

The Golden Chain

Alumni Journal of Sri Aurobindo International Centre of Education



OLYMPIC GAMES, LONDON 2012

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

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

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

CONTENTS

VOL 13 NUM 1

NOV 2012

1 THE EDITORS' PAGE

2 COVER STORY: The London Olympics 2012

Mohiniranjana '87, Soma '94, Yuyutsu '09 & Vikas '02 share their experience.

15 The SAICE Sustainable Energy Project - Phase II

Tejas '01 tells us about the next phase of the project.

18 Uttara Yogi

Arup Mitra '72 tells us about his book.

21 Protection

Lalit Modi recounts.

24 The Boy Inside

Kamalika '10 shares a poem.

25 MEMORIES: A Captain's Journey

Namita Sarkar '61 on being a captain & on Physical Education in the Ashram.

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THE EDITORS' PAGE

by Sunayana '79

Physical education is such an integral part of our student life here in the Ashram that we are all sports fans to some extent. Everyone remembers the enthusiasm with which we used to follow the Olympic Games when they came around. Some may have memories of watching the highlights on the Projector Room terrace and others may remember standing in front of the Corner House board and reading about the extraordinary men and women who had won medals. So, in the days leading up to the thirtieth Olympiad in London the old fever was back.

Since the social networking sites on the internet have made it easy for those who are not physically close to be virtually together, some of us ended up enjoying the Olympic Games as a group. We soon discovered that there are quite a few former students of the school in London now, so it wasn't long before we thought of having a get-together.

One afternoon, towards the end of the Olympic fortnight, those of us who were in London decided to meet up near Tower Bridge where a large screen had been fixed so that people could watch the Games in the open air. There were ten of us and our joy was multiplied by ten as we shared a delicious picnic on the grass and watched the events on a giant screen. Within the hour that we were sitting on that grassy patch, team Great Britain won three gold medals. We were part of all the cheer and the joyous demonstrations of pride around us.

It was our life at the Ashram that gave us that added interest. We had practically grown up in the various playgrounds of the Ashram. When every single afternoon of your life is spent running, jumping, swimming, throwing and playing various team games, you cannot remain unmoved when you watch a world-class athlete or gymnast.

This is the gift of the Mother. The vision of integral education and the integral yoga where bringing perfection to the physical body has a

place of importance. Many people across the globe do sports but the Mother gave it another colour. It is not what we do but the attitude in which it is done that makes our physical education so special.

The Olympic Games are not just a grand international sporting event. They are much more than that. The spirit that drives the competitions is now something beyond bringing glory to your country. It is the human race competing against the limitations of the human body. When a runner breaks a world record we feel that he has taken us all on his back and made us all break that record. When a swimmer comes out with an extraordinary performance we all feel a sense of elation, no matter which country he belonged to.

It is not just going physically faster and higher with the body but also going higher in our consciousness that became evident during the Olympic Games. How far we have come in human history was clear when eighty thousand people applauded in heart-warming admiration as the Jamaican runners won the medals. These are the people whose ancestors had been transported to the West Indies a couple of centuries ago and made to do hard physical labour as slaves. These are the descendants of the survivors. Today the whole world looks at them as heroes.

The atmosphere in London was truly extraordinary. There was such a gush of positive energy that it touched even those who had decided to keep away from the Games. For a while the thoughts of recession and financial difficulties faced by the people were pushed to the background and everyone celebrated in a spirit of brotherhood our common aim of moving towards perfection. "Inspire a generation" was the theme this time and indeed it remained the focus throughout.

It is at times like these that we become aware that we are inevitably moving towards human unity. Ironically, it is through these competitions that we come close and are united. What seemed such an impossible dream some decades ago now seems almost within our grasp. ❧

OLYMPIC GAMES 2012

Mohini Ranjan Mishra (Tulu) '87 is currently the Editor, Sports, of Press Trust of India (PTI), the premier news agency of the country. In a career spanning over 23 years, he has covered several major events including the Olympic Games in Athens, Beijing and London, the Asian Games in Busan and Doha, several Commonwealth Games and a number of cricket tours. Here he tells us of his experience of the London Olympics, 2012.

It was the typical gloomy and overcast weather that greeted me when the British Airways Flight landed at Heathrow Airport. Although it was a fairly long flight from New Delhi, I did not feel particularly tired; in fact I was quite excited as I looked ahead to the big challenge of covering the London Olympic Games.

It did not take me long to complete the immigration formalities as there were special counters

to the Main Press Centre (MPC), which served as the central hub for over 10,000 international journalists who had come to London to cover the 30th Olympic Games. The MPC had to be our first destination as we needed to buy the internet cards and collect the media kits which contained handbooks giving details on various aspects of the Games.

There were about 90 Indian journalists who were in London to cover the Games and most of them had arrived at least four days before the Opening Ceremony. We generally reach the venue a few days in advance to familiarize ourselves with the venues, facilities and the systems.

Many of my colleagues said before I left for the Games that I was lucky to be going for the Olympics and that I would have a lot of fun. But having covered the Athens and Beijing Olympic Games and the Asian Games in Busan and Doha, I knew it would be a hard and gruelling assignment. Covering the event for a news agency is even harder as we are expected to cover virtually all Indian participation.

Planning is key to covering any multi-discipline extravaganza and since I had the experience of covering such major events in the past, I knew how to go about my task. Since I represented an Indian news agency, my priority area was to cover the Indian interest in the Games. India had fielded its biggest ever contingent of 83 athletes in a record 13 disciplines, so I knew I would have a tough job of keeping track of the performance of so many athletes. But in major



Firecrackers at the Opening Ceremony

for the Olympic family and the hordes of volunteers on duty at the airport ensured that my photographer and I had no problem in getting our media accreditation cards validated. In a matter of a few minutes, we were on board the Heathrow Express towards Paddington from where the organisers had arranged transport to our hotel in Covent Garden.

Once we reached our hotel, we just took a few minutes to refresh ourselves and headed straight



The Olympic flame

events like the Olympics, the information system is very efficient and we get detailed results as soon as the events are over.

Having been in the professional circuit for over two decades, I had the distinct advantage of personally knowing many of the athletes and the top officials of the Indian Olympic Association (IOA) who were present in London as part of the Indian contingent. Personal contacts help a great deal in covering big events and they serve as your 'sources' for gathering news. There are times when these 'sources' feed you with vital information for your stories, particularly for reports when no official comes on record or for write-ups which are controversial in nature. Without this network of "sources", a journalist will be greatly handicapped in his news gathering ability.

Interestingly, PTI was the first to break the story on Madhura Nagendra, an Indian volunteer, "gate-crashing" the Indian contingent at the Opening Ceremony march past, which became a raging controversy in the first few days of the Games. My photographer came and showed the picture of Madhura to me when he was transmitting the photos. He asked me whether I could recognise the athlete walking alongside the Indian flag-bearer Sushil Kumar. A closer look at the picture convinced us that something was amiss and that she was not an athlete as she was not wearing the official uniform. We had a scoop. After verifying all the facts, we broke the story along with the photo. Within a few minutes of the story being released, India's Acting Chef-de-Mission, Brig P K Muralidharan Raja called me up to give additional inputs and informed me that India was taking up the matter with the London Organising Committee (LOGOC).

Coming to India's performance at the Games, I must say it was a creditable show. India won six medals (two silver and four bronze) and the good thing is that I was present at the venue to witness these six historic moments and interview the athletes who brought laurels for the country. It is hard to explain the feeling when you see your country's national flag being raised at the medal presentation ceremony.

Many of the star athletes such as Beijing Olympic Gold medalist Abhinav Bindra, boxer Vijender Singh, shooter Ranjan Sodhi, ace archer Deepika Kumari and the tennis stalwarts Leander Paes, Mahesh Bhupathi and Sania Mirza flopped miserably at the Games, but there were some others who rose to the occasion and saved the day for the country. Perhaps India could have bagged a few more medals if the archers, who were touted as serious medal contenders, had lived up to their reputation. The gold medal remained elusive till the very end but it was still the best Olympic show by India so far. The media had predicted 6-8 medals before the start of the Games, so they were not off the mark.



Tulu with India's bronze-winning boxer Mary Kom

It is difficult to compare the organisational aspects of different Olympic Games. The experience of covering the Games in Athens, Beijing and London was different, simply because they are all different countries and have their own cultures and styles. Beijing was all clock-work smooth, everything moved like a well-oiled machine and there was no chance of even a small flaw creeping



With Sushil Kumar, who won the silver medal in wrestling

in. Everything was grand in scale, but somehow it lacked the spirit to some extent. London had its share of glitches and bottlenecks in the initial stages, but on the whole it was a well-organised Games. It was not flashy, nor could the organisers afford to make it too extravagant considering the economic situation Britain found itself in, in the run-up to the Games. The stadia were designed in such a way that the seating capacity could be reduced once the Olympics were over.

Taking into account the threat of terrorist attacks during the Games, security was tight right through the Olympics and it was the British Army which was manning the security access at the important venues. They were cordial but were absolutely in no mood to take any chances. As a

result, everything had to go through the scanner — bags, laptops, digital recorder, purse, belts and even an innocuous comb. It was the same drill every time you entered a new venue. By the first week of the Games, I had stopped wearing a belt.

The men's 100 m run is regarded as the show-piece event of any Olympics and there was no way I was going to miss that. We were in the Main Olympic stadium a few hours before the start as you may not get a good seat in the media tribunes if you come late for such a high-demand event.

The atmosphere in the stadium was simply electrifying. It was an absolutely amazing experience as the capacity crowd vociferously cheered Usain Bolt when he entered the arena for the event. From then on, it was the Jamaican showman who took centre-stage and to see him in action was perhaps one of the highpoints of my London trip.

Covering the Olympics is the dream of every sports journalist and I consider myself lucky to have got these moments in my life. I also strongly believe that my days in the Ashram have helped me a great deal in my career. It is my education in SAICE which has helped me to develop the temperament and remain calm and composed in a highly competitive media world. ❧

THE OLYMPICS EFFECT

Soma Kundu '94

Before the Olympics it was the deluge. The BBC tried to convince me that the country was struck by Olympic fever but I wasn't too sure. At least our neighbourhood seemed immune to it. Anyway, I was mildly excited about the Games: the city was adorned with the jagged shards of the Olympic logo that fluttered cheerfully in the storm; at the train stations the dulcet tones of the Mayor of London announced to tired commuters to "plan ahead of the Games" and to "enjoy the Olympics"; in London, the Houses of Parliament became a huge backdrop for a spectacular *son et lumière* projection of Olympic heroes; and giant Olympic

Rings appeared at iconic places across the UK. What's not to be excited about? At worst, I thought, it would be like the quintessentially British barbeque party where everybody is invited, there is a severe



traffic and parking problem outside the house, and of course it rains. At best, it would be like the miracle of our 1st and 2nd December programmes after the November downpours. With a brolly and a sense of humour everything would be fine.

So, when the torch came to our corner of the country on a wet day I went along just for the fun of it. I certainly didn't expect to be swept away by the incredible, pulsating experience that deeply touched me, and everyone present. We were a part of a huge crowd that had gathered to witness, cheer, photograph the torchbearer, a regular man who has overcome all odds in life and has made a difference to the local community. Altogether 8,000 individuals like him came together with a sense of common purpose to carry forward the historic symbol and inspire everyone with their message of "peace, unity and friendship". Suddenly the Games jumped right out of the TV box and came alive; I felt very connected to the energy around me. And, I was truly impressed by the inclusiveness of the torch relay celebrating the achievements of everyday people, giving every town, and everyone, a feeling of ownership towards the Games. I was catching the fever.

