

# YOUNG AMIL

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## KAP SEMINAR AT LONAVALA, A THUNDERING SUCCESS! Maya K. Shahani Reports:

Friday the 10th of September! The sleepy township of Lonavala woke up to the tumultuous sounds of a busload of animated revelers, followed by a fleet of packed cars and trains disgorging at Lonavala Station. Yes! It was the KAP and YAC members all headed for one destination — the D. T. Shahani Holiday Home. KAP Secretary Mr. Daulat Punwani, a stickler for detail, had split up the members present into five groups of about 20/25 each. Each group was assigned a group leader to moderate the talks and adroitly steer the members on the right track if they digressed. The topic to be discussed for the first session "The responsibilities of parents towards their children and vice versa." The group leaders all hand picked by Daulat Punwani were Mr. Motee Jagtiani, Mr. Bhoja Shahani, Mr. Dhamu Malkani, Mr. Hiro Mirchandani and Mr. Ram Pujawani.

Closed for 2½ hours, from 4.00 p.m. to 6.30 p.m., the members both young and old discovered that they had a lot to say on the subject. The close knit group created immediate rapport and even the most timid shed their inhibitions and discovered to their delight that they had hidden powers of oratory and expression which they never knew existed!

After much light-hearted banter, acrimonious debating flowery elocution, and serious discussion, interspersed with random thoughts and effervescent humour, all were satisfied with the outcome of the first round of talks. The topic under discussion had been viewed from every possible angle. Like the multifaceted pieces of a kaleidoscope every turn presented a different but interesting pattern. It was left to the spokesman of every group to cull the myriad streams of thought and present a coherent synopsis to all the members present when they would assemble the next day for the combined session.

Over a sumptuous dinner of mutton and vegetable koftas, dahi-wadas, cool green salads and dessert, the old and young exchanged views, sometimes raising their voices to be heard across the room. Hovering in the background was the caterer Gurbax anxious to please all, while the indefatigable Daulat saw to it that everything was moving on well oiled bearings.

Dinner was followed by a light entertainment pro-

gramme. Word had got around that Chandur Atma; brother of well-known Radio Singer C. H. Atma, was going to sing. The music lovers made a scramble for the ringside chairs which were hastily re-arranged in the dining hall. An expectant hush descended on the crowd as the well-known singer cleared his throat and got ready to fill the air with music. Unfortunately,

the influence of the West on the Amil Community." Again the participants discovered that they were brimming with thought provoking ideas — one argument triggering off a counter argument. At times the discussions got so heated that the group leader had to act like a safety valve to control steam.

The two hours set aside for the discussion sped by and before the members knew it,

communication.

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His group conceded that the West had a good influence

ed our sense of dress which according to Hiro was a plus point. Western apparel is more practical, provided of course it does not upset our sense of decorum by being too revealing.

One negative influence observed by his group was the incidence of hippies and drug addiction amongst youngsters.

Ram Punwani the next speaker reminisced that be-



A section of the crowd in open session amused at a point raised.

the harmonium let him down and refused to work in harmony with his voice. After bravely battling with an instrument that did not seem to understand the gravity of the situation, the professional singer finally gave up and called it a day. Music buffs, however, doubly appreciated his efforts in singing so well in spite of a badly tuned harmonium.

Breakfast of 'Seyal Dabroti', seum (vermicelli) and fried potatoes, was washed down by a steaming hot cup of coffee by people who seemed to have developed overnight a ravenous appetite for such things, after escaping the humidity of Bombay. Lonavala does affect one in so many nice ways, and everyone seemed to be enjoying this brief respite from the cloying tensions that they had left behind in the city. Mohan Mirchandani the master of ceremonies saw to it that everyone was well looked after.

Dhamu Malkani was seen busily clicking away on his camera trying to preserve for posterity the happenings of the day while his wife kept his three year old son at bay. Daulat Punwani was spotted in a corner struggling to assemble the different groups for the morning session of the seminar — a Herculean task considering he had to deal with 120 people going helter skelter, and children.

This time the topic to be discussed was — "The infl-

ence of the West on the Amil Community." Again the participants discovered that they were brimming with thought provoking ideas — one argument triggering off a counter argument. At times the discussions got so heated that the group leader had to act like a safety valve to control steam.

