

FRIENDS OF LAKSHMI ASHRAM

Lone Poulsen, Praestehusene 6, 2620 Albertslund, DK Denmark

Telephone +45 43961371 – e-mail: lone-poulsen@comxnet.dk

Bank Account IBAN no: DK0330000003141861 – SWIFT-BIC: DABADKKK

Bank reg. no: 4434 – account no: 0003141861

Lakshmi Ashram's homepage: <http://lakshmiashram.dk>

**NEWS FROM LAKSHMI ASHRAM
SANCHAR 132**

March 2018

Dear friends,

We have had a mild January and most of February, but then it became very cold with a lot of wind from Siberia. Now we are looking forward to a nice spring and summer. Here is news again from Lakshmi Ashram. This Sanchar brings the following articles:

- Building my Personal Capacities in Sewing by Meena Mehta
- My Experiences in Managing the Udyogshala (workshop) by Rekha Pandey
- The Problem of Out-Migration by Rakhi Arya – Class 10
- The statement of accounts 2017.

The general meeting takes place on **Sunday 22nd April 2018 at 2 pm. in Albertslund.**

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 and others divide the amount during the year. Therefore we will put 75 kroner into the administration account the first time of the year, we receive money from someone. This also applies if you send amounts that are not earmarked. So all will pay the same amount in subscription and receive the Sanchar.

We use very little money for administration. The money is transferred 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 is received with pleasure. Contributions that are not earmarked are also very welcome. 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 – see the top of this letter.

Best wishes,

Lone Poulsen

Friends of Lakshmi Ashram can save money, if you would be satisfied to receive a mail with the Sanchar. You can also see the Sanchar in the homepage. If you want to get a mail instead of receiving a letter, then please send your e-mail address to: ***lone-poulsen@comxnet.dk***

SANCHAR 132

Building my Personal Capacities in Sewing

Meena Mehta



When I came to the ashram in 1998 I was already around twenty years old, and there were specific personal circumstances that led to me coming here. At that time I possessed no specific skills whatsoever that I could use to support myself. Later I came to realize that I needed to gain some specific skill that could be a source of livelihood for me.

I spent my first year living in the ashram community, taking part in all the daily activities, and during that year I also had the opportunity to learn the basics of weaving woolen rugs in the

udyogshala (workshop) along with the students of class X, under the guidance of Parvati Goswami.

After this first year the ashram sent me to join Basanti Behn in Danya, where she was responsible for managing the pre-school programme of balwaris (kindergartens). For a year or more I assisted Basanti Behn in supervising the balwaris. However I was keen to learn a practical skill such as sewing and tailoring, and in 2001 I was able to take a one month training course in Danya. I was highly motivated to learn to sew and to master the art of making clothes, and very quickly learned the basics. After I had completed the one month training programme I began to put into practice all that I had learned. I was continually making clothes and in doing so I became more and more skilled and my confidence grew. I was living and working in our village centre close to Danya where besides doing sewing myself I also taught a number of local girls and women. I can sew all the clothes that the girls and women require – frocks, *salwar-kameej*, blouses and petticoats. In one day I sew two sets of clothes, that is to say two sets of *salwar-kameej*.

I have been responsible for the sewing in the ashram for a good number of years now, ever since returning from Danya in 2013, preparing the clothes for some 50-55 students. In one year I prepare three sets of clothes for each student.

Now I am fully self-confident that I can support myself through sewing and tailoring. I have observed that tailoring can be a very good means of earning a living for very well educated young people as well, for at the present time the rates charged for sewing clothes are very high. Thus a good number of people are attracted to this occupation. At the same time as raising their families women can earn a good livelihood through sewing at home, and a good number are doing so. In

order to achieve a high skill in sewing very good training is available from local sewing training centres.

I have also taught sewing to a number of the older girls in the ashram, and those who are motivated very quickly learn, although those with less interest do not develop their skills. Some of the older girls who have mastered the skills assist me in sewing clothes for our students.

Besides having responsibility for our sewing centre I am also the *didi* responsible for the students' hostel, a responsibility that I carry out with a spirit of honest commitment. This important responsibility increases my personal experience, and these twin responsibilities for managing both the sewing department and the hostel assist in developing every aspect of my personal life.

My Experiences in Managing the Udyogshala

Rekha Pandey



I started to work formally in Lakshmi Ashram in April 2015 and was given responsibility for managing the udyogshala (workshop). Various activities are carried out in the udyogshala, including the spinning of wool, and then using the spun yarn to weave and knit various items. I teach the children the basic skills of various handicrafts, so that their hands become adept in the specific craft, and they become capable of producing something of value.

