

CFL Newsletter

Issue 6

... dedicated to our donors

Winter '99 - '00

Savandurga beckons! And on the other side of this huge hill, the most visible on Bangalore's horizon, is CFL's new campus. When you have covered half the distance between the city and Savandurga, you can appreciate its true shape - it's a gigantic baby elephant - ears, wrinkly gray body and graceful trunk. It's been sitting here, this massive monolith, for millennia. Once, it must have been surrounded by forest land. Different animals must have roamed here then. But we can only imagine: years of cultivation have completely changed the area, and now we are coming to add our bit of colour to Savandurga Land.

One of these days, the elephant is going to get to its feet and let out a huge trumpet. And it'll be right in our ears.

We've Moved !

Choosing the headlines for this year's newsletter was easy - what could be more newsworthy than picking up a whole school and moving it to a new campus 50 km away? We should know, this is the fifth move that CFL has made! But this time, there's a difference. We're finally in our own, permanent campus. No more living out of suitcases. So the headline should read, "We've moved! For the Last Time!".

February 2000 is the month that we formally began CFL at Varadenahalli. We owe this special moment in CFL's life to the generosity of many, many individuals - which is why we have dedicated this issue to all CFL's donors and well-wishers over the years. We've said it before, but it bears repeating:

every gesture of support has been deeply appreciated.

The other side of the coin is, of course, that this was our last year at Shibumi. We all miss the place a lot (yes, even those leaky thatches). In Varadenahalli, we will have to rediscover what makes a school, a home, vibrant, joyous and welcoming.

On Sunday January 30th, 2000, we had a simple ceremony to inaugurate the new campus. We were overwhelmed by the warm response we received; about 450 people came to wish us well. The Saralas (our youngest group) planted a *rosewood* tree outside the Junior School. Then the Kumari L. A. Meera Memorial Mathematics and Computer Laboratory, the Prof. Y. T. Thathachari Physics and Chemistry Laboratories, and The Haribhai Desai

Library were formally inaugurated by Prof. V. Balakrishnan, Mrs. Madhuri Thathachari, and Shri Natubhai Desai respectively. Prof. Balakrishnan told us that if our students could learn to distinguish old age from wisdom, and fear from respect, a great thing would have been achieved. Mrs. Thathachari said that she hoped our students would learn excellent academics, and then go on to learn about life beyond the realm of knowledge.





What will the move mean for CFL?

People have asked us this question in various ways over the past year. Sometimes there is a concern that we will become too 'settled' an 'institution', and lose a quality of flexibility and vitality. There's also a concern regarding the kind of lifestyle we will move into - will there be a shift from the simple and low-budget way we've run CFL so far? We've looked at this seriously. We have worked for nine years with very little infrastructure, quite frugally. Is there any virtue inherent in this? Now that we've poured concrete into the land, is there a danger of our losing sight of the spirit of the whole venture? It's certainly possible, and the only precaution is to be ever watchful. Like the third little pig, we see that the permanence of brick houses presents some practical advantages. It is up to us to make sure that the essence of the school is not lost - and that challenge may have little to do with the external conditions in which we live. In any case, it is something to learn about in the years to come.

Another concern has been - what impact will our moving there have on the land? To examine this, we need to learn what is 'good' for the land. We have already greened the place quite a bit, begun to enrich the soil and raise ground water levels. But there's no escaping the fact that in the immediate future, some of the insect, bird and animal life that was adapted to the area may move away. Our hope is that our footprint will be small and gentle enough to allow many living things to be attracted to the place in time. This process can only begin when we have lived there for some period, observing the place and its life, becoming a part of it.

And a third question is - how will CFL interact with the surrounding villages? Again, we can best answer this only after we've been in Varadenahalli for a while, getting to know the people and their concerns. Obviously, we are going there with the full intention to share whatever we can, both in terms of material resources and teacher time.

But people also ask us, "Aren't you guys excited?!" and that's the easiest one to answer!

Work on the campus

The library, junior school, kitchen/dining, three residential areas and laboratories are fully ready. A few important spaces remain - art/craft studio, assembly, music and

with Lorenzo, helping with construction, climbing Savandurga, just plain exploring and finding favourite places to sit quietly. Many of them did projects related to the history of the land, the work

"This series of trips is over and there have been lots of things I've really enjoyed, such as getting up at 5:30, and watching the land as the sun came up. I've felt a lot healthier over here. I want to stay here for a long, long time."

Happenings

Fundraising has been an important activity for us during the past two years. Some parents and teachers got together and organised a fundraising event in February 1999. We were really fortunate that two outstanding artistes, Pandit Jasraj, the Hindustani Classical vocalist, and Malavika Sarukkai, the Bharatanatyam dancer, agreed to perform at a benefit concert for CFL. Many people and organisations came forward to help us make the occasion a successful one.

