this spiritual quest I was very seriously looking for the next milestone or some significance.

And we had the horrible experience of practically being pushed out of the temple. I thought and pondered over this, because this was a trip during which I was very open to my SOUL. The realisation came today in the morning, that God is everywhere. You don't have to go to temples or shrines. You've evolved out of this. And here comes the bomb planted in my next milestone: "...that when a certain number of people evolve, the entire human race begins to evolve. We don't know how many are needed — but we know that's how it works." This is from the next book I'm reading by Paulo Coelho — *By the River Piedra I Sat Down and Wept*. This is derived from an experiment conducted in Indonesia with monkeys. A scientist was able to teach certain monkeys to wash the bananas before eating them. Cleansed



of sand and dirt, the food was more palatable. The scientist — who did this only because he was studying the learning capacity of the monkeys — did not imagine what would eventually happen. So he was surprised to see that the other monkeys on the isle began to do the same. And then one day, when a certain number of monkeys had learned to wash their bananas, the monkeys on all of the other islands in the archipelago began to do the same thing. What was most surprising though, was that the other monkeys learned to do so without having had any contact with the island where the experiment had taken place.

Yes, the world is at a point when many people are receiving the same order: “Follow your dreams, transform your life, take the path that leads to God. Perform your miracles. Cure. Make prophecies. Listen to your Guardian Angel. Transform yourself. Be a warrior and be happy as you wage the good fight. Take risks.” This is again from the book by Paulo Coelho. This passage is practically like I was receiving a Military ORDER to listen to my Soul.

Coming to base we have just finished 2 days of BYOFF. The second day screened a few good documentaries as well as interesting movies... none that really stayed with you, but relaxing.

Ramli, with his Sutra dancers, is also here in Z hotel — very humble and quiet people. And the Man mountain (Lalit) also.

Here we are waiting for directions from within us, everything we read or see gives us glimpses of every kind but still no clear signals, or our doubts have shrouded our minds and don't let the signals be correctly read. I'm not looking for salvation in one day or one week but need to know for sure that the path we are on is the right direction at least.

The *dalma* story. *Dalma* is an Oriya preparation of dal and vegetables together (could be dal and meat too). In the train my friend Das, told me this: “If you go to a doctor for some stomach illness, he will tell you, ‘we can do this or this or this’ but what he does not give you is a simple Digene tablet to get rid of your acidity problems.” The same way he says, “My wife is a great cook — everyone says it and I accept it too. But I want to eat simple *dalma* and rice and not some exotic dish. That I don't get.” We had not eaten through our train journey, lived only on bananas. We reach Bhubaneswar, we are picked up by my friend Deba's driver and driven to his house, and for dinner the main item is... right, you've guessed it, *DALMA*. Even this suggested that our little prayers were being heard.... ❧

THOUGHTS ON THE LAST ISSUE

Prithwindra Mukherjee

Received the GC issue commemorating Sri Aurobindo's reaching Pondicherry. A very dexterous editorial conception and realisation, with a sumptuous collection of portraits I had never seen. Among topics and faces missing stand out — other than those you may well imagine — V.V.S. Iyer and Rasbehari Bose.

From 1910 on, Iyer was an active link between Pondicherry (=Sri Aurobindo) and London (=Shyamji Krishnavarma + Madame Cama). Amrita-da remembered him very well. J.C. Ker has published ample hints about Iyer's restless doings.

After the almost successful attempt to kill Hardinge in Delhi (23/12/1912), Rasbehari had gone underground. During the flood relief at

Burdwan, in 1913, Rasbehari learnt from Jatin Mukherjee about the latter's plans of an insurrection during the coming War: Amarendra Nath Chatterjee organised several meetings between the two. Jatin Mukherjee added “a new impulse” to Rasbehari's zeal : “In him R.B. discovered a real leader of men,” writes Uma Mukherjee¹ (*Two Great Indian Revolutionaries*, 1966, pp.118-119). R.B. requested Motilal Roy “to pay a personal visit to Pondicherry in order to obtain the blessings of Sri Aurobindo for the contemplated armed rising.(...) After three months' stay with Sri Aurobindo (Sept.-Nov. 1913) M.R. returned to Chandernagore with the latter's moral sanction to the cause.”

This tiny detail suggests that it is high time

1. No blood relation with Jatin Mukherjee

Continued on page 14...

CELEBRATING SRI AUROBINDO'S ARRIVAL IN PONDICHERRY

Sunayana Panda '79 reviews the events organised for the Celebrations of 4th April 2010, the centenary of Sri Aurobindo's arrival in Pondicherry



Presentation of Sri Aurobindo's Sonnets



Classical Music at the Theatre



Heritage Walk

24th March: Presentation of Sri Aurobindo's Sonnets

On 24th March there was a programme in the school courtyard. It was titled "I am" and was a presentation of some sonnets by Sri Aurobindo which are written in the first person. The recitation was combined with music composed by Sebastien and some of the poems were accompanied with movements choreographed by Sunayana. The participants were mainly former students of various age-groups.

26th 27th 28th March: Classical Music Programme at the Theatre

There was a three-day music festival at the Theatre which was sponsored by the Government and organised by PondyCAN. It included vocal as well as instrumental music in both Carnatic and Hindustani styles. There was a grand finale with Bombay Jayashree's concert and Hari Prasad Chaurasia playing the flute. It was attended not only by members of the Ashram but also by the people of the town and many dignitaries. A large screen was installed in the courtyard where people could sit on chairs in the open air and watch the musicians.

This was one of the events that PondyCAN had organised (see article which follows) together with the Department of Art and Culture as well as the Department of Tourism of the Pondicherry Government.

28th March & 2nd April: Heritage Walk

This activity was organised by The Golden Chain Fraternity and a large number of people gave their names for the walk. We visited three of the houses where Sri Aurobindo had lived between 1910 and 1922: Shankar Chetty House, Raghava Chetty House and "Guest House".

Two of the houses could not be visited because they have been demolished and new structures have come up in their place. We had the privilege of going up to the second floor of Shankar Chetty house. We did not visit the houses in a chronological order because we had to visit Guest House first in order to allow the children who play there to continue their activities as usual. As the number of participants was very large we had to visit each house in batches.

This allowed us to stop in front of each house and listen to the explanations given by the four leader-guides. There were interesting stories of special events which had taken place in each house. We started the walk under the windows of Sri Aurobindo's room and we also ended our tour at that place.

29th March: Commemorative Run

The Government held a commemorative run. There were also many who walked and some went on cycles. T-shirts and caps were distributed to 500 people —participants and others.

29th March to 10th April: Exhibition on Sri Aurobindo's Arrival

This Exhibition was held in our Exhibition Hall and the material was created by the Archives. The show was open to the public and a number of the people of the town visited it. Many rare photographs were put up for the first time and we also got to see rare documents. The

exhibition gave an overview of the historical facts connected with Sri Aurobindo's last days in Bengal and his first decade in Pondicherry.

31st March: Narad's Choir Performs in the Hall of Harmony

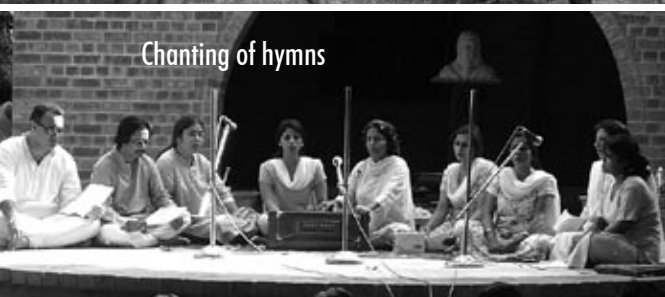
This programme was planned right from December 2009. The participants were mainly students, former students and teachers. It was directed by Narad with the help of Cristof. Along with songs which were sung either as solos or as choirs there were also a few poems by Sri Aurobindo. It was held in the Hall of Harmony and was about an hour long.



At the Service Tree



Warming up



Chanting of hymns



The building



Inauguration

3rd April, Morning: Swarnabhoomi Get-together

The get-together at Swarnabhoomi and the inauguration of the building there will remain in everybody's memory for a very long time. The organisation was flawless, meticulously planned and carefully followed up by our team.

We reached there by 7.30 and gathered around the Service Tree (planted in 2007 from a cutting of the Ashram Service Tree) for a short concentration.

Then we moved to the space in front of the little house. In front of us, in the covered veranda was an exquisite decoration. On a pedestal was placed a white bust of Sri Aurobindo, under which there was a beautiful pattern made with flowers.

