

Vidya Ashram
Sa 10/82 Ashok Marg, Sarnath 221007

Minutes of Annual Meeting (Online Mode) of the Ashram Samiti
3.00-6.00 pm Sun 17 Mar and 4.00-6.00 pm, Tuesday, 19 March 2024

Members Present : Sunil Saharabudhey, Chitra Saharabudhey, Laxman Prasad, Mohammad Aleem, Ehsan Ali, Premlata Singh, Vinod Kumar Choube, B Krishnarajulu, J K Suresh, G Sivaramkrishnan, Abhijit Mitra, Naresh Sharma, Avinash Jha, Girish Saharabudhe, Vijay Jawandhia, Krishna Gandhi.

Members Absent : Amit Basole, Macharla Mohan Rao, Awdhesh Dwivedi, T. Narayan Rao, L K Kaul, Praval Singh.

The Invitation, the Agenda and other accompanying documents were sent by email to all except Mohammad Aleem and Ehsan Ali to whom these were hand-delivered. The Meeting adjourned at 6.00 pm on 17th March for want of completion of the Agenda was reconvened and continued on 19th March at 4.00 pm.

1. **Calling the meeting to order:** The Meeting was called to order and Sunil Saharabudhey was requested to take the Chair. The Meeting was then conducted by Girish as per the Agenda circulated earlier.
2. **Confirmation of new members of Vidya Ashram Samiti:** The Meeting confirmed and welcomed two new Members, Dr K R. Krishna Gandhi, and Shri Vijay Jawandhia, to the Trust. Gandhi briefly spoke on their behalf assuring full participation in the VA processes.
3. **A Brief Yearly Report of 2023-24 by Coordinator:** Chitra Saharabudhey presented the report, circulated earlier, of VA and LJA activities. Varanasi Gyan Panchayat and *Lokaneeti Samvad* programs have opened a dialogue with different sections of the Samaj. Last year VA activists interacted with and interviewed many members of the *lokavidya samaj* on their thoughts on social arrangements for production activities and governance. Chintan vartas at Darshan Akhada have addressed questions of social reconstruction through ideas like Begumpura, Kalyanpuri and Swaraj. Sur Sadhana has served to take these discussions and debates to larger audience. She mentioned the survey proposal by Suresh and GSR Krishnan being shaped at Bengluru, the VA Research Program being developed from Varanasi, the participation by VA in WSF 2024 Kathmandu, Gyan Yatras conducted by *Lokavidya Samanvay Samuh*, Indore, the Tuesday online meetings, and the new VA website as other important initiatives.

Naresh said that the work done under fellowships program is important and it should find a mention in the Report. Sunil said that fellowship program was based on the idea of “*Samajon ki kahani, samajon ki jubani*” and aimed at finding an inside perspective of the Lokavidya Samaj to address a global audience, different from one of either the anthropological variety, or the social scientific variety. There are no established ways of doing this and the Research Program being proposed is aimed precisely at charting such ways and working them.

4. **The Proposed research program from Vidya Ashram:** Talking about the Program Sunil said that it is aimed at understanding the dialectic between lokavidya and ordinary life. All our

discussions hitherto have had the same reference. The proposal is to explore if one can make a substantive progress in this investigation by excavation of *lokasmritis* through what may be called *Bahujan Gyan Samvad*. Complemented with written word, art and literature can such excavation be a serious tool to produce an understanding of the space where your past, politics, ways of life, philosophy, methods of governance etc. all converge?

Avinash suggested that the program may be discussed in Tuesday meetings. This was generally accepted. Sunil suggested that any finance mobilized for the Program may not be directly handled by VA, that many centre may be handling the proposed research activity, particularly if necessity of vernacular initiative is seriously understood. Krish suggested that the work of Dharampal and Sivaram Karanths work on *Yakshagan* should be good resource material for the research to be done. Laksman mentioned the debates in Varanasi around the idea of excavation of *lokasmriti*, as well as some of the work done a decade or so earlier around the concept of *vidyaloka*. He said that research done with this tool will definitely produce some outcome. Chitra ji recalled work done by Ravish Kumar of Delhi in the past to explore the inter-relation between *loka* and *shastra*. She suggested that we might add dynamic of relations (i) between the state, and (ii) between Nature and the bahujan samaj to lokavidya and ordinary life as objects of research.

