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The Golden Chain

Alumni Journal of Sri Aurobindo International Centre of Education



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

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

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

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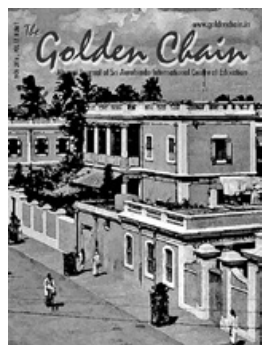
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EDITORIAL TEAM:

Gopal '90, Sunayana '79

EDITORIAL ASSISTANCE:

Anurupa '86, Claire,
Gaurishankar '80, Shyama '85,
Meera '95, Datta '85

ART DESIGN:

Saroj Kumar Panigrahi, Somdutt '90

PRODUCTION ASSISTANCE:

Pranati '83, Kiran '72,
Swadhin '70, Siva

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Phone: 91-413-2233683

e-mail: office@goldenchainfraternity.org

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THE EDITORS' PAGE

by Sunayana Panda '79

On November 24th 2016 the Ashram will complete 90 years since its formal creation in November 1926. Sri Aurobindo had no intention of starting an Ashram when he came to Pondicherry. In fact, he lived for a decade in the company of the handful of young men who had followed him from his revolutionary days, practically in hiding, with very little contact with the outside world. But with the coming of the Mother in 1920, when she made Pondicherry her permanent home, things began to grow slowly. The community developed informally, as more and more people joined the little group, but it wasn't until the Siddhi Day, 24th November 1926, that things took an official turn. From that day onwards the Mother took charge of the outer organisation while Sri Aurobindo isolated himself and focussed on his inner work.

It has been a long journey, through these 90 years, for an institution which started so quietly, without grand announcements. The Ashram has gone through ups and downs, through storms and calm weather, with every decade bringing with it significant changes. The Second World War brought families and the School was started. A decade later the children who had grown up in the Ashram became the adult members of the community. From the mid-1950s onwards more children came but their parents were living outside, so hostels had to be created for them. From the 1980s fewer and fewer students joined the Ashram after their studies. Slowly the Ashramite families disappeared and most students were living with their parents in the town. In this way the Ashram has gone through major changes. But it is still there and its core is still alive.

As we look at the changes we notice that the place of the School, and of the students, in the life of the Ashram has played an important part for a long time in this narrative. Even during the foundation ceremony of Auroville, and its first

couple of years, the students of the school were intensely involved in everything. In the 1970s the number of hostels, or "boardings" as they are called, reached their maximum number. There were 800 students and they all felt that they were a part of the Ashram, because the boardings were very much a part of the Ashram. This may seem strange today because now the connection between the students and the Ashram community is not that strong. There are very few points where the students meet the Ashramites and almost none where they actually interact.

With the passage of time, those who know the early days of the Ashram, those who have seen the Mother and even Sri Aurobindo, will be no more in this world. Then the memory of this community will fade and children will study in the School and leave it at the end, without any knowledge of the institution in which they have grown up. The records of those early days will be there in libraries and bookshelves or in some electronic or audio-visual form but if no one accesses them they will be of no use. It is important to know the past because then we can better manage the future.

The School is an integral part of the Ashram. That is why perhaps an effort should be made so that the students can come closer to the larger community, know it from closer quarters and develop a sense of belonging. Ninety years is a long time and there is so much to learn from that accumulated experience in every field. True, we cannot put the clock back but we can make an effort to regenerate, revive, preserve the essential and grow.

Sri Aurobindo has written in *The Synthesis of Yoga*: "To be perpetually reborn is the condition of a material immortality". This perhaps has been the secret of the survival of the Ashram through great odds, this capacity of adaptation, while remaining faithful to its core values. So let us reflect on how we can be perpetually reborn since the centenary of the Siddhi Day is only a decade away. ❧

POUR LA JOIE QUE CELA NOUS DONNE

Arya Yuyutsu '09

“Stop watching the idiot box all the time,” Mum would sometimes say, exasperated with my need to watch an inconsequential County cricket match between Gloucestershire and Leicestershire or some other Shire that is pronounced rather differently from how it’s spelt. “Is this what you want to do with your life? Watch other people do things and live their dreams?”

I would look at her with just the right mixture of sheepishness and pleading to extract 5 more minutes of viewing time, which she acceded to after a short furrowing of brows.

Not even the more rebellious side of me considered retorting with a “Yeah, that’s precisely what I plan on doing with my life. I want a ring-side view to some of the most captivating sporting events and get paid to do that.” No siree, I was a wee kid with dreams more befitting a child’s regular imaginations.

* * *

field ideas that Rajesh-da had come up with, such as department week where we were asked to work in an Ashram department for a week. It broke for me the monotony of learning things with little practical usage. I was finally actually doing things with the knowledge I was acquiring.

One afternoon as Ishit Shau (class of ’09) and I sat in Room Number 20 talking about football, we realised that not many around us really cared for football that much. Those of you who are aware of Ishit’s body-built rockstar image would find it rather bewildering that this hulk of a chap was once a skinny kid who supported Aston Villa Football Club and sat chatting about football with me. Well, it happened.

Realising the paucity of football info amongst students in our school we decided, equipped with the aforementioned can-do spirit and the ‘space to grow’ that our school affords, to start a sports newsletter with a focus on football, ineptly and uncreatively named ‘Xtra Innings’.

That was my first little peek into what I wanted to do later on. We released 12 issues, done monthly, made completely on some Newsletter Templates we found in the Computer Lab. They were amateur material, as were we. Looking through some of those issues I doff our collective figurative hat to Sujay Jauhar who edited it to weed out every spelling error.

Writing had always been a passion of mine. Hell, I wrote poems (I admit, driven from entirely romantic motives) during math class, for much of my EAVP 4-6 years. But what really had me hooked was theatre. Ever since I had

acted in Radhika-arya’s play, back in my Progrès days, I had fallen in love with the stage. I signed up for every imaginable play in E4, E5, and E6.



Interviewing my childhood hero - Lance Klusener

E4 was a year where I felt liberated. I felt creative. I felt a certain can-do spirit I had hitherto lacked. A lot of it was thanks to the out-of-left-



Lugging around 23 kg of equipment in Australia and New Zealand

I knew pretty early on that I wasn't exceptional at it. Acting alongside people like Utpal, Thirthankar, Sujay, Kamalika puts your acting chops in perspective. But I knew I loved being up there, performing, telling a story to others who were transfixed by my words.

At about the same time I loved watching movies and TV shows, analyzing the acting and delivery of words. It was a world I desperately wanted to be a part of but which I knew I could, at best, be a close spectator to.

I sat at home one evening when I was in K3. I'd never before really given a serious thought to what I wanted to do after SAICE. It had begun gnawing at me now. I put down what I loved to do most: theatre, sport, writing. The idea of getting into Broadcast Journalism dawned upon me soon enough. It married all my passions just perfectly. But the key ingredient to my pursuing it came in Knowledge, in the two years and eight months preceding this trip into 'Life Contemplation Lane'.

While I swept through much of school with a casual disregard for consequences or deadlines or assignments, Knowledge was where I was finally doing just what I wanted to do. School was where I formed my core passions and began discovering myself. Knowledge was where I understood just how I could harness all my potential and change the "intelligent but lazy" comments to "this dude knows what he's doing and I think he

could actually go out there and do it."

Knowledge is where I learnt to think. In Kamal-bhai and Namu's class we learnt to look at problems and understand just what the real underlying issue was. In Kittu-da's class we learnt to question things rationally rather than rebelliously. In David's class we learnt to lay out all of that and put it together in a coherent, concrete way.

But it was Shanti-da who really taught me how to make my mind tick into motion at command. He took a machine that had been assembled and lit the spark that would click it into motion. He ran through the gears one at a time, accelerated to see how quick it could run and then nursed it to make it ready for action.

The road was what awaited. I make it sound dramatic, but it felt like it. It probably does for everyone, as the K3 class song plays out on the speaker, muffling down the tear-stricken version being sung by the class.

This is where the regular bits of clichés come in: broadening your horizons and ideas by going on to study further, grappling for a lucky break to get your foot into the job-door in the industry, being at the right place at the right time to get a job you dreamt you'd get at twice the age you actually got it at. But we could skip much of that on grounds of repetition.



Media Scrum Melbourne – me in leather jacket on the right. Photo Credit: Getty Images



Attending Brendon McCullum's press conference

There are snippets from my studies at The University of Sheffield that warned me of the life that lay ahead. But we choose to hear what we want to hear. We hear the exciting bit about chasing a breaking news story. We phase out the part where you spend hours on end sitting at an edit machine trying to cut some video so it fits within the 2-minute-45-second bracket the package is supposed to go into.

