

The Golden Chain

Alumni Journal of Sri Aurobindo International Centre of Education



All in a day's work!

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

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

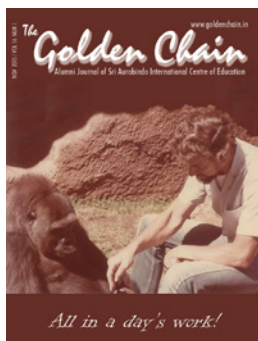
Sri Nolini Kanta Gupta (to the final-year students of the Higher Course on October 26, 1976)

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On the Cover:

Norman Dowsett '60 with a gorilla at the Melbourne Zoo.

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THE EDITORS' PAGE

by Sunayana '79

Hardly had we recovered from the shock of the Paris killings than we are now witnessing in utter horror the flooding of Chennai. Now that the world is wired together we know of these things instantly and in all the gory details. Only one thought comes to mind now: at the source of much of our suffering are ignorance and greed. Interesting to note that Paris, the scene of the terror attack, is also the city where the world has converged to discuss climate change. Yes, it is the very same Paris, the city of the Mother's birth.

If ignorance is the root cause of much of our suffering then education surely plays a great role in making the world free of unhappiness. Through the pages of *The Golden Chain* magazine we get to know how our own former students have lived their professional lives. Their work and what they bring to their profession make them different from others and in an indirect way they pass on to others what they have received from here, through this unusual system of education.

Our cover story in our last issue, focussing on the alumni who are in the medical field, was greatly appreciated and spontaneously others who are in various other fields have shared their experience with us this time. And we have covered quite a range, from a zoo-keeper to a Vice-Chancellor of a University. Not bad, really.

Our former students work in such a variety of fields that when their experiences are shared with the Ashram community it creates a tremendous knowledge-pool. It is true that the Mother had said that all she wanted was living souls but it doesn't mean that these living souls cannot participate in the intellectual life of India or of the world. Indeed, our experience can be a source of inspiration to others. And if done in the right attitude all work can become the Mother's work. As Sri Aurobindo has himself said, the Divine also needs instruments. Knowingly or unknowingly,

we do become his instruments.

We are not making any comparisons here with those who chose to live in the Ashram and those who left. We know that those who have stayed in the Ashram or have joined Auroville are working for the world. The yoga of Sri Aurobindo is not so much about individual achievements as it is for the change of consciousness that will benefit the whole of humanity. Those who have chosen to follow the path of this yoga in the context of the Ashram are doing something that is in a category apart.

We are not talking of "achievements" or "success" here because our yardstick for measuring success or failure is quite different. We are only looking at the work of those who have chosen to live in the world outside the Ashram and how they can contribute to creating a better world for everyone.

Considering that ours is an educational institution which has worked on the lines of a new method, following a unique philosophy of education, we feel very proud that our alumnus Sachidananda Mohanty is now the Vice-Chancellor of a University as well as being a member of the education commission at UNESCO. It can't get bigger than this, as they say, in the world of education. Through him surely this philosophy will touch more lives. We bring you in this issue a conversation with him.

In 2018 we are going to celebrate 75 years of SAICE. We still have three years before us. In fact, the 75th year will begin from December 2017. We hope by then we will get to read more such stories where we can see how the Mother's light has gone out in rippling waves and has touched many more lives through those who grew up in this extraordinary centre of learning.

If you would like to share your experience, of life or work, do send us a mail at office@golden-chainfraternity.org. ❧

EDUCATION FOR PLANETARY LIVING

*Although the Mother has said, speaking about SAICE, that all she wanted was living souls, it did not exclude the possibility of our alumni contributing to the progress of the nation and of the world. So when **Sachidananda Mohanty '75**, was named Vice-Chancellor of the Central University of Orissa it made us all feel very proud. This is the first time an alumnus of our institution has become the Vice-Chancellor of an Indian University. He had previously been Head of the Department of English at the University of Hyderabad. In addition to this he has written 26 books. Our readers are familiar with his name as he has been a regular contributor to The Golden Chain magazine. **Sunayana Panda '79** speaks to **Sachidananda Mohanty '75** on his taking up this new responsibility.*

We feel so proud that you have been appointed Vice Chancellor of the Central University of Orissa. Tell us a little bit about your feelings at this point. How did it happen?

To tell you the truth, I never thought that such a position at the national level would come my way. A former student of mine had seen the circular of the MHRD (Ministry of Human Resource Development, Government of India) for the Vice Chancellor's position and insisted that I apply. There was only a day left. The application miraculously reached the MHRD. Twelve academics out of three hundred odd candidates were short-listed and called for interview at the India International Centre (IIC) New Delhi. I was one of the four who made it to the final round; and then was fortunate enough to be selected by the President of India and asked to head the Central University of Orissa for a period of five years.

An unseen hand, clearly the Divine Grace, seems to be behind this action.

I am glad I was given an opportunity to serve my home State. After all, Sri Aurobindo and the Mother strongly believed in the cause of the Indian languages and cultures.

You have also been nominated as a Member of the Education Commission to UNESCO. How did that come about? And what does this work involve?

It came as a pleasant surprise. To be nominated into the ten-member statutory Commission on Education for UNESCO was a real privilege.

Internationalism of the most progressive kind has been the cornerstone of the educational system of SAICE. The new position would give me a rare opportunity to bring Sri Aurobindo's vision to the attention of our countrymen.

Today, education has become a crucial part of public diplo-

macy and we in India must seize the opportunity by forging more active ties with UNESCO.

The Commission on education is meant to act basically as a bridge between India and UNESCO. Its aim is to bring the many activities of UNESCO to the Indian institutions and vice versa. Regrettably, these activities are not well known in our society and culture. Many notable experiments in education, science and culture, especially at the grassroot level in India need to be carried to UNESCO bodies worldwide. For instance, we must showcase the fact that Bharat



In the office

Vani serves as a platform for 100 languages in our country.

We must collaborate in the domain of distance education and spearhead the internationalization of education in university campuses. We must increase the cultural spread; there must be more cooperation in journalism and mass communication. There must be the promotion equally of museums and the dissemination of the artefacts. Likewise, there must be greater integration between education and culture. There must be a national manuscript mission as well. We must remember that museums are a post-Renaissance phenomenon.

There must be increasing exchange of scholars, more philosophical and cultural dialogues through UNESCO to enhance our capabilities, following the model of the Association of Social Councils of Asia.

From UNESCO we must learn to combine science with ethics. We must think of inclusive innovation and affordable technology. UNESCO should bring out the World Technology Reports as it has creditably done in the case of the sciences.

Similarly, we must learn from heritage preservation practices, known as 'memories of culture' experiments; we need to commemorate exhibits spectacularly carried out under the auspices of



Surveying newly commissioned tribal art at the old campus in Koraput

UNESCO in neglected parts of the world. We must document heritage, including digital heritage. We must create a national register for the

tangible and intangible heritage. Heritage sites are parts of the collective memory of mankind. They are ill-served by fundamentalist forces whether it is the Taliban in Afghanistan or the Islamic State in parts of Syria and Iraq.

What kinds of positive changes would you like to bring about at the University?

Broad-based changes in the academic, fiscal and governance systems – that would be my pri-



Central University of Orissa Campus at Sunabeda inside a valley

mary goal at the Central University of Orissa. The University was set up in 2009 by the Government of India by an act of Parliament, primarily to cater to the disadvantaged sections of populations. I would like to see that the University becomes the hub of education in the regional context. For this to happen, we must undertake infrastructural activities: buildings, labs, hostels, residential and recreational facilities, internet connectivity and so on must be quickly created. Commencement of educational exchanges and public-private partnership programs, innovative courses including skill development programs for the local communities and indigenous Adivasi population would be another area of emphasis. The overall aim is to see that the Central University of Orissa emerges as one of the best in the region in the next decade or so.

Since you have written so many books on Sri Aurobindo and related subjects, your prominent position will draw attention to your books and therefore to Sri Aurobindo in

the academic circle. Can you tell us something about it?

I do not wish to draw attention to myself through my books and writings, but essentially to project Sri Aurobindo's thought and vision in the outside world. His words have a mantric effect; they are truly transformative. Now, what is unique to Sri Aurobindo's vision? It is to integrate the different parts of our being, our warring selves. The binaries and dualities, currently manifest, in contemporary society and culture, such as man-woman, rural-urban, development-conservation, North-South, English-vernaculars, religion/spirituality-secularism and so on, have their answers in Sri Aurobindo. Mutual acceptance and not mutual hostility could be the answer. It is this vision that the Mother wanted to be taken before the nation. Mine is a modest effort in that direction.

How did you manage to write so many books alongside your responsibilities at the Hyderabad University?

As a University Professor for the last three decades or so, my primary responsibility has been to teach, to undertake research supervision, to

mentor students and contribute to the corporate life at the University.

Publications, especially books and journal articles are particularly important for faculty in higher educational institutions; they are considered essential for entry into the peer group. Besides, how can one be an effective teacher and inspiring mentor unless one constantly upgrades one's knowledge? After all, we live in a knowledge-society today. For me, the best inspiration in this regard came from the Ashram system of education.

It is not for name or fame, for public recognition that one

writes, but basically for the joy of writing, for the sake of creativity and for sharing one's ideas with the literary communities. The breakthroughs in ideas and thought processes have their own rewards. I am delighted that my books on Sri Aurobindo have been well received by the intellectual class and the reading public. I am equally glad for my other publications as well. I try to approach every theme from the standpoint of harmony and integration that Sri Aurobindo taught us.

All learning is a life-long process; creativity knows no boundaries and serves its own noble ends. ❧



Village adoption

There is no place for rigid orthodoxy, whether Hindu, Mahomedan or Christian in the future. Those who cling to it, lose hold on life and go under—as has been shown by the fate of the Hindus in India and of the orthodox Mahomedan countries all over the world. It is only where there has been an opening to new light and inevitable change that strength is returning as in Turkey and Persia. In the supramental creation fundamental truth will always find a place; but orthodoxy means a clinging to narrow limitations, and limitations of that kind cannot exist in the supramental creation. All that is permanently true will be taken up into the creation of the future.

