

FRIENDS OF LAKSHMI ASHRAM

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NEWS FROM LAKSHMI ASHRAM

May 2007

Dear friends,

First of all I wish you all a nice and sunny summer. The newsletter brings the minutes from the first general meeting 4th February 2007, the account for 2006, presentation of the committee and articles about festivals in the Ashram, the monthly magazines and a little about Neema Vaishnava's visit in Germany in April/May this year. The rules of the new society are enclosed.

SANCHAR 101

Now it is a fact. The society "Friends of Lakshmi Ashram" has been formed. It means, as I wrote in Sanchar 100, that we are now "legal" according to the Danish system of taxation, and we have avoided paying inheritance tax for the inheritance after Svend Otto Soerensen, and in that way all the inheritance money can be used for the good purpose.

A little change in the daily administration will happen. Up to now I have set 4% of the collected money aside for administration. This money has paid postage, printing of the Sanchar, bank charges etc. The taxation authorities tell, that the society must charge subscription to meet these expenses. Therefore it was resolved at the first general meeting to pay 75 Danish kroner (about 10 Euro) per membership a year. As we have done before we will of course send a surplus that may arise from the administration account to Lakshmi Ashram.

And what will this mean to you? It will not be more expensive to be a sponsor, i.e. a sponsorship is 1725 Danish kroner and the subscription 75 Danish kroner (about 230 Euro and 10 Euro) = 1800 Danish kroner as before. Some people send money once a year for a sponsorship, and others divide the amount during the year. Therefore we will put 75 kroner in the administration account first time in the year, when we receive money from someone. This also applies if you send amounts that are not earmarked. So all will pay the same amount a year to be a member and receive the Sanchar. Unless otherwise instructed I assume one membership per household, club, society etc. A membership gives one vote in the yearly general meeting.

Thank you for all the money for sponsorships and other contributions. I still ask you to support Lakshmi Ashram. Any amount of money will be received with pleasure. Contributions that are not earmarked are also very good. The money will be used for educational material, study tours, project in the villages etc. Thank you for your co-operation.

On 27th April a Lions Club in Denmark celebrated its 50 years' anniversary. At this occasion they distributed some donations for different purposes. Lakshmi Ashram was bestowed with 25.000 Danish kroner (about 3335 Euro) to be used for renovation and extension of the kitchen in the Ashram, which is really needed. Thanks a lot for the money.

Best wishes,

FRIENDS OF LAKSHMI ASHRAM

Lone Poulsen, Præstehusene 6, 2620 Albertslund – Denmark

STATEMENT OF ACCOUNTS 2006.

INCOME:

Contributions received (96%)	106.727,72 DDK
Administration contribution (4%)	4.446,99 DDK
Interest and yield: Bikuben Girobank	1.579,84 DDK
Transfer from Radha Bhatt	23.000,00 DDK
On account inheritance	260.000,00 DDK
Total income	395.754,55 DDK

EXPENSES:

Administration	2.654,00 DDK
Paid to Lakshmi Ashram	117.973,87 DDK
Transfer from Radha Bhatt	23.000,00 DDK
Total expenses	143.627,87 DDK

Net result of the year	252.126,68 DDK
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BALANCE SHEET at 31.12.2006

ASSETS:

Bikuben Girobank account no. 4748312242	321.188,87 DDK
Bikuben Girobank account no. 3141861	1.631,92 DDK
Total bank deposits	322.820,79 DDK

LIABILITIES:

Net capital, beginning 2006	70.694,11 DDK
Net result for 2006	252.126,68 DDK
Net capital, end 2006	322.820,79 DDK

Albertslund, / 2007

Lone Poulsen

The accounts have been audited.

Albertslund, / 2007

Claus Broskov Sørensen

SANCHAR 101

Minutes from the first general meeting for Friends Lakshmi Ashram

Held on February 4th 2007 in Vestervangskolen, Stadionvej 81, 2600 Glostrup.

