

The Golden Chain

Alumni Journal of Sri Aurobindo International Centre of Education



संस्कृताह्वानम् The Call of Sanskrit



OM Sat Sat gyoter Aravinda
ॐ तत् सत् ज्योतिरश्विन्द

OM Satyam ^{jnānam} gyoter Aravinda
ॐ सत्यं ^{ज्ञानं} ज्योतिरश्विन्द

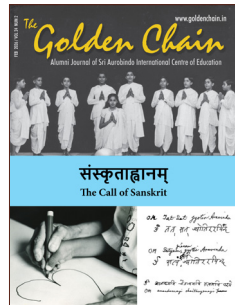
ॐ आनन्दमयि चैतन्यमयि सत्यमयि परमे
OM anandamayi chaitanyemayi param

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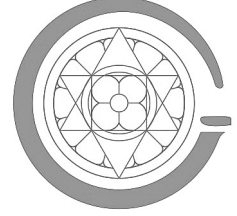


On the Cover:

Sanskrit programme at SAICE; Kindergarten children being taught to write "Om"; Sri Aurobindo's handwriting in Devanagari script.

On the Back Cover:
Class of 2025.

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EDITORIAL

Divyaprakash Pal '99 (Dibbo)

The vital question is how we are to learn and make use of Sanskrit and the indigenous languages so as to get to the heart and intimate sense of our own culture and establish a vivid continuity between the still living power of our past and the yet uncreated power of our future.

Sri Aurobindo, *A Preface on National Education*

My first Sanskrit teacher was Bharat Arya. It was his first year as a teacher and, I believe, also his last at the Kindergarten! The one and only Arya Vishnu came to the rescue. He taught with his entire body and soul and made us literally dance to the resonant cadences of the Shiva Tandava Stotram. The pulsating rhythm of the *damaru*—“*damad damad damad damad...*”—got our hearts thumping, revealing Sanskrit not merely as text but as mesmerizing inner vibration.

In Nouveau Dortoir, Vrajarya (Brajkishore Singh '61) woke us up every morning at the *Brahmamuhurta* to the powerful strains of Sri Aurobindo's *Durga Stotra*. Though we did not realise it then, it was the perfect way to start the day. At School, while I tried to fathom Sanskrit grammar, tenses, and vocabulary, my teacher described me in the Progress Report as “unfathomable.” It was the first time I had heard this term and I wonder if it was meant as a compliment! Beyond grammar and syntax, Sanskrit at the School nurtured expression and imagination. Chinmayee Arya and Archana Arya encouraged us to write creatively for the *Balashvah* patrika, cultivating confidence in thought and language. And then there was Radhika Arya, who made us fall in love with the language and his many stories, making Sanskrit feel intimate rather than intimidating.

I continued with Sanskrit in Knowledge with Usha Arya. We studied the *Bhagavad Gita*. The classes were solemn, almost reverential. Over those three years, the language slowly revealed its capacity to refine perception and deepen attention. Sanskrit ceased to be merely academic;

it became a means of inner education.

Until October 1967, Sanskrit remained an optional subject at the School. A decisive shift occurred on November 11, 1967, when the Mother said: “Every child born in India should know it, just as every child born in France has to know French.” As a result SAICE has accorded Sanskrit a central place in its educational vision. The Mother envisioned it as an instrument for national unity, affirming that when India goes back to her soul, Sanskrit will naturally reclaim its place. Sri Aurobindo regarded it as a pathway to connect to the divinity within, and this aspiration finds perfect expression in his rendering of the *Gayatri Mantra*. It is both an invocation and a reminder, urging us toward self-perfection.

A few years ago, it was decided that *The Golden Chain* should dedicate a full issue to Sanskrit. Our colleague Giridhar Murthy ('79), who had just completed a one-year Diploma in Advanced Functional Sanskrit offered by the National Sanskrit University, Tirupati (NSUT), readily offered to guide this effort. His enthusiasm to pick up his Sanskrit education from where he had left it at SAICE at the age of 60+ after a long career in business was indeed encouraging. “Covid was a godsend for me in this respect,” he reflects. “To be able to study at an institution of the stature of NSUT and learn from some of the finest scholars in the field was a real privilege. Clearly, the seeds for this had been sown at SAICE.” This issue, therefore, explores the unique place Sanskrit occupies in our curriculum and its enduring influence on the lives of some of our alumni.

“To study the past,” says Confucius, “is to divine the future.” Sanskrit today continues to evolve through interdisciplinary fields such as computational studies, health and well-being, and knowledge traditions. It is time we engage wholeheartedly in this effort and continue the great history of the School in bringing Sanskrit to the children—not as a relic of the past, but as a living, luminous force. Only then can the past become a Golden Chain to the future. ❧

SANSKRIT AT THE SRI AUROBINDO INTERNATIONAL CENTRE OF EDUCATION

Giridhar Murthy '79 traces the evolution of Sanskrit at SAICE

BEGINNINGS—BEFORE 1968

Sanskrit was an optional subject at the School till October 1967. We know that the Mother personally encouraged some children to learn Sanskrit. Kittu-da ('57) narrates how the Mother encouraged him to study Sanskrit:

When I was 11 or 12, the Mother told me during Vegetable Darshan, "You are intelligent, you can pick up languages, you must learn Sanskrit." Kapali Sastry was the only available teacher for Sanskrit then. I began learning the language with him. However I did not enjoy his classes as he had a slightly high-pitched voice. I told the Mother, "I do not wish to learn Sanskrit with him." The Mother replied, "*Tu es intelligent, tu dois continuer.*" (You are intelligent, you must continue). So I kept at it. However I still did not enjoy the classes.

A few days later again during Vegetable Darshan, the Mother remarked, "You seem to be a little unhappy." I said, "Mother, I still do not enjoy Kapali Sastry's classes." The Mother said, "I do not force anybody to do anything but you will regret your decision later in life." True, I did regret my decision in my 30s and started afresh, seriously, with Indu-da.

On the other hand, some children took up the study of Sanskrit of their own volition. Vrajarya (Brajkishore '61) who joined the School in 1949 recalls his contact with Sanskrit:

I studied Sanskrit from the time that I came to the Ashram at the age of 12. Several of us—Ira ('62), Smriti ('61), Ravindra (Patil), myself and some others—had opted for it because we considered it to be an important language.

Kapali Sastry was our first teacher. However he became indisposed after a

couple of months and his health did not allow him to continue with the classes. Kapali Sastry's student, Kunjabihari-da, replaced him. After Kunjabihari-da stopped taking classes, Prabhakar-da taught us for many years. Prabhakar-da also headed the Sanskrit Section of the School during this period.

We studied Sanskrit for only one period per week. Compare this with six periods each of English and French (at some point of time this was modified to five periods of English and six periods of French). Therefore our study of Sanskrit was relatively minimal.

At the time, the focus was entirely on texts. No attempt was made either by the teacher or the student to speak in Sanskrit. Teachers and students were free to speak in the languages that they were comfortable with.

Adults too could join the classes as auditors. I remember Debkumar (Bhattacharya) and Suniti (Pantulu) attending our classes in this way; the auditors used to sit behind us but did not participate in the class nor did they have to do any homework.

In the Higher Course, we were free to choose the number of periods that we wished to study the language. I and several others took up Sanskrit more intensively studying it for 3–4 periods per week. Pujalal-ji was one of the teachers in Higher Course. We studied Kalidasa's *Meghadutam* with him.

THE TURNING POINT

November 11, 1967, was a momentous day for Sanskrit at the School. Kittu-da recalls this day:

Tanmay-da, Arati-di ('56) and I were

meeting the Mother to discuss *En Avant* (Fixed classes) and *Vers la Perfection* (Free Progress classes) on which the Mother was concentrating at the time. The Mother asked us, “And so how many languages will there be for those hundred and fifty students?” I replied, “In principle, three: English, French, and their mother tongue.” The Mother remarked, “Ah! But that makes a lot! There is Bengali, Gujarati, Hindi, and then Tamil, Telugu.” I added, “Sanskrit!” Then the Mother explained:

“That is not... Everyone should learn that. Especially everyone who works here should learn that... not the Sanskrit of the scholars... all, all of them, wherever they may have been born.”

We answered: “In principle, Mother, that is what we are thinking of—next year, to make all the children do Sanskrit, plus their mother tongue.”

The Mother responded: “Yes. *Not Sanskrit* from the point of view of scholarship, but Sanskrit, a Sanskrit—how to put it?—that opens the door to all the languages of India. I think that is indispensable. The ideal would be, in a few years, to have a rejuvenated Sanskrit as the representative language of India, that is, a Sanskrit spoken in such a way that—Sanskrit is behind all the languages of India and it should be that. This was Sri Aurobindo’s idea, when we spoke about it.



A Sanskrit play by the students at the School courtyard, August 1980

Because now English is the language of the whole country, but that is abnormal. It is very helpful for relations with the rest of the world, but just as each country has its own language, there should... And so here, as soon as one begins to want a national language, everyone starts quarrelling. Each one wants it to be his own, and that is foolish. But no one could object to Sanskrit. It is a more ancient language than the others and it contains the sounds, the root-sounds of many words.

This is something I studied with Sri Aurobindo and it is obviously very interesting. Some of these roots can even be found in all the languages of the world—sounds, root-sounds which are found in all those languages. Well, this, this thing, this is what ought to be learnt and this is what the national language should be. Every child born in India should know it, just as every child born in France has to know French. He does not speak properly, he does not know it thoroughly, but he has to know French a little; and in all the countries of the world it is the same thing. He has to know the national language. And then, when he learns, he learns as many languages as he likes. At the moment, we are still embroiled in quarrels, and this is a very bad atmosphere in which to build anything. But I hope that a day will come when it will be possible.



A Sanskrit play “Vabrubahana” at the Ashram Theatre, 25 October 1977

SRI AUROBINDO AND THE MOTHER ON SANSKRIT

Sri Aurobindo accorded great importance to Sanskrit as is evidenced by his pronouncements on the language which ranges from its roots and unique characteristics to its efflorescence to its preservation for posterity:

The Sanskrit language is the devabhasa or original language spoken by men in Uttara Meru at the beginning of the Manwantara; but in its purity it is not the Sanskrit of the Dwapara or the Kali, it is the language of the Satyayuga based on the true and perfect relation of vak and artha. Every one of its vowels and consonants has a particular and inalienable force which exists by the nature of things and not by development or human choice; these are the fundamental sounds which lie at the basis of the Tantric bijamantras and constitute the efficacy of the mantra itself [...]

This language increasingly corrupted in sense and sound becomes the later Sanskrit of the Treta, Dwapara and Kali Yuga, being sometimes partly purified and again corrupted and again partly purified so that it never loses all apparent relation to its original form and structure. Every other language, however remote, is a corruption formed by detrition

and perversion of the original language into a Prakrit or the Prakrit of a Prakrit and so on to increasing stages of impurity. The superior purity of the Indian language is the reason of its being called the Sanskrit and not given any local name, its basis being universal and eternal; and it is always a rediscovery of the Sanskrit tongue as the primary language that prepares first for a true understanding of human language and, secondly, for a fresh purification of Sanskrit itself.

CWSA Vol 16: 475-76

Mind is not the last term of evolution [...]

But what then constitutes this higher or highest existence to which our evolution is tending? In order to answer the question, we have to deal with a class of supreme experiences, a class of unusual conceptions which it is difficult to represent accurately in any other language than the ancient Sanskrit tongue in which alone they have been to some extent systematised. The only approximate terms in the English language have other associations and their use may lead to many and even serious inaccuracies.

CWSA Vol 23: 15-16

continued on facing page...

So I would like to have a simple Sanskrit taught here, as simple as possible, but not 'simplified'—simple by going back to its origin... all these sounds, the sounds that are the roots of the words which were formed afterwards. I don't know whether you have anyone here who could do that. In fact, I don't know whether there is anyone in India who could do it. Sri Aurobindo knew. But someone who knows Sanskrit can.... I don't know.

Who do you have to teach Sanskrit? V [Jagannath Vedalankar]?

...

Once I spoke to V. He told me that he was preparing a simplified grammar—I don't know what he has done—for a language that could be universal throughout the country. I don't know.

Perhaps, after all, V is the best."

(*On Education*, CWM Vol. 12, pp. 413-5)

RADICAL CHANGES IN TEACHING SANSKRIT AND THE PIONEERING TEACHERS

The above message of the Mother led to significant changes in the manner in which Sanskrit was taught at the School. Jagannath-arya

...continued from previous page

The ancient and classical creations of the Sanskrit tongue both in quality and in body and abundance of excellence, in their potent originality and force and beauty, in their substance and art and structure, in grandeur and justice and charm of speech and in the height and width of the reach of their spirit stand very evidently in the front rank among the world's great literatures. The language itself, as has been universally recognised by those competent to form a judgment, is one of the most magnificent, the most perfect and wonderfully sufficient literary instruments developed by the human mind, at once majestic and sweet and flexible, strong and clearly-formed and full and vibrant and subtle, and its quality and character would be of itself a sufficient evidence of the character and quality of the race whose mind it expressed and the culture of which it was the reflecting medium.

CWSA Vol 20: 314-15

Therefore it is of the utmost value to a nation, a human group-soul, to preserve its language and to make of it a strong and living cultural instrument. A nation, race or people

which loses its language, cannot live its whole life or its real life.

CWSA Vol 25: 515-16

Sanskrit ought still to have a future as a language of the learned and it will not be a good day for India when the ancient tongue ceases entirely to be written or spoken.

CWSA Vol 1: 612-13

The Mother echoes Sri Aurobindo's thoughts on the language and emphasises its propagation in India:

The Sanskrit ought to be the national language of India. Blessings.

19.4.1971, CWM Vol 12: 224

A disciple of our Ashram was wrongly informed that Sri Aurobindo favoured Hindi as the national language of India; therefore he asked The Mother on what basis She had written the above. The Mother answered:

I said Sanskrit because Sri Aurobindo had told me so. Blessings.

The Mother, 17: 327

Hindi is good only for those who belong to a Hindi speaking province. Sanskrit is good for all Indians.

CWM Vol 17: 332

has documented the changes as follows:

With The Mother's message of November 11, 1967, a great change took place in the teaching of Sanskrit at the Ashram School. Sanskrit was introduced to all the students. Previously, it was taught as an optional subject through the medium of another language as is done in other schools. But after The Mother's message, the Sanskrit teachers here tried to teach it through the Sanskrit medium. They began to speak among themselves and to the students in Sanskrit even outside the school so that they might speak it spontaneously. They prepared interesting games, stories with illustrations and also

various exercise booklets. As a result, children soon began to speak and shout and play, using Sanskrit as they would use French or English. From time to time playlets were staged in Sanskrit to make it "a truly living language".

(*The Mother and Sri Aurobindo on Sanskrit*, pp. 15-16, Edition: June 1987)

In December 1967, Sanskrit was introduced at all levels—Kindergarten, Avenir, Progrès and EAVP. Therefore children in Kindergarten and Avenir who were till then learning only French started learning Sanskrit as well. In addition to Jagannath-arya, the teachers who pioneered the teaching of Sanskrit at the School at this time

were, among others, Usha Desai, Vishnulalit (Aryavishnu), Urmila R. Patel (Urmila-ben), Ratna Chakraborty, Chandrashekhar (Shekhar-da), Rupa, Sarala, Mira Gupta, and Vrajarya. Several of them were formally trained in Sanskrit before coming to the Ashram whereas others were home-grown/aspiring scholars.

Vrajarya recalls his personal journey of teaching Sanskrit and the significant role that Jagannath-arya played in helping him and other teachers to improve their speaking skills during this period:

I started teaching Sanskrit at the School in 1968. The Mother's message of November 11, 1967, became a rallying call for me and all those with a devotion for Sanskrit.

Jagannath-arya made himself available through the day to teachers who wished to practise speaking in Sanskrit. In order to make it easier for him to do this, he moved from the Press where he worked and lived, to an accommodation near the School. We formed small groups of up to 4 persons and started practising speaking in Sanskrit with him and amongst ourselves.

We also have an account by Ramu-da ('72) of the shift in pedagogical approach post the Mother's message:

During my final year at School—December 1967 to October 1968—Sanskrit became mandatory for everyone. Jagannath-arya took our class and adopted a very informal method of teaching. He would converse only in Sanskrit. Language skills were the emphasis rather than grammar. We learnt first through conversation, then moved on to grammar. By the end of the year some of us had learnt enough to be able to narrate stories in Sanskrit.

A few teachers put in all their energies to manifest the Mother's vision for Sanskrit at the School, and to some extent in the Ashram,

following slightly different approaches.

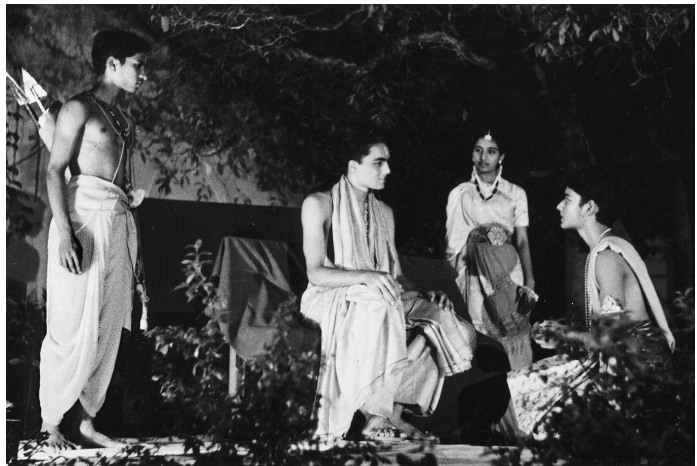
Tarika Dolia ('77) remembers the early 1970s studying Sanskrit with Usha-arya (Desai):

Usha-arya was a fantastic teacher and I will be eternally grateful to her for the Rasa of Sanskrit that she evoked in us. We read Kavi Kalidasa's *Abhijnanashakuntalam*, *Ramayana*, and the *Bhagavad Gita* with her. She used to highlight the poetic aspects and also taught us grammar in such a way that we were eager to learn more.

For Aryavishnu, Sanskrit became a way of life. He started teaching Sanskrit at all levels. He composed songs and invented games to facilitate children's absorption of the language. He also started conversing with all and sundry in Sanskrit and encouraged them to reciprocate. A teacher in Kindergarten has the following interesting story to narrate:

I met Aryavishnu for the first time in Pujalal-ji's room in the Ashram in 1968. He would speak only in Sanskrit. Although I had a degree in Sanskrit I was not so fluent in the language. It was therefore an extremely pleasant surprise to know that someone is able to speak Sanskrit so fluently. I asked him in Hindi "So you always speak in Sanskrit?" He said "I don't understand. Speak in Sanskrit. I will understand."

In addition to teaching, Shekhar-da would



A Sanskrit play by the students at the School courtyard, 1969

LIST OF SANSKRIT TEACHERS IN ASHRAM SCHOOL

Early period

01. Kapali Shastri Ji
02. Pujalal Ji
03. Jagannath Arya
04. Indu Da
05. Kunjabihari Ji
06. Prabhakar Da
07. Krishna Da
08. Krishnakumari Ji

After '67

09. Usha Arya
10. Arya Vishnulalit
11. Urmila Di
12. Chandrashekhar Arya
13. Ratna Di (Chakrabarty)
14. Chinmayee Arya
15. Rupa Di
16. Sarala Ben
17. Mira Di
18. Brajkishore Da
19. Asha Arya
20. Jayashree Ben
21. Jaishree Ben
22. Archana Arya

23. Radhika Arya
24. Bharat Arya
25. Mani Arya
26. Narendra Arya
27. Ritu Arya
28. Geeta Di
29. Madhusudan Arya
30. Ratna Di (Paul)
31. Lavanya Di
32. Vandana Arya
33. Manju Arya
34. Shraddha Arya
35. Shilpa Di
36. Veena Di
37. Sumitra Di
38. Vasundhara Ben
39. Sumedha Ben
40. Nivedita Di
41. Madhulita Di
42. Madhumita Di
43. Prabha Di
44. Arjita
45. Kruti
46. Aneesh

} Helpers

translate plays, or write his own, and stage these on a large scale. Archana Maheswari recalls:

Large scale dramas—‘Bharata Milanam’, ‘Chakri’, etc.—were staged by Shekhar-da. There was so much zeal for Sanskrit in those days that inmates of the Ashram were also interested to participate.

Aravinda Maheswari ('71) provides the following account of his sister's, Chinmayee-arya's, experience of teaching Sanskrit at the School:

When this news [about Chinmayee-arya being awarded the Rajya Sahityik Puraskar by the Ministry of Education of U.P.] was given to Nolini-da, he was very pleased and asked her to work for the Mother with all her capacities. That was the time when she started preparing Sanskrit story-books for children, hand-

written and illustrated with drawings done by many others, aimed at making Sanskrit simple and interesting for children. She cyclostyled them at Vishwanath-da's office for use in the School. These booklets are among many materials prepared by her, which are still being used in the School.

Asha-arya has the following interesting story to narrate of how she started to teach Sanskrit at the School:

In 1960, I left home against my family's wishes to move to Pondicherry since I had this dream from my childhood that I wished to be in a place where there is always Light. Ten years later, that is in 1970, The Mother said: “She will teach at the School.” Kireet-bhai was the Registrar at the time. He told me: “Write down the subjects that you will be able to teach.”

I had done my Masters in Political Science, History and Economics. Therefore I listed these subjects first. My ancestors are from Rajasthan who settled in Bengal. I was born and brought up in Bengal. Therefore my primary language was Bengali. Further there was significant influence of Sanskrit at home. My paternal grandmother would chant the *Bhagavad Gita* and read the *Ramayana*, *Bhagvata Purana*, etc. I was also schooled in Sanskrit at home by a former teacher of the Benares Hindu University (BHU). Therefore I listed Bengali and Sanskrit after the above subjects. The Mother went through the list and selected the last item on it—Sanskrit. This is how I started teaching Sanskrit.

Since I had no formal training in Sanskrit, I started learning from Jagannath-arya. He was a true pandit of Sanskrit. He was impressed with my vocabulary despite the absence of a formal training and asked me how I had mustered such a good vocabulary. “By reading Bankim,” I said. This made him smile. In my view, Bengali is almost entirely Sanskrit.

Subsequently she started teaching Sanskrit in the Higher Course as well.

At a subsequent date, Sanskrit was also introduced in Cours Accélééré in addition to English and French. Initially three periods were assigned to it which subsequently increased to four periods. Shradha Khare ('83) recalls:

Initially it started with three periods. When I became part of the Sanskrit Board, Jharna-di ('63) told me, “They have so many free periods in the afternoon. Why don't you assign them additional periods of Sanskrit?” As a result, we increased the number of periods to four with one period dedicated only for conversation, which Aryavishnu used to take.

In Kindergarten and Avenir, Sanskrit was taught at different times during the day. However in Progrès and EAVP, it was taught during the 6th and 7th periods on Tuesdays and Thursdays, that is at the same time as other Indian languages.

RICH TAPESTRY OF ACTIVITIES IN SANSKRIT

As Jagannath-arya has noted:

They (teachers) prepared interesting games, stories with illustrations and also various exercise booklets. ... From time to time playlets were staged in Sanskrit to make it “a truly living language”.

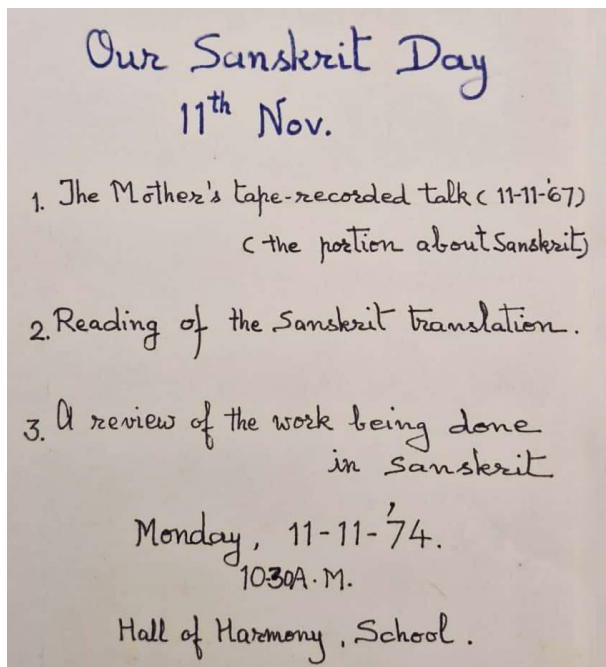
To this, Archana-di adds:

Why should children chant only “Om Namo Bhagavate” in Sanskrit? Why not sing nursery rhymes and other joyful, playful things in the language? Therefore nursery rhymes and songs were added. Later passionate students started performing circus and puppet shows in Sanskrit.

Mani ('89) recalls:

I was interested in magic tricks. When I was in Avenir, it struck me that I could perform magic shows in Sanskrit. After this, all my shows were in Sanskrit. ...

Students of Sanskrit contributed to two journals—*Balashvah* and *Shvah*—based on our age group. We used to write essays, stories, shlokas, etc. Chinmayee-di



Our Sanskrit Day – Poster of Sanskrit Day Program on 11.11.1974

१२-७-७०

मातर्मधुमयि,

वयं सरलसंस्कृतेन एकां हस्तलिखित-

पत्रिकाम् आरब्धुकामाः। तदर्थं लेखाः मुख्यतः

अस्माकं विद्यालयस्य छात्रैः अध्यापकैः एव निबद्धाः

भविष्यन्ति। प्रतिवर्षं पत्रिकायाः द्वौ अङ्कौ प्रकाश-

यिष्येते : अगस्त-१५-पञ्चदशे फरवरी-एकविंशे-२१ च।

यदि त्वम् इच्छसि यद्वयं पत्रिकाम्

इमाम् आरभेमहि तर्हि कृपया देहि अस्मै स्वाऽऽ-

भीष्टं नाम। एतत् अगस्त-१५-७०-दर्शनम् अपु उप-

लक्ष्य वयं तस्याः प्रथमाऽङ्कं तुभ्यम् अर्पयिष्यामहे।

तव चरणकमलयोः प्रणाम-प्रार्थना-

पूर्वकं वयम् इमे ते वत्स्याः —

Letter to the Mother seeking her blessings to start primarily a students' magazine in simple Sanskrit

was responsible for the *Shvah* journal at the time. She corrected our draft and we copied the corrected draft on handmade paper. We also got to draw on it. The journals were an offering for the August Darshan. This activity kept us busy for one and a half months from mid-June to early August which we would thoroughly enjoy.

In fact, the journals had the explicit blessings of the Mother. Aryavishnu had written to Her on July 12, 1970, and had started the letter as follows: "We are interested in starting a handwritten journal in simple Sanskrit. The articles in the journal will be written by our students and teachers." The Mother had approved the publication of the journal and given it the name "Demain". Subsequently a list of suggested names in Sanskrit equivalent to "Demain" were sent to her for her selection.

To mark the red-letter day when the Mother gave her message on Sanskrit, November 11 is celebrated as Sanskrit Day in the School with an event which starts with a recording of the Mother's message being played, followed by a reading of the Sanskrit translation, followed

by presentations in Sanskrit. A Sanskrit Day poster from 1974 indicates that the reading of the Sanskrit Day translation was followed by a review of the work being done in Sanskrit at the School. Unfortunately no record is available of all the Sanskrit Day presentations.

As a result, over time, the School had a rich tapestry of activities in Sanskrit making the language natural and fun for children to learn.

The first wave of teachers inspired some students to take up the study of Sanskrit intensively and to go on to become teachers in their own right, such as Radhikaranjan ('80), Bharat ('81), and Mani ('89). Such was their passion for and erudition in the language that they started teaching it even when they were themselves still studying in Higher Course.

Others, such as Anuradha ('98), Sampada ('02) and Aneesh ('14), were inspired to pursue Sanskrit after completing their studies in the Higher Course here. We track their respective journeys with Sanskrit in separate articles.

PROGRESSIVE CHANGES IN SANSKRIT EDUCATION

The younger generation of teachers also brought about some sweeping changes in the manner that Sanskrit was taught at the School. They questioned as to why Sanskrit should be taught only on Tuesdays and Thursdays, and only in the afternoons. Bharat-arya recalls:

In 1982 when I joined as a full-time teacher, I questioned as to why Sanskrit should be taught only on the designated days and periods. Why not on any day and period similar to English and French. I approached a few teachers with the idea who said, "This is how it has been and it will be difficult to break the pattern." Eventually I approached the Sanskrit Board at the time. They saw my point of view and took up the cause. Sanskrit is now taught at all times during the day.

Shraddha elaborates further:

We have Section collective meetings twice a year where teachers of a Section or a couple of Sections meet to discuss the happenings in their Sections. What is very interesting is that at one point of time, Sanskrit teachers were invited to participate in these meetings along with teachers of what were considered mainstream subjects, such as English, French, Maths, etc. As a result, Sanskrit was decoupled from other Indian languages. This I believe was very important for the position of Sanskrit at the School.

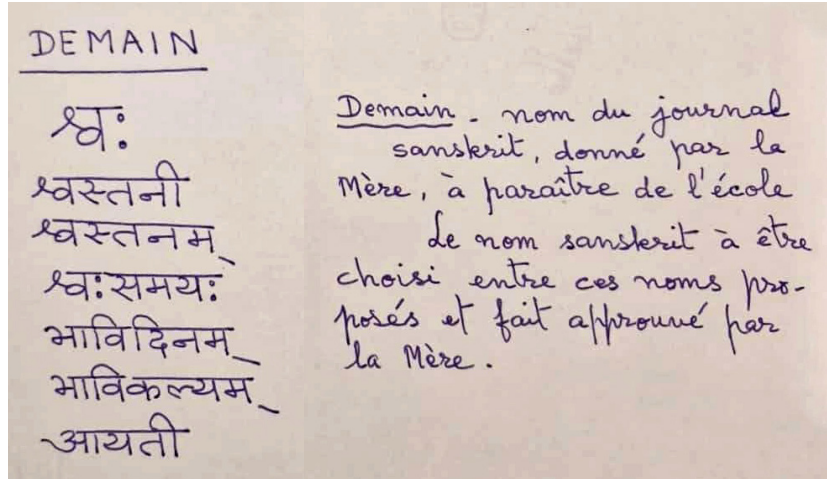
CURRENT CHALLENGES AND INNOVATIONS

At one time, one could hear some children speaking Sanskrit outside the classroom and even outside the walls of the School. However, English seems to have become the lingua franca at the School today sidelining both Sanskrit and French. Consequently, some teachers are experimenting with teaching Sanskrit through children's understanding of English.

The attention span of children is also a challenge these days. Some teachers have introduced Group-work and an element of competition in the classroom to engage children.

AN EXTERNAL PERSPECTIVE

Sampadananda-ji (Mishra), a contemporary leading luminary of Sanskrit, who has developed his own pedagogy to teach Sanskrit from Playgroup (PG) to Postgraduation (PG) which has been adopted by a large number of schools across the country, and who has had the opportunity to observe Sanskrit education at the School at relatively close quarters through interactions with several teachers, strongly



List of suggestions for the title of the students' magazine sent to the Mother for her to select from

endorses it as follows:

When I came to Pondicherry and saw that Sanskrit had been a compulsory part of the education at the School, it filled me with great happiness. I saw that there was an environment for Sanskrit. A large number of teachers spoke Sanskrit naturally. Teachers were also trying hard to encourage children to speak in Sanskrit and live the language.

Further I have not seen such qualitative children's literature—dramas, poems, stories—produced by teachers anywhere in the world. Students have also contributed through the *Shvah* journal. We need to take care to preserve these. I am doing my bit by helping to publish, for example Asha-arya's works, for which she also received the Bala Puraskar award from the Kendra Sahitya Akademi. However a lot more needs to be done.

Teachers of Sanskrit in the initial period put their heart and soul and worked very hard to take care of what the Mother wanted. I wish I was present at the time to participate in this work, in this *yajna*. So this is how the School has a great history of bringing Sanskrit to the children and making it a living language which is missing in schools elsewhere. The current generation of teachers must take inspiration from this. ❀

SRI AUROBINDO'S STUDY OF SANSKRIT

Giridhar Murthy '79 with inputs from Richard Hartz

We are all aware as to how Sri Aurobindo's father, Dr Krishnadhan Ghosh, wanted his children to be brought up: "[he] was determined that his children should receive an entirely European upbringing", and "that they should not be allowed to make the acquaintance of any Indian or undergo any Indian influence. These instructions were carried out to the letter and Aurobindo grew up in entire ignorance of India, her people, her religion and her culture."¹

An important part of culture is obviously language. "He was a brilliant scholar in Greek and Latin, (passed the Tripos in Cambridge in the first division, obtained record marks in Greek and Latin in the examination for the Indian Civil Service). He had learned French from his childhood in Manchester and studied for himself Italian and German sufficiently to read Dante and Goethe in the original tongue."² However, he had not learnt any Indian language other than a slight exposure to Sanskrit and his mother-tongue, Bengali, near the end of his stay in England.

Ambulal Balkrishna Purani, a prominent disciple and biographer of Sri Aurobindo, has recorded the following interesting memoir about Sri Aurobindo's study of Bengali: "Aurobindo began the study of Bengali while he was at Cambridge. The teacher for Bengali then was a certain Mr. Towers. Sri Aurobindo said that he was called 'Pandit Towers'. His knowledge of Bengali was limited to the works of Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar and other early writers of Sanskritised prose. He knew the Bodhodaya and other elementary works. Once Aurobindo took a passage of Bankim Chandra to him. After reading it carefully 'Pandit Towers' turned round and said, 'But this is not Bengali!'"³

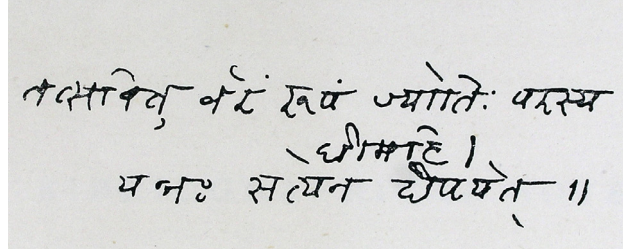
With the above backdrop, let us turn our focus to Sri Aurobindo's study of Sanskrit.

We are aware of his copious translations and commentaries on the Vedas, Upanishads and *Bhagavad Gita*. Possibly less well-known are his translations and commentaries on our Epic literature — the *Ramayana*, *Mahabharata* and Puranas — and Classical Sanskrit Literature — Kalidasa, Bhartrihari and other poets, and his own writings in Sanskrit. How did he manage to achieve so much not having learnt the language till the age of 21! Sri Aurobindo provides several insights:

"He did not learn Sanskrit through Bengali, but direct in Sanskrit itself or through English."⁴

"I don't think many people would consent to make a principle of reading each book 3 or 4 times in the way you advocate, for very few have the scholarly mind — but two or three books should be so read — I learnt Sanskrit by reading the Naladamayanti episode in the Mahabharat like that with minute care several times."⁵

"A teacher was engaged for Bengali, a young



Sri Aurobindo's Gayatri Mantra in his own handwriting

Bengali litterateur — none for Sanskrit."⁶

"Sri Aurobindo passed thirteen years, from 1893 to 1906, in the Baroda Service, first in the Revenue Department and in secretariat work for the Maharaja, afterwards as Professor of English and, finally, Vice-Principal in the Baroda College. These were years of self-culture, of literary activity — for much of the poetry afterwards published from Pondicherry was written at this time —

In his Autobiographical Notes, Sri Aurobindo frequently refers to himself in the third person.