The first group leader, Motee Jagtiani observed that in the world of today, with more money and easy travel it was felt that a dynamic society, such as that of the Amils, will always undergo various changes. Change is a fact of life and the Amil Community has certainly had a share in the changing patterns of social behaviour. It was not easy to say whether these changes were because of the West alone, or because of progress in general.

His group felt that the influence of the West has been detrimental to the extent that the Amils have forsaken their language and religion. The Sindhi community and particularly the Amils in the larger cities, have switched entirely to English as their medium of

communication. The Amils have also lost their traditional methods, manners and rituals of religious practices. Visits to temples and 'Gurudwaras' have declined. Religion must therefore be brought home to the younger generation and efforts must be made to make religion a part and parcel of life.

Being educated, we have absorbed from the West a concept of higher education, research and development. The Amil Community has been in the forefront in the field of education and technical advancement.

The next speaker Hiro Mirchandani countered Motee Jagtiani's impression that the forsaking of the Sindhi language has been detrimental for our community. He felt that knowledge of English has helped Amils in getting better jobs and senior positions. English is a universal language which should be given prime importance. But our children must learn Sindhi as a secondary language.

Hiro's group felt that the West has affected our culture to a great degree. Earlier women were mere housewives constrained within the four walls of the house. Now they shoulder every responsibility with their husbands, and most Amil husbands do appreciate this.

The West had also influenc-



Chandru Atma along with Sonu Advani entertaining with their melody

fore partition we were in contact with the British and the status of women in the Amil Community was high, right from that period. After partition there was a cultural shock, and at that critical period the liberal views of our women due to Western influence proved of great benefit, as they became a financial crutch for their families. Further, the Amils who were employed in the Railways, Income-tax department etc. left their jobs and started their own business and industries. This was possible only because they had assimilated Western technology and knowhow. The Amil became as smart as a Jew.

The West has affected our culture in a positive way. Our dress, behaviour and life-style has changed considerably.

On the subject of permissiveness Mr. Punwani felt that the degree of permissiveness that one witnesses in the West is not so apparent in our community. His group's impression was that although we have imbibed many Western habits we do not ape the West blindly.

If Ram Punwani's soothing, modulated voice had lulled some people to sleep, the next speaker Dhamu Malkani shook them up like a bolt of thunder with his powerful booming lawyer's voice. He started his talk by asking the assembled

(Continued on page 2)

# SUCCESS REPEATS ITSELF AT LONAVALA

(Contd. from page 1)

group the questions" Is there an influence of the West on the Amil community? If so, to what extent is it there? Is this influence good or bad? If bad then how do we check it? A pause — and then he replied.

"Yes there is an influence of the West on our community. The West has become synonymous with development. Innovations like the T.V., Video, Communications and technological advancement are ample proof of this fact. This is definitely a good influence. It has made the world a smaller and better place to live in. Amils, being educated, are bound to take advantage of this advanced technology.

Dhamu felt that the integrity, patriotism and nationalism of the West are qualities one should admire and follow. It is because of these values that the West has made progress. We as parents should encourage our youngsters to imbibe these laudable qualities.

Another commendable virtue of the West is that it believes in the dignity of labour. Here in India we feel ashamed of menial jobs, like that of a waiter for instance. We should review this snobbish attitude of ours.

While absorbing all these creditable features from the West, we as Indians must not forget our culture and religion. We should learn to sift the good from the bad.

## Definition

When *Bhoja Shahani* the last group leader got up to speak one felt that surely by now, all possible issues had been covered and he would have nothing left to say. But in his languorous manner he began his speech by first defining an Amil. He said that AMILS stood for Ambitious, Malleable, Intelligent, Large-hearted, and Smart.

Being educated, we as Amils must move with the times and take advantage of the good things that the West has to offer. We must not take a bullock cart when we can take a jet. The dangers inherent in any new venture should not make us oblivious to its benefits. Our Sufi culture teaches us that every crisis in life has two opposite aspects — the good and the bad, opportunity and danger. We must follow our instinct and do what we feel is right.

