

The

Golden Chain

www.goldenchain.org

Alumni Journal of Sri Aurobindo International Centre of Education



Tapovan Reunion 2005

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)

CONTENTS

VOL 5 NUM 4

AUGUST 2005

1 THE EDITORS' PAGE

2 POST BOX

4 TÊTE À TÊTE: Michael Zelnick

Sunayana '79 meets Michael, former teacher and boarding in-charge.

7 Picture Perfect

We ask Kiran '72 about his work of digitizing Mother's photographs.

12 COVER STORY: Tapovan Reunion 2005

Vilas '70 reports on the reunion held (again) in Normandie.

20 All USA Meeting 2005

Lopamudra '94 reports.

24 ASHRAM HISTORY: Ashram Hindi

An outgoing talk by Tanaya '86 and Anurupa '86 analyses the unique *khichdi*.

33 QUIZ TIME



On the Cover:

Bonfire during the reunion at Tapovan

On the Back Cover:

Photo taken on the Normandie coast.

Quote chosen by Devdip '04

The Golden Chain

Alumni Journal of S.A.I.C.E.

Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Pondicherry, INDIA.



EDITORIAL TEAM:

Gopal '90, Sunayana '79

EDITORIAL ASSISTANCE:

Sanjay '71, Anurupa '86, Raman '75,
Sujata '84, Apurva '93, Suruchi '03

LAYOUT & ART DESIGN:

Somduft '90

PRODUCTION ASSISTANCE:

Kiran '72, Swadhin '70, Punit '89,
Chaitanya '95, Pranati '83, Savita '75

Frequency of Appearance: Quarterly.

Mode of Donation: Donations can be made
by MO/DD/Cheque in favour of "The Golden
Chain Fraternity".

Address for correspondence: The Golden Chain,
Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Pondicherry 605002.

Phone: 91-413-2224140

e-mail: goldenchain@vsnl.net

Website: www.goldenchain.org

IMPRINT:

Publisher:

Jhumur Bhattacharya

for THE GOLDEN CHAIN FRATERNITY, Pondy

Printer:

A. R. Ganguli,

SRI AUROBINDO ASHRAM PRESS, Pondicherry.

THE EDITORS' PAGE

In this issue we cover two reunions — both were held in June this year. One, in Normandie, France, saw a getting together of a number of ex-students from Europe and elsewhere. The other gathering was of devotees and sadhaks in the US and some invitees — the annual All USA Meet — in which some ex-students participated. The reports and photographs of the two reunions, when juxtaposed, throw up interesting similarities and differences.

The Normandie reunion seems, in some ways, like a family picnic: ex-students of varied age-groups, some with their children, all united by their common Ashram background, enjoy a relaxed, happy week-end. There is the joy and peace of being in a beautiful spot in the midst of Nature, there is a fond remembering of School days, there are also meditative, concentrated moments. The key notes seem to be: bonding and nostalgia. What seems to bring this group together is a shared past.

The US meet, on the other hand, seems like a gathering of seekers trying to better understand the path to follow, to better understand the world in Their light. It too is set in beautiful natural surroundings, it has the walks on the beach and the cultural activities and the games of basketball, but through it all the primary intent seems to be of furthering the spiritual quest. What seems to unite this group is a shared vision for the future.

We all like coming together — for renewing the family bonds so to speak, for remembering the old times and catching up on current news. Naturally given our special heritage these events have their deeper moments when, one might say, there is a reinforcing of the inner golden chain. But that doesn't always seem to be the focus of our get-togethers. Isn't it time then that our reunions went one step further? Can they become occasions to rekindle the fires of aspiration, to resolve to work for Their vision, and actually to take up responsibilities, appropriate to our varied skills and interests, for the furtherance of Their work — in us and in the world?

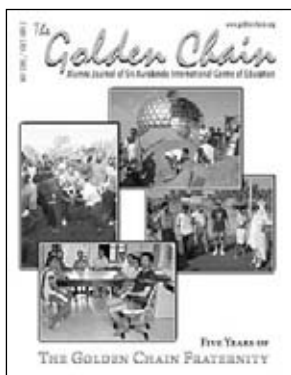
Maybe it is still early days when it comes to organised ex-student reunions. That they happen at all is thanks to the energy and enthusiasm of those who organise them. People are also becoming increasingly conscious of the need to give our reunions a stronger focus, and some ex-students present at the Tapovan reunion did express this need. Regan '88H and Mounnou '69 felt that such reunions should not simply bring us closer to each other, they should also serve in bringing us closer to Her. And in the article on the reunion Vibha '83 and Vilas '70 speak about saying goodbye to happy "nostalgia" and working towards the future.

Our get-togethers — be they class get-togethers, or the grand get-togethers that have been held here in Pondy — all reflect our character as ex-students. Can't they reflect our commitment to Their cause? Let us come together — but with a purpose.

We have also included in this issue a talk on Ashram Hindi given by Anurupa '86 and Tanaya '86 when they were leaving Knowledge nearly twenty years ago. The talk looks into this unique tongue that evolved in the Ashram and was in widespread use among students at that point. It analyses the different languages that contributed to the *khichdi* that is Ashram Hindi, its grammatical structure, its vocabulary, the context in which it was spoken, and its characteristic idioms and distinctive flavour.

The talk is unusual and interesting in that it tries to make an objective, though informal study of an aspect of Ashram student-life which was unique, though it was taken quite for granted.

Our Ashram is an unusual community in many ways — its economics, its social relations, its hierarchies (or maybe the lack of them), its demographics are all features which we never think twice about but which will make for fascinating studies. They will also make for interesting articles for *The Golden Chain*. Any budding sociologists out there? ❧



AVOID GROUPISM

I will raise a murmur of protest against the last issue's (May 2005) editorial page on The Golden Chain Fraternity. Why only a "murmur" and not "take strong objections"? Because I myself am an ex-student and closely linked with *The Golden Chain* magazine. But self-criticism, according to me, is the best way to progress, and so I bring into focus two apparently pleasant statements made by an editor which have become unpleasant by their very stating: (1) We (that is, The Golden Chain Fraternity or more simply called, the ex-students of the Ashram School) belong to that group of "sun-eyed children of a marvellous dawn" — I complete the half-quote from *Savitri*. (2) We have no *samskaras* to be erased as opposed to the poor guys who come from outside with "a baggage of traditions and beliefs which have to be left behind to walk on this path".

My objection to the first quote can perhaps be brushed away by the editor saying that it was "just quoted like that and not really meant to be taken seriously". But the word "just" or the attitude implied, is what makes all the difference. It is like saying to the "others" who are sometimes equally interested in Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, if not more, "You know, we are 'just' superior to you. But don't take our words seriously." It is sheer naiveté if the editor thinks that her words are not going to ruffle anybody. As it is, there is plenty of hostility against ex-students in general. Why add more fuel to these embers of hate?

Secondly, I was shocked to know (I should actually be very pleased) that I, as a member of the Fraternity, had no "*samskaras* to erase". There is a certain obvious truth about it in the sense that we "start with a clean slate". We have repeated this often enough and we all know the advantages of a new beginning. But that gives us only a progressive disposition and produces a conducive environment when many of us are into it. It does not resolve the basic issues of Yoga. In other words, we don't turn into supermen or overmen by the very fact of studying at the Ashram School. What about the subconscious "baggage" that all of us carry, no matter where we come from? Have we

got rid of that? What about the great symbolic battle of the future that the Mother wants us to fight? Has that battle begun earnestly? My objection could again be met by saying, "Oh, now, you are getting into yogic abstractions." But what else can we get into if not Yoga, when we speak of these things? It is here that I want to pull the editor to ground level and say, "Let us be more humble in these matters and let us recognise our strengths as well as our weaknesses." In any case, it is wrong to pat ourselves on the back so enthusiastically.

Incidentally, one great weakness with us, is that it takes us often a very long time to make a definite choice in life, because of the wonderful conditions we enjoy here. The choice is often in-built, but still it takes a long time to realise it as such. One great advantage with people who come to the Ashram from outside is that they do make a choice, a very decisive one, without which they could not have broken away from their moorings. And when they come here, they often find us the very opposite of what they expected us to be. Not that what they say matters to us, but still, it is a point of view which should not be neglected. Nor, do I think, it makes a big difference to Yoga in the long run, because finally everybody seems to get his or her due share of human impossibilities.

Lastly, we seem to have forgotten that the old guard of sadhaks who came here in the twenties and thirties, the solid and venerable pillars of the Ashram — Nolini, Pavitra, Amrita, Dyuman, etc — all came from outside carrying plenty of luggage and yet they stood firm and built the foundations of the Ashram, of course, with the help and support of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother.

I take the opportunity to draw the attention of The Golden Chain Fraternity to look beyond self-complacent definitions. We have plenty of things to learn from everybody even if they don't have much to learn from us. In any case, the real Teachers are Sri Aurobindo and the Mother and not any group which claims the right understanding of their teachings. The fact that we have survived and acted as a *group* is surely to our credit, but let us avoid *groupism*.

Let us make the magazine readable to all who are interested in Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, and even to other sympathetic or like-minded groups. There is a place for specific group interests which unite us, but let us also address other readers who have not grown up here. I understand we don't want to start a newspaper for all and sundry, but neither do we want to convey the impression that "These *Golden Chain* people are mostly talking to each other, or rather, basking in their own imagined glory."

I close my letter with an

apology if I have hurt the feelings of the above mentioned editor, who otherwise is doing a commendable job and deserves full appreciation. It is only when her enthusiasm goes beyond the bounds of discretion that I reserve the right to grumble.

Raman Reddy '75
Pondicherry

Dear Raman,

You seem to have totally missed the point of the editorial of the last issue. The key words of the piece were "head start" and "responsibility". You have gone off at a tangent, arguing about comparisons which I have not made.

The expression "sun-eyed children" was not used in any loose sense. I meant every word of it. This was told to all of us every single year as long as I was in the school by all our teachers. They repeated it every new session, adding, "You are the future, you are the ones through whom the new consciousness is going to work." We knew that a great responsibility was being placed in our hands and that we had to live up to that expectation.

The "samskaras" of which I spoke were only the mental baggage that we acquire as we grow up. I did not mean "samskaras" of past lives, which is why I took care to mention a "way of thinking". Also, I have never said that we have nothing to learn from those who come from outside. One would have to be a total moron to say that. Not only were the early sadhaks, "the venerable pillars", from the outside world

but actually the Mother and Sri Aurobindo were also from that self-same outside world.

I am very much aware of the hostile feelings some people have for the former students. Fortunately this is limited only to Pondicherry and most people who are living outside are not even aware of it. I dismiss this hatred as sibling rivalry. It happens in biological families, it can happen in a spiritual family. It is something which is at the level of emotions and not of ideas therefore trying to explain it will lead us nowhere. So let us not give it more space than it deserves. I am sure that if I said that there is no sun in our eyes and that we are blind and ignorant, it is not going to make those who dislike us run and embrace us.

