

FRIENDS OF LAKSHMI ASHRAM

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**NEWS FROM LAKSHMI ASHRAM
SANCHAR 115**

August 2012

Dear friends,

This time the newsletter brings:

- Minutes of the General Meeting on 25th March 2012
- Basanti and the Kosi: How one woman revitalized a watershed
- Lakshmi Ashram Weather Station – A Twenty-five Year Journey
- An Eight Days Training Programme in Sewing and Tailoring

It still costs 1725 Danish kroner and the subscription 75 Danish kroner to be a sponsor (about 230 Euro and 10 Euro) = 1800 Danish kroner. Some people send money once a year for a sponsorship, and others divide the amount during the year. Therefore we will put 75 kroner into the administration account the first time of 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. I assume one membership per household, club, society etc., unless otherwise instructed.

We use very little money for administration, and the money is sent directly from our bank to the Ashram's bank in Kausani, so no money will be lost – only bank charges.

The surplus from the administration account will of course be sent to Lakshmi Ashram.

Thank you for all the money. 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, education of the teachers, etc. You can send money by a crossed cheque or by bank transfer – the IBAN account number can be seen on top of this letter.

Best wishes,

Lone Poulsen

Friends of Lakshmi Ashram can save money, if some of you would be satisfied just to receive a mail telling that you can read the Sanchar in the homepage. If you want to get the message in a mail instead of receiving a letter, then please send me your e-mail address to: ***lone-poulsen@comxnet.dk***

Thanks to the members who have accepted this.

Minutes of the General Meeting on 25th March 2012

Chairman: Hanne Stenager

Keeper of the minutes: Ruth Sillemann.

The Committee's Report

The committee has not held any meetings, but the members have been in regular contact with each other at other small meetings and by telephone and mail. Lone takes care of the daily work with mail contact to Lakshmi Ashram, Sanchar and money transfers.

Lone has been in the Society for Hearing-impaired in Glostrup and to a meeting for Lions Club in Soelleroed to tell about Lakshmi Ashram.

After that Lone gave us news from the Ashram by telling and showing photos, so it was a very interesting account about the life during the year: We saw a map of the mountain state Uttarakhand, in which LA is placed, and we saw, how you travel up there from Delhi. We saw photos from the school, e.g. cooking in the kitchen and photos of the lessons and the surroundings. Lone told about the oldest girls, who sit for their exam via NIOS (National Institute of Open Schooling) to get a paper. It is good for the students to have such formal paper to show, when they are going to continue their studies.

We saw also photos of David, Hansi and Dipika. Dipika is now in England working in Kings Park Conference Centre in Northampton, and she will apply for a study in an art college.

We saw photos of different visitors, who have been in LA - a German gymnasium, students and teachers from St. Catherine University in USA and a group from Maharastra, who are working among tribal people. And we saw photos of a happy Neema in Porbandar, where Mahatma Gandhi was born. She is working with her Ph.D. in Basic Education, and she will among other things interview 200 former students from LA.

There are now 50 students (23 up to Class VII and 27 up to class XII) in LA. Two elderly women have joined the workers' staff.

We also heard about Basanti and her work in the villages. At the same time she helps with the daily management of the Ashram, as long as Neema is on leave.

The Account: The account was approved.

Subscription: The subscription is kept on Danish Kroner 75 (about 10 Euro) yearly per member.

Proposals Received: No proposals were received.

Elections:

Lone Poulsen, Hanne Stenager and Ruth Sillemann were re-elected to the committee. In addition Lene Rasmussen had mailed that she would like to get into the committee, and she was also elected.

Substitute: Peter Kristensen was re-elected.

Auditor and substitute: Claus Broskov Soerensen and David David were re-elected.

At last Lone gave a talk about Indian authors, who have inspired her. She had made a pamphlet with a survey of the authors and some of their books. A pamphlet which can be used for inspiration and also if you want to start a reading group of Indian litteratur. There was a little exhibition of the books, too. All together something that can make us a little wiser as regards Indian culture.

