

The Golden Chain

Alumni Journal of Sri Aurobindo International Centre of Education



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

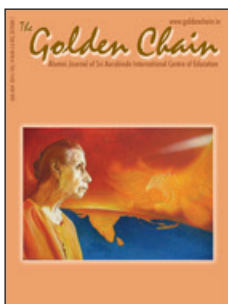
It is a thing nobody can see, you yourselves don't see; but it is a fact, it is there. The golden chain is there within your heart. Wherever you go, you drag that chain, it is a lengthening chain. However far you may go, it is an elastic chain, it goes on lengthening, but never snaps. In hours of difficulty,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

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

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On the Cover:

Painting by Arup Mitra '72

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Group photo of the of the students who completed their studies at SAICE in 2019 along with some of their teachers.

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THE EDITORS' PAGE

by Sunayana Panda '79

In the last one year many of our elders have passed away and each one of these losses reminds us that we have to now live without their guiding presence. For me personally the passing of Shobha-di has been a particularly hard blow. I never learned music from her nor was I someone who spoke to her frequently but our bond of affection was always there.

About twenty years ago I was coming out of the Ashram main Building one day when I saw Shobha-di coming in. She immediately stopped me and said, "Sunī, there is something I would like to tell you." Then she recounted to me an experience she had had the previous week. She had a vision in which she saw the Mother who told her that she wanted her to start evening classes for adults so that not only would they be able to develop their minds but also be able to read Sri Aurobindo's writings.

"The Mother said that if I didn't do this the Ashram would go through great difficulties," said Shobha-di when she had finished telling me about the experience. These classes for adults were started soon afterwards, organised by Ashok Acharya. Classes were created to teach several languages and several artistic skills as well as for the study of certain works of the Mother and Sri Aurobindo.

At first there was a lot of enthusiasm and after that the numbers diminished. But the classes still continue to be held so many years after they were started. Now after Shobha-di's passing I realise that this was one of her very important contributions to the life of the Ashram. This is something we should focus on with greater seriousness and make it more vibrant. The world in which we live has changed and we all need to upgrade our knowledge.

In the Integral Yoga all the different parts of the being should be developed so that the sadhak can grow into a more perfect human being. In this effort the mind cannot be allowed to lag behind. We have to pick up where we had left off because we have reached a point where if we don't progress we will regress.

The Mother always encouraged the members of the Ashram to study and learn. When we were small children we used to play in the school courtyard because a large number of students had been taken and there was no place for us in the Playground. Several times in the week we would see the adults of the Ashram come for their classes around 5 pm. Nolini-da's class was the most popular. He was reading the major works of Sri Aurobindo with these adults.

In our growing up years we have seen sadhaks and sadhikas learning from someone who knew more than them. Our own boarding didi Pramila-di used to teach French to Manju-di and Kamana-di in her room. When we came back from the Playground we would see them reading something aloud. Adults who were engaged in learning and growing in knowledge were all around us.

Sri Aurobindo and the Mother were like two lighthouses of knowledge. We as their followers cannot remain ignorant. Knowledge is endless and we can never know all that there is to know but if we make a start we may be able to get somewhere. The problem with ignorance is that the one who is ignorant doesn't know that he is ignorant. So taking the first step is the hardest part.

The Mother has created the structure. We have to only gather the will to use that structure and grow. We have to only reach out and take what the Mother has already given us. ❧

MY LOVE FOR ARCHAEOLOGY

Guruprashad Arvind Rajendiran '16

My interest in the history of ancient civilisations such as the Indus Valley Civilisation, the Mesopotamian Civilisation and others drew me to the field of Archaeology. I remember the days when I was reading about the Egyptian civilisation and how obsessed I had become in understanding the Egyptian hieroglyphs in the Bibliothèque Choisie during my free time in the Free Progress System from E.A.V.P 4 to E.A.V.P 6. I got a wonderful opportunity to develop my interest and passion for archaeology in E.A.V.P 6 through the preparation for my presentation entitled “How we know what we know of our Past – An Introduction to Archaeology”. During the next three years in Knowledge, I began to read books on archaeology from the Ashram Library as well as e-books from the internet. The more I read the more I realised the importance of archaeology in today’s world especially in India. I also explored the various



Visit to Mansar, Maharashtra (Buddhist archaeological site).

disciplines within archaeology such as prehistory, protohistory, epigraphy, art and architecture etc. During my final year at Knowledge in 2016, I cultivated an interest in epigraphy (Study of ancient scripts) and I decided to study how written languages in the Indian sub-continent emerged, progressed and how some scripts such as the Brahmi, Kharoshti, faded with the passage of time. I was able to share some of the information regarding Indian epigraphy, in my presentation in K3 on “Ancient Indian Epigraphy”.

Subsequently, I decided to pursue archaeology as a career. I enrolled for a Master’s Degree on A.I.H.C & Archaeology (Ancient Indian History Culture & Archaeology) from 2017-2019 at Deccan College Post-Graduate and Research Institute, Pune. I learnt about the basics of archaeology with suitable examples from archaeological sites belonging to various cultural periods from around the world. The theoretical knowledge regarding the methods used in archaeology for excavating a site which I gained from class lectures



Inscription of Naganika, a famous Satyavahana Queen from the 1st century BCE at Naneghat cave, Maharashtra. Photo taken during a study trip.

as well as books helped me immensely when the time came for my first excavation of an Early-Historic site belonging to the Vakata-ka dynasty (3rd century AD/CE) at a place called Nagardhan in Nagpur. During my first day of excavation, I realised my dream of becoming an archaeologist had only begun to materialise and a whole new life of adventures, challenges and questions awaited me. I am delighted to have acquired knowledge and guidance from eminent archaeologists and experienced professors of the university.

Archaeology is a vast discipline; it requires the aid of natural sciences such as chemistry, physics and geology. Archaeologists are trained to understand all the principles of the scientific fields interrelated with archaeology such as archaeobotany, archaeozoology, palaeontology, osteology, and geology. An archaeologist has to become familiar with the geology, the geomorphological features around the site and the types of soils and sediments present in the



A group photo with some of my classmates.



Visit to Ramtek temple, Maharashtra

site. He or she must know the various types of artefacts such as earthenware, bones (animal and human), botanical remains and fossils which he/she may encounter while excavating. However, an archaeologist may choose to specialise in any of the above-mentioned scientific fields. Similarly, archaeologists may also choose to work within a particular time frame such as Prehistory (Stone age period), Protohistory (Copper age period),

Early History (Iron age period) and Medieval History.

In today's world where life has become complex and is dominated by futuristic advances in science and technology, people sometimes forget that the past is not dead but lives on in our customs and culture. It is true that archaeology may not be focused on solving the problems society is facing today, but understanding our past is crucial to understanding our present. Archaeology is the only subject that pursues an everlasting quest for identifying and interpreting physical traces left behind by our ancestors. It is a unique discipline that studies in great detail the life history of man, his relationship with the environment, with society and with people, by discovering, analysing and interpreting pieces of evidence in the form of artefacts and ecofacts through the means of archaeological excavation and archaeological exploration.

I am fortunate and blessed to be a part of this mission to explore, unearth, interpret and understand human behaviour and cultural changes that happened in the past through material remains. At present, my perception and experience in the field of archaeology are beginning to grow and the subject has taught me to become more patient and broad-minded. As a citizen of this country, I hope to rediscover the truths of the cultures and societies of the past and also to take measures to conserve our living cultural and natural heritage for the people of today and tomorrow through the path of archaeology. ❧

THE ASSESSMENT CONUNDRUM

Soma Daly '94, who teaches French in a secondary school in the UK, reflects.

When Sunayana asked me to write a few words about what I have taken away from SAICE and how it impacts me in my life today, I was in the middle of the year-end exams. It was a no-brainer therefore that I chose to channel my reflections on this topic of assessments and how I deal with it personally. We have grown up in a no-exams, no-stress environment, and every time I have to thrust a standardised test paper at my students and see their pained looks, I wish I could wipe away their stress and share instead the true joys of learning. Therefore, the question that always consumes me is – how do I reconcile with assessments in my professional life?

I always feel privileged that we were given the scope to grow up in complete freedom in SAICE. I was one of the students in Tanmaya-da's free progress system. Although many of us think that teachers allowed us to be free to do whatever we wanted, it gets clearer to me as the years roll by, that their gift to us was far more precious. There was trust that ultimately the Mother and Sri Aurobindo were guiding us in our inner journey and even though there wasn't perhaps any visible learning or progress, there was a constant inner progress. Of course, the presence of Progress Reports meant that there needed to be some evidence of learning on our part. The culture of assessing our progress was mostly about 'let's see what we can learn / do together'.



But the conventional way to measure progress is 'I must evaluate the quality of your learning'. As a teacher I face the daily grind of preparing my students to face assessments because my accountability as a teacher is dependent on their measurable learning. Unfortunately, most schools, whether they follow the conventional system of education or are so called 'progressive' schools, have an underlying achievement-based teaching where success is valued, and failure is frowned upon. This is because the assessors (administrators, school board members, legislators) who determine a school's standards rely on the number of students who have successfully secured college and university entry or employment as the main criteria to measure performance standards of educational institutions. Given these circumstances, teachers and researchers are always exploring new teaching methods and assessment techniques in their attempt to humanise education, but usually it all comes down to gathering measurable evidence of students' learning.

Also, assessments in the form of standardised tests imply that education is a quantifiable body of knowledge of correct answers, and teaching and learning are just techniques to acquire that knowledge through drilling. I mean, if a student chooses the wrong answer in a test, how hard is it to recondition him to pick the correct one next time? However, teaching and learning is so much more complex, and to be honest, the world is so



much wider. We teachers know how much we have to be alert and responsive to the diverse ways students make sense of the subject. Teaching is at once intellectual and caring.

In my early years as a teacher, what really motivated me was that moment when a student got it, that shining glint in their eyes when they figured out language patterns and how these work within a structure. Today however, what I truly enjoy is getting how students are getting it, discovering students' myriad ways of understanding. Assessments help me to do just that. It allows me a glimpse of how each student makes meaning of the subject in his own way, and it gives me a sense of commitment to plan lessons that would hopefully support every student in their separate journey to be the best they can be. This is a big task, because I have roughly 300 students and therefore the challenge is enormous, but I am also an eager learner! Thus, lessons and assessments become a shared journey of discovery and a mutual commitment to go further. So now, when my students tell me assessments are 'depressing' and 'stressful', I keep reminding them with my own truth and conviction, that they are doing it for me, to help me understand how I can support and challenge

them further, and that it is absolutely alright to make mistakes. Incidentally, the word assessment comes from the Latin term *ad sedere* – meaning 'to sit down beside': let's see what we can learn together.

In spite of my efforts to alleviate exam anxiety in my students, I cannot shield them from facing the GCSE and A level exams. The way I approach it is like a final match: the students and I, as a team, have worked together for this moment and we give it our best shot. The exams are high stakes, but the world is so much wider. This is the moment when I truly appreciate the most precious gift that SAICE has given me – the possibility to feel free inwardly, no matter what. As a teacher, I hope I can pass on that sense of freedom to my students too. ☸



TO A TEACHER IN THE ASHRAM SCHOOL

The only solution is to annul this test and all that are to come. Keep all the papers with you in a closed bundle—as something that has not been—and continue quietly your classes.

At the end of the year you will give notes to the students, not based on written test-papers, but on their behaviour, their concentration, their regularity, their promptness to understand and their openness of intelligence.

For yourself you will take it as a discipline to rely more on inner contact, keen observation, and impartial outlook.

For the students it will be the necessity of understanding truly what they learn and not to repeat as a parrot what they have not fully understood.

And thus a true progress will have been made in the teaching.

With blessings.

The Mother

(On Education, 21 July 1967, CWM 12: 201)

THE SECRET WEAPON: FAITH

by Anupama Roy '11

“Dans l’ignorance et l’obscurité du début, la foi est l’expression la plus directe du Pouvoir divin qui vient pour lutter et conquérir.” - La Mère

[Ref: *Entretiens* 1957-1958 (le 9 juillet 1958)]

The path of faith is one beyond reason but not without reason. Faith is hope, trust, courage, resilience, determination and will, put together in one word. Rationalists question the logic behind faith, but I also think that however ironical it may sound, it is only their ‘faith’ that they can cut through it.

As a gritty and ambitious girl, it was natural for me to be a go-getter. Confident, capable and committed I took on the challenges as they came with calm and composure. The work-life of an actor can be erratic and inconsistent. My consistent nature may have found that difficult, yet helped me sustain my efforts.

An outsider, as we often hear, doesn’t have it easy in the television and film industry of Bollywood. That I worked in theatre with some of the best theatre directors and groups in the country, added to people’s belief in my craft, but yielded, generally, only verbal appreciation and false promises of work. The journey therefore remained steep and lonely.

