



FROM THE EDITOR'S DESK

Welcome to the tenth edition of BM Connect. In these ten issues we have covered many different topics – but the one theme that stands out always is child centricity – every new step taken by Bala Mandir keeps the child at the forefront.

This has been the basis for a number of changes that the institution has been undertaking, including a number of the infrastructure improvements. A section of this newsletter covers the different initiatives taken up. Many of these have been possible due to the generous contributions of those who have supported Bala Mandir through various funds, including the Rebuilding Fund which was established after the December 2015 floods. The improvements have also been tested during the cyclone Vardah, in December 2016, and have stood up against the forces of nature!

While there are many who donate funds to the institution, there are also those who donate their time to the institution, and to the children, through volunteering or through other like-minded organisations, to increase the happiness and learning of children. Volunteers find it exciting and energizing to work with the children, and see the positive effects on them. Cognizant and NalandaWay are two such organisations whose efforts we have talked about here.

We hope you enjoy reading about these, and other activities in Bala Mandir in the quarter for October to December '16!

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LEARNING THROUGH FIELD TRIPS

Once the half-yearly exams are completed every year, and the Christmas vacation begins, it is time for the children to have some fun – along with some learning! The Bala Mandir children between Standard VI and IX usually go on planned field trips every year, as follows:

- Standard VI: Puttur Temple, to appreciate rituals
- Standard VII: Five places of worship belonging to different religions, to understand religious unity
- Standard VIII: Dakshina Chitra, to understand art and architecture from the past
- Standard IX: 'See Chennai' – to understand and appreciate the rich culture and heritage of Chennai (could not happen this year)

The children thoroughly enjoy these trips, which give them a chance to step out of the Home, and go around Chennai with their friends, seeing new things and sampling snacks!



NEWS BYTES: OCTOBER TO DECEMBER 2016

Formation of Children's Committees

Three Children's Committees were formed based on the three clubs in Bala Mandir. Meetings were held (facilitated by social workers) where the group expressed their opinions about what they liked, and what they wanted changed – rules, menu etc. in Bala Mandir. The openness shown by the children to share their opinions was appreciated, and their feedback has been taken into account.



Vijayadasami at the Day Care Centre

On Vijayadasami day, considered an auspicious beginning, the traditional introduction to writing, Akshara Abhyas, was done for kindergarten children at the age of five. Seven new children were admitted in the Day Care Centre – two children in kindergarten, two children in the pre-kindergarten section, and three children in the toddler section.

Effect of Cyclone Vardah

The cyclone Vardah, which hit Chennai in December 2016, mainly saw the loss of a few trees, particularly a unique fig tree in the High School. Net connections were down for a significant period also, leading to some disruption. However, the cyclone was a good test of the sturdiness of the sheet covering the Infant & Toddler Block, and the netting provided for the SMHS Playground along the canal wall.



Outings in the Dusshera Vacation

The children enjoyed club activities during the week long Dusshera vacation, including theatre, craft and drawing classes. Visits to temples, the Bengal Association for Durga Pooja, and the Deepavali Mela organised by Lions Club, and the chance to watch a football match in the Nehru Stadium brought the children a lot of happiness.

Participation in Competitions

As always, the children of Bala Mandir participated in many competitions over this quarter. The children participated in and won prizes in the Rotary Neeta Talent Contest, Inter-School Sports meet, Bhumi Nakshatra, Chinmaya's Geeta chanting, and the Dance and Drawing competition of the Aikya Foundation.



INAUGURATION OF KITCHEN AND DINING HALL

The Kitchen and Dining Hall in Bala Mandir have been revamped completely with a new wash area. Both areas are now fully tiled, and the kitchen has been redesigned with the help of a kitchen consultant, to make it user-friendly, with new cooking equipment. A new rice storage area was also created, and the staff has been trained in the use of this space, to ensure cleanliness, hygiene and proper storage.

It is traditional that any new cooking space is typically inaugurated with a function, where milk is boiled in an open pot till it boils over the sides. This signifies overflowing happiness and health in the new place. In Bala Mandir, this was held in December 2016 – pictures from the function are given below. The Dining Hall was inaugurated on November 23rd, to coincide with Sarva Dharma Day. The children performed bhajans in the new Dining Hall.



Above: The newly remodelled kitchen, and a glimpse of the milk boiling ceremony



Left and right: The revamped dining hall

CHILDREN'S DAY CELEBRATIONS

Children's Day was celebrated on November 14th, as always, in the Schools and Day Care Centre. Teachers performed songs and dances for the children, who enjoyed themselves very much!



Glimpses from the Children's Day celebrations from across the institution

INFRASTRUCTURE IMPROVEMENTS IN BALA MANDIR

Following the floods in December 2015, a number of infrastructure repairs and renovation projects were started in April 2016. Many of these were completed in the quarter of October to December 2016.

