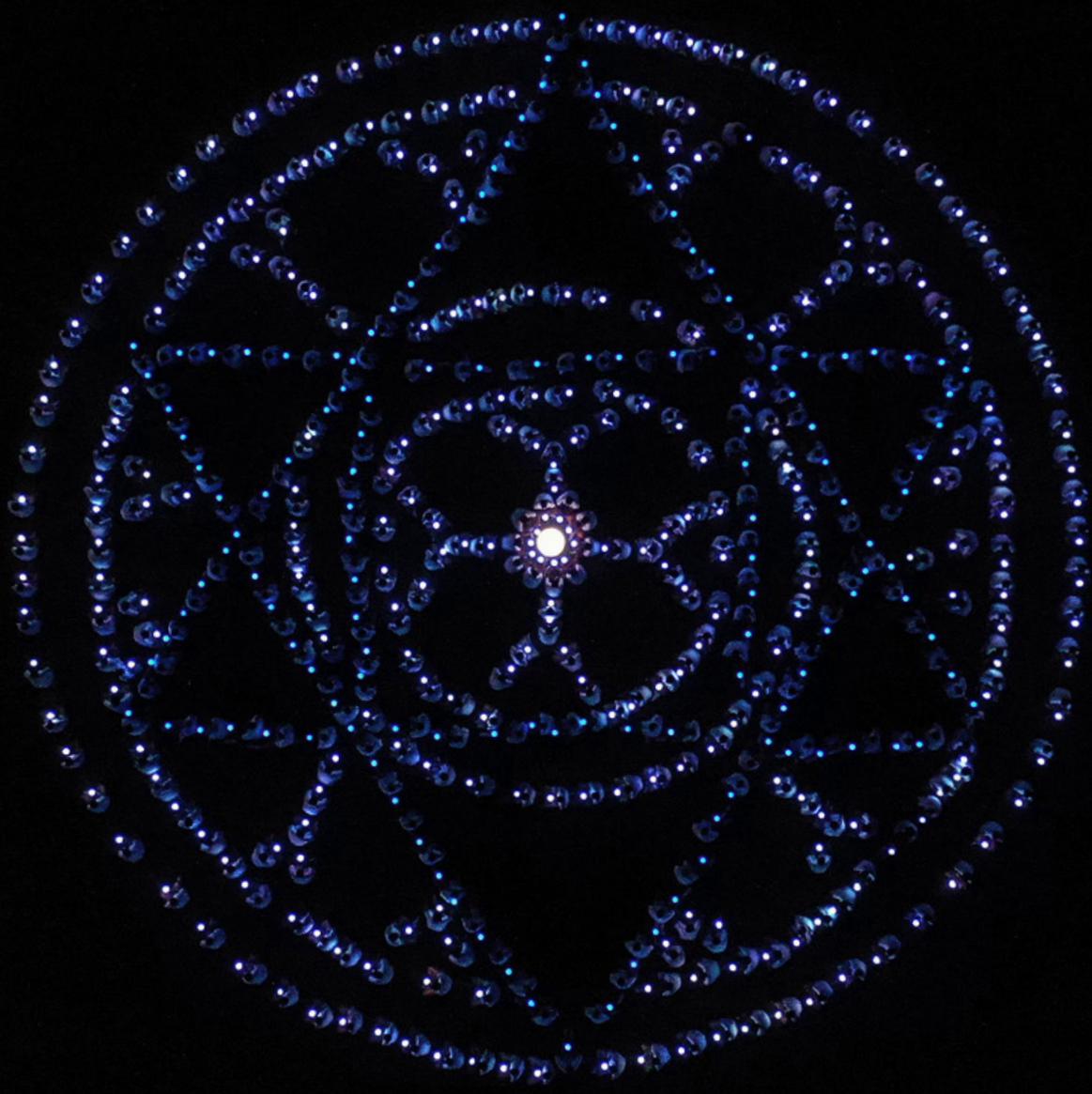


FEB 2019 / VOL 19 NUM 2

[www.goldenchain.in](http://www.goldenchain.in)

# The Golden Chain

Alumni Journal of Sri Aurobindo International Centre of Education



CELEBRATING THE 75TH ANNIVERSARY  
OF OUR SCHOOL

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.

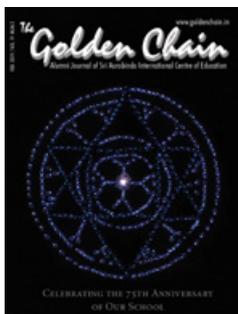
Sri Nolini Kanta Gupta (to the final-year students of the Higher Course on October 26, 1976)

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On the Cover:

Drone image of the SAICE symbol made during "Aurevoir", the concluding item of the 2nd December programme, 2018.

On the Back Cover:

Former students saluting the Mother during the March Past for the 2nd December programme, 2018.

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## THE EDITORS' PAGE

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by Sunayana Panda '79

As I write this we are still in that mood of joyous togetherness. If only we could have held on to those few days when we were all together for the 75th anniversary of SAICE!

The first time we had a celebration of the School's anniversary was in the Golden Jubilee year 1993. That celebration was special because not only was it the first time that such a celebration was taking place but also because the reunion was deeply moving. By then the students had been going out of the Ashram for about a decade, so there were some who were seeing their friends for the first time in 10 years. The emotion of that reconnection with the others was intense. Before that very few left the Ashram so the pangs of separation between class friends had not been felt as acutely as it was in the early 1990s. Moreover, at that time communication was expensive and difficult and travel was not easy. This meant that we were seeing old friends with whom we had lost all contact.

1993 was also the time when we became aware that we were an entity, that the former students were a distinct group which would expand and also there was a need to remain in touch. *The Golden Chain* magazine came into being and it became a platform of communication. It kept us connected not only to each other but also to the Ashram. Once again in the days leading up to 1st January 2000 a spontaneous get-together happened when we found out that many former students had come to welcome the special date. And again we met for the 60th anniversary of the School with a series of events that was planned well in advance.

In November and December 2018 there was something during the 75th anniversary

celebration which was not there in the previous years. This time around our number had increased manyfold and there were many alumni who were participating in the 2nd December programme along with their children who had also become "former students". Some were happy to announce that their grandchildren, still students of the School, were participating in the programme also. Three generations were together in the March Past. This very fact made everyone feel the length of time that had passed and how far back our childhood had been. This time it was different also because thanks to social media we were already very much in touch.

We who had been brought up on the ambrosia of eternal youth had to face the reality of time and perhaps of mortality. The Mother had flattened out time into a space where past, present and future existed simultaneously and this made us feel we were here forever. But now we had gathered to celebrate the 75 years that had passed since the founding of the institution where we had studied. Yes, we were celebrating a length of time.

There had been phases in the intervening years when we felt that perhaps there was a generation gap, perhaps we had grown too old to understand the younger lot. But during this reunion, particularly during the time spent at the Sportsground, we realised that in fact we all stood on the same common ground. We could feel that there was a common thread that ran through all of us, as if we were flowers strung together forming a garland to be offered to the Mother.

Now our collective knowledge, experience and expertise should be used by the Ashram to grow into the greatest seat of knowledge that the Mother wanted to create. Only then will this beautiful garland truly be offered to the Mother. ❀

# MY DAYS IN THE ASHRAM

*Ashok Basu '74H*

**T**he first person to write to me (via e-mail) after my article came out in the November 2017 issue of *The Golden Chain* was Prithwin Mukherjee from Paris.

I had stated in that article that I spent only four years in the Ashram School, Class I to Class IV (1960 – 1964). Then circumstances brought me to Kolkata where I finished school, college and university. When I landed a job my contact with the Ashram resumed and since then I have been visiting the Ashram every year, usually in the winter. I retired from service some five years back and am now sixty-five years old.

Among the few people I knew as a child in the Ashram was Prithwin-da. He stayed with my grandfather in the same house before we landed in Pondicherry. He was a popular teacher in the School although I was not his student. Off and on we met in the School or on the road and like many other senior people he treated me more like a friend. Once when I met him in front of the Ashram he told me “*Hemanta eseche Library-te. Gan sunte jabena?*” (Hemanta has come to the Library. Won't you go to hear his songs?) I could not make head or tail of it and came back home. I did not tell anything to my family members as I did not feel the need. What had happened was Hemanta Mukherjee (the noted singer) had come to the Ashram and was to sing some songs in the Library. At that age I did not know Hemanta Mukherjee. But my father was a Rabindra sangeet teacher in the Ashram and a big fan of Hemanta.

When after an hour I remembered Prithwin-da's words, I casually told my father that somebody had come to the library to sing some songs. By that time I had forgotten the name of

the singer. My father dropped a few names and when he said 'Hemanta' I said 'Yes'. Very excited, my father rushed to the library on his cycle. Sadly, when my father reached the Library, Hemanta Mukherjee was singing the last song. After the programme Manoj-da (Das Gupta) introduced my father to the singer.

