

Report of the Vidya Ashram Samiti (Board of Trustees) Meeting

Saturday, January 20, 2018

Lokavidya Vedike Office

Flat No. 102, 47-Sheshanivas, 1st Main, Thyagaraj Nagar, Basavanagudi, Bengaluru

Members Present : J.K. Suresh, Amit Basole, GSR Krishnan, (Bengaluru), B. Krishnarajulu, T. Narayan Rao, Naresh Sharma (Hyderabad), Girish Sahasrabudhe (Nagpur), Praval Singh, Premlata Singh, Vinod Kumar, Mohammad Aleem, Laxman Prasad, Chitra Sahasrabudhey, Sunil Sahasrabudhey (Varanasi).

Invited and Present : Sunil Chhabda (Valsad, Gujarat), Sanjeev Daji, Sumer Singh (Indore, Madhya Pradesh), M. Chokkalingam (Gram Seva Sangh, Bengaluru)

Chair : Sunil Sahasrabudhey

Agenda

#	Vidya Ashram Trust (Ashram Samiti) Meeting		Start Time	End Time
	20th January 2018; Venue: Lokavidya Vedike Office, Bengaluru			
	Agenda		Choice 1	
1	Report by the Coordinator on action taken on the decisions of the previous Trust Meeting		10:40	11:00
2	Overview of activities in last one year and projection for the coming year (from all Centers)		11:00	13:00
2.1	Bengaluru	J.K. Suresh		
2.2	Hyderabad	B. Krishnarajulu		
2.3	Chirala	Mohan Rao		
2.4	Nagpur	Girish		
2.5	Singrauli	Awdhesh		
2.6	Indore	Sanjeev		
2.7	Varanasi	Lakshman Prasad		
2.8	General	Chitra Sahasrabudhey		
Lunch Break: Interactions with Prasanna and Team				14:30
3	Future of Vidya Ashram	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Review of general national and international situation as the context of the functioning of Vidya Ashram. * Vidya Ashram thought, programs, place(s), management and all else that is relevant may be deliberated upon. * Whether we should like to make a committee to consider all this and place a proposal before the next Ashram Samiti meeting. 		15:30

4	Virtual Presence	Presence of Lokavidya Movement on the Internet. Those who are doing or propose to do anything related to this may come prepared.		16:30
5	Finances	Financial situation, mobilization of finances and presentation of accounts.		17:00
6	Any other matter			17:30

Proceedings (portions in **bold face** relate to decisions)

The meeting took place at the place of Lokavidya Vedike in Thyagaraja Nagar, Basavangudi, Bengaluru. It was chaired by Sunil Sahasrabudhey, President, Vidya Ashram.

1. The meeting opened with a reference to a line in the Lokavidya Satsang (booklet) which called for returns for the work of Lokavidya holders to be commensurate with that for university degree holders. This expanded into a discussion on what the modern education system actually does. Does it impart knowledge or does it constitute a place for teaching new lifestyles and socialization in the context of the ways of the upper classes? This raised further questions about the employability of graduates - engineers and others – because, if the former is not the actual objective of education, it makes no sense to talk about employability and curse the education system or the so educated.

However the question of incomes stayed at the center of this discussion, and it was agreed upon that Naresh Sharma from Hyderabad (with assistance from others) should study the entire question of income from various angles (and in particular, how value is assigned to labor, skills, knowledge and lifestyle in determining wages) and come up with a report that will help Lokavidya Jan Andolan take the income question further.

At this point, it was clarified that asking for equal incomes for Lokavidya for which government initiative appears to be a must is only one strand of the knowledge movement that Vidya Ashram has attempted to shape in the name of Lokavidya Jana Andolan. Other strands are of equal importance, namely organizing Gyan Panchayats, Lokavidya Bazaar and taking the dialogue further on Lokavidya Swaraj, Lokavidya Kala and Lokavidya Darshan, and attempting a new interactive discourse between various domains of knowledge with Lokavidya on an equal standing. This is a process that is capable of producing a better understanding of the new dynamics in the world of knowledge and therefore offers new possibilities for knowledge intervention in the interests of equity and Social Justice.

2. The Ashram Samiti felt that in continuity with this discussion, it should take up the many points in item (3) of the agenda, namely the national and international situation and the future of the Vidya Ashram.

So the discussion moved to the question of what had changed since 2004 (the founding year of Vidya Ashram) that needs to be understood for us to move further today. Vidya Ashram was born and built itself in the context of social movements - Lokavidya Samaj movements against displacements, the farmers movement, World Social Forums, the European students movement, the Latin American movements in Bolivia, Ecuador and Venezuela, the international peasant

moment (Via Campesina), various mobilizations against globalization across the world, Arab Spring, the anti-corruption movement in India, etc. All of these provided the spaces in which Vidya Ashram associates participated and debated by physical presence as well as online with a focus on the knowledge interface that was becoming more and more apparent day by day. The instability in the world of knowledge created by the emergence of internet had given the idea of Lokavidya a great opportunity to press for an equal and dignified place in the world of knowledge and therefore a corresponding place for the bearers of Lokavidya as well. We had constantly argued in these movements to shift the idiom of discourse to a more knowledge oriented terminology, but this met only with partial success. However, these conditions have drastically changed in the last 3-4 years. What we are witnessing today in place of social movements is a huge reaction (or response). There is a so-called Alt-Right wave across Europe, America, India and other places. There is an open clash between the proponents of this new wave and those who were at the helm of affairs earlier (that is post World War 2 for all these 70 + years). Among other things, this clash has raised fundamental questions pertaining to what truth is. The Alt-Right is charged with a position called Post-Truth which according to the old school is not truth because it is not based on evidence and reason and takes recourse to emotions and similar human dispositions.

