

**FRIENDS OF LAKSHMI ASHRAM**

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## NEWS FROM LAKSHMI ASHRAM SANCHAR 146

Marts 2024

Dear friends,

Here is news again from Lakshmi Ashram.

**This Sanchar has the following articles:**

- Visit to Lakshmi Ashram October 2023
- Suryoday and Vijay – a Longstanding Ashram Tradition by Davidbhai
- My Love for the Cows by Soniya Almiya - Class XI
- 10th Women's Festival (Mahila Mahotsav) by Navjot Kaur – Class X
- The Account of 2023.

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](mailto:lonepoulsen2620@gmail.com) (*new mail address*)

# Sanchar 146

## Visit to Lakshmi Ashram October 2023

**23/10 – 28/10 Ane Smith, Anne Thøger and Ruth Sillemann visited the ashram.**

9 years had passed since Ane and Anne together with Marie Thøger visited the ashram. We were most warmly received by Neema, Kanti and Radha and were accommodated on the ground floor of what was the new house 9 years ago. Neema lives on the first floor and so does currently the Australian researcher Susan Germein. During the first afternoon more people appeared to greet us: Hansi, David and of course a lot of girls who just wanted to say hello. It was a lovely reunion and we felt very welcome.

The evening prayer at 6.30 pm was as always an intense and beautiful experience with prayer and song. Afterwards, the topics of the day are discussed. This first evening there was a newspaper reading, where David provided information about the war in Gaza.

Afterwards there was dinner in the dining room, where we as guests get a bench, table and spoon. We are not able to sit cross-legged on the floor and eat with our fingers. The food is tasty and spicy! We don't recall spice being used 9 years ago.

Many girls wanted to say good night, and it was nice; some also just wanted to hug. You can feel that they like having guests.

The next day, Radha came to visit us on our balcony. She and Kanti live in the old ashram. Radha remembered Marie and her visits to Denmark, including the many meetings with Lone and all the others she has known from Denmark. Unfortunately, some of these are no more. Radha has just turned 90, and she says about herself that she has grown old and her memory is not that good, but this is not how we experienced it. She is concerned with what is going on both locally and politically. She is admittedly no longer able to travel, but as she said "then the world must come to me".

The following Thursday, Neema had planned an excursion to make it possible for us to visit some of the villages in the Lodh valley, having meetings with the women from the water committees and visit some of the new village libraries. Off in a car with Ane, Anne, Ruth and Neema in the backseat and Susan in the front seat. A little southwest of the town of Someswhar is a small shop with an attached residence, where Maja Verma lives. We received a festive and colorful welcome.



In addition to Maja, Mera was present; she is a good friend of Neema, old L A student and one of the many women with whom Neema collaborates.

Off we went up to the village; we followed the farmers' narrow and sometimes rather rough and steep paths, but unlike the local women we did not carry heavy loads on our heads. We just carried a bottle of water! We met with the forewoman of the water committee, Basanti, and some of the other women. The idea behind the water projects is to restore the traditional springs. Ponds have been dug to collect the surface water and canals for drainage; we also saw the planting that has helped to hold the water.

It is a very useful and important project; during the dry periods there is a shortage of water. Lakshmi Ashram has been a partner in initiating and helping to carry out the work. Modi, on the other hand, has made sure to set up a water tap in the village, but..... it doesn't work! There is no water in it!! There is a newly built water tank in the area, which can hold 18,000 liters. It ensures that the collected water is stored and can be distributed as needed. It was built by local labor and it was clear that the women were very proud of it.

Then it was time to see libraries. There is a small school in Lodh. In the house next door we saw one of the newly started village libraries. There is a cabinet for the books with various books on the shelves. And it works; children and adults come to borrow books. David ensures that the libraries are supplied with books. The library is looked after by Hama, who lives in the house with her husband. In another village we saw a slightly larger library; it was located in a basement and the walls of the staircase descent were painted pink. Beautiful and festive. Here the book collection was slightly larger, and a lot of lending is going on. Mera looks after the library, and it also functions as a meeting place, like the others, where children and adults can meet, have a chat and the children can make drawings.



