

## Chennai Kalavardhini Study Group Members visit to Manjakudi

The Kalavardhi study group members from Chennai, were blessed with a unique opportunity of spending three days with Pujya Swamiji in the serene village atmosphere of Manjakkudi, far from the madding crowd of the city. This retreat was to be organised in Amboli but the venue got shifted to Manjakkudi. A very special thanks to Smt. Sheelaji for her efforts to create this retreat for us and the memorable experience of Manjakkudi, Pujya Swamiji's birth place.

Pujya Swamiji, conducted Meditation sessions in the morning, followed by talks on the twenty values from 'Value of Values' and ended the day with Satsang. The retreat with Pujya Swamiji was like mananam, reiterating the teaching, Value of values, clearing all their doubts for assimilating the teaching. He also initiated them in the Bhagavad Gita Home Study.

The group members have been studying diligently, Pujya Swamiji's book 'Value of Values' for the last four years, meeting every Saturday. Mrs. Valli Ramaswami and I had worked on creating a Meditation programme based on this book. This has helped us in assimilating Pujya Swamiji's teaching.

The sessions were organised in the air-conditioned seminar hall in Swami Dayananada Arts and Science College building, situated amidst the green paddy fields and rustling trees. We were impressed by the commendable work that has been done by Smt. Sheela Balaji and Sri Ramachandranji in developing this



campus and the institution as well. The vast college campus has all the modern facilities required for the students matching with the colleges in the cities. There is nothing lacking; in fact, it is even better. There are 1600 rural boys and girls being benefited by this institution. It caters to the students from 100 villages in and around Manjakkudi.

The old "thinnai school" where Pujya Swamiji studied is functional even today. It has grown to such an extent, that it has a capacity to educate 2300 children in the same campus. They have buses and vans to pick up children from the neighbouring villages. We can visibly see Pujya Swamiji's vision translated into reality.

A massive auditorium for cultural activities has been built in the campus. It can comfortably accommodate 1200 people. Art festivals are also being organised every year for the locals so that they really do not miss out on the opportunity of witnessing or listening to great performers and maestros.

A child can begin his or her studies from the kindergarten and complete up to the Doctoral programme too without having to look for admissions elsewhere. The students have a good institutional infrastructure, discipline, education, science, art, culture, religion, tradition, sports and above all Pujya Swamiji's blessings.

Wipro has set up a BPO to provide placements for the students who pass out from the college.

Electricity is a permanent problem in the villages of Tamilnadu. Huge generators can be seen working for the sake of the welfare of the students and the staff.

The atmosphere is serene, environment is clean and people are hospitable, simple and loving.

Swami Dayananda Educational Trust is doing an exemplary contribution in the field of education in the rural area besides creating avenues for providing wonderful job opportunities for the locals as well as the inhabitants of the neighbouring villages. It will be a worthy effort to create a documentary and present it as the Model Rural Institution of India. It's heartening to see the organised sustainable growth and development without losing the identity and character of the rural environment.

In the evening Pujya Swamiji took us to Sri Varadaraja Perumal temple in Manjakkudi. We also visited the yennai ghaanam - rural oil extracting unit. Perhaps this is the only one of its kind in India, where oil is extracted from the seeds, using equipment made of wood and using the energy of the bullocks to run the mill.

A music festival was being organised for the first time in the Tiruvarur temple in

honour of the legendary trinity of Carnatic music, the outstanding composers of the 18th century, Sri Thiagaraja, Sri Muttuswamy Dikshitar, Sri Shyama shastri and Tiruvarur being the birth place of the three great masters. Pujya Swamiji inaugurated this festival. All the Kalavardhini members were also honoured by the organisers of the festival.

It will be incomplete without mentioning the three course elaborate delicious cuisine "kalyana samayal saappaadu" we all had. Sri Ramachandranji had planned the menu with such great care that there was no dish which was repeated. The urban dieting thought had completely vanished for the three days. It was a great blessing for all of us to have had lunch with Pujya Swamiji on all the days. The food was organised in the pathashala building. The place is so clean and vibrant that the pathashala children must be feeling very proud to be a student of such an institution.

All of us were touched by enthusiastic participation, the love and hospitality of the staff of the institution and the residents of Manjakkudi. We could see that all residents of the village coming together in Pujya Swamiji's presence. The one road of the village was decorated with rangoli everywhere. The village had a festive look. We also witnessed a rare event, Pujya Swamiji buying vegetables with the local door to door vegetable vendor.

Kalavardhini says a big thank you! to Smt, Sheela Balaji, Shri Ramachandranji, all staff members and the residents of Manjakkudi for making this memorable experience and valuable with Pujya Swamiji happen for us.

For Kalavardhini study group  
Swamini Svatmabodhananda sarasvati