Have a wonderful year

Happy Campers!!

At the Annual Himalayan Nature and Adventure Foundation Camp in North Bengal at the foothills of the Himalayas
## Contents

| Pages 3 – 5 | Remembering Anita Varma |
| Pages 6 – 7 | Hope Cup 2019 |
| Pages 8 – 9 | ‘The Poetics of Fragility’ |
| Pages 10 – 11 | IICP’s 44th Anniversary Celebration: A Photo Journey |
| Page 12 | Unlocking AAC concepts in Children with Complex Communication Needs |
| Pages 13 – 15 | Events |

---

### From the Editors ...

It’s hard to forget someone who gave you so much to remember. Anita Varma... gentle and soft spoken but pure steel within, she left an indelible mark in every person who touched her life. Blessed with a life partner who was a tower of strength and a close family, she was a caring and wonderful mother. Anita was a friend, colleague, mentor to so many. I was fortunate to be one of them. But more than anything else, she was my teacher.

I had gone to IICP in 1991 with idealistic ideas of ‘giving back to society’. As I followed Anita around the classrooms, I had become a little apprehensive, wondering how different ‘working’ with children with disabilities would be from ‘wishing’ to work among them. Assigned to help the teacher in a class of five-year olds, I was given my first lesson. “Treat the children like any ‘normal’ child. Assist them but first let them try. Praise them when they do something right. Scold them when they are naughty (which I consequently learnt could be quite often)!…”

I learnt the subtle difference between sympathy and empathy. The importance of being understanding rather than compassionate. That a disobedient body could think, feel and love just like you or me. Even during the last few weeks before she left us all, Anita taught me the meaning of courage, determination and spirit.

It’s almost as if Leonardo da Vinci had written, “I love those who can smile in trouble, who can gather strength from distress, and grow brave by reflection” with Anita in mind. Rest in peace, my friend.

---

Years ago, in the 60s, the Beatles used to be my favourite pop star band and a favourite song was ‘I get by with a little help from my friends...’ This January edition celebrates friendship that recognises strength and frailty, joy and sorrow, advantage and adversity. Thus we remember Anita Varma with love and fondest memories of her high level of common sense and practical logical reasoning; we recreate a workshop conducted for self-expression; we bring to you events conducted in a spirit of friendship and solidarity.

I also take this opportunity to introduce to our Co-Editor Sumita Roy who has taken a lead role in compiling this issue of *Deepshikha*. Sumita, Mitadi to all the IICP team, joined us in 2016 and is now an integral part of IICP.

Happy reading – the Editorial Team of *Deepshikha* wishes its readers a healthy, happy and peaceful year.

---

*Anjana Jha*

*Reena Sen*
Remembering Anita Varma... colleague, friend, founder member, IICP

“Anita was a colleague and friend, who along with her husband Viren, were the prime architects of a shared dream to create a better world not only for their child but all children afflicted by Cerebral Palsy. Anita and I understood each other, and shared confidences as one mother to another. During our professional association of nearly five decades, we managed to overcome many difficulties thanks to Anita, without losing confidence and retaining our sense of humour. Anita was a soft, gentle mother, intrinsically a kind person, who avoided the limelight, but as a colleague, she was firm, set high standards for herself, and expected the same from others. Her memory will always be cherished.”

– Sudha Kaul

“My connection with Anita started way back in 1975. I was her son Himanshu’s teacher in the Ballygunge Military Camp campus. I remember that first day well – 5th September, Teachers’ Day. I walked Anita with a pot of rasgullas for the staff! I felt quite important... as though I was on to something good... even on the first day! Over the years, to me, Anita was a parent, then a volunteer, a colleague for many years and then a friend. I have seen Anita fight many a tough battle. Even her last battle was fought like a champion! Being brave and sensible. That was who she was.”

– Ranu Banerjee

“I miss you Anita. You were an inspiring teacher, Himangshu’s gutsy parent – who way back in 1976 confidently allowed a novice like me to feed her son – but most of all, you were my friend. We had many an argument – about the definition of inclusiveness, making allowances for limitations and so on... but at the end of it all, we had mutual respect and were buddies. Life changed after Viren’s death – you were never the same. It was like the light had gone out of your eyes, your soul was starved. And just when I thought yes, time is indeed a healer, you ran out of time. You were amazingly courageous and positive till the end, smiling, cheerful and courteous. I hope you are at peace where you are. I miss you, Anita.”

