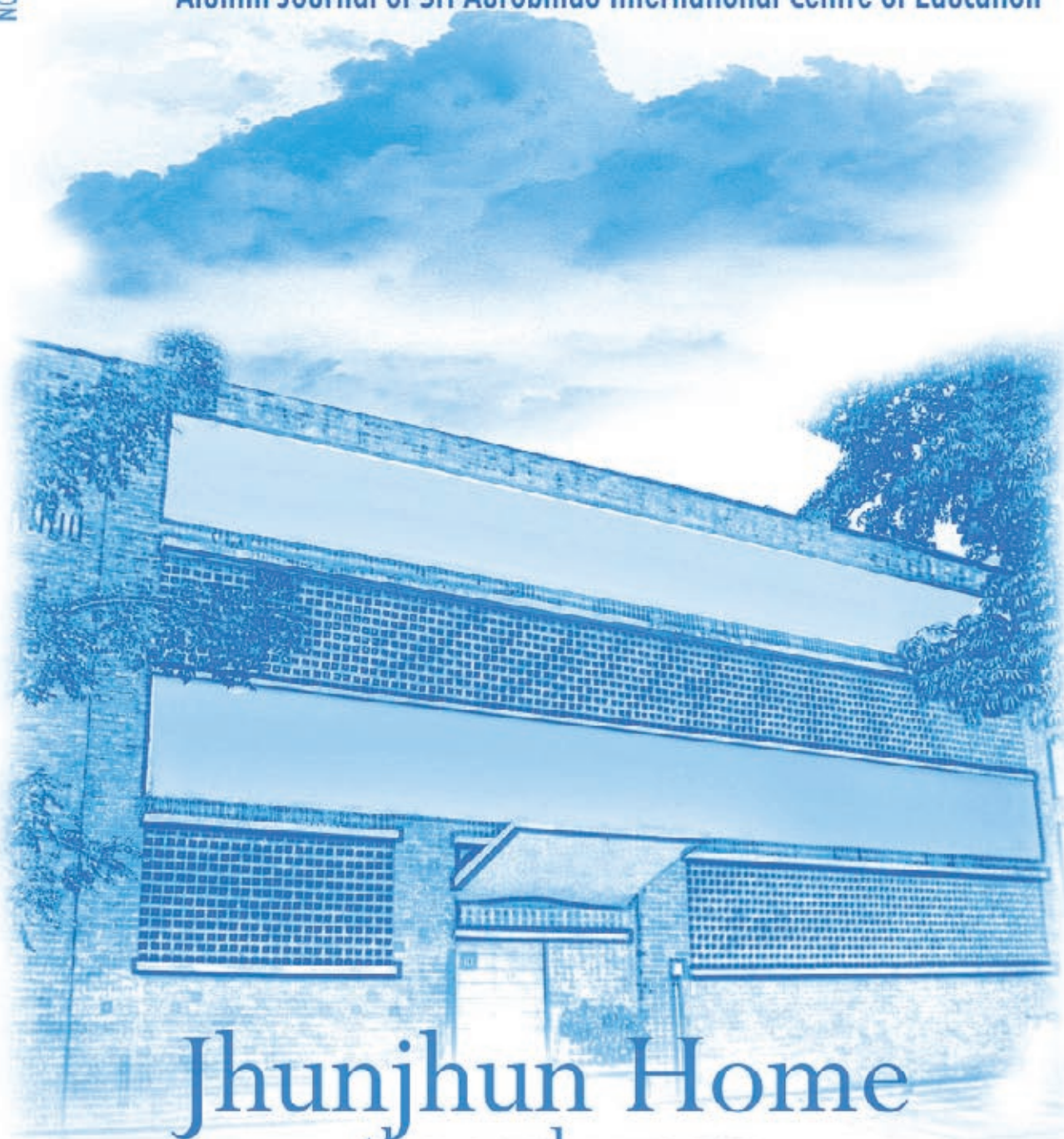


NOV 2010 / VOL 11 NUM 1

The

# Golden Chain

Alumni Journal of Sri Aurobindo International Centre of Education



Jhunjhun Home  
- the early years

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)

# CONTENTS

VOL 11 NUM 1

NOV 2010

## 1 THE EDITORS' PAGE

## 2 TALK SHOP: Making Music

Jerry '07 on pursuing music as a profession.

## 4 EXPERIENCE: What is it like to be Sri Aurobindo on stage?

Anirban (K1) answers.

## 7 ASHRAM HISTORY: The Secret Behind Mother's Saree Distribution

Tara '61 clarifies.

## 8 REPORT: 1) Vermi-culture and the Organic Garden at Swarnabhoomi

Dilip '76 reports on the new developments at Swarnabhoomi.

## 10 BOARDINGS: JhunJhun Home

Debashish '77, Aditya '78, Sunayana '79, Nabanita '85, Pramila-di remember.

## 23 MEMORIES: Jugal-da

Ranganath '62, Manju-di, Vijayendra '62, Sacchidananda '75,  
Rajesh '84, Yogamaya '95, Tejas '99 and Amrit '04 remember.



On the Cover:  
JhunJhun Home.

Cover design: Saroj Kumar Panigrahi

*The Golden Chain*  
Alumni Journal of S.A.I.C.E.  
Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Pondicherry, INDIA.



### EDITORIAL TEAM:

Gopal '90, Sunayana '79, Alo '92

### EDITORIAL ASSISTANCE:

Anurupa '86, Suruchi '03, Claire  
Gaurishankar '80, Savita '75,  
Puru '83, Anubha '00

### ART DESIGN:

Somdutt '90

### PRODUCTION ASSISTANCE:

Pranati '83, Kiran '72,  
Swadhin '70, Chaitanya '95

Frequency of Appearance: Quarterly.

Mode of Donation: Donations can be made  
by MO/DD/Cheque in favour of "The Golden  
Chain Fraternity".

Address for correspondence: The Golden Chain,  
Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Pondicherry 605002.

Phone: 91-413-2233683

e-mail: [office@goldenchainfraternity.org](mailto:office@goldenchainfraternity.org)

### IMPRINT:

### Publisher:

Jhumur Bhattacharya

## THE EDITORS' PAGE

by Alo '92

**M**y theory — perhaps borrowed but deducted from my own experience too — is the following: bringing up a child is essentially making ourselves less and less indispensable. But by the time that state of dispensability arrives, sometimes it becomes too late to undo or introduce ideas, habits and values that were overlooked when one had almost total control over most influences bombarding the growing child!

The control one has is absolute.... Where he went, whom he met and whether or not they spoke was controlled; so was what he ate and wore. Every addition to his vocabulary was predictable and the slightest oddity was immediately perceived and noted. To date I do not have a satellite tv or cable connection at home. My children watch what I show them — the odd freedom to watch cartoons un-chaperoned is on the weekends — and I feel like I have paid a price! Now a year on, everything on Ameya, my son's, wish list is Ben 10 related! But I don't know with what logic everything and every desire that is Star Wars related is condoned! It took me a while to figure out that Star Wars was fine because as a father Amal decided that he could be initiated into the fold of Force lovers! Therefore all obsession was looked upon with sweet indulgence. So it is with this background in self-styled upbringing principles that I have repeated conversations with Amal and his brother Kanav on the pros and cons of a boarding life.

Both have been boarders all their life, and despite all that could be listed as con, the brothers consistently vouch for the GOOD that boarding life does to a child. The most important lesson being, a very organically developed and significantly less acute sense of self-importance, as well as a spirit of sportsmanship, adjustment and co-habitation with an unconscious spontaneity that they cherish all their life. It set me thinking.... What about influences I don't want? What about habits I want to protect him from? What about this exposure and that?... And then I looked back

at my life... and my eyes opened!

I grew up in a household with my grandma, three uncles, two aunts, two sisters and a distant relative! It was like a boarding! My childhood was idyllic because we were left to do what we wanted. We shared because we were so many — we had to! We adjusted — because we had to! We lacked space — it mattered little! Most importantly we learnt, enjoyed and retained so much from such wonderful human beings who gave us their time and space, away from the total control of my parents and grandma, because they knew how to let go, and how much to let go.

Two nights ago I was one of about 12 Ashram students in a small room — and the unsociable person that I am — I was chatting on Facebook! With whom? Daniel — Simmy-ben's son. And what was the conversation about? Trying to convince Daniel to hop over the English Channel and visit France so that my kids and I could meet him. My sisters Jhum and Glory will vouch for the amazing time we had with him as we grew up. He gave us time and he gained patience for sure! But we were so happy! So much so that 30 years on, I feel cheated that he is visiting Pondicherry while I am away! The other name that comes to my mind is Parvati-da who lived in the Laundry, my father's friend. He was such a sweet, loving, caring, fun, indulgent and positive influence in our lives as we grew up.... And slowly I realised that other than having a boisterous, caring, numerous family, it is the contribution of such individuals as Parvati-da and Daniel that have helped me be what I am in a good way!

So I'd like to tell my son this — wings don't have a "certain" time after which it is "alright" for them to grow! Boardings can be fun! Boardings can teach you what I don't even know exists.

So, dear readers, enjoy this issue as we look back at Jhunjhun boarding and relive precious moments from the memories of those who lived that "influence". We also present a collection of articles on the unforgettable Jugal-da, penned by alumni of different generations. ❧



# MAKING MUSIC

*Jerry Silvester Vincent '07*

***How did you get interested in music?***

I got interested in music listening to the audiotapes my brother would play and also watching him play the piano.

***When did you think of making it your profession?***

During the last few months of my final year of Knowledge, but I wasn't yet sure about it. I became sure of it during the holidays that followed.

***Can you tell us something about the K.M. Conservatory where you studied?***

The K.M. Music Conservatory is located at the AM studios in Chennai and the principal of this music school is A.R. Rahman. He started the



school with the idea of creating an Indian Symphony Orchestra. It started in August 2008, the same time that I joined. At this school they teach both Indian classical and Western classical music, with a little more importance given to Western classical. The faculty here are from abroad (i.e. the US, Holland, UK etc). For the full-time course there is an audition process, which has to be cleared to be able to enrol in the program.

Once one enrolls, one has to choose a major (such as piano major, violin major, vocal major etc). In addition, all full-time students have to sing in a choir, learn music technology, music theory and composition, music history and sight-singing and reading. It's a one-year program after which one can opt to study three more years with the affiliation of the Middlesex University.

***What was it like to interact with A.R. Rahman?***

It was a nice experience. While studying in the conservatory I was called to work in one of his projects, and the way he interacted was quite fun. He cracked some jokes to break the ice, and we discussed Pondy and I mentioned to him about our Ashram etc. So it was a very good introduction, after which we talked about the work we had to do. I worked on a few movies and did chorus singing in some of his movie tracks too. I even got the opportunity to transcribe a few string-scores for some of his upcoming projects. After completing one year at the conservatory, I was made faculty for the following batch. I taught music technology and audio engineering. Recently I brought out a nursery rhyme album called 'Rhymeskool' featuring Katrina Kaif. The music supervision was by A.R.Rahman. I composed some songs in the album and arranged and mixed other songs.

***Can you tell us something about your work in the film The Art of Power?***

I and two of my friends at the conservatory (AVS Ramana Rao, Ashwin Subramaniam), with whom I went on to form our musical firm 'Acoustricks', came to know that the director and producers of an upcoming film called "The Art of Power" were looking for a fresh composer.

*The Art of Power* is a thriller about three unassuming young adults living in Washington D.C. whose lives are thrust into a twisted saga of deceit, passion and revenge.

So we approached the director and producers with demos. They liked our work and signed us for the project. All this was done through the internet. They sent us the files (the movie video and the trailer clip) and we sat at my place in Chennai and did the composing and mixing. Once we finished the work we uploaded all the music with the videos. Then we interacted via Skype with the movie crew and discussed changes/problems



Jerry (standing) with A. R. Rehman

and kept track of everything on an Excel sheet. We generally worked late at night (after 10) as I would come back from teaching at around 8 p.m. We completed the score and mix in about 2 months. The movie premiered at the Detroit Film Festival where it got a good response and then it was screened at the Toronto Film Festival. It is going to be commercially premiered sometime late October/early November in the US and based on the response there, some time later in India.

***What special skills do you need to compose music for a film?***

I think a good understanding of the situation in the movie, an understanding and knowledge of music and these days some computer and technical skills too, because nowadays music scoring is mostly done with the help of a musical keyboard and a computer. Some audio engineering skills also help, to know where to place the mikes and how to mix the final product. But mostly I would say musical skills.