After a short meditation, as the morning light came onto the little stage (created with much foresight) Surabhi and her group chanted hymns and gave an auspicious beginning to our day. After that some former students from the batch of 1990 read out a Sanskrit poem composed by Arya-Vishnu on Swarnabhoomi. Then we all lit incense sticks as a symbol of our prayers to invoke the divine grace for this new beginning.

We then had breakfast together, under the branches of the trees. The cooks were right behind the counters and throwing all thoughts of caution everyone generously helped themselves to the hot jalebis.

After breakfast we had a short performance where four sonnets (for 4th April) from Sri Aurobindo were recited, some accompanied by movements. This was done by the former students who had participated in the programme which was held on 23rd March. The sonnets were followed by a speech by Richard Hartz titled "Sadhana and Sahitya". The talk was about Sri Aurobindo's early years in Pondicherry and the inner discipline he was following as well as his literary works of that time. After the talk a thanksgiving ceremony was held for the workers who built the house and there were short addresses by the GCF trustees encouraging all former students to participate in and contribute to the various projects going on.

Once this was over we planted some trees and played volleyball. Neither the sun nor long years of inactivity came in the way of everyone having a good time. Meanwhile Devashish Patnaik and Dilip Patel were available for those who wanted to be shown around the building and know how the construction had been done. They pointed out what materials had been used to make the structure eco-friendly and less expensive.

By this time some more people had joined us and we had a sumptuous lunch as we caught up with old friends. As some of us got down to winding up and putting things away, in little groups people started going back to Pondicherry and the inauguration came to an end. There was satisfaction on all sides — among the organisers and those who had come to participate.

3rd April, Afternoon: Souvenir Distribution

Almost at the last moment we were informed that there was to be a distribution of a souvenir specially made for the occasion, which was going to be held in the Hall of Harmony. We gathered at 3 pm to receive a bag and a photograph.

3rd April, Evening: Music programme in the Playground by Shobha-di

One hundred and thirty singers (students and teachers of our vocal music section) performed in the Playground which was filled with eager listeners. The audience sat facing the western end of the Playground. There were prayers, recitations, chanting of Sanskrit hymns composed by sadhaks and chorus singing. The programme lasted about an hour. This programme also had been planned since long and the rehearsals had been going on for some time.

4th April: Darshan - Visit to Sri Aurobindo's Room.

This year 4th April was observed as a Darshan Day. There was a visit to Sri Aurobindo's room. Generally, for the April Darshan there is hardly any crowd and Sri Aurobindo's room is open only up to 12 o'clock. But this being a special occasion there was a large number of people and the room was kept open until 4 pm.



Breakfast



Richard Hartz speaks



Munna speaks



Volleyball



Souvenir distribution



Chanting programme in the Playground



Chanting at Sunrise



Concentration at the beach
at 4pm on 4th April 2010

Bust from Kolkata



"Lap of Honour"



Government-organised programme
in the Old Port premises

4th April, 6 am: Music Programme at the Beach.

This programme was a repeat of the second part of the performance held in the Playground.

At dawn, before sunrise, the students and teachers of the music section of the school gathered in front of the sea, next to the old pier, where a hundred years ago Sri Aurobindo had first set foot in Pondicherry. There were eighty-two participants this time and they chanted the prayers together. Officially this programme was sponsored by the Government of Pondicherry. Chairs had been provided so that people could sit. There was a fine atmosphere and most of the people gathered there were connected with the Ashram. As the sun rose the singers were lit up by the rays of the morning light.

4th April, 4 pm: 'Lap of Honour', Bust Arrives

This is the exact time when Sri Aurobindo had arrived in Pondicherry. Under the initiative of Ramesh Patel, a devotee from London, a walk/run was organised which started from the old pier, near Gandhi Statue, and finished at the South gate of the School. All who had registered for this 'Lap of Honour' got a commemorative medal with Sri Aurobindo's face engraved on it.

At about the same time a bust of Sri Aurobindo, after making a symbolic (train) journey from Kolkata, was formally installed in Sri Aurobindo's room in the Guest House.

4th April, 5 pm: Talk and Cultural Programme in Tamil at the Old Port

In the Old Port premises there was a cultural programme which was also organised by the Pondicherry Government. There were speeches by several dignitaries on Sri Aurobindo. Dr. Jagannath of the Ashram spoke in Tamil about the life and work of Sri Aurobindo which the general public appreciated a lot.

Gangai Amaran, the well-known music director who had come down from Chennai, performed with his group. They sang songs from his repertoire including those composed by him on the Mother and Sri Aurobindo.

The evening was rounded off with a spectacular display of fireworks.

4th April, 6.45 pm: March Past in Playground.

When the planning was being done for the celebration, The Golden Chain Fraternity trustees had requested Pranab-da to allow former students to participate in the Playground March Past. He had consented but, given that there is very little space in the ground, he had said that they would stand in “garde-à-vous” on one side of the ground while group members marched.

We were all told beforehand that the women had to come in white saris or white salwar-kameezes and the men in white trousers and white T-shirts. Everyone had to have white shoes and socks. People got down to very quickly acquiring this uniform by begging, borrowing and buying.

When the March Past ended we sat down for meditation. There was a unanimous feeling of exhilaration at having participated in this event.

There was equally a great joy among our old teachers and coaches to see us standing in uniform in the Playground. It was such a privilege to stand in front of the map of undivided India with Mother’s symbol at the centre and to be able to sing “Vande Mataram”. For many it was the crowning moment of the celebrations. ❧



PONDY CELEBRATES

Probir Banerjee '78H tells us about PondyCAN and the Puducherry Government's participation in the 4th April celebrations

It was the hour before the Government decided to celebrate Sri Aurobindo’s arrival in Pondicherry a hundred years ago. 20th February 2009 — PondyCAN made a presentation to the then Lt Governor of Pondicherry, Shri Govind Singh Gurjar, on the “Human Unity Park”, at the old distillery site, to commemorate Sri Aurobindo’s arrival in this town. The name was in fact suggested by Manoj-da during our discussion about this proposal as an alternative to the Govt. of Pondicherry’s proposal of a “Family Entertainment Centre” (cinplexes and shopping malls) which would mess up this heritage precinct. The Lt Governor appreciated the con-

cept and in fact told the Tourism Minister in our presence that this was a better project. He heard with keen interest when we told him that the Mother wanted the whole town to celebrate Sri Aurobindo’s arrival in Pondicherry.

In no time we got an invitation from the Chief Secretary to discuss the Centenary Celebration. Many projects were discussed and a decision was taken that the year-long celebration would be from 4th April 2010 to 4th April 2011.

Several meetings later, we were informed by the Chief Secretary, that all the ideas were good but there were no funds. Immediately we rushed to Delhi and met Mr Jawhar Sircar, Secretary Art

and Culture, Govt. of India who said that if the Pondy Govt. applied for the funds they would definitely release them. Among several other people, we also met Dr Karan Singh and requested him to take a lead role in the Centenary Celebration as we felt he could influence the Pondy Govt. as well as the Central Govt. The Steering Committee, which we had discussed with him, got formed just by his making a few phone calls. The Chairperson for this committee was the Lt Governor of Pondicherry and included all — Ministers, Bureaucrats, Ashram, Auroville, Sri Aurobindo Society, INTACH and PondyCAN.

In the Steering Committee meeting PondyCAN and INTACH made a presentation of the “Renaissance of Pondicherry”; a total transformation of the town which will have beauty, order and harmony as its underlying principles. The Mother has given us the message, “The world is preparing for a big change” and Sri Aurobindo has said, “...the function of India is to supply the world a perennial source of light and renovation.” Pondicherry, the ancient heritage city and Auroville, the city for the future, can work together and become an example for a harmonious, inclusive and holistic development; they can harness our cultural, spiritual and natural heritage for social and economic development. The presentation was deeply appreciated by one and all and the Chief Minister has sent the 450 crore proposal to the Hon’ble Prime Minister for approval.

On 26th, 27th and 28th March 2010, PondyCAN, with the collaboration of the Pondicherry Govt departments of Art and Culture and Tourism and the Sri Aurobindo Ashram, organised a Music Festival of Carnatic and Hindustani classical music at the Ashram Theatre Hall. Sunaina Mandeem and Dr Veena from Auroville worked relentlessly and ensured that the music lovers of Pondicherry were enthralled by some inspiring music by Pandit Hariprasad Chaurasia (Flute), Ms R Vidya Bharathi (Carnatic vocal), S Kasim

and S Babu (Nadhaswaram), Uday Bhawalkar (Hindustani vocal), Murad Ali Khan (Sarangi), Bombay Jayashri (Carnatic vocal).

