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**NEWS FROM LAKSHMI ASHRAM
SANCHAR 139**

November 2020

Dear friends,

Here is news again from Lakshmi Ashram.

I wish you all a Merry Christmas and a Happy New year!

This Sanchar has the following articles:

- Reflections of the Students of Class XI on the Impact of the Nationwide Lockdown on Education
- Community Life and Responsibilities in Lakshmi Ashram by Poonam Behn
- Our Experiences as Students of Naturopathy by Neha Joshi

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 139

Reflections of the Students of Class XI on the Impact of the Nationwide Lockdown on Education

The students of class XI spent almost four months at home, but were very happy when they were able to return to the ashram on 20 July and resume their studies. Soon after their return the results of the Uttarakhand Board high school exams were announced and they enthusiastically started the class XI syllabus.



Mira Phartiyal

Lockdown was imposed throughout the entire country, and everything was shut down. During this period I spent four months in my home. I found myself very worried about my education and was continually thinking when the ashram would reopen. The ashram Didis discussed the matter together and came to the decision that they would recall all the students. I learned that I was to return on 20 July. On returning to the ashram I began my studies in class XI. I am really happy that we are studying here. Those students at home are studying online. While some students are benefitting from this, others are not. Here at least all our didis are teaching us face to face. Our school is situated alone in dense forest. Here all of us students live side by side with our didis, and all the time we are learning

from one another. We have returned to the ashram during the Covid-19 pandemic so that our studies can continue without interruption, something that makes me very happy. Now it is our responsibility that we enjoy this opportunity to the full.

Tanuja Negi

Because of the coronavirus all the students, boys and girls, are studying online, with the help of mobile phones. Maybe they understand what they are being taught. The student and teacher are not physically face to face. The economic situation in the homes of some students causes problems, and they are not in a position to purchase all that they need for online studies. Everywhere the schools continue to be closed, so people have to face a lot of difficulties. Sometimes where people live there are problems of networking. Sometimes in the hills people do not have phones. Not all mothers and fathers are in a position that they can afford all the expenses of using a phone. This puts obstacles in the way of the students' studies, and they are not able to study all their subjects.

However in the ashram we are not faced with such problems. Here we are regularly studying all our subjects. This time because of the ongoing coronavirus students are facing a lot of inconvenience in their studies. We still do not know when the schools will reopen. Until then all the students will have to struggle with online teaching.

Minakshi Mehta

With the ongoing coronavirus pandemic a break has been put on many activities, to the extent that even the schools have been closed. This has meant that all the students have had to stay at home and study. During these days students are using mobile phones to study online, but this is not as good as being able to mutually discuss the subject with a teacher. Our school is open and we are happy that we do not have to study online but instead are able to study with our teachers. This is what we want, and we are very happy for it. We benefit far more from studying with our teacher rather than online, and enjoy it much more. If we follow all the rules of social distancing and the like, then we do not have to face any real problems. These days we are studying attentively all the subjects in our syllabus, and are doing all the daily work of the ashram. Our school presents a really lovely sight.

Nikita Mankoti

As a result of the global coronavirus pandemic a national lockdown was declared from 25 March. This has meant that all the schools and colleges, railway stations, social places etc. have all been closed. The lockdown also led to all the ashram students spending almost four months at home. During these four months my experience was that using the excuse of online study students were spending the entire day playing games on the phone. Even if there were arrangements at home for online study, yet despite this because of difficulties with the Internet and connectivity there were problems in studying. Bearing all this in mind the ashram Didis sat together and decided to call all the ashram students back on 20 July. After returning here then our studies immediately started in an organised way. Yet those people who

are studying online are facing all sorts of problems. Leaving aside online study the teaching in the ashram finds the teacher and students sitting facing one another. The student is able to get satisfactory answers to all her questions. When throughout the entire country educational institutions continue to remain closed, those of us in the ashram family are very happy that the ashram is open, that so much care and attention has been given to us and we are able to continue our studies.

Dipika Pande

School education has come to a standstill because of the lockdown, but all of us are very fortunate that the ashram has opened. It is a matter of real joy that we are studying here. Otherwise, everywhere else students are studying online, and are facing many problems. They may lack the facilities or else there are problems of connectivity. Poor students do not have access to smart phones, so what will they do? We can truly say that the teaching in the ashram is truly educational, for it impacts deeply on our minds. We returned to the ashram when the lockdown was reduced, and immediately put our minds seriously to our studies. We get plenty of benefit from it, for there is an excellent relationship between us and our teachers, which is as it should be.

Jaya Nainwal

This year, because of the coronavirus pandemic, we were all sent home. All the educational institutions were closed. Now only our school is open, and our classes are going on daily. Otherwise everybody's studies are being done by means of the phone. Studying using the phone is not right, for nobody can tell who is studying and who is not studying. In the classroom this is not the case.

