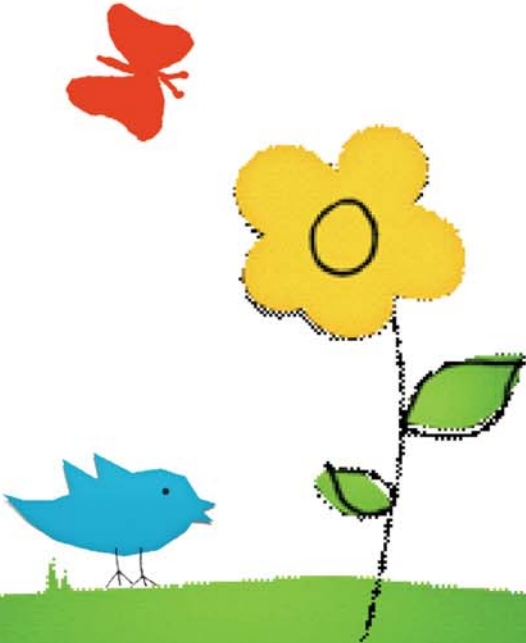


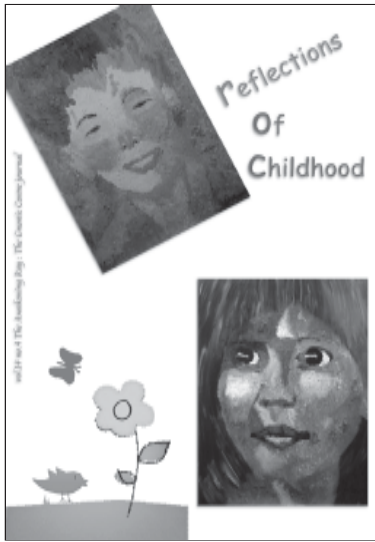
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Reflections Of Childhood







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Editorial

Dear Reader...

"Look carefully... into the eyes of little children,
and you will see a kind of light...
so true, so true, which looks at the world with wonder..."¹

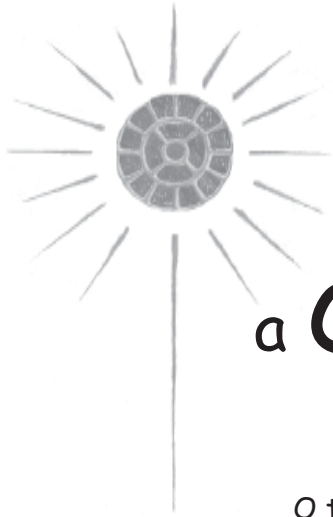
Indeed the eyes of little children reflect such innocence and purity that hardly anyone can remain untouched by them. A world of their own - it is as if the little ones move in their own ether, a substance different from ours. Even a few glimpses into their world bring much joy and simplicity into our hearts... and also, pearls of wisdom... as you will see from the sharing of the little ones at L'avenir...²

Dip into this world of theirs... re-connect to your own childhood, to the child in you... and enjoy these reflections of childhood, which though simple, carry much depth in them.

✍ Anuradha

¹ The Mother

² The Gnostic Centre's preschool - L'avenir (the future)



a Child's Imagination

O thou golden image,
Miniature of bliss,
Speaking sweetly, speaking meetly!
Every word deserves a kiss.

Strange, remote and splendid
Childhood's fancy pure
Thrills to thoughts we cannot fathom,
Quick felicities obscure.

When the eyes grow solemn
Laughter fades away,
Nature of her mighty childhood
Recollects the Titan play;

Woodlands touched by sunlight
Where the elves abode,
Giant meetings, Titan greetings,
Fancies of a youthful God.

These are coming on thee
In thy secret thought:
God remembers in thy bosom
All the wonders that He wrought.

✍ Sri Aurobindo



Mother's Way



14.7.1949

Mother had a way of her own in awakening people, in teaching them to aspire and develop. You will find the following incident instructive from this point of view.

When Mother opened the door, some boys came as usual for receiving flowers from her. She used to give flowers to all of them; to some she would give a rose in addition, putting it in their buttonhole herself; to some she would hand the rose; to each she would select and give. At times it would happen that the hole in which the rose was to be inserted would be too small but she would persist and spend a good deal of time over it. With some she would simply leave it there without making further attempt to push it in.

This morning with one boy she tried to push the rose and then left it without pursuing the attempt. The boy said something in French but I could not hear; and even if I had heard, you know I could not have understood for I do not know French.

After the door was closed I wanted to know what had happened. But there was some nervousness in me because she might say "Mind your own business" (as she



had told to someone else - though she never said that to me). All the same I asked her the reason.

Mother said: Generally I put the rose in his flag because he likes it that way. Today he had forgotten his flag. But I know he did so today on purpose. I know also that after going from here he throws it away. Some boys keep it till the evening, some keep all the time. I see this on the Playground.

Champaklal: Mother, why does he act like that?

Mother: Protest.

15.7.1949

The same boy came in the morning with the flag arranged nicely. It was so well arranged that Mother could easily insert the flower.

But Mother did not put the rose. She gave the usual flower in his hand. He tarried a while looking at the place where Mother had kept the roses. But to no avail. He had to go away without the rose. He did not specifically ask for it though it was obvious he wanted it.

After closing the door I asked Mother: Mother, today the boy came with the flag neatly arranged so that you could put the rose very easily.

Mother: Yes, I noticed it. I have done it purposely. I take note of everything.

16.7.1949

Today as soon as the boy came Mother caught hold of both his hands and spoke to him in French very affectinately. And without his asking she put the rose on him.

His whole approach was different.

It was an education for me to see how she helped him to come into the right attitude without speaking a word.¹

✍ Champaklal

Personal attendant to Sri Aurobindo and the Mother

¹ MP Pandit (ed). Champaklal Speaks. Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo Ashram.



what i want to be



At some point of time in our lives we might have come across the thought - 'what do I want to be...'. At that time we might have taken a long deep breath and given a serious thought to it. But have you ever come across young fresh minds - just 2 and 3 year-olds, who have just begun their journey of life, what they have to say? You will not believe that without taking a single second they can tell you about their dreams of what they want to be...in fact they can also tell you the reason why. I would like to take you for a journey and show you how every child replied to this question and how we as teachers helped them to acquire some of the qualities within them.