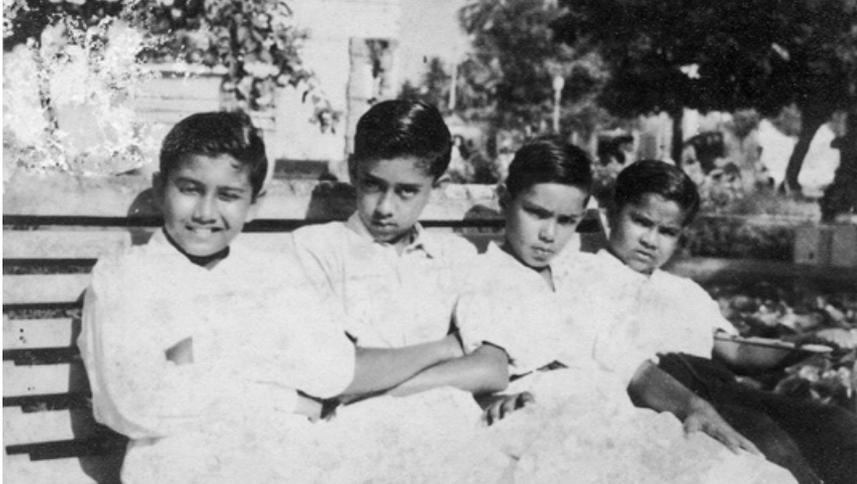
Many eminent people from all fields came to the Ashram now and then. Among them were scholars, singers, dancers, athletes, gymnasts and body-builders. Some came from abroad. They interacted with the Ashram people and performed in the Library, School, Playground or Theatre Hall.

When I was a student there, Mother used to appear daily for morning Balcony Darshan at six o' clock. As far as I remember she stopped these daily Darshans after 1962. Then there were periodic Darshans from the second floor terrace and on special days, at the Ashram Meditation Hall. Once, on one such special day, the Mother was sitting in the Meditation Hall (where Her big photograph is kept at present) and we were proceeding in the queue to offer *pranam* to Her. Many people were sitting in the hall and around. As I went in front of the Mother I bent down to touch Her feet (which was not allowed or encouraged). But I could not get Her feet. I crouched down further below but no trace of Mother's feet. By then others were rolling with laughter and Mother was smiling. Totally puzzled I got up and left the place. What had happened was Mother wore a long gown and Her feet were on a stool with the gown over it. My hands were searching under the stool but could not touch Her feet. I thought it was a miracle – Mother without feet.

As a child I had a peculiar tendency to visit the doctors of the Ashram sometimes. No, I was not sick nor had I any particular problem, but I went for other reasons. Diagonally opposite the playground was Dr. Nitya Gupta's chamber. Robust Kanak-di was his assistant. I would go to the doctor and say "My ears need cleaning". No, the doctor did not shun or ignore me. He asked Kanak-di to take care. Kanak-di would make me sit, check my ears and very gently clean my ears with a small stick with topped with cotton (ear-buds were not invented then). What indulgence! Mission over, I would happily come out of the chamber not even thanking them.

Nripenda's dispensary was a favourite place of mine. After Playground-hours I would sometimes drop in and say, "Nripen-da I have a fracture in my leg and need a plaster". Twice or thrice Nripen-da laughingly dismissed my pleas. Finally one day I went inside limping, my face contorted and said, "Today my fracture is real". Nripenda took me to an antechamber and to my delight plastered my leg. How happy I was. With others' help I somehow returned home in a rickshaw and spent a few days in bed with my family members in attendance. There were a couple of other doctors whom I spared.

Although very small, like others I would go to the Samadhi every evening, usually after Playground-hours. Most people went to fetch incense sticks at the corner of the courtyard, lighted them and placed them beside the Samadhi. Normally we children were not interested in that. But then small incense sticks were introduced for children. They were half the usual size with small dollops of incense on the tips. That induced me to go and collect one stick to be offered at the Samadhi. I do not know whether that was Mother's idea but it worked. Once when I went to take a stick I was biting my nails. Nolini-da was distributing the sticks. When he saw me he at once chided me and asked me to go wash my hands. When I came



The author (extreme right) with his cousins (who were also students in SAICE) in the park.

back he said, "You are going to offer this at the Samadhi. Your hands should be clean". How right he was.

Manoranjan Ganguly (Rabi Ganguly's elder brother) once opened a sweet shop adjacent to the Dining Room. The entrance to the shop was just to the left the Dining Room entrance. We were happy as Kolkata-type sweets were available there. But our favourite place was Ganpatram's restaurant (Cottage) with the terrace on top. Sweets, savouries, ice creams, dosa were all on offer and my cousins and I would sometimes go there for refreshments. Later on they renovated the building and a new restaurant with a terrace came up.

Once there was a plan to renovate and restructure the Playground complex (I am referring to the early 1960s). The idea was to cover the open Playground with a roof as and when required, especially during rain so that normal activities could go on. And this would happen at the press of a button. How lovely. A model was prepared and kept at the physical education department for all to see. We were all excited and discussed the project amongst us. The PED also had other attractions, especially the table football. How thrilling it was to move and swing the wooden players on the rods.

Physical education comprised of a whole range of activities. Boxing and wrestling were already there. When I was a student of class III or IV judo classes were started. One of my senior cousins was inducted. He used to come back from the class and tell us (sometimes demonstrate)

about the different moves he had learnt. We used to listen in awe. Trampoline came to the Playground around this time and it was fun to see some jumping on it.

Every Saturday evening there was a film show at the Playground. Nolini-da used to give a gist of the story and then the screening would start. Some wonderful movies are still etched in my memory. Among them were Guns of Navarone (a war movie), Moby Dick (a film about a big white whale), The Old Man and the Sea (a story about an old fisherman).

It was during our student days that a vast tract of land was acquired next to the Sportsground which was gradually developed into a field suitable for football and cricket matches.

2<sup>nd</sup> December, 1963. As usual it was a special day with a whole lot of activities in the Sportsground. We children also took part. Earlier Mother used to be present at the venue, but due to ill health she was at the Ashram. All was well but soon it started raining which turned into a heavy downpour. Word went to Mother. What

was to be done? “Carry on,” came Her reply. All the events were performed and not a single spectator moved. We came back home thoroughly drenched. The next day on the Ashram Notice Board was Mother’s blessings for all and we heard that no one had fallen ill.

Although my student life at the Ashram was brief (only four years) I can never forget the experiences I had. I finished school, college and university in Kolkata, did several jobs in my lifetime but they did not affect and influence me so much. It is the Ashram which pervades my whole being and to be there every year to spend a few days gives me great joy and pleasure.

How many years I will live in this world I do not know. One day we all have to leave. But to me the greatest consolation would be that I have seen the Mother, been near Her, got Her blessings a number of times. What else do I need? But Sri Aurobindo and the Mother have worked for the whole of humanity. So we must all contribute and collaborate to bring about the total transformation. ❧

## MON ENFANCE AVEC DOUCE MÈRE

*Konkona Mukherjee '72*

**A** l’occasion du 75<sup>ème</sup> anniversaire de notre Ecole à l’Ashram, j’ai eu envie de partager avec vous ces quelques moments précieux que j’ai partagés avec Douce Mère.

J’ai tellement de choses à vous dire que cela prendrait des pages et des pages, toute mon enfance et mon adolescence avec Douce Mère.

Pour la préparation du 2 décembre 2018, je suis entrée, après tant d’années, au terrain de tennis (Tennis ground) et l’émotion m’a prise et je me suis souvenue quand j’avais à peine 6 ans, je courais derrière la voiture de Douce Mère, avec mon frère Bapi (Arindam Mukherjee) et d’autres enfants, pour aller la voir jouer au tennis. Quand les balles de tennis sortaient, nous

avons eu l’occasion aussi de les ramasser. Ensuite quand Douce Mère repartait se reposer au terrain de jeu (Playground), on lui faisait un pranam. Elle nous caressait le visage et souvent la tête de mon frère Bapi.

Je me rappelle à Delafon, avec nos professeurs Light-di et Yatanti-di, Mère nous encourageait beaucoup à faire des dictées et des rédactions pour bien apprendre la langue française. J’ai conservé précieusement les corrigés des dictées et rédactions en encre rouge de Douce Mère. Cela nous a permis de correspondre en français avec Douce Mère. Elle prenait soin de répondre assidûment à toutes nos lettres.

Pour nos anniversaires, Mère nous recevait au premier étage, près de la chambre de Sri Aurobindo.

Je me souviens, en attendant d'être reçue par elle je pouvais entendre Mère prendre sa douche et son doux parfum embaumait la chambre. Le moment venu, Champaklal-ji nous appelait, et Mère nous accueillait avec un grand sourire: « Bon anniversaire, ma petite Konkona », et je me précipitais en m'agenouillant à ses pieds. Elle tenait ma tête et me bénissait, en me demandant: « Quel âge as-tu mon enfant? » J'avais 6 ans. Alors elle comptait exactement 6 bonbons et les mettait dans un petit sac et me les donnait avec des roses dans mes mains.