***Tell us more about your experience of working***

***on the music for this film.***

We used to look forward to coming back home and working, since every day we had a new scene to work on, and it would excite us. We would watch the scene a few days in advance so that it could grow on us and we had time to think about it. Then we would see how each one of us looked at composing the music for that particular scene. It was fun doing this as we came up with some crazy ideas sometimes. We realised that a piece that sounded very good on one day might not sound as good the following day and so we had to keep improving it as the days went by. What we also learnt is the level of professionalism involved. We tried as much as possible to hit the required deadlines.

***What kind of music do you like?***

I like Western classical music, especially Mozart's and Debussy's works. I also listen to pop songs, Indian classical, ghazals, Rhythm and Blues etc. The only kind of music I think I have not yet been able to understand is hard rock. I try and listen to various kinds of music to be able to create more versatile music. I try my best not to limit myself to one style/genre.

***What particular aspects of your education at SAICE have helped you in your professional life?***

I think SAICE has taught me to do everything to the best of my ability and also to do what I like doing most. Sometimes I get projects that will not make me grow musically, so I usually turn them down. I try my level best to be sincere and straightforward in my work and with the people I interact with. I think these values that SAICE has given me have helped me a lot. My friends here in Chennai feel that I am very lucky to have been brought up in a place like the Ashram and SAICE and I too feel extremely fortunate.

***Anything else you would like to add?***

I am very grateful to Sri Aurobindo and MA for guiding me and helping me in all situations, whether easy or difficult. I would like to thank all the teachers of SAICE, in particular Suzanne and Pushkar, and the Ashram for encouraging me and helping me. If the SAICE ever requires any help related to music, I would love to be of assistance. ❧

## WHAT IS IT LIKE TO BE SRI AUROBINDO ON STAGE?

*On the occasion of the August Darshan this year a play was performed at the Theatre, based on a chapter of Sri Aurobindo's life. It was called "Caves of Tapasya" and it depicted the story of how Sri Aurobindo left Kolkata and came to Pondicherry. It was written and directed by Gopal-da (of Corner House) and had a large cast made up of Ashramites, former students and present students. The role of Sri Aurobindo was played by **Anirban Ganguly** who is in the first year at Knowledge and who had played already played this role before. His performance was particularly successful. We spoke to him about how he prepared himself for this role and how he managed to get his performance to that level.*

**Sunayana:** When we were growing up there was a strong feeling we all had that no one should play the role of Sri Aurobindo because nobody can be him.

**Anirban:** Yes, I know.

**S:** So there was never a play where anybody played Sri Aurobindo. I even remember that when a documentary was made on Sri Aurobindo's return to India from England, there were some dramatic reconstructions but it was all shot from the back. Now I think that feeling has gone. Did anybody have any objections this time regarding the fact that somebody was actually playing this role?... Although in the meantime a couple of plays have been performed on the life of Sri Aurobindo....

**A:** Even Gopal-da himself staged a play...

**S:** That was fifteen years back. Gautam Mitra was playing Sri Aurobindo but he was shown from the back.

**A:** I think that was the idea in those times. Maybe things have changed now. I met a lot of people who were really pleased with the fact that I was playing Sri Aurobindo again this time. I think the main thing is that the audience should be able to identify the person whom the actor is trying to portray. And if that happens you would want to see him again and again. There were a few people who were very touched and moved with

my earlier performance but they didn't want to see me again. At the same time there were others who were looking forward to seeing me again on stage.

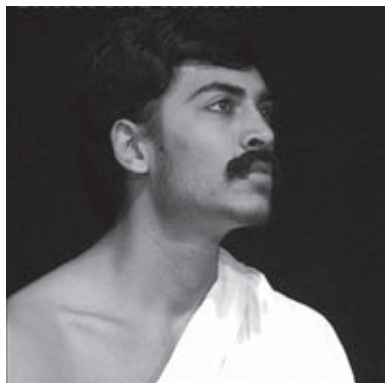
**S:** You see, when it is a Sanskrit play done with children people think, "This is not real. They are just having fun. Let's not say anything." But once it moves to the Theatre and there are adults in the cast, then it becomes serious. Then people judge it.

**A:** Gopal-da had gathered a lot of data and a lot of information. He was always telling us incidents and details about the scenes, so that we as actors could get into the characters and we could know how the

character would react to a certain situation.

**S:** What were your feelings when you were first asked to do the role of Sri Aurobindo? Considering that there were four people playing that role, enacting four different stages of Sri Aurobindo's life, perhaps your feelings were not the same as this time when you played the role alone?

**A:** Actually, when I was given this role for the first time I was surprised and also excited, because it felt very special. Even though there were four people playing it, I was given a very clear idea about the period in Sri Aurobindo's life that I would be portraying. I found it sufficiently special and different from the other three and tried my best to bring out the revolutionary firebrand





and the full enthusiasm and also to bring out the difference. The idea of having four actors was very good because there are these clear phases and each phase is really quite different from the previous phase or the next one.

**S:** What special instructions were you given this time for portraying Sri Aurobindo?

**A:** There were a lot of instructions. The problem is that here in the Ashram, the acting is often very stereotyped. Big personalities are usually played without any life. But I felt that doing these majestic movements, being blank and spiritual was all very fine, but it would have seemed almost like a dream. So I followed some of the instructions given by Gopal-da but I also had my own ways, because I have understood Sri Aurobindo better by doing the plays. It was almost like I could refer to all my comprehension of him gathered through the years. I played the way I felt the role should be played. So you can say it was a mixture of the way my directors have guided me as well as my own experience.

**S:** What was the most difficult thing for you when you were playing this role? Were you a bit intimidated by the fact that people had great expectations?

**A:** Surprisingly, no. When I played the role the first time it was very difficult because I was aware that I was playing Sri Aurobindo. People would expect a lot from me. Even though I tried to focus on my character and forget about the rest, it was a bit frightening. But something changed completely over the years. The last four times I played the role, every time it was a different experience

and things just got better and better. I think the last time I played was for me one of the best I could give. I have now really understood the way, maybe not completely, I mean, I have not seen Sri Aurobindo myself...

**S:** Well, none of us has seen him either. We can only assume what Sri Aurobindo was like from what we have read.

**A:** The only method I could really try was just to let myself go. Frankly, I have this weird method which is a little spiritual actually. I go to the Ashram and I just let myself go, and pray. I say, "Look, I am no one to play you and all I ask you is to guide me on stage, because I don't know how to portray you." I have spoken to Cristof also about this. I simply let myself go. I go blank, that's my method. And there is nothing which surprises me or frightens me when I am on stage, when I am acting. Even after my scene, when I go back-stage, I am there in a corner, all blank. In fact, this time, during the play, I could see people coming back-stage and telling me, "This was good, you acted well." But at that time, frankly, I was too blank. I couldn't react to anything they said. It didn't have any effect on me. But gradually, after the play got over, I slowly came out of it. It was almost like I was in a trance. But it was not intentionally done.



All I could do was to relax and be calm. This time, as the dialogues were recorded, I had technically nothing to say, so I had nothing to worry about. Acting was all I had to do.



S: In a way it was good that the speaking and the acting were separated. So you had to think of only one thing at a time.

A: And so it became easier for me to really let myself go. It was not difficult that way. And I didn't feel anything because the preparation I had done was just to go to the Ashram every day and to really let myself go with the flow, and not try to make an effort. Things just happened.

S: The most important part actually was your voice. Whenever we read about Sri Aurobindo one thing that comes out is that he was an extremely gentle person and he had a very soft voice. We are told that when he gave the Uttarpara Speech, people thought that nobody would be able to hear him because his natural speaking voice was so soft and there were ten thousand people. But everybody heard. In all the first-hand accounts of the people who had lived with Sri Aurobindo one always reads about how gentle his voice was. So that's why I was extremely curious to hear what your voice would be like. And I think it really worked. What kind of instructions were you given when you were doing the recordings?

A: Gopal-da had given very strict instructions. Things like, "Be calm" and, "Have the poise." There were scenes I had with the family, where I was supposed to be with my sister and my cousins and where I had to be a little more humorous. So Gopal-da said, "Have that smile when we are recording also." But, frankly speaking, I thought I could have done better. Even Gopal-da thought that to a certain extent the recording could have been better. After the play there were quite a few people who told me that they were impressed with the voice.

S: Yes, it was spot on. You know, it was as I had imagined Sri Aurobindo's voice to be.

A: Actually in the studio what happened is that there were a lot of people gathered and I found it very disturbing. In the Ashram studio there are two rooms: one is the recording room and the other the control room. So what I used to do is, I used to go to the control room, sit by myself and just revise, read out my dialogues repeatedly and learn them by heart and be by myself, till almost

everyone had moved out, and there were only a few people left. But if I had been all alone, things would have been better.

S: Did anyone help you with your accent? Shiv Shankar and you stood out from the rest of the cast because your accents were just right. Everyone knows that Sri Aurobindo spoke with a distinct English accent. How did you manage to get that right?

A: I knew I was supposed to have an English accent. Gautam-da had told me so. He helped me to a certain extent, but mostly I worked on it myself. You see I have been doing English classes with Althea since I was in school. For the past five years I have been listening to her, and the accent has got into me. So I didn't have much of a problem there.

S: Oh, so that's the secret! Well, well, well! By the way, have you played any other roles in other plays before this?

A: Yes, I have done other plays with Radhika-Arya which were very different. I would like to play other types of roles — like comic and negative roles. But I have never been offered such roles. The first play in which I acted was when I was thirteen and that again was Radhika-Arya's play. It was a comedy he had written.

S: You said that you have played the role of Sri Aurobindo four times and that each time you have gained something more. In between have you played any other roles?

A: After my E4, in E5 I played the role of Krishna. Again it was a spiritual role and I could link it to my previous experience of playing Sri Aurobindo because the role of Krishna that I was playing also had a fiery attitude. But that was two years back.

S: One final question. Did you really enjoy playing this role?

A: Yes, very much.

S: For me personally, it was a very pleasant surprise. I went to the theatre with great apprehension, thinking, "I hope they don't mess up the role of Sri Aurobindo." But you did a great job and now I have got over that feeling of not wanting to see anybody playing him. ❧



## THE SECRET BEHIND MOTHER'S SAREE DISTRIBUTION

*Tara Jauhar '61 clarifies some points mentioned in the article "The Mother and Her Saris" by Sunayana Panda '79 that appeared in our last issue.*

It was nostalgic to read the article on the Mother and her sarees. Sunayana seems to have found out a lot about it. But the real reason for the distribution of the sarees is missing. The Mother herself selected the sarees to be sold through Dyuman-bhai. My mother, Dayawati Jauhar, also bought a saree from him. When people got to know that the Mother's sarees were being sold because the Mother did not have enough money to feed her big family, there was a certain sadness among the Ashramites. The Ashramites themselves, however, did not have any money to buy the sarees. So it was the visitors, or rather devotees, who came on Darshan days or on their birthdays, who bought them. Many of the sarees were purchased by devotees and turned into either *salwar kameez* or gowns for the Mother to wear again.

When Tarachand Barjatya (Dwij, name given by the Mother) came to the Ashram on one of his usual visits, he was shocked to hear that the Mother was selling her sarees to feed her children. He immediately went to Dyuman-bhai and bought off all the sarees and offered them back to the Mother along with the money for the sarees.

It was then that the Mother said that since those sarees had already been sold she could not wear them again. Naturally, she could not even sell them again, so she decided to distribute them to all the Ashramites and that is the secret story behind the distribution of the sarees.

It is also not true that she expected everyone to wear the sarees. She gave a pink saree to me saying that it was the colour of the psychic and she told me very specifically that she did not expect me to wear it and that I should just keep it as a souvenir from her. Similarly, I know that my sisters did not wear their sarees more than once, but preserved them. The saree bought by my mother and the one given to her by the Mother, along with other Ashramites, have both been well preserved.

She did, however, select the sarees for each

person herself. Everyday a number of sarees would be laid out in the corridor of the long passage in front of her room and Akka (Vasudhaben) and probably some other people helped her with the names. When she selected the sarees for a particular person, it would be tagged with the name.

Around two weeks before every Darshan the Mother would distribute simple white cotton sarees with borders during the morning pranam in the meditation hall downstairs to all the ladies of the Ashram and for the young girls she would distribute cloth for making frocks. These sarees were worn on every Darshan day.

