

FRIENDS OF LAKSHMI ASHRAM

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**NEWS FROM LAKSHMI ASHRAM
SANCHAR 137**

March 2020

Dear friends,

Here is news again from Lakshmi Ashram. This Sanchar brings the following articles:

- Report of Ashram Activities in 2019 by Neema Behn
- The 73rd Swāwalamban Divas (The Ashram's Birthday) by Tara Koranga
- The Dawn of a Change in my Life during the Sadhana Course by Beena Mehra
- Statement of Accounts 2019

The yearly meeting is held Sunday 29th March at 2pm in Lone's house.

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. 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. All will pay the same amount in subscription and receive the Sanchar.

We use little money for administration. The money is transferred 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 donations. Any amount 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 – see the 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 137

Report of Ashram Activities in 2019

Neema Behn

In 2019 Lakshmi Ashram completed the 73rd year of its journey. Except for some necessary small changes in the objectives of the institution and its activities made during this long journey, Lakshmi Ashram has sought to maintain continuity in its activities without making any major change. With everyone's concerted cooperation the activities have continued unchanged.

Limitless possibilities continue for both formal and informal education in the institution. There were some 45 students during 2019 in the ashram receiving formal education in classes VI to XII. Besides these four talented students are pursuing higher education at undergraduate level through the Indira Gandhi National Open University. Along with their university studies they also have responsibilities in the ashram for teaching and other practical activities.

After completing their formal education to class XII, six girls, both from within the ashram and from outside schools, in February had successfully completed the seven-month informal course in Practical Application of Gandhian Thought, known as the Sadhana course. For those running the course and for the teachers involved it was a challenge in various ways to develop the powers of understanding and build up the inner moral values based on Gandhian philosophy, in particular of those girls who had come directly from the village or urban background.

On coming to the ashram these girls had first of all to adjust to the simple way of life and the busy round of daily activities, something that took them a long time. Because of their unorganised daily routine at home and the habits and values that they had acquired, they found themselves initially facing difficulties in living in the ashram. Yet slowly after one or two months they came to accept this new way of life as they became familiarised with it. Then they had to try to understand Gandhian thought, so very different from the ordinary teaching that they had previously been exposed to. In the beginning this was somewhat difficult and seemed irrelevant to them, yet slowly but surely the guidance they received in understanding this philosophy and on its basis beginning to bring about change in their personal lives has led to a growing belief in these girls towards Gandhian Thought. They have begun to appreciate the necessity of understanding this philosophy and its value in offering an alternative perspective on life, not only at the personal level but also in regard to the present situation that society finds itself in. Their level of understanding has greatly increased as to which direction the world is going in these days, and what was Gandhi's thinking towards life. They have started to develop a great interest in studying in this direction.

The girls on this year's course have had similar experiences. The 24th Sadhana course, in which five girls are at present participating, began in June. All of them are applying themselves very seriously and thus benefiting greatly from the course. Whatever be the number of students, the fact that this course continues to flourish is testimony of its importance.



After the previous Sadhana course finished in February the ashram arranged for four girls to commence nurses' training in Kasturbagram. One other girl, who had been successful in getting admitted to a postgraduate course in Journalism in Nainital, spent several months working in the ashram before commencing her course. In addition two girls, Neha and Jyotsana, have recently been sent to Delhi to train as naturopathy doctors. The two of them have commenced a three year diploma course. In this way seven girls have been sent through the ashram for professional orientated studies and training.

This year the occasion of Sarala Behn's birth anniversary on 5th April saw the first of a planned annual series of lectures. Nearly one hundred people from all over Uttarakhand, including social workers and intellectuals, young students and trainees, were present for the first lecture. The subject of the lecture was 'The Relevance of Gandhian Thought in the Present Context'. Dr. Ram Chandra Pradhan, an erudite scholar of Gandhian Thought, was invited to deliver the lecture. His lecture created an understanding of the causes of national and international problems and their solution based on Gandhian Thought. Everyone said how valuable the lecture was and were very pleased with it. We have long nurtured the idea that the birth anniversary of Sarala Behn could be the occasion for a series of annual lectures and were very pleased that this finally materialised in 2019, and that this long awaited programme was a success.



2019 was celebrated throughout the country as the 150th birth anniversary of Mahatma Gandhi. In Lakshmi Ashram we organised a special programme on 2nd October (when Gandhi's birth is celebrated as Gandhi Jayanti) in Jhupulchaura Government Inter-College, situated in the Lod Valley where we are actively working with the local community. Some two hundred students of the school as well as men and women from the area took part. All the students, workers and teachers from Lakshmi Ashram were

also present in the programme. Twenty-three students from the ashram put on a very lively presentation of about one dozen short plays that they had prepared, based on incidents from Gandhi's life. This provided an opportunity for the students and the villagers to get a true understanding of Gandhi. The entire programme was a great success. This was an excellent opportunity for our students to go to a government school, and present through plays, songs and speeches their understanding of Gandhian Thought.