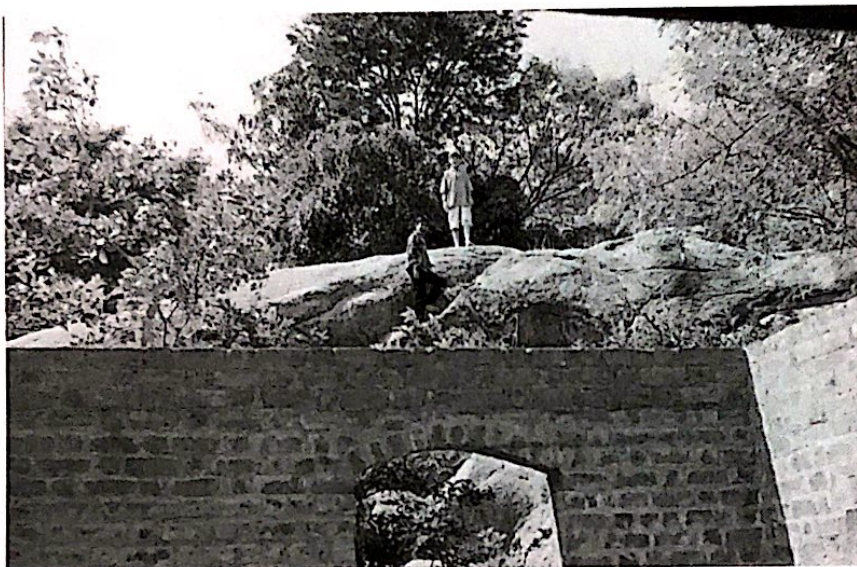
dance, additional residential areas and clear spaces for sports and games. The total area of the campus is now 20 acres.

In September, a team of five employees from British Aerospace in the UK came over to help build and equip the kitchen. This was part of the company's Charity Challenge International programme. CFL is one of the centres in Bangalore receiving financial and other support through this programme. It's the 'other support' that turned out to be so enjoyable for all involved - the interaction between the BAe team and CFL was truly memorable. We're looking forward to seeing them at Varadenahalli again soon - when we can cook for them in the kitchen they helped to build!

All the students have spent time at Varadenahalli, surveying the land

of the farmers in the area, the rocks and soil, plant and insect life and so on. They recorded their observations and experiences in detailed journals. We've included a brief excerpt here from the journal of a fourteen-year old boy.

"This time, I think, I worked at my project a lot better. I really buckled down and started identifying birds. I've counted 41 species and I guess if somebody stayed here throughout the year, just watching birds, over 200 species might be discovered. There are lots of Small Brown Birds and Small Green Birds that I haven't even seen properly...."



Our Donors have been a steady source of financial support and encouragement over the past ten years. We wish to acknowledge each one by name in these columns. If we have omitted any name, it was an oversight - please forgive us. The many people who have contributed to CFL in kind and in spirit are too numerous to list here - we are deeply grateful to them all.

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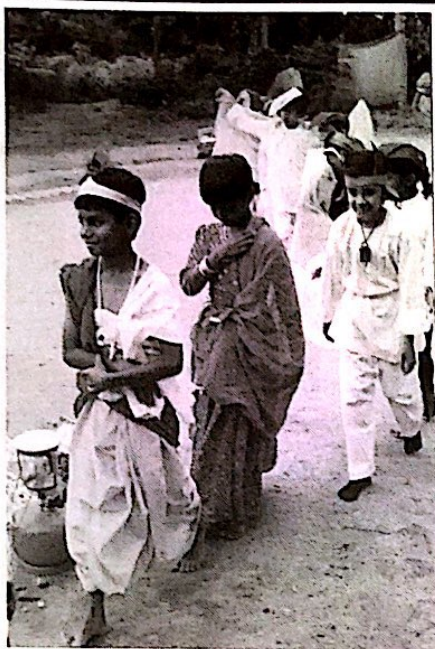
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1st August was our ninth birthday, and the last to be celebrated in Shibumi. Several students also graduated on that day, and were duly teased, felicitated and hugged. In September we celebrated the birth of Krishna, the

more. Every single adult, child and rat (they did some artistic paper chewing) was immersed in the preparation for the festival. We learned traditional folk dances and skits depicting scenes from Krishna's life. And then came the night itself.

