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**NEWS FROM LAKSHMI ASHRAM
SANCHAR 128**

November 2016

Dear friends,

Even if it is a bit early, I will wish you all a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year.

This Sanchar brings the following articles:

- An Inspirational Four Day Padyatra by Jyotsana, Meenu, Neha and Bharati – Class XII
- Ashram Diary by Seema Bisht
- Sadhana Prashikshan by Meenakshi Mehra

It still costs 1725 DKK and the subscription 75 DKK to be a sponsor (about 230 Euro and 10 Euro) = 1800 DKK. Some people send money once a year and others divide the amount during the year. Therefore we will put 75 DKK into the administration account the first time of the year, we receive money from someone. This also applies if you send amounts that are not earmarked. So all will pay the same amount in subscription and receive the Sanchar.

We use very little money for administration. The money is sent directly from our bank to the Ashram's bank in Kausani, so no money will be lost – only bank charges. The surplus from the administration account will of course be sent to Lakshmi Ashram.

Thank you for all the money. Any amount of money is received with pleasure. Contributions that are not earmarked are also very welcome. The money will be used for educational material, study tours, education of the teachers, etc. You can send money by a crossed cheque or by bank transfer – the IBAN account number can be seen on top of this letter.

Best wishes,

Lone Poulsen

Friends of Lakshmi Ashram can save money, if you would be satisfied to receive a mail with the Sanchar. You can also see the Sanchar in the homepage. If you want to get a mail instead of receiving a letter, then please send your e-mail address to: ***lone-poulsen@comxnet.dk***

SANCHAR 128

An Inspirational Four Day Padyatra

Jyotsana, Meenu, Neha and Bharati – Class XII

Suddenly on 4 April we came to know that the girls of class XII were going to go on a padyatra in the Garur valley. On hearing this we were all extremely happy, and all sorts of thoughts were going through our minds, because until now we had never participated in a padyatra. We were to go with Basanti Didi, and before setting off we rehearsed some folk songs as well as



some songs specifically written to awaken the awareness of the villagers. We also prepared some plays that would be a source of inspiration for the villagers. Together we decided that while walking on the padyatra in no way would we lag behind, that we would enthusiastically sing our songs in harmony, would talk with the villagers that we met, and would try to learn a little of the history of the villages that we would visit. We wondered to ourselves how the countryside there would be.

On 8 April at half past seven in the morning the four of us went with Basanti Didi by bus to Garur, where the padyatra team was waiting for us by the Golu temple. The chief organizer of the padyatra was Kishan Rana, while the inspiration for the padyatra had come from Ms. Shiva Sen. Her family were from Ramnagar but she had been raised in Delhi. She had received a scholarship from the Indian government to study law in Britain. However at present she is settled in a village, and wants to work for the rural communities. Kishan Rana also is carrying out a number of activities, including running a school, Hitaishi Vidyalaya, that he established himself, farming his own land, and working not only in his own village but in all the villages of the Garur valley to organize the people, seeking to raise their social awareness.



During the four day padyatra we visited eighteen villages and walked more than eighty kilometers. More than anything else this padyatra truly demonstrated the power of human unity. We sang with great passion and presented our plays that were full of inspiring messages. We were described as the four beautiful girls, the jewels in the crown, always walking ahead of the others. For all four of us the eighteen villages that we visited made a very deep impression.

In those villages close to the road there was little or no truly active community organization. There were village self-help groups whose members contributed monthly to their fund; however this is but one small aspect of a village-based organization, whose members should actively work

together on issues concerning the village. Our experiences were broadly similar in all the villages that we visited. Many roses were in flower, their colours in themselves full of beauty.

The villagers of Bhagartola, to protect their crops of wheat, gently swaying in the breeze, from wild animals, in particular monkeys, had agreed together that every day four villagers would take turns to protect the fields. As a result their wheat was coming along very well. To say the truth their wheat was looking very special.

In one village, Kohina, which was far above the road, the village organization was very good, and they discussed together every activity they planned to undertake. Whereas in the other villages where we spent a night the others in the village did not come forward to lend a hand, in Kohina our experience was quite the opposite. Everyone in the village had come together in one courtyard to prepare our evening meal. The love in that meal was immeasurable.

