

The Golden Chain

Alumni Journal of Sri Aurobindo International Centre of Education



"...the sadhana and the work were waiting for the Mother's coming."

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

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

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

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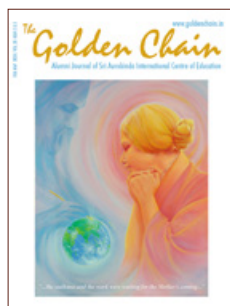
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On the Cover:

Painting titled "A New World is Born" by Dakshina.

© Sri Aurobindo Sadhana Peetham, Lodi, CA, USA

Quote from Sri Aurobindo's letters. Ref: CWSA, 35: 269.

On the Back Cover:

The Mother taking the salute on 24th April 1956.

Special March Past-Darshans of the PED members were held
every 24th April from 1948 to 1961.

24th April 2020 marks the centenary of the Mother's final arrival in Pondicherry. Though Sri Aurobindo and the Mother had first met six years earlier on 29th March 1914, this second coming would bring a decisive turn to their collaboration. It was as if Shiva and Shakti had come together and their work would now profoundly impact the spiritual destiny of mankind.

For us, naturally, this is a very special occasion and there were plans to celebrate it appropriately here in the Ashram. These plans however have had to change. The Covid-19 virus has arrived. Nobody would have foreseen that we would be marking this centenary in the middle of a growing global pandemic.

For the past few weeks, as the world has battled the Covid-19 crisis, all of us have been affected to a lesser or a greater degree. Here in the Ashram, the lockdown has been enforced strictly and the Ashram Main Building, the School and all departments (except those that provide essential services) are closed. Ashramites, students and the extended community have all been confined to their homes. The focus of the last month has been on organising food, water, medicines and other essential supplies for the home-bound Ashramites. At the same time care is being taken to follow all safety measures to prevent the contagion from entering our vulnerable community; vulnerable because it is at once close-knit and because there are many seniors amongst us.

One of the most heartening aspects of this effort has been the participation of former students. In this moment of crisis, alumni have come forward to volunteer in various capacities. Along with young Ashramites, they have researched and helped set up the medical and safety protocols to be followed, worked late into the night organising and planning the distribution of essentials, made daily rounds, sometimes starting very early in the morning, going from house to house delivering

food and provisions. They have made individual runs to provide water or medicines to elderly Ashramites, made trips to the farms to bring supplies, shifted dependent individuals to Ashram guest houses. The list is long... And they have done this for a month now, simply as part of the Ashram family, for "Douce Mère".

While we all face our practical challenges and take the necessary precautions, let us also remember that behind the veil, on the occult planes, perhaps a greater battle is being fought. During the last great pandemic, the Spanish flu, the Mother, who was then in Japan, had very clearly seen, fought and conquered the occult hostile force behind that disease. Keeping this in mind, as children of the Mother let us today try to remain constantly conscious, positive, full of faith, free from fear, and surrendered to her so that she may do her work unhindered. Let us aspire that what she said about her return to Pondicherry a hundred years ago, becomes true once again:

"The anniversary of my return to Pondicherry, which was the tangible sign of the sure Victory over the adverse forces."

These are historic times, and the world may never be the same again. Perhaps this attack has come to teach us something. Perhaps this is Nature asking us to pause and do things differently from now on, to do a reboot of modern civilization. Any change, however, begins from within us and the reboot required is perhaps of our own priorities, our own attitudes, our own consciousness. As we spend more time in our homes, with ourselves, it is perhaps time to look within.

When the Mother was asked, "Sweet Mother, how should I prepare myself for the April 24th Darshan?" she had replied:

"Look attentively into yourself to find out what for you is the most important thing, the thing you feel that you couldn't do without. It is an interesting discovery."

Let us be prepared to discover, and to change. ❧

MY VISIT TO JAPAN

Chhalamayi Reddy '80H tells us of her visit to the country Mother stayed in a century ago.

Japan! It is a country that is a must-visit destination in the mind of many – the land of beauty, cherry-blossoms, ikebana, the tea ceremony and pretty and gentle ladies in kimono walking with miniscule steps....

My idea of the land was no different. My father had visited Tokyo in 1961 and later both my parents did so during the early 90s, followed by my brother and sister-in-law. I too set my mind on visiting Japan one day. My family's purpose of visit was mainly to visit the house in Kyoto where possibly the Mother had lived with her friend Nobuko Kobayashi sometime during the four years of her stay (1916 – 1920) in Japan. That was my primary intention too.

Their visit was made possible through a Japanese friend – Kiyohito Kitagawa, a Buddhist priest who stayed in Puducherry (in the early 90s) for three months to study Sri Aurobindo and Buddhism. Last year (2018 December) it occurred to me that April 2019-20 would be the centenary year of the Mother's final arrival to Puducherry. What better time could there be

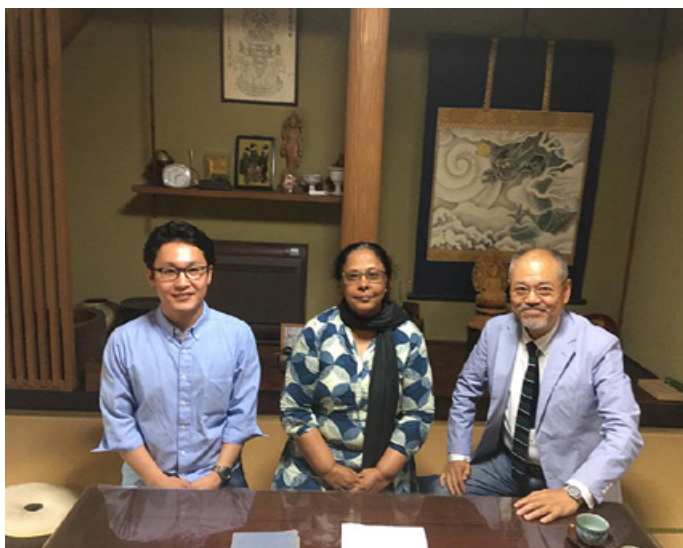
than to visit Japan. Unfortunately, we lost touch with our Japanese friend and couldn't trace him.

I have observed in my life that whenever I have a deep aspiration with regard to the Mother or Her Work in any form, She arranges it miraculously! I requested my IT colleague Aurosri at Sri Aurobindo International School, Hyderabad

to help trace my Japanese friend Kiyohito Kitagawa. Upon doing a search on Google about Kiyohito Kitagawa and Sri Aurobindo and Buddhism we found some lead under 'Dr Kiyohito Kitagawa'. We assumed that he being a scholar he would surely have a 'Doctorate'! When one is desperate one suspends one's

rational thinking! Despite it showing Dr Kiyohito Kitagawa as a medical doctor and his address and official phone number connected to a hospital, I requested an acquaintance in Japan to get in touch with him. To my utter disappointment I was informed with much annoyance that this Dr Kiyohito Kitagawa did not know any Indian and had never visited India!

For a few days with my spirit dampened I let go of my search. But I still continued looking for



Chhalamayi with Japanese scholars



The Mother with her friend Nobuko Kobayashi in Japan

the places to visit in Japan. I suddenly remembered that more than a decade back one of my IT teachers (not a faculty member anymore) was selected by 'Intel' to visit Japan. Upon asking her she mentioned that she had not made any friend with anyone living in Japan as her trip was short and official. However, she knew of an Indian couple who were neighbours at her home town and were presently living in Tokyo namely, Srinivas Sastry and Laxmi. Upon my sincere request Mr Sastry got on the job along with some of his friends to trace this Japanese scholar. After two weeks he told me to write an email addressed to Mr Kitagawa in an institution where he took courses twice a month. They were not prepared to share his phone number. Finally, I received an email from Kiyohito Kitagawa expressing his delight at being contacted. Extensive communication through email followed and I requested him to arrange a visit to where the Mother had



The Mother with Nobuko Kobayashi in Pondicherry

possibly lived in Kyoto. Meanwhile, Venkatesh K Rao and Shailaja planned to visit this sacred destination along with me.

To start with Kiyohito Kitagawa mentioned that the house where the Mother 'probably' stayed in Kyoto was demolished and Atsuko Kobayashi the granddaughter of Nobuko Kobayashi could not be contacted. Despite this information, I insisted that we visit the place as this was my main intention of visiting Kyoto.

As the Mother would have it, just a day before we left for Japan, Kiyohito Kitagawa messaged me mentioning that Atsuko Kobayashi responded by inviting us all to her newly constructed small home occupying a part of the area where Nobuko Kobayashi's house stood formerly. Some part of it is still vacant and the remaining has been occupied by a newly constructed house. My parents, and Anand-bhai and Deepshikha-di had visited the original house in the 1990s and met Midori

Kobayashi (adopted daughter of Nobuko Kobayashi). She has passed away and only her daughter Atsuko lives there. To top it all Atsuko wanted to host lunch for us! She changed the date from 20th to 21st May for our meeting; the date added up to the Grace!

Finally the date arrived. It was a bright sunny day and it matched with our happy excitement to visit this sacred place. Kiyohito Kitagawa drove us there to Atsuko Kobayashi's home. She lives in a small, cozy house in the corner of this property. She warmly welcomed us in and at the very start gave us each a paper bag with a box of Japanese sweets, and a holder for visiting cards. She also gave us each a xerox copy of Seiza Sha – the Silent Sitting Meditation Sangha in which the Mother participated regularly. This practice was started by Dr. Kobayashi



Seiza Sha meditation practice at Nobuko's house.

the Sangha. It was gracious of Atsuko to give us all these! She hosted us with a cold Japanese green tea. She was also kind enough to show the photos of the original home of Nobuko Kobayashi. It was by any standard a big royal classical beautiful home. We were hosted at a restaurant close by with a vegetarian Japanese lunch in the Japanese style of sitting down across a low table. We couldn't have asked for more!

Meeting Atsuko and visiting her house filled us with memories of the Mother and Her presence and we felt truly special and blessed. Recently, however, I came to learn that the house/plot that we visited was constructed around 1932 and was inhabited by Nobuko Kobayashi after the demise of her husband, Dr Kobayashi Sanzaburo. Hence, this was not the house visited by the Mother. The Mother stayed in a couple of rented apartments. Apart from visiting the Kobayashis frequently and being hosted by them initially when she arrived at Kyoto, the Mother did not live with the Kobayashi couple. The actual house(s) where the Mother lived in Kyoto is not known for sure. The house in Kyoto which some have gone to see and (which is mentioned by Sunayana Panda in her book) is most likely the one where Dr. and Mrs. Kobayashi were living at the time, or it was a house on that site. It is probably where the Mother and Paul Richard had initially stayed as guests when they arrived



Atsuko Kobayashi, grand-daughter of Nobuko Kobayashi

to heal the patients at his hospital and after his demise, his wife Mrs. Nobuko Kobayashi, the Mother's friend took responsibility of running

in Kyoto.¹ Or it could perhaps be a house on that site where the Mother had initially rented an apartment (as referred in her letters to Nobuko).

Anyway, little did I know then that my aspiration for wanting to know more about the Mother's stay in Japan would not end there after bidding farewell to Atsuko Kobayashi. Kiyohito Kitagawa had asked whether I wanted to meet two scholars who were interested in exchanging notes regarding Sri Aurobindo's philosophy on the late afternoon of 22nd May. I readily accepted the invitation. I couldn't imagine that I would be on the receiving end of much information being revealed to me on the details of the Mother's stay in Japan between 1916 and 1920.

I came to know that Mr Akai Tishio and Mr. Hidehiko his young associate are employed by the Govt. of Japan to research Indo-Japan cultural relations before WW II. Both scholars are also researching the meditative practices of 'Mirra Alfassa' (the Mother as she is known in intellectual circles in Japan) and Shumei Okhawa (leading philosopher, 1886-1957). They know about Mirra Alfassa's association with the practice of 'Silent Sitting Meditation' or 'Seiza Sha' initiated by Dr. Kobayashi (husband of Nobuko Kobayashi, Mother's friend). They expressed interest in knowing more about the correspondence between Mirra Alfassa and Nobuko Kobayashi. They referred to Pavitra-da's stay in Japan just following Mirra's departure to India and his friendship with James Cousins (member of the Theosophical Society) who knew Mr. Paul Richard and Mirra Alfassa well. They also spoke about Dr. Shinichi Suzuki, the Japanese musician, philosopher and educator whose students from USA visited Japan in the 1920s and mention meditation practices conducted by Nobuko Kobayashi in their diaries. They explained how, along with European architecture, Japanese fine art had influenced the buildings of Puducherry.

They cited examples of the City Hall (the Mairie) and Golconde and the Theosophical Society building at Chennai.

In short they knew much of the details of the Mother's stay in Japan from 1916 to 1920. I couldn't resist the thought of inviting them to the Ashram to speak about their research regarding the Mother and her stay in Japan. Being the centenary year of the Mother's final arrival to Puducherry, I invited them to come at the end of February. They, along with Dr. Helena Capkova, whose research is on Golconde and the influence of Japanese culture in its design, agreed to present their papers in the Ashram School.² It is hoped that these scholars will find some clue about the houses where the Mother actually lived in Kyoto and Tokyo.



In front of Atsuko's apartment, with Venkatesh K Rao and Mr Kitagawa.

I was overjoyed meeting them and felt blessed that my trip to Japan had become truly purposeful and meaningful. The experience couldn't have been timed more perfectly! ❀

1. Editor's note: There is no clear indication as to how long the Mother and Paul Richard lived with Dr. and Mrs. Kobayashi as their house guests. However, the area, the street and the site where their house was situated is recognised and confirmed.

