Indian Culture Comes Alive Through a Truly Spectacular Cultural Extravaganza!


Every year after the spectacular Annual Day of Yoganjali Natyalayam and concurrent anniversary celebrations of Ananda Ashram, there is a general feeling that “this year’s annual day was the best one ever!” I have wondered whether this is a mere loss of objectivity due to the closeness of the recent event or whether it is an actuality. This year however was for sure, the "Best Ever" celebrations till date!

The reality of this unreal universe dictates that change is eternal, and that it is the only constant. If so, we have only two options: either to grow and evolve or to decay and die. If Yoga is conscious evolution, if it is the living of a life of mindfulness, if it is the art and science of spiritual growth; then, our every activity becomes one of positivity, and hence it is but in the scheme of the universal law (the dharma rai), that with each passing year, we become better than we were the year before. This same cosmic law tells us that each generation should surpass the previous in its humanity and that when we live in tune with dharma, this is the way life unfolds.

Swamiji and Ammaji have planted the seeds of Yoga and our beloved Indian Culture very deeply in Pondicherry and their pioneering efforts have started to bear fruit, manifesting a conscious and beautiful goodness (satyam shivam sundaram) that didn’t exist before. The youth and children of Pondicherry are blessed to be born in this punya bhumi and to be a part of Yoganjali Natyalayam is considered their greatest blessing by so many of them. To understand the potential of each child and enable them to actualise it in a loving and supportive environment is the prime objective of YOGNAT that aims to make “The Ordinary Child, Extraordinary and the Extraordinary Child, Great!”
More than 12 hours of non-stop music, dance, chanting and Yogasanas by more than 300 participants, a team of dedicated musicians, hundreds of alumni members and a dozen support staffers, created a joyful and colourful experience of the cultural vibrancy of Pondicherry. Ammaji, the Living Siddha of Pondicherry with her benevolent, loving and eagle eyed direction enabled the whole event to be on track throughout while Dr Ananda and his team kept the hectic pace going from start to finish. The faculty members, student-teachers, staff members and students all worked as a team along with the unstinting cooperation of our parents who expressed their dedication to bharatiya sanskrithi (Indian culture) through thought, word and deed.

A special feature of the jubilee celebrations was the highly popular holistic medical camp organised by Yogachemmal Dr R Balaji and directed by Dr MR Vidhya, Chief consultant physician & Diabetologist Medical Director MVR Medical Center & MVR Poly Clinic that for the first time in Pondicherry brought together the modern allopathic medical specialities of general medicine, diabetology, orthopaedics and obstetrics & gynaecology with AYUSH specialities of Siddha, Yoga & Naturopathy under one roof. Everyone appreciated Dr MR Vidhya and her well trained and efficient team who ran a well coordinated event benefiting many that day.

Consultations were offered by Dr M Malayalathan, Consultant Orthopaedic & Spine Surgeon and Dr. Shabnam Khan, Consultant Gynaec, Laparoscopic Surgeon & Fertility Specialist. Efficient and affordable laboratory services were offered for a minimal cost by the Lister
Labs, Pondicherry. The AYUSH aspects were covered by the team from CYTER of Sri Balaji Vidhyapeeth, Pondicherry AYUSH Department and the Centre for Yogic Sciences of AVMC&RC. Dr B Rajalakshmi Shaktivel of Pondicherry AYUSH Department offered Siddha consultations while Dr Vasundhara covered the Yoga & Naturopathy angle. Yoga therapy was given by Sri Artchudane, Smt Mariangela, Smt Vithiyalakshmi, Sri Dhanush and Selvi Ghayatri. Counselling services were also provided for de-addiction by the team from Mother Care Foundation.

The event started sharp at 10am with the lighting of the tradition lamp (kuthhuvilakkku) by Ammaji, eminent guests, alumni and faculty members with aarthi performed by Master Anandraj Bhavanani and accompanied by the resonating chant of mantras by Dr Ananda and Yogacharini Smt. Devasena Bhavanani. The chanting of Ganeshapancharatnam and Ramashtakam was led by Selvi Dhivya Priya Bhavanani with all the children astounding the audience with their clear diction and flawless rendition of these classics composed by Bhagavadpada Sri Adhishankara.

