

FRIENDS OF LAKSHMI ASHRAM**Lone Poulsen, Praestehusene 6, 2620 Albertslund, DK Denmark****Telephone +45 43 96 13 71 – e-mail: lone-poulsen@comxnet.dk****Bank Account IBAN no: DK0330000003141861****Lakshmi Ashram's homepage: <http://lakshmiashram.dk>****NEWS FROM LAKSHMI ASHRAM
SANCHAR 111**

March 2011

Dear friends,

This time the newsletter brings:

- Sanchar 1 by Devi Puraskar and Radha Bhatt from June 1968
- New Light by Hansi Behn
- Studytour to Sunderdhunga Glacier by Santoshi Mankoti
- The accounts of 2010

We hold the yearly general meeting in Denmark on Sunday 3rd April 2011 at 2 pm.

Report of this meeting will be sent in the next Sanchar.

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 for a sponsorship, and others divide the amount during the year. Therefore we will put 75 kroner in the administration account the first time in the year, when we receive money from someone. This also applies if you send amounts that are not earmarked. So all will pay the same amount a year to be a member and receive the Sanchar. I assume one membership per household, club, society etc., unless otherwise instructed. The surplus from the administration account will of course be sent to Lakshmi Ashram.

Thank you for all the money for sponsorships and other contributions. Any amount of money will be received with pleasure. Contributions that are not earmarked are also very good. 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 – the IBAN account number can be seen on top of this letter.

The accounts for 2010 are attached, and regrettably we have got less money than the years before. Maybe it is because of the global crisis. I hope that 2011 will be a good economic year for Lakshmi Ashram. We use so little money for administration, and the money is sent directly from our bank to the Ashram's bank in Kausani, so no money will be lost – only bank charges.

Friends of Lakshmi Ashram can save money, if some of you would be satisfied just to receive a mail telling that you can read the Sanchar in the homepage. If you want to get the message in a mail instead of receiving a letter, then please send me your e-mail address to: ***lone-poulsen@comxnet.dk***
Thanks to the members who have accepted this.

Best wishes,

Lone Poulsen

FRIENDS OF LAKSHMI ASHRAM

STATEMENT OF ACCOUNTS 2010

ORDINARY PROFIT AND LOSS ACCOUNT

Income

Contributions received	92.426,87 DDK
Subscription: 73 members à 75 DDK	5.475,00 DDK
Interest and yield	170,04 DDK
Total income	98.071,91 DDK

Expenses

Administration	2.793,00 DDK
Paid to Lakshmi Ashram	106.147,96 DDK
Total expenses	108.940,96 DDK

Net result of ordinary account	- 10.869,05 DDK
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BALANCE SHEET at 31.12.2010

Assets

Danske Bank: Giro	3.742,62 DDK
Danske Bank: Danish Deposit	37.184,09 DDK
Total bank deposits	40.926,71 DDK

Liabilities

Ordinary net capital, beginning 2010	51.795,76 DDK
Net result	- 10.869,05 DDK
Net capital, end 2010	40.926,71 DDK

SECONDARY PROFIT AND LOSS ACCOUNT (the inheritance)

Income

Interest 2.070,11 kr. + 2.855,55 kr.	4.925,66 DDK
Net result of secondary account	4.925,66 DDK

BALANCE SHEET at 31.12.2010

Assets

Danske Bank	257.855,69 DDK
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Liabilities

Net capital, beginning 2010	252.930,03 DDK
Net result	4.925,66 DDK
Net capital, end 2010	257.855,69 DDK

Albertslund 28th February 2011

Lone Poulsen

The accounts have been audited.
Albertslund 28th February 2011

Claus Broskov Sorensen

SANCHAR 111

I got the idea to copy Sanchar no. 1 because of this Sanchar number III, so this is the very first newsletter from Lakshmi Ashram received on 27th May 1968 – more than forty years ago. Sanchar 1 is only found in Danish in the archives, so I translated it into English in 2007.

Lone Poulsen

First Newsletter – Sanchar 1 By Devi Puraskar and Radha Bhatt May 1968

Dear friends,

We are so happy to inform you that one of our great aims has been achieved at the beginning of this cooperation to promote international solidarity, confidence and understanding. The inspiration of this we (Radha and Devi) owe entirely to what we saw, learnt and shared with you during our journeys in Scandinavia.