Recently I was busy with the topic 'What I want to be...' The idea arose from a brief interaction with the children over tiffin break. As everyone was sharing some thought or the other, one child started sharing her dreams saying... "You know didi when I will grow big I want to become a princess." I asked: "Why do you want to become a princess?"

Nassia: "So that I can play with my prince."

Didi: "Where is he?"

Nassia: "He has gone to complete his study in the sky. So when he will finish his study he will come back and I will play with him."

I became a little curious to know what other children have to say about their dreams so I started asking one-by-one... "Devyani, you tell me what you want to become when you will grow big."

Devyani: "Oh...me... I want to become a caterpillar."

Didi: "Wow...why do you want to become a caterpillar?"





Devyani: "So that I can eat lot of fresh green leaves and next day morning when I will open my eyes I will be a beautiful butterfly."

Aashmaan: "Didi, I want to become like a Spiderman."

Didi: "Why do you want to become like that?"

Before Aashmaan could say something Devyani stopped him saying... "Didi, he can't become a Spiderman; they eat all rubbish thing."

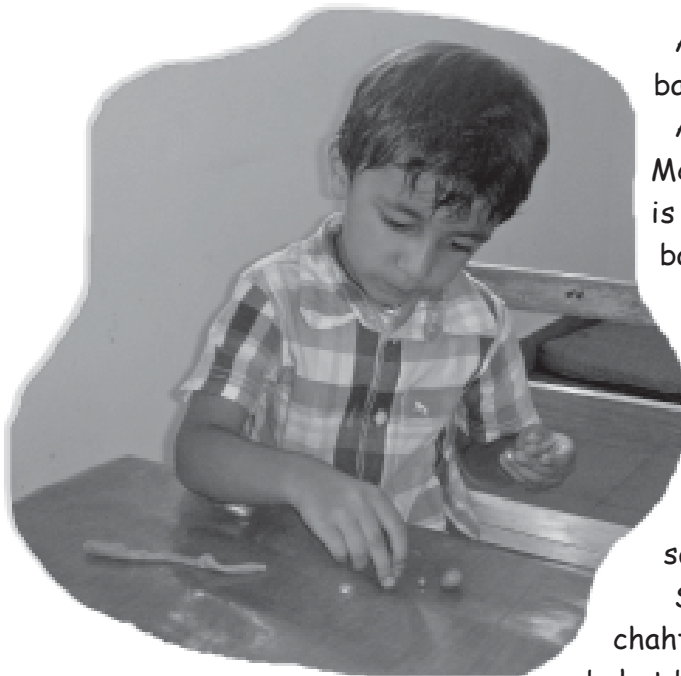
Didi: "What do you mean by rubbish thing?"

Devyani: "They eat flies, mosquitoes and other bugs too. So he can't be that."

Didi replied to Devyani saying... "But you know Aashmaan has something else to share why he wants to become like a Spiderman."

By that time Aashmaan has found his reason for becoming a Spiderman. He says: "So that I can eat mosquitoes."

The journey did not stop here only. I became more curious to know each child's dream. I wanted to know by whom they are influenced and to what extent they are receiving that influence, etc. So the next day I created a concentrated atmosphere and one-by-one asked the same question to everyone in the group. It was quite interesting to listen to them. Though some of them got influenced by their friends and wanted to be the same, some came up with different opinions and thoughts with proper reasons. For example...



Aarna: "Main Lion ki tarah sabse strong banana chahti hun."¹

Akshinav: "Didi, main Lightning McQueen Car ke wheels nahin ban sakta is liye main uska driver banunga aur bahoot tez chalaunga."²

Didi: "Why can't you become wheels?"

Akshinav: "Ooh didi, aap smajhte nahin ho... mere paas to face hai aur hands hain aur wheels ke to yeh sare nahin hote hain...is liye main nahin ban sakta."³

Swaraat: "Main Fortuner Car banana chahta hun....kyun ki Fortuner Car ki body bahut barhi aur strong hoti hai."⁴

¹ "I want to be the most strong like the lion."

² "I cannot be the wheels of Lightning McQueen Car, so I will be its driver and will drive very fast."

³ "Oh, you do not understand... I have a face and hands but wheels do not have all these... that's why I cannot be."

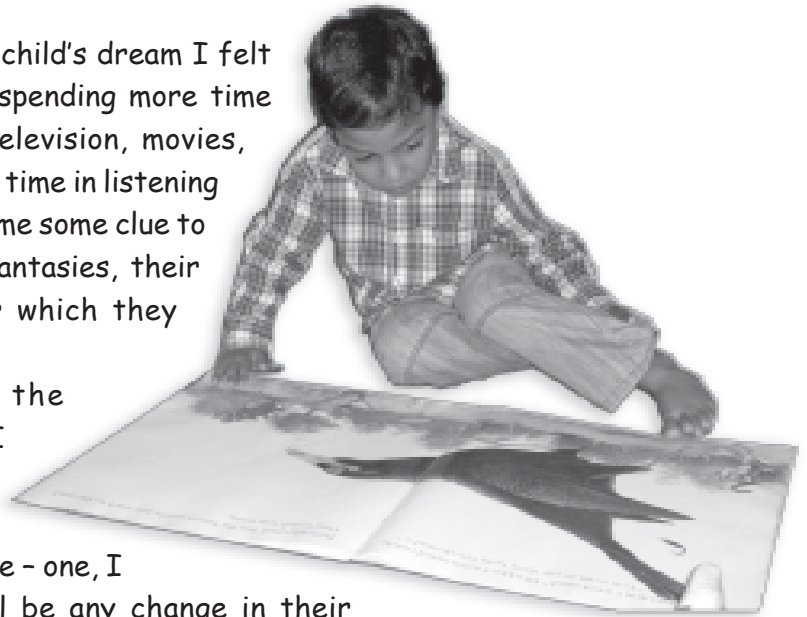
⁴ "I want to be Fortuner Care because its body is very big and strong."

Tyra wanted to become Dora so that she could sleep and go to school and study like her.



While listening to every child's dream I felt that the children have been spending more time being entertained through television, movies, video, computers, etc. and less time in listening to heroic stories, etc. It gave me some clue to understanding every child's fantasies, their favourite cartoon character which they look up to.

The next day when the children seemed settled, I threw the same question to the group. There were two reasons for repeating the same - one, I wanted to know if there will be any change in their making choices and secondly, I also wanted to listen to those children who did not share or just followed their peers.



