

**FRIENDS OF LAKSHMI ASHRAM**

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## **NEWS FROM LAKSHMI ASHRAM SANCHAR 122**

November 2014

Dear friends,

Even if it is a bit early I want to wish you all a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year.

The accounts of this year will be very fine because of big donations from the Scouts in Farum and the Electrician Union in Copenhagen. But it could be very nice if some more private persons would like to support Lakshmi Ashram. They are absolutely still doing a very fine and important work.

Sanchar 122 brings the following articles:

- Gandhi Jayanti 2014 – Gandhi's Birthday by Kanti Bhatt
- The Desires and Thoughts of My Heart by Asha Mahra
- My Experiences by Tara Koranga
- Visiting Lakshmi Ashram by Lone Poulsen

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. Therefore we will put 75 kroner into the administration account the first time of 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 and receive the Sanchar.

We use very 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. The surplus from the administration account will of course be sent to Lakshmi Ashram.

Thank you for all the money. 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.

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: **[lone-poulsen@comxnet.dk](mailto:lone-poulsen@comxnet.dk)**

## SANCHAR 122

### Gandhi Jayanti 2014 – Gandhi's Birthday

Kanti Bhatt

Gandhi Jayanti on 2 October 2014 began with great enthusiasm. We had learned from the newspapers that this year Gandhi Jayanti was going to be celebrated with much more than the usual fervour. Our prime minister, Shri Narendra Modi, in taking up Gandhi's constructive programme of cleanliness, had set a new objective before the nation. Gandhi Jayanti is traditionally a government holiday, but it had been changed into a 'Day of Work' and given the form of 'Cleanliness Day', very important for a country like India. The prime minister himself picked up a broom and was seen sweeping, and the government workers were likewise inspired to sweep and clean their offices. This movement will also give impetus to the struggle for emancipation of the sweeper community, the '*bhangis*'.

This year, in the days running up to Gandhi Jayanti, there was a cleanliness campaign organised on one afternoon in Kausani, while on another afternoon there was a new initiative, art and speech competitions, organised among the students of the local schools. These two competitions were tough, however the zest and enthusiasm of the children makes any task easy. Most of our students, big and small, wanted to take part in the competitions. However the organisers had decided that just eight students from each school would participate in each of the competitions, thus we had to select who would take part.

Our students, besides doing all their daily work, along with the help of their teachers prepared their speeches and their art work, as well as their songs, dances and plays. I enjoyed very much preparing the small children. Payal and Palak very quickly memorized their speeches and spoke very clearly. In just two days Payal was reciting her speech very fluently, in a very clear and strong voice. Palak also made a lot of effort. First they recited their speeches before all the Ashram family in the evening meeting, and the encouraging clapping they received made them both even more enthusiastic.

Everyone in the ashram family was impatiently waiting for 2 October. Early in the morning everyone – the girls big and small, along with the teachers and workers, gathered at the auspicious time of dawn in the ashram courtyard for the *Prabhat Pheri* (Dawn March). With chants of "Mahatma Gandhi Amar Rahe", "Lal Bahadur Shastri Amar Rahe" the *Prabhat Pheri* set off, the children walking in line two by two.

Walking out of the ashram gate they sang a call to wake up at dawn. Everyone felt within themselves a fresh enthusiasm, a fresh joy, a new life. From the next bend they burst into the chorus of another call to wake up on this new dawn. From time to time the songs were punctuated by the chants of "Long Live Mother India", "Long Live Mahatma Gandhi", waking up those people in the homes that they were passing by.

This long line of these pupils of Sarala Behn and Radha Behn descending the winding footpath looked so beautiful that one could not take one's eyes off it. Singing they continued coming down the hillside, and finally reached the road in Kausani. Here the manager of the Anasakti Ashram, Shri Rajendra Mishra, and several others were waiting to welcome us. Here everyone started

singing the famous song, “*Dedi Hamen Ajadi Bina Kharag Bina Dhal*”, which inspires both those singing and listening towards Gandhi’s way of non-violence. The sounds echoed through the market. Everyone was awakened by the raising of chants at the crossroads. From there we started climbing up the winding road towards the Anasakti Ashram. We passed the bend by the Udyog Mandir and the Sarala Behn Museum, and then a second sharp bend took us in by the hotels past the District Board Bungalow, and we entered the courtyard of the Anasakti Ashram.



**Kanti Didi in front with the purple jersey**

Those taking part in the *Prabhat Pheri* ranged in age from little Khushbu and Chandra to Kanti Didi who is 79 years old. All of them, inspired by the understanding that ‘Gandhi is not an Individual but a Way of Thinking’, were moving forward step by step. There was a superb view of the Himalayan ranges from the Anasakti Ashram, while in the courtyard was a fine statue of Mahatma Gandhi and also of his ‘Three Monkeys’ who give us the teaching, “Do not see ill, do not hear ill, do not speak ill.”