We enjoyed the warmest hospitality in your homes and institutions. We received knowledge of and insight in the vitality of your organisations: This devoting work to improve and vitalize the human beings' lives – young and old –, the special attention and care that is given to handicapped and disabled people, and at last, but not at least, the great efforts to promote friendship especially among the younger people from different areas. We saw all over wonderful valleys and mountains, forests and rivers and the sea.

Today you have built modern cities, your industry flourish, and the trade is in full swing. Your countries enjoy wealth and guarantee security from the cradle to the grave.

Radha Bhatt visited different institutions and several families in the year of 1965-66 and Devi Puraskar in the year of 1966-67. During our stays and journeys you have kindly showed us your countrymen's social conditions and presented us to your interesting friends. However we still feel a need for living and during contact between our nations' people, although our nations have political connections through the governments and different sorts of help has been given by social, economic, commercial, cultural and educational organisations and Christian missionaries. But this is all on government level or is limited by their regulations and is too busy.

During our discussions with our friends in Denmark we realized the necessity of a connecting link, through which we can correspond and contact each other. We can exchange ideas and write about personal or social matters and declare the ideal development among our peoples. Then we can respect each other and achieve better understanding and share our ideals.

We are happy that our good friend Jens Svenstrup has agreed to function as a connection link for the "Sanchar" – a Sanskrit word for communication. We intend to write a letter every third month about our work and friends. We will be happy to receive your letters and will enjoy hearing about your work and ideas. We will write about our ideas and our work in the Ashram and our volunteer friends who work for humanity. If you are interested, you can write directly to our friends, and they can write directly to you. Until now we have told our friends about you and your countries. The following is a little about the institution that we are working for.

The Ashram:

Our Ashram is situated in the mountains at 6500 ft (about 1980 m) above sea level. We have a nice view of the beautiful snow-covered mountain peaks of the Himalaya. We are in all 42 members in the age of 7 to 30 years. Most of the girls come from different mountain areas. Our education system is based on Gandhi's ideology. We have one bull and twenty cows incl. calves and a piece

of land of 5 acres, where we grow vegetables to our big household. And we have nearly one hundred fruit trees, and we have planned to plant one hundred more this year.

We teach in spinning and weaving of woollen materials and in reading and writing. These are our three subjects of the education system, and we have a cosy familiar atmosphere in the classroom. The girls get books from the Ashram library, and they don't need to read the textbooks. This was a short description of our institution.

Here is a little of two of our friends, who can write to you in English, if you want it:

Kunjwal Bhai – age 36 years. He has dedicated his life to work for development of the rural population and has been working with this for 15 years. He has especially worked with education of grown-ups and general education and also with structural and other old problems in the villages. Now he is a member of Laxmi Ashram and is travelling all over the Himalaya for the Gramdan Movement (*All in the village work together. They own the land together and share the yield*). **Kanti Didi** is 30 years old. She is a wonderful children's teacher and has worked with us for several years. Just now she is away and is working for the Sarvodaya Movement. (*The Sarvodaya work is carried out by men and women, who help oppressed people by peaceful methods. Gandhi's aim was that there should be a Sarvodaya worker in every village*).

We would like to write about other friends in the next letter.

This is the first experiment. We don't think that our future letters must look like this first one. This letter is only meant as a preface. We will tell you about running events in the future, which is the real purpose of the "Sanchar".

Waiting for your answer,
Kindest regards,
Radha and Devi

A little about some of the mentioned persons:

Radha Bhatt is still going strong, and she is now the secretary of Gandhi Peace Foundation in Delhi. She is also a very important adviser for the Ashram workers.

Devi Puraskar married Radha's sister Devi Pandey. They moved to Bergen in Norway in 1970, but they had still close contact to the Ashram. Puraskar passed away several years ago, but Devi Pandey still lives in Bergen and is very active in an international kindergarten, which she started more than 25 years ago.

Kanti Didi is also Radha's sister, and she is still working enthusiastically in the Ashram.

Shri Kedar Singh Kunjwal had together with his wife a Sarvodaya institution to the south of Almora, in the village of Jainti. He passed away several years ago.

New Light

Hansi Behn

Hansi Behn wrote this essay for the December 2010 issue of the Ashram's handwritten magazine, "Suryodaya", and it reflects on the year that is just coming to an end.