And it was not just I who caught it. One fine day the local train driver started making announcements in Brummie (that's what people in Birmingham speak) and French! Now, if you are aware of the big rift between the Frogs and les rosbifs you'd understand the import of his initiative. He told me he was learning French and thought of using it to help international tourists. Also, keeping up with the spirit, the local Sports and Athletics clubs organised events inviting everyone to have their Olympic moment. This time the meets were not merely picnics with Earl Grey tea, scotch eggs and Victoria sponge cake. The turnout of children, parents and friends on those rainy weekends was extraordinarily high; perhaps the BBC was right about the frenzy. The young and old participants looked very motivated, some children proudly sported shop-bought gold medals to boost their performance. Evidently the schools had done a good job of inspiring these youngsters with stories from the Olympics.

Just as I was remembering fondly all those

golden days when we watched the events in the Corner House video room and discussed them in School and Group with friends, when Mona-da inspired us with his vivid and expansive narratives of the athletes,

Jishnu created a Facebook group with the name Olympics 2012 — Corner House Board. This forum became a part of my life for those two golden weeks of delirious sports, and I still go back to it with affection. Here I shared my excitement from the hours of justifiable TV watching of the Games, learnt important terms like repechage, discovered facts like why it is Team GB and not Team UK, was wowed by the brilliant photographs, acquired information on Team India's events, discussed what the Jamaican secret to sprint success could be, and became at least for a fortnight an expert on random sports whose rules will always remain a mystery. (Thank you Jishnu, and all those who made that virtual gabfest of sports the most 'happening' party in town.)

Then miraculously, the skies cleared and the real party began. I sat glued in front of the tele and watched every bit of the opening ceremony in awe. As I write this the parts are all a blur now. All I remember are snatches such as James Bond calling up to the Palace to take the Queen out sky-diving, Mr. Bean giving a bored one fingered version of the *Chariots of Fire* theme, the green fields of the British countryside, the belching chimneys that forged the sparkling Rings, the celebration of the National Health Service, the Pistols' "God save the Queen, it's a Fascist regime", Tim Berners-Lee tweeting "This is for everyone", the Czech team wearing Wellies during the parade as a cheeky nod to the British weather, the unknown woman in Team India, and Sir Chris Hoy entering the Stadium with the British flag in one hand, arm stretched straight out as the crowd exploded.... It was a rich tapestry of a well-crafted spectacle.



Part of the torch relay

The fun was in spotting the various literary, cultural and sports icons while the commentators crammed in all the information.

However, the vision that sparked the show will remain with me as something pure and bright like the Olympic flame. From all that drums and chaos something beautiful emerged — Danny Boyle as LOCOG’S Prospero evoked something a lot more nuanced than meadows and milkmaids. Boyle states in his programme notes, “We hope that.... through all the noise and excitement you’ll glimpse a single golden thread of purpose — the idea of Jerusalem — of the better world, the world of real freedom and true equality...”. The whole evening was ignited with this belief that we can build a better world and it is for everyone! The ceremony surrounding the flame became a symbol that resonated with a larger vision that we at the Ashram are familiar with at a much deeper level. Indeed, the hill with all the nations’ flags placed in an upward spiral resembled the lotus shaped urn at Matrimandir. The high point of the evening — the lighting of the flame by a group of young athletes — reinforced this theme. The flame whizzed round to light all the 205 copper petals, then the petals rose upwards to form a giant flower of flame. What a magnificent, goose bump moment that was! As the flame filled my screen I remembered another fire that had burnt down houses and shops a year back during the London riots. That anarchy had suggested that the British society was coming apart at the seams; this flower of flame declared that everyone, every nation was united in a shared desire for a brighter future. Hopefully the Olympic legacy, “inspire a generation”, would work at the grassroots level towards helping the youngsters, especially those from a deprived background, to focus their energies on running a race instead of running from the police.

In the following two weeks the young generation had much more to look up to than the capers of overpaid footballers. Apart from the dazzling brilliance throughout the Games, there were certain moments that I personally found intensely touching. Rudisha became the elite athlete with his quiet confidence as he went on to make a new



Rudisha, after breaking the World Record in the 800m run

World Record in the 800m sprint. Most winners can’t believe what they have achieved and in their post race interview they try to make sense of what just happened. In his interview Rudisha stated with utter simplicity, “I had no doubt about winning. The weather was beautiful so I decided to go for it.” The same spirit was there in Ennis’ race. She had already secured the gold medal position in the women’s heptathlon, but she still gave the last bit of herself to come first in the 800m sprint. Mitchell heard his leg snap, but he completed his bit of the 4x400m men’s relay so his team could qualify for the finals. His reason — “I was doing my job.” Marial finished the marathon as an Independent Olympic Athlete because he is a stateless refugee. He had literally run for his life, but had lost 28 members of his family to the violence in Sudan, and now he is waiting for his American citizenship. His positive attitude was heart stirringly inspiring, “Growing up in the war, it was dangerous and hard. It was about survival of the fittest. I feel fortunate to have that, to have that background, that’s helped me with my running and my everyday life.” Our Mary Kom made history by becoming the first female winner of the Olympics bronze medal in boxing! Saudi Arabia’s Attar finished last in the women’s 800m heats and the whole stadium gave her a standing ovation. She and her blue belt judoka team-mate Shaherkani competed in spite of their hugely unequal conditions, but at least they competed. Then there were the British winners who forgot their stiff upper lips and instead made a perfect impression of the “:o” emoticon when they won medal after medal. And the ever-cheerful volunteers showed that Britishness has more colours than red, white and blue.

I was also impressed by the use of so many iconic sites throughout the Games. The panoramic shots of cyclists crossing the Thames and runners flying past the Palace were intended to show off the best of British tradition and history: The Mall, which took its name from the game “paille maille” that Charles II liked to play there, and which later lent its name to the shopping mall; Trafalgar Square with Nelson’s statue dominating it, and the inconspicuous but more important statue of a mounted Charles I, which is the official centre of the city from where all distances are measured; St Paul’s, whose creator’s epitaph inside the cathedral reads “If you seek his memorial, look around you”. Some of the historic sites in central London that were transformed into venues were the Lord’s Cricket Ground, which houses The Ashes of a cricket ball; Hyde Park, a well known duelling ground in the 17th and 18th centuries; Greenwich Park, London’s oldest Royal Park; and the Palladian Horse Ground Parade, guarded by mounted soldiers, which became the venue for Beach Volleyball. Surely even the guards, who are trained to be poker faced, would have caught the Olympics frenzy and taken a sneak peek behind their elaborate headgear at the



skilful matches underway.

Finally the Games came to a close with a show that unintentionally proved the sport stars to be the true celebrities. During the two weeks the Olympians had become our role models and had occupied centre stage in the media and in our daily conversation. The President of the International Olympics Committee, Jacques Rogge summed up the national mood when he observed that the Games had achieved the impossible by inspiring Londoners to talk to one another on the tube.

Now that the Games have ended I try to liven up my days by looking at the photo I took of the torchbearer. It’s a blur. The whole fortnight is a dazzling blur. ☼

CITIUS, ALTIUS, FORTIUS

Arya Yuyutsu '09 shares his experience of the London Olympics

Chronology is, as per norm, the way most stories are told. Staying true to the untraditional approach I’m proud of, I’ll completely disregard this norm as I tell you my Olympic story.

It might be relevant, of course, to give you some background info so that the rest can at least be placed in context. I graduated from SAICE with the Class of ’09 and have since been steadily improving my kitty of journalistic skills. Earlier this year I was called upon by The Reporters’ Academy, which gathers news stories for various Oceania TV networks and is contracted through the Oceania National Olympic Committee, to work alongside their young and talented group of journalists in their bid to cover the London 2012

Olympic Games.

So it was with an over-excited, Red Bull-stacked and sports-loving heart that I reached London on the 21st of July to bathe in the spirit of the Olympics, the pinnacle of sporting excellence, and the ideals that represent it: Citius, Altius, Fortius (Latin for Faster, Higher, Stronger).

CITIUS

It always amazed me that the most expensive tickets are bought for events that we want to see finished the quickest. Be it Usain Bolt’s 100m sprint or Michael Phelps’ quick splash, we urge the athletes to go faster than any man has ever gone before. The value-for-money concept eluded the buyers. Or so I thought.

Then a Bolt of lightning struck me. It wasn't quite just the speed, but the spirit, the anticipation and the inspiration he was to those around the stadium that hit me. It wasn't really the event one paid to watch, it was man's constant struggle and fight against the barriers that separate the human abilities from physical perfection. And people like Usain Bolt seemed to redefine the "struggle" aspect of it, making it all seem almost like a joy, and reveling in the exhilaration of it all.

Another athlete, one far closer to my heart, who pushed her capacities and excelled at this year's Games and emerged out of it all with a heart-touching smile alongside her gold-medal was Jessica Ennis. The Sheffield girl's story is one of loyalty, love, passion and commitment.

Born and raised in the beautiful South Yorkshire town, she has never left the city despite various tempting and lucrative offers. She graduated from The University of Sheffield, a place I'm lucky to call **mine** now, she trained in Sheffield, she lives in Sheffield and she seems destined to stay grounded and rooted to this most wonderful of towns.

"Rooted" is probably a key word when describing the Heptathlon gold-medalist. I interviewed her for ITV last year as she was being honoured by her beloved home-town. As my camera-man worked to fix the tripod and fiddle with intricately technical switches on the camera, I asked Jess if I could take a picture of her. She obliged ever so sweetly.

Something struck me about the smile as I took the snap. Her smile wasn't just the practised smile celebrities often switch to when thrust into the public light, it had something so refreshingly genuine and honest, something that exuded achievement and passion, love for what she was doing and love for all around her.

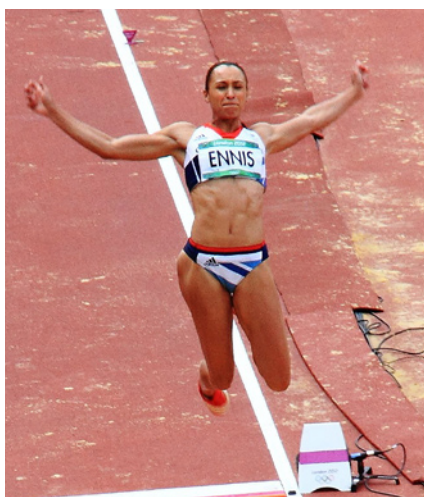
I could see all of that on her face as she stood

on the top step of the podium, tears of joy gathering in her eyes, having beaten off the world in 7 gruelling athletic events. And just as the controversial "God Save the Queen" began to play, my tear-glands began to betray me in a room full of journalists.

Going back to that interview in 2011, at the end of my round of questions which she answered with grace and simplicity, winning my heart over completely, I slid my notebook over to her and requested her for an autograph, a thing I rarely ever do. As I write this, having met people ranging from Michael Phelps to Karan Johar among others, the only two autographs that I've ever treasured and kept are those of Hugh Laurie, my acting idol, and Jess Ennis, my inspiration on various other levels.

I may be a journalist who is paid to remain neutral and non-starstruck on my job,

but as the anthem finished playing and the crowd rose to cheer my favourite athlete, I was a *fan* who felt proud of my home-girl's achievement and much as I tried to control myself, I couldn't but stand and clap in a room full of unmoved, professional journalists.