I got a mixed response - some stuck to what they wanted to be, some of them changed and wanted to become something else, and some still followed. I was not so satisfied with my own approach. I felt I was not taking the children to a deeper level. As I was pondering on my own thought, I heard a voice asking the same question, "Didi now you tell me what you want to become when you will grow big." Rather than replying immediately I told the child, "Hey, you have asked a very deep question and I need some time to think about it." For a few minutes I pretended as though I was thinking and then I answered his question, "I want to become like a flower."

Aashmaan: "Lekin aap flower nahin ban sakte."⁵

Didi: "Why?"

Aashmaan: "Apke paas to petals nahin hai!"⁶

Didi: "You are right...I won't look like a flower but I can have everything that a flower carries within. Have you ever touched the petals - how does it feel like, or smelt it - how does it smell?"

Aashmaan: "Haan... achchi fragrance aati hai aur soft lagata hai."⁷

Didi: "So I can have that. You know how? When I speak to people, I can speak softly, I can always look fresh like a flower."

As we were talking, I observed a few children also joined us and became part of our conversation. At the end of the day I was quite happy. The whole conversation gave me a sense of achievement. You might have observed that

⁵ "But you cannot become a flower."

⁶ "You don't have petals!"

⁷ "Yes... good fragrance comes and it feels soft."



generally one feels excited when theory becomes reality... There are a lot of theories that influence the how, why, and what we teach to children. It is so reassuring when you actually get the chance to see the fruit of your labour and experience first-hand how and what you are doing is working and really benefiting the children you teach.

As The Mother says -

"Even a fleeting idea in a child, at a certain moment in its childhood when the psychic being is most in front, if it succeeds in penetrating through the outer consciousness and giving the child just an impression of something beautiful which must be realized, it creates a little nucleus and upon this you build your action."⁸

Throughout the week we explored various activities to work on each child's dream. I was always watchful with the children's interactions and actions and whenever I came across some unpleasant actions from a child I would immediately remind them of their ideal character - 'what they wanted to be like'. I often showed the positive quality of that particular character. I could see an immediate response from children whenever they were linked with their ideal character. I felt reflecting on their own action was a great help to achieve our aim to some extent.

✍ Sunaina Singh
Teacher-in-charge, L'avenir

"Only when one does what he wants, knows what he wants, does what he wants and is able to direct himself with certitude, without being tossed about by the hazards of life, then one can go forward on the suprarational paths fearlessly, unhesitatingly and with the least danger. But one need not be very old for this to happen. One can begin very young; even a child of five can already make use of reason to control himself; I know it. There is enough mental organization in the being in these little tots who look so spontaneous and irresponsible; there is enough cerebral organisation for them to organise themselves, their life, their nature, their movements, actions and thoughts with reason.

... So if these were taught how to use their reason properly while still very young, they would be ready to start on the great adventure."^{*}

- The Mother

⁸ The Mother, Collected Works of The Mother v.4 p.255. Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo Ashram.

^{*} ---. v.7 (conversation dated 25 May 1955).

Wonderland

I remember
When I was small
The sun was a great big ball...
A god that lit and warmed the world

Every evening she bathed
And splashed about the way I did...
Creating a sunset

Night fell when she drew her curtains
The twinkling stars were lanterns
Which, to keep us safe, she turned on
Soft clouds were her eiderdown

In the great big sky,
Her playground,
She sometimes played thunderball
Lightning struck for every goal
And down came rain...
Her champagne

Whenever she was lonely
She'd lower a bridge...
A rainbow
That people tired of this world
Could climb onto

If she was angry with us all
She'd blow hard,
Making windows rattle
And trees fall

Then, sorry for what she had done,
She'd shed snowflakes on the ground



When I was small
I did believe
The earth, the sky and the seas
Were for birds, animals and trees
Like they were for human beings

I thought a weeping willow tree
Was put there to comfort me
That creatures weaker than me
Were my responsibility

Then, one day,
The world laughed at me
Showed me I'd got it
ALL WRONG!!

That was the day
I GREW UP

And all the WONDER
Was GONE...



the Dreams of a Child



When one is very young and as I say "well-born", that is, born with a conscious psychic being within, there is always, in the dreams of the child, a kind of aspiration, which for its child's consciousness is a sort of ambition, for something which would be beauty without ugliness, justice without injustice, goodness without limits, and a conscious, constant success, a perpetual miracle. One dreams of miracles when one is young, one wants all wickedness to disappear, everything to be always luminous, beautiful, happy, one likes stories which end happily. This is what one should rely on. When the body feels its miseries, its limitations, one must establish this dream in it—of a strength which would have no limit, a beauty which would have no ugliness, and of marvellous capacities: one dreams of being able to rise into the air, of being wherever it is necessary to be, of setting things right when they go wrong, of healing the sick; indeed, one has all sorts of dreams when one is very young.... Usually parents or teachers pass their time throwing cold water on it, telling you, "Oh! it's a dream, it is not a reality." They should do the very opposite! Children should be taught, "Yes, this is what you must try to realise and not only is it possible but it is *certain* if you come in contact with the part in you which is capable of doing this thing. This is what should guide your life, organise it, make you develop in the direction of the *true reality* which the ordinary world calls illusion."

This is what it should be, instead of making children ordinary, with that dull, vulgar common sense which becomes an inveterate habit and, when something is going well, immediately brings up in the being the idea: "Oh, that won't last!", when



somebody is kind, the impression, "Oh, he will change!", when one is capable of doing something, "Oh, tomorrow I won't be able to do it so well." This is like an acid, a destructive acid in the being, which takes away hope, certitude, confidence in future possibilities.

When a child is full of enthusiasm, never throw cold water on it, never tell him, "You know, life is not like that!" You should always encourage him, tell him, "Yes, at present things are not always like that, they *seem* ugly, but behind this there is a beauty that is trying to realise itself. This is what you should love and draw towards you, this is what you should make the object of your dreams, of your ambitions."

And if you do this when you are very small, you have much less difficulty than if later on you have to undo, undo all the bad effects of a bad education, undo that kind of dull and vulgar common sense which means that you expect nothing good from life, which makes it insipid, boring, and contradicts all the hopes, all the so-called illusions of beauty. On the contrary, you must tell a child—or yourself if you are no longer quite a baby—"Everything in me that seems unreal, impossible, illusory, *that is what is true, that is what I must cultivate.*" When you have these aspirations: "Oh, not to be always limited by some incapacity, all the time held back by some bad will!", you must cultivate within you this certitude that *that is what is essentially true and that is what must be realised.*

Then faith awakens in the cells of the body. And you will see that you find a response in your body itself. The body itself will feel that if its inner will helps, fortifies, directs, leads, well, all its limitations will gradually disappear.