According to my records, it was before the August Darshan in 1956 that Mother selected the sarees and these were distributed to the ladies of the Ashram and everybody wore them on 15<sup>th</sup> August, 1956. The date mentioned for the distribution and wearing of the sarees is April 1956, which I feel is incorrect according to my records. Priti-di was probably not maintaining a proper diary and she probably wrote from her memory. April Darshan was always a Darshan when we went twice to Sri Aurobindo: once for March Past in uniform and the second time we went in our normal clothes. So I doubt if it was April Darshan when we went to the Mother in sarees. I think August 15<sup>th</sup> is the correct date.

It was before August Darshan in 1956 that these sarees were distributed and they were worn by everybody on 15<sup>th</sup> August, 1956.

The remaining sarees in Mother's collection continued to be sold by Dyumanbhai for quite some time. When my elder brother Narendra passed away in 1961, Lata bought a green saree and made a gown for the Mother. The Mother wore this gown on the 13<sup>th</sup> day, i.e. the 1<sup>st</sup> of April 1961, when she distributed the special blessings for him during Prosperity. Since the saree was turned into a gown and offered back to the Mother, the blouse remained with us and we still have it as a treasured possession. ❧

## VERMI-CULTURE AND THE ORGANIC VEGETABLE GARDEN AT SWARNABHOOMI

*Dilip Patel '76*

Since a few months now, African worms have been busy at Swarnabhoomi converting leaf litter and other organic waste into very rich vermi-compost that produces remarkable results for plant growth. Ver-



The African earthworm

mi-culture, as the process of worm-aided composting is called, was thought of because of the abundance of leaf litter from the mature mango and cashew trees already on our plot. What basically happens is this: worms are introduced in broken down leaf litter/cowdung/kitchen waste and they convert the biomass into

compost by digesting it through their bodies. The process takes roughly six weeks by which time the worms have laid eggs and the whole process starts again with the worms transferred to a new pit full of biomass.

Several Ashram users and keen gardeners have

reported to me that the vermi-compost and the liquid compost that is known as vermi-wash has worked wonders for their plants especially the flowering ones. We are now happy to sell the excess in little one kilogram bags as well as larger quantities on order.

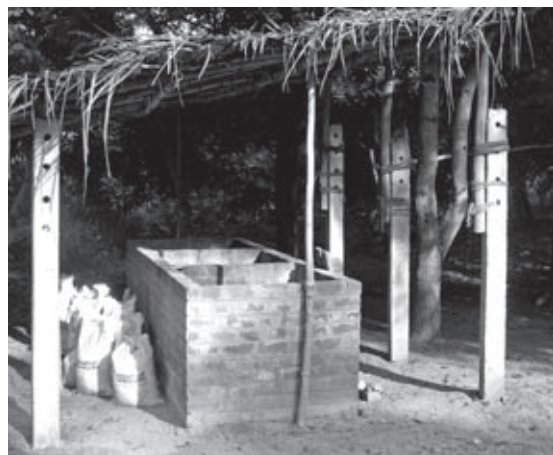
The African worm as opposed to its Indian counterpart produces faster results and is much larger. However it needs to be contained in closed pits so as not to over-

take the more resilient Indian variety. The production slows down a lot in the summer heat but we have fortunately had a fairly cloudy and wet summer so the worms have survived well.

Vermi-culture is in line with our green thematic development at Swarnabhoomi as is our current project of an organic vegetable garden. We cleared a small area, behind the main "Shelter" building, roughly 20m by 10m, made furrows and put in vermi-compost in the "valleys" and planted our first



Dilip collecting the vermi-wash



The compost pits



The fine, fresh, odourless vermi-compost



The organic vegetable patch

vegetable seeds which were okras (*bhindi*). This was our prototype kitchen garden.

The first harvesting happened on our last Sunday work-outing and the okras were so tender that we had them raw with our breakfast!

We have already planted brinjal, chillies, *keera*, beans and *karela* on the much larger plot nearby and hope to go into regular organic



A healthy karela

vegetable gardening to supply our own community. Future plans are for more exotic vegetables such as parval (*potol*), zucchini (which is baby marrow) and of course tomatoes, basil and other leafy herbs. Banana trees will soon be planted to supply us with fruit as well as organic dishes during our working Sundays! Suggestions are always welcome so please contact the GC office.



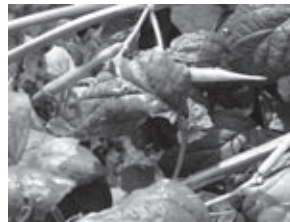
Harvesting the greens (*keera*)

## POSSIBLE PROJECTS FOR THE FUTURE

As the quality of Pondy water is deteriorating there is a suggestion to bottle the excellent bore-well water at Swarnabhoomi in a non-commercial way, for our own consumption.



Brinjals are ready



Cluster beans (*gavar*)

For that though we need to have the water professionally tested and necessary permits arranged. Growing of bamboo/casuarina for construction purposes and a little fruit orchard for children is being considered.

We are blessed at Swarnabhoomi with good soil and there is an abundance of water from the bore-well so hopefully we will succeed in our plans to turn the land into a productive, sustainable, as well as aesthetically pleasing environment. ☸



The organically grown vegetables on display



## JHUNJHUN HOME

The Jhunjhun Home building was offered to the Mother by someone related to a person named Keshawdev Jhunjhunwala. There is still a plaque on the wall of the dining room of the boarding on which it is written that this donation was made in his memory. Perhaps this is the only place in the Ashram where such a plaque which commemorates a donation exists. It is a bit unusual but anyone who sees that plaque can understand how the boarding got its name. There was already an old house with a garden on that site and after it was purchased the dining and kitchen areas were constructed. The room for the person in charge was also added when the front portion was remodelled. During those early years there was a large terrace which was used only for drying clothes. Several decades later the first floor was added.

When the boarding was started, in 1961, it was a time when the School was in full phase of expansion. Children were coming from all over the country, and finding accommodation for them was a problem. As and when the need arose to start a new boarding the Mother arranged for a place and a person to look after the children. The process was very organic and informal. This house which is at the corner of Rue St. Gilles and Rue St. Louis must have come as a great help because not only was it near the Ashram Main Building and the School but it was also just a few steps from the Playground.

The new session of the School was about to begin, some children had already come, but there was no place in the existing boardings for them. Around the same time Rama Halder, (the mother of Debjani, Debabrata and Debashish), had been asked by the Mother if she could take one more child along with her own and look after her. In the meantime two Tibetan girls had been accepted by the Mother and they were coming down from Delhi with Dayawati-ji (mother of Tara-

di, Lata-di, Chitra-di, Purnima-di, Kake-da and Chhote-da) who had been looking after them for a month. It was only during the inauguration of the new boarding that the Mother called Rama-di and told her that instead of one more there would be nine children in all and that she would have to move with her own children into this new place. For the first week or so it was Dayawati-ji who looked after the children until Rama-di could move in and take over the work.

Fortunately for us there are several photos of that inauguration when the Mother visited the boarding along with Nolini-da, Pavitra-da, Kireet-bhai and others. She went around the house and looked at the facilities for the children.



Mother visiting the boarding for the inauguration on 9.12.1961. Background: Nolini-da, Abhay Singh, Pavitra-da, Kireet-bhai. Foreground: the Mother, Dayawati Jauhar, a Tibetan girl.

Perhaps these are the only pictures we have of the Mother visiting a boarding for children. Also, it would seem that it was one of the last times that the Mother came out of the Ashram Main Building. This is why these pictures are very special.

Rama-di took over a few days later and looked after the children. By mid-1962, however, she realised that it was not going to be possible for her to continue to be the person in charge of the





L to R: Dayawati Jauhar, a Tibetan girl, the Mother, Rama

boarding. So she informed the Mother that another person had to be found to replace her. She made a list of names of those ladies who could be

the possible candidates. It was Debashish Haldar who suggested Pramila-di's name as she was his French teacher at school and he thought that she was a person whom children appreciated. When this list was sent to the Mother she underlined Pramila-di's name and this is how Didi was chosen to look after Jhunjhun Home.

At first Pramila-di was reluctant because she had come away to the Ashram at a young age and had never looked after children. Moreover, she did not know how to cook proper meals. At that time she was working at the laundry and the bakery under her cousin Jyotin-da. As he was not keeping very well she was looking after him and helping him. This was another reason why she did not want to take care of the boarding. After much persuasion from Nolini-da she agreed, knowing that this was what the Mother wanted her to do.

In those days food came from the Dining Room for the children but the ladies who looked after the boardings prepared one or two extra dishes. Didi put her heart into it and picked up the fine points of Bengali cuisine and soon became an expert. As there were two Tibetan girls who were non-vegetarian, the Mother asked Pramila-di to cook non-vegetarian dishes for the children. At that time meat was not cooked in any Ashram house. Didi at first flatly refused because she had not touched meat since her early years, having started her spiritual path as a teenager. Once again Nolini-da persuaded her, explaining to her that the Mother was concerned for the Tibetans who were used to eating meat. Nolini-da said, "If

we could become gun-holding revolutionaries at Sri Aurobindo's command surely you can obey the Mother and cook meat." Finally Didi relented and got down to preparing meat dishes.

Since Didi had worked in the laundry earlier there was a special arrangement and the boarding children's clothes used to go to the laundry every day. This was later changed to thrice a week and after that it became twice a week. This practice continues till today. The laundry being connected to the bakery, the children received cakes and biscuits regularly from there. Didi continued teaching in the school. As soon as Didi took charge of the boarding, Pranab-da sent chocolates for the children and appointed Nirmal-da to take the children for picnics to Lake. Nolini-da was the person Didi turned to for advice and Pavitra-da was also around to help.

What was noteworthy about Didi was that she was totally against keeping children in quarantine when one of them had a contagious illness. In the late 1960s when a child had mumps or measles all the children of the boarding were quarantined.



L to R: Amrita-da, Pavitra-da, Nolini-da, the Mother, Navajata, Pradyot-da, Abhay Singh, Udar.

They had to stay at home for two weeks and miss school and sports.

When a few children in Jhunjhun Home had mumps, Nripen-da, the Ashram doctor, asked Didi to keep all the children of the boarding indoors. Didi sent word through Nolini-da informing the Mother that she did not want to follow this method and that she wanted those children who were not ill to continue with their normal

activities. The Mother's answer was really a revelation. She told Didi that she too did not believe in this method of isolating children.

To illustrate this point she recounted an incident from her own childhood. When her brother Matteo was down with a contagious illness, her mother had asked the Mother not to go near him. But the Mother was used to always giving a good-night kiss to her brother before going to sleep. Even though her mother had forbidden her to have any contact with her brother, she decided to quietly creep near him at night and to continue with her goodnight kisses as usual. The Mother ended her story by adding that nothing happened to her and this is how she was convinced that the most important thing is not to be afraid of catching the illness. Hearing of Didi's decision to go against the doctor's instructions, she fully supported her. Once Didi had the Mother's written sanction she let the children go to school and group as usual, isolating only those children who were ill.

A few years later Krishna-da joined Didi and became her assistant. In 1972, as we know, the

boardings of the school were re-organised and they were either only for boys or only for girls. Krishna-da was given the charge of Comfort Home which became a boys' boarding, and Jhunjhun Home was only for girls. When this change took place Didi decided to stop teaching in the school. Soon after that Baby-di (whose real name is Manisha) came to live in the Ashram and was asked to assist Didi who was her relative. After Didi passed away in September 1995 Baby-di became the sole care-taker.

Pramila-di was never in very good health. She was already suffering from asthma before she took up work in the boarding. In spite of this she did the work she was given with joy and to the best of her capacity. In the beginning she had to look after a group of children of mixed age groups and later she was given the responsibility of taking care of fifteen teenage girls. Looking after one teenager is a hard enough task. How hard it must have been to look after fifteen of them! How courageous is the person who takes it up as her *sadhana*! ❀

## DEBASHISH HALDAR REMEMBERS

The Haldar family arrived in Pondicherry during the month of August 1961. However as the school session begins in December, Mr. Haldar went back to Calcutta while Mrs. Haldar stayed on with her three children — Debabrata, Debjani and Debashish — in the house next to Amala's which later on was occupied by Jugal-da. Due to the non-availability of hostel accommodation it was decided that Mrs. Haldar would stay on in Pondicherry.