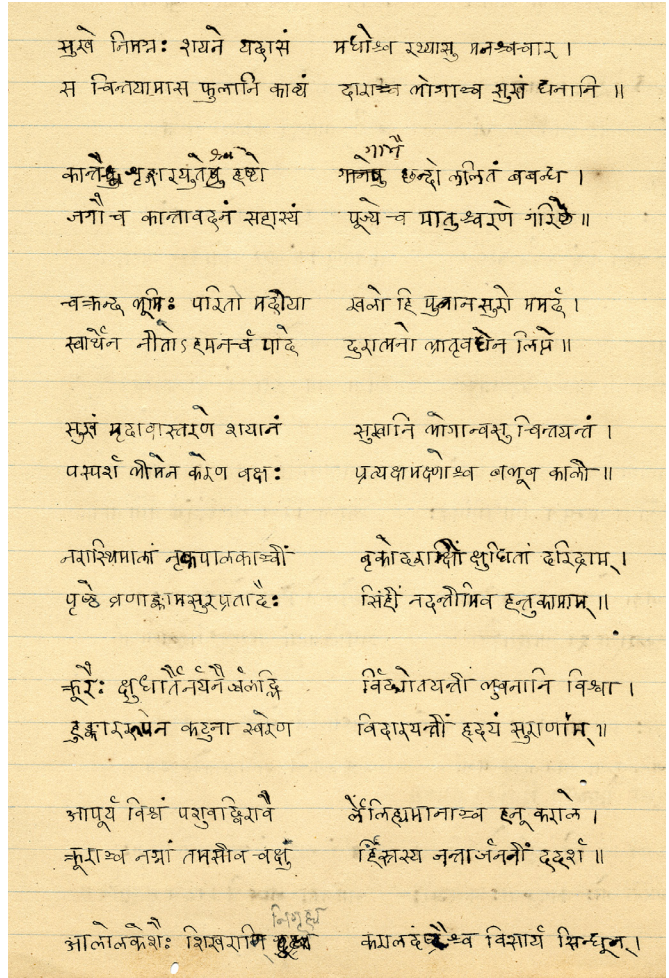
and of preparation for his future work. In England he had received, according to his father's express instructions, an entirely occidental education without any contact with the culture of India and the East. At Baroda he made up the deficiency, learned Sanskrit and several modern Indian languages, assimilated the spirit of Indian civilisation and its forms past and present.”⁷

A. B. Purani adds: “He [K G Deshpande] says that Sri Aurobindo learnt Sanskrit from one Bhasker Shastri Joshi. In fact Sri Aurobindo began Sanskrit in England and continued his studies at Baroda where he read the Mahabharata, the Ramayana, works of Kalidasa and Bhavabhuti by himself. If he talked with anyone on the subject it was to get information and compare notes – not to learn the language.”⁸

How deep was Sri Aurobindo's interest in Sanskrit can be gathered from the following:

“I wrote many memoranda for the Maharaja”, Sri Aurobindo once said. “Generally he used to indicate the lines and I used to follow them. But I myself was not much interested in administration. My interests lay outside in Sanskrit, literature, and in the National movement.”⁹

R.N. Patkar, who had been a student of Sri Aurobindo during his time in Baroda and who later became an advocate, recounts: “The day of his departure came at last and it was extremely touching. ... In the evening, Aravind Babu, though he had a very busy time, called me in his room and I sat by his side. With a caressing touch of his hand on my shoulder he affectionately said to me, ‘Well, Rajaram, we part after all. We part in body but not in soul – which is omnipresent. I leave Baroda because Supreme Duty demands my presence elsewhere and I cannot shirk. ... You will come out successful and triumphant only if you remain honest and good and obey the



Bhavani Bharati in Sri Aurobindo's own handwriting

dictates of your conscience. If you observe this dictum your path will be smooth and you will be happy.’ He finished these words and got up. He went straight to his book case, and knowing my love for Sanskrit picked up two books – Kalidas's Shakuntala and Vikramorvasi – and presented them to me as a token of his love for me. He also gave me a few verses composed by himself, one styled Songs to Myrtilla and Other Poems and the other Urvashi – a translation in verse of Poet Kalidas's drama.¹

I quietly bowed, touched his feet and left the room with a heavy heart and wet eyes.”¹⁰

Sri Aurobindo's pursuit of Sanskrit continued through his Pondicherry years. He borrowed, and even begged, to obtain the necessary material

¹ This book must have been Urvashi, a poem based on the legend of Urvashi.

THE MOTHER'S STUDY OF SANSKRIT

We do not have much information about the Mother's study of Sanskrit other than what She has communicated through Her conversations and messages. We know that She studied the language with Sri Aurobindo, in particular the root-sounds, and continued to study it whenever time permitted.

She mentioned the following in Her conversation with teachers of Sri Aurobindo International Centre of Education (SAICE) on November 11, 1967:

"It is a more ancient language than the others and it contains the sounds, the root-sounds of many words.

This is something I studied with Sri Aurobindo and it is obviously very interesting. Some of these roots can even be found in all the languages of the world – sounds, root-sounds which are found in all those languages."

CWM, Vol 12, p 414

Elsewhere She has said:

"I have the *deepest respect* for Indian languages and continue to study Sanskrit when I have time."

CWM, Vol 12, p 224

for the study of the Vedas. S. Srinivasachari, who was an associate of the patriot-poet Subramanya Bharati and later became part of Sri Aurobindo's inner circle, narrates the following anecdote:

"A few months later Sri Aurobindo who was living in a tiled house in the Hindu quarters, removed to a decent house in the European quarters not far from our houses. After going over there he spent most of his time in the study of Rg Veda. He took my two volumes of Max Muller's edition and I got him the commentaries of Sayana from my sister's husband. In the evenings we found him poring over these volumes. He used to translate for us portions from the texts with their commentaries and give us his own version of them. We found that Sayana's comments were concerned more with the rituals whereas his interpretation brought out the underlying yogic ideas."¹¹

In a letter by Sri Aurobindo to Motilal Roy in whose house he had stayed before relocating to Pondicherry, he says: "I need some extra money badly now for materials for the work I have now seriously entered on in connection with the Veda and the Sanskrit language. In that same connection will you please make a serious effort this time to get hold of Dutt's Bengali translation of the Rigveda & send it to me — or

any translation for that matter which gives the European version."¹²

The study of Sanskrit helped Sri Aurobindo in more ways than one: "Sri Aurobindo never studied Hindi; but his acquaintance with Sanskrit and other Indian languages made it easy for him to pick up Hindi without any regular study and to understand it when he read Hindi books or newspapers."¹³

Well, what did people with profound knowledge of Sanskrit think about Sri Aurobindo's knowledge of the language? We find some insights in the following records.

Dinendra Kumar Roy, who had been appointed to teach Bengali to Sri Aurobindo at Baroda, recounts: "The late Romesh Chandra Dutt had come to Baroda invited by the Maharaja sometime toward the end of 1899, I think – don't quite remember if it was before or after he had left the post of Chief Commissioner of Orissa. I don't think Mr. Dutt knew Aurobindo from earlier times, but he had heard of his poetic genius, and perhaps he had even read some of his poems. Mr. Dutt had just published in England a poetic translation of parts of the *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata*. When he heard that Aurobindo had translated certain parts of *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata*, he expressed an eagerness to see

the translations. Needless to say Mr. Dutt was a distinguished writer in English literature. Many of his English writings are better than those of famous English writers. He was equally fluent in prose and verse, in novels and poetry. So when Mr. Dutt asked quite spontaneously to see Aurobindo's poems, Aurobindo showed them even if a little reluctantly. Mr. Dutt, discerning as he was in literary matters, was so impressed with Aurobindo's poems that he later said: 'Seeing your poems, I regret all the trouble I went to trying to translate the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*! Had I seen your poems earlier, I would never have published my own writings. It all seems like child's play now.' Yet Mr. Dutt's *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata* had received many appreciative reviews in English weeklies and magazines."¹⁴

A. B. Purani has the following observation: "Panchanan Tarkachudamani, a great Sanskrit scholar, was also in jail with some of his disciples. One day Abinash Bhattacharya requested Sri Aurobindo to explain certain passages from the Upanishad, which he did. Abinash recounted the explanation to Panchanan Babu. After hearing it Panchanan said: 'Well, Abinash, I would not have been able to explain this portion as simply as Sri Aurobindo has done.'"¹⁵

In modern times, Sri Aurobindo Society has published a seminal work *Sri Aurobindo and Sanskrit* authored by Dr. Sampadananda Mishra, a contemporary scholar of Sri Aurobindo's works in Sanskrit. In his Foreword to the book,

Vijay-bhai ('64) writes: "Yogi, philosopher, revolutionary, writer, poet, critic – Sri Aurobindo is a multi-faceted personality. A large number of books have been written on the various dimensions of Sri Aurobindo's genius. But very little is known about Sri Aurobindo's knowledge of Sanskrit language and literature, the new insights he has given to its origins, and about his original contributions to it. Though these may not be very large, in comparison to his other writings, they are sufficiently extensive and reveal his great mastery of the Sanskrit language."¹⁶

Dr. Sampadananda Mishra elaborates: "In this manner he mastered Sanskrit in a few years and discovered the real spirit of the Sanskrit language. The door of its vast literature stood open before him. He entered the realm of the Vedas, the Upanishads, the *Ramayana*, the *Mahabharata*, the *Puranas*, the works of Kalidasa, Bhartrihari, Bharavi, Magha, Bhavabhuti, Banabhatta, Vishnusharma and many others. Thus was revealed to him the secret greatness of India and its culture."¹⁷

The above should act as an inspiration for each one of us who follows Sri Aurobindo, irrespective of our age, to learn and engage with Sanskrit. It is possibly the largest window to our culture. Further, it can only enhance our understanding of our mother-tongue and other Indian languages, just as it did for Sri Aurobindo, as well as many international languages if one were to delve deep enough. ❀

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SAMSKRĀNANDA: DISCOVERING AND TASTING BLISS THROUGH THE DEVABHĀṢĀ

Anuradha Choudry '98 who pursued her PhD in Sanskrit from Pondicherry University shares her experiences.



Sanskrit in Zurich, May 2024

You are one of the most accomplished former students in the field of Sanskrit. Can you walk us through your personal journey?

I began studying Sanskrit at the age of seven at the Ashram School. That was my first exposure to the language. Then i studied it throughout all the way up to Knowledge. At Avenir (Delafon sections), i had Vandana-arya and Shraddha-arya as my teachers, followed by Radhika-arya in Progrès for the first three years in School. As i advanced, we had Chinmayee-arya, Archana-arya, and Bharat-arya. Bharat-arya was a big influence because he was very strict. I owe all my grammar to him even today! We studied *subhāṣitas* (epigrammatic poems that convey a lesson) that contain so much of wisdom which was very inspiring. The stories, the *ślokas*, the dramas that we did, the games that we played with Radhika-arya were all very exciting and interesting and made Sanskrit learning a joyful living experience. And then in Knowledge, i continued my Sanskrit studies with Usha-arya and Narendra-arya.

Did you ever have any doubt about the choice that you were making?

I was fascinated by spoken Sanskrit and i¹ think that is a unique feature of the Ashram School where Sanskrit is taught in Sanskrit itself as a living language unlike in most schools across the country. Besides this, various texts inspired me over time, notably the *Bhagavad Gītā*. Its teachings on *niṣkāma karma* – acting without attachment to outcomes – proved practically useful, helping me overcome a lot of situations with fortitude and faith which would have otherwise led to an inevitable disappointment and discouragement. This concept encouraged me to act in the best way possible irrespective of the outcomes by focusing on discovering the joy of right execution instead. The practical relevance of the *Gītā*, therefore, played an important role in keeping me motivated to continue studying the language.

Furthermore, there were three guiding ideas that motivated my Sanskrit journey. First, was a *śloka* from the *Pañcatantra* which i studied with Usha-arya, which said:

प्राप्तव्यमर्थं लभते मनुष्यः
prāptavyamarthaṃ labhate manuṣyaḥ
देवोऽपि तं लङ्घयितुं न शक्तः।
devo'pi taṃ laṅghayitum na śaktaḥ।
तस्मान्न शोचामि न विस्मयो मे
tasmānna śocāmi na vismayo me
यदस्मदीयं न हि तत्परेषाम्॥
yadasmadīyaṃ na hi tatpareṣām॥

“An individual gets the money that has to be got. Even the gods cannot transgress that. That’s why I am not worried nor am I in wonderment. What has to be mine will not be anybody else’s”.

¹The “i” is consciously not capitalised throughout the article due to the author's philosophical perspective on the same.



Birthday joy: OTA, Madras, 1981-82

The second were quotes from Sri Aurobindo where he says: “The recovery of the perfect truth of the Veda is therefore not merely a desideratum for our modern intellectual curiosity, but a practical necessity for the future of the human race” (CWSA, Vol 14, p. 98). Coupled with this, he has another very powerful quotation where he says, “I seek a text and a Shastra that is not subject to interpolation, modification and replacement, that moth and white ant cannot destroy, that the earth cannot bury nor Time mutilate...I seek a scepticism that shall question everything but shall have the patience to deny nothing that may possibly be true. [...] In short, I seek not science, not religion, not Theosophy, but Veda – the truth about Brahman – [...] yasmin vijñate sarvam vijñatam [knowing which everything here is known]” (CWSA, Vol 12, p. 62).

The third thing that inspired me were the Mother’s words, where she says that just like every child in France speaks French, every child in this country must speak Sanskrit.

Therefore, once i completed Knowledge, i did a very simple calculation. If Sri Aurobindo affirmed that the Vedas were the key to unlock a better future for humanity and knowing which everything could be known, and the Mother emphasised the unconditional importance of Sanskrit for the *Bhāratīya* population, then this language was definitely worth investing in for a lifetime. But the burning question was what after studying Sanskrit? How would i earn my living?

That was solved thanks to the *Pañcatantra śloka* which gave me the confidence to pursue what i loved to study rather than compromising on my passion because of perceived potential financial insecurities. I analysed that if i have to do a course on management or journalism, which could have been alternatives, i would be chasing this mirage of money and not do what i was really fond of. I was passionate about Sanskrit and therefore decided to do my higher studies all the way up to PhD in Pondicherry University. I took up the Mother’s and Sri Aurobindo’s words as a life-mission, and as i have delved deeper into their visions, i have understood why they laid so much emphasis on the learning and the promotion of Sanskrit and the potential that this language and its knowledge traditions like the Veda and many others have to offer for the transformation of the human race.

Today, it feels like i have hit a jackpot of sorts! I am happy and humbled to serve as a faculty at IIT Kharagpur where i teach courses like ‘Sanskrit and Heritage’, ‘Indian Psychology’ and have initiated a course on ‘History of Science and Technology in Ancient India (HiSTAI)’. In addition to this, i have the immense privilege of being appointed as a Coordinator of the Indian Knowledge Systems (IKS) Division of the Ministry of Education, Government of India (iksindia.org), at a historical moment when we are revisiting the Education System in an attempt to implement the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020.

What was your PhD thesis about at Pondicherry University?

Pondicherry University was an extension of Knowledge for me. I was the only student with three teachers! I did my PhD under the guidance of Prof. K. E. Dharaneedharan, who was very supportive and allowed me to connect with other scholars who had already been exposed to Sri Aurobindo. My thesis focused on Vedic psychology, which explored the psycho-spiritual dimension of Vedic texts, blending Sri Aurobindo studies with Sanskrit. I studied Kapali Shastri’s works, Jagannath-ji’s works on *Agni-mantra-*

mālā, all of which were valuable sources for Vedic psychology.

In his work *The Secret of the Veda*, Sri Aurobindo says that the secret of the Veda lies in the deeper etymological sense of the terms themselves. For example, the etymology of *agni* is *agre nayati iti* – that which transports upwards – denotes fire because it is a substance that always burns upward, no matter what direction it is placed in. When the *ṛṣi* or seer looked at the sun or looked at *agni*, they did not merely see the material element but also recognised the living force behind it, which was the *agni devatā* or *sūrya devatā*. Our seers went a step ahead and identified the essential spirit of the substance which became its symbolic sense on a psycho-spiritual plane. *Agni*, therefore, became the symbol of will-power at all levels which pushes the individual to strive ahead in all endeavours, from the determination to achieve goals, to the inner fire of aspiration to achieve the highest aims of life that they recognised as the Divine Will in the human being. As a result, it was imperative to first light *agni* before initiating any *yajña* which is also essentially a symbolic act.

Similarly, *sūrya* becomes a symbol of truth, because just like the external sun lights our outer world, the sun of inner Truth illumines the inner mind and our inner world. As a result, the *Gāyatrī mantra* becomes not just an invocation to the sun or to the godhead of the creative power of the sun

(*Savitṛ*) but becomes an invocation to the inner Truth where it said, '*dhiyo yo naḥ pracodayāt*' implying 'Let this (highest Truth) enlighten our minds'. Sri Aurobindo makes this explicit in his *Gāyatrī mantra* where he says '*yannaḥ satyena dīpayet* – Let us be illumined by the Truth.'

My research was an application of Sri Aurobindo's interpretations of the Vedic hymns with a focus on select *sūktas*, pertaining to the central story of the *Āṅgīrasa ṛṣis* and the lost cows. It sought to apply the psycho-spiritual dimension of the texts to show how the story becomes a foundational theme of human aspiration for enlightenment while dealing with the different positive and negative Forces of life. These are the grand imageries of the Vedas. Cosmic forces play with humankind as puppets but every single time, with every thought, speech and action, we have the invitation of the *Devas* for becoming their allies, for becoming conscious Warriors of Light. This concept aligns with the Vedic principle *kṛṇvanto viśvam āryam* (let us make this world a noble place to live in). It is to be noted that when the Vedas talk about making the whole world Aryans, it is not the limited distorted racial version of the Nazi Aryan. The term *ārya* signifies an aspiring soul who is always ready to fight their own battles and to walk the path from lower to higher heights of consciousness. The vision of the Veda is a fabulous call to humanity to become Warriors of Truth and Cultivators of Light.

What other experiences did you gather before launching full-time into your career?

While doing my Masters, I started associating myself with Samskrita Bharati, an organisation that promotes spoken Sanskrit through an immersive model inspired by Ben-Yehuda, the father of modern Hebrew in Israel, who revived the ancient language of the Torah as a living language in Israel by insisting that his child be exposed to that language alone since birth. The story goes that when his child grew up learning only this 'modern' Hebrew as his mother tongue, he took him to the marketplace and started conversing with him in this ancient-



With my PhD guru, Prof. K. E. Dharaneetharan, as his first shishya in Pondicherry University: celebrating his retirement in Varanasi, April 2025

yet-new language. The onlookers were amused and inspired and became curious to learn it too. In a country characterised by the convergence of diverse Jewish populations from different parts of the world, Hebrew became the common uniting thread that bound them in a single identity and thus it became their national language.

Similarly, in a land of greater diversities, Samskrita Bharati is convinced of Sanskrit's potential role as a great uniting factor, especially since many of the *Bhāratīya bhāṣās* are derived from it. This organisation conducts very effective 10 days, 20 hours Spoken Sanskrit camps and correspondence courses across the globe. I trained in their pedagogy which has been a boon for enthusing students worldwide in tasting the joy of the daily application of this ancient tongue.

Besides this, i also had the good fortune of teaching Sanskrit at Auroville's Last School and at the Language Lab, where i tried to kindle the spark of the *devabhāṣā* in some dedicated teachers in the City of Dawn, where it is designated as one of the four official languages. In addition, i was blessed to have been guided by Dr. Vladimir Yatsenko, a scholar-practitioner of the Vedas and of Sri Aurobindo's yoga in Savitri Bhavan. Both of us participated in Sanskrit immersion camps organised by Samskrita Bharati including one which was 21 days long in Delhi's summer and attended by 800 people from across the nation. It was quite an experience to have this population from all states with only one common language for communication – Sanskrit! We were eating, sleeping, drinking, doing everything, thinking only in Sanskrit! From there, i went to another 10-day camp at Nainital. There, i had this strange and unforgettable experience whereby when i had to switch to English after a whole month of speaking Sanskrit, i concretely felt as if the sounds of English were emanating primarily from the tip of the tongue. This was such a concrete physiological realisation of the stark difference of the impact of sounds of the two languages on the body that it drove home the powerful consequences of spoken Sanskrit on our being. Furthermore, this understanding has been corroborated by several participants

who have attended my mantra workshops and Sanskrit courses.

In this context, i remember doing some workshops for the University of Malta on Sanskrit and the power of its sound. I was also invited to speak on Maltese TV and spoke on the power of mantras and the power of OM. To my surprise, when we went for a trip to a place called Gozo, we were in a restaurant when the lady who owned the restaurant suddenly told me, "Aren't you that Indian woman who spoke on OM, the power of OM?" That was quite memorable!

On the same trip, i was invited by Prof. Michael Zammit, from the University of Malta, who translated the *Gita* in Maltese. I learnt from him that not only was the language taught in the university but that they had more than 18 students at the university at the time who were studying Sanskrit. In contrast, when i was a Master's student in Pondicherry University, i was the only student in my batch! And mind you, this was in Malta which has historically been a very Christian-dominated country from where all the Crusaders spread out to conquer the world!

Sanskrit also gave me the opportunity to get associated with a lot of yoga organisations worldwide. I have been fortunate to have been part of many teacher training programs where i along with a friend, Dr. Vinayachandra, offer workshops on Sanskrit, mantras, different yoga-related texts like the *Yogasūtras*, *Upaniṣads*, *Gītā*, etc. In this context, we have been invited to the European Union of Yoga in Zinal, Switzerland, where every year they have a congress in which yoga teachers and practitioners from across Europe meet in a multilingual, cross-cultural environment with the single purpose of deepening their understanding and practice of various yogic traditions – ancient and contemporary. This exposure to the Yoga world in Europe and in many parts of the world has been truly enriching and has given me confidence about the important role that Sanskrit and Sanskritists can play in this context as yoga has spread like wildfire globally.

Post PhD, i was awarded the Erasmus Mundus Scholarship of the EU for an MLitt in Crossways in European Humanities. This course allowed

me to study in the University of St. Andrews in Scotland where i explored subjects like Theory of Literary Criticisms, Culture and Identity that examined factors that lead to identity building like icons, imageries, symbols, etc. In the second semester, i was in the University of Bergamo where i learnt several other new subjects like film studies, semiotics, psychology and so on.

What proved to be most fascinating for me was the study of sociolinguistics which helped me appreciate the linguistic dimensions of the Sanskrit language, which in turn has informed and supported my work with Sanskrit teaching and promotion in various ways.

Sociolinguistics also gave me the idea of how society standardises language and dialects. We learnt how to address questions like: What is the relationship of different linguistic groups and how and what is a dead language? How do languages get endangered and finally die out and their implications? What are the tools for language promotion, language suppression? and so on. The subjects i was exposed to really broadened my knowledge base in a very systematic manner.

On the whole, i would like to say that because of the Mother's grace, i have been extremely fortunate to have had various kinds of exposures to a multitude of activities related to Sanskrit in very different national and international scenarios. These circumstances gave me the opportunity to teach spoken Sanskrit in various milieus to help diverse kinds of people get a taste of the language and to help break the myth that it is a very difficult language to learn.

On a related note, how do the teachers at our School raise their level and knowledge of Sanskrit to be able to teach students who are wanting to pursue it at higher levels? Is there is a risk of fossilisation of the language?

I think that in the Ashram School, we have been extremely fortunate to have had some very distinguished teachers like Jagannath-ji earlier on, then Chinmayee-arya, Archana-arya, Narendra-arya, Arya Vishnu and all the others who laid very solid foundations for the language in the Ashram. The huge advantage that we have here is that we

learn Sanskrit as a living language in its multiple applications. For example, Radhika-arya wrote so many dramas and short stories, some of which we even had the chance to perform.

The beauty with Sanskrit is that if one has a strong grasp of the grammatical foundations of the language, it offers immense potential for creative outputs. One of my professors from Pondicherry University, Prof. Kutumba Sastry, had once noted that mastering foundational texts like the *Aṣṭādhyāyī* and *Amarakośa* with a skilled teacher would enable limitless expressions, and if anyone could dedicate six months for studying them intensively, they could easily master these texts within that time.

Having said this, it is always advisable for a teacher to keep upgrading their knowledge of the subject they teach and enhancing their understanding of its contemporary developments and scope. Sanskrit too is evolving and finding new interdisciplinary applications like in Computational Sanskrit, Sanskrit for Health and Well-being, Sanskrit and its knowledge traditions. If our teachers became more conversant with these emerging facets of the language, they could inspire students to look beyond its conventional associations with scriptures and present its futuristic scope as a tool for undertaking cutting-edge research in various aspects of Indian Knowledge Systems (IKS), which is an emerging area of teaching and research today.

Regarding your second question, the fossilisation of any language takes place literally when its creative possibilities of derivations, word formations, etc. are exhausted and it undergoes no further development in time. The very nature of Sanskrit words allows incredible flexibility based on the use of root sounds that then lead to different derivations and a myriad new word formations that are descriptive of the various functions of the objects they denote. You can keep creating words for as many number of things. Therefore, in my opinion, the inherent linguistic structures of Sanskrit would not ever allow it to become a fossilised language and the role of our teachers should ideally be to enthuse students to resonate with its ever-green spirit.

As to the danger of fossilisation of the language in the Ashram School, i think if the teachers keep themselves informed about the latest developments in the Sanskrit world, this could be avoided. My personal experience has been that teachers like Datta-di and team often invite me to speak to their Sanskrit students to give them an exposure to the wonders the language has to offer. I personally think it acts as a positive motivator for students to study the language with greater enthusiasm.

How was your experience working at one of the most prestigious institutions in the country, IIT Kharagpur?

My IIT Kharagpur (KGP) journey has been a very interesting and enriching one on various fronts so far. The institute has a brand value of its own so when i tell someone that i teach Sanskrit in IIT KGP, they have a different level of receptivity for what i have to say, and that is definitely very encouraging.

In terms of teaching at IIT KGP, i initially taught French for my first semester because there was no readymade Sanskrit course at that point in the institute. Through this course, i helped children appreciate how many similarities there are between the two languages. For example, 'je suis, tu es' is like *asi*. 'Il est' is *asti*. 'Nous sommes' is *smah*. 'Vous êtes' is *stah*. 'Ils sont' is *santi*. There are a lot of similarities.

Subsequently, i moved to teaching Sanskrit and Heritage and Indian Psychology besides coordinating a course on the *History of Science and Technology in Ancient India* (HiSTAI) with the support of our Director at that time, Prof. Partha Pratim Chakrabarti, who also had a broad vision for development of this subject in the institute. This course brought together professors from different departments to explore the historical achievements, current applications, and future potential of Indian Knowledge Systems. Besides designing and coordinating the course, i offered a few classes on language and mind sciences to help students appreciate the psycho-linguistic dimensions of Sanskrit.

I have also developed three online courses at

IIT KGP on spoken Sanskrit which are available on the SWAYAM platform and YouTube for free, viz., Basic, Intermediate and Advanced. The objective of the advanced course in particular is to help participants understand the 'Whys' of the Sanskrit language, to understand all the different aspects of the language if someone wanted to study it. A mere exposure to all the building blocks of the *devabhāṣā* is absolutely mind-blowing! It is, unfortunately, one of the most underrated and underestimated subjects of the millennium especially in this country! It is not for nothing that both the Mother and Sri Aurobindo lay great emphasis on its learning.

Another memorable milestone for me in the Institute was that in 2019 i was humbled to receive the Excellent Young Teachers Award which is given by IIT's Alumni Foundation to one young Faculty Member every year. This award did two things for me and for Sanskrit—it was the first time that somebody from the Humanities Department in a Technical Institute was recognised for their contributions to the institution by the Alumni Foundation. Secondly, it served to put Sanskrit and Indian Psychology on the map of the institute in a positive manner.

One last but very significant aspect of teaching at an IIT is the exposure that i have got to interdisciplinary and even transdisciplinary domains of knowledge, which i would not have got easily in any other institute. For example, a dear friend, Dr. Jenia Mukherjee, specialises in an emerging field called Environmental Humanities which looks at the intersection of Environmental Studies and Humanities. She hosts several international projects on the Sundarbans. Being part of her team, i have learnt to do ethnographic studies in an island called Kumirmari that we have adopted in the southern Gangetic delta. Working with the community, trying to improve their livelihood options through inland fisheries programmes has been a very unique experience and definitely broadened my range of awareness in an area which i would not have normally delved into in a conservative Department of Sanskrit in any other institution.

What is it that keeps Anuradha busy these days?

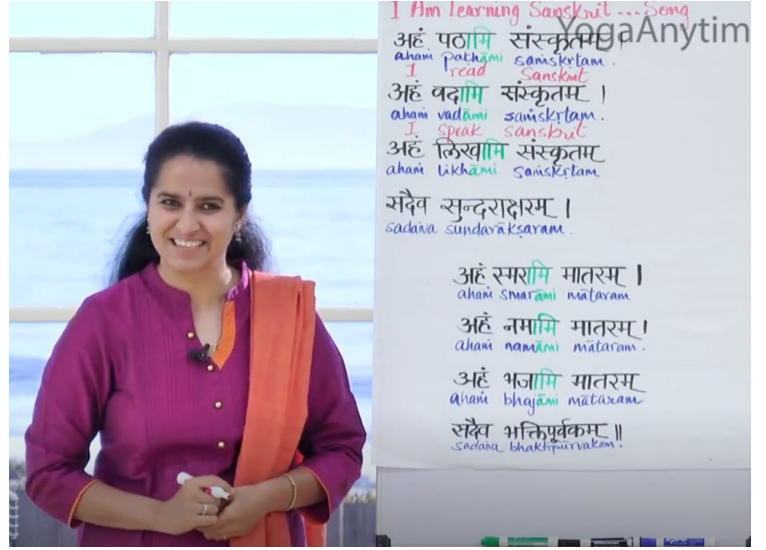
I am busy teaching my courses on Sanskrit and Heritage and Indian Psychology at IIT Kharagpur after a gap of two years, while parallelly serving as a Coordinator in the Ministry of Education's Indian Knowledge Systems (IKS) Division. These knowledge systems were greatly responsible for India's sustained prosperity, which was 32% of the world's GDP in the 1st century AD according to Angus Maddison, 24.4% in the 18th century before the British came, and was down to 4.2% in 1950 when these knowledge traditions were strategically uprooted from our education system by Macaulay and replaced with European content which was regarded as intrinsically superior.

I would like to share a passage and a quote from William Dalrymple's recent book *The Golden Road* that speaks highly about the Indosphere that influenced half if not more of the world's thought as it stands today, much in contrast to what Macaulay and his ilk stated in their (in)famous Minutes in 1835:

Said al-Andalusi, the Qadi or Chief Justice of Toledo (11th Cent CE), was writing an early global study of the history of science which focused on the debt the Arabs owed to the thinkers of South Asia. It is one of the most important contemporary statements of the power of Indian ideas and the prestige of the Indosphere in the medieval Arab world:

'The first nation to have cultivated science is India,' he wrote.

This is a powerful nation, having a large population and a rich kingdom. India is known for the wisdom of its people. Over many centuries, all the kings of the past have recognised the ability of the Indians in all the branches of knowledge. (...) The Indians, as known to all nations for



Yogaanytime: on the sets for a joyfilled online Sanskrit teaching experience, October 2016

many centuries, are the metal (essence) of wisdom, the source of fairness and objectivity. They are peoples of sublime pensiveness, universal apologies, and useful and rare inventions. (...) To their credit, the Indians have made great strides in the study of numbers and of geometry. They have acquired immense information and reached the zenith in their knowledge of the movements of the stars [astronomy] and the secrets of the skies [astrology] as well as other mathematical studies. After all that, they have surpassed all the other peoples in their knowledge of medical science and the strengths of various drugs, the characteristics of compounds, and the peculiarities of substances. Their kings are known for their good moral principles, their wise decisions, and their perfect methods of exercising authority. As to theology, they are in agreement as to the unity of God ...

There is an extensive repository of original Sanskrit manuscripts that has documented these advanced knowledge systems that Said al-Andalusi speaks about, numbering anywhere between four to thirty million, that are awaiting to be decoded! As part of the IKS Division, we are trying to inspire scholars to take interest

in tapping into these hoary texts of *Bhārata*, reviving them and institutionalising them for the benefit of humanity.

In addition, since i have been involved in this field for a few years now, i have come across writings that talk of the fact that there is a lot of our knowledge that is being examined by organisations worldwide like NASA, which are undertaking cutting-edge research based on them. I have also been told by some friends that, during WWII, Hitler had taken thousands of ancient manuscripts from *Bhārata* and preserved them in libraries which are not accessible to us. In our country, people are ready, even today, to give away their ancestral manuscripts for very little because it is a hassle maintaining them and most often because they don't know their real worth!

Taking all these factors into consideration, the IKS Division was started in 2020 to help document, to preserve, to do research, to disseminate and to mainstream the contributions of *Bhārata* to world development as it stands today.

What is your role as coordinator?

The vision of the IKS Division is to rejuvenate and mainstream Indian Knowledge Systems for the contemporary world in the current societal context. As a Coordinator of the Ministry of Education's Indian Knowledge Systems (IKS) Division, my role is to align with this vision and ensure its implementation in different ways. Initially as outreach coordinator, my primary task was to help to bring the *sāstra* to the *samāja*, to bring the knowledge of our ancestors from the 'libraries to the laboratories' – to find ways of spreading awareness about what IKS consists of because not many were familiar with this acronym when we started and why it was important. I am happy to share that courtesy the various schemes that we have launched over the last three years, with the support of different organisations like the AICTE, UGC, ICSSR and so on, and its inclusion in policy documents, IKS has become a buzzword across the country today. In a successful move, UGC has mandated that all its courses should have at least 5% IKS content

wherever relevant, thereby arousing curiosity and interest to know more about it in the academic circles.

Furthermore, to promote '*janbhāgidāri*', or people's participation, we had organised various kinds of events with the Ministry of Culture called 'Dhara: Ode to Indian Knowledge Systems', where each month we focused on one knowledge system, brought together experts who are its stakeholders to create a vision document for 2047, outlining how these systems could flourish in the future and what would be the roadmap for the same. We covered topics like Indian mathematics, astrophysics, the Indian calendar, *āyurveda*, maritime traditions, martial arts, dance and music, chemistry, metallurgy and agriculture. For the last one, on *Bhāratīya kṛṣi paramparā* (agriculture), we had invited about 100+ farmers from across eight states to participate in the event and share about their traditional ways of farming and animal husbandry. In fact, this is the first time that i heard of the term *paśu-āyurveda*, which is the *āyurveda* for animals, a subject on which there will be a course on the SWAYAM platform for those who may be interested to know more about it. Most of the programmes we conducted are documented on the channel of Sangam Talks, which is an online platform containing a series of talks by distinguished scholars.

What i also learnt in the process was that, until a few generations ago, our forefathers had a natural understanding of what to eat, what not to eat and which season to eat what. They had a much greater connect with natural options for healing themselves, whereas we are completely disconnected from nature and have become overly reliant on allopathic treatments for the smallest of ailments. The question that we need to ask is how can we tap into our own knowledge sources for our well-being once again? We have been working with some senior administrators in AYUSH to explore the possibilities of making that knowledge available to children from a very young age in a systematic manner as the new textbooks are being written by the NCERT. Ironically, such attempts are uphill tasks as we are still in a state of induced amnesia about

valuing our own knowledge traditions, so that any attempt to offer an alternative perspective is met with great resistance. Yet the efforts are on to make a lasting dent in the education system for posterity so that future generations will not be able to accuse us of having perpetuated cultural ignorance, which has been happening since the time of Macaulay.

Similarly, we are working with the National Maritime Foundation to see if we can increase maritimity or maritime consciousness in our people, because we are a nation where over 90% of our trade comes via sea routes. As citizens, however, we have very little awareness about the implications and the precautions we need to take to secure our coastlines and other maritime-related matters. It is said that in the coming years, one who will have control over the seas will be a world leader, yet we are not taught anything in our curriculum about our present maritime prowess nor about the greatness and extent of the maritime trade we had undertaken for millennia resulting in our extensive prosperity. In this context, we have been working with the National Maritime Foundation (NMF) to see if we can find ways to again bring maritimity back into the curriculum. Currently, i am coordinating the joint effort of UGC and the IKS Division to conduct Faculty Training Programmes across the country in a bid to train almost 10K teachers eventually.

On a final note to this question, the reason why i took up the invitation to be a Coordinator of the IKS Division is because i believe that we are at a unique and critical historical juncture of a civilisational reawakening. Education lies at the heart of this movement. In a glocal world, we are attempting to institutionalise and nurture cultural groundings without making it parochial in lines with what NEP 2020 (4.27) states – “Knowledge of India’ will include knowledge from ancient India and its contributions to modern India and its successes and challenges, and a clear sense of India’s future aspirations with regard to education, health, environment, etc. These elements will be incorporated in an accurate and scientific manner throughout the

school curriculum wherever relevant”.