On 4th April 2010 PondyCAN orchestrated the main government function:

6.00am — “Century’s Salutations to Sri Aurobindo” held on the beach behind Gandhi Statue (Sanskrit hymns by Shobha-di’s group of about 80 singers).

11.00am — Speech by Dr Karan Singh on the 5 dreams of Sri Aurobindo (this program was eventually held at Bharat Niwas, Auroville on 3rd evening).

6.30pm — Public Function at the Old Port premises which consisted of:

- Inaugural session: the Lt Governor, the Lok Sabha MP, the Chief Minister and other Ministers, and the local MLA spoke about the greatness of Sri Aurobindo. Dr Jagannath of the Ashram spoke in Tamil about the life and work of Sri Aurobindo which the general public appreciated a lot.

- Musical tribute by Shri Gangai Amaran and his group

- Fireworks display

The “Human Unity Park” which had triggered the Centenary Celebration was somehow not coming through even though the bureaucrats liked the concept and our local MLA S.P. Sivakumar had written to the Chief Minister fully supporting the project. Finally in the tourism meeting convened by the Tourism Minister soon after the celebrations, the “Family Entertainment Centre” was scrapped and there was a unanimous endorsement for the “Human Unity Park”. The Chief Secretary even said he would provide the funds. Let us see how the project develops. Let us remember that, “All can be done if the God touch is there” and let us start believing that the work will be at least started on 15th August 2010. After all, what better way can this town celebrate HIS arrival than by laying the foundation for the Renaissance of Pondicherry? ❧

...continued from page 7

“Pondicherry” as an establishment gets rid of some bias concerning Sri Aurobindo’s commitment to the radical (the condescending “Extremist”) revo-

lutionary : the fire that Sri Aurobindo had kindled in J.M. or R.B. was to be transmitted by the latter to Subhas Bose during W.W. II, though the symbolic context had considerably changed. ❧

TAKING INTEGRAL EDUCATION TO THE USA

Prapanna Smith, Ed.D.

In 2002, after several years of preparation, the California-based Center for Integral Education (CIE) opened the doors of the first Integral Education school in the United States, the Rainbow Kids Integral Preschool (RKIP). Four years later CIE opened the Integral Elementary School (IES). Both schools are located in the greater San Diego area. The dream to create such schools had taken root back in 1994, when I went on a journey through India and visited Integral Schools in Dehli, Hyderabad, and in ten locations in the state of Orissa. Shortly thereafter, I left my son, Matthew, at SAICE, where he was to live and learn for the next ten years. Since that time I have often said that the nexus of these two events drove the vision deep into me. Seeing those schools, and leaving my son in a foreign land, had the effect of inspiring me to find a way to introduce Integral Education to American soil. Indeed, I believe this calling was an *adesh* from Mother, and it is She who is supporting this work and helping it to succeed despite all difficulties and obstacles. Finally, I incorporated CIE in 1998 as a California Public Benefit Non-Profit Corporation, then spent two and half years teaching in SAICE until 2001, when I returned to the United States and started working on opening the Rainbow Kids Integral Preschool. The overall vision of the work of CIE is to open schools in three phases: Preschool, Elementary, and then a full K-12 (Secondary) school. Currently CIE is in the middle of phase two.

Opening private schools in the USA is a huge undertaking, one that carries with it great risk, but also wonderful benefits. First, introducing something new from scratch is never easy, particularly when there are limited resources and when the market forces that private education is subjected to can be very challenging. The economic barbarism of our country fosters a culture of distraction and vital enjoyment, all working



Prapanna with students at the entrance of the Integral Elementary School in La Jolla, California

against the sincere urge for inner development and spiritual practice. The aim of education here is not to facilitate the creative pursuit of each student, but to make them into increasingly effective providers and consumers of goods and services in a global and national economy. Fortunately, CIE has managed to build up the infrastructure of its schools through the generosity and support of hundreds of well-wishers and grants from some foundations. Since 2001, CIE has raised nearly

RAINBOW KIDS INTEGRAL PRESCHOOL

Our preschool is licensed to serve children up to six years of age. New students must have attained the age of two and a half years by the time they begin at our preschool.

The teachers observe each child's inclinations and typical areas of focus, and encourage them to develop in those directions, so that they grow according to the best in their own being. By close observation, the teachers try to understand the child's needs, strengths and limitations. The children are not scolded, but discipline is lovingly encouraged.

The child becomes conscious of his/her body through organised physical activities: games, yoga, and dance are used to develop coordination of movement. Special importance is given to training of the senses, and the child is guided to take his first steps in creativity by interesting him in drawing and handwork.

All the children are taught to be brave and fearless. They are encouraged to tell the truth at all times.



In the preschool program, thematic learning forms the core curriculum, with some Montessori instruction as well, with an emphasis on practical life, sensorial development (see box on next page) and social development. Throughout the year there is a progression in complexity of materials offered, and the preci-

sion and refinement of skills and performance expected of the child increases as he matures. We introduce the children to a wide variety of information during the year through our weekly themes. Our themes are as varied as: outer space, pond life, dinosaurs, flowers, the 5 senses, weather, farm life,

etc. Additionally, we have two letters of the week, number of the week, colors of the week, shape of the week, and community worker of the week. We offer some form of creative movement, dance or yoga daily. And we introduce a new continent every eight weeks to the children as well. During each continent's period, we introduce countries, their languages, customs, food, dress, etc.

half a million dollars and has used those funds to invest in the infrastructure for both of its schools, as well as shore up the annual operating budget. Next, finding parents who will pay to have their children educated by a new organisation that has yet to create a long history of student successes can be very difficult.

In the USA people understand that when they have children they will likely have to pay for them to attend preschool, but then from the age of five the children can go to free public schools. Many parents with preschool children can't wait until their kids go to the public schools since that transition will save the family hundreds of dollars per

month. Relatively few people ever even consider private education due to the high costs of tuition and other fees. This reality has made it much harder for CIE to increase enrollment at Integral Elementary even as Rainbow Kids is easily filled to its capacity of about 100 students each year. On the other hand, the Integral Elementary School is slowly growing. With a student body in the 2009-2010 school year reaching 24, we expect to have 35-40 students next school year.

Probably the most inspiring thing for me in this work is to witness the joyful learning among our students in both schools. It is, moreover, a privilege for me to merge my vocation with my

AREAS OF INTEGRAL/MONTESSORI PRESCHOOL CURRICULUM

Practical Life

Purpose: To help the child develop coordination, concentration, a sense of personal independence, and a sense of order.

Children are first drawn to the Practical Life area because these materials are most familiar to them. The exercises of Practical Life



have objects normally encountered in everyday living experiences such as cleaning, pouring, dressing, and polishing. These exercises fall into four main categories: Care of Self; Care of Environment; Grace and Courtesy; and Control of Movement. Many are fundamental exercises that the child needs to master to be able to live and participate in the real adult world.

Sensorial Development

Purpose: To help the child learn to observe carefully, to make comparisons between objects, to form judgments and to reason and decide.

The Sensorial area consists of materials that educate and refine the child's senses. The child learns to recognize similarities and differences, and to discriminate between, and grade, similar objects. These materials help to organise sensory impressions. These skills form the foundation of mastery of tasks involving Math and Languages at the Kindergarten level.

Language

Purpose: To prepare the child for writing and reading.

The Language materials provide a step-by-step progression of activities to develop the necessary skills for speaking, writing, and reading. The hand is strengthened through the use of the Practical Life exercises and the knobbed materials in all areas. Through the use of activities that reinforce precise skills of visual perception, the child learns to observe slight differences of size and shape, which prepares him or her to discriminate between letter shapes. The child learns the phonetic sounds of lower case letters.



Math

Purpose: To help the child develop concepts of numeration, place value, fractions, and the basic operations of addition, subtraction, multiplication, and division.

