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# The Golden Chain

Alumni Journal of Sri Aurobindo International Centre of Education

Mother

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Mère

Continuing Education...



Mother said many times: "Whoever gets my touch, whoever has a second of true aspiration, true love for me, he is finished for life, for all lives — he is bound to me. I have put a golden chain round his neck, his heart is bound eternally to me."

It is a thing nobody can see, you yourselves don't see; but it is a fact, it is there. The golden chain is there within your heart. Wherever you go, you drag that chain, it is a lengthening chain. However far you may go, it is an elastic chain, it goes on lengthening, but never snaps. In hours of difficulty, in hours of doubt and confusion in your life, you have that within you to support you. If you are conscious of it, so much the better; if you are not conscious, believe that it is there. The Mother's love, Her Presence is there always.

Sri Nolini Kanta Gupta (to the final-year students of the Higher Course on October 26, 1976)

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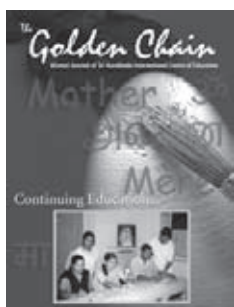
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Quote chosen by Vilas '70.

## The Golden Chain

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## THE EDITORS' PAGE

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by Sunayana '79

Many years ago, perhaps in the mid-80's, I had observed an extraordinary thing. Vasudha-ben, also known as "Akka" to many, was in the Nursing Home. She was suffering from cancer and she had only a few months to live. Her body was so shrunk because of her illness that she looked like a child. She was totally bed-ridden and totally cut off from the world. But every evening a touching scene took place within her hospital room. Urmila-ben would come at a fixed time, sit near her bed and teach her a Sanskrit shloka. Urmila-ben would recite the shloka and Vasudha-ben would repeat after her until she could recite it alone. A couple of months later Vasudha-ben passed away.

Anyone else would have thought "What is the use of learning now that there is so little time left in my life?" or "What is the use of learning since I cannot do anything with that knowledge?" But not she. It was very moving to see this person who knew that she had very little time left in this world, learn with such eagerness and such perseverance. It almost seemed as if she was alive because she was learning. Vasudha-ben had been Mother's personal attendant for years and that proximity must have brought her a great deal of spiritual knowledge. She probably knew that one is truly alive only as long as one progresses. Even when the body can't move the mind can continue to grow.

In this issue we have chosen this idea of endless progress, now organized in the form of classes for adults in the Ashram, as our main story. Although there have always been classes for studying Sri Aurobindo's major works, this is probably the first time that there is an organized effort to have language classes and also classes to develop artistic and creative skills. This has served the dual purpose of bringing knowledge and skills to people who did not have them and bringing people of many different backgrounds together. But most importantly many have felt that through

the language classes they have been able to read Mother's and Sri Aurobindo's works and that has brought them a great help in their inner efforts. For those who have joined the Ashram recently this programme has given them the opportunity to know the Ashram better and to integrate into it more easily.

In 1998 a group of former students had been planning the get-together of January 2000. They thought that instead of just coming together to meet each other perhaps it was better to put something more permanent in place and do something practical. The idea of giving back something to the community which has practically brought us up, and from which we have taken so much, was on everyone's mind. This group then drew up a list of some of the activities that could be started, such as beautifying some of the Ashram departments, looking after the elderly members who were living alone and starting an adult education programme. This last idea had also been in Shobha-di's mind for a while and when she found that the former students could help her to turn it into a reality she was more than happy. The work of getting the people to teach and of organising the classes started almost right away and the programme took off in 1999, a whole year before the get-together.

From the various interviews and articles, it would seem that it has brought a certain fulfillment to those who are learning as well as to those who are teaching. For the students, the fundamental desire for progress has been satisfied and for the teachers, who are mainly former students, there is the feeling of having made a significant contribution to the life of the Ashram.

As we read through this amazing story, its genesis, its development and its far-reaching benefits, let us remember the Mother's New Year message for 1968: "Remain young. Never stop striving towards perfection." The only way to remain mentally young is to constantly progress, to constantly learn. ❧



## REAL TEST

Watching Shankar's video [covering the various activities of Reunion 2003] reminded me of how close we all had grown during that last week of December 2003. But now we have to

hold on to that closeness, truly become The Golden Chain Fraternity. It is when there are no reunions and no celebrations that the Golden Chain must most be felt and lived. This is the real test of its strength.

Jhumur Bhattacharya '61

## OF PROPHECIES

I was struck by the co-incidence of having Devanshu Arya's article "Prophecy" alongside mine, "She Stepped into My Life", as the illness I wrote about and its outcome was also foretold some years ago.

In 1997, a palmist in Delhi had told me that I would fall so ill that coming out of it alive would not be possible. When I

expressed surprise and doubt, he had a second look at my palm and said, "You will finally come out of the illness because your Guru is with you. He is always with you." He then added, "Do not ever leave Him because He was with you, is with you and will be with you."

Isn't it interesting that both the articles under the heading "EXPERIENCE" have a prophecy in them!

Shyamoli Kapoor '78

## WE WELCOME YOUR FEEDBACK.

Please send your correspondence to: The Golden Chain, Sri Aurobindo Ashram P.O., Pondicherry 605002 or email it to us at: [goldenchain@vsnl.net](mailto:goldenchain@vsnl.net)  
Published letters may be edited for reasons of space, clarity and civility.

## SUNDAYS AT THE MATRIMANDIR

The ex-students' visit to Auroville during the Reunion of 2003 was marked by goodwill and affection on both sides. One of the sentiments that was repeatedly expressed was that ex-students should collaborate in some way in the work that is going on in Auroville. To begin with, it was suggested, those who were interested could take up some collective work in Auroville once a week — a suggestion that Srimoyi '78 (Bui) reiterated in our previous issue. There has been some progress in that direction. A group of ex-students has begun going to work at Matrimandir on alternate Sunday mornings. The first trip was organized on 25th April. The group of sixteen left at 6:30am. On reaching Matrimandir, after a 15 minute meditation in the inner chamber, they set to work sandpapering and cleaning metal pipes and clamps used for scaffolding. The work, interrupted briefly for a light breakfast, continued till about 10:15am. The trip concluded with a special guided tour of Matrimandir. **Any ex-student who wants to join this group can contact Devendra '80 (Phone: 2339848(Res), 2220778 (Off)).**

## MONIQUE

We would like to inform all the former students that Monique, our ballet teacher, passed away on 10.4.2004. We propose to bring out a write-up on her in a future issue. If you want to say something or share your memories, please send us your articles by the end of July. You can also email your article at the address given above.



## THE GC LAND

Those who were present during the Reunion last December may remember the land on which we formed the human chain. That plot of land, adjacent to Merveille, was proposed to be acquired by The Golden Chain Fraternity. It would signal the intention of the ex-student body to collaborate actively in the work that is going on in the Lake Estate, and to help further the plans the Mother had for the area. The good news is that that plot of land has now been acquired by The Golden Chain Fraternity. The registration for it was done on 19th April 2004. The photograph alongside shows some members of the Fraternity at the Sub-Registrar's Office in Vanur during the registration formalities.



## GC EX-STUDENTS' DATABASE

We are in the process of compiling an uptodate and comprehensive database of all ex-students of SAICE. The information is being collected exclusively for *The Golden Chain's* records. All those who have not filled in the form given below are requested to do so and send it to us at: The Golden Chain Fraternity, Sri Aurobindo Ashram P.O., Pondicherry - 605002. You can also email the information to us at: [goldenchain@vsnl.net](mailto:goldenchain@vsnl.net)

We are including a scanned image/digital photo of each ex-student in the database, so we request you to send a photograph/digital image along with your form/email.



Mr/Mrs/Miss First Name:.....Last Name:.....

Maiden Name:.....Ashram Name:.....

Date of Birth:.....

Joined SAICE:..... (Year and Section)

Left SAICE:..... (Year and Section)

Batch of:.....

Studies after SAICE:.....

.....

Present Occupation:.....

.....

Hobbies:.....

.....

Current Address (for posting of magazine):.....

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## IN PURSUIT OF ART

*Vishwajyoti '88 lives in Pondicherry and is an artist. Sunayana '79 interviewed her shortly after an exhibition where Vishwajyoti and some other former students had displayed their work at the Ashram Exhibition Hall in March 2004.*

**SUN:** So, Vishwajyoti, when did you first get interested in painting?

**VISH:** That came about rather late. When it came, it came with a real bang. You know, there's a small incident behind this. Long after I finished my higher course... by then I had worked in the Ashram as an Ashramite for about four or five years, I had even tried a nine to five job for a few months... long after all this, I went to see an exhibition in our Exhibition Hall which had been put up by Jean-Louis and some other Ashram teachers.

**SUN:** Right, yes.

**VISH:** I saw these tableaux, made out of pieces of Mother's garments.... I was so moved by the whole thing, it really triggered off something inside me and I felt I had to do something equally beautiful. Before that I had not much formal training in art. The only time I remember doing art in School was when I was in Progrès with Amita-di. For one year I did it with Mahesh-bhai and then I don't know why I left. And then when I came to Sumedha-ben's section I tried my hand at fabric painting with cute little handkerchiefs, but I found my own work so heavy and grotesque compared to what my friends were doing, the delicate work that they were doing, that I thought "I don't want to do this." That was my only brush with art. But after this exhibition I was so overwhelmed, I said I had to do something. You know, I'm normally quite shy but.... I

don't know how long it took me, but I mustered enough courage to go to Jean-Louis and ask him if he could teach me to paint. The first thing he asked me was if I knew how to draw. "I'm afraid I don't know how to draw," I said. If I didn't know how to draw, poor man, what could he say? But he was sweet enough to say "You keep working on your own and when you have produced something, come and show it to me." It took me a while and then, as I didn't know how to draw, I took up

some collage work. I remember doing a Ganesh. Collage and embroidery. I took it to him and he looked at it and said "It's interesting but why don't you use other mediums like crayons and water colours?" So he introduced me to all these different things, and this is how I started doing art work. Not yet drawings. And then he must have seen some scope in me, some little ray of hope, you know, my perceptions may be, because he said "You can come once a week on a regular basis." And then it became twice a week.

That way I continued for about two years. I would take something to him and we would work it out, discuss it.

**SUN:** Basically, Jean-Louis was the one....

**VISH:** He was basically the one who inspired me to take up art after all these years. Then Ulrich presented me with an air-brush and I wondered what to do with it. The air-brush is a new unconventional medium of art. It's mainly used by



commercial artists, but I decided to do something artistic with it. So I started working with this air-brush. And then I was able to make some nice things and my friends encouraged me. And for about four or five years, I think, I've only used the air-brush. So I actually learnt painting in a rather unconventional manner, with the air-brush.