On every other front too there was no end to being disillusioned by what I thought life would be like. From all kinds of relationship pressures, to professional expectations, to family responsibilities, financial needs and the aspect of health and fitness... all tested me and demanded attention. My emotional well-being was certainly the most challenging aspect of it all, through the roller-coaster of these years.

What was truly my only constant through each and every phase, was my Faith. My Faith in HER. In retrospect I realised a few years ago, that what actually was being tried and tested through all the difficulties, was only my Faith – whether Faith was really the central pillar of my life or

not. Was it Her that I sought refuge in or in the millions of other glittering attractions and escape routes? Did I focus on comprehending the purpose of a certain experience or cribbed about why it had happened to me or looked desperately for a way out of it? Looking at the larger picture over time, I realised as I developed along the way that Faith has to be developed constantly. Deeper and higher. An unfaltering faith is the secret weapon through every storm and whirlpool of life. Faith is the only other thing a person needs if he is sincere and honest in his intentions and actions. Life has thrown subsequent challenges and continues to, as it always will, but it also, as it intends to, polishes my Faith like a diamond. For me, now, every obstruction on the path, is an instinctive reminder of my faith being tested, being asked to grow with a little more surrender, every time, while I do everything I have to at other levels.

Baba, exactly a month before his sudden demise, had given me his gold ring with the Mother’s symbol and said: “This is all I can give you. Be sincere and have faith, everything will fall in place.” I took his words with as much seriousness as he said them and have lived by them, only to discover the power and the truth behind them. I continue to say this to everyone, as the Mother said: “Have faith and go on.”

Divine intervention is magical and mystical. But to experience it, one has to walk the path with an honest heart and earnest intentions, and there’s no end to the innumerable small and big occasions where we feel and see Her Help, Her Protection and Her Grace. This is what one will repeatedly witness.

A fear-driven life is a desperate life, particularly in times of crisis. A faith-driven life is a life of unbelievable determination, a life of stubborn perseverance, conscious courage and a resilient resolve. A higher faith is the power I have always sought to own and continue to. If you have Faith, you need nothing and no one else. ❧

BLESSED ANONYMITY

by Chitralekha Mohanty '78



I had always been an admirer of spontaneity and found excitement in walking into my day, looking forward to a surprise. And meeting Tehmi-ben in person was a surprise. She used to take classes on *Savitri* and *The Life Divine* and I was scared stiff of her presence itself, as she appeared rather stern and sombre. However, without much conscious effort and with a positive determination I went to meet her in her office, which was next to Dyuman-bhai's room near the Samadhi.

It was a hot and humid afternoon and I was

Ruminating on my good old days in SA-ICE, my alma mater, persons and events come crowding down memory lane. I may relate here an incident which many in the Ashram today are not aware of, since all the dramatic personae save myself are no more. It was the year 1977. Robi-da, an ace photographer and the head of the Ashram Press, once called me and asked me about my interest and progress in painting. Obviously it gave me a sudden jolt, for both his call and his query were unanticipated and out of the blue.

At that time I was learning to paint from Dhanvanti-ben, who guided us for a few hours in the afternoons. The topics were simple, natural compositions with various subjects. We were also working on perspective, composition and the use of light and shade on objects. Perhaps I was not very serious about my creations, so nothing substantial was happening. So, when Robi-da enquired about my work, all that I said in a few words was that I was still very much of a novice. He then suggested I meet Tehmi-ben personally the next day.



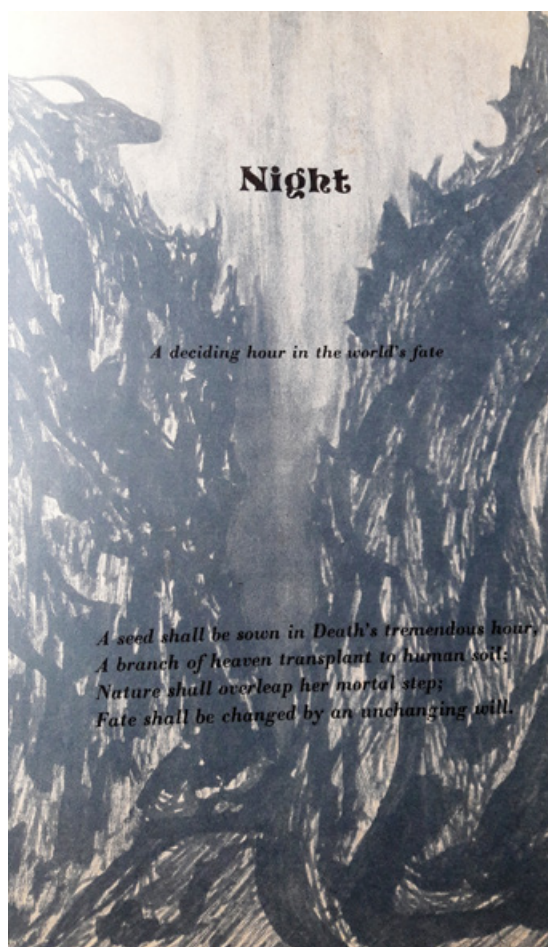
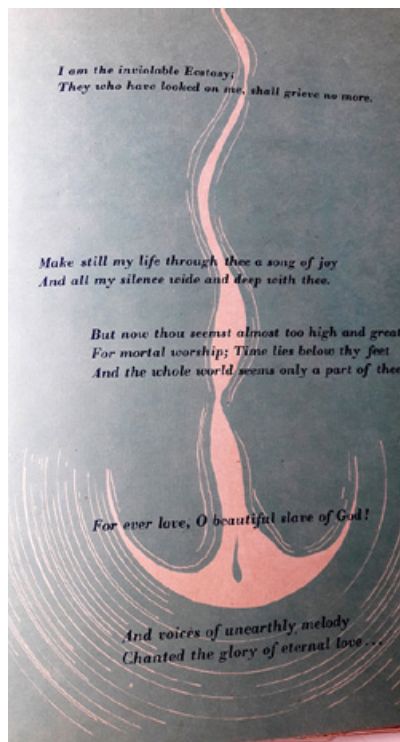
there on the dot at the given time. There was Tehmi-ben. A frail body draped in fine white muslin, her cheeks slightly sunken and her thin long plaited *choti* swinging from side to side, her ethereal figure sailed across the room. Extremely soft-spoken, her faint welcoming smile greeted me. With that half of my fear vanished from my subconscious mind, and gradually I could feel my normal energy flowing out.

Her first question was if I had read *Savitri*, apart from the reading in my regular classes. My answer was a reluctant 'No'. She then read out a verse and asked me what I gathered from it. I was completely blank about it but somehow man-

aged to express some vague ideas that came instantly to my mind. She showed neither dissatisfaction nor any gesture of approval. Subsequently she came to the point — she was keen on the idea of publishing a book for the Mother's Centenary containing quotations from *Savitri* with illustrations and images, and she wanted the paintings to be

done by me.

At first I was taken aback, apprehensive about whether I could do justice to her expectations. The very thought of doing illustrations for *Savitri*, the grand epic of Sri Aurobindo, and my abysmal ignorance of the subject were as if throwing a wet blanket on my mind. But somehow I resolved to take this as a challenge and was soon pretty



excited about it, which also gave me the desired confidence.

She had selected a couple of verses and handed them to me suggesting that I read them over and over again. "Try to tune that into your inner voice and connect to your feelings. Begin to visualise the images that would occur in the mind after reading the lines." Those were her guidelines for me in her first session.

No doubt, at first the task seemed like lifting a mountain on my shoulders, but subsequently with dedication and discipline I was able to overcome the hurdles. The following sessions with her brought more clarity to the central ideas and things started taking shape, I was feeling more grounded and energized and was comfortable enough to interact with her freely. She also gave me enough space to present my views on the subject. In due course I was able to focus and tune into the visualisation without much effort, which

created a clear and detailed mental picture of the work. It was as though an unseen hand was guiding me in and I was able to exceed myself.

In between, Robi-da would reject some illustrations and emphasize on doing something different. He would meticulously explain the layout of the pages and how the printing would be, how many coloured pages would be there and all that. He also implemented his new experiment of having the printed text over the images and the result was outstanding.

One incident I remember very well. There were these lines:

“A seed shall be sown in Death’s tremendous hour,

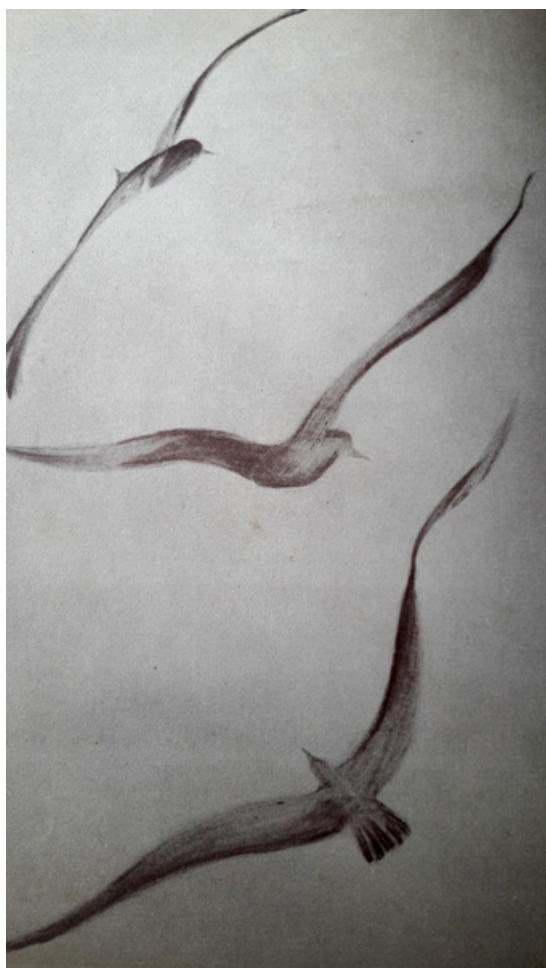
A branch of heaven transplant to human soil;
Nature shall overleap her mortal step;

Fate shall be changed by an unchanging will.”

The chapter was titled ‘Night’. Here Tehmi-ben visualised a deep dark valley, rough and steep, with a buffalo’s head signifying death emerging from the top of the valley. The images created a gory and nightmarish effect, which very much impressed her. It took me around four to five months to complete the whole task.

Finally the book was published in 1978 on the occasion of the Mother’s Birth Centenary. It was named “The One Whom We Adore As The Mother”. Extremely well produced, bound in silk and embossed with golden letters it bore a regal touch. The whole thing was a piece of art, I must say. My journey as an artist had been an experience to remember and cherish. It wouldn’t have been possible without the the spiritual guide Tehmi-ben and the perfectionist Robi-da. This was my tribute to both of them and my humble offering at the Mother’s feet.

Subsequently, it was pointed out to me that my name did not figure anywhere in the book. True, as Byron said, “It’s pleasant sure, to see one’s name in print”. But haven’t we also grown under the benign shade of the Mother, herself an accomplished artist, who said that all true artists have the sense of being the intermediary between



a higher world and the physical existence? Didn’t she explain with further clarity that true artists do not put forward their personality at all and consider their creation as an offering to the Divine? ¹

She also elaborated how the ‘primitive’ painters, as well as the builders of cathedrals in Medieval Europe had this conception of art. Again, some of the best paintings and much of the finest architecture were done by Buddhist monks, who passed their lives in contemplation and practice. They did supremely artistic work, and yet did not care to leave their names for posterity! Whether it is Ajanta and Ellora or the temples of Bhuaneswar and Konarak, it is those pieces of art which bear the anonymous artist’s immortal signature for posterity! ❧

1. Reference for the Mother’s words: CWM, 3:104-105.

THE THRESHOLD OF TOMORROW

On the occasion of the release of an audio-visual presentation based on his paintings and Sunil-da's music, Arup Mitra '72 recalls his journey as a painter.

I began painting at the age of eleven when I was a student of the Sri Aurobindo International Centre of Education. Not only did the Mother encourage me she also asked to see the paintings. Thus, practically all my water colours were seen by her. Sometimes she commented upon them and indicated their meaning.

On my twelfth birthday in 1964, my aunt, Shobha Mitra, and I went to the Mother carrying the first batch of my drawings made with crayons. The Mother at once plunged into my work and turning to me with an obvious expression of surprise, enquired – “C'est toi qui as fait ça?” Then, she asked me to explain what the drawings represented. Moving lightly her head up and down in agreement with my descriptions, she urged me to continue working on art. “Qu'est-ce qui te motive à dessiner?” She wanted to know. So, I told her how visions appeared before my inner eyes whenever I listened to Sunil-da's music.

