

# The Golden Chain

Alumni Journal of Sri Aurobindo International Centre of Education



Alumni in  
**Fashion & Design**

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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## The Golden Chain

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### EDITORIAL TEAM:

Gopal '90, Meera '95, Divyaprakash '99

### EDITORIAL ASSISTANCE:

Anurupa '86, Claire, Seema '89  
Gaurishankar '80, Prabha '80

### ART DESIGN:

Saroj Kumar Panigrahi, Mansee Pratap

### PRODUCTION ASSISTANCE:

Pranati '83, Kiran '72,  
Brahmananda '79, Swadhin '70, Siva

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Phone: 91-413-2233683

e-mail: [office@goldenchainfraternity.org](mailto:office@goldenchainfraternity.org)  
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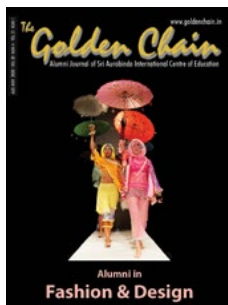
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### On the Cover:

A hybrid fashion show organised by Sangeeta Yesley '93H in  
New York City's Dixon Place Theatre.

### On the Back Cover:

Gingee Walk participants, 1972 (L to R): Kake, Namita, Tarika,  
Grant, Bharati P., Lavanya, Savitri U., Autoshi, Gita D., Samata.

Fashions fade, style is eternal,” said Yves Saint Laurent and over the years, among the students and in the larger Ashram community, fashion has always kept step with the “outside” world, riding through the various waves: bell bottoms and cigarette pants; flared sleeves and cold shoulders; jumpsuits and crop tops; form-fitted clothes and flowing kaftans. Patterns and fabrics matched in step too with polka dots and multi-coloured mottled print, checks and block colours; cotton and chiffon, viscose and organza. Even as fashion waxed and waned in our eclectic community, style remained eternal — crisp and elegant sarees with matching blouses; starched shirts and fitted pants; pops of red lips; kohl-lined eyes; bangs, crisp sideburns and men sporting shoulder length hair. We’ve been through it all. We’ve seen it all.

So, we in *The Golden Chain* team thought why not tip a hat to some of the SAICEians who are connected with the fashion industry. Of course, we were oblivious of the dastardly virus then. So, ironic as it might seem, — since the only fashion statement that most people would’ve probably made this pandemic year would’ve been in their silk pyjamas sets, dreamy, floral kaftans or stylish-yet-comfortable loungewear — we thought this issue might bring some sartorial relief. We have featured five alumni from the world of style. We would love to feature other SAICEians who

are connected to fashion in future issues. So if you know of any former student who designs clothes, jewellery or accessories, do send us their names or step forward if you are one of them.

If the “beautiful” is the focus of our cover story, the “bold” also features prominently in this issue. We bring to you the experience of participants of the Gingee Walk over the years. For a long time the Gingee Walk was a memorable event in the Ashram calendar. The 75 kms walk from Pondicherry to Gingee through the night, the gruelling test that does not seem to end, remains etched in the minds of those who have taken part in it. The Gingee Walk was revived recently and we provide you with both a historical perspective on the event and a reliving of that experience.

We also feature in this issue the life and work of a remarkable SAICE teacher — Pushan. Pushan made a significant contribution to SAICE in the fourteen years that he taught French and English here. He went on to lead the team that revised the translations of the Mother’s volumes into English and finally did pioneering research on the life of the Mother and her family genealogy.

As we bring you this last issue of 2020, we are still in the midst of the Covid pandemic. The year has been challenging in many ways and as we gradually resume our normal activities we wish you all a safe and healthy conclusion to this eventful year. ❧

# A Life of Adventure!

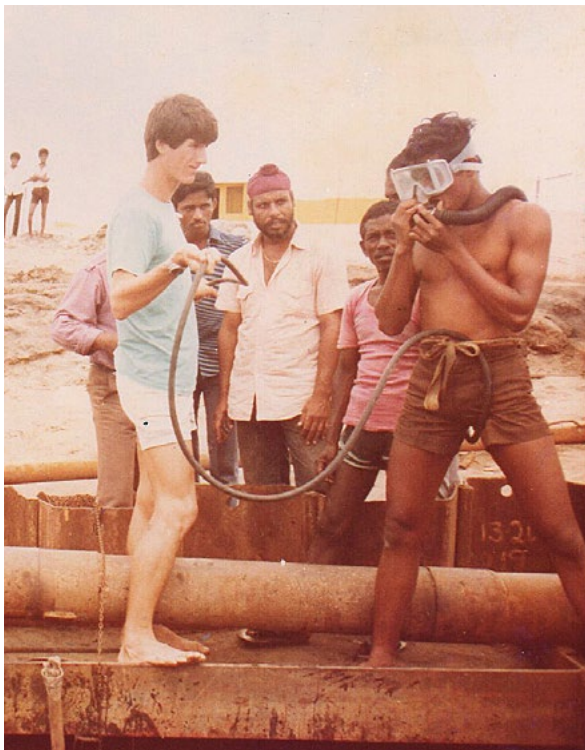
*Seema Agarwal '89 speaks to Alok Mullick '89.*

**I**t was to spearhead a World Bank-sponsored project to install biofuel diesel engines in villages across Odisha, which brought Alok Mullick back to India in 2004. And, once the project was completed, he decided to come and live in Auroville. "The project in Odisha was successfully implemented, and I am happy to say that it is still running as a self-sustainable unit. I grabbed this hiatus in my otherwise roller-coaster life, to pause, reflect, and get back to my roots..." confesses a candid Alok. Since his arrival in Auroville, and right until 2012, Alok was involved with every possible product development connected to solar energy. From solar street lights, and solar driers and de-humidifiers, to a hybrid solar and fuel powered vehicle, he had his fingers in all the pies, until Auroville procured an ambulance for the community, and needed someone

to operate it. Alok, along with his many talents, and qualifications, also happened to be a certified paramedic from NOAA (National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration), U.S.A., as well as from the American Heart Association. As an advanced paramedic, and an AHA instructor, his responsibilities today entail training the Auroville Safety and Security Team to respond effectively to first-aid emergencies and taking care of the technical maintenance of the vehicle. As a paramedic, Alok is always wading the deep waters, just like he always did. This time, figuratively.

Once known as the genius kid, who was mainly lost in his own world of inventions, Alok remained an enigma for many of us. Here was a kid who hardly spoke, for his mind was always on the go, always latching on to a new idea. "Paru-di, the then registrar of the School, used to give me





Early adventures

twenty rupees per month to buy material for my experiments,” he says with a short laugh. And, those twenty rupees took him a long way, through many inventions, and engineering feats.

An introduction to Meccano in Delafon, is all Alok needed to get him rolling in the world of practical engineering. “I used to just love Meccano, and would spend hours building stuff,” his youthful eyes still sparkle as he reminisces those days. Later on, in Amitya-di’s section, which, in the eighties, encapsulated the spirit of ‘Free

Progress’, his creative mind found expression, as the idea of building a ‘solar fridge’ began to take shape. “We procured wood from Prem Bhai’s Carpentry department to make the body; Sri Aurobindo Ashram Press was kind enough to lend us zinc, which is a good conductor, with an excellent R-value... I also remember going to Joshi-bhai for some chemicals we needed. And, under Chamanlal-ji’s guidance, and with all the help from various Ashram departments, we set out to build a functional solar fridge! And, guess what? We succeeded. We managed to bring the inside temperature down to 12 degree Centigrade, and keep it there,” the sense of tremendous satisfaction he must have felt as an 11-year-old is still audible in Alok’s voice. This kind of achievement was possible, he feels, because of the dynamics which existed between the School and the Ashram community at large, with the latter playing the role of an extended family; a role which, perhaps, sadly, has dwindled over time. “Everyone got involved... for everything I ever needed, I knew whom to approach... it could be an individual working in the Dining Room, whose forte happened to be in the field in which I needed advice, and someone,



Alok (left), as a student, on an outing with friends.



meters long. It had an ethanol engine, that Tim had brought back from Europe. The need to place some superhero figurine to man the cockpit resulted in our gluing the Mother's and Sri Aurobindo's photos to the pilot's seat!" Mullick remembers fondly. The plane was soon to become a common sight in the skies around the Lake Estate, being piloted by the gurus themselves.

Examples of Alok's inventions, and unthinkable improvisations abound, right from using bits of broomsticks to repair clocks and watches, to making a paper boat, coated

either a teacher, or some other Ashramite, would be able to direct me to that person, to seek help. Nowadays, it seems to me, the School exists as an isolated isotope, and students do not grasp the great privilege of having an extended, loving family, which is always eager to help, and guide," says a nostalgic Alok.

I still remember the excitement we all felt when one Saturday morning we boarded the bus to the Lake Estate to watch Alok and his team unveil their latest creation: a huge hot-air balloon. In an era when there was no Google to do all the legwork, no calculators to solve the humongous mathematical equations, it must have been quite a task to work out all the measurements carefully in order to find the right ratio, to balance weight and dimensions in a way that would maximise the lift. There was a lot of suspense, along with the buzz... But, when the balloon, with its colourful strips of pink and violet and green, took off, we all stood there in awe and clapped. The next natural step was a plane. "It had a wing-span of three meters, while the body was only two

with wax, and propelled by a balloon, to setting up the Koil Pottery in Allankuppam, where he built stone-grinders, clay-mixing devices and the furnace, right from scratch. "Most of my Saturdays and Sundays in those days were spent at the pottery. In the evenings, I would jog down, through stretches of paddy fields, via Nandanam, to Sportsground. I think that is how I became a good runner. In fact, I would credit our rigorous







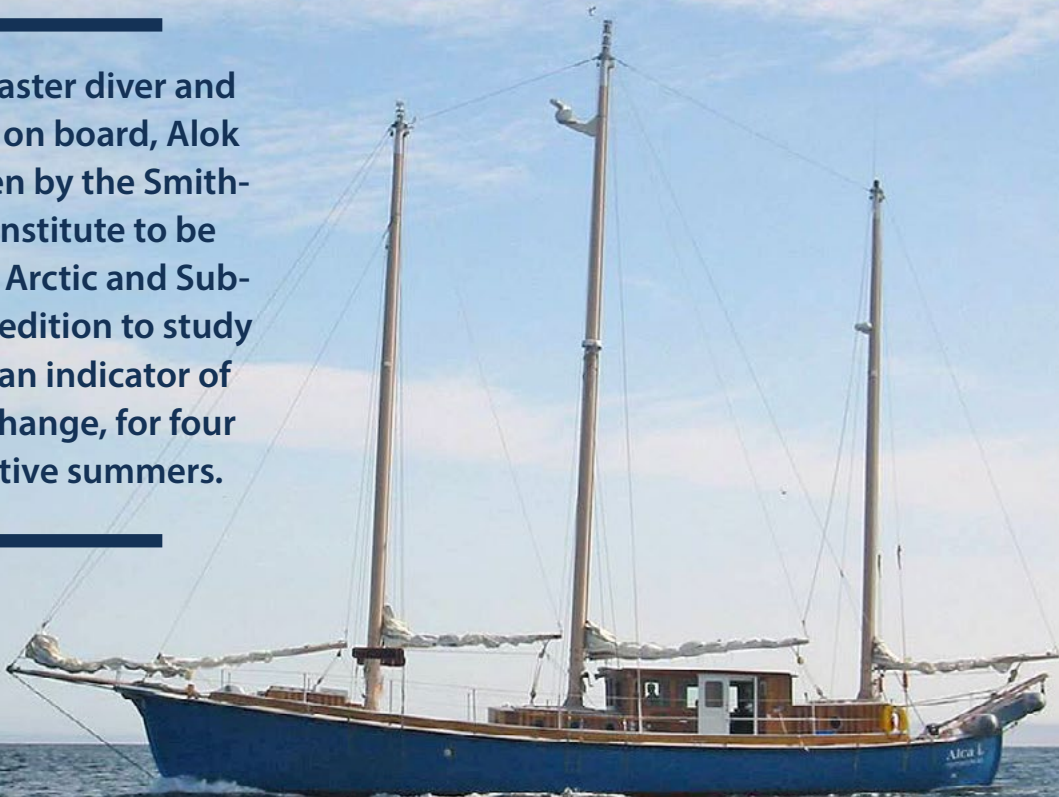
physical education programme which helped me bag an above average score in the fitness and endurance exam conducted by Navy Seals in

Washington D.C., a requisite to become a master diver,” says Alok. As a master diver and engineer on board, he was chosen by the Smithsonian Institute to be part of an Arctic and Sub-Arctic expedition to study algae as an indicator of climate change, for four consecutive summers. When he was not at the Arctic, he was taking scuba diving enthusiasts to the Bermuda Triangle! “The clarity of water in the Bermuda Triangle is like nowhere else I have ever seen. And the variety of fish and their enormous size are something to reckon with. The manta rays, hammerhead sharks, blue angel fish, barracuda, moray eels...” and, suddenly, Alok is transported to the world he left behind more than a decade ago. And when he returns to the living room where we are having the interview, he is beaming, as he exclaims, “Wow, what an adventure it has been!” Indeed. ☼

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# Transforming Visions into Reality



*From dance performances on our School stage and Theater to spearheading an exceptional performance initiative in New York, **Sangeeta Yesley '93H** has had an eventful ride thus far. In this short interview she shares notes about her journey and her work, and talks about how she brought Fashion and Dance together with her unique hybrid project, StylePointe.*

***You are in the capital of American fashion, New York! Tell us your journey from Pondy to NY.***

I'm very thrilled to be in New York City where I can nurture my first love — dance. After working in the field of dance all my life in India, then in the United Kingdom and now in NYC, I decided in 2015 to try cross pollinating two art forms and fashion was the obvious choice. As you so rightly said, NYC is the fashion capital of the world. And I am right here. After delving into the fashion world to gauge the possibility of fusing these two art forms, I found that the process of choreographing a dance and the process of creating a designer outfit have a lot in common. So, making this collaboration really happen, on a professional level, sounded very feasible.