Welcome by Lone Poulsen

It has for a long time been wished to set up a society, so that it is more correct according to the Danish taxation authorities and to be excused payment of inheritance tax for an inheritance after Svend Otto Sørensen. The taxation authorities had told us to give it a favourable consideration, if we succeeded in setting up a society. The daily work will not be changed very much prepared with the activities of the last 40 years.

Election of a chairman: Helle Poulsen

Election of a keeper of the minutes: Hanne Stenager

Motion for rules for Friends of Lakshmi Ashram

A few changes were made, and the passed rules are enclosed.

The year in the Ashram

Lone told about the activities in Lakshmi Ashram. They have started to renovate the old Lakshmi Ashram building, where the school started about 60 years ago. The money for this renovation has come from different funds etc. in India. Neema, the secretary of the school, will probably come to Denmark in springtime. Ruth Sillemann and Lone plans a course "Appreciative Inquiry" for the workers in Lakshmi Ashram. We suppose it will be held in September/October this year. Neema will be able to participate in the planning. The report was approved.

The accounts

The accounts for 2006 was laid before the meeting and approved.

Subscription

The subscription was fixed at 75 Danish kroner (about 10 Euro) a year. It corresponds fairly to the 4%, which has been used until now. The committee decides how to collect it in practice.

Election of committee members and a substitute

The following persons were elected:

Lone Poulsen, Præstehusene 6, 2620 Albertslund, Denmark – chairman

Hanne Stenager, Jonstruphøj 23, 3500 Værløse, Denmark

Ruth Sillemann, Gl. Kongevej 109, 2.tv., 1850 Frederiksberg C, Denmark

Trine Rasted, Nygårdsvej 45, 3.th., 2100 København Ø, Denmark

Suppleant: Peter Kristensen, Jonstruphøj 23, 3500 Værløse, Denmark



Lone



Hanne



Ruth



Trine

Election of an auditor and an auditor substitute

Auditor: Claus Broskov Sørensen, Bavneåsen 79, 2640 Hedehusene, Denmark

Auditor substitute: David David, Bredebovej 35, 1.mf., 2800 Lyngby, Denmark

The inheritance

Lakshmi Ashram will be asked to find out proposals for the use of the money from the received inheritance. It was suggested to use a small amount for a new Danish folder and some exhibit material. It is important with PR for Friends of Lakshmi Ashram. There was also a proposal for a contribution for the printing of a new book about Sarala Behn, the founder of the Ashram. Marie Thøger is finishing the writing these days. And there was a proposal to give some money so that workers of the Ashram would be able to go to Denmark for study visits. Other proposals can be sent to the committee. The proposals will be discussed with Lakshmi Ashram.

Film

The meeting ended with showing the film "The Wall Wallah", which is about a Scottish champion in dike building, who came to the Himalaya by request of Lakshmi Ashram. He taught some villagers to build dikes to protect the forest.

04.02.07 Hanne Stenager

Festivals in the Life of Lakshmi Ashram

Nandi Bisht

The paragraphs written with *italic type* is written by Lone Poulsen. Sources: Dilip Kadodwala and Paul Gatheshill: Hindu Festivals and a Danish travel guidebook.

The Hindu calendar builds on the movements of the moon. The year consists of 12 months. Each month has been divided in a light and a dark half – from new moon to full moon. That means that the time for the different festivals changes from year to year. The Hindu calendar has 354 days, while our calendar, which builds on the movements of the sun, has 365 days.

The Hinduism is one of the oldest religions in the world. The Hindus' belief in God and in how people have to live their lives has developed through a very long time and in different movements. It has not been founded by any individual, and there is not either one particular book, which is particularly holy

Brahman is a Hindu word for God. Brahman is everywhere and in all things. Even if they believe that there is one God, Brahman can be understood and reproduced in many different forms – like many different gods and goddesses. Some Hindus go to the temple, others prefers sacrifice rituals or bathe in holy rivers, take a pilgrimage, and others again have a little room, a shelf at home, where they have their worship. There are festivals and ceremonies, which are not only connected with gods, goddesses and heroes, but also with the sun and the moon, the stars and the planets, rivers, lakes, seas, animals, trees and flowers.