Carnatic vocal selections from numerous composers in different languages were then presented by music students under direction of Nada Yoga Shironmani Smt. Jyothirmayi Shastri and her team of music teachers including Sri Veeramuni and Smt Indumathy Bhanuchander. Selvi J Sankari on the violin and Selvan S Anirudh on the mridungam gave admirable support.
In the pre lunch session an invigorating panel discussion on “YOGNAT: Enabling self transformation and empowerment of the individual” was moderated by Dr Vanaja Vaithianathan, Founder Medical Director & Ophthalmic Surgeon of Jothi Eye Care Centre with members of the YOGNAT family including current students, parents and alumni sharing special life transforming experiences at YOGNAT. This was a very lively sessions and many beautiful moments were shared by the members who all reiterated the wonderful journey they have had through YOGNAT thanks to the pioneering efforts of Swamiji and Ammaji. This spirit of transformation and empowerment of the womanhood was also later reflected in a spectacular group yoga demonstration by 25 ladies representing the 25 years of YOGNAT. Each and every member of the audience was deeply moved by the brilliant coordination and artistry of the demonstration that showcased Yoga Shakti, or the woman power of yoga! The demonstration was conceptualized by Yogachemmal Lalitha Shanmugam and her direction of the show was well appreciated.

The Banner Dance of YOGNAT is always a special attraction as it gives the audience a chance to witness the amazing Yogasana skill of the children and the magnificent teamwork that comes into play. This year, Ammaji divided the banner dance into three teams and each team vied with the others to do better than their best. It is always heartening to see such amazing abilities of these young children and this type of healthy group activity enables them to grow in so many ways. The excellent psychosocial developments of our children over the past many years may be attributed to such golden opportunities that enable them to learn and understand strengths and weaknesses of each member while building up to their team’s best
ever performance. The efforts of Yogachemmal E Gajendran, Yogacharini Devasena Bhavanani, Yogachemmal Dr. Balaji, Yogachemmal Chandrasekar and the teachers team of Smt Sridevi Jayakumar, Smt Tamilselvi Mohan, Smt M V Jayalakshmi, need a special mention as they led numerous practice sessions in the proceeding weeks enabling the kids to do their best. The boys led by Anandraj also gave a scintillating performance when the turn came to showcase their amazing agility and gravity defying abilities.

The dance performances were an amalgam of items drawn from the traditional Bharatanatyam repertoire such as kauthwam, mallari, keerthanam, padam, thillana etc as well as many bhakti filled compositions and energetic folk dances. The small ones made us all proud with their flawless and cute movements while the seniors took the cake with their spellbinding performances.

There were compositions describing the stories of Lord Shiva, Krishna, Shakti, Muruga and the great Tamil culture. All dance teachers had made efforts to present their classes well while Ammaji deputed senior students to each class for hands-on training in managing the young ones, thus adding value to the overall presentations.

The highlight of the dance section was the performance of Saint Thiagaraja’s timeless Panchatnam “Jagathanandakaraka” by the seniors and this 40 minute composition literally took everyone’s’ breath away in its spectacular melodic, rhythmic and emotionally surcharged presentation. Selvi I Krishnaveni as the student-teacher in charge of the dance performances did an amazing job of coordinating all the groups and their practices and her efforts bore fruit in the excellent teamwork and formations presented by all the dancers.

Smt. Devasena’s lovely singing complemented the efforts of Dr Ananda and the musical team of Kalaimamani Jagatheesan, Talamamani Prasanna, Selvi J Sankari and Sri Janarthanan made sure that no stone was left unturned in making the event a grand musical success.
The excellent performances of the children must be credited to the special efforts of the dance teachers led by Smt. Devasena and comprising of the dynamic team of Yogachemmal Smt Kanimozhi Sethiskumaran, Smt R Sri Valli, Selvi P Bhuvaneswari, with inputs from Smt Lalitha Shanmugam. The senior dancers were coordinated and guided by Selvi I Krishnaveni with the support of the senior dance students trio of Selvi S Sowmiya (Devasena Shanmugam), Selvi S Vidhyashankari and Selvi I Balasundari.

