

## Community and Relationship

There are so many different aspects of community life at CFL, and they all vary depending on where we place ourselves in the group. The very young ones relate strongly to *places* and nature—the tyre-swing just outside the library, the pond where a fish has just died, the spider-web in the branches of the rain tree. As children grow older, peer interaction becomes sharper as a way of defining the sense of community. Of course this process occurs among the young ones too. The opinions of peers and seniors become more important not only in how self-perception occurs, but also in defining groups. Later still, there is perhaps a critical awareness that questions these movements of classification and of defining boundaries. As adults, we try to keep all these potential currents in mind, as well as challenging ourselves about how to keep a balanced yet energetic outlook towards the question of what being a community actually means to us.

Given the fact that there are so many different levels of identification and perception among us, what does belonging to

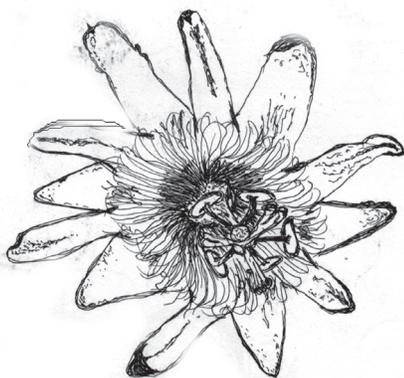


a community mean? To a large extent, of course, this involves trying to see the needs of the community as a whole. Inevitably there is conflict between what the individual wants to do and what the need of the moment is, and this happens to everybody. The “need” of the community might be a simple one: everyone eats meals at the same time. It might be far more complex question: how are we to be responsible about junk food? Garbage disposal? How much plastic do we bring into the school? What are our consumption patterns? We try to bring a participatory spirit to bigger issues such as these, and we try to see together into the implications of the question. We are not aiming at a final resolution of a question, for that realistically never seems to happen; instead, we hope that there can be some learning about patterns and

expectations in this process of expressing ourselves and listening to each other.

We don't really consider the questions and issues of the school as ends in themselves. We try to approach them as facts of life that young people will encounter in the world once they leave us. There is really no distinction between the school and the world; the one is not an idealistic bubble of escape from the other. Questioning the problems that arise in the school, with passion and energy, is a skill that we can all learn to bring to bear upon the wider world “outside.” *Community* is perhaps a word to be used in its widest possible sense.

Perhaps the process of relating is the most basic aspect in analyzing the life of a community. The verb *to relate* is in danger of encompassing so many levels of





meaning as to lose all precision in a kind of slush of goodwill; hence the need to try to be specific about its definition. One important dimension is perhaps the ability to be open and light with our perceptions of one another. Judgement, prejudice, bias: these are the stuff of everyday life and relationship, but a sense of community does seem to demand that we hold these with a light hand and relinquish them as soon as possible. A sense of humor, affection and irony; the ability to not take our own ideologies (or those of others) with life-threatening seriousness; basically a sense of lightness, well-being, care; a glint in the eye while pondering issues of depth and seriousness: all of these seem implied in relating in a community.

The question then inevitably arises as to whether CFL as a community identifies too closely with its own methods of inquiry. In other words, are we too caught

up in our own definitions of ourselves and our ideologies? Are we too pushing a particular agenda, a particular point of view? This is a complex question. At many levels, it would certainly seem that the self-definition of the community is inevitable. We hold certain values dear, and children are quick to pick up the unspoken rules of the game: rules associated with clothing, food, culture generally. From all these aspects, the self-definition of a community inevitably takes shape. Even the questions we choose to explore condition our identity and force



us, albeit gently, down avenues of identity and definition.

