

2019
ISSUE 5

SLAICE

A SLICE OF SAICE

EDITORIAL

We present to you the fifth edition of "SLAICE, a slice of SAICE". In this issue, we shall recount the story of the first ever Ashram road-race winner, have a conversation about our system of education and also acknowledge the growing influence of WhatsApp on Ashram society. Peppered with short stories and poems, are hand drawn illustrations. And at the end of this tedious journey, when asked to write an editorial, the page remained blank, forever postponed until we could no longer delay it. So, here we are on the last day, the copy editors racking their brains for something innovative, funny, witty, anything different actually. But it is too late and we know it. So, here is our futile attempt at an interesting end to an editorial.

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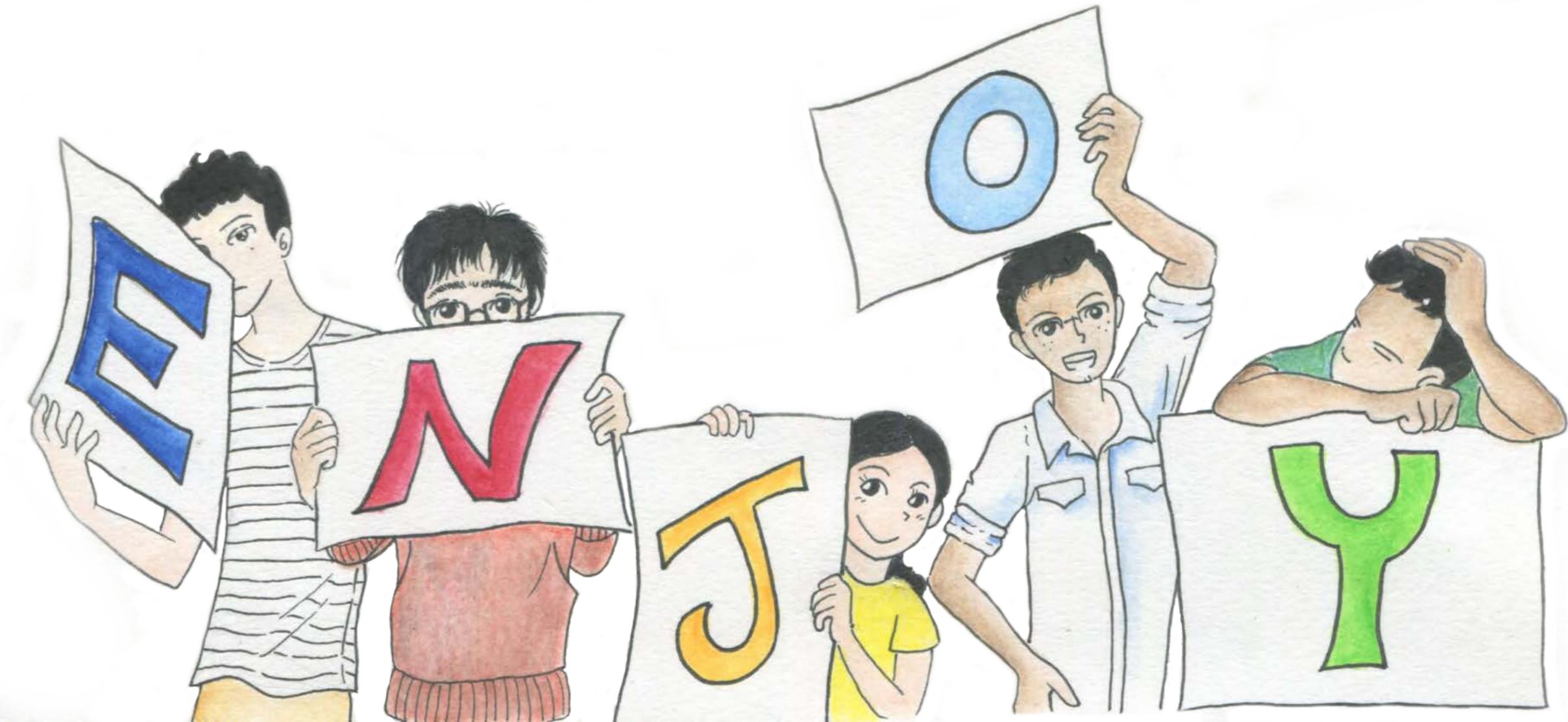
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Special thanks to Sayuri M. for the paintings.



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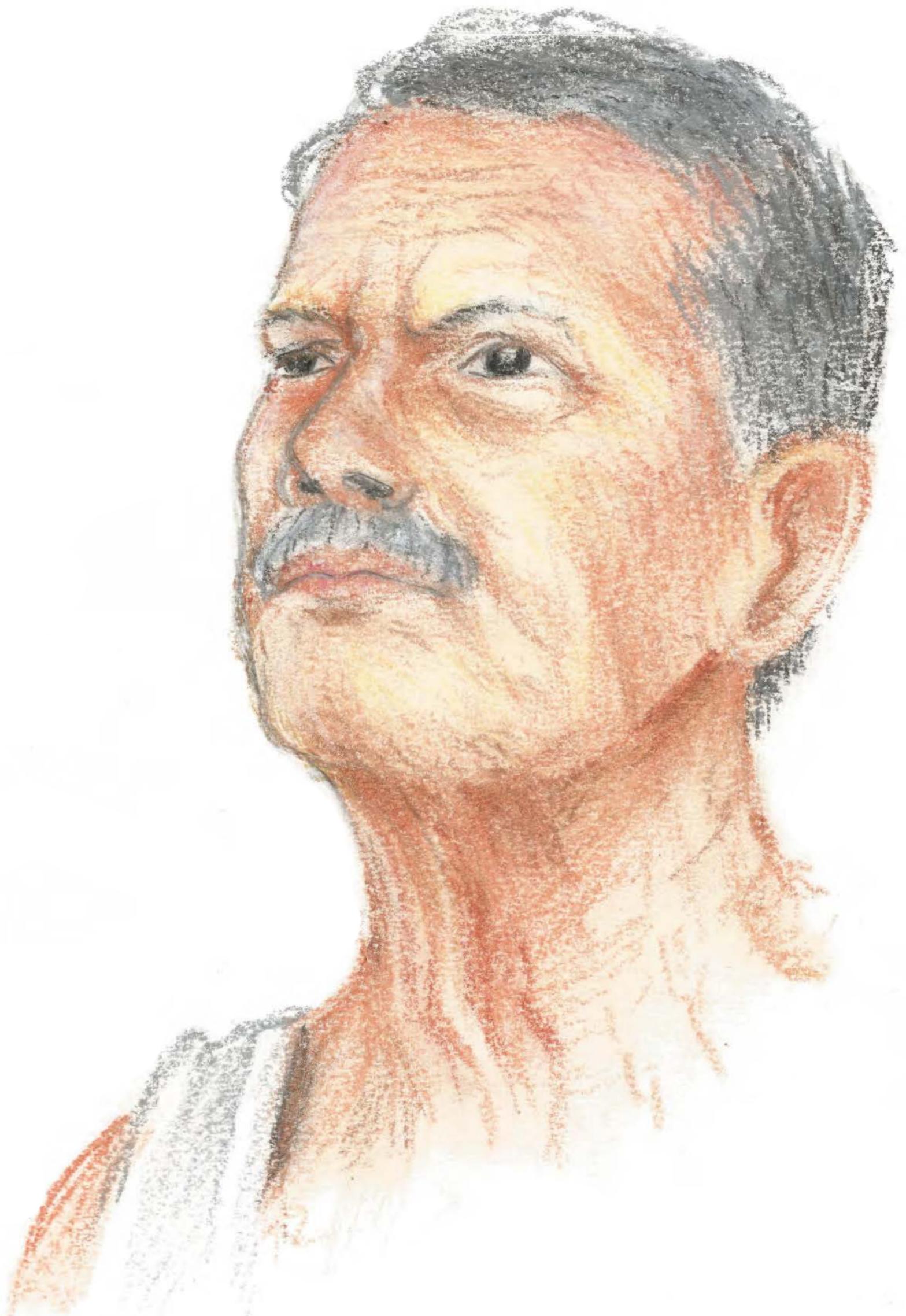
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FACE TO FACE



Adventures Of A Versatile Character

JANAKI P. | E5

IN AN AGE OBSESSED WITH SPECIALISATION, HABUL DA STRIVES FOR EVERYTHING

Abhijit. The name rolls off our tongue awkwardly, for the man who it belongs to is known to all of us as Habul da: Potter, runner, gymnast and much more. Modesty incarnate, he sat on a small stool, his unbuttoned shirt neatly hanging by a chair, as he said, "The first road race. Was that in '72?"

There was no sense of a lingering pride when he recounted to me the story of how he had won the first-ever road race in the Ashram. He stated the facts, laughed a little and said, "Well, I started quite slowly and most people were ahead of me, but then there was this one long, sandy patch where I overtook them all."

However miraculous this might seem to us, Habul da states that it was not that he was exceptional, but simply the fact that he was much more habituated to running on the sandy beach than the others. He recalls, with mildly embarrassed laughter, that he had been offered glucose powder on a parched throat and how it had almost choked him. Back in the day, there were no refreshments like lemon juice, ice or even water and as Habul da moved through a path that he knew only too well, he often had to stop and give directions to passers-by.

"There was something quite interesting that happened, which I came to know later," he smiled as he recalled his fellow runners Ashwin Barai and Howard, "Ashwin Barai was actually just behind me, and there was another American runner called Howard who was waiting to catch me."

Howard, unfortunately, zigzagging through the road fainted due to exhaustion near a bush. Ashwin Barai stopped to make sure he was fine and Habul da laughed as he said, "I hadn't realized any of this, so I continued running ahead. When I finished and they told me my timing, I felt like I could have run faster." There was

no regret in his voice as he stated the last sentence, "I don't regret not going fast, but if I had known my timing I would have finished it in under an hour."

Even though Habul da did run many road races after that, he did not run them with the same enthusiasm since he had to give up running because of his health. There was a poise with which he placed all the facts before me with no hint of regret or pride.

The conversation slowly took a different turn when I began asking him how his life had been when he was a young boy. He said, "Well, the Mother's presence was always there in the background, but we were all busy with school, group and our little responsibilities at home."

He recalled the lazy afternoons where one could hear the sound of the recorders from the school when Grant took classes, and those evenings when he would sneak into the dining room to steal mangoes when all the sadhaks had gone for meditation. As he recreated for me the Ashram of his childhood he laughed and added, "Stealing mangoes is also a skill. You have to know how to not get caught."

AS A TEACHER, HABUL DA STILL REMAINS VERY PATIENT AND UNDERSTANDING. HE WOULD HELP YOU JUST ENOUGH TO LET YOU FIGURE IT OUT ON YOUR OWN.

His eyes travelled around the room as he waited for my next question. The pottery had been started soon after he had finished school and despite his initial wishes to work in Auroville, he had found himself in this little, dusty workshop, whose walls are now lined with cupboards filled with pots and sculptures. As a teacher, Habul da still remains very patient and understanding. He would help you just enough to let you figure it out on your own. For the younger students, he would animatedly recount stories when they insisted and for the quiet older ones, he would let them work on their own until they needed him. From the countless stories that I have heard, I would assume that his forte still lies in ghost stories or funny old anecdotes. As a coach, he is strict and meticulous, and as other students would attempt advanced manoeuvres, Habul da would drill into us the very basics, repeating constantly to our disappointed faces that "This is what matters! Without this, you will never manage the more difficult things."

