

## 7th Thirumurai Awareness Program in New Jersey, USA

The 7th Annual Thirumurai Awareness Program was held on April 29th, 2012 at the Sri Venkateswara Temple Auditorium, Bridgewater, NJ 08807. It was sponsored by the Forum for Religious Freedom, Staten Island, New York. Swamini Srividyananda of Arsha Vidya Gurukulam, Saylorsburg, graced the occasion. Dr. P. Jayaraman, founder of the Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan was the Chief Guest. Introducing the program, Dr. V. Swaminathan, said that it was organized to support the Oduvar Project and the Thiruvaidaimarudur Sri Mahalingaswamy Ther project undertaken by Pujya Swami Dayananda Saraswati.

During the Program, a video message from Pujya Swamiji was shown, needless to say, to the delight of the participants and the audience. Pujya Swamiji referred to the institution of Oduvars started by King Raja Raja Chozha. The Oduvars sang the Thevarams in Siva Temples during the daily worship. It was fostered by successive kings but in course of time with the disappearance of the royal patronage, the Oduvars were unsupported and the religious tradition slowly became extinct. There has been a steady decline of the Oduvars and many temples today are without any Oduvars. Pujya Swamiji



succinctly summarized the situation by saying that we now have the responsibility to maintain the Oduvars who had maintained the tradition of our culture. Pujya Swamiji appreciated the efforts being made in this direction. He also expressed his happiness at the inclusion in this year's program of songs from the Nalayira Divya Prabandham, the devotional songs of the Vaishnava tradition. Swamiji said that in the Vishnu Temples generally the Priests themselves were conversant with the Naalayira Prabandham and they were reciting them during worship.

At the start of the proceedings, a young girl, Uma Mani, offered a Prayer to Lord Vinayaka by singing Arunagirinathar's 'Kaithala Nirai Kani'. This was followed by ten distinguished music teachers of the area rendering the Invocation 'Mahalinga

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1 Reported by Sri V. Ramachandran of Bridgewater, New Jersey, USA



vibho', a recent composition of Pujya Swamiji in the raga Sivaranjani. (See the picture)

Smt Neyveli Ramalaskhmi, who has been trained in the singing of *Thevarams*, rendered selected *Thevarams* of Saint Thirunavakkarasar (Appar) by herself and also along with her students. The songs, in various *pans* (melodies), related to the suffering and incarceration of Appar by the Pallava King of that time and how he overcame them with his devotion to Lord Shiva. The context of each song was briefly described prior to its rendering which enabled the listeners to enjoy the spirit of the song. As a second segment in the program, eight compositions of the Tamil Composers who are now known as Tamil Moovar (Mutthuthandavar, Maarimuttha Pillai and Arunachala Kavirayar) were rendered by the students of Aravind Narasimhan, Ashvin Bhogendra, Dr. Bhavani Prakash, Kalyani Ramani, Manjula Ramachandran, Padma Srinivasan, Rajeswari Satish and Sumati Sarangapani. It can be said that the devotional content of the compositions transported the audience to another world of tranquility and joy. As a third segment in the program, Sri Prasanna Venkatesh

& students rendered *Pasurams* from Nammazhvar Thirumozhi on the twelve names of Lord Vishnu. The proper pronunciation of the Tamil words and the devotion packed singing of the prabandhams that were set to different ragas were inspiring and made all to appreciate the high devotional content of the songs.

After the music session, Dr Swaminathan introduced the Chief Guest Dr P Jayaraman as the founder of the Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan in New York, a person of philosophical bent with a deep learning in our scriptures and a linguist. Dr. Jayaraman spoke about the exalted feeling he had throughout the entire program and dwelt a little on the Nayanmars and Alwars and the aspect of the devotional element exemplified by their lives and their songs. He complimented the efforts being made to preserve the ancient Indian Tradition and concluded by conveying his good wishes to everyone assembled there. The program concluded with all the students singing the inimitable Pujya Swamiji's composition "Bho sambo" in raga Revati as the *mangalam*. (See the picture) Sumptuous lunch was served to all the attendees.