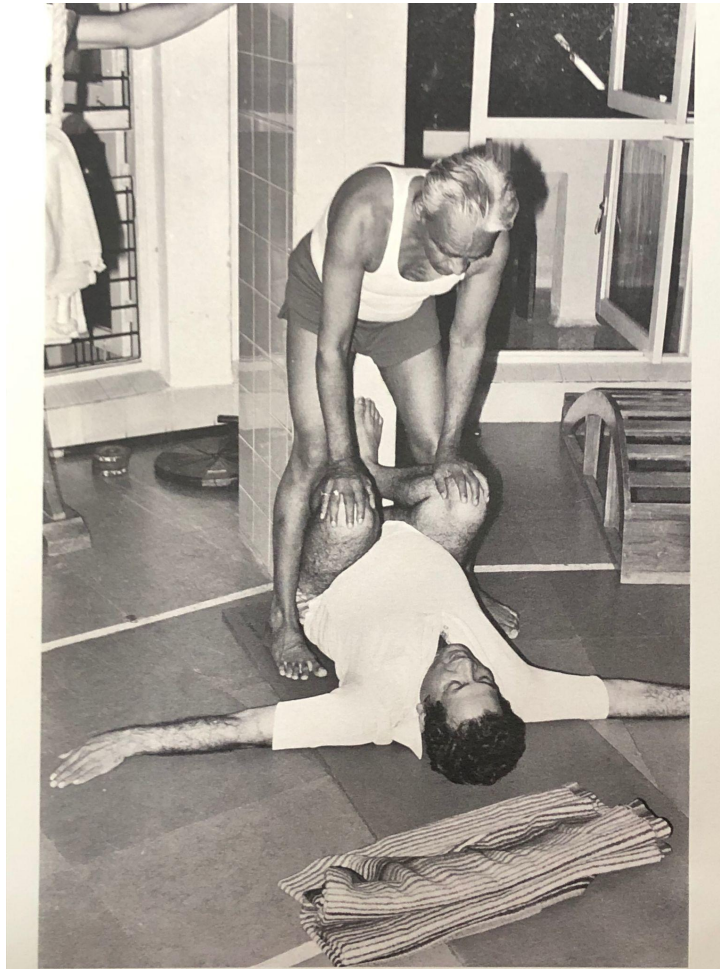


The Hall was Quiet and Cool – by Stephanie Quirk



(images courtesy of Georg & Julia Pedersen from the 1970s at RIMYI)

The hall was quiet and cool, the floor space looking vast and empty, it is 3.50pm. A lot of the assistants and teachers have arrived, they are sitting around the sides, quietly waiting, whispering between themselves or just sitting waiting. A few patients arrive early, they like to get their poses started early. They prepare their first poses and setups. The hall is still waiting.

3.56 some senior assistants run in, they move some of the patients, move and arrange props. More patients arrive taking places, settle on bolsters some at the trestle.

4.03 Guruji steps into the room. You feel the room change. He immediately steps up to the closest patient perhaps working at the grills, perhaps on the trestle. The whole room comes alive, switches on. Loudly, Guruji implores, encourages, exhorts and urges the student to work in their poses. The change is strong, powerful. For all of the gathered students it completely captures their attention. The room is transformed, no longer

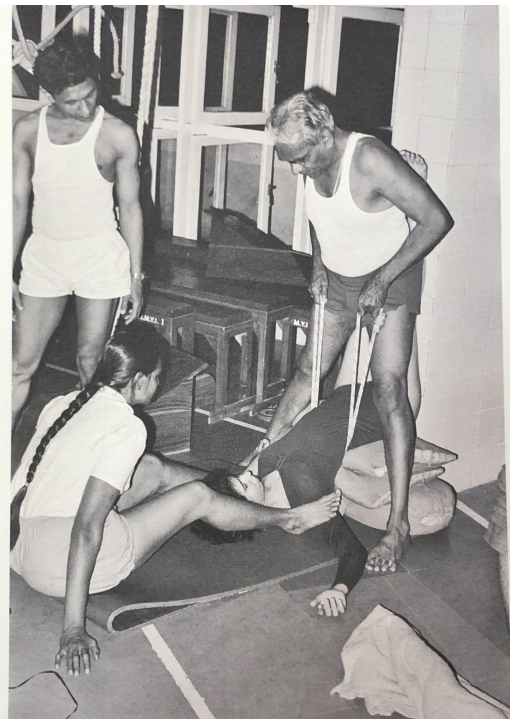
waiting, we are all centered and focused. There is work to be done and the whole room is now involved in this.

As if synchronised with that shift, Geetaji enters the room. She has the same presence and intensity in imploring and charging the patients to immerse fully into the process she has handed them. Every body's attention is now held and focused. The patients on their programmes the teachers and assistants on Guruji and Geetaji directions.

Next, as if a secret signal had been given everything moves, at once every one finds their own locus of movement.. Patients move into their first poses, assistants miraculously juggle three benches, four blankets and five belts above their heads, bringing and carrying them back and forth. Chaos. The work has begun at an incredible intensity.

There was so much movement happening it was difficult to follow any particular cases thread. This level of focus and intensity continues for a good hour at least.