***You have found a niche straddling both the fashion and the dance worlds at the Dixon Place Theater. How did this idea come about and what is it that you do.***

It started with the idea of exploration and trial, simply to see if these two art forms, i.e. Fashion and Dance, could be combined to have a completely new form of art, that will stand on its own, as an interesting performance piece and that will appeal to all the performing art enthusiasts. I had a very clear vision and a clear idea of how to navigate the various stages of pre-production and production and post-production. Needless to say, the premier in 2015 was a very interesting showcase and a huge success. It was appreciated by everyone who attended the event,



which was hosted at Dixon Place Theater in NYC. Dixon Place supports experimental new works.

The first year was the hardest because I was selling an idea to everyone to come and see the show. I had no materials to support my ideas; no photos or videos, nothing to back me up, except my strong belief. I am ever grateful to the first collaborators who believed in my vision and dove in with me. They are truly the reason behind the success of this project — StylePointe. In this project, we don't just bind the two art forms on a superficial level. They are tied on a deeper level. This is not a commission. The designers do not create and make the collections according to the needs of the choreographers. We take on collections that already exist. The themes for the dance pieces are the stories or inspirations behind the designer collections. It is a challenge for the choreographers to work backwards, begin their work from the step where they would normally end! And it is a challenge for the young and early career fashion designers to be able to collaborate with another artist on a professional level. Collaboration is not easy but it is the key to success in life! In addition to creating a hybrid

fashion show, StylePointe helps artists to hone their collaboration skills. I continue to produce this showcase during New York Fashion Week in September every year. You can check it out here: <https://stylepointe.net>.

***How did life in the Ashram and our school contribute to your journey as a performing artist?***

To be diligent and true to my passion and to share my work and provide opportunities to other artists to progress in life was the lesson I learnt in my childhood and in my school. I learnt to be patient and to be compassionate. Also, life in Paruldi's boarding made me into a very organized person. I realized that, in life, being organized takes care of more than half of the work needed to achieve one's goals. We are all visionaries. We all have ideas and visions. But, for me, having a vision is not enough. I like turning my vision into reality. And I am extremely fortunate to be surrounded by a great support system for artists in NYC. My umbrella company is Creative Performances ([www.creativeperformances.com](http://www.creativeperformances.com)). I produce projects and organize workshops to bring together various art forms via this company. ☼





## Sustainable, Efficient, and Elegant Design

*Anubha Sud Arora '2000 is a fashion designer, based in Gurgaon and designs clothes under her mother's flagship brand, AuroMa. After passing out of SAICE, Anubha did her post-graduation in Fashion Communication from the National Institute of Fashion Technology, New Delhi; she also completed her MA in English from Punjab University. In this article she traces her journey and talks about what she thinks is "fashion."*

What is fashion? What is fashion design? Well, I believe that whatever you wear and however you choose to present yourself, is "fashion". At least in some sense of the word. The word itself comes from *façon*, French for a method or way of doing things. That's why I don't consider only high-fashion, or wedding wear, or exclusive fashion brands as "fashion". In the

(altered) words of Amitabh Bachhan from the movie *Namak Halal*: "I walk fashion, I talk fashion, I wear fashion, I am fashion!" I strongly believe in this adage. The choices I make determine my *facon-d'etre*. Fashion is what you wear and what you do.

Now that we've got that out of the way, here's my story of how I got involved in the commercial world of fashion. My journey began early on. As a child, I remember sitting with my mother and cutting fabric from an old dupatta to stitch a dress for my doll. Now my favourite moments at work are when I design clothes for my children! Not very different from my childhood days, I might add. My mother set off on her journey as a designer when I was a child and it appears that I am continuing that tradition. Now my mother and I work together; she remains my guide and mentor.

Growing up in the Ashram, we were surrounded by talented people and exposed to so many creative methods





and most important of all, we were encouraged to explore and pursue our own creative paths. I remember being introduced to fashion illustration in drawing classes with Jean-Louis, who taught me to do a *croquis*, basic sketching, body proportions and stylised proportions. What a delight it was!

While being exposed to creativity and technique helped me in my profession, I also cherish and apply the many values that we quietly imbibed at SAICE — not being wasteful, seeking beauty around us, seeking simplicity, and seeking harmony in things. None of these things were explicitly taught; we just absorbed them organically because they were all around us. I particularly remember one about not being wasteful. When we used to go to Dolly-di to pick up a new notebook, we had to finish completely the previous notebook, including all the margins. I remember comparing rough notebooks with my classmates, discussing how neat they were (not mine) — pages divided in half and space well-utilised.

Similarly, my thumb rule for design is: Do not make or buy garments that you will hesitate to wear. How can I ask people to buy new clothes if they have not worn their previous garments often enough!

This approach minimises wasteful purchases and excessive adornment on garments. So many of us buy clothes that never see the light of day! This kind of wastefulness is unimaginable! So, I focus on sustainable and versatile fashion and design customized wardrobes for my clients that are both versatile and can be used extensively.

I live and work in Gurgaon, which is a melting pot of India's corporate world. My clients constantly juggle the social and corporate worlds, so I strive to provide customized solutions to their daily wear requirements. I believe design has to be sustainable, efficient, and elegant. ❧

*Anubha can be reached at: [anubha@gmail.com](mailto:anubha@gmail.com)*



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*All and everything can be artistic if it is done in an artistic spirit.*

The Mother (CWM 15: 250)



# Elegance above Flamboyance

## ...but Sometimes Crazy and Flamboyant too!

*Divya Goswami '92, fashion designer, entrepreneur, creative artist all rolled into one, talks to Meera Guthi '95 about her work, her journey thus far and her creative pursuits.*

**Looking back at your life, when do you think the fashion spark was lit? And who helped you on your journey?**

I think pretty early. I think even before I turned four. I have three distinct memories from my childhood:

- My mum, her friends and relatives pushing for mirror space in front of a dressing table, getting dressed for a wedding with these elaborate hairdos, buns the size of half a melon, silk sarees with large butas, sarees with geometric patterns and prints.
- I had this orange pin-afore dress with a psychedelic print of orange circles that I found singular from the rest of the clothes I wore.
- I had a royal blue Hawaiian printed dress which turned a mesmerizing purple under the halogen lights at the beach promenade; I would love to go for evening walks wearing that dress just to see the colour change; it fascinated me.

Several people helped me in my journey, starting with my mother and then Bitu-di (Bitas-ta Samantaray).

My mother was influenced by her Bengali and Ashram aesthetics, predominantly natural textiles, handmade cottons, organza, silks, chiffon

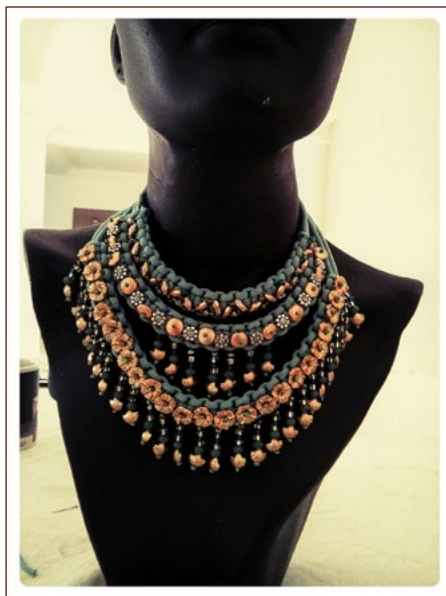
and organza, sometimes embellished with hand embroidery, hand painting and tatting. She had a simple, clean and crisp sensibility.

Through Bitu-di I was introduced to the world of Indian craft and the rich Indian textile heritage. That was definitely one of the grounding factors.

Growing up in an age without the internet, I nourished my curiosity by learning from my teachers at school. Bela-di for hand embroidery for instance. She was the first one to teach me about quality and I was six at that time. She taught me that the reverse of a piece of embroidery must be as neat as the exposed part. She then told me about the way they all used to embroider for the Mother. Gauri-di taught me how to hand-paint on textiles; I use to look forward to her class every week. Then there was the influence of Japanese aesthetics which infused all that surrounded us in the Ashram — the architecture, the interiors, the exterior gardens,

granite, stones, lotus ponds, furniture, textiles and so on. As a child I was drawn to it all, absorbing naturally.

I was always attracted to elegance more than flamboyance. I loved the grace and elegance of Jhumur-di and Gauri-di. I also enjoyed watching the stylish Dolly-di with her unique and



matching umbrellas. She had some collection!

Then there was Sujata-di, she was so fashionable. Not to forget all the teachers who looked so lovely, draped in their Bengali sarees, never in excess.

***You have dabbled in various aspects of fashion including creating your own fashion brand, working for global brands, draping models, designing costumes for movies, designing bags and shoes. Which aspect have you enjoyed the most and why?***

I would say that I have worked in-depth and not dabbled in various aspects of fashion. If something interests me, or for that matter even if it doesn't interest me, I have a professional attitude — nothing *upar upar* or superficial. Because I believe nothing worthwhile comes out of an experience or the exercise of creating a product if it is not done with proper know-how.

I enjoy work, and all the various aspects of my profession, as I feel they are all linked. So, when a certain project demands my attention, I am fully engaged in that, and then I immerse myself in the next project.

***Share an unforgettable memory from your career; one that taught you a valuable lesson.***

Client is King. Deal with it (lol). So you always need to be polite and engaging even when you disagree.

However complex the work, or hard or demanding a situation, one needs to be grounded and not lose focus. I have learnt over time to find solutions and not elaborate or put energy behind

the situation or the problem (this word I dislike using, for me everything is a situation, not a problem). So, the lesson I have learnt is if I lose my cool I destroy everything I have worked for with passion, and that would be a great loss.



***Do you have a fashion guru or a fashion house you admire? And what do you admire most about them?***

The only gurus I have are my spiritual guides living and not living. Having said that, in Europe I love Dior, Valentino and Dries Van Noten; in India the Bengali Babu Sabya,

Muzzafer Ali, Payal Pratap Singh and Pero; from the Middle East Zuhair Murrad and Elie Saab. Then there is Korean designer Minju Kim, and Issey Miyake and Hiroko Koshino, both Japanese designers whose work I like.

***Fashion is a lot about creativity, how has SAICE helped you keep the creative juices flowing?***

I think I answered it previously. SAICE has been the founding influence for perceiving the world with a sensitivity, an almost subtle “harmony and beauty of the mind and soul, harmony and beauty of the thoughts and feelings”. Those are the seeds.

