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The Golden Chain

Alumni Journal of Sri Aurobindo International Centre of Education



MOTHER IN PARIS

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

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

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

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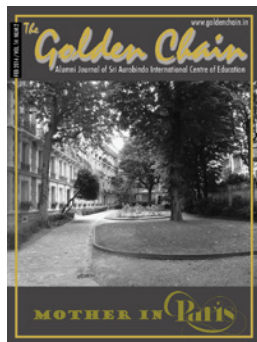
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On the Cover:

A view of the house at 9, Rue du Val de Grâce where the Mother stayed.

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THE EDITORS' PAGE

by Sunayana Panda '79

We had been eagerly waiting for this year to dawn. And now here it is — 2014. On 29th March it will be 100 years since the Mother came to Pondicherry for the first time. In fact, more important than her arrival in Pondicherry is her meeting with Sri Aurobindo. The very day she arrived she went to meet him. From that meeting starts everything else: the beginning of the Ashram and its development. Even the very fact that you are holding an issue of *The Golden Chain* and reading it is also connected to that meeting.

Ironically, many people in the world will mark this year as the 100th year of the First World War. This is an event that changed the world forever. It was a shock to the collective consciousness, the sheer scale of which was unprecedented. Even in the smallest village in France you can find a memorial to the soldiers who gave up their lives for their country. In Victoria Station as well as in many other stations in London one can see plaques where the names of those who died in the two World Wars can be seen. We in India, however, are only vaguely aware of what happened in various parts of the world during that first war that engulfed the whole world.

The Mother's meeting with Sri Aurobindo and the breaking out of the First World War are not totally unconnected. Those who have some insight know that all that happens in the world is an outcome of the Forces which act invisibly — the Hostile Forces and the Divine Force. We know this in our minds but it isn't until we come face to face with the reality of the world and the power of these forces that we realize how true it is. If we are concerned only with the little details of everyday life then we can easily miss the larger picture.

When I had just finished *Knowledge* we were once rehearsing a dance for a 1st December programme for the anniversary of the School. It was choreographed in the contemporary style by one

of the Ashram dancers. The theme of the dance performance was evolution and there were many short pieces showing the philosophy behind the growth of consciousness. There was one particular piece towards the end of the performance about this clash of the forces. I was in charge of the rehearsals for a few evenings. One evening I stood in front of the stage and called out in a loud voice, "Please get ready for your entrance. Can Truth, Light and Love please stand near the left wing and, if you are warmed up, can Falsehood, Ignorance and Death please come to the right wing." From where I was standing I could see the three male dancers in black costumes come hurrying to the right wing while the three women dressed in white were still taking their time. "Truth, please can you hurry up," I called out as the person doing the role of Truth came slowly to the point from where she was supposed to enter the stage. When everyone was in place I called out, "Music!" and the dance began.

They were all very good dancers and I stood back and watched their skillful movements and I remember thinking what a good choreography it was. I was very young then and could watch that dance with my focus on the graceful movements because these were notions in my mind — Truth, Falsehood, Love, Death ... Today I don't think I would watch such a dance without thinking of all that is happening across the world, all that the media brings to us every day. One understands with time that everything that happens around us is finally the play of Forces.

A century has passed since the Mother met Sri Aurobindo and that led to their collaborating and working together. Just as the clouds of war were gathering on one side of the world so were the Divine Forces coming together in another. If we step back a little we can see that their work continues behind the scene and we are all a part of it. ❧

DEBATING CULTURE

Anirban Ganguly '97, better known to his friends in the Ashram as Bumba, is the author of the new book Debating Culture (ISBN 13: 978-81-246-0703-9, published by D.K. Printworld (P) Ltd., New Delhi, 2013). The book is divided into two parts. The first part is about those intellectuals, or thought-leaders, who made independent India turn towards her own culture. These include Swami Vivekananda, Ananda Coomaraswamy, Sri Aurobindo and Sister Nivedita, etc. In the second part he writes about other figures that influenced the growth of Indian culture, then briefly discusses the apathy and neglect with which culture is treated in the national scheme of development. A copy of this book is now available at the Ashram Library for those who wish to read it. Anirban has been working in the field of history, culture and research for many years. He answers our questions.

Can you tell us something about your transition from the Ashram to your doctoral thesis at Jadavpur University?

The transition went through a number of phases. It is very interesting that for my academic pursuits and quest I became linked to Jadavpur University which is, for me and for those of us who are aware of the genesis of the national education movement, the institution which grew out of the Bengal National College of which Sri Aurobindo was the first Principal. So after SAICE, I did my Post-graduate Diploma in Journalism & Mass Communication from Jadavpur University. I had applied and was called to meet the director of the department who had heard of our system of education. He allowed me to sit for the entrance examination saying that if I proved myself there was nothing to prevent me from enrolling for the course even though I did not have a so-called "mark sheet" which is the usual passport to academia. After this, while working, I went on to do my Masters in International Relations from Annamalai University. I chose the subject because I had a fascination for it and since Annamalai was the only University offering a distance course, I enrolled. In 2007, while I was in Kolkata, a chance meeting with Professor Indrani Sanyal, coordinator of the newly founded Centre for Sri Aurobindo Studies at Jadavpur University, proved to be the turning point. She invited me to become active at the Centre and encouraged me to enroll in a doctoral programme. One of

the most active academicians in spreading Sri Aurobindo's thought and vision, Professor Sanyal agreed to become my guide, all the while humbly acknowledging that in this matter there was a lot that she could learn from us, though I have often tried to divest her of that belief. It was her encouragement, direction and unstinting support that really opened up the intellectual world, the world of research, ideas, etc., for me. As a coordinator she has vigorously pushed through the publication programme of the Centre and it is largely due to her efforts, made against great odds, that we now have a steady academic programme in Sri Aurobindo Studies.

How did you decide to do your PhD on Sri Aurobindo?

I had always wanted to do a PhD on Sri Aurobindo, not for any academic gain but for the pure satisfaction and joy it would give me. One former Vice Chancellor was quite flabbergasted and perhaps at his wits' end when I told him that I was doing the PhD because it would give me an unalloyed joy to be able to spend five years of my life focused on the Master, on his ideas, his world, his contemporaries, and that my main aim was not to enter the university or the college system. It was perhaps for the first time that he heard such a thing. Interestingly, this gentleman had also visited the Ashram in Pondicherry, but had obviously failed to imbibe or internalize the fundamental goals of our education system there and that is why his jaw-dropping surprise. So I

was on the lookout for a topic when Prof. Sanyal asked me to look at Sri Aurobindo's contribution to the philosophy of education. Her late husband, Professor S.K. Sanyal, a former Vice-Chancellor of Jadavpur University, was also enthusiastic and encouraged me to undertake the research. That's when the idea came to me of doing a sort of intellectual history approach to the period when Sri Aurobindo participated in the National Movement and was a leading light of the national education initiative. In my study I made a survey of that entire period, keeping Sri Aurobindo at the centre; the title given to it was, "Sri Aurobindo and the Quest for a Philosophy of National Education". It is this work on Sri Aurobindo which has, in essence, turned me into a researcher.



Can you tell us something about what you are doing now?

I am currently engaged in research on civilisational, historical issues and have begun working on my next projects which study the efforts of nationalist history writing and the quest for ethics in politics in India. Another project that I have undertaken and am trying to focus on is developing a counter-narrative to the perception of India, especially from the 17th century onwards, from when our systems, our society and our structures were being gradually deconstructed by the colonial system. When going through some of the primary documents I was constantly reminded of how Sri Aurobindo has described this as a "rodent process". How were we actually subjugated? What were the methods and mechanisms of

subjugation used? Were we as a people, as a civilization and as a society really what a section of Western and Indian observers made us out to be? I am also working in the field of education and have had the opportunity of being on the expert committee constituted by the CBSE for formulating a syllabus for classes XI-XII on the Knowledge, Traditions & Practices of India. Through my work I have come across a number of stellar minds, some of them deep thinkers on civilisational and cultural issues. There are of course other dimensions to the work that allow me an opportunity to interact with and know firsthand the various challenges facing our polity today, in addition to formulating policy input and delivering talks at universities across the country. In addition, I regularly write columns and articles in some of the leading national dailies and news portals. My wife Anuttama who was also educated in the ideals of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, gave up a corporate job, deciding to devote her energies to some other quest in life and she has always been greatly encouraging of my work. She is the one who constantly pushes me to out-perform myself and was a great support in my doctoral work and in the completion of the present book as well. Some of my friends in the Ashram keep encouraging me with their comments and views too.

Your book has recently been published. What made you choose the personalities about whom you have written?

I chose them mainly because they were Sri Aurobindo's contemporaries or were among those who were inspired by him and others for whom Sri Aurobindo himself had words of appreciation. Sister Nivedita was his contemporary in Bengal and had collaborated with him in the revolutionary movement and had taken charge of the *Karmayogin*. Sri Aurobindo acknowledges Swami Vivekananda's influence on the revolutionary movement and on thought movement in India. Ananda Coomaraswamy derived a great deal from Sri Aurobindo, who also appreciated his work, while Woodroffe finds mention in Sri Aurobindo's *Defense of Indian Culture*. K.M. Munshi and Dr. Syama Prasad Mookerjee

ABOUT THE BOOK

From the Blurb:

Barring the political agenda, the vital forces associated with India's nationalist movement were moral, literary and artistic. Many cultural protagonists were vocal in saying that the regeneration of our society could happen through the revival of our arts and culture, not by politics and economics alone. This impulse was quite visible in cultural thought-leaders like Ananda Coomaraswamy, Sri Aurobindo, Swami Vivekananda, Sister Nivedita, John Woodroffe, Syamaprasad Mookerjee, K.M. Munshi and Jawaharlal Nehru. Rabindranath Tagore made a strong case for developing a complete and moving orb of Indian culture.

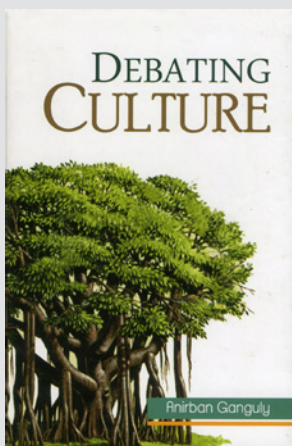
This book delves deep into the vision of these thought-leaders in making India a culturally strong nation, and warns us in different ways against becoming insularly modern. These personalities remind us of our unique past and time-tested virtues and values, and the criticality of sustaining them while being 'modern' in many ways. They exult in our past and call upon us to be the torch-bearers of this legacy. This volume, while doing an in-depth study of these Indian cultural activists laments the lackadaisical attitude of the leaders of independent India in maintaining and promoting our art forms and long-revered culture. A renewed effort in rejuvenating our culture is the need of the hour, especially when its moorings seem to be loosening and its symbols dilut-

ing. It is an irony to call for the recognition of Indian culture in India!

