

The

Golden Chain

Alumni Journal of Sri Aurobindo International Centre of Education



Deepanam



Deepanam School: Towards Free Progress

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 2

FEB 2011

1 THE EDITORS' PAGE

2 TALK SHOP: Moving Pictures

Devanshu '91 on working in the audio-visual medium.

4 PERSPECTIVE: The Cyclical Cycle

Auroskanda '94 on the new cycle revolution.

7 REPORT: A Morning at Swarnabhoomi

Shubha Roy '80 on the December working trip.

8 SISTER SCHOOLS: Deepanam School

Alo '92, Rajeev '91, Anjana '66 tell us about this school in Auroville.

17 CULTURE CORNER: The 1st December Programme

Ayan '10, Shyama '85 share their experience. Sunayana '79 reports.

21 MEMORIES: Jugal-da

Aravindbabu '63 relives the days he spent with Jugal-da.

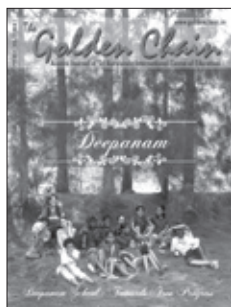
Kirit Patel

Daughter, Uttama Patel, and niece Ekta Patel '09 share their feelings.

Chinmayee-di

Aravinda '71, Surabhi '81, Ratna '91 and Suruchi '03 remember.

32 QUIZ TIME



On the Cover:

Some children from Deepanam School on an outing with their teachers.

On the Back Cover:

Children in the Deepanam School compound.

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, Shubha '80, Anubha '00

ART DESIGN:

Somdukt '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

IMPRINT:

Publisher:

Jhumur Bhattacharya

THE EDITORS' PAGE

by Gopal '90

How is SAICE different from other schools? This is a question many of us have had to answer... to friends or relatives, to colleagues or guests. A friend and I were trying to explain that to a group of Bulgarian visitors and trotted out the usual list: our aims are different, the education is integral, there is a lot of freedom, there are no exams, a class has at most 10 or 12 children, teachers and students are part of one big family etc. etc....

It is always an eye-opener to see something you have taken for granted with fresh eyes. As we responded to their questions, I began to reflect on how exceptional our school is, how revolutionary the experiment, how radically different its aims. I was struck too by how essential the Ashram is to its fulfillment.

I say essential, because for Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, the purpose of education is not very different from the purpose of life itself — namely, the growth of consciousness. While the individual develops and perfects as far as possible all his faculties — his body, his aesthetic and ethical beings, his mental capacities — he progressively discovers, by experience and observation, the world within him and the world without. He is on a quest. Encouraged to look within himself, he will eventually discover in himself the source of the highest knowledge, love, poise and power and will allow it to come to the forefront and lead his life.

This is the scope of the inner and outer adventure that begins at SAICE. This lofty agenda of education would be impossible to pursue in the world at large. The pressures of a conformist, competitive society are just too great, the object of earning a living too immediate, the rat race too intense. Of the four aims of life that our ancients had stated — *Artha, Kama, Dharma, Moksha* — today's society acknowledges only the first two and seems to have little patience for anything else.

Such a world cannot foster the revolutionary new education of the Mother and Sri Aurobindo. It could only have been done in a new world of its own — at the Sri Aurobindo Ashram. The

Ashram with its alternative value-system, its alternative culture, is the ideal place for the new education. From its environment, its atmosphere, we continuously imbibe, as students, knowingly or unknowingly, the ideas and the ideals of living a more meaningful, a higher life.

From the purely practical point of view too this experiment in education is possible only in a large community like the Ashram. Where else would one be able to afford such an incredible student-teacher ratio, such variety of infrastructure, so many activities, such a sense of security and family?

Maybe there is a place. Maybe such a project is also feasible in Auroville. That is the experiment that Rajeev '91 and his colleagues are attempting at Deepanam School, albeit on a small scale. It is heartening to note that an alumnus of SAICE is making a significant contribution to this effort. It is no coincidence then that teachers from Delafon have also been roped in to give their inputs. We wish them all, "Bon courage!"

*

For about 10 years now, since The Golden Chain Fraternity (GCF) was registered as a trust and the publisher of *The Golden Chain*, we have been sending our magazine to alumni free of charge. We were doing it from donations received and interest from our corpus fund.

Now, however, a review of our finances has shown us that this is no longer sustainable. GCF has spent significantly on the building at Swarnabhoomi and there is also a regular outflow for the upkeep of the land. *The Golden Chain* magazine's own expenses have gone up. Printing costs more and postage for sending the magazine abroad has more than doubled recently.

We have, in the circumstances, decided to start taking a few Bulletin-style advertisements (see rates on page 32) and will be able to send the issue abroad only to those who have sent a subscription (Rs 1000 for 3 years). Donations too are always welcome. Please help us in keeping *The Golden Chain* in sound financial health! ❧

MOVING PICTURES

A chat with Devanshu Arya '91

Since when has the audiovisual medium been of interest to you?

I was always interested in the visual medium thanks to my father. Ever since I can remember I have been surrounded by discussions on photography; and films always held a great fascination for me. Not only about what they depicted but also the process of making a film and how pictures moved people who watched them.



Describe your career and how you came to do what you are doing now?

As we were graduating from SAICE in the early nineties, television in India was seeing a new revolution; cable TV was just making its entry. News was being “liberated” from government control. I was very keen on doing a Masters course in Communication. I applied to a couple of universities and got accepted in the Hyderabad Central University. After that I did the rounds of various news channels, but they hadn’t opened up in a big way yet. Just about that time a big French production was underway near Hampi. They were shooting a

film called Hanuman. Samir who was working on it asked me if I would like to join. I jumped at the opportunity, since working in films was always my secret dream. That’s where I met my next employer, Rajiv Menon. He had just finished his first film *Minsara Kanavu* and was looking for an Assistant for this next film which was supposed to be a Hindi film. He never made the Hindi film. Instead he made a Tamil film, *Kandukondein*, starring Aishwarya Rai, Tabu, Mammooty, Ajit, and Abbas with music by A.R. Rahman. It was a great experience, and I got to work with some of the best film technicians in India. Along with the feature film, Rajiv made many TV commercials and that’s how I learnt the art of television commercials which is quite exciting since in the space of 30 to 60 seconds one has to say so much! After quitting Rajiv Menon I started a production house, Ignite Films, in partnership with a colleague from Rajiv Menon Productions and that’s what I have been doing since.

What did you learn from those you worked with early in your career?

Almost everything! Since in classrooms you learn the theory only. It’s only when you actually work with experienced professionals that you learn the intricacies of the work. Since I was interested in direction I was curious about every aspect of film-making and everyone I have worked with contributed in some way or the other.

When you get a subject, describe the thought as well as the work process to bring the idea to fruition.

Since our work involves various formats, i.e. TV commercials, corporate films, music videos, documentaries, the thought process and

preparation vary. Typically we first work on a script, since there is no limit to the number of times one can correct a script. Then we work out a storyboard or treatment of the film — how the film will look and feel. We then have a casting session where we actually call actors to enact a few lines or give certain expressions. This helps a lot, since we have no surprises when we are actually shooting; we know how the actor will look and what his/her limitations are. There are detailed discussions with the art director on the look and feel of the sets or properties that would be used during the film. Then we arrive at the actual production. Here everything has to be planned to perfection, since anything amiss can cost money. After we can the scenes we move to post production, where the film is edited, the music is composed, voice-overs and computer graphics are added. The interesting aspect is that one can keep adding creative inputs at every stage or process and that's what makes the whole process so exciting.

In an advertisement, how do you feel the pulse on what might work? Is it a gut feeling? Or something more researched and surveyed?

The production aspect of an ad film is actually the final stage of a long process of market research. Much before a script is approved, the ad agency has done a lot of homework to figure out the demand of the market, for whom the product is best suited, what class of people is most likely to use it etc. It is only after this process is complete that a script comes to a producer. Of course there are times where we have had to work directly with clients who don't have ad agencies. Then we rely on common sense and gut feeling, and most of the time we have got it right.

How far, if at all, did your formative years at SAICE help you in your work?

My education in SAICE has helped me a lot in my profession — right from writing lyrics in Hindi to having a sense of music, rhythm and aesthetics, to mastery over language! Practically every aspect of my job has a link somewhere with my education in SAICE. I would like to take this

opportunity to thank all the teachers who have taught me from KG to Knowledge.

What inspires you? Which kind of assignment do you like most?

Every project I have worked on has different aspects that inspired me. Sometimes it is the music, sometimes it is a strong visual, at other times it is the challenge to visually bring something to life. Almost every assignment is as exciting as the next. That's what makes this profession so much fun; no two projects are ever the same.



From direction, production, conception, and all other tasks that you do which one do you look forward to the most?

The reason I chose direction is because one is involved in every aspect of film-making and every aspect excites me as much as the other.

You work in a medium that touches the senses to make an impression — what has this work done for you as an individual?

I really don't know if I am answering this question correctly, but when we were studying in SAICE we were taught to do everything in life sincerely, honestly and with perfection. That's what I try to do when I am working on a project. This is always at the back of my mind; this is the underlying principle I work from. This attitude has definitely helped my growth in every way. ❧

CYCLICAL CYCLES

Auroskanda Vepari '94

The recent purchase of bicycles for our children showed me that the wheels do indeed go round. And round again, I suppose. Paranoid with the invasion of sedentary gizmos, we were quite thrilled to see the undying appeal of this ingenious mechanical transport contraption. In fact, the day my six-year-old daughter and five-year-old son learnt to cycle without stabilizers, balancing and propelling forward on their own, will perhaps go down as their proudest moment last summer. I have this gnawing feeling the excitement has less to do with the thrill of forward motion, and more to do with the confidence and independence that the experience lends, or suggests. The freedom to just whiz away on your own must be exhilarating to a dependent child... and addictive. I have already overheard plans being made... bike to school, biking holidays, biking getaways. The first tentative rides will no doubt be forgotten, as the journeys get longer and farther.

