

FRIENDS OF LAKSHMI ASHRAM

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**NEWS FROM LAKSHMI ASHRAM
SANCHAR 102**

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Dear friends,

First of all I wish you all a Happy and Peaceful New Year.

This time the newsletter brings the "Annual Report of Activities in 2006-2007". It is a long report, and I have had to shorten it, because I also have to think about the postal expenses. I think it is an interesting report, and I hope you will enjoy reading it. This time there was not left space for photos, but I promise to bring photos in the next Sanchar, which I will send to you in April.

As I have told before, Friends of Lakshmi Ashram is now a legal society, which means that we now have to charge subscription to meet these expenses for administration. This money pays postage, printing of the Sanchar, bank charges etc. The charge is 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.

The next Sanchar will be send to you in April and I will call to the yearly general meeting on Sunday 27th April. I visit Lakshmi Ashram together with Ruth Sillemann in March. We shall hold a conference / workshop for all the workers. The heading is "Appreciative Inquiry". We are looking very much forward to this meeting.

For the Danish, Norwegian and Swedish members we are happy to send a newly printed book about Sarala Behn, the founder of Lakshmi Ashram. Marie Thoege, a very old friend of Lakshmi Ashram, has written this book. The printing has been paid privately. It is in Danish, so of course we only send it to people, who are able to read Danish.

Best wishes,

KASTURBA MAHILA UTTHAN MANDAL

Annual Report of Activities: 2006-2007

Introduction

This year saw Lakshmi Ashram quietly celebrate its sixtieth birthday on 5th December 2006, for it was on that very date back in 1946, the year before India gained her independence, that Sarala Behn formally began the activities on Lakshmi Ashram in the small cottage that had been given to her shortly after she first arrived in the Kumaun Hills in 1941. The core activity of Lakshmi Ashram continues to be the non-formal, residential school for girls, the foundation of which Sarala Behn had laid sixty years ago. There are regular classes from class one to class ten, while students continuing to live in the Ashram after class ten become trainee workers and at the same time pursue their studies.

The Ashram has its own cowshed and vegetable gardens, and workshop where spinning and weaving activities in wool are undertaken. In the past couple of years efforts have been made to diversify the productive activities. Turmeric powder and tulsi (herbal tea) are produced for sale, along with agarbatti (incense). The Ashram now has a bakery where biscuits and buns are produced for both Ashram consumption and for retail sales. In the past two winters mushroom production has also been started, after two workers had undergone training at an Agricultural University. The Ashram's workshop Udyog Mandir, situated close to the Anasakti Ashram in Kausani, houses the Kasturba Pustakalay (library), which is open daily to the general public. The workshop itself, under the guidance of Anand Bhai, continues to implement its 'Appropriate Technology for Mountain Life' project. In the main market in Kausani is our khadi bhandar (shop), a retail outlet for khadi (homespun and homewoven cloth) and gramodyog (homemade) items.

Sarala Behn had always been very active in the villages of the Kosi Valley, below Kausani, and these links have been built up again during the past four years under the leadership of Basanti Behn. Balwaris (kindergartens) have been established, while Mahila Mangal Dals (womens' groups) at the village level bring the women together to work for community issues – both environmental and social. Lakshmi Ashram continues its village level work in Dhauladevi block, focused on our women's centre in the hamlet of Chalmorigara, close to Danya. The activities are threefold – pre-school education through village balwaris, watershed development and women's empowerment. At the state and national level the Ashram has links to Sarvodaya work through the activities of its former secretary, Radha Behn, who has devoted much of her time and energy in the past year to activities of the Kasturba Trust. At the end of 2006 she was elected as Chairperson of the Gandhi Peace Foundation in New Delhi, following the sad death of a stalwart friend of Lakshmi Ashram, Shri Ravindra Varma.

Lakshmi Ashram Vidyalaya

The Lakshmi Ashram vidyalaya is the heart of Lakshmi Ashram's varied activities – to most outsiders Lakshmi Ashram is synonymous with its non-formal residential school for rural girls. Daily life for the students and workers in Lakshmi Ashram is a finely tuned balance of activities that nourish and develop the body, mind and soul in a holistic manner. It is marked by the annual cycle of the seasons, reflected in the varying vegetables seen in the terraced fields that have been painstakingly created over the years, and in the festivals, both local and national, that are always so eagerly awaited.