By the way I also love all that is crazy and flamboyant, fun and humorous to the extent of being weird and absolutely crazy. But that is just one part :-)

***Paris is known as the fashion capital of the world. But what do you think, really?***

Interestingly Meera, I get to answer all your questions sitting here at the Dubai International

Airport waiting for my flight to Paris to attend and participate in the prestigious International fashion fair, Premiere Vision. And the company I am collaborating with has been selected to showcase at the Maison d'Exception. Yes, I am quite excited, and you have your answer: the whole world is coming to Paris as it is still the global influencer.

***What is it that you do currently?***

I freelance for luxury brands, independent brands. I have my own weaving project that I started a few months ago. I am also pitching for a film project, so fingers crossed.

***And where do you see yourself in a few years?***

I live for the day, the Divine is my mother, I don't project for the future as so far it hasn't

worked out for me. But having said that, I will keep working in the same profession. By the way I spend a few hours in a week working in our Embroidery Department and I enjoy it so much!



***What advice would you give your younger self?***

My younger self was way better than me, a little shy and under-confident, but more pure and sincere.

The advice I would give is: "keep your sense of wonderment, look around, be open and welcoming to the new, the different and the challenging. And whenever something bothers you, breathe, soar high, become a drone then look at yourself and the situation, your perspective will change

and you will start feeling and seeing the situation differently." ☘

## TWO KINDS OF BEAUTY

*There are two kinds of beauty. There is that universal beauty which is seen by the inner eye, heard by the inner ear etc. — but the individual consciousness responds to some forms, not to others, according to its own mental, vital and physical reactions.*

*There is also the aesthetic beauty which depends on a particular standard of harmony, but different race or individual consciousnesses form different standards of aesthetic harmony.*

Sri Aurobindo (CWSA 27:707)



# Conscious Fashion

*From designing, sourcing, manufacturing and marketing garments and accessories for fashion houses, designer labels and retailers, to co-founding an Ethical Luxury candle brand and founding her own company, SourcingStories, it's been creativity and fashion all the way — or rather sustainable fashion for **Mira Patel '97**. Currently an entrepreneur and consultant for the fashion industry, Mira lives in London with her husband. **Meera Guthi '95** profiles her.*

She recalls the early days in the Ashram and says that she was surrounded by very creative people at home and in school. “My mother and aunt Tarala-ben have both been my key inspirations. Growing up, I watched my aunt hand paint sarees for the Ashram department, friends and relatives and watched my mum crochet and embroider.” Says Mira and adds, “In Delafon and School we had such wonderful teachers who gave us a free hand to pursue our creative proclivities whether it was painting on paper with Mahesh-bhai, Priti-di or embroidery and fabric painting with Bela-di and Vimla-ben or exploring tailoring and making wonderful handicrafts with Reba-di, Champa-ben and Saralaben-ji. I also recall a lady, I think, Margaret Smithwhite, who would play music and ask us to paint.” In her more senior years, Mira remembers working with Jean-Louis, a drama and art teacher whose “avant garde” methods freely blended music, theatre and art. She also recalls fondly designing clothes and choreographing a dance for a 2nd December program, organised by Namita-di that had dance forms from different states of India. These creatively liberating experiences and occasions for self-explorations had a deep impact on Mira’s professional life and continue to sustain her.

After completing her Higher Course in 1997, Mira pursued fashion designing from NIFT, Chennai and worked with several fashion and export houses who catered to designer labels like Kenzo, Armani, Alberta Ferretti and Cerruti to name a few. Later, she teamed up with like-minded SAICE alumni, Divya Goswami '91 and Uday Kumar '95 to start Downsouth Design Studio in Pondicherry to create collections and accessories.

Not very long after she took ownership of DSDS and continued creating collections which retailed in her Studio and exclusive boutiques in Chennai and Bangalore, as well as designing for individual customers and some TV celebrities. In these early years Mira gained invaluable experience in every aspect of the fashion and the manufacturing industry. She says, “I truly value those early years, they taught me so much!”



In 2004, Mira decided to take a break to do some travelling in the UK and in Europe. As fate would have it, she also met her future husband and settled in London. “He is in technology and we are from completely different industries, but we really complement each other. I am learning a lot from him about how technology is changing the fashion and retail industry today!” she says.

## WASTEFUL FAST FASHION

The apparel industry, which is a 2 trillion dollar business, has grown on the back of mountains of waste. The biggest cause of this is the mindless use-and-throw attitude to clothes. Americans buy, on average, almost 70 items of clothing a year, which are often worn just seven to 10 times before being thrown away. This breakneck consumption of clothes reflects the current trend of “fast fashion”, a system in which clothing is made quickly, sold cheaply, and for the most part, is considered disposable. It should also be noted that the fashion industry has moved from a 2 season fashion year to a 50 season fashion year! In just 4 years, from 2010 to 2014, the average customer bought 60% more items of clothing, but kept each garment for only half as long. While this attitude may be more pronounced in the West, it is gradually becoming the norm all over the world.

Another major cause of waste in the apparel industry is excess inventory, the huge number of unsold items — up to 30% — that ends up in landfills or is often incinerated. A study in Germany found that 230 million items remained unsold in a year in that country. The trend of unsold and returned items is growing because of increased online sales — 25% of online purchases are returned compared to 9% in-store purchases. H&M reported that in 2018 it had 4.3 billion dollars’ worth in unsold inventory. Big brands often destroy unsold stock ‘to protect the brand’ and as old discounted stock could cannibalize their latest wave of sales.

Gradually however, the industry is taking the problem of waste more seriously. But finally a lot depends on us as consumers, on how conscious and responsible we are with regard to the purchases we make.

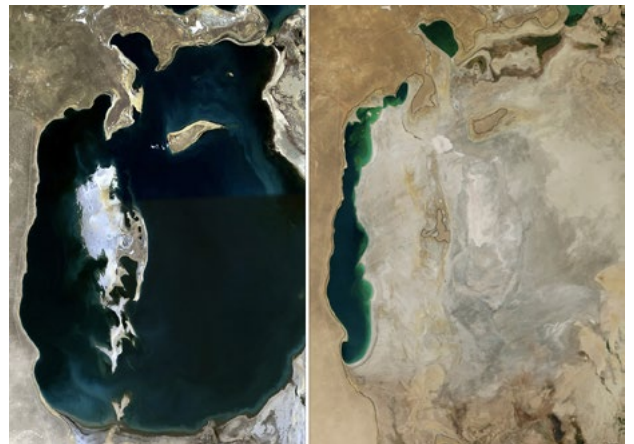
*Based on a CNBC report*

After her break, Mira got back into the industry and over the next 15 years worked for several companies based in the UK and Europe in various capacities and gained invaluable global exposure.

“After about 15 years of doing similar work, I felt the need to do something of my own”, says Mira and adds, “I wanted to use my global network, knowledge and experience to make a difference and use my influence in the industry towards a more ethical and sustainable business.” When we think fashion, we are quick to think of glamorous models walking the ramps or the red carpet and of gorgeous clothes; little do we think about what goes on behind the scenes — the ill-paid workers in developing and other third world countries toiling for hours in deplorable conditions or the poison we’re subjecting the environment to. The textile industry also produces lots of solid waste. These end up in landfills and water bodies, causing environmental issues. Every year, about 90 million items of clothing end up in landfills globally, according to greenofchange.com.

“Did you know it takes 2700 L of water to make a single cotton T-shirt?” Asks Mira.

According to <https://ekoenergy.org>: Cotton is found in 40% of all clothing whilst synthetic fibers, such as polyester and nylon, in 72% of garments. Both have been criticised for their environmental impacts. Cotton is a highly water-intensive plant. Though only 2.4% of the world’s agricultural land is planted with cotton, it consumes almost



Aral sea in 1989 (left) and 2014 (right) after the rivers that fed it were diverted for irrigating cotton plantations. The shrinking of the Aral Sea has been called “one of the planet’s worst environmental disasters”.

## MIRA ADVISES THE FOLLOWING:

- Buy less and choose the greenest options; don't get influenced by consumerism.
- Don't buy cheap clothes; it not only increases over-production, over-consumption and waste, 57% of discarded clothes end up in landfills each year!
- Be a conscious buyer; know the source of your garments, there's a lot of information available on the internet today.
- **BUY, USE, MEND, UPCYCLE, REPEAT !**



10% of all agricultural chemicals and 25% of pesticides. In one of the most destructive environmental catastrophes man has ever created, two rivers that fed the Aral sea were redirected in the 1960s by the Soviet Union to maintain the cotton plantations in what is now Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan. Without these two major water inputs, almost the entire Aral sea has now dried up leaving mostly arid desert.

Fashion is linked to so many industries and is silently shaping and reshaping everything in its ecosystem including, people, culture and the environment. But do we pay any heed to all of that when we buy that glamorous dress or a pair of jeans? Worse still, the race towards being à la mode has given rise to fast fashion which has made the apparel industry one of the major polluting industries (after Oil) and is responsible for 10% of the global carbon emissions.

In her new role — among other responsibilities — Mira works with manufacturers, retailers and fashion startups to continuously improve ways of working and compliance (i.e. - GOTS, Organic, SA8000, SMETA certifications). The Global Organic Textile Standard (GOTS) is a processing standard for textiles made from organic fibers. GOTS ensures that factories and sourcing companies abide by the defined (high-level) environmental criteria along the entire organic textiles supply chain and also ensures the company is compliant with social and

ethics criteria. She explains, “The idea is to bring in a more conscious angle to the business collectively, be it cotton farming, sustainable practices, ethical working conditions, etc.”

This “conscious living” is seeping more and more into her personal life too. Mira recalls her father's words: always help people. She adds, “I have always nurtured this aspect of helping others who are less privileged since my childhood, having watched my father and uncle Vishwa-bandhu-da. My uncle dedicated his life to helping one and all, be it someone in the Ashram or a stranger on the street. For him it was his Sadhana and service to the Mother. He was true to his name – ‘a friend of all the people.’” Mira now does her bit working with charities, one of them being for homelessness, which is a horrific crisis in the UK.

Mira feels special for having lived in the Ashram and having had the privilege, the opportunity, exposure and guidance to reflect on the deeper and higher meaning of life, to ponder, to seek something greater. “No other place on earth can give you this education,” she says and adds, “Often, we live in a cocoon and are sucked into the humdrum of daily existence and are self absorbed. But even then, I feel that Douce Mère is always there and in one way or another she pulls you back on track...the path that leads us to finding the deep truths of Life.” ☼

Reach Mira at: [info@sourcingstories.com](mailto:info@sourcingstories.com)



# Creativity Unleashed

**Nishtha Prasad '15H** is currently pursuing a master's degree in Fashion Management from Paris.

*In this interview, she answers a few questions about fashion, her life in SAICE and creativity.*

**Where are you currently based and what are you pursuing?**

I'm currently pursuing my master's degree in Fashion Management, Marketing and Design Strategies in Paris and will graduate in 2021.

**What is it that you like best about your life right now?**

Being a student is great! Classes are interesting when we're passionate about the subject in general and student discounts in France are worth it, though it doesn't really extend to travelling or going to the movies. Of course, having homework sucks.

**What is it about fashion designing that you like the most?**

Fashion design is all about expressing yourself. It can transform you and also how you feel, within a moment.

**You love jewellery designing. Tell us why.**

Jewellery design has something very personal to it. Jewellery is often a very personal item with a lot of sentimental value attached to it. And there's a certain amount of permanence to it, which is why we have heirloom pieces today. There is very

little room for error and one has to strive for perfection.

**What is your earliest memory of doing something creative?**

Not sure if it's my first memory but definitely one of the earlier ones. I made a bicycle out of thermocol pieces. I was either in Kindergarten or Delafon. So, at the time, it was quite life-size for me. It had a carrier and everything and rolled like the one in The Flintstones. But I wasn't allowed to ride on it to get to school though, so that was a bummer!

**Who is your role model and why?**

Depends on my mood, but currently it's Violet Crawley (the dowager from Downton Abbey). She has spunk!

**How do you channel your inner creative diva?**

It's almost always late at night, and often starts with destroying something to create something new.

**Your fashion mantra?**

Be comfortable! Also, shop in the men's section. They have bigger pockets.