*

From the foreword by Michel Danino

Whether he explores Swami Vivekananda, A. K. Coomaraswamy, Sister Nivedita, or K. M. Munshi, Anirban Ganguly displays a flair for picking out the most stimulating of their thoughts on issues ranging from aesthetics, artistic sensitivity or national education to cultural integration — in a word, what constitutes Indian identity. There is a lurking suspicion that as a nation, we will be time and again forced by circumstances to return to those essential questions. Our prominent intellectuals are confident of having once and for all relegated them to some dark cellar, with neat labels of 'nationalism', 'exclusivism', or even 'chauvinism' stuck on them as on dinosaur bones, but they forget that things in India



move on a longer time scale and that these issues will not leave us, because they are in us.

Also, they do not realise that the thinkers presented here were, in fact, far more inclusive than they themselves are, but insisted on a clear foundation for Indian identity. Today's rallying cry is for 'many identities', which is of course fine as far as it goes, but without such a clear foundation — in effect, a mosaic rather than a banyan tree. Time will tell which model is more sustainable; in the mean time, the thinkers presented here will continue to water the ancient banyan; let us see whether it can still sprout new shoots.

were also greatly influenced by Sri Aurobindo and have written of their indebtedness to him. Others, such as the philosopher K.C. Bhattacharya, who was Sri Aurobindo's contemporary and once a great name in the field of comparative studies of culture and ideas, and Dharampal, a social scientist and historian, both in their own way and through their own work, grappled with

the civilisational-cultural-intellectual challenges that India faced. Of course Nehru was included as an aside and to bring in another dimension to the study.

How has this book been received by the general public?

It seems to have been well received from the feedback that I keep getting. After all, time will

tell. However, I wish we had a more proactive peer review-support community, like some other academic groups have. It was really an eye opener to see that there was interest in the issues that the book discusses. After all culture and expressions of culture and identity are things that permeate our everyday life. One of the senior academicians and a leading public intellectual, a mentor of sorts for me, who released the book said something interesting. He said that the book won't sell. Why? Because it speaks well of India and of Indian nationalist thinkers! Michel Danino, historian and archeologist, was kind enough to write a foreword which set the ideological dimension to the work. I now only hope that those who promised to write reviews of it and received complimentary copies of the book live up to their promise!

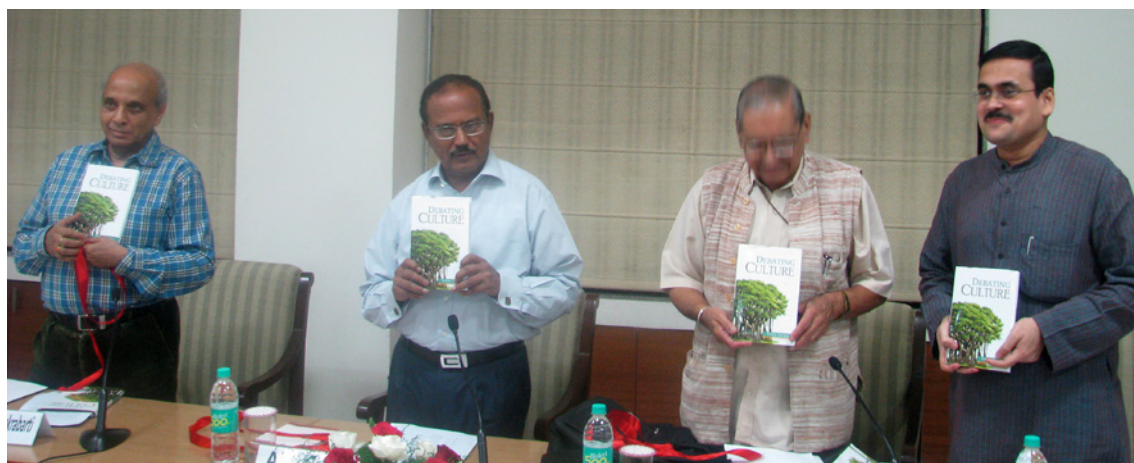
How is Sri Aurobindo viewed by non-devotees in the circles in which you work?

Within the circle in which I work, Sri Aurobindo is one of the most revered figures. They don't have to be devotees but they recognize him as one of the most influential Sages of modern India; a revolutionary, a Yogi, a philosopher of education, a great nationalist, a cultural-nationalist and one of the foremost interpreters of India. Increasingly Sri Aurobindo's contribution to the philosophy of education is being recognized and his ideas and those of the Mother are being discussed and referred to. This is something which

is heartening. I was pleasantly surprised the other day when I had gone to attend an education summit in Gujarat where over sixty Vice-Chancellors had gathered to discuss challenges facing Indian universities in the 21st century. The Commissioner of Higher & Technical Education dwelt for quite some time, in her inaugural speech, on Sri Aurobindo's vision of education and spoke of its principal components. There are many instances like this. In fact in Gujarat I visited the Children's University in Gandhinagar, the first of its kind and supported by the Government of Gujarat, which was developed with the inspiring vision of our Masters. The interaction with the faculty was stimulating and I was deeply moved to see how the concept of education vis-à-vis the child and the teacher, as developed here in the Ashram and enunciated by the Masters, were the guiding lights of the experiment.

What do you think will be the attitude of children born now towards the whole chapter of the freedom movement?

Obviously those born now would not know much about the freedom movement other than what they are taught in a very insipid and compartmentalized manner in school. Not all are fortunate, like those of us at the Ashram, to have grown up under the tutelage of those who belonged to families of revolutionaries. I still remember the exhibition that we put up in 1989 on



At the book release (left to right): Dr. Dilip K. Chakrabarti (eminent archaeologist & Professor Emeritus, University of Cambridge), Shri Ajit Doval, K.C. (former Director, Intelligence Bureau, Govt of India & currently Director, Vivekananda International Foundation, New Delhi), Professor Kapil Kapoor (former Pro-Vice Chancellor, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi & editor, Encyclopedia of Hinduism), the author.

Sri Aurobindo and the Maniktollah lads. I still recall with great joy the fully three hours long play “Agnijuger Agnikatha” that we enacted under the direction of Gopal-da of Corner House and how for days on end he would put up a board with photographs and passages from that period and from Sri Aurobindo’s political life. The dialogue still comes back to me. I had the inglorious distinction of playing the role of Naren Gossain, the approver who tried to implicate Sri Aurobindo in the Alipore Jail but who was finally shot dead by Satyen and Kanai. These left a deep imprint on me and have engendered in me a lifelong interest in the freedom movement and in research work. Unless students are exposed to such activities and approaches, unless they have teachers who feel the way our teachers felt about the freedom movement, this chapter shall forever remain vague for them. Sometime in 2011 I was invited by a leading magazine for teachers, published in Hyderabad, *Teacher Plus*, to write for their special issue on the teaching of history. I narrated how teaching about the freedom movement could be made more interesting and lively for students.

Otherwise their attitude will be at best indifferent and at worst confused. We have some great historians of the freedom movement, among them R.C. Majumdar and I remember Beni-da exposing us to Majumdar’s masterly three volume *History of the Freedom Movement in India* and how since then his work has become one of the permanent anchors of my academic quest. For too long we have lost ourselves in intellectually dissecting the movement and losing out on the spirit that animated it. When teaching young minds it is the spirit that needs to be focused on.

Is there anything you would like to add?

Yes, that I am very grateful to you for noticing my eminently un-readable book on Facebook — interesting how technology has put me back in touch with a whole phase in life that had supposedly passed — and for taking the trouble to go through it and for graciously suggesting this interview and discussion. It is a great feeling and an honour! It is through this that I have felt again, after a long time, the pull of *The Golden Chain* — it is true that this magic chain can stretch for eternity! ❧

A true happiness in this world is the right terrestrial aim of man, and true happiness lies in the finding and maintenance of a natural harmony of spirit, mind and body. A culture is to be valued to the extent to which it has discovered the right key of this harmony and organised its expressive motives and movements. And a civilisation must be judged by the manner in which all its principles, ideas, forms, ways of living work to bring that harmony out, manage its rhythmic play and secure its continuance or the development of its motives. A civilisation in pursuit of this aim may be predominantly material like modern European culture, predominantly mental and intellectual like the old Graeco-Roman or predominantly spiritual like the still persistent culture of India.

India’s central conception is that of the Eternal, the Spirit here incased in matter, involved and immanent in it and evolving on the material plane by rebirth of the individual up the scale of being till in mental man it enters the world of ideas and realm of conscious morality, dharma. This achievement, this victory over unconscious matter develops its lines, enlarges its scope, elevates its levels until the increasing manifestation of the sattwic or spiritual portion of the vehicle of mind enables the individual mental being in man to identify himself with the pure spiritual consciousness beyond Mind. India’s social system is built upon this conception; her philosophy formulates it; her religion is an aspiration to the spiritual consciousness and its fruits; her art and literature have the same upward look; her whole Dharma or law of being is founded upon it. Progress she admits, but this spiritual progress, not the externally self-unfolding process of an always more and more prosperous and efficient material civilisation. It is her founding of life upon this exalted conception and her urge towards the spiritual and the eternal that constitute the distinct value of her civilisation. And it is her fidelity, with whatever human shortcomings, to this highest ideal that has made her people a nation apart in the human world.

Sri Aurobindo (*The Foundations of Indian Culture*, SABCL 14:2)

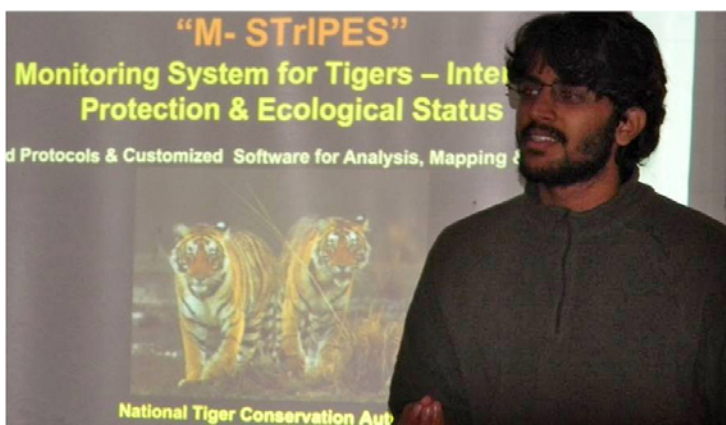
IN THE WILD

Ruchir Sharma '11H is among the rare ones from our fraternity of former students of the School to have gone into the field of wildlife conservation. Working in nature and with nature is a part of our education but to dedicate one's time and energy so wholeheartedly to this activity is quite uncommon. We asked Ruchir what made him share his life with tigers, elephants and rhinos. We share with you his answers.

How did you get interested in wildlife?