India is known as the land of festivals, and not a month goes by without some festival being celebrated. Each and every festival is distinctive in its own special way, linked to the different cultural traditions. Here in the Ashram too we celebrate all the festivals of our villages and homes, at the same time also celebrating the festivals of other faiths, so that the children get an understanding and knowledge of other faiths, and at the same time they get to know how other communities celebrate their festivals.

The annual cycle of festivals begins on 14th January with the festival of Makar Sankranti, also known as Uttarayani, marking the sun's beginning its northward journey to once again dispel the dark of winter. This is celebrated in Kumaun as Ghughutiya. On the previous day we all sit together in the winter sun, preparing sweets from dough, which are cooked in the evening and then put into garlands. The next morning at dawn the hillside echoes with the voices of the children calling the crows to come and partake of the sweets. Once we have fed the crows, then we too enjoy the sweets.

In February, just around the time that the children return from their homes, the next festival that we celebrate is Basant Panchami. This is a regional festival, especially celebrated by the farmers and others with strong ties to the land. We dye handkerchiefs a bright yellow, which are given to everyone as a symbol of spring, and also perform plays that tell of the return of spring after the cold, dark days of winter.

This is followed by the festival of Holi, falling on the Full Moon in the month of Phalgun, (February/March) which is celebrated throughout India. This is one of the major festivals of the year, and is celebrated with great happiness and joy. In those days the children are really happy for the days are spent dancing and singing, and throwing colours over one another. Four or five days pass without them even being aware!

*During the Holi Festival you commemorate stories about the God Krishna, e.g. this one:
"It was a lovely day in the springtime, and Krishna walked along the river together with his preferred companion, Radha, and her girl friends. They were milkmaids, whom Krishna met often, and he made them dance to his flute playing.*

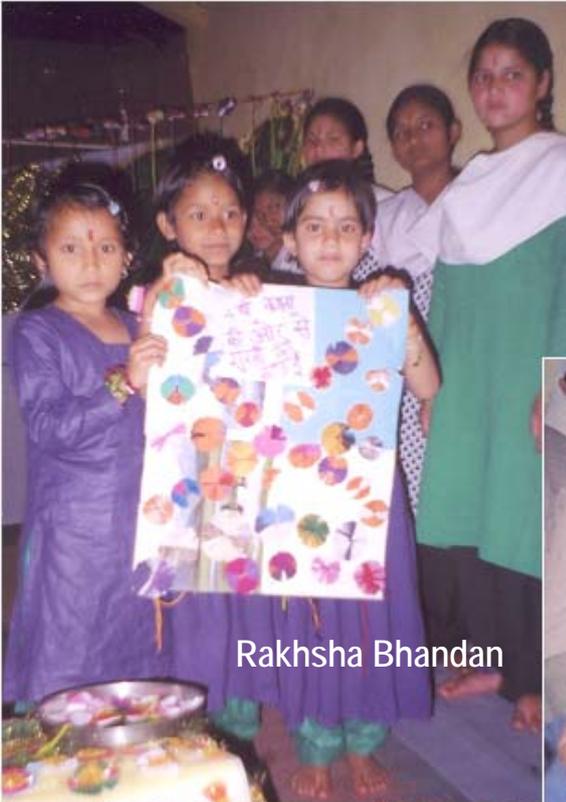
At this occasion Krishna decided that he would be properly amused, and he threw some coloured powder over Radha. She also threw some powder over Krishna, and soon they were all covered with coloured powder from top to toe."