I learnt to ride early, but can't recall the eureka moment when I felt... "that's it; I am off". My mother taught me, I think. Perhaps so did Nirmal-da, a kind, gentle, old man. His smiling face was framed by endearing silver locks, the kind that have sadly become rare in civilised society these days. He taught in the Tennis Ground on or around the compressed clay basketball courts on Sunday mornings. Cycling was a survival skill in Pondicherry. Without a cycle, you might hitch a ride, but not always. Besides, the rear carriers while suitable for a wide range of cargo — from a few school books to a 75 litre aluminium milk can, were not designed with passenger comfort in mind. For example, sitting in the uncomfortable rear seat you risked twisting your ankle in the rear wheel (ouch) if your foot slipped from its precarious perch on the spoke-hub bolts as you negotiated a bumpy ride (often the case). On a

gentlemen's cycle, you could of course sit on the metal frame in front of the rider and behind the handlebars — but you risked being knocked on your bum with the rider's knee, besides other discomforts of being between the rider's arms. All in all, good for desperate, short rides only.

What I do recall rather well is my new bicycle. It was a gift from my parents, perhaps on my tenth birthday, soon after my sister received her new bicycle. Hers was the only trendy model available on the market in those days, the BSA SLR. It came in two colours, navy blue and maroon. It was a far cry from the more retro, industrial, adult models. Preferring size in favour of style, I had chosen from the bigger ones. They came in black and dark green; mine was dark green. With enough metal for a tank, it was heavy. You had to kick it off its stand like you would bring to life a Royal Enfield. To operate the brakes you squeezed hard on steel rods in fluorescent green plastic sleeves. To ring the bell you had to work the shoulder, but the effect was loud enough to warn a napping goat or cow on one of Pondicherry's shaded streets. I got most of the accessories, with the exception of the rear view mirrors, the bright, rubber ornamental trimmings and the extra large rear carrier for milk deliveries. The sponge-filled rexine cover on the hard, flat, merciless leather seat mounted on tight steel springs was a welcome item of comfort, notwithstanding its fast-heating properties when parked under the sun.

Visiting the bike shop here in Britain after all these years, I felt, for an instant, as amazed as Rip van Winkel might have been in his first waking moments. The bicycles were clearly recognisable, but the materials have changed, and the colours and styles multiplied. Steel and metal have made way for aluminium, graphite, and of course plastic. Technology has clearly made its mark, with more aerodynamic and motion control features.

Some of the adult, racing models are slim and lighter than a walking stick. The merchandising and franchise industry has not been left behind, so children can choose from a wide range of themed bikes from Barbie bikes, Ben 10 bikes, to bikes with all ranks of super heroes splashed across. Adults are equally spoilt for choice depending on what you want to use your bicycle for — racing, fitness, terrain, mountain, commuting or last but not the least, incredible as it may sound, leisure. The one I fancy is the electric-assisted bicycle — designed for easy, sweat-free, urban commuting. The array of bicycles is outdone in choice only by the racks and racks of nifty, thoughtful, and ingenious accessories. Helmets, water bottles, gloves, speciality apparel, reflectors and trouser clips are among the thousands of small accessories to make riding pleasurable, comfortable and efficient.

Needless to say, the bike store has not escaped the effects of inflation, notwithstanding the Chinese origin of most products. It may have something to do with buying them in Britain. But on the island of credit and bespoke structuring, you can either buy a bike outright, or on a plan. We bought the children's bikes on a trade up plan. So when they outgrow these, we can take them back and trade them in for bigger ones (terms and conditions naturally apply).

Coming away from the cycle store having forked out a small fortune twenty times the price of my tenth birthday gift, makes me wonder whether the cycle is economical, or the economy is cyclical. Perhaps, both. Either way, the bike revolution is triggering a whole new world of demand, supply and changing consumer behaviour. People of every age and from all walks of society are riding — for sports, fitness, leisure, and weekend or weekday commuting.

There has been a focused drive within the government to promote cycling to meet health, environmental, and transport policy objectives. The National Cycle Strategy aims to triple the number of cyclists from 1996. Much literature, research and consultancy has been carried out, to design successful cycle promotion infrastructure, campaigns in cities.

A few years back Transport for London (TfL),



responsible for mobility within the city and its suburbs, was mandated to develop cycling as a fifth public commuting channel (in addition to the underground, trains, buses, and ferries). The results are impressive. Cycling levels grew by 107% in London between 2001 and 2009, with more growth to come. TfL estimates that of the 1.2 million people in London who cycled in the last 12 months, just over half only cycle occasionally while the rest are regular cyclists. Everyday, Londoners make 300,000 trips on their cycles, of which 38% are dedicated commuters and 39% are trips by children going to school or young cyclists. For the first time in the UK outside London, the national trend of a gradual decline in cycling levels has been reversed.

Appraisal of cycle promotion campaigns carried out by the Department for Transport shows that the benefit to cost ratio is at least 3:1, and may be as high as 5 or 6:1 if benefits are sustained over 30 years.

In London, the initiatives include dedicated cycle highways across the city, public cycle hires,

free cycle training and maintenance sessions, and believe it or not, in these recessionary times, tax breaks for new cycle purchases. New businesses have spawned offering training in road safety and biking etiquette. Some weeks back, Dr. Bike was at work, offering free overhauls to bring old dusty bikes from shed to road worthy state, and imparting pearls of biking wisdom like ringing your bell when your grandmother is crossing the street and how not to undertake¹ a van and avoid blind spots.

'Cycle Superhighways' are new cycle lanes into central London from outer London. They will provide cyclists with safer, faster and more direct journeys into the city. The first two have now been launched, with ten more being introduced by 2015. Designated 'Greenways' are safe routes running through parks, forests, waterways and quiet residential streets — perfect if you're new to cycling, or want to build confidence. The TfL website will now chart you a cycle route, along with the usual tube and bus routes, between any two points of departure and arrival.

Promoting cycling at schools and the workplace is receiving much attention. There is a marked increase in cycling usage in schools that benefited from public funding support for training, more cycle parking facilities, and a Bike It Officer. As a result, the proportion of pupils who cycled to school on a regular basis increased considerably. In schools involved in the Bike It programme the proportion of pupils who cycled to school on a regular basis — either every day or at least once or twice a week — increased by 126%. Likewise in the workplace, employers and facilities' managers are encouraged to provide for safe parking arrangements, showers, and cycle maintenance facilities.

The London public cycle hire scheme is another hallmark of the cycle promotion campaign. The scheme was launched in 2010, thanks to the inimitable Mayor of London, Boris Johnson, who commutes to work on a cycle. TfL has deployed 6000 public cycles across Central London

— that's more than the number of taxis in New Delhi. Users can pick up the public cycles and drop them off at any of the 400 docking stations across Central London. The scheme is a winner and has transformed my own commute making it shorter, faster, healthier and cheaper. I now cycle the last 2 kilometres into work (and the first 2 kilometres back from work) most days.

With increasing taxes, congestion charges and parking costs, driving to work in London is completely passé and will brook no approval or envy, unless of course your car runs on an engine with more than 4000 cc and 500 horsepower. Private transport is less used for utilitarian purposes, and more for recreational and occasional use. Public transport, and active personal mobility devices (such as the cycle) are now in.

This is in stark contrast to the booming Indian automobile market where car sales are booming. In many parts of India, the car has become a symbol of prosperity and status — even if the vehicle can seldom stretch its limbs in the traffic and only work its horn. Interestingly, surveys show that the cycle usage in the UK is below the national average among South Asian communities (Bangladeshis, Indians, and Pakistanis). One of the reasons for this is a perception within these communities of the cycle as a poor man's commuting alternative, perhaps a sentiment carried from the subcontinent itself. Indians seem quick to discard their cycles in favour of motorised two wheelers, and two wheelers in favour of cars — the sooner the better, the bigger the better.

For the moment, I am enjoying biking the last two kilometres of my commute. Perhaps it's a boy thing — it's fun to go to work with a helmet and a backpack, without having to work on a building site or a battlefield. Or perhaps it's just fun to get off a train, and whizz to work through the back alleys. Reminds me of the many mornings in Pondicherry when I peddled at top speed trying to finish my breakfast and brush my hair as I tried, in vain, to reach Knowledge by 07:45 am for the first hour. ☘

1. Undertaking as opposed to overtaking is a risky manoeuvre and not advisable under any circumstance. It involves 'overtaking' from the wrong side.



A MORNING AT SWARNABHOOMI

Our December working trip to Swarnabhoomi always becomes a bigger-than-normal affair. Shubha Roy '80 tells us of the trip made on 26th Dec, 2010. (View snaps of the trip on www.goldenchain.in)

Digging, weeding, planting, watering, chopping wood, clearing dead foliage, saving a frightened toad from the spade — all in half a morning's work at the end of which we had full grown men comparing forearms to see whose was that much stronger from clearing wood to 3, 4 and 5 year olds merrily singing and swinging away from branches, taking in the air, the atmosphere and a Presence which looks over all of us.

We sure had worked up an appetite! Breakfast seemed to go on forever with chips, sandwiches and *jalebis* doing the rounds.

We also learned that:

- Swarnabhoomi is generating more compost than it needs and the excess is available for distribution,

- the water at Swarnabhoomi's well is sweet and pure and drinkable,

- there is a plan to make available in town the vegetables grown there,

- Dilip Patel would like to try out new varieties of plants/vegetables and is looking forward to people sending in seeds suited to this climate and soil.

The second half of the morning saw action of a very different kind.

The sight of a well-marked-out volleyball court and net drew out two spontaneous teams, a ball appeared, a mike materialised along with a referee and scorer and we got a game going, complete with spectators!

An hour and a half of serves, smashes, collisions, falls, dives, sprints, debates, bravado — and we still didn't want to leave.

It was as though we could go on and on reliving our childhood in the Golden Land.

Thank you, Douce Mère. ☼

DEEPANAM SCHOOL

TOWARDS FREE PROGRESS

By Alo '92



Ten years back, on a Sunday morning, or so I think it was, on a visit to Auroville, I came across Rajeev, a fellow alumnus of SAICE, a person I knew a little as he was just a year senior to me and knew a little more too because in the days of 'B' group he had quite a reputation! Rajeev conjured up immediately to mind the image of a self-willed, independent, non-compliant and unfettered person — the kind of person to whom I would ask, when we met, if the snakes were doing fine and whether the mongooses were happy!