I was elated by the Mother's warm response because things were somewhat different at the School. I had been feeling a strong urge to draw throughout the second half of 1964 but was unable to find enough free time to express my ideas. And although my teachers sympathized with my artistic efforts, they were opposed to my skipping classes.

Three weeks after showing my drawings to the Mother, I received a surprise when the new session began in mid-December of the same year! On the very first day I was summoned by Tanmaya-da, the principal teacher of Vers la Perfection. Incidentally, this was the section which promoted free-progress in learning. Not only was Tanmaya-da offering me a new box of paints and a set of brushes, he was also making available a small cassette-player for listening to Sunil-da's music. In addition, I was authorised to miss classes whenever I felt the urge to draw and paint! I was aghast

and openly wondered if this was not a refined way of punishing me for skipping classes during the previous year.

Years later, I asked Tanmaya-da why the administration had made a U-turn in dealing with me. And laughing aloud merrily he explained how, after seeing my mystic drawings, the Mother had summoned Pavitra-da, the then Director of



Arup Mitra as a young student in the School

the School. She had instructed him to make all allied art material available to me and directed Tanmaya-da through Pavitra-da to let me listen to Sunil-da's music whenever I felt like it. Further, I was to be freed from the bondage of the timetable.

Thereafter, a spontaneous outflow of paintings began and a level of maturity was reached

within a couple of years. But I was learning art without the aid of any teachers – and that was the most unbelievable part of my progress. The Mother too was quite satisfied with my natural evolution and never instructed me about style or technique, as she often did to some other artists of the Ashram.

On one of my subsequent birthdays, the Mother suddenly enquired, 'Est-ce que tu pries à Sri Aurobindo avant de commencer à dessiner?' I was caught off-guard and mumbled a vague 'non,' because Sri Aurobindo was practically unknown to my generation of Ashramites. She then advised, 'Demande-lui de t'aider et tu verras la différence.' After that she explained the meaning of one of the drawings that I had taken along to show her – 'C'est la lumière supramentale qui pénètre le noir, oh, pire que ça, le noir de l'inconscience!'

As my aunt used to visit the Mother regularly, I sent my latest paintings through her to the Mother. I am grateful to my aunt for reminiscing in her book – *Living in the Presence* – about the discussions she had with the Mother and also for including her comments about my paintings in an exclusive chapter called 'The Mother and Arup'.

Having painted some big tableaux for my next birthday, I was in a fix when Jyotin-da, of the Flower Service, offered me a big bouquet for the Mother. For there was no way that I could have carried that enormous bouquet in one hand and the three paintings in the other. So, I asked my aunt to help me carry the paintings. As my birthday is on the day following the November Darshan, there would always be a large number of visitors who came for an interview with the Mother along with the regular Ashramites whose birthday fell on that day – like Amal-Kiran, Mohan Mistry and me. For some unknown reason, the Mother was late and we were still waiting for our call at 4:30 even though we had been summoned at 2:30 in the afternoon. That was when stray thoughts began to enter my head. 'Why torture the Mother unnecessarily just to satisfy my greed?' I mused. 'Would she remember an insignificant soul like me among the ten thousand

people who reportedly throng to meet her each year?' So, I resolved not to come on my birthday in the following years.

However, soon afterwards the interviews began and Amal-Kiran entered her room first to re-emerge after half an hour. When my turn came, I squeezed myself in through the narrow passage leading to her room with that massive bouquet weighing five kilos or more. And smiling disarmingly, the Mother greeted me 'Bonne fête!' Then, a blank expression froze over her face. 'Tu n'as pas amené tes peintures?' she asked. Tears of joy and remorse instantaneously formed in my eyes! Oh, how could I doubt that she would forget her child? And the next moment she was smiling again after noticing that my aunt was standing beside me with the newly-made paintings. Then, she spent a full twenty minutes going through each painting even in that delayed interview!

Then, a big event occurred in 1968 other than the founding of Auroville. And this incident bore a huge Impact on me. Being a leap-year, a serialised audio-visual presentation comprising the paintings of Huta-ben accompanied by Sunil-da's music on *Savitri*, was projected at the Playground in-between the two Darshan days of the 21st and the 29th of February. Though the attendance was thin, for me the effect of that show remains one of the spiritual watersheds of the highest order! Right from the start, that half-open meditative eye over the green quarter-globe of the earth, in tandem with the gongs of the supernal music, cast such a trance-like web over me that I had to literally struggle to keep my eyes open. And after each session this subtle ecstasy gripped me over and over again. That was when I got the idea of making an audio-visual album with Sunil-da's music and my own paintings. Between 1968 and 1973 I used to pay regular visits to Sunil-da. And seeing my enthusiasm he responded eagerly whenever I asked him if a certain piece of music was suitable for a particular painting of mine. This way, most of the work of selecting the audio pieces for the album was made within those five years. But then I left for Calcutta in 1976 and returned only in 1990. I was just in time to prepare my audio-visual presentation for the golden jubilee

celebrations of SAICE in 1993. I am grateful that when I sought Sunil-da's permission to edit some *Savitri* compositions to suit my slide-show, not only did he allow me to edit them he heard and appreciated my work.

During my early association with Sunil-da I often asked him if the music we were listening to would suit a particular painting of mine, which, except a few later ones, were known to him. I am glad to say that he always agreed with my choice. Thus, almost all the pieces used in this collection received Sunil-da's approval.

Commenting on my audio-visual presentation of 1993, Patrick told Sunil-da – 'I liked very much what Arup did with your music,' to which Sunil-da replied, 'Yes, Arup is among the few who know how to listen and interpret my music'.

But the story of my paintings will remain incomplete without mentioning my later oil-paintings. Around the year 1970, Huta-ben presented me with some used boards to try out oil-painting. During the same period I met Eduardo Barrios, an artist from Guatemala, who instructed me principally on the preparation of the medium for mixing with oil colours. But in hind-sight I regret painting over those used boards because the new coat of paint that I applied refused to stick to the surface made shiny earlier by Huta-ben's paints. As a result, my second layer kept peeling off after drying. In this manner, some of my works were lost forever.

This fiasco happened in the early 70s. Shortly after, the Mother left her body quite suddenly. I was in Calcutta at the time and heard the news of her passing on All India Radio. In those days, there used to be a two-minute news-headlines bulletin at 7 am. I still remember how the news-anchor,

Surojit Sen, read out a political leader first, and then grimly dropped the bombshell: 'The Mother of the Sri Aurobindo Ashram, left her body last night!' Thus far, and no further. I noticed how my father stopped eating breakfast and sat still while my uncle began sobbing inconsolably before the portrait of the Mother. Then began the torturous wait through those unending minutes for more details to emerge from the Bengali news bulletin at 7:25. Needless to say that I returned to Pondicherry by the first available train but reached the Ashram only twenty minutes after the Mother had been laid to rest. Looking for consolation, I headed for the Meditation Hall where she had laid in state during the past four days. And that is where the magic happened!

I instantly felt that the atmosphere of the Meditation Hall was surcharged with the Mother's presence. What was adding poignancy to it was the buzz of a defective tube-light choke! And no sooner did I enter the area where her bed is kept that I saw her standing in profile and praying silently:

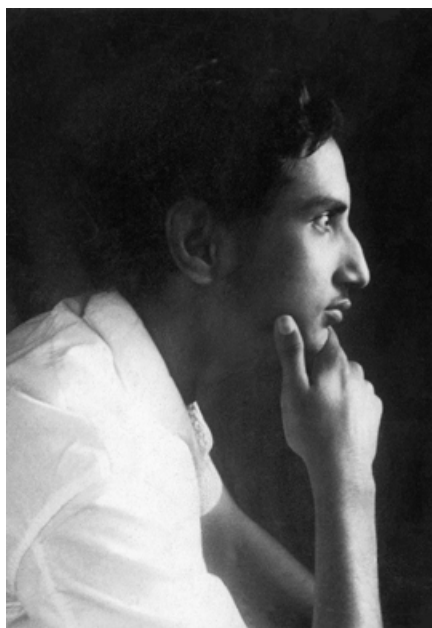
Lord, Thou hast willed,
and I execute:

A new dawn breaks
upon the earth,

A new world is born.

The things that were promised are fulfilled.

After the powerful initiation followed the inevitable pressure for expression. I had no other option but to start painting at once because the momentum kept increasing rapidly! But there was a catch in this. Like all Ashram artists of the time I also knew that the Mother was against us making portraits of the Lord and herself. So, did giving expression to my vision not amount to blasphemy? Although I resolved to make the painting following a prolonged discussion with my aunt, I



Arup Mitra



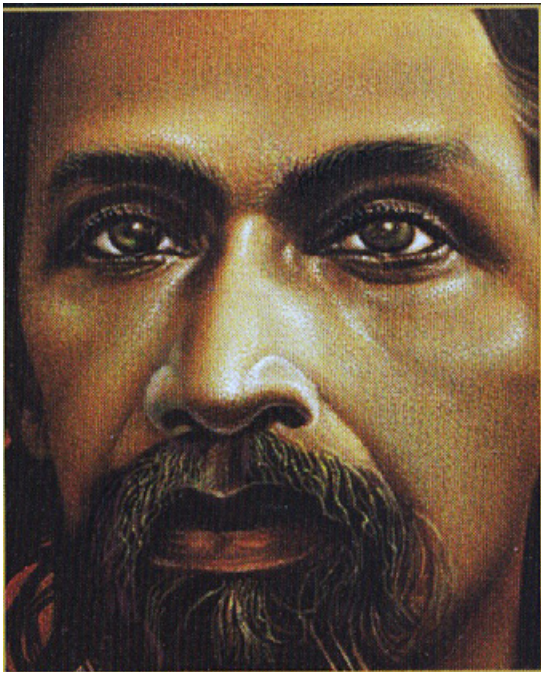
Painting by Arup Mitra

swore not to make it public unless the senior sadhaks of the Ashram approved of it. At this point what brought me comfort and confidence was my aunt's unwavering support. Just then, my former English teacher, an American lady called Patricia, renamed Rijuta by the Mother, gifted to me the art material left behind by her husband. This included a box of Lefranc-Bourgeois oil paints (the French equivalent of the famed British Winsor & Newton brand), a foldable easel and a set of flat and round oil-colour brushes. So, I decided to make a large portrait of about 3 feet X 2 feet in size following this unexpected contribution. And quite justifiably the implementation of this work took me nine months to complete. But the painting was ready before the August Darshan which was the deadline I had set for myself. Then, I sent a request to Champaklal-ji to be the judge of my artwork because not only was he an old sadhak and a long-time attendant of the Mother but also a fine artist acknowledged by her. He accepted the

responsibility with alacrity, asking me to bring the painting to the Mother's room on the morning of the 12th of August 1974. And on the appointed day, he duly took it into her room without as much as casting a glance at it. Meanwhile, I waited with bated breath on the landing below. Three quarters of an hour later he re-emerged with a smile on his face and announced gratifyingly: 'This, indeed, is a special blessing!'

After this great confidence-booster, I followed it up with the one of the same dimension depicting Sri Aurobindo's vision. I am grateful to my long-time friend and associate, Benimadhav Mohanty, for posing graciously for the portrayal of Superman in this oeuvre. Then I made three more life-size tableaux during my stay in Calcutta – Kalki, Conqueror of the New World, and a full-size portrait of the Mother to commemorate her centenary.

In early 1997, I was approached by the managers of Sri Aurobindo Bhavan, Calcutta, to



Portrait of Sri Aurobindo which appears on the cover of Arup Mitra's book, *Uttar Yogi*

make a portrait of the Master. This time, Jayantilal-da supervised my work according to the wishes of Harikant-bhai, who was then the Managing Trustee of the Ashram. Later, this portrait was unveiled and installed in the interview room of the governor at the Raj Bhavan of Calcutta. The inauguration was done by Sri K.V. Raghunath Reddy, the then Governor of West Bengal himself, following a glittering ceremony covered by Doordarshan. This event was conducted within the framework of the golden jubilee celebrations of India's Independence, which also marked the Master's 125th birth anniversary.

My journey as a painter has been long and eventful. This year, 2019, finally saw the release of the audio-visual presentation based on my paintings and Sunil-da's music. The present album *Threshold of Tomorrow* is an improved version of

what was earlier projected in the School courtyard in 1993 by way of a slide-show and tape-recorded music. Thus, my goal was achieved after a patient wait of over half a century! Done primarily under the loving exhortations of my aunt, I shall remain forever indebted to her for getting the work achieved through me. In fact, she was so pleased with the end-product that she herself spoke to Ravi over the telephone for my video to be played at the School. Thus, an important milestone was reached on Wednesday the 17th of July 2019 when *Threshold of Tomorrow* was projected in the Hall of Harmony to the delight of my aunt. But as if in covenant with an occult edict, she passed away quietly just two Wednesdays later. ☸



Portrait of Sri Aurobindo presented to the Raj Bhavan, Kolkata

PLEASE NOTE, THE GOLDEN CHAIN OFFICE LANDLINE NUMBER IS NOW:

0413 - 4504009.