Sri Aurobindo [CWSA: Vol 35: pp 697-698]

DESIGNING A SMARTER CAR FOR 2030

Earlier this year **Pranav Agarwal 'K2** and **Shubhankar 'K2** won the runner up prize at the Valeo Innovation Challenge which brought together innovators in the automotive field. **Pranav** tells **Vikas '02** about the experience.

What made you come up with the mobile-based application to prevent road accidents?

Last year, I had invented a solar-powered device to prevent mosquito breeding, and thereby reduce the incidence of malaria. I am motivated to resolve social and environmental issues with the help of technology, because I believe technology has the power to solve a lot of our problems — all you need is an idea. So this time, it all began when I read in the news that every four minutes road accidents kill one person in India. This disturbing fact got me thinking, and after a month's brainstorming and research I thought I had a promising solution, but needed a platform to echo my idea. I then discovered the Valeo Innovation Challenge organized by Valeo, a multinational automotive supplier based in France which has a presence in 29 countries and employs over 10,000 researchers. Valeo invited students from around the world to develop bold and revolutionary solutions for the automobile of 2030.

Hence, through a three phase competition, in which students from 1037 universities and from 89 countries participated, I developed a working prototype of my idea, made it to the final in Paris, and went on to win the second prize.

What is your project about and what technologies will make it work for the cars of 2030?

I designed an advance collision warning

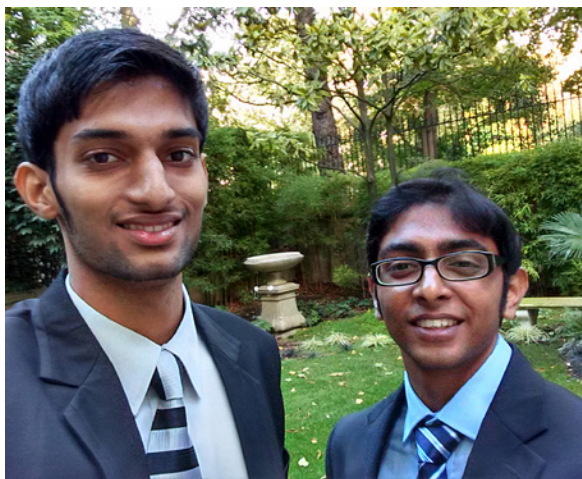
system called “Round The Corner”, which, once installed in vehicles, gives an audiovisual warning to the driver before an imminent collision. The system sends a vehicle's location coordinates in real-time to a web-server through mobile Internet, then creates a safety zone around each vehicle, and if an overlap of two or more safety zones is detected, it warns the respective drivers of an impending accident.

For this system to work, high-precision positioning is required, which is not available at present. However by early 2020, the interoperability of new multi-constellation Global Navigation Satellite Systems

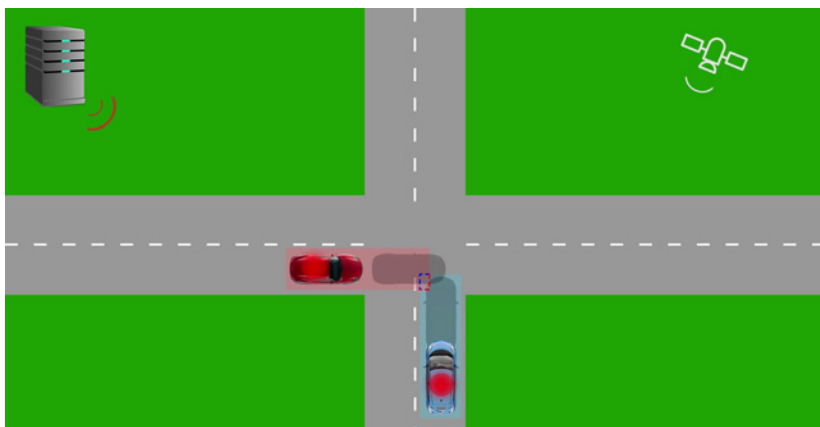
(GNSS) will provide unprecedented meter-accuracy throughout the globe; thus making our system realizable.

Could you tell us how your initial project submission evolved into the final version that you presented in Paris by running us through the month-by-month development?

I started brainstorming for this project in December and submitted an initial concept paper on 1 Feb. As the application process required projects to be submitted as a team and as I had conceived the project by myself, I asked around some friends if I could include their name, and Shubhankar happily agreed to do so. Then on 1 April, it was announced that my project had made it to the top 20 semifinalists and the Director of



Pranav (left) and Shubhankar



Algorithm to detect an imminent collision

my project, the wait was nail-biting. Finally it culminated in the announcement of the top 6 finalists on 1st September... and yes, I was to fly to Paris. So I put all that I could for these last 100m of the race, condensed months of work into a concise 15-minute powerpoint presentation with much difficulty, rehearsed it several times a day for a fortnight,

Valeo's R&D centre in India came down to Pondicherry to congratulate us and meet Manoj-da and other science teachers. It took me a week to recover from the shock of getting selected among the Top 20, but then I fastened my seatbelt for the forthcoming race against time to build a working prototype within hundred days. I spent hours on the Internet studying reports and research papers, and looked for people from diverse fields who could help me. Thankfully, I found the right people at the right time and parallelly started all the three main activities: drafting a twenty-page technical paper, getting the animation and video developed, working with developers on the mobile app and testing it on the road – and all this along with the regular studies and helping organize the annual Science Fair! Through this ordeal of handling so many tasks at the same time, I learnt to prioritize activities and saw the importance of time management.

One of Edison's quotes that kept me going no matter what, is:

"Our greatest weakness lies in giving up. The most certain way to succeed is always to try just one more time."

As the days to the deadline dwindled, so did the hours of sleep. But I successfully submitted the technical paper and the video a day before the hard deadline, and breathed a sigh of relief and satisfaction.

Although I was confident about

and was all set for the showdown on 28 September in Paris.

Yours seems to be an interdisciplinary project. Could you tell us about the different fields of knowledge and the resource persons who helped and guided you?

The research for the algorithm consisted of an interesting blend of elements of physics, statistics, computational geometry, software development, sensor technology, and communication and navigation systems.

To understand the mathematics required for this algorithm, I took the help of Bala-bhai, Shanti-da and Dibyangshu. Parallelly, I approached a Bangalore-based company to help



The concept

me develop the mobile application. Then I got a short animation developed to explain my algorithm and my classmate Shashwat helped me with a video of the prototype. Also, for testing the app on motorcycles, I took the help of 6-7 friends including Mukunda and Shubhankar. All along, my father guided me in the prototyping stage.

What specific trials and experiments did you conduct while testing your app? Could you share with us some data?

Testing the prototype was one of the biggest challenges. In order to test the system with multiple vehicles and in various traffic and possible accident scenarios, we required broad and empty roads. So for days together, we had to do this work at midnight and at noon. Although the alert gets triggered after a delay from the theoretical instance of alert, it is nonetheless triggered with sufficient time to stop before an impending collision – we had successfully demonstrated our proof of concept.

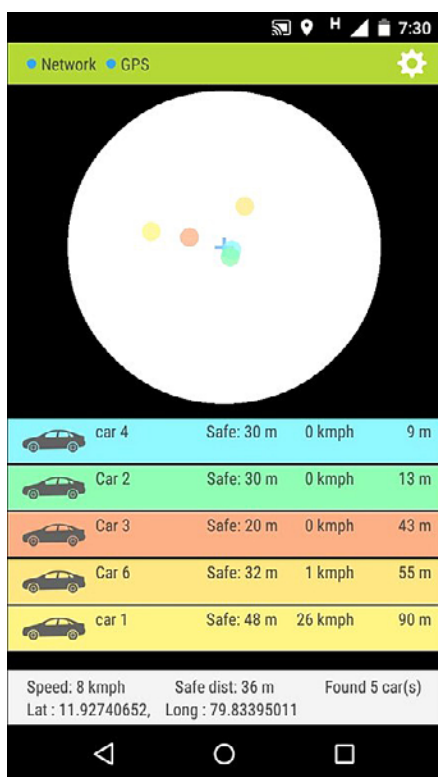
There was a very eminent jury listening to you and judging you. Could you describe to us who they were, and share with us the highlights of the interesting interactions you had with some of them?

The six finalist teams were invited to Paris to present their projects to a twelve-member jury at Maison de la Recherche. The exceptional jury was chaired by Valeo CEO Jacques Aschenbroich who has been named among the top 15 CEOs in the world. It consisted of leaders and pioneers from diverse fields. The eminent personalities included Claudie Haigneré, the first French woman to visit the International Space Station and Advisor to the European Space Agency, and Jacques

Rougeries, visionary architect of underwater habitation, among other professors, ministers and innovators. But the one who grabbed everyone's attention was the recipient of the Fields Medal (Nobel Prize equivalent for mathematics) Cédric Villani. I had the privilege to interact at length with the CEO and Mr. Villani over dinner; the former discussed the importance of innovation in an organization, and the latter inspired us all with his brimming passion for mathematics.

What were some of the questions and inputs you got from the jury after you presented your idea? What did they like about your ideas and what are the drawbacks of your proposal?

“...It's time we make road transport smarter, greener and safer.” After the last sentence of our presentation, we were glad to see faces smiling back at us. The judges seemed happy with the presentation and asked some very pertinent questions. The CEO who has visited Pondicherry, asked how my system will work in a place like Mumbai where vehicles move dangerously close to each other? I replied to him that that was precisely why I have put a feature which stops giving alerts when it is detected that vehicles are moving slowly, as in traffic congestion; the CEO



Radar view of the mobile app

was satisfied with my answer.

The judges said that they were most impressed by our presentation and were especially impressed with our introduction in French. As there was no French team who made it to the final, the French, who have strong nationalist sentiments, felt heartened by the fact that at least we hailed from a former French colony, Pondicherry.

