

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: DK0330000003141861 – SWIFT-BIC: DABADKKK

Bank reg. no: 4434 – account no: 0003141861

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

NEWS FROM LAKSHMI ASHRAM SANCHAR 142

January 2022

Dear friends,

Here is news again from Lakshmi Ashram.

I wish you all a Happy New Year!

This Sanchar has the following articles:

Grassroot Community efforts for the Rejuvenation of Traditional Village Springs by Maya Verma

The Festival of Dipawali by Class XI

Six Day Training Programme for Managers of Lakshmi Ashram's Three Village Libraries –

8-13 November 2021 by Champa Joshi.

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. 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. All will pay the same amount in subscription and receive the Sanchar.

We use little money for administration. The money is transferred directly from our bank to the Ashram's bank, 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 donations. 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 142

Grassroot Community efforts for the Rejuvenation of Traditional Village Springs

Maya Verma

Oversat af Ruth Sillemann



Water is an integral part of Life. In days gone by when the responsibility for the management of local water resources rested with the community, then people understood the importance of water and how life depended on it. However ever since the *Jal Nigam* (Water Board) has taken the management of water into its hands, in

particular the responsibility for distribution of water, then the control of water resources has passed from the community to government or semi-government agencies. The result has been that the village community has become very careless regarding water. The Water Board has provided piped water directly to people's homes, that is to say that people have now started to buy water. With piped water now coming to people's homes and their courtyards, the community's attention has been deflected from their traditional springs and other water sources. This has led to the traditional water sources having reduced flow or even drying up. It has become a vital necessity to save and rejuvenate these springs, and Lakshmi Ashram's attention has been drawn to this necessary work.

In 2017 Lakshmi Ashram drew up a plan with Peoples Science Institute (PSI) in Dehradun to revive these traditional village springs. On observing the current situation of water in a village in the Lod Valley, some sixteen kilometers from Kausani, plans for conducting a survey were drawn up. The survey revealed that in 2016 excessive rains had badly damaged the water pipelines to a number of villages. As a result not even drinking water was available in the affected villages. This situation led to the villagers beginning to search for natural sources of water. A *Jal Chetana Yatra* (Water Awareness Programme) was organised in other villages in the Lod Valley, with the objective of raising awareness of the importance of water and the negative impact of declining flows of water in their springs, through short plays, songs, slogans and open discussions with the community. The public quickly understood the seriousness of the situation.

Then the work of reviving these springs began in earnest. Water Committees were formed in each village, to assume responsibility for implementing the programme, and with the active participation of the villagers various constructive programmes to recharge the springs began. With technical support from Peoples Science Institute and financial support from Bajaj Auto Limited, activities began

using traditional and some new techniques to increase the water flows in the springs in the catchment area of the Sai River. The village women fully understood the objectives of the programme and enthusiastically took up the constructive work in their hands.

Various techniques were made use of to work towards increasing the water flows of the springs, including the construction of *chals* and *khals* (ponds) to store surface run-off water, deepening and widening the drainage channels in the area above the springs, planting of beneficial species of trees and grasses, etc. The *banj* (Himalayan Oak) saplings that were planted were raised in village nurseries maintained by the women and youth. Their saplings were so good that the Forest Department too purchased them.

The constructive activities undertaken to increase water discharge from 2017 until 2021 are now yielding positive results. In some fifteen springs, in many the water discharge has increased while others that were completely dry are once again flowing. The third and most important outcome is that some new springs have emerged. After the treatment of the catchment area the amount of ground water has increased so much that new springs have also emerged, and these have been given a good, solid structure.

In one village, Chanoli, the amount of water has increased so much following the constructive treatment that the villagers have constructed an 18,000 litre tank that is completely full of water. The villagers have constructed this tank with their own community labour and financial contributions.

The Water Committees at the village level have fitted strong gates on the springs to protect their cleanliness and have begun to put padlocks on them. This is so that equal distribution of water can be assured and also to make certain that the springs do not become dirty. This concern and action of the community has given the village springs a beautiful and clean appearance.

The four women in the Lakshmi Ashram team have themselves given training to the village women in measuring the quality of the water and its discharge. Now the village women themselves are measuring the quality of their water sources, and also the discharge per minute of water. This allows them to observe firsthand how good has been the outcome of their efforts.

The Water Committees in some twenty villages in the Lod Valley have actively worked for the improvement and management of their water sources, and the problem of water that the villages faced has been solved to a great degree. Observing this success the people in neighbouring valleys have been influenced and motivated. They want their village springs to be revived also. This underlines just how necessary it is to undertake such work on the water resources, for which the community is now ready, for especially in the hot season they face severe shortages of water.