The question is not "Can we become supermen just by having been students of the School?" The real question is "Can we become ordinary people, who have the same goals in life as people anywhere in the world, after having been exposed to such an extraordinary education?" A very large number of our alumni live and work in the outside world and we often feel that all our energy goes away in just fighting the battle of survival. Feeling spiritually superior to anyone is very far from our minds. The real problem is that

continued on page 11...

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
Published letters may be edited for reasons of space, clarity and civility.

A CHAT WITH MICHAEL ZELNICK

Michael, an American Aurovilian, works at “Quiet”, a healing centre. In the 1970s he was one of the most popular teachers of “Knowledge” and was also in charge of the Young Boys’ Boarding. Sunayana ’79 spoke to him about the days he had spent at the Ashram. We have often spoken to former students. For a change, we thought of speaking to a former teacher.

SUN: So, Michael, can you tell us something about how you came to know of the Mother and Sri Aurobindo and how you came to Pondicherry in the first place?

MIC: Sure. I was 17 years old in 1960. So I hit the 60s in the United States head on and in the course of things I got interested in Eastern spirituality and decided that at some point I was going to go and pursue this seriously. And that’s what happened. As for how I got to Mother and Sri Aurobindo, it’s a funny story. Basically, I was trying to get to India and stay out of Vietnam. I finished school and was ripe to be drafted into the army, so to avoid that, I decided to join the Peace Corps which, back in those days, was sending volunteers to India. I signed up too. I joined this programme only to come to India. I wasn’t interested in teaching.... This was an agriculture extension programme. They were planning to go to Bengal and Assam and teach the farmers how to grow three rice crops in a year instead of two, which was not a subject very dear to my heart. But what happened was that in the middle of the programme, I discovered that I had a legitimate physical excuse that would keep me out of the army, something I wasn’t even aware of. As soon as I learnt about that, I promptly quit the Peace Corps and decided to come to India on my own. I had become friendly with some people who stayed on in the programme and eventually went to West Bengal to join the Peace Corps Service. We corresponded a little, not often, during the two years that they were in service, and when they finished, before they came back to the United States, they travelled a bit in India. And one of the places they came to was Pondicherry, where they apparently came planning to visit for a weekend

and ended up spending about six months. And I knew that they were in Pondicherry and they had mentioned something about Mother. But it was just very casual. Meanwhile, I was actually more interested in Zen Buddhism and so was preparing to go to Japan at that point and join a Zen monastery. I had fixed the date that I was going to leave. About a month before this date, these guys came back from India. Their home was not very far from where I was staying at that time and I went to visit them. And what happened was very, very, interesting, because we spent an evening together and these guys had liked the Ashram....

SUN: Which year was that?

MIC: This was 1968. They had been impressed by the Ashram but they never went back. But in the course of spending this evening with them I can only say that something absolutely palpable came through them and totally zapped me. I mean, it was really like Mother reached through them and said, “Come to Pondicherry.” So much so, so radically, that by the next morning, I had completely changed my plans, and I said, “Well, I’m going to go to Pondicherry and if it’s not what I want, I’ll go off to Japan from there.” You know, this was ’68 and I wanted to move around very freely. On their advice I wrote to Udar and asked him to ask Mother if I could come. And I got an answer that mainly said “I presented your letter to Mother and Mother said, ‘You can come but if it’s a monastery you are interested in, then this is not the place for you. But you can come.’” So I went and obviously I never went to Japan.

SUN: Which month or year was that?

MIC: I arrived in August 1968.

SUN: And you waited until January of ’69?

MIC: I waited until January. I started having

some inner contact with Mother and decided that I wanted to join the Ashram. I wrote and I said that I wanted to join the Ashram. At that point Mother said, "Come and see me." So, that was the first time I saw her.

SUN: After you saw Mother in January of '69, you decided to settle down.

MIC: Well, I had decided to settle down, and it was a question of whether she would allow me to join the Ashram.

SUN: And she said "Yes"?

MIC: She said "Yes" and I stayed.

SUN: So, what did you do at first?

MIC: I started out working as a proof-reader at the Press, because my educational background was in English literature. I could read, so they put me in the Press as a proof-reader and I did that with Leena Dowsett. And we used to proof-read together in the afternoons. So that was what I did for the first couple of years.

SUN: At what point did you start teaching?

MIC: I worked in the Press until probably August '69. I was quite happy proof-reading and I enjoyed the work. I was proof-reading at the Press

and one day, I just got the feeling that I should offer my services to the School, which I had no interest in previously, but it came like an intimation. So I wrote to Kireet and asked him if they would be interested in having me teach at the School. I told him that I had some teaching experience in the United States. I actually had a teaching certificate in the United States and he said that: "Well, I'll ask Mother but, you know, if you have had teaching experience, she won't want you for the School." But I said, "Kireet, I got fired from the only teaching job I ever had." He said "Then it'll probably be all right." It's true! So he went and asked Mother and she said, "All right." So that was how I started teaching.

SUN: At what level?

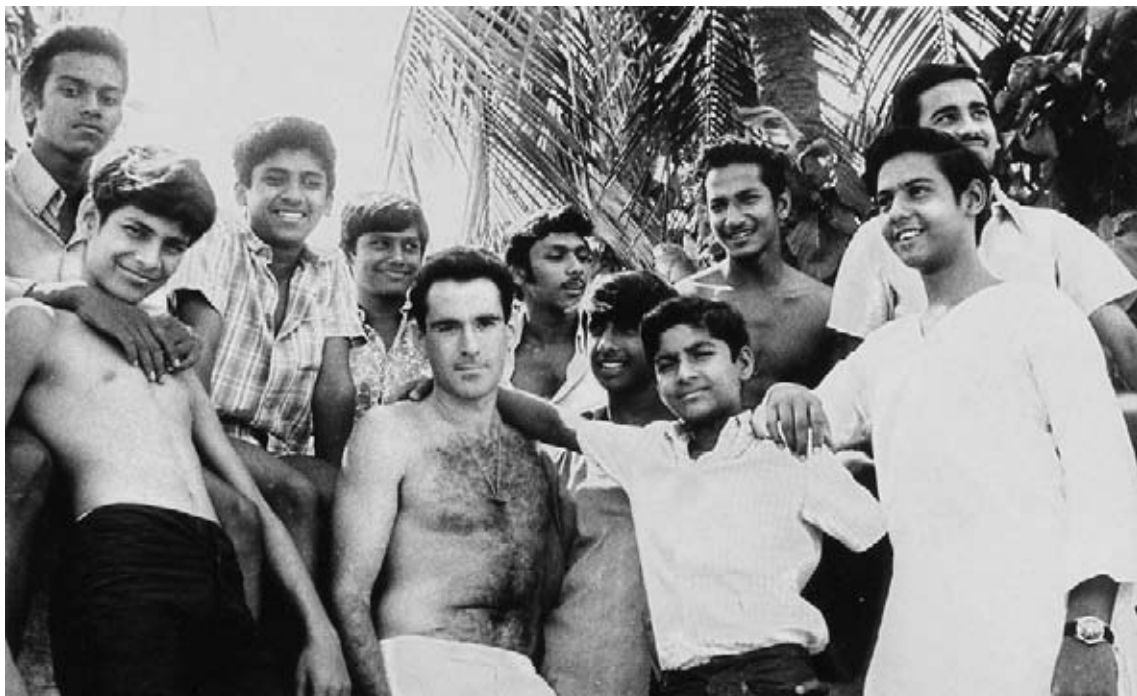
MIC: I always taught in the Higher Course.

SUN: You taught for about how many years?

MIC: I actually taught for eight years. I started in '70 and stopped probably in late '77.

SUN: What memories do you have of that? I mean, how do you remember it now?

MIC: It was sadhana! It was sadhana actually. I found it very interesting. I am in touch with a



Michael with the boys of his boarding. Back Row (l to r): Moloy, Aditya, Kanu, Vinay, Kanhaiya and Anirban (Budo). Front Row (l to r): Arindam, Michael, Ajit Reddy, ?, Debashish Halder.

lot of my students. Of course, I was in charge of the boarding. I see these guys around and we get together from time to time. We are good friends. I have the profound satisfaction of being told many, many times by people that it was very important for them, and that I was a great teacher, and that the exposure really changed them. First of all, I was really struggling against major obstacles, and not achieving too much. But a lot of people insist that they got a lot out of it.

Quite a few students who I worked with not only completed their studies in India but went on to school in America or elsewhere and did brilliantly well. And I said, "Wow! What do you make of that?" I was coming out of a much more rigorous intellectual background and training and tradition. And you know what you guys were used to.... It was very difficult.

SUN: In Knowledge, as we could choose who we wanted to study with, the 1st year students would always ask those who were already there what it was like with such-and-such a teacher. And there was always a very good feed-back about you. They said, "You must absolutely join Michael's class, if you want to do something wonderful. Don't miss the opportunity."

MIC: As I said, I don't know how much value it has in itself, at this point in my life. I probably think less of it now than I did then. What I brought to the students that I worked with was a more intellectually demanding approach than they were used to. What finally came out between the other influences and that was, all put together, something worthwhile. If I had had them all to myself I would probably have spoilt them. Kanu, for example, who was in my boarding, and we have stayed friends over the years, said, "You were the first person that actually demanded that I think about that. And that changed my way of being." So, it was an influence among many. I am convinced that it was positive.

SUN: The fact that your students were Indians studying English or American literature, did that in any way make it more difficult or easier?

MIC: I don't know.... I don't have much to compare it with. Most of the teaching I did except for a brief job in America from which I got fired,

was in the Ashram School.

SUN: Did you start looking after the boarding at the same time as you were teaching?

MIC: It was pretty close. Actually, this is another funny story.... I had been living from the time I came to the Ashram, until that point, at Parc-à-Charbon. I have to tell you that I had always been pretty much of a loner. I am much more comfortable in my own company than with lots of people around. I did not seek out groups and social scenes. I was living in Parc-à-Charbon in semi-dormitory conditions for a year and a half, which was stressful. And it so happened that there was an apartment becoming free, that I had been promised. It was a beautiful apartment on the Beach Road, a first-floor apartment with a beautiful view of the sea, and I was lusting for it. I was not only going to be in my own space, but a beautiful space to boot. About a week before I was supposed to move, Kireet came along and asked me if I would like to look after the Young Boys' Boarding. And I can tell you it was the last thing I would have been interested in; not appealing to me at all. But being an idealistic young sadhak at that time, if Kireet said "Would you like to do this?" I took it as coming directly from Mother and said "Oh, sure, I would be happy to." And there, that was it. And I didn't have privacy again for about ten years!

SUN: You looked after a boarding for ten years!

MIC: Eight years. Seven, eight years.

SUN: So about '78 you must have left the boarding and the School.

MIC: I don't have my years exactly. I know that I came out to Auroville in January '79. And I was in an apartment in Pondy for, at least, a year before that.

SUN: And how was the boarding experience?

MIC: (*laughs*) It was such an amazing clash of two cultures, for them as well as for me.

SUN: Do you have any special moments...?