All of us are happy that in the ashram regular lessons are going on for classes VI-XII, whereas in the community at large this is not so. All of us students are participating wholeheartedly in the daily activities of the ashram. We are all happy that, living together and following all the rules, we have the opportunity for our work and studies to be going on.

** Didi is the formal word for elder sister, and the students refer to the teachers and workers as 'Didi'.*

Community Life and Responsibilities in Lakshmi Ashram

Poonam Behn

Nine years have passed since I joined the ashram family, and I look upon the ashram as my own home, something that will always remain with me. Responsibilities come in various forms, and during the past nine years I have assumed a number of responsibilities. I have received a great deal of support from both the children and didis in understanding in full the nature of these responsibilities, and this has allowed me to do all the tasks entrusted to me.



It is said that those who make an effort will always succeed. David Bhai and Hansi Behn have inspired me to write for Sanchar. To begin with I felt very strange, but then a voice within told me that, when you have the encouragement of such good people, how can you accept defeat, you must at least make an effort. While I was young I did not have the chance to study very much, and I owe so much to the ashram for giving me the opportunity to develop my capabilities.

During these days all the schools continue to remain closed, yet Radha Didi and Neema Didi were so concerned about the education of our girls that all of us workers sat together and it was decided to call all the students back. Now they are busy in their studies. How fortunate we are to live together in such a home or school!

Then I sat down to write. I recalled how strange it was when because of Covid-19 all the children had gone home and how quiet and empty the ashram seemed. Other thoughts also came to my mind, how Sarala Behn had started the ashram for the children, yet at that time without the children somehow something was lacking.

Nevertheless we were kept very busy. For the past two years I have been responsible for growing *tulsi* (*Ocimum sanctum* or Holy Basil), from sowing the seed, planting out the young seedlings and then, when the plants were ready, cutting and drying the plants to be used for herbal tea. This year too I had responsibility for this work. However for four months all our children were at home because of Covid-19, and we had not been able to sow the tulsi seed. How would we prepare the fields? It was decided in June to hire someone to plough the fields in Shanti Wan, a large plot of land in the forest belonging to the ashram. A local villager came along with his plough and bullocks and ploughed all the fields, working hard from early to late.

Then four local women came to prepare the terraced fields. They were very hardworking and full of strength. I already knew Neeru Didi, one of these four women. Whenever I see her she is always working hard, and I have learned a lot from her as how one can work. Through her hard work she earns enough to support her family. She keeps cows and sells the milk in the local community. Such people are a real source of inspiration.

I too worked together with these four women. In four days we had prepared the fields. and then sowed seeds of tulsi. We were then fortunate in getting plenty of rain and the tulsi began to grow, and we were soon able to plant out the seedlings in the empty fields prepared for them, both in Shanti Van and in the fields by Adi Nivas, the name given to Sarala Behn's original cottage.. The

plants were ready for harvesting by the third week of September. We began by cutting the tulsi growing in the fields around Adi Nivas. There were a lot of weeds growing between the tulsi plants, so before harvesting the tulsi the children had to carefully weed the fields.

From 22 September I had another important responsibility, that of managing the grass cutting and haymaking. During the summer and more especially during the monsoon rains the grass grows lush and green on the hillside above the ashram, and also in Shanti Van. When the rains clear away then everyone spends some three weeks working their way across the hillside, cutting and drying the grass. Meena Didi assumed the responsibility of cutting and drying the tulsi with the help of some of the children. This year we did not harvest so much tulsi, only some 60-70 kilos.

I had the help of the older students and didis to cut the grass. There were three students from class IX, and all the students from class X and upwards. Everyone reached the hillside to begin work at 7.30am, coming down in the heat of the day at 11am. From 1.30-4pm the children had their regular classes, and then all those involved in the haymaking went again for two hours to the hillside, gathering the dried grass into sheaves and bringing them down to be put into haystacks. This year we have made thirty haystacks in all. Despite feeling very tired I was full of enthusiasm which made



me feel very good. I was very pleased with the new programme for the haymaking which also allowed the girls to have time for their regular classes, giving them the chance to catch up on the studies that they has missed white at home.

All those students working in the haymaking were divided into teams, with seven people in each team, and also didis. Everybody worked hard within their individual capacity, and as I write the huge task is almost over. From 19 October the usual daily routine will commence once again, with just a little grass remaining to be cut and dried. This year we were faced with a lot of pine needles on the hillside among the grass. With all the girls at home for four months we had lacked people to rake in the pine needles. Then from mid June the monsoon rains began, and the grass began to grow quickly, hiding the pine needles. In Shanti Van especially the grass was very dense and tall in

many places. With the monsoon rain the pine needles began to rot and make good compost for the grass, perhaps an added reason for such dense and long grass.