The number of students in classes I to X has shown no change over the past year, being 51 at the beginning of the year and the same number at the end of the year. Some older students left, but there was an intake of five new students in July 2006. Two joined the youngest class; one went into class VI, while two others joined class VII. The students of Lakshmi Ashram study for the Uttarakhand Board examinations. The examinations for class eight, the Junior High School examinations, never prove a problem. However the High School examinations taken by class ten students are a bigger hurdle. In 2006 three students passed out of six. Those who passed – Tara, Jyoti Pant and Jyoti Joshi – joined the Sadhana training programme. Daya and Hema have both assumed responsibilities within the Ashram community and in 2007 have sat for the NOS (National Open School) exams, while Himani has returned to her

family because of ill-health. In 2007 six students sat for the High School exams and all but one passed. There are no formal classes for Intermediate level students, who study in their spare time. One student each took intermediate exams in 2006 and 2007 respectively and both passed. Formal academic classes only take place for three hours each day except Sunday, but within the daily life of the Ashram community each and every activity is considered an integral part of the students' education. Education is understood in its widest sense as encompassing the holistic development of every aspect of the student's personality, "*Head, hands and heart*".

Thus the students, big and small, along with the workers, take responsibility for each and every activity within the Ashram. Great emphasis is put upon the value of physical labour, and everybody participates in the morning cleaning of the Ashram and its immediate surroundings, and in the preparation of meals three times a day in the community kitchen.

One of the key elements in the day to day running of the Ashram is the system of teams. The students are divided into eight teams, each with a leader and an assistant leader respectively. Each team contains a mixture of ages, some very young students, some older ones. In addition each team has an Ashram worker, '*Didi*', who gives overall inspiration to her team. All the activities in the morning cleaning, also the preparing of meals and washing up of the cooking pots and pans, are undertaken by the teams. Working in teams from an early age encourages the students to work together for the good of the Ashram community, to learn to take responsibility both as individuals and as members of their team. Each team knows exactly what their particular responsibilities are at any time, and the system is so engrained that even if the older workers are absent for some reason, all the students get on with their specific duties.

From the founding of the Ashram sixty years ago, a keystone of Ashram life has been self-sufficiency, both in the material sense and also in thoughts and feelings. From the very beginning agriculture, animal husbandry and spinning and weaving have been an integral part of Ashram life. The students and workers actively participate in running the cowshed, maintaining the terraced vegetable gardens that supply much of our daily needs of vegetables, especially during the monsoon months and into the autumn. They likewise spin wool on simple spindles and the traditional, locally made Bageshwari charkha, while the older students weave carpets and rugs and knit woollen sweaters.

Appendix 1 gives details of production of vegetables and fruits over the past year. It will be observed that there was a sharp decline in vegetable and fruit production compared to the previous year. The main reason was a devastating hailstorm on 7th May that almost totally destroyed the standing vegetables, in particular the seedlings that would have provided us with vegetables such as tomatoes, aubergines, capsicums, cucumbers and lauki during the monsoon. It also wiped out a lot of the fruit that was beginning to form on the fruit trees. The Ashram also seeks to raise as much vegetable seed as possible, so as to be self-sufficient to a degree. During the past year our vegetable seed production was as given in the following table:

Vegetable Seed Production: 2006-07

S.No.	Seed	Quantity (Kg.)
1	Coriander	5.400
2	Lye (Winter greens)	0.800
3	Spinach	4.000
4	Mooli (White Radish)	3.000
5	Cucumber (Kakri)	1.000
6	Pumpkin	0.500
7	Chaulai) <i>Local</i>	0.500
8	Ugul) <i>Summer</i>	5.000
9	Betawa) <i>Greens</i>	0.500
TOTAL		20.700

In addition five kilos of garlic were saved from the harvest to put aside for planting in the coming year.

Despite the best efforts of those managing the cowshed, in particular Indira Behn, the production declined. As Appendix II indicates, the main reason for a decline in milk yields was the loss of one of our best cows. The cowshed plays a key role in hill agriculture, for it provides the dung that is composted and then added to the terraced fields to maintain their fertility. The main limiting factor in increasing milk production is the lack of green fodder during the winter months. During the monsoon there is an abundance of green grass, but following the monsoon, as temperatures fall and winter approaches, the grass quickly dies away.

To meet the need for fodder in winter the grass on the hillsides above the Ashram are cut for hay following the clearing away of the monsoon. During October all but the youngest students are occupied from dawn to dusk in cutting the grass, a task that takes a full three weeks, only resting during the heat of the day. The grass when dry is tied into sheaves and carried down to be built up into haystacks. In recent years the supply of hay has been supplemented by the grass from a new area in the adjoining forest, and the hay has lasted right through until the next monsoon. During the lean winter months the leaves of several local trees are cut for fodder, in particular the leaves of the Himalayan Oak, but neither hay nor tree leaves can provide the nutrition that green grass does.