Given that these processes occur, Krishnamurti's questioning of the identification with a group and an ideal, however benign and well-meaning the latter are, acquires a poignant relevance. Are we talking about merely conditioning children and adults to be somewhat concerned, caring, but still retaining a strong sense of identity, both psychological and socio-political? Do we sense that something beyond this is possible? Somehow we, as a community of concerned individuals, enquiring into the subtleties of the human condition, must continue to learn to deepen and sustain both our awareness of our own psychological movements as well as our communication with each other in dialogue, verbal and non-verbal. Otherwise there is always the danger of crystallization, a sense of complacency that arises from an identification with a set of ideals. There is always that great danger looming over us: the assumption that *we are different* or that *we have understood*. Enquiry and learning can only come with the investment of a tremendous amount of energy and initiative, psychologically speaking. Are we as a community, teachers, parents and children, up to the challenge that faces us?



## History Mela

Having thought about it for many years, we decided to take the plunge and tackle the complexities of history for this year's mela. The attempt was to understand what a child's interest in history might be. What sort of questions would children bring up that might enhance their historical understanding?

We think that it is important for children to learn history by looking at various aspects of a time and culture: the food, clothing, housing. Traditionally, children study only political history with a dose of "culture" thrown in, which is the study of the lives of the rich and the powerful. A more informal approach enhances their appreciation of the details and complexities of the everyday rather than the dynastic.

We chose a very broad canvas to study: from the period of the Mughals to Independence from British rule. This breadth proved to be both a strength and a

weakness. It gave us the space to bring in a wide variety of themes, but at the same time it threatened to subvert our attempts to have a precise focus! Our learning for the next history mela is to choose a more suitable framework to conduct our studies.

The fun was in watching the models and paintings coming up, smelling the food being cooked, hearing weird yells and cries from the drama groups, rising early in the mornings in the thick mist to finish our cutouts, working late into the night with much laughter...

*Diba Siddiqi* has compiled a text about the history mela, documenting both what the activities were and the students' response to these. Here are some extracts:

**Toys and Games:** The Saral-Bilvas immersed themselves in making toys and playing games. The focus here was learning about traditional toys and games which



have been a part of Indian cultures for a considerable period. As far as the "history" bit of this group goes, the kids asked their parents and their grandparents about the games they'd played and the toys they'd had as children...The children learned to appreciate the beauty of toys which can be made with few resources and which are fun to play with.

**Clothing:** A key aspect of studying clothing [by the Tamalas] was to get a hands-on feel of processes—particularly dyeing, stitching and

Many individuals, CFL parents among them, worked very hard to ensure that the mela was a meaningful and creative experience. We thank them for their deep commitment and enthusiasm.



We were reading a story called *Bishnu the Dhobi Singer*. It's about a washerman's son who is adopted by Mian Tansen as a student. I liked it because the boy was our age and I could understand exactly his feelings and the things he did.



The best part of the mela was the last week without any classes, any studies and just working with the things I really wanted to do.

draping... The children experimented with dyeing cloth using both natural (tea and flowers) and chemical dyes...They set about making rag dolls—cutting out templates, stitching the bodies, stuffing the dolls with foam, weaving on hair, draping on saris and dhotis...quite an absorbing affair!

**Food:** The Ketakis began their project by formulating a questionnaire regarding food customs and habits of the recent past...Subsequently they became

What I enjoyed in the mela was how groups worked together. I feel I learned a lot through this process. This was another chance to interact with both older and younger students. I got to know people better.

absorbed in building an earthen *chula*. The process entailed making a brick structure and the coating it with layers of mud...The final part, in terms of construction, involved applying a final coat of cowdung. In tandem, students began doing research on various assigned topics, for instance cooking methods, utensils, trade, agricultural practices and so on.

#### **Art, Architecture and Episodes from Mughal Times [Parijatas and Champakas]:**

The Art group decided to focus on Mughal painting. One student was keen on studying materials and techniques used by artists. The other student was interested in learning about the portrayal of women in Mughal paintings...The Architecture group was interested in learning about the dwellings of common people. They were particularly keen on investigating the area of “vernacular housing” as it receives little historical attention

Right in the beginning I was personally put off by the subject: History. Then as we were going ahead it got interesting. This wasn't a mela to just present things to an audience but a learning process.

in comparison to monuments and forts...The “Episodes” group chose to dramatise travellers' accounts from the Mughal era. They went through various accounts (*Jahangirnama*, Bernier's *Travels in the Mughal Empire*) and selected episodes that could be enacted.



