

FRIENDS OF LAKSHMI ASHRAM

Economy

Helle Poulsen: 2012 4856, Rolighedsvej 6, 2630 Taastrup. 41594021/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
The newsletter Sanchar and communication to India and in Denmark

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

NEWS FROM LAKSHMI ASHRAM

SANCHAR 150

Dear friends,

As you may know, within a short span of time, we have lost three vital pillars of our organization: our Danish chairperson, Lone Poulsen, as well as the two dedicated ashram workers David Bhai and Kanti Didi. We honor them best by continuing our work and strengthening the deep bond between our two countries. Therefore, we begin this newsletter with an update on some of the things that are happening at the ashram right now.

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The cost is DKK 1,725 for a sponsorship and DKK 75 for the membership fee = DKK 1,800. Some choose to send an annual sponsorship, while others spread the amount throughout the year. Because of this, the DKK 75 fee will be allocated to the administration account the first time funds are received during the year.

Thank you very much for all contributions, large and small. Donations that are not earmarked are used for educational materials, study trips, training, and much more. On a final note, we are currently struggling to raise as much funding as we usually do. This could be due to many factors, such as higher postage costs, rising bank fees, and general inflation. Perhaps a neighbor, a good friend, or a family member of yours would also like to make a difference for the girls at Lakshmi Ashram?

Working with nature

By: Asha Mahra

This year, we mark the 30th year of our Gandhi philosophy courses with a project dedicated to watershed management on the Ashram grounds. More than just practical work, this effort has become for each of us a journey toward listening to nature, learning from its wisdom, feeling its soft rhythms, and understanding what it asks of us. When we first got started, a deep emotional bond with nature took root in each of us.



Asha displays cuttings of wild Himalayan cherry, known locally as Padam.

Motivated by Shri Shankar Bhai, a young environmental worker, our work began on July

3, 2026. Before then, we had received basic training in the hydrology of mountain ecosystems. We focused on the catchment area located directly above our local, traditional spring (spring in Hindi: Naula). Through our training, we had learned that when rain falls, nature's landscape acts as a sponge. A healthy watershed retains water so that it seeps into the ground and recharges the groundwater, instead of just running off immediately.

If the landscape is destroyed (for example, by deforestation), the rain washes away the top, nutrient-rich layer of soil (the topsoil). Good management prevents this, so the soil remains fertile.

Naulas (small, covered stone tanks for collecting groundwater) and Dharas (natural stone springs) are traditional, vital water-harvesting systems found particularly in mountainous regions like the Himalayas. When the watershed is nurtured, these dried-up springs begin to flow again.

When trees, plants, and streams are restored, it changes local temperature and humidity conditions in a positive direction. This creates a better and more stable local climate (microclimate) for people, agriculture, and nature alike.

We ensure that streams collect rainwater to replenish underground reservoirs, but effective management is crucial: it prevents topsoil erosion, restores dry springs (Naulas and Dharas), and breathes new life into surrounding rivers and microclimates.

Green Milestones: Protecting Our Soil and Water

Our efforts to restore nature and secure vital water resources on the hillsides are moving forward at full speed. We have achieved very good results over the past period:

- **New Rainwater Harvesting Ponds (*Chaal & Baal*):** We have constructed a primary retention pond measuring approximately 3x3 meters (and 3 meters deep). It captures vital rainwater and prevents the landscape from drying out.
- **Contour Trenches (*Khantis*) Against Soil Erosion:** We have dug 14 new trenches and repaired 11 existing ones along the slopes. Each trench has a runoff capacity of 500 liters. Together, they capture and recharge between **1.0 and 1.2 million liters of rainwater** directly into the hillside, keeping the soil fertile and replenishing the groundwater.
- **Pitting for New Trees:** We have prepared 100 planting pits (approx. 40 cm deep and wide) across the slope, ensuring the ground is completely ready for the next big planting day.
- **Nurturing the Future Forest:** We have built new nursery beds specially designed to protect vulnerable young plants. Here, we are currently nurturing around **400 saplings** that will be ready to be planted out into nature in the coming year.



Trenching work underway on the slopes.

While water conservation has always been central to Lakshmi Ashram's mission, this project reminded us that nature acts as our

mother, nurturing every living being with water, warmth, shade, and life. We do not exist separate from nature; taking care of a single tree, keeping a mountain stream untouched, or treating animals with gentleness is the purest form of devotion.