Then comes 'Phool Deli', celebrated on 14th March. This too is very much a children's festival, and special to Kumaun. Happy at the coming of spring and warmer days, the children go from house to house, scattering flower petals on the thresholds, and also receiving sweets in return which they eat with unrestrained joy.

In July is celebrated the festival of Harela, another local festival. Ten days before the festival 'Harela' (a mixture of seeds of seven different grains) is sown in a special vessel which is placed in a clean spot in the dark. Every day the children look at their 'Harela' to see how much it has grown. Every day they water it, and on the tenth day they cut the yellow shoots and, placing them on everyone's head one by one, recite a traditional blessing for their wellbeing. From this the children imbibe the message that food grains are worthy of worship by us, and deserve our respect.

Raksha Bandhan is a festival for brothers and sisters. Raksha means protection, and bandhan means to tie. It is a festival, which is celebrated by both children and grown-ups.

In the following month Raksha Bandhan is celebrated with great enthusiasm. This festival too is very special, for on this day sisters tie 'rakhis' on the wrists of their brothers. Preparations for it begin a month prior to the festival. The 'rakhi' is a kind of thread, also known as 'raksha sutra'. For weeks before the festival it seems that the market is full of nothing but 'rakhis'. However in the ashram all of us sisters make 'rakhis' with our own hands. To do so, in a spirit of deep absorption and love, we begin some weeks before to pick out threads from pieces of cloth and then, cutting the threads into a round shape, prepare the 'rakhis'. In this way we celebrate this festival with great joy.



Raksha Bhandan



Harela



Diwali



Father Christmas



Shree Krishna Lila

Then just eight days later comes Shree Krishna Janmashtami. This festival is very special for us, for on this day we perform the Shree Krishna Lila, a song and dance drama that tells of the events leading up to the birth of Lord Krishna, and of his childhood. We begin rehearsing for it some fifteen days before. We erect the stage ourselves. How much we like doing everything ourselves! Large numbers of villagers from all around come to watch the performance of the Shree Krishna Lila.

Then in October/November at the New Moon we celebrate Deepawali (Diwali). This festival is celebrated throughout the country. For three or four days we light wick lamps at dusk to light up our homes, which we have earlier thoroughly cleaned and decorated. This festival marks the return of Lord Rama to Ayodhya after fourteen years in exile, and symbolizes the victory of good over evil.

On 25th December we celebrate Christmas which, being the final festival of the year, we celebrate in a fine way. As it is, Christmas is a very big festival. Although this is a Christian festival, yet for us all faiths are equal. We celebrate the festivals of all faiths with equal enthusiasm and fervour. We also celebrate various birth anniversaries too, such as Buddha Jayanti and Guru Nanak Jayanti, the birth anniversaries of Gautam Buddha and Guru Nanak respectively. And we must not forget Maha Shivaratri and Ramnavami, dedicated to Lord Shiva and Lord Rama.

In this way our year, packed with marvellous festivals, comes to a joyful end.

“Suryodaya” and “Vijay” – A Medium for Students’ Self-expression

David Bhai

In its holistic approach to education, Lakshmi Ashram affords numerous avenues of opportunity to its students and workers for self-expression.

Song, dance and drama play an important part in the life of the Ashram. At the festivals the students present dramas, incorporating song and dance. The use of song, dance and drama is also as a medium for taking social messages to the village communities – on themes as varied as environmental issues, liquor prohibition and self-sufficiency. In societies where the printed word is still not so widely prevalent, the spoken word is still a powerful force for putting across ones message.

From the earliest days of the Ashram, two handwritten school magazines have been the most important medium available to the students and workers for expressing themselves in prose and verse, and through painting and drawing. These have been known since their inception as “Suryodaya” and “Vijay”, meaning ‘Sunrise’ and ‘Victory’ respectively. While “Suryodaya” is the magazine for the older students and workers, “Vijay” is the forum of self-expression for the younger students.