– Reena Sen

“I knew Anita for four decades. She was an excellent teacher, trainer, parent and very good friend. A practical, forthright person, she used common sense to solve problems. She would say, ‘common sense is unfortunately very uncommon’. Anita was disciplined, conscientious and highly principled in both her personal and professional life. Anita and Viren were pillars of strength and made significant contributions to the growth and development of IICP. Their absence will be a tremendous loss to the organisation.”

– Sujata Parekh

“In my 41 years of association with IICP, I knew Anita as a committed and competent colleague with impeccable manners. We got really close in the last 10 years of our work together. After work, she would frequently drop by to chat about work or personal matters till Rameshji came to collect her. I shall miss those times and our conversations. Anita and Viren were strong, solid pillars of strength for all of us at IICP. Her sudden departure has left a void difficult to replace. RIP, dear friend!”

– Subhra Chatterjee

Anita with ‘old’ friends (L-R) Standing – Anjana Jha, Sujata Parekh, Ranu Banerjee, Sudha Kaul, Tessa Hamblin, Reena Sen, Subhra Chatterjee

Sitting – MB Cibetri, Himangshu Varma
One of the first persons I met when I joined IICP in 1986 was Mrs Varma. Over the years she held different posts and was an integral part of the organisation. Always a self-motivated, energetic and vibrant colleague, she and I soon became very close friends. She has been a mentor and stood by me through all my ups and downs, good times and bad. Her compassion for the underprivileged and differently abled persons created a huge impact. I will miss my knowledgeable and compassionate friend.

Mrs Varma, with love, gratitude and remembrance – be at peace wherever you are...

– Madhuchhanda Kundu

Words are inadequate to express the sense of loss that I feel when I realise that Anita is no longer a phone call away. In the last decade, though our meetings were infrequent, it was always a comfort to know that I could call her up at any time. Compassionate and empathetic, she always lent a sympathetic ear to my laments about the vagaries of my son, but at the end reiterated that it was time to move on to battle! Many a time, she gently reminded me that God gives one only as much as one can bear. Her unflagging positivity was her hallmark till the end. Miss you Anita!

– Ranjani Dutta

My association with Anita goes back to over 28 years ago. It is due to the selfless dedication, indomitable zeal and professionalism of people like Anita that our institution is what it is today. She never lost her composure and was always available for help and guidance.

I spoke to her on the phone that fateful day just before she collapsed. Who could imagine her end would come so soon?

Farewell dear friend, we shall miss you but all your good work and pleasant memories of your smiling face will endure. You will live in our hearts and minds forever.

– Gita Basu

I find it difficult to accept you are no more! A relay of good memories spanning three decades begins to roll...

We were from different professional backgrounds yet maintained a cordial relationship of trust, faith and respect for each other. I learnt so much from you. I could discuss with you in detail the problems of the children at any time. You contributed a great deal to special education for children with disabilities. Your hard work will remain a legacy for professionals, parents, children and adults with disabilities for all time.

– Dr MB Chhetri

From ‘Mrs Varma’ during my DipSEd days way back in 1989, our relationship evolved and she soon became ‘Anita Di’ for me. As a mentor she was always encouraging, ready to give practical ideas and positive feedback. As a dear friend, she was a pillar of strength – always there whenever I needed her.

An adda session at her place had to be part of my visits back to Kolkata. Now they will always be incomplete...

I miss you Anita Di. Never ever thought that I would have to write a tribute for you. May you be at peace wherever you may be...

– Vijaya Dutt

Years ago, on a visit to an aunt in Sunny Park, Kolkata, I was casually introduced to her tenant – a young woman of about my age. A wide beaming smile accompanied the soft “hello”. Anita’s wide beaming smile is my most lasting memory of her. Her warmth, interest and positive attitude were endearing and enduring facets of her personality. She became my “go to” person when I was in IICP. Her own personal problems were set aside to resolve any of mine. She was a very rare person of great inner personal strength and integrity. Anita remains a person who is difficult to forget.