At that chance meeting in Auroville, Rajeev had the usual indulgent smile as I enquired about his "pets", but then he slowly turned the conversation to how he was trying to structure the Physical Education Department for

the Auroville school children. This was my turn to, "you must be joking, right?" smile. But slowly as we talked I realised that this was not a joke, and that Rajeev sincerely felt the need to organise something to channel the energies of the children of Auroville. He held the time spent in group in his growing years very dearly and wanted the children around him to grow up with a similar important and unforgettable experience.

The years rolled by, and the exchange receded to the dark recesses of memory. Sometimes in brief conversations with other Aurovillians, especially those I knew had children, it would cross my mind to ask them about their "group" and how it was coming along, but I never really did.



Early 2008, just another chance meeting with Rajeev on the roads of Pondicherry and I smirk and

ask him, "So! How is Auroville Dada managing the kids?"



"All is good, long way to go but we are getting there..." is what he tells me. I congratulate him on his efforts and in my mind readjust my opinion of the man. Rajeev had actually got down to channelling the time and energy of children and adolescents!

Just as I reset my brain I hear, "...there's something else. We're busy with the school too..."

The incredulous look on my face must have prompted his reply, "You should come visit us sometime. We're trying something."

And this is how, some time later, I found myself on Rajeev's veranda, sipping some delicious ginger tea which Falguni, his wife, made for us, before she left to teach at the Deepanam School in Auroville. And thus, in the midst of sylvan surroundings and a kukri snake in a bottle hiding from the sunlight, I decide to shed all prejudice and listen to what Rajeev has to say....

Once the children in Auroville complete their stint at the Kindergarten, two roads diverge in front of them. One leads to Transition School and the other, less travelled, leads to Deepanam.

Deepanam has had a colourful past with several teams changing their approaches towards alternative education, which resulted in parents

losing their confidence in the school and consequently imminent closure by the then management.

It was in the midst of this confusion that some highly motivated parents came together to reorganise the aims and *raison d'être* of Deepanam. This was in 2006.

And thus with a conviction that "what will be is uncertain but what is, is not acceptable" this small group approached the authorities to pick up the pieces of Deepanam and create a school that had a different focus. Rajeev of the "snake-and-scorpion-loving-nature-freak" and "not-so-studious" reputation led this little effort and thus a new chapter in the Deepanam School began.

It is late morning now and as I listen to Rajeev and take notes, kukri decides to further dig its head into

the sand.

"It's a nocturnal snake, non-venomous and very shy. Want to touch it?" And so I do, and happy memories of days in Lake and with Atma's animals come flashing back! To me a large part of "education" had been those unforgettable priceless "unacademic" moments that so characterise



our school! And I knew that morning that later when we visit the school, the children at Deepanam would in turn acquire a distinct unforgettable memory of "the day we touched the kukri

FROM DELAFON TO DEEPANAM

As recounted by Anjana Sarkar '66

When Rajeev and Falguni approached us, the teachers of Delafon, for help and guidance for Deepanam school, our reaction was spontaneous, happy and forthcoming. It was very clear that the current organisation at Deepanam was extremely keen and motivated to keep the school alive; and not just anyhow. They were eager to implement as far as possible the principles of a free progress system as laid out by the Mother and Sri Aurobindo.

One of the first things we observed was that certain faculties that needed to be developed before the child could handle freedom were not being tackled. At that young age just providing freedom of choice does not take you anywhere, so we had to work on the teachers so that they were able to give the students tools to handle freedom. They had to start by imparting the basic approach to language, reading and mathematics. Also required were



exercises in increasing the children's concentration span, enabling them to develop poise and the ability to pursue and persevere. Even with art and handwork there needs to be a certain guidance otherwise it is not uncommon to see a child draw boats or trains all year long unless asked, encouraged to explore and attempt new subjects.

The freedom has to be guided. While it is good to let the children choose and pursue their interests, a misguided sense of freedom can easily put them in a rut and also prevent them from taking up new challenges that need more effort on

their part. We have observed this also in Delafon. And therefore a correct balance between what needs to be covered and a freedom in the approach has to evolve.

The other area was more concrete: we showed the teachers how we had prepared and classified our material suited to age groups and

continued on facing page...

and learnt all about it.”

When the new guard of teachers decided to take up the running of the Deepanam School, they were looking for inspiration. It was time to start anew and differently and the way forward revealed itself from the writings of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother. A system of “free progress” would be put in place, inspired and based on Their writings. What is interesting and beautiful is that the teachers approached those at Delafon at SAICE to seek help and guidance. It was, according to them, the most simple and yet the best way to start the process, as the source of help could not have been more directly connected to the visions

of the Mother and Sri Aurobindo and the inputs could not have been more hands-on, practical and essential. The help from Delafon was equally spontaneous and forthcoming. This exchange has proved capital and pivotal in helping Deepanam grow healthy, strong and deeply rooted in the principles of the “free progress system”.

Age group and the child's competency in English — it being the medium of instruction — define the classes. The objective of a class is not necessarily achieved with everyone doing the same thing. Children are encouraged to think differently and reach the objective according to their ability.

...continued from previous page

stages of development. We showed them our library and our atelier too was open to them. We told them that they were free to borrow or photocopy our class sheets. Some of our material that was no longer in use was also given to them. They were free to develop it further and add sheets that were more relevant to their use and environment. We have shown them our model that they can adopt and later adapt to the constraints and advantages of their specific situation.

We have also pointed out to them that the key to the success of a free progress system is coordination and harmony between the teachers. At Deepanam the teachers ranged from those who had very fixed and specific views of what "free progress" meant, to individuals with no teaching background but with a lot of goodwill to learn. So for some, their old baggage had to be shed while for others the experiment was fresh and new. It is also important when work-



ing in a group to have the flexibility to break and regroup. It helps teachers to bring freshness to their approach and prevents monotony and from there a certain amount of disturbance within the teacher. Here at Delafon we have that possibility and we have told them at Deepanam that this flexibility is important.

On the whole we find the current batch of teachers at Deepanam highly motivated. Whatever we have done and provided has been extremely spontaneous and rewarding. Rajeev is a nice, happy, energetic personality who has maintained very cordial connec-

tions with the teachers and group captains in our school. It is that old connection that gave him the idea to approach us and we were willing to do what we could.

Both our organisations have the same aim; the outer circumstances however vary. Deepanam will therefore slowly have to evolve an approach that best suits its own specific environment. Meanwhile we are happy to collaborate in their effort. ☼

The pace of learning and progress is not imposed, nor are the children accorded any special attention or mention if they are "ahead". This policy discourages to an extent the sense of rivalry, comparison and unhealthy competition.

The function of the teacher is to inculcate in the student a will and desire to learn, to develop in the student the urge to excel and live up to new challenges. Individual classes, which do not exceed 8 to 10 students, enable a teacher to closely monitor the progress and the level of the students. Given the fact that different approaches to the same subject are encouraged, teachers prepare each class with varied material to cater to the

diversity of needs.

The school functions Monday through Friday. The morning hours are devoted to regular subjects. Activities are organised on the basis of a weekly schedule that is fixed by the teachers in consultation with the students.

The afternoon session is based on activities the students select. Thus a single class can have mixed age groups. Activities include clay modelling, crafts, embroidery, painting, tie and dye, cooking, origami, soft toys and puppet making and dance. A library and computers are also made available for their use.

Deepanam has an open policy for the children

of guests of Auroville as the management has observed that guests who want to take their time to make a mature decision on whether or not they should plunge into the Auroville experience and



experiment, are greatly relieved if their children can join a school and continue their learning process. Admissions are accepted only after the parents have been screened and their motivation to join Auroville ascertained. They should also have agreed to the principles of free progress, as practised in the school.

So far so good, but where does one draw the line with freedom, and how is discipline maintained? Again a spectre of a prejudice raises its head as I ask Rajeev the question. But then again I get an eloquent answer: Nothing can be achieved without discipline.

While the central theme and concentrated effort remains to keep the child at the heart of the process, a strict outer discipline is indispensable and maintained. There is a constant readjustment of order and discipline so as to maintain as far as possible the necessary harmonious atmosphere conducive to progress.

This is an area where inputs from the teachers of Delafon have helped Deepanam significantly.

With the age group of the students in the school ranging from 8 to 14, it is clear that new areas of learning and new subjects have to be introduced and encouraged by the teachers so that the students' energies can be channelled and their interest focussed.... Kukri meanwhile was using an interesting wriggle process and covering himself with as much sand as he could in his glass jar.

While the focus remains on the progress of the child, and the path to achieve that is the "free progress", the school also keeps in mind the levels and standards reached by similar age groups in conventional schools in India. This is achieved on occasion by using text books from the National Council of Educational Research and Training, maintaining primarily a focus on learning rather than the necessity to "complete a course".

That's where the discussion at Rajeev's place



in Auroville ends and we proceed to see the school — a beautiful green campus with a few small buildings dotting the landscape. We were

welcomed by two horses in a fenced yard and a rat snake and several fish in the science lab. One of the classes had an outdoor session and we could hear Falguni instruct and manage 6 little children playing in the courtyard. At recess, children of all age groups trooped out of their classes. Some went to feed banana peels to the horses while others gathered around Rajeev who brought out the kukri jar. By now the sun was up and kukri had managed to conceal all of himself under the layer of sand. He was brought out gently and the children, wide-eyed, asked a battery of questions.

They got their little brief on the snake while one little hand was placed beside another as the snake wriggled its way from child to child.

I had a smile on my face and a happy heart to see these utterly unselfconscious children interact: a visibly mixed bunch who were comfortable in their classes and in their element feeding a horse or touching a snake. A heart-warming mixture of looks, ages, accents and attire that emanated a feeling that these children were as connected by their hearts to their mind as they were to the red earth they walked on. ❧

A CHAT WITH RAJEEV

Rajeev Bhatt '91 speaks to Alo about Deepanam and Physical Education in Auroville

Your involvement with the school, how did it start?

The current team at Deepanam has been involved with the school since 5 years. The previous team was not very happy with the response from Auroville. Lots of families left the school.



They had tried some methods of alternative education such as those of the Montessori system, or those based on principles of Rebecca Wilde from South America etc. but they weren't successful. Parents were informed that the school was closing. That is when some of us parents got together as we thought that we didn't need to abandon the

effort but instead inspire ourselves from the Integral education designed by the Mother and the Ashram school. We were well-supported by other schools and educational bodies such as SAIER (Sri Aurobindo International Institute of Educational Research). So we started in 2006 with 12 students and today we have 70.