Now Habul da is our beloved pottery teacher, a coach in B group and a captain of D group. He

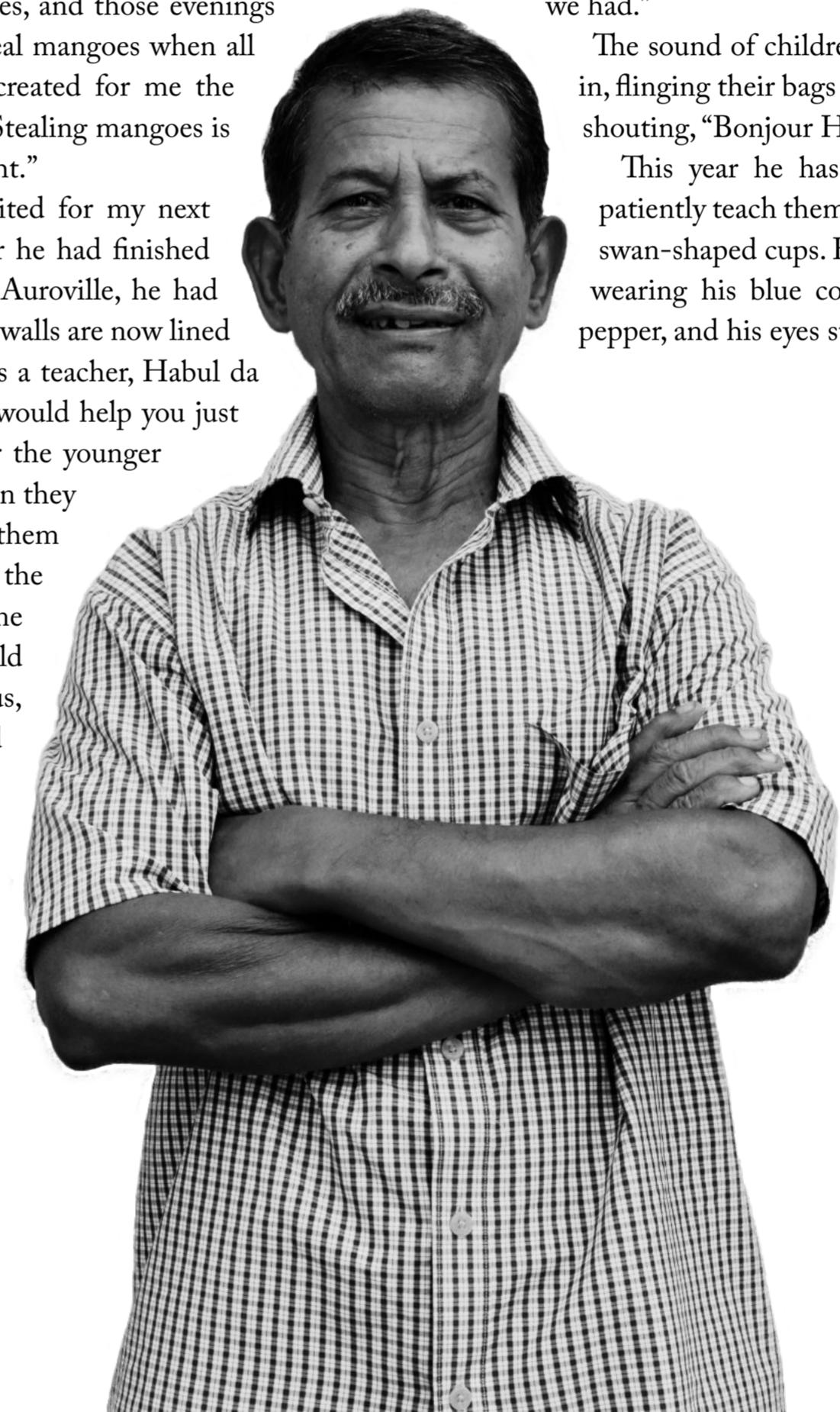
is an artist with many capacities and a perfectionist too. Whether it be painting, or sculpting or even simply hammering nails into wood to make another stool for the pottery, Habul da does it to perfection.

When the interview was about to come to an end, and we could hear the voices of children slowly chatting and walking down the steps that lead to the pottery, Habul da paused a moment and pensively said, "When I was younger, I used to think that having spiritual power made a person very strong and powerful, but I feel that the point is not to be a powerful man, but a better human."

Just as he does with clay, he hopes to mould himself and shape himself into a better person, "The point is not to have a lot of power, like Superman, but to see how much you can clean yourself and purify yourself. That was the work that we had."

The sound of children breaks the silence in the pottery as they rush in, flinging their bags aside, fighting for the stools beside the table and shouting, "Bonjour Habul da!"

This year he has a new batch of students again, and he will patiently teach them how to make the same old floating balls and the swan-shaped cups. Habul da gets up to take his position at the table wearing his blue coloured shorts, and a banian, his hair salt and pepper, and his eyes still gleaming. ■





Reflections On Education

VIKAS (BHAIYA) SHARES HIS VIEWS AND IDEAS ABOUT OUR UNIQUE SYSTEM OF EDUCATION, AND ITS FUTURE

What do you think are the main advantages of our system of education?

In our school, small group interactions make for a more personalized approach towards learning. Going deeper behind the physical fact of having a smaller number of students we need to ask ourselves what is the genesis and the inspiration behind our school? Is the difference from other schools merely the number of students per class? If not, what is it?

We must remember that Sri Aurobindo's vision first began to establish itself through our school and that the Mother spent so many years completely involved in the school, training, corresponding and guiding teachers through the various aspects of education. The biggest difference is the constant presence of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother.

Having limited students per class, the lack of an examination system and the freedom to choose one's subjects are but external manifestations of the principles of education laid down by Sri Aurobindo and the Mother.

What are the advantages of the free progress?

Before the students enter the free progress system, they are still developing their individual personalities and are influenced by their peer group but here they get an occasion to break out of the mould of past habits, conventions and their social environment and explore the true motivations behind why they do what they do and discover themselves and their true interests. They have the occasion to be driven by an intrinsic need for progress.

So it would be good if teachers could help students figure out how they would like to utilize that freedom according to their true svabhava, in the absence of external pressure. Some amount of guidance is initially needed for students to learn how to take advantage of the immense freedom they are given, though even not taking advantage is part of the learning process!

What are the drawbacks and challenges of our system of education?

A Change of Guard and the Task Before us

What I said for the students, applies to us teachers as well. We are given so much freedom, that a certain complacency tends to creep in the absence of teacher-evaluation and feedback. We have to look at ourselves in the mirror and create an environment where teachers are constantly seeking and learning.

In an environment of free progress how much can the teacher be an inspiring example of being a learner? How much do we introspect as teachers? Beyond just teaching subjects, how much are we able to apply the principles of integral education in our classes? In the way we run the school?

There has to be more thought behind the content and the manner of its dissemination. Teachers need to constantly ask themselves how our approach can better reflect the ideals of integral education.

Initially, we had a large number of teachers, guided and directly inspired by the Mother. The number of these full-time teachers, whose main role and priority was teaching in the Ashram, is gradually reducing. With them around it was a different kind of education.

Today, we are in a very interesting transition phase. Full-time teachers, coaches and captains are being replaced by a body of teachers who are mostly former students, bringing in a lot of freshness and energy in terms of course-content and delivery, but that is not enough.

They come with the attitude of "Oh I received so much from this school, what can I give back?"

While this attitude of duty or gratitude is wonderful, it is not enough. We teachers have to be practicing sadhaks and seekers on the path of Yoga. That is much more important than technical competence in a subject. The biggest challenge for us is to inspire in our teachers, the constant and conscious need to be aspirants on the path of self-perfection.

We don't want to segregate school life and life outside school. The whole of life should be part of our education and yoga. Teachers must connect their teaching to the principles of integral education. That kind of an orientation needs to be given to the process of teacher selection.

Mother has mentioned that our school is more for teachers than students. If we have a group of teachers who are inspired by the principles of integral

education and committed to putting them to practice, and are constantly trying to live the ideals of the Integral Yoga, it would make a great difference in the atmosphere. Our students will spontaneously reflect that.

How much are today's teachers reading what Mother and Sri Aurobindo have written on education? To what extent they are being able to practice that in their approach not just in class but in their everyday life?

That's where teachers have to re-align with the ideals of integral education and also be made aware of the developments in the subjects they are teaching. Teacher orientation and training is missing in our school.

On a practical level, replacing current teachers when they're unavailable because of their other responsibilities brings discontinuity in teaching.

What are the primary changes that you would want to bring to the school in the coming years?

Project-based Learning and Communication

The world is slowly shifting from a subject-based approach of education to a more project-based one. Because in doing projects, you develop multidisciplinary skills and begin to appreciate the interconnectedness of subjects and tackle practical problems.

Projects which have questions borne out of the student's curiosity, the environment or suggested by teachers, bring the inquisitive aspect and the joy of learning. The ability to research various books, magazines, online resources and to communicate in a clear manner the essence of what you have done in your project has to be practiced.

Study Skills, Coding and Storytelling

Communication and writing skills have to be honed. Languages are very spontaneously developed through the project itself. With the internet around, the role of a teacher is to guide and help students use the various online resources to acquire a broad picture of the subject and not be too narrowly focused in detail.

I also feel coding should become part of every student's study skills, because it brings in an algorithmic approach towards thinking which is very helpful for the development of the mind. We're surrounded by code and artificial intelligence, whether we like it or not.



We should institutionalize skills such as creating presentations, making graphic designs, animation, photography, documentation of projects, video-shooting and editing, which enhance the art of storytelling.

As technology becomes more and more accessible, we will see it coming into the way the content is actually disseminated. Students and teachers have to be helped to use technology as a tool instead of being enslaved by it, in order to enrich the student's engagement with the subject.

Technology will make access to worldly knowledge so easy, that students and teachers will spontaneously aspire for a deeper knowledge that requires introspection and a seeking for answers to fundamental questions. Thus subjects such as integral psychology and a study of wisdom texts of the world will spontaneously increase as these fields require a subjective approach to knowledge.

This is where a new approach to studying Sanskrit, in order to access the wisdom of the Gita, the Upanishads and the Vedas comes in. We have to connect with our past so that we can better appreciate our present and use it as a springboard towards the future.

Moving towards Free Progress and an Environment of Enquiry and Research

For students wanting to follow a structured approach towards learning, especially something like maths and science, there are beautifully written textbooks that they can use. Learning will have to be customized for different students. One cannot implement free system's approach to everybody but they should be made to try it out at least once.

Somewhere in the background, the students still see themselves as "art student" or "science student" and this affects the approach. We have to help our students analyze

their motivations to study, before we give them a blank timetable and freedom.

This is where teachers are essential. But to have that kind of mentorship we have to have teachers that are here all the time — they are either doing their own research or guiding their students through individual or small-group interactions. There should be places where teachers can do their own research, and students can come and ask the teacher for help and guidance.

Mental and Vital Education, the Development of Faculties and Psychic Education

Beyond study skills, we should also be looking at silencing the mind, rejecting unwanted thoughts in order to make it more receptive to inspiration from higher regions and work on the development of the faculties of concentration, imagination, deep listening and synthesizing different viewpoints.

From the perspective of vital education, we must help students become better listeners and have empathetic communication skills and open them to the possibility of changing and transforming their character by the application of an enlightened and dynamic will.

We have to also help students to acquire a healthy balance between individual and group work, while pursuing free progress. The students should be reminded that they are a part of the whole and must contribute to not just their individual progress but to the collective progress of the community. We have to help them widen themselves rather than looking at individual progress alone.

Finally, we have to create an environment that inspires both teachers and students to pursue psychic education in earnest, if we really want to implement Free Progress — "a progress guided by the soul and not subjected to habits, conventions or preconceived ideas". ■



A large cluster of overlapping squares in various shades of yellow and orange occupies the right side of the image, creating a textured, geometric pattern.

SOUP VERANDAH



Diya

SATYA S. | K1

The flames of the pyre soared into the evening sky; a moment of bright illumination shone from the cremation ground before the fire devoured the deceased to end the sacred ritual. As Prakash gazed into the pile of glowing red coal, his heart felt relieved and he chanted a prayer to bid the soul on its onward journey. He walked to his rusty rikshaw, his loyal commute, which moved by the force of his skinny legs. There weren't any fancy paintings that beautified it nor was there a well-padded seating spot. Simplicity was the way of life for him and his patched up white cotton shirt and dhoti demonstrated that.

As he moved down the narrow streets of Chandni-Chowk, he saw the colourful stalls that were sprawled over the footpaths bustling with a festive atmosphere. Diwali brought light and so did it bring crowds. The shops were filled with firecrackers and the air was infused with the smell of fresh *jalebis*. He heard the noises of *patakas* in the distance while in front of him families bargained with the shopkeepers to earn their best price. There was a complex order in the seemingly chaotic gullies. Engulfed in modern influence, the atmosphere in old Delhi was still enchanting with its powerful energy, hidden mysteries and ancient *havelis*.

Prakash stopped at a popular stall that had people pushing their way to the counter. His thin frame was easily moved around from one side to the other due to the crowd. He decided to wait for his moment. Usually he was patient but today Diya, his six-year-old daughter, would be waiting. Prakash's frustration was building. He thought to himself, "Why can't people form a line?" Then, he caught a glimpse of the shopkeeper and cried out, "Bahu ji, three *rotis* please!". Before he knew it there were three hot *rotis* topped with generous amounts of *ghee* in his hands.