– Beena Mitra

The first thing when I think of Mrs Varma is that she was a strong guiding force in my life both professionally and personally. She was not only my senior colleague but also my mentor, a trusted confidante, a true friend and above all a wonderful person. Over the years she had become an integral part of my life and for me. With her passing, it was like losing a parent all over again.

– Parbati Chakraborty
Remembering Anita Varma contd...

Anita was different, down to earth, no-nonsense and utterly practical. When she was approached for book donations to start the CSE library, her response was, “Books can be collected later. First find out whether they can even handle one”. A kind soul, she quietly paid fees for deserving students, arranged for their coaching and reached out to needy helpers and caregivers.

Only once, did I see her break down when her beloved husband Mr Varma was suffering. And yet she came back to work, after just a short period of mourning with no time wasted over sentimental grieving. Her vacant chair reminds me of the void she has left behind. Farewell dear Anita. May you spend Eternity with your “Friend, Philosopher and Guide”.

– Debalina Ray

Mrs Varma helped me to find solutions to the numerous problems and difficulties I faced taking care of my daughter Shradhha. She was my mentor and encouraged me to join the Open School Unit. This one step gave me a new lease of life. Mrs Varma was the umbrella under which I blossomed into the confident and self sufficient person of today. I will miss all her advice and tips. Her sudden demise has left a void that will forever remain.

– Veronica Nair

Mrs Varma was a favourite with all teachers, staff, students, trainees and parents. She devoted her life to bring IICP to this level. She always helped others and was especially close to challenged children and their parents. Though she is no longer physically present among us, she will always remain present in our hearts and thoughts.

– Mr Nandlal Bind (Parent)

In my student life, I met a number of good teachers. Some made a deep impression with their great thoughts while others with their care, affection and attention towards me. Mrs Anita Varma was the perfect teacher as well as a parent for all of us. She not only helped me with my academics but guided me to make all the right decisions. She had many good qualities. She was kind hearted, very helpful and treated us as friends. We have lost an idol whom we all loved. I pray that her soul rests in peace.

– Mainak Debnath (Ex-student)

When I think of Anita Aunty, her smiling face comes to mind. I never saw her get angry with anyone. She was friendly with us all and often joined our discussions during break, including who should captain the Indian cricket team!

Anita Aunty would request my help with any computer work if the computer teacher was on leave. She always appreciated my effort in academics. When we lose someone special, their influence and memories remain with us. I will always remember Anita Aunty’s smiling face.

– Dipak Ghosh (Ex-student)

Anita aunty always had a smile on her face. She was friendly with all her students and would discuss games and chat about cricket matches with us. She was concerned about each of us as individuals. As a little girl I remember Anita aunty sang rhymes and taught us the poem ‘Piggy on the railway tracks’. Her classes were always fun. In Senior Academics, she conducted sessions on General Knowledge and I still recall things we learnt.

Her memories will always be in our hearts. May she rest in peace.

– Marina (Ex-student)

Varma Aunty’ considered us her own and was a guardian figure to all her students. We could approach her with our problems without any hesitation and she would always provide a solution for them. I pray that her blessings always remain upon us...

(Translated from Hindi)

– Punam Bind (Open School Unit)

Varma aunty was a very good teacher and a kind hearted person. She used to listen to us and tried to solve our problems with understanding just like a good friend. Though she was strict, she gave us enough freedom to do what we wanted. We respected her and therefore tried to follow all her rules. She will ALWAYS remain in our hearts. We miss you aunty.

– Sayoni Dutta (Open School Unit)

Anita with her ‘Open School’ colleagues (L-R) Gita Basu, Shefali Mukherjee, Susmita Chatterjee, Parbati Chakraborty, Arundhati Mazumdar, Debalina Ray
Three hundred and twenty four enthusiastic golfers swung and putted their way across the Tollygunge golf course at the eighth IICP Hope Cup tournament organised in collaboration with Tollygunge Club on 25th and 26th January.