## Comings and Goings

We are happy to welcome *Sunila Rau* and *Chitra Gokhale* as new staff members this year. Sunila is involved with the library and with the maintenance of the computer room, as well as with school accounts. Chitra, who is also a parent, teaches Hindi for middle and senior school.



*K Gopalakrishna*, after being in the school for the past four years (in his second stint as a teacher here), has decided to move on to explore other alternatives in education and philosophy. We wish him all the best in his future.



Many individuals have contributed their skills and energy to some aspect of life at CFL this year. *Diba Siddiqi* has been very involved with the social sciences curriculum and also with co-teaching some middle school classes. She has been conducting photography as an activity this past term as well. Her involvement is very welcome and will continue over the next year. *Sruti Yusufi* has been with us over the past year doing projects on the land and working in the kitchen. We will miss her presence on campus the coming year. *Steve* has run a rigorous and challenging Games and Physical Fitness programme since November. The students have had a real feel of what working hard on fitness means and have seen some dramatic shifts in fitness [and

attitude!] *Jim Flynn* and *Pashwa Jhala*, after working with us for a term, unfortunately had to leave us and go back to England. Even though their interaction was brief, it was very valuable. *Tristan* arrived in October last year and since then has contributed time and energy on the volleyball court and in the kitchen. He returned to Canada in March, either for further studies or for vocational training in furthering his cooking skills.



## Workshops

Due to an oversight, we omitted to mention that *Ajopa Das* conducted art as an activity in the first term in the academic year 2003-04. We apologize for the oversight. Her input and knowledge were very valuable.

Several people have contributed time and energy to conduct

workshops during the year. *Dr Venkatesh* did a second stint with us, conducting an electronics workshop in the first term this year with the Palasha 2s and Ketakis. As usual, the students were very excited and motivated by this. *Roshen*, who is an ex-student of Valley School and Shantiniketan, did a workshop on low-temperature glazing and different types of clay. His interaction has been very valuable and we would like to continue such activities with him. *Subbu*, who is a parent of the school, spent a couple of days in September doing a workshop on art and design. The children were excited to see how design principles affect our perceptions in everyday life. Later, in March, he also worked with the Middle School on Astronomy and star-gazing and has been advising us on telescopes.

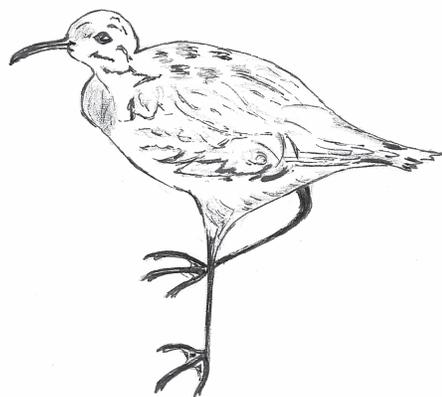
*Shabari Rao*, a former student, conducted a five-day workshop on Kathak in March 2004. She successfully motivated five groups





in learning to dance with structure and rhythm. The groups gave a presentation on Kathak in assembly at the end of this workshop. *Dinesh Rao*, a parent, has generously contributed time and skill to initiate a Carpentry and Woodwork workshop for the Palasha 2s in the last term of this year. It is delightful to see how he has brought in basic skills in tool use and care. The children have learnt to construct a few forms and have enjoyed the process.

Yet again, we must thank *Gerard Bayle* for his commitment and enthusiasm in helping us with our dramatic endeavours, especially during the History mela.