I was always interested in wildlife. As a matter of fact, over the past few years I've come to observe that at a young age everyone is interested or curious about wildlife. My interest was cultivated due to the presence of a dog at home. I used to snuggle up with my dog Tipu, (named after Tipu Sultan by my granddad) under the bed or under the table and to resolve any fights with my family I used to sit with Tipu in his den in the garden. Then there were all the birds and cats we rescued intermittently. Also I used to mimic my elder brother Rohan and pretend I liked everything he did just to annoy him, which I did successfully. But thanks to that obsession of mine as a little boy I also got interested in dinosaurs, sharks and other large predators. Crocodiles and snakes came along with dinosaurs and so Rohan and I also shared a curiosity about snakes. It was in '97 I think, when mom was posted as a Lieutenant Colonel to the Military Hospital in Nasirabad, that we came across a snake bite victim. My mom thought it right to introduce us to the jawan who had been bitten by a Russel's Viper and had survived, after being injected with vials of anti-venom. The facts surrounding his bite were incredible, but when we saw him, which was a month after the bite, it left an image of awe and wonder; his entire torso had patches of dark blue, due to internal bleeding, (the main effect of haemotoxin, the poison found in viperidae, the viper family) and also had some patches on his abdominal area, chest, back, shoulders and thighs. While it was a little scary to see a man literally all black and blue, it gave birth in my mind to this unending fascination and fondness for snakes.

I soon began to learn the art of catching snakes from Rajiv Bhatt '91 in Auroville. Whenever we found time in our vacations, we'd run to Rajiv and pester him to let us hold snakes he had already caught. In the years 2000/2001, both Rohan and I got admission to the Ashram School, and my snake-catching habits were put on hold for several years, until I heard from someone that



At a training for Tiger monitoring, the serious part of my job. (2012)

Atma handles snakes in the dairy. So I refreshed my desire to catch snakes and from then onwards, there was no looking back. There was a time when my dad would walk into my room and find snakes on my bed and I would justify it by saying that they were sunning themselves. My dad was often spooked for me, but mostly just disgusted. He'd constantly say, "Why can't you catch something nicer, something that's actually nice to look at?!" My mom was very supportive, though she did have anti-venom tucked in her bag just in case I ever needed a shot!

As I said earlier, every child has an interest or curiosity for the wonders of the natural world. I was lucky enough to have a very understanding family who allowed me to continue pursuing my

interest, even though they had to deal with snakes in my room or reports of me being chased by tigers or rhinos!



Independant is something one becomes the moment one is in the forest. My friend Ashish and I making dinner. (2011)

How did you get connected to the WWF?

I heard from a family friend that there was a project on large mammals in the Terai of Uttar Pradesh looking for volunteers. I got in touch and decided to go. There was a part of me that was uncertain about it and a lot of the people I knew were even more uncertain, given the fact that my interests in wildlife, in the dairy, were on a one-day-a-week basis and living in the forest would be a lot harder, not to overlook the fact that I adore creature comforts and I'm not patient or tolerant of very many things. But it was my grandparents who told me that I would always succeed no matter what I tried and that I should take on any task, regardless of what anyone else has to say; I just had to believe in myself. And before I knew it I was in the Terai, studying the ecology of tigers. The first few weeks were incredibly tough — no electricity, damp forest quarters, basic amenities, and sub-zero temperatures. It would be fair to say that I hated it for the first few weeks. I mean the work was exciting, but the life was horrid. Every now and then one had to go to the loo in the forest (you know, dig a hole and do your business) but before long I began to love every aspect of it. After six months as an intern, I was hired by WWF in the capacity of part-time consultant for tiger monitoring in the Dudhwa Tiger Reserve and the following year, I became *Project Officer* —

Rhino monitoring, heading the rhino monitoring program here.

What does your work involve?

My work consists primarily of coordinating the rhino monitoring in Uttar Pradesh. That constitutes the daily monitoring of the reintroduced rhino population at Dudhwa Tiger Reserve and the regular monitoring of rhinos which have strayed into the reserve, generally from Nepal.

In Dudhwa we began a very unique monitoring program which was the first of its kind in this country. We created unique identification cards for each rhino based on their facial and other physical characteristics. This system was developed with the help of the Zoological Society of London and WWF International. It was first tried in Nepal in the Bardia National Park by WWF-Nepal and the NTNC (National Trust for Nature Conservation). After its success there it was tried in Dudhwa. The ID monitoring system was created to monitor a rhino population more effectively.



One of the advantages to have permits to be in the forest is that we aren't bound to park timings - hence we run into animals in the middle of the night!

This tiger refused to budge from the road, and we stayed in front of him for a good duration, till he came closer than ten feet! (2011) Fun fact, this particular male, we've been seeing him for the last three years - his home range stretches over approx. 200 sq.kms!

When it comes to monitoring tigers or leopards, which are otherwise known as cryptic mammals, one uses motion sensing cameras, predominantly known as camera-traps, to 'capture' a particular individual. All cryptic mammals have a coat print which is unique to each individual (hence cryptic) and in order to differentiate one

individual from another a comparison of photos of the same flank suffices. (Worthy of a mention here is that each flank of an individual is unique, i.e., the stripes on the left flank of a tiger will be different from the stripes on the right flank of the same individual.) Rhinos aren't cryptic mammals and so one needs a slightly more comprehensive method to distinguish different animals.



Occasionally, the car stalls in the wrong place at the wrong time. The moment our car stopped, this rhino appeared, two feet away from our car. There wasn't much we could do, so I decided to make the most of it and snap this photo. She was nice enough to not trouble us... (2012)

In 1978, Andrew Laurie did his PhD in Nepal on the Greater One-Horned Rhinoceros and this study still stands as the most comprehensive work on the Indian rhino. He found that one could identify individuals by the size and shape of their horn, the cuts and nicks on their ears and the smaller skin folds in their already present large skin folds. This method has been successful in identifying all five species of rhinos found in the world today. Using the same methods as Laurie, the ID based monitoring program compiles the record of each individual present in a given area and then using photographs and remote-sensed data from GPS handsets, it keeps a record of the health, family and whereabouts of each individual. I collect and collate the data, process it and provide it to the park management and together we make decisions on what's best for the management of the rhino population.

My work entails everything from riding on an elephant's back all day, (and sometimes requires sleeping on an elephant's back; some which are

comfortable, others not so) to photographing and observing the behavior of rhinos, to sampling rhino dung looking for worms, and sometimes, unfortunately, observing post-mortems of deceased animals; unfortunate, not because of all the blood and gore in post-mortems, no, that bit I enjoy, but because of the general tension during the death of a protected species. All through my work, I live in the forest with the forest department staff who have become like family; we are constantly looking out for each other.

In which parts of India have you already worked?

I've worked only in the Terai region of India, in the Nandhour Wildlife Sanctuary in Uttarakhand (when it wasn't declared as a protected area), in Pilibhit Forest Division, in North Kheri and South Kheri Forest Divisions, and the Dudhwa Tiger Reserve in Uttar Pradesh.

What is the most enjoyable part of your work?

I can't think of any one aspect of my work which I could rank above the rest. I hear multiple voices in my head, mostly of other people saying, "It's cool how you don't have to spend money to live in a national park"; "You have so much freedom inside a protected area"; "You get to live with animals"; "You get paid to roam around inside a park" and many such things, but if there is one aspect I had to pick, I'd say that I'm happy that I'm not sitting in a cubicle day after day. My office has often been a wooden *machan* (watch tower), where I am sitting looking at a hundred swamp deer and hearing the peaceful sounds of thousands of birds while writing my reports.

What is the most difficult part about your work?

To sum it up in one word — awareness. One speaks of saving the tiger and stopping poaching and then blames the government for not doing their job. In a sense it is correct; the government is at most times not really interested in doing its job. Interestingly, everyone speaks of conservation, but no one really understands it. I've come to really understand it only in the last year.

When most urban people are asked what they feel about the protection of wildlife the answers

are almost always consistent: "People are the worst animals, killing wildlife for pleasure". We are happy to blame others and list causes, but very few of us are willing to step up and do anything about it; this is human behavior in every aspect of life. In rural areas priorities are quite different and in order to survive, to cook food, to build homes, the forest is the only resource. It's easy for someone with twenty-four hours of electricity, living in the comfort of a cement or concrete home to say that people shouldn't live off forests. But for someone who has lived his or her life depending entirely on the resources available from the forest, for them to not depend on the forest because of an ideal is too much to fathom. Education plays a huge role; it's next to impossible to explain to the uninitiated and uneducated about the fragile eco-system and the role each specie plays in it. One needs to spread awareness and unfortunately, those who are aware are comfortable with keeping their thoughts to themselves. We think of it as a choice, not as a moral responsibility, which is what it's closest to.



There aren't any bathing showers in the forest, well, at least not man-made. Here I am, making the most of my elephant Pavankali on a hot summer day.

How can one inculcate the love of nature in children, considering that most urban children are practically addicted to the internet and cut off from the real world?

My family in New Delhi came up with an initiative called "Teens for Tigers". It was an attempt to introduce urban children to our wildlife. Coincidentally, their website, www.teensfortigers.com,

is the first and only website I've ever made! But not deviating from the subject, while the exposed group did become more aware of some of the problems, it was not to the extent that it would cause them to worry; these days the concerns of



My field site. Notice that the three elephants are almost hidden in the grass - the grass is often 4 metres tall! So in order to track rhinos in this habitat, I have a total of 9 elephants. (2013)

youngsters are exams and college applications. And it certainly doesn't help to have your parents breathing down your neck. Each of the parents we met said wonderful things about the "Teens for Tigers" initiative, but not one felt that their child should spend time in the forests, because exams were far more important. But in a sense, that's not their fault; the world is full of cut-throat competition. Yet, one hopes to see at least some of them step out of the rat-race and enjoy our natural heritage.

How does your education at the Ashram help you in your work?

I've had everyone at home, at Auroville, and the Ashram ask me that. And I never seem to have an answer because education is one BIG word, much like conservation! The first thing that comes to my mind when I look at students everywhere studying and wasting their day-to-day life glued to their academic schedules is that I couldn't be more thankful that as students at the Ashram we weren't shackled to a mundane academic routine. The system of education at the Ashram gave me the freedom to think on my own, work on my own, become my own person. Sure I did take a bit too much freedom by skipping a fair amount of classes and avoiding practically every day of

sports, but that is what made me who I am and if I had another chance I'd probably repeat what I did. In a twisted sense, I learned how to misuse, and therefore, how to use freedom. While I did what I felt like, I also spent a lot of time reading what I wanted, studying what I wanted, and thinking a lot about everything. My most vivid memories are Ravi-da's classes, where we read the plays that we wanted to and I think we were among the few who read Dr. Faustus by Christopher Marlowe, a play which became an integral part of me; I've read that play to those closest to me. In Matthij's classes I read many of the famous psychologists — Freud, Jung, Skinner, William James, Assagioli and a bit of Sri Aurobindo, to get different points of view and absorb what made sense. Then there was Anu-ben; I recall almost never working in her class, but she had this faith in me that whatever I did I did for the right reasons, something which constitutes a great part of me today. And of course I owe a great debt to all the teachers who taught me and tolerated my antics! But it was this freedom, this experience of not being taught, but of being made to learn, that changed the way I perceived everything. I even remember Jhumur-di excusing Auro Shashwat and me from her *Savitri* class so that we could go catch a snake at 'Care' (which was by far the best reason to be excused from a class!). Even now I have this insatiable desire to learn, to understand and that more than anything else has been the factor that's brought me to where I am. It's thanks to what I learned from my family, at the Ashram and at Auroville which made me crazy enough to pursue a field like this wholeheartedly!

