

FRIENDS OF LAKSHMI ASHRAM

Lone Poulsen,
Praestehusene 6,
2620 Albertslund
DK - Denmark.
Telephone 45+ 43 96 13 71
E-mail: lone-poulsen@mail.tele.dk
Homepage: <http://lakshmi.adr.dk>

NEWS FROM LAKSHMI ASHRAM

August 2004

Dear friends,

While it is still summertime in Denmark I am happy to send the next newsletter – **SANCHAR 95**, which contains the following articles and poems:

- “Whither Women today?” by Kanti Didi
- Two poems also by Kanti Didi
- “Water – Elixir of Life” (National Environment Awareness Programme) by Neema Vaishnava and David Hopkins
- ”World Social Forum, Mumbai: 17-21 January 2004” by Chandra Pant
- “The Callenges of the Vegetable Garden” by Parvati Tiwari.

I hope that you will enjoy reading this Sanchar. Again I think that it tells a lot about the great work they are doing especially to the benefit to the children and women in the mountains. All this is only possible because many of you are still supporting them.

So 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, projects in the villages etc. As before I ask you to send extra money because of the increase of the daily expenses. Thanks for your co-operation.

You can send money to me by cheque or to the following account:

**1199-3141861, BG Bank, Glostrup Afdeling, Hovedvejen 126, 2600 Glostrup, DK-Denmark
att. Lakshmi Ashrams Venner, Lone Poulsen**

With love,

FRIENDS OF LAKSHMI ASHRAM

Lone Poulsen, Praetehusene 6, 2620 Albertslund – Denmark

STATEMENT OF ACCOUNTS 2003.

INCOME:

Contributions received (96%)	145.541,12 DDK
Administration contribution (4%)	6.064,21 DDK
Interest: Bikuben Girobank	0.63 DDK
Yield: Bikuben Girobank	502,20 DDK
Total income	152.108,16 DDK

EXPENSES:

Administration	4.208,75 DDK
Paid to Lakshmi Ashram	111.510,15 DDK
*Discount for foreign payment	2.233,60 DDK
Total expenses	117.952,50 DDK

Net result of the year	34.155,66 DDK
-------------------------------	----------------------

BALANCE SHEET at 31.12.2003.

ASSETS:

Bikuben Girobank account no. 4959680111	46.443,74 DDK
Bikuben Girobank account no. 314-1861	18.346,56 DDK
Total bank deposits	64.790,30 DDK

LIABILITIES:

Net capital, beginning 2003	30.634,64 DDK
Net result for 2003	34.155,66 DDK
Net capital, end 2003	64.790,30 DDK

Albertslund, / 2004

The accounts have been audited.

Lone Poulsen

Albertslund, / 2004

Claus Broskov Sørensen

* The bank has taken discount of 1.133,32 DDK and 1.100,28 DDK, when I have drawn money to send to Lakshmi Ashram. I found the mistake, when I received the yearly statement. The bank has paid back the amount in January 2004.

Sanchar 95

Back in March this year the local press carried horrific descriptions of the gang rape and murder of a class ten student from Champawat, Priti Pandey, the daughter of a lawyer, as she was returning from the local Inter-college one day after sitting high school exams. This incident and other similar tragic happenings related in the press, inspired Kanti Didi to write the following essay and poems.

Whither Women Today?

By Kanti Didi

Men and women are equally inseparable and vitally important constituents of society. The foundations of our society are established on their mutual interdependence. At the subtle levels of inner reality they are one, even if there are natural outer differences. We can see today that while one class of female society has made great strides, the ordinary classes have been left behind.

Today women's own bodies have become a source of insecurity for them. What is the reason? For centuries past great souls, saints and sages have arisen amongst both men and women. My feeling is that more saints, sages and great thinkers have arisen from male society, who have endeavoured to see that society goes along the right path. Society today exists as a result of their virtuous acts and spiritual endeavours. Nevertheless the fear of insecurity that has manifested itself in today's society is a matter of shame. Why is it that it has become so difficult for a woman to protect her body? There are some people in this world so blinded by lust, of such a sordid nature, that they see women in only one light. They become cruel and fiendish in their conduct, and giving vent to their devilish instincts through their brute force they are bringing disgrace upon society. Not distinguishing between night and day, nor looking upon their mother as Mother, sister as sister, daughter as daughter, they look neither to the past nor to the future. They are forever playing with womankind using their power as men. Perpetrating the most wicked acts, they are bringing about their own downfall. Such people are a curse to society, and because of people like them a great sense of insecurity has arisen among women.