One day Mrityunjoy-da, who was their local guardian, informed Mrs. Haldar that there was another girl student — Geeta — whom the Mother wanted to admit to the School but who had no place to stay. Mrs. Haldar suggested that if an extra cot was provided she could take care of Geeta along with her three children. Mrityunjoy-da mentioned this to Kireet-bhai who in turn informed the Mother.



The first batch of boarders. Back row (L to R): Pushkar, Rama-di, Debabrata. Middle row: Animesh, Debjani, Geeta, Pema, Dicky. Front row: Jayashankar, Debashish H.

On 9<sup>th</sup> December 1961 the Mother inaugurated Jhunjhun Home. Until this time Mrs. Haldar

had no inkling of the responsibility the Mother had in mind for her. In fact after cutting the ribbon, the Mother sent for Mrs. Haldar. Debashish remembers that when they arrived at Jhunjhun Home, Mother was sitting in the verandah outside what is now the Didi's room. The Mother then asked Mrs Haldar whether she was willing to take in one more child. On Mrs Haldar's replying in the affirmative, Mother told her that instead of one more child she was going to give her five more and that they were all going to live in the new boarding that had just been inaugurated. Mrs Haldar naturally agreed. The Mother then showed her the building, pointing out the

rooms for the girls and those for the boys and clearly mentioning that the partition between the two sections must be strictly maintained. She also told Mrs Haldar that she must treat all the children equally.

So this is how Mrs Haldar became the first warden or rather Didi of Jhunjhun Home. The first 9 boarders were: Debabrata Haldar, Debjani Haldar, Debashish Haldar, Jayashankar, Geeta, Animesh, Pushkar, Dicky, Pema.

Mrs. Haldar continued in her job as Didi for about 7-8 months. After this period, she left for Calcutta. She decided to leave because she could not treat all equally as advised by the Mother. ❧

## LIFE IN JHUNJHUN HOME

*By Aditya Srivastava '78*

**W**e arrived in Pondicherry on the 13th of December 1964. Kireetbhai, the then registrar of the School, had informed my father that though the three of us — Arvind, Savita and myself — had been admitted to the SAICE, we had not been provided with hostel accommodation. As a result Suman, our eldest sister, who had completed her graduation, accompanied us as a temporary guardian. We had hardly settled down (we were put up in the Park Guest House) when our father informed us that hostel accommodation was finally available. The very next day on 3rd January 1965, Arvind was sent off to Big Boys' Boarding while Savita and myself were left in the care of Pramila-di at Jhunjhun Home.

As I had never stayed away from my parents, I felt a bit homesick but very soon things fell into place. In those early years life in the boardings was quite different from what it is now. The number of students per hostel was smaller than now — typically 10-12 children with a Didi to take care of them. In most boardings, the boarders were both girls and boys ranging from 6 to 16 years of age. The boarding atmosphere was more of a typical Indian home where the Didi played the role of the mother, catering to our smallest needs. Starting

from preparing meals, supervising the household chores, helping with the homework, fetching the younger children from the playground, settling quarrels, setting up rules and doling out punishment were all part of her responsibilities. Just as at home, we boarders also participated in small household chores such as picking up food from the Dining Room, collecting the fruit bag, sorting clothes for laundry, accompanying the maids to the grocery store (Honesty), etc.

When we arrived in Jhunjhun Home it was dominated by Bengali children and the only 2 non-Bengali ones — Jayashankar and Seraphine — attended Bengali classes and spoke Bengali like the others. So in the beginning we two were the odd kids but very quickly we picked up the language and Didi stopped struggling with her broken Hindi to make herself understood.

With the passing of months I realised that Jhunjhun Home was quite different from other boardings. I suppose this had to do with Didi's personality. Not only we boarders but others too considered her a strict Didi. Children from other boardings usually visited each other on holidays and played together. At Jhunjhun Home we were not allowed to bring in friends or guests, with the exception of our parents and guardians, but

they too were restricted to the verandah or Didi's room. The boys' and girls' rooms were clearly demarcated and we were not allowed in each other's domain. All discussion, talks and meetings took place in the common areas like the verandahs and the dining room. As Didi was particular about neatness and order, we were not allowed to make our beds. This was done by the maids after we left for school. We were not allowed to lie down or touch our beds before lunch and before dinner. No objects were permitted to be left around on the beds and clothes were strictly restricted to the dressing rooms. Once in a while Didi inspected our tables and drawers and our clothes cupboards. All this neatness and the well-maintained garden with the oval lily pond in the centre created a very special ambience and often visitors were shown Jhunjhun Home as a model hostel.

After our physical activities, Didi herself fetched the younger children from the Guest House. The others arrived on their own but had strict instructions not to loiter around. The only place they were allowed to visit was the Ashram. In the mornings before breakfast Didi herself would accompany us to the Ashram. Only on holidays, between breakfast and lunch, we were allowed out on our own but never further than the Playground, the Library, the Ashram and the School building. We were allowed visits to our local guardians on holidays but the latter had to clearly define the hours of these visits and see that we reported back on time for group.

As a child all this discipline did irk me at times. On holidays I itched to go sea-swimming and cycle up to Auroville but Didi just would not allow it. When I insisted, she would ask me to let the leader of these missions come and take her permission in person. Now I knew that was impossible! The leaders themselves, D group boys, would not dare face such an ordeal. To further my case I would point out to her that other boarders went sea-swimming with their respective Didis

on Sunday mornings. Even this new tactic failed. She would say that since the Jhunjhun Home Didi doesn't know how to swim, she can't take that risk. She would ask me what she should do in case anything happened to me. After all she was answerable to the parents and much more to the Mother



Back row (L to R): Aradhita, Anirban Ghosh, Mita, Amitabha, Satyajit, Roopa. Front row: Savita, Aditya, Jayashankar, Kalyan.

who had entrusted her with the responsibility of looking after the children. As a last resort I would point out that something could also happen to us while sea-bathing during group hours. To this she would remind me that during group hours the children's responsibility and safety rested on the able shoulders of Pranab-da and that neither she nor I needed to worry about it. I would be left with my back against the wall. There wasn't much point appealing to my father who had fully surrendered us to Didi's able guardianship. In my frustration I would complain to Suman who would listen sympathetically but wouldn't do anything about it. As I grew up I learned that she was quite happy that Didi was strict and didn't give in to my whims. As a parent I realize how right Didi was. All this discipline and strictness was the expression of her sincere concern for the children. She always took her work given by the Mother very seriously.

Generally before dinner we younger children would sit on mats in the verandah to finish our



homework in Didi's presence. For some months until he passed away, Jyotin-da (Jyotindra Nath, Didi's elder cousin brother in charge of the laundry and the bakery) would come and join us. He was kindness and gentleness incarnate. Some of us boys would do badly in maths and would get a good chiding from Didi but Jyotin-da would immediately intervene and be very kind and tell us that maths wasn't that difficult a subject. In fact he would write down tables for us to learn by heart.

Meal times were extremely exciting and noisy. Boys and girls stood in two queues, age-wise small to big, in the dining room in front of an opening in the wall separating the kitchen and the dining room. Didi served food from the kitchen side. For some unknown reason this was also the time to settle scores among some of the older boys and girls. While Didi served them they would file their complaints, defend themselves and after the verbal duel finally accept her verdict and walk off fuming, or bubbling with victory, with their full plates. While this drama was enacted between the feuding parties, the rest of us watched the fun instead of proceeding with our food. After serving the children Didi would come round and enter the dining room and take her place at the head of the table near the dining room exit. She had to constantly admonish us to keep us quiet and concentrated on our food. As soon as we were through with our meal we were to show her our plate before depositing it in the big tub meant for used vessels. She would scrutinize our plates to check if we were wasting food. Often not satisfied with our explanation for wastage, she would send us back to finish off the food like good children. She would tell us that we should feel ashamed to waste good food while there were hundreds of poor children going to bed hungry. At the time, I could not link up the two facts but did not think it wise to question or argue with her. Only later did I realize what an important lesson that was.

There was another peculiarity of Jhunjhun Home which comes to my mind. While all other children of the School generally reported to Nripen-da in the main dispensary when they were ill or injured, the Jhunjhun Home children were treated by Doctor Babu (Dr. Das Gupta)

who was in charge of the Children's Dispensary. No Jhunjhun Home member had ever been admitted to the Nursing Home. In fact in my very first year I had contracted chicken pox and had to be segregated. The girls' dressing room which was farthest from other living rooms was promptly vacated and my bed was moved there. Didi herself nursed me while the other children attended school as usual. However this was unheard of in other boardings — when chicken pox or measles struck, the usual practice was to send the affected child to the Cure House while the whole boarding was quarantined for a long spell of about 40 days. As Jhunjhun Home was never under quarantine, some children from other boardings finally wrote to the Mother about this discrimination and that put a full stop to the quarantines.

Another very unique feature of Jhunjhun Home was that the higher school authorities treated it as a reformatory. On several occasions, a child whom others found quite unmanageable was given a last chance (before being sent back home to parents) in Jhunjhun Home. Mostly these children did turn over a new leaf and the entire credit went to Didi. She had a unique and clever way of dealing with such children. When the child arrived, she would act as though she knew nothing about his unruly behaviour. She would introduce him to the rest as a very good, special child. If he happened to be vegetarian, she would take particular care to cook some special dish for him on days when we had non-veg food (Jhunjhun Home was the only boarding where non-vegetarian food was served regularly). Though never one to encourage indiscipline, she would be extra kind and ignore small faults. I didn't then understand why, but her method invariably worked. None of these children had to be sent back home.

Now looking back at those childhood days and events, I clearly understand that behind her uncanny ability to handle children, her will-power and unhesitant decision-making, was her deep commitment to her job or rather to the Mother. In fact this is true of that entire generation of dedicated workers nurtured by the Mother and whose number is unfortunately fast dwindling. ❧

# ABOUT JHUNJHUN HOME

FROM PRAMILA-DI'S BOOK *UJJWAL ATEET (THE LUMINOUS PAST)*

*Translated from the original Bengali*

The Mother has said that in human life happiness far outweighs our share of unhappiness. Pushing away the momentary sadness of our lives the Mother gave us happiness beyond measure. She sent word that on 9<sup>th</sup> December, which is the day of Sri Aurobindo's Mahasamadhi, after the meditation I should take the children of the boarding and go to her. On 9<sup>th</sup> December, Nolini-da came to the Meditation Hall and instructed us to go upstairs and wait near the door to the Mother's room on the eastern terrace. We climbed the three flights of stairs to heaven. I went first to the door of Mother's room, holding the hand of the youngest child. I had asked the eldest and the most intelligent girl to stand at the end. The door opened. One by one, in a line we went and stood before the Mother. She gave us a bright smile and said, "Happy birthday, Happy new year, my children". We had waited two years and now we were about to receive blessings from the Mother's hands on the anniversary of the opening of our boarding. Our hearts were filled with waves of joy. The Mother was alone. Right at the beginning a drop of water fell from a flower petal onto the cloth which was covering the Mother's lap. She used to cover her lap with a napkin. The Mother began to look for another cloth to put in its place. At once I took the end of my freshly ironed sari and wiped that drop of water. There was no stain of water on Mother's dress. The Mother was assured and she continued receiving the *pranams*. It took a long time to finish the *pranam*. At the very end it was my turn. I put my head on the Mother's soft feet and with all my heart offered my *pranam*. Sweet Mother pressed my head with both her hands on her sacred feet. Then I stood up. She placed in my hands a beautiful blessing card, on which there was a picture of a lotus, and a big yellow rose. She looked at everyone and

smiled sweetly. Now it was time to say good-bye. The Mother said, "Good-bye, my children". With a new joy in our hearts we went to Nolini-da's room, and after showing who had received what, we came back to Jhunjhun Home, to our abode of peace.

\*

Now I will tell you the story of a theft. One night, almost around midnight a man entered my room and taking my table clock ran out, only to slip and fall at the door. As it had rained, there were some dried mud marks on my floor. I woke up hearing the noise and shouted, "Thief, thief!" The thief took the clock and ran up the stairs and onto the terrace. The children woke up and looked at their tables. The thief had taken away their old pencils and pens. Jayashankar was not in his room. I ran out into the street and called Jayashankar by his name. Jayashankar was calling me from the terrace. "Didi," he was saying, "I have come here to catch the thief. Look, there, he is running away, far away." Jayashankar came down with a big stick in his hand.

I asked him, "Where did you get this stick?" He answered, "The thief gave it to me."