**SUN:** Your paintings have a very strong element of form. Your lines are very definite and there's an impression that the lines constitute the real element of composition. So, one can see that there's a certain amount of drawing in it. How much time do you give per day or per week to painting?

**VISH:** Roughly, I would say, on an average four to five hours in a day, thirty to thirty-five hours in a week. There are some days when I have no time to paint or do my work, but those are days when I feel really bad. Like, I've done nothing in the day.

**SUN:** Do you work everyday at a fixed time?

**VISH:** I try to. After I finish my house chores and everything, I sit down for... from about nine-thirty say to about twelve, twelve-thirty... that varies depending on when I've to make lunch....

**SUN:** That is the point. Because, you see, most women feel that when they are at home the work of running the home is so important, that taking time off from that to do something creative is like taking away from our real....

**VISH:** For me it's the other way, my work is the priority. My housework is a necessity. It has to be done. But I don't put it first, if it can be postponed....

**SUN:** And the other thing is if you are at home

you feel tempted to go into the kitchen and do something or you feel tempted to go and tidy this or that and you say "I can paint later" and it gets postponed.

**VISH:** (laughs) True... true....

**SUN:** That's why I was asking you, do you say everyday "Now it's four o'clock, I must sit down and paint"? Do you have a fixed discipline that way?

**VISH:** Yes, I try to. In the morning hours I try to sit down for at least two to three hours. Afternoons are more flexible, more or less depending on what I have to do, whether I have to go out and things like that. So I do have a discipline, a fixed structure, where I give time for my work, painting.

**SUN:** If anybody comes to your house at that time, do you say "I'm sorry, I'm painting"?

**VISH:** (laughs) Unfortunately, no. Unlike Ulrich, my husband, who is very strict about that. In the morning nobody can disturb him, unless it's really very important.

If you want to do something, you have to set your priority right. He is that way. If I have to go out, I do. Then I paint later, as I have no dead-lines to meet. Sometimes, I have, though.

**SUN:** Have you tried other mediums....

**VISH:** As I said, I started with the air-brush and then later oil became the alternative medium. There also I would like to add that Kirti was very instrumental in getting me started with oil painting because she was the first one to show me how to prepare the canvas. I asked her about oil painting and that set me off on oils. Otherwise it may have taken me longer to start oil painting.





**SUN:** How long have you been doing oil painting?

**VISH:** Two years at the most.

**SUN:** Only?

**VISH:** Right from the time I started to use the conventional brush to what I've achieved, only two years.

**SUN:** In what way has this artistic activity helped you in your inner work, in your sadhana?

**VISH:** About sadhana I don't know. All that I know is that I try to do my work and live my life with as much sincerity and truthfulness as I can. I try to remember the Divine not only in my moments of misery and sorrow but also in my moments of achievement and joy. I know the Mother is always there with me. I may ignore Her sometimes but She is there. I try to use all the depressions and all that to make myself progress.

**SUN:** Has this helped you to develop something inwardly? Some particular capacity?

**VISH:** Art by itself, no. Life in general, yes. In any field, you learn from the mistakes that you make and how you live your life. That sincerity and truthfulness is what I try to keep in my mind always and think of the Mother. And I know that She knows what is best for me, so I can't even ask Her for anything, except to be with me always.

**SUN:** What do you think should be done to help the young students to take interest in real art, as opposed to painting Mickey Mouse on handkerchiefs?

**VISH:** There I think we can do a lot. Introduce them to art appreciation. You know, in Europe I hear they have compulsory classes where the teachers show students paintings, prints....

**SUN:** Actually, once upon a time Amita-di used to take such a class but nobody else took it up or followed it up.

**VISH:** So, to show the children these paintings

and discuss with them. If they like it, why, if not, then again why not. And then to expose them to different movements in art. Our knowledge of art is limited to the Renaissance or to the Impressionists and it ends there. I don't know what the scene is like now. But, you know, modern art has gone through so many phases. Starting from Fauvism to Cubism to Surrealism to Kinetic art, Pop art, so many movements and now it has come to Postmodernism and the Art of identity. So, you know, children should be exposed to all these movements, whether they like it or not is a different thing.

**SUN:** As a general knowledge....

**VISH:** As a general knowledge. And try and understand art, what art is all about. There should be that and then there could be someone who could talk to them about colour, forms, light, composition, balance and perspective. So this will not only help them in art.... Actually, art appreciation has nothing to do with actual drawing and painting,

it opens new doors... and exposing them to art in general will help them not only in art but also in day-to-day life. The sensibilities will get keener. At first when you show them all these things then they will see it in their dressing sense, what colours match, what to wear, what shade of lipstick to wear with what complexion, you know. All these things will develop an...

**SUN:** Aesthetic sense.

**VISH:** Yes, and it will teach them to differentiate the sensible from the senseless, the beautiful from the

ugly, the aesthetic from the grotesque. You know, it will teach them. If you give them this kind of exposure, even in their environment they'll start looking at things from a different perspective. There's one way of looking at things, and there's a view from a different angle. I think that should open them more.



**SUN:** Right. Of course in very, very modern art there is sometimes an element, a very strong element, of the mind and it cuts out a lot of fine sensibility. It's sometimes... it's really grotesque and ugly, but....

**VISH:** You have used the right word.

**SUN:** One would feel repelled by it. Most people when they talk of art think it is this, the art that is sold. The principle of beauty is lacking. That principle of beauty has to be instilled in the children, by teaching them why we find a certain thing beautiful, what is it that really makes us instinctively feel "Oh, this is beautiful" or "This is not." The instinct to recognize beauty. So, don't you think that if they are actually taught to draw, then they would appreciate more the paintings that they have seen? If you've tried doing something and you have failed you tend to understand the greatness of the one who can do it. For example if you are doing gymnastics, you try doing a somersault and you fall. The next time you see someone doing a somersault, you really appreciate it. So, if you've never learnt to draw you can't appreciate the skill of the artist who can draw.

**VISH:** That, I believe, they do in the school, you know. They do teach them how to draw, they take them out. Like Kirti, taking classes, she takes them out to different places and she actually makes them draw. I think....

**SUN:** Oh! Well, they must have progressed a lot, because in our time we were never encouraged to draw.

**VISH:** We used to draw but what they don't have are theory classes, which is also important. And unless you are exposed to theory, you don't develop an understanding. But that's where art appreciation comes in, art history comes in and I like talking about colours and forms and compositions and how to fill out a page. When you are told to draw, you don't start drawing the whole thing. You choose an angle, a perspective, you draw from there.... All that should be developed,

I think.

**SUN:** Before you paint, do you actually visualize your painting, do you actually see it?

**VISH:** I do try to visualize, you know; it all works out differently for different paintings.

Sometimes, as I said, I take pictures of the market scene. Some I did from my imagination, but then I went to the vegetable market and the fish market, I took pictures and from there I did my own composition.... So I work differently, each time, every painting starts in a different way. But it's not like it comes as a vision.... I wish it did.

**SUN:** Do you see.... When you look at a tree or a scene somewhere, do you say "Ah, that would make a good picture"?

**VISH:** That I'm beginning to develop. I think so. You know, I missed out on all that. I wish I had been exposed to that, you know. All the time I try to make the best of whatever I have and move on from there.

**SUN:** And do you sometimes feel like, now, attending a class, or going to learn something different?

**VISH:** I'd like to, but for me what are the possibilities unless I go and join.... I'm too old for joining an institute or....

**SUN:** Anyway, being self-taught has its own advantages also.

**VISH:** I suppose so, an advantage and a disadvantage. And there, you know I don't have to prove myself as an artist. After all, I do what I feel like doing, I'm happy to do it. Whatever makes me happy. But then when you try to exhibit your things, there you see the difference between the Ashram and the other audience.... There they have their own fixed views of what art should be.

**SUN:** Right.

**VISH:** You know what it is and what it is not.

**SUN:** Do you feel unhappy about this fact, that you have to keep in mind what the audience wants and then make something to please the audience?



**VISH:** No, unfortunately....

**SUN:** You have not thought about that?

**VISH:** No, I manage. Eventually, I do what I like to do, because, if I'm not happy doing something, you know, I just....

**SUN:** You would not paint a picture only to please somebody.

**VISH:** I can't say.... Because I'm also selling my work. So all that labour, work and all that... I do commercially what they want but at the same time I need to grow and progress as an artist and that's where the.... That's where I keep these two quite different. So, I work, for selling also and I work for my own progress and growth.

**SUN:** What do you do for your own progress and growth? Is it there that you really express what you want to say, what you want to paint?

**VISH:** I've just discovered this medium, the possibilities. I want to paint everything.... I need to still find my own style and I can't always go on painting everything, I have to develop.... I feel so many artists lose the sense of beauty, either because they want to be different, they want to....

**SUN:** For the sake of being different....

**VISH:** Just for the sake of being unique, you know, they want to.... And often I've seen the words are very big and the action is very little. They paint something quite simple or even something quite incomprehensible but the explanations they give are so grand and pompous in order to lure gullible buyers.... There, for us who have been in the Ashram it becomes a little difficult to understand. Lot of big talk... using big, big words to say hardly anything.



**SUN:** Yes, it's something like the "Emperor's New Clothes". You have to pretend to like it, otherwise people will say you are a fool.

**VISH:** That is more for people who are buying art. It's the money that counts and not the actual work, the name which counts and not the actual work, because of the big name.

**SUN:** Yes, exactly, what do you think of that trend? People buy that art because they are told "this is painted by so and so". It is the name, the tag and the art dealer who puts it to them like a good investment, rather than "This is what I would love to see in my living room. This is what would give me pleasure every time I set my eyes on it." What do you feel about this trend?

**VISH:** There are such people who do buy things only because they like it, then there are people with big money who prefer to buy a big name. I don't know what to say about it and there's nothing one can do (laughs) about it. But you continue painting, because you like to paint.

**SUN:** Exactly, but then you might be led to paint for this kind of mass, to please people.

**VISH:** There you have to be able to put your foot down, you know. There's a big chance that you are led to do that, it may happen.

**SUN:** You might never be a very great artist but at least you would have done what you felt happy doing.

**VISH:** True, right now, yes, I believe that. I

don't know what will happen in the future.

