



BM CONNECT

THOUGHTS FROM BALA MANDIR



FROM THE EDITOR'S DESK

It is the 65th year of Bala Mandir's existence, and the theme for this year is Reaffirm, Renew and Rededicate – creating change in the institution to be in line with the changing times, while retaining the essence of the values and rich history that encompass Bala Mandir. It is but natural that we must look back to our founders and their ideals to draw inspiration from them, while also looking forward to new ways of operating. Many new initiatives have also been taken up with this in mind.

This new Bala Mandir newsletter is one such initiative. It covers anecdotes from our past, news from our present, and thoughts for the future – a blend of different times and eras at Bala Mandir, brought to you.

The idea for this newsletter originated as a way to highlight some of the interesting work done in Bala Mandir, its traditions and culture, and the people who make it what it is today (including our donors) – a glimpse into our institution and the kaleidoscope of activities that happen within our premises. It would hopefully also leave you with some thought-provoking messages on the values and ideals that Bala Mandir has held dear all these years. The newsletter is targeted at our friends and well-wishers – our volunteers, donors, service providers, staff, and Members.

Please do write to us with your feedback as well as your suggestions to message@balamandir.org. This will help us improve our newsletter in future editions. You can also write to the same ID to know more about how you can involve yourself with Bala Mandir.

Hope you enjoy this first edition of Bala Mandir's newsletter, "BM Connect"!

Editor

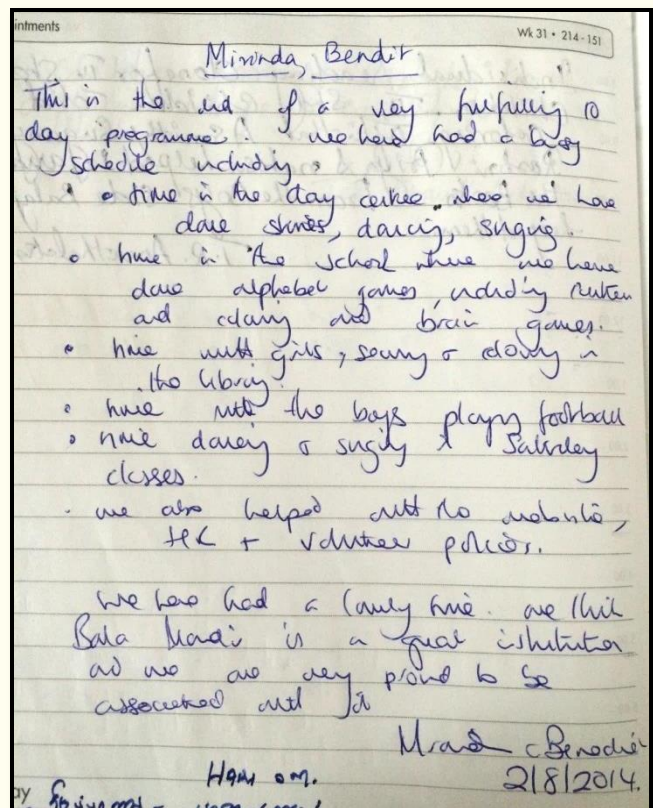
A VISITOR'S EXPERIENCE

Ms. Miranda Corti and her son Benedict, from the United Kingdom, visited Bala Mandir in July-August 14, for the second time, and spent time with the children. Benedict played football with the senior boys, while Ms. Miranda taught the senior girls sewing and reading. They also played games, sang, danced and drew with the children in the Day Care Centre and Vidyalaya.

Ms. Miranda also donated to Bala Mandir the collections she had made through a cupcake sale in her office. She has promised to teach our children how to bake cupcakes during her next visit! The note they wrote in our Visitors' Book on their experience is reproduced here.

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Bala Mandir's Website Launched

Till March this year, Bala Mandir was known more through personal connections. It was felt that, in order to reach out and give the institution more visibility, Bala Mandir should have a website. The website (www.balamandir.org) was launched at the time of the 65th year celebrations of Bala Mandir, with the help of an independent web designer, Mr. C. Venkatachalam. At the same time, official Bala Mandir mail IDs were also created for all units of Bala Mandir.