2. Though the Japanese scholars were not able to come personally, their papers were presented at the Hall of Harmony. Dr. Capkova however did come and present her research.

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE MOTHER'S FINAL ARRIVAL IN PONDICHERRY

By Sunayana Panda '79

Until as late as 1938 there were only three Darshans in the Ashram – the February Darshan, the August Darshan and the November Darshan. The Mother's birthday and Sri Aurobindo's birthday were, of course, being celebrated right from the beginning and after November 1926 the third date was added as the Siddhi marked a milestone in the life of the Ashram. This pattern continued for many years. But something happened in November 1938 that changed things.

On the eve of the November Darshan Sri Aurobindo fell down in the middle of the night and broke his leg. The November Darshan was cancelled, of course, and as Sri Aurobindo had not recovered, the February Darshan of 1939 was cancelled also. By this time people were beginning to feel that waiting for the August Darshan to be able to see Sri Aurobindo again was going to be too long a wait. So they requested the Mother to find another date between the February and the August Darshan. The Mother chose 24th April and from 1939 this became the new Darshan day. This is how the April Darshan was started and the four

Darshans then divided the year into four almost equal parts.

The Mother chose 24th April but there was another date which she could have chosen instead – 29th March – the date on which the

Mother and Sri Aurobindo first met. However, she chose this one. Of course, this date is closer to the mid-point between the February and the August Darshans. But looking at the bigger picture we can see that this day has a greater significance. The Mother has said that her return to Pondicherry was a clear sign of victory over the hostile forces. It was after she came to live permanently in Pondicherry that the real work of the Mother and Sri Aurobindo started. This coming together of the two powers which were complementary brought about a new creation.

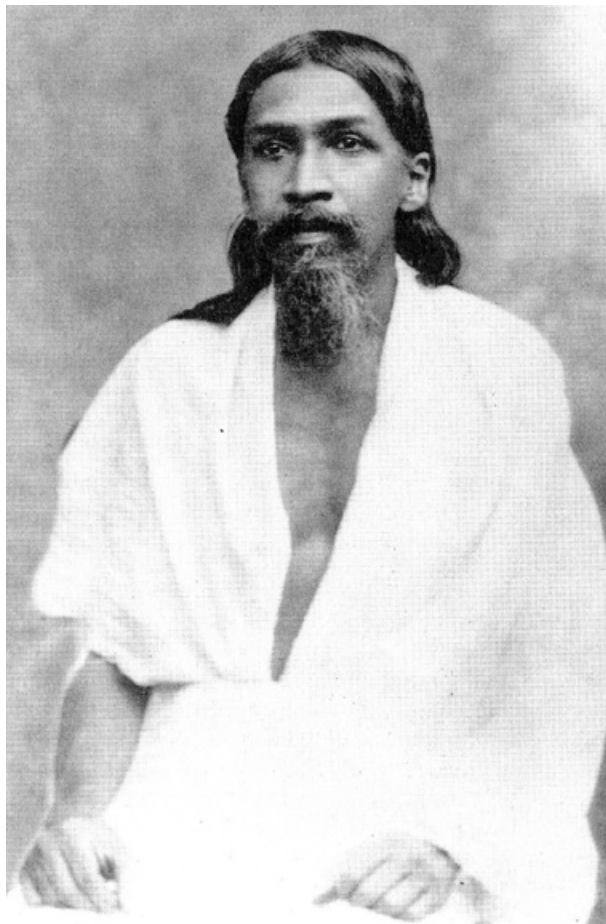
April 24th marks the Mother's return to Pondicherry. She had already lived in the town for a year when she had come in 1914. That first stay was very fruitful because the *Arya* journal was started and a bond had been made with the young men who were at that time living with Sri Aurobindo. That first year had also given the Mother a first-hand



knowledge of life in Pondicherry and had probably given her an idea of the possibilities. Let us not forget that the town was then under French rule and it is very likely that the Mother did not feel totally cut off from her own country.

The Mother and Paul Richard left Pondicherry for France in 1915 after celebrating her birthday in February. But that departure and return to France was very hard for the Mother and she actually fell ill. In spite of the physical separation she kept in touch with Sri Aurobindo through letters. It goes without saying that there was an inner contact that was constantly there.

The opportunity to go to Japan came up and in 1916 the Mother and Paul Richard decided to go back to Asia even if it was not going to be India. The First World War was on and travelling by ship was a dangerous thing but they undertook this journey anyway. They made friends there with Japanese intellectuals as well as those who were seeking spiritual truths in their own way. We know that they were in touch with those who were supporting the Indian nationalists. And it was this aspect of their lives that created a lot of difficulties for them. The British kept a close watch on whatever they were doing. It could even be perhaps because of this that eventually the Mother and Paul Richard decided to leave Japan and come back to Pondicherry.



The Mother has said that when the ship approached the shores of Pondicherry, when they were two nautical miles away, she could feel the aura of Sri Aurobindo. She says it was a physical sensation as one would feel when going from one temperature to another. This return at that time may not have seemed as anything striking or so significant but in retrospect we can see that it was a new beginning and that in actual fact the Mother came to Pondicherry for good, never to

go back again. This means that whatever she had brought with her was what she had. She did not go back to France to bring her belongings. When she came to Pondicherry for the first time the Mother was accompanied by Paul Richard but this time there was also Datta with them. They eventually rented a house on the Beach Road and resumed the activities which they had started with Sri Aurobindo.

At some point Paul Richard decided that he did not want to continue to live in Pondicherry. But the Mother, then simply known as Mirra Richard, decided that she wanted

to continue her life in the path that had been shown by Sri Aurobindo. It must have been a very difficult moment in her life to take this strong decision. Although Paul Richard left Pondicherry, the Mother was not entirely alone. She was living in the rented house with Datta.

When one looks at the Mother's life, one sees

how she did not hesitate to take certain decisions which radically changed her life. She was ready to face the consequences and to adapt herself to the change that this entailed. She continued to live in Bayoud House with Datta until November of that year. Everyone knows how the weather can get cyclonic in November in Pondicherry. One stormy night, it was reported to Sri Aurobindo that somewhere a roof had caved in due to heavy rains. He obviously knew that Bayoud House was not in very good condition and there was every chance of windows breaking and the roof leaking. He must have considered it unsafe to leave two women alone in that old house by the sea on a cyclonic night, so he sent two of his young men to go and bring the ladies over to their house (the Guest House). This is how the Mother and Datta moved to the house where Sri Aurobindo was living. Coincidentally, it was 24th November – exactly six years before this day became the Siddhi day.

This new arrangement was a bit inconvenient at first to the men who had so far lived a carefree and rather indisciplined life. They did not have a fixed programme for their day nor did they engage themselves in any gainful work. Most importantly they did not look upon Sri Aurobindo as a spiritual master. Of course, they respected him but he was more of a friend and an elder brother. The arrival of two ladies, and that too ladies who were not Indian, made them feel a bit ill at ease. Let us not forget that these young men had been involved in a violent revolution and had been ready to make any sacrifice to liberate the country from British rule. It was hard for them at first to accept the Mother and Datta as members of their large household.

Once the Mother became a part of the family she took charge of the cleaning and cooking, and organised the life of the group. She brought about order and discipline and a new phase started in the life of the little community that had formed around Sri Aurobindo. It was indeed the Mother's coming that marked the beginning of a spiritual

sangha. It was from then on that Sri Aurobindo was looked upon as the guru by his followers. The whole identity of the group of young men who surrounded and looked after him changed. From being political refugees they became spiritual seekers.

Sri Aurobindo said to a group of disciples in 1926 that he came to Pondicherry following an inner command and did his own spiritual sadhana but the work of helping others was possible because of the Mother's help. Sri Aurobindo wrote in 1935, "...the sadhana and the work were waiting for the Mother's coming."¹ When she joined the group she was one disciple among others in the household. It took another six years before the Mother could be officially established, on 24th November 1926, as Sri Aurobindo's equal. The Siddhi day marked the official beginning of the Ashram and it would function under the Mother's guidance.

It was the coming together of two powers which complemented each other. It was the coming together of Purusha and Prakriti, of the thinker and the doer, but also of the East and the West. In this work that they undertook together the Mother brought her practical knowledge of the world and turned Sri Aurobindo's thought into a living reality. It was her coming that made it possible for the spiritual community to continue to grow and evolve while Sri Aurobindo withdrew from all outward activities. Even though the disciples could not see him they knew that all was well and that they could be guided, even in the most material matters, by the Mother.

She gave the community a sound financial base and created units which could generate funds for the upkeep of the members. There is a general impression in the world that in order to find the spiritual we must give up or reduce to a minimum the material aspect of our lives. The Mother showed in her own way how to create a harmonious material base for the divine life to manifest itself on the earth. Having been brought

1. Quoted by K. R. Srinivasa Iyengar in his biography of the Mother, p 201.



Darshan, 24th April 1950

up in the West and having lived a full and varied life, rich in experiences, she had the necessary knowledge and skills to create, organise and maintain the material life of the growing group of disciples.

Sri Aurobindo's philosophy is not easy to understand, even for the most educated, but it became a reality to which even the most uninitiated could connect with their minds and hearts because the Mother made it possible. She had the admirable skill of being able to speak of the

highest thoughts in the most simple language. Even the children of the School could understand the work that she was trying to do.

In fact, it was the children who brought the Mother into the classrooms and the playground. When the families started coming to the Ashram during the Second World War the Mother opened the School and a little later the physical education activities started. The Mother was in the middle of all that, giving dictations to the little children herself and also standing at the finishing line of the running track at the Sportground. She truly came down into the middle of all the activities and was a part of the life of the children.

The philosophy of *The Life Divine* would have remained within the pages of the book had she not come to turn it into a reality in the physical material world. This was the work for which she had

come down on the earth but she spent many years in preparation before she came to Pondicherry. When the Mother finally arrived in Pondicherry on 24th April in 1920, the work started – in an unobtrusive manner at first then slowly growing to a more complex and complete fulfilment. ❧

The above article first appeared in Sunayana's book, Mirra Alfassa – The Mother, her Life and Her Work, which is available at SABDA.

FROM MIRRA ALFASSA TO THE MOTHER

A CENTENNIAL TRIBUTE

24 APRIL 1920 – 24 APRIL 2020

by Sachidananda Mohanty '75

EASTERN VOYAGES

In the spiritual annals of India, women travelers from the West would undoubtedly find a special mention. Sister Nivedita, [Margaret Noble: 28 October 1867 – 13 October 1911], Annie Besant [1 October 1847 – 20 September 1933] and in our case, Mirra Alfassa, the Mother, easily come to mind. They were rare Souls who were born on alien shores and undertook great hardship in coming to India, their chosen land. While comparisons are inapt, it must be admitted that both Nivedita and the Mother, in their own remarkable ways, were accepted as disciples by realized Beings like Swami Vivekananda and Sri Aurobindo, respectively; in due course, each chartered out a path for Herself. Sister Nivedita completely dedicated herself to the cause of India's freedom and her spiritual destiny in the world. The Mother became the spiritual collaborator of Sri Aurobindo and advanced his vision of human evolution and the advent of a new species upon earth.

The exact circumstances in which Mirra and Paul Richard came to India for the last time on 24

April 1920 have been recorded in the many biographies of the Mother and Sri Aurobindo. What I should like to do here, instead, is to underline the significance of one hundred years of the Mother's

final arrival in Pondicherry. I shall suggest that in the context of contemporary world movements and forces, Mirra's landing in 1920 in French India for the final time, was a momentous act whose historical significance would unfold before mankind in the next hundred years. Indeed, it would be hard for most to see the meaning behind disparate and cataclysmic world forces and events that preceded the Mother's final landing in Pondicherry.



The Mother with Rabindranath Tagore and others in Japan

CONTEXTS

Mirra's arrival in India in 1920 was preceded by a number of world events whose significance would not have been lost upon Sri Aurobindo and the Richards. Certainly, Sri Aurobindo was aware of them as evidenced in his writings and conversations of the period.

Most noteworthy of them was clearly the outbreak of the Russian Revolution in 1917, launched against the tyranny of Tsar Nicholas II

in Russia. In the wake of the Revolution, paradoxically, one of the first moves made by the Bolshevik leader V.I. Lenin¹ [whose Party seized power from the Social Democrat Kerensky], was to establish the All Russian Extraordinary Commission (commonly known as Cheka) the dreaded secret police organization founded on 5 December 1917 by Felix Dzerzhinsky² at Saint Petersburg and Moscow. What seems to have hardened the stand of Cheka and Lenin early on, was an assassination attempt against Lenin on 30 August 1918 by Fanya Kaplan, a member of the Social Revolutionary Party, one of the many political factions that functioned underground during the early days of the Revolution and were decimated subsequently by the Bolsheviks.

There were quick reprisals and retributory violence by Cheka against supposed enemies of the State. The savagery and brutality, unprecedented in nature through what is called The Red Terror would continue in the Soviet Union much later into the Stalinist period in the form of GPU, NKVD and KGB. For Sri Aurobindo's views on such developments, readers may see the footnotes to *The Ideal of Human Unity*.

OUTBREAK OF THE SPANISH FLU

Another disaster that followed the end of World War I, was the outbreak of the deadly Spanish Flu/ Influenza that struck the world including India. The global mortality ranged from 20 to 30 million, and in India from roughly 10 to 20 million. Reportedly, the virus came to India from influenza-infected World War I troops. The flu would have an impact in the life of Sri Aurobindo as well.