- **Satyamurthi High School:** Multiple projects were taken up in the School, on priority:
 - Raising of the ground floor in the SMHS building by 1 foot, tiling this, and changing the windows
 - Redoing the Rajagopalan Memorial Hall
 - Raising the playground by 1.5 feet, and providing a slope towards the canal (which was well tested at the time of the Cyclone Vardah and following rains, when no flooding took place)
 - Providing protective net along the playground wall, abetting the canal (covered in the last newsletter)
- **Bala Mandir Primary School:** Water proofing the roof of the school, creating appropriate slopes in the open spaces around the building to avoid water logging
- **Daswani Block (now the new Bala Mandir Boys Section):** Creating two halls for occupation by the boys, refurbishing toilets, creating a new study room, changing windows, providing full mosquito meshing, and providing a closed wash area
- **Plumbing Lines:** Raising and re-laying of 60+ year old plumbing lines in the Bala Mandir Main complex, which were at a very low point and causing sewage water backup, and providing CMWSSB connections
- **Prevention of Water Logging:** Putting in proper drainage channels, two collection sumps and a powerful pumping out system in the Bala Mandir complex

The introduction of these initiatives has seen a huge improvement in the quality of infrastructure in the institution, increasing the safety and security of the children.



- 1: Redone School Hall
- 2: Raised Flooring outside the School
3. Study Room in the new Boys Hostel
4. Living Room in the Boys Hostel
5. During construction in the Boys Hostel



NALANDA WAY: ART IN EDUCATION

Bala Mandir has tied up with the NalandaWay Foundation, for an 'Art in Education' programme. NalandaWay is a not-for-profit organisation, whose mission is to help children raise their voices and issues through theatre, visual arts, music, dance, radio and films. Their innovative interventions have helped children develop creativity, learn life-skills and build self-confidence. The programme was started in Bala Mandir in this term.

The idea behind the 'Art in Education' programme is to provide a joyful environment for studies, and help the children communicate ideas and feelings, develop self-awareness and help in conflict resolution. Art material is distributed to the teachers in Vidyalaya and the Primary School. The teachers are trained once every term in the Achieve Through Arts programme, and this is then implemented over the term. An assessment of the impact on the children will be done periodically as well.

S. GOVIND SWAMINADHAN SEMINAR

The S. Govind Swaminadhan Seminar was held on 31st October 2016 at the Obul Reddy Hall at Vani Mahal, for spreading legal awareness among children from schools. The topic this year was 'Right to Information'. It was open to all schools, and students from Standard XI were asked to make presentations on the subject. This time eight schools, including Satyamurthi High School, participated in the seminar. The children made very high quality presentations on the topic, and impressed the eminent legal persons in the audience.

The event was presided over by Justice N. Kirubakaran of the Madras High Court. Advocate Subba Reddy, a long-time associate of Govind remembered him. The session was wrapped up by Advocate T. Mohan who spoke of the importance of the Right To Information in our lives and how it impacted it. Glimpses from the event are below.



KARATE CLASSES

The boys and girls from Standard V to VIII are being trained in the basics of karate by a volunteer from Cognizant. Pictures are shown below from the training conducted.



FESTIVALS IN OCTOBER-DECEMBER

For many years now Bala Mandir has been using festivals as a way to inculcate and imbibe spiritual, cultural, social and patriotic values in the children. Meaningful activities and well explained festivities are carried out. These religious festivities come in order, and the preparation and presentation are done by the Bala Mandir children class-wise. This is done so that by the time the children leave Bala Mandir, every child has had an opportunity to participate in chanting of Ashtothrams, understanding that it highlights the life, teachings and attributes of the deity; pooja to understand the need for method and meticulousness; singing meaningful bhajans which creates a sense of devotion; enactment of dramas explaining the inner significance of the festival, which have been specially scripted and have become part of the lives of the children in Bala Mandir. Homemade costumes and props add to the charm of the festivities.

The quarter between October and December keeps the children busy with various festivals, from across different religions and religious beliefs. It is a time for much celebration – not only do they get a chance to get dressed up and enjoy a play, they also get a holiday from school! The children are trained to perform the plays and bhajans by the staff members in the Home, as well as the older children – a passing on of the baton in a sense. Acting and dancing talents are showcased, with the children losing all stage fright, and performing with full gusto.