And so, when the first experience comes, which sometimes begins when one is very young, the first contact with the inner joy, the inner beauty, the inner light, the first contact with *that*, which suddenly makes you feel, "Oh! that is what I want," you must cultivate it, never forget it, hold it constantly before you, tell yourself, "I have felt it once, so I can feel it again. This has been real for me, even for the space of a second, and that is what I am going to revive in myself".... And encourage the body to seek it—to seek it, *with the confidence* that it carries that possibility within itself and that if it calls for it, it will come back, it will be realised again.

This is what should be done when one is young. This is what should be done every time one has the opportunity to recollect oneself, commune with oneself, seek oneself.¹

☞ The Mother

¹ The Mother, Collected Works of The Mother v.9 (conversation dated 31 July 1957). Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo Ashram.



Reflections of a Teacher

"The education of a human being should begin at birth and continue throughout his life.

Indeed, if we want this education to have its maximum result, it should begin even before birth."

- The Mother

Children are wonderful gift from God to us; every day is different working with them. My journey with these two year old children is really adventurous. Looking at their crying face, for some moments I think I can't take this responsibility. But the next moment I see a bubbly chubby child coming to me with its open arms to hug me. Isn't that interesting? I know the path is not easy. The above quotation inspires me a lot, for I love to be with children and to be open like them. Whatever difficulties come, I like to face.



At the end of the day when it is time to say bye to the children the only thought that comes to my mind is: 'Am I able to understand their need and touch the deeper aspect of their life?' They spend three hours with us which are the most precious time of their childhood. Every day when they come in the morning afresh, I love to spend time playing with them in the sandpit, helping them to make sandcastles, cake, ant hills, den, etc. Running up from the tunnel, hiding under the tunnel, splashing the water puddles after the rain reminds me of my childhood. Many a times I have observed music works immediately; any message you want to give it goes straight towards everyone's heart. Therefore, I generally create an atmosphere where I dance and sing with them. Sometimes I sit with them playing all kinds of musical instruments... tabla, dholak, jhun-jhuna etc. A few of them pull out plastic containers from the toy room to play as dholak.



At the surface level these are ordinary activities but an in-depth analysis unfolds that through each of these activities they learn many things at outer and inner levels. Every day with my colleague I do my planning for the next day. We evaluate each child's progress and growth keeping in mind throughout the day's activities and proceed for the next day's planning. While evaluating I try to connect to each child from the deeper aspect of my being. (Initially it was difficult for me but a gradual process has uplifted my effort of evaluating each child.) In the group I always pray for a harmonious atmosphere where every child can respond spontaneously. It doesn't happen always but sometimes I observe their actions which are very natural and spontaneous. At the same time I have also experienced that it is very real - the day I am disturbed inwardly the whole environment gets affected.

Every child is unique and every child has potential of his own. It is the duty of a teacher to help the child to know himself, the reason of his inner movements. A small little child comes to us with utmost simplicity and full of hope. Their simplicity and straightforwardness is what attracts me most. I have found, to nurture this inner beauty and to set an example before them is itself a sadhana.

"To love to learn is the most precious gift that one can make to a child, to learn always and everywhere".

- The Mother

One day I saw a child observing one small caterpillar. She called out to me, "Didi, dekho kya hai?"¹ I went to her and saw there a small helpless caterpillar disturbed by the ants. The caterpillar was jumping in pain. I immediately rescued the caterpillar and held it in my hand. In the meantime other children also joined us. Seeing her friends she said to them, "Saare chinti pareshan kar raha tha".² They curiously observed the caterpillar and its different parts of the body. "Mujhe bhi do na,"³ a child said to me, so I gently took the caterpillar and gave it to the child. She refused. "Kaun brave hai?"⁴ - as soon as I said that everybody's hand came in front. "Usko bhi bhokh lag rahi hai, tiffin khila dete hain usko,"⁵ one of the children said. I asked them, "Caterpillar kya khata hai?"⁶ "Patta,"⁷ a child behind me answered. I took the caterpillar and left him on a plant. All of them said bye to him.

When I look at a butterfly it gives me a feeling of freedom, free from all boundaries and old set of rules. Our education must be free from what is good and what is bad, what not to do and what to do. Essentially, one must help to learn to know oneself and help him to overcome all his difficulties.

✍ Mousumi Goswami
Teacher, L'avenir

¹ "See, what is it?" ² "All the ants were troubling." ³ "Give it to me also." ⁴ "Who is brave?"
⁵ "It is also feeling hungry, lets feed it tiffin." ⁶ "What does a caterpillar eat?" ⁷ "Leaf."



my butterflies of l'avenir

From finger paints of reds and greens,
to shades of yellows and blue,
from markers to crayons and
Saying "Didi, I love you"

From shapes and numbers,
to sharing with friends
from packing up their own lunches,
hoping the day never ends...

From "Didi, come help me"
To bathroom breaks galore,
from music to cookies,
they come back for more...

From the never ending joy,
to the eagerness to learn
from loving the crafts,
to being nice but stern..

My treasures they are,
what a joy to endear
Like a sapling they grow,
And need to be handled with utmost care...

Every child in L'avenir for me is
a butterfly in air
Some can fly higher than others,
But each one flies the best it can
Why compare one against the other?
Each one is so different!
Each one is so beautiful!
Each one is so special!
This is the nicest experience for me to share.

✍ Trisha Chhabra
Teacher, L'avenir





i am a child ..

i see things that big people dont..

i see the world beyond the sky,
the golden light so very very high .

i see the angels walking in the streets with me ..
i see the curly hair of the goddess of the sea ,

i see the smile in every flower,
i see the diamonds drop as rain shower .

i see the palace of hope in the mud sand beach..
i see a flower shining in the heart of each..



i see life in my big stuffy teddy bear ,
i see the moment of time - now and here .

i see the winding dancing to the music in the air ,
i see the souls unmasked bare

i see my guardian in the sunshine glare,
follow the light to unknown places-i dare !

they say i am a child , living life in a fantasy car ,
they know not , it is they who have travelled so far ,

i find these adults really odd..
for i am the one who has remained nearest to god .