Picture it: just past sunset, and the clouds almost completely cover the sky. A crowd of people sitting on the ground, craning their necks toward the stage. In the corner, a small tense knot of teachers sitting with their fingers crossed, craning their necks to the sky, willing it not to rain! Bright yellow lights shone on the stage, where twenty-odd figures whirled around in colourful precision - the boys in embroidered white, the girls in purple and gold. It rained, but didn't pour, and the sporting audience pulled out handkerchiefs and dupattas and sari



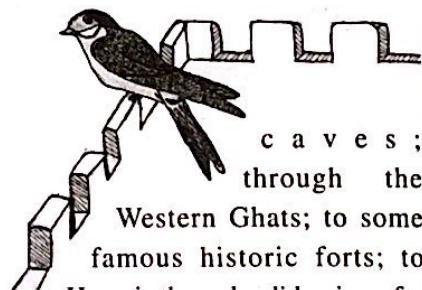
blue cowherd god. Shibumi was colourfully decorated with rangoli work, paintings on the walls and floors, clay scenes, miniature paintings, decorated pots, unbelievably delicate embroidery work, seed and grain collages and

pallus and sat in the rain till the very last item!

October Trips

Long train rides, bumpy buses and jeeps, sleeping bags, bulging backpacks, beautiful historic monuments, playing dumb charades

late into the night, eating all kinds of food...where are you? On a CFL trip, of course! We went to the Himalayas - trekking through Sikkim and Himachal Pradesh; to the incomparable Ajanta and Ellora

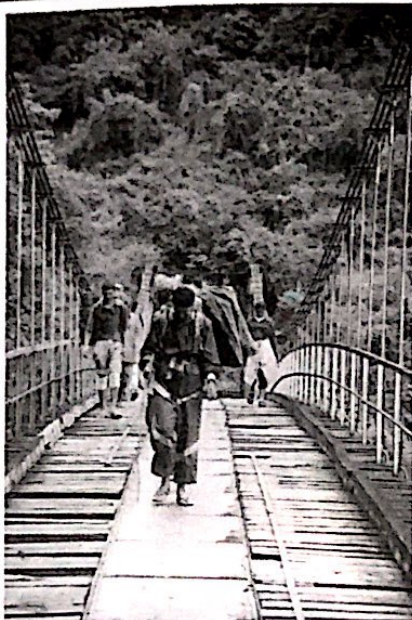


through the Western Ghats; to some famous historic forts; to Hampi, the splendid ruins of a five-hundred year old kingdom; a shorter trip to a riverside camp for swimming and splashing...it seems we will never run out of beautiful places to go to in India.

As always, many groups were hosted and helped by friends of CFL in various places. We're very grateful to The Sahyadri School, Mr. Sandeep Tambe in Yucsom, Srinivas and Yogesh in Pune.

New Courses

Curiosity is alive at all ages at CFL, and we have different ways of responding to it. On the October trip, we noticed the twelve-year-olds were full of lively and sophisticated questions about things around. We thought it might be nice to introduce them to the 'seminar' concept - inviting experts in areas like astrophysics, agriculture, health and nutrition, genetic biology, population geography and graph theory to speak to them. Where did we find such experts, do you ask? Among the parents of CFL, who responded eagerly to our request to make these formal presentations!



On a different note, one of our teachers is in the process of developing two new and exploratory courses (we're calling them "Zen Music" and "Zen Drawing" for the present), for ten to fourteen-year-olds. It is a little difficult to describe the content of such courses in words! In the drawing sessions, for example, the attempt is to see if the children can develop a relationship with the 'object' they are sketching. Indeed, after long periods of quiet observation and repeated sketching of the same simple thing (say, a leaf), one sees reflected in the sketch a gentleness and affection toward it. Both this and the music course are still taking shape, following the ideas and insights of the teacher and students.

Comings and Goings

Danilo Fontana was at CFL till June. A few days before he left, the senior students put up a play directed by him - a hilarious rewriting of Shakespeare's *As You Like It*. While he was here, he worked extensively in the junior school, taught Creative Writing and several Italian songs. Claire

Bernardo spent till September with us. She worked on two major projects (besides many little ones): organising and guiding all the Varadenahalli interactions with students, and interviewing the parents of CFL on the issue of communication patterns in the school. The questionnaire assessed parents' perceptions of how informed/involved they were at various levels of CFL's decision making. The results were extremely illuminating, and hopefully teachers and parents alike can learn from her findings. Kirby Huminuik left us to return to Canada after two years of being completely



involved in the CFL community. We hope that she will return some day.