We remember the bit where a writer thrashed out 3000 words of pristine high class platinum on a football match that will never be forgotten. But we somehow overlook the fact that the same football writer had to report on a dull, dour 0-0 draw where the most fascinating thing that happened was that the announcer sneezed while announcing the fans' attendance at the park.

Working at ESPN was, at first, a lot of sitting in a studio, cutting press conference clips that were sent to us by the brave men who went to lands afar to get into a dingy room and film a guy giving generic replies to increasingly convoluted questions thrown his way.

Journalism isn't something you can do as a 9-to-5 even if you don't like your job. You end up breathing your job, living it, all the time. You better be in love with it if you want to get there. In love with the art of finding a story and telling it.

Two years down from cutting those press conferences, I spent all of March 2015 in New Zealand, working every single day, but as one of the brave men who got into the dingy rooms to film a guy giving generic replies to increasingly convoluted questions that I, amongst others, threw his way.

But that wasn't all. The role of a video journalist had evolved swiftly since the time I had decided to get in the field. Earlier you either held a camera expertly, or edited clips swiftly and precisely, or held yourself just right and spoke well on screen, or made sure that this whole thing happened to a plan that needed exceptional execution.

But the modern video journalist is a multi-purpose Swiss-knife of sorts. My work during the 2015 Cricket World Cup wasn't just relegated to sitting and writing about the cricket matches and attending press conferences. I was also the adequately equipped cameraman. I was also the moderately talented reporter / interviewer. I was also the guy who hung out with the various teams' media managers, forging relationships and executing a plan. I also edited with an acceptable pace and precision.

The need to pull back on their expenses and the desire to make logistics easier has driven news organizations to turn towards multi-skilled people more often. And filming, editing, interviewing and gathering sources, wasn't all. I was also expected to Tweet, make short Vine videos, produce FB posts.

So the previously busy enough 24x7 has now translated to 24x7x4 thanks to evolution's latest gift to mankind: multitasking.

But work rarely feels like a drudgery that I need to get through in order to adhere to a social construct and earn enough green paper to buy products that we didn't realise we needed until we noticed Keira Knightley smiling beatifically beside it.

I actually get a ringside view to "watch other people do things and live their dreams" and be a part of that moment. I get to stretch my creativity and let it snap around something of moderate substance. I get to hear stories and tell them. I get to know how the aforementioned dreams happened. Stories. Chats. Sport. Curiosity. Ask questions. Speak. Perform. Think.

This job was never about the money or status. It is, as our SAICE notebook cover reminded us, "pour apprendre, pour savoir, pour comprendre le monde, et pour la joie que cela nous donne". ☘

GARDENING FOR THE SOUL

LANDSCAPE DESIGN, BEAUTY AND SPIRITUALITY

Devashish Patnaik '82 writes about the journey of creating a garden of beauty, serenity, and reflection at the Park Guest House here in the Ashram.

INSPIRATION THROUGH YOGA

This is a story of healing through connection with nature, focusing on elements of landscape design and being guided by the Integral Yoga. It all began initially as part of my sadhana here at

plants, water and soil. The garden also teaches us to appreciate the unseen in dealing with the energy of the land and with the power of the earth itself. Here is a place where things constantly change with growth and decay.



the Ashram, at Park Guest House. It fell to me at a certain point to take over the care of its garden by the sea. As a creative person and nature lover, I found this escape outdoors in a garden to be a perfect opportunity. Only slowly did the work begin to take a life of its own.

Reading through the works of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother on nature and beauty, I was inspired to investigate a little deeper into the subject. My exploration made me study various books on gardens and landscaping. I realised that the garden is a condensation of the universe; it is a place of natural beauty. Here one can relate in a compassionate way to the living land, the rocks,

After working for a while in the garden I had a major breakthrough. I began to feel a deep bond with the natural world. Being in nature was very soothing and it brought about a refinement in my being. My nature's rough edges were polished and smoothened. Also I felt that here I could be most effective in helping to change the world, particularly in terms of humanity's relationship with nature. In fact what I learnt later in the garden went far beyond gardening and embraced all activities. I

also realised how with the growth of the garden I spontaneously grew.

THE SEARCH

My search was to understand nature by directly participating in it as intimately as I could. Movement, change, light, growth and decay are the lifeblood of nature. Nature is in a state of change and that change is the key to understanding.

Reading a few lines of the Mother, I realised the importance she laid on nature and its power and relevance for spiritual life:

"When you have nothing to do, you become

restless, you run about, you meet friends, you take a walk, to speak only of the best; I am not referring to things that are obviously not to be done. Instead of that, sit down quietly before the sky, before the sea or under trees, whatever is possible (here you have all of them) and try to realise one of these things



— to understand why you live, to learn how you must live, to ponder over what you want to do and what should be done, what is the best way of escaping from the ignorance and falsehood and pain in which you live.” (1)

This became my way of works over time, both in the garden and within myself. For me, labouring in the garden was actually for the benefit of the guests, for creating a healing space for them. It was only much later that I really understood – I had truly benefited more than any guest could ever have! I would like to share some of the significant aspects of this journey of healing in the garden.

Gardening, I knew, was a physical and creative activity; it draws on the intellect as well as the emotions. My approach to gardening was the naturalistic one. I tried to keep it as organic as possible, avoiding chemical inputs. In the landscaping I would avoid artificiality so that the visitors would feel the closeness to nature. By giving nature its freedom, I realised that I had opened myself to the new relationships that nature would suggest.

The living garden is always in a process of change. As plants grow and blend more and more together, as our understanding deepens, we see

things in the garden that we had not seen before or had not understood deeply enough. It encourages us to feel and experience ‘silence’, the inner being in us. It is so fluid that it vibrates with a kind of relaxation. The garden takes time to make, but it has a rewarding beauty.

My idea was to make this garden a synthesis of Indian ideas and the traditions of Japan. The Japanese intend to imitate the intimate essence of nature, not its actual appearance. The garden then serves as an aid to meditation on the true meaning of life.

Japanese gardening is very subtle. What they really do is to suggest Nature, to symbolise Nature in all her vastness, by means of a small number of rigorously selected and meticulously placed garden plants and stones that are pregnant with spiritual associations. They believe that nature is not ornamental. These gardens – characterised by stones, water, unusual plants and minimal amounts of colour – are traditionally designed to promote inner peace and serenity. They eliminate everything which is not essential for their beauty.



THE CHALLENGE

The garden is very close to the ocean. The haunting and compelling beauty of the seaside is deceptive; the elements can also be cruel and destructive. I realised that low-growing plants would help keep the panorama visible from the guest rooms. To add to the difficulty, many plants that prosper in other parts of Pondicherry could not survive here. It is all due to the saline ocean breeze. The solution to this conundrum was



choosing plants that could adapt to the rigours of this climate. Moreover a feeling of spaciousness comes from limiting the number of plants!

The Mother, in one of her talks to the children, says, *“On the physical plane it is in beauty that the Divine expresses Himself.... In the physical world, of all things it is beauty that expresses best the Divine. The physical world is the world of form and the perfection of form is beauty. Beauty interprets, expresses, manifests, the Eternal. Its role is to put all manifested nature in contact with the Eternal through the perfection of form, through harmony and a sense of the ideal which uplifts and leads towards something higher.”* (2)

Here she has described what has been a central guiding principle in designing and maintaining the guest house garden. And we all know the value she places in flowers as a doorway to the psychic being. She says:

“Love of flowers is a valuable help for finding and uniting with the psychic. ...Since flowers are the manifestation of the psychic in the vegetal kingdom, love of flowers would mean that one is drawn by the psychic vibration and consequently by the psychic in one’s own self. When you are receptive to the psychic vibration, that puts you in a more intimate contact with the psychic in your own self. Perhaps the beauty of flowers too is a means used by Nature to awaken in human beings the attraction for the psychic.” (3)

There are of course elements of landscape design other than flowers and foliage which are used to evoke the power and energy of healing. For example, in our garden, I experimented, creating landscapes with local materials, slabs of stones

and granite, setting each piece with my own hands. The challenge was to create landscapes that look as if they have always existed. Natural rocks and stones possess qualities that are both pleasing to the eye and gratifying to the soul. Stones radiate a sense of timelessness, a solidity and presence. They were created thousands of millions of years ago. Their strength and huge variety of colour and texture make them very special.

