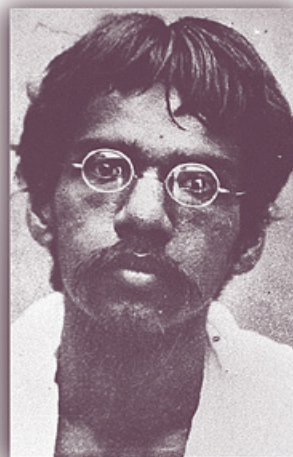


FEB 2012 / VOL 12 NUM 2

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The Golden Chain

Alumni Journal of Sri Aurobindo International Centre of Education



TALES OF EXILE



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

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

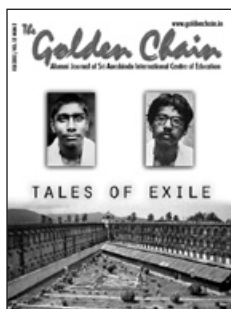
Sri Nolini Kanta Gupta (to the final-year students of the Higher Course on October 26, 1976)

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On the Cover:

Sudhir Sarkar, Barin Ghose and the Cellular Jail in the Andamans.

The Golden Chain

Alumni Journal of S.A.I.C.E.

Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Pondicherry, INDIA.



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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:

Ramraj Sehgal

for THE GOLDEN CHAIN FRATERNITY, Pondy

Printer:

Swadhin Chatterjee,

SRI AUROBINDO ASHRAM PRESS, Pondicherry.

THE EDITORS' PAGE

by Alo Pal '92

I was watching 3 *Idiots* on television. At one point my six year old son came and sat beside me even as the college ragging scene was about to start, and so I forwarded it. And by the time the movie ended I had forwarded many such scenes. There was one however where I brought him close to me so he could be still and watch Amir Khan define a machine in his own words, and then rattle off the convoluted definition of a book to probably the worst teacher in the world! The other scene I wanted him to watch was where the principal of the school defies him to take a class and Amir Khan takes the opportunity to get the class to think out of the box. I am not going to say yet again, that this is why I so love our school, but instead look at School and Group to find an example that summarised this spirit. I doubt anyone who met him or interacted with him would doubt that Kake and his brand of Kake-ness exemplified this.

Way back in 1983 we were asked in class to write down our interests. I had mentioned astronomy. A few days later Gita-di asked a classmate and me to go to Kake's house, as he would teach us astronomy! We went and sure enough there was no "lesson". Instead he gave us a small telescope that my friend and I had to share and all he did was ask us to gaze at the stars! This might seem to some like picking the *Bhagawad Gita* to learn Sanskrit... but then, why not? Why not stargaze, point a telescope at the night sky and start to wonder about it? Kake left us, but his spirit did not, and should never. If on a whim I decide to challenge myself to a crazy act, or if I brush aside a little pain and carry on and forget it while something more interesting is there to see or do, I owe part of that attitude to Kake. The difference being, that while I carry on with a wince, he would have done it with a smile.

I have, today, a god-gifted privilege to sit in the Free Progress Section of the School, to be part teacher, part helper, part "elderly" presence to keep a tab on the students, a responsibility I used to see Kake fulfill. I know that, as compared to him, my resources to help the children are limited. But when I think of what I do, and when I remember Kake sitting on the galleries as I used to walk past the School earlier and give my customary glance at the courtyard, I smile. I wish I can in my own way urge the students to gaze at the stars rather than learn about them from a book.

*

Dear Golden Chain members, this comes from a person who works for the magazine in the limited capacity of tracing and nabbing alumni to urge them to share their experiences with the rest of us. Some of you who have succumbed to the nabbing are also aware of the extent to which this exercise needs nagging. Eighteen years on I would have imagined the magazine would reflect more and more the varied experiences, directions and knowledge spaces our community is represented in. And if it is not, then I would like to speak on behalf of all those who work for the magazine, that god knows we have tried! Meanwhile we of course continue to try... and hope. I am part of a few forums on the internet where I have seen ample examples of the time and quality and quantity of content that many in the alumni community are willing to give to get their voice heard. So dear fellow alumni, use this space to do so too. Do not judge us before you have made the effort, by sending in your own texts, to change or improve matters, and worked towards creating what you feel is the ideal content for this magazine so that it talks to you more meaningfully. ❧

MY WANDERING FEET

Anurag Prasad '10

*The Road goes ever on and on
Down from the door where it began.
Now far ahead the Road has gone,
And I must follow, if I can,
Pursuing it with eager feet,
Until it joins some larger way
Where many paths and errands meet.
And whither then? I cannot say.*

Bilbo's song (*Lord of the Rings*)

“Anurag! Get your head out of the clouds!” This is a phrase I have often heard from my parents and teachers. I have been a daydreamer all my life and my dreams have taken me on some epic adventures! I have climbed mountains, crossed the seas to explore unknown places, fought in wizard duels and flown over the world on the back of a dragon! All this while staring blankly at some obscure formulas or incomprehensible equations! Well, one has to make sacrifices when going on a journey of a lifetime!

While I was growing up, people often asked me what I want to do in life. They asked me about my dreams and ambitions and I realised that it would be awkward to tell them that I want to fly a broomstick and work for the Ministry of Magic. It was then that I started thinking about what I really want from life. I looked at everything I love doing and it didn't take me long to realise that what makes me happiest is travelling! There is nothing that attracts me more than an open road

which leads to places that I have never seen. The sheer thrill of exploring something new makes my life meaningful. The simplicity and freedom of stepping out of the house with a backpack, ready to follow the road wherever it might lead, is, for me, the most liberating experience one can ever have!

I have been fortunate enough to do a fair bit of travelling in the year that has just gone by. Here are some experiences and observations that I would like to share with all of you.

VARANASI

My first impression of Varanasi was one of gloom and decay. I found the place dark and dirty, with narrow lanes and crumbling houses. I went for a boat ride on the Ganga and I was shocked and disturbed by the sight of half-burnt bodies floating on the water. A trip to the Vishwanath Temple convinced me that there was something hostile and depraved about the place. A group of priests cornered me and let me off only after they managed to pinch three hundred rupees from me! All in all, my first day in Varanasi left me deeply uncomfortable.

As I spent more time in Varanasi, I realised that the human mind takes time to accept anything that is wholly alien to it. Walking around the town and exploring the ghats made me see things which I had failed to notice on the first day. Yes, the dirt, decay and corruption were all there but there were other things which made themselves evident as I became a more careful observer.





In Varanasi, the bank of the Ganga is always full of activity. Just sitting at the bank and looking at everything that was going on was an experience for me. There were people of all ages constantly bathing in the holy river, youngsters playing cricket on the shore, middle-aged men deeply engrossed in games of chess that were fascinating to watch, boatmen ferrying tourists from one ghat to another, astrologers, beggars, holy men, tantrics, all contributing in some way or the other to the general feel of the place, foreigners sitting around with some babas and smoking weed and, most prominent in all of these, Death, a presence which makes Varanasi what it is. There are always fires burning at the ghats and seeing them surrounded by all this activity brings a sense of unreality to both life and death. We often perceive life and death as opposites but if they are opposites, how can they exist in such proximity?

Another regular activity at the ghat is the Ganga Aarti which takes place at seven every evening. Five young men in orange robes perform the Aarti with incense sticks and diyas. Their performance is accompanied by live singing and music. After the Aarti, hundreds of diyas are floated down the Ganga. Late at night, they look like bright stars in a dark sky that one can see from above.

GAUMUKH

From Gangotri, the trek to Gaumukh is eighteen kilometres long. I had always wanted to trek up to Gaumukh because I had heard many stories about the grandeur of the Himalayan peaks that can be seen from up there. The trek was everything that I could have hoped for. The weather

was pleasant and the trees and flowers looked fresh and happy. The snow-capped peaks loomed closer and closer and white became the most dominant colour in my surroundings. Just when I reached the Lal Baba Ashram, the only accommodation available on the way to Gaumukh, the snow came! Nothing could have made me happier! I stood a long time in the snow, eating snowflakes that gently drifted down from the sky.

The sheer size of everything I saw in Gaumukh left a deep impression on me. I was simply blown away by the massive peaks, the towering glaciers, the huge boulders and the enormous force of the Ganga which starts its journey from there. Looking at all of these, I felt small and insignificant and all my joys and sorrows, likes and dislikes, strengths and failings seemed to be ridiculously exaggerated. The experience of being alone in that vast world gave me peace and a feeling of unity with all that surrounded me.

KEDARNATH

From Gaurikund, Kedarnath is a fourteen kilometre trek. But, unfortunately, Kedarnath is a



very commercial place. Thousands of people visit the temple every day and the narrow path that leads to the top is often blocked by porters, mules and palakis trying to overtake one another. There is sound and movement everywhere one looks and the place is completely devoid of the calm serenity of Gaumukh. Just when I was thinking about how unadventurous the trek was, it started raining. I walked for a while in the rain but then it

became too heavy for me to continue. I took shelter in a tea stall and drank cup after cup of hot tea to keep myself warm. The rain outside formed a thick curtain which blocked almost everything from sight. Night came and the rain showed no signs of relenting. For the first time while travelling, a hint of fear crept into me. I had to reach Kedarnath and it seemed I would have to do it at night, in the rain and howling wind and without anyone or anything to guide me on the mountain paths. If I had to do it, there was no point in waiting any longer. I set off and while walking in the darkness, drenched to my bones, shaking uncontrollably in the bitter cold, I wondered if I had made a mistake by leaving home. The thought only lasted a second and then I pushed it out of my mind. The Himalayas had given me so many beautiful memories, so many moments of pure joy... Could I not endure some rain, some cold, some darkness for all that I had experienced? While living a safe, protected life I had dreamt of leaving the comforts of home for the wild beauty

of forests, rivers and mountains. This is what I had set out to find! And now, while living my dream, how could I wish for a warm bed and dry clothes? I reached Kedarnath wet, shivering and colder than I have been at any point in my life. But, my heart was warm and glad. I was happy!

Travelling this year has given me all that I could have hoped for. I have seen much of India and there are many things which I now understand about this vast and diverse country. I have walked in forests, climbed up mountains, swum in rivers, explored villages, towns and cities and I have also been to the inaugural Formula One Indian Grand Prix! I have made new friends while travelling and I have discovered that the world we live in is not as dangerous as it is often made out to be. There is something interesting waiting at every turn of the road. One must just have the courage to follow it. So, what are you waiting for? Pack your bags and go wherever your heart takes you! As for me, I am eager to see where life takes me in pursuit of that flighty temptress, Adventure! ☼

...Continued from page 17

and electric wires dangling dangerously added to the mess. The strong wind still howled in the morning as I got ready. I knew that our program for the day was wiped out.