What advice would you give to youngsters who would like to do the kind of work you do?

My advice would be to go ahead and try it. Organisations like WWF-India are constantly in search of dedicated people to work with them for the betterment of the natural world. In India, given the size of our population and the size of our forests, even the state forest departments are horribly understaffed. Most people are afraid of the lifestyle, but the truth is that unless you try it out you won't know whether it suits you or not. Frankly speaking, I love the lifestyle and

if you love the forest, there isn't any reason you wouldn't like it.

Is there anything else you would like to say?

First off, my thanks to you for wanting to feature me in *The Golden Chain*. The more I understand what constitutes conservation, I realize that it is my responsibility to introduce people to this line of work. And so I'm now actually very happy to have a page to myself in *The Golden Chain*. And now I just hope that some of the youngsters at the Ashram can feel inspired to go out, take a leap of faith, one might say, and do what their heart desires. I think students like Sanjay Prasad Ganguli (HC1), and those from Atma's dairy gang, have the interest and the potential to excel in this field, and I'm certain they will. If we, as parents, teachers or just bystanders can help them nurture this interest instead of feeding them stories of horror



Forest life can often become lonely, highly unsocial, so a hobby is a must - I found mine in teaching the illiterate staff how to read and write in Hindi. (2013)

where humans and animals can't co-exist, I can't imagine why we couldn't make the world a better place, at least ecologically. And I'm certain that if a movement to introduce kids to wildlife were to begin in schools, the Ashram would be a place where everyone would gladly run to the front of the line. You know, having said that, I truly think that it would be a great way to help out by taking students for field trips to nearby National Parks or Sanctuaries, something like what Atma, Dilip and some others do during the vacations, except in a much larger way, to introduce everyone to some of our perishing wildlife wonders. ❧

ANIMAL WELFARE IN PONDICHERRY

Priti Kuberkar '83 has been trying to save animals since her childhood. "Even as a small child I used to run after kittens, puppies, goats and even piglets. It was only after I came to Pondy that I first started doing something to protect them. At the age of eight I had my first experience of animal welfare when I paid some money to the dog-catchers to release the dogs from the van," she says. "I have always wanted to create a shelter for stray dogs."

Priti had a few stray dogs sterilized by her own efforts. Then she met **Shonar Joshi** and they had a few more operations done in order to stop the street dogs from increasing their numbers. Their efforts continue even today. However in order to do things in an official way they have created an organization called "AuroJeeva".

We asked the animal lovers **Priti** and **Sanjukta Lall '73H** to tell us something about what is being done in the field of animal welfare in Pondicherry.

When did you start working for animal welfare?

Sanjukta: I started working for the voiceless animals on the streets of Pondicherry from 2009. I soon found out there were many others who have been working for the benefit of these animals for many years. In different areas of Pondicherry, different individuals have been doing whatever they could to help the dogs on the streets of their community.

Can you tell us something about the problem of street dogs?

S: Helping street dogs is indirectly helping oneself. If the community dog is vaccinated against rabies and free of disease then we have made our environment safer for ourselves and our children. If there were no unwanted puppies, our roads would be less crowded with dogs and remain clean. The female street dog has no means to protect herself from unwanted pregnancy and that is where we can pitch in by creating and implementing sterilization programmes and procedures.



Priti: Since no strategic plan has been conceived and implemented in Pondicherry, the canine population has only increased steadily and has now become a concern. The fault lies with the authorities who are meant to control the population via an ABC program (Animal Birth Control). When the dogs become too many for an area, it results in human-animal conflict, aggression, bites, disease. But if you control the number, dogs are fantastic for security, for scavenging, for keeping dogs from other areas out of their own turf and of course for companionship.

Can you tell us something about AuroJeeva?

P: AuroJeeva is a special initiative of the Sri Aurobindo Society. It's philosophy is simple — it is not about being an animal lover or not being an animal lover; it is about being part of a humane society and

an enlightened species. We would like to:

a) Apply pressure on the government to take up this issue seriously and in a legal manner. Till now there has been very little done to curb the



An ABC (Animal Birth Control) operation in progress

growing numbers and what little is done is carried out in a highly cruel and barbaric manner. We have no objections to the work being done as long as it is humanely done.

b) We would like for people from all walks of life to become more pro-active towards the issue of street dogs. For this the mindset has to change from it being someone else's problem; it would be far more effective if colonies, neighbourhoods, housing complexes took on the responsibility instead of relying on the government. It's very doable and we would be happy to provide the guidance.

What is your aim or long-term objective for AuroJeeva?

P: On the practical side, we want to control the dog population, bringing in stability and even an eventual decrease in numbers. However, there is a huge disconnect between people of Pondicherry and the street animals; there is far too much suffering and negligence and with the apathy all around, the whole atmosphere feels very heavy. This must change; that balance between man and animal must be restored; dignity of life applies to all and upliftment cannot be an idea used in isolation for one while excluding the other. It is for that that we aspire.

What is the work you have achieved in the field so far?

P: Our biggest limitation is that we don't have

our own clinic and veterinarian. Despite that, we have managed to perform 64 ABCs (Animal Birth Control) of dogs in the Ashram, Beach Road and White Town areas in less than three months. We also vaccinated 110 dogs within the boulevard zone. Regular treatment for skin problems and emergency rescues are also an ongoing part of our work. But the most important aspect is our constant attempt to make a dent in the mindset that is currently prevailing in the administration — until the whole system is reformed, we will achieve, yes, but in small bits instead of a cohesive change.

What can the common citizen do to help you?

P: Most people don't have the time or don't want to get involved with issues that don't directly concern them. Our point is that everything concerns us the minute we become citizens. And in order to achieve an ideal situation around us, an ideal atmosphere, everyone can and should



Vaccinating a street dog against rabies

participate and contribute. Clicking LIKE on Facebook isn't proactive. Community participation is the first necessary ingredient to an effective solution for anything — not just the dogs. We can always work around timings, finances and

individual capabilities but to completely absolve oneself of responsibility is being plain lazy. Get in touch with us and we will figure out how you can help with utmost respect to the limitations.

S: What we can all do is become more compassionate and kind to the community street dogs, being aware and understanding that this universe was created for them too, not only for human beings. The community dog has nowhere else to go; they are a fact of life and cannot be ignored as their presence affects the quality of our lives, living as we do in the same environment.

What kind of help have you received from the government?

P: The government hasn't really helped so far. But we hope that it will co-operate with us in a positive manner.

What kind of help have you received from your well wishers?

S: We feel the well-wishers around us are now becoming more aware and that is the beginning of help coming in.

P: We have received a little monetary aid from some well wishers and a lot of vocal and written support. However, we would like to broaden our team and unless people make this issue their own, the results we aspire for will come, but very slowly.

Do you do anything to protect animals which are living in people's homes from cruelty inflicted by their masters?

P: As a citizen, you can lodge a complaint with the police against anyone inflicting cruelty towards animals, whether they are pets or strays. Sadly though, most people look the other way as they don't wish to get involved with the police or in any altercations which may take place. This is also a mindset which needs to change.

S: We get such information, but only rarely. One day we happened to find two puppies held together on one leash that was tied to the handle of the front door of a house. So we started talking to the owner to give her suggestions for better care of the puppies; not to have them in the sun nor on such a short leash. That was when we discovered they were breeders who kept a pedigree female in order to sell her puppies and make a profit. The owner was not happy that we entered

her home to give her suggestions. Our intervention may have encouraged her to sell her puppies sooner.

What advice would you give to pet owners?

P: Firstly, if you want to get a dog, try to adopt one from the street. They make fantastic watch dogs and are extremely loving and loyal. Give them the right food and care, and they look as good as any pedigreed dog. Not to mention they come for free. Secondly, please enter into this relationship with full awareness that it is lifelong; you cannot take a pup and then dump it when tired or if you suddenly have to leave town. There is a lot of emotion involved for the animal. Third, please be responsible and have the dog neutered/spayed so that it does not inadvertently reproduce further. Fourth, please be responsible and vaccinate the dogs no matter what the cost. Fifth, please do not buy from a pet shop unless it shows you a license for selling the pet that you are interested in. Most pet shops are illegally selling dogs and flouting at least half a dozen laws set by the Animal Welfare Board of India. By buying from these, you are encouraging an illegal trade.

Is there anything you would like to add?

P: Take an active interest in your town or city and the issues that need looking into. Armchair debates, online petitions can only help a little but the real change comes when you participate more pro-actively. Stop looking elsewhere for solutions — we can all pitch in and solve a problem in half the time that the government would take.

For more details log on to www.aurojeeva.org or write to aurojeeva@gmail.com. ☸



MOTHER IN PARIS

Sunayana Panda '79

Paris! City of beauty, city of love, city of intellectuals and artists. City of beautiful bridges arching over the Seine, city of the Notre Dame cathedral stretching its arms to the sky. City of fashion, style and freedom. City of the Mother's birth. I have seen Paris in her many moods, in summer and in autumn. I have sat in the warmth of her cafés, stood in awe in her many museums and laughed in the company of friends. But today I am walking through her streets in quest of the years when the Mother lived here. The question in my heart is, "How did her upbringing in this city contribute to her personality and ultimately to her work in the world?"



On a sunny afternoon in August 2013 I find myself on Boulevard Haussmann, not far from the Paris Opera. The pavement is crowded with people out shopping, mainly tourists. I have to find a little corner to stand quietly as I take a good look at the building numbered 41. This is the house where the Mother was born. Although outwardly little has changed since it was built, this building in the 9th "arrondissement" is now occupied by offices. I take a deep breath. So, this is where the Mother started her earthly existence.



▲ ◀ 41, Boulevard Haussmann

I try to imagine that day — February 21st 1878 and the arrival of the baby girl into the Alfassa household. Who would have guessed at that time the destiny of this child?

It is well known that the Mother chose the place of her birth as well as all the other details. She even chose her own parents. We can only see in retrospect how Maurice and Mathilde Alfassa were ideally suited to bring up one who was going to be an extraordinary spiritual figure. But we shall come to that later. Let us first consider the time and the place. Paris in 1878 was an exceptional place.