During those days it was the festival of Navratri, so the people looked upon the four of us and some other five didis as representing the nine Durgas, and fed us specially. As part of the Navratri celebrations there was traditional dancing of a circular dance, *Jhora*, until one in the morning. There were conversations on the Gods, traditions that are slowly being lost in the hills. However these people had revived the old traditions, and hopefully we will be able to see them thrive again. In their *Jhora* dance there was no artificiality or showiness at all, just a limitless spontaneity, quite impossible to express in words.

The four-day padyatra concluded in a meeting in the Golu temple in the village of Bhateriya, in which Radha Didi had been invited as the chief guest. In the shade of a beautiful tree the discussions focused on raising of awareness in the villages, in which the older women of the villages, indeed all those present, participated actively. Everyone expressed very clearly the conditions found at present in their villages, and how only they could bring about change for the better. In the end, at the request of all those present there was a group *jhora* in which all those present, the women and men, old and young, took part. With this *jhora* everyone bid farewell to one another, and then we returned with Radha Didi and Basanti Didi to the ashram family. This four day padyatra was exceedingly interesting and inspiring.





Ashram Diary

Seema Bisht

There are six seasons in the year, each of them arriving at a fixed time. In this way from 15 June the rainy season begins. During this season we have great fun getting soaked in the heavy rain. At the same time there is always a fear of accidents. The biggest fear is of those lively fat leeches, which attach themselves to our legs and arms, suck our blood and are difficult to remove. The earth that has been restless under the heat of summer, this parched earth becomes lush and green. Different seasons bring their different joys. Throughout the year we celebrate various festivals, and I will now describe some of these that we celebrate during this season.

Harela

In July we celebrate the festival of Harela, which symbolises the green lushness. The belief is that that person whose 'Harela' is lush and tall, his harvest too will be good. In each home the seeds of five or several different grains are mixed together and sown in a special container, and then put in a dark place to germinate. After ten days they are taken out on the evening before the festival of Harela and worshipped. Because the seeds have germinated in the dark the shoots are yellow, symbolic of the ripe harvest. In the ashram we too sow 'Harela' and celebrate the festival with great enthusiasm.

In the ashram we live a community life. By living in such a way we benefit in a number of ways. We have the opportunity both to learn and to teach others new things. Living here we celebrate the festivals of all faiths, looking upon all of them as ours. The time passed by and August arrived. We were very busy in this month.

Raksha Bandha

This festival is celebrated as a national festival throughout the country on the Full Moon in August. There are a number of stories related to this festival. We learn about it from books and from our elders. We celebrate this too with great enthusiasm. For a couple of weeks before the festival we take out threads from cloth by hand and then, sitting all together, we make *rakhis* from these threads. Our aim is always to make them as good as possible and to make as many as we can. On the day of the festival we all sit together and tie the *rakhis* on the wrists of one another. We sing songs and each class displays the *rakhis* that they have skilfully made. This festival is full of joy and delight. It is considered to be the festival of brothers and sisters. Sisters tie the thread symbolising love onto the wrists of their brothers and the brothers vow to protect them. In the ashram family everyone's arms are decorated with colourful handmade *rakhis*. There is joy on everyone's face.

Janmashtami

Janmashtami is celebrated in August on the eighth day following the Full Moon. On this day was born Lord Krishna. It is believed that God takes birth from time to time on this earth, to destroy tyranny and to restore righteousness, and one such incarnation was Lord Krishna. Lord Krishna killed the tyrannical Kansa and delivered all those living on this earth from their sins. This year it



was celebrated on 24 August. In the weeks before the festival everyone had rehearsed the songs, dances and dramas for the Krishna Lila. This year we prepared a few new short scenes. Everybody, big and small, played their respective roles and the drama went off very well. The great thing this year was that the weather was on our side and there was plenty of sunshine on the day. Often in previous years rain on the day had spoiled the fun of the programme which is held on a meadow below the ashram.

Raksha Bandhan and Janmasthmi are two big festivals that we enthusiastically

prepare for each year. All around echo the *sounds of the songs of Janmashtami*. When we celebrate these festivals in style there is sadness within us when they are over. One particular reason why we are especially happy at Janmasthmi is that our parents and other family members come that day.