Working with all the girls I took full and honest responsibility for cutting the grass and making the haystacks and enjoyed the work very much. I never look upon these responsibilities as a burden, but rather as an opportunity for my personal development. This year we brought down enough sheaves of grass to make 30 haystacks. Saraswati Behn took full responsibility for making the haystacks. Hopefully this fodder will be sufficient for all the cows in our *gaushala* (cowshed) through the winter months and into the spring.

Our Experiences as Students of Naturopathy

Neha Joshi

Both Neha and Jyotsana have studied in Lakshmi Ashram since the primary level and have always been very motivated. After passing their class XII Intermediate exams they took the one year training in Gandhian Thought, and then registered for B.A. with the Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU). They are in the final year of their B.A. studies.



After passing our intermediate exams in class XII the two of us (Neha and Jyotsana) both felt that we ought to take some work orientated training. We felt that we ought to learn something that would be of benefit both for the community and also for ourselves, and in the end we decided that to work in the field of naturopathy and yoga would be ideal. Other sources of inspiration also caused our enthusiasm for this field to grow.

Through the active support of Lakshmi Ashram our dreams of taking this three year diploma course were fulfilled, we gained admission, and from September 2019 the two of us began this course, Diploma in Naturopathy & Yoga (NDDY), in earnest through the Gandhi National Academy of Naturopathy in Rajghat, New Delhi. We were going to have to live far away from Kausani in Delhi and assume full responsibility for our lives. We enjoyed a great deal of support from the secretary of the Academy, Dr. Purneet Mallik. We always received his love and close friendship, as a result of which we quickly felt at home on the campus.

From the outset both of us would go regularly to the Out Patients Department (OPD) of the Academy. We had the opportunity to learn those methods of treatment that those who had graduated with the diploma after three years would learn, yet we were only first year students and were still given the opportunity to learn, something very special for us. We would spend three

hours in the OPD, from 8-11am. Here among our new colleagues and working with new patients we acquired a great amount of new knowledge. During the hot days a higher number of patients would come. As the cooler days of autumn came so the number of patients decreased.

We have successfully learned almost all of the various treatments that are practised under naturopathy – for example the skills of massage, how to prepare and apply a mud pack, how to carry out enema, the use of steam baths, both for the entire body and also for selected parts, hot and cold compresses, different kinds of immersion baths, acupressure, etc.

Our academic classes started on 7 September 2019, one hour on Saturdays and two hours on Sundays. Most of our fellow students were much older than us – at 19-20 years we were the youngest. There were both men and women taking the course. In our opening class we were told of those elements associated with naturopathy. Everything in the universe has its theory and its rules that allow it to be clearly observed and studied. In this way naturopathy too has its ten basic principles, which we wish to describe to you, so that you can understand how this method is different from other medical treatments, and why it is that people are being increasingly attracted to it.

The ten principles are as follows:

1. All diseases are the same, their causes are the same and their treatment is the same.
2. Acute illness is not an enemy but a friend.
3. Germs do not cause diseases.
4. Treatment is not of a particular disease but of the entire body of the patient.
5. Nature itself is a doctor.
6. It takes time to cure a patient suffering from chronic ailments.
7. Suppressed diseases come to surface through Nature Cure
8. Simultaneous treatment of body, mind and soul
9. Diagnosis of the disease is not necessary.
10. No strong medicine should be given to the patient during Nature cure treatment

These ten basic principles provide a strong foundation to naturopathy. Treatment in naturopathy makes use of the five basic elements of traditional Indian medicine – earth, water, air, fire and space. Naturopathy believes that our bodies and the entire creation are made up from these five elements. It is said in the ancient texts, "*Yatha pinde tatha brahmande*", meaning "*As is the cosmic life, so is the individual life*". It was Mahatma Gandhi who was responsible for introducing Naturopathy or Nature Cure to India. In 1946 he opened the first nature cure centre in Uruli Kanchan near to Pune in Maharashtra.

Besides our lectures in naturopathy we also had classes in general science and anatomy. Knowledge of these subjects is compulsory in the field of medicine. We learned a great deal that was new to us in these classes, knowledge that was useful for every aspect of our lives.

At present because of the coronavirus pandemic and all schools, colleges and other educational institutions being closed, our course is for the moment not functioning. The two of us are living here in Lakshmi Ashram and continuing our studies. Radha Didi is taking our classes in naturopathy regularly, so that there is no break in our studies. At the same time we are putting our practical knowledge of naturopathy to use in the ashram, so that others can benefit from what we have learned. We are very satisfied with what we have been able to learn so far, for it is useful and directly beneficial for the community. We still have a lot more to learn of naturopathy and its other methods of treatment, so that we might fully understand this field in its entirety.