In this land of Gandhi's non-violence, in this land of such great men as Swami Vivekananda and Swami Ramtirtha, this is the condition in which women find themselves today. The Mother who Shri Ramakrishna Paramhansa saw revealed for him in Kali, and for whose darshan he became mad with ecstasy, the Mother once seen in the form of young virgins and worshipped – what are we seeing and hearing now? Man, who woman looked upon as her protector, her father, now she is simply food for his lust! For how long can such a situation go on? Such conditions will not be able to last for long. Every possible effort will have to be made to change this situation, and to rise up above it. This is the demand of society.



She remains nothing more than an object of pleasure,
 Man nothing more than the enjoyer.
 If there was any word stronger than 'Rakshas'¹,
 Then I would call him by that name.
 They say that the Age of Women has come,
 Yet I at least cannot see this Age of Women anywhere.
 When I look at the newspapers,
 I see images of young girls' bodies, of distressed families,
 Then will my eyes find rest?
 Will the throbbing of my heart be stilled?
 Will my blood be turned to water?
 Oh God, grant me a hundred births in this world,

 That I may lift up the women.
 Grant me such self-control as Hanuman, such great strength as Shankaracharya,
 That I might rid this world of such blind lust.
 I could make this world the Land of the Gods.
 Do not hang these evil doers,
 Rather put them inside jail and fill them with remorse
 Let them reap the fruits of their actions.
 Teach them self-control, give them guidance to change their outlook.
 Learn what it means to take birth.
 Teach them how to completely destroy devilish tendencies in the human body.
 Teach them how to become Men.
 Otherwise turn them into four-legged animals,
 Load burdens onto their backs.
 Seeing them in a human body we are deceived,
 If they are in an animal body,
 Then we can protect ourselves.
 But cloaked in a human body, they are devils within.
 Don't allow such souls to take birth in human form,
 Allow us also to live.

WOMAN

Even to take birth is a curse.
 If a child is in the womb,
 Let us take a test to determine,
 'Is it a boy or is it a girl?'
 If a girl, let us abort her,
 And get rid of all our troubles.

 In another home, after being reared in the womb,
 Then on coming into this world,

¹ 'Rakshas' – A fiendishly wicked person

The spade was standing ready.
If it is a girl, then quickly bury her,
Or else strangle her,
And thus get rid of all our future cares.

In a third home, even if she survived,
Then she found herself looking after her younger siblings,
And thus she had no chance for education,
A girl - then live like this!
A girl - then don't open your mouth!!
Quickly arrange her marriage,
And lighten the burden on ones head.

In short, a burden in her father's home,
And likewise in her in-laws.
She finds herself being scolded
For not having brought enough dowry,
When she went she was tormented a lot,
One day she was set on fire,
A dowry marriage was celebrated,

Then she uttered a cry,
"Why, alas, have I come into this world?"

But in a second home,
The drunken husband beat her,
Half killed her beating her.
The Lakshmi of the home was made homeless.
Yet on returning to her parents' home,
Then her mother and father admonished her,
Saying, "Why have you come here?"
Your brother lives here.
We have made a place for you there.
From the woman's two heavy eyes
Came two teardrops.
"Why, alas, have I come into this world?"

I'll tell you a terrible thing,
Blinded by lust the man became a beast.
Not calling his mother, 'Mother',
He caused her to lose all her honour.
He went even one step further,
And with his cruel hands,
The murderer killed his own mother.
This is my tale of woe.
"Why, alas, have I come into this world?"

National Environment Awareness Programme: Year 2003-2004

A Brief Report on the Programme organised by Lakshmi Ashram on the theme

“Water – The Elixir of Life”

By Neema Vaishnava & David Hopkins

The Ministry of the Environment has for the past so many years organised a nation-wide programme every year for promoting environmental awareness among the people of this vast country. This programme especially seeks to reach out to the young people of India. In the state of Uttaranchal the responsibility for managing this programme has been entrusted to the Uttarakhand Seva Nidhi (USN) in Almora. This is a long-established organisation, particularly active in environmental education. For the past 17-18 years it has also supported balwari (kindergarten) programmes throughout Uttaranchal, run by local grassroots organisations, including that of Lakshmi Ashram. Indeed our programme was the model for that initiated on a large scale by the USN, and when their programme began Lakshmi Ashram had assumed responsibility for training.



Rally preparing to leave Ashram 24th February 2004

Lakshmi Ashram has participated in this awareness programme for the past so many years, but until a few years ago programmes were always organised in our project area in and around Danya. However for the past few years we have taken the initiative to promote programmes with the schools around Kausani, initially only with primary level schools, but this year with local high schools as well. This year a total of sixteen schools took part – two inter-colleges, four junior high schools, nine primary schools and Lakshmi Ashram itself. These schools – government and private – were in Kausani and the valley of the Kosi River below Kausani to the south. In all 115 students from class V to class X participated in this awareness programme. Even if the students were the focus of the campaign, yet the structure of the programme allowed for the active participation of teachers, parents and the general public.