On 17 December 1918, as she was preparing to travel to Pondicherry at the suggestion

of Sri Aurobindo, Mrinalini Devi passed away, attacked by the same virus. When the news was shared with Sri Sarada Devi, she said to Mrinalini's mother: "You have come? I was seeing in my vision my daughter-in-law Mrinalini. She was a goddess born as your daughter in consequence of a curse. Now that her Karma is exhausted, her soul has departed." According to Nirodbaran, even a stoical Sri Aurobindo was moved by this tragic turn of events.

It would thus be seen that Mirra's arrival in Pondicherry on 24 April 1920 was preceded by tumultuous events, some near, some far. If Sri Aurobindo and Mirra stood for world peace, then the Bolshevik Revolution and later the Nazi-fascist movements during World War II imperiled the evolutionary destiny of mankind. For Sri Aurobindo, freedom was a sine-qua-non for evolutionary progress.

LASTING LEGACY

Around March 1975 when I was in the last year of my 'Higher Course' in the SAICE, I came across, in the print media, a hostile account of Sri Aurobindo by a prominent critic named Claude Alvares. The attack mounted by Alvares was direct and his hostility towards the Ashram somewhat incomprehensible. The Mother had just left her body in November, 1973.

Years later, while examining Paul Richard's papers for a volume on 'cosmopolitan modernity', I came across a reference to the same Alvares in the introduction to a biography of Paul Richard, *Without Passport: the Life and Work of Paul Richard* [ed. Michel Paul Richard, New York: Peter Lang Publishers, 1987, p.72.].

In a telephonic conversation with me in 2009, Alvares, then in Goa, told me of his brief meeting

1. For Lenin's approach to the question of freedom, see his interview with the Anarchist leader Emma Goldman in *Cosmopolitan Modernity in Early 20th Century India*, Routledge, 2nd Global and South Asian edition, 2018.

2. Here are some chilling quotes from Felix Dzerzhinsky, the founder of the dreaded Cheka, under Lenin: "The fact that you are alive is not your achievement – rather a failure on our side." and "We represent in ourselves organized terror, this must be stated very clearly."



with Michel Richard [Paul Richard's son] in America, and said that "he[Alvares] no longer held on to his earlier views on Sir Aurobindo and the Mother". "I was younger then", he said, "I am now able to appreciate the philosophy much better, especially the Mother's concept of education which is quite radical and futuristic."³ I found this a fantastic turn-around and Alvares's declaration quite a revelation.

I mention Alvarez's case because his views were representative of his times, especially the seventies in India; they were indicative of the Marxist critique of religion and spirituality that reigned supreme in the media and academia then (it still does in many quarters today, alas). The episode also illuminates our understanding of the lasting legacy of Mirra. She was a pioneer and a leader in many areas including Education of the future. She excelled essentially in five major

domains that have arguably been in the forefront of our attention in recent times.

The lasting contribution of Mirra, post-1920, may be seen in the following five different categories:

YOGA IN EARTHLY LIFE

First, her attempt to concretely realize Sri Aurobindo's ideal to manifest yoga in earthly life, not through renunciation, and denial of earthly life, but through the acceptance of worldly life with all its mazes and contradictions, through an attempt to transform life by Integral Yoga and a change in consciousness. It must be noted that Indian spirituality has invariably turned its back to worldly life and pursuits. The path of monastic life and salvation, the ochre robe and the monk in the hermitage have invariably fascinated the Indian mind. Seldom if at all, do we see attempts, such as the one made by the Mother, beginning with 1926, to build an Ashram that affirms the truth of human life and eschews the artificial gender binaries and the handling of material resources.

NEED FOR CHANGE FROM WITHIN

Secondly, she maintained that while the external life and the material conditions need amelioration, it is not by the change from without but essentially change from within, an inner transformation, that ultimately brings about lasting change: Yoga or inner life, not for quietude or Nirvana, but for meaningful action in the world.

A NEW EDUCATION

Thirdly, Mirra, stood for a radically new concept of learning and education that she tried out in the Sri Aurobindo Ashram and in Auroville. She worked out in minute details a child-centric integral education that combined both – tradition and modernity, the national and international, the provincial and national, and finally, the material and spiritual. Synthetic in character, this

3. Claude Alvarez, conversation with Sachidananda Mohanty, 23 August 2009. Cited in *Cosmopolitan Modernity in Early 20th Century India*, Routledge, 2nd Global and South Asian edition, 2018.



The inauguration of the University Centre

education seeks the inclusion and transformation of the five-fold parts of our being: physical, vital, mental, psychic and spiritual. Education, according to her, should not be confined to the four walls of the class room; in the final analysis, all life is education. Freed from the bondage of degrees, diplomas, commercial success, the New Education of the Mother is radically different in character and fashions out a new way of life that manifests the best in the human self and realizes the best in human beings.

NEW WOMAN: POST-FEMINISM

Fourthly, she upheld the concept of a New Woman and woman's independence that went beyond the battle of the sexes and the gender divide in favor of mutual respect and understanding. Based on spiritual principles, she led the way, in the life of the Ashram, for complete equality in education and community living. The talks she delivered in Japan, and those she delivered in the Ashram, make it abundantly clear that her views on women and gender relations were far ahead of her times and could be termed as Post-Feminism.

HUMAN UNITY: PLANETARY CITY

And finally, She strove to realize, in concrete terms, Sri Aurobindo's Ideal of Human Unity and her Dream, envisioned in 1956, in the form of the Auroville experiment, the City of Dawn that was born in 1968. Unprecedented in the history of mankind, this experiment marches ahead, despite obstacles and hindrances, a beacon of hope in a world full of violence and turmoil.

A hundred years after Mirra arrived in Pondicherry, her fivefold goals and ideals are still alive and relevant to our times, her lasting legacy in this centennial year. ❧



The inauguration of Auroville

THE BIRTH OF A STORY

Kamalini Natesan (Rina) '84H

“Who wants to read happy stories?” I was told. “Get out of the way, and write a piece of fiction that has drama, intrigue, shades of grey, maybe even black, and perhaps only then, a happy ending.” That shook me and it hurt too. Would I have to make up a story? My true and wonderful narrative would have to stand on its

head, non-fiction to fiction? Well, that’s what I was hearing. All right then, if I can create, so must I un-create.

Thus began my initiation into writing a novel. Would at least some truth eventually make it on to the pages? This was the question that besieged me. If I wanted readers, I had to try, and try

my utmost, to make a compelling tale of my travels, discoveries and experiences into one of trials and tribulations, and have my heroine ultimately triumph over it all. Oh yea baby, I could do it!

Naked Beneath the Midnight Sun is my first long story. I was pressured into telling it, not by anyone else, but the heart. A year spent in Vestby, Norway, as a young college dropout, left an indelible impression – my entire being had been rocked and I was besotted. The whole country, one that I travelled extensively, in turn, steered me, on an inward journey that led me on a whole new trajectory, and there was no turning back. How could I not share that which tore at my insides

repeatedly, in the most passionate and sinuous manner imaginable? So I wrote it, over a period of many years, but in my head alone.

But even after the advent of the computer, it took me a long time to put it all down. Thus began my journey as a novelist.

Nothing is achieved without discipline. I knew if I wanted to achieve, I would have to find the time, each day, to put something down. The editing might have to happen later. So I did take out an hour at a time, every new day, to make some progress.

Some days I wrote for 2 to 3 hours, but never at a stretch. Creative fatigue would set in after an hour, and I would go for a walk, or cook, or simply sit and listen to music and allow the mind to breathe free. Exercise, I discovered, provided my creative gene the bite and nip it needed. While the body was occupied with building muscle from fat, the mind roamed free, wherever it wished to. I found a very able and firm partner in the gym — the cross-trainer, believe it or not. The discipline of writing, also made me disciplined about physical exercise, and does it get better than that! One for one free!

Once I had 30 chapters down, I approached one publisher. Then, I did write in to a few, who asked me basic yet banal marketing questions:

“Who is your reader? What is the age bracket you consider as a reader? Is it a rom-com, adventure, thriller, emotional story?” I was flummoxed. Did it have to be limited within an age bracket or fit into a box? Why won’t everyone want to read an interesting tale set in the most beautiful country of the world — Norway? There was no clear response. I left it at that. Then one publisher, who I ran into at a book launch, said he would be happy to publish it. The story, however, doesn’t end here.

The process of editing began — rewriting and



NAKED BENEATH THE MIDNIGHT SUN

This is the story of Suchareeta (Suchu), a gutsy girl, who goes through rich and varied experiences in the land she has had to run to, from the confines of a safe home. She finds that her destiny is tied in with this land, Norway, truly the most fascinating and stunningly beautiful country in the world.

It is a short tale, in terms of time, barely a year of Suchu's life, and while it moves along, the pace alters as the story weaves in and out of Suchu's mind and heart. Friendships, heart-break, love, travel, risk, adventure and growing up are all a part of this journey.

Norway is the country where it all happens, as it remains etched, even today, in every crevice of my being, as one that is all love and raw beauty. Hail Norway!

I hope the reader discovers what she did, and flows along, much like the Norwegian fjords. May Suchu's tale evoke emotions that resonate with each reader.



adding and subtracting and multiplying. Much dedication and hours of editing later, I had a novel that no longer resembled the story I wanted to tell. And then, ironically, the very publisher who had been willing to publish my story earlier on, rejected my manuscript after much back and forth: the novel wasn't dramatic enough!

Strangely, I was relieved to be let go, because it is only after this that I sat myself down and asked myself some very important questions, which I should have perhaps asked myself far earlier in this process:

What do you want the reader to feel? How much of *your Norway* do you want to share? How much of yourself do you want to share? Is the passion still glowing or has the oil burnt out?

Even as I heard the answers to these self-doubting queries, I sat myself down, and with unabated zeal I went cold-calling. I shot off a bio-note,

a short synopsis and 3 chapters of my novel to all sorts of publishers, within the country and abroad, that very night. I chose ten who, to my mind, appeared to be the 'right sort'. Whether I got accepted or not, seemed to matter less. I wanted to go ahead while the heart was still zealous and the fire still hot. Am so glad I did.

The result came within two weeks. Olympia, UK, had accepted my manuscript! Bam! It was going to happen, and with a publisher with a reputation too. I was beside myself with joy and thanked the powers that be, quietly.

Here we are, at the threshold of a new beginning. I have my fingers crossed, because I pray and hope that Norway, the country at the core of my story, is loved and visited after one has read *Naked Beneath the Midnight Sun*.

It has been planted in the 'Contemporary Fiction' category. ☼



FULL RECOVERY

By Kamalini Natesan (Rina) '84H

Did she close the door?
Yet the light enters,
Ah, chinks in her armour,
to plug she forgot.
Easy, said the Light,
I can find a way,
I always find a way.
Did she remain tight-lipped
When it hit her heart?
she baulked, shook,
brushed away the tremor
that accompanies such light,
'Entry prohibited'
Disregards and slips in
unnoticed.
Did she find
what she sought?
she did perhaps, perhaps not.
Her dismal song,
what poet wrung?
Whose hand tears down
her veinous walls then?
allows neon bulbs
to crack, splinter, unsoil?
Does she know yet,
it permeates her every pore?
The Hour will burst,
as it must,
climactic, epiphanic, cathartic,
gather the spirit scattered,
absorb all opaque matter.
Fully recovered,
Light itself will she be.

A DIFFERENT TIME

By Gaurab Bose '05

There are quiet times and times that are rough
Who wouldn't keep a life infused with peace,
But wherefore we fret; and living gets tough
Shun those we love over the ones we please?
Who wouldn't live a life of adventure and joy
Why then life isn't lived but filled with things?
Dreams are lost, replaced with a survival ploy
Jolted by alarms and as our telephone rings.
Where are we now, and which way is true
If this be night, aren't we close to dawn?
As we advance, everything's made anew
Time won't cease; shouldn't we move on?
We secure our lives, yet our fears never go.
I know I am, the future's not for me to know.



THE 75TH ANNIVERSARY OF DORTOIR

Sunayana Panda '79 reports on the celebrations

The first boarding (hostel) of the Ashram School was simply called “Dortoir” by the Mother. This is a French word which means “Dormitory” but this hostel was more than that. It was a place of privilege as it was directly under the care of the Mother. This boarding for children, whose parents were not living in Pondicherry, was started in 1945, soon after the School was opened in 1943. In January 2020 it completed 75 years of existence and a celebration was organised by Parul-di who has been looking after the children of this boarding since 1964. Even before that she used to help out with this work along with Aruna-ben and Tara.

The main part of the celebration was a variety cultural programme. Rehearsals for this started in October but we had to wait until the School re-opened on 16th December to start the practice

sessions in all earnestness as all those who had gone out of Pondicherry were back only in that week.

There has been an old tradition, of nearly seventy years, of holding a cultural programme inside the boarding on 15th January, the ‘birthday’ of the boarding. So this was the same programme which was presented in the School Courtyard but on a larger scale. We were going to recite the same prayers that we had always started the programmes with for decades. There was also a group song which was a common item in these performances. This year we chose a Bengali song written by D. L. Roy. And the programme concluded with the same prayer which we always recite at the end.

After the opening prayer we started the programme with a narration of the history of the





boarding with a projection of old photos of the house and of the boarders. This was very much appreciated by everyone as this story is not so well-known.

