

FRIENDS OF LAKSHMI ASHRAM

Lone Poulsen, Praestehusene 6, 2620 Albertslund, DK Denmark

Telephone +45 43961371 – e-mail: lone-poulsen@comxnet.dk

Bank Account IBAN no: DK033000003141861

Lakshmi Ashram's homepage: <http://lakshmiashram.dk>

**NEWS FROM LAKSHMI ASHRAM
SANCHAR 124**

August 2015

Dear friends,

Again there is news from Lakshmi Ashram. This Sanchar brings the following articles:

- A New Intake of Ashram Students by Hansi Behn
- Experiences by Neha Joshi
- My Experiences in taking the Sadhana Training Course by Kavita Shah
- My Experiences in Lakshmi Ashram – June 2015 by Julika Schultheiss (German)

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, we receive money from someone. This also applies if you send amounts that are not earmarked. So all will pay the same amount in subscription 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 is received with pleasure. Contributions that are not earmarked are also very welcome. 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***

SANCHAR 124

A New Intake of Ashram Students

Hansi Behn

April 2015 saw thirteen new students joining Lakshmi Ashram. All of these girls except one came from various districts in Kumaun – Almora, Bageshwar and Champawat. The exemption was Shailja, who has come from Jabalpur in Chhatisgarh, and has joined class IX.

Coming from so far away, and from such a totally different background and environment, in the beginning Shailja faced difficulties in adjusting, for the climate, food and living arrangements were so different from what she had been used to. Now though she is very happy, cheerfully living with her classmates and the older and younger girls. She is making efforts to understand and appreciate the way of life here, and to keep busy in the daily round of activities and work.



Of the thirteen new girls, one girl joined class X, three girls are in class IX, two in class VIII, three in class VI and four in class IV. All these new girls except Shailja have come from village backgrounds, but here they are learning to live in a large harmonious community – living, eating and sleeping together, and taking part in cultural programmes. All of them are very cheerful and are learning good habits. Although they have come from different places, yet on settling in here it seems as if they have all come from one home, so well do they get on together.

The small children are full of fun and laughter. They are keenly motivated to join in all the activities of the ashram, and do so very enthusiastically, only limited by their age and capabilities. Collecting firewood in the forest, watering the plants in the garden, participating in the early

morning cleaning – all this and more they have great fun in doing. They are also very adept at presenting cultural programmes. None of these children display any shyness or timidity.

The smaller girls especially are very keen to come to the front during the evening meeting, and report on the work that they have done that day, just as the older girls do. All these girls are really keen to enthusiastically join in each and every activity of the ashram community.

All these new girls, big and small alike, are now happily participating in all the daily activities, living so happily along with all the other girls as if they had no memory of home whatsoever. Throughout the day the ashram courtyard echoes with their joy, their play and their cheerful voices. It is as if a troop of monkeys was running and playing there!

I feel that we have to assist them in enjoying their childhood, providing them with an understanding environment, be alongside them in their all-round development, and give them such an environment that they maintain their joy and zest for living as they grow up to be well integrated individuals. We have a responsibility to interact in a spirit of love with these girls, so that they grow up to live responsible lives.

Experiences

Neha Joshi

Our High School board examinations were to begin from 11 March 2015. All of us classmates were keen to sit for the examinations. On the first day we were to take our Hindi examination. At half past eight after having had breakfast, going down between green fields and along narrow footpaths, leaving behind us countless delightful scenes, we continued on our way. We were to sit our High School examinations at the Government Inter-College in Wajyula, a village to the north of Kausani in Bageshwar District. This was a new place for us, and also for us students of class X the first time that we were to take formal exams. The school was situated in a dense grove of *deodar* (cedar) trees. Arriving at the school we stood in line and, in accordance with the rules for conducting the high school exams, we were each checked. Then we took our allocated seats and started solving the paper. In this way we took each of our exams in the following days.

We enjoyed very much answering the papers. During these days we did not feel any tension, and with an open mind gave our papers. We stayed some two kilometres away from the school with Pushpa Didi, who had at one time worked in the Ashram. Her home was surrounded by lush fields, the wheat and barley ready to ripen. Near to her home was a natural spring, from where clean, fresh water flowed, alongside which we spent most of our time.

After our exams were over, all of us went to spend our holidays at home. By then the wheat and barley was ready to harvest. During this time I had the opportunity to visit my maternal grandparents, and they took me to a number of new places on the Plains. I enjoyed very much seeing these new places and having the opportunity to wander here and there. I saw various things and learned about them. I saw such things as I had previously never seen, such as trains, tempos, parks, new kinds of temples and tall blocks of flats. In this way I enjoyably passed my holidays, and all of us returned to the ashram on 26 April.



