A TRULY SPECTACULAR CULTURAL EXTRAVAGANZA

A report on the 21st Annual day of Yoganjali Natyalayam and 46th Anniversary Celebrations of Ananda Ashram, Pondicherry, India.

Sunday, 20th July 2014

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.

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 eight hours of non-stop music, dance, chanting and Yogasanas by more than 300 participants, a team of dedicated musicians and a dozen support staffers, created a joyful and colourful experience of the cultural vibrancy of Pondicherry. Ammaji 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.

The event started sharp at 2pm with the lighting of the tradition lamp (kuththuvilakkku) by Ammaji, Thavaththiru Velu Swamigal of Melavanjore, eminent guests and faculty members with aarthi performed by Yogacharini Smt. Devasena Bhavanani accompanied by the resonating chant of mantras by Dr Ananda. 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. The chanting of Achuthashtakam was led by Yogachemmal Smt. Meena Ramanathan with the children astounding the audience with their clear diction and flawless rendition of this classic composed by Bhagavadvadpad Sri Adhishankara.

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 Gajendiran, Yogachemmal Dr. Balaji and Yogachemmal G Dayanidy need a special mention as they
led numerous practice sessions in the proceeding weeks that enabled the kids to do their best. The senior boys led by S Sivashankar also gave a scintillating performance when the turn came to showcase their amazing agility and gravity defying abilities. The highlight for many was the Yoga demonstration by the ladies class of YOGNAT who showed that “pulls and pressures” of family responsibilities couldn’t hinder their enthusiasm and their skilful presentation was a truly inspiring display of Indian womanhood. Dr Vanaja Vaithiyathan and Dr Nalini Srinivasan deserve special mention for being the catalysts for this show of shakti.

The dance performances were an amalgam of items drawn from the traditional Bharatanatyam repertoire such as pushpanjali, mallari, alarippu, thillana etc as well as many bhakti filled compositions and energetic folk dances. The small ones made us all proud with their flawlessness and cute movements while the seniors took the cake with their spellbinding performances. There were compositions describing the stories of Lord Shiva, Krishna, Muruga and the great Tamil poetess Avvaiyar. 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 Muruga Varnam by the seniors and this 45 minute composition literally took everyone’s breath away in its spectacular melodic, rhythmic and emotionally surcharged presentation of the multi-splendored stories of the great Lord. 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 who was down with a bad sore throat, while the musical team made sure that no stone was left unturned in making the event a grand musical success.

Excellent coordination and human resource management by Yogachemmal Shanmugam and Yogachemmal Lalitha Shanmugam enabled all the bits and pieces to come together in a smooth and seamless manner while stage arrangements by Sharavanan, Ramalingam and Kaliappan of ICYER/YOGNAT with Dandapani Electricals made everyone feel that they were in a sacred atmosphere.

The Chief Guest of the event, the Parliamentary Secretary to Chief Minister and MLA Lawspet, Thiru M VAITHIANATHAN was greatly appreciative of the efforts of all students and complimented Ammaji and Dr Ananda on an excellent show. “It is important that Pondicherry has such unique organisations like Yoganjali Natyalayam, for we need to cultivate artistic expression as well as human values in our youth” said he while giving away the prizes to the meritorious students. Kalaimamani Rajamanikkam requested the Government to honour Ammaji and Dr Ananda for their tireless efforts in the cultural renaissance of Pondicherry. “Dr Ananda is the only real nattuvanar as he writes the lyrics, composes the music, choreographs the dance, sings it on stage and does the jathis too while wielding the cymbals- the rest are mere tattuvanars” said he in a humourous manner. Professor Madanmohanji, Pulavar I Pattabiramanar and Dr Ardhanari felicitated while Meena Ramanathan was honoured with the title of “Mozhipeyarpu Thaaragai” (star of translation) by Pulavar I Pattabiramanar for her skill in translating Dr Ananda’s various books into Tamil.