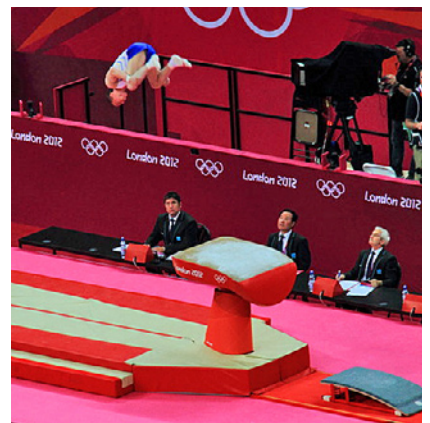
Jessica Ennis, the heptathlon gold medalist

ALTIUS

There are times in life when what you get is wildly better than what you ever expected. The Opening Ceremony was one such wonderful occasion.

While my journalism pass only got me to the Olympic Park, the sturdy armed guards at the stadium itself wouldn't be hoodwinked into letting me go any further. Not particularly keen on having my shirt riddled with bullets and stained with B positive blood, I settled on just ambling over to the other side of the Park and seeing how close I could get to the ceremony itself.

A short while later I found myself strangely



sequestered in an area meant just for the media. This shouldn't really have surprised me given my line of work, but I almost stumbled over this. A quick glance around and I knew why I didn't know of this place.

The journalists around me were either from ESPN South America or BBC or some really major news network from overseas. This was fairly exclusive access. A couple of polite questions later I realised that this path was set aside for the athletes to walk in and out of the stadium for the Opening Ceremony. This was starting to get seriously cool.

A few thousand heart-beats later Greek athletes walked right past us, preparing to walk their lap of honour. They were almost as excited as us, if not more, as they took photos of one another and tweeted via their mobile phones while making their way to the stadium, 30m away. I almost felt like a part of this buzz, seeing them as *people*, extraordinarily talented admittedly, rather than celebrities to be gawped at and chased after.

Such moments can sometimes be rather disappointing or disillusioning but this time, perhaps it was their humanness that made it so, the experience felt elevating and wonderful. And this was just the beginning....

About an hour later I was in a different universe altogether. I had been steadily drifting into the line of athletes walking back from the stadium to the Athletes' Village and somehow no one had noticed me. I felt a bit like Mr India (or The Invisible Man, for the non-Bollywood savvy) as I ambled, unhindered, into the otherwise well-cordoned off path.

The evening just kept getting more and more

surreal from then on. I whipped out my iPhone and began interviewing athletes from all countries as they walked past. A colleague of mine had followed me as well and she made her way to Lebron James and he chatted with us for a while.

That would, ordinarily, have left us awestruck enough to be incapable of movement, but this was as far from ordinary as possible. Often when you walk on the streets and spot a celebrity you go "Look, there's Brad Pitt" or "That's Viraat Kohli" or "That's the totally awesome NLP-expert Sujay Jauhar" but when you're surrounded by a dense crowd full of incredible achievers, the mind just feels madly overwhelmed.

Here I was, walking back from the Athletes' Village, feeling like a salmon swimming headlong into a galaxy of stars, achievers at the highest levels, bathing in their afterglow. I felt tiny, insignificant. I didn't deserve to be here amongst the hallowed elite. I scrounge around for stories that these people create and live. I report about dreams and records and inspiration while they live and breathe those words. These are our idols and what was I doing in the midst of all this?

Yet, strangely, I didn't feel outlawed. They didn't question my right to be there, they welcomed it. They spoke to me, gave me their flags and shared with me their stories, they waved and smiled at me as I wished them luck, they absorbed me into their midst where I wanted to remain forever lost. And as I reached back home at 3 am that night I felt a high that no drug or substance could produce, not that I know about such awful things. Exhilarated, elevated, I reveled in the pure bliss of having touched the sky and waltzed with the stars.

FORTIUS

Strength in the Games isn't, I realised as I watched Mary Kom box gloriously, all about physical capacities. It's more mental toughness and brain power than just super-strong muscles. That said, the muscles do help!

Another oft-quoted maxim is "practice makes perfect" and we hear of stories of tennis players brandishing their rackets even before their diapers have come off. But other athletes have more curious stories of strength and determination. Such as Samoan Olympian Maureen Tumeleali'ifano.

When I was told I had to interview Maureen I was far from enthusiastic. She wasn't a known name and it was at the cost of missing out on meeting up with Usain Bolt, who was flashing his charming smile and talking about his football and cricket ambitions in front of my other colleagues.

The little I'd found out about her wasn't very helpful. She was Samoa's first woman archer to compete in the Games and had been knocked out in the first round of the competition, albeit with a fairly decent score. She was 40-something and looked fairly older than her age. And that's all I knew. Sounded dull. But a journalist's gotta do what a journalist's gotta do. And here I was, at St. Katharine Docks instead of Stratford, holding a mike up to Maureen instead of Usain. And ten minutes later I felt like the luckiest journalist in my team. Here are the edited excerpts from my interview with her:

Me: First up, Maureen, congrats on making it this far. It's a rather amazing achievement to even make it to the Games. Tell me a little about how you got this far.

Maureen: Well, I picked up the bow and arrow seven months back and it has indeed been an amazing journey since.

Me: Wait, what? You have been training for just 7 months?

Maureen: I had never even touched a bow or arrow before that. I am a branch manager at the Samoan Bank and I have two kids who are both in college now and I never thought about the Olympics or even sports. Sports doesn't put bread on the table in the smaller Oceanic nations.

Me: So... *(lost for words)*...how did this archery thing come about? *(I know, not the most elegantly framed question. But I was totally wrong-footed at this point)*

Maureen: (smiling) I decided to volunteer at the archery range 7-8 months ago, to help with our nation's Olympic preparations. I did this for a couple of hours after my bank work. The people there are very friendly and they suggested I give archery a shot, just as a hobby, since I was already here anyway. And I did. And I hit the targets. It just came very naturally.

Me: And what about your job? Did you leave that then?

Maureen: God no! I'm still a bank manager. You get paid very very little to do sport in Samoa unless you're a rugby player. People don't even know about archery. So it's very difficult getting a sponsor. All our Olympians have full-time jobs that pay for their families and sustenance. I've just been given a month's paid holiday so that I can compete in these Games. But I can't stay for the Closing Ceremony, sadly enough.

Me: So how do you manage your day?

Maureen: I wake up early and put in a couple of hours of practice in the morning. Then I get ready for my bank work which starts at 9.30 am. At 5.30, once I'm done, I get back for 3-4 hours of practice and that about sums up my day.

Me: What about the kids?

Maureen: Luckily they're in college now. So they're in New Zealand at the moment.

Me: What do they think about their mum taking part in the Olympics?

Maureen: They can't actually believe it. They're proud of me but they can't understand what's going on really. They've never seen me do any archery and they've only been away in New Zealand a year now.

Me: Getting back a little. Surely seven months isn't enough to learn a sport, practise it, especially with your schedule, and then master it enough to be among the elite who compete in the most prestigious sporting event in the world. How did you manage it? Did you have a special coach or training regime?

Maureen: When I realised I was good, and

the people around me realised that too, the real training began. But our infrastructure for archery is very poor. So, much of my training was my own. I'm largely self-taught. I kept training and getting better. Then I competed in a few events where I did very well. But the Olympics weren't even a thought. The requirement was way too high for me. Then someone arranged for me to go to China for a month before the qualifiers and train with a Chinese coach. He was very good and he corrected a few things in my style but even he didn't think I'd make it this far. Most of the people he trains have to work for at least a decade before making it here.

Me: What else did the Chinese coach teach you? And how long were you there?

Maureen: I was there for a month and he taught me how to breathe among other things. He is very good. The only problem is the language barrier. He spoke only Mandarin and we needed an interpreter. But the coach made gestures and I understood that better than what the interpreter said. Unfortunately my coach wasn't allowed to come to London with me and that's been a drawback. I have to show him my style and all via Skype. It's inconvenient.

Me: Why wasn't he *allowed* to come?

Maureen: The Chinese government won't allow any of their people to coach another country's athlete. When I first applied they didn't think I was any threat at all. But when I'd qualified, they clamped down on things. But they did allow him to Skype-train me. But it's not convenient at all.

Me: Do you think you would've done better had he been able to come?

Maureen: I don't know. Actually I'm happy with my performance. I've come a long way in a very short time. And I'm only 42. In a sport like archery, I can dream about Rio 2016 and start

training for that. And with 4 years more under my belt, I'm confident it'll only get better.

Me: So what next for Samoa's first woman archer in the Olympics? Where do you go from here?

Maureen: I fly back on Monday and get back to the bank work the following week. My friends are very proud of me and have been very supportive, but archery makes no money as I told you. And the branch needs its manager. I can't afford to lose the job. Meanwhile, I'll continue to train and hopefully secure a sponsor so that I can shift to working on archery full-time. I don't know what the future holds. I'm just happy with the present right now.

She smiled as I thanked her and we exchanged email IDs and business cards. Mine says "Broadcast Journalist" having just started out in the profession. Hers says "Bank Manager" having just participated as an "Archer" in the biggest sporting event there is. That said I've been a journalist longer

than she's been an archer. It didn't fit at all.

Her smiling, plain, ageing face hid behind it a story of incredible determination and strength. She looks like a simple mother-of-two whom I would've placed as a housewife at first glance. She doesn't adorn herself with the (justifiable) air of pride and glory. She has a certain dignity that is rare to find. And with that dignity, there is strength. Incredible strength.

I was 13 when I learnt that the Olympic motto was *Citius, Altius, Fortius* (Faster, Higher, Stronger) having watched an episode of Harsha Bogle's Sports Quiz on ESPN. Ten years later, five thousand miles away, I understood just what it truly meant. And even though the London 2012 Olympic Games are officially over, true to its legacy, to *Inspire A Generation*, it has lit the golden triangular torch within me. And this one's never getting blown out. ☼



Samoa's Olympian Maureen Tumeleali'ifano and Yuyutsu



Date: Friday, 31st August
Time: 8:15 PM
Venue: School Courtyard
Duration: 60-70 minutes

THE BUILD-UP

“Mesdames et messieurs, représentant l’Ashram de Sri Aurobindo... Ladies & Gentlemen representing the Sri Aurobindo Ashram...” I almost imagined this announcement being made when I got to know that my UK visa finally came through and that I could in fact visit London for the Olympics as if on behalf of the Ashram and student community! It was a patient wait, with uncertainty looming over the whole trip. The super-fast fibre-optic communication network set up for the London Games, that could handle 3000 photos/sec, would have paled in front of our hi-speed word-of-mouth Ashram communication network that had spread the news of my impending trip before I had time to blink. For wherever and whenever they met me, in the morning, afternoon or during group hours, teachers, students, friends and family were asking me the same 3-word question which took different forms as time went by and I continued to remain in Pondy, even as the Olympics were coming to a close:

1. Adbhuta: VK UK?!!! Oooo...kay... ☺.
2. Confirmation: VK... UK... OK ☺?
3. Disappointed: What VK... UK kab hoga OK ☺?

I almost felt a collective sense of everyone wanting me to go. To all I answered with a smile, “still waiting”, trying to maintain what Sri Aurobindo would have called a “sweet *samata*”, for I was indeed ready for any eventuality. Then... just as it seemed that my UK visa would be as elusive as an Indian medal, Vijaykumar won a silver medal in shooting, and I sensed a silver lining; I got the confirmation that my trip was on, with 5 days of the Olympics remaining! It all happened so fast,

THE LONDON OLYMPICS

A JOURNEY OF LEARNING AND INSPIRATION

Vikas Kothari '02

*(based on an audio-visual
presentation given in School)*

that I couldn’t even wish my students a proper goodbye, for I would have answered their “VK, UK OK?” question with a single word in typical South-Indian style: “Wokay!”

