



LOVE ALL SERVE ALL

Sevalaya's News Letter

FEBRUARY - 2003

Dear Friends,

Pongal (in South India) or Sankaranthi (in North India) is celebrated as a farmers festival, to thank the Sun God and the mother earth, during middle of January. This is the main harvest season in India and normally the villages will wear a festive look as the farmers will have more money to spend. But this year, the picture is quite opposite. We didn't get enough rains and the farmers are facing a very gloomy future. The agricultural production is low and the poor villagers who don't know any other trade are suffering. The life line of Tamil Nadu, river Cauvery, is dry. Thanjavur district, which is known to produce enough rice for the entire state, is under severe drought condition.

Who is responsible for this situation? Some people say it was the Karnataka Government, who didn't release Cauvery water in time. Some people say it was the fault of Tamil Nadu government, not asking for water in time. Are the farmers dying due to starvation? Are they committing suicide or dying natural death? The government and the opposition have different views. For the politicians, even when people are dying, they want to play politics and blame each other. For the common man, it is all news worth reading or worth watching on the TV. Is there anyone who really feels for the plight of the poor farmers and their families? Is there anyone who wants to take some positive action?

'Even if there is one good hearted person, because of his/her presence, the entire population will get good rains' says one old Tamil poetry. Does this prove that all of us have become totally selfish?

How do we produce this 'one good hearted' person? Is our education system capable of doing that? 'We should provide food for all humans' says Mahakavi Bharathi. 'For a hungry man, food alone is God' says Swami Vivekananda. Mahatma Gandhi came up with 18 programs for constructive work. Can we take such powerful messages of these three people to the next generation, again and again, so that, that 'one good hearted' person, who will make sure that all of us get good rains, will emerge?

This is exactly what Sevalaya is trying to do. Along with the regular subjects, Bharathi, Gandhi & Vivekannada's life and teachings are also taught in the classes. Regular slide shows are conducted in many village schools. A three day annual camp is held to talk about these three great men. Competitions are held for the schools in and around Sevalaya, during the birth anniversaries of Gandhi, Vivekananda and Bharathi.

Let us hope, one day, the ONE 'good hearted' person will emerge, and Cauvery will flow again.

Thanks & Regards

Murali

National Service Scheme

Volunteers from Sri Kanyka Parameswari College for Women, Chennai led by Ms. S. Gowri, Co Ordinator were on A National Service Scheme Camp at our Campus at Kasuva village for 10 days from 17.1.2003. Ms. T.V. Jayalakshmi, Principal of the college presided over the meeting and the Principal of the Hindu College, Pattabiram inaugurated the Camp and Mr. A. Annamalai, Trustee, Sevalaya, delivered the special address. Their Schedule included: a veterinary medical camp for our village, Dental and skin camps, temple cleaning, Sports for children and Personality Development Programme among other things. They joined us in our Republic Day Celebrations.

Adarsh Youth Mela

Yuva Shakthi, a registered Charitable Institution aimed at the welfare of the youth, conducted " Adharsh Youth Mela " on 12th January 2003, to synchronise Swami Vivekananda's Birth day. The programme was sponsored by them in association with N.S.S.Unit of Anna University. The purpose is to "achieve National Development through Self Development". In a related Exhibition, a stall depicting the life of Swami Vivekananda attracted wide attention. In the function Mr.V. Muralidharan, Managing Trustee, Sevalaya received the Yuva Shakthi Achievement Award-2003 at the hands of Mr. K. Ashok Vardhan Reddy, I.A.S..

Book-Review Meetings

Date: 4/1/2003.

Speaker: V.Muralidharan

Book: Only Paranoids Survive

Author : Andy Gower

Date: 25/1/2003

Speaker: V.Chitra

Book: Edutha Kaariyam Yaavinum Vetri (Tamil) (Success in All Endeavours)

Author: N. C. Sridharan

Training and Development

A follow-up meeting of the leadership training conducted earlier last month was held on 5th

January. During this session there was a detailed feedback on the programme by the Participants. It was decided to have periodic sessions, focusing on a specific aspect of leadership in each such session.

Insight, an organisation of members of Anna University, conducted a workshop for the students of 8th and 10th Standards on how to work out mathematical problems in a simple



way. The workshop was for two whole days on 11th and 12th January. The classes were conducted by Prof.Ranjani . On 11th January, Prof. Ranjani of Anna University addressed the teachers of our school on " Logic ".



Vivekananda Jayanthi

On 11th January, Vivekananda Jayanthi was celebrated at our campus. Mr. AL. Chidambaram, President, Ambattur Industrial Estate Manufacturers Association was the Chief Guest. He distributed prizes to the winners of the Inter-School Competitions on Swami Vivekananda conducted by Sevalaya. There was a pictorial Exhibition on the Life and Message of Swami Vivekananda on the occasion

ON 12TH January, There was a session on basics and practical applications of Computers for our teachers by Ms.Geetha Priya and Ms.Padmini assisted by some students of NIIT.

Five Great Sons of India.

Readers may remember that Sevalaya is conducting a series of lectures on the five great sons of India, in association with other like minded organizations, viz. Thakkar Bapa Vidyalaya, Gandhi Study Centre, Bharatha Mata Sangham and Yuva Shakthi. Penultimate in the series was on Swami Vivekananda. Swami Padmasthananda of Sri Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama spoke on the occasion narrating interesting episodes from the life of Swami Vivekananda highlighting the values that our youth are to imbibe. Mr.Elango, Panchayat leader, also spoke on the occasion. The Pictorial Exhibition on the Life and Message of Swami Vivekananda presented on the occasion was enthusiastically received.

