

## Swamini Satyavratandaji's retreat

at Manjakkudi Swami Dayananda Memorial – Nov 9 to 11

It was a peaceful and divine experience at the three day camp at Pujya Swami Dayananda Educational Trust (SDET), Manjakkudi. The spiritual sadhana weekend retreat led by our Guru, Pujya Swamini Satyavratandara Saraswati, at Manjakkudi, opened us to the divinity within and without, providing the perfect ambience for a spiritual sadhaka. The serenity and spiritual atmosphere in the agraharam did not come as a surprise, considering that HH Pujya Swami Dayananda ji had spent his childhood years here. What more could one ask for?



### DAY 1

On our arrival, we were directed to our rooms which were housed in a building consisting of the Goshala and Swami Dayananda Study Centre. At the entry gate to the building, we were greeted by a wonderful sight of cows and calves getting ready to be let out for grazing in lush green school grounds. We came to know that the manure from the goshala was being used as a natural fertilizer for organic farming. The Study centre consisted of books and writings of Pujya Swamiji on various subjects.

Our day started with a visit to the Sri Lakshmi Narayana Temple in the agraharam. This temple has been maintained by SDET and helps one start the day with a positive vibration. We were transported to a golden period of Pujya Swami Dayananda ji's childhood when we were shown around the ancestral home in which he had spent his initial years as a child. The house radiated divinity which filled us too.

After a sumptuous breakfast at the koodam, we visited the Meditation Centre on the way to the Memorial. We offered silent prayers at the feet of Pujya Swamiji. Our first lecture session started at the Memorial. The Memorial hall is an ideal class room. The classroom is amply provided with all that is required (and more) for a lecture session. Spacious a/c hall with necessary audio and lighting facilities and dedicated staff to take care of any other need that might arise during the course of a lecture session, etc. were more than one could ask for. The Hall has a life-like resplendent Murti of Pujya Swamiji warmly blessing his students.

No wonder, our Guru, Pujya Swamini Amma chose to teach us the meaning of the Guru Stotram. What better way could be there to express gratitude to one's Guru? The simple stotram which is recited by us every day, opened up a whole new course in Vedanta and Pujya Swamini's explanations, as usual, made the most complex verses extremely simple to understand.

After one more lecture session in the evening, our day ended with a Vedanta Quiz, where we were asked to form groups and question each other on various Vedanta subjects.

### DAY 2 & 3

These two days saw many of the students starting their day either with meditation in the meditation centre or taking a stroll in the village grounds. We then had our usual temple visit and after reciting Vishnu Sahasranamam, we were served delicious prasadam.

We had five lecture sessions on both days, in which Pujya Swamini Amma unfolded the teachings hidden in the Guru Stotram. The stotram glorifies the Guru, who is none other than Brahman, the creator, sustainer, destroyer and the ultimate consciousness. Lord Shiva offers salutations to that Guru whose form is the whole indivisible manifestation, who pervades in all movable and immovable things. That Guru who removes the darkness of ignorance, who is the bestower of ultimate bliss, who is beyond duality, and who is indicated by the Maha Vakyas, and he who is free from the three Gunas. There is no principle greater than the Guru, no austerity greater than the Guru and nothing more beyond the self knowledge that is imparted by Him. To such a Guru, I offer my salutations.

One could practically see the love and dedication of Pujya Swamini Amma towards her Guru when she explained the verses, with great involvement. The last lecture session was attended by Pujya Swamiji's brother, and correspondent, Sri. M.G. Srinivasan. It was a pleasure to hear him address us at the end of the session.

Our visits to the Swami Dayananda Matric Higher Secondary School and Swami Dayananda College of Arts and Science were eventful. It was inspiring to know that the school imparts education to about 3000 students, not only in and around Manjakkudi, but also from various parts of India. Seeing the technology developments in class rooms and the facilities given to the children, one felt like becoming a child again to come here and study.

At the college, it was heartening to know that students passing out do not have the insecurity of finding jobs; they are successfully placed with multinational companies. It was good to know that WIPRO has set up an outsourcing unit at Manjakkudi and directly recruits freshers from this college.

We were also taken to the boys' hostel, the Semmangudi higher secondary school and the girls hostel at Semmangudi. It was heartwarming to see the young boys and girls sing the Aim for Seva anthem composed by Pujya Swamiji (Bharata Desa Hitaya). Girls and boys from different parts of India flock to this tiny village which has now become a vibrant centre for education, thanks to the efforts of Pujya Swamiji, and the blessed souls of the Trust who have been entrusted the responsibility of carrying out his vision.

Then, we were taken to the ancient Sri Varadaraja Temple in Kodavasal. The temple which was in ruins was revived by SDET in 2006 under the blessings of Pujya Swamiji, and houses Lord Varadaraja Perumal with his consorts Bhoodevi and Sridevi. The visit to the huge temple of Sri Tyagesan at Tiruvarur and witnessing the Sayarakshai was pure bliss. Our other temple visits included the ancient Airavateshwarar temple, Oppiliappan temple and the Sarangapani temple. We were accompanied by well informed lecturers who explained to us the specialities of each temple.

We were told that all the activities of the Trust are done under the leadership of Smt. Sheela Balaji, the Chairperson and Managing Trustee. We sincerely appreciate her commitment towards social development initiatives and for carrying on the vision of Pujya Swamiji and thank her for giving us this blissful experience. We pray to Lord Dakshinamurthy for her and her family's well being.

Altogether, it was a divine experience. The Bhaava of the hosts in receiving and taking care of our every need showed us the true meaning of "ATHITHI DEVO BHAVA".

HARI OM!

Report by Ms. Deepa Raviganesh

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Editor.