The flow of water is another deeply satisfying element in a garden. The sound of falling water is an ancient way of focusing the mind in order to let go of stress and problems that plague everyday life. In this meditative garden, the sound of water becomes a vital aid in learning relaxation skills and helps the mind become so tuned in, that distractions are less likely to interfere with concentration. The natural trickle of the water flow is far more appealing than heavy falls that tend to mask birds and other natural sounds that users find appealing. Gazing upon the rills of water and the small pool provide visual inspiration and a fluid coolness all summer long.

BEAUTY

Another aid for inner reflection in the garden is carved or painted inscriptions. These can be provocative, propounding perhaps a philosophical idea or inducing a smile! Calligraphy is a most beautiful art which is fully developed when the choice of lettering style reflects the provenance of the inscription. Gardens are places to stimulate the senses and memories. How gratifying, then, to be reminded of a favourite line while meandering through the garden!

Sculptures are used here for the same purpose. They can take many forms, and their beauty and healing power are dependent upon the quality of materials and the skill of the craftsman. A carefully chosen and positioned piece of sculpture can entirely refocus a garden design, giving a lifetime of pleasure. ‘Objets-trouvés’ can create an atmosphere inviting contemplation. The earth, rocks, the stones and boulders are symbols of

the unchanging, the ultimate reality, the deities. Stones also symbolise the Absolute, the realm of the ancients.

The Mother has said, *“To do this yoga, one must have, at least a little, the sense of beauty. If one does not, one misses one of the most important aspects of the physical world.*

There is this beauty, this dignity of soul – a thing about which I am very sensitive. It is a thing that moves me and evokes in me a great respect always.” (4)

LOVE AND RESPECT

In having reverence and respect for the earth, we enrich our spiritual journey. Without it, the journey is incomplete. When we garden with this understanding and attitude we realise it is a place of growth not only for nature but for our inner selves. In this spiritual space we consciously restore the meaning of what might otherwise be considered ordinary work: digging, planting, watering and maintaining the space. As we gain an understanding of the spirit in matter and in all things, we better appreciate the importance

must also show that loving attention, thoughtfulness, and protection for the living earth. We go to these places, not always to work but to come into contact with the spiritual essence of nature. These spaces truly help us as seekers to live more meaningful and dedicated lives.

Gardens are very important to the health of the environment and for the enrichment of human life. They serve as a mirror reflecting the pleasures of the vast world of nature. In these spaces we also learn that there is a large cycle of life that is beyond our control. We learn patience where there is a long wait from planting to sprouting to blooming, as we learn acceptance when nature takes its own course. We gain humility when we come across a certain complexity of the natural world. Seeing becomes understanding – the Divine’s presence is easily seen in His handiwork. Mistakes and experiments were made but they always taught me something. Experiments for a useful, productive end, part of a forward movement of life. There were many trials and errors before the garden reached its present form.

In the garden we can truly sense an acute feeling of being one with nature in a complete way, a sense of awe and wonder. Love seems to be a priority when one starts working in the garden. Also loving and accepting every aspect of ourselves, we become whole. We begin to experience the compassion that allows us to feel and understand the essence of all forms of life. Once we accept that all life is interrelated it becomes obvious that every one of our actions has an effect on nature, no matter how far removed those actions may be from a garden.

One of the most significant aspects of contact with the garden is simply that it helps to enlarge our viewpoint. If we treat everything as living, our own life is greatly enriched. In the garden very often one feels that one is part of the whole – part of that clod of earth, part of that tiny flower, part of the rain and sunshine.



of cooperation within natural systems as well as among people. Too often, we have lost that connection to the natural world and our awareness of our place in it and our responsibility to nurture it. If we truly care for ourselves, our families, our friends and communities, then we

CONCLUSION

There is no doubt that the Park Guest House garden has seen many visitors, a number of them have had beautiful experiences and have gone away renewed. Upon entering the garden a sense of reverence is called forth, asking for silence and respect. If we heed this signal we may find ourselves rewarded with something hal-
lowed, healing, and special! I have also realised that the quality of that transmission is conditioned by the clarity and character of the receiver. An unexpected realisation has been the degree to which my own life and inner harmony and healing have been enriched more than those of the myriad guests who come and go. Working here is always a means to express oneself, to develop one's capacities and possibilities and also offer service to the whole community. Let me thus serve humbly, fulfilling my presence in this world with loving kindness.

I will conclude here with a line by the Mother from her *Prayers and Meditations*:

"At these blessed hours all earth sings a hymn of gladness, the grasses shudder with pleasure, the air is vibrant with light, the trees lift towards heaven their most ardent prayer, the chant of the birds becomes a canticle, the waves of the sea billow with love, the smile of children tells of the infinite and the souls of men appear in their eyes." (5)



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Devashish has been serving at Park Guest House, Pondicherry for the past 30 years. Editorial assistance for this article was provided by a friend and fellow sadhak. This article first appeared in the April 2016 issue of NAMAHA – New Approaches to Medicine and Health. ❧

ERRATA

There was an error on page 19 of our last issue (GC, May-Aug 2016). Nolini Sen-da should read Nolini Sarkar-da. Also, as many readers have pointed out, Bokul-di was his younger daughter and not the elder one as we had printed.

SRI AUROBINDO AND THE CRIPPS MISSION

Sunayana Panda '79 tells us about her book

What is the story behind this book? How did you get the idea of bringing it out?

I had gone to a library in London to borrow a couple of books. I went to the biography section and was going through their collection when I saw a book on Sir Stafford Cripps. It immediately caught my attention and I brought it home. I was sure that I would find the story of Sri Aurobindo's telegram congratulating him on his proposal to the Indian leaders. Of course, it wasn't there. A bit disappointed, I decided to read the whole book, and discovered this man about whom I had heard so much since my childhood. I had grown up hearing the story of how Sir Stafford Cripps had come to India with a proposal from the British Government and how Sri Aurobindo immediately sent Doraiswamy to Delhi to try and convince the Indian leaders to accept it but ultimately no one took his suggestion seriously and rejected the offer.

I felt that the biography I had borrowed had a lot of invaluable information for our Ashram. So I wrote an essay on Sir Stafford Cripps and sent it to Ravi for publication in *Mother India*. Ravi on his part added a few more documents and articles related to this story of the Cripps Mission and brought it out in *Mother India*. When I saw that issue I thought, "Why not make a proper compilation of everything and publish it as a book so that those who are interested in this subject can access all this information easily and in one volume?"

The subject is an unknown and difficult one. Didn't you feel that the book would be interesting only for a small minority among the followers of Sri Aurobindo?

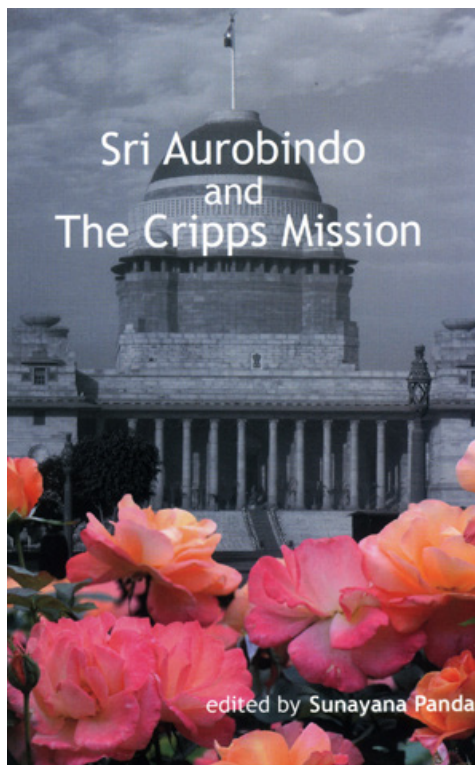
Precisely, because it is such a difficult topic I wanted the common man, the average reader, to be able to understand what this story was all about, otherwise it would remain forever beyond him. I wanted all the devotees of Sri Aurobindo to understand what exactly he had done. When I was a student I had so often heard from various teachers that Sri Aurobindo had done everything in his power to convince Nehru and Gandhi to accept the proposal. So I had always wanted to know what was in that proposal and what reasons the Indian leaders had given for refusing it. I wanted to find it out for myself and then share it with everyone.

How did you go about putting the book together?

Firstly, I looked for published sources of the information I needed. Fortunately, I was in London

for several months so I went to the British Library and read through the books which could give me a complete picture. Believe it or not, I found a lot in our own Ashram Library when I got back to Pondicherry!