One of the highlights that was much anticipated was the screening of YOGNAT & Me: A documentary short by Selvi Krishnaveni Ilanthirayan, Sri Tathagata Mitra, and team, tracing the journey and impact of YOGNAT through the past 25 years. The 25 minute film brought together a myriad experiences and feeling expressed by alumni, teachers and students of YOGNAT and truly captured the spirit of YOGNAT leaving everyone wanting more!

The YOGNAT Annual Awards were bagged by those who had proved their mettle over the year and Best Student Award 2018 was received by Selvi K Swathi while Best Family Award 2018 went to Yogachemmal G Dayanidy, Smt Reena and family (Deganand & Hasini). The Michael Danckwerts Yoga Scholarship was bestowed upon I Mrinali Akshita and P Saranya, the Shri Vijaya Bhaskar Music Scholarship Award to S Narchelvi and R Akshaya and the latest addition, the Sally Stevens Performing Arts Scholarship went to M Gomathi and P Kavya.
The CHIEF GUEST of the event was the Hon'ble Chief Minister of Puducherry Thiru V Narayanasamy who released the 280 paged commemorative souvenir and appreciated the work of the Ananda Ashram.

The souvenir was compiled and edited by Yogacharya Dr Ananda Balayogi Bhavanani and Yogachemmal G Dayanidy, under the benevolent guidance of Ammaji, Yogacharini Meenakshi Devi Bhavanani. Efforts towards this were supported by the Jubilee Editorial Team comprising of Yogachemmal C Shanmugam, Yogachemmal Lalitha Shanmugam, Yogachemmal Dr Meena Ramanathan, Yogachemmal E Gajendiran, Yogachemmal Reena D Joseph, Yogachemmal Dr R Balaji, Selvi I Krishnaveni, and Selvi I Balasundari.

Ammaji was felicitated on the occasion of her completing 75 years of Yogic living in this incarnation, and everyone present sang a birthday song in her honour with 75 resounding claps ringing through the air of the packed auditorium. “She is truly a ling legend of Yoga and one of the greatest women of yoga in modern times. We are indeed fortunate to live in the same time frame as her in Pondicherry”, said Sri N Ardhanari, the eminent Gandhian.

The Chief Minister also gave away the Shironmani awards to eminent awardees and prizes to meritorious students. Selvi Dhivy Priya Bhavanani was given the appointment certificate as Deputy Director of YOGNAT and thus emulates her father who was appointed also as Chairman of ICYER at the age of 15 years.
The Hon'ble MLA Orleanpet Thiru R Siva and the Puducherry Special Representative in Delhi Thiru John Kumar felicitated the occasion. Yogini Satyaprem Gibson from Australia represented the International Yoga Teachers Association and the Australian Yoga Therapy Association and offered tributes on the occasion. Muthamilammami Kalaimamami Pulaivar I Pattabiraman and Sri N Ardhanari the senior guiding lights of YOGNAT blessed the YOGNAT family on the momentous occasion.

During the celebrations, Yoga Jivana Satsangha's SHIRONMANI AWARDS were bestowed upon eminent personalities in gratitude for their noble service for the society. The title award of Acharya Ratna Shironmani was given to Prof Madanmohan, Director, Centre for Yogic Sciences, AVMC & RC, Pondicherry and Prof TM Srinivasan, Honorary Senior Professor, S-VYASA Yoga University, Bangalore in recognition of their selfless service and visionary leadership for the cause of world society through the field of science, Yoga and holistic health. Seva Ratna Shironmani awardees included Sri C Dhandapani @ Raja of the Sri GC Dhandapani Electricals, Pondicherry; Sri Navin N Daswani, CEO of Super Audio Madras Pvt Ltd and Ms V Usha, Senior Advocate of Puducherry in recognition of their notable service for the cause of society through excellence in their chosen fields.