27th December 2009 most of the children, teachers and workers took leave of the Ashram to spend their winter holidays at home. A few parents because they were not free earlier, did not arrive until the following day, so some children did not leave until then. All the



movement and noise and the spirit that fills the hostel when all the children are present, all that was suddenly absent and stillness was everywhere. A strange silence hung all around.

Actually there were still some of the Ashram family here, but they were so few that in the big rooms, in the huge dining hall and in the long courtyard of the ashram, just one or two people could be seen like little insects. However the regular daily programme continued. As there were so few of us the activities were restricted a little. For instance some areas were swept only every third day; every third or fourth day or sometimes only once a week we would go to gather firewood from the forest; we would mix in manure from the cattle shed for the biogas plant only once every few days; even the activities in the vegetable garden were scaled down. All around looked quiet and empty. Only one or two rooms in the hostel were open, while we only used a very small part of the dining hall for meals which made our work much easier.

Five students in class ten who were appearing in board examinations in March 2010 stayed during the holidays, so that they might prepare themselves for the coming exams. These children together shared the responsibility for all the activities. David, Pooran, Tara and Shobha took turns to take their classes. Tara took full responsibility for the kitchen, saving us from the cold by serving us delicious hot meals in an entertaining and cheerful spirit. Shobha took responsibility for the vegetable garden, ensuring that we got fresh green vegetables to eat every morning. Dan Singh, our gardener, helped in protecting the gardens from the marauding monkeys and langurs. As in almost every holiday Indira took care of the cows and calves in the cattle shed. During January the cotton in the old mattresses and quilts was freshly carded, and the mattresses and quilts were re-stitched so they were like new again. This work was long overdue and took a long time, however the results were well worth the effort.

Basanti Behn was very busy in the ongoing block-level three day meetings for women representatives of the local level Panchayati Raj institutions, and every evening she shared her experiences of these meetings with us. Meanwhile David kept a close eye on the computer and the office, while Pooran assumed the role of all-rounder.

For some years we had not savoured the taste of *pinalu* (Cocoyam) and *gaderi* (Taro) grown in our own garden. It was true that sometimes we remembered the harvest that we used to get from our garden, when baskets and small sacks were filled after digging the fields close to the old bathing area and alongside the house in the garden below the hostel. We would then dig pits in the dry fields immediately below the hostel buildings to bury the roots in, and then for a long time we would have the joy of eating them at supper as our evening vegetable. Last year we had thought that this year we must indeed buy some roots of *gaderi* and must make an effort to plant them out. So we had bought some roots from an old lady in nearby Lweshal village. We were very enthusiastic and were already greedy to eat the vegetable!

*Pinalu and gaderi are plants from the same family.
The photo is the gaderi.
Pinalu = Cocoyam Colocasia esculenta
Gaderi = Taro Colocasia Sp.*



It was 27th November. For the past month the Gandhian Studies course students had been studying with Rupal Behn from Kasturbagram, and that very afternoon at two o'clock it was arranged that each of the students was to make a personal presentation of all that she had learned with Rupal Behn. Each of them had already prepared their report. However, even though I recognized the importance of their programme, nevertheless I had chalked out a programme to plant out the *gaderi*, and taking Lalita, our young worker responsible for the garden, and Prakash, a local villager working in the ashram, with me, along with the old woman from Lweshal who had provided us with the *gaderi* roots, we dug big deep pits in one of our large fields and planted the *gaderi*. The following morning we covered the entire field with fine compost, so that the field was a joy for the eyes.

Once again the prospect of eating *gaderi* that we had grown ourselves was making me feel very pleased, and in my mind's eye I could see the not too distant day when the tender new leaves of the *gaderi* and *pinalu* would come forth. New buds and shoots would grow until a broad stem bearing the distinctive large leaves would develop in all its glory. All my hopes and expectations started to dance in time. My hopes were being reflected as it were in my heart. Fine big *gaderi* would develop, and in the coming autumn after the haymaking was over we would take the large *phawra* (digging tool) and the red-handled fork and dig up the *gaderi*, and then prepare its delicious tasty vegetable, and then would enjoy the sensation of its soft texture sliding down our throats as we ate it with warm rotis. What joy that would be! For months we would enjoy it, licking our lips in pleasure.

