

## Arsha Vidya Gurukulam, Anaikatti - Ekānte Vedānta retreat

The serene and scenic campus of the Arsha Vidya Gurukulam (AVG) ashram at Anaikatti was the venue of Arsha Seva Kendram's (ASK) maiden Ekaante Vedanta Retreat held Jan 23-26 2025. It was a unique, energizing and insightful few days enjoyed equally by about 40 participants - most students over a number of years as well as a handful of registrants who were new to **Vedanta**.

### Background

Acharya Dr Jayakumar Ammangudi, trustee of the ASK Coimbatore, has been conducting Advaita Vedanta classes for the last 7 years. Acharya structured the curriculum starting with study of the **Tattvabodhaha** text by Shankaracharya and after it's completion study of **The Bhagvad Gita** commenced in Dec 2019. Teachings and study continued through the global pandemic period and the sacred text was completed after 5 years almost to the day. Study of **Kathopnishad with Shankaracharya bhashyam** was carried out May 2022 till Oct 2024. To reinforce the teachings, Acharya led bi-weekly guided **dhyanam** sessions.

Sessions were conducted in a virtual classroom with students from the Far Eastern region, India, Europe and the UK, US and Canada. Class strength ranged between 30 and 40 throughout.

Other than study classes, students had the opportunity to interact with each other in **satsang** sessions after every class and weekly study group meets.

Needless to say, these have resulted in inter-personal interactions to flower. And after completion of **Bhagvad Gita** study the thought to have an in person interaction was widely shared within the group. The Ekaante Vedanta retreat was designed to provide a forum for course students to meet - in other words an extended **satsanga**. It was also an opportunity for participants to learn the teachings in an ashram-like setting not very different from our ancient rishis times.

Acharya Srinivasan Ji, another trustee of ASK Coimbatore, offers Advaita Vedanta teaching courses as well. Most notably, weekly **Bhagvad Gita Bhashyam** and **Atmabodha** classes. He conducts **Bhagvad Gita moolam** for Kannada speakers, **Nidhidhyasanam** class. In addition he conducts **Yuva shreyo marga** and **Bala shreyo marga** weekly - for youth and children.

### Immersion into Vedanta study

Spread over 4 days, the Ekaante Vedanta retreat was a learning experience for all partici-

pants. It provided a glimpse into daily lives of the long term resident students on AVG campus, **pooja** routine followed at **Medha Dakshinamurthy** and **Murugan** temples, impromptu **satsang** with **Swami Sadatmananda ji** and interactions with other AVG functionaries. Other **seva** activities such as dining hall routine and exposure to on-campus sources like library, study room etc.

The retreat had a few core study topics and activities

- ◆ Guided study of **Sādhana Pañcakam** by Acharya Jayakumar ji
- ◆ Series of sessions on “Bringing **Vedanta** into daily awareness” by Acharya Srinivasan Ji.
- ◆ Introduction to **Ayurveda**, misconceptions surrounding it and it’s daily application by Dr Sheershika.
- ◆ Long term students Meera ji and Narayan ji conducted a set of **Yogasana** that helped the participants limber up and stay refreshed even as the day’s proceedings were under way. It was a valuable tool useful in modern busy day-to-day lives.
- ◆ **Arsha Gokulam Mysore** seva activities and talent showcase led by Sunitha Ji.
- ◆ Visit to a Tribal Village in Anaikatti hills under Dr Soundararajan’s guidance.

Retreat **dinacharya** would start with **pooja** at the **Medha Dakshinamurthy** temple. After invoking the Lord’s blessings, series of **Dhyanam** and **satsang** sessions was each day’s proceedings.

Acharyas arranged for an audience with **Swami Sadatmananda ji** for the participants and it was a very illuminating experience with Swamiji’s practical, cheerful and down-to-earth messages shining through.

Another memorable experience was a visit to **Daya Seva Sadan** with Dr Soundararajan. The impressive and amazing activities against mundane odds that the institution carries out left a deep impression on the visitors. To cap it off, a visit to one of the affiliated villages brought home the impact of modern norms on a simple and frugal society struggling with daily grind. Arsha Gokulam students' performances and impressive account of their achievements was another highlight. A bird’s eye view of their **seva** and guiding philosophies was outlined clearly and succinctly. The retreat concluded formally with a participant feedback, vote of thanks and **Guru Dakshina** ceremony, Feedback shared by participants, especially first time attendees was at the same time thought provoking and conveyed the impact the retreat had on them. It was a cheerful occasion tinged with a sense of longing for more to come. Indeed, one of the suggestions was to make the retreat an annual event .

Any residential gathering requires logistical support and the AVG Anaikatti facilities truly exceeded expectations. From the rooming facilities which were neat and well maintained to the sumptuous offerings of the kitchen was a lesson by itself. The tasty victuals - from morning tea, breakfast, lunch, dinner - were healthy , nutritious and wholesome food. They kept the participants energetic and looking forward to all that the retreat had in store.

All this in the enchanting and captivating presence of the AVG campus **mayuras** was a feather in the cap of experience. Literally and figuratively.

Participants departed by late Sunday afternoon after an intimate and brief meeting with **Swami Sadatmananda ji** where Swamiji wished us well in our studies in his characteristic good humor.

### **The journey continues:**

Participants are unanimous that the retreat was an energising event and helped deepen their focus on Vedanta studies. Satsang, group studies, seva and sessions that answered long held questions were felt to be invaluable and an important milestone in knowledge enhancement. Indeed messages from Hema Shakar ji and Bhavani ji among others expressed these sentiments as they summed their personal takeaways from the retreat.

**- Report by Anirudha Indurkar**