As he headed away from the busy roads, a quietness filled his mind. All around him, instead of the lively faces celebrating with their families, he saw small shacks squeezed one against the other. Although, deep into the heart of the glamorous city there lay this gloomy reality that still existed. There were old women who stared at him, wearing clothes that just about covered them. A few naked children ran around and as they played; for a moment they forgot the sadness that surrounded their lives. It was the slums, a section of society that had no aspiration to live for: a voiceless, faceless community. And for Prakash this was his reality, he had been here since a small boy.

“Diya, I am home baccha” cried out Prakash as he walked into the hut. There were no rooms and a dull light flickered to illuminate a circular space. Diya was reading a comic book when she saw her father walk in, which quickly made her jump with glee. She was young but had eyes that understood all the minute details. Her long black hair reminded Prakash of his wife, who was now merely a memory of the past. There was silence in the shack as they ate the hot rotis. “Winter is settling in; you must keep yourself warm. I’ll try to get some wood before leaving tonight so that tomorrow we can have a fire.” explained Prakash as he took his last bite of the roti. Diya smiled, unaware of the dangers that winter brought. “Don’t worry, I have the privilege of being warm, thanks to you.” Diya exclaimed. He was puzzled by the comment as it had been a while since he had lit a fire during the winter nights. Wood had become a shortage and he couldn’t afford buying it from the market. He let it pass, put Diya to bed and left the house to start his job.

Death had been a recurring aspect of Prakash’s life. As he covered his face from the chilly wind, he remembered Radha’s tragic death. The birth of Diya brought new hope and meaning to his life but so did it end a beautiful

chapter. Diya survived but unfortunately Radha didn’t. He surrendered Radha to the Holy Fires, Agni, the link between the matter and spirit, the seen and unseen, the known and unknown: a messenger between men and gods. Prakash’s personal tragedy which was followed by the revelation about life beyond death had shaped his present vocation. He collected the bodies that lay in his neighbourhood, the ones that were alone in their last moments, their identities forgotten by time and offered them to the god Agni. He had finally realised the deeper significance of a cremation and felt as though it was his duty to liberate the deceased from this earthly world giving them a new life, to begin the cycle afresh.

Tonight, as he walked down his routine path, he found an old lady lying lifeless. With gentle movements he lifted her up and placed her on the rikshaw. The grim winter brought many deaths as people didn’t have enough clothing to protect them. As the cremations happened only at daytime, Prakash would keep the bodies in the shack overnight and complete the last ritual the next day. He gently lay the old woman on the shack floor, making sure to not disturb Diya’s sleep. Then he drank a sip of alcohol that spread warmth in him and headed out to collect the next body.

An hour passed when finally Prakash came back, this time with a lifeless middle aged man. As he bent down to put him beside the old woman he leaped back. Nestled next to the old woman, Diya slept soundly absorbing the last amount of warmth that the body let out. Prakash felt a pang in his stomach as the words echoed in his head, “I have the privilege of being warm, thanks to you.” He felt warm tears roll down his eyes and trickle down his face.

As a part of the city celebrated the festival of light, the other struggled to find warmth, thus was the stark reality of the capital of the largest democracy. ■



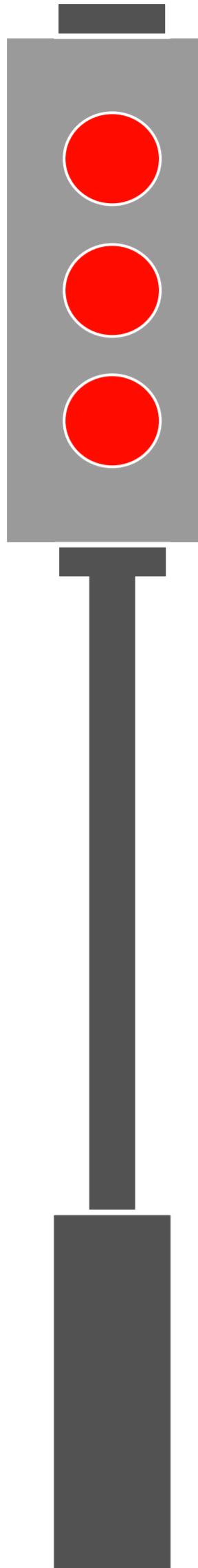
That Time Satan Helped An Old Lady Cross The Street

TANAY K. | K1

She was bent over like a candy cane, and had a small bob of curly grey hair that sat on her head like a cloud, and half-moon glasses that sat on her crooked nose. She was wearing a gown that went down to her ankles, with pink and purple flowers painted all over it, and had a dark blue woolen scarf around her neck to hide her wrinkled neck. Her cheeks dragged down her lips into a perpetual scowl. When she turned her head to look to her left, her shoulders turned with her. She held a cloth bag in her hand that showed the shapes of the round apples and oranges and cauliflower.

"I tell you, these people simply won't give you enough time to get across!" she muttered as she retreated from her third attempt to cross. "Allow me to help," He said, His head peering out of the manhole next to her that had seemed to appear out of nowhere. To the believers, he looked like a red giant with eyes of flame, seven feet tall with large red horns and the bottom half of a goat, fur red as its skin, and the manhole looked to them like a crack in the earth, with flames licking its surface. Others saw a goat headed man with wings. Conspiracy theorists saw Beyonce. But the old woman was an atheist, and being an atheist also meant being a-satanist. As above, so below. She saw a man, with a red construction helmet, a red vest and red boots and red rubber gloves smeared with- she did not want to know. Yet that form was truer than the others, for he took the form of Man more often than not. He would've been handsome if he washed, the woman thought. He had icy blue eyes and blonde hair like gold, and sculpted cheekbones that framed his face.

"Oh, how very kind of you young man."



"You flatter me," He said, pulling off his gloves and holding her hand, "I'm not all that young." He began to walk across the street. "Wait—" the old woman began to say, but she saw that the vehicles had stopped for them. The people in the vehicles looked at them with pale faces, with big round eyes. Dozens recorded the event holding their phones outside their car or bus windows, and one woman was on her knees weeping and wailing in song-like manner. The old woman beamed up at Him as they walked, her eyes glistening with tears of joy welling up in them. She assumed they were touched by the act of kindness. "Say, you're like a walking red light."

Satan let out a deep laugh, and she thought she felt the earth rumble beneath her. "That I am," he replied with a crooked smile. She was more right than she knew.

When they reached the other side of the road, the old lady thanked him with all her heart. "There are still good men," she said. "That is why I'm still here." Satan retorted.

They talked some more, and she invited Him for some tea, but He had he had to get back to His hole, but He promised to visit later. And He did. He always visited.

The world went mad with the sighting of the Devil. The videos the bystanders had uploaded to the internet spread, and newspapers and televised news began to cover the story. Satan Himself did an interview for "60 Minutes", speaking through tears about how He had been misunderstood for millennia and He was really just a victim of employee abuse. But His goal had not been to be seen as benevolent. People would eventually dismiss the man in the interview for a madman or a prankster. There had been a few car crashes when the vehicles had stopped, but that was too small a fruit for the Devil to walk on the earth for. In one of the buses that had stopped to let the old lady cross, had sat the next Messiah; not a prophet, but a modern saviour, a scientific genius. She was going to cure cancer, solve poverty and overpopulation, and end world hunger.

But first she would have had to see the old lady get hit by a truck, and she would've been the one to carry her to the nearest hospital. They would fail to save her, which would then inspire her to work towards her glorious destiny. But none of that happened, because the old lady never died. The girl went home and binge-watched a web series, eating from a bag of potato chips. She lived the rest of her life in that mediocrity, all the while having some faint notion that she was bound for great things, as we all do, but few attempt follow that notion anywhere if not by the forced hand of circumstance. As she grew older, that hope and belief grew into a vague disappointment that great things had never happened to her.

As she lay on her deathbed, dying of - you guessed it - cancer, Satan came to her. And just before she took her last breath, He showed her a vision of what she could have been.

He did not want to destroy the world. He thrives on the world. He only worked to destroy hope and belief - and potential. And the most evil thing he had ever done or would do...was help an old lady cross the street. ■



The Cloud Hunter

A NONSENSE POEM

VIBHU D. | E5

T'was under the Froocko tree he lay asleep
And dreamed did he as he slept so sound
Of the famed legend of the big grey sheep
That swam in the sea and never drowned.

Then he licked his teeth and opened his eyes,
Which grew bloodshot and became so wide,
And he held them there and didn't blink twice,
Till his big eyes had but shriveled and dried.

"O aren't mine eyes that pliffy too much?
For I see a cloud that scoffs at Murd,
Who always advised with a wailful touch:
"Perfection, my Jimbo, is just a word.""

"This cloud mitters me and I do confess
O its form is mimier than Frigool's nest
And I swear by the waters of Dalhomthess
That this cloud I'll catch and then will rest."

And so he swived the bluegrass of Jimha-no
As he ran barefoot and skuttered more
He climbed the peaks of Plunky Dore
And glued his eyes on the cloud he adored.

The black Pino river lay ahead
Where the gloomy frinters swam in their sleep
They fripled their red heads and cried a hymn
And cross he did them, with three short leaps.

He stopped under the nest of the Nimby crow
And briked his toes and ate the Bo tree
But when he saw the greying white dough
He started off on a moaning spree.

It was too late and he froppled now
The sky blinked green and the cloud now thawed
Its marbles came down, and as fate would allow
They met their twins on his cheek, O god!



The Tiger

JANAKI P. | E5

In the quiet evening, the sorrowful, mourning, silently weeping, sky bled,
Its hues seeping into mountains sleeping, one saw nothing but shades of red
Slowly faded the autumn light, another night in a whisper warned
But not a soul was in sight, unheard went that murmur of fright
Amid the wind's whistling, and the cricket's chirping,
Came the mighty tiger's roar: "I am here. Here once more."

Unheard went the worried, warning, whisper in the dark
A gust of breeze, through the tall trembling trees, sent a spark
The dull dry leaves rustled and a flame was born
Golden fire claimed the forest; the moon gazed, forlorn
The beast roared, but his desperate cry rose not above the flame:
"I am lost. Lost once more."

The fire burnt all it had sought, reminding the forest of its forgotten wrath
The night departed with the souls of the dead,
The sorrow of the myriads left unsaid.
But the tiger had escaped the mighty fire, his grave would not be amid the mire.
Once again the mighty roar was heard: "I shall return. Return once more."



La Dête

KRUTI S. | E6

Ce que le jour doit à la nuit
Pour que toute vie joue une symphonie,
C'est quelques gouttes de lumières gratuites;
Et l'humilité pure, infinie!

La transition de ces phases atmosphériques,
Est annoncée par des peintures féériques
Qui cachent le secret chimérique,
De ce que le jour doit à la nuit mystique...

Le jour est une opportunité grandiose,
La nuit — délicate comme un pétale de rose;
Le jour se déclare, charmant, il s'impose,
La nuit avec une révérence, se retire, se repose.

Le jour de vie et la nuit d'après,
Ne diffère pas trop du rite journalier,
Quand on vit, on craint la Nuit
Mais l'heure est sombre, avant que l'aube luit.

Ce que le jour doit à la nuit
Pour que toute vie joue une symphonie,
C'est une foi aveugle en ce qui nous conduit,
Et la gratitude pure, infinie!



THE GALLERIES

Overtaking Communication

AMIT V. | E6



Right after a sound sleep of 9 hours, at day break, I saw her gasping with a dim light at 1% and as I stared at her hopelessly, she died, cutting me off from all knowledge. I couldn't charge her because the charger was damaged. I guess it just meant one day of no Instagram, Gmail (I don't study nor work in open fields, so it was and is a redundant site), Facebook (I left that the day my mother pressed 'like' on one of my pictures), YouTube (I can spare one day of binge-watching a string of videos), Twitter (one day less of reading a thread of angry rants) and WhatsApp (I think I can talk to my friends face to face or a day).

First period

Friend - Where's your laptop, did you get it?

Me - Laptop...?

Friend - Well, it's fine.

9:30 am

Classmate - This time I sent the reminder for the Camera at 7:15. I hope five reminders were enough for you?

Friend - To my phone...?

Classmate - Out of charge..? Next time I will try your mother's phone.

11:30 pm

While I was striding towards the school gate, after surviving 4 periods.

Random student - Where are you running away ?

Me - Running away ?

Random student - I know you are hungry, but I am in need of an empathising friend to go through this practice.

Me - There is practice today ? When was this decided ?

4:58 pm

Just in time I reach annex gate, to find myself the only group member wearing studs. The next minute, I see my group mates cycling into sports ground with basketball shoes.

One of them yelling - "My bad, I should have told you about it in the morning"

They were followed by a leisurely cycling captain.

Captain (laughingly inquiring) - Ashram gayaa?