***What is the most important lesson life has taught you?***

You can plan your life as much as you want but life will snowball you. And yes, Murphy's law is real.

***Your favourite SAICE teacher/coach and why.***

Making me choose one is like asking me to choose only one chocolate from the assorted box! You just can't do it! You've got to love them all.

***A memorable day in SAICE.***

Every day was so different, but some things just remain with you, like dispensary khichadi or dragging the teacher to the beach when it's pouring and teachers recounting stories for birthdays and so many more memories. Christmas is always memorable too.

***Any quote from the Mother or Sri Aurobindo that sustains you when the going gets tough?***

"Avec la patience on arrive à tout". My dad loves using this, especially while shopping ;-).



***When did you know you were going to become a designer? And when did you start pursuing it in earnest?***

It's something that just seemed obvious and natural one day, or maybe my brain just fell in place. And only when I decided to look for jewellery design schools did I know I was serious about it.

***Where do you see yourself 10 years from now?***

Hopefully happy and bossing people around!

***Your words of wisdom for anyone wanting to pursue a career in fashion or designing?***

Be ready for a lot of all-nighters. Also, it's a lot of fun. There's no right or wrong. It's all about unleashing your creativity but also being able to justify it. ☼



# Spiritual Healing

***Lalit N. Modi**, or Lalitbhai as we knew him, was part of the extended Ashram and Golden Chain family. For many years now he was The Golden Chain Fraternity's auditor and advisor on official matters. Lalitbhai passed away on 1st October 2020. His warm, smiling, peaceful and supportive presence will be missed. We present here an article he submitted to us shortly before his passing.*

We met after a long gap of 35 years. At the age of 20 he had migrated to the UK to seek his fortune and I had returned to Pondicherry from Madras (as it was then called) where we had studied together in Loyola College. He had always been a quiet and shy type and hardly someone who would take major initiatives like “googling” for me! But surprisingly he did just that and upon finding my name and telephone number in my firm's website, he called me immediately. He too was always there in the back of my mind and did occupy a little corner in my heart but there was no way I could contact him. He never liked to be in the limelight and my “googling” had not yielded any result. Very often I wondered about his whereabouts and occupation!!

His call jolted me out of my reverie and I was overwhelmed to hear his voice which brought back a flood of memories. Once the excitement subsided I followed up with a series of questions, almost like an inquisition, not giving him the slightest opportunity to respond or defend himself. We briefly exchanged notes on how life had treated us in the last 35 years and he hung up saying he was visiting India shortly on a pilgrimage and would love to come to Pondicherry to see me and visit Sri Aurobindo Ashram. I could only mumble a warm welcome! Was the call a direct result of telepathy or was it just a coincidence? I preferred to believe that it was the former!

On the appointed day I confronted a hermit, tall and serene, wearing an off beat outfit, sporting a long white beard and ash white dreadlocks, eyes like melted ice that exuded an aura of tranquility and an inhibited smile that carried the promise of a secret from another realm!

Recognition dawned only after a couple of minutes of intense gazing. Indeed, it was Naren the timid and introvert buddy who left for the UK 35 years ago. The only thing I found that was English about him now was his English accent. I was just not prepared to encounter this English ascetic! But his appearance at my door that morning was a sort of Divine Crisis Resolution.

Though I was unwell with viral fever and the familiar accompaniment of cold and cough, we spent hours together catching up on our eventful lives. I had been sure the sober, wise, unassuming, shy and reserved Naren of Loyola College would end up as a professor in some university. He certainly did not possess the calculative qualities of a businessman. Obviously I was taken aback when I learnt from him that for a living he was helping out a priest with the daily chores in a temple in the UK, taught pranayama, yoga and meditation and gave spiritual discourses to genuine aspirants. He had not walked down the aisle and spent all his earnings visiting places of pilgrimage and spiritual destinations in India and Nepal. His present destination was Sri Aurobindo Ashram. Next he proposed to visit Kailash, Mansarovar among other places. He invited me to join him but being caught in the grip of ill health I politely refused. I insisted though, that he spend at least a week with me in Pondicherry. Naren spent a week with us and with his kind and subtle ways won the hearts of all my family members ranging from my father to my daughter spanning three generations.

During his stay Naren was observing and appraising me with frank curiosity. My physical and mental self were not in harmony and the fever adamantly refused to subside. There was hardly a



sign of recovery and I was feeling miserable that this happened when I was meeting my friend after 35 years. On the fifth day of his stay Naren asked me to take him to Sri Aurobindo Ashram. Again pointing to my indisposition I offered to ask my brother to accompany him. He politely dismissed the suggestion saying that he wanted me, and only me, to go with him. I was a little shocked by his adamant behaviour but did not want to disappoint him. Not having taken him around our idyllic quaint old town since his arrival, I decided to take Naren to the Ashram, one of the major spiritual destinations of the world. People throng this part of the globe to find their inner selves, give meaning to their lives and to fulfill the needs of their soul!

Being off-season for the tourists the crowd was sparse. We sat near the Samadhi in the Ashram for about an hour. The ambience was pristine. From the serenity of my surroundings I was gently drawn into the tranquility of solitude. Invoking the Divine Providence to work on me, I gradually discovered the power of silence, and peace caressed my soul. It turned out to be a short journey of spiritual discovery, initiating personal spiritual evolution and culminating into a spiritual unfolding of my consciousness. A divine peace engulfed me and I found myself dissolved into the realms of heavenly bliss. A slight drizzle of rain transported me back to earth energized and happy.

Back home my better-half Kirti was anxiously waiting for us. We sat at the dining table chatting for some time while Kirti prepared some tea. While sipping the concoction Kirti noticed and remarked that there was a startling transformation in my health; my cough and cold had considerably subsided and the fever had gone. In fact I too felt hale and energetic. It was then that Naren launched into an explanation of the mystery.

He began by saying that he had observed me for the last few days and felt that I was held captive by hostile forces. The illness had rendered my body fatigued, mind susceptible to negative thoughts and the will weak. The hostile forces which hover around us all the time capitalized on this vulnerability, attacked me, got me

under their influence and then tormented me incessantly rendering me physically and mentally weary before surrounding me by a sheath and aura of submissive indolence. This sheath, he continued, could be dissolved only by being in sacred and sacrosanct surroundings like the Sri Aurobindo Ashram. The omnipresent Divine force so intensely concentrated in such spiritual centers could alone tear asunder the occult field created by the adverse forces, the perpetrators of this noiseless violence. All this seems miraculous, he continued, but this is actually common, that at the slightest weakness of our body, mind and spirit, adverse forces invade our being with perceptible zeal and make us say and do ignoble things. The only way to prevent the assault of these unholy forces was to keep calm and chant the name of the Higher Absolute Force and try to be in sacrosanct surroundings.

Temples, churches, ashrams and similar places are oases of physical and spiritual healing and hence Naren's obduracy to take me to a hallowed destination, namely Sri Aurobindo Ashram!

Sri Aurobindo in his *Letters on Yoga* has mentioned that laziness, questioning the existence of the Supreme Reality, inner conflicts, abnormal depressions and irrational impulses, clouding of the brain, a whirl in the vital desires; vanity and pride are all signs of the influence of adverse forces. It is an intervention from non-human worlds. It is not exactly a possession but a strong visible influence, an attack. Hostile forces are those whose very raison d'être is revolt against the Divine, against the light of truth and enmity to the Divine work.

The human being is a "territory" that the hostile forces seek to conquer and confine within their influence, preventing Divine intervention. Total surrender at the feet of the Divine is the only way towards salvation and once we are in the Divine's custody no malicious force however forceful can dare to touch or disturb us. If there is a strong central faith in the Divine and a total self consecration at all times, even if there are attacks, these attacks can be countered without much difficulty. So this is what is called of us: to turn unconditionally toward the Divine and seek refuge in Him. ❧

# Cosmos

*(Inspired by Carl Sagan's book with the same name)*

*By Utpal Smart '05*

Pause for a moment, step back, let loose the tight reins of the habitual mind,  
And ponder a while about the universe that set you forth.  
You were born from the pangs of a singularity,  
Amidst the throes of space-time,  
A shape-shifting immortal raised on star-stuff.  
At the edge of space, your cradle still stirs  
In the darkness of the cosmic Night.  
Recall the rebellion of heavy metals,  
Which had you, from a dying star, expelled.  
Or the other day, when you were the last, desperate gasp of air,  
An ancient queen by the Nile,  
With an asp upon her breast, inhaled.  
Tomorrow perhaps, you will set sail to populate a distant world,  
Riding on a meteor's tail.  
Permeating an expanding universe,  
You lapse into the finite festival of abundant forms,  
Crafted by the whims of an electron-cloud.  
And so there are worlds within worlds, lives beyond lives,  
Bizarre corners where dimensions merge and realities collide.  
Ever beyond the faint grasp of your select senses,  
Realms of unmeasured potential swell and subside.  
This is the mystery that surrounds your lives,  
Even on the most mundane of days,  
Through the most ordinary of times,  
And the pettiest of hours,  
You still are a precious attempt  
By the Cosmos to fathom itself.





# As I Gaze at the Painted Sky

*By Lucy Jain '60H*

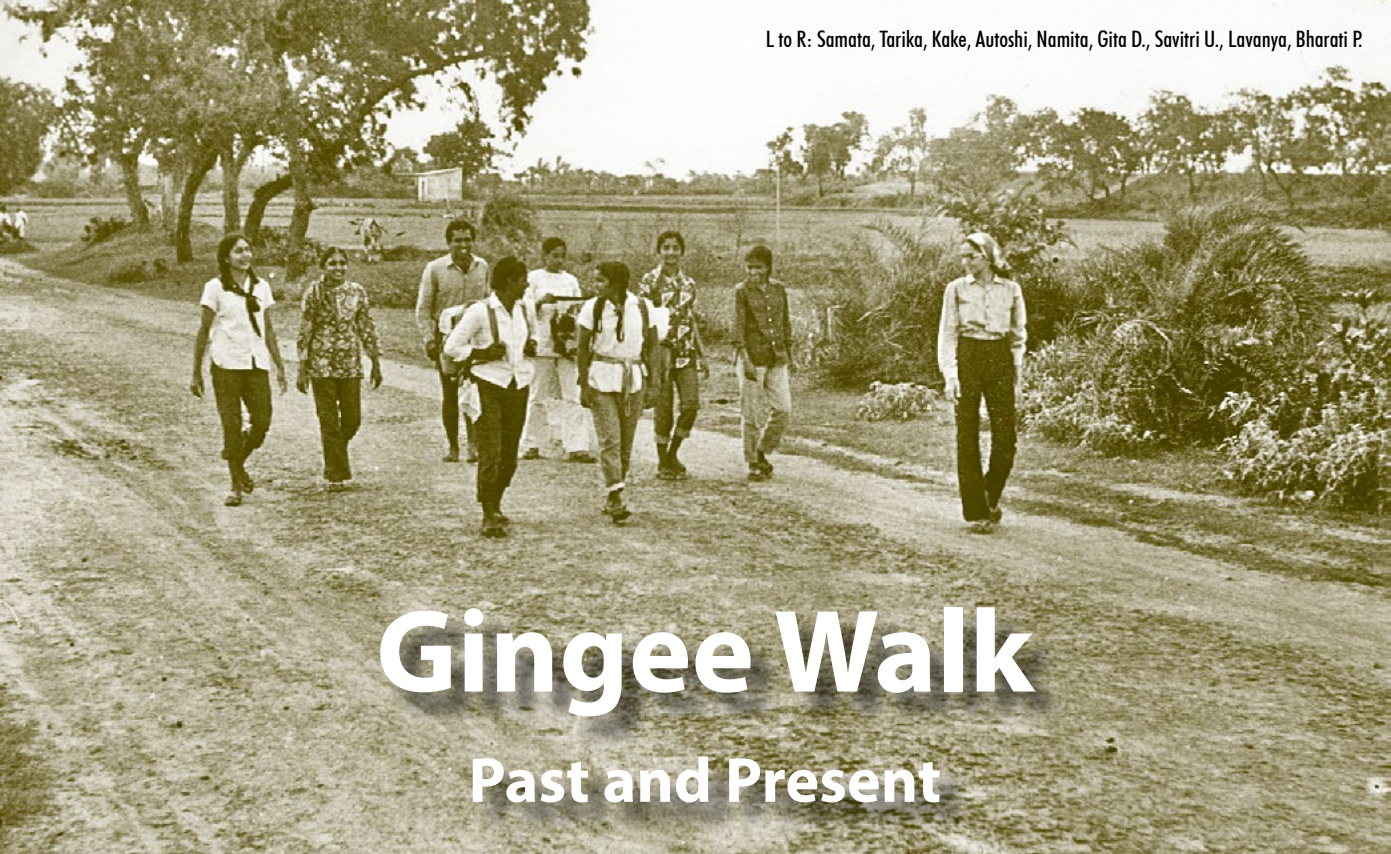
I stand and stare in wonder,  
I think and I deeply ponder,  
As I gaze at the painted sky,  
Who created such beauty for our eyes?