In its efforts for self-sufficiency in cloth, all the students learn to spin wool, the fibre traditionally available in the hills. Locally obtained Tibetan wool is most often used, but the older girls also spin Australian wool, which is then used for producing items softer to the touch. Production of woollen yarn and khadi during the past year are summarised below:

Woollen Yarn Production

Woollen Yarn	Weight (Kilos)	Value (Rs.)
No. 56 yarn – Australian	15.000	5,100.00
Tibetan wool yarn	24.100	5,879.00
Total	39.100	10,979.00

While the Tibetan yarn was spun by the younger students, mostly on the spindle (*takli*), the Australian wool was spun by older students and young workers on the Bageshwari charkha.

Woollen Khadi Production

Item	Wool	Quantity	Value (Rs.)
Sweater	Tibetan	30	9,985.00
Sweater	Merino	4	1,805.00
Woollen Hat	Merino	80	6,320.00
Small rugs (Asans)	Tibetan	12	5,210.00
Rug	Tibetan	1	2,134.00
Total		127	25,454.00

The Tibetan sweaters were made use of by our students, while the Merino sweaters and knitted woollen hats found plenty of demand in our khadi shop in Kausani, especially among tourists during the cold winter months. Our shop is also a good outlet for our gramodyog (homemade) products. For several years now the Ashram has sought to diversify its homemade production, and at the present time three items in particular are produced. Turmeric powder is largely produced from our own production of turmeric, though this year we did purchase some turmeric from a local farmer/teacher, who many years ago had taught in Lakshmi Ashram, when his father-in-law was still the Ashram treasurer. In recent years we have also increased the area under tulsii. The leaves of the tulsii are sun-dried and packaged for sale as a herbal tea. Because of its medicinal properties this is much in demand. The third item produced by the Ashram workers and students is agarbatti (incense). Several years ago one of our young workers took a training programme in incense production, and has since passed on her skills to others. We do face some difficulties in obtaining the raw materials for this activity.

Gramodyog Production

S.No.	Gramodyog Item	Quantity	Value (Rs.)
1	Turmeric Powder	21.000 Kg.	1,710.00
2	Tulsi Herbal Tea	29.950 Kg.	3,532.00
3	Agarbatti	274 packets	2,740.00
TOTAL			7,982.00

One further productive activity that was started a couple of years ago is a bakery, producing various kinds of biscuits, buns, etc. Experiments have been carried out in producing biscuits using different flours, in particular the local millet, whose flour is very nutritious and slightly black in colour. Production is seasonal and so far we have had to rely on an outside skilled baker. So far none of the Ashram workers have acquired the requisite skills, so this is a challenge for the future. The bakery production has been sold locally and also consumed in the Ashram mess.

Bakery Production 2006-07

S. No.	Description	Quantity		Value Rs.
		Kilos	Dozen	
1	Wheatflour Biscuits	544.95		29,080.65
2	Special Biscuits	63.20		3,212.40
3	Cream Biscuits		20	487.80
4	Sour Naan		60	416.40
5	Burfi		1,410	13,711.50
6	Flan		664	11,902.20
7	Cake		31	335.10
8	Bun - large		615	14,999.70
9	Bun - small		867	12,443.70
TOTAL		608.15	3,667	86,589.45

In the previous year two of our young workers, Pooran Pande and Balwant Bisht, had taken a training programme organised by a Research Institute for Hill Agriculture at the Pantnagar Agricultural University in mushroom production, and subsequently the Institute has lent its support in developing a small mushroom production unit in the Ashram. Production is limited to the late winter and spring and finds a local market especially in the hotels, as well as also being consumed in the Ashram. This year on 27th October 2006 95 bags were sown with Button Mushrooms. They first began to appear on 27th December, and the first pickings were made in January 2007. The production is detailed in the table below:

Button Mushroom Production - 2006-07

S.No.	Month	Production (Kg.)
1	January 2007	6.750
2	February 2007	33.800
3	March 2007	51.200
TOTAL (Kg.)		91.750