LE 75^{ÈME} ANNIVERSAIRE DE NOTRE ÉCOLE

Charles Mariannie '73 se souvient

Konkona et moi-même projections, un an à l'avance, de participer au 75^{ème} anniversaire de notre École si chère à nous tous. Notre projet prit forme et quand nous étions sûrs de pouvoir participer à cet événement unique, cela a été une grande joie et un grand bonheur pour nous.

Nous sommes arrivés à Pondy le 20 octobre 2018. Nous avons la chance de pouvoir participer à la célébration entière, programmée pour le 2 décembre. Nous nous sommes rapidement renseignés sur tout le programme et surtout quand nous allions débiter les répétitions de l'exercice d'ensemble, le « drill » et le « march past » prévus.

Mon souvenir quand nous nous sommes tous, les Ex-students, rencontrés dans la « Salle d'Art » le premier jour. Certains d'entre nous, ceux de la même génération, nous nous revoyions après 20 ans, nous avions tous changé bien sûr, un peu vieilli. Mais nous étions tous animés de cette flamme en nous, une motivation et inspiration, celle d'offrir à Douce Mère tout notre travail et consécration, en cette belle occasion. L'anniversaire de notre École que Douce Mère a créée avec tout le soutien de Sri Aurobindo, en 1943. Sri Aurobindo International Centre of Education (SAICE), en tant que tel, a été inauguré en 1952.

Quand l'entraînement et les répétitions ont commencé, nous avons été mis dans le bain tout de suite et nous avons des journées bien remplies, comme il y a plus de cinquante ans ! Cela nous rappela notre enfance, notre adolescence. Douce Mère savait que nous débordions tous d'énergie, et donc voulait que nous canalisions cette énergie pour la rendre positive et ainsi créatrice. Mère nous a toujours encouragés et soutenus dans les activités extra-scolaires, la danse, la musique, le chant, la peinture, le théâtre et les échecs (indoor games). Tout ce qui pouvait

contribuer à l'enrichissement de notre personnalité et de notre caractère.

Et voilà qu'est arrivé le moment tant attendu, notre entraînement au terrain de sports, le « sports ground ». C'était un moment intense, car beaucoup de souvenirs d'enfance ont commencé à défiler en moi-même. Toutes les activités que nous faisions au terrain de jeu (Playground) et terrain de sports, se déroulaient en présence de Douce Mère. Quand nous débitions la saison des compétitions sportives, le premier septembre, je me rappelle Mère, assise devant son symbole et nous distribuant un message et un bonbon (Ganapatram toffee) avec un doux sourire qui illuminait son visage. Cette image m'est toujours restée à l'esprit.

Le dimanche 2 décembre 2018 fut un événement que nous n'oublierons jamais. L'atmosphère était intense et forte. Quand le « march past » a commencé nous sentions la présence de Douce Mère et sa force durant le chant très puissant du « Vande Mataram ». Ensuite le programme des activités diverses commença avec la participation du public qui appréciait beaucoup tous les « drills ».

Arriva le tour des Ex-students: le drill Qi-Qong était extraordinaire ; la musique de la flûte sublime nous menait vers une communion complète avec la nature. Cela nous a permis de nous exprimer avec beaucoup de sérénité et de nous ouvrir ainsi et ressentir la créativité et la beauté de nos mouvements. Merci à toute l'équipe qui nous a permis de nous réunir et offrir cet événement tellement précieux aux pieds de lotus de Sa Grâce Divine.

Sa présence était palpable. Elle était assise, là, sur sa chaise, devant nous, durant toute la représentation.

« Ô Seigneur, Vérité Éternelle, permets que nous n'obéissions qu'à Toi et que nous vivions selon la Vérité. » ❧

TALKS BY NIRODBARAN

Sunayana '79 tells us about a new book she has helped edit

We all know that Nirod-da had a very interesting and humorous correspondence with Sri Aurobindo and for that he will always have a special place in the life of the Ashram. Those of us who had the good fortune of being his students know him as a person. For the others the only way to know him is through his books. In the late 1960s Nirod-da gave a series of talks in the Hall of Harmony. These talks have been compiled and published as a book. In fact, the work of editing and publishing these talks is not over and eventually it will run into several volumes. These talks are a mine of information.

To understand what this book means and why it was published we have to go back to the year 1969. It was a time when the idea of celebrating Sri Aurobindo's centenary was in the air. Everyone was speaking about it and many plans were being made. There were still three years to go but I can remember, even though I was just a child, that there was a sense of anticipation that was growing. It was going to be the big event that everyone was looking forward to.

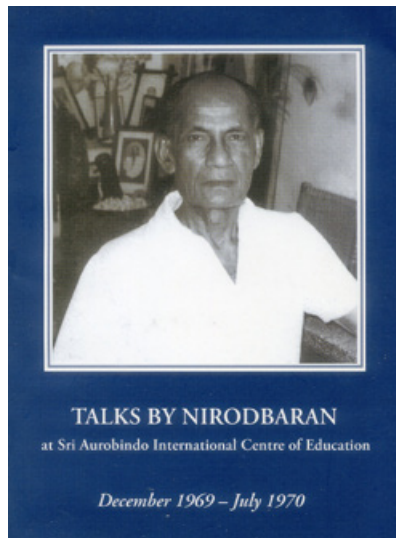
It was during that period of preparation for the centenary that some teachers wanted to know more about Sri Aurobindo, his life and his work. So they requested Nirod-da to give a series of talks that would help everyone know what Sri Aurobindo was like and what he had done. Nirod-da told the Mother about this request from the teachers. She was very happy that they wanted to

know more about Sri Aurobindo and encouraged Nirod-da to go ahead with this project. Nirod-da spoke about his own memories of the early years of the Ashram but he also gathered information from others who had lived in the Ashram during those years before he himself came here. Those stories and memories record some events and activities which don't appear anywhere else in published records. He also read out from the memoirs of Nolini-da which had already been published at that time.

We must remember that Sri Aurobindo was totally inaccessible to the sadhaks. It was only after his accident when he fell and broke his leg that his attendants spent the whole day in his room. From them the others in the Ashram got some inkling about his ways and his likes and dislikes. This is in contrast to the Mother who was in the middle of all the activities and many people in the Ashram had a direct access to her. They could go to her at any time and ask her whatever they wanted to know.

In this book we see the day to day lives of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother and the details of their conversations. We also get to know from the correspondence between Nirod-da and Sri Aurobindo the meticulous attention which was given to each *sadhak* and *sadhika*.

These talks which took place once a week are almost 150 in number. They were recorded by Sudha-di (Umachigi) on a cassette recorder and they were then transcribed by her and Kokila-ben. After they had finished transcribing the



BOOK EXTRACT

In the evening, I don't know at what time exactly, Champaklal used to bring in a flask of soup for the Mother, and he poured it into a bowl, in the presence of Sri Aurobindo. The Mother was in her room, and Sri Aurobindo himself carried the bowl to the Mother. Champaklal said rather humorously that it was a sight for the gods, how Sri Aurobindo carried the bowl – so carefully, so steadily, as if it were an offering he was taking.

Then before the salon was ready, the Mother was living, I told you, in the corner room, facing Pavitra's room, and the adjacent room, where I have the privilege to work, was her toilet room. You know perhaps that even today the Mother has no proper bed. She has a sort of a couch, I don't know the length and breadth – mathematics doesn't come to me easily! But it's just enough, I think, for her body. She never lies flat, because that is a tamasic position... So, ladies and gentlemen, don't lie flat on your mat or your bed, always try to be propped up. I have seen the difference myself. Though the flat position is very comfortable, it is tamasic.

So, in that small room in the corner, she had a couch where she would rest rather than sleep, I suppose, and once she fell ill. Sri Aurobindo used to take for her some fruit juice in a flask. One day, the flask being somewhat new, he didn't know how to open it. He called Champaklal to help him, and he did it in no time.

Here Champaklal said that he called him in a very humorous way, he doesn't remember the words, but the faint memory of humour has stuck.

Another instance: they had in their room a revolving fan. Sri Aurobindo wanted to make it steady. He didn't know how to do it. Again he had to take the help of Champaklal and asked him, "Do you know how to do it?"

Champaklal didn't know (Laughter) but he didn't acknowledge it. (Laughter) He was always an experimenter. Always sees, tries this and that. So, he put his hand and luckily his finger went to the right spot and it became steady! Sri Aurobindo smiled, "Oh! So simple!" (Laughter)

Then the other work Champaklal had to do was to bring hot water for Sri Aurobindo's bath, near about 10 p.m., but the time was never fixed, it was 10, 11, 12, 1 or even 2 a.m. – of course after the Mother had retired. Champaklal says that it was very hot water. I asked him, "How do you know that it's very hot water?"

He said, "When I went there after the bath I used to dip my fingers into the water that remained, and it was extremely hot." [...]

Sri Aurobindo, after the bath, would go for his dinner or supper or whatever light meal, and come back to rinse his mouth. So, meanwhile Champaklal had to wash and clean the bathroom and also remove all the dishes after his meal. You can see then from 10 o'clock to 3 or 4 in the morning he worked, and went back.

talk they would erase the cassette and re-record on it the following week. And this continued until the last talks were given. These talks continued for several years. Sometimes Nirod-da called some of his friends, such as Amal Kiran, Arindam Basu and Nolini-da, to speak.

When these talks started Nirod-da's correspondence with Sri Aurobindo had not yet been published. So sometimes he would read out these letters to illustrate a topic. It was only after these series of talks that the correspondence was brought out as a book.

A few years ago Sudha-di decided to get these talks published. So the handwritten transcript was typed out and edited. The painstaking work of separating the spoken words from the quoted words had to be done by indenting the quoted words and by putting them in a different font. Maurice Shukla and I have edited this volume.

The book *Talks by Nirod Baran at SAICE (December 1969 - July 1970)* is available at SABDA. The talks which were delivered from May 1969 to December 1969 are in a separate volume, edited by Ranganath-da, and can be bought from VAK. ❧

FUNDRAISING FOR THE MOTHER

THE 'ACRES FOR AUROVILLE' CAMPAIGN

Mandakini Lucien-Brun, SAICE teacher in the early eighties, shares her passion

I always remember how Dyuman-bhai would say that he was the Mother's "Yes Man" – and that to whatever She said or asked him to do, he would always say "Yes, Mother". In one particular area, I can say that about myself – I'm the Mother's "Yes Girl" – and that's when it concerns working to get Auroville's still-missing land – the lands She envisioned for Her City of Dawn.

As we all know, India made the magnificent gesture of hosting the Mother's Auroville Project on Indian soil in the name of Humanity and its future generations. What other country would have the generosity, the deep Vision and spiritual understanding to do that?! And further, India designated a specific area of land for this project. But these designated acres could not be taken – they must be purchased. In 1972 the Mother wrote this message:

"The lands for Auroville can be bought and must be bought. The money is needed. Will you help?"

At first, the plots constituting this designated land were so eroded as to have little economic value. But as Auroville's pioneers reclaimed the land, and built so much beauty and dynamism on it, prices started a vertiginous rise, particularly in the City Area. The City of Dawn's success and development made it an increasingly attractive magnet for outside land developers and speculators. Step by step, Auroville's manifestation led to a situation of competition for its land between Auroville, seeking to fulfil its mission, and promoters of commercial projects seeking to benefit

from Auroville's success without a commitment to its core values – often using the Mother's photo as a business lure.

Like many people, I went to Auroville and deeply enjoyed my stays – meditated in the Matrimandir, went to inspiring programs in the Sri Aurobindo Auditorium, was impressed by its educational work and ecological leadership, and its dynamic role in promoting Sri Aurobindo's

Yoga and programs for human unity. Like most of us, I thought there was still all the time in the world to finish getting the land needed to complete its physical base. I was thrilled by Auroville's development and didn't see the parallel danger that was developing too. But in fact, land fundraising had basically stalled,

while the land purchase activity of speculators had consistently grown.

In 2012, I led an AVI France – AVI USA action called "Build it Now!" to raise funds for completing Santé, Auroville's Institute for Integrative Health, and launched the first fundraising calls for what now are its essential Farewell Facilities. So, when two articles appeared in *Auroville Today* in late 2013 about the imminent danger to Auroville's physical integrity from land sharks and from encroachment – it caught my attention. Dr. Karan Singh, Chairman of the Auroville Foundation, wrote these ominous words: *"The City envisaged by the Mother is under serious threat from speculative developers...If we do not get the land, we will not be able to build the city"*.