MIC: Oh, I have lots of special moments. I think it was one of the really great times in my life. I had a very good time. I have a very sweet contact with almost all the boys that were in the boarding. We are still friends; it's always very, very, nice to see them in get-togethers.... ☞

PICTURE PERFECT

We ask Kiran '72 about the exhibition he organized in February 2005 of the Mother's pre-1950 photographs and sketches and the larger work of digitizing and cataloguing these images.

What made you decide to put up an exhibition on the pre-1950 photographs of the Mother?

There has been an increasing demand at the Archives for good quality photographs of the Mother and Sri Aurobindo for use in books, journals, CDs, films, cards, messages and for making photographic prints etc. Very often researchers also want to know when and where the photographs were taken and the sources of information we used to draw our conclusions. So we strongly felt that it was time we carried out a thorough, systematic and serious research at the Archives before many of the images got too faded. We decided that the work would be stored in a digital catalogue. By digital cataloguing, I mean scanning digitally all the important images at high resolution and creating a computer database with all relevant information so that one can retrieve the required image and information with a few simple keystrokes.

We also felt that the work would be incomplete if we did not digitally improve or restore the image quality. Once this was done, it would be easy and convenient to consistently give out high quality photographs just by the click of a button.

This was the idea with which the work started. It was also necessary to actually archive the images. Once they are there in digital form, they do not get affected by insects or by the climate, the way analogue photographs are. They do not discolour with time or loose in quality when duplicated. This means that even if we transfer the digital images from one media to another, over say the next

one hundred years, the colour or quality would still be as good as when the original scans were made. So archiving also played a major role in our decision-making.

After we worked on the images, when the first digital prints came out, we were so happy with the results that we thought we should share this joy with friends and devotees in the form of an exhibition. This was what made me decide to put up the exhibition.

How do you propose to implement your project of cataloguing and restoration?

We have divided the photographs of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother into three broad chronological categories.

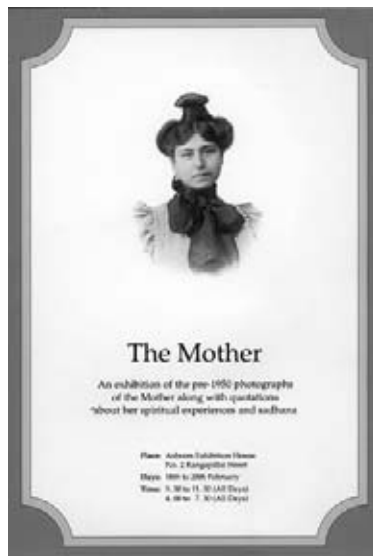
1. The pre-1950 photographs.
2. The April 1950 photographs taken by Cartier-Bresson.
3. The post-April 1950 photographs of the Mother taken by Ashram photographers and others. This is the largest category by far.

Each category will have two parts:

1. Preparation of a digital image catalogue.
2. Restoration of the images.

We started with the pre-1950 photographs of Sri Aurobindo. An exhibition of those photographs was put up in August 2003. Concentrated work on the Mother's photographs began at the end of 2003. The first step was to do research and find out how many pre-1950 photographs of the Mother were in existence.

You have to know that there are no original negatives of the Mother's photographs of the



pre-1950 period. No original negatives! Whatever is there are prints. So, most of the photographs available today are copies of copies, or second or third generation copies of the original pictures. So we are obviously lacking certain details which the original photographs would have. My endeavor was to go back to the earliest known prints in existence, get them scanned at the highest resolution and then clean them up and restore them.

So where did you get the photos? Some of them are extremely rare, never before seen photos. Did you already know that they existed, or did you have to trace them out?

The Archives itself had quite a few of the early photographs, but our collection was in no way complete. We got a lot of help from Pranab-da, who is the chief custodian of most of the im-

the Académie Julien! She too handed over a copy to the Archives. In this way we kept on enquiring and updating our collection up to the last two weeks before the exhibition!

Whenever we got photographs, we also enquired about relevant information such as where and when they were taken, who were the people in the photographs and so on. Once we had obtained all the information we could get, the photographs were numbered, catalogued and scanned at high resolution.

How many pre-1950 photographs of the Mother are there?

We have sixty-six pre-1950 photographs of the Mother. Of these thirty five belong to the period when she was in France, twenty-two were taken in Japan and nine were taken in Pondicherry. It was forbidden to take photographs of the Mother in those early days in Pondicherry. Whatever exists today are nine shots taken from far, without the Mother's knowledge. Some of these were later shown to her and the one where she is seen getting ready to enter a car was even distributed to a few disciples!

Apart from the photographs, we have copies of seven of the Mother's sketches done in France, most of them by Henri Morisset. There is also one self-portrait done in Japan and six self-sketches done in Pondicherry. Altogether, it makes eighty images of the Mother before 1950.



ages of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother in the Ashram. Then, both Janine and Purna, — the granddaughters of the Mother — gave us copies of some original prints. A few of them were totally new to us! Tara was also forthcoming with whatever photographs or information we wanted. And lastly, there was a surprise discovery by Maria Christa about the Mother's group photo at

Do you think there are still some more photographs of the pre-1950 period that we have not yet seen?

Yes. I have been told of some of them. Have I seen them? Only one, but it is in a very poor condition. Some people to whom I have talked about these rare photographs say that they are with people who are now no more in touch with

AN EXHIBITION TO REMEMBER

Sujata Jauhar '84

In February 2005 Kiran Kakad and his team from the Archives presented a beautiful exhibition of Mother's photographs, taken prior to 1950. Many of them were very rare, or never seen before. Starting with Her childhood and leading up to the early years in the Ashram, there were photographs of Her through these years about which she has sometimes spoken. Mother with colleagues in the Académie Julien where She studied art, Mother with a relative, with little André, with Her sisters-in-law, Mother in Algiers and so many others that vividly brought into focus a part of Her life about which we have only heard Her speak. This was part of the fascination the exhibition held for me.

There was also the excellence in every detail that created an ambiance so pleasing aesthetically that I came away with a feeling of deep satisfaction. Captions and quotations were chosen thoughtfully and placed so that each photo had an aura all its own. The subdued use of flowers that quietly added their sweet artistry to the exhibition, the alchemy of Sunil-da's music, the neatness visible in every detail: all these were evidence to me of an effort to achieve a certain level of perfection.

With a very few exceptions, the photos were all large and clear, each one carefully set in a separate frame. There were 98 images in all, es-

pecially enlarged and printed in Chennai for the occasion. It took three years of arduous work cataloguing, cleaning, and restoring to bring the prints up to standard.

When asked how he recovered the rare pictures, he says that most of them came from the Mother's granddaughters, Pourni and Janine, whose help he had sought while doing the research work. Owing to that he unearthed some rare gems. Like a sleuth on a trail, he had to follow leads to trace a print here, a picture there. Some of them came to him as late as two weeks before D-day.

Of course, Kiran has worked closely with a team to bring out this exhibition. Representing a wide range of skills, his team was there to assist him to classify, catalogue, digitally enhance the images, sort and write. All the material he gathered in his extensive research, has been painstakingly annotated, catalogued and digitized; captions and quotations have been gathered over months, after exhaustive reading. Downsizing this voluminous material to strictly relevant passages alone must have required hours of thought; then typing, proofing, printing each passage — a laborious process.

Stepping back into the exhibition in my memory, I recollect a sense of deep wonder, calm, fascination. The halls are charged with a pervading presence and silence. I wonder if all this labour and beauty should lie in storage, and not be out instead, creating a world of enchantment.

the Ashram. Some names have been given. So now it is a question of time and trying to contact the individuals, to see whether they can give us the photographs. We have to get a proper lead and follow it up. We will keep on trying to make our collection complete.

How was the restoration work done?

Most of the originals are chit-pad-size prints that have faded over the past eight or ten decades. Many are marred with scratches and blemishes.

The first thing we did after we made high resolution digital scans of the photographs was to keep a master copy of all these scans — an untouched digital image of the original print. These scans will not be touched so that we always have an exact copy of the original.

The untouched master-copy is valuable in two ways: in case the original print is ever lost, we still have an exact copy of it; and the master-copy serves as the standard against which we can check all subsequent restoration work done on

the image. In other words, we can always check to make sure we have not distorted or falsified the look and feel of the original.

After storing (“archiving”) the master copy, a second working copy was made on our computer. It was on these files that we started working painstakingly. Using *Photoshop*, the popular software, every little scratch and blemish was carefully removed and the image considerably improved, without in any way altering the features of the people in them. The tonal balance and contrast of the photos was also improved, so that they looked really good, sharp, natural — as close to the original as possible. Our approach was a conservative one. We did only what was necessary — no more — so that the photographs were not falsified in any way. The only liberty we took was when the Mother was in a group or with someone. Here we made a close up of her and sometimes modified the background to make the whole image look aesthetic and natural. This is an accepted and common practice.

It was a back-breaking job that took us a very long time to complete — a month or two for each photograph. But now we have brought all the images to a certain standard of beauty and perfection. We can of course still work on them and improve them further digitally, depending on time and disposition.

Previously, each and every photograph that was printed was touched up manually for scratches and blemishes. So if fifty prints were made for sale, each one of them had to be touched up. How much time and energy used to go into that! Now that is unnecessary. We spent three years doing this work at the Archives. Now anybody who wants a photograph can get it and the quality is always there. That is the whole advantage.

Were there any difficult moments, moments when you felt Mother’s help carrying you through?

Yes, especially towards the end, when the exhibition date was nearing. In the last three or four months when I felt that it may not be possible to complete the work in time, I started going to the department early in the morning at 6 am, and

used to stay there very often till around 9 pm, with a break for breakfast, lunch and dinner. I was spending all the time I could and yet there were serious bottlenecks and it still appeared we may not be able to put up the exhibition in time. Then, suddenly, as an answer to an ardent call, things started falling into place and the bottlenecks were cleared swiftly. It was the same with some of the rare photographs which did not come till the very last moment. One fine morning fourteen days before the exhibition and after most of the work had been done, I got a surprise e-mail with three photographs of the Mother. Then, two or three days later, I got a CD with new photographs of the Mother. By then we had only ten days left.

Yes, there were a few moments of grave apprehension as to whether we will be able to make it in time, but She saw us through without having to compromise anywhere

The quotations, photo-captions and other write-ups at the exhibition were most appropriate and interesting. How did you go about collecting this information?

To make the exhibition living, interesting and meaningful, it was imperative to find appropriate write-ups to go along with the corresponding photographs. Two quotations were the guiding principle for the write-ups:

The Mother has said: “Do not ask questions about the details of the material existence of this body; they are in themselves of no interest and must not attract attention.”

Sri Aurobindo has also said: “The Divine puts on an appearance of humanity, assumes the outward human nature in order to tread the path and show it to human beings, but does not cease to be the Divine. It is a manifestation that takes place, a manifestation of a growing divine consciousness, not human turning into divine. The Mother was inwardly above the human even in childhood...”