Montessori principles hold that a child's mind is mathematical and based on the order and perceptual awareness found in the development of the senses. The acquisition of mathematical principles is seen as developing logically from concrete to abstract, and from simple to complex. The child that has mastered the basic concepts involved with Practical Life and Sensorial materials progresses naturally to the Math materials.

sadhana. I am also very fortunate to have a wonderful team of dedicated individuals who are walking this path with me. At times challenges can be overwhelming, particularly since we chose

to subject our work to market forces by opening a private school rather than a charter school in the public system (which, of course, has many bureaucratic challenges and significant barriers

to implementing spiritual components in school programs). In any event, as an entrepreneur once told me, three key components are needed to do this work: a vision, a team, and funding. The first of these is not difficult for anyone with a strong sense that one's life-purpose lies in this work. The second is doable, too, but the third always represents a major challenge. My suggestion for anyone contemplating the opening of any school is... don't do it unless you are prepared to make tremendous personal, emotional, and financial sacrifices for many years, and maybe for the rest of your life! For myself, I have chosen this path, or rather Mother chose it for me, so I have absolutely no regrets. For me there is just boundless joy in the knowledge and conviction that I am fulfilling the mission I was sent here to do.

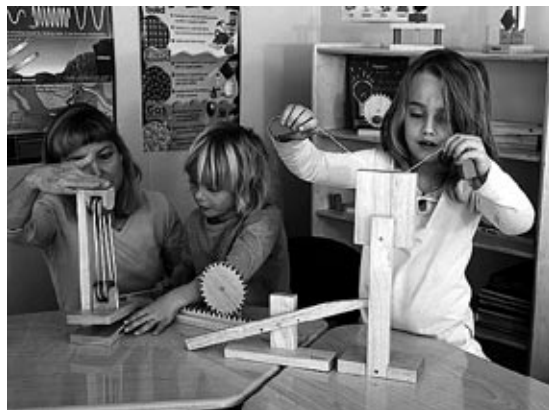
So what is it that CIE offers? Many in the Golden Chain community may wonder to what extent we are able to offer something similar to what is offered at SAICE. Obviously, it would be impossible to transplant the SAICE model to the USA unless it was to be embedded within an intentional community such as the Sri Aurobindo Ashram.



The Integral Elementary School building

However, such a community has yet to develop in America. There is simply nothing comparable to the Ashram in the USA that can support students

with unpaid but dedicated teachers, a larger local and world-wide community dedicated to the Ideal of Human Unity, near-free room and board,



and an infrastructure required for an authentic Integral Education experience for students. Instead, CIE has had to build a local but geographically disparate community of parents, students, and teachers. All of us are private individuals, with private lives and needs, and exist in a world in which earning a living is a necessity. That is,

transactional relationships define the working milieu of the organization. The teachers are paid, parents pay tuition and fees, and costs for rent and other operating expenditures largely govern what the school can and cannot provide for students. Education in the USA can be very expensive!

All that said, there is a great deal that CIE can offer to its students that is similar to what is offered at SAICE, and yet unique when compared to other

private schools in the USA. We offer a very low student-teacher ratio of about 12 to 1. This allows teachers to develop a deep understanding of

A SCHOOL & CLASSROOM STRUCTURE TO MAXIMIZE FREEDOM & PROGRESS

- Student-teacher ratio of about 12:1;
- School organised into three sections: Kinder-



garten (20 students, 2 teachers), Grades 1-3 (Section A, with 45 students, 4 teachers), and Grades 4-6 (Section B, also with 45 students, 4 teachers);

- School structure (into Sections A and B) is based on social realities of mixed aged groupings and multiple human interactions between teachers and students of all ages (rather than on the industrial-age model's traditional classroom structure of segregating children into large single age groups working with an isolated teacher);
- Kindergarten class is a self-contained classroom where children will become prepared to enter into the Section A program;
- Technology integrated throughout the school (not set aside in a designated computer lab) that provides regular access to digital

resources and computer software for learning and creativity;

- Daily program nurtures the mind, body, heart and soul, and includes morning meditation time, yoga, and physical education;
- Space provided for an art center and for a quiet room — to be designated the “Room of Silence” — where students and staff can go to meditate or study in an absolutely silent and consecrated atmosphere;
- The learning environment is rich in resources, providing a variety of hands-on activities, books and literature, audio-visual media, and computer technology. The school is structured, not with classrooms with desks in rows, but rather with stations and centres where students can gain first-hand experiences that are rewarding and enjoyable. Within a Free-Progress setting children find that there



are many opportunities for explorations and healthy experiences of all kinds, both in the classroom and in the community at large.

each of their students, and to cultivate strong relationships with them. In fact, at IES we have two brothers in the school this year from Saudi Arabia whose father recently told me that his family's experience with us has completely changed his idea of what education should be. He said that he and his wife both wept when they read their boys'

teacher narratives we provided with their report cards. He told me that he and his wife were deeply moved when they understood how well our teachers have gotten to know their boys in such a short time. The teacher support of students at IES is very similar to that which we know exists at SAICE.

INTEGRAL ELEMENTARY SCHOOL FAQ

Our elementary school program is located at our La Jolla campus (www.IntegralElementary.com) and supports Kindergarten through Sixth grade.

You say that Integral Education seeks to meet the individual needs of each student. How is this accomplished in practice?

To begin with, the Integral classroom is a small classroom with about a 12 to 1 student-teacher ratio. Each teacher is tasked with having a deep understanding of every student in order to encourage each student's own capabilities and uniqueness. An Individual Learning Plan (ILP) is developed for each student twice a year (in October and March), with the collaboration of parents, teachers, and especially, the students. This approach allows for students to learn at their mental and emotional development level, rather than being forced to match the general common denominator level of their peers.

How do the students study and learn in this kind of process? How do you know if the students are in fact learning?

Instead of rote memorisation the focus is

on gathering and processing information in order to learn how to learn. This is often accomplished through hands-on experiences, projects, and field trips where children are allowed to become very familiar with what they are learning. We use authentic assessment methods that are based upon real-world applications of knowledge and skills. Students create tangible



evidence of learning that is kept in a portfolio, or they demonstrate their new knowledge and skills through dynamic presentations for others to observe. These can take the form of dramatic plays, artistic expressions, technology-based

presentations such as slide presentations or web pages, readings of creative writing, written reports, and so on. Creativity is emphasised rather than requiring students to “fit in” by showing that they know what everybody else knows or “should” know.

Does this mean you don't have academic standards? What does the curriculum consist of?

Our Integral Education program has academic standards and expects results that meet

While CIE emphasises strong academics at its Integral Elementary School in order to meet the cognitive needs of students, we also provide for the affective needs of students through art, drama, music, yoga, Awareness through the Body, and physical education. The trend in the USA these days in both private and public schools is to focus primarily on academic achievement. At CIE, we consider the components for vital and physical education (to use the language of Integral philosophy) to be equally important as the mental education component of our program. In fact, we find that when the vital and physical needs of students

are met, addressing their academic needs becomes very easy. That is, when the affective needs of students are addressed through creative pursuits, the experiences gained there greatly facilitate academic learning. This is one way to understand Integral Education, for it takes up all the parts of the human personality, giving each its proper place in an integral endeavor to educate the whole child. Our goal is not only to do what other schools do (that is, prepare students academically), but to do so in such a manner that they will experience and know the joy of learning, become life-long learners, and discover their aim in life.

or exceed those of comparable academic institutions. Each grade level has what is called a “minimum common syllabus” incorporating the essentials of what is normally accomplished at other academic institutions, but leaving out some of the unnecessary repetition and irrelevant studies sometimes found at those institutions that can lead to disinterest. The curriculum incorporates social studies, reading, language skills, mathematics, life sciences and the arts, including music, dance, drama and visual arts. Learning by doing means children build, care for animals, paint, sing, learn to play instruments, garden, use math manipulatives, learn other languages, and experience different cultures.

This is all very interesting. How can you sum it all up?

Integral Education means that the children are being educated in a way that integrates the modern aim of world knowledge with the ancient aim of self-knowledge. Education in self-knowledge allows students to truly discover who they are and to begin to know their inner spiritual beings, as well as to help them to dis-

cover their life purpose. At the same time they will also be developing world knowledge by cultivating their mental, emotional, and physical capacities and skills. This will prepare them to interact with the world around them in creative and meaningful ways.

The Integral Education Free Progress method of developing the whole being allows children to learn not only what are considered traditional academics, but also to learn to be responsible for their own happiness and emotions. They

learn how to overcome moods, develop conflict resolution skills and the art of friendship, as well as empathy and team building skills. Integral children develop self esteem, independent responses, a relatedness to others, a sense of identity, the ability to think, to solve problems, to make judgments, to reason, and to acquire and organise information.

To sum it all up, the children learn not only how to get along in the world materially, but also how to become resilient, happy people with a solid inner strength and sense of purpose.