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.
FEEDBACK FROM MEENA RAMANATHAN

“Have you ever watched a display of fireworks on stage? Live? We got to see that during the Annual day of YOGNAT. Such a scintillating extravaganza!!!! More than 300 students performing in over a dozen dance items along with yoga demonstrations and banner dance tableaux, chanting as well as singing but the very talented, beautifully cultured young students of Yoganjali Natyalayam. Excellent combination of singing, the instrumental accompaniments and the bright colourfully dressed kids dancing on stage, such a wonderful sight!!! Words fall short of expressions . With a Shiva dance it felt like you were there in Kailash, watching Shiva dance at such close quarters. Right through that dance you stayed united to Shiva or Muruga.. was so blissful!! To remain in union with the divine energies .. isn’t that what we call as Samadhi? Isn’t that the Bliss we are looking out for? That was what we got HERE, while watching them. It was no more the child performing. It was the character they had taken up in that dance. They had become that, transcending us along with them into that magical and ethereal realms. You need not be a dancer or an exponent of dance for this, even an ardent rasika, a lay person like me could feel it. Thank You Sir, for composing the lyrics, the music as well as the choreography along with supporting the dancers with the rhythm/ nattuvangam.... but above all this, beyond your bad throat, your singing was absolutely magical. Thank You Ammaji for enabling all these beautiful events to happen. Thanks to You and Sir, for enlivening Swamiji’s dream, that we get to witness these divinely and wonderful programmes. Am so proud to be a Yognateer!! Kudos to the YOGNAT TEAM!!!! As always, THIS ONE WAS BETTER THAN THE LAST ONE!!!!”

FEEDBACK FROM I KRISHNAVENI

“The biggest blessing of my life is that I’m your student!! Forever thankful and grateful that i joined Yoganjali Natyalayam and still continuing to be so closely a part of such a wonderful family! YOGNAT will always remain as that one place where I can be fearlessly and shamelessly be me and still be loved and appreciated. Thanks a lot sir for everything! For singing for us despite having a sore throat. Blessed to have a teacher who cares so much about his students and who is willing to sacrifice his own personal health for the sake of the happiness of his students. I have always fought for so many things and I am very proud to have done so! Whatever I am today, I own a lot to YOGNAT, Ammaji, you and Devasena miss. A huge Thank you for having me as part of YOGNAT and continuing to encourage me more and more!”
YOGNAT AWARDS 2014

BEST STUDENTS AWARD: Selvi. S. VIDYASHANKARI and Selvi. S. SABHARISREE

MICHAEL DANCKWERTS YOGA AND CULTURAL EXCELLENCE SCHOLARSHIP AWARD: Selvi. DHIVYA PRIYA BHAVANANI and Selvi. S. SUREGA

SANGEETA SAMRAT SHRI VIJAYA BHASKAR MUSIC AWARD: Selvi. R. MANJARI and Selvi. I M EVA AGNES CINDRELLA

BEST FAMILY AWARD: Shri. D. SARAVANAN, Smt. VATCHALA and S.NARCHELVI

YOGNAT POINTS PRIZES

Maharishi Patanjali Section
1. Dhivya Priya Bhavanani
2. C. Pragathi
3. S. Sriragavi

Sri Manika Swamigal Section
1. M. Eva Agnes Cindrella
2. D. Subash
3. S. Keerthana

Sri Shankara Giri Swamigal Section
1. M. Vaishanavi
2. S. Divya Dharshini
3. G. Yuvanth

Swami Poornananda Giri Section
1. V. Aglandeshwari
2. M. R. Dharshini
3. A. Harini

Sri Kanakananda Swamigal Section
1. P. Hema Supraja
2. S. Harini
3. S. Archana

Dr. Swami Gitananda Giri Section
1. S. V. Deepa
2. K. Shakthi Monica
3. S. Ishwarya

FIVE YEARS COMPLETION MEDALS – 2013-14

1. Avala Pujitha
2. Avala Madhusri
3. T. V. Dhakshayani
4. S. Dharshan
5. G. Gayathri
6. P. Haimaja
7. D. Hema Ganesh
8. P. Kavya
9. N. Leo Devanad
10. M. Madhumitha
11. P. Meenakshi
12. P. T. Malini
13. M. Madanraj
14. N. Neya
15. D. Nirmal
16. S. Narchelvi
17. S. Pouvizhi
18. G. Priyavathana
19. V. Priyadharshini
20. K. Raghul
21. S. Sriragavi
22. S. Shailaja
23. G. R. Vigneshwaran
24. M. Vishwa
25. C. M. Hemasree
26. P. Meera Devi