I therefore decided to put only appropriate writings on the Mother’s spiritual experiences and Sadhana about the time the photographs were taken. It was in this light that we went through a number of books collecting passages wherever possible, from the Mother’s or Sri Aurobindo’s writings. The

write-up process itself took us a very long time. There was so much material that we had to eliminate three-fourths of it and include only the most relevant extracts. For an exhibition, you know, one cannot put too much reading material; you have to strike the right balance with the photographs. The idea was to give a fulfilling and memorable experience, both for the mind and the soul.

It must have been really tough to put up such a major exhibition.

It certainly was, but it would not have been possible without team work. Although I did the co-ordination, research, printing etc., many other persons played a key role: Hardie Mohanty helped me in the first phase of the write-up; Kati Widmer did an excellent job of cataloguing and image enhancement using the *Photoshop* program. I must have stretched Bob's patience with my compilation of write-ups at the last minute. He did an admirable job of editing, proof-reading and offering valuable suggestions. And of course, I knew I could depend on Chaitanya for the final print-outs and all computer-related activities. There were also many others from the Archives

without whose help this kind of exhibition would not have been possible. I must say we formed a very informal and harmonious team to put up this exhibition. And then of course there were those who helped to actually physically put it up. There also we had a very nice team. On the whole it was both fun and a challenge which led up to a fulfilling and gratifying experience.

Will it be possible to get copies of some of the exhibited photographs?

A digital file containing the whole collection of our photographs has been handed over to the PED. They will make prints of the photographs selected by Pranab-da and these will be available for sale through Reception Service.

When is your next exhibition coming?

As part of one of our next projects at the Archives, I will be taking up the cataloguing and scanning of the photographs by Cartier-Bresson. When that work is completed, we hope to put up another exhibition. If circumstances permit and all goes as planned, then it could be sometime in 2007. ❧

...continued from page 3

the spiritual truths with which we were brought up only remain in our minds and hearts and often we can not translate it into anything constructive and concrete. My editorial was written keeping this feeling in mind.

As for those who think that there is something wrong with "the Golden Chain people talking to each other" in the magazine, please ask them to look carefully at the cover. It clearly states that this is an alumni journal. It is the very purpose of an alumni journal to make it possible for all the members to talk to each other and keep in touch. It is when you speak about "basking in their own imagined glory" that I am really baffled. What is imagined? Is Binu-da's glory imagined or Parasmani's glory imagined? Is the tsunami relief work imagined? Or is the glory of continuing education for adults imagined? Let me also inform you that the number of non-alumni

readers of our magazine is growing with every issue. Even though this magazine is meant for the former students to keep in touch with their Alma Mater we are very pleased that others too find something interesting in it.

I think instead of arguing about who is superior to whom we should concentrate on the huge load of work at hand. Even as I write this our friends from the Shuddham Group have gone and started cleaning up Vaithikuppam, one of the dirtiest areas of Pondicherry. The time has come to act, to involve ourselves whole-heartedly to bring about Mother's dream of a higher humanity into the reality of our everyday lives.

Sunayana '79

P.S.: I thank you for showing appreciation for my work for The Golden Chain. I too enjoy reading your well-researched articles on Ashram history. ❧

TAPOVAN REUNION 2005

*In June this year an ex-student get-together was again held at Tapovan, the estate belonging to **Kiran Vyas '66** in Normandie, France. **Vilas '70** tells us about it.*



Once again, the magical phrase “reunion in Normandie” came to life at the end of June. Kiran Vyas was again most welcoming, in fact eager to receive us all. We sent out invitation letters to nearly a 100 ex-students and teachers, throwing the net far and wide, with the idea that as it was summer there would be many people from India and else-

where travelling to Europe who could time their holiday to fit in with the grand reunion. For example, for Regan, it was a wonderful ‘coincidence’ that she had to come to Paris for work exactly the week after the planned get-together. This time there were also many new faces from the crop of ex-students who had come to France for further studies after Higher Course: Nagapraveen, Deepti Datla, Champak Reddy and others.

Everyone whom we had e-mailed was excited to learn that Gauri-di and Anjana(ben), two well-loved teachers would be there all the way from Pondy, and I knew that everyone would make a special effort to come because of that.

On Saturday morning after breakfast we gathered in Salle Menuhin (so named in honour of the great violinist who had visited Tapovan for an ayurvedic cure); it is a high-roofed airy room (a converted barn!) with a beautiful wooden stage on which we had the immense fortune to see two excellent performers of Kalaripayat. They not





only showed us some of the graceful exercises of their art, but also performed a contemporary dance piece with a young German dancer. We also had a glimpse into the mysteries of Kathakali from Michel Lestrehan, who has spent 20 years in India. As he came on the stage dressed in a lungi, one could easily imagine oneself in Pondy, just at the sight of that familiar casual dress of the South.



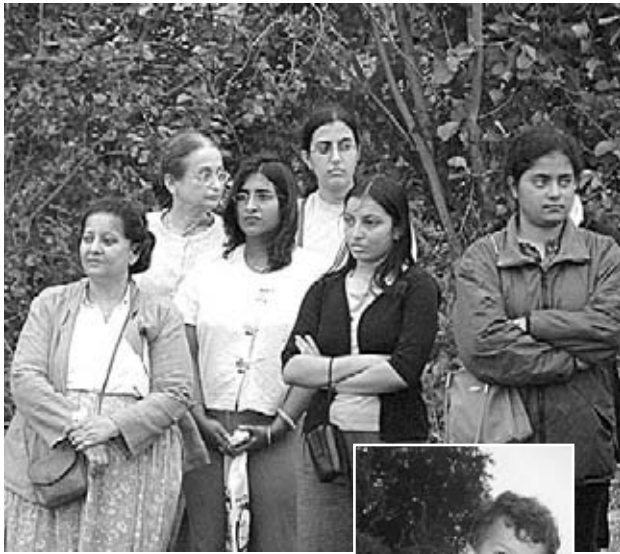
Kiran Vyas's team — Chantal, Pankaj, Falguni, Corinne and others had already made all the arrangements for lodging such a large crowd. For the rest, Hemu stepped in with a smooth i.e. in-



visible efficiency to organise help in the kitchen after meals for washing/drying. Kiran (my brother), Siddharth and Jyotindra took turns picking up those who came by train from Fecamp station.

All the meals this time were on a rather sumptuous scale as Kiran Vyas had invited a chef from Ahmedabad, Haribhai, who took great pleasure in greeting us every day with a beaming smile and ever-new dishes on an almost gargantuan menu.

Kiran Vyas took the new arrivals around Tapovan, which has grown since



our last visit, with many more facilities and new rooms, and more extensive gardens. In answer to someone's query he told us an interesting story about how he came to buy this particular property to create Tapovan. He said that Champaklal-ji, during his visit to Paris many years earlier, had told Kiran: "You should have a place in the country, with trees, cows, fresh butter...." At that time, Kiran thought it sounded like an impossible chimera as they were well settled in Paris with no



thought of expansion; however, he listened to what Champaklal-ji was saying, out of respect and love. Almost ten years later, when they had looked far and wide all over France and almost given up the idea, an artist friend recommended this farm in Normandie. They came down to have a look and Corinne took some photos of the farm; she is a





double exposure! With such a wonderful sign/seal for the new enterprise, Kiran said it was not hard to make a decision.

professional photographer, yet, somehow her film didn't wind forward properly with the result that the last photo that she had taken — which was in Pondy — was super-imposed on the next photo, of the to-be Tapovan. The photograph taken in Pondy had the Mother's symbol in it, and that symbol appeared on the Tapovan photo as an unintentional

For the evening, Kiran Vyas had prepared for a huge bonfire, around which we would have a chanting of Sanskrit *shlokas*. Anxious eyes turned to an over-cast sky on Saturday after an almost Pondy-hot Friday, with even a few spots of rain. So we decided not to wait until too late at night for the bonfire. Mounnou, Mira, Falguni, Shaila and a few others recited the Devi *stotra* and Jishnu, the Shiva *stotra*. For me the most beautiful part was at the end, when Mounnou recited





a *shloka* written by an Ashram *sadhak* dedicated to Sri Aurobindo. She sang it very beautifully and the others joined in by repeating the lines after her. The chanting

voices in the still evening air created a beautiful atmosphere.

Next came one of the most delightful few moments of all: we all gathered in the Salle Saraswati,

a spacious room with Mother's symbol painted on one wall. Here, after we had all introduced ourselves, the many children present treated us to something very special: first, an Irish dance by Emma (Shobha's daughter). She was so light and

agile, like a little fairy from an Irish folk tale. We were all enchanted by her graceful movements; she even taught a few steps to the rest of the children, who joined in with gleeful chaos. Then Roxanne (Lopa's daughter) sang a French song



adorably, going on tip-toes to achieve perfection in her performance.

On Sunday after lunch Ashok Panda gave a





most fascinating presentation of the work he is doing with INTACH for the beautification of our beloved town, Pondicherry. It is a pity that many had left by then and missed this most interesting slide show.

For me personally, the most unforgettable moment was the collective meditation in the room where Sri Aurobindo's relics are installed. I have sat there before for meditation on other visits, but this time I felt bathed in a powerful atmosphere

ferent times: this reunion will of course bring us closer to each other, but what we really want is that in the process we should grow closer to the Mother.

Here are some comments from some of those who attended:

Subhash : Tapovan is "a labour of love", love for the Divine Mother. The event reminded us of the principal goal ahead of us and helped renew our commitment to it. For me, it was a moving experience and I could feel the Mother's presence. You could not have selected a better venue for this than Tapovan. The special presence of Gauridi, Kalu-da and Sumitra-di made all the difference. We were very fortunate to have them amongst us.

Vibha: The one word that comes to mind is THANK YOU: To Kiran and his team for opening wide the doors of Tapovan to us all; to our teachers for being there, reminding us each one in his own way that all we need to remember is that we are Her children, and to everybody present for having made it, happy just being there.

For the next get-together, I personally feel that we should say a short goodbye to the happy "nostalgie" of the past and work towards the future. We the children of the Mother, are adults as well, living out experiences rich in their diversity, in different parts of the world. So probably our



of the presence of Sri Aurobindo. I was magically transported to the room in the Ashram where we sat to wait before going to the Mother on our birthdays. The atmosphere in the room was like a solid block of peace from which it was difficult to move.

As Regan and Mounnou both expressed at dif-

THOSE WHO ATTENDED:

Ajita and Dhiru Chauhan; Amal and Alo Sud with baby Ameya; Anjana-ben and Kalu-da; Anjana Sharma; Ashok Panda; Champak Reddy and Aurelie; Deepti Datla; Gauri-di; Glory Pal; Indira Patel; Jishnu and Priya Gupta; Jyotindra and Shaila Amin; Kiran Patel; Kusum Gheewala; Lopa and Hughes Ollivier with Roxanne and Victor; Malavika Mehta; Mandakini; Manju Sodha; Mounnou; Nili-ma; Nagapraveen; Pravina Mistry; Priyamvada; Rajeev Ghosal; Regan Mitchell; Shobha and Cahal Mooney with Emma and Andrew; Srijita and Jean-Paul Joseph with baby Kenneth Ryan; Subhash and Siddharth Thakkar; Sumitra-di and Bernard; Vibha and David Gosselin with Antoine Kiran and Pierre Arvind; Vilas Patel; two friends of Sumitra-di: Andree Gastou and Chantal Brison.

present could be offered to the alchemy of the atmosphere pervading these coming-togethers and see what happens.

