

FRIENDS OF LAKSHMI ASHRAM

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**NEWS FROM LAKSHMI ASHRAM
SANCHAR 133**

August 2018

Dear friends,

We have had a very dry summer this year. It has really been a problem in Europe. Just now we have had a little rain.

Here is news again from Lakshmi Ashram. This Sanchar brings the following articles:

- Some Personal Reflections on Education in Lakshmi Ashram by Meenakshi Mehra
- How I came to Lakshmi Ashram by Shweta Balsuni
- The Ashram Gardens - A Living Laboratory by Tara Koranga
- Minutes of the General Meeting on 22nd April 2018 for Friends of Lakshmi Ashram

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. The money is transferred 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 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 – see the 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 133

Some Personal Reflections on Education in Lakshmi Ashram

Meenakshi Mehra

Lakshmi Ashram is maybe the one and only school in the Indian state of Uttarakhand that is totally different from all the other government and private schools. The students studying in Lakshmi Ashram have the ability to express their thoughts, and are gifted with powers of thinking and understanding, quite different from the students of other schools. Here emphasis is placed on the all-round development of the students. In Lakshmi Ashram the education imparted aims at the threefold development of the students – intellectual, physical and spiritual – resulting in strong rounded personalities. Lakshmi Ashram is also a place where the students are secure from the influences of the modern world.

Since Lakshmi Ashram was established 72 years ago it has seen great changes with the passing of time. A great many students after receiving their education in Lakshmi Ashram are leading a productive life in society. Many of the present students too, on receiving the ashram education, want to show themselves as worthy individuals before society. I am one such student who having received the ashram education, seeks to make her life meaningful. After passing my intermediate examinations in class XII, I took the Sadhana training programme in the practical application of Gandhian Thought, and this saw a marked development in my personality. This was such a training programme in which, alongside Gandhian Thought, one learned how to develop ones character to be virtuous and steadfast. After completing this training, to a great degree I feel myself to be a worthy student. I feel that I can easily match my steps to the world.



One year on from completing the Sadhana training programme, now in 2018 I find myself as a new worker in Lakshmi Ashram. I am happy that I have now become a responsible individual in the ashram community, because now I have been entrusted with numerous responsibilities. This is a golden opportunity for me to become even stronger and more responsible. I am responsible for the students of class VII, as well as teaching mathematics to classes VII and VIII, English to class VI, and social studies to class X. As class teacher for the girls in class VII my responsibilities include teaching them reading and writing and taking singing classes with them, as well as instilling in them good behaviour. I feel proud that at this young age I have been entrusted with such responsibilities, for at this age it is sometimes a little difficult to control oneself. Now I understand that I am capable of both controlling myself and also managing others.

Another good point about Lakshmi Ashram is that everyone, whatever their position, is given equal value, and those who are weak are encouraged at each and every moment to develop. This is a very important point for in today's society there is so much competition that those who fall behind find it difficult to catch up. However the society in Lakshmi Ashram is completely different from the world outside. Here there is no kind of inequality whatsoever. Because of this the education in Lakshmi Ashram is totally different and is one full of joy.

One thing seems very important to me, that this kind of education should be given in every school, for only then can the all-round development of the students take place, otherwise the textbook-centered education is limited to competing for earning money. The situation of society today is such that both teacher and student simply want to earn as much as possible. Even if the student does not wish to, then pressure is put upon him or her to think in this way. These days if you ask any student what they wish to do or become in the future, then they reply that they wish to become a doctor, engineer or teacher, but nobody says that they want to become a farmer. If we think deeply then the true producer is the farmer. If his son too replies in this way then in the coming days who will grow the food and what will everyone eat? We cannot eat paper, we need grain to eat and production of foodstuffs is essential.



5 June – Environment Day –
Meenakshi second from left

These days the entire world is in a mad rush, everyone copying those around them, and nobody is ready to live according to the rules of nature. In such a situation I feel that the education provided by Lakshmi Ashram is invaluable to end this mad rush.

How I came to Lakshmi Ashram

Shweta Balsuni

My home is situated some 50-55 kilometres from Kausani in the village of Chhati in Bageshwar district. My village is close to the road, where my father runs a small restaurant (*hotel*).

Karki Bubu told my father about the education at Lakshmi Ashram. Karki Bubu lives in Baugar. (*Radha Didi had lived for some five years in the early sixties in Baugar and Karki Bubu knew her in those days and through her knew personally of the activities of Lakshmi Ashram.*) He occasionally lives in Lucknow, and from time to time comes to our home.



When I came to know about Kausani then numerous thoughts came to my mind and I tried to imagine what it might be like there. On 18 April I was to come to Kausani, and I was really keen to see a new place, and to meet the girls there. At eight o'clock that day my father got the car out of the garage. I touched everyone's feet in respect and then sat in the car, and said bye-bye to my brother and sister and to my mother. On the way to Kausani I was looking out at the trees and plants, the animals and birds etc. We passed many shops and small restaurants.

I reached the ashram family around one o'clock, my father coming to leave me there. On arriving in the ashram I liked the surrounding natural environment very much. My father and I did

not know where the office was, however one older student told us the way. My father talked with Tara Didi, Tara Didi very affectionately asked me my name, and then the formalities for my admission were completed.