What is the main principle that guides your team?

At Deepanam we are the 4th team. We call ourselves those who are moving towards free progress. Children should be able to do what they want, to accomplish what they want, without competition, pressure etc. Our aim is to touch the soul of each student and give it a chance to come to the forefront. Ours is a primary school with an age group ranging from 6 to 14 years. And we would like to instil in them the spirit of learning rather than have them follow a fixed standard or course.

At Deepanam, we feel that there is a crisis in Auroville. Children do not see the immense possibility of remaining in Auroville as they grow up — to build the “city”, which needs young and courageous individuals full of passion and belief in the future, in a New World that must replace the present one.

We find that sad as we need to show to the



young in Auroville the tremendous opportunities and challenges that exist here. Here you are rich with many things. Today why is it that our children feel the need to go outside, waste the prime of their youth in regular institutions getting moulded and fossilised with archaic concepts of education and life which makes their decision to come back to Auroville that much more distant? I came to Auroville very young and found that there were infinite opportunities, and have found fulfilment here. I too had dreams but found ultimately that staying back here was the correct decision.

Give us an account of the tough times that you have faced.

Tough times come and go. The toughest time was when we started, as we did not have any teachers. None of us are trained teachers. Our only experience is in parenting. But that turned out to be a blessing in disguise as it helped us start with few preconceived notions about methods. My wife Falguni is a striking example. Having had a conventional education in Ahmedabad, she was most willing to draw a clean slate and absorb the new methods and today she does a marvellous job with the youngsters in the school. We have enormous support from teachers at Delafon. We are open to experimentation. Our most cherished reward is to see children happy to come to school. We have children who bemoan the weekend break as they find it boring!

Administratively what is your major challenge?

At present we have a problem of funds. There are Government grants, but very irregular as they

are shared with other schools as well. Today we have 6 class-rooms and 8 grades. We need to grow and funds have become a major issue. Fund-raising is an activity that we must focus on seriously in the coming year.

Are there any misconceptions about the practices in Deepanam that you have to constantly justify or clarify?

When we say that we follow free progress, people think that we do not study. This is the weirdest misconception about the school. The interpreta-

tions of "Free Progress" are so extreme and off the mark that at times we feel scared to use the words "Free Progress" as people equate it with children not studying.

The other issue is about our policy towards guests. The families wanting to join Auroville never had the opportunity to interact with other parents and families in Auroville. We were sensitised to this. We opened our doors to those people who were truly oriented towards joining Auroville. We have about 10-15 guest-students



annually. Parents are really amazed by the way we are working. Those who come from another system and are sincere about the way we work, make the best of the opportunity.

What makes you persist with the concept of free progress?

My daughter — when I see her interests and

the way she addresses things and gets things done when we provide her with guided freedom. A lot of things get spoilt due to inputs from parents. Coming out of Knowledge, teaching was the farthest thing on my mind, but now I cannot see myself elsewhere. Free progress forces you to constantly question your life and your ways. I am very happy to be a teacher in a free progress environment. I am learning a lot and realising how defective I am/was.

Interacting with these children, what has it taught you?

That one has to teach by example. When I look back at my life in school I see clearly that I have been influenced most by those teachers who led by example. Children have a very critical mind. They cannot be fooled. They will look up to you only if you are a positive example. It has also convinced me that there can be only “good” in the children. Never start out with prejudices or the idea that there is a possibility of “bad” in a student, especially if you are aware of certain influences the child might have got while growing up. I am conscious that this is not only an “Auroville experiment” and that we are creating an education system that should work for any child anywhere in the world. Greet every child with a welcoming smile and all the love you can muster. And then give your best. It is bound to work if you keep yourself clean whatever the background, colour, situation of the child. We are not professional teachers, we are beautiful people. Children need someone they can open up to, someone they can trust. We want to be a family. We do not want to be an institution. This is what I have learnt from Richard. His ready welcoming smile breaks every possible barrier.

Thoughts and wishes about SAICE alumni...

They are the best. I have made a proposal to the SAIER board to find a way to attract alumni from the Ashram so that they can feel inspired and motivated to help us. Whatever they may be they are still the best at this kind of work. I am a prime example really. I was a disaster at SAICE and today I cannot see myself doing

anything else. There gets instilled in us something that is rare. I have had several who have come and are amazing. They straightaway touch the hearts of the students.

Is there anything that you have imbibed in SAICE consciously or not that you would like to impart to the students of your school?

Self confidence. The conviction that you can achieve what you have set out to do. Also the notion that everything is important and each activity has its legitimate place. A lot of qualities that you learn in Physical Education also helped me enormously to tackle life itself.

ORGANISING PHYSICAL EDUCATION FOR AUROVILLE CHILDREN

When did you start the Physical Education program in Auroville? What was the state of this particular activity then, and what were the challenges you faced trying to organise this?

Our physical education programme started 15 years ago. Prior to this it was never given any importance. In the last 15 years we have managed to come a little way. We faced terrible challenges, and most were from the parents. They had to realise that their children did not need to specialise.



It is easier said than done to convince a parent that we were not there to nurture a specific talent of their child, our aim was not to create a Carl Lewis, we instead aimed at developing a strong coordinated harmonious body and a better hu-

man being. This battle is still on. The programme is called Dehashakti, and we accommodate children from Auroville, all schools combined up to the 5th grade. Beyond this the programme becomes optional, but our desire is to motivate the growing children to continue. For Physical Education discipline is a prerequisite. And we try to maintain it by example. It is the only way that works finally.

What motivated you to take up this activity?

Wanting to channelize the energy of growing children. We have seen children here whiling away their time, getting into bad habits, doing mischief and even getting into pretty serious trouble. For that purpose alone, if not for any other, this was something that really needed to be done. Physical education keeps the children bound to some very serious activity. When they are young all children love sports. It is as they grow older that silly ideas of specialisation creep into their minds or there is the other extreme too where the body does not want to strain. We have observed that the fact that Deepanam teachers double up as sports instructors helps children from our school to keep themselves motivated to continue. They perceive that school and physical education are one continuous package. With Deepanam we have succeeded in convincing children to continue beyond the age of 12 years, and we are slowly getting older kids to continue too.

What changes have you perceived in the children since they have started physical education?

A lot of positive changes such as the controlling of emotions, increased physical strength and fitness, more confidence that shows even in school. This is true especially with many Indian girls. They stop being diffident and acquire a significant level of self-confidence. Due to the activities they become confident in their bodies which makes them confident in their minds.

Describe to us how the organisation functions.

Like in the Ashram, every day the activities change. We have games, swimming, gymnastics and athletics. The younger children play simpler games just like we did in A4 and A3, such as

khokho and king and the fortress, while the older children play volleyball and basketball too. We have two three-week “competition seasons”, the first one for individual sports and the second for team sports. For the second we make four houses and each house has children of all age groups and each win helps your house get points. Infrastructurally we have come some distance but we still have a long way to go, and we are yet to reach that level of interest and enthusiasm where we can witness the kind of magic that is in the atmosphere of our (Ashram) Sports Ground during our competition seasons.



This organisation must be extremely rewarding.

At 40 I still feel like I am 20. I am so happy, I feel so alive. I sleep at nine every night without a worry and I am up by six every morning ready to go. I have no Monday blues. In fact I have difficulty in the holidays! We have lots of holidays which we are trying to reduce. Even in the holidays we have started summer programmes in the school for students from all over Auroville. I have so many activities and interests and with the children I get to do them all, so I am very happy. Life is wonderful really! When I compare myself to other ex-students I sometimes bump into, I feel that I am very fortunate. I think now that we need a boarding school. We need to cater to the needs of humanity, we need children from everywhere to experience this. We need to retain our youth to build this city. ❧

THE 1ST DECEMBER PROGRAMME

Ayan '10, who helped organise and also acted in the 2010 programme, shares his experience

In the last few years it has been the tradition for the final year students to take up the annual 1st December Programme. I still wonder what made me want to take it up; till date I am uncertain as to what motivated me. To be honest I had no idea what it was supposed to be like — I had not attended the programme in years and the last time I had taken part, I was very young. I was navigating through uncharted territory and it took me quite some time to actually realise how big a responsibility it is to organise the whole programme. However, my journey began when I came across the album of 1st December 2009; beautiful pictures adorned the pages, and I was left wondering: “How did they come up with such an idea?” Not only was I impressed by what they had achieved but also I felt bad that I had not participated. That was the first time I gave some thought to taking up the programme. Little did I realise then all the hurdles that would come my way and how the experience would change me as a person. Nonetheless, by June I informed the concerned authorities that I would be taking up the programme and began working towards the 1st of December.

Since I hadn't the faintest idea of what went into organising such an event, I decided to meet up with Sujay, a close friend, who had organised the previous year's programme. He gave me all the guidelines, such as who I should contact, who could help me out in my endeavour and how I could go about the whole thing more efficiently, by setting small goals and taking things one at

a time. The next step was to meet Cristof, who with his years of expertise, was an indispensable asset for helping us attain our goal. Cristof readily agreed and in mid-July we sat together for the first time hoping to come up with an idea of what we could do. Ideas for such an occasion are generally hard to come by, but when they do, it is like a vision and everything falls into place quite perfectly. But it is often the wait for a grand idea that tests your patience and makes you feel like you are stagnating. But if you have a steady faith in the

Almighty you'll always be rewarded in the end; and that's exactly what happened in our case.

Session after session, we brooded and explored different passages, different lines and different ideas; eventually we settled on *Savitri* Book 3, Cantos 3 and 4. The next step was to select the passages, which I tried to do. Making selec-

tions while maintaining the connection between the lines seemed impossible at first, but I came to accept it after Cristof did it; suddenly it seemed possible! After having read the initial selection that we had made, we tried to visualise how we could express those lines on stage. Weeks passed, and in September, we agreed that we would not try and represent every line of the selected passages, but rather express what the lines make us feel. As concept, it seemed simple, but actually putting it into effect was a different story altogether. The project seemed to gather some sudden momentum and within the next week I had an idea of what I wanted the stage to look like. Helped by my classmates and Habul-da at the



1ST DECEMBER 2010 — A REVIEW

Sunayana'79

Even though we were in the middle of an unusually long monsoon our spirits were uplifted when we saw on the Ashram notice board, a few days before the end of November, the text that had been chosen for the performance of the 1st December 2010. It was very helpful for those who wanted to know a little about what to expect before going to the Theatre.