- 5. Study of Lokavidya Samaj - The Rationale:** GSR Krishan talked about the Bengaluru initiative and its importance in understanding the changes in the last 70-80 years that have happened in the *lokavidya samaj* and our activity based on that. The procedure for the Study has been finalized and close to a hundred teachers have been contacted to implement the questionnaire-based survey in institutes where the students belong mostly to the Bahujan Samaj. That work should begin after May. In the other part of the Study planned to be completed by end of October, GSRK and Suresh and possibly a few more friends will be visiting villages and interviewing people. A large number of studies on post-independence Indian villages exist (Srinivas, Dubey, Beteille, etc., PhD studies). These will be explored too.

Abhijit suggested the PARI (P. Sainath) website as a resource. GSRK agreed and mentioned studies on farmer suicides etc., as well as many literary works (Kusum Nair's Blossoms in the Dust, etc.) as important source materials too. Krish suggested that the questionnaire may be translated into other regional languages so that similar work may be possible in other states / regions.

- 6. On line presence and VA Website:** Girish talked briefly of the Note circulated earlier dwelling on the two suggestions in the Note: (i) a new substantial page devoted to the Research Program pointing to all the material produced etc., and (ii) developing the website as a seriously multilingual portal, not just to increase its audience but aimed at developing new language and vocabulary capturing the ideas, the political imagination, etc. that we have been talking about as well as the outcome of the research being planned.

Gandhi suggested that we should include on our website links to material of interest to us elsewhere, or even link to another website. He cited example of DKS journal. Others may be requested to provide link to our website too. Naresh suggested incorporating page translators into the website. Many suggested adding audio-visual content to the website.

- 7. Programs (and publications):** Chitra ji talked about the four-fold program proposed for the next year under the heads: (i) LJA, (ii) Publications, (iii) Research Program, and

(iv) Social Media. Incomplete discussions centered on specific suggestions. The members were broadly agreed on the proposals.

Gandhi suggested more discussions on the book proposal, on compiling “*Samajon ki kahani samajon ki jubani*” stories and on Swaraj. Naresh said he is already working on a paper on *lokavidya, Swaraj and Gandhi*. Sunil suggested that we need to write on a broad variety of topics based on a broad set of positions and ideas as we have been doing earlier – but more extensively. hopefully to lead us to be self-critical to a degree that will help the research program too. GSRK talked of a need to think anew, give up some of our pet ideas, which is something we can do unlike political activists, and academics committed to some stream. He said we can generate some you tube content in the form of personal stories and discussion on our ideas. Vijay said we may explore the transition of the country from independent country of independent villages ... etc. as (Vinoba described it) to today’s independent country of dependent villages, to produce data and strong argument.

- 8. Finances, Audit and Accounts and Donations:** Sunil said that the annual expenditure last year was about 14Lakh. This FY (ending 31st Mar 2024) it is around 10Lakh. Remuneration to activists is low by any standards and some increase in donations will be welcome. This may be discussed sometime in one of our Weekly Meetings. The Audited Statement of Accounts circulated earlier was adopted.
- 9. The general political situation in the country and in the world, and lokavidya initiative.:** Speaking on this Krish drew attention to how, globally over, apparently accepted processes like general elections seem to have brought dictatorial, authoritarian forces, individuals, and parties into political power. It is not that the processes are vitiated in some manner with no sanction. The issue is how to question these forces and their actions? Apparently this is happening as there are no alternative visions of the future. He said that *sant-parampara* is the only basis for imagining a future society without the ills and injustice of the present order.
- 10. Any other matter and Concluding remarks by the Chair:** No matter other than those already covered above.
- 11. Concluding remarks by the Chair:** No concluding remarks were deemed necessary by the Chair.

(Sunil Sahasrabudhey)