Even though we have all heard of the French Revolution and how they did away with monarchy in 1789, it was not until the 1870s, almost a hundred years later, that the idea of a republic made itself permanent in the minds of the French people. In the intervening years Napoleon had declared himself Emperor and many changes and forms of government took place until the first President was elected in 1848 and it was from 1871 that the unbroken line of Presidents of France started. By the 1870s France was transforming itself into a modern country. It was in

this atmosphere where truly the ideals of Liberty, Equality and Fraternity were being established that the Mother was born. She grew up imbibing these ideas. It was also just the time when the fruits of the industrial revolution were being enjoyed by all.

The most striking thing about Paris in the 1870s was that the city had undergone a total transformation. The old medieval city had been largely knocked down and a new city had been built on a master plan designed with great care by Baron Haussmann. It was, of course, the idea of Napoleon III, nephew of the great Napoleon Bonaparte. Wide avenues, open squares, public parks were laid out and all building facades were built to exact specifications. The Mother was born into a city where the guiding principle was harmony, an element as essential as air, water



▲ ► Site of 60 Boulevard Haussmann

and hygiene. Beauty, harmony and order were all around her from her birth.

There was a great surge and a collective effort in France to bring perfection to the physical world. France had hosted the Universal Exhibition

in 1878, the year the Mother was born, to show to the world the great material progress the French had made. On display was the completed head of the Statue of Liberty. When the statue was completed it was gifted to the United States. This was a period which saw the creation of the middle class and of the rights of the individual. Travel and communication became easier than before and this opened up the world, making it easier for people in the Western world to know the Eastern half of the world.

Haussmann completely razed to the ground an entire district to the north of Paris and constructed long, straight and wide avenues. All the buildings along them had to be of exactly the same height. Not only that, but all the houses had exactly the same number of floors which were all aligned at the same level. Balconies could only be built on a certain floor and the roofs had to be exactly the same.

It was in such a house, conforming to all the standards laid down by Haussmann, that the Mother was born. It is important to note that her parents had moved to Paris from Alexandria only a year before her birth and rented a flat in this building. In fact, her father's brothers had already settled in Paris a few years before he himself arrived. A whole group of Jewish bankers, like her father and uncle, had come to live in Paris, as the city was at that time an important centre of trade and commerce. Also, those who were wealthy wanted to be in this city where a life of enjoyment and pleasure, the "high life", was the envy of other European countries.

Two years after the Mother was born her parents changed houses. They moved to a building just across the street, no. 60 Blvd. Haussmann, which was similar to the house where they had lived for three years. Today this building doesn't exist anymore. In 1910 it was demolished and an extension was built for the department store Le Printemps, which is still there today. It is an elegant building, full of the decorative motifs of that period. The style and opulence that became the hallmark of French life can be seen on this exterior.

The building which stood on this site, at no. 60

Bldv. Haussmann, is the place where the Mother's early childhood was spent. She lived here from the age of 2 to the age of 8. This is where she sat and meditated in her favourite armchair. This is where she learnt to read and write. The most important event of those years is that her maternal grandmother, Mirra Ismalun, came from Alexandria to live with them after the death of her husband, Matteo Ismalun. She was a wealthy woman and had many social contacts and remained a very strong influence in the Mother's early life and youth.

Paris is divided into many "arrondissements", which are administrative districts. Each one has its own characteristics. The 9th arrondissement even today is a wealthy and elegant district. In the 1870s this is where the banks were located. This is why Maurice Alfassa chose to live there as he was a banker. But in 1887 he lost most of his fortune possibly because of a bad investment. So the family could not continue to live in that area. They then moved to another building, not far from where they had been living. It may be that Mirra Ismalun was living there alone by then and she asked the whole family to move in with her.

This house, no.1 Square du Roule, still stands intact. In fact, the entire block of buildings around the square remains unchanged. However, a parking space has been created under the courtyard at the centre, and the top is covered in glass tiles. But surely at the end of the 19th century it must have been a garden and paths must have run parallel to allow horse carriages to come and go. Today there is a gate which allows only the residents to enter into this area. A little private road continues after the gate on the two sides of which are a series of buildings which look exactly the same.

The Mother's family moved into the first house on the left. We are not sure on which floor they lived. One can see that the house is more modest than the fine building where they had lived on the magnificent boulevard. Although they were not as wealthy as before, Mirra Ismalun, the grandmother, ensured for a while that the family did not suffer. This house is in the 8th arrondissement, which is a very wealthy area too. In fact, today it is in this arrondissement that



many of the expensive fashion boutiques can be found. The Arc de Triomphe and the Champs Elysées, the heart of the city, are here too.

Within a year the Mother's parents, along with the two children, moved to a flat which was in No.3, Square du Roule. In other words, while the grandmother continued to live at No. 1, the others lived exactly two houses away, although we don't know on which floor or in which flat they lived. Even though they did not live together, Mirra Ismalun was in many ways supporting them.

This is the house where the Mother lived from the age of 10 to the age of 19. This is where she actually grew up. The change that takes place in that decade of a human being's life is like no other. The Mother went through all those life experiences that any girl faces between the ages of 10 and 19. As I said before, her parents were ideally suited for the work that had been assigned to them by destiny. They belonged to that social class which could afford to give a good education to their daughter as well as a proper training in art. The most important fact is that although they were Sephardic Jews they were not practising the religion into which they were born. This meant that the Mother's mind was free of all dogma and religious beliefs. She was free to



No 1, Square du Roule

find her own path. Being recent immigrants they were not part of the established French society. So, the Mother was not caught up in any political or class mentality. The Mother has said that her mother, Mathilde, was a very down to earth and strict woman. She ensured that her children were brought up well and were not spoilt. Through her father young Mirra was related to very well-to-do and cultured families. She had access to persons who managed wealth, patronized the artists and surrounded themselves with people of good taste.

During those ten years when the Mother lived in Square du Roule, a great deal was happening in the world. A point to note is that when the Mother came to live here Sri Aurobindo was still in England, just across the English Channel. In 1890 he was a scholar at Cambridge but by 1893, when the Mother was 15 years old, he had left for India. In 1889 Paris hosted the Universal Exhibition for the second time. On show were machines and products which they had created. The great showpiece was the Eiffel Tower to draw attention to the skills of French engineers. The Mother was 11 years old when this iconic structure, the very symbol of France came up. The Paris metro was already there. Photography had started and thankfully so, because we can see such beautiful photographs of the Mother when she was a

child. In 1895 the Lumière brothers would invent cinema. Electricity was coming into general use. Interestingly, it was in 1878, in the year of the Mother's birth, that streets were lit with electricity in Paris. It was in such an atmosphere of the world stepping into the modern age that the Mother's growing up years rolled by.

One cannot look at this building without being moved. What a different world it was in which she had lived. The years spent here were the ones when she was studying art. She must have come out from this gate to go to the art academy as a young girl of 15. The principles of light and shade as well as of perspective occupied her mind. So did her inner experiences. It was here that she had the well-known spiritual experience of going out of her body at night, high above the city of Paris. She could see suffering humanity come up to her and touch the hem of her long robe. The Mother would recount later on: "...and as soon as they had touched it, they were comforted or healed, and went back into their bodies happier and stronger..." Not only this one but many other spiritual experiences of the Mother's early life came to her when she was here.

In 1895, at the height of the controversy around the Dreyfus affair arising from the anti-semitic feelings in France, Mirra Ismalun left Paris to go and live with Elvir, another one of her daughters, in Nice. It must have been



No 3, Square du Roule

a completely different life since Elvir's husband was the Italian Consul. As for the Alfassas, life continued with the two children, Mirra and Matteo, preparing themselves for their future. Even though the grandmother had left Paris the family still had relatives from the father's side. Maurice



▲ ► 49, Rue de Lévis

Alfassa's half brother Léon had married one of the daughters of the Camondo family, which was a very wealthy Jewish banking family of Paris, so the Mother was invited to these magnificent residences. Even today one can see the two beautiful and imposing mansions which were constructed by the Camondo family. One of the mansions was demolished and reconstructed after the First World War and is now a museum. But the other one is still there, although it is occupied only by offices now.

At the age of 19 she left her father's house to set up her own home. Henri Morisset was a fellow student at the art academy as well as a family friend. After her marriage to him the Mother, now Mirra Morisset, left Square du Roule and moved to no. 15 Rue Lemer cier. The house where she went to live was far more ordinary compared to the one where she had grown up. Rue Lemer cier is in the 17th arrondissement which is adjacent to the 8th arrondissement and in those days had a large population of artists.

The newly married couple settled into this flat with the two unmarried sisters of Henri. When one stands on the road one can see only the windows of this flat but having seen the drawings and paintings by Henri Morisset one can

easily imagine the interior. We have the artist's own paintings showing us the Mother and their son André in various poses of relaxation and affection inside this house. From these paintings we can see that the flat was tastefully decorated. From the outside, though, it is really unimpressive. There is nothing that could attract the attention of someone passing by. In fact, not a single person passed by as I stood before it — a stark contrast with the house of her birth.

A new phase started in the Mother's life. Wife, then mother, a sister-in-law and housewife, her days must have been full. Being herself an artist, she must have been actively involved in Henri's professional life. Through him she came in contact with the milieu in which the artists lived. Although she lived for ten years with her husband she was slowly getting more and more involved with spiritual matters and like-minded people. While she was living in this house she journeyed to Algeria twice, lived there for two or three months each time, and learnt occultism from Max Théon. This was in the first decade of the twentieth century and for those times it was highly unusual for a woman to leave her home and travel alone to pursue her quest for spiritual knowledge. She was so deeply interested in occultism and was so often out of the house to meet fellow seekers that sooner or later this must have brought a great strain to their life together and by 1908, the Mother and Henri Morisset parted ways.

What was going on in her life then can be seen in the pages of *Words of Long Ago* — a great upsurge of intellectual activities and gathering of knowledge. After 10 years of



living the life of a wife and mother, the Mother's life took a definite turn from the year 1908, when she began to live alone. She rented a flat which was either in no. 42 or no. 49 on Rue de Lévis which is within the 17th arrondissement. She may have shared that flat with a friend. I reached there around mid-day. In the narrow street covered in cobble-stones, there were a number of small shops and since it was lunch-time there was a crowd. People were buying and selling, eating and chatting, walking along and looking at the shop displays. Life was all around, in great variety. This is how it is now but I am not sure how it was then.

By the time the Mother moved to this house she already knew Paul Richard. He too had been to Tlemcen in Algeria and met Max Théon. In 1910 Paul Richard made his historic first journey to Pondicherry when he heard about and met Sri Aurobindo. Then on his return to Paris spoke

about him to the Mother. They both began to correspond with Sri Aurobindo and this contact grew with time and became stronger and ultimately made them want to go to Pondicherry.

In 1911 the Mother married Paul Richard and they both moved to no.9 Rue du Val de Grâce in the 5th arrondissement. This house is the one that everyone has heard of and many have

seen on a visit to Paris. Way back in 1986, I too had stood at the gate and looked at this house which was at the far end of the long private path around which are a series of residential buildings. A friend of mine who had been there earlier had told me that the people who live there absolutely don't like it when total strangers stand before it and so intensely look at the house. He himself had been taken for a thief when he tried to take a picture. Now the gate remains locked and all those who go there can stand outside and see the house from a distance.