Tara had already told us that she would recite a sonnet by Sri Aurobindo and she did that on the final day although she had not come for the rehearsals. But the big surprise for all of us was the participation of Chitra-di (Jauhar) and Lata-di. They were both recovering from health problems but they gave us powerful recitations from memory. Chitra-di recited from *Savitri* and Lata-di recited from *Prières et Méditations*. Lata-di also narrated an incident of how she spent her first day in the boarding alone before the others came and how the Mother had sent a basket of fruits for her through Dyuman-bhai.

From the time we were planning the programme we had included some texts written by the Mother. We presented some prayers from



Prières et Méditations which were recited live, accompanied with dance and music. The Mother's story *Le Sentier de Tout à l'Heure* was read out and enacted on stage, also accompanied with movements.

Anjan Sengupta sang a Bangla song in which he recounted his memories of growing up in Dortoir. The lyrics of the song were written by him although they were

based on a song by Anjan Dutta.

Debaleena and Swathi Raghavan delighted us with their solo dances and there was also a group dance by current students.



The presentation of the whole variety cultural programme was a team work and many worked tirelessly behind the scenes.

There were two other parts of the celebration. The first was a picnic and the second was an exhibition. We gathered on the Sunday before the 15th and went to Maturudymanam where Kiran-di received us with great warmth. We had our breakfast and after that we were taken to a place which had been specially prepared for us.

This area was near two lotus pools. One of the pools was meant for pink lotuses and the other was to have white lotuses. As we know the pink lotus is called "Aditi" and the white lotus is "Avatar". Around these two pools we planted bulbs of the "prayer" flowers and also stems of

“Sri Aurobindo’s compassion” which had been kept ready for us.

After spending the whole morning there, we went to have lunch at the Lake Mainland. After we had finished eating Batti-da and Tara spoke to us about some incidents connected to the Lake Estate and the Mother. They also answered some of our questions.

The third part of our celebration was an exhibition we held at the Exhibition Hall where we put on display paintings, embroidery and poems by former boarders. It was done a bit in a hurry and we received the pieces one by one even after we had opened the exhibition. Many people came on the last two days and appreciated our work.

It was a memorable time we spent together. There is a special bond between those who have lived together in the same house. This celebration strengthened those bonds. ❀



DORTOIR: SIMPLY MY TAKE

By Anjan Sengupta '78H

A whole lot of Dortoir's bona fide boarders, present and former students, of all ages and from all social strata, arrived here in Pondicherry from far and near to celebrate the boarding's 75th anniversary. With Parul-di at the helm of affairs they put on a splendid show on stage in the School courtyard on 15.01.2020. The variety programme comprised of prayers, recitations, songs, dance recitals and a short play. A comprehensive retrospective of the story of Dortoir was very well depicted through projections of old photographs on screen.

As Dortoir celebrated this milestone, I reminded myself that I stayed in the boarding back in 1970. My story begins 50 years back.

In our times Dortoir was located adjacent to the Playground. In the middle of the boarding's courtyard was a huge Neem tree which was synonymous with the life and culture of Dortoir. It was much like a trusted guardian looking over us. Its shade and soothing breeze, during summer months, was a welcome change from the scorching heat outside the compound. During holidays the cool atmosphere prompted us boys to play cricket indoors in the courtyard.

The summer of '70 was memorable with lots of stories narrated by Koki after lunch, during recess hours. Every afternoon all the children flocked around her, in rapt attention, to listen to the magical story of Dorothy and the Wizard of Oz. The duration of story-telling time used to be short: 15 minutes not more. This was before the resumption of the 5th period, the afternoon session of school. Thus the suspense, the anticipation of the next episodes to come, gripped us even more. Later in life, I came to realise that the most relevant experiences, are simple, and remain etched in memory forever.

Friday's menu for dinner in Corner House has always been special. Just as it is today, in our

times too there were fried, puffed 'puris' with 'aloodum' and mango-juice. The excess of what was served for dinner was carried forward to next day's breakfast on a first come, first served basis. As Corner House used to be within a stone's throw of Dortoir, we never missed the opportunity to make the best use of this close proximity. Saturday mornings at Dortoir, for a number of 'gourmands' like me, used to be frenzied. Rising up from bed earlier than usual and making a dash for the washrooms, each one desperate to be ready before the other, we would rush out of Dortoir to be at the gates of Corner House even before the counters had opened for breakfast!

I am in a time warp. The year 1970 has just unfolded before my eyes and I can see us, boys and girls, memorising our lines for the play to be put on in Dortoir on 15th January. The rains having been scanty and the harvest poor in the preceding year, Parul-di has taught us a song to implore and invoke rains, "*Aai brishti jhnepe, dhaan debo mepe....*", which we shall sing on stage as a group song, in chorus. It is also for the first time in the boarding's history that a poem from 'Abol Tabol', by Sukumar Roy, will be recited and enacted simultaneously. I am excited and nervous at the same time because the person putting it all into action on stage is me.

Back to 2020, and the present. Visuals on the projector screen and a crisp commentary of the story of Dortoir on the microphone by Sunayana, bring me back from my time-travel.

They say that a picture is worth a thousand words. As the story of Dortoir progressed, the 1970 picture of us children, boys and girls on screen, reciting a prayer with clasped hands and eyes shut, was well worth ten thousand words!

The strength of our School is powerfully aligned with the reciting of prayers: words of the Mother written by Her for the children of the

boarding and students of the School alike. Therefore, as in all preceding years, for the boarding's 75th anniversary programme we recited two prayers in French, given to the Dortoir children by the Mother. We were all ears when the Jauhar sisters – Lata-di, Tara-di and Chitra-di recited long passages from the works of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother from memory. One felt then that the presence of Mother's grace and power was always there with them and all of us.

As a way of reliving my childhood memories, I sang a song in Bengali to mark the occasion. While the song was based on an original track composed by a contemporary musician from Bengal, I rewrote the lyrics to capture my boarding life, in simple Bengali. I sang it on stage with the help of Shantanu Verma on keyboard. Sudha-di (Umachigi), my English teacher, encouraged me to translate it into English, which I did. Here it is, all 9 stanzas, refrains included:

The Song

(Of Dortoir, the Neem tree and more)

Dortoir by the side of our Playground
There a Neem tree of vast surround
Capturing memories simple but profound
The Pondy of my childhood unbound!

At Ira Home, unaware of biting lips
I drew ocean's rising waves in heaps
Now, I wish all could have a look
But alas, I've lost that drawing note-book

Dortoir by the side of our Playground
There a Neem tree of vast surround
Capturing memories simple but profound
The Pondy of my childhood unbound!

Parul-di, Koki's affection forever growing
The summer of seventy simply shining
At each story-telling time our eyes glowing
The wizard 'n Dorothy were in the reckoning!

At CH, done with cleaning my food-plate
Thereon a sprint up to School's gate
Rushing on to avoid coming late
Or confront Tanmay-da tête-a-tête!

Dortoir by the side of our Playground
There a Neem tree of vast surround
Capturing memories simple but profound
The Pondy of my childhood unbound!

The retreat, Tindivanam via Jipmer, to Pondy
Scorched by the sun fancied hardy
Beckoning roads made homecoming easy
From anywhere, anytime to get cosy!

But that Neem tree of vast surround
Has alas disappeared from roots and ground
To Playground I have much fear to go
A gate-pass not renewed denies entry so!

Dortoir by the side of our Playground
There a Neem tree of vast surround
Capturing memories simple but profound
The Pondy of my childhood unbound!

Singing the group song in chorus, an all-round performance by the participants, was perhaps the biggest accomplishment on stage team-wise. We stood up for our motherland singing vigorously, "*Dhono dhanne pushpo bhora....*", a nationalistic song composed decades ago by D.L.Roy, part of what is known as 'Dwijendrageeti', a subgenre of Bengali music.

In selecting a group song for the boarding's anniversary, Parul di has always been thoughtful to send out a strong social message. If in 1970 it was invoking the rains to end a prolonged drought, in 2020 it was an awakening song to express love and devotion for one's motherland, and to ignite the minds of all to be trustworthy citizens of our great country.

Victoire à la Douce Mère. Bande Mataram. ❧

THE STORY OF DORTOIR

Sunayana Panda '79

When the School was opened in 1943 the children who were the first students were already in the Ashram. All of them were living with their parents or only with their mothers. Some were living with relatives or some member of the Ashram who had agreed to look after them. Then in 1944 Lata Jauhar, who had come with her parents for a visit to the Ashram, asked the Mother if she could join the School. The Mother accepted her but her parents were leaving soon. That is when the question of where she would stay came up.

Lata-di's father, Surendranath Jauhar, then bought the house which was to become "Dortoir" and along with that came the ground which was behind it. The French man who owned the house used to grow groundnuts in the agricultural lands he owned but apparently he used to dry the nuts in the ground at the back of the house. This is how the house and the ground came together. While the house became the boarding the ground behind it became the Playground. That is why we are celebrating the 75th anniversary of the boarding and the Physical Education Department in the same year.

As the School was in the adjoining building, where there is the body building gymnasium now, some of the rooms which were connected to the Playground became the class-rooms of the School. In this way, the School, the Playground and the boarding were all in one place and all interconnected.

*

The Dortoir house was an old colonial building which had its main entrance on Rue Law de Lauriston, just opposite what is now "Salle d'Art".



As you entered the house, to your left was a large room and to your right was the kitchen. From the main entrance door you crossed a corridor and came out into the courtyard from where a staircase led you to the first floor. On one side of the courtyard was a Neem tree and beyond that was a small door which connected the boarding to the Playground. This small wooden door was in the corner where we cross from the Playground into the Guest House.

Soon a few other children whose parents were not living in Pondicherry joined the School and this is how the boarding grew in numbers. The boys lived downstairs and the girls were upstairs. While the boys were looked after by Chellamma the girls were under the charge of two Parsi ladies

called Gul-ben and Shirin-ben. But this didn't last long. Soon the Mother asked Anu-ben, who later became a dance teacher, and Kusum-ben, who later was the head of Senteurs, to take care of the children.

The Mother was in daily contact with Anu-ben and Kusum-ben and knew every detail of what was happening in the boarding. In those days the children of the Ashram had to help out in some department of the Ashram. The boarding children also were given some work which they did during the early afternoon, before going back to School for the afternoon classes.

In the 1940s and 50s children of the boarding ate in the boarding. Food came from the Dining Room and the ladies who looked after the children cooked something to add to that. There was a big room in the ground-floor which was the dining room of the boarding.

There was a rule which has been followed since then. Mother had given instructions that parents should not be allowed inside the boarding. The parents and guardians could talk to the children at the gate. Parul-di still follows that rule.

There used to be a balcony with decorative iron grilles just above the main gate of the boarding. But when the house was being prepared for the children to move in, the Mother had the doors to the balcony walled up so that no one could go and stand there. One could see that it would have been very unsafe for children to stand on that balcony but also the Mother didn't want anyone, particularly the girls, to stand on that balcony and talk to people passing below. The Mother thought it was a sign of bad upbringing when girls spoke to people in the street through the windows or from balconies.

*

A few years later Anu-ben and Kusum-ben found it difficult to continue doing this work of looking after the children. Kusum-ben fell ill and moved out of the boarding and later Anu-ben also was given some other work. At that point it was difficult to find someone to take over charge of the boarding. When the children asked the Mother who would look after them she told them

that they should look after themselves. The older children like Aruna-ben and Tara looked after the smaller children and were helped by Parul-di.

By the mid 1960s these students finished their Higher Course and moved to the Guest House which was then renamed "Dortoir Annexe". By then several other boardings had been opened and there were general guidelines for all. At this point, in 1964, a new set of children came to the boarding and Parul-di was given the charge of looking after them. To distinguish it from other boardings, Dortoir was often commonly called "Playground Boarding" as it was joined to the Playground.

Right from the beginning Parul-di used to see the Mother regularly to keep her informed about all that was happening in the boarding. The Mother used to give something special for the children. Either it was some fruits or some tomatoes or chocolates. Whenever the Mother received some special food items she would send it for the children of the boarding. Parul-di also received a basin full of flowers everyday from the Mother for the boarding. Even after the Mother left her body Parul-di continued to go upstairs to the Mother's boudoir and get the flowers.

When the boardings were formed they were treated as units of the Ashram and received several things from Prosperity, such as soap, tooth powder, hair oil etc. and the children's clothes were sent to the Ashram laundry. When they were ill they were treated at the dispensary and the Nursing Home. In this way the boarding children were considered as members of the Ashram and looked after by the Ashram. The children too felt that they were children of the Ashram.

*

Initially when the boarding started, boys and girls were living separately although they were in the same house. But a few years later the Mother asked the caretakers not to separate them. When the other boardings were created boys and girls of different age-groups lived together. The Mother wanted children to grow up in a situation which was as close to a natural family as possible. As time passed there were more and more students who joined the School. There were nearly 20



boardings and there were 800 students. So things had to be re-organised in a way which was easier for the School administration. In 1972 all the boardings, excepting Ira-di's, became either all-boys or all-girls boardings. Ira-di's boarding, which had the youngest children, was also later split into two boardings when the boys went with Kavita-di and Brajkishore-da to a different house while Ira-di took the girls and moved to another house. At that point when the boardings were re-organised Dortoir became an all-girls' boarding. At that time there were about 15 girls.

From 1968 the children of the boardings, with a few exceptions, started eating in Corner House. At that point the kitchen facility of Dortoir was almost closed down. However, the regular fruit bag continued to be kept for the children and every afternoon some fruit, usually papaya, was served to them.

★

One of the memorable annual events of Dortoir was the variety programme which used to be presented on the evening of the boarding's birthday on 15th January. A stage used to be set up in one of the rooms and the performance was held

there. All the children participated in the programme which always started and ended with a prayer. The main item used to be a short play. For the first few years when the programme was held in the boarding, the Mother came to see it.