The Chief Guest at the Prize Distribution ceremony was Lt Gen MM Naravane, GoC in C, Eastern Command; the Guest of Honour was David Panter who had mooted the idea of golf for a cause in 2012. We thank the President, Renji Thomas and Members, General Committee, the Golf Captains and Golf Sub-Committee, Team Tollygunge Club led by Anil Mukerji, CEO and Managing Member, members of the Organising Committee, the golfing fraternity, our donors, sponsors and all those who contribute hampers and gifts for the goodie bags for the golfers and special treats for the caddies every year.
Highlights of the Prize Distribution on 26th January

(L-R) Renji Thomas, Anil Mukerji, Dr Sudha Kaul, Lt Gen MM Naravane, David Panter, Viren Sinha and Ravi Dey

Atul Asthana, MD, Goodricke Group Limited with the winners of the 3rd Runners Up Trophies – Amjad Khan, Sudipto Das, Suhail Rajabi and Kaushik Pyne

Renji Thomas, President, presents the 2nd Runners up Trophies to Rakthin Ghoul, Aryan Shah, Aarav Kapoor and Vinan Kapur

David Panter with the winners of the 1st Runners up Trophies – Abhikanks Basu, Rakshit Basu, Jadhan Shah and Surya Sikhar Bose

Lt General MM Naravane presents the Hope Cup Trophy to GS Baweja, Ashit Lathur, Aditya Bajoria and Pradip Surebha

“Where there are friends, there is HOPE”
‘The Poetics of Fragility’
Priya Sen writes about the screening of Lata Mani’s work at IICP’s Media Lab

Priya Sen is a filmmaker and artist working across film, video, sound, and installation. She initiated the Media Lab at the Indian Institute of Cerebral Palsy, Kolkata, in 2015. She lives and works in New Delhi. Lata Mani is a feminist historian, cultural critic, contemplative writer and filmmaker. Her website http://www.latamani.com is a valuable resource for writings that range from feminism and colonialism, to illness, spiritual philosophy and contemporary politics.

The Media Lab at IICP facilitates exploration of media forms – writing, audiovisual, painting, animation. As a space, it honours the openness, uncertainty and tenuousness of creative practice. The July 2018 workshop on self-expression included 16 adults living with cerebral palsy, with varying degrees of physical and intellectual disability. Some had severe hearing impairment. Most were Bengali or Hindi speakers whose knowledge of English is minimal.

Four days into our workshop, it struck me that screening ‘The Poetics of Fragility’ might be an interesting experiment. This work, in Lata Mani and Nicolás Grandi’s words, “is a kaleidoscopic exploration of the texture, vitality and aesthetics of fragility. It interweaves stories of bodily frailty with optical vignettes of nature’s delicacy to reclaim fragility as intrinsic to existence, not something to be bemoaned or overcome”. Its visual language, its framing of fragility, was unfamiliar. The participants had not experienced anything like it before. Watching films was a rare experience for them. Holding attention, concentrating was painful.

Translation – the act of making meaning travel; from one language to another, from one set of realities to another. Translation is at the heart of this media lab. Instead of being an impediment to experience, it exists with ease, aware of its own boundaries and willing to exceed them. Translation becomes an act of imagination here. Words are emptied of meaning, attached to another life, a different set of relationships and associations.

Me, You, and The World – We had insisted on a space that was free of judgement for the duration of the workshop. We wanted to explore the words and worlds of “Me”, “You” and the relationship between the two. We wrote about the two words and we made a list that we could combine in any way we wanted.

YOU: Nature, Student, Human being, Peace, Earth, Identity, Travel, Music, Life
YOU (extended): God, Comparison, Attraction, Excuse, Dream, Duty, Loveable daughter
ME: Spectator, Good boy, Historic, Book, Girl, Assistance, Relationship, Photography, Dance, Computer
ME (extended): Woman, Girl, Emotion, Love, Singer

We asked each other about each other. What are the questions you would like to be asked? How would you like to be known?

My notes: Everyone has asked, What do you do when you are angry? How do you deal with difficult situations? What makes you go into silence? What do you do with silence? Could it be transformed into a generative state? What is a generative state?

Poonam: “I will be able to live with all the things that I understand cannot happen for me. My family on the other hand, they cannot. They don’t hear me and don’t know this. There is nothing for me to do other than retreat into silence”.
Dipak, “Silence is anger and self-harm”.