Karma Yoga Shironmani was awarded to Yogachemmal C. Shanmugam, General Manager, Yoganjali Natyalayam; Yogachemmal E. Gajendiran Senior Yoga Teacher, Yoganjali Natyalayam and Yogacharini Shobana Devi of Gitananda Yoga, Czech Republic in recognition of their service for the cause of spirituality through Gitananda Yoga. Kalaratna Shironmani was awarded to Sri Shanmugavel, Proprietor, Photo Xpress in recognition of his notable service for the cause of society through excellence in the field of photography, film making and artistic manifestation of spirituality.
The senior boys, who are all now into their professional life and leading families decided to perform an Alumni Yogasana Demonstrations and this towards the end of the events was surely a showstopper. Magnificent team work and coordination as well as dynamic agility was showcased by the young men who turned the wheels of time back to recreate the excellence they had consistently displayed over the past two decades. Sri M Swarooparamanan and Sri M Siddhathan, brothers who have been long time students at YOGNAT also gave a spectacular Acroyoga demonstration that blew everyone’s mind.

The event was felicitated by Thiru V Sivashanmugam the Former Director Tourism Directorate who had been instrumental in the conduct of the first international yoga festival in 1993 and also chief guest for the inauguration of YOGNAT in March 1993. Kalaimamani SV Jagatheesan of the Saradha Kala Mandir who has been associated with Ananda Ashram for more than four decades was present and supported the event through his musical acumen.

Arrangements for the jubilee celebrations were coordinated by Yogachemmal C Shanmugam and Yogachemmal Lalitha Shanmugam who managed the press, publicity, reception, venue, hospitality and overall coordination of the daylong event. Excellent makeup and costumes were taken care of by Yogachemmal Smt Kanimozhi Sethiskumaran, Smt R Sri Valli, Selvi P Bhuwaneswari, Smt V Sarulatha with support from Maniyan Tailors, Rajendiran Tailors, and Kalaimathi Costumes. The day long events were carried forward by a dynamic team of volunteers comprising of Yogachemmal R Chandrasekar, Sri Siva S, Sri Swarooparamanan, Sri Siddharthan, Sri Sriram, Sri G Surendiran, Yogasadhaka Kiaan Gupta, Thiru S Sendil Coumar, Thiru G Ramalingam, Selvi Yuvarani and others.

The Sound and Light Arrangements were courtesy of Dandapani Electricals and Puducherry Municipality Staff; Photos by Thiru S Velu, Photo Express; Video by Thiru G Sasi Kumar, NDS 24x7 and the Souvenir printing by Thiru J Selvakumar, Sarguru Printographs.
A special mention must be made of the dedicated Yogacharini Shobana who came all the way from the Czech Republic to help Ammaji during the celebrations and brought with her a loads of goodies in the form of memorabilia for the children. Hundreds of these lovely colourful gifts of badges, key chains, hair clips and mirrors with the Jubilee Celebration image of Swamiji imprinted on them were happily lapped up by the children who heartily appreciate these small, yet very significant gestures of true love for the Guru Parampara.

When you can do your work with love, passion and motivation producing happiness not only for yourself but for others too - then you are truly blessed in your life! We at YOGNAT are tremendously blessed by our Gurus, for, we are ever busy doing stuff that we love and enjoy. This also gives us the chance to constantly evolve ourselves on the path to liberation, the goal of human existence. “Work is worship” said our illustrious Guru Yogamaharishi Dr. Swami Gitananda Giri Guru Maharaj and he makes sure we are busy worshiping the Divine a lot for he keeps us ever busy with newer plans every day.

We at YOGNAT are truly blessed to be Sishyas of such a visionary founder and are constantly motivated towards excellence by our dynamic director and Guru, Puduvai Shakti, Ammaji, Kalaimamani Yogacharini Meenakshi Devi Bhavanani.

E-copy of the Jubilee Commemorative Souvenir released on the occasion by the Chief Minister of Puducherry Sri V Narayanasamy is available for download from https://www.dropbox.com/s/56il2owo0039zch/Jubilee_souvenir2018.pdf?dl=0