**SUN:** Anything else you want to add? Anything we haven't covered?

**VISH:** I guess we have covered everything. ☼

# THE NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

*Subhadra '93 tells us about one of the great libraries of the West*

*In the reading room in the New York Public Library  
All sorts of souls were bent over in silence reading the past,  
Or the present or maybe it was the future, persons  
Devoted to silence and the flowering of the imagination....*

**Richard Eberhart**

**L**ibraries are a great source of knowledge and inspiration. They enlarge the “bounds of human thought”. Not only is a library a storehouse of ancient wisdom but of modern knowledge as well, not only of research publications but of magazines and newspapers as well. Libraries are an important support to the whole educational and research community as well as to the knowledge-seeking layman. A library is like a second home, sometimes even better than a home — a place to be sheltered from everything else except oneself and learning. It is also a treasure-house of a great collection of works of art and other forms of preservation of knowledge and culture.

library as our need to know different subjects grew. In Knowledge we were taught the Dewey Decimal Classification system and could explore the library on our own. What I like best about our library is its atmosphere of reverence for learning and books and its silent meditateness.

Later on, I'm sure, many of us have used many other libraries, specialized and technical with vast collections of books, organized with different degrees of efficiency.

Just as museums, libraries are preserves of the ever-flowering human identity. The remnants of the first libraries are the ancient tablets of Babylonia and the papyrus scrolls of Egypt. The oldest known library at Alexandria (300 BC) began the task of preserving the discoveries of human curiosity and ingenuity — a task that promises to keep mankind busy for ever.

The New York Public Library (NYPL for short) is among the most famous libraries of the Western world, the others being the “British Library” in London, the “Bibliothèque nationale de France” in Paris, the “Russian State Library” in Moscow and the “Library of Congress” in Washington.

From afar the NYPL looks like a Greek temple, with its pillars and its triangular roof. What I find most interesting and original about this library is that as you approach the building, from about two blocks in advance, there are metal tablets engraved into the footpaths with beautiful quotations on poetry, freedom and wisdom. So, as you near the library, you are already drawn into its atmosphere with these quotations that you can't avoid reading as you walk on the footpath. The quotation at the beginning of this article is one of them.

Libraries, being institutions of great public utility, are usually funded by governments or through donations. The NYPL is free for all. Tourist or resident, anybody can go in and access a book in a very short while.

The Library started with a generous donation



My experience of a library, as for many of us, started with the Sri Aurobindo Library. As children, we explored its gardens and its children's section filled with large books with colourful pictures and interesting stories. Later on, we moved on to different sections of the





from a one-time governor Samuel J. Tilden who upon his death in 1886 donated the bulk of his fortune to “establish and maintain a free library and reading room in the city of New York.”

The names of the generous donors are engraved on the walls at the entrance. But there is one donor who is given a place of honour. His name is written on a metal plaque on the floor at the entrance. His name is Martin Radtke. He was a Lithuanian immigrant who, when he came to America, was illiterate. He used to work as a gardener in the city and visit the Library. With time he learnt a lot from the Library, especially about investing, and made quite a fortune. After his death he left all his wealth to the Library. The library honours him because they want to encourage people to follow his example: be curious, and use the Library to be successful.

A building which becomes a library has usually quite a distinctive architecture, like a museum, because it is intended to house precious material, last for a long time and attract people by curiosity. Therefore library buildings are usually built with a lot of care and skill, as they showcase, in many ways, the best of the age in which they were established.

For building the NYPL, there was an open competition from which two architects were selected: John M Carrere and Thomas Hastings. They were both students of the “Ecole des Beaux Arts” in Paris and the building is a very good example of the “Ecole des Beaux Arts” style. The building took about a decade to be built and was officially opened in 1911.

The building is almost entirely in marble, very spacious — with large open spaces and very high ceilings, and long corridors which remind one of the museums in Paris. Animals, especially lions,

were very important to the “Ecole des Beaux Arts” style, and they became important to this Library too. Two majestic lions sit on both sides of the entrance. They are called “Patience” and “Fortitude”, the two qualities which are thought to be very important for people who live in New York City.

The building has the atmosphere of a palatial temple. Its generous spaces encourage largeness of thought and feeling. The main reading room is furnished with large wooden rectangular tables and solid wooden chairs to go with them. These are set at large intervals thus giving each one enough space to spread out and study.

The Library consists of four research libraries and many lending libraries. The main building that I am referring to is the Humanities and Social Sciences Library. The other research libraries, spread across New York City, are the “Library for the Performing Arts”, the “Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture” and the “Science, Industry and Business Library”. There are about 85 lending libraries, with collections totaling 6.6 million items.

The Humanities and Social Sciences Library



itself is organized in various sections. There are collections of books and other items left to the Library by individual collectors which the Library

has enlarged over the years.

The periodicals section is where newspapers from all over the world and in various languages can be accessed. Very old newspapers are stored in the form of microfiche or microfilm. I was able to access a newspaper called *Pioneer* printed from Allahabad in 1933 in microfiche form. The newspaper is condensed into film that you can project onto a screen and read. The *Readers' Digest* uses this section extensively as it digests many articles from here.

The maps section has a great collection of maps of the whole world. Reporters access the maps when a particular place in the world is in the news and they want to know its exact location and town-plan.

The rare books section has a collection of beautiful publications — beautiful in terms of printing, illustration, paper quality or type set. The Gutenberg Bible, printed around 1450, which is the first printed book in the Western world, is part of this collection and is sometimes put out on display. I was able to see it on display and it looked in extremely good shape — the paper wasn't yellow, the print had not faded — it hardly looked over 5 centuries old! I'm not sure if that is because of the quality of the book or the skill of preservation or both.

There is a collection from the person who invented the tobacco machine. He collected a lot of books around the subject of tobacco. The collection has a lot of works of Oscar Wilde, especially the "Importance of Being Earnest" where Oscar Wilde wrote that smoking was an occupation. There are obviously no books of Shakespeare here.

In another collection, Charles Dickens' writing table with its lamp has been preserved.

In addition to facilitating study and research, the library encourages writing by supporting 15 people every year on their writing projects through scholarships. It also provides lockers to writers who have contracts with publishers so that they can keep aside the research books they are using for their writing.

There are also exhibitions every season. The

Library uses its vast collection of material on such occasions. Currently there is an exhibition on Russia. The Library has a huge collection of material of Tsarist Russia which it acquired from Russia when that country was getting rid of everything to do with the Tsars. It is using these for the current exhibition.

There are also regular lectures by various prominent people on various subjects of literary interest where the public is encouraged to participate. How soon do you think you should be able get a research publication after you ask for it? From a collection of millions of books? 30 minutes is the time in which you will get it at NYPL and the Library prides itself over this timing.

Once a researcher chooses what he or she needs and hands over the request at the librarian's desk, the request is immediately sent down to the book storage area through a pneumatic tube. The storage space at the disposal of the library is 12 storeys of stacks of books with 128 miles of shelf space. The NYPL does not follow the Dewey Decimal system but its own system which is called the CATNYP (Catalogue of the New York Public Library). The books are however arranged according to size and cross referenced with their storage location. After the request reaches the storage area, one of the staff searches and retrieves the books and sends them back by the tube to the library upstairs. Because of the high speed with which this is accomplished there is a rumour that the staff at the storage level wear roller skates!

Most of Sri Aurobindo's important works are there as well as many other interesting works published in the Ashram. The oldest publication is *War and Self-Determination; four essays*, by Aurobindo Ghose, Triplicane, Madras, S.E., S.R. Murthy and co. 1920. An interesting book is a book called *Handmade Papers of India*, a book of prints of handmade paper "made at the Sri Aurobindo Mill in Pondicherry".

It feels very good to study at the library — among people with faces from all over the world engrossed in an activity that is precious in a similar way everywhere. ❧

## CONTINUING EDUCATION IN THE ASHRAM

*Maurice Shukla '75*

Life is movement and life at the Ashram must necessarily mean a conscious movement forward and upward. The Ashram is first and foremost Sri Aurobindo's and the Mother's Presence and Consciousness, which form its soul, its core. Then the Ashram is also the body created by this Presence and this body is continually changing, growing, aspiring, evolving at different rhythms at different times. This body, like any individual body, must needs act, think, feel, grow towards the Light. It is fundamentally vital, therefore, that we remain connected to that central Presence even as we move forward. This body we call the outer Ashram is composed not just of the buildings and physical structures but more importantly of the individual sadhaks and

time ago, blessed by an extraordinary destiny and physically touched by the very Makers of that destiny. Others have come later, equally blessed to have been called to Their adventure but who, for some inscrutable reason, are to tread this path of an ever-joyous consciousness holding onto an invisible and not a visible Hand like their predecessors. The marvellous, heart-warming thing is that in this community of fellow-explorers of the New World and Life we all bond into the same fraternity. We're all, in Their regard, equally loved children who form this one single family of common aspiration. And as members of this one family, shouldn't we move happily together towards That which gives meaning and direction to our lives?



This spiritual aspiration, the primary *raison-d'être* of this large body of sadhaks and seekers, needs also to be expressed through its mental life. The quality of its mental life and culture will go to influence the quality of its personality and nature. The Mother saw Auroville as a site for perpetual education and a youth that never ages. Should not the Ashram, as the bedrock of that Inspiration, lead

seekers who have all converged here to aspire to a life that is infinitely more meaningful. Some amongst these sadhaks and seekers arrived a long

the way by example, by incarnating this alchemic principle of existence? For the pursuit of knowledge has a beautiful transforming quality as well.

# I Had a Dream

Shobha Mitra '58

It was 6th February 1996. At about midnight (12.40 a.m.) I had a dream of the Mother. It was in the form of a dialogue. It ran like this:

**Myself:** *Mother, the artists who settle here lose their art because nobody bothers about them. Nobody asks them to perform. Mother, I want to start a monthly programme in the Library to give them the opportunity to perform regularly. This will help them to keep up their practice.*

**Mother:** *Good. Do it. (Then she kept silent for a little while and spoke again.) What is more important is to start some adult classes. Those who settle here must read the teachings of Sri Aurobindo and mine. If it is not done then the Ashram will have to face serious consequences.*

I got up in the middle of the night and wrote down the dream. The language was mine but the message was the Mother's. I hesitated to tell this to anyone because I thought nobody would believe me. Soon after this I heard the shocking news of Paru's passing. Sometime later I spoke to Manoj about this and requested him if our School could take this up as another of its activities. Manoj answered that the School was too busy with its own activities. He then told me: "Since the thing has come to you, why don't you take it up?"

It was not possible for me to do anything immediately because my mother was then very ill. A little later I formed a team with five former students of the SAICE: Ashok, Maurice, Hardie, Dimple and Gaurishankar and requested them to take up the responsibility of the Adult Education classes. It was only in January 1999 that we started these adult classes.