The month of August that had kept us all so busy came to an end and September arrived. In September we marked the birth anniversary of Vinoba Bhave, *Vinoba Jayanti*. On this day we presented short plays depicting incidents from the life of Vinoba, in particular how he had distributed land to the landless and how he had undertaken a *padyatra* (journey on foot) over many years across the length and breadth of India. Vinoba was an ordinary person, yet in distributing land to the landless he had done a great work.

For the past several years a group of students and teachers have come regularly in September from Chhattisgarh, and this year their group arrived on 17 September, staying for a week with us, and joining in our daily programme, mixing in marvellously with our girls. They enjoyed a great feeling of joy in being here. Their teacher, Prayaag Bhai, is teaching us new aspects of education. Different daily routines are found in different places. Here in the ashram we have a set routine from early morning until the evening. The children from Chhattisgarh joined in through the entire day and we all became very close to one another, so much so that it seemed as if they had been part of our community for a very long time. Yet they were with us for less than a week.

On 21 September it was arranged that they would go to Bageshwar. They wanted some of our small children to accompany them, so it was arranged that the girls of classes V and VI would join them, along with two young ashram teachers. After breakfast we got ready and set off for the market. We divided ourselves into two groups, took our seats in the two vehicles that had been booked, and set off on our journey. It is forty kilometres from Kausani to Bageshwar, and on the way we sang a lot in the cars. The children had great fun on the journey, paying great attention to the natural surroundings and asking lots of questions.

Prayaag Bhai was discussing all sorts of subjects with us. At this time everybody was very busy in the fields harvesting the rice. On arriving in Bageshwar we went first to the Chandika Temple situated high above Bageshwar with statues of various deities. This open area on the banks of the Saryu River used to be very extensive, but now houses have been constructed and it is now much restricted in size.

From there we went to the Bagnath Temple. This is a very large temple and a new image of Lord Shiva is being installed. This new statue is very big. Bageshwar's old name was Vyagreshwar, and the old people have related the story of the origin of this name. Pictures in the Baghnath temple told this story, and somebody there familiar with the story told it to us. Once Markandey Rishi came here, sat on a stone in the middle of the flowing Saryu River to perform his ascetic practices and stopped the flow of the river. Lord Shiva and Parvati were watching all of this, and Lord Shiva immediately took a decision. Parvati said, "You assume the form of a cow and go in front of the Rishi to eat grass. I will assume the form of a tiger and run behind you to eat you. You will call out and the Rishi, hearing you in distress will come to save you and the river will start flowing again." Then the Bagnath temple was established on this spot, and in time this place became known as Bageshwar. (*The Hindi word 'bagh' means tiger*)

We enjoyed very much hearing this tale and other information about the temple, which is situated close to the confluence of the Saryu and Gomti rivers. Every day food (*bhog*) is offered to the idols. Wandering back through the old market we stopped to eat in one place where only local dishes were served, which were very tasty. Then we set off back in the direction of Garur. On the way we visited the Kot Temple. I had been there once before, a lot time back. Then there was just a small temple and one or two rooms. Now there has been a lot of new construction, and I enjoyed very much seeing the temple.



All the children were really happy. Then we went to see the Baijnath temple, which is very ancient. It is on the banks of the Gomti River, and a large artificial lake has been constructed there recently. Before there used to be lots of large fish in the river, but the heavy snow two years ago had killed them off. Now new stock has been introduced but the fish are still very small. Having learned of

the history of this temple it was time to return. On the way back Prayaag Bhai told us all about his school in Chhattisgarh, what the people of the area eat, how they live, how they dress. We really enjoyed this day out. It was about half past five when we reached the ashram.

September came to an end and October began. On 2 October we celebrated Gandhi Jayanti, marking the birth of Mahatma Gandhi. At dawn that day all the ashram family gathered in the courtyard and at six o'clock we set off for the Anasakti Ashram, all of us singing as we walked in file, two by two. In Anasakti Ashram we sat in the prayer hall for our morning prayers. The atmosphere was pervaded by a deep peace. Mahatma Gandhi had stayed in this sacred place for some ten days in 1929. Mahatma Gandhi, the Father of the Nation (*Rastrapita*), was born on 2 October 1869 in Sudamapuri in Gujarat, and had dedicated his life to the nation.

