



FROM THE EDITOR'S DESK

Another interesting and exciting quarter came to an end. This March marked the 68th year of Bala Mandir, and this newsletter encapsulates the spirit of 'old' and 'new' that has been the theme for the last few years.

The inauguration of the new Nagercoil building is a new beginning in this direction. Ms. Ingelise Andersen, daughter of Mr. P-H Mortensen, helped inaugurate the building with visitors from Braade Stiftung.

Braade Stiftung's annual visit also marked the celebration of Friendship Day. Along with Mr. Lars Odd Pettersen, guests of Honour included Mr. V. S. Ramana (Former GM, L&T ECC), Mr. Padmakumar (Team Leader HR, Saint Gobain India), and Dr. Karthiyayini (Consultant in Child Development) – who shared interesting messages about the changing face of CSR and child development initiatives. This context and environment is setting the path for many of the new initiatives that Bala Mandir is carrying out.

The issue also covers two special women – Ms. Vedam and Ms. Lakshmi Gopal – a mother-daughter duo whose service and commitment to Bala Mandir is an inspiration to all. They have been at the forefront in pioneering Bala Mandir's new way forward in their respective times.

As always but, the main focus remains the children – their smiling faces in the many photo essays tell their own story!

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GANDHI CONNECT

The annual 'Gandhi Connect' programme, where Gandhiji's teachings are used to build awareness and skills, was conducted this year on January 28th. Ms. V. R. Devika (Founder and Managing Director, Aseema Trust) was the main facilitator – this is her fifth year running conducting this programme for Bala Mandir. She has been covering various topics, and this year's theme was 'Empathy', which is the theme for programmes in Bala Mandir throughout the year.

15 teachers from schools around Chennai participated in the programme. The programme was conducted once again on March 4th for the Bala Mandir teachers who were not able to participate in the first session.

Feedback for the programme was uniformly positive.



NEWS BYTES: JANUARY TO MARCH 2017

Sunitha weds Vasantha Kumar

Sunitha, who had grown up in Bala Mandir, and was working as a teacher in the Day Care Centre, and a House Mother in the Home, got married on March 9th in Bangalore to Vasantha Kumar. As is usual, Sunitha was provided a wedding trousseau thanks to the generosity of donors and well-wishers.



Shivaratri Celebrations

Maha Shivaratri is a festival celebrated in honour of Lord Shiva. In Bala Mandir, a play is performed by the children on stories of Lord Shiva (with a lingam made by the children), and the importance of chanting “Om Namah Shivaya”. The children continue singing bhajans through the night.

Celebrating New Year’s Day

New Year’s Day 2017 was celebrated by the children with gusto. They dressed up in special clothes and also conveyed greetings to each other. The children also got together and made a colourful rangoli (kolam). A special sweet was prepared for the occasion, and the children enjoyed their day off!



Thiruppavai Chanting

It has become traditional in the Tamil month of Margazhi (December-January) for the boys and girls in Standard VI to X get up at dawn and sing Thiruppavai chants. The children also participated in a chanting competition held by Gokula Bhaktha Bhajanai Sabha, which also included a dance.

Cleanliness Session for the Children

Dr. Janaki conducted a session for the Bala Mandir children in the toddler section (studying in LKG, UKG and Standard I) on cleanliness. She spoke about personal hygiene, cleanliness in surroundings, safety measures while playing on the playground, and clean eating habits. She also had a question and answer session with the children.



CARNIVAL AND FOOD FEST

YRG Care, in partnership with SPI Global, conducted an Eco-Kitchen Carnival and Food Fest at Satyamurthi High School. The children enjoyed themselves very much with many activities, including games, painting, mehendi and food items.



ENGLISH CLASSES SUPPORT

Volunteers from Cognizant Technology Solutions continue to support corrective action in English classes for the children, and this quarter saw some momentum. The inputs are starting to show good results.