Finally, any words of wisdom for the younger generation.

Studying Sanskrit is *not* just the study of a language; it is in many ways the study of life in its multiple expressions! It offers deep insights into various *śāstras* and a detailed understanding of psychological processes even in something as ‘dry’ as ‘grammar’, though in this case it is anything but that. Every sound, every word, every sentence is an art and science in itself, a potential tool for the evolution of human consciousness because it requires precise control over breath, vowel length, tongue positioning, grammar, thought formulation, and so on. These conscious and subconscious efforts at various levels sharpen the intellect and serve to ‘programme’ the human operating system in a manner to make it potentially ‘virus-free’. Speaking Sanskrit is a brain-accelerator, linguistic-integrator, nation-builder and soul-uplifter. In short, engaging with Sanskrit and Sanskrit Knowledge Systems (SKS) can act as a master key to unlock several planes of consciousness and to Sanskritise or refine one’s being by understanding the laws of the gross and subtle worlds, thereby inviting us to act wisely for the greater good of all. So please take it up seriously and join me in realising the Mother's and Sri Aurobindo's vision of a Sanskritised Bhārata. ❁



Ekataa---Celebrating our Oneness on 1.1.11: Preparing for a global initiative, Sydney, September 2009

SANSKRIT: A JOURNEY OF SELF-DISCOVERY

Aneesh Raghavan '14 who did his PhD in Sanskrit from Pondicherry University recounts his journey.

Can you talk about the very start of your journey with regard to the Sanskrit language?

I embarked on my journey of learning Sanskrit when I was six during my first year at Avenir (Delafon sections) under the guidance of Sumedha-ben, who introduced us to several simple shlokas and songs. Initially, Sanskrit posed certain challenges for me. Coming from a Tamil linguistic background, I found it particularly difficult to distinctly pronounce or even grasp the aspirate consonants which are known as *mahāprāṇas* (e.g., “bha,” “cha”).

Yet this difficulty had surprisingly not discouraged me as it should have, especially at that tender age, but instead prompted me to approach Sanskrit more analytically. I would keenly observe the differences between the *visarga* and the *mahāprāṇa* while others pronounced these sounds. I eventually deduced that the *visarga* adds a “ha” sound following a vowel whereas the *mahāprāṇa* meant that the “ha” sound followed a consonant. These small discoveries, though helpful and enlightening, did not translate into any special interest in the subject at the time. Yet it was quite amusing and rewarding, I must admit, when I found the same analysis, expressed in a more scientific way, in the advanced texts that I referred to while doing my PhD about two decades later.

What was the method of teaching at Avenir?

At Avenir, the approach to Sanskrit learning was conversational rather than rooted in formal grammar. Shradha-āryā and Radhika-ārya brought the language to life through captivating narratives. One such story was about Rudolph, an English tale narrated entirely in Sanskrit. I also recall Shradha-āryā’s retelling of Dante and Radhika-ārya’s engaging ghost and detective stories, which showcased the diversity of themes that could be expressed in Sanskrit.

In my second year at Avenir, Ritu-di and Aryavishnu had sown several seeds in the form of shlokas. Aryavishnu would teach us the *Māheśvara-sūtras* (the fundamentals of Paninian grammar) more as a fun recitation of different sounds, assuring us that some day we would be fortunate to unveil the grand secret behind them. Similarly, Ritu-di had

taught us a shloka, which amused us back then: “amarīkabarībhārabhramarīmukharīkṛtham dūrīkarotu duritam gaurīcaranapaṅkajam (अमरीकबरीभारभ्रमरीमुखरीकृतं दूरीकरोतु दुरितं गौरीचरणपङ्कजम्).” It was indeed such a beautiful surprise, twenty years later, to not only realise that this was an opening verse of the *Kuvalayānanda*—one of the greatest texts in Sanskrit poetics by the 16th-century giant scholar Appayya Dikshita—but also to admire the poetic intelligence in the



alliterated and charming composition of the verse. By my third year, Vandana-āryā enriched our learning experience with different songs that expanded our vocabulary, such as the delightful tune that taught us the names of fingers: “Ekam, dve, trīṇi, catvāri, pañcaṅgulyaḥ santi, aṅguṣṭhaḥ tarjanī madhyamā anāmikā ca kaniṣṭhā. (एकं द्वे त्रीणि चत्वारि पञ्चाङ्गुल्यः सन्ति । अङ्गुष्ठः तर्जनी मध्यमा अनामिका च कनिष्ठा)” This immersive and creative approach to teaching Sanskrit left a lasting impression without a trace of intimidation or rote learning.

At home, my sister and I were encouraged to learn the *Hanumān Cālīsa* from M. S. Subbulakshmi’s recording. For a long time, I believed it to be in Sanskrit, only to later discover that it was in Avadhi. I enthusiastically shared this recitation with Shraddha-āryā, confident that it would be a rare Sanskrit hymn she might not know. She listened attentively and appreciatively, refraining from pointing out that it was firstly not Sanskrit and that it was one of the most popular hymns ever. Her graciousness allowed me to take joy in my discovery and strengthened my connection to the language.

Talk us through your early years in School. Did you contribute to Śvapatrikā?

In the first three years of School, beginners’ Sanskrit grammar was introduced with lessons on conjugation, sentence construction, and *vibhaktis* (case endings and verb terminations). In P2, Chinmayee-āryā engaged us with Sanskrit storybooks, using a question-and-answer format to encourage comprehension. While I was not particularly drawn to the language at the time, I often created my own interpretations to keep up in class. At times, when I would have my meals at the Corner House, Chinmayee-āryā would give me company and tell me of many Sanskrit words that had a clear link to French words, thus deepening my fascination and interest towards Sanskrit.

In P3, Archana-āryā delved deeper into *vibhaktis* and encouraged us to write illustrated stories. She compiled our creations

into a booklet, which I still treasure, as it was taken for blessings to the Mother’s room. By then, Sanskrit had become more than a subject; it felt like a living language, connecting me to a broader cultural heritage. I was aware that Sanskrit was the language of epics and high poetry and often fancied that I would soon write an epic. When Archana-āryā asked us to make sentences with a list of 40 verbs in the absolutive, I ambitiously set out to retell the entire story of Rama in 40 sentences by forcing into them the absolutive forms, as was required for the class work. In spite of my concern shifting from the practice of absolutive forms to the ambitious retelling of the *Ramayana*, I was only appreciated and encouraged throughout the endeavour.

In EAVP 1, Archana-āryā encouraged us to contribute to the *Śvapatrikā*. My essay, “The Story of a River,” explored multiple synonyms for water and rivers, such as *ambu*, *payas*, and *nīra*, all stacked into a single paragraph. I pored over dictionaries to expand my vocabulary and reflect this in my essays, but Archana-āryā advised me to keep my writing simple—a lesson that initially disappointed my amaturely ambitious spirit but ultimately helped me understand the finer nuance of writing in any language.



In EAVP2, Sumedha-ben introduced us to shlokas set to varied and melodious tunes, many composed in the Ashram by Kapali Shastri and Pujalal-ji. While their meanings eluded us at the time, I now appreciate their profound beauty and significance.

A connection between Sanskrit and culture emerged vividly during my sister's Bharatanatyam programs. Observing the traditional costumes and jewelry, I felt an uncanny, deep intuitive link between the visual aesthetics and the ancient language and its poetry. Even as a child, I dreamed of emulating epic poets like Kalidasa.

I now recognize these aspirations as the early stirrings of my deepening connection to Sanskrit and Indian art and culture.

A pivotal moment in my journey was learning the *Śivatāṇḍava-stotra*. Its intricate verses required us to memorize it without fully grasping its meaning, but the rhythmic beauty of the composition captivated me. This experience deepened my passion for Sanskrit, transforming it from a mere subject into an integral part of my personal and intellectual journey.

What would you say was the turning point for your interest to go up the next level?

From a young age, I had been fascinated by the mystique of the Vedas and always looked for a teacher who could help me understand it. In EAVP 1, I had asked my Sanskrit teacher Archana-āryā if she could explain to me the Vedas. She, in turn, suggested that I approach either Aryavishnu or Asha-āryā who were teachers for the most advanced students. That very day, I went to Asha-āryā and waited for her class to end at the Verandah, close to the School's main entrance. Once the bell rang, I rushed to her and eagerly uttered aloud "ahaṃ vedān paṭhitumicchāmi (अहं वेदान् पठितुमिच्छामि!)" (I wish to study the Vedas). Asha-āryā stood startled, while other teachers who passed by frowned and smiled sceptically



Aneesh with Asha-āryā

at what they heard. A senior teacher had even approached Asha-āryā to warn her that she must not give heed to such premature interests. But Ravi-da came in and gently suggested, "give him something that will quench his interest". Asha-āryā immediately made me sit by her side and recounted some stories from the Vedas and the Upanishads. She told me that I could come to her to know more when I grow older. I was so content listening to the story that I had already decided in my mind that I would later study under her guidance.

In EAVP3, Radhika-ārya took over as our teacher. His unwavering passion for Sanskrit was infectious, and he spoke exclusively in the language, making it a part of our everyday interactions. He taught us sandhi rules with remarkable clarity, ensuring we grasped the foundations of the language. His encouragement extended to creative endeavours, motivating me to compose shlokas for the *Śvapatrikā*. He introduced me to the intricacies of the *anuṣṭubh* meter, presenting it almost as a puzzle to solve. With his guidance, I successfully wrote my first shloka describing the mountains of India in the same style as the famous verse "gaṅge ca yamune caiva (गङ्गे च यमुने चैव)," which describes the sacred rivers. His spontaneous appreciation and admiration of my composition, which I was hesitating to show him, was a moment that filled

me with unparalleled joy—akin to winning a prestigious award. This experience bolstered my confidence and inspired me to compose shlokas more frequently.

The *Śvapatrikā* was often compiled at the last minute, with finishing touches completed on Sunday mornings. During these moments, Radhika-ārya would encourage me to contribute more shlokas, always appreciating my efforts. His ability to correct our mistakes without altering our intended expression made us believe that the work truly originated from us. This approach demystified Sanskrit, transforming it from an intimidating subject into something accessible.

Radhika-ārya also had a unique flair for storytelling. He often shared tales of occultism and his alleged encounters with ghosts, making our lessons as entertaining as they were educational. That year in EAVP3 proved to be transformative, deepening my love for Sanskrit and instilling confidence in my creative abilities. Radhika-ārya's teaching style made Sanskrit a living, relatable language—one that was not only close to daily life but also a source of endless inspiration.

Did you opt for the free progress system?

Yes, I did opt for free progress, and one of the reasons was that I could get to study Sanskrit under the guidance of Radhika- ārya and Asha-āryā. Radhika-ārya introduced us to *Nītiśataka* (a poetic treatise on moral values) and Kalidasa's *Rtusamhāra* (The Garland of Seasons), while Asha-āryā guided us through the *Bhagavad Gita*. These experiences marked our first foray into the broader margins of Sanskrit literature, offering a deeper understanding of its richness and diversity.

In EAVP 4, I composed 20 shlokas in various *chandās* (metrical patterns) for the *Śvapatrikā*. Radhika-ārya encouraged me to recite them to the class, a gesture that made me feel truly special. His unwavering support fuelled my poetic aspirations and gave me the confidence to experiment with Sanskrit poetic composition. By EAVP 5, I had written 60 verses in diverse *chandās* as part of a creative story titled *Śrīkrṣṇalīlārasa*.

The narrative was inspired by Krishna playing his flute on the banks of the Yamuna, where the *Gopis* are mysteriously drawn to him. While in the midst of their household chores, they discover a leaf—brought into their windows by the gentle breeze—which was inscribed with Krishna's name in sandalwood paste. Entranced, they set out to find him but are unable to locate him. The story includes vivid descriptions, such as Krishna hiding from them in the foliage of the Kadamba tree, his reddish feet blending seamlessly with its tender new shoots. Eventually, the tale culminates in the *Rāsālīlā*—the divine dance of love.

In the final scene, Radha, closest to Krishna, places her *cūḍāmaṇi* (crest-jewel) on a kadamba tree and dances with her hair flowing freely. However, she later awakens at home, unsure if it was all a dream. Remembering her *cūḍāmaṇi*, she returns to the tree and finds it there, affirming Krishna's divine *līlā*. The story concludes with Radha's heartfelt prayer to the Lord. In addition to this, I also created my version of *Naucacaritam*, inspired from an opera by Saint Tyagaraja.

These formative experiences—composing poetry, exploring Krishna's divine stories, and delving into the teachings of the *Gita*—not only deepened my connection to Sanskrit but also nurtured my creativity. They instilled in me a lifelong appreciation for the language's profound beauty.

What about dramas?

Radhika-ārya's dramas were a vibrant blend of creativity and diversity, featuring everything from detective thrillers to original adaptations of classical stories. In EAVP 2, we performed a Sanskrit play based on the revolutionary phase of Sri Aurobindo's life. His innovative approach brought the production to life, including creating the dramatic "bomb effect" using fireless crackers—an idea that captivated both performers and audience alike.

Another notable production was a grand Sanskrit presentation of the *Ramayana*. Radhika-ārya's infectious enthusiasm encouraged bold experimentation. One unforgettable moment was the depiction of Hanuman's fiery tail,

a scene achieved with the risky yet effective use of kerosene. These theatrical gimmicks added an element of thrill, making the experience both exciting and memorable for students.

Radhika-ārya's repertoire extended beyond mythology, often incorporating modern themes and innovative narratives. In one production, he tasked me with composing a tune for Urvashi's dance in *Indra-sabhā*. Drawing inspiration from two ragas, I created a melody that remains one of my personal favourites. The performance featured Basab-da on the sitar, and we even recorded the song in a professional studio, adding an extra layer of refinement to the production.

Radhika-ārya's boundless creative energy, imaginative storytelling, and ability to inspire his students made his dramas truly unforgettable. They were not just performances but joyous celebrations of collaboration, creativity, and the timeless beauty of Sanskrit.

What about the classics of Sanskrit literature. Did you read any?

From EAVP 3 onward, we delved into *kavya* texts and began composing shlokas. By EAVP 4 and 5, our studies expanded to include the *Bhagavad Gita*, *Ṛtusamhāra*, *Nīśataka*, and *Bhavānī Bhārati*, under the guidance of Asha-āryā.

In Knowledge, we moved on to the greater classics such as Kalidasa's *Abhijñānaśākuntalam*, *Kumārasambhava*, etc. One significant text was the challenging *Uttarāmacarita*, Bhavabhuti's celebrated play that explores the later life of Lord Rama. Being the only student in the Sanskrit class made the experience profoundly personal and immersive, allowing me to explore the nuances of the language.

Was Sanskrit an obvious and conscious career choice?

I was among the few students who found equal joy in both science and the arts. This unique blend of logic and creativity naturally drew me to law—a discipline that seemed to harmonize philosophical depth with rational rigor. When I shared this aspiration with Asha-

āryā, she was visibly unsettled by my choice. Undeterred, I prepared diligently and cleared my law entrance exams, receiving offers from several institutions. However, conversations with practicing lawyers and other professionals offered a sobering perspective on the realities of the legal profession, especially with regard to my artistic interests. They advised me to pursue law only if financial success was my greatest priority. This advice prompted deep introspection, and I came to a pivotal realization: Sanskrit, with its remarkable confluence of precision and creative expression was the perfect path for me. It also harmonized beautifully with my love for classical dance, weaving together my intellectual and artistic pursuits.

Determined to honour this insight, I cleared the Sanskrit exam at Pondicherry University, fulfilling Asha-āryā's long-held dream for me. In embracing Sanskrit, I not only found my true calling but also discovered a path that seamlessly blended my interests, bringing a profound sense of fulfillment and purpose.

How was your experience at Pondicherry University?

The first year of my MA program at Pondicherry University was fraught with challenges. Frequent strikes disrupted the academic rhythm. While I was eager to learn, the environment offered little encouragement. My fluency in spoken Sanskrit set me apart from my peers, who, despite their prior knowledge of the *Shastras* and BA degrees, struggled to converse in the language. Conversely, my limited familiarity with the *Shastras* left me at a disadvantage in the classroom. Initially classes progressed, leaving me confused and struggling to keep pace. In spite of having great professors, I could never clear my doubts satisfactorily, for the interactions between them and us students were minimal and restrained, unlike the environment at the Ashram School.

Thus, the university setting was far more intimidating. I initially missed the close, nurturing teacher-student relationships I had experienced at the Ashram. But with time, I

learnt to cope with the new system and eventually began to make the best of the lectures and classes I attended. I worked doubly hard in order to keep up with the vast syllabus and eventually got a hang of how the department functioned. One of the great helps was a YouTube class by the grammar expert Soumya Krishnapur who explained the complexities of Sanskrit Grammar, which I was never exposed to in the Ashram. Eventually, the professors noted my interest and made themselves more approachable. By the end of my MA, I was immersed in this new and different Sanskrit education which widened, toughened and deepened my approach towards Sanskrit studies. I was able to complete my Master's with a gold medal from the university.

The Master's course was a solitary journey that tested my resolve and resilience, but it also underscored the importance of self-reliance and perseverance in the pursuit of knowledge.

Where did you pursue your PhD?

After completing my MA, I contemplated pursuing a PhD. However, with no seats available

in most of the institutes that year, I decided to enroll in the one-year MPhil program at the National Sanskrit University in Tirupati. This decision proved to be transformative, as it exposed me to a wonderful setup of traditional education. This was no more a secluded Sanskrit department but a whole university which thrived with Sanskrit. The departments at the university were according to the different *śāstras* in the vast traditional system of education. This setup allowed me to study under eminent scholars in *Sāhitya* (literature) and *Alaṅkāra-śāstra* (poetics). The classes were intellectually stimulating, offering clarity to my long-time doubts.

One of the most profound revelations during my time there was the realization that the traditional Indian education system does not merely separate disciplines into arts and sciences. Subjects like *Nyāya* (logic) and *Mīmāṃsā* (critical investigation) seamlessly integrate philosophy, science, and art. This holistic approach deeply influenced my perspective and reshaped my understanding of knowledge as an interconnected whole.

The serene and sacred hills surrounding the campus served as a constant source of inspiration, motivating me to compose numerous verses. I also actively participated in various campus events and got to witness interesting programmes such as the *aṣṭāvadhāna*, a remarkable literary exercise where a performer simultaneously answers questions posed by eight scholars. These experiences enriched my intellectual and creative pursuits.

I eventually applied for a PhD there as well as in Pondicherry. Though I was selected in both the institutions, I returned to Pondicherry under the wings of my former teacher and doctoral guide Prof K.E. Dharaneedharan, who was very supportive, even through the challenges posed by the pandemic. The École française d'Extrême-Orient (EFEO) was another institution that



Aneesh at the Heidelberg Academy of Sciences and Humanities

opened its doors for me to make most of its resources. The Western scholars working there had an immense contribution in shaping and refining my academic perspectives. Their support and guidance were instrumental in producing my doctoral thesis, which I submitted in 2022 and defended at the beginning of 2023.

What is the nature of your profession?

Presently, I am working as a post-doctoral researcher in a project titled “Hindu Temple legends of South India”, funded by the Heidelberg Academy of Sciences and Humanities.

In this project, we aim to create a database that would interconnect the various transmissions of temple legends relating to the ancient temple city of Kanchipuram, of which the textual traditions in Sanskrit and Tamil play a pivotal role. Research in Heidelberg has undoubtedly been a fresh and enlightening experience, which has exposed me greatly to the Indological scholarship outside of India. In this context, I would like to express my deepest gratitude to all my former teachers and mentors, whose immense efforts and contributions have helped me come this far and continue to help me proceed further on this fascinating Sanskrit journey.

What would be your message to the students aspiring to pursue Sanskrit studies?

Today, when I look back at my choice of having taken up Sanskrit studies, I cannot but

feel fortunate and rejoice for all that it has given and is giving me. It is hard to describe the wealth that this language reveals, for it has at many stages been an eye-opener, almost on a day-to-day basis. For millenniums, this language has been the means to express the loftiest and deepest thoughts which humanity has fathomed. Won't it then, by this very fact, have an unseen effect on those who come in contact with it?

Over these last ten years, I have only been increasingly convinced of the fact that it is the very keystone to truly discovering and understanding India and unveiling its incredible treasures. And this process of truly discovering the depths of one's own country must invariably lead a person to rediscovering and knowing his or her true self.

Today, I am greatly inspired by Sri Aurobindo who, I believe, is one of the finest Sanskritists the world has ever seen. His sharp analytical engagement with Sanskrit scriptures, which never let go of his devotion and vision for the culture of India, is my guiding light. And if there be practical hardships in the journey, it is definitely worth the effort. For, I believe, a sincere pursuit of Sanskrit will undoubtedly keep one aligned with this great movement of self-discovery which the country is presently experiencing, not only for its own salvation but for the good of the entire world.

So, do study Sanskrit! You have a bonus access to the repository that is Sri Aurobindo and the Mother's unfailing grace! ❀

SANSKRIT — A BETTER INSTRUMENT

Sanskrit is better. Sanskrit is a much fuller and subtler language... But these modern languages are so artificial (by this, I mean superficial, intellectual); they cut things up into little pieces and remove the light behind.

...Sanskrit is certainly much more fluid, a better instrument for a more global, more comprehensive light, a light containing more things within itself.

...In these modern languages, it's as if things are passed through a sieve and broken up into separate little bits, so then you have all the work of putting them back together. And something is always lost.

The Mother's conversations with a disciple, 8 October 1960

FRANCE SPEAKS SANSKRIT

Dr. Sampada Savardekar '02 completed her PhD from Pondicherry University with a focus on the Bhagavad Gita. This article is based on a conversation she had with Giridhar Murthy '79.

How did your journey of Sanskrit start? Who or what was the motivation for this?

I began learning Sanskrit at home around age 7–8. I was born and brought up for the first 9 years in Bombay, and we did not have Sanskrit in school then. As a Maharashtrian, Sanskrit was part of our family culture, and we used to recite a few shlokas in the mornings and evenings which were taught at home. I also participated in storytelling competitions though I did not fully understand the stories! My father, though an engineer, loved languages and encouraged me to learn Sanskrit and participate in plays.



What memories do you have of learning Sanskrit in our School?

I joined the Ashram school in 1990 at age 9 and entered Cours Accélééré. Everything was new—I did not know English as I had studied in a Marathi medium school till 5th standard. So English, French, and Sanskrit, I began learning them at the same time. English and French were primary, while Sanskrit was less intense. I also learnt vocal music, Bharatanatyam, handicrafts, and embroidery. I loved the Group (except swimming!) and the exposure to physical education. Sanskrit was not a big challenge from what I remember. The script was completely familiar as Marathi is also written in Devanāgarī script. Shekhar-da and Arya-Vishnu were my first Sanskrit teachers in the Ashram.

After Cours Accélééré, I moved to P3, where I had Archana-di as my teacher. That is where

I really started appreciating the language. That year I had stayed back for the 2nd December Programme as it was the 50-year celebration of SAICE. In the holidays, we did the Sanskrit Day (11 November) programme at the Hall of Harmony. Among the other teachers, Bharat-arya was strict yet inspiring. He enthused us and introduced us to *paryāyväcīśabdāḥ* (synonyms). We had to memorize lists of synonyms for words, e.g., the sky or water, lightning, fire. This got us thinking of the vastness of Sanskrit vocabulary and how the words describe properties of objects rather than simply giving it a random name. He used to also make us compose two-line verses describing classmates on their birthdays, creating

personalized *ślokas* as gifts. In EAVP 5, we studied literary masterpieces like *Sāvītryupākhyānam* from the *Mahābhārata*, which is the story of Savitri as it is originally recounted, as well as excerpts from *Abhijñānaśākuntalam*. Narendrar-arya used to bring storybooks for us to read. We also performed a few plays for Saturday programmes. I remember working with Usha-ben on *Nala-Damayanti* and *Swapnavāsavadattam*. Under the inspiring guidance of Chinmayee-di, I began to pursue Sanskrit intensively in EAVP 5 and 6 and continued in Knowledge.

Walk us through your experiences in Knowledge.

I opted for 5 hours of Sanskrit in Knowledge. I discussed my learning goals and interests with

Chinmayee-di, and we created a plan. We decided to focus primarily on studying the *Bhagavad Gita*, with a smaller portion dedicated to grammar and linguistics.

The *Bhagavad Gita* has been one of my greatest passions. With Chinmayee-di, I sought a comprehensive understanding of the language, not just the philosophical part but also the logical and grammatical aspects. To prepare me, she started working with me on grammar and Panini's Sutas from the original *Aṣṭādhyāyī* in EAVP 6. It is an exhaustive subject and highly technical. I admired Panini's analytical skills and how he was able to gather so much information and express it in such a succinct manner. I also studied *The Essays on the Gita* with Chinmayee-di's father and continued with this in Knowledge under Jugal-da, connecting all my learning into my PhD work.

You decided to pursue Sanskrit studies post Knowledge. What was your inspiration for this and how was the experience?

After Knowledge, I was eager to pursue one of the languages, French or Sanskrit, and I took entrance exams for both. And that year, since we finish in December and then have to start the academic year next June, I had a chance to visit France with the Lions Club Cultural Exchange Program. I was in France for 5 weeks. There were a lot of cultural activities and people from 130 countries had gathered. We were asked to talk about our country and its culture. When I came back, I felt that I wanted to delve more deeply into my roots and continue with Sanskrit.

I initially applied to colleges in Bombay, but the process was tedious. Instead, I chose to pursue my MA at Pondicherry University, where I felt more comfortable. The Sanskrit department had three teachers, all of whom had in-depth knowledge of Sanskrit grammar, Sāhitya, Kāvya Shastra, and so on. At the Ashram, we always had a habit of speaking Sanskrit in class! My university teachers found this quite unique! At university, we studied a lot of Sāhitya and specialized grammar, along with Sanskrit aesthetics and Rasa theory (how to appreciate literature), Nyāya philosophy, etc.

Tell us about your PhD years and walk us through your thesis.

I was quite unsure at first, but my mentor suggested I pursue a PhD directly. The first year covered research methodology, similar to MPhil, allowing for a systematic approach while developing my research interests gradually. I was extremely fortunate to have a wonderful Guru in Dr. K.E. Dharaneedharan whom everyone calls *Guruji*. Highly learned and extremely patient, he beautifully embodied the famous saying '*vidyā dadāti vinayam*' (Knowledge gives humility).

My thesis focused on the *Bhagavad Gita*. I compared four different perspectives: Shankaracharya's commentary, which is the first and most elaborate one; insights from Maharashtrian scholar Sant Jñāneshwar, who has authored *Dnyaneśwari* (a lyrical commentary on the Gita) in the Marathi language so that common people could understand the philosophical aspects; Lokamanya Tilak's *Gita Rahasya*, which was written during his years of imprisonment while on the path of svarājya; and finally Sri Aurobindo's interpretation, which beautifully synthesizes the different yogic paths of the Gita and which was not widely known at the university. Pursuing a PhD on a philosophical topic like this is about personal growth, not just academic presentation, as I engaged deeply with the thoughts of these inspiring and influential figures. My experience was enriched by guidance from my mentor, Dr. Dharaneedharan, an Acharya who held a traditional approach and also appreciated Sri Aurobindo's ideas. Additionally, I actively participated in several conferences while finishing my PhD, which helped build confidence. I remember a conference in New Delhi on the Vedic River Saraswati and its historical significance and one in US organized by the World Association of Vedic Studies.

And post PhD?

After completing my PhD, I attended several Sanskrit-related conferences and connected with the World Association for Vedic Studies (WAVES), which organizes workshops and symposiums globally. I presented Sri Aurobindo's thoughts at

events in Florida and Trinidad. I also developed a *Bhagavad Gita* course for the Gnostic Center in New Delhi, titled “*Bhagavad Gita* in the Light of Sri Aurobindo.” This 4-month diploma course consisted of 10 chapters on key topics from the Gita, supported by audio and video materials, and has attracted students from diverse countries like Haiti, Canada, US, etc. The course is available on their site and has been running for more than 8 years. This year we are also launching a 6-week module (Module 1) entitled “Learn Sanskrit through the Gita”, which will contain 6 live online classes.

Subsequently, I worked with Dr. Peter Scharf from Brown University on digital Sanskrit dictionaries, focusing on correcting OCR (optical character recognition) errors in digital Sanskrit texts. I worked as Research Associate and was entrusted with the task of cataloging mistakes from various dictionaries, including *Apte*, *Monier-Williams*, and *Vachaspathyam*.

After 2 years, I joined the Computer Science Department at IIT Bombay, where I spent the next 4 years working on a Sanskrit wordnet project in collaboration with linguistic specialists from various languages. We worked under the acclaimed Prof. Malhar Kulkarni, who was one of the foremost Sanskrit scholars of the day. This project aimed to create a comprehensive web-based wordnet for Sanskrit, following the existing Hindi wordnet. The task involved coining new words to accommodate modern concepts. This is a necessity since the words used in the epoch that Sanskrit was spoken do not have all the terms that we use today. So you have to coin a word that means “dinosaur,” you have to formulate a word that means “computer.” But you cannot just decide to form new words and enter them randomly. You have to compare them with existing words in other Indian languages as well as consider Sanskrit syntax and logic.

My time at IIT was fulfilling; I engaged deeply with meaningful work alongside top scholars, enhancing my skills in the field. However, I later had to move to France due to my husband’s job, which disconnected me from that vibrant academic environment.

However, during my last year at IIT, I collaborated with an independent scholar on the Sanskrit lexicon project at Cologne University, Germany. This work, aligned with my interests in Sanskrit and digital dictionaries, allowed me to freelance at my own pace, and I continued as an editing consultant for this project till 2024. We worked on the ‘Cologne Sanskrit Lexicon Project’. I focused on correcting typographical and grammatical errors, which honed my attention to detail over years of training.

You also experimented with Sanskrit and Indian culture.

In the past 3 years, I have founded an Indian Culture Centre called ‘*Sanskriti_Inspiration Indiennes*’ to teach Sanskrit in France. After moving here 9 years ago, I discovered limited opportunities for teaching or research in the field of Sanskrit at universities. I decided that I wanted to bring Sanskrit to the masses, and therefore I began the journey of promoting Sanskrit in France!

The Cité Internationale Universitaire de Paris agreed to host my classes, which attracted 10–12 students from the start. I have since built a community of yoga teachers and practitioners as well as other Sanskrit lovers. Many in France are deeply interested in the philosophy of yoga and Indian heritage. They are often deeply moved during our philosophy classes and Mantra-chanting workshops. The enthusiasm for the language and tradition suggests a promising future, and I am passionate about nurturing it.

I also reached out to Shri Kiran Vyas at Tapovan. We collaborated to create completely online video modules with slides and text, simulating a live class experience. This first module received positive feedback and we have since added two more modules. This project represents our commitment to making Sanskrit accessible and engaging for a broader audience.

Over the years, I have discovered two distinct groups interested in learning Sanskrit. One group loves classical languages and ancient cultures, wanting to understand grammar and syntax. The other seeks to enhance their practice of Yoga



or Ayurveda by connecting to the tradition and philosophy through original texts like *Yogasutras*, *Hathapradipika* or the *Bhagavad Gita*. For example, a famous Bharatanatyam dancer from Portugal once expressed her interest to me in incorporating Sanskrit verses into her dance classes. Including Sanskrit enriches various cultural practices, and I feel confident in my ability to inspire others.

I am now collaborating with 6 different institutes/associations to promote Sanskrit and run my personal classes on the *Bhagavad Gita*, yoga philosophy, etc. I also incorporate Sanskrit in my Hathayoga classes. I have created a bilingual website, www.sanskritisampada.org, where enthusiasts can begin their Sanskrit learning journey for free. I have also embraced social media to promote pedagogical content to interested followers.

The incredible gift of learning French since childhood in the Ashram has made this journey possible and I am able to reach out to the local public with ease.

Has your family shown any interest in Sanskrit?

I encourage my children to learn Sanskrit by teaching them shlokas and songs and mantras. They often overhear my online classes, hence they are slowly understanding the richness of Indian culture. In the Ashram, students learn a variety of subjects comprehensively, but abroad, it is a different challenge to ensure children learn multiple Indian languages. However, I have tried to teach them Marathi and a little Tamil, as well as some Sanskrit through recitations. ❀

You can follow Sampada's work on content creation for promoting Sanskrit and yoga @sanskritisampada30



SANSKRIT: MY SPIRITUAL SĀDHANĀ

Desikan Narasimhan '90

What caused you to become passionate about Sanskrit?

This story goes back several decades to my time in Kindergarten. My first exposure to Sanskrit came through hearing the stories from our Itihasas and Puranas, narrated by the awe-inspiring आर्यविष्णुः. His very first question to the class left an indelible mark on me: कः देवभाषया वक्तुम् इच्छति? (“Who would like to speak in the language of the Gods?”). I thought to myself that learning this Divine language would set me apart, making me unique among my peers. I also felt a strong connection to our epics, and while listening to these stories in Sanskrit I found that I could relate to many of the characters and heroes in the *Mahabharata*.

As the years passed, I had the privilege of learning from many remarkable Sanskrit teachers, such as भरतार्यः, राधिकार्यः, चन्द्रशेखरार्यः, and चिन्मयी-दि, among others. To me, they embodied our civilizational heritage and were living representations of the values I held dear. The *Bhagavad Gita* and Upanishads represented the highest spiritual treasures of our times. These teachers were not only masters of the language but also had the rare ability to inspire their students profoundly. My love for Sanskrit grew with each passing year, further fueled by the numerous opportunities to perform in plays, thanks mainly to राधिकार्यः and चन्द्रशेखरार्यः.

आर्यविष्णुः inspired me in a way that was truly unique. He was the only person I knew who spoke exclusively in Sanskrit throughout his adult life, never once uttering a word in any “म्लेच्छ-भाषा” as he called it, meaning “impure or polluted tongue”. Determined to follow his example, I resolved by the time I reached EAVP 3 or 4 that I would speak only in Sanskrit for an entire year, no matter the challenges I faced. Little did I realize at the time how this pivotal decision would ignite a lifelong passion for the Sanskrit language.



What were some of the challenges you faced when you decided to implement your resolution to speak in Sanskrit for a year?

I took my resolution to the extreme by speaking only in Sanskrit, regardless of whether the person I was addressing understood the language or not. I responded to my English, French, Science, and even Tamil teachers in Sanskrit during class. Initially, they assumed I was being stubborn and assumed that I would soon abandon my mad resolution. To their surprise, I persisted, speaking Sanskrit not only at school but also at home and during physical education with my group captains. Some teachers did not appreciate this behavior, and in retrospect, I can understand why. I remember that my Science and Tamil teachers formally lodged a complaint with my parents, urging them to rein in my behavior and

encourage me to conform to more traditional expectations. My parents, however, could only throw up their hands in exasperation, explaining that I spoke to them too in Sanskrit. They said there was little they could do to change my mind.

After some back-and-forth arguments, the two teachers eventually gave up, allowing me to continue in my resolute ways. Still, they found ways to retaliate—grading my homework more harshly than what I thought was fair and seizing every opportunity to chastise me in front of the class. In hindsight, I realized that I paid a price for my obstinacy and can see that their frustrations were justified as well.

However, that year of unwavering commitment to speaking Sanskrit was what truly taught me to think and speak fluently in the language. Before that, I would often think in Tamil or English and then awkwardly translate my thoughts into Sanskrit, resulting in clumsy sentence constructs. But that year forced me to embrace Sanskrit as my primary mode of thought, and it transformed my fluency to a level that sustains me to this day.

What is the place of Sanskrit in your life?