As the children did not go out during the holidays until the 1980s, the rehearsals for the programme started in November. There were recitations of poems and prayers, dances, songs, short skits and the main play. The important thing was that everyone participated. Parul-di and Koki-la-ben spent long hours training the children.

★

In 1976 the old Dortoir House was demolished so that a new gymnasium could be built in its place. The entire northern part of the Playground was demolished and rebuilt. The boarding was moved to the present house which is on Manakula Vinayaga Street. It is in the ground floor of the house diagonally across the Ashram Main Building.

The birthday of the boarding continued to be celebrated with a cultural programme in the new location. It has, however, been discontinued in recent years. ❀

THE GREAT SECRET

Ritaj Kalaskar '19, organiser of the 1st December 2019 Programme, reflects.

It was quite early on in the year that Jhumur-di asked me to start thinking about what I would like to do for the 1st December programme. It may have been my liking for plays but I felt certain that a play must be staged. As I had previously taken part in and organised plays, I told her about my idea and she suggested a lot of plays which I then read. After a beautiful experience the previous year with Cristof's French play, it was a given that he would be a core member of this year's programme. After numerous discussions I finally asked him to write something. However that idea never manifested fully and he came up with the proposal of staging the *The*

Great Secret by the Mother which was similar to what I had in mind when I asked him to write.

I was initially worried that this play had only seven characters, but since many had stayed back last year and others weren't too happy with their previous experiences only four signed up, which was a real shame. Nevertheless, a few more joined us over a period of time and it fit our requirements of a small but concentrated cast to play the characters that represent the epitome of humans in pioneering fields who are trapped on a lifeboat.

Cristof made the necessary modifications to the existing play leaving Mother's passages un-

touched. However, we both felt that we needed to stage this play in 2019 with as much novelty, greatness and relevance as was done in 1954. This of course didn't mean a radical modernization with accessories like smartphones, but through the addition of a new character, the environmentalist. Since we could not include it in the

original play as it would have disturbed its continuity, we put it in a 'prologue' which also gave a context to the rest of the play and some breathing space for the audience before plunging into darkness and light. In the end we reached seventeen versions of the prologue and still it was not quite perfect although the scene of the en-



vironmentalist was very beautifully written and enacted by Anshul casting away all the clichés attached to such an idea. The other actors, Brihas, Jamshed, Baruni, Aditya and Chandrakant-bhai also contributed to the making of a very happy atmosphere.

We began rehearsals in July and we'd meet three or four times a week to work on the monologues, which were very tricky. Having done theatre classes with Maurice during my Free Progress years, I was aware of his experience and expertise and decided to call him to help us. Along with his friend Girolamo who sadly passed away midway,

we worked on diction, physical awareness, visualisation and other exercises twice a week from August; the rehearsals with Cristof continued. We also spent time on imagining the music, which was finally composed by my cousin Ishaan Devasthali and the poster and the brochure which were sketched by Sushanto-da.

The seven main actors were: Savera, Surya, Arjun, Auroakshay, Arjav, Monica (the only female actor to have been a part of the *The Great Secret* ever) and I. We spent a lot of time learning about the characters through books, biographies, letters, stories of survival, videos and monologues from movies. We often met without our directors and had enriching exchanges and productive rehearsals. Out of laziness most of us hadn't learnt our lines till October which was a great disappointment and a point of frustration for both our directors. In November, we often split up the rehearsals and used to meet them one-on-one in the mornings and afternoons. Those in charge of the previous 1st Dec Programme also gave us feedback and suggestions which were very helpful.

In the meantime, ideas about the sets were discussed in late August and early September with Cristof and Vinay. When the idea came up about the boat moving from the stage towards the audience, I could immediately see it and feel it very concretely and nobody could convince me



that it should be otherwise, in spite of the many who doubted and many who resisted it. Both our directors had previously taken part in versions that had a static boat so it was ambitious, but it was an attempt to use modern technology and expertise while keeping intact the old spirit and many of the old forms and settings. This could not have been possible without the tireless efforts put in by everyone at the House Maintenance Service, the Ashram department for which it was also something new.

Drawings, plans and samples for the sets were done in early October with the materials finalised by the end of the month. Actual work began only in November after the Knowledge programme highlights had been staged. Prafull-da's



1ST DECEMBER 2019

Sunayana '79 reviews the School's anniversary programme.

The Great Secret was first performed for the School's anniversary in 1954. It is a play where six characters, all achievers in their fields, find themselves in a lifeboat after their ship sinks mid-ocean. There is a seventh person in the boat who is unknown to the others. As they have nothing else to do and as they think that they will not live much longer each one narrates the story of his life.

The Unknown man gives a conclusion to this series of monologues.

The Great Secret is not really a play. The Mother herself describes it as "Six monologues and a conclusion". The "play" ends when the shipwrecked people catch sight of a ship in the distance. There is no action as the characters are sitting in a boat from where they cannot go out. There is also no dialogue as each one says what he has to say and the next person begins when he has finished. So, it is clearly very difficult to present this piece of writing on the stage. But the 2019 stage version of it was innovative and impressive.

This presentation was very different from all previous productions. The main play was preceded by a prologue which gave a background to what was to follow. It showed the experts being given awards by the President for their achievements and also a conversation between them. In order to keep the story more in tune with our own times a new character was added to the prologue – the ecologist. In a short scene which was added to the original text we saw the

ecologist share his thoughts with the artist and this completed the picture of the thought leaders. As this character does not appear in the text of the main play and so would not appear in the scene of the boat, he stays back and does not join the others who get on to the ship.

There was also another important element in this adaptation of the play. When it was first written and produced in 1954 all the characters were men. The six achievers – the scientist, the industrialist, the writer, the statesman, the athlete and the artist – were all men. But in this

production the artist was played by a woman. Indeed now all these professions are practiced by women and perhaps in a future production all the characters could be women, including the Unknown person!

The show on 1st December 2019 was very special

for another important feature. The organisers had the brilliant idea of making the boat move. This completely changed the play and made it more dynamic and visually more attractive. The boat moved so slowly that it was imperceptible but as the boat changed angles as it moved it showed the group, viewed by the spectators, from a different perspective after every few minutes. This gave the impression of the passage of time and also of changing scenes.

The two parts of the play were clearly different but what was remarkable was that the second half, which was the original play, carried a special atmosphere and was elevating. In spite of its being a series of monologues it held the attention of the spectators. The décor and the lights helped greatly in creating this intense experience. On the whole it was a satisfying performance.



and Rakesh-da's help proved invaluable and they prepared me for every back-up option possible. While the metal structure was made by Divakar-bhai and his workers, Ambi and Akash, with inputs from Prabuddha-da worked on making it move. They looked into every detail and resolved every problem, sometimes with simple modifications to the wheels and sometimes with a complex solution – such as the gearbox and motor assembly given by Debabrata. The actors themselves didn't have to spend more than ten days working on the sets as I wanted them to work on their parts and not be tired. A different set of volunteers Deeksha, Pracheta, Anya, Preeti and others, all of them artists, worked on the waves and on painting the set, with inputs from Habul-da. All of the lights as well as the lighting were mostly Vinay's creativity, and Mahi-da with his dedicated team took our constant changes very calmly while tackling their own technical issues for which they did their level best. Prop changing is perhaps one of the least appreciated jobs but is also one of the most important ones on the final day and Praketa, Aaryan, Sumeru with Debashish-da and his workers executed it perfectly. It is noteworthy that every element of the set was either something reused from discarded materials, or when new material was obtained, it was done only after its future use was determined. We also made sure that it wasn't damaged or modified until it reached its designated department after the wrap up.

Keeping aside all the practical matters, what I learnt is that one can never be adequately prepared for the problems that arise. We were lucky

in more ways than we can count. For example, the motor that made the boat move had a clearance from the ground of just two millimetres and the rubber from the driving wheel tore off during the Dress Rehearsal leaving the boat static throughout but allowing us a full day to fix the issue. So many times, errors which could have been

serious were miraculously made inconsequential. All this gigantic effort made by the make-up artists, the photographers, the cooks, and by everyone in this community together cannot be done by human beings alone.

Just like the characters in the play, there were times when we felt that there was

no way out... but always a light appeared and we found an answer. I knew there would come a point when I would have to let things go, not in a negative sense, but more like surrender, and yet one tends to cling on to everything because one can, one wants to and one feels that one has the power to... However, the First December journey, once a team of people has given enough shape to it, has a life of its own and everyone becomes insignificant. It has its own ways of reaching its light and it almost painfully forces everyone to leave it all to Her.

It was an honour to give life to something so special and a privilege to watch it all come together and appreciate its inexplicable ways. I am sure I speak for everyone when I say that we are all very grateful to Her and to everyone near and far, old and young, who helped us to realise this and, in the process, created a vibrant atmosphere full of learning and experimentation and the space for a deeper self-reflection. ❧



O CAPTAIN! MY CAPTAIN!

Remembering *Debdas (Mona) Sarkar*'55

The following article is based on notes provided by Chanda Poddar and inputs from Krishna Dunder's article which appeared in the SABDA Newsletter. Quotes in the captions are based on statements of the Mother as they appear in Mona-da's books.

*Keep pushing – 'tis wiser
Than sitting aside,
And dreaming and sighing
And waiting the tide.*

*In life's earnest battles,
They only prevail
Who daily march onward
And never say fail!*

Mona-da learnt this poem as a young student in Rani-di's class in the late 1940s and he would recite it, in his strong voice, even in the last weeks as he lay in bed in the Nursing Home. It perhaps

epitomizes not only his love of poetry but the attitude and spirit with which he lived his life here in the Ashram.

Born on 19th January, 1934, Mona-da came to the Ashram with his father and the rest of his family on 27th October, 1943. His father, the indomitable Sudhir Kumar Sarkar, was a close associate of Sri

Aurobindo during the Freedom movement and underwent incarceration in the Cellular Jail in the Andamans.



"Tu es le 4^e de la famille... 4 est la manifestation... un enfant choisi par la Grâce. Lucky boy, lucky boy..."



Mona-da playing his favourite game, football.

Mona-da was among the 1st batch of students when the Mother started the Ashram School on



Spirit (Debu-da): "Then I will drag you by force."
Matter (Mona-da): "I will fight."

No. 6 in the sequence of 10 photos named "Matter and Spirit" by the Mother.



"...Hier, tu étais épantant... une exécution parfaite..."
Swallow dive performed during the competitions in 1958.

2nd December, 1943. Among his favourite teachers were Sunil-da, Abhaysingh-da and Rani-di. He would go to Sunil-da's house and work on experiments there. The frequency of these visits increased when Sunil-da got a microscope, a rarity in those days. As mentioned, Mona-da also loved poetry; he knew many of Sri Aurobindo's poems by heart, and loved to recite them. He also started reading *Savitri* at a very early age.

SPORTSMAN

Mona-da's first love however, was football. He was a prominent member of the Ashram football team and was passionate about the game. Mona-da was also a good gymnast and a fine athlete. We all know of the fit and muscular body he had built. When he was 15 years old, in 1948, a photographer took a series of photos of Debu-da and



1st Dec Programme, "Hour of God". From left to right: Mona-da, Richard, Manoj-da, Vijay-bhai and Brajkishore-da.

Mona-da demonstrating muscle poses. On being shown the photos, the Mother, while appreciating them, added another dimension by putting the images in sequence as a dialogue between Matter and Spirit. In 1957 the swimming pool was opened. In 1958 the Mother was

impressed with his execution of a swallow dive, and told him: "You deserved to be first in execution as well as in attitude. It seemed to me as if you were diving into the unconscious to explore it."

THEATRE

Mona-da participated in a number of 1st December programmes. During the years when the Mother selected the actors, among the various roles he was chosen to play were: Ashwapathy, the man of night, King Eric and Lord Vishnu. The Mother also chose him to play the role of the athlete in *Le Grand Secret*. On one occasion he represented Sri Aurobindo and recited lines from *The Resolution*. It was the Mother who taught him how to recite the lines and which words to emphasize by underlining those words. Mona-da preserved the paper with her instructions till the end of his life. It is interesting that in later years the Mother Herself told him that She wanted him to concentrate more on his inner life and not do these programmes.

CAPTAIN AND LEADER

Mona-da became the captain of the young men's group, group 'C' as it was called then. They were known for their adventures and achievements. Whenever the Mother wanted young people to do something for her she would tell Mona-da, and he would be ready with his battalion of boys to accomplish the Mother's wish. The tasks assigned by the Mother were varied, and often challenging.



Participating in the 1st Dec programme.



*"Let us show that we can meet the challenge."
Harvesting in an Ashram farm when the workers were on strike.
From left to right: Manoj-da, Mona-da and Parikshat-da.*

On one occasion the Ashram received huge logs, which had to be taken from the Railway Station to the concerned department. In an age when large cranes and equipment were not easily available, this was a challenging and risky operation. Though there was an unfortunate accident, quick thinking prevented a major disaster and the job was successfully completed by Mona-da and his team.



"Je voudrais voir comment tu avais arrangé les enfants pour le 'Guard of Honour'." With Indira Gandhi in October 1969.

SERVITOR OF THE MOTHER

Sachidananda Mohanty

A disciplined and dedicated servitor of the Mother, Mona da will be remembered by all those who came in close contact with him, whether at the Sportsground, the Play Ground or elsewhere.

He was dignified in all that he did. Never given to loose talk, he carried out his tasks in a serious and solemn manner.