My cousin Samarth was overjoyed, for all his efforts and prayers at getting the tickets and getting me to London had finally paid off. He told me that he still had tickets for 3 events: a) Synchronised Swimming; b) Athletics, including the 200m finals; and c) the Closing Ceremony and that it was totally worth coming to see Bolt-bhai win the 200m. And so I set-off for London on the night of Wednesday 8th August.



Take off: From Sportsground to London

THE CAMERA FIASCO AT SYNCHRONISED SWIMMING

Synchronised Swimming was the first event I watched. The setting was the beautiful and vast (160m by 80m) Aquatic Centre. Everything was grand and new for me, and I wanted to capture all of it on Samarth’s digital SLR Camera which was the most complex camera I had ever handled. He gave me clear instructions, to shoot in multi-burst sports mode, so that I didn’t have to rely on my inexperience to capture the right moments. However, when I tried clicking, it just wouldn’t



work. The first team of 8 swimmers arrived on the swimming pool deck, and I nervously pressed on the click button again; this time though I noticed the following message on the camera screen: "Subject is too dark."

I rang up Samarth, and told him, "Samarth, camera says 'Subject is too dark.'" As soon as Samarth heard me, he chided me "Bhaiya! You are seeing the fairest of ladies in the world and you're telling me, 'Subject is too dark'!? Remove the cap covering the lens of the camera and there shall be light!"

I did as he told me, and I was able to capture some of the most breathtaking sporting action I had ever seen. After no overnight sleep, plenty of walking and only olives for lunch, Synchronised Swimming was such a treat.

Even as I enjoyed my afternoon, Samarth was soaking in the British sunshine for one hour with a most nondescript placard.

THE TICKET-MASTER DOES IT AGAIN!

Samarth has this incredible knack of acquiring tickets to watch sports events live. He has seen 3 French Opens and Wimbledons and after much 'online sadhana' he got about a dozen Olympics tickets. In fact the online transaction for the Athletics Ticket for the 9th of August, took 20 minutes to go through, and he had the patience not to refresh the page!

So the day my trip got confirmed, he again began looking for a 9th August Athletics ticket for he was going to give away his most prized ticket to me. However, this time all his efforts online went in vain and he was left with one last option. He waited patiently in the Olympic Park, holding a

placard which read, "Exchange one Closing Ceremony Ticket for Athletics Ticket".

After I was done with Synchronised Swimming, I met Samarth and asked him, "What? any luck?"

Within literally two seconds of my asking him this question, a Belgian artist approached him with an Athletics ticket, and told him, "You see my sister and I were going to watch Athletics this evening, but she somehow failed to show up, and I have one extra ticket which I wouldn't mind exchanging for your Closing Ceremony ticket."

Samarth was absolutely ecstatic, for when everything had failed at the very last moment, he finally got the ticket he wanted. So we would both get to see the best night of athletics together after all, with Samarth shooting all the sports action, and I just soaking in the Olympic Experience.

ATHLETICS AT THE OLYMPIC STADIUM

Athletics is clearly the showpiece event of the Olympics, and the main Olympic Stadium, the greatest stage of sporting excellence. Inside the stadium, one becomes a tiny ripple in a sea of cosmopolitan humanity. All the 80,000 spectators come together and raise their voice to celebrate the pinnacle of sporting achievement with thundering roars that sweep across the stands creating a most electrifying atmosphere. Only Usain Bolt's raised finger in front of his mouth, flashed across the giant screens, before the race begins, can briefly silence the buzz. For me the moments before the 200m final when the runners were settling into their blocks were indeed the most memorable ones. The full capacity crowd that was abuzz with excitement, chose to abate their

effervescence creating a most stunning silence — a silence, waiting to burst forth into cheers, with the bang of the gun.

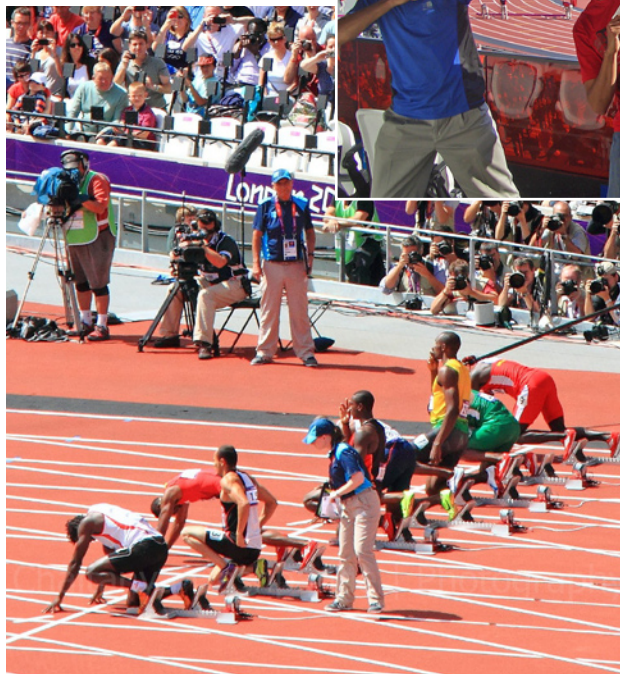
When the gun did go “Bang”, it was as if enough energy was unleashed to burst a thousand dams simultaneously. The floodgates of cheers opened up, and athletes were transported by a tsunami of sound to the finishing line.

SOME CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

When one looks at the lives of the sportsmen, beyond the result or final victory, it is the vision and preparation that are truly most inspiring. For beyond the destination it is the journey that is the reward.

It is the day-to-day devotion, dedication and preparation towards excellence in their chosen field that ultimately leads them to participate and possibly win at the Olympics. It is this universal admiration of physical perfection that unifies the whole world every four years in such a powerful way during the Olympic Games.

After experiencing the Olympics in London, I am convinced that anyone who has passed out from our school and has a passion for sports will be completely inspired by what he sees and experiences. There might be many schools or universities in the world with better sports facilities than we have, but I wonder if anywhere, students undergo such a regular, wide-ranging and integral



Overjoyed, inside the Olympic Stadium. We would later witness Bolt-bhai win gold in the 200m Run.

Usain Bolt silences the crowd in the 100m heats

physical education program, where all the components of physical well being i.e. fitness, strength, balance, agility, flexibility, endurance, posture, rest and nutrition are

so systematically taken care of and meticulously monitored for 18 years from Kindergarten up to graduation. We have experienced practically all the Olympic sports by participating in the major disciplines of athletics, games, gymnastics and swimming day after day for the last 70 years. One cannot help but wonder at the Mother's vision and foresight in developing such a comprehensive physical education programme and is filled with an overwhelming sense of gratitude that She chose us to be part of her unique experiment on the physical plane. ❧

The photographs on pages 3 (top), 7, 9, 12 (top), 14 (centre) were taken by Chaitanya Deshpande '01.

...when you observe the moving body of a person who has practised physical culture in a methodical and rational way, you see a light, a consciousness, a life, which is not there in others.

The Mother (MCW,10:30)

SAICE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT PROJECT — PHASE II

As a follow-up to the report that appeared in our last issue, Tejas Shah '01 tells us about the next phase of the project in which solar panels have been put up to generate part of the electricity that the School requires.

SUMMARY OF THE OUTCOME OF THE FIRST PHASE OF ACTIVITY

The first phase of project implementation in the west and north blocks of the School resulted in the reduction of electricity demand by at least 25% with demand-side measures such as:

- Replacement of inefficient incandescent lamps by fluorescent lamps with electronic ballasts and compact fluorescent lamps with savings ranging from 30 to 75%;
- Replacement of normal fans by more efficient fans with savings ranging from 25-45%;
- Replacement of CRT monitors by LED monitors with savings ranging from 50-75%;
- Replacement of standard air conditioners by more efficient ones, with savings ranging from 30-40%;
- Similar results with other miscellaneous appliances in the school.

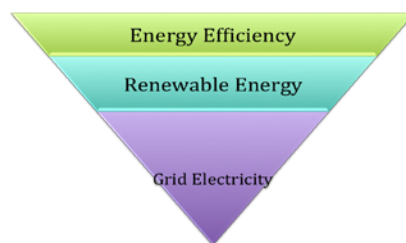
Following the retrofitting of electrical devices and appliances, we have achieved about 23% savings on electricity use in the western and north-western blocks.

While implementing the 1st phase, we realized that overall electrical wiring of the School had to be changed first before taking up similar energy efficiency retrofitting of electrical devices in the eastern and south-eastern blocks of the School.



THE NEXT PHASE OF ACTIVITY

The research methodology that was proposed to reduce the dependence on fossil-fuel based grid electricity is shown below: first reduce the electricity demand through energy efficiency before opting for renewable energy to further reduce the dependence on fossil-fuel based grid electricity.



While waiting for the rewiring of the school's electrical networks, it was proposed to move on to the second phase: installing a grid-tied solar photovoltaic (PV) power generation unit in order to further reduce the electricity dependence on the utility grid.



Students installing the support structure on the School terrace in the hot sun

Based on similar installations commissioned in Pondicherry and Auroville in the last one year, one can expect to produce around 1,500 kWh/year per kW_{peak} of solar PV system. It was therefore proposed to install a 3 kW_p solar PV plant with the understanding that when the energy efficiency measures in the eastern block are com-



Students installing the solar panels under the guidance of Debo '07

pleted, additional solar PV system could be added at a later stage on the basis of results obtained over a period of one year. The 3 kW_p solar PV plant is expected to generate 4,500 kWh of electricity per year, allowing a further reduction in the western block's electricity demand on the utility grid by about 35%.

With the increased use of solar PV systems around the world, the overall system cost has been dropping considerably. The commissioning of the solar PV system was done by Sunlit Future, a unit of Auroville, which has been actively involved in promoting renewable energy mostly in rural and remote areas of India. It was agreed with Sunlit Future to allow our students to actively participate in the installation process. Two of our alumni working with Sunlit Future volunteered to assist our students in commissioning this project. Along with the solar panels and the inverter, a data monitoring system to study and analyse the system was also installed.

The students were actively involved at every step, right from carrying the material to the terrace to installing the solar panels on the aluminium structures and connecting them. Although they were familiar with the theory, this project gave them good practical exposure. They asked relevant questions at different stages and learnt a lot in the entire installation process.

The solar power plant was commissioned in 2 days and now it produces clean electricity without any noise or air pollution and with no moving parts. The gestation period of a traditional power plant is much longer; moreover the fossil fuel used in such a plant emits a lot of pollution.

The data obtained from the solar power plant is being recorded and will be analysed and the results will be shared with *The Golden Chain* in the future. The entire process was very interesting and teachers were very kind to allow their students to take an active part in the installation. This created a lot of enthusiasm amongst the students who



View of the completed installation

worked tirelessly to complete the installation by 24th September 2012. The solar power plant was inaugurated by Manoj-da and Chamanlal-ji on 26th September 2012 at 11 am. ☺

THE SMART GRID

The School has been quite a pioneer in the systematic way it has reduced its electricity consumption and then gone in for solar power generation to meet part of its needs. If others are to follow suit and consumers are to better manage their electricity use and take advantage of such small-scale generation opportunities, the Government will have to revamp its electricity infrastructure and consumers will have to be able to feed in their surplus generated electricity into the main electricity grid and get compensated for it. We will have to move towards what are called “smart grids”. To recall what Brahmananda ’79 mentioned in our last issue: “Smart grids will allow a two-way communication between the electricity suppliers and users and an unprecedented level of consumer participation. The smart grid will give us the option to save money by helping us manage our electricity use and choose the best times to purchase electricity; we can save even more by generating our own power on our roof-tops or backyards.”

