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NEWS FROM LAKSHMI ASHRAM SANCHAR 134

November 2018

Dear friends,

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

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

- Our Life in Lakshmi Ashram by Ruth and Alex Acosta from Mexico
- Travel Accounts from three Danish Girls from Gladsaxe Gymnasium
- Celebrating Birthdays in a New Light by Priyanka Bisht – Class XI
- Radha Bhatt in Denmark

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 134

Our Life in Lakshmi Ashram Ruth and Alex Acosta from Mexico

When we first arrived at Lakshmi Ashram, we realized that we must have been very good in our past lives to be so lucky. Every corner, every landscape, surprised us even more. We could not understand how so much beauty could meet in one place. You, fortunate to have been born in its surroundings, surrounded by floral forests and crystalline rivers, may not realize how privileged you are. But we, coming from the other side of the world, residents of a gray and polluted city, agree with the motto: Uttarakhand, simply heaven!

We came to forget the chaos. To change the traffic for walks, the office work for the garden. We came to learn to use our hands. To awaken our body and remind it of what it is capable of. We



came because we want to learn to live in harmony with our environment. Because we realize that the answer is not in the big cities; in those supposedly 'developed' countries. But in the small communities that work the land every day and live according to what there is.

So, with expectation in the look and uncertainty in the heart, we leave our family and friends behind, and we venture to India in search of the life of Ashram.

What we did not know, is that we would find a great family instead. Because, now

we know, what makes this place wonderful, more than the forest, the rivers and their wild flowers, is its people. You are. It is you who make all this possible. It is your energy and dedication that makes this place transmit so much beauty. Some tasks are more obvious, such as sweeping the roads, working in the field or keeping your rooms clean. But, in reality, everything is connected. The hours of prayer, the yoga classes, the readings of Sidartha also contribute to their spiritual growth and the atmosphere that is breathed.

We also admire that everyone gets involved in the responsibilities, sharing the weight when it is too much, and that they seat at the same level to discuss what can be improved. We are sure that many leaders of politics and the business world could learn valuable things here; as we did.

So there is nothing left but to be really thankful. Thank you for letting us be part of the family. For taking care of us and helping us grow so much. We learned more than we expected, and even more than we realize. And we leave charged with energy for whatever comes. But we're not leaving empty-handed. Here we found the answer we were looking for. What the world needs, if it wants to prevent the planet from collapsing, is more people like the one we found in Lakshmi Ashram. People with the hands of a warrior and the heart of a wise man.

Travel accounts from three Danish girls Gladsaxe Gymnasium

The road takes us by honking cars, plenty of kiosks and a small forest path, which in the end narrows into a blind alley. One cannot doubt where one is. The sound of feet that tip toe on the veranda of the school, and the laughter that can be heard from a distance. The girls' school, Lakshmi Ashram is situated on a hillside in the town Kausani with a view over the Indian mountain province Uttarakhand. The Indian students are dressed in the nicest clothes and they wave and smile at us. The next couple of days we are a part of their daily routines where self-sufficiency, joy, minimalism and hospitality plays a vital role.

Here you can read three accounts from students from Gladsaxe gymnasium.

Frederikke

Our first day at Kausani started at 8am where our high school class were to meet the girls from Lakshmi Ashram for the first time. The sun was high in the sky and we had been down in the town to buy a two-litre water bottle, which would help us keep hydrated on the hot day. We went through the beautiful forest that led us to a gate which opened into the entrance of the girls' school. The girls stood at the veranda and on the second floor where they waved at us and giggled.



David bid us welcome and quickly had us working. Together with two friends, Fanny and Christine, we had to prepare lunch which we were to eat later on. The girls at the school are self-sufficient, and they almost make and collect all their produce for the kitchen themselves. Therefore, we peeled a whole dish of cucumbers that were later used for tzatziki – and while we were peeling the cucumbers we talked about all and everything.

The girls told us about that their favourite actors from Bollywood and Hollywood movies, what their hobbies were and what they wanted to do when they were grown up. Even though it was a bit difficult to communicate, we actually only used simple words and simple sentences in combination with arm movements and mimes. In spite of our differences, we found a lot of

similarities in the things we like to do in our leisure time, and this was extremely surprising since our class in general had imagined meeting people very different from us.

The rest of the day was spent with helping a bit at the school and in the fields where the girls grow their crops. We were having a blast together and all nooks of the school were filled with laughter. After lunch it was time to celebrate the birthdays of all the girls who were born in September – a new tradition that they had started. From our school, two students and a teacher had their birthdays in September too and hence they had to carry a birthday hat and were celebrated with

songs and dances. It was a big celebration and the girls of the school were very much into their dances, songs and games – something that was very fascinating to hear and watch, since clothing and instruments also played a big role.