Turning away from material we can look at those activities that seek to nurture qualities of creative self-sufficiency and qualities of independence of thought and leadership in our students from their earliest years. The undertaking of many of the daily tasks by the students' teams has already been mentioned. One of the objectives of this system of management is the abundant opportunity that it affords the students to develop both qualities of leadership as well as the team spirit. Further opportunities for assuming responsibilities are offered by the system of ministers, who in turn select a chief minister. These ministers assume specific responsibilities within the community during their term of office, usually lasting for 4-6 weeks. As an example there is a 'Minister for Guests', who takes responsibility in

helping the concerned senior worker in meeting all the needs of guests. The Minister for Culture has responsibility for the prayer hall, for the conducting of prayers, and also for any cultural programme or festival that takes place during her term of office. She also has responsibility for editing the handwritten school magazine, 'Vijay', which is regularly brought out by the younger students. A second magazine, 'Suryodaya', contains contributions by the older students, workers and teachers. These two magazines together offer a platform for everyone from the youngest upwards to express themselves in prose or verse and also with pictures. On 5th December to mark the founding of Lakshmi Ashram, the students produced an evaluation of the past year in which they recounted their personal experiences of the year in a handwritten magazine format.

Song, dance and drama play a big role in the life of the Ashram, and the students have various opportunities through the year to express themselves. There are morning and evening prayers when students and teachers take turns in singing. The various festivals are celebrated with great enthusiasm. Dramas are put on to depict the birth and early life of Gautam Buddha, Lord Krishna and Christ respectively. The biggest event of the year is the Krishna Lila that is performed before a large crowd of local villagers, who come from miles around. It has become an accepted part of local tradition, so much so that there is never any need to publicise the event in advance – everyone for miles around knows that the Ashram's Krishna Lila will be performed on the day of fasting. The local people enjoy the drama before going down to the small market in Kausani for the annual mela (festival) that culminates on the second day with the taking out of the deities from the temple around the village.

At Christmas too our neighbours join us in the Ashram courtyard under the cool winter sun to enjoy the nativity play that conveys in a simple way the events leading up to the birth of Christ, and some of the incidents of his early life. The celebration of the festivals of various faiths also reflects the philosophy of the equality of all faiths, one of Gandhi's eleven vows, which are recited every day at both morning and evening prayers. Although all the children come from Hindu families, yet they are brought up from an early age to be familiar with the teachings of other faiths, and enjoy preparing for the Christmas nativity play every bit as much as preparing for the Krishna Lila. The students also perform plays with social themes and have a large repertoire of such songs also. When the opportunity arises then they perform these before a wider audience, especially in the villages. The students of class eight had a marvellous opportunity when they went on study tour in October 2006 to Nainital district and participated in a festival organised by an NGO, Arohi. There they presented plays and songs, all with a clear social or environmental message, quite in contrast to the items put on by students from other schools. The public there were very moved by our students' self-confidence and the emotional feeling that they put into their performances.

A few weeks earlier, on the occasion of Gandhi's birthday, a cultural programme was arranged at the Anasakti Ashram in Kausani, where Gandhiji stayed for ten days in 1929. The students of class eight presented their drama, "Hind Swaraj", and then our Sadhana students put on a short play depicting the events preceding Gandhi's departure for South Africa, followed by some of his first experiences there. A large audience of both tourists and local people were present to see these dramas, both performed with great feeling and emotion. Two further opportunities had also presented themselves in April. The birth anniversary of Sarala Behn falls on 5th April and is marked with a special function at Sarala Behn's cottage, 'Himdarshan Kutir'. This year the students of class eight participated. They presented their drama, Hind Swaraj. Many friends of Sarala Behn were present. Then during the afternoon they went to a nearby village, where they also presented their cultural programme. When the girls of class nine had finished their annual examinations at the nearby Inter-college, they went to our field centre in Chalmorigara, close to Danya. Here they presented cultural programmes over a period of three days in various villages. The songs, plays and dances all had a social or environmental theme, and sought to raise public awareness on the issues portrayed.

Study Tours

The students' study tours were arranged at the end of October and during November, following the completion of the haymaking. These tours took them to various parts of the Kumaun, giving them the opportunity to see at first the activities of various organisations and individuals working for the uplift of rural communities, and also to observe something of the local history. The youngest children in class

four, accompanied by Bimla Behn and their class teacher, Nandi Bisht, visited the famous temple complex at Jageshwar beyond Almora. On their return they stopped for the night in Almora. The following day they had the opportunity to see something of the history of Almora – the temples, the old finely carved houses, the museum – and also the nearby small zoo, before returning to Kausani.