The libraries are a L A project, and according to Radha it is a very important work for many reasons (See Sanchar no 136); children benefit from spending time reading instead of spending time on the omnipresent smartphones. Everybody seems to have one, and even in the smallest shop on the road you can pay with the Indian counterpart to the Danish system "Mobilepay". Another idea behind the local libraries is to create good contacts with the children's parents and families and at the same time ensure that the children can identify with their village.

It was an exciting day where we got a vivid impression of Lakshmi Ashram's local projects. We are very grateful that Neema and the other women took the time to be together with us. We had such a nice day; we laughed, drank chai, ate lunch and talked for hours.

Our last night in the ashram was cheerful. After prayer and reading, there was a performance. We



performed with two verses of the old danish song "Marken er mejet", and Ane explained that the song tells a story about the harvest and how the grain is gathered and then afterwards a harvest festival is held. The subsequent applause was great! Susan contributed with the song "Imagine". She had translated it into Hindi and made a poster with the English text.

Both young and older students performed, and one girl danced a solo dance; a very charming and expressive dance to music from an iPhone.



In the beautiful final number, the 8 oldest students danced a dance where the rhythm was set by drumsticks. Each dancer had two sticks that they beated against each other during this rhythmic dance with many different steps and variations.



We did not experience the life in the Ashram as particularly different from 9 years ago; the basic idea itself is preserved, and the traditions of mixing the spiritual and the practical work are unchanged. The residents of this small collective community are together making their everyday work; everyone contributes, and at the same time the ashram is connected to the surrounding local community and participates in projects that improve the conditions of the people in the villages. Those were good days for us Danes; we experienced to be so heartily welcomed and we benefited from the great hospitality. It is clear to us that both the young ones and the older ones find it valuable keeping in touch with the Danish friends of Lakshmi Ashram. Let's hope it can continue.

*This text is written by Ane and Anne*

## **Suryoday and Vijay – a Longstanding Ashram Tradition**

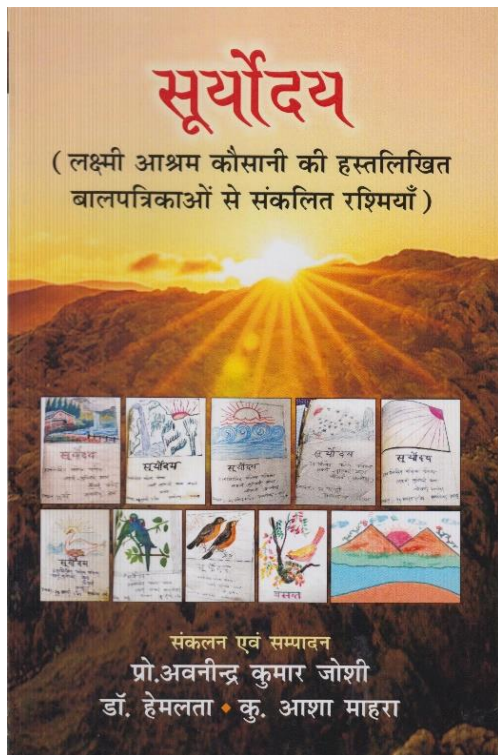
### **Davidbhai**

'Suryoday' and 'Vijay' are two handwritten magazines produced by the ashram students and workers. While the students of class XI-XII and workers contribute to 'Suryoday', all the younger children contribute to 'Vijay'. The meaning of Suryoday is Sunrise, while Vijay means Victory. These two handwritten magazines allow the students and workers to express themselves freely on any subject whatsoever, in prose or verse, and they also contribute pictures/paintings as well. Each issue has a

specific editor, while one or more of the students take responsibility for producing the front and back covers.

The tradition of 'Suryoday' goes back to 1950, and we still have the old issues in the office, all having been bound at some time. They are a veritable treasure trove of articles. There are many articles written by Sarala Behn, the founder of Lakshmi Ashram, which provide an interesting insight into her thinking and philosophy of life. There are also a good number of articles written by Radha Didi and Kanti Didi when they were young workers with Sarala Behn.