I asked myself, "How can we consider ourselves



FOR YOUR COLLABORATION:

<https://land.auroville.org/a4adonations/>
<https://land.auroville.org/campaigns/acres/>
<https://land.auroville.org/campaigns/art-for-land/>
<https://www.facebook.com/acresforauroville/>
contact: lfau@auroville.org.in
contact: artforland@auroville.org.in
contact: manda.lucien.brun@gmail.com

PLUS FOR YOUR PLEASURE!

<https://land.auroville.org/news/>
<https://land.auroville.org/video-acres-auroville/>
Art for Land's event schedule:
<https://unitypavilion.auroville.org/>

faithful to the Mother and be inactive faced with this danger?" And personally I asked "What can I do"? **I understood that the time was now to secure Auroville's missing land - or it would be irrevocably lost forever.** Over the next weeks, the inward call came repeatedly and insistently – "Start a campaign, and call it 'Acres for Auroville'." So I had no choice but to say "Yes Mother!"

After agreement from my colleagues on the AVI France Board, I contacted Aryadeep of Auroville's LFAU (Lands for Auroville Unified). I pledged to be the Mother's watchdog for the use of donations – to be the "good trustee" Sri Aurobindo wrote about in Chapter 4 of *The Mother*. Then all the other AVI centers joined the action. Together, Aryadeep, Aurovilian Sigrid, LFAU secretary Jothi and myself developed a dedicated website, a communication campaign, and donor response and accounting systems to create awareness and enthusiasm. A major associated goal was to create greater unity within the Integral Yoga family around fulfilling the Mother's wishes for the land. Her words are our beacon and guide:

"A harmonious collective aspiration can change the course of circumstances."

The Acres for Auroville land campaign (A4A) was launched as a consecrated action on August 15th, 2014. Among my many roles, I am the treasurer, and work collaboratively and

intensively for all aspects of the campaign on a daily basis from France. We have issued our quarterly A4A massmail communications on every Darshan Day since the start. Our land.auroville.org website (formerly called COLAAP) is rich with land information and campaign news. A special feature is our video section which includes our now iconic film, "Landing Auroville", made in collaboration with Aurovilian Rakhal and AuroImage. Our recent beautiful addition is **"The Mother, an Artist"** which was shown in the Ashram Playground on August 14th and in the Hall of Harmony in October.

Based on an inspiration from Sunayana Panda, Jasmin and Aravinda Maheshwari and I expanded A4A's action by creating the now annual **"Art for Land"** fundraising exhibition and associated events in collaboration with the Unity Pavilion's Jaya and Devasmita Patnaik. This is a wonderful cycle of flowing generosity between artists and land donors. Our dedicated online website proudly includes works contributed by Ashramites and SAICE artists. **On January 5th, we will kick-off our 5th Art for Land Exhibition going on till Mother's Birthday** with many special events. If you're in the area – don't miss them!

Finally, in conjunction with Aravinda, we create an inspiring annual New Year's card. (Contact LFAU or me to be on our mailing list). It is a great satisfaction to me that, despite limited means, several elder Ashramites – who remember the Mother's wishes for the land – are donors to A4A.

On August 15th we kicked off **Acres for Auroville Year 6**, and among the happy results of this action, **over 62 acres** of once-missing land have been purchased to date. But it's not enough – **8% of the City and 68% of the Greenbelt** are still missing and remain targets of outside buyers. So I invite you to join with me in saying "YES" to the Mother. A combined aspiration can change circumstances, and solidarity works as A4A has shown. This is my passion, and I hope it will be yours too. **Together let's secure the land the Mother wanted for the City of Dawn!** ☸



“LES APSARAS”

Shantona Paulmier '78

Le soir tombe, la lumière irréaliste du crépuscule embrasse la terre.
C'est l'heure où les apsaras sont invitées aux royaumes des dieux :
les grelots au son mystérieux s'extasient aux pieds
de chaque danseuse :

Le monde des apsaras illuminé par leur beauté,
rythmé par leurs mouvements des mains, des pieds, des regards.
Elles tournent... tournent... à travers l'espace, les galaxies ;
Vibrent les nuits étoilées jusqu'aux premières lueurs du matin.
La nature et les êtres s'élancent vers les chants,
vers les rāgas matinaux,
et deviennent la félicité éternelle.

La créatrice, l'âme invisible se répand dans ce monde,
en toutes choses éternelle, impérissable.

QUI EST LÀ ?

Shantona Paulmier '78

Qui est là ?
C'est moi, Neel.
Que fais tu ?
Je compte les coquillages...
Et combien en as-tu trouvés ?
Jusqu'au rosier ;
Tes coquillages... d'où viennent-ils ?
Du fond du bleu des vagues,
sur les rivages lointains.
Moi, Neel, je suis heureux
dans l'azur, avec mes coquillages.
Je les compte, je voyage, je les range
Sous l'olivier, jusqu'aux pétales des rosiers.



A GIRL

By Yamuna Siva '61

(written as homework in Tehmiben's class)

A girl is a butterfly glittering with glee,
A dance-about, sweet shrugging, shrewd-eyeing, free,
An artful show-off with her huge ribbon-bow,
A listener to fairy tales with cheeks aglow.
A questionnaire exhausting our patience,
A half-shy, half-bold, shrill-voiced nuisance.
An angelic light! All cares get dispers'd.
A balloon of tears – what time it may burst!
A tiny, rosy darling who hugs her mother;
A ceaseless reporter against her brother.
An imperial nurse to her baby doll,
A master-player of the innocent's role.
A girl is a pearl, so small and smart;
Relish her, cherish her in the shell of your heart.



STRAY THOUGHTS

By Gaurav Bose '05

Not too far away from today
I will be a different man
Some people will hold back
But I must follow my plan.
There will soon be a day too
When my anger will melt away
With the sweat spent on labour
As with love I take on each day.
Beyond the surface of this life
A mighty truth's waiting for me
I am bold and am ready to give
All I have, to be true and free.
Not too far away from now
I'll meet You on the other side
I shall then be true to you, until
From My own self I cease to hide.

FAREWELL

By Yamuna Siva '61

*(Farewell song written for the out-going
'Knowledge' Students)*

Hail to thee, young hero
Trotting out of 'Knowledge'!
Four, three, two, one, zero:
Shooting out of college!

Once we saw thee short and small
Now art thou grown big and tall.
Thine eyes shine like stars.
Thy spirit knows no bars.

Thou'rt ready to launch thy boat
In the roaring sea of life;
Thou'rt already afloat
Amidst love, labour and strife.

A thousand dives, a thousand dips:
How fast is held thy oar:
A syllable of thy lips
Brings treasures to thy door.

Thirty and eight, boys and girls
Lived cosy as a jar of pearls.
Time's hands now o'erturns the jar:
Some fall near while some roll far.

Lovely, simple hearty smiles
Will shine across the miles
O candid souls of every teen!
Our memories are evergreen.



Days of worth
And days of folly!
Days of mirth
Were days so jolly!

Full of plans, and full of hopes,
Always young, and never too old,
Leap you forward as antelopes;
The days to come will be of gold.

In this world of much ado,
Where'er you go, what'er you do,
The Grace Divine is there beside you.
To enrich you ever and guide you.

In moments when the odds harass,
You'll always feel a Motherly caress
Bearing you along; – invisibly,
Yet so very unmistakably.

YAMUNA SIVA – MY DEAR SISTER

Gauri Ramalingam remembers her loving elder sister, Yamuna Siva '61

Yamuna was my elder sister; she has walked with me as a close companion for all these past years. I was bold, happy and confident knowing that she was there to share my joys and also my difficulties. It is not easy to describe her. Yamuna was always sweet, gentle in her ways – yet very persistent in her decisions.

She was a brilliant mathematician, a born poet – she wrote her first Tamil song on Lord Murugan (Lord Karthik) when she was just 8 years old. She loved to write poems and plays. In fact, 33 of her plays were staged in our School, Sri Aurobindo International Centre of Education, with our children. Some plays were enacted in English and many in Tamizh. Non-Tamizh children liked very much to act in our Tamizh plays. At this moment, I am reminded of our dear Shekhar – who was always ready to help us.

Yamuna was an able head of the Tamizh Department.

Sweet old memories swim in my thoughts – they are intense and numerous. I remember the days when we both played carrom, cards, ping pong, etc, at home. Yamuna was a very good chess player.

In the 1950s, when I was in green group (A2) and she in red group (B) – we both wished to go to the Sportsground early in the morning to practise for the forthcoming Athletics competitions. We both walked to the Sportsground. It was pitch dark – no one was there. We sat a while on the cement square platform where Mother used to take our salute. 15 minutes passed, 30 minutes passed... still no one! Only then did we realize

that the time was only 4.15 a.m. By Mother's Grace, we were safe. After about 5.15 a.m. people started coming for practice. This was a thrilling experience. We had a good laugh.

Yamuna loved to gaze at the flowers, the moon, the stars – she enjoyed spending time with our dogs. The mischievous play of our cats and

also the tiny sweet squirrels at home pleased her. She was always the one who named our cats.

She also had a clear mind and was good with designing things. She planned the extra constructions of our house, the arrangements of the furniture, pictures etc. I was just an instrument and followed her good advice.

Yamuna was a lover of arts – she was a singer too;

she has written many songs and set many of her songs to music. She imbibed this gift from our beloved father, Justice S. Siva, a dear child of the Divine Mother and Sri Aurobindo.

Now I miss all her tender looks, soft words, the fun-filled times I spent with her and lastly her motherly affection.

In 1959 she wrote a letter to our Divine Mother. Mother replied thus:

Yamuna, my dear child. Certainly you are fit for Yoga. Let nothing discourage you and persevere.

My help and blessings are with you.

(signed) – The Mother

I ardently pray with all my heart for her soul which is resting on Mother's lap and every moment I am grateful to the Mother for giving me so nice a sister. I warmly cherish this gift.

Yamuna's caring ways, her thoughtfulness shall be treasured through the years. ❧



Yamuna, Gauri and Selvi on the seashore

YAMUNA SIVA... YAMUNA-DI... JAMUNA... YAMUNAKKA

By her youngest sister **Selvi Sarkar '64.**

Yamuna's verses have been rendered freely by Selvi from Tamizh to English.

An absent-minded professor, she always lived in another world, musing over something beyond daily chores. Always thoughtful, able in different skills...the engineer thought that she was an archi-

tect, the way she was guiding him; the carpenter thought that she was a master of carpentry, the way she got him to build a magnificent royal piece of furniture. Overflowing with ideas in various fields, the results were innovative, original and fascinating. She would make beautiful drawings for

showing her designs, but the main stream of inspiration found expression through her poetry, a bit in English, but mostly in Tamizh, for which she has received many awards. She was bestowed with the title: 'Kavi-mugil' – 'poetic cloud'. Few are those who have the two sides of the brain developed: she was a genius in mathematics along with being a poet, a dramatist, a musician, a lyricist.

I admire her poetry for her original ideas and simplicity. Here are a few examples:

In a prayer to Ganesha, 'Pillayar Thudhi', she implores Him "to reduce to ashes the load of sufferings not only of the poor, but also of the rich living in mansions."

Most of the poets and saints pray only for the poor.... Even among the richer lot, are there not

pure-hearted ones affected by sufferings?

She urges Him "to redeem those who spend sleepless nights."

Only those who have known sleepless nights can feel that torment.

In a prayer to 'Goddess Lakshmi', to whom all implore for more and more, she simply says:

"Enough! Enough! All that you bestow is more than enough!"

'KUZALUKKUM OYVAMO!' – 'REPOSE OF THE FLUTE'

Yamuna describes little Krishna in a charming way, "with His alluring attire", "the way He is reclining on His golden bed", "gods watch Him with untiring eyes!"

While His mother hums to lull Him to sleep; "Are those lotus petals fallen over His eyes? While the whole universe is resting, is that not a respite for the tinkling bells and the flute!"

In 'SEYARKAYIL SIKKIYA IYARKAI' – 'NATURE CAUGHT UP IN ARTIFICE', she affirms "that brothers have no time to talk to each other", "neighbors, to wish one another." "The grandson can be seen on the screen, one can prattle with him, but can one hold his cheek?"

"Believing in the Energy without, Man is helpless, unable to find the lost Energy within."

"Nature is a sweet blend of love, grace, beauty, offering..."

Artifice can be summed up as: Enjoyment, constructions, strength, intelligence, accumulation..."

"Let us grow naturally in the lavishness of Nature,

Let us rejoice with measure the gifts of Artifice!"



Candid is the poem: 'NILA', 'THE MOON'.
"Who could have thrown a silver plate in the sky?

It gleams beautifully gazing down on us;
Moving gracefully, looking out for lilies."

Again describing the Moon in BHUMI-THAI'
- 'THE MOTHER EARTH', she says,

"Unable to take off his eyes

From the flower-like face of the Mother Earth,

The Moon spins around Her, for ever and for ever".