In contrast to the other sophisticated doctoral

projects, the simplicity and affordability of this innovation was what was highly appreciated. This strengthened my belief that the best solutions are often the simplest ones, or as Einstein puts it, “When the solution is simple, God is answering.”

Could you describe the projects of the other 5 finalists and tell us about your interactions with the other teams?

When I saw the presentation hall, I was intimidated by the other teams who were setting up sophisticated gadgets and were using cutting edge technology like laser mapping, sensors, cameras with image processing, and algorithms relying on artificial intelligence – whereas I was walking in only with a smartphone in hand.

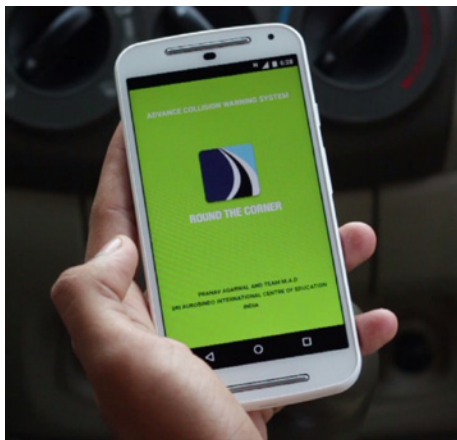
Interestingly all the finalists’ projects were related to autonomous cars and driver safety. The other teams and their projects are listed below:

1. Team Adapt (Spain) – Integrated bio-sensors in the steering wheel to enhance driver safety and comfort
2. Team Auto Gen Z (Germany) – A mirrorless safety windshield system which provides a panoramic view of the surroundings pictured on the top area of the windshield.
3. Team Bright Delight (Germany) – A dynamic communication system that connects pedestrians and a vehicle thanks to the projection of luminous information on the road
4. Team Falcon View (China) – A new algorithm to improve visual-based detection of vehicles and facilitate autonomous driving
5. Team PKU One (China) – An innovative trajectory-planning algorithm that takes driver behavior into account also to improve autonomous driving.

Did anybody show interest in taking your project forward?

This system is meant to be implemented at

a national level or by a large organization like a telecom company. But one of the judges who is recognized internationally for his innovations, suggested that this system should be developed as a mobile application and once sufficient people have it installed, it will start giving results.



“Round the Corner” - the mobile application

Besides increased automobile safety, what are some of the other important spinoffs of your idea?

Considering that over a million people are killed in road accidents, increased automobile safety would itself be a great achievement. But besides that, this system can also serve as the foundation for other applications such as advanced traffic management and for insurance claims.

Valeo made short summary videos about the whole competition. Could you give our readers the link to access these?

You can search for the following videos on YouTube:

Round The Corner: Advance Collision Warning System: (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7Tws6tho924>)

Discover the 6 finalists of Valeo Innovation Challenge 2015: (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oVTqEnKVs4s>)

Awards of the Valeo Innovation Challenge 2015: (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=g-1sOn-S0Y5A>)

Please share some final thoughts on the whole experience and what you learnt through it?

This entire experience has been enriching in every way. It has taken me through the entire process of taking an idea to the product stage. It has taught me to work with pitiless deadlines and most importantly not to get attached to ideas. I had to constantly modify ideas or reject an idea altogether and start afresh, and through this process the final product turned out to be very



Explaining the concept to experts

different from the first submission!

This experience has made me believe in keeping a positive attitude and has confirmed that no hard work ever goes waste. Academics aside, I drew inspiration from the wonderful people I met, became well acquainted with the other finalists and we had a great time together in the City of Lights.

You are a serial innovator. Can you tell us something about the process of innovating itself? Does it happen in a flash? Or do you grope around with various ideas? What kind of mental zone are you in when the ideas come? Is it something that can be taught?

I would say that an innovation is an entire process of ideation rather than just a spark of intuition. I first see a problem, dissect it to its root

cause, research and analyze the existing solutions if any, and then brainstorm for a solution. I have not yet jumped out of a bath screaming “Eureka”, but in this process of ideation which could run into days and months, I do experience moments of sudden revelation. These moments often come when I’m left to myself, like when lying in bed or cycling to the school.

I’m not sure if students can be taught to innovate, but a teacher can certainly inspire his students and fire up this faculty that is latent in some. Also, a conducive environment and



With Cédric Villani

infrastructure is essential to foster a culture of innovation which is germane to our centre of education.

Most importantly, to innovate in any field you need to be passionate, dream big, and be open. ☼

As to what you say about Islamic ideals, you should remember that whatever is necessary to keep from the past as materials for the future, will of itself and automatically be taken into the new creation when things are ready and the full Light and Power at work. It is not necessary for anybody to represent or stand for Islamic ideals or for Hindu or Christian ideals; if anybody here thinks he must stand for one or other of these things, he is making a mistake and is likely to create unnecessary narrowness, clash and opposition. There is no opposition or clash between them in spiritual experience; it is only the external human mind that mistakenly puts them against each other. What we are here to make is a new creation in which there is a larger reconciling Truth than anything that went before in the past; but what will reconcile and create anew is the Power, the Light, the Knowledge that comes from above. The important thing therefore is to prepare yourself for that Power, Light and Knowledge; it is only when that descends that all will be done rightly. Nothing can be done rightly by the individual working without the Light and the Knowledge.

Sri Aurobindo [CWSA: Vol 35: pp 696-697]

LIVING FAITH

Ram Sehgal's book *Faith – A Lifelong Companion*, is an unusual one. There are very few, if any, records of the life of a former student of our school which are written with the aim of showing how the Mother's influence continued to be present in his life even after he left the protective atmosphere of the Ashram. Articles and interviews exist, but not a full-fledged book.

This book is an autobiography with a difference. It is written with the aim of showing the reader how at every step the writer's life was guided by his faith in the Mother. It gives us an example of how life can be lived anywhere and yet be always turned towards Her. Even in an "unspiritual" environment such as the world of advertising, Ram Sehgal could, through thick and thin, hold on to the spiritual core of his life.

Although it is the story of one man's life, we see in the background, in the first part, the story of the Ashram's life. That background tells us a lot about how people lived, how the Mother was the centre of all activities and how the students were a part of the Ashram. It is important for all of us to know that history so that we may understand what kind of an institution we belong to.

Such kind of first-hand accounts are invaluable for all those of us who live outside the Ashram but would like to follow the path shown by the Mother and Sri Aurobindo. The book also gives us a peep into the world of advertising and is full of information.

It's an ideal read that you can take on a journey as the slim volume, with just 100 pages, is handy and can be read very fast.

We have a brief chat with **Ramraj Sehgal '61** about the book.

How did you get the idea to write this book?

One evening while I was in conversation with Manoj-da, he mentioned why nobody was writing about their experiences, about how the Mother's Grace worked in their lives.

I began work the following day. I have mentioned this fact in my acknowledgements.

Did your memories come back to you very easily or did they come back to you in bits and pieces? How long did it take you to write the book?

I did not rely totally on my memory. I had made notes of the experiences over the years. My wife, Manju, who has a great memory, helped me with details wherever it was required.

It took me two years to complete it. The problem I have with my writing is that I am never satisfied. Hence each chapter is re-written at least three times. Sometimes I stop writing for a while and take a break.

Your book is full of details of life in the Ashram of that period. What kind of response have you had from readers?

The older generation of Ashram members



Ram Sehgal, with wife Manju

who were my teachers and classmates seem to have enjoyed reading it. They called me to say it was very good. I think they were re-living those years.

What kind of books do you yourself read?

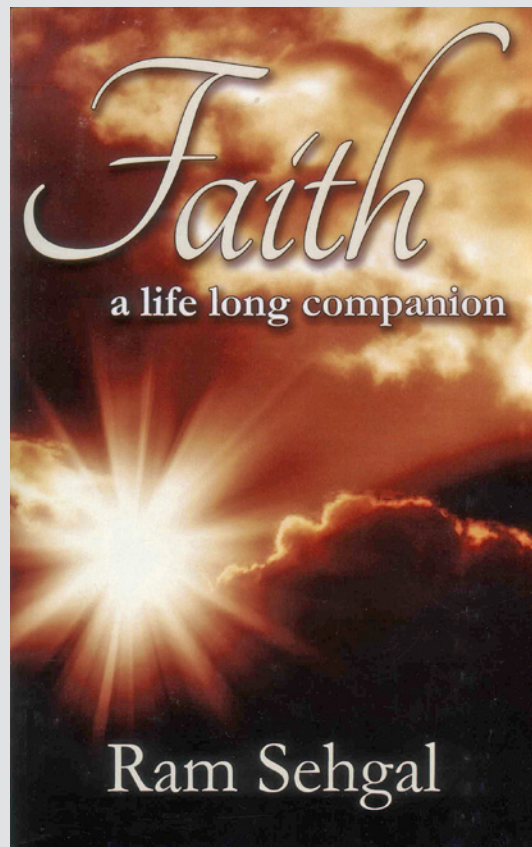
My choice of books changes with time. When

EXTRACT FROM *FAITH - A LIFE LONG COMPANION*

My first hour was spent with the finance manager. The balance sheet figures were much worse than what I had been informed. It shocked me. I struggled to understand the situation of the agency; it was left with practically no client who was spending money on a regular basis. It had four offices: Bombay, Delhi, Calcutta and Madras.

The next meeting with the HR head. He was reluctant to tell me the number of employees the agency had across the four offices. He had been with the agency for over 25 years and never seemed to have recommended to the management that they reduce the staff.

I grasped the problem but did not know where to begin. I was facing an impossible position and my mind was making it even worse. It was throwing in contradictory ideas and adding to my nervousness and helplessness. Invariably, when I am in trouble, I automatically recall the Mother's words. She had said that when you are confused, sit in silence; make every effort to drive away the negative thoughts and await the Divine Grace. It was tough but finally I got some positive ideas. I scribbled a plan of action and left it on the table. I decided to sleep over it and study it the next day. Often I have become enthusiastic with ideas and keen to implement them. However, with experience, I have discov-



ered that I needed to let the ideas take a final shape before I went forward. To hurry is not always the best solution.