Our visit to Sri Aurobindo's room was cancelled due to the confusion and lack of communication. Later we could get permission for only 5 members for the visit on the following day. As the JJH garden was a mess and the photo exhibition had to be quickly dismantled

due to the rain, nothing further could be achieved that day. The next day we gathered in the boarding which now bore a happier look, decorated with flowers, garlands and colourful kolams. The Mother's pictures were exhibited on the dining room tables. We began with a concentration and then sang "Mangalam". This set the mood right. There was a distribution of blessings, souvenirs,

a copy of the book by Pramila-di and *prasad*, followed by an informal chat with Debabrata Halder, one of the very first boarders, who told us about the inauguration of JJH by the Mother and his reminiscences of those first days at JJH.

On the 31st we learned that thanks to the ef-

forts of some of the participants, we had permission to stage our program in the Hall of Harmony the next morning, that is, on New Year's day. What a wonderful start to the New Year! So, everything does happen for the best.



Despite the change of venue and other upsets, the program went off smoothly. Though telephone services were erratic, all participants turned up for the program on time. In spite of the program being long the cooperation of the audience was remarkable.

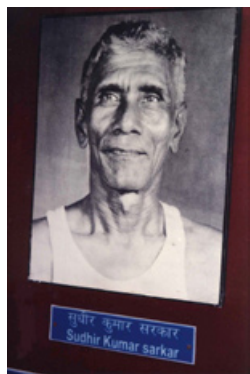
After the program, we all trouped to the Corner House for lunch. ☼

SUDHIR-DA AND THE CELLULAR JAILS IN THE ANDAMANS

By Arvindbabu Patel '63

A few decades ago, when I was a student, I had heard about *Kalapani* or the Cellular Jail in the Andamans from my history teacher. He described in detail the inhuman torture our freedom fighters underwent there. Hearing the name *Kalapani* my fertile childish brain used to fabricate stories and I used to shudder with fear.

Recently in March 2011, I had the opportunity to visit the Cellular Jails about which I had heard so much. On the walls of a hall in the Jail Complex, there were photographs of thousands of freedom fighters along with their names and the particular “crime” for which they were transported to the Andamans. I hankered to see Sudhir-da’s photo because I was well acquainted with him. Fifteen-twenty metres down the hall, I finally spotted his photo. I was thrilled to see his picture, a Greek figure, well shaped nose and a strong, chiselled face.



This photo of Sudhir-da was familiar to me. He must have been in his early seventies. I dashed through memory lanes more than five decades in the past when as a youth, I used to enter Sudhir-da’s house located at 18, Rue Dupuy, in front of Harpagon. Whenever I injured myself while doing sports or had any physical problem, I used to go

to Sudhir-da for treatment. He practised Homeopathy and many people used to go to him for relief. He had a loving nature and while administering the medicine he would utter in Bengali, “Joy Ma”, “Victory to the Mother”, and his medicines worked wonders. Whenever I went to his house for treatment, he would lovingly receive me saying, “Babu, what is the matter? Come in. Are you



keeping well?” etc.

After I told him what troubled me he would open a big rectangular wooden box filled with bottles of Homeopathy medicines. He would hunt out the bottle containing the medicine that he wanted, tap the bottle gently with his index finger so that two or three pills fell into a small folded piece of paper and would tell me, “open your mouth, take this and the Mother will cure you”, and would drop the pills into my mouth saying, ‘Joy Ma’. There was a genuine feeling and concern for the patients. He would say, “Hold on to the Mother, she alone will cure you”.

“Babu, what are you doing? Hurry up, there’s lots to see”, I was suddenly brought back from my reverie by my friend.

I proceeded down the hall. There were tableaux showing the prison uniform the freedom fighters wore, the fetters that chained them so that they could not escape; how they were yoked to the handle of the turning wheel and if they stopped the work due to fatigue they were flogged mercilessly.

Perhaps seeing me a little absent minded, a person approached me with a concerned query: “are you unwell?” I glanced at the person. He had a Bengali bearing.



"I'm perfectly alright", I responded. The gentleman, whose name was Buddha-da, and I then got talking about the freedom fighters and Sudhir-da in par-

ticular.

I recounted to him how Sudhir-da helped save Nolini-da from getting deported to the Andamans.

"Actually, the authorities were after Nolini-da as one of the main accused in the Alipore Bomb Case. He and Sudhir-da were close associates of Sri Aurobindo. The accused were asked to stand in two rows for the identification parade. Sudhir-da, who was standing behind Nolini-da whispered in his ears to remain unperturbed and to look straight into the eyes of the identifier. When the witness came Sudhir-da made frightened gestures and avoided his eyes, pretending to be guilty. The trick worked. The poor fellow got confused and identified Sudhir-da as the accused paving the path to Nolini-da's acquittal. You see, Buddha-da, these young boys like Sudhir-da were fired up by Sri Aurobindo and they were ever ready to sacrifice their life for the cause of their country.

"Sri Aurobindo lifted the struggle for India's freedom on a high pedestal of spirituality. Bengal hearkened to his call. Many young freedom fighters were inspired by his leadership and joined the movement whole heartedly.

"You know, Buddha-da, while other associates of Sri Aurobindo were busy making bombs at Manicktala Gardens, Sudhir-da, a mere youth, stayed in Sri Aurobindo's house as his personal attendant along with Barin-da (Sri Aurobindo's younger brother), Sarojini Devi (his only sister) and Mrinalini Devi (his devoted wife). How fortunate was Sudhir-da to be with and serve the Master. Once Sudhir-da got ill and inadvertently vomited on the manuscript that Sri Aurobindo had written on the *Mahabharata*. What a loss to posterity! But Sri Aurobindo did not utter any

harsh words. Instead he himself cleared up the mess and even nursed his devoted attendant.

"Sudhir-da moved around with Sri Aurobindo as his bodyguard to various places for meetings and lectures. He also accompanied his Leader to attend the Surat Congress.

"Even in Alipore Jail, after Sri Aurobindo and his associates were arrested, there were times when Sudhir-da attended to the Master who was sometimes fully absorbed in meditation.

"Buddha-da, once during the trial in the Alipore Sessions Court, Sri Aurobindo was absorbed in deep meditation and was totally oblivious of his whereabouts. The sentry got annoyed seeing Sri Aurobindo in this unmindful state and roughed him up. Seeing his Lord being manhandled, Sudhir-da jumped down from where he was seated and was about to strike the sentry had his companions not stopped him. How dare the sentry touch the body of his Lord."

Buddha-da and I were so absorbed in our conversation that we didn't realize we had crossed the Exhibition Hall and had come down to the precincts of the Cellular Jails.

Yes, the Jails look impressive today — well kept, with green lawns and stray trees, decorative and flowering plants scattered over the courtyard of the Jail premises.

As we entered the compound we were attracted by two long wings of the Cellular Jails. Originally there were seven such wings, but only three of them remain. The third one cannot be seen from where we are standing, as it is hidden behind the right hand wing. The left and the right hand wings run horizontally and join at the far end with a watch tower on top. Each wing is a long structure having ground, first and second floors.

I glanced towards my left and saw a torch burning under a covered structure. On close observation, I read on the pedestal of the Torch: "Swatantra Jyot", the Torch of Liberty. About



twenty meters away from the Torch, on a raised concrete square platform, is a pillar, which stands on a pedestal, a symbol of respect and honour towards our valiant freedom fighters.

A couple of meters away on our right is a lone

tree and close to it are kept chairs neatly arranged for the tourists to sit and watch the poignant 'Light and Sound' show later in the evening at 5.30 p.m.



On the lawns of the courtyard, fifteen meters in front of the arranged chairs is a square concrete platform. A tableau of a freedom fighter being flogged is placed on the right edge of the platform. Close to the platform there is a long rectangular structure with a red-coloured sloping tin roof.

We saw tourists entering this tin-roofed building. Inside are kept the original vessels used for crushing coconuts to extract oil. I recounted to

Buddha-da Sudhir-da's graphic and poignant description of the inhuman torture he had to bear in the dreaded oil mill:

"Usually a bullock or a horse is made to turn the grinding mill. But in the Andamans men were yoked to the handle of the turning wheel instead of bullocks. Even bullocks plodding along all day, could not turn out more than 16 lbs of oil.

Yet each one of us was forced to yield 30 lbs of oil daily. Sometimes three of us were yoked together and the demand then was to grind 80 lbs. The

work started at 6.00 in the morning and continued till 6.00 in the evening. It would amount to running round and round nearly 40 miles a day with that heavy yoke on our shoulders and the jamadar shouting at us, 'run, run, run faster'. The time for our meal and rest was shortened

to a few minutes and then back to work. For if we did not finish our daily quotas, our punishment was no food, work at night and a shower of unmentionable abuses by the jailers." There were times when the officer in charge would have the tired man bound to the yoke and goad the others to run around dragging him along, bruised and helpless. And to inflict even more torture to the exhausted man, he would be flogged mercilessly.

"Babu-da, how could Sudhir-da survive such killing torture?" enquired a shaken Buddha-da.

"Who or what can harm a person protected by the Divine?" I answered and continued. It is said that Sudhir-da once asked Sri Aurobindo, "If they torture us, what should we do?" And Sri Aurobindo replied, "Think of me, I shall always be with you."

Sri Aurobindo has commented in his *Tales of Prison Life* (written in Bengali) about his companions in Alipore Jail:

"That fearless and innocent look in their eyes, the words breathing power, their carefree delighted laughter, even in the midst of great danger, the undaunted courage, cheerfulness of mind, absence of despair, or grief, all this was a symptom not of the inert Indians of those days, but of a new age, a new race and a new activity."

The time was 4.00 p.m. The public has to vacate the jails premises by 4.30 p.m., so that those



who are interested in seeing the Light and Sound Show at 5.30 p.m. can buy their tickets from a counter situated outside the Jails.

We rushed up the second floor to see the jail cells which were open to the public. There is a long corridor and as one proceeds forward one sees a number of individual cells. The iron gates of all these cells are open for the public to enter and see for themselves how our brave freedom fighters were kept like animals in cages. They could not interact with each other as all the cells are on one side adjacent to each other. On the right side of the corridor there is a series of large arched openings covered with iron bars. In the last cell at the end of the corridor is a framed photograph of Veer Savarkar hung on a wall. We silently saluted this brave son of Mother India.

On our way towards the exit of the Jail Complex, Buddha-da asked, “after Sudhir-da was released from the Cellular Jail, what did he do?”

I recounted whatever little I knew and had heard about Sudhir-da. Being a dynamic person he tried his hand at various business ventures in Bengal and Assam. He got married and had children. Sometime in 1943, after his wife’s demise, he along with his children settled in Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Pondicherry to serve his twin Masters Sri Aurobindo and the Mother. He was a karma yogi and was one of the pioneers in introducing various new ventures which later on developed into established departments. Among the enterprises he introduced over the years were the construction of flush toilets and septic tanks, the manufacture of handmade paper, washing soap, lime, dying of clothes and pottery.