"Eagerly waiting to hear the poets praise His beauty,

He keeps spinning forever and forever."

"As an artist takes pleasure in looking at his painting,

As a sculptor takes pleasure in moving around his sculpture,

Waning or waxing, hiding a while, even forgetting to blink,

He keeps spinning forever and forever."

In 'YARKAI ANNAI', she beseeches 'MOTHER NATURE':

"Please, come and teach us the art,

The way you fashion all that is around us with your deft fingers!"

As though entering the forest, she discovers:

"In secrecy, buds bloom, fruits sweeten,

The lion cub rolls over his nonchalant father,

The fawn sleeps in the embrace of the doe"

"The owl, acting the big chief, watches over the show."

She is happily surprised that

"God has not etched His name anywhere."

Thinking of our mother – 'AMMA', she writes:

"Even now I remember

the taste of the rice she used to feed me,

the comfort of sleeping on her lap."

The nostalgia of sweet memories: "Enchanting thoughts of love cloud my eyes,

The paper is no more visible,

Now the dream begins while the poetry ends."

In 'TOWARDS DAWN', she says:

"When you walk through the forest,
Sing and walk."

"Even fate will give way,

Hearing the footsteps of the hero,

Swing your arms,

Walk as a hero."

"Seconds move towards Dawn...

Light will welcome you."

In a song dedicated to Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, set to music by her, she describes the Master's gaze, "overflowing with the nectar of Grace"; "the whole universe at His service", "Nature rejoicing all around, paying homage at His lotus Feet."

"Not an atom moves without Her consent; remembering Her, removes our ego and desire.

Sand will turn into gold, the heart will shine with its own Light, the skies will descend upon earth.

Heroism and Victory will be established. Miracle, Joy, Marvel.

Their 'Lila', the Soul will rule the Earth."



'UPHILL' is a beautiful poem where she climbs with lots of difficulties to attain the top-most summit where the Mother seems waiting for her. And she realizes at the end that the Mother is walking along with her.

Yamuna began writing poems since her childhood. She would pen a poem for any occasion: anniversary, wedding, homage....

In spite of her sufferings, she wanted to live many more years; she wanted to write and write more.

In an essay on 'Beauty' – 'AZHAGU', after beautiful descriptions of Nature and also of man-made things, she concludes:

"Beauty is giving oneself in friendship, beauty is the heart longing to help others, beauty is the golden age remembering the

golden times.

The whole world is a treasure of beauty,
Life is a beautiful poem,
Even death which makes its full stop is also beautiful,
For those who have lived beautifully." ❧

REMEMBERING YAMUNA-DI

Jerry Silvester Vincent '07

Yamuna-di was one of the gentlest teachers I have ever had. She taught Tamil and I was fortunate to be her student for more than one academic year. She was a very unassuming person, but one who was very knowledgeable and an extremely good storyteller (especially of Indian mythology).

I first had her as a teacher in 'Flower Room'. We were a class of 4 or 5, depending on the year (numbers kept changing as batches were shuf-

fled). We were a very naughty lot (Sathyam, Mrinalini, Raampragash, Sharmishtha and myself). We used to play cricket in the verandah outside the class (the first room to the right on the ground floor of Delafon) until she arrived. Even when she arrived we behaved as if we hadn't noticed or she wasn't there and continued playing. She would first gently tell us to come to the class, then with a little more emphasis and then finally pleading with us, but never raising her voice.



Backrow: Soham, Bala, ?, Rajsekhar, Satyajit. Front Row: Rajesh, Sukanya-di, Gauri-di, Yamuna-di

But more than the classes we enjoyed participating in the plays that she and her sister Gauri-di wrote and directed. They used to generally be for the Saturday 7th period programmes but on some occasions we also staged them for evening programmes. Whenever Gauri-di wasn't present it was as if we were let loose and we ran around playing 'I Spy' or chasing games, all around School. She just was very gentle and couldn't contain our energy. Gauri-di on the other hand was more authoritative and managed to keep us in check.

During these plays if one of us took time to change our costume or there would be some unforeseen gap between scenes, Yamuna-di was ready with songs. She would immediately take the microphone and sing some song that would be very apt for the situation and most often the

audience wouldn't realize that it wasn't part of the act.

Yamuna-di and Gauri-di were very nice to us and treated us like an extended family. They would invite us home annually for Golu (display of dolls during the Dasara-Vijayadasami festivities), post which we would have dinner with them and listen to the songs they sang.

Many of my batch-mates didn't enjoy Indian language classes, but I very much did because of teachers like Yamuna-di who let us be but at the same time guided us when we went out of hand. Yamuna-di and the like are rare. She made us understand her value and gain respect for her while not raising her voice once. I'm sure her gentle soul is in a very happy place and I will miss her very cute smile and gentle voice. ❧

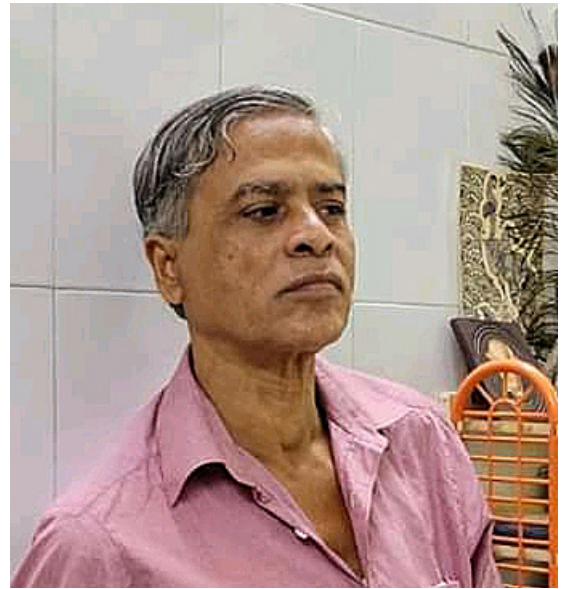
RADHIKA-AARYA – MY SANSKRIT TEACHER

Urmila '89

Radhikaranjan Das, my Sanskrit teacher, recently passed away quite unexpectedly. I wish to express my gratitude by writing a few words about him. But even my thoughts about Radhika-aarya appear in my mind in Sanskrit! This is the amazing effect of Radhika-aarya's teaching.

Radhika-aarya actually taught without teaching. It was through day-to-day conversations, storytelling sessions and theatre plays that we learned Sanskrit. He made even complicated Sanskrit learning easy and entertaining. Even today I can remember some of the lessons, riddles and poems that we did in his class. "If something doesn't sound right, it may just be grammatically wrong", Radhika-aarya would say. So we learnt easy Sanskrit naturally, organically. And this is how the Mother wished Sanskrit to be taught in SAICE.

Radhika-aarya was not only a wonderful Sanskrit teacher, but he also was an accomplished medical practitioner. It is thanks to his



excellent homeopathy medicines and treatment that I delivered both my children without any complications.

Perhaps my Sanskrit teacher is now teaching Sanskrit, the language of the Gods (Devabhasha) in the world of Gods (Devaloka)....

To Radhika-aarya who taught me easy Sanskrit.... Gratitude... And let me also express it now in the language he loved so much....

मम श्रेष्ठः संस्कृताध्यापकः

मम संस्कृताध्यापकः राधिकार्यं अकस्मात् दिवङ्गतः । अहं तस्य विषये स्वविचारान् प्रकाशयितुं चेष्टे...

मम विचाराः संस्कृते एव उद्भवन्ति। एषः राधिकार्यस्य एव प्रभावः । आर्यस्य शताधिकाः मादृशाः पुरातनाः छात्राः तस्य मृत्योः शोकम् अनुभवन्ति ।

राधिकार्यं पाठेन, वार्तालापेन, कथा नाटकेत्यादिमाध्यमेन च संस्कृतम् अशिक्षयत्। तेन कठिनं संस्कृताभ्यासाः अपि रुचिरं कृत्वा सरलतया पाठिताः ।

प्रथमं पुस्तकं, विविधाभ्यासाः इति आसीत् । तत्र कानिचित् कूटानि, अभ्यासान् च अहम् अधुनापि स्मरामि । चत्वारिंशद् वर्षाणि विगतानि। राधिकार्यस्य एषा मम श्रद्धाञ्जलिः अहं सरलसंस्कृतेन लेखितुं पारयामि इति एषः आर्यस्य पाठनस्य प्रभावः ।

अविस्मरणीया तस्य पाठनशैली!

विद्यार्जनात् परं यदा कदापि अहम् आर्यम् अमिलम्, तेन सह वार्तालापं सदैव संस्कृतेन एव अकरवम्। बहुवारं किमपि प्रष्टुम् आर्यम् अमिलम्, श्लोकस्य उत्तरार्थं ज्ञातुं, शरीरस्य अवयवानां सम्बन्धे वा, औषधं ग्रहितुं वा बहुशः आर्यम् उपगता । सः च सदैव परमप्रेमेण मम साहाय्यम् अकरोत्। आवां सर्वदा संस्कृतेनैव अवदाव। आर्य अतीव कुशाग्रबुद्धिः आसीत् ।

कठिनान् विषयानपि सरलीकृत्य अवाबोधयत् । संस्कृत व्याकरणस्मरणाय सरलान् नियमान् च अशिक्षयत् । एकदा वर्गे आर्यः अपृच्छत् – किमर्थं रामेण न च रामेन इति। मया उक्तम् आसीत् – यतोहि रामेन शुद्धम् न श्रूयते इति ।

“सम्यग्, व्याकरणस्य नियमान् अज्ञात्वापि केवलं श्रवणेन भाषाज्ञानं वर्धते,” कथितवान् आर्यः।

ईदृशी आसीत् राधिकार्यस्य पाठनशैली । यथा वयं स्वमातृभाषां हेलया शिक्षामहे, तथैव तेन सह अस्माभिः संस्कृतं शिक्षितम्। श्रीमाता अस्माकं विद्यालये सरलं भाषितं संस्कृतम् ऐच्छत् ।

आर्यं न केवलम् उत्तमः अध्यापकः आसीत् अपि तु उत्तमः चिकित्सकः अपि। मम विवाहात् प्राग् अहं बहुवारं तस्य चिकित्सालम् अगच्छम् । आवयोः संस्कृतेन एव सर्वदा वार्तालापः प्रचलति स्म । तस्य ओषधसेवनेन मम व्दावपि प्रसवौ अतीव सरलतया सुखेन च सञ्जातौ ।

आर्यस्य मृत्योः विषये चिन्तयन्ती अहम् अतीव शोकाग्रस्ता। मन्ये स्वर्गे अपि उत्तमसंस्कृताध्यापकानाम् आभावो वर्तते । तस्मात् एव भगवान् तम् तत्र अनयत्। अधुना मन्ये मम राधिकार्यः देवलोके अपि देवभाषां पाठयति इति मे मतिः ।

सरलं संस्कृतं पाठितं येन,
तस्मै श्रीगुरवे नमः ॥

SHEKHAR-DA

Divyaprakash (Dibbo) Pal '99

Chandrashekhhar Samantaray (known in the Ashram as Shekhar-da) was born on March 11, 1939, on Maha Shivaratri, at Cuttack. He was the elder of two boys. When he was only 2-years old, Shekhar-da lost his mother. His father died soon thereafter, leaving the children in the care of their paternal uncle and aunt. Shekhar-da was close to his uncle, a soil conservation officer, who instilled in him a love



for nature. He always spoke fondly of their journeys across rural Odisha. Shekhar-da never liked the idea of learning by rote and underwent home schooling by a pandit. He excelled in Sanskrit and absorbed the culture and stories of the land, especially the epics. As a teacher of Sanskrit, this informal system of education, very Indian at its

core, would later influence his teaching at the SA-ICE. As a young adult, Shekhar-da was part of a small group of enthusiasts who studied the works of the great Odiya playwright, Upendra Bhanja. It is then that he first came in contact with Sri Aurobindo's teachings and sought guidance on his way of life. Shekhar-da joined the Ashram in August 1963, dedicating himself without reservation to the Divine.

Shekhar-da initially worked at the Fruit Room under Ravindra-ji. One of his cherished responsibilities was to wash the vessels from which the Mother had eaten. As a bonus, he and his co-sadhaks would get to relish the remaining prasada from the Mother's kitchen. But teaching was his real passion. Shekhar-da taught Sanskrit and Odiya at the School for over 40 years. He was a wonderful mentor for many students and would volunteer his time and energy working with the newer students even on a Sunday sometimes. He engaged his students through storytelling and smilingly tolerated even the most mischievous ones. The Mother said that Sanskrit should be the national language of India. Keeping in mind the Mother's view, Shekhar-da advanced his knowledge under the tutelage of Pujalal-ji. Then, with Kireet-bhai's active encouragement, he, along with his senior colleagues Jagannath Arya and Arya Vishnu, pioneered in setting up a structured Sanskrit curriculum. He also served as editor of the biannual Sanskrit journal, *Shwaha*, in the late 1960s. Shekhar-da wrote and staged several plays based on stories from the *Panchatantra* and *Belles Histoires* and engaged himself wholeheartedly in Saturday cultural programmes and Sanskrit Day events that were organised on November 11 every year.