After that I arranged the information and documents into three sections. In the first section I compiled all that Sri Aurobindo and the Mother had said and written on this matter. It was the



EXCERPT FROM THE BOOK

Taken from the chapter “Who Was Sir Stafford Cripps?” by Sunayana Panda:

His real name was Richard Stafford Cripps, although somewhere in his early adult life he dropped the “Richard”. Interesting to us is the fact that he was born in London on 24th April. The year he was born, 1889, Sri Aurobindo was in his final year at St. Paul’s School. The street in Fulham where he was born in London is only a kilometre away from Cromwell Road where Sri Aurobindo was living at that time. Cripps was brought up in a privileged and aristocratic environment. He was keenly interested in science

and did his M.Sc. from University College London although he had been accepted at Oxford. In actual fact, Oxford would have been a more advantageous choice considering that he wanted to eventually enter politics in later life. There he would have been able to make those crucial social contacts which are so necessary to the life of a politician but he chose University College London because it had better laboratory facilities. This may seem as a minor detail but essentially it shows that he was true to himself. Again interesting to us is the fact that he ended his student life after getting his M.Sc. in 1910, the year Sri Aurobindo left active politics and came to Pondicherry.

section dealing with the Ashram’s point of view. I also added what other senior sadhaks like Amal Kiran and Nirodbaran had written about it. The second section was about the whole story seen from the point of view of the Indian leaders and the third section was the point of view of the British. In this way, I presented the story seen from three different points of view. I have shown what was going on in the minds of those who made the proposal and those who rejected it, as well as why Sri Aurobindo thought it should have been accepted.

Is it only a compilation of what others have written or have you also added something else to it?

I have written several essays. I have firstly written an introduction. I have also written an essay on Nehru, an essay on Churchill and also an essay on Sir Stafford Cripps himself. I felt that since so much time has passed many may not know the context in which all this happened. This proposal and the consequences cannot be understood unless one knows what made Churchill formulate that proposal in the first place.

What reactions did you get from the readers?

Many readers have thanked me for taking the trouble of bringing out this volume. Many said that they didn’t know that the Mother also had

said so much about this story. There are so many unknown facts that it is a book of discovery for many readers. I gave it to a few non-devotees and they told me that it has helped them to better understand Sri Aurobindo because it showed them how concerned he was about India’s fate even when he was so far from the field of action. The wrong idea which many people have in their minds, that Sri Aurobindo had abandoned the fight and turned his back on the freedom movement, needs to be rectified.

Is there anything else you would like to add?

When the first copy was handed to me by Swadhin-da at the Ashram Press I felt a sense of achievement that I have rarely felt before. It was a dream fulfilled. On an intellectual level this is the highest and the most difficult work I have done. By putting my mind and heart to it I managed to do this work. And this book is meant for the common man, who is neither a historian nor a scholar, to help him understand a little better an episode which connects our Guru to the history of our country. I have put everything in such a simple language that anybody can understand it. And by the Mother’s grace I had the means to publish the book myself. Actually, this book came out in 2012 so it is not a new publication. ❧

[This book is available at SABDA.]



A TRAVELOGUE

Surabhi Nandy '81

Across dark skies and stormy seas,
Gaping ravines and jagged peaks,
Where danger in death-like silence speaks,
Often I've travelled with magical ease.

On routes strange that to cities lead,
Where life moves under stress and speed,
And lead to ruins of passion and greed
Of some lost race and obscure creed.

I raced through this world not alone,
Many are there known and unknown,
Not by accident we are together thrown
Neither by chance across danger borne.

Sobs of sorrow and past regrets,
Hovering danger and hidden threats
Recede like tides and hazy shores,
When dawn breaks at dream's doors.

Then in wakefulness I look back
To ponder over events I sit back,
I feel the hands of Grace around me
That protect me from every difficulty.

THE HAND OF THE INFINITE

Taarak '08

When the world's not for you,
And you live among the stars,
Walk the paths that seem hungry,
Eagerly waiting for you to pass.

When God's eye watches you,
As you flirt with sky and moon,
The Hand holds and takes you across,
The countless valleys and dunes.

It's then that you wake up,
Sitting at the edge of the universe,
And realize what you lost and gained,
Had nothing to do with you.

It was Him, only Him, He,
Kept you up those nights,
When you wept, for that love,
And made you realize,

You were His heart, His soul.



L'ENFANT

Shantona Paulmier '78
(Lines written on her grandson)

Le petit être avec des yeux de l'univers,
c'est notre Arvind-Joseph.
Il lève les bras vers les arbres, vers le ciel, vers la mer,
ses petits bras pleins de la force de l'univers.

Comme son regard et son sourire révèlent l'immensité!
Ses petits pas avancent et caressent la terre,
créant l'avenir d'un chemin profond et lointain.

Le petit être avec des yeux de l'univers,
il est émerveillé quand il traverse la lumière du jour.
A chaque étagère, il découvre le jouet qui lui chuchote:
"N'est-ce pas c'est toi que j'attends... enfin tu es là,
l'enfant avec des yeux de l'univers."



FOUR SIGHTS

Anjan Sengupta '72
(Written on 16.9.16)



Sum of two plus two and multiplicity two of two in view
Bickered with each other for a variable function in queue,
At par for long in same company of fixed four
To break away from there and grow therefore,
The square root of two felt it was better than the rest
A top number up the ladder must surely be the best,
And they argued and fought as such
Figures undervalued facts twice as much
Until the core result that was always four
Was so sore, it swore to settle an old score
A formula constant in the direction of four
Figured out clever mathematics some more
To sign into zero for a cipher
Naught now in there for any to decipher!

PONDICHERRY'S 2ND HERITAGE FESTIVAL

Sunaina Mandeem '73

When we started planning the second Pondicherry Heritage Festival in late August 2015, many people asked me what the purpose of this festival was, what did we hope to achieve? The question was provocative as, what after all is a festival? It is a celebration. And a heritage festival was a celebration of our heritage. We celebrate the things we value and cherish and love. If we wish our heritage to be preserved, we first need to articulate what it entails then start caring for it and automatically we will end up preserving it.

Pondicherry's history is rich with amazing people who have been attracted to its shores from ancient times. Their gift to Pondicherry, India and the world has been the rich tapestry of its cultural and spiritual contribution through its architecture, arts, literature and philosophy. We are the custodians of this gift of Pondicherry's to humanity and have a responsibility to future generations to conserve it and celebrate its beauty so

that it is always remembered and continues to be a source of inspiration and innovation.

Pondicherry's 2nd Heritage Festival began at dawn on February 5th 2016, with Aneesh Raghavan singing the 'Suprabhatam' facing the rising sun. Ashwini Bhide, who, after enthraling us with her wonderful concerts was leaving late that morning, willingly accepted to sing an invocation and sang a composition by Sant Gnyaneshwar. We could not have hoped for a better beginning to this festival.

Built heritage: At the recently restored heritage building on the southern side of the Park, the Chamber of Commerce, well known experts from India and France shared their work and experience on how to conserve and restore our built heritage, and the restoration/reconstruction of the collapsed Mairie Building. Those present were: K T Ravindran who was the Dean and Head of urban planning at the famed SPA; Shikha Jain, an urban conservationist who represented India



The Inauguration - with Anita Ratnam, Dilip-da, Puru, the French Consul, the UNESCO director and the rest of the team.



The French Institute of Pondicherry - part of our built heritage and also the venue for some of the events.

on the Advisory committee on world heritage, Philippe Toussaint, President of Vieilles Maisons Françaises; Nadine Le Prince, a French painter who made Shekhawati in Rajasthan her home and showed people the economics of restoring those wonderful buildings, as she has restored hers; Benny Kuriakose, an architect inspired by Laurie Baker, who helped create Dakshinachitra, and has been involved in the Muzaris restoration project; Arun Menon, IIT Madras, who looks into structural restoration of historical and monumental structures; Navin Piplani, director of the INTACH Heritage Academy; Vikas Dilawari, conservation architect, who has done remarkable work in conservation of public heritage buildings and Nilesh Thakkar, a conservation engineer whose company carries out significant restoration and reconstruction projects.

In the afternoon, we explored work done in Pondicherry on restoration starting with the beautiful building of the Institut Français de Pondichéry, where this event was held; Charles de Brantes, President of Friends of Pondicherry Heritage and founding member of French Heritage in India talked about their restoration of the Church on Rue Dumas and their next project of restoring the garden opposite the church; Ashok Panda, Arul and A K Das of INTACH, Pondicherry spoke about their work and urban

planner Devangi presented the result of a participatory workshop we had organised in October 2015 on the proposed use of the rebuilt Mairie building, whose restoration/reconstruction has still not been taken up by the government even though the funds are available. The PWD wants to make a lookalike building in cement and concrete while we still keep asking for it to be done with

traditional materials.