“You know Buddha-da”, I went on with the story. “The Department of Pottery is about three miles from the Ashram and for a long time Sudhir-da used to go there cycling, attend the work for a couple of hours and come back cycling.

“Once Sudhir-da had dislocated his elbow. His

sons tried to take him to the doctor to set it right, but he was unwilling to go. So his sons forced him out of the cot and before they could drag him away from the cot, Sudhir-da tightly caught hold of the stick meant for hanging the mosquito net with his injured hand and while pushing and pulling him suddenly, there was a “click” sound and miracle, the dislocated elbow got set by itself. “See, the elbow has become alright without going to the doctor”, saying thus Sudhir-da began to flex and extend his elbow. He had a tremendous capacity to bear pain.

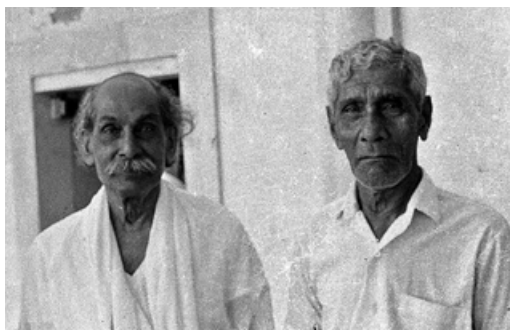
“Even in his old age when he could hardly walk, he would go to the Playground to attend the Gymnastic Marching. Though he could not walk and perform the exercise with the group members, he would stand taking support of a wall and do all the exercises in his own way. He had this never-give-up attitude. He was a daredevil, a fighter, a hero warrior.

“Buddha-da, I will recount a small incident which clearly reflects

what kind of selfless freedom fighter Sudhir-da was”. I went on with my story. “Sometime after Independence in 1947, the Government of India sent two officials to honour Sudhir-da for his services rendered as a freedom fighter. They wanted to donate to him two travel passes, a meagre sum of money and a plaque as a mark of gratitude. Sudhir-da, a simple, straightforward and honest person refused to accept the reward. Instead, it is said, he asked the two officials whether they were ready to donate their blood for Bharatmata who was bleeding due to the Partition.”

Deeply moved, Buddha-da commented, “Truly, freedom fighters like Sudhir-da are hard to find. *Ora Khanti lok*, they are made of pure gold. *Oder Koti Koti Pranam*, I bow down to them thousands of times. Thanks to them, we are breathing the fresh air of freedom.” ❧

Information on Sudhi-da’s life and texts quoted were sourced from the book, A Spirit Indomitable.



RECOVERING A 'LOST' TEXT: *THE TALE OF MY EXILE* BY BARINDRA KUMAR GHOSE

A conversation with **Sachidananda Mohanty** '75

Ever since the emergence of print capitalism, books have been published and disseminated widely in the public domain. Many rare titles, in due course, become 'out of print' and are 'lost' to the reading public. *The Tale of My Exile*, published in 1922 by the Arya Office, Pondicherry, is one such volume. It is the extraordinary personal account of the noted revolutionary Barindra Kumar Ghose (1880-1959), the younger brother of Sri Aurobindo, and popularly known as Barin Ghose.

A bold and charismatic personality who lived a chequered life, Barin was convicted in the Alipore Bomb Case for waging war against the King. He was sentenced to death on 6 May 1909. Upon appeal, the sentence was commuted to transportation for life in the dreaded Cellular Jail of Port Blair in the Andamans to which he was sent on 12 December 1909. After his release from jail in January 1920, as a result of a royal amnesty, Barin visited Pondicherry several times during the early twenties and met Sri Aurobindo. He served as the editor of several Bengali journals such as *Narayan* and *Bijoli* and later *Basumat*. Under instruction from Sri Aurobindo, he set up a spiritual community at Bhawanipur, Calcutta. He took an active part in the cultural life of Bengal and authored more than twenty books. Barin lived in Pondicherry between 1923 and 1929 under the spiritual guidance of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother. He rendered valuable service to them and the newly founded Sri Aurobindo Ashram.

The Tale of My Exile is an important cultural document that has a great deal of contemporary relevance at the national and international level. The Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Pondicherry has brought out a new edition of this text in December 2011. Introduced and edited by Sachidananda Mohanty, the reprint has a preface, critical introduction and bibliography for the present generation of readers.

The Tale of My Exile: Twelve Years in the Andamans, 2011, was discussed recently at the India International Centre, New Delhi, a leading intellectual institution of our country, on 19 January 2012. There was a book discussion at the Sri Aurobindo Bhavan, Kolkata on 21st January 2012 as well.

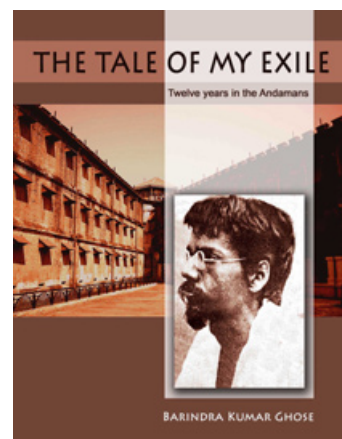
Sunayana Panda of *The Golden Chain* caught up recently with Sachidananda Mohanty for a chat regarding *The Tale of My Exile*. Excerpts from the conversation:

Where did you get the idea to do this book?

We must understand the significance of this text at the outset: *The Tale of My Exile* by Barin Ghose is an important cultural document that must have been seen and approved, in all probability, by Sri Aurobindo, since it was earlier published in 1922 by the Arya Office, the publisher of the journal *Arya* in which the major works of Sri Aurobindo were serialized. The work was translated by Nolini Kanta Gupta. It focuses on issues central to our own times such as the sociology of cruelty and the problem of dealing with cultural

memory. In other words, it raises the questions as to how we must deal with our troubled and traumatic past. After all, the colonial experience that we Indians underwent under the British rule has had profound influence upon our psyche.

In recent years, critics in India and elsewhere, in the fields of postcolonial and holocaust studies have tried to deal with these questions on the basis of the study of the colonial archives. Barin Ghose's *The Tale of My Exile* reveals the working of the colonial mind and regimes of absolute tyranny. In various parts of the world, erstwhile



Excerpts from the book:

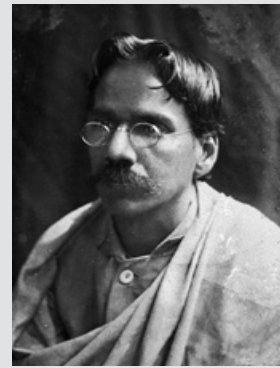
FROM THE INTRODUCTION

In the popular imagination in India, *Kala Pani* or *Black Waters* has served, for long, as a terrifying metaphor for the tyranny of the Raj. It is a constant reminder to the patriotic minded about the sacrifice of those who challenged the might of the Empire and were banished to its farthest corners as an act of savage retribution. The image of the brave and hapless victims, left to suffer and die their pitiable deaths, in the (Andaman) Islands infested by leeches, mosquitoes, tropical diseases and dreaded head hunters, the *Jarawas*, has been part of our troubled national memory.

*



...From the prison records we learn that Barin was Convict No. 31549. There were 78 cells or rooms in the three storeys.... Labour was most dreaded and draconian and had to be performed regardless of one's state of health. Coir pounding, rope making and oil extraction were the main tasks. Work outside the prison was more backbreaking than when it was carried out inside.



The smallest deviation was met with severe whip lashing, crossbar fetters, chain fetters, flogging; punishment dress in the form of gunny bags was common. The medical section often became an active partner in prison torture. Several inmates, such as Indu Bhushan Roy, tragically ended their lives, unable to bear the inhuman torture.... In this hellhole, prisoners learnt to survive through trickery, guile, ingenuity or chicanery. The prison brought out the best and the worst in men. There was heroism and cowardice side by side.

colonial powers such as the White South Africans, the Japanese and the British have attempted acts of 'psychological' atonement and expiation through Truth Commissions and acts of reconciliation. The Japanese, for instance, have gone to the extent of paying monetary compensation to the Korean 'Comfort Women' who were exploited by the Japanese Army during World War II in the Far East.

What kind of research did you have to do?

The research conducted was fairly arduous and time taking over the last 5 years or so. It was carried out in several interdisciplinary areas: (1) biographical : reconstructing the life and times of Barin Ghose, (2) literary: reading through the works of Barin and others such as Upendranath

Banerjee and Ullaskar Dutt (3) sociological: studying critical works that deal with prison narratives and accounts of the Holocaust, (4) ethnographic: going through contemporary accounts of prison in Iraq's Abu Gharib and Guantanamo Bay in Cuba, (5) critical: looking at studies by postcolonial critics like Ashis Nandy and Partha Chatterjee, (6) travel: actual visits to the Cellular Jail in Port Blair, and finally (7) memoirs: reading through the accounts of British officials and survivors of the penal colonies. Putting them all together in a coherent manner of a narrative history, also posed a big challenge.

How long did you take to get this book done?

Nearly five years or so. From the initial discovery of this text in Cornell University's digital

Excerpts from the book:

DAVID BARRY TO THE PRISONERS

'You see, the wall around, do you know why it is so low? Because it is impossible to escape from this place. The sea surrounds it for a distance of 1000 miles. In the forest you do not find any other animals than pigs and wild cats..., but there are savages who are called Jangles or *Jarawas*.... My name is D Barry. I am a most obedient servant to the simple and straightforward but to the crooked, I am four times crooked.'

BARIN DESCRIBES THE JAIL CELL

Each room has a door closed by iron bars

only, with no door leaf. On the back wall of the room, at a height of 4 cubits and a half, there is a small window, closed also with iron rails two inches apart. Of furniture in the room there is a low bedstead 1 cubit and a half wide and in one corner an earthen pot painted with tar. One must have a most vigilant sleep on such a bed, otherwise even the least careless turn would land the sleeper with a bang on the floor. And the tarred pot is a most marvellous invention to produce equanimity of soul with regard to smell, for it is the water-closet and one has to share merrily its delightful company during the whole night.

library till the actual research, and finally, copy-editing work (big support from Karen!) till the text went to the press, all this took time. Jay, Sunam, Swadhin-da, Kiran, Bob, were particularly helpful in this regard. Manoj-da (Das Gupta) was very supportive and so also Biswajit Ganguli of the Sri Aurobindo Bhavan, Kolkata. Many others helped. Above all, it was the Grace of the Mother and Sri Aurobindo that saw this project through.

Many people think that history is of no use since the past is dead and gone. What is your view?

This is totally an incorrect and unsound approach to understanding the discipline. Remembering the past in whatever ways — folk, oral, and written forms, Puranas of the Indian kind or historiography of the western kind — are of crucial importance. In fact, memory is vital to the formation of our identities — individual or collective.