Sanskritam is closely linked with Sanskriti, a term that loosely translates to refinement or culture. I firmly believe that Sanskrit is one of the most powerful tools to temper and purify our most unrefined and unregenerate impulses. Our Maharishis envisioned us as noble, refined, and cultured, which is the true essence of

the term अर्यपुत्र; a meaning distorted by later interpretations, particularly by Western scholars. Bhartrihari expresses this starkly in his esteemed work, Neetishatakam:

येषां न विद्या न तपो न दानं ज्ञानं न शीलं न गुणो न धर्मः ।
ते मर्त्यलोके भुवि भारभूता मनुष्यरूपेण मृगाश्चरन्ति ॥
(नीतिशतकं, 13)

yeṣāṃ na vidyā na tapo na dānaṃ jñānaṃ
na śīlaṃ na guṇo na dharmah |
te martyaloke bhuvi bhārabhūṭā
manuṣyarūpeṇa mṛgāścaranti ||
(Neetishatakam, 13)

“Those who lack knowledge, tapas, charity, wisdom, noble qualities, and adherence to dharma are merely animals, wandering the earth in human form.”

Sanskrit holds a central place in my life here in America. Each day, I have the privilege of reading our scriptures as part of my daily puja, fostering a deep connection with Sanatana Dharma. This practice is spiritually exhilarating, allowing me to converse directly with our Maharishis from ancient Yugas, unmediated by interpreters or translators. I have been blessed by the आदिकवि Bhagavān Valmiki to read the original *Ramayana* twice, uncovering a treasure trove of dharmic values that shape my identity as a Sanatani and illuminates the profound significance of Shri Rama across Bharatavarsha.

Even the Asura Maricha eloquently captures Shri Rama’s essence in the Aranya Kanda:

रामो विग्रहवान् धर्मः साधुः सत्यपराक्रमः ।
राजा सर्वस्य लोकस्य देवानाम् इव वासवः ॥
(३-३७-१३)

rāmo vighrahavān dharmah sādhuḥ satya
parākramah |
rājā sarvasya lokasya devānām iva vāsavaḥ||
(3-37-13)

“Rama is the embodiment of dharma, a benevolent soul whose valor is rooted in truth, and like Indra among the gods, he reigns over the entire world.”

Recently, I embarked on the ambitious journey of reading the *Mahabharata*. The joy I derive from this epic, along with inspiring stories from our history (iti haasa = it so happened), narrated by Krishna Dwaipayana



Desikan (centre) with his classmates

Veda Vyasa, feels like a reward from my past lives (पूर्वजन्मसुकृतं). Vaishampayana's timeless words to Janamejaya over five thousand years ago resonate with me deeply:

धर्मे चार्थे च कामे च मोक्षे च भरतर्षभ।
यदिहास्ति तदन्यत्र यत्रेहास्ति न तत् क्वचित्॥

dharme cārthe ca kāmē ca mokṣe ca
bharatarṣabha |

yadihāsti tadanyatra yannehāsti na tat kvacit ||
(Anushasana Parva, Chapter 113, Verse 8)

“In matters of Dharma, Artha, Kama, and Moksha, O Bharatarshabha, whatever exists in the *Mahabharata* exists elsewhere; if it is not found here, it cannot be found anywhere else.” ||

Beyond the profound dharmic content of these epics—*Mahabharata*, *Ramayana*, *Shrimad Bhagavatam*, the Upanishads, and *Bhagavad Gita*—the poetic beauty of these works is indescribable. There is no Valmiki or Veda Vyasa Trust collecting royalties; these divinely inspired texts exist solely for the benefit and upliftment of humanity, which is why they were composed. Among the five great yajnas that an individual is required to perform daily, ब्रह्मयज्ञः signifies our homage to the Vedas and our Maharishis. The most direct expression of gratitude to these sages is to read their works each day. This is what I attempt to do every day.

For the past seven years, I have also been a Sanskrit teacher with Samskrita Bharati, a Bangalore-based organization with world-wide branches dedicated to the propagation and teaching of Sanskrit. My son has been a student

in my class throughout this time and is preparing to sit for the third level of the Sanskrit as a Foreign Language exam (SAFL) this year. Being part of this organization has been a true privilege, allowing me to contribute, albeit in a small way, to the advancement of dharma and to pass the torch to the next generation. As Shri Krishna states in the *Bhagavad Gita*:

एवं प्रवर्तितं चक्रं नानुवर्तयतीह यः।
अघायुरिन्द्रियारामो मोघं पार्थ स जीवति।

(3, 16)

evaṃ pravartitaṃ chakraṃ nānuvartayatiha
yaḥ |
aghāyurindriyārāmo moghaṃ pārtha sa
jīvati ||

(Chapter 3, Verse 16)

“He who does not follow the wheel of dharma as prescribed by the Vedas lives a wasted life, indulging solely in sensory pleasures.”

Recently, I undertook a pilgrimage, visiting Ayodhya, Naimisha Aranyam, Tirupati, and Srirangam. My scriptural studies provided a firm anchor to experience these sacred sites as a devotee, rather than as an uninformed tourist. A casual observer might see no connection between Ayodhya and Srirangam, but in the *Ramayana*, we learn that the deity worshiped by Shri Rama is the same Ranganatha enshrined at Srirangam, originally gifted by Shri Rama to Vibheeshana during his pattAbhishekam.

विभीषणाय तं राजा प्रददौ धर्मपालकम्।
रङ्गनाथं सदा भक्त्या यं पूजयिष्यति सदा।

vibhīṣaṇāya taṃ rājā pradadau
dharmapālakam |

raṅganāthaṃ sadā bhaktyā yaṃ pūjayiṣyati
sadā ||

Uttarakandam, Chapter 24, Verse 8)

"The king (Rama) bestowed upon Vibheeshana the deity Ranganatha, who is the protector of dharma, to be worshiped with devotion always.”

In conclusion, Sanskrit serves as the medium through which I pursue my spiritual sādhanā. It is the very life-breath of my existence and has anchored me to dharmic values notwithstanding the challenges of living in a highly materialistic society in the United States. ॐ



Desikan with his parents

SPREADING THE LIGHT OF SRI AUROBINDO AND SANSKRIT

Dr. Sampadananda Mishra is a prominent Sanskrit scholar. He is a passionate advocate of Indian Knowledge Systems (IKS). His expertise encompasses Sanskrit language and literature, Indian culture, spirituality, and education cultivated through profound study of the teachings of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother.

I am deeply grateful to the Golden Chain Fraternity for conceiving a special issue dedicated to Sanskrit—a language that has shaped my entire being.



Sampadananda Mishra delivering a lecture

EARLY LIFE AND FOUNDATIONAL INFLUENCES

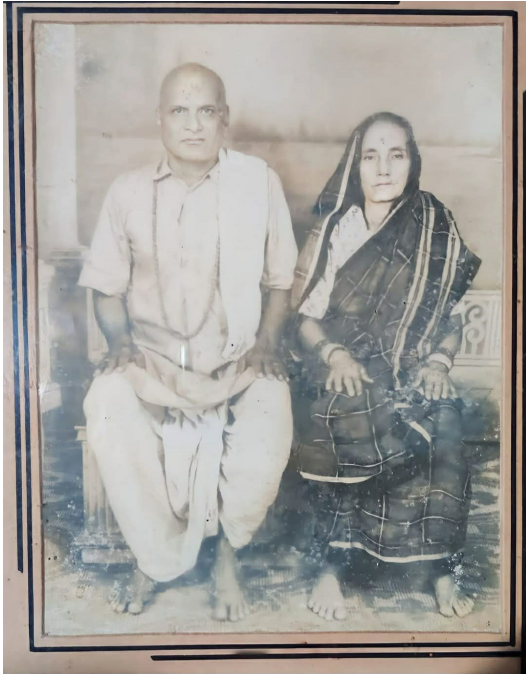
Sanskrit has been an inseparable part of my life since childhood. I was nurtured under the affectionate guidance of my grandfather, a respected Sanskrit Pandit, who instilled in me a deep reverence for the language and its cultural spirit. He firmly believed that every family in India should dedicate at least one member to serve the nation through the preservation of its spiritual

and cultural heritage. Out of his five grandsons, he chose me to devote my life to *Samṣkṛta*, *Samṣkṛti*, *Dharma* and *Deśa*. Whenever he visited a temple or mutt, he would take me along, teach me *ślokas*, and ask me to recite them before the *ācāryas*. These experiences, though simple, profoundly influenced me. My grandfather lovingly but firmly impressed upon me that I must carry Sanskrit within me wherever life might lead. His mentorship instilled in me both a discipline and a sacred responsibility.

Following his vision, I pursued my formal education with Sanskrit as my main subject. I completed my undergraduate studies with Honours in Sanskrit, followed by a postgraduate degree specializing in Sanskrit grammar. I later earned an M.Phil. and subsequently a Ph.D. in the same field. My grandfather's most enduring instruction was: "Do not become anyone's servant. Sanskrit is a language of freedom. Experience that *svatantratā* and pursue paths that offer both knowledge and dignity—*āyurveda*, *karmakāṇḍa*, *jyotiṣa*, or teaching. Establish your own Gurukul but do not become dependent on employment." This message resonated deeply with me, shaping both my intellectual path and my approach to life.

ENCOUNTER WITH SRI AUROBINDO'S VISION

After completing my education in Odisha, I joined Pondicherry University to pursue my M.Phil. In Odisha, I studied under Professor P. K. Mishra, a long-time devotee of Sri Aurobindo, who regularly conducted study circles at Utkal University, Bhubaneswar. During these gatherings, he would read aloud passages from



Sampadananda-ji's grandparents

Savitri while his wife prepared delicious meals, which proved to be the greatest attraction. Professor Mishra later organized a study tour to South India, which concluded with a five-day stay in Pondicherry. During that visit, we listened to Nadkarni-ji's talks on *Essays on the Gita* and *Savitri* and we explored various departments of the Sri Aurobindo Ashram. Even though I knew little about Sri Aurobindo then, something about this place drew me deeply.

The first books I bought were *The Foundations of Indian Culture* and Sri Aurobindo's biography. I could barely comprehend them at the time—my English was weak, and I had never received much exposure to the language—but the aspiration had been kindled. Upon completing my M.Phil., I returned to Odisha. A few months later, I received a letter from the Sri Aurobindo Society inviting me to join them. Professor Kutumba Shastry, my teacher and then Head of the Department of Sanskrit at Pondicherry University, had recommended my name. Without fully understanding the nature of the organization, I accepted—and thus began my journey with the Sri Aurobindo Society in 1995.

ADAPTING TO A NEW INTELLECTUAL WORLD

The initial years were challenging. I found myself among scholars and thinkers whose command of English and familiarity with Sri Aurobindo's works far exceeded mine. Yet, I trusted that the environment itself would nurture me. I requested my colleagues to give me one year solely for study and introspection, during which I immersed myself in Sri Aurobindo's writings: *The Foundations of Indian Culture*, *Essays on the Gita*, *The Upanishads*, *The Secret of the Veda*, *The Ideal of Human Unity*, and *The Future Poetry*.

Simultaneously, I explored the Mother's reflections on Sanskrit. One statement by her where the Mother said that just as every child born in France has to learn French, every child born in India must learn Sanskrit struck me profoundly. This idea transformed my purpose. I resolved to dedicate my life to bringing Sanskrit to as many people as possible—especially to children—in the light of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother.

RESEARCH, WRITING, AND CONTRIBUTION

As my study deepened, I discovered the immense yet largely unacknowledged contribution of Sri Aurobindo to Sanskrit language and literature. Surprisingly, I could not find a single academic work dedicated to this subject. Determined to fill this gap, I resolved to write the first book on Sri Aurobindo and Sanskrit. I received encouragement and assistance from several individuals, including Dr. Vandana, M. S. Srinivas, and Deshpande-ji. The guidance of Amal Kiran (K. D. Sethna) was particularly invaluable. During my visits to his residence for *seva*, I would occasionally seek his feedback on my drafts. His insights and encouragement helped refine my work. This effort culminated in the publication of *Sri Aurobindo and Sanskrit*, which examined Sri Aurobindo's contributions to the Sanskrit language and literature in their entirety. Subsequently, I expanded upon various sections of the work into independent research projects. One such study on Sri Aurobindo's philosophy of linguistics—his "new philology"—

became the basis of my doctoral thesis at Utkal University. To the best of my knowledge, this was the first academic exploration of Sri Aurobindo's linguistic philosophy. I feel profoundly blessed to have contributed, in however small a measure, to that sacred intellectual lineage.

When I first joined the Sri Aurobindo Society, I had little understanding of what the Society or the Ashram truly represented. At that time, the situation was far from ideal—there were many internal challenges. Despite these obstacles, I reminded myself that I had come here for Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, and I resolved to contribute positively and sincerely. My conviction was that the prevailing narrative could be transformed through dedicated work—and, in time, this indeed came to pass. I immersed myself wholeheartedly in various projects, striving to bring to light lesser-known aspects of Sri Aurobindo's life and work. Gradually, my efforts began to bear fruit. Some of my works were displayed at the School—*Sri Aurobindo and Sanskrit*, Sri Aurobindo's *Century of Life*, and other initiatives that illuminated Sri Aurobindo's multifaceted contributions. I also prepared audio-visual materials, including CDs on the *Bhagavad Gita* and *The Wonder That Is Sanskrit*, and organized a special program on *Bhavani Bharati* at the Ashram Theatre. Within five to seven years, these sustained efforts began to change perceptions, and I felt that my work was beginning to be recognized and respected within the community.

REVIVING BHAVANI BHARATI FOR THE CONTEMPORARY GENERATION

I take particular joy in recalling that I was perhaps the first person to systematically promote Sri Aurobindo's *Bhavani Bharati* across the country. This powerful work, though central to Sri Aurobindo's spiritual nationalism, had rarely been introduced to younger audiences. I therefore initiated efforts to bring

Bhavani Bharati into school curricula. One of the earliest and most enduring examples of this initiative has been at Seth M. R. Jaipuria School in Lucknow, where we began organizing *Bhavani Bharati* competitions more than a decade ago to spread awareness and appreciation among students.

These events have now been held annually for the last twelve years, attracting around a thousand participants from schools across Uttar Pradesh each year. Through such activities, I have sought to disseminate Sri Aurobindo's thought and vision to a wider audience, especially the youth. Reading Sri Aurobindo's interpretations of the Vedas, Upanishads, *Bhagavad Gita*, and the works of classical masters like Kālidāsa and Śāṅkarācārya has profoundly transformed my own understanding of these texts. Their meanings have deepened and expanded in light of his spiritual and philosophical insights. The clarity that has emerged through this journey has been nothing short of revelatory, and I feel truly blessed to be part of this work.

A FAMILY IMMERSSED IN THE SPIRIT OF THE ASHRAM

This journey has not been mine alone; it has touched my entire family. My wife and



Sampadananda-ji with Prof P K Mishra

daughter too have entered into the living spirit of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother. My daughter, for instance, has been studying *Savitri* with Jhumur-di for the past three years, and she often remarks that reading it never feels like reading English—it feels like chanting a *mantra*. Such is the transformative power of Sri Aurobindo’s language and vision. It transcends linguistic boundaries and opens the heart to the deeper rhythms of consciousness.

SANSKRIT AND THE NATIONAL LANGUAGE

When we speak of a national language, the very term *national* often evokes discomfort or contention. People immediately ask—how can a language be declared national in a country as diverse as India? This question itself reveals a deeper issue: the lack of a unified sense of *nationhood*. Only when the people of India wholeheartedly accept every aspect of the Nation and Nation-spirit does a language naturally emerge as its expression. Sri Aurobindo himself was once asked why he repeatedly spoke of the national system of education or national way of life. What did he mean by national?

Sri Aurobindo’s conception of nation and nationalism was fundamentally different from the political or territorial definitions that dominate modern discourse. For him, the nation was not a geographical or administrative unit but a living spiritual being—a *shakti*, a manifestation of collective consciousness. In contrast, what is often termed *nationalism* today is a narrow and self-centered idea. To illustrate Sri Aurobindo’s vision, let us consider the teaching of geography. In modern education, geography is reduced to the study of maps, population, and statistics—all measured and categorized in a purely mechanical way. But Sri Aurobindo spoke of sacred geography: an education in which the land of India is experienced not as mere territory but as a living Mother. In traditional India, a child began the day by remembering the sacred sites of the nation—Mathura, Kanchi, Kashi, Gaya, Ayodhya—and by reciting the verse: “*Samudra-vasane devi, parvata-stana-mandale, Vishnu-*

patni namastubhyam, pāda-sparśam kṣamasva me.” This was followed by reverent remembrance of the sacred rivers—Ganga, Yamuna, Saraswati, Godavari, Narmada, Sindhu, and Kaveri—while bathing. Geography, therefore, was never taught; it was lived. That purity of vision—the perception of the land as divine—is what Sri Aurobindo meant by the national way of teaching.

When Sri Aurobindo said that “Sanskrit ought to be the national language of India,” it was not merely a political proposal. It was a statement of spiritual vision. His intent was not to impose Sanskrit as a state-declared national language but to awaken it as the heart and soul of the nation. For Sanskrit to become the national language, the nation-spirit itself must vibrate with its primordial sounds, for divine life is the ultimate goal of India’s destiny.

The purity and power of Sanskrit sounds are unparalleled. Indeed, even a reprimand in Sanskrit can sound like a blessing. When such consciousness is realized—when divine life becomes firmly established—Sanskrit will not need to be imposed; it will naturally become the language of India.

Sri Aurobindo clarified that the Sanskrit of India’s unity would not be the ornate language of Kālidāsa, Māgha, or Bhāravi, but the simple, direct, and integral Sanskrit of Vyāsa and Vālmiki—the Sanskrit of the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*. The *Ramayana* represents the *heart* of Bhārata, while the *Mahabharata* represents its intellect. When the simplicity of the *Ramayana* and the rational depth of the *Mahabharata* are harmonized, they reveal the true spirit of India—Bharata-Shakti, or Bhavani Bharati as Sri Aurobindo called it. When this nation-soul awakens, Sanskrit will once again flow naturally through the life of India, without resistance or discomfort.

Of course, in the present circumstances, such a transformation appears difficult. India’s immense linguistic diversity cannot be ignored. Sanskrit, therefore, must not be seen as replacing regional languages but as their source and support, much like the Gangotri from which many sacred rivers originate. Sanskrit and the regional languages

must grow together, each nurturing the other. Otherwise, as seen in certain regions such as Odisha, neglecting Sanskrit endangers even the survival of regional languages. Without Sanskrit, these languages lose their vitality, their ability to renew themselves, and their creative power of word formation, which in Sanskrit is both transparent and systematic.

In educational practice, Sanskrit must therefore be introduced at the very foundation. When my daughter joined the Ashram school, we spoke to her only in Odia and Sanskrit during her early years; she learned no English at all until she began formal schooling. Some teachers appreciated this, especially those teaching Sanskrit and French—both highly structured, scientific languages. This system, where Sanskrit and another logical language like French are taught early, builds mental discipline and linguistic sensitivity. English, being largely illogical and irregular, should come later, once the student's linguistic foundations are firmly rooted in structure and clarity.

ANCIENT LANGUAGES: GETTING TO THE FOUNTAINHEAD

Sanskrit and Tamil are two of the oldest languages. As Sri Aurobindo explains, both are cognate, or sister, languages that co-existed alongside others such as Greek, Latin, Lithuanian, Chinese, Hebrew, Arabic, and Urdu. These are all among the ancient linguistic systems that, according to Sri Aurobindo's philological insights, point toward a more primordial source language. That source language, however, remains unknown to modern scholars. To trace its existence, Sri Aurobindo argued, we must identify certain surviving clues embedded in the world's earliest linguistic structures.

After extensive comparative study and analysis of Greek, Latin, and most of the European languages, Sri Aurobindo concluded that Sanskrit possesses the greatest potential to reveal the key to this lost source language. Contemporary linguists refer to this hypothetical proto-language as the "grandmother language,"

whereas Sri Aurobindo evocatively named it *devabhāṣā*—the "language of divine origin."

Vedic Sanskrit, in particular, stands out as a language uniquely capable of illuminating this origin. It retains a remarkably transparent and comprehensive system of root sounds, semantic fields, and grammatical structures. The phonology, morphology, semantics, and syntax of Sanskrit preserve the primitive linguistic intuition that once animated early human speech. When Sanskrit loses a particular nuance, Tamil or Greek or Latin often retains it—and vice versa. Thus, Sri Aurobindo envisioned a comparative, integrative study of languages through which one could reconstruct the deeper unity underlying global linguistic evolution. Unfortunately, modern linguists often dismiss these insights. They have their own agenda. I often find myself debating them, because without engaging with Sri Aurobindo's integral perspective one cannot truly grasp the spiritual dimension of language.



Sampadananda-ji with Prof Kutumba Shastri, former Head of the Department of Sanskrit, Pondicherry University, at the 16th World Sanskrit Conference held in Bangkok, Thailand, in 2015

Consider, for example, the Sanskrit root *stha*. A systematic analysis of all derivatives from this root demonstrates how languages across the world are interconnected. Why is a place called *sthāna*? When you say *sthā*, the experience, if you observe all the words, refers to the experience of stability or immobility. So anything which is stable, fixed, also leads to the idea at a physical level of strength and heaviness. At a mental-psychological level, it refers to being strong-willed, or obstinate, or stubborn. So, at each level, at a physical level, at an emotional level, at a mental-psychological level, you can find these meanings matching with *sthā*. A place is called *sthāna* because it doesn't move. Interestingly, English words containing the same consonantal cluster *st*—for instance, stability, stubborn, exist, establishment, station, stagnant, sturdy, or steel—also evoke the sense of solidity or permanence. This parallel confirms Sri Aurobindo's assertion of an eternal relationship between sound, sense, and symbol in Sanskrit. Meanings are not arbitrarily imposed for convenience; they arise from an inherent resonance between sound and experience.

Panini, the great Sanskrit grammarian, identified approximately two thousand root sounds. From these, more than three hundred million words can be derived through a systematic and generative process. This is, in essence, the earliest known form of generative grammar. From a single root, one can produce thousands of meaningful derivatives by logical and rule-based transformations. It is a living demonstration of how language itself unfolds from sound into sense, from vibration into expression—a principle that lies at the heart of Sri Aurobindo's linguistic philosophy.

OF AIs AND LLMs

We are making steady progress in this area. There have been extensive discussions, particularly with researchers working on large language models (LLMs). Those who specialize in LLMs naturally understand the technological framework, but they need to collaborate closely with scholars who have an in-depth

understanding of how Sanskrit actually functions. Only through such an interdisciplinary exchange can meaningful progress be achieved.

Some attempts have already been made to integrate Sanskrit into AI frameworks. However, I still have certain reservations about these efforts, as they often approach Sanskrit merely as a subject of artificial translation—reducing it to a set of mechanical correspondences. What is required instead is an engagement with the natural syntactic structure and experiential depth of Sanskrit. Only then can artificial intelligence be trained in a way that truly reflects the living, dynamic nature of the language.

In my current work, we are actively training AI systems with Sanskrit texts, beginning with the Upanishads. The goal is to train the AI tool to identify the root sound of every word in the Upanishads and then describe the experiential essence underlying each. Sri Aurobindo condensed the vast range of human experience reflected in Sanskrit into six fundamental categories—sound, thought, contact, movement, motion, and light. Building on this framework, we are in the process of categorizing approximately 33,000 root sounds according to these six experiential dimensions.

For example, around 5,000 roots may be classified under “thought,” while another 7,000 may relate to “contact.” Once this categorization is complete, a remarkable advantage emerges: one no longer needs to rely on conventional dictionaries. If a particular root is tagged under “contact,” then any word derived from that root will inherently carry some nuance of contact—whether at the physical, emotional, mental, psychological, or spiritual level.

This project enables a new way of interpreting the Upanishads—one that follows Sri Aurobindo's linguistic and experiential insights, delving deep into the consciousness encoded in each root sound. It is a highly concentrated and meticulous undertaking, requiring time and sustained effort. Once the Upanishads are complete, the same approach will be extended to the *Bhagavad Gita* and the Veda Samhitas, with the broader aim of developing an AI model capable of understanding

Sanskrit not merely as a language but as a system of consciousness.

REDISCOVERING INDIA AND ITS KNOWLEDGE SYSTEMS

After the introduction of the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, the concept of Indian Knowledge Systems (IKS) has become very popular. Over the last two to three years, the University Grants Commission (UGC) has trained nearly 10,000 teachers in IKS, and the goal is to train hundreds of thousands more in the near future.

Broadly speaking, IKS refers to the corpus of knowledge generated within the Indian subcontinent—across all regions and languages—whether in Odia, Marathi, Tamil, Telugu, Malayalam, Kannada, Sanskrit, or others. Whatever knowledge was created, systematized, and preserved in any field—be it Ayurveda, architecture, astronomy, metallurgy, shipbuilding, or Aśvaveda (the science of horses)—collectively constitutes IKS. However, IKS is not merely a repository of ancient scientific or technical information; it is also about the mode of presentation, the linguistic creativity, and the intellectual method through which Indians expressed and transmitted knowledge.

Take the *Mahabharata*, for example. With over 100,000 verses and innumerable interwoven narratives, it is a masterpiece of composition. No modern scholar, however trained in critical reasoning, can challenge Vyasa's structural mastery and claim that the stories have been misplaced. This reflects not only the Indian genius for storytelling but also our unique epistemic and pedagogical methods.

Many claim that the modern West introduced us to systematic research, thesis presentation, and hierarchical numbering systems (1.1, 1.1.1, 1.1.1.1, and so on). But if one studies how Vyasa organized the Rig Veda—10,500 scattered mantras meticulously classified according to *ṛṣi* (seer), *chandas* (meter), and *devatā* (deity), and arranged into ten *maṇḍalas* (books)—we see an astonishingly advanced system of organization that predates modern methods by millennia. The

notation 10.3.3, for example, precisely locates the tenth *maṇḍala*, third *sūkta*, and third *mantra*. How was such an indexing system conceived several thousand years ago?

When skeptics dismiss texts like the *Ramayana*, *Mahabharata*, and Purāṇas as “fanciful imaginations,” Sri Aurobindo provides a profound rejoinder. He says, let us accept that it is fanciful imagination. Yet in my country, imagination has created Sita, Draupadi, and Savitri. If imagination has produced such ideal figures, my salutations to that imagination. This highlights the purified and elevated power of imagination inherent in the Indian spirit—an imagination not destructive but deeply creative and spiritual.

Thus, the essence of IKS is not merely the accumulation of ancient scientific insights but an awareness of how rooted our knowledge traditions were. We constantly nourished the roots of our civilization, ensuring that its branches, leaves, flowers, and fruits flourished naturally. Today, by contrast, we water only the visible branches—the external expressions—while the roots are left dry. The result is inevitable: despite much effort, the tree of culture begins to wither. To be rooted does not mean to return mechanically to the past; it means to build a solid foundation on which we can stand firmly and from which we can leap toward the future. IKS provides precisely this foundation—enabling us to draw inspiration, strength, and insight from our roots while engaging dynamically with the present.

Speech therapy is an area where IKS can be implemented quite easily. To correct your child's speech difficulties is very expensive, but seldom is there a proper solution. I challenge that no speech therapist can provide a solution to the speech problems of an Indian child. That is because they follow the Western model, which has its own importance for the Western languages. But our language, our environment is very different. How can the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA), which has to be adapted by speech therapists, help a Marathi child? I present the Sanskrit Alphabet model, which teaches every child the Sanskrit alphabet right from childhood. There will be no

speech defect at all. I have a huge project on this. I have submitted it to the Government of India and they said that entrepreneurs can take it up and then set up labs.

IKS, therefore, must become an integral part of our education, culture, and everyday life. Whenever I interact with students, I speak to them about Pāṇini or share insights from my research on robotics in ancient India—and they are fascinated. When presented logically and coherently, children listen with keen interest. It is our responsibility to communicate this heritage meaningfully.

Every Indian language has contributed to this vast knowledge system. However, the majority of manuscripts—literally *lakhs*—are in Sanskrit, many of which remain untranslated and undeciphered. Without an understanding of Sanskrit, it becomes difficult to access or interpret them. Much of India’s spiritual and yogic literature, even when written in regional languages, draws upon Sanskrit’s symbolic framework. One can decode these symbols only through an entry into Sanskrit.

My recent project explores “Cryptography and Sanskrit.” I am developing an encryption and decryption model inspired by ancient Indian linguistic and philosophical systems, with the goal of presenting it to the Ministry of Defence. Our traditional encoding systems were vastly

different from today’s algorithm-based methods. They were based in poetry.

Our mathematics is in poetry. Our chemistry is in poetry. Our physics is in poetry. Our geography is in poetry. Our dictionaries are in poetry. So unless and until one understands poetry, the fineness of languages, it would be very difficult to enter into IKS and appreciate it. Today we find ourselves far removed from these sources. There is a powerful line delivered by a famous actor: “Fall, fall like the waterfall that cascades from the mountain yet never loses its beauty.” This, too, is the art of life—to descend into the world without losing one’s inner grace. The revival of IKS, envisioned in NEP 2020, can play a crucial role in helping us being rooted and rediscovering that inner grace and strength.

As Sri Aurobindo reminds us in *The Foundations of Indian Culture*, particularly in the chapter “Indian Culture and External Influence,” India can rise only by being herself. There is nothing wrong in adopting elements from other cultures—if they contain truth and utility—but we must assimilate, not imitate. Assimilation, Sri Aurobindo emphasizes, means internalizing what resonates with our *Ātman*, our inner being. Only then can it become truly our own—only then can we achieve *ātmasāt*, a living integration of knowledge and spirit. ❀



Sampadananda-ji with participants of Bhavani Bharati competition 2025 at Seth M R Jaipuria School, Lucknow

SANSKRIT KARYALAYA: WORKING TOWARDS FULFILLING THE MOTHER'S VISION FOR SANSKRIT

*Possibly only a few are aware that the Ashram has a department dedicated to Sanskrit, the Sanskrit Karyalaya. The department completed 41 years of its existence on July 1 last year and during this time has been working tirelessly to fulfil the Mother's vision for Sanskrit. **Giridhar ('79)** met up with **Dr Narendra Arya** who heads the department presently to delve deeper into its history and activities.*

Who initiated the idea of the Sanskrit Karyalaya?

The first attempt for a magazine in Sanskrit to be published from the Ashram was made on June 10, 1971 by Jagannath-arya, Mr. Jagannath Vijayesh, a teacher of Sanskrit from the School at Sri Aurobindo Ashram Delhi Branch, Aryavishnu and Chinmayee-arya.

They wrote to the Mother requesting Her to select a name for the magazine from among a few suggested names. The Mother selected Rāṣṭrabhāṣā stating "Le premier titre semble le meilleur. Bénédiction." The letter to the Mother and her response are on the next page.

The teacher carried the letter with him to Delhi stating that this would help him raise funds for printing. Soon after he became a sanyasi. As a result, the initiative came to an abrupt halt.

Several years later, Aryavishnu and I initiated the idea of an institution to work on Sanskrit. We co-opted Jagannath-arya and Chinmayee-di. Pradyot-da, one of the Trustees of the Ashram, was a great lover of Sanskrit. Aryavishnu and I approached him for his thoughts on the matter. He advised us to write a letter to the Trustees.

We wrote to the Trustees requesting for the formation of a Trust named "The Mother's Sanskrit Trust". The Trustees approved the idea but advised us to form and operate as a Department of the Ashram.

They said they would provide space for the Department but also put a condition that the Department must be financially self-sufficient similar to "Mother India" and "Advent".

When and where was the Inauguration held?

The Inauguration was held on July 1, 1984. At the time, the Ashram had a Goshala (cowshed) which was located just next to the Distillery at the end of East Boulevard. Aryavishnu used to live there and therefore decided to have the Inauguration there.

What was the Program for the day?

We held a short meditation where Madhav-ji, Udar-da, Vrajarya, Jagannath-arya, Babaji Maharaj, Balkrishna Poddar-ji, Chinmayee-di,



At the inauguration programme
From left to right: Aryavishnu, Narendra Arya, Jagannath Arya, Geeta Lall,
Archana Arya, Chinmayee Arya, Shyamaljit

Douce Mère,

Inspirés par Ton message que le sanskrit doit être la langue nationale de l'Inde, nous voudrions publier une revue pour populariser le sanskrit simple et vivant. Nous voudrions de toi un nom pour la revue, ou si Tu veux, bénis un des noms qui nous sont venus.

La revue serait publiée de Delhi et un jeune professeur, Jagannath Vijayesh, de Delhi Ashram School s'offre à prendre toute la responsabilité de son édition et sa publication.

Nous Te prions pour Ta permission et Tes bénédictions pour la revue.

Avec nos pranams à Tes pieds de lotus,

Tes enfant,

Le premier titre semble le meilleur.

bénédictions

La Mère

Jagannath
Jagannath Vijayesh
Nishmalati
Chinmayee Maheshwari

१. राष्ट्र भाषा - National language, langue nationale
 २. राष्ट्र भारती - Muse of the Nation, Muse de la Nation.
 ३. राष्ट्र वाणी - Speech of the Nation, Voix de la Nation.
 ४. राष्ट्र सञ्जीवनी - (Language) of National Revival - (Renaissance) Nationale
 ५. राष्ट्र हृदयम् - Heart of the Nation - Cœur de la Nation.

Letter to the Mother seeking her blessings to start a journal to popularise a simple and living Sanskrit

Archana-di and others were present. This was followed by the distribution of the Mother's message of August 16, 1969:

“Je ne vois pas la nécessité d'un message. Les messages ne convainquent que ceux qui sont déjà convaincus.

Il vaut mieux apprendre le sanscrit et tâcher d'en faire une langue bien vivante.”

“I see no need for any message. Messages only convince those who are already convinced.

It would be better to learn Sanskrit and try to make it a truly living language.”

The above message was in response to the following letter from Aryavishnu to the Mother:

“Sweet Mother,

We would like to have – as the expression of what You want – a message from You about the new life for Sanskrit, of which You gave us a glimpse in Your talk of November 11, 1967. We would like to translate this message and publish it in the Ashram journals, for some disciples would like to know what You have said about this matter.”

What are the objectives and activities of the Department?

The objectives and activities of the Department were beautifully summarised as below by Balakrishna-da who was heading Sri Aurobindo Book Distribution Agency (SABDA) at the time:

“The Sanskrit Karyalaya of the Sri Aurobindo Ashram has been active for a number of years in promoting and popularising a simple form of Sanskrit. This is in keeping with the declared wish of the Mother that a simple form of Sanskrit should be the national language of India.

The Mother, who was deeply influenced by this classical language, desired that for the common use it should be a simple form of Sanskrit which can be written, spoken and understood with ease, so as to remove the prevalent dread of the language as a very difficult one and meant only for scholars.

The research work of the Sanskrit Karyalaya of the Ashram in this direction has so far produced a number of innovative books for teaching

A REJUVENATED SANSKRIT

A conversation between a Student of Sanskrit (S) and Narendra-Arya (N)

S: What has been done in so many years to come closer to the ideal that the Mother spoke of?

N: The Sanskrit Karyalaya is a Department of the Ashram where we have published and continue to publish material – printed books, audio lessons and songs, videos, etc. – to learn Sanskrit in a simple and easy manner. Our learning material is being used in 600 of the Integral Schools in Odisha, as well as some other schools. We also publish a Sanskrit journal, *Lokasamskritam*, twice a year since 1985.

S: There is another question that has been bothering me. The Mother has said “To learn a language one must read, read, read – and talk as much as one can.”¹ How can we implement this practically?

N: This is exactly what we have tried in the Sri Aurobindo International Centre of Education (SAICE). Teachers began speaking with students in Sanskrit not just in class, but all the time – when greeting each other, during meals, sports, etc.

S: The Mother has also said “You must study grammar well if you want to understand what you read.” Sanskrit Grammar is difficult, isn't it?²

N: Not really. As Sri Aurobindo has

explained “The structure that we find [in Sanskrit] is one of extraordinary initial simplicity and also of extraordinarily mathematical and scientific regularity of formation.”³ Further Rick Briggs, a researcher at National Aeronautics and Space Agency (NASA), has this to say about the scientific nature of the Sanskrit language: “Once the alphabet is learned, there is just one step to take in gaining access to the Sanskrit language: learning the case and tense endings. The endings are what make Sanskrit a language of math-like precision.”⁴ We use a few songs and tricks for learners to remember the rules.

Recently, we have also introduced in Accélére a handbook “Sanskrit in 11 hours”, which can help students understand 50-60% of the language of the Gita. With this we can prove that learning Sanskrit is a one-time job.

