

FRIENDS OF LAKSHMI ASHRAM

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**NEWS FROM LAKSHMI ASHRAM
SANCHAR 129**

March 2017

Dear friends,

This Sanchar brings the following articles:

- Hardworking Sita – Kavita Bhatt – Class VII
- Personal Thoughts – Kavita Bhatt – Class VII
- A True Companion – Jyotsana Bora – Class XII
- Research on Lakshmi Ashram – A Brief Introduction – Neema Behn
- The Account of 2016.

The general meeting takes place on **Sunday 2nd April 2017 at 2 pm. in Albertslund.**

It still costs 1725 Danish kroner and the subscription 75 Danish kroner to be a sponsor (about 230 Euro and 10 Euro) = 1800 Danish kroner. Some people send money once a year and others divide the amount during the year. Therefore we will put 75 kroner 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 129

Hardworking Sita

Kavita Bhatt – Class VII

Kavita has written this story for the students' handwritten magazine, "Vijay", which was released on 1 November 2016.

There was a girl whose name was Sita. Her parents were very poor. They wanted to educate their daughter but they were unable to do so because they were poor. Sita used to make flags and would go to sell them. Once 15th August (*Indian Independence Day*) was being celebrated in the school, and Sita was watching from the school gate.

She was thinking, "Oh, if only I was studying in school then I too could be celebrating this day." When the children were going to school then they too were buying her flags, until all her flags were finished. Then she continued standing.

The programme was going on in the school field. The Sita saw that the headmaster was unfurling the flag, and then she saw that coloured petals were falling from the flag. Sita enjoyed very much seeing all of this. Laughing, Sita started to clap her hands.

The programme continued, and a little later a teacher said, "I am going to ask a question, and whoever gives the correct answer first will get a price. The first question is, 'Where was Ram Prasad Bismil born?' " Nobody could answer this question, but then from behind Sita raised her voice, "In Saharanpur District."

Everybody looked behind and then Sita, feeling very frightened and upset, stood up. Sita thought that she had done something very wrong. Then the teacher said, "This child has given the right answer. Because nobody here on the stage could give the correct answer, thus this girl too has the right to receive the prize." He called her inside and Sita continued to feel that she had done something very wrong.

The teacher asked her, "What school are you studying in?" Sita replied very quietly that she was not going to any school, because her mother did not have the money to buy the school books.

Then the teacher asked her, "How did you know the answer to the question?" Sita replied, "My mother reads me the stories of great men." The teacher then decided that from that day Sita could study free of cost. The teacher said, "There are so many people who want to study yet are unable to do so." Sita went home and told her mother, who was very happy, and Sita started to go to school every day.

Note: *Ram Prasad Bismil (1897-1927) was an Indian revolutionary who participated in the Mainpuri conspiracy of 1918, and the Kakori conspiracy of 1925, and struggled against British imperialism.*



Personal Thoughts

Kavita Bhatt – Class VII

If only I was water,
I would forever quench everyone's thirst.
If only I was a nightingale,
I would serenade everyone with sweet songs.

If only I was a crowing cock,
I would wake everyone up early.
If only I was henna,
I would colour everyone's hands.

If only I was a monkey,
I would frighten everyone with my call.
If only I was a tree,
I would feed everyone with sweet fruits.

If only I was a pen,
I would put everyone's words into writing.
If only I was an exercise book,
I would know the thoughts in everyone's mind.

A True Companion

Jyotsana Bora – Class XII

Jyotsana wrote this essay for the Christmas issue of the older students' handwritten magazine, 'Suryoday'. All the students in the ashram are encouraged to maintain a personal diary.

Just as letters joined together create a word, words put together form a sentence, in turn these sentences make a paragraph, and finally these paragraphs come together to create a piece of writing, an essay, a memoir, an autobiography, a diary etc.

In this way I have in my diary recorded my changing thoughts. In 2007 I came from my home to Lakshmi Ashram. Before that at home when I was very small I used to play with my friends. On coming to the ashram I



felt very upset at being separated from my friends, however on reaching here I found lots more companions and I felt very happy. I quickly fitted in with the daily routine. On coming to the ashram I found a new companion, it was here that I was to come close to this new friend, who would become as treasured as my old friends. From my childhood until now, throughout this long period, this new friend has become my true and inseparable companion.

