

## FRIENDS OF LAKSHMI ASHRAM

### **Economy**

Helle Poulsen: +45 4159 4021, Rolighedsvej 3, 2630 Taastrup. [poulsenh@gmail.com](mailto:poulsenh@gmail.com)

Bank – IBAN nr. DK0330000003141861 – SWIFT-BIC: DABADKKK

Bank reg. nr. 4434 – kontonr. 0003141861

### **Communication**

Ruth Sillemann: +45 3123 2963, Borgergade 32, 2.tv. 1300 København K. [rsillemann@gmail.com](mailto:rsillemann@gmail.com)

The newsletter Sanchar and communication to India and in Denmark

**Website of Friends of Lakshmi Ashram:** <http://lakshmiashram.dk>

## NEWS FROM LAKSHMI ASHRAM SANCHAR 149

Dear friends,

Here is news again from Lakshmi Ashram.

### **This Sanchar has the following articles:**

- Anti-Liquor Movement in Kausani by Diya Phaswan
- The Padmashri Award – a Tribute to Collective Efforts by Radha Bhatt
- Many thanks to the ashram by Tanuja Rawa
- The ashram library by Navjot Kaur
- Honoring our heroes: The work of Sarala Behen Museum by Arun Tiwari

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. 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 very much for all the donations.

*Best wishes*

*Helle and Ruth*

Friends of Lakshmi Ashram can save money, if you would be satisfied to receive a mail with the Sanchar. You can also find Sanchar on the homepage. If you want to get a mail instead of receiving a letter, then please send your e-mail address to: [rsillemann@gmail.com](mailto:rsillemann@gmail.com)

# SANCHAR 149

## Anti-Liquor Movement in Kausani

*By Diya Phaswan*

KAUSANI, UTTARAKHAND — In these quiet Himalayan foothills, where women once embraced trees to save their forests during the famed Chipko Movement, a new form of grassroots resistance is taking shape. Today, the daughters and mothers of Uttarakhand are again linking arms—this time outside liquor shops, marshaling the same moral force to protect their families and their community's fragile peace.

For decades, Lakshmi Ashram has been at the heart of such activism. Guided by the legacy of Sarala Behn and Radha Didi, the ashram has empowered generations of local women to speak out against alcohol abuse and the social devastation it brings. Since the 1960s, their campaigns have shut down numerous liquor shops across the region. Yet the struggle remains uphill: liquor revenue remains a dependable source of income for the state government, and shop licenses have quietly multiplied.

In Kausani, the hill station better known for its sweeping views of Himalayan peaks and its associations with Mahatma Gandhi, Sarala Behn and Lakshmi Ashram the prospect of a new liquor shop has long hovered on the fringes. Hotel owners and traders, eyeing the tourist trade, have periodically pushed for it. Until now, the moral pressure of the ashram had held them back.

That changed in March 2025.

Word of the proposed shop reached the ashram belatedly—but once it did, the reaction was swift. Students and workers gathered for an emergency meeting, painted placards, rehearsed slogans, and marched into the town center. Their procession snaked through the market, voices rising in anti-liquor chants and songs. At Kausani's central junction, they held a public meeting, reminding residents that the town's reputation rested not on nightlife but on serenity—a sanctuary sought by visitors from around the world. A liquor outlet, they argued, would erode that peace and place local women at greater risk.

Many shopkeepers listened politely; some even nodded in agreement. But others clung to the belief that tourists wanted alcohol, and that a liquor shop would boost business and fill hotel rooms.

For the ashram's students, the demonstration became a lesson beyond textbooks—an initiation into civic courage. Speaking before an entire marketplace, they discovered their own voices.

A second demonstration followed days later, but the mood in town had shifted. The business community, angered by the protests, confronted the marchers. A handful of intoxicated men hurled abuse. The students responded by invoking Gandhi: no anger, no insults—only calm explanation, delivered briefly before the group withdrew, singing.

Despite the opposition, the liquor shop opened on schedule. For many at the ashram, it was a moment of profound disappointment. That such a commercial venture could take root in this “peace capital” of the hills felt like a violation. Yet there was also resolve. They had spoken; they had not remained silent in the face of what they believed to be injustice.

The protests did not end with the opening. A third demonstration saw students joined by participants from a national gathering on Gandhian Thought at Anasakti Ashram. Together, they stood before the shop—peacefully, purposefully—keeping alive the tradition of non-violent action.

The struggle continues, quietly but persistently. At Lakshmi Ashram, Gandhian philosophy is not only theory but a daily practice woven into academic life, community work and personal growth. For many students—including me—the message resonates deeply: non-violence is not passive. It is active, disciplined resistance to what harms society.

And in Kausani, that resistance endures, one peaceful protest at a time.



*Women demonstrating in the town center*

## The Padmashri Award – a Tribute to Collective Efforts

By Radha Behn



*Radha Behn receives the Padmashri Award from The District Magistrate of Almora*

It was one of those once-in-a-lifetime phone calls, which stay in the memory long after the event. Towards the end of January this year, I was staying in Vinoba Ashram in Central India, known as Brahma Vidya Mandir. My mobile phone rang. It was the District Magistrate of Almora, Shri Alok Kumar Pandey. He said, "You've been selected for the National Padma Shri Award. I hope that you will accept it." I did not respond with a simple 'yes' or 'no', but instead asked curiously, "Who has proposed my name?" The District Magistrate replied, "Your name is well known in the country, it doesn't need to be proposed by anyone." That is how I found out that I was going to receive this award.