S: This is an eye-opener for me! I would like for us to meet again to allow me to understand the details.

N: Gladly. I fervently hope that.

References

1. CWM, Vol 12, p. 221
2. CWM, Vol 12, p. 220
3. SABCL, Vol 10, p. 570
4. Spring Issue of AI, 1985

and learning Sanskrit adopting a different method. Beginners especially will find these books extremely helpful to learn quite easily the language which is believed to be difficult.

A few publications deserve special mention: *Surabharati*, *Saralamskritasaranani*, *Sanskritam Bhashamahai*, *Learn Sanskrit the Natural Way* are some of the books which both beginners and the learned will find immensely helpful in learning, mastering and popularising the language.

The Sanskrit Karyalaya has also published a comprehensive book: *Sanskritasya Vyavaharikaswarupam - Functional Sanskrit:*

Its Communicative Aspects (335 pages) by Dr. Narendra, a scholar and an inmate of the Sri Aurobindo Ashram. This unique book by Dr. Narendra is a systematic study and an in-depth research work for establishing that Sanskrit can be made both simple and fully communicative.

“The ideal would be”, as the Mother said, “...to have a rejuvenated Sanskrit as the representative language of India”. And every Indian perhaps has a role to play in not only reviving Sanskrit, an indispensable element of the ancient Indian cultural heritage, but also to make it once again living and vibrant” (CWM, Vol. 12, p. 414).



Udar-da and Sri Madhav Pandit at the inauguration of Sanskrit Karyalaya

The books mentioned above are available on SABDA's website <https://www.sabda.in>.

Surabharati with its four parts are being used as textbooks in more than 600 Integral Schools of Odisha since 1990. These books with an audio version are available on the website: sanskrit.motherandsriaurobindo.in.

Speak Sanskrit the Easy Way, Pratyaksha-Paddhatya-Samskritam (Sanskrit: A Direct Approach), Sambhashana Sahayah are the later publications to facilitate the study of Sanskrit. Twenty-one video lessons of about 3 hours duration are also available on the above website.

Rutger Kortenhorst, Head of Sanskrit Section at John Scottus School and a recipient of Padmashri, has been visiting the Sanskrit Karyalaya for the last 19 years to introduce simple and spoken Sanskrit in his school. Learning materials prepared at the Karyalaya such as Grammar Songs, Script Songs, etc. are available on his website: sanskrit.in.

Gabriella Burnel, a student of St James School, London, and an online instructor of Sanskrit and chanting of Mantras,

Shlokas, Bhajans and Songs also visits the Sanskrit Karyalaya to learn simple and spoken Sanskrit and to collect materials for her work.

Sanskrit Karyalaya also brings out a magazine in Sanskrit *Lokasamskritam* which was published quarterly to start with, and subsequently half-yearly in February and August. We had applied for "Rashtrabhasha", the name selected by the Mother, to the Registrar of Newspapers. However, this name was rejected since it had

already been allotted to another magazine.

Pujalal-ji was invited to be the Chief Editor of the magazine which he graciously accepted. He also helped to bring in a large number of life members – 150+ – for the magazine. After his demise, Jagannath-arya became its Chief Editor. After Jagannath-arya's demise, I invited Usha-di to be the Chief Editor. I have been the Chief Editor since Usha-di's demise, although I have been involved in the ground work for the magazine since the start.

Shankar, an inmate of the Ashram, is also involved with Sanskrit Karyalaya's activities.



Inauguration ceremony at the Goshala (July 1, 1984)

Has the Department always operated from its current location?

The Department first operated from where the Archives Library is today. Jayantilal-da had

allotted us space there for a Composing Section. We then moved to a space next to the Ashram Press, then to where we are presently, which is where Jagannath-arya used to live.ॐ

संस्कृतस्य शिक्षणार्थं भाषणार्थं च उपयोगि- पुस्तकानि

Books published by the Ashram to aid in learning Sanskrit

- | | |
|--|--------------------------------|
| 01. सुरभारती – प्रथमभागः | 20. वेदप्रवेशः |
| 02. सुरभारती – द्वितीयभागः | 21. संस्कृतं भाषामहै |
| 03. सुरभारती – तृतीयभागः | 22. सम्भाषण-सहायः |
| 04. सुरभारती – चतुर्थभागः | 23. दुर्गास्तोत्रम् |
| 05. Speak Sanskrit: The Easy Way | 24. श्रीअरविन्दोपनिषद् |
| 06. संस्कृतस्य व्यावहारिकस्वरूपम् | 25. सरलश्लोकाः |
| 07. सरलसंस्कृतसरणिः (प्रथमभागः) | 26. अर्घ्यम् (दश नाटकानि) |
| 08. सरलसंस्कृतसरणिः (द्वितीयभागः) | 27. रम्यनाटकानि |
| 09. Learn Sanskrit: The Natural Way | 28. पाणिनीयप्रवेशः |
| 10. व्यावहारिकं पाणिनीयम् | 29. पाणिनीयपद्धत्या शब्दरूपाणि |
| 11. आदिकाव्यात् प्रेरकप्रसङ्गाः | 30. प्राथमिकं पाणिनीयम् |
| 12. प्रत्यक्ष-पद्धत्या-संस्कृतम् | 31. सरसश्लोकाः |
| 13. रङ्गमेत्रे संस्कृतम् (षड् नाटकानि) | 32. Mantras in Sunil's Music |
| 14. श्रीमाता | 33. छन्दोऽलङ्कारपरिचयः |
| 15. आलापमाला | 34. बालश्लोकाः |
| 16. संक्षिप्तगीता | 35. भवानी भारती |
| 17. कथाञ्जलिः | 36. स्तोत्रसङ्गीतिका |
| 18. नीतिशतकम् | 37. कथासंग्रहः |
| 19. सक्तथाः | 38. तमिळ्-संस्कृत-सम्बन्धः |

Some of these books with audio are available at: sanskrit.motherandsriaurobindo.in

SANSKRIT IN AUROVILLE

Compiled by **Aravinda M '71** and *Samskritam Auroville team*

Sanskrit was seeded in the very foundation of Auroville on 28 February 1968, when, after a reverberating broadcast in the Mother's voice in French, the Charter of Auroville was read in Sanskrit, along with English, Tamil and 15 other national languages.

Each language carries with it a special vibration and force and we believe Sanskrit has a unifying force. The more we make it into a living language, the more its unifying force supports us in realizing human unity, which is the goal of Auroville.

On the occasion of the inauguration of Aspiration School in Auroville, the Mother wrote:

“Languages to be studied in Auroville:

- (1) Tamil
- (2) French
- (3) Simplified Sanskrit, to replace Hindi as the language of India
- (4) English as the international language.”

– 15 December 1970

From the start, ex-students of SAICE along with some teachers have been involved in teaching and other activities in Sanskrit in Auroville.

Shanti-ben, one of the first teachers in Aspiration, recalls:

“In Aspiration School, we prioritized teaching Sanskrit to children above 7 years old. A Sanskrit teacher from Promesse would visit regularly, and later, Deepshikha would join us for chanting sessions. We'd start school time with shloka recitation. In the big hall, pillars had hand-written charts, which served as a visual aid.

“We knew the Mother was very keen about Sanskrit and had mentioned that it should become a spoken language in the Ashram school. Under Chinmayee-di's guidance we learnt Sanskrit in a special way, which was enriching. We studied grammar in groups according to the children's age and standard. A memorable experience was welcoming Shri Champaklalji and Nirodbaranji,

where children chanted Sanskrit verses.

“A personal inspiration was Ishopanishad in Sri Aurobindo's handwriting, which we photographed, enlarged, and framed. The first and last stanzas still impress me. I also learned about भक्ति योग and कर्म योग from the Gita which had a great influence on me.”

Currently Sanskrit is present in Auroville schools mostly through some chanting but has not been able to grow into a spoken language. However, the call for learning Sanskrit continues to be alive and has brought over time many inspiring teachers to our schools, both from outside—we fondly remember the generosity of Acharya Vishnulalit and other beloved Ashramites—and from within the community, such as Vladimir Iatsenko (who presently teaches at La Grace centre in the US), Jean-Yves, Agni Vigyan and others.

SANSKRIT IN THE AUROVILLE LANGUAGE LABORATORY (ALL)

Today a landmark in Auroville with its beautiful sustainable building near Unity Pavilion, the Auroville Language Lab began as a project in 1998 with Tapas DR and Mita R as its founders. They write:

“ALL was deeply inspired by the vision of a multilingual Auroville. Sanskrit has always held a special place in our work and hearts. Over the years, several initiatives have taken shape:

Adult Classes: Small group classes have been conducted over the years by teachers such as Vladimir, Vigyan Agni, Aravinda and Nishtha.

Early Resources: In 1999, with support from the Foundation for World Education, we acquired key texts like *Dhātu Manjari*, *Shabda Manjari*, and others.

Sanskrit Year 1999–2000: In collaboration with Bharat Nivas (Dr. Aster Patel) and with support from Dr. Kireet Joshi (then Chairman, Auroville Foundation), ALL helped organize

Speak Samskrit camps during the official Sanskrit Year. Over 800 people participated. ALL hosted follow-up camps, and about 12 Aurovilians completed Level 1 teacher training with Samskrita Bharati. Anuradha Choudry from Pondicherry University and a former student of SAICE was part of the core team. These efforts brought Sanskrit into daily life—one could even greet people in Auroville in Sanskrit!

Certification Courses: In collaboration with the Rashtriya Sanskrit Sansthan, New Delhi, ALL became a recognized center for beginner-level Sanskrit certification.

Research Visits: We visited key Sanskrit institutions such as the Academy of Sanskrit Research in Melkote and the Rashtriya Sanskrit Vidyapeeth in Tirupati.

Ashram Collaboration: ALL collaborated with the Sanskrit Karyālaya of the Sri Aurobindo Ashram led by Dr. Narendra. We supported a Sanskrit-based dance production he created (performed at Matrimandir in 2003–2004) as well as the making of a Sanskrit film.

Recent Activities: Regular Sanskrit teaching was revived in 2024 in collaboration with Nishtha. Since then, Sanskrit chanting has become part of the Lab’s evening programs, led by Shri Visvanathan-ji, Lalita-ji, and Remesh. A

Lalita Sahasranāma chanting session is currently held every Wednesday evening.”

SANSKRIT TOOLS FOR HUMANITY: SANSKRIT RESEARCH INSTITUTE (SRI)

Martin Gluckman's interest in Sanskrit began with Ayurveda. After initial studies in his native South Africa, he travelled to India, Nepal, Sri Lanka and Tibet to deepen his learning, and resided for some years in Nepal, where he tried to meet as many traditional physicians as possible. His deep immersion into Ayurveda, where all terminology and literature was in Sanskrit, prompted the need to read the texts in the original language, including the Samhitas.

Having come to live in India in 2003, Martin joined Auroville in 2007. While volunteering in a kitchen where they were implementing Ayurvedic aspects of nutrition, he started Sanskrit classes with Agni, a young Canadian Sanskrit teacher. Realising that Sanskrit was a ‘Himalayan peak’ to climb, he enrolled for an online degree in Sanskrit. Combining his creativity and his background in computer science, he started to create tools that would make it easier for him to learn Sanskrit “and also to appreciate the language, enjoy it, and bring out its beauty through digital expositions. For example, Sanskrit has more than 200 words

for sun and moon or sky or rain, and this is very exceptional among languages.” A postgraduate degree led him to Panini and the Vedas and a journey of exploration that continues till today.

He began to work with teams of volunteers. “The beauty of Auroville is you have this incredible spirit of volunteer-ship. Everyone comes to Auroville as a volunteer and gives their time to the Community. So my labour of love became the work on Sanskrit.” His project was formalised in 2013 as the Sanskrit Research Institute, a play on words resulting in the mantric sound “SRI”. Martin says the journey of Sanskrit is full of surprises and wonderment, and



Agni Hotra at sunrise and chanting at Bharat Nivas, Auroville, on Sanskrit Day, August 2025

literally every week they get the most incredible people from around the world approaching them and saying they want to work with Sanskrit.

The love and passion for this unique language has led SRI to develop a vast array of Sanskrit learning tools that are offered freely to 'humanity as a whole'. What could be more perfect, both as an expression of the spirit of Auroville and for this language which was born and developed in India but has moved beyond geographical barriers due to its universal nature! "If we publish a new work, we put it in the public domain as Creative Commons in the spirit of the Rishis," explains Martin.

SRI's Sanskrit Dictionary (sanskritdictionary.com) has over a million entries and is being used by around 1 lakh visitors per month from all over the world. What makes it special is that multiple dictionaries can be searched in parallel from contemporary and ancient data sources. The site's synonym explorer helps to generate synonyms in Sanskrit for an English word, and then parallel that word with the same word in 103+ languages of the world. The SRI website says you will often see similarities, and sometimes the identical word will be there, for example sambandha (relationship in Sanskrit) and sambandið (relationship in Icelandic). Conversant in 10 languages, Martin has found astounding parallels between Sanskrit and the ancient 'click sound' language of Southern Africa's original people, the San and Khoi, which he researched in recent years.

Other fascinating tools are an easy Sanskrit Writer, a Sanskrit Text to Speech engine, a Root Explorer, a Word Frequency Tool, Brāhmī Output, Sanskrit OCR, Sanskrit Posters, Sanskrit Reference Tools... a world to explore. It even includes a presentation of the 64 traditional arts along with a translation of each of the arts.

"Whenever we saw an opportunity where

Anchors of Sanskrit in Auroville



computers could marry with Sanskrit and do something useful, we wanted to help people to digitize Sanskrit work." ... The ocean of Sanskrit literature hasn't been fully mapped. Every village, every ruler and village elder had their own collection of manuscripts. Very few of these collections have been precisely documented. The National Mission of Manuscripts in Delhi has already got a database of millions of manuscripts, and their work is only scratching the surface of what's out there.

"There are international scholars and universities preserving, digitizing, working with great Sanskrit manuscripts and collections all over the world. It is basically seen as a group effort, a global effort. It's been adopted globally, and there's the World Sanskrit Conference which happens every few years." A highlight for SRI was the hosting of the 7th International Sanskrit Computational Linguistics Symposium (ISCLS) from 15-17 February 2024 in Auroville, a milestone for Sanskrit in the City of Dawn, and true to its mission of research and unending education.

SOME COLLECTIVE INITIATIVES

From time to time, workshops and week-long Sanskrit sambhāshanam courses were held for adults, in Bharat Nivas and Savitri Bhavan, with Dr. Sampadananda Mishra. After one such course in October 2014, a chanting group was formed

that met thrice weekly. Arnab Bishnu Chowdhury ('95) assisted this group musically during 2016.

In 2023, Samskrita Bharati's two-week-long Sanskrit teacher training program was hosted in Bharat Nivas in Auroville, where more than 100 Sanskrit enthusiasts from South India lived and were inspired to speak only in Sanskrit while they studied to become Spoken Sanskrit teachers.

SAMSKRITAM AUROVILLE AND VIDYAMANDIR

“The story of Vidyamandir is one of a community effort with a collective harmonious aspiration for a steady flowering of Sanskrit and Indian Knowledge Systems in Auroville”, says Deven, holding a pivotal role in this initiative. “In February 2019, a small group of Aurovilians gathered with a keen intention of revitalizing Sanskrit in Auroville. This was the seed of *Samskritam Auroville*, nurtured by the belief that Sanskrit, when made into a living language, could radiate its unifying vibration across the township. Holding space full of Light and experiencing unity even during the atmosphere of intense conflicts has been one of the most meaningful gifts we have been able to offer.”

Dr Sampadananda Mishra enthusiastically supported this initiative. The group began with regular Sanskrit conversation circles, chanting sessions, and collaborations with existing community events to bring Sanskrit into public spaces in a natural, joyful way. Lively in-person and online courses were also offered by Anuradha Choudry ('98) and Ojasi Parameswaram.

In addition to learning the fundamentals of the Sanskrit language, we also organized weekly Sambhāṣaṇa (conversation) classes which created an environment where beginners and advanced learners alike could participate without fear of making mistakes. The approach was playful and immersive, inspired partly by the methods of Samskrita Bharati but adapted to Auroville's multicultural setting.

It soon became clear that this was not just about the language but also about reconnecting with the deeper roots of India's knowledge systems and their relevance for Auroville's ideal

of human unity. Thus, *Vidyamandir* was born as a unit under Sri Aurobindo International Institute of Educational Research (SAIIER) with an aspiration to offer learning programs that support all beings in harmonizing spiritual and material life.

Deepening into Indian Knowledge Systems: The scope of our work steadily expanded to include introductions to Ayurveda and Swadheena Swasthya Mahaavidya, Yoga and Vedanta philosophy, Natyashastra, Naada Yoga, often taught in collaboration with visiting scholars and practitioners. Workshops would weave language with knowledge—for example, a session on *Bhagavad Gita* might cover the concept of the three gunas (sattva, rajas and tamas) alongside practical aspects of how these gunas play out in our everyday life ranging from the food we eat to the quality of surrender we offer to the Divine.

Cultural and Artistic Events: Sanskrit lives not only in books and classrooms but in art, music, theatre, and celebration. Several offerings in the Matrimandir gardens incorporated Sanskrit verses and also musical events brought together traditional Indian instruments with Sanskrit chanting. On special occasions such as Gita Jayanti or Sri Aurobindo's birthday, large groups gather to chant select chapters or even the whole of the *Bhagavad Gita*. These events are not performances for an audience—they are collective offerings, where the vibration of the words is shared by all.

Community Engagement and Collaborations: We actively sought collaborations both within Auroville and beyond. Partnerships with Bharat Nivas, Savitri Bhavan, and the Auroville Language Lab allowed for larger workshops and residential camps. The group also reached out to Auroville schools, offering Sanskrit classes, storytelling sessions from the epics, and playful games to introduce children to the language. These school programs aimed to spark curiosity rather than impose rigid learning, planting seeds that might grow naturally over time.

A 10-day-long Sanskrit Sannam brought Sanskrit lovers from Auroville, Pondicherry and



the bioregion together. Among other highlights were weeklong experiential Natural Health Science camps based on Vedantic philosophy, anchored by Dr Arun Sharma who teaches Practical Nature Cure widely in India and overseas.

Online Experiments for Transformation (vidya.auroville.org): Deven shares “While at a subtler level, inner discovery and becoming willing servitors of the Divine Consciousness has been at the core of all our work, since the past few years we have co-created a methodology for offering transformational learning programs in an online setting which are receiving heartening participation and feedback. The online medium also allowed us to include people living outside of Auroville but connected to its spirit. These offerings included a collective yajna to wake up in the Brahma-muhurta every morning for six weeks and meet at 5 am to study together, reflect, practice in day-to-day life and come together to share our experiences, learnings and insights for bringing the wisdom from scriptures like *Bhagavad Gita*, *Dhammapada* and *Isha Upanishad* in daily life. Throughout this journey, we feel the force of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother guiding us and we feel deeply grateful for being the instruments for this work.”

Agni Veda Research—Nishtha’s journey into Vedic Sanskrit and Sri Aurobindo’s ‘Hymns to the Mystic Fire’.

Born in Germany in 1956, Nishtha started to visit Auroville regularly from the age of 20, and spent 3 or more months annually in the Sri

Aurobindo Ashram. In 1981, he settled permanently in Auroville. Right from the beginning, he immersed himself in studying the works of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, *The Synthesis of Yoga* and *Essays on the Gita*. His first interest in the original Sanskrit was aroused during one of his stays in the Sri Aurobindo Ashram, where he took part in lessons on *Essays on the Gita*, first with Maheshwar-ji and later with Dr. Aravinda Basu (also known as Arindam-da).

Nishtha felt especially attracted to Sri Aurobindo’s epic poem *Savitri*, his sonnets and other poems. It was this interest in mystic poetry that led him to explore Sri Aurobindo’s ‘Hymns to the Mystic Fire’ and ‘Selected Hymns’ in *The Secret of the Veda*.

He began by practicing pronunciation with recorded cassettes and transliterating Vedic hymns. He worked with Shri Jagannath Vedalankar to learn Vedic chanting and later joined Vladimir Yatsenko’s Sanskrit courses.

Nishtha’s research focuses on Vedic hymns, comparative studies of Vedic terms, and metrical restoration of Vedic texts. He has developed an alternative Sanskrit method for spiritual seekers, incorporating Vedic grammar and poetry. His approach emphasizes reconnecting with the language at its deepest level, rather than just treating words as mechanical tokens.

He has taught Sanskrit in Auroville and at the Indian Psychology Institute, Puducherry. He has created seasonal course programs on Vedic topics and conducted meditation sessions with Vedic hymns. In 2018, he founded *Agni Veda Research* to share his knowledge.

Nishtha is working on a Sanskrit-English dictionary with over 550 pages, featuring renderings and commentaries by Sri Aurobindo.

Highlights of his research include:

- Studying hymns from the Rig and Atharva Veda to understand sequential esoteric meanings
- Compiling Vedic words with ‘independent Svarita’ and trisyllabic pronunciation

- Exploring connections between Sanskrit and Tamil, suggesting a possible common origin
- Metrical restoration work which includes completing the Sanskrit Samhita text of the Bhūmi Sūkta (Hymn to the Earth) of the *Atharva Veda* and working on chapter 11 of the *Shukla Yajur Veda*

Nishtha's alternative Sanskrit method aims to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the language, incorporating Vedic grammar forms and poetry. He has created nearly 40 beginner lessons and is revising them based on feedback. He looks forward to sharing his revised lessons with new students to guide them in their own Sanskrit journey.

OTHER VOICES

“I discovered Sanskrit when an intensive 3-month training was offered in Last School some twenty years ago, with Anuradha Choudry, whose enthusiasm is very contagious. This language resonated very much in me, and I continued studying it, especially the grammar with Vladimir, an Aurovilian Sanskrit scholar. Then I offered to teach it in Last School, either to adults or to teenagers desirous to learn it, and I keep doing it. Knowing Sanskrit allows you to access directly the great scriptures of India and to bathe in the sound and rhythms of the language, experiencing its mantric character, which no translation can give you.” – Jean-Yves, Sanskrit teacher at Last School

“My journey in Sanskrit started before I came to Auroville, in the USA, while living at Sri Aurobindo Sadhana Peetham. It was there that my interest was born but it could not be nurtured properly as I lacked the discipline and focus required to get over the initial hurdles in learning the language. After

learning Devanagari, syllabary and a limited vocabulary, my progress was stalled. It was only when I came to Auroville that I found a conducive atmosphere for my deep foray into the language. My primary interest was in the Vedic texts and there were certain lines of research I wished to pursue. Very quickly after arriving in Auroville, I was put in touch with Nishtha and we ended up spending many years doing this research together. I'm grateful to Auroville and to Nishtha and Vladimir for enabling me to open the doors I was hoping to in the realm of Sanskrit.” – Angelo, Aurovilian

“Auroville, in my experience, is a place charged with a highly active spiritual consciousness. That's why whenever I speak Sanskrit or make others speak Sanskrit, letting those Divine sounds spread into the Divine environment that is Auroville, I feel it reaches not just the geographical town called Auroville but the entire Brahman itself, which includes this little globe we call as the Earth. Auroville thus gives us the opportunity. It's that powerful. That's why, our small efforts in Auroville make a big impact beyond our imagination. After all, it's not a matter of believing but of experiencing” – Ojas Parameswaran, scholar, trainer and speaker on Sanskrit and *Bhagavad Gita* ❀



Gita chanting at Mother's Flower Garden, Auroville, December 2025

SANSKRIT AND THE NATIONAL LANGUAGE

Giridhar Murthy '79 and Narendra-Arya

with inputs from an article in Sri Aurobindo's Action, October/November 2008

INTRODUCTION

Language is a sensitive issue. In our country people speak more than 1,500 languages. Everybody's language is unique to him and dearest to his heart, and he would generally accept no other to be the best. Under this condition, to choose a National Language for India has become an enormous challenge.

As of 2025, 22 languages have been classified as Scheduled Languages under the Eighth Schedule to the Constitution of India. There is no National Language of India. When the Constitution was adopted in 1950, Article 343 declared that Hindi would be the Official Language and English would serve as an additional Official Language for a period not exceeding 15 years. The Official Languages Act, 1963, which came into effect on 26 January 1965, made provision for the continuation of English as an Official Language alongside Hindi.

The National Language is a language that represents a country's cultural and intellectual identity. Official Languages are languages recognized as the primary means of communication in official matters, such as legislation and administration.

CONSTITUENT ASSEMBLY DEBATES

During the Constituent Assembly Debates, 1949, Sanskrit was considered as a potential national language by some members. Pandit Lakshmi Kanta Maitra, a member of the Constituent Assembly from West Bengal, brought an amendment for the adoption of Sanskrit as the national and official language of India. He said: "It is surprising that none even considered the desirability of recognizing Sanskrit as one of the languages of India. That is the depth to which we have gone ...

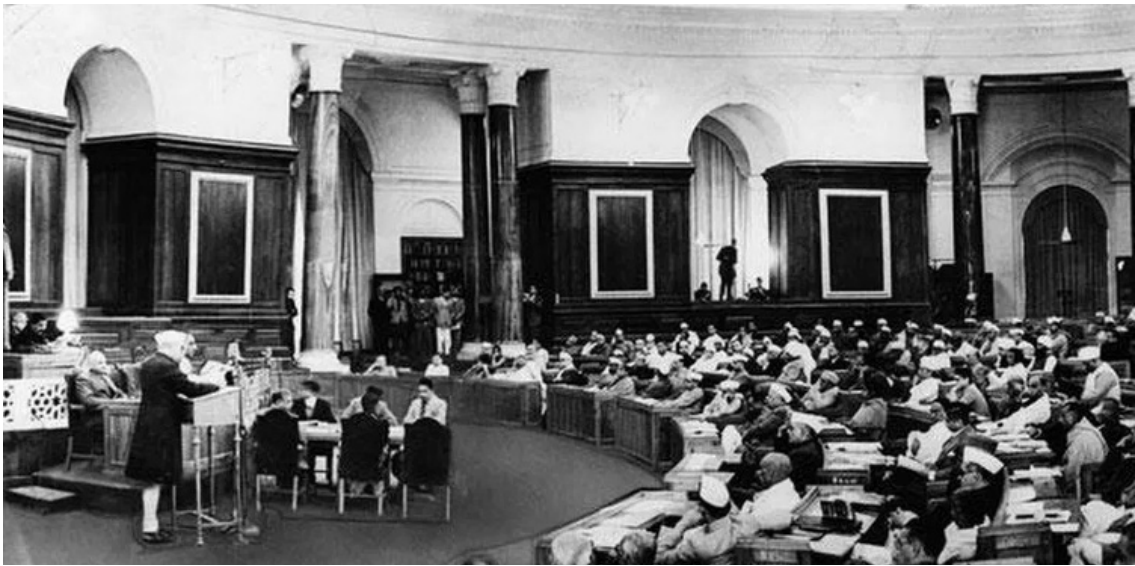
If today India has got an opportunity after

thousand years to shape her own destiny, I ask in all seriousness if she is going to feel ashamed to recognise the Sanskrit language – the revered grandmother of languages of the world, still alive with full vigour, full vitality? Are we going to deny here her rightful place in free India? That is a question which I solemnly ask. I know it will be said that it is a dead language. Yes. Dead to whom? Dead to you, because you have become dead to all sense of grandeur, you have become dead to all which is great and noble in your own culture and civilization... But I submit that it is not a dead language at all. Wherever I have travelled, I have not been able to make myself understood in any other language, I have been able to make myself understood in Sanskrit."

Mr. Naziruddin Ahmed, another Member of the Constituent Assembly also representing West Bengal, had this to say: "Yes [Sanskrit should be adopted as the National Language of India], and for the simple reason that it is impartially difficult to all. Hindi is easy for the Hindi-speaking areas, but it is difficult for other areas. I offer you a language which is the grandest and the greatest and it is impartially difficult, equally difficult for all to learn. There should be some impartiality in the selection. If we have to adopt a language, it must be grand, great and the best. Then why we should discard the claims of Sanskrit, I fail to see. If the non-Hindi people have to learn a language, they would rather learn Sanskrit than a language infinitely below Sanskrit in status, quality and rank."

(Constituent Assembly Debates, Vol. IX, dated 30.07.1949 to 18.09.1949)

However, Sanskrit was ultimately not chosen and the debates highlighted the divide between Hindi and non-Hindi-speaking regions of India regarding language preferences, with Hindi



Constituent Assembly Debates 1946-50

eventually being selected as the Official Language along with English as a result of a casting vote.

THE SANSKRIT COMMISSION

The Sanskrit Commission, established in 1956, chaired by Ms Suniti Kumar Chatterji, a distinguished Indian linguist and scholar of Indo-Aryan languages, emphasised the importance of Sanskrit as a foundational element of India's cultural and intellectual heritage, highlighting the irony that Sanskrit had not been made the National Language.

“The Commission recommends the following pattern for the study of languages in Schools:

(i) Class 1-5: only the mother-tongue with voluntary extra-curricular lessons in Sanskrit *Subhasitas*, etc.; (ii) Class 6: the mother-tongue and English, the extra-curricular lessons in Sanskrit *Subhasitas* etc., being continued; and (iii) Class 7-11: the mother-tongue (reduced), English and Sanskrit (V. 27). In this connection, the Commission thinks that it is not advisable to add the burden of Hindi as the fourth language at the School stage. The best results, in the opinion of the Commission, will be achieved if Hindi is made a subject of study at the College stage, on the basis of a knowledge of the mother-tongue and Sanskrit (V. 25).”

-Report of the Sanskrit Commission, 1956-1957, published by the Govt. of India, New Delhi, 1958, p. 250

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATE

In 1963, Shree Chapala Kanta Bhattacharya, a Member of Parliament from Raiganj, West Bengal, brought a Constitutional Amendment for adoption of Sanskrit as a co-Official Language along with Hindi. There he said: “When I suggest that Sanskrit be accorded the status of an official language, I do not make a new or surprising proposal. In fact, that proposal has been pending before the country since the days of the Constituent Assembly.

“The Hon’ble Prime Minister has laid down that the official language of India should not be a foreign language and at the same time, it must be a language of all acceptance. – I submit, again, that there is only one language in the world which satisfies both the aspects, and that language is Sanskrit.”

“A question is asked whether a language can be accepted as an Official Language when it is not a spoken language. To that my reply is, to be an Official Language it is not necessary that the language should be the language of the masses. Today we have English as an Official Language of India and we have fought for it. It is the language of only the intelligentsia, and language of the intelligentsia has been accepted in the Constitution as the Official Language of the Union. In that way Sanskrit has always been the language of the intelligentsia in India.

“It is stated in the Kher Commission Report that even after two centuries of learning of English, not even one per cent of the people of India could express themselves sufficiently in English. Will they throw out English because not even one per cent of the people speak English?”

Nineteen MPs took part in the discussion. Out of the 19 MPs, 15 spoke in favour of the bill. But Shri Hajarnabis, the Minister of State in the Ministry of Home Affairs, did not allow a vote on the Amendment.

Jana Shiksha O Samskrita by Dhyanesht Narayan Chakraborty pp 65-67, p 101 and p 95

ANTI-HINDI AGITATION

1965 was the crucial year when English was to cease as the co-Official Language and Hindi become the sole Official Language of the Indian Union. Ten days before the Republic Day (January 26), C N Annadurai, Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu, wrote to Lal Bahadur Shastri, Prime Minister of India, stating that his party would observe the changeover as a ‘day of mourning’. Further he added a clause in the form of a request to postpone the day of imposition by a week, so that Dravida Munnetra Kazaghham (DMK), a political party based in the state of Tamil Nadu, could enthusiastically join the rest of the Nation in celebrating the Republic Day.

“No” was the answer from New Delhi. In consequence, the anti-Hindi agitation broke out and the people of Tamil Nadu demanded a separate State, ‘Dravida Nadu’. Spearheading the protests, C N Annadurai is reported to have said at the time:

“It is claimed that Hindi should be the common language because it is spoken by the majority. Why should we then claim the tiger as our national animal instead of the rat which is so much more numerous or the peacock as our national bird when the crow is ubiquitous?”

“Making a language (Hindi) that is the mother tongue of a region of India the official language for all the people of India is tyranny. We believe that it will give benefits and superiority to one region (the Hindi-speaking region). If Hindi were to become the official language of India,

Hindi-speaking people will govern us. We will be treated like third rate citizens.”

Sri Aurobindo’s Action, October 2008, p. 14

THE MOTHER’S ADVICE

The Mother’s advice echoes much of what has been presented above, and goes even deeper.

In August 1965, the Mother was asked:

Q: India is much preoccupied by the linguistic problem. What should be the correct attitude for us in this regard?

She replied:

A: Unity must be a living fact and not the imposition of an arbitrary rule. When India will be one, she will have spontaneously a language understood by all.

CWM Vol 12, p. 253

On 15 December 1970, The Mother gave the following list of languages to be studied at Auroville:

1. Tamil
2. French
3. Simplified Sanskrit to replace Hindi as the language of India
4. English as the international language

CWM Vol 12, p. 225

Around the same time, the Mother also made the following remark:

“Sanskrit should be the real national language. It is only Sanskrit which will be ultimately acceptable to the people of India. Sanskrit is the only language which creates an equal handicap for all the parts of the country, so that nobody has a natural advantage over others in learning it. When I speak of Sanskrit, it should be simple Sanskrit, but not “simplified”.

“When India goes back to her soul, Sanskrit will naturally become India’s national language.”

India The Mother, 2002 edition, p. 207

In reply to questions on Hindi or Sanskrit as India’s National Language the Mother said:

“Hindi is good only for those who belong to a Hindi-speaking province. Sanskrit is good for all Indians.”

CWM Vol 17, p. 332

SOCIAL RELEVANCE OF SANSKRIT

The following messages of Swami Vivekananda justifies the social relevance of Sanskrit.

“Who told you to neglect spirituality and Sanskrit learning? What have you been doing all this time? Why have you been indifferent? Why do you not become Sanskrit scholars? Why do you not spend millions to bring Sanskrit education to all castes of India? That is the question. The moment you do these things, you are equal to the Brahmin. That is the secret of power in India. Sanskrit and prestige go together in India. As soon as you have that, none dares say anything against you. That is the one secret; take that up.”

Complete Works, Vol III, 9th ed., pp 298-99

“The only safety, I tell you men who belong to the lower castes, the only way to raise your condition, is to study Sanskrit.”

Vedanta Kesari, May 1962, p. 16

TECHNOLOGICAL RELEVANCE

NASA researcher Rick Briggs wrote in AI (Artificial Intelligence) Magazine in the Spring of 1985: “Another hope for the return of Sanskrit lies in computers. Sanskrit and computers are a perfect fit. The precision play of Sanskrit with computer tools will awaken the capacity in human beings to utilize their innate higher mental faculty with a momentum that would inevitably transform the world. In fact the mere learning of Sanskrit by large number of people in itself represents a quantum leap in consciousness, not to mention the rich endowment it will provide in the arena of future communication.

The fact is that Sanskrit is more deeply interwoven into the fabric of the world consciousness than anyone perhaps knows. After many thousands of years, Sanskrit still lives with a vitality that can breathe life, restore unity and peace on our tired and troubled planet. It is a sacred gift, an opportunity. The future could be very bright.” ❁

SUBRAMANIA BHARATI ON SANSKRIT

Elders such as Gandhiji are of the opinion that Hindi may be offered as the common language for India. But Sri Aurobindo Ghose, who may be rightly called the greatest of the Indian patriots, and many others say that Sanskrit is the common language of India. They say that this is not a new status to be conferred upon Sanskrit, it has enjoyed it from ancient times. For instance, before the advent of the British rule in this country, in what language would a king from Tamilnadu have written to a king in Gujarat if he wanted to communicate with him? If it was in Tamil the Gujarati king would not have understood it, and it would not have been possible for the Tamil king to write in Gujarati. Hence their communication had to be in Sanskrit, a language in which the Pundits, the Rajagurus and the Chief Ministers of both the States were equally well-versed. Is that not evident?