I joined the advertising profession, the first book I read was: *Confessions of an Advertising Man* by David Ogilvy — the most respected advertising person in the world. Thereafter, I read all the books written by Dr. Edward de Bono — the guru who taught how to use the right brain. Reading these books helped me in my creative thinking. I bought all the books that were published on consumer research — about how consumers think and behave.

I had to travel two weeks in a month hence on flights I read fiction — the books that had won international awards.

However, the only continued reading I did was the works of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother through my entire life.

The younger ones among our former students have little or no interest in the past of the Ashram. How important is it, in your opinion, for them to know about how people lived when the Mother was still in her physical body?

It is a real pity if they are not interested in the golden period when the Mother's physical presence dominated everyone's life. ❧

[The book, *Faith, a Lifelong Companion* is available at SABDA]

DEVELOPING LEADERS

Lucy (Dharitri) Chaddha '79 speaks about her work

Tell us something about your work?

I work as a director in leadership development and learning at Citrix, a technology company based out of their Silicon Valley campus. I have been in this field for 29 years. Prior to Citrix, I was at HP and Cisco in similar roles. My journey, prior to working in these technology companies, includes time spent in management consulting at AchieveGlobal and Pricewaterhouse Coopers. I also spent time at a non-profit for a short period.

At Citrix, my team is part of a center of excellence for the whole company, and we support the learning and development needs globally. I partner with various people in the company to bring together a holistic view of what development our employees and managers need.

I was brought in to develop the curricula for raising manager and leader effectiveness in the company. So, I have been spearheading the roadmap and curricula for developing our managers at every level; across their career stages – from their first 90 days to getting them ready for their next role. We do most of the design and development work internally; however, I also work with Harvard, Stanford, BTS, the Neuroleadership Institute (David Rock) and other higher learning institutions to build out the curricula. The leadership programs are anchored within the framework of the company culture, values and leadership expectations. Building out the curricula is time-consuming work involving many across the company as some of the leadership programs span 9-12 months.

I have seen great leaders and I have seen

ineffective or poor managers who lack the ability to inspire and help people do their best work. It often comes down to lack of self-awareness or blind spots. Many of the engineers who are driving 200-400 people teams have no idea about how to set direction, how to motivate and inspire, how to lead teams. They have become managers through technical competence, not because they inspire teams to get collaborative work done. We start by providing them 360 degree feedback; they self-assess; their teams and managers assess

them. When the composite picture is pulled together, the picture often reveals huge disconnect between how they see themselves and how others see them. With that awareness and coaching, these technical leaders are ready to start on their journey of change.

I also help our managers and employees learn change agility and resilience. With non-stop change, disruption and innovation happening in Sil-

icon Valley, our employees show signs of change fatigue. This is an interesting area for me as I am learning about how the brain and heart need to work together to drive change – both at the personal level and at the organizational level.

How did you get interested in this field of work?

In some ways by accident. In my heart, I believe Mother has placed her children in the environments where they can learn and grow best based on their own unique inner aspirations.

In my first few months in the US, I was working as an editor looking at internally developed training materials and I realized that I wanted



to create experiential ways of learning, not just through expert lectures. So, I took the first bold step to ask for a mentor at this company and a different role. The mentoring led me to a role as an instructional designer. I loved the work. My own desire to push the boundaries for how adults can learn through business simulations brought me in contact with work that was happening in Stanford Business and the D school and Harvard. I had opportunities to learn from many pioneers early in my career (Jack Zenger, Jack Welch, Thiagi to name a few). I have been lucky to have had managers and peers who believed in my potential and allowed me to take on strategic roles.

What influences have shaped your work?

Most recently, I find myself bringing neuroscience into leadership discussions. What neuroscience has to say about insights, the “aha moments” and how reflection leads to behavior change is fascinating to me. I continue to see the relevance of emotional intelligence and employee engagement in my work, along with business fundamentals. Everyone is a leader and needs to develop herself or himself to lead more effectively. As one shifts from contributing individually to contributing through others, emotional intelligence also becomes important.

How did your roots, your upbringing influence your career choice?

Self-awareness is something every child learns at the Ashram. We had such great examples of

leading by example, of the integrity and of the discipline it takes to be truly good at something. In so many ways, my background has a lot to do with my career choice. Leadership is about influencing and inspiring others to do their best work and be the best they can be. I find myself in the business of driving self-awareness in a corporate setting.

My involvement with music too has shaped my work. I often use the metaphor of a symphonic orchestra working under the vision and interpretation of a conductor; each instrument has a different role, different expression and style and yet the orchestra works together to produce great music.

Do you sometimes speak about the Mother or the Ashram to colleagues in your field?

When people are interested in learning about me and about my upbringing, I speak about the Mother. Mostly, this discussion happens only in special one-on-ones when there is some opening. Some of my managers see something quite unique in how I conduct myself and seek to know more about me.

You were a shy person when you were in School and Knowledge and now you are guiding people to be effective leaders. How did this change in your own personality come about?

There is confidence in experience. There is strength in authenticity. People are drawn to both. I am still shy. ❧

If there is anybody in this Asram who is a Hindu sectarian hating Mahomedans and not opening to the Light in which all can overcome their limitations and in which all can be fulfilled (each religion or way of approaching the Divine contributing its own element of the truth, but all fused together and surpassed), then that Hindu sectarian is not a completely surrendered disciple of Sri Aurobindo. By his narrowness and hatred of others he is bringing an element of falsehood into the work that is being done here.[...]

What is being done here is the preparation of a Truth which includes all other Truth but is limited to no single religion or creed, and this preparation has to be done apart and in silence until things are ready.[...]

Sri Aurobindo [CWSA: Vol 35: pp 699]

ENGINEERING EXCELLENCE

Himanshu Mistry '91

Years ago when I had begun my life as an entrepreneur in renewable energy, I had written an article for The Golden Chain. It is upon the request of Sunayana-di that I am writing something once again. It is about getting back on the road of life after having slipped down from it and not fading away in the dark of the night.

2005

I had heard about something called “mid-life crisis”, but really came to know more about it when suddenly the family business I was a part of shut down in unforeseen circumstances. The others involved in this enterprise pulled the carpet from under my feet and my life was not going to be the same anymore. The little world I had created for my family and myself was over. It was the time when I came face-to-face with the impermanency of Life.

2006

Instinctively, my reaction was to go and settle down in Pondicherry, near the Ashram. I always wanted my kids to have the childhood that I had, in an effort to relive my childhood through them. But it did not happen; my kids were not admitted in the SAICE.

I returned to Gujarat, with a weight on my shoulders. My father had passed away, a broken and sad man leaving nothing behind. My savings had dwindled away due to the fruitless stay in Pondicherry, and I was forced to decide upon taking up a job in order to support the family.

I always had a passion for engineering and technology. Our family business used to be a major engineering and fabrication facility once upon a time. It was by luck that I was offered

a job with one of the companies we had worked for, as a shop-floor supervisor. It didn't sound like much, but I had no choice.

I worked hard and learnt the tricks of the trade. I used to work by day and study by night. I was a perfectionist, QA / QC (quality assurance/quality control) interested me very much. In a few months' time, I knew the books of Engineering Codes & Standards, such as ASME & TEMA, like the back of my hand. I appeared for the NDT exams and cleared them, took a crack at IME and then AIME and then it went on over the years. Soon, I was working on all major projects of the company, overseeing massive heavy equipment — pressure vessels for refineries, fertilizer and chemical plants. This

is where I started learning how to handle customers, third party agencies, documentation and everything.

2007

I went on to be the QC in-charge. However, one day, I was asked to go for a final round of negotiations for a major government fertilizer plant job, as the regular guy was not present that day. We were pitted against the likes of L&T, ESSAR EHES, Anup and were expected to lose. Out of the blue, by fluke and a stroke of luck, I secured my first order. It was a massive 38.5 lakhs X 4 nos. job. Overnight my portfolio changed from QC to Business Development. My quest for my ultimate dream job had begun.

2007-2008

My next job was with a company manufacturing components and systems for defence



At JSPL – Raigarh, Chhattisgarh – in 2013



101/CA Tube-in-Tube, Waste Heat Reboiler – my first major order

applications and was supplying to HAL, Navy, Air Force and also to NLC. It was a dream job and it fuelled my continuous interest and liking for such things.

For the first time in my life I was traveling far and wide; I had stepped out of my little town and seen the world. This included a visit to INS Virat for development of some sub-system. Delhi was the most frequented location and my enthusiasm propelled me forward. I was being entrusted with more complex and difficult work, which involved a lot of other things apart from merely engineering.

We had supplied a TVC (Thrust Vector Control) cleaning system to the Navy for cleaning the TVC of their Harriers. This contraption failed and caused a minor fire, which was luckily put out before any big damage could take place. Then the game of cover-ups began and I was dragged into it. This gave me access to records of various such supplies. I dug into them and was horrified at the sub-standard material which was used each time, putting at risk the lives of our men in the battlefield. I was badly shaken and couldn't take it anymore. I felt like quitting, my conscience was telling me to do so. I did not want to do a job with a feeling of guilt.

On one side it was a well-paying job very near home and on the other side there was my upbringing which was stopping me from being involved in such malpractices.

I didn't know what I should do. I did talk about this to some friends of mine, but was advised that

if it is a good job don't throw it away. Why bother as long as you are getting your money? Instinctively, I phoned up Chamanlal-ji (Dr. Chamanlal Gupta) and explained to him what was troubling me. I can still recall his words.... "Do what your conscience tells you to do, because that is what Mother wants you to do." He supported me in making a difficult decision. I resigned. The company was not ready to let me off the hook, because I knew too much. At one point I felt that I should spill the beans and get them nailed, but then I knew that there were just too many people involved from top to bottom. I opted to go in a quiet way.