Quand je suis rentrée en première année de « Higher Course », en 1970, nous avions nos cours dans la « Bibliothèque » (Library). Quel bonheur d'avoir nos cours individuels dans le jardin ou dans les salles au premier étage ! Durant cette période, j'avais demandé la permission de participer à un concours de Dictée, à l'Alliance Française, organisé par la France. J'eus la surprise d'être classée première avec 20/20. Et de recevoir le premier prix : une bourse.

Douce Mère m'a appelée pour me féliciter, et j'ai déposé cette somme d'argent à ses pieds. Elle a remis l'argent dans mes mains, et tenant mes mains elle m'a dit: « Tu auras besoin de cette somme pour tes projets et je te vois vivre en France ». J'ai terminé mes études en 1972



Konkona (centre, in shorts) looking at the Mother emerge from her car.

(le bâtiment de Knowledge était construit) et je vis depuis en France.

Quel bonheur de pouvoir participer au 75ème anniversaire de notre école. Je remercie Jayati et son équipe de leur patience et de leur courage, à nous apprendre ce magnifique « Qi Gong » (drill). Nous sentons une certaine sérénité en nous et une union avec la nature qui nous entoure. Merci DOUCE MERE. ☸

## HERD

*by Kamalika '10*

Follow the herd  
Like you've been taught.  
Fight the fight  
Your elders fought.

To look around  
You must forget  
No thirst to discover  
Don't stir, nor fret.

Just stare at the bottom  
Of the one ahead  
Miss all things new  
And then you're dead.

A wonderful life this must seem,  
To those who are cowards and dare not dream.



## ALLEY

*by Kamalika '10*

They warned me about the alley  
They said it was no good.  
Stick to the path, they told me  
Stay focused, like you should.

I stood watching the alley  
Jostled by the crowd,  
Move ahead, they whispered  
Day dreaming's not allowed.

I took the narrow alley  
They laughed as they watched me go,  
A Choice, A Dream, A Hope, A Risk,  
Things they'd never know.

# JE PARTIRAI

*Krupa Shah '06*

Demain dès l'aube dans le jour blafard,  
Je partirai pour ne jamais revenir,  
Je poursuivrai l'horizon qui dépasse le regard  
Là, quelquepart au delà des souvenirs.

J'irai écouter le murmure des eaux,  
Seule, sur les bords de la béatitude  
Là, dans le silence, ignorant les mots,  
Je demeurerai un instant en solitude.

Et quand le vent bohémien des vastes prairies,  
Sifflera cet air des choses lointaines  
Je volerai sur les ailes d'une pensée chérie  
Pour frôler les herbes hautes des plaines.

Puis la lumière s'effacera du monde,  
Le crépuscule viendra, il fera soir  
Je partirai dans mon voilier sur la mer et ses ondes  
Pour cueillir les étoiles du noir.

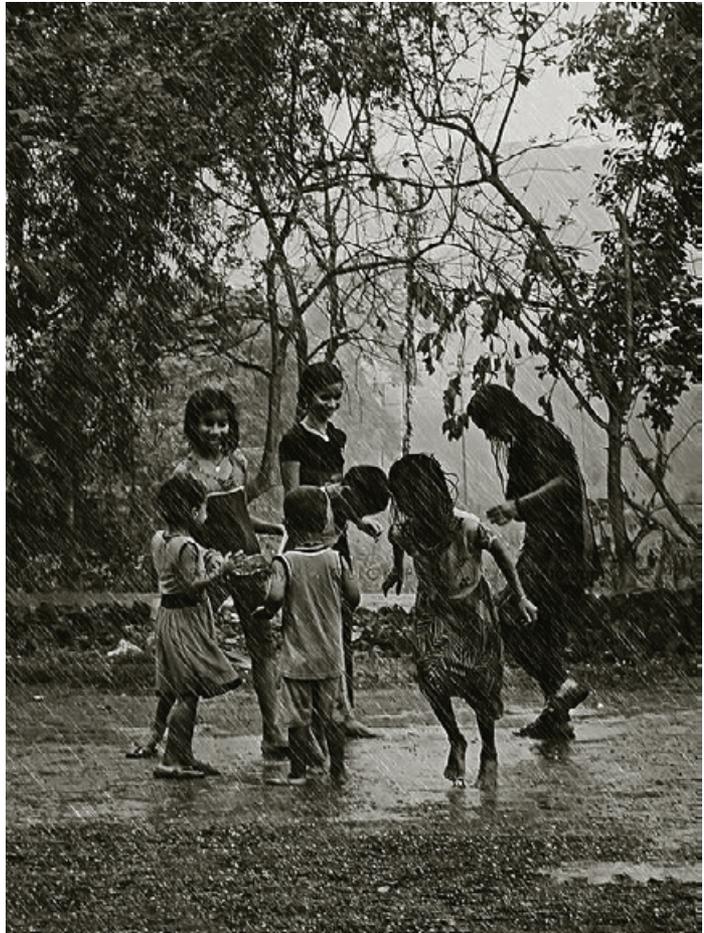
Mais la nuit berçera mon âme rebelle,  
Lasse, heureuse, doucement je pleurerai...  
Dans mon coeur encore cette voix, cet appel  
Et devant mes yeux, une ombre de l'éternité...



# UNTIL THE NEXT MONSOON

*by Anjan Sengupta '78H*

Revive in the rain  
Monsoon's last bargain  
Before seasons change again  
Heal and heart regain,  
Sing a song for me,  
The tune's in the tree.  
Dance all the way  
With the wind, leaves will sway,  
Sing in the rain, dance with pride  
And if you cry the rain will hide  
Your tears till they dry soon.  
Until the next monsoon.



## CELEBRATING THE 75TH ANNIVERSARY OF OUR SCHOOL

*Our School celebrated its 75th anniversary on 2nd December, 2018. Just as for the Golden Jubilee in 1993, for the celebrations of the millennium in 2000 and for the 60th anniversary in 2003, a number of events were organized to commemorate the occasion. While some programmes were held earlier in the year, the real buildup to the celebrations began in the last week of November and climaxed on 1st and 2nd December.*

*Former students began arriving around 20th November to be part of the celebrations. After the usual Darshan on the 24th, from 25th November to 29th November a series of talks by former students was held in the School. Chitra-di, Aurofilio, Probir and Sunaina Mandeem, Sunayana Panda, Brahmanand Mohanty, Samir Sarkar and Vikas Kothari shared their experiences.*

*On 30th November, in the morning, Saumitra, a former physical education coach from Germany who had worked with Ashram children and youth in 1958 shared his thoughts and reminiscences.*

*On the same day, in the evening, the former students' cultural variety programme was held in the Dining Room hall upstairs.*

*Visits to the Matrimandir were organised and those who had come for the celebration could go in small batches to Auroville on 29th and 30th November and 1st December.*

*On 1st Dec in the morning, a memento (a commemorative bag and a booklet) was distributed to present and former members of SAICE and PED in the School's Hall of Harmony.*

*On the same day, the Former Students' art exhibition was inaugurated at the Art Gallery.*

*In the evening, for the annual 1st December Programme, an adaptation of Sri Aurobindo's poem "Who" was staged at the Theatre.*

*In the evening of 2nd December, the anniversary celebrations culminated with the physical demonstration at the Sportsground in which former students were allowed to participate. This was followed by the traditional dinner at the Corner House.*

*On 3rd December, former students got together at Tranquille near the Lake Estate for a picnic.*

*In the following pages we cover the events held during the celebrations and the participants share their experiences.*

# KALEIDOSCOPE OF EXPERIENCES

*Sunayana Panda '79 tells us about the series of talks held during the celebrations*

There was an idea in my mind to have an event during the celebrations of the 75th anniversary where various former students of the School could speak about something exceptional that they had done. That idea evolved into a series of talks, mostly two per day. We started on the 25th, just after the Darshan, and continued until the 29th. The first talk was held at the Video Room of the School but on the other days we had the Hall of Harmony. All the talks, except Chitra-di's, were held during weekdays in the morning so we had fewer listeners than we had expected.



Chitra-di (Sen)

We started with Chitra-di (Sen) who is now one of the most senior teachers and who was present when the School was opened. Her book about women's physical education in the Ashram has documented many events and facts that we were unaware of. Chitra-di spoke about the early years of the Ashram and the School, bringing in interesting anecdotes that showed us how different things were at that time. Fortunately, Chitra-di's talk was held on a Sunday and that made it possible for many to attend who were later unable to come during weekdays. The Video Room was packed and Chitra-di answered many questions.



