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200 foreigners take part in cleaning drive at Sabarimala

Radhakrishnan Kuttoor



A group of foreigners attached to Mata Amritanandamayi Math take part in the cleaning drive held on the banks of river Pampa in the foothills of Sabarimala on Tuesday. Photo: Leju Kamal

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From the riches of the United States, France and Germany, they came to India seeking the 'Truth' of life. Picking rags and the stinking waste accumulated on the banks of river Pampa, which the Ayyappa devotees consider 'holy', these followers of Mata Amritanandamayi say that cleaning Sabarimala was a "great mission" entrusted with them by their spiritual Guru.

As many as 200 foreigners attached to Mata Amritanandamayi Math at Vallikkavu in Kollam took part in the four-day intensive cleaning drive at Sabarimala and Pampa that came to a close on Tuesday.

The Math has linked its popular 'Amala Bharathom' cleaning project with the Government's Zero Waste Sabarimala programme with a mission to keep the pilgrim centre clean and preserve its serene atmosphere, according to Swami Amritaswaroopananda Puri, Math vice-president.

Talking to *The Hindu* on conditions of protecting their anonymity, a few foreigners shared their opinion on the importance of keeping Sabarimala clean and waste-free.

A 62-year woman from the US said it was a wonderful experience to visit the holy hillock and clean the filth accumulated in the surroundings of the temple pond there as part of the cleaning drive.

"I saw the Vedic maxim, 'Tatvamasi', meaning 'thou art that' or 'that is you', written in Malayalam atop the Ayyappa Temple. It was a Keralite friend who had read out the maxim for me and I was impressed to know that it encapsulated the very philosophy of the Sabarimala pilgrimage," she said.

Another man, a technocrat from the US, said it was the mantra, 'Lokah Samastah Sukhino Bhavantu' preached by the Mata that had lured him to India in search of the 'Truth'.

"The British say 'God save the king', Americans say 'God bless America' and Indians say 'Lokah Samastah Sukhino Bhavantu,' meaning 'May eternal peace and goodwill prevail in the whole world'. This sublime thought is the very inspiration of the hundreds of volunteers taking part in the cleaning drive at Sabarimala," he said.

The Amala Bharathom volunteers have completed their cleaning drive on Tuesday, segregating and packing the entire waste collected in as many as 50,000 bags for its safe disposal at the TDB incinerators at Pampa and Sannidhanam.

Going by the speech of the Additional Chief Secretary, K. Jayakumar at the inaugural function of the 'Zero Waste Sabarimala' project at Pampa on Monday, "Mata Amritanandamayi has been keenly watching and monitoring the cleaning operation at Sabarimala from Germany with the help of its live webcast on the Internet."

As many as 4500 volunteers of the Math took part in the four-day cleaning drive that began on November 5.

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