In my dream the Mother specifically mentioned the teachings of Sri Aurobindo and Hers and so keeping that as our primary focus we have tried to add a few more subjects (whatever was possible) because I have witnessed in my own life how the Mother used to urge us to take interest in different subjects, in various aspects of life. Since these classes are attended by many young inmates, we have tried to take a broader outlook and offer different possibilities

to help them know more because Education in its true sense is an adventure that is purifying and all-embracing.



When the mind focusses on ordinary, mundane things, it starts dividing existence, it gets into a sense of separateness and I-ness. When the mind focusses on knowledge, wisdom, truth then it unites and becomes a vehicle of greater harmony, it releases an incredible joy and enthusiasm and love for this marvellously divine world. Or to give you another metaphor: our mind is like water. In whatever vessel you pour water, it assumes the shape of that vessel. In the same way in whatever thought you engage the mind, the mind becomes that. When as a community we remain focussed on thoughts of knowledge, of beauty, of joy, of

love for the Divine, then all our collective and individual anxieties, fears, tensions and worries just drop away. The little drops merge with the ocean and peace and strength result. And the community becomes puissant and united in the true sense of the term.

This endeavour of "adult education", or "continuing education" as I prefer to call it, was sparked off by this same Inspiration and as all true Spirit-sparks, this too was lit by the Mother's Grace and Guidance which came to Shobha-di in the form of a dream. One day she gathered some of us and shared this intriguing dream and as we



tried to understand it, we felt that She was sending us some sort of an indication about the urgent need of taking up this aspect of the Ashram's growth which the Mother seemed to indicate in the dream. And the service that was required of Her children was to start an experiment in "continuing education", beyond the regular young student-community to the larger more grown-up one within the Ashram. It has been doubly marvellous for us on two counts: one, it has offered many of us, former students of the Mother's School, an opportunity to express our gratitude and love through serving Her in whatever capac-

of five: Shobha-di, Ashok Acharya, Hardie, Dimple, and myself. As soon as we began throwing the seeds around we found a groundswell of goodwill for the idea and we managed to get the willing cooperation of about 60-65 people as teachers/organisers/animators. Several of them were not trained teachers but then in the Ashram haven't we all learnt our vocation through love for the Mother? The number of students who enrolled in the first year, 350, seemed like a reconfirmation of Shobha-di's dream. Gaurishankar joined the organisers' team a year later.

This adventure in continuing education start-

ed on 2nd January, 1999, with a meditation in the Hall of Harmony. The classes began subsequently and were held primarily in the evenings and on Sundays in the School main building, the Dining Room hall (upstairs), the Music Room and Delafon. Later when the Salle d'Art (the old Art Gallery) was given to the School for its use, Manoj-da graciously opened this wonderful space to us as well. We offered the learners the following: (beginner to progressively higher levels) in French, English, Sanskrit, Tamil, Bengali and Hindi, Vocal music, Tabla, Flute, Painting/Drawing/Calligraphy and Theatre. A series of talks in English, Hindi and Kannada by select speakers were started on the major works of Sri Aurobindo and the



ity we can: as teachers, as organisers, as animators or as administrators. And two, it is helping many of the relative late-comers to the Ashram to feel truly part of Her Family through this common need and aspiration for increasing knowledge of and increasing kinship with the new Consciousness. I have been working in this experiment in whatever role that is required of me and only I know how much I gain inwardly through this opportunity to serve, at the level of my own growth as well as at the level of the deep joy and satisfaction it gives me.

When we started this in 1999 we were a team

Mother and these are in fact open to all. Two new fields have been added since: Electronics and Art through Waste-material. We have held intensive spoken Tamil, Sanskrit and French workshops, First-Aid workshops and an energy-conservation related workshop.

Today in its 6th year, the continuing education experiment caters to almost 400 students with the invaluable help of about 65 teachers (including the Music teachers), some of whom are regular teachers of our Centre of Education as well. Without their happy collaboration this experiment could not have been taken forward



and I would like to take this opportunity to thank the Mother's Grace for giving us so much to help us serve Her!

To me personally, this opportunity of contributing my mite to this project has not been so much about imparting or learning some languages or skills. It has a deeper, wider, more significant import than the merely academic: to give a sense of oneness and belonging to every member of the Ashram community, a sense of belonging to the Mother's family, a grateful means of breathing a little bit of the Master's consciousness. It was precisely with this in mind that we invited, as part

of this same project, a number of old sadhaks and sadhikas to come and share with us their privileged moments with the Mother and Sri Aurobindo (Chitra-di, Vishwanath-da, Millie-di, Shobha-di, Dr Bisht, Madanlal-ji, Chamanlal-ji, Aster, Batti-da, Richard, Kailash-ben, etc.)

Among the 60 odd teachers we have, many are also former students of the School and this gives the present-day learners a whiff of the magical air that pervaded the School during their time and also a taste of a refreshingly different relationship between teacher and student that the latter may not have experienced anywhere else before coming to the Ashram. It provides the students of this continuing education scheme a marvellous way of connecting with the core that animates our world here, a real sense of "feeling at home" as it were. So it is a two-way traffic, of mutual benefit to both learner and teacher, in the sense that we are all growing together through this collective endeavour. The most moving aspect of this endeavour has been once again the ready, spontaneous help and collaboration we have received from the Trustees, from the School (Manoj-da, Arati-di, and Ravi in particular), and from Ved-ji at the Dining Room.

Flowers have each their individual fragrance but without the breeze their fragrance would not





spread around. In the same way each one of us is a wonderful being, full of love, beauty and devotion but our individual fragrances somehow remain unshared and unfelt in the absence of a collective communion. The act of coming together in this pursuit of knowledge and belonging and joyous harmony acts as the breeze that helps spread these

fragrances around. And this creates cordiality, enthusiasm or *utsaha* in this life of sadhana we have all come to lead here.

If I were to make an assessment of these 6 years of continuing education, I must admit that it has been most positive and encouraging at every level. The interest and the collaboration are growing and the air resonates with widening gladness. However, this does not mean that we haven't faced any problems or even misunderstanding sometimes, but everybody, by the Mother's ceaseless Grace, is beginning to realise and feel its usefulness. As the sun gloriously

sets on the western horizon, our School livens up every evening with the happy earnestness of grown-ups from the different walks of Ashram life, in classrooms, before their easel or on the stage, remembering gratefully the Mother and Sri Aurobindo who continue to breathe into our lives unending loveliness and joy.

## A CONSCIOUS EFFORT TO LEARN AND GROW

*Simmy-ben, our Kindergarten teacher of many decades, reflects on the experience of teaching English in the Continuing Education Program*

**T**his is my sixth year. I spent four years with my first group of students and this is the second year with my present group.

The first group had a greater facility with the language (many read a lot and could speak fairly well). Most had been here a long time and were ashramites.

The present group is quite mixed; only a couple are ashramites, some are parents of Kindergarten children, most are relative newcomers of a year or two. Their facility of expression is minimal and I have had to get down to the simplest, most basic

structure of the language to help them to speak at all. They all write better than they speak. Even though motivated to learn, their study habits, ability to pay attention in class, all need development. The first year was tough going but this year they have progressed in being regular, doing some homework and concentrating in class.

What was most amusing is that for months, they didn't understand my pronunciation, nor did I understand theirs. E.g. I say "bomber" — he writes "bamboo". But perhaps now, we have crossed that hurdle!

In many ways, they are exactly like children.



Their ability to forget is phenomenal. You have just finished correcting them and in the very next breath, they can make exactly the same mistake and be completely oblivious of it! Somehow with children one learns to expect this. With the adults, my expectation was different. But now, I'm reconciled to my fate — endlessly repeating, “no, not I have pen” but “I have a pen”. Teaching them to use “the” and “a” correctly is a real Waterloo.

The greatest challenge is to integrate, that is to weave on one loom the teaching of English with the aim and practice of our life here. With both my groups, this has been almost automatic. Many of my students are Oriyas and I feel a great affinity with them as they are ever full of devotion. So we are all just simple “bhaktas” of the Mother and Sri Aurobindo. In many of their meetings and in our classes the atmosphere is sometimes filled with a light and sincerity that is touching.

Our class is an interactive living experience. As the months and years go by, the links between us grow more intimate and multi-faceted — our families, the work we do, our joys and travails are all grist to the mill of language and inner growth. Birthdays, picnics, discussions, painting,

visits to Ashram farms or departments where they work or Matrimandir, are all celebrations of our group's agenda. But on all excursions, there is one interdiction. No speaking in Oriya! Does it happen? More or less....

Finally, is there a difference between teaching children and teaching adults? A happy difference is that grown-ups can be, and are, masters of their own destiny, if they so choose.

Children being children are impressionable and greatly influenced as well as necessarily circumscribed by the parents, family and society in which they live. Of course growing up here tends to counteract this. But in my long years of being with the children, there have been many for whom I have wished and worked for a different understanding and handling from their parents or guardians.

So with my adult students, their conscious effort to learn and grow is for me a source of real encouragement and infinite motivation.

Finally, I find each one, whether child or adult, unique and ever so lovable and this gives me great joy and stamina.

Teachers of the Continuing Education Programme with Manoj-da and Arati-di





# RECOGNISING THE BEAUTIFUL

*Arup Mitra '72, who takes Art Classes, answers our questions*

***In spite of lacking a systematic training from a young age, some of the adult students may have natural talents in this area. What has been your experience as an art teacher for the adults?***

True talent is irrepressible. Suppressing talent is like letting steam build up relentlessly inside a boiler. If not released, this pressure will automatically blow itself out. In such cases, inspiration and talent work hand in hand in striving to find the right vehicle for self-expression.

If an adult has not felt the urge to create, it is simply because the inner drive has not been strong enough. However, a natural talent for appreciation may already have developed in an individual due to the existence of a cultural background or due to an active interest in the arts. In such a case, it may be enough to proceed with the cultivation of visual sensibility. This will allow the learner to recognise beauty wherever his eyes fall. It is in this particular domain that the difference between child education and adult training lies. While a child must be taught to discover the world around him, a grown up individual may simply be instructed to recognise the latent beauty in things.

***Over the years, what are your observations regarding the inspirational and imaginative aspect of the adult students on the one hand and the technical competence on the other?***



It is interesting to note that technical competence often improves the imagination. The mastery of techniques inexorably leads to a more effective outflow of in-

spiration, one of the fundamental objectives of the free progress system. It is like developing a big repertoire of vocabulary so that the right word can be chosen to match the description of the right situation. In art, however, the effectiveness of expression customarily depends on the choice of the right technique for expressing the right subject. And as in all other fields, this basic skill too can be cultivated through discipline and practice.