Aurofilio Schiavina

On the 26th, Aurofilio, Probir and Sunaina Mandeem (Nini) spoke about the beach restoration project. Nini added details of what has been planned for the future, particularly what will be done for making Pondicherry a better city. Aurofilio had an audio-visual presentation which was very well-made and all the technical details were clearly shown. The Pondicherry sandy beach which had disappeared three decades ago has now come back thanks to the persistent efforts of PONDYCAN, an organization which is made up of some of our fellow alumni.



Sunayana Panda



Brahmananda Mohanty

On the 27th, there was a strike in Pondicherry so we had to cancel the event planned for that day and reschedule it for the next day.

On the 28th I spoke about the mural at Golconde and its history. I had helped Krishnalal to paint it so I thought I should share all the details about all the symbols that the artist has hidden in his work. It is a work of art that is not known by everyone and even those who know about it are unaware of its background story.

After I finished, Brahmanand Mohanty spoke about energy. His talk was titled “From Consumers to Prosumers – The Mother’s vision of the Ashram as a self-sufficient community”. He spoke about how we can reduce our consumption in energy, be more conscious about waste and take the initiative to produce our own energy. He gave examples of how the Mother had encouraged the Ashram departments to be careful about how they used the resources available.

The last day, the 29th, was reserved for two interesting talks. One was given by Samir Sarkar who has been working in the field of film-making for a long time now. Recently he has produced a film which has won several awards already. Samir spoke about the work of a filmmaker and all that is involved in producing a film. He answered questions from the audience about the business aspect of Indian cinema as it is practised now.

We ended the series with the thrilling account of Vikas Kothari about their climb to the top of



Samir Sarkar

Mount Kilimanjaro. This fantastic climb was undertaken by Vikas, Puru Kothari, Samarth and Mukut. The photos which were projected gave us an idea of the topography of the area. Vikas’ story was supplemented by the anecdotes recounted by his cousin Samarth Kothari and his friend Mukut (Aurobrata Ghosh). The audience enjoyed the numerous details which the climbers gave in their narration.

This series of talks gave us an opportunity to share our knowledge of the world and of the Ashram. If all the former students pooled their knowledge we would have a formidable knowledge base. Hasn’t the Mother said that she wanted the School to be the greatest seat of knowledge in the world? What are we waiting for? We have to make a start somewhere. ❀



Vikas Kothari

# THE CULTURAL PROGRAMME

*Sunayana Panda '79*

Every time we have celebrated an important anniversary of the School, we have had a cultural programme. It was so in 1993 during the Golden Jubilee of the School and again in 2003 when we celebrated the 60th anniversary. Even when we had all gathered for celebrating the dawn of the year 2000 we had spontaneously put together a variety programme. So, it was only natural that such a programme was expected for the 75th anniversary.

The preparation for this programme began in all seriousness in September. Those who wanted to participate gave their names and I ensured that there were a few items of music and a few of dance.

Each group of participants had their rehearsals separately and we met only on the 28<sup>th</sup> when we had a technical run-through. Our daily rehearsals of Olga's songs were held at the GC office and we met there often after the drill practice. We had to adjust our other activities to this practice schedule. The group began to get bigger as a few more joined us towards the end. The songs were chosen in such a way that each age-group had some songs that it was familiar with.

On the 30<sup>th</sup> we had a good crowd and the programme was longer than expected. Konkona



Anurekha Jhunjunwala

Mukherjee and her group brought back the well-known songs and musical pieces of the 1960s including some Bengali ones. The singers were Konkona herself, Charles and Tapan Chawdhury. They were accompanied by Ishit Shau, Tapan Chatterjee and Sayan on instruments. The audience sang along when they knew the words. In the 1960s and early 70s, Tapan, Charles and a few others used to hold concerts of western popular music which attracted a lot of students, so we looked forward to hearing them.

This was followed by a solo dance by Anurekha who had choreographed her dance to a song sung by Smriti-di. As we had lost Smriti-di in the middle of 2018, hearing her clear and melodious voice was like having her back again for a short while.

Anjan Sen Gupta recited a Bengali poem which he had himself written, inspired by Sukumar Ray. Recitation of poems was a common feature in variety programmes of the past but it seems to have disappeared in recent years.



L to R: Sayan, Tapan Chatterjee, Charles, Kondona, Tapan Chowdhury and Ishit



Anjan Sengupta

The second dance of the evening was performed by Amrita, Debalina and Sumati. The novelty of this item was that each dancer performed in a different style. Amrita danced in the Odissi style while Debalina danced in Kathak and Sumati in Bharata Natyam. This short item was appreciated very much.



L to R: Debalina, Amrita and Sumati

We ended the evening with songs taught to us by Olga. Our group was made up of eleven women and two men. Among the women were Rijuta Talreja, Vandana Pabrai, Bitasta Samantaray, Bina Dharod, Priti Mahimtura Kuberkar, Paroul Patel, Anjali Gupta, Manimala Ghosh, Shantona Paulmier, Rajrupa Bhattacharya and me. The two men were Satya Dayanand and Nirav Shah. We were accompanied on the key-board by Shantanu Verma. It was a great joy for us to sing the songs that we had learnt as children when we were in the primary classes. We relived the joy that we had felt

when we used to go to Olga's classes half a century ago. We were ourselves surprised to see how fresh those memories were and how those melodies had remained within us for all those years.

This informal programme was enjoyed by all and brought us a sense of togetherness. In the end we were happy that we performed in the Dining Room because many of our former students had not seen the upstairs hall and it became an opportunity for everyone to be in a place which had such a strong link to our growing-up years. ❀



Participants of "Olga's Songs"

# THE MATRIMANDIR VISIT

*A visit to the Matrimandir was organised for the alumni during the reunion.  
Shashwati Shoney '84 shares her thoughts on meditating in the Inner Chamber.*

A trip to Auroville is always rejuvenating for the mind, body and soul. The spaces of green act like a cooling gel to the eyes and the crisp fresh air makes our lungs greedy for more. We've all been to Matrimandir several times but this time the visit was special. Was it the daily practice of Qi Gong or was it just the splendour of the Golden Globe towering over the greenery? But I felt unusually calm and quiet. As we waited under the gnarled branches of an immense tree, I felt myself slowly slipping into a meditative mood. After a while we climbed up the stony stairs and in no time we were in the big hall. I seated myself and focused on the crystal ball that captured a stream of amethyst grey light. The silent weight of evolution's unanswered questions surrounded us. Did the ball hold the answers to the deep mysteries that punctuated our lives and often tickled our minds? After all, what are we looking for?

My eyes wandered around slowly. Against the unending white walls we almost looked like diminutive statues, some serious, some happy, some truly blissful. The crystal ball changed colours. I saw shadows fleeing across. Clouds? Or was it Time? My thoughts too were fleeing unfettered. I took a deep breath... OMmmmm... letting the stillness take over. Someone coughed. The echoes distracted me out of my meditative limbo. Where was I? Who was I? A chimp? A cave-woman? A voodoo doc, a modern day woman? An artist?

The questions faded away to a distance as if they did not matter. I looked around at the others. I sensed we were all searching for the same things in our own ways. I felt a kinship with Nature, the animals and all my fellow beings.

My eyes were closed. My gaze tuned inwards. I travelled the length and breadth of my mind and body like a floating spaceship doing a tour of the galaxies. I was calm. I was peaceful. I was free and blissful. I was compassion. And then I realised I was the crystal ball. I was radiating its energy through me. Hallucinating?

Fleeting moments later, it was time to get up and leave. We went back through the trees and green pathways with the sound of water still murmuring into our half-awakened ears. No one dared to break the magic of the silence that encircled us for a long long time. Did I find my answers? May be... maybe I did.... This wasn't mathematics. I certainly understood there were hundreds of answers to our hundreds of questions. It's up to us to intensely focus on what fires us and gives us that sweet joy that we would want to experience again and again. It is up to us to capture that magic and reflect that energy in whatever we do. We all have that crystal ball in us. We only need to catch that stream of light and energy and spread it.

We left Matrimandir with a heart full of gratitude for all the people who had toiled for years to build it. A big 'thank you' goes out to Srimoyee (Bui) for giving us this opportunity. As I waved goodbye I knew we would be back soon. ☘

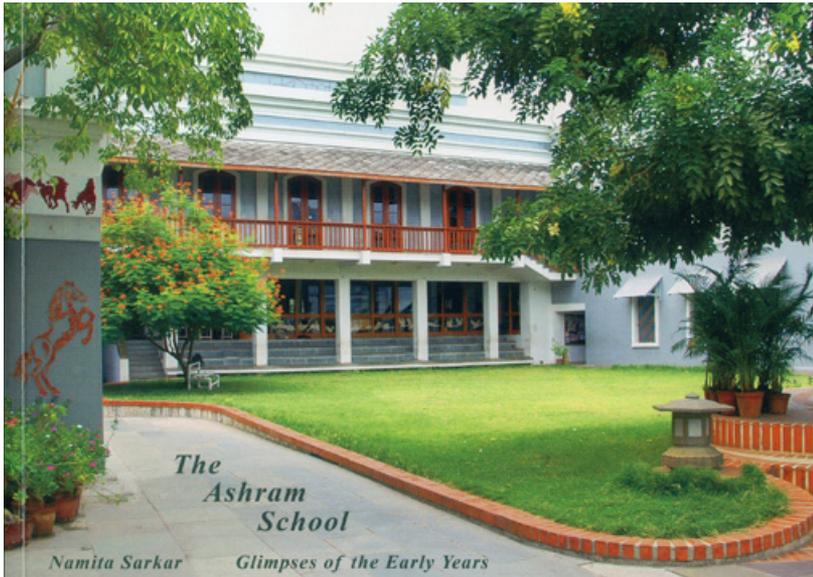


## GLIMPSES OF THE EARLY YEARS OF THE SCHOOL

To commemorate the School's 75th anniversary, in Aug 2018, Namita-di gave a talk in the Hall of Harmony on the early years of the School.