▲ ► 15, Rue Lemercier



40, Rue de Lévis

As one enters Rue du Val de Grâce, straight ahead is the church, after which the road is named, with a large courtyard in front. This street is around the area of Montparnasse, and in those days it was a place which attracted a large



gathering of artists, writers and musicians. Not far from this street is the Jardin du Luxembourg.

In many ways, this house was the most important one in Paris, among all the others. Here she was intensely progressing in her own sadhana and



Painting by Henri Morisset, showing the interior of the flat in Rue Lemer cier. The Mother herself posed for two of the figures. The child at the centre is their son André.

continued corresponding with Sri Aurobindo. In 1912 she started writing her diary entries which we now know as *Prayers and Meditations*. This is where her friend Alexandra David-Néel used to come and meet her. This is also where the group of seekers that had gathered around the Mother met once a week. It would seem that this house continued to be rented by them when Paul Richard and the Mother spent a year in Pondicherry in 1914. They came back to France in March 1915 and continued to live in it. It was only when they left for Japan that they actually gave it up.

This is the house in which the Mother lived before she left France forever. Her very last days in the country of her birth were spent here. When she left for Japan she probably did not know what was going to happen. She came to Pondicherry in 1920 directly from Japan and never left Pondicherry after that. The Mother's life was divided in two halves — the time spent before settling down

in Pondicherry and the 53 years that she lived here. In fact, she spent a greater number of years in Pondicherry than anywhere else. So however interesting Paris may be it is Pondicherry which was her true home and her *karmabhoomi*.

Today's Paris is quite different from the Paris where the Mother had lived. But as one walks through the streets one cannot help thinking that this was the place on earth that the Divine Mother chose for her early life, during which she prepared herself for her ultimate work. Whenever I speak to someone who does not know the Mother and I say, "She was born and brought up in Paris," there is always a half smile or a look of doubt. It is as if they want to say, "Paris doesn't sound like a very spiritual place!" So I have to always explain that the Mother had to grow up with a sound knowledge of the material world and know the basics of organization and management of money in order to manifest in the physical world the dreams of a divine life which Sri Aurobindo had expressed



9, Rue du Val de Grâce

in the world of thoughts. The education she received was necessary for her work and it was for this that the Divine Mother chose to take birth in this beautiful city of Paris. ❧

THE VIZIERS OF BASSORA

THE 1ST DECEMBER PROGRAMME, 2013

After a very long time, probably 12 years, we had the pleasure of watching a play written by Sri Aurobindo for the Annual Programme of the School which celebrated its 70th year. Even though it is a long play it was kept in its entirety. There were many students for whom it was the first time that they were acting in such a difficult play. To everyone's amazement the rehearsals started in the middle of the year and the performance on the 1st was almost flawless.

By a strange coincidence there was a performance in Auroville of The Viziers of Bassora two weeks later. This gave an opportunity for the audience to see how the same play could be interpreted in two different ways. It must also have been very enriching for the students to see other actors playing the same roles that they had enacted only a couple of weeks earlier.

Although the performance was 3 hours long it did not seem so lengthy. Everyone sat till the end and felt they had been carried through by the power of the story. As every year, many people stepped in to help in various departments. The team work bore fruits and became a memorable experience for all.

We bring you an interview with the two main organizers of the annual programme, Adeebah and Smaran and a piece by the director of the play, Cristof.

Sunayana: What made you choose *The Viziers of Bassora*?

Smaran: Since we were a large group of students we decided to take up a play which had a large cast.

Adeebah: As it is a very difficult play we were discouraged by everyone and were told that it was beyond our capacities to perform it.

Sm: But the more we were discouraged the more we were eager to present it.

A: However, Cristof was very encouraging. He assured us that we were justified in wanting to do something different.

Sm: At first we wanted to include older actors who were more experienced than us but ultimately we decided that we would have an all-student cast.

Su: I am told that the real problem with organising the 1st December programme is that it clashes with the rehearsals of the Knowledge programme, since both take place at the same time.

Sm: Indeed, this fact created some difficulties. Around September we could feel the enthusiasm that accompanies the preparation of the Knowledge Programme and we found it hard to plan the rehearsals. To compound our woes there was another play being put on by Priti-di in which many of our actors were also participating. To solve this problem we decided to hold the rehearsals of some of the scenes at the School, where these actors were already

working, while others were held at the Theatre.

Su: Is it true that you started working on



the play right from June? Considering that, for more than a decade, students have never started work before 3rd November, this information has come as a piece of news.



Sm: In fact, all through the months of June, July and August we only had readings of the play, sitting in classrooms.

A: At the same time Cristof conducted workshops for a whole month to prepare us for the real work. He gave us various kinds of training, for example voice-training and learning to be at ease

on stage and even organised activities where we could know a little better the various members of the cast. We even worked on roles which were not our own in order to understand the details of the whole play. For example I played the part of the son of the evil vizier, just to get a feel of it. In other words, we did not work only on our scripts.



Su: Does this mean that you started working on the actual play seriously only after the Knowledge programme was over?

Sm: Not really. We had started thinking about the various aspects of the performance well before that. We knew that we wanted the first few scenes around the arches, with very few props.

Su: By the way, how did you get the idea of the arches which formed part of the sets of most scenes?

They were really very effective.

A: There is a very interesting story behind this. As the School stage was being used by the students of the E-6, we couldn't rehearse there.

Sm: And the Hall of Harmony was taken by



the group rehearsing with Priti-di. So we decided to rehearse in the passage in front of the Teachers' Room.

A: We were standing in front of that verandah and looking at the actors who were standing on the balcony on the first floor, when Cristof exclaimed that the arches were looking so beautiful. That's how he had the idea. He said, "We should have these kind of arches on the stage too."

Su: What were the arches made of?

Sm: They were made of metal and the decoration was made of paper. We fixed wheels on them so that we could move them around.

Su: Did you feel awed by the fact that this play was written by Sri Aurobindo?

A: We always wondered how someone who had written *The Life Divine* could have also





written this play!

Sm: We were lucky that the main characters just fell in love with the lines. Whenever we met we spoke in words taken from *The Viziers of Bassora*.

Su: What did it bring to you personally?

Sm: I am completely transformed after that one month's work.

A: I have changed too. In fact, we have

both changed.

Su: You say that you were changed in that one month. Was it because of the fact that you were involved in the organisational side as well as acting a part? Did you have any prior experience in organising a stage production?

A: I had participated in programmes, but it wasn't on this scale.

Sm: It was not that we changed only in our outer personalities; the lines somehow seeped into us.

A: The characters Nurreddene and Anice are so life-like and yet they have something so profound. While they are enjoying themselves, they are also growing inwardly. Not only the two main characters but the other characters as well.

Sm: We know the lines so well that now we text each other with lines from the play.

Su: In Auroville there were three performances and in the Ashram there was only one. When you are going to perform only once, you have only one chance, so you put your heart and soul into it.

A: Yes, it's true, we had only one chance, so we went all out. However, on the first of December, the performances are special because of the Presence. On the last day, everybody felt the Presence, even the helpers felt it.



Sm: Even the people who were in the market scenes, who had to be on the stage only for five minutes, came every day for rehearsals. The enthusiasm with which they worked was amazing. Cristof loved working with them.

Su: Is it true that our fellow alumnus Jerry composed the music?

A: Yes he did. We took a big risk because he came in just ten days before the programme.

Sm: We already had some music but we were not satisfied with it. So we decided to take the opportunity of re-doing some of it when Deep-tendu told us that Jerry was willing to compose music for us.

A: At first we thought that it was too late to change the music and we were worried that we might find ourselves with a new piece that we did not like. However, Cristof was of the opinion that it was worth trying. "Let's take a chance," he said. Jerry was in Pondicherry for three days and we explained the situation of each scene to

him. He came up with the brilliant idea of having a theme music for Anice and Nurreddene. As late as the 27th of November we received a new piece of music.

Su: That must have been rather difficult for the technicians to handle.

A: That is where Smaran's father stepped in. He handled the controls. He followed the instructions that we gave him in one day

about where to fade in and out and where to turn on and turn off the music. And he did all this with just two days' practice.

Su: What was Jerry's reaction when you told him to compose the music?

Sm: He said he wanted to do it because it was different, as it had an Arabian theme, which was unusual. It was a whole new experience for him.

A: And also it was something that was going to be played in the Ashram. That was why he was





all the more enthusiastic. He sat for three nights and finished everything. He actually started working on 25th November.

Sm: It was very difficult for him because on the day that he composed mu-

sic for the scene with Nureddene and Anice, the lovers, he could not compose for the scene of the execution, because it has such a different mood.

Su: Anything else you would like to add?

Sm: The last week was horrible; we had a couple of accidents. It was the first light trial and the second run-through. We were moving the arches when one of the wheels got stuck, and one of the arches fell, and it fell on a student, Akshay. He fell into the lights pit, and his nose hit the concrete edge so we had to rush him to Jipmer. We got back at 2 o'clock in the morning. Udit, the hero, also had a small accident on the 26th at the Sports Ground.



A: I saw the inside of the General Hospital and Jipmer, which I had never done before. So we had a lot of additional experience. Smaran and I supported each other despite long days and nights. Luckily neither of us fell ill, despite work-

ing 16 to 18 hours a day.

Su: You must have learnt so much from this experience.

A: It's been the kind of experience we wouldn't have got anywhere else. I was very glad that both of us took this up. Smaran was so co-operative, we never had any problems working together.

Sm: I felt really bad for Adeebah, because she had such an important role. She had the main role and she had to do all the running around.

Su: Really Adeebah, hats off to you. You were doing the main role and there was all this responsibility on your head!

THE VIZIERS OF BASSORA

(Editorial note from Vol.4 of CWSA)

The manuscript of this play was seized by the police at the time of Sri Aurobindo's arrest in connection with the Alipore Bomb Case in May 1908. It seems to have been written a few years before that, towards the end of the period of his employment in the Baroda State (1893-1906).

Sri Aurobindo never saw the manuscript of *The Viziers* after his arrest, and he is said to have particularly regretted its loss. Once in Pondicherry he tried to reconstruct one of the missing scenes using a partial draft he had with him, but soon abandoned the effort. In March 1952, fifteen months after his passing, the manuscript was handed over to the Sri Aurobindo Ashram by the government of West Bengal. It was transcribed and then in 1959 published in the Sri Aurobindo Mandir Annual, as well as separately.

The source of the plot of *The Viziers of Bassora* is "Nur al-Din Ali and the Damsel Anis al-Jalis", a story told in the *Arabian Nights* (thirty-fourth to thirty-eighth nights).

A: It's something I wouldn't suggest anybody to do. I took it up as a challenge and really wanted to do it. In fact, after all this I have matured as a person.