It has been rightly said that 'those who forget history are condemned to repeat it.' No right thinking person would agree with Henry Ford

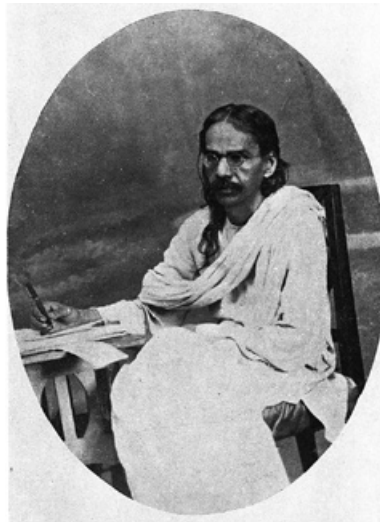
when he said that 'history is bunk'! Not just reading the myriad aspects, small or big, that constitute the past but interpreting it in the light of contemporary thinking is a crucial role played by cultural critics the world over. The example of the New Historicist Stephen J Greenblatt of Harvard

University with regard to the so-called 'discovery' of America by Columbus is a good instance of the exciting research that has been carried out in recent years in the field of cultural history. In India, the *Subaltern* School has added new historical perspectives to our understanding of the past. Considered from a deeper angle, many of the new approaches would be seen as aligned with the Aurobindonian view of studying the past. An adequate knowledge of our past will surely lead us in

the right direction to our future.

Is there anything else you would like to say?

The progressive and dynamic spirituality that Sri Aurobindo envisioned and the Mother put into practice, is integral in character. It includes



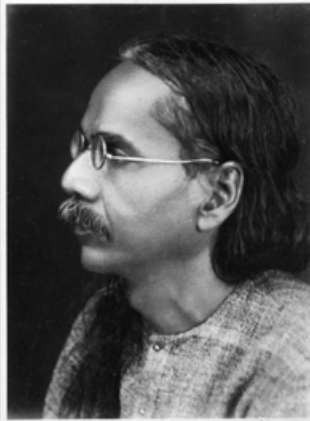
Excerpts from the book:

BARIN ON LEARNING ROPE-MAKING

We had never done rope-making or coir-pounding in our life. Even perhaps our ancestors to the fourteenth generation had never heard the names of such things. And yet we did the thing. On the first day all of us were given rope-making. A bundle of coir was thrown in front of each of the closed cells with the command, “*Rassi batto*”, that is to say, prepare ropes like a dear good boy. We opened our bundles, handled them a little and finally sat down in despair. To make ropes out of that? Was it possible? There were the four warders there. They came as private tutors to teach us this dreadful work.... This was our maiden effort and what wonderful ropes we made, narrow at one place, thick at another, and all covered with bristling fibres! Not to speak of the honourable Government, we ourselves burst out into laughter on beholding our own achievement.

ULLASKAR WROTE MOVINGLY

‘In our ordinary bullock driven indigenous oil mills, the quantity of mustard oil that a bullock cart could give, going round and round the



whole day, does not amount to anything more than eight seers or sixteen pounds at most whereas, the quantity we had to give, was fixed at one maunder eighty pounds per diem; of course allowing for all the difference that makes between mustard and coconut oil from that big oil mill.’ (*Twelve Years of Prison Life*)

THE FINAL MOOD IS A SPIRITUAL ONE. AS BARIN OBSERVES:

And yet our delight was not small even in the midst of such sorrow. For it is a thing that belongs to one’s own self. One may gather it as much as one likes from the inexhaustible fund that is within and drink of it to one’s heart’s content. Not that, however, the lashes of sorrow were an illusion to us. Even the Maya of Vedanta did not always explain them away, so often had they a solemn ring of reality about them. But a tree requires for its growth not only the touch of the gentle spring, but the rude shock of storms and rain and the scalding of the summer heat. Man remains frail and weak and ill developed if he has an easy and even life. The hammer of God that builds up a soul in divine strength and might is one of the Supreme realities. (*TME*)

developing an enlightened mind as well. The dominant intellectual traditions of the West, while illuminating many areas of the human behaviour, have not been adequate in dealing with the more profound psychological and spiritual aspects of life. The introductory chapters of *The Human Cycle* and *The Ideal of Human Unity*, in this regard, are very instructive. Sri Aurobindo tells us that history and sociology have been blind to the deeper Idea Forces that determine the course of human life and the destiny of communities and civilizations.

There is a lesson here for those of us who

have had the privilege of being students at the SAICE. Our judgment of men and matters will be more considered, balanced and nuanced if we gained a historical perspective. Our nation too must show a greater awareness of historical consciousness in the literary and cultural domains. More ‘advanced’ nations in the West have, after all, invested in the creation of archives and archival research as a crucial component of education. This is something we need to learn and emulate; we can thereby create a new historiography in accordance with the Indian intellectual traditions. ❧

1ST DECEMBER PROGRAMME, 2011

Ayesha Srivastava '11

There are moments in life that cannot be explained in tangible terms. The 1st December programme happened to me in much the same manner. To this day, I wonder what prompted me to take it up. A spon-



taneous urge with absolutely no cerebration was how I took up the 1st December programme. Having spoken to the authorities, it was established that I was now officially organizing the 1st December programme 2011. The feeling that something wonderful and important had happened to

me stayed with me for quite a few days before I was hit with the question, "And now what?!" I had no clue. I started turning wistful. I realized then that moods are erratic and intuitive urges, at the level of my consciousness, totally unreliable! Yet something, a really little something, felt right.

In a few months time the immensity of the responsibility began to dawn on me. Giving up seemed easy but it wasn't an option. If I had known when I stepped into Knowledge that 3 years later I would be taking up the 1st December programme, I would surely have taken *Savitri* classes. But that not being the case I was at a loss

about what to do. Like everyone before me I too wanted to do something different, something unique. But what? I then remembered Sri Aurobindo's *Love and Death* which I had read when in E6, and remembered enjoying it thoroughly. Priti-di's paintings, with all their vibrant colours, had accompanied the poem then, and they were still fresh in my memory. And just like that I knew what I wanted. I wanted to bring alive those images.

And then the fun began. I read and re-read the poem and pictured it differently each time in my mind. And when an idea repeated I noted it down. I began to draw extensively. I never thought of stage décor but images. I realized then that I needed help with organizing. There were too many aspects to putting on a programme of that stature. So I approached Arjun, my classmate who was an amazing organizer, to help me. He



readily agreed. For weeks we sat together discussing ideas. After which we approached Cristof, for guidance and support. And working with him was truly an amazing experience.

1ST DECEMBER 2011 - A REVIEW

Shyama '85

The Annual Programme of the 1st December was eagerly awaited, as usual. The piece chosen for this year's performance was Sri Aurobindo's long narrative poem *Love and Death*. It was something different from what we have seen in the last few years. Although it was not a play, we followed with interest the story of Ruru and Priyamvada and a host of other characters, who helped or posed obstacles on their journey to finding each other again.

As usual the whole project was taken up by the Knowledge students. The concept and presentation were very picturesque and tastefully colourful. As has been happening for the past several years, the preparation started on 1st November and considering that the whole work was done in 30 days the amount of work packed into that one month is worthy of appreciation.

The world of *Love and Death* was re-created

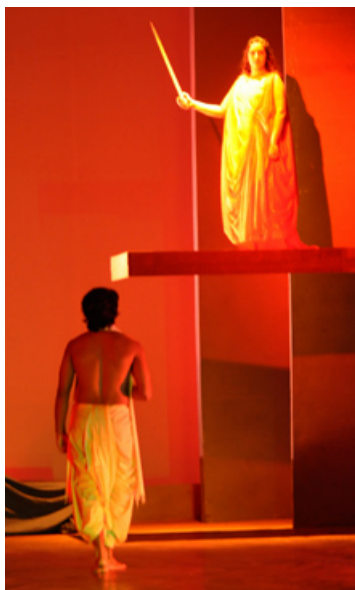


with the help of stage decors and light effects successfully and it helped the viewer to enter into the poem. Behind this beautiful make-believe world were Cristof, Mahi-da, Bokul-da, Bina Dharod and Ambi who put in their

special skills. A set was made with full length cut-outs of trees, spanning the entire vertical space of the centre of the stage and these unusual proportions made it easy for the spectators to enter into this world of fantasy. This visual effect represented the forest in which the beginning of the story takes place. The river and the boat in which Ruru

crosses it, were very cleverly crafted too.

The beautiful costumes were designed keeping in mind the Indian and the Greek influences which are interwoven in this story of Ruru and Priyamvada which so closely resembles the tale of Orpheus and Eurydice. The narrators had Greek style clothes while Ruru was wearing a dhoti. Maybe the only jarring note was the



One thing at a time. One day at a time. After all the tears of a last K-fest had been shed, and a last class party as students was out of the way, we began serious practices on the 1st of November. Everyone moved around the sets helping as much as they could. It was amazing to grasp the impact of even attempting

to make something beautiful.

Too soon the programme day came. We had been told earlier, a number of times, that on the programme day there was a Presence and no matter what, the programme just happened. Those were empty words... until that day. There are absolutely no words to describe the atmosphere back-stage. There were problems, errors, nevertheless everything just seemed to happen. I have brief glimpses of that day in my mind. But the whole programme passed as though I was living a memory, a dream.



costume made for Priyamvada who was wearing a gown and had bits of fabric around her waist which looked rather like an apron. A mention has to be made of the music which would have blended better with the theme had there been more of the Indian element.

The sum total of all these particulars helped to create the world of the poem, but could the actors do justice to their roles within it? On the whole, yes. But there were many scenes which left much to be desired. Two short fortnights of rehearsals do not allow amateur actors to get under the skin of their characters. The 1st December demands the best we can offer and those of us who have been watching this programme for decades have grown up seeing others give themselves entirely to it. Somehow this sustained effort has been missing from this show in the last several years. More care goes into the creation of décor and costumes. These are important factors, no doubt, but a certain level of acting is also

required to bring a written work to life, give it vitality and beauty of spirit. All those who have directed and organised such a show will understand this. Although this time Cristof was very happy that work concerning stage décor and other related work got executed with promptness.

Discouragement is the last thing that a critical appreciation should bring about in the hearts of the performers. If we want to improve our standards then the young participants have to be told that a certain length of time is required to help their efforts to flower. Just as in nature it takes a certain length of time for a bud to flower and after that for it to mature into a fruit so too a performance requires the time which it takes for an actor to prepare himself so that the spectators take the full *rasa* of the final product.

All in all, this presentation of *Love and Death* was enjoyable and brought back to our minds this well-loved poem.



The only moment I remember is the end when I had to give the sign to close the curtains. The deep effect it had on me is something, I believe, I will never forget. And just to live that moment again, I could go through the whole experience of tak-

ing up a programme of that magnitude a thousand times.