The programme had the usual simplicity and the atmosphere of a meditation. Since the text chosen included "The Adoration of the Divine Mother", the audience had the pleasure of listening to well-known and well-loved lines. There is a joy in listening to lines which have lived within us for many years — a joy of recognition.

As usual too the performance was a combination of recitation, music, chanting and movements. Unlike other years, however, this year those who were chanting live during the performance remained in the wings, out of sight of the audience. The choreography of the movements was refreshingly different, restrained and appropriate. Shyama, in the role of the Divine Mother, was outstanding in her performance. All in all, the show maintained the standard that was expected.

Having said this, there is something one has to mention. It is now almost a decade since the annual programme at the Theatre is being done by the Third Year students of Knowledge. Of course, everyone is happy that the outgoing students get a chance to work on a text taken

from Sri Aurobindo and coming as it does, within a month of the Knowledge Programme, it puts everybody's mind at rest. Everyone is reassured that the students have learnt the essentials. But, on the other hand, the organisation of this programme has changed to such an extent that something is surely lost. Rehearsals can only begin from the 3rd of November, after the students have recovered from the stress of the Knowledge Programme and from all the parties and farewells. With only three weeks

in hand before the dress rehearsal, the whole team is forced to practise morning, afternoon and night non-stop and even late into the night.

Compare this to how it used to be done before. The first readings took

place in July by which time the cast and the script had already been finalised. As the actors went through their texts, by working for a couple of hours every evening after the day's activities, not only did they learn their own lines, but slowly everyone else's as well, just by listening to everyone say theirs. Every actor had a chance to know what other actors were doing in other scenes. And slowly every actor could fully understand the character he or she was playing. The character actually grew within the actor over the four or five months during which he or she worked on the play. In this manner, it was more than just a performance.

It must be really hard for those who step in to help, to have to work under so much pressure of a deadline. Is it fair to test their goodwill to that extent? Perhaps it is time something was done to bring the old format back. ❧



pottery section, we made a model of what I had perceived. We submitted a drawing of the plans to the Construction department and they were extremely helpful and put up the basic structure

by the first week of October. With just about two months to go the stage was ready, but we were nowhere in terms of what we were actually going to do on stage. Initially I had 16 participants in



my cast and it was impossible to find a common time for all of us to meet. But each made his/her little sacrifice and we all met together so that I could share what I wanted to put on. However since the idea wasn't really clear in my head either, we just went through the script and hoped that someone would come up with something. Unfortunately, nobody had anything concrete to suggest. With time running out, Knowledge Programme practice occupied the cast members and all we could come up with throughout October was a vague and rather inexperienced attempt at materialising the script. The stage was ready but still looked bare, the cast seemed eager but had no direction and I was worried that I would fail to put on anything at all. That's when Cristof's experience took over and although he admitted that this was probably the latest he had begun working on a 1st Dec programme, he was resolved to help us. But it wasn't smooth sailing all the way because on the 1st of November, a month before the final day, four cast members decided to drop out. To make things worse, another dropped out the next day. Our cast was crippled overnight and I felt betrayed.

Given the time that was left, I was in shock and I really wasn't certain whether we could put on the programme. But like in every difficult situation some unseen force always guides us, and before I knew it, Narad had agreed to help us out. Two girls who had worked with Narad earlier in the year joined the team. It was quite a turn around of emotions, from shock and despair to hope and gratefulness. We worked hard, and were determined to put on something worthwhile; we wanted it to be an offering at the Mother's feet.

What we experimented on the next few days on stage was just about expressing ourselves, through singing, dancing and music, while we recited the lines. It was the power of the lines that guided us. Chanting 'OM' collectively brought us all together in some way, and we began to enjoy ourselves while exploring the new meanings that we discovered in the lines.

Narad and Cristof were instrumental in explaining the value of the lines we had chosen and how these lines could bridge all barriers and bring everyone closer. It was a revelation to us and we hoped that what we presented would be a sort of meditation for all who came; we hoped to create an atmosphere which would unite us. Naturally, as the final day approached, fatigue had begun to set in because we had been practising throughout the day — morning, afternoon and night. We were desperately trying to make up for having started late. Despite that, thanks to the Grace of the Mother, we achieved something that I couldn't have dreamt of on the first day. It still baffles me as to how we put on anything at all in the first place. Nevertheless, we had worked and practised in a quest for perfection and our jour-



ney had brought us to the final day.

All the difficulties, all the hard work, everything seemed worth it because the day of the programme still feels like a dream, which I cannot describe in words; it is something that can only be felt and not told. It will always remain an unforgettable experience for all of us. And we will always cherish the opportunity of having participated in this offering. ❧

EXPERIENCING THE ALCHEMY

Shyama '85 shares the experience of participating in the 1st December programme

My journey of shows at the Ashram Theatre began at the age of 6 or 7, initiated by Ira-di. I take this opportunity to thank her for introducing me to the performing arts. My first participation in the 1st December programme was in the year 1976 when 'Love and Death' was staged by Amita-di. It was an unforgettable experience, for the joy her direction and handling of the play brought to me. Capable of mingling and playing hide and seek with us before the rehearsals, amazing indeed was her procedure that could get the youngsters aged eight or nine to choreograph their own dance.

Drama came my way much later. Whatever skill or artistry I have today for performing on the stage was imparted to me by Cristof. The children of our Centre of Education must wake up to the fact that in him we have a treasure-house of stagecraft. But they must know that only if they want to learn will he be able to help them develop their potential. He will never demand anything or impose his ideas on them.

Getting back from remarkable directors to my own journey, somewhere on the way I realised that performing in the Ashram Theatre was special and doing so for the 1st December went beyond 'special'. Why was it so? I had no clue as to the answer despite my pondering over the question and analysing it, till one day during a 1st December practice, Svetlana, Cristof's mother, answered my query. We were chatting with her that day, which was a rare occasion for she never liked to waste time, and in the course of our conversation one of us asked her: "Will you please tell us something about your experience with the Mother while working for the 1st December Programme?" This

was her answer:

"There are many things I could recount to you but there is one thing I would like to share with all of you. The Mother had told me that on 1st December, Sri Aurobindo is present for the show and it is not just a show but an occasion for her to work upon a certain difficulty in each one of us."

Well, since the Divine herself had spent time in stagecraft at our Theatre, she had naturally left a special force of creativity there and its touch came to me through inspired ideas and executions, surpassing my normal capacities.

My journey continues; but since then I have known it to be a very special one, for its pathway is made of magic cobblestones of creativity leading me to the world of Drama. And I suggest to all who read these few lines, if ever they get a chance to participate in a programme at the Theatre and in particular for the 1st December: "Do not miss experiencing the Alchemy."



The signboard on my path displays: '1st December 2010'. This time's programme was the most challenging of them all. I was called on the 5th of November, learnt my lines by the 10th, and then started rehearsing to get the scene set. Wow! Indeed a great pressure. By the 22nd Cristof fell ill followed by Narad who was helping us with voice training and the chants. Then it was my turn and the students', to succumb to fatigue. Everything gradually came to a silent rest. Although a participant, I became a spectator. Never before have I been able to disconnect myself from my efforts and expectations the way I managed to do this time. And from that silent rest what emerged on the evening of the 1st is something I could not understand then, but in the few days that followed I knew that 'the magic' had taken place. ❧

JUGAL-DA

By Arvindbabu '63

In the year 2009 sometime during the month of March I had my toe operation in the PIMS Hospital. After a week's stay at the Hospital I was taken to the Ashram Nursing Home. I stayed there for about a month and then was shifted to the former Senior Citizens' Home, by the side of the Ashram Dispensary.

At the Senior Citizens' Home I was greeted by Jugal-da with a big smile, "*Esho bhai, esho bhai. Kemon achho, bhaloto?*" (Welcome brother. How are you? all right?)

"*Shob bhalo achhe*" (All's well), I reciprocated with an equally broad smile.

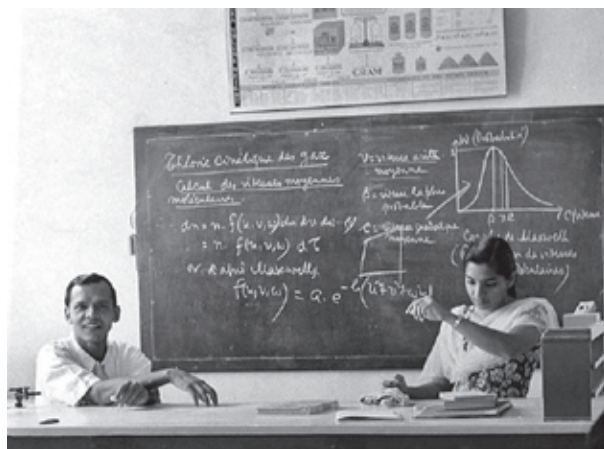
His face brightened with joy when he came to know that I would be staying there for a couple of weeks. Somehow, right from our first meeting Jugal-da took me into confidence and began to recount his thoughts and feelings:

"See Babu, my one aim in life was and is to serve the Master and the Mother, and I have tried to follow that as sincerely and honestly as I can as a professor. I have written a couple of books on various topics in the light of our twin Masters. They are the *raison d'être* of my existence and I would like to pass the remainder of my life in devoting all my time and energy in their service. Physically it is not possible to serve them as I am not fit enough but at least intellectually I can be of some help to them," revealed Jugal-da spontaneously and with heartfelt emotion.

And that is how he went about. He told me that he was conducting classes on the Master's works twice a week and that if I was interested I could join the classes. I gladly accepted the invitation.

There were about eight participants, doctors and staff of the Dispensary and the Nursing Home. I was the only invitee. The class would begin with a short concentration and then Jugal-da

would ask one of the students to read a paragraph or two from a particular book. After the reading, he would explain the content of the passage and would refer to various extracts from other books of the Master which expressed the same thought. Then he would invite questions and would spontaneously answer them, all the time referring to the books to hammer into the participants that all the answers are there in the Master's writings. We have only to study them with an open mind and heart.