Although Gandhi should be present in our hearts, yet simply by putting our feet on this ground made sacred by the touch of Gandhi’s feet a feeling was aroused within us that touched our very hearts. When one looked out across the Katyur Valley below and the high green hills, then Gandhi’s words rang true, “Kausani is the Switzerland of India”.

We entered the hall dedicated to the memory of Gandhi, where the entire floor had been covered with beautiful carpets. The walls were adorned with pictures of Gandhi’s life, which present his eternal message of Peace and Non-Violence to us. All the children sat quietly in lines on the floor, all the hall became filled with a prayer like atmosphere, as we waited for the sounds of prayer to begin. Then a sound came from one corner, “*Lead us from the Unreal to the Real*”. Everyone joined in unison, “*Lead us from darkness unto light*” and sang the long All Faiths prayer. The hall then reverberated with the sweet sound of Gandhi’s beloved hymn, “*Vaishnav Jan To Tene Kahiye*” and his much loved devotional song “*Ragupati Raghava*”. The hall was immersed in the spirit of Gandhi. In front was a very large portrait of Gandhi, making it feel as if he was here in person.

Meenakshi’s beautiful voice singing “*Aaya Dwar Tumhare*” truly touched the heart, with Suman’s sweet voice accompanying her making the devotional song all the more beautiful to the

ear as she sang the second line, “*Rama Aaya Dwar Tumhare*” – the atmosphere in the hall was wonderful. The sweet voices of the girls big and small increased the bliss of the prayers.

From eleven until twelve there was an essay competition in which students from various schools participated. Then from half past two in the afternoon a cultural programme commenced from a stage set up in the courtyard of the Anasakti Ashram beneath a large awning erected to keep off the sun. The atmosphere of Gandhi Jayanti was such that everyone was influenced by it. Gandhi was indeed for everyone – rich and poor, women and men, children and the elderly, those of each and every caste, of every country – all in all he was truly the Apostle of Mankind, and he was a true Servant of India.



At the end of the programme the prize-winners were declared. The chief guest, the commanding officer of the Signals Regiment unit in Kausani, inspired by the simplicity of our girls, was full of praise for them. This year our students received a good number of prizes, some receiving an award for coming first. The table below gives the details of the prizes received. Lakshmi Ashram’s cultural programme was also judged to be the best, classes ten and twelve presenting a play on Gandhi’s Salt March, while class eleven presented the traditional Gujarati Dadya Folk Dance.

Name	Class	Age	Competition	Place
Payal	4	10	Speech	First
Palak	5	11	“	Second
Diksha	8	14	“	First
Meenakshi	11	16	“	First
Manisha	9	15	Painting	Second
Diksha	8	14	Essay	First
Meera	5	11	“	First
Kusum	5	11	“	First

## The Desires and Thoughts of My Heart

### Asha Mahra

When I had passed my high school examinations in class ten, then my mother and father were not prepared to allow me to continue my studies. I thought that if I would not study further, then there would be nothing in my life because this is the first opportunity in my life. My life was passing away; if I was now to be careless then this life would not come back again and again. I thought, "What should I do?" For several days I was sunk deep in thought.



Manju Didi from my village gave me the idea of studying in Kasturba Mahila Utthan Mandal, Lakshmi Ashram in Kausani. I became very happy. Manju asked my father if I was going to continue to study or not. My father told her, "Daughter, how will I support her education for my condition is not good." Manju Didi said that she would help. I asked my father, then my father said, "Daughter, I am not able to educate you. Look at my condition." I replied, "But, Papa, how will I pass my life? Everywhere I am surrounded by difficulties."

I secretly continued to phone Manju Didi. I did not phone in front of anyone for my father had forbidden it. I said to my father, "Papa, please educate me. I will work hard and my efforts will bear fruit." However he continued to refuse. For seven days I refused to eat, for seven days I could not sleep. My parents placed food in front of me, but I told them my situation, that I would not eat until they took me to Lakshmi Ashram. My father said, "You have never been anywhere, what's come over you? I said, "Papa, why did you say that I would go with Manju Didi?" I told him that one day he would see the fruits of my efforts, that those who make an effort in life are never defeated. I also told my father that if he did not want to educate me, then how could he educate my brother. My father replied that we were both equal. I told him that Lakshmi Ashram would make my life.

One day Manju Didi arranged for me to speak to Radha Didi on the phone, and the next day I arranged that my father could speak to Radha Didi on the phone. Radha Didi told my father that he should send me to Lakshmi Ashram. My stubbornness brought me to Lakshmi Ashram. One day I thought that I would continue my studies and eventually become a headmistress in an Inter-college, that one day I would be able to help my mother and father to educate my brother so that he too would excel in life. My father was saying that if only he had enough money then he could whatever he wanted. I told him that everything would turn out fine.