Everyone amongst us had given their best shot. Nothing more was expected. ❧

CELEBRATING JHUN JHUN HOME'S GOLDEN JUBILEE

By Savita Srivastava '75

Towards the end of 2010 some of us realised that our boarding, Jhun Jhun Home, was on the verge of completing its 50th anniversary on 9-12-2011. Didi (Pramila-di) had always celebrated the boarding birthday very quietly; however, we felt 50 years definitely asked for some kind of get-together and celebration, specially considering that JJH is the only boarding inaugurated by the Mother which has not changed its location.

Initially several ex-boarders told Baby-di (Manisha) that they would like to gift some-



thing to JJH on this occasion. We discussed this and concluded that it would make much more sense to give a collective gift — something useful in the long run. And why not get together and celebrate this special occasion and share it with the entire Ashram community in the form of a programme?

We fixed 30th Dec as a tentative date and approached the authorities for necessary permissions. This done, we met on a Sunday in April 2011 and proposed the following programme: 1) Visit to Sri Aurobindo's room; 2) Exhibit of JJH related photographs; 3) Contribution to a fund; 4) Cultural programme in the evening.

As many ex-boarders live outside Pondicherry and some had expressed the desire to participate, we decided to make use of the internet to communicate with the ex-boarders. We sent emails and our program was posted on the GC site.

There was not much of a response though.

Except for the cultural program, work on other items went fairly smoothly. Chandranath-da was very helpful in providing us with Mother's photographs in the boarding on the inaugural day. The same were projected at the beginning of the cultural program.

As donations began to trickle in, Baby-di decided that a water filter would make an ideal gift. Praveen-bhai helped us select and procure one well beforehand. He also agreed to undertake the dinner planned for the 30th. Baby-di with Shilpi's help did the shopping for other items while Datta (Mukherjee) undertook the preparation of a souvenir that participants would take away.



The cultural program of course demanded much more attention. Considering the mix of participants and the shortage of stage talent, we could only come up with a variety program.

Serious practice began only from the 17th. Though the persons in charge took care of their individual items, everybody needed to get some practice on the stage itself. Coordinating 15 items with about 65 cross-participating members was not easy. Practising items simultaneously became further complicated as we had only the duo of Uttam and Munna (Gaurishankar) for accompaniment on any item where this was needed.

Ordering the program items was another tricky affair. Apart from bringing harmony and avoiding monotony, we also had to worry about individuals needing enough time to change between items. After some mental gymnastics we arrived at a reasonably harmonious and practicable order.

As we closed in on the last week I learned that we would get only one mike and light

THE PROGRAM AS IT FINALLY TOOK PLACE:

1. 31 Dec: Visit to Sri Aurobindo's room for only 5 members.
2. Photographs of the Mother at Jhun Jhun Home on 9-12-1961 were displayed in the verandah, where she had actually sat, and in the dining hall. Old photographs of boarders were also displayed.
3. All assembled at Jhun Jhun Home immediately after the visit to Sri Aurobindo's room. After concentration, there was distribution of blessings, Pramila-di's book, souvenirs and *prasad*.
4. 1 Jan: Cultural program in the Hall of Harmony, SAICE, at 9.30 am.
5. Lunch after the cultural program in the Corner House.



trial and that too on the final rehearsal fixed for the 27th Dec. I busied myself writing a detailed light script which was quite new to me. Then, during the rehearsal, several problems surfaced. Some of the lights for the stage were not available. The quality of some recordings was bad, the duration was too long, etc. As a result there was hectic activity on the 28th and 29th as we huddled with Basab-da redoing the recordings, shaving off minutes here and there. The practice on the 29th was long since the dancers from Bangalore had arrived and this was the only day they could practise all together. I

still wonder how they managed to put on a fairly good performance without ever having had a full practice with all.

The D day dawned or rather hit us hard. Though there were Met. Dept. warnings about a cyclone, I had a firm belief that this time again, like so many times before, the Divine Grace would deflect the cyclone away from us. But the cyclone struck and struck hard. How easily and often we take the Divine Grace for granted! The result of nature's fury could not be imagined without looking out on the streets which were a mass of felled trees and branches and covered with green leaves. Bent poles, broken glass from windows

Continued on page 4...



WHERE HAVE ALL THE PAVEMENTS GONE?

by Sunayana Panda '79

Having spent some years in London I have by now got over my sense of wonder over the flowers in the front gardens, the fruit yoghurts and seeing sunlight in the sky at 9 pm. I have even got over my initial shock of seeing everyone dressed



Traffic island where you can stop while crossing and look at the traffic coming from the other direction. Notice empty pavements and clear signs.

in black. But there is just one thing that continues to take my breath away. That is the sight of clean, empty, wide pavements.

I still marvel at the way I can walk from my house to the supermarket which is a kilometre and a half away without having to once step out except when I have to cross the road. The people walking alongside me on the perfectly level pavements know that this is the basic minimum a human being in an urban environment can expect. But for me this is absolute luxury.

As I walk back home I dream and reflect, since I don't have the stress of having to negotiate the traffic. I float in nostalgia and remember how, forty years ago, Pondicherry was just a sleepy town. True, there were no air-conditioned supermarkets, no cash machines and no satellite TV but how wonderful it was to have wide open

roads where one could walk fearlessly.

Children actually walked to school if they did not go by bicycle. People went everywhere on foot and if they really had to go very far they took a cycle rickshaw. There were so few cars that one could count them and auto-rickshaws were unheard of. The roads were not jammed up with parked cars and motorcycles. There used to be neat rows of cycles outside public buildings such as the General Post Office or banks.

But all that is a thing of the past. Now it is common to see teenagers on scooters and everybody else on motor-cycles and in cars. And the



Pedestrian crossing which everyone respects.

pedestrians? Well, there's just no place for them. It is now too dangerous to walk. Everybody is on a motorised vehicle but how many have actually heard of the rules of the road? From the way the traffic moves, hardly anybody, it would seem. For example, no one ever stops or even slows down near a cross-road. One can imagine how dangerous this is when one remembers that Pondicherry is actually built in a grid pattern so you cannot take twenty steps without coming to a cross-road. What was supposed to make the town more organised has now become a nightmare.

Pondicherry: a pavement can become a stall, a home/temple, a garden!



The roads are full of speeding vehicles and the pavements are used for everything except what they were made for. Look around you and you will see that the space that should rightfully belong to the pedestrians is now hijacked by the hawkers, tea-stalls and small shops or parked vehicles. The new houses which are coming up are more and more being built from the place where the road ends because every inch that is not the road must now be grabbed.

As one steps onto the street one finds that one third of the space has been taken by the parked vehicles and the remaining two-thirds is taken up by traffic moving at high speed in both directions. So what does the poor pedestrian do? He is forced to steer himself in that same space where cars, motorcycles, scooters, bicycles and auto-rickshaws are engaged in a race.

The one thing that could be done without spending a great deal of money would be to make zebra crossings. Not all zebra crossings need traf-

fic lights; there are some which are meant to be pedestrian crossings where those who are on foot have priority. But on second thought, zebra crossings are more than just a few stripes of white paint. They have to be respected and the vehicles will have to stop when anyone is crossing the road. And that is where we will fail. We just don't know how to respect other people's rights.

As I walk back from the supermarket in London I dream of seeing these same beautiful pavements in Pondicherry. How wonderful it would be if Indians too could slow down at cross-roads and stop to let pedestrians cross the road. In the meantime all I can do is look admiringly at the traffic islands and the priority pedestrian crossings. I still stand and gape like a tourist when I see the big red double-decker bus slow down to



a stop when a bent old woman puts her foot forward on a pedestrian crossing to go to the other side of the road. ❀

MEMORIES

Born on 23.12.1946, Promesse, or Samvit Kumar Jauhar, or simply Kake as he was best known, first came to the Ashram as a little child. A winner of the Prix d'Honneur as a student, Kake '67 went on to become a well-loved teacher in the Free Progress "system" and a Group captain. His joie de vivre and unique personality made their mark on all who got to know him. He passed away on July 7, 2010 at the age of 63. We present here some articles remembering him and some excerpts from his letters on education written to his father.

KAKE, MY LITTLE BROTHER

Tara Jauhar '61

I was extremely excited. I was a little over ten when we got the news of his birth. But it would be almost a year and a half before I would get to see my baby brother Kake. Even at that very tender age, he had those great soulful eyes that filled his face with their radiance, and were the focus of his contact with everyone.

I was around thirteen, and ready to mother my little brother, when Kake came for almost every Darshan with my parents, and would often live with us in Dortoir.

On returning to Delhi, he would often think of the Mother and tell my father that he wanted to go to see Her. My father would then tell him to write a letter and would write it on his behalf expressing the child's

wrote back an answer which was posted to him. These two letters are reproduced here:

Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Pondicherry 21-3-50.
My dear Kaka
we all remember you always
and miss you very much.
we hope you will come
back soon and enjoy yourself
here. With my love and
blessings.

à Monsieur Kaka
aux bons soins de
son papa
New Dehli

26-4-50
My dear Kaka
many thanks for
your letter.
I can not go to
Dheli but my love
is with you.
Blessings



Kake, seen with the Mother

feelings as closely as he could. On two occasions when I took Kake's letters to the Mother, She

As per our family tradition, the first hair cutting ceremony of boys is performed during the 3rd year on Janmashtami Day. This is considered to be a very auspicious and sacred occasion in the life of a child. Kake's *mundan* ceremony was performed in Pondicherry. My father took him to the Mother in his ceremonial dress for her blessings.

The Mother took Kake in Her arms and said, "Oh, such beautiful hair is to be cut! No, he is looking so beautiful with this long lovely curly

hair, why cut it?"

The Mother then brought out a pair of scissors and cut a little lock of his hair and said, "I have performed his ceremony. No more hair to be cut. Now you can take him and finalize the ceremony and give the feast."



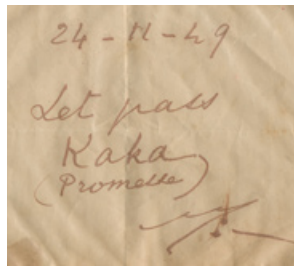
Kake, after the Mother cut his hair

Manodhar-da then trimmed the hair and made it neat and the ceremony was thus performed. Kake still had the hair and the scissors with which the Mother had cut his hair in a box in his room until the end.

On 24th November 1949 when Kake was less than 3 years old, I asked the Mother if he could go for Sri Aurobindo's Darshan. At that time children below 4 or 5 years (I don't remember exactly) were not permitted for Sri Aurobindo's Darshan. Mother wrote out the permission on a piece of paper.

He was barely three when Mother first allowed him to come into Sri Aurobindo's presence, and I believe he was the youngest to have Sri Aurobindo's Darshan.