Barsha spells out her alphabet board: “I was innocent and carefree as a child. I have grown up fighting many battles”.

My notes: Where do we find the energy we need to go on, from day to day?

On her board Putul spells, “I search for happiness and find it within my own mind”.

‘The Poetics of Fragility’, was introduced in Bengali – the world “fragile” translated literally as “bhongur”, that which can easily break. The word wasn’t intuitive in this space, I discovered later. There was a palpable disconnect between understanding the breakability of thin ice or glass, and grasping the lived experience of fragility that was being summoned.

Lata had said she would tell audiences: Watch this film with your body. She said she didn’t really understand what this might do to the watching. (Perhaps a shift in the sensory experience of it?) I passed on this instruction. There was silence in the room. To me, the entire workshop had encompassed the body and its primacy. Body and “media practice” – body that doesn’t necessarily obey / body and mobility / body and time. Things had to be reconstituted, rearticulated and reimagined. “Media” and “practice” had to be set free. When the film started, I watched them watching or trying to. Some were strapped into their wheelchairs, some were trying to keep their heads steady to watch in one direction; some had to keep their hands and legs from flailing around at the slightest movement. Some were still, not moving at all. The images on the screen started filling the room. The ocean, dancing city lights from a car, a leaf quivering in a storm, a spider’s web. I listened newly to the hauntingly beautiful sound of the trombone. I took in the wisdom of fireflies. ‘We incapacitate ourselves by resisting nature’… ‘cleaving to one way of being’ … I watched through the eyes of the whole room. A man struggled to take off his wet, white coat at the edge of the ocean. The camera followed his performance.

“The coat is sin. He is freeing himself from it”, Chandan said in the break.

My notes: I am not sure how this is being seen. This film is so much about the body, but the body that has been signified, been given meaning, been identified as fragile, that has suffered and been imprisoned. I am surrounded by such bodies in this room. I understand nothing of the ways in which this film is being watched or experienced or felt. I don’t know attention spans, or time. In fact, I know nothing about time in this space. We divided the watching into two parts. We didn’t respond immediately.

In the second part, the room felt tangibly less tense. The flow of the film had been entered into. Each image was unto itself. Is this being experienced in waves? In layers? Or indeed like a kaleidoscope?

The film ended with text on screen:

No strength without fragility, No gesture inconsequential
No life pointless, No death final

Shraddha said, “I feel a bit sad”. Barsha pointed at her board: “At first, I thought the filmmaker is trying to tell us something that is outside of life and death, but now I understand that what she is telling us about is the force of something that is between life and death”.

Tanveer, “This is making sense of many anxieties”.

Putul laughed, and made a gesture of holding something close to her heart. She said it was what the film made her feel.

Chandan, “This film tells us that the will to live and to desire don’t lessen”.

Abhigyan, who is severely hearing impaired said, “I liked the play of light and darkness”.

Dipak said he had watched the film very carefully.

Listening to everyone, I realised I did not know whether “fragility” as an idea had been experienced. I decided not to ask. Then Putul said, “When the mind is very troubled, the body breaks down”.

Poonam added, “I am breaking every moment”.
IICP’s 44th Anniversary Celebration
A Photo Journey

Day 1

Dr Shashi Panja, Minister of State, Women and Child Development and Social Welfare (Independent Charge), inaugurates the exhibition

Guest of Honour Swrajie Chatterjee, renowned singer and musician sings with the band

Rabindra Sangeet exponent and Guest of Honour Swagatalakshmi Daigupta is introduced to the students

Jeet Bera uses his communication board and tablet to give information on his class theme to students of a city school
Day 2

The Guests of Honour on the 2nd day were tabla maestro Pt Shuben Chatterjee, singer Somlata Asharya and Inspector Arup Mukherjee of Kolkata Police.

An ‘Open Mike’ in the courtyard was a great hit with visitors.

Day 3

State Commissioner for Persons with Disabilities, Debabrata Chattopadhyay reciprocates the welcome by a student.

Impromptu performance by the band members of the band ‘Mohini Glorugali’.

A ‘Gurukul’ (a school in ancient India) was one of the many colourful displays.

Subhangi explains the ‘Imagery of Music’ to Nishoeth Srimann, Principal/Secretary, Indian Institute of Hotel Management, Kolkata.