One huge difference between SAICE and CIE's schools is the nature of the atmosphere in which they exist. Of course, many or all of us who have lived at or visited the Ashram share the inter-subjective experience of the vast, all-pervading spiritual consciousness that bathes the Ashram atmosphere with its light and presence. The power that emanates from the Samadhi of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, as well as the consciousness arising from the consecrated *tapasya* of the teachers at SAICE, as well as that of the members of the entire Ashram community, is something that cannot be replicated elsewhere,

except, perhaps, in those places where relics have been installed and maintained through the care and devotion of those to whom they have been entrusted. Such a powerful atmosphere is not as evident at CIE's schools, though Mother's influence and presence can be felt and experienced by those who are open to Her.

One way this is done is by placing a copy of *Savitri* in each classroom. Also, daily meditation in both schools helps to cultivate a spiritual atmosphere, as does the explicit intention of the teachers to expressly acknowledge the psychic being of each student. Many of the parents who

bring their children to CIE's school are also very spiritual, much more so than what we typically find among materialistic Americans. Some of



Field trip to the local aquarium

the mothers of our students, in particular, are deeply involved in a wide range of spiritual practices such as meditation, hatha yoga, and subtle energy and lightwork. Several of our moms are practitioners of something called "Soul Memory Discovery" in which they take clients through a deep process to purify their being, develop pathways to access their inmost inspiration, and find meaning and purpose in their lives. In the future, with Mother's Grace, and after we have found our permanent school site, we hope to create an even more powerful atmosphere by housing Sri Aurobindo's relics and creating a sanctuary where all can go and experience the Force of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother that the relics carry with them wherever they go.

So where do we go from here? As previously mentioned, CIE is currently in the midst of the second of three phases in its development and growth. Integral Elementary School will hopefully reach full capacity within the next few years. We still have six years remaining on the lease for our current elementary school site, which means we have at least that much time to locate and buy, or build, a full K-12 Integral

School. To do so, however, we will require resources amounting to millions of dollars. We also plan to create an Integral Teacher Training program where teachers can learn how to meet the integral needs of their students and develop new pedagogy to take advantage of learning environments with low student-teacher ratios, and that offer the widest possible range of activities for students to discover and explore. We would also like to put together some sister-schools' projects in which students at various Integral Schools can connect, become email pals, and maybe have year-long student exchanges, as well as provide the means for teachers to share ideas and arrange visits to each other's schools. There is much work to do, as we aspire to establish Integral Education as a viable alternative for parents who want their children to learn to grow from within, to discover their life purpose, and then contribute to making this world a better one for future generations. If out of this even a few children who are born sadhaks find their way to us and we are able to help them on their way, then we will have done something quite remarkable for the work of Mother and Sri Aurobindo in the USA. ❧



The Integral Elementary School playground

The boxed text has been sourced from:
<http://www.IntegralEducation.org>
<http://www.RainbowKidsSchool.com>
<http://www.IntegralElementary.com>

THE MOTHER AND HER SARIS

Sunayana Panda '79

Those who were fortunate enough to have lived in the Ashram when the Mother was physically present can remember her as a person in addition to thinking of her as the Universal Mother. When they think of her they can remember her smiles, her voice, her gestures, her gait and so many other aspects of a living human being. Perhaps there are several layers of memory superimposed one on top of the other. But to the rest of us, when we think of the Mother we have in our minds the images that we have grown up with. They come to us from the innumerable photographs that have always been around us. We turn to these images to inwardly communicate with her, to pray, to seek solace; but surely over the years we also sometimes stop to admire the pictures for their aesthetic qualities. And sometimes the mind does drift off and we admire the Mother's physical appearance and even her clothes.

It is amazing to see how the Mother went through so many different ways of dressing through her life. We see her in her long French dresses of the end of the 19th century, in kimonos while she was in Japan, after that in saris, then in *salwaar-kameez* and finally in her gowns. One

cannot remain untouched by her elegance and the way she was, at all moments, an embodiment of grace and refinement.

We have grown up looking at her photos, at her beautifully embroidered saris, and so find

nothing out of the ordinary. But seventy years ago many were shocked to see a spiritual guru dressed up in silk saris, in attractive colours. After all, was it not normal for those on the spiritual path to renounce luxury and to be clad in white or saffron cotton clothes? To a question on why the Mother wore such beautiful clothes, Sri Aurobindo had replied that the Divine Mother could not be represented on the earth by ugliness and poverty.

Beauty is a divine attribute and it was natural for the Mother to be tastefully dressed, as we see her in all the pho-

tos. Her beautiful saris were offered to her by the devotees. Some were bought in Bengal and sent, others were embroidered in the Ashram. The ladies of the embroidery department spent all their time and energy creating with thread and needle the exquisite saris which the Mother wore. We read in Vasudha-ben's correspondence about the great pains they took over each of these saris. But at the beginning when the Ashram was still a little



The Mother during pranams on a puja day

community with limited resources, the Mother used to wear ordinary cotton saris which were even patched and darned.

It is interesting to note that when the Mother came to live permanently in Pondicherry in 1920, she wore saris everyday and all the time, as all other *sadhikas* of the time. And, as was the custom then, she also covered her head. From our point of view, looking back from the 21st century, it seems strange that she continued to cover her head with the end of her sari even when most ladies stopped doing so. In fact, she wore a matching band on her head to hold the sari in place, which was known as “the crown”. These crowns were made by the same *sadhikas* who embroidered the saris. During those very early years the Mother did not wear anything other than saris when she came out of her room. Old timers remember that she even played table tennis in her sari.

As time passed, when the Ashram grew at a very rapid pace, the Mother changed the way she dressed. For her normal activities she wore a gown, and over that she wore a long thin top which opened in front and which was called “the coat” by those who made and embroidered her clothes. When she wore her gown she tied a thin piece of cloth on her head which was called “the veil”. In fact, only a very few ever saw her with her head uncovered. We see her dressed in this way in the photo where she is distributing flowers from a plate or playing the organ.

In the 1950s, after Sri Aurobindo left his body, the Mother came out and participated in all the activities of the School and the Playground, visited the departments, played Tennis, went to visit Ananta on his island and went to see the Ashram lands and farms. During this phase of her life she wore the *salwar-kameez* and tied her famous kitty-caps on her head. Did she

invent the kitty-cap? Who knows! Her *salwars* and *kameezes* were tailored by Bela-di who used to teach embroidery and Mother’s sandals were made by hand by Lakshmi-ben, Baba-bhai’s sister. Many ladies and young girls embroidered her veils, scarves, crowns and the wristbands which she wore when she played tennis.

The *salwar-kameez* became her usual outfit and it was so practical too. Generally light in colour, sometimes cut from saris offered to her, her *kameezes* were always very elegant and tastefully created. She went to the Playground in this costume and even when she received the Prime Minister of the country at the Playground she was in her *salwar-kameez*. It served her for both formal and casual occasions.



The Mother with Pt. Nehru at the Playground

After 1962 when the Mother stopped coming down completely and remained in her second floor apartment she wore a gown and once again a very light jacket in silk or had a stole over her shoulders. Only then did we get to see her hair. By this time photography was more common in the Ashram and we get to see very many pictures of her in this style of dressing. When she came to give Darshan from the terrace, opposite the

dispensary, she wore a cloak over her gown.

During the 1950s, even though she did not wear saris for her day-to-day activities, the Mother did put on very beautiful saris on the *puja* days when she came down for the *pranams*. Most of the photos in which we see the Mother in a sari were taken during the *puja pranams*. The practice of holding special *pranam* on *puja* days was started in the early 50s and we know that this was stopped probably in 1958 when the Mother moved to her room on the second floor. It is also known that the *puja pranams* were stopped for a while and resumed before being stopped completely. The Mother wore special saris for each of the *pujas*: Durga Puja, Saraswati Puja, Lakshmi Puja and Kali Puja. The members of the Ashram filed past her, one by one, to take her blessings. The Mother was very particular about the colours of the saris she wore on *puja* days. On Durga Puja days it was red, on Saraswati Puja days it was white, on Kali Puja it was maroon and on Lakshmi Puja days it was deep pink. In the beginning she was offered black saris with gold borders for Kali Puja days but as she did not like wearing black saris the colour was changed to maroon.