In the afternoons from 1-2 o'clock we have our spinning classes in which everyone takes part, the workers and the students. The yarn that is produced through spinning is then used for knitting hats, scarves, sweaters, gloves etc., which are then put on sale in our small store in the udyogshala. Whenever any visitor comes to visit the ashram then we make sure that they see our store. When they learn that all these items have been made by the children they are very impressed, because children in the towns and even villages who are studying in school do not do such work in addition to their studies. When they see our knitted woolen hats and scarves, then they are very happy to purchase them.

In both the morning and afternoon we are also weaving rugs (*kaleens*) and small mats (*asans*) in the udyogshala. These are produced in a special way on carpet looms, and it is only a few of our students who have acquired the necessary skills. Carpet weaving is a skill particularly associated with the Bhotia¹ community. We try to teach the children new skills so that they might become so

¹ The Bhotia community is a tribe with a background from Tibet

adept that they can support themselves in any situation, and so that they will become so self-sufficient in various skills that they can meet their expenses at any time.

I enjoy working in Lakshmi Ashram very much, and I feel that I am learning something new each day. The children too knit very enthusiastically. When I have taught them how to knit sweaters then the children were very happy. They were all very keen that their sweater would be the very best, and each of them was saying to me how their design was different from the others, or else they were requesting me to teach them a more difficult design so that their sweater might be the very best. The children were so inspired that some even purchased woolen yarn from the bazaar to knit sweaters for themselves. I felt so good to see all this! In my mind I want to learn even more so that in turn I might teach them.

We also stock in our store tulsi (*a herb in the same family as basil and used as a herbal tea*) and turmeric, both items that we have grown ourselves in the ashram, for sale. After harvesting the tulsi is dried, while the turmeric is ground, and then both are packed for ease of purchase. I explain to our visitors the good qualities of both tulsi and turmeric, and what benefits we gain from them. Our visitors are usually so impressed by Lakshmi Ashram that there is no need to tell them anything. All in all I get a great deal of satisfaction from this work.



The Problem of Out-Migration

Rakhi Arya – Class 10



The ashram students regular contribute to two handwritten magazines, 'Suryoday' for the workers and older students, and 'Vijay' for the younger students. Rakhi contributed this essay for the latest issue of 'Vijay' brought out at Christmas)

Having picked up the daily newspaper I was reading through the news when one item in particular caught my attention. It described a village where out of seventy families only three were now living in the village. Reading further I learned that all the other families had migrated away from the village. This news left me feeling both very surprised and sad, and I felt a sense of shame also. These days leaving ones village

and going to the towns has become commonplace. This is what we refer to as *palāyan* or migration. There is migration away from all the hill districts of Uttarakhand, and this out-migration is becoming a very big problem. As a result every day the newspapers bring news about migration.

People are locking up their strong and beautiful homes that they have put so much effort into building and, going to other places or more distant towns, their homes are getting covered with grass and weeds. In this way fine houses are going to ruin – in such a situation it would be much better if these houses be given to those without homes. However nobody acts in this way. Once there was a time when if a young person left the village, then everyone would join together in giving him a fine send-off. However today the position is that so many people are leaving the village that the neighbours are often not even aware that the family living opposite have left, and that the house has been locked up for good.



I feel sad that in this day and age too, people are leaving their villages in such large numbers in the name of education and employment. Leaving this sacred land of Uttarakhand people are going to Delhi and other such cities, and in these cities the pressures of population are ever increasing. A few months ago the air in Delhi was so polluted that it was difficult to breathe. Because of the tall narrow buildings in the cities there is no way for the air to circulate freely. Because of the ever increasing number of vehicles, the

growing population, mechanization, etc., sources of pollution are expanding, leading to a major environmental problem. Even so people enjoy living in these polluted towns and cities. People say that as there is no employment in the hills, they are forced to migrate to the cities.

However the people do not wish to work here in the hills. There are numerous opportunities for work here, but are people ready to take up the challenge? The people here are rapidly abandoning farming, or otherwise their hearts are not in farming. Is the land in these hills really that useless? People say that wild animals are destroying their crops. Have we reached that state where the people are dominated by the animals, and out of fear are no longer ready to farm? They should be motivated instead to find a solution to the problem.

However the truth is that one day those people who have gone to the cities will once again long for the cool air and cold water of the hills. They will have no option but to return to these hills and once again make the land that they had considered useless suitable for agriculture. However even today there are some people who would never want to leave these hills and its land. The impacts of migration are never positive but always adverse.