✍ Shibani Dara



THE COLORS OF LIFE

IS A HILL, PART OF
CHILDHOOD

THE JOY OF INNOCENCE

IS A TREASURE TO
BE FEASTED



" THE SETTING SUN HAS THE
SAME JOY AS THE RISING SHINE"

" EACH DAY IS A NEW CREATION ,FOR,
THE PRESENT IS THE ONLY REALITY ,
THERE IS NO REGRET OF THE PAST ,NO
FEAR OF THE FUTURE ...HOW
FORTUNATE IS THE CHILDHOOD OF
ONE'S LIFE"



the Siblings

The first child is often the apple of everyone's eye. And then come the siblings... What happens to the first child then? The account below from L'avenir offers insights into how to handle this sensitive period in the child's life... ..

August, 2010

The problem

Before winding up the group we did sharing with the children. After the sharing everyone got ready to go home. A few parents had come to pick up their kids, so I was helping children to put on their shoes. Suddenly I heard X screaming at someone saying, "Aap isko mere school kyun laye ho...ise door phenk do... mujjhen isko apne saath nahin lekar jana hai."¹ I turned towards X to figure out the reason for him being so upset. I saw his grandmother was holding one of his younger brothers in her arms and that made X very upset. He continued scolding and screaming at his daadi and younger brother. I looked at the little one's face. He appeared very sad. His whole face was as though some one had stolen his smile. Seeing X's anger I tried to talk to him, but as he was in a different mood, he did not listen to me. I asked his grandmother the reason for him being so upset because we had never seen X being so very upset and angry. I was even more surprised when I heard his grandmother's reply. She told me that he does not like to see one of his new-born twin brothers, and everyday after going back from the school he hurts him badly by crushing his feet or hitting him.

Though I knew that after coming of the twins X had become quite insecure and was also going through a lot of ups and downs, but I had not realized that he was carrying this much of hurt and anger within. We tried to tackle the situation for the day but after that I did not feel too happy about it. Throughout the day I felt something was bothering me so I shared the incident with one of my seniors to lighten myself and also to get some advice.

Reflection

My senior shared an instance from her own dealing with a very aggressive 3-year old - an allegorical story depicting the child's inner struggle with his anger had been an instant hit with the child, gradually helping him deal with his anger. She suggested that I try out a similar approach with X and see if it works.

¹ "Why have you brought him to my school... throw him far away... I will not take him with me."



Action

As X loved listening to stories, during Tiffin time keeping X's issues in my mind I cooked up a story and shared with the group. The story went like this ...

Once there was a lion family. In that family there were mamma lion and papa lion. One day mamma lion and papa lion thought of having a baby. So they prayed to god and asked for a baby. God listened to their wish and sent them a baby lion as a gift. Mamma lion and papa lion were very happy to have that baby lion in their family. The baby lion too was happy with them. Gradually when the baby lion grew a little big, he started going to the school and made many friends.

I observed that X was very intensely listening to the story. Therefore, while narrating the story I included everything that X used to do in the school and also at home. I continued the story.....

Quite often mamma lion and papa lion saw that whenever the baby lion used to be at home he used to miss his friends. So they decided to give baby lion a surprise gift. So they again prayed to god and asked for another baby. God again listened to their wish and gave them not only one but two babies together. Everyone was very happy in the lion family.

Before I could move further, X suddenly said, "Lekin maine to god se ek hi manga tha... usne mujjhen two kyun diya? Main to sirf Y ko pyar karunga, Z ko nahin."² And X moved out. I was quite amazed after listening to such a response from X. The only thought that came to me was that can such a young child think like this!

Besides the story I also spoke to his parents and tried to know about his interaction with his siblings at home. I came across many incidents that helped me to understand X more closely and take up every issue sensitively while interacting with X. Knowing that X was a very reasonable child, I took every step very carefully.

The Next Day

Today X entered the classroom with his Mickey Mouse bag and bottle, asking his grandmother to stay outside. He seemed very happy so I asked him, "Aap to aaj bahut khush lag rahe ho." X replied, "Didi, aaj mujjhen Y aur daadi chorane aaye hain." I could sense the reason for him looking very happy. I again questioned, "What about Z, where is he?" X replied, "Maine use kura mein phenk diya."

Didi: "Kyun?"

X: "Kyunki use mujjhen god ke paas wapas bhejna hai."

I could not think of anything else except saying, "Lekin god to jo gift deten hain use wapas nahin lete hain."

X seemed very thoughtful and again he asked, "Kyun?"

² "But I asked god only for one... why did he give me two? I will love only Y, not Z."



Didi: "Kyunki god ko bahut achcha lgata hai jab koi unke gift ko pyaar se rakhe aur uska care kare."

X looked at me saying, "Thik hai," and went off to play.³

As the day before's story was incomplete, during the circle time I shared the same story with a little change in it. I had added the morning discussion in the story. I found the same kind of intensity in X while listening to the story. I observed that when I was narrating the story he sat closer to me and was staring at my face and listening to it quietly. The main reason for repeating the same story was to help X accept his twins with a happy heart.

Two days later

This morning T & T were sharing the morning greeting of their family.

Tyra: "Didi, before coming to the school I hugged my didi, mamma and papa."

Taarini: "Didi maine to apne brother ko kiss bhi kiya tha."⁴

I observed X was listening to them quietly and once they finished their sharing he said loudly, "Maine bhi sabko hug bhi kiya aur pyaar bhi kiya. Maine mamma ko, papa ko, daadi ko, Y ko and Z ko bhi pyaar kiya."⁵

It was the first day when X added Z in his conversation. I was happy to see a glimpse of opening in him. We continued our effort through stories and other conversations. Every day I modified the story as per the situation and X's discussion. We had also spoken to his parents and from time-to-time discussed how to go about it.

A week later

Today it was raining, only a few children had come. X had come with both his brothers. He was happy; there was not a single sign of unhappiness. In fact, he approached me for me to see them. I had a few flowers in my hand so I asked X if he would like to give one to each of his brothers. He happily took two flowers from my hand and gave it to his younger brothers. Till then while Y was looking quite happy, Z seemed a bit sad. I observed that when X tried to give one flower to Y he could not hold it and Z lit up and happily took the flower from X's hand. I noticed a gentle smile on X's face when Z took the flower. I commented on Z's response and his happiness.