Jugal-da taking a Science class in the Laboratory (1953)

John Milton's poem "On His Blindness" flashes before me. It reflects the mental agony that Jugal-da was going through. Milton was burdened with the guilt of not being able to serve his 'Maker'. So he offered his poetry as a means of serving Him:

"And that one talent which is death to hide

Lodged with me useless, though my soul more bent
To serve there with my Maker, and present

My true account,..."

Patently bearing all the vicissitudes and difficulties that a blind man faces, Milton went on

writing poetry as a humble offering of his 'talent' to his 'Maker'.

Facing courageously and bearing the adverse situation Jugal-da served the twin Masters by spreading their teachings in his capacity as a professor and a writer, and may have found some solace as Milton puts it beautifully:

“
...who best
Bear His mild yoke, they serve Him best...”
and

“They also serve who only stand and wait.”

Dr. James of PIMS Hospital had advised me to come on a certain date for the removal of a rod that had been inserted in my operated toe. On the day of my departure to the hospital, Jugal-da simply refused to have his breakfast. He said, “Let Babu go to the hospital and after that I will eat.”

We entreated him to have his breakfast. There was plenty of time before my leaving for the hospital but he refused to oblige. He took a chair, kept it in front of my room and sat on it, near the door, waiting quietly. In the meantime, I got ready, had my breakfast and at about 8.30 am I left for the hospital. While going Jugal-da wished me, “All will be well by the Mother’s Grace.”

I felt extremely embarrassed by Jugal da’s behaviour. Why was he so concerned about me that he refused to have his breakfast at the stipulated time, about which he was fastidiously particular?

Sensitivity of the heart grows by inner culture and refinement of the feelings and emotions. Wordsworth expresses it beautifully in his poem ‘Intimations’:

“Thanks to the human heart by which we live,
Thanks to its tenderness, its joys, and fears”,

Tender fellow-feelings, sharing joys and fears with others are the outward expressions of a sensitive, wide heart. And for Wordsworth even an insignificant flower in a corner evoked deep feelings:

“To me the meanest flower that blows can give
Thoughts that do often lie too deep for tears.”

The soft heart, delicate as a flower, could also become a hard, solid rock when it came to abiding by certain principles as a discipline, so important in chiselling the diamond-heart to perfection.

Generally, Jugal-da did not accept anything from anyone, be it in the form of foodstuff or gifts. He gladly took whatever food was served from the Corner House, but he simply refused to have anything from elsewhere. Quite often, some delicious dishes were sent to me from my house and I tried to share them with him in the beginning, but realising his unwillingness to oblige, I discontinued the practice.

There is a difference between principle and rigidity. One could very well interpret Jugal-da’s refusal to accept anything — be it in the form of edible things or some present or offering — as rigidity or headstrong behaviour. But if someone decides as a principle not to accept anything from anyone except whatever is given by the Mother, it is a firm decision which he is bound to adhere to. That’s what Jugal-da was practising as a part of his *sadhana* — not to be tempted, not to slacken even for a moment from the stand he had taken as a principle.

Again, as a principle, Jugal-da avoided meeting people as interacting with them would distract from his sole concentration on his *sadhana*. He insisted on meeting a person by appointment and if someone came to see him all of a sudden for some work or for wishing him well, he would show his displeasure and cut short any further discussion as quickly as possible. Once an acquaintance of his had come to share some family problems with him and wanted his advice. Without prolonging the discussion, Jugal-da just told him:

“Tenfold problems crop up when one sincerely takes up *sadhana*, because the old habits and samskaras persist and resist the working of the higher forces and there is an inner struggle. It is painful to part with worldly attractions and desires”, explained Jugal-da to this person, and told him point-blank:

“See, better sort out these problems by praying to the Mother and Sri Aurobindo, and don’t run to me for advice. They are the best Helpers.” Saying this Jugal-da asked him to leave.

One has to ruthlessly discipline oneself to walk on the thorny and stormy path of *sadhana*, that’s what Jugal-da was trying to follow. ❧

A LIFE WELL LIVED

Dilip Patel '76 recalls: My brother **Kirit Patel '74H** spent the years between 1963-1968 at SAICE and was by all accounts a brilliant student. He went on to study in the UK, qualifying as a banking professional, a job he accomplished with great success. Kirit was a man of diverse interests and gave himself fully to the people he loved, always being there for them, generous to a fault, a bon-viveur, with a subtle sense of humour and a ready smile. He was the head of the finance department at ADIA (Abu Dhabi Investment Authority), a company he served for almost 40 years, and was contemplating retirement to Pondicherry when fate intervened.



Some of you may recall the article I wrote on him some years back (GC, Nov 2005) when he had a heart episode and recovered as well as his heart and the marvels of modern medicine would allow. Towards the end of last year he suffered very badly with a pinched nerve in his back and was in agonising pain for several weeks. He recovered and was getting back to normal routine in Abu Dhabi when on the fateful morning of the 6th of October he collapsed at home, having suffered a heart attack from which he did not recover.

His younger daughter, **Uttama Patel**, (who is a writer and editor of an online parenting magazine called **southasianparent.com**) had come upon Kirit's diaries and subsequently started a feature in her magazine called Daddy's Diaries the first one of which we reproduce below with her kind permission. It is a moving account of the feelings of a young daughter on the passing of her beloved father.

Also reproduced (next page) is a spontaneous account on Kirit by my younger daughter **Ekta Patel '09**.

I start from the end.
When I first opened it, I was reminded immediately that my father no longer lived. It is an extremely private world, the pages of a diary. And having entered his, I was taken straight to the core.

"The ideal man of Vedanta..." he wrote in calligraphy, "will accept pain as readily as pleasure; hatred, wrong, insult and injustice as composedly as love, humour, and kindness — death, as courageously as life. For in all things he will see the mighty will which governs the Universe."

He had never uttered those words to us as children, or even as adults, but those were the words he lived.

As parents, we are inclined to perfection. We want our children to go to the best schools, to achieve success in their careers, to marry the love of their lives, and to do good in the world.

To achieve this perfection, we often micromanage their lives, dictating their choices to make sure they avoid failure at all cost.

But failure, I have learned, is as necessary as success. We cannot be humble if we do not fail. We cannot understand gratitude if we do not fail. We cannot appreciate the pain of others if we do not fail. For all those reasons and many more, if we have not failed, we have not succeeded.

My father, a man of great personal and professional achievement, was a proponent of that failure — in every drawback he saw a hidden blessing.

I once got a terrible grade in an economics final, and called him on the verge of tears. He replied calmly, "Of course you didn't do well in economics. That's why you're a writer."

When I struggled to land my first job amidst a group of investment banker friends who were

given offers before graduating, he would say, “When you do get it, it may not be the perfect job, and it surely won’t last forever; but it will be the job you’re meant to get, at that time, for that reason, to learn something you don’t yet understand.”

When I finally did, it was a job in a tiny town in the middle of the Poconos mountains. But it was an experience that changed my life. The value of what I learned then exceeded anything I had learned before, or have learned since.

So while we try our best to do our best for our children, we must remember to give them the freedom to live out their own destiny, and to fail on their own terms. Your children will not thank you for a perfect life, in a perfect house, with the perfect material belongings, be they iPods or fancy cars.

They will remember what you said, what you taught, but most of all, how you lived.

If someone insulted my father, he would remain silent. If he witnessed injustice, he would battle it with composure, not anger. If he felt outer physical pain, he would call on inner strength.

So I draw a circle and bring you back to the quote he scribbled down in what was perhaps a moment of reflection.

Although we must always make a good, sincere, and strong effort to be good, sincere, and strong parents—we have to leave some things to the unknown—be it God, be it the Universe, be it fate.

If we want our children to live fully, and to learn well, we have to teach ourselves to set them free. ☘

PACKING – A FAREWELL FROM KIRIT PATEL

Ekta Patel '09

(This is something I started to write without purpose, but along the way, it seems to me, my beloved Kirit-kaka started speaking through the words.... It is as if, through this piece, he was saying farewell to all of us who adored him and were privileged to have been a part of his life. Though the memories and facts don't always match his life, what came was spontaneous and so I have left it.)

Packing. The insanity of it. What should I take and what must I leave behind? This house, this street, this city have shaped my life and now that I must say goodbye, I find I cannot bring myself to. There lies my diary, weathered but intact, chronicling everything that I chose to put into words about my feelings, my relationships, my fears. I leaf through it and think about the journey of my life, how the shaky hand learned to shape words just as I learned to take my first steps, falling and crawling and wobbling. I notice that I often let weeks pass before I got back to writing. Those were times when I was not conscious of significant events or lessons learned. As the lettering grows steadier, I can make out a growing awareness of self and sur-

roundings, a better understanding of the things people did and made me do, much like the transition between being candid and saying just about anything that comes to mind, often being scolded for it, and knowing what to say when, weighing the situation, the surroundings and the people around. With steadiness in control came ideas that matured and thoughts that deepened, values that were being shaped by the page and emotions better understood by the paragraph. Confessions of sorrow and anger, lies and betrayal were penned darker and left deeper impressions on the other side of the page much like unpleasant events scarred me. I see that when I wrote about my happiest moments and the people who caused them, my handwriting and wording somehow reflected the love I had felt.

As I flip the pages, I read the recurrent names of the people who matter most to me, who made my life turn out as beautiful as it did. These were the hands that cooked for me and cleaned me, the arms that carried me, the ears I whispered secrets into, the eyes that looked at me and knew how I felt, the lips that kissed me, the smiles that said I belonged, the back that had once been my



seat, the cheeks that paled and the brows that furrowed in anxiety for me, the chin that rose when I did well, the embrace that comforted me, the tiny fingers that reached out for me, the many voices that scolded or praised me, laughed and teased me, cried for me, sang for me, screamed and whispered to me, taught and consoled me, confided in me and the love in all forms that sustained me. These were the people I loved most and I would soon be leaving. Suddenly it did not matter what items I left behind. I was leaving the people and the environment that had nurtured me.