The formal inauguration at the Gandhi Thidal that evening was by the director of UNESCO from Delhi, the famous dancer Anita Ratnam and other dignitaries who emphasised the importance of conserving heritage, followed by Krithiga's dance. As they could not be with us, messages from Dr. Karan Singh, INTACH and Revathy along with video clips from Mallika Sarabhai and Kalki Koechlin were projected. The craft bazaar next door was abuzz with activity by Pondicherry and Auroville organizations mostly connected with children. A lot of creativity could be seen there over the three days, with children expressing heritage through painting, drawing, and having fun.

Day two began just after sunrise with a local group singing traditional ancient music at the Kalatheeswarar temple on Mission Street.

The sunrise walk in Pondicherry's urban forest behind Swadeshi Mills with the Forest department and our volunteers was a revelation to those who went on it.

There were also guided tours to art galleries, heritage homes and the Golden Bridge Pottery.

Natural Heritage: Aurofilio talked about the erosion of the Pondicherry coast, and how finally we were on the verge of its restoration;



Songs of Pondicherry's poets

Dr. Ramanamurthy from NIOT outlined the methodology of the solution being adopted for this restoration; Nityanand Jayaraman spoke movingly on the condition of the wetlands in Chennai, why the city was flooded last year and how it could have been avoided; Raghu Menon of the Pondicherry Science Forum spoke about the wetlands and the system of the tanks from the times of the Cholas in the Bahour area and the importance of conserving it and keeping it working, ensuring there are no encroachments, no garbage being dumped or chemicals and waste polluting it. This is a perennial struggle but the farmers' groups in Bahour are a committed lot and keep at it, against all odds. This system ensures that most of the rain water gets collected and can be used for irrigation and ground water recharge, minimising runoffs. This session ended with Paul Blanchflower of the Auroville botanical garden telling us about the forests of this region.

Heritage of the Performing Arts: In the beautifully restored Maison Tamoule, musicians, dancers and theatre people talked about their art forms and what being in Pondicherry meant to them. Aneesh Raghavan spoke about the history of music in Pondicherry, how several musicians came to offer their music to Sri Aurobindo, how Dilip Kumar Roy trained M S Subbulakshmi to sing Meera bhajans and how music and dance

continue to be an important part of Pondicherry's culture (with more and more children learning dancing these days). Krithiga, a young Bharatnatyam dancer, and Rekha Tandon, an expert Odissi dancer, shared their experience. Adishakti's Vinay talked about theatre, and Auroville's Aurelio about creating music and musical instruments. Anita Ratnam recounted, with dance movements, the evolution of Bharatnatyam from a temple dance to the classical dance it has become and shared her experience of becoming a dancer.

At the Gandhi Thidal, children enthralled everyone with their lively dance performances in the evening. Aneesh danced Odissi at 'Gratitude' on Rue Romain Rolland and day two ended with a Caribbean music concert by Erika Lernot at the Alliance Française.

On Day three, a large group set off early to Kalliveli tank for bird watching while the rest of us were on the beach road where the sunrise was greeted with a delightful performance by Shobha Raghavan's students who sang compositions of great poets who lived in or passed through Pondicherry.

Heritage of the Written Word: The French Institute and the Ecole Française have been carrying out extensive research on ancient texts, both Tamil and Sanskrit. Their researchers shared the

work they have done on the Saiva Agamas; Sangam literature; poetry of the Alvar saints both Vaishnava and Shaiva. A young singer took us back in time with her superb singing of the Pasuram. Prof. Manoj Das spoke about Sri Aurobindo and the Mother; P Raja on Subramania Bharati; Vengada Soupraya Nayagar on Ananda Rangapillai and the extensive diaries he left behind; Mannar Manan about his father the poet Bharathidasan. Maurice Shukla then engaged Pondicherry's young writers - P N S Pandian, Sairam Krishnan, Sushrut Badhe and Olympia Shilpa Gerald in an interesting exchange about what inspired them, their experiences and the challenges they faced.

Our Heritage of visual arts: At Ray and Deborah's house on Rue Dumas, painters, sculptors, photographers, potters, film makers, fashion designers had an animated exchange about what it meant for each of them to be in Pondicherry and do the work they did; how being here inspired them and at the same time threw up many challenges.

Traditional and modern performances by

children of Sanjeevi Nagar and Alankuppam villages that evening at the Gandhi Thidal included dances with yogasanas and gymnastics. The Adishakti group performed drumming to a captivated audience in the beautiful setting of one of Pondicherry's best-maintained restored buildings, the Cluny Embroidery Section. The three-day festival ended with Poojarini's wonderfully choreographed "celebration of natural heritage through dance" by young Bharatnatyam dancers from Anegundi Village, Hampi and her modern-dance students from the Lycée Français de Pondichéry. In beautifully designed costumes, to an eclectic selection of music from around the world, these young girls transported us to hills, rivers, rocky boulders, waterfalls, and forests.

Many people from the 2015 team had dropped out, leaving us wondering how we would make the festival happen in 2016. But a whole new set of people came forward, former students of SAICE, other Pondicherians we met by chance, and this dedicated team which is expanding, is planning the 3rd Festival in 2017. ❧



The finale - a celebration of natural heritage through dance.

For me everything in human life is mixed, nothing is completely good, nothing completely bad. I cannot give my entire and exclusive support to this idea or that idea, to one cause or another. The only important thing for me, in action, is Sri Aurobindo's work, automatically my conscious support is with all that helps that work and in proportion to the help. And for the work to be carried on as it must be I need all collaborations and all helps, I cannot accept only this one or that one and reject the others. I cannot belong to this party or that party. I belong to the Divine alone and my action upon earth is and will always be for the triumph of the Divine, irrespective of all sects and parties.

The Mother (CWM, 13:51)

ALUMNI ART EXHIBITION

A report on the exhibition of artistic creations by some of the former students of SAICE.

When the 2015 exhibition of some of the former students ended, there was so much appreciation from everyone that they decided to hold another one this year. So, on 18th September, they opened this year's exhibition, displaying their artistic creations.

There were 21 participants this time and there was a greater variety in medium and materials used. Apart from drawing, painting, photography and embroidery there was also glasswork by Bhrata Reddy, ceramic art by Ange, leatherwork by Gauri-di, calligraphy also by Gauri-di, block-printing by Bitasta and creative writing by Ekta Patel and Taarak Parashar.

There was an interesting mix of generations, which brought a variety of styles. There were very fine, meticulous paintings by Gauri-di and Arup-da (Tagore), exquisite pencil portraits by Bokul-da and very neat pictures of birds by Smriti-di. But the highlight of the show this time was definitely the incredibly fine embroidery done by Vrinda-di. She had painstakingly recreated with her needlework the self-portrait of the Mother and a portrait of Sri Aurobindo drawn by the



SHOWCASING CREATIVE WORK

Dilip Patel

The attempt at showcasing the creative work of former SAICE students, the gathering together of talent, varied and substantial that it is, here in the Ashram's Exhibition Hall, turned out to be a beautiful experience. I was gladdened by the response both from the participants and the viewers, and the inspiring comments that were made during the show — so much so that I want to immediately plan for next year's event!

So, this is a plea to our alumni, wherever they may be, to submit their creative work — be it art, photography, ceramics, poetry or anything else that can be displayed. Let's make next year's exhibition even more varied and a wonderful showcase of more new talent. Remember age or ability should be no bar, as long as something beautiful is achieved.

Mother. It had to be seen to be believed.

Photos taken by Atma, Ritarpan, Taarak and Vandana were displayed. They are all lovers of nature so it was a feast for the eyes.

Pranati Pai and Dilip Patel worked very hard to put everything together. Pranati's embroidery, like last year, was appreciated by all. Dilip exhibited several paintings in watercolour, showing his skill and mastery. Vishwajyoti delighted everyone with her large flower paintings on canvas as well as two abstract ones. Sanjukta displayed her pictures, done in a variety of styles, taking up different subjects. Sangita surprised the viewers with her creations and decorations using paper pulp, wood waste and dried leaves. Shyama was another surprise artist whose work people had not seen earlier. She had taken up painting seriously only a year ago. Vilas brought her painting on silk, which her friends already knew about but to the others it was something new and different. ❧

“SOURCING OUR ONENESS” AT NAINITAL

A report on the camp that was held from October 2-8, 2016, at Nainital which brought together participants from various organisations and communities inspired by the vision of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, including a few from The Golden Chain Fraternity. Former students and Ashramites who are interested in this initiative can keep in touch with our office for information on future programmes.