Some say that it will not be practical to keep Sanskrit as the common language for the whole country, since it is difficult to learn Sanskrit and

acquire proficiency in it. This is perhaps true if we were to follow the old way of learning. But we do not need to do that anymore. Now Sri Bhandarkar, a pundit from Mumbai has written primers through which one can learn Sanskrit in seven or eight months without the help of a teacher. Of these, the first book has already been translated into Tamil. This method can be even further simplified. In fact, anyone who reads the *Panchatantra* thrice with understanding and learns it by heart, should acquire the ability to speak Sanskrit fluently. It may take long to be familiar with the strenuous style of Bana and Bhatti; but for common use, works like the *Panchatantra* which are written in a more simple style are sufficient.

Bharati Pudhaiyal, pp. 74-75, edn. 1958

The article first appeared in *Swadesha Mitran* and later in the June 1942 issue of *Kalaimagal*. It was translated from the original Tamil by Bala-bhai.

LIFE: AT THE FEET OF THE MASTERS

Kapali Sastri was a Vedic scholar who had his early training under the renowned Kavyakantha Ganapati Muni. His scholarship and spiritual sadhana endeared him to Ramana Maharshi. From 1916 onwards he was drawn to Sri Aurobindo's yoga and settled down in the Sri Aurobindo Ashram. Interpreting the philosophy of Ramana Maharshi and Sri Aurobindo became a lifelong vocation for him. When the Mother started the School, Kapali Sastri became the first Sanskrit teacher.

The following article on his life is extracted from *T V Kapali Sastri* by Prema Nandakumar (Publishers: Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers Pvt Ltd).

Mother India has had a perennial roll-call of superb teachers. This has been so ever since the Vedic age placed great importance on the sacred master-disciple bond. This bond was not desecrated by payment of fees. It was a spiritual bond.

Kapali Sastri was born on 3 September 1886 in Mylapore, Madras. His father, Visweswara Sastri, was a Sanskrit scholar attached to the Connemara Oriental Library. He named his son Kapali after *śrī Kapāliśvara*, the presiding deity of the Mylapore temple. The family was well-known for its Sanskrit scholarship and expertise in traditional ritualism as well as *śrī-vidyā upāsanā*. Visweswara Sastri initiated his son into *śrī-vidyā upāsanā* quite early and the study of the *sāmaveda*, as the family belonged to the *sāma* branch of *bhāradvāja gotra*.

By the time Kapali was twelve years old, he had read the *Ramayana* twelve times over. He had begun *śrī-vidyā upāsanā* which includes ritual worship, recitation and meditation. He was now

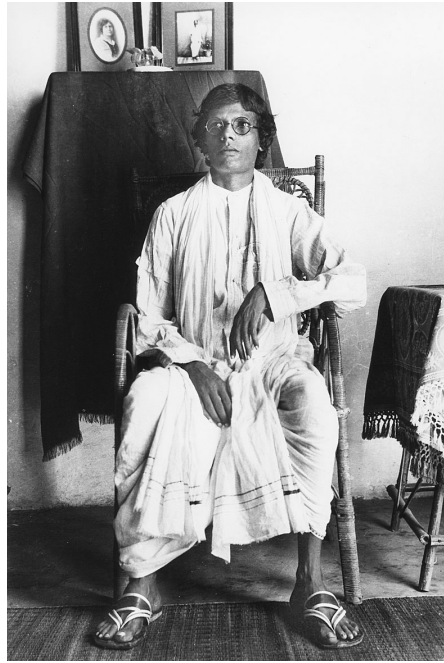
studying in the Hindu High School, Madras, and gaining a regular English education.

But he was no blind, ignorant adherent of the Vedic system. As he grew older, he watched keenly the preeminent sway the Vedic hymns held over each and every aspect of the Hindu's religious, spiritual and secular lives. True, the Vedic *Rks* (verses) learnt in the unswerving traditional way had a mesmerising effect and even an energising power on the adept.

The deeper listening of his soul after studying Sayana's *bhāṣya* on the Vedas indicated that there were other worlds within the hymns for man to capture and open new pathways to knowledge and growth.

Kapali wanted to know more about the Vedas that would help him take up a systematic study of

the scriptures. His aspirations were answered when the renowned scholar Vasista Ganapati Muni came to the Tripurasundari Temple in Tiruvottiyur. ... There was a palpable spiritual atmosphere when Ganapati Muni recited a few *ślokas* composed on the spot in praise of the goddess. He then withdrew.



The next day when Ganapati Muni came to the temple, he found the young boy in his place performing *mantra-japa*. Ganapati Muni waited till the *japa* was over and then enquired about Kapali. In reply, Kapali recited verbatim the verses composed by Ganapati Muni the previous day. Delighted, Ganapati Muni immediately drew Kapali to himself as a promising student.

For another quarter century Kapali was to be in close contact with the great teacher and imbibe the experiential knowledge of *tantra śāstra* and the inlaid significance of the Vedas. Ganapati Muni was instrumental in inspiring Sastri to take up the writing of poetry, translations and commentaries of significant works on spiritual matters.

The Maharshi (Sri Ramana Maharshi) granted Kapali Sastri even on his first *darśana* the rare gesture of *hasta-dīksā* which helped the young man make an incredibly swift progress in his spiritual studies. Pleased by the young man's sincerity and devotion, Sri Ramana Maharshi called him "Cinna Nayana" [Little Master]; Ganapati Muni was already known as "Nayana" [Master] in Tiruvannamalai.

Meanwhile, Kapali became a Sanskrit teacher at Muthiyalpet High School, Madras. Then came 1914 which marked a major turning point in his life. In the month of August he came upon the first issue of *Arya* edited by Sri Aurobindo.

[Sri M P Pandit notes] "Sastri took the issue home and started reading it with avid interest under his dim lamplight at night. The very first page fascinated him. It was the beginning of the *Life Divine*. It was followed by other features among which was the *Secret of the Veda*. For the line of thought that Sri Aurobindo was propounding was precisely the same that he himself had chalked out and pursued during the preceding years. The solution to the problem of life given in the *Arya* was also identical with his own. He read the entire issue of closely printed 64 pages that very night. And what is more, he read the whole issue every night thereafter till the next one arrived."⁶



He [Sastri] genuinely wished to meet Sri Aurobindo to express his wonderment and gratitude to one whose writings on the Veda seemed to be giving a rare clarity of perception. It was indeed the Time Spirit that was drawing the disciple to the Master for a renewed revelation of India's Vedic heritage.

1917 brought Sastri a golden opportunity. He was invited by a Pondicherry group to take part in the Sankar Jayanti celebrations being organised in the French enclave. As soon as he reached Pondicherry, Sastri went straight to the Tamil poet, Subramania Bharati who he had known earlier. While they were conversing, Bharati happened to recite a poem on [Lord] Subrahmanya he had composed recently to overcome the problems that were attacking him from all sides:

Spirit of the Vedas! Come!
 O heroism, O flame!
 O javelin that dries up
 the sea of worries
 of the woe begone.
 Teacher! Child of the Supreme!
 Fire blazing in the cave!
 give us works and the fruits thereof.
 Chief of immortals,
 my homage.

He [Sastri] asked Bharati how he had come across the idea (Child of the Supreme! Fire

blazing in the cave). The poet replied that he had been studying the Rgveda for some time with Sri Aurobindo. Sastri immediately requested Bharati to take him to Sri Aurobindo. Though Sri Aurobindo was not receiving visitors, Bharati said he would try as Sastri begged: "I have come on a pilgrimage to him." Bharati did manage to arrange an interview on the following day.

Sastri met Sri Aurobindo at the appointed time. It was indeed a supernal experience for Sastri to come face to face with this blazing spiritual Agni. As he was to recount later:

"As I went up the stair and reached the threshold, there stretched in front of me a long hall and a simple table and two chairs at the centre. At the farther end was a room on the threshold of which stood Sri Aurobindo. Like a moving statue – such was his impersonal bearing – he advanced towards the table as I proceeded from my end and we both met at the centre. Like Rama, the Aryan model of courtesy and nobility held up by Valmiki, Sri Aurobindo spoke first, *pūrva bhāṣi*. I had carried with me a lemon fruit as a humble expression of my esteem for him and after he sat down, I placed it on the table in his front and said: *sudīnam āśid adya* (a happy day today)."¹⁰

He seems to have experienced a veritable downpour of power upon him during that brief period:

"Well, as soon as I saw him, even from a distance, there was set in motion, all of a sudden, a rapid vibratory movement in my body from head to foot. There was a continuous thrill and throb, I seemed to stand on the top of a dynamo working at top speed and it was as powerful as it was new. It lasted for nearly four to five minutes. It did not really stop at all."¹²

He met Sri Aurobindo again in 1923 and received an assurance of the latter's grace. As far as Sastri was concerned, no doubt marred his faith in the Aurobindonian yoga. The very fact that Sri

Aurobindo's complexion which had been dark-brown six years earlier had now become golden was proof enough. This was transformatory yoga and not contradictory to *Tantra* in which he had already become an adept. So Sastri began to visit Pondicherry during the Darshan days. When Ganapati Muni came to Pondicherry in 1928, he told Sastri that Sri Aurobindo and the Mother were *divya mūrthulu* (divine beings). His disciple had, indeed, gained the right refuge.

[...] on 21 May 1929, Sastri did resign his job at the Muthialpet School. He was forty-two. He joined the Ashram as a disciple of Sri Aurobindo. Incidentally, this discipleship did not have any verbal initiation either. When Sri Aurobindo announced that the Mother would be in direct charge of the spiritual lives of the *sādhakas*, Sastri accepted the same and became an unswerving devotee of the Mother.

At the Ashram, Sastri happily performed the tasks assigned to him. Even such mundane tasks like issuing paints in the Building Service acquired an uncanny perfection in his hands. When the Mother started a school for the children of the Ashram, he became the first Sanskrit teacher. He was affectionate and caring. One of his students, Parubai Patil who later became the Registrar of the Sri Aurobindo International Centre of Education, recalled that sometimes it was like asking the Himalayas to teach a sparrow.¹⁹ ... As a Sanskrit scholar he was much in demand. Even Sri Aurobindo would refer to him now and then for clarification of a grammatical or astrological problem.

At the Ashram in Pondicherry, Sastri was ceaselessly at work. He translated the first canto of *Savitri* in the forties and the translation was read carefully by Sri Aurobindo who commended it for its attention to the original and for its poetic excellence. Sastri also wrote extensively on Sri Aurobindo's philosophy and yoga and related them to the signposts in the rich Vedic tradition.

References

6. *Versatile Genius* by M P Pandit, p 290
10. *Collected Works*, v. II, p. 234
11. *Ibid.*, p. 212

12. *Ibid.*, p. 234
19. In a private conversation with the author on February 22, 1996

PUJALAL-JI

A LIFE OF DEVOTION, SANSKRIT, AND LITERARY CONTRIBUTIONS

Pujalal-ji was one of the early Sanskrit teachers at SAICE. Based on the Mother's guidance, he devoted his life to making Sanskrit a living language. We provide a brief life sketch and cover his literary contributions.

The following piece is compiled from articles in *Mother India*, June 2008 (by **Krishna Chakravarti**) and September 2002 (by **Dhanavanti** and **Usha Desai**).

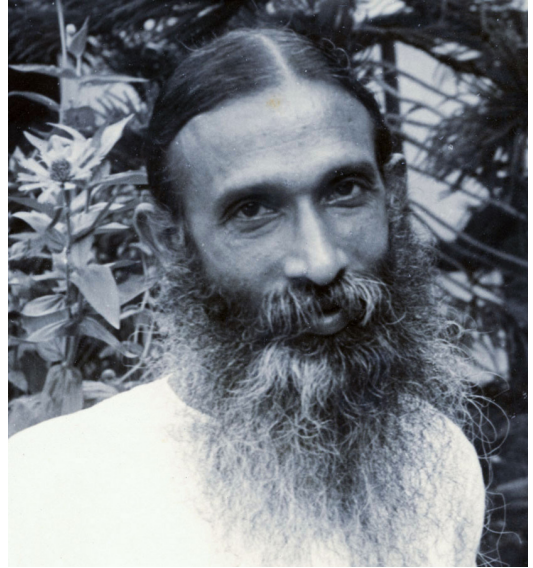
Pujalal was born on 17 June 1901 in Godhra, Gujarat. His life was marked by an unceasing adoration of the Divine—the Divine he discovered incarnated in the person of Sri Aurobindo. He recounted a transformative encounter at the Library House around 1925 or 1926:

“Unexpectedly I saw that Sri Aurobindo was coming down the stairs for his dinner. I stood wonderstruck, for it was not the great yogi whom I saw before my eyes, but the Lord of Yogis in his eternal glory. His sun-bright eyes cast a luminous glance of grace on me, utterly overpowering my being. My heart and soul felt blessed by this mighty vision of the living Ishwara, the Lord of Yoga and Yogis.... I got my God, my Ishwara, my fulfilment, living in the divine person of Sri Aurobindo.”

This vision marked the beginning of a lifelong spiritual pursuit, shaping both his personal and professional trajectory.

The early part of Pujalal's childhood was spent in Godhra, but he moved to Nadiad for his secondary education, where his intellectual curiosity and interest in learning flourished. It was in Nadiad that he met Purani-ji, a pivotal influence who was engaged in founding Akhadas (gymnasiums) and promoting athletic culture across Gujarat. Drawn to Purani-ji's dynamism, Pujalal actively participated in wrestling, lathi, knife play, and gymnastics. Through Purani-ji, he also learned of Sri Aurobindo and the Ashram in Pondicherry.

Pujalal visited the Ashram in 1924 and was granted an audience with Sri Aurobindo. When



he expressed his desire to pursue yoga, Sri Aurobindo asked, “Why do you want to do the yoga?” to which Pujalal replied, “To realize God.” Sri Aurobindo observed him thoughtfully and then placed his hand on Pujalal's chest, saying, “The Divine Power is above. Aspire and reach.” Pujalal regarded this moment as his formal initiation into spiritual life. In November 1926, he returned to the Ashram permanently, just in time to be there for the Siddhi Day. He was one of the twenty-four persons present on 24 November 1926.

LITERARY PURSUITS AND CONTRIBUTION TO SANSKRIT EDUCATION

Joining the Ashram awakened Pujalal's

dormant poetic talent. Two of his English collections of poems were reviewed by Sri Aurobindo, who personally selected the titles *Rosary* and *Lotus Petals*. The Mother subsequently referred to him as “My Poet,” a rare and significant honor. Later, between 1973 and 1985, Pujal translated *Savitri* into Gujarati and published approximately twenty-five works, including translations of Sri Aurobindo’s poems and dramas and a masterpiece for lovers of Gujarati poetics, a book called *Chhandpravesh*.

Pujalal was a devoted scholar and teacher of Sanskrit. Following the Mother’s guidance that Sanskrit should become a living, spoken language, he developed materials to facilitate learning, including lessons, dialogues, dramas, poems, and selections of shlokas with English translations. His publications included *Sarala Shloka* and *Sarasa Shloka*, designed to be easy to memorize while conveying the essence of Indian philosophy. Pujalal-ji would catch hold of any child loitering in the Ashram courtyard and give him or her a notebook to write down a *shloka* and the *chhanda* used in it, then read, explain and chant the *shloka* in the appropriate *chhanda*. With all these contributions to make learning Sanskrit easier, he would figure first among the pioneers who popularized Sanskrit in the Ashram school.

For many years, every morning at six o’clock, children would gather in his room to chant shlokas, transforming the Ashram environment into a delightful hub of Sanskrit learning. Maurice (’75) fondly remembers:

“As a little boy, I used to go to Pujalal-ji every morning around 6 to learn Sanskrit shlokas from him. Pujalal-ji would write each shloka in his extraordinarily neat hand in the notebook and then ask me to recopy it. This may have helped in memorising the shloka. I was always amazed at how quickly I would be able to commit the shloka to memory. It obviously had to do with the climate of gentle heart-warming love and affection that Pujalal-ji created between the teacher and the student. I cannot forget that atmosphere in the room with Pujalal-ji sitting serene, and relaxed (as if time didn’t exist!), totally composed, with this soft, gentle affection streaming all around

him, as he repeated a shloka: it was like a Vedic ashram, with children sitting around a rishi and breathing in purity and warmth and knowledge all at the same time from the environing air itself! That formidable mix of the morning breeze, the presence of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother inside the Ashram, the fragrance of the flowers and incense from the Samadhi a few metres away, the sound of those pristine Sanskrit syllables uttered in an unhurried steady voice by this unbelievably gentle loving teacher blending with the sweet birdsong and squirrel-chirping from the Service tree—it was all quite overwhelming, really, even for a child like me!”

Pujalal’s literary engagement extended beyond the Ashram school. He along with Jagannatharya founded the magazine *Lokasanskritam*. All this literary activity was an outpouring of his *bhakta hridaya*—the devotee’s heart. Pujalal’s inherent poetic abilities may have even stretched more than a millennium! He once revealed that in one of his previous lives he had been a friend and court-poet of Prithviraj Chauhan, the king of Delhi and Ajmer. His name was Chandrabardai and he was known as Chand-kavi.

LEGACY

Pujalal used to say, “Pray to the Mother that she hold you by both your arms and never leave you.” He would say, “I feel that service to the Divine is everything. I have never done any yoga. I don’t even know what yoga is. You can get everything through service... Look at His Grace and compassion: if we take one small step towards Him, He moves ten strides forward to embrace us.”

Pujalal’s life reflects a rare synthesis of scholarship, devotion, and pedagogy. He not only enriched Gujarati literature through translations and original works but also transformed Sanskrit education within the Ashram by creating accessible learning tools and fostering a culture of spoken Sanskrit. Pujalal’s life illustrates that the pursuit of knowledge, spiritual aspiration, and compassionate mentorship can converge to create a transformative impact on both individual learners and the broader cultural milieu. ❧

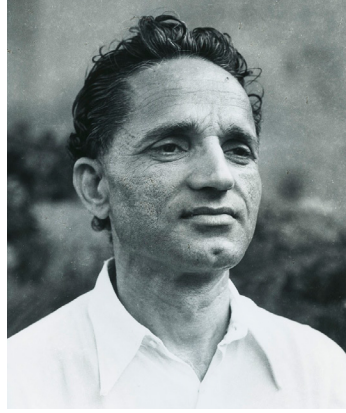
JAGANNATH ARYA (VEDALANKAR)

Jagannath Vedalankar came to the Ashram in the mid-1940s. A distinguished Vedic scholar, he was among the foremost pioneers in advancing the Mother's vision of Sanskrit as a living language. Through his quiet authority and deep humility, he mentored several teachers and students, remaining a guiding presence until his final days.

The following piece is compiled primarily from an article published in the May-Aug 1996 issue of *Lokasamskritam*.

Jagannath Arya was born on 15 September 1913 in Multan, Punjab (now in Pakistan). He pursued his higher education in Gurukul Kangri, Haridwar, one of the foremost centres of traditional Vedic learning. Though born in a Vaishya family, his conduct and scholarship was so exemplary that the Gurukul conferred upon him the honorific "Sharma," traditionally reserved for Brahmins—a recognition of his intellectual stature. In 1937, after graduating as a gold medallist, he was awarded the title "Vedalankar," signifying one who embodies Vedic wisdom. He then taught the Vedas and Chemistry at the Gurukul and served as Hostel Superintendent for some time. His intellectual range was remarkable: he possessed a rare polymathy that seamlessly integrated ancient Indian sciences with modern scientific thought, particularly Chemistry.

During this period, he came into close contact with Acharya Abhaydev Vidyalkar, through whom he was introduced to the works of Sri Aurobindo. Acharya Abhaydev was in correspondence with the Mother, and when she sought a competent Sanskrit scholar for the newly established Ashram Press, arrangements were made for Jagannath Arya to join in October 1945. At the Press, he was entrusted with the responsibilities of proofreading, translation, and publication of Sri Aurobindo's works in Hindi and Sanskrit. After the Mother's message on 11



November 1967, arrangements were made for Jagannath Arya to join the School as a teacher. He went on to mentor numerous fellow teachers and students, focusing primarily on the Vedas, the Upanishads, and the *Bhagavad Gita*. Throughout the day, he made himself readily available to teachers eager to practise spoken Sanskrit. He adopted a very informal method of teaching and would converse exclusively in Sanskrit, laying emphasis on communication skills rather than grammar.

Alongside Pujalal-ji, Jagannath Arya co-founded

the Sanskrit journal *Lokasamskritam* and later served as its Editor-in-Chief following Pujalal-ji's passing. When the Mother expressed her aspiration for Sanskrit to become a living language, she reposed great faith in him and said: "Perhaps, after all, V [Jagannath Arya] is the best."

Asha Arya (Agarwal), who studied extensively under Jagannath Arya, recalls. "He was a true mentor and a *Mahāpandit*. He went out of his way to help me by being available on Sundays, after lunch hours, and before and after group. I studied the Upanishads with him, particularly the *Kāthopaniṣad* and the *Kenopaniṣad*. He was always dressed simply, usually in a white shirt. Very few recognised the greatness of this self-effacing man. Nolini-da once remarked that such a pandit was not there in the Ashram and he doubted how many such scholars there were in India. For me, he was a father figure, *adbhutam!*"

SHEKHAR ARYA

Divyaprakash Pal '99 (Dibbo)



Chandrashekhar Samantarya (affectionately known as Shekhar-da) joined the Ashram in August 1963. He began his service in the Fruit Room, where he was entrusted with washing the vessels from which the

Mother had taken her meals—a responsibility he regarded as both sacred and formative. He later went on to teach Sanskrit and Odia at the School for over four decades, shaping generations of students with quiet dedication.

A gifted playwright, Shekhar-da authored several original works in Sanskrit and translated plays from his mother tongue, Odia, as well as from Hindi. He believed that participation in theatre offered an education equivalent to a

year in the classroom, fostering confidence, sensitivity, and moral imagination in young minds. In recent years, Dr. Sampadananda Mishra, eminent Sanskrit scholar, has published a selection of Shekhar-da's plays in a book titled *Ramyanātakāni*, which not only reflects his literary accomplishment but also embodies his enduring commitment to imparting life lessons and ethical values to children.

Beyond the classroom and the stage, Shekhar-da was known for his love of gardening, cooking, and the creation of exquisite floral arrangements at the School. "I give you flowers," the Mother once told a sadhak, "so that you may develop the Divine qualities they symbolise." On his first birthday in the Ashram, the Mother presented him with small, bright pink blossoms she had named "Happy Heart." Throughout his life, Shekhar-da brought warmth and happiness to the hearts of all whom he taught and encountered.

Mani ('89) offers a similar view:

"When I joined his class in Higher Course, most people said that he was a high-level scholar who did not teach at lower levels. As a lover of Sanskrit, I felt apprehensive because my general comprehension level of Sanskrit was limited, yet I joined due to my deep interest. And guess what! With me, he was the embodiment of patience. I attended Veda classes in Sri Aurobindo's light for two to three years along with other senior sadhaks. Jagannath-ji had an affinity for me and was easily approachable. He often invited me to attend classes at his home before Group. He understood that I did not understand some of the concepts, but he never challenged or discouraged me. Such was his way.

Personally I feel that the Divine Mother, out of compassion, specially arranged a Vedic scholar who was the embodiment of patience and humility. It was as though she wished us Sanskrit lovers to learn not only Sanskrit but also

Sanskriti. I must say that I realised his true value only much later."

Jagannath Arya translated several works of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother into Sanskrit, including *Vedarahasyam* (selected hymns from *The Secret of the Veda*), *Agni Mantra Mālā* (selected mantras from *Hymns to the Mystic Fire*), and *Kathāmañjarī* (*Tales of All Times*). Among his major original contributions are *Jyotiṣām Jyotiḥ*, an esoteric exposition of selected Vedic hymns, and *Kuṇṭāpa Sūkta Saurabham*, comprising selected mantras from the *Atharva Veda*.

Jagannath Arya's life was a unique synthesis. He journeyed from the traditional Vedic world of Gurukul Kangri to the integral spiritual vision of Sri Aurobindo, demonstrating that ancient tradition and modern spiritual evolution are not only compatible but mutually enriching. In serving the Mother with quiet dedication, he became a perfect instrument in making Sanskrit accessible and relevant. ❧

ARYAVISHNU

THE TEACHER WHO PERSONIFIED SANSKRIT

Dibbo Pal ('99) remembers his first Sanskrit teacher, Aryavishnu, who made such an impact on our lives. This article is a quiet celebration of his life and the many memories he has left behind.

EARLY LIFE

Vishnulalit was born on 5 January 1941 in a village near Janakpur, Nepal. His father, Indrajit Singh, a zamindar, followed a disciplined regime of *dand-baithak*, *lathi*, and wrestling, which laid a foundation of physical culture in the family. Vishnu, the fifth child, spent his formative years in this rural milieu. Vishnu and his elder brother, Shyamlalit, lived in their maternal family home to attend a high school in Chandauli, Bihar.

His maternal uncle, Raghavprasad Singh (Vrajarya's [61] father), who was serving in the postal services of the army during the Second World War, was posted in Calcutta in 1943. He had started wondering what to do with himself and his family after the war when, one day, by happenstance he noticed a signboard "Sri Aurobindo Pathmandir" near College Square. Having learnt there what to do to be able to go to the Ashram, he went to Pondicherry and found in the Ashram his heaven of dreams. He resolved to bring here all his near and dear ones. Vrajarya along with his sister Kavita-di ('66) reached Pondicherry on 16 January 1949. They were admitted to the Ashram School and subsequently received the Mother's permission to join Dortoair, then the only Ashram boarding for children.

Soon thereafter, Raghavprasad proposed to Vishnu and Shyam to come to the Ashram and they happily agreed. However, their father would not have consented, so they left home secretly in 1952. The Mother was informed about their arrival. Vrajarya recalls:



"During the 9:30 a.m. darshan, I asked the Mother if I could bring the two brothers to her, and she agreed. After meeting them, she said, 'Ils sont gentils. Ils peuvent rester ici.' Very soon they were provided Ashram food and, in course of time, accommodation and Prosperity. Vishnu joined the School, while Shyam, already 18 and a matriculate, was given work in the Dining Room. Vishnu quickly distinguished himself as a good student. Although several years behind in most subjects, he progressed rapidly in Sanskrit, catching up with me. After completing his Higher Course, he was assigned work at the Ashram Press and in Counouma's office. His posting to the Press was particularly fortunate, as Jagannath-arya was then overseeing all Sanskrit-related publications. Vishnu sought as much time as possible with Jagannath-arya to improve his Sanskrit."

After the Mother's message of 11 November 1967, Vishnu—now known as Aryavishnu—adopted Sanskrit almost exclusively in his daily life.

A LIFE DEVOTED TO TEACHING

In 1968, it was decided that Aryavishnu should devote all his working time to teaching Sanskrit in the School. He would teach in the Kindergarten in the mornings and in the School in the afternoons. Jagannath-arya taught the advanced sections while Aryavishnu focused on foundational learning, spoken Sanskrit, and



Aryavishnu with his sister Shobha and cousin Brajkishore Singh

phonetic clarity. In Cours Accéléré, he recorded students' recitations to help them improve their diction, a practice well ahead of its time.

A Kindergarten teacher recalls:

"His style was original and imaginative. He created games that made learning joyous. He introduced children to the *Śiva Stotram*, not to teach scripture but to cultivate correct Sanskrit pronunciation. With each name (e.g. Gaṇeśa), he would draw out a letter—say, *Ga*—and lead the class through *ga, gā, gi, gī*, and so on. The children absorbed the language almost unconsciously. He also had a remarkable flair for composing verses spontaneously. His *ślokas* were not necessarily the serious type. They could be about people, activities, etc. sometimes playful, sometimes profound."

In 1994, Manju-arya (Sharma), then associated with the Sri Aurobindo Divine Life Education Centre, Jhunjhunu, Rajasthan, first met Aryavishnu at a youth camp in Sri Aurobindo Society:

"It was the first time I saw someone conversing exclusively in Sanskrit," she recalls.

Manju would later work closely with him, co-creating songs and teaching materials. She started actively assisting Aryavishnu in the Kindergarten and would be present as often as possible in his classes whether it was the study of *varṇamālā*, Vedic mantras, or *ślokas*. "Children love to sing songs in Sanskrit. I would write

them and Aryavishnu would correct them. On Darshan days, we sang compositions dedicated to the Mother and Sri Aurobindo, many of them he himself had written. Everything I teach today is rooted in what I learnt from him."

Manju settled in Pondicherry in 2005, completed her B.Ed., and pursued her M.A. in Sanskrit, though she was not yet fluent in spoken Sanskrit. Working daily alongside Aryavishnu transformed her command of the language.

"He had mastery over many languages—French, Brahmi, English, Bengali, Odia, Maithili, Marwari. He initiated me to French," she notes.

Once while travelling with Aryavishnu by train, she found that he was talking with everyone in the compartment in Sanskrit! "He instinctively chose words that were common to Sanskrit and the person's mother tongue or other language that he or she knew, which made communication effortless. People were captivated by his ease and would gather around him." His reputation for fluency earned him invitations to centres across India, including Mattur in Karnataka, renowned as one of the country's few Sanskrit-speaking villages. He also travelled regularly to Jhunjhunu during the school holidays, teaching with his characteristic enthusiasm. Manju adds:

"He translated several of Pranab-da's songs into Sanskrit. Those songs are still sung today at the Jhunjhunu centre. He sowed the seeds of lifelong love for the language."



Mani ('89) reminisces the good old days when the morning used to start with Vedic chants. "Aryavishnu was probably the only teacher I had who had learnt Sanskrit through Sanskrit. He would call us to recite *R̥g-Veda* mantras under the Patience Tree on the School stage at 6:30 a.m. During Durga Puja, we recited the *Caṇḍī Pāṭha* for ten consecutive days. We did this for nearly 5 years. It felt entirely natural and spontaneous."

A QUIET STRENGTH

During his student years, Aryavishnu excelled physically as well, becoming a skilled wrestler, a practitioner of *lathi*, and a gymnast particularly adept at the parallel bars. He soon became captain and coach, imparting these skills to younger students with great efficiency.

His younger sister, Shobha Singh, remembers him as both affectionate and firm-minded:

"When he left home, I was only two. He often regretted leaving me behind and urged our uncle to bring me to the Ashram. When I eventually came in my mid-twenties, he was already deeply rooted here. I wanted him to live with us, but he refused for seven years. I cooked for him, but he wouldn't accept home food. He preferred having his meals at the Dining Room so as to reach out to as many people as possible to fulfil his vision of spreading Sanskrit. I often had to sneak containers of food into his bag on his way to School!"

Aryavishnu developed vitiligo early in life, which proved to be a great handicap. For many years, he fought it with all that he had been advised, but he had such a strong will that he did not allow it to affect his services in the School or at the Playground. In the last few years, his hearing and sight became weak but he continued all his work as far as possible.

Shobha recounts his final moments:

"On the fated day, Bhaji suddenly asked if he could have lunch at home; he had severe stomach pain. It was the first and, tragically, the only time he asked me for food. I served him curd rice. Later that afternoon, he collapsed in my arms and passed away."

LEGACY OF A SĀDHAK

Aryavishnu embodied the spirit of a true *sādhak*—dedicated, tireless, and wholly devoted to the cause of Sanskrit. Physically, perhaps, he is one who has spread most persistently and dynamically the Mother's message. Sanskrit scholar Sampadananda Mishra, formerly of the Sri Aurobindo Society, remembers:

"I was inspired by his passion. He insisted on giving all instructions in Sanskrit. Sometimes students grew frustrated. When someone mentioned this to him, he replied: 'If they express their frustration in Sanskrit, it's fine. If they use another language, I will scold them!' Such was his love for the language."

Manju concludes with a phrase that seems to resonate with everyone who knew him:

"*Na bhūto na bhaviṣyati*—there has never been anyone like him, and there never will be." ❧



The German gymnastics coach Kurt Friedrich with his students at the old gymnasium, 1962

First row seated from left to right:

Vishweshwar Dundur (Vishwa), Prabhakar Rupanagunta (Batti), Debdas Sarkar (Mona)

Second row seated from left to right:

Bhuddat Paliwal, Lakshman Sehgal, Vishnulalit Singh

Third row seated from left to right:

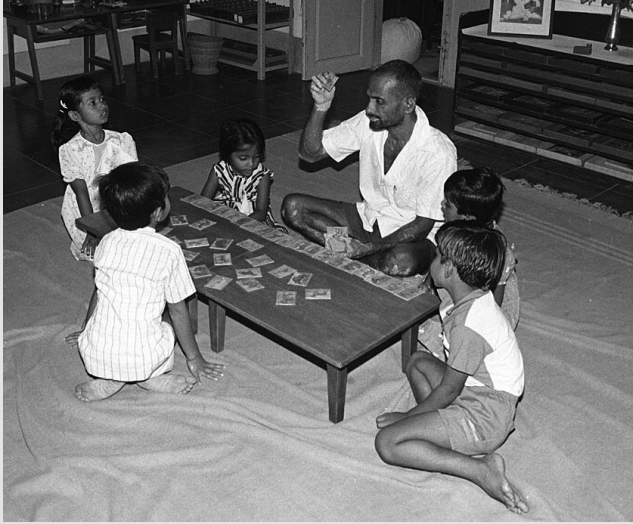
Niranjan Chakravarty, Kurt Friedrich, Subodh Vashishtha, Grant Beresford

Last row standing from left to right:

Phani Bhushan Manna, Padmakar Mirajkar, Ajit Sarkar

EVERYONE'S SANSKRIT TEACHER

Anubha Sud ('00)



Aryavishnu was everyone's Sanskrit teacher. Insistent on conversing purely in Sanskrit, he used to ensure that the conversation flowed even if the listener did not remember his or her Sanskrit. Using a mixture of actions, repetition, and slowed down speech, he made us feel we would never be out of touch with this miracle of a language. I am sure you too might have met him outside the Dining Hall one morning and tried to hold a desperate Sanskrit conversation with him.

My interaction with him was different. I was the quintessentially intelligent, but lazy, student in EAVP 4, 5, and 6. I had left as many classes as I could under Tanmay-da's vigilant eye. He gave me the liberty to pick and choose anything I wanted to try my hand at. I thought he was indulgent towards me, but now I know he was wise beyond imagination.

It was EAVP 5, Monday 7th period, time for my, and everybody's, mother-tongue class, and I was looking forward to Hindi when I was told to join the more senior batch. I had to join the senior students' group studying with Ravindra-ji in his room at the Ashram. Erudite

and immensely knowledgeable, Ravindra-ji was too serious for me and the topic of *Ramayana* too lofty for my brain. Later, when I declared to Tanmay-da that I would not like to continue Hindi, since my mother tongue was Punjabi, I expected that to be the end of the story because who could teach me Punjabi in the Ashram? He had allowed me to leave so many other subjects after all.

I was told to study with Aryavishnu. But Aryavishnu only spoke to us in Sanskrit!

My first class with Aryavishnu was by the pond. He brought to the class of one student a large tome of linguistic studies between Hindi, Punjabi, and Sanskrit and claimed

that I was going to teach him Punjabi. Instead of learning my mother tongue, I started sharing whatever little I knew of it with him. He showed me similarities between Punjabi and Sanskrit through various sentences and parallel structures. We studied by the pond, outside Mahesh-bhai's room, on the stage, outside Jharna-di's room, wherever we could find space. He taught me things whenever he saw I was open to learning, in whatever method he could gather. Patiently, over two years, he helped me unfold the secrets of the language. As a year-end project, he made me translate the Durga Stotra into Punjabi without knowing Punjabi. He took my inclination for *phanki* and transformed it into a curiosity towards languages.

Today I teach languages to over 100 students. Between Spanish, German, French, and English grammar, many of my explanations go back to patterns and linguistic devices Aryavishnu showed me in Sanskrit. I did not teach him Punjabi, he taught me the secret of languages through Sanskrit.

OUR JIJI

*Aravinda Maheshwari ('71) remembers his sister Chinmayee Arya,
a long-time Sanskrit teacher at SAICE*

(written in collaboration with Archana & Jasmin Maheshwari)

Chinmayee-di, as she is lovingly called in the Ashram, was simply “Jiji” to us, the Hindi version of the Bengali “didi” with which we are so familiar here.

