

Missing “Shraddhaa” , they look forward to “Jaahnavii”

It must have been a “leap of faith” for Samskrita-Bharati USA, the non-profit voluntary organization which promotes spoken Sanskrit around the world. In February 2007, they decided to entrust the responsibility of teaching a five-day residential spoken Sanskrit camp to Prakruti Mavanur, Muthu Narayan, Sowmya Joisa, Kartik Shastri and Varija Yelagalawadi – all young Indian Americans, the last two being teenagers themselves.

Envisioned by Shri Vasuvaj, the International Coordinator for Samskrita-Bharati and a fulltime volunteer based in Bangalore, the camp was aptly named “Shraddhaa” – one meaning being ‘faith’. From June 23 to 27, it took place in the scenic Arsha Vidya Gurukulam at Saylorsburg in Pennsylvania with 12 girls and 10 boys between the ages of thirteen and seventeen as participants. The overall coordinator for the camp was Sowmya Joisa, a recent baccalaureate degree recipient from the University of Pennsylvania. Committed to the cause of spoken Sanskrit, Sowmya currently serves as a full time Samskrita-Bharati volunteer in the United States.

The activities varied from interactive classes, language games, yoga and multi-media presentations to skits, songs, outdoor games and a treasure hunt – everything in Sanskrit! Samskrita-Bharati’s popular listen-speak-read-write method of teaching Sanskrit proved to be successful with the Indian-American teenagers too. There were two batches – “Chaanakya” for those who were totally new to the language and “Gaargii” for those who had some prior knowledge.

Beyond speaking in Sanskrit, teenagers ventured into translating favorite Bollywood songs into Sanskrit. The enthusiasm spread to the staff and visitors to the Gurukulam who were astonished to hear the youth speak in Sanskrit. It was no surprise that some of them began to attend the classes and enquire about how to learn to speak in Sanskrit.

The camp proved to be lot of fun and learning for the teenagers. *“3 days into the camp, one of the teenagers asked me if we could extend the camp to a week or 10 days. I said, may be we can try next year. ‘Can we do it right now?’, was what I got back”* said one of the teachers of the camp ! Jaya Nambiar, one of the participants, wrote in her testimonial - *“The teaching style was amazing and very productive. The young teachers were easier to relate to and it made the experience enjoyable and rewarding.. The camp in general was extremely fun filled and included lots of close friends.”*

Though the camp concluded weeks ago, the teenagers have resourcefully managed to keep in touch. They have created a face-book group, and the messages resound with the same theme – how much they miss camp, teachers, and each other. Additionally, the youth have committed to register and meet up at – “Jaahnavii” - the residential family camp to be organized by Samskrita-Bharati during the Labor Day weekend in Edison, NJ.

For once it is not the parents who are asking their children to attend a Sanskrit Camp, but the teenagers who are requesting their parents to register them!!

Website: <http://www.speaksanskrit.org/shraddhaa>
(site updated with links to about 180 pictures, testimonials, video and photo-presentation)

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Some sample pictures are given below.
High resolution versions can be provided upon request.



All the 22 participants of the teenagers Sanskrit residential camp – Shraddhaa 2007 - in front of the main temple and hall at Arsha Vidya Gurukulam, Saylorsburg, Pennsylvania.



The teachers (L to R): Prakruti Mavanur, Sowmya Joisa, Kartik Shastri, Muthu Narayan and Varija Yelagalawadi. All of them have grown up in the US and have made speaking in Sanskrit as part of their daily lives



The beginning of the “nidhi anveshanam” or treasure hunt



Indoor Language Game: “Kaartik vadati” , the Sanskrit version of Simon says



Every day at the camp started with a Yoga session



Every day at the camp ended with a “manoranjana kaaryakramaH” or entertainment program – a scene from a Sanskrit skit enacted by the participants



A class in progress: all sessions started with a song and were very interactive