- Why?
- Madhav Pandit's name is written on it. The thief said, "Please give this to him."
- Did he take the stick from Madhav Pandit's house and come to our terrace to give it? Do you know him?
- No, I don't know him.
- So why did you go?
- To catch him. He escaped by slipping down the drain pipe. I told him, "I am coming down too." The thief said, "*Tambi* (younger brother), don't come down. You will fall."
- What would you have done if he had taken you away?
- He would not have taken me away. He was

smiling with joy when he saw me.

The young ones told Jayashankar, "So, you are the thief's younger brother!"

Jayashankar replied, "He was not a thief. He did not take the stick."

I said, "But he took my clock away." Jayashankar said with great sadness, "What will you do now? How will you go to school if you cannot see the clock?"

By that time it was six in the morning. He took the stick and ran to give it to Madhav Pandit. Then he went to Amrita-da and told him about the theft. He also told him that I had to be given a new clock.

In the afternoon Kameshwar came with three policemen. They measured the footprints of the thief and made an estimate of the value of the things which had been stolen. All together it added up to eight rupees of those days. The thief turned out to be the husband of our maid-servant. Finally the police could not catch the thief. Before he could be caught the thief took his wife and ran away from Pondicherry. Before evening, Amrita-da sent me another clock.

The Mother sent her blessings through Pavitra-da. He asked us, "Do you all sleep with the doors open?"

- Yes, Pavitra-da, we leave them open.
- So what will you do now?
- From today all of us have decided to bolt the doors from inside.
- Mother has been giving some thought to exactly this matter. She has said very forcefully to tell you that under no circumstances should anybody shut the doors. The reason behind this not shutting the doors is that it will create fear in the minds of the children. Once fear gets in you can do nothing. The children will lose their courage - they will never be able to progress in life. Courage

is the greatest possession of the young. Courage brings wisdom. Can you not sleep with the doors open?

- I will not shut the doors. I was only thinking of the children when I spoke of shutting the doors. Now there is no question of shutting the doors. We have to obey the Mother's instructions.



Pramila-di with the boarders and some of her students:  
Back Row: Datta Mukherjee, Sammita, Miriam, Mita, Savita, Subir K. Nath, Subir Bose  
Middle Row: Gautam Dey, Pragna, Debashish Lahiri, Anup, Aditya, Uma, Sushil  
Sitting: Pramila-di, Sanjeev, Krishna-da  
Front Row: Devendra, Krishna Bannerjee, Gopal Dalmia, Sampat, Shivangauda

- The Mother has said that all of you should repeat the Mother's and Sri Aurobindo's name in your minds before going to sleep. These names will be your shields of protection. Because of this incident of theft you have received from the Mother a new courage, an inner strength and much more.

This was our sweet Mother's sweet initiation. We accepted this lesson with great joy. Even now none of us shut the doors. Even if we shut them we do not draw the bolt.

\*

One Sunday afternoon I was sitting with the

children and talking to them about Nolini-da. Suddenly Jayashankar, a seven year old South Indian boy quietly told me, pleading with all his heart, that he wanted me to take him to Nolini-da once. That evening I took him and we stood outside Nolini-da's door. He was ready at that time and was about to go to the Playground. When he saw us he called us in. I said, "Jayashankar wants to see you." Nolini-da stood up. Jayashankar went up to Nolini-da and started talking to him in Bengali. Nolini-da said, "Look at me." Jayashankar replied, "Wait! It's a bit difficult."

- Why?
- There isn't enough light in your room. I cannot see very well.
- Let's go and stand in the hall where there is a lot of light.
- Yes, let's go.

Nolini-da stood under a bright light. Jayashankar looked at him. After a while he said, "Now I want to see you from the back." Nolini-da turned around. Then he turned and looked to the right and to the left. I made a sign to him to stop.

He said, "It's all right, Nolini-da, I have seen you properly."

- Have you seen very well?
- Yes, I have seen very well.
- So, what did you think? Did you like what you saw?
- I really find you very handsome. I really like you.
- Is there anything more to see?
- No, there is nothing more. Now you can go.
- All right, let me go then. All of you should also go to the Playground for the meditation.
- Yes, we will go. I like going to the meditation.

As we were coming away, Nolini-da said with joy, "Within eight months he has picked up Bengali very well. Can he read?"

I said, "No, he can't read. He has only learnt to speak."

It was this open-hearted attitude that Nolini-da had towards children which touched me so much. ❧

## REMEMBERING PRAMILA-DI

*Sunayana Panda '79*

I don't know why I remember Pramila-di so much these days. Maybe it's because I realise only now that I learnt from her some of the essential lessons of life. Also, it was she who gave me a peep into the life of the early days of the Ashram, and made me understand the background of the institution in which I was being brought up.

All this happened more than thirty years ago, in 1977. But it is not the number of years that makes those days so remote. It is the extent of change that has taken place since, that makes this story seem like it had happened in another life. Let me see if I can show you how much the world has changed since then. Telephones were those big black contraptions which you could only see in Paru-di's office if you had the misfortune of

being called there. There were no television sets and the only time we saw moving images was in the Playground on Saturdays. The internet, of course, did not even exist in the '*karan jagat*'. Our world was limited to the School, Corner House, Playground, Tennis Ground and Sports Ground. We carried money on us only when we went to Nehru Street occasionally. In fact, we thought of money as something which was in the outer periphery of our lives. 'Share' was still a verb and not a noun.

It was in such a world that we lived in Pramila-di's boarding. Although we called her 'Didi' she was old enough to be our grandmother and instead of the affection and respect that one associates with the word, when we called her there was only respect and a certain amount of fear. It



had, of course, something to do with Didi's appearance. She was short and dark and had those strange perfectly round glassy eyes. Even though she was in her sixties — at least she looked that old — Didi had thick dark hair that cascaded down to her ankles. If you happened to see her at night, a short dark figure in a starched white sari and her black hair forming a dark frame all around her, you could easily have mistaken her for one of the characters out of those scary stories she told us. How her sari remained perfectly ironed and



creased at the right places even at midnight is one of those unsolved mysteries of the universe. Didi had a reputation of being the strictest boarding in-charge of all times. All our efforts at trying to justify a mistake fell on deaf ears — quite literally. Didi was hard of hearing and never managed to hear more than half of what we told her.

However much we feared Didi, one thing was certain. We never had the feeling that looking after us was a 'job' she was doing for a certain number of hours in a day. It was clear that she was doing her *sadhana*, and that we had been kindly allowed to live with her. She cooked lunch and dinner for fifteen girls when she could easily have sent us all to Corner House. She was always there when we returned from School or the Playground. We always caught sight of her through the open door giving French lessons to various Ashramites or just having a cup of tea with a visiting parent. Even though we rarely started a conversation with her, it was very comforting to know that we could go to her whenever we needed to. The furthest she ever went was to the Ashram Main Building,

the eastern gate of which was not even a hundred metres away from our door.

While we enjoyed her extraordinary culinary skills we were also aware that Didi was famous for not tolerating any nonsense. When we were told that Didi wanted to see one of us in her room we knew we were in for a bad time. It was really something we dreaded. Having been several times called to her room and scolded I soon discovered a pattern in her manner of delivering punishment. I noticed that she stopped her deluge of harsh words when she saw tears. Keeping this in mind I used to get my tears out as soon as I thought that I had been scolded for a reasonable length of time. Maybe this is how I developed my acting skills!

Our relationship started on a strange note. As I entered the boarding for the first time I was so disheartened, having heard all those horror stories of how Didi was excessively strict, that tears just streamed down my cheeks. Looking at me, Didi said "Don't be sad. Think of the smile you will have when you leave this boarding in a year or two. You have that to look forward to." I found that a rather clever way of putting things. Within the next few weeks we quickly made up our minds about each other.

I used to come home late every evening and I always had an excuse, so Didi was convinced that I was an incorrigible liar, and I on my part, found her language so harsh that I was sure she had a block of wood where usually the human heart is supposed to be. Didi never believed anything I said. Once I came home about fifteen minutes after the time fixed for us. I had to request Didi to open the door for me. As I came in she asked me why I was late. I told her that I had a Russian class. At that time, not having found any common free periods, we had kept this class in the evening. "Russian!" exclaimed Didi, "What are you going to tell me next?"

"It's true," I replied, "I am learning Russian."

"And who is your teacher?" she asked.

"Sebastien," I said, with a note of pride.

"Never heard of him," commented Didi, but it sounded more like, "Another one of your cooked up stories!"

"Sebastien is Svetlana's son."

"Isn't his name Cristof?" she asked, thinking she had caught me at last.

"This is her other son."

"I thought Svetlana had only one son."

What could I say to that? So I just showed her my Russian notebook so that she could see that I could write the Russian script.

Didi just raised her eyebrows and said, "Tomorrow you will come and tell me that you are learning Chinese and that's why you got late coming home."

I decided it was better to keep quiet and let her have the last word. I made sure that I got home on time on the days when I had my Russian classes.

Strange but true, very soon we simultaneously developed a secret admiration for each other too, without losing any of our mistrust. I knew that she kept mostly to herself and that she was entirely dedicated to her *sadhana*. There was absolutely nothing else in her life. That to me was something so high, so much beyond me, that I looked at Didi with a secret admiration. She, on the other hand, knew that I was in Knowledge and that in itself was an achievement in her eyes. It meant automatically that I was studying the major works of Sri Aurobindo and that was what made her consider me a notch above the other girls, most of whom were still in school.

Then something happened, before the April Darshan of that year, which changed our relationship for ever. Usually before the Darshan we girls spent all our waking hours planning what we were going to wear that day. Looking back, it seems something totally silly, because after all we were not going to a party; we were only going to the meditation! But girls will be girls and that's how it was. I had a bright idea. I was going to borrow one of Didi's saris.

Didi had a formidable collection of saris. It was quite a coincidence, actually. The number of saris Didi had was very large because she took great care of them and they just never wore out. She received saris not only from the Ashram but also from her family in Bengal. In her room there were two cupboards, the first one contained her Ashram saris and the other one had all her

Bengal saris.

When I entered her room and told her as loudly and clearly as possible that I wanted to borrow one of her saris she opened her cupboard, revealing her beautiful handloom saris from Bengal. "Take any one you want," she said generously.

At this point, I must make an aside and add a vital piece of information. In the year 1977 Bengal handloom saris were the last word in fashion. The tourists were wearing them, the models in advertisements were wearing them and the actresses never seemed to have enough of them. We had even seen a film where the heroine sang a song as she dried these lovely saris, at least twenty of them, hanging them from the clotheslines on her terrace one by one. We were at an age when our conversations inevitably centred around who was wearing what, and that year we had discussed at length the colour combinations, the width of the borders and the subtleties of the weaves of those handloom saris from Bengal.

As Didi held the door of her wardrobe open for me to choose from I went closer to her and said, "Didi, I don't want one of these. I want to wear one of your Prosperity saris." These were the very simple white saris with a printed border that Didi received from the Ashram four times a year.

"My Prosperity saris!" said Didi in disbelief. "Why do you want to wear my Prosperity saris?"

"I want one of those because I really like them. When I go for meditation around the Samadhi on Darshan days I see the ladies of the Ashram, our teachers and captains, wearing them and they look so special. Everyone has the same print. One can see at once that they belong to a family and that they are not like everyone else."

Didi looked at me quite surprised.

"I want to belong to that family. I too want to be special," I explained.

There was a long silence after which Didi said, "The saris given by the Ashram, which we receive from Prosperity, are actually given by the Mother. I believe that my saris come from the Mother even though she is not in her physical body any more, and I receive them as I used to when she actually gave them to us. Whatever comes from

the Mother is filled with her power. These saris become the physical channel of her love and her force which she wants to give to us. In these saris there is just that force which is meant for me, for my progress and my *sadhana*. You cannot take one of my Prosperity saris and put it on because there is a force in it which is given only for me.”

Then Didi sat down and continued, “When I came to the Ashram I was exactly your age. I was only seventeen. But I wasn’t as intelligent as you are. I was just a village girl and could not speak English or French. You go to Knowledge College and read Sri Aurobindo’s works. I could barely communicate with the Mother at first.”

I was, by then, looking at the floor in utter shame. I wish I could have told her, “Didi, I am just having a good time in Knowledge. I don’t have even a fraction of the deep understanding of spiritual matters nor the unconditional devotion that fills your heart. I am just an ordinary teenager. I would never have the courage to choose a spiritual life at this young age as you did.” But, of course, the words remained unpronounced in my mouth.

