

FRIENDS OF LAKSHMI ASHRAM

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**NEWS FROM LAKSHMI ASHRAM
SANCHAR 145**

September 2023

Dear friends,

Here is news again from Lakshmi Ashram.

This Sanchar has the following articles:

- Reflections on a return visit to Lakshmi Ashram by Susan Germein
- Raising our Voices against Atrocities on Women in Manipur by Hansi Behn
- Sadhana Course 2023-2024 by Neema Behn and Sadhana Students
- The Account of 2022.

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, 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: lonepoulsen2620@gmail.com (new mail address)

Sanchar 145

Reflections on a return visit to Lakshmi Ashram

Susan Germein



I first visited Lakshmi Ashram in September 2016, with the desire to do my doctoral research here. Luckily for me, they said “Yes”, and since then I have been back several times. I am there now, and for the first time am experiencing the August rains: steady, heavy rain that soaks the earth, freshens all the greenery and makes the view over the valleys and mountains even more beautiful (even if the price to pay is the danger of the odd mosquito or leech to keep one alert).

Every time I come to Lakshmi Ashram there are changes: new faces, routines, technology and so on. But also there is a lovely continuity: classes, seva in the garden or kitchen, collecting fodder for cows, haymaking, celebrations, plays, singing and shared meals, all punctuated by the daily rhythm of 6am morning prayer and 6.30pm evening prayer.

At the moment, if it is not raining, everyone goes up to the meeting room at Lakshmi Ashram (Radha’s house) for Evening Prayers, to enjoy together the silence, prayers, singing and daily news with Radha Didi and Kanti Didi.

One of the pleasures for this returned visitor is reconnecting with the girls. Girls who were in Class 6 in 2017 have now finished Class 12. So the little girls with whom I did origami, drawing or English, have now blossomed into mature young women. It’s lovely to meet them again, with such a sense of connection and friendship between us. It’s always interesting to hear what path students have taken with their lives after leaving the Ashram. And of course there are several who stay on, to perhaps do the Sadhana course and complete their BA, while working as class teachers.

It seems to me that at the moment there is at the school a very strong group of mature, thoughtful and enthusiastic young women, who are really blossoming and finding their place in the world. One can feel their influence in the school. The current Sadhana course has 3 girls from the village. That means that they attended the local high school and now have chosen to come to Lakshmi Ashram for this special course. This I think is evidence of the high regard in which the school is held locally.

I’ve always thought of Lakshmi Ashram as having porous boundaries. By this I mean that it has rich connections to the wider community – locally, national and internationally. Many visitors come to the school: rather than having to go out to the world, it seems that the world comes to us. In the 10 days that I have been here we have had visits from Professor Avanindra Kumar Joshi, an Someshwar-

based College Principal, who has put together a book collating the articles written by the girls for their “Sarvoday” Journal, over a period from 1951 to 1960. Another visitor is Garima Pant Tripathi, who studied in Lakhmi Ashram until class VII in the nineties, and who is now doing a PhD at Kumaon University on Kumaoni language. She is spending a few days at the Ashram, accessing the library to assist with writing her synopsis. Another current guest is



Ramesh Sharma, a long-time Gandhian activist who worked with the Gandhi Peace Foundation for many years. All these visitors share their stories with the girls, and Ramesh, with his strong singing voice, one night led the girls in a rousing anthem that calls for respect for all religions and cultures in India. This idea of respect for different religions expresses a Gandhian ethic which is really needed right now in India. And always at evening prayer, David Bhai and others share news from around the world. Therefore the girls become very well informed about the goings-on in the world, both intellectually and morally.

Raising our Voices against Atrocities on Women in Manipur

Hansi Behn

Manipur is a state of India situated in the north-east of the country, bordering on Myanmar. The two main communities living in the state are the Maitei and the Kuki. The Maitei mostly live in the Imphal valley and are Hindu, while the Kukis are a tribal community living mostly in the hills who have converted to Christianity.

The Maitei community at present does not have the right to settle in the hill areas, but are demanding that right. This has been a cause of tension between the two communities for years. From time to time these tensions have erupted into open violence. At the beginning of May this year tensions again surfaced. Since then more than 150 people have lost their lives, houses have been burned and thousands of people have been displaced and are forced to live in relief camps.

A shameful and painful incident took place on 4 May, when a crowd of men from the Maitei community took several women from the Kuki community, stripped them and forced them to walk through the village. The most shameful aspect was that this all took place under the gaze of the police. What was the role of the leaders? Two months later this incident came to the notice of the world when a video went viral, just as the monsoon session of parliament was about to begin in Delhi.

Those carrying out this attack were all young men. Such attacks have led to many tribal people seeking refuge in the neighbouring states of Mizoram and Nagaland.

It has all led to nationwide condemnation, with women taking out processions in many parts of the country, organizing meetings and expressing their outrage.