³ Didi: "You are looking very happy today."

X: "Didi, today Y and grandma have come to leave me."

Didi: "What about Z, where is he?"

X: "I have thrown him in the garbage."

Didi: "Why?"

X: "Because I have to send him back to god."

Didi: "But god does not take back the gift he gives."

X: "Why?"

Didi: "Because god likes it very much when someone keeps his gift with love and cares for it."

X: "Okay."

⁴ "I even kissed my brother."

⁵ "I also hugged everyone and gave love to everyone. I gave love to mamma, papa, grandma, Y and also Z."

Most of the kids went to the twins and enjoyed playing with them. X also seemed excited to touch their hands and feet one-by-one. Seeing this we asked X's grandmother to stay back for some time. We observed when the twins were crawling on the mat X went to them and very gently patted them on their head one by one.



Today I could see a great improvement in X's behaviour. He seemed to me very happy and also enjoyed being with both his brothers. There were no preferences between Y and Z. He was carrying love for both. I know it's too early to say that but seeing his interaction I felt a sense of achievement. It is just a beginning and I have to help him to further deepen his bonding with his twins and grow as a healthy, happy and loving child.

✍ Sunaina Singh

Snow flakes*



Have you watched the snowflakes then,
In all their merry-making

The glide, the turn, the random fall
Occasional drops just faking?

Your wet nose-tip, your cloudy breath
Small puddles all a-caking

And when you're done, look how the sun
Comes out, all back a-taking.

✍ Tripta Batra

Education Consultant

* 'fakes' is not a typo for flakes



the Gift of Childhood

Some times, the gift of childhood comes in a traumatic manner but teaches us basic lessons of life...

In the early 1960s, my father was a tax official at Balasore, on the eastern sea coast of Orissa. I was about seven. We lived in the Sales Tax Colony: five small houses in a row. At the centre of the colony was a well that made up for the absence of running water in the households. At the extreme end of the colony was an ancient Bel tree. A pathway snaked its way forward through the small opening in the hedge and reached a mosque. A little distance away, was the Church Lane U.P. School: a modest room with a tinned roof that passed off as an educational institution.

In conformity with bureaucratic ethos, my father's boss, the Commercial Tax Officer (CTO), lived in an imposing bungalow with his family. The office of the CTO was equidistant from the bungalow and the colony. All in all, a cozy setup!

As could be expected, social contact with the boss's family was limited. However, thanks to the profile of my mother, an acclaimed poet, our family had a greater degree of access to the bungalow, the seat of Power, than my father's counterparts. I was happy to accompany my mother to this house periodically. Besides, there was a little cherubic girl with curly hair in a bright frock to play with. It was picture perfect! An idyllic setting!

One day on a periodic visit to the bungalow, my eyes fell on a small coin, called one Anna in those days. Although unaware of the use of money, I knew of its value. Making sure that no one spotted me, I pocketed the coin stealthily.

Back home, I shared my triumph with my sister. Soon it reached the ears of my mother.

Next morning my father accosted me: 'Do you have the Anna with you?' he asked me in disarming tone. Little did I know that it was a façade, and inside, he was seething in anger. Sheepishly I brought out the coin from the hidden place and handed it over in silence.

The public place in the colony was the well. My father took me there and gave me a thrashing in full public view. Every one looked in horror and sympathy, but my father was unmoved. To me he was cruelty personified. Why did he have to do it, I wondered. Thanks to the plea of my mother, I was let off. Deeply humiliated, burning inside, I came back home.

But I learnt the lesson the hard way : to take away an item that does not belong to you amounts to a moral transgression and is called theft.



Was this lesson necessary? More importantly, did it have to come in this manner? Years later, my father would have agreed with me. I never broached the subject to him. Today he is no more. By 1966, my sister and I had joined the Sri Aurobindo Ashram School (SAICE) at Pondicherry. By then, my father had realized that while lessons were important, the instrument of punishment had to be replaced by the path of love. It had to be reform through love and understanding, and not through the power of the rod.

But the spirit behind my father's action in Balasore was essentially correct. There should be no compromise with wrong-doing of any kind. There was no crime which was small or big; crimes begin early through seemingly small insignificant acts. They must be curbed firmly, and decisively.

The experience was traumatic, but it left a deep impression upon me. As I grew older, and read about wealth and trusteeship in the writings of the great minds, I began to understand the lesson I had learnt many years ago: some times, the gift of childhood comes in a traumatic manner but teaches us basic lessons of life.

✍ Sachidananda Mohanty

Professor of English, University of Hyderabad





up in the Jamun Tree

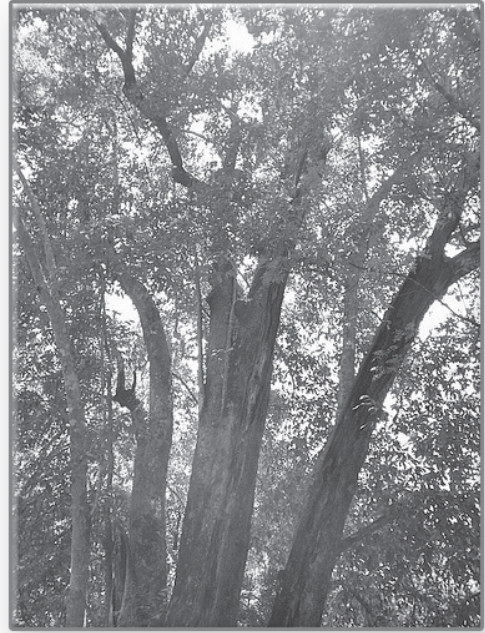
"Radha, get down from that tree NOW. Don't you have to study? Always on the tree, who will get marks? As it is you don't help around the house, playing the whole day. Oooooffff! you and your ruffian ways!' My mother's regular complaint almost every weekday evening and weekend morning. I get down listlessly waking up from my summer evening slumber.

"H.w, study, classes, relatives, be a good girl!... Oiiii Mummy, what has this got to do with my Jamun tree?" My mother explains the same ritual again, and again I choose to be deaf.

Walking everyday to my bus-stop, I look at the tree, waiting for the fruit to come. Every afternoon on my way back home I look at it as if within these hours it has borne fruit. Come monsoon and the tree will be laden with fruit, it will be home to insects and birds, it will be my secret resting place. My father will choose to boast about the amazing qualities of this black berry, "The java plum is very beneficial for diabetics, it is sour and helps control body sugar. The bark has astringent properties,".....blah, blah.... But he will definitely add some more to this dialogue.