Didi continued, “Even though I could not say anything much to her, the Mother always understood what was going on in my mind. She knew that even though I was serious about my *sadhana*, I was, at heart, still just a young girl. So when I would go to her to receive my sari at Darshan time she would keep one that had a yellow border for me.”

I stood absolutely amazed. I could not say a word, so much was I overcome by emotions that I had never felt for Didi before. And at that very moment she too was suddenly looking at me as if something new had been revealed to her about the young girl who was standing before her. From then on our relationship took quite another turn.

That day I finally chose a beautiful Bengal handloom sari and went away but every now and then Didi would call me to her room and tell me how people lived in the Ashram when she had just come. She spoke to me about the early *sadhaks* and the intense life of the Ashram. She showed me letters that the Mother had sent to her

cousin Jyotin-da. She spoke about how he was a very advanced soul in the path of yoga. Sometimes I tried telling her that I was getting late for my afternoon class but I knew that Didi couldn’t hear a word of what I was saying. Moreover, she was so deeply engrossed in the stories she wanted to tell me that I didn’t have the heart to stop her. I also knew that whatever I was learning from her at that moment was certainly not anything less than what I would have learnt in the class that I had just missed. I had to find an excuse for my absence and had to put up with the annoyance of my teachers, but deep in my heart I knew that I had a privilege that no one else had.

During the school holidays that year there were quite a few of us who did not go out of Pondicherry. One night we asked her to tell us a ghost story. “Bhuter galpo shunbe?” she asked. Then she chose the father of all “bhuter galpo” — Shakespeare’s *Hamlet* — and narrated it to us in her East Bengal dialect. Afterwards she called me to her room and to show her affection for me she said, “I have a birthday present for you. I will tell you the story of *Othello* on your birthday.” And indeed I heard her version of *Othello*, told once again in her East Bengal dialect, on the evening of my eighteenth birthday. I count that among the most original presents I have ever received in my life. I took that as a mark of her love and was glad that our relationship had taken such a beautiful turn.

When the year ended and I had to go to another boarding, she asked me to come and see her whenever I had the time. As I was leaving I smiled at her. She said, “Do you remember what I had told you? I knew you would be smiling when you were going to leave.” True, I was smiling. But it definitely wasn’t because I was happy to go. However, I decided, as I had often done during that year, that it was better to let her have the last word.

Every time I remember her now my heart fills with gratitude because she showed me by her example that one’s inner life is actually one’s only real life. The rest is just decoration, like the insubstantial icing on a cake. ❧

# AMADER ADORÉR PRAMILA-DI...

By Nabanita Deshmukh '85

“Gaarls, meechif korbéna, gaarls siti bajabéna! (girls don’t do mischief, girls don’t whistle) were Pramila-di’s favourite phrases.

## A STRICT DIDI BUT...

Pramila-di was not only the Jhunjhun boarding guardian but a dear didi who brought us up with care and affection. Clad in a white sari with flowing, grey hair and thick-rimmed spectacles, Pramila-di was the very epitome of strictness. She rarely smiled, spoke in a low, grave tone and observed each move you made like a benevolent hawk. But once you came to know her, the reserve parted, revealing the sunny side of her nature.

## A ‘SOUND’ FRIEND...

Pramila-di’s dearest and oldest friend was Priti-di (Manoj-da’s and Arati-di’s eldest sister). She often visited Didi and spent many pleasant but vociferous evenings with her. “Vociferous” because both the didis were hard of hearing. One day, much to our amusement, after an unusually loud, argumentative meeting, Priti-di marched out of Didi’s room in a huff. When asked what the matter was she irritably remarked:

“Oh! You must be well aware that your Didi is **really** hard of hearing. It is difficult to hold a decent conversation with her!”

## GREEN THUMB...

It was an open secret that Pramila-di loved her plants much more than any one of us. We often saw her pottering around the garden in her wooden sandals (khadam) with a trowel in hand. You would be surprised if I told you the menu she chose for our boarding plants: egg yolks and crushed shells for breakfast followed by rotting tea leaves and manure for lunch! My! Did we not pinch our noses at the putrid stench! But now, on looking back, I can say with pride that our boarding garden was certainly the most beautiful in the vicinity.

## SURPRISINGLY AMUSING...

Pramila-di was devoid of any humour but there were exceptional moments, peppered with naughtiness and laughter, so to say.

I had an irritating habit of forgetting my rubber slippers in front of bathrooms. I wore them fastidiously, making loud clip-clapping noises as I walked, much to the annoyance of Didi. But once I came out of the bathroom, I always forgot to put them on. Didi used to call me to her room and chide: “Nitu, don’t forget your slippers, one day the slippers will forget you!” I laughed to myself: “How can slippers ever forget?”

One day, to my surprise, I could not find my slippers anywhere. I looked for them under the bed, in the study room, among the plants, near the door but they were nowhere! “Have you seen them?” I asked my friends. They had not. I did not dare ask Didi, she would have surely taken me to task, so I promptly reported the loss to my mother (she was in town). That evening when Ma came to meet Didi, she spied my slippers in Pramila-di’s room! “I had hidden them under that cupboard,” she told my mother mischievously, “to teach Nitu a lesson!”

Didi tiptoeing past the bathroom and furtively hiding slippers is hard to imagine but it does show that Pramila-di had a naughty side to her nature, so rarely glimpsed.

‘Better take care of things lest they forget you’ is a valuable lesson I learnt from her.

## REMEMBRANCE...

Many years have gone by since Pramila-di passed away but her face, her voice and her caring ways, I cannot forget. Encouraging, kind but strict, she was a good guardian to a group of happy, energetic but noisy girls. And as Jhunjhun boarding completes its fifty years next year, what can I really say? I can at best remember, yes, remember our dear Didi with gratitude... and a smile! ❧



# JUGAL KISHORE MUKHERJEE

1925-2009

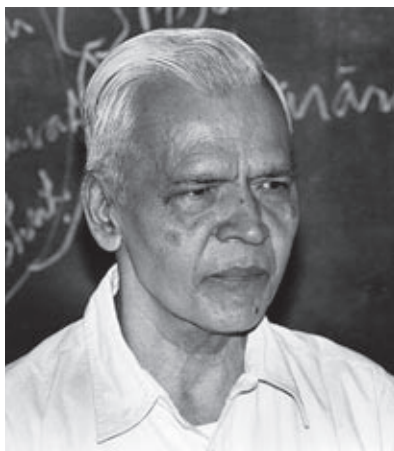
*R. Ranganath '62*

Jugal Kishore Mukherjee, one of the most eminent intellectual sadhaks of the Integral Yoga of Sri Aurobindo, passed away on December 15, 2009 at the age of 84. Though somewhat weakened physically due to his age, and all the more so because of an unfortunate accident, when knocked down by a motor cycle a few years ago, he was actually in quite good health and did not suffer from any chronic ailments. His sudden end came as a shock to the Ashramites. He had a deep inner life and there can be no doubt that his soul has winged its way into the protective arms of the Divine Mother.

Jugal Kishore Mukherjee, affectionately called “Jugal-da” by one and all in the Ashram, was born in a remote village in Bengal. His father passed away when he was only an infant in his mother’s arms. His mother, reduced to very difficult circumstances, somehow managed to raise Jugal-da to boyhood with often one sparse meal a day. Jugal-da’s brilliant intellect was noticed by the village school teacher and he was helped and referred to a better school some distance away from his own village. His mother, ever willing to sacrifice her all for the sake of her son, somehow managed to support him in order to enable him to pursue his studies. He landed in Calcutta for his college education and came in contact with the Sri Aurobindo Pathmandir on College Street, an important centre for the dissemination of Sri Aurobindo’s teachings. Studying often under street lights, he managed to

complete college. He was lucky enough to have the great Meghnath Saha as his professor.

He never forgot his mother’s advice, dinned into his ears from infancy: “Remember, my son, for those who have no one in this harsh world, there is always God, the Universal ever-present Friend, who never fails.” Guided by his mother and beaten into tough mettle by the vicissitudes of a life of extreme poverty, he developed an irreversible inner life, and it was only natural that when only 24 years old, without pursuing further studies, Jugal-da came and settled in the Sri Aurobindo Ashram in 1949. Hence he was blessed with the Grace of having had Sri Aurobindo’s Darshan for two years.



Jugal-da was assigned work in the Ashram School by the Mother, where he taught Physics. But on any given day, rather than teaching Physics he would be more inclined to be discussing Sri Aurobindo’s philosophy or Yoga. Such was his love for Mother and Sri Aurobindo around whom his life was centred! On the occasion of one of the anniversaries of the Ashram School, he was asked by the Mother to play the role of the hero in Sri Aurobindo’s play, “Perseus the Deliverer”. It was during one of the rehearsals in Her presence, that the Mother commented most favourably about the clarity of Jugal-da’s mind. His thoughts were always precisely formed and clearly expressed.

Jugal-da organised the Higher Course in the Sri Aurobindo International Centre of Education

and was made the head of that section when the location was shifted to the present four-storied building on the Sea Front which the Mother named, “Knowledge”. Frequently corresponding with the Mother, he took detailed guidance from her for running the institute. In the last couple of years, he consciously withdrew from active service in “Knowledge”, declaring to one and all that he wanted to “realise” Sri Aurobindo’s and the Mother’s teachings, having studied them for a whole lifetime.

Jugal-da was a prolific writer, having written many books in English and Bengali. He was a contributor to many journals connected with Sri Aurobindo’s philosophy. In his book, *The Destiny of the Body* (1975), he discusses the transformation of the human body into a divine supramental body from a scientific and biological angle. With his vast knowledge of science, he points out many interesting facts about longevity in the animal world. In 1989, he wrote *Sri Aurobindo’s Poetry and Sanskrit Rhetoric*. In 1990, followed another book from his pen: *From Man Human to Man Divine*. Then in 1995, came a book on Sri Aurobindo’s humour, *Sri Aurobindo: The Smiling Master*. In 1994 he produced a small booklet entitled *The Wonder that is Amal Kiran* in commemoration of the ninetieth birthday of K.D. Sethna, another very eminent Aurobindonian scholar, author and literary critic. In his book, *The Practice of the Integral Yoga*, Jugal-da gives practical hints to be applied in day-to-day life-situations, keeping in mind the principles of the Integral

Yoga. *The Mystery of Death, Fate, Karma and Re-birth* was published in 2004 and it seemed that this subject was already holding his attention in the last phase of his life. Then came some booklets: *Sri Aurobindo Ashram: Its Role, Responsibility and Future Destiny*; *The Ascent of Sight in Sri Aurobindo’s Savitri*; *Principles and Goals of Integral Education*. There were two Bengali books as well: *Poorna Yoger Sadhan Paddhati* (in two volumes) and *Mrityu Rahasya*.

Jugal-da was often consulted, personally by many and officially by the Ashram, for clarifications regarding the subtler points in Sri Aurobindo’s philosophy. In his personal life, Jugal-da was ever the perfect example of “simple living and high thinking”. He always shunned luxury, even ordinary creature comforts and lived a very simple, bare life. His room was full of books that overflowed even onto his bed, for lack of storage space in cupboards.

His withdrawal from active life, restricting himself to his small room, which was situated diagonally across the street to Sri Aurobindo’s room, seemed to be the preparation for his last years on earth.

Jugal-da’s passing away has undoubtedly left a gaping hole in the intellectual fabric of Ashram life. Any question put to him regarding Sri Aurobindo’s and the Mother’s teachings was always answered quoting book, chapter, para, page.

His absence will be felt to a high degree. ❧

(This article first appeared in *Sraddha*, a journal from Kolkata).

## JUGAL-DA AND KNOWLEDGE

*Savita Srivastava ’75 traces the early development of the Higher Course and Knowledge, speaks to one of Jugal-da’s two assistants, Manju-di, and to one of his early science students, Vijayendra Patil ’62*

Jugal-da passed away on 15<sup>th</sup> December 2009. It seems he waited for the new school session to begin his last journey. In our minds Jugal-da is inseparable from the Higher Course (HC). He took charge of it from the session that began on 16<sup>th</sup> December 1967 when the

HC was housed in the Sri Aurobindo Library premises. Right from the beginning, Jugal-da kept systematic records of all HC activities.