Where he passes, he leaves behind,  
Beauty in color, form and line,  
Can we hearken to His cause,  
He who evokes such ecstasy in our soul,

Call him by whatever name,  
To each of us he is the same.  
He is the Supreme Lord of Creation,  
Before him we bow with deep devotion.

Can we not hearken to His call, He  
Who evokes such ecstasy in us all?





# Gingee Walk

## Past and Present

*The Gingee Walk has been a memorable experience for all those who have participated in it over the years. In the following feature we share participants' memories from different generations.*

*We start with Batti-da, who tells us about how the Gingee Walk started in the 1940s and how the Mother encouraged them. In the years that followed, while outings and camping trips to Gingee were held, the walk to Gingee did not happen.*

*Then, in 1971, the first Gingee walk with girls was organized. Mother's permission was sought and she sent her blessings. We include here an article by Autoshi who was in that first batch of walkers. Also featured are images from the 1972 walk.*

*After 1971, the Walk became a regular annual event with Kake organizing it. The participants were boys and girls from groups B, C and D. The Gingee Walk continued for a number of years till the mid-eighties with captains and coaches like Arvind Babu and Rajkumar also there to encourage the walkers.*

*With reports of the mosquito-borne disease, Japanese Encephalitis, becoming widespread in Tindivanam district, the Gingee Walk was discontinued. Since then the Gingee Walk has tried to make the occasional comeback — with Arvind Babu leading some non-student groups and Ambikaprasad taking the initiative some years ago — but has also seen periods of dormancy.*

*Four years ago, after quite a long hiatus, Devdutt Lall and his team decided to revive the Gingee Walk so that a new generation of students could experience it. We feature the stories of two of the 2019 participants. Their articles echo the experiences of many that have gone before them.*

# How It Began

*In an evening chat, **Prabhakar (Batti-da) '58** tells **Devdutt '81**  
about the origins of the Gingee Walk*

A long time ago, in the year 1945-46, some of us young boys (Narayan, Gadadhar, Pranab-da and I) decided to go to LalPahar (the Auroville Red Hills) with Biren-da. The trip was organised on a Sunday. The walk was done barefoot. This was considered a big event as we had to cross the town.

The next outing was to Aryankuppam and included Biren-da, Narayan, Richard Pearson, Kittu-da and I. We went in the morning down to the 1st River on the “route de Coudaloure” which is now known as Cuddalore Road. We walked along the river. We had Ashram round buns as our refreshment. We decided to bring back a big brick and as it was heavy we took turns to carry it. We gave the big brick to the Mother during the vegetable Darshan at the Ashram. Currently this brick is supposed to be at the Library.

We decided to do such outings fortnightly on Sundays and got Mother’s permission. We were sanctioned bread, milk and two tins of milkmaid. We used to leave early in the morning and would return before lunch. We had Mirudala and other girls joining us too and they would wear skirts for the walk.

Ashram had only six cycles which were kept in the “Cycle House” which is currently the Water Room. We decided to go cycling to Lake. We would go doubles cycling with Biren-da taking me pillion and Richard taking Kittu-da.

We decided to include more people and therefore covered Jalad-da’s bullock cart in canvas to carry our things and people. We loaded our things onto it and walked to the Lake.

Around 1946-47 we decided to walk to Gingee and informed Mother about it. Mother asked us if we had good shoes. I told her that we had old tennis shoes. Mother then inquired about the

water that we were going to carry. I told her that we would not be able to carry water for two days. She was very concerned about hygiene. She also inquired if we were going to make tea.

We started our walk at 4:30 am. We were Norman, Vishweswar, Sudhir (pet name Vazi), Bababhahi and I. We carried our food and water. After 12 miles we stopped to make tea using a portable stove which belonged to Pavitra-da and which we had managed to get hold of. We also had two buns which were rationed.

We took the Tindivanam route. Norman, with his long strides, was ahead and then I followed. Baba-bhai decided to give up after 12 miles and took a bus to Gingee and we gave him all our bags. He was supposed to wait for us at the Travellers’ Lodge. At our first stop we got rid of our shoes and walked barefoot thereafter. We drank river water or rain water. We reached at night. It had taken us 15 hours.

We spent the night there, and in the morning asked Baba-bhai to make the tea. We could see the hills from the bungalow but decided to walk back instead of going to the mountains. We walked back till Tindivanam. From there Baba-bhai picked us up in my sister’s car.

The next year I told the Mother that we want to spend a few days in the Gingee hills and not just walk and come back, and Mother agreed. So we went to Gingee by bus and spent few days camping and walking in the hills. It continued this way for a few years. There was no group walking to Gingee until 1971 but there was camping organised in small groups.

Mother encouraged activities like walking and cycling. She had herself done some serious cycling and walking in her twenties. She was particular about hygiene though, and specifically about the quality of drinking water. ❧



# A Walk Down Memory Lane

*Autoshi '71 remembers the first organised Ginge Walk that included girls*

**I**n December 1971, we, a batch of young girls with a few grown-ups went walking to Ginge. We started at around 3.00 p.m. from the Playground Guest House.

We hadn't gone very far when we started having problems with our chappals and could not walk easily. So we picked up a longish stick from the roadside and put the chappals in it and walked on barefoot. Shyamali (Harinarayan Ghosh's sister) carried the stick hobo style. By the time we came to Jipmer's steep slope (not the mild incline it is today), Shyamali was already tired and did not want to walk anymore. It was decided that she could continue in a public bus going towards Ginge. But we couldn't let her travel alone on public transport. Grant offered to go with her in the bus. That is when we realised our chappals had fallen somewhere along the way. Shyamali



Savitri U. and Gita D.



Goupi and Tarika

was not even aware of it. We gave most of our bags with the food stuff to Shyamali and Grant to take along with them to Ginge.

Kake, our Leader, said he would take us through a short cut and we could reach Ginge early. O Boy! What a short cut! It turned out to be longer than the normal route.

We reached Pandy Gate in Ginge at around 7.00 p.m. in the evening the next day. We had walked for more than 24 hours. We were so exhausted that we dropped down where we stood and almost immediately fell asleep.

In the middle of the night we woke up feeling very hungry. We opened the bags that Grant





L to R: Gita D., Namita, Autoshi, Lavanya, Savitri U., Kake, Bharati P., Samata

and Shyamali had brought in the bus. We rummaged through all the bags for something to eat. Imagine our condition when we found almost nothing! Grant and Shyamali, obviously having reached long before us, feeling hungry, had eaten up most of the stuff. Only one or two packets of biscuits and some bread were left for us. When we asked Grant and Shyamali, they started accusing each other of eating up most of the food!

In the morning when we woke up we found that we had spent the night in an area scattered with cows' and goats' visiting cards!

Anyway in spite of all the hardships it was a memorable adventure. ☼

## EARLY PARTICIPANTS

Those who took part in the 1971 Gingee Walk:

Kake, Grant, Goupi, Autoshi, Gita D., Lavanya, Savitri U., Savitri M., Shyamali G., Debjani, Namita, Bharati P., Chandrika.

Those who took part in the 1972 Walk:

Kake, Grant, Goupi, Autoshi, Gita D., Lavanya, Savitri U., Tarika, Samata, Namita, Bharati P..



# Reviving the Gingee Walk

*Devdutt Lall '81, who has been organizing the Gingee Walk for the past four years, summarises the 2019 experience.*

**W**e decided to revive the Gingee Walk after a long hiatus, so that a new generation of students (members of groups B, C and D) could experience it. Our latest Gingee Walk — the fourth year we are organizing it — was held on 9th December, 2019. The date was fixed in consultation with the camping dates so that those who wanted to participate in both activities would at least have the option.

We had a total of 24 participants with 13 students and 11 former students. We had a trial walk on 3rd Dec for those who wanted to practise.

On 9th Dec we met at the Corner House (CH)

at 2:30pm with everyone (walkers and the support team) and did a small concentration and started the walk.

We had the Auroville Ambulance and two cars to accompany us during the entire walk. We also had two friends on a bike join us in the evening.

We started off at a comfortable and leisurely pace but very soon there was a good distance between the first and the last batch.

We walked in the evening sun which meant that everyone was thirsty and so we drank a lot of water before we reached Vanur. Our cars joined us at around 7:30pm onwards and encouraged us by giving us oranges and refilling our water bottles.



L to R: Kake, Tarika, Grant, Bharati P., Lavanya, Goupi, Autoshi, Gita D., Samata, Savitri U., Namita



As many walkers were hungry even before we had reached our scheduled dinner spot, we decided to serve dinner which was prepared by Pravin-bhai and was in Bobby and Vandana's car. This allowed everyone to have dinner at their pace and time.

We crossed Mailam and the Villipuram highway and entered the Desert Road. We were stopped by the local police and we explained that we were on a training camp. They insisted that we have a vehicle attached to each group, which we did. There were a few dropouts on the Desert Road.

The last batch reached the Tiruvanmalai highway around 3am and from there it was the last stretch. We had a few more dropouts in the

last leg.

The first batch reached Gingee at 6:15am and the last batch at 8am. There were a total of 8 students who completed which included 6 girls, which was very good.

We all went to the Chandragiri Temple where everyone relaxed and a hot breakfast was served to all.

After breakfast there was a group who wanted to drive back and the rest relaxed. Those who wanted to bathed in the pond near the temple which was really relaxing and

the muscles got released.

We waited for the Green and Red group picnickers, had lunch with them, and then returned together to Pondy. ☘

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**We decided to revive the Gingee Walk so that a new generation of students could experience it.**

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Standing (L to R) Gawa, Devdutt, Bittu, Jaydev, Ranidi, Prithiv, Dhwaneet, Basant, Swarnojit. Sitting on the Platform (L to R) Kush, Praketa, Mayuri, Jasmin, Suchitra, Deeksha, Anya, Shephali, Standing on the platform (L to R) Dyuman, Lakshman, Arjun, Sayuri, Janaki, Sharmishtha, Sanchari. Squatting (L to R) Shanti, Brihas, Pranjal, Vidyut, Taarak



# Conquering Pain

*Suchitra 'K1*

While volunteering in the Ashram, I met Devdutt-da. When I came to know that he organises early morning cycling sessions, I asked his permission to join the cycling group as I was really interested. During one of the cycling days he mentioned the Gingee Walk and he encouraged me to participate but I refused. I said “I can’t walk, I don’t like walking and this year I didn’t even do the athletics walking competition.” Then he explained to me the difference between track walking and the Gingee Walk. I agreed to join the walk. On the 3rd of Dec, we went on a trial walk to Matrimandir, which, he said, will prepare me for the Gingee walk. We reached Matrimandir which was our turn-back-point and half of the total distance to be covered. There we had our breakfast, and then we headed back. On our return, I realised that my knee was already starting to hurt. I couldn’t bear the pain, I slowed down but pushed myself to finish.

As the day of the Gingee Walk approached, I was very excited and energetic. Every day, mornings and evenings, I used to walk on the beach road. I told myself whatever happens I will finish the walk.

December 9th, the day of the Gingee Walk arrived. We started from Corner House in the afternoon. From the beginning I kept up a good pace. While walking, I concentrated more on my weaker leg, but after a while, the knee of my other leg began to hurt and a point came where both the knees were hurting. By this time separate groups had formed, and we did some stretches to relax our muscles. During the walk, many times, I felt like giving up due to the acute pain,

but I had promised myself that I would finish the walk.