Her research was based on her conversations with early students and teachers and on old documents and papers available at the School. The talk was accompanied by quotes recited by the students and old photographs were projected to evoke the atmosphere of the early years.

The talk was much appreciated and it was decided to present the material in the form of a booklet. The text was revised and made more complete to serve as a short history of the formative years of our School. This book, titled *The Ashram School – Glimpses of the Early Years* was released on 1st December, 2018, on the occasion of the School's 75th anniversary and is available at SABDA. ❀



## MEMENTO DISTRIBUTION

On 1st December, at 10 in the morning, a short meditation was held to mark the 75th anniversary of the School. Manoj-da, Kittu-da, Gauri-di and Amita-di then briefly shared their memories of the School's early years. After this, a memento (a commemorative bag and a booklet with photos of the Mother in the School and her quotes on education) was distributed by Jhumur-di and Gauri-di to the present and former members of SAICE and PED in the Hall of Harmony. This event was organised by Bharati Patel. ❀



*The organisers of the 1st December Programme, 2018, tell us about the challenges they faced to stage their interpretation of Sri Aurobindo's poem "Who". Sunayana '19 reviews their effort.*

## PRODUCING THE 1ST DECEMBER PROGRAMME

*Tvara '18*

Having performed in the 1st December programme only once before, taking it up as one of the organisers this year was quite a challenge and brought a lot of pressure. This was especially true considering that it was also the 75th anniversary of our School. Everywhere we turned, people had questions and suggestions, but Sanchari and I started out with a clear idea of what we wanted: an interpretation of "Who". This was much more easily said than done. Obviously, a majority was of the opinion that we had bitten off more than we could chew, but we were still hopeful. We felt the production should be such that we should be able to accommodate all those who wanted to participate (something we kept in mind for the anniversary). To our surprise though, there didn't seem to be much of a response. We still kept pushing, but I did have moments when I thought that giving in to doing a play might be easier.



A few months of badly managed time and busy schedules later, we reached November and realised we were completely out of our depth. We did not have the necessary members, or time, or backing to execute this plan. We needed help. For a while it seemed like we were alone and didn't know what to do, with no guidance or support. It was the most stressful week of my life, wonder-

ing if this was going to be the first year when there would be no 1st December performance. It felt like every step forward we took meant backtracking at least five. People kept dropping out because of misunderstandings and the demanding schedules. It felt like it was all falling apart.

That is until we were finally forced to change and ask for help, no longer waiting for someone to step forward and show us the way. Sayan came in and became a binding force for the performance, piecing the music and recordings



together, editing the audio through days and nights. Prashanta helped in many ways – from choreographing large compositions to creating the small apple hanging from the tree. The same dancers who had practised for three hours would stay back to fold flowers with Rati and Debaleena, only to spend another hour or so playing badminton. The time, energy and commitment of our participants and helpers was the sole reason we were able to achieve anything.



What I learned is that it doesn't matter if you don't have the best pianist, carnatic singer or kathak dancer. It doesn't matter if people don't believe in your ideas or vision, or don't agree with them. What matters is the sincerity with which you work, the kind of energy you put into what you are doing, the belief you have in Her overseeing everything. As I've been told and seen for myself at least twice, "The first of December is Her programme, and there is always a touch of magic on that day."

## PUTTING THE SHOW TOGETHER

*Sanchari '18*

**P**ersevering through the 1st December programme this year was one of the hardest things I've ever done. And yet I would jump and seize the offer to organize something like this again, albeit a couple of years later perhaps. Will I be better equipped to handle it the next time? Absolutely not. If there is one thing I've learnt in the course of organising this event it is that you'll never be fully ready to handle anything; you just need to be sincere in your efforts all the while keeping your final goal in mind.

Tvara and I had held numerous meetings with our participants through the academic year to get the project started but nothing ever fell into place because of some reason or the other, and before we knew it November had already

arrived. We were far from ready; our ideas were beyond the scope of our resources and not too many people around us other than the two of us seemed to understand our vision. We wanted it to be a collaboration with our participants from the very start but it could only be so if we all saw the same vision. A few days into November, we had to rework our ideas and with extensive help from Prashanta and Ambi, among other participants, our illustration of the poem began consolidating.

Along the way, problems that we never encountered or observed in the past 1st December programmes began to surface. A lot of them were technical; sometimes the choreography of one dance didn't fit harmoniously with the others, sometimes the transition from one stanza to another seemed too forced and very often ideas



clashed - the last one affected us the most because we found it hard to accept something we were not convinced of.

As the month moved on, we swallowed all pleasant as well as unpleasant things and just kept doing our work keeping in mind that it's Her programme and the only thing we could do for the best result was give it all we had. Sayan spent sleepless nights editing the music, Tvara spent

hours figuring out ideas with Prashanta and Rati, and Debaleena spent entire evenings during and before the holidays designing our sets. On the morning of the programme, all I could tell myself was that I had put in all the effort I could and the rest lay in Her hands and in the evening She showed us that it did.

Looking back, I realise that the best reward for putting on a programme on such a massive scale is the enriching learning experience. Not only did I grow as an individual but now I also know how much there still is to learn and I have never felt more eager to do so.



## THE 1ST DECEMBER PROGRAMME – A REVIEW

*Sunayana Panda '79*

If there is one poem that all former students know by heart then it is surely Sri Aurobindo's "Who". So choosing this as the subject of the performance on the 1<sup>st</sup> December 2018 was a good idea as the audience could immediately connect to it. This time the cast was made up of students of all age-groups and there were a few former students too. Considering that it was the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the School it was appropriate to include school children.

The poem was interpreted stanza by stanza through music and dance. At times it looked a

bit too literal but it was visually very harmonious. The sets were particularly attractive and the costumes aesthetically created. The lights and the music blended well with the theme. The focus was on the themes of Krishna and Kali, on Love and Power. These two themes were elaborated on stage through dances and movements. There was a recorded recitation of the poem which accompanied the interpretation on the stage. The text of the poem was the core around which many elements were added.

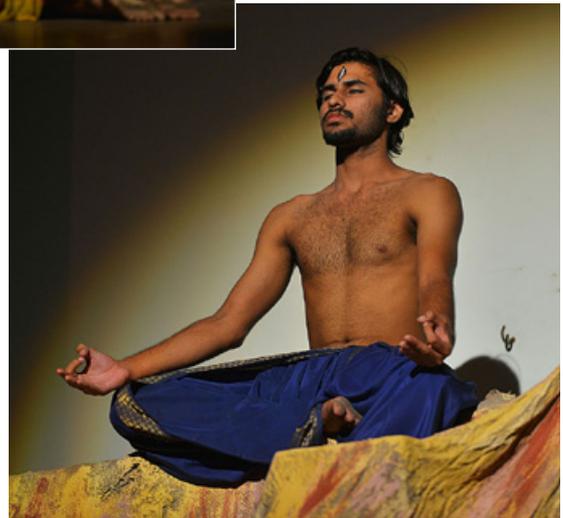
As many remarked later, the performance



As it always happens there was a very fine atmosphere created by the collective effort and aspiration for perfection. Once a year we sit together and concentrate on a literary creation of Sri Aurobindo. This is an experience that we all look forward to and in this anniversary year we came back with a feeling of joy and beauty. ❧

*Photos by Dhwaneet Shah.*

was too short and simple for such an important anniversary. People expected the programme at the Theatre to be on as grand a scale as the one at the Sportsground. Perhaps this expectation was there because the former students who live outside have kept the memory of the 1<sup>st</sup> December programme as it used to be many years ago when there was a proper director who used to create the entire show with his or her ideas. What most people don't know is that for almost fifteen years now the annual programme at the Theatre has been performed and directed by the students, and Cristof is there to help.