He continued to go regularly with me to the Mother. I remember some interesting anecdotes connected with these visits. A big bakelite crane stood in one corner of Mother's room. Kake would invariably point to it and say: "Mothel, Mothel, batak batak!" Finally, the Mother gifted him that 'batak' when She came to visit our house on his birthday. We used to live then where part of Auroform now stands. The few steps leading to the house from the footpath are still there. She brought the crane with some balloons tied to it



as a birthday present for Kake. The crane is still there in our house.

In those days, visitors who wanted to join the Groups even for a few days, were permitted by the Mother. And so whenever Kake would come to Pondicherry, he would be allowed to join the youngest Green Group children. It was there that he learnt to do all kinds of races. On one occasion, when he went upstairs to the Mother with me, he challenged the Mother to a running race. We were in the corridor on the first floor of the Ashram. "Mothel, Mothel, running race," he said and ran off down the corridor with the Mother following him. Then he came back and said, "Mothel, Mothel, walking race." Again he sped off down the corridor, with Mother behind him. He then sat down and putting his hands on the floor piped up, "Mothel, Mothel, rabbit race." Mother laughed and said, "Ah, ça, je ne peux pas le faire!"

The Mother would daily distribute toffees to all of us. Kake would invariably stretch out his little hand and say, "Mothel, Mothel, topffee, topffee." As soon as Mother gave him a toffee, he would slip it into his other hand behind his back, and hold out the hand again for another toffee!

This would continue for a while till Mother would gently say, "Non, mon petit, ça suffit."

In the evenings when the Mother watched the gymnastic marching of the elderly people, Kake would often be hanging around. One day he walked up to the Mother and without hesitation pulled out the foot-stool from under Her feet and sat down on it. I saw this from a distance and ran to stop him. The Mother stretched out Her hand towards me to signal not to say anything. He did this a few times.



Kake with the 'batak' Mother gave him

Since he was the only child of his age in the Ashram then, old and young all enjoyed pampering him, especially Sunil-da and the Ganguly family. As he grew up, he and my youngest brother Chhote (Victor) developed a very close bond with Sunil-da. Through adolescence and later, they confided in Sunil-da, who helped them both to grow and discover themselves.

Kake was a staunch believer of the Free Progress System and worked towards its success throughout. He also had great leadership qualities. In the afternoons his room was full of students who came to learn a wide variety of subjects from him, starting from science and mathematics to computers, watch repairing, stamp collecting, jigsaw puzzles and a host of other activities.

When the Free Progress System derailed for a while in our school, he left and joined the Lake Estate where he worked for a number of years. He was always concerned about the welfare of the people at Lake, but finally returned to his first love — “teaching in the Free Progress System”.

When the Sports Ground was being constructed, he led a group of youngsters to work there at night to expedite the completion. I wrote

to the Mother to let her know that he came back very late every night. He was up early again the next morning and worked through the whole day. The Mother replied: “If he does it with *pleasure*, it does not matter much at his age, provided it does not last for too many days. In any case as soon as he feels tired, he *must take rest*.”

Similarly, when Auroville started, he was amongst the first to take his band of youngsters to build the roads for Auroville at night. He had a contagious enthusiasm and was always ready to lead in any project in which he believed. I

often chided him as an elder sister for his over-enthusiasm but also admired him for many of his characteristic qualities. ❧



Kake and Tara

KAKE, THE MAN OF ACTION

Arvindbabu '63

Cowards die many times before their death. The valiant taste of death but once.

Shakespeare

For a man of action, inaction is worse than death. Knowing full well that he was a heart patient and had had an angioplasty just a couple of months back, Kake went on with his routine activities. He was a teacher, a captain. He took active part in playing games — Football, Basketball, Volleyball and Tennis. As though this much was not enough, Kake, along with his students, did multiple other activities, like repairing watches, radios and other machinery and gadgets. He often went to the market to buy something or other, or visit a shop

to give things which he could not repair himself. Students were encouraged to come to his house during their spare time after lunch to do some practical works. He hardly rested the whole day. Ashram inmates and local persons as well as foreigners came to Kake for some help or other. In fact, the day he left his body, he played a full Tennis match for an hour, then went to the market to catch up with some pending work and there on the road he developed a massive heart attack — and puff! He became totally inactive — forever. Yes, a soldier prefers to die on a battlefield rather than in the comfort of a cosy bed.

That was Kake, a super-active man. He was an all-round person, a jack of all trades. Name any subject, any activity — and it interested him. He

THE MAN WITH A PERMANENT SMILE

Mangal Kothari '80

I never saw a frown on Kake's face. In fact you could not frown for long before him because in spite of your frown he kept smiling.

Kake had his own interesting ways of doing things. However strange they might have been, when you recollect them you can't help but smile.

His company or his stories could never bore anyone. Here are two interesting incidents with Kake which I still recollect:

1) He was in charge of Nandanam Orchard where there were a lot of mango trees. Somehow interestingly, in the Ashram, mango stealing has been very much a part of many a student's life. Kake knew this so he made an innovative rule for Nandanam: No stealing of mangoes but anyone who wanted to eat could sit on the tree

and eat as many as he/she wanted.

2) One year during the men's games competition season, we were having a hockey match. Kake was playing right out and I was the centre. I dribbled past one or two players and passed to Kake at right out. To my surprise Kake was not there in his position; he was somewhere near the goal-keeper. Annoyed I asked him what he was up to. He calmly replied, "Mangal I was creating confusion." Little did he realise that he was not confusing his opponents but rather his own team.

His leaving us was too sudden and unexpected. The Gods must be weeping having realised their mistake and I'm sure Kake must be smiling at the fact that Gods too once in a while make mistakes like us humans.

Whatever Kake's ways and means, he was one person who, even if you met him once, would leave an everlasting impression on you. ☞

bubbled with zeal that was infectious. Students and people around him were inspired by his presence. He spread the joy of living all around him, and radiated a pleasant, happy personality; he was always laughing, joking and happy. If asked for any help, he was ever-ready to comply. No one was refused a lift on his motorbike.

On the gruelling walks to Gingee it was Kake's enthusiastic encouragement that instilled in the hearts of walkers courage and strength to go on walking till the end, though the whole body would cry with pain. His constant talking and singing kept boredom and sleep at bay, for at a certain period of time during the walk one feels terribly drowsy due to extreme fatigue.

Kake's leadership qualities shone out best when he led the walkers to climb the hills, Napoleon or Beret. It was the confidence he breathed into the climbers that encouraged them to manipulate a difficult situation or hazard a dangerous climb, where one false step and one would slip down a deep gorge.

Kake was the Master of the Rules of Games, all games. Whenever a dispute arose during a game, any game, the two concerned parties would consult him. His interpretation of the rule for that par-



Kake, the mountain climber. With students at Gingee – view from the top.

ticular game would be final. Both the teams had to accept it with grace. Once a *Kab-baddi* match was in progress. As usual, a dispute arose concerning the specific rule of the game. The teams could not come to an agreeable solution. So



LIVING AN IDEAL

Excerpts from an article by Pranjal Jauhar

Kake's unswerving faith in the Mother and the insights he had given me to the philosophy of the Mother and Sri Aurobindo are in themselves enough to make a special place for him in my heart, till the end of my days....

In the post-cyclone period when I would visit the coastal areas of Odisha for reconstruction of school buildings, Kake-chacha joined me twice. His being there gave a different direction to the whole experience. He would get into the educational aspect, the aim of the school and the sadhana that one has to do.

Even on a trip when comforts and luxury were at arm's length, the possibility of moving his arm towards them never occurred to him. However, he would take care of other people's comfort.

In 2001, we were in Cuttack and were to travel to Katni to attend Basant. We decided to take an overnight train to Sambalpur and change trains there. I would normally travel by sleeper class, but this time I had booked by third AC. Kake-chacha was quite upset about it and wanted to change it. I found out that there were no seats in the train and told him that we had no option. I had gone out for work and when

I returned, I was told that our ticket had been cancelled and we had got wait-listed sleeper tickets. Someone had assured us that we would get the tickets confirmed. However the tickets did not get confirmed. When we got onto the train, to our dismay, there were no seats available and the floor space between the seats was also occupied. I thought that we would have to stand and travel. But Kake-chacha found a seat under which there was no luggage. We requested the person sleeping on the floor to give us some space to slide under the seat. Kake-chacha first slid in and then I went in. I was half in and half out. When he wanted to go to the toilet, I had to push the person on the floor, move out myself and then he could come out. I don't mind traveling in this fashion, but what I found hilarious was that we had given up confirmed seats in an AC coach, for which we got only half the refund and were travelling in this fashion.

He died of a heart problem. A heart that went out to everyone. A heart that was so big that it could accommodate lots of people, take everyone's problems....

The standards set by him are high. Will we be able to match them? The ideal he was living with was too pure. Is it possible for us to walk in his footsteps? ❧



As a captain in Sports Ground

the members of both teams approached Kake for some clarification. Kake at once blurted out, "There are two interpretations of the game: one Indian and the other Western. Which one do you want for

clarification?" All those who heard his comment burst out in hearty laughter.

Kake had his own theories. Our coaches always advised us to do warming up before and after any

sports activities. Kake did not agree with this advice. He would say, "You must always remain warmed up," and would add with a mischievous smile, "If you find a thief is robbing you, will you start warming up allowing him to run away with your stolen valuables?"

I can visualise Kake sauntering up and down the road between the School and the Ashram in the early hours of the morning greeting people with "Bonjour" or "How are you?" Always smiling, always happy, full of joie de vivre.

Wandering through memories of sixty-three years ago I see the child Kake with his other tiny friends at the Sports Ground eagerly waiting for the Mother's car to arrive. A bundle of energy, bubbling with life, Kake is the star attraction who zooms clearly into focus among the other starry

ON THE MOTHER

An article by Promesse written on 19.2.67

Her voice comes to me on the wings of light, a voice whose notes command not, a voice that comes lightning-like to the hearts of men and opens the doors of love.

Was it a message or a reply, a call from above to lift the curtain and unveil the sweeps of light, bliss and grandeur?

Time began with the planting of a tiny seed of love in the mud of a desolate and eyeless world. The history of this universe is a strange chronicle of the growth of this seedling into the magnificent tree of human aspiration whose boughs reach far into the sky. Humanity stands today on the cross-roads and the next great turn has to be chosen. But left to himself man is powerless to choose even his own destiny.



O man! Rip yourself open and find in your heart your godhead, your Mother. For She alone can bear your burden and She alone can shower Her grace and fashion the blossoms of a luminous fulfillment.