Ajita: On behalf of all, I would like to thank Kiran Vyas (and his team) for offering Tapovan for our reunion once again. Many, many thanks for your warmth and hospitality, your kindness and generosity that made it possible for us to have



our reunion in such a beautiful place.

Most reunions are of people who are in more or less the same age bracket. Our reunion had the whole range — from the first year of the school, 1943, up to Priyamvada from year 2000.

Hopefully we will all make the effort to cement and strengthen the bonds as we return to our different towns and cities. For me, the reunion re-charged batteries deep within.

Indira: “Merci beaucoup à tout le monde” who made this gathering a reality. Kiran Vyas’s place, like its name, is really “Tapovan”, so ethereal and peaceful, and the hospitality is like no other. I feel so, so honoured to have been a part of these events and I came home uplifted. Words are not enough to explain the atmosphere that is created whenever some of the individual golden links gather in a place like Tapovan; the atmosphere is magic, and similar to that felt at the celebration of 50 years of our beloved School in Pondy.

And finally, I agree whole-heartedly with Vibha’s assessment — that “la prochaine fois” we should put “nostalgie”, however delicious it is, on hold, and look towards an exciting golden future. How exactly? We can talk about this more at the next rendezvous in Tapovan — in May 2007. ☿



ALL USA MEETING 2005

Lopamudra '94

This summer in the United States of America, for three days, Mother's love united some of her children in an annual gathering called the All USA Meeting. It was a renewal of the contract of allegiance to Sri Aurobindo and Mother's work, an effort to discuss our goals and share our experiences. It was a spiritual rekindling of fires in a common hearth, and in short a family reunion. This was a happy common ground to meet fellow pilgrims from around this vast nation and listen to aspirants of the Divine Life.

Historically, this confluence, whose acronym is AUM, is held once a year in different parts of the nation. It started in 1985 when returnees from Auroville and Ashram who used to meet in their own circle and enjoy *satsang* woke up to the idea of a national meeting. The name was struck upon and its relationship to the sacred *Om* added fervour and direction to the gatherings. It had to be a sacred space, a time to be cherished.

Every year certain devotees offer their organizational skills to make AUM happen. The logistics need to be drawn up more than six months in advance, especially if it is to be held in a national

park in summer, which gets booked early. A different theme is chosen every year, speakers are invited, topics are discussed and a coherent body of activity is drafted. Typically some speakers are from the Ashram in Pondicherry and Auroville, for whom travel and visa plans have to be chalked out. Finally brochures and emails are sent to the various ashrams and study circles in America, attendees enroll, accommodation and catering services are booked. So far it is just the preparation for the conference. When the real people show up from all around America and Pondicherry, the finer and harder part of hosting begins.

This year, the organizers were a husband and wife team, Richard and Nishi Carlson, from near Seattle, Washington. On June 9th the attendees were picked up from Seattle airport coming from as far away as New York. Some drove from California across the borders of three states. The venue was the northwestern tip of continental America. I think if you lean hard enough from one of the many hilltops you can see the isles of British Columbia in Canada. The reunion itself was held in a national park called Fort Worden, which has facilities for holding large conferences.

We were about 90 of us, just a handful of the many devotees in the US involved in study circles and other activities under the guidance of the Mother and Sri Aurobindo. It was a cozy hostel where we stayed, each in his room within calling distance from the others. The ground-floor snack kitchen became an informal meeting place where we could look out onto the ocean and re-link in tender bonds. Upstairs was the meditation chamber where we gathered in the morning at 6:30 to sit in peace and welcome the day. We took walks on the beach, passed by the caravans in the park, spotted a deer, a raccoon,



and heard the seagulls fly. There was a great collective joy, carefree days of having left our ordinary life way back in time and space and met under the sky with a thousand stars. After lunch or during a break we grouped together in various mixes and walked through the pine trees, climbed up the hillock and looked into the precipice, down at the ocean below and the land across. Oval and round shingles shimmered by the white lighthouse. A kayak swerved away from the orange buoy. A cargo ship sent forth its siren, gliding perhaps towards Vancouver or Vladivostok. There were some relics of the fort-hood of Fort Worden — concrete canon podiums with underground vaults. One night at ten when the light of day was just fading, five of us came upon such an underground chamber hidden midst the pine trees. We were trotting around testing the echo, then made a circle and chanted *Om*. The ancient fortification answered back matching the different pitch and volume.



Alok Pandey

The theme for AUM 2005 was “The Promise of the Future.” Debashish Banerji, president of the Sri Aurobindo Centre in Los Angeles, set the mood by planting a question in each mind. The promise was Mother’s when She said a new world *will* be born. Later after the Supramental Manifestation on Feb 29 1956, She announced that the new world *is* born, and the things decreed *are* fulfilled. What was the promise She made which She then declared fulfilled? Is this golden age going to befall us willy-nilly, or do we have to prepare ourselves for it? What better time than now to re-energize, to surrender to Her will — actively? Is the call to the Divine Life imperative? For those who are willing, Mother has sanctioned Her blessing

“Blessed are those who make a leap towards the future.” Technology, convenience of living, advertisements, the market, are they tools to whip up desires, or can they perhaps have a unifying force behind them? Is there an occult conspiracy underlying appearances? These were the questions that heralded the AUM 2005.

Another of the main speakers, Alok Pandey from Pondicherry, true to his name, was a beacon of light. He warned us of the dangers of technology and the powers it might unleash. The only safety would be to seat all endeavors on a solid psychic foundation. Alok enriched his talks with a gushing flow of Sri Aurobindo’s poetry, whose brilliance of expression no language can surpass. As Sri Aurobindo puts it “not through the stumbling intellect but Truth is greater and asks for deeper ways”. He traced the story of evolution, which is a story of aspiration, and urged us to launch our ship far out into sea. And what is the formula offered? To be connected to the psychic being. The rest of the issues would find their own resolution, their own place in the grand scheme of the universe. His knowledge, devotion, humility attracted some of us of a younger generation to a heightened aspiration for the Yogic life. We were full of questions and he was full of answers. Better still he added anecdotes from the Puranas and from the old Ashram life, and we talked late into the night, after sessions and during hikes in

the park. What more can the *jijnasu* ask for but such a generous *jnani*?

Matthijs, teacher of integral psychology in Knowledge, was yet another main speaker at the AUM. He had a twinkle in his eyes that was invitation to look into the fount of his Ananda. He spoke about epistemology, an enquiry upon the source of our much valued knowledge. The sense organs, our portals on the external world, are mechanical collectors of sound, shape, smell, colour. It is the processing centre in the brain with its millions of neurons that creates knowledge out of those bits of information. But this is a partial knowledge of reality as it is perceived by the sense organs. Matter, which is not endowed with thought process, has an inherent knowledge of itself. He gave the example of a glass of water which has the know-how of its boiling point, of its volume, of its surrounding, of its position in the solar system. Similarly parts of our being know truth, and it is there that we must seek our truth, not in statistical analyses and mass of data.



Matthijs and Subhadra '93 during a group discussion

Apart from these speakers there were other speeches: panels of four speakers had been formed who spoke on chosen topics, at the end of which the discussion was opened to the audience for further thought. This was followed through by group discussions of six or seven persons on the same topic. The groups were formed at random as we counted serially from 1 to 10, then all the same numbers made a group. These round-table

discussions gave us opportunity to share ideas, clarify doubts, see another's approach and finally to make new friends on the Path. The panel topics centered on the theme of science and spirituality were: future community, integral education, yoga and modern living, the future body, future of science.

Through all these activities we stepped back and saw how Man is reaching out to meet the Spirit — like Michelangelo's painting on the Sistine Chapel ceiling — despite his by-lanes of science and toys of technology and labyrinth of psychology. How he is breaking his limits of body and mind, how all progress points him to the earliest preoccupation of man on earth — God, Light, Freedom, Immortality. How he is accepting the occult, the supernatural, how ecology is teaching him humility and globalization is forcing him to recognize the brotherhood of man. We gathered to diffuse goodwill for the child who is stumbling in us, in our society, in our nations, and to march under the optimistic sun. There were educationists, psychologists, businessmen, ecologists, Aurovilians, devotees from the Ashram in Pondicherry, ex-students.

The lecture and dining halls were a short walk from the hostel, past a stone cottage lined with colourful flowerpots and green lawns hiding squirrels. The first sight on entering the lecture hall was a giant globe of the earth as seen from a satellite, with the whirling clouds, green-brown earth and blue seas. At the far end of the hall facing the audience were the radiant photos of Mother and Sri Aurobindo. A devotee placed a white blouse worn by the Mother at the altar, for all to cherish. Every day began with a devotional song by Devi Karunamayee, a Sufi singer from the Delhi Ashram. On one of the evenings she took us on a classical music revel. Other activities included workshops offered by AUM attendees. I participated in creative movements, similar to the "movements with music" in the Playground, a little more dance-like and free flowing. Other workshops were on yogasanas, *Savitri*, Hindustani classical music, planes and parts of the being, integral education, meditation with drawing. One day some of us played a game of basketball in

an indoor court. Through all group discussions, games, walks in the park, while queuing up for lunch or sharing an umbrella, a feeling of unity permeated our being. What a marvel that in such a short period of time so many can come close enough to discuss their deepest thoughts. An unspoken secret passed through — She is here participating with us, blessing us, uniting us.



Richard Carlson, one of the organisers, with Aster '63

There is always a special bond among ex-students, like there would be between siblings, whatever their age gap. We studied in the same rooms, played on the same grass and ran on the same track. Lakshman Sehgal '65, who is a biologist involved in cutting-edge research, was there in his evergreen freshness, recounting his personal experiences of Mother waiting with the measuring tape at the triple jump pit. In the panel discussion he spoke of the strength and beauty of the body and his respect for it. He also shared some of his experiences on educating children of immigrants where he and his wife Hansa '65, who was also at the AUM, are trying to introduce Mother's ideas on education. In the basketball game Lakshman was an inspiration, so agile and energetic. His game was exemplary and it showed us that we can all hope and work for a never-ending youth. We just have to keep the muscles conscious. Mahashweta '90, my sister Subhadra '93, and myself kept gravitating to the same lunch table as if we were in Corner House and revisited memories of the Ashram School. In one of the walks where Subhadra and Mahashweta were together, they sang the Sanskrit song that we had learnt in School

"Avirbhoota Bharata Janani", and impressed some of their audience. On that trip they also saw a bald eagle, the American national bird, which we see petrified in currency coins. Ahana '00 was at the AUM diligently taking notes, the youngest participant after the organizers' two sons. She had come with her father-in-law, Prapanna, who taught in the Ashram School for a brief period. (He has subsequently started a children's school in California, modeled after the free progress system.) Aster '63 was one of the speakers and she shared her experiences of the Ashram days when our Gurus were in their physical bodies. Her optimism for technology and its reaching out to the land of the spirit, her childlike awe at scientific discoveries, spread an encouraging breath on the cumbersome luxury of modern life.