He was an evolved soul who endeared himself to all.

INSPIRING PRESENCE

Prithwindra Mukherjee

So fascinating the way some of the Mother's children of our generation have been an inspiration to the younger ones. Mona-da was indeed an inspiring presence even to those of us who were close to him by age. "A sensitive heart with a mindful sympathy" could best define his personality, in addition to acknowledging his obvious physical excellence.

In the early days the Mother often sent Mona-da with his young dynamic group to the farms: sometimes to help with the harvesting, or as in 1972 when there was a strike of the workers, to organize things and maintain security, or when there was a flood in Le Faucher to help with the emergency measures.

There were times when the Mother asked him to organize night duties, sometimes to keep watch in the farms. On one occasion it was to catch a thief who had made Ashram houses his target. The thief was apprehended successfully.

On 11th February, 1965 the anti-Hindi agitation turned into an attack on the Ashram. Mona-da and his brave team had a big role to play in defending the Ashram and its property [see Eckhart's reminiscences].

On important occasions, Mona-da and his volunteers were there to organize and help with the event. Among such occasions was the



"Mass Exercises should be practiced like the musicians who spend hours and hours on a scale to make it perfect." Conducting the 2nd Dec Programme.

Auroville Foundation Day on 28th Feb, 1968, the concreting of the pillars of Matrimandir in the early seventies, the President of India's visit to Auroville in the early years. On these occasions the volunteers had to often work through the night to ensure that all went smoothly the next day.

The Mother referred to him as a 'born leader'. Once when he went to see the Mother, She told him that she saw his full group behind him – clearly a reflection of how much he loved them, and how much they were a part of his consciousness.

MARCHING AND 2ND DECEMBER

Most of us remember Mona-da overseeing the March Past and the 2nd December programme. His commanding presence, his soldier-like



"Fais bien ton travail! Bonne chance!"

posture and gait, his crisp commands inspired us to be smart and strong as we marched and to imbibe the spirit of the occasion.

Mona-da was also a familiar figure, till recently, during the Gymnastic Marching in the Playground. It was in 1958, when Pranab-da stopped overseeing this activity that Mona-da took over and began giving the commands. The Mother once told him that she could hear his voice from her room in the Ashram. She also told him that she could even see him, in the Playground, and that she was very much present to take the March Past.

Mona-da had many interactions with the Mother regarding the 2nd December programme.



"Je serai là avec vous tous à 5h30."

SPORTS AND GAMES

Sports and games form an important part of our life. Football was a very popular game, but unfortunately every day there was some accident or an unpleasant story. The Mother chided the players saying, “Can’t one be a little more conscious?” Then she described how flawless was the game played by Mohun Bagan’s team: “To me, it seemed to be a complete game in itself. I liked it very much.” The Mother continued:

“And you know, the best way of protecting oneself or avoiding accidents, is to have the right attitude, and a correct attitude towards the game and the opponent.... the game has to be played well, as a sportsman, without hurting the others,... or without being frightened, without getting nervous or irritated, above all not to get excited ... keep the inner calm ... concentrate a little before the game, ... then one will never be a victim. Because my protection is always there.”

(Sweet Mother: Luminous Notes, p. 146)

ON READING SAVITRI

“My child, every day you are going to read *Savitri*; read properly, with the right attitude, concentrating a little before opening the pages and trying to keep the mind as empty as possible, absolutely without a thought. The direct road is by ‘the heart’. I tell you, if you try to concentrate really with this aspiration in a very short time, perhaps in a few days, what you cannot do normally, you can do with the help of *Savitri*. Try and you will see how very different it is, how new, if you read with this attitude, with this something at the back of your consciousness; as if throughout it were an offering to Sri Aurobindo. You know it is charged, fully charged with consciousness; as though *Savitri* were a being, a real guide. I tell you, whoever,

wishing to practise Yoga, tries sincerely and feels the necessity for it, will be able to climb with the help of *Savitri* to the highest step of the ladder of Yoga, will be able to find the secret that *Savitri* represents. And this without the help of a Guru. And he will be able to practise it anywhere. For him *Savitri* alone will be the guide, for all that he needs he will find in *Savitri*. If he remains very quiet when before a difficulty, or when he does not know where to turn to go forward and how to overcome obstacles, for all these hesitations and these incertitudes which overwhelm us at every moment, he will have the necessary indications, and the necessary concrete help. If he remains very calm, open, if he aspires sincerely, always he will be as if led by the hand. If he has faith, the will to give himself and essential sincerity, he will reach the final goal.”

(Sweet Mother: Luminous Notes, p. 46)

ETERNAL PRESENCE AT THE SAMADHI

The Mother told Mona-da:

If you are in difficulty or you want an answer ... bow down your head at the Samadhi and speak frankly to Sri Aurobindo all that you have to say, without hesitation, without doubt, as you come to tell me — and you have seen so many times that your difficulties have disappeared....

You know, earlier, when He was in His body, people used to say He was very far, remote and inaccessible to men... During that period He had hardly any time to occupy Himself with the people or hear their complaints. But now He has universalised himself, become vast, very intimate and close. There is a bond with everyone...

It is formidable. His presence vibrates, concrete, all round the Samadhi.

(Blessings of the Grace, pp. 119-122)

It was something he often shared with us, the participants of the programme, through the years. The Mother always promised him that she would

be present for the programme, even though she had stopped coming physically: “When I say I shall be there, be sure that I shall be there with



Mona-da sharing his "Conversations with the Mother" in the School courtyard.
Richard (captain) once told him: "Mona, you opened the door and we heard the Mother."

all my will. I shall be there to participate and to assist in all that is going on." It is "my day" is what she said. The weather was always a tricky factor during the programme. On one occasion she promised Mona-da, in a beautiful and poetic way, that she would be there to help, and that she would be controlling Nature. And so it was. On another occasion when the programme was done in pouring rain, she said it had been a test for us and we had been victorious.

CONTACT WITH THE MOTHER

In the late 1960s Mona-da used to go regularly to the Mother, whether it was for the various special responsibilities she had assigned him or for his regular work as the person in-charge of the Ashram Pottery, or for matters related to the 2nd December or for his progress in the Sadhana.

These conversations with the Mother, which were originally held in French and sometimes even an hour long, were noted down from memory by Mona-da. At times the Mother wrote down some things for him in his diary. This interaction with the Mother makes up the material for the four books he has brought out: *The Supreme*, *Blessings of the Grace*, *Luminous Notes* and *Throb of Nature*.

In *The Supreme*, Mona-da recollects what the Mother said about herself, about her unseizable, eternal self, about the power in her voice and in her gaze. There is also mention about the sadhana she had undertaken on the cells of her body.

In *Blessings of the Grace*, the Mother reveals how her consciousness and Sri Aurobindo's are the same. She discusses the underlying vibration in her book, *Prayers and Meditations*, and in Sri Aurobindo's *Savitri*. In one conversation she lays out the steps to find one's psychic being. The book also has some important notes that the Mother made in Mona-da's diary. The Mother used to love teasing Mona-da and there are also some playful interactions (e.g. Mother saying: "Je vais tirer tes oreilles jusqu'à ce que tu devienne Buddha.")

The third book, *Luminous Notes*, discusses subjects like the real meaning of one's birthday, the significance of the Mother's signature and of various photos of hers. It generally deals with the deeper reality behind appearances.

In the fourth book, *Throb of Nature*, Mona-da



"... Ma Lumière tombe comme une pluie sur toi."
Mona-da with the Mother on 1st Nov 1954

has noted Mother's comments on Nature, e.g. the significance of flowers, the Service Tree, about a storm that struck Pondicherry and its purpose, how everything is in movement.

There were two other books Mona-da had in mind and which he had started working on. Perhaps they will be printed eventually. The 5th book was of the prayers the Mother wrote in her hand and which she gave him on various occasions from 1949 until 1973. These are about 100 in number. He had named the manuscript *Manifestation of the Divine*. The 6th book was on his conversations with the Mother on Physical Education. He cherished these conversations, spread out in almost 16 notebooks (in French) and called them "a bridge between the Mother and him."

While it has to be kept in mind that these books are based on notes from memory, in them the Mother sometimes reveals to us an aspect of herself and her working which is not available elsewhere. There are also insights on aspects of the life and sadhana here that are precious. There is a particularly important conversation Mona-da

has recorded about the importance of *Savitri* [see box on page 36] which the Mother, when she saw it years later, referred to as "correct on the whole."

Mona-da was fortunate to have had close interactions with the Mother. He was one of her chosen soldiers. The Mother once told him, "Le Suprême t'a choisi." With his passing on 11th October, 2019 one more of those who had grown up directly under the Mother's care and guidance has left us. He exemplified for many of us the unswerving faith, courage and dedication of a "hero warrior" of the Mother. It is for us now to imbibe this spirit.

Fittingly, for most of us, our most lasting memory of Mona-da will probably be his salute to the Mother at the end of the March Past. We can still hear his voice ringing loud and clear from the depth of his being, resounding till the sky. All of us, our blood tingling, repeating Vande Mataram three times, and each time the salute to our Motherland and to our divine Mother growing more powerful:

"Victoire à la Douce Mère! Vande Mataram! Vande Mataram! Vande Mataram!" ❀



"... If nothing short of a perfect perfection can satisfy you, then... Mahasaraswati has presided over your birth..." Mona-da saluting the Mother at Sportsground.

MEMORIES OF MY BROTHER

Debkumar Sarkar (Bhai-da) '60 remembers

Mona-da was the fourth child born to Sudhir Sarkar and Sunitibala Devi. From an early age, his interest in football and sports was overwhelming. My father recounted that as a child, Mona-da would not get up in the morning unless my father called him: "Mona Das goalkeeper, get up!" (Mona Das was Mohun Bagan's goalkeeper in the thirties).

Our family arrived in Pondicherry in October 1943, five weeks before the Mother inaugurated the Sri Aurobindo Ashram School.

STUDENT LIFE

The first episode that I remember took place sometime in the late mid-forties. Mona-da, together with Narendra Jauhar, was accompanying me home from school, when a man coming from the opposite direction happened to nudge me. Mona-da immediately handed me his books and knocked the fellow into a gutter, with stagnant water in it, just opposite Arati-di's room.

I recall two other incidents about Mona-da when he was fourteen years old. At that young age Mona-da already represented JSASA in football. The other incident is about Athletics. In an athletic meet, JSASA was to compete against a local team at the Military Ground. The Ashram team was well represented in almost all the events. The walking event was a walking race around Pondicherry, which was almost always won by Pranab-da, with Hriday-da coming in second and Lalubhai third. Some other

events held in the Military Ground were Discus, where we were represented by Pranab-da, Javelin by Hriday-da, Pole Vault by Debu-da, High Jump by Subodh's elder brother Suman-bhai (with his own peculiar style). In the 110 meters hurdles, Mona-da was chosen. An incident happened just the day before the competition. As a young lad of 14, Mona-da was going around barefooted, when he accidentally stepped on a rusty nail. The next day the foot was infected and swollen. Mona-da's foot was heavily bandaged but in spite of that he took part and finished third in the event! During the prize distribution, no one was as proud as Mona-da, who was cheered from all sides for his brave efforts. When Mona-da went to fetch his prize it seemed as if he was walking on clouds! One had to see it to believe it!

In the late forties, the Mother allowed the children of the Ashram, of course under supervision, to bathe in the sea. There are many stories about how elderly sadhaks could at last take a dip

in the waters of the Bay of Bengal. Before swimming, everyone would apply oil to their bodies. Once Mona-da took me into deep waters, and I was to hold on to his swimming shorts, but a huge wave took me away from him. I kept wobbling up and down and every time I was up, I could hear Mona-da praying to the Mother "Ma, Ma, Ma!" He finally got hold of me, and brought me to shallow waters.

You all must have seen in the old Bulletins the



A SPORTSMAN AND A GENTLEMAN

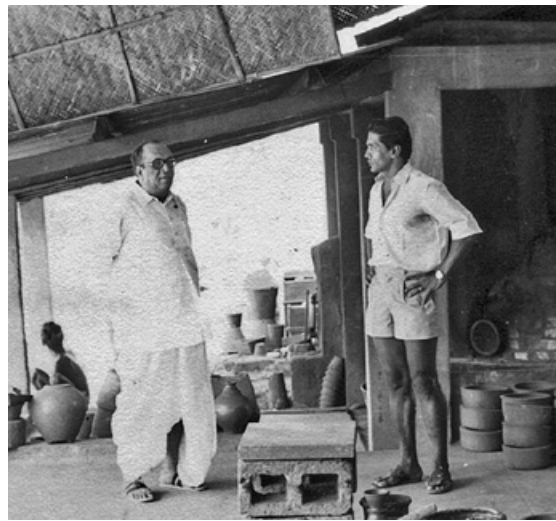
Surendra Singh Chouhan

Mona-da was essentially a sports person and a giant pillar of the Ashram sports department. He nurtured and nourished many talented youngsters of the Ashram school towards the ideal of physical perfection. He donned the mantle of “Captain” with a high professional proficiency. He was a hard task master. He disliked anything which was sloppy and shoddy around him. Under his watchful eyes, we all worked hard with gainful results. He loved playing football and how well he played! It was an exciting experience always to play along with him at the Sports-ground in the Ashram senior football team. Mona-da was a familiar figure year after year to supervise the March Past and the physical exercise of the most senior group of the Ashram sadhaks in the Play Ground. His simplicity of nature and way of interacting with people was disarming. A gentleman to the core, endowed with ready wit and a fine sense of humour, Mona-da had endeared himself to one and all by his amiable nature and easy accessibility.