Around 9 pm we reached our dinner spot and had a light dinner. My only aim was to finish the walk.

Once we reached the Tiruvannamalai highway, which is also the last stretch, I felt very excited and full of energy and I started speeding up. The last 3km were the most painful. Both my knees were hurting terribly. Whenever I stopped to take a break, starting off again was more painful, so I tried not to stop. Towards the end I held Sharmistha’s and Pranjali’s hands, and with both of them encouraging me, we finally reached Gingee. I had a big smile on my face and I couldn’t believe that I had finished.

I was feeling really sleepy so I had my breakfast and went off to sleep; when I woke up I couldn’t take a single step forward without help. Then

Devdutt-da called us to take a dip in the pond. I walked towards the pond but didn’t feel like getting inside, so I sat down at the edge of the pond. After a while Tarak and Devdutt-da pulled me in, saying that my legs will heal faster. They told me to swim across the pond, I tried but wasn’t able to proceed much. I tried different strokes to swim across; finally I reached a rock and sat down for a while. My legs were very sore and sensitive, and while swimming back, Devdutt-da, by mistake, kicked my leg and the pain was awful: I screamed and almost had tears in my eyes.

Then we came back to Pondicherry with Green group and Red group, in their picnic bus. Whatever the challenges and the pain, I loved this experience and would love to go again next year and the next.... ❀

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**I told myself whatever happens I will finish the walk.**

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# A Walk to Remember

*Anya 'K3*

For a long time I had been waiting to participate in the annual walk from Pondicherry to Gingee. As I would be in Pondy this time after doing the 2nd December programme, I finally signed up for it. In the pre-walk meeting, Devdutt and Taarak briefed us on the Gingee Walk. Finally the day arrived – 9th December 2019 – I was ebullient on the outside, but inside I hid the thrill of treading the unknown.

One ambulance and two cars accompanied us with snacks, water and dinner. “All that we have to do is walk, walk and walk,” affirmed Devdutt.

The walk began at around 3:15 pm after the concentration in Corner House. We got divided into batches, within the first 5 to 10 kilometres. Initially Devdutt walked with the last batch – Deeksha, Jasmin-da, Laxman, Sanchari, Taarak and me. As we walked at a rather comfortable pace, Devdutt went ahead. We talked and laughed and each of our thread of words weaved into a fine and colourful weft. Eventually with every step the darkness became heavier and heavier, similarly my limbs too felt heavy. It was the constant care of the people, in the two cars and ambulance, which kept us going.

At the end of 35 kilometres, in a shed by the Mailam road, our dinner awaited us, but for that, we still had to walk another 7 kilometres! That is when the second toe of my left leg shouted out to me, “Au secours! Au secours!” I asked it to behave like my right second toe, which although identical to it, hardly troubled me. I looked at a lamppost which stood far ahead, as tall as an average Indian teenager and wondered how long it would take to grow to a full-fledged man, and then eventually to grow three times that length! Soon, and yet not soon enough, when we reached our dinner spot, it was 10:45 pm! We sat down to eat some poha cooked for us by Praveen-bhai.

“The real walk begins after dinner,” was a

comment I had heard from those veterans who had already treaded this path. The closer we drew to Gingee, the more my mind had to ignore the helpless cries of my exhausted lower limbs. A motorbike also came to our service by this time. Each one in turn was describing in the most unimaginable manner, how he or she felt at this point, and came up with bizarre ways to escape the walk. I envied a carefree, plump man snoring by the roadside, lost in the world of his dreams, while I was dreaming and consciously sleepwalking; I knew that there was the journey of an entire night awaiting me.

Before we reached the Desert Road, as it was called, Taarak walked with Laxman and Sanchari on either side. He led them, by holding their hands, just like a father would lead his children. And eventually, Jasmin-da, also did the same, and the children he led were Deeksha and me! This way walking became easier than before, hand in hand, everyone's pace set to a single rhythm; this unity radiated energy, which propelled us forward from one step to the next. Jasmin-da recounted stories which were enjoyable and also kept the mind busy, it made the body forget its longing for rest and also muted the constant complaining hubbub of the lower limbs. Soon we reached the Desert Road – a long, straight stretch commencing from a flyover. The ambulance was to accompany our batch as there were three distinct batches now. On reaching it we paused, as policemen warned us of the possibility of some unforeseen problems. But then we continued. By this time my lower limbs were numb as they had reached the nadir of tolerance – I felt no aches or pains. The policemen who were patrolling the flyover on motorbikes, with a hand gesture ordered us to hurry. I wondered if they were in our shoes, would they be able to carry out their own orders!

After the flyover the road seemed deserted

indeed, and we all fell silent. Thanks to the flooding of the moonlight, I noticed that the smooth tar road eventually got uneven. My eyes frequently closed by themselves and my body walked like an automaton. My awareness of the surroundings got fuzzy.

We crossed the uneven road and there emerged a smooth tar road again. After this would be the final section of the highway, leading straight to Gingee. At times we became the fools of our own expectations when on seeing some distant lights we believed it to be the final stretch towards our liberation. Finally, far away we spotted our ambulance, looking like a small toy. As we approached it, we almost felt that the ambulance was moving away from us, but the fact was that we were moving slowly. On reaching the ambulance, Taarak and Jasmin da let go of our hands and left us to take our decision. Sanchari chose to give up, and climbed into the ambulance. Seizing the opportunity, I also wanted to give up; but I just blanked my physical consciousness and continued with the aid of the mental will-power, without pausing I walked on slowly until the rest joined me. We continued on our own and Taarak and Laxman walked ahead of us. After a while orange streetlights illuminated our path and revealed the figures of our fellow-walkers ahead of us. We overtook them, but Jasmin-da and Deeksha slowed down and Taarak and Laxman went ahead. And I walked alone. This was the time my vital being surfaced and various emotions enveloped me. A chaos resounded within me, "Why did I sign up for the walk? For mere fun? What was the purpose of inflicting this third degree torture on myself?" And silent tears rolled down my cheeks; I walked on. Suddenly I realised that I had caught up with Taarak, Laxman and other Red group boys. I walked past them like a stranger, unwilling to let them see my tear-stained face. Taarak then continued with me, leaving the boys behind, although his long strides didn't match my short ones. The length of the road tested my patience; so, with the aid of my imagination, I lengthened the road till infinity and doggedly, continued walking its teasing length. Then the road attracted me with its cleanliness and I felt

like lying down right there, but my mind controlled my body like a tyrant and it didn't dare do anything but walk. All of a sudden, I noticed the ambulance. We had reached the end of the Desert Road which opened into the highway.

We waited there for five minutes until the last batch reached us; we were told that Jasmin-da and Deeksha had also given up. Meanwhile, my physical consciousness which had been resting in the ambulance, crept into me as I sat down to sip some water. On resuming the walk I needed to be cajoled at every step. Devdutt pulled me along holding my hand, and I felt like a stubborn child. Around 3:00 am, when I came to know that we needed to walk another 20 kilometres, which meant another 5 hours, before we reached our ultimate goal, my confidence completely shattered. I was exhausted but still I would not give up – this was my problem.

It was impossible for me to keep up with the swift short steps of Devdutt. I didn't want him to pull me along anymore, but nonetheless he did. As he coaxed me along, I continued to ignore my complaining physical consciousness, and after half an hour or so, my mind was liberated of the physical complaints. I broke away from my batch and walked alone, absolutely automated by my mind. For the next 3 hours or so I walked alone. The ambulance came in sight from time to time, and Gawa, on his bike, kept going up and down, showing his selfless concern for the walkers. A few buses and cars drove past me. Now that I was alone, with the thousand selves which built my identity, the purpose of the walk dawned on me. My journey was in fact, a meditation in motion, breaking through my mental limitations which had settled inside me, over the past 20 years of my life. The purpose of my every step was to test my will-power. I understood the dichotomy of my previous state when I felt tortured with every step and yet I would not give up – this was because the pain was juxtaposed with the joy of getting closer and closer to the goal. With this realisation, I experienced nothing but joy. With every step I was determined to finish. Constantly I remembered the Grace of the Omnipresent which serves inconspicuously and remains unnoticed. In the





Standing (L to R) Srijita, Sayuri, Mayuri, Pranjal, Bittu, Arjun, Deeksha, Anya, Dyuman, Sharmistha, Suchitra, Devdutt, Shephali, Kush, Swarnojit, Praketa, Shanti, Lakshman, Prithiv, Basant, Vandana. Sitting (L to R) Sanchari, Janaki, Alok, Jasmin, Vidyut.

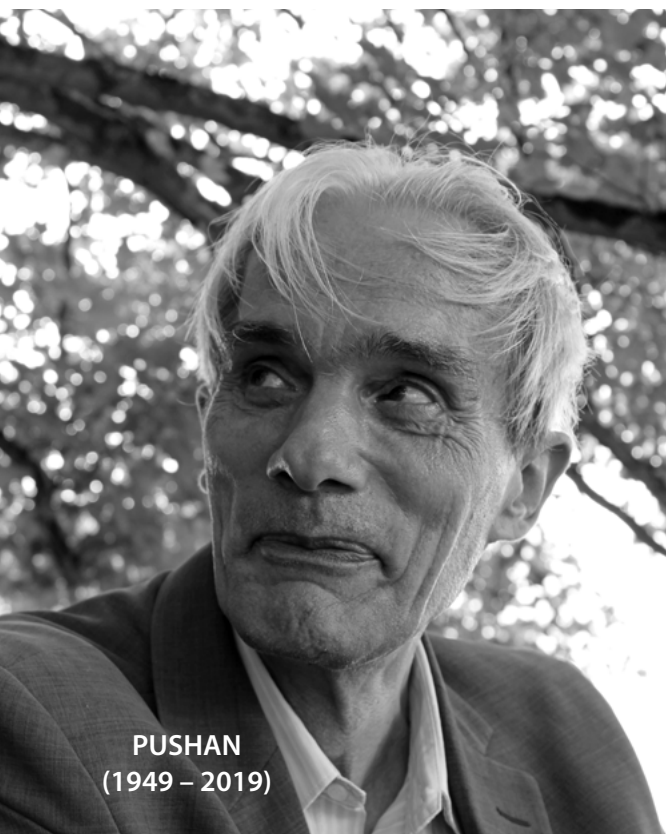
meantime, I saw Gawa taking a pillion – it was Laxman, and then coming back to pick up another Red group boy and finally Taarak – I guessed they had given up. Not seeing, nor hearing any of the Red group girls, I guessed that they were still walking.

With the morning rays, strangers were seen now and then, coming out of their houses. To their questioning eyes I might have seemed possessed. Gradually everything brightened up and the traffic got denser. Suddenly Gawa dropped Jasmin-da, right beside me. Yes, he had decided to walk the remaining kilometres with me. I frequently questioned him, “How much longer?” He would reassure me and I would continue. I got impatient; the Gingee town was right there ahead of us and I took forever to reach it, yet I was ready

to get there at any cost. I sensed now that the back of my left knee didn’t stretch fully with every step. I kept walking, just as I had been doing for the past 15 hours. Eventually I entered the gates of the Gingee Fort, where Devdutt and two Red group girls also joined me. From there, on being given the opportunity, the Red group girls chose to go in the car till the temple, at the foot of the mountain, – our ultimate destination. On being given the same opportunity, I asked myself, “If you could walk for 16 hours, then can you not walk for a few more minutes?” Immediately, I got my answer. I chose to walk on, Devdutt and Jasmin-da also continued with me. We reached the temple at eight in the morning. With resounding claps our fellow-walkers and helpers, welcomed the last batch. ❧

# Remembering Pushan

*Pushan, who taught English and French at SAICE for 14 years, made a significant contribution to the translation of the Mother's works into English and did some remarkable research into the Mother's family's antecedents, passed away at the end of 2019. His friends, students and colleagues remember him in the following article which has been compiled and edited by **Mandakini**, a friend of his who herself taught in our School in the 1980s.*



PUSHAN  
(1949 – 2019)

**T**his past December in Paris, our dear friend and inspiring teacher Pushan left his mortal incarnation. We remember him as a tall, slim, gentle, private and deeply intelligent man, with a long ponytail, an ironic sense of humor, and a mischievous smile. He was a translator par excellence, an untiring researcher, an uplifting mentor who left an indelible mark on his students, and a warm and caring

friend. Fully devoted to the Mother, he was an uncompromising seeker of truth, and a person devoid of prejudices or any sense of superiority based on culture, religion or age. His physical passing is a moment of sadness, but also one of warm memories and deep respect for his work and his many very significant contributions.