The Festival of Dipawali

Class XI

India is often called the nation of festivals, and behind every festival there is a story hidden. In this way there is also a story behind the celebrating of Diwali.

It is said that when Lord Rama, Sita and Lakshman, after spending fourteen years in exile in the forest returned to their city of Ayodhya, then the residents of Ayodhya, filled with joy, lit wick lamps (*Diyas*) and decorated the entire city with garlands of flowers, and the celebrations went on for several days. Ever since then across almost all of India this occasion is celebrated as the Festival of Lights or as Dipawali.



This festival is celebrated in November, in the traditional calendar on the occasion of the New Moon in the month of Kartika. In preparation for this festival, the villagers give their homes a good clean, apply fresh paint to the woodwork, and decorate the doorways with beautiful *Alpana* and *Rangoli* designs.

In the past the festival of Dipawali was celebrated by lighting wick lamps and candles and with just a few fireworks. However over time the nature of the festival slowly changed, and nowadays fireworks are set off to excess, making it

sometimes appear that this festival is only for lighting fireworks, and people simply find joy in this. As a result the true dignity and profundity of the festival is greatly diminished. As a result of this excessive lighting of fireworks both air pollution and noise pollution are greatly increasing. We in the ashram are greatly concerned about this, for this is harmful both for our breathing and for our overall health. Here in the ashram we live in a pollution-free environment and we are all motivated to maintain it this way.

The manner in which we celebrate Dipawali in the ashram is very different to that in society at large. We have decided that we will not light fireworks of any kind, and that we will celebrate Dipawali joyfully together in a pure environment.

Two days before Dipawali everyone has joined together in painting *Rangoli* in varying designs on the thresholds of their rooms, as well as in community spaces such as the prayer hall, office, kitchen and guest house. The students were all divided into groups, and all of them carried out this fine work of painting each and every stroke of the Rangolis very attentively and with great interest and responsibility, their elder sisters guiding them. This year they had more time for this activity, allowing them the opportunity to excel themselves.

On the first day of Dipawali, Mahalakshmi Puja, some two hundred wick lamps were placed on a large Rangoli design on the hostel verandah.



Radha Didi lit the first lamp to inaugurate the Dipawali celebrations. Then all the students joined together in lighting the wick lamps and then gathered together in a circle in the courtyard to sing devotional songs – *Bhajans*, following which each of the students picked up two wick lamps (*Diyas*) and placed them on the railings of the verandah in front of their rooms. In the darkness of the evening on this night of the New Moon these lines of lights were very attractive. With our *Rangoli* and *Alpana* designs, the garlands of marigolds above the doors, lighting all the lamps made the surroundings look so beautiful, as if this was the city of Ayodhya.

On this first day of Dipawali we worship the Goddess Lakshmi, the Goddess of wealth and prosperity. We gathered in Shanti Bhavan, our prayer hall, which the girls had decorated and created a small shrine, sang devotional songs together and then performed worship of the Goddess. Following this sacred offerings of *Prasad* offered to the Goddess were distributed. Various sweets associated particularly with Diwali – *khil*, *khilauna* and *batasha*, along with fruits – bananas and apples, were served to everyone. Everyone was extremely happy and full of joy.



The following day is celebrated as Govardhan Puja. On this day worship is offered especially to the cows. In the Hindu faith the cow is worshipped as the Mother, and in the ashram too we keep up this spirit and tradition. In the ashram we know this day better as *Van Bhoj* (Forest Feast).



In the ashram Sarala Behn had started a very special and fine tradition that we have continued until this day, one of going into the forest, taking our lunch there, and then in a totally free and easy atmosphere singing, dancing and acting together, having a great deal of fun. This year too, as for some years previously, the girls prepared all the food in the ashram kitchen and then brought it up to the meadow near to the ruins of the old cottage known as Nepal Bhavan. Here all of us ate together, sitting in the open under a clear blue sky with the rich greenery of the tall trees all around us, and then we children presented our cultural programme. Everybody enjoyed it immensely. Coming back down the hillside to the hostel we pounded the *chyooore*, prepared by soaking rice grains for ten days and then, on the evening of Govardhan Puja, roasting the rice grains and then pounding them in the stone mortar.

The third day of Dipawali is known as *Bhaiya Dooj*. This festival is primarily a festival symbolising the bonds between brothers and sisters, in which the sisters bless their brothers. In our Kumaun sisters bless their brothers with *chyooore*. In the family the older people place *chyooore* on the heads of all the family members and give their blessings. When we gathered for lunch, then before eating Radha Didi blessed each one of us, placing *chyooore* on our heads. We all felt extremely fortunate because at every festival Radha Didi bestows her love and blessings on each and every one of us.