*Above in a high breathless stratosphere,
Overshadowing the dwarfish trinity,
Lived, aspirants to a limitless Beyond...*

[from Savitri by Sri Aurobindo]

Under the title ‘Sourcing Our Oneness’, a series of programmes was conceived for those working for the realisation and fulfilment of the aims and ideals of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother through 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 the Sri Aurobindo Ashram Delhi Branch. The aspiration is to facilitate the coming together of people from these various backgrounds and initiating the building of a constellation that works in resonance, from which can emerge a collaborative



work and support, furthering the work of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother within our own organisations, in India and in the world.

The very first programme in this series was hosted at the Unity Pavilion, Auroville on May 31, 2015. The second programme was hosted by Sri Aurobindo Society at its Sharanam premises, near Lake Estate, on October 25, 2015. A third event was organised at Bharat Nivas on 28th February, 2016, in collaboration with The Golden Chain Fraternity. The latest programme in this series was held in the premises of Sri Aurobindo Ashram Delhi Branch at Nainital, from October 2 to 8, 2016. For this event, participation was invited from all over India and abroad, for a week-long programme.



During this week, like the petals of a lotus, the different groups working for Mother and Sri Aurobindo came together in the scenic wonder: Van Nivas of Nainital. They were a group of approximately 85 participants, coming from India and abroad, representing most of the above mentioned organisations. The group had a wonderful balance with half the participants being between 20-40 and the other half in the age groups above, including very respected elders. This made for a wonderfully fun and creative space which also held depth and silence.

The seven-day programme was filled with interesting and delightful activities, many of them new and experimental to all of us. The purpose of this getting together was to experience working from oneness, to meet and know each other in that

space, and from these experiences see what will emerge, how this oneness can manifest in action.

The basic tools or instruments which we applied in the workshop were the twelve qualities/petals of the Mother's symbol (i.e. Sincerity, Humility, Gratitude, Perseverance, Aspiration, Receptivity, Progress, Courage, Goodness, Generosity, Equality, Peace); and Sri Aurobindo's five dreams given in his address to the nation on August 15, 1947 (briefly, the creation of a free and united India, the liberation and resurgence of Asia, a world union based on an international spirit and outlook, the spreading of the spiritual gift of India to the world, and a further step in human evolution to a higher consciousness).

Most days would commence by gathering ourselves outside in the open space in front of Sri Aurobindo's statue and chanting the Gayatri Mantra and chants selected for the theme of that day. These daily precious minutes of collective devotion revealed the marvel of voices gathering and communicating to the Beyond. All nature—birds, monkeys, trees—joined us in this offering. This would be followed by inspiring readings and interactive sessions with Tara-di and light-hearted fun sessions with Aurovilian Fif who works



as a medical clown. Fif helped many of us to become free from our inhibitions, come closer to one another, and surrender to the oneness and light in and around us.

This would be followed by small group activities using the twelve qualities to act from our intuitive space. Each day had as a theme one of the Matrimandir gardens of Life, Power, Wealth, and Utility together with the qualities of Goodness, Generosity, Equality and Peace, enabling us to look deeply at environment, organisation, wealth and karma Yoga. In this exercise we also used inspiration and guidance from Mother's significances given to flowers. Thus our calculative and logical mind was given some rest, and we let ourselves flow with the higher energy. Our creative juices unleashed, we achieved impressive results in seeing how the various qualities could foster the development of Life, Power, Wealth and Utility.

The central activity for the workshop was a collective process to see how we could work towards the realisation of Sri Aurobindo's five dreams. Five groups of 15-20 each worked on one of the dreams over the course of five days and then presented their results to the entire assembly. Looking through Impacts, Outcomes, Outputs and Inputs of activities that would work towards achieving these dreams, the groups laid practical steps to follow Sri Aurobindo's divine plan towards a true human unity based on a higher consciousness.

In the evenings were opportunities for



presentations. One of the most inspiring evenings was when the various youth participants shared their experiences about their respective work and activities. These included various members of Youth groups in Auroville, the Sri Aurobindo Society, as well as other individuals. It was heartening to witness so much fresh energy being directed towards the unification and uplifting of the youth in India and the world.

Mornings and afternoons also held other optional activities to energise the body and mind. These included Pranayama; Embodiyoga; Awareness through the Body Meditations; Clay Modelling; talks or discussions on topics such as Tantra, science and spirituality, and the work of various participants; River Crossing; Rappelling; and three mountain treks. The treks in the lap of Nature included breath-taking viewpoints of Tiffin Top, Sri Aurobindo Peak and Naina Peak, filling us with a sense of great appreciation for the beauty within and around us.

The evening meditations took on a new hue when wonderful singers from the facility — Gaurab and Siddhant — mesmerized us with soul stirring bhajans of Meerabai

and Kabir, evoking a deep sense of devotion and gratitude.

Videos on Auroville, the Ashram, and the life of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, as well as presentations of the Sri Aurobindo Society and the Delhi Ashram, brought things into perspective. Understanding the work taken up by each of the main participant organisations through the



presentations and discussions helped to broaden our horizons and contribute to the collective work accordingly.

After the week-long meeting, many of the participants shared taxis for a two hour winding drive to visit Madhuban in Ramgarh. Some stayed just for a few hours, others for a night, or longer. Madhuban is a beautiful retreat centre on a mountainside overlooking a valley and the surrounding mountains. It is far from the tourist crowds and beautifully managed by the





Sri Aurobindo Ashram Delhi Branch. From there some of the participants hiked to Tapogiri, which is a centre run by the Sri Aurobindo Ashram in Pondicherry, and even further, to Mountain Paradise, another centre managed by the Delhi Ashram. After the evening meditation at Madhuban, most of the youth participants gathered for a meeting to discuss possible collaboration in future projects in the villages surrounding Madhuban. Gradually, the participants departed for their respective journeys home.

The meticulous organisation of activities by Jaya, Helena, Mita, Anju, Shivakumar, Kavitha, Uma Ramanan, Muna and others helped the many events flow smoothly. Sushil dedicated himself to videotaping the many sessions during the week. Thanks also to the staff for the wonderful meals and service and their guidance on the outings and treks. The efforts of Narayanan and

friends for arranging the transport to and from the camp was also deeply appreciated. We specially thank Tara-di for hosting the event, her encouragement, and getting everything together in a harmonious manner.

Over the days a wonderful resonance emerged and slowly we all danced in the rhythm of the higher music, as one big family, making beautiful friendships and carrying wonderful memories, committing to work together for the future realisation.

*Of creation's oneness sweet and fathomless,
Compelled to embrace my myriad unities
And all my endless forms and divine souls
O Mind, grow full of the eternal peace
O Word, cry out the immortal litany:
Built is the golden tower, the flame-child born*

[from *Savitri* by Sri Aurobindo] ❧



GROWING UP IN THE ASHRAM - PART II

By Maria Jain '73

PROSPERITY DISTRIBUTION

(This incident was recounted to me by Vilas who got it from Jharna-di. Later on I got it confirmed from her.)

In those days, everybody went for Prosperity Distribution, on the 1st of every month, not just one member of a family. The head of the family (usually the lady of the house) received the Prosperity box. The Prosperity distribution was held on the first floor above the reception room. There is a verandah as you reach the top of the stairs. Behind that, to the north, there is another hall. The Mother would be sitting in the far end, facing south in the second hall. She usually wore a salwaar-kameez as She would leave for the Tennis Ground after the distribution. As far as I remember, Prosperity Distribution was always in the afternoon but it was different on New Year's Day. The queue would go round the verandah before it passed in front of Her. Harikant-bhai and his helpers would stand on the right side of the Mother, where there were tables laden with boxes, leading to the exit. Harikant-bhai and his team would keep an eye on those who were passing through the verandah and keep their boxes ready, to avoid delays.

The Mother would give flowers to everybody with Her ever-present charming smile and we would continue on our way out. That day She gave me a Plasticity flower along with a lovely smile. I took it in one hand and extended another hand for more. She kindly gave me another. But I wanted more. The Mother said, "Assez (enough)." I had to move on. Jharna-di was right behind me and witnessed this peculiar incident. For the life of me, I do not know what I was thinking of. I have absolutely no memory of it. What kind of greed!

DARSHAN DRESS

It was really special on Darshan days. A few

weeks before the Darshan we would go to Sahana-di to get ourselves measured. Then, the Sunday before the Darshan, the Mother would give us our frocks or skirts, etc. Sahana-di and her team would keep an eye on the queue, like the Prosperity group. As we approached the first Meditation Hall, near the stairs, we would see the Mother in one of Her beautiful saris (on actual Darshan days they were truly resplendent) seated there. The ladies could see all those who were coming (in alphabetical order), and pass on the correct dress (with our names) to Sahana-di who would in turn hand it over to the Mother. The Mother would give it to us with a beaming smile, so full of love. The ladies would of course get saris of the same colour and pattern. Men and boys were given napkins.