She was the eldest of four of us, two sisters and two brothers. This, our father used to point out, formed the smallest possible family, for each one’s important experience of growing up with a brother and a sister!

Although only five years older than me, the youngest, Jiji was always like a guardian and a loving protector to the three of us. Quiet, serene and poised as she was even from her earliest days, we spontaneously went to her for wise answers to our queries or resolutions to our disputes. From all my childhood memories I cannot recollect a single incident of seeing her angry or rash with anyone, and she would not lose her poise even when such emotions occurred in her surroundings.

Jiji was born in Varanasi on the full moon in August 1946. This is the day of *Raksha bandhan* in the Indian calendar, when sisters tie *Rakhis* of protection to their brothers. Her name Chinmayee was given on suggestion of a friend of our father’s, who was a devotee of Mother and Sri Aurobindo. Celebrating her birthday with *Raksha bandhan* every year made us happily aware of the joy and blessing our Jiji was to us, the very essence and personification of the ideal of an elder sister. It is interesting to note that *Raksha bandhan* has been declared as “Sanskrit day” by the Government of India.

Our parents were both teachers, our father in Philosophy at a post-graduate college and our mother in Mathematics at a girls’ intermediate

college in Mathura, where the family had settled in 1949, and where we spent all our childhood. Besides the influence of the holy city which is the birthplace of Lord Krishna, our parents carefully instilled in us a deeper awareness of Indian spirituality, behind the seeming mask of divergent rituals and traditions. Story-telling by Dadiji, our grandmother, and the reading of scriptures like the *Ramayana* and the *Bhagavatam* on special occasions, were all a happy part of our childhood, and came to form the very basis of our inner life and character.



This photo was sent to the Mother before Jiji’s joining the Ashram in 1970

Along with the steady focus on the deeper truth in all ceremonies and celebrations, we grew up surrounded with classical and devotional music, poetry and the arts. Jiji embodied that very love of music, which remained one of the most important elements

throughout her life. The gift of a beautiful voice and her innate sweetness made her a wonderful instrument for the sublime and inspiring music that would continue to touch all those around her.

An atmosphere of learning pervaded our family home, and simplicity, beauty, cleanliness and natural health were the foundations of an exceptional upbringing for which we remain ever so grateful to our parents.

Jiji had a profound and abiding love for the *Bhagavad Gita*, as is well known to all her friends and students in the Ashram. In our childhood, one of our favourite places was the Gita Mandir in Mathura, a temple specifically dedicated to this central teaching of Shri Krishna. Our father would organise a yearly function there on the



At the age of two, 1948

day of Gita Jayanti, and we would enjoy a whole morning of recitations, songs and enlightening discourses. It was also my birthday by the Indian calendar, a privilege which I deeply enjoyed.

Jiji's schooling started with being enrolled as the first student of a new Montessori School in Mathura, where she was fondly loved, and considered a model pupil by her teachers. Sensitive

and caring of nature, she enjoyed an affectionate relationship with classmates and friends, as well as with many of her teachers.

At the age of 16 she went to Varanasi, city of learning and her place of birth, where she joined the Vasant College for Girls in Rajghat for her B.A. For us this was a big change, not to have her constant presence at home, except for Deepavali holidays and during the summer breaks. Clearly, being in a better learning environment and institutions was given precedence over living with the family, which gradually made each one of us leave home for higher studies, to opportunities that were not available in our home town.

In 1964 Jiji joined the Banaras Hindu University to pursue an M.A. in Sanskrit. Two years later she enrolled for PhD. She was only twenty then. In April 1967, she visited the Ashram in Pondicherry, brought by our father, who had first come here in 1953. She had Mother's balcony Darshan twice, on 24th April and on 4th May (4-5-67). Feeling a strong inner call, she wanted to remain in the Ashram right then. However, on the advice of a senior sadhak of the Ashram, she went back to finish her PhD with the feeling that the work she had started should be done as an offering to the Mother. It was a lesson in *karma yoga* for her, to offer all her work to the Divine.

Jiji returned for a second visit to the Ashram in February 1968, a special time which was blessed by two balcony Darshans, on the 21st

and the 29th, and the foundation ceremony of Auroville on the 28th. In June of the same year I came for my first visit and received the Grace of the Mother's Darshan in Her room. I came back to stay in December after getting admission in the Ashram School, and joined the Higher Course. In August 1969, the entire family came together and had the Mother's Darshan in Her room on Jiji's birthday. The following year, after completing her PhD, Jiji returned to the Ashram for good and joined the School as a Sanskrit teacher in June 1970.

She later recalled how she felt totally tongue-tied in her first days at the Ashram School, when it came to communicating in simple spoken Sanskrit! This was something that she had not learnt, in spite of her MA and PhD studies in Sanskrit. So first she had to practise it herself! She also remembered how at that time most verbal communications in the Ashram and the School took place in languages unfamiliar to her, including English which she was not used to speaking, and the Ashram Hindi that was completely foreign to her!



Chinmayee Arya's class in Knowledge

The room given to her in July 1970 on Rangapillai Street was not considered safe enough for a newcomer, therefore I was asked by Kireet-bhai to shift from the boarding and stay with her. After a gap of 8 years, it was wonderful to live together again. A year and a half later I moved to a room near the Press, where I had started working on completing the Higher Course. By then our father (Maheshwar bhai) and sister (Archana), who had arrived in April and June

1971 respectively, had also started living in a house close by on the same street. At this stage, while our family home was gradually getting established in the Ashram, our notion of family was also expanding, to include more and more familiar Ashramites.

Some striking features of Jiji's personality come to my mind. She couldn't bear any ugliness and disharmony, be it physical or psychological. Her room was always kept in meticulous order and all her belongings looked spotless and perfectly maintained. Even simple objects surrounding her were for her living beings, which she cared for with affectionate hands. She once told Archana that she aspired to keep her room ready and apt to receive the Mother at any time. The very essence of her being seemed to be a part of Mother's great form of Mahalakshmi, the embodiment of divine beauty and harmony, and her deepest aspiration was to be a channel of Her divine Love.

Mahasaraswati played hardly a lesser role. Jiji's doctoral thesis was a critical study of *Rasagangadhara*, which is a treatise on rhetorics written by the 17th-century critic and poet Pandit Raj Jagannatha. The thesis was published as a book by the Rajasthan Granth Academy in 1975, and was awarded the Rajya Sahityik Puraskar by the Ministry of Education of U.P. When this news was given to Nolini-da, he was very pleased and asked her to work for the Mother with all her capacities. That was the time when she started preparing Sanskrit story-books for children, hand-written and illustrated with drawings done by many others, aimed at making Sanskrit simple and interesting for children. She cyclostyled them from Vishwanath-da's office for use in the School. These booklets are among many materials prepared by her, which are still being used in the School.

Generations of students and Ashramites have been taught and touched by Jiji during her 39 years at the Ashram and School. From young children to Higher Course students, Dining Room workers to friends and colleagues, all have loved and cherished her, not only for her knowledge of Sanskrit and music, her deep appreciation of



Jiji with Archana, August 2000

the rich and timeless Indian heritage, but also for her very being which radiated peace, devotion, beauty and harmony.

In the early months of 2009 Jiji told Archana, with whom she had shared a happy and intimate closeness through all their years at the Ashram, that she felt a decisive turn in her life approaching. She could not tell exactly what kind of change was awaiting her, but it was an imperative sense that Mother was preparing her for a big step and a very different kind of work, which may be a radical departure from everything she had been doing so far.

She was to be accurate in her premonition. The six months to come, from undergoing surgery in July 2009 until her passing on January 15, 2010, would indeed take Jiji on a journey of vastly accelerated transformation and inner growth. It was a process that reached extreme intensities and forced the limits in many ways — limits of mental understanding, of will-power, of physical endurance, all of which she had plenty! — ultimately leading her to a transcending of any perishable support, to a constant giving of herself into the hands of the Mother in an act of total surrender and faith, in what we felt was a great *yajna* of her entire being. Her own words sum this up so intimately, "I feel that my body is one cell in the body of the Mother."

For us, accompanying her through this period of her life was a unique experience and gift in many ways, as the love and closeness that had been the natural privilege of our childhood was now taken to new and ever greater depths. It is impossible to do justice to that journey in the context of a

few pages, and we are aware that in talking of her experience, we tread on a sacred ground of which we got but precious glimpses. In spite of extreme discomfort and pain, whoever saw her was always struck by her unvarying composure and dignity, her unsubdued sense of humour, and her sharp wit and presence of mind which amazed us again and again. But the greatest treasures we received came from the deeper dimensions she reached, of which she managed to share many boons, including a few poems and songs which she dictated to me in the Nursing Home. At one stage, she was planning to paint four beautiful banners for her room with the four words that were most central to her experience: Grace – Gratitude – Faith – Beatitude. In moments when the physical pain became unbearable, rather than asking for

painkillers, she would turn every breath into a chanting of the sacred sound OM. Through and with her, we spent many hours during the days and nights, chanting the Omkara and the mantras that brought near and made tangible Their marvellous Presence and Grace.

Now, more than a decade after her leaving the physical dimension, all memories of pain and ordeal are as if miraculously gone, and in its place we feel but her enthralling smile and hear her delightful voice, sweetly teasing and challenging us to move forward with courage, to transcend our own limits in that flame of absolute love and self-giving that was her last and greatest teaching to us. ❧

Om Anandamayi Chaitanyamayi Satyamayi Parame
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A NOTE OF GRATITUDE TO CHINMAYEE-DI

Dr. Sampada Savardekar

Most of my adult life has been a reflection of the inspiration of a few teachers who inculcated in me the determination of pursuing one's interests and passions wholeheartedly and courageously. I have tried to nurture my passion by shaping my working years around my deep-felt interest of the Sanskrit Language.

In the Ashram school, we have an incredible blessing to integrate Sanskrit into our regular curriculum, as envisaged by the Mother. So many incredible teachers like Archana-di, Bharat-Arya, Arya Vishnu and others have taught us Sanskrit with great energy and enthusiasm. They revealed different dimensions of the divine language: its lyrical beauty, its divine sanctity, its mantric power. Among all of them, I fondly remember Chinmayee-di whose graceful style of teaching Sanskrit is totally unforgettable.

I studied Sanskrit with Chinamayee-di in School and then chose to study the *Bhagavad Gita* and take Sanskrit classes with her in the 3 years of Knowledge. We focused on

different aspects of the Gita: the beauty of the vocabulary, analysis of grammar, phonetic rhythms and power of alliterations, and so on. On other days, we discussed specific Sanskrit terminologies in Sri Aurobindo's light, referring to the *Essays on the Gita* for example. She led me to discover the beauty of *Maheshwara sutras*, the *Ashtadyayi* and Panini's incredible genius. It was like uncovering the logic and magic of Sanskrit, and its intricate yet simple systematisation by Panini.

I have had a beautiful connection with her sister Archana-di as well. Her father Shri Maheshwari-ji as we called him, was also my teacher. In Knowledge, I studied *Essays on the Gita* with him and most classes took place at their residence since he was advanced in age by that time. The whole family, I found was enlightened, kind and extremely sweet to me. I will always remember them, the time we spent together in discussing Sanskrit, Indian literature, the Gita and Sri Aurobindo's writings. The memory of those precious moments is fondly treasured. ❧

USHĀ ĀRYĀYAI NAMAḤ

Anuradha Choudry '98 reminisces about Ushā āryā, one of the early Sanskrit teachers at SAICE.

A caring teacher, she embodied the true spirit of an acharya and inspired many a student to pursue the language.

Usha Ben Desai, fondly known as Ushā āryā, was not just my Sanskrit teacher but an *ācāryā* in every sense of the term. Dedicated and sincere in imparting knowledge to eager minds, she was an embodiment, as the word *ācāryā* signifies, of the profound principles that we would study together, for half a decade, from the end of school and all through my Knowledge years. Simple, unassuming, gentle yet firm, infinitely patient and kind, she was instrumental for my discovery of the wonders of Sanskrit literature from the Gītā to the Upaniṣads and the Vedas, from the poetry and drama of Kālidāsa to the stories of *Pañcatantra* and the plays of Bhāsa and Bhavabhūti's *Uttararāmacaritam*. She unravelled these texts for me in a manner that my love for Sanskrit and what she had to offer grew deeper with every treatise we explored.

I will also remain forever indebted to her as she guided me through all the 700 verses of the Gītā, analysing each one meticulously from the perspective of its grammar and its psychological implications as discussed by Sri Aurobindo. Like a true teacher, she never imposed her views on me but gave her suggestions and allowed me the complete freedom to question her till I was satisfied with the explanations we arrived at. My study of the Gītā thus proved to be a linguistic and transformative psycho-spiritual treat! The

methods she adopted to enlighten me on its verses, not only laid the foundations for my ability to grasp Sanskrit verses as they are recited, but they helped me internalise several invaluable lessons that Srī Kṛṣṇa taught Arjuna on the battlefield, which continue to inspire me and offer psychological solace while going through different vicissitudes of life.



I did not realise then to what extent she had touched my life and silently influenced my future pathways but as I look back on my own journey and listen to stories of how often students across the country have been 'terrorised' out of Sanskrit by their strict uncompromising masters, I can say with certainty that she played a key role in my love affair with the language and the

enthusiasm with which I have been sharing it with my students. An *ācāryā* par excellence, Ushā āryā, along with several teachers I have had the humble privilege of learning from, including my Ph.D. supervisor, Prof. K. E. Dharaneedharan from Pondicherry University, was the model I would aspire to emulate throughout my teaching career – a caring mother-figure whose sole focus was to make sure that while learning the outer shell of the language, which itself has much to offer, I would actually touch and taste the sweetness of her kernel and become receptive to her undying spirit which has upheld this civilisation through trepidation across ages.

After graduating from the Ashram, I stayed in touch with her while doing my M.A, M.Phil. and Ph.D. in Sanskrit from Pondicherry University. It was luckily not yet the age of smartphones so I made it a point, in the tradition of the good old days, to meet her every now and then and update her about my progress, which she would acknowledge with her signature smile and bless me to keep the Sanskrit torch burning bright wherever I went. Ushā āryā has passed on since when I was away from Pondicherry, but the memory of us sitting in Knowledge and delving deep into the cryptic verses of the Upaniṣads remains as fresh as if it was yesterday. Although she was not physically around when I stepped into IIT Kharagpur to teach Sanskrit, I know that, as she rests safely with the Mother, she also rests

assured that her moulding of this śiṣyā more than two decades ago is serving to make this nation and this world a little more *saṃskṛtamayam*. My dedication to the cause of Sanskrit is my humble *gurudakṣiṇā* to her and to all those who have unconditionally lit that spark within me to help realise the Mother's vision that one day the passion and the joy for learning Sanskrit will return and spread like wildfire in this country so that just as every child born in France speaks French, every child born in this sacred land will look forward to learning and speaking the *devabhāṣā* and usher in a new renaissance of the *bhāratīya* consciousness.

*Uṣārye sadākṛtajñā śiṣyāhaṃ te sādaraṃ
praṇamya susmṛtimālāmetāṃ samarpayāmi -
kṛpayānuḡrhyatām । ❧*

RADHIKA-AARYA – MY SANSKRIT TEACHER

Urmila ('89) expresses her gratitude to Radhika-Aarya ('80) whose spontaneous ways of teaching Sanskrit made the language easy and fun.

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

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

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



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

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

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

मम श्रेष्ठः संस्कृताध्यापकः

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

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

राधिकार्यः पाठेन, वार्तालापेन, कथानाटकादिमाध्यमेन संस्कृतम् अशिक्षयत्। सः कठिनां संस्कृतभाषां रुचिरां कृत्वा सरलतया अपाठयत्।

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

अविस्मरणीया तस्य पाठनशैली!

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

कठिनान् विषयानपि सरलीकृत्य सः

अबोधयत्। संस्कृत-व्याकरणस्मरणाय सरलान् नियमान् च अशिक्षयत्। एकदा वर्गे आर्यः अपृच्छत् - किमर्थं रामेण न, रामेन इति। मया उक्तम् आसीत् - यतो हि रामेन शुद्धम् न श्रूयते इति।

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

ईदृशी आसीत् राधिकार्यस्य पाठनशैली। यथा वयं स्वमातृभाषां हेलया शिक्षामहे, तथा सः अस्मान् संस्कृतम् अशिक्षयत्। श्रीमाता अस्माकं विद्यालये सरलं भाषितं संस्कृतम् ऐच्छत्।

आर्यः न केवलम् उत्तमः अध्यापकः आसीत् अपि तु उत्तमः चिकित्सकः अपि। मम विवाहात् प्राग् अहं बहुवारं तस्य चिकित्सालयम् अगच्छम्। आवयोः संस्कृतेन एव सर्वदा वार्तालापः प्रचलति स्म। तस्य औषधसेवनेन मम द्वावपि प्रसवौ अतीव सरलतया सुखेन च सञ्जातौ।

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

सरलं संस्कृतं पाठितं येन,
तस्मै श्रीगुरवे नमः।

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SANSKRIT AND MULTILINGUALISM

Sachidananda Mohanty '75 argues that an integral approach

to language planning demands an equal treatment of Sanskrit and the Indian Languages.

The most effective way to destroy people is to deny and obliterate their own understanding of their history.

— George Orwell

Sri Aurobindo's pioneering work in the domain of Comparative Philosophy and Vedic Studies brought to our attention, perhaps for the first time, the importance of Sanskrit in unraveling the ancient wisdom of India, primarily contained in the Vedas and the Upanishads.

The latter were not, as Sri Aurobindo explained in *The Secret of the Veda*, *The Origins of Aryan Speech*, and *The Foundations of Indian Culture*, the repository of animism or primitive Nature worship; they harbored deeper mystical wisdom and Spiritual Truths which could be unlocked through a study of symbols that the Vedic seers mastered and revealed to the world. In *The Secret of the Veda*, he described this approach as 'the psychological interpretation' of the Vedic texts.

Clearly, the willful and unwitting effacement of this body of hieratic wisdom, largely caused by the colonial amnesia, has led, as George Orwell reminds us instructively, to the obliteration of our precious past and collective memory/identities.

This was not singular to India; in other parts of the world as well, the so called 'discovery' of the New World by Christopher Columbus led to expeditions of conquistadors like Cortez

and Pizarro; the invasions contributed to the decimation of ancient civilizations of the Incas and the Mayas. Names of the newly 'discovered' lands, as post-colonial critic Stephen Greenblatt explains,¹ were arbitrarily changed; the rich linguistic and oral traditions of Native Americas came to be replaced by Spanish and Portuguese in Latin America, and by French and English in North America. There are lessons here for the modern world.

Regrettably the decline of Sanskrit and the Sanskrit-based thought systems of India have been compounded by the emergence of language conflicts, manifest such as the Sanskrit-Pali and Sanskrit-Prakrit conundrum. In modern times, there have been conflictual relationships as well between Sanskrit and Indian tongues, popularly called the vernaculars or the 'Bhasha' languages.

How shall we restore the importance of Sanskrit while being mindful of language pluralism, central to the cultural diversity everywhere? I shall argue in this essay that Sri Aurobindo's view and understanding of languages, including the role of Sanskrit and world languages, was far ahead of his times. His vision was an evolving one; it was also integral. He saw the growth of Sanskrit and the development of Indian languages as of equal importance, *a sine qua non* for the growth of the Indian Nation and the future world cultures.



The reason Sri Aurobindo gives pivotal importance to Sanskrit is more than a linguistic one. He declared that while languages are essentially means of communication, a unique human gift, the fact that a certain body of hieratic texts came to be written in a particular symbolic lexicon/mode of a given language was of paramount importance in the history of human consciousness. In the larger cross-cultural sense, we may perhaps draw parallels with the language of the Gnostics in early Greece, or the lexicon of the early Egyptians that expressed itself through hieroglyphics.

Sanskrit was important, Sri Aurobindo maintained, because the Vedic and Upanishadic wisdom was important for mankind and for the upward march in human evolution. He states this in the most emphatic manner in an essay that appears in the volume entitled *Essays Divine and Human*.ⁱⁱ

Sri Aurobindo writes in revelatory terms:

I seek not science, not religion, not Theosophy, but Veda- the truth about Brahman, not only His essentiality, but about His manifestation, not a lamp on the way to the forest, but a light and a guide to joy and action in the world, the truth which is beyond opinion, the knowledge which all thought strives after—*yasmin vijñate sarvam vijñatam*. I believe that Veda to be the fountain of that Sanatana Dharma. I believe it to be the concealed divinity within Hinduism, — but a veil has to be drawn aside, a curtain has to be lifted. I believe it to be knowable and discoverable. I believe the future of India and the world to depend on its discovery and its application, not to the renunciation of life, but to life in this world and among men.

In 'The Origins of Aryan Speech' which was meant to be part of a larger treatise on the subject, Sri Aurobindo explains the significance of Sanskrit in the context of Comparative Philosophy of the European kind that commanded attention

among scholars of language families during the early and Mid-Nineteenth century. The discovery of Sanskrit, he adds, was expected to be as momentous a discovery as the discovery of Greek was to the scholarly community in Europe at the time of the fall of Constantinople. Unfortunately, it was an opportunity lost.

Worse still, in the hands of regressive and atavistic forces like the Nazis, the term Aryan came to be associated with eugenics and racial supremacy. S. S. leader Himmler, responsible for the extermination of Jews, sent an expedition to the Himalayas in search of 'pure-blooded Aryas.'

Sri Aurobindo explains that he uses terms like 'Arya' as a cultural category and not as a racial category. In fact, geneticists have recently demonstrated that the entire population in the Indian subcontinent has descended from a common gene pool, thereby completely debunking the 'Aryan Invasion theory.'

The discovery of Sanskrit, Sri Aurobindo declares, had considerable impact upon comparative philosophy, comparative mythology, science of religion, ethnology, and sociology. In the science of speech, he argues, if we were to look for a key to unlock the mysteries, it would undoubtedly be Sanskrit. Indeed, Sanskrit, he concludes, is 'the key to the problem.'

While European philosophy has started from word-identities and identities of final word-meaning, Sri Aurobindo proposes 'to start from root-identities and identities of original and derivative root meaning, even from sound-identities and identities of fundamental and appreciating sound-meaning.' This was doubtlessly a most original and novel way of deciphering the Vedas, distinct from the established commentaries of Sayana and Yaska.

The significance of such a linguistic theorization by Sri Aurobindo gains ground, when he postulates that his theory 'took its rise not from any analysis of the Sanskrit word system, but from an observation of the relation of Tamil in its non-concretized element to the Greek, Latin and Northern Indian languages.'

The conclusion he draws was an unmistakable one: Kindred root sounds must also be of one family. It was 'guna' and 'natural mind impression' that contained in itself the 'seed significance' which it imparts to its 'descendants.' In other words, it was not a 'chance aggregate of words, no language found by chance or arbitrarily but a physic-mental growth as organic, as closely related in its members, species, families, sub-families as any particular species of physical fauna or flora.'

Viewed from this angle, the study of Sanskrit in our times does not become 'the embalmed mummified remnant of a dead culture, as alleged by detractors.' Sanskrit scholars like Columbia University Professor Sheldon Pollock choose to see the Sanskrit language as 'a tool and agency of Brahmanical hegemon,' a far cry from what Sri Aurobindo has argued all along. As the Indologist Rajiv Malhotra correctly maintains: Pollock sees only 'the Sanskrit super-structure,' but 'little or no value in the deeper philosophical and cultural underpinnings.'

Malhotra's *Battle for Sanskrit* [Harper Collins India, 2016] offers a much corrective reading in this context. It is more than ever necessary, therefore, to rescue Sanskrit from the deeply entrenched bias of Euro-centrism that has relied, far too long, on a cultural-materialist reading of the texts that denies the core values of Vedic wisdom.

From Sanskrit and the classical languages of the world, we may now turn our attention to the place of Indian languages and the powerful instrumental role they play in the formation of provincial/regional identities in the Indian subcontinent.

We may see the importance Sri Aurobindo gives to the Indian languages in his seminal essay entitled 'On Linguistic Provinces'ⁱⁱⁱ where he spoke of the pivotal importance of native tongues for a vibrant national culture. It is not a mechanical uniformity but a creative and living unity, he argued, that we need for the greatness of

the Indian Nation. This was before the formation of the linguistic states in India in 1956.

Sri Aurobindo declares insightfully: '[India] has always been throughout a congeries of diverse peoples, lands, kingdoms and, in earlier times, ... diverse races, sub-nations with a marked character of their own, ... which yet succeeded in fitting into the general Indian type of civilization and culture.'

Similarly, writing on the question of the unity of humanity, based on the formulaic approach of a common tongue, Sri Aurobindo discards such mechanical options in favor of a creative union, based on diversity in languages. He anticipates the formulations of some of the leading Multiculturalists of today:

Language is the sign of the cultural life of a people, the index of its soul in thought and mind that stand behind and enriches its soul in action. Therefore, it is here that the phenomena ...of diversity may be most readily seized, more than in more outward things... Diversity of language is worth keeping because diversity of cultures and ... of soul groups are worth keeping and because without that diversity life cannot have full play, for in its absence, there is a danger, almost an inevitability of decline and stagnation.^{iv}

From seeing the greatness of Sanskrit as the master key to deciphering the ancient wisdom of India for humanity, to comprehending fully the role of Indian languages and language pluralism for the growth of the Nation, and finally, nurturing and sustaining the various languages of the world for a world union---Sri Aurobindo has offered a theory of languages of extraordinary insight and depth.

Linguists teach us that when a language dies, an entire culture dies. In the contemporary world, some languages like Spanish are advancing and marching ahead rapidly from Boston to California, while others like the language of

the Jarawa tribes in the Andamans have nearly perished.

It is time we mourned this loss as a collective one, a loss for the entire mankind; we need to take urgent steps for the preservation of the languages of the world.

Sri Aurobindo teaches us in *The Ideal of Human Unity* the fundamental lesson of 'diversity in oneness.' It is by being faithful to the spirit of diversity that we can discover the underlying unity and serve the cause of Sanskrit and Multilingualism. ❁

- i. See Stephen Greenblatt, *Marvellous Possessions: The Wonders of the New World*, in The Greenblatt Reader, Ed. Michael Paine, MA: Blackwell, 2005. Grateful to Professor Greenblatt for an inscribed copy of this book received at Harvard University in 2005.
- ii. Sri Aurobindo, *Essays Divine and Human*, Vol.12, CWSA, p.62.
- iii. Sri Aurobindo, 'On Linguistic Provinces' (Message to Andhra University) dated December 1948, *Autobiographical Notes and Writings of Historical Interest*, CWSA, Vol. 36, p.498.
- iv. *Sri Aurobindo: A Contemporary Reader*, Ed. Sachidananda Mohanty, New Delhi: Routledge, 2008; rpt. 2016, p.75.

क ख ग घ – KA, KHA, GA, GHA

One day, during a lively discussion in the royal court, the King decided to test Kalidasa's unparalleled poetic skills. He challenged Kalidasa to compose a four-line verse ending with the aksharamaala क ख ग घ (Ka, Kha, Ga, Gha). Kalidasa accepted the challenge with a confident bow. As he wandered through the quiet streets of Ujjain, Kalidasa noticed a young girl walking ahead of him, carrying a palm leaf in her hand. Intrigued by the sight of her and hoping for a brief distraction, Kalidasa called out to her.

"Ka twam bale?" he asked in Sanskrit, his voice filled with curiosity. "What is your name, child?" The girl stopped and turned toward him, her eyes twinkling with amusement. "Kanchanamala," she replied with a smile. Kalidasa was struck by the simple beauty of her name, which meant "a garland of gold." Sensing a lively spirit in her, he decided to continue their conversation. "Kasya putri?" he asked, meaning, "Who is your parent?"

Kanchanamala answered without hesitation, "Kanakalataya," referring to her mother, Kanakalata, whose name also meant "a vine of gold." Kalidasa couldn't help but smile at the poetic nature of their names, already feeling his thoughts begin to turn.

Amused, Kalidasa then asked, "Kim va haste?" meaning, "What is in your hand?"

Kanchanamala lifted her palm leaf slightly, as if presenting it to him. "Tali patram," she said, "A palm leaf."

Kalidasa's curiosity grew. "Ka va rekha?" he asked, "What is written in it?"

Without missing a beat, Kanchanamala replied with a knowing grin, "Ka, kha, ga, gha," reciting the first four consonants of the Sanskrit alphabet.

In that instant, it was as if a bolt of lightning struck Kalidasa. Her simple, innocent answer contained the very sounds he had been struggling to find for his poem. Kalidasa hurried back to the palace, his heart light with relief and excitement. When he reached the court, he bowed before the King, who watched him with curious eyes. "Your Majesty," Kalidasa began, "I have completed the poem as you requested."

का त्वं बाले ! काञ्चनमाला
कस्याः पुत्री ? कनकलतायाः ।
हस्ते किं ते ? तालीपत्रं
का वा रेखा ? क ख ग घ ॥ ❁

THE POWER OF LANGUAGE TO MOULD ONE'S CHARACTER

Lopa Mukherjee '94

The words we choose to speak are determined by several factors: our character, how much we pause to think before we speak, the vocabulary we possess, and the trio of *desha-kala-patra* – the message, the moment, and to whom we are speaking. Nothing surprising so far. But if someone turns this on its head and tells us to consciously use certain words that will mould our character, would we believe them? Does saying “sorry” make us feel sorry more often than those who don't use that word enough? Feeling sorry for others makes us more empathetic. But isn't it all supposed to be inside-out? We don't want to make “sorry” a convention. We want it to be an emotion. True, ideally it should be inside-out, spontaneous. But if one does not have empathy, how does one get started? This is where the outside-in theory gives you a practical method to become someone you are not right now but would like to become.

There is research evidence to back this hypothesis gathered by linguists, anthropologists, and psychologists; for example, Lera Boroditsky, who has several talks on YouTube. Some of her examples will help us understand how the structure of language determines what we think, and since what we think controls our actions and motives, our character can be moulded by the language we use.

For example an aboriginal tribe in Australia has no words for “left” or “right”, but uses cardinal directions (north, south, east and west) instead.

They'll say, “You have an ant in your north-east collar-bone.” You fidget and turn around trying to locate it. And they help you by saying, “Now it is to the South, no West. Can you please keep still facing the North?” Then there are Eskimos who have many words for shades of white because it is a question of survival for them to slide down a translucent icy slope or sink in newly formed milk-white snow. For Russians pale blue is a different colour than dark blue because they seldom get blue skies and agriculture depends on how precisely the colour of the sky has been noted. In the tropics if you tell someone it is raining, they want to know if it is a drizzle, a shower, a downpour or a storm. Pacific Islanders have various words for the sound of waves, by which they can determine the shape, speed and direction of tides.



It turns out that the Australian aboriginals are better able to find their way home when lost. Their inner compasses, which is an organ in the brain, has more synapses. Similarly the Eskimos' eyes are more sensitive to white, the Pacific Islanders' ears are sharper. Clearly, languages are shaped by the environment in which they evolve and in turn shape the people who speak it.

Language is also influenced by the social milieu of its speakers. Collectivist societies would use indirect language where the I-statement would be subdued, such as “One has experienced...” instead of “I have experienced” or “This painting was made by me” rather than “I have painted it.” Indirection uses the third vibhakti in Sanskrit, as in “done by me, maya kritam”, which is a common structure of speech in the East. Some languages use even more subdued tones by referring to oneself as “this person, eshah janah” or “this nobody” as in Hindi “is naacheez”.

It has been found that in languages where objects have genders, people describe those objects using feminine or masculine words. Say the moon was feminine, one would describe it as honey-dripping, a muse, gentle and so on. But had it been masculine it would be cold, unblinking, absconding. Think of the adjectives used in National anthems that see their country as feminine. Vande Mataram has sujalam suphalam, the mother who is fertile and generous. Contrast it to the French national anthem, written for the fatherland. It is a battle cry that describes the sorry and gory state of the vanquished enemies.

A Vietnamese who migrated to the USA during the Vietnam War recounted how his parent’s worldview was less complicated than his because they spoke only Vietnamese which has no potential mood (indicating something that could, should, or would happen under certain conditions, what is called vidhiling in Sanskrit). When they were waiting for the bus to take them to safety they had to let one bus go because it was overcrowded. Later they heard that that very bus was blown to pieces. He asked his parents what would have happened had they been able to board that bus. The parents replied, “We did not board it; so what is your question again?” Clearly, language both subtly shapes and is shaped by our belief systems and character. So now let me ask you some provocative questions that may make you think about your character and why you choose the words you do. Do you call the supervisor of your group the “head”, as in the organ that thinks for the entire group? Do you say “sorry” feeling sorrow for the other person’s

situation, as the etymology of the word suggests? When you say “please” are you pleading for yourself or making sure it pleases them? Which of the pleasurable words you use most often: satisfied, happy, wonderful, cheerful, fine, okay. When someone asks you for something they need do you say: yes, sure, possible, ok, or show a thumbs up? When you love a dish cooked by someone else, do you compliment it with: wow, superb, mouth-watering, other-worldly, tasty, good, nice, not-bad, or not-bad-at-all.

SANSKRIT: CONNECTING TO THE ROOTS OF WORDS AND SOUNDS

Sanskrit has given us many synonyms to choose from. But it has given something more intimate – the roots that bring rasa to the word’s meaning. Every word has its building blocks, or root words wrapped up in it. Take swadhyaya. Swa means the self and Self. Adhyaya is to study. Swadhyaya is the study of the Self, self-study, studying the Self with the self – all three meanings in the same word. When you want to use the word “lotus” in Sanskrit, you choose among the synonyms based on your context. Does your context need to show its aspect of purity or harmony? If purity, use pankaja that tells the listener that it was born (ja) of mud (panka). If harmony use aravinda, the one with many spokes (ara) held together by a hub.

We can go deeper than the roots. Every sound has a vibrational quality that when uttered lingers within as though one were a tuning fork. Therefore our chants make us repeat phrases, like Shanti and Aum. An example that Sri Aurobindo illustrates in his masterful article on philology, *The Origin of Aryan Speech*, is the word vrk. In it one can hear something tearing. So vrka is wolf. That which rips apart causes pain, it is not straight, it is crooked. Varaka is a poor fellow. Vakra is crooked. Vrksa is a tree that branches out in all directions. There are other examples. When we use the word jagat for the world it tells us that all are born (ja) from movement (gati). Krishna’s lifting of the Govardhan mountain symbolically means increasing (vardhan) the light (go). As we dwell on the root words, we

start getting a sense of the vibrational quality of sounds. Indeed this is the intention of a spiritual language such as Sanskrit. This is called the sphota theory, where the meaning should burst (sphota) in our minds like an explosion. Sri Aurobindo practiced this methodically as a siddhi to attain in the perfection of his yoga. We can find diary entries on this faculty, called the *Bhasha Shakti*, in *The Record of Yoga*.

When choosing from synonyms, the wisdom texts pick the right word for its roots and its vibrational quality. As example let us read Sri Aurobindo's explanation for choosing synonyms for horse in his commentary on the *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad*. The relevant part of the hymn is translated as:

“He became Haya and bore the gods, Vaja and bore the Gandharvas, Arvan and bore the Titans, Aswa and bore mankind.” (*Brihadaranyaka Upanishad* 1.1.2) (CWSA:18 pp. 276)

“The sense of Vaja is essentially substantiality of being attended with plenty, from which it came to signify full force, copiousness, strength, and by an easy transition substance & plenty in the sense of wealth and possessions.” (CWSA:18 pp. 285)

“Ar signifies essentially any kind of preeminence in fact or force in act. It means therefore to be strong, high, swift or active, preeminent, noble, excellent or first; to raise, lead, begin or rule; it means also to struggle, fight, to drive, to labour, to plough. The sense of struggle & combat appears in ari, an enemy; the Greek Ares, the war-god, arete, virtue, meaning originally like the Latin virtus, valour; the Latin arma, weapons. Arya means strong, high, noble or warlike, as indeed its use in literature constantly indicates. We can now discover the true force of Arvan,—it is the strong one in command, it is the stallion, or the bull, i.e. master of the herd, the leader, master or fighter. The word Asura also means the strong or mighty one. The Gandharvas are cited here briefly, so as to suit the rapidity of the passage, as the type of a particular class of beings, Gandharvas, Yakshas, Kinnaras whose unifying characteristic is material ease, prosperity and a beautiful, happy & undisturbed self-indulgence; they are angels of joy, ease, art, beauty & pleasure.