*We would like to thank the following parents who supported our kitchen over the past year: Sowmya, Nalini, Shalini, Lovely, Bharati and Vijaya. Their support and involvement have meant a lot in keeping the spirit of the kitchen flourishing. We would also like to thank Vijayalakshmi for her steady and sincere contribution in the library.*

*Deepa Mandrekar and Manjunath very kindly offered to accompany teachers and children on excursions this year. Their presence and support were invaluable. Many parents and other friends – space does not permit a full list – really helped us out in terms of accommodation and contacts during the trips. Our warm thanks to all of them.*

*We are grateful to Sathish Kumar and Rahul Gonsalves for preparing a crisp and attractive new website ([www.cfl.in](http://www.cfl.in)) for the school.*

## Campus Happenings: A Sampling

In the first two years of our stay at the present campus, we invited children from the village school in Varadenahalli to spend an hour three days a week at CFL. This was just a start in the attempt to share some of our resources and time with the village children. They spent time doing jigsaws, listening to stories, playing group games, drawing and so on. A few interested children were receiving help in learning English. We had a book returning and borrowing session each week, for which children came from villages beyond Varadenahalli as well.

Currently, there is a different pattern of interaction with the village children. They have been coming in to do projects with children in the school. In the first term of this year, children of the 4th and 5th standard in the village school learnt conversational English with the Tamala2-Palasha1 group using simple cards and

other techniques. This process culminated in a bilingual play based on *Jack and the Beanstalk* that the children did together. This past term, the same groups have done an art and craft project together.

Interacting with the village schools in formal ways is something we are very keen to do more of in the future. Of course, apart from this formal interaction, there is plenty of informal contact that goes on in the form of walks, contact during melas and other occasions and so on.



Thanks to the efforts of Shandilya, a former student, we now have a really beautiful aquarium near the kitchen. It is always a focus of attention, and it really seems to calm the mind to watch the fish and plants and the light in the water all engaged in a relaxed yet precise kind of dance.



As part of a science project, the Tamala 1s have constructed a seesaw near the junior school and now have firsthand experience of the mysteries of levers and fulcrums.

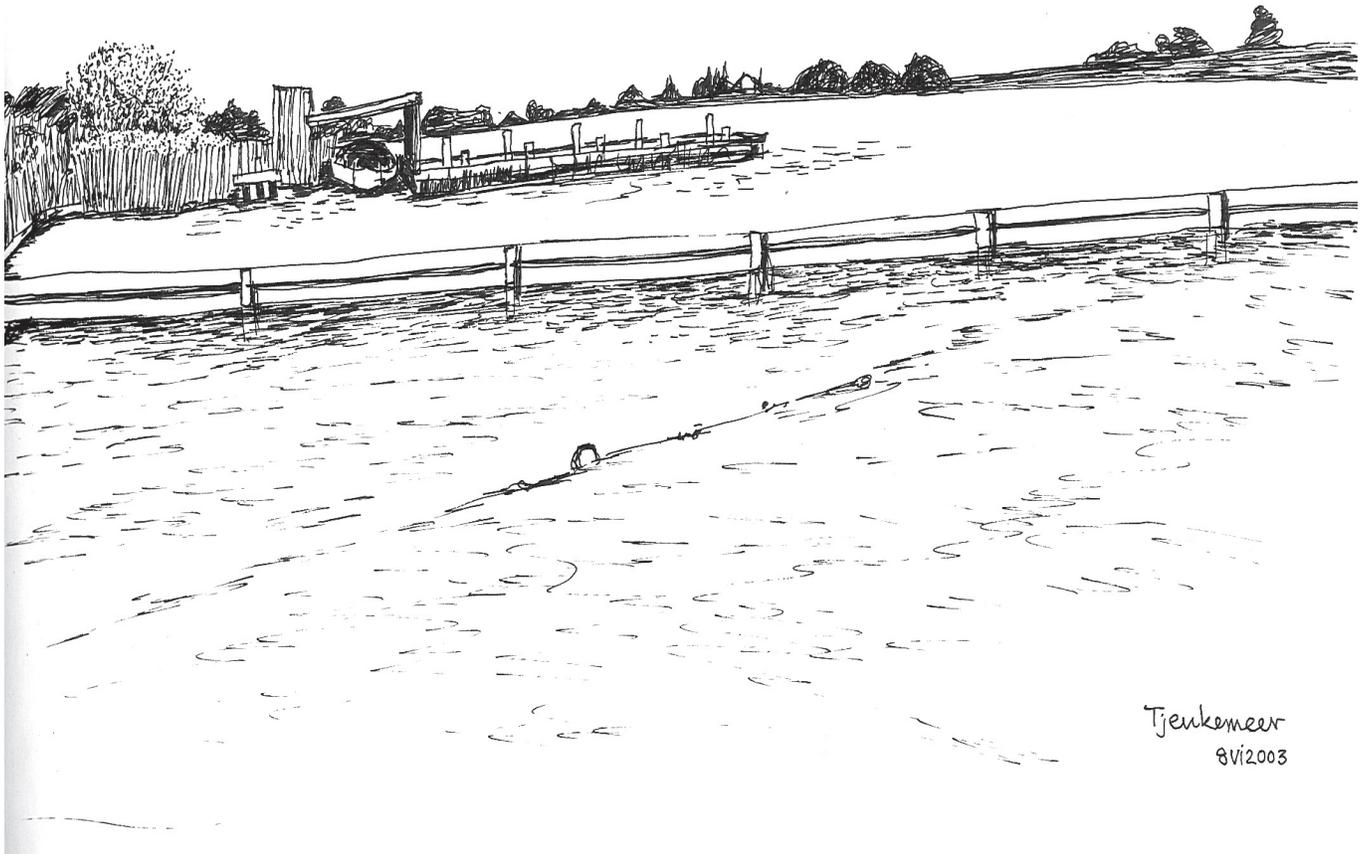
Samuha, an NGO based in Raichur, came to CFL in April-May 2004. Some of their staff surveyed the CFL campus and suggested techniques for watershed management. Their help is much appreciated as it is very appropriate for a dry campus such as ours.