The smart grid is intelligent electricity infrastructure that uses sensors, monitoring and communications technology, automation and computers to improve the flexibility, reliability and efficiency of the electricity system. Smart grids make use of technologies that improve fault-detection and allow self-healing of the network without the intervention of technicians. The improved flexibility of the smart grid

permits greater penetration of highly variable renewable energy sources such as solar power and wind power, even without the addition of energy storage.

India is poised to enter the small club of nations who have “smartened” their energy distribution systems. The Government has announced an investment of Rs 5 billion for smart grids with 8 pilots across the country. Interestingly the first of the eight smart grid pilot projects was inaugurated in October in Pondicherry. To quote *The Hindu* (Oct 21st, 2012):

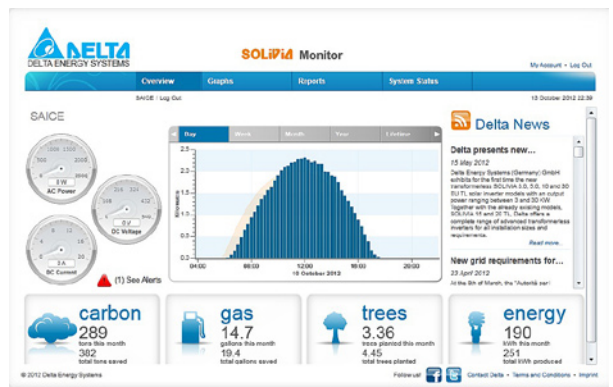
“The main highlights of the project are installation of advance metering infrastructure in houses with a Control Data Centre in the Electricity Department, which would help consumers [...] monitor real-time power consumption data and at any point of time know the exact billing amount. Since consumers could know the billing on a real time basis, they could appropriately manage power usage[....]

“As far as the department was concerned, they would be able to monitor online energy usage patterns and detect malpractices, energy theft and thus enabling them to connect or disconnect supply online. Besides, the advance metering system would help the department to bill power tariff online and collection of dues online, said the official.”

So if all goes well, we in Pondicherry could really become pioneers in better electricity management and green generation.



Inauguration on 26th Sept 2012



Data from the Monitoring System

UTTARA YOGI

Arup Mitra '72 answers our questions about his book "Uttara Yogi"

Your book is a long novel. Why did you choose the format of fiction to talk of the revolutionary, pre-Pondicherry years of Sri Aurobindo's life?

A historical novel allows a rebuilding of a period, re-enacting of events, restoring places, and bringing back to life personalities that were involved in Sri Aurobindo's life. Under such a wide perspective, Sri Aurobindo's life assumes a new dimension. Adopting the medium of creative history also allows the legend of the Uttara Yogi to be utilised as the backdrop for the novel. Such resourcefulness exists only in fiction-writing and is not possible in a biographical work.

Why did it take you so long to write this book?

The research itself took eight years. This entailed visiting the various places associated with the life of Sri Aurobindo such as Baroda, Calcutta, Darjeeling, Khulna, Nainital, Ooty, Deoghar, Rohini, and even the Dighiria Hills where Barin's revolutionaries tested their first bomb. However, much as I would have liked to visit the UK, I could not because of the expense involved.

The sifting of relevant information through the voluminous pages of official documents also took a very long time. These included the records of the Government of India, the Governments of Bengal and Baroda, the India Office (London) and the Calcutta Police Commissioner's Office. Although gathering bio-data and various career information of some of the leading characters

was time-consuming, it was essential to do it to breathe life into the two hundred odd real-life characters in the novel. It was also imperative to collect first hand news from some hundred-year-old dailies kept at the National Library and The Statesman House in Calcutta.

And then, just as I thought I had exhausted all data, the re-discovery in 1997 of the original

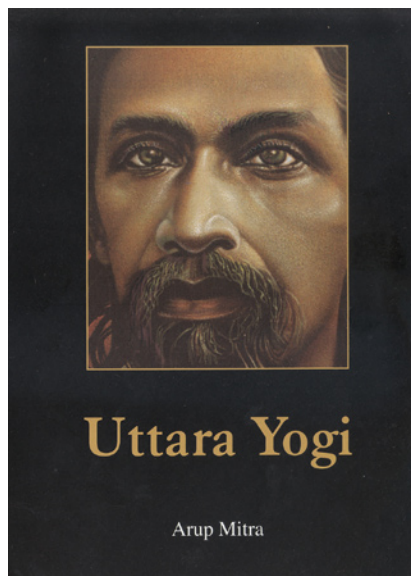
Alipore Bomb Trial records opened up new lines of research. This necessitated two long trips to Calcutta to collect exhaustive notes. Later, these notes turned out to be a virtual treasure-trove of information!

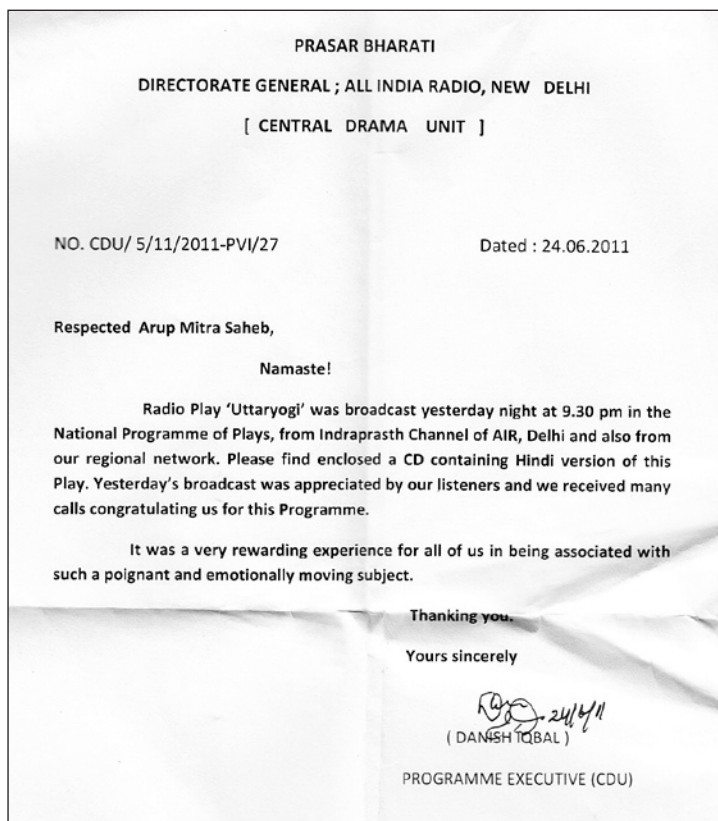
My full-time engagement at the Lycée Français de Pondichéry allowed me only part-time work on the project. But luckily, the generous four month holiday that the Lycée offered enabled me to dash off to various places for on-the-spot studies. Further, the translation into English of the copious Bengali primary source documents took additional time and energy.

What was the most difficult part of your work?

Being a student of literature, I rightly foresaw the need to fashion the novel into a modern classic. But being inexperienced, I had to re-write the text some thirty times before I was pleased.

Another big challenge was the incorporation of the vast database of information without making the text heavy or obtrusive. The smoothness of the narration was essential to avoid boredom too. And to achieve this, I had to mix facts with fiction, create characters and situations, and write dialogues and descriptions in such a manner that





a display of events could automatically be enacted before the eye of the reader. My experience in painting was a big help in doing this. The final outcome was a harmonious flow of creative history — the most essential feature of any historical novel.

How did you feel when it finally came out?

To be honest, I had no feelings. Twenty-one years is a long time. And to sustain the same interest and enthusiasm throughout the project was possible only because I considered myself a conduit for my Master's work. But would I have knowingly embarked upon such an ambitious, two-decade-long project? —I am not sure. Yet from the outset, the publication seemed a *fait accompli*. Even the cover of the book was visible to my mind's eye. Therefore, armed with patience, perseverance, determination and grit, I strove to make the work as perfect as possible, leaving its fruition in the hands of the Uttara Yogi.

What was the feedback you got from people not connected with the Ashram?

Those who read the book liked it very much.

I have heard comments like: "The entire writing maintains a high pitch," "I read the book twice within a week," "Sri Aurobindo's spirituality bursts forth like a flame," "The novel has all the ingredients of a thriller." The numerous reviews that appeared in the national newspapers were largely approving and sympathetic. These included *The Hindu*, *New Indian Express*, *Times of India*, *The Asian Age*, *Deccan Herald*, *Deccan Chronicle*, *Organizer*, besides many vernacular dailies.

One reader was so impressed that he came from Delhi to see me. "I read the book through the night in one sitting!" he affirmed. He was so obsessed by the idea of reading the second part (yet to be written) of Uttara Yogi that he would not leave without securing the promise that I would publish the sequel the following year!

Mr. N. Ranganathan is the author of the detailed note on the legend of the Uttara Yogi that Sri Aurobindo

Archives had published earlier. He is a direct descendant of Kodyalam Vasudeva Iyengar, one of the real-life protagonists of my novel. Impressed by my handling of the Uttara Yogi episode, this seventy-two-year-old man drove his family from Mannargudi to Pondicherry to congratulate me.

While launching my book in 2010, the well-known dancer and choreographer, Ms Anita Ratnam, disclosed that she herself was a direct descendant of K.V. Iyengar! And her claim found instant echo from a man sitting in the crowd! Ms Ratnam then went on to describe the novel as a fine example of 'Magic Realism', a term coined by the South American writer Gabriela Marques to describe the use of creative history in rebuilding periods, places, personae and events.

Ms Prema Nandakumar, the well-known writer, married to another direct descendant of K.V. Iyengar, also praised the book. She is the daughter of K.R. Srinivasa Iyengar, the famous biographer of Sri Aurobindo.

But the best part was of course the adaptation

UTTARA YOGI – A BRIEF REVIEW

Sunayana '79

There are many ways of telling the story of how Sri Aurobindo was involved in the revolution that shook up the country before it was liberated. The one written by Arup Mitra is truly original because it is written as a novel. What is new and interesting in Arup's book is that alongside the story of Sri Aurobindo's life before coming to Pondicherry is another story which runs parallel to that and is totally a work of fiction. The two stories, one true and the other a creation of the author's imagination, run side by side and intercut into each other.

This format has the big advantage that at no point does the narration make Sri Aurobindo the central character, so we see him as if through the other story — indirectly. It is as if we see him in soft focus rather in the harsh glare of the spotlight. In the foreground is the saga of a Bengali family and the turns and twists of the destinies of the various members. In the background is the story of Sri Aurobindo's life until he comes to Pondicherry. Other characters speak about him and what he does. In brief intercuts we actually see him.

The title alludes to the prophecy that was made by the guru of Nagai Japata in Tamil Nadu who had foreseen the arrival of a yogi from North India and that it would be the indication that India would one day be free. When Sri Au-

robindo's arrival was reported, it became clear to the followers of this guru that this was indeed the yogi for whom they had been waiting. The novel begins with this prediction and ends when it is fulfilled. An element of suspense is there, tickling the reader's mind, and making him wonder how this prediction will come true.