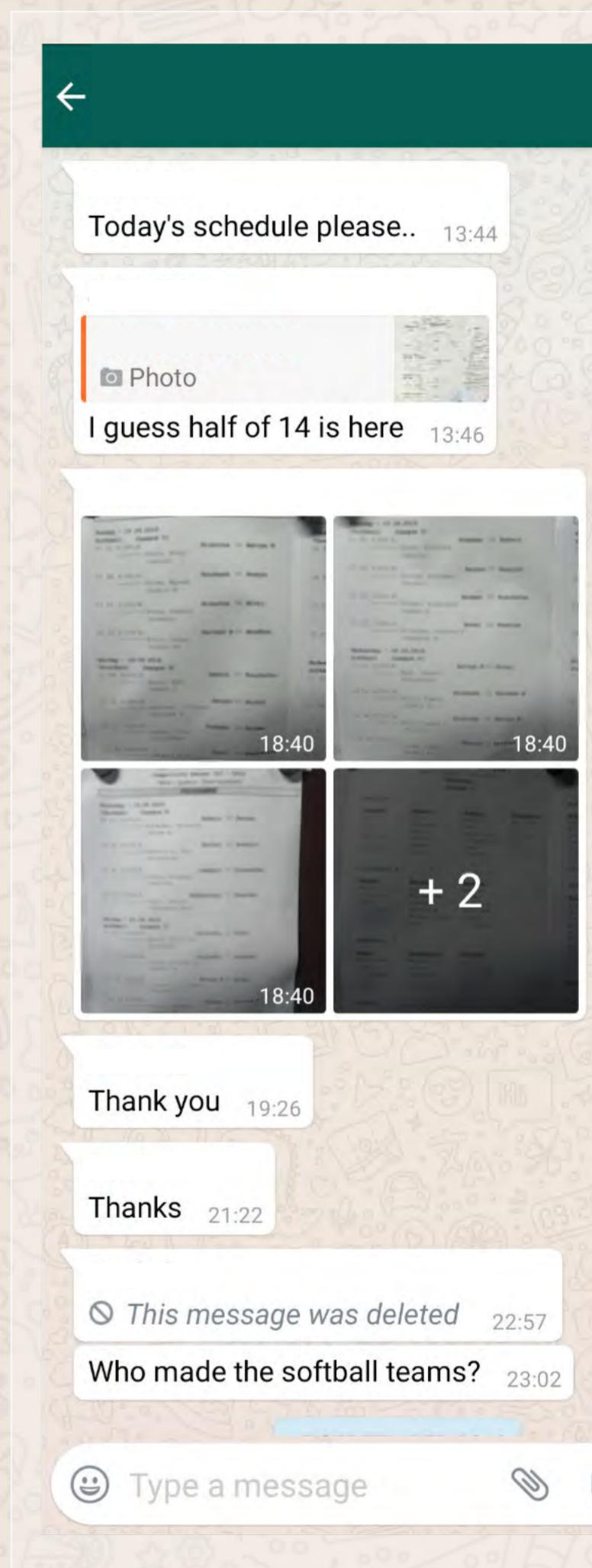
How was this boy so lost when Ashram has 5 notice boards, 3 of which are in school and one each in Knowledge and Ashram? One right beside the galleries, staring at you as you leave or enter school and another one staring at you as you enter Knowledge and yet we are lost at times. These notify us about events starting from Nettoyage, an outside speaker, programs and plays to medical check-up. For the most part they do their work excellently, still they fail to keep us updated on wide range of events that students would want to be notified on and this is where the secondary source of information from all notice boards notifies us about events out of their grasp : WhatsApp. Students from E4-K3, who add up to about 150 students use WhatsApp. You have notice boards peppered all around school staring at you as you go around school and as you are expected to visit the Ashram daily, you should be able to see all the competition schedules there. Still, we have incidents of people missing out on important notices because no one posted the information on their class or sports WhatsApp groups. However, WhatsApp is still a secondary source to these notice boards, but there are places where WhatsApp is the only notice board, most of them in events where teachers are not involved. There are four such striking examples. First of these is the set of messages posted by classmates, informing the marker that they will not be present at 7:40 or 1:45 most of the time without a reason mentioned.

The same set is also observed in D group:

The second one is for extracurricular activities organized by teachers, like

**HOWEVER, WHATSAPP IS
STILL A SECONDARY SOURCE
TO THESE NOTICE BOARDS,
BUT THERE ARE PLACES
WHERE WHATSAPP IS THE
ONLY NOTICE BOARD...**

dance programs, music concerts and play practices with flexible timings, where when more than half the participants don't turn up, the meetings are pointless. Here, teachers and students are forced to call each student personally if there is a change in their practice schedule or hope that everyone has WhatsApp and can give the reassuring blue tick before the cancelled practice time. Often this lack of WhatsApp accessibility for the teacher has left him/her at the mercy of secondary sources like participants who are attending the practices to tell the him/her that a student won't make it. In the case of students lacking WhatsApp accessibility, they are, at times left to pointlessly come to their practicing area only to find that the practice for the day has been cancelled and that the rest of the participants forgot to inform them.

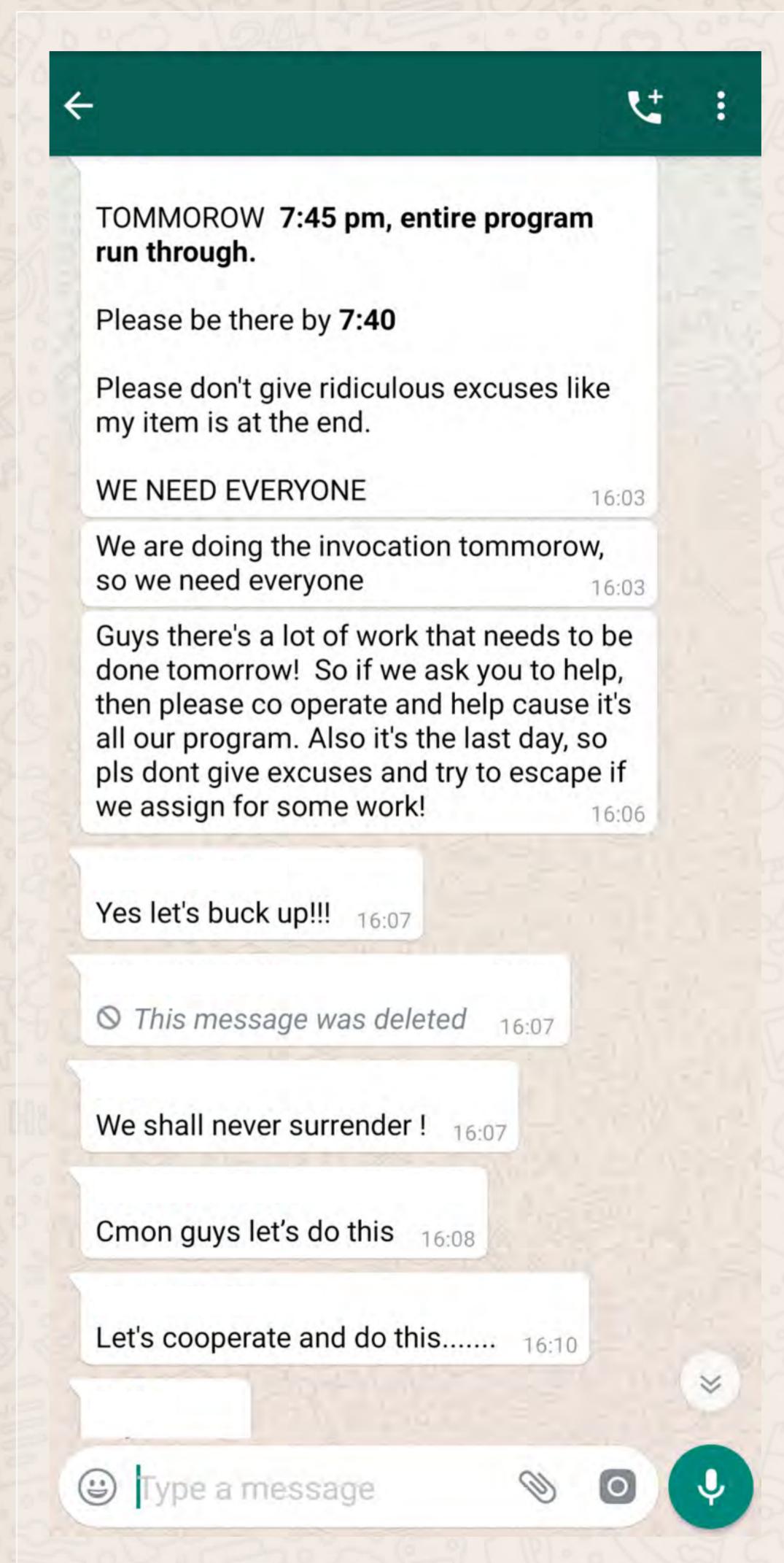


Lastly for student driven activities, WhatsApp becomes inevitable, because for these activities, nothing can be really certain like whether there is a need to meet or to find out the common free time. Especially finding out each student's availability becomes a hassle even if 3-4 students need to be called personally. For example in the E6 program or the K program, the only possible ways are either word of mouth or WhatsApp, there is practically no option of putting up notices. Notice boards are unlikely to be used because the practice schedules need to be much more fluid than the schedules of games competition. In the case of Knowledge, passing information by word of mouth can be tough because the person calling for practice or meeting may not even find the student in Knowledge.

In all this, the predecessor of WhatsApp which dominated this domain of notifications, Gmail, seems to have lost steam. It is still in use when lengthy messages are to be sent by teachers, but when it comes to informing people about schedule timings, and finding their availability, WhatsApp easily outpaces Gmail. It can show whether a person has checked the message and also its feature of sending a notification "ting" on our mobiles acts as a reminder. It is true that Gmail can be set to have the "ting" but this is possible only on mobiles which are more convenient with WhatsApp anyway. Another feature of WhatsApp is the group chats which Gmail or other apps haven't got a hang of yet.

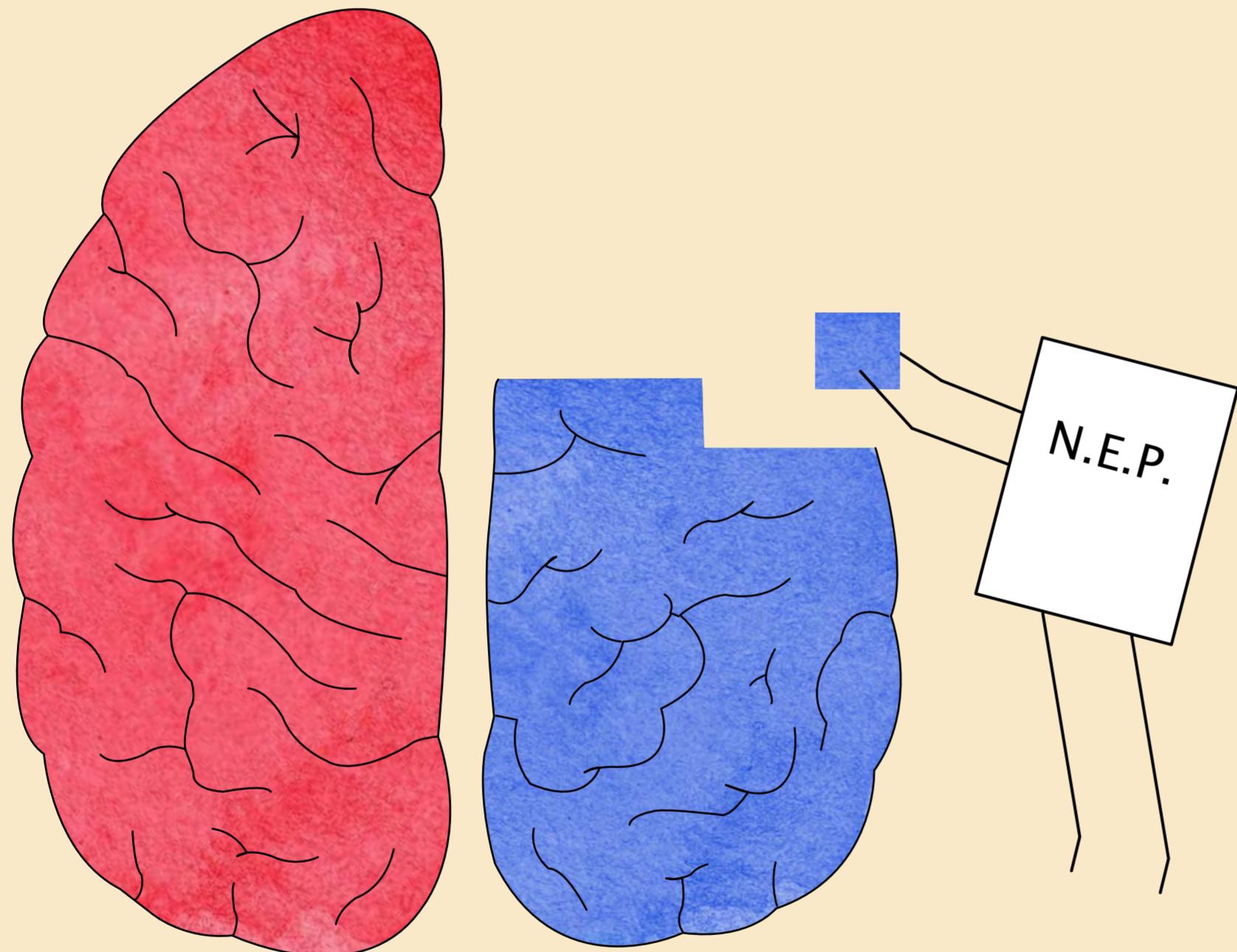
The fact yet remains that WhatsApp with its growing importance, hasn't yet touched the essential notices, but is slowly overshadowing these wooden boards. Its growing importance is likely to push more and more students to either be in our characters's place or just join its ranks. Even

if the notice boards are useful to Ashramites, people are likely to tap the WhatsApp icon to stay in touch with all important notices. People are becoming dependant on WhatsApp as much as our character.■