(Extract from an article published on the website of Overman Foundation).

photos of Debuda and Mona-da, who was then 15 years of age. Those were a series of photos known as “Matter and Spirit,” taken by one Dr. Ghosh. These pictures were sent to an international photo exhibition in Stockholm – the visitors were astounded to know that both Debuda and Mona-da were vegetarians and could still build such muscular bodies. In the Ashram of the forties, the diet was simple and vegetarian. Eggs were only slowly being introduced. Just after the Second World War, sugar, tea and even butter were rationed in the Ashram.

In the last years of the forties, after the regular Playground hours, the Mother would watch the captains perform some exercises, which were done in a semi circle. One exercise I remember



“Tu peux mettre ces vases près du Samadhi”, Mother once admiringly remarked, on seeing a big, artistic vase made in the Pottery (which Mona-da was in charge of).

very well, was known as “Gidhy-gidhy”. In deep knee position, with hands on the distal part of the femur (knee), one shifted the body weight from one side to another. While most of the others were satisfied doing two to three hundred, Mona-da did one thousand, one hundred and eleven. This explains how Mona-da built his lower extremities, his positive obstinacy and endurance.

But it was football that Mona-da was most interested in. In those days, the members of the JSASA played either in the Military Ground or in the grounds where Nolinida had once played in his youth, the Cercle Sportif Pondichérien (CSP).

It so happened that some members of the Minerva football club from Madras had seen Mona-da play and wanted him in their team. So Mona-da went to the Mother for Her permission, but he got an answer in the negative. He was to remain in the Ashram; the Mother had other plans for him.

ASHRAM WORK

One of the first assignments that Mona-da was given, was to arrange the harvest in Casanov. It was in 1951 or 52 that he got his next assignment. It was about catching a burglar or was it a cat burglar? It was a local fellow who wore dark blue shorts (stolen from Kamalkumar’s terrace) and black shirt, a thief who was known to be always active on moonless nights, and who went from terrace to terrace. The Mother told

Mona-da that he should arrange for young boys to do night duty to catch this thief. On the very first night, Mona-da and his gang caught the miscreant. The thief was badly beaten, not so much by the boys doing night duty, but by others. Then the police was called.

In those days, only the French officers had a jeep, the rest of the police corp used bicycles. Kameshwar was Ashram's man whom you had to contact regarding police matters. Kameshwar then went to the police station. Remember in the fifties, the Ashram did not have any telephones. The first telephones were installed in the late fifties. People like Udar and Monoranjan were the first, if I remember well, to have a telephone. So in the early fifties, there was no hurry. The lighting on the roads or the street lamps had remained unchanged for fifty/sixty years. Not to exaggerate, a torch was more powerful than the street lamps! The thief was kept lying for more than four hours! The policeman on duty, cycled in the dark, came to Nirmal-da's house where the thief lay. The policeman then returned to the police station to fetch more help. This is to show how inefficient the police corp was, but things changed after independence (1st Nov. 1954).

The Mother entrusted Mona-da with more and more work. He organised Pranabda's birthday celebrations, looked into the details of the 2nd December Programme, and when the Mother retired to Her room, Mona-da would take charge of the Gymnastic Marching, which he kept doing till the very end.

People have asked me about what Mona-da did in those days. For a while he repaired cameras in Chimanbhai's house. The Mother, at one time, made him work as a mason. He built Parikshit's apartment above Charupada's kitchen.

In 1965, a few months after the local disturbances, he and his friends went up to the Mother to take Her permission to organize the night duties. He then wrote a detailed account of how he would go about it.

PERSONAL INTERACTION

To speak on a more personal note, every Saturday, just after Balcony Darshan, I would run to



From left to right: Sri Kamaraj, Mona-da and Prime Minister Nehru.
This photo, taken on 13/06/1963, was sent to me by Mona-da.

Nirmal-da's garden, from where I would rush to Mona-da's home, (he was then living in the Captain's house, a tiny wall separated the two buildings), to get four or six annas, to buy a sports newspaper known as "Sports & Pastime".

I remember another personal account of mine. As I was a thinny-skinny fellow, my father would give me a spoon of cod liver oil before I went to sleep. Mona-da, on the Mother's recommendation, in his turn, would take me to the Bakery, to drink a small glass of yeast, as a source of protein! None of which was tasty, so I would certainly never ask for more.

Sometime in the late fifties, Norman Jr and I went to the Mother and asked for Her permission to be promoted from green group to grey group, the young men's group, also known at that time as Group C. This came as a big surprise to Mona-da, who was the captain of Group C. For some time, he was known by the name of 'Mona C'. But that

did not last long, for soon he was called Mona-da!

To speak about the one negative quality he had, I will quote his American friend Larry who gave him the title, 'the general of procrastination'. Ask him for a favour, and he would answer: 'Not now, later!' Only Chanda-di could outmanoeuvre him in such situations. This of course did not apply to the work given by the Mother.

In the 60s Mona-da used to go to the Mother for work. Years later, if by chance you came to our house before noon, you would find Mona-da in his bedroom, sitting inside with the door closed. I later learnt that he would rewrite from memory all that the Mother had spoken to him. This is how he preserved the conversations with the Mother, which later became the basis for his books. This collection of conversations can be compared, in my mind, to Nirod-da's and Purnaji's correspondence with Sri Aurobindo.

I have been living in Europe since 1963. I went abroad to study. Without Gama-da (elder brother) and Mona-da's help and constant encouragement, I would never have succeeded. Mona-da kept the Mother informed throughout my stay in Germany.

From the very beginning, Mona-da and Chanda-di would regularly exchange views with me through letters. Later on, we conversed through faxes and still later, we communicated via telephone. We ended our talks, almost always by repeating, "VICTOIRE À LA DOUCE MERE, BANDE MATARAM !" Should he forget this at any time, then Chanda-di was always there to remind him.

It was Mona-da who encouraged me to write the numerous letters that I wrote to the Mother and She Herself answered them. These letters are a treasure, because they were hand-written by the Mother. In the beginning She even wrote the address on the envelope. Without the encouragement and the guidance of the Mother I would never have succeeded. I cannot thank Her enough for all the help and support I received. Those hand-written letters can be published at a later date.

In Mona-da, I have not only lost a brother, but also a true friend. His dedication towards the

HEROES LIVE FOREVER

Sucharu '90

Dear Chanda-di

We were always told from our childhood that heroes are always immortal. After giving up their body, they live through the people who idolize them. They live in their thoughts, in their actions, in their behavior which time and again reflects the hero, the gladiator who was once in their midst!

Mona-da was one such personality whom everyone who has ever stepped into Playground would consider a hero! A commanding voice that resonated beyond the skies, a physique that would put the Greek gods to shame, an aura that made you turn round again to see who had passed... Mona-da was all this and more to us... But the most inspiring and endearing thing about him was his closeness to the Mother and the interactions with her that he described in his beautiful and lucid style!

Today when he has left us, I just realise how much of him I carry with me, which I'm sure I'll pass on to some of the next generation. I can truly feel that though he has left his body, Mona-da will live forever.

Mother, his sincere, devoted attitude towards the Mother, his willingness to be a true soldier of the Mother, his closeness to the Mother – that is what makes him so unique.

Dear Mona (my father insisted we omit "Da", because when my father first visited the Ashram, in the thirties, Ashramites did not use "Da"),

REST IN PEACE, I miss you a lot.

Yes, Mona, it was you who most encouraged me to pursue my studies in Germany, it was you who helped me keep contact with the Mother, for which I am immensely thankful and full of gratitude. Pray that you may rest in peace on the Mother's bosom.

VICTOIRE A LA DOUCE MERE! BANDE MATARAM!

OM SHANTI, SHANTI, SHANTI! ❧

CAPTAIN MONA

Eckhard

I came to know my dear friend Mona in 1959. I was aware of his humorous directness and liked him from the very beginning. But inwardly he became my dear friend during the night of the riots of 1965, as described in my book "Terminal Zero" of Dietrich Duvelsteen [text given below].

I had the privilege to see the Mother and Sri Aurobindo in One Person. I see all other people in the Ashram as my playmates in Mother's World-Kindergarten. My respect for and trust in people is quite limited, but there is one exception: My very dear Mona! I could see him visiting me in Kathmandu before trekking to Muktinath, while his body was still in Pondy. He was not aware of this. But I know the truth of a line in Savitri: "The ever-living whom we name as dead!" So where is the problem if our friends take rest in an internal trance? Or as Sri Aurobindo says in his poem,

The Rishi: "For Death's a passage, grief a fancied thing, fools to annoy."

But when Mother left her body on 17th November 1973 I was extremely depressed. It was Mona who told me: "Stop crying. Come to my room in the afternoon." There he explained to me that Mother had told him that *Savitri* can be our Guru. This is a very small but efficient and practical part of the total truth. We should be grateful now to have a practical method of slowly, very slowly opening to the higher consciousness of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother – if we read *Savitri* regularly! Based on life-experience I will hazard to give this practical advice: Trust in the Grace, choose the Truth, read *Savitri*! This is not for a big number of people, but perhaps for a few.

My privilege is to be fully aware of being a very naughty boy, very far away from being pious, but hopefully one of Mother's children.

"WE TAKE THEIR RICKSHAWS"

An extract from Eckhard's book Terminal Zero in which his experiences are shared through the character of Dietrich Duvelsteen

In the year 1965, Dietrich was again fortunate to be a permanent visitor of the Sri Aurobindo Ashram in Pondicherry. The weather was pleasant and everyone was in high spirits. Only one part of the Tamil population was unhappy because the government had been attempting to make Hindi the sole official language of India. So one could read in contrasting big white letters on the dark surface of the road: "Hindi is poison – Tamil is sweet." There was a rumor of riots brewing in the neighbouring towns and villages with fires being set and plunder.

On a beautiful spring evening, Dietrich walked from the Golconde guest house to the Playground for meditation. Above were the twinkling stars of Orion, and the meditation was peaceful and harmonious.

Then suddenly one could hear the howling of an agitated mob and see a reddish sky in the direction of the old quarter of Pondicherry. There was a growing fear that the unrest might reach the Ashram. It was a very unpleasant predicament to wait for the attack of an agitated, drunken and hostile mob.

Naturally the brave and well-trained youth of the Ashram were not willing just to stand by idly without taking defensive counter-measures. A few boys began to equip themselves with lathis (stout bamboo stick) and left the Playground by a side door. A small troop of a dozen was chosen to guard a bridge over the sewage canal near the Ashram's Golconde guest house. Captain Mona Sarkar was in command of this small group: among them were Chandrakant, Kalu, Norman.... Their front-line was the sewage canal full of stinking filthy water. Most probably no aggressor would voluntarily wade through this broth. They could rely on this and concentrate on defending the bridge itself.

But suddenly a screaming mob attacked in waves. There were more than 3000 fishermen, rickshaw drivers and other individuals who seemed to enjoy this very special kind of entertainment.

Of all the ugly situations which Dietrich didn't like, this circumstance of being helpless and being attacked by an armed and aggressive mob was the worst. The memory of the cruel experiences during the war flooded back to his mind and accelerated his heartbeats. Deep inside, he was surely a pacifist. Because of his negative war-time experiences there was no urge whatsoever to be intent on any armed confrontation. In Germany he had taken part in demonstrations against rearmament. With enthusiasm they had sung: "Behind the wall of the barracks, Konrad Adenauer is lurking!"

Captain Mona, though, was in his finest mood. His eyes were shining, reflecting his in-born courage. He was far from feeling defenseless. After all he was the son of a Freedom Fighter who had been long imprisoned in the terrible jail on the Andaman Islands, with iron chains and shackles on his feet. Mona had an indomitable

will never to allow any injustice. He was always ready to defend himself and others, and he was certainly no pacifist.

He commanded: "Put your lathis aside and collect big stones as ammunition!" As the aggressive mob came nearer and nearer, they received them with an unexpected hail of stones from a very short distance. Luckily, the cowards ran away.

They were quite successful in their defense. Kalu, one of the Ashram hockey players, pursued the cowards, catching several with his hockey stick. These so called "prisoners" were kept as exemplary culprits for the police – except that the policemen were non-existent in the streets as they had been stationed to protect the palace of the governor.

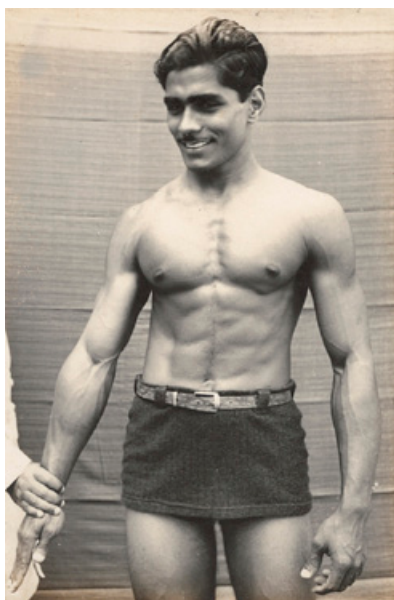
Mona's troop was in a good mood after the success of their counter-attack. In the meantime they collected more

stones as "ammunition" so as to be prepared for the next wave of aggression.

The situation had become worse. In the nearby street of the Ashram's main building a stone was thrown against the window of Mother's room. The Post Office adjacent to the Ashram was aflame; several Ashram houses had been attacked.

The mob was preparing the next aggression. To protect themselves against the very efficiently hurled missiles, the next wave approached with rikshaws in front of them. The assailants pushed the rikshaws backwards, with the hoods extended as shields. It was a threatening phalanx. Behind this protective shield the shouting agitators followed. Especially one with a red turban was dominant.