In this way all of us in the ashram family had together over these three days peacefully and joyfully celebrated the festival of Dipawali. All the new girls very much enjoyed how we celebrated Dipawali in the ashram.

Six Day Training Programme for Managers of Lakshmi Ashram's Three Village Libraries - 8-13 November 2021

Champa Joshi

Lakshmi Ashram is at present running three Kasturba Children's Libraries (*Kasturba Bal Pustakalay*) in three nearby valleys. The first was established in the village of Raulyana towards the head of the Kosi valley, the second in Jhupulchaura in the Lod valley, and most recently a third library has been opened in the village of Baiganiya in the valley of the Mansa Nala. A six day training programme was recently arranged by Lakshmi Ashram for the three women managing these libraries, and besides these three women our four village level workers also participated.

This training programme was planned and carried out in two stages. The first three days of the training were held in Lakshmi Ashram, in the inspirational presence and under the guidance and direction of Radha Didi.

Each day the training programme was divided into two sessions, focusing on both underlying principles and their practical application. In the first session on the opening day Radha Didi discussed in depth our main objectives in establishing children's libraries in the villages. She said that in order to build a fine citizen Lakshmi Ashram has opened village level libraries for the children.

Thus those responsible for running the libraries need to understand that the centres are not simply libraries from where the children can borrow books and then after reading return them. They will also carry out such activities with the children as will assist in developing every aspect of their personalities. Such activities will be carried out through the library with the young children and the teenagers that are essential for the development of their personalities, aspects that are largely ignored by their school and their parents.

These include developing a sense of honesty in their personal lives, an understanding and attachment towards the natural environment, and interpersonal relationships based on love and respect, along with a sense of helping one another, as well as their parents. Playing games, singing songs and acting plays are all means that contribute to improving their health and increasing their happiness.

Along with these activities using one's discretion one can read and explain stories and plays to the children, seeking to inspire the children to take up the morals taught in these stories in their own



behaviour. A further aspect of the work of the library managers is to establish good contacts with the parents and families of the children, and making efforts for the children to identify themselves deeply with their village. We must seek to create an enthusiastic atmosphere in the libraries, so that they become a means for instilling good values and understanding in the individual.



Through our libraries we seek to work with the children in such a way that each and every child will abjure every kind of drugs or intoxicants and instead find a place in their lives for good qualities. Likewise we have to be careful in our use of modern technology, and we discussed together how best we can ensure that the youth do not misuse these gadgets.

The second aspect of the training was in imparting skills of practical activities, with on-hands training in action songs and children's games as well as giving instruction in various methods of telling stories to children. Stories are a living education through which we can convey our subject to the children.

One way of developing links in the children to their natural surroundings is to make item of play using local materials – soil, stones etc.

The young women trainees responded very enthusiastically and with great interest to these activities, enjoying themselves very much. Now they will be able to engage the young children and teenagers in all these activities.

On the third day we discussed together the learning from the previous two days, and how we might bring quality to our work with the children. The participants emphasised the need for Lakshmi Ashram to provide guidance and motivation from time to time to those managing the libraries.

Following the three days of training in the ashram three days of training took place in the three village libraries.

On the 11th the training took place in Jhupulchaura, and the following two days in Baiganiya and Raulyana respectively.

The library in Jhupulchaura has been transferred to a different house. Some fifty to sixty students are making use of this library. Very small children are not coming. As this library is centrally situated, close to the Inter-College and primary schools, it is very well used.

The library in Baiganiya, in the Mansa Nali valley, is very alive, and the young woman running the library takes a great interest in her work. The majority of the children using the library are being educated in English medium private schools, however by and large they are lacking in self-confidence. If you asked them questions they were hesitant to answer, and lacked the ability to fluently express themselves. However ever since the library opened the children are very happy with their library,

and have developed a great interest in learning and understanding, and their self-confidence has developed greatly. On 12th We spent an hour and a half with the children in the afternoon and they joined in all the activities very enthusiastically. However there is still a need to work hard with the children to further develop their ability to confidently express themselves verbally.

The children using the library in Raulyana, at the head of the Kosi valley, however have no inhibitions whatsoever. They remembered all the activities that they had learned in the past year, and have developed very good qualities – such as keeping their library near and clean, saying prayers when they come together, showing a respect for people, and interacting one with the other with love and cooperation.

In all three libraries the desire and interest to learn has increased greatly in the children. The atmosphere in the villages has also improved for the better. For those children who had previously wandered here and there on the roads and footpaths the libraries have given them a new sense of direction and outlook on life.



The Ashram family – winter 2021