Ruth Sillemann

Sanchar 115

We have been allowed to bring the article mentioned below from IWP – **India Water Portal**. See this IPW version: <http://www.indiawaterportal.org/post/19838>

Basanti and the Kosi: How one woman revitalized a watershed

Guest post by *Chicu Logariwar*

The Kosi river in Uttarakhand is the lifeline for the areas it flows through. However, now the demands on its water are increasing. Supply of water to army cantonments and to cities has severely depleted its flows. The forests and villages that it nourished are now starved of water by urban thirst. But this story proves that villagers are more than passive victims. Once, they contributed to the problem by indiscriminate use of natural resources. Today they are its proud protectors. Their inspiration is a tireless and committed woman. This is her story – and the river's too.



The Kosi near its source (Photo: Chicu)

The child widow: Basanti was married at 12, but her husband passed away soon after. Kind relatives recommended that she be sent to a Gandhian Ashram that they had heard about. And so it is that in 1980, a young child widow came to the Lakshmi Ashram in Kausani (Almora district, Uttarakhand) to learn weaving and knitting. She had studied till the 4th standard, but was barely literate. Here, she passed her 12th standard, and then continued to study further.

The teacher: When Lakshmi Ashram began opening balwadis (kindergartens) across the district, she went there to teach. Just 30 years ago, and child marriage was still rampant in the area. Girls as young as 15 would come to the schools, but not for themselves; they would come to drop off their children. Lakshmi Ashram started off with 25-30 such schools, When Anil Bordiya, the then education secretary praised their work and declared that such activities should be throughout the state, this gave a further fillip to girl's education. Hearing of her work, her father praised her. Despite the low salary, he supported her work and acknowledged its importance.

The social worker: Basanti continued to work with schools and Mahila Sanghatans. For a few years, she worked in Dehradun, but her love for the mountains was hard to resist. She returned to Kausani in 2002, determined to work in the mountains for 'jal, jungle, jameen' (water, forest, land).

A big task, and she confessed to the author that she did not know where to begin. She was undaunted however, and started her work in the most basic fashion. She first got a friend – Parvati Goswami to show her the roads to the various villages.

The activist: In 2003, she read an article in Amar Ujala that spoke about the effect of deforestation on rivers. It stated that, ‘If the cutting of forests and the spread of forest fires is not stopped the Kosi will die in 10 years.’ That spurred Basanti into immediate action. Despite the popular opinion that the women in the mountains would never listen to her, she persisted. She would follow the women to where they were cutting wood and show them the article. A few years ago, there had been conflict over water when there was a drought and the police had not allowed the villagers to use water for irrigation. She referred to that and asked them what their alternatives were if the Kosi were to dry up. The women admitted that they did not have any real options and also stated that they had never earlier made the connection between forests and water.



Basanti behen (Photo: Chicu)

The negotiator: Basanti behen convinced the women in the valley to form community based organizations to conserve their forest. People agreed to refrain from cutting live wood, especially oak. The women also began to keep a watch on their forests. Initially they received a lot of opposition from the men, and also from the forest guards. With Basanti behen’s encouragement, the women entered into an agreement with the forest officials. According to this,

- Neither the forest department nor the villagers cut wood
- The forest department recognizes the villagers’ right over dry wood.

At that time, there was a lot of antagonism against the forest department, and any attempt at arriving at an agreement was seen as ‘siding with the forest officials’. Basanti convinced the villagers that the forest belongs to them, and not to the government, and that they have a responsibility to protect it. Gradually, the villagers accepted this viewpoint and began fighting forest fires and conserving the forest.



*Watershed of the Kosi. Compare the dense young growth with the sparse older forest
(Photo: Chicu)*

The results: It is only in the last couple of years that the forest department has begun active afforestation in the area. For the last decade, the only conservation measures were a ban on chopping of green wood and a prevention of forest fires. The ecosystem has responded magnificently to this protection.

- Forests: Where there were sparse pine forests, now broad-leaved trees are coming back in. The forest floor has saplings of rhododendron (buraansh), oak (banj), and myrica nagi (kaafal). All this through natural regeneration.
- Water: Seasonal naulas (springs) are now flowing throughout the year. The naulas at Rauliyan and at Kaphadi would dry up in the summer. For the last couple of years, they are perennial.
- People: Acknowledging that they are the stewards of their ecosystem and working towards its protection has vastly increased the social capital in the area. Today, the Mahila Sanghatan where Basanti behen works is actively involved in the gram panchayats. It is in this area that women sarpanches are far more than a token nod to equal representation.