When I was small then my friends were the same age as I was. In the same way as I slowly grew older, similarly my diary has also surprisingly grown up with me. So listen to me – just as I have developed physically, mentally and intellectually, so in the same way my diary has developed. Once I was small, mischievous, free and lacking in understanding, and according to the level of my thinking and understanding my companion too was equally lacking in knowledge and comprehension. From then until now there has been a great change in its form, its thinking, understanding, etc. Now I am intelligent, knowledgeable and stable, full of numerous thoughts and beliefs. Both of our levels have equally progressed.

My diary is made from the bark of trees. Its body is a clean white colour. Just as we protect our bodies with clothes, similarly to protect my friend it is covered with thick cardboard so that it does not suffer in any way. To make it look more beautiful I have decorated it with an attractive cover. I do not want it to suffer in any way either because of me or anyone else. None of its pages should get damaged. Whenever any page does get detached then I feel very upset. At this time I feel great pity for the person who made it, for I find that his apparent honesty and hard work are sadly reflected in the page of my diary suddenly getting detached. I want to attach the page again to restore my diary to its original state.

Every day I colour these white pages with my descriptions of my work, thoughts, plans, conclusions and responses. My endeavour is to continually inform my dear companion diary of my new reflections, so that he will always be happy, that the two of us will progress together and will always be friends. My companion (diary) comes every year in a new form into my hands, just as each year changes, and every year I am happy with it. I really like my companion in every way.

I find just one shortcoming in my friend, that it is unable to speak with me, but can only listen. It listens to my changing positive and negative thoughts that fill my mind throughout the day. In Hindi literature there are eighteen genres of which one is the diary, which assists me in writing and reading Hindi. Through writing in my diary I become personally aware of my progress. Through keeping my old diaries, in reading them again I become aware of my progress. Every page, every sentence in my diary gives me new energy, new inspiration and strength. I have shared those moments of joy and sadness with this friend of mine, which otherwise I am unable to share. This friend of mine provides me the opportunity of looking at these old moments in writing and reliving them. I have decided that I will always be joined to this friend through writing. I truly believe that it has given me guidance in receiving and giving countless ideas, emotions, and who knows how much knowledge.

This is my constant friend on the path of life, giving me support and always there by my side. I hope that I will always maintain this true friendship, and share each and every good thought in my progress in my activities with it.

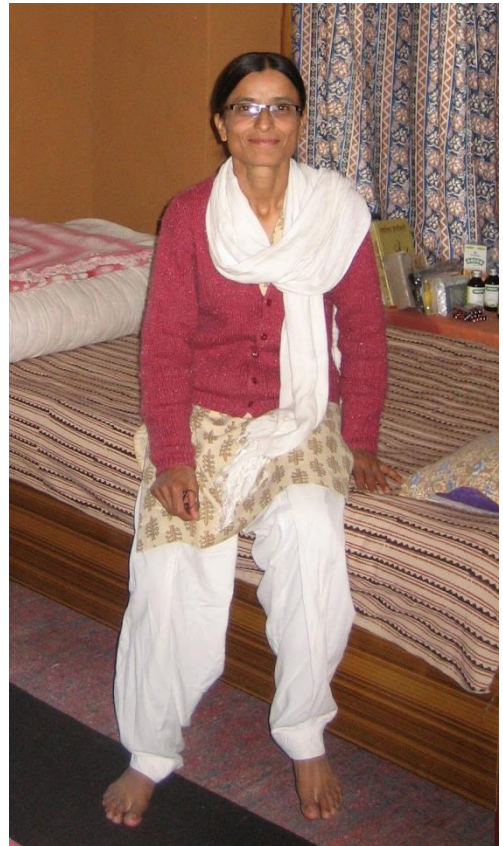
Research on Lakshmi Ashram – A Brief Introduction

Neema Behn

For some years I had nurtured a desire in my mind to meet all those girls who had studied in Lakshmi Ashram, along the model of *Nai Talim* (Basic Education) developed by Gandhi, from 1946 to the present day.

The desire and inspiration to meet these girls was to seek to understand and be acquainted with the outcome and impact of Lakshmi Ashram's educational model of *Nai Talim*. Gandhi had stated that his *Nai Talim* was the key to *Swaraj*, the model of education that would lead society towards *Swarajya*. This was indeed an immense assertion. I had this inner desire to know and understand what those specific features of *Nai Talim* are that would lead towards *Swarajya*. I also felt the need to find out what features of *Nai Talim* were adopted by Lakshmi Ashram, and to ascertain what impact it had on the student's personal, family and social life. This could only be found out if someone was prepared to actually undertake the research.

