

Newsletter #1 from INDIA ~ by Sagarika Devi

Confusions sometimes can be so sweet. It was the result of one such small confusion that I was linked to Monica Svensson, Mushroom Consultant, National Association of Mushroom Consultants in Sweden . The result, **I was flying to Sweden to present a paper in the 14 th International Fungi & Fiber Symposium 2010. It was just before I left India that I came to know the International Mushroom Dye Institute had been considerate enough to choose me for the IMDI sponsorship. It came as a pleasant surprise and great motivation to me as I had just exchanged a few emails with Dorothy Beebee where I had mentioned my research work at Shri AMM Murugappa Chettiar Research Centre, Chennai, India. Hence I was eagerly waiting to meet her so as to extend her my sincere thanks.**



It was a dream come true as the flight sailed through the clouds flying towards its destination. And it was a privilege that in spite of her busy schedule, Monica had driven all the way from Gysinge to Stockholm to receive us at the airport. It being the first international trip for me, I was anxious and restless with all my eagerness to meet the other participants. But it came across as a surprise that everybody out there was waiting to meet and hear from me. As the evening approached I was quite relaxed and felt as if it was my second home. The next day morning, the team for mushroom excursion had gathered together





and what I observed was passionate charged up people interacting with each other looking forward to learn from each other despite their several years of expertise. It was altogether a new experience for me as we in India hardly come across such opportunities. As we drove across, it was only patches of green everywhere that I could see or remember. We separated into groups for collecting mushrooms and I was with Susan Hopkins from USA . A warm lady with a contagious spirit, Susan helped me to identify, photograph and collect mushrooms that were good dye yielders. It was an enriching experience

for me as Susan happened to be a great teacher who made all this appear extremely interesting for a first timer like me. She used to sit with me in the nights after the fore-drags to help me identify, label, prepare sections of these mushrooms before we kept it on the blow dryers. Never for a moment did I feel that I was talking to experts with around 30 years of hands on experience.

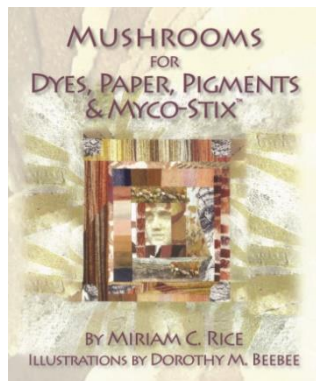
“There are no foreign lands. It is the traveler only who is foreign.” –Robert Louis Stevenson

*It was humility and teach-ability at its paradigm that I experienced. And it was Carla Sundstrom’s light hearted stories all the way around during these great mushroom excursions that kept the participants in spirit high. Amongst the other experiences were the workshops on Mushroom dyeing, Mushroom painting, Mushroom printing, Chip-carving, Crochet, Mushroom paper making, Tanning fish skins and Potluck dyeing etc. The humble spirit of **Susan Hopkins and Dorothy Beebee during the dyeing workshop kept reminding me of one thing said by some one that knowledge brings responsibility and humility.** The most interesting part was the sharing sessions which almost every participant looked up to for learning something new. It was like all colours of mushrooms intertwined and woven into different products that were beautifully arranged in the exhibition hall. As I write this let me not miss the opportunity to tell you about the tomboy charm of Ulla Brengdahl and Liza Johansson who always kept our spirits high and were very encouraging during the workshops.*



Karin Engerström-Gerstel reminded me of a small child riding on her bicycle, so considerate and warm to make sure that each participant got a refreshing and healthy tea break in time. I cannot help but mention the hospitable spirit of Erna-Britt Nordström who almost forgot her laptop that she had lent me and Susan for getting our presentations ready. It was great to hear the ideas of all the other presenters during the lecture sessions. What seemed quite obvious and global was the social concerns related to dyeing procedures, effective mordant use and the biodegradability of the effluent released.

It was a moment of pride when Dorothy M. Beebee presented me a book on **“Mushrooms for Dyes, Paper, Pigments and Myco-Stix”** by **Miriam C. Rice**. It was personally so touching



when she walked up to the stage to say that Miriam would have been very happy to know about the work that we were promoting. My heart skipped a beat and my spirit was rekindled to motivate me to march towards my goal. As a custom every year, we were given a warm welcome at the country representative meet as the new representatives for our own countries. Here I had the opportunity to meet enthusiastic and like-minded people – experts from other 15 different countries who had gathered to discuss strategies of spreading awareness and knowledge amongst the dyers all over the globe on these green or eco-friendly dyes.

Amongst all the other important happenings there were also healthy food sessions which everybody looked forward to. It was such an enjoyable experience and there were no rules as everyone mingled and giggled or joked across the tables. Swedish cuisine, like that of the other Scandinavian countries, is traditionally simple. I relished the famous dishes including Swedish meatballs and fish traditionally served with gravy. Also there were these delicious boiled potatoes with sauce and lingon berry jam with pancake as a part of the main course meal. The traditional flat and dry crisp breads were great additions that have developed into several contemporary variants. Ulla hosted a snacks party where we tasted the regionally important food called “Surstromming” (a fermented fish) in Northern Sweden and eel in Scania in Southern Sweden. As the final day approached, every participant was busy noting down the correspondence address of the other participants while wishing them adieu till the next Symposium at Jaca, Spain in 2012. It felt as if a grand ceremony in the family had ended where everyone departed with the thought of meeting the others in 2012.

Before I boarded my flight to India, I had the opportunity to spend some personal time with Susan where we visited the famous Vasa Museum and had lunch together. My simple words would not do justice to express my heartfelt thanks to Susan for all her support during the entire Symposium. As I was flying back I thanked God for having blessed me with this great opportunity.

“No one realizes how beautiful it is to travel until he comes home and rests his head on his old, familiar pillow.” – Lin Yutang

My words fall short to thank Monica Svensson who was always supportive to extend any help needed at any time to make this trip possible. It was her extra mile mentality that kept motivating me all through this cumbersome process. I still remember a mail from her where she wrote, “It is not a matter whether you will be with us for a day or two, what is more important for us is to have you here among us so that we can learn from you.” I was also looking forward to reach India and extend my sincere gratitude to Mr M V Murugappan, Chairman, Shri AMM Murugappa Chettiar Research Centre, Chennai, India for having supported me in making this eventful journey. I would also like to acknowledge and thank my colleague, Dr. K. Kannathasan for all his sincere support. Moreover, let me not forget to express my gratitude for my family and all others who helped in making this trip a success, unconditionally.

“Without new experiences, something inside of us sleeps. The sleeper must awaken.” – Frank Herbert”

The ability to see beyond and keep progressing with an inexhaustible courage is what the 14 th International Fungi Fiber Symposium2010 has imbibed in me. I wish many such great years of accolades to the Fungi Fiber team.

[Shri AMM Murugappa Chettiar Research Centre](#)

Mushroom dye pigments research at the Shri AMM Murugappa Chettiar Research Centre