National Education Policy And Ourselves

CHIRAG S. | K2



THE N.E.P. HAS RELEASED A RATHER EYE OPENING PLAN, WHICH SHOULDN'T GO UNNOTICED

Aurobindonians must be rejoicing at the direction proposed by the Draft National Education Policy 2019 (N.E.P.). More than a hundred years after Sri Aurobindo wrote an illuminating series of essays on the subject — later compiled under the titled A System of National Education, and which forms, along with The Mother's writings on education, the basis and guiding principles of our own system — India's policy document echoes him. Certainly, there are differences, some even fundamental — the goal of the N.E.P. is to make India a global superpower, while in the Ashram we are supposed to be preparing ourselves for the next stage of evolution — but the similarities are striking and important for the future of our country. And for ourselves.

The document's philosophy may be summarised as "An integrated yet flexible approach to education" (page 28); integrated as in holistic — which is understood as intellectual, artistic, practical and moral — and flexible as in "discovery-based" learning (pages 28, 47, 49, 74, etc.) as opposed to rote memorisation that vitiates India's schools.

The system the N.E.P. proposes for the kindergarten closely resembles our *jardin d'enfants*. The emphasis is on helping the child develop all her fundamental faculties, through sensory and expressive development by conversation, drama, music, art, and physical education.

The fundamental shift away from book learning is crucial — and long-overdue — as "Over 85% of cumulative brain development occurs prior to the age of six" (page 47): the current system is actually detrimental, as is obvious from the sheer terror associated with what must be the most vibrant period of life, and also from The Mother terming such education "*bourrage de crâne*" (*L'éducation mentale, Éducation*). The policy justifies this: "It is only at about the age of 8 that children adapt to more prescribed learning." (page 47), which is exactly Sri Aurobindo's view: "A child of seven or eight, and that is the earliest permissible age for the commencement of any regular kind of study..." (*Simultaneous and Successive Teaching, A National System of Education*).

ASSUREDLY, THE SAICE IS A HEAVEN — MOST OF US WILL ALWAYS CALL IT HOME. THE GREATEST SUCCESSES OF OUR EDUCATION IS THE LOVE FOR LEARNING THAT IS AWAKENED IN THE STUDENT...

This liberal approach is carried over to Primary School, and that is when the student will learn to read, to write, and basic mathematics, just like in Avenir and Progrès, while allowing and encouraging him to grow through what even we here foolishly call extra-curricular activities. The objective is to build “Foundational Literacy and Numeracy” (chapter 2, pages 55 - 64); one of the hallmarks of our own system is the strong base that every student is helped to build.

The n.e.p.’s system for the next stage, which roughly corresponds to the EAVP years, would almost make it indistinguishable from ours. The plan is to “Empower students through flexibility in ‘course choices’” (page 78), exactly like our Libre Progrès. This necessitates a fundamental shift in the approach to education: recognising that there must be “No hard separation of content in terms of curricular, extra-curricular, or co-curricular areas” (page 78), because every student’s journey of growth is hewn by him and for him, and that is precisely the purpose of education — growth. We, teachers, parents, students, of the Ashram must remember this in all our actions. Speaking about teachers, the n.e.p. also recognises their individuality and need for growth, promising and encouraging flexible curricula “so that they may teach in a manner that is best suited to their own desired teaching styles and to the needs of the students” (page 101). The personal growth of our teachers and captains is not only the purpose of their life, but also essential to the development of their pupils. A teacher who has stopped growing can be easily made out by the students, and one who does, even in old age, is appreciated immensely for investing their energies in the class; he or she is far more likely to awaken their interest and command their respect.

This is as far as my reading of the n.e.p. goes. But the purpose of a summary of this policy document is, as you have surely gathered, what we can learn from “the outside world”, as it catches up.

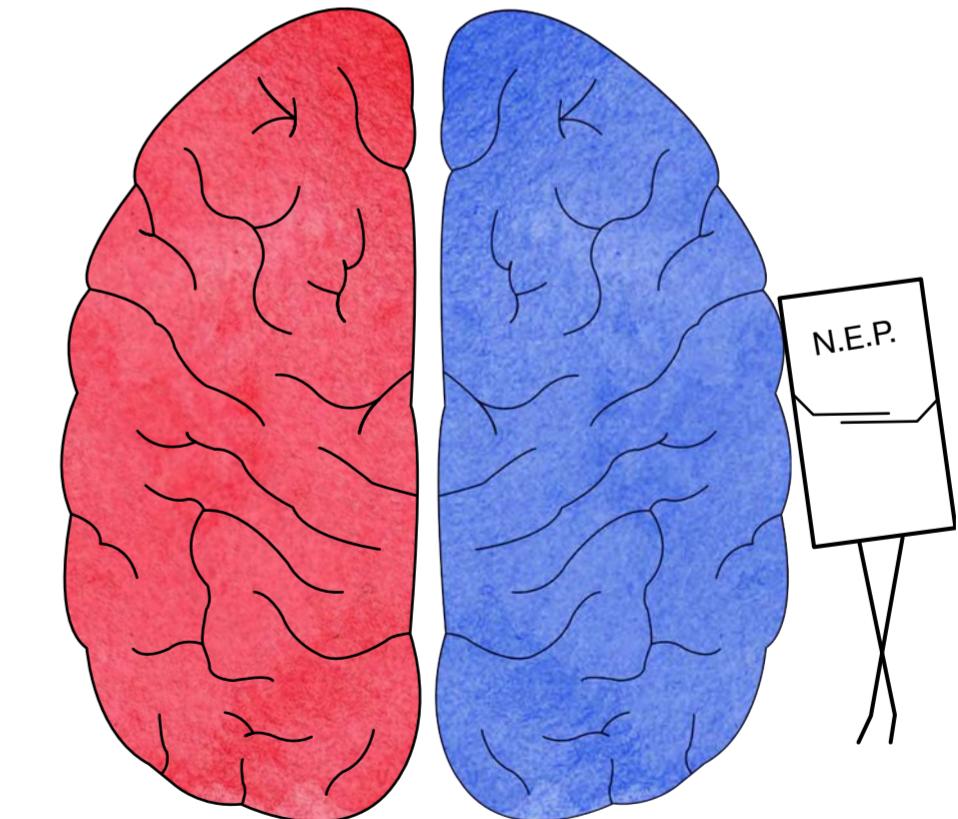
Imitation is certainly the best form of flattery, as proved by your puffed up chests from reading that India’s National Education Policy copies what you have been doing for the past 75 years. My intention was strictly the opposite, precisely because the policy makers arrived at these conclusions independently and not through imitation.

Assuredly, the SAICE is a heaven — most of us will always call it home. The greatest successes of our education is the love for learning that is awakened in the student—“the most precious gift that one can give to a child”, says The Mother (Mental Education, On Education) — which anyone can verify for themselves by interacting with, especially, the young ones of our school, and the solid foundation we are given which stands us in good stead for all the years to come. But, how much more remains to be sought! Shall we be satisfied by this much?

We mustn’t be. We must question everything, that is after all the characteristic of our time, but be patient and true in our search for answers. For those who feel our system inferior to the outside world, the n.e.p. will serve as its vindication and a stark reminder of its deeper purpose; for those who hark back to a golden past and an abysmal present, the n.e.p. will hopefully jolt them out of their pessimism to ensure they remain ahead of the world as the SAICE, in their eyes, once was; to those who are looking to revivify this place — and yes, too many aspects of the School have stagnated “and stagnation is death” — the n.e.p. will be the inspiration for them to continue on their quest; but above all, this is for those who float along, allowing a reading of the n.e.p. would be the perfect opportunity to awake, arise, and understand what this place stands for.

The latter are our greatest hope in manifesting Their ideals.

Our strength lies in being ourselves. ■





A Trip To ISRO

ANIRUDDHA P. & JEYASURIYA M. | E6

A COUPLE OF E6 STUDENTS RECOUNT THEIR EXPERIENCE AT THE SATISH DHAWAN SPACE CENTRE

Many wish to visit the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO), for us it became an exciting reality!

Going for a field trip is an annual tradition for E.A.V.P - 6. This year, we took a huge chance and wrote to ISRO telling them about our eagerness to visit the Satish Dhawan Space Center (SDSC). To our surprise, our appeal was accepted! It was all so sudden that we barely had any time to read up about the institution and its various achievements so that we would be better prepared to use our trip for learning new things. The night prior to our departure, we were so excited that we did not get adequate sleep – it was just too exciting. Imagine actually standing at the launch site!

ISRO was established under the aegis of Department of Space (DOS) with its stated Vision to:

“Harness space technology for national development, while pursuing space science research and planetary exploration.”

ISRO's main aim is the peaceful harnessing of space and related technologies to improve the lives of the citizens via its INSAT programme for telecommunications, TV and the IRS remote sensing satellite programme to aid in better managing natural resources of the country and to provide environmental monitoring capabilities. It also aims to make India a self-reliant nation in the design and development of launch vehicles, satellites, and other ground technologies. It also seeks to pursue space research and planetary exploration.

The journey to ISRO's Sriharikota High Altitude Range (SHAR) was very tiring but as we got closer to our destination the ever increasing exhilaration warded off much of fatigue. It was a euphoric experience to be standing in the Mission



Control Center (MCC) right beside the Launch Director's chair and then walking to the launch pad looking up at the massive towers learning about the process of bringing the rockets from the silos to the site. Never had we imagined this being possible for us. The precision required during the entire process, the tracking and analysing the huge amounts of data coming in and relaying it in a timely manner with minimal transmission losses was more than we could easily comprehend. The scientists at ISRO really do "bend it like Beckham"! It was stunning to witness the destruction caused by the recent launch that had burnt the paint off the launch pad, damaged trees around and even destroyed a reinforced glass panel at one of the locations. The super massive dugouts which handle the millions of litres of water that comes gushing in to cool the site

was something to behold. Looking up, it was scary how the engineers were coolly climbing up the monumental machines preparing for its maintenance.

After the launch of Chandrayaan 2, the control was shifted to Bangalore, leaving the MCC in Sriharikota free for viewing. You won't believe us when we say, what a wonderful place it was - huge screens, the room filled with computers and behind the last row of computers was a little gallery encased by a glass wall, for V.I.P.s to witness the mission while the scientists lead it to success. We also visited the ISRO Telemetry, Tracking and Command Network (ISTRAC) and the Museum; but for us, the most memorable sites were the and the launch pad which blasted-off the Chandrayaan 2

rocket - The GSLV Mk-III, also nicknamed the Bahubali of India - into space.

Our trip was an unforgettable one. We are indeed very proud of all at ISRO for their continuous efforts and never-say-die attitude. There is so much to learn even from an all too brief visit! ■



Breakfast Takeaway

PRIYANKA B. | EX STUDENT

AN ACCOUNT OF WHAT GOES ON BEHIND THE DELIVERY SYSTEM OF DINING ROOM

It was not until my final year that I learned to organise the minutes, occasionally stretching into the hours, between waking up and heading to Knowledge. Thankfully, morning discipline has only seen improvement ever since I was bestowed the responsibility of collecting Dining Room breakfast for my grandparents.