I never dreamt that I was going to receive this precious National award. I was not even excited to get this award. I am deeply pained by the way people and successive governments are destroying the environment in the name of material development. I am aggrieved with the growing communal discrimination and economic inequality in society. I felt this was not the right time to accept national honors. However, it occurred to me that the work for which I'm being honored wasn't just mine alone. It was a collective effort of the women workers at the ashram, the village women, the young people who worked with me, and all my colleagues. This honor is for all of them. So, declining the award would not send out a positive message.

However, I wanted to receive it among my people in or out of the Ashram at Kausani. I thought it was more reasonable and suitable to my mind. There was an alternative way in the hands of the Government too. If the receiver was unable to travel to Delhi to receive the award from the hands of the President of India, then it would be sent to the residence of the Awardee. Accordingly on 3<sup>rd</sup> July the District Magistrate and other officials came to the Ashram to give the award. The men and women co-workers of the two adjacent valleys and from around Kausani were present on the occasion. These people of the villages were representing the mass people of the world like friends who had helped our work. I was happy to receive the award in their midst in an informal ceremony at Kausani with the beautiful local songs, instead of in the Presidential Palace in Delhi.

### **Many thanks to the Ashram**

*By Tanuja Rawat – Class VII*



*Tanuja*

I express my thanks to my paternal aunt (*Bua*) because it was my Bua who brought me to Lakshmi Ashram to study. I want to say my thanks to Lakshmi Ashram. Sarala Behn Ji and others of you started Lakshmi Ashram and have run it ever since.

Lakshmi Ashram is in a very beautiful place. I like the environment here very much, and I like it very much in the ashram. I like very much all my big sisters (*Didi*) very much, for they pay attention to me just like my mother. Here I receive the love from each and every one, even more than I get from my relatives. Many guests also come here, from home and overseas. I get the

chance to meet with all of them. Coming to the ashram I am getting the opportunity to learn so much.

One thing that is amazing is that Sarala Behn Ji was an English woman who had come all the way from London and opened the ashram school, what a big work. I wish I could have had the opportunity to meet her!

How fortunate I am that I could come and study here and can learn so much. I came here in class VI. I had passed in class V, yet I still could not read fluently in Hindi. After coming to the ashram, I have strengthened my skills in both reading and writing.

On the last day of every month in the ashram we also celebrate as a community all the birthdays of that month. I very much like how we celebrate the birthdays as a community. The personalities of the people in the ashram are very good. Once again, I extend my deepest thanks to the ashram that they gave me the chance to come here. I wrote this small poem for you all:

“Dear big sisters (*Didi*) of the ashram

Such a good ashram

Dearest Ashram

Beautiful Ashram

The loveliest Ashram”



*Having a good time together in the library*

## **The Ashram Library**

By Navjot Kaur – Class XII

“There can be no better friend than music and books.” For me I have no better friend than these two. My friends never allow me to feel that I am alone. Right from an early age I had a love of music and enjoy very much singing songs. I also compose a lot of songs myself. Whenever I compose a new song, I take the first opportunity to sing it to my fellow students. They like the songs that I have composed very much.

In this way I also enjoy reading books very much. In our ashram there is also a library. I am responsible for the ashram library. I really seek to encourage everyone in the ashram to read books.

I also very much like to introduce new activities to the students. The girls of classes VI and VII are always very enthusiastic to read books. Whenever a new box of books comes to the library then I open it with the small girls. The students come to the library on Saturdays. Each of them leaves with a book of their liking.

I really enjoy these two good friends of mine – music and books. I will always keep them with me. All of you too should make these two your friends. You too will get a great joy and respect in making them a part of your life.



*Navjot in the library*

## Honoring Our Heroes: The Work of Sarala Behn Museum

*By Arun Tiwari*

At Lakshmi Ashram, we are working hard to preserve the history of the freedom struggle in our valleys. Our main goal is to make sure that the bravery, sacrifices, and dedication of local freedom fighters are remembered by everyone. Through our museum work, we are collecting and organizing photos, newspaper articles, old documents, and stories that show the lives and contributions of these heroes. So far, we have developed a list of freedom fighters from Boraro and Katyur valleys. This collection is just the beginning, but it gives us a strong foundation to build a more detailed record of our local history.

In the future, we have many plans to expand this work. One important step is to collect information from the jail department. We also plan to develop a documentary to showcase the stories of these brave people. As part of this project, we will interview people who were close to Sarala Devi. Through these efforts, Lakshmi Ashram aims to create a museum that is not just a collection of old items, but a place where visitors can connect and understand the sacrifices of our heroes and be inspired.

We hope that by preserving these stories, future generations will value the freedom we have today and continue to honor the legacy of those who fought for it.

Our museum work is a small but important step in keeping the memories of Sarala Behan Ji and local freedom fighters alive. With each photograph, article, and interview, we are bringing their stories out of the shadows and giving them the recognition they truly deserve.



Arun working in the library