On the last day at night we ended with a meditation of gratitude, to be able to participate in such a reunion of spirits, gratitude for the earth, for the growing psyche of America, for our collective self, for the Mother and Sri Aurobindo who have transformed our lives and are continuously transforming it. AUM lasted three full days only, but it felt like a long time; so charged were we with consciousness, so alive to living, so much warmth had been exchanged, so many questions answered, so many fellow pilgrims to look forward to meeting



again, so many rays of the one Sun.

Four days later on the morning of June 13th everybody embraced goodbye, and parted, strengthened in aspiration, bound to a promise towards the Future. ❧

ASHRAM HINDI

We bring you a nearly two decade-old outgoing talk by Tanaya '86 and Anurupa '86 on Ashram Hindi.

The transcript of the talk was happily found by Tanaya recently (having moved with her from Ohio to Florida and through three apartments and four homes over fifteen years) and sent to Pondy. We thought it would be interesting to incorporate it in The Golden Chain, as the talk chronicles a period of student life at the Ashram School that is now history. It was a time when most students (and former students) spoke amongst themselves in a language known as “Ashram Hindi”, a mixture of Hindi, English and Bengali. Ashram Hindi has since gradually disappeared from the vocabulary of the Ashram students and been replaced by English (Ashram English?).

The talk, we hope, would remind former students who have used Ashram Hindi, or still use it, of the “good old days” and would give the present students an idea of what this peculiar, in-house, language was. We’ve tried not to edit the talk much. We bring it to you as it was spoken all those years back. The “research” and “analysis” that went into the talk is also more or less what was done at the time, and there are bound to be inaccuracies. We welcome all feedback and corrections and hope that the talk will revive interest in this language which students of the Ashram School had, for a long time, made their own. So without more ado, शुरू हो जाए ?

DEFINITION OF ASHRAM HINDI

What is Ashram Hindi? And by whom is it spoken?

Ashram Hindi is a language spoken by a small community living at the Sri Aurobindo Ashram in Pondicherry. It is not an entirely new language, but an original mixture of mainly 3 languages: Hindi, English and Bengali. As the main structure is Hindi, the language is called Ashram Hindi. It has been made more colourful by the introduction of several invented words. Ashram Hindi is spoken mainly by students and ex-students of the Ashram School. Elders also use it, but our talk is based on Ashram Hindi as spoken by the students.

ORIGIN OF ASHRAM HINDI

We all use Ashram Hindi everyday, but I’m sure very few of us know why and how the language began to be used in the Ashram at all, that is, its origin.

The origin is not easy to trace and because it happened so very long ago, we had to ask some people of the older generations about it. And each

had a different idea concerning the origin of Ashram Hindi. So what we tried to do is to combine the various versions we got. Some elders here may not agree with our explanation, and we accept that it may not be the exact one. But then, as nobody quite knows the precise origin, a rough idea will be good enough.

Long back, let’s say before the 1950s, the greater part of the population in the Ashram was probably Bengali, but more importantly, most of the teachers were Bengali. So Bengali was the language commonly in use, and if you have observed in the older generations, even the non-Bengalis, such as Richard or Vishwa, speak Bengali very fluently.

Well then, later, presumably due to the School, children started coming from all over and consequently, there was a great influx of non-Bengalis in the Ashram. In order to communicate with them, elders, especially Dada, their captain at that time, had to take recourse to a common language. The language that everybody understood to some extent was Hindi. So when Bengalis, whose knowledge of Hindi was rather poor, tried to speak the

language, you can imagine the result — a highly Bengalicized Hindi was created. We say Bengalicized because Bengali had a strong influence on Ashram Hindi.

Take for example the kind of Hindi spoken by a senior captain of the time:

बाच्वालोंग बादाम बाचके खाएगा । आन्दार में पिपीलिका हाय। *Bacchalog badam bachke khaega. Andar mein pipilika hay.* English translation: Children, sort the ground-nuts before eating. There are ants inside.

तुम आश्रम में থাকने के लिये उपोजुक्तो नेय हाय। *Tum Ashram mein thakane ke liye upojukto ney hay.* English translation: You are not worthy of staying in the Ashram.

Also, Hindi was probably nurtured in the boardings, where there were no Bengalis so to speak, but only Gujaratis, Hindi-speaking students and so on. Among them we should not forget to mention the Jauhar family, who it seems, feeling shy to speak correct Hindi, preferred to talk in Ashram Hindi.

So Ashram Hindi was born and evolved due to the coming together of people of various mother tongues in the Ashram, and the subsequent need for communication. Both the elders and the young ones used it, but Ashram Hindi spoken by students began to develop and get enriched and does so even today. We will discuss this Ashram Hindi, developed by the students. We could call this the language of the young. When one is young there is a lot to say, lots to share, to laugh at and to criticize, in other words an age “bubbling” with life. The language therefore that the young ones created reflected this “bubbling life”. In order to express their feelings in the most precise and expressive manner, they borrowed words from other languages and even created their own.

What were the circumstances that helped Ash-

ram Hindi to grow and to flourish?

Children got the opportunity of learning and speaking Ashram Hindi more in group, because here they were not compelled to speak a correct language like in the classes. Here they also came in contact with older generations who knew Ashram Hindi. Moreover in group, chatting, gossiping and discussing presented an ideal situation for the flourishing of Ashram Hindi.



STRUCTURAL & GRAMMATICAL ANALYSIS OF ASHRAM HINDI

We will now take a closer look at the language. We'll try to analyse first its grammatical structure and then its vocabulary. As mentioned earlier, Ashram Hindi is an amalgam of mainly three languages, English, Hindi and Bengali, with negligible contributions of other languages. The structure is basically Hindi. For example:

Ashram Hindi: तू class इतना often फ़ाकी मारनेसे तेरेको surely भगाएगा । *Tu class itna often fanki marne se tereko surely bhagaega.*

Very chaste Hindi: तुम कक्षा में इतनी बार बिना कारण अनुपस्थित रहें तो तुम्हे जरूर निकाल देंगे। *Tum kaksha mein itni bar bina karana anupasthit rahin to tumhe zarur nikal denge.*

Notice that the order of words is the same for both.

Below you will see the considerable simplifications that have taken place in the use of pronouns. We have given the pronouns in French and their equivalents in correct Hindi and Ashram Hindi.

French	Hindi	Ashram Hindi
Je	मैं (Mein)	हम (Hum)
Tu	तू / तुम (Tu/Tum)	तू (Tu)
Il / Elle	वह (Vah)	वो (Vo)
Nous	हम (हम लोग) Hum (Hum log)	हमलोग (Humlog)
Vous	Respect: आप (Aap) Plural: तुम लोग (Tum log) Respect plural: आप / आप लोग (Aap/Aap log)	तूलोग (Tulog) तुमलोग (Tumlog)
Ils / Elles	वे / वे लोग (Ve/Ve log)	वोलोग / ओ लोग (Volog (O log))
	मैंने (Meine)	हम (Hum)
	तूने / तुमने (Tune/Tumne)	तू / तुम (Tu/Tum)
	उसने (Usne)	वो (Vo)
	हमने (Humne)	हमलोग (Humlog)
	आपने Aapne	आप (Aap)
	Respect: उन्होंने (Unhone) Plural: उन्होंने (Unhone)	वो (Vo) वोलोग (Vo log)

As the purpose of Ashram Hindi was immediate communication, it accepted the simplest forms for its structure and grammar. For example, one of the striking features of Ashram Hindi is the constant and liberal use of the masculine gender. On the one hand, this could be due to the direct influence of Bengali that does not distinguish between genders, and on the other hand, it was accepted because of its simplicity.

The masculine gender is used by everybody including girls. For example a girl would say: हम Sports Ground जा रहा है। तू मेरा साथ आयेगा? (Hum Sports Ground ja raha hai. Tu mera sath ayega?) instead of in the feminine gender, as in correct Hindi: मैं Sports Ground जा रही हूँ। तुम मेरे साथ आओगी? (Mein Sports Ground ja rahi hoon. Tum mere sath aogi?).

In Hindi उन्होंने (Unhone) is used as a form of respect, but in Ashram Hindi it is replaced by वो (Vo). For example, third year students have been going to Paru-di since the last two weeks. If we

want to know what she said to one of them, in polite Hindi the question would be: उन्होंने तुमसे क्या कहा? (Unhone tumse kya kaha?). However we would ask most naturally: वो तेरको क्या बोला? (Vo tereko kya bola?). So, Ashram Hindi does not have any separate form of politeness as in correct Hindi or French. In this respect it is similar to English.

In fact, Ashram students are often considered to be impolite. While this may not be entirely untrue, we may ask ourselves: Are we truly so very impolite or is it our language that makes us seem so? For example when we say: “Sri Aurobindo ये poem में क्या बोला?” (Sri Aurobindo ye poem mein kya bola?) are we being disrespectful? Certainly not. Similarly when we speak of elders in terms such as वो कहाँ जायेगा? (Vo kahan jayega?) or वो class लेगा? (Vo class lega?), they are natural to us and do not denote any disrespect, just as in English “What are you doing?” or “What did she say?” is accepted as perfectly polite. And yet वो जायेगा, वो बोलेगा etc. sound impolite because we spon-

taneously compare them with the polite, sweet-sounding, correct Hindi. In fact, forms of politeness have not evolved in Ashram Hindi because Ashram Hindi is basically a language of equals. Moreover it always accepts the simplest forms.

VOCABULARY

Now we come to the vocabulary. As it was not possible to note down all the words of Ashram Hindi, we have selected the most expressive ones and which form what we may call the students' jargon. We will first give you the words that are directly borrowed from or bear the influence of the three languages: Bengali, English and Hindi. You will observe that their pronunciation, meanings and/or usage are often distorted. We will also try to give you the context for a few words, to make the meanings clear.

Let's start with Bengali. First some words that keep their original meaning and pronunciation in Bengali.

BENGALI WORDS

Original words: बाँदरामि, बेंटे, आजे बाजे, बाजे, हाबा, लैदा, नैका / नैका चोण्डि, नैकामि, फाजलामि, उडी शाबाश, बैका, बोका, ई तो, गॉडोगोल, गैन (ज्ञान), पाजी. *Bandarami, Bente, Aaje baaje, baaje, haba, ledda, naika / naika chondi, naikami, fajalami, udi shabash, bainka, boka, ei to, gondogol, gen (gyan), paji.*

Examples:

1. ऐ, C group का captains हमलोग का talk सुन रहा है । कुछ **आजे बाजे** बात नहीं कर देना । *Ei, C group ka captains humlog ka talk sun raha hai. Kuch aaje baje baat nahi kar dena.* Meaning: The C group captains are hearing us talk. Don't say anything silly.