Hence on Darshan Days we were all similarly dressed. It was truly marvellous. No fashion parade, which Darshan Days later became an excuse for. I remember well the yellow dress with zigzag lines in black which had patterns of young girls in red holding a pot each on their head in a very graceful pose. This happily happened four times a year! Sahana-di's department had to work really hard and fast.

We are all aware of how the Mother would go into a trance suddenly. The whole queue would stop for an unspecified time. Those were truly moments we cherished. We could gaze at Her ethereal beauty for 10 to 15 minutes, sometimes even half-an-hour! As it is, the Mother was physically beautiful, and the Divine essence made Her beautiful beyond words. Now I know why Tulsi-das kept writing that the Avatar's beauty cannot be described in words. It is truly beyond description!

BUTTER DISTRIBUTION

If my memory serves me right, butter was distributed every Sunday. Each individual would

get around 100g of salted butter, perhaps Amul butter. On one side individuals were given their portion out of a sort of wooden cylinder. The butter was pushed down with an attached rod onto the person's vessel. On the other side were plates on two scales to weigh the butter on plastic papers. Then they were moved over to the recipient's box – so there were two individuals on each side. I remember Krishnakumari-ji and Karuna Dhir would be part of the distribution team. My family would get quite a big quantity, around one pound. Ravindra-ji would, of course, instruct how much was to be given to each person/family, as in the Sugar and Tea Distribution. (There too I had butted in and joined the team for the Salt Distribution – given by a lady from a jute bag, and often the salt would be as hard as rock. Hence I offered to help or was asked by her (I can't remember which), and later was the sole person given charge of the Salt distribution. Salt was distributed freely – there was no fixed quantity.)

Well, during the Butter Distribution I used to hang around, watching the whole process. There was another Bengali lady at the back taking out the butter from tins into large raised aluminum plates from which the wooden cylinders would be filled up. This lady asked me to take the plates to the counter. That was my entry. The real work came after the distribution – cleaning up the plates, the wooden contraptions, the plastic papers, etc. with hot water. I also participated in the work of melting the leftover butter from the empty tins, often grazing my hand in the process.

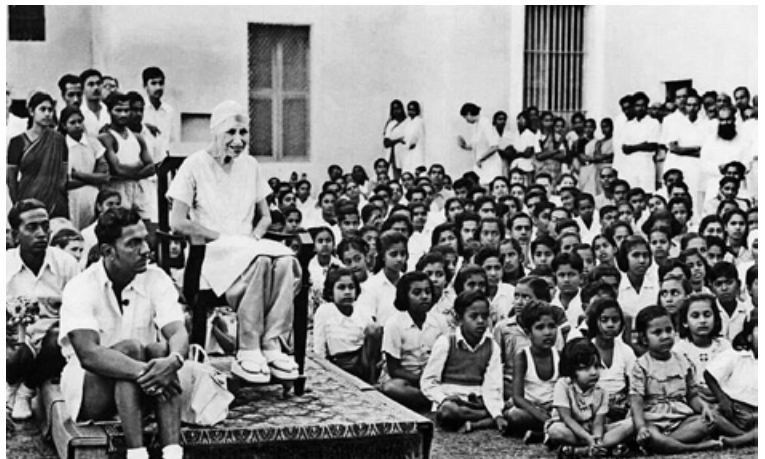
I do not know in which year this happened, but due to some reason unknown to me, the Butter Distribution was suddenly stopped. Many years later, when during the early morning Fruit Distribution only two bananas were put into almost all the fruit-bags, Ravindra-ji told me, "I give only bananas because if I stop this then the whole Fruit Distribution will stop. I do not want it to share the same fate as the Butter Distribution. The Mother was not informed of

the reason why butter could not be given, and the problem continued." (I have no memory as to the cause – Ravindra-ji must have mentioned it to me.) When the Mother came to know of it, She exclaimed, "Why didn't you inform me?" By then the damage was done, and it could never be revived in the same way. Of course, now we are given a big spoonful of fresh white butter twice a week for breakfast at the counter.

There is a sequel to this: Dada recounted this to me personally. He said as the Butter Distribution was stopped, the Mother would give some money to buy butter for a few people. Being the Divine Mother She had to find a way out for at least some people.

CHRISTMAS IN THE PLAYGROUND

The earliest Christmas distributions I attended were held in the Playground. A square was made in the centre like at the Theatre now. If it rained the distribution was held in the old gymnasium which was on the right after entering. It



The Mother during a function in the School. Arima is sitting in the front row.

was rather small and is not there anymore.

I remember that once I received a big doll in the lottery (lucky draw) from the Mother – it had a huge skirt held in place with wires inside. Only the face was made of plastic or some other material. There was no neck, a small chest, the rest comprised of this huge skirt made probably by one of the ladies, Madhumalti or her sister. When the Mother handed it to me She gave me a look,



Arima is one of the little Kumaris around Mother during this unusual pooja.

opening Her eyes wide, as if to say “Oh, what an enormous doll!” then smiled very enchantingly. It was really a memorable moment.

Unfortunately I do not have the doll any more. Moths and insects ate up the grand robe as we did not have the sense to preserve it properly. It just stood on a medium-sized cupboard with a mirror for many years.

The Mother had given a set of soldiers playing the band to Arima. We still have those. There were, I think, around a dozen soldiers in khaki uniform and red caps.

BIRTHDAYS

Everybody knows how special birthdays were in the Ashram. For us there was an additional reason to be excited. Most of the students, especially the girls, would prepare as many boxful of pretty things for the Mother as possible – there were boxes of embroidered handkerchiefs, napkins, even saris; then there were paintings again on handkerchiefs, napkins, etc.; then there was one box full of little knitted booties, tiny sweaters; then crochet bags, beaded glass-covers, motifs, etc. (Knitting and crotch were taught to us by Kaushalya-ben, Ram Sehgal’s mother, every Sunday in her house.) The crochet bags with colourful glass/plastic beads were much in demand. We would insert satin cloth inside and add tassels. There was spray work on various fabrics. I remember making big birthday cards with the Mother’s photos and pictures of flowers, etc. for Her to give to others on birthdays. There was also leather work with Prem-bhai – lovely purses,

bags, etc.

There was a purpose behind all this. As the Mother looked at each item so admiringly, picked up the little booties and smiled so sweetly, we wanted to prepare more items, so that we could spend more time with Her. She was so appreciative and visibly happy that we were encouraged to do more, ever more.

Hence we worked hard before our birthdays, and we would go up to the Mother’s room, carrying these boxes proudly, sometimes five or six of them!

INDIAN GIRLS WERE ENCOURAGED

Ravindra-ji would mostly give the work of serving at the extra Darshan Counters to girls or ladies. Once somebody asked him the reason and he replied that the Mother had Herself asked to push girls to the forefront as they have been downtrodden and held back for thousands of years. That is the reason why he always encouraged the girls.

For the Mother’s Centenary in 1978, extra counters were set up at Society’s Beach Office. It was decided to have an extra counter in Matrisharan too (where SABDA’s main office now functions). Ravindra-ji asked me to take full charge of it – to arrange whatever was necessary to run it. Of course, he also assigned my father to help me out, but I was given to understand that I was fully in charge.

TOMATO DISTRIBUTION

Ravindra-ji once recounted this incident to me. The Mother used to distribute tomatoes. Well, tomatoes being tomatoes, some rotten ones would escape Ravindra-ji’s notice and become part of the distribution.

Sometimes, when this was given away by the Mother the person would actually come back to the Mother to return it and exchange it for another one!

HIGHER COURSE

I had just completed my first year of Higher Course, as it was known then. Knowledge came into existence the very next year [1972], so my

second and third year of the Higher Course were in the new building of Knowledge. At that time Higher Course classes were held in the Library. We had real fun in that year, we were roaming all over the place, the dark rooms downstairs, even the cellar-like space in the basement was a very popular place to hide in. The main classes were mostly held on the first floor, the large verandah was free space for all, just like the huge hall in Knowledge was later on. Jugal-da's table was at the very entrance to the verandah. There were two Silence-rooms, the first one leading off the verandah and the other was the last of the three rooms. The centre hall did not have any place to sit as far I remember. There were some classes held in the south-eastern corner room near the garden.