The girls of class five visited the tiny village of Kukuchinna, at the very end of the road beyond the famous temple of Dunagiri. They were accompanied by our field worker, Basanti Behn and two of our young teachers, Puja and Gauri. Here is a private day school for local children. Lakshmi Ashram has maintained good contacts with this school over the past few years, and students from there have also visited Lakshmi Ashram. Besides academic studies yoga, meditation and cultural activities are an integral part of the daily programme of the school. Teachers from both schools discussed methods of teaching; our teachers took some of their classes, while their teachers took classes with our group of students. Students from both schools presented cultural programmes.

The girls of class six went to the village of Chamuwa beyond Jageshwar, where a government school teacher, a good friend of Lakshmi Ashram, is actively working in the local community. The class was accompanied by Kanti Didi, a senior ashram teacher, along with three National Open School students, Hema, Daya and Indira. There were beautiful views of the Himalayan ranges. They stayed several days there – one day they took out a rally for one kilometre promoting village cleanliness and hygiene. They had meetings with the teachers and students, and visited some of the villages interacting with the local villagers. They also presented cultural programmes in the local community. On their return they visited the historical Almora jail, where numerous leaders in the struggle for independence, including Jawaharlal Nehru, were imprisoned. They also saw the museum in Almora and visited the research farm of the Research Institute for Hill Agriculture. As mentioned earlier, the students of class eight, accompanied by Bimla Behn and Nandi Bisht, went to the Grameen Haat Mela organised by the development organisation, Arohi. From there they continued the second day to Naukuchiya Tal, visiting two active organisations on the way. They had the chance to visit Nainital, and then returned via Lamgara where they spent their third night.

The students of class ten were the most adventurous. Accompanied by Neema Behn, Gauri Behn and a German volunteer, they went first to the village close to Dharamghar, where the Berinag Gram Swarajya Mandal is very active. The Ram Lila was going on in the village, but our students also took to the stage and presented short plays, including ‘Hind Swaraj’ and one carrying an anti-liquor message. Liquor abuse is a major social problem in the hills, and over the years the Sarvodaya organisations and workers have consistently raised their voices against this social evil and campaigned vigorously against the presence of liquor shops. Rising high above Dharamghar to the north is the high hill of Shikar, with a fine temple on its summit. To the north lies the village of Bhanar where every year a mela (festival) takes place. It culminates in a yatra under the full moon to the temple at Shikar. Our students and teachers first spent the afternoon and evening at the mela, an education in itself, and then in the early hours of the morning climbed up through the dense forest in the moonlight to the temple at Shikar. This was an experience they would never forget! Descending towards Dharamghar the party managed to get divided, some going one way, the rest along a different path! However, in the end they met up safely.

Gandhi Vichar Prashikshan (Sadhana Programme)

After a gap of one year, the Ashram again conducted a training programme in Gandhian thought, the Sadhana programme. This year the training programme lasted almost one year. It was inaugurated on 26th June by Sushri Radha Bhatt who lit the lamp and told the students, ten in all, about the objectives of the course. Neema explained the daily pattern of the course and highlighted the need for self-discipline and for following all the rules of the training programme. The course includes classes presenting an introduction to the life and teachings of Gandhi, along with discussions on present day issues in Indian society and the relevance in their context of Gandhian thought. The students participate in the day to day practical activities of ashram life with the other students. Singing has an important part in the course. They also learned sewing and spinning. There were ten students in all on the course, three Ashram students – Tara, Jyoti Pant and Jyoti Joshi – who had passed their High School exams that spring, and seven girls new to Ashram life. The latter all quickly settled down to the pattern of community life, quite different to what they had been previously used to.

On 29th October the ten students and their teacher, Archana Bahuguna, left Kausani for Wardha, where they were to spend a month in the Gandhi Vichar Parishad. An intensive programme of classes and exposure visits was arranged for them. They participated in a three day 'Mitra Milan' in Sevagram, where they met constructive workers from all over India. They visited Vinoba Bhave's ashram at Paunar and also Baba Amte's Anandwan, where they were most inspired by the work being undertaken for those afflicted with leprosy, the blind, the deaf and dumb and other disabilities. It was a real eye-opener for them all, to see what a self-sufficient community had been created, with only salt and kerosene being purchased from outside. There was also a three day Grameen Majdur Shibir, which gave them a direct insight into the problems facing the surrounding rural communities. From Wardha they went to Nagpur where they took part in a ten day programme of Vipassana meditation. On their return to Kausani they broke their journey in Agra to see the Taj Mahal, and then in Delhi where among other sights they visited the Science Museum, Rajghat and the Red Fort. Their course continued through the winter and into the current year, formally coming to an end on 5th June, celebrated in the Ashram as International Environment Day.