Nearby stood Chandrakant, well-known for his skill in long distance throwing. He was their "artillery" for medium distances, so they supplied



"Tu es doué d'un corps parfait..."

him with suitable sized stones. He aimed at the fellow with the red turban, who disappeared after a short time.

Captain Mona's troop, too, now tried to protect themselves against stones and sticks by wrapping towels around their heads like turbans, to provide at least some protection for their skulls.

Slowly the shield front of rickshaws approached. The aggressors hoped to be successful with their new strategy. The Ashram boys looked at each other expecting a disaster.

Then came the practical command from Captain Mona: "Collect stones, quickly and... step back, near the wall." Next, full of courage, the clear announcement: "We take their rickshaws!" The little troop asked him: "How?" His answer: "Quite simple, when they have passed us, there will no longer be a protecting shield!"

So they waited with rapidly beating hearts, allowing the rickshaws to pass by them. Then from close range, they threw the big stones at their assailants. The rickshawallas ran away together with the whole mob. So finally, they had taken their rickshaws! They then used these to build a strong barricade to block and defend the bridge.

On the other roads leading to the Ashram, the situation was equally threatening. But all Mother's children were protected. Only one boy of the Ashram, Togo, had been seriously wounded. Togo was too daring and most probably alone. He had been hit on the head, which resulted in a fractured skull, but fortunately, he survived.

Meantime, after an emergency call from the Ashram, the Malabar Lancers arrived in truck loads. They joined this modern "Kurukshetra". The soldiers looked disciplined in their khaki

uniforms, with puttees. Immediately they blocked the road facing the mob. The proposal that they move to the other side to encircle the mob and arrest the aggressors was not approved. Their argument: "We cannot fire, as long as you are in the same direction." The Malabar Lancers could not employ the usual procedure of using teargas or rubber bullets or water cannons, as they were given only real ammunition.

With a megaphone the soldiers tried to calm the aggressive mob and warned the crowd, explaining that they had no teargas, telling them they had better go home to avoid bloodshed. Instead of listening and calming down, however, the mob began attacking the soldiers. At the very last moment, in self-defense, from a short distance they opened fire. The mob fled in panic.

After all the noise, everything became very quiet. The wounded aggressors were taken to the nearest hospital for treatment. The troop commander announced an "unofficial" curfew.

The next few days and nights were extremely quiet. The girls and boys of the Ashram were on guard all the time. The boys who had been active in the night could get some sleep. When Dietrich examined himself under the shower in Golconde he found several scratches and bruises which he had received while in action.

A few days later, visitors arrived from Germany. They were puzzled by the presence of the patrolling soldiers. Unfortunately, one of Dietrich's friends gave the story away and explained about the

stone throwing and so on, "and Dietrich threw some really big ones!" This was not much appreciated and was regarded as bad conduct.

That is the End of this story. ☸



Manoj-da and Mona-da

MY SOULMATE

Saumitra remembers Mona Sarkar

In August 1958 I came to Pondicherry as a 23-year old freshly-graduated sports teacher to teach sports for three months in the Sri Aurobindo Ashram. During these three months I got to know and appreciate many people, but between one person and me a special relationship developed. This person was Mona Sarkar. He often visited me; mostly he brought



Saumitra and Mona, 1958

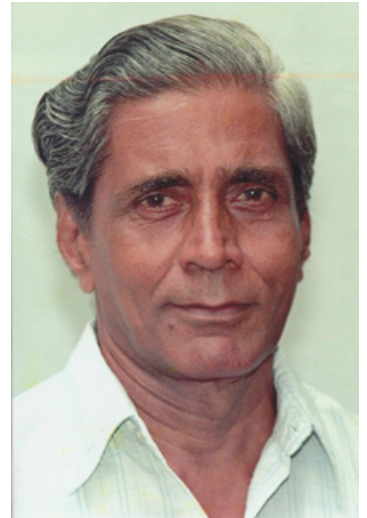
a little something with him, for which I thanked him of course. And then he said: “Why do you always say thank you? He who gives it to you is your friend!” We had deep discussions. When you looked into his eyes, you felt you were looking into a deep fountain. He lived in close inner relationship with Sri Aurobindo and the Mother. In his thinking and speaking he was – what in German is called a bit antiquated – “sanft” (gentle). In contrast to this was the cheerful, vital, dynamic, powerful, pithy manner in which he gave his commands as a captain.

After three months of work, the Mother bid me farewell. As a gift she presented me her Golden Book. My farewell with Mona was especially moving. I will never forget how he stood before me with tears in his eyes to tell me – in German! – “Auf Wiedersehen”. Seldom have I been so aware

of the meaning of these two words. One does not say goodbye forever, but only “until we meet again”. And when I said in my words of farewell that it was my deepest wish to come back to Pondicherry someday, these were not empty words.

This wish was fulfilled in 1992. After 34 years (!) I visited the Ashram with my wife Antje and our youngest son Wolfgang. It was as if I had never been away. Now my wife and our son could understand why over so many years my friendship with Mona had been maintained.

Our oldest son Hartmut, too, was lucky to meet Mona and Chanda on the occasion of two



Mona, Chanda, my wife Antje and son Wolfgang, 1992



Mona, my other son Hartmut, and Chanda, 2012.

business trips to Chennai in 2012 and 2013. He rested – like his father 54 years ago – on Mona's bed. He was able to go for Darshan to Sri Aurobindo's room, received from Mona a flower and a photo of Sri Aurobindo, which deeply impressed him.

In the middle of 2018 Mona wrote to me that the Ashram School will celebrate its 75th anniversary at the beginning of December. They wanted to invite me, as I had influenced the sports life in the Ashram exactly 60 years ago. After some hesitation, but encouraged by Eckhard, I agreed. Eckhard and I flew to Pondicherry at the end of November. A strong motivation for this trip was my hope of seeing Mona again.

There were touching encounters with many people who still knew me from 1958, but above all with Mona and Chanda, who welcomed me with great warmth and with whom I spent many hours. They showed me many treasures of the Mother. Mona took me to his room and confided some secrets to me: "But only for you, Saumitra!" Indeed, Mona was my soulmate for over sixty years and he will always remain so.

Since 1958 we were in close contact. He sent me letters, Mother's Ashirvad, the yearbooks and

especially the books with his conversations with the Mother. Whoever reads these books feels the intimate relationship between the two.

How many times have we invited Mona and Chanda to visit us in Germany! Nothing has ever come of it. During my last visit it became clear to me why Mona had never been able to leave the Ashram – not even for a short time: he had to serve Sri Aurobindo and the Mother all his life.

For me Mona is a particularly faithful devotee of the Mother. His death could not be described better than with these words:

"Captain Mona Sarkar has attained the Mother's Feet, to continue to serve Her." ❧



Saumitra, Mona and Eckhard, on 2nd Dec 2018, about to leave for the 75th anniversary programme.

CROSSING OVER

Shipra

Around 4.10 pm on the fateful day of 11th October 2019, I went to see Mona-da in the Room B of Nursing Home. I found him with eyes closed and breathing heavily; however, there was no sign of restlessness. There were two persons around Mona-da: Chanda and Naveen. The latter sweetly offered me a seat which was accepted gratefully. All three of us had our eyes focused on Mona-da. Mother's music playing in the background was soothing and uplifting. A little later Chanda came near me and said Mona-da had been in this state for the last 3 days! I suggested that she repeat Mother's name near his ears. To which she replied Mother's music was already being played close to him. I prodded her to go and be near Mona-da. Slowly Mona-da's face which was a little distorted was easing out with a quiet expectancy. There was a very strong Presence and quietude in the room.

At around 4.40 P.M., Chanda straightened Mona-da's shirt, quietly adjusted Mother's blessings and, as he had wished, started to chant boldly "MA Sri Aurobindo" while placing her hand on Mona-da's chest. The chanting was unmistakably full of THEIR power and presence and along with her we were also quietly chanting. Mona-da was definitely listening. While doing this, Chanda asked Naveen to call the Sisters. At this stage Mona-da appeared even more quiet, with a relaxed face. I noticed he was moving his arm! A Sister came and examined Mona-da – B.P., pulse, fever - then left after adjusting the bedsheet and his clothes. Chanda continued chanting "MA Sri Aurobindo", Dr. Mandeep came after 5 P.M., checked his eye lids and quietly said "Mona-da has gone very peacefully." We were quiet. The crossing over had taken place during chanting but we were completely unaware! It was indeed a



*In some faint dawn,
In some dim eve,
Like a gesture of Light,
Like a dream of delight
Thou comst nearer and
nearer to me.*

(A poem of Sri Aurobindo
which Mona-da loved to recite)

Le 16 Juin 1951

Mère,

S'il n'est pas défendu de dire. Alors dis-moi, comment est-ce qu'on sent quand on réalise le Divin? (77)

Certainement ce n'est pas de ces choses qu'il est facile de dire, et même si on les dit, elles sont encore plus difficiles à comprendre pour ceux qui n'ont pas eu l'expérience.

Mais je peux sommairement le formuler ainsi!

On se sent parfaitement libre, parfaitement heureux, parfaitement conscient. Si

Le 28 Janvier 1951

Douce mère,

Est-ce que c'est vrai que Sri Aurobindo reviendra? Et si oui, est-ce qu'il sera dans sa forme primitive? Parce que j'ai entendu, que Tu m'as dit, qu'il reviendra.

Sri Aurobindo reviendra sûrement dans le premier corps supra-mental. Mais quand et comment, cela il ne l'a pas dit.

great, silent, unobtrusive move unlike Mona-da's style but true to his inner being's dictate. One who adored the Mother and Master went over to THEM with THEIR names ringing in his being. What else could one wish for?

I looked at Chanda and was amazed to see how she maintained her composure after hearing Dr. Mandeep. To say her conduct was exemplary would be an understatement. She was quiet, strong, loving as a true friend and taking all the steps rightly as Mother would have expected. She did not relent even for a second and remained impeccable at that crucial hour. "Victoire à la Douce Mère! Bande Mataram"! ❧



"Seigneur Suprême, nous T'implorons: Manifeste-Toi"



QUIZ TIME!



ANSWERS TO THE QUESTIONS OF THE NOV 2019 ISSUE

1. *Why is 24th November 1920 an important date in the history of the Ashram? Sri Aurobindo's Siddhi Day is the 24th November 1926. What happened exactly six years earlier?*

On this day, 24th November 1920, the Mother moved to the Guest House where Sri Aurobindo was living. From that day onwards they always lived in the same house.

2. *Where was the first boarding (hostel) of the School?*

This boarding was adjacent to the Playground and was connected to it. It was called "Dor-toir" and it celebrated its 75th anniversary this year.

3. *In which poem would you find these lines of Sri Aurobindo?*

*I walked on the high-wayed Seat of Solomon
Where Shankaracharya's tiny temple stands
Facing Infinty from Time's edge, alone
On the bare ridge ending earth's vain romance.*



"Adwaita" (Sonnet)

4. *Why is the house where the Primary section of the School located called "Delafon" and "Flower Room"?*

"Delafon" was the surname of the family which owned this house before it became an Ashram house. A portion of the house was used to distribute flowers to Ashramites every day and this is why it is popularly known as "Flower Room".

5. *What is the spiritual significance of the flower of the Croton plant? The leaves are very colourful but the flowers are white or light cream.*

"Power to Reject Adverse Suggestions."



ACRES FOR AUROVILLE Land Campaign

15th August – Sri Aurobindo's birth & India's Independence
2019 Launch of A4A's Year 6 for Auroville's missing land!



For Sri Aurobindo, the unification of mankind was “a necessity in the course of Nature, an inevitable movement”. Auroville was created by the Mother to create a place for the “international spirit and outlook” that Sri Aurobindo said must grow. She said that her only goal was “to give a concrete form to Sri Aurobindo's great teaching that ***“all the nations are essentially one and meant to express the Divine Unity upon earth through an organised and harmonious diversity”*** to show that ***“Truth lies in union rather than in division”***.”

To underscore this truth of unity at the heart of its mission, the words ***“Auroville, the city at the service of Truth”*** were placed in French and in Tamil on the Banyan tree that is next to the Matrimandir at the center of Auroville:

Auroville, la cité au service de la vérité

மெய்ப்பொருள் பணிக்கே ஓரோவில் நகரம்

For 51 years, the City of Dawn has flowered step by step, serving and showcasing this truth of oneness of the Human Family in its rich diversity. But its designated land is still incomplete – many essential acres are still missing from the universal township's base. We invite you to join us – to purchase the needed remaining land so Auroville can manifest, in fullness and harmony, the truth of its great vision!

Please specify your donations '**ACRES FOR AUROVILLE**': via cheque/ bank transfers to Auroville Unity Fund; via your country's AVI center www.auroville-international.org or online via www.auroville.com/donations/
Donating/Deductions info: <https://land.auroville.org/a4adonations> Our website: <https://land.auroville.org>
Acres for Auroville is a collaboration of Auroville International & Lands for Auroville Unified

Photo: Nolini-da & Ranju; Quotes from Sri Aurobindo's message of 15/8/47 & the Mother's 15 August 1954 declaration

The reminiscences will be short.

I came to India to meet Sri Aurobindo. I remained in India to live with Sri Aurobindo. When he left his body, I continued to live here in order to do his work which is, by serving the Truth and enlightening mankind, to hasten the rule of the Divine's Love upon earth.

The Mother

21 February 1968