2009

Douce Mère, and the stars above have been with me always! I always make efforts to feel HER presence in my life and yes I know SHE is there at all times, often carrying me during the worst times and helping me to squeeze past tight corners. I did not have to wait long.

2009 was when I began to work in the big league. I landed a job with none other than Zaverchand Gaekwad Ltd – Flexican Bellows & Hoses Pvt. Ltd, the Company tracing its roots to the Maharaja of Baroda, Sayaji Gaekwad. When I joined this company I was extremely raw to the corporate world. But as a good sponge, I



FCC Flue-Gas System – IOCL

was soaking up all the knowledge and assimilating all the information I was receiving. This is the place where I learnt many things such as



With IOCL, Paradip — Pressure Balance Expansion Joints, through Punj Lloyd

planning for expos, brand building, business development and at the same time the technical side too: designing, piping analysis, material fatigue, stress factors, property of materials etc. My studies continued. I learnt the ropes well and in a matter of a few years I had become the principal business development and techno-commercial person for the company. I was proud of working here and being involved in so many of the major projects happening in India! It felt good working with the top companies in Indian Industry. It was a fabulous period of life. I worked hard, sometimes 12 to 18 hours per day, travelled to locations all over India to various refineries and thermal power plants.

I felt at the top of the world. My hard work brought good results, I was following major projects and getting approvals, inquiries, orders. In 2014 I landed the biggest order in my life — a project for NTPC Kudgi 800 MW x 3 STPP. In 2014 I was judged the Best Marketer of the Year. NPCIL, NTPC & BHEL were my favourite customers. My previous experience working with Government agencies was helping me.

Every time I was going in for a big meeting, I used to phone up my mentor Chamanlal-ji and, in a sense, used to ask his blessings, and every time he used to end by saying, “the Mother is with you.” Yes, Douce Mère was there always. All that I touched turned to gold.

Between 2012 and 2015 there were 6 major nuclear projects happening in India, and I made

sure the company was a part of all of these. I became a specialist at getting nuclear power projects. The NPCIL office in Baroda was near a place called VUDA circle, where there is a statue of Sri Aurobindo. Just before I stepped in there, my eyes used to go to Sri Aurobindo’s statue always. I also began managing projects, and started PMI courses. The larger projects of the Company were managed by me from inception to commissioning. Equipment I had worked on are presently functioning in KAPP & RAPP, BARC etc.

But all the time I was missing my family. I missed my neighbourhood, my people, my house, the orchids, the pets, the sea, the beach, the surf and everything. On Saturday evenings I used to travel 5-6 hours from Baroda to my hometown and then on Sunday evening I used to return. It was hell sometimes. All the while, I was praying for a job located nearer home, so that I could be with my family, see my kids grow up and be with them for all the festivals, share their joys and pains.

From 2009 to 2014 I had moved from Executive, Business Development to Senior Manager, Business Development, I had reached the saturation point, there was no going further.



Massive Rectangular Expansion Joint for NTPC Gas Based Power Plant

2014 OCTOBER

I was working in the office doing some real brain-racking equipment design, when suddenly I received a phone call from Australia. It was a



Massive FCC Metal Expansion Joint – the heart of all refineries

company informing me that I had been short listed for some job and the interview was in Mumbai. I duly appeared for this interview, and to my dismay I was ushered into a room filled with at least 10-15 people, most of them coming from extremely good companies. My initial interview went well, but I did not hope for much. Then in November I received another call, this time from one of the directors of this Company, telling me that I was further short-listed and was to appear for a personal interview in Baroda itself. This time I found that the initial crowd had been eliminated. There were but 3-4 people left including me.

This interview included a lot of technical questions, mainly involving designs, processes etc. but also about the various industries in India, mainly refineries and oil & gas projects. For a month or so nothing happened; there was no further communication. After a month at the end of December 2014 I was informed that I had been selected. The first call was to my better-half and the second call was to Chamanlal-ji. I think he was happy; he must have been proud of me. Students from SAICE have touched the skies! They are everywhere, in every field... but not so much in hard-core mechanical engineering. But now there was also one SAICE kid who was working in the top echelons of mechanical engineering in India.

2015

In March 2015 I joined Hidroflex. This Company was into the manufacturing of critical

equipment for Oil & Gas, Refineries, mainly FCC / RFCC applications. The first task assigned to me was to get the approvals and vendor registrations from all the 27 refineries in India and all the consultants and EPC / LSTK contractors into such projects. Engineers India Ltd (EIL) is the highest technical institution and organization when it comes to Refinery and Oil & Gas projects in India. Only those companies which are technically competent, with adequate experience in this line of work, get approved by EIL. To work with EIL or to be involved in some project of EIL's is a dream for most engineering professionals. I was fortunate enough to now become one of these privileged few.

From a small time entrepreneur, in a small town, to becoming someone involved in some of the most prestigious projects.... A decade has passed by. Life has seen ups and downs, often uphill climbs, sometimes roller-coaster rides, from extreme rags to riches. But behind all this there is always a sense of doing something in a perfect way, in the most ethical way. Life has no short-



At Engineers India Ltd. (EIL), the highest technical body in India

cuts; the hard way usually builds a firm foundation. Yes, and always the sense that there is Douce Mère taking you forward and showing you the way. When doors are shut in your face, SHE makes new doors open and guides you through newer avenues and paths. ☼

NORMAN RECOUNTS

Norman Dowsett '60 spoke to a small group of Ashramites and former students of the School at the Ashram Library, in November 2014. We bring you a transcript of the interaction.

For those of you who don't know me, I grew up here in Pondicherry in the Ashram from the age of 5 to 29, after which I went to Australia and for most of my life in Australia I worked at the zoo looking after animals of various kinds. I have spent 18 months in Canada doing the same thing, working in a zoo in Toronto. In the middle I travelled quite a lot to many countries for many reasons, mostly for pleasure. I have been to most of the South East Asian Countries. I have also been to Montreal. I have been to Jordan. My interest has changed slightly over the last few years to the fields of archaeology and prehistory. So most of my travels nowadays are around visiting archaeological sites in Malta, in Jordan, in Turkey. Actually, I have just come back from Turkey.

Over the years at the Melbourne zoo I have worked with just about every animal. In the last 15 years as an anthropologist I have been looking after the butterfly section. The Butterfly House is an enormous glass house which is about 30 metres long and 20 meters wide and 6 metres high. In there, we have about 15 species of butterflies flying around at any given time. Inside is a complete reproduction of a tropical rain forest including a stream that goes through. It is completely climate-controlled with heating and cooling. We provide our butterflies with about 12 hours daylight and 12 hours night. This duplicates roughly the summer conditions for butterflies in Australia which means they are active. They are

prone to think that they are always in summer and active and they are breeding right through the year. So that's what I have been doing.

How did your parents come to hear about the Mother and Sri Aurobindo? How did they come here?



My father, during the Second World War, was in the Royal Air force. He was stationed in India. He was a Navigator and an Intelligence Officer and they used to fly from Calcutta and Madras, over Malaysia, Burma and somewhere behind the Japanese lines. When he was in Madras, you can imagine the military conditions. The food was not exactly exciting. One day they saw

an advertisement in one of the local newspapers. It said "Pondicherry: French Cuisine". So when they had a few days off they came down to Pondicherry and stayed in Hotel de l'Europe which was run by Magry. Coincidentally, on the table there was sitting a book by Vivekananda which attracted my father's attention. Even before the war, my parents were both interested in alternative spiritual worships. They had exhausted their interest in religion, Christianity and all that, and they were looking elsewhere. So this appealed to him, attracted him. He read it and he asked the manager if he had any more books. And he was told, "No, there is nothing here. But if you go to the Ashram there is plenty." So he ended up at the Ashram gate and was shown to the reading-room which was then the library and he was given *The Life Divine*. And the next day he was given an interview with the Mother.

Which year was it?

That was during the Second World War. So exactly which year I am not sure. It could have been 1942 or 1943. After having met the Mother he was hooked. He stayed on in India after the War, after he was decommissioned, and we came over in 1946. We arrived here in February just in time for Darshan and I was 5 years old. We met the Mother in Pavitra-da's room upstairs, but I don't remember the meeting with the Mother at all. I was completely obsessed with Goldie. Goldie was a dog, which was allowed to go upstairs. When Mother came in, Goldie also came in. Goldie and I, we sat down and played and the rest is....

Any memories of Sri Aurobindo?

At that stage, no. But a year or two later.... Many people have asked me the question about my impressions of Sri Aurobindo. Difficult to say at that age but the only thing I can relate it to is something like Mount Everest — an enormous presence.

How were the first years when you left Pondicherry and went to Australia? How difficult was it for you to adapt to life there?

Not too difficult. I mean, the Ashram was not so isolated really from Western thoughts and Western culture and all that. So it wasn't really very difficult. The hardest part was not becoming a guru! It's true. I mean, in those days when people heard that you had spent 20 odd years in an Ashram in India, they absolutely wanted to sit at your feet. They want you to do something invaluable and change their lives. It was hard but I must confess the temptation to be adulated was quite strong. It is very easy to fall into that trap. To think that you are actually going to give them some moksha when you know very well you can't. If you are honest with yourself, you can't do it. I can't at least.

Did you then stop saying that you lived in an Ashram?

Very much so. But they still notice that there is something different. Some of them say "What's wrong with you?" Others ask, "Well, what is it?"

How did you start working in a zoo and what were the requirements?

When I first went to Australia, for 2 years I

worked as a laboratory technician in Biology at the University of Canberra. At that time that was a brand new institution and so they were not terribly fussy about who they got, which was lucky for me. Otherwise I would probably not have had the job if they knew better. Anyway for 2 years, I worked there. We had a conference on animal nutrition and one of the talks there was given by a curator from the Melbourne Zoo. I was so impressed. I always had an interest in animals and so I went and spoke to him afterwards. He told me to write to the Director of the Zoo in Melbourne to see what they could do.