“The choice is imperative.” Is this a command or is it an answer from above that rings a bell somewhere deep within us and bathes our hearts in a symphony of colours? “The choice is imperative.” The voice that utters, speaks to the yearning heart of men and hearts touched by Her love answer to Her call. The heart sees no choice, does not reason, but takes refuge in Her, the Mother. It has no fear, and abyss there is none. There is a burning efflorescence, a soaring column of love that in a final spurt of effect will lead man into the flames of the kingdom of Truth and Bliss. ❀

children. The sound of a horn alerts the scattered children. They at once assemble and wait for the car to stop. The Mother gently alights from the car and all the children fall at her feet. Oh! What a marvellous sight! The Mother is radiant with Her smile emanating joy and love all around. She blesses the cherubims one by one tenderly, lovingly, happily. The children too are overjoyed by the Mother's presence and they dance around in glee. The whole Sports Ground is vibrant with love, beauty and joy.

The passing of years did not change the sweet countenance of Kake. Even at the age of sixty-three he wore the same face I saw fifty-nine years back in the Sports Ground. Then he was just a four-year-old kid. Though the face and body got a lot bigger, Kake maintained the same bright face



Kake, in the foreground (centre), with the Mother with chubby cheeks, sparkling eyes and an ever-smiling visage. ❀

PROMESSES

Cristof

L nous avait fait tant de promesses —
Promesse d'être là, chaque matin, marchant pieds nus dans la rue entre l'école et l'Ashram pour nous dire bonjour et nous donner un sourire pour commencer la journée,

Promesse de marcher, pieds nus encore, chaque année jusqu'à Gingee, par tous les temps, si possible en portant quelqu'un sur son dos, et à condition de revenir à pied le soir même, en portant deux autres personnes dans ses bras,

Promesse de quitter l'école juste au moment où la cloche sonne le matin pour aller distribuer les montres entassées dans sa hotte de Père Noël,

Promesse de toujours garder, sous sa poitrine sauvage, le cœur d'un enfant malicieux et sage,

Promesse d'attendre patiemment sur les marches de l'école qu'un élève se décide à vivre le libre progrès, lui qui ne croyait qu'au progrès de la liberté,

Promesse de jouer tous les matches et si possible ceux des autres, quelle que soit la division, lui qui avait horreur des divisions et n'aimait que multiplier les sourires pour rien et les services pour tous,

lui qui nous avait promis de jouer le jeu de la vie jusqu'au dernier set, avant de quitter le cour, nous laissant le cœur défait, mais plein d'espoir pour le remercier d'avoir été ce qu'il était, sans fanfare mais avec sa trompette qui, elle aussi, nous faisait parfois sourire — mais qu'importe les fausses notes quand la musique est si forte qu'on ne l'entend même plus,

Promesse que l'on peut faire le yoga sans faire d'histoires, se faire des amis sans se faire d'ennemis, et faire l'ange en faisant gentiment la bête, alors que tant de gens font la bête en faisant l'ange,

Promesse que la vie n'est pas ce qu'on pense mais ce qu'on croit, et ce qu'on croit a tellement peu d'importance,

Promesse que les souliers d'argent sont pour les autres et pour soi les vieilles chappals, qu'au bal de la vie on peut danser sans descendre de cheval, qu'au marché de l'amitié ce qui se vend le mieux est encore ce qui se donne,

Promesse qu'il serait toujours auprès de celle qu'il aimait plus que la vie et qui l'aimait et l'aimera toujours plus qu'elle-même, et qu'il aime et aimera toujours où qu'il aille, sur terre et au Paradis, puisque l'amour, comme la peine, est un chemin qu'il faut suivre jusqu'au bout,

Promesse qu'il la tiendrait toujours dans ses bras comme il se tient lui-même dans les bras de sa Mère, puisqu'on ne quitte jamais ce qu'on aime, qu'on ne se quitte que soi-même,

Promesse qu'il ferait tout pour Elle, qu'il se tiendrait toujours à Ses côtés, prêt à remettre sous Ses pieds le petit tabouret que nous

avons tendance à retirer.

Promesse qu'on peut vivre avec Son sourire jusqu'à la dernière seconde

puisque ce Sourire, c'est Elle, et qu'Elle est là, toujours.

Et ces Promesses,

il les a toutes tenues,

tenues légèrement, sans faire de bruit,

tenues comme on tient une plume, pas comme on tient la Vérité dans sa main, si fort qu'elle tombe en poussière,

et les a laissées s'envoler.

Et c'est pourquoi, nous aussi, nous lui faisons la promesse



d'attendre patiemment que notre âme vienne
s'asseoir sur les marches auprès de nous et dise :
« Me voilà ! Promesse tenue ! »
comme tu as tenu les tiennes,
comme on tient au petit monde qu'Elle a créé
pour nous
pour que nous puissions y grandir un tout
petit peu,
et marcher ensemble vers la mer, vers le soleil,

le cœur serré, le cœur ouvert
par la peine, la peine que l'amour se donne
pour nous donner des ailes.
Que ceux qui passent le matin devant l'école,
même s'ils ne sont pas pieds nus,
même s'ils n'ont pas de montre à réparer, sui-
vent la trace de ses pas,
sinon jusqu'à Gingee, du moins jusqu'à
Mailâme ! ❧

THE QUINTESSENTIAL SADHAK

Sammitta Mohanty '75

My daughter Ahana broke the news of Kake's passing away as gently as possible. Nonetheless we were emotionally shattered on receiving the news. It was hard to believe that we wouldn't see Kake's infectious smiling eyes on our future visits to Pondy. I still remember how he used to boast light-heartedly that he has 'golden eyes', not brown ones.

My earliest memory of Kake was when I heard that somebody called Promesse had got the "Prix d'Honneur" in 1967. I was a simpering starry-eyed newcomer to SAICE. Kake seemed like a demi-god who had achieved the highest honour. Back then I had never believed that I would ever be associated with someone who had attained that level of perfection.

I came to know Kake when he taught us Chemistry in E.A.V.P. As far as I can remember there were around 10 girls in this class with 2 teachers teaching two different subjects. While Kake taught Chemistry to the wise ones, Sharda was the popular teacher of the others. Those were the days! Later in the B2 group activities, I found Kake to be an extremely sensitive and inspiring coach, be it for gymnastics, athletics or games. Kake's subtle ways of boosting our sagging spirits never failed to bring out the winner in us. He was ever so tolerant and humorous.

I remember the day I had planned to make ice-cream in a manually operated bucket-shaped

ice-cream maker. A huge block (may be weighing 40 kg) of ice was procured for the event. We were waiting for the milk to be supplied so that we could go ahead with the procedure, but the milk was not available. With Kake around, our disappointment was transformed into a whole lot of fun. Kake said that it would be a shame if we allowed that huge block of ice to go to waste. So Vilas, Charu, Pinu, Rachita and I took turns to sit on the ice with a sack spread on it and squealed merrily taking joy rides in the verandah of Big Girls Home which was Vilas's boarding then.

How can I forget the wonderful and sometimes eerie night-outs, on one of which Pinu's tongue got stuck and she could just repeat Kai-Kai-Kai, trying to call Kake because she thought she had seen a ghost. The hapless soul was an equally terrified fisherman.

The vacations were so much more enjoyable because Kake was either introducing us to the wonderful world of Danny Kaye from Tara's Music Collection or helping us to fit the pieces of a gigantic jigsaw puzzle in the room of the Guest House where Pinu and Charu used to live. How we used to wait for Tara to open the doors of her room in the Guest House so that we could all pile up and listen to the music records chosen by Kake. Sometimes Kake would try to sing along with the inimitable Danny Kaye. But Kake was no singer, bless his soul. He was much more than a singer. He was a friend, philosopher and guide. ❧

"MY IDEAL OF EDUCATION"

Excerpts from Promesse's letters to his father

My dear father

...Being a teacher I feel that I know too little about how to teach and now I am wondering about what I should teach. Mother has quite definitely said that the important thing is not the subject but the inner growth. To understand this is very difficult and from there to be able to do it is still more difficult....

21.05.68

This year we were a batch of teachers and we had 30 students under us. The aim we decided on was to throw off all subjects or rather unite all subjects and teach them as one. Naturally you would be thinking that it would be a nice jumble and the students would learn nothing, but that is why I must first clarify what our aim in teaching is. Our main aim is to widen the consciousness of the student so that he can face the new world with an open mind and leap into it and not get held back by the ideas of the past. It is true that most of the subjects help you to widen your consciousness but these are mostly taught from the point of view of accumulation of knowledge which is totally false and valueless for us....

16.09.70

...The role of the teacher, as I believe, is only to enter in contact with the student, watch his interests and try and help him to follow them as best as he can. Many teachers come up with the problem that some of their students show no interest in anything, and by anything they mean the eight classical subjects of English, French, Maths, etc... This is absurd because I believe that only a handful of students may show interest in these lines; most will not. The work of the teacher is often to be able to place new subjects and new choices before him. The interest of the student may be very strange in nature, but I believe that still the teacher must follow it up. For instance, if a student is interested in the world of cinema, I believe that the teacher must find out what in this line attracts him. It may

often be the fame you get, often the beauty, often the colourfulness. Each of these attractions are basically healthy and the teacher can show his student by guiding him correctly to new regions of fame (like the conquest of the Moon) or new regions of beauty (like nature) or new regions of colour (like the study of crystals and then breaking up of light) and thus step by step the student is led deeper and deeper into different realms which helps to widen him and also to fulfill his desire or interest. If the pupil is told not to take interest in cinema and forced out of it, his desire for that will be stronger. He has to look through cinema into a new world which is better and greater....

24.9.70

...The system of Education here is slowly evolving and I am personally concerned that finally what we will have will be a system of learning Yoga; that is to say a system which insists primarily on self-realization and self-perfection....

Most of the teachers here are now convinced that for a better educational system, the first and foremost point is that we ourselves must be Yogis. So I feel I cannot talk much about my work but must go on doing it....

02.03.76

My reason for moving out of the Centre of Education is quite different. I did not leave Education but what I left and still want to leave is the method of Education followed today. In this method one seeks to satisfy the needs of the parents, so that the child is like them. He should be able to establish himself in the social and economic world of today. I, on the contrary believe that we are here to build a new world where these standards have no value and that new valuations and standards should be put before the child. What these will be will get clearer as we seek for them or as we understand Mother and Sri Aurobindo in greater depth....

23.12.82

Promesse later rejoined the School as a teacher in the Free Progress "system".

KAKE-TAUJI

By Sujay Jauhar '09

They say my smile is like his. The child who had the brazen — yet nevertheless endearing — audacity to challenge Douce Mère to an aeroplane and rabbit race, lived through life with that smile. Therefore, when I am told that the Cheshire cat grin

and the crinkly eyes are a familial trait I've inherited from my uncle, I take it as an immense compliment; an implied compliment, which I sometimes think I may not deserve entirely. I wish I were more like him.