I had always been keen that some researcher might take up the challenge of working on the articles of Sarala Behn, so we were very pleased when Dr. Sunanda Mukherjee contacted us. In her e-mail on November 2019 she wrote,



“Dear Madam/Sir

I, Dr. Sunanda Mukherjee, Associate Professor of English, Kidderpore College (University of Calcutta), have been researching Sarala Behn and Mahatma Gandhi for the past few years. I have found Sarala's Vyavharik Vedanta (and its English translation by David Hopkins), and other writings fascinating and extremely contemporaneous in today's divisive and fretful world. However, while working, I have strongly felt that Sarala Behn's life and work have not received adequate attention. I am interested in more research on Sarala and would like to know if any of her letters/ diaries/ journals are available. I would also like to know whether any biographical work on Sarala exists.”

Dr. Sunanda Mukherjee and her husband, Rajiv, were eventually able to visit Lakshmi Ashram in May 2022 and documented all the articles by Sarala Behn that were in the bound copies of 'Suryoday'.

This work of highlighting the contents of 'Suryoday' was taken a step further when in July 2022 Professor Avনীन्द्र Kumar Joshi promised to produce a book containing a selection of contributions from 1950-1960 to 'Suryoday'. He was true to his word and by the beginning of 2023 it was ready in the press. He had done an excellent task in selecting a good range of articles from 'Suryoday' to present in book form, including a good number by Sarala Behn herself. In my introduction to the book I had concluded in writing. “Professor Joshi's selfless efforts to bring these unknown writings to a larger audience will be amply rewarded if you, the reader, find that these essays and poems truly bring alive for you the creative energy within these students of Lakshmi Ashram, which had been so diligently nurtured by Sarala Behn.”

As you will see from the contributions by our students to Sanchar 146, the tradition of writing for 'Suryoday' and 'Vijay' is still very much alive even today.



## My Love for the Cows

Soniya Almiya - Class XI

One day I was going from the hostel courtyard towards the gaushala, where our lovely cows live, each with an individual name, for example Lakshmi, Bindu, Manju, Shambu, Shyama etc. all of whom I love very much, and when I come in front of them they lovingly moo on seeing me. Saraswati Didi, who is responsible for the gaushala, every day goes to them and feeds them fresh grass. I really enjoy serving the cows. The cows maybe cannot express themselves, however we understand the language of their lowing. There are four cows in the ashram gaushala, and four calves.

Whenever I look in their eyes full of love then it seems that seeing us they wish to say something to us. Some of the cows in our gaushala are somewhat restless, while others are very quiet. I want to tell you a little about the cows in our gaushala.



**Lakshmi:** To begin with I will tell you about Lakshmi. If you have looked attentively you will have observed that Lakshmi is a little restless, yet I really like her lowing. When I release her from where she has been tied up then she runs really fast and shakes her tale vigorously. Not only that but she has one habit that everyone likes, that she lets each and every one to open the rope about her neck. But I do not like it that she is always the last to be untied from the cattle shed. When all the other cows have gone to the forest, only then is she let free to come outside. She does not go to the forest for she does not have the habit. Ever since she came to our gaushala she has never gone to the forest.

**Saraswati:** I cannot say that I really like Saraswati cow, and all of you will understand why I feel that way about Saraswati, for she comes to hit me! I do not go close to her, and if I do go close then she starts to shake her head. Of all the cows she is the most restless. When she is eating the waste food

from the kitchen then she turns the bucket upside down! But I must add that I love all the cows – so that’s the story of Saraswati!