Death Anniversary of Sarala Behn

The death anniversary of Sarala Behn on 8th July is always marked by a special programme, and this year the theme was 'Voluntary Organisations and their Role'. In the morning havan was performed on the site of her Samadhi (memorial grove), and then after breakfast the meeting took place. Radha Behn gave a lead to the discussions, which were chaired by Shobhan Singh Negi, who had taken part in the very first Training in Gandhian Thoughts in the early nineties here in the Ashram, and then had worked for many years with SIDH in Mussoorie. Concern was expressed over the diminishing aspect of truly voluntary work, and the ever increasing dependence on government and other funding agencies for supporting projects.

Visitors to Lakshmi Ashram

The Ashram continues to welcome visitors, both from other parts of India and also from overseas. In April a woman from Kerala shared in our life for several weeks and taught some of our older students the basics of self defence. One afternoon the following month, we unexpectedly welcomed members of the Peoples Theatre from Punjab. They performed some music for us, playing traditional folk instruments, and singing some very moving songs, including a long ballad on the life of Udham Singh.

In September we welcomed a group of 23 third year students studying for the Bachelor of Elementary Education at a College in New Delhi. They visited Kausani for some five days as part of their practical programme, interacted with the Ashram staff and students and experienced the ethos of the Ashram education. In January students, boys and girls, from class eight of the Sardar Patel Vidyalaya in New Delhi visited Kausani a few days. Their physics teacher had earlier contacted us. We had explained that during January most of our teachers and students are at home, and that his students would only find a small core of us here. However he was not to be deterred! The programme went off very well, his young students were able to interact with our girls and experience a way of life totally different from their own affluent backgrounds.

In March a group of five German students visited us for ten days. They came through a German organisation, VIA.e.V., on a programme organised by the Gandhi Peace Foundation in New Delhi. This exchange programme has been running for many years, and we welcome a group almost every year. They spend some time in Kausani and participate in the daily life of the Ashram, and then also go to our centre in Danya to observe our field activities. This year's group comprised four young women and one man. All had a very lively interest in all that they saw and heard. In the autumn we welcomed three young women from Germany. One had heard of the Ashram through a German peace organisation, KURVE, but came independently. She spent nearly six months here. The two others were nineteen year old school-leavers from Gottingen, whose history teacher had long connections with India and had visited the Ashram very briefly in 2005. They came to India in October and stayed until the New Year here. They were very hardworking girls; there was not a single activity that they did not take part in!

In the spring one of the Ashram's oldest Danish friends, Anna Rambusch, along with another Danish friend, Kirsten Grosen, visited us for a couple of weeks. Despite both being in their eighties they were very young in spirit and joined in wholeheartedly in the Holi celebrations. Rebecca Klenk from the United States, who had spent several years in Kausani in the nineties, was also here at Holi. She had come to Kolkata in January for six months, her husband Daniel having a fellowship to undertake research there, and she took time off for a brief visit to Kausani.

Activities in Udyog Mandir (workshop)

The main activity of the Udyog Mandir, situated in Kausani close to the Anasakti Ashram, is the workshop functioning as an integral part of the 'Appropriate Technology for Mountain Life' project. In its early years it focused on the needs of the artisans working in wool, but for some years now its main thrust has been on the design and production of appropriate tools for hill agriculture. In the past year it has been working very closely with the district level Watershed Development Programme in Almora and Bageshwar districts. Tools valued at Rs.4,98,650/- were produced during the year, while sales of agricultural tools totalled Rs.4,34,238/-. Its research work in solar power and water power is also continued, and together with villagers in the Kosi valley is installing an improved water mill.

Community Activities in the Kosi Valley

Basanti Behn has continued her work among the communities of the Kosi Valley, from its source on the eastern slopes of Burha Pinath down valley as far as Someshwar, and also in the Mansa Nala valley, a tributary of the Kosi, joining it at Someshwar. The Uttarakhand Seva Nidhi has continued to support balwaris in 12 villages, both in the Kosi valley and in the valley of the Mansa Nala. These are run by local girls, and are an important medium for establishing firm contacts with the village community. Four bal melas were organised in the spring, in Khirakot, Lweshal, Chhani and in the Mansa Nala valley.