In 1974, following the general reorganisation of Ashram boardings, Shekhar-da was given the task of managing the Home of Progress (HOP) – a hostel for older boys. He spent the major part of

CHANDRASHEKHAR AND THE "LOCK" HE ESCAPED

Manoj Das

Sometime in 1961, while I was a College Lecturer at Cuttack and had begun to study Sri Aurobindo, Prapatti, whose earlier name was K.C. Pati and who had joined the Ashram resigning his Govt. job as a Lecturer in Philosophy, visited the city. One forenoon while I was with him, three bright young men, Gadadhar, Sunil Behari and Chandrashekhar, all lately interested in Sri Aurobindo, came to see him with some queries. Prapatti directed them to me. Ignorant of the fact that I was only slightly more literate than them in regard to the subject, the first two churned my capacity for a while and looked satisfied. But all that time the third one kept just smiling and silent leaving it to me to realise later that quietness indeed was his wise way of absorption. All his life Chandrashekhar – Shekhar-da as he was called – was marked by a quiet demeanour.

I joined the Ashram in February 1962. All the three young men also visited the Ashram around that time and became ardent devotees of the Mother. The gentle and well-read Gadadhar, while working for some years in an enterprise, dedicated himself to organising Sri Aurobindo Study Centres in Odisha; Sunil Behari became a noted educationist and as a professor and author carried the Master's and the Mother's

educational ideals into his sphere. However, Chandrashekhar joined the Ashram in August 1963.

Soon thereafter his family urged upon him to visit his home at least once because of the wedding ceremony of his younger sister. Chandrashekhar wrote to the Mother for permission. There was no response. He sent a reminder. The

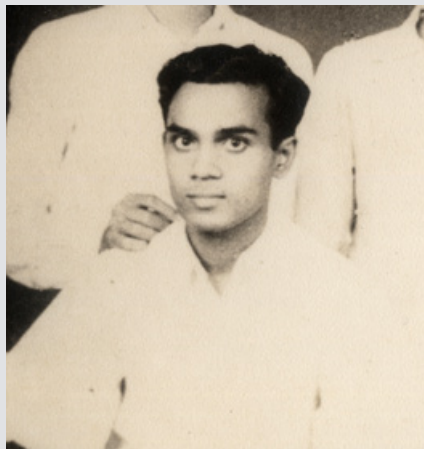
Mother was silent. When he wrote for the third time, the Mother said something to this effect: he will fail to return if he went!

Needless to say, Chandrashekhar gave up his intention of obliging his family. But before long the Mother's observation grew prophetic for him as well as for his friends when it was revealed that his family had made all arrangements to put him under a colossal lock – wedlock – practically

keyless to boot – as soon as he had come within their reach!

Thus he escaped the ordeal – with a loving hint from his true destiny – a destiny by then surrendered to the Mother. The episode is authentic – narrated to me by his dear friend Gadadhar.

In the Ashram Chandrashekhar's dedication to his task was well-known. Ever calm and courteous, I always admired him though we rarely communicated with each other.



this life at 90, Chetty Street and ran the boarding with practicality and meticulousness. The boarding days were the most carefree days of our lives – full of fun, food, and happiness. Every season

had its flavour and aroma: warm banana cutlets after group, pokhala bhata (rice soaked in water with fried potal and mashed potato as a side dish) in summer, samosa chaat for birthday parties, the



ubiquitous Mediterranean-style beetroot salad in thick sweetened curd, and refreshing power syrup. Shekhar-da would cook for the participants of programmes held at the School. Whatever food remained would return to the boarding. One loud shout – “Food!” – and all the boys would be up in a jiffy devouring the leftovers, a midnight feast nonpareil. I remember my friend Nitin (Arora) who would be snoring one moment and ravenous the next. A stout Punjabi boy, he could smell food from a mile!

Shekhar-da rose with the sun. His room was bright and impeccably kept. He had a large wooden table and an old tape recorder, a cupboard full of books, a cane armchair, and a wardrobe full of well-kept kurtas. He was economical with the use of electricity and water. All tube lights had to be switched off by 10 p.m. As a warden, he was often happiest when left to his own devices – whether it was tending his terrace garden, cooking, going for long nature walks, or feeding his fish, cats, or dog. Shekhar-da saw everything but said nothing. His admonishments came in the form of a visit to the registrar’s office. I was often called out on account of playing loud music, playing outdoor games indoors, and for scaling the wall after a late night watching cricket.

Shekhar-da expressed himself through his work. Apart from managing the boarding and his teaching activities, he tended the garden at the School, took charge of the Youth Hostel at the Maret Garden, and made daily flower arrangement at the Hall of Harmony and for the morning meditations on Darshan days; he also helped stage actors wear the dhoti, a skill at which he was particularly adept. Evenings were for quiet contemplation: reading, writing, storytelling, listening to music, or, in later years, watching mythological serials on TV. His life and work were a faithful offering to the Mother. An example of his unwavering faith was that nights before a cataract operation, he felt the Mother gently caressing his eyes, and he was miraculously cured of the thick film of cataract.

Shekhar-da was always occupied – but never too busy to share his kindness with those around him. He lived a long and happy life and succumbed to ill health only at the very end. In his last days, confined to a wheelchair, he seemed happiest reading and contemplating the shlokas in the *Bhagavad Geeta*. On September 29, 2018,



Shekhar-da breathed his last, surrounded by a few who had served him faithfully in his last days. With his passing, the Ashram lost a silent, dedicated worker.



Shekhar-da enjoyed the simple things in life – flowers, a walk in the woods, a warm meal. He taught us to serve with a smile. ‘I give you flowers’, the Mother once told a sadhak, ‘so that you may develop the Divine qualities they symbolise’. On Shekhar-da’s first birthday in the Ashram, the Mother gave him small, bright pink flowers that

she had named ‘happy heart’. Throughout his life, Shekhar-da remained a peaceful and self-effacing karmayogi blooming under the Divine’s care. He will always fondly be remembered as a caring, kind, and patient guardian and teacher – one of the few who represented the old way of life of the Ashram. ❧

EULOGY FOR SHEKHAR-DA

by Prasanna Mohapatra '09

When I think of Shekhar-da, I think of an old, stocky, large-bellied man walking down Chetty St. heedless of the weather, the traffic, the noise, the chaos, returning to the boarding religiously after lunch. Some say he walked because he had no faith in people dropping him safely back to the hostel. Rumors go that one of the students once dropped him near the bus stand and asked him to walk back. Some say he just liked walking, some say it was just a way to digest his lunch. Maybe he walked because it was therapeutic. One will never know. But in his last few years he began sitting on bikes of the most trusted. The man was clearly in pain. But like every person who leads an inner life he never let his

physical troubles ruin his spirits. In the boarding he would be his usual self. He would go about his duty with a frown on his face, a strict demeanor. But he was anything but strict. He was a harmless grandpa who loved us, who allowed us to fool around, who enjoyed the recklessness of our youth, who forgave our wrongs and rewarded our rights.

I lived in boardings (hostels) throughout my years at SAICE, for fourteen years, in four boardings, but only Shekhar-da’s “Home of Progress” felt like home. And this is only because of one reason: freedom. We had nobody to wake us up in the mornings, nobody walking in on us to check whether discipline is maintained, nobody asking us to keep the volume low, nobody stopping our

FROM CHANDRASHEKHAR TO SHEKHAR-DA

Gaurav Bose '05

I was 10 years old, but I have a clear memory of meeting a gentleman in Kolkata in my father's office who knew Shekhar-da. I was in Kolkata to visit my family during the holidays; it was my first vacation after joining the Ashram School. I cannot clearly recall why I had accompanied my father to his office. We must have had some program to go somewhere from there. As I was waiting, a gentleman probably in his mid-thirties walked into my father's office. He was well acquainted with my father and once he was introduced to me, he began asking questions about Pondicherry and the Ashram. At that age it was much easier to talk about the Ashram as I never expected anyone to understand it. I spoke of my life as a student in the Ashram School and sports and other extra-curricular activities I took part in. What was often conveyed was not my understanding of this place but how I felt about it.

The gentleman listened to me with interest and when I was done, he said he knew an

inmate of the Ashram who teaches Sanskrit in the Ashram School. When I asked him the name out of curiosity, he said "Mr. Chandrashekhar". I grew curious, but he quickly added that Mr. Chandrashekhar was an extremely short-tempered man. My 10-year-old mind could not tally the description of Mr. Chandrashekhar with our dear Shekhar-da because I could not make the association of anger with the man who gave many of us our first break in school theatre, patiently taught us Sanskrit songs and directed my first play ever. Once I returned to Pondicherry, I inquired with Shekhar-da if his full name was indeed Chandrashekhar and he confirmed it. Insignificant as it may seem, this incident stuck with me. Throughout my school days I had a bad temper and often got myself into serious trouble for not being able to control it. In those moments, I have often pondered how Mr. Chandrashekhar transformed into Shekhar-da leaving no trace of anger and becoming an embodiment of love.

game of cricket, nobody telling us to return to the hostel at a particular hour, nobody giving us sermons on an ideal life. We managed ourselves. In the five final years of School we turned from boys into men in complete freedom. And Shekhar-da respected that. There were some incidents in the boarding that could have got us suspended or even expelled from the School but Shekhar-da almost always gave us a second chance.

Shekhar-da's favorite hobby was cooking. He was a good cook and like all good cooks he loved to feed others. His birthday was a day of festivity: teachers, coaches, students, parents, sadhaks of all ages, anyone even remotely connected to him would show up for the grand party. That was the only day we were expected to be on our best behaviour. Apart from that, there was always something cooking in the dimly lit kitchen of

the master chef. The favorite boys of the boarding (those who ran errands) were invited often for dinners mostly cooked in Odia style. We who were less fortunate would generally wait for some leftover food from programs performed in School or the Theatre Hall. Most often the food would arrive at pretty late hours but for some reason we boys were always hungry. We would wipe the pots clean. A patented recipe of Shekhar-da was banana cutlet and this was something that was distributed generously to everyone. Often wafts of the aroma of sumptuous dishes would float into our rooms upstairs. We would run down to see what the chef was up to but Shekhar-da would always ask us to leave him alone. He wouldn't let us touch a thing. If we stubbornly stuck on then he would ask us to taste a tiny bit of the preparation and exclaim "gardhaba!". The kitchen was



the only place in the boarding where I felt unwelcome. I thought this was something unique to Shekhar-da but over the years I have noticed that good cooks are very territorial.

It has been ten years since I completed Knowledge. It had become a habit of mine to drop by the boarding whenever I was passing by to check on the old man. It was painful to see his health deteriorate suddenly. He was finally shifted to the Nursing Home where I met him for the last time before his death. He looked peaceful, he was enjoying the Ratha Yatra playing on a laptop. He welcomed me with a smile, he did not speak but I could see no pain. How could a man knowing that death is knocking at his door be so calm and content? He finally breathed his last and his emaciated body lay on the bed on the ground floor of the boarding. As I sat there, my eyes welled up with tears just to know that that grim, shrunk face would not break into a naughty smile and call me “gardhaba” again. ❧

EVER-SMILING SHEKHAR-DA

Chaitanya Deshpande '01

My earliest memory of Shekhar-da goes back over thirty years... it was 1988 and I recall that I was selected for the role of a young boy – a rather silent role as I did not speak the language – in an Odia play that Shekhar-da was directing. Unfortunately, I have now almost completely forgotten what the play was about. The only memory I have of it is a 1988 photograph of the play.

Apart from the plays he directed, almost everyone also knew Shekhar-da for his dedication to the beautiful flower arrangements at the School. I recall seeing him early in the morning on Darshan days making sure nothing was out of place with all the flowers on the School stage. Little did I know then, that a decade later, Shekhar-da would become an important part of our young-adult

lives, in his capacity as the chief caretaker of the Home of Progress (HOP) or Big Boys' Boarding (BBB).

BBB was the last boarding that most boys would stay in before they completed their studies in Knowledge – it was almost a rite of passage and all of us wanted to be moved there as early as possible. As luck would have it, I was sent to BBB later than the others and only spent 3 years there, as opposed to the 4 or 5 years that the others spent. By this time, we had heard stories, legends even, of BBB and of Shekhar-da and we had to experience it all ourselves!

My first impressions of Shekhar-da were that he always had brief, concise interactions and in Sanskrit, or rather in ‘you-speak-English-I-speak-Sanskrit’, except if you knew Odia. The

other things that struck me was that he always seemed in good humour, not necessarily the laugh-out-loud variety, but always with a smile on his face.