The Dining Room provides a space for the peaceful partaking of meals while harbouring a warm sense of the collective. However, some prefer to carry their meals to their homes or workplaces for logistical reasons. The takeaway circuit has at least one and up to three stops. This last typically includes the Guest House, the vegetable room at the corner of the Dining Room courtyard, and the serving counter inside the Dining Room, in flexible order.

The annexed Guest House is reserved for the distribution of eggs, an arguably vegetarian source of protein, should those who disagree choose to argue. Egg collection involves handing over a little drawstring bag—preferably preceded by a soft ‘jhatka’ to smoothen out any potential creases—which is then placed atop a tidy pile of similarly coloured drawstring bags, and receiving in exchange an identical-looking bag with the allotted number of eggs. The bags are colour-coded according to number starting with three (pale green), four (red), five (cream), and pink (six); the single egg allotted to the single sadhak is delicately placed in the palm of a single hand.

Vegetables are distributed twice a week, on Thursdays and Sundays, rather logically at the Vegetable Room. Each household corresponds to a number. This number is neatly embroidered onto a characteristic Prosperity cloth bag along with the name of the primary holder. The number is marked on one of the orderly trays reserved for empty bags, as well as under the designated slot on shelves for

THE OCCASIONAL DISTRIBUTION OF SEASONAL FRUITS AND
VEGETABLES SENT IN ABUNDANCE FROM THE FERTILE ASHRAM
F FARMS ALSO TAKES PLACE HERE.

filled bags. The empty bag is to be deposited into the tray, the full bag collected from the shelf. The process is repeated the following time with the two bags respectively serving converse functions. The occasional distribution of seasonal fruits and vegetables sent in abundance from the fertile Ashram farms also takes place here. One typically observes cues of eager recipients extending into the courtyard on these days.

Finally, the most essential part of the circuit is the serving counter where one is graced with *dahlia/khichudi*/special bread, slices and bananas, and milk/curd. This last can be doled out in ladles of four sizes and corresponding portions, so that any number up to eight can be achieved with a combination of two or less servings. The portions are generous, and ensure that all sadhaks are equipped with athlete-level calories for the day's numerous tasks.

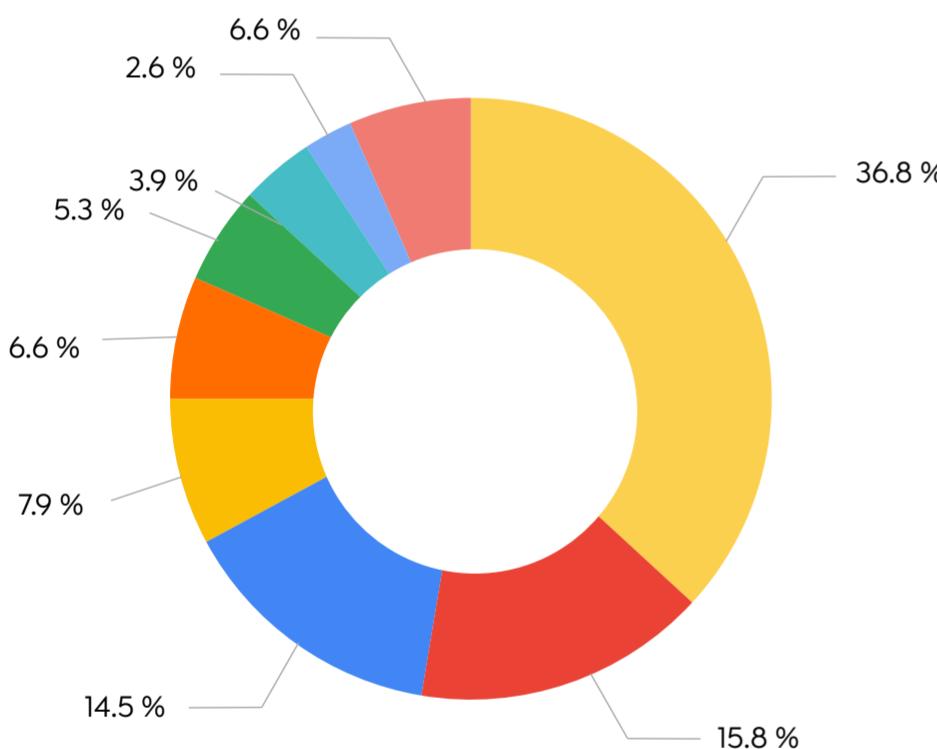
With minimum investment, the Dining Room takeaway system runs with near-divine efficiency. In an age obsessed with communication, it requires none. In a generation afforded with impatience, it is completed in less time than it takes to describe ■



Who We Are & What We Eat

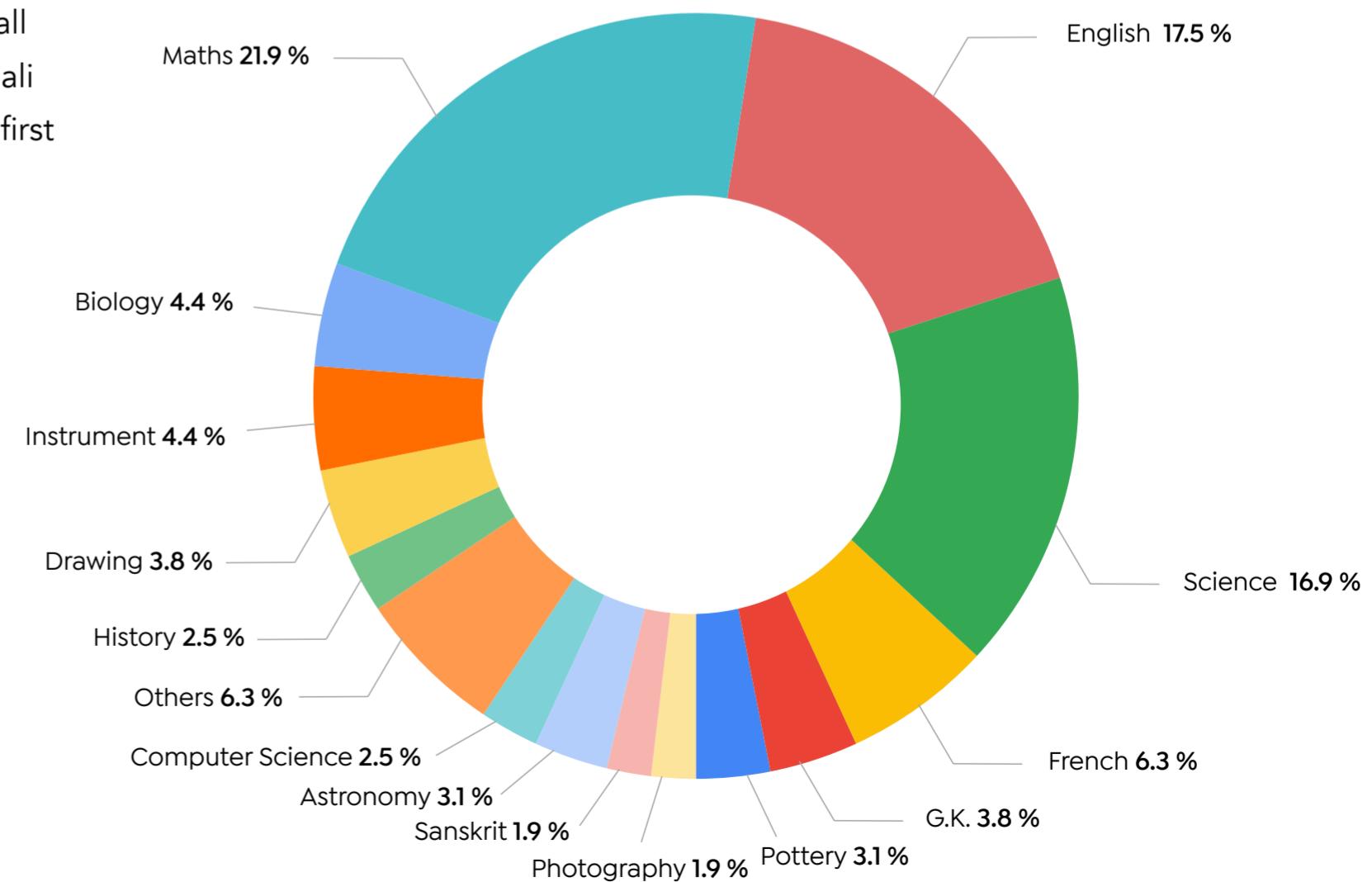
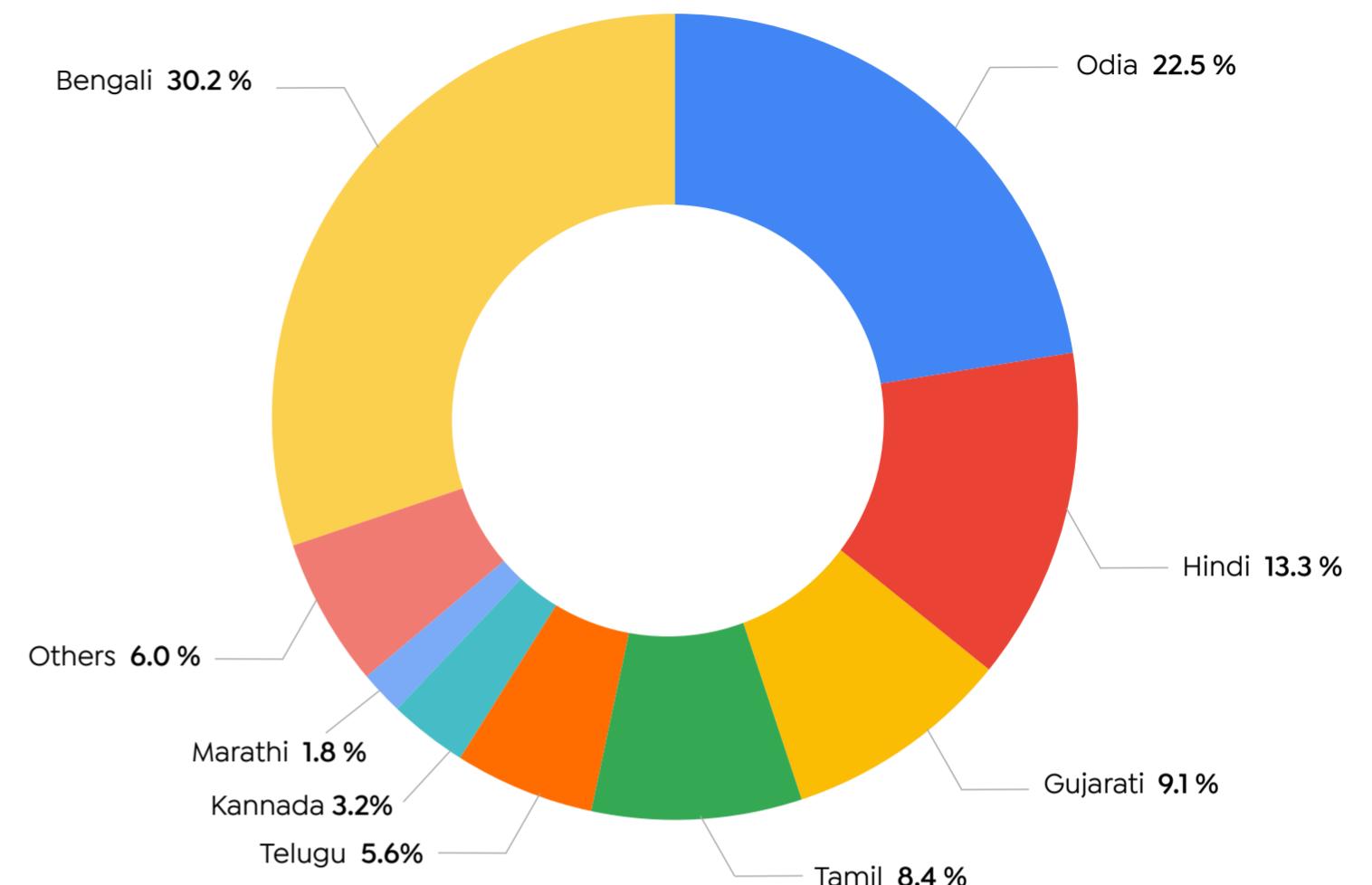
VIBHU D. & NARENDRAN K. | E5