On the morning of 28th December 2009 when I got up, then I saw that the piles of compost at the sides of the fields had all been spread level, and in almost all the fields from the hostel up to the drinking water spring something had left its 'calling card'. "This is the work of wild pigs, Didi", Dan Singh told me.

The wild pigs had not left the pit of one *gaderi* untouched, but had ravaged each and every field. Dan Singh had inspected the entire garden. They had disturbed the field where onion seedlings had been planted out. Oh! What had befallen us? I was completely taken aback, because I had never before



seen the damage that wild pigs can do to fields. That morning all the girls here were completely taken aback. "Didi, look! They have also dug up Tara Didi's field", said Santoshi, while Meena shouted, "Look here below the cattle shed! They have dug up the side of the fields here also." Deepa and Champa called out, "They have pushed their snouts into the turmeric fields by the old bathing area too." Hema said, "You've seen nothing, in the fields close to our home the wild pigs eat the *gaderi*, potatoes and pumpkins also. They come in large groups and we have tried everything possible to kill them but without any success." We were all stunned. Lakshman Bhai, our Bihari carpenter, tried some means of frightening them away, but all proved useless.

I started to think to myself that even before I had had the chance to enjoy the sensation of the tasty *gaderi* going down my throat, the raw *gaderi* had gone down the pigs' throats! I had gained nothing – I had neither heard the experiences of Rupal Behn's students, nor had I tasted the

delicious *gaderi*! For just a brief moment I was also sad, but that was not the way out. For the whole of January the story of the wild pigs remained with us.

Whatever had happened, we happily passed the whole of the winter holidays, together enthusiastically sharing the responsibilities of daily life. These five students had participated responsibly in each and every activity, giving all their energy to whatever they were doing. With the end of the holidays at the beginning of February, the children and workers returned, and the daily round of activities began again in earnest. During 2010, besides my responsibilities in the office, I tried to participate fully in other activities. However I also took a few days holiday here and there, including fifteen days in July.

I was sometimes busy with Lalita and all the other girls in the garden. We planted out marrow seeds in one or two fields, while in others we planted out seedlings of tomatoes, aubergines and capsicums. In the heat of June we laboured to save the seedlings by giving them water as regularly as possible. The hard work of Lalita and Godavari, along with the children, bore fruit and until September and October we had the chance to enjoy eating all these vegetables. During the haymaking Parvati Kaira worked hard with the smaller children to prepare the garden to provide us with greens during the coming winter months.



This year we made good use of the hour put aside for our spinning class. Everyone took part enthusiastically in the spinning class and spun fine yarn to the best of their ability. We enjoyed trying to sing along gently to the music on the cassette player – traditional devotional songs, Kumauni melodies and rousing protest songs.

From time to time through the year came the various festivals that we give so much importance to in our Ashram life. We celebrated all these festivals in traditional style and with great enthusiasm. Everyone, big and small, participated wholeheartedly in these festivals – a very positive benefit for us all. The red and yellow colours of Holi, Lord Krishna's dalliance and dance with the herdgirls and the dazzling wick lamps of Deepawali taught us how we too could live our lives full of colour, love and light.

Through the regular bringing out of our handwritten magazines, 'Suryoday' and 'Vijay', all of us had the opportunity to express our feelings, our artistic abilities and our thoughts through prose, verse and pictures. During the afternoon school assembly we gained courage and inspiration from the articles in magazines that were read out to us, and also kept in touch with what was going on in the outside world through the news, good and bad, published in the local paper.

Some times we welcomed visitors from various parts of India and from other countries. We got inspiration from listening to what they had to tell us, and by having discussions with them. Through them we learned a great deal. During the year we also benefited from Radha Behn being in our midst, telling us of her travels in different corners of India, of important incidents of courage taking place in various parts of India that gave each of us personal strength.

The cold dry weather of January and February and the falling of the leaves in March from the Himalayan oaks taught us how to keep happy as we worked in the cold. In the spring the earth, decorated like a bride, showed us how to live a life full of hope. The extreme warmth of summer, with the heat of the round red sun drying up the water, taught us how to live with less water. Then

the fury of the monsoon rains gave us the strength to come close to those grief-stricken families who had suffered through this natural calamity and had lost their homes. The fortnight's haymaking gave us the strength and energy to work together as one.