We soon also realised that he and food had a secret love affair – secret because he did everything to keep the aromas from his kitchen away from the boys but the hungry wolves that we were, we would always find out. We finally had to accept that his cooking was strictly meant for his friends.

There were stories though of smarter boarders outwitting Shekhar-da at his own game. He would always tell the ever-ravenous boys that they were dreaming and that he never cooked anything in the kitchen. Of course, no one was going to just accept that. Legend has it that some boys somehow found their way into the usually locked kitchen when Shekhar-da was away, found and ate all of the sweets that he had recently made, taking care to ensure that nothing looked obviously amiss. Later that day when Shekhar-da found out that all his cooking efforts had disappeared, he went up and down the three floors of the boarding asking all the boys. The response he got was “You told us no cooking happens in your kitchen. So if nothing was prepared how can it go missing?”

Shekhar-da mostly kept to himself – so much so that you could go months in the boarding without ever interacting with him. He would always be happy to speak with you, but briefly. His one-liners were an instant hit and the subject of many jokes in our days at the boarding. As far as I remember, while we did take him for granted



often, we respected the boundaries between student and teacher – he also taught Sanskrit and Odia at School. A few years before I was in the boarding though, legend has it that the boarding boys ‘terrorised’ him with their pranks. One such story was about him being taken for a ride, quite literally, under the garb of giving him a lift to the Ashram – he was dropped a few kilometres away and had to walk twice as much as he would have had to without that ride! I’m sure though that he took it all in his stride and that all of his ‘tormentors’ still remember him fondly.

When I got to know that Shekhar-da has passed away, the only thing I hoped for was that he was smiling and happy till his last day. All the messages I received about him were about how wonderful a person he was, how he always had a smile on his face, about his simple and peaceful disposition.

I have no doubt that this is exactly as he would have liked himself to be described – brief, to the point and ever-smiling. That is also how I will always remember him. ❧

SOME OF MY TEACHERS

By Arvindbabu Patel '63

JAYANTIBHAI PATEL

French teacher. He taught French, initially to little children and later to older children as well. Soft spoken, loving and caring, Jayantibhai was a serious person, but not rigid. He never stopped learning French, and tried his level best to get the correct French pronunciation. From a proper French teacher, a native French speaker, he learned all the techniques and subtleties of the French language. At one time, while moving around his house or climbing the stairs to go to his room upstairs, or for that matter wherever he went and whenever he could, he would go on repeating the French vowels, trying to pronounce them with the correct intonation, with the right stress and in a proper French manner or style, and with correct lip movement – a e i o u y.

Jayantibhai was a gentleman who maintained a positive attitude in all circumstances. A quiet, unassuming, simple and sincere sadhak with boundless goodwill and unwavering fellow-feeling. I never heard from him any harsh or hurting words. Unfortunately his later years were difficult for him and he lost some of his positivity. How did this happen to such an exceptionally good man? Was it the unrelenting loss of hearing and inability to pursue the work the Mother had allotted him – teaching French and painting to children; along with the inability to continue the stimulating interactions with other teachers, his family and group members? Was it some karmic cause beyond our understanding?

MANUBHAI PATEL

Gujarati teacher. He was a jovial, always joking, fun-loving person. Children liked him, as he used to fabricate stories on the spot and recount them with a lot of action and drama. Once he

started to tell a story named – “Arvindbabu and Latpat”. Now I forget the content of the story, but I remember that it was an adventure story, and the children enjoyed it immensely. As I was the



Manubhai Patel

hero of the story, I heard it with rapt attention and identified myself with the ups and downs the hero passed through in his adventurous pursuits.

Manubhai left the Ashram, got married and had children. Then he came back to the Ashram with his family for good. Now he is no more.



Pavita

PAVITA

A British lady and an English teacher. She was a rather strict woman with quite a sharp temper. She would flare up if a child played some mischief. She could not tolerate fun-loving children. Discipline was what she insisted upon. She was a strict task-master, but she failed to realise that children will be children. Mischief, enjoyment and play are part of childhood.

I remember Pavita used to clean the streets and footpaths around the Ashram at night. She seemed to be doing the sweeping work all night. Nowadays there are four or five persons who are doing the same job Pavita used to do single-handedly.

Another good work she was doing was that she did not allow any rikshawalla or beggar to sit on the streets and footpaths around the Ashram. If she noticed them, she turned them away with her violent bodily movements and loud enraged shouting.

After the Mother left her body in 1973, Pavita left the Ashram and went to England, never to return. She is no more.

KIRIT JOSHI

Professor of Philosophy in the Higher Course. Students enjoyed his method of teaching: he would invite questions on any philosophical concept or thought, and would answer extempore. After completing his answer, he would tell us to open a particular page from *The Life Divine* or *The Synthesis of Yoga* etc. Then he would read out

the particular paragraph containing the thoughts or concepts or ideas he had just expounded. Kiritbhai had a fantastic memory and he could answer the queries of a student according to his grasping capacity. There was an amalgam of students; all three sections of the Higher Course joined his philosophy class. Roughly 30-45 students participated, plus some elderly persons who wanted to join the class were welcomed too. I remember two of them: Romen Palit and Raghavji (Brajkishore's father).

At one time Kiritbhai was registrar of Sri Aurobindo International Centre of Education. He was a dynamic person. He brought about a number of changes in our education system. Perhaps due to his initiative the School got a grant from the Central Government. Perhaps the quarterly exams in the Higher Course were introduced by him, though later on these exams were discontinued at the Mother's instructions.

He left the Ashram later on and got a job in the Ministry of Education in the Centre. After retirement he came back to Pondy. But again he was absorbed as a consultant in the Gujarat Education Ministry. Later, due to ill-health he returned to Pondicherry and passed away here.

RAVINDRA KHANNA

Our Professor of Poetry. He would talk in a slow-cadenced monotone, and if a student was not interested in poetry, would feel bored to death. But I enjoyed the class very much. I abhorred subjects like mathematics and science – too many numbers and theories to remember. I had the same problem with geography and history, piles of dates and names of places and events to retain which my brain cells were incapable of. Poetry gave freedom to my imagination. I was not bound to numbers and theories, names and dates, and I could drift freely in the world of imagination and feelings, and enjoy the beauty of Nature. Poetry appealed to the heart, while sciences and mathematics to the mind. Well, I can "wander lonely as a cloud / That floats on high o'er vales and hills", and see and feel and enjoy the multitudinous beauty of Nature. Yes, it was a joy to be with Nature.



QUIZ TIME!



Know the answers to the following questions? They will be printed in our next issue.

1. Why is 24th November 1920 an important date in the history of the Ashram? Sri Aurobindo's Siddhi Day is 24th November 1926. What happened exactly six years earlier.
2. Where was the first boarding (hostel) of the school?
3. In which poem would you find these lines of Sri Aurobindo:
*I walked on the high-wayed Seat of Solomon
Where Shankaracharya's tiny temple stands
Facing Infinity from Time's edge, alone
On the bare ridge ending earth's vain romance.*
4. Why is the house where the Primary section of the school located called "Delafon" and "Flower Room"?
5. What is the spiritual significance of the flowers of the Croton plant. The leaves are very colourful but the flowers are white or light cream.



ANSWERS TO THE QUESTIONS OF THE MAY 2019 ISSUE

1. *Where was the Auroville information office in Pondicherry in 1968?*
It was in the house which is now the administrative block of the School.
2. *Who was the first child to be born in Auroville who survived (the actual first baby to be born in Auroville died in infancy).*
Aurofilio is the first child to be born in Auroville. The first baby who was born in Auroville was named 'Auroson'. This baby died, drowned in his little tub. The parents had another son and this son was again named 'Auroson'. But Aurofilio was born before him.
3. *When was the foundation stone of Matrimandir laid?*
21st February 1971.
4. *Who represented Pakistan during the Auroville foundation ceremony in February 1968?*
Bhagvat Dolia and Shubhra Banerji.
5. *What kind of flower is the Auroville flower?*
It is a pale orange-coloured hibiscus.

MOTHER INDIA

February 21, 1949 was the date that *Mother India* — a monthly review of culture — was launched. On its 70th anniversary we are giving a brief background of this journal.

K.R. Poddar, named Navajata by the Mother, had conceived of a paper that would specifically concern itself with finding a solution to the world's current problems. The project was presented to the Mother. She, in consultation with Sri Aurobindo, approved it. Navajata proposed Amal Kiran's name as Editor and this too was sanctioned by the Gurus. There was no commercial interest in the project whatsoever.

When the main articles for the first issue — written by Amal Kiran and Soli Abless — were sent to Pondicherry, not only Sri Aurobindo but also the Mother listened to Nolini Kanta Gupta's reading of them. Both gave their total sanction; furthermore they sent words of praise.

Henceforth every editorial written by Amal Kiran, however lengthy, was read to Sri Aurobindo before publication and he sent a telegram of approval or modification. Once a sadhak expressed his sceptic opinion to a view stated in the journal; when this was reported to Sri Aurobindo he said: "Doesn't he know that *Mother India* is my paper?"

After the passing of Sri Aurobindo all editorials were read out to the Mother. After a year or so she expressed her reservations on the political writings, since Sri Aurobindo was not physically present. Thus in February 1952 *Mother India* was converted wholly into a cultural review; it also changed from a fortnightly to become a monthly. The Mother was consulted at all times over the running of the periodical; and she occasionally contributed her writings and attended to diverse problems of cultural policy.

If any devotee or admirer of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother is interested to subscribe to *Mother India* our subscription rates are Rs 200 per annum and Rs 1,800 for 10 years. Price of a single copy is Rs 30. All DD/cheque payments are to be made in favour of *Mother India*, Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Pondicherry. For outstation cheques kindly add Rs. 15 for annual membership and Rs 50 for 10-year subscription. DD/cheque should be sent by speed post only. The correspondents should give their full address in block letters, with the correct pin code. Kindly also provide us with your email address and mobile number.

MOTHER INDIA

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ACRES FOR AUROVILLE Land Campaign

15th August – Sri Aurobindo's birth & India's Independence
2019 Launch of A4A's Year 6 for Auroville's missing land!



For Sri Aurobindo, the unification of mankind was “a necessity in the course of Nature, an inevitable movement”. Auroville was created by the Mother to create a place for the “international spirit and outlook” that Sri Aurobindo said must grow. She said that her only goal was “to give a concrete form to Sri Aurobindo's great teaching that **“all the nations are essentially one and meant to express the Divine Unity upon earth through an organised and harmonious diversity”** to show that **“Truth lies in union rather than in division”**.”

To underscore this truth of unity at the heart of its mission, the words **“Auroville, the city at the service of Truth”** were placed in French and in Tamil on the Banyan tree that is next to the Matrimandir at the center of Auroville:

Auroville, la cité au service de la vérité
மெய்ப்பொருள் பணிக்கே ஓரோவில் நகரம்

For 51 years, the City of Dawn has flowered step by step, serving and showcasing this truth of oneness of the Human Family in its rich diversity. But its designated land is still incomplete – many essential acres are still missing from the universal township's base. We invite you to join us – to purchase the needed remaining land so Auroville can manifest, in fullness and harmony, the truth of its great vision!

Please specify your donations **‘ACRES FOR AUROVILLE’**: via cheque/ bank transfers to **Auroville Unity Fund**; via your country's **AVI center** www.auroville-international.org or online via www.auroville.com/donations/ **Donating/Deductions info:** <https://land.auroville.org/a4adonations> Our website: <https://land.auroville.org>
Acres for Auroville is a collaboration of Auroville International & Lands for Auroville Unified

Photo: Nolini-da & Ranju; Quotes from Sri Aurobindo's message of 15/8/47 & the Mother's 15 August 1954 declaration

CLASS OF 2019



Back Row (L to R): Dhruva Prasad, Sumeru Paul, Ritaj Kalaskar, Abner Manzar, Rithartha Chakraborty, Prachetha Kumar Behera, A Ashwin, Sarthak Haruray
 Third Row (L to R): Auroakshay Sajjan, Savera Yadav, Sreeman Santra, Kunal Biswas, Arjun Vir Datta, Aditya Maru
 Second Row (L to R): Deepthi Madabhavi, Preeti Padma Parida, Jhumur Bhattacharya, Manoj Das Gupta, Swadesh Chatterji, Kittu Reddy, Dilip Mehtani, Madhurima Chatterjee, Shweta Goswami
 First Row (L to R): Ravikanti Samanvita, Debaleena Bagchi, Aditi Partha, Yashasvini Sathyanarayanan, Sulochana Das, Narmada Guha Roy, Aditi Tyagi, Arpita Mahanta, Bishwarupa Kar, Madhurima Das