'Balu Sir' Summer Camp held in May

The Balu Sir Summer Camp was held for children both from Bala Mandir's Home and the urban slum. It was held in memory of Mr. V.Y.Gaitonde, or 'Balu Sir', who for 60 years had interacted with and played with Bala Mandir children. This endeavour was conducted in May 2014 for 15 days in partnership with Bhumi, where the children learnt and enjoyed different kinds of activities including storytelling, folk dances, Indian martial arts, and craft work. A valedictory function was held, with participants receiving certificates and story books.

Communication Sessions on Code of Conduct

Bala Mandir's Vision, Mission and Code of Conduct were articulated in 2013-14. A two-day 'Orientation Programme' on Bala Mandir's working was conducted in May for Members, social workers, Coordinators and Unit Heads with discussions on future plans for each Unit in Bala Mandir. Over June and July, communication sessions were held for all staff members on the Code of Conduct, and how it needs to be reflected in everyday working. The sessions were conducted in Tamil and English, and were very well received by the staff.



Madhavi weds Rajesh

Madhavi, who grew up in Bala Mandir, got married to Rajesh M. Dave on Sunday, May 18th at Bala Mandir premises. Madhavi had been working in Dell Computers and living in a women's hostel. Rajesh is working in a jewellery shop and lives in Sowcarpet. As per tradition, the bridal trousseau and the necessities for starting a home life were provided to Madhavi by Bala Mandir, through the generosity of our donors.

FUNCTIONS FOR 2014

Functions are held by each of the units in Bala Mandir between June and September of the year. Each year an overarching theme is selected for the functions – this year's theme, aptly, was the 65th year of Bala Mandir. Each unit conducted a programme with cultural activities, and also held an accompanying seminar on topics of interest. A glimpse into the functions for 2014 is provided below.

Vocational Training: June 27 & 28



Mr. M.V. Subbaiah, Trustee, AMM Foundation, addressed the audience

Mr. Mortensen and his contribution to Bala Mandir were remembered



Trainees did a play about Bala Mandir and its evolution

Trainees also did a dance and a yoga demonstration



Kamaraj Day: July 15 & 19



Dr. M. Rajendran, Former VC, Tamil University, spoke eloquently about the importance of education

Children dedicated Bala Mandir to Kamarajar's ideals through speech and mime



Children also presented a Villu Pattu on Kamarajar



Ms. Uma Shanker from Kalvi Trust for Research & Education shared insights into Montessori education

Ms. Maria Josephine of V-Excel Academy of Training & Excellence spoke on Inclusion in Education



Medical Day: August 26

Children's Health is Tomorrow's Wealth



Chief Guest Dr. Mohan Rajan of Rajan Eye Care Hospitals shared his thoughts

Dr. Indu Balagopal talked about Total School Health



A very interactive presentation by Dr. Naresh Kumar and team from SOCHARA-CEU on "Nutrition and Preventing Diseases"

Children participated with gusto



Founder's Day: September 24 & 27



Ms. Uma Narayanan of SOS Children's Village shared her memories of Manjumma

A dance about Bala Mandir



A song about 'Amma' and a Villu Paatu on Manjumma



Ms. Chandra Thanikachalam, HGS, ICCW, TN & members from different NGOs presented on Best Practices in Child Care Institutions



FEATURED DONOR

For the first edition of our newsletter, we are proud to feature **Mr. Ganpat Mani**. Mr. Mani is a donor who contributes to every section of Bala Mandir – the Children's Programme, Higher Education for our rehabilitated children, school education and vocational training. He also takes out time to visit Bala Mandir regularly, and brings carefully selected gifts for the children and staff, carrying them all the way from the United States. An excerpt from the very interesting interview conducted with him:



Please tell us a little more about yourself.

I live in the Mile High City, which is the nickname for Denver in Colorado, USA. I retired one year ago as the CEO of ConverDyn, the nuclear fuel joint-venture subsidiary set up by Honeywell and General Atomics. My 40+ year career was mostly in international business. I am currently on the Board of Directors for two nuclear companies, and have got recently involved with the Denver-Chennai Sister Cities initiative. I completed my undergrad in metallurgy and have an MBA. I have lived outside India since I was 13, and the last 43 years in the USA. Exposure to different countries at a young age gave me an interest in foreign languages such as German, French and Japanese. Since I never lived in Tamil Nadu, I can only speak Tamil but cannot read or write it!