Class XI

Back row: Bharathi, Jyotsana, Neha

Front row: Meena, Purnima

There was still a long time before we would receive our mark sheets, and a separate timetable was drawn up for us. During class time, rather than reading our textbooks, we learned various handicrafts, including embroidering tablecloths, which were all new for us. We all had a great interest in learning, and we grasped very well the techniques involved in making these new things. During this period we also made some decorative items, and had plenty of time to spend reading in the library. I read the short stories and also the novels of the famous Hindi writer, Premchand. We also tested our minds in solving some jigsaws, and made various charts depicting science related themes as well as inspiring sayings of great men. All in all we enjoyed these weeks very much.

On 26 May at one o'clock we were able to see our examination results on the Internet. As we waited there was a lot of tension in our minds. However, when we learned the results then we were overjoyed, for all six of us had done very well and got good numbers. How

pleased we all were! Then our regular lessons for class XI started. All of us are now putting our minds to our studies. Reading our new textbooks we are keen to learn more and we have a real interest in the new subjects.

My Experiences in taking the Sadhana Training Course

Kavita Shah

Any individual can only achieve something when a deep interest and a strong desire are awakened within – it is these two qualities that enable man to progress in life. A time came when I too became aware of this, and today I am very conscious of this.

I have lived in Lakshmi Ashram for the past twelve years. Since my personal understanding began to develop I have been shown such a path that will assist one greatly in building one's life on a firm footing.

For the past 23 years an educational programme on Gandhian Thought has been running in Lakshmi Ashram. This programme started in 1993, and since then many courses have been completed. Since I came to the ashram in 2004 I have seen a good number of courses. Since I was very small I have known about this course, and I had been waiting for the day when I would be old enough to take this course.



In 2014, after passing my class XII Intermediate Exams, I joined the Gandhian Thoughts course. I felt then that this course show me the way so that whatever I wanted to achieve in life the path to reach there would materialise. Until then I had only heard about this course, but now I would personally have the opportunity to experience it for myself.

I felt happy in my mind that in the coming eight months I would learn something new. Focusing all my joy I joined the Sadhana classes. This course lasts eight months and allows us to increase our understanding, gives us the strength to live our lives, and offers us an opportunity to truly know ourselves. I do not feel that before I joined this course I knew myself. Only after joining this course have I learned to understand myself. All of us have a basic level of understanding; however through joining this course I acquired a true understanding.

During this course we were not burdened by formal study. While we were studying in school I felt that we were too busy studying our textbooks to have much time to read other books. Joining this course I had the chance to learn and see a great deal. During this course we went to Dehradun to participate in a Vipassana meditation course. Through the practice of Vipassana our minds become balanced. To begin with our minds were not still, but as the days passed so our minds became more concentrated. During these ten days I came to know my breathing and, closing my eyes, travelled through my body, and came to be truly aware of my entire body. I feel that I have benefitted greatly through Vipassana.

Taking part in this course I gained new knowledge at the intellectual level. I came to know all about Gandhi. I learned a lot through reading Gandhi's autobiography. For him every instant presented opportunities to learn what he wanted, and he put this into practice. Reading his autobiography we learned exactly how Gandhi had lived his life. Throughout his life he never accepted defeat. Within him was a powerful steadfast sense of purpose. Truthfulness completely filled Gandhi. His life was one of Truth. Gandhi wanted Truth to be established in society. He had never accepted any specific God, for him Truth was God. Gandhi had established a number of ashrams in South Africa and in India. His main objective in opening these ashrams was that people would learn to live in harmony with Nature.

During the course we went for 42 days to Maharashtra, where we had the opportunity to see at first hand the Sevagram Ashram that Gandhi had founded.

Going to Wardha we had the chance to see a number of places, and while there we studied Gandhi's seminal book, "Hind Swaraj", and also learned about Gandhi's concepts of Basic Education. During these eight months my self-confidence and courage were awakened. I felt that I had benefitted a great deal. Before I was aware of it these eight months had passed. All in all I was really happy to have participated in this programme. Our Sadhana Course formally finished on 30 March. On this last day I came to fully understand and appreciate all that I had learned and what changes had come about in me.

My Experiences in Lakshmi Ashram – June 2015

Julika Schultheiss, age 29, from Germany

First of all, I want to mention that whatever I write, it will be from my very subjective perspective and only a small image of the whole picture that was generated within the last four months, which is of course a very limited time. Furthermore, my experiences have been so vast, that every try of writing about them will only reflect a small part.

I want to thank all the sisters and brothers in Lakshmi Ashram for giving me the possibility to live in their world for four months. It has been an intense and an enriching period in my life. To a certain extent, living a simple life in the nature and spending so much time outside made me feel more balanced. I realized how little you need to be happy in life - looking from a materialistic perspective.

My motivation to volunteer in Lakshmi Ashram on one hand was to learn something, to see and experience Indian culture, to learn a bit of Hindi and about Gandhian philosophy. On the other hand, I also had the expectation and the deep wish to contribute something, to do something useful, to share a part of knowledge or experience with the inhabitants of Lakshmi Ashram which could improve their system a small bit somehow.