In *Moments Eternal*, a book by Priti Das Gupta, we get to read an interesting anecdote. The author recounts how one day she and her friend Gauri Bhattacharya (Sunil-da's wife) were chatting when Priti-di suddenly said that when the Supramental Descent took place the Mother would give away all her saris to the women of the Ashram and then they would get to wear them. At that time, before it happened, the Supramental Descent seemed like a distant possibility and so the two friends had a good laugh at this thought. Since there seemed to be no real connection between the descent and the giving away of saris it was obviously a flash of intuition on Priti-di's part because indeed in March 1956 the Mother started giving away her saris to the women of the Ashram. And on April Darshan day all of them wore these saris of the Mother and went for *pranam*. What a sight it must have been — all the ladies of the Ashram gathered together, wearing the Mother's own saris!

The reason for which the Mother gave away

her saris comes as a bit of a surprise. It was a period of great financial difficulties, in spite of the Supramental descent, and the Mother started by selling off her jewels and after that she started selling her expensive saris. After she had sold some of her saris she distributed the rest to the women of



The Mother in a sari

the Ashram. All those of us who have known her only from afar and know her only as the smiling spiritual mother of a large family have perhaps never thought of how she ran this family. Listening to the memories of those who lived through those extraordinary days one realises that she was very much a human mother, worrying about feeding the family that had gathered around her, always careful about the resources that were in her hands and frowning on all forms of waste.

When the Mother started selling her saris she also sold off the ones which had been laboriously embroidered by the *sadhikas*. Vasudha-ben was heart-broken when she came to know that the saris that she had created with such love and devotion for the Mother had actually been sold. She had taken days and months to achieve a faultless execution of the design and each sari was a masterpiece and now these saris belonged to some

other ladies. Many say she was inconsolable and wept for days together. Dyuman-bhai explained to her that the saris were being sold because there was no money and not because the Mother did not consider those saris precious any more. Some think that one of the reasons for which the Mother eventually stopped selling the saris was because of the distress it caused to Vasudha-ben. The Mother also came to know that many ladies expressed the sentiment that only those who had money had managed to get a sari of the Mother and that those who could not buy one could not get one. There could have been many reasons for this decision but it is a well-known fact that it was only after she had sold some of the saris that she



The Mother in one of her saris embroidered by the sadhikas

gave away the remaining ones to the women of the Ashram.

The one fact everyone remembers is that the Mother took great care to decide who would get which one. She decided two or three saris at a time. Even ladies who were not in the Ashram but were devotees were given these saris. Some ladies were given the blouse which went with the sari. As the Mother wore very long and loose-fitting blouses the ladies had them altered and wore

them with the saris. Those who were too young to wear saris were given frocks which had belts made from the borders of the Mother's saris, and for some their saris were kept until they were old enough to wear them. Some older girls who were not wearing saris yet were given both a frock and a sari.

Urmila-ben remembers that she and her sister Usha-ben got saris that had the same pattern but in two different colours. Jhumur-di received a light blue sari and the Mother asked her later on if she understood why she had been given that colour. She also remembers that she, Chum-di, Gauri-di and Bubu-di were all given saris of the same material but in different colours. Gauri-di received a light green sari with a black and gold border. Parul-di was given a red sari which the Mother asked her to wear on stage when she was doing the play "L'Ascension vers la vérité". Sometimes people were given a colour that they did not particularly like but there was some inner reason for them to receive that colour or that pattern.

A few days after the Darshan the Mother remarked that she found two women had draped their sari really very beautifully. She said that one of them was Bhavatarini-di, but no one asked her who the other one was and so we will never know. Many remember that the Mother surprisingly gave saris with very bright borders, sometimes even red, to some of the ladies who had long been widowed. Even though they had lost the habit of wearing colourful saris and were feeling embarrassed to wear a red-bordered one they still had to put on the sari given by the Mother on Darshan day and go up to her.

The interesting thing to note is that when she gave away her saris she expected them to be used and worn by those who had received them. The saris were not meant to be kept as souvenirs and the ladies wore them frequently, as another article of clothing in their wardrobe. Kiran Kumari, who used to work in the Mother's room and whose work it was to keep the Mother's clothes ready for the next day, says that the Mother gave away her saris because she knew she was not going to wear them and so did not see the point of keeping them in her wardrobes for the sake of preserving them.

If she did not need them then it was better that others made use of them. She did not have any sense of attachment to her belongings. And the fact that all the women of the Ashram received a sari just shows what a big collection of saris the Mother had.

Old timers say that the Mother was fond of giving and this distribution of saris was also one of her loving gestures to those who were around her. People offered her beautiful and expensive things and many sent her food-stuff such as rare fruits, cheese and chocolates. The Mother often shared what she received with others and receiving presents from the Mother was a common thing for many.

The Mother is even known to have opened her wardrobe and given her saris to be worn on the stage for certain performances. When she put up her own play “Towards the Future” she wanted very specific colours for the costumes of the two actresses. She chose two saris of those particular colours from her own collection and they were worn on the stage by the two ladies who were performing in the play.

Tracking down this story of how the Mother gave away her saris to the sadhikas of the Ashram was an eye-opener. However much we may have heard about the Mother’s all-encompassing love it is still always moving to hear about actual instances which show an outward expression of that link of affection between the Mother and those whom she had accepted as her disciples. Sharing one’s

clothes with someone has a note of intimacy and this episode shows how there was a true feeling of living in one big family around the Mother. The way she carefully chose a sari for each one, keeping in mind the person’s inner progress and outer preferences, also tells us something about how the Mother had a personal relationship with each *sadhika*.

In a strange sort of way it is this aspect of the human mother that brings us closer to the Divine



The Mother in a sari in the very early days of the Ashram

Mother. In the end this story is not about how the Mother gave away her saris — it is about how she thought of each of her “daughters” and decided which sari in her wardrobe would be best suited to each one. It is her extraordinary capacity of love that reveals her divinity and draws us to her. ❧

KAKE PASSES AWAY

We would like to inform our readers that Promesse Jauhar '67 (Kake), former student, teacher, captain, is no more. He passed away on 7th July 2010 of a sudden cardiac arrest. Those of you who would like to share your memories of him, kindly send us your articles at the earliest. The articles may also be included in a commemorative volume on Kake that is being planned by Tara Jauhar and the family.

MEMORIES

Born in South Africa in 1914, Olga came to the Ashram in 1953 with her husband, Allen, and sons, John and Robert. She taught singing to the younger children of the School, accompanying them on the piano. She also played the musical pieces when the children learnt basic rhythmic movements in the Playground. She was a part of the School for several decades. She spent the last years of her life in "Care" and passed away on 27.07.09. In the following pages students of different generations share their memories of her.

OLGA

K. Venkatesh Rao '82H

Hearing "Olga is no more" is like the very sound of the high note on her piano... ending in silence.

She was my first English teacher in L'Avenir — perhaps in the year 1967. She really put the love of the English language in me. I remember two of her remarkable qualities — her stress on pronunciation, and her sense of discipline. She would stand erect, absolutely erect, and ask us children to look at her lips — which would take the shape of a perfect round when pronouncing "O" and form a perfect oval, when saying "AW", and so on.

As a child, what fascinated me was the small red typewriter she would bring to class. It had a double coloured "red / black" tape. She would type — "click, clack, click, clack" — making small progress cards for each student. It sowed in me such a desire for typewriting that I learnt it later in life, and in this day of the internet world, it really helps, as your speed of communication depends on the speed of your typing on the ubiquitous keyboard!

For many years in my early school days, I remember going to her music class on Wednesdays, after the 9.30 am vitamin break. As we ambled leisurely into her class, adjacent to the Dancing Hall, a simple stern look at those who came late was good enough to melt the latecomers! Once we settled into our little seats, she would fastidiously inspect our tiny fingers to check if we had trimmed our finger nails. If we hadn't, or had done a quick trim with our teeth, she was quick to spot it. She

was a perfectionist. The second test was to pass her "no-slouch" rule — "Children, sit straight!" was a familiar call. Once we had our backs straightened as it were, the music class began.

She taught us lovely songs, so lovingly. Some days when we behaved well, she allowed us to crowd around her and she would play some



wonderful classical pieces. I remember asking her once, who her favourite composer was — she said Schubert. Later in life I heard quite a few of his compositions, and always remembered Olga.

Another interesting incident I recall — she used to tell us stories, especially about cheese. I remember asking her how cheese tastes and she would make her eyes big, roll them, and say "Wonderful ... so tasty." The word "cheese" became so evocative that we imagined it would be better than the ultimate Ashram Ganapatram

burfee. We almost prayed for some cheese, and finally, lo and behold, Olga brought a piece of cheese to the class! It was a cheese cube of about 2.5 inches x 1 inch, wrapped in silver foil. Perhaps someone from abroad had brought it for her. We children were gripped with excitement. The meticulous person that she was, she brought a knife and cut it into some 10 tiny pieces. We queued up and she placed one each in our palms — and the dream ended there! We could not instantly develop a taste for cheese, and the fact was that it was indeed very distant in taste from the familiar *burfee*!