The main topic for this year's campaign was **“Water – The Elixir of Life”**, an extremely important and relevant topic. Giving particular attention to the role and importance of Water, efforts were made to develop an integrated understanding of all natural resources, for they are all inter-related one with the other. This year's programme was organised in four stages. To begin with firm and regular contacts were established with all the schools taking part, and the theme of the campaign was discussed with the teachers and students.

In the second stage a question paper was devised, focusing on “Water – The Elixir of Life”, based on observation of management of water resources, both the local traditions and modern methods. Based on this question paper the students carried out a study of both kinds of management found in their local surroundings, their villages and the nearby area, both through their own personal study and by seeking the help of their parents and teachers. They found out about the existing springs in and around their villages, learned of the present situation of water resources, the reasons for the falling levels of water, especially in the springs, as well searching for and understanding the effects that this has on daily life. They also sought to quantify the amount of water consumed daily by their family.

In the third stage the children were tested in their schools to determine the interest and inquisitiveness aroused by this study and the efforts that they had made in undertaking it. Several people together undertook this evaluation.



Girl from Junior High School & Kanti with poster

In the fourth stage two programmes were organised in Lakshmi Ashram itself, the first for the senior students, the second for the primary school students, in which they presented their understanding of water through poems, essays and pictures as well as song, dance and drama. It was a rare opportunity for children from different local schools to come together, and to see Lakshmi Ashram. The students of each school in turn presented the posters that they had painted, explaining the themes illustrated. Those who had composed poems read these out – the quality of these poems was often praiseworthy. Where time permitted the students also read out their essays. The schools then presented their

cultural programmes. Prizes were distributed on the basis of the efforts they had made, nobody being excluded. Both programmes concluded with the students taking out a rally in Kausani, when the children made a call to the local public to think deeply about the subject of water.

The students also had the opportunity when coming to Lakshmi Ashram to see at first hand efforts being undertaken for protection and conservation of water. The local people in Kausani, as well as the Mahila Mangal Dals and Yuvak Mangal Dals (local women's and youth groups) in the Borarau Valley, had played a leading role in increasing the children's enthusiasm.

This programme had a very positive effect. The interest of the children in recognising and understanding those resources related to their lives in the local setting increased. At the same time through this programme the participation of the teachers in constructive activities is increasing. Everybody requested that such programmes be organised again, suggesting an increase in the possibilities of undertaking related activities in the future. The programme offered opportunities also for the development of those workers from other institutions who participated in the planning of this programme.

World Social Forum, Mumbai: 17-21 January 2004

By Chandra Pant

Lakshmi Ashram Field Office, Danya

Chandra was one of our earliest balwari teachers in Danya, and since we commenced our environmental activities in collaboration with the Society for Promotion of Wastelands Development in 1989, she has been the team leader for this work. Over the years her organisational and leadership skills have developed, and she has become a fine community worker. Indeed the achievements of Chandra and her team in the past five years in a small watershed management project have won praise from numerous institutions, in particular for the active participation of the village community in project activities, which have been carried out at very low cost. This year she had the opportunity to go to the World Social Forum, organised this year in Mumbai, and on her return has prepared a short report.

In January, with the help of a local organisation in Bhowali, “*Sairiyon ka Sangathan*” (SKS), I took part in the World Social Forum organised at the Nesco Maidan in Goregaon, a suburb of Mumbai. It was the first time that I had had the opportunity to take part in such a huge gathering, something that I had no expectation of at all when SKS had invited me to join a group going to Mumbai. Then the only thought in my mind was that there was going to be a meeting organised on natural resource protection.

For me the major attraction of the World Social Forum was to see people who had come from all four corners of the world, their differing cultures and dress. The cultural programmes that they presented really thrilled me. Secondly I came to realise that throughout the world the same battles are being fought – raising ones voice against social evils, struggling for the advancement of women, the oppressed and the poor. On 17th January I took part in a symposium in which women coming from many countries expressed their thoughts and ideas.

Lilian Silebreti welcoming the ongoing women’s movement in India, and she also said that the arrangements made for the fourth WSF in India were really good. She added also that she had brought posters from her own country, that explain what women must do to achieve their rights. She closed by saying that:

***“You can trample upon all the flowers of the garden,
But you cannot stop the coming of the spring.”***

Sunila Waisinghe from Sri Lanka then spoke, saying that all of us will accept that Human Rights are for everybody, that ten years ago the leaders of the world had also accepted that violence against women is violence against humanity. She ended by saying that:

“If the women are not free, then the world too is not free.”