When the celebration was finished, David asked whether we could also sing a small song or show a dance – and as he said, *"You only get this opportunity once in your lifetime"*. We started by looking very insecurely at each other and since we felt that it was rude not to contribute with anything ourselves, one of the girls from the class, Buur, bravely sang a song from the film *"The Hobbit"*. Both teachers and students from both countries applauded her, and David recognised her bravery.

The day slowly turned into the end of the day, and there was a lot of hugging and waving. Luckily, we were to be together the next day, but we had already created friendships in all directions no matter nationality and background.

Katarina

It was our second day in Kausani, and after having visited Lakshmi Ashram the day before, we now went on a hike in the mountains. We had the best possible guides with us, David, and four of the older girls from Lakshmi Ashram. The hike in itself was incredibly beautiful – the nature of the valleys, the villages and not the least the people. I felt, that I got to see *"the real"* India, far away from the tourist streets. The hike was with no doubt, fantastic, but what made the biggest impression was not the cows on the trails, or the scenery, but the four sweet girls from Lakshmi Ashram.



I quickly got into conversation with them, in spite of our verbal differences, and after about half an hour, I had four new girlfriends in India. I have never experienced such an openness, interest, hospitality or enthusiasm from anyone before. A lot of the communication consisted of arm movements, sounds and facial expressions, and even when we did not communicate, there was some sort of connection. Hand in hand, we walked through forest, fields and villages and in spite of sweaty palms, we kept holding hands, something I

am not used to from Denmark, especially not with people I have just met. We laughed, we sang and not the least got to know each other.

After a couple of hours, a lot of laughter and a blister on my foot, it was time for lunch. The girls sat a bit secluded, eating their lunch, and the students from Gladsaxe Gymnasium, a couple of meters

further away, eating their lunch. But, this did not last long. I went to the girls, and before having said anything, they asked me to join them, which I had no doubt in my mind about doing. I tasted their chapatis, pumpkin dish, and last but not least their sour cow milk – and this tastes crazy. Once again, their overwhelming hospitality warmed me and another beautiful memory was created.



After lunch, we spent a bit of time with different games before continuing the hike. The destination of the hike was a Hindu temple in one of the towns in the area. With sore feet we got to the town with its colourful houses and the well-known Indian city noise. We performed puja in the temple, fed the fish in the river with feed that the girls had bought and walked to the dam. The little walk to the dam was, just like the rest of the hike, filled with laughter, hugs, singing and a new edition – a water fight. We stood at the dam for a long time, just looking and time flew, actually so much that we were half an hour late for the taxis, which was not looked well upon from everybody. But, for me, it was worth everything. The time with the girls had ended now, but luckily, we were to see each other again the next day.

One of the best things that I have brought home from my study trip to India, is my four new friendships, which were created at the hike. I am so lucky, that I still after my return to Denmark am in contact with the girls.

Lakshmi Ashram, thank you so much for this opportunity.

Camille

My experience is also from the first day at Lakshmi Ashram. The day before our first meeting with the school, we had travelled with bus and train for 12-13 hours to come from Delhi to Kausani. Before even coming to India, we had spent almost 2,5 years preparing for everything that India has to offer, and I was not disappointed. Actually, I was more overwhelmed by how big the school is and what a beautiful view it has.



It did not take long before the whole class were put to work. A couple of girls from my class and I had to help collecting firewood in the forest. We were taken into the forest by the friendly Indian girls who had all kinds of questions for me, "did I have any siblings", "who was my best friend", "what is my favourite colour" and it kept going back and forth. It was not always easy to understand each other, but we succeeded one way or the other.

At one point, I walked into a spider web and in a split second there were several girls with me to ensure that I was okay. It was not because spiders are dangerous, but because they could see that I got spooked. One of the older girls took my hand and said that I did not need to worry, and I walked with her for the rest of the time. I systematically avoided all spider webs on the road, but she trudged directly into them, even the ones with big spiders. In spite of my reservation for her relationship

to spiders, we quickly started talking. After having collected fire wood for 1,5 hours, I had already learned several sentences in Hindi. She had explained to me how they collect fire wood every day, so they can have a fire going in the kitchen for cooking food. They grow their own vegetables and grain, they collect their own fire wood, they do not just take nature for granted and they embrace all strangers as if they were their friends. My respect for their relation to strangers and nature had grown. I feel that these things are something that I will bring home with me from this trip and try to continue in my everyday life.