If the tree is so beneficial then why am I called down everytime? It gives me shade from the scorching heat as the Maali splashes water all over it, it gives me shade from all others around me, it gives me my space. It gives me the liberty to think on my own. Hanging on to one branch I love to dream, but suddenly my little cousins come to ask for berries. Sucking the juicy blackberries we grin with open-mouths to show our blue-black stained teeth. The older ones must be looking for me anyway to sit me down and teach me History, Geography, Maths..... as they must show my mother what responsible brothers and sisters they are. Reluctantly I climb down to listen to the language of books.

Sometimes I do take my books up, my mother resents this. "Whoever studies on the tree? You need to study on the study table, see we have this wonderful mahogany wood table for you but you choose to be a monkey. Whoever saw an educated monkey?"





"Typhoid, the tests show she is suffering from Typhoid", tells the doctor. The entire household is instructed with the precautions to be taken. I must suck on the juice of the blackberry I so love, it is therapeutic. Yes it is I think secretly.

"Mummy this table is made of wood?" I ask as my mother is gently stroking my hair; is not the tree wood, that is what was taught at school. I check the tree and yes of course it is wood.

So many years passed with this routine. My habit of spending time up on the Jamun tree stopped suddenly with the pressure of studies, however the practice of gazing up at it remained. The familiarity I feel.

The pleasurable school life moves to cool college life. Tests, exams, entrances etc. are demanding. They are urgently important, a lot more important than the tree that I had nestled in. "This is a crucial time, you must work harder," I am told everyday regularly. I do understand yet yearn to climb up my tree one more time. More exams and then comes marriage. A turning moment when it is strange to understand happiness at entering a new period or sorrow at leaving our domains. Too many functions, at any wedding the tailor becomes the most important person in our lives. Too many rounds to shops for this and that, we must please all our relatives. Everytime I steal a long look at my tree, it is bidding me Bye, the branches seem to come alive and swing to the marriage songs. It seems glad for me. The next morning as I prepare to leave my house finally there is blissful silence outside... so opposite to the chaotic rituals inside.

In the evening I quietly move away from the house and climb up the tree. I am not as nimble as I used to be. Perched high up I weep, thinking of varied scenes from my life, I weep. Getting down I feel drained yet energized.

Many trips are made back to my parental home, these frequent visits gradually become rare. Everytime I visit my household, I turn automatically to gaze at the tree. The tree has wizened over the years, shriveled it is still home to insects and birds though the fruit has lessened says my father.

At the fruitwala I am told, "Madamji, best Jamun from Bali, imported hai, not very expensive for you, take the whole box". I sniff the jamun but they never smell the same. I buy jamun from the vendor but they never taste the same.

I sit under the Gulmohar tree and admire the newly blossomed fruit-bearing flowers of the guava tree, for in the wintery afternoons it is good to revel in the sunshine. Memories come back, so vivid, I can actually see myself perched high up again. I am hanging on to the branches just like the monkey my mother must have imagined me to be. I float in this memory before I realize where am I. Some days later, I buy a Jamun sapling and plant it hoping that my children will climb up the tree and I shall sit under its shade remembering my own Jamun tree.

✍️ N Radha Arora



Stories by 3-year olds

While working on the topic 'Sense of Rhythm' we took story as a means to explore the rhythm in language. Children explored various ways of telling a story. They also made their own story book. They were guided through the following steps -

- Children were given a basket full of cut-out pictures to choose a few pictures according to their choice.
- Then children stuck those pictures on separate sheets.
- They also placed them in order - as they wished.
- And finally they narrated the whole story in their own words.

- Sunaina Singh

Teams... a story by Tarini

"One day birds were sitting on the tree. Then one bird fell down.



In the play ground four rabbits were playing a game. They were going round and round to eat the carrots. Then one rabbit stepped on the carrot and fell down. Then another rabbit came and helped him.



After that all the rabbits went for swimming. Then a bird and tiger also joined them.



After swimming tiger went home to eat his food. When he was eating a leaf, one ant also came into his mouth. The ant tried to come out but she couldn't.



But when tiger was drinking water the ant ran out from tiger's mouth.



The ant ran and ran and went to a birthday party. When she saw nobody is seeing her she climbed up on the cake and started eating."

*

Didi: Hey Tarini why do you want to name your story 'Teams'?

Tarini: Because they all stay together in the same house, they play together and also they eat together in one plate.

Mummy, Papa and Baby... a story by Arvin

"Eni aur Mini two pigs the. Wah base-ball khel rahe the.



Eni aur Mini ke baby unko window se dekh rahi thi.

Eni aur Mini apne baby ko bahut pyar karten the, aur wah usko raat me pyar se sulaten the.



Phir subah me wah apne baby ke sath garden me grass ko dekhten the. Aur phir apne baby ko school bhi bhejaten the."



trans:

Eni and Mini were two pigs. They were playing baseball. Eni and Mini's baby was watching them from the window. Eni and Mini loved their baby a lot, and put it to sleep at night with love. Then in the morning with their baby they used to watch the grass in the garden. And then they used to send their baby to school also.





Friends... a story by Khushi

"Ek bar ek lion bahut happy tha kyunki usko bahut dur ek crow dikh raha tha.



Phir ek bear aur squirrel uske paas jaten hain aur lion se puchatein hain, 'Aap ko kya hua, aap happy kyu ho?' Lion unko batata hain ki usko ek bird dikh raha hai, es liye wah happy hai.

Phir sab bird ko pakarne jaten hain. Tab ek wolf unko help karne aata hai.



Wolf unke liye kuch flower lata hai aur bolta hai ki chalo hum is flowers ka juice banaten hain.

Phir ek rabbit bhi unke paas juice pine aata hai. Phir sab bahut achche friends ban jate hain."