I have often thought that sitting at the back of the main hall on a therapy class night is like viewing Hieronymus Bosch's Garden of Earthly Delights. The room from the centre even tends to appear as a triptych. Trestles to the left where everyone enters, the Ropes and Viparita Dandasana benches section on the Right. All manner of life stories and accounts are being attended to with props and attendants in those sessions. Lives in suffering, lives on discovery as well as recovery. A vast array of conditions are tended to. Postures entered into, immersed and absorbed or if not, an adjustment, an adaptation is applied until the right fit.

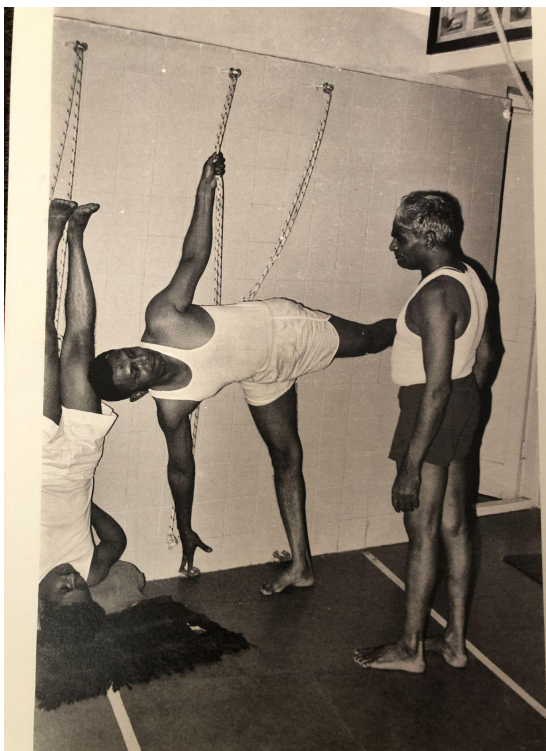


Geeta calls patients over to her desk, she is reviewing their programmes. She talks and listens to them recounting their experiences. She makes adjustments to their sheet, deleting poses, re-organising others. Sometimes it is the teacher's and assistant's work that is seen, reviewed and adjusted !

Guruji is always surrounded by a swarm of assistants. After 20 mins or so, there usually appears to have been an unspoken reckoning. Among those who had vied to assist the Guru directly only those who are nimble footed, skillful and deft of hand are still closely attending. The rest faded back to behind the columns, though still with a belt in hand or between their teeth 'just incase', ready to jump, ready to work. Slowly they would get absorbed into helping another teacher's work.

We all work into the night. The room is chaotic and noisy but no one notices. We are in it. There is no separation, all immersed, all involved.

The strongly voiced encouragements subside as Guruji works. It is a curious thing to realise that when Guruji himself is deeply involved he becomes quieter and quieter. Not silent, only an occasional comment or instruction is heard above the general noise of the room. We all lean close in to hear what he says. His voice becomes soft, quiet and often with an economy of only what he need to say. Single words to indicate pose to do next, a nod in the direction of any prop wanted. The assistants were getting whittled down, the ones that stay likely had worked with Guruji on previous nights, so they knew what the nods mean.



Guruji was very consistent in his work with the patients. He would apply a similar sequence, the same poses over and over again. But no two practices were ever the same, he watches and listens for evidence of change within that repeated practice. He made changes in their experience that were subtle. One time turning a blanket through 90 degrees, as he said the grain of the blanket would be better if turned, and sure enough the recipient thought it improved the experience. It seemed to me that along with the deepening awareness being conveyed to the patient through his administration of subtle changes, he had instigated their own healing process. The change went in.

In watching Geetaji, though attending to every student, seeing all with her penetrating gaze, what I noticed a lot was that she would concentrate and convey everything through the teacher or assistant assigned to the patient. Her focus was on them. She knew what the patient needed but seemed intent on the bringing the teachers skill and insight to be in that therapeutic process. Getting the teachers to reach in required the shattering of their own limitations of knowledge and ignorance. That breakthrough did not come easily. Geeta had to exert, exhort and cajole. Everything was revealed to Geeta's eyes and any indication that something was hidden would be brought into clear light and revealed. That force was undeniable. She changed the teachers, she changed the student.

As the night wore on Guruji's admonishments had quietened but not completely silent. If you had the fortune to be close you would hear the shabda or vibration that seemed to reveal where Guruji was working from. In his absorption of the students state he worked from the centre, from the heart. That was his healing process.

He hummed, as he worked he hummed, sometimes seemed to be a tune, but mostly just a hum, to himself. We only naturally hum when we are content. His work, his task to heal and give to others, to release his heart's energy for benefitting had a sound it was a quiet hum.

At the end of the night's work both Geetaji and Guruji would be found sitting on the platform, talking with patients, their relatives, with the assistants, everyone was relaxed, the work was done, it was complete. Everyone felt that sense of completion at the end of the class.

Guruji would wander off back to the house, usually first. By the time I was leaving the courtyard to go home, I could hear Guruji in the house chuckling and talking to Abhijata's small baby. He was playing with her, chuckling and cooing. He had left the responsibilities he held as the Yogacharya, the teacher, the Guru he was bathing in the aura and innocence of a new baby.