An equally important aspect of the work in the valley has been the formation of Mahila Mangal Dals in each village. The women have recognized the strength that they have collectively, and have taken direct action on various environmental and social issues that directly impinge on their daily lives. Their group discussions particularly focus on issues of Water, Forests and Land. There is great concern being expressed in various quarters over the existence of the Kosi River, the very lifeline of the local communities. In recent years there has been a steady decline in its annual minimum flow, and fears expressed that it may even dry up in the not too distant future. Inspired by this concern, the local Mahila Mangal Dals decided that they would put a ban on cutting green fodder from the oak trees on Pinath during the winter months, and likewise would not cut any green wood, only collecting dead wood for fuel. Whenever fires break out in the forest they immediately leave everything that they are doing, in order to go high into the forest to beat out the fires. They have established an excellent working relationship with the local officials of the Forest Department. In their concern for the equitable use of the waters of the Kosi River during times of low flow, they have taken direct action against hoteliers in Kausani who were pumping water from the river into tankers to meet the needs of their hotel.

During the monsoon tree planting of broadleaved fodder species was undertaken in several places, and with support from the Kumaun Karigar Samiti in Ranikhet twenty latrines were constructed in a total of four villages. The four biogas plants constructed the previous year are all functioning well. During the autumn, with the guidance of Grassroots, a small forest nursery was established in Lakshmi Ashram, with some five hundred saplings of Himalayan Oak (Banj) grown from seed. Another programme was undertaken in the spring and summer of 2006 with the youth of high school age in the Kosi Valley, with assistance from the Uttarakhand Seva Nidhi. This programme included interaction between the village students and those of Lakshmi Ashram, focusing on environmental issues such as village hygiene and sanitation, and also water conservation. On May 2006 they joined the ashram students in digging two large refuse pits in the ashram.

Village level Activities in Dhauladevi Block

It is almost thirty years since Lakshmi Ashram commenced its activities in Dhauladevi block. Now the activities are mainly centred in the area close to Danya. The Ashram has a centre in the hamlet of

Chalmorigara, managed by two permanent field workers deputed by the Ashram. However most of the field workers are local residents. During its long presence in the area the Ashram has quietly worked for women's empowerment and the results are to be seen in the inner strength of the field workers in Danya. During the past year the main areas of activity have continued to be the running balwari (kindergarten) programme, supported by funding through the Uttarakhand Seva Nidhi, and the micro watershed development programme being implemented as part of the Himotthan Pariyojna funded by the Sir Ratan Tata Trust. The balwari programme continues to address a felt need for pre-school education, especially in those villages at a distance from the main road. There are three clusters of balwaris, centred on Danya, Kheti and Sahkande respectively. Each balwari has a young teacher, an educated local girl, and where the numbers of children exceed twenty then she has a young assistant too. The balwaris put emphasis on self expression through song and dance, games and simple handicrafts. The balwaris seek to develop the children's awareness of their natural surroundings, sowing the seeds of an environmental consciousness. The highlight of the balwari year is the Bal Mela (festival) organised in the springtime, which bring together the children from different balwaris in the area. Because of the distance between the three clusters of balwaris, three separate Bal Melas are organised.

This year saw the completion of the implementation of the first phase of the Himotthan Pariyojna in eight villages in the Sarkhet micro-watershed that lies immediately below our centre. The interventions include community awareness programmes and training programmes for all sections of the community, assistance to individual villages – for example a new irrigation channel in Khuna, and support to individuals - such as compost pits, smokeless kitchen range, and polyhouses. Plantation and soil and water conservation activities have been undertaken with the local community in two places. In almost all the activities the beneficiaries contribute in cash or kind.

The community awareness programmes provide an opportunity to the youth of the project area, as well as the members of the Village Development Committees and the Watershed Committee, to go on exposure visits to observe for themselves similar projects in other parts of Uttarakhand. Training in sewing offers an opportunity to the young women to become skilled in the use of the sewing machine, and in cutting and sewing garments. The agricultural package was made available to farmers in each of the villages falling within the project area. Among other inputs it included polyhouses to encourage production of off-season vegetables, and the compost pit to improve the quality of natural compost.

Activities of Radha Behn:

Lakshmi Ashram was delighted to welcome Radha Behn back in their midst after she had resigned from her position as General Secretary of the Kasturba Gandhi National Memorial Trust in October 2005. Even though Radha Behn has during the past year continued to devote time to the activities of the Trust, in particular their peace activities, and from December 2006 has also assumed the responsibility of being chairperson of the Gandhi Peace Foundation, nevertheless she has also found time to give to the activities of Lakshmi Ashram. During the past year she gave a month to conducting classes with our teachers, a number of whom are young and inexperienced, in particular discussing the broader issues of education – looking at Gandhi's ideals of Basic Education, and also discussing in depth the concept of the Free School as developed in Denmark during the nineteenth century, and still a vibrant movement even today. Whenever she was in Kausani she gave time to conducting classes with the students in the Sadhana course, sharing with them her lifetime of practical experiences in Sarvodaya.