In today's fast-paced, technology-driven world, humanity all too often forgets this sacred bond and mistakes ecological destruction for progress. Although this initial chapter of our watershed project is completed, our stewardship continues throughout the year.

It is inspiring to walk the path paved by Sarala Behn, an English woman who, on Gandhi's advice, made these quiet hills her home. She dedicated her life to empowering mountain women and planted the seeds of environmental harmony that Lakshmi Ashram keeps alive today. Her spirit reminds us that everything in creation has its proper place: a fish belongs to the river, a bird belongs to the open sky, and humanity belongs to a living earth. If we tear them apart, we leave the Earth hollow and bare.

FACT BOX**100 Native Trees Planted**

We have planted 100 trees across 10 ecological species to restore mountain soil and support local livelihoods:

- **Utis (Himalayan Alder):** Fixes nitrogen to enrich barren slopes and provides wood for local artisans.
- **Pangyya (Wild Himalayan Cherry):** Provides wild fruits and nutrient-rich foliage for wildlife and livestock.
- **Reetha (Soapnut):** Yields natural, biodegradable soap traditionally used for hair and textiles.
- **Angoo (Himalayan Ash):** Supplies durable timber crafted into hockey sticks and cricket bats.
- **Kwerai / Kwairai (Kachnar):** Provides protein-rich fodder for local cattle.
- **Deodar (Sacred Cedar):** Revered for its spiritual serenity; produces resin, essential oils, and traditional remedies.
- **Chyura (Indian Butter Tree):** Yields seeds pressed into traditional cooking butter (chyura ghee).
- **Phalyant (Blue Oak):** Provides livestock fodder and flexible bark used to weave durable baskets.
- **Banj (Himalayan White Oak):** The heart of the Kumaon ecosystem. Retains soil moisture and supplies crucial leaf mold fertilizer.

A collective celebration

A preview of the seedlings before they are planted on the slopes.

While the women from the Gandhi philosophy course spearheaded the project, every member of the ashram family participated in establishing the nursery and in the planting drive. What began as a conservation effort was transformed into a joyful festival of shared purpose.

The rhythm of the day

By Urwa

At present, I am staying at Lakshmi Ashram, attending a Sadhana course that offers a close look into the heart of its daily life. The day here unfolds in a highly disciplined and organized manner, where special importance is given to prayer, physical exercise, studies, and working with nature.



It begins with the morning prayer, which gently awakens the children and prepares both mind and body for the entire day through shared yoga practice. From there, responsibility takes root; the children divide into groups to prepare breakfast and dinner, followed by an hour of physical work in the gardens and surrounding grounds. Cleanliness and cooperation are

woven into every chore, even down to washing their own utensils after lunch.

As the afternoon begins, the practical meets the academic. Classes open with the rhythmic art of weaving before moving into other core subjects until five in the evening. Afterwards, snacks and environmental activities reconnect the children with nature, leading into a brief period of personal time.



Manual labor and intellectual pursuits continue hand in hand, in the true spirit of Gandhi.

By twilight, the ashram gathers again for evening prayer. This is a time for shared experiences, where children talk about their day and Radha Didi shares global news to keep everyone aware of the world beyond. After singing songs and offering a pre-meal prayer that every living being may receive sufficient food, the day winds down with group studies. Before sleeping, the children write in their diaries, recording their work, lessons, and feelings—a practice that allows them to reflect deeply and understand themselves.

A Tribute to Lone Poulsen

By Radha Bhatt

We, here in the Tropic of Capricorn, and Lone, in a polar region, felt like family. Their financial support was crucial to our organization, but the close bond with our Danish friends was no less important. In this sense, Lone's passing feels like the loss of a loved one.



Radha and Lone at a Friends of Lakshmi Ashram gathering

It was in the 1990s, when I first met Lone Poulsen at the home of my friend, Marie Thøger. She greeted me with quiet, humble grace. Soft-spoken and economical with words, yet everything she said was meaningful. This was the woman who would go on to manage the work of 'Lakshmi Ashram

Friends.' Already a teacher with professional responsibilities, Lone took upon herself the significant task of supporting Lakshmi Ashram — an institution based on Gandhian principles, located in the Himalayan region of India, far from her native Denmark.