Written in a readable style, the book abounds in little details which help to situate the story in the historical context in which Sri Aurobindo lived. The fact that the author is an artist is evident from the visual nature of the narration. The reader becomes a witness to the dramatic events that lead the story on, so much the story-telling has a ring of authenticity. This, of course, comes from the fact that Arup Mitra himself has done years of research about all the factual details and made sure that there are no errors in that respect.

Published by Neogi Books in Delhi, the book has an impressive cover design. Against a black background is framed a portrait of Sri Aurobindo painted by Arup Mitra himself. The volume runs into 560 pages and is very beautifully produced. The book has been appreciated by people who are not followers of Sri Aurobindo's philosophy. It has been dramatised and presented as a radio play in Hindi on All India Radio in June 2011.

The book is available at SABDA. It is also available as an e-book on the internet.

of the novel into a radio-play. Under its monthly National Program of Plays, All India Radio broadcast its radio-play 'Uttara Yogi' on 23rd June 2011. It was aired simultaneously in Hindi and all the major languages of India by AIR's regional centres. Furthermore, the Director of the Department of Plays of AIR informed me that he had received many congratulatory calls from the public following the broadcast.

What was the feedback you got from people connected with the Ashram?

As in all matters connected with the Ashram, the silence of the general public seems to endorse

the non-controversial aspect of the book. The fact that this fictional work is also sold through the outlets of SABDA is further proof of this endorsement.

Anything else you would like to say to our readers?

Although Uttara Yogi revolves around Sri Aurobindo, I have steered clear of making him the central figure of the novel to spare him from acting, reacting or saying things that are not on record. Thus, he avoids arousing any controversy, which otherwise would defeat my purpose of taking him to a larger audience. ❧

PROTECTION

Lalit N. Modi recounts an incident that reminds us of Her constant presence and protection.

Theirs was an arranged marriage, arranged by their families, arranged by society and prearranged by the Divine. Dilip who went “bride hunting” from Pondicherry to Porbander with stopovers at Chennai, Bombay, Ahmedabad and Rajkot finally descended on Kirti’s house like a head hunter from Borneo. Common friends, kith and kin, arranged the meet. With one glance Dilip observed that the family was honourable, cultured, disciplined, hospitable and conservative. The head of the family was the oak-like grandpa, a strongly built six-footer with a Gandhi topi adorning his head. Beside him sat Kirti’s grandma, a puny little thing, hyperactive and enthusiastic. Kirti, the coy and compact bride-to-be, was juxtaposed beside her protective grandma, her vocal ally. The gentle parents and her aunts with heads covered by their saris, and obese middle-aged uncles of various sizes and shapes, arrayed like on a battlefield, looked serious and curious like a jury, but infallibly polite. On that day the nervous Dilip gathered a large share of inquisitive eyeballs from all sides. But the most powerful ones were the searchlight-like ones of her brother Raju!

The bespectacled brother looked hard at Dilip as though he was an alien from Mars and it seemed that his spectacles would crack at any time. But behind the tough look there appeared to be a deep concern accompanied by deeper furrows on his forehead. Breaking traditions, the brother did not allow his sister to carry the traditional tray of tea and cookies for the prospective bridegroom and his entourage, and instead did it himself. The knight in shining armour accepted the cup of tea from him with a comment, “Raju, you seem to be an all-rounder,” to break the silence and ice! Raju was not amused by the wise-crack. But all the while he was trying to make an assessment of this stranger in his confused mind.

After exchanging pleasantries, Dilip glided a few questions at the demure and timid Kirti,

which her grandma answered with clarity and Dilip wondered who he was going to marry! The rest of the family gently asked grandma to allow Kirti to respond but the ancient septuagenarian did not yield and protected Kirti from the barrage of queries like a goalie protecting the goal post. To her, her every answer seemed like a goal saved and the delight and glee elicited with every ‘save’ was palpable. In the meantime Raju took a seat 5 feet away from Dilip like a centre forward attempting a penalty stroke and trying to place Dilip in proper perspective, sweat running down his brow and jowls. Names of common friends and relatives were thrown around and the family trees of Dilip and Kirti were drawn and discussed. When the traditional and popular *paan beeda* was offered the guest refused it politely. He also refused to take the traditional betel nut powder. When the grandpa threw the million-dollar ‘what is your occupation’ question at Dilip, the latter replied casually that he was a C.A. and had commenced practice about 6 months ago in a 10’ by 10’ room. His freehold assets comprised of a table and three chairs which were also moved to this new office from his house!!! He had only a few accounting assignments and a future to carve out and look forward to, nothing more nothing less. The grandpa was impressed by Dilip’s honesty, but Raju was shattered. As it is he was not able to place this Clint Eastwood from Pondicherry either under the category of the good, or the bad or the ugly! How could he, after learning that Dilip was a novice in his profession, give his sister’s hand in marriage to this alien from the South and whose character he knew nothing about? Mentally, it was an emphatic no from him. For a gentle girl like his sister who had grown up on a diet of Enid Blyton, Denise Robbins and Harold Robbins, Dilip’s probable diet of Alfred Hitchcock, Perry Mason and Jeffrey Archer would not match, he presumed.

Dilip and his entourage left after a great

brunch, and immediately the bride's family went into a huddle to decide the destiny of their loved one. Raju expressed his reservations while his parents and assembled relatives had nothing negative to share and left the decision to the wisdom and maturity of the seasoned grandpa. The vintage senior by virtue of his being the head of the family exercised his veto power and voted for the espousal; and a day later when Dilip's assent also came he was overjoyed. He explained to Raju that his years of experience indicated that Dilip's frankness and honesty must be appreciated and taken seriously and here was a youngster who was all out to prove his worth and mettle in life. He firmly believed that Dilip was the right counterpart for his granddaughter. Not that the rest including Raju were unhappy. The apprehension lay in the fact that none knew much about Dilip and that the daughter of the house would have to be sent nearly 3000 km away down South and that too with a toddler who had just taken his first step into his career and whose professional qualification was his only asset. Raju was aghast that the other members of the family did not share his concern in spite of this whole host of reasons.

The marriage was celebrated within two weeks and by the middle of the third week the couple left for Pondicherry, leaving the brother Raju tense, apprehensive, worried, and nervous. His stress, despair and anguish reached a vertigo level and the very next day he called up his sister to find out if everything was okay. The sister assured him that all was fine but that did not give him much solace because he knew his affectionate sister would not complain even if she were not happy in her new home. He lost his sleep and would often get up in the middle of the night with his brow sweaty and heart beating. He however saw a silver lining in his proposed visit to Pondicherry for the marriage

reception which was slated ten days later. He restlessly began counting the days to the visit, constantly lost in thought. When the rhythm of our thoughts is lost, it reflects in our actions. This in turn throws off the very rhythm of life. Raju's rhythm of thought and life went for a toss.

One night the beleaguered Raju went to bed tired, in a daze and with a very heavy heart worried and concerned about his sister's situation all alone in an alien land with alien people. That night he saw an elderly lady in his dream. She held her hand up in blessing as if consoling him and saying, "Don't worry, I am there." He got up abruptly wondering what was happening. It was

5.00 am and being summer-time the soft light of dawn had already begun to make inroads into his room through the window. A slight scratching sound from outside the half-closed window of his room fell on his ears and arming himself with his spectacles, he peeped out of the opening to survey the source of the gentle sound of scraping. Outside he saw the bou-

gainvillea gently swaying in the breeze and softly caressing the window. Neither the appearance of the kindly old lady in his dream, nor the bougainvillea's ballad made any sense to him. Once again he got engulfed by the anxiety about his sister's circumstances and decided to go for a walk while a band played solemn music in his mind's ears. On the way he whispered a teeny weenie prayer and took consolation from the fact that he would be in Pondicherry in a week's time to personally appraise the situation.

Forty-eight hours of a combination of bus, train and taxi journey finally brought him and his parents to Pondicherry. Noticing his sister's gentle demeanour carrying the familiar sweet smile and twinkling eyes, the typical Gujju atmosphere of the household and the way she mingled with



her adopted family, all of Raju's strong confrontational opinions and apprehensions evaporated. He could never imagine that Kirti could kick-start her married life so gracefully and be such a gracious hostess. Sighing in relief, bidding farewell to his frown, he disarmed himself and felt a wee bit apologetic too. He looked at his parents with a satisfied smile and was rewarded with knowing looks. Sitting in the large hall and stretching his tired muscles Raju's eyes fell on the photograph of the Divine Mother of Sri Aurobindo Ashram hanging on the wall and he jumped out of the sofa.

Going close to the photograph and after scrutinizing the picture intensely, he became ecstatic and charged with emotional voltage. Turning around he asked Dilip who she was. Dilip was surprised by the high decibel of his voice but patiently explained to Raju that she was the Divine Mother of Sri Aurobindo Ashram and people still thronged to Pondicherry to visit the Ashram though she had left her body more than a decade ago. He tried to explain to Raju about her divinity and that people worshipped her and that she did not profess or advocate any religion but was an apostle of spirituality. Her grace was infinite and love eternal and that she was the Supreme Mother, a living goddess by herself. Raju was by then shaking like jelly and practically in tears. "What happened, Raju?" enquired Kirti with deep concern. All that Raju could do was exclaim, marvel and wonder. Slowly, he walked towards Dilip and sat down beside him and expressed his desire to confess something. Slightly perturbed Dilip asked Raju to calm down and allow his feelings to flow without fear or inhibitions. Ecstatic, Raju

spoke in detail about his apprehensions of marrying off Kirti to an unknown individual like him and that too in an unfamiliar place; and that the noble lady who came and consoled him in his dream was none other than the Divine Mother herself — the very same Divine Mother in the photograph. "I am sorry I felt tense and uneasy about your marriage to Kirti, but this Divine intervention and recommendation has shown me my place and proved me wrong," he conceded. "Don't worry Raju, your predicament and anxiety about your sister were totally justified and I too would have felt the same way if I had been in your shoes. You are lucky to have had the *darshan* of the Divine Mother in your dreams and it only shows the purity of your heart and soul. Further do you know that the sound of the bougainvillea scraping gently against your window was an even bigger mystic signal of the Divine? The Mother had by establishing an inner contact with each flower given spiritual significance and meaning to every flower. According to her bougainvillea is the personification and representation of PROTECTION; and the scraping of the bougainvillea against your window was a clear-cut signal that your sister was under her care and protection," clarified Dilip.

Raju, the tireless crusader, was overwhelmed by the Divine conclusion of the episode. He withdrew into a meditative stillness and felt himself enveloped with Divine love, so sublime, so soothing and so concrete. He became desire-less but full in all respect. He thanked the Mother for the protective care conferred on his sister and for revealing to him the spiritual horizon beyond religion and religiosity. ❧

... There is a special personal tie between you and me, between all who have turned to the teaching of Sri Aurobindo and myself, — and, it is well understood, distance does not count here, you may be in France, you may be at the other end of the world or in Pondicherry, this tie is always true and living. And each time there comes a call, each time there is a need for me to know so that I may send out a force, an inspiration, a protection or any other thing, a sort of message comes to me all of a sudden and I do the needful.

The Mother (CWM, 13:76)

THE BOY INSIDE

Kamalika '10

He loved to play, to laugh, to live
He loved being himself
Clueless, that he'd soon have to
Stack his joys in the corner-most shelf.

Alterations! Changes! Was all that was asked,
Yet none to help or guide,
He yelled and screamed and wanted to know
What was wrong with the boy inside?