How did you begin charity work?

Travelling around the world made me open to new ideas, new people and customs. I started working in Germany in a steel plant as an apprentice when I was 16. At the time, I could not speak a word of German, but found so many people ready to help me. I realised then how important it is to be open to people, to help when you can, and to forge personal relationships – not just in business, but in life as well. My wife and I support about 30 charities through our contributions during the year, and since my retirement, would like to further develop the “personal connection” with the institutions supported.

We thank Mr. Ganpat Mani for the time he took out to speak to us!

How did you get involved with Bala Mandir?

Several years ago, my aunt Mrs. Jaya Gokulamani (who used to work with UNICEF) recommended Bala Mandir to me as an organisation of integrity. That is how I started contributing here in a small way. Later I found out about the donor advisory programme of United Way Worldwide (UWW), which allowed me to donate bigger sums and avail of income tax relief as per government laws. I found that, more and more, “cheque book charity” was all well and good, but I wanted to start interacting more with the children and the institution who was the recipient of the charity. That is when I started coming to Bala Mandir and Anbu Karangal (the other orphanage I support in Chennai) for more visits.

You provide some very interesting gifts when you visit. Can you tell us more about that?

Essentially I go to every class and ask the students to pick the best student according to them, from the schools and in the ITC. For that student, I give a gift which is age and gender appropriate. That way I make a personal connection with a child. I also feel that it gives a lesson to children on the need to excel. A friend of mine helped me with audiology books, to supplement the reading for Meenakshi, the girl whose audiology course I support. I also deeply appreciate the efforts that the caregivers put in, and try to bring something for them to recognise their efforts.



DID YOU KNOW?

Bala Mandir's Main Block, which houses the senior girls and the junior children, is over 60 years old! It was inaugurated in 1951 and was the first building of Bala Mandir. It houses 100 children and 7 staff members today. It was renamed the Ramnath Goenka Block in 1994.



FESTIVE MOMENTS IN BALA MANDIR: NAVARATRI AND KOLU

Every year Navaratri is celebrated with a lot of gusto in Bala Mandir. The children and matrons create a “kolu” each year – dolls arranged on steps. The entire set up of the kolu is done using dolls which have been collected over many years in Bala Mandir. The dolls are of the Gods of the Hindu pantheon, stories from mythology (such as the churning of the ocean), scenes from everyday life, temple scenes, scenes from a marriage, saints, and freedom fighters. The children also planted seeds and created a live garden that was growing through the period of Navaratri. The pictures of this year’s celebrations and kolu are provided with this article.



Girls in the Home from Standard IX and X take up the responsibility for the preparations for daily pooja and receiving visitors. Girls belonging to Standard IX also visit Members to invite them for kolu, and to attend kolu in their homes. The girls sing bhajans and songs when they visit the different homes. This is done to teach the children about culture and tradition, and about courtesies and social grace. It is excellent exposure for the children who will soon be stepping out into society.

Members, teachers from the school and staff members come to see the kolu in the Home and receive a simple traditional offering consisting of betel leaves, betel nuts, turmeric and vermillion, and small gifts. In keeping with cultural tradition, the visitors also sing songs in front of the kolu.

Every day, as prasad, “sundal” (a dish made from pulses) is made. Different kinds of pulses are used everyday, and varieties are made – some savoury and some sweet. This is given to all visitors, and is a good source of protein for the children too.

The concept of the Divine Mother’s victory – good over evil is explained to the children. Every evening, senior boys and girls alternate to perform ashtotra pooja. For the first three days Durga Pooja is performed, for the next three Lakshmi Pooja is performed, and for the last 3 days, Saraswathi Pooja is performed.

On the ninth day, Ayudha Pooja is celebrated in all parts of Bala Mandir. Equipment in each area is cleaned and smeared with turmeric and vermillion. A pooja is then conducted by the staff and children in every location. Bala Mandir’s vehicles are also cleaned and a pooja is done for them as well.

On the last day, Vijayadasami, a drama “Mahishasuramarthini” is presented by the children in the Home, depicting the significance of the festival.