PONGAL CELEBRATIONS

Pongal celebrations this year were very special, with Member Dr. Reddy taking part in the celebrations, dancing sportingly with the children, as the pictures show!



INAUGURATION OF THE NEW NAGERCOIL BUILDING

The new building in Nagercoil, donated by Braade Stiftung was inaugurated on February 9th. The house warming function of “Milk Boiling” was done at 8 a.m. along with the committee members, children and staff, and guests from Braade Stiftung. The children performed an enjoyable variety cultural programme followed by a special lunch.



VISIT BY BRAADE STIFTUNG

Braade Stiftung conducted their annual visit to Bala Mandir, and visited the different units.



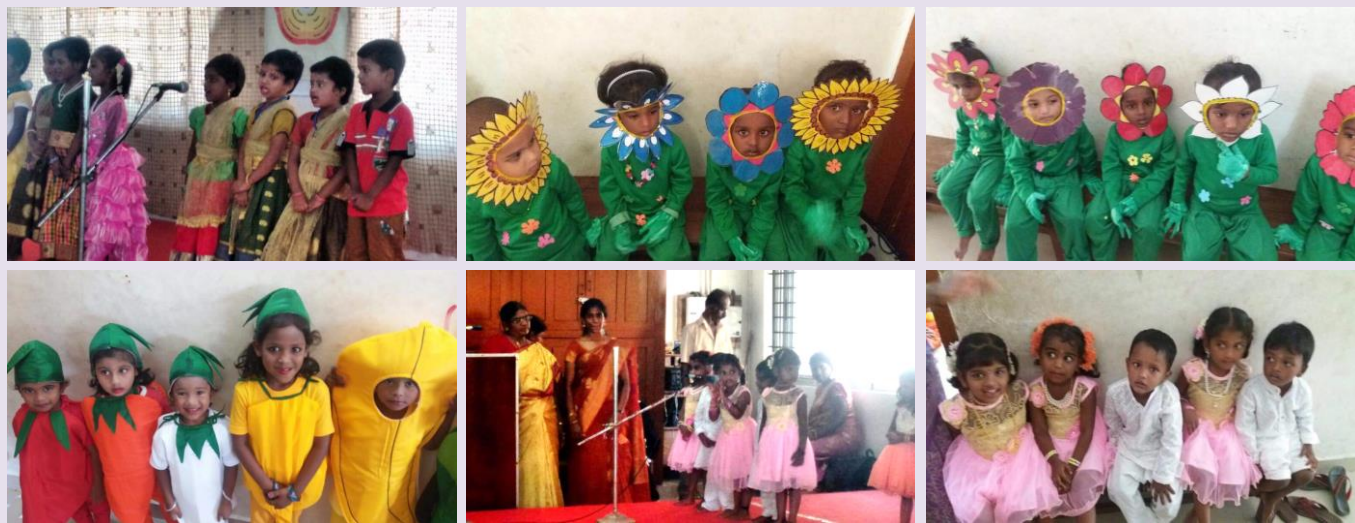
FRIENDSHIP DAY

Friendship Day was celebrated on February 4th, held at the P. Obul Reddy Hall in Vani Mahal. The children put up a programme on Equality, “Samathuvam”, through music, dance and drama. They depicted episodes in the life of Bharathiyar, Dr. Ambedkar and Dr. Abdul Kalam, highlighting the impact these incidents had in their life. There were two dances – one showcasing the different dances of India and the other showing people of all castes, communities and professions dancing together. The Bala Mandir choir presented songs on greatness of women, and Bharathiyar songs emphasizing on Equality.



CELEBRATING EXTRA-CURRICULARS

KG Annual Day – where most of the children participate in cultural events



KG & Vidyalaya Sports Day – where every child participates in a sports event



BMPS & SHMS Sports Day – a variety of sports events for the children



BALA MANDIR ANNIVERSARY

The 68th anniversary of Bala Mandir was celebrated on March 10th, with the children putting up a programme on the theme of 'Equality' at the Rajagopalan Hall in Satyamurthi High School. A special lunch was served in the Dining Hall. Sports were held for the children in the evening, as were extra-curricular competitions. The festivities are captured below.