Lakshmi Ashram Weather Station – A Twenty-five Year Journey

By David Hopkins

Today is a very appropriate day to sit down and write about the long story of Lakshmi Ashram's weather station, for when I took the temperature readings this morning it was to discover that the maximum temperature of 35°C recorded yesterday, 14 June, made it the hottest day since we had begun keeping daily records of temperature and relative humidity at the end of 1987. The previous warmest days had been on 2 and 5 June 1995 when the temperature had reached 34.5°C.

In Britain there is a long history, going right back to Victorian times, of enthusiastic amateurs maintaining weather stations, but unfortunately that interest is not found in India, so a station like Lakshmi Ashram can contribute substantially to our understanding and knowledge of weather in the Kumaun Hills.

My own interest in the weather goes back to my childhood growing up in the Kentish countryside in an old farmhouse. We had inherited a wall barometer that had pride of place in our hall. It was the only barometer I had ever seen in people's homes that actually worked! Across the road was a farm with old oast houses, a unique feature of the Kentish landscape, the cowl of which revolved with the wind and thus gave a precise indication of the wind direction. For several years I maintained an informal daily record of the weather. My fascination with the weather was also revealed when on my one and only visit to an auction room in the nearby



The house that David looked out to in his childhood.

town of Ashford I paid the princely sum of one shilling for sixteen volumes of 'Symon's British Rainfall' from 1880-1895! In the days when the word 'networking' had never been heard of, George Symons singlehandedly built up a network of several thousand dedicated individuals across Britain who contributed their daily rainfall measurements to the British Rainfall Organisation.

When I first spent a year in Lakshmi Ashram in 1972-73 there was already a rain gauge here, and during that year I kept daily records of rainfall, and I still have the graph book that I recorded the daily readings on.

However the story of the present weather station goes back to 1986 when the Uttarakhand Seva Nidhi Environmental Education Institute in Almora gave us funding to purchase a rain gauge, and then in the following year supported the purchase of a maximum and minimum thermometer and a wet and dry thermometer to measure relative humidity, as well as a Stevenson Screen to mount the thermometers in. Since then we have maintained continuous daily readings, the continuity only broken for a few months when vandals stole the thermometers – at that time the station was close to



the now vanished cottage of Nepal Bhavan. Since that incident the station was transferred to a site close to our Udyogshala.

Although the maintenance of the station and taking daily readings has been largely my responsibility, nevertheless I have always had support from the students and workers, so that in my absence measurements continue to be taken daily. For the past few years Tara has been an invaluable support to me in this work, being extremely conscientious in taking the daily readings.

David Hopkins at his weather monitoring station (Photo: Basant Pandey)

From time to time we have been requested to provide meteorological data for government departments, in particular the Forest Department and the local Army Camp, for we are the only people in the immediate vicinity who are keeping regular readings.

During the past two years we are also providing daily readings on a monthly basis to the Geography Department of the Almora campus of the University of Kumaun. A project funded by the Department for Science and Technology is being implemented under the leadership of Dr. Jeevan Singh Rawat in the catchment area of the Kosi River. As part of this project we have been provided with additional equipment, including an evaporation pan, anemometer and a bucket rain gauge.

For a good many years Lakshmi Ashram was an active partner in the educational programme, MetLinkInternational, organised by the Royal Meteorological Society, and during the past year we have begun to contribute monthly readings to COL – Climatological Observers Link, in the UK, one of a dozen overseas contributors.

It was during those days when we began to contribute to the MetLinkInternational programme that students of Lakshmi Ashram first had an introduction to the Internet. During the short periods each year when the programme was actively interacting with schools across the world, I would take a student each day to take the weather readings with me, and then we would walk to Kausani's lone cybercafé in the Hill Queen Restaurant, and there with Kiran Khulbe's help go to the MetLink website, and then the student herself, with a little guidance and assistance from me, would fill in the webpage and send it. When an Internet connection came to the ashram, then the students could send the data from our office itself. The MetLink website carried one page which gave a list of those schools where the highest and lowest temperatures had been recorded, and also the most rainfall. At the afternoon meeting we would then find these places on a map of the world, and consider together why particular places were very warm while others were very cold.