Stamped by 'reason' that he failed to grasp,
Longing for love by his side
He toiled to be what was asked of him
Lost...was the boy inside.

He called himself a self-made man,
Proud were all of his glory,
Soul sunk in mire, he couldn't care less,
He wrote his brand new story!

Ruler of his kingdom, he forgot his 'self',
Dirt, he could guiltlessly hide
A world-made Frankenstein was he
Killed was the boy inside!

He loved to be, all else but 'he'
Yet a voice in his heart that cried,
Confused, hurt, but resolute
He disregarded the boy inside!

A distant memory ran past him...
Just the one he could not forget,
One that bridged him to 'himself';
Facing it — the coward's regret.

But some strange magic pulled him on
A truth — he could not hide,
Redemption was all that he sought
And to find the boy inside.

Difficult it might have seemed at first,
A steep, roller-coaster ride!
Yet clear was the sky after years of storm,
He was now... the same boy outside. ☘



A CAPTAIN'S JOURNEY

Namita Sarkar '61 who has been a group captain since the age of thirteen tells us about her journey, about her contact with the Mother, about physical education in the Ashram and the 2nd December programme.

What was your first contact with physical education? At what age did you join group? How was it then? Where was it conducted?

As you all know, the Mother started our school on 2nd December 1943. I came in January 1944. I was 4 years old, so I was one of the first in the kindergarten along with a few other children. There was no physical education activity at that time. My teachers Manubhai (Albert-da's elder brother) and Pranbhai used to sometimes take us to the Park or to the sea-front inside the little park of "Monument to the Dead" and we used to play there freely.

Sometime in 1944 the Playground and the Dortoir property were acquired by the Ashram, and it was only in 1945 when Dada (Pranab-da) came that he started to organize the Physical Education activities with the bigger boys. Biren-da came a little later and taught us little children songs and games. I remember Nirmal-da and Shanti-da teaching the older boys and girls croquet and "King and the Fortress" or "Shikhela" as it was then known. I have been told that the Mother has also played croquet in the Playground.

At what age did you become a captain? How were you chosen and which group were you

captain of? What were your initial experiences?

As the number of children started growing, they were divided into different age groups with different sets of captains. There were 2 groups for the younger children: A1 and A2. Nirata and Aruna were the captains for the youngest group A1.

Tara and Usha R. Patel were the captains of the slightly older children in A2. I was then in A2.

Sometimes our captains used to choose one of us children as monitors. We had to help our captains in different ways, doing odd jobs. I do not know what Dada or my captains saw in me, but in 1953 at the age of 13, I was told that I was to be a captain. All the young children were then regrouped in 4 groups, a new group was created for me.

A2 still had the slightly older children

with Tara and Usha as captains. The other captains were:

For A. 1.1 Nirata

For A. 1.2 Namita

For A. 1.3 Aruna

I think at first, there were about twelve children in my group. There wasn't much difference in age between me and the children of my group, so sometimes they used to bully me. I would then refer it to Dada or to the Mother and they would



Namita (standing next to Pranab-da and Gangaram-da) looks on as the Mother distributes a prize

tell me what I should do.

For example, I had a child in my group who was very unruly — if I told him anything, he used to spit on me! This was brought to the Mother's notice and she told me to make him sit in a corner for a week, and then only allow him to participate once a week. If he behaved well, then twice a week and so on, till he changed completely.

Another example which comes to my mind is very interesting — a child had the habit of biting all the children when he did not like something. Any amount of explaining or scolding did not help to change his habit. When the Mother was told, she said he should have a net muzzle tied to his mouth when he came to the Playground. So Albert-da stitched a mosquito net cloth muzzle for him. The moment he came to the Playground he used to come to me and ask me to tie the muzzle for him. I must say, that in those days the Mother used to be in the Playground till quite late, so all of us were also there. What was surprising was that he never even tried to open the muzzle by himself. Before going home he used to come to me and ask me to untie it. In due course he got rid of the habit of biting.

What was your contact with the Mother and Dada during those years? What values did you learn from them?

In the meantime Dada had started teaching me all that I had to do with the children, the exercises, the games etc. and also guiding me in various other ways. He taught me what were the qualities that a good captain should have, and what should be my aim.

Apart from this, every week he used to give me a set of questions regarding anatomy, physiology and other aspects of physical education. As I was very young, he even used to keep the books which I could consult to answer the questions. He took his time to correct my answers and explain to me anything that I did not understand.

Very often in those days when the Mother came to the Playground after her game of tennis,

she used to stand there in front of her room to watch what I was doing with the children.

Dada has been my advisor and mentor during my growing years. He had always tried to show me the right path to follow and also how to strive to become an ideal child of the Mother. He always said a captain should be a friend and a guide. He gave me confidence and courage in all that I undertook. I remember the first time I had com-



Namita taking group (1982)

posed a drill all by myself; it was a drill with cymbals. I was young and had no experience. Both the Mother and Dada were highly appreciative of it. So when our Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru came to the Playground, I was asked to perform the cymbal drill with my group children in front of him. I was thrilled. That is when I think I really started gaining confidence.

Dada always told me to be straightforward and frank. He said you are the Mother's child. You should not be afraid to speak what you believe to be true. Here I must also mention — in those days the Mother used to take our children's class in the Guest House, and there was a time when she used to tell us "this week children, you are not going to tell a lie, or quarrel etc." and the next week we had to tell her if we had succeeded or failed and why. I do not know if I have succeeded in my endeavour, but in those days as a child of the Mother, I would sincerely strive towards it.

Dada was always concerned about the well-being of the children. In those days there was no

Corner House, where the children could have their tiffin. So we children had to go back home at 4.00 p.m. after school to have our tiffin. As I was living quite far and had to start my group at 4.30 pm, Dada spoke to the Mother about it, and she made arrangements so that I could have tiffin with the children of Dortoir.

I think it was some time in 1958 that all the small children's groups were renamed as A1, A2, A3, A4, and A5, as it is till date, and I have always been the head captain of group A3.

I would like to share with you something which I feel most of you would be interested to know. How did we get a piano in the playground? But for this a little digression is necessary. I have to tell you a little about myself. As I have told you earlier I came here as a child of 4 and a French lady by the name of Mme Caspari used to make us sing and dance by playing on the piano. I was just fascinated by the instrument and whenever I got a chance I would try to press the notes. Years later Olga arrived and there was a notice in the school saying all those who wanted to learn the piano should give their names. I was one of the first to give my name. So many of us had given our names that we got only half an hour per week to practise on the piano that first year. We also had theory classes in the school. And then the next year for some reason or other only a few who had a piano or could afford it were allowed to continue. I was extremely sad. So some time in 1957 or 1958 I asked Dada if we could get a piano in the playground for singing and doing movements with music with the children. Dada spoke to the Mother about it and soon we had a second-hand piano. It was kept in the old store room on a platform, and a window was made on the wall beside it, so that the person playing on the piano could see the children doing their movements in the open ground.

I still remember the day the piano arrived. As soon as I finished my group at 5.30 pm, Dada told me that the Mother would like to see the piano. So there I was with the Mother, Dada and many others in the Store Room in front of the piano.

The Mother asked me to play something, but after a gap of 1 year the little I had learnt, I had

forgotten, so I told her I did not remember anything. She then asked me whether I could play the scales — I thought I could but I was too shy and afraid of making mistakes. Then, the Mother said, "I shall play on the right side and you play on the left!" So, that was it — both of us played a few scales together. I then requested the Mother to play something and she did. Soon after that, I started again taking piano lessons from Olga on the Playground piano, and I would play for the children during our music classes. Those who were in my group at that time must have some remembrances. But after a few years, I found it was difficult to play the piano and teach the children who were in the open, in the Playground. So we requested Olga to come and play for the groups. (The Rhythmic Hall came much later in 1980.)

A few years later a devotee donated the Yamaha piano, which is now in the Rhythmic Hall and the old piano is kept in the Band quarters.

The Mother was always very loving, but she was also very firm with us. There was a time, when due to some personal problems, I wanted to give up captaincy. When I wrote to her, this is what she wrote back to me —

"For what are you here? I had the impression that it was for yoga — What happens to you is the result of what you are (for every human being it is the same). Change your character and things will change — and if other people do not change at least your reaction will change and you will not lose your temper."

"You are needed for the work and if each one had to change work instead of amending his ways most of the work would be stopped."

"Je suis toujours avec toi pour t'aider, mais pour que l'aide soit efficace il faut que tu la veuilles et que tu l'appelles, au lieu de penser à ton égo et à son désir d'être bien traité. Bénédiction."

How have you been adapting to the change in the attitude of the students? How have the values of the students changed from generation to generation?

With time so much has changed, but it is normal. In those days our whole life was centered around the Mother, but now that she is no more physically present amongst us, our responsibility

has increased all the more. I don't think it is difficult to adapt to the changes in the attitude of the students, if we are open and try to understand them. We should try and inculcate in them the true values, never forgetting even for a moment our real aim.

Time does not stand still, and changes are inevitable, but we, as captains and teachers, should take the children into confidence and try to understand them, help them to become better human beings. I think the best way is to LOVE and TRUST them. If we can kindle that little spark in them for progress, I think we have done our duty, and the rest will be taken care of.

It is not right if we expect the children of today to be like the children of a few decades back. They are much more confident about themselves — they know exactly what they want in life. We should not impose our ideas on them, but we can surely show them reason and try to help them reach their goals.

You have organized 2nd Dec programmes before. They have always been innovative, done with a grand overall theme, and very well organized. Can you tell us what goes into organizing a programme of this scale?

The Mother has always given great importance to the 1st and 2nd December programmes (annual days of the Ashram School). When she was coming out she used to attend the rehearsals and suggest improvements wherever necessary. She wrote 3 plays for the 1st December which transmit the philosophy of life that she wanted to communicate to us.

Through the years the captains and group members have all strived hard to bring something new every time to the 2nd December programme. And being a part of this big organisation, I have also tried to do the same. I was given the responsibility of organizing the programme in 1989, 1993 and 2003.

Such programmes require a lot of thinking and advance planning in the minutest of details to be successful and I do so with all my heart and soul. For every such programme I start planning

almost two years ahead. I am only an instrument and it is the Mother who guides me and helps me at every step. One person can have the idea but the success of the programme depends on the execution; it is a team work. As I direct the programmes, I have to be very clear in my mind as to what I want to present, only then do I ask for help. Sometimes help comes from the most



From the 2nd December programme based on Indian Folk Dances (1989)

unexpected quarters. I do not like to leave anything for later. One thing I know for sure, that such a programme is only possible here, where we have so much talent and good will; we only have to look for it. Till today, all those whom I have approached for help have willingly accepted to collaborate in their field — be it the artists and painters, the musicians, the dancers, the singers, the choreographers, the captains, the electricians, the technicians, the group members and the ground in-charges. Many of our former students have also come forward to help us in different ways. I am open to suggestions that help to enrich the programme, but only if it fits in the big plan. When so many people work together, there are bound to be differences of opinion, and it is for the leader to tackle them amicably and with understanding so that the work can be done in a happy atmosphere and harmoniously. Finally, for all of us it is an offering to the Mother, so we try and put in our best.