Other News:

Soon after Sarala Behn had come to the Kumaun Hills the cottage, Lakshmi Ashram, was made available to her by the Sanwal family to live in, and later on formally donated to the institution. The passing of time had affected the structure of the cottage, the foundations were weak and subsidence was threatening the very existence of this historical building. The institution was very fortunate to receive funds from the Chief Minister's Discretionary Fund for its reconstruction, and this work has been ongoing since August 2006. As far as possible the cottage is being rebuilt in its original form.

APPENDIX I: Production of Vegetables & Fruits for the Year 2006-07

Name of Vegetable	Production (Kg.) 2006-07	Production (Kg.) 2005-06	Production (Kg.) 2004-05
Green Vegetables	55.0	56.0	260.0
Lye	163.0	279.0	516.0
Chaulai	-	-	35.0
Ugul	70.0	150.0	54.0
Fenugreek (Methi)	10.5	19.9	5.7
White Radish (Mooli)	273.0	383.0	781.4
French Beans (Dwarf)	127.0	406.0	159.0
Onions	8.0	10.5	22.2
Capsicum (Shimla Mirch)	43.0	223.0	23.3
Pumpkin	442.0	737.0	610.0
Marrow	-	57.0	28.0
Cucumber	403.0	750.0	483.0
Tomatoes	24.0	76.0	47.0
Bottle Gourd (Lauki)	-	18.0	26.7
Pinalu	185.0	294.0	168.0
Aubergines	-	127.0	50.3
Cabbage	107.0	23.0	-
Bitter Gourd (Karela)	-	7.5	49.0
Ram Karela	-	38.0	-
Turmeric (Haldi)	5.0	-	-
Spinach	39.5	179.0	56.0
Broad Beans (Bakula)	8.0	75.0	9.3
Garlic	34.0	64.0	94.0
Okra (Bhindi)	4.0	4.6	4.0
Coriander	19.7	7.2	28.8
Peas	6.0	114.0	-
Ginger	11.0	18.0	-
Turai	3.6	15.0	20.0
Sitaphal	70.0	55.0	50.0
Green Chillies	-	2.0	-
Carrots	4.0	-	-
TOTAL	2115.3	4188.7	3580.7

FRUITS

Malta (No.)	210	2765	188
Lemons (No.)	12	129	467
Pomegranates (No.)	-	-	60
Peaches (No.)	-	-	450
Pears (No.)	500	-	1438
Bananas – dozen	23	6.25	20
Mushrooms (Kg)	63	-	-

Production – Decrease in vegetable production over 2005-2006: -49.5%

APPENDIX II: Production of Milk from Ashram Gaushala: Year 2006-07

S. No.	Name of Cow	Milk Yield (Litres) 2006-07	Milk Yield (Litres) 2005-06	Milk Yield (Litres) 2004-05
1	Kshama	1429.000	1833.000	1715.800
2	Kajal	1930.000	2270.000	2094.000
3	Lali	1468.000	1246.500	1202.500
T O T A L		4827.000	5349.500	5012.300

(Decrease in Milk Production over year 2005-06: -9.8%)

Sadly we lost one of our cows, Kshama, in the autumn, which was the main reason for the decline this year in milk production.

APPENDIX III: Sales from Kausani Khadi Bhandar: Year 2005-6

S. No.	Description	Total Sales 2006-7	% Change	Comments
A. KHADI				
A.1	Cotton Khadi	1,47,659.05	+10.64%	
A.2	Woollen Khadi	84,006.00	-4.51%	
A.3	Blankets	8,285.00	-51.58%	
A.4	Khadi Silk	855.00	-74.89%	
A.5	Muslin Khadi	14,138.00	+23.16	New stock purchased
Total Khadi Sales		2,54,943.05	+0.60%	
B. GRAMODYOG				
B.1	Shampoo, soap, etc.	16,445.00	+55.24%	Ranikhet produce
B.2	Honey, Jam etc.	2,810.00	+62.43%	Ashram produce
B.3	Agarbatti	2,284.00	+111.48%	Ashram produce
B.4	Turmeric Powder	380.00	-62.96%	Ashram produce
B.5	Raw Turmeric	410.00	-65.43%	Nainital produce
B.6	Candles	3,373.00	+524.63	Ashram produce
B.7	Tulsi Herbal Tea			
Total Gramodyog Sales		19,393.00	+55.29%	