One by one, classes of students during their study tours gained the courage to face all sorts of situations, experienced different ways of life, their varying geographical conditions and the difficulties that they faced. On their return they shared their experiences according to their ability.

From time to time during the various cultural programmes organised almost all the girls and workers participated, and through their performances we were given a fine glimpse of the artistic abilities inside all of them.

On the Kumauni festival of *Phool Deli* we enjoyed the play based on the new bride anxiously awaiting the gifts coming from her parents' home; at Shri Krishna Janmashtami the dance drama of the mischievousness of the young Krishna; on the occasion of Buddha Jayanti the play depicting the change in heart of the robber Unglimal; on the occasions of Gandhi Jayanti and the Ashram's founding day on 5 December – celebrated as Self-sufficiency Day, the presentation through short plays of incidents from the lives of Mahatma Gandhi and Sarala Behn respectively. All these different dramas reflected all sorts of cultures and traditions.

We also enjoyed the coming of new children into our family this year. From time to time we also enjoyed meeting old students and former workers. On 28th November Munni Bisht (Bora), came along with her husband and daughter to meet us. I felt so good to see her. Munni's situation during her childhood was quite different. Then she was usually rather sad. However the atmosphere of the ashram had made her a different Munni, strong and happy by the time she came to leave. After that she was fortunate in finding a fine life partner, and now she is living a very good life. If I recall those childhood days of Munni, then it seems how far away those days have been left behind us. What backgrounds do these children come from, where do they go on to? Her daughter is now 23 years old, taller than Munni. What an incredible change has come in her life. These days she lives in Mumbai, no other work outside her home. She has now lost the habits of the hills, living in a completely different world in the big city. What huge changes come about in our students' lives! When the time came for her to go Munni's eyes became filled with tears and she clung to me as she used to do when she was small. "Didi, how can I ever forget all of you and this place? Whatever I am today is thanks to here. During my time here I came to know my own strength, and I have come to understand how the time I spent here was very empowering."

I too gain strength from the children's talents, their academic achievements and their fine development – it dispels any feelings of despondency that might arise in my mind from time to time. In working hard with our well-organised daily schedule we give a strength and optimism to our Ashram family. Whatever we say one to the other is for the good of the ashram as a whole. If anyone of us says something to one of the children, then we should take it in the right spirit as being for the education of the child. We are living in this sacred place and all of us are continually learning. So we should live together as one, keeping a cheerful and positive outlook on life.

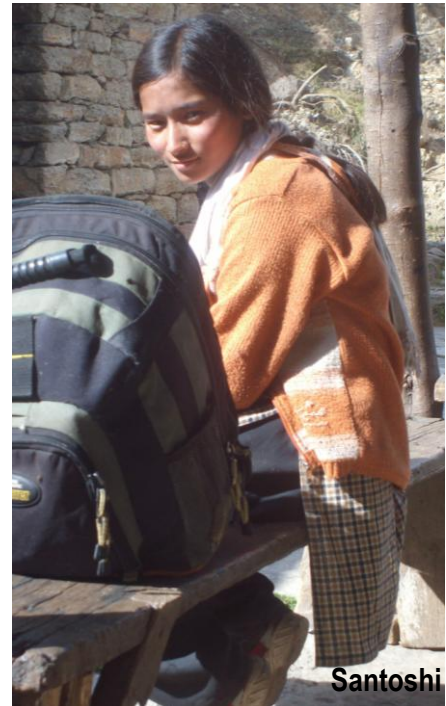
The year 2010 came bringing some messages for us in a number of ways. Some of these we achieved, while others remained incomplete. Whatsoever we have realised in 2010 we must incorporate into our lives and await the golden dawn of 2011, having faith that the New Year be full of joy and good fortune, bringing new encounters and sweet tidings.

So let us look forward to the new light of the first rays of the dawning of the New Year.