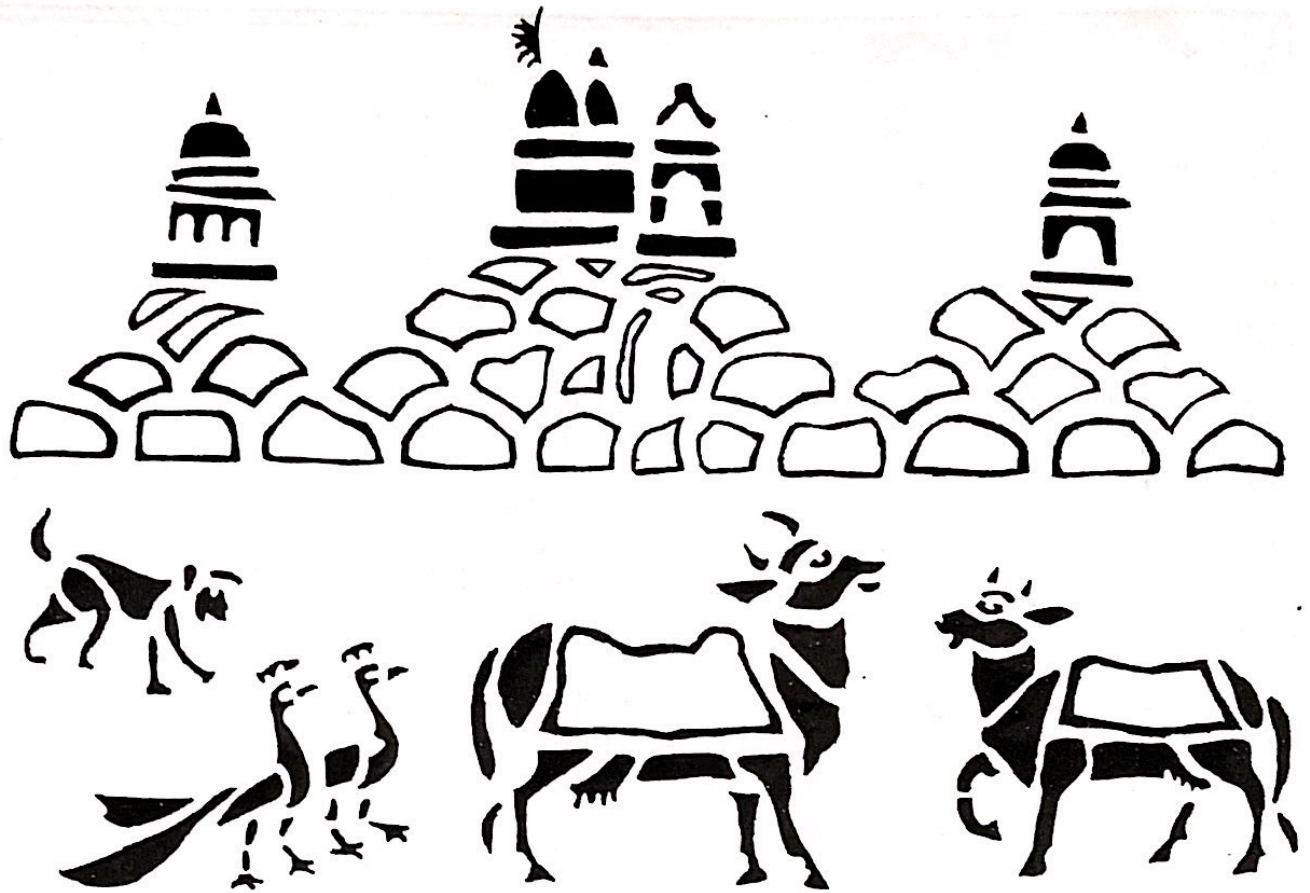
Early in 1999, two rare comets visited us. Gary Primrose from England and Christian Leppart from Germany came to India to work with CFL's Post School students in Wynad. They both spent several days at CFL - took trips to Varadenahalli, and gave us invaluable advice on land and energy matters. Let's hope it isn't too many years before they come by again!

The Bare Necessities

Early last year CFL's Post School students spent three months in Wynad at the Gurukula Botanical Sanctuary. Many of you may already have heard about their programme, called 'Exploring the Essentials of Living'. The students lived on a piece of land beside the rainforest, in a home they built themselves over three weeks, from mud, logs and thatch. They cooked simple food, simply delicious, on a mud and wood stove they made. The river nearby provided water for drinking and washing, which they diverted for their needs. They learned a lot about sustainable living, looking after the land and keeping healthy. The emphasis of the course, however, was on learning how to work together, resolving conflicts as they arise.

During the three months, several resource people visited them to present short courses on things like health, local and global energy issues, land care, brain and mind, current affairs. In the context of the life they were living, everything down to the bare minimum and yet fully sufficient for their needs, these topics gained new significance.

The students tell us that this experience has affected them deeply. Every activity was integral to their programme, from picking coffee and pepper, to grappling with thorny plants for fencing, to finding in oneself the ability to live harmoniously with the group.



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