We sought throughout the year to celebrate the major festivals and birthdays of enlightened souls in an instructive way. As always, we celebrated Shri Krishna Janmashtami (marking the birth of Lord Krishna), and the birth of Jesus Christ, Christmas, with the local community. The way in which we celebrate these two festivals becomes more and more public orientated. This year both these festivals were celebrated in the ashram courtyard itself. This year we have made the ashram courtyard more functional. With the objective of making it more practical for organising large public functions we have widened part of the courtyard, thus giving ourselves more space.

It would be appropriate to tell you at this point that this year we undertook some much needed construction work in our *gaushala* (cattle shed), extending the yard outside where the cattle are tethered and also building a strong retaining wall. We have also constructed a large tank to store the rainwater from the roof of the hostel. The stored water will be especially beneficial during the hot, dry summer months.

In 2019 we also began another important programme, opening a children's library in a village close to Kausani. The library has developed into a children's meeting centre, where children from the age of five to fifteen come, where they benefit from basic teaching that they are not receiving in school, along with other activities. On opening the library some forty to fifty village children, who otherwise used to wander aimlessly here and there, now come to the centre and have become studious. At the same time their families are also inspired to take benefit of the library.



A second library has been opened in the Lod valley where we are actively working among the local community. Several hundred students and their teachers are members for the library is situated close to two or three schools and colleges.

Both these libraries are being run by educated girls of the village who are receiving just a nominal honorarium. Radha Didi and others from the ashram provide them guidance. Since 2017 a programme is being implemented in the Lod valley in seven villages to protect and revive thirty traditional water sources (*naulas*). In a good number of these *naulas* the water levels were very low, and some had almost dried up. Even where water was available in the *naulas* the villagers often neglected them. In 2019 we are witnessing successful results in those *naulas* where work has been carried out during the last two years. The discharge of water in those springs that were almost dry is increasing, and several new springs have appeared. This programme is being managed by four women from these villages. Under this programme water user committees have been set up at the village level for conserving and increasing the water levels. The village communities have come to understand that as it is they who make use of the water, they are responsible for its management.

During the year former students occasionally come to visit Lakshmi Ashram. During 2019 some four or five former students came to visit us and have remained in continual contact with us. Two good friends from Denmark also came and spent three weeks with us in the autumn, taking an active part in our daily activities. Two groups of high school students, from the United States and Denmark, visited the ashram and participated in our daily programme. There was a very good informal rapport between them and the ashram students. The Danish students had the opportunity to take part in our programme on 2nd October, something that they all enjoyed very much.

Lakshmi Ashram has always been a place for young men and women working in the community to come to learn and understand our way of life. During 2019 some three or four young men and women working in a remote village in Nainital district visited at various times, stayed in the ashram and gained practical experience of the ashram life. They learned from Radha Didi how social work can be undertaken, had discussions with her and listened to her experiences. In

December they brought a dozen women and girls to the ashram and stayed for two or three days, spending the time with our children and taking part in our daily activities.

Radha Didi was busy throughout the year, both in Uttarakhand and across the country, both spreading her thoughts and also taking part in and giving guidance to ongoing social movements and campaigns on social issues.

In this way Lakshmi Ashram, within its capacity, continues to responsibly fulfill its role through its activities both within its campus and outside in the community. The influence of whatever activities it has undertaken is clearly seen in the lives of both individuals and in the wider society.

The 73rd Swāwalamban Divas

Tara Koranga

The founding of the ashram on 5 December 1946 is celebrated every year on this day as Swāwalamban Divas or Self-Reliance/Self-Sufficiency Day)

5 December 2019 was an important day. Not only the ashram members but those living nearby impatiently wait for this day. Whereas we had celebrated Swāwalamban Divas in 2018 in the Udyog Mandir, this year we celebrated it here in the ashram campus.

On the morning of Swāwalamban Divas a good number of people in greeting one another with 'Jai Jagat' also extended their best wishes for Swāwalamban Divas. There was a real feeling of enthusiasm and innovation in the atmosphere. Today all the various departments of Lakshmi Ashram mounted displays of their various produce, and through means of charts the workers and students presented written information detailing the income, for example milk production from the dairy or vegetable and fruit production from the garden. The display of products was arranged in a very systematic way for perusal. The workers and students of the ashram, members of the public living nearby, our field workers active in the Lod Valley for the renewal of the traditional springs (*naulas*), along with a dozen or more children from Raulyana, all took part in the programme.