All in all, we can only thank Lakshmi Ashram for the fantastic hospitality we all felt, which led to an unforgettable experience. We encourage all adventurers to go out and meet new people. "A successful travel is a return ticket to experience" – and we only have positive experiences from Lakshmi Ashram.

Thank you very much – we already miss you.

Celebrating Birthdays in a New Light

Priyanka Bisht – Class XI

In our rapidly changing society birthdays have now come to be widely celebrated. It has only become popular in the past few years. Now even in the hills its deep impact is felt. Now everyone has started celebrating birthdays, whether they recognize the importance of this day or not. Harmful practices such as cutting a birthday cake or DJs blasting out music destroy the beauty of this day.

In our school we celebrate birthdays community-wise. On this day there is a feeling as if a new light has been lit



in everyone's hearts. This celebrating of birthdays has begun from the start of this year. On the last day of every month we celebrate together the birthdays of all those workers and students that have fallen during that month. This day, rather than being special to any one individual, becomes a collective celebration, and it has now become an integral part of the ashram's activities. This day, a blend of simplicity and great joy, is celebrated in a special way.

When the last day of the month comes, the day that we celebrate birthdays, the preparations begin right from the morning. It is marvelous to think that we have been able to find a fine way to celebrate birthdays that does not hurt anyone. All sorts of new creative ideas, including self-composed songs and poems, all come together to make up the evening cultural programme. This allows for the true development of the ashram children. Each and every one plays their part in making these birthday celebrations full of real interest.

Truly the world is changing day by day, and along with this traditions are being lost. The objective of celebrating birthdays is not simply to have fun, but rather at the same time its value lies in gaining knowledge, and becoming aware of and understanding the direction of one's life.

On our birthdays each of us recalls our mother's infinite love and our father's fond love for us. In the ashram family we find even more love than in our homes, a love that is otherwise slowly being lost in other schools as well as in the family. If we do not seek to arrest this change then western culture can come to increase its hold.

It is our good fortune in the ashram that we celebrate birthdays collectively. Call it a school or a family, but on this day there is a deep feeling of love among everyone, big and small. This is such an occasion when everyone can express their creative talent and art. There is as much joy as in other places, but in addition an atmosphere of peace and the artistic expressions are present in an ideal environment. At this auspicious time we take a vow that in the future we will do even better in our lives than in the past. We do not celebrate our birthdays together solely for fun but also with an objective. The simple act of assuming the responsibility for working together to present any programme increases one's own personal satisfaction. Divisions between us, feelings of dislike or rivalry, all these are reduced as we join together.



In the towns the celebration of birthdays has spread like wildfire, but it is absolutely vital that we understand its true nature. The source of inspiration in the ashram for this good work is our teachers. They recall how they had spent their youth, how each morning comes, each evening comes. Birthdays offer us the opportunity to become aware of our changing age and of our development.

Often in the cities children look upon birthdays simply as an opportunity to have lots of fun. There is not the space for them to reflect on whether they are developing ideally or not. Celebrating our birthdays

should allow us the opportunity to follow the path of living the ideal life, something that we must not lose.

People are deprived these days of celebrating their birthdays communally. These days everyone's outlook is shaped by machines. On their birthdays they want everything, and make selfish demands on their parents. It is vital that we renounce such greed. Instead we must seek to imbibe the good habits of our elders. This should be our vow on our birthday, and this will make our birthdays something to truly remember. This should be the prime objective of celebrating our birthdays, and making it a time of joy.

This programme is celebrated with great enthusiasm on the last day of every month after evening prayers. All those children and workers whose birthdays have fallen during the month all come forward to sit at the front. In celebrating this special day as a community there is a special feeling of warmth and compassion. Afterwards we enjoy a special sweet dish for our evening supper. In this way celebrating birthdays as a community, both for me personally and for everybody else is very inspiring, a time full of fun. Sharing everyone's love and the blessings of our elders has become a tradition. Now we all eagerly await the last day of the month so that together we might celebrate the birthdays of yet more of our classmates and elders.

Radha Bhatt in Denmark

Radha Bhatt visited Denmark in September this year. She was invited one month to Mexico by friends there. In Mexico she participated in different projects and gave lectures. On her way she visited her sister in Oslo and friends in Denmark. Her travel ends in Italy with other projects, and she goes back to India on 18th November.

While Radha was in Denmark she visited Gladsaxe Gymnasium and had a nice talk with the students who were going to Lakshmi Ashram just two days afterwards.