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*If you call me in order to do things as well as you can, there's nothing wrong. But, it is true, you know, when I come back from there, at the end of the session, well, I am drained. I have to rest [...] The performances we have on the 1st and 2nd of December or other events of this kind, draw, draw, draw... After a while it is made up for again. It isn't serious but it's true that it draws.*

*But I have no objection; on the contrary, I myself tell you, "My children, if you are doing something difficult, call me, call me." No, not in order to come first or gain a victory, but so that nothing unpleasant happens to you. Call me so that things may go as well as possible, not for showing off but for the joy of doing well. And you may also call in order to do the thing as an offering, and then it becomes very good.*

**The Mother (CWM, 6: 201,202)**



## THE 2ND DECEMBER PROGRAMME

*The celebrations for the 75th anniversary culminated with the physical demonstration on the evening of 2nd December, 2018. The programme was special in many ways. There was an exceptionally high number of participants with many students who usually go out in the holidays staying back for this special year. Former students were allowed to participate in this year's programme and they came from far and near – about 200 of them participated in the Qi Gong drill and over 250 took part in the March Past and the singing of Vande Mataram. This year also saw a technical innovation with a large LED screen at the back of the ground showing aerial real-time footage taken by drones flying overhead. The programme was held in an intense and uplifting atmosphere which climaxed in the final item of the evening, “Aurevoir” where participants came together to form the complex SAICE symbol (see cover). On the whole the programme was a beautiful offering to the Mother and Sri Aurobindo on this special occasion.*

*In the following pages, Jayati, who was the primary composer of the Qi Gong drill, and former students who participated in the programme, share their experience.*

### THE QI GONG DRILL

*Jayati '84*

**F**or me it all began when I received a call from Satya of “The Golden Chain Fraternity” informing me that former students would be allowed to participate in the 2nd December programme for the 75th anniversary of the School. “Will you take it up?” he asked me. I was hesitant as it would be challenging and a frightfully unknown journey. My first reaction was to suggest the names of some persons who could take it up. But some coaxing and assurance of support from Pranati finally made me say “Yes”.

I called upon our ballet team – Jyostna, Chitra and Darshana – and counted on their eagerness to help me with the teaching. I prayed for this offering to be special as this opportunity to participate in the annual demonstration had come after many years for the ex-students.

Then, there was a video post from a friend “spring forest Qi Gong” that aroused my curiosity to know what Qi Gong was. I searched the net and found out about Qi Gong . It is an ancient Chinese meditative practice that allows the body,

mind and spirit to communicate with the 'universal consciousness'. It has health benefits that come by supporting the body's natural tendency to return to balance and equilibrium and also by gently yet profoundly creating strength, flexibility and balance in the muscles and joints through slow gentle movements. Eureka! This could be it!

Basing myself on Qi Gong movements I put together a routine in this format, a drill showing images from nature, of animals and birds. I wanted to start the performance with a depiction of the golden tortoise (the symbol designed for the championship badge) symbolizing the Supramental which alone can bring about the transformation – the red centre representing the illumined physical and the white rays indicating the dynamic nature of the light. Closing the drill with movements with torches accompanied by Sunil-da's music seemed to be the naturally befitting end. After a long hunt for the music the whole thing fell into place.

I got in touch with a few of my classmates, Rajesh, Shashwati and Tapan, who volunteered immediately along with other ex-students Hardie, Shubha, Chidanand and Jasmine. All twelve of us started on this journey in September and became the dream team (as we named ourselves) which took up the responsibility of teaching others in smaller batches. Shradhdha and Surabhi joined us later.

Here began the challenge. The ex-students who joined were close to 200! They came in all sizes, they came with different fitness levels, they came in all ages. And the most difficult part of all was that they joined the drill at different times, even as late as 24th November!

Positions had to be decided based on height among other things. Movements had to be finalised based on everybody's fitness and age. With new people joining constantly things were dynamic and changes were taking place every day.



Qi Gong drill – galaxy formation

My worst fears of this being a challenge and a frightful journey seemed to be coming true. However, our faith in our effort and offering never faltered.

The enthusiasm and commitment to make this drill a success took a new turn with these challenges. Practice sessions were taking place at all kinds of hours, from 6 am to 8 pm and at all kinds of different places. We were at it! At the Tennis ground, at the Playground, at the Dancing Hall, at Montbrun House, at the Salle d'Art, to accommodate everyone as it was a large number. Some were even practising in their bathrooms and some were stealing time away from work! The whole experience was absolutely amazing. Even Nature decided to test our commitment with cyclonic weather, with rain pouring over us, but this did not deter the participants in any way at all. We were there with our umbrellas, our raincoats or plastic bags on our heads. By the end of it all, even the ants in the Sportsground climbing on our legs stopped bothering us.

Honestly, I have no idea how we pulled it off. The outcome was truly beautiful.

The culmination was the eager request from all for an encore. An outpouring of joy and appreciation further bonded us and turned this into an extraordinary experience. All of us felt the Divine Grace and cherished this whole experience with gratefulness in our hearts. My prayers were answered and someone rightly commented "Oh, a Divine drill!" Yes, it was a journey done consciously, an offering that made us proud of being alumni of SAICE.

# THE 75TH ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATIONS

*Anjan Sengupta '78H*

The 2<sup>nd</sup> of December, the anniversary of our School, had a greater relevance last year because we were celebrating the completion of its 75<sup>th</sup> year. The month of November 2018 therefore witnessed a flurry of activities. Our preparation for the “Qi Gong” drill was very intense. But the former students eventually performed so gracefully that this drill, with its holistic movements of coordinated body postures, lived up to its name, ranking high among the other performances of the evening of 2.12.2018 at the Sportsground.

Before the 2<sup>nd</sup>, between the 25<sup>th</sup> and the 30<sup>th</sup>, there were many interesting talks on different topics at the Hall of Harmony, which lifted our spirits and definitely the standard of the celebration-related activities that were going on then. Then there was a variety programme in the upstairs hall of the Dining Room, performed mostly by the former students who offered songs, dance recitals and a recitation – a collection of items that exuded bonhomie and nostalgia among the audience and participants, giving much momentum to the occasion.

I would like to congratulate all the former students who participated in the “Qi Gong” drill. But special mention should be made of those –

and I include myself with great exuberance to the list – who were in the “tableau” format. The “tableau” was like an appendage to the main drill and meant for those who joined late. What was creditable was that we learnt our part of the drill in a record time of just ten days! To get a hang of things, some of us applied simple quantitative aptitude methods to memorise the sequences of our part in the “tableau”.

For example, if the serial order of sequences of the movements were: ‘Salute – Energy in and out – Tiger’ we termed it as ‘SET’. Similarly, ‘Deer-Bear’ became DB. ‘Snake – Bird – Lotus’ became ‘SBL’. In this way we figured out SET DB SBL as the sequential order, without any mix up, quite easily.

It amuses me to remember that, as students many years ago, we applied similar acronyms such as BODMAS (Bracket – Of – Division – Multiplication – Addition – Subtraction) to remember the sequential order for solving ‘simplification’ problems in quantitative mathematics!

For having earned an “encore” for the Qi Gong drill we must give due credit to our coaches who were relentless in their efforts in teaching us and monitoring us as we practised hard every morning and evening under difficult and varying conditions: torrential rains, gusty winds or scorching



Former students (men's group) saluting the Mother during the March Past



The Qi Gong drill

sun. We even practised overtime to make up for lost time owing to a day's 'bandh'!

Participating in the 'March Past' was, for many of us former students, a second chance of a lifetime. Singing 'Vande Mataram' full throttle along with the Ashram Band was another experience that I will cherish in my mind for a long, long time.

The average age of the participants in the 'Tableau' was touching 60 but the indomitable spirit was astonishing. To give an example, I

was pleasantly surprised with myself for having gained strength from within to get going. A habitual late riser, I woke up every day to report at 7 am for practice in the Sportsground. Today I live with a deep sense of fulfilment for having participated in the 2<sup>nd</sup> December programme. As I always say, one has to be desperate to be passionate, just as we were – our coaches and us.

Over and above all, the Mother's Grace worked on us to be disciplined, focussed and to bring accomplishment in the end.

## BEYOND MOMENTS OF CELEBRATION

*Tapas Bhatt '75, an Aurovilian, on participating in the 2nd December programme.*

I accepted the invitation to participate as a former student in the 2<sup>nd</sup> December programme at the Sportsground without any hesitation. I said to myself, "This is a rare gift and a special occasion to come closer to Her, to learn to be Her ideal child and to reflect on what I could do to receive her Force in the best way." How could I miss this chance to re-visit the old memories of fun and joy of life in the Sportsground? And what a warm welcome we received from all!

So, from 1st November to 2nd December I decided that my life would be focused on engaging 100 percent of my time and energy on learning the Qi Gong Drill – be it at the Sportsground, Tennis

Ground and at the old Art Gallery (Salle d'Art). I thought, "Wherever and at whatever time, come what may, my first priority will be to plunge back into my old Ashram School discipline and routine and enjoy every moment spent together with old classmates, teachers and friends. I must be available whenever called for practice."