After having heard the reports of these atrocities Radha Didi, personally feeling the pain and suffering of these sisters of Manipur, felt that the ashram should take the initiative in raising their opposition to these tragic events, and Neema wrote an appeal to the residents of Chhani-Lweshal gram panchayat and of Kausani – sisters, mothers, brothers and students – to take part in a protest demonstration.

The ashram students created slogans to raise during the demonstration, and made placards with the slogans written on them to carry in the demonstration.

On 23 July the students and workers of Lakshmi Ashram, expressing their opposition to this shameful incident, also took out a procession from the ashram courtyard to the bazaar in Kausani, joined on the way by local women. They raised slogans such as:

“Mahila Himsa Band Karo, Band Karo.
Manipur Sarkar, Sharm karo, Sharm
Karo.
Mahilaon Par Atyachar,
Satta Iski Jimmedar.”

“Stop Violence against Women,
Manipur Government be Ashamed.
The Administration is Responsible for
the Atrocities against Women.”

This and other slogan echoed all around the hillside. The children and women were full of anger in their opposition. Radha Didi and Kanti Didi also accompanied the children and women in their demonstration, this despite Radha Didi finding it difficult these days to walk far up or down the steep hillside.

When the demonstration reached the centre of the village where three roads meet, they stopped there and there was a public meeting, in which a good number of women from Kausani along with some men took part.



Radha Didi, Kanti Didi, Neema and others addressed those present on the violence against women existing in our society, and how this violence can be addressed and stopped. The need was emphasised for the women to strengthen themselves individually, that they must not consider

themselves weak. There is a need also for the women to organise themselves to collectively combat violence. We need also to strengthen ourselves to combat domestic violence – only then can we come together to stop such abhorrent crimes, from the family to the community, and then to the entire country.

“Mahila Ekta Jundabad, Jindabad”
“Long live Women’s Unity”

This slogan echoed all around, and the meeting concluded with a rousing song –

“Khud jiyo auron ko bhi jine do,
Yahi to jindagi ka rasta,
Tumhen aman ki shanti ka wasta”

“Live and let live,
That’s the way of living.
You yourself are the means of Peace”

The local community, especially the women, was very grateful to the ashram for having had the courage to take the initiative to raise their voices against the terrible violence against women, which has been taking place in Manipur.

Sadhana Course 2023-2024

Neema Behn and Sadhana Students

In the year 1993-94 Lakshmi Ashram began an eight month study course in Gandhian Thought. This course is now known in brief as the Sadhana Course. Most of the girls taking part in this course come from Uttarakhand. Those ashram students who have passed their class XII Intermediate exams then take this course. Those girls who come from their villages to participate in this course have sometimes pursued their higher education to B.A. or M.A. During the eight months of this course the training of the girls takes place at four levels:

1. Ideological Training – This aspect of the course concentrates especially on explaining Gandhian Thought. The course seeks to explain to the students Gandhi’s concepts of Truth, Non-violence and Justice, and based on this to understand Gandhi’s constructive programmes and his concept of Satyagraha, that is to say his programme of civil disobedience and passive resistance. The students seek to develop their individual personalities based on Gandhian Thought.
2. Practical Training – In this aspect of the Sadhana programme the students participate fully in the community life of Lakshmi Ashram, and come to appreciate and understand the true underlying values of the community life through their active participation. The three essential values are those of mutual love, cooperation and the spirit of service. They imbibe these values through the teams of students that undertake most activities, participating in the management of the daily life through the ‘council of ministers’, community meals, and community prayers morning and evening.
3. Handicrafts Training etc. – To move towards the ideal of self-sufficiency it is essential to develop manual skills. These include sewing and knitting. In addition the girls also receive computer training.

4. Spiritual Development – By this we understand coming to an awareness of one's inner life, developed through participation in a ten-day Vipassana meditation course, daily community prayers in the ashram and singing, especially of devotional songs.

For the development of these four aspects, in addition to participating fully in all the ashram's daily activities, during the eight months the Sadhana students are sent wherever there is the opportunity to develop these values. Also Gandhian thinkers from across the country are invited from time to time to take their classes in the ashram. They are also taken on a long study tour, where they have the opportunity to study at first hand the ideas of other Gandhian thinkers and also grassroots constructive activities. They also have the opportunity to see for themselves Gandhi's ashrams.



In this way the Sadhana Course is run to develop the all-round personality of the girls. Last year all the girls then studying in class XII decided to pursue their own development, leaving the ashram to take up higher studies or practical training. Thus in 2022 we were unable to run the Sadhana Course. This year we commenced the present Sadhana Course on 5 June.

There are now six girls on the course. They have now completed almost three months of the course, and we will now share their personal experiences in this report.

Janaki Bora: During the past three months I have both learned and understood a lot. Most importantly I have come to understand what I am, for in life we talk a lot about others, and seek to know more about others rather than ourselves, but in the Sadhana Course we are paying more attention to ourselves. I have also been introduced to Gandhian Thought and have come to understand how Gandhi had in his personal life totally imbibed the values of Truth and Non-violence. In his life his prime objective was Truth. I have come to understand that Truth is the one and only way for an individual to progress personally and to develop his/her life. It is true that the path of Truth is full of challenges, one will be faced with difficulties, yet we cannot separate ourselves from Truth, we can never accept defeat. Gandhi faced many difficulties in his life yet he never retreated and never rejected Truth. This we are learning from Gandhi.