THE CRUCIAL ROLE OF A TEACHER

Bala Mandir's Member-in-Charge, Education, Ms. Swathantra Sakhivel reflects upon the all-important role of teachers in children's lives, and exhorts them to become mentors who inspire children to become the best version they can, of themselves.

The purpose of education is not only to bring out the best and the noblest in a child, but also to endow him with an understanding of the true aim and significance of human life so as to enable him to face the world at the end of his academic training.

Schools should offer a system of learning that creates a fine balance between thoughts, emotions and movement in a child's growth. The school should provide an environment where activities for the harmonious development of personal, social, emotional, physical, cognitive, aesthetic and spiritual capacities can be nurtured.



These objectives of education can be achieved only by well-trained and qualified teachers with competence, dedication and commitment. They form the pillars of a strong educational system and lay the foundation for a value-based, holistic education for children.

A great teacher is not simply one who imparts knowledge to his students, but one who awakens their interest and makes them eager to pursue knowledge for themselves. The interest of the students is proportionate to the true capacity of the teacher.

Thinking of his teacher, Mahatma Gandhi had said that he had little recollection of the books he had read or the lessons he had studied, but he always remembered those men and women whose lives had been inspirational and who had become vital teaching forces throughout his life.

A teacher should remember that a child is not an amorphous piece of clay to be moulded by his parents and teachers. Each child has his own inherent qualities and temperament pattern, which

have to be modified to some extent by his interactions with his parents, friends and teachers.

Children need to learn how to think. There should be a creativity drive and an enthusiasm for learning. The skills, techniques and principles, which children pick up while still young help them to perform well in all fields.



In learning a language, good management, habits, attitudes and values can be incorporated from childhood as these are difficult to acquire in adulthood. As Weiss Robert remarks, "As an adult, you are a creature of the habits you developed in your childhood. It is easier to develop good habits when you are young than to change bad habits when you are older."

Teachers should realize the crucial role they play in the lives of children. To be a teacher is certainly a huge responsibility, but it also offers ample rewards of watching and helping the blossoming of young souls, fully engaged in their effort of self-discovery and self-mastery.

Nearly 35 years ago, one teacher Gaine Ginot, reflected, "I came to the frightening conclusion that I am the decisive element in the classroom. It's my personal approach that creates the climate. It's my daily mood that makes the weather. As a teacher I possess a tremendous power to make a child's life miserable or joyous. I can be a tool of torture or an instrument of inspiration. I can humiliate or humour, hurt or heal. In all situations, it is my response that decides whether a crisis will be escalated or de-escalated and a child humanized or dehumanized." Teachers should think about how this could hold true in their daily roles.

STAFF NEWS: JULY TO SEPTEMBER

20 Year Service Awards

Four of our staff members received 20 year service awards on Founder's Day:



Mr. Panneerselvam, Manager, German Hall: One of the best known faces around Bala Mandir, who handles German Hall single-handedly. One has to only call him up for any help and he happily lends a hand!

Ms. Usharani, Assistant, Medical Unit: Has donned many caps – caregiver, admin staff and now helping with medical. She is famous for making the best coffee in Bala Mandir!



Ms. Rajeswari, Helper, Hospital Block: Has been an ayah for a long time, serving infants and toddlers. She is known to be ready to take on any task given to her!

Ms. Deepthi, Teacher, Day Care Centre: A Bala Mandir girl, who today teaches young pre-primary children in the Day Care Centre. She is very talented at craftwork



Our congratulations and best wishes go out to:

- To Mr. Arulraj, Social Worker, who got married in August
- To Ms. P. Dhanalakshmi, Matron, who became grandmother to a baby girl in July

Welcome to Bala Mandir!