He further went on to say that we have been a migrant community. By migrating to the West our Amil forefathers have opened up new vistas for the new generation and made good financially. However, one sad feature of emigration was the plight of migrant children. Many parents living in the West have come to the shocking conclusion that their children are undergoing a severe identity crisis. Torn between two cultures, often confused and resentful, the offspring of these parents present a disturbing social problem and are truly a lost generation.

*Bhoja* also observed that these days there is less attachment between parents and children here in India, just like it has been in the West.

*Vishni Malkani* then invited members of the audience to air their views, if any, on the subject under discussion.

*Mr. H. G. Malkani*, well known builder and advocate suggested that we should raise funds for having our own cultural centre where we can have cultural programmes. "We must have classes for propagating the Sindhi language" he emphasised. *Mr. Uttan Chandiramani*, Colaba Sindhi Panchayat Secretary also reiterated that we must uphold our Sindhi language, and stop this blind aping of the West by speaking a foreign language. There was an amused titter in the audience as he kept reverting to English when he could not find the appropriate words in Sindhi. Hawk-like, they hounded him at every slip! Undeterred, *Mr. Chandiramani* went on to say that he found the late night disco parties an abhorrent practice and one of the worst things that the West had taught our youngsters.

## Disco

An indignant *Anju Mirchandani*, one of our fiery youngsters, immediately spoke up on behalf of her clan and defended these disco parties as harmless. She felt that the younger generation was responsible and mature enough to stay within the limits prescribed for them and that most parents trusted their children not to let them down. *Mr. Mohan Shahani*, Dr. Shanti Shahani's husband good humouredly remarked that today's parents should not grudge the younger generation this harmless pleasure as they themselves used to dance, cheek to cheek in their days. *Gautam Thadani* seconded this.

*Principal Kundnani*, either out of righteous indignation or a feeling of being cheated, wanted to know where exactly these so called cheek to cheek parties were held when he was young. According to him the West was not the culprit, but money was the root of all evil. Too much black money made it possible for every affluent home to sport a well stocked bar and parents looked on indulgently as their children blew up their money at parties in five star hotels. He lamented the fact that the very fabric of our society was being ripped apart and marriage as an institution had lesser meaning. He praised the efforts of the Panchayat in holding such seminars as it gave everyone an opportunity to share their views and instilled in us a sense of unity and understanding.

Other notable speakers were *Mrs. Meera Advani*, her daughter *Sonu* and sister *Dr. Mohini Mirchandani*. *Sonu* rendered a beautiful,

thought provoking poem which tugged at everyone's heart strings.

*Chandur Atma* then took over, this time armed with a harmonium that was a shade better. Along with *Mrs. Gidwani*, *Geeta's* mother, and *Sonu Advani* he regaled the audience with age-old melodies.

As a fitting finale to the proceedings of the evening, *Mohan* announced that it was *Mr. & Mrs. Daulat Punwaney's* wedding anniversary. *Mrs. Punwaney* had come all the way to Lonavala straight from hospital and went right back to the hospital from there. A glowing example of a wife giving moral support to her husband!

The last day in Lonavala dawned bright and cheerful with a slight nip in the air. After downing a breakfast of crisp pakwaans served with Daal and Bhajias, the large group assembled in the huge K. C. College Hall for the combined group discussion on the "Responsibilities of parents towards their children and vice-versa". The session started off on a religious note with a beautiful prayer rendered by *Maya and Kumar Mansukhani's* little daughter.

*Mr. B. T. Advani*, vice-President of the Panchayat, then presided over the meeting and introduced the speakers.

The first group leader, *Moti Jagtiani*, remarked that there were very few youngsters in his group and hence the views expressed were mainly those of the parents. His group emphasised that basic responsibilities start with parents. They should give time, love and care to children right from birth. They should set the examples of good, healthy conduct and behaviour so that their children copy the positive side of human character. Parents should create a relationship of friendship with their children so that they learn to respect their parents and not fear them.

There should be constant communication between the young and old. Common meeting at dinner time should be encouraged in every family, when there is a relaxed exchange of views.

## Mothers

The social life of mothers, party hopping and kitty sessions does result in lack of proper attention to children. The bringing up of children by maid servants just because the mother does not have enough time must be stopped, or at least minimised.