I would meet her every time I visited Pondicherry, and she would greet me with such warmth and a beautiful smile — I was always, “My little child” for her. She would say in an almost stac-

cato manner — *Ven-ka-tesh*. My grandmother, who lived in the Ashram, hardly knew any language other than our own mother-tongue, save a few words of Tamil. Olga and she would always communicate — it was delightful to watch them — with minimal words. They would hold their hands, beam smiles at each other, and say “*nalla-nalla*”, (good-good or fine-fine) a few times, in different octaves. That was pure joy.

Till today, I clip my nails every week, love the English language, and try to keep a straight back, physically and otherwise, and type my way on the keyboard — all thanks to Olga. I owe it to her. She was a true sadhika and a great teacher. She demonstrated to us young minds then, what it means to be disciplined and what is meant by physical perfection — she was a living example. ❧

HER SONGS LIVE ON...

Nabanita Deshmukh '85 remembers

*“Ten green bottles standing on the wall,
If one green bottle should accidentally fall,
Nine green bottles standing on the wall...”*

A lesson in Maths? No, you have got it wrong. It is a song learnt in Olga’s class! Olga’s class? Let me tell you something about it.

Way back, in the mid-seventies, we were a bunch of chirpy 8-year-olds who attended Olga’s class once every week. In those days, the classes were held in the Music Room adjacent to the Dancing Hall, near the French Consulate.

“Good morning, Olga!” we wished her as we entered.

“Good morning children!” she replied eyeing us sternly through her thick-rimmed spectacles. She chided us if we wore long-sleeved dresses.

“How can you wear such dresses in hot weather!” she used to crossly remark. But then, as she began to play the piano, bouncing on her stool to the rhythm of the notes, the entire room came alive to the sound of music. Everything was forgotten — the scolding, our grumbling

and the heat.

“Good morning Mary Sunshine/How did you wake so soon...”

“Jingle bells, jingle bells, jingle all the way...”

“Lullaby and good night...”

“Une belle chanson pour la belle saison...”

Olga had a song for every occasion in her thick, old book of tunes.

As a little girl, I was embarrassed because I did not know how to whistle when all the boys of my class could. I blew and puffed, sweated and huffed but no amount of effort brought a whistle to my lips. One day, much to my dismay, Olga chose a song called: “Whistle daughter, whistle,” where we had to sing the entire song and whistle the refrain.

“YOU HAVE TO WHISTLE!” Olga firmly told us, “And everyone has to do it one after the other. No excuses!” When my turn came, I began to sweat with nervousness. “Help me, Douce Mère!” I prayed, more scared of Olga’s scolding than of my poor whistling skills.

Olga began to play the piano, the boys whistled superbly but when my turn came... someone whistled the entire refrain for me! A sweet-

natured boy in my class had come to my rescue! Olga had her back to us and she hadn't noticed it! Phew! That was close! But it made me learn whistling in a week's time!

Many years later, I went to Olga's house with a card and a bouquet. She was unwell. "I'm old now," she told me sadly, "and everyone's forgotten me!"

"We haven't, Olga!" I consoled her, "I remember so many songs you taught us!"

"Really!" she exclaimed, "Why don't you sing a few for me?" So there I was, standing on the pavement near Olga's door, softly singing a *dozen* songs! When I finished, Olga had tears in her eyes.

"Thank you, dear," she whispered, "that was the sweetest gift you've given me!"

I came to know later that she had been admitted to CARE where she passed away a few years later.

Olga's gone but her songs live on...

How can I sum up my feelings? Words seem inadequate but would a poem do? Let me see which one... oh, yes! I'll choose Wordsworth's "The Daffodils", take liberties with it, change a few words and then... let the lines do the talking for me!

"For oft, when on my couch I lie
In vacant or in pensive mood,
They float across my *charmèd* ears,
Which is the bliss of solitude;
And then my heart with pleasure *throngs*,
And dances with *dear Olga's* songs." ❧

FUN-TIME WITH OLGA

Arup Mitra '73

In spite of reaching what was then known as Class 2 in 1961, I was still languishing in Delafon. And this was a wound that refused to heal. For, my classmates and I had rightfully expected to rub shoulders with the elders in the big school instead of remaining in the lower-section with smaller brats. Unaware then that lack of space was the reason behind this administrative decision, even the generous naming of our class *L'arbre ensoleillé* by the Mother brought only a lukewarm cheer to our hearts.

Amazingly, what did temporarily raise our spirits was the weekly fourth-period-visit to the corner of the next block that housed the piano room adjoining the Dancing Hall, right under Pradyot-da's kitchen. Hence, this hour, earmarked for learning nursery rhymes set to tune under Olga's tutelage, turned out to be a delightful amusement, pepped up by the aroma of delicious dishes being cooked upstairs. We even invented new forms of mischief, exposing the gentle-natured Olga to the caprices of a horde of naughty devils.

However, by devising a unique scheme, Olga did manage to extract some relief. At 11.30 she would play a note on her piano and whoever guessed it rightly could leave. But we were not

allowed to hazard more than one guess at a time. And if we made a mistake, she would start it all over again by playing a different note, confusing our immature minds further. However, in this, Vivek Rane was the cleverest among us and always departed first. But shamefully, I was forever the last one to leave. And one day, the exercise went on till noon! Being the only one left behind, not only did I keep struggling to guess Olga's note, but also kept my uncle waiting in the sun. Ultimately, she let me off out of pity but not before giving me a fright.

Simultaneously, in that same year I was in group A4 with all my classmates. Again, we had fun spending a weekly-hour at the piano room during group time too. One day, something unmentionable happened and we could not stop giggling. This resulted in Olga's reporting our misbehaviour to our group captain Dinesh-da (presently known as Sri Dinesh) naming me the ringleader!

In addition to giving me a severe dressing-down, Dinesh-da promptly set a punishment for the entire group. "So, you love to laugh, do you?" he asked us menacingly. "Good. That is what you will do tomorrow for an hour. But mind you,



With her sons John and Robert

anyone stopping short of the stipulated hour will have to run ten laps around the playground!" Although we felt it to be rather unfair, there was nothing to do about it. So, we dejectedly gathered the next day at the playground anticipating the worst.

The stage was set for our punishment but Dinesh-da had grossly underestimated the *joie de vivre* of one of our group mates. Bubbly, bouncy and boisterous, the chubby-cheeked Jyoti V. Reddy was quite extraordinary! And no sooner did Dinesh-da blow the whistle than Jyoti set off chortling effortlessly.

Witnessing her hilarity, we also burst out laughing. Within minutes, a strange spectacle befell group-members on their way to the gymnasium: a whole bunch of eight-year-olds merrily laughing their heads off under the dignified supervision of two long-faced group captains, Dinesh-da and Purnima-di (Jauhar)!

Even though this session of laughter went on and on, some of us missed the target by a whisker. Unbelievably, Jyoti glibly giggled her way past the hour that was slapped on us! And displaying fairness and magnanimity, Dinesh-da even gave her a special prize for her high spirits! That at least was some consolation for those of us who had to run those ten laps around the playground.

Thoroughly chastised and expecting another rebuke, we reported to our next singing class with bowed heads. But not only did Olga keep silent on the painful episode, she melted our hearts with her sympathy and warmth.

That was the day we became friends forever. ☼

SHE RADIATED JOY

Suruchi Verma '03

"Good Morning! Good morning!", a cheerful face and a welcoming smile greet us all. Then follows an enthusiastic chorus, "Good morning Olga!" Excited little children bustle their way in twos through the entrance of the Piano Room to hurriedly reach their demarcated seats.... So many of us have entered that well-loved cozy classroom, as Avenir and Progrès students. For me, spending about 40 mins immersed in music with her every week, singing all the while to her tunes, used to be great fun as well as learning — "a joy forever"! Also, as children of Group A4, we used to march to her rhythm on the green tarpaulin as her tiny fingers danced merrily on those black and white keys in the Rhythmic Hall....