2. ऐ, तेरेको मेरा team में रहना होने से ये सब **नैकामी** चलेगा नहीं । *Ei, tereko mera team mein rehena hone se ye sab naikami chalega nahi.* Meaning: If you want to remain in my team, all this fuss won't do.

3. इश, Drama का hero के लिए तेरेको वो ही **बोका / हाबा** मिला । *Ishh, Drama ka hero ke liye tereko vo hi boka / haba mila!* Meaning: You could get only that stupid / dumb chap to be the hero in your play!

4. When something we say turns out to be right: **ई तो देखा**, हम बोला था ना । *Ei to dekha, hum bola tha na.* Meaning: See, I had told you so.

5. While teasing a boy: तू क्या लड़की को escort करेगा । तू तो एक number का **लैदा** (लैदा पैय्या) है । *Tu kya ladki ko escort karega. Tu to ek number ka ledda (ledda paiyya) hai.* Meaning: How will you escort a girl. You are a weakling no. 1.

Some other words are originally Bengali, but have been Hindicized:

चाल मारता/हुआ, छोट मारा, पक्का, दम, फटाया, अड्डा मारता, खटायेगा, पैदायेगा, टानकर, टैंडा बैका, मुण्डी (मुण्डु), खेपेगा

Examples:

1. During the athletics competitions: तू Long jump में real **फटाया** । *Tu Long jump mein real phataya.* Meaning: You really outdid yourself in long jump.



2. आज तो Third year students का photo उठाने वाला है । तू आज ही क्यों **छाट मारा**? *Aaj to Third year students ka photo uthane vala hai. Tu aaj hi kyon chhant mara?* Meaning: They're going to take a photo of third year students today. Why did you give yourself such a crew cut?

3. बहुत **चाल मारने** से, पैदा के छोड़ेगा । *Bahut chaal marne se, paida ke chhodega.* Meaning: If you show off, I'll give you a thrashing.

4. तूलोग C.H. का सामने **अड्डा मारने** से Dada

solid खेपेगा । *Tulog C.H. ka samne adda marne se Dada solid khepega.* Meaning: If you hang around chatting in front of C.H. Dada will scold you.

5. C.H. का लूची का क्या top smell आता । मेरे को सच्ची टांकर भूक लगा । *C.H. ka luchi ka kya top smell aata. Mere ko sacchi taankar bhook laga.* Meaning: The “luchi / puri” in C.H. is smelling great. I’m really feeling terribly hungry.

6. On the “गादी” court: छी, क्या टैंडा-बैंक बनाया ! *Chhi. Kya tenda benka line banaya.* Meaning: You’ve made such a crooked line.

In some other Bengali words the meanings have been distorted: पोदोल (vegetable found in Bengal, used in A.H. in the sense of “what nonsense”), छोट देगा (also used for a slapping movement tangentially to the back of the head and upwards), पौंचा.

Example:

1. वो English drama देखा? My God! क्या पौंचा acting था! *Vo English drama dekha? My God! Kya poncha acting tha!* Meaning: Did you see that English play? My God! What rotten acting!

ENGLISH WORDS

Similarly for English, some words retain somewhat their original meanings.

Original words: joke, joker, cool it, mind, buzz off, bully, strain, pain, crazy, grab, rotten, retarded, happy, cheat, junk.

Examples:

1. तू सोचता हम Mass drill करेगा? **Joke!** *Tu sochta hum Mass drill karega? Joke!* Meaning: Do you think I’ll do Mass drill? Forget it!

2. Consoling someone after insulting or offending him: खाली खाली **mind** क्यों करता? हम really mean नहीं किया । *Khali khali mind kyon karta? Hum really mean nahin kiya.* Meaning: Why are you taking it [i.e. what I said] unnecessarily to

heart? I really didn’t mean it.

3. तू खाली खाली इतना **strain** नहीं कर । *Tu khali khali itna strain nahin kar.* Meaning: Don’t strain unnecessarily.

4. वो लड़कीवाला real **pain** है । *Vo ladkivala real pain hai.* Meaning: That girl is a real pain.

In some other English words either the meaning/usage or the pronunciation have been distorted: hopeless, deadly, bankrupted (film), heavy



(=very), thaddu (=3rd class), tight दिया, solid, buttering, B.C., freak, cooty pie / coot (=cute), far out, too much, flat (=exhausted), kill (boys’ games smash), bamboo देगा.

Examples:

1. Arvind Sajjan **heavy** light है । Arvind Sajjan heavy light hai. Meaning: Arvind Sajjan is very light.

2. Picnic का ढोकला कौन बनाया? Real **far out** / **too much** था । *Picnic ka dhokla kaun banaya? Real far out / too much tha.* Meaning: Who made the “dhokla” for the picnic? It was really great.

3. दिन का दिन उसका **solid** चाल बढ़ रहा है । *Din ka din uska solid chaal badh raha hai.* Meaning: Day by day he’s getting too big for his boots.

4. Saturday का film real **deadly** था । *Saturday ka film real deadly tha.* Meaning: Saturday's film was really superb.

5. Last year का Knowledge programme का "Film Salad" real **killing** था ना? *Last year ka Knowledge programme ka "Film Salad" real killing tha na?* Meaning: The "Film Salad" in last year's Knowledge programme was really great, wasn't it?

6. 1500 m. run most **thaddu** item है । *1500 m. run most thaddu item hai.* Meaning: 1500 m. run is a really third-rate item.

7. A D-grouper may say: ज्यादा फाजलामी करने से Batti-da **tight देगा** । *Jyada phajalami karne se Batti-da tight dega.* Meaning: If you fool around too much, Batti-da will give you a good scolding.

Suffixed words: We also often add the English suffix 'fy' to Ashram Hindi words. For example we often say: खटाफ़, डुबाफ़, खेपाफ़.

Abbreviated words: We have even shortened some English words and made them more succinct: Imposs (ible), (it) means, top (class), shut (up), fab (ulous), (fagged) out, prob (lem), buzz (off).

HINDI WORDS

Similarly for Hindi, some words have kept their original meaning, while others have been distorted.

Original words: झापड़, उल्टा-सीधा, मरियल, फ़ालतू, बक्ता.

Distorted words (i.e. distorted meaning and/or usage): पैत्रा, चालू, मालूम, आलू, दिखाता, उड्डाकर, घुमा दे, घुमा कर, सोता, बॉस मारता, सड़ियल, बिच्चारा, गरीब, खाली-खाली, साधु बच्चा, गुरु, चेला / चेलामी, लगाया (slap / झाँड़ा), बुखार हुआ, चोर, बिन (भी), पन (पर), खिलेगा, भगाएगा, छटपट, जमाएगा, चढ़ा, सड़ गया, खुल गया.

Examples:

1. ऐ **मालूम**, कोई उसको pond में push कर दिया । *Ei malum, koi usko pond mein push kar diya.* Meaning: Did you know that someone pushed him/her into the pond?

2. तेरा क्या हुआ? इतना **बिचारा** face क्यों बनाता? *Tere kya hua? Itna bichara face kyon banata?* Meaning: What happened to you? Why are you

looking so sad / dejected?

3. तेरको उसका गाना सुनने क्यों जाना है बोलतो? उसका most गरीब voice है । *Tereko uska gana sunane kyon jana hai bolto? Uska most garib voice hai.* Meaning: Why do you want to go to hear him/her sing? He / she has a very poor voice.

4. No wonder उसको Prix d'excellence मिला । वो तो एक number का **साधु बच्चा** है । *No wonder usko Prix d'excellence mila. Vo to ek number ka sadhu baccha hai.* Meaning: No wonder he /she got the Prix d'excellence. He /she is a teachers' pet.

5. Girl asking boy: अच्छा तू Knowledge programme में हमलोग का साथ गरबा करेगा? *Accha tu Knowledge programme mein humlog ka sath garba karega?* Meaning: Will you do garba with us for the Knowledge programme?

Boy answers: तेरा **बुखार हुआ**? or मेरेको पागल कुत्ता काटा ना क्या?? *Tera bukhar hua? or Mer-eko paagal kutta kaata na kya?* Meaning: Are you mad? or Has a mad dog bitten me or what?

In Hindi, खुल गया means something "has opened" and सड़ गया means it "has rotted", whereas in Ashram Hindi both terms are meant to denote exhaustion/strain, ex. मेरा Fitness test करके खुल गया/ हम Fitness test करके सड़ गया । (*Mera Fitness test karke khul gaya / Hum Fitness test karke sad gaya*). Also in Hindi, खिलेगा means "to blossom" but in Ashram Hindi it is often used by some to mean खेलेगा (to play), for ex. "हम Basketball खिलेगा।" "हम बिन खिलेगा।" (*Hum Basketball khilega. Hum bin khilega*). Meaning: "I will play Basket ball." "I will also (बिन=भी) play."

Some Hindi words, such as वाला (vala) and लोग (log) are used in an exaggerated and fanciful manner in Ashram Hindi. In Hindi वाला is a suffix with limited usage. It is used for words such as दूधवाला (Doodhvala) or चायवाला (Chayvala). But in Ashram Hindi it is added to almost anything, be it an object or a person. We would say: वो lady वाला (vo lady vala) or book वाला (book vala) or cycle वाला (cycle vala, i.e. not for the cycle man, but for the cycle itself). Similarly for लोग. But लोग is used only for persons and not objects. We can say: players लोग (players log) or stupid लोग (stupid log) or even for animals: birds लोग (birds log), कुत्ता लोग (kutta log), गधा लोग (gadha log).

COINED WORDS

Now we come to the coined words that seem to be independent of the influence of any language. They were simply created by some imaginative minds, ex.: स्यौज्यो, चपाएगा / चप्पाकर, गुल झाड़ता (to tell a lie), चणे, चैंडा, झिंगझेंग (originally for sound volume. Now extended to flashy dresses), झाड़ता (boast/scold/writing), टिकटिकी, आँटिपुटली, गौच्चा (big, huge), भाँड देगा (a grabbing action upwards on the head).

ABBREVIATIONS

M.M.B.S. = मोनेमोने बिश्शेश / बिश्शो शुन्दोरी. *Mone mone bishesh/bishwo shundori*. Meaning: Someone who thinks herself to be very beautiful/ Miss Universe.

M.B.B.S. = मा बाबार बेकार शॉन्तान. *Ma Babar bekar shontan* or *Members of the Back Bench Society* Meaning: Those who are good for nothing.

C.M.B.B. = छोटे मुँह से बड़ी बात. *Chhote muh se badi baat*. Meaning: Those who talk more “wisely” than their years.

C.P.B.D. = Chance पेले body देखाय. *Chance pele body dekhay*. Meaning: Shows off his body at the least opportunity. For example, comment heard in the gymnasium: वो जो एक hour से mirror का सामने खड़ा है, real C.P.B.D. है. *Vo jo ek hour se mirror ka samne khada hai, real C.P.B.D. hai*.