I have also learned some handicrafts and new skills, such as sewing, knitting and the computer. I am enjoying very much learning all these new skills. Through the Sadhana Course we are learning both theoretically and in practice how one might become self-sufficient.

Aarti Phaswan: Through the Sadhana Course I am learning all about myself, what qualities and what shortcomings I personally have. We are studying Gandhi's autobiography, his book Mangal Prabhat on his eleven vows, and also some other books. I am very happy to have the opportunity to take part in this course and am finding it very interesting. Through reading about Gandhi's life I have come to understand how essential the element of Truth is. I have come to appreciate that in life the path of Truth is the true path. Even if we are defeated, even so we must not abandon Truth. Our reading and writing in this course helps us personally to develop our understanding. Along with our studies we are also learning some skills and handicrafts that will assist us in becoming self-sufficient. I am

enjoying the course very much, and am finding answers to a number of questions in my mind through this course.

Jaya Nainwal: I am an ashram student, and have long been very keen to have the opportunity to take this course. I had felt that the syllabus to class XII had offered me everything. However the Sadhana Course offers us practical knowledge, through which we can learn more and understand more, and now I too have the opportunity to benefit from this course. I fully believe that in these eight months I will learn a great deal. I have had the chance to understand Gandhi's life and his practice of Truth.. My powers of understanding are developing through this course. Gandhi had given everyone in society respect and justice. His life was grounded in Truth and Love, and he won over the world through these values. I too am coming to imbibe these values.

Diksha Bora: Through the Sadhana Course classes I am learning more about myself and understand more my true significance. Learning about Gandhi's thinking and his life I am personally trying to incorporate some of his teachings in my own life. The teachings on this course have led to my desire to become self-sufficient very strong. I feel that the Sadhana Course is showing the true path of life. This course is providing me the direction to go forward

Our classes are being taken by the ashram teachers. Some people are also coming from outside to explain Gandhian Thought to us. These people are personally living Gandhi's ideals in their lives, and we are learning a great deal from their personal experiences. In the classes and discussions in this course I am finding answers to a number of questions that have arisen in my mind.

Through Gandhi's life I have come to understand the importance of Truth. Truth is the supreme value. Life grounded in Truth is the true life. Our lives should be simple and humble. My interest for this has increased.

Neha: After coming to join the Sadhana Course I am learning a great deal here in the ashram. The main objective of the Sadhana Course is to understand Gandhian Thought, and to learn about the activities that he undertook in his life for India. The second main objective of this course is to understand oneself.. The ordinary individual does not know the answer to such questions as "Who am I?" or "What is the meaning of Life?" I have come to understand how man can follow the path of Peace and how he can establish a spiritual power within himself. I seek to make every effort to follow the path of Truth. I think that I must light the lamp of Truth within myself. I am also learning how I can recognize my true objective in life. Coming here, I have learned how to live a community life. I am also learning knitting, sewing and the computer.

Puja: In this eight month course known as the Sadhana Course we are also learning about Gandhi's model of Basic Education, otherwise known as Nai Talim.. I am learning many new things in this course, and am developing all-round. First and foremost in this course we learn to know ourselves. Radha Didi has also taken our classes. She told us of her experiences in working in the villages, as well as Gandhi's Truth and Non-violence. If I was not on this course, then I would never have had the opportunity to learn so many things. We are also coming to understand Gandhi and the great range of activities that he undertook in his life. As a child Gandhi had done a lot of bad things, but the great thing about Gandhi was that he never repeated these mistakes. Rather he had learned from his mistakes.

During this course we are also learning the use of the computer and sewing, and I especially enjoy sewing. This skill will serve me well in my future.

FRIENDS OF LAKSHMI ASHRAM

STATEMENT OF ACCOUNTS 2022

ORDINARY PROFIT AND LOSS ACCOUNT

Income

Contributions received	423.456,04 DKK
Subscription: 35 members à 75 DDK	2.625,00 DKK
Total income	426.081,04 DKK

Expenses

Administration	1.368,00 DKK
Paid to Lakshmi Ashram	129.794,01 DKK
Total expenses	131.162,01 DKK

Net result of ordinary account	294.919,03 DKK
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BALANCE SHEET at 31.12.2022

Assets

Total bank deposits – account no: 3141861	395.329,69 DKK
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Liabilities

Ordinary net capital, beginning 2022	100.410,66 DKK
Net result	294.919,03 DKK
Net capital, end 2022	395.329,69 DKK

Albertslund, Oktober 2022

Lone Poulsen

I December 2021 we received a rather big amount from the inheritance after Marie Thoege. This amount will be transferred in the next three transfers.