I have been working as a school psychologist in Germany for the last four years and therefore seen many schools - systems - from inside. As a systemic psychologist, I found it interesting from a professional point of view, to look into a system like the Ashram, with very fixed rules and a long history. And also to think about the rules and development of this system. Each school has different implicit and explicit rules, and in my job I experienced that a lot depends on the principal and his way of leading the system. I feel deep gratitude that the inhabitants of Laxmi Ashram let me into their system and welcomed me as a sister.

I want to share my daily experiences. The life in the Ashram is organized through a very tight schedule, starting with the morning prayer and Yoga lessons at 6am. Thereafter, drinking tulsi tea together and about one hour of cleaning in groups. I usually cleaned with one of the groups. Sometimes I would try to do things in a different way than the girls were used to (e.g. collecting dust in a dustpan at once instead of shifting it from one step to the other and then sweep it all together again) and often would be corrected by them, hearing that my way was not right. At 8am having tasty breakfast sitting on the floor with folded legs. Afterwards “udyog”- working in the garden, carrying wood, cleaning the cowshed etc. for 90 minutes. I was surprised how hard the girls worked, carrying heavy loads on their heads. I often felt like a spoilt girl, as when I tried to work as hard as they did, I felt exhausted easily. Still, I tried to take part in the activities every day. Lunch was already at 11.30am, followed by a short time to rest and prayer at 1pm. Until 2pm, the girls were either spinning wool or learning new songs. From 2pm-5pm the girls were taught in the school.



Three times a week, the time after school was free for games and playing. The other days, the girls were working in the garden again, as they had their own class fields which they had to cultivate. At 7pm was evening prayer. Afterwards, Ashram assembly was taking place: Girls were reporting about their classes or group work, were showing dance and acting performances. Sometimes Didis (big sister; a woman who lives in Ashram) expressed their disappointments about things that haven't gone right during the day in a loud manner. With the girls sitting in rows and not being allowed to look backwards, where most of the complaining Didis were sitting, it felt like a strict hierarchy. Maybe changing the sitting position into a circle, which allows everyone to have eye contact could support equal conversation. We had dinner altogether afterwards, at about 7.45pm. For the girls, the day used to end with some time for homework or playing in their rooms.

I tried to be useful by teaching basic English in two classes. In the beginning, I visited one of the English lessons to get a first impression of how it was being taught. The teacher, one of the Didis, opened the book and every girl had to recite the poem on the first page. The poem was "twinkle, twinkle little star" and far too difficult for the girls to understand. After ten minutes, the teacher asked me to continue with the class and went away. An observation that led me to think that some of the Didis are



not qualified as teachers or social workers, but live in the Ashram because of some problems they face in their lives themselves. From my point of view, finding a safe place for their own is of higher priority for those, rather than giving something to the girls. That was my first English lesson and from that day on, I was highly motivated to create lessons that would be more fitting for the girls, awake their interest in the language and teach them basic conversation sentences that they could use when a visitor comes to the Ashram.

Minutes of the General Meeting on 15th March 2015 for Friends of Lakshmi Ashram

Chairman: Lone Poulsen. **Keeper of the minutes:** Ruth Sillemann.

The Committee's Report

Lone bids welcome and tells that the board has not met this year. Everything has gone off by email, telephone etc.

The newsletter – Sanchar - appear three times a year as usual, and Lone tells that now it is 25 years since she visited Lakshmi Ashram for the first time. She accompanied Marie Thoeger, who was going there to write an environmental book together with Radha, who just in those period stopped as the secretary of the ashram. 55 Sanchars have been edited since then, and she tells that she is very fond of the co-operation with David about this work.

In February this year Lone was in Vamdrup in Jutland to tell about Lakshmi Ashram for the staff of the Troldkaer School. All the staff goes to India in March 2015 and visits Lakshmi Ashram. They are all very committed and will surely get a lot out of this visit.

Lone tells about the Ashram that there is a steady number of workers and students. The daily life passes on quietly and calmly with classes, guests, meetings and courses and daily practical work. They have also had some visiting teachers. Friends of Lakshmi Ashram has unfortunately had to suspend the idea of supporting further education of the girls who leave Lakshmi Ashram because difficulty to get money or this purpose. It has been more difficult the latest yaers to get money from different people. The number of members in Friends of Lakshmi Ashram was 55 in 2014 (and 68 in 2013).

We see photos from the Ashram and enjoy the fine photos, which is from Lone's trip in 2014 together with Henning, Helle and Marie Raakaer Jensen, and there are also photos from Marie Thoeger, Anne and Ane's trip last year.

The Account and the Subscription

The account was approved. The subscription is still 75 DDK (about 10 Euro) yearly per member. Lone mentions that the administration expenses are low because of free copying.

Proposals Received: No proposals were received.

Elections

The committee was re-elected and consists of: Lone Poulsen (chairman), Hanne Stenager, Lene Rasmussen and Ruth Sillemann. Substitute: Peter Kristensen.

Auditor and substitute were also re-elected: Claus Broskov Soerensen and David W. David.