For them the Horse becomes full of ease & plenty, the support of these qualities, the vahana of the Gandharvas.” (CWSA:18 pp. 285-286)

“And Haya? In the light of these examples we can hazard a suggestion. The root meaning is motion; but from certain kindred words, hil, to swing, hind, to swing, hiṅḍ, to roam about freely & from another sense of hi, to exhilarate or gladden, we may, perhaps, infer that haya indicated to the sage a swift, free & joyous, bounding motion, fit movement for the bearer of the gods.” (CWSA:18 pp. 286)

“Last of all, the Horse becomes Aswa for men. But is he not Aswa for all? Why particularly for men? The answer is that the Rishi is already moving forward in thought to the idea of Ashanaya Mrityu with which he opens the second Brahmana of the Upanishad. Man, first & supreme type of terrestrial creatures, is most of all subject to this mystery of wasting & death which the Titans bear with difficulty & the gods & Gandharvas entirely overcome. For in man that characteristic of enjoyment which by enjoying devours & wastes both its object & itself is especially developed & he bears the consequent pressure of Ashanaya Mrityu which can only lighten & disappear if we rise upward in the scale of Being towards Brahman & become truly sons of immortality, Amritasya putrah.



The beeja mantras

That form of force in matter that is self-wasting because it wastes or preys upon others, is man's vahana." (CWSA:18 pp. 286-287)

Japa, or the repetition of a sacred name, is prescribed as a common spiritual practice in many religions. The effect is like a Tibetan prayer bowl that vibrates louder and louder with every turn of the hand around the edge. Just the utterance of a few syllables can produce this harmonic effect within. Try with repeating "shanti" and feel it in your muscles, in your nerves, in your breath, in your mind, in your heart. Feel the effect of beeja mantras: aim, kreem, kleem, hum, aum. Like a flute player explore the quality of different notes. Add some words, sentences, aphorisms. Listening to them has a different impact. Uttering them is more powerful. Try variations: aloud, silently moving the lips, in your mind alone, slowly, fast, tunefully. When ready pick up an Upanishad and read the slokas. Sri Aurobindo has translated most of the major Upanishads in English. Add the understanding to the phrases you utter and observe the effects within you.

It is easier to choose words when we have the luxury of time. But when we are speaking in real time with people we have to be conscious of every syllable that comes out of our mouths. The Mother's essay on the tapasya of speech that helps us in *Vak Shuddhi* is part of a longer essay called *The Four Austerities and Four Liberations*.

She says one of the most important and the most neglected of mental disciplines is speech control. Many wonderful practices can be found in this essay that will supplement the two already proposed – going back to the roots and tuning in to the vibration of sounds.

My love for Sanskrit came from feeling the vibrations of the first phrase of the Isha Upanishad: *ishavasyam idam sarvam yatkincha jagatyam jagat*. All this is the habitation of the Lord whatever is born of movement in this world. (*Isha Upanishad 1*)

This powerful phrase often used by Swami Vivekananda fills me with purpose: *uttishthata jagrata prapya varan nibodhata*. Arise, awake, honour the blessings you have received. (*Katha Upanishad 1.3.14*)

And this reminds me to Re-Member: *aum krato smara, kritam smara, krato smara, kritam smara*. O Will remember that which was done remember. (*Isha Upanishad 16*)

Research shows that the mind is best able to pick up new languages at an early age, and later it struggles. But with a will to learn anything is possible at any age. The Mother reminds us that age itself is in the mind. There are short phrases in Sanskrit charged with vibration and meaning, called the mahavakyas. This is a good place to start or resume one's swadhyaya. One day it will dawn on us why Sanskrit is called the language of the gods, devabhasha. ❧

SANSKRIT: MAJESTIC AND SWEET

The ancient and classical creations of the Sanskrit tongue both in quality and in body and abundance of excellence, in their potent originality and force and beauty, in their substance and art and structure, in grandeur and justice and charm of speech and in the height and width of the reach of their spirit stand very evidently in the front rank among the world's great literatures. The language itself, as has been universally recognised by those competent to form a judgment, is one of the most magnificent, the most

perfect and wonderfully sufficient literary instruments developed by the human mind, at once majestic and sweet and flexible, strong and clearly-formed and full and vibrant and subtle, and its quality and character would be of itself a sufficient evidence of the character and quality of the race whose mind it expressed and the culture of which it was the reflecting medium.

— Sri Aurobindo
SABCL, Vol. 14, p. 255–56

AROUND THE WORLD IN EIGHTY MINUTES!

Devika Murthy ('81) remembers Prakash Patel ('67) who was an integral part of the SAICE's Free Progress section and was for more than three decades part of the team in charge of Project Ecolake, involved with environment, education and eco-restoration.

Like most people, I too love travelling, seeing new destinations, exploring offbeat paths and experiencing unique cultures, so there is little doubt that that is what drew me to geography being taught by Prakash-bhai in the School.

Along with English at which I was excellent – if I may humbly say so – geography was a favourite subject of mine.

After completing the Higher Course at Knowledge, Prakash-bhai began his teaching stint with maths, (with which I struggled terribly!) but since there were already many doing that, he switched to geography convinced that it was equally important and interesting, and I for one, amongst others for sure, am truly glad that he changed track.

Tall and trim, Prakash-bhai was unfailingly polite and pleasant and one of the most decent people I have ever known. He was always measured in speech and action and never raised his voice even when we were being a bit mischievous. If I were to encapsulate his personality in one phrase, it would genuinely be “With goodwill towards all and malice towards none.”

Prakash-bhai spoke fondly and frequently of Kenya since he was born there and spent his early years in Africa! Indeed, Nairobi is one of the ten most exotic locales in the world, bordered by majestic mountains on one side and the vast Indian Ocean on the other, and is a land of breathtaking natural beauty between the sea and the snowcapped peaks! So there was a hint of justified pride whenever he mentioned it, though

Pondicherry was his permanent home by then and he of course never looked back.

Our Geo classes took place in Chanda-di's section on the first floor, just around the staircase and at the southeast entrance to the Hall of Harmony. A large simple wooden table and plain backless benches were all the furniture to be had, but it was there and then that my fancy took flight!

We were likely six or seven in the group, and the classes twice a week were one in the morning slot and the other in the afternoon, if I remember right.

Prakash-bhai would invariably be dressed in a spotless half-sleeved shirt and perfectly pressed shorts, his jet-black hair with a side parting would be neatly combed with never a strand out of place, his broad forehead bereft of any frown, and his calm demeanour and smiling face would welcome us, even as his elegant hands distributed books for that day's session, and I eagerly awaited these 'treasures' to glimpse what we would be focussing on in that period.

The initial moments would pass in greeting everyone, in settling down and in general inquiries, but the forty minutes that followed held my attention to such an extent that I never felt that it was study, which is the ideal way to learn!

It was a *Window to the World* which I would eventually witness, once I started journeying both in India and abroad.

After a half-hour lesson, Prakash-bhai would make us play games, and the one we cherished



the most was of finding names on the map. He would divide us into two teams and give us sixty seconds to locate what he wanted identified.

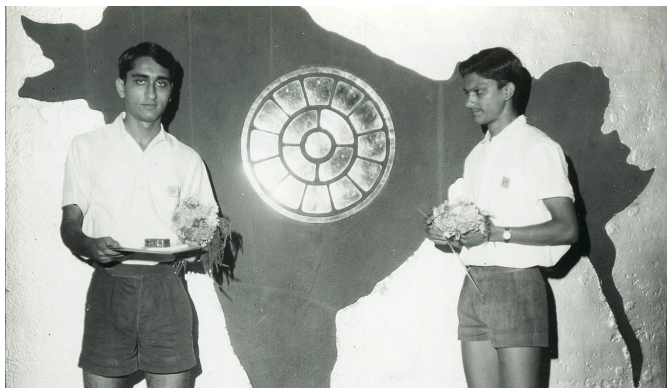
How we all scoured the big and detailed atlas in front of us trying our utmost to win points for ourselves and for the team, and our excitement knew no bounds when we spotted a town or a river, an island or a capital, a desert or an icy range that we were searching for. Christopher Columbus was mayhap not a title as delighted on discovering America for real as we were on spying it on paper! There would be loud shouts and animated consultations, and other teachers and students nearby would shush us, but the thrill of the challenge was as exhilarating as it was actually seeing these places later in life!

I used to chatter a lot in those days, and the only thing that could keep me quiet was if I was doing something that appealed to me. I was an avid reader, and to keep me from talking and aware of my enthusiasm, Prakash-bhai would wisely give me material to go over, especially in my free time, and I would pore over the profusely illustrated articles and colourful photographs on the pages of local brochures and glossy international magazines, and forgetting everything else I would be lost in wonder and imagine going to those places someday! Though to be honest, at that stage it seemed impossible to me.

But by Grace, destiny fulfilled my dreams and I have travelled far and wide and visited multiple cities in many countries on several continents and enjoyed it as thoroughly as I did learning about them growing up.

One day, persuaded by Prakash-bhai's gentle prodding I suppose, and perhaps thinking that it would be a fun trip, I decided to go to the Lake Estate with a bunch of energetic youngsters who went there regularly on Sundays. I recall leaving with a mixed batch of friends and assorted acquaintances.

But by gosh, it was no picnic: cycling in the summer heat and humidity, up slopes and down ditches, labouring under the scorching sun, digging in unrelenting sandstone that did not have a single blade of grass on it, and hauling



Group prizes, 24 November 1967 - Sports stars of the year: Prakash Patel (left) and Siddhartha Bhabock

heaps of dry crusty clay from here to there and god knows where seemed fruitless and futile!

There was not a tree in sight to offer shade, so it was definitely no walk in the park! And worse, our efforts did not seem to make a jot of difference to the hard gravelly ground even after hours of toil on non-existent soil!

Well, I promptly realised that it was not my calling, and frankly my first outing also became my last! I never ventured there again, and I have good cause to guess that with my moaning and groaning they did not miss me at all!

As the decades rolled on, Prakash-bhai tied in education with ecology and the environment, which has lately become the buzzword across the globe. This led him with other key players to planning, executing and developing Merveille and other projects of afforestation and water conservation with passion and devotion that lasted a lifetime. And today the region is considered an emerald marvel.

“Keen to Green” became their motto and mission and thanks to the help, support, finance and other indispensable resources by the Ashram and numberless individuals and institutions, it is now an oasis of abundance and an area of scenic lushness with a variety of flourishing flora and fauna.

And one can only pray that Prakash-bhai's spirit rests in peace, one with the earth that was so beloved to him, where, as he most poignantly said, the Divine Mother is watching over it all: “*Mère Veille*”. ❀

The author's free website is readwriteon.wordpress.com

RAJKUMAR-DA

THE MAGICIAN WITH MANY HATS

Jahnavi ('86) remembers Rajkumar-da ('70) who was everyone's captain. A true gentleman, he enthralled whole generations of children with his wit and humour and spread his kindness wherever he went.

Jagannath Panda first came to Pondicherry in 1963 with his nephews Ajit and Ashok Panda, who had got admission in SAICE. Once here, he too wanted to study in SAICE, so he refused to go back to Orissa. But his brother hadn't applied for his admission, so Jagannath was told to write to the Mother. She permitted him to join our School without even a formal application! A little later, he requested the Mother to change his name. The Mother gave him the name RAJKUMAR.

Initially, he was put in the then Orissa Boarding, under Manoj-da (Das) and Apa (Pratigna-di). A few years later, he wanted to join the Indian Army but could not do so as he had an injured knee. Once he came back, he settled in the Ashram permanently. He became a captain in 1974.

Rajkumar-da, or Rajju as he was fondly known to all his children, was the most loved captain of green and red groups. His inimitable humour, his capacity to hold all enthralled in his South Indian-accented story telling of the *Ramayana* or the *Mahabharata* would keep children rolling in helpless laughter. To us children, though he wore a captain's uniform, he was a fellow group member, sharing our pranks, our laughter, our difficulties. But when he meant to control the group and infuse discipline, he could, with one stern command, pull all the children in line.



He inspired and encouraged many a beginner swimmer who would test the waters fearfully and gingerly on 1st April, and by 30th April would be joyfully swimming one lap, which was a lifetime achievement for him/her—all

because of the steady, patient efforts of Rajkumar-da. He would dive in dramatically, unhesitatingly, uniform and all, in case he thought a child was in distress in the water.

For the B group children, 31st May was a golden day! They looked forward to Rajkumar-da's talk on the do's and don'ts of the annual road race in Lake Estate held on 1st June. His speech was a masterpiece in straightfaced humour! He would warn them of signs of dehydration by beseeching the children "Please! If you see Sri Krishna in front of you (that means you are hallucinating), then

Stop, Stop! Sit down in the middle of the road. I will come with a van and pick you up!" Or "If you see roses on mango trees.... Stop, Stop! Don't proceed further. I will pick you up." Or "If you ask yourself philosophical questions like 'Who am I?', 'Where am I?', and 'Why am I here?', then it is time you sat down on the road or even lie down on the road. I will pick you up."

In October during the red group games tournaments, woe betide anyone who came late to the rassemblement. The dire consequence would be to wait in the "White House" (near the volleyball courts) on a Saturday evening.



That was the worst punishment as one was eager to go to the Saturday night movie and would be late for it, as he would detain you in White House till 7 pm!

What a joy it was to watch him during the Novelty races of A3, 4, 5....he was a child himself, integrated and intermingled with them!

Every 3rd December, he would ride pillion with Pranab-da on his motorbike to visit all the picnic spots our groups would be going to and inform the concerned persons that our children were coming on such and such dates. Each of these people would be presented with a diary. No group picnic after 2nd December was complete without him. He would climb into the bus with all his band baaja and two pieces of wood called *das kaathi*, which he guarded with his life. Popular Hindi film songs were the order of the day. Remmamma remmamma re was his favourite, making up new, absurd and ridiculously funny stanzas along the way, involving the names of group members.

Or his Oriya version of the *Ramayana* in the jatra style:

“Sita pindhila bellbottom
Raamo assila helicopter re...”

which in today’s world would probably invite censure or raise a few questions. But in those simple, uncomplicated days, these lines would make us laugh uncontrollably.

Though he took group of A5, 4, 3 and B group, he did not belong to any group. He was a Captain of all. He was also the architect of the challenging mind-over-matter 70 km Gingee walk, the famous and popular walk from Pondy to Gingee.

In the days of no mobile phones and minimum connectivity, he would organise the walks with perfection, so that there was no inconvenience to anyone. That was his greatest quality.... He never wanted

to inconvenience or trouble anybody. The convenience of all was his sole concern, be it crowd management for Christmas, Darshan queues, or the 2nd December programme.

On every 1st November morning, he would accompany the children going out on vacation, in a bus, specially organised for them, or in the Pondy–Madras train. He would ensure the children were provided a meal in a hotel (Hotel Picnic, it was called) near the Madras Central Station. He would see that each child boarded his/her train safely (the last train left at 10.30 pm) and then head back to Pondy and inform Dada that all have safely left for their hometowns. That was his commitment to his children.

Come an emergency, there was no second person more reliable than him. He was fully involved in the medical assistance for patients with Vishwabandhu-da. He handled medical emergencies at all hours of the day or night and would say “never hesitate to call me” whatever the day or time.

He inspired D groupers and many others to follow his instructions and be there, any time of the day or night, for donating blood or being on night duty for a patient in Jipmer. He took meticulous care of his volunteers too. No helper was left to fend for himself in the vast machinery of a government hospital. He would ensure their comfort while they gave duty and take them

out for a special meal after the duty was over. He was infinitely compassionate when it came to the comfort and well-being of a patient. He would personally go with every patient, see that they were comfortably established in a ward or a room, install an Ashram volunteer to take care of the patient, and only then move on to the next. He never lost his cool or his patience.

Another place where he was the epitome of cool-headedness and a gentleman in his dealing with people was during the darshans. He was the pillar behind so many efficiently organised darshans. He handled crowds like a magician, with grace, firmness, respect, and compassionate tolerance. He commanded great respect from his volunteers who followed his instructions to the letter.

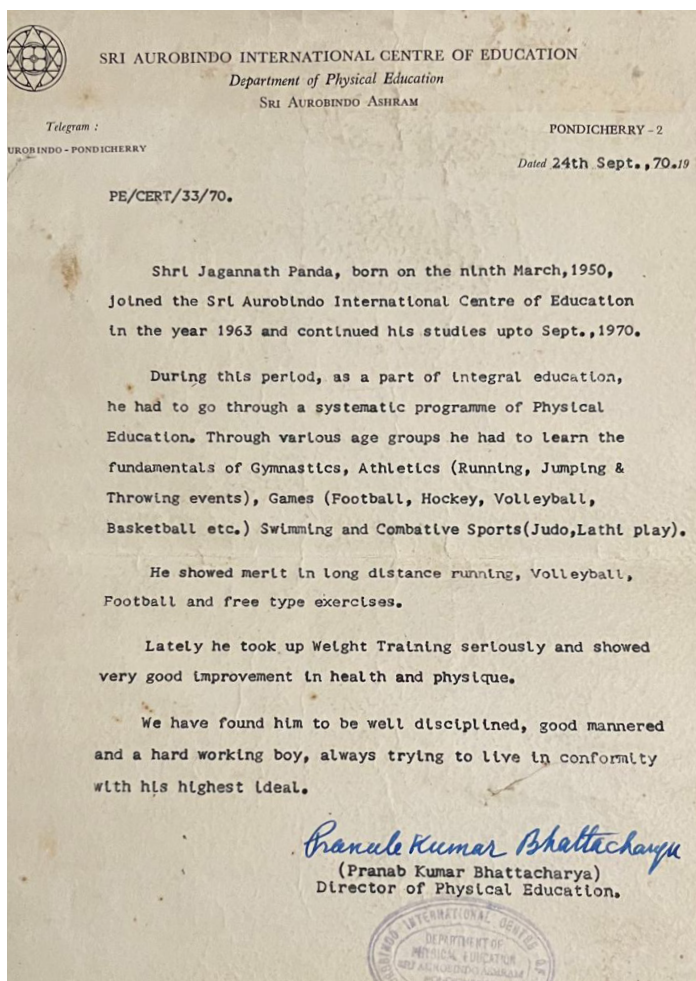
Darshan was not an event management for him. For him, Darshan was a family event, a time for a peaceful get-together in common prayer and meditation. And he created such an atmosphere of quietude, peace, and silence for the devotees waiting in queues to meditate and concentrate before their darshan that one automatically felt the pervading peace and did not feel disturbed or agitated.

He was tireless the whole day, walking up and down and addressing each and every problem personally with a respectful hearing to all. At that moment, it seemed like he was a man who drew energy from another Source. For what reason he was asked to discontinue these two crucial roles was a mystery to all of us. Whatever the reason, he was greatly disturbed and hurt by not being part of these two commitments, which were closest to his heart. But he bore it all with stoic good humour. His dedication to the Ashram and his work never wavered.

He was the mainstay of the 2nd December programme as well. He would cycle around town, personally

informing the 150-odd invitees. He devised an infallible system for dyeing all the different colour group shorts without mixing up the names. He was at the gate on duty at the Sports Ground on 2nd December with his ever-faithful and committed team....he was a master crowd controller.

Every night at 10.30 pm he would take a round of the Playground, checking all the taps, switching off lights that were left on, checking if doors/windows were fastened, replacing the dumbbells and other apparatus in their proper place if careless exercisers had left them here and there. He would take a lot of pains to maintain all the body building apparatus and to keep them in good condition for group members to use.



He had also made permanent markings on the Playground walls to facilitate the marking of the lines for the Darshan March Past.

His store-room at the Playground was organised in impeccable, apple-pie order. All the numerous keys of the Playground were tagged so that no one had trouble identifying which key belonged to which door. Every cupboard was meticulously labeled. Everything in its place, and a place for everything. He was always the last man standing.

He was the life and soul of Christmas games for children and organising the lines for the receiving of presents.

A man for all seasons and a man who wore with ease and command so many hats at the same time. But to me, he epitomised the character of the joker in *Mera Naam Joker*—one who made the world laugh but always carried within him a deep pathos and sadness



of something.... of some unanswered questions, some unerased pain.

Today, the heavens must be ringing with laughter at his entertaining jokes while we on earth hear only the last echoes of his inimitable humour. ☸

ARUN

Arun Mohanty (1974-2025) graduated from the Ashram School in 1996. After completing his studies, he joined the Ashram Bakery and served as Group D captain, which he continued till the end. Arun had an interest in philately, outdoor exploration, and listening to music. Here, his friends remember him for his simplicity, warmth, and devotion to the Mother.

UNTIL WE MEET AGAIN

A hearty welcome, a firm handshake,
The cheery warmth of a simple loving heart,
A loud voice and laughter earthy and strong,
An open door to all, offering coffee, shared moments and advice,
This was the mortal raiment in which you appeared to us.

But what, O soul, was the mystery behind?
The inner journey that none can fathom or perceive.

A brief moment lived on this earth's surface,

Gone too soon to the lap of the Mother we crave.

My heart cries for more such shared moments that could have been,
And wonders why was this so brief and swift?

A story half told, a song half sung,
Unfinished to our human eyes and heart,
Hope we meet again someday on the shores of Eternity,
And get to complete our mortal unfinished drama.

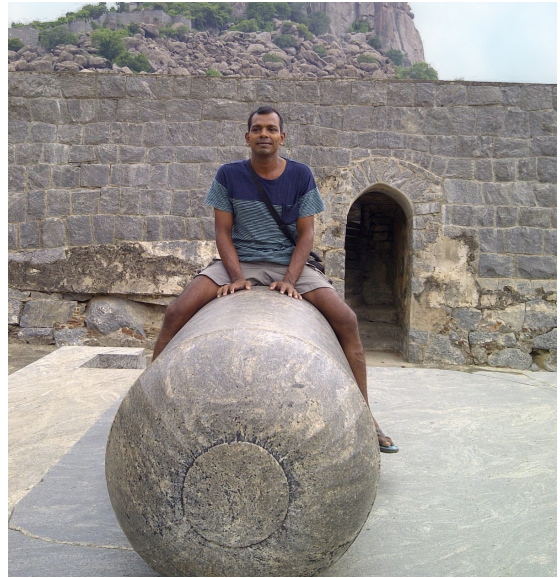
- Samrat, '95

THE MOTHER'S CHILD

With deep sorrow and a heavy heart, I share the passing of a cherished friend whose companionship spanned over 32 years. Our bond began when I started working in the Ashram and he was still a student at the School. From the very beginning, his unwavering love and devotion for the Divine Mother was a source of inspiration—not only for himself but for all who came in contact with him. His sincerity and spiritual commitment left a lasting impression and shaped my own life within the Ashram.

There was a time when, disheartened by challenges in the cycle department, I considered leaving the Ashram. It was he who, with compassion and conviction, reminded me that the Divine Mother wished for me to remain and serve. His words strengthened my resolve and helped me continue the path that has been central to my life's purpose.

We spent countless hours together—discussing, debating, and exploring ideas that touched our hearts and minds. Though we sometimes disagreed, our conversations were always rooted in respect, warmth, and a shared commitment to truth. His untimely departure



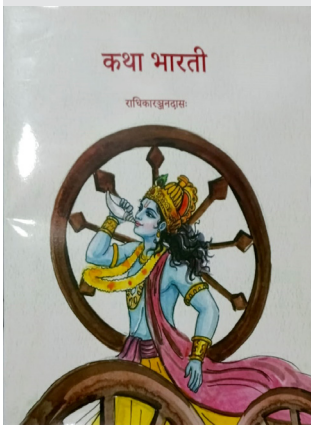
has left an irreplaceable void, one that aches deeply within the heart.

Yet, in quiet moments, I feel his presence still—gentle and reassuring—as if he has not truly left us but remains near, guiding and watching over us. His memory, love, and wisdom will remain a source of strength and inspiration for all who were privileged to know him.

May his soul rest in eternal peace.

- Vishwanath, Ashram Cycle Department

RECENT PUBLICATIONS



Kathā Bhārati
(Published by Garuda Prakasham Private Limited, Gurugram; Editor Sampadananda Mishra)

A collection of 10 entertaining short stories from the *Mahabharata* written by Radhika Arya, covering the episodes of Savitri,

Nala Damayanti, Shantanu, Ekalavya, and Bheeshma among others.



Ramyanāṭakāni (Published by Garuda Prakasham Private Limited, Gurugram; Editor Sampadananda Mishra)

A collection of 7 plays written by Shekhar Arya, including “The Music-Loving King,” “Tiruvalluvar,” and “Soul-seeking Nachiketa” among others. Each play imparts life lessons and ethical principles for young students. These plays were staged at the School and were well received.

FROM INCEPTION TO FULFILMENT: THE STORY OF SACAR'S EDUCATIONAL AND RESEARCH INITIATIVES

Sri Aurobindo Centre for Advanced Research (SACAR) was founded in the year 2000 by Dr Ananda Reddy ('69) and Deepshikha Reddy. Dr Shruti Bidwaikar is its current Managing Trustee. Giridhar Murthy ('79) met with Ananda, Deepshikha and Shruti to delve into the story of SACAR in its Silver Jubilee Year.

Ananda, walk us through your studies at SAICE, and your academic and teaching journeys immediately after completion of the Higher Course. I understand that the Mother guided you personally in many of your decisions during this period. Can you take us through these as well?

The Mother granted me permission to join the Ashram School in 1958. I joined and followed the system of education that was then in place. I remember that it was only in the mid-1960s, when the system changed, that we were introduced to the Free Progress System. That too went through multiple changes, and in 1967, I joined the Higher Course of the Ashram School. I recall focusing mostly on the major works of Sri Aurobindo.

I was truly fortunate to have had wonderful teachers such as Kireet Joshi, Tehmi-ben, Kishore Gandhi, Manoj Das, and Ravindra Khanna. In my great enthusiasm, I even wrote to the Mother at the end of the Higher Course, listing all the major works of Sri Aurobindo that I had studied during that period. I also wrote to Her for approval to go to USA and continue further studies there. She responded thus:

“I can tell you immediately that all depends on what you expect from life. If it is to live an ordinary or even successful life according to the usual old type, go to America and try your best.

If, on the contrary, you aspire at getting ready for the future and the new creation it prepares, remain here and

prepare yourself for what is to come. You will answer on your birthday.”

(17.01.1969) Blessings

Obviously, I stayed back in Pondicherry. Then, my interest turned to Auroville. When I went to see the Mother and told her about my aspiration to join Auroville, She listened for a little while and replied, “*C'est bien.*” Then She asked me if I knew André. I replied, “Yes, Mother, I know him.” She then said, “You go and speak to him; he will give you the work.”

After this I met André-da and he asked me to act as a liaison between Auroville and the Ashram. A few months later, I wrote to the Mother about the possibility of my joining the Aspiration School which had just started.

The Mother replied in the affirmative. So, from 1971 onwards, I worked there. Later around 1976, I decided to pursue higher studies at Hyderabad.



Sri Aurobindo Centre for Advanced Research (SACAR)

Soon I received guidance, in a dream from the Mother, that I would return to Pondicherry after five years. I earned a Master's degree in Philosophy and also in English Literature, completed an MPhil in English Literature, and later on I did my PhD in Philosophy from Madras University.

I did return to Pondicherry in five years, in 1981, but did some odd jobs to make a living. Later, I had the opportunity to teach at Assumption University in Bangkok for three years from 1992. Before I left in 1992, we laid the foundation for a research centre in Pondicherry. In 1995, I returned with the idea of developing it.

What motivated you to found the Sri Aurobindo Centre for Advanced Research?

When I observed the situation in the Ashram regarding the teaching structure, I noticed that many individuals were guiding aspirants and youngsters in the thought of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, mostly focusing on Sri Aurobindo's yoga. However, I felt that his teachings ought to be shared with young people across India, not just with those who wished to become sadhaks. There were aspirants seeking a new perspective.

I believed that the best way to achieve this would be to establish an academic institution. I envisioned an academic centre exclusively for young minds, including those who were not necessarily devotees but were eager to study Sri Aurobindo's philosophy, yoga, world-view, etc. That is how the idea came to me and I began pursuing it.

My extensive exposure to education in Auroville, work in universities across India and Thailand, and travels to Sri Aurobindo Centres in Europe, America, India and the Far-East prepared me for this initiative.

I was even inspired by a dream-vision that showed me the design for the physical infrastructure of SACAR. Final affirmation came from Pranab-da, who said, "The Mother has told you to build it. She will build it, do not worry."

SACAR was conceived as a centre for advanced studies on Sri Aurobindo, specifically within an academic framework rather than replicating existing institutions.

Shruti, walk us through your academic journey and what led you to join SACAR and how you have been associated with it?

I have been a member of SACAR for 11 years and am now its Managing Trustee. My association with SACAR started as a student. In order to prepare for my PhD at Pondicherry University, I took an orientation course from SACAR in 2006 and that helped me immensely to formulate my proposal for research. After this, I received guidance and help from Dr. Reddy for my thesis on Sri Aurobindo's Aesthetics and Poetics based on *The Future Poetry*. During this time, I also made extensive use of SACAR's library.

After completing my PhD, I wanted to remain associated with an institution which was researching on Sri Aurobindo's works so that I could learn further and dive deeper into these. After working at a few other places, I realised that SACAR was the only centre which was doing intensive research without compromising on the quality. When the opportunity arose to join SACAR, I grabbed it at once.

Since I joined SACAR, I have learnt administrative work along with academics. My involvement includes organising and participating in all academic activities of SACAR. I also oversaw SACAR's digital transition, developing online courses, webinars, and content, ensuring global outreach.

Can you explain why you believe it is important to study Sri Aurobindo's works from an academic perspective?

An academic study of Sri Aurobindo's works helps us to understand life, its problems and Sri Aurobindo's vision for the world in a logical manner. When we go to other academic forums and are asked any questions, we can explain this convincingly based on our reading. SACAR provides a structured, scholarly engagement, offering an academic framework to understand his works deeply.

Are some of Sri Aurobindo's works more suited to academic research than others?

We cannot say so. At SACAR we welcome all

those who want to dive deep into any work of Sri Aurobindo. We have a knowledge bank based on earlier research on *Savitri*, *The Life Divine*, *The Synthesis of Yoga* and *Essays on the Gita* for those who want to choose topics from these books. However, we do not restrict ourselves to these. Our knowledge pool at SACAR is ever-evolving with books and research being added by various scholars. So far, we have published about 50 books with research done by ourselves and other scholars. Many others are in the pipeline.

Would you like to see any prioritisation in the research carried out?

From time to time we do choose themes for research. As of now our focus is on Sri Aurobindo's five dreams and his book *Renaissance in India*. We believe that there is much to explore in these two areas.

On the other hand, SACAR encourages holistic and interdisciplinary research such as: exploring Sri Aurobindo's works in connection with his other writings, substantiating Sri Aurobindo's writings with the facts from other books and sources, comparing a few concepts from Sri Aurobindo's writings to other world-thinkers and studying the evolution of consciousness through world-events and personalities.

How did you go about establishing SACAR's credentials in academic circles and where does SACAR stand in these circles today?

SACAR collaborated with Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU) and Maharaja Sayajirao University, Vadodara, offering Certificate, Diploma, PG Diploma, MA, MPhil, and PhD programmes in Sri Aurobindo Studies. Courses were inter-disciplinary. Workshops for PhD scholars and young researchers further strengthened SACAR's academic reputation.

Academic collaboration has expanded through MoUs with Pondicherry University and Nalanda

University, strengthening research and educational partnerships.

Today, SACAR is recognised as a leading centre for education, research, and cultural studies. We are working on a proposal to make SACAR as a Study Centre for Sri Aurobindo Studies recognised by various universities.

What progression have you seen in the awareness of and research on Sri Aurobindo's works in academic circles and what remains to be done?

Awareness and research have grown through study camps, workshops, online courses, publications, and collaborations with universities. Scholars now have better access to resources and guidance. Universities are encouraging students to take up research on Sri Aurobindo's works. Continued expansion of online and regional outreach, deeper interdisciplinary research, and integration of academic study with practical application remain areas for further development.

I guess that Sri Aurobindo's 150th Birth Anniversary was a good opportunity to grow awareness of Sri Aurobindo and his works. Can you explain how SACAR was involved with this?

SACAR conducted online courses, webinars, discussions, and content generation initiatives



(From L to R): Shruti Bidwaikar, Deepshikha Reddy and Ananda Reddy, Trustees of SACAR

leading up to and during the 150th Birth Anniversary in 2022. A one-month online training programme *India on the March* was also organised to engage scholars and seekers with Sri Aurobindo's vision. With the help of the Ministry of Culture, we celebrated two major events in 2023 and 2024: *Sri Aurobindo's Literary Festival* and *India's Evolutionary March*. Both events were a grand success and were attended by about 20 research scholars along with more than 40 participants in each. During the same time, we also published about 35 books and curated 5 exhibitions and developed an App for Google Playstore: Aurodarshan.

If I am a scholar interested in researching Sri Aurobindo's works, how should I go about it?

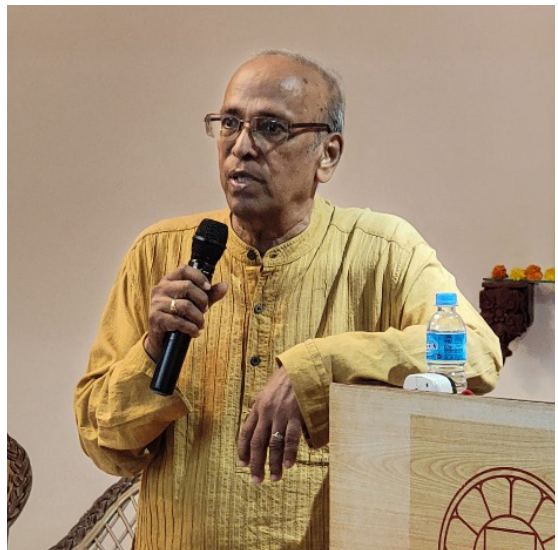
Students can enrol in SACAR's academic programmes, attend study camps, workshops, and seminars, access online courses, publications, and digital resources to begin with. All these can be done even after completing the Higher Course in the Ashram. After their Masters in their chosen subject, they can come to SACAR for guidance and mentorship for their further research and PhD. We intend to open the channels of further studies for the students who take up Sri Aurobindo studies in the Higher Course.

What guidance/support can SACAR offer me to achieve my research goals?

SACAR provides academic mentorship, coursework on Research Methodology to study Sri Aurobindo's works for PhD scholars and young researchers, online and residential courses, access to our publications, etc. Lodging facilities during study camps support immersive and intensive learning experiences.

My congratulations to SACAR on its Silver Jubilee. What is the theme that you have selected to celebrate it?

The Silver Jubilee was celebrated with the four-day workshop on *Sri Aurobindo's Savitri: A Whole Universe in Verse*. We followed the Mother's advice of not comparing *Savitri* with any other work, for She said: "And men have the audacity



Ananda Reddy at the podium at SACAR

to compare it and find it inferior in inspiration to that of a Virgil or a Homer...I assure you there is nothing under the blue sky to compare with *Savitri*" (Mona Sarkar, *Sweet Mother: Luminous Notes*: 33). So, we planned an inter-reading of *Savitri* with Sri Aurobindo's other works. We believed that doing this would facilitate a better understanding of *Savitri* and the other works of Sri Aurobindo.

The event explored *Savitri* alongside other works like *Record of Yoga*, *The Life Divine*, *The Synthesis of Yoga*, and *The Human Cycle*, accompanied by cultural performances, exhibitions, recitations, discussions, and book launches all based on *Savitri*.

Looking forward now, what are the activities planned in the next few years and what is your vision for SACAR, say in the next 10 years?

Activities planned for the next few years are to continue expanding online courses, regional and global outreach, interdisciplinary research, publications, workshops, and digital content. Our vision is to remain a dedicated centre for academic, cultural studies and spiritual engagement with Sri Aurobindo's works and become increasingly relevant to the present crisis of humanity. ❧

CLASS OF 2025 WITH SOME OF THEIR TEACHERS



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