These two magazines are usually brought out on a specific occasion, usually one of the festivals celebrated by the Ashram community. The most recent occasion was the festival of Buddha Purnima, celebrating the birth of Gautam Buddha, which is celebrated on the full moon falling in the Hindu month of Baisakh (April-May). Every year on this occasion the students perform a play presenting the events leading up to the birth of Prince Siddhartha, his childhood and the events that led to him renouncing his princely life. This year the full moon fell on 2nd May, and that afternoon everyone gathered in the Ashram meeting hall, Shanti Bhavan, to enjoy the students’ drama, and also for the release of the two magazines.

To give you a flavour of the writings of the students, translations are offered of three of the contributions to the latest issue of “Vijay”. The first essay is by Hansi Joshi in class seven. She is a very sensitive and hardworking student, very conscious of the hardships that her mother faces as a young widow in a conservative rural society. Her short essay touches briefly on some of these issues – relations with her mother-in-law highlighted by the incident with the sickle, her striving for some economic security through raising goats, the lack of basic health amenities. Hansi has a very strong bond with her elder brother, who has a miraculous escape in a bus accident two years back, that claimed over thirty lives. He had been living in the temple in Kausani and going to the local government school. Following the accident the temple priest took full responsibility for his medical treatment, and as Hansi writes, he is now at a Sanskrit school in Haldwani.

Experiences at Home

Hansi Joshi –Class VII

Leaving the Ashram family, I set off for home on 27th December. At first I did not want to go home. Then, as one by one my Ashram sisters left to go home, so I too was keen to go.

I reached home at two o'clock. My mother had gone out to graze the goats, but a little later she returned home, bringing the goats with her. I greeted her with respect. I was not feeling so well, so I took a rest while my mother prepared a meal for us. My elder brother is studying in the Sanskrit Vidyalaya in Haldwani. He did not come home this year, so I was missing him a lot. At half past four my younger brother came home from school and greeted me.

From the next day I started to study for an hour each day, sometimes though only half an hour, because my mother was not keeping well. A few days later she began to suffer from a severe toothache, and because of this I could not put my mind to my studies. I had no desire at all to do any work. One day her tooth was giving her extreme pain, and she started to cry. That same day we could not find our sickle. It turned out that my grandmother had taken it, and when we asked for it back she came threatening us. My poor mother could not say a word.

A little later my brother took our mother to the hospital. I said to mother, “Have your tooth taken out, otherwise I will be worrying about you.” When they left for the hospital I was left thinking, “What will happen to us?”, and I cried a lot. The doctor in the hospital said, “I cannot remove this tooth.” Then my mother went to another dentist, and he removed my mother's tooth with great difficulty. I was so happy when my mother came home.

Then once again I could put my mind to my studies, and I studied regularly every day. Mother too was feeling much happier, though there was still a little pain.

On 15th January was the festival of ‘Ghughutiya’, and together we made 293 ‘ghughute’ (deep-fried sweetmeats) in all. I was missing my elder brother that day, for he could not come home. On 23rd January was the festival of Basant Panchami. That day I called to mind the Ashram, for most years I celebrate this festival there.

The second contribution is a poem by Prabha, who has just gone up into class six. Even the smallest children are encouraged to express themselves in verse, and for many of the older students and workers it is a very popular means of self-expression. Here in the foothills of the Himalaya, living under pollution-free skies, the children are very much aware of the night sky, for most of the year outside the monsoon cloud free and full of twinkling stars.



The Stars in the Heavens

Prabha – Class 6

The stars in the sky, how lovely they are.
Far, far away – they twinkle.

Look up to the sky, how lovely the stars are.
The stars come out at night, in the daytime they hide.
They are far away from us, yet they give us light.

Look at the stars in the sky, how nice they are.
The stars are so small, they seem so lovely to me.

There are so many stars in the sky,
With them the moon and the sun, all living together.