The responsibility was immense, yet Lone fulfilled it tirelessly for nearly four decades, bringing to it her deep understanding and gracious, tactful nature. She was remarkably punctual and hardworking. Even after the long journey from Denmark to Kausani, and the final one-mile uphill trek to Lakshmi Ashram, she would greet us and the girls with a cheerful smile. Within a day of her arrival, she would immerse herself in work — accompanying the students on walks in the forest, sitting in the office to review the ashram's operations, carrying out all these duties in the village setting with ease and loving dedication.

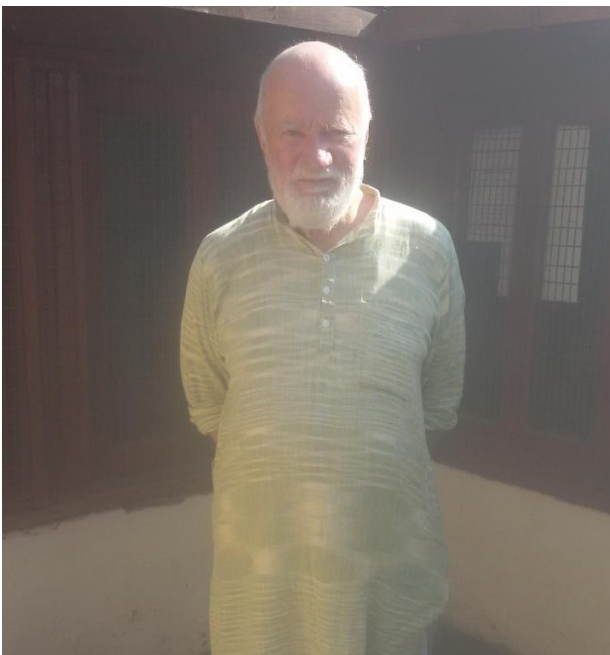
The Ashram is deeply grateful to Lone and to the many friends who have lovingly supported our work over the years, with Lone serving as the vital link between us. Even amidst her own difficult circumstances, she continued the work with consistency. She often said that working for the Ashram was what liberated her. She truly understood the profound relevance of the Gandhian principles that form the bedrock of the Ashram.

Her passing leaves a deep void for us, given her commitment and wisdom. We at the Ashram offer our heartfelt tribute to her. May she attain eternal peace

In Loving Memory of David Bhai

By: Neema Waishnava

As all our friends in Denmark and across the globe already know, our beloved David Bhai passed away at the beginning of March this year. His passing came as a great shock to all of us. Although he had grown physically weak over the last two to three years—and we noticed how this gradual decline seemed to weigh on his spirit and quiet his usual joy for life—his presence remained deeply meaningful to our community.



David Bhai, as many will remember him.

David Bhai's close association with Lakshmi Ashram began in the late 1970s and early 1980s. Over the decades, he took on countless responsibilities with grace and devotion. He first started as a helper in the ashram's vegetable and fruit gardens, while also assisting the office with English correspondence. Gradually, his role expanded to teaching, serving as the ashram librarian, managing accounts, and much more.

David Bhai dedicated his entire life to the mission of Lakshmi Ashram. Through his selfless service, he taught, educated, and inspired generations of girls and women from

Uttarakhand and beyond. To the girls and staff, he was a devoted teacher, a caring brother, and in his later years, a father figure affectionately called *Babuji*.

After marrying Hansi, a graduate of the ashram who managed the office accounts, the two worked side-by-side in administration. David Bhai supported Hansi with the accounting alongside his other duties. Though he was never formally appointed as an administrator or accountant—a fact he often noted with gentle humour—he quietly held the primary organizational responsibilities of the ashram for decades.



The David Hopkins Weather Service. Under his direction, temperature data is meticulously recorded here. The center is crucial for researchers studying climate change in the Himalayas.

He was also the cornerstone of the deep connection between Lakshmi Ashram and the *Lakshmi Ashram Vanner* in Denmark, as well as friends worldwide. Known and respected by so many across Uttarakhand and internationally, he encouraged the girls to write for public magazines, nurtured their curiosity, and shared his deep knowledge of history, geography, mathematics, and life skills. His constant wish was for every girl at the ashram to be happy, comfortable, and empowered. We were exceptionally fortunate to have had David Hopkins in our lives and at Lakshmi Ashram; He will be deeply missed and forever remembered.

