

“Puja Swamiji’s 80th Birthday Celebrations & 24th Anniversary function at AVG Saylorsburg, USA”.

The skies in Saylorsburg, PA around the Arsha Vidya Gurukulam reverberated with the sound of Vedic hymns and prayers for four days and the air gleamed with the Vedic fire, while the Lord Varuna also bestowed his blessings of rain showers upon the earth. It appeared as though the pancha bhutas themselves were joining hands with the hundreds of devotees serenading the 80th birthday celebrations of Puja Swami Sri Dayananda Saraswati. With the blessings of Lord Dakshinamurthy and beloved Puja Swamiji, the 80th birthday and the Arsha Vidya Gurukulam’s 24th anniversary events were celebrated in a grand manner at AVG, Saylorsburg, PA from August 12 through 14th of 2010. Disciples and well wishers of Puja Swamiji, filled with a deep sense of gratitude and devotion, participated in great numbers in the festivities making the celebrations a grand success. The four day celebrations were filled with religious and cultural events and further blessed by discourses and satsangas with Puja Swamiji. As a grand finale to the events, the Gurukulam’s 24th anniversary was celebrated on Aug 15th, which also coincided with Puja Swamiji’s calendar birthday.

Religious events

Sixteen priests and vedic scholars, who were well versed in the rituals, from many Hindu temples from near and far had assembled to conduct the religious functions in a specially constructed tent. The rituals were coordinated splendidly by AVG priests, Sri Ganesan and Sri Ravi. Beginning auspiciously with the abhisheka to Lord Dakshinamurti on the morning of Thursday Aug 12th, the function began with Ganapathi Homa dedicated to Lord Ganesha for blessing the function to proceed without any hindrances. A variety of homa dravyas including fried modakams were offered during the 1008 repetitions of Ganapathi mantra. This was followed by Dakshinamurthy mula mantra japa. Sitting before the decorated kalasams and invoking Lord Dakshinamurthy and performing shodasopachara puja, more than 130 devotees recited the mula mantra 1008 times each amounting to more than 100,000 repetitions. The kalasams were transported to the temple and abhishekam to Lord Dakshinamurthy was performed with the mantra-imbued holy waters of the kalasams. In the evening, the Vedic pundits chanted the taittryopanishad and Gana and Jata parayanam from the four Vedas, and performed the Rudra trishati archana with the 300 names of the Lord from the famous Rudram.

The second day saw the performance of rudra ekadasi --- eka dasa rudras invoked in 11 kalasams and the chanting of sri rudram 11 times by 11 priests followed by an anuvakam of chamakam for each repetition. A rudram homa followed with the purna ahuti and vasordhara accompanied by the complete recitation of chamakam. It was heart-warming to see Swamiji getting an abhishekam with sprinkling of the kalasa teertham and flower petal abhishekam. Devotees felt blessed to be part of the moment. More than 150 women dressed in traditional Indian attire performed the deep pooja and kumkuma

¹ Reported by Dr. Shankar Sundaesan and Dr. V. Swaminathan

archana on the auspicious Adi Friday evening with the chanting of Lalitha Sahsrnamavali seeking the blessings of the Universal Mother.

On Saturday, a variety of homas including Mrutyunjaya Homa, Apamrtyusukta Homa, Mrtsanjivani Homa, Sudarsana Homa, Dhanvantri Homa, Avahanti Homa and Ayushya sukhta Homa were performed on behalf of Pujya Swamiji by the priests praying for a long life for Swamiji, removal of all rogas and obstacles. With the completion of the Vasordhara with the chamakam recitation and purnahuti, Pujya Swamiji was received with a red carpet welcome with poorna kumbha, crowned with a flower kreedam, garlanded and offered the maha prasada with the resounding aashir vachanams from the assembled vedic pundits. Swamiji's purvasrama brothers and their families had graced the entire occasion and the whole festivities were celebrated by the assembled devotees as their own family function. A sense of peace and happiness pervaded the entire Gurukulam.

There is nothing more satisfying to a disciple than to revere his Guru and the morning of Aug 15th began auspiciously with a pada pooja to Pujya Swamiji. Swami Vidadatmanada performed the pada pooja and did the archana with the chanting of the Dayananda ashtottara. As more and more flowers gathered on the Guru's feet, the disciples felt more and more elated as if the pratibandhakams (obstacles) to seeing the truth were removed.

Cultural events

Many cultural events were also organized on all the days. Every evening the audience was treated to a variety of Indian classical music and dance programs. Noteworthy is that many of the artists were young adults whose families have been blessed to have long and deep association with the Gurukulam. Miss Shreya Adiraju, who is pursuing an undergraduate degree at Emory University, gave an inspired Carnatic vocal concert which included a few of Swamiji's compositions. Ms. Sumitra Guha, with equal felicity in both North Indian and Carnatic styles, enthralled the audience with a well rounded North Indian music concert. The Bharata Natyam dance recital by Ms. Rukmani Vijayakumar showcased several items with authentic delivery. Gurukulam's ashthana vidwan, Pandit Sri Mukesh Desai, enthralled the audience with his soulful voice and melodious songs. On Saturday, AVG young adults presented a beautifully choreographed dance presentation that high-lighted Pujya Swamiji's multi-faceted activities and contributions to humanity. About 22 dancers, ranging in age from 10 to 22, presented fourteen creative dance pieces in various styles set to the choicest and appropriate selection of songs from a wide ranging selection that included the Dayananda panchakam, Sambandhar thevaram, Bharathiyar's song, Valmiki Ramayanam Dr. U.V. Swaminatha Iyer's song and Bharta desha hitaya, the anthem of All India Movement for SEVA, to highlight Swamiji's projects and contributions to education, AIM for SEVA chaatralayas, Chariot Project at Thiruvaidaimarudhur, Oduvar project, Rama Sethu and Veda Pathasalas among others.

Felicitation to Pujya Swamiji were made by several of his disciples and students who shared the warm memories of their interaction with Swamiji over the years, and recounted the highlights of his teaching, his work, compassion and service to humanity. A huge birthday cake was lit in a decorated mantap to the accompaniment of dancing youngsters, who participated in the cultural program.

24th Anniversary Celebration

The twenty-fourth anniversary of the Gurukulam celebration formed the pinnacle of Swamiji's 80th birthday festivities. The function began with a Carnatic music concert by Maharajapuram Sri Ramachandran who fittingly set the appropriate tone for the occasion with the rendering of suitable kritis. Several of the dignitaries who were present addressed the audience and felicitated puja Swamiji.

Many new books, including Pujya Swamiji's masterly "Yoga of Objectivity," Advaita Makaranda with Tattva Prakasika commentary of Swami Tattvavidananda and manisha panchakam of Swami Viditatmananda and CDs were released on the occasion. Swamiji spoke on "uddharet atmana atmanam – May one lift oneself by oneself." After a sumptuous lunch, the audience returned for Question and Answers session with Pujya Swamiji that lasted for three hours. Swamiji patiently addressed all the questions with his characteristic style and wit and the audience left for home with the powerful message of self upliftment and warm wishes for the ashram and Pujya Swamiji.

It is gratifying to note that the grand success of the entire event was made possible by the dedicated AVG staff under the inspiring leadership of Sri Suddhatmaji and a volunteer corps that included about 100 families and 200 members working tirelessly for long hours irrespective of the blazing sun and the pouring rain during the four days.