***This is an area of culture which often reflects our inner being. Any experience with your students worth remembering?***

Every form of art reflects our inner being. Only, the visual media of painting communicates more easily to the masses due to its universal appeal. After all, signs require no language.



In this respect, my own experience with the adult students has been very much in line with what I have just said. I feel amazed to see the immediate results following the instruction of a particular technique. These expressions very often surpass my expectation, making me wonder how much could have been gained by the timely acquisition of these tools of self-expression earlier in life. However, while deliberating carefully on the matter, one is left with only viable alternative: that things are better learnt late than never.

# An Overview of the Continuing Education Programme

*The organisers provide the facts and figures.*

About six years ago, when the ex-students' Millennium get-together was being planned, various proposals were received by the organising committee. One of them was the Programme on Adult Education. This project of having evening classes in various subjects for Ashramites and others actually started on the 2<sup>nd</sup> of January 1999.

Shobha-di '58 was the initiator of the whole idea while Ashok '80, Dimple '80, Gaurishankar '80, Maurice '75 and Hardie '80 helped in the implementation of the project.

The student body of the Continuing Education Programme is composed of Ashramites, volunteers giving free service to the Ashram, parents of children studying at the Centre of Education and former students and their spouses. This year there are around 400 students. The teachers that take these evening classes number around 65.

At present the subjects of study are:

- 1) Languages: English, French, Sanskrit, Tamil, Hindi and Bengali are being taught from the beginners' level to more advanced levels.
- 2) Works of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother in English, French, Hindi and Kannada. These lectures are open to all.
- 3) Music: There are two sections, vocal and instrumental. In the former, classes in Hindustani and Carnatic classical music, hymns and songs in Sanskrit, Bhajans, Rabindra Sangeet, Nazrul Geeti, songs on the Mother and Sri Aurobindo, Odissi music, etc. are offered. While in the latter, we have classes in Flute (Indian) and Tabla.
- 4) Painting.
- 5) Theatre.
- 6) Workshops: From the year 2000 there have been several workshops in diverse fields. There were two workshops on First Aid and one in Management of Natural Resources such as water, air and energy etc. Additionally there are workshops held in spoken Tamil, Sanskrit and also

French. These are usually held during the month of December and benefit a large number of participants.

Subjects of study are added as their need arises and if relevant teachers are available. Last year two new classes were begun: Art from Waste Materials or "Best out of Waste" and Electronics.

Every year a special event is held by the students: in 2000 and 2002, there were cultural programmes and in 2001 and 2003, exhibitions of paintings. Last year the Sanskrit classes presented plays and recitations.

In October 2002 one of the English classes put out a Souvenir volume — it was a selection of essays written during the 4 years of their study.

During the second year the organisers became increasingly aware of the students' longing to hear about the Mother from those who had known Her in Her physical body. A series of hour-long talks were begun entitled "Reminiscences of the Mother" given by those willing to share their intimate experiences with Her. A few of these talks extended over two or three sessions. Some of the speakers were Chitra-di, Millie-di, Shobha-di, Vishwanath-da, Batti-da, Dr. Bisht, Aster-di, Chamanlal-ji, Richard, Madanlal-ji, Kailash-ben etc.

The aim of this Programme of Continuing Education is to attempt to fulfill for the adults of our Ashram community their vibrant need to learn and to progress in the Light of the Mother and Sri Aurobindo.

It is also the utter sincerity of the students and their effort to progress that is the most striking and touching aspect of the program. It is also experienced as a positive, invigorating and unifying force in our Ashram community.



# STUDENT-SPEAK

*The Golden Chain spoke to some of the students who have been attending the adult classes for some years. Panchali, Mira and Alok work in "Honesty". Jagatram is now at the Lake Estate and Raju (who is also a teacher for some of the classes) works in the Press and at the Lake Estate. Kanakalata works at the Mother India office and also at the Dining Room. Robin-da works at the Mother India office. He is known to former students as the brother of Reba-di (teacher) and the father of Srimoyi '93. Here are some excerpts from the discussion.*

## REASONS FOR JOINING

**GC:** We want to know first what made you want to take up these classes. For instance are you studying French and English to be able to read and understand Mother's and Sri Aurobindo's works? What about other subjects like dramatics? What were your intentions for joining these classes?

**Panchali:** Languages we learnt because we are working in Honesty, and customers speak different languages.

**Mira:** To understand them. And they speak many languages including French.

**GC:** So it is actually for your work itself.

**Panchali:** Also here in the Ashram so many languages are spoken. It is good to speak with people in their mother-tongue, so we can understand their feelings and expressions. Without knowing any other language, except Oriya, we can't express ourselves.

**GC:** When you started the classes you knew only Oriya and maybe a little bit of Hindi?

**Panchali:** Hindi and English. But not fluently.

**Jagatram:** I took up English classes because, earlier when I read Sri Aurobindo's and Mother's works I didn't understand some of the fundamental things. I studied English for four years. I took painting classes because that is something I liked to do from my childhood. So when I got the facility here I joined that class also. But now I only learn Sanskrit and Sanskrit also so that I can better understand Sri Aurobindo. Earlier when I read Sri Aurobindo's books, when there were some verses, I could not even read those letters.

**GC:** Now that you have studied English for four years, can you read Sri Aurobindo's books in English?

**Jagatram:** Yes, I can read and understand, but

not completely. But I try a little...

**GC:** But Sri Aurobindo's books you could have read in the Oriya translation also.

**Panchali:** There is a big difference between reading the original work and the translated book.

**GC:** Now that you can read the original you find a big difference?

**Jagatram:** In the original there is sweetness!

**GC:** Are any of you also learning French so that you can read Mother's books in the original French?

**Kanakalata:** Yes. I started the French class because when I started going to the Playground during meditation I was not able to understand anything. I used to just hear Mother's voice. Suddenly once I dreamt that Mother was giving me a book with a blue cover — it was in French! And I told this to Rijuta who was my very close friend. She used to work in Dining Room also. And when I told her the story of my dream she told me "I will be very happy to teach you French." So then I started learning from her... and she brought me exactly the same type of book to start... I was very happy to learn with her. This continued for some time, but then she passed away. After her passing away I was very unhappy that I could not continue. But I used to read *Entretiens* of the Mother by myself. Then this year I felt like taking it up again. So I have joined Maurice-da's class.

**GC:** Robin-da, perhaps you can tell us something. What led you to...

**Robin:** See, in the early 60's I read somewhere that those who know French have a special relationship with the Mother. So, during those days it was easy to write to the Mother. So I wrote to her about learning French. I was posted in Bombay

at the time. Then Mother sent her blessings. So I attended classes there and in one year I learnt French. But my job was transferable and the pressure of work and of studies also mounted. So I had to discontinue. When I came here after retirement, in some of the papers I found that Blessing. And I also remembered what the Mother has said “Whatever problems you have, you better solve them now. Tomorrow it will be ten times more difficult.” So I thought in the next life it will be very difficult to learn French. So I started here. My only problem was that time was very short for me, because I am not going to live another forty years to learn French. In the Ashram they teach only once a week. If there is a dance programme you miss that class. So after learning here for two years I went to the Alliance Francaise in town. I completed their certificate course. And now I am again attending the classes here for maintaining what I knew and also for my personal studies. So my case may be a little different. My object is mainly to read Mother’s original, specially Mother’s *Entretiens*. And also that something intangible... as Sri Aurobindo has said, you enter into a special relationship with the Mother through French.



**GC:** Do you feel that once you learn French... let’s say during meditation you hear Mother speaking in French, does it evoke something?

**Robin:** I don’t think it is that perceptible. In what sense Sri Aurobindo said that, we don’t know, but since he has said it, I tried to learn. It

gives a joy. I read *Entretiens* with a friend of mine who knows French. I find that from zero level now I am able to read *Entretiens*. And he shuts his eyes and says, “Yes, I am able to follow what you are reading.” That gives a joy. And that must be making some special connection with the Mother.

**Raju:** Specially in the Playground, what happened was that it remained a noise. Very frankly. Now at least we are able to make out some phrases. Now we are able to focus and concentrate. Otherwise in those days, when I had to meditate, I had to switch myself off.

## LARGER BENEFITS

**GC:** You mentioned that knowing other languages helps you to converse with others in the Ashram. Also by knowing English better and some French, you are able to read and understand Mother and Sri Aurobindo in the original. Do you feel that now you can get into the culture of the Ashram better? Somewhere it has allowed you to be more in tune with the Ashram culture? For instance, till you know English well or even French, you feel as if a part of the Ashram’s activities, like the recorded talk during meditation or the 1<sup>st</sup> December programme, are out of bounds for you, that you cannot relate to that. Now maybe you feel more in tune with all that?

**Raju:** I will put it differently. Not so much the languages but the regular interaction with other Ashramites during classes helps us to integrate more. Suppose I go to a department. Suppose I go to Honesty. Earlier I went there as a customer. Now I don’t go there as a customer because there are three or four people that I know. I can walk in more freely. It is as if you are going to your own department. Just like the Playground, this also helps us to integrate amongst ourselves. Otherwise we remain in our own departments. Now we know about other departments, their practical problems, their timings, difficulties. It is more of “satsang”, a brotherhood.

**GC:** It creates a sense of community.

**Raju:** There is also some sort of a subtle learning for everybody — the teachers also. For example, you know somebody working in a department and about whom you don’t have much



# Think Tamil

*Shoba, teacher of Tamil, answers*

***How did the idea of giving Tamil lessons come to you ?***

First of all, I would like to thank the Divine for giving me this splendid opportunity to spend my time in such a useful manner. In fact this idea was not mine, Ashok-bhai was the one who suggested the idea of giving Tamil lessons to non-Tamilians. He also proposed that I could conduct a workshop on conversational Tamil to start with. That was the beginning of the Tamil classes.

***Had you ever taught Tamil to non-Tamilians before taking up this task ?***

No, I never had the opportunity to conduct language classes. I had been a primary school teacher for a year before my marriage. After that I never thought that I will get into teaching. Here too, I would not say I teach. I just enjoy talking very freely and encourage the students to talk in Tamil correctly and fluently.

***As you had no experience of teaching Tamil, how did you approach your work here?***

When Ashok-bhai first proposed the idea of the workshop I had no idea of how to go about it. In fact I was wondering, how to do it. I was then advised by Ashok-bhai to consult Sampat who was already conducting such workshops in

Sanskrit. He was kind enough to share his experience and also showed me certain materials he had developed. I also remembered my first days in Mysore when I was new to Kannada and just anyone on the street was my guru. I could well imagine the difficulties of my students here and prepared a course which dealt with the fundamental requirements of daily life.