A Heartwarming Farewell to Kanti Didi

By Neema Waishnava

Tragically, less than three months after David's passing, when we were still carrying the pain of losing him, our Ashram family suffered another profound loss with the passing of our senior and beloved member, Kanti Didi, on June 3, 2026.



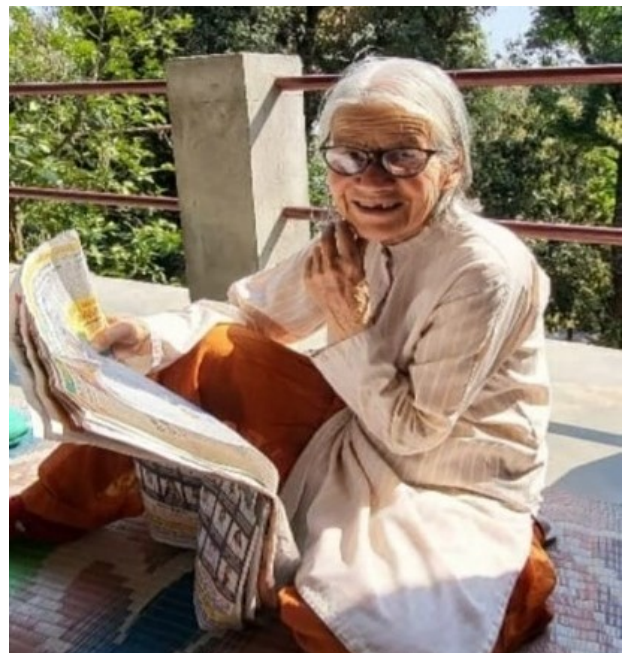
Kanti Didi had a deep love for nature. In her honor, the slopes at Lakshmi Ashram are named Odi.

Kanti Didi passed away from a heart attack following her long battle with heart disease. Though physically frail in her final days, she remained mentally sharp, vibrant, and full of life. Until her very last days, she shared her love of music with the youngest girls, teaching them songs and leading the singing during evening prayers.

Kanti Didi joined Laxmi Ashram two years after her elder sister, Radha Didi, who joined in 1952. Kanti Didi worked under the guidance of Sarala Behn. Kanti Didi served as the principal of the Laxmi Ashram School for many years. Even after her retirement, she continued to guide young people in running the school and its activities.

She was very fond of music and theatre and dedicated herself to teaching and training many of the students' girls in the Ashram school, she never seemed to tire of working for it. She was always a joyful, simple, and loving person. Her simplicity and warmth inspired many people, both within and outside the Ashram.

She also loved visiting villages, meeting the villagers, and listening to their problems. She enjoyed welcoming visitors to the Ashram and caring for them with great affection and attention. Kanti Didi's life was deeply devoted to Gandhi's thought and practice. For many years, she taught Gandhian thought to young people attending the Sadhana Course run by the Ashram.



Music, theatre, philosophy, ecology, people – and news from all over the world. Kanti was curious about everything.

Both David Bhai and Kanti Didi leave behind a legacy of warmth, selfless service, and dedication that will forever remain in the hearts of the Laxmi Ashram family.

Statement of accounts 2025

ORDINARY PROFIT AND LOSS ACCOUNT

Income

Contributions received	68.051,54 DKK
Subscription: 30 members à 75/100 DDK ¹	2.550,00 DKK
Total income	70.601,54 DKK

Expenses

Administration	1.168,00 DKK
Paid to Lakshmi Ashram ²	48.835,11 DKK
Donation to Mahila Haat ³	9.999,99 DKK
Total expenses	60.003,10 DKK

Net result of ordinary account	10.598,44 DKK
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BALANCE SHEET AT 31.12.2025

Assets

Total bank deposits – account no: 3141861	40.847,49 DKK
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Liabilities

Ordinary net capital, beginning 2025	30.249,05 DKK
Net result	10.598,44 DKK
Net capital, end 2025	40.847,49 DKK

Taastrup, August 2026

Helle Poulsen

¹ The membership fee was increased from DKK 75 to DKK 100 at the general meeting on 31 May 2025. For payments made after this date, a membership fee of DKK 100 has been deducted from the first payment.

² There has only been one payment to Lakshmi Ashram in 2025.

³ 1 A donation has been received for Lakshmi Ashram's sister organization Mahila Haat in 2024. The money was transferred to Mahila Haat in 2025.