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Foundation Day Celebrations at Arya Samaj Emphasize Vedic Values

By MANU SHAH

HOUSTON: On weekend of August 10 and 11, the serene premises of the Arya Samaj Society resonated with the chanting of *mantras* and the offering of rituals in three *chatur veda yajnas* performed to link the Human and Divine. The occasion was to commemorate the 22nd Foundation Day or *Sthapana Divas* of the Arya Samaj Society of Greater Houston.

Founded by Swami Dayanand Saraswati in 1875, the Arya Samaj was started as a reform movement to free Hindu society from incorrect beliefs and corrupt practices and puts emphasis on Vedic values. It promotes one formless God, virtuous conduct, universal education and judging people by their actions, not the caste they were born in.

The celebration was spread over two days and began on Saturday, the 10th with a *yajna* in which 12 couples participated. Acharya Dr. Surya Nanda, a renowned Arya Samaj priest, presided over the *yajna* by reciting *mantras* selected from the Vedas in his clear and strong voice, with explanations in English. He explained the meaning of the word *mantra* which is thought and observed that wise people choose their words carefully. He also said that just as the Sun and Moon do their work, so also must Man perform his duty. He added that a person who lives only for himself and does not share his wealth is a sinner whereas a person who shares his wealth is a *deva* or God. The *yajna* was repeated the following morning and evening with verses recited from all four Vedas.

Emcees Renu Jain and Minu Garg introduced Dr. Devbala Ramanathan, an Obstetrician and



The chanting of *mantras* and the offering of rituals in three *chatur veda yajnas* were performed at the Arya Samaj Society on August 10 and 11. Several *bhajans* were sung beautifully over the two days. The occasion was to commemorate the 22nd Foundation Day or *Sthapana Divas* of the Arya Samaj Society of Greater Houston.



Gynecologist from New York and a much sought after Vedic speaker all over North America. She is also a gifted poet and singer and her topic for the evening's discourse was "Principles of Life" or *Jeevan*

Ke Siddhant. Dressed in a simple cotton sari, she spoke forcefully in chaste Hindi about the ills that have befallen Mankind. According to Dr. Devbala, people have distanced themselves from religion

and believe only in the Epicurean philosophy of "eat, drink and be merry" with no thought to the wondrous life we have been given to attain liberation. She also offered ten Principles of Life that can help us lead a better life and emphasized the importance of inculcating Vedic values and culture in our children. Dr. Devbala's talk was interspersed with couplets that were rich with poetic meaning. Quoting Shakespeare, she offered some sound advice to the gathering to "love all, trust few and hate none".

The next morning, Dr. Devbala followed up with another illuminating talk on *atmabodh* – the soul which needs to be cleansed and this can be achieved by practicing the principles of the Vedas and adopting service to others as a way of life. She also explained that the fragrance spread by the *ghee* (clarified butter) and other offerings, when added to the *havan* or sacred

fire purify the environment. A Punjabi *bhajan* and a song dedicated to Swami Dayanand Saraswati was sung beautifully by Priya Gulati and this was followed by a group of tiny tots from the DAV Montessori school who brought a smile to everyone's faces with their solemn rendition of "*Itni Shakti hamein dena data*" followed by the lively tongue twisting *Chanda Chamke Cham Cham* from *Fanaa*. Not to be outdone, the DAV Sanskriti children presented the essence of the morning's discourse with the song "*Insaaf ki Dagar pe bacchon dikhao chal ke*."

The Arya Samaj *bhajan mandali* led by Smriti Srivastava and assisted by Satyajit Verma, Minu Garg, Neha Srivastava and Priya Gulati sang several *bhajans* over the two days which included the soothing "*Tumra Bin Hamra Kaun Nahi*" from the Aamir Khan starrer *Lagaan*. Other highlights included the well-known composition *Mile Sur Mera Tumhara* sung in various languages by Vinita Arora, some members of the Arya Samaj and youngsters Isha Dua, Arnav Sood accompanied by Arjun Arora on the drums and Anusha Sood on the violin.

Consul General P. Harish and his wife Nandita were also invited to participate in the *yajna* and did so willingly. In his address to the gathering later, he lauded the Arya Samaj Society for spreading the message of the Vedas and incorporating it in their own lives with their selfless service to society.

The two day event which went like clockwork was the outcome of the sincere efforts put in by Ashutosh Garg, Sanjay Jain and of course the many volunteers.

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