THE SPIRIT OF SERVICE CONTINUES!

Current Member of the Executive Committee, Ms. Lakshmi Gopal's mother, Ms. K. Vedam or Vedamma as she was fondly known, took over as the Honorary General Secretary of Bala Mandir on the demise of the Founder Smt. Manjubhashini (Manjumma). Hers is a story of grit, determination and passion for her cause – service.

Vedamma's association with Bala Mandir began on the day of her retirement in 1983 – from the Central Social Welfare Board, where she retired as Joint Secretary. Vedamma immediately responded to Manjumma's invitation to join Bala Mandir, with which she had an association because of her role in monitoring usage of Government funds in child welfare institutions.

Vedamma lost her husband at the very young age of 22. She had studied upto Standard VIII prior to her marriage. Her extremely supportive mother in law encouraged her to study and requested Smt. Durgabai Deshmukh to allow her to take her Matriculation examinations through the Andhra Mahila Sabha. With six months to go, through immense hard work, Vedamma passed her examination. This was followed by a Bachelor of Arts from Ethiraj College and a Master of Arts from Presidency College. Ms. Lakshmi says that her enduring childhood memories are of her mother studying.

Vedamma was in-charge of adoption in Bala Mandir and she was very deeply involved in the process of placing children appropriately with parents. With her in-depth knowledge, she was also very passionate about the vocational training of Bala Mandir boys, and those from economically deprived backgrounds. Under her mentorship, the Bala Mandir Carpentry, Laundry and Screen Printing units, as part of Vocational Training, flourished. For years, Bala Mandir was very well known for producing school furniture, educational toys and greeting cards.

Vedamma put in every effort to get government approval for recognising P-H Mortensen Industrial Training Centre for NCVT courses, and was happy that her efforts fructified, but unfortunately did not live to see the complete establishment of the training centre because of her untimely demise due to cancer in 2000, till when she was completely involved with Bala Mandir.

Ms. Lakshmi Gopal, Vedamma's daughter, came to Chennai from Mumbai in 1996. She was immediately asked to join Bala Mandir by her mother, as a volunteer. She had been working at the Indological Research Institute as a Librarian. Ms. Lakshmi took up an active role along with Ms. Hema Srinivas in the setting up of the Vidyalaya and Day Care Centre. Very soon, she became a master trainer and resource person for the Hincks Dellcrest Learning Through Play Early Childhood Programme. She took up the task of spreading parenting messages to parents, field-level workers, professionals, kindergarten teachers across Chennai and Tamil Nadu. She has worked on translating all the literature into Tamil, and has created Tamil songs about them to easily disseminate its messages. Her work on Divyaprabandham and its link to early childhood has also garnered a lot of appreciation,

In the past 2 decades, Ms. Lakshmi Gopal has contributed tremendously to Bala Mandir's All India Early Childhood Programme. She continues to train and educate Resource persons and has also supported BMRF's CSR projects. She has excellent penmanship, is a poet and translator, and has come up with many innovative games for the children. Bala Mandir is lucky to have her devoted service as an inspiration!



Vedamma



Ms. Lakshmi in a session



The songs by Ms. Lakshmi based on the LTPC

HR NEWS — JANUARY TO MARCH 2017

Welcome to Bala Mandir!

- Ms. Girija, House Mother, Children's Programme
- Ms. Revathy, Coordinator, Donation & IT
- Mr. Krishnamoorthy N, Coordinator, Accounts
- Mr. Chandru R, Instructor, VTC

Welcome to Bala Mandir!

- Mr. Vignesh, Maths Teacher, SMHS
- Ms. Rajeswari, Teacher, Vidyalaya
- Ms. Lakshmi, Helper, Day Care Centre
- Ms. Muniamma, Helper, Day Care Centre

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