Class VI – Sweeti with the light hair band

Tara Didi then showed me to my room, and introduced me to my new class teacher, Tulsi Didi, who put my things safely in the rack, while I met my new classmates. All of them, like me, had just recently come to the ashram both to study and to learn other skills.

The next day I was placed in the third team. The name of our team is Kali Ganga (*this year all the eight teams are named after rivers of Uttarakhand*), and our team leader is Vidya Didi. I enjoy very much working together with the older girls in my team.

(Bubu means grandfather in the local language, but is used by children for any elderly person; Karki is a local surname. Thus Shweta addresses this elderly family friend as Karki Bubu.)

The Ashram Gardens - A Living Laboratory

Tara Koranga

Depending on the season a range of different vegetables are grown in our ashram garden. These days it is the monsoon season and the view of the garden looks wonderful. Our garden is situated on sloping land, thus the fields are terraced one above the other. These days in the garden there are French beans, tomatoes, aubergines, *rajma* (kidney beans), *mooli* (white radish), ginger, turmeric, maize, *bhindi* (ladies' finger), capsicums, *chaulai* (amaranth), *bathua* (*Chenopodium album*), *pinalu* (*taro*), *gahat dal* (horse gram) etc.

At the edges of the fields are vines of cucumber, *lauki* (bottle gourd), *karela* (bitter gourd) and pumpkin. On these vines flowers are already appearing, even some fruit. All of us eat the produce of our garden with great enthusiasm. Actually first place among vegetables goes to the potato, for it adds to the taste of other vegetables. However it is difficult to grow potatoes in our garden, for at night wild pigs and porcupines come from the surrounding forest and dig up the potatoes. Thus we normally purchase potatoes from local farmers or from the market in Kausani. This year though Indira Didi experimented in growing potatoes in one field, took great care in protecting them, and was rewarded with a good harvest.

These days we have a range of fruit in the garden, including peaches, pomegranates and darim (a type of small pomegranate). We will enjoy the pomegranates in September. The fruit on the orange and lemon trees are beginning to form, but these will not ripen and be ready to eat until November-December. Thus throughout the year we enjoy a range of fruits and vegetables.

These days Indira Didi has overall responsibility for the management of the garden. For the past four years she has been absorbed body and soul in planning the optimum use of the garden. Sometimes she makes contact with the local centre of the government Horticultural Department in



Kausani, who are able to give her information on how to improve our horticultural activities. Occasionally the staff of the centre comes in person to our garden.

One day during the winter three staff from the local centre of the Central Institute of Medicinal and Aromatic Plants (CIMAP).in the nearby village of Pyura, after having first contacted the ashram and discussed their plans with Radha Didi, came to our garden. They studied the garden and the crops being grown, and then discussed with Indira Didi the possibilities of sowing several



kinds of medicinal plants, including Aloe Vera, chirayta (*Gentiana cherayta*) and lemon grass, on an experimental basis. Indira Didi extended her full support to them, and near the small pond in the centre of the garden gave them part of class X's field where they prepared a plot, sowed seed and erected a small poly-tunnel to protect them. Now these plants have developed well, although some have not survived. From time to time the staff from CIMAP comes to check the progress of their plants.

These days monkeys and langurs do not come so frequently to the garden, but when they do then Indira Didi immediately calls our two dogs, Ruby and her son Senti. The two of them enthusiastically chase the monkeys and langurs away. Fear of the dogs makes the monkeys hesitant to come to the garden.

In December 2014 a very heavy snowstorm badly damaged our large polyhouse, but this last autumn it has been completely restored.

Everyone living in the ashram works in the garden under the direction of Indira Didi. Our garden is not simply a garden, for it also provides fodder for our cows from the grass growing on the slopes between the fields.

The garden plays a very important role in the education in Lakshmi Ashram, intimately linked to our way of life as a living laboratory.

Minutes of the General Meeting on 22nd April 2018 for Friends of Lakshmi Ashram

The meeting took place in Lone's home.

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

The Committee's Report

We had a board meeting just before the general meeting. Lone takes care of the daily work with mail contact to the Ashram, Sanchars and transfer of money. Information and news go on via mail. Since Lone started she has sent out 64 Sanchars – three Sanchars a year – normally in March, August and November.

Last year an exciting co-operation between a Danish Gymnasium (Grammar School) began. Their oldest class visited Lakshmi Ashram in November 2017. Lone participated afterwards in a parents' meeting, and the students were very enthusiastic about their visit, so the plan is that a new class will go down there this autumn.

Lone showed photos from the daily life in Lakshmi Ashram: We saw photos of the beautiful views, the grass cutting, the Diwali festival and other festivals, the visit of the Danish students and students from USA and photos of the new students in LA.

There is a steady number of students and workers in LA – many older girls.

Radha Bhatt will visit Denmark in the autumn of 2018 in connection with a travel to Mexico, Norway and Italy.

The Account

The account was approved.

There are 54 members of Friends of Lakshmi Ashram in 2017.

The administration is cheap because of free copying. The money for Lakshmi Ashram is normally transferred in February and August. In February 2018 we transferred about 55.000 Danish Kroner (about 7.500 Euro) – of this 5.000 from the administration account.

The Subscription

The subscription is still 75 DDK (about 10 Euro) yearly per member.

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: Helle Poulsen.

Auditor was also re-elected: Claus Broskov Soerensen.

Substitute: Peter Kristensen.

After the meeting Ruth showed photos and told about her visit in India in March/April 2018.