For months and months nothing happened. Then during the summer of the second year that I was in Australia I made a very long cycle trip from Western Australia, half way across South Australia, and ended up in melting Melbourne. So I thought "Since I am here I will go and see them". There were no special requirements in those days — nowadays you might need a PhD. Again I would have failed. As Batti once intro-



duced me to someone saying, "Norman is an ex-student but he was not much of a student", which was very true actually. So that's how it all started and since then, as I said, I have worked with just about all the sections.



We have different sections. We have the carnivore section, which is lions, tigers, bears etc.. We have the reptile house, we have the bird section. We didn't have butterflies in those days, they came much later. So I have moved around working with everything, and ended up in the Butterfly House. The Butterfly House is particularly interesting because it's complex. When you have got an elephant, you have got an elephant, but when you have got a butterfly, you have got an egg, you have got a caterpillar, you have a chrysalis and then a butterfly comes out. And so this miracle unfolds in front of you everyday which holds your interest.

Were you always interested in animals?

My first incident with animals was when I was 11 years old. We used to all trundle off to Cazanove for harvesting. In those days there was Biren-da, Batti, Mona. They used to do serious harvesting. We used to just fool around. When I was roaming around, I saw a snake disappearing into a manure pit and without thinking I grabbed it by the tail and pulled it out. It promptly turned around and bit me and it was a cobra. The thing with most snakes is that the first bite is often what is known as a dry bite. It does not inject venom. So it's like a warning bite, which was obviously what happened there otherwise I wouldn't be talking to you tonight. Anyway I dropped it and it went away and I too went away.

Even when I was quite young this interest, this

curiosity was there.... My mother always says that my interest in zoos came about because I grew up in a cage. This is true. I was born in 1940 in December during the World War. And in our house, we had this big cage that was made of steel. Solid steel on top, and steel corners and mesh on the sides. Every night we slept in there. This was to protect us in case the house collapsed during the bombing. So every night my sister, my mother and myself crawled into this and slept quite comfortably. There was a big mattress inside of course and every night I took a box of snails that I had collected. I insisted that they too go to bed with me and every morning we had this ritual of finding the snails because they had naturally not sat there in the box but crawled all over the place. So we had to go through all the beddings and lift up the bed sheets and the mattress to find them and then we had this great discussion as to whether we had got them all, because we forgot how many were there. So that's how it all started.

Over the years we used to collect baby squirrels, baby birds and then I used to collect snakes — the odd ones here and there that we found — nothing serious.

Did you have any pets?

No, actually not, not so much, but in the laboratory with Richard for a few years, we had several mongoose and a lot of Indian birds came in injured and Richard and I would treat them. We had a pangolin at one time. I don't know if any of you know what a pangolin is, it is called an ant-eater. They have very strong shields all across their body and used to be not common, but we used to find them occasionally. The gypsies would bring them around. So that was about it.

Once you left Pondicherry and came back did you find a lot of difference in the Ashram? Did you find Pondicherry very different? Pondicherry has changed so much.

Pondicherry has changed. Yes, there are more people, more motorcycles, more cars and more fumes but the Ashram has not changed terribly, not that much. For the children who were growing up in the Ashram it was a lot freer in our times. Sometimes at 11.30, as soon as the bell rang, we would run to Le Faucher. And there used

to be a well in Le Faucher where water used to come out automatically and that water contained a lot of iron. And so as kids we used to think if we drank that water we would grow up to be very strong. So we would run there at 11.30 and drink this water and come running back for lunch. That sort of nonsense used to go on.

Stealing mangoes was a major occupation for us. One day I was in Parichand-da's mango tree. My class was going on in the West Wing of the School. I thought I was safe. Who can see in all those trees with the bushy leaves? With mangoes inside my shirt I came down and my teacher met me as I was coming into the School. He said, "How were the mangoes, Norman?" I said, "What mangoes?" He said, "We saw you". They had been studying telescopes. Through the telescope they saw Norman in the mango tree. I forget who the teacher was, I must confess.

Could you tell us something about the various animals you have worked with at the zoo and some of your experiences?

I've already told you that the zoo was divided into sections: animals, bird, reptiles etc. The most interesting episodes of course will always come when you work with primates; the simple reason being that they are very much like us. You know how monkeys respond. They are all playful and adventurous. You can relate to them because of their expressions and their behaviour which is very similar to ours. When I first started at the zoo, for example, safety was not a major issue. Over the years this has changed simply because the culture in Western society has changed dramatically and people try to sue everybody for anything. And so if a keeper got injured he would sue the zoo because they didn't give him the right conditions. But in the old days all that was not there. So in the enclosure for the monkeys, in the centre there were two balconies and there was a straight ladder going up and there were about 30 monkeys in this enclosure including the dominant male, the male who is the captain or the king, who controls everything and everybody. And he would also try to control the keepers. But we liked to control him because of our safety.

You had to take a hose and a scrubbing brush

and a bucket. You had to climb up to the top balcony first, clean that, come down to the second one, clean that and then come down to the lower and other areas. And there was a vertical ladder going up. Every day without fail he would test you. You had to go up the ladder. He would be seen on the top and he is looking down at you like that. If you look at the monkey it's a threat. So you couldn't look at him.

You shouldn't look at him?

No, if you look at him he'll take it as a threat and then he'll challenge you and then it's up to him and you as to who backs down first. And as his repertoire of aggression is much stronger than yours, as he has very very sharp teeth, I don't think it's a good idea. So you go up the ladder



with the scrubbing brush, with this hose in your hand and as you slowly go up you keep your head down. Then when you come to the top you hope that he has backed up. So at last you put your hand on the last rung where he was sitting and if you put your hands there and if he is not there you're safe. If he's there then you wait. What he wants to do is, he wants to go through your hair.

Monkeys groom each other, it's part of their social strategy and bonding. They groom your hair and most people think they are looking for lice. They are actually looking for salt. You perspire and there are salt crystals in your hair, on your scalp. And they take out these salt crystals and they eat them because there is not much salt in their environment. And it is also a form of bonding between each other. They go through



the fur in the hair, through the body, and any other dirt they remove. Of course if there are lice, they'll remove them. So ever so often the dominant male would want to do that to me and I would have to just stand there with this hose in one hand, the scrubbing brush in the other hand and hang on somehow while he would take his time grooming me. So he would go through my hair and I couldn't look up. Then when he was satisfied — that might take 15 minutes he would then step down and condescend to let me come up and start cleaning.

Did you enjoy this?

Of course, because it's fun. There is an element of danger — like playing Russian roulette. It is that element of danger which you enjoy. It is like when I was in Toronto in Canada, there we had an enclosure of 10 acres which had 40 bison and they are very big animals. When I stand up, the male's shoulder is at my head height. It is a very, very large animal. And during the spring when they have calves, you have to tag the calves within the first three days, because that's when the calf is sitting there and it doesn't move much. And so you drive this small truck and come between the calf and the mother. Then one of the keepers has to quickly hop out and take this thing which is like a pair of pliers with a plastic tag in it. And he

has to jump out and tag the ear of the calf. It's red or yellow or blue for the identification.

As soon as you put the tag in, the calf will make an enormous noise, like "Ahh, ahh!" because it is painful. And then instantly there is thunder. And 40 bison are coming across the field at you and you have to make sure you get back into the truck before they arrive. Normally they are quite friendly; you can walk through the herd. When you are cleaning up, you actually push them aside but now they are deadly. Even though they know you, they are deadly. They believe the calf is in danger. So you quickly get in and they come running all around. The mother, in the meantime, has come around and found the calf safe and everybody is happy. The herd is mill-



ing around the truck wondering what's going on, where is the danger, who is the attacker? And you are safely inside the cabin waiting. Then you wait for 10 minutes and then you back the truck out and you leave. So, that sort of things happens all the time. ☿

To be continued...

THE ALUMNI ART EXHIBITION

After many years there was an art exhibition with the creations of the former students of the School. It happened quite spontaneously and those who could be readily contacted were asked to participate. There was embroidery by **Pranati Pai '83**, paintings by **Dilip Patel '76H**, **Vishwajyoti Mohroff '88**, **Sunayana Panda '79**, paintings on cloth by **Bina Dharod '86**, nature photographs by **Atma Reddy '81** and **Ritarpan '07**, patchwork by **Datta Mukherjee '73** and creative use of packing cardboard by **Devashish Patnaik '82**.

The exhibition lasted from 15th to 19th October and was highly appreciated by all those who came to see it. This positive reaction has led us to decide to hold such an exhibition next year again. The tentative date fixed for the group show is 20th August 2016. All those who would like to participate can get in touch with The Golden Chain office.

The main artists who were behind this year's exhibition have shared their thoughts with us. We asked them how they discovered the form of art they were pursuing and what its contribution is to their life. This is what they had to say.

DILIP PATEL

Art has been a part of my life since early childhood. I would watch my mother's deft fingers weave, embroider, knit and sew with ease, while carrying out the many jobs around the house. My father too



was a handyman, taking pride in doing most jobs generally done by skilled workers, like carpentry, machine embroidery and car mechanics.

I believe one should pursue an abiding passion in life for the entire length of one's life, so in my case the perfecting of an art form has been the aim and the raison d'être, fortified further by the very high status to art given by the Mother and Sri Aurobindo.



When one loses oneself in an art form, one is less aware of oneself and more aware perhaps of the Self since it is perfection one is striving for. It's a "high" that cannot be explained, only felt.





VISHWAJYOTI

In school I merely dabbled in drawing and painting. But when I visited an exhibition put up by Jean-Louis Duhalde and some of our Delafon teachers in the Exhibition House in the early '90s, I felt the sudden urge to create something as beautiful as what was before me. They had made some exquisite tableaux of collage and embroidery using pieces of material left over after making Mother's kameezes. This show was the trigger point for me and there has been no looking back since then. From being barely able to draw and trying to make beautiful things with just collage and embroidery to attempting to understand and create abstraction by negating realism and the familiar, has been a long journey.