As I scan the room, I perceive many tokens of love. My watch lies in the corner of a drawer, the first watch my parents gave me as a child. It is more than forty years old and half the strap is missing. It was torn apart when I fought with my brother years ago. The bright colours have dulled and dust layers the edges and houses itself in the grooves. It no longer tells time but it reminds me of the many occasions that I have shown it off,

the parties and holidays, the recesses and promenades. It is a symbol of my timeless bond with my parents.

I observe that the rag I was using to dust the furniture had once been a shirt a friend had bought me for a birthday long ago. The table I dust has scratches on it from the time my nephews and nieces had scribbled on it. My wife and I smile at me from a photo on the table. It was our wedding day and our bright eyes showed our excitement in anticipation of a happy life. I look at my finger and the ring that bonded us.

As I open the cupboard, my hand instinctively goes to the drawer that contains both my daughters' baby clothes, diaper pins and milk bottles. Whether torn or broken, I could not part with these treasures. My first is successful in her calling and currently on maternity leave, madly in love with a wonderful man. How I long to hold her baby in my arms! My second, though more vulnerable, has a lot to give, and her strength lies within her.

How the years have passed! How I wish I could take all of this, all the people and memories, all the things that marked milestones in my life!

I look at my suitcases and wonder at my stupidity. What am I taking and where? The things do not matter. I realise that I am just going from one home to another, and that the people, the souls I met in this life, will also follow me in time and we will meet again. I have no fear of parting. The farewell is but temporary. I am ready to go. ❧

INVITING CONTENT FOR OUR WEBSITE'S 'RESOURCES' SECTION

The Resources section of our website (<http://www.goldenchain.in/resources/>) makes available Ashram-related digital content for free download. Currently we have music by some Ashram artists and composers as well as images (of the Mother and Sri Aurobindo, the Ashram, Auroville) that can be used as desktop wallpaper. We intend to keep increasing the scope, variety and quantity of the content provided. We invite all (alumni, Ashramites, devotees) to contribute suitable content. If you have:

- beautiful images that you have taken,

- posters or e-cards you have created,
- small video films you have put together,
- powerpoint presentations you've created,
- music that you have composed,
- other digital content that can be shared,

we would be happy to make it available to others through our website. You can email it to us at: office@goldenchainfraternity.org

Please note: The content should be appropriate for the larger Ashram-connected community (draw inspiration from Their vision) and should not violate any copyright laws.

OUR JIJI

Aravinda Maheshwari '71

(written in collaboration with Archana & Jasmin Maheshwari)

Chinmayee-di, as she is lovingly called in the Ashram, was simply “Jiji” to us, the Hindi version of the Bengali “didi” with which we are so familiar here.

She was the eldest of four of us, two sisters and two brothers. This, our father used to point out, formed the smallest possible family, for each one’s important experience of growing up with a brother and a sister!

Although only five years older than me, the youngest, Jiji was always like a guardian and a loving protector to the three of us. Quiet, serene and poised as she was even from her earliest days, we spontaneously went to her for wise answers to our queries or resolutions to our disputes. From all my childhood memories I cannot recollect a single incident of seeing her angry or rash with anyone, and she would not lose her poise even when such emotions occurred in her surroundings.

Jiji was born in Varanasi on the full moon in August 1946. This is the day of *Raksha bandhan* in the Indian calendar, when sisters tie *Rakhis* of protection to their brothers. Her name Chinmayee was given on suggestion of a friend of our father’s, who was a devotee of Mother and Sri Aurobindo. Celebrating her birthday with *Raksha bandhan* every year made us happily aware of the joy and blessing our Jiji was to us, the very essence and personification of the ideal of an elder sister. It is interesting to note that *Raksha bandhan* has been declared as “Sanskrit day” by the Government of India.

Our parents were both teachers, our father in Philosophy at a post-graduate college and

our mother in Mathematics at a girls’ intermediate college in Mathura, where the family had settled in 1949, and where we spent all our childhood. Besides the influence of the holy city which is the birth place of Lord Krishna, our parents carefully instilled in us a deeper awareness of Indian spirituality, behind the seeming mask of divergent rituals and traditions. Story-telling by Dadiji, our grandmother, and the reading of scriptures like the *Ramayana* and the *Bhagavatam* on special occasions, were all a happy part of our childhood, and came to form the very basis of our inner life and character.

Along with the steady focus on the deeper truth in all ceremonies and celebrations, we grew up surrounded with classical and devotional music, poetry and the arts. Jiji embodied that very love of music, which remained one of the most important elements throughout her life. The gift of a beautiful voice and her innate sweetness made her a wonderful instrument for the sublime and inspiring music that would continue to touch all those around her.



Dadiji surrounded by Chinmayee, Chaitanya, Archana and Aravinda at the family home in Mathura, 1956



At the age of two, 1948



At the age of 17 in Mathura

An atmosphere of learning pervaded our family home, and simplicity, beauty, cleanliness and natural health were the foundations of an exceptional upbringing for which we remain ever so grateful to our parents.

Jiji had a profound and abiding love for the *Bhagavad Gita*, as is well known to all her friends and students in the Ashram. In our childhood, one of our favourite places was the Gita Mandir in Mathura, a temple specifically dedicated to this central teaching of Shri Krishna. Our father would organise a yearly function there on the day of Gita Jayanti, and we would enjoy a whole morning of recitations, songs and enlightening discourses. It was also my birthday by the Indian calendar, a privilege which I deeply enjoyed.

Jiji's schooling started with being enrolled as the first student of a new Montessori School in Mathura, where she was fondly loved, and considered a model pupil by her teachers. Sensitive and caring of nature, she enjoyed an affectionate relationship with classmates and friends, as well as with many of her teachers.

At the age of 16 she went to Varanasi, city of learning and her place of birth, where she joined the Vasant College for Girls in Rajghat for her B.A. For us this was a big change, not to have her constant presence at home, except for Deepavali holidays and during the summer breaks. Clearly, being in a better learning environment and institutions was given precedence over living with the family, which gradually made each one of us leave home for higher studies, to opportunities that were not available in our home town.

In 1964 Jiji joined the Banaras Hindu University to pursue an M.A. in Sanskrit. Two years later she enrolled for PhD. She was only twenty then. In April 1967, she visited the Ashram in Pondicherry, brought by our father, who had first come here in 1953. She had Mother's balcony Darshan

twice, on 24th April and on 4th May (4-5-67). Feeling a strong inner call, she wanted to remain in the Ashram right then. However, on the advice of a senior sadhak of the Ashram, she went back to finish her PhD with the feeling that the work she had started should be done as an offering to the Mother. It was a lesson in *karma yoga* for her, to offer all her work to the Divine.

Jiji returned for a second visit to the Ashram in February 1968, a special time which was blessed

by two balcony Darshans, on the 21st and the 29th, and the foundation ceremony of Auroville on the 28th. In June of the same year I came for my first visit and received the Grace of the Mother's Darshan in Her room. I came back to stay in December after getting admission in the Ashram school, and joined the Higher Course. In August 1969, the entire family came together and had the Mother's Darshan in Her room on Jiji's birthday. The following year, after completing her PhD, Jiji returned to the Ashram for good and joined the School as



This photo was sent to the Mother before Jiji's joining the Ashram in 1970

a Sanskrit teacher in June 1970.

She later recalled how she felt totally tongue-tied in her first days at the Ashram school, when it came to communicating in simple spoken Sanskrit! This was something that she had not learnt, in spite of her MA and PhD studies in Sanskrit. So first she had to practise it herself! She also remembered how at that time most verbal communications in the Ashram and the School took place in languages unfamiliar to her, including English which she was not used to speaking, and the Ashram Hindi that was completely foreign to her!

The room given to her in July 1970 on Ranga-pillai Street was not considered safe enough for a newcomer, therefore I was asked by Kireet-bhai to shift from the boarding and stay with her. After a gap of 8 years, it was wonderful to live together again. A year and a half later I moved to a room near the Press, where I had started working on

completing the Higher Course. By then our father (Maheshwar bhai) and sister (Archana), who had arrived in April and June 1971 respectively, had also started living in a house close by on the same street. At this stage, while our family home was gradually getting established in the Ashram, our notion of family was also expanding, to include more and more familiar Ashramites.

Some striking features of Jiji's personality come to my mind. She couldn't bear any ugliness and disharmony, be it physical or psychological. Her



Jiji with her Birthday card from the Mother, and Aravinda with *rakhis*, on *Raksha bandhan* day in August 1970

room was always kept in meticulous order and all her belongings looked spotless and perfectly maintained. Even simple objects surrounding her were for her living beings, which she cared for with affectionate hands. She once told Archana that she aspired to keep her room ready and apt to

receive the Mother at any time. The very essence of her being seemed to be a part of Mother's great form of Mahalakshmi, the embodiment of divine beauty and harmony, and her deepest aspiration was to be a channel of Her divine Love.

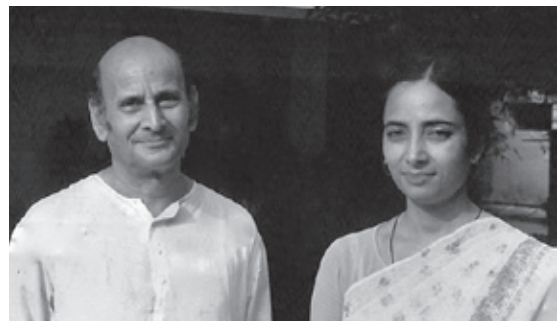
Mahasaraswati played hardly a lesser role. Jiji's doctoral thesis was a critical study of *Rasagangadhara*, which is a treatise on rhetorics written by the 17th-century critic and poet Pandit Raj Jagannatha. The thesis was published as a book by the Rajasthan Granth Academy in 1975, and was awarded the Rajya Sahityik Puraskar by the Ministry of Education of U.P. When this news was given to Nolini-da, he was very pleased and asked her to work for the Mother with all her capacities. That was the time when she started



Chinmayee-di with some students on her birthday, August 1981

preparing Sanskrit story-books for children, hand-written and illustrated with drawings done by many others, aimed at making Sanskrit simple and interesting for children. She cyclostyled them from Vishwanath-da's office for use in the School. These booklets are among many materials prepared by her, which are still being used in the School.