Su: While you were on the stage you must have had at the back of your mind a constant



voice saying, “I hope this actor doesn’t forget his lines”, or “I hope that one doesn’t bungle his costume.”

A: Yes, All the time. Even until the last day I was thinking, “Oh my God, this hasn’t come and that hasn’t come.” But Cristof told me, “Calm down. And think about

Anice.”

Su: When you are acting on stage and also responsible for the organisation it is a very difficult thing, because you get so distracted. You can’t think of your own role.

A: In fact, I would strongly recommend the future participants of the 1st December programmes not to repeat my mistake. I know that I could have performed my own role much better had I not taken up all the other worries. We had taken up the responsibility, Smaran and

I, so we had to face everything. It was wonderful working with Cristof; he is so special. He should continue to help with the 1st December for as long as he can. It was his positive attitude that carried us through.



FLIGHT 011213 — THE PLANE TRUTH...

Cristof

The co-pilot’s view on the 1st December Yearly Flight from Knowledge to the Theatre, 4000 hours after he first embarked in 2001.

Twelve years ago, when it was decided that the First December Programme would be reformatted and become a Students’ Affair, I was taken by surprise, well, not such a happy one at first sight. But I soon realised that I had become too selective as far as the passengers were concerned, and that new faces had to be taken on board.

The new Bride, I admit, was lovely, though a bit wayward, and I learned to value her gifts, especially this one: to be true to her



dream without being unfaithful to mine. A delicate, sometimes frustrating, but always exhausting and enriching experience.

When I heard that the students had chosen to put up Sri Aurobindo’s play *The Viziers of Bassora*, I gasped and took a deep breath: I knew what it meant. They did not.

We boarded the Plane (Flight 011213) very early, in mid-May, and most passengers happily ran to their seats and shared their sweet memories and “dramatic romances” while I entreated them



to learn their part.

Some passengers were glued to the windows, watching twenty years of their lives fly past. Some fell asleep, some woke up mid-way. I woke up in August, when we were pushed from one corner of our minds to another, to land in the end at the back entrance of the School, under arches that looked exactly... like what we needed! "We must play the Viziers under those very Arches!" I exclaimed. Two movable arches could mould the space as required for the various scenes

and sets. Our elusive genius Pushan dived into the internet and brought back dozens of specimens. We chose one and Prafulla and Rakesh constructed them with a smile and lots of metal. Then Pushan, Deeptendu and Smaran designed the Moslem Robe of our two-winged shifting Palace.

Mid-October, the Plane, as every year, crashed on Knowledge Terrace where it remained firmly grounded for the next two-three weeks. I waited patiently as the passengers whispered from time to time in my ear: "We are last-minute people." Wrong. They are last-second people. Eventually,



the plane managed to take off, flapping its battered wings in all directions, and slowly gained dizzying speed.

We had three Presiding Deities, two Omnipotent and one Omnipresent: Smaran, the Father; Adeebah the Son, well, the Daughter, and Deeptendu the Holy Ghost. But we had also to travel ten thousand miles in three hours. No problem. The Holy Three did something simply miraculous:

they took care of the plane *and* prepared the field for the landing at the same time.

In the plane, the Divine Steward, Arjav was planning the exact route the plane would follow to the minutest detail. When he broke his arm, his speed increased dramatically. With one arm, he surpassed Nataraj.

Meanwhile, Udit was seen through the windows surfing on waves of light, sitting now on the left wing, now on the right, getting blow after blow, but flying on holding Adeebah by the hand. Peter Pan and Wendy. Adeebah-Wendy was like a necklace of glowing dew drops under the first rays of her Nurreddene Sun. How fresh and pure love is under Sri Aurobindo's gentle poetic pen!

Every passenger rehearsed with a yogic attitude, a mixture of commitment and absolute detachment, and eventually they even learnt their lines to earn my eternal gratitude. Mudit our Pianist-Poet-Mathematician transfigured himself with utmost ease into the most wicked of

Viziers; Best students Aurodeep and Moutoshi surprised even the jury by winning the award for Best Supporting Actors; Sheikh Rohit had kept the plane shaking with his rolling eyes and his pranks; Hans the adorable Executioner was kept by Arjav right in the middle of the plane for security reasons; Chinmayee was aglow with anger like cinders simmering in the passing midnight sky; swimmer Saptarshi swam from Bengal to fish Tamil minnows for us; martial Utsarg





from Turkey to fight King Praveen whose thundering voice broke from under miles of muscle and garment, and Broker Debayanto managed to sell slave-girls to all and fight the Devil without a single hair of his being dislocated, beating Johnny Weissmuller, Rudolf Valentino and Errol Flynn. Then suddenly Mayuresh woke up and became Harkoos! He had read the Coran with closed eyes. Now a wise old counsellor appeared on stage one day, and we

realised much later that it was Narottam the Great. At the rear of the plane, the colourful trio, Gitanjali, Karishma and Saumitro struck some delightful notes on their harpsichords.

At one point we trembled: when both wings fell on Akshay's nose. But Richard's worthy disciple was saved by Super Heroes Guddu, Saumitra, Prasad and Udit. And was soon back on board with his Cary Grant Smile to the relief of our young and dear enthusiasts Adit and Sanchari.

Air Marshal Bappu and Imperial Nitu did not mind repairing and rerepairing the wings, spending a thousand and one nights on top of the plane while fabulous fairies Sneha, Bina, Ahuta and Ishita decorated the heavens and earth with the help of millions of safety pins. Iconic Baruni, Captain Cook Shailbala and their army of Merry Merchants gave spice and spin to the adventure.

Then came the Fated Day. Eternal Mahi, Transcendent Arun, Zen Master Suri, Heroic Aloka, Himalayan Sukhi and immortal Bokul descended

from the Heavens with their top-most Angels to fix the lights as the plane was still flying on, but thanks to their amazing skills and to Smaran-Aladin the plane looked like a Christmas Tree. One night, some unusual shades of sunlight fell upon the arches. Wonder ! but no wonder: Jean had come from the vast sun-tracks of Auroville to help light up our little stage.

Then Maurice came and instilled fresh confidence in the lovers' hearts.

Two days before landing, there was a transfiguring sight: Lolo was flying full speed like a shooting star through rainbows of laughter! I knew she would — but knowing is one thing, and experiencing another...

The landing was indeed as smooth as silk thanks to the Queens of all Fabrics and Costumes, Bina and Bitasta and their untiring dedication. At the Airport, a transfixed Deep had prepared everything, borrowing all possible artifacts from merciful Tenzing and Jagat. And Deep even found time to play a dazzling Villain! Turbans off!

Our Father had spent many a night weaving together threads of music of the Sufi Spheres, while Jerry had gallantly composed a few pieces for us at the last moment with his usual smiling brilliance.

During the flight, Adea sometimes gently entreated me to be more commanding; she would have liked me to fasten their seat-belts. But I like passengers to breathe freely. For me space comes first, a space



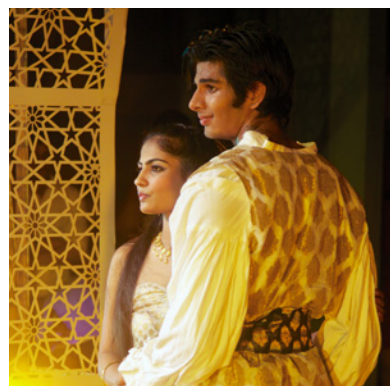


as vast and serene as possible for sowing some seeds of love and surprise. Then let them grow, let the miracle happen if it wills, since “all’s miracle here and can by miracle change”. Sometimes it works, sometimes it looks as if it didn’t. Then? Spring doesn’t perish with the seed nor love with the lover.

Ten days before arrival time, I had sensed a slight apprehension in the air: “Will the thousand and one pieces of the First Decem-

ber MegaPuzzle scattered all over the plane, assemble at last?” I had to reassure them: the Last Piece always falls in place on the First... with a Smile.

And every year it is there, above the Airport where we land after our long, long flight home. ❧



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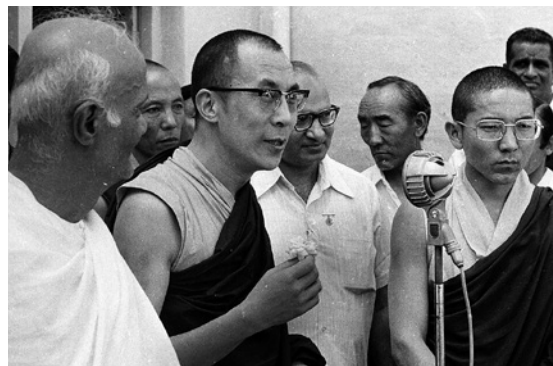
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TIBETANS IN THE ASHRAM

Sunayana '79

In the year 1959 the Tibetans were driven out of their homeland. The Dalai Lama escaped to India and took refuge in Dharamsala. For some years, the Tibetans who had come at the same time lived in the hills but later they began to find other places in India where they could start a new life.

In 1961, the first Tibetans came to the Ashram. The Mother accepted two young girls, Diki and Pema who spent some days at the Centre in Delhi. Mother asked Dayavati Jauhar, Tara's mother, to bring them to Pondicherry. They lived in Jhunjhun Home and were looked after by Pramila-di. A little later another group of three girls came and as they were too old to be in the School they were taught nursing by Dr. Satyabrata Sen (Chitra-di's brother). There was also a young Tibetan man too who worked in Treasure Nursing Home.



The Dalai Lama addressing the students of the School.

In the late 1960s many other Tibetans arrived and joined the school. They were all from very good, even aristocratic families. A group of four teenage boys arrived and after them Peljor, Katak Tulku and another young boy came. Diki, Pema and the five young men had been directed to the Ashram by a lady called Freida Bedi, who was the mother of the actor Kabir Bedi. But no one seems to be too sure how the first contact was made with the Mother.

In small groups they came to the Ashram to get a better education as well as a spiritual background. Since they were so many, a separate boarding was opened for them. As it might be expected, most of them were good at sports. Within a few years most of them left Pondicherry. One of them, Katak Tulku, the father of Tenzing, Gawa and Norbu, settled down in Pondicherry and opened a business manufacturing carpets. He set up a small school for the children of the workers of his carpet factory.

Right at the beginning when the first Tibetans were sent to the Ashram the Mother wrote to her friend Alexandra David-Neel whether she could send one or two young Tibetans to her so that she could teach them all that she knew about the Tibetan culture and mysticism. Alexandra replied that she could not, perhaps because her adopted son Yongden had died and she thought that the Mother was sending someone to replace him.

For a few years the five school children, Phurbu and her brother Tenzing, Tsering and her brother Kunsang and their sister Yangchen, were the only Tibetans in the Ashram. In 1972 when the boardings were reorganised the girls went to live in the girls' boarding and the boys were sent to the boys' boardings. Tenzing, who was really very bright and loved by everyone, passed away while he was in his teens. This came as a shock to the student community. One by one the others left and only Phurbu remained until she completed the Higher Course in 1981. Incidentally she was the first Tibetan to have completed her studies here.