Art keeps me busy. For someone with neither a formal education in art nor an inborn talent for it, the path I chose has not been easy. Turn-

ON SEEING THE EXHIBITION

Vrinda Patnaik '63 writes to Dilip

Today we were deeply moved and filled with joy to see the beautiful exhibition of Douce Mère's children blooming into creative artists. Hearty congrats and our prayers to Them to give you more grace and light to pursue your art.

There are many things to tell you — for instance the lovely golden yellow pollen gently falling from the flowers on the leaves made me aware that even the tiniest part is not forgotten in your observation. That is simply amazing. Your spray paintings of Ganesha look like real statues. Bravo.

Pranati's hidden talent of perfect stitching and combination of colours with delicate touches here and there is simply wonderful.

Vishwajyoti's nature paintings are so realistic too, especially the flowers.

Atma and Ritarpan's photographs bring us very close to the animal world's beauty....

Sunayana is another hidden talent — very expressive.

ing my passion into my profession made it all the more difficult because in a profession there is not much room for experimentation; as a rule, if you sell one style well, stick to it. But I keep trying to study art for art's sake and to experiment with different styles and mediums. So, this process becomes something like trying to make a living while still studying.

While my artistic journey has not been easy, occasionally forcing me to try out online jobs and even teaching, I have always been compelled to return to art. As Mehli Gobhai, a leading Indian abstractionist said in an interview, "When people ask me whether I enjoy painting, I say: I'm not sure 'enjoy' is the right word. I say I'm rather miserable while painting, but I am more miserable when not painting." What I learned and imbibed growing up in the Ashram reflects in my paintings, and what I am today is largely due to my art.



PRANATI

In the early seventies I did a year of embroidery when I first joined the Ashram school. The classes were held in the Flower Room then and Moon-di was my first teacher though the overall teacher in charge used to be Bela-di.

After a few years when I came to Sumedha-ben and Sudha-di's section, with their encouragement I continued embroidery. I learnt a variety of things with Sudha-di such as Shadow Work, Cross Stitch and Petit Point. Sumedha-ben guided me in the field of English embroidery. She was very encouraging and taught me to do some extraordinary needlework. I still remember my best work which was quite a number of handkerchiefs (white on white) which I had carried up to Sri Aurobindo's room on my birthday. After that period I occasionally did some embroidery, such as a dress for my daughter or handkerchiefs for friends etc.

As the children grew up and left home I had a little free time so I decided to do embroidery once again.



When I see a beautiful photograph or a painting I get excited and feel like putting it on cloth. Unlike painting it is very difficult to capture the exact shade on a piece of cloth but I try to match it to the best of my ability. While working if I am not happy I remove and restart several times. In every stitch I try to put in my best and create harmony. And when at the end a petal or a bird emerges it feels wonderful. This is something that relaxes me and gives me immense happiness. When I am working I am transported to a different world and that is the time I am closest to my innermost thoughts and it is an offering from me to the Mother. ❧

SOURCING OUR ONENESS AN EXPLORATION OF HARMONY

On October 25th, 2015, Ashramites, Aurovilians, former students, members of Sri Aurobindo Society and others came together for a workshop and discussions at Sharanam in the Lake area. Organised by the Sourcing Our Oneness team and hosted by Sri Aurobindo Society, it created an environment for fruitful interactions amongst those with common interests and similar areas of work and set the stage for future collaboration. The following article is based on a report by the hosts.

Sourcing Our Oneness is an initiative that aims to bring together people from various organisations such as Auroville, Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Sri Aurobindo Society, The Golden Chain Fraternity, World Union, Sri Aurobindo's Action, Auroville International, SACAR, and Delhi Ashram Branch that are working for the fulfilment of the aims and ideals of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother. The aspiration was to facilitate the coming together of individuals from various backgrounds to create a common platform where the collective aspiration can guide the outcome, where a process of harmonious collaboration can begin. The very first program





This was followed by a session offered by Aloka on an exploration of the theme of harmony through the five elements and the corresponding five senses. Beginning with some simple fun exercises to test concentration, the session moved to a deeper level as everyone was asked to be mindful of the various emotions or dimensions in us. Altogether a beautiful experience, uplifting the gathering through awareness!



in this series was hosted at the Unity Pavilion, Auroville on May 31, 2015. Following encouraging feedback and the generation of a lot of goodwill, a further program was planned.

The second program in this series, on the theme of 'Harmony', was hosted by Sri Aurobindo Society at its Sharanam premises on October 25, 2015, where about 60 people participated. After the initial refreshments, the participants gathered in the main hall of Sharanam for a collective invocation of the Mother's presence through the chanting of Sanskrit hymns, led by Dr Sampad-ananda Mishra and his team. Jaya (of the Unity Pavilion in Auroville) and Shivakumar (of Sri Aurobindo Society) welcomed all the participants and briefly explained what was in store for them for the day.





areas of interest such as Education, Health, Sports and Physical Education, Arts and Crafts, Music, Architecture and Construction, Farming and Gardens, Water and Environment, Technology and Research, Enterprise and Business Organisational Work, and Outreach and Communication. Every group had participants from the various organisations and was joined by a senior person from that particular field of activity (often someone from the Ashram who had been guided by the Mother). The group members were helped by group facilitators to arrive at collective insights of the group on the chosen topic. The participants

ideas generated through the discussions will be followed up with concrete action plans. Former students who are interested in sharing their experience and knowledge in any of the above-mentioned fields, and who are also keen to be part of a collaborative action are welcome to contact us.



Jaya and Shivakumar concluded by saying that this event will be followed up with many more future programs. The day's sessions ended with the playing of the Mother's reading of *Savitri*.

The ambience at Sharanam, the organizing team's efforts and the participants' involvement in the program created a beautiful atmosphere of harmony all around. All in all, it was a confluence of people from various organisations and backgrounds, getting together for sourcing their oneness. ❧



were also able to share their thoughts and experiences about their work and connect with others in the same field. An action plan was discussed on how to remain in touch with each other and continue and expand this collaboration. A final session was held where a representative from each group read out the outcome of their discussions, and it was resolved that these suggestions and



CHILDHOOD MEMORIES OF THE ASHRAM

Pratip Nahar '60 remembers. He passed away shortly after writing this article.

We were among the first children in the Ashram, that is, my brother Prabir, my sister Lucy and I.

We came to Pondicherry along with Sumitra-di and Suprabha-di (our aunts) on 31st October, 1941 on a very stormy day, although our stay in Pondy was to be very happy and peaceful. We stayed for 19 years in the Ashram, and in all those years only one day I had fever.



At the ashram reception entrance (left to right): Prabir Nahar, Gigi-di (Sumantrada's mom) holding Lucy and Pratip Nahar

I was 5 years and 8 months old, my brother Prabir was 4 years and 9 months old and my sister Lucy was just 2 years and 9 months old. I remember that in those early years my brother and I used to have a jolly good time playing. Initially Lucy was still too small to play with us.

After some time Chum, Jhumur and Bubu arrived in the Ashram. Our families knew each other and we used to run about in the Ashram building playing merrily.

When Mother saw that we were not studying, she asked us to come to her once a week and play with her. In the meantime Gauri also started playing with us. So every week we — Prabir, Lucy, Chum, Jhumur, Bubu, Gauri and myself — used

to go to the Mother and play “Ringa Ringa Roses” with her. When we said “all fall down”, she had arranged a chair where she would sit down. She used to give us sweets.

Kuckoo (Vinay) and I learned English from Dr. Doraiswami. I also learned from Prithwi Singh Nahar, my grandfather.

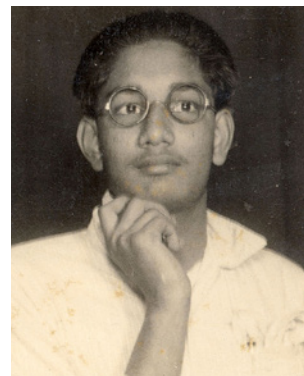
These are the very first memories of the Ashram for me.

Then when we were a little older, the Mother arranged private classes for us. In the meantime other children had joined the Ashram. So we started having regular classes with Tinkori-da, Sukumar-da and Pavita-di who taught the small children and Sisir-da, Prabhakar-da and Chandulal-da who taught older students. These classes were held where the Playground is at present. This was in 1942.

Finally on 2nd December, 1943 the School was formally opened.

There are a couple of memories from those early years which remain strongly etched in my mind. I remember the occasion when I was asked to recite “The Blue Bird”, Sri Aurobindo’s poem, in front of Sri Aurobindo. I was asked to stand on a small stool in front of a curtain, behind which Sri Aurobindo was sitting. Mother was sitting near me.

Then there was that day when I had gone to the Mother to receive flowers next to Sri Aurobindo’s room. She suddenly caught hold of me and turned me around and gave me a big blow on the back. I was so startled that I could not utter a word. Then she laughed and asked me where my hiccups had gone. Only then I realized I was having hiccups



and that was how she had stopped them.

In the Ashram, we had a busy schedule. We got up at 5:00 am, took our bath and went for balcony Darshan and then to the Dining Room for breakfast. School started at 7:45 am and the morning session ended at 11:30 am. The afternoon session started at 2:15 pm and ended at 4



pm. The physical activities started at 5 pm and ended at 7 pm. By the time we had dinner, finished studies and went to bed, it was 10 pm.

Here are some of the things that I remember from my school days. The Sunday picnics with Biren-da. The favourite places we used to go to

were the Red Hills, to the Military ground for football and to the Lake for swimming. At the Lake Biren-da initially threw us inside the small pond and we had to swim or drown. Obviously all of us learnt swimming because we are all alive till now. (Thus I could also later save a priest from drowning.) I remember our favourite food during our picnics was bread with lots of condensed milk.

Once we went to Red Hills with Abhay Singh-da. It was cloudy and drizzling slightly. It was wonderful weather for a picnic. There we saw that the ravines had filled up with water and we thought we would have a lovely time swimming, but as soon as I jumped in with my rain coat, I was caught in a very vicious current which turned me upside down. Seeing me jump most of the others also jumped in, and we all suffered the same fate. Luckily for me, my hand got caught in a small tree jutting out from the side of the ravine and thus I was saved and I managed to catch hold of the others. The persons who had not jumped in then pulled us out. We were extremely lucky to have survived this ordeal without severe injury.