***What was your experience on the first day as a teacher?***

I was quite scared to face students who were all 50+ or even 60+. I also knew that some of them did speak some broken Tamil and I did not want to tell them anything wrong. I did not know where to begin, so I said "Concentration". Then the first sentence in Tamil "What is your name?" There onwards the students themselves guided me towards what was required.

***Any interesting experience or observation that you would like to share with our readers?***

Every class is an interesting episode for me. I also think that the students make a lot of effort to think in Tamil before speaking. I really find these classes very lively with a lot of funny expressions during our chat sessions. For all the fear I had on the first day, now I have started looking forward to the next class. It has greatly enriched me and I would like to thank all my friends, students, the organisers and my family members for their support and encouragement in this endeavour.

of an impression. Suddenly, that person shows a tremendous progress in one area (in the class). You see a different personality. I have seen in many cases. When that person makes progress it opens up something in us. That is a very subtle point.

**Panchali:** And it helps us also because instead of gossiping and watching T.V. we are attending all these classes. In the classes we are reading Mother's and Sri Aurobindo's books. So that one hour we are really enjoying in that class. On the other hand when we gossip for one hour, after

that we feel something bad. We wasted one hour. But in our classes we are really benefiting.

**GC:** There is a sense of progress.

**Panchali:** Yes.

**GC:** In which classes do you read Mother's and Sri Aurobindo's works?

**Panchali:** In every class. In every subject we are only three or four. So nobody is there to complain. So we ask them to read Mother and Sri Aurobindo in Bengali, in Hindi, in English also. We read Mother and Sri Aurobindo. After that some grammar and spoken language.

# Simply Sanskrit

Narendra-arya

My experience in teaching Sanskrit in the Ashram School has revealed a fundamental truth. Learning Sanskrit is relatively easy for those knowing their Indian mother tongue well. It is this mastery that allows the adult Oriya beginners to learn Sanskrit more easily. Not only have these students maintained their steady progress over the years, but they also have developed a genuine passion for the language. I am happy to note that I have been able to instil a sense of discipline and punctuality too in them. The late arrival of adult students, a problem with almost all my colleagues, has been reduced to insignificance in my class. There is, however, a humorous side to this. In order to increase the power of comprehension of my students, I often narrate stories with very complicated beginnings. So, unless someone is well versed with the first part of the narrative, he is unable to follow the rest. And it is this factor that acts as a big catalyst in gathering everyone in the classroom well before time.

Another significant aspect in the students' growth has been their yearly participation in Sanskrit dramas. They have not only learnt to pronounce and articulate well through this regular partaking, but the refreshing experiences have actually helped to bring the teachers

and students closer. Now, we are a big, happy family of brothers and sisters. Although many students feel that their daily routines threaten to disrupt their learning, no one actually has left the class. On the contrary, dissatisfied with just one weekly session, they have now decided to hold an additional class on Sundays too!



Sampat-arya taking a Sanskrit class

So far, I have emphasised only on speaking and understanding the spoken language. But with time I also plan to introduce the reading of simple literature. For this, my new book named *Speak Sanskrit the Easy Way* would no doubt be very handy. It is a book with supportive audio CDs, for self-teaching Sanskrit that is bound to facilitate the process of learning to a large extent.

## ATTITUDE OF STUDENTS & TEACHERS

**GC:** Sometimes one joins classes because one thinks one should or because of some casual interest, but the will to concentrate and work is not there. One comes to the class, one spends the time but at the end of the year one is not sure how much one has learnt. How serious are you about the classes?

**Jagatram:** There's a big difference between when we were children and when we are adults. Here we love to learn.

**GC:** There's a strong will to learn?

**Jagatram:** We have learnt that without learn-

ing, in future we will suffer. During our student days (laughs), school was like a burden on us. We always studied for exams. But here it is a free-style. There the teachers were giving us tasks and we always tried to cheat. Here we just love to learn.

**Panchali:** Here it is a great opportunity, because the teachers are very good. They are asking the students what the students want to learn. Then the teacher teaches that. That's why I like it.

**Jagatram:** There the teachers are only doing their duty, here they love teaching. And they have a lot of experience. And they have wide knowledge compared to our school teachers. Our

school teachers could only go through the course and we only learnt that.

**Raju:** Students are serious. Some come all the way from Lake, cycling down every other day.

**GC:** Really? For evening classes?

**Raju:** Yes.

**GC:** How do they go back?

**Raju:** They go back cycling. The thirst to learn is there whether they make progress or not. There are psychological needs that have to be met. Somewhere there's an urge to progress. They come, in spite of the odd timings.

**GC:** As we said there is this feeling of community when you come here together in the evening for the classes. That's also part of it.

**Alok:** That's the main objective of it. Even Maurice-da told us in our class, that this is the main objective. Even he told us that if anyone of us wants to go to Alliance, he will arrange for us to go. But we told, "No, we don't want to go there."

## PRACTICAL ISSUES

**GC:** I also wanted to know from a practical point of view... for instance, some of you have stopped some of the classes. Why is that? Many of you say you don't have the time. Somebody said that just one class a week is not enough. What are the practical issues?

**Raju:** See, why I stopped French is that I did it for four years, and I think I can just manage with it now. I can go on my own. My object is not to speak, not to speak in a French way. I am able to read Mother and Sri Aurobindo with a dictionary. So that's the reason why I stopped. Because it was too much. I was doing four periods.

**Jagatram:** Yes, these classes take up a lot of time. It's very difficult for us, because there's no time. We have to work for long hours in the department, so there's very little free time. But at the beginning there's a great desire to join all the classes. I want to do this. I want to do that. We take many classes and after two or three years we understand that there isn't sufficient time. We are not students, we are workers. So for this we have to create time.... Now I don't go to painting classes, I do it at home.

**Panchali:** We learnt for three, four years, so

we can manage now. We can write and read and understand and speak also in Bengali, Hindi and English. English we don't have the chance to speak to each other, so because of that, it is not coming. So we need to speak. I stopped some classes because I love dance and music. So I give more time to that.

**GC:** How regular are the classes?

**Raju:** Now it is more or less stabilized. In the first and second year many people came and...

**Panchali:** Our teachers are very regular.

**Alok:** Also Ashok-bhai has always informed us of what is happening, even informed us if ever a class got cancelled.

**GC:** What about the students?

**Panchali:** Students are very regular. In our classes we are four or five only and we are always regular.

**Jagatram:** Classes are held regularly. And the students come regularly.

**GC:** Any suggestions to change the way things are organized?

**Jagatram:** If we learnt with workshops, then we will learn more. If we talk to each other... Now we are doing mainly theoretical. If there are actually different situations, then we can talk about them and learn more practically.

**Panchali:** This is happening in our dramatics class. Only in language classes that is not possible.



There is only one hour or forty-five minutes. But in dramatics class we are doing things practically, in Maurice-da's class. We speak with each other and do some things.

**GC:** At the end of the year there's a program. For instance, the Sanskrit class puts up a Sanskrit

programme. So at that time you must be coming very often to practise.

**Kanankalata:** At that time we can learn more.

**GC:** It is more intense.

**Jagatram:** It is practical.

**Kanankalata:** Because we have to do something in front of people, so we have to give time.

## SADHANA AND/OR STUDY

**Panchali:** But nowadays I don't feel like doing any programmes, because there are so many complaints from my friends and elders also. Because I have seven or eight classes, so I have to do so many programmes. So after that people are saying, "Are these people coming for sadhana or programmes?" So, after that I told all my teachers that I wouldn't like to do any programmes, I only want to study. To begin with when we came here everybody encouraged me, "Do programmes, that's your art, you should do it." But now everybody is complaining. So I stopped. Only a few people like Shobha-di, Ashok-bhai and Minu-di, my dance teacher, still encourage me. "You should do programmes. Mother has said many things about programmes, you should do them."

**GC:** You have people saying, "Why do you spend all your time doing programmes? You can go for meditation?"

**Panchali:** Someone asked me, "You are doing only classes or are you also going for meditation or reading?" I told him in our classes we are doing meditation — one hour. Sometimes Maurice-bhai makes us do meditation for one hour. With



meditation he makes us do many things. He used to do chanting of OM etc. In our language classes also we are reading Mother's and Sri Aurobindo's books. And that satisfaction is different from gossiping and other things. But they are not thinking of that. They are thinking "These people are doing only classes."

**Raju:** Work is not the only thing. But somehow that trend is setting in now. It is an integral approach but somehow we are going only towards thinking that work is the only consideration. If you work you can neglect the other parts. Work is not the only thing. Definitely work is the main thing, but it's not the only thing. Now the trend is coming to that. If you work you are a sadhak, if you don't work you are not a sadhak.

**GC:** On the whole, has this been a good experience?

**Raju:** One hundred percent.

**Alok:** One thing I must say. We are really grateful to Shobha-di and the ex-students' group who have really helped us a lot. Specially Ashok-bhai has helped the three of us a lot. ❧





## AN INTERVIEW WITH DIKSHIT-BHAI

*The following interview was taken on 26th March 1981. Dikshit-bhai added written notes to parts of his interview with Susan and Aloka. These have been added as footnotes to the main text.*

*Dikshit-bhai, in which year did you come here first and how did you come in contact with Sri Aurobindo and the Mother?*

I came here in 1920. At that time I saw Sri Aurobindo<sup>1</sup> and the Mother.

*Which month did you come?*

In October or November. Mother was already there. I met her in [Bayoud] house. She was staying there separately.

*Did you call the Mother, "the Mother"?*

At that time, we had no definite names.

*Sri Aurobindo, did he call her "the Mother"?*

No, later.

*What did he call her?*

Mirra. We called her "Mother" afterwards.

*How long did you stay?*

I stayed here for a week. I saw 5 times...

*Sri Aurobindo and the Mother?*

No, only Sri Aurobindo. He gave us time. Then, after a week, we went away. A friend of mine asked me, "What have you gained from the visit?" I said, "Causeless, objectless delight which

lasted for a month and a half."

*Did he speak to you on yoga?*

Yes. I said, "I want to see the [Divine] Mother."

He said, "Offer all your actions to Her." In a way, that was the beginning of my yoga. Next time, when I saw him in 1923, after 3 years, he said that the Divine Mother and the Lord are also in the heart. The first time he said, "The Mother is above the head." And the next time, "Both are there in the heart and above the head."