Such simplicity, selflessness, courage, understanding, love, and a perfectly unique and wonderful brand of eccentricity I have scarcely seen rolled up into one person, who was nevertheless, so much more than the sum

of his parts. That sum added up to an impossible number, which was expressible in no other terms but Kake-tauji. I appreciated his qualities even when he was with us, and are not a figment of the imagination rendered delirious by loss, which views things through the stained glass of sorrow. Now they come back to me with a new tenderness as memories of a childhood and youth spent with Kake-tauji, moments I will always cherish as some of my closest and fondest.

When I was little I spent hours with him in his room playing games that ranged from puzzles, to sliding around on the slippery floor in his bathroom, to gazing agog at his wonderful collection of little curios, even to the outrageous magic show that involved making little objects disappear in the dense growth of his incredibly hairy chest. There were of course the customary snack breaks

in which I was treated to goodies kept especially for me. “*Bas Khatam?*” I would exclaim, with a touch of nostalgia at the end of these sessions.

However, my all time favourite was his Tintin collection. I could spend hours gazing at the attractive illustrations while he patiently recounted the stories to a child who had a reputation for asking too many questions, most of which were uncannily irrelevant. I eyed that collection with such greed, and dropped broad hints as to my propensities with such blissful disregard to propriety that he gifted the entire set to me, over a period of several birthdays. In retrospect I realize with a sudden pang that he was generous, almost to a fault. Going through his personal belongings now I notice how very little he owned for his own possession or enjoyment.

Indulgent he may have been, but he wasn't the stereotypical uncle who provided a convenient escape from the regimental rule of Mama and Papa. He could be the strict disciplinarian too, when required. When I just began speaking and before I came to know him as Kake-tauji, he was Kaketauno to me: a concocted appellation which consisted of the name I was *supposed* to call him by and a suffix which was the word I heard most often from him.

Kake-tauji the martinet was nowhere harsher than on himself in the regulation of his daily routine. His inflexible and somewhat ludicrous food and sleep timings were a joke among family and friends. I sometimes asked him, “Kake-tauji, how can you



In the band



On the stage

possibly *get* sleep at 8pm?” To which he would answer, “I like it,” with a self-explanatory smile. Morning was his time though. On my birthdays, when I would go out earlier than was customary, he was the first one I met on my way to the Ashram. It was always the firm hug, the priceless smile, and a gruff, “Bonne fête!” But the love was tangible; we never spoke about it but I knew he was immensely fond of me, and he knew I adored him.

His attitude towards ailments and physical pain was another point of great eccentricity, though in the end, it proved to be his undoing. Nevertheless, it was commonly known that if you had a fever, or a twisted ankle, it was better to keep mum about it in his presence, lest a few laps round the track were prescribed for the former, and a session of his own unique brand of excruciating massage therapy was immediately administered for the latter. And yet, when I lay abed with a fever or a twisted ankle — and there were more than a few every year — he was the one who invariably visited me, with Vandana-masi. And despite the customary advice of jogging treatment or the threat of a massage, I saw deep concern, affection and love. In every walk of life his attempts to dissemble his true feelings by hardness and gruffness were betrayed by the simplicity and spontaneity of his acts of goodness

RIJU JAUHAR REMEMBERS

He [Kake] had a soft corner for the poor and needy. Once when I reached Pondy he asked me if I had tipped the driver and I said yes. He then suggested I tip the driver some more as he was building a house and was badly in need of money. He would make sure the maids got to watch some TV in their spare time, and would even often put on movies for them. He treated the drivers, maids and servants really well, and they adored him too.

(Excerpt from a letter)

ERIC SCHAFFER WRITES

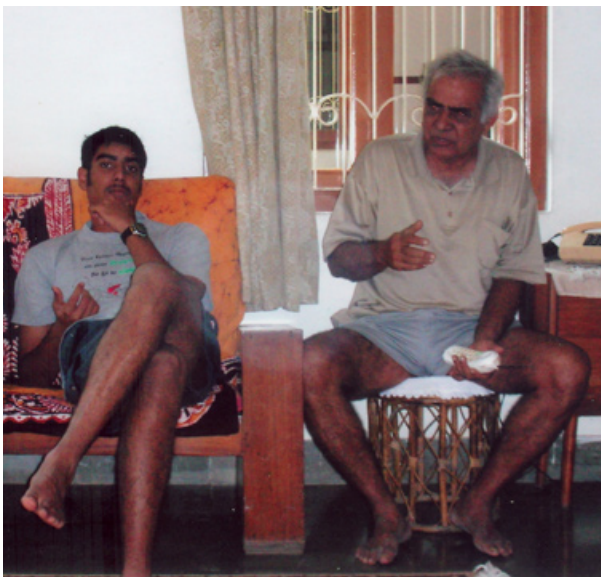
To the best of my knowledge Kake-da never wrote a book.... He approached the knowledge of transition with innocence, and from spontaneity he defined the future. He offered little in novel theory; just pointing to the legacy of Sri Aurobindo and the Divine Mother. But he operationalized their knowledge in the fabric of his being and the flow of his life.... The gift of the Masters was manifested in his innocence....

He was the glowing child of the Mother. He was a warrior by nature, as am I. But warriors that can see the joke of the universe and eternally play in that sandbox of stars.

(Excerpt from a letter)

and love.

As I got older we grew to be very good friends and, as strict as he had been with me in childhood, so too he became increasingly permissive as far as I was concerned. This may have been partly due to the fact that he was a stalwart of the Free Progress system of education — not merely academic education but an education in the classroom of life. I’ve had many intellectually stimulating discussions with him on the subject — and indeed on every other subject, philosophical, or otherwise — with some heartfelt agreements, but also with striking differences of opinion. But what always struck me was the maturity of his insight and his acuity for understanding human nature. And it seemed to spring from a kind of



Sujay and Kake

intellectual intuition which rested on the firm basis of an unshakeable faith in the Mother and Sri Aurobindo and their words, and which was so much in contrast with my own clinically analytic and arrogant intellect.

It is thanks to him that I was inducted into the Free Progress system in School at all. Given my history as a disruptive influence on classes, and a reputation of some notoriety in teacher circles, it seemed very unlikely indeed that my teachers would risk letting me loose, quite literally, in the Free Progress system. They were, however, lenient enough to give me a chance, provided Kake-tauji would take full responsibility for my studies and behaviour thenceforward. He accepted the challenge gladly, and the three years that followed have proved to be some of the most important and formative of my life till now. They also changed somewhat the dynamics of the relationship between us, as Kake-tauji, in addition to being the uncle he had always been — and continued to be — became something of a mentor, and a father-figure.

During the first of these three years, the sudden passing away of my father — uncannily similar in many respects to Kake-tauji's own — left me devastated, shattered, utterly disconsolate. At fifteen, too old to forget about it as a painfully surreal dream, yet too young to quite come to grips with the enormity of my loss, I risked

spiralling into severe depression. I would have too, had it not been for Kake-tauji. He forced me to school the very day after my father's passing, to resume my routine in general; a somewhat cruel act, I thought at the time. Yet I felt, almost, he wept within, as I wept openly. God knows how deeply he must have suffered at the loss of his little brother; but he never broke down; he couldn't: for me, for all of us. He was the rock upon which we slowly rebuilt our lives. I was profoundly grateful to him for all that he had been to me, done for me, and there were many occasions when I wanted to thank him, and just simply tell him how much he meant to me. It is a gratitude that has gone unexpressed, and it is something I shall always regret.

His emotional resilience and sunny optimism have left an indelible impression on my life. And now if I can find the strength to deal with his loss, it is only thanks to him. I will miss him for lunch on Tuesdays, for a smile and a wave as I had got from him so often as I passed him on the street, for gentle chidings on my late-coming, for the basketball tournaments we played as team-mates, for the way he pottered around everywhere barefooted, for so many other everyday inconsequential things that render my vision temporarily hazy as I remember them....

He may be gone, but he will live through the memories of all whose lives he had touched with a little sunshine, a little love, a little simple happiness and giving. To me it is the loss of an uncle, a mentor, a father, the one person I trusted most in my life. And yet I must smile; smile as he would have wanted me to smile; smile selflessly so others may smile; smile for all that's left in life to smile for; smile for him because he is, at last, back with his Mother; smile his smile. ☼



ANSWERS TO THE QUESTIONS OF THE LAST ISSUE'S 'QUIZ TIME!':

1: *When was "Corner House" opened?*

It was opened on 11.6.1967. Corner House will complete 45 years this year.

2: *What was so special about the decade 1950 to 1960 in the history of the Ashram?*

During these ten years the Mother came out and participated in the activities of the School and Physical Education, and visited the departments of the Ashram.

3: *Why is the house where the primary classes are held also known as "Flower Room"?*

Flowers from the Ashram gardens are distributed to the members of the Ashram here. In the past special bouquets were made for those who were going to see the Mother in her room on their birthdays.

4: *Here is a message the Mother gave to a group of people who were visiting the Ashram in April 1956. Who were they?*

"We salute you, brothers, already on the way to the physical perfection for which we all aspire here.... We feel sure that today one step more is taken towards unity of the great human family."

This message was given to the Soviet gymnasts who visited the Ashram and presented a demonstration at the Sports Ground.

5: *What is the spiritual significance of the white flower which grows on the bush just behind the place where incense and flowers are distributed near the Samadhi? It has an extraordinary perfume.*

Perfect Radiating Purity.

Knowledge shall bring into the aspirant Thought

A high proximity to Truth and God.

Sri Aurobindo

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*Do not look behind, look always in front,
at what you want to do.
And you are sure of progressing.*

The Mother



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Difficulties in Yoga

The nature of your difficulty indicates the nature of the victory you will gain, the victory you will exemplify in Yoga. Thus, if there is persistent selfishness, it points to a realization of universality as your most prominent achievement in the future. And, when selfishness is there, you have also the power to reverse this very difficulty into its opposite, a victory of utter wideness.

When you have something to realize, you will have in you just the characteristic which is the contradiction of that something. Face to face with the defect, the difficulty, you say, "Oh, I am like that! How awful it is!" But you ought to see the truth of the situation. Say to yourself, "My difficulty shows me clearly what I have ultimately to represent. To reach the absolute negation of it, the quality at the other pole — this is my mission."

Even in ordinary life, we have sometimes the experience of contraries. He who is very timid and has no courage in front of circumstances proves capable of bearing the most!

To one who has the aspiration for the Divine, the difficulty which is always before him is the door by which he will attain God in his own individual manner: it is his particular path towards the Divine Realisation.

There is also the fact that if somebody has a hundred difficulties it means he will have a tremendous realization — provided, of course, there are in him patience and endurance and he keeps the aspiring flame of Agni burning against those defects.

And remember: the Grace of the Divine is generally proportioned to your difficulties.

The Mother (CWM, 3: 143)