At the Tea Party for staff and well wishers, the cake generously donated by Kookie Jar is cut by Upanecta Sen, Himalini Varma and Sonali Nandi.

The Advocacy Group held puppet shows for the visitors.
Unlocking AAC (Augmentative and Alternative Communication) concepts in
Children with Complex Communication Needs

A national seminar organised by the National Institute of Speech and Hearing (NISH) was held in Thiruvananthapuram, from 17-19 January, 2019. Swati Chakraborty, Head IT, IICP reports

Dr Sudha Kaul, Vice Chairperson and Founder, Dipak Ghosh, Advocacy and IT Trainer and I were invited to participate as resource persons. The audience comprised speech & language pathology students, professionals and special educators. Dipak Ghosh inaugurated the seminar with his paper on ‘Introduction to Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC)’ in which he spoke about the critical importance of AAC in the lives of individuals with complex communication needs.

Over the three days, several presentations were made by the IICP team on assessment strategies, a team approach in intervention using ‘SPICES’, an approach developed by Dr Kaul, enhancement of literacy skills and developing social competence using AAC. The other speakers were Dr Usha Dalvi, Dr Namita Jacob, Ms Rajul Padmanabhan and Ms Akila Vaidyanathan. Discussions included strategies on early AAC intervention by speech and language pathologists, assessment and selection of adaptive AAC systems for children with visual impairment and complex communication needs, the use of PECS to build spontaneous communication in Autism, and overcoming challenges and barriers in implementing AAC in the Indian context.

An exhibition organised by the Centre for Assistive Technology & Innovation (CATl) to promote a range of assistive technology products brought together researchers, product developers and users. On the final day, panelists Dipendra Manocha, Deepa Narasimha, Prof Anupam Basu, Ms Therese Willkomm, Ms Shanti Raghavan and Dr KM Abraham emphasised that the inclusion of AAC users was of prime importance to overcome the pitfalls in the development and implementation of AT as well as adaptation for access.

Prof Anupam Basu and Swati Chakraborty gave a joint presentation on IICP’s collaboration with IIT Kharagpur to develop communication software and apps and how active participation of experienced AAC users was the key to successful solutions. The ‘International Society for AAC (India Chapter)’ was introduced at the venue and members of the audience were requested to join this collective.
Events

Volunteer’s Day
Thank you all for your unstinting support

‘Hum Kisise Kam Nahi’ (Lesser than none) – A Music Festival for artists with disability organised by Ankur Advocacy Group, IICP

Chief Guest, percussionist Pt Bickram Ghosh with Guests of Honour Deepa Mukherjee and Dipak Kumar Banerjee

The talented musicians of Mano Vikas Kendra, Kolkata were a great attraction at the ‘fest’ held at Rotary Sadan

Winners at ‘Abhilasha’ a Fest organised by Lakshmipath Singhania Academy – Samik Sen, Subhansree Basu, Ishita Pal, Soumen Bagdi

Paintings by IICP artists were displayed and sold at the Art Mela, CIMA Gallery
Admiral (Retd) VK Saxena, MD GRSE hands over a cheque in support of two ‘GRSE classes’ to the students of the Life Skill Training Unit, Centre for Special Education

Alka Bangur, MD, LN Bangur Group is welcomed by Soumen Bagdi, a student of the Senior Academics section

Ashir Gupta, MD, TM International Logistics Ltd and Mrs Gupta inaugurate the ‘Smart’ class in Junior Academics II

World Cerebral Palsy Day at the Fountain of Joy, Kolkata
Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC) Week

Barsha uses her Communication board to converse with students

Dipak Ghosh demonstrates a text to speech app ‘Avaz’

3 December International Day for Persons with Disability – An Awareness programme at the Purnaree Palli bus stand

Christmas in ICP
Internationally reputed pianist Jennifer Heesstra with Benjamin Coello on the bassoon and Courtney Miller on the oboe; also in the picture is Sonali Nandi, COO and Director, Technical Services, IICP

The IICP Band with Janet Ahmed, our longest serving volunteer who teaches music
Those were the days, my friend...

Dedicated to
Anita Varma,
an integral part of the
IICP team