I came to the ashram as a result of my own inner desire, and now am learning a great deal, much more than I could ever have learned at home. When I came here my father told me that I would find it very hard. I told him that the first day would be hard, but that from the second day things would become much easier. I am thinking that I came here through my stubbornness, I will learn to stand on my own two feet, then my parents and everyone else will be very happy. Then all the worries in my mind will go far away.

*I will stand on my own two feet!*



## My Experiences

### Tara Koranga

On 15 September 2014 at eleven o'clock in the morning, Pushpa and I set off for Kathgodam in the KMOU bus. We reached Kathgodam station at half past six in the evening, from where we continued our long journey by train. Enjoying the varied sights along the way the two of us arrived on 18 September at half past nine in the evening at Kanyakumari station, where Dr. Menon had come in person to receive us. We both felt very good to meet him, and we went along with him to the Vivekananda Kendra where arrangements for our board and lodging had been made.

Around nine o'clock in the morning on 19 September we went to the Vivekananda Rock for the formal inauguration of the five-day national youth camp. Those of us taking part in the youth camp, along with the camp organiser and teachers went by boat to the Vivekananda Rock. Reaching there I was imagining a number of things in my mind. It was my very first experience of seeing this sort of place situated in the sea. The Vivekananda Rock is situated off the southern tip of India close to Kanyakumari, where the Arabian Sea, the Bay of Bengal and the Indian Ocean meet. It was remarkable for its beauty and its cleanliness. Seeing this inspiring place brought a great sense of peace to the mind.



Puspa and Tara at the Southern tip of India

These days were very important for me. The theme of the camp was "My Dreams for India", a subject that appealed very much to me. For five days there were very interesting discussions on points such as - What do we think about India? What kind of India do we want to see in the future? I was able to express my own inner feelings. During the camp I had various experiences, just as:

- This was my first long journey.
- I had the opportunity to live for some days with new friends and in a new place.
- I came to know lifestyles, cuisine and languages different from my own state.
- I shared the ideas of people of my own age from other states.
- Listening to the conversations of the others taking part in the camp I became enthused to expand the circle of my own activities.
- I found answers to a number of questions arising in my mind.

All in all through this five day camp I got the inspiration as to what efforts I can personally make to make India even better. Now I must make a personal beginning. Now I have an



Participants in the workshop – organizers standing

interest to take part in learning about such stimulating subjects in the future. All the arrangements during the course of the youth camp were excellent.

I express my sincerest gratitude to all those who inspired me to take advantage of this opportunity. These few words are insufficient to express my feelings. They amount to no more than a small attempt!

## Visiting Lakshmi Ashram

### Lone Poulsen

On 13th October in the afternoon my family and I arrived in Lakshmi Ashram. Neema and David were standing down on the road in Kausani to welcome us. We should stay in the ashram for five days. It was a very lovely visit. We were welcomed and treated so warm-hearted and were really spoilt, even if everybody were very busy with the grass cutting. The guest minister Manju was fantastic in her care for us – so here we express our THANKS to her.

On the second day it started raining at lunch time, but all the weather experts could tell us that in October we would only see showers, so it would stop soon. It did not hold good this year! For one and a half day the rain was pouring down monotonously. David, who has made weather observations for many years, could not remember that this had happened before. As he said: "It is quite unusual, but not impossible!" He told us the next day that it had been raining like that all over the Northern part of India – from Delhi and up over the whole



The haystacks in the rain



Himalaya – “western disturbance” he called it. The rain stopped late in the evening, and it was starry, so the next morning the Himalayan peaks were very clear and beautiful. Luckily the rain had not spoilt the grass cutting.

On 16<sup>th</sup> October we celebrated Radha Didi’s birthday with kheer (sweet rice porridge) for dessert at the lunch, and the below photo was taken on that day. In the evening the girls entertained us after the meeting with beautiful songs, fine dances and a hilarious sketch. The famous stick dance was performed by the big girls, but even the small girls had learnt to dance a little with the sticks.

On the 18<sup>th</sup> we left the ashram – in a sad mood and we miss them all very much. It was a wonderful experience. THANK YOU SO MUCH!

On our way to Simkholi we visited the Sarala Behn Museum and the Library. We were impressed of both things. The Museum was very inspiring. The photos on the walls told the story and philosophy of Sarala Behn. I am sure that all the visitors here will leave the museum with many thoughts in their mind. The library was also very fine. They have really got a big collection of books, and it was all so nice and tidy. There is still work to do with the workshop in the building, but already now you could get an impression of it. No doubt Pooran Bhai has done a lot of work here. On the top floor B2R (Business to Rural) is housed. Here a lot of young people were taught to use computers. Maybe one day some of the Lakshmi Ashram girls will be educated her.



*The Lakshmi Ashram Family wishes all of you  
a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year!*

In the next newsletter Sanchar 123 we will bring a diary description from Marie Thogers visit in March in Lakshmi Ashram. It will be sent out before the general meeting and will be used as an introduction to the meeting.