In memory of those delightful hours she spent in our midst, we decided to present a small programme for her birthday (24th April, 2007) at Care where she was then residing. We have a

theatre group led by Sunayana and that's where the idea sprung forth. So we were an amalgamation of young and old, some endowed with music, others hesitant. But the enthusiasm carried us on. We decided to revise some of the songs we had learnt in Olga's classes. The hunt for lyrics, music notations, as well as the convenient time and place of rehearsals began. Gradually, one by one, "Greensleeves", Beethoven's 9th Symphony, "My Grandfather's clock", and the like started ringing out loud every evening. Finally, nearing sunset, on the 23rd of April, we gathered at Care amongst a quiet, serene, chosen audience — old men and women in sober colours, many of them strangers for us (the younger lot) and amidst them, dear Olga — the guest of honour for the day! As she had told us that if we did not get there by 6 pm she would fall asleep we had to make sure that everybody was there on time. Although our notes were not always as perfect as she would have liked

them to be, our feeling and effort reached out to her and she was full of appreciation for us. It was a joyous sight to see her tapping her feet in rhythm as she listened to us. Later we went up to her room and she greeted us, all smiles, and though she did not remember most of our names, she was moved and happy. Those moments at her bedside were touching and precious to us. The joy of giving expression to memories and feeling through melody, to a lover of music, was much more ful-

filling than any successful performance. In fact, our reward was the calm gratitude in the hearts of the spectators, which shone in their eyes.

Personally for me, Olga always radiated joy. All through my school days, as long as she lived in her house on Rue Dupuy, I used to pass her window and she would wave at me with her little hands. The joy and love that she used to vibrate, sometimes even from across the street, were always felt and cherished in my heart as a child. ❧

UN MOMENT TOUCHANT

Aneesh (Étudiant, EAVP 5)

Il y a trois ans, une grève a eu lieu à Pondichéry et m'a empêché de sortir de chez moi. Très ennuyé, j'attendais le soir pour pouvoir sortir de la maison aussi bien que de l'état d'ennui. A 18:00 heures, j'étais déjà dans les rues, me dirigeant vers le théâtre. La brise marine me caressait et la lumière du crépuscule me baignait dans sa douce chaleur. En me promenant, soudain un souvenir précieux est apparu dans mon esprit : celui du cours de musique auquel j'assistais comme élève de deuxième année d'"Avenir".

Une fois par semaine, un de nos professeurs nous emmenait à la salle d'Olga, notre professeur de musique. Comme c'était amusant de voir Olga sauter de joie en nous regardant entrer dans la petite salle ! Son visage s'éclairait comme si elle se transformait en petite fille pleine de vie. Elle posait des doigts tremblants sur le clavier, mais chaque note qu'elle jouait, elle la jouait avec confiance et perfection. Parfois elle se mettait à danser et à chanter sur sa musique. Comme j'étais heureux quand elle se tournait vers nous et échangeait des sourires avec chaque enfant ! Ces beaux moments ne duraient qu'une période. Comme l'heure de la récréation approchait, Olga perdait sa jeunesse et commençait à se plaindre et à bouder. A la porte, elle nous disait au revoir jusqu'à ce qu'elle ne nous voie plus....

C'était un des rares cours que la maîtresse et les enfants attendaient impatiemment. Olga et moi, nous sommes devenus amis. Les images

de moi l'aidant à marcher jusqu'à l'Ashram, lui posant des questions sur l'Afrique du Sud (son pays), lui offrant en cadeau un piano en origami pour son anniversaire, écoutant les plaisanteries qu'elle me racontait, filaient comme des étoiles dans mon esprit.

Soudain, je me suis rendu compte que j'étais debout devant 'CARE'. On m'avait dit qu'Olga y était, donc tout de suite j'y suis entré. L'atmosphère était calme. Il y avait une belle et douce musique et les vieilles personnes immobiles semblaient être dans un monde lointain. Là dans un coin, une vieille dame était assise sur son lit. C'était Olga, notre maîtresse. Tout excité, je suis allé vers elle et je lui ai dit bonjour. Ses yeux brillaient parmi des rides et son regard me fixait. Elle ne semblait pas me reconnaître ! J'étais triste....

Il y eut un moment de silence.

Puis le silence fut brisé par une voix douce : « Petit garçon, excuse-moi, je ne te reconnais pas, mais je sais bien que tu es jeune et tu as un avenir magnifique. Comme la Mère nous l'a dit au sujet des enfants, vous êtes les lampes qui illumineront le monde de l'avenir. » Puis elle a ajouté : « Moi je suis une vieille femme qui va mourir peut-être aujourd'hui ou demain. »

J'avais les larmes aux yeux. Elle m'a pris dans ses bras. C'était un moment extrêmement touchant ! Peu après, en essuyant mes larmes je lui ai dit « au revoir » et je suis parti chargé de souvenirs ineffaçables.... ❧

ENERGIE INÉPUISABLE

Professeur à Progrès, la petite école, j'avais l'habitude de faire des petites sorties avec mes élèves et je me rappelle encore la remarque d'un jeune garçon de dix ou onze ans comme nous marchions dans la rue vers un jardin qui se trouvait un peu plus loin.

« Courons, insistait-il, c'est si fatigant de marcher ! »

Surpris et curieux à la fois, je lui demandai : « Mais pourquoi, voyons ? »

« C'est vrai, répondit-il, je me sens plus rafraîchi et détendu quand je cours ! »

Rappelons la même remarque spontanée de Douce Mère quand elle allait se promener parfois en voiture. Elle disait à Pavitra qui conduisait d'aller de plus en plus vite sur les grandes routes. Et quand lui, prudent, équilibré et tempéré en toutes choses, l'interrogea étonné, elle de répondre : « *Tu sais, je me détends davantage quand nous allons plus vite.* »

Richard Pearson

DOUCE MÈRE N'EST PAS LÀ

In her class one day, a teacher showed a little boy some pictures of a school that was very beautiful and which had every modern facility. Wanting to know the boy's reaction she asked him if he would like to study there. The boy immediately shook his head and said, "No!" The teacher told him that the other school was just like ours and had all the facilities that we have here. The little one very sweetly replied, "Mais il n'y a pas Douce Mère là-bas!" (But the Mother is not there!)

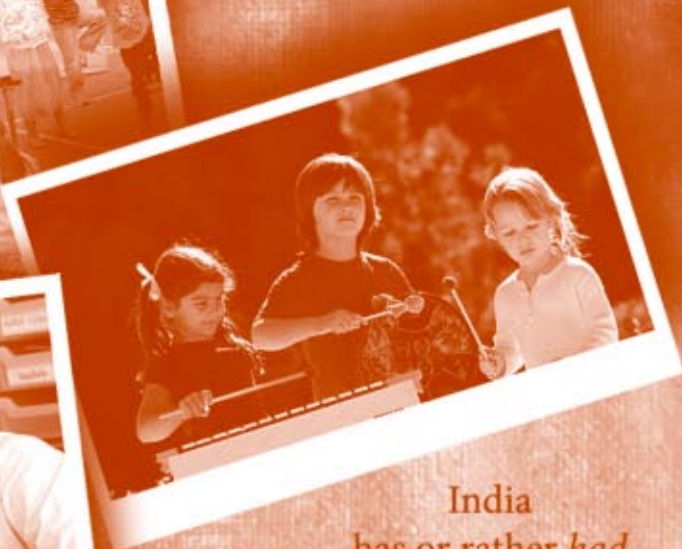
BLAGUES

Once a teacher narrated a fairy tale to her class. She said that if they kept their windows open at night a fairy would come to them. Immediately a child jumped up and announced, "Tu dis des blagues. Quand je garde mes fenêtres ouvertes, les souris viennent." (You are bluffing. When I keep my windows open, rats enter!) ☿

QUIZ TIME!

*Quiz Time is back. Know the answers to the following questions?
The answers will be printed in our next issue.*

1. Why was Bipin Chandra Pal imprisoned for 6 months?
2. In which part of the Ashram Main Building was Sri Aurobindo on the evening of 24th November 1926?
3. There is only one picture in which the Mother and Sri Aurobindo are seen together. On which date was this picture taken?
4. Who did Sri Aurobindo go to receive at the railway station in 1921?
5. What is the spiritual significance of the iris flower?



India
has or rather *had*
the knowledge of the *Spirit*,
but she neglected matter
and suffered for it.

The West
has the knowledge of matter
but rejected the Spirit
and suffers badly for it.

An integral education
which could,
with some variations,
be adapted to
all the nations of the world,
must bring back
the legitimate authority
of the Spirit over a matter
fully developed
and utilised.

The Mother
(CWM, 12: 251)