**Manju:** Let’s now talk about Manju. Wherever Manju is you will hear the sound of a bell – ‘Tan Tan’. All of you will understand why this is – it’s because Saraswati Didi has tied a bell around her neck. Whenever I hear the sound of a bell in the gaushala, then I know that Manju is around. I am always somewhat frightened of Manju, for she also comes towards me ready to hit me. In my eyes Manju is different from the other cows for she is somewhat taller, and she is always very quick in eating her food. Just as humans can be responsible, so too can cows such as our Manju is. She takes all the other cows to the forest and later on brings them all safely back. She goes in the lead and all the other cows follow her. Manju has got very long horns, and when I see her horns this too frightens me. So that is all I have to say about Manju!

**Bindu:** Bindu is well built, a little fat maybe. She does not shake her head, but certainly is always ready to hit one with her hooves. I never go close to Bindu. If Bindu is giving milk, then before milking her we have to bind her legs together. Only then can we milk her. Another trait of hers is that when she is eating the waste food from the bucket she puts her whole head inside the bucket, then all the waste food gets stuck on her face and she really looks funny, just like a cartoon! I really like Bindu – that’s her story.

**Shambhu:** Let us now talk about Shambhu. He is by far the biggest member of our gaushala, takes care of all the cows. However what can we do, he is getting old now. Even his hair is turning white, but never mind – so long as he is given plenty to eat and drink all is fine. He gets more fodder to eat than any of the cows. If he was not in the habit of hitting people then he would go to the forest as well. However he remains tied up all day.

Now I will tell you about the cows that we have at home in my village of Dauni. My mother raises cows. However when they are let loose to go to the forest, to begin with they do not make a move and then one has to give them a push to send them on their way. Then late in the day they do not return from the forest, who knows whether they are lost! Now we are rising calves – who knows whether, when they are big and start to go to the forest, they will return or not. My younger brother loves the cows very much.

So that is all that I have to say about our cows at home! Raising cows is a very virtuous act, and it is said that cows are the home of thirty three crore gods and goddesses. Our ancestors used to say that we ought to touch the feet of the cows both morning and evening, and by doing so all our troubles would be removed, and that we would always be positive in our thinking. We get an amazing energy from serving the cows. Then again our homes are purified by gomutra (cow urine), and it finds a special place in traditional healing as a medicine. Likewise a cow’s gobar (cow dung) is used in numerous ways, especially in plastering the walls. It is widely believed that the house remains pure by plastering the walls with gobar. I have not only heard this, but have seen my mother practice this. However I have not seen this practiced in other homes in the village, for now most homes are made of cement, and gobar is no longer used to plaster the walls, as was the practice in the traditional



stone built houses. These days people are not even ready to touch gohar! However we must not become like this, but rather must continue to remain attached to it.

## 10th Women's Festival (Mahila Mahotsav)

Navjot Kaur – Class X (Navjot – second from right in the photo)

I had been waiting for far too long for the opportunity to go on a study tour. However finally our programme was arranged and that was a really fine day when we had the opportunity to experience Gigare village in Salt development block of Almora district. Now I will recount to you our experiences of Paisiya, where on Sunday 26 November the Women's festival (Mahila Mahotsav) took place.

That Sunday morning all of us got up bright and early and then sat together for morning prayers. After our prayers were over we lent a hand in preparing the breakfast. At ten o'clock we were all ready to set off for Paisiya. All the others set off by car, while I went with Vikram Bhai on his motorcycle. I had thought that we would all go on foot, but when I found out that Paisiya was eight kilometres away, then I was struck dumb. My stomach was turning over and I started crying, for I always feel travel-sick when travelling by car. Then Vikram Bhai said to me, "Don't cry, you'll go with me on my bike." Then I was very happy. It was my first opportunity to go on a motor bicycle in the hills, previously I had always had to go by car, and as a result could not enjoy looking at the rich, lush valleys. Today though I was going to have the chance! Riding on the bike the wind felt very strong, thus I took great care to shield my ears, so that I did not suffer from the cold. On the way from time to time we met women who were going to the Mahila Mahotsav in Paisiya, and Vikram Bhai was telling them all to go by bus.