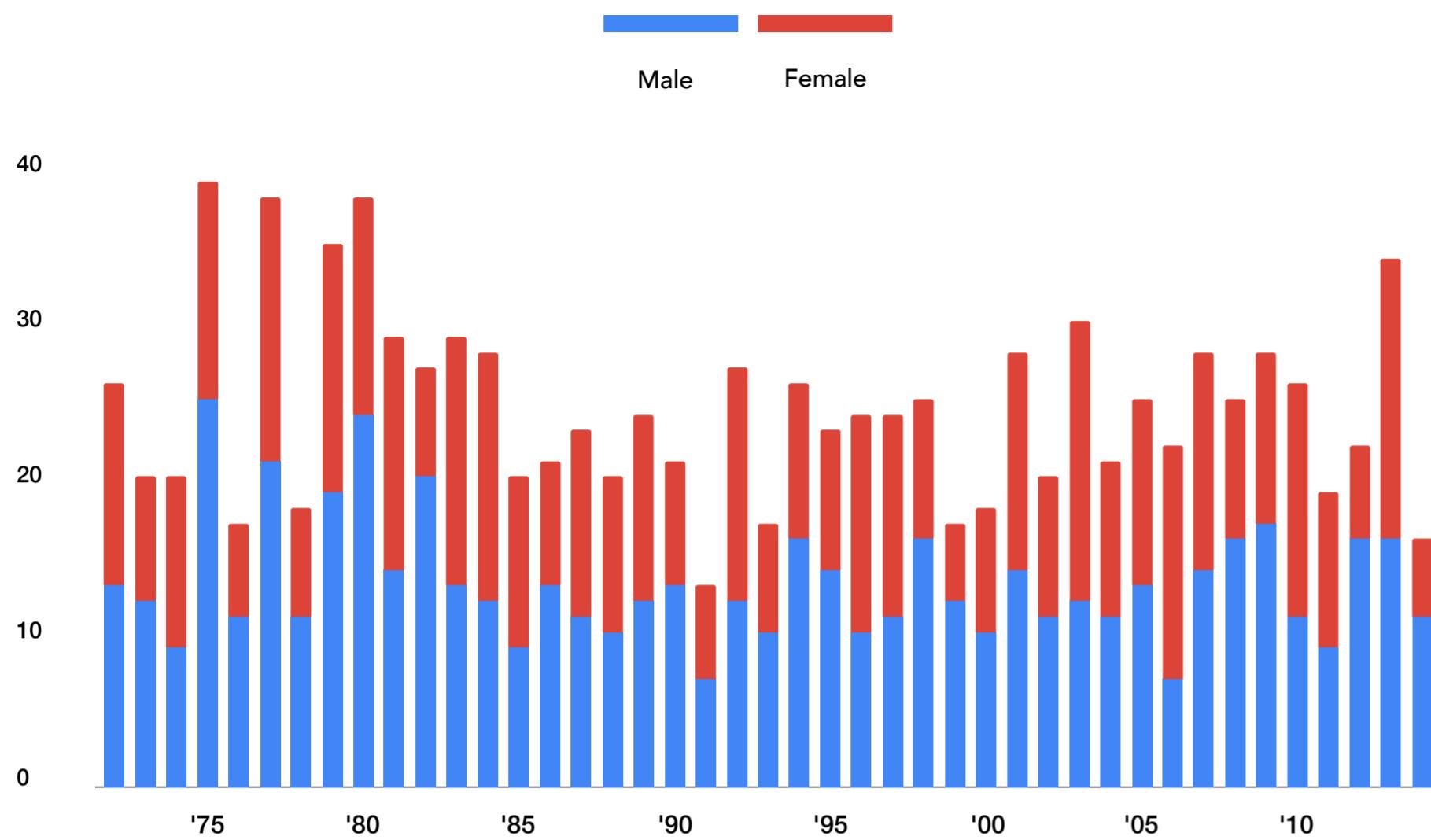
After surveying 267 students, ranging all the way from P1 to K3, these are the results that we have ended up with. On the right, we have the linguistic distribution of students showing our diversity. Another interesting observation is that about 1 in every 2 students speak either Bengali or Odia at home. The 'others' section includes English, French, Japanese, Italian, and Tibetan.



On the left, we have the linguistic distribution of students in Knowledge. Again, the Bengali and Odia speakers account for a little more than 50% of all students, but the percentage of Bengali speakers is larger than the one in the first chart.

We asked 160 students of school, ranging from classes P1 to E6, what their favourite subject was. Clearly, the trio of Maths, Science and English come up on top, with Maths being the favourite subject. The 'others' section consists of Singing, Dancing, Tech lab, and Eco Lake work. Another interesting observation is that G.K., which is taught only in the classes of P1 and P2, still shows up as the 6th most popular subject. Clearly, it is a favourite among the young children.





We looked into the list of all K3 batches ranging from the year 1972 to 2014, and found the class' strengths and the gender distribution throughout the years. Of all the 1051 students, 54% were males and the other 46% were females. And it's clear that there is no particular trend in the class' strengths.

$$13 \times 3 = 39$$

Smallest class (Class of 1991)

Biggest class (Class of 1975)

Ashram Bakery in Numbers

700

is the number of bread loaves baked in bakery every day. On average, it makes around 128 tons of bread every year, which is the mass of an average blue whale.

4000

is the average number of Christmas cakes baked every year, whose combined mass is around 300 kg.

31

If bread loaves were used as bricks, we would be able to annually construct 31 houses of 1200 sq.ft. each.

200

is the number of bread loaves wasted every year, which are then shredded and given to cattle.

1870

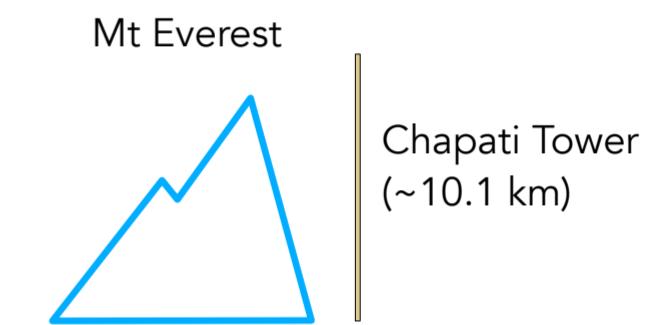
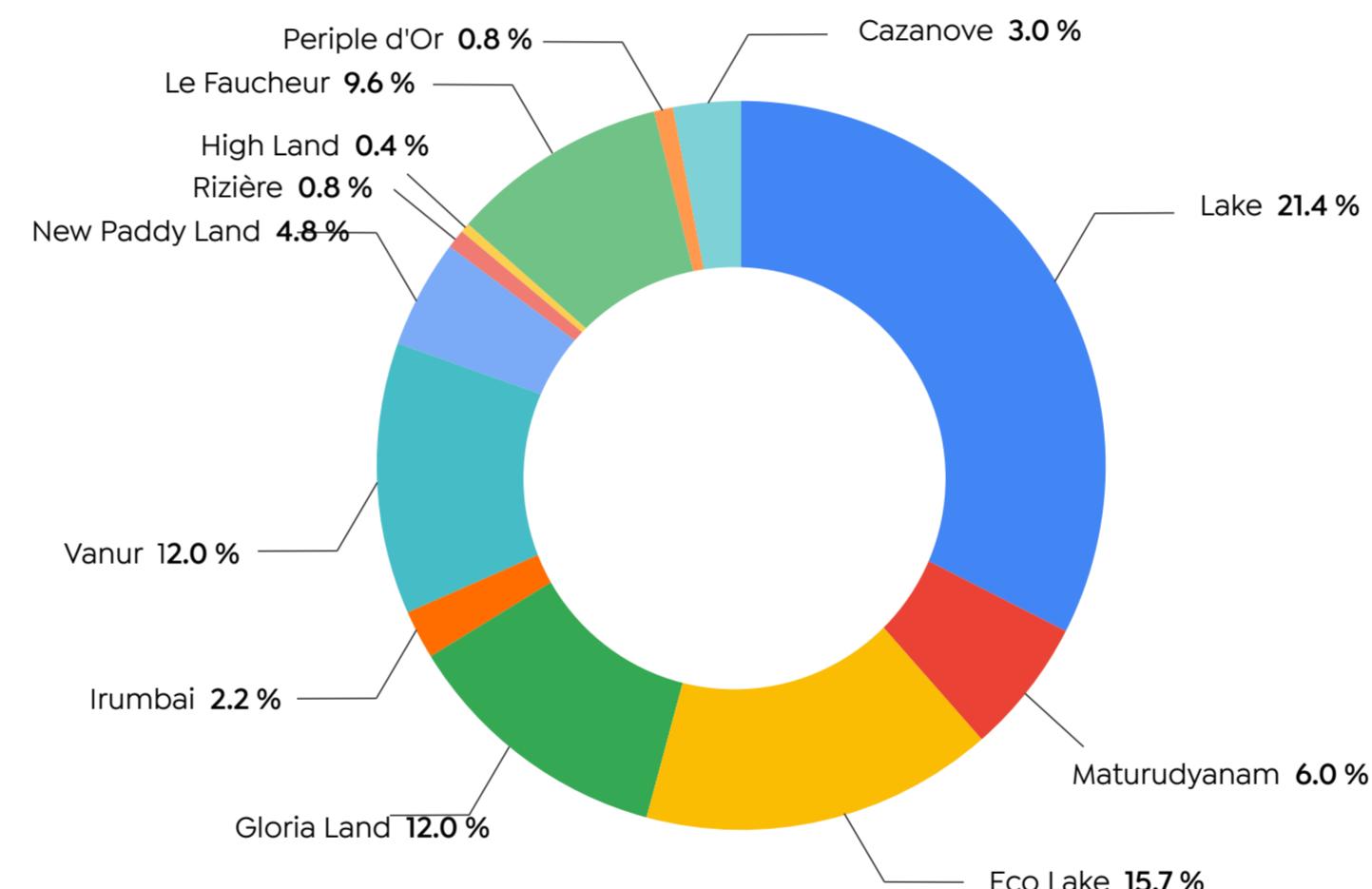
is the maximum number of bread loaves baked per day, which is done on busy Darshan days such as 15th August and 21st February.

Ashram Agriculture In Numbers

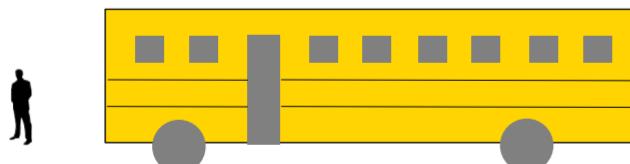


Ashram lands produce around 112 tons of bananas every year, which is enough to cater to about a third of Iraq's consumption.

Around 102 tonnes of wheat are consumed every year in Ashram. If we make chapatis out of all that wheat and stack them on top of each other, we will have a tower around 1.15 times taller than Mt. Everest.



The pie chart above shows the distribution of Ashram Lands.



Ashram lands produce about 550,000 litres of milk every year, and if we make paneer out of that, we will end up with a giant paneer block the size of our big bus.



75 tonnes of rice are produced annually in the Ashram. The length of all the rice is approximately equal to the perimeter of India.

The background of the image is composed of numerous overlapping squares of varying sizes and shades of purple, creating a textured, abstract pattern.

BUCKET LIST

Bridges to Cross

Eshima Ohashi Bridge

Location: Matsue and Sakaiminato, Japan

The Eshima Ohashi Bridge joins the cities of Matsue and Sakaiminato. The 1.6 km long bridge's incline makes for an anxious ride. Its rollercoaster appearance is due to the 6.1 gradient on one side and 5.1 on the other. The design is unique to accommodate the ships that pass underneath.





Suspension Glass Bridge

Location: Shiniuzhai National Geological Park, China

This glass bridge stretches 430 metres between two mountains. Visitors can see the 300 metre drop through the bridge's glass floor, making it a must-visit attraction. After its opening, the bridge had to be temporarily closed because it was handling 10 times as many as the allotted 8,000 visitors per day.

The Vine Bridge Of Iya Valley

Location: Iya Valley, Japan

The vine bridges of the Iya Valley, built 900 years ago were constructed of slats of wood placed ten inches apart and held together with two wisteria vines. They've been reinforced with more vines and side rails, but those afraid of heights won't enjoy looking at the 14 metre drop between the wide cracks.



Langkawi Sky Bridge

Location: Langkawi, Malaysia

The Langkawi Sky Bridge stretching 125 metres on Mount Mat Cincang in Malaysia is suspended from just one tall, tower-like structure. It gives a 360-degree views of the Langkawi islands and sections of glass on the bridge give the onlooker a spectacular view straight down to the ground, 100 metres below.

Nanpu Bridge

Location: Shanghai, China

We're billing this as one of the coolest bridges ever thanks to the dizzying Inner Ring Road which gives motorists a circular thrill ride that zips them from Central Shanghai to the Pudong District across the Huangpu River. The bridge is a sight to behold at night and equally impressive is its sister bridge the Yangpu, which at 8,354 metres is one of the longest cable-stayed bridges on earth.