I also remember we swam in the sea from Parc à Charbon to the Tennis Ground with Biren-da.

In school we were taught French, English (poetry, prose and Sri Aurobindo's works), Hindi,



At the Lab: Arati-di, Richard, Bhavatarini-di, Pratip, Bino?, Prapati?, Joshi-bhai, Kireet-bhai.

Mathematics, Physics, Chemistry, Biology, Botany, Astronomy, History and Geography. We had our own laboratory for Physics and Chemistry.

We took part in various physical activities. We played many games, such as basketball, volleyball, tennis, football, cricket and handball. Athletics consisted of running, walking, high jump, long jump, hop step and jump, javelin, discus and shot-put throws. We were taught gymnastics, boxing, wrestling and malkhamb. We did marching everyday and mass drill once in a while. We had a table-tennis table at home where we played every day.

In school my first teacher was Rani-di, followed by Violette, Tehmi-di and Nirod-da. The



During a picnic. Those standing: Binu, Parikshiti, Dipak Sen, Anirudha, Amarandra and Arun

Physics classes were taken by Jugal Kishore-da. Chemistry was taught by Joshi-bhai. Maths was taught by Nolini Sen-da, Sunil-da and for the higher classes by Dr. Venkataraman of Madurai

PRIZES RECEIVED FROM THE MOTHER

1-May-47: 75m race - 2nd, *Brinjal Race* - 2nd.

1-May-48: *Games* – Consolation.

1-Mar-49: *Cricket, Volley Ball* – Winner.

1-Sep-49: 400m Walk – 3rd, *Discus* – 3rd, *Long Jump* – 3rd, 100m Race – 3rd, 400m Walk – 2nd, *High Jump* – 3rd, *Balance Race* – 2nd.

1-Sep-50: *Sack Race* – 2nd, 800m Walk – 3rd.

2-Dec-50: *Mathematics* – 2nd.

3-Dec-50: *Jump to Chinning* – 2nd.

1-May-51: *Basket Ball* – Winner, *Hand Ball* – Winner, *Tennis Doubles* – Winner.

1-Sep-51: 110m Hurdles – Runner-up, *Pole Vault* – Runner-up, *Shot Put* – Runner-up, 400m Walk – Winner, *High Jump* – Winner, *Broad Jump* – Winner, *Wheel Barrow Race* – Winner, *Discus, Javelin* – 3rd, *Tug of War* – 2nd.

1-Dec-51: *Stamps* – Runner-up.

1-May-52: *Table Tennis* – Runner-up, *Tennis (Single)* – Runner-up, *Football* – Winner.

1-Sep-52: 110m Hurdles – Winner, 100m – 3rd.

1-Sep-52: *Tug of war* – 2nd.

1-May-53: *Football (C/D)* – Winner, *Football (C)* – Winner, *Basket ball* – Runner-up.

1-Sep-53: *Javelin* – Winner, 100m Race, 1500m Walk – Runner-up, *Shot Put* – 3rd.

1-May-53: *Volley Ball* – Winner.

1-Sep-54: *Javelin* – Winner, *Shot Put* – Winner, *Hop, Step and Jump* – 3rd.

1-Sep-55: *Hammer Throw* – Winner, 110m Hurdles – Winner, *Long Jump, 100m Race* – 3rd.

1-May-55: *Mass Drill* – C.

1-May-56: *Basketball, Football, Softball, Basketball* – Runner-up.

1-Sep-56: *Mass Drill* – Winner.

1-Mar-57: *Basketball* – Winner, *Football* – Winner, *Softball* – Winner.

1-Mar-58: *Basketball* – Winner, *Football* – Winner, *Tennis (Doubles)* – Winner.

1-Mar-59: *Tennis (Doubles)* – Winner.

1-Mar-59: *Volleyball, Tennis (Single), Table Tennis (Doubles)* – Runner-up.

24-Nov-60: *Mass Drill* – Runner-up.

on Sundays for 3 hours.

Prabir and myself learned colour photography with Chimanbhai in his lab. We learnt how to develop and print a colour picture. We also did photocopying of Sri Aurobindo's works.

I began teaching Chemistry, Physics and

Maths. I taught for several years and this helped me later to take classes in Germany, Saudi Arabia, Yemen, Kuwait, Bahrain, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, Nepal and in India in Travel and Tourism as Lufthansa German Airlines Passenger Sales Manager for India and Nepal. ❧

KOBI NISHIKANTO

By Prabhakar (Batti-da) '58

Once Sri Aurobindo had said of Kobi Nishikanto, "He is a Brahmaputra of inspiration."

Nishikanto had once recounted this anecdote to me. Once, he and his friend Dilip Kumar Roy were casually chatting, when all of a sudden Nishikanto composed or "downloaded" a poem from somewhere. Not to be outdone Dilip Kumar Roy sang out the poem in the form of a song. Kobi said, "Oré, tui pot koré tune deesh kikoré?" (How do you manage to instantly compose

a tune?) And he replied, "Oré, tui pot koré kobita banash kikoré?" (How do you manage to compose a poem instantly?)

When Kobi Nishikanto arrived in Pondicherry with the purpose of living in the Ashram he sat on the pavement waiting for Sri Aurobindo to reply to his request to be admitted into the Ashram. He waited for four days and four nights in the courtyard of Hotel Amnivasam. Then he was admitted on a "trial" basis. He was finally accepted as a member of the Ashram but he

was forewarned by Sri Aurobindo: “If you live in Bengal you will have great fame, but if you stay here you will not have ‘that’ fame and may have to undergo a great deal of physical suffering. You may choose.”

We know what he chose and how much he suffered. When I asked him, “*Kobi, tumi èto bhugchho kèno?*” (Poet, why are you suffering so much?) He replied, “*Na bhuglé Gurur kotha shotti hobé kikoré?*” (If I don’t suffer how will my Guru’s words come true?)

Kobi could not converse very freely in English. He preferred to speak in Bengali. I don’t think he knew much English but his book “Dream Cadences” has forty poems in English. Of these 18 are original Bengali poems translated by Dilip Kumar Roy. One of them, the 19th, has been translated into English by Sri Aurobindo himself. How many does that leave? $40 - 19 = 21$. So the remaining 21 English poems were written by Kobi!

Not many know that Kobi was a great cook and a greater artist. He accompanied our group on an annual picnic to Lake. Mona had invited him. He came and cooked rice, dal and a cauliflower dish. Everything tasted good and normal. Later we found out that the dal was cooked in the leftover tea of the breakfast which he didn’t want to throw away. We came back none the wiser. After the picnic he was made an honorary member of our group – which is now called “D” but which in those years was called “C”.

Kobi always complained about the fact that his paintings had been removed from their wooden frames. This would have damaged his paintings as they were very heavy, composed of layers on layers of oil paint. This was his style. Many of his paintings were given to the Art Gallery and perhaps the frames were cut up and recycled!

I asked him in later years, “Why don’t you paint again? You have nothing to do. I will get you the materials.” He replied, “No, no, it requires a lot of concentration and that would make my blood pressure shoot up.”

After that he was fast deteriorating and gave up on life. But before that he was often in

JIPMER. Once he was there and he came to know that the Mother was going to give *darshan* from the new balcony on the terrace and he wanted to come and see her. He called me. I took a car and went there. The doctor in charge, a Bengali man well acquainted with Kobi, said, “No, no, you cannot be moved out of the ward.” But Kobi kept



on pleading, adamant. Finally, he struck a deal. He said, “Doctor, you come with me and keep a watch on my pulse. If it gets any worse we return to the ward.” That was agreed upon. We started towards Pondicherry, with me driving and the doctor holding Kobi’s hand. As we approached the Ashram the doctor was amazed and admitted that the pulse was much better. We had the *darshan* of the Mother and we went back to JIPMER hospital happier and wiser.

During those 17 years after the Mother placed her foot on his chest [see anecdote recounted in the editorial of our last issue] and his passing away he suffered a lot but he fooled Yama. He said to me, “*Batti, Jomraj élo onék baar. Bhablo ‘éké niyé ami ki korbo?’ Ar cholé gélo.*” (Yamaraj came many times. He thought ‘What will I do with this fellow?’ and went away.) Finally, even Yamaraj could not bear to see him suffer and he took him away. Where is he now? He had said, “Look for a boy with big cheeks and big eyes who likes sweets.” ❧



QUIZ TIME!

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

1. Who did Sri Aurobindo engage as a tutor when he wanted to learn Bengali after he came back from England?
2. Where did Sri Aurobindo go and live when he was released from prison?
3. She was given her name by Sri Aurobindo when she was a child. She has been a teacher in the school for decades. Who is she?
4. Who was the famous lady from the early days of the Ashram who wrote to Sri Aurobindo that she was going to kill herself and received the reply : "If you are not there anymore who will make luchs for me?"
5. What is the spiritual significance of the honeysuckle flowers?

ANSWERS TO THE QUESTIONS OF THE MAY 2015 ISSUE :

1. *How many stanzas are there in Sri Aurobindo's poem "A God's Labour"?*
There are 31 stanzas.
2. *Which institution was given the date 23.4.56 by the Mother for its inauguration?*
The Mother's International School (MIS) at the Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Delhi Branch.
3. *What programme was organised by the School on 7-7-1977 (7.7.77)?*
Nolini-da was invited to give a talk to the students as it was a special date. Although he started the talk by speaking of the significance of special dates he ended the talk by speaking about the Mother and the significance of her work.
4. *Why is there a statue of Sri Aurobindo at the UNESCO headquarter at Paris?*
Because he has projected the idea of Human Unity as the inevitable future of the human race. It was this thought that has culminated in the existence of Auroville.
5. *What is the spiritual significance of the flower of the brinjal (aubergine) plant?*
Fearlessness in the vital.

*If you can always smile at life,
life also will always smile at you.*

The Mother



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