Eventually we reached the Inter College in Paisiya. I saw that a very large number of women had gathered, many wearing traditional hill dress. Then I began to look for my class fellows, and going just a little ahead met them all. Then the programme of the Mahila Mahotsav began. The entire



programme was being organised by the Rachnatmak Mahila Manch (Constructive Women's Forum). The programme commenced with the women singing a Song of Welcome. Following this opening song, various groups of women within the Forum presented their individual programmes. The women were presenting the entire programme with a great sense of self-confidence. Those of us students from Lakshmi Ashram presented a play, whose title was 'Pahli Roti' meaning the first chapatti. Our play had such an impact on the audience that many of them were emotionally overwhelmed and began crying, for this play presented the Truth about the present time. The ongoing social changes mean that the younger generation make no effort to relate to their past.

The Rachnatmak Mahila Manch every year select a specific theme for their Festival, and the subject this year was 'Play is Essential in Women's Lives'. All the women present enthusiastically participated in all the games organised. One was the challenge of running with a spoon in ones mouth balancing a small lemon on it, (rather like an egg and spoon race) but there were many other games, including a three legged race. Looking at how eagerly the women were participating, it seemed as if they were reliving their childhood days! Some women were initially a little hesitant in joining in the games, but when then saw how the others were so enthusiastically taking part, then they too lost their shyness and came onto the playing field!

Truly if slowly the women come together in local groups where they openly discuss matters one with the other, then very quickly the women will come forward in society. If such a strong women's group can be formed in a small village in a remote part of Uttarakhand, then our Uttarakhand can help to change the entire nation.

The meeting of the Rachnatmak Mahila Manch concluded with a traditional Uttarakhand circular dance known as a Jhora, (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CfmLDqxy-0>) and then all the women started heading back towards their homes. We too were ready to return to Gigare village when suddenly the chairperson of the Rachnatmak Mahila Manch, Sunita Devi, came to meet us, something we all enjoyed very much. She expressed in no uncertain terms how much she liked our play. When I met her, then a number of questions were arising in my mind, but because of a lack of time I could not say very much, even so I did find the time to ask her one or two questions. One was whether her family offered her their support or did they seek to prevent her being involved in such activities. In reply she emphasised that every one of her family encouraged her to go further, something that I was very pleased to hear.

It was now getting late for us to leave. All of my fellow classmates went back by car, while I went back on the motorbike. While returning, then I observed how quiet the entire route was, and found myself thinking that, unlike in the towns, here there was far less pollution and the smell of car exhaust fumes, neither were there traffic jams. In this pure air I enjoyed very much going from Gigare to Paisiya and returning from there.

How fortunate I was that I had the opportunity to participate in this study tour. This journey will ever live on in my memory. I express my heartfelt thanks to the ashram for giving all of us the opportunity to take part in this study tour, and to be able to see for myself the respect that these village women enjoyed, that they were in every way equal to their menfolk. They are taking part in each and every programme, advancing all the way, something that I was very pleased to see. This four-day study tour was very interesting and enlightening.

# FRIENDS OF LAKSHMI ASHRAM

## STATEMENT OF ACCOUNTS 2023

### ORDINARY PROFIT AND LOSS ACCOUNT

#### Income

Contributions received	65.290,90 DKK
Subscription: 31 members à 75 DDK	2.325,00 DKK
<b>Total income</b>	<b>67.615,90 DKK</b>

#### Expenses

Administration	1.146,00 DKK
Paid to Lakshmi Ashram	325.031,99 DKK
<b>Total expenses</b>	<b>326.177,99 DKK</b>

Net result of ordinary account	<b>-258.562,09 DKK</b>
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### BALANCE SHEET at 31.12.2023

#### Assets

Total bank deposits – account no: 3141861	<b>136.767,60 DKK</b>
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#### Liabilities

Ordinary net capital, beginning 2023	395.329,69 DKK
Net result	-258.562,09 DKK
<b>Net capital, end 2023</b>	<b>136.767,60 DKK</b>

Albertslund, March 2024

Lone Poulsen

In December 2021 we received a rather big amount from the inheritance after Marie Thoege. Now the last amount has been transferred.