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AGHOR FOUNDATION

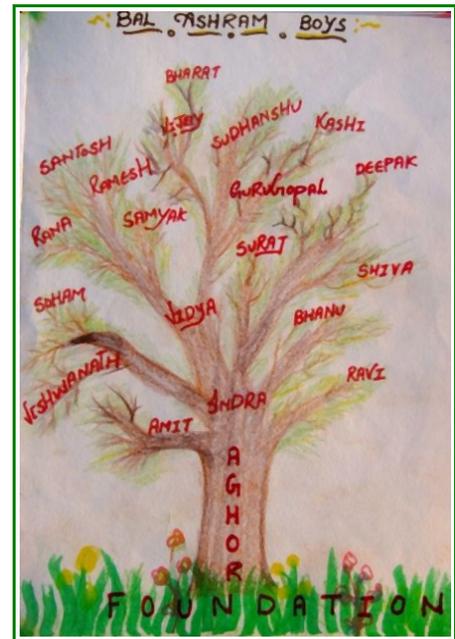
BAL ASHRAM

GROWING AMBASSADORS

From a small seed Bal Ashram grew into a beautiful tree (picture by Vishvanath). This tree gives shade and fruit to everyone who comes to it.

Dear friends of Bal Ashram,

My name is Maria Ragozina and I am closely connected to Sonoma Ashram. For the last 3 years I heard and read a lot about Bal Ashram and other projects in Varanasi, India. Finally in winter 2012 I decided to travel to Varanasi and see it all with my own eyes.



What I saw was a delight for my eyes. Bal Ashram is an orphanage but it very different from other orphanages I've been before. Bal Ashram is a safe and nourishing home for 20 boys. And more than that – it is their loving family. All devotees, teachers, employees and even members of broader community treat the kids as their own. Bal Ashram children are a good example for their peers both in India and in the US. The boys have enthusiasm for study, respect for others and are very well behaved. Many elder boys (both Bal Ashram residents and community members) have been with the Ashram for 11 years. These young adults have grown up to be good human beings, responsible citizens and spiritual ambassadors of Aghor Foundation. It is my honor and pleasure to introduce them to you:



Ramesh, 18

has been Bal Ashram resident for 11 years. He is studying commerce at Mahatma Gandhi Kashi Vidyapeeth, Varanasi. Ramesh is also very involved in Amrit Sagar – Eco Park and permanently resides there. He is studying the science of beekeeping with local and foreigner specialists. He takes great care of his bees and has

recently planted a garden of flowers for them. A bee farm could support both the Ashram and Ramesh's living. Currently Bal Ashram produces Eucalyptus and Wildflower honey. I personally tasted this honey – it is yum!



Gurugopal, 21

is another elder Ashram resident. He has been with Bal Ashram for 3 years, before that he lived in a sister ashram. Gurugopal is the backbone of Ashram's seva. He gladly offers his help wherever needed: cleaning, press ironing and watching younger boys. Gurugopal also leads arati ceremonies, prepares puja and havan items. When I asked Gurugopal about his career choice he said that he is interested in engineering, computers and innovative agriculture. He considers studying agriculture so that he can apply this knowledge at Eco Park.

Sarvesh (Tinku), 30

comes from Ashram's broader community and has been with Bal Ashram for 3 years. Sarvesh holds a Bachelor of Arts degree in management from Allahabad University. Sarvesh is a volunteer who manages Ashram's accounting, bookkeeping and office work. He is also involved building of Eco Park project and is a member of Yuva Shakti ("Youth Power" - a union of Bal Ashram's elder boys and young men from the community formed to help with Ashram's projects and to spread Ashram's spiritual message in the society).



***Amrit Sagar** ("Ocean of Nectar") Environmental Center is a working model of the best environmental practices and a teaching center demonstrating traditional and innovative sustainable practices. Eco Park is already a huge success in the community and includes 1) organic dairy with 10 cows; 2) bio-gas system; 3) Solar technology; 4) composting; 5) sustainable farming: organic vegetables, herbs and Ayurvedic medicinal plants; and 6) bee farming. So much more can be done on that land! For more information about Amrit Sagar, please visit http://www.sonomaashram.org/india_service_projects_amrit_sagar.php.*



Vishvanath, 17 (on the left)

has been with the Ashram for 11 years. He graduated from high school and currently prepares for exams to Banaras Hindu University, Varanasi, where he will pursue a degree in fine arts. Vishvanath's special interests are painting and sculpture, he also likes to design greeting cards. Vishvanath has a small delivery business distributing milk from Ashram's dairy farm in to the community. For being just 17, he is a very responsible young man. Vishvanath envisions to use his artistic skills in beautification of the Ashram and design work for its projects.