The current Knowledge site consisted at that time of a technical laboratory for engineering students and an open ground on the beach side. This

ground was used as a playground for non-group children who were admitted in the school and were waiting to be accommodated in the regular Physical Education groups. This building was under the charge of Vishwanath-da. The HC needed a proper facility of its own so Jugal-da approached Vishwanath-da and it was agreed that the new HC building would come up at this site. The ground floor was planned for the Technology Lab, the first floor for the Biology Lab while the second and third floors were allocated to the HC. This plan changed later as the Biology Lab was shifted to the second floor and finally the first and third floors were allocated to HC.

The building came up floor by floor. The first floor was ready for the school session beginning on 16<sup>th</sup> December 1971. Nolini-da inaugurated the Knowledge building on 15<sup>th</sup> Dec 1971. From the next day, HC moved from the Library to its permanent premises in Knowledge on the first floor. It is at this point that 3 helpers — Manju-di, Ajanta-di and Kamana-di (part time) — were appointed to help Jugal-da with the logistic and administrative work at HC. A little later Ajanta-di left this work to teach Bengali and consequently Kamana-di became a full time worker.

### MANJU-DI SHARES HER EXPERIENCE

So how did Manju-di feel working under a highly intellectual person like Jugal-da? Was she afraid? She laughed and replied in the negative. Though there was a big gap between Jugal-da's expectations and the helpers' abilities and there were scoldings galore, the latter never felt a sense of fear or humiliation. In fact Manju-di said this was his way of teaching. Jugal-da was a perfectionist and always gave them detailed and thorough instructions. He was meticulous and would at times repeat his instructions without allowing any interruptions so that each detail was clearly understood. Manju-di felt she had come a long way through this systematic training received from Jugal-da. Though the helpers were aware



During Mother's visit to the School. Jugal-da is seen on the extreme left.

of the limitations of their communication skills in the English language, Jugal-da never let them feel it as a shortcoming. Even towards these assistants, his attitude was that of a committed teacher — exacting but with due respect. When the work was done well, they were encouraged and rewarded with praise.

Similarly Jugal-da was systematic and particular down to the minutest detail when it concerned students and their progress reports. Immediately after the academic session ended on 31<sup>st</sup> October, he would start the work of progress reports and complete it invariably by 17<sup>th</sup> November. Here again he was very thorough and rechecked his work against the reports submitted by the teachers. In some very rare cases when students came back for some corrections, he was willing to go through the records and rectify genuine errors but always adhering faithfully and strictly to the reports submitted by the teachers.

The result of the rigorous training imparted to the assistants is a systematic, chronological record of the entire history of the HC since 1967. These not only include progress reports and courses taught but any special events, lectures, talks and programs that took place. All official photographs too are well preserved in chronological order with names of each individual written at the bottom.

From Manju-di we get an insight into Jugal-

da's organizational abilities and systematic approach. Most intellectuals are generally not known for these qualities. So did Jugal-da owe them to his pre-HC days when he was involved in the teaching of science? Most of those who have gone through the portals of Knowledge can best associate Jugal-da with the teaching of *Savitri*, *The Life Divine* and other major works of Sri Aurobindo; not many would guess that he began as a teacher of science.

## A TEACHER OF SCIENCE

To learn about Jugal-da as a teacher of science, I spoke to Vijayendra-da who was his student.

Jugal-da came to the Ashram with his mother in the year 1949. He was a gold medalist in MSc. Physics. In those early days the Mother asked him to teach science. He taught physics and mathematics to the senior students. Along with the teaching job, he also attended to the generator in the Workshop, connected to the Mother's room, in the last shift. This meant uncertain and late hours as the Mother often worked very late into the night. It was only after Her room lights were switched off that Bula-da would give Jugal-da the green signal to sign off. The late hours never affected Jugal-da's work the next morning. He was an extremely disciplined person and was always up at 5 in the morning. He always looked fresh, kept good health and was never absent due to illness. He fully integrated himself in the life of the Ashram and enthusiastically took part in physical activities including table tennis. He was friendly and enjoyed spending time with the children also.

As a science teacher Jugal-da was clear-headed, methodical and systematic. He did not believe in wasting time in frivolous activities. On special occasions, such as birthdays and the eve of Darshan days, Jugal-da preferred to read from the *Bulletin*. He believed that birthdays which provide us with an opportunity for progress should not be frittered away. Although he was serious as a teacher, he was very helpful and approachable. When a student needed help with studies or homework, time and place were no bar. Some went to his house at odd hours to seek his help.



Taking a science class in the Laboratory

Though he was a brilliant and outstanding student of science, once he joined the Ashram, Jugal-da never looked back at the life outside. Once he was asked to write a science paper to be presented at a seminar outside Pondicherry. He did so, but when asked to present it himself he was reluctant to go. He wrote to the Mother that he did not wish to go anywhere but if She ordered him to go, he would obey. In reply the Mother told him to do as he wished. So he decided not to go. The only time he ventured outside Pondicherry was on a short visit to Neyveli with Pavitra-da.

Jugal-da stood tall and big and it was a bit difficult to imagine him down with illness. However, in April 2005, he met with an accident which confined him to the Nursing Home and away from Knowledge for an entire year. On his return in 2006, he began transferring his HC responsibilities to Jhumur-di. He stopped taking *Savitri* classes, and instead taught students topics of their choice in the light of Sri Aurobindo's works. In August 2007, while coming down the stairs at home, he missed a step and injured himself. Following this, he decided to discontinue his work at Knowledge and confined himself to his room in the Senior Service where he was shifted following the injury. He spent his time in study until he passed away in 2009.

Irrespective of the work he did or the subjects he taught, the highlight of his life was his complete immersion in the study of Sri Aurobindo's works. The books he wrote and left behind are ample proof of a deep understanding and mastery of these works. ❧



# IN MEMORIAM - JUGAL KISHORE MUKHERJEE

by Sachidananda Mohanty '75

It is hard to believe that Jugal-da is no more with us. A *karmayogi* till the very end, he came to represent, for many decades, an institution of learning that the Mother aptly named 'Knowledge'.

It would be hard to write the history of higher education in the Ashram without the vital presence of Jugal-da. At the 'Higher Course', we carried out under his care, projects in a liberal academic environment. The training has had a lasting influence upon us.

It is no one's claim that Jugal-da's approach was perfect. Indeed, some would find him inflexible in many issues. It has to be admitted, however, that he brought to his task as an academic administrator a rigour and a discipline which led to the long-term stability and success of the system.

Education for Jugal-da was a life-long mission. A colleague, Professor Amitabha Das Gupta who teaches Philosophy at the University of Hyderabad, and a family friend of Jugal-da, recalls that the latter was an outstanding student of science at Calcutta before he joined the Ashram. Unlike some other *sadhaks*, we never heard much about Jugal-da's early life in the outside world. He treated Pondicherry as his *karmabhoomi*.

I was a student at the Higher Course between 1973 and 1975. I was Jugal-da's student during this period and watched him work from close quarters.

We saw Jugal-da generally in his white *dhori kurta* or white *dhori* with a matching 'prosperity' shirt. He lived a spartan life and scrupulously adhered to the Ashram discipline. Physically robust, his back straight, he walked the distance, often carrying a *surai* of drinking water for home.

As students, we saw very little of the trappings of authority such as a special chamber or office for Jugal-da. Generally, he occupied the first table in the spacious hall of Knowledge. This is where he met his own students and gave instructions to two of his dedicated assistants: Manju-di and

Kamana-di. If there was a good deal of co-ordination among teachers regarding class hours, (as there must have been), the task was carried out quite unobtrusively behind the scene.

Jugal-da wrote most of his notices in his own hand-writing. He was one of the first to arrive and last to leave before we broke for lunch. Morning meditation, with or without music, began on time. Displeasure was shown to those who arrived late. A true liberal academic environment could be built, he believed, on a bed-rock of discipline and punctuality. After all, there is a distinction between a true liberalism and a *laissez faire* approach.

Study through reflection and silence – a general cultivation of the mind in the light of Sri Aurobindo, this was the kernel of Jugal-da's approach. At his best he enabled the student to discover intellectual truths from within. At other times, he digressed, his lectures focused on relatively unimportant matters. Part of the difficulty seemed to lie in the fact that he shouldered many responsibilities. Perhaps he had the necessary energy and dedication. His critics and detractors might have found his adherence to discipline somewhat rigid and dogmatic, but he did not care. The important thing was to carry out the work, year after year.

At Knowledge as in the school, we learnt to study with pleasure. We loved to work in the 'Silence Room' and looked forward to the lectures by visiting professors. We were particularly fond of the end-of-the-year presentations by students themselves. Free, frank and provocative, these sessions, often in the form of a symposium, attracted a large gathering of students and teachers. Even as we spoke freely and frankly, we maintained decorum.

I looked forward to my classes with Jugal-da, especially those on *Savitri*. In his sonorous voice, he would recite the lines of the Magnum Opus. For him, the verses came as Sri Aurobindo had

intended them to be: incantatory *mantric* utterances. His eyes would close as he would explain the significance of the cantos in simple language. At times, the examples cited would be from our day-to-day life and led to much mirth and laughter. But all classes were unfailingly memorable.

All the while, Jugal-da kept a close watch on the central hall and ensured that there was discipline. If our attention strayed, he brought us back on track in a gentle manner, at times with a look of disapproval.

Towards the end when he was in the Nursing

Home I was surprised to find that he had developed a kind of '*vairagya*', a spiritual detachment. He seemed to suggest that he had done his best. It was time to move on!

Jugal-da has indeed moved on to another world. His memories will live though with generations of students who passed through him. With hindsight, we have learnt to admire many of his qualities which appeared then as quaint. That's what life teaches us: to be more indrawn and to cherish with gratitude all the good things that have come our way. ❧

## JUGAL-DA

by Rajesh Shoney '84

It was on a lazy Sunday afternoon that I got a phone call. It was Teacher's Day and Jugal-da's birthday was round the corner. Shashwati and I were just reminiscing about our days with him and how much he touched our lives. The phone call was from Alo and when she asked me to write a few words on him, I jumped at the opportunity. Here was my chance to express my feelings for a person whom I respected and admired and loved all at the same time.

It's a pity that the younger students do not know the Ashram greats like Jugal-da or Dada the way our generation knows them. What they did for us and what they meant to us was and is truly amazing. Our 'Da's and 'Di's are in words and in deeds our 'Da's and our 'Di's. I don't know too many institutions that nurture this kind of bonding between teachers and students!

My relationship with Jugal-da began with a question. And it developed over myriads of questions over the years.

This was sometime in December of 1981. We had gathered in the room overlooking the sea for our first class of *The Life Divine*. Call it arrogance of youth or plain stupidity, but I vehemently disagreed with him on the very first line of the book. My contention? It was wrong to conclude that the ultimate preoccupation of mankind manifested

"itself in the divination of Godhead, the impulse towards perfection, the search after pure Truth and unmixed Bliss, the sense of a secret immortality" just because it survived the longest periods of scepticism and returned after every banishment. Why could it not be concluded that the opposite was true? This seemed more likely as the periods of scepticism seemed longer and this impulse was banished time and again!

I was prepared to be severely rebuked for questioning this conclusion. On the contrary, we ended up discussing this for hours over several classes. This was the speciality of Jugal-da's classes. Absolutely NO questions were taboo. You could ask him ANYTHING. And the astonishing thing was that he could turn the most mundane of questions into subjects for philosophical discussions eventually leading to Sri Aurobindo's works. This was Jugal-da's way of showing us that our Master has the answers to absolutely anything that life can throw at us. All we need to know is where to look.

And Jugal-da knew where to look! He was famous for his "turn to page 104, paragraph 3, line 7" directions. We did not study "a" book with him. We studied all of Sri Aurobindo. No class with him ended without Manju-di/Kamana-di carrying in and us carrying out a minimum of 10

different books from the room.

Jugal-da believed in a faith that was based, in parts, on mental knowledge but not limited by it. He encouraged us to question everything and not give up questioning till we were satisfied. Once the questioning process was over, however, he told us to calm our minds. He made us realize that there were dimensions to life that were beyond the understanding of the mind. This whole process led to a different kind of blind faith. A humble faith in Sri Aurobindo's words that believed, "Even if I can't see it now, understand it today, it must be true as our Master has said it."

He made the subject so fascinating that we would hold him back even after 11.30. We would stand under the tree outside Corner House and keep bothering him with more questions. He would rush away, long after 12, saying, "ei baar amake jete dao, bhai! Nahole khabaar paabo na!"