Despite having to suffer many hardships the *Rastrapita* never allowed himself to be defeated. Facing all the difficulties thrown at him, in the end the *Rastrapita* brought about the freedom of the country. While Gandhi was staying in Kausani he wrote the introduction to his book, '*Anasakti Yoga*', a translation of the Bhagavad Gita into Gujarati. For this reason the government bungalow where he had stayed later became known as the Anasakti Ashram. When Gandhi came to Kausani he said that this was the Switzerland of India. At that time there were very few houses and no hotels. Now though there are a lot of hotels and many houses, which has greatly changed the atmosphere and spirit of Kausani. Gandhi showed the entire world a new path. The famous scientist Einstein said, "Generations to come will scarce believe that such a one as this ever in flesh and blood walked upon this earth."

Having completed the programmes for Gandhi Jayanti, that evening the teams were announced for the annual haymaking and the sickles given out, and from 3 October we had a different daily schedule. For the duration of the haymaking the Ashram family was divided into two groups. The small girls who were unable to join in the haymaking took responsibility for all the work at home, while the older girls and the workers were busy in the haymaking. Early on the morning of 3 October, immediately after morning prayers, putting on their gloves and taking their sickles in their hands, all of us headed for the plot of ashram land in the forest which we call the 'new boundary'. In the beginning of the haymaking all of us were filled with great enthusiasm and were keen to work as quickly as possible. Slowly as we worked our enjoyment increased. We could clearly see the Himalayan peaks from where we were working.

This year we did not often get a glimpse of the peaks because the atmosphere was very hazy. The 'new boundary' is also called Shanti Van (*Forest of Peace*), and this spot is very peaceful and full of joy. Every one of us enjoys coming here to sit or work for Nature has blessed this place with a special quality. In thirteen days all of us, big and small together, completed the haymaking, and we resumed our usual daily programme. Now we are all busy preparing for Diwali and are busy in our studies. Here I conclude the description of our experiences over the past four months.

Sadhana Prashikshan

Meenakshi Mehra

Gandhian thought will very quickly be successful in finding acceptance in the world. This ship of the materialist world is in rough waters. Gandhian thought will certainly be successful in saving the ship from sinking. In this ongoing process of ever growing awareness, Gandhian Thoughts have been alive and active in the Ashram since the time of independence right up until the present day.

Lakshmi Ashram is preparing such citizens who can bring about change in the world through Gandhi's thinking. Here in Lakshmi Ashram every year an eight month course is run to comprehensively introduce a group of some nine or ten students to Gandhian thought. This year a group of nine students is taking this course. During this course our depth of understanding has greatly developed. We are coming to a much deeper understanding of the true state of the world. Gandhian thoughts are proving to be extremely helpful in developing our personalities.



We have had the opportunity to participate in a number of meetings, giving us the opportunity to increase our knowledge. We have also been participating in the project to produce tulsi, known in English as Holy Basil, right from the sowing of the seed to the packaging of the finished product. We will also determine its cost based on the effort that we have put in.

As part of this course, all of us went to Dehradun in September to participate in a Vipassana Meditation course. Hearing the word 'Vipassana' for the first time it seemed a little strange, yet by acquiring this knowledge one obtains liberation. Through the practice of Vipassana the individual is freed from desires, hatred, burdens, anger, and every kind of agitation of the mind. This knowledge was practiced in ancient times in India, but slowly the knowledge was lost, but the seeds of this knowledge were preserved to the east in Burma, where even today it continues to bear fruit. Shri Satyanarayan Goenka, after learning the practice of Vipassana in Burma, came to India where he has spread its knowledge. This knowledge is indeed very ancient.

We decided together to participate in the ten day camp in the Vipassana centre in Dehradun. Even though there was no physical activity involved, yet one had to sit for hours on end involving oneself in mental activity which was very hard. Sitting for hours with one's eyes closed, focusing one's mind on oneself seemed very difficult. We meditated for eleven hours each day.