Generations of students and Ashramites have been taught and touched by Jiji during her 39 years at the Ashram and school. From young children to Higher Course students, Dining Room workers to friends and colleagues, all have loved and cherished her, not only for her knowledge of Sanskrit and music, her deep appreciation of the rich and timeless Indian heritage, but also for



Papa and Jiji, September 1983

her very being which radiated peace, devotion, beauty and harmony. Other first-hand accounts in this issue of *The Golden Chain* reflect on various aspects of her personality, as it continues to live in the memory and hearts of so many of us at the Ashram.

In the early months of 2009 Jiji told Archana, with whom she had shared a happy and intimate closeness through all their years at the Ashram, that she felt a decisive turn in her life

approaching. She could not tell exactly what kind of change was awaiting her, but it was an imperative sense that Mother was preparing her for a big step and a very different kind of work, which may be a radical departure from everything she had been doing so far.

She was to be accurate in her premonition. The six months to come, from undergoing surgery in July 2009 until her passing on January 15, 2010, would indeed take Jiji on a journey of vastly accelerated transformation and inner growth. It was a process that reached extreme intensities and forced the limits in many ways — limits of mental understanding, of will-power, of physical endurance, all of which she had plenty! — ultimately leading her to a transcending of any perishable support, to a constant giving of herself into the



In her room, 1989

hands of the Mother in an act of total surrender and faith, in what we felt was a great *yajna* of her entire being. Her own words sum this up so intimately, “I feel that my body is one cell in the body of the Mother.”

For us, accompanying her through this period of her life was a unique experience and gift in many ways, as the love and closeness that had been the natural privilege of our childhood was now taken to new and ever greater depths. It is impossible to do justice to that journey in the context of a few pages, and we are aware that in talking of her experience, we tread on a sacred ground of which we got but precious glimpses. In spite of extreme discomfort and pain, whoever saw her was always struck by her unvarying



Jiji with Archana, August 2000

composure and dignity, her unsubdued sense of humour, and her sharp wit and presence of mind which amazed us again and again. But the greatest treasures we received came from the deeper dimensions she reached, of which she managed to share many boons, including a few poems and songs which she dictated to me in the Nursing Home. At one stage, she was planning to paint four beautiful banners for her room with the four words that were most central to her experience: Grace – Gratitude – Faith – Beatitude. In moments when the physical pain became unbearable, rather than asking for painkillers, she would turn every breath into a chanting of the sacred sound OM. Through and with her, we spent many hours during the days and nights, chanting the Omkara and the mantras that brought near and made tangible Their marvellous Presence and Grace.

Now, a year after her leaving the physical dimension, all memories of pain and ordeal are as if miraculously gone, and in its place we feel but her enthralling smile and hear her delightful voice, sweetly teasing and challenging us to move forward with courage, to transcend our own limits in that flame of absolute love and self-giving that was her last and greatest teaching to us. ❀



Jiji's everlasting smile,
photo taken in 1995

Om Anandamayi Chaitanyamayi Satyamayi Parame

DIDI

Surabhi '81

Some moments are eternal, some experiences are ever-lasting, some relationships are immortal. They seem to defy the iron laws of time that usually draws every-



In the role of Meerabai at the Ashram Theatre, September 1981

thing into the oblivion of an obscure past. Freed from the bonds of the Past, Present and Future, they seem to breathe in a luminous immortal consciousness.

My experience with Chinmayee-di is an unforgettable and unique truth of a synthesis of “the Moment, the Man and the Goal”.

Amongst the special persons I idealised and whose influence is magical in my life, Chinmayee-di holds an esteemed position.

Fate brought us together in the New Creation building sometime in May 1986. Ever since then, each day began with warm greetings, ‘*sudinam*’ and closed with ‘*suratri*’ which were always embellished with her lovely compassionate smile. Her chiselled classic features, her calm and graceful appearance, her spontaneous smile and composed conduct, her ingenious ways and detailed perfection in works, were totally inspirational. Above all, her integral *samata*, equanimity, was supreme.

Chinmayee-di, mostly addressed as Aaryé and Didi, had always been a loving guardian in my formative days, in sunshine and in rain. I consider myself extremely fortunate to have spent with her 22 precious years. We have often shared humour, poetry, music and the baffling secrets (mysteries) of life.

An unwavering flame of faith and devotion was her strength to fight the final tough battle of this life. As an embodiment of Beauty, Nobility and Wisdom, she guides me even now from subtle regions. She is with me in that part of myself which aspires for Beauty and Harmony.

My salutations to Didi:

The outer forms perish,
Divinity never departs,
She dwells in me forever
As in countless hearts. ❧

CHINMAYEE-DI

Ratna Paul '91

I always admired Chinmayee-di, even before I knew her. Elegant in *saree* or *salwar kameez*, she radiated love and beauty. A person of great knowledge and yet so humble and so simple! Her eyes twinkled with kindness and her smile illumined her whole being.

She was a very popular teacher and her life re-

volved around her students: School, Knowledge or the Music room — one would always find her at one of these places.

It was in E3 or E4 that I first had her as my Sanskrit teacher. With her we travelled back in time to have a glimpse of the *Bhagavad Gita* and witness the colloquy between the Guru and

his Shishya, Sri Krishna and Arjuna. The *Gita* has always fascinated me, not only because it is a book of Light and Knowledge but also because it guides us through our day-to-day life with practical solutions to our problems. Guided by her we took up the challenge of reading the *Gita* with great enthusiasm. She would patiently explain and re-explain the shlokas when necessary without any annoyance, fatigue or irritation. Slowly my attraction for the Sanskrit language increased and the cause for this development was of course my teacher, Chinmayee-di. On the way I realised the depth of her vast knowledge and was absolutely astonished by her simple, humble nature. She was someone who could be approached anytime, anywhere. Throughout my student career and even afterwards, not once did I see her feeling disturbed or annoyed, although I often approached her for various reasons.

I cherish every moment that I spent in her presence because right from the first day of my acquaintance till the last, whenever I met her I learnt from her. She was like the vast endless ocean on whose shores I still stand, not even having touched the water. She was someone I looked up to, someone I followed blindly, for such was the trust she inspired.

She was wonderful! Soft and gentle, her face was always adorned with a radiant smile. I am indeed fortunate to have received her endless love that she so extravagantly showered on me. ❀



Chinmayee-di with Ratna

HER POISE WAS INSPIRING

Suruchi Verma '03

Generally one *admires* in another something which one lacks, otherwise the same qualities become cause of mere appreciation. Chinmayee-di had a great many qualities....

Sincerity and aspiration — we say we cannot judge somebody's sincerity; her sincerity and aspiration to live the life of a *sadhak* came through and touched me directly without any need for outer expression or mental judgment.

Affection — she had an inner affection, a kind of quiet love and goodwill for people that was too profound for words. Benevolence rested in her heart always.

Self-control — I have never heard her speak ill of anyone nor behave impulsively. Her speech and actions had a power and meaning and were never unleashed without purpose.

Refinement — she stood out in her appear-

ance and interaction. Harmony and beauty accompanied her throughout the years I knew her.

The combination of these traits gave her an aura of peace. That I admired much. Her persona, dignified and poised always awoke in me a wish to emulate, a need to learn. I found her poise inspiring.

She was my teacher, officially for 5 years from E.A.V.P.5 to K.3, but she taught and guided me till the end of her days. She was always very patient. A Sanskrit scholar, she went to the essence of the *Gita*, using examples from everyday life to make concepts clear

to us and to help us imbibe the values of our culture and aims for life. As a new Ashramite, I often needed guidance and she gave it to me with ease and understanding. She had an essential role to play in forming my ideals and she made explanations simpler by herself being an example. ❀





QUIZ TIME!



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



1. What did the Mother wear on her feet when she played tennis?
2. Who was the friend of the Mother who saw Sri Aurobindo and spoke to him before she did?
3. What name did the Mother give to the acrobatic group formed by Tara-di, Parul-di, Badal-da, Ravi-bala-ben and Sumedha-ben in 1950?
4. In which year did the Mother mention having seen a UFO? She used the English words “flying saucer” even though she was speaking in French.
5. What’s the spiritual significance of drumsticks?



ANSWERS TO THE QUESTIONS OF THE LAST ISSUE :

1. *Where was the Ashram School when the Mother started it in 1943?*
It was in the Playground.
2. *In which year did the Mother stop giving the morning Darshan from the balcony on Rue St. Gilles?*
1962.
3. *Which game was Nolini-da very good at?*
Football.
4. *Who donated the money with which Golconde was built?*
Sir Akbar Hyderi, the Dewan of Hyderabad State.
5. *What is the spiritual significance of the flowers of the Neem tree?*
Spiritual atmosphere.

ADVERTISEMENT RATES FOR *THE GOLDEN CHAIN*

In an effort to make *The Golden Chain* magazine more economically sustainable we are obliged to start taking advertisements. We invite and request all those who are in a position to put their companies' ads in *The Golden Chain* to come forward and help us in this manner.

The format of the ads will be the same as those in the Bulletin — a quote from the Mother or Sri Aurobindo at the top and the company's logo and other information below.

The advertisement rates are as follows:

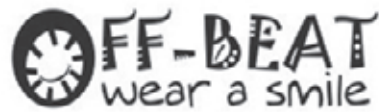
FULL PAGE FOR ONE YEAR (FOUR INSERTIONS): RS 6000

HALF PAGE FOR ONE YEAR (FOUR INSERTIONS): RS 3000

Do not look behind, look always in front,
at what you want to do.

And you are sure of progressing.

The Mother



T-Shirts & Eco Bags

Offbeat Apparels India Private Limited

No.16, Mariamman Koil Street,

Vazhaikulam

Pondicherry 605012

Telefax: 0413- 2223556

Email: sales@offbeat-pondy.com

www.pondylifestyle.com



The student should come to school not like someone going to his daily grind because he cannot avoid it, but because it would be possible for him to do something interesting. The teacher should not be in school, come to school with the idea that for half an hour or three-quarters of an hour he is going to recite something which he has more or less well prepared and which is boring even for him, and that therefore he cannot amuse the students, but instead to try to come into contact mentally – and if possible more deeply – with a number of little developing individualities who, we hope, have some curiosity about things, and in order to be able to satisfy this curiosity. So he himself must be aware, very modestly, that he does not know enough and that he has a lot to learn; but not to learn from books – by trying to understand life.

The Mother
On Education (CWM, 12: 409-410)