Look up at the sky, how lovely the stars seem.
Let's all work together, and we'll also shine like the stars.

We will close with a short essay by Bhawana Joshi, who has just gone into class five, in which she describes what she intends to try and achieve in the coming year. She clearly expresses just how she wishes to develop in every aspect of her daily life, both as an individual and as a member of the Ashram family. One cannot help but think how differently someone of her age from a more materially better-off background would have written.



My Thoughts for the Coming Year

Bhawana – Class V

I want to learn so many things in my next class, class V, such as reading and writing in Hindi. I want to be able to write English neatly. I want all of us to speak affectionately one with the other, to understand one another. In our work in the garden I want to learn to hoe and weed and to plant out saplings and vegetable seedlings. In our dairy I will learn how to clean out the bedding from the cattle sheds, and to clean the dairy. I will learn all the work there is to do. I will explain to my classmates whatever they do not understand. I will discipline myself to do my homework at the set times, and to write my diary every day. I want to learn how to spin well. I will learn how to do all the work that my elder sisters (*Didis*) give me and will do whatever they tell me to do. I will work with my team and learn to do as I am told. I will bring in my clothes every day from the washing line. I want to learn how to wash my clothes myself. I will try hard to keep our room tidy. I want to learn how to cook vegetables and chapattis and to wash the cooking vessels clean. I will not speak rudely to anyone and will pay attention to my studies. I will do whatever Nandi Didi (my class Didi) tells me to do. I will try to keep myself neat and clean, likewise my cupboard. I will learn to bathe myself. I will learn how to sit properly in class, will improve my handwriting and make the best use of my time. I will not touch anything that is not mine without asking first. I will do whatever I have to do, and take part in all my duties. All in all, I will make a great deal of effort in my next class.

A Little of My Visit to Germany

Neema Vaishnava

We were a group of seven Gandhian workers from different part of India who had been invited to Germany by Via-ev. Via-ev is a non-government organisation for international and inter-cultural exchange which offers internships and voluntary services in Germany and abroad. They are sending their volunteers to India as well. The Gandhi Peace Foundation in Delhi is placing the volunteers in different Gandhian organisations. Lakshmi Ashram has also had short terms volunteers during six years now.

The main purpose of coming to Germany was to meet with the people who are working on many kinds of issues in Germany and other parts of the globe as well. So in our three weeks' programme, we have seen various organisations, groups of people, folk high schools, ordinary schools and universities, and we have been talking about our work and the idea of Gandhi and Indian culture and spirit. We found that a lot of people are very much aware of the crises in the world, and they are trying to understand deeply the method of getting over these. In their understanding Gandhi's thoughts are more and more relevant now than ever before. After meeting and talking to many people I realized that there are many people who are involved to do something for the society. It gave me lots of hope and I feel much inspired by them.

We met people who are trying to be more natural and live according to the law of the nature, but at the same time I also realized that the system which is existing in Germany is now becoming more and more automatic and unnatural. Therefore it is not so easy to do what you like to do, I mean if you are living in this system then you do not have much opportunity to practice your ideas in your life, but still we did meet some of people who are developing their own system and living.

We are all facing the same problem all over the world like globalisation which is totally opposite sustainability. Globalisation is just a profit oriented idea for few people. We feel we have to join our hands together to fight against this with sustainable method.

We also visited many historical places, and I really got interested in history after this visit. We stayed with different families. It was really a good experience being with the family, because we could learn a lot about the way of German life. The programme has been really well organised by Via -ev. We are very thankful to them.

My travel ended with a short stay in Denmark to meet some of the friends of Lakshmi Ashram. I worked together with Ruth Sillemann and Lone Poulsen to prepare the course "Appreciative Inquiry" for the workers in Lakshmi Ashram. The course is planned to take place in springtime 2008.

In the photo I am presenting the cheque from Lions Club Søllerød in Denmark for our kitchen renovation. We are very happy to receive this donation.