The first day we learned the practice of *ānāpāna*, observing the inward and outward breath, cool and warm, passing through the nostrils. During the second and third days we observed the sensations felt in the nose, our mind focusing all the time only on this part of the body. However it was extremely difficult to focus the mind. During these three days our bodies had to tolerate a great deal of discomfort. We got bored sitting for hours with our eyes closed. Sometimes I found myself feeling drowsy. When I stood up after meditation I felt as if I had committed myself to much too big a task. There was a great deal of pain in my waist, feet and neck, and in my mind I just wanted to run away. However on the fourth day when we began the practice of Vipassana then pleasure came from exploring the sensations of the body, and I had no idea where the time went.

The meaning of Vipassana is '*observation of the reality within oneself*'. With our eyes closed we simply allowed the mind to travel through the body, and to recognize the sensations in our entire body, simply observing whatever sensation was taking place in any part of the body without any feeling of desire, aversion or anger. In a state of detachment we observed these bodily sensations free of any reaction. If there is desire towards a pleasant sensation then the power of this desire already present within us will increase instead of decreasing. Similarly if we feel aversion towards an unpleasant sensation then this aversion will only increase. Thus we must feel no desire or aversion towards any sensation. Simply observing these sensations a time will come

when we will feel such sensations as if they were waves in our body, as if bubbles were rising up and then dissipating. If we feel as if waves were ceasing it means that old habits were coming to an end, while if we felt waves were rising up it meant that new good influences were developing within us. Though I personally did not experience anything like that during the course, however we learned thorough our teacher about these sensations. Success will only be achieved through continual practice. In ten days we receive only the tiniest part. To receive this knowledge in full one has to practice for a long time.

In the evenings we listened to talks by Shri Satyanarayan Goenka. Listening to these talks one was filled with a great feeling of joy. He described exactly the feelings that we had experienced during the day in meditation. Listening we laughed a lot, although for ten days we had to observe a vow of silence. During the day we did indeed maintain silence, and only during the evening listening to the talks we laughed on hearing amusing anecdotes. Indeed sometimes we could not stop ourselves laughing. When on the tenth day we were able to break our vow of silence, I had no desire to speak to anyone.



Sadhana Group

Back row

(L-R):

Bharati Tiwari
Mamta Koranga
Babita Pandey
Meenakshi
Jata Phartyal
Prema Baira

Front row

(L-R):

Asha Mahra
Suman Kandpal
Indu
Nirmala Pathak

On that final day we were shown a film on the changes brought about in Delhi's Tihar Jail by Kiran Bedi, an IPS officer who gave a new direction to the lives of the prisoners in the jail. When she heard about Vipassana, then through Goenka she had a thousand prisoners in Tihar jail introduced to Vipassana, and slowly but surely changes came about in these prisoners. In the film a number of prisoners, telling of their experiences, became very emotional. Seeing the tears in their eyes, those of us watching were much moved too. From this film we learned the powerful influence of this practice.

We considered ourselves very fortunate that we had the opportunity to learn this practice. In the future we will teach this practice to others. This practice will be of help to us in taking the thoughts of Gandhi to each and every individual, teaching us how to live in a spirit of equality and in a spirit of friendship with everyone.

In this training course in Gandhian Thought in Practice, as we gain an understanding of Gandhi's thoughts so we are able to develop them personally in practice. In the future the nine of us will seek to introduce these thoughts to others. Looking at and understanding the present-day situation, where day by day there is such extreme competitiveness, resulting in a continual deterioration in the state of the environment, we will then seek to explain to others what we have to do.

In this Age of Science man is busy in making machines. Having created the atom bomb man is creating destruction for himself, and he does not realize that, by overexploiting Nature, one day Nature is going to destroy him because to make all these machines and other things he is robbing Nature in excess. I feel that after some years both diesel and petrol will be exhausted and then once again we will travel by bullock cart. The ancient times will be very quickly returning again.

To resolve these problems there is a great need today of Gandhian thought. There are so many other problems such as violence, corruption, terrorism and globalization. These problems are indeed fearsome and burning. We want to save our world from these problems. How often we have such discussions amongst ourselves, and then we feel convinced in our minds that we have to change the people in this world, yet for now we ourselves need a lot of guidance to develop ourselves. Our promise is that we will keep Gandhi alive and that day is very quickly coming.