As a knowledge movement, this development ought to interest us immensely. We would like to address the question of truth from a Lokavidya perspective and also expect to be heard in spite of (and also because of) the dichotomous melee that has emerged around the question of truth. We have the chance now for a politico-ontic construction and elaboration of the Lokavidya standpoint. This is perhaps where the seeds or the roots of a new political imagination lie. The Samiti was of the opinion that we should continue this discussion amongst us to develop ideas that can harmonize with LJA and take it forward.

3. At this point, the question came up of reorganization of Vidya Ashram to suit our current state and reflect the advanced understanding. A committee chaired by Krishnarajulu had earlier suggested a structure based on regional coordinators etc. with autonomous functioning. However, it was felt that restructuring from the point of view of the idea of distribution may be looked at again. This because distribution in the sense of being spread out and connected without anyone or anything having a domineering position seems to be the new shape that the world of knowledge is taking. This is similar to the idea of Swaraj at which we have been for some time and which may provide the basis for further reflections on the idea of truth in the Lokavidya perspective. This demands that Vidya Ashram itself should be an example of what a distributed structure should look like; it also calls for a serious debate amongst us on whether the idea of distribution constitutes a new focus for organizations in economics, politics, knowledge domains et cetera for the higher goals of equity and Social Justice. **Naresh Sharma agreed to initiate discussion on this idea of distribution and come up with a proposal for reorganization of Vidya Ashram in collaboration with others.**
4. The meeting broke for lunch at this point and resumed with points (1) and (2) on the agenda. Chitraji reported on the happenings and some organisational problems faced last year at Vidya Ashram. Two main things were the passing away of Shri Rajit Singh and the misdeeds of Dilip Kumar which led to his posts being withdrawn. Members gave their suggestions on how the Sarnath campus should handle these issues.
 - Rajit Babu had passed away in Varanasi in a road accident on 12th February 2017, after the Ashram Samiti meeting in Nagpur. He was remembered for his integrity and

contribution to the building of Vidya Ashram by managing accounts and general affairs of the Ashram.

- **It was suggested and agreed upon that Dilip may be asked to give his resignation from the membership of Vidya Ashram Trust.**
- **It was also decided that accounts may be handled by hiring more persons and spending whatever is required for that.**

5. Various members from different places talked about the initiatives and the activities in those places.

Girish from Nagpur talked about the continued association with the farmers' movement in Maharashtra. LJA Nagpur has been partly successful in impressing upon them the need for raising the question of peasant household income being commensurate with that of a government employee. In addition a dialogue has been opened with Dalit leadership in Aurangabad during the Gyan Panchayat work that has been initiated there by Sanjeev.

Krishnarajulu from Hyderabad spoke about the LJA Hyderabad Publications, the periodical Lokavidya Prapancham and the booklets on Lokavidya Bazaar and Lokavidya Swaraj. These publications he said have given them new contacts in some district places. A team also visits rural bazaar location once a week for dialogue with people there.

Laxman Prasad from Varanasi spoke about the various activities of Vidya Ashram and LJA at Varanasi and other places in UP and Bihar. These related to presence and participation in the activities of Bharatiya Kisan Union and organization of Kisan-Karigar Panchayat in October every year. There is regular participation in the meetings and activities of Sajha Sanskriti Manch, a platform of most of the social activists in Varanasi. There is also a place in a village Salarpur about 5 km from Sarnath which is a place identified as Varanasi Gyan Panchayat. The gatherings there are held in collaboration with Shoshit Samaj Dal. A new publication series has been started in Hindi in the name of 'Swaraj Pustakmala'. The first booklet has the title 'Swadeshi Samaj aur Swadeshi Gyan'.

Sanjeev from Indore talked about the developments there particularly those relating to Kala Gyan Panchayat. For regularly attending this process Lokavidya Samanvay Samooh has activated its office in Sudama Nagar. He also talked in some detail about the programs that are being worked out to be taken up in the village Paladi and the city of Indore. He invited members for Kala Gyan Panchayats to be held in these places on 10th March 2018. He asked members to come forward and extend support to have one or two persons working on a regular basis for LJA in Indore.

Suresh talked about the Lokavidya Vedike initiative – the theoretical and practical activities that have been initiated in Bangalore under its aegis. He talked about the participation in the Zero-Tax Satyagraha for handmade products being organized under Gram Sewa Sangh (Prasanna's) leadership and how this Satyagraha may be seen as a fraternal movement from the LJA standpoint. He invited the members to take greater interest in this initiative from Bangalore in terms of writing more and finding time to spend in Bangalore, perhaps 3 days at a stretch or for a week, to focus the discussion both on larger issues and concrete tasks.

6. **It was reported (and the Ashram Samiti agreed) that Abhijit Mitra has offered to take charge of the Vidya Ashram website.**
7. The financial situation was reported. . The audit report for the assessment year 2017-18 was placed on the table and passed. It was reported that the collection has gone down. There were no new ideas on the question of mobilization of finances. The matter needs to be paid serious attention.

The members attending the meeting were amply thankful to Suresh for the comfortable arrangements of lodging and boarding.

The meeting concluded with a word of appreciation for all those who have contributed in various ways, and continue to do so, in building and the progress of Vidya Ashram.

Sunil Sahasrabudhey