Pushan was born Francis Bertaud, of French parents, on the French national holiday, July 14th 1949, with, as his sister Anne-Marie said, “a sequence of 7s”. His parents went to England to teach for what was meant to be a year, and then stayed on. So Pushan grew up in England, where his father was a professor of French literature at the University of North London and his mother, a French teacher in various secondary schools in London. He first studied at St. Alban's Prep School and Finchley Grammar School in London, and then came to France at age 13 where he finished his high school studies at Lycée du Parc Impérial in Nice, with “Mention Très bien”. He went on to study for a degree in philosophy at the Faculté des Lettres et des Sciences Humaines in Nice but dropped out after his first year in the wake of the May 1968 student revolution in which he cheerfully said he took “active part”.

Then with “the need for inner and outer experiences” and “a powerful, dreamlike attraction for India”, he set off into the unknown. He wrote : “I left France on Easter Sunday 1969 and arrived in India one year and one day later after hitchhiking through the Middle East with many adventures on the way.” He paid for his travels doing odd jobs en route: as a stage and lighting technician for an Istanbul cabaret, (thanks to prior experience

in Nice); as a window-dresser for Westernized shops in Damascus's Grand Bazaar; by painting and selling posters on the pavement of a chic boulevard in Beirut; making glass bead artefacts which were then sold by an Armenian middleman in Teheran, as a private English teacher, and as a one-assignment translator for UNESCO. The trip included his getting robbed and beaten in Afghanistan. But true to his spiritual quest, he sought out and met Middle Eastern Sufi masters and brotherhoods.

At last the goal of India was reached ! He recalled "walking across the Pakistan-India border at Firozepur in the magic light of a late afternoon and feeling suddenly overwhelmed by a feeling of deep peace such as I have never before experienced." Other indelible memories were of his first moonlight visit to the Taj Mahal, and of bathing in the Ganges at Benares and at Rishikesh "thus linking up with... the countless millions who have been doing this for four thousand years or more." There were his first 1969 experiences of monsoons: a complicated car trip through Bihar (where his car repeatedly slid on the mud into ditches) and "wading thigh-deep through the brown and turbulent waters in the flooded streets of New Delhi."

When he arrived in Delhi, he was broke, and lived for some time on the upper floor of a tiny Krishna temple in Old Delhi with a bhakti swami who gave him "my first lessons in the art of letting go and being free". Then he fell gravely ill from dysentery, and was found and saved by an Indian gentleman whose address he had been given by an American in Istanbul. This saviour was Ram-ji, a 72-year-old former disciple of Gandhi and head of the Bharat Sevak Samaj, who became Pushan's mentor in India and lifelong friend. Pushan worked for Ram-ji as a secretary, driver and interpreter, travelling together around India for nearly two years. "He is the one person to whom I owe my first insights into the realities of Indian life... from showing me how to eat and speak and dress to providing introductions to outstanding people in practically any place I cared to travel to."

The time with Ram-ji included long

discussions "that lasted far into the night". Once, when Pushan asked him "where can I find true spirituality?", Ram-ji's immediate answer was "Sri Aurobindo". Pushan wrote to his parents:

*« Je connaissais déjà Sri Aurobindo pour avoir lu ses livres, j'avais visité l'ashram mais n'avais pas pour autant achevé ma quête dans les ashrams de l'Inde. Quelques mois plus tard, en novembre-décembre 71, je me mis à lire sérieusement les œuvres de Sri Aurobindo, celles de Satprem. La réponse de Ramji (la vraie spiritualité se trouve chez Sri Aurobindo) avait fait son chemin .... Puis le 25 décembre, j'arrivai à Pondy pour une troisième visite de trois jours: je rencontrai Mère le lendemain et sus alors que mes recherches avaient pris fin: c'était ici que je devais être. »*

The Mother then became his life and Nolini-da gave Francis the spiritual name Pushan.

While Pushan had never planned to go into teaching as both of his parents had done, once settled in at the Ashram, that's exactly what he did, and joyfully. In his letters from '76 and '78 he wrote to his family about how much he loved being a teacher at Knowledge, how he adored the experience of teaching English, and was "in 7th heaven being able to express himself in a language he loves so much". The love and work bore rich fruit, and left a permanent imprint on the lives of his students. Bulu remembers:

"As children in the School we used to admire him a lot, fascinated by his looks and his name. As a Frenchman he should have been named Francois — why Francis? We found it perplexing! With his long hair tied behind his back, his enthralling stories of overland travel from Europe to India, his conspicuous quietness, and his strange name Francis, he was for us an avatar of Sir Francis Drake. We used to admiringly call him 'Pirate', pronounced in the French way. I still remember a game we played in his class. One of us would go outside the room and the rest of the class would concentrate on a particular colour, one we had collectively decided upon. The person outside would come back to the classroom and he was asked to "see" (not guess) the colour we had all concentrated upon. Ninety-five percent of the time it was correct."



“When I look back upon those years, I can see that his class and his personality had a formative influence on the development of who I am as a person today; especially he instilled in me a love for spirituality and an insatiable urge to explore the inner worlds. That influence was never loud but strong and quiet like an incoming tide at night. That is his legacy for me, the reason behind my love and admiration for who he was. That will remain with me for the rest of my life and fill me with a deep sense of gratitude every time I think of him.”

Other students remember with gratitude how he prepared them for going to study or live in France.

Cristof contributes these memories of the period when Pushan was associated with Free Progress at SAICE : “Il naviguait d’un bout de l’école à l’autre, très sollicité pour son bilinguisme, ses compétences et son extrême gentillesse, sa vraie courtoisie, sa délicatesse sans mièvrerie ni affectation qui faisaient de lui un être à part, dans tous les sens de ce mot. Je me souviens de lui comme du doux savant soixante-huitard à la queue de cheval et au calme olympien. Il était si apprécié et aimé (à la Pushan, en douceur, à une certaine distance). Ceux qui l’ont côtoyé et ceux qui l’ont aimé ne sont pas près de l’oublier.”

Ashram teacher Nancy came to know him first at lunchtimes in the Ashram Dining Room in the company of his longtime good friend Tanmaya-da. She recalls : “He was kind enough to teach me as much French as I could manage. Once he helped me out with a 1st December play. He was a wonderful person.”

With his impeccable bilingualism, Pushan made major contributions as a translator, starting with articles for *Le Courrier de l’Inde*. From June 1976 he worked as part of a team for the English translations of the French works of the Mother for the Centenary Edition of 1978. He wrote to his family that “he loved the work and he loved the team.”

Shraddhavan recalls: “Pushan was instrumental in getting the project approved and launched by the Ashram authorities, when he was able to persuade the Mother’s son, Monsieur André

(Morisset), who was in charge of all Ashram publications in French, that a new edition was essential because of many infelicities and even serious errors in the then-existing translations of the Mother’s writings. Monsieur André obviously appreciated Pushan’s bi-lingual abilities, and made him the head of our small team, then considered to be the best in the way of understanding French and giving it appropriate expression in English.”

“The name Pushan seemed to fit him very well - one of the many Sanskrit names for the Sun, especially the sun’s role as ‘the Fosterer’ which helps things and creatures grow and prosper. Using it reminds me of the many happy hours spent working with him and Mirajyoti Sobel in Norman Dowsett’s office-library, revising the 16 volumes of the Mother’s Collected Works for publication for Her 1978 birth-centenary. That time was certainly one of happy growth and learning for me, as the three of us immersed ourselves in the Mother’s luminous writings volume by volume. So many precious memories remain with me from the years we worked together. I remember that his birthday was on July 14, but am astonished to learn that he was younger than me — he figured in my life as a leader and guide who could easily have been my senior by 10 years or so!”

After 14 years at the Centre of Education, Pushan started working full-time at the Ashram’s Archives & Research Library and he was soon enthusing in his letters to his family about his job. Bob recalls: “Pushan had a natural elegance to him, an inborn sense of aristocracy. While he conveyed an air of refinement and nobility, he was not a snob. And he was a giver. When I asked his help, he gave it. For many volumes we needed English translations of unpublished material in French. A superb translator due to his fine knowledge of French and English, Pushan was our man.”

“His first project was to research the life of the Mother before her arrival in Pondicherry in 1920. He organised our biographical documents on the Mother and made a useful database of her life by typing up information on hundreds of green cards and setting them in order by date. His

fascination with the Mother was lifelong and he became, in the course of time, I believe, the foremost authority on her outer life. I think of him with much fondness and respect. After he left, he remained turned to the Mother, and now that he has departed from our precarious earth, I believe she is comforting him in her arms of love.”

His longlasting contribution was indeed his research about the Mother’s ancestry and he corrected many misunderstandings. Gilles Guigan, head of the AV Archives, wrote this: “When Pushan left the Ashram in the mid-1980s and resettled in Paris, he did an extremely detailed and reliable research over the years on Mother’s extended family and early life, which he posted on the major French genealogy website Geneanet. If one clicks on one name, another page opens! Almost every time I visited my family in Paris in the past 10 years or so, we had lunch together and spoke of our progress (by far, mainly his progress) in our common field of interest (Mother’s extended family and her early life in Paris).”

“Pushan’s research has proved that some of Mother’s biographers were very wrong in some of their statements. I remember meeting Janine (Morisset-Panier, the Mother’s grand-daughter) in Paris, probably in 2005, and we both agreed that a number of facts on Mother’s outer life were wrong. She encouraged me (and Pushan) to correct them. For example, the Mother’s name and her grandmother’s name, Mirra, were, in fact, both written with two “r”s and Her father was a Sephardic Jew and not an Arab Muslim. (Both sides of the family had settled in the then Ottoman Empire — her father’s family in Thrace, the European part of modern Turkey, and her mother’s family in Egypt, an Ottoman Pachalik since 1517).”

“One of the many things Pushan did was to walk through every graveyard in Paris to see if he could find Mother’s family members. In 2011, in the Jewish sections of the Cimetière de Montparnasse, he found the burial vault of the Famille Ismalun-Alfassa which contains plaques of Mother’s parents, of her maternal grandmother, Mirra Ismalun (née Pinto) and of other relatives. Mother’s descendants were not aware of the existence



Pushan at the Ashram

of this vault (and others that Pushan subsequently found). The Mother’s biographers should be grateful to Pushan, and I miss a very interesting friend.”

A scrupulous researcher, Pushan accepted only verified facts that he gleaned, not only from the internet (which were often contradictory) but also from his intensive ferreting through 19th and 20th Century newspaper articles, national and municipal archives (including of the City of New Orleans), immigration records, and French, English, and Italian publications. He was truly what Cristof has called “The Mother’s Sarama” ! Mandakini has kept his correspondence on the subject, and provides here some glimpses into the development of his research :

- ♦ In 2008, Pushan found an 1879 family marriage contract with the names of all



Mother's birthplace — 41, Boulevard Haussmann

there's still quite a bit of work to be done."

- ◆ In 2011, he compiled the dates, places of birth and signatures of three generations of the Mother's family starting with Her grandparents.

- ◆ And in 2015 he began to publish the basic findings of his research online "adding more material, tiny detail by tiny detail, every day."

Janine, Pushan's close friend, approved of his findings. Her daughter Fabienne, wrote this : "She said that the problem was that the Mother's father was born in what was then the Ottoman Empire. He was from Turkey but it wasn't called Turkey then,

the witnesses and also located the apartment building at 41 Boulevard Haussmann where the Mother was born, despite the change of the street's original name and physical configuration.

- ◆ In 2009 he completed the Pinto family tree for which he found links by birth or marriage to noted statesmen, innovators, and respected government officials. He wrote to Mandakini: "ces Pinto n'en finissent pas de m'étonner.... Janine was quite surprised to find out about all those Pintos, many of whom she knew nothing about.... But I still haven't found Adam and Eve's birth certificates! More seriously,

and he wasn't Muslim. Janine certainly wanted to correct this." When the English version of Pournaprema's book, "Une Drôle de Petite Fille" came out, Janine asked the Ashram to correct the misinformation and a sticker was glued on every book with the correction. Further clarity was provided in Sunayana Panda's article which appeared in *The Golden Chain* issue of February 2013. Sunayana writes "I am very grateful to Pushan for all the information I received from him about the Mother's life which I included in my articles."