*Did you follow this direction? Could you feel the presence?*

No, not really, because I had to start, you know. I mean, it was a feeling in the mind, and then I had to continue. It takes a long time. It takes a very long time! Then I came in 1926 and 1928. In 1928, I stayed for a few days. And then, finally, I came in 1929. Whenever I came, I used to work. In 1929 I started working in the Dining Room. I cooked in the Dining Room and laid the tables in the evening. After a few months, six months, my friend, who was an engineer [Chandulal],

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<sup>1</sup> Dikshit: "We met Sri Aurobindo in the upstairs verandah of the Guest House. Sri Aurobindo came out from the western door of the room near the terrace. He came out at the given time to see us. He was dressed in a dhoti, part of which was used as a scarf to cover the upper body. We offered pranam at his feet. After pranam, he sat down on a chair. There was a table near the chair and he sat down facing south. I sat on his right, Punamchand in the front and Champaben on the left. After we were seated, he signed to me to ask what I wanted. I asked him three things. The first — I wanted to see the [Divine] Mother. He asked me, "What do you do?" I replied, "I try to remember Her. When I forget Her, I try to remember Her again." He said, "The Mother is above the head. Offer all your actions to Her." The second thing I said was, "I love knowledge." He told me, "There are two ways of acquiring knowledge. One is by the laborious method of studying books. The result is poor and uncertain. The second is to open oneself to the higher consciousness and receive the knowledge from there." The third thing I said was that I love education. He spoke for some time on education. What he said was pleasant and agreeable and I was lost in the joy of listening. Later, I remembered the substance of what he said and made some notes, covering about 16 points. They were shown to Sri Aurobindo. Sri Aurobindo showed them to the Mother. Both approved of them."

asked the Mother if I could make payments to the servants, because building work was going on at that time.<sup>2</sup>

*The Ashram building?*

The Ashram building, near that extended wing. There was another house where Pavitra lived. It was an old house which had a gate opening on the northern side. So, in the evening, I used to come and make the payments. Six months like that. Then Mother asked me to work full time in the Building Service and leave the Dining Room work. So I looked after the stores and made the payments and kept the accounts. The building work continued. Then I also began to supervise the masons and carpenters. Two or three years later, we took up the house opposite the Atelier where the Dining Room was there. We bought the house where the Dining Room is at present and the Dining Room was shifted there.

*Where was the Dining Room before?*

Where Prithwi Singh used to stay. At present, Ravindraji and Anuben are staying on the top. It was a tiled and dilapidated house. Later, it was demolished and rebuilt. There were very few people then, you know, about 40 to 50.

So the main building work was going on. There was an old house where the Atelier is there.

It was demolished and our Building Service office was moved to Retraite, the house where Ramakant and Vishwanath-da work. After a long time, after many years, I was transferred to the timber godown where there is now our Laboratory.

*Science Laboratory?*

Science Laboratory, where Joshi is working. You see, formerly, that was the timber godown. In 1958 [1955]<sup>3</sup> the Mother came once to the timber godown and said, "We would like you to give this away to the Laboratory." So I had to go to the Theatre. There were eleven godowns there. One or two godowns were hired. Timber was transferred there and we began selling it to the public. Formerly, it was only meant for the Ashram. Timber and cement and tin-sheets, asbestos sheets — all these were there. Afterwards, all this came under the charge of Udar. Then in 1961 or '62, we started Comfort House, a Guest House for the public. I worked there for two years. It was first managed by Udar for a year. He gave it up and then Honesty Dahyabhai, Chiman-bhai, C.T. Shah, managed it. And then they closed it. When it was closed, I came to the Ayurvedic Dispensary. Kesarimal was there.

*Which year?*

I can't remember the date. Mother opened

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<sup>2</sup> Dikshit: "The Ashram was growing rapidly. To meet its requirements of housing and furnishing, many houses were rented, leased and purchased. A gang of workmen — carpenters, masons and coolies — was organised. Many Ashramites were pressed into this work. The construction of the main Ashram building was taken up on a priority basis. The main Ashram building was originally made up of four houses: Library House, Meditation House, Rosary and Atelier — Pavitra's house. Pavitra's house was a two-storeyed old building with four rooms as outhouses and a gate opening on Rue St. Gilles (*Balcony Road*). The Mother used to go out for a ride from this gate. It was decided to demolish this house and construct a new one in its place. In the main building, an Atelier and a motor garage were constructed on the ground floor and a residential room for Pavitra on the top. From the outhouses, residential rooms for Chandulal, Bulletin Office, a room for Dyuman and a staircase room were built. There was an open space behind the Library House, which was used as a garden for plantain trees by the Mother. This place was used for constructing a garage, Prosperity hall, Fruit Room, a room for Prithwi Singh and a bathroom. The Cold Room and residence for Ravindraji and Anuben were later additions. When the outhouses of Pavitra's house were used for constructing new rooms, Building Service stores were shifted to two houses on the opposite side of the road — houses later used for Mother's Kitchen and the Drawing Office. At present you find the main Ashram building surrounded on all four sides by Ashram houses and Ashram property. In the beginning, they all belonged to others. They were later acquired by the Ashram."

<sup>3</sup> Dikshit-bhai's memory seems to have failed here. The timber godown was made ready for the first International Salon of Photography on 15<sup>th</sup> August 1955. It was thereafter converted into a Science Laboratory in 1956.

the Ayurvedic Dispensary in '57. She came here also in '58. Twice she came, and then every year on 22<sup>nd</sup> February (it was opened on 22<sup>nd</sup> Febru-



ary), she used to send blessings to the Ayurvedic Dispensary. From that time, I am continuing. I have been here [at the Ayurvedic Dispensary] for 18 years. I do accounts, pay the workers and do general work. My work is not that of examining people and giving medicine, but general things and accounts. Now this young man is helping me, my labour has lessened. So what more?

*Can we ask how old you are?*

Yes, I am 90, running 90.

*Running 90 and you are still in the Group?*

Yes.

\* \* \*

*Can we know something about the sadhana?*

You see, it is the descent of the Supermind and transformation of mind, life and body. That is the descent. Going up is over, going up to the Supramental and staying in the Supramental. Supermind is the new principle that has been realised, made active, and now the Supramental Power has to be brought down into mind, life and body to transform them. The question now is of the body, the material body, the physical body — what the Mother did in the last years from the time she retired. She was working mainly on the body, how to open the body to the Divine Truth and make it accept the Truth, because it is unconscious, it is part of the Inconscient, it doesn't know that the Divine is in the material consciousness. Mother has done that. Her body became conscious and that is now also possible for others because she has done it. Sri Aurobindo stopped with the bringing of the Supermind into the body, what is called Mind of Light, and then, at the end, he transferred it to the Mother. Mother started with that.

*How do you find this in your own body?*

I think, my yoga is yoga of the body because when I came here, I was a man who had lost everything, my body had become an animal-body.

*At the age of 30?*

Yes, when I came, I couldn't remember anything, I didn't know anything. I had no mental power because my brain had been destroyed. So I built up my brain, built my body and I hope to continue and finish this work in the body. Old age has affected the body but, I think, it will change.

*Do you do anything particular?*

Nothing particular. You see, the Light, the Power of the Mother and Sri Aurobindo comes down more and more into the cells of the body. I am recovering my mind, my life and body. Mine is a regeneration of the body. My brain has been rebuilt and I am happy and healthy. I never suffer, never fall ill and generally don't take any medicine.

*continued on page 32*

# KESARI NANALAL DIKSHIT (1891-1988)

Raman Reddy '75

There was something ancient behind the frail physique of Dikshit-bhai. Not only was he physically old — he was ninety years old when this interview was taken — but he gave you the feeling of being an old hand at Sri Aurobindo's Yoga. A man who had passed through many seasons of life and different periods of Ashram and even pre-Ashram history.

Dikshit first came to Pondicherry in November 1920 and met Sri Aurobindo in the Guest House and the Mother in Bayoud House. Sri Aurobindo was still known as Aurobindo Ghose and the Mother as Mirra. Dikshit at that time was in charge of what was perhaps the first ashram in Gujarat connected with Sri Aurobindo's Yoga. In 1920, the ashram was on the island of Kansia<sup>1</sup> near Bharooch, before it was shifted to Patan in 1922, after which it was disbanded under Lele's instructions. Champaklal, who joined Dikshit at Kansia in 1920, says that a whole

book could be written about what he learnt from him and his management of the ashram. Sri Aurobindo enquired about it when Champaklal visited Pondicherry in April 1921. Dikshit then came to Pondicherry in 1923, 1925 and 1926, missing the Siddhi Day by a month when he came in September and left in October of the same year. Sri Aurobindo retired and the Mother took charge of the Ashram. Aurobindo Ghose was now called

Sri Aurobindo and Mirra soon came to be known as the Mother. The Ashram began to develop and needed material resources. In September 1927, Sri Aurobindo sent Punamchand<sup>2</sup> from Pondicherry on one of the earliest fund-raising tours. Dikshit accompanied him. Both went to Poona and Bombay, addressed merchants and students and personally approached the rich without much

success. A Marwari gentleman told them to make an announcement in the Press instead of approaching people individually. They wrote about the suggestion to Sri Aurobindo who replied that the time for making a public appeal had not yet come and that his work was still in the preliminary stages. Dikshit came back to Pondicherry in 1928 and finally settled down in the Ashram in February 1929.

Construction work in the Ashram main building had begun and there was a growing need of workers and supervisors. Dikshit, af-

ter a short stint at the Dining Room, was given work in the Building Service under his old friend Chandulal, the Ashram engineer. He supervised and paid the workers, looked after the stores and kept the accounts. After many years, he was transferred to the Timber Godown, known in the annals of Ashram history for its "timber throne" (Sri Aurobindo's words) occupied by both Sahana and Nirodbaran for a short time in the thirties. In



<sup>1</sup> The ashram at Kansia was on the estate of the late Kamalaben's father, Kashibhai, who regularly sent fruits to Sri Aurobindo. Kashibhai was in Pondicherry from 1927 to 1932. For more details, read *Champaklal Speaks* (2003), pp 4 ff.

<sup>2</sup> Punamchand came first to Pondicherry in March 1919. He and his wife Champaben were in the Ashram at Kansia before they moved to Pondicherry in 1923. Both were present in the Ashram on the Siddhi Day.