By the late 1960s there was quite a big group of Tibetans in the Ashram. For the rest of the students it was something new and although there were children from all over India this was like having a little group from another culture altogether. The Dalai Lama visited the Ashram and Auroville in January 1973 and had an interview with the

PHURBU

Sunayana '79

One fine morning we were astonished to read on a social media site that our Tibetan friend Phurbu Dolma '81, with whom we had lived in the same boarding, had passed away after fighting a battle with cancer. It came as a surprise because only a month or so earlier she had been participating in our conversations on Facebook. It is difficult to reconcile oneself with this phenomenon of death which takes away a person forever from the world of the living. But when it happens to be a person who is relatively young and with whom one has grown up it becomes even more baffling.

Those of us who had been with her in Pragati Home, looked after by Jaywanta-ben and Kusumanjali, got together and organised a meditation for her soul twelve days after her passing. We decorated the table with vases of flowers and put up the Mother's and Sri Aurobindo's photos, then placed a picture of Phurbu. After the meditation we sat and remembered the happy days we had spent in those same rooms and in that same verandah when we were teenagers.

Phurbu's passing away brought back memories of another era. We remembered all the jokes but also all the quarrels, and laughed even though our hearts were heavy with the loss of a friend. As we shared our memories we realised that we are one family and when someone is taken away forever it feels as if a member of our family has left us. We also realised that sharing all the difficulties of those growing up years binds people together, no matter how far we have lived from one another after finishing School. Those who grew up

in boardings are a bunch of people who think and feel differently from those who grew up with their parents.

*

After finishing her studies in the Ashram Phurbu went to Dharamsala where she joined the Tibetan community and was asked by Mrs. Jetsun Pema to work in the Dalai Lama's administrative office where she could help with the liaison work relating to French sponsors for Tibetan children.

She worked in this set up for about 10 years before moving to France. A few years later she started working for an association which was promoting the Tibetan cause. She even wrote a book on Tibet which carried a foreword by the Dalai Lama himself. She accompanied any delegation which came to create

awareness about Tibet in France and acted as interpreter as well as assistant. She herself attended any gathering where she could speak about Tibet and specially rectify misconceptions.

Because of the Chinese harassment of the Tibetans, many parents regularly send their children over to India to be brought up away from the negative influence of the political situation. These children are taken care of by Tibetans living in Dharamsala. Phurbu worked from France to find sponsors for them and to place them in good schools. She herself sponsored some of these children.

She participated in the Tibetan exhibition that takes place every year in Paris. Phurbu held a sale stall where she sold things made by Tibetans as well as her book.

When she discovered that she had cancer she moved to India and breathed her last in a hospital in Delhi.



Mother. Later he addressed the students in the School courtyard and also visited the boarding where the Tibetan students were staying.

When Auroville was started there were a few Tibetans who joined. Interestingly, there were a

number of French people who took a great interest in the Tibetan cause. It was they, particularly Claude Arpi, who finally created a very strong bond with the Tibetan community which resulted in the construction of the Tibetan pavilion.

THE DALAI LAMA'S MEETING WITH THE MOTHER

An account of the Dalai Lama's visit. The Dalai Lama's questions were put to the Mother by Kireet Joshi, the Registrar of the Centre of Education, who in turn conveyed the Mother's answers back to the Dalai Lama. The following extract is from the Mother's Agenda.

Dalai Lama: It is my dream to have the perfect economic development of Tibet, the perfect organisation, the efficiency that we find in Communism, but all this based upon, founded upon the Buddhist qualities of Compassion and Love, so that the people in power do not degenerate into corruption. What is Mother's view of this dream, and whether such a thing will be realized in Tibet?

The Mother: It is not a dream. It will naturally be. But the time it will take, I do not know. This is something like what Sri Aurobindo has said about the Supramental.

Truth, Love, Compassion will give a basis to the new creation. It is not birth but the value of men that should give the right to authority.

If the teaching of Sri Aurobindo can spread over the world, and if there is the full manifestation of the Supramental, then the Supramental will be the power of the liberation of Tibet.

It is bound to come, it will come; but if it goes

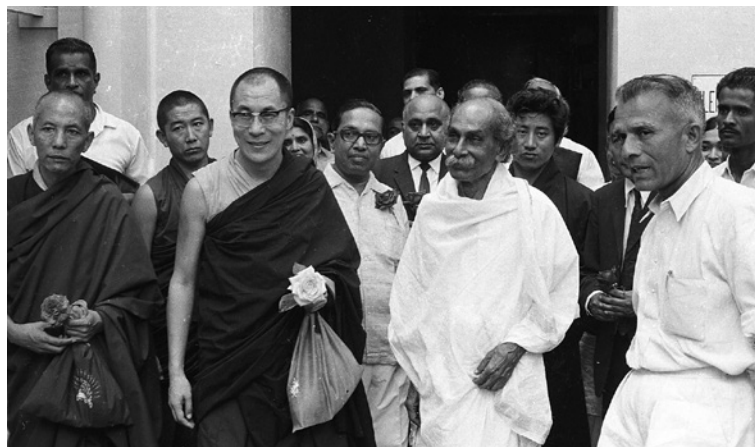
as it is going now, it will take hundreds of years. But if the Supramental is manifested, it may come quick. Quick does not mean ten or twenty years — that would be almost miraculous.

Kireet Joshi: But the Supramental is now working very powerfully.

The Mother: It is, it is working. It will be manifested with enough power when the right

people have the authority.

For the moment, it seems that the opposition, the falsehood attacks with full power before dying. Never, never have men lied as much as they are doing now. It seems the old habit



The Dalai Lama at the School (near the passage to the Teacher's Room)

comes spontaneously. But it must be broken.

We are at a very — what we could call an unpleasant moment of the history of the earth. It is interesting because the action is very powerful, but I can't call it pleasant.

But I have told you that already; I wrote it.

Kireet Joshi: Yes, Mother. The Mother has given the message.¹

Dalai Lama: As for myself, I have no desire to continue in power in the Government. For I feel that the Government involves so much of conflicts of parties, and the necessity of taking sides with one party against the other...

The Mother: One can govern without taking

1. Message of November 26th 1972: "Before dying, falsehood rises in full swing. Still people understand only the lesson of catastrophe. Will it have to come before they open their eyes to the truth? I ask an effort from all so that it has not to be. It is only the Truth that can save us; truth in words, truth in action, truth in will, truth in feelings. It is a choice between serving the Truth or being destroyed."

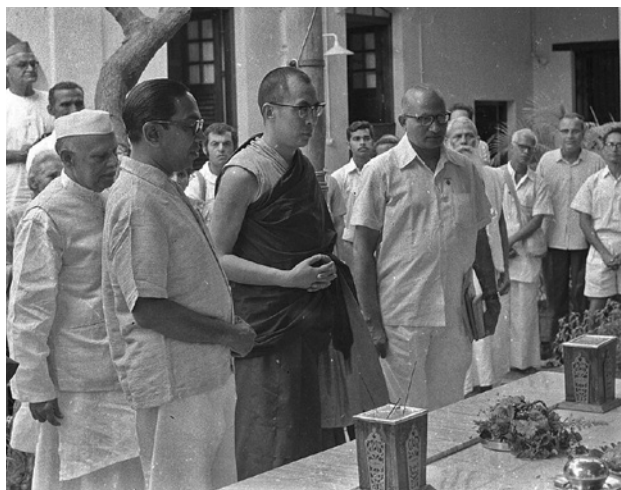
sides. That is the mistake of all the governments; they reduce their capacity tremendously.

But beyond the mind, there is a higher and deeper consciousness — they would find a Consciousness in which one can make use of all the capacities. It is a question of the consciousness being broad enough, so that each capacity can be put in its place in order to make a general harmony.

Dalai Lama: There is goodwill, there is sincerity among people all over the world, but the number of such people is not large. Will they be able to have an effect to change the conditions of the world?

The Mother: It is bound to change; it is bound to change. Only, if the people are sincere it will shorten the time; it will go faster if the people are sincere.

The first and indispensable step is to stop all falsehood. Falsehood is all that contradicts in us the Presence of the Divine.



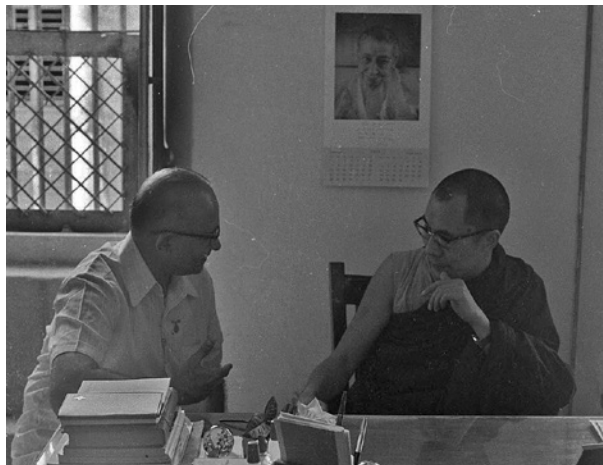
The Dalai Lama at the Samadhi

The Mother's impressions of the Dalai Lama after his visit:

A truly benevolent man. Buddhist benevolence, you know, and he practises it marvelously.

He seems to have no ...no selfishness in him (there is no word for it in French)². I mean, a constant concern to do the right thing.

Very benevolent — he is very benevolent.



The Dalai Lama with Kireet Joshi

I was told something (I don't know if it is true), he is reported to have said, "Sri Aurobindo and the Mother are the most important personalities in the world today" — I don't know if it is true.

He seems to have been pleased with his visit. He was very happy to see the school and the children.

But on the plane where I live...he doesn't seem to be very conscious THERE...I don't know, I don't know, but in any case he has a very light presence, very light — he doesn't impose himself at all.

I sensed a very strong man — very strong. And harmoniously strong; his arm was bare, you know, it gave the feeling of a strong and quiet force. But ...I didn't have much of a deeper contact...I can't say.

I told him Tibet would become independent again... Sri Aurobindo's idea was an independent Tibet within a sort of great federation with India. But when will that happen? I don't know. ❧

2. This conversation took place in French.

Words written by the Mother in this house, 9 Rue du Val de Grâce, just before leaving France to come to India in 1914:

March 4, 1914

It is likely to be the last time for a long while that I am writing at this table, in this calm room all charged with Thy Presence. For the next three days I shall probably not be able to write.... In an indrawn state I contemplate this turning page, vanishing into the dream of the past and look at the new page all full potentially of the dream of the future.... And yet how trifling this seems, how childish and unimportant, when seen in the light of Thy eternity. The only thing that is important is to obey Thy law with love and joy.

O Lord, grant that everything in us may adore and serve Thee.

May Peace be with all!

The Mother

Prayers and Meditations (MCW 1: 88)