My Experiences on Study Tour

Santoshi Mankoti

This time I was lucky to have the opportunity of going to the Sunderdhunga Glacier on study tour, and all of us in class ten were very enthusiastic. We were imagining all sorts of things in our minds, and at the same time we were all very excited. We were going to be accompanied on our study tour by Neema Didi and Basant Bhai, also by Shanti Didi and Leonie Didi. We set off on 15th November in the local bus that was bound for Bharari and Saung. We were blessed with beautiful views of the snow capped Himalayas, making us feel even happier and all sorts of thoughts came to our minds. Down in the Katyur Valley the villagers had put large piles of compost on their fields, and the fields looked most enchanting. However there had been landslides in many places, causing many trees to be uprooted. With so many trees destroyed, Mother Earth looked extremely disfigured. Man has treated Mother Earth in the most appalling way. Sand and gravel have been excavated from the rivers, leaving deep pits in the river beds. Indiscriminate cutting of the trees has caused the soil to be washed down. Mother Earth has been so ill-treated, yet even so she has shown great forbearance. Yet because of Man's disrespect for Mother Earth, there have been so many landslides. Passing through such heartbreaking landscapes we arrived in Bageshwar, and set off at two o'clock from there for Kapkot, where we arrived at four o'clock. There we enjoyed very much being able to chat with the girls in the Kasturba Girls School, a residential school run by a local organisation, Gramin Utthan Samiti, who offered us accommodation for the night.



The next morning we set off by jeep towards Wachham, passing through a number of villages on the way – Chirabagar, Timlabagar, Parmati and Phoolbari, as far as Samgaon. Before we knew it we had reached the end of the road and, leaving the jeep, we walked on through Karmi village and headed towards Wachham. We enjoyed the walk very much. One of the workers of Gramin Utthan Samiti, Neema, was also accompanying us. We enjoyed very much talking to her along the way, and the time just flew by. We reached Wachham about four o'clock. There we were welcomed by Khima Didi who is working in a medicinal herbs project jointly run by Gramin Utthan Samiti and another organisation, Lok Chetana Manch. She was able to tell us a lot about the project.

The next day we set off for Jatoli. On our way to Jatoli we passed through fine forest until we reached the village of Reting, below which was the confluence of two rivers, the Pindar and the Sunderdhunga. We finally reached Jatoli at four in the afternoon, and met the residents of this village. Arrangements had been made for us to stay in the home of Roop Singh. Jatoli was a very beautiful village. We found time to walk around the whole village, and an elderly lady told us all about the village. Twenty two families live in Jatoli. They dress somewhat differently to how we do. It is situated in a beautiful setting and the snow-covered Himalayan peaks can be seen from the village. During the winter months there is a lot of snow. There is a primary school in Jatoli, but after that the children have to go a long way to attend High School. We were not able to understand her dialect, but even so we tried to understand what she was trying to put across to us. We enjoyed talking with her very much.

The following morning at a quarter to eight we set off for Kathailiya. Passing through the middle of the village we then started to climb steeply for some time. After the steep climb levelled

out, we found ourselves sometimes descending and sometimes climbing through dense forest. Then suddenly we emerged from the forest onto open pasture where all of us sat and rested. On our way we also saw a number of waterfalls. Before reaching Kathailiya it began to snow. Enjoying walking through the falling snow we eventually arrived at Roop Singh's shepherd hut in Kathailiya where we were to spend the night. As we reached the hut the Himalayan peaks were gleaming immediately in front of us. It seemed as if we only had to just go a little further on and we could touch the Himalayas! Wherever the ground was free of snow, it looked quite black. The views in the evening as night fell were a delight for the eyes. We lit a fire and warmed our hands and feet.

Spending the night in Kathailiya, at seven o'clock the next morning we set off for the Bailuni Bugyal. We found the path covered in snow. Taking good care to keep our balance we started to climb upwards. We enjoyed the eight kilometre uphill climb, having plenty of fun in the snow along the way. We could see a number of peaks from the Bailuni Bugyal (alpine pasture) including Nanda Khat, Maa ka Singar, Maiktoli and Pwalidwar. It was extremely cold; wherever we looked there was snow. With snow falling all around nothing but white could be seen. When the rays of the sun were touching the peaks of the Himalaya, the peaks looked as if they were shining with gold. Here high in the Himalaya we found a great difference between the trees found lower down and those found higher up. Those trees found at higher altitudes spread out close to the ground. At that height snow usually falls, which stops the trees from growing upwards. However lower down snow rarely falls and the trees grow upright and tall.

All of us enjoyed this tour immensely. This adventurous trek increased both our mental and physical strength. Such tours must continue to be organised in the future. I want to see all of the glaciers in Uttarakhand!