Golden Bridge

Location: Da Nang, Vietnam

This bridge isn't necessarily scary, but definitely worth a mention. Vietnam's Golden Bridge juts out of the Thien Thai Garden in the Ba Na Hills and is held up by a pair of giant hands. It sits 1,400 metres above sea level and is 150 metres long. The hands have been purposefully aged to look as though they've been there for centuries, even though they were constructed in 2018.





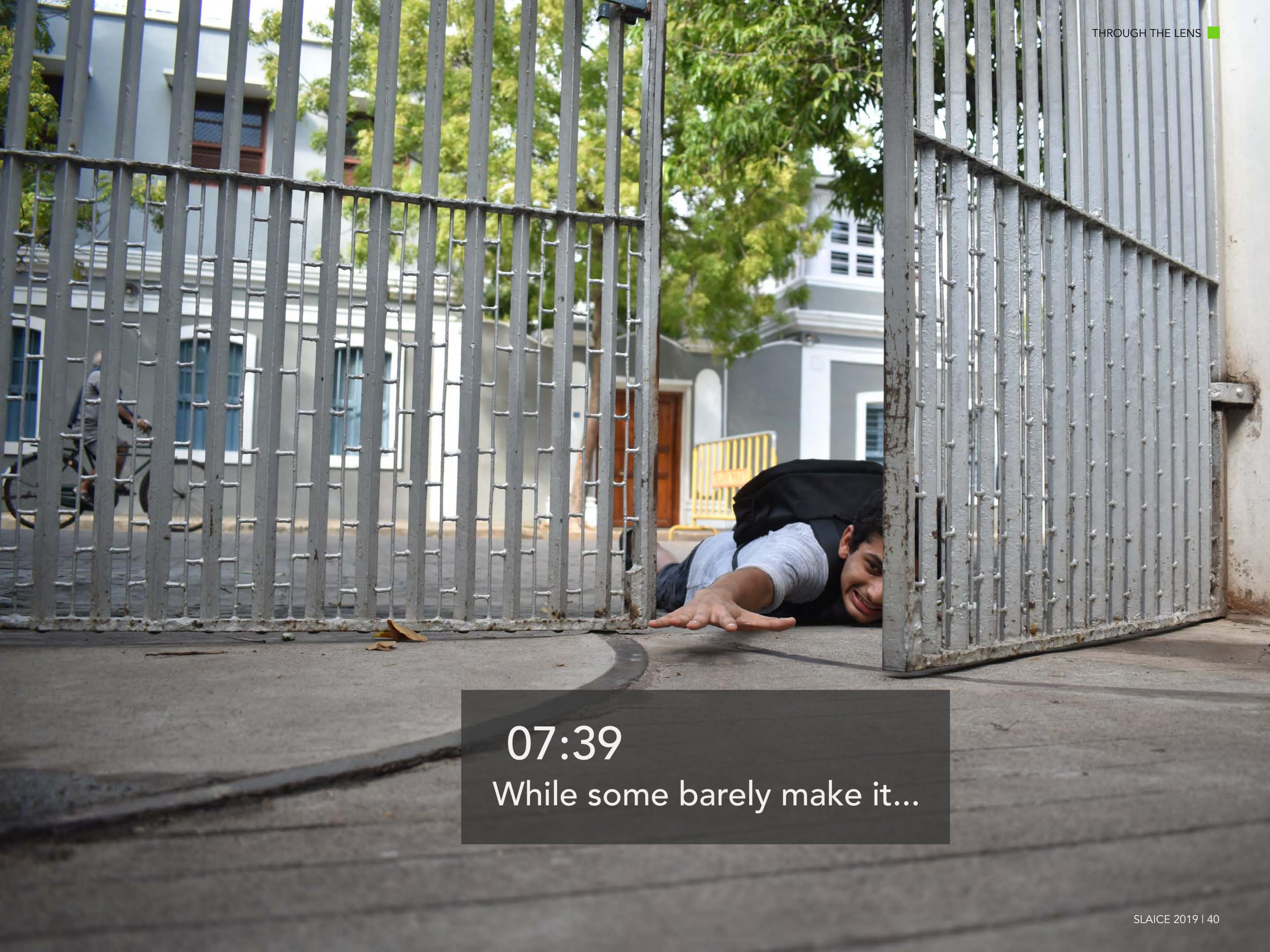
THROUGH THE LENS

What Time is School?



07:25

Early bird gets the board...

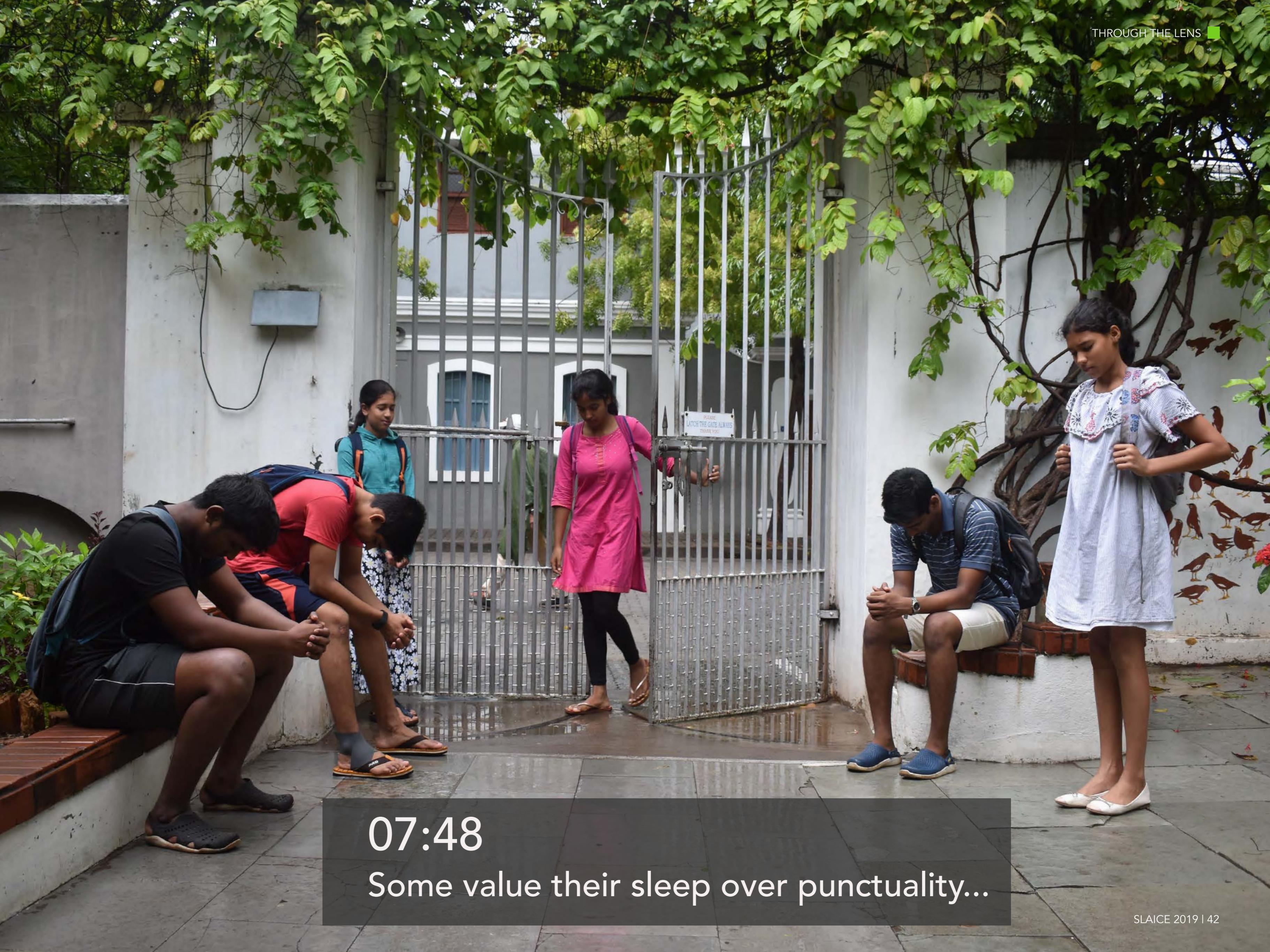


07:39

While some barely make it...



07:43
Others depend on
the mercy of the marker...

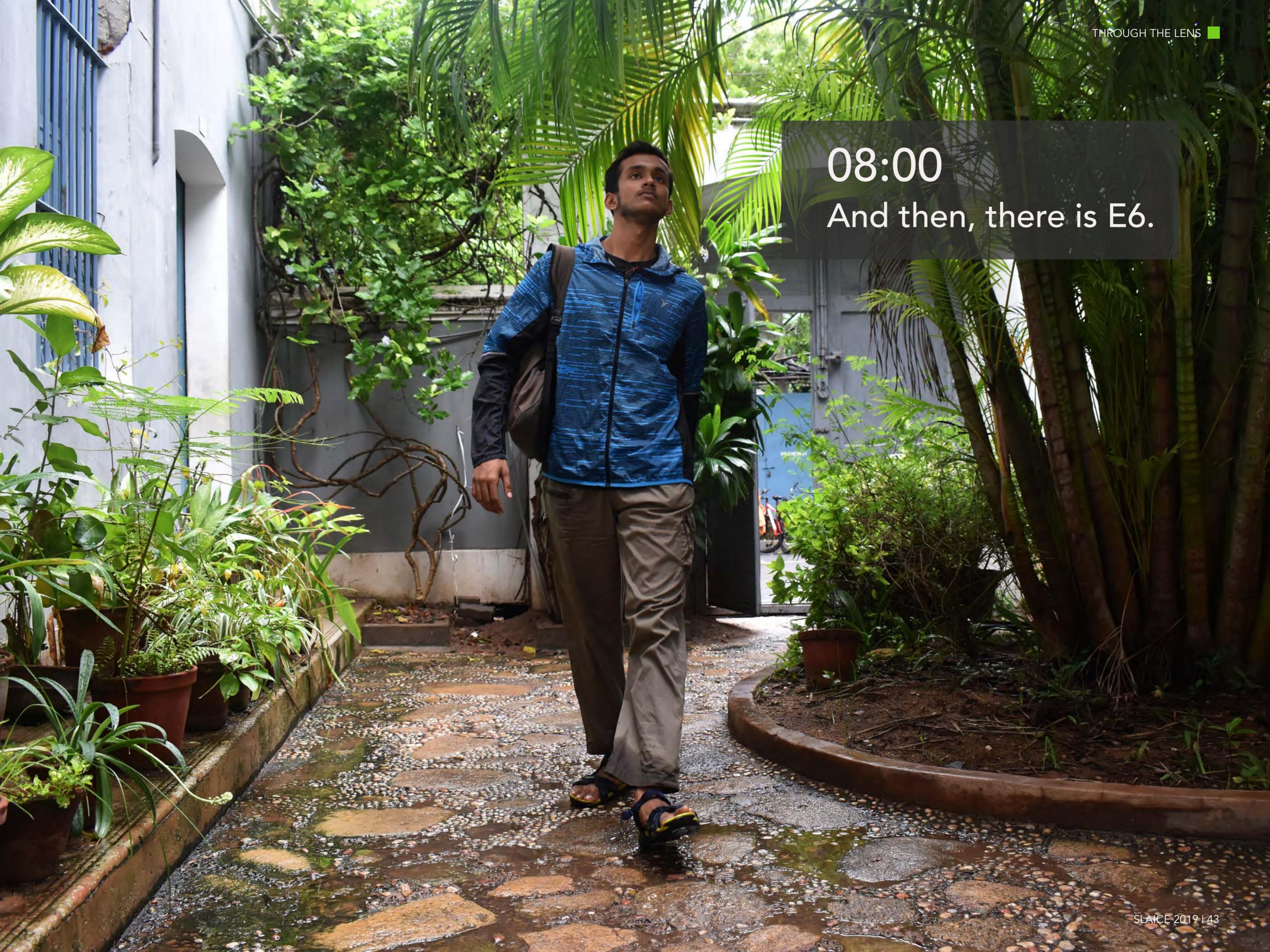


07:48

Some value their sleep over punctuality...

08:00

And then, there is E6.



DROP US A LINE...

Feedback helps us grow. We'd love to hear what you think.
Write to us at slaicemag@gmail.com

Thank You
Mag Team 2019



L to R: Narendran K., Vibhu D., Satya D., Ramyak S., Aurokrishna S., Janaki P.
Sitting: Shashwat P.