P.L.P. = Pondicherry लैद्दा police. *Pondicherry ledda police*. Meaning: Alludes particularly to the very loose shorts worn by some members of the Pondy police force (in those days).

In Ashram Hindi, there are also some words that are a little vulgar or crude, the most widely among them being: साला (*sala*), बे (*be*), लफ़ड़ा (*lafda*). Some boys use it at least once in every sentence.

CHANGING USAGE

We said previously that Ashram Hindi reflects the life and dynamism of the young who use it. So it is never stagnant or fixed. It changes incessantly, renews itself. Hence words are introduced into the language, live on for some time and then are effaced and replaced by other words. Like clothes, you also have words in fashion. We will

give you some words that are somewhat outdated, and others that have been introduced by the very young children. We've not made them up. They are all genuine.

Outdated words: Vacant, gobet, scoot, bongo, horrendous, gonz, zooby, पोड़ा, मस्त, मक्खीचूस, चण्डि, पुचकी, सुट्टु (sweet), सिवि (superb), ब्रॉ ब्रॉ (superb), जब्बरजस्त, आण्डु गाण्डु, झाँटार काठी

Latest words (in fashion among children): भंड, क्या हुआ? (what do you mean), फूट, goocho (good), creep, bug, git (get out), सुइसुई, आसोने (Yes).

You may have noticed that many of the words we mentioned are used to convey likes and dislikes, to criticize or to appreciate, such as: top है, solid है, or थड्डु, बाजे, or to denote different degrees of intensity, such as: उट्टाकर, चप्पाकर. There are many words for teasing and bullying, such as: बाँबू देगा, पैदायेगा, टैगायेगा. All these words comprise the most expressive part of the language. And you will agree that they are words that would be mostly used by youngsters. Other such words are: गुल झाड़ेगा, फुँकी मारेगा, अड्डा मारेगा, जमायेगा.

WHY DO YOU SPEAK ASHRAM HINDI?

We interviewed some students, mostly our age, to find out their opinions concerning Ashram Hindi.

The first question was: “Do you like to speak Ashram Hindi? And if so, why?”

Most students said they liked to speak Ashram Hindi. Some others admitted that they did, but felt that it was not right to distort and mutilate Hindi as is done in Ashram Hindi. One even said that every language has its sanctity that must be preserved (You can be sure that all those concerned about the distortion of Hindi were girls). Only very few, in fact just 2 or 3 out of the 11 people interviewed said that they did not like to speak Ashram Hindi, but admitted that they could not help speaking it as everybody around them did. One girl asserted that she was compelled to speak Ashram Hindi, as most of her friends did not understand correct Hindi.

About why they liked to speak Ashram Hindi, the answers were more or less the same: Ashram

Hindi is an easy language, devoid of rules or grammar. You cannot talk wrong Ashram Hindi. There is no such thing as right and wrong Ashram Hindi.

It comes as a great relief after a class (especially a French or an English class) where a correct language has to be spoken and a consistent effort has to be made throughout the period.



Also in Ashram Hindi, you never have to grope for words, because if a word does not occur to you in a language, you are free to borrow it from another, as long as it is intelligible to your listener. Hence the lack of grammar and the vast fund of vocabulary drawn from various languages make Ashram Hindi easy to learn and to speak. In fact there is hardly a process of learning the language. You pick it up naturally when you come in contact with it. (One newly admitted student told us that she had picked it up within 3 or 4 days). It involves no thinking, no effort, but comes spontaneously. Moreover Ashram Hindi is a great help to those who cannot speak any proper language fluently.

Also many felt that Ashram Hindi made talk very informal and even intimate. They also added that some words in Ashram Hindi are more expressive for conveying certain feelings or reactions, and that their equivalents in other languages are not so telling, evocative or precise. We

have already given you instances. But let's take another example, the word डुबाया. In English, the equivalent would be: to let down, which is certainly not as vivid as the word डुबाया which means "to drown". In fact the word is so expressive that even while talking English we make use of it, adding the suffix "fy", e.g. "He डुबाified the team" (*He dubafied the team*).

One girl made a very interesting remark: she said she liked Ashram Hindi because it is our language, Ashram's language. Our love of Ashram Hindi probably springs largely from the fact that we have in a way created this language, given it an original turn. So it is very close to us, a familiar and homely language. One boy even suggested, with his tongue in his cheek, that it should be made the national language.

CAN YOU USE ASHRAM HINDI TO EXPRESS SERIOUS THOUGHT?

Another question that we asked was: "Do you feel the need of a formed language when trying to express serious thought?"

Well, everybody save one answered in the affirmative. They said that when expressing something serious or profound they automatically reverted to English.

We attempted to analyse why. Firstly, Ashram Hindi seems to lack seriousness because right from the beginning it was never intended to express serious thought. (As mentioned while discussing the origin of Ashram Hindi, it was used only for immediate communication.) So we always associate Ashram Hindi with gossip and daily conversation, never with serious discussion. Moreover the Ashram Hindi in use today is more than half English for ex. "Pondy का most of the roads really bumpy है" (7 out of 9 words are English), "हम sure है team choose करने quite diffi-

cult होगा” (5 out of 9 words are English), “T.V. में Saturday probably English film दिखाएगा” (5 out of 7 words are English). This is because our vocabulary in Hindi is extremely limited. Most of us are non-Hindi and have never learnt the language. We know only some very simple words that occur frequently in everyday talk such as जाता, खाता, पीता, सोता.

So when we talk of something serious that involves difficult words, sometimes even technical or literary words, we draw mostly from English. And soon we are using so many English words that unknowingly or unconsciously, we have reverted totally to English; almost nothing of Hindi remains in what we are saying.

WILL ASHRAM HINDI LAST?

Finally we asked the question: “Do you think Ashram Hindi will last?”

We felt that this question could be interesting, because nowadays there is a strong inclination towards English, especially among the younger generations. They speak very little of Ashram Hindi. English has become popular because:

1) The students read so many books, comics and magazines in English. They are also exposed to it through television, films and especially video.

2) In more and more families the parents talk to their children in English. So in this way the children are exposed a lot more to English than we were at that age.

In fact some of the Delafon teachers told us that within 1 or 2 years in Delafon the children start speaking English amongst themselves.

To come back to our question: “Do you think Ashram Hindi will last?”

More than half said that it would last and that it has come to stay. But many also felt that it would gradually die out.

But you can be sure that it has still not died out, and is widely spoken. Most students said that in batches they usually talked in Ashram Hindi, especially when they were in big batches. For example, when the teacher has gone out and all the

students start talking, or after a match of Basket Ball when the players are discussing the game, the discussions are usually in Ashram Hindi. (When Bengali students get together though, they usually speak in Bengali. This is not so noticeable for other languages except Gujarati to some extent.)

CONCLUSION

We’ve given you an overall idea of the origin and development of Ashram Hindi. We would also like to share with you some of our experiences during the preparation of the talk.

We chose the subject because we were convinced that it would be of universal interest, but also because it was an unexplored domain and because we thought that it would be fun working on it. As expected, the preparation was real fun. We had lively discussions amongst the two of us, and others who were interested also enjoyed providing us with information. We saw them getting happy and excited because it brought back past memories. It was not merely fun, but it often set us thinking and made us aware of our manner of speech.

Before the talk both of us were entirely pro-Ashram Hindi. But the study of the language has made us more objective. We can now see both its advantages and disadvantages, which are, to sum up:

Positive points: The most important positive point of Ashram Hindi is its simplicity. It is easy to pick up, understand and manipulate. It involves no thinking. It has no fixed rules or grammar. Its vocabulary is both extensive and very expressive and colourful. It is a great help for those who can’t speak English fluently, which is the only other language apart from Ashram Hindi that is used for daily conversation.

Negative points: Ashram Hindi is not suitable for all situations, such as serious discussions, but meant only for light exchange. It is rather harsh-sounding and impolite when compared to Hindi. It has no linguistic value. Being a thorough jumble, a खिचड़ी, it lacks the beauty, the sanctity, the dignity and the refinement of a pure language. ❧

QUIZ TIME!

Here are the questions for this issue. Send us your answers by email...

1. "...the completest synthesis that has been realized to this day of the genius of Asia and the genius of Europe..." Who wrote this about Sri Aurobindo?
2. "...look and you will see that your thoughts come into you from outside. Before they enter fling them back." Who said this to Sri Aurobindo?
3. "In the interest of peace and good government, it is absolutely necessary that this man should be removed from the political arena." Who wrote this to the Home Secretary of the Government of India on 16th May 1908, referring to Sri Aurobindo?
4. "Long after he is dead and gone, his words will be echoed and re-echoed, not only in India, but across seas and lands." Who said this about Sri Aurobindo?
5. How did Barindra Kumar Ghose, Sri Aurobindo's younger brother, call him?

ANSWERS TO THE PREVIOUS ISSUE'S QUESTIONS:

Who played the part of Perseus when Amita-di did the role of Andromeda?

Believe it or not, it was our very own Jugal-da! We have only seen him in the role of the head of Knowledge. Most of us were not even born when Jugal-da played the role of the hero on the stage in 1954.

Who did the role of Vuthsa Udayan in the 1958 programme of Vasavadutta?

The role of Vuthsa Udayan, the hero, was played by Jhumur-di [see photo]! This was a rare occasion when the role of the hero in one of Sri Aurobindo's plays was done by a woman.

Who played the roles of Priam, Achilles and Zeus in Ilion in the 1992 1st December programme?

All three roles were done by Bhrata Reddy '83 (Buchu). We have seen double roles in films, but this was a triple role on stage. Every time Buchu made an exit from the stage he ran to the green room where there were about five people waiting to help him to change from one costume to another.

How many times has the play Prince of Edur been preformed at the Ashram Theatre?

This play has been done three times; December 1970 (directed by Svetlana), December 1982 (directed by Gautam Mitra '76), December 2002 (Directed by Maurice Shukla '75).

What was the theme of the 1st December programme of 1972, Sri Aurobindo's centenary year, and what was so unusual about the programme?

In the centenary year (1972) the programme for the 1st December was recitations from Canto One, Book Eleven of *Savitri*. Unlike other years, this performance was in the School Courtyard, as the Ashram Theatre was being renovated. The programme was repeated on 15th December for Ashram members who could not see it on the 1st due to the lack of space.



If you desire only the Divine, there is an absolute certitude that you will reach the Divine, but all these questionings and repinings at each movement only delay and keep an impending curtain before the heart and the eyes. For at every step, when one makes an advance, the opposite forces will throw these doubts like a rope between the legs and stop one short with a stumble — it is their *métier* to do that.... One must say, “Since I want only the Divine, my success is sure, I have only to walk forward in all confidence and His own Hand will be there secretly leading me to Him by His own way and at His own time.” That is what you must keep as your constant mantra. Anything else one may doubt but that he who desires only the Divine shall reach the Divine is a certitude and more certain than that two and two make four. That is the faith every sadhak must have at the bottom of his heart, supporting him through every stumble and blow and ordeal.

Sri Aurobindo

(SABCL: Vol. 23, pp. 584,585)