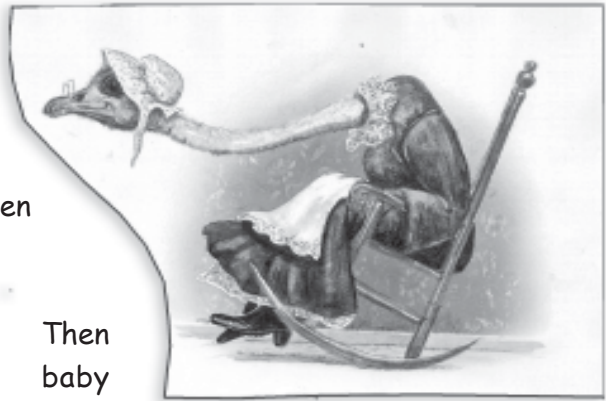
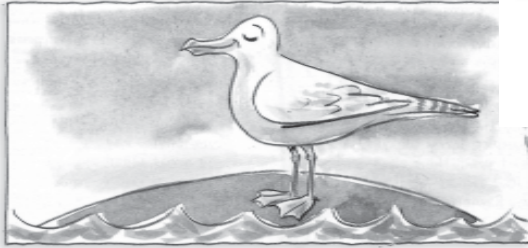
trans:

Once a lion was very happy because he could see a crow quite far away. Then a bear and a squirrel go near him and ask the lion, 'What's happened to you, why are you happy?' Lion tells them that he can see a bird, that's why he is happy. Then all go to catch the bird. Then one wolf comes to help them. Wolf brings some flower for them and says that let's make juice of these flowers. Then one rabbit also comes to them to drink juice. Then all become very good friends.



Mamma bird and Baby bird... a story by Myra

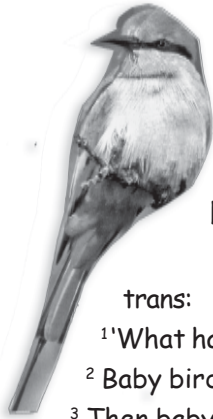
"One day mamma bird was sitting on the chair. Suddenly she fell down. Then she cried and cried.



Then
baby
bird

comes to mamma bird and asked her
'kya hua.'¹

Then mamma bird scolded baby bird.
Baby bird bahut cry karti hai aur
wah apne friend ke paas jati hai aur
usko sab kuch
batati hai.²



Phir baby bird happy ho jati hai aur mamma bird ke paas jati
hai. Aur jab baby bird happy hoti hai tab wah green ho jati
hai.³

trans:

¹'What happened'

² Baby bird cries a lot and she goes to her friend and tells her everything.

³ Then baby bird becomes happy and goes to mamma bird. And when baby bird is happy, then she becomes green.





Enriching children's future

"It was the best of times, it was the worst of times..."¹

Often while interacting with little children we forget what is the future we are preparing them for. A look at our society shows some disturbing tendencies - most of which can be traced to a warped and inadequate education. Two factors which can contribute greatly in creating a positive, a noble and an enriched future are - 1) a refined aesthetic sense, and 2) a wideness of the mind.

At the same time, we are in times when a lot more seems possible than earlier... This again demands an anchoring in our inner being so that we rise up to the richness that life offers us, and do not remain shut in the narrow rounds of humdrum expectations and modes of living.

The following is something you can reflect on...

Cultivating the Aesthetic Sense

"To this general education of the senses and their action there will be added, as early as possible, the cultivation of discrimination and of the aesthetic sense, the capacity to choose and adopt what is beautiful and harmonious, simple, healthy and pure. For there is a psychological health just as there is a physical health; there is a beauty and harmony of the sensations, even as there is a beauty of the body and its movements. As the capacity of understanding grows in the child, he should be taught, in the course of his education, to add artistic taste and refinement to power and precision. He should be shown, led to appreciate, taught to love beautiful, lofty, healthy and noble things, whether in Nature or in human creation. This should be a true aesthetic culture, which will protect him from degrading influences."²

- Discuss the above in the context of the upbringing of your children. Explore the various aspects of and the need for cultivating the aesthetic sense in children.



- Draw up a list of ways in which you can cultivate the aesthetic sense in your child/children.

Widening the Mind

"For the mental instrument can equally be a great help or a great hindrance. In its natural state the human mind is always limited in its vision, narrow in its understanding, rigid in its conceptions, and a constant effort is therefore needed to widen it, to make it more supple and profound. So it is very necessary to consider everything from as many points of view as possible."³

- Discuss the above in the context of the upbringing of your children. Explore the various aspects of and the need for widening the mind.
- Draw up a list of ways in which you can widen the mind in your child/children.

✍ Anuradha



¹ Charles Dickens. *A Tale of Two Cities*.

² The Mother. *On Education 'The Education of the Vital'*. Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo Ashram.

³ ---. *'The Science of Living'*



Events

15 august : Sri Aurobindo's birthday

A beautiful morning, very quiet... serene and intense... a meditation followed by prasad and tea. The message:

"What Sri Aurobindo represents in the world's history is not a teaching, not even a revelation; it is a decisive action direct from the Supreme."

- The Mother

14, 15 august : Nine Gems in Savitri

Two talks by Ameeta Mehra at the Sri Aurobindo Ashram (Delhi branch), providing insights into what we can gain from the study of Sri Aurobindo's epic of mantric poetry, 'Savitri', for our own growth of consciousness.

20, 25, 26 august : Connecting Inner Power with Global Change

A series of 3 talks by Pravir Malik at the Gnostic Centre. These talks form a part of a larger series, towards an online postgraduate programme to be offered next year.

12 august : New Perspectives in Higher Education

An interactive session with students of Psychology department, at Delhi University, based on the multimedia presentation on Higher Education (by the Gnostic Centre).

8 august : New Semester of ICIS online programmes

Three new postgraduate programmes were launched this semester:

- Studies in the Rig Veda
- A Study of the Bhagawad Gita
- Integral Education

8 august : First Essentials in Learning

A workshop for L'avenir parents (of 2-3 year olds), focusing on the need and some methods to develop gross and fine motor control, socialisation skills and opening up of the child.



25 July : Widening the mind and Refining the Aesthetic sense

A workshop for L'avenir parents (of 3-4 year olds), engaging the parents in how to widen the mind and refine the child's aesthetic sense - and its connection with creating a nobler and more harmonious society.



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**“There is no greater courage
than to be always truthful.”**

The Mother

with best wishes

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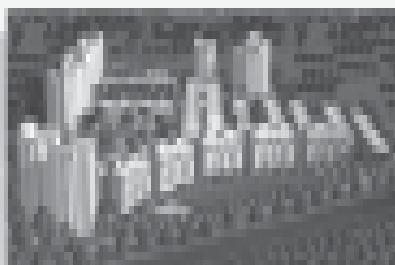


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