Thanks to a generous funding effort from individuals working at BAE Systems, the games field at CFL has been expanded. Seven BAE employees stayed on campus in October 2004 doing volunteer work to help make this possible, working under Michael. The football pitch has been expanded by blasting a large granite outcrop, and a new volleyball court has been created adjacent to the football pitch. The entire field now has a fence running around it.



In terms of landscaping, the embankments surrounding the field have been carefully graded and held in place with granite retaining walls, basalt rip rap and meadow grass. The project will be finished with extensive tree planting during the coming monsoon.

Gregory and Karthik have been working on a project on snakes (funded by CFL and an outside source) in and around the school this past year, and have also contributed to the school in various ways. It is really wonderful to note that they have managed to raise awareness about snakes to the extent that if one is now spotted in the neighbourhood,



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the villagers, rather than harming it, make a quick phone call to the two young men to come and catch it! Next year Greg and Karthik will continue their studies and we wish them the very best.

We are very sorry to report the death of Rani, our dog. Rani joined us while the school was in Shibumi and many of us have had a warm and close relationship

with her. She will be missed. To keep Satsuki company, Bindu, a pup from Varadenahalli, has joined our campus.

In the last week of school, we had an informal evening with parents and students just to relax and have fun together. We had an adaptation of Badal Sarcar's *Evam Indrajit* directed by Gopal, which was very enjoyable and thought-provoking. We hope to have more such informal evenings in the future.

It has been good to see that the entire school has been using the open forum as a means of communicating about the complexities of campus life this past year. We have discussed various issues both of a personal nature and those touching upon the life of the community as a whole, and it has been heartening to see the energy everyone has brought to the discussions.

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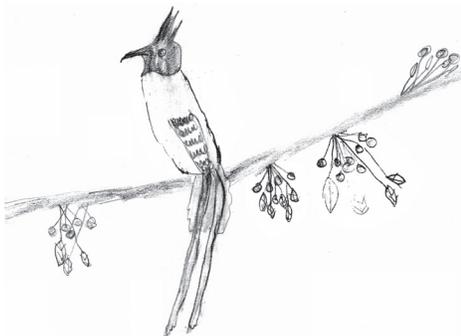
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The paradise fly catcher. Has a crest on its head. It has two ribin like tale and eats flies.