Republic Day Celebrations.

On the Republic Day , Mr.H.Venkatarangam, Branch Manager, Indian Bank, Tiruninravur hoisted the National Flag at our Campus. Mr.S.Rajagopalan of Yoga Vereinigung Rajagopalan, Germany, was the Guest of Honour on the occasion. There was a cultural Programme by the children of Sevalaya on the occasion.

From our Diary

On 1.1.2003, twenty of our children were the guests in the New Year Celebrations conducted by Pattabhiram Youth Association.

On 4.1.2003, our children participated in the essay, oratorical, Quiz, and Tirukkural Competitions conducted by Chinmaya Mission at Tamaraipakkam. They received Participation Certificates.

On 9.1.2003, an eye check up was conducted for our Inmates by the Doctors attached to Valliyur Government Health Centre.

On 21.1.2003 and 22.1.2003, I .Q. Test was conducted for our children by Ms. Malavika Vinodhkumar attached to Dr. M.S. Swaminathan research Institute.

Community Participation

Constructive Programme of Gandhi envisages participation by the local rural community in the development activities. We , at Sevalaya thought that we should involve the local beneficiaries of our developmental work should atleast contribute some physical labour. In a series of meetings with the rural people, particularly the parents of the poor children receiving free education in our school, we mooted this idea. This has been well received and people have offered one hour of labour each week in our agricultural farm. We believe that this step will bring in greater involvement of local people in our work.

THE ROBES THEY WORE

Even the tiny tots in Class I in our Mahakavi Bharatiyar High School at Sevalaya campus can recognize from their pictures the three great men who are our guiding spirits. "Swami Vivekanandar!" they shout out when we show them a picture of Swamiji in his magnificent ochre robes. So also, they know Mahatma Gandhi from his simple half *dhoti* and upper cloth, and Mahakavi Bharathi from the black coat and white turban. How did these great souls come to adopt these peculiar modes of dressing?

Swami Vivekananda started wearing the ochre coloured clothing of a *sannyasi* after he took to *sannyasa* along with a dozen other young disciples of the Master Ramakrishna Paramahansa, in January 1887. The young *sannyasis* set up a *math* at Baranagore near Calcutta. They used to wear ochre coloured *dhoti* and upper cloth whenever they ventured out of the *math*. But inside the *math* they had on no more than the simplest of simple white loincloth. Such was their poverty! Swami

Vivekananda wore the ochre clothing even less often than the others, and used to dress mostly in a white *dhoti* and *kurta* during that period. In July 1890 Swamiji embarked on a *yatra* around India. At that time he took to wearing ochre-coloured clothing on a regular basis — a single layered ankle-length *dhoti*, a simple *kurta* and an upper cloth. Many millions became Swamiji's ardent followers during these wanderings. One of them was Ajit Singhji, the Maharaja of Khetri, a princely state in Rajasthan. Swamiji spent about three months in Khetri as the Maharaja's guest in 1891. In May 1893 the Maharaja came to know of Swamiji's proposed trip to America to attend the Parliament of Religions conference in Chicago. He immediately sent his Private Secretary Munshi Jagmohanlal to meet Swamiji who was then in Madras, and to bring him to Khetri. The Maharaja then made all the further arrangements for Swamiji's trip, including the necessary additional finance. On the eve of Swamiji's setting sail to America from Bombay port, Jagmohanlal, on the instructions of his Maharaja, took Swamiji to the best cloth shops and tailors in Bombay, and in spite of Swamiji's protests, fitted him out with stylish silk robes and flowing silk turbans, all of ochre colour. The calf length silk robe that buttoned up in front, and the silk turban with its feather-shaped crowning on top, that Swamiji wore to such brilliant effect, are said to have been designed by the Maharaja himself.

Mahatma Gandhi's attire of a 'half-naked fakir' was of course not designed by any Maharaja. He copied it from the simple peasant of Tamil Nadu.. In September 1921 he was on a tour around Tamil Nadu. At that time he used to dress in the traditional Kathiawari fashion, in a *dhoti* with a *katcham* in-between that split

the wrap between the two legs, a long full-sleeved *kurta*, and a multi-layered turban. Arriving in Madras on 15th he traveled to Cuddalore, Kumbakonam, Trichy and Dindigul, and reached Madurai on the evening of 21st. The tour had been a disappointment to him. The people of Tamil Nadu had not taken to wearing *khaddar* to the extent he had expected. He had also found the behavior of the crowds at his meetings terribly noisy and disorderly. That evening at Madurai he had many visitors, but he appeared to be lost in his own thoughts. At about 10 P.M. he asked for a barber to be sent for and had his head shaven. Rajaji and Dr.T.S.S.Rajan, were among those present; and they all feared that he was probably contemplating taking *sannyasa*. Gandhiji assured them that he had no such intentions. The next morning on 22nd he was seen dressed in only a half-*dhoti* and an upper cloth. The elaborate Kathiawari dress was gone. He then left for Karaikudi by car. When he took his seat in the car streaks of light of the rising sun fell full on his bear head and bear limbs. He looked a radiant mass of light.

Bharathi's attire of Punjab type turban and a black coat, and the moustache stylishly twirled up, were all expressions of his protest against the stifling conservatism of the tradition bound Brahmin families of that era. His paternal aunt Kuppammal and her husband Krishnasivan in whose house he lived as a teenager, frowned upon such breaks from tradition in his dressing mode. But that only added to his determination to fight against diehard traditionalism; and his dress was symbolic of that determination.

Every picture of these three great men tells these stories.

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