You would perhaps want to know how I chose these themes. Each has a story. It was in the year

1987. I was in Paris on vacation. My brother Ajit Sarkar and his wife Selvi Sarkar had by then created an Indian Cultural Centre, "Soleil d'Or" where many activities were taught. I happened to attend an International Folk Dance festival in the Netherlands where they were participating. What an experience! The seed was sown, and it started to take shape in my mind and on my return I told Dada that I would like to do the Indian Folk Dances for 2nd Dec. He encouraged me. I had 2 years to plan and get everything ready. We finally performed the folk dances and the sports of the different States of India and titled it, "Mother India, one in soul, in forms diverse". It was an unforgettable experience.

The second programme was for the Golden Jubilee of our school in 1993 and the theme (in the Mother's words): "Let us work as we pray, for indeed work is the body's best prayer to the Divine." These are words of the Mother which, as a child, I had seen framed and hung on the wall of every department.

One important feature of the Golden Jubilee celebrations was the participation of our former students, the alumni. More than 250 ex-students of all age groups came from all corners of the world. They all came to be a part of this wonderful experiment; it was their home coming. That year the number of participants was more than 900. For the former students I chose the "Torch Drill" as "all our students who have gone out into the world are the torch bearers of the Mother and Sri Aurobindo". I remember, this item was such a success that after the programme was over, they had to repeat it, so that all the participants could see it. The first time they were all on the ground and could not see it. The whole month of practice in November was full of joy and it finished all too soon, but it will always be very memorable for all the participants.

The next programme was in 2003, "The Rhythms of the World." I had again gone to Europe on vacation in 2000, and was at Brussels at my nephew Mihir's place. At a media library I happened to come across a set of international



The former students' Torch Drill (1993)

folk dance music with the accompanying books. I at once asked Mihir if he could copy the music for me and also photocopy the books. That was soon done. On my return, after I had got Dada's full backing (for the idea as well as the significant expenses of the costumes), I began to work very hard for months to learn the dances from the books. Then like a miracle I was introduced to a lady who knew quite a few folk dances and who also helped me with the designing of the costumes. In the meantime some of our former students, who have tailoring units in Pondicherry, happily did all the stitching of the costumes free at the expense of their work. They told me it was their offering to the Mother and to the institution where they had grown up. To top it all, sometime in mid-November one of our former students came forward with a very generous contribution for the 2nd December expenses. Dada thanked the person with all his heart and told me, "If you are sincere in your work, Mother always sees that you get help". As I have said, in all my ventures, I have got a lot of help from all sides, and I take it as the Mother's Grace.

What is the theme of this year's programme? It seems it includes drills which had been done in front of the Mother. You are also planning to use projections on a large screen. Can you tell us what the overall idea is?

The theme of this year's programme is "THOSE MEMORABLE YEARS" (Physical Education in Sri Aurobindo Ashram).

I have been a part of physical education here from the very beginning, and I have seen the

Department of Physical Education grow under the Mother's guidance. Today, the children and the new members don't even know that the Mother has given so much of her time to build this place with the help of some sadhaks. She put in front of us the true aim of physical education.



From the 2nd Dec programme based on International Folk Dances (2003)

She found in Dada a perfect instrument for her work on the physical plane. He along with many more dedicated sadhaks have made this possible. Today what we take for granted is the fruit of their labour and sacrifice. I wanted to show how all these activities that are done here have evolved slowly; nothing was pre-planned. So, I thought before all this is forgotten it would be good if I could document it.

Yes, we are trying to re-do most of the activities that we had done in front of the Mother and which she had appreciated and encouraged so much. I wanted to re-create a bit of that atmosphere, when the Mother used to be present during all our activities. That is how I got the idea of doing some projections on the big screen.

Along with preparing for the programme, you are working on a book about the history of physical education in the Ashram and the Mother's involvement with the children when she used to come out during the 50s. Can you tell us about it?

I have already told you why I started to document the growth of physical education here in the Ashram. The Mother has given so much of her time to this activity. I started to write relying

on my memory. But I realized that memory could falter, so I started to interview the people who were still around. Many of them don't remember and many are no longer present amongst us. So I consulted the PED documents and records, the *Bulletins*, some books written by Dada and other sadhaks. I thought if we put many photos the readers would be able to relate to all that we were speaking about and it would be very interesting. I very strongly feel the Mother had her plans, I was just the instrument. Once I started to work, help came from the most unexpected quarters. To whomsoever I went for help, readily accepted. Some of our former students and friends who work at the Archives were very enthusiastic and suggested that we could also include all the activities of the Mother and her involvement with the children when she was coming out during the 50s. They are all helping me in the making of this book. There is so much of goodwill and help from different quarters. I strongly believe it is the Mother's wish. We hope to bring it out for the Mother's birthday 21st February 2013. It will be our offering to Her.



From the 2nd Dec programme based on International Folk Dances (2003)

I must say, it has been a very big work for me, but I have enjoyed every moment of it, as I have relived all those years with the Mother. I have felt her Presence all the time with me. ❀

The first part of this interview first appeared in SportSpirit, a Students' Magazine, published by PED.

Dear Alumni

*The Board of Trustees of **The Golden Chain Fraternity** felt that clearly defining and communicating the Vision and Mission of the Trust would improve the focus for its activities and forward planning. The following formulation, it believes, provides a wide umbrella for the various activities that are possible for the alumni to come together and assist, in any manner possible, with humility and gratitude to The Mother, the institution that has provided us the foundation and the tools with which we are building our lives:*

VISION STATEMENT:

The Golden Chain Fraternity exists to serve, as an act of gratitude to The Mother, the SAICE and the Ashram community in any manner possible.

MISSION STATEMENT:

To encourage alumni to participate actively, in any manner convenient, in the community; to exchange ideas; to attend events; to volunteer; to create new ways for alumni to stay connected to and draw inspiration from each other and the SAICE and to contribute to the continuing uniqueness of our institution.

We shall seek to achieve this by remaining conscious of and adhering to our **core values** of:

- Being faithful to the teachings of Sri Aurobindo and The Mother.
- Recognising that there are many approaches to the Truth.
- Allowing diversity to flourish without seeking to impose any specific thought process.

Vision Statement: An aspirational description of what an organization would like to achieve or accomplish in the long-term future — i.e broader / longer term.

Mission Statement: A mission statement defines what an organization is, why it exists, its reason for being. — i.e. more specific and shorter/medium term.

Core Values: Core values are also called guiding principles because they form a solid core of who you are, what you believe, and who you want to be going forward.

P.T.O. for another important announcement....

SALE OF A MAJOR PORTION OF THE SWARNABHOOMI LAND

The Board of Trustees of The Golden Chain Fraternity (GCF) wishes to advise that after due consideration, deliberation and much heart-burn, it has been decided to sell a major portion of the Swarnabhoomi land (including building, bore-well, etc.).

GCF had purchased this land, thanks to the benevolence of some alumni, further to a request from Prakash-bhai for Ashram related parties to acquire land bordering Merveille to provide a kind of security buffer zone from the ongoing sand quarrying and to this end we are glad to have been of some assistance for these past 10 years.

During these years, we have attempted to the best of our abilities to generate some interest and participation in activities on the land. Regrettably, these have not borne fruit and for various reasons, the alumni fraternity has been unable to respond with the interest or commitment needed to keep this going.

Given the above, we are now faced with increasing expenses to no clear and justifiable purpose to continue our presence there on a long term basis. Our current financial position does not enable us to bear this regular monetary outflow.

It has therefore been decided that, other than about 1 acre of land immediately adjoining Merveille where the Service Tree is growing, the rest of the land shall be sold off. In case any alumni are interested, they may please email office@goldenchainfraternity.org.

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*Be simple,
Be happy,
Remain quiet,
Do your work as well as you can,
Keep yourself always open towards me —
This is all that is asked of you.*

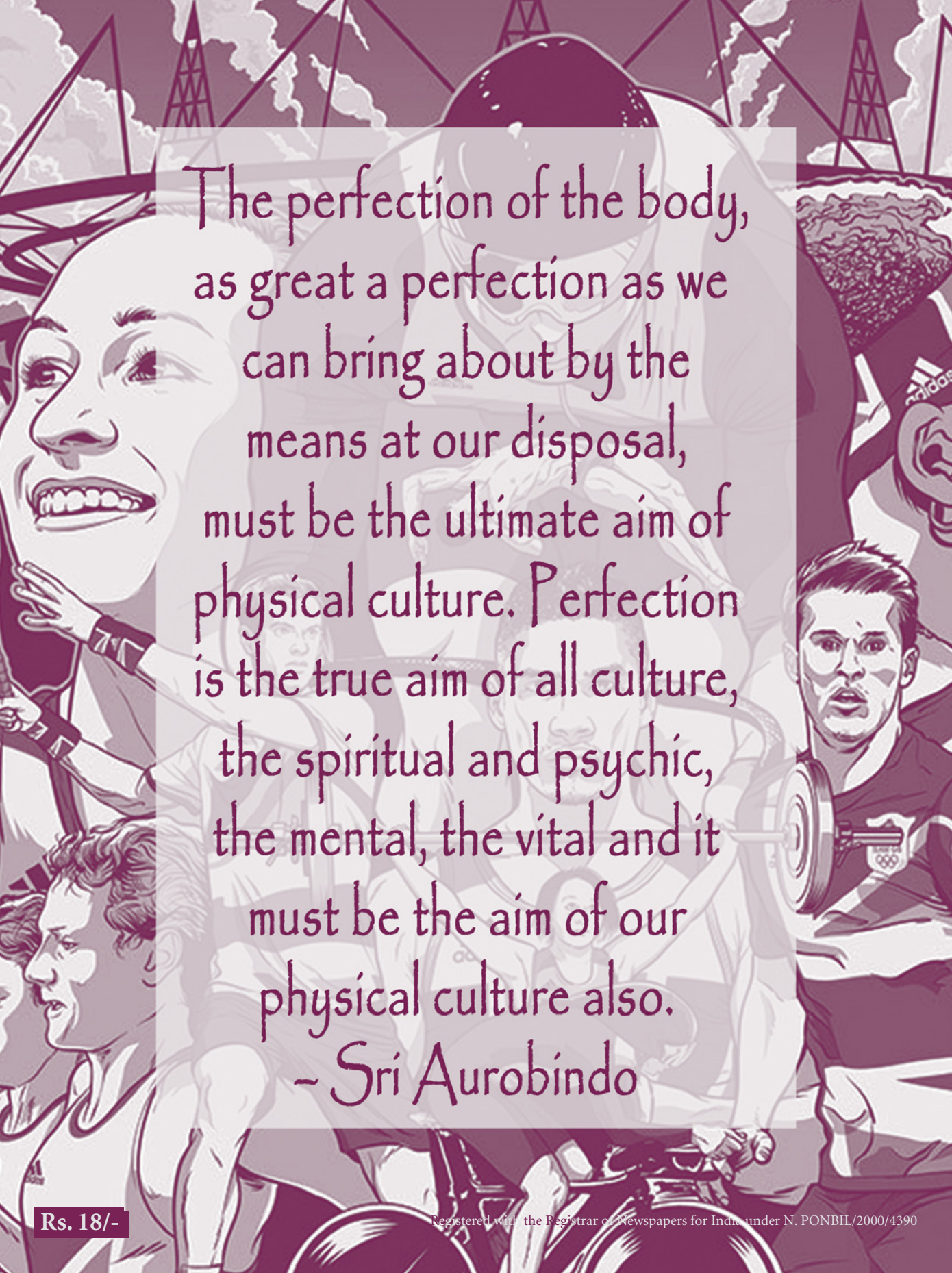
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must be the ultimate aim of
physical culture. Perfection
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the mental, the vital and it
must be the aim of our
physical culture also.
~ Sri Aurobindo

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