There is a dearth of detailed weather statistics in the public domain in India, so when I was able to provide details of daily rainfall over twenty five years to the website IndiaWaterPortal they were extremely delighted. With the forceful persuasion of Chicu Logariwar I also finally produced a guest article for this website, for which Chicu produced the graphs, seeking to compare the temperature and rainfall data from our centre for two decades, 1990-1999 and 2000-2009. While it is wise not to jump too quickly to any conclusions, the data showed that while there was no variation in the annual rainfall in these two decades, and while there was only a minor difference in the number of days of rain, there were marked differences in monthly rainfall distribution. The winter months were very much drier in the second decade, impacting directly on the local farmers' winter crops. Winter temperatures showed an increase, and everyone is very much aware that snowfall events are now very much less frequent than they used to be.

By contrast, even if this summer has been extremely dry, the data showed a marked increase in summer rainfall in May and June during the second decade, and correspondingly little change in temperatures.

Climate Change and Global Warming are very contentious issues these days, and twenty five years of records is too little to start coming to any firm conclusions. Unlike in Western Europe where there are abundant records going back for well over a hundred years, herein the Himalayas weather data is extremely sparse. Thus the small efforts of Lakshmi Ashram over the past twenty five years are nevertheless an invaluable contribution in our efforts to understand the local climate and possible changes that might be occurring.

An Eight Day Training Programme in Sewing and Tailoring

By Deepa Rana – *(Has just passed her class twelve exams and is presently taking the Sadhana training programme.)*

Srimati Kiran Singh from Gurgaon, the wife of a Sikh activist who is working wholeheartedly for communal harmony and through whose activities she had come to meet with and be very inspired by Radha Didi, is always seeking ways and means to assist others. Where she lives in Gurgaon she has a very active sewing and embroidery unit. She was inspired with the idea of bringing her sewing and embroidery craftsmen to Lakshmi Ashram so that they might teach the arts of sewing and embroidery to our girls. With this objective in mind she arrived in Kausani on 6 July along with her tailor master, Raju Bhaiya, his wife Muskan and their small son Kaif, and on 8 July the ashram girls gathered in the Ashram's sewing centre and enthusiastically began to learn the art of sewing.

The daily programme was divided into three classes as below:

- 8-10am: The students of the Gandhian Thoughts (Sadhana) training programme
- 10am-Noon: 3 class XII students, Shobha Behn (teacher) and Rekha Pande, Pooran's wife.
- 2-4pm: Meena, Daya, Hema and a new worker, Poonam Daya, who is in charge of the sewing department, and Meena from our Danya centre were present throughout the day, while Kiran Didi was also always there to give us guidance. Raju Bhaiya took all the measurements and taught us sewing.

The format of the training programme was as follows:

- Taking measurements
- Cutting the outline of cloth on paper
- Cutting the cloth itself
- Learning to make different kinds of collars
- Hemming by hand.



We have cheerfully and with a deep interest learned all these activities during the eight days, and during this time a kind of new atmosphere was created among us through learning the craft of tailoring. Kiran Didi and Raju Bhaiya live on the plains, yet every day they had to climb up and down the hillside between the residence in Lakshmi Ashram and the sewing department by the Udyogshala. This was very difficult for them in the rains. However in the end when their farewell programme took place on the evening of 15 July, and there was a display of all the clothes that the trainees had made, followed by a cultural programme presented by the ashram students, they were both so totally overcome with emotion that it was almost impossible for them to express their feelings. From this it seemed that they had found a new life here. Kiran Didi said that everyone had given her so much respect that she felt herself dwarfed by it all. For Raju Bhaiya, a young man of 28 years, it was the first time that he had stood up in public to speak and he was completely overwhelmed, the more so because he comes from the Muslim community and it was the first time that he had spent so long in such different surroundings.

During this training programme, making use of two hand-operated and two pedal-operated sewing machines, the following items were made

- 30 pairs of salwar-kameej, and two pairs of kurta-pajama.
- Cloth for 38 pairs of salwar-kameej for the students has been cut and they are being stitched now.

A deep awareness has been generated in all of us towards the art of sewing, and everyone has been inspired to learn sewing and tailoring. We will always remember the beautiful atmosphere of love created during these eight days. All the credit for this goes to Kiran Didi, and all of us thank her from the bottom of our hearts.