

Dear Ahimsadhara,

Thanks for your correspondence re. Mangroves 40th anniversary on Easter Sunday. I have been unable to reply as my time has been short due to work commitments. I read your letter and while I am happy to see that there has been a start made on admitting the truth about the abuse of children at the ashram in Australia under Akhandananda, I believe the complete lack of care or consideration of the welfare of the children that came afterwards is now the major issue confronting Ashram administration .

This lack of consideration is continuing as far as I'm concerned, in that we are still blocked from commenting on the Mangrove Mountain Facebook page, which is both discriminatory and insulting.

In addition, the Ashram has only posted the parts of the weekend that look good to the public and not the sessions held to try and listen to the victims who were abused while living in the Ashram as children and to those affected by it. Would it not be a gesture of gratitude and respect to those who attended and participated to at least post a recognition of the day and its important role in the Ashram's unfolding story? It's disappointing that the Ashram admin continues to foster a culture of secrecy and is not giving a full and truthful representation of the present situation for all to see. It all seems to boil down to damage control as the Ashram tries to preserve their pristine image for marketing purposes.

Transparency is essential if SY wants to regain credibility with people, this is what is necessary now. The "Taskforce" members need to remember that unlike 30 years ago, their current responses are being scrutinised by the Royal Commission and the Ashram will not be able to repeat the same breach of ethical behaviour and neglect of duty of care that occurred those many years ago. The use of an intermediary from Real Justice as an outside source for information regarding appropriate response is a positive move, as I can't see that an objective view can be achieved among a group of Satyananda devotees that stand to lose much from the exposure of this scandal that was swept under the rug many years ago. I can also see that there are members of the Working Together team who really do have the best intentions for a satisfactory resolution, however, the choice of certain people to be part of this team does not sit well with me.

For instance, Haribodhananda, who, at the time when the abuse was exposed, travelled widely with another Swami named Omananda to gather information in order to discredit the victims of Akhandananda to help his defence when he went to trial (there are many people who will attest to the truth of this statement). This guy has no credibility as a person who may want a good outcome for the victims and is probably placed in the Working Together group to report back to the hierarchy of the organisation. I must also mention here that at the Easter day event he approached one of Akhandananda's victims to enquire whether she was speaking with other "ashram kids" on Facebook (without enquiring as to her wellbeing, without thanking her for making the effort to attend etc). Aside from being none of his business, and inappropriate, given the theme of the day, an apology would have been more in order than an interrogation. As one of the victims of Akhandananda, I will have absolutely nothing to do with this untrustworthy snake.

Another of your taskforce was heard to say that the girls brought it on themselves and it was just a small hiccup...wonder how she would feel if that were her child? The same victim mentioned above was also approached on the Easter day by another long term resident sanyassin who told her (again without thanking her for coming or expressing any sorrow at what she had been through), that she

(the swami) "is still terrified of being bullied by large groups of roaming children". I think her meaning is clear. **Blame the victims.**

So even though we have **always** known who we have had to contend with, maybe you also need to educate yourself as to just who you are working with and what the motives behind their **volunteer** appointments to the team may be.

In the period after we had all been conveniently removed from the ashram, as Haribodhananda and Omananda went about Australia questioning various people, Akhandananda sent another Swami who also supported him to murder people who were to give evidence against him in his trial. I lived together with one of the other victims at the time. She was a target of Akhandananda's order and had the swami carried out the order, with the method that was to have been employed, I would have been included as a victim, with my life also being endangered or lost. You can imagine the fear and distress that having these people creeping around and threatening us created, which stayed with us for years afterwards. Sounds like the script to a bad movie, but it's true and all documented.

There have also been three known suicides due to the devastating effect of the breakup of the Ashram and its aftermath.

It is a fact that Haribodhananda supported Akhandananda fiercely and add this to the fact that a person who was a **victim blamer** has remained in the Ashram, representing it as a senior Swami, speaks volumes about the attitude of the Ashram and of Satyananda and of their benign attitude towards the abuser and his supporters. I know that at the time a group of Swamis went to India and sought guidance from Satyananda, who said that Akhandananda was to be reinstated as director after dealing with his "personal problems" with the bill for his expensive defence apparently footed by the ashram.

The "Taskforce" also needs to take an honest look into the inaction and avoidance of the issue by the Guru Satyananda at the time as he conveniently went off wandering to escape from any attention being directed his way. Where is Niranjan? How come he remains silent like a coward? Although Satyananda is now dead, Niranjan still lives and is the guru who is responsible for the guidance of the organisation and therefore it is a **necessity** that he speaks on this issue. If it involved everybody praising him or giving him a donation I'm sure he'd be there with a smile on his face, but we don't even warrant a personal apology apparently. He's just hoping it'll all go away. These two "Gurus" are widely purported to be men of integrity and spirituality, but obviously this is not true. The lack of respect, commitment and interest in dealing with this situation from the leadership is appalling, so I suppose disdain and cowardly action is all we can expect from the followers of such people.

Are the "Old Guard" of the ashram really going to be forthcoming or completely truthful about their roles in their utter failure in their duty of care to the Ashrams children that began 30 years ago when being questioned by the Royal Commission? Some of these people were well aware of inappropriate behaviour. At the time, the administration showed themselves to be completely devoid of conscience or compassion for sexually, physically and mentally abused children that took place in their institution by their inaction. Now it has come back to bite both them and the Ashram. While for the victims it's been a long time coming, sadly, this will now affect a whole lot of people who have become involved in the Ashram since that time and are innocent of any wrongdoing. So I hope that

the emotions brought up by the upheaval this will cause in these peoples' lives will now be directed towards those who brought it upon them by not dealing with the abuse victims in a meaningful way at the time. Those who, instead of helping us got rid of us, then turned their backs and were glad to see us gone so they could continue with their nice spiritual life.

Meanwhile, I struggled to live as a 16 year old institutionalised young girl in a world that I really had no clue how to deal with or navigate. This led me to be in many situations that would have been very unlikely had I been allowed to complete my education as promised by the Ashram leader at the time. Not once has anybody from the ashram ever enquired as to my wellbeing, and only because we started to come out with our stories on Facebook has any kind of idea that there may be justice for us been possible to contemplate. If we had not spoken then, I doubt any of the processes now being put in place would have been willingly initiated by the powers that be in the Ashram. Out of sight, out of mind should be their motto, but not anymore.

So this is a brief description of my view of what's going on now and also how I have felt over the last 30 years. It's important that you understand why I and others will object to Haribodhanandas inclusion in any group that is supposed to have concern for our welfare. I also mistrust the Ashram hierarchy and don't believe that they will do anything but pay lip service while working behind the scenes for their own protection.

I recognise your personal willingness and commitment to try and find a meaningful way to address this issue and thank you for your sincerity, also that of YogaSandhan who was originally in communication with us. I am sure that it is a difficult road you find yourselves on...keep persevering with it. I wait with interest to see what develops from these initial steps. Regards,

APV

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