Through his research, Pushan also identified the Mother's Cosmic Circle friends and contacts, in particular the descendents of Louis Thémanslys, and went to Jerusalem where he met them





◀ ▲ The tomb Ismalun-Alfassa at the Cimetière Montparnasse.

And so closes this affectionate memorial. As many interviewed friends concur “His warm friendship and the happy moments spent with him, cannot be put into

an article.” For Mandakini, he lived true to the name he liked to use “Pushan, son of Surya”. And as Cristof wrote: “Après tout, son départ ne fut qu’une virgule ou tout au plus un point-virgule dans la longue histoire qui nous réunit tous.” ❧

Link to Pushan’s research: <https://gw.geneanet.org/anupadin?lang=en&n=alfassa&p=mirra>

and the other perpetuators of the Cosmic Circle tradition.

Pushan had a soft spot for his nieces, physician Sophie, and European Commission spokesperson of several years, Natasha, who wrote “I see Francis as an inspirational man whose triumphs and tribulations have given me an ability to be open-minded, and have opened my eyes to the world outside Europe. I am forever grateful to him for all that he has taught me.” In her career, Natasha has been living the large approach that Pushan passed on to her. Not so long ago, Pushan wrote of the pleasure of being introduced to Natasha’s boss, then longtime European Commission President, Jean-Claude Juncker, who said to him “So you’re THE UNCLE!”



Gazing at a painting of Mathilde Alfassa (the Mother’s mother).

# Hommage à un pèlerin d'Orient dans l'âme

Jyoti Garin '84

Le Centre international d'éducation Sri Aurobindo de l'Ashram à Pondichéry est fondé sur un socle et des valeurs solides, grâce à l'incalculable dévotion de ses deux fondateurs, Mère qui en fut l'artisan et Sri Aurobindo, le maître à penser. Mais la qualité de l'enseignement qui y est prodigué tient bien sûr à la compétence, au dévouement et à la recherche perpétuelle d'amélioration de ses enseignants.

## L'HOMME, LE PÉDAGOGUE

Pushan était incontestablement un des piliers de l'école. Sa double origine (britannique et française) et sa soif de culture l'ont mis en route après la vaste révolte spontanée de 1968 en quête d'une source pure où se rassasier, l'Inde se présentant probablement comme une évidence à cette époque.

Comme professeur, Pushan s'imposait à tous ses étudiants par sa vaste culture, son sens de l'histoire et ses méthodes de travail ; avec lui nous avons découvert la langue française et tous ceux qui suivirent ses cours admirèrent encore son aisance à débrouiller les questions obscures, car il choisissait toujours de traiter les aspects les plus difficiles, ceux qu'il nous aurait été impossible de travailler avec nos seules forces, nos seules connaissances. Nous savions que l'exigence qu'il nous demandait, il se l'appliquait encore plus à lui-même.

Tel le soleil nourricier, Pushan nous a nourri aux lettres françaises. Il avait aussi la fraîcheur de la lune dans un pays chaud. Son enseignement a incontestablement généré ma détermination à visiter la France et, hasard des rencontres oblige, m'y installer.

Que cette tribune soit aussi l'occasion pour moi de rendre hommage aux autres professeurs et entraîneurs sportifs et artistes remarquables de l'Ashram qui nous ont aidés à grandir. Je trouvais en ces personnes beaucoup plus que des professeurs ou coaches sportifs, mais de véritables amis, voire des membres de la famille (ou de la grande famille, *kutumbakam*), qui se penchaient sur nos interrogations d'adolescents ou de jeunes adultes avec un sens inégalé de l'humain :

अयं निजो परोवेति गणना लघुचेतसाम् ।  
उदारचरितानाम् तु वसुधैव कुटुम्बकम् ॥

*ayaṃ nijāḥ paro veti gaṇanā laghucetasām ।  
udāracaritānām tu vasudhaiva kuṭumbakam ॥*

[Hitopadeśa]

« Cela est mien, cela est tien », voilà le calcul de ceux qui ont l'esprit mesquin,  
Mais pour les cœurs généreux, la terre entière est leur maison.

Pushan fut successivement traducteur et interprète (anglais-français ; français-anglais), puis professeur de langues avant de se consacrer corps et âme à ce projet de généalogie qui sera son principal testament, offert généreusement au monde entier, grâce au réseau désormais planétaire.

Bien que son travail de « chercheur » l'occupât vingt-quatre heures sur vingt-quatre, on arrivait à se voir de temps en temps à Paris.

À chacune de nos retrouvailles, nous abordions les sujets les plus divers, tels de foisonnantes plantes d'un jardin luxuriant : les langues et la pédagogie, les avancements de la neuroscience qui contribueraient à façonner des clés pour

mieux appréhender la conscience, l'histoire, nos dernières écoutes en musique classique indienne, mais aussi les découvertes scientifiques, la philosophie et l'anthropologie. Son projet de généalogie avait sa place coutumière dans nos échanges à bâtons rompus.

Mais derrière ce chercheur, se cachait un homme discret. Si ces dernières années, il était passionné par ses recherches sur la généalogie de Mère, il a toujours été épris d'une grande curiosité à l'égard du monde et de ses richesses vivantes. Ses autres centres d'intérêt allaient de la lecture bien sûr, à l'écoute de la musique classique indienne, la marche en nature pour se ressourcer et l'insondable richesse mise à notre disposition par Internet...

## SUR LES TRACES DE MÈRE...

Travailler sur les membres de la famille de Mère l'amena naturellement à approfondir la question du contexte historique sur lequel il travaillait de manière transversale.

Sa tâche de fond consistait à explorer les archives administratives afin de créer une sorte d'inventaire de documents d'état civil, personne par personne, en les prenant systématiquement, par ordre alphabétique — mais étant donné l'incroyable richesse des bibliothèques diverses qu'il a fréquentées et le manque de recherches sur la question, son inventaire se rapproche d'un catalogue raisonné — et souvent le premier jamais réalisé sur ces personnes, dont il faut également rechercher les (trop rares) traces qu'ils ont laissées dans les archives — essentiellement des actes notariés — afin d'écrire leur biographie et replacer leurs vies dans le contexte de l'époque. Mais le

temps lui a manqué pour finir de contextualiser ces données... *Avis aux amateurs !*

Ce projet portant sur celui de la famille de



Mère (Mirra Alfassa) initiait un parcours original qu'il cultiva à travers ses recherches sur le terrain : lieux, rencontres insolites sans oublier le détour par les temples que sont les bibliothèques (tant générales que spécialisées) tout en assurant l'écriture des carnets à l'ancienne, c'est-à-dire, à la main avec son écriture fine et cryptique mais avec un code précis à la manière des aphorismes (*sutra*) pour aller vite. Pas d'assistant pour déchiffrer son grimoire des feuilles du jour. Il œuvrait en solitaire, discret, grand travailleur tenace et libre.

Combien de fois avons-nous arpenté les allées des deux grands cimetières de Paris (Montparnasse et le Père Lachaise), dont il connaissait chaque recoin, les tombes ou mausolées les plus marquants, nous recueillant sur celles des ascendants de Mère qui y sont inhumés.

Pas d'honneurs, pas de prix ni de médaille. Tel *L'Homme qui plantait des arbres* (récit de Jean Giono, 1953), il avançait :

*« Pour que le caractère d'un être humain dévoile des qualités vraiment exceptionnelles, il faut avoir la bonne fortune de pouvoir observer son action pendant de longues années. Si cette action est dépouillée de tout égoïsme, si l'idée qui la dirige est d'une générosité sans exemple, s'il est absolument certain qu'elle n'a cherché de récompense nulle part et qu'au surplus elle ait laissé sur le monde des marques visibles, on est alors, sans risque d'erreurs, devant un caractère inoubliable. »*

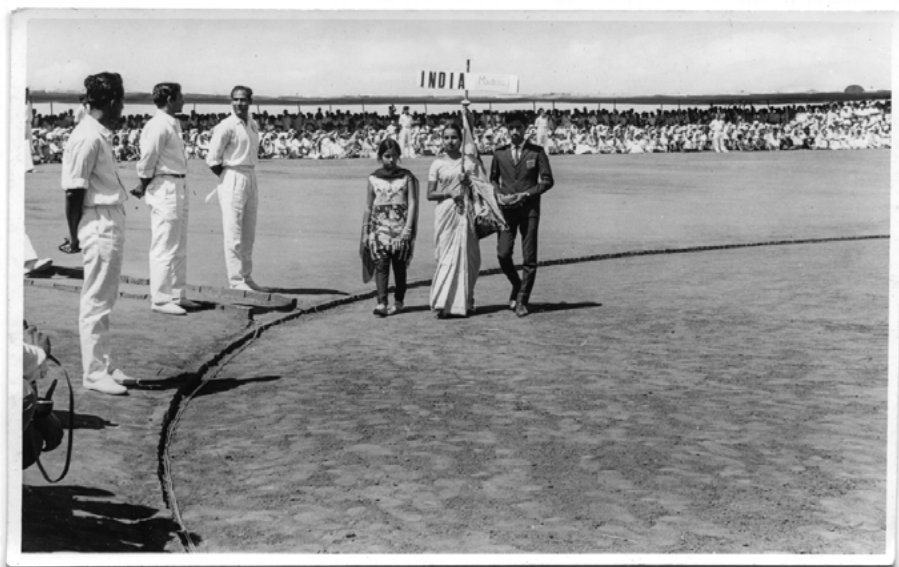
Merci à toi, Pushan, pour ton inestimable apport à tant d'élèves, à ton legs, et repose en paix ! ☸





## ACRES FOR AUROVILLE Land Campaign

**A united action to consolidate & secure Auroville's designated material base!**



We were all much younger when the momentous event of the inauguration of Auroville took place. Many of us were deeply marked by the event, and participated right from the start. And over the 52 years of its existence, so many of us have also helped Auroville grow, supporting what the Mother willed and envisioned for the City of Dawn.

India, as the world's great source of spiritual wisdom, is the birthplace of Sri Aurobindo, and the home of his Ashram. Naturally, it is also the host for Auroville, founded as the Mother's "next seeking" of the Ashram. This City of Dawn is meant to be "a collective experiment for the progress of humanity" — a "first step" for developing the "organised and harmonious diversity" for world evolution that Sri Aurobindo said was both needed and inevitable. Today, Auroville is internationally recognized as a showcase incarnating the multiple oneness of the Human Family, and as a site of dynamic efforts to support humanity's deep urge for unity and peace.

**"All that is needed is a little soil to let the plant grow"**<sup>1</sup> said the Mother — a needed material base for anchoring this new creation in Matter. And so a land base on Earth for the Dream was designated by India. Consolidating this "Master Plan" area, and protecting the Matrimandir, is an essential imperative for a solid, forceful whole. But today, Auroville's physical base is still incomplete. We invite you to join the "Acres for Auroville" united action to purchase the still-needed land that the Mother envisioned and wished.

**"We are here to open the way of the Future to children who belong to the Future"**<sup>2</sup>

**As children of the Mother, we have a role in nurturing and helping to fulfill Her Dream!**

Please specify your donations '**ACRES FOR AUROVILLE**': via check/ bank transfers to **Auroville Unity Fund**; via your country's **AVI center** [www.auroville-international.org](http://www.auroville-international.org) or online via [www.auroville.com/donations/](http://www.auroville.com/donations/)

**Donations & Deductibility info:** <https://land.auroville.org/a4adonations> Our website: [www.land.auroville.org](http://www.land.auroville.org)

**Acres for Auroville is a collaboration of Auroville International & Lands for Auroville Unified**

Quotes: 1: CWM Vol. XIII p.281; 2: from the Mother's message to SAICE on 6 September 1961, CWM XII p. 111.

*The ultimate victory of the Divine is certain  
beyond all doubt.*

*- The Mother*



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*Endurance and plasticity, cheerfulness and fearlessness  
are the qualities specially needed for the examinations of  
physical nature.*

**The Mother**

(CWM, 14: 43)

Rs. 18/-