Here is a quick look at the festivals celebrated in this quarter:

About the Festival	How it is celebrated in Bala Mandir	A Glimpse
The ten-day festival, Navaratri , where the Divine Mother is worshipped in three forms: giver of good qualities, wealth and learning, culminating in Vijayadasami, victory of good over evil	‘Kolu’ is placed in the Home and pooja is done every day, with prasadam distributed; this year was special, with the boys hosting their own ‘kolu’ in the Boys Section, and joining the girls when they visited members’ homes	
Ninth day of Navaratri, Ayudha Pooja (‘Implement Worship’), where all machinery and working equipment is worshipped	All sections of Bala Mandir are cleaned out thoroughly; each section has a pooja and prayer, and all equipment is worshipped, including the vehicles; gifts are given to the staff	
Diwali , the festival of lights, symbolising the victory of light over darkness, and knowledge over ignorance, welcoming God’s light to dispel the darkness in human life	All children receive new clothes; staff and children get together to burst firecrackers; a special meal is served with sweets	
Karthigai , which signifies the light of knowledge, which illuminates the world; celebrates the Lord in the form of a bright torch, which shines forth to defeat darkness	The story of the birth of Karthikeyan, who is created from the power of Lord Shiva, is told through drama; the children light lamps around the Home	
Christmas , celebrating the birth of Jesus Christ, and upholding His ideals and teachings	The children enact the Nativity Play in Tamil, and sing carols in Tamil; they also enjoy a Christmas special meal	

SCIENCE EXHIBITION

Children in the Schools presented their projects as part of a Science Exhibition. A quick look at some of the interesting projects presented as part of this:



ROUTINE IN THE DAY CARE CENTRE

The importance of a daily routine is established early in the Day Care Centre, with the children receiving instructions on how what they need to do at every stage. This then turns into habit very quickly for the children, and it becomes almost like second nature to them.

The routine followed by them is as follows:

- In the morning, after prayer, the children sit in a circle and every child is given an opportunity to say their name, parents name, class, school name, family members, what they ate etc.
- Children in the Baby Section are being taken to the playground every day and allowed to walk around the God's idol and are taught the names of objects in the outside environment. They love to shake hands and wish anyone who comes to their class.
- They are taught good toilet habits, learn to ask for water and what they need, identify parts of the body, vegetables, fruits, animals and their sounds, in both Tamil and English.
- Fine motor skill activities like stringing beads, scribbling with crayons and color chalk piece, building blocks, joining links are some of the activities being given each day.
- Indoor and Outdoor games- include giving them balls to play with, as well as rocking chairs / horses. Free play in the outside play ground on the swing, slide and the walking-path where they balance-walk are also enjoyed.
- During Value Education- the teacher narrates moral stories and the children interact.

The daily routine developed has seen a huge improvement in the motor skills and learning capabilities of the young children. It is heartening to see their smiling faces every day in the Day Care Centre!



TRAINING OF DAY CARE CENTRE TEACHERS

Teachers in Bala Mandir were trained / re-trained in the use of the Learning Through Play Calendar (LTPC), which has been indigenised for use in India by Bala Mandir Research Foundation (BMRF) for children upto 6 years. The training was carried out by Ms. Lakshmi Gopal, Resource Person for Early Childhood Training, and Member of Bala Mandir. The objective behind the training was to better equip the teachers in the Day Care Centre to capture and provide most relevant information from the tools available in the LTPC, and to educate parents and include them in their child's development, through specific focus messages and age wise inputs. It was also felt that the training should include a strong component of self-development of the adult / spiritual values / empathy / understanding of child needs, to help teachers interact better with the children, and with other adults, including parents, fellow teachers, and other stakeholders.



Ms. Lakshmi Gopal took the teachers through three different stages from Birth to 3 years. A hand out was given to the teachers with important information for each of these stages including care during pregnancy. The teachers were able to recap all important points to be given to pregnant women, including emotional well being, timely medical care and immunisations, precautions to be taken during pregnancy and brain development in the womb. Some of the general inputs regarding communication included ensuring that parents are given information about *What is to be done*, *Why it is to be done* and *How it is to be done*. She also urged the teachers to do a preliminary assessment of 'parenting' knowledge of the parents, and development of the children.

An activity was conducted, where the teachers were asked to pick chits and handle each of the following questions. These are usually common doubts that mothers would have.

How do I handle the child when he/she is throwing a tantrum?

My child looks very weak, how can I ensure that he gains weight?

My child has diarrhoea, what can I do?

My child is not yet walking, what can I do?



Ambica and Deepthi, two of the most experienced teachers in the Bala Mandir Day Care Centre who regularly talk to parents, shared their experiences. They spoke about various situations including talking to mothers who are insecure about their child's abilities. They stressed on the importance of not comparing the child to others and explaining to parents that each child is unique and develops at her own pace.

The training of the teachers is an important step to ensure parents participate in the learning experience of the children.

HR NEWS — OCTOBER TO DECEMBER 2016

Welcome to Bala Mandir!

- Ms. Meenakshi, Nurse, Children's Programme
- Ms. Preethi, House Mother, Children's Programme
- Ms. Anjalai, Helper, Children's Programme

Welcome to Bala Mandir!

- Ms. Meenakumari, Teacher, Day Care Centre
- Ms. Ramani, Helper, Day Care Centre
- Mr. Babu, Helper, Bala Mandir Primary School

Performance Appraisal

Translation of forms into Tamil was completed for teachers and other staff as required.

Confirmation Process

All employees go through a confirmation process six months after joining, with a mail going to their supervisor five months after they join. Supervisors provide their recommendations for confirmation or extension of probation.

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