1955, he moved to the godowns of H.E.C. (Honesty Engineers and Contractors) near the Theatre and began selling building material to the public. Commercial activity had begun in the Ashram. The Honesty Society of Dahyabhai sold groceries and Honesty Engineers & Contractors of Udar did construction work at competitive rates. Dikshit then moved on to Comfort Guest House, the first guest house of the Ashram, not counting Parc à Charbon (now Park Guest House) which was only a dormitory in those days. Comfort Guest House was soon wound up but the demand for comfortable accommodation has been only recently fulfilled. Dikshit finally anchored his boat at the Ayurvedic Section, joining Kesari-mal, another old friend from Patan. There he did again what he did all his life at the Ashram — accounts and general work. He never specialised, never became an Ayurvedic practitioner, neither a builder, nor a businessman. Dikshit-dada, one might quip, was not good for anything but Yoga.<sup>3</sup> He said, “People pick up languages in six months — Bengali, English, French, any language. But I picked up none.” At the same time, he never had any doubts about the Divine or even questions to ask the Mother on his own sadhana. What did he do when he met her? “I had very little to talk. Only bow down and meditate at her feet.”

Dikshit was given accommodation in Subbu House on 21<sup>st</sup> February 1929, the day of his final arrival at Pondicherry. He stayed there all his life with two other sturdy uncomplaining old-timers, Jibanhari and Mohanlal, both of whom came around the same time. All the three lived upstairs and the toilets and bathrooms were downstairs. They had to adjust their daily routine to municipal timings of water. Underground and overhead water tanks were built in 1972 when we (my mother and I) moved into the same house; newcomers obviously needed more facilities. Another decade passed before a bathroom was built upstairs, again

not for them but for another newcomer. Dikshit, by then, had crossed ninety and was still going to Group. I remember a familiar sight around 7 p.m. when Jiban, himself bent with age, accompanied Dikshit to Group, holding him by the hand. Dikshit hunched forward and sideways precariously as Jiban guided him through the ever-growing vehicular traffic. Luckily, Subbu House is only one block away from the Playground where both practised daily the physical exercises prescribed for the older sadhaks. Dikshit especially was an indomitable physical yogi. Towards the end, when he could not keep pace with the others, he was allotted a small strip in a corner of the Playground where he did the same exercises as the rest of the group. Most people would have quietly retired at his age to preserve their self-respect. During the Second December Programme, he continued doing the Mass Drill, totally out of sync with the rest of the two hundred or so participants, like a grand old goblin dancing to his own tune. But the spirit showed and nobody laughed. He stopped going to Group only a couple of months before he died at the age of ninety-seven plus. During his last days, he told Gopal who took care of him, to tie two big photos of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother inside the mosquito net so that he could constantly see them while in bed. He refused to go to the Nursing Home and insisted on not being disturbed, for he said “he would not be there”. It was as if he was consciously withdrawing from his body. “The light in his eyes had left,” says Gopal. The proof is there in some photographs taken during this period. Finally, on the night of 15<sup>th</sup> October 1988, his breath slowed down and he passed away in a state of quiet composure. Thus came to an end the saga of one of the earliest sadhaks of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother — Dikshit-dada, a man who lived a long, long unruffled life without losing sight of the great fundamentals of Yoga — simplicity and surrender to the Mother.

<sup>3</sup> Dikshit had a clear mind and a remarkable memory and his favourite books were *Savitri* and the *Life Divine*. Gopal, his attendant, says that Dikshit could remember the page numbers of passages from these books which he had read out to him daily. At the age of 95, Dikshit pointed out a textual error to Dhananjay Desai who was reading out Sri Aurobindo's sonnets to him. Dhananjay insisted that he was reading correctly but later found out that he was reading the new version of the Sonnets while Dikshit remembered the old one.

*Did you ever talk to the Mother about this?*

I had no reason to talk, I have never talked or written about yoga, because everything is there in the books. I had no questions and doubts about what is written or doubts about the Divine. I had very little to talk, I had very little to write.

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*How did you find out about Sri Aurobindo?*

You see, at first we adored him as a national leader. Then in 1914, the *Arya* came out. I liked it. I said to myself, "Here is the Master who is doing what I am fumbling about like a child." Then, in 1920, I had a great desire to see him<sup>4</sup>, and I came here.

*You wrote from Baroda?*

No, my friend Punamchand had come here six months before. So we three came, there was no permission at that time. (Afterwards when people came here, they had to ask for permission.) Amrita was informed and I saw Sri Aurobindo in the Guest House, where there is the children's playground now.

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*What was the discipline in the Ashram in the early days? After '26 when the Mother took over?*

There were no rules. Only four rules were there. One rule was, "Behave as if the Mother is looking at you for she is indeed always present." That sentence was put up there. No other rules were there.

*Were you here on the 24<sup>th</sup> of November?*

No, I left a month before. I came in August and left in October.

*Your memory is very good.*

I see. A good compliment!

*But it seems that now the Ashram is far more relaxed whereas in those days it was not so.*

It was not so because, at that time, the sadhana was going on, the transformation of the mind, vital and physical. Afterwards, when the children came, the atmosphere and discipline became different.

*How did you feel when the children came?*

I felt nothing. It is all their [Mother and Sri

Aurobindo] way of doing. They are the Masters and they know best.

*But it was very different in those days.*

Naturally, those people who only want this life came here. Now the general life is there. When there are people with a particular direction, a definite line, the purpose is there. Now the purpose of life is general — as it advances it has to grow and change. Always the discipline is from within, never from outside. Nobody is asked, "Why do you do this or why do you do that?" It was never that way. But there is the strong Will, the Truth-Will, pervading in the atmosphere. The atmosphere here is relaxed but the Truth-Will is there to change it.

*Were you here at the time of Sri Aurobindo's passing away?*

Yes, of course. I was here. I never left.

*How did you feel when he left his body?*

You see, he never left. I didn't feel that he had left and even now I don't feel they have left. Physically, they have left, but what is Sri Aurobindo and the Mother? It is a spiritual personality, the Spirit, the Truth and God. That is there. They were human embodiments, is that all? But, really, what is Sri Aurobindo and the Mother? It is Spiritual Consciousness, the Sachchidananda Consciousness, the Supramental Consciousness. That is there always. It cannot be destroyed. It doesn't need any form or it may not have it. That is there.

*It must have been a great shock when Sri Aurobindo left the body?*

Yes, certainly.

*And then the Mother...*

We have human feelings, human relations and reactions.

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*Can you tell us any personal incidents with the Mother?*

Once she wrote to me (we used to send our diary of work in those days, I had joined the Playground), "You see, I have not forgotten you."

*She hasn't forgotten you?*

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<sup>4</sup> Dikshit: "I thought of a guru or a guide on the path. There are many realised persons, but I thought of only Sri Aurobindo."

She has not forgotten me. Once she was coming from a walk. She used to go out in her car for a drive at about four or five and return in the evening. This was [*in the thirties*] before she went to the Tennis Ground and Playground. She was going for a ride when the house [*Pavitra's house*] was being built. She passed by me and noticed that a strap of my *chappal* [*sandals*] was broken. She asked me, "Why don't you get it repaired?"

*She noticed it!*

She noticed it. Then about my teeth, she recommended that a denture should be made for me. I wrote to Sri Aurobindo, "I think I will get new teeth, I don't need any denture." He replied, "You see, teeth can grow but it's the most difficult thing. Of all the parts, new teeth are difficult to grow and Mother has asked them to make a denture for you because it may be helpful for chewing food." So I thought I will take it.

*So the teeth didn't grow?*

It's a long process to make them grow now. I can't say what will become of my body, how it will react and change.

*But your body feels very strong?*

It is strong but the effect of old age is there in all the parts. You see, it has wrinkles, weight has decreased, the muscles have less and less flesh...

*But the other day you were reading without glasses.*

Lens? I discarded the lens long ago.

*Oh, you had one before?*

Yes, before I used it for seeing the Mother and cinema. After they [*Sri Aurobindo and the Mother*] left, I used it only for reading. Let us see what happens. It is Nature's work, you know.

\* \* \*

*When you came back here permanently, how often did you see the Mother? Did you take your notebook to her?*

Yes, I came on February 21, 1929 when she was distributing *Grace*<sup>5</sup>. I didn't have Darshan because I came too late. Two telegrams were sent to me, but they didn't reach me. I came at four o'clock.

Darshan was in the morning. I met Mother in the Darshan room when she was distributing *Grace*.

*How many times a day did Mother give Darshan in those days? How many times a day?*

Many times. She would come in the morning and give blessings. There was Pranam in the morning.

*For everybody?*

Yes, for everybody.

*There were few people then?*

Very few people then.

*Then you had classes in the evening.*

Classes, there were no classes then. She used to read. Once there were *Conversations*. Very few people, 8 to 10 people were there.

*In her room?*

In her room or wherever, in Prosperity or the Meditation Hall. I don't remember exactly the places. Sometimes in some people's houses also. She used to visit sadhaks' rooms in the beginning.

*Every day?*

Once a week or so, it was all fixed.

*But you could discuss with her your problems?*

I had no problems.

*No problems! Not even with work?*

No doubts, no problems.

*But what about the work?*

Work? No difficulty. You write the report and send it to the Mother.

*Send it?*

Send it. Instructions were then received through Chandulal, our engineer, for the Department.

*So when did you see the Mother privately?*

Privately!

*On your Birthday?*

On birthdays, yes, we saw her. And sometimes she called people.

*Would you talk with her?*


Why not?

*What would you say?*

I had very little to talk. Only bow down and meditate at her feet. ❧

<sup>5</sup> Garlands which had been offered during the Darshan were distributed by the Mother the same day. This came to be known as the Garland Darshan.





*The difference between a vacant mind and a calm mind is this: that when the mind is vacant, there is no thought, no conception, no mental action of any kind, except an essential perception of things without the formed idea; but in the calm mind, it is the substance of the mental being that is still, so still that nothing disturbs it. If thoughts or activities come, they do not rise at all out of the mind, but they come from outside and cross the mind as a flight of birds crosses the sky in a windless air. It passes, disturbs nothing, leaving no trace. Even if a thousand images or the most violent events pass across it, the calm stillness remains as if the very texture of the mind were a substance of eternal and indestructible peace. A mind that has achieved this calmness can begin to act, even intensely and powerfully, but it will keep its fundamental stillness – originating nothing from itself but receiving from Above and giving it a mental form without adding anything of its own, calmly, dispassionately, though with the joy of the Truth and the happy power and light of its passage.*

**Sri Aurobindo**

(Letters on Yoga, SABCL 22-23-24, page: 637)

This quote has been chosen by Vilas Patel'70. We invite any quote from Sri Aurobindo or the Mother that touches you and that you would like to share with all. Please send us the reference along with the passage.