VACATIONS

The Mother did not want students to go out during the holidays but we were very happy to spend our vacations in Pondicherry as there were all sorts of competitions: carrom, chess, etc. Then we had embroidery competitions in those days, also singing competitions. Once we learnt cycling there was no stopping us. Holidays meant we could ride off to Lake, Le Faucheur, Maret Garden, Second River, and later to Auroville. My mother was at her wit's end. We had a real gala time!

NEW YEAR WALL HANGING

I do not remember which New Year's Day it was, but it was in the '60s. There used to be a black wall-hanging full of multi-coloured flower-like patterns embroidered in silk threads and it used to be hung on the wall behind the Mother's chair for New Year or Prosperity Distribution.

This wall-hanging had become rather frayed. It was decided to embroider a new one exactly like it. There were only a few weeks left for the New Year and there was a real rush to finish it. Everybody pitched in, as it was a very simple kind of embroidery – it was shadow-work in reverse. All the ladies of the Embroidery Department were busy bending over a rather large frame on which this wall-hanging, made up of several pieces, was fixed. Even students like us were allowed to contribute to the embroidery work. Quite a few people could work on it together. There was such a feverish haste about it – when one stretch was over it was taken out and the next one was fixed. Ladies and girls of all ages were working on it at a furious pace to meet the deadline.

It was a great and memorable incident, especially when on New Year's Day it was hanging behind the Mother, who was radiant.

MOTHER'S CLOTHES & GAIT

In the 1950s, when we were children, the Mother wore saris only inside the Ashram for Darshan and other Special days. During those years She always wore salwar-kameez when She stepped out of the Ashram, whether it was to go to any of the Grounds or to visit departments, or even farms, etc.

Her gait was most decisive – I remember the times She would step out of the Prosperity Room onto the small terrace which led to Pavitra-da's room. We would all stand, in a sort of guard-of-honour, on both sides, and She would walk past briskly with a charming smile and a sweet "Bonjour!" to our chorus of "Bonjour, Douce Mère!" There was not only purpose in the way She walked but also grace. ❧



The Mother during a New Year's day distribution. Behind her is the embroidered wall-hanging which all helped to finish.

ARUNA PANDYA

CAPTAIN AND LOVER OF CHILDREN

Parul Chakraborty '61

Aruna Pandya was born in a Gujarati family on 27th December 1934. Her father brought his whole family for the April Darshan in 1945. Her brothers stayed back and were put in the Mother's first boarding called Dortoir. The Mother showered special care and attention on these children who

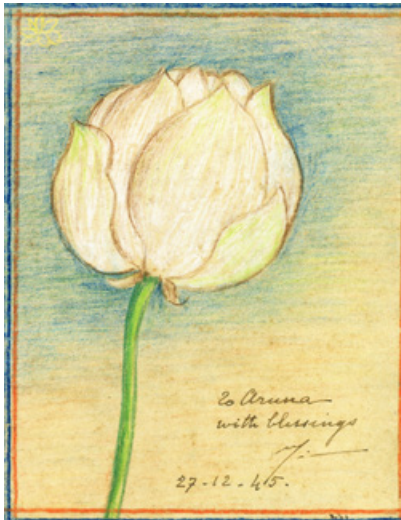
lived away from their parents. Aruna joined the Dortoir boarding in August 1945.

Aruna was fondly called Anna-ben by all of us. She was unique in her ways — healthy, hardworking, helpful, loving and kind to everyone. Discipline, simplicity and sincerity were her qualities,

appreciated by all who knew her.

Pranab-da came in 1945 and started physical education. In 1946 Aruna and Nirata became

captains of the very young ones (now called A5). At that time it was named group A1. The older children's group was called A2, looked after by Tara J and Usha R, who were also made captains at an early age. The children loved Anna-ben as she could become one with them and understood them very well.



A birthday card from the Mother



The siblings: Krishnakumar, Aruna, Kokila and Arun

Once the Mother chooses someone for Her work, She gives along with it the necessary capacity, strength, force and Grace. If we are sincere and straightforward in our attitude towards the work, then we will go a long way without any difficulties. The Mother will guide us towards our goal.

The Mother helped these young, enthusiastic captains by giving them lessons that they could teach the small children. She took a great deal of interest and guided them in the field of teaching. Annaben was one such enthusiastic child of the Mother, disciplined, regular and sincere in her endeavor.

Anna-ben worked at the Prosperity, Dortoir and at the Playground. She was a very devoted

OUR CAPTAIN ARUNA

Yamuna Siva '61

Captain of the 'green' little ones,
A fond child of our Mother Sweet,
Part of Prosperity, part of us inseparably.
That spontaneous smile spreading joy:
An active and aspiring friend
In our midst, so living and loving.
Noble and nice, at constant service.



Shepherding the little ones during March Past

person, surrendering entirely to the Mother's work. She was regular in her activities and perfection was her aim.

We admired the way she captained her group (A5). The children loved her dearly. Her way of dealing with them was spontaneous, which she kept up from the first day to the very end. Her dedication was praiseworthy. She never neglected her group and this kept her healthy in mind and young like her children.

Her faith in the Mother kept her smiling all along even towards the end, when her journey

DADA ON ARUNA-DI

...Perhaps it will not be out of place here, if I mention the name of a captain who has given the longest service until now with a spirit of perfect dedication and complete self-sacrifice. She is Aruna Pandya. In 1946, at the age of 12, she started taking children's physical education classes and she is still continuing this work, with the same enthusiasm with which she started her work. And above all, she has never given me any trouble.

May Mother shower Her choicest blessings on Aruna.

Excerpt from an article by Pranab-da which appeared in SportSpirit, Dec 1993

brought suffering. She refused medication and took shelter in the Love and Light of the Mother. Finally, she fused with the Eternal on Friday, the 19th of August, 2016.

Her smiling face is unforgettable! All our prayers to the Mother for Anna-ben's well-being. ❧

ANNA'S BUNDLE

The stork on his cosmic wings did bring
A magical bundle bulging sweet,
And watchfully gliding, soaring saw,
On a winter's morn, our family Tree.

So thus it was and thus began
The promise of things to happen here.
The crying child, the walk and fall
The effort of someone good but small.

Thus the rolling orb did go,
Thus the numbering, changing years...
Dramatic Dortoir's Phineus King,
And dinner bell's insistent ring.

The call to order and whistle's rule,
Rotating rope, the breathless skips;

The jangling hoop advancing wild,
The chase and chance to jump it through!

Her student mind, her labouring will,
Yet young of age, yet truly found,
That play is work, and work is play
In art of Mother's skill in works....

Prosperity's clean and shining key
The soap and oil, the tooth-paste toil,
Are sacred gifts to softly send,
The love of One's love for all!

Now the burdened stork just over the sea,
Muses golden in dawn-light free:
"God knows his Will, declared to me-
Which Tree receives His bundle here!"

*(Sunday 21.08.2016.
Dedicated to Aruna's soul.)*

QUIZ TIME!

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

1. In which year was the new Hall of Harmony inaugurated?
2. Who was in charge of Big Boys' Home?
3. Who was the main person who did the typing work required for the school in the 1970s? There were several people but who was the main one?
4. How was Sanjiban-da connected to the School?
5. What is the spiritual significance of the bright red variety of the "Silence" flower? (It can be found in Auroville.)

ANSWERS TO THE QUESTIONS OF THE MAY-AUG 2016 ISSUE

1. *What work was given to Nirod-da when he joined the Ashram?*

He was asked to look after the Timber godown and to supervise the carpenters.

2. *Why did the Mother stop the system of exams which were being held earlier?*

She did that because some students used to fall ill as they were anxious and stressed and also because some students were found cheating. She did away with the exams and put in place a new system.

3. *In which year was the lotus pond in the School courtyard made?*

1978. Before it was made, there used to be a small room with a terrace on top of it in that place.

4. *What anniversary do we celebrate on 6th January?*

It was on 6th January 1952 that the present School Building was inaugurated. At that time the School was called "Sri Aurobindo International University Centre". This name was later changed to "Sri Aurobindo International Centre of Education" in 1959. Before it moved to the present building the School used to be in the Playground.

5. *What is the spiritual significance of the tulip?*

Blossoming.

ERRATA

In our last issue there some errors in the answers in the quiz section.

The sandals for the Mother were made by various ladies at various times and not only by Lakshmi-ben. In the very early years a lady called Tajdar used to make them.

The Puja Pranams were indeed stopped in 1952 but they were resumed some time later and continued until 1958 when the Mother cut down a lot of her usual activities.

*Give all you have, this is the beginning.
Give all you do, this is the way.
Give all you are, this is the fulfilment.*

The Mother

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

The Mother



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The Mother

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