During this year the children from Raulyana have joined us in a number of festivals. Lakshmi Ashram's contacts with the children of Raulyana have come about through the village library being run in the village by the ashram. This library is being run in the village Panchayat Bhavan (community centre) at the wish of the villagers. Basanti Behn goes every day to the village to manage it. The village children when they come home from school go every day to the library to borrow and return books, while some children bring their homework to do there, some play while others tell or listen to stories. Some children come with the objective of taking part in cultural programmes – singing, dancing and acting. Now there is a good strong group of some 40-50

children from the village. As a result these children have come through Basanti Behn a number of times to join in the ashram festivals.

On 5 December there was also a cultural programme in our meeting hall, Shanti Bhavan, where the exhibition had been mounted. The ashram students and the small children from Raulyana presented songs and dances, and recited self-composed poems, all based on the life of Sarala Behn. They also presented plays on themes such as how did Sarala Behn come into contact with Gandhi and how did she come to begin the basic education school that is Lakshmi Ashram.

On this occasion several students and workers shared their experiences in front of everyone – how they personally felt having lived and worked in the ashram, how they had personally developed, etc.

A number of students also spoke on the theme of self-reliance, saying how in the context of the present day being fully self-sufficient is very difficult, however we are making efforts as per our individual abilities to become self-sufficient. Some of those who spoke said that through mutual inter-dependence too we can make efforts to live a self-reliant life. Some students read from Sarala Behn's writings to express their experiences.

On this day the children were listening very intently when the older girls responsible for the various departments of the ashram, along with one or two male workers, told of their experiences, and the children too shared their thoughts. This all made for a very enjoyable occasion.

On the occasion of Swāwalamban Divas Radha Behn (*Barī Dīdī*) spoke in a very interesting way about the time that she had spent with Sarala Behn and highlighted the objectives of the ashram teaching.

Every year on the occasion of Swāwalamban Divas various tasty items are prepared in the kitchen using produce from our own garden and locally grown grain, and this year was no exception. For all of us Swāwalamban Divas was very special and a source of inspiration.

The Dawn of a Change in my Life during the Sadhana Course

Beena Mehra

Beena is one of the five students who have taken the latest Sadhana training programme in Gandhian Thought.

There are times when suddenly an opportunity comes in our life that we could never have imagined, yet that time teaches us the art of living. Such a time came into my life while taking the Sadhana course, one that perhaps I could never have imagined. I am really happy that during these eight months, at every moment I have been presented the opportunity to come to know and understand better Gandhi's thinking in great depth, and could to a degree begin to put it to use in my personal life and in society. From this I



could understand that my disciplined practice (*Sadhana*) during these eight months was meaningful.

At the same time there had long been various questions in my mind that I sought answers to. The two most important questions were ‘Who am I?’ and ‘What is the purpose of my life?’ During the *Sadhana* course I got clear answers to these questions and a clear understanding developed within me. I became very alert to my true nature, a very big achievement for me.

I also had the opportunity to take a ten-day course in Vipassana meditation, an unforgettable time. During the Vipassana course I was successful in coming to understand my inner self. How important is meditation in life, which releases us from the sorrows and worries of the outer world and takes us towards freedom – this I came to a deep understanding of during the Vipassana course.

Thus I consider myself very fortunate that during these eight months, alongside my personal development, I have gained the experience as to how one should live in society.

Therefore I thank Radha Didi, Neema Didi and all the members of the ashram family from the bottom of my heart, and I will truly try to put into practice all that I have learned during these eight months.



L-R: Asha, Beena, Shweta, Neema, Neetu, Sakshi, in front Diksha (Diya). Asha took the course two years ago and was responsible for the welfare of the students

FRIENDS OF LAKSHMI ASHRAM

STATEMENT OF ACCOUNTS 2019

ORDINARY PROFIT AND LOSS ACCOUNT

Income

Contributions received	112.942,13 DKK
Subscription: 44 members à 75 DDK	3.300,00 DKK
Total income	116.242,13 DKK

Expenses

Administration	2.616,05 DKK
Paid to Lakshmi Ashram	115.318,65 DKK
Total expenses	117.934,70 DKK

Net result of ordinary account	- 1.692,57 DKK
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BALANCE SHEET at 31.12.2019

Assets

Total bank deposits – account no: 3141861	49.524,77 DKK
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Liabilities

Ordinary net capital, beginning 2019	51.217,34 DKK
Net result	- 1.692,57 DKK
Net capital, end 2019	49.524,77 DKK

Albertslund, 4th March 2020

Lone Poulsen

The accounts have been audited.

Claus Broskov Sørensen