Following her, Jaydeep Ghosh, a lecturer in economics from Delhi, said that the priority issue is this, that women despair of a government that does not provide them any benefits. Many other women then presented their thoughts before the gathering, but because they largely spoke in English I was not able to understand very much.

The next day there was a meeting on the theme, ‘Democracy in the Himalayas’, in which Shri Rajendra Rawal said that the entire Himalayan region is on fire, the hissing of the flames can be heard far and near. He emphasised that there is a deep need to understand the history of the Himalayan region. Continuing the discussion Shri Rajendra Dhasmana that the people living close to the land have

a true understanding of the ground realities. World Bank schemes such as Joint Forest Management (JFM) and Swajal (a people-based drinking water and sanitation scheme) have been imposed from above. He stressed that no scheme should be made on our behalf, rather all the countries in the Himalayan region should come together and, looking in depth at the possibilities and potential, should draw up projects and schemes.

On 19 January a meeting was organised by an Udaipur (Rajasthan) based organisation, 'Astha', on the theme of women and local government. In this meeting women who had come from Rajasthan, and who are actively participating in the local level political structures of Panchayati Raj, shared their experiences of the activities they had been involved in and their achievements. Everyone present was very inspired by what they heard, and agreed that they would share what they had heard with local groups in their respective areas, so that these groups can also share in the learning.

Because of the language barrier I could not take part in all the programmes, nevertheless I enjoyed very much having the opportunity of going to the World Social Forum, and all the credit for whatever I had the chance to see and hear goes to SKS of Bhowali for arranging for a group from Kumaun to participate.

The Challenges of the Vegetable Garden

By Parvati Tiwari



Parvati Tiwari with the mooli seed (white radish)

Parvati Tiwari came to Lakshmi Ashram three years ago, initially to take the training programme in spinning and weaving. She comes from a village to the north of Kausani situated beyond Garur called Wajyula and had been deserted by her husband. After her initial training was over she also had the opportunity to take a short training programme in the Khadi & Village Industries Commission's training centre in Haldwani in agarbatti (incense sticks) production. Within the Ashram she first took responsibilities for the small children before working with Parvati Goswami in the Udyogshala. For the past year she has assumed responsibility for managing the Ashram's terraced vegetable gardens that provide the Ashram kitchen with fresh vegetables.

Last year in August in a meeting of the Ashram workers I was given responsibility for managing the vegetable garden. To begin with I did not like it, but slowly as I got used to working in the garden, so I came to enjoy it very much. Through working in the garden I gained knowledge and experience, and now I enjoy the work very much. My interest in agriculture has been aroused, and I am making efforts to see that there is enough production of vegetables to meet the

needs of the Ashram kitchen. However we have not been able to grow potatoes.

(Editor's note – when potatoes used to be grown the biggest problem were porcupines who used to come from who knows where in the middle of the night to dig them up!).

Instead we purchase potatoes from the market in Kausani. However we grow all our other vegetables in the garden.

Sometimes I also face difficulties in my work, but these too offer me opportunities for learning. These days my 'Didis' (sisters / workers) help me a lot in the garden, and also give me advice, something I appreciate very much. I had no previous experience of growing vegetables, but these days I am learning a lot through my daily work. My desire is that I produce as much vegetables as possible, as well as producing as much seed as possible. We get good results from our own seed, while seed purchased from the bazaar does not give such good results. I recently experienced this when I purchased vegetable marrow seeds from the bazaar. These were sown and there the marrows showed plenty of growth, however they produced almost no marrows. The plants were much bigger than they should have been.

I have recently produced a good amount of seed, as given in the table below:



Pavati Tiwari with the garlic production

Seed Production from Lakshmi Ashram garden - 2003-04

Seed No.	Vegetable	Seed Output (Kilos)	Seed No.	Vegetable	Seed Output (Kilos)
1	Coriander	6.000	9	Ugal (Summer Greens)	9.000
2	Garlic	80.000	10	Fenugreek	2.000
3	Cucumber	1.000	11	Chaulai (Summer Greens)	4.000
4	Mooli (White Radish)	4.000	12	Okra (Ladies Finger)	0.500
5	Pumpkin	1.000	13	Bakula (Broad Bean)	0.500
6	Dwarf French Bean	9.000	14	Karela (Bitter Gourd)	0.050
7	Lai (Winter Greens)	10.000	15	Capsicum	0.050
8	Spinach	9.000	16	Aubergine	0.050

(Total seed production 136.150 Kilos)