To do this every day was of course quite a challenge and risky too. It meant I had to drive down from Auroville every day through heavy ECR traffic, through the pollution and noise, and sometimes in heavy rain. But the moment I entered the Sportsground complex, its atmosphere calmed me down and I felt like I was bathing in Her grace and love.



Qi Gong drill – tortoise formation

The feeling of being one family, the love, discipline and dedication to Their work could be felt at all times. As if eternity prevailed over everything in its ever-present luminous vibrations. I was impressed by the attitude of service and commitment of the Ashram members – on an individual and collective level, day in and day out – towards physical education, towards the perfection of the body, to make it an instrument of the Divine. I felt inspired to give my best to this collective physical effort.

Doing the drill together meant for me – however simple each movement may be – a lot more than just repeating movements together 5 to 10 times if required. It also meant learning to synchronize, harmonize, to seek perfection and

beauty in each movement. What it meant most of all was that I was back in Her lap, and She was allowing me to receive Her grace. It was something that was difficult for me to believe, and at every conscious movement, I would thank the Mother for allowing me to be in Her Atmosphere. It felt so special that I had tears in my eyes every day when I practised the Drill and did the March Past practice. It was a real experience of giving and surrendering to Her. It felt like we were all, in humility, welcoming and celebrating the coming of a New World!



The Mother was there. Her all-pervading presence was felt while we marched past Her. Let us continue to be Her true servitors. And may this Golden Chain grow bigger and brighter and keep all of us connected to this True Inner reality.

Former students (men's and women's groups) after singing Vande Mataram



# SAICE '75'

*Tapan Chowdhury '74*

*Fais de nous les guerriers héroïques que nous aspirons à devenir, pour livrer avec succès la grande bataille de l'avenir qui doit naître contre le passé qui veut durer, afin que les choses nouvelles puissent se manifester et que nous soyons prêts à les recevoir.*

The 75th anniversary celebration of S.A.I.C.E. has been one of the greatest events in my life! It was a festival of Divine Grace.

It was such a happy gathering of the Mother's children from all over the globe and from different walks of life that assembled here to honour and celebrate the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary of our beloved S.A.I.C.E! It was not an annual celebration of alumni with parties and lectures on successful careers, it was not a revival of nostalgia but a proof and promise of a "solidarity" in our faith in Her and in Her action. We, Her children, were brought here by Her for this unique occasion to reassure each other that we are ONE and that we have been prepared and chosen to work for Their vision of the spiritual destiny of India and the world.

It was not only that one day, the 2<sup>nd</sup> of December, that was the unique day, it was the several weeks of preparation leading to it, along with the other small events, that added colour to the celebrations. Whether we were participating in the drill or doing marching practice in the morning,

or our music rehearsals in the afternoons, or the drill and marching practice at the Sportsground in the evening, every day was a celebration! Mother's grace was everywhere, at every moment, in everyone, in every action, in every event big or small! Sleep became a waste of time! I couldn't wait for the morning to get back into the exciting rhythm of the festive activities, so intense was the joy in this selfless work. There was total understanding and goodwill between the participants



The Qi Gong drill

and differences were absorbed in good humour. There was also a total humility and a childlike obedience towards the captains. A constant and sincere effort to do our best, whatever be the activity, was the reigning attitude. Nothing, neither rain nor shine, nor the long hours,

could stop the enthusiasm and momentum to be part of this Divine event. And finally, when 2<sup>nd</sup> December arrived and it was time for the physical demonstration, the joy was overwhelming and every exercise was synchronized in total harmony with the tune and beat of the music. It was as if we were floodlit by the Mother's grace!

Even after the show has ended, nothing has faded, memories are alive and active. Let us keep alive the spirit of the celebrations with us always. May Her grace that is embedded in our hearts remind us at every moment of our duty towards the spiritual destiny of India and the world. ❀

# A TIME TO CHERISH!

*Ishita Deshmukh '04*

**W**e are here at last! For months, we had been discussing the participation of the alumni in the 2nd December programme, marking the 75th anniversary of our beloved alma mater. Many had planned their annual leave around it, others had given up important functions, and some, for the first time, had travelled alone, staying away from family and its responsibilities for over two weeks. The excitement, the dedication, the love tinged with nostalgia was evident everywhere.

At the beginning of November, a few members



The path leading to the breakfast spot

of the Golden Chain Fraternity thought that as there were variety programmes, talks and videos organized throughout the month, there should also be a picnic post the event, a culmination of the festive season with a relaxing get-together of old friends – the SAICEian family. My parents were approached for the venue, and they happily agreed to host the picnic at Tranquille (better known as Basu-da's land near Ousteri Lake).

However, the detailed planning started only after the 20th of November, when most of the alumni were already in town. Mangal oversaw the budget, while Pranati helped take down the



Introducing ourselves year-wise

names and collect the contributions. The latter, along with Shubha and Hardie, joined us to decide the menu for breakfast and lunch, ably aided by Gaurishankar (Munna). The caterer who had worked with us for my sister's as well as my wedding was called, as he was familiar with our land and its facilities. Another caterer was asked to serve a non-vegetarian dish for lunch which was to be prepared separately to not offend the main caterer. Meanwhile, Satya arranged buses and vans for transport. The idea was to travel together to recapture the spirit of the school days.



Listening to the introductions

On 3rd December, we were up at 5:00 am and at the farm by 6:30 am, ready to welcome all. The day was bright, cloudless and breezy. No rain clouds threatened to spoil the fun. Once everyone arrived, we were served cups of steaming tea / coffee. A sumptuous breakfast

consisting of khaman dhokla, potato sandwiches, kachoris with three types of chutneys was laid out. Bala Sundari celebrated her birthday by offering hot jalebis and distributing toffees.

After breakfast, we gathered around under the raintree. Since our staff had arranged for mikes and speakers, Pranati suggested that Siddharth (Bishu) and I call out the years, and those who had graduated that year, could come up to the stage and introduce themselves. It was an excellent way to break the ice between the generations. No one expected it, but the next two hours were spell-binding. Many shared humorous stories of their childhood, at School, in the various hostels, and with Jugal-da. No one stirred, rapt in fond memories. Even the mid-morning tea was served without a break in the proceedings. For the youngsters, it was a glimpse of the Ashram life before their birth. Finally, the session ended with a request for help in some of the future projects.

Since there was still an hour to go for lunch, an enterprising group went for a guided walk of the neighbourhood with Taarak. Others milled around, relaxing and chatting about yesteryears.

Lunch was served half an hour before time and not a minute too early. Thinking of the delicious chicken curry, we were famished. The vegetarian feast consisted of green salad, boondi raita, poori, shahi paneer, alu gobi matar curry, fried rice, and some sides, toma-to chutney and papad, ending with malpua and rabdi. Everyone loved the food, an apt finale to a wonderful outing.

As people left the farm and the staff wrapped up, I wondered at the passage of time. 75 years – hundred flashbacks, thousand memories, million experiences – all treasured in our minds, to pick out and share during these rare occasions. It was an unforgettable picnic – truly a time to cherish! ❀



Lunch



Gathering under the tree to introduce ourselves

# ART IN SAICE

*Celebrating 75 Years of the Sri Aurobindo International Centre of Education*

*Kirti Chandak '91*

When I planned for the SAICE alumni exhibition to celebrate its 75th Anniversary, I knew it was not going to be easy. But I also knew it was important and had to be done. Without further delay I booked the Ashram's Exhibition Hall from the 1st to the 9th of December, and with Dilip Patel's inputs, Amita-di's and Priti-di's guidance and mainly Vishwajyoti Mohroff's assistance the exhibition was put up.

With today's social media network, reaching out to those connected by email and WhatsApp was easy. But the difficult part was to reach some of the senior artists who were not connected by these. So it was only by meeting them in person that I could communicate and share my idea for

putting up this show and convince them to participate!

Finally we managed to have on board most of our senior artists like Amita Sen, Mita Chakraborty, Dhanvanti Nagda, Priti Ghosh, Abhijit Mitra, Saroja Sarma, Kiran Mehra, Arup Mitra, Meena Mitra, Sampat Sajjan and with the middle generation artists such as Arvind Akki, Sanjukta Mahapatra, Upendra Ratra, Sunayana Panda, Kusum Mistry, Dilip Patel, along with artists from Auroville - Tapas Bhatt, Arvind Maheshwari, Hufreesh Chopra, Jyoti Khare, and those from Pondicherry and around - Viswajyoti Mohroff, Somosree Chandak, Nina Mehra, Shreya Roy Manhas, Ishita Deshmukh, Rijuta Talreja, Menaka Deorah, Triasha Paul and me.



Opening of the Exhibition

For the inauguration it was heart-warming to hear stories from Kittu-da of how the Mother entrusted the responsibility of the Exhibition Hall to him and to know Amita-di's experiences as the youngest art teacher in the School. After that Dhanvanti-ben also shared her thoughts. This is what they all had to say:

**Kittu-da:** "I will tell you how I got associated with the Exhibition Hall. In 1972 March 29th Sisir-da called me and showed me a brochure of an exhibition put up in Delhi by the Centre and said, 'What are you people going to do here?'"