He had this unique style of teaching. If we were studying materialism, he would become its advocate and challenge us saying that this was the ultimate philosophy. We would rack our brains to try and disprove this but most of the time the whole class together would fail to do it. After we had exhausted all that we had to say on the subject (this took weeks, sometimes) he would eventually bring in Sri Aurobindo. Since we had just spent hours and hours deliberating on the subject, the true value of Sri Aurobindo's words would then hit home. He taught us humility and taught us to respect and admire Sri Aurobindo.

He had the ability of speaking to each student in his/her own language. For romantics like me, he had stories from literature and folklore to illustrate a point. For science students, he used a clinical language. For students who joined his class only to fill up the time table, he had a completely different approach!



With an outgoing batch

When it was decision time at the end of Knowledge, I told him that I would like to join the Ashram but was not too sure if I was ready for it. I will never forget his words then: "When the call comes, you will have no doubts in your mind. There won't be any questions. You won't need any advice from anybody. But, do keep in touch with the Ashram and keep an open mind." He handed me a copy of *The Life Divine* with, "To my dear brother Rajesh with all the affection of my heart. Bon voyage." To this day, this is one of my most treasured books.

I did not go for a job waiting for me in the US because of his advice to me. This has been one of the best decisions of my life. I owe it to him. I feel blessed. Jugal-da was like a true elder brother to me. In Knowledge and even after Knowledge, he was there for me. I shared a personal and warm relationship with him.

He named both my daughters and told me to bring them up in as loving an environment as possible. He specifically advised Shashwati and me to never ever fight in front of the children. We have always tried to do just that.

So many times, one does not realize the true worth of a person till he/she is gone. This is my way of saying, "I miss you, Jugal-da." ❀

# OUR WATCHFUL NEIGHBOUR — JUGAL-DA

by Yogamaya '95

**T**he first time we were addressed by Jugal-da was when we were students of E.A.V.P 6. My first impressions of him were that he was a very serious person, always to the point, always clad in white, in other words a person who lacked colours in life. I wasn't even sure if he appreciated the colours around him or noticed anything apart from his books and his duties. But I was to be proved wrong soon.

When I had expressed my impressions about him to my father, he had something completely different to share. He recounted to me about the time when Jugal-da's mother was critically ill. She had only a few hours before she left her body, and

shobaar jonne koree Jugal-da..." but still Jugal-da never failed to express his gratitude. This incident brought a few colours to my palette of impressions of Jugal-da.

A lot of us remember Jugal-da as the head of 'Knowledge', a good teacher, a guide and a mentor, but we at 'La Clinique' home have been fortunate to see another side of him too. His balcony overlooked a part of our huge garden, and he was our watchful neighbour.

His keen vision knew just how many 'power' flowers bloomed directly under his balcony in a side garden patch along the wall. We have a beautiful plant of pink 'power' flowers on which almost 20-30 flowers bloom at a time. He kept a count of the blossoms and when there were more or fewer than usual, he would let us know. He knew which creepers were climbing up the adjacent wall and if any new plants were sown or uprooted, he always made sure that 'Torola and Bishobondhu' (Tarala and Vishwabandhu) were aware of what was happening in this part of the garden patch. Many a time he would point out to my mother, "Hain Bhai Torola, aajke ekhane budhaa (our old gardener) kom jol diyeche..." (has watered less).

He also kept an eye in the afternoons and evenings on our main door. He knew what time the inmates came to pick up or drop the various transport vehicles (the ambulance, the ambassador, the bike etc.) for Dispensary and Nursing Home use. If there was any unusual disruption in any routine he would politely enquire, "Hain Bhai Bishobondhu, aajke keno....?" And papa would tell him of any emergencies that had happened or any delays in the picking up and returning of the vehicles. These conversations took place with him standing on his balcony and the others standing below near his favourite 'power' plant.

In Knowledge we have seen how disciplined and strict he was, but apart from that, another hue in his daily life to keep himself physically fit, was his daily walk and the routine after that. He would



Jugal-da with some children in the early years

my father was asked to go to Jugal-da's residence. Papa sat with Jugal-da till his mother breathed her last, and those precious and painful moments were shared beautifully. Since then, whenever Jugal-da met my father, he would always express himself in Bengali and say, "Tumi aunek korecho amaar Maar jonne..." (You have done a lot for my mother) and Papa would reply, "Aami



walk in and out of his room, and along the length of his tiny balcony in the evenings for a good half an hour or more. Then he would walk to Corner House and on his return he would read or listen to the news on the radio. His news bulletin would be all ready when Dr. Dilip Dutta came to park his car in the shed after 8.00 pm. He would switch on the light of his balcony and come out when he heard the engines of the car die down. Dr. Dutta would stand near the 'power' plant and standing on his balcony, Jugal-da would present the national and international news in every important detail to Dr. Dutta who would patiently listen and discuss the reports.

On special occasions, like our birthdays, or if the banana trees had yielded a bunch of the yummy fruit, we would give him enough to distribute to everyone in his building. He saved us the time and energy of going around the block to the main door and delivering the goodies. He did this by lowering an Ashram fruit cloth bag tied to a string, and then pulling up the bag of goodies with a big smile, and a continuous, "Hain bhai, shobaay ke debo..." (will distribute to all). He would make sure that when he met us the next

time he had a few words of appreciation regarding the sweets or the home-grown bananas. More bright tinges of colours on my palette of impressions of Jugal-da.

It was awkward for us (gujju Patel cousins) to speak to him in Bengali, since we had all been his students in Knowledge and had always communicated with him in English. But we noticed that he spoke in Bengali when at home, and then it was not a teacher talking to his student, but a senior family member talking to the children of the family. When Dhira would come from London and greet him, he would converse with her in Bengali enquiring about her life and family overseas. I remember one day when, all smiles and waving an envelope, he called, "Torola". He had received a birthday card from Dhira, and this simple piece of paper brought out the child in him. The excitement was apparent in his words, and he was really touched that an ex-student (from this family) had sent him greetings.

Even though the outward appearance was all white, colours were abundant, and on several occasions we at La Clinique were witness to this beautiful, colourful painting of Douce Mère. ❧

## THE SMILING JUGAL-DA

by Tejas Mehta '99

"You and five of your other classmates are in a sinking boat," I remember Jugal-da asking one of the girls in my class. "If five of you must survive, one has to be thrown out. You have to choose. Who will it be?"

The poor girl understandably was in a fix and struggled for an answer. But a good 12 years later, I can still recall Jugal-da rubbing his hands, shaking his head, smiling away and saying, "*Khoob mushkil, khoob mushkil!*"

A peculiar sense of humour, which not everyone understood or appreciated, but an aspect of the man that can't be missed, apart from his intellectual prowess and a ten-elephant-sized memory.

On another occasion, a teacher had registered a complaint against me for some *bandrami* I had

committed. Jugal-da summoned me and I hesitatingly defended my white lie by referring to the *Mahabharata*'s famous line, '*Ashwatthama hatah.. iti gajah*'.

To my utter surprise, Jugal-da broke into a gentle chuckle and ended the 'scolding' trying to convince me to do something more constructive, "Why do you want to continue with this class? *Chhede dao.*"

If one doesn't have a sense of humour it is hard to analyse someone else's, especially if the person in question is Sri Aurobindo. No wonder one of the books Jugal-da wrote — and that I studied with him — was *The Smiling Master*, which was an analysis of the canons of the art of humour with examples from Sri Aurobindo's writings. Simply brilliant. ❧

# THE LEGACY OF “HAIN BHAI”!

by Amrit Arya '04

“Hain Bhai!” These words will resound in the mind of every Knowledge student who has been under the tutelage of Jugal-da in SAICE. It’s a trademark or signature expression of Jugal-da that makes us nostalgic about the good old days in Knowledge.

Everyone is aware of Jugal-da’s elephantine memory and his precise and acute mathematical way of reasoning, not to forget his subtle sarcastic humour.

I had the privilege of attending his classes on *The Synthesis of Yoga* and *The Life Divine*. He had a very peculiar and interesting way of teaching which was to guide the students to interpret Sri Aurobindo on their own by referring to various other books of the master.

In our *Life Divine* class we were actually more entertained by his direct but still subtle sarcastic comments on various students, ex-students and Ashramites. At the time we enjoyed them to the fullest as they provided us some *masala* and gossip. He had a unique and peculiar way of recounting his stories by ruthlessly stripping off the personality of the subject concerned. But today when I think back and analyze, I feel his intention was not to disrespect or mock anybody but to make us realize that we are all varied elements in the life of the Ashram, all guinea pigs of the Great Lab of the Life Divine which They have created and pioneered in Pondicherry.

Jugal-da was a living legend and my father, Anand Arya, also had the privilege of learning under him. My father was actually very close to Jugal-da during his period in the Ashram. He used to consult him often regarding various queries on the Ashram and *The Synthesis of Yoga*. One story which Jugal-da always recounted when I was in Knowledge, was that it was my father who had informed him on the morning of 18<sup>th</sup> November 1973 of the Mother having left her body the previous day. He used to recount the entire episode to me and to my other classmates. And at the end he used to say, “*Aikhon Anander cheleke ami shikhashi*” (Now I am teaching Anand’s son).

Our batch was one of the last ones to pass out from Knowledge before Jugal-da stopped taking classes due to ill health and physical problems.

A teacher for generations of students, with a mammoth memory and a deep ocean of knowledge — that was Jugal-da. His literary works are numerous and I was fortunate enough to receive a book written and signed by him — *The Practice of the Integral Yoga* — with a small message addressed to me on the first page of the book. *The Practice of the Integral Yoga* is a comprehensive guide to the Integral Yoga of Sri Aurobindo.

The legacy of “Hain Bhai” will remain in the hearts of several Knowledgians and Jugal-da will always be remembered as an epic figure in the pages of the history of SAICE. ❧

## **GOLDEN JUBILEE OF JHUNJHUN HOME**

Jhunjhun Home will celebrate its 50th anniversary on 12.9.2011. A get-together will be held after 16th December 2011. All former students who were in Jhunjhun Home are requested to contact Baby-di (0413-2233653) for more information.



# QUIZ TIME!



*Know the answers to the following questions? They will be printed in our next issue.*

1. Where was the Ashram School when the Mother started it in 1943?
2. In which year did the Mother stop giving the morning Darshan from the balcony on Rue St. Gilles?
3. Which game was Nolini-da very good at?
4. Who donated the money with which Golconde was built?
5. What is the spiritual significance of the flowers of the Neem tree?



## ANSWERS TO THE QUESTIONS OF THE LAST ISSUE :

1. *Why was Bipin Chandra Pal imprisoned for 6 months?*

He was imprisoned because he refused to testify against Sri Aurobindo when the British police brought up a sedition case against *Bande Mataram*.

2. *In which part of the Ashram Main Building was Sri Aurobindo on the evening of 24th November 1926?*

He was in the room which is just above the reading room in the reception block. This room is now the place where the Mother's stamp collection is kept. Many may remember it as the place where Noren Singh-da used to work.

3. *There is only one picture in which the Mother and Sri Aurobindo are seen together. On which date was this picture taken?*

That picture was taken by Henri Cartier-Bresson on 24th April 1950.

4. *Who did Sri Aurobindo go to receive at the railway station in 1921?*

He went to the Pondicherry railway station to receive his sister Sarojini.

5. *What is the spiritual significance of the iris flower?*

It is "Aristocracy of Beauty".



# Class of 2010

Rs. 18/-



Standing (Last Row left to right): T S Sandeep Ram Tandale, Indraneel Kastha, Gaurav Dave, Sushrut Rao, Anitra Base, Bishwajit Roy, Ayan Chatterjee, Amrita Pai, Nidhi Somani  
Standing (Third Row): Anurag Prasad, Mirasree Sarkar, Shruti Garg, Shreya Gupta, Ganesh Kumar, Satdhananda Samaddar, Sumita Das  
Sitting (Second Row): Tanushree Pal, Swadesh Chatterji, Dilip Mehtani, Manoj Das Gupta, Jhumur Bhattacharya, Kittu Reddy, Arati Das Gupta, Ritam Kumar  
Sitting (Front Row): Spruha Banik, Kamalika, Marisha Ganguli, Sharanya Das, Sunayna Mahtani, Ishani Sarkar, Auro Surya Rakha Bhagavatula, Mira Pratiksha