*Dhamu Malkani* started off in a lighter vein by telling us about the father who was delighted to hear about the birth of his son. But when he went charging to the delivery room his wife admonished him for wasting his time there when he should be arranging for their son's admission to school. This father learnt to understand his responsibility as a

parent right from that admonishing.

Parents are responsible for building the character of their child. They should not impose their will upon the child but leave him to make up his own mind, after giving him proper vocational guidance by judging his aptitude. This is a competitive world so parents should instill the competitive spirit in their children.

A question *Dhamu* asked was — "Should parents bear the cost of their child's University education even if they can afford it?" Many children abroad find an employment based career as they grow older and pay for their own education. There was a conflicting opinion between the attitudes of the East and West for funding University Education.

Another question that he asked was "Should the child proceed abroad to further his career especially if he has aged parents?" Again opinion was divided on this subject. Relentlessly he asked a third question "Should old parents give away all they have to further their child and finally land up in an Elders Home?" Thought provoking queries with no water tight answers.

## Friends

*Hiroo Mirchandani* the third speaker started off confidently, but his overworked vocal cords suddenly gave way and he asked his charming daughter *Madhu* to take over. Pert and saucy, dressed in a jaunty trouser outfit, *Madhu* was as confident as her father. She stated that parents and children should be more like friends. If parents bring up their children with care, love and devotion, and respect their feelings, the children in turn will reciprocate in a like manner. They will automatically look after their parents as warmly as they themselves were cared for. *Madhu* felt that all family problems should be discussed together whether it relates to the son, daughter or daughter-in-law. This will give us a feeling of unity and togetherness. Another relevant point that she raised and which was not discussed in depth by the other groups was that if there were no sons in a family the daughter should look after the aged parents.

*Ram Punwani's* group felt that the responsibility of the mother is greater than that of the father because the mother is responsible for the training and character building of the child.

*Ram Punwani* then dwelt upon the responsibility of the married man towards his parents. He felt that although the married man definitely should look after his aged parents, the parents very often feel that they own the son, which creates friction in his marital life. There is a tug of war between his wife and parents which makes him the unfortunate victim.

As *Bhoja Shahani* had left the day before, *Mrs. Meera Advani* stood up as the spokeswoman for her group. She felt that even if a mother has to work out, due to an economic necessity, she can devote all her spare time on her child. Lack of rapport between parent and child was a genuine grievance in today's society. Another sad thing was that there was a passive acceptance by older people of today that children will leave the house when they grow up and get married. We must shake ourselves out of this misconception and nurture the joint family system with all our effort and might.

After the group leaders had had their say, the dias was left empty for members of the audience to come forward and voice their opinions.

*Principal Kundnani* got up with a rather baffled look on his face and said "After listening patiently to the mornings proceedings it seems that something has gone wrong somewhere. You are all berating parents and holding them responsible for all evils.

She stated that in China the practice was to abort all female foetuses since they are now expected to have only one child per family. In the West there is no discrimination between girls and boys. In fact, in India, it is usually the daughter who cares for parents in their old age. Being liberalised, we Amils should set the trend by giving girls the same importance as boys.

## Objection

*Mr. Gulab Gidwani* got up to state that in China female babies were aborted not because boys were preferred, but as a measure for controlling the population explosion. Less females meant less children in future generations.

*Mr. Kan Punwani* arised a relevant question "Should parents have objections to their children marrying outside their community?" Speaking from his own experience, he felt that there was peace and harmony in his home in spite of his children marrying non Sindhis. Parents should, therefore, see to their child's happiness rather than be dogmatic about caste and creed.

*Dr. Deepak Advani* felt that the behaviour of parents towards their own parents was important as children learn by example. Similarly *Sardar Gopalsingh's* view point was that as you sow so you reap. Action and reaction are equal and opposite.

*Kumar Mansukhani* strongly recommended every one to read the book "I'm O.K. you are O.K." by Dr. Eric Burns. This book, he felt, has an in depth account of parent-child relationships and explains how a person becomes what he is.

The final session was a free for all where anyone with anything worthwhile to say, about things in general and about the working of the Panchayat in particular, could do so.