"I said, 'You have to ask yourself, you are in charge. It is not for me to decide, but it is for you to decide.' So he went to Kireet-bhai's room, and they wrote a letter to Mother that they were requesting Kittu to put up an exhibition. I was very nervous. They got the answer because the Mother wrote 'Blessings'. So I told the Mother, 'I am prepared to do this, you have given me your Blessings. But I will do it on two conditions: firstly, you have to give me a team and secondly, you must see all the photographs with the *Savitri* selections and the quotations from *Sri Aurobindo On Himself*.' The Mother agreed. So straight away she gave me three words: Respect, Sincerity, Adoration. The Mother said, 'You must take a big board and write it in light blue.' Pale blue is the colour of Sri Aurobindo. So Sanjeevan-da wrote it. I have got it still at home.

"The second thing I did was to give every photograph with the *Savitri* quotation to André-da, and André-da would show it to Mother. Except for one photograph which Mother rejected, all the others she accepted. All the quotations she accepted. For some quotations she wrote 'Excellent, very well chosen.' For some she said 'Think a little bit.'



L to R: Manimala, Arup Mitra, Kusum Mistry, Vishwajyoti and Amita-di

"So that is how the whole thing went on. On the 12th of August we were supposed to open this hall. So on the 10th of August I went with Amrita-da to the Mother with a big board written by Sanjeevan-da with the three words: Respect, Sincerity, Adoration. And The Mother wrote on it - 'Blessings' in very big words. And then we opened the Exhibition Hall on the 12th of August. On the 20th of August it was to be closed, but people asked me to extend it. So I said, 'I will ask Mother if I can extend it.' She said, 'Not 1 minute!' Seven o'clock it was to be closed and I said, 'All right.'

"I asked André-da why the Mother had said that. He said that the Mother had sent Sri Aurobindo's emanation here, he was physically present. Satprem came on the last day. I compelled him to come. He came and said that Sri Aurobindo was there. There was nothing more to be said. So the exhibition was over on the 20th and at 7 o'clock we closed it.

"Sometime later Krishnalal-ji wrote to the Mother, 'I would like to hand over the exhibition hall charge to Kittu.' I asked the Mother, and she said yes. So I asked her if it was under the Centre of Education. She said, 'No, it will be under the Sri Aurobindo Ashram and it must be kept open to all the devotees and disciples, whether they are Ashramites or local people or from outside, all

those who have the right attitude.’

“Thus we all know that the Ashram Exhibition Hall continues to be an active exhibiting space open to all.”

**Amita-di:** “Kittu spoke to you about this Hall and how he was connected to the Mother for its opening. I was connected to the Mother with art for education. She herself commissioned, with her signature and blessings, the room in the School which has been named the ‘Art Room’, so that the School could have art as a regular subject for the students. The little children had drawing classes already. But some of those in the middle age group wanted to paint so I used to give them papers, they would paint and I would take them and put them in a little cupboard. It was a little cumbersome.

“Then one day Mr. Anil Bannerjee, who used to come to do repair and maintenance work at the School every vacation, looked at the area where the Art Room now stands. The School Art Room has today two rooms: one small room where we exhibit and one longer room. The space of that long room was a terrace. So he converted it into a room, and made it possible for us to project slides directly on the wall, without the help of a screen. So the students were very happy. However, they could only go there in the evening after the meditation was over in the Playground. So we arranged the projection for them and they were so excited to see the French Impressionists on the wall. And they asked me to repeat the ‘Nenuphar’ paintings. The famous ‘Nenuphar’ by Monet. They kept staring at the pictures and could not imagine it could be so beautiful. So the Art Room of the School had been constructed and the Mother liked that Art was introduced for the students at college level too. Some of them asked me to do a 3-year course. The 1st year was for European Art and Primitive Art, the 2nd year was for Indian Art and the Bengal School of Art. You all know that the Mother was connected with the Bengal School of Art also. And the 3rd year was for the Far Eastern Art. Mother liked my syllabus. She even said, ‘Now Amita has found her syllabus, now she will be able to complete her article on art. So I have written something on art.’”

**Dhanvanti-ben:** “If you have something to say, there will always be people to listen. So for any creative person, the important question is, ‘Do I have anything to say or not?’ Your conviction is in your own heart and mind and your life, ‘I have something to say, and I am going to say it in my particular way.’ You make your own way, and it is not easy. People think painting is easy, it is just a way of spending time, but that is not so. It is a struggle.

“People tell me, ‘There is no struggle in your paintings.’ When I showed a power point presentation of my paintings, a young man told me, ‘Madam, you know nothing about life. You do not know poverty. You live in your Ashram, well protected, so you paint these flying figures.’

“I said, ‘Look here, there is struggle in life, and I know there is struggle in life. So you want me to paint the struggle again and show you the struggle of life? No, I want to give two drops of joy. You accept me or reject me, I do not care. But I will give you two drops of joy. So for me art is something which is my contribution to life, it is not the struggle but the end of the struggle. Behind this flying figure there is a long walk on all kinds of terrain. And I am giving you not the walk but the result of the walk. The joy you have when you reach the top of the mountain. I want to give that happiness only. I will give only two drops of joy; accept it or reject it.’”

All those who visited the alumni exhibition were delighted. There was a warm participation with a wide span of age-groups, from age 18 to 80, showcasing a variety of styles, mediums, techniques, some amateur and others more mature, but all very eager to be part of this wonderful occasion and celebrate the joyous moment together.

For the closure of the exhibition we planned a sharing session on the subject – “Art in SAICE and the Ashram, in the past, the present and the future”. Some experiences of how the Mother intimately guided and encouraged the art activities here were shared. We asked ourselves, “How is it coming along in the present and what about its future in our integral education and community life of the Ashram?”

I summarise the points that were brought up: At the level of art education, it would be good if a syllabus can be put in place for learning the history of World Art and Aesthetics as part of the general curriculum. Music, poetry and visual art are the best educators of the soul and have the power to make us grow in our consciousness. The important thing is developing the aesthetic sense which makes one open towards the beautiful instead of the ugly, and the good over the evil. If science subjects are considered important and part of the general syllabus why not also the arts as they are understood in the broadest sense?

At the community level it would be good to have an active open studio space for a more creative engagement, where anybody interested from the School and the Ashram and its extended family can engage in its practice.

And to take this forward Tapas Bhatt from Bharat Nivas at Auroville has invited this show to Kalakendra from 3rd February to 3rd March 2019, as a culmination activity of the 50th anniversary celebrations of Auroville and to pay a tribute to the Mother and Her Ashram members

who played a major role in the inaugural ceremony of Auroville on 28th February 1968.

If we ask ourselves, “Why is art so important? What is the role it plays in our life?” then we can find the answer. It helps embellish our lives and gives us joy, it educates us and we progress and it transforms our consciousness and makes us soar higher. Thus in the future it would be a true homage to our alma mater if we could re-infuse art in our integral education system and daily life here with the highest of intents. ❧

*Photos by Arvind Akki and Suman Kittur*



L to R: Kirti Chandak, Vishwajyoti, Arvind Akki, Amita-di, Priti-di, Jyoti Khare and Triasha

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*Between them music, art and poetry are a perfect education for the soul; they make and keep its movements purified, self-controlled, deep and harmonious. These, therefore, are agents which cannot profitably be neglected by humanity on its onward march or degraded to the mere satisfaction of sensuous pleasure which will disintegrate rather than build the character. They are, when properly used, great educating, edifying and civilizing forces.*

**Sri Aurobindo (CWSA 1: 448)**

*The discipline of Art has at its centre the same principle as the discipline of Yoga. In both the aim is to become more and more conscious; in both you have to learn to see and feel something that is beyond the ordinary vision and feeling, to go within and bring out from there deeper things.*

**The Mother (CWM 3:105)**

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I, Ramraj Sehgal, hereby declare that the particulars given above are true to the best of my knowledge and belief.

Date: March 2019

(Sd.) Ramraj Sehgal  
*Signature of Publisher*

### **ADVERTISEMENT RATES FOR THE GOLDEN CHAIN**

In an effort to make *The Golden Chain* magazine more economically sustainable we have, for the past two years, been taking advertisements. We invite and request all those who are in a position to put their companies' ads in *The Golden Chain* to come forward and help us in this manner.

The format of the ads is the same as those in the Bulletin — a quote from the Mother or Sri Aurobindo at the top and the company's logo and other information below.

Our advertisement rates are as follows:

**FULL PAGE FOR ONE YEAR (FOUR INSERTIONS): RS 6000**

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**“For Beauty is the worship that Nature offers to the supreme Master of the Universe ; Beauty is the Divine language in form”**

**-The Mother**



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