Thus I began personally to think about carrying out research on this subject. In 2011 I had decided that I had to research this topic, and Lakshmi Ashram gave their approval to this idea. After receiving approval in November 2011 from Dr. Sudarshan Lyengar, the vice-chancellor of Gujarat Vidyapeeth in Ahmedabad, to do so in the Department of Gandhian Philosophy, I registered for research.



In my research proposal I suggested selecting 200 girls who had studied formally at Lakshmi Ashram and 100 who had studied informally, that is to say who had come for a shorter period to the ashram for various training programmes. In this way I set myself the goal of conducting case studies on 300 students, divided into three periods, from 1946-1966, 1966-1986 and 1986-2014.

For my case studies I selected those students who were over eighteen years old. In undertaking case studies there is no necessity to undertake a large number and the chief objectives of research can be achieved in carrying out a limited number of case studies. However I wanted to reach out to as many students as possible, and therefore I set myself a large number as my objective.

It proved difficult to reach my target but after a lot of effort I was successful in achieving 50% of my target for girls who had studied formally, that is to say 100 students, and 25% of my target for those who had undertaken training, that is to say 25 students, and took their interviews. In order to meet them I went to various parts of the country - Delhi, Rajasthan, Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra and Uttar Pradesh – while in Uttarakhand I travelled to Dehradun and other towns, as well as to various far-flung villages.

I undertook my case studies in two ways, one conducting interviews on the basis of questionnaires, the second in going to the home of the interviewee and their area of work and observing in person their personal, family and social life.

The most challenging task was to achieve the necessary objectivity between the researcher and the interviewee. This presented a challenge because both the researcher and the interviewee had been students of Lakshmi Ashram. Thus it was not easy to extract true, unbiased information. In order to extract true information from the respondent questions would be asked in various ways, and more often a relaxed conversational mode was adopted. The respondent was reassured that the researcher and the interviewee would now chat one with the other and that, having distanced themselves from Lakshmi Ashram, there would be no preconceptions or bias of any kind in either's mind. After thus winning the confidence of the respondent then slowly she would begin to reveal her true experiences and her understanding, but to achieve this required a lot of time on my part.

Thus I had to spend a lot of time with each and every respondent. For 95% of the interviewees on meeting me it seemed as if in doing so they had rediscovered something much loved. Meeting me meant bringing back memories of their childhood and adolescence spent in Lakshmi Ashram. They were very happy in recounting their experiences. Some girls would repeat one thing over and over again, constantly asking about the present activities and atmosphere of Lakshmi Ashram. They were happy that they had found a means of reconnecting with Lakshmi Ashram. Being conscious of how they were feeling, I too felt lost for words. Then I and my respondent had slowly to withdraw ourselves from these deep sentimental feelings so that we might continue our work normally. Even so it sometimes seemed as if some respondents did not reveal all that they wanted to say of their experiences, but visiting their home, family and area of work and observing at first hand I got a better idea of how much and in which ways their education in Lakshmi Ashram had impacted on their lives.

On the basis of the three periods given above I found in which period there had been the most practice of *Nai Talim* education and its deepest impact. The data that came out of the case studies indicated how the basic education imparted in Lakshmi Ashram increased those qualities that lead towards *Swarajya*. In all of the girls that I met this education had to a greater or lesser degree helped in their all-round development. It had provided great possibilities and opportunities to expand the otherwise very limited lives of the hill girls and to allow them to progress.

There were a total of seven chapters in my research thesis. Chapters 4, 5 and 7 cover the history of Lakshmi Ashram, an introduction to Sarala Behn, data illustrating the impact and influence of the education received in Lakshmi Ashram on individual, family and social life, and the personal stories of students. The essence of the successes, challenges and potential of the *Nai Talim* based education of Lakshmi Ashram are presented along with some conclusions.

In this research a small and concise document of the seventy years of the activities of Lakshmi Ashram was prepared, on the basis of which in-depth studies can be undertaken. Also based on it those essential elements of *Nai Talim* that are still present in our education can be revitalized and strengthened, while further work can also be undertaken to bring about any necessary changes.

Through this study my personal understanding increased greatly, in particular in understanding *Nai Talim* in depth, while it has also enabled me significantly in understanding the ideology and activities of Lakshmi Ashram. Now I hope that this study will assist in improving the education of Lakshmi Ashram.