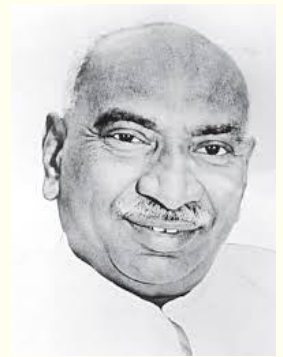
- Mr. Koteeswaran, PET Teacher for Schools
- Mrs. Saraswathi, Admin. Assistant for Schools
- Ms. Neena, Coordinator for Vidyalaya School
- Mr. Gokul, Apprentice Trainee, Skills Training Centre

THOUGHTS FROM THE STUDY CIRCLE

Since June, on Thursday mornings, alternate groups – Social Workers / Unit Heads / Admin Staff / Caregivers – collect as a “Study Circle” to reflect upon the values that drive work at Bala Mandir, and upon how we can all improve ourselves in our professional and personal life. Sessions are facilitated by senior Members. Each week one attendee also brings a thought or inspiration to share with others. The interactive discussions give the attendees a new perspective on work and life as a whole.

A few such sessions were devoted to the discussion on the ideals that our founder, Sri K. Kamaraj, held dear in his own life. These ideals hold true even today, and have driven, and continues to drive Bala Mandir's own way of working. Discussions in the Study Circle centred around each ideal, how we practice it in our day-to-day work, and what more we can do to inculcate it into our lives. The eight ideals are:

1. *A work ethic of service, sacrifice and hard work*
2. *Taking time to think before reacting to any situation – especially adverse situations*
3. *Responding to the needs of the community*
4. *Taking prompt actions according to the changing times*
5. *Choosing to appoint people with values and integrity*
6. *Never being forced to take a decision under stress, or because of pressure from the outside world*
7. *Practicing frugality in life*
8. *Sharing with and distributing to those in need*



KNOW OUR MEMBER: MS. KALPAGAM NARAYANAN

One of the most special Members of Bala Mandir's Executive Committee is Ms. Kalpagam Narayanan, affectionately known by the children as "Kadai Teacher" (Story Teacher) by the children, and "Kalpamma" by the staff and Members of Bala Mandir.

Kalpamma is in charge of Tailoring and Senior Girls. She is also a member of the Rehabilitation Committee. All ex-Bala Mandir girls who have been rehabilitated and who have any kind of problems always contact their Kalpamma for crisis intervention. But her special connection with the children comes from the stories that she has been telling generations of Bala Mandir children. She spends time with the children every day, telling them moral stories, which are made very interactive through her special brand of creativity. She comes to Bala Mandir on most days without fail, even though she is 83 years old!

Kalpamma first came to Bala Mandir through her nephew, who had classmates from Bala Mandir, and wanted to invite them for his birthday party. She began by spending one hour each day with the children, balancing this service with her duties at home. She would help the children with their writing.



As Kalpamma spent more time at Bala Mandir, she felt the need to do more. She noticed that the clothes of the children needed some mending, and started with that. She also noticed that a young girl in the Home had asthma problems, and decided to train her in tailoring to give her something else to focus on. Her training is now conducted for many of the girls and boys in the Home, and has even become a source of income for many rehabilitated children.

Kalpamma's spirit, her ability to connect with the children, her interactive story telling, and her service towards Bala Mandir are a source of inspiration for Members, volunteers and staff of Bala Mandir.

NEW INITIATIVE UPDATE: CUSTOM SOFTWARE DEVELOPMENT

Thanks to generous donations from Mr. Subbaiah Subramaniam (Singapore), Netstream Technologies is developing customized software for Bala Mandir. The first two modules have been released to Bala Mandir. One is in use, and the other is in the testing stage currently. What the modules can do is detailed below:

Children's Module:

- Details on every child in Bala Mandir
- Status update for every child on a regular basis – academic, medical, behavioural, parent visits etc.
- Reports on the Home – headcount & current status

Donation Module:

- Information on all donations received and donors
- Receipts to give to donors for all donations
- Direct flow into finance system for income
- Reports on different types of donations received

General		Leave	Hospitalization	Photo update	Parent visit	Medical	School	Behaviour	Discharge
Admission no	Foundling Home-000000001								
Admission Date	18/11/2011								
Name	Esther								
Sex	Female								
Date of Birth	20/06/2009								
BMKT Unit	Adoption								
Child Condition	Normal								

Published by: Bala Mandir Kamaraj Trust,
Phone: +91 44 2834 1921

No. 8, G.N.Chetty Road, T.Nagar, Chennai 600 017
Email: main@balamandir.org Website: www.balamandir.org