

Getting acquainted with a taste of rustic customs

J Arockiaraj, TNN Aug 13, 2012, 04.59AM IST

MADURAI: When the village heads of the Keezhamattaiyan village near Sholavandan asked the 90-odd students from six city colleges to remove their footwear before entering the village, they were surprised. Wearing footwear is banned in the village for all the castes, in respect of the village deity.

Students participating in 'Heritage 2012', organised by the Tata - Dhan Academy, were exposed to many such local practices as part of the two-day programme which was inaugurated on Saturday. The academy, situated in T Malaipatti in Vadipatti taluk offers a post graduate diploma in development management and aims to give students an authentic village exposure. Students were given a ceremonial welcome with 'oyilattam' followed by a small pooja in the village temple. They later joined the villagers in a dance of 'kummi'. A Umarani, director of [the academy](#) said the goal of the programme was to make the youth aware of the customs followed in villages. "Every village has their own unique custom, food, health practices etc, many of which are not known to the outside world. The programme was organised to give students an opportunity to appreciate the local practices and wisdom followed in villages," she said.

J A N Vijayabharathi, co-ordinator of the programme, said the villagers shared their knowledge about traditional medicinal practices and local cooking methods with the students during the programme. The two-day programme also had a lot of competitions centred on the village, their practices, culture and problems. "The villagers of Keezhamattaiyan say they face an acute water problem and have to travel a great distance to avail any health care. Students will study these problems and suggest solutions as part of the programme and participate in competitions like marketing the rural products," Vijayabharathi said. On Sunday, the students were taken around the village temple which is believed to be built in the 13th century during the heritage walk.