Shiva, 21 (on the right)

is Tejbal's younger brother and is also connected to the Ashram for many years. He is a 3rd year student of Commerce Faculty in Mahatma Gandhi Kashi Vidyapeeth, Varanasi. Shiva has an interest in economics and business. Further on, he plans to use his business skills for Ashram's business matters. Shiva is good at computers and participates in drafting of newsletters about Bal Ashram. He is also a part of Yuva Shakti union and is responsible for e-mail communication within the group.



Chandan, 28

is an activist from the community and volunteers for the Ashram for 4 years. Chandan holds a degree in medieval history from Mahatma Gandhi Kashi Vidyapeeth, Varanasi. Chandan is responsible for marketing of Ashram's organic produce (vegetables, honey, ghee, spices etc.) and takes care of Ashram's shop. He is a valuable connection link between Bal Ashram and broader community. Chandan is also the head of Yuva Shakti union. He comes from a large farming family and is inspired to share organic methods of Eco Park with other farmers.

Sudhanshu, 19

has been an Ashram resident for 11 years. He graduated from high school and is currently studying therapy at Swami Vivekananda Yoga Anusandhan Samsthana, Bangalore. Upon completion of this 1 year course, Subhanshu will become a therapist in Ayurveda, naturopathy and physical therapy. He is also interested in hydrotherapy (term hydrotherapy). When Subhanshu finishes his study he plans to return back to Bal Ashram and to practice therapy there and in the community.



Tejbal, 28

is connected to the Ashram through his family since Ashram's foundation. He obtained a legal degree from Mahatma Gandhi Kashi Vidyapeeth, Varanasi. Currently Tejbal helps with marketing of Ashram's produce in the community. On February 15 Tejbal and Rolli celebrated their wedding at the Ashram with a beautiful ceremony and Babaji's blessings. All residents, employees and guests of the Ashram were a part of the celebration.



Hemant, 23

is a part of Bal Ashram from its foundation and resided there from 2004-2008. Very early in his life Hemant developed an interest for yoga. From 5th grade on he was practicing with a local yoga master. As high school student, Hemant was teaching yoga classes to Ashram boys. Thereafter Hemant studied yoga philosophy for 1 year at Banaras Hindu University, Varanasi, and continued his education for 3 years at Swami Vivekananda Yoga Anusandhan Samsthana, Bangalore. Hemant recently obtained a Bachelor's of Science degree in yoga. Hemant's decision to become a yoga professional was driven by his desire to help others. Now Hemant is looking for opportunities to get more experience in yoga therapy. He also plans to renew yoga classes for the Ashram community.



YUVA SHAKTI

Each of these young man are ambassadors of Bal Ashram, carrying its ideals and spirit to the society. Each boy has distinct talents, knowledge and skills. All together they become a power that changes the world around. This power is called Yuva Shakti ("Youth Power"). Several months ago the boys decided to form a union with

the goal to educate the society on environmental awareness and sustainable agriculture. This is an important teaching of Babaji's; to treat the Earth and Nature in general as the Mother, to carefully use her resources and to be grateful and content for Her abundance, preserving it for future generations.

The boys will educate people in a very practical way – by their own example. They continue to develop different areas of the Eco Park and introduce new eco practices. Then they spread the information among friends, family and neighbors. They share their produce and knowledge with the community. Daily it is hard work but slowly-slowly it yields fruit.

'Holy Compost' – a new life of flower garlands



Compost making is just one example of Yuva Shakti work. Boys are making organic compost from puja garlands for use in Eco Park and for sale to local farmers. Chandan, head of Yuva Shakti union, proposed to use earthworms for compost production.

An expert in worm composting comes weekly and teaches the boys the delicate art of composting. Soon they will be able to run this project independently.

First portion of earthworms was placed for reproduction in the temporary plastic tank. Then worms will be put in permanent brick tanks. Worms are feed with food leftovers and also with flower garlands. Thousands of flower garlands are offered daily in the hundreds of temples in Varanasi. After puja the flowers are thrown away on the street. The boys collect those garlands from nearby temples, use them for compost and eventually for growing of new plants.



When the compost is ready, it is weighted and packaged. The first portion of Eco Park's compost was sold in an instant to local farmers! The results of this humble compost projects are many:

- ⤴ there is less waste on the streets of Varanasi
- ⤴ boys learned a new professional skill
- ⤴ compost is used to fertilize the soil in Eco Park's garden
- ⤴ sale of compost brings some income for Bal Ashram
- ⤴ and last but not the least – it is a message to local farmers to grow in harmony with Mother Nature.

What a success! Yuva Shakti – GO-GO!

Inspired by Eco Park? Please consider contributing towards its further development at http://www.sonomaashram.org/how_you_can_help_financial_contributions.php

For updates please visit our website <http://www.sonomaashram.org/>, contact us at info@sonomaashram.org